
Woman and Violence in Artistic Discourse of the Russian Revolution and Civil War (1917–1922)

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Translated by Dan Healey

Where you now? Who kisses your fingers?

Line from Alexander Vertinsky's popular song

Where you now? Who pistol-whips you?

Civil War parody

For Russians, the historical memory of the 1917 Revolution and the Civil War (1918–1922) is inseparable from its artistic representation. Both authors and audience have shown a sustained interest in this theme for over eighty years. Of special significance are those works of art created contemporaneously with these events. They are the results of immediate impressions, instantaneous products of the atmosphere of the time. In addition these artworks of the revolutionary years actively shaped the discourse that determined popular consciousness about numerous issues, proposing modes of thought and action in conditions of civil conflict.

Despite the difficult political and military situation in revolutionary Russia, the channels of dissemination for artistic texts were numerous and even expanded in some regions of the country. Printed matter of various types – newspapers, magazines and posters, especially propaganda – was published in massive quantities. Literary evenings, art exhibitions, theatre performances and cinema screenings attracted a broad audience both in the capitals of Moscow and Petrograd, and in the provinces, especially the south.¹ Many refugees from Bolshevism, hungry and cold, fled to the southern regions and sought to reconstruct their customary intellectual and recreational pursuits there. The artistic elite

of the capitals was well represented among these refugees, and these provinces experienced a corresponding enrichment in cultural life.²

Moved by a desire to place art at the service of their regimes, politicians of the Red (Communist) and White (anti-Communist) camps³ eagerly sought contact with the artistic intelligentsia. Art was viewed as an important instrument for creating an attractive face for each regime, and a means to discredit the opposition. With frequent changes between Red and White regimes in many regional centres, it was not uncommon for one and the same artist to produce work for both, shifting ideological sides with each change of authority. It can therefore be difficult to distinguish between the personal convictions of an artist and the political orientation of work done to order.

As a result of my explorations in Russian and Ukrainian libraries and archives I have assembled a wide database of artistic texts of 1917–1922 including literary prose, poetry, essays, political leaflets written in the style of short stories and fables, drama scripts and film screenplays, political posters, caricatures published in newspapers and magazines, drawings and even sculptures. They were created both in Bolshevik and anti-Bolshevik territories and present a reasonably full impression of the artistic discourse of the period. This essay will examine these works of art for their representations of woman as an object of violence; not only the use of physical force, but also the limitation of women's physical and spiritual possibilities, the deprivation of their free will.

This specific subject has received little scholarly attention, though a wide variety of Russian and Western work has concentrated on the artistic texts of the Revolution and Civil War period. This work has primarily explored Bolshevik propagandistic art in its role in the transmission of official ideology, the construction of the New Soviet Person and a pantheon of new heroes, symbols and rituals for the Soviet regime; it has also sought to gauge the impact of agitprop art on mass consciousness, and the establishment of identity.⁴ Of great relevance for the present article are works that employ a gender analysis of this period's artistic production,⁵ and those exploring the theoretical aspects of violence, including violence in the Russian Revolution.⁶

The Russian Revolution and Civil War were traditionally understood as male events, and that is why its art and literature are embodied primarily by male figures. Nevertheless, representations of women's bodies also found a place in this work. The figure of the suffering woman was quite widespread in revolutionary era art. Drawing on traditional conceptions of human nature, Russia's artists generally ascribed victimhood to women, violent action to men. The figure of the suffering woman, along with those of the child, the aged, disabled or wounded person were almost always marked as 'our own', in the

ranks of the weak and defenceless of 'our own' camp. All the political regimes contesting the Civil War used a variety of means including the artistic to declare that the defence of the weak was a matter of honour.

A significant role in this iconography and discourse was the allegorical figure of woman symbolising concepts such as the Motherland (Russia), freedom and revolution.⁷ Two basic approaches to her representation are discernable: the first is the strong woman, flourishing, a figure of hope and resilience, and the second an unhappy, prostrate, crippled, isolated figure in need of protection. The balance tipped in favour of the second approach as the course of events shifted from the swift and relatively bloodless February Revolution of 1917 to the bacchanal of mutual destruction of the Civil War. The image of Russia as a suffering woman was used mainly in anti-Bolshevik artistic representations. In their role as enemies, the leaders of the Bolshevik movement and the soldiers and sailors who supported them were portrayed as violators and deceivers.

