

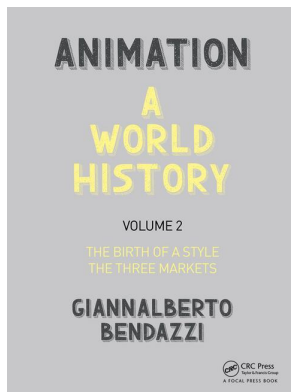
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## **Animation: A World History Volume II: The Birth of a Style—The Three Markets**

Giannalberto Bendazzi

### **Soviet Union**

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# 4

## SOVIET UNION

### Russia<sup>1</sup>

Since Stalin's 1932 decree *On the Reconstruction of Literary and Art Organizations*, the Soviet Union's political establishment had directly or indirectly steered the country's arts and sciences. The ending of the Second World War brought Stalin first to the status of a war hero and eventually to that of a winning God, which – apart from the sheer terror that reigned during the 1930s and 1940s – contributed to the total obedience that was given to his word in every field of society, including filmmaking.

After his death,<sup>2</sup> his 'lieutenants' got locked in a three-year power struggle for his succession, from which Nikita Khrushchev emerged, ultimately winning the Kremlin from political hardliners like Georgy Malenkov and Vyacheslav Molotov.

Khrushchev's speech 'On the Personality Cult and Its Consequences' (the so-called 'Secret Speech', as it was delivered behind closed doors, during a special session and on the last day) at the 20th Party Congress in 1956, in which he denounced, even mildly, what the Soviet people had to endure during the years of Stalin's reign, marked the beginning of significant internal liberalizations. Millions and millions of political prisoners were set free; the victims of the great purges and deportations were rehabilitated; and forbidden/forgotten books, works, entire styles and trends could come back. The process was gradual and uneven, prolonged well into

the following decades, but the first signs were to appear pretty soon. Most importantly, Khrushchev encouraged a moderate freedom of speech and opinion (which included satire and satirical periodicals), and opened up the Soviet Union to foreign influences – for example, in 1957, the VI World Festival of Youth and Students held in Moscow, an event that would shatter the image about Westerners and about the Third World. Now, Muscovites could meet foreigners and judge for themselves.

Khrushchev's leadership, which ended in 1964, was not devoid of hard times, however. His impulsive temperament (plus his mutual aversion to American president John F. Kennedy) wasn't always of help in the world of diplomacy and, in October 1962, his political moves brought the world to the brink of a nuclear war in the Cuban missile crisis.

In comparison with the icy Stalin era, this time was, anyway, called the Thaw. The very name came after the title of a 1954 novella by Ilya Ehrenburg and, generally speaking, the first ideological shifts would come disguised as literary discussions (around Ehrenburg's *The Thaw* itself, for instance, or the 1956 novel *Not by Bread Alone* by Vladimir Dudintsev).<sup>3</sup>

This endearment seemed to come to an abrupt symbolic end, for instance, when Khrushchev visited an art exhibition (entitled *New Reality*), featuring several nonconformist artists, in the Manezh building just off the Kremlin

<sup>1</sup> By Giannalberto Bendazzi and Mikhail Gurevich.

<sup>2</sup> Iosif Vissarionovich Dzhughashvili ('Stalin') died of cerebral haemorrhage on 5 March 1953, aged 75.

<sup>3</sup> Historical periods don't coincide precisely with calendar dates, social and cultural eras overlap and go with uneven pace; politically, 'the Sixties' started, probably, in 1956 (with the XX Party Congress) and ended in 1968 (with the invasion of Czechoslovakia); the effects of the Thaw would be tangible well into the Stagnation Era; and Stalinism, in some form or degree, would be resurrected time and time again.

walls. He utterly disliked the paintings and called it ‘pederasty in art’.<sup>4</sup>

Ideological purges were less wild but didn’t stop. *Zhdanovshchina*<sup>5</sup> had been a prime example, and there were some twists, against the commonplace wisdom. That may help to explain the visual richness and diversity that gradually, but decisively, came into animation. The artist’s community was pretty tight, and ‘cross-pollination’ was inevitable and important.

When Khrushchev was removed from office, Leonid Brezhnev, a much more conservative-minded leader, took over. During his long term in office, which has become known as the Stagnation, the screw of censorship was tightened again but, apart from the fact that nobody was shot any more for not painting or writing as the supreme leader wanted, this censorship was concerned with the text more than with the aesthetics. This fact allowed artists, animation artists included, considerably more freedom than they had had for the last two decades.

From the middle of the 1930s to the beginning of the 1960s, the task that Soviet animation was mainly to fulfil – in the eyes of the State apparatus, anyway – was the production of children’s films, often favouring rotoscoping, always making use of the classic cel technique and the round American style. This style, however, had sober movements, far from the deformations and contortions typical of slapstick comedy; in short, it learned from the calmer and dignified lesson of Disney’s feature films. There is also to add the issue of the so-called ‘realism’, which was both the demand of the ‘socialist art’ orthodoxy and the drive of national tradition.

