

## JURAJ HERZ

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The work of Juraj Herz has never attracted the attention it deserves. Despite his involvement with *Pearls of the Deep*, he remained on the periphery of the main developments. This was why Liehm excluded him from his almost encyclopedic series of interviews and is to some extent borne out by Herz's own views:

*I cannot say that I have the sense of belonging to the Wave. I rather feel that I am at one with certain individuals—with Jireš, or Schorm, but not with the Wave.<sup>1</sup>*

It is interesting that he should refer to two of the New Wave's more conscious craftsmen since, despite their ordered framework, his own films sometimes hover on the verge of a Jakubisko-like excess.

Although a Slovak, Herz's films have been almost exclusively Czech. He came to cinema via a training in drama and work as a director for the Semafor theater. Like Manzel, he appeared in the Semafor-inspired *If a thousand clarinets...* (1964). He worked as an assistant to Kadár and Klos and was assistant rector on Brynych's *Transport from Paradise* before working on one of the episodes for *Pearls of the Deep*. He made two feature films in the late sixties, *The Sign of Cancer* (*Znamení Raka*, 1967) and *The Lame Devil* (*Kulhavý ďábel*, 1968), the first a psychological detective story, the second a musical burlesque. According to Škvorecký, *The Sign of Cancer* was a socially critical work that attacked antiintellectualism while Liehm<sup>2</sup> regarded it as one of a select group of films that entertained as well as informed.<sup>3</sup>

It was probably Herz's existence "on the periphery" that enabled him to continue work in the postinvasion years without making naive propaganda or, like Kachyňa, settling for children's films. His most important film, *The Cremator* (*Spalovač mrtvol*, 1969), was the most successful "art" film of the postinvasion year, and it is difficult to imagine that its atmosphere of pessimism and decadence met the approval of the authorities. Herz was involved in the brief flowering of original films for Slovak television that began with Stanislav Barabáš's version of Dostoyevsky's *A Gentle tature* (*Nežná*, 1967) and continued with his own adaptation of Maupassant's *Mouche*, *Sweet Games of Last Summer* (*Sladké hry minulého léta*, 1969). His next two

films, *Oil Lamps* (*Petrolejové lampy*, 1971) and *Morgiana* (1972), were adapted from novels by Jaroslav Havlíček and Alexander Grin, respectively. He obviously chose the well-known Eastern European expedient of the time machine, making films set in the past and based on established literary works. However, he maintained an individual approach and chose subjects that provided a scarcely optimistic view of human nature. All three films became the subject of contention and conflicting attitudes despite winning international awards. His collaboration with Jaroslav Kučera on *Morgiana* has been described as the last film of the New Wave. Had it not been for the Soviet director Sergei Gerasimov's timely observation that it was the best film yet made of Grin's work, it would certainly have run into major trouble. Both *Oil Lamps* and *Morgiana* provided scope for a continuation of some of the "grotesque" and "decadent" preoccupations of *The Cremator*.

Herz worked for a year with the novelist Ladislav Fuks on the screen adaptation of his novel *The Cremator*. Like Lustig and Grosman, Fuks lived his youth during the Nazi occupation and was preoccupied with the wartime situation and the Jewish theme. He made his reputation with his first novel, *Mr. Theodore Mundstock* (Pan Theodor Mundstock) which was published in 1963 and issued in an American translation in 1968.

*The Cremator* is set before and after Munich and is concerned with the rise to power of an insane worker in a crematorium, whose incinerators will soon be put to use by the occupying power. His mental deterioration is linked to the rise of Nazism, and there is a conscious emphasis on the bourgeois respectability of his family life. The film is a criticism of collaboration. Karl Kopfrkingl becomes a willing tool of the occupying force while his wife and son acquiesce in their own ritual murder. The linking of the story with the Jewish theme suggests that the message of the film might well be linked to that of Brynych's *Transport from Paradise* – "never again like sheep." On the other hand, it can also be interpreted on a more general level as a criticism of the Czech tradition of survival at any cost. The film's constant overstatement — extreme close-ups, liberal use of the fish-eye lens, its deft use of black comedy, and the insidious relish of Rudolf Hrušínský's performance—makes *The Cremator* a uniquely disturbing experience.

