

# The phenomenon of the Russian / Soviet *dacha* and the image of the *izba* in Andrei Tarkovsky's movie *Mirror*



POLINA PAVLIKOVA   
Université du Luxembourg

**Abstract:** The meaning of *dacha* developed, and even radically changed over time, in the Russian Empire, then in the Soviet Union, and continues to evolve in contemporary Russia, as well as in the post-Soviet countries and other parts of Eastern Europe. The first *dachas* appeared at the time of Peter I, who presented lands to his nobles. In the Soviet Union, *dachas* were used mainly as vegetable gardens and became an essential resource for survival. During World War II, *dachas*, or country houses, were used for evacuations. In this article, the phenomenon of the Russian *dacha* with its recreational and salvatory functions is explored in the light of Michele Foucault's heterotopia theory and Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of chronotope. The analysis of the *dacha* space as an ambivalent site of leisure, and a necessity for survival is supported by the example of Andrei Tarkovsky's film *Mirror*. In this autobiographical movie, the director shows how Alexei (his hero and alter-ego) and his family escaped to the countryside during the war and used the *izba*, a traditional Slavic house, as a shelter. However, physical salvation turns into spiritual trial. The powerful opposition between mind and body, emptiness (starvation) and fullness (wellbeing) is explicated in the poem "Eurydice" by Arseny Tarkovsky, which the director artistically appropriates in the movie to reinforce the semantic message of the visual text.

**Keywords:** *dacha*, *izba*, Russian countryside, heterotopia, chronotope.

**Résumé :** La signification de la *datcha* s'est développée et a radicalement changé au fil du temps, d'abord dans l'Empire russe, puis en Union soviétique, et elle continue d'évoluer dans la Russie contemporaine, ainsi que dans les pays post-soviétiques et autres régions de l'Europe de l'Est. Les premières *datchas* sont apparues à l'époque de Pierre I<sup>er</sup> le Grand, qui offrait des terres à ses nobles. En Union soviétique, les *datchas*

étaient principalement utilisées comme potagers et sont devenues une ressource essentielle pour la survie des populations. Pendant la Seconde Guerre mondiale, ces maisons de campagne servaient aux évacuations des villes. Dans cet article, le phénomène de la datcha russe, avec ses fonctions récréatives et salvatrices, est exploré à la lumière de la théorie de l'hétérotopie de Michel Foucault et du concept de chronotope de Mikhaïl Bakhtine. L'analyse de l'espace de la datcha en tant que site ambivalent, alternativement lieu de loisirs et nécessaire espace de survie, est illustrée par l'exemple du film *Miroir* d'Andreï Tarkovski (1975). Dans ce film autobiographique, le réalisateur montre comment Alexeï (son héros et alter ego) et sa famille ont fui à la campagne pendant la guerre et comment ils ont utilisé l'*izba*, maison traditionnelle slave, comme abri. Cependant, le salut physique se transforme en épreuve spirituelle. L'opposition entre l'esprit et le corps, le vide (avoir faim) et la plénitude (être rassasié) est expliquée dans le poème « Eurydice » d'Arséni Tarkovski, que le réalisateur s'approprie artistiquement dans le film pour renforcer le message sémantique du texte visuel.

**Mots-clés :** datcha, *izba*, campagne russe, hétérotopie, chronotope.

“Mirror is also the story of the old house  
where the narrator spent his childhood [...]  
This building, which over the years had fallen into ruins,  
was reconstructed, ‘resurrected’  
from photographs just as it had been,  
and on the foundations which had survived”  
Andrei Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time* (Tarkovsky, 1989: 132)

### The Russian / Soviet *dacha* and its functions as a socio-cultural space

The meaning of the concept “*dacha*” developed, and even radically changed in the Russian Empire, then in the Soviet Union, and continues to evolve in contemporary Russia, as well as in the other post-Soviet countries and some Eastern European countries.<sup>1</sup>

In the morphological sense, the root of the word *dacha* (дача) is “to give” (давать). The mass spread of *dachas* appeared in the time of Peter I, who gave lands to his nobles.<sup>2</sup> Owning a *dacha* as a place to spend holidays became popular among wealthy Russian citizens. Stephen Lovell describes the emergence of this mass social phenomenon:

1. To know more about *dachas* in comparison to second homes in the West: Treivish, 2014.
2. To know more about the history of *dacha*: Stephen Lovell, 2016.

