

Juraj Herz, The Cremator (1968)

Juraj Herz's film, based on the novel by the Czech writer Ladislav Fuchs, raises serious questions about identity, manipulation and guilt. The main character of the Cremator, Mr. Karl Kopfrkingl, manager of a Crematorium in Prague in Czechoslovakia in the late 1930s and early 1940s, when the interwar democratic Czechoslovak Republic is overwhelmed by extreme right wing populist policies (note the worrying parallels with today!) prides himself on being a model father of a "decent" middle-class family.

But what happens then?

The novel and the film is a study of what happens to a potentially unbalanced individual at a time when he/she lives in a society without any firm moral and civilisational values. The work is also an accusation of totalitarian regimes which rely for their existence on pathological characters, or on potentially pathological characters which can be driven to absolute pathology.

The film is a tour de force performance of Czech actor Rudolf Hrušínský, who plays Karl Kopfrkingl brilliantly.