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HEROES OF NEW RUSSIA: ANALYSIS OF CHARACTER ARCHETYPES IN THE WORKS OF ALEXEY BALABANOV

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Režie

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HRDINOVÉ NOVÉ RUSI: ANALÝZA ARCHETYPŮ POSTAV V DÍLE ALEXEJE BALABANOVA

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Abstract

The master thesis *"Heroes of New Russia: Analysis of Character Archetypes in the Works of Alexey Balanov"* introduces the life and work of one of the most remarkable directors of a new Russian cinema, Alexey Balabanov.

Through the use of qualitative content analysis it discusses all his genre feature films, both finished and unfinished, and focuses on the hero archetypes that the director/screenwriter Balabanov kept using. Furthermore, it describes changing of these archetypes over time as the society of the new Russian Federation kept on changing after the fall of the Soviet Union and as Balabanov perceived that change, both in his life and in his works.

Finally, the thesis puts all the ascertained findings into a broader context, based on national, historical and cultural aspects to provide an objective framework for the subjective approach of the famous director.

Abstrakt

Diplomová práce *"Hrdinové nové Rusi: Analýza archetypů postav v díle Alexeje Balabanova"* představuje život a dílo jednoho z nejpozoruhodnějších režisérů nové ruské kinematografie Alexeje Balabanova.

Užitím kvalitativní obsahové analýzy pojednává o všech jeho celovečerních filmech, jak těch dokončených, tak i těch nedokončených, a soustředí se na archetypy hrdinů, které režisér/scénárista Balabanov ve svých dílech soustavně využívá. Kromě toho práce rovněž popisuje, jak se tyto archetypy v průběhu času měnily, stejně tak jako se Ruská federace měnila po pádu Sovětského svazu a jak Balabanov sám tyto změny vnímal, ať už ve svém životě či ve svém díle.

Zjištěné poznatky práce dále zasazuje do širšího kontextu postaveného na národních, historických a kulturních aspektech tak, aby poskytla pro čistě subjektivní přístup slavného režiséra také ryze objektivní rámec.

Content

Introduction

The art is set to imitate reality, but by doing so it also has the power to change it and re-imagine it. Alexey Balabanov's films had such strong cultural influence on the Russian audience at the time of their release that they have gradually become a part of the national identity in the same way that the Marlboro cowboy or Superman became parts of the American consciousness. Such a strong cultural phenomenon is important in every culture, especially in one's own. In order to determine who are the new Russian heroes and villains, how they correspond with the classical archetypal characteristics and structures and what qualities they present to their audience – as is the research goal of this master thesis – the cultural aspect needs to be considered and thoroughly examined.

The thesis attempts to study and to classify the characters in Aleksey Balabanov's genre films. Recognizing their cultural and artistic significance, it sets up the task to determine what made Balabanov's heroes so unique and so vastly popular for the Russian audience at the time.

Through theory of archetypes, semiotics and media certain character features and patterns could be recognized and put in the cultural and historical perspective in order to find out what have made his heroes predominate in the Russian Post-Soviet culture.

The initial hypothesis this study uses to approach the analysis of chosen films has been determined based on the author's own experience with Russian society and his belief that the characters in Balabanov's films – due to the nature of the art form and to the desire of the viewer to engage with events of the film – are nothing but templates that the audience project themselves upon. Their analysis therefore presents an opportunity to understand the consciousness of Russian people at the time, preserved perfectly on screen.

Many modern theoretical scholars are interpreting Balabanov's films and the actions of his characters in a very one-sided manner, assessing the

problematic only from their own point of view as foreigners, experiencing Russian culture only from the outside. As they clearly haven't spent enough time studying or understanding the cultural topographies of the period, they tend to superimpose their own (often very westernized) view on the otherwise very complex subject. This fact motivated the researcher to try and find universally recognized aspects in the character features and behaviour that can transcend national and cultural borders and be even considered archetypical.

1. Theoretical basis

Film analysis is not mathematics; it does not calculate with facts and can be perceived as strongly subjective at times. This, however, does not mean that it cannot be grounded in broader theoretical frameworks. Such scientific support for film studies is frequently provided by social sciences. As Barry Preston writes: „*Those who embark upon the task of dissecting and explaining movies often turn toward one or more of the social sciences to provide a framework through which to understand the cinema. Film theorists and critics through the years have honed their own craft by borrowing ideas from scholarly disciplines such as linguistics, sociology and psychoanalysis.*" (Preston, 1996 : 1) In case of this thesis, we borrow from ancient Greek philosophy, psychoanalysis and the modern theory of media, supported strongly by semiotics in order to discover, describe and analyse character archetypes in the work of Alexey Balabanov.

The idea of film and philosophy (or psychoanalysis) being closely connected is nothing surprising. Ancient myths or the word of mouth were carriers of information and understanding life in the past, at the break of the 20th century the media and film took over and are still occupying the leading position now. One of the most significant examples of the role of film in understanding life and explaining situation around can be observed in the ideological vacuum in Russia after the fall of Soviet Union and can be credited to Alexey Balabanov.

As James Brandon points out: "*Films are a great place to experience philosophical ideas in action; allowing the educated viewer to make intellectual connections as abstract ideas are interpreted through a film's action, precisely because both philosophers and filmmakers are working from the same palette. Contemporary philosophers, like film-makers, are reacting to the world around them. Art often seeks to hold up the "mirror to nature," and the afore-mentioned films are reflecting the reality of post-Soviet Russia.*" (Brandon, 2009 : 7 – 8)

Such research which thoroughly analyses the influence of reality and Balabanov's life on his work, however, cannot be realized without the initial introduction into the theory of archetypes, which will follow in the next subchapter. We present three main approaches to the issue in this thesis – the one spoken of by Plato, the one developed by Carl Gustav Jung and finally the modern approach popularized greatly in the theory of media, which resonates also in literature and film.

1.1 History of Archetypes

The archetypical theory can be traced back several millennia and finds its origin in the works of Plato. The word "archetype" itself figuratively means the first model or the first form (*arché* being origin and *typos* being type in Greek). According to Plato, archetypes are pure forms or blueprints of all things, unchangeable and perfect in their nature. As he states in his Timaeus dialogue: *"The work of the creator, whenever he looks to the unchangeable and fashions the form and nature of his work after an unchangeable pattern, must necessarily be made fair and perfect."*[1] These fair and perfect archetypes, as Plato suggests, embody the fundamental characteristics of things and all objects and concepts of material world are mere manifestations of these constructs.

The idea of archetype being the pinnacle of perfection in the sense of purity of form was further pursued by many theorists and scientists of various fields, such as Thomas Browne or Francis Bacon. The strong influence of Plato's notion of archetypes can also be found in religious studies, for example in The Works of Ralph Cudworth: *"(...) there were other objects of the mind, universal, eternal, immutable, which they called intelligible ideas, all originally contained in one archetypal mind or understanding, and from thence participated by inferior minds or souls,"* (Cudworth and Birch, 1829: 260), in semiotics and in analytical (Jungian) psychology.

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[1] PLATO. Timaeus. [online] *The Internet Classics Archive by Daniel C. Stevenson*. Web Atomics, 1994 [cit. 30th July 2017] Accessible at: http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/timaeus.html

1.1.1   Archetype in Analytical Psychology

The use of archetypes in analytical psychology is fundamentally connected to the life and work of Swiss psychologist and psychoterapeutist Carl Gustav Jung. Based on his clinical research, he discovered that various symbols and characters re-occurring in his patients' dreams are transcultural, trans-religious and even trans-mythological, which led him to believe that their origin must be subconscious. He followed the work of Sigmund Freud regarding the theory of the unconscious and built his own theory on its foundations.

The Collective Unconscious

Jung called what Freud called the unconscious (i. e. the aggregate of everything that a person had once known, thought, experienced, supressed and forgotten) *the personal unconscious* and added a whole new aggregate he called *the collective unconscious*, which according to him is shared among all beings of the same species.

The existence of archetypes as he understood them helped him greatly to prove his point. *"My views about the 'archaic remnants,' which I call 'archetypes' or 'primordial images,' have been constantly criticized by people who lack a sufficient knowledge of the psychology of dreams and of mythology. The term 'archetype' is often misunderstood as meaning certain definite mythological images or motifs. But these are nothing more than conscious representations; it would be absurd to assume that such variable representations could be inherited."* (Jung, 1964 : 67)

The archetype in Jung's terminology therefore *"is a tendency to form representations of a motif — representations that can vary a great deal in detail without losing their basic pattern"* (Jung, 1964 : 67). The fact that archetypes do not lose their basic pattern proves, according to Jung, that archetypes are in fact a significant part of the collective unconscious.

Jungian Archetypes

Jung did not just define archetype as a general term. His theory also brought him to study the most common archetypes, to group them and distinguish them from one another. Although eventually stating that the amount of archetypes is virtually unlimited as many of them tend to merge and combine and at times it is almost impossible distinguish where one ends and the other begins, we can still recognize several basic classes with similar main features or qualities based on Jung's research. These are *archetypal events* (such as birth, death, initiation, marriage etc.), *archetypal motifs* (such as apocalypse, deluge, creation etc.) and *archetypal figures* (great mother, father, child, devil, god, wise old man, wise old woman, the trickster, the hero etc.). (Jung, 1964)

Jung's archetype categorization, however complicated and unclear at times, was broadly embraced by many artists in the course of the 20th century and very soon found its way into a whole spectrum of classical art forms working with narrative, such as literature or opera, as well as in the modern art form of cinema, because *"as with fairy tale, films can speak to us of universal human issues at the level of the imagination, providing objective imagines to reveal compensatory psychic elements outside of our own subjective experience"* (Hauke and Alister, 2001 : 198) and *"archetypes are psychologically organized sets of relations that function to enable certain relationships between images and consciousness."* (Hauke and Alister, 2001 : 191)

Stuart Voytilla supports same notion as Hauke and Alister claiming that films are contemporary forms of mythmaking, reflecting our response to ourselves and the mysteries and wonders of our existence and archetypes used in films are unconscious projections of the collective unconscious that serve to embody central societal and developmental struggles in a media that entertain as well as instruct. (Voytilla, 1999)

1.1.2   Type, Archetype, Stereotype

C. G. Jung himself stated that *"not for a moment dare we succumb to the illusion that an archetype can be finally explained and disposed of. Even the*

best attempts at explanation are only more or less successful translations into another metaphorical language (indeed, language itself is only an image)." (Jung, 1951 in Hauke and Alister, 2001 : 183) This gave many other scientific disciplines the opportunity to study archetypes in their own discourse.

Theory of media, for example, following Jung's work, key principles of semiotics and various historical and contemporary findings in cultural studies, works with a concept of archetypes based on the level of *representation* of reality through media channels, which in many aspects strongly corresponds with the notions followed and researched in film analysis focused (not only) on characters. "*Representation connects meaning and language to culture. (…) It is an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It does involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things.*" (Hall, 1997 : 15)

Such representation, based on the work of Graeme Burton, "*involves a typology of repeated surface characteristics – appearance and behavior – that through repetition reinforce ideas about the type and/or group depicted.*" (Burton, 2010 : 23) Based on the intensity of recognition and depth of cultural history Burton distinguishes three main categories of characters – types, stereotypes and archetypes. With every category the representation of reality is more simplified and more general with type being the most specific and archetype being the most general.

"*Archetypes are characters which are recognizable across genres, have few but very dominant features and characteristics. They are in effect a distillation of ideas about gender, or possibly about well-known occupations.*" (Burton, 2010 : 23) A typical example of such archetype would be a male hero adventurer, who is attractive, persistent, honourable and loyal, such as King Arthur or Theseus in mythology or in a form of James Bond or Luke Skywalker in modern cinema.

"*Stereotypes are equally recognizable, but rather less mythic. They tend to belong to genres rather than to cross them. They may distil the*

characteristics of specific social roles, or of more contemporary occupations. But they also generate meanings about the stereotype which come out of the conservative and dominant aspects of ideology." (Burton, 2010 : 23) Example of such stereotypes could be a depiction of a female bartender, who *"has big boobs and a big heart. What she stands for are ideas about sex without danger for the man, listening without criticism, the boosting of self-esteem, and above all a woman who knows her place in a male universe."* (Burton, 2010 : 23) As clearly visible from the example, stereotypes can be and very often are sexists, racist or discriminative in the context of modern world.

