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SALTO – SOMERSAULT

ZABITÁ NEDĚLE – WASTED SUNDAY (1969)

Posted on July 28, 2015

Drahomíra Vihanová was born in south Moravia in the town of Moravský Krumlov on July 31st 1930. After graduating grammar school, she followed her interest in classical piano and moved to Brno to study at the conservatory. Her professor confessed to her that he didn't believe she was meant to be a pianist so Vihanová left for Prague where she quickly found work at a television station as an assistant director on musical broadcasts. She enjoyed the work and wanted to advance in her career, and her superiors suggested that she would need to educate herself more before continuing the career path.



She attended FAMU in the early sixties with several of the major directors of the Czech New Wave, such as Chytilová and Schorm. Vihanová began her studies with the plan of returning to her television career, but by graduation her interest in filmmaking had grown. However, her time at the conservatory was not wasted; her interest in music was in part the inspiration of her student film FUGA NA ČERNÝCH KLÁVESÁCH (FUGUE ON THE BLACK KEYS, 1964), which focused on the story of a black exchange student studying at the conservatory. The film follows him on the day before his graduation performance; he spends the day not thinking about anything but the performance and at the end of the day learns his entire family has died. Vihanová combines the character's emotion about his family and conflict about the performance to create a humanistic portrait. The film is beautiful in how it blends cultures and people. Vihanová captures brief elements of racism, never focusing on it, only giving us a glimpse to show us how it is part of the character's normal day. Both English and Czech are also spoken in the film, the beginnings of Vihanová's desire to show the blending of cultures within the Eastern Bloc. Vihanová's interest in music also influenced one of her stronger film aesthetics, editing. This is much more evident in her documentary work, which began in the seventies.

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After graduating from FAMU, Vihanová's first feature film work came from assisting Otakar Vávra, one of her teachers from FAMU. ROMANCE PRO KŘÍDLOVKU (ROMANCE FOR BUGLE, 1966) gave Vihanová the opportunity to not only assist in directing, but also work on casting and editing.

Vihanová was interested in working on her own feature film, and her classmates were beginning to release their own films, defining the era of the Czech New Wave. Unfortunately, Vihanová ran into a few setbacks trying to begin work on her first feature film as a director. In an interview with her for the Czech TV series ZLATÁ ŠEDESÁTÁ (GOLDEN SIXTIES), she claims that she was never much of a writer, so eventually Vihanová selected a novel *Zabitá Neděle* written by Jiří Křenek and was approached by Jan Procházka at Barrandov Studios to turn that story into a film.

Production for this film was truly unique and it's the story of its creation that does a great job of exposing what that transitional period from '68 to '69 was really like in Czechoslovakia. Shooting was supposed to begin in 1968, but with the censorship at its lowest point, practically every director sought to put out a film in the relaxed climate. Because of this, Vihanová struggled to find a cinematographer and before she could begin shooting ZABITÁ NEDĚLE, the Warsaw Pact armies invaded and the Prague Spring was over. Early in 1969, Vihanová was about to leave on a flight to visit a friend in Paris and called Procházka, confessing that if she wasn't able to make the film she planned to stay in Paris. Procházka told her that the film could be made, but she needed to have a print struck by December 31st, 1969.



They filmed ZABITÁ NEDĚLE in the city of Hradec Králové and at Pevnost Josefov, a fortress that was occupied by Russian troops at the time. Vihanová would shoot during the day and edit the film at night, trying to meet the deadline at the end of the year. The film was completed on time, though some elements weren't fully realized, such as the final scene with the target, which was meant to fade to black over time. Vihanová has also expressed issues with some of the sound in certain scenes. The film was screened for a select few at Barrandov Studios, and then was subsequently banned "forever" along with three other films. Vihanová would be banned from film for the next seven years, with the public unable to see ZABITÁ NEDĚLE until after the Velvet Revolution in 1989. She spent her first years working at a library before she was allowed to secretly recut trailers for imported foreign films. When she was allowed to return to directing in 1977, it was

in the genre of short documentary film at Krátký Film Praha. Finally in 1994, Vihanová released her second feature film PEVNOST (THE FORTRESS) twenty-five years after finishing ZABITÁ NEDĚLE.



ZABITÁ NEDĚLE begins with the memory of Arnošt (Ivan Palúch), a military commander cast to a small outpost, attending his mother's funeral in his hometown before returning to his post at Josefov. Soon after, Arnošt wakes from his dreams to a hangover from his debauchery the night earlier, and committed to never drinking again. The audience watches Arnošt as he suffers through getting ready for the day, while also experiencing the memories he recalls from times that are both long ago and as recent as the past night. He is most troubled by the fact he spent almost all his money the previous night at the local tavern owned by his on-and-off girlfriend. He spends his Sunday walking to one of the military facilities he oversees, which is largely deserted besides an older overweight guard who hasn't noticed two teenagers sunbathing in the yard. Arnošt arrests them for trespassing, but becomes frustrated while typing up the report, arguing with the girls and then eventually releasing them. With nothing left to do, he returns to the same bar he was at the night earlier, abusing his girlfriend while she constantly tries to support him. After fighting with her in the street, he returns home drunk and after counting what change he has left for the day, he commits suicide.

ARNOŠT THE STRANGER

ZABITÁ NEDĚLE has only one true character, Arnošt, and the film focuses on his psychological state over his final day alive. Arnošt is a product of the military system; he only knows how to follow rules and is subjected to the repetitious doldrums of active duty life. He has more than likely reached his career ceiling, as he has been relegated to keeping watch over facilities that were established under Austrian-Hungarian totalitarian rule. The walls are painted with slogans such as "FORGET WHAT YOU SEE AND HEAR -SILENCE". When he listens to the radio in the opening scenes, it's filled with stories of death with flooding in Brno and earthquakes in Morocco. Josefov as a location is oppressive, its roads are circular and the fort is enclosed. Its inhabitants are mostly soldiers, older women and gypsies. A small village outside the fort is the closest to the world.

thing to any sort of modern lifestyle. Arnošt's personal life is seemingly as oppressive as his surroundings. Vihanová alludes in the opening scene to two important details: his personal relationships and how his memories often feel like nightmares.

A majority of ZABITÁ NEDĚLE tends to focus on Arnošt's relationships and how it lends to his isolation in Josefov. There are three female characters that are tied to Arnošt in different ways that help to shape the psychology of his character. Ingrid is a young girl who lives in the same neighborhood as Arnošt. While Ingrid's youth is representative of the typical narrative themes of innocence and wonder, she is also there as an extension of Arnošt's psychological state. The only time Arnošt appears at peace in ZABITÁ NEDĚLE is when he is teaching Ingrid about life or having a philosophical discussion about the difference between having experienced something and the drive to experience something. This discussion with Ingrid is of utmost importance to Arnošt, as he seems devoid of any desire to search out a new experience, but obviously holds that desire dearly enough to try to ingrain it in Ingrid. Ingrid also seems to innocently enable Arnošt's destructive drinking by being the person to go get him a beer when he's hungover in the morning.



The second female character is Marie, the local bar owner in town who is in love with Arnošt. However, Arnošt returns little of the affection and simply abuses the relationship with its free access to alcohol, and her desire to do anything to potentially please him. Vihanová never directly explains the disconnect between Arnošt and Marie, but she does leave several paths open to exploring their relationship. Marie seems to have lost any desire to fulfill herself, a trait that seems equally strong in Arnošt. She is also seemingly part of the repetitious cycle that already exists in Arnošt's life. Spending each day opening the bar, seeing the same customers, and eventually catering to Arnošt's drinking in the evening. Marie even comes off as slightly bourgeois when compared against Arnošt. Arnošt lives in a small apartment with little to no possessions and a dying tiny ceramic stove, while Marie owns a bar and furnishes her house with ceramic animals.

The third woman is a mysterious figure, and is potentially the lover Arnošt left behind when he was stationed in Josefov. The only time they actually interact is in the first scene in which Arnošt attends his mother's funeral. Beyond that, she only appears in the dreams and memories of Arnošt, often in a sort of

corrective replacement of Marie. In one scene, we watch as the band at Marie's bar warms up for the evening while the faint sounds of the wedding march can be heard in the warm-up. Eventually, the scene fades into a dream of Marie and Arnošt getting married. They kiss at the stop of the steps of the church, but the scene repeats over and over with Marie and the mysterious women replacing each other over and over. However, the audience is aware that her character is no longer present, and that she is relegated to Arnošt's memory. All three of these relationships help to define the lack of any real relationship Arnošt might have, essentially giving him the feeling of isolation.

