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| Poetry or Real Estate: Kozintsev on Hamlet's Defeat and the Arrival of Fortinbras |

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POETRY OR REAL ESTATE: KOZINTSEV ON HAMLET'S DEFEAT AND THE ARRIVAL OF FORTINBRAS*

This paper explores the history of Soviet filmmaker, Grigory Kozintsev, and his relationship to Shakespeare's Hamlet, paying close attention to the problem posed by the play's finale and the arrival of Fortinbras. Using the director's working diaries, books, films and correspondence with the many Soviet artists who contributed to both his theatrical production in 1954 and his cinematic adaptation in 1964, this article examines the relevance of the Danish prince in Soviet society, and the difficulty of staging a classic work with built-in political interpretations and associations.

Key words: *Shakespeare, Hamlet, adaptation, translation, Kozintsev, FEKS, eccentricism, Fortinbras, Shostakovich, Pasternak, Freidenberg, Nabokov, Akimov, Meyerhold, Stalin Soviet cinema*

Поэзия или право на землю: Козинцев о поражении Гамлета и прибытии Фортинбраса

Тема статьи — непростое отношение советского режиссера Григория Козинцева к финалу Шекспировского «Гамлета», т. е. к появлению на сцене Фортинбраса. Разбирая записи в дневниках, книгах, фильмах и письмах Козинцева, обращенных к его знаменитым современникам, которые участвовали в театральной постановке в 1954 году и в его работе над фильмом в 1964, статья проливает свет на тему всевозможных политических нюансов и ассоциаций в сталинскую и пост-сталинскую эпоху.

Ключевые слова: *Шекспир, Гамлет, адаптация, перевод, эксцентризизм, ФЭКС, Козинцев, Фортинбрас, Шостакович, Пастернак, Фрейд-денберг, Набоков, Акимов, Мейерхольд, Сталин, советское кино*

This paper is dedicated to the memory of Yakov Leonidovich Butovsky, whose painstaking and loving labor in Kozintsev's archive has made the work of so many young scholars possible. His openness to the exchange of ideas was second to none, and his exceptional kindness will be remembered in film circles and beyond for years to come.

This paper will focus upon the changes in Grigory Kozintsev's approach to Shakespeare's *Hamlet* throughout his artistic career. Kozintsev's 1964 film version of *Hamlet* has been acknowledged to be a cinematic masterpiece world-wide, and yet merely punctuates a lifetime of dedication to this Shakespearean text. Ten years prior to this film, in 1954, the year following the death of Josef Stalin, Kozintsev had the opportunity of staging the play in the Leningrad Academic Theater of A.S. Pushkin. This production thus marked the

post-Stalin cultural thaw, all the more so because Kozintsev used Boris Pasternak's translations and asked Dmitry Shostakovich to write music for the stage production, both artists widely known to have survived serious danger from the hands (or desk) of the country's former General Secretary.

Kozintsev's meditations on this adaptation process inform his *Collected Works*, two pieces of which have been translated and published in English under the titles *Shakespeare: Time and Conscience* (published in 1966) and *King Lear: The Space of Tragedy: The Diary of a Film Director* (published in Russia posthumously in 1973 and in English translation in 1977). Thus, for a detailed examination of Kozintsev's directorial work on Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, there exist several avenues of exploration. Apart from the primary documents, the books and the films themselves, my particular approach makes use of the existing correspondence primarily between Kozintsev and Pasternak, which sheds further light on the adaptation process, the disagreements in interpretation between the artists, and some

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singular changes of opinion that occurred in the ten years that separated Kozintsev's productions. Examination of these documents indicates that of all the difficulties Kozintsev experienced with the play, his approach to the ending loomed largest, for the figure of Fortinbras was not only problematic for the artist in 1954, but remained so until his death in 1973. While describing Kozintsev's engagement with *Hamlet*, this study will find its particular focus in the director's understanding of Fortinbras. In elucidating the transition from theatrical design to cinematic adaptation, I will also discuss Kozintsev's work on the play within the context of the contrasting opinions of Pasternak and his famous cousin Olga Freidenberg, whose correspondence included a critique of Kozintsev's theatrical production.

When *Hamlet's* Ophelia, the female foil of the Danish Prince, goes mad after the death of her father, she speaks in half-sentences, in unfinished, seemingly meaningless phrases. According to the observers, her speech is dangerous: "Twere good she were spoken with, for she may strew/ Dangerous conjectures in ill-breeding minds" (4.5.14–5). Among the many implications of Horatio's statement is the intimation that the omissions in Ophelia's speech cannot be articulated safely for they propose a threat to the court of Denmark. Moreover, her effect on others can only be compared to that of a truth serum, for as her onlookers attempt to fill in the blanks of her speech, they betray their own deepest secrets and most cautiously suppressed thoughts:

*Her speech is nothing,
Yet the unshaped use of it doth move
The hearers to collection; they aim at it,
And botch the words up fit to their own thoughts (4.5.7–10)*

Ophelia's predicament is emblematic of the play itself; *Hamlet* has the capacity to force the hand of its interpreters to uncover their most hidden insights. In the words of the Soviet filmmaker Grigory Kozintsev, "We naively think that we solve Shakespeare. This is a nonsensical solution. It is he who has solved us, not we him"¹. During his lifetime, the overtones of Kozintsev and his contemporaries' solutions to Shakespeare, and *Hamlet* in particular, became increasingly grave in meaning, as the century itself called for an ever-growing amount of bloodshed.

