

*Moscow Does Not Believe In Tears* is a 1979 melodrama and comedy Soviet film directed by Vladimir Menshov. The stars include Vera Alentova (who played Katerina Tikhomirova) and Aleksey Batalov (who played Gosha). Valentin Chernykh wrote the film and the cinematographer was Igor Slabnevich. In 1980, the film won the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. It was Menshov's second and most critically acclaimed, feature film, his first being 1976's *Practical Joke*.

The film is all about human relations and how the atmosphere of a country in regards to economics and all other facets of a society in which people find themselves living in at any given time affect them. In the case of the film, this time is set in, initially 1958 Moscow and then a more subdued, complex and difficult 1979 Russia. Here we see the aging and development of a specific group of people in relation to the aging and development of their city of Moscow. How the two interact as well as the insular reactions between the specific group of men and women, provide a unique look at universal interaction between any people.

Specifically, the role of women is extremely fascinating and dynamic in the film. The three leading women are Katerina Tikhomirova (played by Vera Alentova), Lyudmila (played by Irina Muravyova) and Antonina (played by Raisa Ryazanova). All three move to Moscow from smaller towns to achieve their dreams. The most important relationship is between Katerina Tikhomirova and Gosha (played by Aleksey Batalov). Gosha represents the man Katerina has been looking for her whole life, and apparently the key that is needed to fulfill her, the missing link in her life that can not be replaced by anything else: success at work, valuable friendships, a healthy daughter, economic stability, etc. Thus, the true moral of the film is that no matter how advanced and

independent a society becomes, no matter how successful both men and women can be on their own, at the end of the day everyone needs a romantic relationship (notwithstanding healthy, strong friendships) in order to be truly happy. The moral can be rightfully interpreted as a conquering of materialism, showing that industrial revolutions and economic boom can never fully replace the importance of the richness of human and familial relations to a fulfilled life.

That being said, the capabilities and power assigned to women increases tenfold between the years 1958 and 1979 in which the film takes place. The lead, Katerina, transitions from a mere poor factory worker to the owner of the factory she once worked at, and this is paralleled by her transformation from an impressionable, naïve and vulnerable young woman to a somewhat hardened, completely self-responsible and in charge businesswoman. This transformation is painted in an extremely positive light because through this materialistic and “on-paper” transformation, Katerina also internally transforms for the better. Though she is not happy yet, she no longer allows herself to be mistreated by cowardly, mean men such as the first she falls in love with and father of her child. This man, Rudolf (played by Yuri Vasilyev), is a TV cameraman who initially dominates Katerina. His wealthy status, dignified appearance, and overall class overwhelm her. She, along with her best friend, Lyudmila, pretends to be wealthy daughters of a prestigious professor, whilst Lyudmila is housesitting at a fancy apartment.

All three women are completely different in personality but want the same things: a stable, successful relationship that gives them the wealth and status in life they seek. Ironically, as the film plays out, we find that the women can only achieve this through working on themselves and not through any man, thus really empowering women: the

film shows that women can only truly make themselves happy in the shallow, material goals they may set for themselves. Relationships between men and women should thus be reserved for spiritual and purely humanistic, pure and loving motives. Thus, the film empowers the role of women by displaying the ideal relationship as being achievable only after a thorough development of one's inner self. There is no relationship that can provide a "short-cut" to the higher things in life. Rather, real relationships can only be built on an equal footing and respect for each other. This is illustrated by all three women's lives.

Beginning with Katerina, her lies to the TV cameraman come back to haunt her. Since she pretends to be wealthy instead of her real self (which is of course, much better): a hardworking, determined factory worker earning her chemistry degree, Rudolf and her's relationship is built on shallow foundations. As soon as her true identity is revealed, Rudolf dumps her, proving that their relationship was built on pillars that don't actually matter (i.e. materialism, class standing). Even though Katerina is pregnant, Rudolf reveals his inner low class by abandoning her anyway since she is "beneath" him in status. This cruelty however, is the impetus in Katerina's beautiful building of her whole life. She then becomes the only one she trusts in building her own destiny. As a single mother, she gains confidence, self-composure and material wealth and success, climbing the ladder to the owner of the factory she once worked at. Of course, only then, after becoming her true self through hard work and independence is she able to have a truly loving relationship with Gosha. Thus, when she says to him that she's been looking for him her whole life, this really means that she has been looking for herself. The two join as complete consummate entities unto themselves, this being the only way to have a truly

strong relationship, free of lies and deceit. In this way, Katerina is shown as a self-empowered woman who made herself and thus was able to embark on a mature, responsible relationship to completely fulfill her already successful life.

