CHAPTER 11

"The Soviet Abroad (That We Lost)": The Fate of Vasilii Aksenov's Cult Novel *A Starry Ticket* on Paper and on Screen

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One piece of information with which we like to startle our students when teaching film and adaptation theory is that at least half of all films produced worldwide can trace their origin to some literary text. Statistically, one out of two movies we watch is not a "film," but a "book-to-film adaptation."[1] Usually, we like to add another piece of information that is equally revealing, namely that quite often successful and popular films are based on mediocre and forgotten novels. How many people are aware of the fact that it was a short story by Daphne du Maurier (1952) that inspired Alfred Hitchcock to make his classic *The Birds* (1963)? How many Western viewers of Andrei Tarkovskii's *Stalker* (1979) are familiar with the sci-fi novel by the Strugatskii brothers on which it is based?[2]

If the one-out-of-two-films argument is intended to trigger preconceived notions about the superiority of literature, the film-might-be-better-than-the-book argument has the opposite function: It questions the primacy of literature and, by implication, the "derivative" nature of film adaptions. Is the difference between the two really that substantial, especially where the perception of the viewer is concerned? Is not the lasting popularity of films based on forgotten novels evidence of their artistic self-sufficiency and independence from their source texts?

Posing these questions in such general terms may be a legitimate way of starting a theoretical discussion in class, but what about the specific historical context in which film adaptations are produced and then received? Some novels (or plays for that matter) may initially enjoy considerable success and then be eclipsed by their screen versions. In Russian cinema, the classic example is

The Cranes Are Flying (1957), based on Viktor Rozov's moderately successful play *Forever Alive* (1956), which earned such international accolades that the source text was almost entirely forgotten. A forgotten text, however, can also be "resurrected" when it is successfully adapted for the screen. This is what happened to Fridrikh Gorenshtein's novel *Expiation* (1967) when Aleksandr Proshkin used it for his critically acclaimed 2012 film, thereby reintroducing to a wider audience a writer who had been known only among a small circle of samizdat specialists.[3]

What these examples tell us is that the presence of a book lurking behind a film adaptation is perceived at various times in varying degrees of intensity and that it can even be completely annulled. Thirty- or forty-year-old film adaptations showing contemporary life "back then" may be valued by subsequent generations of viewers as historical documents, rather than as faithful or creative screen versions of some literary original. Indeed, as I hope to show in this chapter, post-Soviet viewers of the 1962 film *My Younger Brother*, an adaptation of Vasilii Aksenov's cult novel *A Starry Ticket* (1961),[4] appear to be less interested in discussing the differences between the hypertext and the original than in vicariously experiencing "the time when my parents were young," as one viewer put it.[5] Owing to the richness of its audio-visual possibilities, film is arguably better equipped than literature to facilitate such an experience offering not only visual, but verbal and aural information as well.[6] The setting of *My Younger Brother* (Estonia, then still a part of the Soviet Union), the main actors (stars at a later stage of their careers, but making their debut in this film), and the lavish use of diegetic and non-diegetic music add to the film's overall impression of a "window to the past," a snapshot of the "Soviet abroad that we lost."[7] While still looking at a book-to-film adaptation, today's Russian viewers seem to experience *My Younger Brother* primarily as a crossing of both temporal and national borders and less as an engagement with Aksenov's novel.

In what follows, I will corroborate the above thesis, amongst others, by scrutinizing viewer reactions on kino-teatr.ru, a Russian cinephilic website where viewers can not only download films, but also discuss them, and exchange anecdotes, facts, and opinions, thus "creating and sustaining cinema/cultural memory."[8] In order to do so, however, I must begin by examining the production history of *My Younger Brother*, in particular the ideologically motivated changes that Aksenov (one of the co-authors of the screenplay) was forced to accept. Here we touch on an aspect of film adaptation that, to my knowledge, adaptation theory has not really addressed, focusing its attention mostly on Western film and the technicalities of film adaptation. That overlooked aspect is the ideological vigilance of the Soviet state and its power to oversee and interfere with the very process of film adaptation. *My Younger Brother* presents itself as a rewarding case study, allowing us to see how state officials

could exercise "damage control" by having a controversial novel turned into a relatively harmless film and how these acts of ideological fine-tuning mostly go unnoticed or are ignored by post-Soviet viewers.

A STARRY TICKET AND THE SOVIET YOUTH NOVEL

Beginning in the mid-1950s and continuing into the early 1960s, Soviet literature saw the emergence of the so-called "youth novel." To define it as an entirely new genre would be an overstatement since it continued to rely on the master plot of socialist realism, including such motifs as the rite of passage (by which the hero passes from a state of "spontaneity" to one of "consciousness") and the supporting figure of the mentor who provides the hero with moral guidance.[9] The youth novel is different from "classical" socialist realism, however, in that it features a very young protagonist (usually a high school graduate) and that the movement of the plot, in contrast to the hackneyed stories of high Stalinism, is "centrifugal"; the hero, a born Muscovite or Leningrader, decides to leave the capital and test himself by seeking employment at some construction site, usually in Siberia. Even if he does not settle permanently in his new environment (which he often does), but decides to return to Moscow or Leningrad and continue his education, the reader is left in no doubt that the hero has significantly matured and will soon become a worthy member of Soviet society.