According to Solomon Volkov, Dmitry Shostakovich, Kozintsev's longtime collaborator, loved to repeat the words of the famous Russian theater actor and director, Vsevolod Meyerhold, who believed *Hamlet* to offer such a wealth of artistic possibilities that "if all the plays ever written suddenly disappeared and only *Hamlet* miraculously survived, all the theaters in the world would be saved. They could all put on *Hamlet* and be successful and draw audiences"². For Kozintsev, however, it was not merely this multiplicity of meaning that fascinated and attracted him, but rather a sense that, with Shakespeare, he could articulate some of his most intimate meditations on the uneasy century in which he developed his craft, a

century which also ultimately took the life of his much admired contemporary, Meyerhold.

Kozintsev's attention to Fortinbras is highly significant; for the Soviet citizen, the problems surrounding the transition of power reflected the constantly shifting world of Russia's political life, its progression from autocracy through revolution to Stalin and finally to Khrushchev. Moreover, this personal reaction to *Hamlet* has been a facet of the Russian tradition of the nineteenth and, more specifically, twentieth centuries, with Shakespeare evoking in Russian writers and artists some of the most searing meditations about the meeting spaces between character, temperament and history. The figures of Shakespeare's plays have also been accepted into everyday Russian life where they have come to assume new specific local associations, attaining a proverbial force in Russian language. In Turgenev's short story "King Lear of the Steppes," for example, the village gentlemen spend the night involved in a discussion "about Shakespeare, about his types, about profundity and fidelity with which they have been delineated from the very inmost of human nature," as each man at the gathering begins enumerating "the Hamlets, the Othellos, the Falstaffs, even the Richard the Thirds, and the Macbeths — these last, it is true, only as possibilities) with whom he had happened to come into contact".

In Soviet Russia, Claudius, Lear, and Macbeth seem to have moved quite significantly from abstract literary possibility to stark reality William Shakespeare himself, then, presents a problematic figure within any society ruled by dictators, for the English bard is particularly in his element when portraying the intrigues, betrayals, and machinations that occur within the world of politics, and such texts held dangerous connotations within the political arena of the former U.S.S.R., as any open portrayal of corrupt politicians, or even of a society in such deep inner turmoil, was antithetical to the artistic mandate of the theatre and cinema of that time. Indeed, *Hamlet* was particularly disliked by Stalin, who considered the Danish Prince a weak and useless character for the Soviet people. In this sense, 1954 marked a pivotal moment in the history of *Hamlet* in Russia, for there were two adaptations — Kozintsev's version in Leningrad and Nikolai Okhlomov's in the Moscow Academic Theater of V. Mayakovsky.

Throughout his collected writing, Kozintsev makes it clear that his relationship with Shakespeare was one of the most important of his life. He regarded the English bard not as a poet belonging to the sixteenth century, but as an artist whose thought would only mature with time. Having noted, for example, that there was no real understanding of *Hamlet* until the play was discovered by German Romantics and, more specifically Goethe,³ Kozintsev reflects on the duration of time necessary to understand the fuller implications of any real thought that may lie dormant for a very long time: "Working on Shakespearean tragedy reminds one of archaeology; the search is always going deeper, beneath the limits of the top layers; the whole is usually reconstructed from fragments. But the strange thing is that the deeper you dig, the more contemporary everything

¹ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Vremya i sovest': iz rabochikh tetradei* [Time and Conscience: Notes from Working Diaries]. Moscow: Biuro propagandy sovetskogo kinoiskusstva [Bureau of Soviet Cinematic Propaganda], 1981. P. 204.

² Volkov, Solomon. *Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*. Pompton Plains, NJ: Limelight Editions, 2004. P. 84.

³ "Scholarship has accepted the opinion that Goethe gave new life to *Hamlet*. There are, by the way, scholars who maintain that the decisive word was pronounced by August Von Schlegel in his lectures. Others refer to the letters of Friedrich von Schlegel as containing this new idea for the first time" (STC 111).



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that comes to the surface seems as it reveals its significance"⁴. It is for this reason that one of his books on Shakespeare is entitled *Our Contemporary, William Shakespeare* [Nash sovremennik, Villiam Shekspir] (translated into English as *Shakespeare: Time and Conscience* so as to avoid confusion with the Polish critic Jan Kott's 1965 book, *Shakespeare our Contemporary*).

It is clear that Kozintsev was engaged in this type of archaeological dig with regard to Shakespeare for most of his life, and that with every decade the meditation became more potent. In his own words, Kozintsev's art developed according to the following pattern: "When I was eighteen, I was taken by the camera on a fun dolly [na vesyolom kolese]; at twenty two — it was genre, style, actor; at thirty — meaning; at fifty — truth"⁵. Indeed, his approach to *Hamlet* seems to move according to this pattern: from frivolity and games to a solemn quest for truth. Thus, documenting the early days of the experimental theater of FEKS, the Factory of the Eccentric Actor, established by Kozintsev and his artistic partner Leonid Trauberg, the actor, Sergei Gerassimov recalls an early 1920s production plan for a "*Hamlet* completely 'reworked'. The modernization began with the death of the King. Death reached him through the ear, but he succumbed not to a d mod poison, but to a high-tension electric current through a telephone receiver"⁶. For whatever reason, this particular production never materialized (much to an older Kozintsev's relief), and the artistic team devoted themselves to other experimental projects, including the 1926 film adaptation of Yuri Tynianov's screenplay based on Nikolai Gogol's *The Overcoat*.