The theme of Russia as the victim of Bolshevik social experiments was often tied to the Reds' hopes for worldwide revolution. The Bolsheviks' determination to sacrifice Russia on the altar of the coming 'worldwide conflagration' that would eradicate capitalism is vividly exemplified in the White poster of 1918, 'Victim of the International' (Figure 1). Bound Russia – a fragile young woman in a Russian traditional dress



Figure 1: 'White' poster '*V zhertvu Internationalu*' (Victim of the International). Unknown artist. *Courtesy of Russian State Library.*

(*sarafan*) and headdress (*kokoshnik*) lies at the foot of a statue of Karl Marx with the inscription, 'International'. The names of the various political actors depicted on the poster were written above the image since their faces were not well-known to the population. The main assailant, revolutionary ideologist and leader of the Red Army Leon Trotsky, in a butcher's apron and wielding a knife, murders Russia. The chief Red leaders look on with approval: the acknowledged Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin, the Head of the All-Russian Central Executive Committee Yakov Sverdlov, Moscow Soviet boss Lev Kamenev, leading internationalist in the Party Karl Radek, and others). They are accompanied by the last head of the Provisional Government Alexander Kerensky,⁸ and Red Army soldiers and sailors. All these figures, except Russia herself, are men. One of them clasps a bag marked '30', a reference to Judas's betrayal of Christ for 30 pieces of silver. Most of these figures are portrayed with what would be recognised by the audience as Jewish features. In this way the enemies of Russia were marked by gender and ethnicity.

Many variations on the theme of violence against woman's body (representing Russia) were developed chiefly in poetry, particularly in the work of Maximilian Voloshin, Marina Tsvetaeva, Ilya Ehrenburg, Velimir Khlebnikov and Fyodor Kasatkin-Rostovsky. Russia's enemies strip her clothes off, 'cut her heart to pieces', stamp on her with their boots, torment her with fire, flood and stones, bind her to the pillory or tighten the noose round her neck. The woman symbolising Russia subjected to these outrages is depicted as crazed from trauma, struck deaf and dumb, naked, swollen from hunger, covered in wounds, scorched and drained of blood.

A popular form of anti-Bolshevik artwork depicted Russia as a crucified figure. Visually the figure corresponded with traditional imagery of the crucified Christ. The legend 'Golgotha' was usually included in visual depictions and literary representations to emphasise the similarities with Christ's passion. The image of 'Russia crucified' corresponded to the notion, widespread in the White camp, that the Revolution was a Jewish plot. The Bolsheviks' militant anti-religious propaganda and violence further enriched White conceptions of the crucifixion of Russia, as a crime against the Russian Orthodox faith. At the same time it was a crime against Mother Russia. The concept of Russia was traditionally associated with the feminine principle; gender and national identity were combined in the Mother Russia trope.⁹ From this perspective, the unexpected gender inversion of the object of crucifixion – Russia-as-Woman instead of Jesus Christ, the Son of God – appears logical.

In some cases, the crucifixion of Russia was associated in artistic texts with specific revolutionary events. The peace treaty of Brest Litovsk,

between Germany and Soviet Russia in March 1918, conceded vast territories to the Germans, but was annulled by the Soviets after the German Revolution of November 1918. Russia's crucifiers were shown as Bolsheviks or Germans, or in some cases, both. A caricature by Vladimir Meingard entitled 'March 1918, Golgotha' (Figure 2) portrays Russia as crucified woman, wearing a crown of thorns and guarded by revolutionary soldiers and sailors with bayonets and grenades. Near the cross is the hammer that drove the nails through the body of Russia, and an open bottle of alcohol, compensation for the deed. Two more figures in German uniforms gaze victoriously at the scene, cynically commenting, 'Russia greets us with open arms'.¹⁰ In another example of crucifixion, on the cover of the *New Satirikon* a German soldier is portrayed driving nails through the palms of Russia in the form of a young maiden.¹¹

The October 1917 Bolshevik seizure of power likewise invoked crucifixion imagery. Ilya Ehrenburg's poem cycle, 'Prayer of Russia' is the

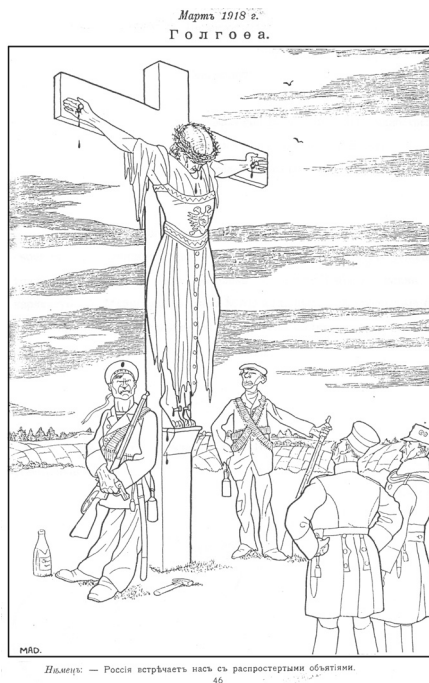


Figure 2: 'Mart 1918 Golgofa' (March, 1918 Golgotha) by MAD (pseudonym for Vladimir Meingard). From: MAD, *Tak bylo... Karikatury* (Odessa: Zhizn, 1918), p. 48. Courtesy of Institute of Scientific information in Social Sciences, Russian Academy of Sciences.