The same lesson unfolds itself in the other two lead women, though in markedly different ways. Katerina's best friend, Lyudmila is flirty and extremely ambitious. It is her idea to lie about their identity and invite a bunch of "successful" men over to her housesitting apartment and to woo them, thus easily "earn" her goal of being a wealthy, classy woman. However, this ploy is deceiving to women and illustrated as such: it falls apart at the seams, and each woman learns it is up to her and her only to achieve success, and that a relationship with a man should and is inherently based on something much different and more pure and wholesome. Lyudmila ends up with a successful hockey player, Sergei (played by Aleksandr Fatyushin), who later becomes a hopeless alcoholic. Thus, their roles are switched: initially, Lyudmila relies on him for stability and economic wealth. Later on, Sergei is constantly knocking on her door, asking for money. Thus, Lyudmila becomes empowered on her own, earning financial independence, clearly with no thanks, and rather in spite of, her unfortunate choice of man. The consequence of their relationship shows that its original motives were not wholesome and like the other two women, she learns the hard and only way, that she can only create herself through her own work, not upon relying on a man. This knowledge does well for all characters, making them more compassionate, humanistic people. The men too also evolve for the better: Sergei eventually beats his alcoholism after Lyudmila finally cuts him off, and even Rudolf, the cruel and arrogant cameraman, repents and develops compassion when he is alone throughout his adult life, as a consequence of his cruelty to

Katerina. Thus, the whole film is essentially a series of lessons learned and earned by each character, the result of which instills in them better morals and bigger hearts. Lyudmila's inherent personality never changes; she remains funny, flirty and a go-getter when it comes to men, but she earns her independence nonetheless and learns that relationships must be designated for larger causes than simply material gain (as shown by the consequences of her relationship with Sergei).

The third woman, Antonina (played by Raisa Ryazanova) exemplifies, in many ways, the final characters of the two women, but from the very beginning. She is the only woman who doesn't have to learn a lesson so-to-speak because her initial relationship with her husband, Nikolai (played by Boris Smorchkov) is inherently built on what the film seeks to illustrate as a solid, pure foundation. Nikolai is a farmer and Antonina never pretends to be anything she's not. Antonina is blissfully married with three children by the time Katerina and Lyudmila reach the breaking point of their lives: Lyudmila finally divorces Sergei and Katerina is at her deepest sadness shortly before meeting Gosha. In fact, Nikolai is largely responsible for bringing Gosha and Katerina back together, after searching him out and having a long, albeit drunken, heated conversation with him. Thus, Nikolai is clearly a good, solid guy. Him and Antonina's relationship exists as a model for the other characters, despite the three women's drastically different personalities. Each woman learns the same lesson through personal development and independence.

Born on January 23, 1898, in Riga, Latvia, Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein was an acclaimed Russian director who was an innovator of montage techniques, famously recognized in films like *October* (1928) and *Alexander Nevsky* (1938). Eisenstein worked in theater before directing his first feature, 1925's *Strike*, which introduced film montage

to audiences. His next two works continued the trilogy on the Russian Revolution, and his later films included *Qué Viva Mexico* (1932) and *Alexander Nevsky* (1938).

Eisenstein, who contended with censorship from Joseph Stalin, died on February 11, 1948 in Moscow [Soviet Union], Russia.

Eisenstein's 1925 film *Battleship Potemkin* is by far his most famous, revolutionary and influential film. It was his second feature film. The cinematographer was Eduard Tisse, who also worked on Eisenstein's feature debut, *Strike*. The scriptwriter was Nina Agadzhanova, She began working in film in 1924 and went on to write scripts for several other Soviet films. The film is based on the real mutiny that occurred in 1905, in which a leading rebel soldier was indeed shot and responsible for a large, successful mutiny in which the sailors took over the ship. The people, likewise, did support the mutiny and were strongly suppressed by on-shore soldiers, though the Odessa steps massacre never actually occurred. *Battleship Potemkin* thus presents a dramatized version of the 1905 mutiny, making the film one of the most influential propaganda films of all time.