To this point, the most famous and scandalous interpretation of *Hamlet* had taken place in 1931-32 in the Vakhtangov Theater under the direction of Nikolai Akimov. In this version, *Hamlet* was turned completely inside out, with an overweight and banal Hamlet, a human embodiment of mediocrity, and a drunken Ophelia occupying the center of the "tragedy." As Akimov later explained, in those days "there was no piety felt toward the classics"⁷. Shostakovich was also asked to compose music for this version, and Kozintsev later reused some of this same music for his theatrical production. Shakespeare's most famous tragedy, however, could only play as a comedy in the Soviet Union for a very short period of time. The interpretation of Hamlet as a weak-willed and spoiled prince did not gather much support during the most difficult and tragic years of Soviet history.

It is significant, then, that Kozintsev viewed the play not as a tragedy of will, as many believe it to be, but rather as a "tragedy of conscience" central to every repressed artist, unable to fulfill his/her goals⁸. In the 1950s, after working on *Pirogov*, a film ultimately altered beyond recognition by State censors, Kozintsev retreated from cinema, returning to the theater, where he had worked periodically during the 1940s. With the passing of Stalin in March of

1953, the unofficial ban on *Hamlet* was lifted, but Kozintsev's offer to stage the play was by no means an unimpeded process. In a letter dated the 7th of September, 1953 and addressed to his set designer, the "dear and priceless friend and master" Nathan Altman, Kozintsev describes the frustratingly long procedure of confirming the contract with the Leningrad Academic Theater's artistic director, R. Skorobogatov. As the country scrambled to work through the early implications of the passing of Stalin, Kozintsev's permission to stage *Hamlet*, of all plays, was punctuated by uncertainty from the theater's high profile officials. The fact that *Hamlet* had never even been explicitly banned along with the recent memory of colossal censorship focused on Kozintsev's works, created an atmosphere of indecision and vacillation. Kozintsev, in his letter, nevertheless indicates his impatience to bring Altman to Leningrad to begin the actual work:

There appeared in the papers an interview with the theater, in which it is stated that our production will in fact begin. [...] On the 10th, I am to go to the theater, seemingly to sign the contracts and resolve all remaining questions (including your own immediate arrival) but, schooled by these recent events, I believe nothing. If everything will really be put into motion, then they should immediately contact you by telegram. [...] This is my news, if indeed one can call this news⁹.

Whether or not the meeting of the 10th took place as had been promised to Kozintsev, the production was eventually put in motion and, in a letter to Pasternak dated October 9th, 1953, Kozintsev writes the following, with clear relief and gratification:

I would like to write to you that I have begun staging *Hamlet* in the Leningrad Academic Theater of A.S. Pushkin and that we are all receiving great satisfaction from working with your translation. The play will begin early next year [...] I would like to meet with you and seek your advice¹⁰.

From the context of the letter, it is clear that Kozintsev was excitedly asking for guidance from one of the country's greatest poets, whom he expected to delight with the news that his contemporary translation of *Hamlet* would finally be performed in the Soviet Union.

Kozintsev, however, was to be somewhat disappointed. At this time, Pasternak was in Moscow, working on *Doctor Zhivago*, and while he "took keen interest in the Leningrad *Hamlet* production," any advice he would give Kozintsev manifested itself in letters, for he could not allow himself to interrupt his writing to visit Leningrad¹¹. Thus, the two artists entered into a correspondence that sheds light not only on the difficulties Kozintsev encountered in the staging and production of the 1954 version, but also on Kozintsev's general approach to working with Shakespeare's texts for the decades following, including his struggle, and eventual disagreement with Pasternak, over the play's finale.

⁴ Kozintsev, Grigory. *King Lear, the Space of Tragedy: The Diary of a Film Director*. Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1977. P. 49.

⁵ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Vremya i sovest': iz rabochikh tetradei* [Time and Conscience: Notes from Working Diaries]. Moscow: Biuro propagandy sovetskogo kinoiskusstva [Bureau of Soviet Cinematic Propaganda], 1981. P. 9.

⁶ Schnitzer, Luda, and Marcel Martin, eds., *Cinema in Revolution: The Heroic Era of the Soviet Film*. New York: Hill And Wang, 1973. P. 114.

⁷ Akimov, Nikolai. "О постановке 'Гамлета' в театре им. Вахтангова" [On the production of *Hamlet* in the Vakhtangov Theater]. *Театральное наследие* [Theatrical Inheritance]. Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1978. P. 129.

⁸ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Shakespeare: Time and Conscience*. Translated by Joyce Vining. New York: Hill And Wang, 1966. P. 143.

⁹ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Vremya i sovest': iz rabochikh tetradei* [Time and Conscience: Notes from Working Diaries]. Moscow: Biuro propagandy sovetskogo kinoiskusstva [Bureau of Soviet Cinematic Propaganda], 1981. P. 416.

