

## Document Citation

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Evelyn Gerstein's first review of a work by Sergei Eisenstein, *POTEMKIN*, was published in *The New Republic* on October 20, 1926, when governments in Britain and Germany were banning the film as too revolutionary. Miss Gerstein then hailed *POTEMKIN* as ". . . a solitary cinema masterpiece. It makes no compromises, it is rid of childish romancing. . . . It is revolution! Not the anaemic and picaresque dumb show patented in Hollywood, but a black, cosmic fury."

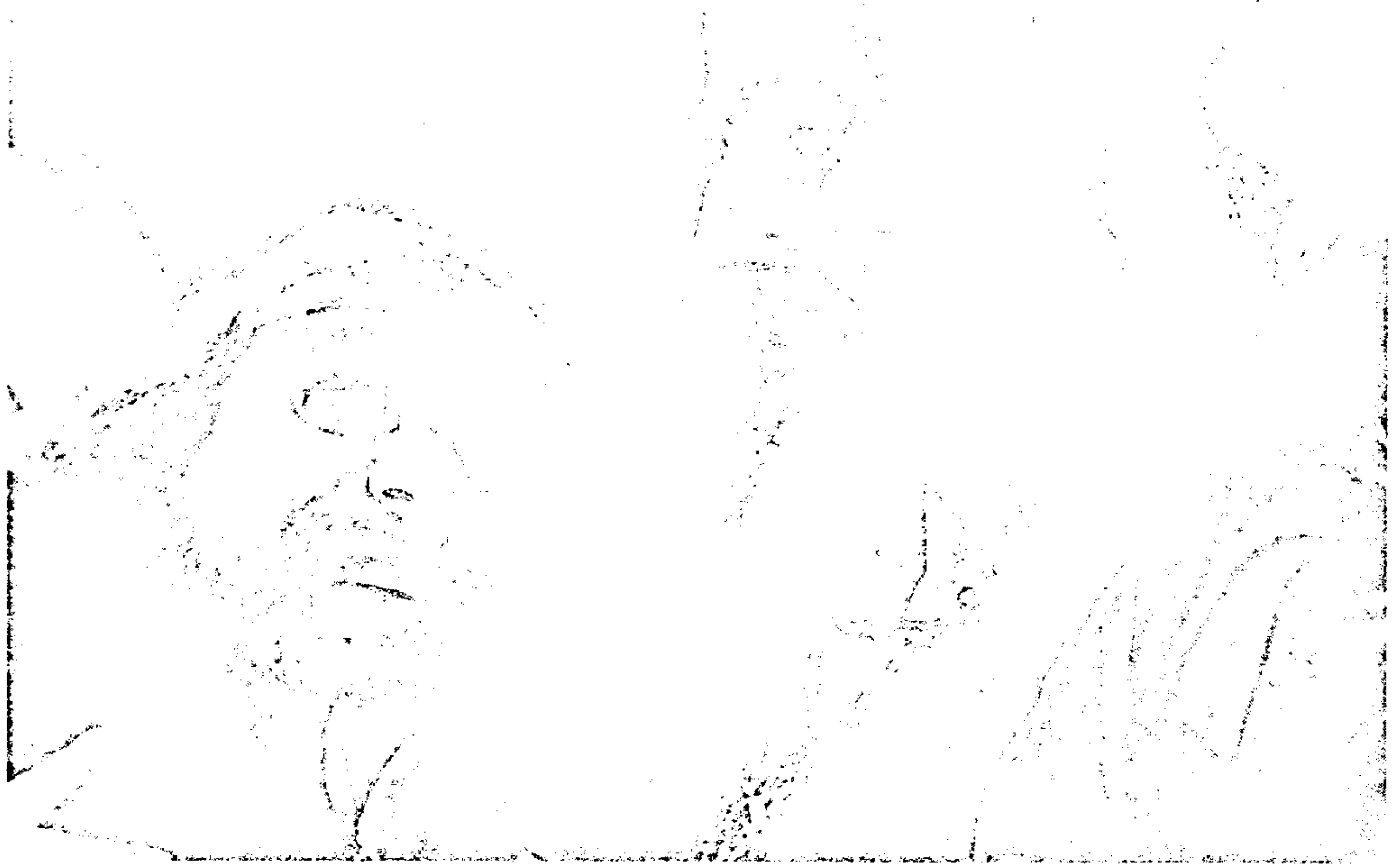
Such vigor and perception have characterized Miss Gerstein's writing since. Primarily a critic of films, but also of drama and music, she has published in *The New York Times*, *The Saturday Review*, *The Nation*, *Vanity Fair*, *Theatre Arts*, *Theatre Guild Magazine*, *Stage Magazine*, *The New Republic* and *the Boston Evening Transcript*. She has travelled widely, and as early as 1924 she toured Europe as by-lined correspondent on film and other arts for the *Boston Herald*.