Although the rise of the youth novel and youth theater during the Thaw has received its share of scholarly attention, it is often overlooked that a significant number of the most popular youth texts were swiftly adapted for the screen. Viktor Rozov's play *Good Luck* (1954), one of the biggest successes on stage in the 1950s and one of the earliest texts to introduce the hero's flight from the center, was made into a film only two years after it premiered in the Central Children's Theater.[10] The screen version of Aksenov's debut novel *Colleagues* was released in December 1962, less than three years after its initial publication. Preparations for the shooting of *My Younger Brother* began even before the novel was published in the literary journal *Youth* in the summer of 1961. If the production of film adaptations during the immediate post-Stalin years was dominated by early Soviet literature, then by the turn of the decade filmmakers increasingly turned to contemporary texts not only to capitalize on their success, but also sometimes to "correct" the ideological flaws of the hypotext.[11] Not surprisingly, the practice of removing moral ambiguities was especially widespread in late Stalinism, but it was also adhered to during the most liberal spells of the Thaw.

Owing to the complexities of the production process, film was even more vulnerable to ideological interference than literature. If the publication of a

novel could depend on the judgment of three or four individuals (including the authoritative voices of such chief editors as Valentin Kataev or Aleksandr Tvardovskii), the release of a film required the approval of a plethora of officials and organizations ranging from the studio director to the Secretary of the Komsomol, from the Cultural Section of the Central Committee to the KGB, and from the Minister of Culture to the Party leader himself.[12] In *A Theory of Adaptation* Linda Hutcheon poses the reasonable question: What exactly is adapted in a film adaptation and how is it done?[13] In the context of Soviet film we may want to add: What officials and organizations had a say in the process? The genre of the film adaptation put the authorities in a position to control the "damage" done by the publication of recent, controversial novels. This is true of the Thaw in general with its unstable political climate and its many inconsistent cultural policies; it is particularly true in the case of *A Starry Ticket/ My Younger Brother*, the publication of which received a warm welcome from younger readers, but also provoked fierce criticism from high-ranking party officials, literary critics, and high school teachers.

A Starry Ticket tells the story of three high school graduates from Moscow who, much to the dismay of their parents, decide not to prepare for next year's entrance exams, but to take a well-deserved vacation in the city of Tallinn instead. Joining them at the last moment is their peer and aspiring actress Galia who has a crush on the central character of the trio, Dima Denisov. Boisterous and used to male friendships, Dima initially has trouble expressing his feelings for her, insisting provocatively that, like his friends, love should be "free." According to Alik Kramer, the intellectual of the group, the three young friends "only recognize the satisfaction of sexual requirements."[14]

Made at the beginning of the story, statements like these are a clear reminder that the main characters are still immature and will have to change in order to become conscious Soviet citizens. Aksenov has Dima and his friends go through various trials that seem conducive to their maturation: shady offers from a black marketeer (which the trio resists), poker games gone wrong, and, worst of all, Galia's decision to leave Dima for an aging playwright. Eventually, the financial situation of the young tourists becomes so desperate that they must find jobs at a collective fishing farm, the final step, it would seem, toward acquiring "consciousness." For two of the three friends, the outcome of this confrontation with hard work follows established patterns. A would-be writer, Alik eventually comes to recognize the lacunae in his knowledge of Russian literature. He has not even read *Anna Karenina* and is now prepared to continue his education. Basketball player Iurii, the third member of the trio, wants to settle down in Tallinn, work as an apprentice at the Volta factory, and marry the local girl with whom he has fallen in love. Even Galia, who returns to Dima in the closing chapters, appears to be chastened by the events. She no longer hopes for a flying start to her acting career, which the aging playwright

could have helped her to achieve, but seems prepared to enroll modestly in the Leningrad school of acting. Only Dima still has not found a clear goal in life. Echoing the official rhetoric of Soviet ideology, in the very last chapter he ironically concludes: "*Dmitrii Denisov plans his life by chance* … What a fine subject that would make for a Komsomol debate."[15]

Katerina Clark discusses *A Starry Ticket* on an equal footing with Anatolii Kuznetsov's 1957 novel *The Continuation of a Legend*, the youth novel's "official progenitor," she contends.[16] More recently, however, Aleksandr Prokhorov has argued that Aksenov's novel should not be seen as an attack on the epic wholeness of Stalinist literature, but rather as an ironic engagement with the very genre of the youth novel.[17] It is telling, for example, that Dima and his friends poke fun at the symbols of Thaw culture and do not go to Siberia to work, but to Estonia, the most Western republic of the Soviet Union, simply to have a good time.[18]