All that would be tangible in the work of leading masters of the ‘new wave’ and beyond; Yuri Norstein’s (and

others’) detailed, nuanced character movements are in part rooted there.

Animation of puppets and cut-outs resumed from 8 June 1953, when decree No. 183 ordered the opening of a specialized section at Soyuzmultfilm. The first ‘new’ puppet film was *Dva zhadnykh medvezhonka* (The Two Greedy Bear Cubs, 1954) by Vladimir Degtyarev (Moscow, 18 January 1916–6 September 1974).<sup>6</sup> Evgeny Migunov’s *Karandash i klyaksa-veselye okhotniki* (The Pen and the Blot-Lively Hunters) was released a month later.

The main artists of that time were well-established professionals Ivan Ivanov-Vano, the Brumberg sisters, Lev Atamanov and Mikhail Tsekhanovsky. They all had unquestionable loyalty to the Party – a prerequisite for a continuous professional career. Some of them, however, knew that aesthetically better films could be done; some of them even wished they would.

Beside the traditional shorts, some (few) feature and featurette films were also produced.

Ivan Ivanov-Vano, the guarantor of ideological and stylistic orthodoxy, was the most influential personality in the community. He became a favourite of the public, too, with the feature film *Konek-gorbulok* (The Humpbacked Little Horse, 1947).

Ivanushka, the fool boy, is magically given a humpbacked, little horse. He goes with it to the city, finds favour with the king, but then is forced to find for him a firebird and the maiden of the seas. Ivanushka complies, but then the king wants to become young again to marry the maiden. In order to do, so he must first bathe in boiling milk, then in hot water and then in ‘bitterly cold’ water. The king decides to try out this procedure on Ivanushka, first. The humpbacked, little horse magically saves his

<sup>4</sup>In fact, many of the establishment figures of socialist-realism officialdom were either themselves ‘avant-gardists’ in the beginning, or immediate students of avant-garde masters. Some of the unique storylines in this domain were (re)discovered later – for instance, on a fantastic art collection in Uzbek city of Nukus (capital of the autonomous Karakalpakstan Republic), a second in the world with regard to Russian/Soviet avant-garde. Stories like that might cast a different light on the developments of ‘national’ studios in Soviet republics.

<sup>5</sup>The *Zhdanovshchina* (that we know as *Zhdanovizm*) was born in 1946. *Zvezda* (Star), the journal that published the satirist Mikhail Zoshchenko’s writings, was criticized by Stalin on 13 April 1946 at a meeting of the Politburo. On 14 August, the party’s Central Committee deliberated that the journals *Zvezda* and *Leningrad* had to correct their mistakes and their defects, through the cessation of the publication of the works of Mikhail Zoshchenko and the poet Anna Akhmatova. On 21 August, the *Pravda* newspaper, official party spokesman, published the resolution against the two periodicals. Zoshchenko and Akhmatova were expelled from the writers’ union, *Leningrad* was immediately closed and *Zvezda* changed course and joined the slander. The Central Committee secretary with responsibility for ideology and culture, Andrei Aleksandrovich Zhdanov – after whose name this stricter state control of art was called – started then (in 1948) a campaign of persecutions of composers such as Dmitri Shostakovich, Sergei Prokofiev and Aram Khachaturian. Zhdanov was servile to (and terrorized by) Stalin. He died in that same 1948, aged 54. In the post-Stalin years to follow, more characteristic would become cases like that of poet and novelist Boris Pasternak: publication of his masterpiece *Doctor Zhivago* abroad in 1957, Nobel Prize in 1958 and crowds and free speeches at his funeral outside Moscow in 1960.

<sup>6</sup>He would ensure his popularity with the nine-minute *Kto skazal Myau?* (Who Said Meow?, 1962), the first really successful puppet film made after the war.

master: the boy comes out of the three cauldrons a strong, handsome man, with whom the girl falls in love. The two lovers leave and the king tries in his turn to bathe; but the spell is over, and he is boiled to death.

The film was well animated and well supported by a warm, competent narration, for which the two co-directors Aleksandra Snezhko-Blotskaya (1909–80) and Viktor Gromov (1899–1975) are to be acknowledged, too.<sup>7</sup>

In this *Humpbacked Little Horse*, versatile Ivan Ivanov-Vano was able to combine the things he most cared for: the Russian tradition, the pleasure of storytelling, the love for the poor and the contempt for the arrogant.

The next feature film he and Snezhko-Blotskaya directed was *Snegurochka* (The Snow Maiden, 1952), from Aleksandr Ostrovsky's text,<sup>8</sup> with Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov's music and again with clear folkloric roots. The Snow Maiden, the immortal daughter of Spring and Frost, yearns for the companionship of humans. Her mother eventually gives her this possibility, but when she at last falls in love, she melts.

