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**The Depiction of War in Soviet Movies: A film
Analysis of Elem Klimov's *Come and See* (1985).**

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a Master Degree in English Literature and Civilization

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Abstract

This research paper offers an analysis of what is regarded as one of the best war movies ever made, which is Elem Klimov's "*Come and See*" (1985). It aims at providing the key points and arguments that make this movie such a realistic take on the theme of war, without reverting to typical falsification or propaganda that is still plaguing the film industry to this day. This will require an introduction to the context and the background of the movie, with the addition of an analysis of the plot and the ideas behind some selected scenes, and how the use of some mise-en-scene elements enhances the meaning of those scenes. Film theory is the main theory that will be used in order to prove the points brought in, while other theories such as New Historicism, and Psychoanalysis will make few appearances in some sections due to the vastness of the topic. With that in mind, we will explore the ways in which this film effectively conveys its anti-war theme and sets itself apart from other movies of the same category.

Keywords: Cinema, Conflict, Trauma, War.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my family, friends, and all of my loved ones who have always supported me, and blessed me with knowledge, love, and encouragement throughout my entire life.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my deepest appreciation to my parents, who have always been there for me and taken exceptional care of my well-being and education. They have shown unwavering support, love, and motivation, providing me with all the necessary resources and materials to pursue my dreams, regardless of the financial implications. They have granted me the freedom to explore, learn, and grow, allowing me to develop my own unique perspective that will undoubtedly benefit me and those around me throughout my life.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to my supervisor, Mr. Kaci, who guided me through every stage of my dissertation with utmost efficiency and professionalism. My relatives, who have supported my aspirations and dedicated their time to help me achieve my goals, and my dear classmates, with whom I have shared wonderful memories, exchanged valuable insights and helped each other during challenging times. I genuinely hope that my research will bring positive outcomes and prove to be beneficial not only to myself but also to those who will read it.

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General Introduction

From Friedrich Ermler's *She Defends Her Motherland* (1943), Mikhail Chiaureli's *The Fall of Berlin* (1949), Iosif Kheifits and Aleksandr Zarkhi's *Malakhov Kurgan* (1944), during World War II, Soviet movies, used to parallel the state of Western movies of that time, in the sense that both were heavily focused on propaganda, chauvinism, blind patriotism, and the promotion of their former ideology and political spectrum.

However, just like how the counter-culture movement of the 60s in America deeply affected Western perception and expression of culture, ideas, art, music, and of course cinema, similarly, Stalin's death in 1954 marked a whole new shift and revival of Soviet art and expression where artists, old and new, would be granted more freedom to voice and showcase their opinion and works with less restriction and censorship from their government.

In the context of historical war movies, a significant change can be noticed, as newer films that do not use the same old practices of glorifying or romanticizing war would appear, such as Elem Klimov's masterpiece *Come and See* (1985).

Problem of the Study

Cinema is one of the most immersive forms of art in terms of storytelling and expression since it has this unique way of holding the viewer's attention and experiencing the producer's story and vision through a particular formula that consists of the use of visuals, dialogue, sound design, characters...etc, which is something that won over the general public and turned into one of the most popular art forms of our time.

Depending on the producer's intention, knowledge, skill, and devotion, cinema can even be used in order to teach and educate people about numerous historical events in a uniquely enchanting way that history books cannot mimic. As Robert.A.Rosenstone said: "Films create a historical world with which the written word cannot compete " (np). Or

alternatively, take advantage of its power to influence people for bad purposes, such as misrepresentation, personal agendas, or even propaganda. It can no longer be seen as just an instrument of entertainment and communication, as it also holds a significant and influential role in shaping and recording our cultures, societies, and history which are things that cannot be taken lightly or for granted. It's a double-edged sword that can be used either for good or bad purposes and a decision that is all in the hands of the producers and their teams.

In terms of historical movies, and more precisely war movies, this ability of using such an influential medium as cinema for dishonest purposes is much more common and mainstream than we might think. By looking at Western war movies like *The Green Berets* (1968), *Blackhawk Down* (2001), *Red Dawn*, *Act of Valor* (1984), and *Pearl Harbor* (2001), patterns that many of us are familiar with can be noticed in their narratives: chauvinism, patriotism, and the romanticization of war. Indeed, there are also Western movies that treat the topic of war in a much more grounded and professional way such as *Saving Private Ryan* (1998), but even this classic tends to display the same problems only in a more subtle manner, which did not make it safe from criticism, regardless of the intention of educating people on the gruesomeness of armed conflicts (Biguenet). Few war movies manage to deliver an insightful and authentic exploration of this complex and multifaceted topic that is war, which is why this thesis will focus on Elem Klimov's Soviet movie *Come and See* (1985). A film that came at a time when the USSR was still existing, yet still manage to bring one of the most accurate and harrowing depictions of war that other cinematographic works of the same genre, old and new, fail to achieve.

Research Questions

1- What is the problem with war movies?

2-What makes a movie anti-war?

3- How does *Come and See* succeed in portraying the reality of war?

Significance of the Study

War movies in general serve to recount military conflicts of conflicts that happened in different countries and different periods. However, their authenticity is much to be questioned because Films in general are a way to manipulate people's emotions and reactions. The power of films is their ability to transport us into another world and make us forget that what we are watching is fiction. Yet regardless of that, there are times when the producer subverts people's expectations and manages to tell a conveying story realistically and artistically in a way that challenges the usual traditional style of filmmaking and storytelling, without diving into typical propaganda and misinformation.

Dennis Rothemel, a Professor of Philosophy at California State University, made an interesting research that englobes an in-depth analysis of many different war movies, basing his judgment on how they treat military conflicts, their accuracy, authenticity, and realism. He expresses his concern that very few of them deliver a clear anti-war message without any sort of misconception (80), and from his viewing, only four manage to accomplish that idea. Those are: *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1979), *The Thin Red Line* (1998), *Paths of Glory* (1957), and *Full Metal Jacket* (1987). For him, the key to what makes these movies truly anti-war is their truthfulness and realism in the depiction of the experiences of soldiers in combat. Not in the traditional way of portraying them as heroic and fearless brothers in arms who are ready to sacrifice themselves for the greater good, but by transmitting the actual real feelings and experience of what is involved in the middle of such a dangerous and traumatic environment, which are according to him: fear, horror, doubt, terror, panic, loss, horrific injury, and particularly; the confrontation with death (ibid).

Klimov's *Come and See* perfectly describes and fits Rothermel's criteria of what constitutes an anti-war movie. In a time where so many abstain themselves from delivering a genuine and unbiased cinematic exposure of war and not admitting its ugliness and horrific nature, it feels important to explore in which ways this movie succeeds at transmitting its message, where so many fail.

Aim of the Study

The objective of this research is to demonstrate how a Soviet-produced film as *Come and See*, is able to effectively depict the true essence of the horrors of war in a deeply insightful and realistic manner, and even surpass numerous Western films that have trivialized this heavy and sensitive subject into a mere element of the storyline and source of amusement.

The Literature Review

When we think of the word cinema, the word "Hollywood" instantly comes into our minds as it is the source and the place where most of the movies we consume come from. In his book *Movie Wars: How Hollywood and The Media Conspire to Limit What Movies We Can See*, American film critic Jonathan Rosenbaum offers interesting arguments on the power that cinema has in influencing and shaping people's minds, while also condemning the state of modern movies in general. One of the points that he offered is that the audience is partially complicit in the fall of cinema due to the industrialization of that domain; "Ordinary films, made purely for entertainment (that is commercial) purpose, will continue to be astonishingly witless, already to the vast majority fail resoundingly to appeal to their cynically targeted audiences" (20). Moreover, he eventually recognizes that the media and distributors hold some sort of monopoly on the general opinion and quality of a movie (90), therefore judging it and asserting a specific verdict on them, and mainstreaming it, instead to let the viewer actually watch them and make their own conclusion. Curiously, while being published in

2003, the book is actually really relevant even to this modern day, just by looking at which movies are trending or winning at the box office.

