

ORIGIN ACTION

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
SOURCE METHOD EXEMPTION 3B2B  
NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT  
DATE 2007

FROM Amembassy MOSCOW

DATE July 12, 1965

SUBJECT: Report on Ukrainian Film: "Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors"

REF

To celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Ukrainian writer Mikhail Kotsyubinsky, the Ukrainian Dovzhenko Film Studio in 1964 produced a film from his novel, Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors, one of the most remarkable Soviet films seen by the reporting officer and the few spectators who had the opportunity of seeing it when it was shown on June 15 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Annex. According to the Counselor of the Dutch Embassy, who went to considerable trouble to obtain Soviet agreement to have it shown to diplomats only, the Soviet authorities do not know what to do with this film. Not only could it be considered too progressive for showing domestically, but the film may very well even be considered too daring for showing abroad, although it would undoubtedly be well received, particularly by those eager to point out increased cultural freedom in the USSR. However, excerpts from the film were recently shown and praised on Soviet television indicating that the authorities may take the plunge and release it, possibly with the more daring passages censored or padded with additional material.

The director makes vivid use of color, startling camera techniques and extreme symbolism in following the story of the love of a young man for a young girl from a hostile family (a la Romeo and Juliet). When she dies, he has an unhappy marriage and is finally killed in a fight. This is all set in an honest and realistic portrayal of the hard, brutal life of the Gutsul people of the Carpathian Mountains in the 19th Century. To the extent that it depicts the animal passions, the crude and miserable way of life and all-pervading religious devotion (based more on pagan rituals and beliefs than Christian teachings) of these people, the film is in keeping with Soviet ~~unflattering~~ portrayal of the unwashed masses before their "liberation" by socialism. However, out of keeping with Soviet concepts is the fact that the people are not shown as particularly displeased

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by this state of affairs, as being oppressed or held down by any social class or external aggressor, or as possessing any inherent nobility. The earthiness and lustfulness of the people, even of the hero, leave no room for the romanticism and puritanism of almost all Soviet films. This film is more risqué than many of the Western films which the Soviets are always quick to describe as depraved and "decadent."

There are many striking aspects of the film, among which may be cited the following:

1. In one episode, the barren wife disrobes and walks completely naked through the fields to make a fertility offering; she is seen by an aroused village witch doctor who tries to rape her. In the scene after the wedding, the husband disrobes his bride, examines her and then the scene discreetly fades out. There are numerous views of men and women cavorting lecherously at drunken dinners. All of these add up to a strong affirmation that sex is not just a Western invention.

2. The religious symbolism is carried very far. While it is frequently critical, as in a scene where the hero Ivan stands in a saintly posture as a drunken Christmas procession goes by behind him, in other scenes it seems to reinforce a fundamental devotion despite the crude exteriors. In one scene the head of a real man fades into that of Christ on the cross and in another women are gathered around the dead Ivan as in medieval paintings of the Pieta.

3. Although made up of individual, extremely realistic scenes, the story as a whole is told in an abstract, surrealist way. The camera jumps from scene to scene; there is little dialogue (in hard-to-understand mountain Ukrainian at that) and only brief descriptive titles flashed on the screen between episodes. Filming technique includes use of a lurching, advancing, or spinning camera, rapid shifting from camera to camera, panning (to the point of irritation) of brightly colored scenes to convey impressions, and separation or isolation of primary colors to create moods (e.g. red for death, or black and white for mourning).

4. The film recalls Ingmar Bergman in many respects. There is a constant play between myth and reality, the supernatural and an accurate and detailed depiction of life, until they seem to merge. From the beginning, the hero and heroine seem doomed to a tragic fate which is of no interest to the hard and disinterested world around them. It is implied that this tragic thread runs from generation to generation.

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From Moscow

This movie in seven parts in color was directed by Sergei Paradzhanov; screen play was by Ivan Chenday and Sergei Paradzhanov; Victor Ilenko was in charge of camera, and the music, largely folk music, was by Y. Skorik. It is understood that the actors were taken from the area with possibly the exception of the main leads. A thermofaxed copy of a description of the movie made available by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is attached.

Since writing the above, a Liternaturnaya Gazeta correspondent told the reporting officer that there have been a few showings of the film in the Ukraine which have elicited favorable reviews. He also thought the film had been entered in at least one film festival in South America and had won some sort of award.

For the Ambassador:



Malcolm Toon  
Counselor for Political Affairs

Attachment:

Copy of a  
Description of the Movie

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