The “modern” dacha may be said to have originated in the early eighteenth century, when Peter the Great handed out plots of land (“dachas”) on the south shore of the Gulf of Finland to his courtiers and insisted that they build themselves imposing exurban residences. Here, suddenly, was a new type of dwelling, one with no precise analogue in pre-Petrine Russia: a house intended for intermittent (mainly summer) occupancy, located within easy reach of a major city, and lacking a pronounced economic (i.e., agricultural) function (Lovell, 2002: 255).

*Dacha* culture reached its peak before the Russian Revolution. The *dacha* phenomenon found its reflection in Russian literature and visual art. Moreover, it is a fair assumption that the *dacha* itself (understood as a Bakhtinian chronotope, defined by the unity of time and space) or the *dacha* lifestyle influenced and stimulated the creative activity of writers and painters. This can also be compared with the special *dacha* places for the Soviet intelligentsia, such as Peredelkino, where famous poets like Boris Pasternak or Arseny Tarkovsky lived and created. The specific function of stimulating creative processes that some *dacha* places used to have is also one of the reasons why the phenomenon of *dacha* could be considered an essential element of Russian / Soviet culture.

The Revolution, the civil war, and of course, communist ideology broke the flourishing *dacha* culture, resulting in the destruction or confiscation of many *dachas*. The concept of leisure had not yet been fully established. Sanatoriums were strongly supported by the Soviet government, with an emphasis on their therapeutic function,<sup>3</sup> meaning that access to them became one of the most desirable holiday options. The Soviet government also tried to create their own *dacha* culture based on a new ideology. *Dachas* were treated as a place to relax after the working week. At the same time, the perception of *dachas* as a place of leisure place changed significantly due to the increasing importance of farming. The *dacha* was still an option to spend a holiday, but it accumulated an essential function of supporting the provision of life’s necessities.

The *dacha* became a space where the Soviet citizens could relax, but also work. The physical labor gave the *dachnik* (*dacha* user) an extra means of livelihood and, as Stephen Lovell notes, “ideology was never separate from economics” (Lovell, 2002: 283). It is also important to mention that these summer houses could not be privatized, and a *dacha* was something quite ambivalent in a country where there was no private property. As described by William E. Butler, the *dacha* is “perhaps the most

3. In the current work we are not going to explore the phenomenon of sanatoriums. However, I would like to recommend the article where this phenomenon is analyzed in detail: Koenker, 2009.

popular, and certainly from the legal point of view the most ambiguous, object of personal ownership” (Butler, 1988: 185). As in the time of Peter I, the *dacha* was again defined by its instability: “In the 1930s it reclaimed something of its medieval and Petrine meanings: a piece of property that was bestowed at the discretion of the leader and that could just as easily be taken away” (Lovell, 2002: 287).

At a certain point in the Soviet period, a *dacha* became essential as a means of subsistence for more than just its gardening possibilities.<sup>4</sup> During World War II *dachas*, or country houses, acquired another function: they were places for evacuation. Some people were able to leave the city in order to settle in the countryside. In modern times, as the market situation has changed, the *dacha* is seen more as a place of relaxation than somewhere to grow food.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the meaning of the *dacha* can be reconsidered in the light of a pandemic situation, when many people saw it as a chance to escape from a virus, – this hypothesis could be developed in future research.

A brief review of the socio-cultural context of the *dacha* is necessary to identify the main functions of this specific type of country home. In the Russian / Soviet tradition, the *dacha* accumulates various and sometimes opposing functions. The *dacha* had / has leisure and alternative activity functions (especially interesting its role as a creative space for the Soviet intelligentsia and the nobles of the Russian Empire). Moreover, a *dacha* was / is seen as providing access to additional nourishment. The latter function took on greater significance as the *dacha* acquired the function of shelter. In this work, two functions of the *dacha*, holiday and salvatory, are analyzed. Using the example of one family's story of both happiness and fear at their country home, we will examine how the *dacha* space could radically change and be endowed with various functions.