Knowing how hostile the relations between Aksenov and the authorities would eventually become, we may be tempted to read too much irony into a novel that was completed in early 1961, more than a year before the Communist Party began its campaign to bring artists and writers more closely to heel.[19] But irony certainly plays a role in the depiction of the story's two potential mentor figures: the fisherman Igor Baulin, Dima's captain at the kolkhoz, and Dima's older brother Viktor, a promising young scientist. Igor possesses all the physical characteristics of the ideal Stalinist hero ("a man of cast-iron with steel jaw and armored concrete logic"[20]), but it is Dima who suggests—and who succeeds in persuading the crew—to refrain from drinking vodka at sea. If they stay completely sober, they may win the labor contest of the kolkhoz and be rewarded for it by going out on a big trawler on the Atlantic. Thus Igor and Dima temporarily swap roles. The subordinate tells his superior what to do and the superior complies.

Similarly, Dima's older brother, the ideal son and conformist Viktor, tries to talk him out of traveling to Estonia, advising him to channel his youthful energy in a more productive direction. As befitting a seventeen-year-old, Dima reacts by ridiculing his brother's bourgeois lifestyle and his reluctance to take any risks in life. But the irony of this situation is that it is precisely that which Viktor ends up doing. His personal dilemma—play it safe by defending his "old-school" dissertation or antagonize his institute by going public with his own ground-breaking experiments—is finally resolved in favor of the more rebellious option. Like Dima, whose independence he admires, Viktor decides to take a "first slippery step aside, off that straight main road prepared for me."[21] At the end of his report to the Science Council, the dramatic climax in Viktor's story, he demonstrates a defiance that we would more readily associate with Dima. Addressing the declared enemies of his recent work, he exclaims: "Anything new is a risk. But what of that? If we never risk anything, what will

come of the work we are doing?"[22] What this means for Viktor's career remains obscure. He tragically and somewhat mysteriously dies in an airplane crash while on duty and yet here again we see that the distribution of the roles of mentor and disciple are reversed.

The failure of the mentor figures in *A Starry Ticket* is indicative of what is arguably the novel's main theme: the estrangement between generations in terms of cultural preferences and social practices. Dima and his friends mock the values of their parents and teachers by wearing jeans, listening to jazz and rock music, and by rejecting the strict labor ethos that society imposes on them. Viktor, who is ten years older, belongs to a different generation (at least in Dima's perception), but as a teenager he too listened to boogie-woogie on X-ray film. Significantly, the generational conflict that divides his institute is not only about scholarly issues: Viktor's opponents also criticize him for once bringing a "painted-up hussy" to a party and "dancing the rock-'n'-roll with her."[23] Most importantly, however, the character that could serve as Viktor's mentor, his immediate supervisor at the institute, does his pupil a disservice. He first supplies him with an unimaginative hypothesis for his dissertation and then advises him to go ahead with the defense anyway so as to secure a position at the institute. Encouraging careerism over scientific integrity, Viktor's supervisor is anything but a proper mentor. Once again, the novel appears to dispute the traditional role of the older generation as moral leader of the young.

Although some of the irony in Aksenov's novel may have been lost on its readers, for conservative critics there was plenty about which to feel offended. *A Starry Ticket* is the first Soviet novel in which youth is represented as speaking a language of its own, a vocabulary of slang words or "argotisms" incomprehensible to the older generation and therefore conducive to the creation of youth identity. The suggestion that Soviet youth, or at least a substantial part of it, talked like Dima and his friends was unacceptable to language purists who reacted by arguing that the characters were not representative of Soviet youth in general and that, consequently, there was no need to write about them; or that if Soviet youth did use slang, it had no place in high literature. Less conservative readers admitted that the characters were drawn from life, including their slang and infatuation with Western music, but they questioned Aksenov's eagerness to immortalize them in literature. The fact that Aksenov had devoted an entire novel to these youngsters raised the suspicion that the author approved of their walk of life and wanted to hold them up as a model for imitation.

Even more alarming than the use of youth vernacular in the novel was the very idea of a generational divide running through Soviet society. Although this would become a major issue only after the release of Marlen Khutsiev's film *I Am Twenty* in 1964 (also a film about three young Muscovites),[24] *A Starry Ticket* did significant groundwork, so to speak, by portraying parents

and children as living in different worlds, but without necessarily condemning that situation. Dima's claim to autonomy is presented as quite legitimate, and the moral authority of his parents as practically non-existent. Both at readers' conferences and at the editorial office of *Russian Writer*, which was planning to publish the novel as a separate book edition, Aksenov was repeatedly criticized for depicting the members of the older generation as rude and primitive, while idolizing the waywardness of the young.