most famous revolutionary-era depiction of Russia as a woman crucified by the Reds.¹² Written at the end of 1917, it was published in Moscow in January 1918 and republished later that year in Kiev. Ehrenburg reflects the tragic evolution of the relationship between Mother Russia and the people. Opening with the people's indifference, the poem depicts how the crowd turns to insulting Mother Russia's body ('we stripped her, whipped her, sank our teeth into her gaunt breasts'), transforming her into a diversion for the mob ('We dressed this sickly mother in the red tights of a fairground prancer ... Quick up on the rope and dance in our circus! All will applaud you!'). And finally – 'In the autumn of nineteen hundred and seventeen we crucified her'.¹³ Ehrenburg was one of the few who memorialised the genuine protectors of the Russia that was dying, 'pale short maidens in huge greatcoats', the famous Women's Battalion that was the last defence of the Provisional Government in the Winter Palace from the Bolshevik assault.¹⁴

Crucified Russia was also a theme in the literary work by poets Fyodor Kasatkin-Rostovsky, Leonid Lask and Maximilian Voloshin. Voloshin depicted the crucifixion as suffering for the sins of the people, as a repetition of Christ's passion and as a token of Russia's special providential mission, to lead Europe from the 'paths of disaster'.¹⁵ In this fashion he contradicted the Bolshevik ambition of worldwide revolution.

However mutilated and near death the figure of Russia as woman might be, it was significant that she was nevertheless depicted as still alive and desperately in need of a protector. In anti-Bolshevik thinking this protector was the courageous warrior of the White armies, a man, naturally.¹⁶ The act of rescuing the unhappy nation from the clutches of the Bolsheviks became a traditional artistic cliché in 'White' Russia. Thus, in a scene from a sketch entitled 'Humiliated and Rejuvenated' presented at the Intimate Theatre, Kiev, a White volunteer removed the rags from a woman representing Russia and wrapped her in the pre-revolutionary tricolour flag.¹⁷ In the climax of a series of tableaux-vivants under the title 'Russia and the Bolsheviks', in the New Theatre in Rostov-on-Don, White soldiers rescue a woman symbolising Russia.¹⁸ Another illustration comes from a publication of the Enlightenment Agency (a propaganda organ of the southern Russian Denikin regime), 'The Tale of Prince Ivan' penned by the pseudonymous 'Grandfather Volkhonya'.¹⁹ A widowed Tsarina looks for a new husband-Tsar for herself and her children. The choice falls on a cunning man who promises much, with a balding head, deep-set eyes and a goatee (clearly hinting at Vladimir Lenin). He deceives the Tsarina and brings disasters to the kingdom. The realm is saved by Prince Ivan, a favourite character in Russian folklore, and in this case, a generalised image of the White volunteer soldier.

Similar scenarios often bore a mythological accent: Russia as a maiden, in the clutches of a dragon, seeks the help of St George;²⁰ Perseus speeds to the aid of Russia-Andromeda.²¹ The allusion to mythology was more generally a characteristic of White propaganda production. 'Red' ideology correctly held that the broad mass of the public needed symbolism that was simpler and more accessible.²²

Early in the Revolution different political forces used images of women symbolising freedom and revolution. These figures consciously drew upon the pantheon of French Revolutionary imagery such as Delacroix's 'Liberté' evoking the beautiful woman in Classical dress, but there were also 'home-grown' versions – the youthful, physically delicate Russian girl. Very often 'freedom' and 'revolution' were interpreted as synonymous. During 1917, numerous political parties fought desperately for the exclusive right to defend freedom and the revolution and it was difficult to distinguish real from declared aims. The confusion of the situation in 1917 was figuratively reflected by a poet using the pseudonym 'Ro'. He depicted Freedom as a young maiden selecting a suitor to determine her fate from among the political parties, reasoning 'Everyone is passionate, everyone could smother me in an outburst of passion'.²³

In spite of the real 'smothering' of Russian freedom after 1917, in 1918–1919 the Bolsheviks continued to exploit this image in its French variant in posters and sculptures. The most famous example was Nikolay Andreev and Dmitry Orlov's monument 'Freedom' (*Svoboda*), also known as 'The Soviet Constitution' (*Sovetskaia konstitutsiia*) erected in the centre of Moscow in 1919.²⁴

The image of freedom-as-a-woman underwent significant evolution in the anti-Bolshevik camp. The 'pure, radiant bride' of early 1917, having been raped by the Bolsheviks, changed her nature; often she was depicted in imitation of the American Statue of Liberty, but instead of a torch of liberty she raised her fist in defiance.²⁵ In another version instead of a pedestal the statue of Russian freedom stood upon carefully fashioned coffins.²⁶

In this camp, the Revolution was no longer associated with freedom. From the viewpoint of Bolshevism's opponents, the liberal revolution of early 1917 had been defeated and profaned by the events of that year and its final death-knell had been the Reds' seizure of power. One essayist (writing *feuilletons*, a polemic literary genre common in the Russian press), Andrey Rennikov, depicted the degradation of the Revolution in the image of a young, attractive woman, a niece of the German Staff (an allusion to German sources funding Russia's Revolution). Having arrived in Russia she passed 'from hand to hand' among leading figures of the Provisional Government. Eventually in a shabby, filthy and verminous state, this 'charming fallen creature' finds

herself in the hands of Trotsky, amusing herself with drunken soldiers and sailors.²⁷ In an illustration by Boris Antonovsky, Trotsky plunges a knife into the back of a woman representing the Revolution; she is naked to the waist, exhausted, clothed in a red skirt and cap.²⁸

It is worth noting that the representations of bodies of allegorical female figures had one characteristic in common. They were solely images of women suffering violence; the body's potential as a site of resistance was not employed. Simultaneously, the expectation of a rescuing male figure was emphasised.

