



## MURKY IMAGES. THE POETICS OF INTERTEXTUAL DISSONANCE IN THE APOCRYPHAL FILMS OF ANDREI ZVYAGINTSEV

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Andrei Zvyagintsev, compared almost instinctively by critics with Andrei Tarkovsky, belongs to the group of filmmakers – though not a numerous one – for whom religious themes and symbols are the inalienable building blocks of the film world. Perhaps the main features of the director's artistic idiolect need to be seen in the totality of subjection to the 'sacred imagination'. Strictly speaking, the above remark relates primarily to the first two films of Zvyagintsev: the famous *The Return* (*Vozvrashchenie*, 2003) and the underrated, though perhaps even more moving *The Banishment* (*Izgnanie*, 2007). These films – called 'modern parables', or 'parables with a biblical character'<sup>1</sup> – have strongly determined the way in which the young Russian filmmaker's works are interpreted. They have also established further expectations of his work – even *Elena* (2011), which was fundamentally different in terms of style, has gained the label 'sacred'.

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<sup>1</sup> See A.Trwoga, *Droga Ojca. Symbolika męskości w „Powrocie” Andrieja Zwiagincewa*, [in:] *Wizerunki mężczyzn i kobiet w najnowszym filmie europejskim*, ed. K. Arcimowicz, K. Citko, Białystok 2009, p. 78; U. Tes, *Symbolika „Wygnańia” Andrieja Zwiagincewa – konteksty religijne i malarskie*, [in:] *Wobec metafizyki. Filozofia – sztuka – film*, ed. U. Tes and A. Gielarowski, Cracow 2012, p. 345; *Przypowieść z tajemnicą. Z Andriejem Zwiagincewem rozmawia Andrzej Kołodyński*, „Kino” 2004, No. 3.

It seems that both *The Return* and *The Banishment* can reasonably be called contemporary apocrypha<sup>2</sup>, as both works methodically and comprehensively, and sometimes even with some irritating ostentation, use elements of Christian symbolism and enter into a non-canonical dialogue with biblical and evangelical messages<sup>3</sup>. There have indeed been attempts to assign Andrei Zvyagintsev's work to different cultural traditions (such as being imbued with Zen Buddhism, like the films of Yasujirō Ozu), but it is rather difficult to consider them fully legitimate and compelling<sup>4</sup>. It should be noted that in the work of the Russian filmmaker an important role is also played by symbols that – though generally supporting a religious interpretation – are more universal, archetypal – and therefore their isolated presence would be insufficient for an apocryphal reading of *The Return* and of *The Banishment* (islands, gardens, towers, mountains, water and forests also need to be added to this type of symbol).

Andrei Zvyagintsev's work seems particularly interesting in the context of the apocrypha of contemporary cinema, not so much due to its very expressive, creative nature, but due to the application by the director of original artistic means that – on one hand – are asking for an intermedia reading from viewers

<sup>2</sup> See M. Jankowska, *Narracje apokryficzne w kulturze współczesnej*, Poznań 2011.

<sup>3</sup> See e.g.: K. Biedrzycki, *Powrót taty*, [in:] *Wariacje metafizyczne. Szkice i recenzje o poezji, prozie i filmie*, Cracow 2007; K. Frankowska, *Między prawdą zdjęcia a prawdą obrazu. O filmach Andrieja Zwiagincewa*, „Kwartalnik Filmowy” 2009, No. 65; B. Lisowska, *Tajemnica wiary i ofiary. „Powrót” Andrieja Zwiagincewa*, [in:] *Nowa audiowizualność: nowy paradygmat kultury?*, ed. E. Wilk, I. Kolańska-Pasterczyk, Cracow 2008; Urszula Tes, *Symbolika „Wygnań” Andrieja Zwiagincewa – konteksty religijne i malarskie*, op. cit.; A. Trwoga, *Droga Ojca. Symbolika męskości w „Powrocie” Andrieja Zwiagincewa*, op. cit.; T. Lubelski, *Tydzień z ojcem*, „Kino” 2004, No. 3; I. Kurz, *Wygnań*, „Kino” 2008, No. 3.

<sup>4</sup> A. Trwoga, *Droga na Wschód. Inne spojrzenie na „Powrót” Andrieja Zwiagincewa*, „Kwartalnik Filmowy” 2007, No. 57-58. The researcher attempted to look at Zvyagintsev's feature debut through the prism of traditions of the East and Japanese aesthetics.

