Directed by Marleen Gorris  
Screenplay by Nancy Larson  
Based on the autobiography by Eugenia Ginzburg  
Produced by Christine Ruppert  
Original Music by Wlodzimierz Pawlik  
Cinematography by Arkadiusz Tomiak

Emily Watson…Evgenia Ginzburg  
Pam Ferris…Genia's mother  
Ian Hart…Beylin  
Ben Miller…Krasny  
Ulrich Tukur…Dr. Anton Walter  
Benjamin Sadler…Pavel  
Monica Dolan…Pitkowskaya  
Agata Buzek…Lena  
Nick Dong-Sik…Confucius  
Pierre Shrady…Pitkowski


NANCY LARSON has three screenplay credits: 2009 Within the Whirlwind, 1988 The Wizard of Loneliness, and 1978 Coach.


**Yevgenia Ginzburg**

Yevgenia Solomonovna Ginzburg (December 20, 1904 – May 25, 1977) (Russian: Евгения Соломоновна Гинzburg) was a Russian author who served an 18-year sentence in the Gulag. Her given name is often Latinized to Eugenia.

Born in Moscow, her parents were Solomon Natanovich Ginzburg (a Jewish pharmacist) and Revekka Markovna Ginzburg. The family moved to Kazan in 1909.

In 1920, she began to study social sciences at Kazan State University, later switching to pedagogy. She worked as a rabťak (рабťак, рабочий факультет, workers' faculty) teacher. In April 1934, Ginzburg was officially confirmed as a docent (approximately equivalent to an associate professor in western universities), specializing in the history of the All-Union Communist Party. Shortly thereafter, on May 25, she was named head of the newly created department of the history of Leninism. However, by the fall of 1935, she was forced to quit the university.

She first married a doctor Dmitry Fedorov, by whom she had a son, Alexei Fedorov, born in 1926. He died in 1941 during...
the siege of Leningrad. Around 1930, she married Pavel Aksyonov, the mayor of Kazan and a member of the Central Executive Committee (ЦИК) of the USSR. Her son by this marriage, Vasily Aksyonov, born in 1932, became a well-known writer. After becoming a Communist Party member, Ginzburg continued her successful career as educator, journalist and administrator.

Following the assassination of Sergei Mironovich Kirov on December 1, 1934, Ginzburg, like many communists (see the Great Purge), was accused of participating in a "counter-revolutionary Trotskyist group." this one led by Professor N. N. El'vov and concentrated in the editorial board of the newspaper *Krasnaya Tatariia* (Red Tataria) where she was employed. After a long fight to keep her party card, she was expelled from the party, officially excluded on February 8, 1937. Then, on February 15, 1937, she was arrested, accused of engaging in counter-revolutionary activity in El'vov's group and concealing this activity. Because she was a party member throughout this alleged activity, she was also accused of "playing a double game." From the day of her arrest, and unlike most of those around her, she forcefully denied the NKVD's accusations and never accepted any role in the supposed "counter-revolutionary Trotsky organization." As recorded in her initial interrogation, when asked whether she recognized her guilt, she responded "I do not acknowledge it. I have not engaged in any Trotskyist struggle with the party. I have not been a member of a counter-revolutionary Trotskyist organization." Her parents were also arrested but released two months later. Her husband was arrested in July, sentenced to 15 years of "corrective labor," and his property confiscated under Articles 58-7 and 11 of the RSFSR Penal Code.

On August 1, 1937, although Ginzburg still did not recognize her supposed guilt (despite the NKVD's repeated, ruthless interrogations), a closed meeting of the Military College of the Supreme Court of the USSR (in Moscow) sentenced her to 10 years imprisonment with deprivation of political rights for five years and confiscation of all her personal property. The judgement was declared to be final with no possibility of appeal. Ginzburg later wrote, in a letter to the chairman of the Presidium of the USSR's Supreme Soviet, that her entire "trial" took seven minutes, including the questioning and reading of the judgement: "My judges were in such a hurry that they did not answer any of my questions and declarations." Interestingly, in one of the most revealing chapters of her autobiography, Ginzburg expressed great relief upon hearing the verdict, because she had feared up to that very moment that she would be condemned to death: "To live! Without property, but what was that to me! Let them confiscate it - they were brigands anyway, confiscating was their business. They wouldn't get much good out of mine, a few books and clothes - why, we didn't even have a radio. My husband was a loyal Communist of the old stamp, not the kind who had to have a Buick or a Mercedes... Ten years!... Do you [the judges], with your codfish faces, really think you can go on robbing and murdering for another ten years, that there aren't people in the Party who will stop you sooner or later? I knew there were - and in order to see that day, I must live. In prison, if needs be, but I must at all costs live!... I looked at the guards, whose hands were still clasped behind my back. Every nerve in my body was quivering with the joy of being alive. What nice faces the guards had! Peasant boys from Ryazan or Kursk, most likely. They couldn't help being warders - no doubt they were conscripts. And they had joined hands to save me from falling. But they needn't have - I wasn't going to fall. I shook back my hair curled so carefully before facing the court, so as not to disgrace the memory of Charlotte Corday. Then I gave the guards a friendly smile. They looked at me in astonishment."