It is also important to note that it would not be accurate to identify all countryside places where people could temporarily reside as *dachas*. First, in Russian, the word *dacha* has positive connotations, as it conjures up the idea of leisure. *Dacha* also means an additional place to stay during the summer period / holidays. But it would be difficult to characterize someone's shelter from war as a holiday home (even if it used to have this function). Second, during World War II, the Soviet Union was still an agricultural country. Despite rapid industrialization, many people continued to live in traditional houses in the country that were their main and

4. Apart from *dachas*, a Soviet citizen could get a plot in garden partnerships: “tiny plots for vegetable gardens [...] were especially popular in the starving war and postwar years.” (Nefedova, Savchuk, 2014: 171).

5. An interesting article about the post-Soviet *dacha* using the example of Ukraine: Hormel, 2017.

only residences, so we cannot treat their property as *dachas*, which were originally secondary homes.

In this article, we will analyze the image of a country house in Andrei Tarkovsky's movie *Mirror*, and various terms will be applied to it. The word *izba* can only be used for a house, while the word *dacha* can describe a house, the space around it, and a function of the place. The country house in Andrei Tarkovsky's movie definitely accumulates similar functions to the listed functions of a *dacha*. Moreover, there are certain scenes of a pre-war time in the movie, where the family used the house as a holiday place and a secondary home, so it could be identified as a *dacha*. However, the visual look of the house in *Mirror* is traditional, so it could be treated as an *izba* according to its building type. As mentioned above, it would be strange to use the word *dacha* when it is used as a shelter, so in this part of the analysis, we will use terms such as *izba* or simply, a country house. Furthermore, it should be noted that neither the heroes of the movie, nor Andrei Tarkovsky himself in his reflections, intended to specify the type of this place. In reality, it was a place of temporary dislocation, and for the director personally, it was a very special place where he was evacuated and where he was growing up as a child.

### The *izba* in the film *Mirror* by Andrei Tarkovsky

In the autobiographical movie *Mirror*, Andrei Tarkovsky shows how he, his mother Maria, and his little sister leave Moscow and try to survive in a village. The famous Russian director shares his memories with his audience through the eyes of Alexei, who is his hero and alter-ego. Alexei appears at two ages: as a child of two or three and as a twelve-year-old boy. When viewers see a little child on the screen, it means that the scene is taking place before the war and the family is spending time in peace at the *dacha* space. On the contrary, the sequences with Alexei at twelve years old are set in wartime, when the family was evacuated.

In the current article, the image of *izba* is analyzed in the context of the artistic transformation of Andrei Tarkovsky's memories. To choose specific moments from the past is a certain form of self-knowledge. Proposed by Boris Averin in his analysis of Russian autobiographical prose, the concept that the personality is recreated or reconstructed by the act of remembering is applicable to the study of *Mirror*. According to Boris Averin, a man accurately remembers secondary events and details of his life. The same happens with Andrei Tarkovsky's hero who recalls seemingly insignificant details of his childhood at a critical point in his life. The main object of his recollections is the ambiance of the countryside and the

*izba* as a house itself, which could actually be considered a protagonist of the movie on its own.

There is one example that gives us an understanding of how serious Andrei Tarkovsky's fixation on his family home was, and how strong his intention to recreate the chronotope of a *dacha*, the place and the time where and when he was with his family in pre-war time or in the evacuation. For the shooting of the film, the director built a new house on the foundations of his old family home based on photographs. It was important for him to completely rebuild the *izba* and not use artificial sets. Moreover, Andrei Tarkovsky even wanted to "recreate" the natural environment exactly how it was in his childhood memories. The director described his emotional intention to recreate the space in his book "Sculpting the Time":

A field lay in front of the house; I remember buckwheat growing between the house and the road leading to the next village. It is very pretty when it is in blossom. The white flowers, which give the effect of a snow-covered field, have stayed in my memory as one of the distinctive and essential details of my childhood. But when we arrived to decide where we would shoot, there was no buckwheat in sight – for years the kolkhoz had been sowing the field with clover and oats. When we asked them to sow it for us with buckwheat, they made a great point of assuring us that buckwheat wouldn't grow there, because it was quite the wrong soil. Despite that, we rented the field and sowed it with buckwheat at our own risk. The people in the kolkhoz couldn't conceal their amazement when they saw it come up. And we took that success as a good omen. It seemed to tell us something about the special quality of our memory – about its capacity for penetrating beyond the veils drawn by time... (Tarkovsky, 1989: 132).