In 1956, this time teamed with Mikhail Botov (1910–75), Ivanov-Vano directed *Dvenadsat' Mesyatsy* (The Twelve Brothers-Months), out of a Samuil Marshak's fairy tale play about a malicious stepmother, a lazy daughter and a diligent stepdaughter, who are recompensed by twelve brothers-months according to their merits. The featurette *V nekotorom tsarstve* (Once upon a Time, 1957, again with Botov) was based on the folk tale *By a Wave of the Wand*. A peasant is rewarded for of his kindheartedness, and can make his dreams come true; but real happiness lies in his village and in his sweetheart. *Priklyucheniya Buratino* (The Adventures of Buratino, 1959) made in collaboration with Dmitry Babichenko (1901–1991), was based on the already mentioned Aleksey Tolstoy's version of *Pinocchio*.

The Brumberg sisters worked on medium-length films. *Propavshaya gramota* (The Missing Patent, 1945) is based on a classic, early novella by Nikolay Gogol; it tells of a Cossack who goes to Saint Petersburg to give a letter to the Tsarina, and has to overcome a lot of opposition. *Noch' pered Rozhdestvom* (The Night before Christmas, 1951), with music by Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov, and based on another classic, early Gogol novella, features a blacksmith who

wants a pair of beautiful shoes for his whimsical beloved, and who obtains them at the royal palace.

*Polyot na Lunu* (Flight to the Moon, 1953) is about a boy who participates in an interplanetary trip so as to help the crew of a vanished rocket. It was an early spark of the space age that would infect everybody in the years to come, accompanying satellite launchings, manned expeditions around the globe and conquest of the moon. In *Ispolnenie zhelany* (Wishes Come True, 1957), a lumberjack receives the gift of realizing his every wish and marries a beautiful princess.

The two sisters' mainline production, however, was educational, with attacks against poor study habits and laziness as in *Devochka v tsirke* (The Girl at the Circus, 1950), *Ostrov oshibok* (Island of Mistakes, 1955) and *Stepa moryak* (Stepa the Sailor, 1955). *Fedya Zaytsev* (1948) was at least noteworthy for its vivacious storytelling. The film tells of a boy who draws a little man on the school wall, lets a schoolmate be accused of the mischief and finally, remorseful, confesses in front of the entire class. Adamantly in good faith, the two ladies produced a remake of this monument to guilt, sin and self-flagellation in 1960: *Chelovechka narisoval ya* (It's Me Who Has Drawn the Little Man).

Meek, round faced, always smiling Lev Atamanov chiefly produced adaptations of literary texts, emulating Ivan Ivanov-Vano. An accurate artist, though ready to lean towards sentimentalism, Atamanov was rather weak as far as inventiveness and storytelling ability were concerned. The film *Alenky tsvetochek* (The Reddish Flower, 1952), based on a subject by Sergey Aksakov (1791–1859), told of a merchant returning from faraway lands who, while taking home a gift for his dear daughter, is captured and kept prisoner by an ogre, until the girl comes to the rescue. It's the nth variation of the 'the beauty and the beast' plot, in Russian literary tradition known mainly in this Aksakov version (published in 1858).

Atamanov's best-known works include *Zolotaya antilopa* (The Golden Antelope, 1954), based on Indian tales, and the feature *Snezhnaya koroleva* (The Snow Queen, 1957). The latter, from Andersen's tale, is the story of a boy named Kai, who is kidnapped by the Snow Queen, imprisoned in the ice palace and finally freed by his sister Gerda's love.

<sup>7</sup>As the negative of the original film was heavily damaged, Ivanov-Vano made a second, longer version almost thirty years later, practically in the same layout – cleaned-up in execution, but visibly lacking some freshness and energy of the earlier one. Digital technology permitted a satisfactory restoration of the original film in 2004.

<sup>8</sup>Aleksandr Ostrovsky (1823–1886) was one of Russia's most admired playwrights. *Snegurochka* was first staged as a play in 1873, but its most famous version is the Aleksandr Ostrovsky/Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov opera of 1882.

This film was loved by the public and by festival juries and won several awards.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Atamanov continued children's productions but also worked on more ambitious projects, such as *Buket* (The Bouquet, 1966), *Skameyka* (The Bench (1967, based on caricatures of Danish artist Herluf Bidstrup), *Balerina na korable* (The Ballerina on the Boat, 1969, praising the pure beauty of art),<sup>9</sup> *Eto v nashikh silakh* (We Can, 1970, dealing with political and social events and again using the sketches of Herluf Bidstrup). Atamanov died in Moscow on 12 February 1981.

Mikhail Tsekhanovsky forfeited his old ambitions and devoted himself to literary adaptations and children's cinema. *Skazka o Rybake i Rybke* (The Tale about the Fisherman and the Fish, 1950) after Pushkin; *Kashtanka* (1952) after Chekhov's short story. In 1954, he made the medium-length *Tsarevna-byagushka* (The Frog Princess, from a popular tale and, in 1956, the short *Devochka v dzhunglyakh* (The Girl in the Jungle), from an Indian tale about a girl who sets a tiger free. In 1962, he made the feature film *Dikiie Lebedi* (The Wild Swans, from Hans Christian Andersen and eventually, in 1964, he made his last film, a widescreen, nineteen-minute, pale remake of his great *Pochta* (Mail) of 1929.