Yevgenia experienced at first hand the infamous Lefortovo and Butyrka prisons in Moscow, and the Yaroslavl "Korovniki". She crossed the USSR on a prison train to Vladivostok and was put in the cargo hold of the steamer Jurma (Джурма) whose destination was Magadan. There she worked at a camp hospital, but was soon sent to the harsh camps of the Kolyma valley, where she was assigned to so-called "common jobs" and quickly became an emaciated dokhodyaga ("goner"). A Crimean German doctor, Anton Walter, probably saved her life by recommending her for a nursing position; they eventually married. Anton had been deported because of his German heritage. In February 1949, Ginzburg was released from the Gulag system, but had to remain in Magadan for five years. She found a position at a kindergarten and began to write her memoirs in secret. However, in October 1949, she was arrested again and exiled to the Krasnoyarsk region, but (at her request) her destination was changed to Kolyma at the last minute. No reason was ever given for this second arrest and exile.

After Joseph Stalin's death in 1953 and following Ginzburg's repeated, vigorous appeals to various authorities to have her case reconsidered, she was released from the exile (on 25 June 1955) and allowed to return to Moscow. She was rehabilitated in 1955. She returned to Moscow, worked as a reporter and continued her work on her magnum opus, her memoir *Journey into the Whirlwind* (English title). She finished the book in 1967 but was unable to publish it in the USSR. The manuscript was then smuggled abroad and published in 1967 by Mondadori in Milan and Possev in Frankfurt am Main; it has since been translated into many languages. Eventually, her memoir was divided into two parts, whose Russian titles are "Krutoi marshrut I" and "Krutoi marshrut II" - "Harsh Route" or "Steep Route." She died in Moscow, aged 72.
Dutch director Marleen Gorris is one of the most feminist directors around. She has actually won an academy award for one of the most feminist films I have ever seen, *Antonia’s Line*, which won the best foreign language film Oscar in 1995. Her other films include *A Question of Silence*, *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Luzhin Defence*.

Her new film tells the true story of Evgenia Ginzburg (Emily Watson) who was sentenced to 10 years hard labor in Siberia during Stalin’s reign in the Soviet Union. Watson is her usual wonderful self in this intense story about a woman who believed she was a solid and stalwart party member, who wound up in a whirlwind of accusations with no power. But while the gulag is extraordinarily depressing, the film is a story of hope as Evgenia is able to find love with the camp’s doctor (played by Ulrich Tukur) under these most difficult circumstances.

Women & Hollywood was able to ask some questions of director Marleen Gorris and writer Nancy Larson when their film was screened at the recent NY Jewish Film Festival.

Women & Hollywood: Nancy, tell us how the story began.

Nancy Larson: I had developed a film with another producer and the producer wanted to work with me again. And he asked me what book I would like to do. And I had read this book and I said this is the one I would like to do.

W&H: So they hired you to write the script?

NL: I came in more like a writer/producer in a way. I just wrote the script and the first person we thought of was Marleen.

W&H: Marleen, what made you interested in the film?

Marleen Gorris: I was very interested in the subject because there is so little done with that particular period. The Stalin Purges. Stalin in general. And I was also fascinated with Russia. Even now, a great part of the population worships Stalin. So obviously the Russians did not do anything with their history in that sense as for instance the Germans did. What I mean is that it came out into the open and people started talking about it and historians went into the subject. None of all that happened in Russia. And then of course it was a personal story of a woman who had written very extensively with great memory about what she went through. Also, my admiration for this woman. Where does one get the power to survive something like this? And all these elements I thought were fascinating to make a film of.