The novel's most disturbing aspect, however, was the lack of personal development in the main character, who fails to become the politically conscious and socially integrated individual that socialist realism liked to showcase. Even if it is undeniable that Dima has matured as a result of his experiences in Estonia, at the end of the novel he is as clueless about his future as he was at the beginning. When, two days after Viktor's funeral, Dima pays a visit to his old, already half-demolished apartment building, he discovers that the starry patch of sky that Viktor liked to gaze at from the window seat of his room resembles a punched railway ticket, a "starry ticket." Dima ponders the deeper significance of staring at the view his brother loved so much and concludes that Viktor's "starry ticket" is now his (a cliché of the Soviet novel: The mentor dies, but leaves a sign for the hero who will continue his work).[25] This potentially solemn moment fails to instill in Dima the optimism and sense of direction with which the hero of the youth novel is usually rewarded. The very last sentence of the novel ("But to what destination would that ticket take me?") especially infuriated the critics, unpleasantly reminding them of Holden Caulfield, the teenage narrator and main character of *The Catcher in the Rye*, which had been published in the Soviet Union a year earlier. That American society was producing cynical good-for-nothings was only natural given the political system, but such a character was incompatible with Soviet reality, even if Aksenov was suggesting the opposite. As Evgeniia Levakovskaia, one of the editors of *Russian Writer*, put it in her in-house review in February 1965:

> Salinger's hero, also a young lad, is plunged into despair by the reality that surrounds him, but Salinger shows us the immediate events that lead his hero to this state. In the biography of Dima Denisov we are not presented with any such events and yet he constantly grumbles at everything.[26]

FROM HYPOTEXT TO HYPERTEXT

What options did the makers of the screen version, including Aksenov himself, have to preserve the spirit of the hypotext, while simultaneously preventing the myth of the big Soviet family from disintegrating altogether? How could

they create a hero that was rough around the edges, youthfully rebellious, but not in a threatening manner? Not surprisingly, these options turned out to be very limited. In a 1993 interview, Aksenov stated that the Central Committee of Komsomol demanded that the hypertext be considerably different from the hypotext; if not, it would block its release. Such was the pressure on Aksenov—from Komsomol and from Nikita Khrushchev personally—that he publicly recanted, admitting that he had not succeeded yet in creating the positive hero and role model that his readers supposedly asked for.[27] An obligatory exercise in self-criticism that today seems anything but convincing, the recantation in *Truth* testifies to how little leeway the filmmakers had when they turned to adapting *A Starry Ticket* for the screen.

As Julian Graffy has shown, the generational conflict that is so crucial in the novel is successfully removed in the film by presenting the youthful rebellion of Dima and his friends as a natural stage in their maturation.[28] Of crucial importance here are the characters of Igor and Viktor who take on the role of understanding adults and who, I would add, can influence the young, but cannot be influenced by them. In an invented scene toward the end of the film, Captain Igor Baulin praises the group for having "worked quite well" on the fishing farm, a compliment suggesting that they have developed from simple "phrasemongers" into real workers. Predictably, the episode in which Dima persuades Igor not to drink vodka was omitted in the film.

My Younger Brother does not simply smooth out the differences between the teenagers and the more mature twenty-somethings Igor and Viktor; it almost completely removes the older generation. Galia's mother almost violently wiping lipstick off her daughter's mouth, Iurii's father repeating several times that "we have used the rod too little, comrades," and finally, Dima's mother bemoaning the cruelty of children—all these reactions of the parents did not make it into the film. As a result, the group's stay in Tallinn looks more like a poorly planned, but essentially harmless vacation, than an attempt by teenagers to escape the stifling control of their parents. The only scene in the film in which generations do seem to clash is also substantially altered so as to dissociate Dima and his friends from "vulgar" Western culture. If in the novel Dima and Galia actually dance to rock 'n' roll music in the courtyard of the apartment building and Dima mocks one of the older tenants by inviting her to dance, then in the film this scene is reduced to a neighbors' quarrel over noise pollution that the trio merely happens to be witnessing.

Graffy has observed that the film's most significant departure from the hypotext lies in the reduction of Viktor's role.[29] In the novel, he is as important as Dima, and they take turns narrating the story. By and large, this structure is preserved in the film: The narration in the first person by either Dima or Viktor is simply transposed by adding a voice-over. But if the novel lets us in on Viktor's personal and professional doubts—whether he should settle

down and marry his girlfriend, how he should respond to Dima's scorn or the schemers at work—the cinematic hypertext marginalizes him to such an extent that these questions become irrelevant. He is simply Dima's older, more experienced brother. In the novel, Viktor's death is all the more shocking because Dima still feels ill-prepared for life (a point to which I will return); in the film, Viktor's death signals that he has fulfilled his function as mentor and that Dima will now take the next step on his path to maturity.

