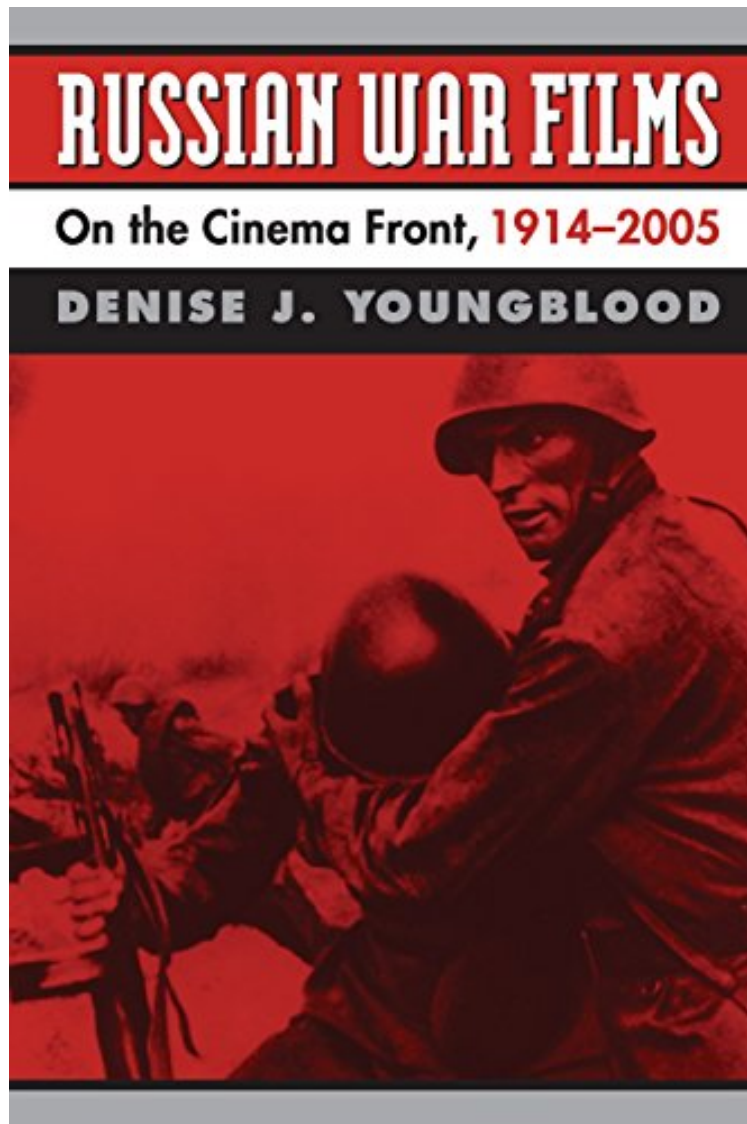


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Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005

Denise J. Youngblood

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Denise J. Youngblood : Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005 before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Russian War Films: On the Cinema Front, 1914-2005:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Excellent Resource on an Underappreciated Body of Cinema By J. Merritt I can add little to the content overview provided by the other reviewer. I'll only add my encouragement that you buy this book if Russian history and/or Russian films interest you at all. As the author indicates, for better or worse, no other film genre captures the Russian spirit in the 20th century as aptly as do war films. For those who are new to an appreciation of Russian/Soviet cinema, Youngblood provides an excellent introduction to a generous selection of

seminal works. For the already-avid fan, like me, her work has expanded my knowledge and appreciation of the great Russian films and filmmakers, and the sociocultural context in which they functioned. Scholarly, to be sure, but in the best sense, and the book is still entertaining and accessible to all. Recommended. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Without compare

By Paul E. Richardson

If interventionism drew the battle lines between East and West for the 20th century, the new art of cinema became an important front in that ideological and cultural war. Indeed, inside the USSR, as Youngblood indicates in this fine new volume, the Soviet film industry was often referred to as the "cinema front." The crippled Russian film industry was nationalized in 1919 (interestingly, Nicholas II had apparently considered the same move in 1915, to create a "moral state cinema" free of "the pernicious influence of the western democracies"). From that point forward, this "most important of the arts" (à la Lenin) served a political end: propagandizing on behalf of the Soviet state. And perhaps no films were more important in that effort than films about war, where themes of loyalty, suffering, heroism and sacrifice abound.

