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Liudmila N. Mazur

First President of Russia B. N. Yeltsin Ural Federal University, Ekaterinburg, Russian Federation

Designing the Revolutionary Myth: Soviet Feature Films of 1917-1953

Abstract

Professional community of historians grows ever more interested in feature films as a historical source. Reflecting reality in designed images, films can provide reliable information concerning not only facts of consciousness and conduct, but also past events as transformed in the representation of film producers. There are several ways in which reality is reflected in cinema: documentary, realistic, fantasy, romantic, etc. It is mythological one that holds a special place and is often associated with accomplishment of propaganda objectives and historical memory construction. In a point of fact, all these functions were performed by early Soviet films that were to promote new socialist values and those of communist education. The article examines the role of Soviet cinema in constructing Soviet historical myth, including the one of revolutionary "creation." This latter one lies in the core of the mythological cycle including cosmogonic, etiological (myths of transfiguration) and eschatological (myths of the end of days) myths, as

well as the “myth of the golden age.” Taken together, they form a mythological picture of past, present and future. Drawing on genre and thematic analysis of the 1917-1953 films the author identifies main stages in the construction of the Soviet historical myth, determines its image-structure and traces the transformation of images under the influence of political and ideological processes in the Soviet society. Feature films of the historical-revolutionary genre produced in the USSR in 1917-1953 are studied as a historical source. In total, about 100 films have been analyzed, 18 of which are devoted to the events of 1917. The author identifies the more significant works that have determined visual imagery and interpretative approaches to the characterization of the events of October 1917.

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Keywords

Historical memory, feature films, historical myth, revolutionary myth, stages of formation, structure and images of the historical myth.

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Mazur Liudmila Nikolaevna, PhD in History, associate professor, First President of Russia B. N. Yeltsin Ural Federal University, заведующая кафедрой, Ekaterinburg, Russian Federation, +7-922-202-73-69, Lmaz@mail.ru

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