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***Bakenbardy* (English title: *Sideburns*). Yuri Mamin, dir. Lenfilm, 1990. 96 minutes, color. No English subtitles. VHS Video. Mike's Video, 227 Brighton Beach Ave., Brooklyn, NY, 11235. \$25.00.**

Yuri Mamin's genre-blending film *Bakenbardy* reviews the danger of the rise of totalitarian authority in postperestroika contemporary Russia. The heavy-handed, phantasmagoric satire is at times a surrealistic musical comedy with a political subplot that gives way to almost-documentary footage of Russian "gippis" of the 1990s who would not have been out of place in San Francisco's Haight-Ashbury of the late 1960s, except that in Mamin's film the marchers carry Christian crosses instead of peace symbols as symbols of rebellion.

The possibility of the rise of fascist tendencies in contemporary Russia was the topic of a "Galeriia" television program on the Russian First Channel in 1990. But rather than through interviews, Mamin's timely film poses questions on the streets of the small but urban town of "Zaborsk." The discussants are youth gangs from each end of the political spectrum, both confused in a time of national and personal self-discovery. The Hippie-like group "Capella" (the sign on their clubhouse is spelled in English letters, not Cyrillic) seeks to devour any and every available sensual pleasure previously denied to the preperestroika Russian Communist Party. Brandishing Christian crosses in parade and staging mock street murders and suicides, they delight in the process of shocking their elders, giving no less a "slap in the face of public taste" than did their cultural predecessors of the pre-Socialist Realism era such as the Russian Futurists and the Russian Absurdists. At an evening gathering, Capella stages a "race" of lewdly shaped balloons, in which one of the contestants is "Janissary"-the same name of the favorite in the cockroach races of Act III of Mikhail Bulgakov's 1927 play *Beg (Flight)*. However, Capella shocks not only their elders but also some of their right-wing contemporaries who view the group as unabashed Westernizers, destructive to Russian society and culture.

The film opens fading martial music into a manic rendition by Viktor (convincingly portrayed by Viktor Sukhorukov) of Pushkin's poem "Prorok" ("The Prophet"). In the style of an American street-corner evangelist, Viktor emotes through a portable loudspeaker, but has to hurry to finish the poem and recites the final verses of the thirty-line poem as the police lead him away. A few scenes later, this self-styled Pushkin of the 1990s is leading one of his neophytes (played by Aleksandr Medvedev) home to "Zaborsk." Here is the beginning

structure of Turgenev's 1862 novel of generational conflict *Fathers and Sons*. Viktor plays the part of the radical Bazarov, older and ostensibly politically wiser than the young student Medvedev. They arrive in the older generation's home, where Turgenev's young Bazarov admonished the elder Nikolai Petrovich Kirsanov to get rid of Pushkin and gave him a copy of Buechner's *Stoff und Kraft*, but here Viktor replaces Uncle Pasha's wall picture of Lenin with one of Pushkin.

Pasha is an unofficial Communist Party sculptor, that is, he chiefly sculpts busts of Lenin for government use. Upon receiving a phone call cancelling a completed commission of a bust of Lenin, the sculptor is persuaded by Viktor to transform it into a bust of Pushkin, thus completing the not-so-subtle symbolic change.

While Turgenev used old-fashioned language reminiscent of earlier Russian gentry, Mamin's characters speak in the now old-fashioned euphemisms and phrases of the government doublespeak of post-Stalinist Russia. Bazarov, too, wore "bakenbardy" and ridiculed the Westernizing ways of those present as detrimental to Russia. And in chapter 21 of *Fathers and Sons*, Bazarov even misquoted Pushkin, as Viktor often does in this film. One scene has Viktor making a wild, versified statement on his version of political reality, then attributing it to Pushkin's unpublished verses. But Viktor, unlike Bazarov, fails to develop insights into his own absurd posturing. Mamin stages Viktor as a really dangerous Bazarov, not just a different generation, but a mutant combination of several negative strains of Russian character nourished by the postperestroika era of political confusion and cultural anarchy. This time of self-discovery in Russia scares the right-wing-minded into a conservative frenzy which wants to "return" to the "order" of previous times. Seeking scapegoats, they find the Western-appearing Capella, who have sometimes shockingly seized a new freedom to experiment with previous cultural norms. The fear leads the Pushkinists of Viktor's youth club "A.S.P." (Aleksandr Sergeevich Pushkin) to a Brownshirt-like approach to order in the streets. Viktor wins over a gang of "Liubertsy"-like, muscle-building thugs by his martial arts proficiency with his Pushkin cane, and with a military style of physical training, discipline and Pushkin orientation. Viktor cries: "He (Pushkin) really is our everything!"

Duped by the local authorities first into using the Pushkinists as an unofficial militia designed to enforce unpopular actions, Viktor is then led into overplaying his hand by being a bit too enthusiastic in keeping order at a local political gathering. The next day Viktor is called a "Fuehrer in Sideburns" by the media and is forced out of town after the police shave off his and his group members' sideburns to the accompaniment of Viktor's screaming.

Mamin reminds us of the responsibilities that "freedom" brings and the

dangers that must be brought out into the open at the same time as they are allowed to run their course. The film ends on a warning note that this "will-to-be-led" impulse to fascism is only just beginning. The police hold Viktor down and shave his sideburns, but his new baldness only changes his style. The film closes with Viktor and his newly named "Maiakovsky" clique in Hare Krishna-like robes, marching militantly down a dark street.

Too bad Viktor did not think to name the new group after the nineteenth-century Russian playwright Griboedov; then Cyrillic initials "A.S.P." tattooed on group members would have been easier to change into "A.S.G.," but perhaps that is another film.

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