W&H: Did you first think of Emily? You had worked with her before.

MG: I can’t remember when I thought of Emily. This film was very long in the making — the financing was difficult. First we had a French producer and then that went wrong. We ended up with a lovely German producer. And two countries, Poland and Belgium supplied some of the money. But it took forever.

W&H: When did you write the script?

NL: I don’t even remember. Must have been seven years ago. Of course, it was an ongoing process throughout the seven years.

W&H: Do you feel that it was the subject matter that made it so difficult to finance? Is it that it was a woman’s story? Is it a story about a time period that people would happily say bye-bye to and not pay attention to again?

MG: People say this is a bio-pic. No bio-pics. This is a political film. No political films. They always came up with some excuse.

NL: There’s always a reason not to make a film.

W&H: Do you have distribution here in the US? Are you looking for it? What are your thoughts for the next level for this film here in this country and elsewhere. Has it premiered elsewhere?

MG: It has been shown elsewhere.

NL: In fact it’s been a work in progress. Between festival to festival there have been adjustments.

MG: One thing that didn’t really works in our favor is the world crisis. Last year was abysmal. Half of the American distributors went broke and out of business. In Europe it’s not much better. We are looking for an American distributor. It’s not exactly a barrel of laughs. It’s either the big blockbusters that people go to or comedies, especially in bad times. But I presume that’s part of the difficulty for a lot of independent films to find distributors.

W&H: Most of your films have had a strong feminist themes. Has that been deliberate on your part?

MG: I guess you could say so. I never really understood why it would be worth commenting on a film that a film has a woman as a person. It still seems to be very unusual. Given the fact that more than half of the people on this earth are women we should get this attention.
NL: It’s funny you don’t say to a man I’ve noticed that you only make films about men.

W&H: Do you feel that taking that position has helped your career? Hurt your career? Or is it just who you are?

MG: Well, it is just who I am. It’s difficult of course to say if it’s hurt my career. In a sense I have had an Oscar for *Antonia’s Line* which is a very feminist point of view as well. So I certainly can’t complain of lack of attention. Of course, if I had made completely mainstream films or films lacking feminist perspective – then my career would certainly look different I imagine.

W&H: You see from your bio you directed an episode of the *L Word*. Was that fun? Enjoyable? How did you like working here in the US?

MG: I have worked in the US before. I did a film called *Carolina* with Shirley MacLaine and Julia Stiles which went straight to DVD because the Weinstein Company didn’t like it enough I think. And the others were British. And they asked me one time. And I thought yes, I liked working in the states. Actually, most of it was done in Vancouver so I didn’t really work in the states.

W&H: Can you talk a little about the Virginia Woolf movie and your experience with that?

MG: That also took years. It was really a wonderful experience with Vanessa Redgrave who is a magnificent actress. I actually shot the first part with the older people first. Then we had a break in the film because the producer lost all his money. Then the American distributors of *Antonia’s Line* took over the film and gave me the money to finish it three weeks later. And then I did the younger generation. That was very fortunate because that almost never happens that you break a film in the middle and then someone else gives you money to finish it. It was hugely enjoyable making a film like that.

W&H: What is it like to be a director where you’re from? What is it like to be a woman director from a country where you can have a body of work?

MG: The main difference is that women filmmakers, or any filmmaker from a small country, is subsidized by the government. That is something that Denmark has, and we in Holland and Germany. In that sense it’s easier. I think we have in Holland quite a number of women filmmakers, even though there still aren’t as many as men. But there is not such strict difference as apparently there are in America. I did try at one time to make a film here in the states because I was asked and that didn’t work out. And then of course you go onto other things. But it’s tough. Whatever you do – it’s tough.

W&H: What is your advice for an upcoming and/or established screenwriter? And what is your advice for a director?

NL: For me I have not had very good luck with the studios. I’ve had good luck in terms of getting many commissions but not in terms of getting films made. And I think you have to find a way. Europeans are more interested in what I do so I tend to go there. They don’t pay as much but they tend to make your films. But my advice is really to absolutely persevere with what you’re truly interested in. Otherwise everything sounds alike.

MG: That is definitely my advice as well. Persevere. Because what else can you do? Or choose a completely different profession all together.

W&H: You come from a place where a woman’s vision is treated differently. Is that true?

