



Nostalgia Nostalgia

Director: Andrei Tarkovsky

Production Companies:

Opera Film Produzione, Raidue, Sovin Film

Executive Producers: Renzo Rossellini,
Manolo Bolognini

Producer: Francesco Casati

Production Executive for RAI: Lorenzo Ostuni

Production Supervisors: Filippo Campus,
Valentino Signoretti

Production Administrator: Nestore Baratella

Assistant Directors: Norman Mozzato,

Larissa Tarkovskaya

Screenplay: Andrei Tarkovsky, Tonino Guerra

Director of Photography: Giuseppe Lanci

Camera Operator: Giuseppe De Biasi

Editors: Erminia Marani, Amedeo Salfa

Assistant Editor: Roberto Puglisi

Art Director: Andrea Crisanti

Set Dresser: Mauro Passi

Costumes: Lina Nerli Taviani, Annamode 68

Make-up Supervisor: Giulio Mastrantonio

Titles: Studio 4

Music Consultant: Gino Peguri

Sound Recording: Remo Ugolinelli

Dubbing Consultant: Denis Pekarev

Sound Mixer: Danilo Moroni

Sound Re-recording Supervisor: Filippo Ottoni

Sound Re-recording Assistant: Ivana Fidele

Sound Effects: Massimo Anzellotti,

Luciano Anzellotti

Italian Version: Cesare Noia

Cast:

Oleg Yankovsky (*Andrei Gorchakov*)

Erlend Josephson (*Domenico*)

Sergio Fiorentini (*Italian dubbed voice of Domenico*)

Domiziana Giordano (*Eugenia*)

Lia Tanzi (*Italian dubbed voice of Eugenia*)

Patrizia Terreno (*Gorchakov's wife*)

Laura De Marchi (*woman with towel*)

Delia Boccardo (*Domenico's wife*)

Miléna Vukotic (*town worker*)

Alberto Canepa (*peasant*)

Raffaele Di Mario

Rate Furlan

Livio Galassi

Piero Vida

Elena Magoia

Mario Novelli

Italy-USSR 1983

125 mins

Digital 4K

A Curzon re-release

Re-releases

Nostalgia

How could I have imagined as I was making *Nostalgia* that the stifling sense of longing that fills the screen space of that film was to become my lot for the rest of my life; that from now until the end of my days I would bear the painful malady within myself?

Andrei Tarkovsky

Behind the credits, a monochrome vista that says it all. A distant river curling at the foot of a hill. A white horse so motionless in the morning mist you'd swear it was a model (watch it, though, and it does twitch). A woman and children in peasant shawls, somehow expectant in an aimless walk. An Alsatian dog, bounding past. Distant woods and fields, probably Russian (well no, they're Italian; contrary to rumour, nothing of the film was shot in Tarkovsky's homeland). And dead centre, transfixing the landscape, a telegraph pole. This black, ugly icon, standard environmental splinter that one actually has to make an effort to see, appears repeatedly in *Nostalgia*, the direct link with Tarkovsky's latest signals. It's there not just because, as the filmmaker might innocently assure us, that's where he found it (in the final construction we are left in no doubt that the telegraph poles are planted by design), but because in its linear simplicity it's an assertive exclamation point. Voices flow through it from countless elsewheres, urgent, accusing, placatory, musical. The problem for Tarkovsky's new expatriate (called Andrei in case we might overlook any similarities) is that the flow tells him too much, and far too little. 'You haven't phoned your wife for two days,' nags his companion, and he looks (as ever) blank. Inside his head he was with his wife just moments ago. And there was nothing to say.

Tarkovsky/Gorchakov tells us firmly that nobody else can understand what it's like to be a Russian abroad. We don't even know what 'nostalgia' means to a Russian. 'It's not simply a feeling of sadness,' says Tarkovsky, 'it's a sickness, a moral suffering of the spirit resembling the loss of faith and hope. Those who cannot overcome it, die.' This may not be quite the reaction of those fated never to see their native Surbiton or Runcorn again, but even from a merely British standpoint it's possible to see what he's getting at, particularly with the help of other Tarkovsky outcasts. Kelvin in *Solaris*, Solonitsyn in *Stalker* (that was one the Russians didn't have a word for), Alexei in *Mirror*, Rublev and the child-soldier Ivan, all were tethered to a past of elusive contentment and sought despairingly to reconstruct it once more. Above all, the *Solaris* metaphor hasn't lost its pathos: failing in his marriage for the second time around, the traveller in that one created from his own dreams the facsimile of his family home. Now Andrei in *Nostalgia*, knee-deep in amniotic fluids (vodka included), resolves firmly: 'I'll go and see Dad when I get back,' and in an extraordinary marriage of hope, longing and memory, his mind's eye at last reveals the *dacha* in solaristic displacement. No parents, to be sure, but there's his dog, its devotion innocent of the treacheries and commitments of the spoken word. As snow falls, Tarkovsky dedicates the film to the memory of his mother, safe from the sorrows she endured in *Mirror* but also now beyond reach of apology, atonement, love. Unless the telegraph lines, still up, really do lead somewhere.

