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Following Brodsky. Andrey Zvyagintsev's *Apocrypha*

Вслед за Бродским. *Апокриф* Андрея Звягинцева

Abstract. The article presents the study of the short film *Apocrypha* by Andrei Zvyagintsev. The text is aimed at the interpretation of the movie in the context of the problem of memory, which is emphasised in the selected work in the explicit and implicit visual associations with the figure and poetry of Iosif Brodsky. The recognition of these characteristic elements in the structure of Zvyagintsev's film has the influence on the perception of its meaning, leading the culturally aware recipient towards discovering its broad interpretative potential in view of the Russian literary tradition. The study is conducted using the comparative method of analysis. The core theory which constitutes the methodological foundation of the study is Astrid Erll's concept of cultural memory expounded as intertextuality, i.e. the continuous building up of layers of texts, which are mediated, as well as her idea of transcultural memory, defined in the first instance as a process of fluctuation between the individual and collective level of remembering. Attention is turned to the motifs, which are characteristic both for Brodsky's and Zvyagintsev's poetics, such as the aquatic symbolism, temporal and topographical relationships, chromatography of cold colours etc. The application of the selected methodology in the presented discussion allows for exposing the dynamics of the changing nature of culture, which becomes the container of the social and territorial fluctuations of memory.

Keywords: Brodsky, Zvyagintsev, *Apocrypha*, memory, Saint Petersburg

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The world-wide debut of Andrey Zvyagintsev's short film *Apocrypha* (*Апокриф*, 2009) took place on the 23rd of July 2009. The film was meant to be one of the novellas in the anthology *New York, I love you* (2008), an American production constituting a sequel to the film *Paris, je t'aime* (2006). Both films were coproduced by Emmanuel Benbihy, who invited the Russian director to the project. It was envisioned as a series of short films about the cities of love, respectively New York and Paris, each part created by a separate director. Whereas the focus group screening of *New York, I love you* featured 14 films, 2 of them – Zvyagintsev's *Apocrypha* and Scarlett Johansson's *These Vagabond Shoes* – were removed by film distributors and found their way to spectators only through DVDs,

which were widely available around the world. The rejected films were said to be not dynamic enough and not compatible with the other short projects (Zvjagincev 2009c, electronic source).

The story mentioned above may explain the relatively low popularity of the Russian movie among journalists and academics, although they tend to consider it as one of the most typical of Zvyagintsev's works, contrary to his other short films, e.g. those included in the TV series *The Black Room* (*Черная комната*, 2000) (Câpka, electronic source). The presented study is aimed at the interpretation of *Apocrypha* in the context of the problem of memory, especially the work of cultural and migratory memory, which is reflected upon in the movie both in the explicit and implicit visual associations with the figure and poetry of Iosif Brodsky. Consequently, the attention will be turned to the visual representations of the repetitive thematic motifs in the lyrics and essays of the Nobel Prize winner, as well as to the dynamic nature of memory processes, which are assumed to be encoded in the montage solutions and the structure of the whole film. Brodsky's texts which will be of particular interest to me during the analysis are his essay *In a Room and a Half* (*Полтора комнаты*, 1986) and the poems in which the author explores the potential of the aquatic symbolism. They are selected as the most symptomatic model texts showing the relationship between the inevitable interchangeability of the processes of remembering and forgetting.

The study of *Apocrypha* will be conducted using the comparative method of analysis. The core theory which will constitute the methodological foundation of the interpretation is Astrid Erll's concept of cultural memory expounded as intertextuality, i.e. the continuous building up of layers of texts, which are mediated and in a way rewritten due to the work of social and collective memory. It is worth noting that this approach remains very close to Yuri Lotman and Boris Uspensky's propositions, treating culture as a never-ending and open process of negotiation, assimilation and mediation. The other notion, which will be undoubtedly referred to, is Erll's idea of transcultural memory, defined in the first instance as a process of fluctuation between the individual and collective level of remembering, a kind of circulation in many different dimensions, i.e. social, media and semantic (Erll 51). It could be linked *inter alia* to Maurice Halbwachs's concept of social frames of remembering, so called *cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, which – contrary to any immediate associations this notion may evoke – emphasise the fact of the instability of memory, its transitional nature and continuous striving to overcoming territorial or social boundaries (Halbwachs 51–96). Halbwachs focused on the diversity of these *cadres*, which permeate and overlap in the minds of individuals, as well as on the specific transcultural character of each individual mind, which is able to produce memories, deciding about the uniqueness of every human being. Finally, Erll's understanding of transcultural memory is derived from Wolfgang Welsch's

observations of the changing nature of culture, which is no longer homogenous, ethnically consolidated or attached to a given geographical area (Welsch 194).

