National Identity, Cultural Authority, and the Post-Soviet Blockbuster: Nikita Mikhalkov and Aleksei Balabanov

Susan Larsen

> Right now it's very difficult to imagine a film that would have a social impact comparable to the impact that some films had before perestroika, that is, in an era when cinema was larger than cinema, larger than life. Today life is larger than the cinema.
>
> —Sergei Selianov, director, producer, and head of the film company STV

Size Matters

In the first post-Soviet decade, Russian filmmakers have watched their domestic audience, their international renown, and their cultural authority shrink and all but disappear, as the annual production of feature films sank from an all-time high of 300 films in 1990 to a near all-time low of 28 in 1996, then rose again to hover between 30 and 50 per year between 1997 and 2000.[1] Reliable statistics are difficult to obtain, but studies indicate that the average Russian bought less than one film ticket annually in the 1990s and that contemporary Russian films accounted for only 3 to 8 percent of the nation's box office revenue in the last decade.[2] A Russian film that made it into a movie theater in the 1990s (as opposed to being screened primarily at festivals) had already triumphed over long odds, and a film that managed to recoup its production costs was the rare exception, not the rule. The reasons for the decline of the Russian film industry are by now well known: the collapse of centralized distribution networks; a flood of low-priced foreign imports into the cinema, television, and video markets; the dilapidated condition and outdated equipment of Soviet-era cinemas; widespread video piracy; the much-maligned "darkness" (*chernukha*) of so many contemporary films; and the economic crises that decimated government subsidies for the film industry and made cinema tickets a luxury for the few rather than entertainment for the masses.[3]

The epigraph is taken from Sergei Selianov et al., "My snymaem kino vopreki . . . ," *Iskusstvo kino,* 2000, no. 6:7.

1. The number of Russian feature films rose to 38 in 1997, 40 in 1998, declined to 31 in 1999, and rose again to 39 in 2000. See Daniil Dondurei and Natalie Venger [Nataliia Venzher], *The Film Sector in the Russian Federation* (Moscow, 2001), 34, at www.obs.coe.int/oea_publ/eurocine/doubled_film.pdf (last consulted 19 May 2003).

2. Nataliia Venzher, "Vyzhivat' ili zhit'—vot v chem vopros!" *Iskusstvo kino,* 1997, no. 7:7; Diliara Tasbulatova, "Prokatnyi bum," *Itogi,* 16 July 2002, 47; Dondurei and Venger, *Film Sector,* 50–53.

3. On the Russian film industry in the 1990s, see Dondurei and Venger, *Film Sector;* Birgit Beumers, "Cinemarket, or the Russian Film Industry in 'Mission Possible,'" *Europe-Asia Studies* 51, no. 5 (July 1999): 871–96; Susan Larsen, "In Search of an Audience: The New Russian Cinema of Reconciliation," in Adele Marie Barker, ed., *Consuming Russia: Popular Culture, Sex, and Society since Gorbachev* (Durham, 1999), 192–200. On the Russian video market, see the report prepared by the Interactive Research Group for the European

The business of cinema is gradually reviving in Russia: since 1999 Russian box office receipts have doubled each year, but these profits—projected to reach $70 to $80 million by the end of 2002—derive almost entirely from the screening of Hollywood films.[4] Yet as Russian President Vladimir Putin complained in July 2002, "the number of film theaters in the country has almost doubled, yet national [*otechestvennye*] films constitute only 2 percent of those in distribution."[5]

The few Russian films that have achieved significant commercial success on the domestic market in the post-Soviet period are thus doubly significant as markers of change both in the Russian film industry and in its audience. The identity crisis confronting the Russian film industry as it negotiates a painful transition from a closed, state-subsidized market to one that is—at least in principle—"free" has shaped the story lines, aesthetic choices, and marketing strategies of the two most commercially successful directors of the post-Soviet decade: Nikita Mikhalkov and Aleksei Balabanov.[6] The ambitions, working methods, and financial resources of these two directors differ tremendously, but in a decade punctuated by repeated calls—from critics, distributors, industry bureaucrats, and film directors themselves—to renounce auteurism in favor of entertainment, both have attracted a broad audience with films that reveal a common concern with Russian national identity and cultural authority in the post-Soviet period. The advertising slogan for Mikhalkov's *Sibirskii tsiriul'nik* (Barber of Siberia, 1999) was "On russkii, eto mnogoe ob"iasniaet" (He's Russian—that explains a lot), but it could just as easily have been used to promote Balabanov's *Brat* (Brother, 1997) and *Brat-2* (Brother-2, 2000).

These films offer very different explanations of what it means to be Russian, but each is engaged—more or less explicitly—with the relationship between contemporary Russian life and the cultural traditions of the Soviet and prerevolutionary past. Mikhalkov's two post-Soviet hits, *Utomlennye solntsem* (Burnt by the sun, 1994) and *Barber of Siberia,* are epic melodramas set in the Stalin era and the reign of Alexander III, respectively. Balabanov's *Brother* is a criminal thriller set in contemporary St. Petersburg, but it stages crucial scenes of thuggery and betrayal against a wall covered with a woven reproduction of Viktor Vasnetsov's painting *Bogatyri* (The legendary heroes, 1898). *Brother-2* also frames its contemporary plot with pointed historical references, mocking the cultural pretensions of its *biznesmen* villains in its opening scene in which an anonymous "new Rus-

Audiovisual Observatory, *Russia: Video Market in Transition* (Moscow, 2001), at www.obs.coe.int/online_publication/reports/IRG_video.pdf (last consulted 19 May 2003).

4. Tasbulatova, "Prokatnyi bum," 45.

5. Cited in Aleksei Karakhan, "Rossiiskoe kino podderzhat," *Kommersant Daily,* 18 July 2002, 13.

6. A survey of Russian film journalists in 2000 placed Mikhalkov as the first and Balabanov—together with his longtime producer, Sergei Selianov of STV—as the third most influential members of the Russian film industry. (Aleksandr Golutva, former head of Lenfil'm Studios, now deputy minister of culture in charge of filmmaking, was placed second). Given Mikhalkov's much longer career and prominent position as head of the Filmmakers' Union since 1997, Balabanov's place in this list is startling. Survey cited in Daniil Dondurei, "'Vy gangstery?'—'Net, my russkie,'" *Iskusstvo kino,* 2000, no. 11:71.

sian" is videotaped as he leans against a shiny black Hummer and recites Mikhail Lermontov's "No, I'm not Byron, I am a different / Still unknown, chosen son of fate / Like him, a pilgrim persecuted by the world / But with a Russian soul."[7]

Although made in different genres and set in diverse environments, all of these films are engaged with the problem of creating a new "hero of our time."[8] In their invocation of a heroic national past, these films invite their viewers to compare contemporary and historical models of heroic conduct. These models are all emphatically masculine, as are the conflicts and communities central to these films, each of which casts paternal and fraternal bonds as vital threads in the tattered post-Soviet fabric of Russian national identity. In what follows, I read Mikhalkov's two historical epics as paternity suits, an attempt to reconstruct a father figure that never existed. As Mikhalkov likes to say about *Barber of Siberia,* in a phrase that reveals the extent to which his film about the heroic past is intended as a blueprint for the troubled present, "It is not about what was, but about what ought to be."[9] By contrast, Balabanov's hero, Danila Bagrov, is a fatherless killer who substitutes a dangerous but irresistible fraternity for a flawed paternity, defined by his devotion to a *frère fatal* rather than any superfluous *femme.* I am not suggesting that the quest for paternal and fraternal bonds is the sole source of these very different films' popularity; they are also the products of skilled directors, gifted cinematographers, and talented actors and most of them benefited from publicity campaigns that were more carefully orchestrated than has been the norm for Russian films in the 1990s. Despite their differences, much of the pathos of these films derives from a common anxiety about what it means to be Russian at the end of the twentieth century, and most of the films articulate that anxiety in terms of threats to masculine "honor" and "dignity" (Mikhalkov) or national "might" and "right" (Balabanov). The conflation of national identity with masculine authority is a key component of these films' appeal to Russian viewers in a decade in which it often seemed as if Russian filmmakers had lost both their market share and their claim to the nation's imagination.