Outside of Arnošt's personal relationships, there tends to be an overwhelming sense of failure. One of the first things Arnošt says is his need to stop drinking, but by the end of the film he has already rescinded from his goal. Though Arnošt is a soldier, he is seen only killing two flies and a few rats, opponents far below his caliber of training. Even though he is an officer in the military, it seems his only job is to teach citizens in the town about the dangers of nuclear war, which they are apathetic to learning, and checking in on empty facilities. When he catches the two girls sunbathing while also trespassing, it seems at first he wants to abuse his power to control the girls, but once he begins to interrogate them he finds himself restricted to his militaristic training, opting to write up a report on the ladies' crime. As his report comes to a close, he scrambles to find a pen as the sunbathers jeer and taunt him, as the word *péro* in Czech means both pen and a slur for penis.



Arnošt's memories also often turn into nightmares in *ZABITÁ NEDĚLE*. In one such early memory, Arnošt recalls Polish prostitutes coming over, in which Vihanová films them moving around the apartment, circling the camera at sharp angles both above and below them, disorienting the audience. He yells at the prostitutes to leave, and all of a sudden he finds himself frantically chasing after them through hanging sheets, as the memory ends with a shot of one of the prostitutes sitting in his window laughing maniacally. In another, he rambles about the debt he owes to the bar while a masquerade party is going on. Vihanová films the scenes with extreme close-ups of the guests as their masks are removed exposing the old villagers. These film techniques lend a nightmarish sense of entrapment to Arnošt's existence.

Around two thirds of the way through the film, Arnošt begins to question his ability to discern reality. The Duu

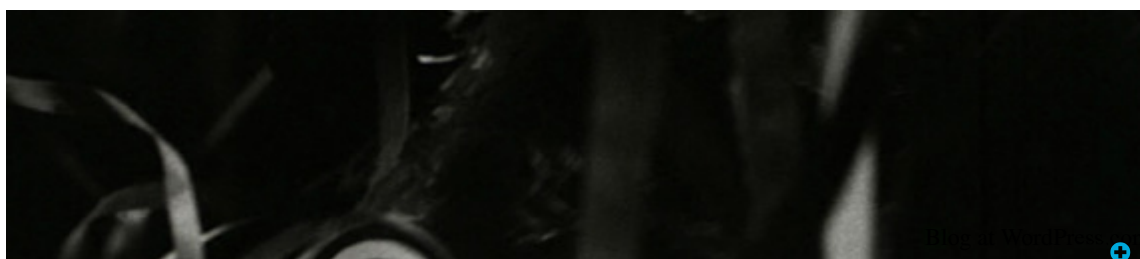
He announces this question shortly before passing the same gypsy who has been smoking outside his apartment, while the gypsy's dog has been digging the same hole. Vihanová set up this experience for the audience by not discerning any of Arnošt's memories as being either real or imaginary, blurring the lines between any chronological order. Arnošt flirts with this reality in an early scene in the film where he cleans and loads his gun while mimicking suicide. The scene is contrasted with a memory of Arnošt teaching a friend how to shoot a gun; his friend seems unable to shoot or simply afraid. This scene serves as exposition to show Arnošt once had both a desire and interest in growing his technical skill of shooting, but now sees that ability as an outlet to escape.



ARNOŠT THE CITIZEN

While Vihanová herself doesn't see *ZABITÁ NEDĚLE* as a political film, it's interesting to view the film against the existing socialism of its time of the original filming. In **Czech And Slovak Cinema: Theme and Tradition**, Peter Hames writes that films in this era were often meant to criticize society, not politics. It's only the fact that socialism controlled every facet of society that causes us to see the films as being political, when politics was not always the directors' intention.

The Prague Spring was in part born out of the lack of change occurring within Czechoslovakia. As such, everything is seemingly stationary within *ZABITÁ NEDĚLE*. Arnošt doesn't seem to be progressing within the ranks of the military, which helps to explore the humanistic side of *ZABITÁ NEDĚLE*. The elements around Arnošt's life are also stationary; the gypsy and his dog are repeated throughout the film, staying in the same spot and doing the same thing.





Another socialistic element is explored through Arnošt's financial situation. His plight of being out of money comes to a climax right after the sunbathers are set free. After releasing the girls, he notices the old guardsman's wallet in the back pocket brimming with money. He pulls a charade, pretending to have left his wallet at home and the guardsman is quick to offer 100 korunas. This scene seems to reinforce this new idea of the unofficial economy in the realm of the tip or bribe in existing socialism. The guardsman seems quick to view the 100 korunas as a way to counteract his mistake of letting the girls trespass onto the property. Arnošt seems to have a change of heart once he realizes how quick the guard is to give up the money, possibly reminding himself that he is buying into the system that is the cause of his deep oppression. In Milan Simecka's *The Restoration Of Order: The Normalization of Czechoslovakia* we get a sense of the potential emotions tied to this scene. In his chapter on corruption, he satirically describes the idea of giving a tip or bribe and how it has evolved under that existing socialism. It's here he describes "It was flourishing by the sixties; and in the renewed order which eliminated all means of public protest, it is regarded as something quite normal... these days, if a citizen requires something a little more out-of-the-ordinary than a loaf of bread or a tooth extraction at an emergency clinic, then he will budget in the various well-tried forms of corruption ranging from a crumpled hundred-crown note stuffed into an overall pocket to the refined combination of services of all kinds". Interestingly enough, Simecka describes the "crumpled hundred-crown note" as the go-to form of bribery in his chapter on corruption.





If *ZABITÁ NEDĚLE* had been released as originally planned in 1970, its themes would have been all too real for audiences. Its repetitive cycle and lack of change would have been even more relevant in 1970. Arnošt's relegation to Josefov and commanding rank but without anyone to command would have been seen as a product of normalization, having been screened out from any sort of real authority with the hope that his alienation would have led to what was his tragic end. His position as a Czech soldier would also highlight his uselessness in the wake of the Russian occupation.



VIHANOVÁ THE DIRECTOR

Unfortunately, Arnošt was never a victim of normalization while Vihanová was, feeling the very real experience of being screened out. Vihanová probably lost any real opportunity of influencing the Czech New Wave, and seems to have subsequently influenced her post-communist career. In her interview with Robert Buchar in *Czech New Wave Filmmakers in Interviews* she laments about how both feature films released in post-communist Czech Republic were poorly received by Czechs and fared slightly better in the West. Vihanová is a strong willed director who refused to bend to politics, accepting her fate after the ban.

When she returned to cinema through documentaries in 1977, it was a strong comeback. *POSLEDNÍ Z RODU* (LAST OF KIN, 1977) is a powerful short documentary exhibiting the last horse-drawn logger in Czechoslovakia. It is beautiful in its ability to show a humanistic side to work that is seemingly being replaced by homogeneous machinery. At the same time, *POSLEDNÍ Z RODU* works as a strong political metaphor about the lack of care for the lowest workers. To this day, Vihanová seems underrepresented not

just in the world of Czech cinema but film at large. Hopefully over time we can overcome this barrier to better appreciate Vihanová's convictions and additions to the cinematic language.



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Categories: 1960s, Czech

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SALTO – SOMERSAULT

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SALTO – SOMERSAULT (1965)

Director: Tadeusz Konwicki

Writer: Tadeusz Konwicki

Composer: Wojciech Kilar

Cinematographer: Kurt Weber

Cast: Zbigniew Cybulski, Gustaw Holoubek, Wojciech Siemion

Iga Cembrzyńska, Zdzisław Maklakiewicz, Włodzimierz Boruński



When SALTO debuted in 1965, it was book-ended by two significant periods in Polish history that deeply affected film in the country. In 1956, tensions reached a high mark with de-Stalinization across the Eastern Bloc and the Poznański Czerwiec, a rebellion by workers in Poznań. This led to the establishment of Władysław Gomułka as the leader of the Party and ushered in a relaxation of censorship among the arts. For film, this meant the birth of the Polish New School brought in by a new generation of directors who grew up during the war. Directors such as Kutz, Wajda, Munk and Morgenstern were allowed to present themes that had been previously censored. While no aesthetic style dominated Polish New School, the topic of feelings and the repercussions of the war seemingly echo across a majority of the films. However, as quickly as the Polish New School arrived, it was also suppressed. While there is no exact end for the Polish New School it is generally believed to have ended in the early sixties, though some films would appear from time to time rekindling the feelings expressed during the Polish New School.