Figures of women in the art and literature of the Revolution and Civil War were not confined to allegorical images. Famous women in history, literary personages and contemporary women were widely represented as well. Artistic representations of such women, suffering violence, can be placed in a number of categories, first the so-called passive victims, ordinary women in scenes of senseless murder, destruction, famine, epidemics. In Figure 3, for example, against a background of houses

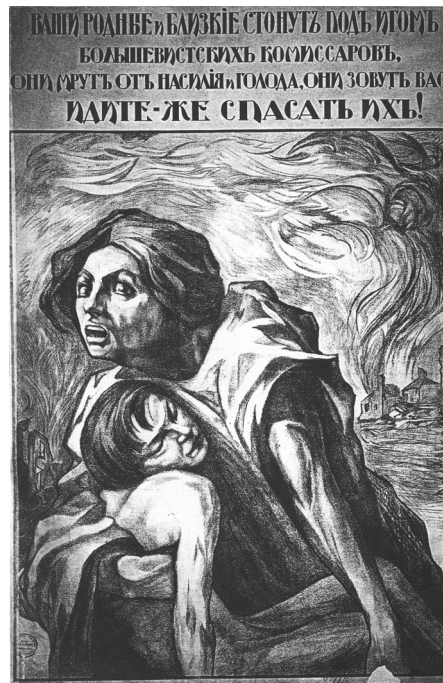


Figure 3: 'White' poster 'Pod igom bolshevistskikh komissarov' (Under the yoke of Bolshevik Commissars) by artist Vladimir Zagorodniuk. From: Nina Baburina, *Rossiiia 20 vek. istoriia strany v plakate*. Moscow: Panorama, 2000, p. 60. *Courtesy of Nina Baburina.*

on fire a woman presses her child to her breast, her face frozen in terror. Similar imagery included women scrambling over corpses with Death with his scythe in pursuit on horseback, or women stripped naked by robbers on a winter street. Such scenes circulated widely in both White and Red posters and drawings. For those who commissioned these images, and those who created them, the presence of women among the victims of the opposition's forces greatly intensified their emotional impact on the audience.

A second type shows direct objects of violence as participants in actions of civil confrontation (*grazhdanskoe protivostoianie*) in the past and present. Both Red and White images often portrayed as the field nurse who saved soldiers and in extreme situations took up arms herself, even sacrificing her life on the battlefield for the cause. These feminine feats were contrasted with the cowardice of men who refused to take up arms. White Russian art featured famous French martyr heroines such as Jeanne d'Arc and Charlotte Corday, though the 'Charlotte Corday of the Russian Revolution', Fanny Kaplan, who in 1918 was accused of firing at Lenin and was executed by the Bolsheviks, curiously did not figure in contemporary artistic texts.

In this vein, the Bolsheviks attempted to commemorate Sofia Perovskaya, hanged in 1881 for her part in the assassination of Tsar Alexander II.²⁹ A monument unveiled in Moscow on the first anniversary of the Bolshevik seizure of power, sculpted by Ivan Rakhmanov, was considered artistically weak and was soon removed. A second Perovskaya monument by the Italian Futurist Orlando Grizelli was unveiled in December 1918 in Petrograd (Figure 4). The large head on a quadrilateral plinth reminded some of a lioness and others of a bat. It too was soon removed.³⁰

A third type of female object of violence emerged. In these figures, pain became transformative, triggering not merely the survival instinct but an evolution from passive suffering to active struggle against their assailants. A production by Kote Mardzhanishvili of Lope de Vega's play, *Fuente Ovejuna* (The Sheep Well) presents the most vivid example of this type in the character of Laurencia. The production was intended as, and was received as, a powerful propaganda piece as well as an artistic gesture, in the context of spring 1919, when Kiev was under Red control. The role of the peasant girl Laurencia was played by a popular actress, Vera Yureneva. Director Mardzhanishvili and his colleagues designed their production of this play about a peasants' revolt in medieval Spain to underline its contemporary resonance. Laurencia's monologue is the climax of the play: the simple peasant girl grows in the eyes of the audience into a fearless heroine. Tearing herself from the arms of her assailant, in bloodied and torn garments and tangled tresses she lambasts her fellow villagers for their inactivity and summons them



8. Открытие памятника С. Перовской в Петрограде. 1919 (скульптор О. Гризелли)

Figure 4: Unveiling of monument to Sofia. Perovskaia in Petrograd Sculptor Orlando Grizelli, December, 1918. From Vladimir Tolstoi, *U istokov sovetskogo izobrazitel'nogo iskusstva*. Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1983, p. 99. *Courtesy of Vladimir Tolstoi.*

to revolt, and a popular uprising ensues. The performance ended with a shower of leaflets and the strains of the 'Internationale'. Running for forty-two days in succession, the production was seen by many Red Army soldiers who literally left the theatre for the front line in the battle with the Whites.³¹ The play was mounted repeatedly in Moscow and Petrograd, not just indoors but in public squares as well.