(or, more broadly, intertextual)<sup>5</sup>, while on the other hand lead to a re-evaluation and devaluation of the shifting meanings in the context of this reading. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to state whether the talented successor to Tarkovsky deserves to be called a moralist, or rather a 'discreet provocateur'.

Andrei Zvyagintsev's films are open works that pose continuing difficulties for those researchers who aim to clearly identify the issues involved or formulate a single, coherent interpretation of them. Sometimes, it seems more reasonable to uncover alternative avenues, indicating possible groups of topics and determining how to re-evaluate individual motifs depending on the research perspective adopted. This method was chosen by Krzysztof Biedrzycki, who identified a number of complementary interpretations of the director's debut feature film. The critic presented *The Return* as a psychological film (about an experience of reunion between a father and his sons, and the resulting consequences), a film-parable (about initiation into adult life and the road to self-discovery), a film about Russia (about leaving the experience of totalitarianism and the Russian power complex) and finally as a religious work – 'probably the most important religious film for many years', an attempt to 'search for God in a world from which He has disappeared'<sup>6</sup>. Certainly, this latter aspect of *The Return* is the most important, although in the case of audiences that are not very conversant in cultural artistic texts (especially European paintings) it seems to be possible to overlook this aspect.

In the first two feature films by Andrei Zvyagintsev, the main way to update religious references, and thus an important method to underline the virtue of the sacred themes, situations and events presented in the film, is (besides music) evoking artistic intertexts inspired by holy scriptures, especially

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<sup>5</sup> In this paper, I will use a broad definition of the word 'intertextuality', not only in the sense how a text helps to understand another text, but also how visual arts (esp. paintings, other films) help to interpret films. See R. Nycz, *Tekstowy świat. Poststrukturalizm a wiedza o literaturze*, Warsaw 1995, p. 59-82.

<sup>6</sup> Krzysztof Biedrzycki, *Powrót taty*, op. cit., p. 313.



Figure 1



Figure 2

quotations and allusions in paintings. A special role is played by the composition of the image and the frame in *The Return*, where the plot revolves around the tragic ending of an excursion to an island by two teenage boys and their father, who after years of absence finally comes home (perhaps from prison). According to the method probably seen in the films of Ingmar Bergman, shots showing the parent asleep (in the first part of the film) were modelled on the famous painting by Andrea Mantegna – *Dead Christ* (c. 1506), and the camera operator (Mikhail Kriczman) made every effort so that this intermedia allusion was clear (see figure 1 and figure 2).

The theme of *Dead Christ*, and yet another allusion to Mantegna's image, is marked by a scene at the end of the film when the boys lament over their dead father's sunk body that was placed on a boat. Importantly, his tragic death on the island, which is seen as a sacrifice offered to the rebellious son (the man dies in a fall from a tower while trying to rescue Ivan), takes place on Friday, the day of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. (The film covers a period of seven days, from Sunday to Saturday, which further reinforces the evangelical reference.) Yet another scene provokes biblical interpretations: the family eats dinner together; the frontally filmed father (Konstantin Lavronenko) gives the boys wine diluted with water and divides food like Jesus. In this instance, interpreters discern not only references to the Last Supper, but also to Supper at Emmaus (see the paintings of Rembrandt, Caravaggio and Titian). As the Gospel says, during a shared meal, which takes place in the village on the day of the Resurrection of Christ, the two disciples recognised him by the way he broke the bread – then he vanished from sight, leaving behind a deep faith in the fruit of his martyrdom (Lk 24: 13-35). Zvyagintsev, using evangelical motives, constructs the logic of film's story whereby the scene of the family supper prefigures the death of the hero, the nameless father, but this death is revealed as a moment of recognition by the sons of the true nature of his feelings (the inscrutable and dour father suddenly discovers his unconditional love) and turns out to be a breakthrough on the way to their

self-development and manhood. Undoubtedly, the problem of coping with authority in *The Return* has both a political and religious dimension.

