

# A Painting Sculpted in Time: *The Adoration of the Magi* in Tarkovsky's *The Sacrifice*

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1. The Vivid Presence of *The Adoration of the Magi* in *The Sacrifice* and the Conception of the Film
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## 〈Abstract〉

Leonardo Da Vinci's unfinished painting, *The Adoration of the Magi* (1481), operates as a substantial key to Andrei Tarkovsky's final film, *The Sacrifice* (1986). On the one hand, this painting, which became the object of a pictorial adaptation in the film, operates as its "genuine" origin. On the other hand, it is referenced and reminded in various ways over the course of the film, thus becoming the object of a complex intertextual work. The painting, which

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particularly stands out in the opening sequence of the film, played the key role in the conception of the film, including its script-writing. In fact, since the landscapes, the characters, the theme of *The Sacrifice* closely relate to those of *The Adoration of the Magi*, the two texts deserve to be the subjects of a profound comparative study. Furthermore, whenever the painting is “cited” over the course of the film, that is, four times in the form of an insert, excepting the opening sequence, its various layers (characters, landscapes, theme etc.) are richly discovered and actively respond to those of the film. Tarkovsky’s work on Leonardo’s painting in *The Sacrifice* opens the prospect of pictorial adaptation that is quite different from literary adaptation, and it presents an example of sophisticated intertextuality. The Russian director’s work joins the tradition of classic Western paintings, best exemplified by Leonardo Da Vinci, who defined paintings as “cosa mentale,” meaning a mental thing. Korea’s traditional literati paintings, of which the ideal is the trinity of poetry, calligraphy, and painting, is the “cosa mentale” *par excellence*, thus becoming a fertile source material for potential pictorial adaptation and the object of intertextual work.

**Key words:** Andrei Tarkovsky, *The Sacrifice*, Leonardo Da Vinci, *The Adoration of the Magi*, intertextuality, pictorial adaptation, literati painting

The films of Andrei Tarkovsky, one of the most admired auteurist filmmakers, are well-known for their intertextual richness. They are usually filled with references to works of art: painting, literature, and music. This is an overall characteristic of Tarkovsky’s films, as is elucidated by Johnson and Petrie: “His films are, of course, full of references to and quotations from literature, painting, and music—so much so that art itself becomes an underlying and

unifying theme in Tarkovsky's work" (250).

Not surprisingly, Andrei Tarkovsky's final film, *The Sacrifice* (1986), also contains references to a large number of other artworks, both implicitly and explicitly. *The Sacrifice* is one of the best examples of intertextuality in general, where one text creates and elevates its own meaning through interactions with a large number of other texts. For example, Alexander, a main character in *The Sacrifice*, is a former actor who once played the protagonist of Shakespeare's *Richard III*. One of the first lines he speaks to his son in this Swedish-language film—"words, words, words"—, when he laments the uselessness of words, comes from *Hamlet* (act 2, scene 2). *Macbeth* is the original source of "which of you has done this?" (act 3, scene 4), the line Alexander spits out in English when he unexpectedly discovers a miniature house his son has prepared for his birthday. While there are many Shakespearean references, Dostoyevsky's *The Idiot* is also heavily quoted: Alexander has also played Prince Myskin, the main protagonist of *The Idiot*, and there are certain parallels between Maria, the servant in the film, and Marie, a woman who appears briefly in Dostoyevsky's novel.<sup>1)</sup>

Furthermore, although *The Sacrifice* makes limited use of music, Johann Sebastian Bach's "Erbarme Dich" from the *St. Matthew Passion* appears as a leitmotiv at the beginning and end of the film. As regards paintings, Victor's birthday present for Alexander is a book of Russian icons, including those by Andrei Roublev, and Alexander regrets the loss of all "spirituality and childlike simplicity" as he leafs through the book. Also, on the second floor of

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1) The beginning of *The Idiot* contains an episode about a character named Marie whom Prince Myskin met in Switzerland. This woman, who has the same forename as Maria in *The Sacrifice*, also works as a maidservant. She shares similar characteristics with Maria in the film, who appears to be simple, modest, and timorous, namely "a holy innocent" (*The Idiot*, 63-68).

Alexander's house, the main location of the film, hang replicas of two Leonardo da Vinci paintings, *St. Jerome* and *The Adoration of the Magi*. All these artworks are very familiar to Andrei Tarkovsky, as they are directly related to the director's career and life.<sup>2)</sup>



Figure 1. *The Adoration of the Magi* by Leonardo da Vinci (1481)

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- 2) J.S. Bach was the musician whom Tarkovsky most admired, and his piece, "Choral Prelude in F Minor" serves as a leitmotiv in *Solaris* (1972) as well. Tarkovsky directed a stage version of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in Moscow in 1976, and had attempted to adapt Dostoyevsky's work, including *The Idiot*, to film, although the plans never materialized. *Andrei Rublev* (1963) was his second feature, the last sequence of which is entirely devoted to fragments drawn from the painter's 13 icons, which appear directly on-screen for 7 minutes and 23 seconds. Finally, Leonardo da Vinci was one of the most influential painters for the director, as is clearly shown in his "autobiographical" film, *Mirror* (1974).