Paternity Suits: Mikhalkov and the Melodramatic Blockbuster

The aesthetic, ideological, and commercial ambitions of Mikhalkov's *Burnt by the Sun* and *Barber of Siberia* are driven by a quest for moral clarity that

7. M. Iu. Lermontov, *Sobranie sochinenii* (Moscow, 1957), 1:270. This and all other translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

8. Lermontov's *Geroi nashego vremeni* was invoked in so many reviews of Balabanov's *Brother* that it may well have inspired the Lermontov scene at the beginning of *Brother-2.* See, for example, Marina Drozdova, "Srochnaia mobilizatsiia v 'geroi nashego vremeni,'" *Kinoglaz,* 1997, no. 17: 39; and the comments by Irina Liubarskaia, Ol'ga Surkova, and Ol'ga Shervud in "Brat: Kritiki o fil'me," *Seans,* 1997, no. 16: 39.

9. He uses this phrase several times in comments included on the DVD of the film released in Russia, as well as in interviews with the foreign press. See Philip Kemp, "Free Cheese from the Mousetrap," *Sight and Sound* 10, no. 8 (August 2000): 10; Michael R. Gordon, "In Filmmaker's Ideal Russia, a Presidential Role?" *New York Times,* 21 February 1999, 3.

Peter Brooks has identified as the origin of the "melodramatic imagination."[10] Brooks explains the emergence of melodrama in France after 1789 in terms that suggest why so many Russian filmmakers have turned to the conventions of melodrama since 1991 and, perhaps, why Russian audiences responded so powerfully to Mikhalkov's skillful exercises in this genre. For Brooks, "Melodrama starts from and expresses the anxiety brought by a frightening new world in which the traditional patterns of moral order no longer provide the necessary social glue. . . . It demonstrates over and over that the signs of ethical forces can be discovered and can be made legible."[11] Like the "classical" melodramas Brooks discusses, *Burnt by the Sun* and *Barber of Siberia* rely on the polarization of ethical opposites in order to achieve a "remarkable, public, spectacular homage to virtue, a demonstration of its power and effect."[12] Both films also stage their homages to Russian masculine and national virtue with the stylistic, emotional, and narrative "excess" that Brooks explains as the by-product of melodrama's compulsion to confirm and restore the values of "the old society of innocence."[13] Despite their disparate settings, *Burnt by the Sun* and *Barber of Siberia* are equally intent on affirming their charismatic heroes' old-fashioned virtues—honor, dignity, patriotism—in typically melodramatic plots that accentuate these virtues by subjecting the protagonist to unjust accusations, malicious persecution, and undeserved punishment. These melodramatic impulses—the tendency to excess, spectacle, and an insistence on the public acknowledgment of virtue triumphant—are also evident in the elaborate premieres and advertising campaigns for both films. Both films also tell stories about a child's separation from its father, a loss that the films' historical setting equates, particularly in *Barber*, with lost cultural and national traditions that the films themselves seem intended to restore. As they reestablish a genealogy of heroic Russian masculinity, the films also place themselves in an equally heroic genealogy of Russian filmmaking in which patrimony, paternity, and patriotism merge and reinforce one another.

Burnt by the Sun

Burnt by the Sun was the first post-Soviet film with any claim to blockbuster status: it shared the Grand Jury Prize at the 1994 Cannes Film Festival (with Zhang Yimou's *To Live*) and in 1995 became only the third Russian-language film to win the Academy Award (Oscar) for Best Foreign-Language Film.[14] Coverage of the film's international awards and its elab-

10. Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New York, 1985). On the use of melodrama in other recent Russian films, see Susan Larsen, "Melodramatic Masculinity, National Identity, and the Stalinist Past in Postsoviet Cinema," *Studies in Twentieth-Century Literature* 24, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 85–120.

11. Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 20.

12. Ibid., 25.

13. Ibid., 32.

14. Mikhalkov refused to screen the film at the 1994 Open Russian Film Festival (Sochi) and withdrew it from consideration for the Russian "Nika," the post-Soviet equivalent of the Academy Awards.

orate Moscow premiere, as well as the celebrity of its director and star, helped keep the film in the "hit parade" of the Russian video market for forty-eight weeks.[15] The film's success was due in large part to Mikhalkov's personal involvement in its distribution and promotion. In an attempt to recoup production costs of $3.6 million, yet keep the film affordable, his production company, TriTe, tried to locate regional sponsors to subsidize ticket prices and promised in return that Mikhalkov and other cast members would attend the film's opening. In exchange, TriTe insisted that local sponsors promise not to release the film on video or screen it on television before it had finished its run in theaters.[16] The film was effectively financed, produced, and distributed on the basis of Mikhalkov's professional reputation and personal celebrity, both internationally and at home.[17]

In Sergei Kotov, the "legendary" division commander who is the charismatic hero of *Burnt by the Sun,* Mikhalkov reclaims an image of triumphant masculinity and honorable national identity from the Stalin era in a form that defies the widespread tendency in 1990s Russian cinema to depict Stalin-era loyalists as flawed or false heroes.[18] *Burnt by the Sun* stages its contest for the historical moral high ground between its two protagonists—the civil war hero Kotov (Mikhalkov) and Mitia (Oleg Men'shikov), the NKVD agent assigned to arrest Kotov on a sunny June day in 1936—as a romantic rivalry for the affection and respect of Kotov's beautiful young wife, Marusia (Ingeborga Dapkunaite). As several Russian critics observed, the film inverts contemporary stereotypes about the Stalinist past that would ordinarily have cast the piano-playing émigré Mitia as the victim and the Bolshevik hero Kotov as the villain in the love triangle in which all their conflicts—moral, political, and romantic—are played out.[19] As Mikhalkov noted in an interview, however, "I do not give the viewer the right to pity [Mitia]."[20] The principal strategy used to crystallize the opposition between Mitia and Kotov is based less in history than in the conventions of melodrama, however, as Kotov wins a moral and

15. Miroslava Segida and Sergei Zemlianukhin, *Domashniaia sinemateka: Otechestvennoe kino 1918–1996* (Moscow, 1996), 470. On the film's premiere, see Tat'iana Cherednichenko, "'Utomlennye solntsem' v 'Rossii,'" *Iskusstvo kino,* 1995, no. 3:19–20. The film's performance at the Russian box office is unknown, but press reports support its producer Leonid Vereshchagin's claim that *Burnt by the Sun* outsold all other Russian films in the year of its release, when it was screened in over thirty-five regions. On the film's distribution, see Iuliia Khomiakova, "'Oskar,' 'Nika' i 'Feliks' vstrechaiutsia na Malom Kozikhinskom" (interview with Leonid Vereshchagin), *Kino-glaz,* 1995, no. 3:35.

16. Khomiakova, "'Oskar,' 'Nika' i 'Feliks'"; Nikita Mikhalkov, "Rezhisser ne dolzhen dolgo nakhodit'sia pod obaianiem svoei kartiny. Eto opasno," *Iskusstvo kino,* 1995, no. 3:9; Evgeniia Tirdatova, "I dol'she veka dlitsia den' . . . ," *Kino-glaz,* 1995, no. 1:40.

17. On the film's production history, see Khomiakova, "'Oskar,' 'Nika' i 'Feliks,'" 34–35, and Birgit Beumers, *Burnt by the Sun* (London, 2000), 114–16.

18. On contemporary films set in the Stalin era, see Julian Graffy, "Unshelving Stalin: After the Period of Stagnation," and Anna Lawton, "The Ghost That Does Return: Exorcising Stalin," both in Richard Taylor and Derek Spring, eds., *Stalinism and Soviet Cinema* (London, 1993), 212–27; 186–200.

19. Andrei Plakhov, "Mikhalkov protiv Mikhalkova," *Seans,* 1994, no. 9:21.

20. Mikhalkov, "Rezhisser ne dolzhen," 11.

sexual victory over Mitia, the man who tries—unsuccessfully—to usurp Kotov's place in the affections of his wife and daughter, Nadia (Nadia Mikhalkova, the director's daughter).

