

Poem of an Inland Sea (Поэма о море) (1958), 95 minutes, 70mm print courtesy of Gosfilmofond. Russian with English subtitles. Directed by Yuliya Solntseva, Written by Alexander Dovzhenko, Cinematography by Gavriil Egiazarov, Edited by Aleksandra Kamagorova, Production design by Aleksandr Borisov and Ivan Plastinkin, Music by Gavriil Popov. Principal cast: Boris Andreyev, Evgeniy Bondarenko.

Alexander Dovzhenko, the torchbearer of Ukrainian national cinema, had his life cut short by a heart attack at an unfortunate time in 1956. The period of the Thaw was upon the Soviet Union and Dovzhenko had wasted no time in preparing a trilogy of deeply



personal, epic scripts for a newly liberated era. These were to mark his long awaited return to the grandiose folk lyricism of his silent War Trilogy of the 30s after decades of Stalinized artistic compromise in works such as *Michurin* and *Shchors*. *Poem of an Inland Sea*'s events are set after those of the two succeeding trilogy installments (*The Story of Flaming Years* [1961], *The Enchanted Desna* [1964]), but Dovzhenko had planned to produce *Poem* first, and had already commenced with location scouting, casting, and filming rushes for the film before his death.

The tragedy of his unrealized trilogy was felt strongest by his wife Yuliya Solntseva, who promptly set the production back in action with herself at the helm. Her goal was meticulous faithfulness to the script and vision of her husband, and she retained Dovzhenko's hand-picked cast and crew. A host of diminutive reactions ("They're better than nothing") from cinephiles have stained these three films' reputations since their premieres, no doubt induced by Solntseva's modest public deferrals to her husband's primacy and a chauvinistic ethos. But such reactions, issuing namely from contemporary Soviet audiences, were also due to the sheer anomaly that *Poem of an Inland Sea* and its successors presented for critical audiences of the time, half a dozen years before Sergei Paradjanov and Yuri Illienko would lay the foundations of Ukrainian poetic cinema.

Poem of an Inland Sea chronicles army general Ignat Fedorchenko's return to his childhood town on the Dnieper river after a 30-year absence. He reunites with his parents and brother and boosts the village's morale regarding the Kakhovka hydroelectric dam project which will permanently flood many

of the residents' rustic homes. *Poem* shares with Dovzhenko's earlier *Zvenigora* (1928) a delightfully dizzying confluence of miniature themes, namely the new generation's discovery of a treasure that lies beneath the soil of their ancestral homeland, and the prominence of a malevolent young man whose base antics threaten the moral fabric of Ignat's project with the collective farmers, prompting the singular line, "If there are people like you, why would I raze my village for a sea?" And *Poem* shares the Dnieper dam plot with Dovzhenko's first sound film, *Ivan* (1932). The character of the water of the Dnieper is at center stage, and the viewer is taught to welcome its diluvian therapy, as horrific memories from the war are never far off.

Before his death, Dovzhenko had made up his mind that 70mm widescreen presentations would befit the flavor of his three scripts. Undoubtedly Solntseva had her husband's intentions in mind when she chose to film these abnormally short epics (as far as gargantuan 70mm productions go, 90 minutes might as well be a short film). Through international festivals the film reached the *Cahiers* crew, of whom Jean-Luc Godard and Jacques Rivette both included *Poem* in their top ten lists for the year of 1961, along with Fereydoun Hoveyda, Pierre Braunberger, Pierre Kast, Jean de Baroncelli, Georges Sadoul, Jacques Doniol-Valcroze, and Louis Marcorelles.

The Story of Flaming Years (Повесть пламенных лет) (1961), 91 minutes, 70mm print courtesy of Gosfilmofond. Russian with English subtitles. Directed by Yuliya Solntseva, Written by Alexander Dovzhenko, Cinematography by Fyodor Provorov and Aleksei Temerin, Production design by Aleksandr Borisov, Music by Gavriil Popov. Principal cast: Boris Andreyev, Antonina Bogdanova, Evgeniy Bondarenko, Sergei Lukyanov.

Solntseva followed *Poem of an Inland Sea* with *The Story of Flaming Years*, a similarly pull-out-all-the-stops ode to the Ukrainian national spirit,



and employed many of the same cast and crew members from *Poem's* production. *Flaming Years* is chronologically the first film in the series, the titular conflagrations of Ukraine's years in World War II regaled in immediate retrospect through wizened narration (the voice of Soviet director Sergei Bondarchuk).