However, Leonardo's unfinished painting *The Adoration of the Magi* (Figure 1) should not be considered on the same level as all the other artworks referenced in the film, because this painting operates as a substantial key to *The Sacrifice*.<sup>3)</sup> Of course, the director almost systematically utilized paintings throughout all his feature films.<sup>4)</sup> However, with the exception of *Andrei Rublev*, no other painting was as comprehensively used in his other films as *The Adoration of the Magi* in *The Sacrifice*, where it functions as an aesthetic principle profoundly related to the whole film. This film presents an unusual example of a painting functioning as the genuine source of cinematic creation, beyond being a mere object or decoration, thereby opening up discussion of how a painting can be adapted into a film. Furthermore, *The Sacrifice* constructs its own world through continuous interactions with the painting, rather than remaining a simple adaptation of it.

This essay will examine how fundamental *The Adoration of the Magi* is within the film text and in the process of the film's conception, and then perform a comparative study of these two works, especially considering landscapes, characters, and themes, before finally considering the dynamic interactions between the painting and the film, with emphasis on the insert shots of Leonardo's painting. On the other hand, Korean literati painting considers the painting as a mental thing, just as Leonardo do, and this is why this essay deals with the potentiality of the Korean literati painting in the conclusion. Above all, the fact that a Russian director performed a profound intertextual

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3) Hence, I agree when Peter Green states: "*The Sacrifice* is especially imbued with the ideas of this painting. Two works are of a Kindred spirit; and many of the motifs that one thinks of as specifically Tarkovskian are also to be found in Leonardo's work" (123). However, he does not elaborate on this idea.

4) For the paintings present in Tarkovsky's films, see Jeremy Mark Robinson, *The Sacred Cinema of Andrei Tarkovsky*, Kent: Crescent Moon Publishing, 2006, p. 238. Though the best-known example of Tarkovsky's uses of painting in his films appears in the last sequence of *Andrei Rublev*, it is not an isolated case.

work on an Italian painting in his film will give a creative inspiration to the comparative Korean studies.

## 1. The Vivid Presence of *The Adoration of the Magi* in *The Sacrifice* and the Conception of the Film

Tarkovsky's film introduces very profound and intimate resonances with Leonardo's painting. These are so strong and fundamental as to cover, both visually and spiritually, nearly all dimensions of the film: objects, characters, landscapes, and themes. First, the film's primary objects can be found in this painting. Second, there exists a profound resonance between the landscape of the painting and that of the film. Third, the film's main characters secretly identify with the figures in the painting. Finally, the film's main theme corresponds to that of the painting. A hypothesis can be drawn from all these facts: that the painting functions as the genuine source of cinematic creation for the film.

To examine this hypothesis, we should investigate certain scenes where the painting is most prominent. *The Adoration of the Magi* is almost omnipresent in this film. Since a replica of this painting hangs on the second floor of Alexander's house, nearly all the scenes involving Alexander in his room feature this painting. In fact, the scene where Alexander prays to God, asking Him to stop the nuclear war, which is the main crisis of the film, takes place directly in front of this painting. Apart from the scenes where the painting is featured in the background, the painting appears no less than five times in independent shots—mostly inserts—during some of the film's most crucial moments. Moreover, the 5-minute, 28-second-long opening sequence is entirely devoted to this painting. While *The Sacrifice* consists of 126 shots in total, six substantial shots throughout the film are exclusively devoted to presenting the painting.

The painting particularly stands out in the film's opening sequence, which focuses on the painting's details. During the credits, the most essential part of *The Adoration of the Magi* is shown in a stationary state, where the Magus, probably Balthasar, offers his gift, a censer, to the Son of God. This scene consists of three primary elements: the Magus, the present, and the Infant Jesus' hand receiving the present. Once the credits end after 4 minutes and 6 seconds, the camera slowly moves up along a tree trunk in the painting. Beginning from the lower right-hand corner of the painting, the camera slowly passes over the painting's most impressive images: the Infant Jesus, an old man looking at him with surprised eyes, and two celestial women making solemn hand gestures. It is significant that a fierce combat is taking place behind this tree trunk, shrouded in thick dust. The camera ends on a single tree in the upper right-hand corner of the painting.

Furthermore, the transition from the opening to the second sequence shows how closely the painting and the film are related. The opening sequence ends with the image of the tree and is followed by Alexander and his son planting an actual tree by the sea. Evidently, a tree, one of the most meaningful objects in this film, comes from Leonardo's painting. Through this passage, a close association is immediately established between the painting and the film.

The link between the film and the painting does not end here. The entire final shot of the film is also devoted to the tree. Here, the camera movement mirrors the movements in the opening sequence. As in the opening sequence, the camera begins from the lower part of the tree, moving upwards along the trunk and ending on the top of the tree.<sup>5)</sup> Here again, J. S. Bach's *St. Matthew Passion* is played, which David Burnand referred to as "the sensual

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5) Chris Marker explicates the interconnectedness between the first and final shots in the film in his documentary devoted to Tarkovsky, *Une Journée d'Andrei Arsenévitch* (France, 1999, 55 min.).

evocation of a search for redemption[,] a plea for mercy" (118). The first two sequences and the final shot, perhaps some of the most important parts in any film, reveal their close affinity<sup>6)</sup> with the painting.

