

Document Citation

Title	[Ivan the terrible]
Author(s)	
Source	<i>Publisher name not available</i>
Date	
Type	review
Language	English
Pagination	
No. of Pages	2
Subjects	Cherkasov, Nikolai (1903-1966), St. Petersburg, Russia (Federation) Eisenstein, Sergei (1898-1948), Riga (formerly Russia), Latvia
Film Subjects	Boyarskii zagovor (Ivan the Terrible, part 2), Eisenstein, Sergei, 1958 Ivan groznyi (Ivan the Terrible, part 1), Eisenstein, Sergei, 1944

Eisenstein's "Ivan the Terrible" was planned (and published) as a two-part film but like so much of this director's work, an idea grew beyond its original conception, and what was originally simply an episode of the second part (called by Eisenstein "The Boyars' Plot") grew into a complete part and a third episode was then envisaged to complete the work.

The third part would have shown the extermination of the Kolychev family and the downfall of Pimen and the boyars at Novgorod; treason in the ranks of the oprichniks (Ivan's special guard) and the final triumph of Ivan with the faithful Malyuta and the now loyal Peter Volynets (the novice chosen to assassinate Ivan in Part Two) defeating the Poles and the Baltic Germans and reaching the sea.

Eisenstein had scarcely completed the film when he suffered a severe heart attack. The film was severely criticised and put aside. Two years later, in 1948, after he had made some revisions, a fresh heart attack proved fatal. He was discovered in his Moscow villa, an article about his use of colour in "Ivan Part Two", in front of him.

The episodes intended to form Part Three have disappeared. There remains of them only the script and some of the many hundreds of drawings Eisenstein made in designing the whole film.

Undoubtedly the two parts of "Ivan the Terrible" can count among the greatest achievements of the cinema, involving not only a complex reconstruction of a famous historical character and his environment, but the final fruition of a cinematic style that can best be called classical, and this incorporating the dramatic use of colour at a time when colour was merely an added box-office novelty.

Eisenstein has achieved, what, in fact, a painter such as Rembrandt has achieved, truth of character within a supreme quality of plastic beauty.

To realize this Eisenstein had to dominate the production entirely. The actor Cherkasov tells us:

"Our designer was I. Shpinel. Eisenstein worked with him very closely. He linked his art work with his work as a director. In sketching the costumes, he strove to make them stress the nature of the given character, to embody it in plastic outlines, and his achievements in this respect were outstanding. He was unflagging in his attention to what seemed secondary things, to the accessories — utensils, church plate — striving for expressiveness in the smallest details, for the stylistic unity of all components. He sketched the entire finale of the first part of the film in consecutive shots, nor were these the kind of rough sketches directors usually make, but a series of detailed, perfectly finished drawings. He strove to reproduce on the screen what he had drawn on paper and took great pains arranging each shot, looking into the camera eye for a long time before starting, to shoot, striving to make each shot a finished painting. The film contains a number of shots that are truly brilliant in their harmony of purpose and unity of stylistic treatment. Among the finest of these is the coronation scene and the crusade to Alexandrovskaya Sloboda.

"As director Sergei Eisenstein set me a complicated task — to portray the development of the character of a great historical personality. The numerous external changes that Ivan passed through, from a carefree youth to an imperious ruler, exhausted in battle but still strong, in themselves presented serious difficulties.

... The make-up required much effort. Before the shooting of the film began, Eisenstein, the make-up expert V. Goryunov and myself spent almost six solid weeks devising the make-up. ... Ivan the Terrible is shown at sixteen stages of his life, and each stage required a specific make-up."

Eisenstein's use of the close-up is almost psychological in as much as the shots not only reveal individual character but give us a truer picture of the situation and we find we are following the drama on two levels.

The dialogue too is free, unhampered by short takes. A short soliloquy might spread itself over some two or three shots — making, incidentally, the task of the sub-title translator particularly difficult.

Eisenstein has used colour in a sequence that naturally begs colour — the banquet and orgy in which Ivan's special guard, the oprichniks, led by his favourite, Feydor Basmanov, sing and dance. Here, the scarlets (now a little orangey) leap out of the gloom and add tension to the scene and the dramatic climax that is to immediately follow.



Below: Ivan invites his cousin Vladimir to a banquet and dresses him up in the Tsar's royal regalia. Conniving with him in this plan which ends in Vladimir's death, is Fedya Basmanov. Left to right in the picture: Fedya, Vladimir and Ivan.





Ivan the Terrible. Episode Two: The Boyars' Plot. Scenario and Direction — S.M. Eisenstein; Music — Sergei Prokofiev; Photography — Andrei Moskvina and Eduard Tisse, Choreography — R. Zakharov; Costumes — L. Naumova and M. Safunova; Production: Mosfilm at the Alma Ata Studios and completed in Moscow 1943-1946, issued 1958. Cast: Ivan — Nikolai Cherkasov; Malyuta Skaratov — Mikhail Zharov; Fedya Basmanov, Ivan's favourite — Ambrosi Buchma; Metropolitan Philip of Moscow, formerly Fyodor Kolychev — Andrei Abrikosov; Euphrosyne Staritsky, aunt to the Tsar—Serafina Birman; Vladimir, her son, and cousin to the Tsar — Pavel Kadochnikov; Archbishop Pimen of Novgorod — Alexander Mgebrov; His novice, Peter Volynets — Vladimir Balashev; Prince Andrew Kurbsky — Mikhail Nazvanov.

This is a must, of course, for anyone remotely interested in the cinema. It is a classic work in which formalism is brilliantly combined with a searching psychological interpretation. Cherkasov's performance of Ivan is unique, and here, as the ageing Tsar, compelled to imprison his once faithful friend, Philip and combat the wiles of his aunt and the Archbishop Pimen and their naive accomplice, Vladimir, the actor brings to a close an era of film making, and indeed acting. This is not to say we will not see anything of a similar standard again, we shall, but it will not be in this style; artistic concepts (not standards) will be different.

Contemporary Films, who are presenting the film, are to be congratulated in not accepting the Russian sub-titled version but in allowing Mr. Ivor Montagu, who worked often in close co-operation with Eisenstein, on many matters, to give us a version, as authentic as we could possibly have had. For a full comprehension of the film readers are recommended to the booklet, "Ivan the Terrible," advertised in this issue.



"THE BOYARS' PLOT"—In his second film epic on the life of Ivan, Eisenstein portrayed the mad Czar (right) seating the pretender on his throne to mislead would-be assassins.

