



Tuesday 19 January 2021

#Klassiki

*Kharms (2017)*  
by Ivan Bolotnikov

'I am interested only in 'nonsense', only in that which makes no practical sense. I am interested in life only in its absurd manifestations.'

Daniil Kharms' surreal imagination and proclivity for the absurd, was not contained by his artistic practice. He lived as he wrote: beautifully, recklessly, authentically and nonsensically. The tragic facts of his life are haunting; he lived in persecution from the Soviet authorities, in poverty and suffered a lack of understanding from the general public. He ultimately died of starvation in a psychiatric hospital, his pacifist stance was cause for execution and he mimicked insanity to avoid this. In many ways, this strange and fettered existence follows the absurdity of his own writing, which evoked a deeply unsettling whimsy. It is even thought that Kharms, preternaturally self aware, chose the name 'Kharms' as a play on the English words 'charm' and 'harm'.

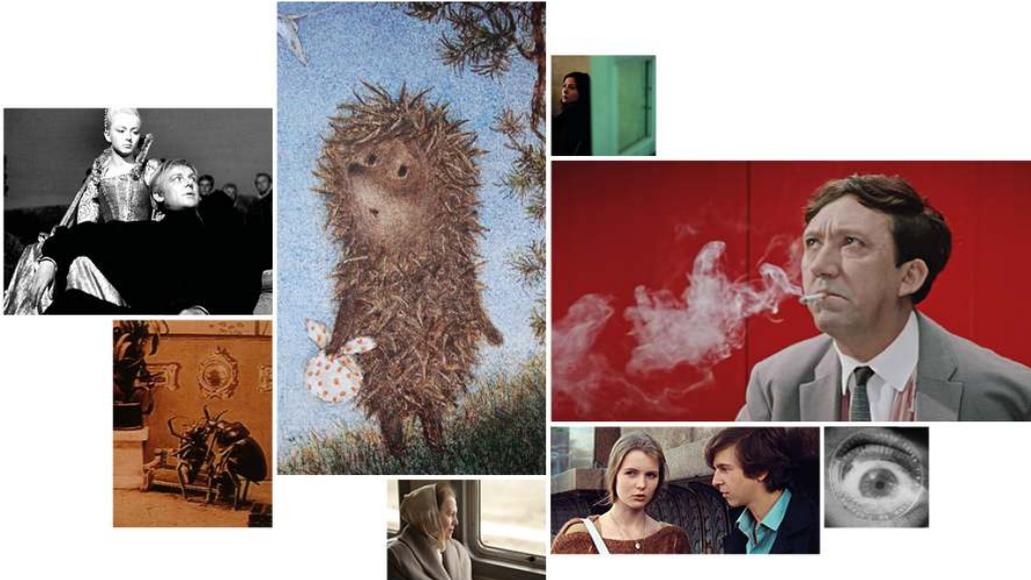
Ivan Bolotnikov's dialogue in his biopic is witty and incisive. A considerable feat, considering the scope of the topics covered and the fast and whirling realisations from Kharms himself, or from his contemporaries. In their artistic and literary avant-garde circles they are safe, they discuss science, the supernatural and art whilst wearing unusual clothes. Sometimes these meetings of genuine intellectual minds turns into drunken parties. All the way through the festivities they recite poetry, both their own and others. In the so called 'real world', Kharms experiences no such freedom. He recites a love poem to his lover, filled with epic images of romance. In response she derisively turns over, hungover, the magic of the previous day having dissipated for her, 'Which stars Daniil?' Even his father does not understand him, he lodges a complaint against his son's work, 'You are rationally and consciously making reality irrational.' Kharms is strangely serene, and tells his father that his choice of phrasing is an interesting play on words.

Born in pre-revolutionary St Petersburg in 1905, Kharms' witnessed some of the magical city's most dangerous and most compelling years. Leningrad in the era before the Great Patriotic War was a fertile base of philosophy, artistry and revolutionary thought, set amidst decaying decadence. One

world was disappearing as another was blooming. Bolotnikov's film, which deservedly won the awards for best screenplay and best cinematography at the Shanghai International Film Festival recreates this changing landscape to stunning effect. Not only are the set design and costumes truly wonderful, the Napoleonic architecture and grandeur of the setting is made knowingly faded and authentic. The benches are chipped; the walls that line the Neva are cracked; as often too are the facades of the buildings; and the interiors are a mixture of scarcity and indulgence, ripped wall papers line rooms scattered through with luxury items.

Most interestingly, Bolotnikov goes beyond situating his film in the time and place. He actively plays with archival footage. Initially this is interspersed throughout the film, with clear differentiating sequencing. But the clean cut between his acted scenes and the archival footage disintegrates through the course of the film. In one beautiful scene, Kharms looks out of his apartment window, the view outside the window is edited to be black and white archival footage, whilst we observe Kharms, filmed in colour, looking out this window. This meta-technique is not only visually interesting, most fittingly it situates the man who reached such posthumous fame simultaneously in both 'now' and 'then'; the belated admiration of today, and of his contemporary space. In another moment Kharms prays for a miracle, a paper plane covered with his writing is animated as it flies across real historical footage of Leningrad. It is a poetic moment, and an upsetting one. We are aware of the conflict waiting just a few years on.

Kharms' final fate is also shown. Shot in black and white, the last few painful years of his existence are interspersed through the reflections on his happier years. In one scene, Kharms starving and alone in his bare room catches and strokes a rat. In the next scene, him and his lover, years earlier, mess around in an apartment pretending to look for rats. Interestingly, Kharms is quoted as prophetically saying, 'The USSR lost the war on its first day. Leningrad will be either besieged or bombed to death.' As well as his profound portrait of an artist's ultimately tragic life, Bolotnikov expresses Leningrad's own tragedy, as the city transforms from the seat of avant-garde experimentation to a city ravaged by war and ideology.



### Ivan Bolotnikov

Ivan Bolotnikov (1969) is an award-winning Russian film director. First he was formerly educated in history of art, before attending film school in Moscow in 1999. He is a relative newcomer to the scene, a mere four years ago he released his debut, *Kharms* (2017). His first film was met with critical acclaim and numerous awards for its inventive reimagining of the poet's life. Most recently, he released *Palmyra* (2020), which takes on the difficult topics of extremism in Syria, and a father's attempt to stop his daughter's radicalisation.

### 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, KLASSIKI ranges 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 Pirosmi 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'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, Tatiana Isaeva, Zoryana Mischiy, Olja Mljivic, Seraphina Paisey and Talitha Piggott.

### Upcoming Klassiki Screenings

Klassiki will screen a new film in our weekly curated series, until February 4, 2021, where encouraged by the success of this weekly film season, we are launching our new VOD platform, [klassiki.online](http://klassiki.online). Please share the news with your friends!

#kinoklassika #cinemaonthehop #kinoklassiki



@kinoklassika



@kinoklassikafoundation

Klassiki programming is supported by funds from the BFI Film Audience Network (FAN) which is made possible by the National Lottery.