



Key Scene **The horse ride near the end** *Arsenal*

There's Soviet cinema of the '20s – all that rush, that movie adrenalin, that Utopianism – and then there's the Ukrainian, Blakean Dovzhenko. This, his fifth film, is in one sense about the emergence of pan-Ukrainian politics after World War I, and the lead up to a disastrous strike in Kiev. But it's not about the official version of these events. Whereas Eisenstein was sometimes ideologically shrill, and Pudovkin was always ideologically shrill, Dovzhenko looked too closely, and responded to the landscape too intimately, to conform completely to the Soviet song and dance. So his film starts in stillness: "There was a mother." Women stand motionlessly. "There was a war." We see silent, dead villages like de Chirico paintings. A horse talks. A buried soldier makes a joke. The war is absurd. Perhaps Dovzhenko saw Fernand Léger's *Ballet Mécanique* in Paris, but he certainly felt the tragedy of war, and filmed it.

Arsenal's one sequence that is full of Soviet fervor and speed, the famous horse ride towards the end of this film, brings tears to the eyes: A soldier is dying. He wants to be buried at home, so a horse races through a wintry landscape, with him in tow. So full of speed and hope is the scene that modern viewers half expect the horse to take off into the sky like the boys on the bikes in *E.T.*, but here is Dovzhenko's *coup de foudre*: As all this happens, the soldier's mother stands beside his open grave waiting for him. There's nothing more moving in Soviet cinema of the 1920s.

Mark Cousins

Date 1929

Nationality USSR

Director Aleksandr
Dovzhenko

Why It's Key This is one of the most moving and exciting scenes in revolutionary Soviet cinema.

From "*Defining Moments in Movies – The Greatest Films, Stars, Scenes, and Events that Made Movie Magic*" (NY, 2007)