Building on the ideas of Soviet film theorist Lev Kuleshov, Eisenstein felt that montage operates according to the Marxist view of history as a perpetual conflict in which a force and a counterforce collide to produce an entirely new and greater phenomenon. He compared this process in film editing to "the series of explosions of an internal combustion engine, driving forward its automobile or tractor." The force of the famous scene, "The Odessa Steps" arises when the viewer's mind combines individual, independent shots and forms a new, distinct impression that far outweighs the shots' narrative power by itself. When the film was seen in early 1926, it made Eisenstein world

famous. The movie was ordered up by the Russian revolutionary leadership for the 20th anniversary of the Potemkin uprising, which Lenin had lauded as the first evidence that troops could be counted on to join the proletariat in overthrowing the old order. Ironically however, Joseph Stalin over fears it might incite a riot against his regime eventually banned the film.

*Battleship Potemkin* is chock full of important, symbolic or just fascinating scenes and moments. The very opening features crashing, violent waves, which foreshadow overflowing impotent rage the audience is about to witness. The often rhyming titles lend a poetry to the script and increases the sense of it being an edifying, moralizing complete work, rather than just a film. The powerful scene that incites the crew members to riot, in which they are expected to eat a piece of hanging meat (resembling more a carcass) covered in maggots, provides many symbols. The doctor who investigates the meat clearly lies when he tells the crewmembers that it's perfectly ok. His wealth and status is signified by his eye-glasses, slim, unworked appearance and dignified air. Thus already, we see the wealthy as an opponent in the film, beginning first with the lying doctor, who of course, is supposed to have nothing but the crew members best interest at heart (just like the state itself). Just as the meat is rotten, so is the state and the relationship between captain and crew members. Later on, the crewmembers ax the meat, signifying revolt and rebellion as well as a foreshadowing of more deadly "axing" to come. Further, all the crew members actions of meticulously cleaning cannons and other artillery weapons shows that these are ready to be used and just waiting to be turned against the captain, seeing as the crew members are clearly the ones truly handling the weapons. Countless actions similar to these all add up to create a sense of increasing tension and

foreshadowing of the cohesive collective effort of the crew members as a sort of well organized army, such as the use of hammers, montages of a barrel of missiles (featuring the symmetry of down, passive missiles contrasted with loaded missiles), as well as flag-raising and lowering.

The film has many religious undertones, one of the first of which constitutes the premier climax of the film. After the titles “Give us this day our daily bread” occur on screen, a crewmember smashes his plate in the first visible fit of anger. Thus, religion is futile against violence and no amount of words or lofty phrases can prevent the primitive anger and need for justice in the hearts of these and all workers. These religious tones are painted as attempts to pacify justice and to keep people imprisoned and in line, as opposed to the real, non-corrupted mission of religion. This, of course relates to the entire Communist mode of thought toward religion. Further, the odd priest that occurs throughout the film, attempting to prevent the crew members from becoming violent, is seen as a joke, at best a distracting and annoying insect who needs to be half-mindedly swept away and given no further thought. Further, the frizzy hair of the priest and overall goofy appearance mocks his position and influence. The lack of, so-to-call respect for a generally esteemed profession of a priest shows the real shift in priorities and mind set of a whole group of people during this time in Russian history, a history in which Orthodoxy was so startlingly huge a part.

The mutiny begins shortly after the smashing of the plate scene, marked by a bugle call. The strength and fraternity of the crewmembers is frequently shown by a long view shot of the deck, in which the enormity of the crew is shone in a symmetrically organized, unified fashion. Due to Eisenstein’s vision of revolutionary propaganda,

*Battleship Potemkin* is conceived with avoidance of creating any three-dimensional individuals (even Vakulinchuk is seen largely as a symbol). Instead, masses of men move in unison, as in the many shots looking down at Potemkin's foredeck. The captain comes from below the deck, signifying his truly low place, despite status, and also possibly alluding to the “underworld” or hell itself. It symbolizes that he is not actually in charge of the crew, since he does not reign above and over them but rather is below them. However, the rebel captain, Grigory Vakulinchuk (played by Aleksandr Antonov) stands at the top of the ship, above the crew, showing that he’s the real boss. Lastly, the captain attempts to go back below the ship to his so-to-speak “lair,” when the real rebellion starts but the mutinous sailors, showing that even his fake position no longer can keep him safe, stop him.