A graduate of Radcliffe and Columbia University's School of Journalism, Miss Gerstein for three years taught film history at Hunter College and she has lectured extensively to colleges, women's clubs and other groups.

She was for years a special consultant and coordinator for various film production companies and distributors, including Samuel Goldwyn and United Artists. She founded and for seven years managed Evelyn Gerstein Associates, a public relations firm in Rockefeller Plaza with clients that included the School of American Ballet, several museums and the National Film Board of Canada.

Much admired by film scholars and readers for many years, Miss Gerstein, recently widowed, lives in New York City. She travels occasionally and always seeks out new film experiences. She has recently written *FILM COMMENT* ". . . without meaning to disparage our great inheritance of old films, it is almost more important to know, discover and aid young people who will continue in depth the challenge of the early films. I find the contemporary films so far in advance of the other arts, at the moment, that for every play, painting or even book that I might want to read or see there are some five films I MUST see."

Miss Gerstein's review of Eisenstein's *IVAN THE TERRIBLE*, hitherto unpublished, was written in early 1960, shortly after the release of the two-part film, which opened in New York in November of 1959. *IVAN THE TERRIBLE* is distributed in the United States by Brandon Films.



IVAN THE TERRIBLE  
part I

IVAN THE TERRIBLE, of which Part II, *The Revolt of the Boyars*, was shown briefly for the first time in New York in December, for a few week-ends together with Part I, is Eisenstein's last tragic irony, monumental and unique, from original sketch to editing of its work print—no other exists—swan song and dark flowering of man and artist.

Under ban for twelve years by the Central Committee that now warns that "peaceful co-existence should not weaken the ideological struggle" and that films be in "accessible and simple form" "in the spirit of patriotism and national pride," IVAN II was withheld on the varying counts that have pilloried Eisenstein over the years—anti-historicity, agebite of inwit, and the too likely parallel between Ivan's "surrounders" to the hooded and torch-bearing night riders of Griffith's *BIRTH OF A NATION*.

Yet as one of the several parables of the past recast in the years between 1939 and the end of the war, to bestir a lagging nationalism and quicken a sense of heroic lineage, IVAN is the only survivor, due not so much to its timeliness as to the timelessness of its concept and the poetic manner of its telling, transmuting the dust of history into a magic frieze of film strip, resplendent and reverberating vista of a man in time—a Russian Book of Revelations for the twentieth century.

Filmed at night under duress of war in the underground studios of Alma Ata, Central Asia, as the Nazis attacked Moscow, interrupted by Eisenstein's work on *MOSCOW STRIKES BACK*, etc., both parts of IVAN were shot simultaneously, with Cherkassov as Ivan shuttling between the deformities of mind and body in the Mephistophelian figure of the aging Ivan, steel-tipped kisten in hand, and his youth in flower at the coronation; from the embattlements of Kazan to the inner monologues of encircling doubts within Kremlin walls and cathedral naves.

