

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An independent film club based in Chelmsford

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Leviathan

Dir. Andrey Zvyagintsev Russia - 2014 - 142 mins.

Cast: Alexsei Serebryakov; Elena Lyadova; Vladimir Vdovichenkov; Roman Madyanov.

It was either 'Ida' or 'Leviathan' for Best Foreign Film Oscar in 2015, and the former won! A great choice, as we will all remember it from last year's CFC programme. But now a chance to see the magnificent and highly deserving runner-up.

The story of a family living in the far north of Russia, '*Leviathan*' portrays a man battling to save his ancestral home from demolition after a corrupt local bureaucrat sets his sights on expropriating the land for his own purposes.

The official reaction to the film in Russia was scathing. Vladimir Medinsky, the culture minister, told *Izvestia* newspaper that '*Leviathan*'s portrayal of the church was "beyond limits", and that "its characters were not real Russians." Indeed, and the police officers portrayed in our own TV series 'Line of Duty', say, were not real police officers. Not to mention the Director of Public Prosecutions in the BBC's recent 'Undercover' drama not being a real DPP. And we might go on...

Medinsky went on: "However much the authors [of *Leviathan*] made the characters swear and swig litres of vodka, they are not Russians. I did not recognise myself, my colleagues, friends or even friends of friends, in *Leviathan*." He said that he hoped Zvyagintsev would make films in future "without this existential despair". One may wonder what our own 'Minister of Culture' (doesn't that title convey an ominous Orwellian shiver?) might say about much of British (BBC?) TV drama and independent cinema output in the privacy of his own home? And Zvyagintsev's response? He told *The Guardian* he believed Medinsky should be fired for his comment and that the state funding of movies is led by a policy of "all flowers should grow but we will only water the ones we like".

Perhaps the tone of "existential despair" detected by Medinsky was inevitable given that the Book of Job seems to be a major source of inspiration for the film, holding little hope or optimism for the human condition. The satire of Russian authorities, the Orthodox church and the power structures in Russia is vicious and unrelenting, and even the victims are not particularly sympathetic characters, driven to drink, infidelities and anguished outbursts. An Orthodox Church spokesperson condemned the film as "filthy libel" while the media in Russia completely ignored both the film and its international success on the film festival circuit. The first Russian film to win a Golden Globe since *War and Peace* in 1969, as well as being nominated for an Oscar, was ordered to be re-edited into a sanitised version for Russian distribution: a new law banned swearing in films.

Before *Leviathan* Zvyagintsev was mostly known for his 2003 film *The Return*, which won him a Golden Lion at Venice. Following *The Return* he directed *The Banishment* (2007) and *Elena* (2011).

Our next films: ***Theeb*** on 2 June, and our last screening this season, ***Hail Caesar***, on 15 June. After the screening of ***Theeb***, we will hold our last **Discussion Session** this season. Please stay behind and meet in the foyer if you would like to take part. The previous two events have been extremely successful!