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The Museum of Modern Art Department of Film

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October 2 - November 18, 1975

SOVIET SILENT CINEMA

Part 2: 1926-1927

2 Films by Yuri Tarich
A FOREST TALE

CZAR IVAN THE TERRIBLE or WINGS
OF A SERF

By special arrangement with Gosfilmofond, the Soviet State Film Archive, and the Pacific Film Archive of the University Art Museum at Berkeley, the Department of Film will present the second of a three-part retrospective of Soviet cinema in its silent period. This program is the most comprehensive ever mounted outside the U.S.S.R. of the classic and revolutionary films of the Soviet Union. Part I, comprising 29 titles, covered the years from 1918 through 1925, and was presented in 1974 from March 7th through April 15th. Part 2 limits itself to the two peak years, 1926 and 1927, and will include forty titles to be exhibited from October 2nd through November 18th. Part 3, completing the silent years of Soviet filmmaking, will be announced in the future.

The works in the retrospective were selected from a list of surviving Soviet silents in the Gosfilmofond Archive by Professor Jay Leyda in consultation with Victor Privato, Director of Gosfilmofond, and Tom Luddy, Program Director of the Pacific Film Archive. Professor Leyda is the author of the definitive text in English on the history of Russian and Soviet cinema, Kino.

The majority of the prints in Part 2 will contain only the original Russian intertitles. Some of the films which will complement the program will be from the Museum's own collection, and many of these will have English intertitles. Almost all the films will be in 35mm.

Synopses and detailed information will be distributed at each screening. The documentation for the notes has been supplied through the generosity of Gosfilmofond, Jay Leyda, the Pacific Film Archive, Jacques Ledoux of the Cinémathèque Royale de Belgique (Brussels), Vlada Petric and Andy McKay. Additional information is also drawn from the Museum's own Study Center files. The Department of Film owes a special thanks to Sonia Volochova who is not only translating from original Russian sources but who is assisting in the compiling of these notes as well.

Saturday, November 15 at 5:30 A FOREST TALE

Monday, November 17 at 2:00 CZAR IVAN THE TERRIBLE or WINGS OF A SERF

A FOREST TALE (LESNAYA BYL). 1927. Released May 10, 1927. Adaptation of The Swineherd, by M. Charot. 8 reels. Belgoskino. Russian intertitles. ca. 70 minutes.

Alternate Russian title: GRISHKA-SVINOPAS (SWINEHERD GRISHKA).

It is believed all extant prints are incomplete; the third reel is missing.

Scenario: Yevgeni Ivanov-Barkov, Yuri Tarich. Director: Yuri Tarich. Photography: D. Shlyugleit. Design: Yvgeni Ivanov-Barkov. Assistant directors: I. Piryev, V. Korsch, V. Stepanov.

Cast: N. Armenev (Pan Drabsky); G. Kravchenko (Vanda (Wanda), his daughter); P. Rozhitsky (Zhabinsky, Catholic priest); A. Zakatov (lieutenant); S. Borisov (cavalry sergeant major); A. Zhukov (Kosyuk, the nobles' warden); A. Otradin (Levon, a shepherd); L. Danilov (Grishka, his son); M. Kotelnikov (Stepan); I. Klyukvin (Andrei, a blacksmith); V. Makarov (forester); L. Dedintsev (Colonel

Yastrzhembsky); V. Korsh (adjutant); T. Kotelnikova (Gelka); K. Chebisheva.

Synopsis

It is 1920. White Russia is in the hands of its Polish residents. The landed Polish gentry is once again ensconced on its estates, and once again holds the White Russian peasant in subjection at the point of their bayonets. But the gentry's well-being, with its magnificent dinners and balls for the White Polish officers, is only a surface phenomenon. In the dense White Russian forests partisan detachments are readying forces to fight for freedom. The scout of one of these detachments is the daring swineherd Grishka. By observing the movements of the Polish troops he is able to warn the partisans of a forthcoming trial of the village's peasants. Their surprise attack on the Polish convoy transporting the arrested peasants rescues the prisoners. This initial battle against the Polish Whites triggers a peasant uprising. The Polish gentry hastily flee their castles, and, hard pressed by the partisans, the occupation forces retreat. But fresh Polish detachments from the city come to the aid of the retreating troops. The insurgents' ammunition gives out. Their only hope of survival lies in the fighting Red Army, then advancing toward Minsk. Grishka's girl-friend, Gelka, is sent ahead to effect a meeting between the two forces. And just as the partisans' last bullet is fired the Red cavalry appears on the hills. Under the joint blows of that army and the partisans the Polish Whites flee White Russia. And a new Red Army fighter stands guard at the Minsk Revolutionary Committee--swineherd Grishka.

