

KIND FILES

THE FILM COMPANION

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BED AND SOFA

JULIAN GRAFFY

L.B. TAURIS

Bed and Sofa

KINOfiles Film Companions

General Editor: Richard Taylor

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BED AND SOFA: The Film Companion

JULIAN GRAFFY

KINOfile Film Companion 5

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Production Credits

English title: BED AND SOFA
Original Russian title: TRET'IA MESHCHANSKAIA [Third Meshchanskaia Street]
Alternative Russian title: LIUBOV' VTROEM [Three in Love, Ménage à trois]

Production company: Sovkino, Moscow, 1927

Release date: 15 March 1927

Theme and libretto: Viktor Shklovsky

Director: Abram Room

Screenplay: Viktor Shklovsky, Abram Room

Assistants: Sergei Iutkevich, E. Kuzis

Director of photography: Grigori Giber

Design: Vasili Rakhals, Sergei Iutkevich

Length: 68 minutes, 2025 metres

Cast

Kolia [Nikolai], the husband	Nikolai Batalov
Liuda [Liudmila], the wife	Liudmila Semenova
Volodia [Vladimir], the friend	Vladimir Fogel
The yardman	Leonid Iurenev
The nurse	Maria Iarotskaia

Bed and Sofa is available on video in the USA from International Historic Films

Note on Transliteration and Dates

The transliteration system used for proper names in the text of this study is that of the Library of Congress, without diacritics, with the following emendations: (a) when a Russian name has a clear English version, such as Eisenstein, Mayakovsky, that is preferred; (b) when a Russian surname ends in *-ii* or *-yi*, this is replaced by a single *-y*, e.g. Shklovsky; (c) when a Russian given name ends in *-ii*, this is replaced by a single *i*, e.g. Grigori.

The standard Library of Congress system is used in the Notes and the Further Reading.

When he gets up in the morning at the beginning of the film, Kolia tears a page from a tear-off calendar on which we can clearly see the number 3, though the day of the week below it is not clear, and there is no reference to the year. Later he announces to his wife, Liudmila: 'Today is Saturday – don't forget to clean the floors.' These references to time are followed by three specific temporal references in succeeding intertitles. The first says that 'Fogel had already lived at the Batalovs' for three days'. The next, 'The morning of 9 July', is the day Kolia leaves Moscow on business. This is followed by a title '14 July, The Aviation and Chemical Society Day'. The sketch of the set design by Sergei Iutkevich also clearly shows a calendar with the year 1926.

All this evidence clearly dates the events of the film to the summer of 1926, the year the film was made, in which 3 July was indeed a Saturday, as confirmed by D. Crystal (ed.), *The Cambridge Factfinder*, 3rd edn (Cambridge, 1998) p. 148. A later intertitle takes the film's story on into the autumn.

When Kolia returns from his business trip, he sees that the calendar has not been touched in his absence. At this point a close-up of the calendar clearly shows both the date, the 9th, and the day, Saturday. But, obviously, the 3rd and the 9th cannot be the same day of the week – if 3 July was a Saturday, then the 9th would be a Friday. The explanation would seem to be that in October 1926, when, as the cameraman Grigori Giber reports, the film's interiors were being shot, the tear-off calendar's pages for July had long been consigned to the rubbish bin. The crew simply used the pages for the current month, trusting in the fact that the month itself was not indicated; 9 October 1926 was, indeed, a Saturday.

Some commentators have set the film in 1927, when 9 July *was* a Saturday, though this in turn raises the problem that 3 July 1927 was a Sunday, which goes contrary to Kolia's initial statement. They have used their conjecture to suggest that the film makes direct reference to the political developments of July 1927, but, since shooting was completed at the end of 1926 and the film premiered in March 1927, this possibility can be excluded.