However, it was not Leonardo's painting that inspired the conception of the film in reality. *The Sacrifice*—the only film with an original screenplay by Tarkovsky—went through several revisions. As is shown in his own testimony (ST, 217), Tarkovsky began *The Sacrifice* before conceiving of *Nostalghia* (1983), and developed it mainly after he finished shooting *Nostalghia*: in a journal entry dated February 14, 1984, he wrote, "I finished the screenplay" (Journal, 480).<sup>7)</sup> This original screenplay briefly features Leonardo's painting in a scene where Alexander talks with Otto, another main character in the film, though the painting served merely as a topic of conversation at that time.

It is thus clear that the painting became a key feature in the film after the original screenplay was completed. About ten months after finishing the screenplay, Tarkovsky visited the Uffizi Gallery in Florence, which houses Leonard's painting; he wrote of his visit to the gallery in a journal entry dated January 8, 1985: "*The Adoration of the Magi* agitated me" (Journal, 501). Since this confrontation, it seems the painting must have occupied a privileged place in the director's imagination, as indicated by Tarkovsky's choice of the word "agitate"; it finally became an essential element in the film. This confrontation with Leonardo's painting may have led to subtle modifications to the screenplay,

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6) Deleuze's use of the term "affinity" here points out that two different art forms express the same idea (Deleuze, 137).

7) An English translation of this screenplay is included in *Andrei Tarkovsky: Collected Screenplays*, translated into English and published in 1999. Meanwhile, the English translated version of Tarkovsky's journal, where his film concepts were recorded in detail, *Time Within Time: The Diaries 1970-1986* (translated by Kitty Hunter-Blair, London: Faber and Faber, 1994), is incomplete compared to its French version. The French version has been twice published by "Cahiers du cinema," in 1993 and 2004. Here I reference the definitive edition published in 2004.



the results of which are not insignificant for the realization of the film.

For this reason, I consider the painting to be the source of cinematic creation for *The Sacrifice*. Here the term “source” refers to a creative principle rather than a temporal beginning, meaning that from a certain moment this painting began to function as an essential frame of reference for this film. In other words, after the completion of the screenplay, this painting began to function as an aesthetic principle for the entire film by expanding its influence on how Tarkovsky’s original idea developed. This consideration leads us to a comparative study between the film and the painting.

## 2. A Comparative Study: Landscapes, Characters, and Themes

I have just examined the nature of the relationship between an object of fundamental importance to the film, i.e., a tree, with that of the painting. However, the affinity between the painting and the film is not limited to this object; the landscapes, the main characters, and the themes in the film also correspond to their counterparts in the painting in important respects.

### 2-1. Landscapes

One of the most meaningful resemblances between the two works lies in the landscapes. In the film, the only verbal mention of Leonardo’s painting is Otto’s comment that the painting is “sinister”, a statement which Alexander immediately acknowledges. But what makes Leonardo’s *The Adoration of the Magi* sinister?

It is necessary to analyze the context of the Epiphany in Leonardo’s painting. Leonardo’s Epiphany does not take place in a pastoral and peaceful landscape. While many earlier paintings on the same subject focused on the long, splendid procession of the Magi, Leonardo instead provides a wider context to this

incident. Here we must pay no less attention to the background of the painting than the Epiphany taking place in the foreground. Specifically, ancient Roman ruins occupy the upper left side of the painting, while a fierce combat between knights is depicted in the upper right side. The combat would yield uncontrolled massacres and mutual destruction. A juxtaposition of the Epiphany scene with this dark background creates an unforeseen effect: from this context emerges an imminent demand and need for Incarnation. Leonardo's originality and innovation, which he brought to visualizing the painting's theme, lie in the very contextualization of the Epiphany.

Meanwhile, on the surface, the landscape of *The Sacrifice* is peaceful, quiet, even picturesque, and all the events in the film take place in or near a very beautiful dacha by the sea. This beautiful landscape, however, becomes infiltrated and gradually obscured by another landscape, which is sinister, frightening, and apocalyptic. In fact, two elements directly threaten the pastoral landscape of *The Sacrifice*: the outbreak of a nuclear war in the film's "reality" and the protagonist's hallucinations about the end of the world.

Like Leonardo's painting, Tarkovsky's film depicts an apocalyptic war and calamitous ruins. First, the outbreak of a nuclear war is one of the film's main events. This war primarily corresponds to the upper right side of the painting, where a furious battle is being waged behind trees, surrounded by thick dust.<sup>8)</sup> Second, the images of ruins in the film appear in the form of Alexander's hallucinations. These are oneiric scenes, always presented in black and white, where Alexander's deep-rooted anxiety becomes visualized. The "actual" war and "imaginary" ruins thus constitute the apocalyptic landscape of the film.

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8) Leonardo da Vinci insisted on the "dust effect" in representing the battle. According to him, the density of the dust expresses the fierceness of the battle. He wrote: "[for depicting a battle], first you must represent the smoke of artillery mingling in the air with the dust and tossed up by the movement of horses and the combatants" (Leonardo, 301).

