

The Cremator

Anna Lamberova

Date

The book

Ladislav Fuks

- ❖ 24.09.1923 - 19.08.1994, Prague
- ❖ Czech novelist
- ❖ Focused mainly on psychological prose
- ❖ Other significant works: Mr. Theodor Mundstock, The Death of a Hamster, The Mice of Natalia Mooshabr

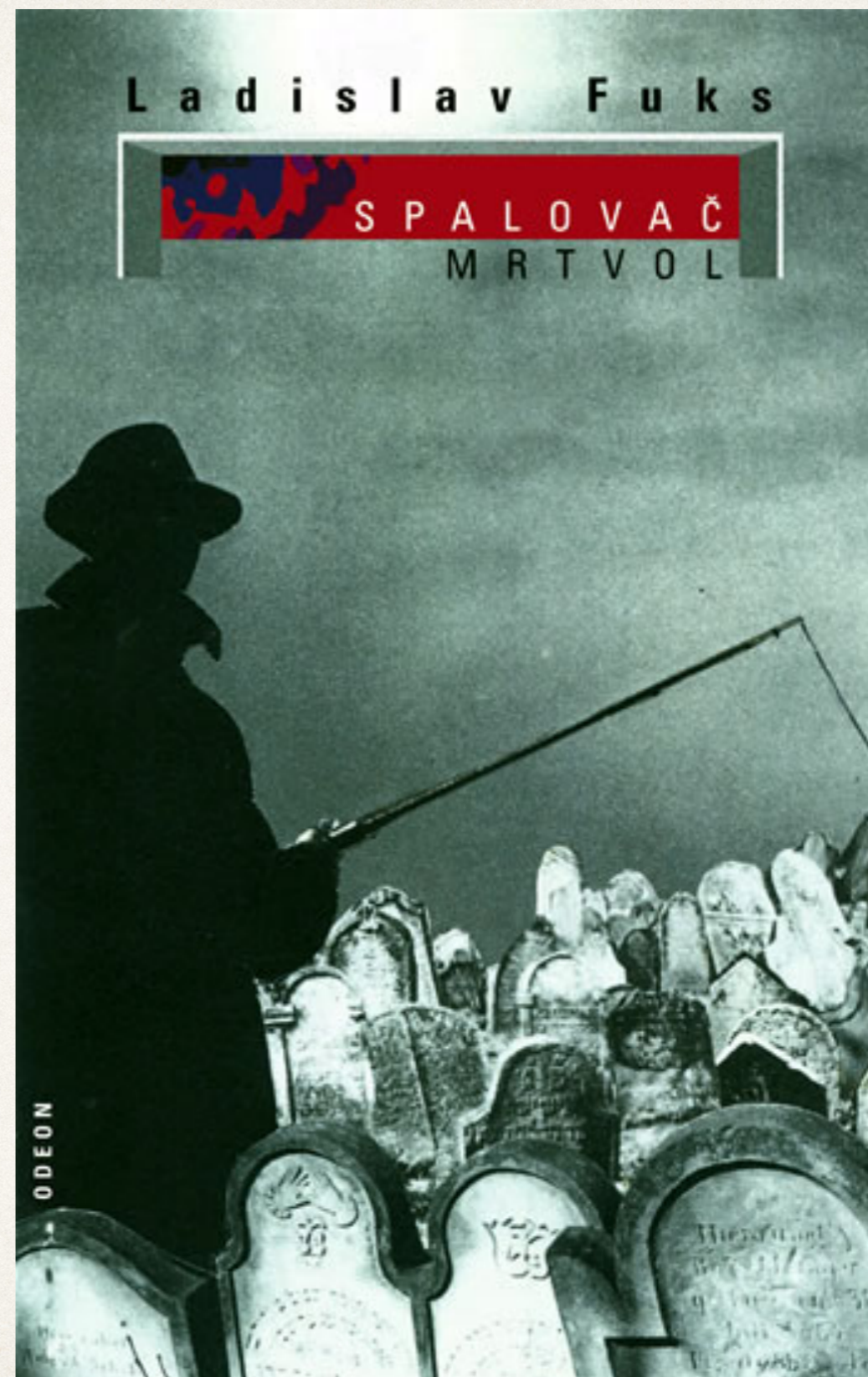


About the author

- ❖ Fuks was not Jewish himself, but he had Jewish friends and classmates and was threatened by their fate under the Nazi regime
- ❖ He was also afraid to be deported to a concentration camp, because he was a homosexual (which was a crime at that time)
- ❖ Because of that he felt a strong connection between him and the Jewish population and could understand their anxiety and desperation, which he later described in his books

