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Ivan's Childhood won the Golden Lion at Venice, the Grand Prize at San Francisco, the Grand Prize and a diploma for 'Poetic direction condemning war' at Acapulco, the Selznick prize for 'a film contributing powerfully to peace', and two further festival prizes;

In *Ivan's Childhood* we turn to and from Ivan's dead parents and dead childhood and conclude with scenes that never were.

Ivan's Childhood is a last-war film that introduces us to a boy returning to the Russian lines after a scouting expedition. We see his twelve-year-old waif's face peering through the mists and barbed wire studying the swift-flowing river that forms the No Man's Land between the armies and which he must traverse. Follows a scene in which the boy imposes his will on the under-officers in a situation reminiscent of the First Act of Shaw's *Saint Joan* and, welcomed at headquarters, refuses for the umpteenth time to be fobbed off with relegation to a military school safe behind the lines. His parents are dead, his village destroyed, he himself escaped from a concentration camp—his living can only be revenge. Eventually Ivan accompanies two officers crossing to the German side to recover the corpses of two soldiers, caught and executed while trying to help the boy back on his last expedition and now displayed on the bank 'to discourage the others'. In their task the two officers succeed, but from his intelligence mission Ivan never returns. Years later, his comrades find in Berlin after the victory a folder recording his capture and fate.

This same 'scenario' has been told a hundred times, in fiction or in fact, the



Kolya Burlyayev in *'Ivan's Childhood'* and as the boy who casts the bell in *'Rublev'*

young 'Red Devils' as much heroes as their elders, running the gauntlet to improbable triumph (as in *The Feather Letter*) or dying for rashness, like Petya Rostov in *War and Peace*. But this is something quite different. The film is not about a boy's death at all. Not that such tragedies do not occur, or that they cannot be told, as they have been by Tolstoy and so many others, to epitomise—indeed melodramatise—war's arbitrary injustice. The very facility and repetition of this symbol weakens its impact nowadays. The tragedy here, however, is much worse because more inescapable. Ivan's fate is sealed before ever the film begins. He is wonderfully played by Kolya Burlyayev. From the moment we see the wide-eyed creature in the mist, the contrast between the skinny, hungry, sometimes blubbing boy and the expert spy, professional, authoritative, competent, indispensable, the two bound in a single being—a soldier who has known torture and triumph alike, a child on whom grown men depend—we know he cannot survive.

The film has subtly changed its hub from that in the novel (called *Ivan*) to that designated by the new title *Ivan's Childhood*; and that, in the true sense, has already died. The film is not disfigured by the unnaturally cheery or the conventionally hysterical. With one blow it annuls a whole cinémathèque of the war films of all lands. Soldiers and officers, all are reasonably decent—samples at hazard of mean sensual man—all alike are under tension that frays and saps the nerve but against which they stubbornly endure in ways varying according to their character. We know, peace come, they will return to living. But what is there for Ivan? His parents gone, his playmates dead, the burden of responsibility even unto life and death shouldered in immaturity, he is not a real boy, he can never be a natural man. Peace would finish him as surely as a bullet.

This is No. 1 of the Tarkovsky features. Follows No. 2. The first is of a child where he should not be, in the trap of duty-death constituted by patriotic war. The second centres on the dilemma of the artist trapped helpless in a world of horror. Where the first film depended for its achievement on the performance of the boy, and the atmosphere of the unendurable tension, the second depends above all on the persuasiveness and conviction of the atmosphere of barbaric and arbitrary indifference to man.

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