The final category is types. They are the least distinctive ones *"perhaps because they're also most sketchily drawn, the least represented and so the least reinforced. (…) Examples might be the stupid gang member, as parodied in Bugsy Malone (1976), the bucolic farm worker, as represented in a television adaptation of H.E. Bates' The Darling Buds of May (1991), or the sharp young party-goer, who appears in material such as Bridget Jones's Diary (2001)."* (Burton, 2010 : 23)

1.2 New Russia

On 26th December 1991 the Soviet Union was officially dissolved and a new era in the history of Russia has begun. The people of the newly formed Russian Federation as well as citizens of the former Soviet republics, not knowing yet that they would face many challenges both social and economical in the following years, welcomed the fall of the authoritarian regime.

1.2.1   Cinema after the Fall of the Soviet Union

Deconstruction of the old system brought many changes to the lives of the former Soviet citizens in general, for the filmmakers, however, the change was even more dramatic as it brought new, before unimaginable problems. *"Culturally, the Russian artistic spirit rejoiced in the eliminated censorship, eroded ideological taboos and dismantling of social realism. But soon Russian artist faced other restrictions and demands above all financial ones,*

which had been unknown during the Soviet times when the state entirely subsidized the arts and culture." (Hashamova, 2007 : 11).

Not being bond to any state polices or agendas anymore, the filmmakers were free to find their own way to create the kind of cinema they wanted. This possibility, experienced for the first time in their lives, significantly changed the topics and themes they wanted to portray from propagandistic pieces towards realism and changed completely the role they played in the society. As Birgit Beumers explains: *"After the collapse of communist ideology, filmmakers rejected demands to construct the future, but also abandoned the concept of the (formerly underground dissident) filmmaker who defended spiritual values. Instead they began to portray the reality that surrounded them without the ideological constrains hitherto imposed."* (Beumers, 1999 : 1)

And the reality was far from the ideal image superimposed by the western media, enveloped by beggars on the street and pornography on shelves of the books stores and VHS film rentals, managed by the so called "new Russians" – ruthless businessmen who quickly adapted to the new reality of capitalistic market conditions. Experiencing the mafia shootouts and ever present danger of unprovoked violence, living in decomposing houses and communal apartments while the civil war in the south regions of the country claimed thousands of untrained young conscripts who had no chance but to sacrifices themselves for the government which was getting more and more corrupted by the minute, *"the filmmakers have rejected their 'mission' to act as prophets (as they have done in the Soviet period), or to guide morally and aesthetically,"* (Beumers, 1999 : 1) rather reflecting their expedience in the bleak but realistic works known as "chernuha" (the black film).

The audience, used to the positive propagandistic cinema suddenly found themselves watching films with no positive outlook on life and no spiritual guidance whatsoever, and a once thriving cinema market of the Soviet Union was gradually reduced to almost nothing. *"Directors of profoundly non-commercial films were paradoxically expected to support Russia's*

transformation into a market-led society. Yet, so-called 'genre movies' were, from the outset, much better suited to that task and, true to form, they have been eagerly consumed by Russia's mass audiences." (Weinhold, 2013 : location 132) Unfortunately, there were not many genre movies at that time and people were not interested in artistic and intellectual art-house films that did not provide them with any answers and any help in such difficult times. They were leaving cinemas uncertain and unable to adapt to the new reality of the country they once knew or they turned to Latin American soap operas playing on their televisions and lost interest in the Russian cinema altogether. As Beumers concurs: *"The sharp drop in film production also reflects a crisis in the role and the function of cinema in a changing society."* (Beumers, 1999 : 2)

"Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, post-Soviet Russian cinema has served as a platform for the expression of an emergent national identity challenged by Russia's geopolitical troubles, by the advent of the capitalist market, and by the rise of the New Russian bourgeoisie." (Weinhold, 2013 : location 134) This situation has led to the urging desire to reinvent the nation and its cinema. This search for the new cinematic language was strongly reflected in the 1995 film "The Russian Idea" written by Oleg Kovalov and directed by Sergei Selianov. The film explores history of the Russian cinema and analyses the works of famous filmmakers such as Sergei Eisenstein and Vsevolod Pudovkin, who incorporated deeply religious pre-revolution imagery into the then new socialistic narrative in order to create the Soviet identity and succeeded. Russian directors of the post-soviet time were facing very similar challenge, this time however without the guiding hand of the propaganda.

1.2.2   Searching for a New Russian Hero

Oxford Dictionary describes national identity as sense of a nation as a whole represented by nation's own distinctive traditions, culture, and of course – language. (Hornby, 2000) Speaking of Russian national identity and the search for it after the fall of Soviet Union it is, however, necessary to add that *"identity has a number of dimensions. It may be about a sense of place*

– belonging to a community in a certain city or country. It may be about history – having a certain shared background of events and experiences. These may go back to the past or previous generations (...) It may also be about family and history – the stories around a dead grandmother and where she came from. It may be about cultural practices – from the observance of religious occasions to the rituals of family holidays. It may be about role and relationship – taking on experiences and obligations of fatherhood. It could be about occupation. But most likely it is to be about a combination of some or all of these factors." (Burton, 2010 : 25)

National or cultural identity, same as general mythology, revolves around a hero. Russian Federation after the fall of Soviet Union, however, did not have any heroes. The "black" movies provided realism and a brutal portrait of the society and its problems but gave the audience no example worth following, *"the late Soviet representation of the national identity has proved tenacious in post 1991 Russia, despite official commitment to multiculturalism* (Bassin, 2012 : 10), and the foreign soap operas did not resonate with the domestic audience like anything else than a mindless entertainment.

The transition period between the fall of a totalitarian regime with all its rules, patterns and heroes and the stabilization of the new situation when none of the rules applied anymore brought uncertainty and eagerness to once again discover Russian national identity which would lead the people forward and once again give them the sense of belonging and security. As Bassin suggests, *"originating with a structural transformation that shook traditional identities, the move to the national may have been highly contingent, but once available the nation form became the vehicle to overcome the early modern and modern psychological crisis of identity."* (Bassin, 2012 : 20)

And so the great search began. One approach chose to strengthen the national identity through looking back to the past and rediscovering once great heroes from the time of Tsars, who could remind people that Russia

was once great and that there was something to be proud and patriotic about even now, when the situation were bleak and immoral. Apart from that, there was another approach, a comparative one or even a conflict one, one may say. The goal of this approach was to see Russia as better, truer and more honest than the countries in the West led by the United States of America. This approach to the development of national identity heavily depended on the psychological terms as an awareness of difference or as a feeling and recognition of "we" and "they". (Lee, 2000) As Hashamova explains, *"the fantasy of the demonized/idealized West breaks down only to evolve into another one that supports Russia's moral superiority over the commercialized and shallow West."* (Hashamova, 2007 : 39)

Cinema was absolutely essential in the reconstruction of national identity. *"Both art-house films and genre movies have, in their different ways, grappled with the 'Russian Idea', with Russia's relationship to its Soviet past, and to its constituent Others."* (Weinhold, 2013 : location 146) Among others, directors such as Nikita Mikhalkov, Kira Muratova, Vadim Abdrashitov, Aleksandr Sokurov, Aleksey German and Aleksey Balabanov were the ones who stood out. *"Occupying a central place in recent Russo-Soviet film, these six directors represent a critical cultural continuum from the late Soviet to the post-Soviet years."* (Condee, 2009 : 3) Only two of them, however, achieved a mass commercial success – Nikita Mikhalkov and Aleksey Balabanov, both emerged in the creation of genre cinema at the time.

1.2.3   Mikhalkov and Balabanov

Mikhalkov and Balabanov are textbook representations of the two ways the cinema approached reconstructing/developing Russian national identity as mentioned in the previous subchapter.

Mikhalkov turned back to the past and to the pre-revolution heritage. For example, his "*The Barber of Sibiria' addresses the anxieties produced by western triumphalism, which overwhelmed Russians at the end of the twentieth century. The director situates the presentation of the positive national ideas in an imaginary historical context and idealizes this context to*

promote faith and optimism in Russia's future." (Hashamova, 2007 : 17). While Mikhalkov's films were successful, both domestically and internationally, they did not manage to gain a cult following like the ones created by Balabanov with his "Brother" being the most successful. As Gusiatinskii glosses: *"It turns out that, in our genetic makeup, the Tsars have long ago and forever been replaced by the Brothers."* (Gusiatinskii, 2001 : 33)

Balabanov's success was caused – among many other factors – by the fact that he chose to follow a different path. He did not turn back and did not look to the future; he focused on the contemporary Russian situation and tried to find the grace among the dirt, the crime and the unpleasantness of everyday reality. *"Balabanov's genre films deliberately and self-consciously set out to challenge the very 'Russian us' with which critics and viewers identified when engaging with them."* (Weinhold, 2013 : location 343)

He focused on heroes having personal fights rather than on the great Russian idea and the audience related to it even stronger, as *"the cultural analysis is a project more of argument than of variability and so the invocation of the national is never without deeply subjective elements."* (Condee, 2009 : 5)

Everyone could relate to Balabanov's character. Everyone felt familiar with the situations he portrayed. His films offered *"a distinctive commentary on post-Soviet realisations of the Russian Idea which was being hotly discussed all over Russia during that period. In so doing, they actively reflected the contemporary Zeitgeist of which they are, knowingly, the quintessential product."* (Weinhold, 2013 : location 326)

Finally, one of the other reasons why Balabanov's films resonated so strongly with the audience was that he as one of a handful of directors, who failed *"to conform to the categorisation outlined. His films transgress cultural and genre boundaries. They refuse fixed genres and one-dimensional national identities, negating the viability of Manichean Self/Other representations."* (Weinhold, 2013 : location 153)

1.2.4   Brother: The Birth of a Hero

In 1997 the search for a new Russian hero was over as Balabanov's film "Brother" affected masses. It *"became a hit, infusing new life into post-Soviet cinema through its entertaining mastery of the Hollywood idiom. It was the first of five 'genre movies' which, all together, constitute an on-going cinematic narrative, self-consciously mapped onto the post-Soviet historical context from 1991 to 2006. For the combined purposes of reaching larger audiences and engaging with developments in Russian society, this meta-narrative combines two primary genres: the gangster movie and, to some lesser degree, the Western."* (Weinhold, 2013 : location 317)

Brother was definitely the most popular Russian film in 1997 and it was also *"extremely popular with Russians when it came out on video, moving 300,000 units by September of 1998, at a time where legal sales of Hollywood blockbusters typically numbered around 70,000 (...). This was a major event for the post-Soviet Russian film industry."* (Brandon, 2009 : 11)

For a modern Anglophone eye it could have been quite surprising, even incomprehensible, that the whole nation would identify with Danila, the hero so different from the typical muscular western hero. However different he was in physical appearance, he was in fact portrayed as morally superior. (Hashamova, 2007). *"The film, Brother, successfully kick started post-Soviet cinema's intercultural dialogue with its dominant Other, Hollywood. And it did so, whilst conveying the vicissitudes of Russia's rapidly shifting cultural identity through its Western Other's voice."* (Weinhold, 2013 : location 791)

1.3 Alexey Balabanov

Aleksey Balabanov, as one of the most remarkable directors of a new Russian cinema, was strongly influenced not just by the general state of things in the ideological vacuum of the Post-Soviet times as described in previous chapters, but also through various significant events experienced in his life. Some of them resonated in his works more than others – for

example the tragic event in Karmadon Gorge which changed dramatically his film style – all of them, however originated in his life, his beliefs and in people around him.

His life influenced the topics he chose to use in his films as well as in characters he portrayed, often repeatedly, developing their personalities over time as Balabanov himself changed due to the exposure to aforementioned life changing events. To focus on his biography next is therefore essential for the purposes of the thesis.

1.3.1   Balabanov's Life

Aleksey Balabanov was born in Sverdlovsk (today Yekaterinburg) in 1959. His family, as he admitted in one of his interviews, was a part of the 'nomenclature' (i.e. a cast of party workers and administrators). Balabanov's mother, who was a doctor by education, was occupying a privileged position in one of the prominent medical institutions in the country and was in friendly relations with the future first Russian president Boris Yeltsin. His father, while working as an administrator in Sverdlovsk movie studio, was also educated in law and engineering. As we learn from interviews with Balabanov's childhood friend Evgeny Gorenburg, *"Alexie's parents were not mean, his mother was strict and the father as a person of art most of the time did not care at all"* (KUVSHINOVA, 2015: page 27). However, it is worth mentioning that Balabanov's father was a close friend with the USSR's Minister of Culture.