¹⁰ Ibid. P. 417.

¹¹ Barnes, Christopher. *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography 2, 1928–1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. P. 291.



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Regardless of any eventual difference of opinion, Kozintsev maintained from this point on that Pasternak's translation was "a true treasure," for it presented the language of Shakespeare's characters as "contemporary Russian speech, free from stylization"¹². More problematic, and yet eventually most invaluable was Pasternak's emphasis in his letters on the necessity of Kozintsev's absolute freedom in working with the text: "I forgot to say the most important, the reason why I wrote this letter. Cut, change, and reorganize as you want. The more you throw out of the text, the better[...] Use the text as you want, with full freedom: it is your right"¹³. Indeed, while Kozintsev came to see Pasternak's advice of 1953 as among the most influential of his entire career, at first, he was somewhat astonished by such an unorthodox approach, especially from a greatly esteemed poet. In a November 1953 response to Pasternak's letter, he expressed his determination to do his utmost so that any abridgment would take place "only in the most unavoidable cases"¹⁴.

At this early point of the artistic process, Kozintsev was still presumably struggling with the task of packaging the entirety of Shakespeare's play, so long unstaged in Russia, and hesitated to cut too many parts:

One only begins cutting, and a poetic entrance is lost, the force of poetry disappears, and other expression (in terms of action) can never be as invaluable. And so the unavoidable abridgment (for the play's running time) I am trying to do in full scenes, and not inside the most poetically forceful spots¹⁵.

Nevertheless, increased cutting was inevitable, as the running time for the play demanded it more and more. Furthermore, Kozintsev ultimately made use of this "right" of cutting to the fullest for the stage version and not simply because of a matter of time, but a matter "of conscience"¹⁶. Thus, this freedom of movement enabled Kozintsev to attempt an adaptation, or rather, a transformation of this famous play into a contemporary text.

Kozintsev would later describe Pasternak's approach to translation in his book, *Deep Screen*:

Pasternak approached Shakespeare with the deepest love, and by "reckless treatment," he understood it seems not the ripping apart of tragedy. It was necessary to solve the most complex task: to transform the verbal texture into some other principle, a wordless or succinct action. The main issue was the complex relationship between the words and the very essence of literary work, for it is always possible to pronounce every word, and say nothing¹⁷.

Therefore, the attempt to transform poetry into "succinct action" necessitated a liberal attitude with the text, and this attempt was

¹² Kozintsev, Grigory. *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* [Collected Works in Five Volumes]. ed. Valentina Kozintseva, Yakov. Butovsky. Leningrad: Isskustvo, 1982-6. Vol. 1. P. 240.

¹³ Ibid. P. 240.

¹⁴ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Vremya i sovest': iz rabochikh tetradei* [Time and Conscience: Notes from Working Diaries]. Moscow: Biuro propagandy sovetskogo kinoiskusstva [Bureau of Soviet Cinematic Propaganda], 1981. P. 418.

¹⁵ Ibid. P. 418.

¹⁶ Ibid. P. 419.

¹⁷ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* [Collected Works in Five Volumes]. ed. Valentina Kozintseva, Yakov. Butovsky. Leningrad: Isskustvo, 1982-6. Vol. 1. P. 241.

made possible by the advice of Pasternak, who, like Horatio, found more meaning in the gaps in speech, and "considered that the merit of poetry was that there was more left unsaid than there was said"¹⁸.

The matter "of conscience," in turn, involved the staging of the finale of the play, which resulted in a disagreement with Pasternak as well as general puzzlement on the part of his audience. Kozintsev's first production of *Hamlet* was not generally regarded to be a major success, but rather a "highlight of the 'Thaw,'" as "such a production of *Hamlet* would have been unthinkable under the *ancien regime*"¹⁹. Most conspicuous in the production was the complete exclusion of Fortinbras' arrival in the moments following Hamlet's death. It is ironic that in following Pasternak's advice, and using his right to cut whatever he deemed necessary, Kozintsev opened himself up to serious criticism from his audience as well as from Pasternak.

As indicated above, the arrival of Fortinbras, which marks the end of the play, was a lifelong question and considerable irritation for Kozintsev. The director could not find any possible means of understanding how Shakespeare could welcome a new ruler, who was "ready to put thousands of people aimlessly into the earth"²⁰ over a matter of a piece of land of little value and who would rule over a country populated by "vacuous fools" such as Osric²¹. This refusal to process and celebrate the meaningless transition from one corrupt government to another mirrors quite tragically the actual situation of Kozintsev's own country, which was to bask in the relative freedom of the Thaw for only a short period. One has only to peruse the correspondence between Kozintsev and Pasternak around the time of the 1954 staging of *Hamlet*, to see this dilemma forcefully stated, as well as to appreciate the director's desire to communicate his deep objections to his country's politics to another artist, who understood the State's situation all too well:

I find nothing pleasant in Fortinbras. [...] With what should I end the tragedy? I would have liked to finish it with a thought often repeated in tragedies: the force of the noble human effort, the power of poetry, which does not want to agree to the baseness and humiliation of the century — and will survive all the coats of arms and the thrones of tsars.