For Aksenov, the decision to reduce Viktor to a secondary character and turn him into a "function" of Dima's story must have been hard to swallow. At a readers' conference in September 1961, he had shown himself to be slightly annoyed at discovering that the discussion centered almost completely on Dima, whereas the character of Viktor was hardly brought up at all. The two brothers were equally important in the novel, Aksenov insisted, the influence between the two generations they represent being mutual: "No matter how strange it may seem, but it appears to me that the generation of 17-year-olds exerts a significant influence on us."[30] As we have seen, the ironical reversal of the mentor–pupil relationship is indeed one of the novel's more surprising aspects and one that was deemed unacceptable in the hypertext.

Once it was decided that the film would revolve around Dima and his friends, the main challenge was to deal with the hero's persistent lack of purpose in his life. Changing the title from *A Starry Ticket* to *My Younger Brother* seemed justified in light of Dima's central role, but it also removed the notion of a destination not yet reached. To further neutralize the inconclusiveness of the novel, the filmmakers also drastically changed the sequence of events. Dima's half-ironic words that he still has not worked out a "program for life," addressed to Viktor in the penultimate chapter of the novel, are moved considerably forward in the hypertext so as to set up a contrast between his immature behavior before his departure from Moscow and his more serious attitude toward life after his return. Thus, the trip to Tallinn becomes a logical step in a search for personal self-fulfillment.

Enhancing the goal-oriented direction of the plot even further is the removal of the very last sentence of the novel ("But to what destination would that ticket take me?"). Although the film too remains silent on exactly what Dima is going to do with his life, the closing shot makes it clear that he shares his friends' healthy optimism and looks at life more confidently than ever before. We see Dima, Alik, Iurii, and Galia slowly moving away from the rubble of the old apartment building in the direction of a construction site with new buildings and cranes. The shot shows the four friends walking from the bottom corner on the left of the screen to the top corner on the right so that they seem to be moving upward, presumably to some "higher goal." By using immediately recognizable images of progress and social renewal, the film replaces the ambiguous conclusion of the novel with a more optimistic open ending.

Finally, the urge to both simplify and sanitize *A Starry Ticket* manifested itself in the reduction of those dialogues that contained too much youth slang. At the readers' conference mentioned earlier, Aksenov had defended its functionality, claiming that the story would be unconvincing if Dima and his friends spoke standard Russian. Young readers present at the conference supported him, expressing their admiration for the novel and emphasizing that it was precisely the language that made them recognize it as a work of art "about us." According to one young reader, "*A Starry Ticket* is written in a truthful and true-to-life manner. And it's written in a language you will encounter in our milieu at every corner. (…) The majority of our peers support this work."[31] "From guys of my age I have heard only positive things about it (*applause*)."[32] Probably for this reason, the officials (or Aksenov's co-authors of the scenario) deemed it necessary to intervene; youth slang, especially when it was directed at the characters' parents, was largely banned from the film. *Kon'* (literally "horse") as a derogative term for father and *khata* for apartment were banned, as was the distinctly *stiliagi*-like (or hipster-like) expression *chuvikha* ("girl," or rather "bird"); *molotok* (a pun on the generally acceptable *molodets*, "well done") and *derzhi khvost pistoletom* ("don't lose heart") were preserved.

Considering all these excisions and adjustments, how successful was *My Younger Brother*? With twenty-three million tickets sold, its performance at the box office was not impressive; it certainly did worse than the screen version of Aksenov's debut novel *Colleagues*, which sold over thirty-five million tickets. On the other hand, these figures tell us little about how the film was received by those viewers who actually went to see it. It is possible that, because *My Younger Brother* was based on a controversial novel, it received a considerably lower rating, and consequently, was less widely distributed. Kristin Roth-Ey points out that limiting distribution practically guaranteed small audiences and that the authorities employed this strategy throughout the post-war period.[33] Possibly, this was also the case with *My Younger Brother*.

Limiting ourselves for the moment to the reactions of officials and critics, we observe that these professionals were usually highly outspoken, and in most cases, negative. Graffy adduces two diametrically opposed reactions, one from *Art of Cinema* critic Vera Shitova who thought that the film was far more naive and "good-natured" than the novel, and one from two conservative critics of *Our Contemporary* who rejected the film on the grounds that, in their opinion, the characters had preserved their irresponsibility.[34] The critic of *Soviet Screen* also considered *My Younger Brother* a failure as it offered only visual "illustrations of the novel," but no real insight into the characters' inner lives. Oleg Dal', who played Alik, was nonetheless complimented on his performance, as was cameraman Anatolii Petritskii.[35] In *Soviet Culture*, critic Vadim Sokolov came to a similar verdict. Claiming to be uninterested in the film *as* an adaptation, he concluded that the makers had not succeeded in showing what makes

the characters tick. As a tool to explain and understand contemporary Soviet society, *My Younger Brother* was anything but a success.[36]