Despite living in the very centre of the Soviet Union in Ural region Balabanov's family traced their ancestors back to Ukraine, Moldova and Poland, however always only identified themselves as Russians. Aleksey was born while both of his parents were still in university and neither of them had much time to actually raise him. His mother started very early on to build her career in the Communist Party and was constantly busy, so the family mostly relayed on the help of various babysitters. When Aleksey was only two years old his parents were sent to Kazakhstan in order to assist with development of several agricultural projects. Unable to take their child with them, small Balabanov was sent to his grandmother in Vladivostok

where he spent a year; this was perhaps the very first of his many future travels.

After the family reunited they moved back to Sverdlovsk. As Balabanov's mother Inga recalls: *"Aleksey was a very communicative boy – he grew up in the kindergarten, then in primary school. We just put the key around his neck and he called me to work when he came home from school on his own, reporting that he would now go play outside."* (KUVSHINOVA, 2015: page 29)

As a child Aleksey spent all his summers in Ukraine with relatives from his mother's side. His parents would only come to drop him off and then two months later to take him back to school again. However, he was never alone as he became a part of much bigger family (his mother had four other siblings and Balabanov's grandparents also took care of two more adopted children). These trips to Ukraine mark the beginning of Alexey's creative career.

Author Origins

During a trip to Odessa teenage Aleksey visited catacombs where defenders of the city fought in the World War II and it made such an impression on the boy, he sat down later back in school and wrote an essay about it. The paper was then publically displayed as an example of excellent writing. Aleksey's mother describes the event as follows: *"Aleksey was in a very bad relationship with his language teacher because he always had an opinion of his own and spoke it out without thinking. He already started writing small stories back then, almost like movie scripts but only showed them to his father."* (KUVSHINOVA, 2015: page 29) It was also his father who taught him to always tell the truth even if it meant to get into trouble for it.

As Balabanov later mentioned in many of his interviews, his parents did not devote much of their time to him per se but they always made him to attend language school in order to develop his skills in foreign languages. By the time he attended university he was fluent in English and was also studying French (which he then completely forgot). Study in a language

school was considered a sign of privilege at that time but Balabanov never thought of himself as such, he rather saw himself as a hooligan. In one of his interviews he describes a story about how he killed a pigeon with his slingshot. Driven by guilt he supposedly buried the bird and broke the tool of his crime but after a week he made another slingshot and went pigeon hunting again. His mother and his best friend of that time have no recollection of such behaviour at all, on a contrary Aleksey had a reputation of a disciplined and quiet kid who prefers to read books over running around outside.

Influenced by Music

In 1974 Balabanov and his friends founded a rock band. This decision later influences Aleksey's creative and personal life perhaps more than anything else. Through certain connections in tourism organizations he gained excess to the "holy grail" of that time – foreign music. The band members later remember this time as follows: *"We were young and arrogant and we believed that music could change the world, so we copied those songs without hesitation and were not even stopped from doing so by our complete inability to play. For example, listening to Aleksey's singing was a pure torture."* (KUVSHINOVA, 2015: page 32) All members of the band admit that the main reason for forming it was not the music but rather a desperate attempt to be bit more popular with girls. Unfortunately for Aleksey, this did not turn out the way they planned. On his high school graduation dance he was beaten up by a jealous lover of his girlfriend, losing two teeth. This moment – as his friends later admitted – traumatized Aleksey mentally and perhaps led to the reoccurring motive of female betrayal in his work.

In 1975, Aleksey and his friends went for a trip to Caucasus Mountains where they were almost killed in a traffic accident. Brakes of the truck they were driving broke down and the vehicle lost control on the mountain road.
In 1976 Balabanov successfully passed the entrance exams to study at the University of Education in Gorkie (today Nizhny Novgorod). Leaving home to attend his studies Aleksey burst in tears, knowing that he would never come back.

Experience Abroad

In 1980 two groups of students from Gorkie and Minsk were selected for an exchange program to attend one semester of study in England. Balabanov was one of the students who passed both, the multiple knowledge and background checks and a very intimidating interview with KGB. Upon their arrival to London the group leaders (KGB agents in disguise) found out that students have to be split in two batches again and that one of those is awaited in Manchester. The controlling officer had no choice but to stay in London and leave the other group unattended. Aleksey Balabanov was lucky, he went to Manchester.

Later on in his interviews Balabanov remembers that he was shocked by the total freedom he was given to attend his studies, by the free choice of subjects and friendly and open attitude of the professors. Soviet students were given 11 pounds a week which was more than enough for food, beer, books and most importantly vinyl records. Aleksey who was always passionate about music felt like being in paradise. He gathered a great collection back then – a part of it can be seen in his movie Dead Man's Bluff (Zhmurki). Balabanov remembers this time of his life as follows: *"When I came back, everyone was asking how much meat cost in England and I did not know. I had no interest in such things. All I knew was how much the records cost. Second hand, good quality was very cheap, only a pound a piece."* (KUVSHINOVA, 2015: page 33) At this time Balabanov also realized that he was not interested in immigration to the west. As he stated in one of his interviews, people in England were "uninteresting" and he was above all excited about real and interesting people.

Serving the Country

After his return to Soviet Union Balabanov and his friends become very popular in their student dorms as the music collection was put to a good use for "discothèques" and Aleksey finished his studies surrounded by easy life and a well-deserved attention from women. Immediately after his graduation, however, he was drafted. At the time, there were only two options for a professional translator: two years in Ethiopia during a conflict

or a job of a radio communication officer in cargo aviation division. Balabanov thought staying in one place for two years would be very boring, so he tricked the medical examination committee by memorizing the eyesight test chart and was accepted for fly duty.

His division was stationed in Belorussia. Through his military years Balabanov felt very lonely and abandoned. As he wrote in his journals, he was mostly waiting for his friends to visit him which did not happen often. During his service, Balabanov worked on many missions delivering weapons and supplies to countries like Angola, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, Yemen or Syria where he was more than 40 times. His unit lost two cargo planes with the crew. In 1983 almost in the end of his service Balabanov was transferred to Riga where Soviet Union was selling submarines to foreign countries.

Aleksey did not like to talk about his time in the army, only referring to it as the worst time of his life. His friends and family were convinced that something serious happened to him during the service that changed him forever. Balabanov himself later only stated that during his service in the army he realized that men are mortal and anybody can be killed any second.

"Now I go make cinema"

Arriving home as a lieutenant in a uniform, Aleksey's first words were: *"Now I go make cinema"*. His desire to be a part of cinema "at any cost" was not a surprise for his parents, as he practically grew up with his father at the movie studio. He moved to Moscow to attend screenwriting classes in VGIK (State University of Cinematography named after S. A. Gerasimov) and after a short time he became fed up with his professors and with the inability to find common ground in writing. He abandoned the studies and moved back to Sverdlovsk, asking his father to help him get any job on a movie set. Soon enough he started working in the lowest position of the 3rd AD and sorting material for editing. With various movie crews he traveled all around Soviet Union, visiting Siberia, Kamchatka, Sakhalin and northern ocean. Balabanov fell in love with the north and with very special and

interesting people living there. At the same time, unfortunately, he starts developing his drinking problem.

His official filmography states there were three films made by Balabanov as a director during his time in Sverdlovsk:

1987 - *"It Was a Different Time Before"* (Раньше было другое время)

1988 – *"I Don't Have a Friend or One Step Beyond"* (Уменя нет друга, или One step beyond),

1989 – *"Nastia And Jegor"* (Настя и Егор).

These short student projects have one thing in common: all of them are dedicated to young people involved in a booming underground rock scene which Balabanov was also a part of.

Centre of the Underground

In 1986 Sverdlovsk Rock Club was founded, which was essentially government's attempt to control this new and unknown cultural movement. The generation of young artists that formed legendary Russian rock groups and have influenced the country's musical scene for decades was closely connected by their personal relationships and origin – Balabanov was in the middle of this Cultural Revolution as a host of all the parties. He was lucky enough to get a big poorly furnished apartment from his parents – an extreme rarity at the time – and naturally, young people of the "underground" flocked to it. In 1987 Balabanov published a provocative article about the rock movement in one of the most important soviet magazines "Ogoniok" where he describes the everlasting thirst of the young generation to find their own voice, the desire not to be bound by rules and the void in their hearts that will never be filled by the comforts of life.

In "It Was a Different Time Before" some of the later reoccurring motives were established, such as a woman betraying a man, not because of any evil motives, just under the pressure of circumstances or by accident, and the alienation of all the characters which are remote and distant from what is happening to them. The film was a great success when it was screened in VGIK, mostly because of the music by Balabanov's friends which people of

Moscow had only heard about from very rare recordings and tapes circulating among the young. This new underground wave only lived through people copying recording from each other before, Balabanov's film put them on screen for the first time and people finally found out who they were listening to.

To Be a Director

In 1987 Balabanov attempted again to gain a film education, he was accepted to a two year program for screenwriters and directors. As he remembers in one of his interviews*: "No one wanted to be a screenwriter, everyone wanted to make their own films and become a director. But none could admit it until Viktor Kossakovsky (a successful future documentarist) said it out loud. He made me a director too.*" (KUVSHINOVA, 2015: page 45) In the end of the studies some students received a budget to make a documentary film. The result of this exercise was Balabanov's film *"Nastia and Jegor"* (Настя и Егор, 1989) – a mockumentary in a sense because Balabanov shot his friends who he knew very well and who he could influence. This film as well as the works of other students was put together in an almanac and critics declared that the new Russian Auteur cinema was born. As the following years showed, only Balabanov and Kossakovsky became professional film directors.

During this time Balabanov made an important acquaintance – with his future producer and partner Sergei Selianov. Sergei was already a successful young director at the time, his first film *"Day of the Angel"* was very warmly received by the critics and the audience alike, so Balabanov convinced Sergei to become his roommate. In reality Selianov was never actually in the dorm or in fact at school, as he was working on his second feature film then. From time to time, however, Sergei would come back and engage – as he put it – in *"important student activities of talking about films, consumption of alcohol and smoking"*. (KUVSHINOVA, 2015: page 46) Balabanov introduced him to his "rock friends" from Sverdlovsk and together they discovered their common love for the work of Terry Gilliam. Selianov also revealed to them that his attendance to the program was a pure formality as he was only interested in getting the official "director's

license", a document it was impossible to work without in Soviet Union. As the year 1990 approached the country, the rules changed dramatically and it became clear that there was no need for formal paperwork anymore. Selianov left his studies, maintaining good relations with Balabanov who was about to finish the program soon.

At the time there were only three places left where films were still produced: Sverdlovsk, Moscow and St-Petersburg. After his graduation Balabanov made a decision to continue his career as a film director and was facing a choice. Sverdlovsk as his home town was already behind him, so he moved to St-Petersburg to look around. Selianov let him to stay in his empty apartment for the summer while he was away. Balabanov drove a bicycle around the empty town during co called "white nights" and was charmed by the city and impressed by its extremely high ceilings. When Selianov came back, Aleksey made up his mind to stay in St-Petersburg.

Change of Mind

At the time of the great change all of the old soviet directors in Russia were facing crisis. Soviet system of control failed as well as censorship but instead of it being a blessing it turned out to be a curse. Many people were depending on it. It was their stimulus to fight, to do something clever, to criticize the system. In this new and fast changing world the older generation suddenly did not know what to talk about, what to do. As a reaction to this, Aleksey German (one of the most acclaimed Russian directors) organized a special section for the debut films in the St-Petersburg's film studio. Selianov introduced Balabanov to German but after screening of *"Nastia and Jegor"* and reading some of Balabanov's script work, German only shook his head and said that it was "too soon" for him to make a feature film.

1.3.2   Filmography before Karmadon Gorge

Happy Days (Счастливые дни) (1991)

First feature length film by Aleksey Balabanov. Based on the work of Samuel Beckett, the film tells the story of a man without any memories of his past or friends. Surrounded by the empty dark streets of a decaying

city, he wonders alone in the search of his place in life. Few people he meets on his way are always seeing someone else in him, someone they want to see, calling him different names and demanding what he cannot give.

