

Solothurn 2000

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35th SOLOTHURNER FILMTAGE 2000: US AND THEM

Another season of penance has arrived for the Swiss cinema. After the attempts at recuperating from the myth of Wilhelm Tell on the 700th anniversary of establishing The Swiss Confederation, after the voiced reluctance towards joining the EU and the complex of having Jewish gold in national banks, the time is ripe for the resolution of probably the most difficult moral dilemma which has been unsettling the country's hearts and minds for quite some time. At stake is the matter of the sealing of the border during WWII against Jewish (albeit not only Jewish) refugees from the occupied Europe, for whom Switzerland could have become the last safe haven.

The slogan 'The boat is full', taken from the title of Markus Imhoof's film, popular some 20 years ago, has become a kind of a pang of conscience for the whole nation and a part of a broader syndrome which encompasses the attitude towards foreigners in general. This very complex of neutrality turned out to be the leading theme of documentaries presented during the 35th Solurian Film Days. Kaspar Kasics's *Closed Country* and Irene Loebell's *Eine Reise nach Genf (Journey to Geneva)* sounded as the disturbing voices in this great national sacrament of confession which took hold of the Swiss media. While Loebell, through the 'talking head' method, tells the story of a writer Fred Wander, whose deportation from the Swiss-French border eventually led him to Auschwitz concentration camp (the director discovered family photos confiscated from the would-be refugee), Kasics arranges an almost documentary confrontation between a *Grenzschutz* from those times and a group of Jews who were refused an entry to Switzerland. On one hand we receive a portrayal of a gendarme who blindly follows orders and seems to differ very little from the Nazi criminals and on the other we are faced with a vivisection of cornered fugitives who even until today have not managed to come to terms with their tragedy. An unquestionably positive feature of the film constitutes the fact that, despite the overall veristic quality of the picture, the problem posed acquires a quality of an almost symbolic tale of undeserved, blameless blame.

The syndrome of Fatherland also surfaced in an excellent, balanced documentary of Tobias Wyss, devoted to the 'enfant terrible' of Swiss political, media and literary scene. *Der Meienberg*, through compilation methods, renders a profile of a rebellious intellectual, resentful of the pettiness of his nation's political ideology, unresolved historical matters and present time procrastination. Niklaus Meienberg chooses suicide as a way out, incapable of coming to terms with his Fatherland.

These dilemmas are fortunately alien for young documentary directors who gathered to work on the project *ID Swiss*, devoted to the idea of multicultural Switzerland. Seven filmmakers aged 31-42 (Bernasconi, Davi, Fares, Wageh, Mulase, Thümena, Werenfels) approached the task in an original, even slightly satirical manner, presenting seven excellent tales about 'us' and 'them' in a country where every eighth child is born in a multicultural family and a quarter of all the taxes is paid by foreigners. The key word - multiculturalism - is tinted with many shades of humour, which tells more than elaborate documentaries lavished generously by Solure during former seasons. Take as an example a tale of the dilemmas of football fans and players: who should one cheer if one is a 'Swiss Italian' and the match is between Italy and Switzerland? Consider also the revealing journey to the Swiss colony in Cairo and to a Swiss granny in Zollikofen. Or the culinary mixture composed of Indo-Swiss ingredients. The film itself is spoken in 6 languages, ranging from the Arabic to 'schwyzerdütsch' -- and this fact alone is a confirmation of the idea of multiculturalism transferred to the cinema screen.

The originality and unpretentious nature of this enterprise were closely related to a motion picture by five directors (Amiguet, Reusser, Magnin, Fares, Vouillamoz), entitled *Histoires de fête (Festival stories)* and set in the last-year's grape-picking celebration in Vevey. Seemingly only a pretext for a film etude, it nevertheless turned out to be a successful collage of interesting narrative and workshop ideas. I best remember a story of

an old man who escapes a retirement home to undergo, accompanied by the festival music in the memorable day of the solar eclipse, a wondrous love experience, probably the last one in his life.