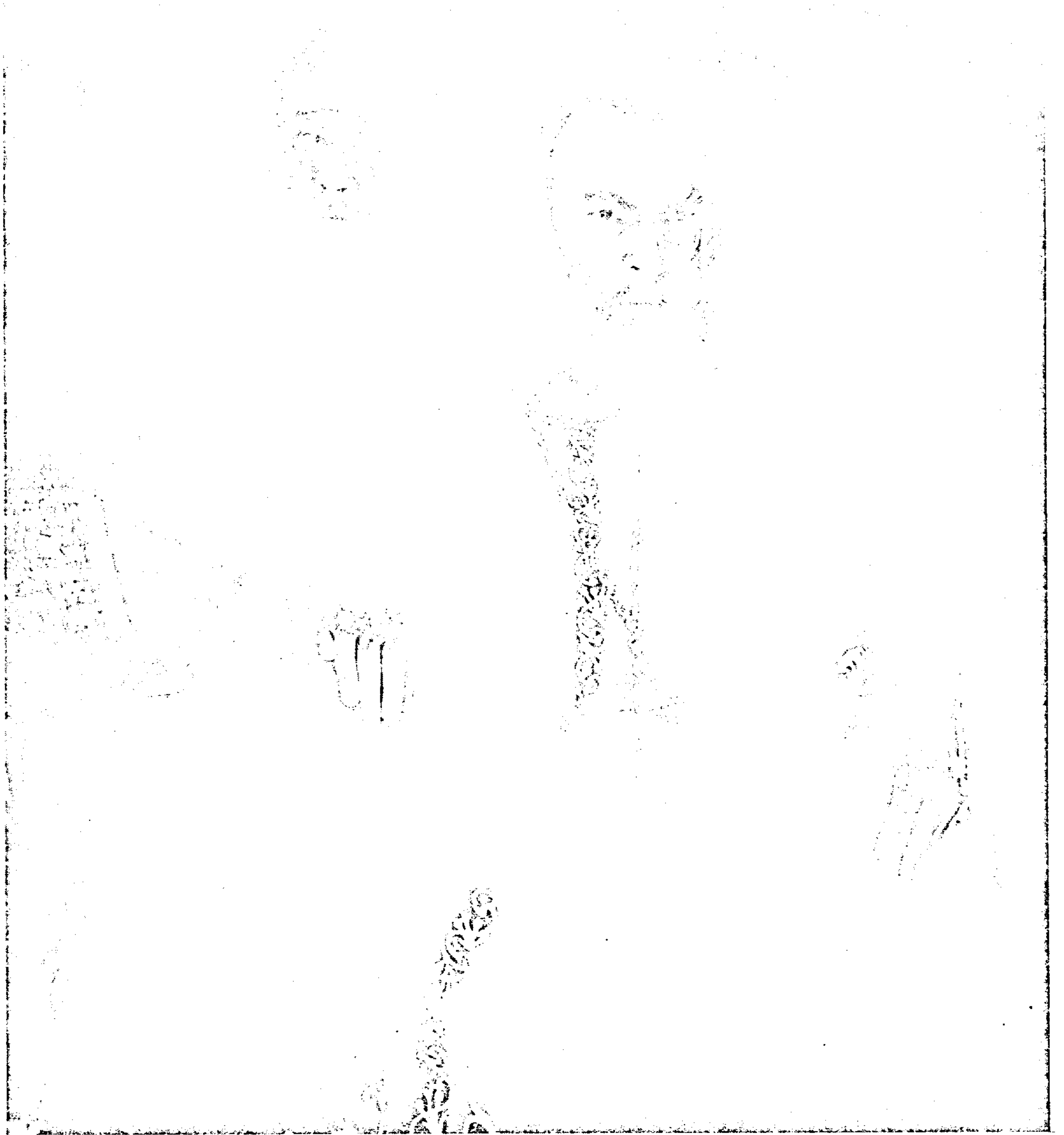
IVAN is reputed to have fared well in Russia and in Paris, but New York critics found its pace "turgid," its great burgeoning close-ups a primitive film making. I suppose IVAN is neither "too accessible" nor "simple"; neither was Eisenstein or his time. Yet, taken at its simplest,

any Russian could aver it is still the old Slavonic fairy tale of the great Tsar, the beautiful princess, the wicked courtiers and the evil Baba Yaga who bedevilled him.

Erected as elegantly as the geodetic domes of Buckminster Fuller, IVAN's framework is both classic and viable, compacted of Byzantine mysticism and the magic sevens, Marxian myth with its thesis, antithesis and synthesis, and the inner light of Freud cast in dark places. As in all great visual art, the eye dominates; the all-seeing eye of God presides over the Kremlin arches; gigantic frescoes with the fixed pursuing eyes of the Byzantine painters shadow the protagonists; people confront each other with long, wordless stares—as in silent films or the paintings of El Greco in which the eyes seem to plunge into one's soul and draw the spectator into the frame. At the coronation, Ivan's eyes flash Olympian lightnings at the waiting cynical eyes of the ambassadors of the Renaissance; they burn with a saturnine glitter at the revelry of the last banquet; eyes condemn, reflect, speculate, and always communicate in these dramatic dialogues of silence.

What a film this is, as pregnant with meanings as the brilliantly painted Russian easter eggs with their myriads of lesser eggs within. To see it once is barely to catch its complexities. Much is inevitably lost to the non-Russian spectator because of the appositeness of each bit of dialogue, intoned psalm or inner play in a film in which every focus of the camera adds inexorably to the pyramids of feeling.