Perhaps the only critic to like the film better than the novel was writer Lev Kassil', author of numerous books for children and adolescents, and an outspoken critic of *stiliachestvo* (or hipster culture) and "bad taste" on the pages of *Youth*.[37] Although Kassil' also would have preferred to see Viktor being allocated more screen time, he complimented the makers for ignoring the "stiliagi [hipster] lexicon" and for explicitly passing judgment on such "deviations in language and behavior." Particularly the phrase "We dread banalities and therefore we are afraid of simplicity," Kassil' argued, was quite an improvement. Absent in the original, "this very profound, wise and accurate thought provides the key to a correct understanding of this work" (i.e., *A Starry Ticket*). Kassil' also had no doubt that Dima fully understood the significance of Viktor's starry ticket being bequeathed to him as he was now aware of the responsibility resting on the shoulders of his generation.[38] Published in *Truth* and expressing the Party line, the review by Kassil' was soon promoted as the only correct interpretation of the film. At a meeting between young writers and the Ideological Commission of the Central Committee in December 1962, Committee Chairman Leonid Ilichev praised Aksenov for having put the criticism of *A Starry Ticket* to good use by adding a few "specifications and corrections" to the film. To contradict those writers and critics who continued to favor the book over the film, Ilichev explicitly referred to the review by Kassil' in *Truth* in which the main characters were given "a more proper assessment."[39]

Understandably, Aksenov himself was disappointed, especially because he felt that he had let the audience down. In his own words, readers were shocked at the "outrage committed against our novel."[40] Determined not to make any further compromises, Aksenov then refused to rewrite the novel for *Soviet Writer*, the publishing house with which he had signed a contract for a separate book edition in July 1962. Over the course of three years, he missed several deadlines and when he finally submitted the manuscript in January 1965, the publisher received only one copy instead of the two to which he was entitled, which delayed the reviewing and editing process even further. At this point, *Soviet Writer* even threatened to cancel the contract. It is unknown if Aksenov eventually complied and sent a second copy, but the in-house reviews written as late as 1965 and 1967 reveal that the author had made no substantial changes to enhance the novel's political reliability. On the contrary, growing more peevish as the negotiations dragged on, Aksenov even managed to squeeze in a reference to the infamous exhibition of abstract art at the Manege exhibition hall that took place in December 1962, more than a year and a half after the publication of *A Starry Ticket* in *Youth*.[41] What ensued was a stalemate: The editors demanded that Aksenov rework

the novel; Aksenov stubbornly refused. This situation lasted until 1970 when the entire manuscript was sent back to the author. In Russia, *A Starry Ticket* would never be published as a separate edition until the breakup of the Soviet Union.

MY YOUNGER BROTHER FIFTY YEARS ON

In the previous section, I concentrated on the published reactions to the film, positive or negative, suggesting that they might not have entirely coincided with the full spectrum of possible responses from ordinary viewers. Was *My Younger Brother* really a failure, as most of Aksenov's supporters seem to have claimed, or was it an improvement, as Lev Kassil' wanted his readers to believe? Were the admirers of *A Starry Ticket* really that outraged when they saw its adaptation for the screen? According to Aksenov, they were, but he was looking back from a distance of thirty years when he made this comment, and the reaction he registered may not have been characteristic of the audience in general.

Though it is impossible to reconstruct the film's reception by ordinary viewers when it was released, thanks to the discussion lists now available on the Internet, at least some first-hand impressions can be accessed. While those viewers who were genuinely disappointed by *My Younger Brother* in the early 1960s may not want to discuss the film, the variegated reactions that were posted by other early viewers on kino-teatr.ru suggest that the general reception was more positive than Aksenov remembered it to be. One "vladimir grechko" remembers reading *A Starry Ticket* in 1961 when he was still a high school student. Even if he did perceive the cinematic hypertext as "something secondary," he still liked it: "It was impossible not to like it by definition."[42] Another list member writing under the alias "SneP" admits having been "too young" to understand what the film was about when he saw it at the age of ten in 1962, but "[the music by Mikael Tariverdiev] moved me so much that I went to see the film again the very next day."[43] Five months later, SneP posted a more forthright reaction in which he stated that the hypertext's release in 1962 "was a real event." "Perhaps this was the first time (Soviet) youth was shown as it really was and not as the ideologues wanted to see it."[44]