Before moving on to the interpretation of the selected short film, it is worth pointing out the most important commentaries regarding *Apocrypha*, which can be found in print or online. Zvyagintsev himself, in the interviews following the premiere of the film, turns attention to technical aspects connected with its creation:

До съемок только мечта увидеть этот город. Я решил, что, действительно, что-нибудь обязательно должно родиться. В запасе была идея, связанная с именем Иосифа Бродского. Фрагмент стихотворения, которое мы использовали в фильме – это перевод из Уистона Хью Одена. Кстати, эпизод в новелле, который происходит у дома Бродского, можно сказать, основан на реальных событиях. Когда мы впервые пришли к дому Бродского на Мортон стрит 44, мы с Мишей (оператор Михаил Кричман. – Примеч. Grazia) гадали, окна какого этажа из трех были окнами его квартиры. Так в сценарии появился вопрос туристки, обращенный к нашему герою. Актриса, сыгравшая эту роль, спросила у меня: „Это действительно дом Бродского?“ „Да“. „А кто такой Бродский?“ – уточнила она... (Zvjagincev 2009b, electronic source).

Apocrypha's director most often explains that he had never visited New York before making the film, and therefore the conceptual phase of preparing the project was particularly difficult. Additionally, its very idea stayed somewhat bit enigmatic as the directors of the novellas did not know the content of the other episodes but their own. As a result, the most creative job connected with the plotline was done spontaneously, already on the spot, in *The Big Apple*:

У меня еще в Москве была идея соединить фигуры Бродского и Одена, оттого в фильме и звучит стихотворение Уистона Хью Одена в переводе Иосифа Бродского. Потом, уже в Нью-Йорке, дополнительно появилась аллюзия на *Фотоувеличение* Антониони (Zvjagincev 2009a, electronic source).

The question, which turned out to be the most intriguing to the largest number of journalists, was of course the one touching upon the reasons for the film's exclusion from the movie screenings. In this instance Zvyagintsev emphasised the meaning of his authorship vision of the cinema, which is not easily accepted worldwide, as well as the importance of the inner energy of the discussed film, which remains unrecognised by some spectators (Zvjagincev 2009c, electronic source).

Есть официальная версия, озвученная французским продюсером проекта: по оценке фокус-группы в новелле Скарлетт Йоханссон (актриса выступила в качестве одного из режиссеров проекта. – Примеч. Grazia) и в моей действие развивается слишком медленно, и главное – совершенно непонятно о чем наши с ней фильмы. Таково было мнение

американской фокус-группы. Мы мирно разошлись с продюсером. Он очень много хороших слов сказал мне напоследок, сдобрив их извинениями. Но у меня есть собственная догадка о причинах, побудивших американского прокатчика удалить нашу новеллу из альманаха. Я чувствую, что наша новелла просто другой породы и потому она самым естественным образом выпала из общего ряда. Думаю, одной из причин мог стать иной стилистический подход к визуальному и, главное, к ритмическому решению (Zvyaginsev 2009b, electronic source).

Another issue, which is repetitively brought up in the press, is the question of the film's title. Some reviewers connect the religious meaning of the word *apocrypha*, being the text not included in the canon of the officially accepted gospels, with the history of the movie's exclusion from the final version of *New York, I love you!* In this domain the title can be considered a metaphor of the rejection and a symptom of misunderstanding its purpose. Some analysts treat it as a synonym of the story of love, parallel to the other biblical texts, whose main focus is basically the same. Vladimir Tsyapka, apart from noting that *Apocrypha* represents typical stylistics of Zvyagintsev's movies, mentions also the *syuzhet* analogy with Michelangelo Antonioni's *Blow-up*, describing the Russian film as the sign of respect to the Italian director ("дань уважения мастеру") (Сâпка, electronic source).

