

I chose to make a presentation on *The Shop on the Main Street* because it was a movie I had already seen and loved. I saw it in the Bubny Memorial of Silence, outside, with a live music. It was an experience but to be honest, the video, the sound and the live music didn't always work the best together. The Bubny station also isn't the most quiet place so I knew I'll have to watch the movie again.

Ladislav Grosman himself had written the screenplay so the movie is almost identical to the book. I would say, this is one of the examples when the movie is better than the book. The story itself is a strong one, but in the movie we feel it more and strangely enough we have more time to connect with the characters. I would say that if you are a quick reader, reading the book would take you around two hours which is almost the same time as the length of the movie. In this similar amount of time in the movie you see the characters even when they're not speaking so you literally see more of them. It sounds obvious but generally when I hear people comparing movie adaptations they complain about the lack of character's depth in comparison to the book.

The biggest difference between the two works is the language. Grosman chose to write the book in Czech even though he was Slovakian and the story takes place in Slovakia. In the movie the characters speak in a dialect of Slovak language, Rozálie Lautmanová switches between this dialect, Slovak heavily influenced by Polish and Yiddish. This gives the movie extra layer of authenticity and makes it even more of a testimony of the Second World War in Slovakia.

The story (This text is also in the presentation so if you have read it there, you can skip this paragraph.):

Tono Brtko, joiner, "ordinary man," becomes an "aryanizer" by a document, a piece of paper, given to him by his brother in law and a Hilnka's guard commander Markus Kolkocký. Brtko suddenly becomes an owner of a small haberdashery originally owned by an old Jewish widow Rozálie Lautmanová. The nearly deaf widow doesn't understand her situation and thinks that Tono Brtko is her new assistant. Tono also starts to repair her old furniture, eats delicious soups that Rozálie prepares but outside of the shop he acts like he does his job of being an aryanizer of Lautmanová. Brtko's greedy wife is really happy he's finally a rich man and a shop owner. Brtko has no reason to harm the old lady but he is afraid, he will be labelled as a "White Jew" for helping her. "*A White Jew is worse than a Jew. He isn't one of them, but he's on their side!*" says Kolkocký to Brtko. But then the day of the transport comes. Brtko finds out Lautmanová didn't get the order for transport and decides to save her. But Rozálie doesn't seem to understand her situation and in a really emotional and tense scene Brtko and Lautmanová are both fighting to save their lives since they think the other person is a threat to them. In the end Brtko sees through the window Kolkocký coming to the shop and pushes Lautmanová into a closet and closes quickly the door. But Kolkocký had no intention of entering the shop. When he walks away Brtko opens the closet door and finds out he had accidentally killed Rozálie. Horrified Brtko sees a hook in the ceiling and hangs himself.

This movie is often referred to as a tragi-comedy. I can't agree with this statement. For me, there is nothing funny in the movie. What might be seen as funny or comic

could be the relationship between Brtko and his wife Evelína. Evelína acts like an irritating wife and the scene where she tells of Tono for washing his feet inside could be as well in some comedy but in *The Shop on the Mainstreet* it feels raw and true and for me, there is nothing funny in it. Evelína only wants to be rich and she couldn't care less for an old Jewish shop owner, her only interested is her wellbeing and social status. She keeps comparing herself to her wealthy sister who married fascist leader.

This movie's greatness is due to the acting skills of Ida Kamińska (Lautmanová) and Jozef Kroner (Brtko). Seeing a picture of Kamińska holding her Oscar statue was quite a shock for me. In that picture she looks like a lady but in the movie there's no doubt she is a deaf old widow. Her acting feels so natural, no wonder she was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Actress. Kroner's acting is brilliant but sometimes, only sometimes, I could tell, he was acting. I really needed to think hard before I realised what was it in his acting that still in spite of the feeling that he was acting was so breath taking. It was his ability to act in a way, you felt like his character exists not only in the movie, but has some history, has lived through some things and that he eventually really exists. (This is the character's depth I was referring to earlier. The book *Brtko* doesn't exist outside the time we read about him. He is only a character in the book, not in the world preceding the story.)

I must mention the final scene where Brtko and Lautmanová are in the edge of their emotions, they're both fighting to save their lives. Rozálie thinks Brtko wants to hurt her and Brtko knows that he would be killed if he saves Rozálie. This is probably one of the most memorable scenes in the Czech cinematography, at least for me.

This movie sparked a lot of controversy mainly because it shows the "happy" fascist atmosphere that was shared among Slovaks who got their own state, it shows the Hlinka's Guard, the huge memorial on the main street. In this movie it isn't only the Germans who persecute the Jewish people, but Slovaks themselves. In the beginning of the movie there is a caption saying that Slovakia accepted the Nuremberg Laws.

In our seminar we have been talking about the Czechoslovakian new wave, about movies showing young people. I wouldn't say *The Shop on the Main Street* is a classical new wave movie, since it doesn't use modern camera techniques we've seen for example in Jan Němec's *Diamonds of the Night*. But it does have the voyeurism feel especially in the scene when Brtko's in laws come to visit him.

I think, this movie is so unique for many reasons. One must definitely be the fact that the story takes place in a small Slovakian town. Also, it doesn't show the Holocaust we are "used to." There are no concentration camps, no transport's trains, the story starts already in the towns where people have no hesitation to send their neighbours to death. And lastly, it shows a story of an old lady, there are no "beautiful young lads" as in *The Diamonds of the Night*, it is so cruel and naturalistic without showing any blood at all.

It shows, that the cruelty and horror of Holocaust were the common people who overlooked and approved it.