Both, the film and its source material are soaked with absurdum and symbolism. Shot in black and white on locations in St-Petersburg, the film manages to capture a very depressive and dark atmosphere. It was not very well received in Russia after its release, but had a much more successful international run including its selection for the Un Certain Regard program of the prestigious film festival in Cannes. For the first time director, this was a major success.

"Happy Days" introduced a variety of topics and elements that re-appear in almost all Balabanov's films in one form or another, such as a wondering innocent man, a newcomer in a big city, a prostitute with the golden hart, water, minimalism, one-liners and one of Balabanov's major topics – humiliation and violence.

The Castle (Замок) (1994)

A film based on Franz Kafka's famous novel is Balabanov's second feature film and – in his own words – a great failure. It was both production and financial nightmare from the very beginning, as the miscasting of the main role and the new medium of "colour" distracted Aleksey significantly and jeopardized the overall quality of the film. As he later admitted, he was ecstatic to shoot and didn't listen to himself or the crew – a common mistake for the second time directors. Until the day of his death Balabanov spoke of The Castle as of his worst film and was deeply ashamed of it.

Despite a very cold critic's and audience reception of the film, Balabanov managed to extract a valuable lesson from this experience and realized the next topic he wanted to address at the same time, as the postproduction of The Castle took place in Berlin, where he visited a museum of pornography and surprised, discovered a fairly forgotten episode of cinema history – very early pornographic pictures. Inspired by this discovery and enchanted by

the subject, he purchased an antique photo album of erotica and pornography and for the reasons unknown to him, as he later admitted, wanted to make a film about it. After the failure of his current picture, he knew that such a provocative subject will be out of reach. First, he needed to regain his investors' trust and the critics' love. Before being able to shoot a film about the early days of pornography in Russian Empire, as he intended, he knew he needed to make a cheaper and a more popular film.

Brother (Брат) (1997)

Between 1995 and 1996 a group of young filmmakers was trying to shake up the old government funded system and to create their own new film industry, which would make Russian cinema self-sufficient and – most importantly – profitable. With extremely low budgets and limited resources these thirteen directors managed to achieve quite spectacular results. All their films were shot in two or three weeks without sets and expansive exteriors. The mobile shooting crew was working for free at the time, only getting a share of the future profits. These principles are remarkably similar to the famous "Dogam-95". In case of Russian cinema they were, however, motivated economically, not by the desire to achieve the purity of art.

The idea to combine musicians and gangsters in one film came to Balabanov a long time ago. He knew both of the "worlds" quite well, musicians he met in his school days and gangsters just came naturally, as they were a fairly regular part of everyday life in Russia of the 1990s. Balabanov also always started his films with the soundtrack; music was something that created the image for him and not the other way around. Many critics were sceptical about "Brother" because of this. They felt that it was more of a music video than a film. The audiences, however, felt otherwise and welcomed this new approach to Russian cinema with open arms.

The script was finished in matter of days, but it wasn't until Balabanov cast Sergei Bodrov Jr. that the story begun to take its final shape. Balabanov trusted his actors in general and allowed them to develop a lot of aspects of their characters through their talent, even to adjust the story to a certain extent. As Balabanov later admitted, without Sergei as the main role the

film would become cheap and forgettable. It was Sergei who brought realism and a shocking softness to the main character.

Due to the extremely limited budget most of the crew and all the actors were shooting for free, interiors were shot in apartments of the crew members and costumes was borrowed from them as well. Music for the film was licensed for free based on the agreement that Balabanov would make a music video out of the film material, too and the film stock was leftovers from the Hollywood production of Anna Karenina the crew bought with a very good discount. Total cost of the production was estimated at 50 000 dollars.

Despite the limitations, the film became an instant classic and is considered the significant part of the Russian culture even now. Its almost overnight financial success finally allowed Balabanov to realize his desired and more ambitious project – Of Freaks and Men.

Of Freaks and Men (Про уродов и людей) (1998)
Balabanov believed that "Of Freaks and Men" is his best and most perfected film. Stylized into sepia, the film was designed to mimic 19 pornographic pictures. The colour as well as several episodes of the film is directly influenced by the photo album purchased in Berlin.

After the great success of Brother, Balabanov could afford to shoot the film the way he wanted with proper exteriors, costumes and even with very expansive visual effects, at that time. Despite all the efforts, however, the movie didn't please the domestic audience at all. At the first screening, people were leaving the theatre and even threatening Balabanov with physical abuse. Surprisingly enough, the film won the best picture of the year award that year and Balabanov received an award, too as its director.

Extremely provocative but brilliant "Of Freaks and Men" became a stepping stone in the development of Russian cinema after the collapse of the Soviet Union and despite the violence present in the film; Balabanov always believed that it actually is about love.

Brother 2 (Брат 2) (2000)

The first "Brother" managed to capture the image of the time it depicted very well and the second one achieved the same with stellar precision. Everything in Russia has changed since the first movie as well as everything changed in the world of the "Brother". Critics accused Balabanov of making a "commercial" and "post-modernistic" film. The audiences, however, did care about it and the success of the second film exceeded the warm welcome of the first one significantly.

In an interview, Nikita Mikhalkov noted: *"I believe that 'Brother' and 'Brother 2' are remarkable depictions of hopes and desires of a major part of the Russian population. These are films for the people whose desire for justice is at most importance for them and achieving it even with violent methods is forgiven and justified. It's a kind of Russian 'Robin hood'."* (KUVSHINOVA, 2015: page 100)

The film didn't receive any awards. It was actually trashed by critics for not living up to the high standards of the first part. In his 2009 interview, Balabanov defended the picture: *"These are two different films, 'Brother' and 'Brother 2'. They just have same characters in them. We knew we were making a completely different film from the start and we always believed that it should be a comedy."* (KUVSHINOVA, 2015: page 103) Although the audience was demanding a third movie, Balabanov wanted to go back to more serious themes instead.

The River (Река) (2002) - *unfinished*

The River was an ambitious project which was never completely finished due to the tragic death of the main actress. She died in a car crash which also almost claimed the lives of Aleksey and his son, the cinematographer and the editor. The crew was deeply touched by the loss and was unable to continue with the production. While the accident was not the fault of the production unit in any way, Balabanov felt responsible for it.

The film was supposed to tell the story of a small community of Jakut (one of the northern tribes), which was exiled to a remote village because they suffered from leprosy.

People participating in the project believed that it was the most talented and most powerful of Balabanov's works, but they admitted that it was also extremely brutal and dark in its tone. Left without an active project, Aleksey was forced once again to come up with the new film very fast. In the very same year he shoots "War".

War (Война) (2002)

Everyone was expecting the third instalment of the "Brother" as Balabanov's casting of Sergei Bodrov once again started the rumours that the new film was going to be a continuation of the beloved films. Despite being very popular with the audience for being controversial and political for the time of its release, critics accused Balabanov once again of the exploitation of the same topics – patriotism, racism, desire for justice – these themes, among many others resonated strongly with the public back then and only grew stronger in today's Russia.

The film was shot on locations within the active war zone and depicted a very real conflict which was raging in the south of Russia for years. As Balabanov admitted in one of his interviews, he didn't know what the truth was in the film or what side he should have taken in the conflict. After talking to many real participants of the war, he realized that each of them has their own point of view of the same events. Unable to determine what was true, Balabanov decided just to show the way the war was and let the audience decide.

1.3.3 Filmography after the Karmadon Gorge

One of the most important and tragic events in the life and career of Aleksey Balabanov – which influenced his work in the most significant way - was the tragic death of his crew and friends in the Karmadon Gorge.

On 20th September 2002, the Kolka ice field slid into the gorge killing 106 people – 42 of them were the members of the crew, who just finished the second day of shooting Sergei Bodrov Jr.'s second directorial film. The nation was devastated to learn about the death of Sergei Bodrov Jr., who was one of the most beloved actors of his generation.

Balabanov lost his friends and trusted colleagues on this day. Such a devastating feat of destiny shortly after the tragic death of the actress on the set of The River looked like a curse to many. Some people believe that Balabanov never completely recovered from these events and that they lead to his early death. What is strongly noticeable, however, is that his films were very different from then on – his next two films were even initiated by his old friend and producer Selevanov. As he admitted later in his interviews, it was his attempt to save Aleksey from depression and to make him keep working.

Dead Man's Bluff / Blind Man's Bluff / Zhmurki[2] (Жмурки) (2005)

After a long break, Balabanov's new film was a fiasco. Not so funny comedy exploiting the style already set by Quentin Tarantino. The return to film after such tragedies was tough. Balabanov admits that he was trying to make a film for younger generation which he didn't fully understand. With the tough run in cinemas, the film found its audience on the internet few years after, so in a way the plan to address the younger people was eventually a success.

Critics bashed the film for the exaggerated characters and grotesque setting. Balabanov admitted that he was trying to make a "comics" film. He admittedly succeeded and essentially became a parody of himself from his early days. The film soaked with dark cynical humour was Balabanov's response to his personal tragedy and the loss of his friends.

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[2] The English translation of the original Russian name of the film (Zhmurki) differs, depending on the source/database mentioning it (such as IMDb.com, Rottentomatoes.com, Amazon.com, Kinokultura.com etc.).

It Doesn't Hurt Me (Мне не больно) (2006)

Balabanov tried himself in a new genre of melodrama. His attempt to make a lighter and friendlier film made critics to believe that Balabanov is "over" as a director, as his earlier films will never be surpassed and will remain as a reminder of the director once aspiring for greatness.

"Zhmurki" and "It Doesn't Hurt Me" felt like unnecessary films, which no one expected and no one wanted. The audience was waiting for "Brother 3", which could never be made for obvious reasons. Subverting the expectations, Balabanov's next film was far away from comedy or melodrama.

Cargo 200 (Груз 200) (2007)

Cargo 200 is a military code used for shipping the remains of the fallen soldier home and as Balabanov's movie it was a massive scandal upon its release. The events depicted in the film split the public, as most of people found the content shocking and offensive. Critics and Balabanov's colleagues also claimed that the horror and the violence shown in the film was not a part of the time period the story was set in.

Balabanov stepped out of line that most people at the time were too afraid to cross. The country have changed, most of film directors who managed to survive the 1990s found themselves in a niche, where they can comfortably survive without challenging themselves or the art form they work with. With his approach, Balabanov became an outsider, unnecessarily provocative, too brutal and too real for the modern world.

Cinematographer Aleksander Simonov remembers: *"When 'Cargo 200' was released and the scandal broke out, we went to see Tarantino's 'Death proof' in the cinema. This film is full of violence but the audience laughed and no one was offended or shocked. I think 'Cargo 200' was such a scandal because people always wanted something like 'Brother' from Aleksey. Instead, he made this and they just couldn't forgive him."* (KUVSHINOVA, 2015: page 142)

Morphine (Морфий) (2008)

The script based on "A Country Doctor's Notebook" by Mikhail Bulgakov was written by Sergei Bodrov Jr. before his death. For Balabanov, it was a continuation of their collaboration and friendship which was abruptly ended by the tragic accident in Karmadon gorge. "Morphine" was supposed to be a directorial debut for Sergei, but at the time costume drama set in the 19th century was too expensive to produce. Luckily, the script survived and Balabanov adjusted it to suit his directorial style.

The film was a great success in the eyes of the critics and Balabanov was praised for returning to the intellectual and "sensitive" cinema.

The Stoker (Кочегар) (2010)

For some people this film became Balabanov's "opus magnum". A lot of unrealized ideas of past and future projects found their place in the confined space the main character lives in. The main character who is clearly designed as Balabanov's own alter ego.

The film is littered with Balabanov's own films "hyperlinks" and visual quotes, as he is extremely self-conscious about his own films and the things he has done in life.

Me Too (Я тоже хочу) (2012)

"Me too" is Balabanov's first and last film shot in a digital format. Film operates with the same archetypes and characters that were a part of his films from the very beginning. A prostitute, a film director, musician and gangster – these characters were always inhabiting Balabanov's "cinematic universe", therefore there's no surprise that they are also the focus of his last work.