Since cinema is such a flexible medium that can tell any type of story and any genre of it, war is surely a topic that had been and is still being told by many different producers. However, in this thesis named: *The War Film: Historical Perspective or Simple Entertainment*, Clayton Odie Sheffield shares her concern on how the topic of war and military service is presented and explored in American movies and cinema. She questions their credibility, realism, and effect on the audience, and especially criticizes the role of certain producers in reducing such a heavy and serious subject as war, into nothing else but entertainment and a mean of propaganda to polish the image of the American soldier and the military industry as a whole. She communicates her own personal observation that the public's perception of the military is mostly shaped by their representation in cinema, to the point that even soldiers despise the way they are depicted in them (143). And with the increasing population, the percentage of people not associated with the military environment has greatly increased, and have no other way of obtaining accurate information about the status and professionalism of the military than what they see in the media (Sheffield). Something that can be harmful to both civilians and soldiers.

A fact that is not only applicable to American movies but to the entire medium as well. Even when Hollywood reigns mighty in the film industry, other movies from overseas are guilty of this practice as well even from a long time ago. In *Soviet Cinema Politics and Persuasion Under Stalin*, Jamie Miller explains how the Bolsheviks, even since their rise into power in 1917, used cinema as their main weapon of mass control to keep the public opinion favorable and supportive of the communist government that had replaced the tzars, blending politics and cinematography in the most symbiotic way possible, offering to us an unclutter

understanding on how the authoritarian soviet government held such a vicious grip on what people were allowed to see, as better quoted "The new organization (The ARK), was established as a reaction to the Moscow Society and, in its declaration, it pointed to the colossal significance of cinema as a powerful ideological weapon in the struggle for communist culture " (106).

Come and See (1985), produced by Russian filmmaker Elem Klimov, and co-authored by Ales Adamovych, is a Soviet war movie that was made and released during the period of the USSR, yet somehow manages to deliver a refreshing and uniquely thrilling experience of the horrors of World War II, without relying on propaganda, stereotype, or romanticization of tragic events, and goes completely against the previous narrative styles that were mainly in favor for the portrayal of heroism and patriotism. A curious case that could be answered by the effect that Stalin's death in 1953 had on Soviet culture and artistry, as a new wave of freedom of expression took over the land after Khrushchev's succession to Malenkov. American history professor Denise J. Youngblood supports that statement in her dissertation *Post-Stalinist Cinema War II: Tarkovskii's (1962) and Klimov's and the Myth of World 'Ivan's Childhood' 'Come and See* (1985), where she analyses the two movie's deviation from traditional Stalinist propaganda movies, informing us that unlike previous Soviet leaders, Khrushchev was much more open-minded and compliant to let artists express themselves, which lead to some sort of artistic renaissance that allowed many artists to finally come out to light and showcase their opinion without fear of punishment or censorship (413). Something that would also allow cinematographers to delve into the theme of war more maturely and humanely without relying entirely on the old methods (ibid). A statement also confirmed by The American Association of Historians, in their review of *Come and See*, that Stalin's death and Khrushchev's reign were the big bang that gave the free card to so many Soviet classics well known and beloved by both the public and critics (Par 4).

In order to understand why *Come and See* is such a critically acclaimed movie, and why is it so praised for being such a realistic depiction of war, far more different than the usually ideologically driven ones, we have to understand the personal view and mind of the creator himself. In an interview with the Russian filmmaker, Ron Holloway offers many important information and details about the producer's cinematographic history, philosophy, and motivations, with many answers to the making process of his movies, his personal goals, the socio-historical context, the hardships that he went through during their making, and many other interesting facts that are detrimental for the further understanding not only his movies but also his worldview.

The second important thing to consider for a better understanding of the movie is the socio-historical context surrounding it. The movie is the adaptation of the co-screenwriter's novel *Kathyn* (1971), which recounts the lesser-known atrocity of the Kathryn massacre, perpetrated by the Nazis against the people of Belarus. The story is told through the perspective of Flyora, a character who serves as the author's self-representation, recounting the horridity of the events from his own childhood experience and the survivors' testimonies, with the addition of historical documents. A tragedy where the invading German units destroyed more than 9200 villages, in which at least 600 of them had their inhabitants killed and burned alive (Adamovych np). The reliance on historical facts and documents makes both the novel and the movie that is based upon it more historically accurate and credible.

One of the most admirable and worth-praising accomplishments made by Klimov in *Come and See* is giving homage to the civilians. British academic Hugo John Robertson Slim, brings an interesting way of analyzing geo-political conflicts in his work entitled: *Killing Civilians: Method, Madness, and Morality in War*, in which he raises an important question as to how and why history and historians often neglect the voice of the civilians, who are most of

the time, the biggest and most affected portion of the population by war and the many other calamities that come along with it. The author's general idea is that most civilians die from war rather than in battle, "with loss of identity and livelihood ultimately proving more deadly in the aggregate than bullets and bombs" (qtd. in Astore Par 5). Surely, it is a fact that a lot of film producers ignore, and unfortunately favor the soldier's point of view and journey, instead of basing themselves on the reality that the biggest victims of war are the civilians who are caught in the middle of the madness.

In conclusion, War and war movies in general, are an open window to many sorts of criticism and observations by the public, since they surround so many other topics and themes, and often conjure various questions related to human philosophy, morality, and nature, as they go in pair with that theme. Klimov's masterpiece *Come and See*, offers all of those elements, while simultaneously delivering a very dreadful and harrowing depiction of a real historical conflict, with no glorification or romanticization of the events presented, as numerous other critics and researchers have praised and noticed before. Now what will be added in this research, is explaining in which ways it succeeds at transmitting this anti-war message so differently from other movies of the same category, by proposing alternative ideas, theories, and examinations of the plot and the elements of the movie. That will be done through a narrative and a mise-en-scene analysis of the film, with both personal and alternative interpretations, backed up by scientific and academic sources as well, which will add balance and credibility to this thesis.

Research Method and Procedure

In order to conduct this research in the most efficient way possible, three steps had to be followed. The first one is giving reliable context and background information surrounding the movie, which is what will be found in the first chapter. The other two steps are offering a narrative and a mise-en-scene analysis of the movie. The Narrative analysis is by picking

specific components of the story and analyzing the meaning, interpretations, and implications that they offer. And the mise-en-scene analysis through a few elements of the mise-en-scene itself, and explaining how their use also contributes to the meaning of the story, the message, and the atmosphere of the movie. All of it will be done through qualitative data analysis, by taking books, reviews, journals, interviews, videos, and websites with the most relevant and accurate information related to the research. Film theory is the main approach that will be used throughout the thesis, but there will also be mentions of new historicism and psychoanalysis in some sections of the chapters.

Structure of the Research

The research will be split into three chapters. The first one will focus on giving a clear understanding of the background of the movie, from the producer's biography and vision, the historical background of the movie, and the plot summary, for the readers to have a clear view and comprehension of the overall context surrounding the film and the research.

The second one will handle the examination of the story's narration with the selection of certain story components such as the thematics, symbols, and characters, through the dissection of particular scenes, analyzing the themes that they evoke, the symbolic connotations behind some of the movie's elements, and a character study to provide a comprehensive interpretation of the significance and purpose of the protagonist in the story.

The third one, which is the mise-en-scene analysis, will be conducted through the investigation of the elements of the mise-en-scene like the camera, the sound design, the special effects, and the performance, by explaining their utility in the enhancement of the narrative and cinematic experience, and how those materials when merged together can create meaning, and engage the viewer in the universe presented to them, also through the choice of some key scenes that will be used to convey the arguments presented arguments.

Limitations of the Research

It is to be taken into consideration that due to the nature of the research, sources such as review websites and critics, foreign websites, and YouTube videos will also make an appearance, which might be deemed as unreliable to the reader. This choice is mainly due to the type of this research which deals with a movie, and movies can be very subjective depending on the viewer. Indeed, scientific and academic sources will be employed when using new historicism, and psychoanalysis theory since it is based on historical events and psychological facts. But when Film theory is employed, it will turn more subjective, as it is to be kept in mind that a movie can be interpreted in many ways and a person can have a completely different opinion of the meaning behind the scenes or even the entire story and can have a completely different experience of the movie.

Chapter I: Background of the Movie

Introduction

In order for the reader to understand the philosophy and intention behind the movie, it is important to have a general idea of the information surrounding it for them to judge and comprehend the arguments offered in this analysis. Unsurprisingly, we will see how everything is linked together and contributed in one way or another to the making of the movie's story, themes, essence, and even message.