In the early sixties the Party renewed its censorship of wartime themes, causing many directors to turn to safer adaptations of Polish literary canon. Films that broke from the Party line were given a very limited distribution or had their release delayed or outright banned. Some directors, such as Wajda, branched out to do co-productions with other countries while some Jewish directors emigrated from Poland, such as Aleksander Ford. Andrzej Munk tragically died in 1961 in a car wreck while in the middle of shooting his film PASAŻERKA (PASSENGER, 1963). All of these events led to a creative suppression within Poland during the sixties and a reduced Polish New School.

The period of Gomułka's leadership is known as mała stabilizacja, or small stabilization. What little reform Gomułka had brought in October of '56 was long forgotten at the start of the sixties. It wasn't until the riots of Grudzień in 1970 and the replacement of Gomułka with Edward Gierek that Poland saw a renewed

relaxation in censorship of film. Film would flourish again within Poland, leaving directors freer to discuss themes that were once taboo. The film units were restructured with some of the directors of the Polish New School leading the units. *SALTO* remained true to its roots in Polish New School, though, and was suppressed by the Party, relegated to a small distribution to a handful of arthouse cinemas.

SALTO begins with a mysterious stranger, played by Zbigniew Cybulski, jumping off a train seemingly being pursued. He escapes to a small town, hiding in a house he claims to have known from the past. He tells the owner, played by Gustav Holoubek, that he is being hunted and offers only a bunch of aliases. Cybulski's character spends the night, but in his dreams he is executed by soldiers in the very bed in which he fell asleep.

The next day, he wanders around the town having philosophical discussions with its inhabitants. He tells a fortuneteller her own future and develops a relationship with a young girl named Helena, claiming he knew her mother and sees her within Helena. Later he heals artists' children by unknown methods and the town begins to accept the stranger. They invite him to the town's anniversary party that night where he continues to have philosophical dialogue and teaches them a dance that he has invented and named Salto. By morning, he has earned the town's trust, but the stranger's wife shows up at the town with her children explaining that he is a liar and a fraud. The film ends with him running from the villagers as they pelt him with stones.



PAST PRESENT AND FUTURE

Konwicki was born in 1926 outside of Vilnius, a reoccurring locale in many of his works. When Poland became occupied by Germany during the war, Konwicki joined Armia Krajowa fighting both the Germans and the Russians. He claimed to be a part of one of the last squads entrenched in the woods outside of Vilnius. When the PZPR was first set up, Konwicki was swayed by the tenets of socialism. He went as far as publishing a powieść produkcyjna, production novel, titled *PRZY BUDOWIE* (AT THE CONSTRUCTION SITE, 1949), which was a short novel written in social realist style. Being in his mid twenties, Konwicki spent those creatively formative years surrounded by Stalin's cult of personality and propaganda defining what

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was man. This was also a Party that censored and altered the history of Armia Krajowa, redefining them as partisan soldiers fighting fascism in favor of socialism. Konwicki began to challenge some of the Party's ideas and quickly found his work censored. By the time of *Poznański Czerwiec*, Konwicki was already questioning the true role of the Party and his own complicity of his past actions.

In 1956, *Rojsty* was the first novel where Konwicki challenges social realism by writing a narrative that questions the blind faithfulness to nationalism and the blurred morality of a soldier's perspective. The next year, Konwicki took on the role of literary director at the film unit *Kadr* that featured the directors Wajda, Munk, Morgenstern, and Kutz. He wrote his first screenplay for Stanisław Lenartowicz's *ZIMOWY ZMIERZCH* (WINTER TWILIGHT, 1956), a poetically dark and expressionistic film about the different effects of the war on two generations. Finally, in 1958, Konwicki debuted his first film as a director *OSTATNI DZIEŃ LATA* (LAST DAY OF SUMMER). *OSTATNI DZIEŃ LATA* is a largely experimental film in both narrative and imagery, two aesthetics that would carry on throughout his creative work. Konwicki would go on to write the scripts of several masterpieces for other directors such as Kawalerowicz's *MATKA JOANNA OD ANIOŁÓW* (MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS, 1961) and Morgenstern's *JOWITA* (1967).



Konwicki's work feels deeply personal at times, with scenes that seem drawn from his own experiences during the war. In some of his books, such as *KOMPLEKS POLSKI* (POLISH COMPLEX, 1977) and *MAŁA APOKALIPSA* (MINOR APOCALYPSE, 1979), he goes so far as to name the central character after himself. In *SALTO*, the fortuneteller shares the same birthday as Konwicki, though Cybulski's character doesn't give such a positive fortune for that date. Progressing through the director's work reveals a linear narrative and the blending of time and the blurring of memories' reality. Konwicki's work is oneiric, as there seem to be no rules that constrict his characters or his ideas. It's in this state that he chooses to discuss the ideas that seem overly complicated in its twist and turns, and distorted truths that seem entrenched by the deep emotions with the past; these ideas of what it means to be Polish and to carry the weight of the sins of past.



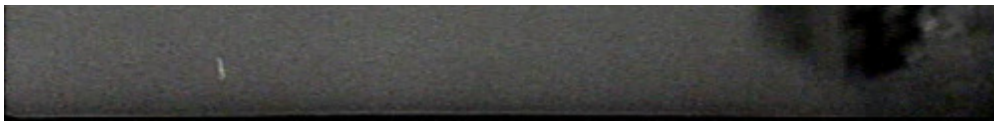


Konwicki's work remains relatively unknown in the west, but in his homeland of Poland he is celebrated for his literary achievements. His film work, though, seems to be esoteric on both fronts, perhaps for its suppressed distribution under the Party's regime or its difficult non-traditional narratives. *SALTO* is definitely steeped in Polish culture, but it is still relevant internationally by exposing the difficulties one can experience by coming to terms with one's past. But by creating a work that is so personal, an international audience can better come to understand the situation of the Poles of that generation.

TRUTH FROM REALITY

SALTO is a film that tests an audience's ability to discern reality among the surreal. Cybulski, as the stranger, convinces the villagers he is being hunted by some authoritative power; as an audience, we see his dreams in which he is haunted by his past actions during the war. Konwicki is vague about these dreams and we can never discern if he is the victim of these atrocities or if he carried them out himself. By the end of the film, we realize a new truth as he is simply pursued by his wife that wants help taking care of their children. This leads us to believe that maybe the truth is the stranger is haunted by all three, the collective fear of secret police, the past, and day-to-day life. Konwicki, in an interview, prided himself on the ability to tell truth from the lies, a skill probably worthwhile to survive in Poland during his time.





Like his other works, *SALTO* also blends together the past with the present and future. While the stranger explores the town, you can hear the distant sounds of machinery that one resident warns are uranium factories about to be built in the area. In other scenes, we watch as dirt bikers loudly ride through town in an intimidating fashion that seems to draw comparisons to how Cossacks are shown in Polish films riding on horseback and terrorizing villages. Another example is the previously described scene where the stranger's dreams seem to bleed in to reality. In a way, Konwicki's complexity leads in to the simplicity of the idea that all our experiences are the conclusions of our sole decisions and that we will continue to see the echoes of our past within our future. Yet at the same time, Konwicki seems to understand how holding on to one's past can lead to a standstill. In one scene, we watch as the stranger stands knee deep in a flowing river as his host begs him to stay. He responds almost apologetically "You see, this is how I am."



You can think what you please, but I went through a lot in my life. It's nothing unusual in this country. If I described it in a book, no one would believe me. I ruled the people and toiled in a quarry. I gave away houses and begged for bread. I shot at people and I was strangled with barbed wire.

Konwicki reinforces these themes as universal by denying almost all of the characters individuality with a given name. The only character given any individual identity is Hannah, but the stranger constantly denies her this by calling her by her dead mother's name, a ghost he sees in her. Another character talks about how he assumed different identities during the war and now goes as Blumenfeld, a terrific performance by Włodzimierz Boruński. The central character gives many names for himself, and in a passionate ex-

change with Hannah he describes himself as any type of Pole imaginable from miner to ruler. Absent of any sort of individuality also calls into question any of the characters' actual existence. In fact, many of the conversations between the stranger and the villagers seem confessional, as if he is attempting to convince a fraction of his own soul to absolve him. There are some obvious conclusions to be drawn here, such as the stranger's attraction to Hannah's representation of youth, and convincing Blumenfeld to accept his identity. Again, all of this seems to encourage the audience to decide for themselves what is the truth.