Andrei Tarkovsky's comment supports the point that the film set was established as the space of his very reality, because it was the director's principle and the artistic prerequisite for the successful realization of the movie *Mirror*. However, the example of the *izba* in the film of Andrei Tarkovsky is a visual image of an artistic product. The *izba* from the director's memories is as real as it is not real, so the object of our research cannot be considered as a purely social-cultural space, but it should be analyzed as a social-cultural space through the artistic vision of an individual. That is why we are going to focus on the *izba* house and *dacha* space as a part of Andrei Tarkovsky's memories, as a place or a chronotope, where his alter ego Alexei managed to get a specific survival experience.

## The heterotopia / heterochrony features of the *dacha* space in *Mirror*



The narrator in his real age is physically absent in the movie, so the viewer sees two-three and twelve-year-old Alexei as a part of the memories of adult Alexei. Andrei Tarkovsky does not show his main hero in his actual age, but gives us the opportunity to perceive the events as Alexei saw / dreamt / remembered them. In *Mirror*, the country house absorbs memories of various periods of Alexei and his family's life. As Michel Foucault explains, one of the principles defining a heterotopia, understood as a space that is somehow contradictory and "other" to its context, is a break from traditional time. The philosopher laid great stress on the time aspect and coined a symmetrical term to heterotopia, heterochrony. The conceptual frame of a heterotopia / a heterochrony as a parallel space that accumulates time could explain the specificity of a *dacha* space in the analyzed movie.

For example, Andrei Tarkovsky shows the country house as a zone that contains Alexei and Maria at various ages. The movie ends with a mysterious scene where young Maria is pregnant. She is talking with her husband about their future child. Being in an ambivalent mood, lightly smiling and shedding tears at the same time, she suddenly turns her eyes directly to the camera and looks at the viewer for a second, which is unusual for Andrei Tarkovsky's cinematographic language. After a moment, Maria turns back and it seems that she is watching her own future.

In the same space, the director shows Maria as an old woman with two or three-year-old Alexei, so it seems that Andrei Tarkovsky's heroine as a young woman sees herself in old age. According to the storyline logic of the movie, Maria as an old woman (played by Andrei Tarkovsky's mother, Maria Vishnyakova) is the grandmother of Ignat, but not the mother of Alexei. So, the appearance of Maria and Alexei in these particular ages could not occur in a realistic scene. Moreover, in one of the last shots of the scene Maria (played by Margarita Terekhova) is standing in the background and looking at herself, old Maria, crossing the field. Andrei Tarkovsky is not only confusing the viewer with the age of the heroine and her connection to Alexei, but he decided to place the same character in different periods of her life physically in a single space: essentially, we see three Marias in one and the same place. The *dacha* space became a magical heterotopia / heterochrony zone that absorbs past, present, and future. A similar meeting of the young and old heroine takes place in the

mysterious scene when Maria's husband is washing her hair and old Maria appears in the reflection in the mirror (1:41:26 – 1:45:00).<sup>6</sup>

The final scene gives the impression that everything that the viewer saw was exactly what young Maria saw herself when she looked back. Margarita Terekhova's heroine turns to her future and accepts it: she sees her older self, as well as her future children, who will remain small for her forever. The director shows how intense Maria's desire to know the future is, so he makes Margarita Terekhova turn back one more time. Once again, the viewer sees small children crossing the field together with old Maria. The illogical difference in their ages could be made by the director to illustrate disharmonious relationships between children and parents, who often perceive each other in an unrealistic way. As Alexei always sees his mother as an old woman in his childhood memories, for Maria her son will be always "little" regardless of his real age.