Of course, it is ironic that the hypertext could be perceived (or is now remembered) as *not* complying with the ideological demands of Party officials, considering that men such as Ilichev and Kassil' favored the adaptation over the hypotext. But SneP's comment is also interesting for another reason: It shows that the film has come to share the subversive aura of the novel and is no longer perceived as a bleak adaptation of it. For Russian viewers watching the film today, *My Younger Brother* is a way of engaging with or reliving the Soviet

past, a sensation that is fueled as much by Tariverdiev's extraordinary music as by black-and-white images of a former Soviet republic. Characteristically, most comments do not mention the novel at all, centering instead on the moods and memories that the hypertext triggers: "Nice film, nice … reflecting the calm, post-war realities of the Khrushchev area" (Zhravlik);[45] "The film is absolutely not boring. In the 1960s it aroused an inexplicable subconscious bright sadness. Now it's nostalgia for those times" (Starikov Evgenii);[46] "Nostalgia for those times when we weren't afraid to live. As a child you could travel somewhere with the greatest of ease. You could land a job, the union did not leave youth to your own devices" (Irina K.);[47] "My favorite film of the 1960s. After watching it you feel wings growing on your back and you want to run, no, fly somewhere and to hum Tariverdiev's beautiful melody" (Tori).[48] Although a few members of the discussion list compare the film with the novel and are inclined to view the latter as "more honest, more truthful," they claim they can still value the hypertext as an independent work of cinematographic art (Evgenii Geindrikh).[49]

If the elated comments quoted above give the impression that *My Younger Brother* appeals mainly to "older" viewers with active memories of the early 1960s, then quite a few admirers explicitly identify themselves as being born substantially later. "This is not only a film for the young generation of the 1960s," a certain Oksana comments. "I watched it when I was seventeen (at the end of the 1990s)."[50] Sergei Dement'ev from Moscow, who was born in 1984, regrets having missed that "wonderful time," but it did not prevent him from "literally falling in love with this film as an adolescent."[51] For Evgenii Geindrikh, one of the most prolific commentators on the discussion list, Dement'ev's year of birth is an unpleasant reminder of his own advanced age: "I read your reaction, Serezha, and I immediately felt 'ancient.' As a matter of fact, although I'm older than you are, I didn't see that blessed time either (I was born in 1967)."[52]

The recognition that a once trendy film can also appeal to later generations is not unusual, of course. Browsing the discussion on *Walking the Streets of Moscow*, another youth film of the Thaw period, we find very similar comments that ooze nostalgia and favorably juxtapose the film to post-Soviet cinema. In this respect, Sudha Rajagopalan is absolutely right when she states that the site kino-teatr.ru provides the "tools to contribute to collective memory of old cinema."[53] What is remarkable in the case of *My Younger Brother*, though, is that its link with its hypotext has become much weaker over the years so that it is no longer perceived as an adaptation. The beautiful shots of Tallinn's medieval town, Estonian beaches, and nightlife show a world from which Russian viewers are now separated by temporal and national borders. It is not the novel, but the assumed historical reality of the early 1960s that provides the framework for judging the hypertext.

The question of whether *My Younger Brother* is true to the spirit of *A Starry Ticket* has been replaced by another one: Is the film historically accurate? To Evgenii Geindrikh, it apparently is. He thought Dima and Galia were very similar to his parents "both in age and in their way of thinking."[54] The ensuing argument with a certain "ecva," who claimed that the film gave a distorted picture of life in the 1960s and that Aksenov "had made it all up,"[55] did not so much address the issue of fidelity as that of realism. Did Soviet youth really live it up in the early 1960s like Dima and his friends, or was this the privilege of a happy few? This question, which occupied critics and Komsomol officials fifty years ago, is still relevant today, only now it is the film rather than the novel that is seen as containing the answer.

CONCLUSION

On reflection, the adaptation of *A Starry Ticket* resulted in the crossing of both temporal and spatial borders. In 1962, *My Younger Brother* was negatively impacted by the ever-changing political demands of the Soviet government. Elements of the hypotext, deemed politically acceptable at one moment during Krushchev's Thaw, were perceived as regrettable sometime after the refreeze. As for so many Soviet writers of the Thaw period, the constant vacillation between liberal and conservative cultural agendas within the Soviet government made the creative works of Aksenov constantly available for reevaluation. The borders between acceptable and unacceptable cultural and political positions were in a permanent state of flux. By the late 1980s and certainly after the break-up of the Soviet Union, the political correctness of these works became less of an issue for discussion. Today, they are perceived as historical artifacts of a brief moment in Russian history—representative of the Thaw or, in particular, of temporal and spatial markers of the 1960s. The final point may be that *My Younger Brother* is just that, an invitation to take a journey through space and time, for students and film lovers to cross boundaries in order to relive a youth that no longer exists.

NOTES

1. Linda Hutcheon adduces even more impressive evidence. According to 1992 statistics, 85 percent of all Oscar-winning Best Pictures are adaptations. Hutcheon with O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 4.
2. Arkadii and Boris Strugatskii, *Roadside Picnic*. The novel was published in 1971.
3. For a discussion of Proshkin's film adaptation, see Boele, "Aleksandr Proshkin."
4. *My Younger Brother*, directed by Aleksandr Zarkhi, premiered on August 20, 1962. <http://www.kino-teatr.ru/kino/movie/sov/3960/annot/> (last accessed November 25, 2013).