CROSSROADS IN TIME

SALTO stands as superb film portraying the inner turmoil of life, and in a broader context the history of Poland. Visually, the film feels like a dream and the non-linear narrative helps to complete that picture. The reality of what was experienced at the time seemed overwhelming to the point of absurdity. It's only fair to say that the pain felt during that time still reverberates today. Konwicki seems to feel that Poland is a victim of larger powers, but at the same time is aware of the influence it's held on even lesser powers. Yet at no point it seems Poland was given the chance to write its own history except for its own trappings of the past. *

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A KIS VALENTINÓ – LITTLE VALENTINO

Posted on March 28, 2015

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A KIS VALENTINÓ – LITTLE VALENTINO (1979)
Director: Jeles András
Writer: Jeles András, Tóth Zsuzsa
Composer: Lendvay Kamilló
Cinematographer: Kardos Sándor
Cast: Opoczki János, Iványi István, Farkas József, Ladányi Dénes



When director Jeles András graduated from *Színház- és Filmművészeti Egyetem* he followed the path of many other Eastern European directors by filming documentaries and doing TV films. In 1979 he paired with fellow graduate, friend, and cinematographer Kardos Sándor to release *A KIS VALENTINÓ*. Debuting at a point in Hungarian history that was experiencing a lack of growth and the beginning strain of a global recession that heavily hit Eastern European economies.

Jeles took that documentary style to create a slice-of-life film that follows a young man as he carelessly wanders around town spending money he has stolen from work. *A KIS VALENTINÓ* captures the feelings of Hungary in the late 70's, an era seemingly without opportunities and a looming unknown. At times, the film feels reminiscent of the aesthetics of Antonioni, with Jeles choosing to focus on a character that is without direction and seemingly alone. Jeles claims that at one point *A KIS VALENTINÓ* was over four hours long with a deeply dense narrative, where characters are constantly lost and found in both the foreground and background. With its current edit, *A KIS VALENTINÓ* maintains that density if the audience chooses to seek it out themselves.

Laci (Opoczki János) begins his day leaving one job for another where he helps move furniture. He is tasked with mailing off the money from his first job to officials. While traveling with his coworker, they stop at a post office but Laci decides not to mail the money. His coworker is frustrated that he is taking so long at the post office when they have work to do, so he leaves Laci there alone. Laci spends the rest of the

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day loafing around and slowly spending the money on frivolous things like cakes and cigarettes. He hires a taxi and has the driver aimlessly drive him around the city. They stop so Laci can visit his mother who seems trapped in a state of depression, lying silent and motionless in bed. Soon he visits a bar and gambles on a pinball game with other youths. He spends the last of his money on a young prostitute for his friend. With the money spent, Laci goes to the police station to seemingly turn himself in.



No Direction

A KIS VALENTINÓ embodies a general sense of apathy based on the experiences of Hungarians in the late seventies. While things may have been easier in Hungary at the start of the Kádár era with the paternalism of the *gulyáskommunizmus*, the late seventies saw a reawakening of the Cold War and the start of a global recession that heavily hit the Eastern Bloc. The new opportunities afforded by *gulyáskommunizmus* dried up in Hungary as the country returned to a situation that was more in line with the rest of the Eastern Bloc that hadn't experienced a change in economic policies. This scenario becomes the crux of the singular day where the audience follows Laci and the stories around him.

To capture the absurdity of the situation, Jeles blends both elements of the real and the surreal through his use of filmic language. A KIS VALENTINÓ is not just composed of staged shots, but includes scenes of voyeurism documenting the real lives of Hungarians. This technique is more prominent in the opening of the film as Laci rides the tram and leaves the station. Jeles continues to blur reality by creating a narrative that is constantly turning away from central character and briefly focusing on characters that are removed from Laci's personal story, but still bound by his aimlessness. While at times it's difficult to sense this in its current state, Jeles claims the idea is more fully envisioned in his four hour cut. These secondary characters were meant to flow in and out of Laci's story. For example, in one scene Laci lays on a broken bench watching his coat burn in a trash can while a wedding party is leaving the chapel. The same couple is seen in the Du

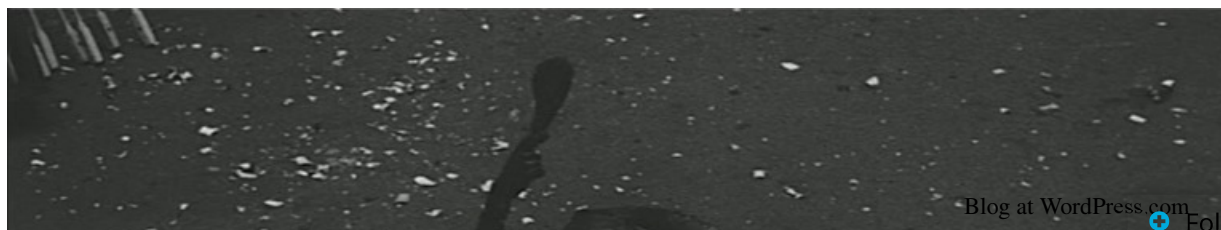
again at the end of the film riding the tram. Some of these characters were purposely meant to be unnoticed throughout the film, representing in a larger sense the feelings of Hungarians whom felt their concerns were unnoticed.



Jeles also chose to mix both traditional actors with non-actors. Opoczki János, who plays Laci, originally showed up at the casting call as support for his friend who was interested in being in the film. Jeles was impressed by his carefree attitude and approached him for the role believing he was perfect for the apathetic Laci.

Besides his apathy, Laci is also marked by his loneliness and isolation. Throughout his day, Laci seeks companionship either by calling out to girls or taking taxi rides. When Laci stops to visit his mother she is despondent, lying motionless in bed unaware of him. His aimlessness dominates his life, and because of this he seems unable to focus on committing to connect with another human. Towards the end of the film he can't even pursue the prostitute, instead letting his friend go off with her and afterwards paying for the prostitute himself with the last of his ill-gotten gains.

Both Laci's loneliness and his apathy help to define the large sum of money as his only opportunity to break for the perpetuity of his motionlessness. This idea of wealth as an outlet to curb one's troubles is no doubt a universal idea that any audience can connect with, which is what helps *A KIS VALENTINÓ* to reach a wider audience. Yet for all the money Laci spends, nobody seems positively affected by it. Laci seems uncomfortable with his endless taxi ride and his mother is unresponsive to the cake he has bought her. In one scene he eats at a nice restaurant in a hotel, but only one other couple exists in the establishment, reminding us how isolated Laci is from reality.





All of this leads to how absurd Laci's reality is, a reality that is poised at a standstill, seemingly at its end. Jeles' use of surrealistic scenes and dialogue help to blunt this seemingly dark tone by being a balance to the voyeuristic slice of life elements that are carrying that depressing message. Though Laci's narrative seemingly ends with his surrender at a police station, Jeles again chooses to balance that message.

Flowers For Sale

Jeles impresses most when one starts to deconstruct how dense *A KIS VALENTINÓ*. It's not just Laci's lack of direction that is depressing; it's also the idea of how much cruelty is lurking in his shadow. Even though he was supposed to post the money he stole earlier that morning, he is fearful later on in the day that the police are already on to him. After leaving his mother's apartment, he is stopped by two secret police in the hallway, one of which is played by a non-actor. They question Laci's identity and ask to see his papers but let him go. Later in the film he eats at a different restaurant and when it comes time to pay the tab the waiters beat him up. He escapes and finds a river where he undresses and floats in the water. This is uncharacteristically filmed as the only slow motion shot in *A KIS VALENTINÓ*, focusing on Laci as he submits to his humiliation and cleanses himself.





A KIS VALENTINÓ also carries a positive tone with the idea that something new can emerge when something is lost. It's because of the stolen money that Laci is afforded a new opportunity, whether it is positive for him or not. This is seen in the staged scene where Laci puts his coat in a trashcan and sets it on fire and goes to lay on a bench. As he lays and watches it burn, a new beginning is being witnessed in the background of the scene with a wedding occurring. At the conclusion of the fire, we see a statue was placed at the bottom of the trash can and it's the only thing that remains among the ashes.

Jeles expands on this thematic dichotomy with how both he and cinematographer Kardos Sándor aesthetically shoot A KIS VALENTINÓ. The film itself is black and white, well into the color era of film for Hungary. Besides being black and white, the film is also blown out with many scenes having overexposed shots with too bright whites and too dark blacks. This is partly because Kardos used no interior lighting and instead set up artificial light outside of windows; and also because of Jeles' desire to overlay lots of text over the image. The text that appears throughout the film helps to lend a more novelistic feel to A KIS VALENTINÓ. Interestingly, Kardos did not care for this aesthetic touch to the film.