1. Introduction: Before *Bed and Sofa*

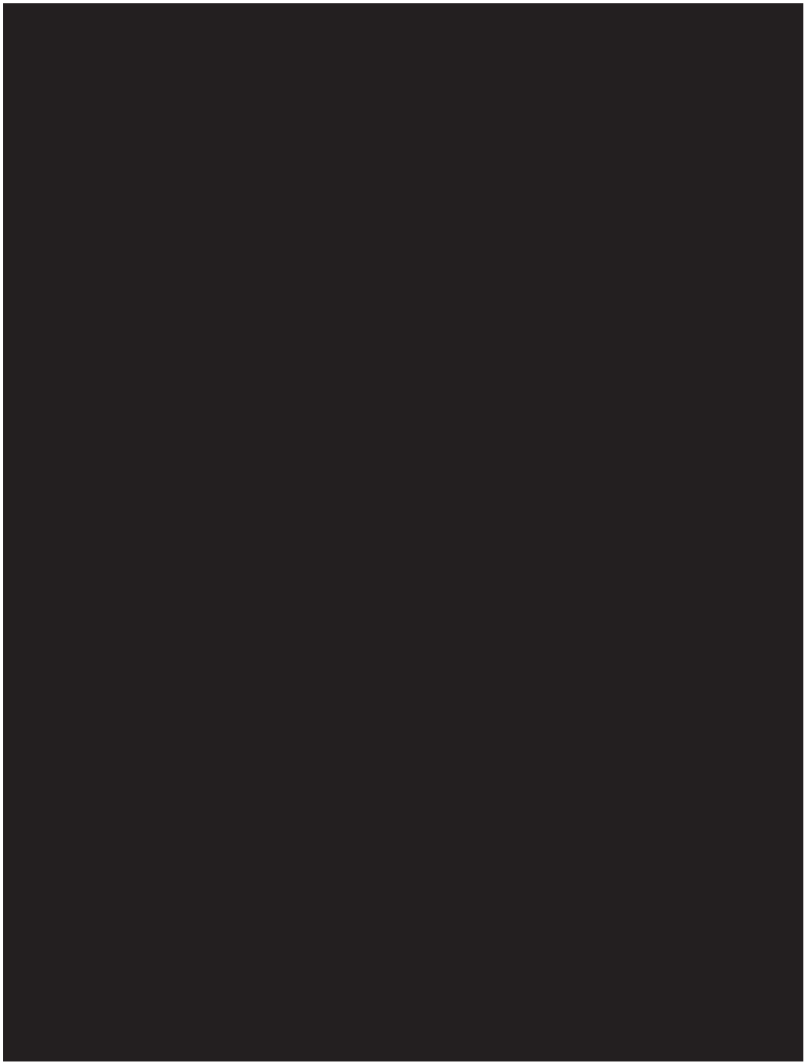
Abram Matveevich Room, the director of *Bed and Sofa*, was born on 16 June 1894 (old style) in the town of Vilno (now Vilnius, the capital of independent Lithuania, but then part of the Russian Empire). In 1914 he entered the Neuropsychological Institute in Petrograd where he studied medicine. His famous cinematic contemporary, Dziga Vertov, two years Room's junior, made a similar journey, from the provincial town of Białystok (now in Poland), entering the Institute in 1916. In 1917 Room moved to Saratov, where he continued his studies in the medical faculty of the university. During the Civil War, in 1918, he was sent by the Red Army to work as a doctor on the Volga.

Room had been interested in the theatre since childhood, and he participated in the nationalisation of the art institutions in Saratov in 1918. In 1920 he became the director of the Saratov Young People's Theatre, staging plays and running theatre workshops. In 1923 the People's Commissar for Enlightenment, Anatoli Lunacharsky, visited the town. He invited Room to Moscow and introduced him to Vsevolod Meyerhold. Room began work at the Theatre of the Revolution, which Meyerhold headed, directing Aleksei Faiko's play *Lake Liul*, the story of a petit-bourgeois intellectual's coming to revolutionary consciousness. The play premiered on 8 November 1923, for the sixth anniversary of the Revolution, and was widely discussed in the

Soviet press. Room recalls that even at this stage his interest in the cinema was growing and that it influenced his staging of the play. Soon afterwards he met Esfir Shub, later one of the leading Soviet documentary film-makers but then working as an editor at the exhibition section of Goskino, the State Cinema Organisation, and under her influence he himself made the move to cinema.¹

The First State Film Factory [Pervaia Goskinofabrika] had been established in 1923 in the former Khanzhonkov Studios on Zhitnaia Street in Moscow in 1923.² Room began work there the following year, as an assistant to the director Czesław Sabiniski. The first film he directed himself was called *Guess What MOS Says* [Chto govorit 'MOS', sei otgadaite vopros, 1924], an advertisement reel for the Moscow Advertisement Bureau, which, with its eccentric tricks, Room turned into a calling card for his own work. It was followed by *The Chase for Home-Brew* [Gonka za samogonkoi, 1924] a propaganda film against alcoholism, which Goskino considered to be too naturalistic and negative, instructing that Room should be given no further films to direct and should be sacked from the studio.³ But the studio managed to keep him on and in 1925 he directed his first full-length film *The Bay of Death* [Bukhta smerti]. Set during the Civil War in a southern port held by the Whites, it tells the story of a middle-aged mechanic who comes to realise the rightness of the Red cause. Even in this ideologically charged tale, Room shows both an acute concern with the fate of the individual and an interest in the role of objects and setting. It was followed in 1926 by *The Traitor* [Predatel'], set in the pre-Revolutionary period, in which a tsarist agent provokes a group of revolutionary soldiers to a doomed rebellion, which is mercilessly crushed. After the Revolution the provocateur is exposed by the Cheka and punished.⁴

During this period Room also played a leading role in ARK, the Association of Revolutionary Cinematography [Assotsiatsiia revoliutsionnoi kinematografii] which had been set up in February 1924 as an action group to encourage government interest in the cinema, and to make sure that the films that were made had an ideologically correct stance. He was a member of the ARK board, a leader of their Thursday meetings which discussed new films and cinematic issues of importance, and a member of the board of the association's journal, *Kinozhurnal ARK* (renamed *Kinofront* in 1926), to which he



1. Portrait of Abram Room, 1920s

contributed a number of articles.⁵ Such was Room's fame in the 1920s that he was linked with Eisenstein and Kuleshov, Pudovkin and Vertov as one of the 'big five' directors in Soviet cinema.

Room wrote the screenplay of *Bed and Sofa* in collaboration with