In many studies devoted to Andrei Zvyagintsev's work, a sense of confusion or disorientation among their authors is revealed (to a lesser or greater degree) regarding the creative processes of the Russian director; there also appear indications of a particular type of difficulty connected with its interpretation. In this context, the authors are careful to 'lead the viewer along paths of only seemingly real solutions, suggesting false leads and references'; they perceive 'a perverse reversal of the biblical, and especially the evangelical motives' as part of a 'fully fervent dialogue with religious tradition'; they accentuate 'the game of paradoxes' and the 'process of summoning up and revealing biblical themes, wrestling their elements with a story built within the «reality» of the film's world'. Undoubtedly, it is tempting to make a generalising reflection on the creative strategies of Zvyagintsev that are responsible for this kind of artistic effect, and ask what cognitive message his films communicate.

It has already been highlighted that *The Return* and *The Banishment* are works that expose their intertextual nature, and they do this in many different ways, in a manner that is not clear at all, and they even functionalise their own twisted references. The field of intertextual relationships is in the case of these films initiated so that the updated meanings signal a need for a multi-variant reading, usually requiring not only the knowledge of a variety of texts and cultural codes, but also an effort to 'read with reservations'. It seems that one can identify several major issues or phenomena associated with the intertextual strategies used by Zvyagintsev's apocryphal films.

Due to the references to holy scriptures – usually mediated through allusions to works of art created from their inspiration (especially to paintings) – Andrei Zvyagintsev's intertextual practices could be described as poetic interdiscursive dissonance. The creator of *The Banishment* – unlike,

for example, Larisa Shepitko in the famous *The Ascent* (*Voskhozhdeniye*, 1976)<sup>7</sup> – evoking, sometimes repeatedly and clearly, a variety of religious contexts, does not allow them to be holistically and consistently ‘arranged’ into narrated stories, stubbornly confuses any plan of symbolic references and multiplies and confuses interpretive clues. The field of these multiple interdiscursive relationships therefore determines the game of meanings that signify a variety of tensions, also of antithetic and ironic nature.

A good illustration of the phenomena is found in *The Banishment*. It is a poignant and poetically painful film about the death of the love between a man and a woman – a love whose rebirth requires the sacrifice of her life. As Urszula Tes aptly puts it,

As once Antonioni, [...] Zvyagintsev diagnoses the feelings of today’s humanity cut off from spiritual and metaphysical sources. Referring to the rich biblical symbolism, he discovers the primary link between the message of eternal topos and the situation in which modern man has found himself<sup>8</sup>.

Vera (Maria Bonnevie) is the wife of Alex (Konstantin Lavronenko) – a cold and introverted man, and the mother of his children. This woman, unable to break through the wall of alienation that separates her from her husband, in deaf loneliness and despondency decides to take a desperate step: she tells Alex that she is carrying other man’s child in her womb. The man rises to the wounded pride that does not allow him to see the remnants of hope in the eyes of his wife lovingly gazing at him, and despite dithering he forces her to have an abortion. Vera accepts her fate in silence, after which she takes a suicidal dose of sleeping pills. The death of his wife and the discovery of

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<sup>7</sup> Adam Garbicz writes in the context of this film about ‘a flawless plan of symbolic references to the sacrifice of Christ’ (idem, *Kino, wehikuł magiczny. Przewodnik osiągnięć filmu fabularnego. Podróż piąta 1974-1981*, Cracow 2009, p. 179).

<sup>8</sup> U. Tes, *Symbolika „Wygnańia” Andrieja Zwiagincewa – konteksty religijne i malarskie*, op. cit., p. 345.

the truth about her alleged betrayal are a shock to Alex, plunging him into despair, but also bringing sincere repentance, which seems to be a measure of his spiritual redemption and the (untimely) triumph of love. The transformation of man and his inner cleansing is visually symbolised by the image of a dried-up spring which is reborn under the influence of intense downpours.

In *The Banishment*, as in *The Return*, the world presented takes on a religious dimension, primarily due to the insertion into the parabolic story of appropriate symbolism and evoking characteristic artistic intertexts that are not only embellishments or simple comments on the stories being told, but somehow fit into the complex structure of these films. These treatments unambiguously affect the revaluation of the characters. The meanings that come to the fore following the introduction of the intertextual references are closely related to the sphere of the indefiniteness of the characters and need to be considered as part of a reflection on the motivations of their behaviour.

