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The Gospel According to Andrei: Biblical Narrative in the Films of Andrei Tarkovsky

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The Gospel According to Andrei:
Biblical Narrative in the Films of Andrei Tarkovsky

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Language and Literature and The Division of the Arts
of Bard College

by
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Introduction: the Principles of Repetition

“And this I dreamt, and this I dream,
 And some time this I will dream again,
 And all will be repeated, all be re-embodied,
 You will dream everything I have seen in dream.”
 -Arseny Tarkovsky, 1974

Seven years after the debut of *Stalker*, which follows the journey of three men into a barricaded toxic wasteland called the “Zone,” the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant exploded, and it has since been widely regarded that *Stalker* was Andrei Tarkovsky’s prophetic warning of the impending disaster. Though the notion itself is preposterous, it illustrates a couple of the most important overarching themes in the films of Tarkovsky: prophecy and prediction. In his autobiography and dissertation on filmmaking *Sculpting in Time* (1986), Tarkovsky contemplates the relationship between artistic discovery and related theories of the infinite. He explains that:

An artistic discovery occurs each time as a new and unique image of the world, a hieroglyphic of absolute truth. It appears as a revelation, as a momentary, passionate wish to grasp intuitively and at a stroke *all* the laws of this world—its beauty and ugliness, its compassion and cruelty, its infinity and its limitations. The artist expresses these things by creating the image, *sui generis* detector of the absolute. Through the image is sustained an awareness of the infinite: the eternal within the finite, the spiritual within matter, the limitless given form (37).

Tarkovsky’s analysis of the artist’s process does not initiate a hierarchy of art as surpassing truth, but rather collapses the two; he posits that art *becomes* truth when it “appears as a revelation,” and, in this revelation, unveils the chief oppositions of the world: its “beauty and ugliness, its compassion and cruelty, its infinity and its limitations.” By acknowledging the presence of the “infinite” in so-called truthful art, then, Tarkovsky presents his philosophical perspective on art, that it offers an opportunity for the disruption of linear time.

An understanding of Tarkovsky's doctrine on time can perhaps be best understood as it emerges from the historical context of varying interpretations of repetition, which is a concept that has been considered by artists and philosophers since at least Aristotle's *Physics*. In *Physics*, pre-socratic philosopher Anaximander, for example, grapples with the earth's elemental relationship to repetition, arguing:

there is a body distinct from the elements, the boundless, which is not air or water, in order that the other things may not be destroyed by their infinity. The elements are in opposition to each other: air is cold, water moist, and fire hot. Therefore, if any one of them were infinite, the rest would have ceased to be by this time. Thus, he said that what is infinite is something other than the elements, and from it the elements arise (3.3).

In defining the infinite, or the "boundless," as a "body distinct from the elements," Anaximander expresses the impossibility of the practice of repetition. Unlike Tarkovsky, who confounds the infinite with the artistic temperament, Anaximander asserts that the infinite is an entity that is inherently singular. He explains that, because of the intrinsic opposition of the natural elements, if infinity exists, then everything else ceases to exist. Therefore, infinity is either impossible, or it is something that is not at all related to anything physical; and, in this non-physical state, it must be the starting point from which the elements emerge, and not the other way around.

Socrates shifts his predecessors' discourse on repetition from a scientific analysis to a psychological inquiry, essentially refuting the claim that repetition must be bound to the elements. Socrates conceived the socratic method of education, which comprises reverberations of speech in a seminar setting. It is important to note, here, that the word "repetition" itself etymologically refers to speech: the early fifteenth century definition, which means "the act of saying over and over," translates from the old French *repetition*, and directly from the Latin *repetitionem* (nominative *repetitio*) which means "a repeating." Socrates, then, builds effectively

on Anaximander's failed hypothesis of natural repetition and transports it into the theoretical realm, with, of course, the knowledge that a reverberation is not the same as a repetition.

In the nineteenth century, Søren Kierkegaard, like Socrates, countered the pre-socratic elemental understanding of repetition by disregarding physics as much as possible in his hypothetical thought experiment *Repetition* (1843). And, though it is difficult to discern what sect of eighteenth-century European philosophy Tarkovksy was influenced by in particular, Kierkegaard was a vital component of the modern theological zeitgeist to which Tarkovsky contributed. Kierkegaard, under the pseudonymous authorship of Constantin Constantius, describes repetition, stating that “repetition and recollection are the same movement, except in opposite directions, for what is recollected has been, is repeated backward, whereas genuine repetition is recollected forward” (131). Here, Constantin represents an impossibility. The laws of chronology prevent a repetition that “is recollected forward,” since that movement requires both an amnesia and something of a rupture of universal time that allows an isolated incident to occur exactly as it has once occurred. Constantin's theoretical definition of repetition, juxtaposed with Anaximander's early expression of the conflict between physics and repetition, defines repetition as something that must exist within a vacuum; that is to say, without influence over anything outside of itself, or influence by anything outside of itself.

In his 1883 philosophical novel *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Friedrich Nietzsche, in a continuation of the eighteenth-century European philosophical school of thought, considers the notion of the “eternal recurrence of the same” as it relates to the self-mastered individual or *Übermensch*.¹ Nietzsche, then, unlike Kierkegaard, considers repetition as a condition that is

¹ Trans. “Over-man” or “Super-man”

generated from the self, as opposed to from some divine universal intervention. In the novel's third part, Nietzsche narrates a discussion between Zarathustra and the animals he encounters:

‘Everything goes, everything comes back; the wheel of being rolls eternally. Everything dies, everything blossoms again, the year of being runs eternally. Everything breaks, everything is joined anew; the same house of being builds itself eternally. Everything parts, everything greets itself again; the ring of being remains loyal to itself eternally. In every Instant being begins; around every Here rolls the ball There. The middle is everywhere. Crooked is the path of eternity.’ –/– ‘Oh you foolish rascals and barrel organs!’ answered Zarathustra, smiling again. “How well you know what had to come true in seven days – and how that monster crawled into my throat and choked me! But I bit off its head and spat it away from me. And you – you have already made a hurdy-gurdy song of it? Now I lie here, weary still from this biting and spitting out, sick still from my own redemption’ (175-176)

Here, Nietzsche sets up an opposition between the pre-socratic, natural conception of science:

that everything “blossoms” again alludes to the the inevitability of botanic cycles, and the “year of being,” which suggests that Zarathustra’s aforementioned “eternal recurrence of the same” adheres to the earth’s rotation around the sun divorced entirely from human influence.

Zarathustra counters this hypothesis, and responds that the animals are merely “foolish rascals and barrel organs,” and thus rejects their physiological meditation on repetition, and, considering Nietzsche’s dogma on the autonomy of the human will, suggests repetition is instead a human choice. Yet this choice, for Zarathustra, is not enacted.

Despite the notably different approaches toward understanding repetition observed by pre-socratic and modern philosophical thought, it is in each of these works evident that repetition cannot properly function within the bounds of physical or psychological law. Theological law might take a different stance, however, as biblical narrative structure contradicts Constantin’s rejection of recollection as a method of repetition, in that the Christian Bible acts as a thread that carries its principal thematic elements through the various texts in a way that involves legible

transposition from one segment to the next. The practice of theological typology, in particular, a method of language deconstruction that examines the relationship between the Old and New Testament of the Christian Bible, discovers a distinct, allegorical foreshadow in the Old Testament that manifests literally in the New Testament. Take, for example, the theological etymology of the term “typology,” which appears in Romans in an instance in which Paul the Apostle instructs a modern reader on biblical exegesis. Paul describes Adam as “a type [τύπος] of the one who was to come” (Rom 5:14), the “one who was to come” being Christ. Biblical scholarship was popularized by the earliest church fathers, a relevant example being second century Greek philosopher Origen Adamantius, who defended his involved interpretations by arguing that “just as man consists of body, soul, and spirit, so in the same way does the Scripture” (33).

This typological pattern emerges frequently in the Christian Bible, notably when it considers the text’s primary patriarchal relationship: God the Father and Christ the Son. The prominent account of the relationship occurs in the Synoptic Gospels of the New Testament, but relocates itself notably in many other areas of the Bible. When, in Genesis 22, Abraham climbs Mount Moriah in response to a command from God to sacrifice his son, Isaac, it is a clear foreshadowing of the Crucifixion of Christ in the New Testament, as well as a transposition of the story that also changes and corrects elements of it.

In *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, Robert Alter discusses the principles of repetition as it relates to the Hebrew Bible’s narrative format. He outlines the ways in which the text offers a prime example of repetition, as much of the narrative functions around the notion that divine prophecy will inevitably be fulfilled. He explains that “from the beginning of Genesis to the end

of Chronicles, is an account of how divine word--and in more ambiguous ways, often human word as well--becomes historical fact” (114). Here, Alter describes a particular kind of repetition that is enacted by speech, and is necessarily withheld because of a devout faith, as well as an understanding of and belief in divine order.

Alter then shifts his argument to an analysis of the physical medium of ancient scripture itself, and explains that “the unrolling scroll, then, was in one respect like the unrolling spool of a film projector, for time and the sequence of events presented in it could not ordinarily be halted or altered, and the only convenient way of fixing a particular action or statement for special inspection was by way of repeating it” (114). Here, Alter applies Anaximander and Constantin’s theoretical arguments regarding repetition and transfers them to the context of practicing arts. He expresses first the possibility of repetition, (that an error can be “fixed”), and then describes its utilitarian purpose: a repetition transforms and sometimes even goes so far as to correct a narrative.

Based on Alter’s commentary on repetition within the artistic “scroll,” it seems that, since the celluloid is itself a kind of linear manuscript, an analysis of the cinematic form would be most suitable in understanding the application of this theory. In his seven-featured body of work, Andrei Tarkovsky attempts to unravel certain Biblical narratives in film form in order to make sense of this repetition in a way that both the pre-socratic and eighteenth century European philosophers had difficulty with, by inserting the stories into a modern narrative and outlining the cyclical nature of these narratives as they emerge in the Bible. Indeed, Kierkegaard applies biblical narrative explicitly when considering repetition in *Fear and Trembling*, which was published simultaneously with *Repetition*. In *Fear and Trembling*, which considers the

aforementioned Genesis 22, Kierkegaard discusses the qualities that must be possessed by the Knight of Faith: a person who is able to perform any duty, unquestioning, before God. He states “the knight, then, makes the movement, but which one? Will he forget it all, for this, too, constitutes a kind of concentration? No, for a knight does not contradict himself, and it is a contradiction to forget the whole substance of his life and yet remain the same” (43). In *Repetition*, Kierkegaard had stated that repetition requires forgetfulness, yet this forgetfulness is an inherent contradiction for the Knight. Kierkegaard, then, goes a step further than Anaximander in disproving the practice of repetition, and thereby disproves the actualization of repetition in its relationship to faith.

Tarkovsky considers the same questions as Kierkegaard, and is similarly concerned with human relationships to faith. In fact, he even cites Genesis 22 as inspiration for his final film *The Sacrifice* (1986). But, unlike Kierkegaard’s experiments, Tarkovsky’s do not disprove themselves. Where Kierkegaard considers the characters of Abraham and Isaac and their journey up Mount Moriah, for example, Tarkovsky, in *The Sacrifice*, transports the same events into a story of characters similar to, but certainly different from Abraham and Isaac, and figures their journey into one more recognizable to him (a Scandanavian landscape in the late twentieth century). It seems, then, that if modernizing these biblical narratives is the key to successfully executing repetition, Tarkovsky has done so in the breadth of his filmmaking portfolio; (in *Andrei Rublev* [1966], Tarkovsky revisits the New Testament’s Crucifixion narrative multiple times within Andrei’s medieval world, and in *Solaris* [1971] he finds grounds for a retelling of the parable of the Return of the Prodigal Son in outer space.)

Tarkovsky was born in 1932 in the village of Zavrazhye, which is now the Kadyysky District of the Kostroma Oblast, Russia, to the esteemed Russian poet Arseny Alexandrovich Tarkovsky and Maria Ivanovna Vishyakovna, a student of literature and professional corrector and editor. Tarkovsky spent much of his childhood displaced, moving back and forth between Yuryevets and Moscow, and had a fraught relationship with his father who left the family to join the army in 1941. Tarkovsky's childhood would later serve as inspiration particularly for his films with autobiographical themes, and tangentially for films seemingly unrelated directly to his own life. Though much of his filmmaking is based on personal experience, however, it would be unfair to categorize Tarkovsky as a particular kind of filmmaker. In his article "Tracing the Russian Hermeneutic: Reflections on Tarkovsky's Cinematic Poetics and Global Politics," Cerwyn Moore states that "Tarkovsky's work in cinema fitted into a much broader Russian aesthetic--often referenced in culture, which in itself forms a kind of interpretive reservoir--that evolved prior to the Bolshevik revolution" (61). Here, Moore highlights the fact that Tarkovsky can be considered as something of a pioneer; one who fits into "a much broader Russian aesthetic," and yet evidently, in the tactile and abstract nature of this aesthetic, diverges from any kind of pre-Bolshevik norm.

When contemplating the filmmaker's aesthetic sensibilities, Robert Bird considers Tarkovsky's body of work through a similar lens as the pre-socratics in their understanding of repetition and time. In *Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema* (2008), Bird investigates the films as they relate to the earth's physical elements. Instead of deciphering Tarkovsky's understanding of time as in opposition with the elements, however, as the pre-socratics might, Bird uses the filmmakers' sensibilities to aid a knowledge of his ubiquitous understanding of time and its

relationship to the elements of his films. In his introduction, Bird declares the intention of his analysis, explaining that he hopes to “define and account for this elusive element that animates the images without ever becoming visible” (23). Tarkovsky, then, has discovered a perfect equilibrium between his aesthetics and thematic material, which makes him a prime example of the cinematic representation of time.

In *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky meditates on the tension between linear time and his own artistic temperament. At the beginning of the third chapter “Imprinted Time,” Tarkovsky asserts that “time is a condition for the existence of our T. It is like a kind of culture medium that is destroyed when it is no longer needed, once the links are severed between the individual personality, and the conditions of existence” (57). Here, time is constructed by Tarkovsky as an element that helps carry an artist to a place where “it is no longer needed”; a mere condition that helps us keep track of our own status in the world. He continues by stating that “history is still not Time; nor is evolution. They are both consequences. Time is a state: the flame in which there lives the salamander of the human soul” (57). Time, to Tarkovsky, when positioned within the ideologies of faith, becomes equivalent to temporality as a mere tool with which to indicate the presence of something within the human condition; to keep track of the presence of the “human soul,” which is similarly the basis by which biblical narratives illustrate their subjects’ proximity to sin or salvation.

In his films, then, Tarkovsky attempts to depict the abstract nature of time in order to conceive his own experiment on repetition, similar to Anaximander and Kierkegaard and others. He does this, in part, by exploring elements of memory. In *Sculpting in Time*, he posits the conceptual nature of memory, arguing that “time and memory merge into each other; they are

like the two sides of a medal. It is obvious enough that without Time, memory cannot exist either. But memory is something so complex that no list of all its attributes could define the totality of the impressions through which it affects us. Memory is a spiritual concept!” (57).

Tarkovsky applies his theory on the relationship between time and memory particularly in *Andrei Rublev* (1966), *Solaris* (1972), *The Mirror* (1975), and *The Sacrifice* (1986), and does so through the framework of Biblical narratives that all confuse their placement in time through vehicles of foreshadow, as well as reference to future memories.

To highlight his assertion on time, Tarkovsky references a moment in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s 1872 novel *Demons*, in which a character explains that “in the Apocalypse the angel swears that there’ll be no more time,” by which he means that, once sin is resolved, time will no longer be a necessary marker of a person’s progress and position in the world. Dostoevsky and Tarkovsky would agree with this notion, which is a fact voiced through their characters. When, at the end of *Andrei Rublev*, Andrei seemingly transcends the patterns of sin by way of his icon creation, another image is presented as an epilogue to the film; four horses, which symbolize the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, as if to say: if the cycle of sin was broken, this is what it would look like; a different kind of a apocalypse--but this experiment has not yet been actualized.

My argument, then, intends to realize Tarkovsky’s methodology in converting these narratives, in an attempt to translate the implications of the cinematic recreation of a biblical scene. My attempt to deconstruct this methodology begins with *Andrei Rublev*, which is a film primarily about aesthetic creation. In it, Tarkovsky recreates Pieter Bruegel the Elder’s 1564 painting *The Procession to Calvary* in a young characters’ divine vision. There is one problem,

though: the medieval era in which *Andrei Rublev* takes place pre-dates Brueghel's panel painting by nearly one-hundred-and-fifty years. Thus, Tarkovsky performs an impossibility, which is the basis of the inquiry of my first chapter, which considers artistic creation as a method of deconstructing and subsequently retelling the narrative of the Crucifixion. Tarkovsky's grappling with the scene through a reference to the Renaissance painting is much different from that of his Russian companions, for example, the "Grand Inquisitor" chapter of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, which I also analyze in the chapter, both as a point of comparison and as a comment on the inevitability of return within these embedded creative works.

I will also consider the ways in which Tarkovsky's final film, *The Sacrifice*, examines how he perceives another biblical narrative: Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac in Genesis, this time with a focus on language. Employing semantics and scripture, Tarkovsky suggests an inherent border between faith and a certain subject. In his analysis of the story of the Binding of Isaac, Kierkegaard characterizes Abraham as an emigrant from the ethical sphere, and states that he has entered the absurd the moment he agrees to bring his son up Mt. Moriah. I challenge that view, however, and posit that it is not his action but in fact his language that moves him from one realm to the other; as Kierkegaard explains, "Even though I go on talking night and day without interruption, if I cannot make myself understood when I speak, then I am not speaking" (113). Yet he continues to speak.

Finally, I intend to underscore the inherent throughline of cyclicity in Tarkovsky's body of work in a chapter that focuses on thematic structure, by way of his renowned science fiction film *Solaris*. *Solaris*'s final frame is a recreation of Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn's painting *The Return of the Prodigal Son*, which is thereby the narrative the film functions under. Through

an examination of the theme of return in the film, I will consider the ultimate, narrative implications of a biblical repetition. Though Tarkovsky does not necessarily afford an answer to the question of repetition as a whole, as Kierkegaard attempted to do, his films serve as a blueprint through which to understand the ramifications of the rupture of pre-ordained biblical narratives, and, through that, recontextualize our universal understandings of Christian apocalypse.

Chapter I

The Passion According to Andrei Rublev and Ivan Karamazov: Disrupting the Crucifixion Narrative in *Andrei Rublev* and *The Brothers Karamazov*

In 1966, Andrei Tarkovsky premiered his sophomore feature *Andrei Rublev*, an eight-part portrait of medieval Russia and its beloved icon painter. The film considers an act both vital and deeply consequential: the artistic depiction of a Christological scene. But Tarkovsky's portrayal diverges from the typical narrative study of an artist, as the film ends right before Andrei embarks on the creation of his first acclaimed icon. In structuring the film this way, Tarkovsky considers the process involved in preparing for a personal interpretation of a Christological scene--in this case, the Crucifixion of Christ, as understood in the Christian Bible.

The Gospel According to Matthew, which is the most relevant Synoptic Gospel in an examination of transfigurative biblical narratives due to its intimate ties with the Old Testament,² describes the event of the Crucifixion in four parts. It begins with the Road to Calvary, transitions to the actual Crucifixion as performed by the Romans, Jesus' crisis of faith: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mt 27:46), is followed by the *Pietà*,³ and ends in the eventual Resurrection: "When the centurion and those with him who were guarding Jesus saw the earthquake and all that had happened, they were terrified, and exclaimed, 'Surely he was the Son of God!'" (Mt 27:54). In his reckoning with the Crucifixion, Tarkovsky applies a variety of alternative retellings of the Biblical narrative, such as Pieter Bruegel the Elder's Renaissance painting *The Procession to Calvary* (1564), and the "Grand Inquisitor" chapter of Fyodor

² The Gospel According to Matthew has more quotes from the Old Testament than Mark or Luke.

³ Pity; the lamentation of the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene.

Dostoevsky's novel *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880). In creating this layered narrative structure within *Andrei Rublev*, Tarkovsky examines the recounted progression of the crucifixion within a given society, while also alluding to its inevitable cyclical nature. Like within the biblical story itself, Tarkovsky argues a progression of stages required in a *re*-telling of the story, which begins with a recognition of the divine, and will ideally transform into a breaking of the cycle of return.

A conversation in *Andrei Rublev* that demonstrates two characters' diverging interpretations of the New Testament's Gospels suggests Jesus's Crucifixion is a narrative that responds to personal interpretation. In the sequence,⁴ a debate prompts a vision of the Passion,⁵ which, in turn, allows Tarkovsky to emphasize the importance of artistic authorship within this particular biblical narrative. Their diverging viewpoints highlight the medieval worlds' fraught relationship with Christianity, which was accompanied by an atmosphere of modernization. In the scene, the film's protagonist, young icon painter Andrei, stands between his mentor, the revered Byzantine painter Theophanes the Greek, and Foma, Andrei's seemingly naive and mischievous apprentice, in a barren wooded area outside of Moscow. Andrei and Theophanes discuss a hypothetical return of Christ to their fifteenth century world, which is heavily shaped by Tatar invasion, and is correspondingly caught amidst a daunting distancing of the Russian people from religion. Tarkovsky uses the omnipresence of the Tatars both as an actualization of sin, and as an interruption to and barrier between a perfect sacrifice.⁶ Indeed, when considering *Andrei Rublev*'s Tatar invasion and the violence inflicted upon the Russian people, it is evident that patterns of sin have not yet been broken, which is a state that is notably similar to the world preceding the Synoptic Gospels. During the debate between Andrei and Theophanes, Foma

⁴ The sequence starts the film's third chapter: 'The Passion According to Andrei.'