A similar freshness of approach was present in a film by Romed Wyder, entitled *Pas de café, pas de télé, pas de sexé* (*Neither coffee, nor television, nor sex*). This humorous story concerns 'Hausbesetzers', who dwell illegally in a deserted, designated for demolition Geneva building and who must face a serious dilemma: from a fake marriage needed only for the acquisition of a Swiss passport, a true love is born. The film speaks of an adventure of eliminating illusionary appearances from life, of replacing phoney relations with authentic feelings.

A similar cord is struck by Judith Kennel's *Zornige Küsse* (*Thorny kisses*). But this story of a rebellious teenager placed preventively in a Catholic boarding school, and there inadvertently falling in love with a priest, hardly contains any fresh or innovative morals. There are too many calculated words, images and tell-tale finales for the lazy audience.

Almost the same deficiencies comprise the 'new Tanner'. His *Jonas et Lila, à demain* (*Jonas and Lila, 'till tomorrow*) is a continuation of a 1976 film *Jonas qui aura vingt-cinq ans en l'an 2000* (*Jonas, who will be 25 in the year 2000*), but lacks the charm of its predecessor. Jonas managed to get married (with a beautiful African), to understand a little of the ways of this world, but still has not found his place in life. Perhaps he is on the right track, thanks to a video camera received from a director friend. The only problem is that he cherishes too much the city's peripheral dumping grounds and that is a rather graceless set for the camera eye. But let's not be too fussy. This veteran of Swiss cinema (born 1929) has made another picture of his 'own', perhaps even 'younger' than several of the previous ones. The movie is mostly about the love between Jonas and black-skinned Lili, the love that the director Anzian feels towards a Russian actress for whom he abandons his life passions and about the Russian woman, lost in the Swiss city life, who shares her time between the street and pornographic movie sets and who apparently talked her friends into stealing the borrowed video equipment from Jonas after he conducted with her a learned interview with a huge ape in the background. Out of these relations (and others), Tanner constructs his rhizomatic tale of human experience at the beginning of 2000.

But *Jonas* did not please the tastes of the Solurian audience. Instead, received with much admiration was an unsophisticated but glamorous Daniel Schmid's *Beresina oder Die letzten Tage der Schweiz* (*Beresina, or the last days of Switzerland*), thanks to gorgeous Elena Panowa. She plays a Russian call-girl, who through her innocent plotting causes a *coup d'état* in the alpine republic and is then crowned a Queen of Helvetia. Schmid's picture sends a mocking grin at the viewer, who in his beautiful but terribly boring country has little opportunity at committing sacrilegious acts towards the authorities. There is more, however: Beresina symbolically purifies her fellow Russian women, who frequently force the Swiss into reflecting upon the East meeting the West. I would not underestimate this unsophisticated *catharsis*; I would prefer Schmid not to fall into complete absurdity. The movie is worth seeing also because of Geraldine Chaplin in a supporting role.

This year, The Swiss Movie Award in the category of 'best plot', went out to *Emporte-moi* (*Take Me Away*), a movie directed by Léa Pool, who has lived in the Canadian province of Quebec for a quarter of a century. This excellent psychological study tells a story of the joyless growing up of a thirteen year old girl from Montreal in the early 60s. Family conflicts (father, a Jew with Polish background, torturing the family with his poetic lack of fulfilment) constantly tug at the unstable psyche of Hanna, who simultaneously experiences her first encounters with love. She finds consolation in cinema, where she seeks refuge from her miserable family life and takes particular pleasure in observing the actions of Anna Karina's Nane, the heroine of Godard's *Vivre sa vie*. And that's what the film is about: a teenager seeking her own way of life in a situation which demands such a fast maturity. In the end, Hanna receives as a gift an amateur film camera and the images she creates seem to lead her towards a better life.

Pool's film, quiet and modest, filled with autobiographical motifs, speaks about themes of which cinema often screams. It does not speak meekly, however. The immense drama of a girl growing up, wondrously played by tomboy Karine Vanasse, hits us with an intensity of a lightning bolt. Which is not so easy to achieve, not only here, in Solure.

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