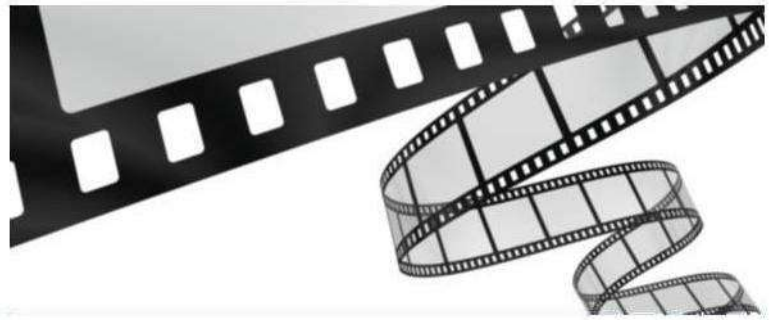


CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

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The Student (2016)

Russia 118 mins

Director: Kirill Serebrennikov

Cast: Pyotr Skvortsov, Viktoriya Isakova, Yuliya Aug

Reviews:

Phil Hoad, The Guardian – March 2017

In another cinematic attack on the Russian Orthodox church, following 2014's magisterial [Leviathan](#), *The Student's* scripture-spouting teenager Venya (Pyotr Skvortsov) launches a one-man protest against decadent modern education. He refuses to strip off for swimming practice, but getting naked to disrupt sinful contraception classes is fine, apparently.

Director Kirill Serebrennikov, adapting [Marius von Mayenburg's](#) 2012 play for his eighth feature, wrings significant humour out of the Messiah/naughty boy dichotomy, particularly in Venya's mother's exasperated responses to her issue's latest decree. Propelled by restless long takes and Skvortsov's imposing presence (he shares the lofty pugnaciousness of [Michael Shannon](#), whom he physically resembles), *The Student* finds a higher satirical calling. The toadying responses of the local priest and school principals to the preacher in their midst needle the Orthodox church's obscurantist influence over Russian public life.

Serebrennikov comes close himself to falling under Venya's spell, with one indelicate lift from Lars von Trier's Rammstein sequence in [Nymphomaniac](#) hinting he's not quite sure where to stand on his motor mouthed preacher. But if *The Student* lacks the searing moral exactness of the Russian literature on which it draws, it's an often hypnotic warning against dogma's eternal allure.

Tom Williams, Little White Lies

Going through puberty is a rough time for any adolescent. For Veniamin (Pyotr Skvortsov), the star of Kirill Serebrennikov's *The Student*, teenage angst manifests itself as a religious tirade. His violent dedication to Christianity is treated as something new – a reflection of Vladimir Putin's 2013 enforcement of religious teachings in schools.

If you're feeling out of touch with scripture, then this film will replenish any lost knowledge. It includes live annotations of Bible passages which appear every time our unlikable leading lad makes a quotation. The text is integrated into the scene, whether it's inscribed on a chalkboard or the walls of a gymnasium. There's a big contradiction within the Russian school system that Serebrennikov's film explores.

Teachers blindly accept a strict religious syllabus, yet they discipline the boy for following them in the obsessive manner he does. The most centred character is his Biology teacher (Viktoriya Isakova) who is sensitive to religion and open to scientific teachings despite adversity from conservative colleagues and the explosive Veniamin.

It soon becomes clear that Veniamin's insistent views extend to homophobia and anti-semitism. Yet his outbursts and the ill treatment he receives from his family do become wearying. Some eruptions are actually rather funny, like when he strips naked in protest at having to place a condom on a carrot, or his acting like a 2001 primate to stand up against evolution.

The only glimpse of human empathy we see is his brief romantic involvement with Lidiya (Aleksandra Revenko) who he soon ditches in favour of the cross he holds over his shoulder like a bindle. The Student is stimulating when trying to decipher the rationale of the troubled high school boy who has looming arial shots hovering over him as if being watched by God. A haunting ending that lands a sucker punch from out of nowhere makes the narrative seem very real and rounds o the film in a heart breaking manner.

Club notices:

Our last presentation: 'Letters from Baghdad'

There were 21 Audience Reaction slips returned after the showing of this film the breakdown from these slips were as follow:

- 'Excellent': 8 votes
- 'Very Good': 10 votes
- 'Good': 1 vote
- 'Satisfactory': 1 vote
- 'Poor': 1 vote

Please visit the current season page at <http://www.chelmsford-filmclub.co.uk> to read all the feedback comments.

Our next presentation:

Tuesday 8th May at 8pm – "Hunt for the Wilderpeople"