⁵ The suffering and death of Jesus Christ in canonical gospels.

⁶ A sacrifice that will prevent humankind from needing further sacrifice.

imagines his own interpretation of the Passion narrative, and, in doing so, inadvertently comments on the position of the artist within his artwork.⁷

The initial spatial juxtaposition of Andrei and Theophanes serves as a reminder of their contrasting moral standpoints; Tarkovsky overlaps the characters within the frame, while simultaneously illustrating a psychological break by having them cast their glances at different points in the distance, thereby situating them on different planes within their shared space (fig. 1). The framing of the figures points to a distinct tension between the characters' interpretations of the Gospel.



(fig. 1) Theophanes (left) and Andrei (right) discuss the Crucifixion in *Andrei Rublev*

Theophanes asserts his viewpoint first, expressing an attitude of cynicism toward the relationship between God and the Russian people. This disposition is a product primarily of a decline in Christian values, which, in Theophanes' interpretation, has accompanied rapid

⁷ This question is vital within medieval Russia. Iconoclasts called the practice of depicting any Christological scene an abomination, as they believed portraying God in any way reduces his divinity.

modernization and a people that no longer adheres strictly to the teachings of the Bible. He states, "Everything is an eternal circle and it repeats and repeats itself. If Jesus returned to earth, they would crucify him again." Theophanes presents this theory with dismay, arguing that the crucifixion is doomed to repeat itself. And thus commences Foma's vision.

In the "Grand Inquisitor" chapter of *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), a novel that centers around a triad of Russian brothers grappling with their respective relationships to Christianity, Fyodor Dostoevsky asserts a similar notion of the cyclicity of the Crucifixion narrative as Tarkovsky when investigating a different hypothetical return to the Passion that holds a similar sentiment as Theophanes'. It is important to note, here, that Dostoevsky had significant literary influence on Tarkovsky, who expresses this overtly many times throughout *Sculpting in Time*, once stating, "Of great significance to me are those traditions in Russian culture which have their beginnings in the work of Dostoevsky. Their development in modern Russia is patently incomplete; in fact they tend to be looked down upon, or even ignored altogether" (93).

"The Grand Inquisitor" is a poem told by Ivan Karamazov, the eldest Karamazov brother and self-proclaimed scholar and atheist, that takes place during the Spanish Inquisition, fifteen hundred years after Jesus's original arrival in Jerusalem, and a hundred years after Theophanes and Andrei discuss the implications of Jesus' hypothetical return to a Tatar-invaded Moscow. The Inquisitor characters' skepticism of both Christ and Christianity, as described in scripture, sets up a conflict that is necessary for the narrative to end with a sacrifice. Had the people not deemed Christ blasphemous prior to the crucifixion, He would not have had the opportunity to be martyred for faithful and unfaithful humans alike.

The Inquisitor poses himself as an enemy and a threat to Jesus, which is an opposition that sets the story effectively into motion. Ivan holds a more derisive attitude toward the cyclicity of the narrative, calling a return to the story “an absurd thing” (246), whereas Alyosha, the youngest brother and a devout monk, listens intently, understanding the return more so as a directive on transcending the confines of this seemingly trapping rotation. Characters like the Inquisitor are precisely what Theophanes despairs over, but the Inquisitor, like the Russian people faltering in their faith, might in fact be the most necessary figure in this restating of the narrative; a figure who affords the opportunity for transformation.

Ivan describes the Inquisitor as he begins to interrogate Jesus. He asks:

Do you know what will happen tomorrow? I do not know who you are, and I do not want to know: whether it is you, or only his likeness; but tomorrow I shall condemn you and burn you at the stake as the most evil of heretics, and the very people who today kissed your feet, tomorrow, at a nod from me, will rush to heap the coals up around your stake, do you know that? Yes, perhaps you do know it (250).

By saying “perhaps you do know,” The Inquisitor acknowledges the inherent, unavoidable prophetic nature of Jesus’ return. He threatens Jesus, stating that he is going to “burn [him] on the stake as the most evil of heretics,” thereby inadvertently complying with the final stage of the cycle, propping him on a device that adheres to both the iconic imagery of Jesus on the cross, and the time period involved, shifting it only slightly by adding fire. In the world of *The Brothers Karamazov*, scripture is still referenced, but subverted in a derisive manner.

The cyclical nature of the narrative of Christ is acknowledged further in Ivan’s recognition that the Inquisitor plans to crucify Jesus on the basis of who he was when he previously materialized on earth centuries ago. With this objective, the Inquisitor moves the story not only to a method of repetition but also into a self-referential circuit. The sinful nature of

the Inquisitor perpetuates the return; once Christ has appeared on earth, the story must end the same every time.

And, through this parallel, we can better understand Foma's vision, which adheres to a similar notion of cyclicity, while also adopting both personal and modern analyses of the story. As Andrei responds to Theophanes's hypothesis, Tarkovsky allows a vision from an artist, whose position as an amateur is emphasized greatly throughout *Andrei Rublev*, to play out in full. The sequence begins as though it has been dreamed by Andrei, who, while Theophanes describes the lack of mercy that was shown to Jesus in his mortal life, looks out at the water before an abrupt cut to another body of water in an unspecified, imagined, parallel world that is similar enough to be clearly influenced by Foma's--perhaps a place nearby where Andrei or Theophanes gazed when refusing to meet one another's eye.

Foma's vision addresses the same questions as Ivan's, but the former's is one that is predicated on an artistic inclination inspired by icon painters, as manifested alongside his struggle to reconcile the idea of the appropriation of this narrative in an ever-modernizing Russia. In *Russians and their Church*, Nicholas Zernov discusses icon painting, arguing the transcendent nature of the art form. He states:

Icons were for the Russians not merely paintings. They were dynamic manifestations of man's spiritual power to redeem creation through beauty and art. The colours and lines of the [icons] were not meant to imitate nature; the artists aimed at demonstrating that men, animals, and plants, and the whole cosmos, could be rescued from their present state of degradation and restored to their proper 'Image'. The [icons] were pledges of the coming victory of a redeemed creation over the fallen one. . . . The artistic perfection of an icon was not only a reflection of the celestial glory -- it was a concrete example of matter restored to its original harmony and beauty, and serving as a vehicle of the Spirit. The icons were part of the transfigured cosmos (107-8).

The significance of Foma's vision lies primarily in his silence during the conversation. As an aspiring painter, he understands the near incomprehensible through that which compels and moves him: the creation of art. Zernov asserts that man's role in the narrative of Christ, even in the centuries following the Crucifixion, is to "redeem creation through beauty and art." Purely by imagining the scene, Foma has begun to accomplish much of this redemption by cultivating it as a singular, personal relationship to the story. Zernov asserts that the painter is able to imagine the scene as it affects him, and then salvage it by way of transferring it onto the panel upon which it will be preserved, away from whatever threat Theophanes fears modernity might inflict on it.

Later in the film, Theophanes' death complicates his relationship to divinity. In *Elements of Cinema*, Robert Bird discusses the episode of *Andrei Rublev* titled "The Raid." He explains, "At first the viewer sees only an unknown hand leafing through a charred volume. In the course of the ensuing conversation Theophanes surprises himself by speaking lines from the New Testament, exclaiming 'I remember! I haven't forgotten!'" (97). Here, Bird notes both the transcendent nature of scripture, and its artistic qualities. If scripture can transcend time and space, ("I haven't forgotten!") then artistic creation can similarly redeem the present.

In a 1984 retrospective on his own work *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky, like Zernov, explores the divine elements of art-making, stating, "Perhaps the meaning of all human activity lies in the artistic consciousness, in the pointless and selfless creative act? Perhaps our capacity to create is evidence that we ourselves were created in the image and likeness of God?" (241). Here, Tarkovsky makes a similar claim to Zernov and Bird, and suggests that artistic creation is the closest we can come to understanding God because it replicates what he himself did when creating man. By defining artistic consciousness as "pointless and selfless," Tarkovsky does not

mean that God's creation of mankind was pointless and selfless, but that a replication of God is not Godliness; rather an appreciation of Godliness. In fact, to Tarkovsky, God's creation of mankind in Genesis was *not* pointless or selfless, but rather something that yielded a relationship and appreciation particularly *because* man could recognize this likeness and strive to replicate it.

In his vision, Foma begins to methodically reconstruct the Crucifixion narrative in terms personal and identifiable to him. The vision itself commences with a man crouching over a stream and drinking from his cupped hand. Though the scenery is not unlike the location in which Andrei and Theophanes' conversation takes place, the dense body of snow, as opposed to the woods' thaw, situates the scene in an alternate time. The man stands up, and, with him, the camera pans upward, revealing a giant wooden cross and with it the man's identity: this is Christ, as Foma understands him. Physically, he resembles Andrei, and through this likeness Foma subconsciously draws a parallel between the two, making the case that the Christ he perceives is both an artist and a person fixed in his own world.

The vision continues as a scene that combines elements of Foma's world and the world depicted in the Gospels. The camera continues its movement with a pan to the right, which reveals Christ's followers as they lead him toward the hill on which his cross will stand. Their cumbersome winter-wear also functions to confirm this version of the Passion as one that has transformed in accordance with its author; a frigid atmosphere impedes on the characters' movements here, while "scorching heat" is often emphasized in the Gospels. This difference in fundamental detail is a product of Foma's lack of exposure outside his own climate, and sets his vision apart from elemental tradition (fig. 2).

In voiceover, Andrei suggests that to regard a repetition of the Passion as a bad thing is to fundamentally misunderstand the purpose of Jesus on earth. “Jesus came from God,” says



(fig. 2) A winter-adapted procession to Calvary in *Andrei Rublev*

Andrei, “so he is all-powerful. And if he died on the cross, it was predetermined, and his crucifixion and death were God’s will. That would have aroused hatred not in those who crucified him, but in those who loved him, if they had been near him at that moment, because they loved him as man only.” Here, Andrei asserts that the crucifixion must have been for some greater good, as it was “God’s will,” and that it is the duty of man to defy a sense of earthly love and all impulse and ensure Jesus’ death; because it services Jesus’ purpose on earth, this sacrifice is the ultimate act of love.

The Gospel According to Matthew explores the complex nature of Jesus’s crucifixion and the psychologically tormenting act of sacrifice required when considering the case of Judas Iscariot, the apostle who reveals the identity of Jesus to persecutors, an action which ultimately

results in his Crucifixion. Gathering with his apostles at communion, Jesus declares: “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me” (Mt. 26:21). This statement, told simply and as more of an acknowledgment than as a warning, asserts what is necessary, and thus inevitable. The nature of the Gospels’ inherent completion in their various narratives, (that which is foretold becomes true, and is, in that sense, already true), forces the characters into a cyclical sequence: when Jesus declares that one of the apostles will betray him, he has already begun to do so. It is said earlier that “one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests and said, ‘What will you give me if I betray him to you?’ They paid him thirty pieces of silver. And from that moment he began to look for an opportunity to betray him” (Mt. 26:14-16). Reports of Judas’s betrayal suggest that, although Judas’ motivation for his betrayal is greed, as Adam and Eve’s is curiosity, and Peter the Apostle’s fear, these emotions serve as mortal fronts for prophetic necessities. Had Judas not betrayed Jesus, Jesus would not have been crucified and thus martyred for the sins of man.

Jesus’ actions further infer the necessity of Judas’s sin when directly following his prediction of betrayal, “Jesus took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is my body’” (Mt. 26:26). By offering the bread to the apostles, Jesus complicates what should be an event that inspires anger by nourishing and rewarding Judas with his body, another form of sacrifice born only from love. The prophetic nature of these narratives, however, should not be mistaken for a necessity. While Theophanes and Ivan consider them with a sense of inevitability, Andrei and Alyosha are situated by their authors as characters to break the cycle.

Theophanes introduces the notion of divine recognition into his analysis of modern Russia. His despair is predicated on the notion that the Russian people would recognize Christ, which should, too, alone necessarily be cause for rejoice in the preservation of the people's faith. Tarkovsky fears that this may not be the case, however, and uses a progression of Christological depictions in *Andrei Rublev* to express that anxiety. The fundamental difference, then, in Theophanes and Andrei's viewpoints regarding a modern crucifixion is predicated on their separate notions of recognition. Indeed, were the people not to recognize Christ, he may not need to be crucified, but the lack of recognition would underscore an inherent lack of faith.

It had been established, then, that a significant level of faith is required in order to be able to recognize a divine scene. In "The Grand Inquisitor," the Inquisitor tells Jesus he is flawed because his dogma inadvertently impedes man's ability for free-will, which is the one thing he should have autonomy over under Christianity. He argues that, of course, man *has* free-will, but once a figure who is able to heal the blind appears before him, he no longer wishes for it. The Inquisitor tells Jesus, "Anything you proclaim anew will encroach upon the freedom of man's faith, for it will come as a miracle, and the freedom of their faith was the dearest of all things to you, even then, one and a half thousand years ago" (251). Historically, important figures in Jesus' narrative possess autonomy in the elemental psychological sense of the word, but are tormented in a way that forces them to act in a rebellious manner, and thus bring Jesus a step closer to the cross.

An example of man's tendency to disobey command is stated in scripture, when Peter, Jesus' first ordained Apostle and the founder of the Christian church, receives a series of complicated messages from Jesus in the Gospel According to Matthew. First, Jesus "sternly

orders the disciples not to tell anyone that he was the Messiah” (Mt 16:20). In his order, Jesus has placed Peter in a seemingly impossible situation, as he has previously established denial of Christ as a mortal sin, warning that “everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven” (Mt 10:32-33). In this seemingly transparent directive, Jesus reminds his followers of his position as the son of the Lord; his Word on the matter is of great authority. Peter is placed in a position of existential torment and nobly situates himself as someone to convey that. Jesus sets up this internal moral conflict to provide Peter with an impossible choice that is influenced not by Heaven or Hell, but by a necessary sacrifice in carrying out his earthly duty--the continuation of the legacy of Christ. Tarkovsky and Dostoevsky alike consider these kinds of torments, and position their characters as figures to move into a state of divinity despite the troubling psychological anguish inflicted upon them.

The Inquisitor continues his critique of the presence of free-will under Jesus’ rule, explaining, “There is nothing more seductive for man than the freedom of his conscience, but there is nothing more tormenting either” (254). Had Jesus informed Peter directly, for example, that he wanted him to “deny [Him] three times” (Mt 26:34), as opposed to that he simply *would*, denying Him might have been a seductive endeavor; when Peter lied to bystanders outside the court where Jesus was being prosecuted, he would likely have been relieved afterward, as opposed to weeping bitterly.

Indeed, sin is vital in a return to the narrative of the Crucifixion. Without it, Adam and Eve would have never left the garden, and humanity would be but a cluster of naked children content with understanding nothing beyond the grass beneath their feet. The sin is what sets the

cycle into motion, but faith is what should break it. Considering *Andrei Rublev's* Tatar invasion and the violence inflicted upon the Russian people, these patterns of sin have not yet been broken. In the film's chapter titled "The Raid," the Tatars reign death and destruction over Moscow, including in a church Andrei has been painting. One of the Tatars asks, "How can [Mary] be a virgin if she has a son?" which points directly to an inability to make the leap of faith required to surpass the skepticism of Andrei and Theophanes' modern world. And this is not the only instance in which the Tatars relate specifically to Christianity: after seizing Moscow, they burn a man at the stake, which invokes an image of Christ's persecution, while also foreshadowing Dostoevsky's Spanish Inquisition.

The practice of Hamartiology defines sin as an offense against God by way of an offense against his creations, which, created in his likeness, are considered continuations of his self. It is relevant, then, to review the Old Testament and the conception of the natural order that Augustine defends in *Contra Faustum*. Genesis describes the creation of order when "God said, 'Let there be light.' And there was light! God saw that the light was good, so God separated the light from the darkness" (Gen 1:3-5). Genesis's description of the creation of light finds a chain of command in the relationship between speech and order: God appoints light, the light is and is exactly what he imagined, and God subsequently approves of the light.

The creation of humankind appears later in Genesis 1, when God says, "Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26), and then "God created humankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them" (Gen 1:27). Genesis discovers a similar methodology in the creation of light and the creation of humankind, but in the creation of light, God finds inspiration from "darkness" (Gen 1:2) and thereby conceives light from an opposition,

whereas in humankind the design is born particularly from the image of himself; the “image of God,” which in its Latin origin *Imago Dei* signifies a rigid symbolic relationship between God and man. (Recall, here, the Inquisitor’s greeting of Christ: that he is either Christ, or his likeness).

The Greek etymology of the word “image,” which is revisited multiple times in Genesis, is also important to note here. Image, from Greek εἰκών or *eikōn*, translates to “icon” or “resemblance,” and is later adopted to describe the religious portrayal of Christ, though the Russian Orthodox belief is that Genesis 1:26 is, in fact, the first instance of an icon. An icon painting, which emerged as a Christian tradition arguably sourcing back to Luke the Evangelist in the first century, intends to separate the self from the work and eliminate any sense of egoism, thereby serving and connecting the viewer with the divine.

Dostoevsky suggests something similar about the corruption of the Russian people four centuries after the Spanish Inquisition. *The Brothers Karamazov* centers around a plot of murder and deception, but perhaps the novel’s most relevant example of sin exists in the chapter titled “The Odor of Corruption” in which Alyosha’s mentor, Father Zosima, dies. Dostoevsky describes how “little by little, but more and more noticeably, an odor of corruption had begun to issue from the coffin, which by three o’ clock in the afternoon was all too clearly evident and kept gradually increasing” (330). Here, the body of a father which should have, if he was truly the saint Alyosha thought him, been perfectly preserved, begins to rot, indicating an inherent imperfection. The rotting of Zosima makes clear that in Dostoevsky’s world, not even the most holy are immune to corruption. Following the odor of corruption, Alyosha makes the decision to leave the monastery as a response to this test of faith, and, as he does so, another of the church’s

Fathers declares, “But you will come back!” (337) as if to report on Dostoevsky’s narrative structure itself; given the character of Alyosha as someone who seeks redemption in people, his only appropriate response to the rotting of Zosima can be to return and attempt to break the cycle of sin, and this faithful disposition enacts and perpetuates a cycle in itself.

The Inquisitor proposes that it is God’s allowance for sin that makes man love him so: “We will tell them that every sin will be redeemed if it is committed with our permission; and that we allow them to sin because we love them, and as for the punishment for these sins, very well, we take it upon themselves” (259), but through the questions Ivan poses, Dostoevsky indicates that it is actually precisely this God-infused potential for sin that makes the human narrative possible in the first place: Eve ate the fruit so that man could later discover a way to repent for it. Dostoevsky’s understanding of Christianity is, of course, different from that of his protagonists; though he can be likened to Alyosha, he does not particularly favor one voice over the other. In his essay “Philosophical Anthropology and Dostoevsky’s ‘Legend of the Grand Inquisitor,’” Ellis Sandoz attempts to ground Dostoevsky’s philosophical and theological viewpoints, explaining that, after Marx’s conception of a socialist ideal,

Dostoevsky makes his entrance. Beyond him lies the Nietzschean apotheosis of man and the transvaluation of values. Dostoevsky pitted his conception of man against the anthropology of atheistic humanism. As a young man he wrote: ‘Man is a mystery. It must be unravelled, and if you give your life to the task, do not think that you wasted it; I devote myself to this mystery because I wish to be a man.’ He remained true to this task throughout his days and in all his art (355).

Sandoz’s placement of Dostoevsky between Marx and Nietzsche’s respective conception of the “modern man” offers the former’s intention as an artist as understanding the religious man and the atheistic man. In its varied cast of characters, *The Brothers Karamazov* serves as an attempt

to unfurl the so-called mystery of man, in that Dostoevsky, unlike Nietzsche, considers that religion is at the heart of man's value system.

Alyosha questions the legitimacy of Ivan's hypothesis of God's encouragement of sin, when he stops his brother and asks, "Is [this] a boundless fantasy, or some mistake on the old man's part, or some impossible *quid pro quo*?" (250). Indeed, Alyosha's question is appropriate, as all biblical exchanges fundamentally operate on the grounds of a *quid pro quo*. An important figure--a follower like Peter, or a demonic opposer like the Inquisitor--takes the fall and is existentially tormented in order for the narrative to function, and then God, in whatever form, similarly takes the fall in that he is sacrificed in order for humankind to proceed onward, and so on, and so on, until the pattern is broken.