Aleksandr Popov is not surprised that Zvyagintsev's film did not meet the expectations of the American public as, in his opinion, the spirit of the Russian culture is too obvious in *Apocrypha*, which generally should be read as a meta-thematic work about cinema and photography. He also notes that:

В отличие от других режиссеров альманаха, признававшихся в любви к тем или иным районам Нью-Йорка, для Звягинцева важнее показать драму отношений людей через призму поэзии Бродского – поэта в той же степени интернационального, как и русского (Popov, electronic source).

The 9-minute-story shows that the landscape can mark the way to understanding oneself, can help reflect on the meaning of life, leading to the reconsideration of some past events, in particular the problem of difficult relationships in the family. This kind of interpretational direction evokes the connotations with Wystan Hugh Auden's lyrical statement, expressed in *Funeral Blues*: "I thought that love would last forever: «I was wrong»", which was translated into Russian by Brodsky as the verses of the poem *Похоронный блюз*: "Любви, считал я, нет конца. Я был не прав".

Some reviewers on the Internet site *kinopoisk.ru* expand on the issue of the chromatographic palette of the film, dominated by bluish and greyish colours, considering it a characteristic element of Zvyagintev's film poetics, the artistic device building up the atmosphere of melancholy, as well as a visual sign marking

the end of love. Brodsky is perceived as the central figure in the film, present not only in the verbalised commentaries concerning the search for his flat, and the presented image of his book *Landscape with Flood* (*Пейзаж с наводнением*), but also in the layers of emotions and affects evoked by the film:

Случайную пару, мужчину и женщину, которые переживают не лучшие, но такие настоящие моменты своей жизни. Он читает их лица, читает ссору, их любовь, страсть, боль расставания, таким образом переживая их эмоции как свои. Ведь в этом и есть смысл чтения. Читая стихи, читаешь душу автора. Иосифа Бродского давно нет в живых, а его стих есть. Человек не ходит по этой земле, а мы переживаем его боль, его любовь, страдания, иногда счастье (*Мы не замечаем, как часто читаем души*, electronic source).

Lyudmila Klyuyeva, the author of the most inspiring and detailed analysis of *Apocrypha*, for the core of her interpretation chooses the strategy of deconstruction. She takes advantage of the metaphor of the frame to study the structure of the film, temporal relationships, and the specific topographical meaning of the place where the action begins. The study of the Russian scholar focuses also on the semantic field of the film, in which the past and present meet together to move forward the plotline and have an impact on the future. The outer events influence the inner experience of the protagonists, whose transformations can be observed on the screen in the language of their gesticulation.

То, что мы видим на экране – абсолютно соответствует определению, данному Жаном Эпштейном – „драма под микроскопом“. Экран предъявляет работу наблюдателя, который пытается осмыслить случайно подсмотренное событие. Режиссер интегрирует в сюжет фильма механизм деконструкции этого события, препарировав его до мельчайших составляющих, давая возможность максимально приблизиться к событию, буквально „войти“ в него, пережить его изнутри. В режиме деконструкции уже запечатленное на видео событие неожиданно открывается поразительным текстом, который буквально пишется на наших глазах языком тела и жестов, заставляя напряженно „вчитываться“ в открывающиеся смыслы (Klûeva 303).

In this context the chief role is assigned to the multi-layered text of the human face, which – in Klyuyeva's opinion – reveals the results of the work of memory, and constitutes the imprint of the movement of life (Klûeva 314–315). The basic device used to observe life in Zvyagintsev's film is the potential of the freeze frame. The references to this stylistic solution will become crucial for the interpretation of *Apocrypha* presented within the framework of this article.

At the beginning of the analysis it seems important to ponder the question of the intertextual dialogue with Antonioni's *Blow-up*. As it was mentioned above, some critics already noted the structural and thematic similarities between both works, among them, first of all, the focus on the job of the cameraman/photogra-

pher, who incidentally becomes the witness of the milestone events in the life of the individuals in the films. These, rather obvious associations, however, have never been discussed in a broader and deeper context, allowing for building up the connotations between the Russian and other countries' cultural traditions, which are mediated in *Apocrypha*.

