



Student Films Based on the Short Stories of Arnošt Lustig at the Beginning of the 1960s

Michal Bauer

Faculty of Arts, University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice, Institute of Czech Studies
bauer@ff.jcu.cz

SYNOPSIS

The study deals with films made at the beginning of the 1960s by Jan Němec and Dušan Klein, then students at the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU), based on short stories by Arnošt Lustig from the books *Démanty noci* (Diamonds of the Night) and *Ulice ztracených bratří* (Street of Lost Brothers) — namely *Sousto*, *Králíček* and *Ďábelská jízda na koloběžce* (Mouthful, Little Guinea Pig and Devilish Ride on a Scooter). These student films represent not only the beginnings of the artistic careers of both directors and a search for the form of their future creative path, but are also a document of the gradual emancipation of artists from the power relations and the search for possibilities of an individual existence within the framework of the totalitarian regime. They attempted to create timeless images of humanity within history, images which have a negative form of fear, anxiety, solitude, pain and loss, but also at the same time the endurance of humanity, which — in accordance with the conception of the writer Arnošt Lustig — is expressed through a specific action and the preservation of hope.

KEYWORDS

Czech 20th century literature; Czech 20th century cinematography; Shoah; art and the totalitarian regime; Arnošt Lustig.

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The year 1960 marked the fifteenth anniversary of the end of the Second World War, which was also manifested in Czechoslovak cultural output,¹ including film. Examples in literature include Karel Šiktanc's *Heinovské noci* (Heine Nights), which was published especially for the occasion of the 'fifteenth anniversary of the liberation of our coun-

1 This relates not only to Czech and Slovak literature, but also to translated works, as documented for example by the prose work *Koronki weneckie* (Venice Lace) by Jarosław Iwaskiewicz, which was published in 1960 in the famous edition *Soudobá světová próza* by the publisher Státní nakladatelství krásné literatury, hudby a umění, Eric Lambert's novel *The Twenty Thousand Thieves*, or the novel *Le Commandant Watrin* by Armand Lanoux (both were published by the Naše vojsko press).



try' and embellished with pictures 'drawn by children from Lidice and the Buštěhrad kindergarten' (Šiktanc 1960, colophon), while Pavel Nauman published the short story 'Životopis kočky' (Biography of a Cat) in the collection *Menší zvířata* (Smaller Animals),² Elena Chmelová wrote the collection of short stories *Zbojnickým krajem* (Through Bandit Territory), which also included prose texts on the theme of the Second World War, the first two volumes of Vladimír Mináč's *Generace* (Generations) trilogy were published in Czech, namely *Dlouhý čas čekání* (The Wait) and *Živí a mrtví* (The Living and the Dead), and Jarmila Otradovicová re-narrated the recollections of those who had taken part in the foreign resistance, above all the pilot Jan Skopal, in the book *Hrdinství je prosté* (Heroism is Simple). Works of a documentary nature include Jaromír Hořec's collection *...i děti šly na smrt* (...Even Children Went to their Deaths), on the fifteenth anniversary of the liberation of Czechoslovakia the first two books of Ludvík Svoboda's book *Z Buzuluku do Prahy* (From Buzuluk to Prague) were published, and for example Ratibor Rudiš compiled the selected literary work *Voják a armáda v krásné literatuře po druhé světové válce* (The Soldier and Army in Literature since the Second World War) etc.

A similar situation existed also in cinematography: in 1960 a number of short and feature-length films³ on the theme of the Second World War based on literary works written both by established authors who were promoted by the regime such as Jan Drda and his *Němá barikáda* (The Silent Barricade, 1946), and by younger writers who were only recently published, such as Arnošt Lustig, whose debut works were published in the late 1950s — *Noc a naděje* (Night and Hope, 1958),⁴ *Démanty noci* (Diamonds of the Night, 1958), *Ulice ztracených bratří* (Street of Lost Brothers, 1959). Here I deliberately name two different authors who focused on the same genre — short stories — though their poetics and approaches are fundamentally different. Of the films made in 1960 that were based on works of literature it is possible to mention for example *Stopy* (Footsteps, employing motifs of Jan Drda's short story 'Vesnická historie' [A Village History] from *Němá barikáda*,⁵ directed by Jaromil Jireš), *Hlídač dynamitu* (The Dynamite Watcher, directed by Zdenek Sirový, based on the same literary source),⁶ *Nenávist* (Hatred, directed by Hynek Bočan according to the short story of

2 Nauman's book emerged from the artistic competition 'on the 15th anniversary of the birth of the People's Democratic Czechoslovak Socialist Republic' (Nauman 1960, p. 6).

3 According to the statistics of Jiří Havelka, short films did not occupy a subordinate position in comparison with feature-length films, e.g. in 1960 a total of 176 of our feature films were exported, and 322 short films (Havelka 1967, p. 94).

4 The collection of short stories *Noc a naděje* was written about by Ludvík Aškenazy as early as at the end of 1957 (in *Naše vojsko*, 20. 11. 1957), and reviews (by František Swidzinský, Svatoslav Svoboda and Milan Suchomel) were published in January and February 1958. At the beginning of his mini-interview with Lustig, Václav Vepřek stated that the book *Noc a naděje* had been published in January 1958 (Vepřek 1958, p. 1). According to Aškenazy, Lustig's book debut was the 'first genuinely artistic testimony about the Terezín ghetto, about the spirit of the age in which it was created, about the eternal variations of human destiny' (Aškenazy 1957, p. 194).