Vera is a woman endowed with extraordinary humility and gentleness of character, carrying within herself deep desire, true love (the source of her suffering is the conviction that her husband loves her and the children 'as things'). The heroine of *The Banishment* seems impenetrable to the end in the motives of her behaviour, thereby giving the impression that she is nursing some great secret<sup>9</sup>. Vera's character is stylised by the director on the Mother of God<sup>10</sup>, but also in parallel on the Old Testament Eve, the primeval mother of humanity – this is shown, among other things, by her poses and gestures,

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<sup>9</sup> One gets the impression that what is important here is not only the secret behind who is the biological father of Vera's unborn child (the truth that the child belongs to Alex is revealed only in the final part of the film). The baby is surrounded by an aura of uniqueness in the film: imbued with symbolic references – through evoking the scene of the Annunciation – it is associated with Jesus (see also the words of Liza addressed to Alex's wife: 'God likes a trinity').

<sup>10</sup> As Urszula Tes underlines, the colours of Vera's dresses (blue and red) correspond to the robes of Mary in the *Annunciation* by Leonardo da Vinci, which is referred to in the climactic sequences of the film.

which take on particular significance when the director (twice) summons up Masaccio's fresco *Expulsion from Paradise*<sup>11</sup>. A reproduction of this fifteenth-century work appears on the card on which the children mark off the passages of the Bible that they have read. Incidentally, the director used a similar procedure in *The Return*: after the father's arrival, the boys find an old book in the attic with the etching *The Sacrifice of Isaac* by Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, which finds its 'contrary' reference to the later scene of a quarrel on the beach that results in the father's – and not the son's – death.

The sequence in which Vera undergoes abortion (which takes place out of frame) is accompanied by solemn sacral music – the thanksgiving piece by Johann Sebastian Bach *Magnificat*, and the children's reading of the *Hymn* from the Letter of St. Paul to the Corinthians. Zvyagintsev's inclination at this point of the film was to maintain the principle of counterpoint. The parallel editing during the abortion sequence enables the heightening of painful tension, mixing various images and evoking through the film's narrative the heterogeneous content. The meaning of what takes place beyond the eyes of the viewer conflicts with the idea of the Annunciation, which implies a joyful announcement of the birth of the Son of God and the future redemption of man (the camera moves to show the children doing a huge jigsaw of a reproduction of Leonardo da Vinci's *Annunciation*). However, paradoxically, it is the death of Vera and her unborn child that are in Zvyagintsev's film a border point, a breakthrough that leads to the appearance of deep remorse and the

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<sup>11</sup> K. Frankowska, among others, writes more broadly on this subject in *Między prawdą zdjęcia a prawdą obrazu*, op. cit., p. 150-151. Urszula Tes in turn, in the previously cited work, develops in this context a reflection on the symbolic meaning of the space depicted in the film (see for example the way in which the orchard and the surroundings of Alex's home refer to the garden of paradise, the closed church refers to the closed gates of paradise, the churchyard cemetery refers to death as a direct consequence of the sin of Adam and Eve and, of course, to banishment from paradise).

need for repentance<sup>12</sup> in a world of fallen values, together with the hope of rebirth. In this way, in the *The Banishment's* ideological and symbolic dimension, the suicide of the film's pregnant heroine takes on the meaning of the sacrifice of Christ...

As part of the reflection on the sphere of interdiscursive links and references, which seem particularly characteristic of Zvyagintsev's work, the relationship between the various particles or levels that occur inside the Russian director's films also deserve attention<sup>13</sup>.

This matter is directly related to issues undertaken by Katarzyna Frankowska in the inspirational work *Między prawdą zdjęcia a prawdą obrazu* [*Between the Truth of the Photo and the Truth of the Image*]. The author of the article draws attention to the fact that in the structure of *The Return* and *The Banishment* 'there are elements that could serve as counterweights to the biblical narrative elements'<sup>14</sup>. These are photographs that appear (among other things) in the final sequences of the two films. The photographs – from their inherent nature acting as 'quotations from the real world' (they are spontaneously treated as a faithful record of facts) – prompt viewers to reappraise their whole reading of the films. Their role seems to be of particular importance due to the fact that the Russian director interweaves these images with what is not said, which is accompanied by the almost complete lack of verbal communication between the characters. According to Katarzyna Frankowska, in the work of Zvyagintsev photographs indicate the fallibility of viewers and their suggestibility:

<sup>12</sup> *The Banishment* is accompanied by music from Arvo Pärt's *Penitential Canon*.