Another explanation of this scene could be more mystical than psychological. The specific countryside space can be seen as a transitional zone from life to death. As in the previous scene, we see adult Alexei surrounded by doctors and strange visitors who have also a touch of belonging to another century, as they had appeared in one of the mysterious scenes when Ignat reads Alexander Pushkin's letter. Both these scenes are also obvious examples of heterochrony, a place that saves the pieces from various time periods.

In addition, the heterotopia / heterochrony nature of the *dacha* space in *Mirror* emerges when Andrei Tarkovsky shows some old objects on the ground in the final scene. The well seems to be full of broken things that look like dishes. It seems like the place has been abandoned and it contradicts the logical storyline of the film as the young couple obviously spends time in this country house. Perhaps the director wanted to show the future of this place when it would be left by the family. Another hypothesis is that Andrei Tarkovsky intended to show what time has done to the domestic items that have been there for years. The attention that the director paid to the abandoned objects also reminds us of the black-and-white forest scenes, where the dishes fall from the table under the force of the wind. These images will be analyzed below in the context of the poem "Eurydice" as a visual representation of the fullness-emptiness opposition.

6. The film is available online: *The Mirror*, directed by Andrey Tarkovsky, YouTube (<https://youtu.be/NrMINC5xjMs>).



## Andrei Tarkovsky's experience as a part of the collective memories of Soviet / Russian people



Even though the movie *Mirror* is definitely autobiographical, Andrei Tarkovsky combines his personal memories with collective memories. In the highest degree of this term, those collective memories are presented by the director when he shows the historical chronicle of war events (for example, the Soviet soldiers of the Red Army crossing the Sivash). Even when recreating the place of his personal childhood memories, Andrei Tarkovsky manages to make it recognizable to a wider group of people. In his autobiographical book *Sculpting in Time*, the director noted that he had received many letters from the audience indicating that in *Mirror* they found something similar to their own experience. One reaction was as follows:

Thank you for *Mirror*. My childhood was like that... Only how did you know about it? There was that wind, and the thunderstorm... "Galka, put the cat out," cried my Grandmother... It was dark in the room... And the paraffin lamp went out, too, and the feeling of waiting for my mother to come back filled my entire soul... And how beautifully your film shows the awakening of a child's consciousness, of this thought!.. And Lord, how true... we really don't know our mothers' faces... And how simple... You know, in that dark cinema, looking at a piece of canvas lit up by your talent, I felt for the first time in my life that I was not alone... (Tarkovsky, 1989: 10).

Analyzing this comment, we can conclude that Andrei Tarkovsky has succeeded in allowing the viewer to connect with his personal experience gained in the evacuation and to be emotionally affected by it. That became possible because the director managed to artistically explore the place of his childhood memories as a chronotope where time and space are united. The *dacha* as a chronotope intakes all connotations, negative or positive, that it acquired over time. So, the main focus of the analyses of the *dacha* space in *Mirror* is on what Andrei Tarkovsky / Alexei and especially his mother do, see, feel in this place. Following the conflict that is developed narratively on the main character, Maria, is the key to understanding the specificity of the *dacha* chronotope.

## The *dacha* space as a trial place in *Mirror*



Maria and her children who have probably never fully experienced the country lifestyle have to adapt to the new conditions. Andrei Tarkovsky shows how his mother Maria tries to find some money or food for her family. The heroine decided to visit the doctor's wife, Nadezhda, and to sell her earrings. In this scene, the oscillation between fullness and emptiness, physical starvation and mental suffering, the need of the body and the desire of the soul will be represented, and as we will see further, these oppositions are actualized in the image-text relation between the movie scene and the voice-over of the poem "Eurydice" by Arseny Tarkovsky. Taking into consideration certain details of this scene is essential to analyze the meanings that unfolds at the visual-verbal boundary of the movie.