At the conclusion of A KIS VALENTINÓ the audience is again reminded of this duality between positive and negative themes. After Laci surrenders himself to the police, the camera follows a new character leaving the station that stops to buy flowers before getting on the tram. Though the audience is unaware, he

sits next to the couple that was married earlier in the film. Jeles again uses a wildly different film style and intersects a completely different film among this scene. The opposing scene takes place in a bar with well-known Hungarian actors. The patrons drink and fight while dialogue talks about the titanic sinking and the band playing till the end. This different scene leads the audience to witness a new beginning being evoked by another's ending.



A New Chapter

While an understanding of the context of its initial release in Hungary is necessary to grasp the totality of Jeles' vision, *A KIS VALENTINÓ* is a rarity for its time. A refreshing blend of styles, it's a film that seemingly exists in the ashes of an era of the more inventive sixties films. Still, it stands shoulder to shoulder with the previous films from that era thanks to Jeles' ideas and Kardos brilliant camerawork. Opoczki János' role as Laci is sublime in its ability to capture a cultural feeling. Undoubtedly, it is understandable why *A KIS VALENTINÓ* is an influence on contemporary Hungarian directors.

Categories: 1970s, Hungary

0 Comments

ÉDES ANNA – SWEET ANNA

Posted on March 25, 2015

É DES ANNA – SWEET ANNA (1958)
Director: Fábri Zoltán
Writer: Kosztolányi Dezső, Fábri Zoltán, Bacsó Péter
Cinematography: Szécsényi Ferenc
Cast: Törőcsik Mari, Mezey Mária, Kovács Károly
Fülöp Zsigmond, Báró Anna, Gobbi Hilda, Makláry Zoltán



Director Fábri Zoltán had a long film career, beginning in the early fifties and ending with his final feature in 1983. Fábri was a man known to be mostly concerned with humanity, often choosing narratives surrounding the events of World War II as a vehicle to deconstruct his ideas about humanity. This interest would lead him down an aesthetic path that mostly dealt with realism. He would also adapt most of his films from well-known Hungarian novels and short stories.

ÉDES ANNA is an adaption of the book of the same title, written by beloved author Kosztolányi Dezső. While Kosztolányi is little known outside of Hungary, he is known for trailblazing Hungarian fiction at the start of the twentieth century by contributing to the Hungarian journal *Nyugat*. While Kosztolányi sought mostly to distance his creative works from politics, he would find his work constantly attacked by both sides as Hungary rapidly changed from fascism to socialism, and finally to occupation in the early part of the twentieth century. Bacsó Péter, who helped to adapt the novel for the film, would later direct films such as *A TANÚ* (THE WITNESS, 1969) which starred Fábri Zoltán as his only appearance as an actor.

ÉDES ANNA begins after the fall of Kun Béla's socialist republic in 1919. Only briefly a socialist state, Hungary would soon transition back to a monarchy after a Romanian invasion of Budapest. The Vizy's are a middle class family who live in a building where the superintendent, Ficsor, is a socialist supporter. As the country shifts from socialism back to monarchy, Ficsor looks to save himself from persecution by promising his goddaughter, Anna (Törőcsik Mari), as a maid for the Vizy's. Mrs. Vizy (Mezey Mária) abuses Anna by psychologically controlling her life. Anna becomes desperate to find a connection with another person and falls in love with Mrs. Vizy's nephew, Jancsi (Fülöp Zsigmond). However, Jancsi is only misleading Anna, and she quickly finds her world falling apart. She succumbs to her psychological state, killing both of her masters and waiting at the scene of her crime to be arrested.





A Bitter Taste

ÉDES ANNA takes a deeper and darker look at the complicated relationship between a servant and a master. Until Anna is introduced as a character, the film follows the perspective of first Mr. Vizy and then Ficsor. At the start of the film, Mr. Vizy is worried to speak about the revolution in front of Ficsor in case the socialists maintain control of power in Hungary. However, both characters are quick to switch sides for their benefit. Ficsor tries to convince Mr. Vizy that his nephew is a part of the push to abolish the socialist powers. When monarchy returns to Hungary, the Vizys hold Ficsor's socialist past over him. To protect himself, he offers his goddaughter as a maid for the Vizys.

Mrs. Vizy exerts her control over Anna by psychologically abusing and torturing her. Her main method of exacting this torture is by removing any identity Anna may have or want. When Anna is first brought in to the household, Mrs. Vizy goes through the few items Anna has brought with her, trying to discern what may be emotionally important. This isn't the only time Anna is reduced to the few items she owns; at the end of the film, her few possessions are accounted for and when she is proposed marriage by the local chimney sweep, he counts the few possessions he can offer her. Mrs. Vizy will also mock and test Anna in front of guests, either by discussing how obedient she is or how she can't cope with a nicer lifestyle, such as stomachaching the same food she and her guests might eat.

Both the shifting of political alliances and the use of psychological control form the framework of a master and servant relationship as experienced in ÉDES ANNA. An audience will identify with Anna, as she is the only character who is never given the role of master, and until the end of the film never tries to influence or control another character. ÉDES ANNA actually plays both political sides as distasteful, at the end of the film when Anna is desperate for any sense of compassion she turns at last to her only family member, Ficsor the socialist superintendent, who claims she is betraying him and risking his life.





Anna is also a naive character, unaware of her role as a pawn in a larger game. Halfway through the film, Anna is proposed to by a widowed chimney sweep but she is afraid to leave the Vizys. Later on in the film, the nephew of Mrs. Vizy, Jancsi, who convinces her that he's in love, seduces her. Anna sacrifices the offer of continuing to live in her social class for the dream of reaching new heights, but she is unaware that someone else is just using her.

While the plight of Anna is universally understood by the viewer with an interest in humanity, Fábri transcends this sentimentality by contextualizing Anna as a larger metaphor for the nation of Hungary. While in the early twentieth century in which *ÉDES ANNA* takes place, Hungary finds itself occupied and torn apart by the victors of the first World War. The novel's original still rang true, if not painfully more so after the 1956 Revolution. That revolution proved how little power Hungary had in its servant and master relationship with the Soviet Union. At the conclusion of *ÉDES ANNA*, Anna kills her masters but patiently waits for the police to come and arrest her. Though she rebels against the looming power, she doesn't escape her servitude and instead realizes what she actually is, a prisoner.



All That Glitters

ÉDES ANNA is at most times dark in its realistic portrayal of Anna's servitude, yet Fábri wants the audience to witness the humanity that dwells deep within the core of Anna. This is best seen in the relationship between Anna and Bandi, the child she takes care of before becoming a maid for the Vizys. Bandi's toy trumpet is one of the few things that Anna keeps as a possession. In an early scene we watch Anna as she dreams, asleep in the Vizy's kitchen, of Bandi and the fairy tales she told him of birds flying out of a clasp knife. As she listens to Bandi's words, we watch as birds fly past her window in the kitchen. This is one of the only times that director Fábri blends reality with the surreal. He returns to this imagery when Jancsi seduces Anna in her bed in the kitchen, again the birds past the window, a visual reminder that Anna is detached from the reality around her.

It's interesting to think how Fábri presents Anna both as the ideal servant to Mrs. Vizy and deeply humanistic to the audience. Yet by meeting both agendas, Anna is unable to escape in the inevitable, where she strikes back at her masters. Fábri elects not to spend much time dwelling on Anna's consequences, instead leaving it up to the audience to decide if the rebellion was a natural part of her existence. In the original novel however, Kosztolányi continues the story following the trial of Anna as she continues being a pawn in a larger game of control. When she is eventually convicted, we see as how the rest of the lives carry on without thought of Anna.



What works so well to keep the audience engaged with such a depressing tale is how well executed the atmosphere is in ÉDES ANNA. Fábri perfectly captures the dark tone of the book, even enlisting a heavy and at times brooding piano score. This atmosphere is something Fábri doesn't explore as deeply again until *AZ ÖTÖDIK PECSÉT* (THE FIFTH SEAL, 1976), another film that explores the moral depth of its characters

in difficult situations. What separates *AZ ÖTÖDIK PECSÉT* from *ÉDES ANNA* is the amount of hope that remains in the film. While Anna's outcome may be ambiguous, what is important to her remains with the audience in their thoughts. While Mrs. Vizy tried to control every aspect of Anna's life, she couldn't change who she was as a person.



Mercy

Fábri adapted a novel that was perfect for revisiting in the context of its initial release. The sting of the failure of the Revolution in '56 was still there two years later during the film's release, and the paternalism of Kádár was just beginning to settle in, which is perhaps why the film found itself released past censors. Because of this context, I feel that Fábri saw *ÉDES ANNA* as a ray of hope, that human ideals can carry on through the darkness. While a masterpiece still in modern times, *ÉDES ANNA* continues to be a relevant message about the dark relationship that exists between a master and its servant.