Kozintsev could not understand how to stage such a rupture in what he believed to be the essence of not only the play, but of human life: "the power of poetry" which will not yield to any external authority. Furthermore, he suspected that Shakespeare's own inclusion of the triumphant entrance of a new ruler was not artistically, but politically motivated:

Either it is a decorative finale: ostrich feathers on helmets, flags, fanfare and all that operatic luxury that I've wanted to avoid in this production. Or, and I believe this to be the case, the ending was necessary because of censorship. Whatever was happening with the

¹⁸ Kozintsev, Grigory. *King Lear, the Space of Tragedy: The Diary of a Film Director*. Berkeley: University Of California Press, 1977. P. 19.

¹⁹ Barnes, Christopher. *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography 2, 1928-1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. P. 291.

²⁰ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* [Collected Works in Five Volumes]. ed. Valentina Kozintseva, Yakov. Butovsky. Leningrad: Isskustvo, 1982-6. Vol. IV. P. 539.

²¹ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Shakespeare: Time and Conscience*. Translated by Joyce Vining. New York: Hill And Wang, 1966. P. 171.



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dreamers and protectors of human honor, the throne of England needed a strong ruler²².

Pasternak, however, showed himself to be rather indifferent to Kozintsev's insight; he saw no such confusion in Shakespeare's ending. His answer was remarkably simple. In a letter to Kozintsev, he wrote: "The end seems to me natural. It is the roar of life's general continuation after the silence of isolated death. Such contrasts are not rare for a Shakespeare curtain. They are habitual with him, and clear as to intention"²³.

Kozintsev's trouble with the character of Fortinbras, however, was not lessened by these words, and he opted for a different ending entirely. He cut Hamlet's final words welcoming the new ruler, "I cannot live to hear the news from England, But I do prophesy th' election lights on Fortinbras. He has my dying voice," and even the famous "the rest is silence" (5. 2. 337-41). Kozintsev's vision demanded that after Hamlet utters "Had I but time — as this foul sergeant, Death, is strict in his arrest — O, I could tell you [...]" (5. 2. 319-20), the tragedy ends and the audience's attention is directed to a celebration of poetry, rather than politics: "the set decorations are cleared, and against a minimalist background, coming to the front of the stage, Hamlet recites the words of the 74th Sonnet as his final monologue, addressing not literally the audience, but some kind of invisible interlocutor"²⁴. Kozintsev's account does not match that of his assistant director, Reuben Agamirzyan, who notes that as the set decorations are cleared, a large statue of Nike of Samothrace, the goddess of victory, remains on the stage set against a blue sky.

Having asked Pasternak for a translation of this sonnet, Kozintsev received a rather threadbare first draft: "My translation is a sketch. It should settle for a little while even if it is successful, and in the coming days I will not work on it any more"²⁵. As time was pressing, however, Kozintsev was forced to find another solution, and so he used the translation of the poet and writer Samuil Marshak, inadvertently offending Pasternak, who was somewhat "miffed" at this slight²⁶. As he wrote to his cousin, Olga Freidenberg, a formidable philologist in her own right, whose posthumous fame far exceeded her limited prominence in Soviet Russia during her lifetime, Pasternak partly blamed himself for this confusion: "I sometime answer too speedily with unpleasant consequences, and in letters, there often lie nuances of brusqueness, which can offend the addressee. In this manner, I believe I have offended Kozintsev"²⁷.

Ultimately, Kozintsev's staging of *Hamlet's* finale clearly unsettled audiences, although Agamirzyan notes that all audiences re-

sponded favorably to the statue of Nike: "Poor Nike was also lucky: from review to review, she was remembered by all — by those who accepted the Fortinbras-less finale, and by those who categorically rejected it"²⁸. Freidenberg, who lived in Leningrad, had the opportunity of seeing the play and replied to her cousin's letter, carefully describing her impressions of the production. Her overall verdict in her letter written April 4th, 1954, was that "the play was magnificent, but it wasn't Shakespeare"²⁹. The brunt of her criticism was directed toward the absence of Fortinbras. According to her, this cut resulted in the loss of the most important philosophical conception of the play, the very "sense of its sense:" "There was no Fortinbras. And because of this, a singularly philosophical image disappeared. What is *Hamlet* without Fortinbras? It is like with Maupassant: in the final phrase, there is the disclosure of the very sense of its sense [raskrytie vsego smyslovogo smysla] (I wrote this by accident, but I'll leave it)"³⁰.

Freidenberg's argument for the importance of the finale is highly significant for it replicates her own meditation on life and the imminent approach of death. Among her general admissions to Pasternak of her profound exhaustion with life and heartbreak over the passing of so many of her dear friends, she attributes a similar tiredness to Hamlet himself. In her understanding of Shakespeare's play, Fortinbras represents a fresh force that is prepared to take over the burden of life where the tired prince is crushed under its weight. In a further identification with Hamlet, Freidenberg, a classical philologist, sees the prince as a creator and discoverer of meaning under deep layers of time:

[T]his is Fortinbras. It is eternal youth; it is life in its unconditional ebb and flow. He must come. When Hamlet dies, Fortinbras enters — otherwise life could not continue on earth. Hamlet takes so much away with his death! In what lies his drama? In the fact that he lived for life itself (if one can say such a thing!), that he took life's full weight upon himself; he worked from morning till night creating its meaning, moving through the thickness of its sense, like an earthworm. Hamlet's exhaustion is infinite. Fortinbras is not burdened by this world-weariness³¹.