The precredit and credit sequences together create a mood of nightmare. There are exaggerated close-ups of parts of animals – a leopard, a python, a rhinoceros, and an elephant. As Karl talks in a melodious and obsequious way, the image of a snake is intercut with his comments. The images are justified by a visit to the zoo – at the end, Karl and his family are arranged in a respectable "album" grouping but distorted within the shape of an oval mirror. The credit sequence itself is a montage of hands, portions of bodies and faces sinking into an infernal holocaust, accompanied by a ghostly female voice that Zdeněk Liška uses as a major musical leitmotif.

The first scene provides an incongruous contrast as piano and violin play at a reception, and the atmosphere of a prewar tea room is evoked. Karl has leaflets

<sup>1</sup> Juraj Herz, quoted in Škvorecký, *All the Bright*, p. 214.

<sup>2</sup> Liehm, *Closely Watched Films*, p. 322.

<sup>3</sup> The others were Forman's films and Ladislav Rychman's musical, *The Hop Pickers* (*Starci na chmelu*, 1964).

distributed which urge people to save up for their cremation. He gives a lecture on "the good humanitarian state" and quotes from the *Tibetan Book of the Death*. The sooner man returns to dust, he argues, the sooner he can be freed from the inhibitions of life and be reincarnated. Evil and suffering must be destroyed: incinerator will dispose of a human body in seventy-five minutes.

Karl's campaign is closely paralleled by that of the Nazi engineer Reinke, an honored guest at the reception. Over dinner, he points out what Hitler has achieved for the benefit of Austria. He too has his leaflets, but this time they extol the virtues of National Socialism. He points out that there must be at least a drop of German blood in Karl's veins and that a sensitive man would be aware of that fact. Karl decides that his son, Mili, should perhaps learn more German. However, he is perturbed by the political turn in the conversation – he had rather wanted to tell Reinke about the freak born with two heads, four arms, and four legs.

The alliance between the two men is progressive and inevitable, Reinke exploiting both Karl's madness and the hypocrisy of his bourgeois beliefs. On his second visit to Karl, for Christmas dinner, he points out in confidence some of the advantages of joining the Nazi party. In particular, he mentions membership in the casino, where wives are not allowed and only blonde girls are to be found. For the first time Karl's wife, Lakmé, shows independence from her husband by refusing to join in a toast to the great German nation.

Karl soon goes to his family doctor, Dr. Bettelheim, to ascertain whether his blood is Czech or German. At the casino, he begins to denounce his friends and acquaintances: "We have enemies – even in the crematorium." These include not merely a woman who has rejected his advances but, more especially, the director, who once said he'd like to incinerate all Germans. His denunciations also take an oblique form. His friend, Strauss, and Dr. Bettelheim are good men but "do not understand." As for his nephew, Jan, he is only a boy, but he does encourage Mili to go wandering (earlier he had praised Jan for the reverse).

The arrest of Karl's colleagues coincides with the physical arrival of the Germans and the raising of Karl's hand in a proud Nazi salute. While his first denunciations have been partially related to the furtherance of his career, there is no end to the demands that will be made of him or the film's progressive nightmare. When Reinke discovers that Lakmé is half-Jewish, Karl obliges with her murder, that of his son, and the attempted murder of his daughter. At the end of the film, he is escorted to a waiting car by Nazis, who hold an umbrella over his head. Now, he says, he can save the nation, humanity, and the whole world. As the rain pours down, a vision of the Tibetan capital of Lhasa appears behind the windshield wipers of the car.

The film is permeated by a sense of insanity. In selecting a madman as their hero, Herz and Fuks are able to generate an additional horror that provides a fresh response to the familiar and mundane qualities of Nazi logic and the collaborationist ethic. At the beginning of the film, Karl may be obnoxious and slightly mad, but his initial steps toward the Nazis are based on a perfect awareness that they are the future

overlords and that he is in a position to advance his career. A few friends and acquaintances may be sacrificed without too much effort, but whatever his limitations as the model paterfamilias he imagines himself to be, the liquidation of his own family must lead to total insanity.

*The Cremator* is a film of excess, and there is nothing in its major scenes designed to underplay or lighten the horror of the central theme. The deliberate use of comedy and the exaggerated horrors depicted provoke a response that is often a mixture of laughter and nausea. The disjunction between words and action is a characteristic shared with the theater of the absurd, but there is nothing purgative about the humor.