5 The scriptwriters are listed as Jan Hartmann, Pavel Juráček, Vladimír Goldmann and Antonín Máša (*Stopy*, 0:14).

6 In 1960 Zdenek Sirový made a short student film based on his own screenplay on the theme of the Second World War — *Ještě včera to znamenalo smrt* (Only Yesterday it Meant



the same name, also from *Němá barikáda*). These three short films were combined in the form of a film collection of short stories and shown in cinemas under the joint title of *Hlídač dynamitu* (1963). It appears that the selection of Drda's short stories, which were canonical for many during that period, were a matter especially for the older generation, namely for certain pedagogues at the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU): the three aforementioned adaptations were assigned by František Daniel to his 3rd year drama students, who were later joined by 4th year students of camera and direction (Bernard 1982, p. 20). The students themselves had a preference for more recent texts over descriptive literary approaches. This was the case of Jan Němec with his discovery of the figure of Arnošt Lustig and his first short stories published in magazine and book form, which reminded Němec of the work of William Faulkner. This ignited his interest in making the film *Čekání* (The Wait), based on the short story 'Od rána do večera' (From Morning Till Evening, Lustig 1959a); this short story underwent a radical transformation for the book edition entitled 'Záře půlnočního slunce' (Glare of the Midnight Sun; Lustig 1959c, pp. 151–160).⁷ However, the realisation of this film was prohibited by Otakar Vávra, who was then the new head of the department of direction (see Němec 1966, p. 181; Bernard 2014, pp. 33–36; *Když si film o něco začne říkat* 2000, p. 80).

Another example of the filming of a short story by Drda in 1960, this time outside of FAMU, is *Vyšší princip* (A Higher Principle), a feature-length film by Jiří Krejčík. Also from the same year are the films *Práče* (The Slinger), based on the book of the same name by Jan Mareš and directed by Karel Kachyňa, and *Přežil jsem svou smrt* (I Survived My Own Death), directed by Vojtěch Jasný, based on the theme and screenplay by Milan Jariš. Other collaborations also took place at the time, for example between filmmakers and musical composers, documented for example by the short film *Fantasia pro levou ruku a lidské svědomí* (Fantasia for Left Hand and Human Conscience, 1960), a joint work of the director Pavel Hobl, the musical composer Aleš Jermář and the cameraman Jan Špáta, which was awarded at the Cannes Film Festival in 1961 (Festival de Cannes 2021).

Collaboration between film and literature, writers and filmmakers was a mutually rewarding and inspiring experience. Film procedures and techniques were reflected also in Czech (not only) literature from that time, while conversely directors liked to seek material for their films in literature. For example, Jan Němec spoke many times about his inspiration by Franz Kafka and Marek Hlasko, who was also close to certain authors based around the magazine *Květen* (for example Ivan Klíma acknowledged his influence, which resonates also in the first short stories by Milan Kundera), and cre-

Death), capturing a meeting of a boy (Jan Tříška) and a Jewish girl (Jana Hlaváčová) locked in a room, hearing noises from outside and feeling an oppressive sense of fear, which is documented by the final conversation between the two young people that concludes the film: 'I'm so scared Pavel. — When will this all end?' (*Ještě včera to znamenalo smrt*, 6:07–6:29).

7 Another form of this short story can be found in the collection of books entitled 'Od rána do večera' (Lustig 2006, pp. 324–348). In an interview with Martin Šulík and Jan Lukeš in 2004, Jan Němec stated the title of Lustig's as 'Od večera do rána' (From Evening Till Morning; see Bernard 2014, p. 35).



ated a film adaptation of his short story 'Najświętsze słowa naszego życia' (The Most Sacred Words of Our Lives; Hlasko 1957)⁸ at FAMU; the film was later lost (Němec 1966, p. 180). Hynek Bočan conceded that he was unable to write the screenplay himself, and as a result turned to a number of writers, including Milan Kundera, Vladimír Páral, Alexandr Kliment, Věra Stiborová, Ivan Klíma, Jan Klíma, Jan Trefulka, Zdeněk Mahler, Pavel Buksa (Karel Michal), Milan Uhde and Václav Havel (*K zařazení Hynka Bočana* [On the Classification of Hynek Bočan] 1967, pp. 204–205).⁹ From the late 1950s it is possible to observe an interest on the part of filmmakers in works by Ludvík Aškenazy, Ivan Kříž and Jan Procházka, although directors also chose books by older authors, whom they thereby returned to the officially edited and reflected art in Czechoslovakia, for example reviving the work of Karel Čapek after an interlude of a decade (the short story film *O věcech nadpřirozených* [Of Things Supernatural] by the directors Jiří Krejčík, Jaroslav Mach and Miloš Makovec, 1958, *První parta* [The First Rescue Party] by Otakar Vávra, 1959) and even that of Karel Matěj Čapek-Chod after sixteen years (*Mstitel* [The Avenger], directed by Karel Steklý, 1959).¹⁰ In the 1960s these works were joined by further writers, many of whom were chosen by Hynek Bočan, as well as for example František Hrubín,¹¹ Bohumil Hrabal, Vladimír Kórner, Josef Škvorecký, Milan Kundera, Arnošt Lustig etc.