Of these two, the painting's direct influence can be felt in the scenes of imaginary ruins, which Alexander hallucinates. The first scene of imaginary ruins, which appears right after Alexander faints because of a sudden collision with his son, shows the bottom of a building with two parallel staircases, between which there is an arc. These two staircases and arc (Figure 2) explicitly remind us of the Roman architectural ruins of *The Adoration of the Magi*.

## 2-2. Characters

The affinity between the painting and the film extends to the main characters of the two works. The main figures of *The Adoration of the Magi*, who are emphasized in the film's opening sequence, are the Magus, the Infant Jesus, and the Virgin Mary. They correspond to the characters Alexander, the little boy, and Maria in *The Sacrifice*, respectively.

Alexander is the first figure who maintains a private link with the painting. The contextualization which Leonardo brought to *The Adoration of the Magi* endows a new meaning to the act of the Magus who makes his offering to the Infant Jesus. Considering the "sinister" background of the painting, his act is to be interpreted as a prayer for peace and salvation against the vicious cycle of death and destruction. This wish is especially embodied within the Magus' gesture. In Leonardo da Vinci's paintings, gestures should generally be considered as non-verbal "language", which, rather than serving accessory roles, actively participate in expression.<sup>9)</sup> The Magus' gesture of offering mirrors exactly the gesture of a person who sincerely gives what he holds dearest to God, an expression that is deeply imbued with a sense of desperation and eagerness.

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9) Regarding gestures in Leonard's paintings, see André Chastel's work: *Le Geste dans l'art*, Paris: Liana Levi, 2001.



Figure 2. A building with parallel staircases that appears in Alexander's first hallucination in *The Sacrifice* (1986)

Alexander's sincere gesture echoes that of the Magus, which the film throws into relief twice. First, he swears to dedicate to God all that he has, provided that God stops the imminent apocalyptic disaster. He appears above all to be a man of prayer, whose virtues include honesty, modesty, and sincerity. By volunteering to sacrifice himself, moreover, he deliberately enters into a kind of "symbolic death"; he sets his own home on fire, refuses to speak, separates himself from his dear family, and so on. In brief, Alexander's character deserves the definition of a contemporary Magus. Therefore, the passage from the opening sequence to the second sequence does not merely set up a relationship between the trees in the painting and the film; it also establishes an intimate relationship between the Magus in the painting, upon which the film's very first shot lingers for quite a while, and Alexander, who carries out the lesson of the parable while planting a dead tree by the sea.

What connects the little boy in the film with the Infant Jesus is not only

their shared sacred silence,<sup>10)</sup> but also their roles as bearers of acceptance and hope. Regarding the representative technique of the Infant in Leonardo's painting, it is his action that differentiates him from the rest; though still understandably appearing to be tacit, the Infant Jesus attentively looks at the censer offered by the Magus and then stretches out his left hand to touch the gift. We may infer that, because the Son of God accepts the present from a human being, salvation for the latter can be made possible. Just as the Infant Jesus accepts the precious gift offered by the Magus, the little boy in the film accepts his father's words and actions. In the last sequence, the little boy barely manages to drag a bucket full of water and pour some on the trunk of the dead tree. This action exactly corresponds to Alexander's first words related to the parable.

Furthermore, the moral of what Alexander tells the boy early in the film, namely the uselessness of words or the separation between words and actions, becomes miraculously resolved through this boy's behavior. The Infant Jesus and Alexander's son thus share a common characteristic: a concordance between words and actions. Just as the Infant Jesus would later realize the predictions of the prophets, the little boy in the film literally fulfills his father's words. Both to the boy and to the Infant Jesus, there is not the slightest rupture between the Verb and the Act, but only a divine concordance, as in the first verse of the Gospel according to Saint John, from which come the little boy's first and last words: "In the beginning was the verb; why papa?" It is not a coincidence that the film Tarkovsky dedicated to his son presents a boy as

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10) It is interesting to point out that, regarding the problem of words, this unnamed little boy in the film is the polar opposite of his father. While the initially loquacious father becomes decisively silent towards the end of the film, the boy goes in the exact opposite direction: at the beginning of the film, the boy appears momentarily mute, while the final words of the film are entirely reserved for him. As soon as his father stops speaking, he begins to speak.

a bearer of hope, just as the Epiphany does the Son of God.

Finally, meticulous work takes place to associate Maria, a mysterious maidservant character in the film, with the painting's Madonna. Peter Green points out their association from various objects visible in Maria's house during Alexander's visit, such as a cross, as well as from Maria's act of washing Alexander's hands (130). In addition to the fact that Maria shares the same name as the Virgin Mary,<sup>11)</sup> two formal and gestural instances occur within the film. When Maria first appears in the film, she continually occupies the center of the frame. From her first to her very last appearance in the film, Maria is mainly placed in the center of the frame (Figure 3); in fact, almost whenever Maria appears in the film, the camera continuously follows her movements to keep her in the center of the frame. This method of framing is privileged, since the camera does not move in relation to other characters. Of course, this central position is associated with the Virgin Mary's position in the composition of the painting. Because the Virgin is able to link the sacred with the profane and because it is through her that the divinity appeared on Earth via the Incarnation, it is not accidental that she appears in the center of the painting, the subject of which is the Epiphany.