Lost people looking for happiness, isolated and scattered, they don't understand why things are happening to them and have no way of knowing. Same as Balabanov himself, he could not understand why this cosmic "injustice" had happened to him and why people had to die around him.

The mysticisms of the film have even continued after Balabanov's death – forty days after he died the lonely chapel depicted in the movie collapsed. In Russian Orthodox Church it is believed that the soul of the deceased is finally ready to leave the Earth and travel to Heaven forty days after death.

2. Methodology

Unlike *quantitative research*, which consists of systematic empirical investigation of observable phenomena using statistical, mathematical or other computational techniques, a *qualitative* one does not operate with measurements and quantitative data (which is any data that is in numerical form) (Given, 2008), which makes it the only logical choice for the purposes of this thesis.

Qualitative research is primarily exploratory. It gives reasons and presents opinions and eventually provides both, the researcher and the audience, with explanation of the chosen subject.

2.1 Qualitative Research

There are many definitions of qualitative research from very broad ones to more specific and none of them are strictly unified. Reason behind this is that qualitative research can truly have many specifics and forms as it can include whole systems of various phenomena. As research theorists Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln explain: *„Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representation, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them."* (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000 : 3)

At the beginning of any qualitative research, there is an assumption and a theoretical framework *"addressing the meaning individuals of groups ascribe to a social or human problem."* (Creswell, 2013 : 44) Researchers then collect and analyse data (such analysis could be both inductive and deductive) and establish pattern or themes within them. The final findings

or summarizing reports then usually include their *"contribution to the literature or a call for change."* (Creswell, 2013 : 44)

During qualitative research, the researcher is traditionally challenged *„to seize upon the interpretations people place on existence and to systematize them so they are more readily available to us. This is a process of making large claims from small matters: studying particular rituals, poems, plays, conversations, songs, dances, theories, and myths and gingerly reaching out to the full relations within a culture or a total way of life."* (Carey, 1975 : 190 in Lindlof and Taylor, 2011 : 5)

Results of qualitative research are traditionally holistic images, treatises and studies of the problem as a complex phenomenon, rather than individual descriptions of various aspects of it or numeral results. As Jan Hendl points out: *„Qualitative researchers do not complete a data puzzle whose final shape they know. Rather than this, they construct an image which is gaining its contours as the data are gathered and as they are familiarizing themselves with them. In their search for meanings and with their desire to understand things, the researchers create a detailed description of what they observed and recorded."* (Hendl, 2008: 50)

2.2 Content Analysis

Content analysis or the study of documents is widely used qualitative research technique that we will also benefit from for the purposes of this thesis. It is defined as *"analysis of the manifest and latent content of a body of communicated material (as a book or film) through classification, tabulation, and evaluations of its key symbols and themes in order to ascertain its meaning and probable effect."* (Krippendorff, 2012 : 1) Such communicated materials (documents) are deeply rooted in human lives and are ever-present in our everyday routine. Even communication, which seemingly only depends on spoken word often include the usage of one or more documents (Lindlof a Taylor, 2011). As surely sensed, „documents" in this context does not necessary mean only written (or spoken) word but also a whole range of non-verbal and symbolic aspects.

Such wide nature of the documents means that some degree of interpretation is necessary in content analysis to asses and correctly interpret the data. As Margit Schreier points out: *"Data never 'speaks for itself', it does not 'have' a specific meaning. Meaning is something that we, the recipients, attribute to the words we hear or read, to the images that we see."* (Schreier, 2012)

Apart from interpretation, this research method also contains data gathering and their reading. The data gathering means either collecting the samples of material objects and documents, or – which is what our research is based on – representation of verbal, visual or audible samples. These samples we examine, describe and finally, we interpret them in the light of the theory, history and other contextual aspects. (Lidlof a Taylor, 2011)

2.3 Research Demarcation

Before we proceed to the analytical part, it is necessary to establish the research material through a specific research demarcation. Alexey Balabanov is credited with 17 films that he directed and 14, which he also wrote as a scriptwriter[3]. In order to establish the extent to which his life influenced his work, it is logical to analyse films he did not just direct but also written as the author's connection to these works of art will always be closer than to films he did not participate in creating on the level of idea and development of such idea.

Another demarcation parameter is the type of the film. As we established in previous chapters, it were Balabanov's genre films that had most influence on the audience and created a cult following. These films also had the most culturally significant and distinguishable characters, upon which all three earlier described theories of archetypes (the concept of archetypes by Plato, by C. G. Jung and finally, the media theory framework) can be applied and explored in all its aspects. The thesis will therefore be focused on analysing

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[3] Internet Movie Database. [online] *Alexey Balabanov*. IMDb.com, Inc. , 1990 - 2017 [cit. 15th August 2017] Accessible at: http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0049326/?ref_=nv_sr_4

Balabanov's genre films, both written and directed by him, which are – Brother, Brother 2, War, Zhmurki – and the main characters appearing in these films.

2.4 Research Goal

The goal of this research is to target and describe the main characters in Balabanov's genre films in order to determine whether they correspond with any archetypical theory presented in the theoretical part of this thesis and if so, to provide an explanation of how and why.

Should there be any deviations from the archetypical characteristics in the characters, the goal is to identify them, explore them and provide clarification of such cases based on the study material itself, researches of other relevant authors and the contextual situation of Post-Soviet Russia. The secondary goal of this research is to ground these new Russian archetypes (and their possible deviations from the common interpretation of heroes) in the context of Balabanov's life.

2.5 Research Questions

The qualitative content analysis of Balabanov's genre films will be focused on following research questions:

- What character archetypes can we find in Balabanov's genre films?

- To what theoretical archetypical categorization do they belong?

- Are there any deviations of these characters from their own archetypes?

- What aspects of Balabanov's characters are original in the context of Russian cinema (never seen before)?

- Are there any aspects of the characters that we have seen before in the context of Russian cinema?

- Are there any aspects of the characters that we have seen before outside the context of Russian cinema?

- Are Balabanov's character archetypes interchangeable with any other outside Russian context?

- How does the hero look like in Balabanov's genre films and how does he differ from the Western/Anglo-Saxon perception of a hero?

- How does the villain look like in Balabanov's genre films and how does he differ from the Western/Anglo-Saxon perception of a villan?

- What is the relation of the good and the bad guy(s)?

3. Analytical part

In the analytical part of the thesis, we must first define and describe the established research material, i.e. Alexey Balabanov's genre films, which were all written and directed by him. These films, as specified in the Methodology chapter of the thesis, are: Brother, Brother 2, War and Zhmurki.

From the general description of the films and their story we then direct our main focus on the lead characters appearing in each of the films, describing them as personalities in relations to their environment and to other characters, as well as pointing out any features or attitudes they may share with existing archetypes grounded in Jungian, Platonic or semantically oriented media theory.

3.1 Brother (1997)

As we addressed in the theoretical basis of this thesis, in the Post-Soviet Russia there was a strong call *"for a genuinely popular mass cinema to create new heroes, myths, and cultural values appropriate for a new society"* (Anemone, 2001 : 143 in Brandon, 2009 : 12). When Alexey Balabanov came to aid this situation with his "Brother", critics may have claimed that it was not much of an art but rather a means of entertainment for the crowds. What they had to admit, however, was that "Brother" was *"the kind of mass-market filmmaking that deserves serious attention from social historians."* (Youngblood, 2007 : 213 in Brandon, 2009 : 10)

3.1.1 The Plot

Danila Bagrov, a young war veteran returns to his hometown. His mother insists on him joining his older brother Victor in Saint Petersburg where Victor – according to her – became a "big man". Despite what we as audience may expect from how his mother speaks of him, Victor is an assassin and works for the mafia.

Being commissioned a strike on "the Chechen" (the mafia boss from Chechnya who has taken the market over from the Russian gangster called

Krugly), Victor knows he would not be allowed to get out of the assignment alive. Fortunately for him, his brother Danila is coming to town. Victor exploits Danila's loyalty and convinces him to carry out the task in his stead. Hiding behind the facade of false patriotism, he presents the assassination as a way to help Russian people against the Chechen gangster.

Against all odds, Danila shows excellent preparation and marksmanship skills. The assassination is successful; however, Danila – unaware of Kruglyi's goons as Victor did not warn him – is wounded in his escape. In a desperate attempt to shake off his pursuers, he jumps into a passing streetcar, killing one of the goons as he does so. The streetcar's driver Sveta (who Danila ends up having an affair with despite her being married) takes him to safety.

Danila is nursed back to health with the help of his friend Goffman (a russified German) and the money from the contract allows him to access the modern day goods he couldn't afford before such as better clothing, drugs, concerts and parties, where he meets Cat, a young promiscuous party goer. Danila's exploits, however, don't go unnoticed by the criminal underworld. In self-defence or for moral reasons Danila has to kill several Krugly's henchmen, in return the gangster orders Sveta to be raped for helping him and furious Danila then mercilessly retaliate. He kills Krugly and his men but spares his brother Victor, very well knowing that he betrayed him.

Disappointed by the city and its people, Danila symbolically washes his hands in the dirty waters of the river and gives away the mafia money he doesn't value to the people he met on his journey. Only wise Goffman doesn't take any, seeing what kind of evil they bring. Disappointed Danila then hitchhikes to Moscow in a search for a better life.

3.1.2   Lead Characters

Lead characters in "Brother" are: Danila, Victor, Sveta, Cat, Goffman and the mafia boss Krugly.

Danila

Danila Bargrov (his family name means "pike pole") is one of the most iconic characters in the Russian Post-Soviet cinema. With minor cultural differences typical for the Russian society, he still very much represents the classical western archetype of a hero in many ways.

He is a masculine hero adventurer who journeys in the unknown lands (represented by the big city of Saint Petersburg), being loyal to his brother and his own moral code that may be a bit confusing for the foreign observer but in the time of his creation, because of this code Danila was greatly admired among the people and became a certain "moral compass" for the new generation of Russians.

As any other legendary hero, women find Danila irresistible. Although he uses this quality without hesitation, he still keeps his honour and always protects the ones who share his bed.

In a broader context, Danila's journey can be easily compared to the crusade or to a pilgrimage and same as any holly crusader he is also taking upon himself a certain moral obligations. He protects the week and punishes the evil. Earthly possessions such as property or money mean nothing to him. He searches for people with higher moral order and is gravelly disappointed in finding himself surrounded by morally corrupt and greedy men.

As determined by Carl Gustav Jung (in Jung, 1964) and Joseph Campbell (in Campbell, 2008), Danila possesses many features of the archetypical hero and his journey:

- *Unusual circumstances of birth or origin of the hero* – Danila's father was a criminal who was killed in prison, his brother is an assassin and yet Danila refuses to succumb to crime without moral cause
- *The hero leaves his home and travels to the unknown lands* – Danila goes to the big city of Saint Petersburg

- *The hero has a special weapon* – Danila makes himself two guns (a revolver with the silencer and a sawed-off shotgun) that he uses to accomplish his quest
- *The hero receives supernatural aid* – Danila is saved by a chance, by a streetcar driver and by his friend Goffman
- *The hero must prove himself many times during the adventure* – Danila fights a great number of obstacles in the course of the film
- *The hero is severely wounded* – Danila is shot and recovers without professional medical help
- *The hero experiences atonement with the father* – Danila's brother Victor serves him as a father figure; Victor betrays him but in an emotional climax of the film Danila forgives him
- *Woman as the Temptress appears in the hero's journey* – Danila meets Cat who introduces him to drugs and modern western life. Danila rejects this lifestyle
- *Spiritual guidance from old mentor* – Goffman provides philosophical advice for Danila

From the structural point of view, Danila fits perfectly into the western iconography of the storytelling. Unlike these western heroes, however, he doesn't go through a significant change. On the contrary, Danila is the one thing that doesn't change. He is the indestructible pillar of honour surrounded by corruption, crime and morally degraded men he doesn't even consider worth his attention or mercy. By the end of the story he rewards the just and continues his search for the worthy people and the morally high place he would belong to. This makes Danila a perfect embodiment of the Russian ideal at the time; he protects justice and lives by the masculine code of honour that is shared by most of the Russian people until today.

Victor

Victor is a foil character to Danila; he is everything that Danila isn't. He is greedy, manipulative, disloyal, dishonest and he commits the highest crime of all – the betrayal of his own family.