5. <http://kino-teatr.ru/kino/movie/sov/3960/forum/print/>, no. 51 (last accessed March 3, 2014). For the sake of convenience, I give the link to the print version (*versiia dlia pechati*) of this discussion list. This allows one to read all the reactions on one page instead of having to visit the electronic version on various pages. All reactions were checked for the last time on March 3, 2014.
6. McFarlane, *Novel to Film*, 26; Leitch, "Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory," 153–4.
7. "The Soviet abroad that we lost" is a term of my own invention combining the title of Stanislav Govorukhin's highly tendentious 1992 documentary *The Russia That We Lost* and the expression the "Soviet abroad" that designated Estonia when it was still a part of the Soviet Union. For a discussion of Estonia as a popular destination for Soviet tourists, see Anne Gorsuch's study *All This Is Your World*, 50–77.
8. Rajagopalan, "Kino-teatr.ru: contemporary cinephiles at work," 81.
9. Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 226–8.
10. For a discussion of Rozov's incredible success in the mid-1950s, see Manon van de Water, *Moscow Theatres for Young People*. The screen version of *Good Luck* premiered in February 1957 (directed by Georgii Natanson and Anatolii Efros).
11. Hutchings and Venitski, "Introduction, The *ekranizatsiia* in Russian Culture," 10.
12. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 30–2.
13. Hutcheon with O'Flynn, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 9–10.
14. Aksenov, *A Starry Ticket*, 58.
15. Ibid., 220 (original italics).
16. Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 228–9.
17. Prokhorov, *Unasledovannyi diskurs*, 210–11.
18. Ibid., 211.
19. For a detailed discussion of this campaign, see Johnson, "The Politics of Soviet Culture, 1962–1964," 1–89.
20. Aksenov, *A Starry Ticket*, 174.
21. Ibid., 142.
22. Ibid., 160.
23. Ibid., 154.
24. On the generation issue in *I Am Twenty*, see Buttafava, "Interview with Marlen Khutsiev," 28.
25. Clark, *The Soviet Novel*, 30.
26. Russian State Archive of Literature and Art (RGALI), f. 1234, op. 20, d. 61, l. 7.
27. Vasilii Aksenov, "Search for a Positive Hero."
28. Graffy, "Film Adaptations of Aksenov," 111–12.
29. Ibid., 112.
30. RGALI, f. 2924, op. 2, ed. khr. 28, l. 67.
31. RGALI, f. 2924, op. 2, ed. khr. 28, l. 60.
32. RGALI, f. 2924, op. 2, ed. khr. 28, l. 62. Some young readers were more ambivalent, however: "About the novel's language. In general I like it very much, it's part of life, but, of course, it's not the way in which you talk to your parents. We don't constantly talk like that among ourselves either, it's a bit exaggerated (in the novel) or it's done on purpose to emphasize. But I think it shouldn't be the norm (*applause*)." RGALI, f. 2924, op. 2, ed. khr. 28, l. 57.
33. Roth-Ey, *Moscow Prime Time*, 52.
34. Graffy, "Film Adaptations of Aksenov," 111–12.
35. Kuznetsov, "Starshie i mladshie ('moi mladshii brat')," 19.

36. Sokolov, "Mal'chiki iz 'Barselony,'" 2.
37. See, for example, his article "Pogovorim o vkusakh."
38. Kassil', "Moi mladshii brat," 6.
39. "Iz stenogrammy zasedaniia Ideologicheskoi komissii TsK KPSS," 376.
40. Quoted from Graffy, "Film Adaptations of Aksenov," 111. The information was taken from an interview with Aksenov on Channel One (Russian television) in the mid-1990s.
41. When Party Leader Nikita Khrushchev visited the "Thirty Years of Moscow Art" exhibition at the Manege exhibition hall, he was outraged by a collection of non-figurative paintings. His reaction has gone down in history as the signal for the "most far-reaching crack-down on the creative arts in the Soviet Union since the Zhdanov purge of 1946–1948." Johnson, "The Politics of Soviet Culture, 1962–1964," 101.
42. <http://kino-teatr.ru/kino/movie/sov/3960/forum/print/>, no. 161 (last accessed March 3, 2014).
43. Ibid., no. 86.
44. Ibid., no. 86.
45. Ibid., no. 3
46. Ibid., no. 9.
47. Ibid., no. 10.
48. Ibid., no. 12.
49. Ibid., no. 41.
50. Ibid., no. 51.
51. Ibid., no. 21.
52. Ibid., no. 23.
53. Rajagopalan, "Kino-teatr.ru: contemporary cinephiles at work," 84.
54. <http://kino-teatr.ru/kino/movie/sov/3960/forum/print/>, no. 31 (last accessed March 3, 2014).
55. Ibid., nos. 33, 34.