Maria explains to Nadezhda why she and her children came to the countryside: they had to be evacuated to Yuryevets because of the bombings in Moscow. The confrontation between two women, non-local and local, or a person living in city and a person living in village, slowly intensifies. Nadezhda shows Maria her son sleeping in a beautiful cradle. The rich decoration sharply contrasts with the look of the clothes of the guests. Maria becomes embarrassed, as it is difficult for her to accept that she cannot provide the same stable conditions to her son. Moreover, Nadezhda talks about her husband, and the contrast between the married neighbor and single, lonely Maria becomes even more obvious. Andrei Tarkovsky highlights that conflict when showing Nadezhda's child waking up happily laughing at the exact moment Maria is finding it hard to breathe. The mysterious noise that the director often uses in the movie can then be heard, and Maria runs out of the room.

Apparently, Maria came to sell her jewelry in order to buy food for her hungry child.<sup>7</sup> She had to walk hours to the doctor's house, and she feels physically weak and sick from the starvation and fatigue. Furthermore, it is painful for Maria to watch Nadezhda's overprotected son while her own son is barefoot. Understanding all of these nuances is necessary in order to analyze the poem "Eurydice" that follows this scene where the soul is also exhausted by physical hardships and suffers like Maria.

Nadezhda appears to be pregnant, and because she feels unwell, she asks Maria to help her to slaughter a rooster. The strongest contrast between the two women is shown, as the vitality of Nadezhda reaches its peak. Being a city person and having moved from Moscow to a village

7. The memoirs of Marina Tarkovskaya (a sister of Andrei Tarkovsky) describe how their mother, Maria Vishnyakova, tried to sell earrings made of turquoise during the war. In *Mirror*, earrings with blue stones are also shown (Тарковская, 2006: 172-174).

during the war, Maria is scared to kill the bird, but she agrees, so Alexei does not need to do it. Andrei Tarkovsky is trying to emphasize that his heroine is not part of this countryside world, she is out of this community. For example, another scene of the *Mirror*, shows Maria watching the neighbor's country house burning. Because of her personal reasons, she perceives it in a detached way. We see the same estrangement in the scene with Nadezhda: even if Maria is involved, it is also a form of suffering for her as she cannot adapt to this life. As we are going to see in the following scene (1:21:00 – 1:37:00), the director enforces this feeling of being an alien or an outsider by using his father's poetic text where the soul cannot survive in a physical world.

The moment when the rooster is killed takes place off-camera, and the viewer sees only Maria's face in a slow motion. The symbol of a bird is extremely important, as in "Eurydice," it is a variant of a soul. Another detail of the scene is that Maria and Alexei leave Nadezhda's house without waiting for the doctor who was supposed to give them money for the jewelry. Being tired and hungry, Maria and Alexei return home. Simultaneously, the voice-over of Arseny Tarkovsky<sup>8</sup> is reading "Eurydice."

**"Eurydice," and the dichotomy between mind  
and body as the core element in the image of  
the *izba* in Andrei Tarkovsky's *Mirror***



The poetic text that is quoted in the film is centered on the problem of the relationship between the physical and the spiritual. As we will see further, the relationship between text and image is quite specific: "Eurydice" is some sort of a comment supporting the scene. Arseny Tarkovsky describes the fatigue of a person's soul in his or her body:

A person has one body,  
Singleton, all on its own,  
The soul has had more than enough  
Of being cooped up inside  
A casing with ears and eyes  
The size of a five-penny piece  
And skin – just scar after scar –  
Covering a structure of bone (Tarkovsky, 1987: 157).<sup>9</sup>

8. Arseny Tarkovsky is a famous Russian poet and father of Andrei Tarkovsky. The director often used his poetic texts in many movies such as "Stalker" ("Сталкер," 1979) and "Nostalgia" ("Ностальгия," 1983).
9. The original Russian text of "Eurydice" (Тарковский, 1991, 1: 221): "У человека тело / Одно, как одиночка. / Душе осточертела / Сплошная оболочка / С ушами и глазами / Величиной в пятак / И кожей – шрам на шраме, / Надетой на костяк."