Zvyagintsev's reference to the works of Antonioni plays an important, underestimated role in his film; it is not only a technical or sentimental strategy to pay tribute to the widely acclaimed Italian master of cinema. It helps to define the central theme of the Russian film, which seems to be the memory of death, which is not understood as a demise of the physical body but rather as a continuous process of degradation, loss of people, things, being the consequence of the fact that there is nothing fixed or everlasting in life. Brodsky is undoubtedly chosen as the guide leading us through this unstable world, chosen not by accident, as his poetry, written both in Russian and English, makes him simultaneously a national and international writer, who all his life had striven to define his identity, accepting his American life and, at the same time, never losing Russia on his personal horizon. Additionally, one should also remember that death "disguised" in many metaphors constitutes one of the main topics of Brodsky's works, which to a large degree are also connected with different types of megapolises, e.g. New York, Venice, Leningrad/Saint Petersburg, marked by their own history and culture. As a result, the American city in *Apocrypha* should not be treated solely as the setting of the film and Brodsky's place of abode, but more symbolically as a kind of topographical memorial, a *lieu de mémoire*, as expounded by Pierre Nora. The analysis of Zvyagintsev's movie has to take into account the social change of narration, tightly connected with New York, which took place after the 11th of September 2001. In view of the events of that day, which – according to Gavriel D. Rosenfeld – has become the turning point in memory studies, the city cannot be defined as mainly a multi-ethnic centre of culture or business, but in the first instance becomes the American representation of the nation's history of suffering and the crisis of a divided world (Rosenfeld 147).

The associations with Antonioni's *Blow-up*, apart from giving *Apocrypha* the status of a meta-film about photography and filming, locate it in the context of the movies showing the work of cinema safeguarding the memory. It functions through the continuous fluctuation and mediation of migratory themes, as Marek Hendrykowski defined, dynamically and permanently changing topics, which have been always present in films, constituting the *élan vital* of culture, the domain of symbolic activities (Hendrykowski 143). The protagonist of *Blow-up*, which was inspired by Jose Cortazar's short story, becomes the accidental witness of a murder, which is being committed in front of his eyes. He discovers it also incidentally, when his eyes catch some strange, blurred details while he is studying

the photos hanging on his apartment wall, taken in the park. The mechanism of the recognition of death is identical to the strategy used by Zvyagintsev, i.e. the freeze frame revealing the past becomes the motor of the present action, which allows for projecting the future behaviour of the main character.

The boy in *Apocrypha* also touches upon death, as he – as an unaware witness – watches the end of the fading affection. Several times he rewinds the film presenting the couple on one of the Manhattan bridges, and he analyses their emotions, which – as expressed on the woman's face – could be described as the ones displaying the metaphorical murder of love. The photo, which suddenly falls from Brodsky's book and is found on the bench, shows the woman and the man still smiling and embracing, freezes the happy moments of their life, contrarily to the shots in *Blow-up*, being the proof of a crime. In both stories, Zvyagintsev's and Antonioni's, love is intertwined with loss and death; in a way it is also an inseparable element of the daily routine. It could be even said that it is something accidental and ordinary, but powerful enough to fully transform the life of the individual, to give it a new beginning. Again, in both cases this change achieves the status of a mystery, it is the phenomenon, which is conditioned by the person's ability to believe, to hope and trust. Zvyagintsev's protagonist seems to take advantage of the situation observed to rework the memories of his parents' divorce and the breakup of his family. Antonioni's photographer, taking a decision to join the tennis pantomime at the end of the film, also proves that life cannot be taken too seriously, that all human relationships are governed by certain rules, which need to be accepted to move forward and cope with the things remaining beyond the human understanding and influence.

Love is just one of the many problems with which the theme of death is mediated in *Apocrypha*. Most of all, it is marked by the instability and non-durability of various phenomena, which are visually emphasised in the film. The inevitable end of the present world is perceptible in the condition of both material and immaterial things. The most evident moment confirming such an approach to reality becomes Wystan Hugh Auden's poem *Funeral Blues*, which is read in the film when we can see the boy running to retrieve the book left by the couple on the bench. The lyrics is not recited in its original English version:

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy bone.
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners come.

Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He is Dead,
Put crêpe bows round the white necks of the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black cotton gloves.

He was my North, my South, my East and West,
 My working week and my Sunday rest,
 My noon, my midnight, my talk, my song,
 I thought that love would last forever: "I was wrong".