Marleen: I don’t know in general. I’m not so sure. My first films were met with a lot of opposition and also, fortunately, a lot of encouragement. But in many ways I find the states freer. And almost every woman works in the states. But that’s not the case with Holland, even though Holland quite an emancipated country.
For a film that deals mainly with a time of captivity in a place of wretched deprivation, Gorris and Larson contrive to show us a fair amount of small, kind -- sometimes quite surprising -- moments. From a bowl of raspberries handed by a peasant girl into the boxcar in which our prisoners are being shipped to a dinner in the home of Russian camp commandant and the many acts of kindness between the women prisoners -- one of whom steps in front of a guard's rifle to protect her friend -- these tiny fragments build slowly, helping the women to survive and the audience to thrive.

Gorris has always been intensely interested in women and how they fit into the world. And if her men range from craven (the father of Evgenia's children -- though what else could he do when so few of his ilk got out alive) to barbaric (the prison guards), they can occasionally (like the German prison doctor, beautifully played by Ulrich Tukur) be a source of joy and help.

As a writer and poet, Ginzburg is sustained through her imprisonment by the art of poetry. One of Gorris' achievements is to give this poetry its proper place, along with the politics of the time, the horror of prison life and the sustaining love Ginzburg finds from both her women co-prisoners and her doctor. That the filmmakers manage to honor all these with intelligence and feeling adds up to a quiet triumph.

At the audience Q&A following the screening, Ms Gorris and Ms Larson were asked some thoughtful questions which they answered with equal thought. One viewer wanted to know how the director had become interested in this subject. Gorris explained that her interest went back quite a long while. Financing for the movie took a very long time to raise, but this gave the director and her producer an opportunity to think about the movie. "No, it was certainly present, but Evgenia does not speak much about that. I think she saw this as more directed against the intellectuals. In the camp itself, there was a strong anti-Semitism which was not particularly underscored in the movie."

Were the tensions between Evgenia and her husband also apparent in her memoir? "Not so much," Ms. Larson told us, "but they are there if you read between the lines."

The Anti-Semitism was not particularly underscored in the movie. "No, it was certainly present, but Evgenia does not speak much about that. I think she saw this as more directed against the intellectuals. In the camp itself, there was a strong differentiation between the criminal prisoners and the intellectuals, and the latter were at the bottom of the pile and were preyed upon terribly by the criminal element." Was the "I have a body" poem by Osip Mandelstam referred to in her memoir? "No," explained the director, "but I felt it was so right and was necessary to have in the film."

Was the burying of the piece of candy also referred to in the memoir? "No, that was not there, either. We just imagined it!"

"You find out what you're really interested in, and then you pursue it," explained Larson. For her part, Gorris was particularly interested in how political paranoia could lead to something as awful as what we see here, in the process discovering also how one could find some humanity present.

"This was a particularly difficult script to get right," the director explained. "So many people died in these labor camps, and yet, extermination did not seem to have been the goal. So how to portray all this? It demands a different focus, without placing too much emphasis on politics, or horror, or romance or even poetry. So I hope the film did come out well, with the right balance," she told us. At which point, via applause, the audience assured her that it had.

How did she incorporate the poetry so well? "Poetry was so important to Evgenia, so it was equally important to us that we use the correct amount -- and make it fit within the film."

How did she come to choose Emily Watson for the role? "I had worked with Emily on The Luzhin Defence and had loved her work ever since Breaking the Waves. Emily really wanted to be here with us today but could not come because she is making a film in Australia -- which is a long commute."

Where was the film shot? In Russia, perhaps? "We shot the film in Poland and Germany. We attempted to use Russia: I spent a fruitless weekend there, and our producer was arrested at the border for some very small reason and then had to pay an entire new air fare to get back home. I don't think the authorities would have been helpful, had we have even been able to reach them. But, of course, you never know."

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See you in the fall. If you’re not on our email list, send an email to either one of us and we’ll send you the Fall 2013 schedule as soon as we get the confirmations from the distributors.

Contacts: email Diane Christian: engdc@buffalo.edu ... email Bruce Jackson bjackson@buffalo.edu ... for the series schedule, annotations, links and updates: http://buffalofilmseminars.com ... to subscribe to the weekly email informational notes, send an email to addto_list@buffalofilmseminars.com ... for cast and crew info on any film: http://imdb.com

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