Much like in Dovzhenko's *Ivan* (1932), *Flaming Years's* hero (also named Ivan) is a quasi-immortal Ubermensch brimming with agrarian vigor, who at one point in the film brings himself back to life solely by willpower. Smoky, destroyed battlegrounds are transcended through symbolic interludes—a dead man in a canoe floats through a flooded wetland of mangroves—pantheistic meditations on the country and its rivers, and idyllic flashbacks. The detached and universalized narrative mode strikingly prefigures that of Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line*

(1999), a connection strengthened by Solntseva's sumptuous heaping of sunset-dappled rivers and heaven-through-the-trees shots.

It feels a sad irony that the pertinence of the

themes from Dovzhenko's silent classics is renewed in Solntseva's trilogy by the repetition of the World War phenomenon; the eradication of a classroom of anti-fascist school children in *Flaming Years* was not an event that the lessons of *Arsenal* (1930) could have prevented. I see in Dovzhenko's new theme of rivers and their baptismal power an attempt to wash clean the rubble of misfortunes in preparation for a brighter future, "a favorable flow of good times," as the statue of a dead soldier expresses to his widow.

It was a favorite film of Fereydoun Hoveyda, a *Cahiers* hanger-on in the '60s and later the Iranian ambassador to the UN, as well as Jean-Luc Godard, Luc Moullet, Jacques Rivette, Bertrand Tavernier, and Claude Mauriac. Solntseva was awarded the Best Director award at the 1961 Cannes Film Festival for her work.

***The Enchanted Desna* (Зачарованная Десна)** (1964), 81 minutes, 70mm print courtesy of Gosfilmofond. Russian with English subtitles. Directed by Yuliya Solntseva, Written by Alexander Dovzhenko, Cinematography by Aleksei Temerin, Edited by V. Korovkina and Lyudmila Pechieva, Production design by Aleksandr Borisov, Music by Gavriil Popov. Principal cast: Boris Andreyev, Evgeniy Bondarenko, Vladimir Goncharov, Evgeniy Samyolov.

Solntseva's final installment of Dovzhenko's posthumous trilogy stands out as the set's most unabashedly odic and idyllic—its most *Earth-y*. Framed by Dovzhenko's semi-fictionalized autobiographical



reflection on a childhood near Ukraine's Desna river, which floods the nearby village each springtime, *The Enchanted Desna* abounds with montages of Alexander Nikolaevich picking sunflower petals, eating acrid bulbous blossoms, and shaking apple trees while his grandmother spends her energy cursing his rambunctious soul. The nostalgia vacillates between supine, apple-eating grandfathers and handsome heroic fathers, who call their children nightingales and sparrows. And it is the love of Alexander's for his gardening mother, and the motherly presence of the Desna that lends the detached events of the film a warm heart. As Alexander's sagacious, dissociated voice tells us from the scorched ravines of postwar Ukraine, "All our acts and mishaps flow like water in the banks of time."

It is hard to imagine that Tarkovsky's poetically-framed works *The Mirror* (1975), *Stalker* (1979), and *Nostalghia* (1983) were not stylistically informed by *Desna's* essayistic structure. The common conception is that *Desna* was Dovzhenko's least polished script of the trilogy, giving Solntseva freer reign with her pastoral renderings and folksy *tableaux*. The collateral ramifications of Solntseva's artistic freedom were felt worldwide, with Jean-Luc Godard proclaiming *Desna* the greatest film of 1965, and Morrissey selecting a screenshot of a

child whose "eyes are encrusted with hurt and premature wisdom" for the cover of The Smith's 1986 "That Joke Isn't Funny Anymore" single. Jean Eustache, François Truffaut, Georges Sadoul, Louis Marcorelles, and Michel Ciment all listed *Desna* in their top ten lists of 1965.

*One of the most ravishing spectacles ever made, an ecstatic riot of color and sound that uses 70mm and stereophonic recording with all the freedom and imagination of an inspired home movie....The astonishing landscape shots that permeate the film—a moonlit lake and sky suffused in green, a field rapidly traversed by the camera as though by a plow—seem to have no precedents in Dovzhenko's work. Solntseva has gone on record as saying, "If Dovzhenko had lived, I would never have become a director. All that I do I consider as 'propaganda, defense, and illustration' of Dovzhenko." Be that as it may, I find *The Enchanted Desna* probably more exciting and beautiful than any Dovzhenko film since *Earth*. If Solntseva's talent be treason, then let's make the most of it. — Jonathan Rosenbaum, 1972*