He has clearly forgotten "the way" and has been corrupted by the "new times" and the western lifestyle. His attire and behaviour is nothing but parody of the western gangster he is so desperately aspiring to be. His swagger appearance, however, only covers a weak and scared persona lacking any moral authority or honour. Victor can even be considered a symbolic warning for the audience, an example of where the ideas and freedoms of the west could bring those eager to seize them.

Victor clearly resonates with the archetype of the trickster and the deceiver. Like a biblical serpent he introduces Danila to the forbidden fruits of blood money and what they can bring him in the new world.

Sveta

The character of Sveta (the name means light) can be classified as one of the caretaking archetypes such as a "Mother" or a "Lover". She helps the hero without any selfish reasons and gets punished for that. With almost biblical intensity she is abused by the gangsters and by her own husband, yet she endures it all as if it is some kind of divine punishment through which she should be redeemed.

Sveta represents traditional Russian mentality, which can be traced to the works of Fyodor Dostoyevsky and even beyond. Her decision to stay with her abusive husband and her shaming of Danila for being a killer is a harsh reminder for the hero of the true values of life.

Cat

Cat is the opposite of Sveta. Although she can be seen as a helpless prostitute at the times, she is in fact not selling herself because she has to, she just provides sexual favours as a mean of exchange; she is a "Temptress". Being another example of the symbolic dialog between the east and west in the narrative of the film, Cat is enjoying the new western lifestyle more than anything else. Techno music, drugs, promiscuity, her love for money and fast food are portrayed in the film almost as a caricature.

Goffman (The German)

Goffman can be classified as a typical example of the wise old man archetype. He is poor and lives in a remote and forgotten place (in this case it's a cemetery) but in the moment of need he helps the hero and heals him from his wound almost magically. He also provides Danila with moral guidance, refusing his blood money and reminding him about the spiritual strength.

Interesting aspect of the character of Goffman is his origin – he is a russified German. We may guess that perhaps through this character Alexey Balabanov tried to find the dialog between Russia and the West, as only through combining and assimilating both cultural approaches we can hope to obtain wisdom and understand each other in the end.

Krugly

Gangster boss with the nickname Kruglyi (round), which is obviously given to him because of his physical appearance, is the antagonist of the narrative. His annoying habit of talking in proverbs and his non-brutal appearance deprives him from any dignity or power. He is a hyperbolic portrayal of the gangster-businessman of the time whose desire for money and power justifies (in his eyes) the murders and the torture.

In a context of the Russian vs. West narrative, he is undoubtedly Russian but unlike other characters who are also associated with the national identity, the arrogant and dim-witted Krugly is a colourful example of what was wrong with the Russian nation as a whole. He is a great representation of the fact that even without the western corruption the Russian character itself carried many immoralities in its core.

3.2 Brother 2 (2000)

Three years after the release of the "Brother" the audience finally welcomed the sequel. Main characters – Danila Bagrov and his brother Victor – returned, new characters joined the plot and the story took place partially in Russia and partially in the United States. This time, the movie was written and shot as a comedy.

3.2.1   The Plot

It's the year 1999, several years after the events in Saint Petersburg from the "Brother" and Danila is reunited with his war comrades Illia (a Russian) and Kostia (an Ukrainian) from the Chechen campaign in Moscow. All three of them are invited to a TV show to talk about the war and their lives after it. Illia is working in the museum, Kostia is a security officer in the bank and Danila tells his usual story that he wants to become a doctor. His appearance on TV kick-starts his affair with a Russian pop star Irina Saltykova and also causes his brother Victor, now a police officer, to go to Moscow to share in Danila's success.

Kostia, who works for a banker called Belkin, has a twin brother Mitia who is a professional hockey player in the USA and is being cheated out of his large salary by Mennis, Belkin's American partner and the new "Al Capone". Asking Belkin for help and through a misunderstanding, Kostia is killed. Danila confronts Belkin about the murder and believes the banker's lie that Mennis was the one who arranged the assassination. Belkin then sends his goons after Danila but both he and Victor manage to eliminate them without much trouble.

Danila decides that they should go to America to help Mitia and to restore justice. Knowing that they will be hunted by the mafia, Danila uses his brother as a decoy. Victor flies directly to Chicago while Danila travels to New York and then drives to Chicago, undetected by the Ukrainian mob that awaits them.

Victor falls in love with the USA in an instant. His treacherous, brutal and ruthless personality thrives there. He immediately assaults a police officer, has a party with prostitutes and kills a Ukrainian gagster in the shootout. Danila, on the other hand, keeps a low profile. After he is sold a faulty car by a sleazy Jewish Russian immigrant, an American truck driver Ben helps him to get to Chicago. Ben shows Danila a more humble America and befriends him.

In Chicago Ben suggests paying for a prostitute for Danila. He is refusing her services but after learning that she is Russian by the name of Dasha, he offers her money and help. Ben has to hold him back when the pimp assaults her. Felling the obligation to rescue Dasha, Danila returns to the black district of the city to search for her. She helps him to acquire guns and when her pimp comes to assault her again, Danila kills him and his men without hesitation.

After brutal shootout in the night club owned by Mennis, Danila climbs the office tower to confront the gangster himself. The two have a conversation about the value of money and truth. Mennis is reduced to an emasculate fearful mess. Danila spares his life.

After returning the money to Mitia and a daring escape to the airport with the assistance of Ben, Danila and Dasha take a flight to Moscow. Victor is arrested by the police for the murder of the Ukrainian mobsters, the fact that he is very happy about as he will remain in America he learned to love.

3.2.2   The Lead Characters

Lead characters in "Brother 2", which are analysed for the purposes of this thesis, are: Danila, Victor, Dasha, Illia and Belkin. The Americans, such as Ben or Mennis, however important for the plot of the film, are not talked about as they are not Russian and therefore cannot serve as an example of new Russian heroes.

Danila

Danila's character has changed very little from the time of the "Brother". He is keeping his honour and his higher moral status, sparing the lives of both Belkin and Mennis (the antagonists of the film) while maintaining the moral dominance over them. He remains the classical hero people learned to love in the first film, representing justice and truth, fighting for order that is once again being disrupted by the actions of the west.

The four years that has passed from the events of the first film have changed the country quite a bit. There is less brutality and struggle, the life has become more comfortable and Danila seems to be integrating into this new world. He is having an affair with the Russian pop-star, even though he is not a big fan of her music. His friends are having normal jobs and when he says he wants to become a doctor we almost believe him.

This time Danila is set to avenge his friend and to restore justice in the west itself. His trip to the United States with his brother, who utterly succumbs to the temptation provided to him there, is an ultimate test of Danila's internal values; the test that he passed with flying colours.

Victor

After the return to his hometown and his mother at the end of "Brother", Victor has become a police officer. It is a clever satire upon the state of the Russian society and its internal affairs of the time that an ex-mafia assassin can easily become an enforcer of the law.

The character of Victor has turned into a comic relief in "Brother 2". He is once again a foil character to his brother Danila as he reacts very differently to the same western temptations – his weak self-indulging personality lacking any moral focus or determination thrives in USA unlike Danila. Victor has no desire to return to Russia, although the alternative is staying in American prison, and through that he completed his transformation and full integration into the western doctrine as it is perceived and portrayed by Balabanov.

Dasha

Once again in "Brother 2" Alexey Balabanov creates an image of the kind-hearted prostitute. Dasha has fallen prey to the glorified image of the west and pays a heavy price now for believing in the glossy picture full of colours and glam that was sold to the Post-Soviet Russia. Despite spending years in the corrupted west, she has not abandoned her moral code, which is strongly admired by Danila who feels obligated to save her from that forsaken place like a wounded comrade from the battlefield. In return,

Dasha becomes Danila's partner and support on his mission to restore justice.

Dasha provides a strong contrast to Irina (a popstar Danila is having an affair with earlier in the film). Despite being well taken care of or pretty like Irina, Dasha possess a strong will and a powerful character, she shows courage and ingenuity in the face of danger.

Belkin

The change in the Russian business of late nineties and early two thousands is well portrayed by the character of Belkin. Instead of the brutal but simple Krugly from the first film we see a new type of businessman, who however remains an antagonist. Belkin is cunning and smart and he holds the power in the new Russian society firmly in his hands. His business is no longer a small market, but a wide stage of international banking. He no longer deals with the problems himself; he has people to do it for him. Appearing as spineless and week, he is in fact a very dangerous opponent, who is able to lie convincingly even with the gun pointed at him. He is playing everyone to his advantage, setting his enemies against each other and getting away with it.

Illia

Illia is Danila's best friend and ally. He is showing a new aspect of the Russian life that has emerged at the time – the computer and technological knowledge, which appears almost mystical but proves extremely useful in the hero's quest for justice. His ability to find information and hack car security systems is new for the Russian cinema and for the society. The legendary image of almost omnipotent Russian hacker he is creating has taken the dominant place in the minds of not just the domestic audience but has spread well beyond the borders of the former Soviet Union.

3.3 War (2002)

After opening titles depicting the news real of Chechen Muslim extremists on the streets of the half destroyed city of Grozny, the footage cuts to Ivan, an ex-soldier who is being interviewed in prison. He is asked about the

events of Chechen war that took place in the summer of 2001. The film itself is shown as Ivan's flashback.

3.3.1 The Plot

Ivan is held captive by Aslan Gugaev, a warlord who is waging jihad against the Russians. Together with Ivan there are two foreigners held captive – John and Margaret, British actors who were kidnapped on the border with Georgia. Ivan, due to his technological and linguistic knowledge is used by Aslan to operate the computer and search the internet. The warlord is not religious but uses the Sharia law to justify his actions and cruelty towards the people he holds hostage for ransom.

Transferred to a different holding place, John, Margaret and Ivan meet another captive, a Russian officer, Capt. Medvedev who is paralyzed from the waist down. Ivan is impressed by the Medvedev's calm strength and confidence.

Scared for his life, John convinces Aslan that if he is released he would manage to collect a sum of two million pounds to buy freedom for his fiancée Margaret. Aslan believes him but gives him only two months to collect the money. He also releases Ivan to deliver a message to the captain's family that if they will not find the ransom for him, he is to be killed in a month. John and Ivan are going their separate ways.

John fails to find any support back home neither from the government nor from the NATO. He is forced to sell all his possessions and even after that he is still unable to accumulate the sum required to buy Margaret's freedom. The only help he managed to get is a sum of 200,000 pounds from the TV Chanel 4 for the promised film he would make about his "adventures" in Russia. Desperate John flies back to Moscow in hope for the assistance of the Russian government.

At the same time Ivan is making his way to Saint Petersburg to talk to the Capt. Medvedev's family. He meets his mother, his wife and a daughter, but

has no heart to tell them about the desperate conditions the Captain is in and that there is not much chance for him to get out alive.

The only assistance from the Russian government John managed to get is a number for an old corrupted KGB officer who may be able to help him. Realizing how desperate his situation is and that the time is running out, John decides to go and find Ivan to ask him for help.

Ivan is alienated in his own hometown, his family and his friends are almost strangers to him, so when John finds him and proposes the desperate plan to confront Aslan, Ivan agrees out of sympathy for John and because of his desire to save Capt. Medvedev.

The two man gear up for the journey back to Chechnya. Ivan understands that the ex-KGB officer is setting a trap for them in Vladikavkaz in order to get their money and manages to avoid it. The two men then buy a passage to Chechnya with the contract forces for a pair of good shoes.

Desperate for the transport, Ivan and John set up an ambush on one of the roads. The first vehicle they meet is a bus full of women and children which they spare. The second car on the road is a jeep with Chechen paramilitary, which Ivan kills in a gun fight. John is not ready to kill people and Ivan barely manages to survive.

Ivan convinces John to accept reality, take responsibility and fight. John manages to take a grip of himself and the two continue the journey deeper into the mountains. By chance they capture a Chechen shepherd Ruslan, who Ivan manages to convince that he works for NATO and holds the shepherd's family hostage. Ivan forces Ruslan to lead them to the Aslan's village. John accuses Ivan of cruel and vengeful behaviour towards Ruslan, but Ivan, knowing local culture and traditions is only showing his power to ensure Ruslan's cooperation.

