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“A Failed Successful Film: The Film Adaptation of Georgi Vladimov's Story "The Big Ore"”

Georgy Vladimov's novel *Bol'shaia ruda* (The Big Ore) was first published in the 7th issue of the journal "Novyi mir" in 1961. Its success was enormous, not only among readers, but also among official critics, who defined its genre as a "production novel". Vladimov became a celebrity, and bypassing all the formalities he was accepted into the Union of Soviet Writers a month later. Despite the laudatory reviews, Vladimov himself always felt that it was the most misunderstood of his works: "The *Big Ore* was not accepted but tolerated" (Shnitman-McMillin, 160).

The film "The Big Ore", based on a script by Georgy Vladimirov, was directed by the famous producer Vasily Ordynsky. The lead role was played by the splendid and very popular actor Yevgeny Urbansky, "zhenulka" (his little wife) was played by everyone's favourite Inna Makarova, the film featured music by Mikael Tariverdiev, and songs to words by Nikolai Dobronravov were sung by Maya Kristalinskaya. It is hard to imagine a more vivid constellation. The film was released in 1964, instantly winning the hearts of the audience (Messerer, 151-52). Many professionals believed that this was the best role of Evgeny Urbansky. But Vladimov himself soon wrote: "It's a shame about 'The Big Ore'. Of course, I couldn't help but feel sad because I put a lot of time and effort into it; I wanted it to be a grandiose picture. And somewhere in the material it did seem grandiose, I don't know how it turned out so drab and boring. People watched the material in preparation (the last or penultimate scene) and cried, I'm not lying. But when they watched the whole film, no impression. The divinity has gone, and where it has gone and how it has gone, God only knows" (Shnitman-McMillin, 171).

The plot of the film repeats the content of the story, the most forgotten of Vladimov's books. Viktor Pronyakin, a thirty-year-old driver, arrives at the quarry of the Kursk Magnetic Anomaly, at that time a new 'construction site of communism'. After wandering around the country, he decides to settle on KMA, where a very important excavation was being done, in which he wants to take an active part by showing others the highest class of truck driving. He is ready to work hard and expects that his honest work will provide him and his family with a decent living. The dreams of the then homeless thirty-year-old driver are basic "... a hut with a small allotment, a little fridge, a TV, and some sorts of furniture" (Vladimov, 74).

Pronyakin gets the job, but the production standards for the truck he restored are so abnormally high that it is almost impossible to meet them to receive a full wage. This forces Viktor to use risky driving techniques on a dangerous road, which makes the other drivers very nervous and especially when the autumn rainy season begins. Viktor's energetic nature, his impatience and confidence in his professional skills lead him to decide to drive in the rain, which is forbidden under safety regulations. That's when a serious conflict arises between him and the driver's team.

Suddenly, in a rainstorm, huge deposits of precious ore are discovered in the quarry. In impatient excitement, having persuaded the excavator driver to overload the back of the truck, he drives up a steep clay road. But for a moment he loses control, and the truck together with

its driver plummets from a terrible height into the pit. Pronyakin dies in hospital a few days later.

After his death, a characteristic Soviet frame-up begins, in which Pronyakin is presented as a hero, a model of labour consciousness.

The film begins admirably with a song that has the motives of parting, of the eternal road, of a vague hope and the doom of death. A picture of the sea with ships and barges emerges, an eternal image of ceaseless fickleness. There is nothing similar in the story itself, but the cinematic language of these shots is superb.

Further on, however, something gets thrown off, and the film's narrative shifts to another level. Action is transferred on mine of the Kursk magnetic anomaly. At the very beginning of the novel, Viktor stands above the pit, and the text immediately conjures up a sense of a Moloch, a "fantastic dragon", grinding up human destinies, sending a "menacing warning" to the lonely figure of a man standing above the pit. In the film this meta-realism is lost completely, although the shot of Pronyakin standing above the pit exists.

A. Kotz wrote that Vladimov: "... understood that, in the end, it is work that helps the writer to understand man. And this became for him the discovery of a whole aesthetic continent" (Kotz, 171). Pronyakin longs for real work and a great cause: "I can work as few people can" (Vladimov, 56). I.B. Rodnyanskaya describes Vladimov's character as, «a gifted artist, a master of his craft» (Rodnyanskaya, 399). And this impression remains with the viewer, thanks to the significance of the image created by Yevgeny Urbansky. Otherwise, the spectator is presented with a quite conventional plot: the clash of a group and an individualist, although the usual re-education of the latter does not take place because of Pronyakin's death.

But, as Stepan Rassadin wrote, the beautiful expressive language and symbolic imagery of the story, were not translated into the language of film. The film followed the letter of the text too closely (Rassadin, 5).

The superb acting and strong plot structure ensured the film a box-office success.

But in his prose, the thirty-year-old writer argued quite the opposite: there is no place for exploits in normal human life. The person is born not for feats, but for high-grade life, professional and personal, about which so dreamed Vladimov's hero. In Vladimov's prose, the failure of a system which was unable to provide a normal life for its most important class – the proletariat – was clearly exposed. As A. Gladilin wrote, "The Big Ore was "a requiem for the working class" (Gladilin, 6) . Its hero was doomed.

But this story also reflects the writer's fate: the death in accident of his first friend Gennady Panarin and of his favourite actor, Yevgeny Urbansky, who died in a car crash while filming the next film.

On the 1st of May in Moscow a film "Snegir'" produced by Boris Khlebnikov, based on Vladimov's novel *Three Minutes of Silence* was screened for the first time. Boris Khlebnikov speaking of his film very clearly indicated the necessity of translating beautiful Vladimov's prose into cinematic language. I hope that he succeeded.

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