The difference between the physical and the spiritual is revealed using very physiological descriptions. The representation of the body is schematic, caricatural even. Especially in the original text, the reader can feel that the presentation of an image is somewhat grotesquely simplified, as in the paintings of the Russian avant-garde artists. The eyes and the ears are symbolized by circles, and the skin and the skeleton are represented with lines. In the second stanza of the poem, the body is considered as a prison for the soul, “its living prison-cell” (Tarkovsky, 1987: 157). However, in the third stanza, a strange contradiction appears: the main idea of the poem changes radically, and it seems that the author refutes himself. The concept of the necessity of freedom is deconstructed:

A bodyless soul is sinful  
Like a body without a shirt –  
No intention, nothing gets done,  
No inspiration, never a line (Tarkovsky, 1987: 157).<sup>10</sup>

In other words, separating the soul from the body is a sin. The author stresses that the soul should be active, and the body helps it to gain experience. The idea of a “sin” in its religious meaning is extremely important for the poem. According to Arseny Tarkovsky, a soul cannot have any intention or inspiration without a body. To consider, to be outside the experience (that means to be outside the body) is “sinful” for the soul. In the last stanza of the poem, the soul is humanized by comparing it to a child:

Run along then, child, don't fret  
Over poor Eurydice... (Tarkovsky, 1987: 157).<sup>11</sup>

The logical question arises: why does Arseny Tarkovsky mention Eurydice only at the end of the text? Even though the poem is named after a dryad from Greek mythology, it seems that the text is not really about Eurydice. How is her image connected to the main conflict between physical and spiritual, body and soul in that case? Probably, the answer is in the fourth stanza, where the author describes how the lyric hero is dreaming about “a different soul”:

And I dream of a different soul  
Dressed in other clothes [...]  
Spiritous and shadowless  
Like fire it travels the earth... (Tarkovsky, 1987: 157).<sup>12</sup>

10. Original Russian text (Тарковский, 1991, 1: 221): “Душе грешно без тела, / Как телу без сорочки, – / Ни помысла, ни дела, / Ни замысла, ни строчки.”
11. Original Russian text (Тарковский, 1991, 1: 222): “Дитя, беги, не сетуй / Над Эвридикой бедной...”
12. Original Russian text (Тарковский, 1991, 1: 222): “И снится мне другая / Душа, в другой одежде: [...] / Огнем, как спирт, без тени / Уходит по земле...”

The conflict of the poem is that the soul cannot be absolutely free and cannot be outside the body. The lyric hero wishes to identify the soul with fire. Now it is liberated, it can therefore leave the earth without a shadow of the physical body that contains it. As a compromise, in the last stanza, the author offers the reader the image of a child as guardian of a pure soul<sup>13</sup>. Paradoxically, in a poem named after a heroine of Greek mythology, the important postulate of Christianity is incorporated: the recognition of the inseparability of mind and body. While Cartesian dualism manifests the dichotomy of immaterial and material, ancient Greek philosophers insist on the dualism of human nature, in the Christian understanding flesh and spirit are united in a man, so the concept of the body as a “prison” of the soul is illogical. In the beginning of Arseny Tarkovsky’s poem, the separation of the physical and the spiritual is celebrated, but in the third stanza the author states that “A bodyless soul is sinful / Like a body without a shirt.”

Relying on some of the conclusions stemming from our analysis of “Eurydice” can help us comprehend the various images developed in the movie. More specifically, it will enable us to analyze how the image of the *izba* was constructed. The *dacha* space is not just a setting for Andrei Tarkovsky, it is a full-fledged object of study for the filmmaker. As already mentioned, Arseny Tarkovsky’s poem is introduced at the very moment when mother and son leave Nadezhda’s house, but most of the poetic text is heard when a black and white shot of the forest can be seen onscreen. As in some previous mystical scenes, a flying bird and a strange gust of wind appear. The camera shows a wooden table in the forest: various objects fall under the force of the wind. It seems to be a table that the viewer has already seen several times in the movie. However, the place previously looked alive: there were children, a kitten was sitting on the table, milk was flowing from a jug. The house is personified as the body of the family, and the family was its soul. Now the family is gone, and the *izba* is empty. Moreover, the empty containers on the screen are left without anything inside. This is once again reminiscent of the idea of Arseny Tarkovsky’s poem: the body is only a form, a vessel the soul is trying to leave.