The film structures its audience's response to its two protagonists by emphasizing visual rather than verbal narratives of heroism. Although the film provides far more details about Mitia's history than it does about Kotov's heroic past, Mitia's stories about himself are never buttressed by the visual evidence that affirms Kotov's position as the melodramatic hero. Mitia's character is revealed in long theatrical sequences in which he is always an *actor:* he arrives at Kotov's dacha disguised as an old man, later dons a gas mask and bathrobe while playing a frantic can-can on the piano, then improvises a puppet show in which he tells a fable intended to persuade Marusia that he abandoned her only because Kotov blackmailed him into becoming a Soviet spy among the Russian émigré community in France. This fable, like the many actual masks Mitia assumes, offers what the film argues is a *disguised* and thus, inauthentic, version of the truth. Mitia's story remains just that—a story.

Kotov's "story," however, never has to be told, because his heroism is universally acknowledged by everyone around him—from his five-year-old daughter, Nadia, to the NKVD thugs who beat him into a bloody pulp at the film's conclusion. The film repeatedly stages scenes in which Kotov is the object of almost speechless adoration. Much of *Burnt by the Sun* is shot from Nadia's point of view, and her wide-eyed vision of her on-screen father, the "legendary" division commander Kotov as played by her off-screen father, the equally legendary filmmaker Mikhalkov, shapes the viewer's response to the film. Kotov radiates love for his youthful wife and innocent daughter, and it is their loving admiration of him as husband and father that makes the strongest case for Kotov's status as an authentically Russian national hero, whose principal allegiance is to his extended "family," the Soviet people (*narod*), and only secondarily to the Soviet government.

This distinction between popular and official heroism is established from the film's first shots of Kotov, lying prone in an old-fashioned wooden bathhouse and beaming as Nadia beats him with the traditional birch switches. His wife smiles at them both as she stands with her naked back to the camera, bathed in amber light from the window. This idyllic vision of family togetherness is markedly *not* sexual: it presents the film's hero as a man of simple, domestic pleasures, one who prefers traditional, rural Russian cleansing rituals to the modern conveniences of gas heat and running water. Kotov's moral purity is further accented by the opening shot of his bare-chested young daughter perched astride his own naked back. This family's nakedness—to each other and to the viewer—suggests that they have nothing to hide and nothing to fear; like Adam and Eve before the Fall, they are strangers to shame. This bathhouse idyll is interrupted, however, by an urgent demand for Kotov to protect the local villagers' fields from a division of tanks performing military maneuvers. Kotov, not unlike his cinematic predecessor, the equally legendary division commander Chapaev, immediately leaps astride a horse and gal-

lops off to intervene. Unlike Chapaev, however, Kotov is riding to forestall a military charge, not to lead it. This scene establishes Kotov's primary loyalty, to the Russian land, rather than to the Soviet chain-of-command. Kotov has only to demand, "Don't you recognize me?" to plunge the young commander of the tank division into a fit of giddy veneration and unquestioning obedience. Similar incidents recur throughout the film, among them a scene in which a troop of Young Pioneers wearing shirts with Kotov's portrait march by his dacha to salute him in honor of the holiday on which the film takes place—Stalinist Dirigible Construction Day.

The film's pivotal demonstration of Kotov's moral authority occurs at the moment when it is most profoundly called into question. In a moment of quintessentially melodramatic *misrecognition,* Marusia rebels against her husband after hearing Mitia's fable about the nameless evil wizard who separated the young lovers.[21] As Marusia flees the dinner table in tears, Kotov runs after her, but the ensuing pursuit is shot as if it were a silent film. Kotov and Marusia's lips move as they remonstrate with each other, but the soundtrack offers only the tune of the tango, "The Weary Sun" that is the film's theme song. The dialogue track gradually resurfaces as Kotov pounds up the stairs into the attic after Marusia. The attic setting recalls the bathhouse of the film's opening scenes: the warm light bouncing off rough-hewn wooden walls and rafters evokes the same pastoral mood, and the ceiling is hung with *veniki* (the bundles of twigs bathers beat themselves with as they steam). As Kotov comes in the door, he begins removing his clothes and tells Marusia to "wait, come here," while she threatens to jump out the window if he comes any closer. Kotov makes no attempt to defend himself against Mitia's accusations but simply displays what the film intends both Marusia and the viewer to respond to as his masculine authority—which the film equates with moral virtue. Kotov pulls his wife into his arms and begins to remove her dress; in the ensuing love scene Kotov and Marusia wordlessly reach orgasm together on a bed of straw in a haze of golden light. The choreography of the sex scene places Marusia on top, as if to emphasize that Kotov has not forced her into bed, but drawn her there with his magnetic charm.[22] His appeal in this scene, as throughout the film, is powerful, but passive—he lies back and accepts the adoration of his wife and everyone else. The purely visual logic of this scene argues that Marusia returns to Kotov not because of any "stories" he tells her, nor because he forces her to submit, but because of his literally incredible sexual magnetism—a magnetism that the film casts as a moral force. The conflation of sexual and moral arguments is most apparent in the moment of post-coital bliss when Kotov explains to Marusia that he, like Mitia, would also have abandoned his loved ones if so ordered, but that he would have been motivated by duty and love for the Motherland, while Mitia was motivated only by fear. Kotov makes this argument, however,

21. On melodrama's characteristic "misprision and recognition of virtue," see Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination,* 28–34.

22. For one viewer's enthusiastic, if probably tongue-in-cheek, response to the novelty of this sexual position, see A. Akulov, "Seks po-mikhalkovski," *Argumenty i fakty,* 1996, no. 6 (no. 799): 1.

only after it is no longer necessary, because—as the film hammers home in these scenes—his wife is back on his side the minute he touches her.

All of these scenes mobilize the substantial expressive means at Mikhalkov's command to stage what Peter Brooks has compellingly identified as the "core of melodrama's premises and design . . . the admiration of virtue."[23] This admiration of virtue is precisely the function of the many scenes in which Kotov is the silent object of other characters' esteem and love. In their emphasis on Marusia's and Nadia's unquestioning love for Kotov, these scenes recast a model hero of the Stalin era as a model family man, restoring a sense of generational—and historical—continuity between the public heroes of the Stalin era and their descendants that almost all other post-Soviet films set in the 1930s have felt compelled to deny.

Barber of Siberia

The success of *Burnt by the Sun* enabled Mikhalkov to raise the money necessary to begin shooting *The Barber of Siberia* in 1997, ten years after he had first conceived of the idea for the film. *The Barber of Siberia* cost $43 million to make and $2 million to promote, the bulk of which ($33 million) came from European partners. *Barber*'s cost became a part of its publicity campaign—"the most expensive film in Russian history" and "the most expensive film made in Europe this year [1997]."[24] Number one at the Russian box office in 1999–2000 and number two in video sales for 2000, *Barber* is, according to one recent report, the only Russian film to place (eighth) in the "all-time top 20 films at the Russian box-office."[25] But *Barber* may also have lost more money than any other Russian film made in the last decade. Widely panned after its much anticipated presentation on the opening night of the 1999 Cannes festival, *Barber* received a lukewarm reception in Europe and has yet to find a U.S. distributor.[26]

The long shadow of Hollywood shaped both *Barber*'s successes and its failures. With its huge budget, international cast, elaborate sets, and beautiful costumes, the film was intended to make Russian audiences proud and foreign audiences humble. In order to recoup its production costs, the film had to appeal to foreign viewers, a necessity that influenced the

23. Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination,* 25.

24. See the interview with Mikhalkov on the DVD *Sibirskii tsiriul'nik* (Ruscico, 2000). In addition to interviews with Mikhalkov, Oleg Men'shikov, and Julia Ormond, the DVD includes the documentaries "On the film set" and "In the Kostroma Military Academy." Many scenes are also accompanied by the voice-over commentary of Mikhalkov and his cameraman, Pavel Lebeshev.