Categories: 1950s, Hungary

0 Comments

MAGASISKOLA – THE FALCONS

Posted on March 16, 2015

MAGASISKOLA – THE FALCONS (1970)
Director: Gaál István
Script: Gaál István, Mészöly Miklós
Cinematography: Ragályi Elemér
Cast: Ivan Andonov, Bánffy György, Meszléry Judit



Gaál István's *MAGASISKOLA* marked a turning point for his career, shooting for the first time in color and choosing to adapt a novel written by Mészöly Miklós. Gaál chose to use the Hungarian style of *parabolisztikus* to convey the ideas present in Mészöly's original story. At first *MAGASISKOLA* appears shockingly direct, a parable showcasing the falcons as militarized killers who obey their leader's commands to kill other birds. While the fear of such a regime being imposed is universal, a deeper theme lies beneath *MAGASISKOLA* exploring the tension of paternalism in the Kádár era. The combination of these general themes with the specific experience of Hungary in the late sixties helps to elevate *MAGASISKOLA* as one of the most important Hungarian films in the post-new wave era.

MAGASISKOLA follows Gábor (Ivan Andonov), a writer who is interested in a government program that is training falcons to control the bird and pest populations in the puszta. Gábor moves in to the compound working alongside its leader Lilik (Bánffy György) and the other falconers. He observes how the birds are trained to survive and fight other birds through diet and practice. Overtime Gábor becomes intrigued by the idea of how order is observed in the tiny falcon community. Lilik sees his work as important while the surrounding farmers hold him and his ideas with contempt. Eventually Gábor becomes aware of the inhumanity that is occurring and flees the farm after a tragedy strikes the falcons.



The Order of a Regime

When Gábor first arrives at Lilik's farm he is interested in its concepts but later is drawn into that world by Lilik's commitment to the ideas, obsessing over the order and balance among the falcons. Lilik even spends his free time painting and drawing the falcons. Gábor is fascinated by their ability to control and tame these creatures but later is fearful when he realizes the falcons are sacrificing their identity. When Gábor recognizes these changes within himself, he chooses to escape silently instead of rebelling against Lilik.

Lilik paints a picture of a dichotomic world shifting between anarchy and progress, visualizing a balance between the two in the form imposed militaristic order. He constantly returns to this theme of balance and uses it as justification for the killing of the other birds, a necessary evil to maintain that balance. As a viewer we are given this isolated perspective for most of the film, that is until the two central characters interact with outsiders to the falconry installation. These outsiders, local farmers, view the falcons with distrust and behold their actions as if they were criminal. They don't recognize a balance but instead witness the violence of the falcons hunting and torturing the birds they track. None of them are willing to confront Lilik though and instead choose to act subversively, such as taking down his warning signs.





This complicated relationship between both freedom and anarchy is present in every aspect of *MAGASISKOLA*. Gaál uses the sounds of humming electrical wires, the cries of hawks and the shouts of falconers to create a sense of repetition and order. While alone and in short dosages they seem inconsequential, but when focused on and when they become unending these sounds shift to being torturous. In one scene Gaál has the falconers riding in a circle shouting commands to a falcon to move between them. Lilik presents it as a training exercise but the camera perspective is from within the circle of riders, creating an atmosphere of being trapped for the audience. Just like sound, the landscape itself projects an oppressive aesthetic. Like many of his peers, Gaál uses this seemingly endless flat expanse of the Puszta as not just a metaphor of oppression, but to help isolate the characters to truly bookend the parable style.

All of this emphasis on balance is of course an illusion crafted by Lilik himself. Lilik commands the falcons and chooses when and how many herons die and how they will be trained. In one scene Lilik displays to Gábor a project of his where he has trained two falcons to hunt one prey. When one falcon captures a heron he waits for the other and together they slowly eat away at the heron while keeping it alive for Lilik. This scene is important because it helps to reaffirm the audience's dislike of Lilik and his disillusion but also to humanize Gábor as he sympathizes with the injured Heron. The order to help establish a sense of freedom is enacted out by the falcons, but they have no freedom themselves as they are a puppet for Lilik's theories and ideals.

A Shortened Leash

While *MAGASISKOLA* resonates universally with its themes of order and control, it really shines as a parable of the political climate in Hungary at the time of its release in 1970. In fact the narrative seems almost prophetic given that Mészöly wrote his short story after the '56 Revolution. Lilik is so enthralled by his own ideas that he doesn't recognize that he has created a form of paternalism for his falcon regime. The concept of paternalism rang so very true for Hungarians in 1970 under the Kádár administration.

Following the Russian invasion of 1956, Kádár was selected by soviet leaders to continue their ideology within Hungary. Kádár understood his situation well and enacted policies such as no longer needing to profess loyalty to socialism and farm collectivism. While it's true that in this era Hungarian citizens saw a relaxation of censure and an economic boost, all of that came with a cost. That same freedom that was allocated to citizens was used as ammunition to attack its internal critics. Kádár's administration would use the relaxed restrictions as measuring stick against people who wanted too much freedom. These situations were manipulated to teach a lesson to the rest of the populace.



Lilik best represents this concept in a late scene in *MAGASISKOLA* where, during a night storm, the falcons tied to posts get caught in the puddles. One falcon, bug eater who is named for its lack of desire to kill other birds, drowns in the puddle that forms below its perch. Lilik claims it's because Bug Eater complained and complained until it got a longer leash, and that leash is what led to Bug Eater getting caught up and drowning. The parallels between Lilik and Kádár run deep through *MAGASISKOLA* with scenes like this. Lilik is often found quoting the words of fictional falconer Dawlah Taymur as matter-of-fact ideas, akin to how Kádár would use quotes from Marx and other socialist figures. Watching *MAGASISKOLA* in theaters during its initial release, it would have been very difficult for Hungarian audiences to separate the character Lilik from Kádár.

High Above

MAGASISKOLA marks an important transition for both Hungarian film and culture. The freedom in film of the Eastern Bloc New Wave in the late 60's seemed almost forgotten under a tightening censorship. At the same time, the region would soon be experiencing the worst of a global economic depression towards the end of the decade. *MAGASISKOLA* was also the first adaptation of Mészöly's work, who still today remains an important figure in Hungarian literature. This film also marks the first use of color by both director Gaál and cinematographer Ragályi. A lot of time was spent in deciding in the usage of color in the film which can be seen by how Lilik wears muted and faded colors while Gábor first appears in brighter outfits.



MAGASISKOLA remains a masterpiece of a film by more than just its aesthetics and narrative backbone. Gaál is able to take the parable, a Hungarian staple, and transcend it's political commentary and find a universal message. It's the combination of both themes that makes Gaál's film one of the best Hungarian parable films. Watching the film for the first time, it's message is still shockingly relevant. *

Categories: 1970s, Hungary

0 Comments

ДВА ДНІ – TWO DAYS

Posted on March 7, 2015

ДВА ДНІ – TWO DAYS (1927)
Director: Георгій Стабовий (Heorhii Stabovyi)
Script: Соломон Лазурін (Solomon Lazurin)
Cinematography: Данило Демуцький (Danylo Demutsky)
Composer: Бориса Лятошинського (Borys Liatoshynsky)
Cast: Іван Замичковський (Ivan Zamychkovsky), Сергій Мінін (Sergei Minin)



ДВА ДНІ

It's fairly interesting to think about cinematic production within a country like Ukraine, in a decade that is bookended on one side by conflicts over its territory by Russian and Poland, and on the other side the man-made famine Голодомор (Holodomor). Each event cost millions of Ukrainian lives and were the direct influence by outside powers. These two devastating events in history potentially had as much influence as Russification did on Ukrainian cinema of the 1920's. As such, a cinema style focused mostly on aesthetics of lyricism seems best for an audience that would want to detach from that harsh reality. This poetic style is rooted in the early works of Олександр Довженко (Oleksandr Dovzhenko) and seen in the works of many later directors such as Юрій Ілленко (Yuri Ilyenko).





It's in this context that *ДВА ДНІ* comes as a surprise, a film rooted not just in realism but one that resonates with the emotions of its nation through an identifiable character. Director Стабовий created a film that was more in line with the aesthetics that would appear in the next decade, Soviet Realism. But *ДВА ДНІ* deviates from that style in several ways, by focusing on an individual instead of the collective, and the absence of heroism. This creates an experience that is balanced between Ukraine's poetic roots and the forced Soviet Realism. Though in a modern era, the film can be viewed as potentially propaganda, something Стабовий would do later in his career, there are elements that conflict with this idea. It's important to note that many key Ukrainian directors of the twenties would at some point in their careers focus on propaganda including Довженко.