About the book

- ❖ 1967
- ❖ Belongs to “the first phase” of Fuchs’s work
- ❖ Grotesque horror, psychological prose



The plot

Prague, the late 30s. The main character of the book is Karel Kopfrkingl, caring husband and father, who works in a crematorium. He is romantic person, who has a great interest in Tibetan philosophy and is also fascinated by death. He believes, that by burning the corpse, he releases that person's soul and it goes straight to heaven. K has a wife Marie (he calls her Lakmé) and two children - Zina and Milivoj. He has Jewish friends and partners and generally thinks, that Jews are nice and good people. His other friend - Reinke, who is German, suddenly becomes fascinated by Hitler's ideology and continuously tells K how they will install the new world order and erase violence and injustice. He also constantly reminds K, that he has a German blood in his veins and that makes him a chosen one. Step by step K falls to that ideology, he starts to spying on his Jewish friends, tell lies about his colleagues in crematorium, so they would be arrested by gestapo and regularly visits Nazi's parties. His friend Reinke opens his eyes to the fact, that his beloved wife is half-Jewish and it's impossible for him to get a higher position in a party with a family like that. Possessed with the thought, that Jews are miserable and also with his lust for power, K kills his wife, but he is persuaded, that he actually saved her from the future suffering. Later he kills his son for the same reason and plans to kill his daughter, but was stopped by a sudden hallucination and taken to a psychiatric hospital. He lives until the end of the war and once he sees the Jews coming back from the camps, he says "I've saved them all".

Motifs

- ❖ Powerlessness and the suffocating atmosphere of pre-war Czechoslovakia
- ❖ The main characters transformation could be seen from two sides: either he is a weak person with psychiatric problems, who is easily persuaded and therefore accepts the greater evil without hesitation or he was an evil character from the start and just got into the right circumstances, which let him fulfill his wishes
- ❖ Fuks actively uses grotesque - all characters speak in unnaturally “noble” style, Kofrkingl keeps seeing the same people in different scenes and says the same words in different situations, Fuks doesn't really describe what's going on outside the Kofrkingl's head