Important was *Zakoldovannyi malchik* (The Enchanted Boy, 1955). It was a film in five parts, based on the fairy tale of Selma Lagerlöf, which owes its success to the directors Vladimir Polkovnikov (1906–1982) and Aleksandra Snezhko-Blotskaya. The excellent work of the artists, a riveting storyline, and well-defined characters made it a classic for today's audience, too. *Seraya sheyka* (The Little Grey Neck, 1948), directed by Polkovnikov and Amalrik, is a combination of sadness and hope that shone at several prestigious film events.

We already encountered Mstislav Pashchenko (Yaroslavl', 1 April 1901–Moscow, 22 October 1958) in 1938, when he made the remarkable *Dzhyabzha*. After the war, Pashchenko moved to Moscow from Leningrad and

adjusted himself to the general line. Films: *Kogda zazhigayutsya elki* (When the Christmas Trees Will Be Lit, 1950), *Lesnye puteshestvenniki* (The Forest Adventurers, 1951) and the prize-winning *Neobyknovennyi match* (An Extraordinary Match, 1955).

This last film was co-directed by Boris Dezhkin (Kursk, 19 August 1914–Moscow, 13 March 1992), an artist who, for several years, worked mainly for other directors, only occasionally making his own creations. In the 1960s, he became definitively a director after his internationally successful film *Chipollino* (1961, after Gianni Rodari).

The sense of change was brewing within the profession and the artists were ready to go beyond the long-imposed limits.

Most important of all, professional discussion emerged on the need to pass, in the production process, to a teamwork method, since the old Tayloristic system no longer permitted the animation to advance.

### Ivan Ivanov-Vano<sup>10</sup>

Ivan Petrovich Ivanov-Vano<sup>11</sup> lived a professional life long and rich enough to acquire status (which he enjoyed for decades) of a patriarch of the trade and a doyen of the guild. However, as happens with figures like this in shut-in societies, his real biography is yet to be thoroughly researched, and the cloud of controversy yet to be penetrated. According to critic Anatoly Volkov, a close confidant in later years, there were some facts in biography that Vano would be reluctant to recall even in memoir.<sup>12</sup>

He was the one whose work, as Yuri Norstein noted in his memorial note, was pioneering in many aspects and, as a whole, 'linked with a single thread the formalistic quest of 1920s and the modern-day auteur animation'.<sup>13</sup> Though, shall we add, through

<sup>9</sup>This film, although rather banal, is a stylistically evolutionary piece; graphics in the style of Raoul Dufy, music by the great Alfred Schnittke.

<sup>10</sup>[By Mikhail Gurevich]

<sup>11</sup>To his most common Russian surname he added 'Vano', a nickname his mother used to call him in childhood. Perhaps he followed the bohemian fashion of the day, with the aim of distinguishing himself from namesake colleagues. See Anatoly Volkov, *Na korabliakh fantazii nashei* (On the Ships of Fantasy of Ours); <http://www.film.ru/article.asp?ID=712>. All quotations from Russian language sources are in Mikhail Gurevich's translation unless indicated otherwise.

<sup>12</sup>Anatoly Volkov, *Na korabliakh fantazii nashei* (On the Ships of Fantasy of Ours); <http://www.film.ru/article.asp?ID=712>.

<sup>13</sup>'Yuri Norstein on the Death of Ivanov-Vano' (entry authored by E. Podolskaya) in *Noveishaia istoriia otechestvennogo kino. 1986–2000. Kino i kontekst* (The Newest History of Domestic Cinema. 1986–2000. Cinema and Context), Vol. 4, Saint Petersburg, 2002; quoted as in: [http://www.russiancinema.ru/index.php?e\\_dept\\_id=1&e\\_person\\_id=1280#](http://www.russiancinema.ru/index.php?e_dept_id=1&e_person_id=1280#).

mountains of conventional studio productions, jungles of internal politicking and marshes of stylistic compromises.