Furthermore, a gesture performed by Alexander during a critical scene in the film reinforces this process of identification between the film's Maria and the painting's Virgin; only when "the ritual" of sacrifice and offering culminates in Alexander's arson of his own home does Alexander recognize Maria's

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11) A kind of nominal play is at work in the scene where Otto persuades Alexander that Maria has mystic power. When Otto says, without any proof or explanation, "Maria can do it! Maria," Alexander replies, "Maria? Which Maria?" Since this dialogue is preceded by the third insert shot of the painting, whose central figure is not easy to ignore, the word "Maria" can, sooner or later, be linked to the Virgin. Alexander duly asks what Otto means by "which Maria." This cognitive confusion, both for Alexander and the spectator, aims at linking these two figures by their identical name.

presence. It is this maidservant before whom he kneels quietly—an obvious sign of veneration—before being taken away by the ambulance. The union between Maria and Alexander suggested in the film is not to be interpreted as carnal but rather spiritual or symbolic. Regardless of whether the union actually took place or not, it is a sacred union; in other words, a hierogamy.



Figure 3. The last appearance of Maria the maidservant in *The Sacrifice* (1986)

In this sense, the opening and final sequences of the film do not share just an identical object (i.e., the tree), identical camera movements, and identical music; even the characters are identical. Alexander, as he is taken away by an ambulance; the little boy, watering and then lying underneath the tree; and Maria, riding a bike while watching all these events, are alter egos of the main figures in the painting—the Magus, the Infant Jesus, and the Virgin Mary—who appear in the opening sequence of the film.

## 2-3. Themes

This film thematically resonates with Leonardo's painting. Other than the tree mentioned earlier, I will also consider another object that incarnates deeply the theme of both works: a present. The central event of Leonardo's *The Adoration of the Magi* is an offering of presents to the Son of God. In fact, the theme of *The Adoration of the Magi* without presents is unimaginable, since presents are closely tied to the tale itself. The presents should not be considered as something trifling; on the contrary, they must be considered as significant objects, since a present intended for the Son of God should be something precious. The precondition that the offering be the dearest thing to the giver inevitably involves a truly spiritual state, as well as self-sacrifice. The authenticity of someone is the main stake here. Through this self-sacrificial act, a simple present becomes an offering.

The timeframe of *The Sacrifice* lasts one or two days, which includes the protagonist Alexander's birthday. For this reason, several presents feature in the film: Otto's present (an authentic map of Europe from the end of the seventeenth century), Victor's present (a book of Russian icons), and finally Alexander's son's present (a miniature of their big wooden house, made in collaboration with Otto). Over the course of the narrative development, a present's meaning is clarified by Otto, who is always faithful to his role as messenger: "Every gift involves sacrifice. If not, what kind of gift would it be?" The importance of this line consists in forming an intimate connection between a present and a sacrifice, through which a present becomes an offering.

At the film's climax, it is possible to postulate the existence of another "present" in spite of its implicit presence: Alexander himself. Giving away everything dear to him and going back to "the Christian sense of self-sacrifice" (ST, 218), Alexander decides to make himself a big "offering" to God.<sup>12)</sup> This

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12) Michel Tournier's novel *The Four Wise Men* "interprets" the famous biblical event of *The*



is why *The Sacrifice* can be defined as the contemporary version of *The Adoration of the Magi*. Compared to the English title, *The Sacrifice*, the film's original Swedish title, *Offret-Sacrificatio*, more clearly shows the director's intentions, with emphasis on the act of offering.

### 3. Interactions between the Film and the Painting

Leonardo's painting does not only function as the origin of *The Sacrifice*. The painting continuously intervenes in the film text to lay the foundation for dynamic interactions with the cinematic world. Here we need to examine the interactions between the painting and the film in detail, particularly in relation to the way in which the film's unconventional narrative unfolds.

The narrative line of *The Sacrifice* is ambiguous. Tarkovsky describes it thus: "I aimed [...] at building the picture [*The Sacrifice*] into a poetic whole in which all the episodes are harmoniously linked. [...] As a result, the overall structure of *The Sacrifice* became more complex and took on the form of a poetic parable" (ST, 222). The narrative line, scene by scene, does not proceed in a "natural" manner but instead evolves through a big ellipse, as often seen in poetry: there are ellipses, sometimes radical, between the successive scenes. Consequently, the "poetic" construction results in increasing narrative ambiguity.

A "poetic" narrative construction relates to the points of omission and abrupt transition that fundamentally agitate the development of the narrative stream. It is remarkable that the insert shots of *The Adoration of the Magi* are used at these moments. They do not completely eliminate the ambiguity of the narrative, nor are they used for that purpose, yet it is necessary to pay attention

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*Adoration of the Magi* from this perspective of sacrifice. The author supposes the fourth Magus is Taor, and describes the process by which Taor realizes the meaning of self-sacrifice and becomes himself another offering. Michel Tournier, *The Four Wise Men*, translated by Ralph Manheim, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.

to the fact that they provide a certain basis for the narrative's poetic leaps. Except for the opening sequence, five insert shots of the painting are used in the film in total, and at least two of those can be related to the narrative leaps. These points are the very moments where the painting and the film actively interact with each other.