The stars are not wanted now, put out every one;
 Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
 Pour away the ocean and sweep up the wood.
 For nothing now can ever come to any good (Auden, electronic source).

Zvyagintsev's New York becomes the place when an extract of Brodsky's translation of the poem is presented:

Он был мой Север, Юг, мой Запад, мой Восток,
 Мой шестидневный труд, мой выходной восторг,
 слова и их мотив, местоимений сплав.
 Любви, считал я, нет конца. Я был не прав.
 Созвездья погаси и больше не смотри
 вверх. Упакуй луну и солнце разбери,
 слей в чашку океан, лес чисто подмети.
 Отныне ничего в них больше не найти (Oden, electronic source).

It could be proposed that the introduction of Auden's lyrics becomes the turning point of Zvyagintsev's short film. The poem focuses on the situation of the loss of the loved one, which is compared to the destruction of the world. The relationship which was thought to be stable and lasting is gone, reducing the outside reality to an existence devoid of the elements constituting its permanent foundation, such as the ocean, the sun, and the moon. Consequently, the world is also seen as a fragile construction, which may be rebuilt or even partially removed, or "dismantled". Additionally, this feature can be easily recognised as yet another motif typical for Brodsky's works, known for their repetitively appearing pictures of the human individual who is surrounded by the characteristic objects of aquatic provenience, e.g. the sea, the river, the bridge near the city, *inter alia* in the collected poems *Landscape with Flood*. The symbolism of the leitmotifs mentioned above as well as bringing about the figure of Auden, one of the most respected poets by the author of *Elegy for John Donne*, allow us to assume that the name of the Russian Nobel prize winner functions in Zvyagintsev's film as a kind of central axis, a keyword connecting the meaning of the events building up the plotline with their interpretative parallels, confirming in this way the continuous processes of the cultural memory as expounded by Erl1. As a result, the loss described in Auden's poem in the context of the film could be associated with Brodsky's recurring memories of his parents, who passed away in Russia, unable to visit their only son in emigration, which permanently

changed the emotional geography of the poet as it was expressed in his intimate essay *In a Room and a Half*, written in the USA:

There are two pictures of my parents taken in their youth, in their twenties. He, on the deck of a steamer: a smiling, carefree face, a smokestack in the background; she, on a footboard of a railroad carriage, demurely waving her kid-gloved hand, the buttons of the train conductor's tunic behind. Neither of them is as yet aware of the other's existence, neither of them, of course, is me. Besides, it is impossible to perceive anyone existing objectively, physically outside your own skin, as a part of yourself. "... but Mom and Dad/ Were not two other people" as Auden says. And although I can't relive their past, even as the smallest possible part of either one of them, what is there to prevent me, now that they are objectively nonexistent outside my skin, from regarding myself as their sum, as their future? This way, at least, they are as free as when they were born. Should I brace myself then, thinking that I am hugging my mother and father? Should I settle for the contents of my skull as what's left of them on earth? Possibly. I am presumably capable of this solipsistic feat. And I suppose I may also not resist their shrinkage to the size of my, lesser than their, soul. Suppose I can do that. [...] I am them, of course; I am now our family. Yet since nobody knows the future, I doubt that forty years ago, on some September night of 1939, it crossed their mind that they were conceiving their way out. At best, I suppose, they thought of having a child, of starting a family. Fairly young, and born free on top of that, they did not realize that in the country of their birth it is now the state which decides what kind of family one is to have, and whether one is to have a family at all. When they realized that, it was already too late for everything except hope. Which is what they did until they died: they hoped. Family-minded people, they couldn't do otherwise: they hoped, planned, tried (Brodsky, electronic source).

The above confession shows the process of Brodsky's reformulation of his family and re-identification of his own role after the loss of his parents. He uses Auden's words as the basis for further understanding of the inevitable life changes. He starts from the memories of the parents' youth to claim the present situation and look forward to the future. The analogous mechanism is used by Zvyagintsev as the strategy of the protagonist's recognition of his world. In this case Brodsky's name functions as a metaphorical bonding agent of the two realities, the answer to the questions posed by everyday life. The boy in *Apocrypha* moves from the state of the unknown – he does not realise Brodsky's existence in the beginning – to the condition when his name becomes identified with Russian poetry, the specific, very concrete person and place in the topography of New York, as well as the key to solving his personal problems, a re-definition of the protagonist's family. As a result, it could be said, developing Klyueva's observations, that the film structure is based on the frame within a frame, building up – similarly to Brodsky's literary world – a series of semantic chains consisting of *inter alia* such notions as family, love, death, and memory.