25. Box office statistics are maintained on http://www.boxofficemojo.com/intl/alltime/russia.htm (last consulted 19 May 2003), which reports that *Barber* earned $2.6 million between February 1999 and mid-July 2002. For details of the film's production costs and theatrical release, see Miroslava Segida and Sergei Zemlianukhin, *Fil'my Rossii: Igrovoe kino, 1995–2000* (Moscow, 2001), 111. Video sales are listed on www.videoguide.ru/top50_2000.asp (last consulted 19 May 2003).

26. Kemp, "Free Cheese," 10.

film's plot, script, and casting.[27] With more than 70 percent of its dialogue in English, the film was also touted by Russian critics as a likely contender in the Oscar nomination not simply for Best Foreign Language Film, but for Best Film of the Year.[28]

The extravagance of the film's ambition was fully apparent in its Moscow premiere on 20 February 1999, a date chosen to coincide with that of the film's most elaborate scene, the *maslenitsa* festival that takes place just before the beginning of Orthodox Lent. Held in the Kremlin Palace, which was specially equipped for the occasion with up-to-date projection equipment, a new wide screen, and Dolby surround sound, the premiere of *Barber* was packed with high-ranking government officials and politicians, including both former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin and then Prime Minister Evgenii Primakov. The screening was followed by a fireworks display over Red Square, as if it were a national holiday, and several observers speculated that Mikhalkov was opening not only his new film but also a campaign for the presidency. Like any Hollywood film with aspirations to blockbuster status, *Barber's* premiere was accompanied by special merchandise that signaled the film's ambition to catch up to and surpass Hollywood, with its toy action figures tucked into McDonald's happy meals. The Moscow parfumerie "Novaia Zaria" released two new fragrances in honor of the film, an "evening cologne, Cadet No. 1" and a "day cologne, Cadet No. 3"; Davidoff prepared a special *Barber of Siberia* cigar; and the Parisian firm Hermes created 100 "collectible" silk *Barber of Siberia* scarves.[29] The choice of luxury merchandise seems motivated less by commercial than by ideological goals, intended more as a signal of its implied audience's refined tastes and healthy pocketbooks than as a means of achieving marketing synergies (more film tickets, more visits to McDonald's). All of these choices—the Kremlin Palace, the audience of politicians, the post-show fireworks, the "exclusive" merchandise—are emblematic of the film's ambition to beat Hollywood at its own game and its simultaneous ambivalence about playing Hollywood's game in the first place.

These same ambitions and ambivalence are evident in the film itself, which celebrates a folkloric Russianness in elaborately staged scenes of the carnival before Lent, yet requires its characters to speak English in 70 percent of their scenes.[30] *Barber* was clearly intended for the English-

27. In Mikhalkov's commentary on the DVD release of the film, he refers repeatedly to those parts of the film that he intended to appeal to foreign viewers, to whom he attributes a fascination with Russian "exotica" and the "enigmatic Russian soul."

28. Aleksandr Kulish, "Kak poluchit' Oskar," *Premiere* [Russian edition] 19 (April–May 1999): 6.

29. On the premiere and product tie-ins, see http://mikhalkov.comstar.ru/news/news.html (last consulted 19 May 2003); "Mikhalkovskaia sibiriada," *Kino Park* 23 (April 1999): 22; Mikhail Novikov, "V kremle zapakhlo iunkerami," *Kommersant,* no. 26 (1670) (23 February 1999): 1; Stephen Kotkin, "Is Russia Ready for a Film-Director President?" *New Republic,* 5 April 1999, 16. The scarf design is on view at http://mikhalkov.comstar.ru/news/hermes.html (last consulted 19 May 2003).

30. Modeled after famous paintings of the pre-Lenten festival by Boris Kustodiev ("Maslenitsa," 1916; "Balagany," 1917; "Portret F. I. Shaliapina," 1922), these scenes in-

speaking market: the film was released in Russia with no subtitles, only a voice-over translation in the immediately recognizable tones of its director, Mikhalkov. This creates a particularly odd effect in the romantic scenes between Julia Ormond and Oleg Men'shikov, who play the film's English-speaking star-crossed lovers. Yet the film's plot is explicitly anti-American: a mad American inventor, McCracken (Richard Harris, in full scenery-chewing mode), has hired a Chicago lady of dubious morals, Jane Callahan (Julia Ormond), to use her feminine wiles to obtain imperial financing for the construction of a logging machine he calls the "Barber of Siberia," which will, he claims, fell more Siberian timber in a day than 500 men working for a month. Jane's roundabout route to the grand duke in charge of the relevant imperial committee leads her into the arms of Andrei Tolstoi (Oleg Men'shikov), an idealistic and naive young cadet (*iunker*) at the Imperial Military School. Jane betrays Tolstoi's love and his trust as she attempts to seduce General Radlov (Aleksei Petrenko), who has a direct line to the grand duke. In a crucial moment, she explains to Andrei that her involvement with the general is "just business." "Business" is the villain of the piece: driven to jealous despair by Jane's feigned infatuation with the general, Tolstoi attacks him with a contrabass bow ripped from the hand of a musician accompanying a school performance of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's *Marriage of Figaro.* As a result, Tolstoi is charged unjustly with attempting to assassinate not the general, but the grand duke, who is also in the audience; he is sentenced to hard labor and exile.

As the train carrying Tolstoi and his fellow convicts to Siberia pulls out of the station, he breaks into Figaro's aria about replacing amorous dalliances with military pursuits, "Non piu andrai, farfallone amoroso."[31] This scene is quintessentially—and literally—melodramatic: a musical demonstration of persecuted heroism, in which the "proof" of the hero's virtue is his loyalty to cultural values long vanished—not from the world of the film, but from that of the film's viewers. Figaro's aria is Tolstoi's "theme song" in the film: his enthusiasm for Mozart symbolizes his allegiance to the "high" cultural values—in both war and love—that the film maps as central to a heroic Russianness.

Tolstoi is separated forever from Jane, but she has conceived—from their single sexual encounter—a son, who, like his father, refuses to lie about his most deeply held beliefs and who has also inherited his father's love of Mozart. The son's integrity is shown in his refusal to shout "I don't give a shit about Mozart" when ordered to do so by the moronic sergeant in charge of his U.S. Army boot camp. In the end the son's persistence is rewarded; the sergeant admits defeat and bellows in surrender, "Mozart is a great composer." As he does so, the son removes the gas mask in which

spired one critic to lambaste the film as a "Russian souvenir" for foreigners. Tat'iana Moskvina, "Ne govori, chto molodost' sgubila," *Iskusstvo kino,* 1999, no. 6:33.

31. "No more, you amorous butterfly/ Will you go fluttering round by night and day/ disturbing the peace of every maid. . . . Cherubino, on to victory / On to military glory." Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Le nozze di Figaro,* libretto by Lorenzo da Ponte, trans. Lionel Salter, Deutsche Grammophon (1994), 53.

he has been jogging all day in punishment for his insubordinate refusal to denounce Mozart. The viewer sees the son's face for the first time and realizes that—except for his blond hair—the son is a dead ringer for his Russian father. By casting Men'shikov as both father and son, the film links Russian heroism with masculine integrity and a willingness to suffer for European cultural ideals and further asserts its disdain for American "values" as crass, corrupt, and uncultured.

The film ends just as Jane is about to give her son Andrew the letter about his father that has shaped the film's narrative, which is structured as a series of flashbacks from Jane and Andrew's lives in 1905 to scenes from Jane and Andrei's past in 1885. In the film's symbolic structure, Jane's role is reduced to that of the necessary intermediary between father and son. Her voice-over narration frames the film, casting it as a letter from the past to the present, a reminder of a lost paternal legacy and national tradition that is—much more than the thwarted romance—the heart of the film.