[The Enchanted Desna is a film] about which I don't know what to say critically, which give[s] me the feeling of having a lot to learn. Also Rossellini's film about steel. They are films which cut right through me; whereas with others I can see what to take and what to leave. I say this is great, but I could never do it myself...They are films I want to talk about because I don't really know what should be said. — Jean-Luc Godard, 1965

Press Release Draft:

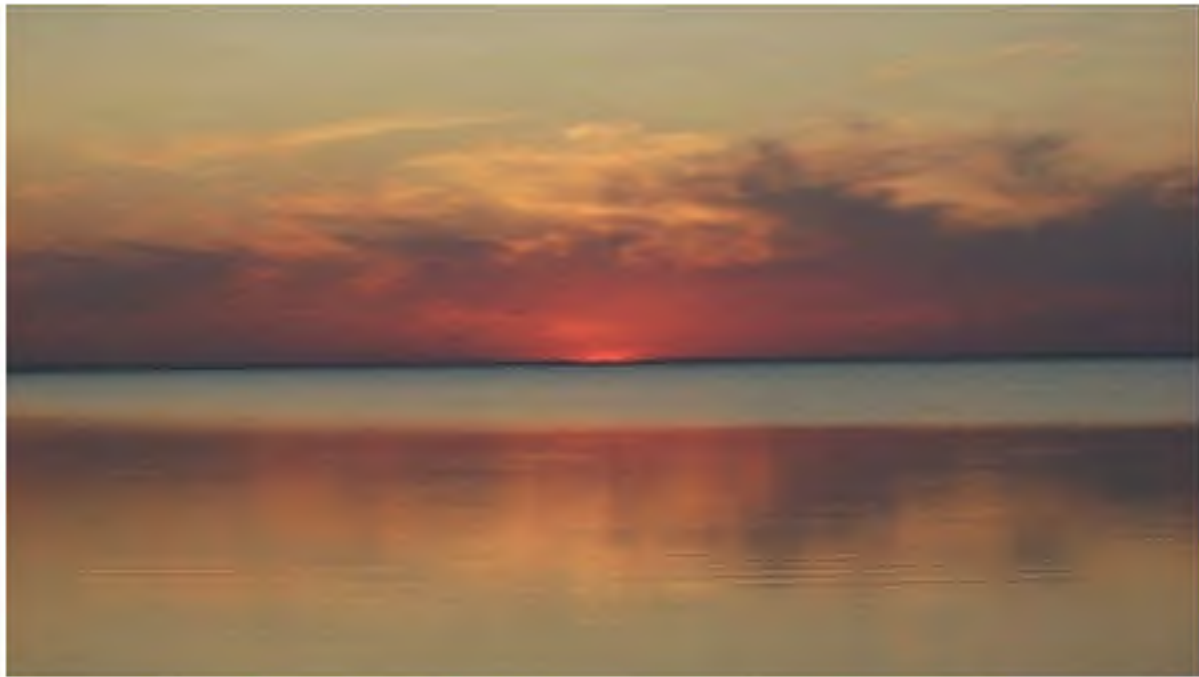
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

YULIYA SOLNTSEVA'S 70MM TRILOGY — NORTH AMERICAN PREMIERE

Films include *Poem of an Inland Sea*, *The Story of Flaming Years*, and *The Enchanted Desna*.

[Date TBD]



Astoria, Queens, NY (Date TBD)—Alexander Dovzhenko, the torchbearing father of Ukrainian cinema, had his life cut short by a heart attack at an unfortunate time in 1956. The post-Stalin period of the Thaw was upon the Soviet Union and Dovzhenko had wasted no time in preparing a trilogy of deeply personal, epic scripts for a newly liberated era. The tragedy of his unrealized trilogy was felt strongest by his wife Yuliya Solntseva, who promptly set the production of the trilogy back in action with herself at the helm. Her goal was publicized as meticulous faithfulness to the scripts and vision of her husband. Thus, a host of diminutive reactions (“They’re better than nothing”) from cinephiles have stained these three films’ reputations since their premieres, especially in Ukraine and Russia. This cool reception was no doubt aided by Solntseva’s modest public deferrals to her husband’s primacy and a chauvinistic ethos, but also due to the sheer anomaly that *Poem of the Sea*, *The Story of Flaming Years*, and *The Enchanted Desna* presented for critical audiences of the time. Before his death, Dovzhenko had made up his mind that 70mm widescreen presentations would befit the flavor of his three scripts, but what Solntseva was able to accomplish with her lavish pastoral panoramas is a rare sight to behold.

Yuliya Solntseva’s 70mm Trilogy is organized by writer and programmer-at-large, Max Carpenter.