The three men reach Aslan's camp. Ruslan reveals that his clan has been in a blood feud with Aslan for centuries and if given a gun he would assist Ivan

and John in the siege of the village. John continues to film everything. The men attack the village and using element of surprise to their advantage they emerge victorious. Believing that Aslan raped Margaret, John kills him in rage. Now without opportunity to bargain for their lives they are forced to escape by the river. Cornered in the ancient tower they are rescued by the Russian military that Capt. Medvedev calls for aid.

At the military base John is paying 35 000 pounds he promised to Ivan and goes on bragging to the other Russian soldiers about his exploits, oblivious to completely emotionally destroyed Margaret. Ivan pays Ruslan for his help.

The final scene reveals that John became rich and famous in the UK by selling the film and the book about his adventure. He never married Margaret. Ivan gave all his money to Capt. Medvedev's family for the medical procedures to restore his mobility. Ivan is being prosecuted for killing innocent Chechens; the film made by John is used as evidence against him.

3.3.2   The Lead Characters

Lead characters in "War", which are analysed for the purposes of this thesis, are: Ivan, John (although not being Russian), Capt. Medvedev and Aslan Gugaev.

Ivan

Ivan is a young soldier who fits the warrior archetype. He is aggressive, purposeful, mindful, adaptable, decisive and skillful. He is loyal to his comrades and risks his life in order to rescue and protect them. These qualities, however, come with a price as Ivan is generally emotionally detached from things, which of course helps him to accomplish the task of fighting the enemy more effectively, but at the same time it's preventing him from going back to the normal life.

Ivan didn't choose to become a warrior, he was forced into the army and then into the conflict. Traumatic events and his imprisonment as a slave

have made him nationalistic and determined to fight the Islamists in his way. Ironically, the ferocity, aggression and brutality with which Ivan deals with his enemies he has obviously learned from his captives and especially from the antagonist, Aslan.

Ivan is surprised at times by John's behaviour and the decisions he makes but at the same time he admits that he can still understand them as they are human. The Russian Ivan and the western John are then finding unity in fighting as brothers in arms, however they do not share the same concept of honour as John never visits Ivan in prison or tries to help him in any way. On the contrary, the consequences that Ivan has to endure after the completion of his mission, no matter how severe, he accepts as a true warrior with no regrets or remorse.

John

The character of John, although not being a Russian and therefore not formally a subject of the presented study, should however be considered at this point nonetheless as he is a foil character to Ivan, who helps significantly to highlight Ivan's character by the principles of comparison.

John represents several delusions which are deeply rooted in the Russian society in the association with the western point of view – he believes in human rights and he think that they should somehow be respected in the war zone, too. He believes that the governments will help him and that the terrorists can be reasoned with. Ivan has none of these delusions as he understands that what is happening around him is war and he knows that only the strong and determined have the power to survive it and to win it.

Capt. Medvedev

The character of captain Medvedev is a variation of the archetype of the honorable Russian officer. Confident in the face of danger and the fearful odds, he remains calm even in the most desperate situations, earning Ivan's respect and Margaret's affection in no time. Even paralyzed he continues fighting and doesn't let the discipline of his subordinates deteriorate. He is a role model for Ivan, a man of utmost respect.

Aslan Gugaev

Aslan is the leader of Chechen terrorists and the antagonist of the film. Aslan provides an iconic example of the warlord cultivated by Russian media during the late 90's and early 2000's. As a symbol of the enemy, Gugaev is a quintessence of the Islamic extremist during the Chechen conflict. Not religious and yet justifying his atrocities by the Sharia law and the necessities of war against the infidels, he is bargaining for his money and brags how weak the Russians are in the between. Driven by his greed, he holds innocent people captive for ransom and only recognizes power and aggression as his common tongue. As a character, Aslan is almost entirely stripped off any redeeming qualities and looks more like a dangerous animal you cannot reason with rather than the living breathing man.

3.4 Zhmurki (2005)

This criminal comedy opens with university lecture about how the Russian businessmen accumulated their start-up capital. The lecturer points out that the most of the modern oligarchs have acquired their capital in the 90's through their criminal activities. The film then cuts straight to the mid 90's where a set of events is happening simultaneously, having effect upon one another bringing the pieces of the puzzle into a whole in the end – much like Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction (1994).

3.4.1   The Plot

Palach (his name meaning the executioner) is torturing a man with a gag in his mouth, trying to make him speak. Three masked men ambush him, looking for the same information. After a gunfight, only Stepan (one of the masked men) is left alive. He finds a note in the tortured man's jacket with the information he was looking for.

The trio of the unlucky low-level gangsters is looking for work. Koron, Baklazan (his name meaning the aubergine) and Bala are out of luck and out of money. They receive a phone call from the "policeman" with a job proposal.

Simon and Sergei – two local mafia henchmen visit local drug producer nicknamed "Doctor". Sergei tries to extort money from him but runs into him armed guards. The resulting gunfight is lethal for the "Doctor" and his men as Simon proves to be a great shot. Unfortunately, however, they have just killed the "golden goose" and their boss, local mobster Sergei Mikhaylovich will be greatly displeased. Later on, Sergei Mikhalovich also finds out about the murder of Palach and sends his men to investigate.

Stepan, a corrupted police officer, is offering Koron, Baklazan and Bala the aforementioned job in a form of setting an ambush and stealing the case of money the ambushed men will be carrying.

Sergei Mikhaylovich gives Simon and Sergei a task of purchasing heroin from a Jewish lawyer and gives them a case filled with money.

Stepan makes a deal with Mozg, who is another criminal having a feud with Koron. Stepan is to give away the location of Koron and in return Mozg will deliver him the case. Therefore Stepan will have no need to pay Koron for his services.

On the way to their job, Simon and Sergei meet their old friend Kaban, who advises them to move away from the small town and to go to Moscow to make money. Kaban is now a part of the government and has moved on from the racketeering and murders he was previously participating in.

Simon and Sergei are then ambushed by Koron and his men but due to confusion, they end up with the case filled with drugs and not the money as they were hoping.

Sergei Mikhaylovich learns about the ambush and sends Simon and Sergei to retrieve the drugs. They are to go to Stepan to torture him and to kill him after he gives away the place of Koron's hiding.

Koron opens up the case and finds out that the misplacement has happened. The trio is desperately trying to find out what to do now.

Simon and Sergei torture Stepan who gives them all the information they need to find the place where Koron and his men are hiding. In order to find the drugs, Simon tortures Baklazan but is interrupted by the Mozg and his henchmen. Both him and Sergei eliminate them easily and continue the torture. As Koron and Bala return to their place of hiding to witness the torture of their comrade Baklazan, Sergei challenges them to the game of Russian roulette. He defeats them but is eventually shot by Baklazan.

Simon calls a medical student to perform a fast and painful operation in order to save Sergei's life and succeeds. The two then decide that it is time for them to leave the town and take the advice of their friend from Moscow. They take the case packed with heroin and escape. Then, the film cuts to sometime in the future. Simon and Sergei are in Moscow as a part of the Russian government which they bought in by the heroin. Mentally, they never really gave up on their gangster lifestyle and practically they have simply just moved up into a higher order of things to gain more profit.

3.4.2   The Lead Characters

Lead characters in "Zhmurki", which are analysed for the purposes of this thesis, are: Sergei, Simon, Sergei Mikhaylovich and Stepan.

Sergei

Sergei is a sly and cunning, manipulative trickster, he's the "brains'' to his friend Simon who is the "muscle". Sergei is a Russophile, pseudo religious low-level gangster who is smarter than many around him. He is what Belkin from "Brother 2" could have been before his rise to power. As the ending of the film shows, his qualities have made him a great addition to the Russian government.

Simon

Simon is a typical brute, a gangster who shoots first and thinks later if ever. Luckily for him, his friend Sergei does all the thinking in exchange for what Simon stays loyal to him and protective of him. Simon is an Americanophile, on whose example Balabanov once again mocks the west, showing that only stupid brutes would love comic books, fast food and foreign music. Despite

the fact that the character of Simon is strongly hyperbolized, people like him did indeed inhabit the reality of the Russia in the 90's.

Sergei Mikhaylovich

A soviet functionary who turned into a gagster; Sergei Mikhaylovich is in a big way a parody of Nikita Mikhalkov, Balabanov's fellow director who actually played the part in the film, making the parallel flawless. Not very smart or courageous, Sergei Mikhaylovich is a caricature of the mafia boss. He lacks the skills needed for the new era and – as the ending of the film shows, too – is inevitable replaced by younger and smarter gangsters.

Stepan

Stepan is a corrupted police officer who is more of a gangster rather than a law enforcer. His attempts to manipulate one side of the mafia world against the other only lead to his death. Arrogance, stupidity and cowardice are the typical traits of such character in the Post-Soviet Russia.

3.5 Balabanov's Characters

As clearly noticeable from the descriptions of each and every studied film, there is an obvious pattern in the choice of characters and specifically in the choices of the heroes that Balabanov portrays. Based on the content analysis (and particularly of the analysis of the characters portrayed in the films) of Brother, Brother 2, War and Zhmurki, we can highlight several re-occurring archetypes, mostly noticeable are the hero and the gangster.

3.5.1   The Hero

Speaking of archetypes and their presence in the work of Alexey Balabanov, we can isolate the Hero\warrior archetype as possibly the strongest of them all. Both Danila from "Brother" and "Brother 2" and Ivan from "War", who are the most significant examples, show the traits that transcend widely beyond the narrative of the chosen films and – which is most important - beyond the Russian cinema itself. As Burton suggests: *"The heroic male adventurer who is physically powerful and irresistible to women repeatedly emerges in popular texts. He is Caucasian in appearance and marked by*

loyalty in male bonding and persistence in pursuing quests." (Burton, 2010 : 23)

Danila and Ivan indeed share these features, however, for the viewer deeply rooted in western culture they may seem as antiheroes rather than heroes, mostly due to their lack of common western idealism, courage or almost Christian morality which tends to be typical for the contemporary heroes of ultimate goodness. Why is that? And why – while western viewer stays perplexed in their incapability to understand what it is that people find attractive about Danila or Ivan, almost entire Russian population sympathizes with the two and with the values they defend on screen, even approving using the methods they chose to do so.

Norris and Torlone postulate one possible explanation: *"Balabanov has consistently used outsider and vigilante heroes as a means of redefining what it means to be 'Russian' after the USSR."* (Norris and Torlone, 2008 : p. 12) Based on this hypothesis, Balabanov's heroes resort to violence in an effort to preserve what they see as "theirs", which is generally excused and even approved by the public in the classical approach when means serving a purpose can be excused, no matter how inappropriate they are. However, there is another point of view that none of the scholars whose work we studied for the purposes of this thesis suggested.

Perhaps the settings of the films made it difficult to realize but when one compares the features of Danila or Ivan as characters and if one narrows down their paths, one must inevitably realize that they share staggering similarities to a whole film genre, vitally and fundamentally embedded in the western society – the Western.

Both Danila and Ivan are not engaging in anything else than the classical "frontier justice" as their morality and courage dictate them to take matters in their own hands when the law and order of the country fail to provide the adequate representation and protection of the interest of its people.

The great distrust in authorities and the ever-present desire for justice and "truth" to prevail is one of the core Russian values, both pictured on the screen as well as permanently present in their general way of life. As a well-known Russian political scientist Ekaterina Shulman stated in her recent interview for Echo of Moscow radio: *"Justice is one of the most important and basic Russian principles, and it's very diverse. It's important for all of us but it's understood differently. Sometimes, justice is the law and sometimes it's mercy. It can be vengeance, too or a revenge but at the same time it can be equality. The feeling of justice is universal for all Russian people and hardly can be quantified at it varies strongly depending on the situation."*[4]

Through his characters Balabanov managed to provide people with comfort of stability using the illusion of the ever-present righteous fighter who stands up for the morality and truth even when the times are difficult and turbulent, after the empire felt and the new era is far from stable. In a sense, all Russians at that time wanted to be Danila or Ivan and wanted to have the power to fix their broken country and the society they were forced to live in, even if it requires murder.