Actually, every time the painting appears on-screen, one of the abundant meanings of the painting is summoned. For example, in my discussion of the painting's landscape, I have earlier focused on Otto's comment that the painting is sinister. Otto's visit both begins and ends with insert shots of the painting (the first and second inserts). After Otto's departure, Alexander confronts the painting alone. This moment occurs simultaneously with the prime minister's official announcement on television. Alexander, while staring at the painting, hears the terrible news about the outbreak of nuclear war in a voice-over. This is the moment where the sinister landscape of the painting resonates with the crisis of the film, or where the crisis of the painting is "transplanted" onto that of the film.

From a narrative perspective, *The Sacrifice* contains at least two critical moments of ambiguity. The first relates to Alexander's internal progress. After his prayer to God, Alexander receives Otto in his room; Otto suggests that by spending one night with the maidservant, Alexander can save the world, which is in danger of extinction. He ends up accepting Otto's seemingly absurd suggestion. However, this process of acceptance is not clearly explained, considering that he simply responds to Otto's suggestion with dumfounded smiles. This moment is crucial from a narrative perspective, as hereafter Alexander passes directly from words to actions that appear utterly absurd and irrational to ordinary people.

Alexander's motives for acting out are not explained in the film nor in the screenplay. As Alexander considers Otto's suggestion, an insert shot of *The*

*Adoration of the Magi* appears.<sup>13)</sup> Before making a decision, he stares at the painting, which is merely presented without any verbal explanation. Nonetheless, I argue that how he makes his decision lies in this confrontation with the painting. This is the moment where Alexander develops an intimate consciousness where, regardless of its form, only self-sacrifice can bring meaningful changes to humanity in crisis. It is thus possible to say that this moment resonates with the Magus' sincerity emerging from his gesture of offering against the background of apocalyptic war and ruin.

The way Tarkovsky chooses to present the painting in this insert shot is noteworthy. None of the five inserts shows the painting clearly. The painting always appears indistinctly along with the landscape reflected off of its protective glass. The same goes for the insert where Alexander confronts the painting. When Otto says, "I prefer Piero Della Francesca [to Leonardo]" and leaves, Alexander turns his head towards the painting. In the next shot, the painting is presented while the camera zooms out (fourth insert). Here the painting is momentarily clear, yet soon becomes obscure as the focus abruptly changes within the same shot. At this moment Alexander's silhouette is also shown juxtaposed with the reflection of a tree shade on the glass (Figure 4). Here, the person looking at the painting appears with the blurred image of the painting, and Alexander and the painting coexist as one single image; he is presented like a figure in the painting.

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13) Though substituted for Leonardo's painting in the film, a poem by Osip Mandelstam appears at this moment in the screenplay (Screenplay, 549-550).



Figure 4. Alexander's reflected silhouette on the glass of the painting in the fourth insert.

Another point where the narrative's fundamental ambiguity arises is the sequence where Alexander visits Maria. After he prays to God, Alexander collapses on the couch on the second floor. Soon, Otto visits him to talk about Maria's "secret", and Alexander goes to Maria's house. He then wakes up on the couch the next morning. How did he return home? Did he simply dream all this? Perhaps he never went to Maria's house? No sufficient explanation is given in the film because the film does not show him going back home; only some hallucinations are shown instead.<sup>14)</sup> However, in the screenplay, written two years before shooting, this journey is clearly described: "Maria is sleeping. Mr. Alexander raises himself on one shoulder, listening. Then, trying not to wake Maria up, he dresses quietly in the darkness, takes his coat off the chair, puts the revolver back in his pocket, tiptoes out of the house and within a minute is cycling along the white road in the early dawn, between

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14) Regarding the narrative ambiguity of *The Sacrifice*, see Sean Martin, *Andrei Tarkovsky*, Vermont: Pocket Essentials, 2005, p.188-192.

the occasional roadside pines" (Screenplay, 554).

By eliminating the scene originally included in the screenplay during the filmmaking process, the film's narrative enters into a fundamental abyss; everything that happens from Alexander's prayer to the time he wakes up on the same couch the next morning, such as conversations with Otto or events at Maria's house, can simply be interpreted as Alexander's dream.<sup>15)</sup> This delicate modification causes a fundamental problem for narrative interpretation. The last insert of *The Adoration of the Magi* comes in the final dream-like sequence during the passage from Maria's house to Alexander's house. This insert, where the Virgin appears prominently, prepares viewers for the next scene, where the wartime atmosphere disappears and the world returns to a peaceful and normal state. This context emphasizes the meaning of the Incarnation within the painting. Here, what resonates between the painting and the film is the time of salvation promised by the Epiphany.