Similar to Ivan's, Foma's vision serves as a consolidation point through which Tarkovsky begins to methodically unravel different kinds of expressions of the scene. Once the cross and thus the subject's identity is revealed and reckoned with, Tarkovsky transports the camera outward to an objective wide-shot of Jesus struggling under the weight of the cross he carries up the snowy mountain, followed by eleven apostolic figures. The distance between the camera and the subject here indicates Foma's goal when imagining the sequence: to gain an understanding of the divine he has not yet attained.



(fig. 3) the Virgin Mary crosses the frame in *Andrei Rublev*

This distance is breached when Foma's interpretation of the figure of the Virgin Mary crosses in front of the frame and stops before the camera (fig. 3). She turns as if to peer into the lens and thus unite the viewer with the frame, and then looks back at the figure who represents Mary Magdalene, who also looks toward the lens in an indirect manner. In this near interaction with the camera, Tarkovsky brings into the narrative another level of viewership. Not only does Foma listen to and interpret a conversation and subsequently have a vision of his own, but the movement of the characters toward the camera forces a reflection of the screen that acts as a barrier between the viewer and the vision, leaving the viewer to interpret Foma's vision just as Foma's interpretations lead him to the vision.

The two women look at the scene of Jesus and his apostles and then move onward. The shot then cuts expeditiously to a close-up of Jesus, covered in snow, underneath the cross he carries. He stands up and the camera follows him; he brushes snow off of his jacket: he is weakened, melancholy; human. The close-up moves Jesus to an elevated plane as he drags his cross up the hill. He looks down on the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene. Once Jesus rests on

the cross, the vision suddenly ends, and in its place is Foma, gazing into the distance. He washes his muddy paintbrushes; Tarkovsky has established the young apprentice with potentiality to become a worthy creator.

Foma, as a character peripheral to the nominal artist, anticipates Andrei's icon paintings, which do not make an appearance until the very end of *Andrei Rublev*. Formally, Foma's vision is unlike the icon painting of medieval Russia, which strives to be a simple, unified, transhistorical kind of depiction of a Christological scene. An icon painting intends to separate the self from the work and eliminate any sense of egoism, thereby serving the viewer and connecting him with the divine. Through this, the icon hopes to be a non-specific sign which points toward faith, as opposed to an exact representation of that which it depicts. In his theological work *Iconostasis*, Russian Orthodox philosopher Pavel Florensky describes the icon's intention of the iconic face, stating:

the *countenance* (*lik*) of a thing manifests its ontological reality. In *Genesis*, the *image of God* is differentiated from *the likeness of God*; and long ago, the Holy Tradition of the Church explained that the *image of God* must be understood as the ontologically actual gift of God, as the spiritual ground of each created person, whereas the *likeness of God* must be understood as the potentiality to attain spiritual perfection (51-52).

The icon composition requires a confrontation with divinity that, if expressed literally, may be misunderstood. Dostoevsky elaborates on Jesus' divine qualities in "The Grand Inquisitor" in a way that allows this "likeness," or *homoousion*,⁸ while, unlike the Inquisitor, refusing to describe him physically. When Jesus enters, "The sun of love shines in his heart, rays of Light, Enlightenment, and Power stream from his eyes and, pouring over the people, shake their hearts with responding love" (249). What is masked here as a physical description offers no hints as to

⁸ A Christian theological term which describes Jesus as the same in essence or being to God.

what this character actually looks like: his heart is described, yet he is not bound to human form; he transcends it. When describing a “likeness to God,” Florensky also recalls Genesis, that “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). The wording of “likeness” as opposed to an indication of replication suggests that divinity originates from representation like an icon. In this case, it is understood in its substantive understanding of an *Imago Dei*: the ability to locate God through human features, thereby allowing a window for all of man to acquire an approximate relationship to him, should they be open to it.

The premise of *Imago Dei*, which denotes the same tradition of “likeness” as the icon, as understood in Genesis, is predicated on the notion that man has a distinct understanding of his origin; which is to say, an understanding of his relationship and correspondence to God. The notion of *Imago Dei* transfers itself to the New Testament, the Synoptic Gospels in particular, when demonstrating the definition of sin as it relates to humankind. In the Gospel of John, Christ is described as telling his disciples “everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:53). It seems, then, that the metamorphosis of the tenet of sin hardly transforms from the Old to the New Testaments; its basis being that a divine order is rooted directly in this *Imago Dei*, which is also the image of humankind, and thereby to regard this image as divine and uphold this notion is vital in avoiding sin.

Christ’s birth, as recounted in the Synoptic Gospels, can be interpreted as a simultaneous attempt to resolve human sin as initiated by Original Sin,⁹ and as a way for God to reveal his own humanness. Christ’s materialization is often regarded as God’s notion of the perfect

⁹ Genesis 3:1-24

sacrifice, and such a notion is foreshadowed in Genesis when God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. God intervenes, however, commanding Abraham “Do not lay a hand on the boy... Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son” (Gen 22:12). The correlation between Abraham’s near-sacrifice of his son and Christ’s determined perfect sacrifice signifies a discernible pattern of transposition and transfiguration when it comes to *Imago Dei* in scripture.

When considering the concept of *Imago Dei*, the question of free-will is inherently involved with a separation from physicality. One of the elements that makes the problem of free-will so paradoxical in Ivan’s hypothetical is the Inquisitor’s suggestion that Jesus, in order to redeem the human race, must be equally human and divine. The Inquisitor brings Jesus’s mystical qualities into question, explaining that “there are three powers, only three powers on earth, capable of conquering and holding captive forever the conscience of these feeble rebels, for their own happiness--these powers are miracle, mystery, and authority” (255). This statement is very much in line with the main issue the Inquisitor is grappling with--and that is the irremediable hierarchy of God over man; a steadfast “authority” which holds them “captive”--but raises a similarly thought-provoking question by using the descriptors “mystery” and “miracle.”

In order for Jesus’s intention to function, he must perform miracles, or else man would have no justification in putting faith in him. This can be interpreted as the inciting incident for the following of Jesus in the Gospels, and similarly as the first action performed by a returned Jesus at the beginning of “The Grand Inquisitor,” as previously explored. In order to perform miracles, Jesus must possess divine capacities, which inevitably place him above those who follow him, and followers who perform miracles possess the miraculousness of Jesus merely

through their own faith. Essentially, without Jesus's mystical qualities, there is no following, yet with these qualities, there can be no equality, and therefore man is at once captivated and held captive.

Not only does the relationship between man and Jesus involve a mystical quality, but also a mysterious one. When Jesus first appears at the beginning of "The Grand Inquisitor," the people shout out: "Yes, you were right, you alone possess his mystery, and we are coming back to you--save us from ourselves" (258). Here, man himself admits it is the "mystery" of God that they find attractive, thus lowering themselves further in this uneven power dynamic. Because of this mystery that they do not and can not possess, they must be "save[d]... from [themselves]," thus importing a power dynamic that will result in a continual yearning for Jesus' return until he does return and the people act as his subordinates.

Similar to Dostoevsky's non-description of Christ, the composition of the icon is mysticized in the flattening of the image, an action which presents the subjects as existing both inside and outside of corporeal space. The bodies themselves are flat and inflexible and lacking in many of the nuances--curves and shadows--associated often with humanness. Through this, the painter makes an effort not to implant a conception of fixed time or biases into the work, and, perhaps most important, any projection of self. He thus makes his icon a work which selflessly transcends the image itself and does not fall victim to a personal sense of bias.

The Gospel According to Ivan serves both as an inadvertent fulfillment of the repetition of the Passion of Christ, and as a remark on the inevitability of a continuous return to the narrative. The narratives, (from the Gospels' reflection on the sacrificial stories of the Old Testament, to Dostoevsky's reflection on this fictional version of the Spanish Inquisition), like

the arts by which the medieval iconists of *Andrei Rublev* are indirectly inspired by, shift through phases, and thus this singular narrative essentially changes form every time it is returned to. At the beginning of his poem, Ivan's hardly diverges from the classical description of Jesus in the Gospels. Upon arrival, He performs a miracle when "an old man, blind from childhood, calls out from the crowd: 'Lord, heal me so that I, too, can see you,' and it is as if the scales fell from his eyes, and the blind man sees him" (249). In the Gospel According to Matthew, Jesus similarly repairs the blind, when "blind men came to him, and he asked them, 'Do you believe that I am able to do this?' 'Yes, Lord,' they replied. Then he touched their eyes and said, 'According to your faith let it be done to you'; and their sight was restored" (Mt. 9:28-30). In the Acts of the Apostles, the tradition of healing the blind in the Christian faith is continued following Jesus' death. In this case, more specific imagery is employed, when

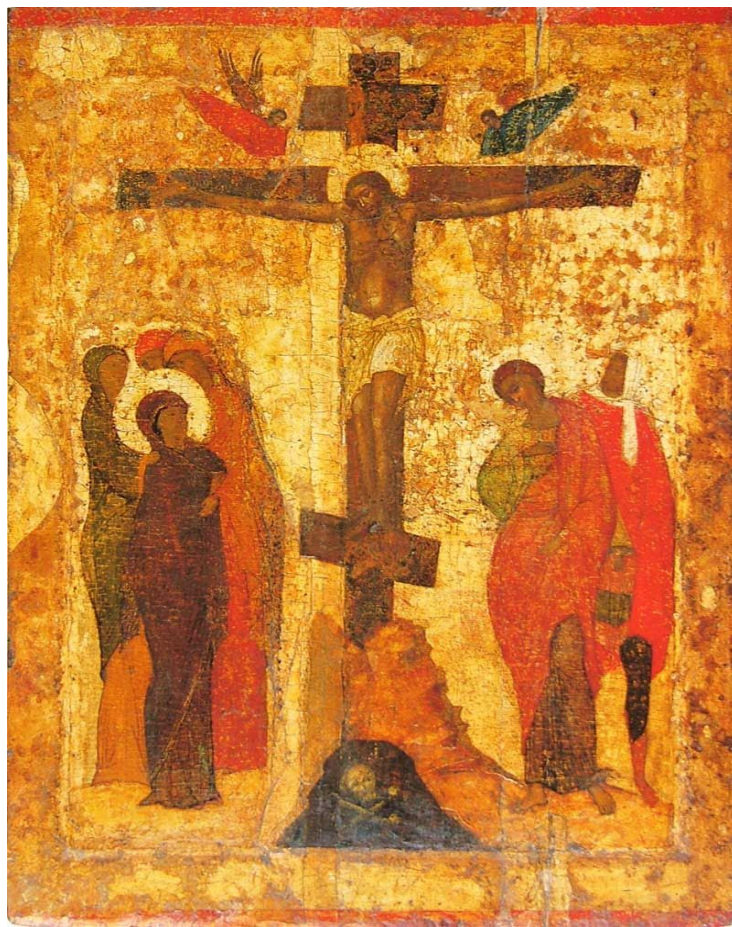
Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, 'Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.' Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again (Acts 9:17-19).

The parallels between the structure of Ivan's "The Grand Inquisitor" and commonly sourced synoptic material on Jesus and his return through the Apostles point to a basic format that is not, in all of the court clerk and monastic performances, diverged from.

Ivan explains his reasoning for formatting his theological pursuit as a poem, describing to Alyosha a custom in old poetic works "to bring higher powers down to earth. I don't need to mention Dante. In France, court clerks, as well as monks in the monasteries, gave whole performances in which they brought the Madonna, angels, saints, Christ, and God himself on stage" (246). Here, Ivan proposes the merit of recreating biblical stories, and also of doing so through artistic creation, since, as Tarkovsky indicates in *Sculpting in Time*, mimicking God's

holy affinity for creation brings one closer to understanding Him. Ivan suggests that performing these stories has the power to bring “God himself on stage,” which sets a context for “The Grand Inquisitor” poem. The story Ivan is about to tell should be taken as a demonstration of both his own relationship to divinity, and, like Foma’s vision, what he believes would likely occur if Jesus were to return to earth.

And, in his icons, Andrei does precisely what the old poets strive to do: bring God himself onto the stage, though Andrei’s representation of the Crucifixion, which was created shortly after *Andrei Rublev’s* time, is much different from Foma’s exaggerated and dramatized conception of it. In Andrei’s icon (fig. 4), the eyes of those surrounding the cross are downcast



(fig. 4) Andrei Rublev’s version of the crucifixion scene

and passive, and the image is not one of pain and torment but of humility and grace. The features of the characters of the icon are nearly identical, which places an emphasis not on their humanness, but instead on their gestures and transcendence into divinity.

In Foma's vision, however, Tarkovsky does not invoke the formal aspects of an icon painting, but instead a distinct citation of Western renaissance art, invoking specifically Netherlandish painter Peter Bruegel the Elder's 1564 panel painting *The Procession to Calvary* (fig. 5), which, existing within his landscape series, illustrates Christ on his expedition carrying the cross. The solemn religious depiction of the Gospel's event is, in composition, unquestionably formal. The scene was famously depicted by Hans Multscher in 1437 with *Christ Carrying the Cross*, and decades after by Hieronymus Bosch in 1515 with his painting of the same name.

Bruegel's painting structurally honors the formal content of a typical crucifixion painting: Jesus's mourners (the Virgin Mary, John the Disciple, and two nameless holy women) are located in the foreground, and the temperature of the sky is both ubiquitous and foreboding. In both the painting and the sequence, the snow-covered hill divides the land and the sky; the heaven and the divine, which emphasizes the struggle between an understanding of Christ as human and an understanding of Christ as God. This struggle is also conveyed in the painting's crowded nature: unlike in Andrei's icon, where Christ is the central figure, Christ is here almost hidden. He is



(fig. 5) Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Procession to Calvary* (1564).

blocked by a number of peripheral characters, and there are no planes or lines or emphasized spotlights the viewer can use as a clue to distinguish this character. In this sense, Bruegel explores a kind of Christological depiction that tests its viewers faith in a different way than an icon painter would. Bruegel employs a visual Apophatic Theology,¹⁰ describing Christ as what he is not.

In *Andrei Rublev*, Tarkovsky implements a similar technique as is used in *The Procession to Calvary* in his decision to shoot the film anamorphically. By doing this, Tarkovsky, like Bruegel, crowds the frame, and in this stylistic choice poses a similar question as Theophanes:

¹⁰ Theology by negation with Pre-Socratic origins.

would we recognize Christ if he were to return to earth? Would we even know where to look? Ivan asserts confidently that “He [would appear] quietly, inconspicuously, but, strange to say, everyone [would recognize] him” (249). This ubiquitous recognition suggests a sort of inevitability; this is not the kind of test of faith one would encounter in a Bruegel painting, it is beyond doubt that no matter how “quietly” and “inconspicuously” Christ materializes, a recognition and following is a vital element of the narrative, and thus, not only the few believers, but “everyone recognized him.” In Dostoevsky’s answer to the question, Christ holds a divine quality that distinguishes him from all others, and thus should mitigate any worry, but Andrei worries that this might not be the case, and it is this force which incites a reluctance to paint icons.

Ellis Sandoz explores the recognition of Christ in this scene in what he argues to be “*the Principle of Active Love*” (359). Sandoz explains that “The tension of faith and Christ as the affirmation of the essence of eternal Being *who* is Love and Freedom and Truth is the ‘feeling-idea’ which dominates the Legend and which makes this piece of writing *itself* the climax of Dostoevsky’s Christian metaphysics” (360). Here, Sandoz explains Ivan’s claim that everyone in the Legend would immediately recognize Christ can be credited to Dostoevsky’s emphasis on the principle of “Active Love” or “feeling-idea” in the pre-Nietzschean, religious man. The participation of man in this recognition, then, is much more important than the participation of the divine.

The investigation of recognition, however, is exactly where the distinction between an Eastern icon and Western renaissance Christological depiction lies. The mere basis that Bruegel’s painting is part of a landscape series separates it inherently from Rublev’s depiction of

the same scene: where an icon strives to focus on the figures and cause the landscape to vanish almost entirely, the Renaissance painter uses the landscape to ground his scene, first and foremost, on a familiar earth.

Tarkovsky, like Bruegel when he placed Mary, John, and the holy women at the foreground of his painting, is concerned with the question of physical placement. In fact, the first words uttered by Theophanes in the chapter of *The Passion According to Andrei* are: “so you’ve decided to put the apostle on the left, Andrei.” The significance of Andrei’s place as an icon painter is often remarked upon in the film, and this question of placement, as in Bruegel’s painting, has the power to transform the weight of the work altogether. Later, Andrei will place his icon’s subjects in the center, thereby presenting his compelling case that it is vital to be non-vague when painting about Christ.

Despite the landscape and foreground’s ubiquitous qualities, however, Bruegel places Jesus within his own time, fifteen hundred years after he was crucified, in order to investigate his own relationship to the story and bridge the gap between the past and the present, unlike Rublev who, as aforementioned, strives to divorce these figures entirely from our linear concept of time. For example, it is not Roman soldiers that escort Christ to the cross, but the red-tunic wearing mercenaries of Bruegel’s Netherlands. The holy women are dressed in the clothes that would have been worn at the time of the Crucifixion, while the rest of the figures, with the exception of Christ himself, are dressed in the Flemish garments of Bruegel’s time. By implementing attire from his era, not only does Bruegel rectify the rift that exists in the centuries between the event itself and his own time, he takes a step further and blurs the line between elements of Christ-era Jerusalem and sixteenth century Netherlands in the painting. The clothing worn in *Andrei*

Rublev's sequence, too, is contemporary to Foma's world, yet the presence of rustic carts and animals combine the scene with Bruegel's painting, as elements in Bruegel's painting unite themselves with that which occurred fifteen hundred years earlier.

The worn-down dress of Christ also hints at the relationship between two kinds of categories of iconographic depictions: The Crucified Christ, in which Christ is depicted on and around the cross surrounded by the Virgin, St. John, the thieves, and more holy figures, and depictions of the *Noli Me Tangere*¹¹ or the *Road to Emmaus*.¹² Resurrection images in which Christ is shown as a gardener or a pilgrim and is oftentimes not easily recognizable. In Bruegel's painting, both kinds of images are synthesized successfully. As in *Emmaus*, Christ is hardly recognizable and almost effectively hidden in the frame, while still adhering to the rules of *The Crucified Christ*, thereby making *The Procession to Calvary* an unmistakably Christological image--which also poses the question of inherent recognizability through faith. By exploring both of these kinds of paintings, Tarkovsky asserts the infinite quality of Christ as he exists before and after the crucifixion, considering his non-linear relationship with humanness, in addition to claiming that it is through the medium of painting that this quality can best be explored.

By consolidating *Andrei Rublev's* subject with a painting that Rublev predates by a century and a half, Tarkovsky comments on the relationship between creation and transfiguration. That Foma is able to consider and reinterpret a painting that he will not know in his lifetime breaks sequential time, and recontextualizes it within the bounds of faith; indeed, God does not know time as we know it; for a figure who has anticipated all events on earth,

¹¹ Noli me tangere ("touch me not") is the Latin version of a phrase spoken by Jesus to Mary Magdalene when she recognized him after his resurrection in John 20:17

¹² Luke 24:13-35

Bruegel's painting already exists, and has eternally existed, and will continue to exist. Thus, Andrei and Theophanes consider Jesus in a linear fashion: were he to return, his own attitudes, alongside outside perceptions of him, would have changed based on a modernizing society. But Foma challenges that notion through his own artistic vision by foreshadowing a painting which breaks the boundaries of linear time, and brings his own personal voice into the vision, transforming it into something that is at once subjective and intimate. In *Sculpting in Time*, Tarkovsky remarks upon the difficulties of representing a particular time period. He states

We cannot reconstruct the fifteenth century exactly, however thoroughly we study all the things that remain from it. Our awareness of that time is totally different from that of the people who lived then. But nor do we think of Rublyov's 'Trinity' in the same way as his contemporaries, and yet the 'Trinity' has gone on living through the centuries: it was alive then, and is so now, and it is a link between the people of that century and this (79).

Here, Tarkovsky remarks upon the dangers of attempting to contain a study of a historical moment within that moment. He argues that the modern perspective is not one that can be erased, nor should it; if the Trinity exists now, then the fifteenth century Trinity should be considered with that in mind.

Following the sudden death of Foma, Tarkovsky applies a different kind of study on creation than his dealings with Renaissance art in the film's final segment titled "The Bell." The sequence takes place twenty years after the conversation between Theophanes and Andrei in the woods, and Russia remains in a cycle of mortal sin and despair: in a catastrophic, biblical flood-like manner, the Bubonic Plague has wiped out many of the people. "The Bell" follows a young boy who claims to have learned the secret of bell-making from his distinguished bellmaker father, and is subsequently commissioned by the city to produce a church bell. His method of creation begins with a distinct air of egoism. The film, which performs ultimately as a

study of the events leading up to a series of acclaimed icon paintings, investigates the separation of self required in artistic conception.

In his analysis of the bell's creation, Tarkovsky once again alludes to artistic representations of moments in scripture. At the beginning of his process, the young bellmaker searches for the perfect clay with which to cast his bell. He rubs it between his fingers and watches it dissipate in the rain, a gesture which recalls Foma washing of the clay from his paintbrush following his Christological vision. From mere touch, the young boy is able to discern that *this* clay is the key to his craft which suggests a kind of artistic authority that transcends basic egoism or motivation, and afterwards he lies prostrate on the ground as if in a transcendent state of discovery.