Karl's love of music is demonstrated during the opening reception where the mood is predominantly comic and he says that people should like music (quoting German examples). He asks Mr. Strauss, whom he later denounces, if he is related to Richard Strauss. During a guided tour of the crematorium, which resembles an oriental temple, Karl introduces a new employee, Mr. Dvořák, to the wonders of the establishment. Dvořák is played by Jiří Menzel in the rather absent-minded style of Arnoštěk, reacting in comic manner to the horrors revealed. Karl shows him the gas ovens, coffins, an iron bar that may come in useful (to kill his son, Mili), and the corpse of Miss Strunná whose skin is "wonderfully pink." In an automatic movement, he runs his comb through her hair, setting it attractively, and then combs his own. The sequence ends with the small figures of Karl and Dvořák framed and dwarfed by a huge battery of funeral urns. Karl has already asked Dvořák if he likes music. In a later scene, he is asked to play Dvořák's *Largo* as a coffin is pushed into the furnace by the equivalent of a devilish stoker from Hieronymus Bosch. In a domestic scene, Karl suggests that they should play Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* (*Songs for Dead Children*), or perhaps, something more cheerful like Saint-Saens's *Danse Macabre*.

The hypocrisy of Karl's attitudes is brought out in three linked sections set at a fair, in a brothel, and in his "model household." Like most fathers, Karl occasionally takes his family to zoos and fairs. Their faces light up with unaccustomed pleasure as they listen to the fairground organ, watch the merry-go-round, and see the acrobats. However, he has other "entertainments" in store. First there are the wax-works, a chamber of horrors that includes a bathroom (he will murder his wife in a bathroom) and a murderer who used a crowbar (another reference to the murder of his son). Then there is the exhibition of freaks, of the effects of syphilis and gonorrhoea. But, he observes: "Modern medical science can protect us" – a cue for a cut to Dr. Bettelheim's practice where Karl acquires just such protection lest he be infected by his work. ("You know, I touch no woman but my own angel.")

In two directly linked sections, Karl's visit to a brothel and his home life are contrasted. The depiction of the brothel is particularly sordid, emphasizing the mechanical nature of the sex on offer. It opens with a panning shot of deglamorized whores, singling out a thin and demented-looking blonde. Karl is unable to have his favorite woman and is issued a towel at the foot of the stairs leading to the girls'

rooms. Later, a prostitute squats to wash herself as Karl takes off his trousers. He observes that it's a good thing Mr. Dvořák isn't smoking so much and screws up his shirt as an unseen but presumably oral sex act is performed. Throughout the episode, the obscenity is emphasized by constant reference to a carefully wrapped gift he has bought for his daughter, which must on no account be crushed.

When the scene shifts to his home, he is again shown in his shirt and socks commenting on Dvořák's smoking habits. He presents Zina with her present and announces to the air and as if in communion with another world: "We have a beautiful and blessed house." The juxtaposition of his "model" family life with obscene sex is brought to a conclusion in a later scene at the casino as Reinke talks to him and Karl struggles to watch the chief Nazi collaborator being fellated by a prostitute under the table. It is then that he learns that he must show his loyalty by murdering his wife.

This procession of scenes based on Karl's sexual habits provides a good example of the way in which events and episodes consistently interrelate, contributing to the irresistible drive toward a horrific climax. A political dimension is always present. The three major scenes at the crematorium are specifically linked to political developments – successively Munich, the threat of the German army on the border (someone comments: "We live in a civilized world. Why should they occupy us?"), and the physical presence of the Nazis.

Karl's future attacks on the three members of his family are meticulously prepared for through the references to the iron bar, the bathroom, and the "joke" that he should hang up his wife as part of the Christmas decorations. The care that he lavishes on his sickly-looking son, Mili, wiping his glasses and combing his hair in the precise manner he reserves for corpses, reveals the narrow line that divides Mili from life or death. Each of the attacks is presented with maximum horror, accompanied by Karl's reptilian unctuousness, his hypnotic and meaningless monologues. His concern for order is particularly nauseating as he ties his wife's shoelace after hanging her and hoses away his son's Wood at the crematorium.

*The Cremator* was clearly conceived and made with a great deal of freedom, and there are few concessions to the conventions of either "popular" or "art cinema" taste. It is an imaginative, illusionist, aesthetically well-structured work, which, nevertheless, forces the audience to reflect on what it has seen. While it forces reflection, its power also derives from its hypnotic effect—its imagery, the monotonous sound of Karl's voice, the attraction of the calling female voice on the soundtrack. It is this duality of attraction and repulsion that makes the film unique.