Born in Moscow, on 27 January 1900, to a lower-class family distressed by poverty, Ivan had little chance for a decent formal education: he managed to complete perhaps just a few years of grade school, and the lack of proper credentials would become a matter of jealous rumours among colleagues when he became a full professor of a film school in the 1950s.<sup>14</sup>

From early years, he was a self-reliant breadwinner. At the age of fourteen, he made a major choice, entering the Moscow School of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture which, in a few years in post-revolutionary Russia, would be drastically transformed to finally merge in 1920 with the already mentioned Higher Art and Technical Studios (Vkhutemas). Upon graduation in 1923, the young artist got lured by his friend Vladimir Suteev (1903–1993) to try the exotic field of animation. He visited the experimental workshop led by Nikolai Khodataev, Yuri Merkulov and Zenon Komissarenko, under the roof of GTK, State Technical College of Cinema, and made his first cut-out character move on film. Then, part of this group workshop formed an animation department at Mezhrabpom-Rus's studio in 1925.<sup>15</sup> Their

work at first involved technical–instructional or educational–scientific films and sequences, before it led to *Senka the African* (1927), considered to be the first Soviet animation for children, on which Vano was already credited as co-director.<sup>16</sup> Then, as a draughtsman, he worked on *The Skating Ring* (1927, directed by Yuri Zheliabuzhsky), brilliantly drawn in the simplest contour line<sup>17</sup> and in which, as Norstein puts it, ‘the character image is shaped primarily though movement as such’. Vano was one of the first to understand the very nature of animation as that of ‘dynamic graphic art’ of a specific kind.<sup>18</sup>

In the early 1930s, Vano solidified his directorial credentials at Mezhrabpom-Film;<sup>19</sup> worth remembering are *Black and White* (1932), based on Mayakovsky's poem,<sup>20</sup> and *Tale about Tsar Durandai* (1934). This first immersion of his into the depth of genuine Russian folklore and its not-quite-conventional stylistics was a historical satire, with a denunciation of the tsarist past. This film was a quite playful and brave formal exercise, dynamic and full of original gags.

With the formation of the centralized Soyuzmultfilm studio, Ivanov-Vano engaged in numerous short- and medium-length projects, from propaganda pieces to a parody on *The Three Musketeers* (1938), to the screen adaptation of Korney Chukovsky's<sup>21</sup> children's poem *Moidodyr* (Clean

<sup>14</sup> See, for instance, Lana Azarkh, ‘Multiplicatory’ (Animators), *Iskusstvo kino* (Film Art), No. 9, 2010; <http://kinoart.ru/2010/n9-article26.html#2>.

<sup>15</sup> See details of studio's developments in Boris Pavlov, ‘Animation in the “Russian Hollywood” of the 1920–1930s’, *Animation Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Spring 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Though he performed, in fact, different functions within the characteristically collectivist work flow; as Merkulov would later recall: ‘Cherkes drew the backgrounds [ . . . ] in pencil in the style of the Aleksandr Iakovlev's African drawings. Vano drew complex patterned ornaments and graphics in the style of Konstantin Somov or Chekhonin and I, who was fascinated then by Russian folk luboks [prints], drew Senka himself’. In *Žizn' v kino. Veterany o sebe i svoikh tovarishchakh* (Life in Cinema: Veterans Tell about Themselves and Their Comrades), Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1971, p. 131 (English translation cited as in: Boris Pavlov, ‘Animation in the ‘Russian Hollywood’ of the 1920–1930s’, *Animation Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Spring 1998, p. 19).

<sup>17</sup> As Laura Pontieri observes, the very ‘graphic choice – a thin, white profile on a black background – is unmistakably indebted to the work of one of the world's first animators, Emile Cohl’. Laura Pontieri, *Soviet Animation and the Thaw of the 1960s: Not Only for Children*, London: John Libbey, 2012, p. 16.

<sup>18</sup> *Yuri Norstein on the Death of Ivanov-Vano* (entry authored by E. Podolskaya) in *Noveishaia istoriia otechestvennogo kino. 1986–2000. Kino i kontekst* (The Newest History of Domestic Cinema. 1986–2000. Cinema and Context), Vol. 4, Saint Petersburg, 2002; quoted as in: [http://www.russiancinema.ru/index.php?e\\_dept\\_id=1&e\\_person\\_id=1280#](http://www.russiancinema.ru/index.php?e_dept_id=1&e_person_id=1280#).

<sup>19</sup> Renamed upon reorganization in 1928; at some point, around 1934, Vano became the head of animation. See Boris Pavlov, ‘Animation in the ‘Russian Hollywood’ of the 1920–1930s’, *Animation Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Spring 1998, pp. 22, 24.

<sup>20</sup> The earliest of the studio's surviving sound animation, the film used the post-synchronization technique. See Boris Pavlov, ‘Animation in the ‘Russian Hollywood’ of the 1920–1930s’, *Animation Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Spring 1998, p. 25.

<sup>21</sup> Born in Saint Petersburg in 1885, died in Peredelkino in 1969, Chukovsky was one of the best-known poets for children of his time.

'til Holes, 1939), a long-lasting staple of national, gently didactic mythology of childhood and growing up (he would revisit it with a remake in 1954). His style gradually became more and more conventional, sweetly naturalistic, close to the Disney canon. (In discussions during the mid-1930s, Vano would appear among the resisting artists, though not as the most forceful one; later, after years of conformity, he would cautiously voice certain reservations; the corresponding chapter in his late-in-life memoir would be entitled 'In Disney's captivity'.)