(fig. 6) The young bellmaker finds the perfect clay in *Andrei Rublev*

Tarkovsky here implements an image (fig. 6) that is physiologically reminiscent of Renaissance depictions of a moment from the Acts of the Apostles in which Saul, on his way to

Damascus, is struck by a light from heaven. The story recounts: “He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you, Lord?’ Saul asked. ‘I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,’ he replied. ‘Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.’ (Acts 9:4-6). This moment has also been represented in Fra Angelico’s *The Conversion of St. Paul* (1430), Giovanni Bellini’s *The Conversion of St. Paul* (1472), and Caravaggio’s *Conversion on the Way to Damascus* (1601) (fig. 7), all depicting Paul splayed on the ground like the young bellmaker. The passage represents a divine mission that later strikes a connection with the young boy’s prostrate gesture referenced here by Tarkovsky, which suggests an allowance for an appropriation of the self and separation from egotistical will, which bridges the gap slightly between a reference to Caravaggio’s Renaissance painting and Andrei Rublev’s looming icons.



(fig. 7) Caravaggio's *Conversion on the Way to Damascus* (1601)

As the sequence moves forward, the young boy adheres to the disposition that is required to paint an icon and transforms into a state of fear and trembling.¹³ He acknowledges that he will be whipped and flayed if the bell does not chime, and his physical disposition reflects that state of awareness. The young boy, exhausted, leans on Andrei and thereby reconnects him with the narrative of creation (though he has not yet himself been able to create). Andrei finds a kindred spirit in the young boy, and Tarkovsky represents this in the plains on which they are rendered.

¹³ Terminology seen notably in Philippians 2:12, later referenced by Søren Kierkegaard in his philosophical study on Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son, Isaac (Gen 22:1-19)

In one moment, Andrei looks down at the young boy from above, as though he is perceiving him as an apprentice-type figure like Foma, though the young boy ends up being the one who inspires Andrei's bravery in re-starting his process of creation, and not the other way around.

It is significant to note, here, the difference between Caravaggio and Bruegel's depictions of the Conversion of Saul. In Caravaggio's version, which Tarkovsky adheres to more closely, Saul is at the center of the frame and is situated in an unmistakable fashion; the subject is clear, which builds on the structural composition of an icon painting. But in Bruegel's (fig. 8), he is difficult to find, and is thus reminiscent of the complicated nature of recognizing divine scenes through Tarkovsky's anamorphic lens.



(fig. 8) Pieter Bruegel's *Conversion of Paul* (1567)

The young boy's creation process continues with his digging into the ground to create a casting pit, which invokes a self-effacing image that Tarkovsky challenges, in turn, with a slow,

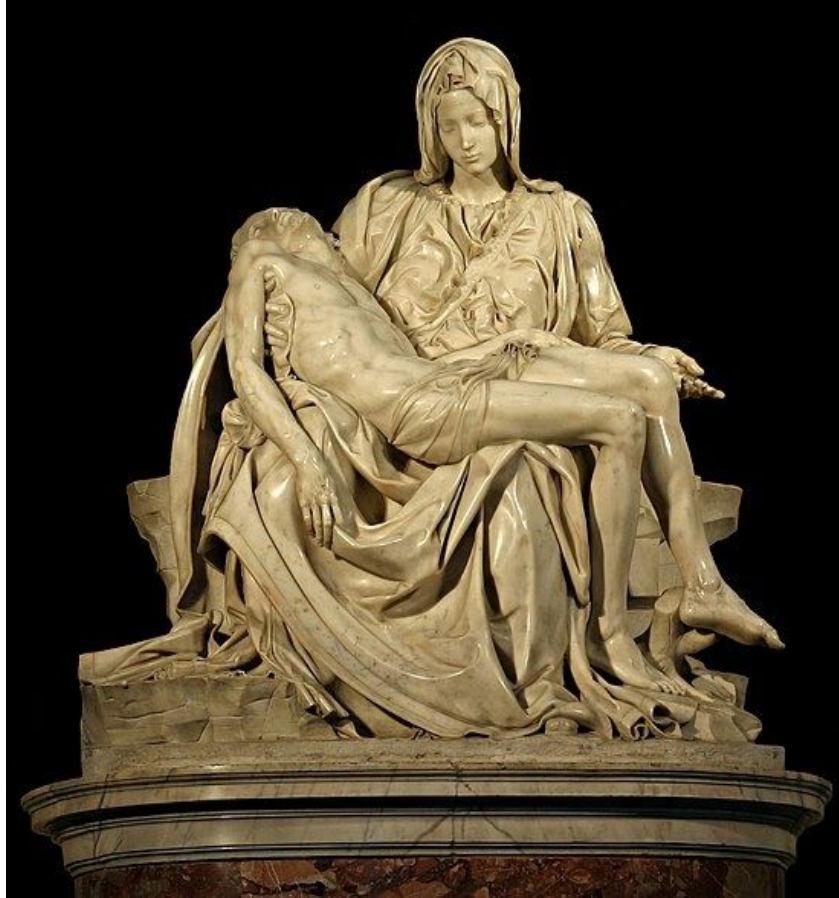
ascending God's-eye shot that acts as a comment on the small, meager nature of the artist in relation to his art. This is representative of the relationship between an icon painter and his icon, and the separation of self and ego involved in that kind of creation. When the bell does ring, the young boy weeps in sorrow and relief. He admits to Andrei: "my father never passed on the secret," and Andrei holds him in a gesture which mimics a pietá¹⁴;¹⁵ (fig. 9) a stage of the Christological procession which occurs in succession with what Foma imagined (fig. 10). The young boy's confession emboldens Andrei, who before was not able to



(fig. 9) Andrei comforts the young bellmaker in *Andrei Rublev*

¹⁴ Pity.

¹⁵ Most famously a Renaissance sculpture by Michelangelo Buonarroti, which depicts Mary sorrowfully holding the dead body of Christ after the crucifixion.



(fig. 10) Michelangelo's rendition of the *pietà* (1498)

paint a rendition of the Last Judgment,¹⁶ because he believes he does not deserve the glory of doing so. However, when Andrei realizes the young boy has the courage to create art as an endeavor that is entirely individual, he finally comprehends the state required for true artistic creation. He responds to the young boy. "Let's do it together," he says. "You and I. You'll cast bells. I'll paint icons."

In *Iconostasis*, Florensky argues that "the basis of every icon is spiritual experience" (75), and so the successive movement of the young boy's courage to Andrei's artistic inspiration indicates a correlation between the bellmaking and Andrei's future icons. Unlike Foma, who,

¹⁶ Typically refers to Apocalyptic language used in the Bible, specifically the Gospel According to Matthew 7:13-23

though his vision serves as a premise upon which Andrei's understanding of recognition via icons is cemented, was sacrificed for Andrei's inability to create throughout the majority of *Andrei Rublev*, the young bellmaker now lives and will continue to live alongside Andrei and give him the courage he needs to finally create. These two young artists' visions ultimately unite to refine Andrei's work.

With that, *Andrei Rublev* comes to an ecstatic and cathartic finale in which the methodical black-and-white suddenly transforms into a near-abstract montage of luminous color. Tarkovsky presents, for the first time in the film, Andrei's work: indistinguishable geometric gold shapes which introduce a fundamental color in the icon scheme, Christ holding the Holy Book, Christ's two fingers raised. The sequence shows eventually, in full, Andrei's most recognized work, *The Trinity* (1425) (fig. 11), which was completed a year after the creation of the bell, which represents the three angels who visited Abraham as stand-ins for the Christian Trinity, "one God in three persons" – the Father, the Son (Jesus Christ), and the Holy Spirit. Florensky discusses the



(fig. 11) Andrei Rublev's *The Trinity* (1411 or 1425-27)

painting in *Iconostasis*: “The iconic subject of three angels seated at a table existed within the canonically determined ecclesiastical art long before St. Andrei. In this sense, he invented nothing new” (83). The transformation of the painting to the cinematic format, alongside the context of the young artists, however, transforms its meaning.

The way Tarkovsky frames the painting allows the film to finally transcend formal filmmaking elements. Through this, he asserts that Andrei has, at last, mastered creation. The halo shines, the jewels glisten, and the face of divine figures are confidently presented, finally allowing the viewer a window into the sublime. In his book *Andrei Tarkovsky: Elements of Cinema*, Robert Bird recalls Tarkovsky's discussion of his work at the Artistic Council of the Sixth Creative Unit of Mosfilm: “the shift to color for the closing display of Rublev's icons [in

Tarkovsky's words] 'will create the unusual effect of a blow, the very step which, perhaps, somewhere conventionally divides life and art'" (43). He later argues, too, that "While *The New Testament Trinity* is indeed shown in full, it is flanked by broad bands of empty space, which underscore its subordination to the space of the cinematic screen" (78). And life and art are divided precisely in the culmination of both Foma's Christological vision and the courage of the young bellmaker, which function as a framing device that inspires Andrei to finally lean into a faith in his artistic creation, and, in doing so, seemingly have the courage to break the aforementioned cyclical pattern. When the Tatars burn Andrei's church, ash rains from the sky like snow, indicating the necessity for rebuilding after the return of this narrative. Indeed, the young bellmaker succeeds in rebuilding: he knows he must dig into the ground to make a great piece of art. And he does.

But *Andrei Rublev* doesn't end with images of Andrei's final creation. The film's final image is of four horses standing in the rain; but, though perhaps an allusion to the Book of Revelation, Tarkovsky's horses, unlike the horsemen of the apocalypse, are entirely unthreatening (fig. 12). Still, their presence in the film bears significance in that the image is a notable epilogue to the display of Andrei's icon paintings. Note, here, that Revelation is often used as a synonym for Apocalypse. In the New Testament, the horsemen signify a total apocalypse, so Tarkovsky's placement of this image at the end of *Andrei Rublev*, similar to how this version of the apocalypse is placed at the end of the Bible, suggests that the breaking of the cycle is merely a personal conquest for Andrei, and that the biblical narrative still exists in his Tatar-invaded world, as well as any world the artist attempts to transform.



(fig. 12) The four horses in the final frame of *Andrei Rublev*

Ivan makes an effort similar to *Andrei Rublev's* final sequence to culminate the elements of his poem as it comes to an end. The Inquisitor argues that Jesus is in agreement with him regarding the power dynamic of this relationship as he recalls a perceived resistance: “You did not come down from the cross when they shouted to you, mocking and reviling you: ‘Come down from the cross and we will believe that it is you.’ You did not come down because, again, you did not want to enslave man by a miracle and thirsted for faith that is free, not miraculous” (256). But Ivan might refute this point. The Inquisitor argues that it is precisely in Jesus’ refusal to come down from the cross that He imprisoned the people, not only by becoming their savior through death, but also by leaving them on their own. The basic principle of a “return” makes it so that man becomes more of a prisoner, as they have waited “even with greater faith, for fifteen centuries have gone by since men ceased to receive pledges from heaven” (247).

Not once in “The Grand Inquisitor” does Jesus speak. He does not need to. Joseph Frank argues that Christ’s silence “serves as a goad to the conscience of the Grand Inquisitor, who,

while pretending to carry out Christ's wishes on earth, knows he is doing the opposite. The monologue of the Inquisitor, swinging between his accusations against Christ and self-exculpation, betrays the tension gnawing at his conscience" (*Dostoevsky* 873). The Inquisitor's questioning of Jesus' dogma fits perfectly into His narrative of rebellion and then martyrdom; the Inquisitor does all the work as Jesus watches contently his perfectly oiled, timeless machine of love and defiance manifest until it ends in an inevitable punishment, (in this case, the burning at the stake). Ivan ends his poem:

The old man would have liked him to say something, even something bitter, terrible. But suddenly he approaches the old man in silence and gently kisses him on his bloodless, ninety-year-old lips. That is the whole answer. The old man shudders. Something stirs at the corners of his mouth; he walks to the door, opens it, and says to him: 'Go and do not come again... do not come at all... never, never!' And he lets him out into the dark squares of the city. The prisoner goes away (262).

The Inquisitor hopes for an answer from Jesus, and this is because he hopes that his System in the Spanish Inquisition is such that it will defy Christianity in a way that was ultimately unsuccessful in Jerusalem. But Jesus merely "gently kisses him." He has returned into an unfamiliar world as the same loving being. The kiss ultimately functions as a gesture of gratitude toward the Inquisitor for having proven the prophecy; the narrative of redemption is doomed to repeat itself eternally. For this reason, the Inquisitor has lost the fight. The Inquisitor beseeches Jesus "do not come again," shuddering at the thought of such impossibility of escape from a narrative that traps its subjects eternally. But Jesus, in "The Grand Inquisitor" referred to as "the prisoner" is also trapped within the narrative, begging the question: what is the real sacrifice? The hanging on the cross or the awakening three days later?

Alyosha inherits a likeness to Christ while acting as a pupil to Ivan, and reveals this through both his silence and his final action in the chapter. Once Ivan has finished the poem,

Alyosha “[stands] up, [goes] over to him in silence, and gently kisse[s] him on the lips” (263). Alyosha, a man of great faith, performs this as a gesture to demonstrate to Ivan that, despite his views that Alyosha perceives as sacreligious, he still loves him. The kiss also demonstrates Alyosha’s attentiveness to the details of the story: like Jesus before the Inquisitor, he is silent during this interrogation of Jesus, interjecting only to gain a deeper understanding of his brother’s views. In addition, it points to the original source material of the Bible: in which “Judas, one of the Twelve, suddenly arrived. A large mob, with swords and clubs, was with him from the chief priests and elders of the people. His betrayer had given them a sign: ‘The One I kiss, He’s the One; arrest Him!’ So he went right up to Jesus and said, ‘Greetings, Rabbi!’ and kissed Him” (Mt. 26:47-49). Here, Dostoevsky adds a level of irony to the narrative--indeed, Alyosha’s gesture is one of love, but it is also one that warns of betrayal. When kissing Ivan, Alyosha proves that he has not only listened whole-heartedly to “The Grand Inquisitor,” but understood its message. Thus, he performs the role of Jesus, as Andrei performs as a divine creator, and situates Ivan’s before him as the Inquisitor.

Dostoevsky composes the kiss as intentionally vague. Frank interprets the action as proof of Ivan’s deceptive nature. He calls attention to the fact that

This sentiment motivates Alyosha to kiss Ivan on the lips, and he is then jokingly accused of “plagiarism” by an Ivan “highly delighted” at this symbol-laden reenactment. Presented here is his mostly humanly appealing side, Ivan is shown as fully aware of the grief gnawing at his brother’s heart at this moment. Dostoevsky, however, did not wish to end on such a sympathetic image of Ivan, who had succeeded in provoking Alyosha to approve of an act of revenge. And so the narrative introduces a subtly discordant note in the final paragraphs as Ivan walks away after directing his brother, “and now you go to the right and I to the left.” Alyosha “notices that Ivan swayed as he walked and that the right shoulder looked lower than the left” (14: 241). Traditionally, the devil is associated with the left side, and because he limps when he walks, the left shoulder seems higher than the right. The narrator thus uses folk beliefs to associate Ivan with the dread spirit the latter had just evoked so approvingly in his legend (878).

Indeed, even though the reader may be inclined to collapse the characters of Alyosha and Dostoevsky, Frank argues that Dostoevsky suggests a naivete inherent in Alyosha's character, both in his committing what may be an act mimicking biblical betrayal,¹⁷ but also in his siding with what Frank refers to as a "dread spirit." Dostoevsky, then, refuses to favor one voice over the other, thereby allowing the characters to leverage themselves into favorability in this struggle between reason and faith.

By posing the poem as a philosophical atheistic thought experiment, Ivan, like Jesus, inadvertently tests whether or not the Passion narrative will repeat itself. Therefore, in short, Alyosha seemingly transcends what Ivan proclaims to be an inevitably cyclical narrative by imitating Christ in gesture. Alyosha's act of love gently repudiates Ivan's, who understands it on a basic, human level. Earlier in *The Brothers Karamazov*, Ivan asserts his perspective on love, telling Alyosha, "I want to live, and I do live, even if it be against logic. Though I do not believe in the order of things, still the sticky little leaves that come out in the spring are dear to me, the blue sky is dear to me, some people are dear to me, whom one loves sometimes" (230). Here, Ivan uses the "sticky little leaves" as a seemingly frivolous allegory for a love that is romantic and impulsive, that do not comply with "the order of things."

At first, Alyosha struggles to accept Ivan's leaves, asking after Ivan has completed his Grand Inquisitor poem: "the sticky little leaves, and the precious graves, and the blue sky, and the woman you love! How will you live, what will you love them with?" (263), to which Ivan responds "if, indeed, I hold out for the sticky little leaves, I shall love them only remembering you" (263). Indeed, Ivan's version of love is at odds with Alyosha's, yet it is the sticky little

¹⁷ Judas's kiss

leaves that help him to understand his brother, and thus encourages Alyosha to transcend the narrative by way of his own understanding of a Christ-like, all-accepting love. In order to love Ivan, Alyosha recognizes that he must first understand him, just as the existence of God is predicated on a human brain that is psychologically able to interpret something divine. One must, at this moment, recall Ivan's important question of whether we should "love life or the meaning of it" (209), to which Alyosha might instruct him to love life *as* the meaning of it.

Like Andrei's proclamation at the end of *Andrei Rublev* that he will "paint icons," and thereby push back against Russia's current atmosphere of sin and resolving to use his art to attempt to break the cycle of Christ's return to earth, Alyosha, at the end of *The Brothers Karamazov*, similarly transcends Ivan's proposed concept of an inevitability of return. At the end of the novel, Alyosha attends the funeral of a young boy, Ilyusha, and, while there, is celebrated by his friends. Alyosha tells the children: "dear friends, do not be afraid of life! How good life is when you do something good and rightful!" "Yes, yes, the boys repeated ecstatically. 'Karamazov, we love you!' a voice, which seemed to be Kartashov's, exclaimed irrepressibly. "We love you, we love you," everyone joined in. Many had tears shining in their eyes (776). The novel's final page culminates in a communion that functions as a testimony to Alyosha's narrative transcendence. Through his emphasis on a disposition of love throughout the novel, he situates himself inadvertently as a Christ-like figure in order to disprove Ivan's hypothesis. Ivan tells Ilyusha's friends "certainly we shall rise" (776). His language here alludes to a Christ-like rising from the dead, but transforms himself and the boys as the subject of the sentence in the place of Christ. Like Andrei and the young bellmaker rising from their crouched positions to "cast bells" and "paint icons," so, too, will Alyosha and the children, undoubtedly rise.

But, just as Tarkovsky suggests another apocalypse that follows Andrei's optimistic attempt to purge sin through icon painting with *Andrei Rublev's* final image symbolic of the four horsemen, so does Alyosha's encouragement of the apostolic children at his wake not, in Dostoevsky's eyes, necessarily break the cycle of sin. Indeed, Alyosha, like Andrei, epitomizes Christ-like characteristics at the end of *The Brothers Karamazov*, but Dostoevsky ensures the continuation of sin in the character of Ivan. Sandoz remarks upon Ivan's orientation, explaining that Ivan's

rebellion is not against God but against His Creation. The gnostic complexion of this rebellion is patent. Personally and concretely, that is, beyond his 'fantasy' of theocratic socialism, the issue of 'Everything is lawful' is parricide: the murder of Fyodor Pavlovitch Karamazov by Smerdyakov, moral Caliban and biological half brother and spiritual son of Ivan. This 'direct attack against nature and procreation,' upon a despicable man whose nature is implanted in Ivan's own and keeps him from the God of Alyosha (but who is, nonetheless, his father), drives Ivan mad. Ivan has rebelled ostensibly because of outrage at suffering and out of humanitarian pity, because of revulsion to killing. But he finds that, consequential to his 'humanitarian' solution, after the supreme crime of deicide, the Nietzschean murder of God, there can follow only *parricide*. The realization that the cure was worse than the disease drove Ivan mad. Thence, killing, and killing, and killing, as Dostoevsky knew so well (364).

Here, Sandoz argues that, in the character of Ivan, Dostoevsky suggests an inevitable post-apocalyptic apocalypse. Perhaps ironically, Ivan's rebellion can be understood as a direct or indirect reaction to the Christ-like Alyosha; a reaction in which parricide, the inverse of the Crucifixion narrative, is enacted. Ivan is, indeed, driven mad by the theocratic socialist ideal that *everything is lawful*, and, later in *The Brothers Karamazov*, is met by a "visitor" he believes to be the devil. The visitor, likely a manifestation of Ivan's anxiety, explains to him

there is no law for God! Where God stands--there is the place of God! Where I stand, there at once will be the foremost place... 'everything is permitted,' and that's that! It's all very nice; only if one wants to swindle, why, I wonder, should one also need the sanction of truth? But such is the modern little Russian man: without such a sanction, he doesn't even dare to swindle, so much does he love the truth... (649)

The devil here notes that there is an inherent opposition between lawlessness and truth. He seemingly confirms Ivan's anxieties expressed in the Grand Inquisitor, in that a permission for sin; an atmosphere that suggests "everything is permitted" creates a strange paradoxically subservient power dynamic. Ivan finds it impossible, then, especially as a "modern Russian man" himself, to come to terms with the conflict presented here: either religious law exists, or it very much does not exist, and if it does not exist, then one is thrown into societal torment, and if it does exist, then one must work to correct societal flaws and be presented with a situation more dire than the sin itself, (in the Karamazov's case, the murder of the father).