1. The producer's Biography and Vision

Elem Guermanovitch Klimov is a Russian cinematographer born during the Soviet era on the 9th of July 1933 in Stalingrad and died on 26 October 2003 in Moscow.

Even from a young age, Klimov states having a very early and traumatic exposure to the grisly and nightmarish reality of war. He and his family were witnesses of the Stalingrad war that lasted from 1941 to 1942 that opposed the USSR against the Third Reich. In an interview answering some questions regarding his last movie *Come and See*, he shares memories of his tragic childhood, such as being caught in the middle of the chaos, and witnessing bombings and the degree of the collateral damage caused by the Volga River being set ablaze, while his mother protects him and his younger sibling with covers, cushions, and her own body, during their escape to the Ural Mountains (Klimov 2:13).

With such a premature exposition to the dark side of humanity, this misfortune would deeply affect both his values and his cinematography, as it is perfectly transcribed in his last movie, *Come and See*:

"To be more exact, it was some kind of reflection of what I felt of my own emotions at the time of the war. Or, you might say, of my wartime

childhood...So, like a lot of my friends and acquaintances, we all experienced together very hard times. We had to work hard. We felt human suffering. These were my memories of the war. Memories that will never leave me. And I am sure that, one way or another, they were reflected in the film *Come and See*" (Klimov 7)".

Later in his life, he would study aeronautics at Moscow aviation school, and graduate from it in 1957. His passion for cinema started to emerge during his introduction to the VGIK (The Federal State Film Institute), something that would encourage him to give up on his previous field and mark the beginning of his cinematography. It was a revelation for Klimov who, while going to the end his studies at the request of his parents, began to make small amateur films to start his career as a filmmaker. After working as an aeronautical engineer for one year, he passed the VGIK entrance exam and graduated in 1964. He rose to prominence with his low-budget student films and was hired by Mosfilm just out of school, where he made his first feature film; *Welcome or no trespassing* (1964) (DVDKlassic trans).

His hatred for bureaucracy and politics, and his own unique way of going against the traditionalist cinematic narration of his country are very well transmitted in his works. One of his movies, *Agony*, released in 1981, which is a historical reconstitution of imperial Russia, retelling Rasputin's relationship with Tsar Nicholas II and their downfall, received harsh criticism from the Soviet government for humanizing those historical figures instead of depicting them in stereotypical and caricatural ways. He defended his stance by stating that Nicholas II while being a ruler, was also a human being who enjoyed spending time with his family and friends, but lacked the skills necessary to lead a major country during a time of change (Klimov 1). Confessions like these, allow the audience to have a glimpse of his own mind and life philosophy, and understand his intentions and choices behind his stories, which can easily be spotted and experienced through a proper exploration of his cinematography, with *Come and See* being one the best examples.

Before its final release in 1985, the Russian producer fought for more than seven years of censorship and other inconveniences for the movie to finally come out, as the State Committee for Cinematography "Goskino", disapproved of the script, claiming that it wasn't heroic enough, did not portray the bravery of the partisan, and was nothing but aesthetics for the sake of naturalism (Murzina). A massive hit to his project which forced him to make a pause, with the addition of other inconveniences such as illness, and unfinished works would completely stall the release of the movie for several years. (Klimov 9:37). When the 40th anniversary of the great patriotic war finally approached, an opportunity was finally given to him, and used it to his advantage to release the movie with the authority's approval, and the freedom to show his long-crafted work to the public (Klimov 10:10).

1.1. Introduction to the Movie

Come and See, is a 1985 Soviet war drama film directed by Elem Klimov , starring Aleksei Kravchenko and Olga Mironova as main protagonists. It is based on the 1971 novel *Khatyn*, written by his friend and co-screenwriter Ales Adamovych (Klimov 6:46), which narrates his own personal experience, with the addition of survivors testimonies, and historical documents of the deadly and unforgettable Kathyn massacre.

The film portrays the tragedy of the horrors of war during the Nazi invasion of Belarus, commemorating the tragedy of the Kathyn massacre, while offering one of the most realistic and shocking cinematic depictions of war.

Originally, the proposed title was *Kill Hitler*, but even after undergoing seven years of censorship, and finally being allowed to screen the movie, he was informed that the word "Hitler" could not be included. (Klimov 0:45) The producer clarified that the title did not refer to the literal killing of Hitler as an individual, but rather to the metaphorical killing of the evil within ourselves. As stated, "We all have our inner demons to confront" (8:03). Due to the

alteration required, the author consulted his brother, who suggested referencing the New Testament. Upon reading the Book of Revelation of Saint John, the producer was inspired by the verse "And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals, and I heard, as it were the noise of thunder, one of the four beasts saying, Come and see" (Revelation, 6:1-17).

While being a domestic success, and even winning a golden prize at the 14th Moscow International Film Festival (Wikipedia), Klimov's film is not only considered one of the best war movies of all time (Collins), but also one of the best movies ever made (bfi.org.uk).

1.2. Historical Background

The movie tells the story of Flyora, a young Belarussian kid who finds himself in the middle of the horrendous war that his country is going through at the hands of German occupation. It provides an intimate look at the physical and psychological horrors of the 1943 Kathyn massacre, and how the Belarussian civilians were affected during that time.

However, before the Germans, the red army also perpetuated its own Kathyn massacre in 1940. Indeed, after the Ribbentrop nonaggression pact was signed between Germany and the Soviet Union on the 23rd of August 1939, It included a secret accord that allowed them to divide Poland between the two powers, which later led the Soviets to capture between 230,000 and 240,000 Polish prisoners and the execution of more than 14,736 by the People's Commissariat for International Affairs; the "NKVD", after their refusal to convert into Sovietism (Kalin 76). Nowadays, the official number agreed on is estimated to be 22,000 including military officers and soldiers, policemen, officials, intelligentsia...etc all together (Wilsoncenter.org Par 1).

The USSR vehemently denied its involvement in the massacre, which caused tensions with Poland and tarnished their relationship with the country. In January 1943, mass graves

that were identified as Polish would be discovered by the Germans. They employed the finding of the tombs for their benefit as a means of propaganda, urging representatives from the Red Cross and Poland to inspect the corpses personally, with the aim of creating a division between the Western Allies and the Soviet Union (Kalin 76).

It wasn't until 1991, when their final leader Gorbachev implemented his policy of openness, that the documents exposing the truth would eventually surface. This enabled the USSR to ultimately confess to their crimes, and the Polish to attain their rightful justice (Kalin 77).

Although the film underwent censorship from the State Committee of Cinematography, which claimed that it failed to depict the partisans in a heroic light and dismissed it as mere naturalistic aesthetics, it is to be speculated that their true motive was to suppress the name Khatyn, since it would aware the public with their association in the Polish genocide.

Now the Khatyn massacre that the movie depicts, is based on the German annihilation of Belarussian villages including civilians during their invasion in 1943, where over 9,200 towns and settlements in Belarus were decimated, with almost all residents perishing or being burnt alive in over 600 of them, leaving only a handful of survivors in that Holocaust (Adamovych np).

When the Nazis began their rampage on the 13th of March 1943, the rural community residents were unaware of the incident that occurred in the morning, where a fascist motor convoy was ambushed by gunfire on the motorway, only 6 kilometers away from Khatyn. This resulted in the death of a German officer. Despite being innocent, the people of Khatyn were already condemned to death, as they were forcefully evicted from their homes, regardless of age or gender, and even used their rifle butts to awaken the sick from their

slumber, showing no ounce of mercy for anyone. They resumed their acts of terror by herding everyone into a barn, then burning them to ashes (Kathyn Memorial Complex Par 1-2).

The German unit appearing in the movie responsible for the real events, is the "Sondereinheit Dirlewanger", a Special Unit established in 1940 by Oskar Dirlewanger as a distinct division of the Waffen-SS, consisting of convicted criminals who were not expected to survive during their service in the army. The SS recruited them in order to be used for specific combat situations. This unit was eventually deployed in eastern Europe in countries such as Ukraine, Poland, and Belarus to fight the Soviets, during the invasion (Ingrao np).

According to Russian historian Vadim Erlikman, Belarus was the country that suffered the biggest human loss during World War II, with the death of more than 2,290,000, in a population of 9,050,000, which means that 25.3 % of them perished during the war (23-35).