In 1939, Vano was among the founders of the animation designers' workshop at the newly formed design department in VGIK (All-Union State Film Institute),<sup>22</sup> where he would stay as a professor for decades. He mentored several generations of artists, many of whom would become his collaborators and eventually turn to directing.<sup>23</sup>

A new start came in the mid-1940s and into the 1950s, when Vano devoted himself almost exclusively to the fairy tale genre, with a distinct national-Russian identity (e.g. *The Humpbacked Little Horse*). Though far from *Durundai's* liberating bravado and 'rough', folk-art style, with regard to craftsmanship, as Russian culture professor David MacFadyen writes, it 'undoubtedly set itself a tall order in terms of action and smooth, stylistically consistent movement'.<sup>24</sup> With vivid narrative flow and distinct characters, and incorporating

stylized imagery of Old Russia and certain folkloric elements (within the rediscovered tradition of book illustration, particularly of Ivan Bilibin), and thanks to taste for rhythm and humour, the director managed here to 'transform Disney technique into a powerful enterprise – a Russian film'.<sup>25</sup> In some other works – like *The Snow Maiden*, practically a film-opera of Rimsky-Korsakov's music – he couldn't escape paying his dues to the lifeless, overdone rotoscope technique, prevalent for the period.<sup>26</sup>

The Zagreb School exponent Borivoj Dvorniković recalls: 'We had the opportunity to watch Russian cartoons after the Second World War and were admired by new sensibilities and atmospheres, especially in the luxuriously animated fairy tales of Ivanov-Vano'.<sup>27</sup> Still, a distinct sense of patriotic-didactic pathos came through. American scholar of children's literature Jack Zipes writes, 'Ivanov-Vano drew upon the wish-fulfilment potential of fairy tales to make a loaded political metaphorical statement'.<sup>28</sup>

With his reputation strengthened (and being among the very few allowed to travel during the Iron Curtain era), Ivanov-Vano became the international face of Soviet animation, a frequent festival attendee, and, later, vice president at ASIFA from its inception for years on. His internal influence, though very tangible, was informal; he never

<sup>22</sup> As his daughter Galina would testify much later, in 1938 Vano was fired, if only conditionally, for nonattendance at work – which at this especially harsh time could be considered a serious offence punishable by a prison term – and the Film Institute's timely offer came about also as a heaven-sent escape. See Anatoly Volkov, 'Na korabliakh fantazii nashei' (On the Ships of Fantasy of Ours), *SK-Novosti*, No. 48, 29 June 2000; <http://www.film.ru/article.asp?ID=712>.

<sup>23</sup> In the early war days, Vano made an extremely strong war propaganda short, *Ne toptat fashistskomu sapogu nashei rodiny* (The Fascist Boot Won't Trample the Soil of Our Motherland, 1941).

<sup>24</sup> David MacFadyen, *Yellow Crocodiles and Blue Oranges: Russian Animated Film since World War Two*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press – MQUP, 2005, p. 75.

<sup>25</sup> Yuri Norstein on the Death of Ivanov-Vano (entry authored by E. Podolskaya) in *Noveishaia istoriia otechestvennogo kino. 1986–2000. Kino i kontekst* (The Newest History of Domestic Cinema. 1986–2000. Cinema and Context), Vol. 4, Saint Petersburg, 2002; quoted as in: [http://www.russiancinema.ru/index.php?e\\_dept\\_id=1&e\\_person\\_id=1280#](http://www.russiancinema.ru/index.php?e_dept_id=1&e_person_id=1280#).

<sup>26</sup> Again, however, he had reservations about it. He kept them to himself and, at a certain point, expressed publicly, with proper caution. See transcript of his 1951 discourse on the issue at a studio conference in the book *Kinovedcheskie zapiski* (Film Studies Notes), No. 80, 2006 (publication and introduction by Georgy Borodin). Here, Vano considers the importance of rotoscope as a learning tool for animators and calls for a 'creative approach' in its possibly limited application; also, as Borodin emphasizes, this discourse shows that the issue was, in good part, embedded in the problem of human characters in animation.

<sup>27</sup> Borivoj Dvornikovic, e-mail letter to Mikhail Gurevich, 8 January 2012.

<sup>28</sup> Jack Zipes, *The Enchanted Screen: The Unknown History of Fairy-Tale Films*, New York and Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2011, p. 95.

had an administrative power at the studio. Nor was he a politician per se: in fact, he joined the party very late. He was for years a chair of the animation section at Filmmakers Union, but not the open member of its 'nomenklatura' leadership. A regular or occasional mediator of the official line, he was a survivor and a guardian of continuity and tradition, but with a pretty wide vision.

In 1960, Vano moved to the puppet division of Soyuzmultfilm, a move that he considered a logical development since, from the very beginning, he had worked with 'flat pin-joint marionette' – in his view, a definite variety of puppet film.<sup>29</sup> There, he undertook a number of projects in mixed media that contributed importantly to the stylistic revolution of the 1960s and 1970s: *Letayushchy Proletary* (A Flying Proletarian, 1962), *Levsha* (The Left-Handed, 1964), *Vremena Goda* (Seasons, 1969) and *Secha pri Kerzhentse* (The Battle at Kerzhnets, 1971).