Pasternak's reaction to his cousin's letter was deeply sincere. He answered almost immediately, on the 16th of April, 1954: "Dearest Olya! I'm responding to you the very moment after having read your talented, captivating, broad and deep letter [...] I wept, reading your lines"³². Freidenberg's health turned for the worst in the year following these letters, and she died in July of 1955.

While Pasternak's initial reaction to Kozintsev's problems with Fortinbras was, as described above, terse, the poetics of Shakespeare's finales reappeared in his works in 1956, when he published expanded notes on his "Translating Shakespeare" [Zamechaniya k perevodam iz Shekspira]. His words seem to echo both his correspondence with both Kozintsev and Freidenberg. Though he does not reiterate Freidenberg's overwhelming sense of exhaustion, he

²² Kozintsev, Grigory. *Vremya i sovest': iz rabochikh tetradei* [Time and Conscience: Notes from Working Diaries]. Moscow: Biuro propagandy sovetskogo kinoiskusstva [Bureau of Soviet Cinematic Propaganda], 1981. P. 419.

²³ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Shakespeare: Time and Conscience*. Translated by Joyce Vining. New York: Hill And Wang, 1966. P. 220.

²⁴ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Vremya i sovest': iz rabochikh tetradei* [Time and Conscience: Notes from Working Diaries]. Moscow: Biuro propagandy sovetskogo kinoiskusstva [Bureau of Soviet Cinematic Propaganda], 1981. P. 420.

²⁵ Ibid. P. 422.

²⁶ Barnes, Christopher. *Boris Pasternak: A Literary Biography 2, 1928–1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. P. 291.

²⁷ Pasternak, Boris Leonidovich. *Переписка с Ольгой Фрейденберг* [Correspondence with Olga Freidenberg]. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981. P. 310.

²⁸ Agamirzyan, Reuben. *Время. Театр. Режиссер*. [Time, Theater, Director]. Leningrad: 1987: 4. P. 89.

²⁹ Pasternak, Boris Leonidovich. *Переписка с Ольгой Фрейденберг* [Correspondence with Olga Freidenberg]. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1981. P. 312.

³⁰ Ibid. P. 313.

³¹ Ibid. P. 313.

³² Ibid. P. 315.



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emphasizes the mediocrity that inevitably rushes on stage after the passing of a great hero: “[Shakespeare] makes vulgar mediocrity snort and rush in on the funereal solemnity of his finales”³³. Remaining consistently indifferent to the explicit political intrigues and connotations of the transition of power, Pasternak also adds his characteristic sense of the presence of eternity despite life's catastrophes:

No situation as seen by the artist or the thinker is final; every position is the last but one. It is as if Shakespeare were afraid lest the audience should believe too firmly in the seemingly unconditional finality of denouements. By breaking up the rhythm at the end he re-establishes infinity. In keeping with the character of modern art and in contrast to the fatalism of the ancient world, he dissolves the mortal, temporal quality of the individual sign in its immortal, universal significance³⁴.

Such an interpretation corresponds to Pasternak's original, terse reply to Kozintsev. Here, however, Pasternak articulates a more elaborate perspective of the necessity of the ending: it reconfigures a sense of eternity that underlies the finite existence of Elsinore and Hamlet's story.

Whether or not Kozintsev considered the 1954 stage version a flop, it hardly put him off the play altogether, for after his return to cinema a few years later, he decided to film the play and learn from the mistakes of the theatrical production. In *Deep Screen* [Gluboky ekran], published in 1971, Kozintsev recollected his great surprise at Pasternak's advice to cut Shakespeare's text so liberally, insisting that such advice is most particularly suited to cinema: “The freedom, which was for me as well as for Pasternak so necessary, could only be found in a complex way: not only must one try to secure the essence of tragedy in the fullness of its meaning, but also to find the character of Shakespeare's imagery in a different art form”³⁵. Thus, once again, for his 1964 film, Kozintsev used Pasternak's translation and asked for new music from Shostakovich.

It is noteworthy that in inviting Shostakovich to collaborate in film, Kozintsev expressed his conviction that cinema provided a more “basic” or necessary medium for listening and understanding Shakespeare than did the stage. As he completed *Hamlet* and was preparing to tackle *King Lear*, the last film before his death, Kozintsev insisted upon “an infinity between listening and hearing”: “Many times, I have listened to a whole Shakespearean text in the theater, and often did not hear what was basic [...]—all this I am sure can be expressed on the screen more completely than it is possible on the stage. Yes, more completely and with fewer words”³⁶. Ultimately, *Hamlet* the film received far more praise than did the stage version, but for Kozintsev, the confusion surrounding Fortinbras was by no means resolved.