However, what was significant was that a change gradually took place in the way of reading literary works and creative interpretations in their adaptation for film or television. This marked a break from the hitherto predominant transcription from book to screen in the most literal possible style in favour of interpretative shifts, and above all inputs which enabled other views of the material, the characters, the narrative, the setting, the conception of time etc. This applies in spite of the fact that

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- 8 Printed after the short story is the information that 'the professors from FAMU in Prague have now forced the young filmmaking adept [i.e. Jan Němec — author's note] to revise the film four times — for a more moral content and wording — the screenplay written according to the short story published today' (Hlasko 1957, p. 109). This postscript, evidently written by the translator Lenka Teigová, was also an encumbrance upon Němec in his studies (Němec 1966, p. 180). Two of Hlasko's short stories 'Śliczna dziewczyna' (Beautiful Girl) and 'Pierwszy krok w chmurach' (First Step in the Clouds), were published as early as in October 1956, translated by Lenka Teigová in the magazine *Květen* (Hlasko 1956–1957). All three of these short stories present a theme of a somehow disturbed, broken or complicated relationship between a man and a woman, relating especially to young people.
- 9 In 1957, Robert Bresson stated with regard to literary film adaptations: 'Only in the sense that it helps us auteurs understand something in advance about what we're going to develop, instead of embarking on a very long process, very long for me, without any guarantee. It's a kind of laziness' (Bresson 2016, p. 52).
- 10 In the second half of the 1950s two films were made by Karel Steklý based on Jaroslav Hašek's novels, namely *Dobry vojak Švejk* (The Good Soldier Švejk, 1956) and *Poslušně hlásím* (I Dutifully Report, 1957), which were problematic due to their highly specific interpretation. However, Hašek was not comparable to Karel Matěj Čapek-Chod or Karel Čapek, since interest in his work on the part of filmmakers, and above all the possibility of working with them, persisted after the communist putsch of 1948.
- 11 Hrubín was one of the scriptwriters of *Vynález zkázy* (An Invention for Destruction, 1958), directed by Karel Zeman.



Arnošt Lustig, in an interview for Czechoslovak Radio on 12 September 1964 spoke of the importance of the ‘author finding a director who is in harmony with him both in emotional and intellectual terms. Here I mean that they should be people who have a common vision of the world, who think something very similar about the world. I have been lucky enough to meet such directors who have met this requirement for a certain concordance’ (Lustig 2021, p. 118). If we view this requirement on a very general level then we could acknowledge its validity, though the director’s right to his or her own conception of the literary material is indisputable, and this somewhat traditionalist approach on Lustig’s part rather reveals the primary position of the writer. In 1957, the French director Robert Bresson stated the following with regard to this relationship:¹²

We have to make films the way we write — that is, with our feelings. What’s so difficult in cinema is to find a way to express oneself, to make felt what one feels, instead of creating a story, a spectacle if you will, whether finely or poorly composed (Bresson 2016, p. 52).

For some artists, the roles of author, scriptwriter, director and also actor have intersected: for example, Oldřich Daněk began with the theme for Krška’s film *Zde jsou lvi* (Scars of the Past, 1958), appeared in Weiss’s film *Taková láska* (Appassionata, 1959, based on the theatre play of the same name by Pavel Kohout), in the making of the film *Ošklivá slečna* (The Plain Old Maid, 1959) — for which he created the theme and screenplay — he worked as an assistant director to Miroslav Hubáček, after which there followed films which he wrote and directed himself: *Tři tuny prachu* (Three Tons of Dust, 1960), *Pohled do očí* (Look into my Eyes, 1961), *Spanilá jízda* (Charming Journey, 1963), *Lov na mamuta* (Mammoth Hunt, 1964), *Královský omyl* (The King’s Blunder, 1968). Pavel Hobl was similarly versatile, working as an actor, scriptwriter, assistant director and director, from his student film *Ztracená posice* (Lost Position, 1956), via his remarkable films *Máte doma lva?* (Do You Have a Lion at Home?, 1963), *Za pět minut sedm* (Five Minutes to Seven, 1964), *Ztracená tvář* (Lost Face, 1965), *Velká neznámá* (The Great Unknown, 1970), up to his last feature film *Třicet panen a Pythagoras* (Thirty Maidens and Pythagoras, 1973, premiere 1977). Věra Chytilová occupied even more roles, working as an actor, continuity girl, clapper, assistant director, author of themes and scripts and director, from the first film in which she appeared, *Císařův pekař — Pekařův císař* (The Emperor’s Baker — The Baker’s Emperor) directed by Martin Frič (1951), continuing through the 1950s and 60s and later, including the seminal films from the 1960s *Perličky na dně* (Pearls of the Deep; to which she contributed with her short story ‘The World Café’, 1965), *Sedmikrásky* (Daisies, 1966) and *Ovoce stromů*

¹² Worthy of mention from the environment of film and literature is a poll conducted by the magazine *Cahiers du Cinéma* in December 1966, in which the respondents were not only French artists: authors included Italo Calvino, Lawrence Durrell, Romain Gary, J. M. G. Le Clézio, Nathalie Sarraute, Claude Simon, authors writing for film included Jean-Louis Bory, Michel Cournot, Claude Mauriac, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Jean Thibaut, and filmmakers included Jean Aurel, André Delvaux, Samuel Fuller and Marcel Moussy (*Film a román* 1968).

rajských jíme (Fruit of Paradise, 1969), though she had already attracted attention previously with her medium-length student film *Strop* (Ceiling, 1961). Another example is Pavel Kohout and the films *7 zabítých* (Seven Days in a Week, 1965) and *Svatba s podmínkou* (Marriage with Strings Attached, 1965). Some writers wrote film reviews or at least reports of new domestic and foreign films. By this means Arnošt Lustig promoted films (and books) on the theme of the Shoah, or Soviet films of the time such as the text ‘The Destiny of Man [,] the apex of Soviet film’. At the time Arnošt Lustig wrote about films as follows: ‘In a moment of emotion it is difficult to find sufficiently apposite words with which we could describe this film both succinctly and accurately. [...] In *The Destiny of Man* there is the whole of Russia, and within it the power of the Soviet Union. From this film you feel the unconquerable, victorious strength of humanity. You are proud of it, you feel that this is the true man of our age, born and raised in hope and the struggle for communism’ (Lustig 1959b, p. 12).