Hedged about with interpreters, and with his wife firmly at hand for his recent London visit at least, Tarkovsky appears to have been well laden with Russian luggage during his past two years of European activity. Language, as interviews with him repeatedly illustrate, has preserved a not unsought-for zone between the filmmaker and his questioners, and if *Nostalgia* were simply about Gorchakov's refusal to cross that same zone with the help of Eugenia, the girl whose business is that of making contact, the film might be shrugged aside as being concerned with just another tempted tourist whose homesickness keeps him faithful. 'He's in love,' suggests the motherly hotelier as Andrei moons about the corridors. 'No,' says the girl sourly, 'It's just that his mind's on higher things.' Gorchakov certainly aligns

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himself with the 18th-century musician Sosnovsky whose letter (given to Eugenia to read as if in prior explanation of his refusal to accept her offered breast) states unequivocally: 'I would die if I never returned to Russia, saw the birches, breathed the air of my homeland.' But there's more to the story. Sosnovsky did return, says Gorchakov; he soon started drinking, and eventually committed suicide. The political point is startlingly obvious. *Nostalgia*, once contracted, is an incurable affliction. Who, having seen the hills of Tuscany, wouldn't long to see them again?

So *Nostalgia* offers a broader horizon by identifying Tarkovsky/Gorchakov/Sosnovsky with yet another outcast – the anguished Domenico who, having unsuccessfully isolated his family for seven years (much as Andrei keeps placing his in mental quarantine), has now deduced that if you can't protect them from the world then the world itself must be changed. One drop of water plus another drop of water makes one (larger) drop, he points out, and Gorchakov, no stranger to water, slowly realises that the equation connects with his own, fairly intolerable outburst to Eugenia that knowing Russia requires more than knowing Tolstoy or Pushkin. We get to know each other, he tells her, by abolishing frontiers. A practical girl, she dismisses it as no kind of project (in the political sense) for her immediate future; but for Andrei, who would burn his books rather than attempt to translate them, the simplicity of Domenico's approach has an elemental impact. To wash the frontiers away, to acknowledge the single ocean of humanity, to pray that it will ever happen, requires, despite the mingling metaphors, at least a modest flame of faith. He does, with Domenico's candle, the best he can.

Enclosing the final image is the ruined cathedral through which, in an earlier dream, Andrei has already wandered. 'Lord, do you see how he begs You?' says the girl in his mind, 'Speak to him!'. 'I always do,' says the God in his mind, 'but he's never aware of it.' Faith of a kind has tugged the poet across Italy to turn back at the threshold of the Church of the Madonna, where the studied miracle of life bursting from the Virgin's robes confirms a natural truth to the watching women but leaves Eugenia cold (not for her the suggested status of humble, subservient fecundity; not, at least, until she falls for a man in whose eyes she has all the independence of a cigarette packet). Faith of a kind sends Andrei sloshing through a flooded temple, or likening his wife to a painting by Piero Della Francesca. And the chill Renaissance arches that stand watch over his Russian-ness, a tentative reconciliation of cultures that has been implicit throughout the film in Eugenia's iconographic Russo-Italian features, form one of the cinema's finest statements of agnostic hope.

Never one to unlock the secrets of his images too readily, entitled as they are to their own private litany, Tarkovsky is unconcerned about the penetrability of *Nostalgia*. In conversation filtered clumsily through the language barrier, he'll confirm it's intended to be Domenico's son in abrupt colour close-up who, fresh from seven-year seclusion, stares at a breathtaking hill-top town wreathed in mists and asks, as well he may, 'Is this the end of the world?'. He'll agree that the sequence in fact conflicts with the rest of the monochrome/colour dialogue of the film, and agree equally cheerfully that it might be justified (if justification be needed) as a 'bridge' between past and present. As a poet, he'll support any reading if the poem supports it too. His visual language is hypnotic, dazzling and audacious, particularly in the hotel scene where he calmly tracks into close-up on the bed while dimming various circles of light, staging a rainstorm, and introducing a very palpable hallucination. The purgatorial crossing and recrossing of St. Catherine's Pool, whatever one's sympathies by this stage, is also an undeniable triumph of pure cinema. If Andrei, frozen in expectancy at the end, is indeed Tarkovsky himself, we are entitled to a degree of faith that as filmmaker at least, he has no intention of changing, and that the lines are still open.

Philip Strick, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, December 1983