

10. Juraj Herz: *The Cremator* (*Spalovač mrtvol*, 1968)

Screenplay: Ladislav Fuks and Juraj Herz, based on a book of the same name. Director of photography: Stanislav Milota. Music: Zdeněk Liška Set designer: Zbyněk Hloch. Cast: Rudolf Hrušínský (Kopfrkingl), Vlasta Charmostová (Lakmé), Jana Stehnová (Zina), Miloš Vognič (Mili), Ilja Prachař (Reinke), Vladimír Menšík, Jiří Menzel. 95 min.

The masterpiece of Gothic director Juraj Herz is a black horror comedy, inspired by a novel of Ladislav Fuks. The great Czech actor Rudolf Hrušínský shines as Kopfrkingl, a crematorium operator who becomes unhinged by ambition, the corrupting influence of National Socialist ideology, and a delusional vision of a better future through more efficient crematoria.

„I heard about a book with an interesting title, *Spalovač mrtvol*, written by Ladislav Fuks. So I read it and I was actually disappointed. But I arranged a meeting with Fuks anyway, and we worked on the script for about two years. During shooting, it became clear that this was a unique chance which wouldn't come again. It was in 1968, and I had absolute liberty in my work. I could film whatever I wanted to. In *Spalovač mrtvol*, I was fascinated by the humor. I went to various projections of the film in many different countries, from the Netherlands to Naples, and I was keen to see how the reactions of the audience were completely different in every country. In Prague, people were depressed; in Slovakia, they laughed; in the Netherlands, it was a comedy from the beginning to the end; in Italy, the spectators went from the cinema right to the bar because cremation is just impossible, awful and unacceptable in their country. When I was working on *Spalovač* I knew that it was the right way, it is my feel for humor, my feel for something that could be called a horror humor, even if I don't take *Spalovač* as a pure horror film: I think it is more a psychological thriller or psychological horror.“

Juraj Herz, interview (Ivana Košuličová: “Drowning the bad times”, *Kinoeye*, Vol 2, Issue 1, 7 January 2002: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/01/kosulicova01.php>).

Assigned reading:

Hames, Peter. *The Czechoslovak New Wave*. “Juraj Herz.”