Tarkovsky and Dostoevsky similarly employ elements of Christ-like depictions in the Bible (a loving replication of a kiss of betrayal, for example, or, more broadly, an ability to persist in the face of adversity), in order to express what would be required to break the cycle of a repetitive return to the narrative of Christ's crucifixion. In doing so, the importance of a divergence from sin is heavily shrouded with a necessity to paradoxically continually reproduce recreations of the scene, thereby participating in the very repetition, and producing what may indeed be a cure worse than the disease.

Chapter II

The Voice Belongs to the Silence: *The Sacrifice*'s Linguistic Reframing of "The Binding of Isaac" and Subsequent Subversion of the Abrahamic Knight of Faith

Twenty years after the release of *Andrei Rublev*, Tarkovsky premiered his seventh and final feature film, *The Sacrifice* (1986), a semi-autobiographical portrait of Alexander, a middle-aged man struggling with his relationship to God in the midst of an impending nuclear Holocaust. Like *Andrei Rublev*, the film grapples with the implications of the cinematic adaptation of a biblical narrative, which it focuses on through its allusion to philosophical texts that consider the critical division between language and religious materialism. Specifically in his recreation of the Old Testament's story of Abraham's near-sacrifice of his son Isaac on Mount Moriah, Tarkovsky adapts a self-reflexive and referential literary vocabulary in an attempt to both highlight the relationship between the film and its source material, and the significance of a modern adaptation of a biblical narrative.

Genesis 22 describes the event of Abraham's expedition in nineteen verses. God first instructs Abraham, "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you" (Gen 22:2). Abraham obeys the command, and, once he has reached the top of Mount Moriah "bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son" (Gen 22:10-11). God intervenes, however, and commands Abraham, "Do not lay a hand on the boy... Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son" (Gen 22:12). In his modern retelling of the story, which is often referred to as "the Binding of Isaac," Tarkovsky essentially implements

the same narrative structure: a command, a pilgrimage, an intervention, but, unlike in Genesis's somewhat terse account, *The Sacrifice* engages with philosophical and literary texts, and thereby considers the way interpretation of scripture can posit an inherent barrier between faith and the faithful.

The Sacrifice's opening sequence lays out a foundation for a philosophical inquiry into the Binding of Isaac. Alexander, a retired aesthetic lecturer and self-proclaimed public intellectual, attempts to simply convey faith to his son who is temporarily mute due to an operation, whom he refers to as "Little Man." 'In the beginning was the word,' says Alexander, 'but you are mute, mute as a fish.' Here, Alexander introduces a discrepancy between language and faith. From the reference to the opening line of the Gospel of John, the fourth canonical gospel, Tarkovsky situates *The Sacrifice* intentionally in conversation with a sentence that's semantics is debated in scholarly circles.

Indeed, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1) is an abstract rendering that cannot stand without explanation. In his book *Jesus as God: The New Testament Use of Theos in Reference to Jesus*, Murray J. Harris states that "the term God is being used to denote his nature or essence, and not his person. But in normal English usage 'God' is a proper noun, referring to the person of the Father or corporately to the three persons of the Godhead" (69). Here, Harris expresses a dichotomy between God as a corporal and divine being, and the way in which the gospels' sentence structure (the use of a noun as opposed to an adjective) complicates the meaning that is seemingly more straightforward in other areas of scripture--for example, in Genesis 22.

But, in appending his reference to John with a comment on his son's muteness, Alexander affords an altogether different, and, likely, erroneous, interpretation of the verse. Alexander interprets the line literally, and gleans a rigid relationship between faith and language. It can be derived that, to Alexander, scripture *becomes* God, and he subsequently views speech as the connective link between man and God. In addition, by following his recitation of scripture with "but," the conjunctive adverb that changes the sentiment of his sentence altogether, Alexander asserts that silence is inherently bad when considering faith. In this philosophy, Little Man has become less than human: he is a "fish," and this characterization suggests that, in Alexander's eyes, speech is the *only* mode by which man can approach the divine. This may be a product of his self-centered disposition, his career-emphasis on language, his crucial misunderstanding of scripture, or Pneumatology,¹⁸ or all of the above. But, in Alexander's demotion of his child to a fish, he indicates that, without speech, we are to be considered mere creatures, and thus essentially impossible to communicate with. It is appropriate to suggest, then, that Alexander's definition of successful speech is communication: when his words are not understood and returned, they are no longer of use to him.

In *Fear and Trembling* (1843), Søren Kierkegaard's (under the pseudonymous authorship of Johannes de silentio¹⁹) analysis of Genesis 22, silence is a critical component of faith. Kierkegaard confirms that the highest act of faith, which is, in Abraham's case, a willingness to sacrifice his son at the request of God, requires a teleological suspension of the ethical, or else it is an act that is grotesque and murderous. Kierkegaard explains Abraham's actions:

He acts by virtue of the absurd, for it is precisely the absurd that he as the single individual is higher than the universal. This paradox cannot be mediated, for as soon as Abraham begins to do so, he has to confess that he was in a spiritual trial, and if that is

¹⁸ The metaphorical "breath" of the Holy Spirit.

¹⁹ Which translates to "John the silent"

the case, he will never sacrifice Isaac, or if he did sacrifice Isaac, then in repentance he must come back to the universal. He gets Isaac back again by virtue of the absurd. Therefore, Abraham is at no time a tragic hero, but is something entirely different, either a murderer or a man of faith. Abraham does not have the middle term that saves the tragic hero (56-57).

Unlike in the case of a tragic hero like Greek mythology's Agamemnon²⁰, Abraham cannot communicate his choice to his loved ones, because it does not exist within the boundaries of the ethical, and moves for the duration of his excursion into the boundaries of faith, or, as Kierkegaard refers to it, that of the "absurd." Kierkegaard defines the ethical, simply, as the universal, and the ability to communicate yourself and your intentions to others, and be communicated with accordingly. Once Abraham receives private communication from God, he becomes an emigrant from the ethical sphere, and must therefore conceal his undertaking from his wife Sarah and, most importantly, from Isaac. Any attempt to communicate about this undertaking becomes an effort to rationalize the absurd, and becomes, subsequently, a "confess[ion] that he was in spiritual trial," which Kierkegaard believes will inevitably be met with dissuasion from Sarah and Isaac due to the morbid nature of God's request.

Therefore, by condemning Little Man 'but you are mute, mute as a fish,' Tarkovsky introduces Alexander as a character unlike Abraham due to his insistence on conveying faith, which he defines as John's "Word," through language. Indeed, Abraham is not silent; at least not in any literal sense. When venturing up the mountain, Isaac points out to his father "'The fire and wood are here,' Isaac said, 'but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?'/ Abraham answered, 'God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son.' And the two of them went on together" (Gen 22: 7-8). When his son inquires about the lamb, Abraham knows the only thing

²⁰ Agamemnon is given the choice between saving his daughter and saving his nation.

he cannot do is be silent, for, by doing so, he runs the risk of becoming conspicuous to those who still operate under the ethical sphere. So he defers the meaning of his statement by offering a sentence that functions on multiple levels and allows a variety of interpretations.²¹ The “lamb” in question, for example, could, for Isaac, (and Abraham, on a certain level), be regarded as a term of endearment used to describe a young child, or, if Abraham’s statement is indeed literal, it could either be a warning, a statement, or a divine prophecy.

In *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, George Ferguson points out that “a typical reference [to the lamb] is John 1:29, ‘The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!’” (20). Abraham’s possible comparison of Isaac to a lamb, then, confuses even more his patriarchal position in Genesis 22, as Isaac may not only be a sacrificial object, but a divine character, like Christ, delivered for a very specific purpose. In confusing the discourse between himself and Isaac, Abraham manages to remain silent while speaking, which is exemplified in Isaac’s acceptance of his father’s statement, and then “the two of them went on together.”

Kierkegaard reminds the reader that actual silence and the silence of incommunicability are not the same thing. He states “Even though I go on talking night and day without interruption, if I cannot make myself understood when I speak, then I am not speaking” (113). By introducing God as the subject that will resolve Isaac’s inquiry, Abraham defers the answer to the question, and thereby altogether avoids having to confront his aforementioned emigration from the ethical sphere, while still remaining within that sphere in Isaac’s eyes through literal speech. The semantic structure of his answer, too, is significant, as Abraham claims that “God

²¹ See: “How to avoid Speaking: Denials” *Derrida and Negative Theology*. Eds. Harold Coward and Toby Foshay. SUNY, 1989, (73 – 136), “Cogito et histoire de la folie”

himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son” which may indicate either that the answer is directed toward Isaac, or that Isaac is, himself, the burnt offering; (say it outloud). So Abraham is able to convey two meanings at once--one public and one private--in order to avoid what Kierkegaard refers to as a “confession.” He has, as Kierkegaard suggests, gone on talking day and night without interruption, but he has made himself understood to both Isaac and himself, even though the modes of understanding are not nearly the same.

Kierkegaard finally remarks upon the duality of Abraham’s speech, explaining, “If Abraham in resignation had merely relinquished Isaac and done no more, he would have spoken an untruth, for he does indeed know that God demands Isaac as a sacrifice, and he knows that he himself in this very moment is willing to sacrifice him” (119). Abraham takes on this apophatic theology when he “multipl[ies] the defenses” in his communication with Isaac. For example, by telling Isaac “God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt offering” (Gen 22:8), Abraham offers a defense in place of the true answer (Isaac *is* the burnt offering), not by staying silent, but by providing an answer approximate to the truth.

In his book *How to do Things with Words*, J.L. Austin investigates a variety of methods and modes of speech. He explains that language can function on multiple levels at once, describing that “it is the happiness of the performative ‘I apologize’ which makes it the fact that I am apologizing: and my success in apologizing depends on the happiness of the performative utterance ‘I apologize’” (47). Here, Austin illustrates a multi-faceted kind of speech that not only describes an action while also eliciting a response, but also is contingent on the way that the action is perceived both by the person speaking, and the person being communicated with. Such is the basis of Abraham’s communication with Isaac: Isaac must be content with his father’s

answer, while Abraham must feel as though he has avoided lying, and, simultaneously, avoided revealing too much.

Kierkegaard discusses silence not only in the context of Abraham and Isaac, but in the context of general faith. In 1849 treatise *The Lily of the Field and the Bird in the Air*, he claims that “you cannot say this bellowing or this voice disturbs the silence. No, this belongs to the silence, is in a mysterious and thus in turn silent harmony with the silence; this increases it... it is silent, but its silence is expressive” (15). Here, Kierkegaard aligns silence with divinity, as it places no barrier between faith and its subject (the Lily, the Bird). But Kierkegaard’s description of silence is not strictly silent; no, the “bellowing or... voice [which] disturbs the silence” is in “silent harmony with the silence,” just as Abraham’s indirect answer to his son is, too, silence. But Alexander is unable to remain silent, and it seems to be his obsession with speech that “disturbs the silence.”

In *Andrei Rublev*, Andrei becomes the characterial antithesis of Alexander, in that he takes a decade-long vow of silence due to his supposed inability to reach God through his art. Though the silence seems to be something of a last resort, this kind of vow is accepted and appropriate as a method of humbling oneself and becoming more suited to approach the divine. Andrei refuses to disturb the silence which is, as Kierkegaard claims, a kind of prayer, and it seems to be all that *The Sacrifice*’s Alexander can do.

The significance of this hermeneutic²² language in *The Sacrifice* can perhaps be gleaned from understanding first the differences between Abraham and Alexander. Most notable is the characters’ relationships to God prior to embarking on their respective sacrificial conquests. In

²² Interpretation of biblical language

the chapters of Genesis involving Abraham, he is consistently described as attempting to communicate with God, as well as denoting a direct correlation between God and good fortune: “Then Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelek, his wife and his female slaves so they could have children again” (Gen 20:17). Alexander, on the other hand, seems to avoid the topic of God altogether, and, when confronted with the subject by the local postman, he admits his relationship to God is ‘non-existent. I am afraid.’ Once again, Alexander is portrayed with the burden of excess of speech (Even though I go on talking night and day without interruption, if I cannot make myself understood when I speak, then I am not speaking), and when the postman asks him about God, he does not hesitate to vocally confess a lack of faith. But, similar to Abraham’s deferral of his true sentiment when relating to Isaac in *Fear and Trembling*, Alexander inadvertently complicates his relationship with God even further through speech. Indeed, his confession could be read as his lack of faith being a result of his fear, or of his fear being the result of his inability for faith; or, perhaps, that he does not have a relationship to God, *and* he is afraid. For Abraham, it is speech that allows him to correctly perform his faith, but for Alexander, it is speech that only confuses his relationship to God.

Due to these contrasting relationships to divinity, Alexander’s Binding of Isaac narrative is structured differently from Abraham’s. While Abraham is chosen to sacrifice his son: “God tested Abraham. He said to him, ‘Abraham!’” (Gen 22:1), Tarkovsky represents Alexander’s emigration a little differently. Halfway through *The Sacrifice*, Alexander sits in solitary despair over newscasts that promise nuclear warfare. He privately recites the Lord’s Prayer,²³ and adds at the end a bargaining plea. ‘I will sacrifice anything,’ he says. ‘My house, my son, my voice, to

²³ Jesus’s instruction on how to pray, as told by the New Testament (Mt. 6:9, Lk. 11:2).

be rid of my fear. I *will* do it.’ Tarkovsky uses Alexander’s bargain as a framework for *The Sacrifice*’s sacrifice; Alexander, like Abraham, has a private address to God, and because of this, and what Kierkegaard refers to as an “Absolute Duty” toward God, the protagonist must abandon the ethical and commit a morbid act.

Austin’s definition of Performative Speech, which “do not ‘describe’ or ‘report’ or constate anything at all, are not ‘true or false’; and... the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as ‘just’, saying something” (5) is significant particularly in an analysis of prayer, which should neither serve the purpose of communication with God, as God should not be expected to answer, to negotiate, or to deliver information, as he is all-knowing. Thus, Alexander’s prayer *must* be performative, or else he has significantly misunderstood the function of prayer itself, and his performance must be an illustration of the faith that he previously admitted he did not have.

Austin acknowledges, too, that, though some words have the power to perform action, (an ordained minister can marry two people, for example), speech can also have no effect at all. He gives an example: “Consider ‘I divorce you’, said to a wife by her husband in a Christian country, and both being Christians rather than Mohammedans. In this case, it might be said, ‘nevertheless he has not (successfully) divorced her: we only admit some other verbal or non-verbal procedure’; or even possibly ‘we (*we*) do not admit any procedure at all” (27). When considering Austin’s example of the potential powerlessness of words, then, one is once again drawn to Kierkegaard’s definition of silence and the barrier it removes between faith and the faithful.

Though Alexander offers the conditions of his bargain, he never explicitly states the subject of his fear. Though it seems to be the logical conclusion that he fears nuclear destruction, it is important to recall the ambiguous fear he proclaims when inquired about his faith, (“non-existent, I am afraid”). If Alexander fears the non-existence of God, then the resolution of his bargain wouldn’t be the saving of the world, but rather the returned favor that would clearly announce the presence of God. And if, like he suggests in the film’s opening sequence, his fear is his cynicism regarding the teleology of man, then perhaps nuclear annihilation would be the appropriate response to his plea, like the event of the Flood,²⁴ or the Bible’s final Book of Revelation.

It is precisely this kind of subtle application of semantics, then, that changes the trajectory of the respective sacrifices. While Abraham is commanded to bring Isaac to Mount Moriah, Alexander declares that he will sacrifice “anything,” and thereby offers himself an array of choices. No entity explicitly responds to or requests anything of Alexander, however, and he is therefore offered a deluge of religious liberty and, ultimately, choice (the sacrifice of his house or his son *or* his voice). By affording his protagonist a monologue where Abraham was only offered the short response to a command, Tarkovsky suggests that it may perhaps be the freedom of language and ability to interpret words of scripture that has moved his character and his world which is under threat of another apocalyptic flood-like scenario farther from the *actual* definition of God; (one can only imagine that God would *not* offer Alexander a choice, but he offers himself one anyway).

²⁴ Genesis 6-9

As Sylvia Fleming Crocker points out in her article “Sacrifice in Kierkegaard’s ‘Fear and Trembling’”: “The knight of faith is not so much looking at the future as he is looking at God; he is relying not on his own powers of self-determination but on God’s determination of his future” (128). The difference between Alexander and Abraham, according to Crocker's interpretation of *Fear and Trembling*, would be that Abraham allows God to determine his future, whereas Alexander offers himself the agency to determine his own future. Crocker explains that Abraham’s disposition “was one of *not caring* whether he got Isaac back, but rather of trusting God to make disposition of the future. He is willing to have it either way: to let God take Isaac, or to return him to the father who loved him but would give him up, as *God willed*” (128). Here, Crocker enacts a passive choice offered to Abraham: life with Isaac, or life without Isaac, but a choice given to him by God rather than himself. In Alexander’s case, however, it is a choice between the end of the world and the sacrifice of an offering of his choosing, and, unlike Abraham, he cannot simply abide either choice.

It is important to note, here, that the Latin origin of the word sacrifice, *sacrificium*, (a sacrifice) which is derived from *sacrificus* (a performance of priestly actions), requires that the sacrifice be *sacra* (sacred). In addition, a terminological distinction is often made when discussing a priestly sacrifice, in that there is a sacrifice, and then a “bloodless sacrifice.” In *The Sacrifice*, Alexander offers himself the two distinct kinds of sacrifice, the blood sacrifice and the bloodless sacrifice, and, ultimately, gifts himself the choice of the bloodless sacrifice.

By the laws of Trinitarian Christian theology,²⁵ sacrifice is typically characterized by the primary example of God’s sacrifice of Christ in the canonical gospels of the New Testament to

²⁵ The belief of the threehead of God.

reconcile humankind and divinity and redeem the people from their innate predisposition toward Original Sin.²⁶ So a Christian sacrifice, unlike the *sacrificium*, requires an attentiveness to the familial structures and the iconic image of Christ on the cross presented in the New Testament, and in the Old Testament, with Abraham as a person situated by God to mend the broken covenant through his sacrifice of Isaac.²⁷

When Abraham keeps his promise and binds Isaac to the rock, he is met with further validating comments from God: “Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the angel of the Lord called out to him from heaven, ‘Abraham! Abraham!’” (Gen 22:10-11), whereas Alexander’s statement is never returned. At the end of *The Sacrifice*, Alexander burns his house down in response to what he interprets as God having answered his prayer and saving the world (this response comes in the form of silence; the world is still and quiet and therefore no longer seems to be in harm’s way). But in the film’s final moments, Little Man seems to have found his voice, and asks ‘In the beginning was the word. Why is that, papa?’ and Alexander is not there to answer.

As characters who defy the ethical, both Abraham and Alexander struggle to convey their own narratives. It seems as though Abraham’s sacrifice is not, in fact, Isaac, as Alexander’s is not his house, but their sacrifices are indeed indefinite sacrifices of the ethical by way of language. Alexander’s role as a retired aesthetic lecturer makes his relationship with language much more complicated than Abraham’s, and, as he grapples with philosophical and fictional texts alike, Tarkovsky makes this apparent even before introducing the film’s theological questions.

²⁶ Eve eating the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3.

²⁷ The broken covenant was predicated on God’s belief that “limited humans” could not properly atone for their Original Sin, or subsequent mortal sins.

In *The Sacrifice*'s opening sequence, Alexander laments over the sinful nature of the contemporary world. 'Our entire civilization is built on sin, from beginning to end,' he says to himself. 'We have acquired a dreadful disharmony, an imbalance, if you will, between our material and our real development. Our culture is defective. Perhaps you mean that we ought to study the problem and look for a solution together. Perhaps we could, if it wasn't so late.' He quickly qualifies his statement by quoting William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*: "Words, words, words" (II.II, 178), before declaring that he 'at last know[s] what Hamlet meant. Here, Alexander, like Shakespeare via Hamlet, considers the barrier between speech and action, and the ways in which speech can feel like action, and through that replace it. Yet, he does so using words; and not his own words, but words created hundreds of years prior and inevitably recontextualized within his twenty-first century.

When Hamlet laments, "Words, words, words," he has not only discovered an inability to express himself through words, but a subsequent inability to express himself in any other way. Thus, like Abraham and Alexander, he continues to speak. Hamlet attempts to convey this frustration to Polonius and expand the futility of these dreaded "words":

the satirical rogue says here that old men
 have grey beards; that their faces are wrinkled; their eyes
 purging thick amber and plum-tree gum; and that they have a
 plentiful lack of wit, together with most weak hams. All which,
 sir, though I most powerfully and potently believe, yet I hold it
 not honesty to have it thus set down (II, II: 1300-1306).

Here, Hamlet describes the book he is reading, recounting a description that begins with the plausible assertion that "old men have grey beards" and "their faces are wrinkled" and then descends into fanciful description of eye that purge "thick amber and plum-tree gum," but completes his summary with the admission that he "most powerfully and potently believe[s] the

descriptions]” as if he has no choice but to do so. Yet in this belief comes an innate contradiction: that he holds in it “not honesty and [has] to set it down” epitomizes the impossibility of Hamlet’s existence. He cannot believe words, yet he has no choice but to do so. Similarly, he cannot make himself understood when he speaks, yet it is all he can do.