Soviet Fiction Films:
An Annotated Catalogue, Vol. I.
Moscow, 1961, pp. 206-07,
No. 474

Translated and revised by Sonia Volochova

CZAR IVAN THE TERRIBLE, or WINGS OF A SERF (KRYLYA KHOLOPA). 1926. Released November 16, 1926. U.S. release: March 11, 1928. Drama. 9 reels. Sovkino (First Studio). Russian intertitles. ca. 115 minutes. (Please note running time)

The American release title given above was later shortened to IVAN THE TERRIBLE; and there are a number of variant transliterations of CZAR:TSAR (the most accurate), TZAR, CSAR.

Other alternate English titles: WINGS OF THE SERF, WINGS OF A PEASANT, WINGS OF A SLAVE, A SLAVE'S WINGS.

Scenario: Konstantin Schildkret, Viktor Shklovsky, Yuri Tarich. Direction: Tarich. Codirector: Leonid Leonidov. Photography: Mikhail Vladimirsky. Design: Vladimir Yegorov. Editor: Esther (Esfir) Shub. Assistant director: V. Korsh. Director's assistant: Ivan Pyriev.

Cast: Leonid Leonidov (Tsar Ivan the Terrible); Safnat Askarova (Maria Temryukovna, Ivan's second wife); V. Korsh (Tsarevich Ivan); Nikolai Prozorovsky (Fyodor Basmanov); N. Vitovtov (Prince Drutskoi); I. Arkanov (Prince Kurlyatev); V. Makarov (his estate neighbor); I. Klyukvin (Nikishka, the serf); S. Garrel (Fima, his bride, a serf); M. Kotelnikov (Ivashka, Fima's brother); I. Kachalov (Malyuta Skuratov); A. Dzyubina (Khayat, a Circassian woman); K. Chebysheva (Princess Kurlyateva, the mother); V. Virskaya (the younger Princess Kurlyateva); V. Kurganov (Afanasi Vyazemsky); A. Zhukov (Vaska Gryaznov); K. Yefimov (metropolitan); T. Barysheva, F. Britan, Snezhinskaya, V. Savitsky.

Synopsis

The Boyar Kurliatov raids the village of his neighbor, Lupatov, after the latter refuses to lend his serf Nikita, who is reputed to be clever with mechanical appliances. Kurliatov wants him to repair a clock, one of the first that found its way into Russia.

Kurliatov's raiders also bring along Nikita's bride, a peasant girl, Fima.

In Kurliatov's bondage, Nikita repairs the clock, and all of his spare moments he spends in testing the winged contrivance fashioned after the form of a bird, with which he intends to fly.

Nikita's tests with the flying machine are duly reported to Boyar Kurliatov who orders a severe flogging for Nikita and his bride Fima, accusing them of being in league with Satan.

While in church praying, Ivan the Terrible learns that Kurliatov has swooped down upon his neighbor, Lupatov, and carried away all his serfs. He orders Drutzkoi, captain of the guards, who has just returned from a 'gallant escapade' with the czarina, to bring Boyar Kurliatov immediately before him. The Czar's messengers, headed by Drutzkoi, arrive just in time during the flogging, and declaring Kurliatov's action an offense against the authority of the Czar, make it an excuse for wrecking the household of the old influential boyar whom his master, the Czar, wanted to eliminate.

The same day Boyar Kurliatov is brought before the Czar. Indignities are heaped upon him; finally presented with a jester's cap, he is ordered to dance and presently he is dispatched by Czar Ivan to his death.