As in the medieval Kabuki theatre, Eisenstein has considered sound, movement, silence, space, colour, music—each as an element in its own right, neither paralleling the drama nor underscoring, but each dynamic in its peculiar way, moving like the voice of a fugue, contrapuntally, as Bach considered his voices "like persons who conversed together like a select company, if there were three each could sometimes be silent and listen to the others till it again had something to say, moving towards a climax that included them all." This way one hears movement and sees sound as in the sequence in which "the sabre whistles, the heads fall."



IVAN THE TERRIBLE—part II

When the Metropolitan Philip confronts Ivan with his infamy in the cathedral to catch the conscience of the Tsar, he does it in terms of a medieval miracle play of the Book of Daniel, the Hebrew children and the fiery furnace. Without benefit of the Eisenstein script or knowledge of Russian, this minor miracle of craftsmanship would be lost. The script reads:

*The monk chants—'Have mercy, O Lord'  
The eyes of Sabaoth flash lightning  
But more terrible than the Fires of Hell, tortures, burns,  
gnaws the tormented spirit of the earthly Tsar of  
Muscovy.*

*The monk chants the names of the dead.  
Malyuta and Basmanov comment—'one thousand and  
five hundred souls were executed in Novgorod'  
Ivan mutters—'Not in anger, not in malice. Not in fierce-  
ness. But for treason. But for betrayal of the whole  
people's cause.'*

*Malyuta to Basmanov—'One hundred and seventy mon-  
asteries have been pillaged and destroyed'  
Ivan—'Not for myself, not for ambition's sake. But for  
the motherland.'*

Eisenstein's Ivan is at once legend and symbol, a telescoping of man in history, a poetic encounter between old and new, the Renaissance man in the Middle Ages, the visionary prophet of the Old Testament seeking a closer union with God, a builder of Empire shadowed by his astrolabe, reaching out of the crippling walls of the Kremlin and the encroachments of darkness and ignorance to establish his god-head, a deeply subjective portrait with as many meanings as there are spectators.

One's first glimpse of Ivan is at once heroic and sinister, emerging on Prokofiev's theme-song played against moving clouds, his face shadowed by the image of the double-headed Russian eagle, his song.

*'the storm approaches  
the voice of the people is the voice of God  
into my hand I take the avenging sword of the Lord  
Ocean sea, azure sea, Russian sea. Thou reaches to the  
very Heaven  
Thy waves beat to the highest sun  
The Russian rivers run to Thee, on thy shores cities stand.'*

And the film was to have ended, in IVAN III, with Ivan at last on the shores of his ocean sea, his "yellow dog" Malyuta, last of the feudal barons he originated, dying; alone with his priest and confessor, sole survivors of the war against the Germans.

IVAN THE TERRIBLE is neither literal nor documentary; those who are real in IVAN I—Malyuta, Basmanov and son—become depersonalized through IVAN II, and in the symbolic language of poetic myth, only the principals, the family, never degenerate into masks.

Imagery everywhere, but nothing too much, no spattering of exuberant fusillades as in the earlier films, now sharpened to essence, each gesture a complex of meaning, each focus dynamic and triple ply, each use of sound or colour or black or white whipping this vast polyphony of association—from the white swans of the wedding to the black of the diabolic treachery of the last banquet.

Using colour for the first time, in a single sequence—IVAN III was to have been filmed entirely in colour—Eisenstein saves it for the last great leap from the dark of the inner monologues to the explosiveness of action, the link between the thought and the deed. The camera closes on the discarded mask of the dancer as Ivan proclaims "the farce is over" and the saturnine yellows and reds and beady blacks of his Walpurgisnight blanch into the grey dawn of the murder in the cathedral.

Ivan's loud echoing laugh as he enters the cathedral to be confronted by the play within a play and his infamy, is the remembered laugh of the Mexican mestizo, the vacilada, as Anita Brenner described it—"irreverent, full of longing and despair, in expression a shock, grotesque, concealing the heroism of thought, of emotion, of expression."

Legend and source, conveying a triple portrait of artist, priest and man of action, their inner and outer worlds, in times past and time present, IVAN THE TERRIBLE I and II, magical fragment of trilogy, separate yet interlaced movements of a mounting Russian symphony, belongs in the great mainstream.

In the bleaker night of the future, this master work of a great artist in exile within his own culture, incanting, recanting, forever torn between his loyalty to Marxism and his integrity as artist, this perennial "contradiction of being" that is the stuff of all great art, will be used, perused and treasured, to enrich alike the imagination of those who make films and those who watch them.



IVAN THE TERRIBLE—part II