Throughout the period of the conflict, over 300,000 guerillas, known as partisans, were taken to the forests to fight their invaders, and two-thirds of Belarusian territory was under guerilla control for most of the war. An accomplishment over their neighboring countries that would give birth to many heroic figures and engrain their identity with pride and patriotism (International League for Human Rights 4).

1.3. Plot Summary

It's 1943, and two Belarusian boys are excavating a sand field in search of discarded firearms, hoping to enlist in the Soviet guerrilla forces. Yustin, an elderly man, cautions them against it and warns that they are actually digging an early grave for themselves. One of the boys, Flyora, discovers a rifle, and the following day, the partisans arrive at his residence and enlist him into the partisan much to his mother's dismay, fearing the loss of her son, just like her husband, and the harrowing fact that allowing him to join the war assures an early death

for her and her children. Shortly after, the partisans team takes Flyora with them against his mother's wishes.

The resistance fighters gather in the forest and get ready to march in. Flyora becomes a member of their unit as a junior militiaman and is instructed to carry out all the tasks in the detachment. Eventually, when the partisans are set to advance, their leader, Kosach, instructs Flyora to stay behind at the base as a backup and orders him to trade boots with one of his comrades. Disappointed and resentful, Flyora wanders into the forest, and encounters Glasha, a beautiful blonde girl, in a questionable mental state, who is also left behind, and mistakes Flyora for Kosach. Suddenly, German planes appear and start to release paratroopers, while bombarding everything with heavy artillery fire.

Flyora becomes temporarily deaf due to the explosions. After seeking refuge in the woods, he decides to return to his hometown with Glasha. Upon arriving, he discovers that his family is absent, with his sisters' dolls scattered on the ground, and the house infested with flies. Glasha forces herself to act as if everything is alright, and despite the obvious truth that his family is dead, Flyora presumes that they are hiding in a neighboring place separated by a muddy swamp. As they flee the village, Glasha glimpses a massive heap of corpses piled behind a house. Upon making it to the other side, both are having a meltdown and start fighting. Flyora is unable to come to terms with the loss of his family and becomes hysterical and almost drowns Glasha. Eventually, they are found and taken by a member of the resistance named Rubej, who then leads them to a refuge where the villagers who fled from the Nazis took shelter. Flyora sees Yustin burnt to a crisp lying on the ground, who blames him for the tragedy by revealing their whereabouts to the Nazis when digging for the rifle. After this brutal realization, Flyora breaks down, and shoves his head on the ground out of shame, accepting the cruel consequences of his disobedience.

Later on, Rubej decides to take Flyora and two other soldiers to look for food. They come across with the enemy, and discover that the food storage is too heavily guarded to be looted. Unknowingly, Flyora guides the group through a minefield resulting in the death of two companions. At dusk, Rubej and Flyora sneak into a populated town and successfully steal a cow from a farmer who collaborates with the Nazis. However, as they flee across the fields, they are fired upon, resulting in the death of both Rubej and the cow. The following day, Flyora flees the scene and tries to steal a horse from a farmer but in vain. Soon after, they hear the sound of approaching German soldiers. The farmer assists Flyora in concealing his partisan jacket and rifle in the field and takes him to his home. There they hastily discuss a fabricated identity for him.

A Nazi troupe enters the village and gathers everyone into a wooden barn, locking them inside. They inform the frightened people that anyone can exit the barn through a side window, on the condition that they abandon their children. No one moves, except for Flyora who accepts their offer and climbs out. Shortly after, a lady tries to escape with her child, but is pulled away by her hair, and her toddler is thrown back through the window. Grenades are hurled into the barn, which is then set ablaze and shot at. Flyora witnesses the horrific sight of the murder of his own people while the Nazis cheer, take pictures, laugh, and have fun at their accomplishments. The woman who manages to escape the barn is grabbed by the hair and taken by a group of soldiers in their vehicle and is assaulted.

Flyora roams outside the village and comes across the lifeless remains of the same group of German soldiers that ravaged the village, who were caught off guard by the Partisans. He proceeds to retrieve his rifle and jacket from the field where he had concealed them earlier. In the process of departing, Flyora encounters the woman who attempted to flee the barn with her child staggering he way out with blood running down her legs. He

mistakenly confuses her with Glasha, then returns to the destroyed town and runs into his comrades who have captured a handful of the assailants along with their associates. The chief collaborator, refuting their responsibility for the massacre, translates the German commander's words, who claims to be a good person and a loving grandparent. The other soldier is disgusted and enraged by his superior's cowardice and informs his captors that they, as an inferior race and communist sympathizers, will deserve their demise and will soon be annihilated. The collaborator pours the prisoners with the can of petrol that Flyora brought, but the crowd, repulsed by the sight, shoots them all down before they can be burned alive, putting an end to their lives with less agony.

As the partisans depart, Flyora stumbles on a portrait of Adolf Hitler on the muddied ground, and fires at it, marking the first instance of him using his rifle. Following each shot, a series of montages are displayed in reverse, portraying the ascent of Hitler and the Third Reich contrasting the corpses of their victims, and eventually concluding with a photo of an infant Adolf in his mother's lap. Flyora furiously shoots at each of them, but cannot bring himself to shoot at the still image of baby Hitler.

In the movie's final sequence, Flyora catches up with his partisan comrades and merges with them as they march through the forest, vanishing into the obscurity of the trees.

Conclusion:

These are the overall most important details and information regarding the movie's background. It will be very handy for the upcoming chapters, for us to truly comprehend the analysis of the story, including the references and context, since the same information will make other appearances during the future segments.

Now we will start with the first chapter by picking and analysing some of the most notable components of the story, and interpreting them in order to uncover their contribution to the

plot and narration of the movie, with the addition of the various themes and ideas that they convey along the way.

Chapter II: The Narrative Analysis

Introduction

Within this section, we will analyze particular sequences, by selecting certain elements that are part of the plot and its narration, such as the thematics, semiotics, and characters, for the sole purpose of proposing plausible interpretations and explanations behind their meaning and contribution to the story. Additional scholarly and empirical sources will also be used in order to substantiate the arguments provided, confer them with validity and credibility, and investigate the instances where art mimics life. As a side note, all of the timestamps that refer to the movie in this entire paper are from Mosfilm's Youtube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjLiApN6cfg&t=4842s>.

1. The Thematics of the Movie

While categorized as a Soviet war movie that presents a protagonist joining the partisan to fight the oppressors, the execution, story, and ideas do not make it seem like it is promoting or praising the Soviets, military service, or war. On the contrary, since it is an homage and demonstration of what the victims of the Katyn massacre went through during World War II, the most fitting description for the movie is anti-colonial. Klimov himself corrected the misinterpretation of his work by assuring that the film was never intended to be anti-German. Its primary focus is on delivering a message that is both antifascist and antiwar. Admittedly, the goal of the film was also to explore the nature of humanity, with questions such as what defines human beings? What are their limitations, and how far can they be pushed to the brink? (Klimov 8).

From those statements alone, the movie's plot, and the narrative direction, many thematics and thought-provoking questions can be raised. Among those ideas, we have: The

enemy as a potential victim of war, the reality of war, and the concept of killing the Hitler within us.

1.1. The Enemy as a Victim of War

Undoubtedly, the portrayal of the Nazis joyfully engaging in violence by executing and burning the villagers in such a cruel and leisurely manner feels almost surreal and is deeply unsettling, creating a sense of horror that is difficult to endure (01:52:10). But it is done for the narrative purpose of conveying the immense suffering and loss experienced by the Belarusians during that era. Yet, their characterization does not stop at that depiction alone, and added this specific scene; where the German troops and their collaborators get ambushed by partisans and hold a few of them as hostages in order to interrogate them (02:05:45).

Here, this particular scene is what truly revolutionizes and distinguishes it from other war movies. It allows the opposing side to present their narrative, motivations, and the circumstances that shaped them. We have one character speaking on behalf of his men, acting as a victim and trying to justify himself and reason with the villagers in the hope of mercy, stating that it was Fuhrer who forced them to do it and that in times of war, nobody is to blame (02:07:25-02:11:11), while another one is repulsed by this display of cowardice and embraces his heinous actions and ideology.