I have described the film as a comedy, and, as in the case of the repeated appearances of an arguing couple, the humor is sometimes conventional. However, since they appear even in the sequences leading to the assaults on his children, the progressive incongruity becomes part of the film's overall nightmare. The dialogue is frequently witty because of the inappropriateness of the comment or its plain

stupidity, but it is difficult to laugh outright when faced by a huge close-up of Karl or the implications that lie behind the words.

The film's one concession to art house cliché is the stylized and continued presence of Death, who takes the form of a beautiful brunette. This kind of device has been used by directors as diverse as Cocteau and Don Levy and has its counterpart in Fellini's "innocence" figures and Jirě's flower girl in *Valerie and Her Week of Wonders*. However, considering the film's addiction to excess, it is a curiously understated symbol. She merely appears, unexplained, at regular intervals (the crematorium, the brothel, the boxing match, the crematorium again, Lakmé's funeral service, the conclusion). She fades into the background and provides the same latent attraction as the musical leitmotif.

Herz's next film was made in his native Slovakia for Slovak television. *Sweet Games of Last Summer* (1969) was adapted from Maupassant's *Mouche* and won a prize at the Monte Carlo television festival. Despite its luminous color photography (Dodo Šimončič) and loving re-creation of turn-of-the-century atmosphere, it betrays the limitations of its television origins. Its brisk pace and overemphatic musical score are foregrounded at the expense of a theme that would have benefited from more restrained and reflective treatment.

The heroine, Ria (Jana Plichtová), Maupassant's *Mouche*, is a poor laundress excluded from the social life of her lover, Rothschild (František Velecký). The romance is waning when Rothschild's friends meet her for the first time and find themselves entranced by her sexuality. Unlike Maupassant's heroine, Ria remains faithful to her lover but leads each of the five friends to believe that she has slept with the others. At the end of the film, after a miscarriage, the men offer to make her another child. The twist in the film, however short-lived, is in moving from a situation in which women are used in a male-dominated society to a kind of matriarchy in which the woman holds sway over five potential lovers. Also of note is the offbeat sensuality of Jana Plichtová with her red hair, gray eyes, and freckled white skin, which is very far from that of the conventional beauty.

The sexual theme is continued in *Oil Lamps* (1971). The story of an unconsummated marriage and a man dying of syphilis are not, one would have thought, the ingredients around which to build a romantic love story – but that is what Herz has achieved. Havlíček's novel, written in 1935, was scarcely a model of Socialist Realism. Škvorecký suggests that "other-isms, like psychologism, naturalism, and a predilection for decadent themes, all of them pejorative in the socialist realist vocabulary, are better applicable to his work."<sup>4</sup>

In adapting the novel, Herz produced his most conventional and aesthetically balanced work. It draws great strength from a use of traditional romantic narrative, but the physical sickness at the heart of the tragedy is explicitly linked to social and moral corruption. The film's main achievement lies in the juxtaposition of

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<sup>4</sup> Škvorecký, *All the Bright*, p. 214.

this unpleasant reality with the formal aesthetic beauties of the great romance. Herz was working for the second time with Dodo Šimončič, and the very lush qualities of the surface color seem to hint at concealed decadence.

The opening scene is set in a theater on New Year's Eve, 1899. A man in evening dress sporting a silver sash marked "1900" welcomes the new century. He speaks optimistically of the world being a better and happier place in fifty years. There is an extended dance sequence, fireworks in the park, and the film's heroine, Štěpa (Iva Janžurová), joins in the mood of optimism and hope.

Štěpa's love life is frustrated by the restricted middle-class views of her parents, who refuse to let her marry a social inferior. A "liberated" young lady who drinks beer and dresses "outrageously" (in orange), she offends against the proprieties demanded by her most suitable escort. It is in this confined situation that her interest revives in her cousin and former childhood sweetheart, Pavel (Petr Čepek), now an officer in the Austrian army and the natural focus of the town's female attention.

Pavel's father is in financial difficulties, and the family farm is run by his elder brother. Pavel himself spends his time on gambling, drinking, and women. Gradually, it is revealed that he is suffering from syphilis and that this is the real reason for his failure to return to the army. He eventually accepts his family responsibilities by agreeing to marry Štěpa in an attempt to get them out of their troubles.