We would like to think that the popularity of this production and its heroine can be explained not only by revolutionary romanticism, its contemporaneous appeal and the talent of director and cast, but also by the popular yearning for a national saviour in the form of a woman, since Russia's male politicians had by then already demonstrated their insolvency. The case of Russia's 'queen of the screen', Vera Kholodnaya, could serve as an argument in favour of the proposition. Her mass appeal as silent film actress was enhanced by rumours of her supposed espionage activities for various foreign states. (Indeed, the question of her being a 'Russian Mata Hari' continues to generate frothier journalism

to this day.) Kholodnaya died in the southern Black Sea port city of Odessa in February 1919, then under anti-Bolshevik control. 'The Funeral of Vera Kholodnaya', directed by Pyotr Chardynin, enjoyed a huge box office success in White-controlled Russia. Kholodnaya's final film appearance – after her death – saw her dressed in one of her very best outfits, her face carefully made up. Not everyone believed she had actually died. Rumours that Vera Kholodnaya, astride a white steed, had gathered her own army and like Jeanne d'Arc was liberating Ukrainian towns and even declaring herself Empress of Ukraine, were remarkably widespread.³²

Nevertheless, images of the woman with a gun in her hand or encouraging others to violence were rarely associated with 'destructive aggression'. Authors presented these women in the context of 'defensive aggression'; the violent actions of these women were justified by the right to self-defence, the defence of one's own family or country.³³ The sole exceptions to this rule were a small number of stories about wicked women Bolsheviks published in the White press.

The Civil War division between 'us' and 'them' created conditions ripe for the image of the woman as victim by virtue of contacts with the 'alien' forces of the other side. Prostitutes were the first to be portrayed this way. The 'oldest profession in the world' was not strictly speaking condemned as a crime either before or after the Revolution. Angry attention was focused on those who organised 'dens of vice' or who recruited women into prostitution, and often, towards the men who used sexual services – the clients. In the new socialist society prostitutes were regarded as a hold-over from the old regime.³⁴

In revolution-era literary work, the prostitute was usually censured for 'promiscuity' (*vseiadnost'*) and for selecting her clients not according to their political orientation but according to their money or for sentimental reasons. Where the male enemy appeared in political posters often prostitutes were depicted too – drunk, gazing indifferently at the horrors committed by their clients.³⁵

The best-known prostitute in the literature of Russia's Civil War is Katka, the heroine of Alexander Blok's 1918 poem 'The Twelve' (see Figures 5 and 6). The poem was widely circulated and evoked fierce controversy in the White and Red camps. The central event of the poem is the murder of Katka. She is killed accidentally by her lover Petka when he shoots his enemy Vanka. The text accepts Katka's murder as the consequence not only of jealousy but of her sins under the old regime – consorting with officers, cadets and more recently with the turncoat Vanka, who used to be a 'Red', that is, one of 'us'. Vanka's otherness is ambiguous: both Vanka and Petka served Soviet power, the former as an ordinary soldier and the latter as a Red Guard.³⁶ Yet Vanka also had money ('that bourgeois son-of-a-bitch'), a crime enough



«ДВЕНАДЦАТЬ» Рисунок Ю. Анненкова. 1918.



«ДВЕНАДЦАТЬ» Рисунок Ю. Анненкова. 1918.

Figures 5 and 6: Illustration by Yuri Annenkov to Alexander Blok' poem 'Dvenadtsat' (The Twelve), 1918. From: Alexander Blok *Sobranie sochinenii v 6-ti tomakh.: Pravda. Tom 3.* (Moscow Pravda), 1973. *Courtesy of Publishing House 'Pressa'.* In Figure 5 Katka is still alive. But the cat with devil ears looking out of Katka's shoulder and black rectangle of the window with the cruciform frame behind her head symbolize the nearest tragedy.

to the penniless Petka. Innocent Katka's death is blamed on the 'old world' and the tragic events are drowned out by the 'music of revolution'. Some recent critics see in Blok's 'The Twelve' the triumph of a self-sufficient masculine principle that is destructive and has no need for any kind of feminine values. The feminine in the poem is not only degraded, it is extinguished: any feelings of regret over the death of Katka are unworthy of the stern brotherhood of Red soldiers.³⁷

Class vigilance in the choice of a male partner was not only required of prostitutes, but of all women in this discourse. In the Civil War which pitted brother against brother and son against father, the choices women made were subject to political judgements. The typical love-triangle of Civil War-era plots (including that of 'The Twelve') involved a man from 'our side', a man from 'their side', and a woman obliged to choose the man from 'our side' if she wanted to avoid violence.