Regardless of their shortness, these two speeches show completely different standpoints, pick the viewer's discretion, and flood them with questions, ideas, and implications regarding this particular choice of words, and drastic disparity in mindset. Throughout the movie, the Nazis are portrayed more like a destructive entity that wipes everything in their way than actual humans, and it is only at the end that the protagonist has actual physical and verbal contact with them. Hearing their opinion and giving them room to have a conversation humanizes the opposite side without justifying, forgiving, or downplaying their heinous acts.

Nevertheless, if we take both interlocutors at heart, they represent the idea of how war's tendrils corrupt the soul of people who are just like us, rips them off their humanity, and turns them into irredeemable monsters.

This phenomenon has long been a question among philosophers and scientists, as it goes with the study of human nature itself. Yet the Milgram experiment proffers the best explanation for this specific condition. The Milgram experiment, created by American psychologist Stanley Milgram between 1962-1963, is a startling test that gauges to what extent a person would obey the commands of a legitimate authority figure, even if it meant acting against their own ethical principles. The experiment assessed the willingness of individuals to administer electric shocks to others, causing them harm, if instructed to do so by an authority figure. The outcome revealed that 65% of the participants were willing to cause harm to another person if instructed to do so (Milgram).

Due to his Jewish origins, Milgram was fascinated with the quest of understanding human nature, which led him to question the reasoning behind the Nazi's crimes during World War II. And for him the answer is obedience. (Milgram 2). He emphasizes that similar acts like these frequently occur on a smaller scale: regular citizens are instructed to annihilate others, and they comply because they believe it is their obligation to obey orders. As a result, they obey authority, which has long been labeled as a virtue, but can be twisted when utilized for bad intentions (ibid).

While recognizing that the experiment alone just scratches the surface of what Nazi Germany was really about in order to achieve such high support and encouragement from their citizens, he emphasizes that other factors like indoctrination and punishment also play a huge part in the process of programming people's mind into doing things that go against their moral values (176-177).

The worldwide ethical guidelines regarding killing in military conflicts accentuate the principle of the (jus in bello), which clearly forbids the killing of non-combatants, and declares the transgression of this rule is condemned and referred to as an act of terrorism (MacMahan 693-733). Yet somehow, it is more said than done, since a lot of times, non-combatants make most of the losses during these types of conflicts (Slim).

So, if we take a look back at that scene, we can deduce that the Nazi character confessing that it was Fuhrer "Hitler" who ordered him to do those heinous crimes, is not farfetched or completely false, since Milgram proves that when a higher figure of authority orders someone it is likely from them to comply, agree, and submit on their orders. Of course, it does not justify nor forgive their actions in any way, but it offers an interesting retrospective on the psychology of soldiers who go beyond following orders. In the context of the movie, Hitler is the authoritative force, and the ideology that they were forced to conform to is Nazism.

1.2. The Reality of War

World War II movies are on a whole other level when it comes to misrepresentation. In his article published by the Guardian entitled *Why Are We So Obsessed with Films About the Second World War*, Andrew Pulver shares his concern with the cinematic obsession with this specific war, stating that while ending in 1945, cinematically speaking, refuses to end (Par 1). Only 130 movies were made about World War I, in comparison to the second which includes more than 1300. The first reason behind this obsession is the storytelling potential that this crucial period of history marked so many aspects of our modern life, from the ethical to the technological, historical, political, and economic (Par 3). Another one is the producer's desire to fulfill their own fantasy and add fictional elements to it like Tarantino's *Inglorious*

Bastards. (ibid), or present it as an achievement and reinforces the patriotism and accomplishment of some countries or historical figures like in *The Battle of Britain* (par7).

In the *book War and Film*, by James Chapman, he groups war movies into three categories: War as spectacle (17), War as tragedy (103), and war as adventure (171). He qualifies *Come and See* as war as tragedy, which is undoubtedly the most accurate word and category to put a war movie. War is objectively a tragedy, it is not a spectacle like in *Save Private Ryan*, nor an adventure as *First Blood* tries to express it. "War is a racket. It always has been. It is possibly the oldest, easily the most profitable, and surely the most vicious. It is the only one international in scope. It is the only one in which the profits are reckoned in dollars and the losses in lives". (Butler 1). War is hard to understand for those who did not experience it. It brings bombings, sniper attacks, abductions, rape, and more, leaving nothing but fear and trauma. It also leads to shortages of essential resources like food, water, and electricity, damages crucial institutions like hospitals and schools, and destroys trust among people. War affects both those directly involved and innocent civilians. (Mazzarino et al 1-38).

An interview, held by *Al Jazeera* named *War, Who Really Benefits from it?*, really deconstructs the old-time lie that military conflicts serve noble causes. Daniel Ellsberg, an anti-war activist and whistleblower, reveals that the biggest benefactors of war are top figures such as bankers, politicians, and weapon manufacturers (3:17-6:40), citing J.P. Morgan's financial gains from supporting countries in World War I and the ongoing lucrative market in destabilizing Middle Eastern nations as few examples. A statement pretty much similar to the conviction of the ex-US marine Smedley Butler, who said the same thing more than 80 years before social media ever existed, arguing that in World War I, only a small group of individuals reaped the benefits of the crisis. And in the United States alone, no less than

21,000 individuals became millionaires or billionaires as a result of the war. Those individuals openly declared their significant financial gains, resulting from the war, in their income tax submissions. While the exact number of other war profiteers who intentionally misrepresented their tax returns remains unknown (1-2). But the thing that he feels the sorriest about is that none of these people will ever experience the amount of pain and harshness that soldiers like him went through in order to keep their fruitful business still ongoing:

"How many of these war millionaires shouldered a rifle? How many of them dug a trench? How many of them knew what it meant to go hungry in a rat-infested dug-out? How many of them spent sleepless, frightened nights, ducking shells and shrapnel and machine gun bullets? How many of them parried a bayonet thrust of an enemy? How many of them were wounded or killed in battle?" (ibid).

In conclusion, it is unreasonable and unprofessional for producers to delve into the theme of war through a rose-tainted glass viewpoint without including or speaking about its downsides and true nature. And Hollywood is extremely guilty of this practice since it is not a secret that the American military complex pays huge amounts of money to have its field, soldiers, and policies portrayed in a good light, to the point where The U.S. Office of War Information had an entire unit just to achieve that task (CBC Radio), with the Bureau of Motion Pictures being the prime example of that. From 1942 to 1945 alone, the Bureau evaluated approximately 1,652 screenplays, modifying or rejecting any content that depicted the United States unfavorably, including any material that painted Americans as "unaware of the war or opposed to it."(ibid). So it is a fair judgment to say that Klimov accomplished his mission of offering a realistic cinematic representation of war, by focusing on the hellish nature of this man-made disaster, and the magnitude of damage that it brings on the psychological level, with a clear illustration of the civilian casualties and the amount of emotional trauma that it brings into their lives, preferring authenticity and honesty, rather than

following on the footsteps of those before him who took advantage of this beautiful medium for ingenuine purposes.

1.3. Killing the Hitler Within

The original title of the movie was supposed to be *Kill Hitler*, and by doing so, Klimov rectified that he did not mean it in a literal sense, but rather metaphorically, in the context that we have to kill the evil within us, as he notes that "We all have our inner demons to confront, to some extent or other" (7:55). He also reassures that his film does not stop at telling the story of the Kathyn genocide, as it is also an exploration of the human nature and psychology when confronted in a tragic and unforgiving environment and pushed to their limit, As clearly mentioned by him in his interview with Ron Holloway, affirming that one of the most significantly crucial objectives behind the production of that movie was to delve into the essence of a person. He confronts the audience with questions such as: What defines a person? What are the boundaries of human capacity? What are the highest and lowest points that a person can reach? (Klimov 08). Quoting Dostoevski: "A human being is a beast in you that you can face, and it faces you". And for Klimov, under specific conditions, a person can discover within themselves horrific traits that they would have never believed in. And this is the essence of his portrayal in *Come and See*. His objective was to present a person on the brink of their limits, and at times, even going beyond them. To reveal the true nature of humanity. In his convictions, these inquiries and objectives are the most crucial in the realm of art (ibid). Intentionally or not, his convictions are pretty similar to Carl Jung's notion of the shadow if we take a look at his description in *Aion: Researches Into The Phenomenology of The Self*:

"The shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of It involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential

condition for any kind of self-knowledge, and It therefore, as a rule, meets with considerable resistance. Indeed, self-knowledge as a psychotherapeutic measure frequently requires much painstaking work extending over a long" (8).