The film



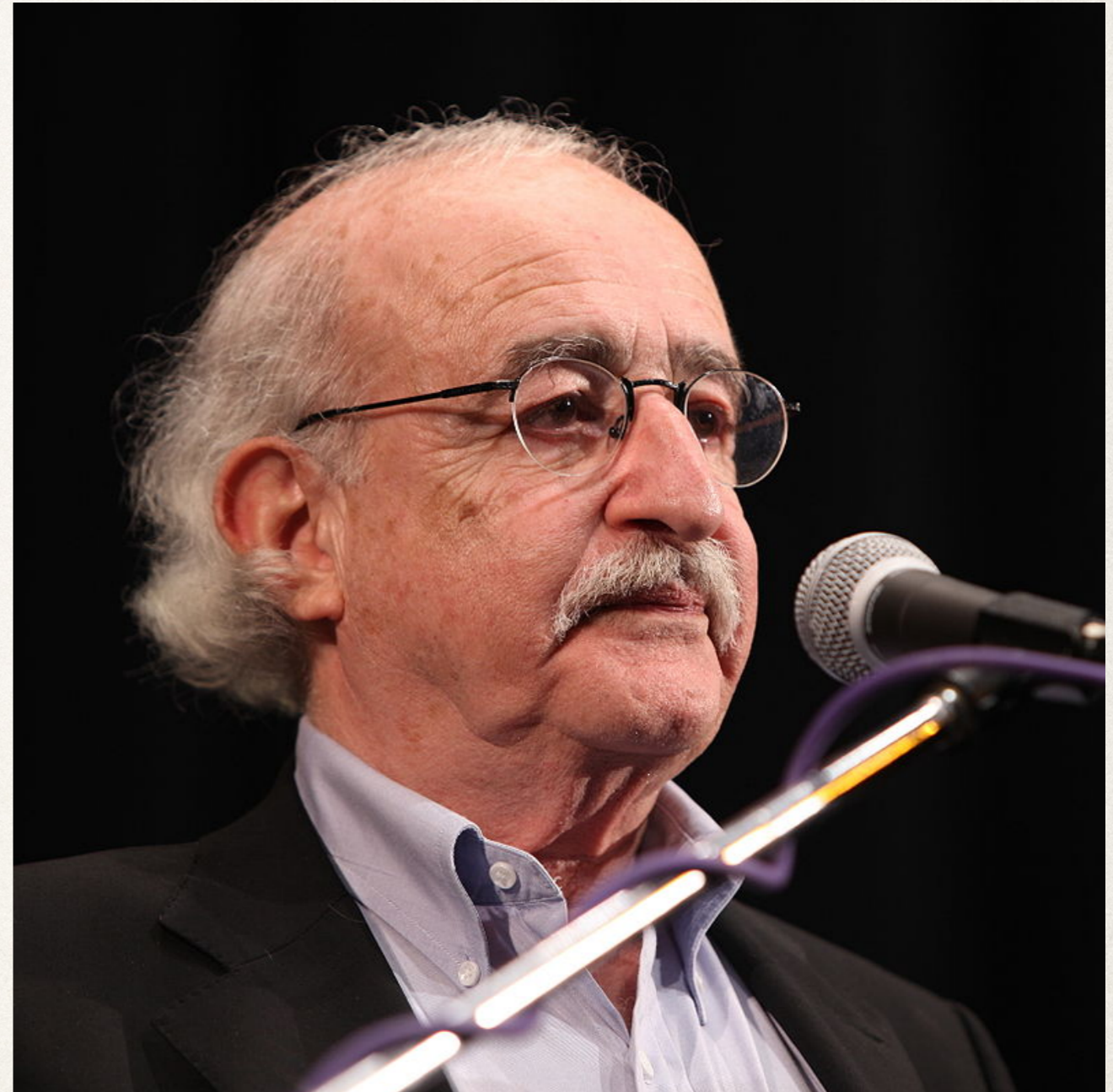
About the film

- ❖ 1968
- ❖ Director: Juraj Herz
- ❖ Script: Ladislav Fuks, Juraj Herz
- ❖ Czech New Wave
- ❖ Was forbidden and put into safe right after the premiere, was shown in cinemas again in 1990



Juraj Herz

- ❖ 1934 - 2018, born in Slovakia
- ❖ Jewish origin
- ❖ Survived the Holocaust with his family
- ❖ Director, script writer and actor
- ❖ Said, that The Cremator was the only film, that he made exactly as he wanted it



Differences between the book and the film

- ❖ There are no major differences between them, maybe because Fuks himself was working on the script
- ❖ The film left out few scenes from the book, for example, the family walk to the lookout tower. At that point of the book Kopfrkingl is already at the Nazi party and he tells his family about the greatness of the Reich
- ❖ Some scenes were added to the film, but were not present in the book. The film shows Kopfrkingl as an unfainful husband, who regularly visits “the massage salon” and his lust also plays part in his affection to the new ideology. Because of his loyalty to the Nazis he gets access to elite brothels and that empowers his decision to get rid of his family
- ❖ The main difference is the ending. In the book Kopfrkingl is taken to a psychiatric hospital and appears again in a short epilogue after the end of the war. In the film he drives away with Nazis to work with them for “a higher purpose”. The director also wanted to add some scenes showing K during the Soviet invasion in 1968, but that didn't happen



Karel Kopfrkingl and their family pet Rosana



The murder of Lakmé



Kopfrkingl and his son



Kopfrkingl's daughter

Thank you for your time!
