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The New Pictures

Ivan the Terrible: Part 2—The Revolt of the Boyars (Janus Films). Russia's Sergei Eisenstein (1898-1948) has been described as the Michelangelo of the cinema. In the '20s, *Potemkin*, *Ten Days That Shook the World* and *Old and New* established him as the film's greatest master of vast composition and dynamic form. In 1943, in the midst of World War II, he started work on a huge film chronicle of the reign of Ivan the Terrible. For Part 1, which was shown in the U.S. (TIME, April 14, 1947), Eisenstein won a Stalin Prize. But Part 2 displeased Stalin, and Eisenstein died before he could make the necessary changes. For the next ten years, Part 2 lay unseen in the Soviet Film Archive. In 1958, five years after Stalin's death, the film was at last



CHERKASSOV AS IVAN

A horribly beautiful adagio.

released, and is now being seen in the U.S. It is a queer, lugubrious, horribly beautiful adagio, the second movement in an opus conceived, in formal terms, as a mighty concerto for the camera.

Part 1 described the foundation of Ivan's royal power and personal happiness, the destruction of both during his struggle with the *boyars* (nobles) who murdered his wife and drove him to abdi-

cation, and the restoration of his power by the will of the people. Part 2 tells how the *boyars* plotted to assassinate the re-established sovereign, how he discovered the scheme and broke the power of the nobility with a bloody purge.

Eisenstein's Ivan (Nikolai Cherkassov) bears little resemblance to the historical figure. According to some historical accounts, Ivan IV of Russia (1530-84) was a psychopathic sadist who slaughtered thousands of Russians, gleefully assisted at the torture of his enemies, and murdered his own son in a blind rage. Eisenstein's Ivan is frankly intended to represent Stalin, who admired Ivan as the founder of the Russian state, and liked to think he was "terrible" only because he had to be. Eisenstein therefore dutifully whitewashes the brute. But the whitewash is spread so thin in some areas of Part 2—in which Ivan's purge of the *boyars* presents an obvious parallel to Stalin's purge of the party—that the spectator can only wonder how the director managed to escape with a mere reprimand. As Cherkassov plays him, Ivan-Stalin is a full-blown paranoiac and power maniac, and his hysterical protest that his crimes have been committed "not for myself, but for the motherland" has the ring and the glare of madness.

A quality of delusion penetrates every detail of the picture, as though it were not intended to represent a reality but a nightmare. The entire film was photographed at night in what seems to be the crypt of a cathedral. The ceilings are so low that much of the time the actors have to crouch, and often they scuttle about the floor like giant, furry rats.

Furthermore, the actors behave in a vastly exaggerated, pantomimic manner—the lines are sung, the gestures danced—that was obviously suggested to Eisenstein by the Japanese (Kabuki) style of acting. When the method works, Eisenstein's scenes have the weight and majesty of grand opera at its grandest. When it does not, the picture is ludicrous. But even when it is ludicrous, it is mysteriously beautiful. And even when it is beautiful, it is horrible—as horrible as life in Ivan's or Stalin's Russia. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that Eisenstein is protesting the horror and the madness he portrays. He seems rather, in a deeply patient Asian spirit, to be trying to explain to himself the hideous paradox that Stalin, in 1943, had become Russia's savior.