Now let us pose a final question: where does salvation come from in the film? Actually, the structural ambiguity of the film marginalizes the eventuality of the film: to spend a night with Maria brings salvation. If not, does Alexander's prayer bring it? This is not clear. We do not even know if the crisis indeed existed. At the end of the film, the world finds itself in peace. While the author of this gratifying return to life resides in full darkness, Alexander begins, from there, a true sacrificial act: he decides after all to keep his promise to God. Let us underline that this act does not aim to bring salvation, since salvation is already there. This act of giving up all that he has and all that he is does not therefore *bring* salvation but *accomplishes* it. Moreover, his act shows the

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15) Tarkovsky clarified that he intentionally composed the film such that various interpretations could be possible; he himself presented three possible interpretations (ST, 224). These can be called Christian, heretic, and atheistic interpretations, respectively. On the other hand, in another interview, he asks, "Can you imagine that such a film can be accomplished by a nonbeliever?" (*France catholique*, 3).

authenticity of his choice post-factum; that is, he acted without any calculation. A miracle can be born precisely when someone renounces all possibility, and, in this sense, it can continue to exist only in the form of a paradox. If a miracle takes place in *The Sacrifice*, its possibility is owed to the authenticity of a man and to his sincere choice. Such a miracle is deeply rooted in what Leonardo tried to visualize in his painting.

#### 4. Conclusion: Film Adaptation of Painting and Intertextuality

Operating as the genuine "origin" of the film, *The Adoration of the Magi* is also integrated into *The Sacrifice* as its internal essential. What this phenomenon suggests can be understood from two different perspectives. First, since *The Adoration of the Magi* is an undeniable source for the film, the painting can be understood from an adaptation point of view, and in this regard the two texts deserve to be the subjects of an independent comparative study. Second, this painting acquires a dimension of intertextuality by actively intervening in the aforementioned important moments of the film. Here, *The Adoration of the Magi* turns from a source of inspiration into an object for interaction. I would like to clarify those two perspectives below.

First, the profound affinity between Leonardo's painting and *The Sacrifice* can be regarded as a special case of adaptation. From this perspective, by setting up a painting as the principal object of adaptation, *The Sacrifice* challenges the tradition of film adaptation, in which literature/film have topped the hierarchy for a long time. The painting here is not a modern painting with a strong sense of self-consciousness about its modes of representation, but one which belongs to the mimetic tradition, including paintings with biblical, mythical, or historical motifs. Such a painting may provide as many various cinematic motifs as a literary work, including landscapes, characters, objects, and themes.

Furthermore, this sort of painting supposes an evident “narrative”, as usually indicated by its title, which can fully be transferred into a cinematic narrative. Lastly, as I have examined earlier in discussing the way Maria is framed, such modes of representation in painting can supply ample ideas to those in film.

What is most significant, however, is that this painting materializes the spiritual not through the exploitation of language but through that of the visible. As is generally known, classical Western paintings had an ambition to reach the spiritual through the visible; those paintings meticulously exploited the visible and explored how the spiritual could be realized in such a way. It is in this sense that Tarkovsky, who believed that the visible is the most mystical and attempted to incarnate philosophical problematics in his cinema, also joins the tradition of classic Western paintings, best exemplified by Leonardo da Vinci, who defined paintings as “cosa mentale”, meaning a mental thing.

On the other hand, *The Sacrifice* gives us something more than a simple example of adaptation. In adaptation, as the adapted text replaces the original text, the latter usually takes a “transcendent” position over the former, whereas in *The Sacrifice*, the original text does not disappear, but stays present within and interacts with the film. *The Adoration of the Magi* in *The Sacrifice* creates total and profound interactions, from the surface of the film to its deepest level. It is thus clear that any convincing interpretation of *The Sacrifice* would not be possible without inquiring into its relationship with the painting. In this process of intertextuality, the meanings of the painting do not remain fixed but constantly shift. Since the film develops its own world by making reference to different aspects of the painting and expanding its meaning, various aspects of the painting come to the surface each time it appears on-screen. As I have examined earlier, sometimes landscapes, sometimes characters, and sometimes objects are under the spotlight. This process can be understood as a process of dynamic “dialogue” between the film and the text referenced within.

This dialogue actualizes not only the cultivation of the various layers inherent within the painting, but also that of cinematic worlds that cannot be reduced into the painting. In order to make the dialogue itself possible, the film must carefully construct its own unique world.<sup>16)</sup> Beautiful landscapes filled with suspense, camera movements filled with emotion, resourceful soundscapes, and rhythmical montages where time is “felt” are no less essential to Tarkovsky’s film than its spiritual orientation. It is for this reason that close interactions with Leonardo’s painting do not result in the infringement of the film’s autonomy, but in the richness and the delicacy of its cinematic world.

Tarkovsky did not include Leonardo’s painting in his film merely for some peripheral function but rather constructed his whole film around the painting as a principal, central element. Tarkovsky’s *The Sacrifice* becomes the field of intricate interactions between the old master’s fine art tradition and cinematic language. It is well-known that Tarkovsky thought of cinematic process as “sculpting in time”. This essay argues that, in making *The Sacrifice*, he sculpted Leonardo’s painting itself in time: the old painting came to have some cinematic dimension and vice versa.

