

Some thoughts about Andrei Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev*

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Much has been written about the 'symbols' (items and images) that reappear in successive films of Tarkovsky: horses/dogs, liquids (water, rain, milk), and others. However, in *Rublev*, an additional recurring idea is brutality. With equal regularity, the person responsible for the brutality is not the person who carries out the brutality. The Jester is mysteriously chosen to be attacked and 'disappear' at the opening of the film by the soldiers, but only towards the end does Tarkovsky reveal that Kirill is the person who was responsible for the Jester's seemingly arbitrary and grave misfortune by admitting to Rublev that it was he who "denounced" him. The parallel with Stalinist Soviet life is an unavoidable conclusion. Again, the stonemasons are blinded by the military guard under the *order* of the Grand Duke, but not by the Duke himself. Similarly, we witness Boriska, a sympathetic character, who himself orders the innocent mentally slow friend to be flogged. Can we not deduce that this kind of activity, which was not uncommon under Hitler and Stalin's regimes, is being imparted by Tarkovsky?

Returning to the Grand Duke and Grand Prince (one on the side of the Tartar invaders): can we really tell one from the other? The invader and the resistor are both guilty parties against their people. This blurring of the brother-enemies is certainly a Hitler-Stalin parallel, and in fact the idea that the viewer cannot readily distinguish them is perhaps the most important point (note of course the Tarkovsky cast the same actor to portray both rôles). The ideology may be different, but the crimes are the same. The political aspirations of the few cause untold suffering to the greater population, and are apathetic to their crimes (note the remorseless and indifferent attitude of the Grand Duke in the face of the burning of the lowly town administrator).

The idea of duality also emerges a number of times throughout the course of the film. Rublev's paternal involvement with the mute girl which is ripped away from him, returns in the form of Boriska, for whom he breaks his silence at the precise moment that we see a the reappearance of the mute girl (with daughter) juxtaposed with the bell sound (which is identified with Boriska). Is the bell sound, which we hear from the very outset of the film, the intonation of the spiritual in

Art, the core of artistic endeavor? It is heard again and again at pivotal moments when Rublev confronts himself with artistic questions. The synthesis of the sounds and the images of the two youths in his life is therefore significant in understanding their meaning. Both the girl and Boriska have bouts of inconsolable crying, each time shifting Rublev's outlook on art and life, each associated with rain images. But are the girl and Boriska real? Are they embodiments of the emotional core of art that Rublev first discovers at one point in his life, only to lose and subsequently rediscover? The youthful, still maturing emotional state, the purer, untainted expressiveness of these characters is what the Artist searches for. The dual mentors of Kirill and Daniil, both envious, albeit to different degrees, and both conservative in nature: Kirill expresses his greater admiration in Theophanies' work, and the argument over the painting of the Last Judgement between Rublev and Daniil expresses the later's opinions on the matter quite clearly. Are these not in fact elements of the personality of the artist Rublev himself - self-doubting, torn between keeping with tradition and forging his own language? The final images of the film of the icon depicting the Trinitarian angelic figures stand as we first see Daniil, Kirill, with Rublev at the center in the first interior shot of them in the film. Rublev as Artist and Creator of his own Universe, a divine Universe similarly anointed by the Artist as those surrounding the grail in the painting. The soul of the Artist as well as his life come to fruition as a unified subject in the painting; as interiors and exteriors are juxtaposed in Russian iconographic works, so here is the substance of the Artist displayed as one.

The carrying of the fire-stone across the snow with tongs has the same impact of the 'dream-come-true' image that he Tarkovsky would revisit in Nostalgia with the carrying of the candle through the barren pool. One notices this activity in Rublev occurred at the point when the girl leaves him (when he begins his 'search' which will end in his finding Boriska), and when he breaks his silence and the usefulness of painting returns to him at the conclusion of the film; here the dream is fulfilled.

Many of the images that Tarkovsky focuses on during the concluding segment, wherein for the first time we see the actual paintings of Rublev, have their roots earlier in the film. Tarkovsky is clarifying that it is necessity for the Artist (himself of course included) to draw from his own life experiences and understanding of history and humanity in order to speak to the people of his time rather than restrict one's motivation based simply on the acquisition of money through

accurate re-rendering of the learned techniques of one's forbears. Notice the bird on the shield in the painting can be seen earlier in the lifting of the dead bird in the woods, as well as the flying bird over the destruction of Vladimir. As well, the appearance in the painting of the distressed woman, her face emerging from the cleft of her arms, is drawn from the image of the pagan woman that saved Rublev as she watches him leave, her head resting on her arms.