Film adaptations on the theme of the Second World War made in 1960 also include *Sousto* (Mouthful).¹³ According to Němec’s memoirs this was meant as a substitute, wherein instead of the aforementioned *Čekání* he created this film, the conception of which ‘was stylistically the polar opposite of the film that wasn’t made [...] — a realistically stark photograph’ (Němec 1966, p. 181). Nevertheless, *Sousto* enjoyed considerable success, including at foreign film festivals. It was screened in several countries — Belgium, the Netherlands, Cuba, Hungary (Havelka 1975, p. 215, 222, 227, 229), and was acclaimed by Pavel Juráček (Juráček 2003, p. 637). According to Hynek Bočan it was a document of the greatness of Němec’s talent, and he proclaimed it to be a ‘film that completely surpassed what was being made at the time. This was a film from another world’ (*K zařazení Hynka Bočana* 1967, p. 203).¹⁴ Although the film was named *Sousto*, it was based on Lustig’s short story ‘Druhé kolo’ (The Second Round) from *Démanty noci* (1958); both of these short stories are to be found at the beginning of the book.¹⁵ In the short story ‘*Sousto*’ this genuinely concerns a mouthful, specifically the search for a little food for a sister and mother in the ghetto, a lemon¹⁶ because they are sick, while in the short story ‘*Druhé kolo*’ it is about finding bread for two friends and the narrator himself, thus in its way it also concerns a morsel, or a few morsels. (However, this applies similarly for example in the longest prose text in this collection of short stories, ‘*Tma nemá stín*’ [Darkness Has No Shadow], in which two

13 Zdena Škapová states that *Sousto* dates from 1959 (Přádná — Škapová — Cieslar 2002, p. 357), which corresponds with the database of the Studio Archive of FAMU, where this year is stated; this is evidently in connection with the school year of 1959–1960, in which the film was made.

14 Hynek Bočan was then assistant director of Němec’s film *Démanty noci* (*Démanty noci*, 01:56).

15 ‘*Sousto*’ opens the book (pp. 7–21), followed by the short story ‘*Druhé kolo*’ (pp. 22–34). The first story presents the experience of someone else, the second short story the author’s own experience (Lustig 1958).

16 According to Milan Uhde, who obtained the short story during his summer work experience on the editorial board of *Nový život* in July 1957, the main protagonist wished to find milk in the ghetto (Uhde 2009, p. 491), but in the version published in the magazine — it was revised for the book edition — this was changed to a lemon (Lustig 1957b, p. 1189).



friends, fleeing from the deadly transport, attempt to procure some food from a German woman.)¹⁷

My own view is that neither the short story nor the film represents a realistically stark photograph, as it was referred to by the director Jan Němec. The short story lacks an introduction, and the protagonists, who are not characterised in closer detail, are thrown straight into a multiply extreme form of a distressing situation, as starving participants in a deadly transport. Bread is not merely food but also a symbol of hope of escape and an impulse towards it, and here there is a merging of the objective passage of time and the subjective experience of it, in which the past is inserted into the present in the form of recollections of the time before the war, filling a split second between the individual harrowing events. In the first and final paragraph the times then meet, in a situation in which the heroism of the figure who a moment ago saved another person's life is expressed with characteristic banality: "It's going to be me," said the boy in the middle, the one they called Marquis. [...] "It was you," said the little one to the boy in the middle with a rather stupid smile, watching him with his timid, lost eyes; and when Marquis remained silent he added: "And I felt stupid leaving you in that mess to catch hell, with nothing to show for it" (Lustig 1958, p. 22, 34). In one of the magazine publications of this short story, which is markedly different from the definitive version, the scharführer who guards the bread wagon is nicknamed Glutton, and the little one's explanation is further followed by the last sentence of the story: 'Big Dipper began to tear up the remainder of the loaf for the payoted Jews' (Lustig 1957a, p. 20).¹⁸

If we are to consider some kind of photograph, then this is not a photograph of events, but rather one of emotions, inner states, fears or heroism, and the preservation of human dignity. It appears as if Němec's self-interpretive words were in fact directed rather at Robert Bresson's film *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé* ou *Le vent souffle où il veut* (A Man Escaped, 1956), which opens with the director's words: 'This story is true. I present it to you as it happened, without embellishments'¹⁹ (*Un condamné à mort s'est échappé*, 0:05–0:15). The inspiration of this film and the director Bresson upon Němec was acknowledged by Němec himself, and written about by Jan Bernard (Bernard 2014, pp. 38–39). This influence indisputably existed, and related not only to *Sousto* but also *Démanty noci*. The audio inspiration is remarkable: Bresson's film begins with the cited words concerning the veracity of the story, which are written on the screen (or rather on celluloid, now on screens and monitors) and accompanied

¹⁷ This prose work was adapted for film by Jan Němec, with the title of *Démanty noci* (1964), which as he states himself, was according to the wishes of Arnošt Lustig, who saw this as another way to promote his book; Němec would have preferred the title *Tma nemá stín* (*Když si film o něco začne říkat* 2000, p. 81). Before Němec's film, another long or feature-length film was made based on Lustig's first short stories — *Transport z ráje* (A Convoy Leaving Paradise, 1962), directed by Zbyněk Brynych (the director's assistant was Juraj Herz, the screenplay was written by Lustig together with Brynych); the titles state: "The film is based on Arnošt Lustig's book *Noc a naděje*" (*Transport z ráje*, 01:29:32–01:29:34).