Klimov's belief in the moral dilemma that the human being goes through in times of disruption, is akin to Jung's vision on this topic if we compare their arguments on this matter. In the sense that both acknowledge the existence of this dark side of the human psyche, and both encourage us to be conscious of it, and work on taming this beast in order to keep it at bay, and be in harmony with our human nature. The difference is that one calls it "The Shadow", the other one as "Hitler".

There are two instances in the movie where this idea of "killing the Hitler within us" is projected to the viewer.

The first one is when the partisans and villagers hold the Germans and their collaborators responsible for the massacre as hostages (2:06:25). There is one partisan soldier interrupting their execution, suggesting a more painful death for their previous deeds. We can see Flyora with a gallon of oil in his hand, and a villager coming with a torch in his hand, with the intention of setting them on fire as retribution for what they have done to their people. However, regardless of their disagreement between them, they chose not to burn the hostages, and instead just shoot them to death, opting for a quick death rather than mimicking their inhumanity the same that they did to their village previously.

By opting for mercy to the same people who annihilated their loved ones, they are transmitting the main message of the movie by "Killing their Hitler within", as the hatred, grief, and desire for revenge did not blind them from afflicting the same pain that had been afflicted upon them by those criminals, as it would make them no better than their former enemies, therefore killing their inner Hitler.

The other one is when the Partisan departs, and Flyora stumbles on a poster of Hitler on the ground, which causes him to use his rifle for the first time in the whole movie, and frenetically shoot at it, with each shot depicting Hitler's life in reverse. When the last picture shows Hitler as a baby, Flyora suddenly refrains himself from shooting him, as tears fall over his face, reminding him that even monsters like the infamous Fuhrer, used to be a baby who are the embodiment of innocence. And once again, by not shooting a baby, he abstains from giving up to their "Inner Hitler", and becoming a monster just like him. It is the equivalent of what Jung refers to as the assimilation of the shadow, where someone with their inner self, therefore finding a balance between his normal self and becomes in tune his shadow, something that is only achieved through resistance to certain projections (9).

Throughout the movie, Hitler is depicted as the personification of evil, the source of every conflict and tragedy occurring in the movie, a projection resulting from the collective suffering that stained the mind and hearts of the victims of the Nazi crimes. Yet, the sequence stopping at a picture showing him in his purest and most vulnerable state, making the protagonist stop his uncontrollable rage, defines the character's resistance to the ingrained projection of Hitler as the embodiment of evil, making him and the viewer contemplate the bitter truth that even the most horrible of human beings, at a certain point of their life, used to be innocent.

Ultimately, these are the main themes that *Come and See* incites the viewer to think about, using ingenious writing, storytelling, and subtlety to ingrain those ideas in our minds without loudly or blatantly stating them. Various yet successful at crafting and delivering the Anti-war message that the producer hoped to deliver.

We will now explore an alternative method of interpreting sequences. Rather than solely considering abstract concepts that enhance our comprehension of the story, we will examine

how specific details, objects, and components can establish symbolism, add and expose truths and information about the plot, in the upcoming study of the semiotics in the film, through the choice of some shots and scenes.

2. Semiotics

Many of the shots and sequences are conveyed in a way that insinuates that everything has an intended meaning, which the movie invites us to interpret and decipher. In this scene for instance, by walking deep in the woods, Flyora accidentally steps on a bird nest, and kills its babies (27:53). And just after the artillery scene, we see that it belongs to a bird, specifically, a white Stork, that is now staring at the sleeping form of Glasha and Flyora (42:10).

Later, when he goes back to his village, and finds nobody there, the same bird can be seen standing near the pit where Flyora takes a look, and the sound design focusing on the irritating noise of bugs, suggests that bodies are decaying there. The potential meaning and link for these scenes is that the bird whose family was murdered is now showing the culprit (Flyora) the death of his own kind, with the obvious death of his family and the villagers, as revenge and retribution for his crime (59:57). Other interpretations have suggested that this unnecessary violence against nature simply signifies that even the smallest and insignificant creatures, can eventually be victims of war as well alongside humans, and experience their own torment in the process (Michaels 216).

Another animal with possible symbolic meaning is the loris appearing during the climax. We can see it, being in the care of one of the German soldiers during their attack on the village (1:48:44-1:51:50). It serves as a contrast and irony, to their evil actions, with them showing tenderness to animals, while remorselessly killing their fellow brethren in humanity.

During an attentive viewing of the film, an interesting detail can be noticed by the audience. The airplane appearing at the very beginning of the movie makes a few reappearances at certain moments; in (6:00), (35:48), and (1:54:49). The airplane is a Focke-Wulf 189 Uhu, also nicknamed "The Flying Eye", is a type which was very common among the Germans during the Stalingrad war. It was used both for combat and espionage (Gunston 31). Its significance in the context of the movie alludes to the constant watching of the enemy over Flyora, and their threatening presence in the Belorussian territory.

At last, the final example is found at the end of the movie, when Flyora comes across Hitler's poster on the ground and shoots frenetically at it while depicting the dictator's life in reverse, and stopping at a picture of him as an infant. It offers a plethora of interpretations and theories worthy of study (2:15:18).

One of them suggests that it refers to the notion of taking justice into one matter's hands. This climax with Fuhrer's image being destroyed by Florya's furious firearm shots, and each shot turning back the clock to some historical events and Hitler's life, symbolizes Flyora's desire to erase and rewrite those infamous past events of violence depicted through the documentary footages, which serves as his own vision of justice, founded on the accountability of a single person (Tallgren 261).

All those meticulously crafted choices serve a very well-intended reason, that the producer decided to embed, in order to use alternative ways to tell his story than to rely on dialogue only, and append his own personal cinematic touch in the domain of storytelling, which leads to another important take which is the writing of the characters.

3. The Character Analysis

The character of Flyora, played by Alexei Kravchenko, is undoubtedly the most important character of the movie, and the most developed one which is why this section will focus only on him.

He is the embodiment of the producer and co-writer's childhood memories and a representation of the collective trauma of the Belorussian victims, while also serving as a demystification of war movie protagonists.

In the beginning, Flyora is portrayed as a young naïve, and very idealistic boy full of eagerness and excitement, ready to join the army with the hope of serving and saving his country. However, as the movie goes on, this innocent and naïve mindset further dissipates and shatters for the worse.

The first time his ideal is challenged is when Glasha informs him that his comrades left him behind out of pity, which he vehemently denies, and defends himself by lashing out at her. The artillery scene in (36:30) is a key moment where the movie shifts from verbal admonition of war to an actual depiction of its horrors, and serves as the first real exposure to war for Flyora and a rite of passage for him to carry on in his journey.

The second time his innocence is tested is when he goes back to his home village (49:19). The environment clearly speaks that everyone is dead, but denies it. There is a long pause of him standing still as if trying to digest what he is actually denying, yet again, he still refuses to accept the truth and affirms to Glasha that his family is somewhere else.

The only time he finally confronts the truth he had refused to acknowledge, is when he reunites with the village's survivors (58:00). This newfound reality is brought upon by a meeting with one of the survivors, Yustin, an elderly man who is presently suffering from some severe injuries., blaming him for not heeding to the warnings. This interaction ends up

generating within the protagonist an overpowering sense of survivor guilt - a keen realization that all the tragedy that has befallen his people is due to his actions. The guilt deepens as he comprehends the fact that the location of their village had been divulged by the German plane. Eventually, the protagonist finds himself grief-stricken, burying his face in the mud while the rest of the village wails in agony.

These scenes, in particular, serve not only to showcase Flyora's development as a character, but also as a deconstruction and criticism of war movie protagonists, who are often presented as honorable heroes who leave their loved ones behind to fight for a noble cause and reduce their struggles and turmoils as nothing else but entertainment. They rarely offer or even imply the consequences of being exposed to such dangerous and objectively traumatic experiences, in which if done so, are either downplayed, ignored, or justified.