A film scenario in the diaries of Vladimir Amfiteatrov-Kadashev, the director of the cinema department of the arts division of the Enlightenment Agency (Denikin's propaganda office in the White south) illustrates this triangle. A film project conceived on American lines (called 'Dragon's Ring') described a respectable girl whose affections are sought by a White Volunteer instead of the traditional cowboy and a Bolshevik instead of a villain. It goes without saying that the girl falls for the White soldier in the end.³⁸ The plot of a poem by Evgeny Vensky entitled 'Partisan's Love' (*Partizanskaia Liubov*) used the triangle structure as well.³⁹ In a White stronghold, Rostov-on-Don, a beautiful and popular girl, Nadya is on friendly terms with Kolya, a gymnasium student. Nadya however becomes the object of a suitor who refuses army service hoping to sit out the conflict at home. To the indignation of all Nadya, returns his affection. The poet, via his characters, compares her actions to the shameful Treaty of Brest-Litovsk (when the Reds surrendered so much of the Russian Empire to the Germans). But justice triumphs in the end: Kolya joins the White Volunteer army and Nadya follows him as a nurse, forgetting about her 'deserter' suitor. The young lovers are now united by a common cause as well as their mutual affection, growing stronger for it.

The Red version of the love triangle often seemed untraditional. The role of 'the man from our side' was sometimes played by a mentoring Bolshevik, sometimes by the Revolution itself which opened the heroine's eyes to the 'alien' nature of her lover 'from their side', laying out the appropriate path to take. The endings of such dramas were crystal clear. Soviet classics of the 1920s, such as the play *Lyubov Yarovaya* by Konstantin Trennev, the story 'The Forty First' by Boris Lavrenev and other works, cultivated this model that showed women the right choices to make.

Women had to subordinate their choices to the requirements of shifting political regimes not only in the sexual sphere. Propaganda on the Bolshevik side was especially clear about this. Prospects for those who did not submit were particularly gloomy. The poet Vladimir Mayakovsky, a supporter of the Bolsheviks, gave such advice in his 1920 agitprop poem, 'What the Woman-Worker Did and What the Woman-Worker Must Do':

Woman-worker, if you don't want to be this
Filthy slave,
If you want to be a free and satisfied woman,
Go and join the Russian Communist Party ...⁴⁰

A similar stark choice faces the '*baba*' (woman)⁴¹ in Mikhail Cheremnykh's 1920 poster, 'The Story of the Bagels and the Baba' (Figure 7). Refusing to recognise the Soviet republic, and refusing to give Red Army soldiers her bagels free of charge, she was swallowed up by the enemies of the Soviet state.

The image of woman as an object of violence was employed widely and in a variety of ways in the literary and artistic works of the Revolutionary and Civil War period. This image was frequently created and distributed to the requirements of the propaganda organs of competing political camps, and more rarely, by authors working according to their own impulses. Both the officials commissioning propaganda or artists themselves – painters, sculptors, writers, directors – were overwhelmingly men.

In the artistic works they fostered, women as objects of violence were allegorical figures symbolising Russia, the Revolution, freedom, famous literary, historical and contemporary heroines, passive victims of conflict and direct participants in military action. Their suffering was supposed to 'work' to construct the image of each side in the battle: a negative image of the assailant, and a positive one for the rescuer. In the majority of cases physical violence against women was interpreted by authors as an anomaly, the consequence of the wickedness of the regime that inflicted the violence. Moral violence however, the 're-education' of women to correspond to the current political priorities of a given regime, was held up in these artistic texts as a norm.

Men, or symbols traditionally embodying the masculine principle, were almost always depicted as the perpetrators of this violence. They also, with rare exceptions, figured in the role of women's saviours. In this fashion literature and art relayed a biological-anatomical determination of models of behaviour. At the same time a modest number of striking examples of women who actively opposed violence (created to order primarily for Bolshevik propaganda), broke with stereotypes and prepared society for the reception of the 'new' Soviet woman.



Figure 7: 'Red' poster 'Istotia pro Bubliki I pro Babu' (Story of the Bubliki and the Baba) by Mikhail Cheremnykh, 1920. From Mikhail Cheremnykh. *Al'bom*. Moscow: Sovetskii Khudozhnik, 1984. Courtesy of publishing House 'Galart'.