¹⁸ The renowned version of 'Druhé kolo' can be found in *Květen* magazine (Lustig 1957–1958).

¹⁹ 'Cette histoire est véritable. Je la donne comme elle est, sans ornements.' The English title of the film is relatively simple — *A Man Escaped*.



by silence (up to the 15th second of the film). This is then followed by the music of Mozart: Kyrie from Mozart's *Great Mass in C Minor* (K. 427), which is also repeated at the end, following the successful climb over the prison walls and the hurried departure of the protagonists (*Un condamné à mort s'est échappé*, from 01:34:30). The story is thus concluded also via the medium of music. The sung words 'Kyrie eleison' ring out, accompanying the image of the fugitives retreating into the distance, and their flight is thus accompanied by a plea for the gift of salvation. Here also Bresson abandoned not only his protagonists, but also the original literary template, the autobiography of André Devigny published by Gallimard in 1956.

A pivotal role is played by sounds in both Němec's and Bresson's films. For example, the fleeing Fontaine and Jost can be recognised by a creaking bicycle, which means they have to hide and wait for a while; first of all we hear the sounds, and only afterwards is this followed by an image of the Nazi pursuing them on a bicycle (*ibid.*, 01:29:56–01:31:12). What unites the films is the sound of footsteps. Bresson's protagonists flee without shoes, only in socks or stockings, while before Němec's hero (Tomáš) goes out to find bread, the second (Marquis) tells him to put his shoes on, which he does (*Sousto*, 06:15–06:21). In Bresson's film the fugitives are the lieutenant Fontaine (played by François Leterrier) and François Jost (Charles Le Clainche).²⁰ During their flight, in addition to the aforementioned creaking bicycle, both young men are helped by the sound of the guard's footsteps. Before Fontaine kills him, his footsteps pause for a moment and go silent. Because the viewers cannot see the guard they are dependent upon Fontaine's impression that he is lighting a cigarette. Here the German guard appears in the form of sound and silence: steps and halting (*Un condamné à mort s'est échappé*, 01:05:15–01:27:05). Lieutenant Fontaine kills him without the guard being seen, or his killing being depicted.²¹ At the end both fugitives are shrouded in darkness and smoke (*ibid.*, 01:34:50–01:34:56).²² Němec's film *Sousto*

20 A pair of escaping prisoners appear also in the film *Démanty noci*, and in Lustig's original it is first of all also a pair (Lustig 1958, pp. 83–135), in the revised version three fugitives (Lustig 2000). Peter Hames appositely notes that 'Miroslav Ondříček's camera is so close to the events that it becomes a third participant in the escape' (Hames 2008, p. 191). Ondříček was the second cameraman of the film, together with Jaroslav Kučera, the third was Ivan Vojnár (*Když si film o něco začne říkat* 2000, p. 84).

21 To the question of why he did not depict the death of the guard directly, the director replied: 'I can't respond directly to that question. I would simply say that if I had shown the death of the sentry, the film would have become instantly detached from what it is up to that point. You can't make a misstep when it comes to what you show and what you don't show, especially what you don't show. It came from my way of seeing and feeling' (Bresson 2016, p. 53).

22 It is impossible not to see a certain analogy with *Démanty noci*. Whereas Bresson's hero kills the guard, Němec's protagonist is unable of doing the same in the case of the German woman to whom he goes for food, and the killing takes place in the form of visions (*Démanty noci*, 31:40–36:48; incidentally this is also the case in Lustig's prose text, Lustig 1958, pp. 113–120). The scene of the vision of killing the woman 'is recorded by a handheld camera, the event is recorded repeatedly with a slight shift, and is placed between the virtually static portraits of the protagonist and the photographs of the interior. The (im)mobility, like the principle of collage, is thus shifted also onto the narrative level, and establishes



begins with the sound of footsteps. This sound appears simultaneously with the introductory titles in the first ten seconds. It is only after them that the figure of the Nazi scharführer appears, walking around a number of wagons, one of which contains bread. At the same time the counting of numbers can be heard from Marquis's lips, which represents the measuring of the time it takes for the scharführer to walk round the wagons. The sound of his footsteps returns shortly before Tomáš (played by Ivan Renč)²³ goes out for bread (*Sousto*, 06:00).

Jan Němec not only used a different title for the film, but also changed the names of the characters and allocated them different positions: Marquis — Tomáš, Big Dipper — Marquis, Little one — Drobeček, Drobek (see Bernard 2014, pp. 37–38; however, Bernard wrongly states that their nicknames in the short story are given to them on the basis of their height, since the naming of Marquis bears no relation to height, just as Big Dipper does not refer to height but to the fact that 'before the war, the tall one had worked as a janitor at the Astronomy Institute, and when they weren't fighting they'd given him the grandiose title of Big Dipper'; Lustig 1958, p. 22). However, the fundamental difference between the book and the film consists in the fact that Němec entirely eliminated the ethically most harrowing situation in the short story, namely the act of the little one, who stood before the barrel of the pistol at the moment when the scharführer wanted to shoot Marquis (Tomáš in the film), thereby saving his life and confirming one of the mottos of Lustig's book: 'The good in man is manifested in action' (*ibid.*, p. 5). The director needed to change the film as against the original short story, specifically in that three heroes go out to procure bread, in order to bring about a different positive outcome than the one in the book: from the individual saving of a human life and also a document of humanity against the backdrop of the war there is a shift in the direction of a hopeful outcome, in which the boys obtain the means to attempt to escape. There is also a symbolic division of their positions-roles: one (Tomáš) procures the bread, the second (Drobeček) hides it and the third (Marquis) helps his injured friend (Tomáš). At the end footsteps are again heard (*Sousto*, 09:55), over which the narrator Tomáš speaks, informing us that the scharführer's blow was not heavy, and that 'finally the moment had come when we could say that we'd set out tomorrow' (*ibid.*, 10:03–10:14). The film concludes with a passage from Bach's *Toccatina and Fugue in D Minor* (BWV 565) and the closing titles.²⁴ The shift of perspective

