



Tuesday 24  
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## *The White Bird Marked with Black (1970)* by Yuri Ilyenko

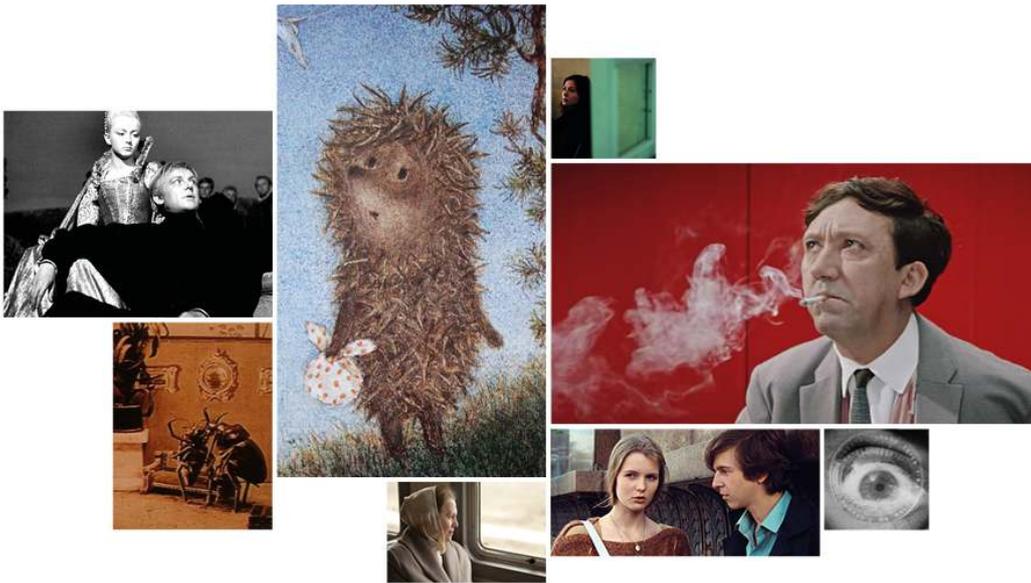
Georgiy grows up in a small mountain village in North Bukovina. With an unfortunate geographic location, the traditional Hutsul community is caught between the competing interests of Romania, Germany and Russia. Life in this backward Hutsul community is unremittingly brutal. On top of this, Georgiy's family, the Zvonars, are musicians who make a meagre wage. Everyone is hungry and his father's desperation makes him cruel. Yuri Ilyenko films this tragic story with beauty imbued with mysticism and a sense of wonder. The camerawork is astonishing, not only is each individual frame stunning but the operating techniques are accomplished and complex. When Dana, the priest's daughter and the love of his three brothers, gets married to a Russian soldier, the camera tracks her newly wed husband as he walks towards her, and then circles around them in a long take as they dance together for the first time as husband and wife. The effect is appropriately dizzying and captures the euphoria of celebration. The sequence is also underwritten with a mania that foreshadows the declaration of war that is just about to come.

Ilyenko was Sergei Parajanov's cinematographer for the highly acclaimed *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1965). Many film scholars have noted the unique aesthetics in *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1965) and much of this is due to Ilyenko's distinctive, and accomplished, visual style. Parajanov's film also detailed life in the Carpathian Mountains and its folklore but it stays away from the political. *The White Bird Marked with Black* (1971) released just five years after, heavily focuses on traditions and symbolism; but these symbols are placed in the context of their precarious position alongside the constant political and personal conflicts happening in and around the village. The symbolism in the film comes from a long folkloric tradition, but simultaneously represents the friction that wrecks each family's life. Georgiy's father owns four clocks, he often sits by these and watches them anxiously, a desperate keeper of time. One of the clocks shows the time in Moscow, another the time in Romania, one the time in Poland and lastly one shows German time. His reasoning is so he won't have to constantly change the time with each new occupation. He is often shown sat with the clocks, before we know their significance, in a gorgeous shot he is framed with two clocks

on either side of him, lit by candlelight and his shadow cast against the wall. It is a nod to the total powerlessness of the villagers, who can do nothing but live through the tides of time and the power changes this brings.

The village witch, who is deeply in touch with the pagan traditions of the region, is also a prostitute. It is significant that the one with such profound knowledge is also a victim of war's machinations. She is shown frequently with visiting soldiers and is a symbol of sexual fascination for Georgiy. One of Georgiy's elder brothers, Orest, becomes a nationalist and joins the Insurgent Army. It is a noble pursuit but he loses himself in it. He brutally murders Dana's husband and inadvertently causes his brother Petro's death. Petro himself had gone to fight with the Soviets and Bogdan, the third elder brother, hides from the war in the woods. Georgiy's father had described his sons as resembling the clocks, 'each running to the wind, each on his own time.' This transpires to be tragically true, as the family is torn apart by and thrown into different ideologies.

*The White Bird Marked with Black* (1971) has been criticised for its pro-Soviet message. Ultimately, the villagers are shown as happy in the new Soviet society and Georgiy becomes a doctor in the new stability. Whilst this is true on the surface, the film's real message is far more ambiguous. Even the white bird of the title has complex connotations. His mother tells Georgiy the story of the stork who was once a man. According to folklore, God gave the man a heavy sack and said throw it over the cliff but don't look inside. The man, wanting to know God's secrets, did. God turned the man into a white bird with a black mark, and told him once he rid the world of foul things he could make him a man again. The stork itself is intoned with ambiguity: both a keeper of peace and a sinner. Georgiy's ultimate fate is to balance both good and evil, as well as he can. But as much as the new Soviet system brings stability, it is also shown to bring tragedy. It drives the Priest, a man who practically raised Georgiy, to madness and suspicion. The film's closing shot is of a log raft drifting down the river. This raft was seen earlier, but with Georgiy's brother's afloat on top of it. Now it is empty, and drifts along at the whim of the current.



## Yuri Ilyenko

Yuri Ilyenko (July 1936- June 2010) was a Ukrainian film director, cinematographer and screen writer. One of Ukraine's most influential filmmakers, he was a pioneer of poetic cinema and the Ukrainian New Wave. His films detailed Ukraine's rich history and tradition, as well as Ukraine's precarious contemporary position. Known for his work as Sergei Parajanov's cinematographer for *Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* (1965) his visual sensibilities stunned the film world. His ventures as a director have been equally beautiful, *The Eve of Ivan Kupalo* (1968) and *A Strip of Uncut Wildflowers* (1979) were recognised as culturally as aesthetically significant. His films have been highly awarded, *The White Bird Marked with Black* won the golden prize at Moscow International film festival.

## 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 Central Asian 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.

## 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:

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## 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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