Flyora starts from healthy, joyful, and full of hope and dreams, to mentally unstable and permanently damaged, with emotional scars and regrets that will be ingrained in him for the rest of his life. Which is something much more truthful and accurate to life than what Hollywood tries to depict in many of their movies. As an example from real life, it has been documented that Over 1.8 million veterans who served in Iraq and Afghanistan had come back home with a lasting injury, and almost 1 million of them were associated with psychological well-being and traumatic brain injuries, and also face moral injuries and intricate survivor guilt, which brought their own distinct and intricate difficulties (Hirshberg).

So we can deduce that Klimov's succeeded in this category, by dismantling the myth of the noble hero, offering a flawed character that completely subverts the expectation of a now overused trope, through the escalating destruction of his innocence and ideal due to his constant exposure to human cruelty and casualty, with an accurate representation of what

would resemble a protagonist being caught deep in the tendrils of war, which is by far much more realistic and respectful to reality than what Hollywood is trying to sell.

Conclusion:

While a movie can have many different interpretations and meanings depending on the viewer's own perspective and imagination, those are what might have been the actual intended meaning behind those thought-provoking scenes, as it is one of cinema's most unique attributes; to let the audience decide for themselves on the significance behind the crafted compositions that they are presented to, thanks to its subjectivity, uniqueness, and shapeless form.

Chapter III: The Mise-en-scene Analysis

Introduction

In this concluding chapter, we will proceed to shed light on certain aspects of the mise-en-scene and analyze how the deliberate application of camera angles, sound design, special effects, and performance can merge harmonically together to imbue abstract concepts into the viewer's mind, replace language with the precise manipulation of these elements, captivate us with the ambiance and tone of the world, and ultimately providing coherence to the narrative and the vision of the Filmmaker.

1. The Camera

The camera is undoubtedly one of the most crucial instruments in the domain of Filmmaking. This device alone possesses the capability to capture the essence of a scene, express certain emotions, and direct the viewers' focus to what is presented on the screen. With the use of precise framing, composition, and motion, the camera can enrich the story by setting the tone, highlighting significant details, and constructing a visual language unique to the plot with its own identity. It can effortlessly alter perspectives, visually exposing diverse viewpoints and adding complexity to the different characters and their interactions.

In *Come and See* There are two notable types of shots used. These are close-up shots and tracking shots:

The close-up camera shots are extremely impelling at projecting the character's emotional turmoils and decaying mental state, giving the viewer a realistic and harrowing portrayal of what such a terrifying experience can do to the human mind. That is especially thanks to Kravchenko's performance, who is able to convey the emotions of pure terror,

hopelessness, and despair, with such alluring facial expressions that make the audience forget that this is just an act and not real.



For example, we have a close shot of the girl who had been kidnapped and raped by the Nazis. This specific zoom on her battered and bruised face, bloodied lips, and blank stare, is utterly disturbing to look at and transmits her feelings right to the viewer as if she's looking right through the viewer instead of the camera and breaking the fourth wall (2:04:35).



While what happened to her wasn't shown in any way, the previous scenes including her clearly allude to that and leave it to the viewer to piece everything together. The close shot is mainly a way to convey what she has been through without saying anything. Cinematographer Roger Deakins, speaks about the meaning behind this particular take on-camera use, calling it

"Creating beauty with ugliness". According to him, Klimov's use of close shots, is similar to what portraits communicate; "you're looking at one person, and that person looks right through you, which makes it feel like you share a connection with them" (4:50-5:10). That is what makes this shot so unsettling and bothersome. Because it feels like she is pouring her tragic experience directly into the minds of the audience.

In other words, close-ups, in the context of the movie, provide a structural framework for the sprawling historical drama that is inspired by the Kathryn massacre, share the intimate moments of the characters directly with the audience, while simultaneously serving as a marker and symbol of the ravages of war and its dreadful results on the souls who get caught in the middle of it (Michaels 215).

The tracking shots, achieved through the steady camera are very prominent in many scenes and serve many different purposes which are all narratively linked.

For example, here from (14:18) to (14:50), the scene follows the mother of the protagonist fighting and trying to dissuade the partisans from taking her son away and sending him to his inevitable death, then finishing with the camera and the family of the protagonist helplessly watching him from a window being dragged along with the soldiers.



This entire sequence feels more gut-wrenching and trenchant with the camera following the mother, as it makes the viewer seem like he is partaking in the events and not just watching them, which is also something that wouldn't have been accomplished with another use of camera or alternative way of storytelling.

A second scene that uses the tracking shots brilliantly, is in the climax of the movie, where the Nazis are burning the barn full of innocent villagers (1:51:25-1:54:50).



The entire sequence is eerily dreadful yet beautiful in a distorted way. The incorporation of cheerful music, combined with the guttural cries and pain of the civilians, and the soldiers acting like hunters toying with their prey, all are effectively demonstrated through tracking shots using the steady camera, with its ceaseless motion and rotation around the area to capture every single movement and detail of that monstrous calamity, giving once again to the audience the impression that they are participating in a carnival of death, where laughter and horror are blended into a parody and as a contrast of what the innocent victims are going through at that moment.

One last example worth mentioning is within the ending of the movie, (2:20:00) where everything is finished, and the partisans make their way to the dark forest. The camera is following the soldiers from behind, with Flyora rushing to join them. As they keep walking, the camera seems to struggle to keep pace, so it cuts through the trees in order to reach them,

reconnects with the crowd from behind, then proceeds to film them from afar as they carry on their duty with the song *Lacrima* reaching its conclusion.



An aesthetically pleasing sequence where the same result would have been achieved manually but the outcome and impact would have been distinct. Thus, employing a steady camera is a clever choice as it offers a sense of urgency without the disruptive nature of handheld shots, which can sometimes be disorienting, and reinforces the slightly poetic vibe that it conjures which truly enhances the overall feeling of the scene (Deakins 5:47-6:40). On the other hand, while the objective meaning behind it has never been shared by the creator, it gives the freedom for various potential meanings, such as being a sign of the necessity to move and carry on with life, regardless of the hardships, injustices, and unforgiveness of life, after all the agony that they shared.

Meanwhile, some others interpreted the last shots of the scene, where the camera tracks back to the photographer's position and carefully frames a balanced portrait of the partisan, as a cinematic representation of traditional socialist realism, which offers a tableau of the collective will of the Soviet people, all meticulously concluded in the very last shot of the film (Michaels 214).

Overall, these are one of the best examples of how the camera furthers the cinematic experience, where it enhances the story and unravels the intention of the producer to share a tragic event that is engrained in the collective mind of the people who were inflicted by it, for both the domestic and the global audience.

2. The Sound Design

In the realm of art, sound design is utilized to express the purpose, feelings, essence, or ambiance of a narrative presentation, or auditory arrangement. It has the ability to offer an emotional backdrop, enhance, and even direct the listening audience to the world, context, and setting that is presented to them. It reinforces the depth and dimension of the cinematic experience, builds and links exclusive settings, mood, and atmosphere all together, generating a captivating viewing of a movie, just through the ambiance and vibe customized especially for it (Sapp 1).

The sound design is genuinely used throughout *Come and See* in a figurative and meaningful way for both narrative and realistic purposes. As an example of that, the film often uses it to create a sense of disorientation and chaos, with explosions and gunfire echoing and reverberating across the landscape when the protagonist is confronted with the enemy, making it faithful and realistic to the historical and environmental context surrounding it.

But the most noteworthy use of sound design in *Come and See*, is in its impression of the character's psychology. As we know, the story is all through the point of view of Flyora, and the sound design is employed in a way to let us know that. When the artillery scene finishes in (37:20), and the bombings are over, there is an irritating ringing noise that plays for a moment, where Glasha's words are muffled and distorted, translating that the protagonist lost his ability to hear and that he entered the nightmarish dimension of war.

That particular noise can be heard in another sequence, and it is played when Flyora is having an emotional breakdown. At (49:26), upon returning home and discovering his sister's dolls scattered on the floor, he remains still and fixates on them while the loud noise of buzzing flies intensifies the atmosphere, insinuating the theme of death and creating an unsettling feeling of unease and suspense. The previous deafening noise takes over again which makes the character hold his head in agony. It explains to the viewer that they are hearing what Flyora mentally hears, putting us in his perspective. Here the sound design serves the narrative purpose of the portrayal of the character's downgrading mental state, projecting his fractured view of reality into our own minds. A tragic change caused by his daunting and lurid exposure to a conflict that he was never meant to take part in, symbolizing his loss of innocence, and descent into madness.