Tarkovsky was heavily captivated by *Hamlet*’s narrative, and even attempted to stage it in the later years of his filmmaking career. Robert Bird explores Tarkovsky’s relationship to *Hamlet*, and states that “perhaps... Tarkovsky’s own visualization of *Hamlet* was so complete that it had completely merged the play with his mind, making it impossible to explain, let alone realize on the screen” (112). In addition, Tarkovsky once stated the significance of Shakespeare’s work in a diary entry, stating that “*Hamlet* — or a portion of it at least — should be filmed in Monument Valley. It’s astonishing that in places like this, where one ought to talk to God, Americans make Westerns like John Ford used to.” Tarkovsky’s mention of Monument Valley²⁸ expresses a correlation between *Hamlet* and a place in which man must act as a paramount individual in order to communicate with God.

The Sacrifice traverses its source material, Genesis 22, and Kierkegaard’s exegesis, in its exploration of the connections and subsequent paradoxes of faith and ethics. Perhaps more pertinent to the film, however, is its characterial restaging of *Hamlet*. In Alexander’s obsession with language and Hamlet-like soliloquies, he not only complicates his relationship with faith, but also begs the question of the legitimacy of the placement of the modern man within a revised biblical narrative.

²⁸ A valley in the Colorado Plateau that was a filming location for films like *Stagecoach* (1939) and *The Searchers* (1956), and is often considered to define the American West in cinema.

It is important to note, here, the structural discrepancies between the mediums used to inform and influence *The Sacrifice*. The film ultimately stands apart from the body of works that consider the Knight of Faith because it considers a more objective point of view than its predecessors. Inherent in the cinematic medium is an attention to background and often finer details, as well as sound (which, in the case of the aforementioned literary works, is only really grappled with in terms of speech). In addition, the viewer of the film seems to be addressed more directly than, for example, the reader of Genesis: where Genesis is something of a terse instructive, *The Sacrifice* must be filtered through the cinematic “eye” and be consciously or unconsciously referencing the presence of the camera, which itself can be perceived as a strange and unnatural barrier.

Because of the films’ awareness of its audience, then, it must be noted that the analysis of Alexander is inevitably different than the analysis of Abraham. Genesis presents Abraham with an omniscient objective voice that really only affords him one choice: sacrifice Isaac, or else be something of a villain, or at least a failure in the eyes of scripture. And even in Kierkegaard’s modern, rhapsodic interpretation, the story of Abraham and Isaac is ultimately told in the narrow, unforgiving voice of the philosopher without counter-points or room for alternative perspectives. So we have, on the one hand, a story that is more or less clear in its objectives, and, on the other hand, an interpretation of it that is more so about the author himself than the passage at hand. Tarkovsky does something radically different, however, in that he overwhelms the senses and refuses to reach a resolution at the end of the film.

So Tarkovsky has complicated the figure of Abraham by adjoining him to the iconic tragic hero of Hamlet, who, like Alexander, is a man of a torrent of contradictions and conflict.

This is expressed in particular through the language of Hamlet himself, who refuses to stop talking even when, like Abraham, he knows that he is unable to communicate himself, and, like Alexander, misunderstands and misrepresents his own feelings due to the frustrating approximate nature of language. When Hamlet encounters the supposed ghost of his father, he both rejoices and laments at the sight, demanding:

Why thy canoniz'd bones, hearsed in death,
 Have burst their cerements; why the sepulchre
 Wherein we saw thee quietly inurn'd,
 Hath op'd his ponderous and marble jaws
 To cast thee up again. What may this mean
 That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel,
 Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,
 Making night hideous, and we fools of nature
 So horridly to shake our disposition
 With thoughts beyond the reaches of our souls?
 Say, why is this? wherefore? What should we do? (I.IV, 675-686).

Here, Hamlet first scrutinizes the return of his father not in its psychological implications, but in the chilling details of his physical ascension: it is his “bones” that should have been eternally laid to rest that Hamlet is concerned with, and the “sepulchre” and its “marble jaws” that should have been impossible to divide. Hamlet then asks his father and, perhaps, himself “what may this mean,” inquiring a kind of conflict in faith; he is untrusting of what should, to a person of faith, be interpreted as a divine memorandum. He finishes his appeal by asking “what should we do?” which is Alexander’s core question in *The Sacrifice*. The two, then, find immediate connection in their traversal between an inclination toward faith and an inability to truly see what lies beyond their immediate power of recognition. Alexander has no choice but to believe that there is a God that he can make an appeal to, or else all is lost, just as Hamlet must trust that his father really has made a return, or else he is psychologically unsound. “What should we do?” resonates with

Hamlet's kind of psychological tragic hero, since his choices and actions, like Abraham's, exist on two separate plains: the ethical and the faithful.

Indeed, Hamlet understands that the appearance of his father's ghost will inevitably disrupt his world, just as Abraham and Alexander know that, once a sacrifice is enacted, the action defines the trajectory of his life. Before venturing to meet the ghost, Hamlet explains to Horatio: "If it assume my noble father's person,/ I'll speak to it, though hell itself should gape/ And bid me hold my peace" (I.II, 462-465). In the assertion that "hell itself should gape" if the figure before him is actually the ghost of his father, Hamlet concludes an inevitable rupture in his version of the ethical. In addition, Hamlet's sacrifice, which is, ultimately, his own life in the name of familial justice, ends a royal bloodline, just as the death of Isaac would permanently disrupt Abraham's genealogy. In Alexander's case, though, the disturbance is reversed: Little Man survives at the end of *The Sacrifice*, and the implications of the ultimate sacrifice are wholly unclear.

Ultimately, the presence of God is real, or the heroes of these narratives are insane, yet, paradoxically, the presence of God in relation to the characters relies on a lack of understanding by those around him. During their encounter, Hamlet's Father's Ghost explains his purpose in returning to earth: that "The serpent that did sting thy father's life/ Now wears his crown" (I.IV, 776, 777). The ghost's revealing that he was murdered, and subsequent call to action when he asks Hamlet to avenge his death, recalls Genesis's first interaction between God and Abraham. Hamlet does not seem, at first, to be at all conflicted by this call-to-action, but is rather prompted and inspired by it. Those around him, however, interpret it as evidence of his psychological unrest.

In another diary entry, Tarkovsky explains the significance of Hamlet's pursuit of revenge. He asks:

Why does Hamlet seek revenge? Revenge is a way of expressing family blood ties, a sacrifice made for those near and dear, a sacred obligation. Hamlet, as we know, avenged to join "the broken link of times," or rather to realise the idea of self-sacrifice. Persistence or obstinacy is frequently apparent in actions which only hurt the person who undertakes them — this is a perverted form of sacrifice.

Tarkovsky's understanding of *Hamlet's* main character arc is that his obligation toward his father is "sacred," which transforms what might be understood as a thoughtless quest for blood incited by insanity into a mission not dissimilar to Alexander's; he will redeem what is important by way of outward expression, and, ultimately, self-sacrifice. Indeed, both Hamlet and Alexander end up making a significant self-sacrifice, (Alexander burns down the house he venerates, Hamlet loses his life in his decision to really *act*, rather than just talking about acting), and, in both cases, the sacrifice acts as a method of expressing family blood ties.

Just as it is difficult to determine precisely what kind of character Hamlet is, so does Alexander traverse the line between a heroic figure who attempts to rescue his family from a harrowing fate and a man of intense delusion. After offering his house or Little Man or his voice in a private communication with God, however, Otto offers Alexander an alternative to the choice he has given himself, and, through that, draws him slightly out of the Abrahamic problem of total incommunicability. Otto tells Alexander that he can sleep with a neighbor, Maria, and the world will be saved. Alexander is tormented by this choice, as, unlike his prior prayer, it is unclear whether this offering is genuine or trustworthy, like one from God would be, or merely a nonsensical ploy from Otto.

Despite his inner conflict, Alexander visits Maria. Upon arrival, she comments on his dirty hands, and then proceeds to fill a jug with water so he can wash them. This gesture recalls Mary Magdalene's anointment of Christ prior to his Crucifixion by way of washing his feet,²⁹ which, alongside the characterial allusion of Tarkovsky's Maria as a prostitute figure, suggests Alexander's Christ-like disposition. In Matthew's description of the scene, Christ is aware of his sacrifice, and tells Judas: "When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial" (Mt. 26:12), and Alexander seems to be similarly aware that he is making a bargain in exchange for the protection of the world.

When in bed with Maria, she and Alexander levitate over her bed, and in this disconcerting effect, Tarkovsky reminds the viewer of the potential psychological rift between the protagonist and the world around him. The cinematic format, here, affords a less biased perspective than *Hamlet*, which ultimately favors dialogue and action. In *The Sacrifice*, however, the world around the scene at hand is always present, and thus blurs the line more consequentially than its predecessor.

Alexander sleeps with Maria, and when he does, the condition of the world is not resolved as promised. Like in the opening sequence following Alexander's first reference of Hamlet, the scene between Alexander and Maria suddenly cuts to a similar image of black-and-white destruction, but this time, it is not still; people run through the streets, debris falls from the sky, and ominous sounds emanate through the space (fig. 13). What seemed to be a resolution to this scene of divine intervention, then, has perhaps confused things even more than the moments of Alexander's prayer.

²⁹ Matthew 26



(fig. 13) people run through the streets in a vision in *The Sacrifice*

Just as Hamlet seeks revenge to exact the bond between himself and his father, so does Alexander's eventual sacrifice of his home unify him and Little Man. At the end of the film, Alexander sets fire to his home as an offering to God to save the world from nuclear Holocaust. Once he has ignited the curtain, the fire seemingly disappears and the camera frames his face which reflects perhaps the vague coloration of a fire, but directs it specifically to Alexander's perception (fig. 14). Tarkovsky's introduction of an ominous fire, and then subsequent dismissal of it, suggests a dichotomy in Alexander similar to the one Hamlet experiences: Alexander does not know whether he is making the correct choice; nor does he know whether or not what he is perceiving is real. All he knows how to do is act. Alexander acts, here, like Hamlet, as he finally replaces speech with action.



(fig. 14) Alexander looking at the curtain on fire in *The Sacrifice*

Following the medium close-up of Alexander looking into the fire, the camera moves into the house and frames Alexander in a wide shot in his doorway with the backdrop of the vast landscape in the background (fig. 15). *The Sacrifice's* sacrifice has suddenly moved from Alexander's subjective experience to something more objective, as if he is a player on a stage, and a character in someone's else's scene, as Hamlet becomes a pawn to exact the father's revenge. In changing the dynamic of Alexander's framing, Tarkovsky weaves in and out of subjectivity and objectivity so as to call into question the conflict that arises of whether one should exist within the world participating in devices such as speech, or whether one should trust that their father's ghost is their father's ghost, or that a bargain with God will save the world.



(fig. 15) Alexander leaves his house in *The Sacrifice*

The following cut finds Alexander sitting in front of his burning house, (fig. 15) which recalls the miniature version of the house that Little Man built him for his birthday (fig. 17). The connection between the two images brings forth, once again, the psychological elements at play in Alexander's sacrifice; an image of a burning house that looks like a miniature gives rise to whether or not Alexander's bargain is real or imaginary. The significance of Little Man's gift, too, serves as a representation of a kind of sacred holy relic, and the notion that some things are worthy of sacrifice and some are not; and, for Alexander, that is based largely on a sense of sentimentality and attachment to material things.



(fig. 16) Alexander watches his burning house in *The Sacrifice*

Alexander then moves away from the burning house, and the stagnant shot switches to a pan to the left that follows him until the house is out of frame. Once the house is out of frame, he turns around to glance back at the house, and we must, once again, trust and imagine his subjective vision, instead of seeing it for ourselves; all we hear is the crackling of the fire in the background. The shot changes from a single wide-shot of Alexander to a shot of multiple people: Alexander's family runs into frame. The sacrifice, then, has suddenly become a collective experience, as opposed to one that is unique to our protagonist. This moves the experience of the sacrifice itself into the collective sphere, and posits what might have happened if Abraham had attempted to express his divine mission to his wife.



(fig. 17) The miniature version of Alexander's house in *The Sacrifice*

Once joined by his friends and family, Alexander begins to speak to his friend Victor. He says: "I did it. Don't be upset! Listen to me, Victor. I've got something very impor--" he pauses, and then corrects himself. "No. Silence." Alexander's declaration of silence is the culmination of the events in *The Sacrifice*; he has spoken for so long that he has finally understood speech, and being, and now--hopefully--things have resolved themselves. Yet, it is unclear whether or not the world *is* saved, or if the destruction is yet to happen, or even if the world was ever in danger, in the first place.

The placidity of the ending of the film recalls the moments after Alexander's recitation of Hamlet's "Words, words, words," during which Alexander has a vision of what the world might look like after this nuclear annihilation. The world, as it was, ceases to exist, and yet the stillness and silence remains. This vision places the threat of apocalypse in a potentially imagined space: perhaps Alexander's preparation was for a threat that was never present, just as Hamlet's

sacrifice may have been for his psychological unrest, as opposed to his father's ghost. Tarkovsky might, too, have considered apocalypse in a similar vein as the end of *Andrei Rublev*, in which the four horsemen are not only entirely non-threatening, but almost paradisiacal, as if we might have misunderstood the implications of a total-apocalypse in Revelations.

Recall, too, at this moment that Alexander finally rejects the notion and practice of speech, Kierkegaard's statement on the premise of divine silence: "you cannot say this bellowing or this voice disturbs the silence. No, this belongs to the silence, is in a mysterious and thus in turn silent harmony with the silence; this increases it... it is silent, but its silence is expressive" (15). Indeed, Alexander greets what he perceives to be God's silent command, unlike his aforementioned "Abraham!" with, finally, silence, and "silence" is the last word uttered by Alexander in *The Sacrifice*.

And, yet, silence is not achieved, even after Alexander has explicitly advocated for it. The sound of the water mixed with the chirping of the birds of the air is almost oppressive in its all-encompassing nature. The choice, then, appears to be the abundance of speech and human autonomy, or the overwhelming reminder that silence will be replaced with something else, (our three tragic heroes cannot make themselves understood, and yet they continue to speak, and if they choose not to speak, then they are lost).

To cue the end of the film, Tarkovsky brings back the music of the film's opening sequence: Bach's "Erbarne Dich, Mein Gott" from the Saint Matthew Passion, as if to not only remind the viewer of the narrative's ultimate non-silence, but also to reference the inherent closed-circuit nature of the cinematic experience. Just as Ivan Karamazov's rejection of the classical narrative structure of the Crucifixion might have simply offered, in its place, a more

sinister version of the account, so might Alexander's so-called silence call to attention the impossibility of *real* silence, and thus replace speech with something different altogether.

Chapter III

Was Lost, and is Found: *Solaris*'s Reconciliation of the Father and the Son

Though it premiered over a decade earlier, *Solaris* (1972) is a film that works to unify the themes of *The Sacrifice*'s central patriarchal relationship, as well as *Andrei Rublev*'s contention with cyclicity in biblical narrative form as it relates to the production of art. *Solaris* studies the relationship between human consciousness and physical space in the form of a science fictional production that follows Kris, a psychologist, on an investigative mission to examine the mysterious and catastrophic psychological unrest of astronauts aboard a spacecraft. Like *Andrei Rublev* and *The Sacrifice*, *Solaris* employs a specific biblical narrative as its framework, which it focuses on through its restaging of and overt reference to biblical paintings. The film references, in particular, Rembrandt's 1669 vision of *Return of the Prodigal Son*, as conceptualized as a parable in the New Testament.

When recounting the story of the Return of the Prodigal Son, the Gospel According to Luke follows the classical narrative structure of a parable: it is a story, told simply, with the intention of illustrating a moral. Luke recounts Christ telling the parable, who begins by describing "a man who had two sons" (Lk 15:11), and divides his estate between the two of them. The parable's inevitable point of contention arises when the younger son "squandered his wealth in wild living" (Lk 15:14), and eventually resolves itself; the moral subsequently arising, when the prodigal son returns home and "his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him" (Lk 15:20).

The passage intends to illustrate not only the unconditional love and graciousness embodied by Christ as transmitted through the father of the Prodigal Son, but also the perils of acting with envy, as the supposed virtuous son does: “Look! All these years I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!” (Lk 15:29-30). In the conflicting natures of the two sons, the parable intentionally sets up an opposition regarding what moral should be derived from its story: on the one hand, the moral might be one in favor of forgiveness, while, on the other hand, it might be one that reprimands envy, even when the envy in question may appear just. In its basic narrative structure, too, the parable is at once ubiquitous (it tells the story of any Christian who has strayed from God), and personal, in that it is, in a literal sense, about a particular family. In employing a parable without a clear objective, then, Tarkovsky traverses the line between narrative and psychological inquiry into the characters in question.

In *Solaris*, Tarkovsky further complicates the parable not only by mystifying what should perhaps serve as straightforward source material, but also by inserting modern philosophical conceptualizations of return, as well as underlying commentary on Soviet society. In the third act of the film, Tarkovsky uses a conversation between three characters: Sartorius, a surviving crew member of the Solaris ship, Kris, a brooding psychologist and the film’s protagonist, and Hari, an illusive reproduction of Kris’s wife who died of suicide, in order to illustrate the way the classic biblical and mythic structures are subverted when placed in the otherworldly, science-fictional space.

Tarkovsky constructs the scene in which the conversation takes place in a space that is entirely at odds with the makeup of the spacecraft (fig. 18). While the rest of the ship is notably sparse and adheres to a traditional, modernist understanding of a futuristic vessel (as seen in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*, for example, or early iterations of *Star Trek*), the room in which the characters convene is an austere, wooden space that transcends history as it works to unite certain elements, such as Miguel de Cervantes's 1605 novel *Don Quixote*, and Pieter Brueghel's renaissance paintings *Corn Harvest* (1564) and *The Hunters in the Snow* (1565), which not only exist at the time of the film's creation in different geographical spaces (the former at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, and the latter in the Kunsthistorisches museum in Vienna, Austria), but also represent different seasons. In his construction of the room, Tarkovsky works to unify elements of history, while also creating a confused, layered narrative similar to that depicted in *Andrei Rublev* with Foma's renaissance vision.

In *Elements of Cinema*, Robert Bird comments on Tarkovsky's commitment to the embellishment of historical relics. He discusses this, in part, through the acknowledgement that *Solaris* is based on Stanisław Lem's 1961 novel of the same name. He explains that "Lem's off-handed comparison of Sartorius to Don Quixote becomes in the film a repeated study of an engraved illustration from an old edition of Cervantes' novel, which is amongst the few momentos Kelvin takes to the spacecraft" (119).



(fig. 18) The wooden room in *Solaris*

Amidst the transhistorical and unified qualities of the room, the sequence, too, seems to be the moment during which Hari finally transcends her state of being purely the projection of Kris's memory, and becomes, as much as possible, "human." The significance of Hari's materialization from Kris's memory not only points to the latter's psychological unrest and the involved connection between space and the human mind, but also to the nature of Hari's arrival into the world of *Solaris*. From the moment she arrives on the spacecraft, Hari wakes up a number of times, and, each time, becomes more aware of the fact that she is not entirely human, and is a mere shadow of herself. This constant, oppressive repetition recalls Friedrich Nietzsche's theory of Eternal Return as told in Aphorism 341 of *The Gay Science*. Nietzsche describes the thought experiment:

What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: 'This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence—even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal

hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!

Nietzsche here enacts a hypothetical that is, as previously explored in Kierkegaard's--under the pseudonym Constantin Constantius--*Repetition*, essentially an impossibility. The idea that a life "as you now live it and have lived it" can be lived "once more and innumerable times more," again, requires a sort of amnesia that is totally at odds with the inherent human state. The notion of an "eternal hourglass," too, points to the temporality of this supposed Return: not only must Time itself be manually "turned upside down again and again," but the sequence in question must end so that it can begin again, (and again). When performed, then, Eternal Return, like Constantin's *Repetition*, looks catastrophically different than when it does when it is simply hypothesized. For Nietzsche, repetition *is* possible, and yet, he manages to avoid the potential physical implications of the return, and makes it solely a psychological question. Constantin does not avoid the temporal and corporeal realities of his experiment, but, unlike Nietzsche, he proves it to be erroneous. In *Solaris*, repetition occurs, yet time Hari wakes up, she becomes detrimentally more aware of her physical and psychological existence, or lack thereof.

On her first awakening, Hari exists in a transcendent, blissful childlike state. She kisses Kris, as if she knows, upon instinct, that there is a connection between the two of them. She then looks at a photograph of herself and asks Kris who is in the photo, and follows her inquiry by declaring, "I have the feeling as if I've forgotten something." Hari's first awakening becomes, too, the first instance upon which she is really self-aware. The self-reflexive kind of consciousness in Artificial Intelligence, or that akin to it, has become a trope of the science fictional genre, in that a non-human entity realizing it is a non-human entity might be perilous

because the human consciousness is what separates us from the animals, and helps us seize, and subsequently maintain control of, the world.