the (non-)linearity of the narration — fragments of the present, past and (hypothetical) future may be arranged according to a key other than the traditional one, they need not be linked chronologically and causally' (Svatoňová 2016, p. 190). In the film *Démanty noci* and in the short story/novella *Tma nemá stín*, both protagonists disappear into the darkness of the forest (*Démanty noci*, 01:06:19–01:07:18). 'They waded into the night like its double slim shadow' (Lustig 1958, p. 135). Jiří Cieslar highly rates this ending to the film, as well as a series of other elements, although surprisingly he attributes them to Jan Němec and neglects the role of Arnošt Lustig and his short story template (Cieslar 2000, p. 77).

²³ In another film from FAMU, *Malíř Kamil Lhoták* (academic year 1959–1960), directed by Karel Vachek (under the pedagogical guidance of Elmar Klos and Václav Sklenář), Ivan Renč (mentored by Ján Šmok) was the cameraman (*Malíř Kamil Lhoták*, 0:12–0:34); Renč later for example made the remarkable film *Hlídač* (The Guard, 1970).

²⁴ All the titles read: 'The Prague Central Film Library presents a film by FAMU — *Sousto*' (*Sousto*, 0:01–0:10). 'Based on the short story by Arnošt Lustig. Screenplay and direc-



from the third person to the first person in the film (furthermore emphasised by Jiří Šámal's camera, which frequently copies the perspectives of the individuals;²⁵ nonetheless an identical principle is used in Bresson's film, in which the chief character is also the narrator, in the form of an internal monologue) emphasises the concluding hopeful outcome, which opens up the possibility of a future in a positive form, whereas the short story does not address the issue of the future situation.

Filmmakers continued to show interest in Lustig's short stories, which is documented by a pair of films produced by FAMU from the same period: *Ďábelská jízda na koloběžce* (Devilish Ride on a Scooter, 1962–1963) and *Králíček* (Little Guinea Pig — 1961/1962/1963),²⁶ based on the short story 'Bílý' (The White Rabbit) in the book *Démanty noci*, the screenplay of which was contributed to not only by the director Dušan Klein (mentored by Elmar Klos and Václav Sklenář) but also by Vladimír Körner.²⁷ Whereas in the film *Sousto* the plot of the short story 'Druhé kolo' was truncated, in *Králíček* the opposite process took place: the plot line was extended, above all with passages that have an explanatory purpose, thereby weakening the implicit emotional expression of the narrative and the significance of the act of the small boy in an extreme situation.²⁸ The relationship between the girl and the boy, Flea (who has no name in the short story, in the film she is named Ilona; played with superb directness by Karla Svobodová) and Ugly Tomáš (renamed Petr in the film, and played by Ivan Bukovský), takes different forms in the short story and the film. Lustig works with intuitive understanding without the possibility of direct verbal communication;

tion Jan Němec. Camera Jiří Šámal. Head of production crew Petr Weigl. Cast: Ivan Renč, Jan Bartůšek, Oldřich Bláha. Crew: R. Weber, J. Lojík, J. Pacák, R. Adamcová, J. Menzel, V. [sic! — author's note] Vihanová, E. Passerová, M. Melcerová, J. Balzer, J. Šofr, F. Uldrich. Pedagogical management: V. Wasserman, V. Hanuš, B. Šmída, J. Dobříchovský. Head of production: J. Černý, A. Lysoňková. FAMU 1960' (ibid., 10:18–11:03).

25 The unusual camera angle is noted by Jan Bernard (1982, p. 10).

26 The film does not contain dating in the titles, in the literature on the film we can find the years 1961 (Havelka 1964, p. 66, though elsewhere Havelka states 1963 — see Havelka 1975, p. 200), 1962 (Bernard 1982, p. 58) and 1963 (*Český hraný film IV, 1961–1970. Czech Feature Film IV, 1961–1970* 2004, p. 157). According to the catalogue of the FAMU library, the film was produced in 1963 (*Králíček*, Katalog knihovny FAMU 2021; cit. 12. 7. 2021). The inventory of student films in the FAMU Studio Archive also states the year as 1963. Klein commenced his studies in 1958, and this concerns work at the department of directing in his 3rd year, thus dating to 1963 does not correspond. As early as 1959 the archive inventory of films of the FAMU Studio records Klein's work *Jména, k nimž nejsou lidé* (Names for Which There are No People).

27 The information in the titles of *Králíček* reads as follows: 'The Prague Central Film Library presents a studio scene of the 3rd year of the FAMU Studio based on the short story *Bílý* from *Démanty noci* by A. Lustig. Cast: Otto Sklenčka, Nina Jiráňková, Karla Svobodová, Ivan Bukovský, screenplay D. Klein, V. Körner, direction Dušan Klein, camera Marián Minárik, production K. Vejřík, Z. Bartoš, musical collaboration Josef Ceremuga, sound Oldřich Tichý, head of production Jana Kresslová, pedagogical mentoring of direction E. Klos, V. Sklenář, cameras E. Landisch, editing J. Dobříchovský, production B. Šmída' (*Králíček*, 0:05–0:41).