Besides, it is worth noting the parallels in the temporal relationships, which could be characterised as heterochrony, the overlapping and simultaneous coexistence of the past, present and future, both in *Apocrypha* and in many of Brodsky's

works. It may be assumed that Zvyagintsev visually tries to reconstruct this temporal overlapping; the spectator can continuously see the protagonist rewinding the film taken on the bridge, and he reinterprets these past events to build his emotional future. He is observed as coming to terms with his present situation while the framed picture of New York is displayed in the background, confirming the fact that he simultaneously constitutes a part of a bigger picture, visible to those located outside the screen. According to Mieke Bal, heterochrony is one of the symptoms characterising the society which is relocated (Bal 53). It is connected with the experience of an uncertain future, a future which is stabilised by references to the past and present. In the opinion of the critic, it may mark the unpleasant condition of suffering, as the time which has become condensed cannot be structured, it is deformed and useless in the process of motivating individual activities. Consequently, it could be said that taking advantage of such a strategy Zvyagintsev emphasises Brodsky's migratory experience, and makes him an unrecognised stranger in New York, who gradually finds his permanent place there. In this context Zvyagintsev's artistic solution could be also associated with Alison Landsberg's notion of prosthetic memory, marking the process of a deterritorialisation of memory and assimilation of other people's past to create one's own imagination of the present (Landsberg 144–161).



Apocrypha, dir. Andrey Zvyagintsev (2009)

The scholars of the Russian Nobel Prize winner's works very often turn attention to the categories of the sacred and profane time. Joanna Tarkowska in her book *Conceptualisation of Russia and the world in Iosif Brodsky's poetry. Home – city – homeland (Konceptualizacja Rosji i świata w poezji Josifa*

Brodskiego. Dom – miasto – ojczyzna) notes the special role which is assigned to winter in his poetry, its becoming the pretext to show the opposition between these two time aspects. The cold and snowy season is described as the eternal presence, the period when Brodsky's protagonist feels like immersing himself into the stable and indestructible sacral time, which does not exclude the existence of the other, linear, ordinary time of the everyday life (Tarkowska 55). In this context the Neva often functions as the prefiguration of time, turning Leningrad/Saint Petersburg into a calm asylum, a city whose eternal power takes over the earthly routine. Piotr Fast assures that the juxtapositions of the cold cosmos with the lifetime of an individual are definitely not accidental, they can be tracked over the years in Brodsky's poems, exposing the problem of the subjectivity and objectivity of time, in spite of the fact that the meaning of the cold tends to change (Fast 121).

Зима качает светофоры
пустыми крылышками вьюг,
с Преображенского собора
сдувая колокольный звук.

И торопливые фигурки
бормочут – Господи, прости,
и в занесенном переулке
стоит блестящее такси,

но в том же самом переулке
среди сугробов и морен
легко зимою в Петербурге
прожить себе без перемен,

пока рисует подоконник
на желтых краешках газет
непопулярный треугольник
любви, обыденности, бед,

и лишь Нева неугомонно
к заливу гонит облака,
дворцы, прохожих и колонны
и горький вымысел стиха (Brodskij 1961, electronic source).

At this point it could be noted that this intertwining between the earthly and transcendental layer of the city life, exposed in the presented fragment of Brodsky's *Петербургский роман* (1961), is to some degree transformed into Zvyagintsev's vision of New York, which is definitely the place inspired by Brodsky, the city modelled as the American version of the northern Russian metropolis, with its dominating image of water, bridges, and the Hudson Bay, possibly even stand-

ing for the Gulf of Finland etc. As a consequence, the motif of the frame within a frame discussed above could be also associated with the symbol of the window, exposed in the very same poem.

О, Петербург, середины века
 все будто минули давно,
 но, озаряя посвист ветра,
 о, Петербург, мое окно

горит уже четыре ночи,
 четыре года говорит,
 письмом четырнадцатой почты
 в главе тринадцатой горит.