In *Barber* Mikhalkov is summoning his viewers to return to the three codes embodied in his hero's life: the Russian officer's code of honor, the Mozart lover's allegiance to high culture, and the patriot's loyalty to the traditional "folk" (*narodnyi*) way of life that Andrei adopts in his Siberian exile as a village barber living humbly with his wife—and his family's former maid—the loyal Dunia (Anna Mikhalkova) in a wooden cottage filled with apples (emblems of paradise regained, perhaps) and small children. All three of these codes intersect in the film's final sequence, which juxtaposes the two "Barbers of Siberia," ten years after Andrei's fateful attack on General Radlov. The contrast between the ways in which the mad American inventor and the noble Russian cadet have appropriated the title of Mozart's comic hero is pointed: McCracken's Barber is a grandiose machine that butchers the forest, and McCracken in his black neo-gladiator's driving outfit is a demonic imperialist. Andrei's barbering, by contrast, is never seen, only signaled through the sign by his door and the simple tools—a straight razor, some brushes, a leather strop—laid neatly on his table. The first Barber is a hellish vision of murderous foreign technology: as it bites into the forest, it sends the locals running in a frenzied mass down the slope. As an old-style barber, Andrei may also pull teeth and let blood, ministering to the villagers' physical ills as well as trimming their beards and hair.

The film's cultural agenda is most obvious in its transplantation of the refined Mozart-loving cadet to the Siberian countryside, asserting in this way a link between a love of European culture and a loyalty to the traditions of Russian rural life. What links the two, although this may not be immediately obvious, is the third code central to the film: the Russian officer's code of honor. The film's final scene—a breathtaking aerial shot of a vast forest—is followed by a black frame with a single sentence in the lower half of the frame: "This film is dedicated to Russian officers, the pride of our fatherland." The viewer accustomed to Hollywood conventions may find it odd that a romantic melodrama is dedicated to "Russian

officers," but the key to Andrei's character—and to the film's national plot—is Mikhalkov's idealized vision of the prerevolutionary officer's honor and dignity.

The film displays its young officers' honor and dignity, however, not on the battlefield, but in their performance of an aristocratic masculinity that is presented as a set of theatrical behaviors: a duel to defend a lady's (Jane's) honor, precision marching drills, and amateur theatricals. Central to all these performances—and, I would argue, to the film's conception of a heroic Russian masculinity—is the passionate bond that unites the cadets to one another. Unlike the talky love scenes between Jane and Andrei, the cadets' love for each other is conveyed primarily through visual imagery, not words. The duel between Andrei and his best friend, Count Polievskii (Marat Basharov), is—literally—the most heated scene in the movie. The actors' rapiers cast off sparks as they clash, illuminating the emotional fireworks between Andrei and the other cadets, whose scenes together are far more impassioned, intimate, and intricately choreographed than those between the doomed lovers Andrei and Jane.[32] In contrast to Andrei and Jane's single love scene, very little of which depicts them in the same frame at the same time, the cadets are repeatedly filmed in one another's arms at moments of crisis. After Andrei is wounded in the duel, his captain gathers him into his arms and carries him down the dormitory hallway, embraced on either side by weeping cadets enveloped in sheets and billowing white night shirts. The angle of Andrei's slumped head and dangling feet, the captain's worried tenderness, and the cadets' loose white garments all contribute to a composition that is almost Pieta-like in its portrait of collective grief for a fallen hero.[33]

The contrast between the love that binds the cadets and the romantic love between Andrei and Jane is most marked in the scenes following Andrei's attack on General Radlov. As chaos erupts in the theater after Andrei's attack on the general, Count Polievskii leaps on Andrei in a dramatic flying tackle and presses him into the floor, in effect "subduing" him, but also sheltering his friend's body with his own. The ensuing sequence of scenes alternates six floor-level close-ups of Polievskii's weeping face pressed into Andrei's cheek, his hand cradling Andrei's head, with medium shots of the panicked crowd exiting the theater. Jane's face is only intermittently visible in the melée as she is pulled from the theater,

32. The greater emotional intensity between the cadets may be due, in part, to the language difference. Andrei and the Count speak Russian together, while Andrei and Jane speak a carefully modulated and often stilted English. On the digital manipulation of the sparks in the duel scene, see Mikhalkov and Lebeshev's commentary on the DVD.

33. It may seem preposterous to compare the cadets' gruff little captain Mokin (Vladimir Il'in) to the grieving mother of Christ, but it is also worth noting that the sequence that portrays Mokin's dawning awareness and discovery of the duel begins with a scene in which he is sitting behind a sewing machine, patiently stitching a costume for the cadets' amateur theatricals. The contrast between this scene of quiet domesticity and the sound of swords clashing off-screen gives additional symbolic weight to Mokin's role as the cadets' surrogate parent, a figure who is more maternal than paternal, given his choice to protect rather than punish Andrei and his friends for their violation of the laws against dueling.

calling out to Andrei. The stillness of the two cadets and their wordless intimacy is in marked contrast to the frantic crowd and Jane's fruitless attempts to reach Andrei. The close-ups of Andrei and Polievskii are framed in this sequence so that only half of each cadet's face is visible on screen, as if to suggest that they complete each other in ways that Andrei and Jane never can.

A similar substitution of homosocial affection for romantic passion occurs in the scene at the Moscow train station as Andrei is being taken away in a convoy of convicts to Siberia. The film cuts back and forth between the long lines of convicts assembled on the station platform, and much shallower medium shots of the crowd assembled to see the convicts off. Among this crowd the camera briefly picks out Jane, Captain Mokin, Andrei's mother, her maid Dunia, and the cadets. All of them are trying to say a final farewell to Andrei, but only the cadets succeed in making contact with him. Once the train has pulled out of the station, and the gust of smoke blown across the platform has cleared, the silhouettes of the cadets appear in the middle distance on the now empty platform. The cadets dart about for a few seconds shouting Andrei's name, then gather as a group and break into a tearful rendition of the cadets' marching song ("Kadetskaia furazhka"). Inside the train, Andrei launches into Figaro's aria and, as the train pulls away, his voice is heard shouting, "I love you Messieurs Cadets, I love you." The camera then slowly tracks from right to left in a close-up shot across the faces of the remaining six cadets as they sob on one another's shoulders. Cinematographer Pavel Lebeshev here makes maximally effective use of the wide-screen Panavision format to create a moving frieze of grief. Despite her role as the catalyst of Andrei's desperate action and subsequent punishment, Jane is irrelevant to the emotional logic of this scene. The passion informing the scenes between the cadets underscores the film's obsession with restoring a heroic image of Russian masculinity that has very little to do with the film's ambitions for commercial success as a romantic epic.

Russian reaction to the film was sharply divided: with few exceptions most critics panned it, yet audiences flocked to see it in theaters.[34] It is always risky to speculate about the reasons for a film's popularity, but I will take that risk here. In the first place, Mikhalkov's personal celebrity and elaborate publicity campaign turned the film's release into an event. Second, the film is beautifully made: unlike most recent Russian films, it *looks* like a blockbuster, refusing to concede an inch to the economic constraints that have hobbled the ambitions of most contemporary Russian

34. For a valiant attempt to give the film a positive review, see Kirill Razlogov, ". . . . Il' perechti 'Zhenit'bu Figaro,'" *Iskusstvo kino,* 1999, no. 6:25–29. The most negative reviews include Moskvina, "Ne govori," and Aleksandr Arkhangel'skii, "Podschety i proschety," *Iskusstvo kino,* 1999, no. 7: 65–67. For a representative sample of critical views, see "Sibirskii tsiriul'nik: Kritiki o fil'me," *Seans,* 1999, no. 17–18:77–79. For a balanced discussion of both critical and audience reaction, see Mikhail Brashinskii, "Iz Rossii s liubov'iu," *Seans,* 1999, no. 17–18:81–84; Dmitrii Bykov, "V Rossii nichego ne byvaet slegka!" *Iskusstvo kino,* 1999, no. 7:49–51; and Andrei A. Eshpai, "V poiskakh novogo zritelia," *Iskusstvo kino,* 1999, no. 7:3–56. On the film's ambitions and social resonance, see Iu. Gladil'shchikov, "Pervyi blokbaster Rossiiskii imperii," *Itogi,* 9 March 1999, 43–47.