28 However, Jan Bernard is of the opposite opinion (Bernard 1982, p. 59).



all of this is taken care of by Ugly Tomáš's monologue, which Flea is unable to hear, and by gesticulations and eye contact from afar. In the film a direct dialogue takes place, which weakens and even eliminates the inadvertence of childlike intuition, an understanding between two child (i.e. still innocent, as was accentuated at that time) victims of the system, of evil, power and violence. The namelessness of the girl — she has only a nickname, given to her by the boy — in the prose work further underscores Ugly Tomáš's deed, in which he plucks Flea from the mass of nameless children and renders her human by trying to please her, to give her some form of happiness: what in ordinary life is banal in the ghetto becomes heroism, an expression of humanity.

The character of Dr. Foss (played by Otto Sklenčka) is added in the film primarily as an incarnation of evil and for the purpose of clarification; his explanation is directed formally towards the nurse Wally (played by Nina Jiráňková), but is of course intended as a message to the viewer. Dr. Foss not only introduces a new character but also a further plot line: an inspection by the International Red Cross comes to the ghetto, and so it is necessary to pretend that the children are being genuinely cared for. As part of this pretence it is first of all necessary to kill Ilona because she is sick, and must not be shown to the inspection commission in such a condition. In the film Petr meets with Ilona and the boy informs her that the doctor is conducting experiments on rabbits, by giving them lethal injections; the viewer is thus forewarned of the fate of the girl (*Králíček*, 5:51–6:37). The scriptwriters borrowed from art the familiar and often used notion of the parallel between humans and animals: when the doctor separates the girl from the others and draws the curtain around her, he encloses her within the space of his experiment, which this time ends not with the death of a rabbit, but of a human being.²⁹ Very effective use is made here of the dimming of the light, the use of ghostly sound effects and Marián Minářik's suspended camera, under the pedagogical guidance of Eduard Landisch (*ibid.*, 7:00–7:30). The doctor's instruction that 'They should be in rooms of eight' (*ibid.*, 3:20–3:22) and 'There may be no more than eight of them in a room' (*ibid.*, 7:34–7:38) appears twice in the film, which is the only repetition and is evidently intended to symbolise the separation of children in rooms like rabbits in hutches. The allusion to a rabbit is further underscored by the fact that Ilona eats a carrot, given to her by Petr, which is noted also by Dr. Foss (*ibid.*, 8:27–8:28). The girl's 'ouch' not only signals the end of her life, but also brings about the extinguishing of the light and is then followed by an image of a tap dripping in twilight, almost darkness. Through the darkness and the sound of dripping water sneaks Petr, bringing a rabbit to show to the now dead Ilona. He (mis)hears from the nurse the same as in the short story: namely that the girl is no longer there, but nothing more specific. Lustig's sentence, spoken by Ugly

²⁹ Both boys in *Démanty noci* are conceived as the game in a hunt arranged by the old men, which concludes in one of the most suggestive scenes in Czechoslovak cinematography, namely a banquet at which the old men celebrate their success in the hunt (*Démanty noci*, 44:40–01:02:42). The humiliation of a human being is a fundamental theme of Lustig's prose works, including humiliation before the kill; in the film the decision on the fate of the captured prisoners is preceded by the dancing and singing of the triumphant hunters, who however in their age evoke a dance of death: not only the death to which both youths are to be condemned, but also the now approaching death of the old men themselves.

Tomáš, 'But I have so little time' (Lustig 1958, p. 44), which has a powerful, existentially tragic effect, is replaced at the end of the film by the upward movement of the camera away from Petr, left alone with a rabbit, which no longer serves any purpose (*Králíček*, 10:59–11:20). The sound of the dripping water and the mournful music (arranged in the film by Josef Ceremuga) seem to count down not only to the end of one life, but to the extinction of humanity. This is saved here by the small boy, stroking the rabbit cradled in his arms.³⁰

The second adaptation of a short story by Arnošt Lustig, directed under the guidance of Elmar Klos by Dušan Klein, who also wrote the screenplay (in which he was pedagogically mentored by Václav Sklenář), is *Ďábelská jízda na koloběžce*.³¹ This time the subject matter is not the Shoah or the Second World War in general; instead the

30 The actor who played Petr in the film *Králíček*, today the academic painter Ivan Bukovský, whose parents were imprisoned in a number of concentration camps, later recalled: 'That year (1962) I also became a star actor. It happened like this: in the autumn of sixty-one I was returning from somewhere or other with my parents late one afternoon, and we stopped by the shop window of what was then the Československý spisovatel publisher (the former and now also present Topič salon) on Národní třída street, where among other things they were exhibiting a number of reproductions of artworks. I was familiar with these works, and went on a learned, appraising spiel about them. We were addressed by a smart looking young man who introduced himself as a student of directing in the last year at FAMU, who for a long time had been looking for a small Jewish boy who could draw, in order to play one of four roles (there were no more characters in the film) for a graduate film based on Arnošt Lustig's short story *Králíček*. The young man was invited into our home (we lived around the corner on Karolína Světlá street) and given an introduction to my artistic career, he drank a coffee or tea or whatever, and received a promise of my future co-operation. And so I acted in that film with Ota Sklenčka, Nina Jiránková and the then child star Karla Svobodová. For me the whole thing merged together with football, because at that time our national team was playing in the World Cup in Chile, finishing second behind the famous Brazilians. That young man then went on to make a whole series of psychological films, mainly detective films for which he was relatively well respected, but he didn't find fame until he succumbed to popular taste and made a dreadful, cringing series about Poets' (Bukovský 2014, p. 24). On the basis of this recollection, including the related memory that the dubbing was mixed at the time of the culminating World Cup in Chile, which was an unforgettable experience for the thirteen year old Ivan Bukovský, I date the film to the year 1962.