Štěpa's hopes for romantic fulfillment, a happy family, and her radiant optimism are brilliantly portrayed in Iva Janžurová touching performance. Her subjectivity is sufficient to protect her from the incoherent suspicions already voiced in the community and the innuendo of Pavel's own comments. Although her parents originally oppose the match, the romance proceeds. The Sunday promenade with Pavel resplendent in his blue uniform and the marriage ceremony that soon follows are colorful, romantic occasions, but Pavel's straight, emotionless face is in direct contrast to Štěpa's open happiness.

Her sexual needs are stressed early in the film when she visits her uncle's farm. At night, she discovers Pavel making love to the servant, Magda, (Jana Plichtová). The sounds of lust are magnified as she peers eagerly through cracks in the wall. Pavel is thrust obscenely between the girl's spread legs as she bites his hand. Štěpa gasps, they stop, and she runs off. She therefore has no illusions about Pavel's past or his sexual prowess.

There is a similar scene on her wedding night after Pavel has refused to make love to her and feigned sleep while she talked of the future and homemaking. She leaves the room and again hears the sound of movement in the outer buildings. This time it is the elder brother who pursues Magda and beats her up for sleeping with Pavel. The scene works as a physical complement to the destruction of Štěpa's own sexual hopes.

The scenes with Magda emphasize the callous way in which she is treated by the brothers. While Pavel's willingness to fulfill himself with the servant increases

Štěpa's frustration, Magda is no more than an object to be used. Aware of his condition, Pavel is quite happy to infect her, but his fundamental respect, perhaps a developing love, for Štěpa leads him to his life of subterfuge. Later in the film, Magda's death forms part of the film's escalating horror. When Štěpa asks what has happened, she is told: "Nothing – she just died," which is a fair comment on the significance accorded her life.

Apart from a morning of false optimism that follows the wedding, the film provides an unrelenting record of Pavel's physical and mental deterioration. Štěpa increasingly takes on the responsibilities of running the farm while remaining unaware of the real nature of his illness. He invites a friend to visit them in a misconceived attempt to get Štěpa pregnant with the child he cannot provide himself. Later, as his condition gets worse, it is linked to his destructive use of a shotgun. An idyllic winter scene in which two children play with a hare in the snow is shattered by Pavel's abrupt killing of the animal. In other scenes, he sits at his window and shoots birds in a pointless and indiscriminate carnage. After suffering progressive hallucinations, his condition deteriorates further, and he is found sitting in the corner of his room shredding and eating his pyjamas. Finally, when Štěpa visits him in the institution to which he is confined, she finds him completely disintegrated and foaming at the mouth.

In a tragic but rather too obviously calculated denouement, Štěpa strikes up a relationship with a little girl accompanied by a nun. Unknown to her, the child is Pavel's daughter. The nun and the girl travel back to the farm ahead of Štěpa, but the father and Pavel's brother want nothing to do with his offspring. Štěpa passes them again and the girl runs toward her, only to be called back by the nun. During her absence, the father has suggested to his son that he should marry Štěpa in order to hang on to the property. The film ends as the farm gate closes behind her, locking her into the sordid economic situation that led to her tragedy.

There is little point in searching for hidden or "coded" messages in *Oil Lamps* since it gives every sign of being a straightforward adaptation from its source. The wonder is that such a moving but pessimistic story could be filmed at all. Herz and Šimončič again produced a film rich in atmosphere, turning to good advantage the Sunday walks, the parasols, and the bright blue of Pavel's Austrian uniform. Beneath the decorative "art nouveau" surfaces lies the reality – of syphilis (the other side of the soldier's "heroic" image), of marriage contracted for financial reasons, of the brutality of class relations. As a portrait of its time, it would seem to be acceptable in socialist realist terms while lacking a "positive" outlook. In fact, more than anything, it is a film about the death of hope. The short-term answer to the welcoming of the twentieth century at the film's opening is a resounding negative in which the demands of politics (the Austrian army) and economics thwart the possibility of relations between individuals.

*Morgiana* (1912) is a very different kind of work. This time, Iva Janžurová takes on the difficult dual role of the bad sister and the good sister, the first devoting

herself to the attempted murder of the second by use of a slow poison. She wears heavily stylized make-up to convey Viktoria as the embodiment of evil and Klára as an innocent and beautiful young girl. For the part of Viktoria, she wears a jet black wig, with the face underneath a white mask split by a gash of lipstick. The double performance clearly indicates that both sisters may be seen as part of the same personality, but any sense that we may be about to enter the world of Brecht's *Seven Deadly Sins* or Bergman's *Persona* is soon put to flight. The film develops as a gothic melodrama full of exaggeration, implausible plot development, and not a little homage to Alfred Hitchcock.