filmmakers. Third, the film's plot asserts the superiority of a Russian cultural tradition that it presents as simultaneously aristocratic and "of the people." Andrei is a graduate of the Imperial Military School, but he comes from a poor family and he marries his family's former maid, the loyal Dunia, who is presented as an archetypal peasant mother in the film's penultimate scenes. In his thwarted affair with Jane, Andrei exemplifies Mikhalkov's vision of a Russian moral and cultural tradition that—like the film itself—aims to rival and surpass the commercially ingenious, but spiritually bankrupt, traditions of the United States and its ruinous obsession with *bizness.*

Fatal Fraternities: *Et tu, Brat?*

"Bizness" is also the villain of Balabanov's *Brother* and its even more popular sequel, *Brother-2.* Both films build their central conflicts around the clash of American commerce—whether in violent pornography, McDonald's hamburgers, or professional hockey players—with values that the films identify as uniquely Russian. In contrast to Mikhalkov's historical melodramas that seek to restore a vision of the past in which contemporary Russian audiences can take pride, however, Balabanov's two *Brothers* deny the power of the past to influence—much less, rescue—the present. Both *Brothers* replace the ties of history and paternity that Mikhalkov's films exalt with the bonds of an insistent, but unreliable, fraternity. This replacement is signaled explicitly in the first *Brother*'s plot, which introduces its hero, Danila Bagrov (Sergei Bodrov Jr.), as the son of a habitual criminal killed long ago in a prison fight. In order to prevent Danila from following in the footsteps of his disreputable father, his mother sends her son from the provincial city where he was born to St. Petersburg, to seek guidance from his older brother Viktor (Viktor Sukhorukov), who has become, she believes, "some kind of bigshot" there. But Viktor is not simply Danila's brother; as both Danila and his mother insist on several occasions, Viktor took his "father's place" for Danila. This combination surrogate father and older brother, however, has now become a professional killer, and he immediately enlists Danila to help him assassinate a gangster known only as "the Chechen." Viktor wins Danila's help by appealing to his fraternal loyalty and his patriotism, describing the Chechen as a "former terrorist" who is persecuting both Viktor in particular and the "Russian people" in general. In reality, as the viewer knows from the outset, Viktor has been hired to kill the Chechen by a competing gang of Russian bandits who are themselves actively engaged in blackmailing and terrorizing the "Russian people."

The film conflates family and national bonds as the basis of Danila's impromptu vigilante justice throughout the film, yet Viktor's many betrayals of Danila's trust suggest that brotherly love—like its national equivalent, patriotism—is only a convenient fiction, not a moral absolute. The film allows its viewer to applaud Danila's overt patriotism in scenes such as the one on a St. Petersburg bus when he pulls a gun to force two men of generically "Caucasian nationality" to pay the fine for riding without a

ticket. As the men cower and beg, "Brother, don't kill us," Danila pauses, then delivers the subsequently much-quoted line: "You're no brother of mine, you black-assed scum."[35] A parallel scene at the end of the film, however, invites the viewer to consider the dangers of using either brotherhood or national identity as a basis for moral judgment or action. In this later scene, Viktor cowers at Danila's feet, begging him, just as the fare-beaters had earlier, "Don't shoot me brother, don't shoot, don't kill me." Although Danila knows that Viktor's treachery is responsible for his girlfriend's rape and has almost caused his own death—he lifts his brother from the floor and tells him, with the big childlike smile that is central to Bodrov's charm in the role, "But you are my brother. I used to call you Papa." This line brings the film full circle, as it marks once again Danila's fatherlessness and the inadequacy of the surrogate fathering offered by his cowardly, murderous brother. The parallel phrasing and structure of these two scenes signal both the powerful appeal of calls to fraternity and the dangers inherent in surrendering to that appeal without examining its bases in fact.

Not only are fathers absent in the first *Brother,* so is any sense of history, and with it, any illusion that the cultural traditions of the past can revive a deracinated present. This message is telegraphed most obviously in the character of Hoffmann, the homeless German who sells secondhand clocks but finds no buyers at the outdoor market where rival gangs of racketeers compete for power. The German is the film's ethical voice, the only person who views Danila's vigilante justice as a sin, and the only one who refuses to accept the money Danila has earned by fulfilling his brother's contract killings. The force of the German's judgment is undermined, however, by the fact that he lives in St. Petersburg's Lutheran cemetery, which he calls his "motherland," for it is here that his ancestors are buried. The German's role in the film is to bind Danila's wounds and bury his victims, but the cultural values—and the history—he represents are powerless to influence the world of the living.[36]

The film's opening scene invites the viewer to see the film as an elegy for a world populated by wingless would-be angels, fallen not so much from heaven as from history. The film begins in an autumnal landscape that is gradually revealed as the set of a music video being made to promote the Nautilus Pompilius song "Kryl'ia" (Wings).[37] The music video offers a literal interpretation of the mournful ballad's lyrics, illustrating its opening lines, "You remove your evening gown / standing, face to the

35. For comments on the "danger" of such dialogue and the enthusiastic audience response to it, see Daniil Dondurei, "Ne brat ia tebe, gnida . . ." *Iskusstvo kino,* 1998, no. 2:64–67, and Viktor Matizen, "Skromnoe ocharovanie ubiitsy," *Seans,* 1997, no. 16:41.

36. For other critical perspectives on the German's role in the film, see E. Margolit, "Plach po pioneru, ili Nemetskoe slovo 'Iablokitai,'" *Iskusstvo kino,* 1998, no. 2:60; and I. Mantsov, "Strogii iunosha," *Iskusstvo kino,* 1998, no. 2:62.

37. Nautilus Pompilius is a hugely popular rock band that emerged, like Balabanov himself, from the provincial backwaters of Sverdlovsk in the late 1980s. Balabanov's association with Nautilus Pompilius dates from the mid-1980s, when he made two "underground" amateur films featuring the band. Tamara Sergeeva, "Pro brat'ev i urodov" (interview with Aleksei Balabanov), *Iskusstvo kino,* 2000, no. 4:89.

wall," with a shot of a blonde woman in a long black dress, standing with her face against a ruined tower wall, but the song itself is about missing wings, a loss linked to "that insane war" where "we all lost something."[38] As the singer laments, "I see fresh scars / On the velvet of your back / ... Where are your wings / that I loved so much?" As these last two lines are repeated three times, Danila walks up over a hill and stumbles into the middle of the video, walking into the camera's viewfinder and then pausing to ask a technician the name of the song. The video's director shouts in outrage, cutting off the filming and the song just after the line "We used to have time." The film fades to black for a moment, stopped—like the song, like Danila, like the time in which Danila lives—in its tracks. The song is never heard again, but Danila hunts for it throughout the rest of the film: he asks the security guard whose arm he dislocated in a fight on the film set for the name of the song, and he looks for the album on three different occasions—each time unsuccessfully—in stores. This persistent quest emphasizes Danila's inarticulate, always frustrated longing for "wings," for some form of transport—both literally and metaphorically—out of the violent material world in which he lives, a world in which, as "Wings" continues: "We used to have time / But now we have things to do." This opening sequence has no direct relation to the rest of the film's plot, but it functions as a sort of political and cultural manifesto for the film as a whole. Both audiences and critics focused on the transformation of *Brother*'s baby-faced hero into a master assassin—alternately deploring the film's violence and apparent advocacy of a crude and xenophobic nationalism and praising its mastery of the crime genre. They ignored the other transformation that takes place in the film: Danila's metamorphosis into a die-hard fan of Nautilus Pompilius, which takes place in the margins of the film's more thrilling action, is equally significant.[39]

In the sub-plot of Danila's growing obsession with Nautilus Pompilius, as he seeks out rare recordings and video footage, or postpones an "urgent" meeting with his brother in order to attend a Nautilus concert, *Brother* addresses a conflict that is central to the film's own production and one obscured in the debates about its violence and xenophobia. This is the conflict between the late Soviet cultural intelligentsia and the new Russian consumer, the chasm that separates the self-styled "high-brow" producer of culture and the ever more influential "low-brow" consumer of films like *Brother*. This gap is signaled in the ingrained hostility that separates the world of the self-consciously "cultured" elite (Balabanov,

38. V. Butusov and I. Kormil'tsev, "Kryl'ia," from Nautilus Pompilius, *Kryl'ia* (St. Petersburg, 1996). Lyrics published on the group's official website, www.nautilus.ru (last consulted 19 May 2003), which indicates that the songs for this album were written in the winter and spring of 1995, after the outbreak of war in Chechnia in December 1994.