The small child, Alexei, enters a house: by the age of the actor, it is possible to understand that this scene is a memory or a dream about pre-war time spent in the *dacha* space. That decision to change the timeline once again reminds us of the dichotomy of the functions that an *izba* has as both a holiday house and shelter. In the next shot of the analyzed scene, the pattern of absence and emptiness rises to even a higher level than seconds before. In the abandoned room, the mysterious wind blows through the curtains. Presumably, it is the same mysterious wind

13. To know more about it: Поляк, 2013.

that Andrei Tarkovsky uses at the beginning of the movie when he made the doctor turn back to Maria several times. That also reminds us of the even more obvious connection between Andrei Tarkovsky's heroine and Eurydice: Orpheus turns back to his lover just as the doctor turns to Maria. Paradoxically the wind in *Mirror* simultaneously resonates with the divine breath, the Spirit of God, and antiquity: once again Christian and mythological traditions are reflected in the aesthetics of both visual and verbal texts.

The *izba* as a holiday house that symbolizes fullness suddenly became a place associated with emptiness and brokenness during the war. Only the empty shell of the house remains and as in the poem "Eurydice," its soul seems to be lost. In the next shot the child, with a large jug of milk in his hands, is reflected in the mirror. This image contrasts sharply with the falling and broken jugs that we saw a few minutes earlier. Thus, the director plays with the images of emptiness and fullness and visualizes them in various proportions and forms. "Hungry" vs "full" is also a version of this opposition, but in the jewelry selling scene it is just more obviously presented than in the shots of broken dishes around the *dacha* space.

The act of killing a rooster in order to feed a child is a physical, corporeal, fleshly manifestation of the value system of both movie and poem. However, as concluded, Maria could not really accomplish her mission, as she fled Nadezhda's house without money. Maria is almost like the soul from "Eurydice", which is exhausted from being in a prison of the body and refuses to experience the human world.<sup>14</sup> The confrontation between mind and body, mental and physical that took place in a specific *dacha* zone finds its culmination in the analyzed scene. Fragile hungry Marie could not be as Nadezhda whose fullness was brought to its peak by the pregnancy. As the soul in Arseny Tarkovsky's poem leaves the world of people, Maria leaves the wealthy house, which is the absolute embodiment of the physical side of life.<sup>15</sup>


As shown, in *Mirror*, we mainly see the narrator's childhood memories or dreams. Therefore, the image of the *izba* is shown through the eyes of a child, so the poetic atmosphere of a place is partly romanticized in the vision of a small hero. At the same time, this perceived image is partly broken, as the director constantly reminds us about the starvation and the despair that Alexei's family experience being evacuated. On the visual and verbal levels, Andrei Tarkovsky explicates the tension between people and the environment that becomes a place that both saves and tests its guests.

14. In the Russian original, it says "уходит по земле." That could be translated literally as "leaves the earth by foot."

15. To learn more about Arseny Tarkovsky's poems in *Mirror*, and particularly about the poem "Eurydice": Павликова, 2021.

In the beginning of the article the various functions of the *dacha* were proposed. Analyzing the example of Andrei Tarkovsky's movie was an attempt to reconsider the conceptual meaning of how the *dacha* space turned from a space of physical salvation into the space of a mental trial for Maria and her family. The place that used to have a function of leisure and give happiness occurred to be something that gave a chance for the director's and many other families in the Soviet Union to persist during World War II. The *dacha* space as a usual holiday space acquired its twin, or more precisely, its antonym, as a space with a function of shelter.

**Polina Pavlikova** is currently working on a PhD thesis entitled *A Twin Texts Phenomenon: The Act of Self-correction* at the University of Luxembourg. She holds a BA and an MA in Philology from Saint-Petersburg State University, and specialises in the poetry of prose-writers such as Andrei Bitov and Vladimir Nabokov; the relationship between the verbal and the visual in Andrei Tarkovsky's films; and the problems of post-colonialism in the context of the post-Soviet space.

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5737-2102>

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