Ivanov-Vano's filmography includes some forty titles, most of them made with co-directors: Leonid Amalrik, sisters Brumberg, Alexandra Snezhko-Blotskaya, Mikhail Botov, Vladimir Danilevich, among others.<sup>30</sup> The nature of these collaborations could have been different through the years. The collectivist–workshop spirit often defined the modus operandi in the 1920s; later, the division of labour, the role assignment and the merits attribution would become more of a sensitive matter and, finally, just an administrative function. Some (as animation historian Georgy Borodin relates) would charge Vano of exploiting interchangeable 'ghost directors'; others, such as studio art director Lana Azarkh, held a milder view: 'Ivan Petrovich divided his time between VGIK and the studio. Aleksandra Gavrilovna Snezhko-Blotskaya worked with him as a second director [. . .]. Vano had quite wonderful artists–designers, all of them VGIK graduates: Lev

Milchin, Viktor Nikitin, Nadya Stroganova. With such a strong, powerful group, Ivan Petrovich (his studio version) didn't take much of a trouble at the studio. He was a multifaceted man: gourmand who kept an open table, mentor who took care of students, fisher and mushroom hunter who loved mother-nature'.<sup>31</sup>

The issue becomes all the more important and touchy with regard to later, much less conventional, projects. It would be a tempting simplification, perhaps, to say that Vano just held younger talents under his authoritative–protective wing, allowing them to experiment and thus encouraging the new era to flourish. The reality was probably more complicated. At least in part, the veteran director got a second wind revisiting themes and techniques of his daring youth. On *The Left-Handed Man* [see next section], he worked with designer Arkady Tyurin, his recent student who had made a graduation project on exactly the same material, and Yuri Norstein, then an animator on the film, made an invaluable contribution to the overall artistic direction. On the other hand, Vano himself had cherished the idea from the 1930s and first tried to employ 'lubok' (Russian print) stylistics way back in *Tsar Durandai*. For *Battle at Kerzhnets* (according to Norstein, now co-director) Vano was the driving force behind the design – arguably the artistic pinnacle of his career, with incredibly rich texture derived from icons, frescoes, book illuminations–miniatures.<sup>32</sup> Tyrannical on the surface, this patriarch, in fact, showed a good deal of tolerance and understanding at the face of rebellious auteur-understudy, to the latter's ultimate gratitude. Said Norstein: 'They didn't take me seriously, and he was the first who gave me a chance to feel myself a director. I contradicted him in his own language, and only because of that he, through resisting, would agree at last and give me freedom'.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> See: Anatoly Karanovich, *Moi druz'ya kukly* (My Friends Puppets), Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1971; quoted as in: [http://www.russiancinema.ru/index.php?e\\_dept\\_id=1&e\\_person\\_id=1280#](http://www.russiancinema.ru/index.php?e_dept_id=1&e_person_id=1280#).

<sup>30</sup> In some cases he is credited as 'principal director', in loose translation from Russian trade lingo.

<sup>31</sup> Lana Azarkh, 'Multiplicatory' (Animators), *Iskusstvo kino* (Film Art), No. 9, 2010; <http://kinoart.ru/2010/n9-article26.html#2>.

<sup>32</sup> Vano first conceived *Kerzhnets* as a puppet film; it was later jointly reimagined using complex cut-outs.

<sup>33</sup> Yuri Norstein on the Death of Ivanov-Vano (entry authored by E. Podolskaya) in *Noveishaia istoriia otechestvennogo kino. 1986–2000. Kino i kontekst* (The Newest History of Domestic Cinema. 1986–2000. Cinema and Context), Vol. 4, Saint Petersburg, 2002; quoted as in: [http://www.russiancinema.ru/index.php?e\\_dept\\_id=1&e\\_person\\_id=1280#](http://www.russiancinema.ru/index.php?e_dept_id=1&e_person_id=1280#).

He supported a number of others as well, helping them find professional footing, including, for instance, Francesca Yarbusova, before she became Norstein's principal and permanent collaborator (and wife), and filmmaker Garry Bardin. As studio legend goes, when Bardin,



The old master kept working well into his last decade, and wouldn't give up on his staple – the traditionally drawn fairy tale. In 1975, he produced the remake of *Humpback* and, as late as in 1984, Pushkin's *Skazka o tsare Saltane* (Tale of Tsar Saltan, co-directed by Lev Milchin). He continued teaching and participating in studio and union affairs, a stringent adept of morals, generally respected – if not unanimously revered. A few months before the end, Vano suffered a stroke while on an outing alone in the woods. Almost immobilized, he pulled himself together to make a small campfire, and that was how the colleagues, who lived nearby in the cluster of dachas (cottages), managed to find him.<sup>34</sup>

Ivanov-Vano died on 25 March 1987. His funeral was perhaps one of the very last unifying occasions at the dusk of the era.