The film is based on *Jessie and Morgiana* by the Russian novelist Alexander Grin, where the action is depicted through the eyes of the cat, Morgiana. A protégé of Gorky, Grin was a prolific writer of fantastic tales, often set in the imaginary country of "Grinland," and was influenced by the work of Edgar Allan Poe. In 1950, eighteen years after his death, he was denounced as an "arch-cosmopolitan," but his work again became influential in the Soviet Union after the death of Stalin. As mentioned earlier, Gerasimov found Herz's adaptation particularly close to the spirit of Grin's work. In view of the ambivalent official attitudes, it is scarcely surprising that Herz's film should be seen as cutting directly across the official policies of the early seventies.

The opening scenes of the film are fast and fragmented, thrusting the audience into a distorted atmosphere from the first shot. A precredit sequence is set at a funeral where the two sisters appear in black, one (Klára) attractive under her veil, the other's face lost in darkness. As with *The Cremator* and *Oil Lamps*, the credits are particularly evocative – the red lips and eye motifs linking the subject to Freudian symbols and a chess board foretelling Viktoria's methodic campaign. A match strikes, and four repeated images of Klára are reflected in a mirror. Viktoria's envy of Klára's youth and good looks is revealed as she both chides her and caresses her face. This is followed by the first scene in which the action is seen through the eyes of Morgiana, Viktoria's Siamese cat. The camera approaches from floor level, producing a strange, distorted, and distanced view of the action.

The narrative development of *Morgiana* has much in common with both *The Cremator* and *Oil Lamps*, the use of slow poison on Klára paralleling Kaif's increasing insanity and Pavel's physical and mental degeneration. However, unlike the earlier films, *Morgiana* cheats outrageously to provide its happy ending. The woman who sold Viktoria the poison attempts to blackmail her and is very convincingly pushed over a cliff into the sea, the length of the fall emphasized in long shot. Miraculously, she survives to produce a final revelation after the death of Viktoria—she had supplied a concoction that would only appear to poison people.

However, the film is presented as if the poison were real, striking at audience sympathies in the most direct way. Not only is it tested on a red setter, but a child is suspected of having drunk it (as does Morgiana). For the poisoning of Klára, Herz draws directly on the methods developed by Hitchcock in *Suspicion*, complete

with extreme close-ups of poisoned glasses and bowls. Her deterioration is indicated by the progressive use of glaring oranges and reds. It culminates in hallucinations that give Kucera the chance to use some of the color techniques developed for *Daisies*.

At the end of the film, Viktoria attempts a fake suicide, stage-managed to provoke an intervention by the maid. However, Morgiana enters through a window, causing a draft that blows the door shut just as Viktoria hangs herself. The cat's action results in a real suicide. Klára recovers, and the film ends at Viktoria's grave in a snow-covered cemetery. There is a frozen close-up of Morgiana.

The speed and attack of *Morgiana* recall the hectic pace of Herz's adaptation of Maupassant, and the film lacks the careful elaboration of a Hitchcock or Chabrol. The Herz is capable of this graduated approach is apparent from *Oil Lamps*. In the final analysis, *Morgiana* is an exercise in style for its own sake that deliberately heightens the absurdity of its melodramatic plot. Inevitably, it is the evil sister whose story is interesting while the beautiful Klára often appears vacuous and stupid. Despite an avant-garde gloss, *Morgiana* is a piece of pure gothic entertainment with which the entire team seems to have had enormous fun.

Herz's personal and "decadent" work was something quite out of place in the post-1968 history of Czechoslovak cinema and was to provide one of the few points of interest in competition at international festivals. *Morgiana* won the Golden Hugo at Chicago in 1973, and, as *Variety* characteristically put it, it was "a novel offbeat fantasy that shores up the more lackluster general Czech film pictures these days."<sup>5</sup> Those who like to seek for deeper motivation may well wonder why a director would choose themes of self-destruction through collaboration, syphilitic deterioration linked to militarism, and the poisoning of the good by the bad. Any "auteurist" interpretation would be forced to the conclusion that this is a very black interpretation of the human condition.

In: Hames, Peter. *The Czechoslovak New Wave*. University of California Press, Berkeley, 1985, pp. 245-255.

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<sup>5</sup> Gene Moskowitz, „Morgiana“, *Variety*, 9 August 1972, p. 20.