Hari then tells Kris “It feels like I have to see you all the time,” reminding him that her existence is bound to his memory of her. Indeed, Hari’s journey into a consciousness that emulates humanness is far from over. The more self-aware she becomes, the more intent she is on committing suicide like she did when she was back on earth. Recall, at this moment, Nietzsche’s implementation of Eternal Return, and the “demon” that initiates it. In addition, each time Hari attempts suicide, she is subsequently resurrected by the prison of Kris’s unceasing and impulsive memory. The repetition proceeds and transforms in nature, each time becoming more gruesome and volatile, until Kris, Hari, and Sartorius convene and confront the nature of Hari’s existence in the transhistorical and transspacial room aboard the spaceship.

At one point during the conversation between the three characters, Hari becomes upset, and Kris kneels before her (fig. 19) in a gesture that both mirrors the motherly comfort of the *pietà*, and foreshadows the motif of the parable of the Return of the Prodigal Son, as it is structurally analogous to Rembrandt’s staging of the scene (fig. 20), (notice Hari’s hands placed on different levels of Kris’s back, her head bowed slightly in silence). In referencing both of the biblical scenes in his staging of iconic Christian art works, Tarkovsky expresses *Solaris*’s core oppositions: Solaris versus home, and the mind versus the world. Kris’s surrendering to the comfort of the mother figure, Hari, indicates his attachment to and reverence of her, despite her not being his real wife, and yet a tension arises with the pose’s allusion to Rembrandt, in that it illustrates a fundamental guilt that Kris is experiencing about abandoning his home, as well as yearning for fatherly forgiveness.



(fig. 19) Kris kneels in front of Hari in *Solaris*



(fig. 20) Rembrandt's *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (c. 1662)

Not only do *Solaris*'s central relationships, (Kris and Hari, Kris and the father), mirror paramount biblical relationships (the former as Mary and Christ, the latter as the Prodigal Son and his father, but, perhaps, too, the thematic throughline of the works' patriarchal relationships: Abraham and Isaac of the Old Testament, God and Christ of the New Testament, to name a few), but also looks to the Latin epic style. Classical literature, which is often defined by its inclination toward heroic and comprehensive narratives, serves as an unconventional point of thematic contrast to the often more morally inclined biblical narrative--in particular, in the case of a parable.

When considering the complex, repetitious relationship of Kris and Hari, Tarkovsky seeks inspiration, in particular, from Roman poet Ovid's 8 AD historical Latin epic poem *The Metamorphoses*. Though Ovid was not the first to adapt the story of the relationship between Orpheus, son of Apollo, and his wife Eurydice, he did consider it within the classical style and the characterial archetypes often implicit within it. The story follows Orpheus, who, shortly following the death of his wife, is instructed that she will be resurrected and thus reunited with him on one condition: he does not turn back to look at her as she follows him out of Hell. The story explains "they'd almost reached the upper world, when he,/ afraid that she might disappear again/ and longing to see her, turned his gaze/ back at his wife. At once she slipped away--" (X, 48-52). Ovid then explains the event, simply, that: "she died again" (X, 56). These words seem ultimately to be at odds with one another; death, in its permanence and finality, should not possibly occur "again," and yet, for Orpheus and Eurydice, it does.

Hari and Kris's second love story follows a similar trajectory: they must return, perhaps eternally, to this moment of intense loss that is born from the inability to resist the moment of

looking back--the materialization of the beloved produced by a lack of trust in the psychological image of her. Indeed, *Solaris* finds an ultimate connection between its central love story and that of Orpheus and Eurydice, in that Orpheus sacrifices the possibility of being with his wife again for his own distrust.

But, in Tarkovsky's version of the story, there is a crucial difference: his Eurydice does not fall back into abstraction. Hari survives, and she continues to be resurrected, and Kris continues to send her back into Hell by looking back, and looking back, and so on, and so on. In this breaking of the narrative format, Tarkovsky begs the question of *how* one should grapple with the return of the beloved from the dead. During the sequence in the wooden room, Sartorius points out, repeatedly, that Hari cannot feel emotion, and that Kris should not be tormented by his love for her, simply because she is not human. And, in one sense, this statement is true: Hari is a mere projection of Kris's memory, a product of his guilt--a symptom of the mysterious properties of Solaris's ocean. But, on the other hand, Hari cries, bleeds, sweats, and describes her feelings in depth. She responds to Sartorius's claim, that "I am a woman," a distinct, intensely reflexive declaration of self.

Hari's confused sense of reality and self is an important thematic motif to *Solaris*, as the film's premise consists of a literal investigation into the psyche. What is real and what is imagined is an important question, at first, primarily for Kris, but becomes an important question for the increasingly self-conscious Hari, as well. Kris's sense of self begins to deteriorate, too, just as Hari's does in a more obvious and forthright manner. Part of Kris's crisis-of-identity can be explored through the aforementioned opposition between Tarkovsky's narrative and thematic influence: there exists, on the one hand, a tragic hero like Orpheus who succumbs to the poet's

romantic inclination, and, on the other hand, the guilty and morally corrupt figure of the Prodigal Son.

Tarkovsky places, in addition, a tension between the space of Solaris and of home by implementing Pieter Bruegel the Elder's 1565 Northern Renaissance work *The Hunters in the Snow* in the wooden room alongside other historical relics (fig. 21). When the painting is introduced, it is in fragments, similar to the revelation of the icon paintings at the end of *Andrei Rublev*, with sinister, apocalyptic music playing in the background. This framing of Bruegel's work undoubtedly leads the way for a more ominous interpretation of the work, especially in its similarities to the thematic trajectory of Kris's own character arc. Though *The Hunters in the Snow* does not necessarily lend itself to one avenue of interpretation, Tarkovsky's emphasis on particular sections of the painting, paired with the ominous soundtrack, as well as the placement of the painting in the film, offers an apocalyptic, pessimistic reading.

The painting is a part of a series that depicts seasonal changes and the ability, or lack thereof, of village people in the Netherlands to cope with a succession of *forces majeures*, and depicts, specifically, a scene of foreboding tumult that is contingent on the viewer's ability to see the canvas in its entirety, including elements of the landscape that cannot be reached by the eyes of those depicted. It is a spectacle of foreshadow and dramatic irony, manifest in the short space between a group of hunters and the village to which they return. The concept itself relies heavily on the time periods' lack of scientific understanding of the earth. Elements of the painting attempt to depict an idealism posed by the community that are juxtaposed somewhat ironically with hypotheses of impending devastation, based on the pivotal political revolution of the 1560s.



(fig. 21) Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Hunters in the Snow* (1565)

The painting is set at the heart of winter and illustrates, in particular, a trio of weary men with unmistakable dispositions of defeat as they return, daunted by the uncertainty of what is to come, to a village empty-handed accompanied by their band of sluggish dogs. One cannot help but speculate, then, that the implementation of this particular painting might help the viewer make sense of Kris's ultimate return home. A journey outward, like in Kris's case, ultimately suggests that he will return home with something new to offer. And, yet, the hunters return home empty handed, even though the disposition of the village people is at odds with that knowledge. Knowing this, Kris, then, is bound to return home empty handed. Indeed, the scene before the hunters' gaze is at odds with their general propensities: the scene of the village at the bottom of the hill is idyllic as peasants prepare for the snow, which, based on the cold, grey color of the sky, will inevitably soon befall them in apocalyptic masses, with undeniable expressions of joy.

Women pull one another across ice on wooden sleds, families jovially play ice hockey, some sit by the snow and gaze into the icy landscape, a small group lights a dazzling fire on which to roast corn.

Above the scene sits a group of crows, analogue of the viewer, who, like the birds, is privy to all planes of the image of a world that is forever locked in winter: the hunters, the peasants, the snow-capped landscape, and the unforgiving wintery skies. Through this, Bruegel offers a distinct window into the world of his painting, and provides his viewer with the knowledge that the hunters' failures to provide food might inflict starvation upon the homestead, and in this he bestows insight of what the society is not, and, in that way, crowns the viewer as all-knowing. The viewer of *Solaris* is offered this same insight, then: as soon as the film's narrative becomes analogous to *The Hunters in the Snow*, the viewer can only imagine that Kris's ultimate failure will bear devastating results.

The painting's composition comprises of three diagonal planes: the eye begins on the slope upon which the hunters stand in the foreground and is situated above the village in a way that provides leverage for them to examine the scene of the peasants in its entirety, the flat plane of the village on which the villagers enact the activities of their everyday lives in the middle-ground, and the perilous snow-consumed mountains and muted grey skies from which the storm will soon descend in the background. This left-to-right, back and forth formation draws the viewer's eye on a seemingly never-ending circuit across the image: the hunters doom the people, the people are overthrown by the winter, and then back to the beginning again. In this composition, Bruegel forces the viewer to understand the image as a whole; an understanding that encapsulates unrelenting foreshadow. The haunting nature of Bruegel's work is determined

by a relationship of juxtaposed scenes and insights: the viewer, by bearing witness to all three planes and looks, accordingly, from hunters, to peasants, to mountains, and back again to hunters, understands what an entire community ultimately does not.

Though the structure of the painting on its own follows a distinct back and forth pattern, Tarkovsky uses cuts and close-ups to create his own visual patterns and place emphasis on sections that Bruegel does not. In the sequence, Tarkovsky first focuses on a dog that is looking back at the viewer, as if to not only warn him of some impending event, but to bring the viewer into the scene regardless of the centuries between him and the painting. The camera then pans over the figures that are farthest in the distance, and then moves to a single crow hovering over the scene. The juxtaposition of these images emphasizes the relationship between the human figure and the distinct air of watchfulness that the crow symbolizes. Once Hari and Kris begin to levitate, the scene cuts back and forth between them and the painting, as if to unify the experiences in both a psychological and visual sense.

The tension of the archetypical, heroic demeanor of Kris's journey and the placement of the ominous painting in the pivotal moment in the film begs the question: what kind of "hero" is Kris? Indeed, in *Solaris*, Kris is offered the valiant role in a dangerous mission, accepts, and, in a sense, "conquers" Solaris. But what *is* Solaris? How much of his experience is, indeed, psychological, and how much of it consists of an attempt to conquer memory and the "self"? Tarkovsky does not necessarily provide an answer to any of these questions, but instead offers a deluge of interpretations. If the story is taken literally, then Kris might be the ultimate tragic hero who, like Orpheus, loses the beloved. If taken figuratively, then the story might be more in line with a parable like the Return of the Prodigal Son. And, yet, the implementation of Bruegel's

painting suggests something in between: Kris has, in a literal sense, journeyed to the bounds of the universe; quite literally, the “final frontier,” and, like the hunters, returned empty handed. It is of course more obvious what the implications of this anticlimactic return might be for the villagers, but the juxtaposition of the work with the ending of *Solaris* suggests that the implications of Kris’s return from sin might very well be dire. It is important to note, here, that there is a distinct parallel between the structure of apocalypse and sin--apocalypse is meant to be a response to, or cleansing of, sin, and it is thus not surprising that both the painting and the film might blur the line between redemption and apocalypse. In this ambiguous ending, Tarkovsky additionally blurs the line between classical narrative structure and figurative moral teachings: in fact, it is the very implementation of the moralistic parable that recontextualizes the film. One can watch the entirety of *Solaris* without thinking of Kris as a sinner, and yet, in the final frame, he repents tenaciously.

Solaris is ultimately either a story about conquering unknown territory, or about the importance of a homecoming expedition, or both. This, again, raises the significance of Tarkovsky’s implementation of classical literature within the film. In the character of Kris, while considering what kind of “hero” he might be, Tarkovsky sets up an inherent opposition between two classical heroes journeys: Homer’s ancient Greek *The Iliad*, and *The Odyssey*. The two essentially both tell the story of the heroic character Odysseus, but, while *The Iliad*’s focus rests on venturing outward into the world, away from home, to conquer and fight great battles, *The Odyssey* is a story about a yearning for home; about seeking the homestead despite having seen all the restless wonders of the world.

Tarkovsky's implementation of the parable of the Return of the Prodigal Son ultimately works to reconcile the tension between the use of Campbell's varying mythic structures of the "hero's journey," and Ovid's death of the muse. At the end of *Solaris*, Kris returns home after he discovers that Hari has successfully killed herself. Once he has reached his home, Kris looks through the window of his house with an expression of sadness. His father puts dishes away, unaware of the return of his son, and rain falls in the house, (fig. 22) which recalls a moment in *Andrei Rublev* in which Andrei proclaims that there is nothing more terrifying than snow in a church, by which he means that, to be exposed to the unpredictable nature of the elements offers a dimension of chance that can destroy creation. Kris might agree with Andrei's sentiment, but takes it a step further to suggest that, while the unpredictability of the elements of Solaris left him vulnerable to the heartbreak of the recollection of a dead lover, his psyche seemed to be just as aligned with this notion of instability.



(fig. 22) Rain falls inside Kris's house at the end of *Solaris*

Solaris ends with Kris kneeling in front of his father and his father subsequently placing his hands on his sons' shoulders in an act of comfort and forgiveness (fig. 23). This image directly recalls Dutch painter Rembrandt's Baroque 1669 rendition of the Gospel of Luke's Return of the Prodigal Son. The painting signifies the ultimate act of spiritualism in that the fathers' hands command both a firm, patriarchal gesture, as well as a tender maternal one. Recall, too, that the parable itself is essentially framed around the father: "There was a man" (Lk 15:11), and this man is the source from one this genealogical fable stems. In fact, the very reality that the prodigal son *is* prodigal is contingent on the laws of genealogy: the son squanders his birth-given fortune; without it, he would not have been able to depart and subsequently return. The "man" and subsequent "men" (the sons), in question, are never identified, or even allowed qualities, apart from their various and admittedly overt virtues, that differentiate them from one another. And, this is not the only instance in which the ambiguity of Luke 15 bears well for future artistic interpretations of the passage: the sparse nature of the account is such that it does not disclose the Prodigal Son's intention in wandering off to essentially squander his fortune, nor does it particularly share the details of the nature of this squandering. The son might have shared Kris's intention, for example, in departing his homestead. The tale, then, is ubiquitous, and has been transferred continually amongst many mediums, and is yet altered slightly every time it is depicted. Still, The Gospel According to Luke unambiguously emphasizes the significance of the formal patriarchal structure, and the unavoidable significance of a son reflecting upon the patriarch and continuing it. The thematic trajectory of the parable ultimately unfolds as follows: a young man rejects the patriarchy, becomes melancholy in his absence, and ultimately

reconciles himself with the patriarchy; all is restored. Thus, in its restaging of a painterly version of the story in which the father is the only character who is faced entirely forward, *Solaris* does the same; a film that centers around the relationship between a husband and the memory of his dead wife ultimately ends with him returning to his father.



(fig. 23) Kris asks for forgiveness from his father in *Solaris*

Not only is the Return of the Prodigal Son parable an metaphorical directive that transcends any specific family in its lack of specificity, but also one that works to comprehend the relationship between God the father and his creations; children. This relationship is highlighted well in the Gospel According to Matthew, when Christ poses, in another parable: “What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders away, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off?” (Mt. 18:12). Here, Christ highlights an important element of the relationship between God (the father) and the people (the Prodigal Son) as one of ultimate forgiveness, and the significance of turning one sinner onto the straight path.

At the end of the parable, the graciousness of the father is not returned by either of the sons, (even the Prodigal son does not offer an apology, but rather a self-pitying remark: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son” [Lk 15:21]), and the other son reprimands his father with scornful envy. And, yet, the father does not turn away from his sons, but rather attempts to kindly correct their behavior. One of the functions of the parable, then, is to highlight the imbalance of the relationship between the father and the son. Indeed, the son does not suggest that he is unworthy of anything but being a “son,” and, through this, highlights the regimented structure of the father and the son; there are things one can do to be worthy of being a son, and similarly unworthy.

One of the sources that likely directly influenced Tarkovsky to implement this particular biblical narrative in *Solaris* is the re-emergence of the Prodigal Son archetype in nineteenth-century Russian literature. A work that is perhaps most relevant in this instance is Dostoevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* (1866), a novel that follows a protagonist, Rodion Raskolnikov, who, like the Prodigal Son, rejects the fixed structure of the world through committing the ultimate abandonment of the ethical: murder. Like *The Brothers Karamazov*, *Crime and Punishment* works to consider the return of the Russian son, and the implications of the transformation of Luke’s parable into a modern setting.

The novel makes reference, in particular, to another narrative of return that appears in the Gospel According to John. The Death and Resurrection of Lazarus is told as a narrative portrayal of a miracle, but highlights, too, like the Return of the Prodigal Son, the importance of the patriarchal structure, and inevitability of return within that structure. John 11 begins with the simple statement that “Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany” (John 11:1). This

opening sentence places emphasis on two characteristics of Lazarus: first, he is a “man,” and thus, like the Prodigal Son, holds importance in the patriarchal structure, and second, he is “of Bethany,” and, like the Prodigal Son, too, is bound to a geographic location as a part of his identity as the man.

The narrative continues: “It was the Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment, and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick” (John 11:2). So, in the second sentence of John 11, Lazarus becomes “lost,” and in need of return. When hearing of Lazarus’s sickness, Jesus accordingly replies “This sickness is not to end in death, but for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified by it” (John 11:4). After Lazarus dies, it becomes clear that his death was a necessity in order for Jesus to both enact his miracle, and perpetuate the common biblical narrative of return. The scene is described: “Jesus wept. So the Jews were saying, “See how He loved him!” But some of them said, “Could not this man, who opened the eyes of the blind man, have kept this man also from dying?” (John 11:35-37). The confusion of the people: why could Jesus not “have kept this man also from dying,” highlights the importance of the passages’ narrative structure: either Lazarus keeps on living, or else he is resurrected from the dead--just as the Prodigal Son either remains with his father, or offers his father a chance for forgiveness and himself a chance for true retribution and holiness.

John 11 reaches its conclusion when Jesus “cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come forth.” The man who had died came forth, bound hand and foot with wrappings, and his face was wrapped around with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.” (John 11:43-44). That Jesus implores “let him go” specifies Jesus as a character who is actively engaged in Lazarus’s narrative of return, and sets it apart from the Return of the Prodigal Son, in that

Lazarus's return is based on a holy miracle, whereas the Prodigal Son's is contingent on the allowance of God's grace for personal an active decision toward atonement.

In *Crime and Punishment's* fifth section, as Raskolnikov comes to terms with the fact that he likely cannot escape the imminent punishments for his crime, he goes to visit Sonia, a young prostitute³⁰ to discuss with her his forthcoming metaphorical departure from the world: he is Lazarus, and his sickness is, until this point, likely unto death. His interaction with scripture and subsequent enlightenment, however, changes that fact.

Dostoevsky describes Raskolnikov's entrance into Sonia's room: "I've come to you for the last time," Raskolnikov went on gloomily, although this was the first time. "I may perhaps not see you again..." "Are you... going away?" "I don't know... to-morrow" (448). Like the Prodigal Son, Raskolnikov is aware of his own departure; "I've come to you for the last time" is analogous of the son demanding his father "Father, give me my share of the estate" (Lk. 15:12) in preparation for his own journey outward.

Raskolnikov has a sudden moment of religious clarity when he picks up Sonia's version of the New Testament. He asks, suddenly, "Where is the raising of Lazarus? Find it for me, Sonia" (460). Though his intention in wanting to read John 11 is at first unclear, the resemblance between Raskolnikov and Lazarus becomes soon evident, and the former aware of this relationship. Raskolnikov appends his request for Sonia to find the passage by declaring "In three weeks' time they'll welcome me in the mad-house! I shall be there if I am not in a worse place" (460). Raskolnikov's awareness of the inevitability of his downfall due to the murder he

³⁰ Likely an overt allusion to the charitable character of Mary Magdalene

has committed--that he will end up in “the mad-house” or “a worse place” positions him as a figure who, like Lazarus, is headed toward a “death” beyond his control.

Once Sonia has read the story of Lazarus in its entirety, Raskolnikov creates a composite of Lazarus and the Prodigal Son in his response to the verses. Dostoevsky sets the scene: “the candle-end was flickering out in the battered candlestick, dimly lighting up in the poverty-stricken room the murderer and the harlot who had so strangely been reading together the eternal book” (465). In this description, the emphasis is placed on the shameful aspects of both the space and the characters. The room is “poverty-stricken,” which is a state that might have, in another scenario, been a result of a prodigal occupant. The characters themselves are described merely as a “murderer and a harlot,” which, juxtaposed by their “reading together the eternal book,” promises retribution that is both a result of, and analogous to, the story of the resurrection of Lazarus.

Though the narrative of *Crime and Punishment* has found obvious similarities between Raskolnikov’s faltering from the straight path and John 11, Raskolnikov, in his commencement into repentance--which occurs four days after he commits the murder, just as Lazarus is left dead for four days, and when Sonia reads: ‘Jesus said, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, Lord by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days.’ She laid emphasis on the word *four*” (464-465)--perhaps inadvertently, compares himself to the Prodigal Son. When Raskolnikov initially enters the room, he commands Sonia “Why are you standing? Sit down” (448). This terse comment on Sonia’s positionality recalls *Solaris*’s motif of figuring Kris physically below other characters. Recall that he once embraces Hari’s waist in a gesture that mimics the *pietà*, and, of course, in the final shot of the film, greets his

father in a similar way that makes him unambiguously analogous to the Prodigal Son. And yet, while Raskolnikov is commanded to enact an inversion of the *pietà*, Kris seemingly does so instinctively as he falls to his knees before his wife and his father. Dostoevsky's spatial reminders throughout this scene serve as a visual comment upon where in the biblical narratives the characters lie.