Fake foreshadowing enhances the audience’s suspense regarding the outcome of the mutiny. When the captain threatens to hang them all like dogs on the mast, a fantasy montage of hanging bodies on the mast emphasize the real-life possibility of just that happening. By showing the always-possible downfall of the crew, the audience supports them even more and their feats seem even more remarkable considering the way things could have been without their courage. The phrase “like dogs” marks a pattern in the film of meat and treating people like meat. For example, when the crew is captured in a giant net for their disobedience, they resemble a school of helpless fish desperate for air, caught by a couple of uncaring fisherman.

The music really illustrates the chaos of the mutiny, and also highlights the view toward religion. The score, written by Edmund Meisel, changes from major to minor after a shot of the cross. It is relatively calm and evenly paced for the most part, but switches

to intense, fanfare like motives every time the rebels are shown. Drums and brass are highlighted for these sections and the overall tempo of the music increases throughout the film. Tchaikovsky's "1812 Overture" is quoted at the end, signifying patriotic celebration. As well as religion, art is shown as inconsequential to the greater cause of justice for all. This is illustrated by the smashing of the ship's piano and the sheet music on it during the height of the mutiny (a pristine piano was also shown in the beginning of the movie to mark the contrast).

Toward the end of the film, Grigory Vakulinchuk, sadly gets shot in the back of head. This cowardly shot makes Grigory look more like a hero and the shooter even more malicious, immoral and low. As Grigory was the leader of the whole crew and responsible for the success of the mutiny, his death can perhaps be paralleled to Jesus Christ, as if he's replacing Jesus in the modern world, who was killed mercilessly to "save the rest." Further, at the end of the film, the dead man calls out, which alludes to Jesus' resurrection. However, the huge and important difference is that, unlike Jesus, Grigory did not show mercy to his oppressors and enemies. A scene of him sleeping with a burning cigarette, perhaps implying impending carelessness and its deathly consequences also foreshadowed Grigory's death.

The most famous scene is the massacre on the Odessa steps, though, unlike other scenes in the film, this did not occur in any way in reality. Nevertheless, it is the most palpable scene in the film. For starters, the scene is shot with an extremely wide angle, furthering the impression of the sheer number of people who are massacred and the cruelty of the soldiers. Here, for the first time we see cruelty towards women and children instead of only sailors on the battleship. This of course, heightens the emotional impact.

We see poor, crippled and rich and dignified people next to each other celebrating at the end of the movie as well as being slaughtered on the Odessa steps, showing a newfound equality among classes. The shot of the long stairs in which so many steps are visible, shows the slowness in escaping the soldiers and the helplessness of the people, also heightened by people tripping and falling everywhere. Army men even shoot children and people step right on top of the dead bodies, showing a passivity to violence in both the soldiers and people in such dire times. A powerful shot occurs when a woman carries her dead child up stairs, walking over dead bodies. A confrontation then ensues between the mother with her dead child and soldiers, who proceed to shoot her. Importantly, the soldiers' faces are never shown, only their feet, guns and shadows, showing their detachment from human individuality and therefore, compassion. The people of Odessa, too, are seen as a mass composed of many briefly glimpsed but barely seen faces. Thus, there is almost no personal drama to outweigh the bigger, important political drama.

At the end of the film, we see the first color: red. It is on the raised flag, symbolizing victory and patriotic sentiments. The shot of small sailboats at the end also symbolizes individual to mass freedom and independence from any overbearing rule. The missiles go down at the conclusion, symbolizing brotherhood and communistic united ideals unite. Lastly, a shot of the ocean occurs just as in the beginning, but this time the sea is very peaceful, foreshadowing prosperity and calm to come instead of the violent turbulence it foreshadowed in the beginning.

Eisenstein's montage experiment was a mixed success. The film failed to attract a mass audience, which disappointed Eisenstein. However, it was released in a number of international venues, where audiences reacted very positively. In both the Soviet Union

and overseas, the film was shocking to audiences, more so for its intense, graphic violence for the time over its political statements. The film holds up as one of, if not the best, propaganda films of all time for its ability to influence political ideas through emotional responses achieved via Eisenstein's pioneering techniques of montage and distinct narrative.