39. Critics did address the soundtrack but focused primarily on the anachronism of making Danila the fan of a group whose popularity peaked in the early 1990s, well before the period when the film is set. For other readings of the soundtrack, see Iurii Bogomolov, "Killer-brat killera," *Iskusstvo kino,* 1997, no. 10:29–31; Margolit, "Plach po pioneru," 59; Iurii Gladil'shchikov, "Odinochnoe plavanie," *Itogi,* 1 June 2000, online-version at http://www.itogi.ru/paper2000.nsf/Article/Itogi_2000_06_01_144334.html (last consulted 19 May 2003).

Viacheslav Butusov) from that of culturally illiterate consumers like Danila; it is further reflected in the film's opening scene and subtly reiterated throughout the film, when his girlfriend Sveta is first raped by gangsters, then beaten by her husband on a bed located just beneath a large woven reproduction of Vasnetsov's *The Legendary Heroes*. The painting's subject is in sharp contrast to the violence that takes place beneath it: it depicts three knights in shining armor who are described in Soviet-era art history as "standard-bearers of the idea of Russia's invincibility, the people's guardians and protectors."[40] Although critics have described Danila as an "authentic knight" (*podlinnyi rytsar'*) or a "Russian legendary hero" (*russkii bogatyr*), his inability to protect Sveta makes it clear that he is not, in fact, an heir to the heroic Russian tradition.[41] The literal and symbolic impotence of the national and cultural values exemplified by Vasnetsov's painting is further emphasized by its unremarked position in the background of the film's central action.

The unbridgeable gap between Danila and the world of self-styled "elite" culture is signaled most effectively in the sequence that begins when a film director stumbles into the scene of a "hit" in progress, in a neat parallel to Danila's accidental interruption of a videotaping in progress at the beginning of the film. The hapless film director—who had knocked on the wrong door in search of a birthday party—is dragged inside, threatened with death and tied up. Shortly thereafter, Butusov himself, Nautilus's lead singer, knocks on the same wrong door in search of the same party, but Butusov is spared the director's fate, as the host of the party he is seeking summons him up one more floor before the trigger-happy gangsters can decide what to do. Danila pauses for a moment, then slowly follows Butusov upstairs and gains entrance to the party of assembled artists and musicians, by asking first for some aspirin, then for permission to "just sit here for a while." He wanders through the rooms of the apartment, the walls of which are hung with paintings, silently observing Butusov and the other assembled bohemians. Danila's presence in this scene is neither hostile nor judgmental. Instead he occupies the place allotted him in the cultural economy of this bohemian elite: a silent, admiring proximity to a world of which he understands—without having to be told—that he can never be a part.

Danila returns to the apartment below just in time to prevent the film director's murder. Having promised earlier to protect the director if he will just keep quiet, Danila keeps his word, shooting the thugs with whom he came and treating the film director as if he were a new friend, rather than his hostage. He asks the director whether he knows Butusov, does he own "Wings," and will he make a tape of the album for him—in exactly the same tone of voice as he later asks him for help in dragging the four accumulated corpses to the cemetery. The director shakes with fear throughout these scenes, which some critics have viewed as evidence of

40. V. M. Volodarskii, ed., *The Tretyakov Gallery in Moscow: Painting,* trans. B. Meyerovich (Leningrad, 1979), figure 77.

41. Margolit, "Plach po pioneru," 58; Mark Lipovetskii, "Vsekh liubliu na svete ia!" *Iskusstvo kino,* 2000, no. 11:58.

Balabanov's "masochistic" relationship to his own film and its hero, but I would argue that they offer instead an idealized version of the relationship between the post-Soviet producer of culture and its consumer.[42] Art may be relegated to the margins or the background of the lives of characters like Danila and Sveta, but they recognize it when they hear it, and they treat its makers with suitably humble respect. Danila, after all, cannot sing: as he explains to Sveta, he has "no ear." Danila, in other words, is a musician's or a filmmaker's fantasy fan—undemanding, admiring, loyal, and protective.

Danila was also, as it turned out, many filmgoers' fantasy hero, although for very different reasons. After playing Danila in *Brother,* Sergei Bodrov—who had already won fame and several acting prizes for his first film role in his father's *Kavkazskii plennik* (Prisoner of the mountains, 1996)—became a bona fide film idol.[43] Neither movie-star handsome, nor exceptionally gifted as an actor, Bodrov's tremendous popularity was based primarily on his role in both *Brother* films as the baby-faced, good-natured boy from the provinces who beats the malevolent "new Russian" city slickers at their own game, yet never betrays his one fundamental principle: loyalty to family and nation. The role is emphatically not romantic: Danila neither courts nor pines for the women into whose lives he stumbles. His brief sexual encounters are staged almost as afterthoughts; the principal purpose of Danila's only distantly romantic interactions with women in both films is usually shelter—a place to rest and hide for a few days from the bandits who constantly pursue him. Danila's face only lights up when he greets his brother. The powerful appeal of that single word, "brother," as the source of Bodrov's popularity cannot be underestimated.

By grafting the folkloric story of the country bumpkin ("Ivan the Fool") who outfoxes his conniving older "city" brother onto the familiar "new Russian" character of the hired killer, Balabanov created a fairy tale for post-Soviet audiences. The film's nostalgia-inducing soundtrack and distinctive editing, however, established a subtle but recognizable aesthetic distance between the film's implied viewer (or author) and its action.[44] The much-discussed "charm" of Bodrov's performance as an inarticulate but honorable nationalist seems to have enabled many viewers (as witnessed in their panegyrics to the earlier film on the *Brother-2* website) to

42. Mantsov, "Strogii iunosha," 63. Matizen also views the directors in the film as stand-ins for Balabanov ("Skromnoe ocharovanie," 41) and argues that Balabanov should have played these roles himself.

43. Bodrov and Oleg Men'shikov, his co-star in *Prisoner,* shared the prize for Best Actor at both the Russian Film Academy Awards ("Nika") and the Open Russian Film Festival (ORFF) in Sochi in 1996. In 1997 Bodrov took home the Best Actor award from the ORFF for *Brother,* which also won the award for Best Film. Bodrov's death in an avalanche in northern Ossetia on 20 September 2002 provoked a huge public outcry. Both print and on-line media provided extensive coverage of the search for survivors for weeks afterwards; in the first three weeks after his death, more than 3,500 comments were posted on the memorial webpage set up by STV, the company that produced both *Brothers,* as well as Bodrov's own directing projects: *Sestry* (Sisters, 2001) and *Sviaznoi* (The messenger), which he was shooting on the day of his death.

44. Balabanov's much discussed use of black frames to separate episodes has been persuasively analyzed by N. Sirivlia, "Bratva," *Iskusstvo kino,* 2000, no. 8:27–28.

overlook that distance and focus exclusively on the simple plot at the film's heart: "our" guy beats the bad guys, whether they are alleged Chechen terrorists, elitist film directors, hired killers, or racketeers. "Our" guy keeps his word, makes his own weapons from scratch, and slaughters the bad guys without breaking a sweat, but rejects their blood money. In *Brother* Danila never states his actions or intentions. He asks questions instead: "Do you have 'Wings' by Nautilus?" or "Tell me, German, what is the meaning of life?" His only statement that comes close to formulating a principle is the emphatic assertion at the film's end that he, in contrast to everyone else in the film, "keeps his word."