Notes

1. St Petersburg was renamed Petrograd from 1914–1924; it had been Russia's capital since 1703, but for strategic reasons Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin moved the Soviet government to Moscow in March 1918. The 'south of Russia' of this period does not precisely correspond to the south of today's Russian Federation. During the Civil War the boundaries between 'Russia' and the contested new republic of 'Ukraine' shifted frequently, and southern provinces such as the Don, Kuban', Stavropol'e and the republics of the Northern Caucasus were under anti-Soviet rule for prolonged periods and became places of refuge for inhabitants of the capitals, who often hoped for a restoration of 'Russia One and Indivisible'. In this article phrases like 'southern provinces' or 'southern regions' may refer to territory in either Russia or Ukraine as constituted today. [Translator's note.]
2. See Anna Eremeeva, *'Pod rokot grazhdanskikh bur' Khudozhestvennaia zhizn' Iuga Rossii v 1917–1920 gg.* (St Petersburg: Nestor, 1998).
3. The Whites were a disunited collection of forces, with monarchist, national-patriotic and militarist-authoritarian programmes, and the author draws on material created under several White regimes. [Translator's note.]
4. Viacheslav Polonskii, *Russkii revoliutsionnyi plakat* (Moscow: Gosizdat, 1925); Boris Butnik-Siverskii, *Sovetskii plakat epokhi grazhdanskoi voyny 1918–1921* (Moscow: Vsesoiuznaia Knizhnaia Palata, 1960); Vladimir Tolstoi (ed.), *Agitmassovoe iskusstvo Sovetskoi Rossii* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 2002); Peter Kenez, *The Birth of the Propaganda State: Soviet Methods of Mass Mobilization, 1917–1929* (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Stephen White, *The Bolshevik Poster* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988); Richard Stites, *Revolutionary Dreams: Utopian Vision and Experimental Life in the Russian Revolution* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989); James von Geldern, *Bolshevik Festivals, 1917–1920* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993); Richard Stites (ed.), *Culture and Entertainment in Wartime Russia* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995).
5. Victoria E. Bonnel, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997); Elizabeth Waters, 'The Female Form in Soviet Political Iconography, 1917–32', in Barbara E. Clements, Barbara A. Engel and Christine D. Worobec (eds), *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), pp. 225–42; Nina Baburina and Svetlana Artamonova, *Zhenshchiny v russkom plakate* (Moscow: Panorama, 2001).
6. Erich Fromm, *Anatomiia Chelovecheskoi Destruktivnosti*, tr. C. M. Teliatnikova and T. V. Panfilova (Moscow: AST, 1998); Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. by Leon Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982); Seyom Brown, *The Causes and Prevention of War* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1987); Victor V. Bocharov and Valery A. Tishkov (eds), *Antropologiya nasiliia* (St Petersburg: Nauka, 2001); Vladimir Buldakov, *Krasnaia Smuta. Priroda i posledstviia revoliutsionnogo nasiliia* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 1997).
7. Women's figures symbolised such concepts as justice, art, science and the spring season as well.
8. The Provisional Government assumed power upon the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II in February 1917; Alexander Kerensky served in it from the outset and led it from July to October 1917.
9. For a discussion of 'Mother Russia,' see Joanna Hubbs, *Mother Russia: The Feminine Myth in Russian Culture* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988).
10. *MAD Tak bylo ... Karikatury* (Odessa: Zhizn', 1918), p. 46.
11. Konstantin Grus's picture on the cover of *Novyi Satirikon* 5 (1918).
12. Ehrenburg grew up in Moscow. He joined the Bolsheviks at age fifteen in 1906, and went into exile in Paris, where he became a writer. He returned to Russia in 1917, and criticised the Bolsheviks. 'A cosmopolitan patriot,' Ehrenburg later became a famous Soviet writer and journalist. See: Joshua Rubenstein, *Tangled Loyalties, The Life and Times of Ilya Ehrenburg* (New York: Basic Books, 1996); Jeffrey Brooks, *Thank You, Comrade Stalin!*

- Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 172–73, 187–88, 192–93.
13. Ilya Ehrenburg, *Stikhotvoreniia i poemy* (St. Petersburg: Akademicheskii proekt, 2000), pp. 304–6.
 14. On the Women's Battalion, see Richard Abraham, 'Mariia L. Bochkareva and the Russian Amazons of 1917' in Linda Edmondson (ed.), *Women and Society in Russia and in the Soviet Union* (Cambridge, England, and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 124–44. For a photograph of the Women's Battalion see Barbara E. Clements, Barbara A. Engel and Christine D. Worobec (eds.), *Russia's Women. Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), Illustration 14.
 15. Maksimilian Voloshin, *Izbrannoe* (Minsk: Mastatskaia Literatura, 1993), p. 125. Poem 'Russian Revolution' (*Russkaia Revoliutsiia*) (1919), Maksimilian Voloshin, *Izbrannoe* (Minsk: Mastatskmaia Literatura, 1993), p. 125–126.
 16. As the English researcher Paul Robinson noted, White officers saw their duty as restoring Russia's violated honour with their blood. Russia – the Motherland – was like a woman whose honour the Bolsheviks had destroyed. See Pol Robinson, 'Nevol'niki Chesti': Muzhestvennost' na pole boia v nachale XX veka' in Sergei Ushakin (ed.), *O Muzhe[n]stvennosti* (Moscow: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2002), p. 197.
 17. *Vechernie Ognii*, 24 October (6 November), Kiev, 1919, p. 3.
 18. N. G. Zograf (ed.), *Ocherki istorii russkogo sovetskogo dramaticheskogo teatra, vol. 1: 1917–1920*. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1954), pp. 151–52.
 19. Ded Volkhonia, *Skazka pro Ivana Tsarevicha* (Rostov-on-Don, 1919).
 20. See Magdalin Verigo, 'Poem', *Russkoe privol'e*, Perm 1 (1919), p. 2.
 21. In a drawing by Vladimir Zagorodniuk in the magazine *Raduga* 1 (1919); see unnumbered pages in centrefold.
 22. Bonnel notes that Soviet artists also used Western European traditions of political art, from which they appropriated various symbols and allegorical images. But only a small stratum of educated Russians could 'read' these symbols and allegories, at least in their full implications. For a party that aimed at reaching broad strata of the population with its message, these kinds of image left much to be desired. See Victoria E. Bonnel, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), p. 83.
 23. Ro [pseudonym for A. Kalmenson], *Gudok. Revoliutsionnye satiry* (Odessa, 1919), p. 4.
 24. The sculpture deteriorated rapidly and was dismantled in the late 1930s. For a description, see Elizabeth Waters 'The Female Form in Soviet Political Iconography, 1917–32', in Barbara E. Clements, Barbara A. Engel and Christine D. Worobec (eds.), *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), p. 230.
 25. See, for example, MAD *Tak bylo... Karikatury* (Odessa: Zhizn', 1918), p. 38.
 26. Re-mi, 'Rossiia ukrashaetsia', *Novyi Satirikon* 43 (1917), p. 8.
 27. Andrei Rennikov, 'Padshaia', *Faraon* 1 (1919), pp. 4–7.
 28. *Novyi Satirikon* 2 (1918), p. 12.
 29. In their public memorials the Bolsheviks gave men more credit for the development of culture and society in the past as well as in the present; of the twelve monuments erected in Moscow between 1917 and 1919 only one (to Sofia Perovskaya) commemorated a woman's contribution. See Elizabeth Waters 'The Female Form in Soviet Political Iconography, 1917–32', in Barbara E. Clements, Barbara A. Engel and Christine D. Worobec (eds.), *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991), p. 228; Victoria E. Bonnel, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), p. 70.
 30. Vladimir P. Tolstoi, *U istokov sovetskogo monumental'nogo iskusstva* (Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe Iskusstvo, 1983), p. 219