Another notable use of sound design to convey something abstract is the use of Mozart's composition *Lacrimosa* when the protagonist shoots at Hitler's portrait. Throughout the movie, the Nazis are captured as the embodiment of evil by killing, burning, and ravaging everything in their path. In this scene however, while Flyora mercilessly shoots at Hitler's portrait with reverse images of his life and crimes, while simultaneously playing one of Mozart's most notable pieces, serves as a contrast and a question to the viewer as to how and why these people "The Nazis" are able to commit horrendous things such as genocides, yet create something so beautiful and endearing as *Lacrimosa*. An artistic choice that conveys Klimov's intention of reflecting on human nature, where sound and image symbiotically work together to achieve something more efficient than words.

3. The Performance

A good performance is an element of the mise-en-scene that can hugely impact the perception and reception of a movie, and make it come alive since it possesses the ability to

mesmerize and involve viewers, creating a lasting impression on both their hearts and minds. Regardless of whether it is a leading or minor role, a proficient performer can take the audience on a journey into the film's universe, eliciting a diverse array of sentiments and rendering the plot authentic, memorable, and immortal.

Aleksei Kravchenko's portrayal of Flyora is an impeccable demonstration of an actor's dedication to their craft. He seamlessly merges with his character to the point where the audience is completely immersed in the story, oblivious to the fact that they are watching a performance.

Kravchenko does an impressive job of portraying the most negative and damaging emotions that a human can conjure, such as terror, guilt, and pure despair, in such a credible and realistic manner, that it gives the impression that this is exactly what someone would feel and experience if they were put in such damaging situation. It is truly heart-wrenching for the spectator to observe the hero's transformation from a pure and inexperienced young boy with a patriotic spirit, to a mere shell of his former self as he descends into the deepest pits of hell insanity and loses his youthful innocence. The character witnesses everything that he believed in and held dear crumble in the most brutal and savage manner imaginable while being unable to do anything about it. Even when not pleasant to look at, at the same time, it is probably the best way to present this type of conflict, since war leaves nothing but tragedy and despair for the people who go through it.

We can see Flyora's face changing from youthful and smooth, to wrinkled pale, and petrified. Even his hair color changes from blonde to gray, as a testament to what he endured.



This unadulterated and outstanding performance from such a young actor is basically due to the fanaticism and perfectionism of the director Klimov, which would almost rival Kubrick's in terms of commitment to their art and their fierce grip and influence on their actors. In fact, Klimov expressed that it was a very difficult role with extreme emotional consequences (Klimov 8:40). He even insisted on having non-professional actors, because in his opinion professional ones lack reliability and create emotional distance, whereas unprofessional actors show more eagerness and compliance to create something artistic (11:05). the sake of realism and veracity.

In an interview recounting his experience during the making of the movie, Kravchenko shares that he had to undergo many requirements to accomplish that alluring performance. Among them, is going through a strict diet which consisted of running and drinking water only for several days to achieve the required physique for his role (5:37). Watching footages, of concentration camps, wars, and dead bodies for hours (3:00), and wear specific-colored lenses that darken his eyes to match the emotional state that the scenes demanded to express (7:01). He also stated that in order to get the right impression of crying, he was asked to imagine his mother being bedridden and dying, which would immediately cause him to break into tears (2:10).

Even more interesting fact, the procedure of the filmmaking deeply impacted the young actor's mental health, as the making of the many morbid scenes had such a terrible psychological impact on him that they had to bring in a hypnotist in order to keep him sane, and confessed that wooden barn scene was the most traumatizing one (Klimov 11:39). While questionable, just like Stanley Kubrick, in the eyes of the producer, it is seen as a necessary evil to achieve a higher goal which is artistic perfection.

4. The Special Effects

Special effects are one of the most important elements in filmmaking since they offer the ability to bring life and realism to the world that they introduce. In *Come and See*, the old Soviet tendency of using real-life footages is applied and appears throughout the entirety of the action scenes. For example, instead of using the necessary pyrotechnics for the explosions, they used real explosives in order to film the artillery scene in (36:30) (Klimov 11:57), enhancing the thrill and grandeur of the spectacle, as the presentation provides a vivid depiction of the perils of being trapped in a warzone, and demonstrating the extent of devastation and ruin that it inflicts upon both mankind and the environment.

In a particular sequence, Flyora seeks refuge behind a cow as tracer bullets fly towards them, tragically hitting the animal and recording its slow and agonizing demise on camera (1:22:50). The use of real bullets implies that the cow was genuinely sacrificed for the purpose of the story; portraying the harsh realities of the characters' environment (Kravchenko 8:19). This unsettling decision effectively conveys that animals also bear their own part of the suffering, underscoring the brutal repercussions of war. The producer even admitted that the scene almost cost his life and the lives of his assistants, as the bullets barely missed them. This dangerous encounter showcases the cast and crew's dedication and courage as they pushed the boundaries of authenticity to create a compelling cinematic experience that goes

beyond the boundaries of mainstream storytelling. The scene acts as a sobering reminder of the sacrifices made to capture the essence of human artistic devotion in the domain of movie-making, leaving an indelible imprint on the history of cinema.

Nowadays, the appearance of technological improvements has revolutionized the filmmaking process, permitting the introduction of grandiose scenes via the exceptional skills of computer-generated imagery (CGI). However, in the past, filmmakers did not have the number of resources that we have today. Instead, they depended on resourcefulness, ingenuity, and a continuing pursuit of the ideal gear and materials to bring their projects to life. The absence of CGI in movies makes their achievements all of the extra exceptional and visually striking, as they required a first-rate quantity of effort, dedication, and craftsmanship to realize. A luxury that is very rare in our modern times.

Conclusion

There are indeed many other elements of a *mise-en-scene*, however, those are probably the most important and impelling ones, for the sole reason that they add so much more to the story, and bring the 1943 setting of Belorussia into life, and engulf us into not only this tragic historical period but also to its mental and emotional baggage that allows us to sympathize and relate to the victims who were caught in the middle of that madness.

General Conclusion

The present research has been conducted with the goal of demonstrating how and why Elem Klimov's *Come and See* is seen as one of the most accurate and genuine cinematic representations of war, and the ways in which the movie succeeds at delivering this revolutionary take on the topic of war which made it so widely praised and acclaimed.

Throughout history, many realist and naturalist writers such as Stephen Crane and Tom Hardy took the pen in order to deconstruct and criticize war in their literary works, with "War is Kind" and "The Man He Killed" being the best examples of that, offering a completely new view and exploration of a theme that had been overexaggerated and romanticized for so long.

The same thing happened to the medium of cinema, where a new wave of directors deviated from the old tropes with a completely new and refreshing way of storytelling, tackling the theme of war in a much more realistic and humane manner that is better suited for such a delicate topic, with Elem Klimov and his masterpiece "Come and See".

The findings of this research show that *Come and See* is more than a typical anti-war movie. It is also a deep dive into the essence of what constitutes a human being, challenging his morality and nature to the extreme when confronted with nothing but death and despair. A war movie, should always be honest with its audience and admit to the terrifying truth and dangers of war, and never downplay them for the sake of the story, or personal gain. War is a topic way too sensitive and complex for it to be diminished into mere entertainment or Manichean morality. It is a life-shattering experience that destroys and afflicts both sides in more ways than another. When watching *Come and See*, the viewer feels nothing but hollowness and disgust viewing those gruesome scenes where both civilians and soldiers, are being robbed of their life in many different ways. Nor do they enjoy watching the protagonist

being tortured, pushed near death, and losing his sanity throughout the entire story. It is a voluntary choice made by the filmmaker for the sake of realism and demonstrating the brutality and ruthlessness of war, to expose them to its effects on the human soul, life, and mind, which is undoubtedly the right formula of what makes this movie truly anti-war.

In conclusion, it is very important for producers to respect reality, and take advantage of cinema and its many benefits to make people aware of those facts, rather than misguiding them into the false idea of heroism and glory, and instead focus on fostering discussions about the ethical and moral implications of war, which can generate analytical thinking and deeper comprehensions of the real color and aftermath of these types of conflicts. Authentic depictions in movies possess the ability to instruct, illuminate, and evoke compassion, revealing the human toll of war and urging a reflective assessment of its influence on people and societies, which is what this study contends with Elem Klimov's *Come and See*.

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