

**Pavel Lungin's Orthodox Turn in  
*The Island* (2006), *Tsar* (2009), and *The Director* (2012)**

David McVey, The Ohio State University  
[McVey.23@buckeyemail.osu.edu](mailto:McVey.23@buckeyemail.osu.edu)

Award-winning Russian director Pavel Lungin has released ten feature films to date. It follows that Lungin's films would contain Jewish protagonists and address the de facto and de jure oppression that has dogged Jews during all points of their history in Russia, as the director hails from a secular Jewish background. In tackling the so-called Jewish Question, Lungin's early films exhibit frenetic cinematography and carnivalesque narratives, which feature ample drinking, raucous music, and fast-paced action. But beginning with his 2006 film *The Island*, Lungin jettisons the Jewish Question altogether, sloughs off boisterous secularism, and instead concentrates on narratives and protagonists informed by Russian Orthodoxy, a religious tradition that has often been openly hostile to Jews. This shift is even more mind-boggling in that Lungin has declared nonreligious affiliation as recently as 2012 in an interview with *Dozh*'. Why, then, does Lungin focus so heavily on archconservative Eastern Christianity in his latest outings?

My presentation will discuss three of Lungin's recent Orthodox-themed films—*The Island*, *Tsar* (2009), and *The Conductor* (2012)—to demonstrate that Lungin has expanded his project of indicting patriarchal oppression and suggesting alternative models. I will unpack the function of Russian Orthodoxy in the above films' narratives and portrayals of Orthodox characters, particularly in relationship to religious and secular patriarchy. I will also analyze the attendant function of the films' formal elements, focusing on aspects such as spiritual music, contemplative photography, and deliberately paced editing. I shall propose that Lungin has not so much offered an uncritical embrace or indictment of culturally re-ascendant Russian Orthodoxy, but rather has incorporated some of its subversive and palliative elements as a means of working within the system to designate antidotes to abuses by Russian patriarchy which afflict not only Jews, but the entire dissenting population.