Brother-2, by contrast, eliminates most of the earlier film's potentially alienating effects, minimizing the distance between the viewer and the film's central character in its plot, aesthetic choices, and promotional campaign. The non-negotiable bond of brotherhood—and its often fatal consequences—is hammered home in the proliferation of brothers of all sorts in *Brother-2,* among them: Danila and his two former army "brothers," Il'ia and Kostia; Kostia and his twin brother, the international hockey star Mitia; Danila and his own brother, Viktor; and the international criminal "brotherhood" (or *bratva,* a homophone for the film's Russian title, *Brat-2*).[45] The film's convoluted action centers on the consequences of Kostia's attempt to prevent his brother Mitia's exploitation by the evil Chicago businessman, Mr. Mennis (Gary Houston), who is confiscating Mitia's National Hockey League salary and marketing snuff films produced in Russia. Kostia is murdered by the henchmen of Mennis's Moscow partners, and Danila then enlists his own brother, Viktor, to travel with him to Chicago to avenge Kostia's death by recovering Mitia's salary from Mennis. In the process, he also rescues Dasha, a Russian prostitute using the street name Marilyn, from her African-American pimp, a character seemingly plucked directly from Hollywood's blaxploitation flicks of the 1970s. The plotting is preposterous and hard to follow, even for an action film, but Danila's primary motivation is always clear: to avenge the Russian victims and rescue the Russian hostages of an evil global empire run by criminal American entrepreneurs.[46] Most important, however, this revenge-and-rescue plot—and its popularity among many fans—is driven by the compulsion to prove that Danila has both "might" and "right" on his side. Danila's final scene with Mennis casts their conflict in precisely these terms, as he delivers the following speech to the trembling businessman:

> Tell me, American, what is power [*sila*]? Is it really money? Now my brother says that money is power, and you have a lot of money, but so what? I think that power comes from right [*pravda*]. Whoever is right, that's who's more powerful. Here you've deceived someone, made a pile of money, and what of it—have you become more powerful? No, you haven't. Because you're not in the right. But the one you deceived, he's in the right, so he's the more powerful. Yes?

45. On the proliferation of brothers in *Brat-2,* see ibid., 26.

46. For a vivid description of the film's narrative inconsistencies, see Dondurei, "'Vy gangstery?'" 69–70, and Lipovetskii, "Vsekh liubliu na svete ia!" 55–56.

This is the key speech in the film, and the one to which fans responded with enthusiastic comments on the film's website, often accompanied by nationalist, anti-American, or racist remarks.[47] The link between Danila's role as the embodiment of might and right and his role as a "national" hero is made repeatedly in the film, in lines such as "In wartime Russians don't abandon their own," "Russians don't surrender," or "Are you gangsters?—No, we're Russians," as well as in the film's final song, a Nautilus hit performed by a children's choir that accompanies Danila and Dasha's departure for Moscow.[48]

Balabanov's *Brother-2* is not the only recent Russian film with a nationalist and anti-American theme. Its phenomenal success among Russian audiences is explained not only by its portrait of the Russian underdog defeating evil American capitalists, nor even by the celebrity of its star actor, but also by its calculated use of contemporary Russian pop music on the soundtrack and its sophisticated website. Only two Nautilus songs are heard in the film; the remainder is set to songs by more contemporary and, in most cases, younger performers (Zemfira, Bi-2, Krematorii, Agata Kristi, Masha i Medvedi, and others), all of whom allowed the filmmakers to use their music free of charge.[49] To heighten the film's celebrity quotient, as well as its contemporary relevance, Balabanov cast pop star Irina Saltykova, playing herself, in the role of Danila's nominal love interest in *Brother-2*. In all of these ways, *Brother-2* set out deliberately to capitalize on the popularity of music that its own hero disavows. "In wartime we don't listen to music like that," he tells Saltykova.

The film's official website, opened on 15 April 2000, also contributed to the buzz surrounding its premiere, as well as facilitating the sale of cassettes, DVDs, soundtrack recordings, and a video game based on the film called "Obratno v Ameriku" (Back to America). The website provided extensive advance publicity for the film; opportunities for fans to question the filmmakers and stars; a "chat room" and bulletin board for viewers' opinions; a summary of the film's press, both good and bad; participants' biographies; and even detailed information about the hockey stars and cars used in the film. The site's most controversial section is titled (in English) "Black and White." It consists of extensive statements by Balabanov and Bodrov against "political correctness" and their generalizations in support of the film's racist portrait of African Americans. Balabanov claims, for example, that "There are many drug dealers among [American]

47. "Vashi otzyvy," on www.brat2.film.ru (last consulted 19 May 2003).

48. As their plane takes off, the choir sings: "Good-bye America, Oh!, Where I have never been / Farewell forever." V. Butusov and D. Umetskii, "Poslednee pis'mo" (also known as "Proshchal'noe pis'mo" and "Gud-bai Amerika-o"), first recorded in 1985; released on Nautilus Pompilius, *Nevidimka.*

49. For details, see www.brat2.film.ru/soundtrack.asp. Balabanov also directed a music video of the Bi-2 song featured in the film, "Polkovnik" (The colonel), that starred Bodrov and played in regular rotation on Russian MTV during the two months prior to the film's Moscow premiere on 11 May 2000. "Nashe radio" also assisted in the film's promotion by putting its soundtrack in rotation. On the film's promotional campaign, see Sergei Selianov, "My tut mandarinami torguem," *Iskusstvo kino,* 2001, no. 5:6–10; and "Novosti" on www.brat2.film.ru/.

blacks; they live on welfare, they don't want to work. It's everything that could happen with us here if the whole war in the Caucasus moves into the major cities."[50]

It is tempting to take the position of director Aleksei German, one of Balabanov's early mentors, who—when asked to comment on Balabanov's work by the journal *Seans*—cited Balabanov's "absolutely racist statements" and refused to discuss his work with the explanation, "He's no Wagner."[51] Yet the phenomenal popularity of Balabanov's two *Brothers* makes them landmarks in the history of post-Soviet cinema. In its fiercely anti-American plot and Hollywood-style commercial ambitions, *Brother-2*, in particular, is the quintessential post-Soviet blockbuster, simultaneously resisting and succumbing to the global dominance of American popular culture.

Despite their many differences, Mikhalkov and Balabanov are each engaged in their recent work with a struggle to create a Russian film with the power to move post-Soviet audiences back into cinemas. Significantly, each casts a soldier as his hero: Kotov is a "legendary" civil war commander, Tolstoi—an ideal cadet, and Danila—a veteran described by his comrades in *Brother-2* as "the toughest" of them all. The choice of a soldier as hero facilitates the films' conflation of national authority with heroic masculinity, but it also derives from a nostalgia for the patrilineal "great family" that Katerina Clark has identified as a "master trope of Soviet rhetoric" in the 1930s.[52] In Mikhalkov's attempt to reestablish a historical connection to unjustly condemned military fathers and Balabanov's reassertion of brothers' obligations to one another, both filmmakers invoke the metaphor of a "great family" united by shared moral certainties, cultural values, and unconditional loyalties to a state that no longer exists. Yet the craving for community remains, as does the yearning for a heroic national image capable of defying foreign threats and alien cultural influences. Mikhalkov's doomed fathers and Balabanov's stubbornly loyal brothers seem intended to assuage that yearning, as they offer images of heroes whose cultural authority and sexual magnetism derives from their allegiance to a masculine moral code that equates patriotism with filial and fraternal loyalty. In their emphatic masculinity and often xenophobic nationalism, the heroes of these films also suggest the depth of their creators' insecurities about the national potency and cultural authority of the nation—and the film industry—that they represent.

50. See www.brat2.film.ru/b&w.asp. For particularly impassioned critiques of the film's racial politics, see Dondurei, "'Vy gangstery?'" 69–70, and Lipovetskii, "Vsekh liubliu na svete ia!" 57–58.

51. "Aleksei Balabanov: Portret," *Seans*, 1999, no. 17–18:226.

52. Katerina Clark, *The Soviet Novel: History as Ritual*, 3d ed. (Bloomington, 2000), 129.