Once Sonia has finished reading, Raskolnikov's "face was particularly stern and there was a sort of savage determination to it. 'I have abandoned my family to-day,' he said, 'my mother and sister. I am not going to see them. I've broken with them completely'" (465). Here, by acknowledging that he has "abandoned" his family, Raskolnikov inserts himself into the biblical archetype of the son who has left home indefinitely. He does not explain why, even when asked: it is the venture outward alone that makes it possible for him to return, and be virtuous. Indeed, Raskolnikov indicates a teleology to his departure when he implores that Sonia join him. When Sonia asks where he wants to go, he simply responds: "How do I know? I only know it's the same road, I know that and nothing more. It's the same goal!" (466). Both in suggesting Sonia accompany him on the "road," and in declaring that there is a definite and common "goal," Raskolnikov suggests that the intention in a venturing outward--like Odysseus in his respective journeys, and more significantly, Doctor Kris Kelvin--is to enact an attempt to resolve a certain sin, and, in addition, that different kinds of sin can be corrected in the same journey of departure, (and, of course, the crucial return.)

Raskolnikov essentially embarks on his journey of repentance after he has likened himself to the Prodigal Son. He asks Sonia,

What's to be done? Break what must be broken, once for all, that's all, and take the suffering on oneself. What, you don't understand? You'll understand later... Freedom and power, and above all, power! Over all trembling creation and the ant-heap!... That's

the goal, remember that! That's my farewell message. Perhaps it's the last time I shall speak to you. If I don't come tomorrow, you'll hear of it all, and then remember these words. And some day later on, in years to come, you'll understand perhaps what they meant. If I come to-morrow, I'll tell you who killed Lizaveta... Good-bye (467-468).

Here, Raskolnikov positions himself as a Christ-like figure who intends to "take the suffering on [him] self." He describes the process of venturing out into the world to repent as one that yields "freedom and power," and that, once man has conquered the ability to sin and repent, he has essentially inherited the ability to understand "all trembling creation and the ant-heap." Mortal power, to Raskolnikov, is the ability to correctly enact the cycle of sin and repentance--murdering Lizaveta, and then promising "I'll tell you who killed Lizaveta," and so on, and so on.

Raskolnikov's story, much like the story of Kris Kelvin, ends in unsettling ambiguity. After being convicted of killing Lizaveta, he is sent to jail, and remains there at least until the end of *Crime and Punishment*. Though he clearly intended, in the aforementioned scene, to repent for his crime, he finds difficulty doing so in prison. Dostoevsky describes his tormented state: "if only fate would have sent him repentance--burning repentance that would have torn his heart and robbed him of sleep, that repentance, the awful agony of which brings visions of hanging and drowning! Oh, he could have been glad of it! Tears and agonies would at least have been life. But he did not repent of his crime" (757). The natural conclusion to the Prodigal Son's narrative of repentance, then--a punishment that aptly fits the crime--has not had its desired effect on Raskolnikov. His self-reflection indicates that he had acted in a way that he believed would force him into a state of atonement due to "fate," and yet, Dostoevsky describes, simply, that "he did not repent of his crime." It seems the natural conclusion, then, that the journey of the repentant sinner cannot only follow the motions of the Prodigal Son--departing from societal

structure against his better judgment, squandering his “fortune” in whatever form that might exist, and then returning home and asking for forgiveness, (and, of course, receiving it). Indeed, the terse parable structure insists that there must be another element at play in order to properly repent. Raskolnikov has done as the Prodigal Son did. And yet, he has not done so correctly.

This question has to do, in part, or in whole, with the soul. It is important to note, here, that the concept of the “soul” in Russian literature is radically different from in any other literary tradition. The idea of the “Russian Soul” was popularized in the mid nineteenth century, arguably by Nikolai Gogol’s novel *Dead Souls* (1842). The novel itself intended to comment upon the expendable nature of the Russian people in the eyes of the government--and largely landowners--that they were nonchalantly described as “souls.” The term itself transformed from political commentary to one that considered national identity, and ultimately the “Russian soul” became a symbol of optimism. Dostoevsky adapted this concept, too, by considering something of a collective unconscious, which is enmeshed with ideas of collective Christianity.

While imprisoned, Raskolnikov continues to consider the psychological rationale for his lack of inward repentance. He ponders ““Why does my action strike them as so horrible?” he said to himself. ‘Is it because it was a crime? What is meant by crime? My conscience is at rest. Of course, it was a legal crime, of course, the letter of the law was broken and blood was shed. Well, punish me for the letter of the law... and that’s enough” (758). Here, Raskolnikov subverts and perhaps gravely misinterprets a passage from scripture in order to outline a divide between sin and crime, as it relates to the structure of societal law. St. Paul asks in 2 Corinthians:

Are we beginning to commend ourselves again? Or do we need, like some people, letters of recommendation to you or from you?/You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone./You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts./Such confidence we have through Christ

before God./Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God./He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. (2 Cor. 3:1-6).

Here, St. Paul defines the opposition between an act of punishment and an act of atonement. By claiming “You yourselves are our letter, written on our hearts, known and read by everyone,” Paul declares God to be the ultimate “law,” and that anyone who strives to understand the difference between right and wrong should know it anyway (in his “heart,” already known). By describing God *as* the “letter,” Paul confounds corporeal law and spiritual law, so as to suggest that the two aid in understandings of one another. Indeed, Raskolnikov understands that what he has committed was crime, but a “legal crime,” and not one that involves his soul. Yet, with his acknowledgement of 2 Corinthians, he separates the physical and the spiritual world, thereby suggesting that the punishment he is undergoing is acting as a barrier toward the spiritual world because it is not suited for his crime--whereas Paul argues that God would be present in Raskolnikov’s cell, regardless. Raskolnikov believes, in addition, that the punishment might too aptly fit the crime, in the sense that he is being punished on a legal scale, and not an existential one. Though the legal system considers that a murderer should be punished, this belief is not ubiquitous as it does not take into account the soul in question--if the soul is not affected by the punishment, then atonement is not possible.

At the end of *Crime and Punishment*, however, a shift is made from a legal retribution to an internal one. This occurs when Raskolnikov meets with Sonia, who is residing in the same prison as him. Dostoevsky explains “How it happened he did not know. But all at once something seemed to seize him and fling him at her feet” (765). This gesture, which symbolizes the beginning of Raskolnikov’s journey to *true* repentance, is also physically analogous to the

aforementioned *pietà* imagery, as well as a repetition of this inadvertent gesture of repentance; “something seemed to seize him,” and an allusion to Rembrandt’s rendition of *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. By confounding the two narratives: the Passion of Christ and his parable regarding fathers and sons, Dostoevsky, like Tarkovsky, collapses the proverbs of the noble, sacrificial Christ-like demeanor, and that of a repentant sinner.

Dostoevsky continues to consider the similarities between the two narratives when describing the teleology of Sonia and Raskolnikov’s relationship. He explains “They resolved to wait and be patient. They had another seven years to wait, and what terrible suffering and what infinite happiness before them! But he had risen again and he knew it and felt it in all his being, while she--she only lived in his life” (765). Here, Dostoevsky not only confounds the aforementioned biblical narratives, but, in addition, by explaining that Raskolnikov had “risen again,” brings back the miraculous resurrection of Lazarus. It is important to note, here, that the story of Lazarus is not only one that considers the nature of miracles and importance of the belief in them, but also in the lack of finality involved in death. Though Lazarus is resurrected in a literal sense, all human beings will be resurrected in a non-literal sense: in their birth into divine form in the afterlife.

And such is the case with Raskolnikov, who, though he has not died, promises to undergo a complete rebirth and spiritual transformation. And, in his risen state, Raskolnikov will endure “terrible suffering,” which is indeed holy and good (the Passion of Christ originates from the Latin verb: *patior, passus sum*, which means “to suffer,” “bear,” or “endure”), as well as “infinite happiness,” which is often how heaven is described in scripture and prayer. So Raskolnikov’s repentance occurs in three parts: he makes the active choice to depart from the “straight way”

like the Prodigal Son, he undergoes a miracle in that he surrenders to the grace of Christ, like Lazarus, and is resurrected, endures or promises to endure the suffering of Christ (and, of course, enters Heaven or “eternal happiness”).

At the end of the novel, Raskolnikov revisits John 11. Once he has re-read the passage that Sonia read him out loud before, he is overcome with newfound joy:

Seven years, *only* seven years! At the beginning of their happiness at some moments they were ready to look on those seven years as though they were seven days. He did not know that the new life would not be given him for nothing, that he would have to pay dearly for it, that it would cost him great striving, great suffering./ But that is the beginning of a new story--the story of the gradual renewal of a man, the story of his gradual regeneration, of his passing from one world into another, of his initiation into a new unknown life. That might be the subject of a new story, but our present story is ended (766-767).

Here, Dostoevsky promises not only of Raskolnikov’s regeneration by way of suffering: that his new life will afford him great happiness, but “that it would cost him great striving, great suffering,” and also of the inevitable return to the cycle of sin and retribution, and so on, and so on. The narratives of art creation and breaking of linguistic barriers promise the hypothetical interruption and eclipsing of the seemingly eternal cycle of sin, but Dostoevsky explains that there would inevitably soon be “the beginning of a new story--the story of the gradual renewal of a man, the story of his gradual regeneration, of his passing from one world into another, of his initiation into an unknown life.” Though it is evident that Raskolnikov is undergoing a divine spiritual change, it is important to note, too, that the language employed by Dostoevsky here is the language of death. Indeed, the “unknown life” suggests a venturing into the afterlife, as well as the aforementioned “eternal happiness.” In addition, though Raskolnikov’s transformation, here, is overwhelmingly positive, it is still the commencement of a new kind of cycle: though he

has, like Dostoevsky's Alyosha and Tarkovsky's Andrei, broken the cycle of sin, the cycle inevitably transforms itself from one kind to another.

In *Crime and Punishment*, then, Raskolnikov breaks the cycle of sin through his participation in various biblical narratives. How, then, does Kris's like participation in *Solaris* offer insight into the outcome of his journey into space (and back again)? It is worth noting, here, that there is a distinct difference between Dostoevsky's narrative and Tarkovsky's, in that Tarkovsky must express his protagonist's existential outcome through moving image as opposed to explicit inward analysis. So, what are the implications of Tarkovsky ending *Solaris* on an ambiguous image? In a literal sense, Kris has done quite the opposite of breaking the cycle of the return to biblical narratives, as he is participating in the reproduction of a painting, which is itself a reproduction of scripture.

Tarkovsky's implementation of Rembrandt's *The Return of the Prodigal Son* forces *Solaris* into a narrative about redemption, and his reproduction of a reproduction of a story suggests that Kris is merely participating in the repetition of the cycle, as opposed to breaking it or transforming it, as Andrei Rublev and *The Sacrifice*'s Alexander likely did. Kris's problem, his "fatal flaw," it seems, originates from his inability to distinguish between pagan narratives of return (that of Orpheus and Eurydice, for example), and Christian narratives of return. In confounding the two, then, by enacting Hari's return in a way that is reflected entirely upon himself, and without considering the spiritual implications of death, and, more importantly, not reconciling that Hari's death was not, in fact, the end of Hari, (as it was not the end of Lazarus), Kris finds himself unable to appease his own views on death, and is therefore stuck in an alternate kind of reality. It seems, then, that this inability is precisely what he is repenting for,

and his narrative of repentance will continue to proliferate, as did the memory of Hari, as does the planet of Solaris in its alien, scientific instinct, and, of course, as does a reel of film when you feed it through the projector again and again.

Conclusion: This I Dreamt

And this I dreamt, and this I dream

And this I dreamt, and this I dream,
 And some time this I will dream again,
 And all will be repeated, all be re-embodied,
 You will dream everything I have seen in dream.

To one side from ourselves, to one side from the world
 Wave follows wave to break on the shore,
 On each wave is a star, a person, a bird,
 Dreams, reality, death - on wave after wave.

No need for a date: I was, I am, and I will be,
 Life is a wonder of wonders, and to wonder
 I dedicate myself, on my knees, like an orphan,
 Alone - among mirrors - fenced in by reflections:
 Cities and seas, iridescent, intensified.
 A mother in tears takes a child on her lap.

-Arseny Tarkovsky, 1974

When Andrei Tarkovksy set out to create *Mirror* (1975), he did so, in part, as an attempt to recapture the moments he feared were forever lost in his childhood. Because of this, *Mirror* is largely autobiographical, and one would be remiss to assume that they could not glean a great deal of understanding of the filmmaker himself based on these luminescent one-hundred-and-eight minutes.

Mirror, which centers around the life of Tarkovsky's mother, in the film named Margarita, (though Tarkovsky's actual mother makes a number of appearances throughout), follows a family and their experiences of World War II. This occurs in an ephemeral, transitory space, as Tarkovsky imagines his moment of conception, recalls himself as a small child (1935-6), young adult (1943-5), and aging poet (1969). The latter is perhaps the most

consequential aspect of *Mirror* in this instance, as Tarkovsky uses the poetry of his father, Arseny, as read by Arseny, in a voiceover narration.

In this layered narrative structure, Tarkovsky considers not only his own memories and their inevitable transformative nature, but, in addition, the memories of others as juxtaposed with his own. Tarkovsky does not shy away from implementing filmmaking styles that will inevitably cause confusion, and moves freely between time periods on a single-shot basis, swiftly leading from black-and-white to color without obvious narrative prompts. In their personal relationship, Andrei and Arseny reconstruct the formative biblical patriarchal narrative and consider it through the use of poetry. This can perhaps best be exemplified in Arseny's poem, "And this I dreamt, and this I dream," written a year before *Mirror*'s initial release, and integrated into the film's soundtrack.

In the poem's first line, Arseny sets up a framework for his forthcoming work by explaining that "this I dreamt, and this I dream," and, in that introduction, he immediately establishes a tension between the past and present that is inherent in his exploration of linear time. That "this," the singular moment, he once "dreamt," and at present "dream[s]" instantly collapses the past and the present through the poetic form. Arseny goes on to bring in another element into this meditation on time: the future--that he is intent that "some time this I will dream again." What promises, from its title and opening lines, to be a scrutinization of the repetition involved in the confoundment of poetics and time, cements itself as such when Arseny explains that "all will be repeated, all be re-embodied," and, in that statement, joins together the concepts of repetition and recreation, as Kierkegaard, for example, in *Repetition*, resisted doing. Arseny builds, too, upon the aforementioned pre-socratic natural understanding of repetition

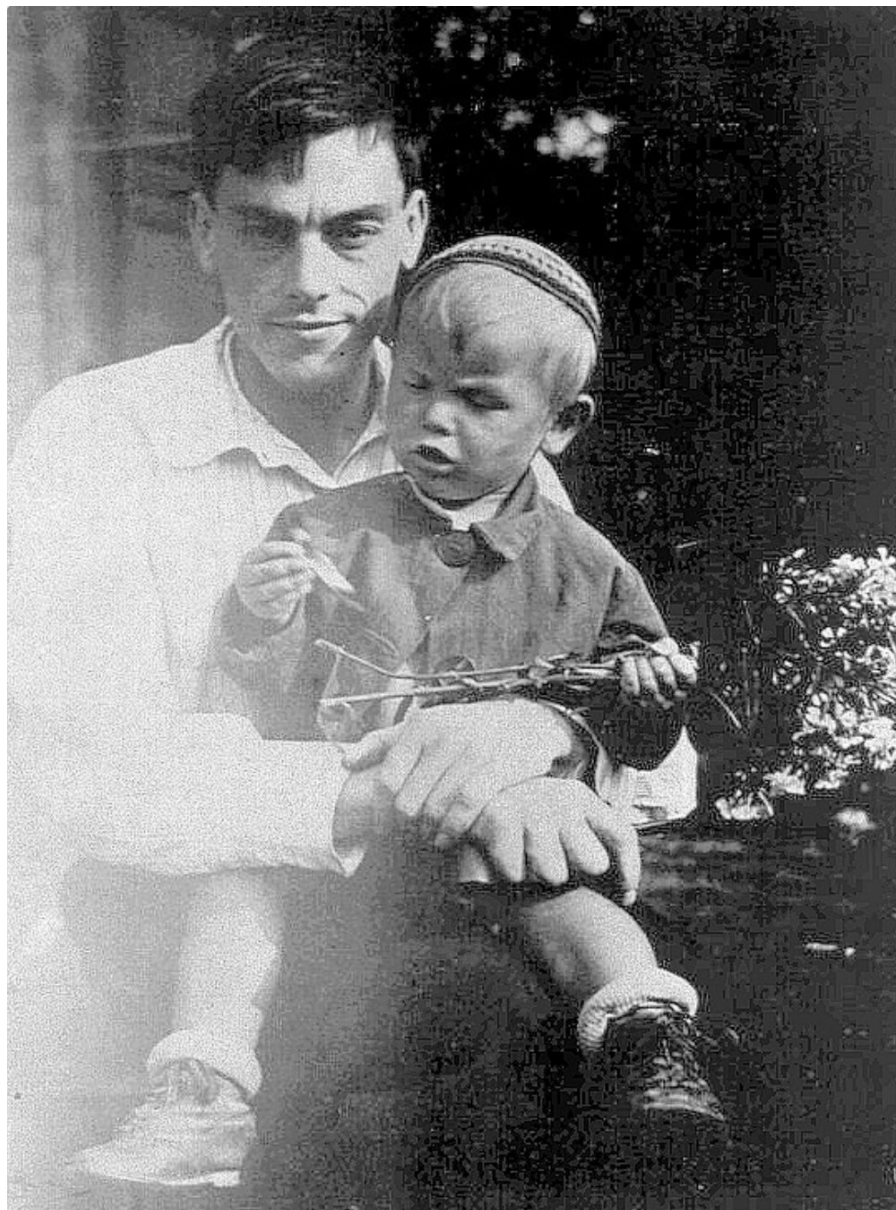
when he explains that “Wave follows wave to break on the shore,” and ends his second stanza as “wave after wave,” so as to not only meditate on the repetition of the natural world, but the way that can be understood as pertaining to the cycle of human life.

Arseny then addresses his reader, proclaiming that “You will dream everything I have seen in dream.” Here, he shifts the narrative from a personal reflection to one marked with ubiquitous claims. Andrei’s use of his father’s poetics in *Mirror*, then, builds upon that sentiment, as the poem’s claims of repetition become not only as addressed to a poet and his reader, and of the self and the world: “To one side from ourselves, to one side from the world,” but also a father and his son. Arseny likens his words to Dostoevsky’s understanding of the apocalypse in *Demons* as no longer requiring time, and states that “No need for a date: I was, I am, and I will be,” which follows, in addition, his perhaps inadvertent confoundment of the father and the son, as if to build upon the elemental understanding of repetition and transport it into genealogy and, consequently, biblical narrative. Arseny then explains that “I dedicate myself, on my knees, like an orphan,” which further builds upon his likening repetition to a genealogical problem: he has become an “orphan,” a child, as opposed to a father, and, in his dedication of himself, too, mirrors images of prayer: “on [his] knees.”

In the final line of “And this I dreamt, and this I dream” Arseny invokes the image of the *Pietà* by describing that “A mother in tears takes a child on her lap.” By concluding his poem in this way, Tarkovsky bridges the gap between the pre-socratic, elemental understanding of repetition, the eighteenth-century European psychological approach, and genealogical and biblical narratives. By using the poem in *Mirror*, Andrei, in addition, invokes the Word of the Father, as if to say that his own filmmaking method may very well be conclusive when

considering theological repetition, but Arseny's Word is a useful vehicle by which to understand it.

Indeed, the totality of Andrei Tarkovsky's cinematic portfolio carries the sentiment of his father's "And this I dreamt, and this I dream," both in content as well as method of application. *Andrei Rublev* confounds the past, present, and future tenses in its employment both of the non-time specific technique of icon painting, as well as its application of renaissance painting in a film that is set strictly during a medieval time period. Tarkovsky, then, like his father, uses his own method of artistic expression, as well as a citation of his Russian predecessor, Andrei Rublev, to flatten time and space and thus enact a repetition. *Solaris* finds a similar rupture of linear time both in its collapsing of historical space, as well as in its meditation on the inconclusive nature of death. The same kind of repetition is invoked in *The Sacrifice*, but this time through language, which inadvertently unites Tarkovsky's final film with the vocabulary of his father. When, at the end of the film, and, essentially, Andrei Tarkovsky's career, Little Man asks "In the beginning was the Word; why is that Papa?" one might understand that as an invocation to Arseny. And, while Little Man, in his youthful spirit, surely has yet to find the answer, Andrei, with a portfolio of cinematic works now behind him, knows precisely why that is.



Arseny and Andrei Tarkovsky, c. 1930 - Sergei Eisenstein Cinematography Library

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