ДВА ДНІ begins with the Red army about to invade the town, with fighting already at the doorsteps. An estate owner is packing up his valuables and his family, and leaves the property and its hidden valuables in the care of his loyal servant Antin. The son of the estate owner gets lost at the train station and returns to the estate in fear of the Red Army. The estate is eventually found by the Red Army who want to set themselves up in it as a base of operations. Antin discovers his son leading the Bolshevik squad, a son that had been missing since he enlisted with the Russians in the first Great War. Antin, loyal to his master, hides the Son of his master in his quarters, keeping him hidden from his own son. Antin becomes torn between the love for his son, and his loyalties with the family he works for.

The next day, Antin's son receives orders to send his squad to retreat while he remains behind as a spy. He is followed by the young master of the estate and reports Antin's son's location when the White Army returns later that afternoon. Antin pleads with the young master, reminding him of his salvation, but the young master is unsympathetic to Antin. After the hanging, Antin is consumed with rage and sets fire to the mansion, locking the soldiers and family inside of it. *ДВА ДНІ* ends on the morning of the third day with Antin lying dead on the side of the road





Status Quo

While Soviet Realism wasn't an imposed aesthetic until the thirties, *ДВА ДНІ* still challenges some of those ideals that were already ingrained in Soviet Cinema. *Стабовий* chooses to put the focus of the film on two characters and their relationship, Antin and his son, instead of a collective group. This helps the audience to relate with the central character of Antin, who is feeling trapped between two political ideals that are both willing to sacrifice Antin for their own benefit. This sense of being trapped between two opposing powers, while being powerless himself, is why *ДВА ДНІ* resonates so well with a Ukraine of the twenties. The focus on individuals is also what makes *ДВА ДНІ* a compelling drama, as Antin's relationship with his son further complicates what he thought were his personal ideals.

ДВА ДНІ also combats the Soviet theme of heroism by having no character that is morally superior. Though true, the White Army can be seen as the most morally bankrupt, unflinching in its decision to hang Antin's son and shown returning to town in a montage with the collaborators that they kill. What's interesting, though, is how *Стабовий* contrasts both the Bolsheviks and the White Army. Both of them inhabit the mansion in a similar fashion, from unloading their equipment and playing on the piano to how they lounge in the study and smoke cigars. If it wasn't for their uniforms, it would be hard to tell which army was currently occupying the mansion. By the end of the film, even Antin is filled with the same rage that is enveloping the country, and we are shocked to see him shoot at his victims as they try to escape their burning tomb.



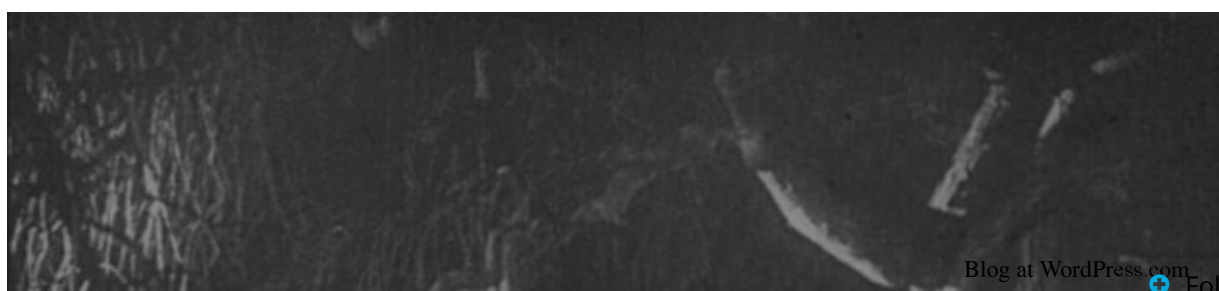
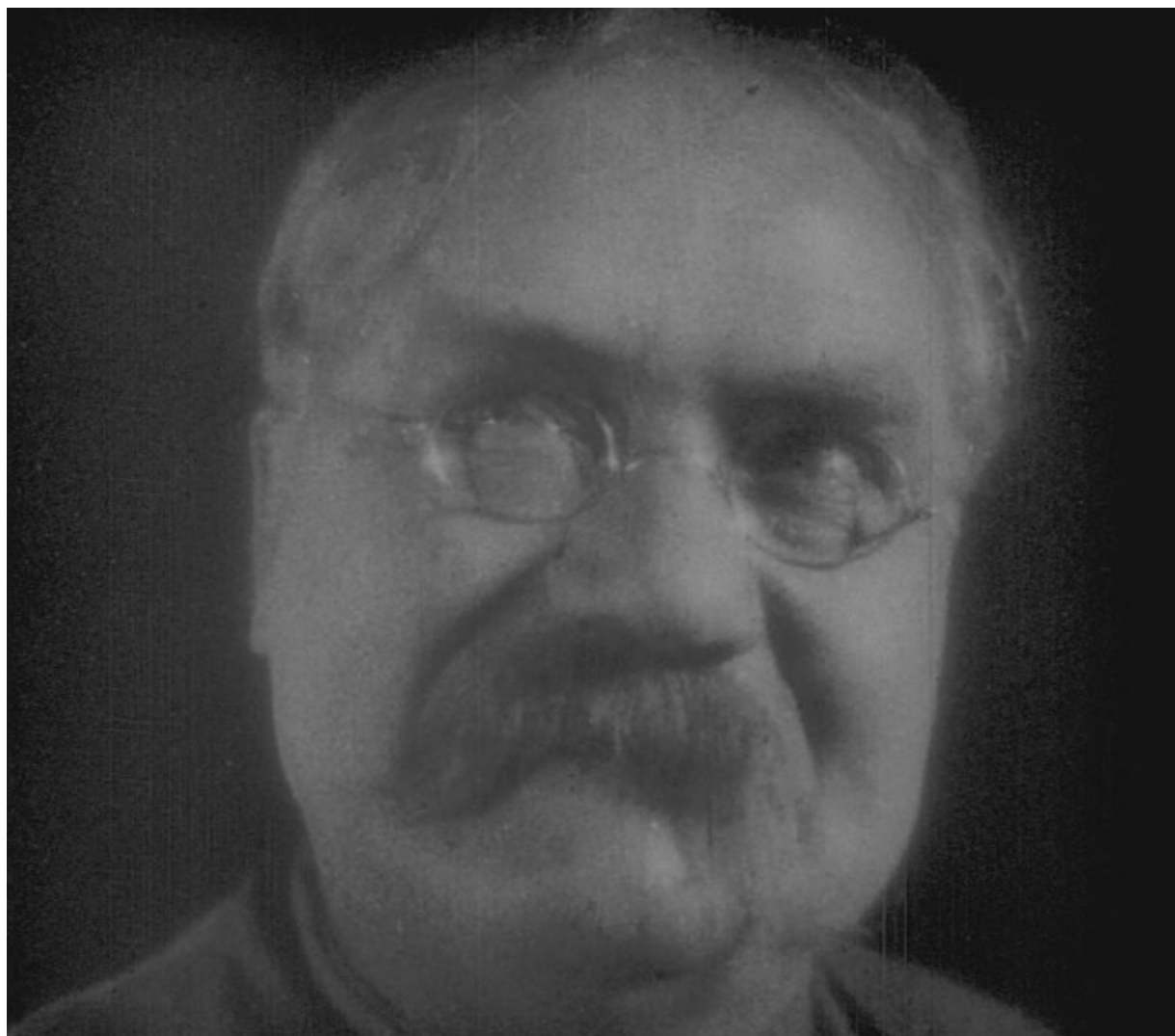


Finally, the ending of ДВА ДИИ has an interesting deconstruction that can be viewed with two different perspectives. As an audience, we can view Antin's actions as being the result of a personal revolution in which he enacts his revenge upon both the White army and the upper class. Antin is lead to this rage through personal tragedy by both the young master's betrayal and witnessing his son's hanging. The alternative viewpoint can be taken from a modern perspective, that Antin's predicament is solely brought on by his son's decision to become politically active. However, this viewpoint feels like a cheap trap, one that relies solely on negative emotion tied to socialism. Perhaps its better to view ДВА ДИИ from the first perspective but to expand on the ideas that it was meant to drive a passive audience into any stance, whether it was for or against a political shift.

