

Jakob the Liar

Book:

Jurek Becker

1969

Film:

Frank Beyer and Jurek Becker

1974

HOLOCAUST IN FILM ADAPTATIONS 2020
JIŘINA MANKOVÁ



Story

Jakob lives in 1944 in a jewish ghetto in Poland.

One day he accidentally hears in a German radio that the Russians are quite close from where the ghetto is.

He wants to tell people, but they do not believe him.

They only believe him, when he says that he **has a radio**.

Story

The gossip that Jakob has a radio and about the Russians being close spreads through the ghetto very quickly.

People want news from the radio, so Jakob keeps making up the war situation.

The film ends with all of the jews beign deported from the ghetto.

Charakters



Mischa



Jakob



Kowalski



Lina

Rosa Professor

Jakob

Before the war, Jakob used to have a café, now he loads and unloads trains at a train station.

There is nothing very special about him, he is a man in his middle age, who one day started a rumour and then couldn't stop it.

Lina

Lina is a little girl whose parents got deported.

Jakob and the professor are taking care of her, at the beginning of the film she is quite ill.



DEFA

Kowalski

Kowalski is Jakobs old friend, he also works at the station.

He represents the people hungry for information about the Russians, throughout the film he wants Jakob to tell new and new stories.

Professor

Professor is a respected member of the community.

He probably is not a doctor, but acts like one.



Mischa & Rosa

Mischa also works at the station.

He is a young man, he has a girlfriend - Rosa, whom he saves from being deported. Rosas parents however do get deported and after that Rosa lives with Mischa.

Mischa is the first person Jakob tell about the Russians, Mischa then spreads the information in the station.

Important motives

- Every time Kowalski asks for new informations, Jakob is quite angry, he doesn't want to keep telling lies.
- He even claims that the radio is broken. Kowalski finds a repair man, Jakob then lies that he repaired the radio himself.
- Lina has never seen a radio, she want Jakob to show it to her. He can't, so she looks for it. She finds a lamp and she stinks it is the radio.
- Rosa's street gets deported, Mischa saves her in time. When she finds out she wants to go after her parents, but Mischa stops her.
- There are people, who are concerned with the rumours, because thay are afraid of what the German would do, if they found out.
- Jakob is remembering the times before the war.

Interesting scenes

- 00:37:21-00:40:20
 - Jakob wants to have some actual news to share, so he goes to use a German toilet, because he saw a soldier go in with newspaper and go out without it.
- 0:52:29-00:53:12
 - Lina and the lamp
- 1:12:0-1:15:18
 - The professor shares his concerns with Jakob
- 1:26.07-1:29.30
 - Jakob confesses to Kowalski that he has been telling lies.

Jurek Becker

- 1937 born in Poland
- Between years 1942 and 1945 was in concentration camps (Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen)
- After the war, his family lived in East Germany
- He studied philosophy and since 1960 he lived in Berlin and wrote screenplays.
- Jakob der Lügner (1969) was his first novel and he even received the Heinrich Mann prize for it.
- In 1974 he co-wrote the screenplay for the movie.
- He died in 1997.

First script

- The inspiration for the novel was a story his father told him from a Polish ghetto about a Jew, who had a radio.
- He first wrote the story as a screenplay in 1963, it was almost filmed, but finally it was cancelled from several reasons.
- The first story ended with the ghetto being saved by the Russians just before the end of the war, which was historically incorrect - no Polish ghetto was saved in this manner.
- Becker then rewrote it as a novel.

Of interest

- The outdoor scenes were shot in a Czechoslovak city Most, because it was under demolition at the time.
- The main actor Václav Brodský, who was Czechoslovak was offered the role also the first time.
- Jakob the liar is the only film of East German origin to be nominated for an Academy Award for the Best Foreign Language.
- The screenplay (and also the book) works with quite some comedy, (Which can be seen in some of the selected scenes.) but it still works with the heavy topic in the serious manner that it deserves.
- The film works very sensitively with music, it uses a solo violin which very well completes the ghetto experience.

There is another adaptation of the book - an American film with Robin Williams from 1999.