О, Петербург, твои карманы
 и белизна твоих манжет,
 романы в письмах не романы,
 но только в подписи сюжет,

но только уровень погоста
 с рекой на Волковом горбе,
 но только зимние знакомства
 дороже вчетверо тебе,

на обедневшее семейство
 взирая, светят до утра
 прожектора Адмиралтейства
 и императора Петра (Brodskij 1961, electronic source).

Both in Brodsky's poem above and in Zvyagintsev's film, the window/the frame constitutes the centre of the protagonists world, an *imago mundi*; it marks the boundaries of the territory, which is given the status of the sacralised space, where the privileged place is assigned to the family, the people surrounded by and living in the city (Tarkowska 54). The people occupying the Petersburg space are the focus of the reality, which in the lyrics is often characterised by its instability and proneness to destruction.

The inevitable flow of time noticeable in the disintegration of things and relationships is revealed in Zvyagintsev's short film on many interconnected layers. Using the chromatographic palette similar to Brodsky's, dominated by winter bluish and greyish colours, the director makes the recipient note the emotional cruelty and coolness ruling over the scene of the breakup of the couple on one of the Manhattan bridges, despite the sunny weather on that day. The sadness of the woman whose words cannot be heard but can be read from the movement of her lips is rhythmised with the abundance of the surrounding water and the title of Brodsky's book – *Land-*

scape with Flood in its Russian version – found on the bench. In this context both could be associated with the woman's flood of tears, overwhelming and powerful, having at the same time the power to annihilate and stimulate a new life, to bring regeneration. The dynamics of this process allows me also to propose the thesis that the aquatic metaphors in this film sequence could be referred to the work of memory with its obligatory cycle of forgetting and remembering, i.e. exposure of the loss, which is necessary in order to gain something new, to recreate the existing foundation. The structure of the film, based on the mechanism of the flashback, could justify the above interpretation, leading to the conclusion that one of its core themes is the migratory and floating nature of memory, accentuated in its montage structure. Additionally, in view of repetitive motives in Brodsky's works, it could be stated that New York's waters are the symbolic representations of Leningrad's canals, lost by him but never forgotten, as Russia has always been his point of reference.

The unsteadiness of the world is studied in *Apocrypha* also in the changing image of the material things accompanying the everyday life of the individual. One of them is the recurring picture of the wooden poles regularly flooded by water. The relation to the aquatic symbolism allows for linking it with the work of memory discussed above; however, apart from this connection, it may lead the recipient towards the perishability of the substance exposed by Zvyagintsev. Both phenomena, in turn, bring to mind the literary portraits of Brodsky, even though prepared in different places of the globe, always joined by the connotations with Leningrad-Saint Petersburg, the city made of stone, the stable centre of the world, as for example in the already mentioned *Landscape with Flood* (Pawletko 177). Zvyagintsev's focus on the wood and water in the film is first of all linked to New York, the city built of concrete skyscrapers, which once seemed to be one of the world's pillars but, which suddenly, one day, turned out to be as easily damageable as Lego bricks. Consequently, this visualisation could be read as yet another reference to Brodsky's belief in the destructibility of human reality, its floating nature. Wood, when compared with stone, equates to fragility, the potential of being demolished or even disposed of, which in Zvyagintsev's work is strongly mediated in all the images marking different variants of the closure or a worsening condition of things. One of such examples could be the end of love between the protagonist's parents, the motif introduced at the beginning of the film by the father's question about the mother's feelings. In this short conversation with the son the answer is expressed not only in the boy's words but also in his facial expression, momentarily overshadowed by the sign of worry or even hidden suffering. The condition of the male parent after the divorce is somehow signalled in the appearance of his jacket. Generally, he makes the impression of a decent man who is happy with the meeting with his child; the close-up of his garment, however, reveals small holes on its back.