<sup>13</sup> 'The relations between the various textual particles or levels inside the work' are counted by Janusz Sławinski as being among the most important forms of intertextuality (the entry 'intertekstualność', [in:] M. Głowiński, T. Kostkiewiczowa, A. Okopień-Sławińska, J. Sławiński, *Słownik terminów literackich*, ed. J. Sławiński, Wrocław 1998, p. 219).

<sup>14</sup> K. Frankowska, op. cit., p. 147.

Bearing in mind the reproduction of biblical images, we look at the photograph viewed in the last scene [of the *The Return*] by the boys and we are willing to accept the idea of the influence of a supernatural power. The photograph found in the father's car is deceptively similar to the one that the boys found in the attic. The only thing missing is the father figure. Only when a series of other pictures appear on the screen instead of subtitles do we realise that we were wrong, and more than once. Firstly, there are several versions of the photographs such as those from the attic and the father's car – which is understandable – some without him. Secondly, the cheerful mood emanating from the photographs shown as a record of the trip with their father is surprising. Bearing in mind the scenes of conflict, we analyse the last photographs carefully, paying particular attention to the characters' emotional state. It turns out that these states do not agree with the atmosphere that we recall from the situation. The photographic scenes on the beach are idyllic; the relaxed and cheerful boys (surely Andrei) are swimming. The tense scenes in the car are also not mirrored in the photographs – the boys are fooling around and pulling faces. As the cinema audience, we experience a strange feeling – the pictures show the space outside the film's frame, they widen it, and tell their own story<sup>15</sup>.

If we stand by this interpretation<sup>16</sup>, we have to note that the final sequence of *The Return* 'condenses' not only plot elements, but also in its own way produces a theme from the idea, important for Zvyagintsev's film, of a person's cognitive wandering (and this wandering – as it is clear from the context – applies to both transcendent and earthly issues). Formally speaking, this sequence acts as an autotropic repetition, modifying the meaning of the

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 149.

<sup>16</sup> Another (though perhaps non-contradictory) interpretation of the ending of *The Return* can be found in Biedrzycki's work, which interprets the sequence with the photographs as a reference to the finale of Tarkowski's film *Andrei Rublev*. The researcher acknowledges that it is '[...] a polemical reference, because the place of unearthly reality is absolutely a material world, even banal. But, in this reference lies a deeper thought, because the everyday and ordinary life become the subject of religious meditation, so these photographs are not so far away from being holy icons' (K. Biedrzycki, *Powrót taty*, op. cit., p. 313).

message towards a metatextual reflection<sup>17</sup>. The director uses a mirroring mechanism so as to annex the nature of the communication situation, whereby the viewer of the film (as the subject of incorrect diagnosis) seems to be in a position analogous to that shared by his misguided heroes.

One other issue should be raised. The Russian director also uses inter-discursive space that is associated with intertextual tensions within the actor's character. This type of game can only be played in cinematography, and is sometimes used to generate comic effects, although it is not limited to this<sup>18</sup>, as evidenced by the use of Fritz Lang in Jean-Luc Godard's *Contempt*, Gloria Swanson in Billy Wilder's *Sunset Boulevard* or Humphrey Bogart in Woody Allen's *Play It Again, Sam*.

Andrei Zvyagintsev cast the same actor as the male lead role in his first feature films. The characters played by Konstantin Lavronenko in both works remain unavailable and secretive, cold and mostly silent. This creation of the protagonist of *The Return*, constantly associated via intertextual allusions with the Old Testament figure of God the Father, and Christ as well, seems to be of particular importance in the context of the idea of close apophatic theology. It is difficult to disregard the situational ambiguities associated with the behaviour of this character, which at the same time could suggest that his criminal past is also important for the course of events. In *The Banishment*

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<sup>17</sup> 'Autotropic repetitions [...] modify the meaning of a work towards a metatextual reflection (which means for example that they «comment on» the media identity of the message in which they appear; they refer in some way to an appropriate storytelling technique or other rules of organisation, or possibly to the process of its creation or reception' [B. Pawłowska-Jądrzyk, *Uczta pod Wiszącą Skalą. Metafizyczność i nieokreśloność w sztuce (nie tylko) literackiej*, Warsaw 2011, p. 102].