## Lithuania<sup>35</sup>

It was not until the 1950s that Lithuania's first professional animator Grazina Brasiskyte (1926–1983) appeared. She went to study animation in Moscow and joined the Soyuzmultfilm studio, where she later supported the animation efforts of Zenonas Tarakevičius. As an art director, she created many animated films: *Užburtas berniukas* (The Boy under a Spell, 1956) directed by Vladimir Polkovnikov stands out. She created scenography and characters for *Gintarinė pilis* (The Amber Castle, 1960) directed by Aleksandra Snezhko-Blotskaya, an adaptation of a Lithuanian fairy tale.

## Georgia<sup>36</sup>

After Vladimir Mujiri's untimely death in 1953, the animation studio was closed down. Work was resumed in 1956 by enthusiasts Vakhtang Bakhtadze, Arkadi Khintibidze, Kote Mikaberidze, Shalva Gedevanishvili, Temur Mikadze and Grigory Chmutov. Soviet indoctrination was imposed through education, therefore films created during this period were full of friendship, generosity, love, devotion, heroism, improvement of taste and antithesis between good and bad. This task was achieved by directors who tried (rarely successfully) to escape from stereotypes and drawing on the repertoire of poems, songs and tales belonging to Georgian mythology and folklore. Arkadi (Kako) Khintibidze (Ozyrgeti, Dzimiti, Georgia, 8 January 1898–Tbilisi, 4 August 1963) made the most out of that all: *Japhara* (id., 1951), *Tsavi Chuka* (The Otter Chuka, 1953), *Niko da Nikora* (Niko and Nikora, 1954, after the Georgian fairy tale *Tsiqara*), *Chkhikvta Qortsili* (Jay's Wedding, 1957, after Vazha-Pshavela's<sup>37</sup> short story *Chkhikvta qortsili*) and *Nakheartsisila* (The Half-Chicken, 1962, after Vazha-Pshavela again).

The first step in the direction of fresher filmmaking was made by Vakhtang Bakhtadze (Tbilisi, 26 December 1914–Tbilisi, 14 September 1991), who directed the short *Khelmarjve ostatis tavgadasavali* (Handyman's Great Adventure, 1957) – a story about a robot.<sup>38</sup> It gave birth to the first Georgian theatrical cartoon series.

Shalva Gedevanishvili (Tbilisi, 23 February 1897–Tbilisi, 21 January 1990), who previously played as an actor in René Clair's, Abel Gance's and Alberto Cavalcanti's films and assisted some of the major Georgian live-action directors, became highly appreciated for his animations: *Naziko* (The Mollycoddle, 1950) tells us how sport strengthened a mollycoddle; *Urchi Tikani* (Refractory

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then a director in Obraztsov's puppet theatre, brought to the studio his screenplay *Dostat' do neba* (To Reach the Skies), Vano approved it with the words, 'We don't have anyone to handle it now, and you're a director anyway; so, go and make it into a film yourself!' – thus jumpstarting Bardin's film career. For details on differences in co-directors' vision, see Laura Pontieri, *Soviet Animation and the Thaw of the 1960s: Not Only for Children*, London: John Libbey, 2012, p. 180.

<sup>34</sup> Details of the story were told by daughter Galina, in her memoir (published by VGIK internally without distribution and therefore hard to access) and in conversations with Georgy Borodin – related by the latter in personal communication.

<sup>35</sup> By Valentas Askinis and Cinzia Bottini.

<sup>36</sup> By Lali Gorgaslidze, Lia Beruashvili and Alice Dugoni.

<sup>37</sup> Famous poet of the nineteenth century, Vazha-Pshavela (1861–1915) was the pseudonym of Luka P. Razikashvili.

<sup>38</sup> This film is also known under the Russian title *Prikljutsenija Samodelkina* (Adventures of Samodelkin) and has as a protagonist a man-like robot. Very popular, Samodelkin returned in three sequels.

Kid, 1953); *Mzetchabuki* (Sun-stripling, 1954); *Qhursha* (Lop-eared, 1953) and *Niko Da Siko* (Niko and Siko, 1961). In the years to come, he would direct *Gmiri Erti Saatit* (Hero for an Hour, 1963), *Rogor Tsarmoishwa Sakhli* (How the House Was Built, 1965), *Eshmakis Jvartsma* (The Devil's Crucifixion, 1967), *Saghebavta Ajanqheba* (Rebel of Colours, 1968), *Qhochaghi Bakuri* (Attaboy Bakur, 1969), *Lurja* (Roan,

1970, the two main characters being a clever donkey and a stupid wolf. The plot of the film sees the donkey who, although stepping into a wolf hound, manages to free himself using a clever trick, kicking the wolf in its teeth) and *Kaleidoskopi* (Kaleidoscope, 1971). The majority of these cartoons were safely based on Georgian fairy tales and paintings.