Fathers of Cinema

Стабовий's feature film career was short, shooting just a couple more films before moving to Moscow to direct Soviet propaganda. He would enlist with the Red Army in World War I, and after the war began a career as a playwright. His successes as a playwright quickly lead to success at screenwriting. A film he wrote the screenplay for saw the director removed because of trouble with his alcoholism. The film was such a success that Стабовий began his career as a director. His debut film would be *Свіжий вітер* (A FRESH WIND, 1926) and would also mark the debut of cinematographer Данило Демуцький (Danylo Demutsky).

Демуцький is by far one of the most talented Ukrainian cinematographers, being one of the first to really translate his photographic mastery of shadows and light to cinema. The imagery he creates in *ДВА ДНІ* is one that is both documentative and deeply personal. Some of the greatest scenes of *ДВА ДНІ* takes place a night, using the lack of light as an effective metaphor for the crisis at hand. After working with Стабовий, Демуцький would later collaborate with Довженко (Dovzhenko) helping to create his poetic vision appear on film. Демуцький would lead a very successful film career but be haunted by frequent imprisonment over his work on certain films.





Passage of Time

ДБА ДHI stands at a crossroad of time that in the Modern era of an independent Ukraine may be too painful to revisit. It's a film that poses trouble for a region that may want to forget or alter its past even if its still deeply entwined to it. Still, it's hard to avoid the compelling drama that unfolds for Antin over such a brief period of time, an era that potentially felt endless for its intended audience. ДБА ДHI remains as a gorgeous film capturing a personal tragedy that is all too relevant in today's Ukraine. *

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Categories: 1920s, Ukraine

0 Comments

EGYMÁSRA NÉZVE – ANOTHER WAY

Posted on March 4, 2015

EGYMÁSRA NÉZVE – ANOTHER WAY (1982)
Director: Makk Károly

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Script: Galgóczi Erzsébet

Music: Giorgio Moroder, Dés László, Másik János

Cinematography: Andor Tamás

Cast: Jadwiga Jankowska-Cieslak, Grazyna Szapolowska, Jozef Króner

Andorai Péter, Reviczky Gábor



Makk Károly has been making films since the 50's and is still directing features as recently as 2010, but his work is barely recognized in the west outside of his 1971 masterpiece SZERELEM (LOVE). Much like SZERELEM, EGYMÁSRA NÉZVE uses a relationship as the central element for its themes. Both films also occur against the backdrop of harrowing times, with EGYMÁSRA NÉZVE occurring during the wake of the 1956 Revolution and SZERELEM involving a husband absent, arrested as a political prisoner. Still, if you were to compare Makk's political commentary against that of his colleagues, the films are outwardly more direct. Choosing a narrative that is identifiable makes EGYMÁSRA NÉZVE more humanistic, far from the abstract scenarios in films by fellow director Jancsó. Perhaps it is this tepidness in Hungary's more relaxed censorship that helps Makk arrive at this level of prestige among Western critics.

Like a tragic play, EGYMÁSRA NÉZVE begins with the conclusion of events. Lívía (Grazyna Szapolowska) is in the hospital suffering from a serious injury, her husband is in jail and her lover has committed suicide. Now returning to the start, we learn Lívía is a journalist for a paper in Budapest that has just hired a new writer, Éva (Jadwiga Jankowska-Cieslak), who presumably had been blacklisted for participating in the 1956 Revolution. Together they share an office and Éva soon falls for Lívía who is married to an officer, Dönci (Andorai Péter).

One night after work, they visit a bar with another journalist and after an evening of drinking they kiss and embrace where Éva confesses her love. The next morning, Lívía feels unsure so she exchanges offices with a coworker to put space between herself and Éva. Along with another reporter, Lívía and Éva are assigned to report on a new farmers' commune established after the revolution. At first, Lívía rejects the assignment based on her feelings about Éva but eventually she decides to make the trip.



The commune hosts a party and invites the reporters. Éva spends her time questioning the farmers, searching out corruption in the community. Livia chooses to dance with most of the men present at the party while Éva conducts her interviews. At the end of the night, Livia chooses to avoid Éva who is disappointed. When they return, Éva submits her story but the editors find it too critical of the regime. She quits in protest of her story being censored and pursues Livia by writing her letters.

Eventually, Livia returns to her and they decide to live together, but when Livia tells her husband, he shoots her. Éva visits her in the hospital, but is rejected by Livia. Depressed and alone, Éva tries to cross the border and commits suicide by slowly approaching a border guard.

Taboo Relationships

Central to *EGYMÁSRA NÉZVE*'s narrative is the relationship between Lívía and Éva, with much of the discussion centered on their sexuality. While homosexuality was mostly absent from the screen in Eastern Europe, commentary about sexuality in general was pushed by many other directors such as Dušan Makavejev and Věra Chytilová, who dominated this issue in the 70's. In contrast to these directors, Makk's discussion is certainly conservative as commentary on ideas such as gay rights or their treatment is almost wholly absent from *EGYMÁSRA NÉZVE*. In fact, the only scenes that broach the subject involve the police, including a scene where a detective interviews Éva about Lívía being shot; he is more interested in how the couple engages in sex. In an interview, Makk says this scene comes from their own desire to understand lesbian relationships before principal shooting. They received the same response Éva gives in the scene and come to the understanding that the relationship between Éva and Lívía is no different from their own relationships.

While it's true that their sexuality is not important in the message of the film, it's the condition of their relationship in the context of the time period that drives the central theme of *EGYMÁSRA NÉZVE*. Homosexuality was a taboo subject in the 1980's, but even more so in the 1950's. It's the impossibility and difficulty of this relationship between Éva and Lívía that is the focus of Makk. Writer Galgóczi uses this situation as a mirror to parallel the events of the 1956 Revolution, questioning how people can survive in such extreme emotional shifts. Lívía's love of Éva is a deeply personal crisis because she is now uncertain of her identity. This is a feeling that was universally shared among Hungarians after the failed revolution, and was returning as Hungary and other communist states dealt with the global recession in the 1980's.

EGYMÁSRA NÉZVE also uses Éva and Lívía relationship to discuss ideas of conformity and tolerance. These themes are brought up throughout the film usually during pivotal points of conflict in their relationship. In the scene where they visit the communal farm and go to the party, Lívía renews her question of her sexuality, choosing to dance with several men at the party and ignoring Éva. Their difficulty is there to highlight the difficulties of the communal farm and the problems it represents with its forced conformity. This idea is again repeated when Éva submits her article and her boss censors it against Éva's wishes. Lívía has rejected Éva at the party, choosing to conform to social norms and again characters are forced to conform and tolerate the political climate.



Black and White

These dualities in *EGYMÁSRA NÉZVE* define the perspective of the characters that view the world as black or white. For Éva, she can't live in a world without Lívía's love and she can't work for a job where she is forced to subvert any part of the truth. Lívía struggles with her identity, unable at times to break from the heavy handed conformity surrounding her. Makk and Galgóczi both recognize this situation and use the impossibility of the character's situation to propose the idea of an alternate solution or finding a grey area that avoids outside influence.

In *EGYMÁSRA NÉZVE*, Makk does a superb job of capturing the atmosphere of love between Éva and Lívía. After the scene at the bar where Éva confesses her love, we watch as both characters wander a park and spend time alone on the bench. Their passion feels reassured until the police arrive to break up their privacy, with the idea of conformity crushing down on them. Their love allows them to forget this for a brief evening until the police threaten to tell Lívía's husband and the more radical Éva is just arrested.

This outside influence enforcing a specific viewpoint is of course a part of the larger picture for Hungary. In the context of the 1950's, it's the suppression of the revolution and in the 1980's it's global economics oppressing the country. While this idea is not original in Eastern European cinema, or international cinema, what really emboldens this theme is the atmosphere Makk is able to create in *EGYMÁSRA NÉZVE*. Also, both actresses, Jadwiga Jankowska-Cieslak and Grazyna Szapolowska, do a phenomenal job with capturing the spirit of the relationship between Éva and Lívía.





Another Way

Over a decade after SZERELEM, Makk again creates a masterful work in EGYMÁSRA NÉZVE that is able to critique both politics and social norms in a single film. As an audience, we are reminded that if the situation is unpleasant we should be free to seek another way to find our own happiness. Even if the situation feels impossible, being able to feel true to oneself helps to overcome the difficulty. EGYMÁSRA NÉZVE's message still resonates today with social issues not dissimilar from those of 1982, so perhaps it's best to revisit the film to see that there is always another way. *

Categories: 1980s, Hungary

0 Comments