Poem of an Inland Sea (Поэма о море)

[SCREENING DATE TBD]

Dir. Yuliya Solntseva. 1958, 95 mins. 70mm print courtesy of Gosfilmofond. Russian with English subtitles. With Boris Livanov, Boris Andreyev, Evgeniy Bondarenko. *Poem of an Inland Sea* chronicles army general Ignat Fedorchenko's return to his childhood town on the Dnieper river after a 30-year absence, in which he reunites with his parents and brother and boosts the village's morale regarding the Kakhovka hydroelectric dam project which will permanently flood many of the residents' rustic homes. *Poem* shares with Dovzhenko's earlier *Zvenigora* (1928) a delightfully dizzying confluence of miniature folk themes. The character of the water of the Dnieper is at center stage, and the viewer is taught to welcome its diluvian therapy, as horrific memories from the war are never far off. Through international festivals *Poem of an Inland Sea* reached the eyes of the *Cahiers* crew, of whom Jean-Luc Godard and Jacques Rivette both included it in their top ten lists for the year of 1961.

The Story of Flaming Years (Повесть пламенных лет)

[SCREENING DATE TBD]

Dir. Yuliya Solntseva. 1961, 91 mins. 70mm print courtesy of Gosfilmofond. Russian with English subtitles. With Boris Andreyev, Antonina Bogdanova, Evgeniy Bondarenko, Sergei Lukyanov. Solntseva followed *Poem of an Inland Sea* with *The Story of Flaming Years*, a similarly pull-out-all-the-stops ode to the Ukrainian national spirit. The titular conflagrations of Ukraine's years in World War II are regaled in retrospect through wizened narration (the voice of Soviet director Sergei Bondarchuk). The film's hero Ivan Orliuk is a quasi-immortal Ubermensch brimming with agrarian vigor, who at one point in the film brings himself back to life solely by willpower. Smoky, destroyed battlegrounds are transcended through symbolic interludes and pantheistic meditations on the country and its rivers. The detached and universalized narrative mode strikingly prefigures that of Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* (1999). Solntseva was awarded the Best Director award at the 1961 Cannes Film Festival for her work on the film.

The Enchanted Desna (Зачарованная Десна)

[SCREENING DATE TBD]

Dir. Yuliya Solntseva. 1964, 81 mins. 70mm print courtesy of Gosfilmofond. Russian with English subtitles. With Boris Andreyev, Evgeniy Bondarenko, Vladimir Goncharov, Evgeniy Samyolov, Zinaida Kirienko. Solntseva's final installment of Dovzhenko's posthumous trilogy stands out as the set's most unabashedly odic and idyllic. Framed by Dovzhenko's semi-fictionalized autobiographical reflection on a childhood near Ukraine's Desna river, *The Enchanted Desna* abounds with montages of Alexander Nikolaevich picking sunflower petals, eating acrid bulbous blossoms, and shaking apple trees while his grandmother spends her energy cursing his rambunctious soul. The nostalgia vacillates between supine, apple-eating grandfathers and handsome heroic fathers. It is the love of Alexander for his gardening mother, connected to the motherly presence of the Desna, that lends the film its sanguinity. Jean-Luc Godard proclaimed *Desna* the greatest film of 1965, whereas critic Jonathan Rosenbaum called it, "one of the most ravishing spectacles ever made, an ecstatic riot of color and sound that uses 70mm and stereophonic recording with all the freedom and imagination of an inspired home movie."

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Through coordination with members of MoMA's and the Museum of the Moving Image's film departments, I have assembled the following rough budget for the *Yuliya Solntseva's 70mm Trilogy* program:

Preliminary Program Budget (assuming MoMI as the venue)

Cost to ship prints first class from Moscow and back based on quotes from FedEx International Priority	\$5,416.00
Gosfilmofond's rental charge for three films this is a cursory upper limit, and due to MoMI not being a FIAF member	\$1,500.00
Mosfilm's charge for the film rights the company would consider a MoMI screening to be non-theatrical	\$0.00
Charge for screening at a non-FIAF venue free in this case, because of MoMI's relationship with MoMA	\$0.00
Sub-ti's charge for three instances of live subtitling barring an official quote from Sub-ti, MoMA offered me this estimate	\$3,000.00
Curatorial fee to cover costs of my labor without much clout I am keeping this bite-sized	\$2,000.00
Cost for Jonathan Rosenbaum's travel and hotel a Bohemian rate compared to MoMA's domestic rate of \$1600	\$1,000.00
Total cost of program	\$12,916.00