In the Spinning Mill under the supervision of the Czarina is a spinning wheel, one of the proudest possessions that Czar Ivan has as it is the only spinning wheel in Russia. The wheel is broken. Czar Ivan is greatly annoyed at having no one to repair it. It is suggested that he let Nikita repair the wheel. Nikita is released from the torture chamber where the Czar's officers are trying to extract a confession from him that he is an ally of the devil because of his flying experiments. Nikita repairs the spinning wheel and gains the favor of the Czarina. As she becomes interested in Nikita, the Czarina banishes her former lover, Drutzkoi.

At this time English merchants are buying flax of Czar Ivan and to impress his guests, the Czar, as a good merchant, orders a special entertainment at which Nikita is commanded to demonstrate his flying machine.

On a clear afternoon in the presence of a brilliant assemblage, Nikita climbs with his machine to the roof of the tallest building, and thence glides down slowly and gracefully until he lands in the snow and is acclaimed by all present. Over the protests of his English guests the Czar decides that it is ungodly for humans to want to fly and orders the execution of Nikita....

...In an underground prison awaiting his execution, Nikita is visited on his last night by the Czarina accompanied by her maid. The Czarina cuts Nikita's bonds while the maid watches outside. Drutzkoi surprises the Czarina in Nikita's dungeon. The Czarina urges both to fight and in the struggle when Drutzkoi is getting the better of Nikita, she, with her own hand, plunges a knife in Drutzkoi's back and escapes through a secret passage. The guards are clamoring at Nikita's door and just in time the maid rescues him and they both escape from the pursuing guards, the maid into the Czarina's chambers and Nikita up the stairway presumably on the way to freedom.

The Czar is informed of what has happened. The dying words of Drutzkoi are "ask the Czarina." Meanwhile, Nikita is caught on the outside trying to escape and is brought before the Czar's chief torturer, who by chance notices the Czarina's ring on the serf's finger. He immediately brings the ring to the Czar while Nikita is flung aside. The ring and Drutzkoi's dying words are quite sufficient for the Czar. He goes to the Czarina's chambers. In his wife's chamber the Czar carefully puts the ring, taken from Nikita, on the Czarina's finger and his suspicions are confirmed. With his own hands, he strangles her.

In the meantime in the dungeon Nikita meets his fate, while Ivan the Terrible on the spire tolls the bells for the repose of the Czarina.

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One of the "masters of repertory" (the polite term for traditionalists) was Yuri Tarich who, after his move from scenarist to director in 1925, directed ten silent films, nearly all of them vigorous period pieces that took little notice of any basic change going on in the art of Russian films, for there was always a steady market in and out of the Soviet Union for efficiently told tales of the Russian past. The best of these was the first film that Tarich directed independently, released November 16, 1926, WINGS OF A SERF (shown abroad as IVAN THE TERRIBLE), a drama of the time of Ivan IV: the unhappy fate of a serf who is so unwisely clever as to invent an apparatus for flying through the air. Yet when this story leaves the memory, what stays is the extraordinary portrait of Ivan, as played by Leonid Leonidov. Of his place in the film, shrewd Shklovsky, who worked on this script, had this comment:

'In the case of WINGS OF A SERF, a film made conscientiously and, I suppose, with archaeological exactitude, talented Tarich did not realize what richer material he had at hand in the face of Leonidov; the director's hands were busy with all sorts of things, while Leonidov was left at the side.'

Another factor in the lasting quality of the film may lie in the composition of the crew. One of Tarich's assistants was Ivan Pyriev, who was not to ripen as director until the sound period; and the film was cut by Esther Shub, who was to show a new form of film -- her quiet invention -- in the following year.

-- Jay Leyda, Kino, A History of the Russian and Soviet Film.

Tarich (January 24, 1885--February 21, 1967) did not fulfill the promise he showed in CZAR IVAN THE TERRIBLE. After A FOREST TALE, which was the first White Russian film, he concentrated on films of that Soviet Republic. His best known films, in addition to the two being shown, are BULAT-BATYR, 1928; THE CAPTAIN'S DAUGHTER (KAPITANSKAYA DOCHKA), 1928, an adaptation of Pushkin's story; DO

ZAVTRA (TILL TOMORROW), 1929, codirected with I. Bakharom; and THE ELEVENTH OF JULY (ODNADZATOYE IYULYA (THE ELEVENTH OF JULY)), 1938. In the fifties and subsequently he worked on documentary and educational films.

Sonia Volochova