The film stages the finale in the following way: Fortinbras enters, but Hamlet, though dead, remains the focal point of the denouement. After Hamlet's death, the camera pans right in the direc-

tion of the sea, but stops with a close-up of the very rock on which Elsinore stands. There is a brief tolling of the bell, which is then followed by the sounds of marching armor: Fortinbras has entered Elsinore, striding purposefully and followed closely by his army. He delivers his speech to his captains, telling them to bear Hamlet away nobly and to clear the bodies from the castle. Shostakovich's opening musical theme reappears during the procession which bears Hamlet out of the confines of the castle, beyond the opening of the portcullis, which had so notably trapped the Prince inside in the exposition of the film, though now the music is enriched with new melodic variation. Nonetheless, the steady beat remains even while the music seems to have a re-emergent triumphant timbre as Hamlet's body is carried out along the seashore, where crowds of peasants have gathered to witness the events unfolding within the castle. Kozintsev cuts to a shot of the sea. In other words, in the finale, Fortinbras is introduced not as a new ruler, but as a man who honors Hamlet. His presence and the accompanying music seek to give Hamlet's memory its due, rather than to celebrate the triumph of new military power.

As Kozintsev himself made clear about his 1954 stage production, “There was no ‘catharsis’ or purification on my stage”³⁷. Such a statement is true again of his film version, but not for the reasons that historian of Shostakovich's film music, John Riley, suggests: “the film ends as it began, with images of the sea and rocks and the music of Hamlet, whose ineffectuality has endangered the state”³⁸. Such a reading ignores Kozintsev's identification with Hamlet's quest for truth and virtual indifference to the need to build Elsinore into a grand political kingdom. Fortinbras does not bring with him any relief or optimism over the future of Denmark, even if he represents the might of the future state. Riley's emphasis on the importance of military stability bypasses the more pressing issue that with the death of Hamlet, so dies the hope of the quest for truth and meaning, as well as for self-expression, so prominent in Russian interpretations. According to Kozintsev, the power of the state can only mask growing catastrophe. Moreover, this awareness of imminent catastrophe underlying any glorification of power represents the very core of Shakespeare's tragedies:

Why do I love Shakespeare so much? Because he sensed it all. His genius is not in the power of the contemporary (contemporary for me) form, but because this form expresses foreseeing.

So what is, ultimately, the most important aspect of his art? A sense of unavoidable, approaching catastrophe³⁹.

This insight also reappears in Kozintsev's 1969 film version of *King Lear*, a play in which the transition of power cannot cover up the deeper sickness that seeps from the underlying layers of the kingdom's powerful political structure.

As late as 1973, the year of his death, Kozintsev was still engaged in decoding the ending of *Hamlet*. Moreover, in his notes, he finally permits himself to articulate his own disappointment with

³³ Pasternak, Boris Leonidovich. *I Remember: Sketch for and Autobiography*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1959. P. 149.

³⁴ Ibid. P. 149.

³⁵ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* [Collected Works in Five Volumes]. ed. Valentina Kozintseva, Yakov. Butovsky. Leningrad: Isskustvo, 1982–6. Vol. 1. P. 241.

³⁶ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Shakespeare: Time and Conscience*. Translated by Joyce Vining. New York: Hill And Wang, 1966. P. 269.

³⁷ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* [Collected Works in Five Volumes]. ed. Valentina Kozintseva, Yakov. Butovsky. Leningrad: Isskustvo, 1982–6. Vol. IV. P. 539–540.

³⁸ Riley J. Dmitri Shostakovich: A Life in Film: The Filmmaker's Companion 3 (Kinofiles Filmmakers' Companion). I. B. Tauris. 2005. P. 96.

³⁹ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Vremya i sovest': iz rabochikh tetradei* [Time and Conscience: Notes from Working Diaries]. Moscow: Biuro propagandy sovetskogo kinoiskusstva [Bureau of Soviet Cinematic Propaganda], 1981. P. 9.



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Pasternak's indifference to this bewildering question of Fortinbras, as Kozintsev rather grimly mimics Pasternak's dismissal of the problem:

And so, the finale. Hamlet gives his support to Fortinbras. Historical harmony. The argument between Denmark and Norway, unfair peace treaty, etc. [...] Already long ago I was bothered by this. I was never able to achieve "purification" in this scene.

"It is simply the noise of continuing life. One man dies and life continues making more noise," thus Pasternak answered my perplexity⁴⁰.

To explore the scene further, Kozintsev had searched through archives, trying to find whether or not the scene had been written as a typical Renaissance masque for the new ruler of Denmark, but was unable to "boast of any sensational discoveries"⁴¹.

Still determined to find meaning to this scene, Kozintsev eventually decided that the appearance of England's new monarch, King James, forced Shakespeare to leave the stage altogether. Kozintsev even interpreted Hamlet's last words, "the rest is silence," as Shakespeare's own early farewell to the stage — thus choosing silence over glorification of the state. Consequently, the ending would yet again have to be rewritten and Kozintsev proposed the following sequence:

Today [...] I understood clear sequence; time has entered its joint — with the participation of the protagonists and Shakespeare himself.

Only one link needed to be replaced: at first Fortinbras entered into Denmark. "The rest is silence," answered the poet when he was asked to write a masque for Fortinbras' seizure of the throne.

Life continued to make noise. But poetry was silent. There was a mute period because of the breakdown in the interests of those who were dictating orders and the tastes of the poet.