Tarkovsky’s work on Leonardo’s painting poses the final question of what kind of painting can be appropriated this way in contemporary cinema. His work opened the prospect of pictorial adaptation that is quite different from

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16) Such an attitude adheres to Tarkovsky’s own adaptation methodology. When he adapts a work, including a literary one, he is insistent that a critical distance to the original text be maintained by interpreting the original in his own way. Following Michael Klein, I may call his methodology “critical adaptation” as opposed to “faithful adaptation” or “free adaptation”(10-11). The examples of *Solaris* and *The Stalker* could provide us with certain relevant implications. In the case of *The Stalker*, though one of the original authors participated in the screenplay, the final outcome turned out to be totally different from the original novel, *Roadside Picnic*; whereas *Solaris* provoked an intense reaction from the original author, Stanislaw Lem, for its “betrayal” of the original work.



literary adaptation, but the number of paintings that can be appropriated this way is severely limited. In this context, it is important to note Korea's traditional literati paintings as fertile source material for adaptation. The literati paintings can be objects of cinematic adaptation for the following three reasons.

Firstly, Leonardo's work in Tarkovsky's film not only functions as the genuine "origin" of this film, but it is referenced and reminded in various ways over the course of the film, thus becoming the object of a complex intertextual work. Therefore, only specific kinds of paintings, that is, more precisely, paintings as "a mental thing" as configured by Leonardo, can be used in this complex work. And Korea's traditional literati paintings are paintings as "a mental thing" *par excellence*. Literati paintings do not simply represent landscapes, still objects, or individuals, but express a mature individual's personality and refinement and realize the person's comprehensive world view. In literati paintings, therefore, the spiritual aspect of a painting itself can become a source of adaptation.

Furthermore, literati paintings contain numerous elements that can be used as leitmotifs for cinematic creation. The ideal of literati painting is the trinity of poetry, calligraphy, and painting. Since elements in not only painting but poetry and calligraphy are richly present, literati paintings can be rich source material for adaptation. In other words, literati paintings synthetically materialize linguistic elements such as poetry or prose, typographic elements as in calligraphy, and visual elements present in paintings. Thus the world of literati painting that professes the trinity of poetry, calligraphy, and painting displays aspects of composite arts such as cinema, and the three elements of poetry, calligraphy, and painting create a harmonious spiritual world while playing different functions in a single literati painting. All these elements can be used as objects of cinematic adaptation, and also referenced and reminded as elements of active intertextuality within a film.

Finally, the last reason I pay attention to literati paintings is another fundamental aspect of Tarkovsky's work, that is, a succession of spiritual tradition that ceaselessly flows through within a culture. In *Andrei Roublev* (1963), Tarkovsky translated the life and paintings of Russia's greatest mind, Andrei Roublev (1360-1430), into his film, and although never realized in life, he also made great efforts to adapt Dostoyevsky's literary works into films throughout his life. Therefore, Tarkovsky's way of film-making suggests the contemporary re-assessment of the traditional spiritual culture, and it is in this respect that literati paintings can be regarded as rich cultural resources. The cinema, thereby, can find its place within the context of the spiritual history of a culture, not as its eliminator but as its successor.

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## 시간 속에 봉인된 회화: 안드레이 타르코프스키의 <희생> 속의 <동방박사의 경배>

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안드레이 타르코프스키 감독의 영화 <희생>(1986)에서는 레오나르도 다빈치의 회화 <동방박사의 경배>(1481)가 핵심적인 역할을 수행한다. 이 그림은 한편으로는 (문학적 각색과 다른) 회화적 각색의 대상으로서 이 영화의 진정한 기원으로 기능하며, 다른 한편으로는 영화 진행 도중에 지속적으로 인용되고 환기됨으로써 풍요로운 상호텍스트적 기능을 수행한다. 이 영화의 타이틀 시퀀스에서 강렬한 존재감을 드러내는 다빈치의 이 그림은, 실제로 시나리오 쓰기를 포함한 이 영화의 구상 단계에서 핵심적인 역할을 했다. 사실상 <희생>의 배경들, 인물들, 주제 등은 이 그림의 그것들과 긴밀한 관계를 갖고 있기 때문에, 심도 깊은 비교연구의 대상이 될 수 있다. 나아가 이 그림은, 타이틀 시퀀스 이외에도 이 영화의 진행 과정에서 4번에 걸친 인서트의 형태로 환기되고 인용되는데, 이때마다 그림 속에 들어 있는 서로 다른 층위들(인물, 배경, 주제 등)이 풍요롭게 환기되면서 영화의 그것들과 적극적으로 호응을 이룬다. <희생>에서 <동방박사의 경배>를 대상으로 이루어진 타르코프스키 감독의 작업은 문학적 각색과 구별되는 회화적 각색의 길을 열고 있으며, 나아가 풍요로운 상호텍스트적 작업의 예가 된다. 타르코프스키 감독의 작업은

결국 다빈치가 규정한 것처럼 '정신적인 것'으로서의 회화를 계승한다. 시/서/화의 일체를 표방한 한국의 문인화 전통은 '정신적인 것'으로서 회화를 구현하고 있기 때문에 타르코프스키의 작업과 같은 회화적 각색 및 적극적인 상호텍스트적 작업의 대상이 될 수 있다.

**주제어** : 안드레이 타르코프스키, <희생>, 레오나르도 다빈치, <동방 박사의 경배>, 상호텍스트성, 회화적 각색, 문인화

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