Apocrypha, dir. Andrey Zvyagintsev (2009)

On a surface level of the interpretation it could be linked to the probable lack of female attention, which – in cultures similar to Russia, characterised by the traditional distribution of household duties – is associated with such activities as cooking, sewing and cleaning at home. On a deeper level of knowledge, though, Zvyagintsev's focus on the jacket holes may presume another type of visualisation of Brodsky's observations, contained in his essay *In a Room and a Half*:

They took everything as a matter of course: the system, their powerlessness, their poverty, their wayward son. They simply tried to make the best of everything: to keep food on the table – and whatever that food was, to turn it into morsels; to make ends meet – and although we always lived from payday to payday, to stash away a few rubles for the kid's movies, museum trips, books, dainties. What dishes, utensils, clothes, linen we had were always clean, polished, ironed, patched, starched. The tablecloth was always spotless and crisp, the lampshade above it dusted, the parquet shining and swept.

The amazing thing is that they were never bored. Tired, yes, but not bored. Most of their time at home, they were on their feet: cooking, washing, circulating between the communal kitchen of our apartment and our room and a half, fiddling with this or that item of the household. When they were seated, it was of course for meals, but mainly I remember my mother in a chair, bent over her manual-cum-pedal Singer sewing machine, fixing our clothes, turning old shirt collars inside out, repairing or readjusting old coats. As for my father, his only time in a chair was when he was reading the paper, or else at his desk. Sometimes in the evening they would watch a movie or a concert on our 1952 TV set. Then they would also be seated. This way, seated in a chair in the empty room and a half, a neighbor found my father dead a year ago (Brodsky, electronic source).

Zvyagintsev's camera seems to belong to a very sensitive reader, turning attention to the nuances, which can be associated with the poetics of Brodsky's

works. Analogically to the Russian-American writer, the director is fascinated with the memory of the body, the interactions between the corporeal and the affective sphere of the human activities. In the selected film it is noticeable, first of all, in the concentration on the mimics of the female face. The scene of the couple's breakup is practically mute, similarly to the majority of *Apocrypha*. In spite of this, the unheard dialogue is very dramatic as all the emotions are immediately translated into the work of the facial muscles of the crying woman.



Apocrypha, dir. Andrey Zvyagintsev (2009)

The language of her body is transparent; she is clearly suffering and denying the acceptance of the partner's decision. Her emotions seem to pave the way to understanding the situation of the boy's divorced parents, at the same time becoming again the factor motivating the reading of the scene through the lyrics of the Russian admirer of Auden. Tarkowska describes the motif of the face in Brodsky's poetry as "the sum of the existence", in this way confirming the presented recognition of the image of Zvyagintsev (Tarkowska 242).

Двуногое – впрочем, любая тварь
(ящерица, нетопырь) –
прячет в своих чертах букварь,
клеточную цифирь.

Тело, привыкшее к своему
присутствию, под ремнем
и тканью, навязывает уму
будущее. Мысль о нем.

Что – лишнее! Тело в анфас уже
 само есть величина!
 сумма! Особенно – в неглиже,
 и лампа не включена (Brodskij 1978, electronic source).

The presented analysis of Zvyagintsev's *Apocrypha* showed that the central theme of the film is memory and its various ways of being understood. The Russian director, building the plotline of his work, seems to take advantage of the motifs which are characteristic for Brodsky's poetry, i.e. the aquatic symbolism, autobiographic references, temporal and topographical relationships, chromatography of cold colours etc. The recognition of these elements in the structure of Zvyagintsev's film have a strong influence on the perception of its meaning, leading the culturally aware recipient towards its broad interpretative potential in view of the Russian literary tradition. Only such an approach reveals the inner dynamics of the film, which is to a great degree based on the juxtaposition of opposite phenomena or categories such as: love-death, New York-Saint Petersburg, woodstone, remembering-forgetting, regeneration-destruction. Additionally, one can say that treating the film as a meta-thematic work about photography, as inspired by the associations with Antonioni's *Blow-up*, puts *Apocrypha* in the context of world culture, emphasising the international dimension of Brodsky's poetry, and, simultaneously, Zvyagintsev's cinema. The methodology applied in the article, with its references to Astrid Erll's concepts of (trans)cultural memory, allows for noting the continuous and inevitable building up of intertextual relationships between the layers of texts, exposing the dynamics of the changing nature of culture, which become the container of the social and territorial fluctuations of memory. Zvyagintsev's core strategy of reflecting upon these transformations seems to be the multidimensional use of the metaphor of the frame, exposed in his work in its various representations such as visual references to Halbwachs's concept of *cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, the mechanism of the freeze frame, flashback, frame within a frame, heterochrony etc.

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