Youngblood [Disclosure: Dr. Youngblood is on Russian Life's Advisory Board.] covers the eight decades of cinematic history in admirable detail, reviewing and recounting 160 films in all. The result is not merely a thorough history of Russian cinema, but a cultural history of 20th century Soviet and Russian life. After all, Soviet leaders used film to construct their interpretation of reality, to instruct their subjects how to live and how to perceive the wider world. In particular, Youngblood asserts, Russian leaders used war films to create images of the enemy, of the barbarians beyond the gates. "Throughout its short history," she writes, "the USSR was arguably more concerned with barbarians than most states (save, perhaps, the United States), whether they were real or fabricated, internal or external." Most often the enemy constructs were quite predictable, but in each era, and about each war, Youngblood shows, there were also films with ambiguous heroes, reflecting the often complex nature of the enemy (and also sometimes the artistic courage of the directors) and of war. The history of 20th century Russian film is as layered and deeply textured as the history of the country over this period. Youngblood's encyclopedic analysis offers no grand theory to explain all there is to know on this wide subject - that would be folly. Instead, she carefully explores the veins of artistic development, how they interacted with historical events and real-life politicians and actors. As a reference work for researching plots of some of the most important Russian movies of the last century, this book is without compare. As a tour of the Soviet cinematic landscape, it is as valuable as sitting through 160 feature films - with all the useless parts chopped out. (Reviewed in Russian Life)

War movies have long been the most influential genre in Russian cinema, so much so that in the Soviet Union's militaristic society, cinema front was used to describe the film industry itself. Denise J. Youngblood, an internationally recognized authority on Russian and Soviet cinema, provides the first comprehensive guide to this long-neglected genre. Youngblood explores more than 160 fiction films on Russian conflicts from World War I to Chechnya. These movies represent a wide range of cinematic styles and critical receptions. While not ignoring classic war films like Chapayev and *The Cranes Are Flying*, Youngblood introduces readers to the films that shaped and reflected Soviet views of war, like the rousing World War II favorite *Two Warriors*, the Thaw classic *The Living and the Dead*, and the Brezhnevian extravaganza *Liberation*. This remarkably humanistic body of work was often at odds with official policies and depicted the futility of war. Youngblood is especially insightful regarding the relationship between Stalinism, Socialist Realism, and filmmakers in creating the war film genre during an era marked by increasing militarization, conformism, and state terror and by the importance of cinema in the World War II propaganda effort. Stalin's obsession with movies led to the revisioning of his role in the Civil War and the Great Patriotic War. "Yet, Youngblood argues, Soviet filmmakers were not mere puppets of repressive regimes. Indeed, some filmmakers subtly subverted official politics and history in the guise of art or Hollywood-style entertainment. She brings the story to the present by showing how post-Soviet Russian filmmakers have not only turned a critical eye on the recent wars in Afghanistan and Chechnya but are also revisiting the complex realities of World War II. Youngblood tells a fascinating story that will appeal equally to film aficionados and history buffs. By tracing the evolution of cinema through the twists and turns of both Soviet and post-Soviet society, she helps us understand the role movies played in 20th-century Russia, not only in the making and unmaking of political myths but also in the writing of history.

A major contribution not only to the history of Soviet popular culture but also to our understanding of the dynamics of cultural production in an authoritarian society. Richard Taylor, author of *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* Evokes unforgettable images of heroism, human grief, and national tragedy [and] testifies to the uninterrupted chain of creativity running through several generations of filmmakers, notwithstanding state censorship. . . . A must for the general reader interested in Russia and its destiny. Anna Lawton, author of *Before the Fall: Soviet Cinema in the Gorbachev Years* Youngblood once again demonstrates that she is the most knowledgeable scholar of Soviet and Russian cinema. Peter Kenez, author of *Cinema and Soviet Society: From the Revolution to the Death of Stalin* From the Back Cover "A major contribution not only to the history of Soviet popular culture but also to our understanding of the dynamics of cultural production in an authoritarian society." --Richard Taylor, author of *Film Propaganda: Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany* "Evokes unforgettable images of heroism, human grief, and national

tragedy [and] testifies to the uninterrupted chain of creativity running through several generations of filmmakers, notwithstanding state censorship. . . . A must for the general reader interested in Russia and its destiny."--Anna Lawton, author of *Before the Fall: Soviet Cinema in the Gorbachev Years* "Youngblood once again demonstrates that she is the most knowledgeable scholar of Soviet and Russian cinema."--Peter Kenez, author of *Cinema and Soviet Society: From the Revolution to the Death of Stalin* About the Author Denise J. Youngblood is professor of Russian history at the University of Vermont and coauthor of *Cinematic Cold War: The American and Soviet Struggle for Hearts and Minds*.