No longer did one want to say "words, words, words". It was more honest to enter real estate, selling and buying land"⁴²

In other words, the passage of power leads inevitably into a mere exchange of one system for another. Nonetheless, it is the poet, who even in his silence, continues to provoke the voice of conscience, giving beauty and meaning to what Kozintsev had previously understood to be "the baseness and humiliation of the century"⁴³. Moreover, in his contemplation of Shakespeare's silence, Kozintsev clearly contemplates upon his own often unwilling labor under Stalin's regime: "To be one's own judge. Let you not experience this judgment. But without it — nothing in art can be done. The figure of silence is an entire poetics unto itself. From a system of silence is born eloquence. And what eloquence!"⁴⁴. For Kozintsev, then, the finale of *Hamlet* was not merely an artistic puzzle

that had to be solved in order to create a successful work of art. Rather, it became a key to his own artistic and moral sensibilities. His need to find a solution to the finale led him to explore the rather impossible hypotheses of Shakespeare's historical existence, and the necessity on Kozintsev's part to relate his own political situation to that of England at the turn of the seventeenth century indicates how profound his own identification with this text eventually became. While his interpretation of the political transitions at the end of *Hamlet* was not in unison with that of Freidenberg or Pasternak, all three of these major thinkers found that in the events following Hamlet's death, there lies a clue to their own artistic development in a country that experienced so much political turmoil.

Questions surrounding the character of Fortinbras also caught the attention of another great Russian contemporary, Vladimir Nabokov, a writer whose aristocratic family lost its land and property during the revolution. Far away from his home country and from the conversation depicted above, Nabokov felt a similar pull to untangle this Nordic character, and articulated an interpretation diametrically opposed to that Kozintsev, Pasternak or Freidenberg. Like them, however, he considered Fortinbras to be the key to Shakespeare's play. Thus, in Nabokov's novel *Bend Sinister*, another immigrant voice, Ember, with a similar history to that of the author himself ("an obscure scholar, a translator of Shakespeare in whose green, damp country he had spent his studious youth"⁴⁵) gives his unequivocal sympathy to Fortinbras. Ember's reading of the play is as follows:

In *Hamlet* the exposition grimly promises the audience a play founded upon young Fortinbras' attempt to recover the lands lost by his father to King Hamlet. This is the conflict, this is the plot. To surreptitiously shift the stress from this healthy, vigorous and clearcut Nordic theme to the chameleonic moods of an impotent Dane would be, on the modern stage, an insult to determinism and common sense [...] Consciously or unconsciously, the author of *Hamlet* has created the tragedy of the masses and thus has founded the sovereignty of society over the individual. This, however, does not mean that there is no tangible hero in the play. But he is not Hamlet. The real hero is of course Fortinbras, a blooming young knight, beautiful and sound to the core. With God's sanction, this fine Nordic youth assumes the control of miserable Denmark which had been so criminally misruled by degenerate King Hamlet and Judeo-Latin Claudius⁴⁶.

Whether or not Ember articulates Nabokov's personal opinion, it is clear that the idea of reclaiming lost lands, so central to Nabokov, never occurred to Kozintsev, Pasternak, or Freidenberg.

If listening to Ophelia's broken sentences, Horatio senses danger, Gertrude is reminded only of her own guilt:

*To my sick soul (as sin's true nature is)
Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss.
So full of artless jealousy is guilt
It spills itself in fearing to be spilt. (4.5.17–20)*

⁴⁰ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* [Collected Works in Five Volumes]. ed. Valentina Kozintseva, Yakov. Butovsky. Leningrad: Isskustvo, 1982–6. Vol. IV. P. 540.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* P. 539.

⁴² *Ibid.* P. 539–40.

⁴³ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* [Collected Works in Five Volumes]. ed. Valentina Kozintseva, Yakov. Butovsky. Leningrad: Isskustvo, 1982–6. Vol. V. P. 419.

⁴⁴ Kozintsev, Grigory. *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* [Collected Works in Five Volumes]. ed. Valentina Kozintseva, Yakov. Butovsky. Leningrad: Isskustvo, 1982–6. Vol. IV. P. 539.

⁴⁵ Nabokov, Vladimir. *Bend Sinister*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1947. P. 29.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* P. 108.



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The pause in the transition of power from Hamlet to Fortinbras becomes precisely that “unshaped” space which calls its onlookers to fill the interval with their own experience of life and meditations. Kozintsev, Pasternak and Freidenberg, all Soviet artists forced to curb their opinions for the sake of their own safety, react to this

space in their own personal manner. While such a disagreement among different artists might seem on the surface to be a trivial matter, it testifies to the aptness of Kozintsev's insight that out of silence grows eloquence.

Primary texts

For Kozintsev's writings, the following editions were used:

- Kozintsev, Grigory. *Sobranie sochinenii v piati tomakh* [Collected Works in Five Volumes]. ed. Valentina Kozintseva, Yakov. Butovsky. Leningrad: Isskustvo, 1982-6.
- Kozintsev, Grigory. *Vremya i sovest': iz rabochikh tetradei* [Time and Conscience: Notes from Working Diaries]. Moscow: Biuro propagandy sovietskogo kinoiskusstva [Bureau of Soviet Cinematic Propaganda], 1981.

Translations from these texts are my own, as well as those of the correspondence between Boris Pasternak and Olga Freidenberg. Where English translations of Kozintsev's work were available, I used:

- Kozintsev, Grigory. *Shakespeare: Time and Conscience*. Translated by Joyce Vining. New York: Hill And Wang, 1966.
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