Same as in the Western, the lonely gunman uses force and violence to bring order to the frontier land and to defend the people who live there; Balabanov's heroes are bringing justice to the Post-Soviet frontier land of mobsters and lost ideals. As a Russian proverb says: *"The good should have good fists."* – the idea which was never common in the Soviet era and its cinema, concentrating more on constructive and peaceful approaches to resolving conflicts through cooperation with one another, seemed to settle down very deep in the ideological vacuum of the 1990's. The nation suddenly become a pilgrim in its own land stumbling toward its uncertain future and was forced to defend itself from the new and unknown threats, both internal and external. As this kind of situation never occurred in the

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[4] SHULMAN, Ekaterina. [online] Interview for the radio Echo of Moscow, 30th August 2017. [cit. 30th August 2017] Accessible at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S2PRyS4ePpI

history of Russia, there was no need for characters like Danila or Ivan in the soviet cinema.

As the country and the society were managing to put out its internal struggle and to restore the order, the attention of the Russian people turned outwards in a search of where they belonged among other countries and eventually defined themselves once again through the comparison with their old opponent, the USA. The strongest evidence of this can be found in "Brother 2". Although according to Condee *Balabanov tries to construct an even more crystalized fantasy in relation to the anxieties of nation: he clearly divides the world into us versus them and transforms his character from a defender to an aggressor"* (Condee, 2009 : 234), examining Danila's behaviour in the depth, one necessarily does not need to agree. Yes, there is a strong demarcation between the Russian ideals and the American ones and one clearly defines another and vice versa, the position of Danila as an aggressor is, however, questionable, as he stays the course of his actions throughout the whole film, defending the innocent and punishing the guilty.

The parallel with a lonely Western gunman who barely speaks continues with the example of Danila (or Ivan) furthermore (in their intimidating nature, their protective approach to the worthy and so on) and is crowned in the end of the narrative when both heroes – the Western ones and the Balabanov's ones – eventually leave the world in which they and their violent (or their moral) ways don't belong.

3.5.2   The Gangster

Apart from heroes, Balabanov portrays a selection of antagonists who differ one from another and yet also share similar features. In order to explain his classification of gangsters better, we may return to the parallel of the Wild West narrative and its heroes who share a significant set of features with the heroes of new Russian cinema.

Aslan ("War") is the savage tribe leader who can be compared to the vicious Indian chiefs as they were often portrayed in the Western films. He is an

agent of chaos who fights against order for his land. His methods are violent and brutal and he is to be destroyed by the forces of justice.

Krugly ("Brother") is a local gang leader, who is roaming the lands harassing the settlers and fighting the other gangs. He is not smart or cunning but compensates this deficiency with his swagger persona. He is fighting the hero with overwhelming force of his gang, inevitably loses and ends up dying without honour.

Belkin ("Brother 2") can be compared to the powerful businessman who comes to town perhaps to build a railway, deceiving people into selling their lands and leaving them with nothing. He is fully integrated in the new order, representing another type of danger for the hero and his allies. The law of the state is on his side but the law of the people is not. For his crimes against the common folk he must be punished.

None of these characters were fully developed and presented in the Soviet setting. They indeed existed in their rudimentary form but they only belonged to the western narrative and were placed in the western context as to show that such barbarisms are not possible in the just and prosperous Soviet Union.

In Balabanov's work these characters are not very different from the archetypes common in the classical Hollywood film. The reason for this can be that he "westernized" the topics and the characters on purpose in order to show their weaknesses and corruption more clearly or – because the real gangsters of the time that he portrayed in his films were learning how to be gagsters from Hollywood films – we may be witnessing the simulation of the simulation where it is no longer possible to realize where the real objective representation of the events ends and where the artistic satire of the archetypes begins.

3.5.3 The Prostitute with the Heart of Gold

The stereotype of a prostitute with the heart of gold is ever-present in the narrative of the Western, as it was perhaps reality in the frontier life. Prostitution was, however, a new and vastly unknown thing for the Post-Soviet Russia. Balabanov is not using this archetype directly; instead he modifies it to suit the Russian morals. The characters of Sveta or Cat ("Brother") are promiscuous not because of money or because they have to but because they fall for the hero. They see sex and intimacy as a way to return a favour or portray their affection and not as the way to gain advantage or money. The only real prostitute in the study material is Dasha ("Brother 2") but she is portrayed as a victim of the situation and as a hostage of the western world.

All of the women portrayed in Balabanov's film are helping the hero in a way and all of them are keeping their honour, too, in their own way. All of them are reminding the hero about his wrong doings and warning him from letting his violent intentions to overcome his fundamentally good nature. All portrayed women are also self-reliant and independent, as it can often be seen in the Western films as well.

Without a doubt, the character of the prostitute (even the honourable one) was completely forbidden in the films of the Soviet era, and if ever mentioned, it was only in the connotation with capitalistic countries as the symbol of evil and the corrupted system that is forcing women to sell themselves for cash.

3.5.4 Other Re-occurring Characters

Balabanov's films are littered with less significant characters which can most predominantly be characterised as some sort of a stereotype but mostly as types (as defined semantically in the theory of media). They represent small parts of the narrative and are mostly deprived of any features besides the ones attributed to their type/stereotype but the fulfil an important task of bringing the world around the hero to life and providing valuable social

commentary on the reality of Russia at the time and the drama surrounding the lead characters.

A corrupt police officer

Victor ("Brother 2") becomes a police officer despite his assassin background and arguable morals, showing how corrupt and indistinguishable from the actual criminals the law enforcers have become in Russia in the 90's.

Stepan ("Zhmurki") is a police officer who uses his position as a means to obtain money. He hires criminals and sets them one against another, knowing all of them personally.

Dim-witted gangster\henchman

Koron and his gang are the prime examples of such types. All of the henchmen of Krugly or Belkin are the same, too, not very bright and getting scared easily with the sole purpose of their lives being pleasing their boss. Their actions inevitably end up in failure in one way or another.

Wise old man

Goffman in "Brother" is a prime example of such a character. Normally, we would be talking about the archetype of the wise old man; however, Goffman is not given much space in the film to fully fit in the classification.

Facing a brand new problem caused by the collapse of economy, Russian film and television in the 90's often portrayed homeless people, bums and vagabonds as people of great knowledge and almost shamanistic qualities. Quite often they also carried something forgotten during the country's transformation, like morals or spiritual believes. In case of Goffman this characteristic fits very well.

Young computer hacker

In the early 2000s the importance of technology has become apparent and Balabanov reacted by the introduction of the character of Illia in his film "Brother 2". Unfamiliar with computers at the time, the society perceived

his skills almost like magical powers, lending him an aura of a modern-day magician.

Vulgar, uneducated criminal

This type can mostly be seen in the smallest parts in Balabanov's film. The most apparent are two characters – Alexander Matrosov ("War") who is a loud vulgar Russian criminal who hates the Chechens but buys heroin from them anyway to sell it to his own people; and Kaban ("Zhmurki"), who is a former gagster, now residing in the Russian government who instructs his fellow criminals to join, too in order to gain more power and money.

All of these types can easily be found in the western films about mafia as well, often hyperbolised or caricaturized, but for the Russian society after the fall of Soviet Union these people were painfully real. In a comparison to western film production these characters frequently tend to be transformed, reimagined and distorted versions of their western origins, which however even strongly highlights the fact that the Russian society of that time was a slanted imitation of the west.

4   Conclusion

In his films, Alexey Balabanov managed to present and portray a whole array of characters (and character archetypes) that have strongly reflected the life in the Post-Soviet Russia with a great degree of accuracy. We can argue that many of them are hyperbolised for the entertainment reasons; either to provide the comic relief or to move the narrative forward in a more action-packed way, but nevertheless, all the characters remain relevant from the historical perspective. By the time Balabanov's films were released, his characters were easily recognisable by the audiences, clearly understandable and widely welcomed, filling the gap left in the Russian society (and its cinema) after the fall of the regime.

The call for explanation of the current situation in the new-born Russian Federation was answered by a perfect, detailed and truthful depiction of bleak days, dirty streets, mafia bosses and struggling common folk and the call for a hero, for the role model who could give a searching nation direction was answered by Danila and by Ivan and by their high moral ground too noble even for the current situation that Balabanov cleverly layered with their humanity, their physical weaknesses and their betrayed trust which they still carry as a badge of honour, showing their enemies that nothing can shatter their conviction.

Balabanov's heroes are very much Jungian and they are very much archetypical heroes sharing most of the common traits traceable from Arthurian myth all the way to Captain America of today, but they do possess specific cultural aspects typical for Russia, too, such as achieving justice at any cost, no matter the blood, the damage or hurt, the distrust towards the system and the look behind the façade of things and people. New Russian hero doesn't necessarily see a prostitute as dirty or a murder as bad and he doesn't rely on others either – he is indeed happy if they help, but he doesn't share the idea of common good for all people and the principal of turning the other cheek (apparent for example very well in the comparison of the character of Ivan and of John in "War"). New Russian hero is taking matters in his own hands, much like the righteous lonely

gunman in the Western movies. Such similarity surprisingly is not spoken about at all in the theoretical texts about new Russian cinema or about Balabanov's work we have encountered for the purposes of this research but can easily be grounded in the fact that Russian cinema as well as the Russian society as a whole was westernising in the course of the 90's at a rapid pace and many of the character archetypes Balabanov uses can be traced to Hollywood films and to the American culture, based on their features, behaviours and their journeys, despite their obviously nationalistic stance in the narrative.

Comparison of Russian and American is omnipresent in Balabanov's work, not just from the perspective of the characters but also from the general narrative. Speaking of characters, however, there is one unified quality which the hero, the antagonist and also any other character share, which the western hero portrayal seldom shows – they are all flawed in one way or another, no matter whether they represent good or evil and Russian or Western. These flaws had realistic background in the society after the great change and found its way in Balabanov's films serving as a mirror for the audience to recognise themselves and the life around them in the narrative of the films. It served as a reminder of the lack of morals and national and personal identity which was as brutal as the life of the time itself. Such flawed characters never existed on the screens of the Soviet Union, there was no place for them among the idealistic image of life they were portraying. New Russian cinema, however, demanded truth without glamour and sugar-coating, which had never been seen before.

Despite presenting strong nationalistic tendencies in his films, Balabanov used very common western archetypes in order to depict the events that took place in the 90's Russia. Perhaps he has chosen this approach cautiously in order to achieve maximum efficiency for his message and in order to talk to the audience in a language they can understand, as western cinema was very common at the time of his films, or perhaps the westernisation of the Russian society went so deep in his time that it was impossible to stay true to the subject without utilising these archetypes in one way or another.

Speaking of Balabanov's characters, we cannot fail to mention that there isn't just darkness in them. On the contrary, there is a lot of light, too. Balabanov shows the audience that there are still great and noble qualities in Russian people, not just in heroes like Danila or Ivan, but in common people, too with their "unimportant" lives like Sveta, Dasha or Goffman. These characters are more important than the heroes in a way because the audience doesn't expect them to battle mobsters and saving the world. And it that lies their strength and their honour, to help the heroes, to suffer pain but never give up, never see violence or murder as an answer (like Sveta, for example). Even the negative gangster characters such like Belkin or Sergei Mikhalovich are in fact both loving fathers, for which they are rewarded as they are spared in the end.

Following the Russian artistic tradition in literature, Balabanov creates characters that are never fully evil or completely good. The archetypes that they represent could indeed be found all around the world in different shapes and forms of art but as they are Russian, born in the turbulent and brutal times after the collapse of the Soviet Union, they lost their gloss, replacing it by the harsh and unpleasant truth and the decision that it's them who needs to bring justice to the new "wild" landscape of the ruined country. That is what makes them believable and relatable. It's what makes them human. We can almost claim that we witness a partial alienation of the archetype from its archetypical structure in Balabanov's characters as – for example – the hero is deliberately committing crimes, having affairs with married women and killing people with no remorse. In the context of new Russian cinema, however, he is just morphing, morphing into a new archetype, still based on the old ones characterized by Jung, but on top of it forged in flames of the turbulent period of no justice, no understanding and no mercy but what he makes himself.

As the conditions changed, the order returned and life in Russia became better and brighter, the fierce justice fighters and their counterparts were put to rest, remaining only in the memory of the nation as a reminder of the harsh times that it survived and risen from. That's why Danila will never

return, as he simply has no place in the modern day world anymore, he can rest easy as his quest was successful when he reminded people what justice and truth are and how important than ever they are in the darkest of times, the reminder that was desperately needed then.

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