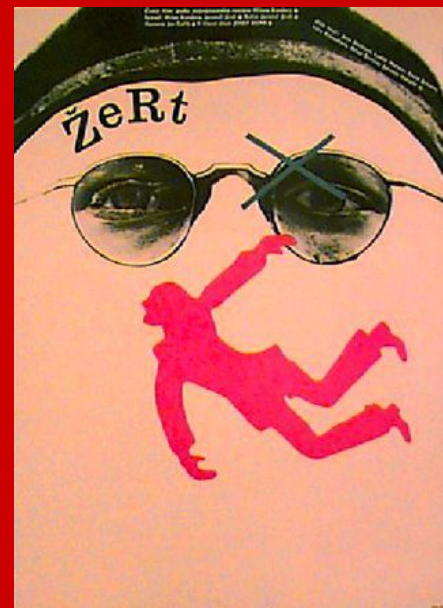
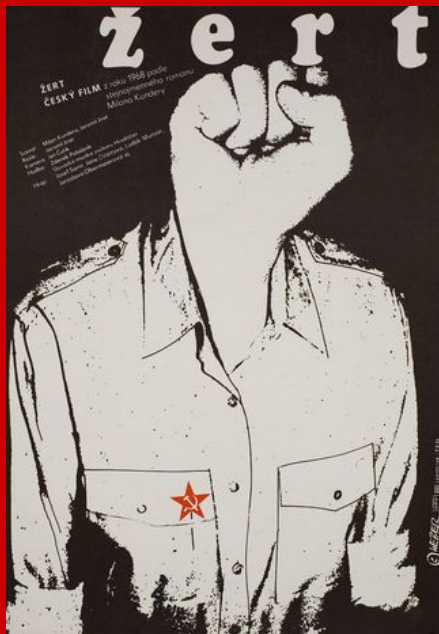

Žert (The Joke, 1969)



Louise Irving

—

Q: How does this film comment on the extent to which people are willing to be corrupted for career reasons/personal gain?

[The Joke is] “a politically pointed character study” - Arun Kumar

“[...] the cruellest joke of all is played on every one of the ... four characters by History, as the utopias they seek – political, spiritual – lead not to paradise but to purgatory.” - Brian Kenety

Ludvík



- How far is he ultimately willing to go to enact revenge?
- Cynicism renders his allegiances hollow
- He is more preoccupied with his own revenge plans than any actual political ideologies.
- Attempt to weaponise sex posits heavy narrative irony .



Pavel

- Past devotion to the Party has dissipated – got comfortable enough to pursue his musical ambitions, free from politics.
- Highlights the period as a time of ‘moral compromise, passivity if not apathy, and escapism’. Acceptance and/or belief in the regime, gives way to an easier life, with a ‘higher standard of living’.
- Married for Party loyalty
- His betrayal is punished narratively anyway since he is miserable, rendering Ludvík’s mission pointless

Helena



- 'Easy target' for Ludvik – vocal about her frustration and loneliness
- Exists to be unwittingly taken advantage of by Ludvík, has genuine feelings for him.
- Evocation of sympathy as an 'innocent'
- Helena as both a stand-in Markéta and her foil

Marketa



- “Naïve, joyful, severe”
- Unwavering dedication to Marxist doctrine vs Ludvík's lust for her
- Marketa's blind obedience to the Party is not directly punished
- Her loyalty was conditional on the long-range prospect that he would eventually convert over to doctrinaire Marxism. No hope = No chance for Ludvík

To summarise:

***The Joke*, viewed through an entirely political lens, is 'a film about the futility of revenge', but through the characters we are given an analysis of Czechoslovak people's attitudes and commentary on why corruption will never end well.**

Thank you for listening!

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