<sup>18</sup> See K. Majewska, *Intertekstualność w filmie – odmiany i egzemplifikacje*, „Studia Filmoznawcze” 1998, № 19, ed. S. Bobowski, Wrocław 1998, p. 82 ff. See also: N. Carroll, *Problem z gwiazdami filmowymi*, [in:] *Fotografia i filozofia. Szkice o pędzlu natury*, ed. S. Walden, transl. I. Zwiecha, Cracow 2013.

in turn, Lavronenko plays the role of a character who seems to embody the father of mankind – Adam, though reservations could be made here...

In the face of this tangle of complications and intertextual references, and the multitude of what remains unsaid at various levels of the work, does the facial identity and the acting style of Konstantin Lavronenko remain indifferent to how we envisage the character whose fate we follow on the screen?

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The first two feature films by Andrei Zvyagintsev, *The Return* and *The Banishment*, are characterised by a multiplicity of themes, which are outlined mainly through a variety of intertextual references that the Russian director initiates almost continuously and with real pleasure. Among these relationships, a particular place is occupied by biblical and evangelical references, which in Zvyagintsev's work are mostly mediated through artistic intertexts (especially paintings). The Russian director entangles the viewer in a subtle play of meanings: he evokes canonical scenes and stories, but distorts symbolic references, multiplying and confusing further interpretive clues. In addition to (completely inconsistent) references to the works of others, intertextual tensions are shown in his work on at least two levels: between different elements or levels of a given film (the function of the photograph motif next to the rest of the film text) and between the various films of Zvyagintsev himself (casting the same actor in both *The Return* and *The Banishment*).

The apocryphal films of Andrei Zvyagintsev – somewhat similar in spirit to the postmodern prose of Vladimir Nabokov<sup>19</sup> – invite the viewer into a labyrinth of meanings that rapidly develop with the participation of its own

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<sup>19</sup> T. Dobrzyńska, *W poszukiwaniu tematu tekstu literackiego. Propozycje lektury opowiadania Władimira Nabokowa „Wiosna w Fialcie”*, [in:] *Tekst – styl – poetyka*, Cracow 2003, p. 57-106.

cultural competences. In both cases, these meanings ‘absorb’ the same motives and constantly revalue, and even exclude them. But while the writing of the author of *Lolita* has rationalist (it is apotheosis of intellect) and relativistic overtones (‘it shows the world its unstable nature, which is the subject of probabilistic inquiries’ and ‘questions the identity of things and the obvious meaning of human experience’)<sup>20</sup>, Zvyagintsev follows the mystery of human destiny; he wants to capture the metaphysical community of the limits of experience. This mystery in the work of the Russian director emerges in a quite obvious way from the eternal truths established in archetypes, in biblical and evangelical wisdom. It is much easier to see this in the fusion of ‘murky images’ than it is to understand it.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 104, 105.

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## **Murky Images. The Poetics of Intertextual Dissonance in the Apocryphal Films of Andrei Zvyagintsev**

The first two films of Andrei Zvyagintsev, *The Return* and *The Banishment*, deserve to be called modern apocrypha, as they methodically and comprehensively utilise elements of Christian symbolism and are part of the non-canonical dialogue with religious messages. The films are characterised by a multiplicity of thematic plans that are outlined mainly through a variety of intertextual references. Among these relationships, a particular place is occupied by biblical and evangelical references, which are mostly mediated by artistic intertexts (especially paintings). The Russian director entangles the viewer in a subtle play of meanings: he evokes canonical scenes and stories, but distorts symbolic references, multiplying and confusing further interpretive clues. In addition to (completely inconsistent) references to the works of others, intertextual tensions are shown in his work on at least two levels: between different elements or levels of a given film (the function of the photograph motif next to the rest of the film text) and between the various films of Zvyagintsev himself (casting the same actor in both leading roles).

The talented successor to Tarkovsky follows the mystery of human fate, eager to capture the metaphysical community of critical experiences. This mystery in the work of Zvyagintsev emerges in a quite obvious way from the eternal truths established in archetypes, in biblical and evangelical wisdom. It is much easier to see it in the fusion of 'murky images' than it is to understand.

**Keywords:** Russian cinema, Andrei Zvyagintsev, intertextuality, modern apocrypha, Christian symbolism.

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