



## Literary Constellations of Andrey Zvyagintsev's Oeuvre

This book offers the interpretation of complete works made by Andrey Zvyagintsev, one of the best-known contemporary directors, in the context of selected texts from Russian literature. Although his films tend to be widely discussed in the press and compared with masterpieces from the world cinematography (e.g. the works of Michelangelo Antonioni, Ingmar Bergman, Robert Bresson, Michael Haneke, Alfred Hitchcock, Alexander Sokurov, and most often, Andrey Tarkovsky) it is easy to note, both in Poland and abroad, the lack of in-depth monographs that treat his works as a whole, a consistent and carefully planned art project. This monograph is the first attempt to undertake such research. The interpretations presented here are comparative in their nature, and their methodological basis is the category of cultural memory as expounded in the theories of Astrid Erll and Renate Lachmann, who combine this term with the broadly understood notion of intertextuality, which is close to the concept of the memory of the text. Apart from detailed analyses of all Zvyagintsev's short and feature films (including TV series), the book also offers an overview of articles published so far on his works in Russian, English and Polish. The author takes into account the comments made by the Russian director himself concerning his movies and the situation of contemporary Russian culture.

The introduction presents the general concept of the book and its theoretical background, giving a justification for the research method that has been selected and focusing attention on the relationship between the development of memory studies and the process of close reading of literary and film texts. This part of the monograph also explains the choice of the metaphor of the constellation as the framework of separate studies contained in each chapter, as well as the way of thinking about the world.

Chapter One focuses on a discussion of three episodes of the TV series *Black Room*, i.e. *Bushido*, *Obscure*, and *Choice* in the context of Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*. The aim of this part is to understand the role of the migratory motif of the underground in Zvyagintsev's films, which leads to discovering

a number of formal, structural and thematic similarities between the works of the two authors, such as *inter alia* the references to the category of the double, taking advantage of the aesthetics of (*neo*)-*noir*, and the gestures of the body that can be associated with the concept of the simulacrum.

Chapter Two offers an examination of the first feature film *The Return* and one of Andrey Platonov's short stories with the same title. The juxtaposition with the literary text helps the author to propose a new way of interpreting Zvyagintsev's movie, which is treated as a study in overcoming various types of traumas. The observation of nonverbal language in the film allows the recipient to connect the extreme experiences of its teenage characters with the memories of war defining the hero of Platonov's prose.

Chapter Three gives the insight into family relationships in the film *The Banishment* and Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, concentrating primarily on the behaviour of two main female protagonists in both works. Finding a number of visual and verbal correspondences between them, the author tries to prove that Vera and Anna serve as representations of the function of art in society undergoing crisis, and a reflection of the role of the feminine element in the world. These compatibilities also turn the reader's attention to the work of memory, transforming the concepts, motifs and themes appearing in culture, updating them and making them still intellectually challenging.

Chapter Four presents the results of the analysis of the short film *Apocrypha*, exposing the explicit and implicit visual associations with the personage and poetry of Iosif Brodsky. Attention is paid to the motifs characteristic of both Brodsky's and Zvyagintsev's poetics, such as aquatic symbolism, temporal and topographical relationships, the chromatography of cold colours etc. The application of the selected methodology in the discussion allows for reflections on the dynamics of the changing nature of culture, which again becomes the container of the social and territorial fluctuations of memory.

Chapter Five offers an interpretation of the short movie *Mystery*, which is compared with Ivan Bunin's story *Sunstroke*. The central part of the case study comprises the issue of photography, the question of remembering the past and object-subject relationships. While Zvyagintsev's film presents a more individual perspective of looking at these problems, Bunin's prose reveals a more collective point of view, bringing to mind the problem of nostalgia and historical past.

Chapter Six contains a discussion of the spatial elements in the film *Elena* from the point of view of selected Anton Chekhov dramas. This investigation shows that space not only allows the quality of the relationships existing between the characters to be recognized, but also encodes and anticipates the fictional pattern of Zvyagintsev's work. This part concentrates on the juxtapositions of subsequent shots functioning as assonances or dissonances, as well as on the inner montage of single units, revealing important elements of the film structure, emphasising the ambiguous nature of the reality and the disintegration of the contemporary world.

Chapter Seven focuses on an interpretation of *Leviathan*, adapting the traditions of Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin, in particular those deriving from his novel *The Golovlyov Family*. The discussion of selected satirical aspects of eating and drinking activities found both in classic and contemporary works refers, among other things, to Olga Freudenberg's findings on the nature of basic life rituals and Thomas Hobbes's treatise on the structure of the society and government.

Chapter Eight examines the relationship between *Loveless*, the latest of Zvyagintsev's feature films, and *The Heart of a Dog*, one of Mikhail Bulgakov's most popular short stories. The author is not interested in treating Zvyagintsev's text as an illustration of Bulgakov's plot, but rather in discussing certain topics which are deposited in Russian literature and constantly reused and reinterpreted, creating the framework for communication across 'the abyss of time.' Analogies between the selected texts are sought in the area of their structure, some thematic overlapping, the authors' approach to the issue of authoritarian ideology, and the role of technology, as well as in exploring the function of space as one of the narrative mechanisms, in particular, in the context of the category of home and anti-home.

Conclusions, followed by a bibliography and index, constitute the closing parts of the monograph. Taking advantage of the new application of the category of cultural memory allows the author to propose a model of possible understandings of the metaphor of the constellation in reference to Zvyagintsev's oeuvre.