Sergei Loznitsa's *In the Fog* holds a unique space in the canon of modern Russian language war films. Many of the films set in the Eastern Front feature harsh seasonal scenes and heavy snow. This is unsurprising: snow is a symbol of hardship and death; it viscerally communicates the extreme weather conditions and of course, it is an aesthetic dream. Wide sweeping shots are often favoured in such films and there is a preference for scenes of battle. Alongside the major players there tend to be a flurry of characters, who disappear toward various tragic fates. Larisa Shepitko's *The Ascent*, Aleksei German's *Trial on the Road* and Alexander Kott's *Fortress of War* are all films of this nature. *In the Fog* with its leafy, fertile forestry and its autumnal palette is by contrast, intimate and highly characterised. The camera work is close range, even claustrophobic at times. It has drawn comparisons to Andrei Tarkovsky's *Ivan's Childhood* and Elim Klimov's legendary film, *Come and See*. These comparisons are natural, given the location and the autumnal woodland aesthetic chosen by the films' directors. However, whilst these films share a visual sensibility they are drastically different in terms of theme and plot.

Loznitsa's protagonist Shushenya is utterly unique. Unlike most protagonists in war films he is neither hardened by the violence, nor impassioned by vengeance or justice. Instead Loznitsa depicts a curiously decent man, one who is almost like Alyosha Karamazov in his natural, and maddening, goodness. Whilst digging his own grave, he tells his executioner to be and presumably once a family friend, to tell his wife he was killed by the Germans with a Christlike tone of forgiveness. His interrogation is revealed to be due to an execution, headed by the occupying forces, that spared him but killed his colleagues. But for honest Shushenya, a quiet man, this was not salvation but an out of the frying pan and into the fire moment. The apparent mercy at the hands of the Germans, only led to suspicion by the partisans. As the film unfolds and Shushenya's position as an unwitting bait placed for the partisans is unveiled, we are asked to ponder the question that Shushenya himself asks: 'What has happened to us, that we distrust each other more than we distrust them?'

The western part of Belarus was occupied from 1941-1944 by the Nazis. The occupying forces assumed a higher authority, the partisan movement grew and the atmosphere was thick with suspicion. The murky events of this time are still controversial today. *In the Fog* communicates perfectly the region's pastoral lifestyle that is buried deeply under the distrustful, fractured society. In one scene Burov, the partisan, visits his mother. A Belorussian officer in the German forces knocks on the door and asks Burov, as one would ask a neighbour, to help fix the tank. Burov refuses, and references a childhood scrap during which he knocked out the officer's tooth. He antagonistically states, 'When I see you now, I wish I'd knocked them all out.' The interconnectedness of the villagers is apparent, and this heightens the tragedy as the lines between friend and ideological enemy are drawn. Loznitsa shows that the act of categorising is a morally unclear, or even foggy business.

The film opens with the execution Shushenya is spared from, and Loznitsa uses the opportunity to capture the fullness of the village. As his camera tracks through the square, bustling countryside life is displayed. It would look normal if it were not for the black tanks that surround the market, and the ominous tracking shot of the backs of the captives' heads as they march toward their fates. Kerstin Decker, film critic for *Tagesspiegel* has suggested that the reason Loznitsa frequently opts to shoot from behind his subjects is because it suggests the perspective of an omniscient observer, a grim reaper if you will. This is certainly a fertile and likely analysis, for death never feels far away in *In the Fog*. From the moment that the film starts, and through poor Shushenya's journey through the woods there is an exterior eye that seemingly follows Belorussians and German occupiers with eerie neutrality. The fog that descends over the end of Loznitsa's film is a great equaliser as all the men are eclipsed. The only view point that can penetrate this mist is perhaps the lens of death itself. As the fog descends and the literary analogy is made real and inescapable, Loznitsa forces us to question what the real tragedy is. The war, or a village turned in on itself? As the final shot rings, the victor unseen we question what's a worse fate for Shushenya, the loss of his life, or the loss of his innocence?
Sergei Loznitsa
Sergei Loznitsa is a Belarusian born and Ukrainian raised director. An exceptionally talented man, he studied mathematics in Kyiv, and was forging a career in artificial intelligence and Japanese translation. He changed tracks and turned his hand toward filmmaking. Initially, he was known as a documentary filmmaker and directed 18 highly acclaimed documentary films before taking on fiction. He is highly regarded for his logical and mathematical lens, both aesthetically and in terms of plot as he combines his new discipline with a logical sensibility. His first film, ‘My Joy’ (2008) was selected as a contender for the Palme d’Or and his second film, ‘In the Fog’ (2012) followed suit. He is undeniably, one of the talented directors on the global stage today, and a vital Russian language voice.

About Red Front
Marking VE Day and the end of the war on the Eastern Front, May 9th, this season of remarkable and rarely screened films includes works from famed directors Aleksei Germann and Andrei Konchalovsky, contemporary director Sergei Loznitsa, female director Tatyana Lioznova, as well as Yuri Norstein, widely considered to be the greatest animator of all time.

Screenings will take place online every Tuesday and Saturday, from Saturday 9 to Saturday 30 May 2020. Reframed in short order, since cinemas have gone dark, Red Front is a unique co-operation between Kino Klassika, the Institut français du Royaume-Uni and partners and directors of cinemas and studios in the UK and Russia. Supported by the Russian Embassy in London, Lenfilm, Soyuzmultfilm, Gorky Film and others, it replaces a planned cinema season in London, Bristol, Manchester and beyond.

WWII had effects that range well into this century, but the level and extremity of the loss suffered by the Soviet Union had significant social impact. The films we are showing are made by innovative, modern directors across various genres. We have included a diverse range of style and narrative to show the various ways film has been used to commemorate, remind and heal. Our mission is to shine a light on these rarely seen, contemporary masterpieces in an act of remembrance for the past and recognition of the present. As always with Kino Klassika screenings, each film will be accompanied by specially commissioned programme notes.

If you are enjoying what we do, please spread the word by sharing our posts on facebook, twitter and social media.

Support Us
Kino Klassika is a UK registered charity (1150791). We rely on the generosity of our supporters. If you want to encourage education and engagement with classic Russian language, Eastern and East European film, please support us by making a donation.

Our bank details are as follows:
Account no. 69358087
Sort code 60-15-33
Or please donate at our website: www.kinoklassikafoundation.org

About Kino Klassika Foundation
Kino Klassika creates programmes of film restorations, publications, art commissions and events to educate audiences about classic Russian language and Eastern cinema. This includes a 2-year programme to spotlight the pioneering work of filmmaker Sergei Eisenstein, our first restoration projects including Hakob Havnavanyan, Arabesques on the Pirozmani Theme and Jirtdan (1969). We have recently completed Melodia! Discovering Musicals from Russia and the Caucasus, a screening season in partnership with the British Film Institute, Institut Français, Bristol Watershed and Broadway Nottingham. The program celebrated the diversity and complexity of Soviet, Russian and Caucasian musicals. It gave UK audiences a unique opportunity to explore an undiscovered musical tradition.

Kino Klassika’s trustees are Professor Ian Christie, Daniel Jowell QC, Roger Munnings CBE and Justine Waddell. The patron of Kino Klassika is Ralph Fiennes.

The Kino Klassika Team
This screening could not happen without the unstinting support of the Kino Klassika team: Joseph Andreyev, Nathan Dampier, Tatiana Isaeva, Zoryana Mischiy, Olja Miljevic, Seraphina Paisey and Talitha Piggott.

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