31. See Eteri I. Gugushvili, *Kote Mardzhanishvili* (Moscow: Iskustvo, 1979), p. 218.
32. Konstantin G. Paustovsky, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol.3: 'Povest' o Zhizni. Nachalo Nevedomogo Veka' (Moscow: Goslitizdat, 1958), p. 705.
33. 'Destructive aggression' and 'defensive aggression' are Erich Fromm's terms. See Erich Fromm, *Anatomiia Chelovecheskoi Destruktivnosti*, tr. E. M. Teliatnikova and T. V. Panfilova (Moscow: AST Ltd, 1998), p. 33.
34. See Natal'ia Lebina and Mikhail Shkarovsky, *Prostitutsiia v Peterburge. 40-e gg. XIX v. – 40-e gg. XX v* (Moscow: Progress-Akademiia, 1994), pp. 106, 137, 138, 142.
35. See for example the Red poster 'People's Court' (*Sud Narodnyi*) by Dmitrii Moor and the 'White' poster 'Wading through Blood and Climbing over Mountains of Corpses' (*Cherez krov' i cherez trupov grudy*), in Victoria E. Bonnel, *Iconography of Power: Soviet Political Posters under Lenin and Stalin* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), Figures 5.7, 5.9.
36. The action of the poem takes place in the winter of 1917–1918. Red Guards were popular militia patrols that emerged in 1917 and political control of their operations was monopolised by the Bolsheviks; Petka is thus identified with Soviet power. Vanka is depicted as having been a Red Guard in the revolutionary year 1917, but later signing up with the Petrograd Garrison, part of the ordinary forces inherited from the old regime. This garrison supported the Bolshevik takeover in October 1917. Vanka's distancing from the Bolsheviks is suggested in his trajectory from revolutionary Red Guard to traditional garrison soldier. In March 1918, Trotsky disbanded both the Red Guards and the inherited military and founded the Red Army as a single force to combat the emerging White challenges to Soviet power.
37. Sergei Stratanovskii, 'Poet i Revolutsiia. Opyt sovremennogo prochteniia poemy A. Bloka', *Zvezda* 11 (1991), pp. 150–61; Gennadii Karpunin, 'Istoriia liubvi i prestupleniia Petrukhi', *Sibirskiiie ogni* 11 (1980), pp. 157–64. On the masculine 'face' of the Russian Revolution see Eric Naiman, *Sex in Public: The Incarnation of Early Soviet Ideology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997); Eliot Borenstein, *Men without Women: Masculinity and Revolution in Russian Fiction, 1917–1929* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000).
38. Russian State Archive of Literature and Art, *fond 2279, opis' 1, delo 10, list 7*.
39. *Donskaia volna*, (22–24 (50–52), 1919), p. 12.
40. Vladimir Mayakovsky, *Sobranie sochinenii*, vol. 7. (Moscow: Pravda, 1978), p. 61.
41. Baba – a pejorative noun denoting a married woman or a woman in general; it can also mean midwife. For Bolshevik perceptions of the 'baba', see Elizabeth A. Wood, *The Baba and The Comrade: Gender and Politics in Revolutionary Russia* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997). [Translator's note.]