



Tuesday 27 October 2020

#Klassiki

*Postman's White Nights (2014)*  
*Andrei Konchalovsky*

Time works strangely in the village of Konchalovsky's film. In some ways time is crystallised: the wooden interiors, the village traditions and the fish that continually spawn from a certain place in the river. In other ways everything is in flux. The older generations are no longer seamlessly replaced by the younger; some are, but most want to leave and the village's population is dwindling and getting older with each year. Lyoka pulls Irina's hair. She is his unrequited love and former classmate, 'When you were in school your hair was long and in pigtails... it was better then.' Irina is nonplussed.

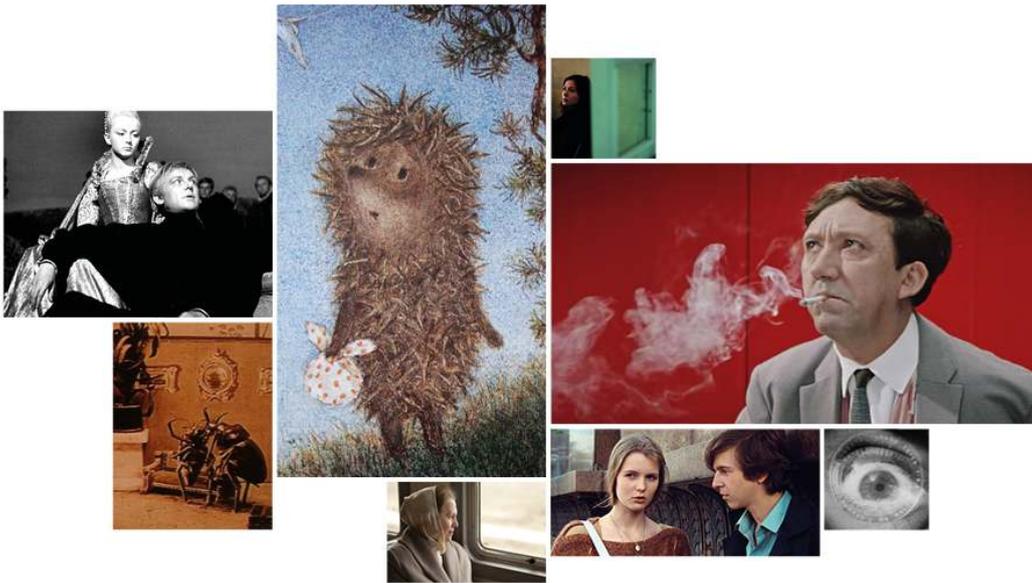
Lyoka, the titular Postman, is the village's primary contact with the outside world. In his boat, he visits the mainland to collect their parcels. He is the only consistent, tenuous link between the isolated village and the outside world. Indeed the nature of his job means that he weaves together the fabric of their society. The only person who intimately knows each one of their situations, problems and habits, he delivers not only letters but medicine, pensions and advice. Always clad in camouflage, at the beginning of the film we see him surrounded by immense natural beauty as he rides up the river. It is clear there is no other sign of civilisation for miles. The pleasure Lyoka takes in his job is evident. Generally respected by the villagers he is aware of their most intimate secrets and acts as the only confidant for many of the older men.

Andrei Konchalovsky, a director with a dazzling and varied filmography, turns his hand with this recent film to compassionate realism. Mixing fact with fiction it exists in the space between documentary and scripted drama. Much like Byambasuren Davaa's 2005 film about a nomadic Mongolian family, *The Cave of the Yellow Dog* the actors, with the exception of Irina and Timur who are played by professionals, are amateurs hailing from similar provincial places. Aleksey Tryapitsyn plays the titular Postman wonderfully. At the film's beginning a photographic coda is introduced. He places photographs from his life, and from the village, on the table and explains the images' back stories. We see snippets of his old life: the livestock he once owned, his friends who met untimely deaths and multiple pictures of him, as he puts it, fighting with vodka. A fight, he says, he regrettably lost. Lee Marshall for *Screen Daily*, applauds Konchalovsky's incredibly

believable experiment: 'What emerges is a tender, melancholy, occasional funny, frequently inconsequential cinematic pastoral, a gentle, meandering lament for a rural lifestyle that is on the verge of dying out. Genuine country postman Aleksey 'Lyokha' Tryapitsin carries the film, his cheeky-chap persona veined by Slavic fatalism as he interacts with those on his round.'

