

Marlen Khutsiev's New Soviet Woman of the Sixties

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In his celebrated 1960s films *I Am Twenty* (*Mne dvadtsat' let*, 1962-65) and *July Rain* (*Iiul'skii dozhd'*, 1966), Marlen Khutsiev vividly presents a new female prototype for the era's cinema. Other films of the 1960s, particularly Kira Muratova's *Brief Encounters* (*Korotkie vstrechi*, 1967), would go further in this cinematic presentation of the new Soviet woman, but Khutsiev establishes a vision of the feminine that merits more attention than it has typically received. *I Am Twenty* (or *Lenin's Guard* [*Zastava Iliycha*], as it was originally titled) goes only part way—through the important, yet never central figure of Anya (Marianna Vertinskaya)—in depicting a new Soviet woman of the 1960s, but it is in *July Rain* and in the film's central heroine Lena (Evgeniia Uralova) that Khutsiev generates a filmic reformulation of the Soviet woman's place and stature within both Soviet society and cinema. Portraying Moscow as a vibrant backdrop to the lives of Lena and the other stylish twenty- and thirty-somethings at the center of his film, Khutsiev uses a filmmaking style inspired by the French New Wave to recast the role of young Soviet women in a contemporary urban environment where men no longer seem to predominate. As Lilya Kaganovsky has noted in her insightful discussion of films by Muratova and Larisa Shepitko, “what is missing from the films of the 1960s in the USSR are the men,” as husbands, fathers, and brothers often go missing, either figuratively or literally.¹ Khutsiev fills this void with a female protagonist unwilling to acquiesce to the Soviet male, whether he be present or indeed absent. At the film's end, in particular, Lena, who has finally resolved a major ambiguity in her life by rejecting a marriage proposal, walks out of a pedestrian tunnel and into the spring air of central Moscow and the Alexandrovsky Gardens by the Kremlin, where Victory Day celebrations have commenced; Lena soon finds herself at a gathering of aging veterans on

¹ Lilya Kaganovsky, “Ways of Seeing: On Kira Muratova's *Brief Encounters* and Larisa Shepitko's *Wings*,” *The Russian Review* (July 2012): 497.

Theater Square by the Bolshoi Theater. Leonid Utesov's rendition of WWII-song *The Road to Berlin* rings out, the veterans embrace, and Lena strolls by, seemingly contemplating her own personal victory but also showing a resolve that implicitly emulates the passion and heroism of those who defended the city and country from the Nazis. As I will contend, it is within this vivid setting that Khutsiev's female protagonist ultimately shines.