Fatalism pervades the film, undoubtedly. In spite of it being so pleasant to watch, on reflection you realise with some surprise that very little good occurs. This is a realisation somewhat contrary to the viewing experience. Irina respects Lyoka but cannot summon up romantic interest in him. Lyoka's engine is stolen and engenders a personal crisis. Before this catalyst, despite having recovered from his alcoholism he remains tormented by nightmares. Lyoka speaks to one of his friends, a depressive struggling with loneliness and alcoholism, who comments on the village's fate: 'We have our pensions and the shop has everything- but still, nothing is good.' The small community is presented as trapped and in crisis, but surrounded by astonishing natural beauty. These moments of revelation take place in small homely wooden houses and against a backdrop that seems so fertile when compared to the lives of those who live in it. However, whilst neighbouring Arkhangelsk is presented as an economic escape, a trip Lyoka takes there with Timur displays the abrasiveness of the city after the wide open skies. The village might be a dead end, but it is a beautiful one.

*Postman's White Nights* feels Proustian in its ability to capture the nuances and experience of time. It is a highly sensory affair where for the characters memory is constantly triggered against a changing world. The familiarity of the small space with its idiosyncrasies and its seasonal staples continually remind the characters of the past. We know parallels between past and present will continue in a place like that where island life is so deeply embedded in rawness and ritual. Nothing is truly new: love, heartbreak, alcoholism, death and birth all have parallels with the past there. But simultaneously, nothing will ever be the same again. The fish continue to spawn in the same spot in the river, but now rockets shoot over them in the near distance.



### Andrei Konchalovsky

(Born August 20, 1937) is a prolific and highly acclaimed filmmaker, theatre director and screenwriter in both Russia and internationally. He has been awarded membership of the Legion of Honour, a Cavalier of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic and has won the Silver Lion at Venice multiple times. His works include feature films, television and stage productions in both Russia and the United States. He was a frequent collaborator of Andrei Tarkovsky, famously penning *Andrei Rublev* with him, and his most famous Russian directorial credits include *Uncle Vanya* (1970), *Siberiade* (1979), *Assia and the hen with Golden Eggs* (1994) and more recently, *Paradise* (2016), the Venice film festival winner.

### About Klassiki

Klassiki screens a highly curated selection of director led films, with each week's choice introducing UK audiences to an important filmmaker's work. An opportunity to experience online a weekly curated selection of the best of Soviet, Russian, Caucasian and East European cinema, and KLASSIKI choices range from early silent cinema, to masterpieces of animation, from post-war classics to contemporary Cannes winners. Supplementing the film experience, KLASSIKI offers specially commissioned and downloadable programme notes as well as podcasts and filmed introductions which give biographical, social and political context to each film. We also program film seasons, including RED FRONT: 75 YEARS OF RUSSIAN WAR CINEMA and TASHKENT FILM ENCOUNTERS, to spotlight classic cinema from Central Asia.

This is the birth of Klassiki, our planned free streaming platform, which will allow you to stream great cinema from the region, literally on the hop.

### 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](http://www.kinoklassikafoundation.org)

### About Kino Klassika Foundation

Kino Klassika is the only organisation in the world dedicated to spotlighting cinema from Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia. The foundation 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 and our first restoration projects *Hakob Havnatanyan*, *Arabesques on the Ploshmani Theme* and *Jirdan* (1969). We have recently completed *Melodia! Discovering Musicals from Russia and the Caucasus*, a screening season in partnership with the British Film Institute, Institut Francais, Bristol Watershed and Broadway Nottingham.

KLASSIKI continues Kino Klassika's longstanding undertaking to showcase classic films from the region. By giving audiences access to unseen gems as well as the opportunity to meet and chat with directors and filmmakers from Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia, Kino Klassika are a trusted, credible and essential part of the UK's specialist film exhibition sector.

Kino Klassika was founded by Justine Waddell. The trustees are Professor Ian Christie, Daniel Jowell QC, Roger Munnings CBE. 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, Alexia Claydon, Olga Doletskaya, Seraphina Paisey, Talitha Piggott and Jack Weeks.

### Upcoming Klassiki Screenings

Klassiki will screen a new film in our weekly curated series, every Tuesday from 2pm. Please check in with us on social media or via our website to access each week's new screening. And please share the news with your friends!

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