31 The information in the titles reads: 'The Prague Central Film Library presents a film by FAMU — *Ďábelská jízda na koloběžce*' (*Ďábelská jízda na koloběžce*, 0:42–0:53). '*Ďábelská jízda na koloběžce*, based on the motifs of the short story of the same name by Arnošt Lustig was written and directed by Dušan Klein, camera Jiří Stöhr, head of film crew Karel Kopš, music Josef Ceremuga, editing Josef Dobřichovský, sound Oldřich Tichý, sound effects Bohumír Brunclík, Josef Bor, pedagogical mentoring Elmar Klos, Václav Sklenář, Ján Šmok, Bohumil Šmída, Josef Dobřichovský, cast Martin Růžek, Jan Švejnoha, Marcela Jandová, Věra Bublíková, Josef Kemr, Ilja Racek, Jan Kovařík, Petr Touš, Josef Němeček, Jiří Těšík, also collaborating on the film were Elmar Kloss [sic! — author's note], František Čtvrtník, Julie Domastová, Josef Kozel, Zbyněk Bartoš, Anna Smrštíková, Marcela Měšťanková, Antonín Vlasák, Jan Polášek, Miroslav Krippner and others, head of production Jana Kresslová, Karel Fiala. © FAMU 1962–63' (*ibid.*, 3:38–4:58).



story is played out at an unspecified time in the present day, evidently after the war, and links together with Lustig's endeavour at the time not only to return to the past in his work, but to capture the world of the present. The short story of the same name opens the author's third book — *Ulice ztracených bratří* (1959). Both the prose work and the film confront dreams and reality, in which the evil is no longer fascism but alcoholism (the first image of the film is a father with a pint and a jug of beer — *Ďábelská jízda na koloběžce*, 0:26–0:36) and the irresponsibility of the father (played by Martin Růžek), the broken family from which the mother is absent, and the boy Cézár (played by Jan Švejnoha) is often alone. His most frequent way of dealing with the situation is dreaming and running. The son, confronted with his father's repetitive jabbering and blaming of the regime for his own incompetence, imagines all the ways in which he will excel and find worldwide fame. His actual act is to help the driver Toník (played by Ilja Racek) when his goods vehicle catches fire; in the process he burns his hands (Lustig 1959, pp. 19–21, and in the film *Ďábelská jízda na koloběžce*, 25:25–29:10 and 29:40–30:00). This experience leads him to his most realistic wish — to become a driver. However, at the same time, because of this event he misses the chance to say goodbye to the only friend he has, who is moving away with her parents, and so at the end of the film he is once more alone (ibid., 32:52–33:44). In contrast with the short story, which ends with Toník's friendly gesture of appreciation for his help and his concern for Cézár's burnt hands, the film is concluded with this image of incomprehension and the boy's solitude, which is underscored by the twilight and the approaching camera, ending with a close-up of his head.

Jan Němec also wished to work with Lustig on another film. However, in addition to a screenplay he had written based on Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* (*Od Démantů noci ke Kafkovi* [From Diamonds of the Night to Kafka], 1964, p. 367), he did not realise this until ten years later in Germany, in the adapted form of the television film *Die Verwandlung* (Bernard 2014, pp. 147–154; Bernard 2016, pp. 41–48), about which he stated in May 1964: 'And together with Arnošt Lustig we've been talking about Dita Saxová' (*Démanty noci v otázkách* [Diamonds of the Night in questions], 1964, p. 6). As is well known, this collaboration was abandoned, and in 1967 the film of the novella of the same name was directed by Antonín Moskalyk, who two years previously had filmed Lustig's second famous novel *Modlitba pro Kateřinu Horovitzovou* (A Prayer for Kateřina Horovitzová) for Czechoslovak Television.³²

Klein's student films *Králíček* and *Ďábelská jízda na koloběžce* did not meet with success, in contrast with Němec's works *Sousto* and *Démanty noci*, which won several film awards both in Czechoslovakia and abroad. However, this success among film critics and at domestic and foreign festivals was not reflected in the size of audiences at screenings of *Démanty noci* at cinemas in Czechoslovakia: in 1964 and 1965 the film was seen by 72 500 people (Havelka 1975, p. 278), and by the end of the 1960s by 88 700 viewers (Havelka 1976, p. 286).³³ This may be related to the fact that Jan Němec's work

32 However, this did not represent a definitive parting of the ways of these two artists: in 1993, within the GEN cycle, Jan Němec produced the documentary *Arnošt Lustig pohledem Jana Němce*.

33 For the sake of comparison, *Transport z ráje* (1962) was then seen by an audience of 497 000, *Dita Saxová* (Dita Saxová, 1967) by 339 900 viewers, other films on the theme of



is based on symbols: within a minimal space he expresses momentous events and states which take on a mythical form. He could be characterised as a pathetic filmmaker, who attempted with the most basic means and situations to 'embrace man, the world, humanity' (Boček 1968, p. 220).

In the aforementioned interview in May 1964 — and similarly in a further interview of July that year, in which he spoke of an attempt to create not a film image of the war or an anatomy of a war story, but rather a 'certain anatomy of the human essence', in which he further added that 'that's what was fundamental to me, and that's the reason I excluded all external manifestations of war (shooting, uniforms etc.)' (*O Démantech noci s Janem Němcem* 1964, p. 365) — Jan Němec expressed the essence of his approach not only to Lustig's work, but also succeeded in capturing the 'language' of his films and art in general. This was not merely an image of the Shoah — even if this, in and of itself was intense and effective in several aspects — but something more universal, a characteristic of various different forms of humanity. Dušan Klein attempted the same in *Ďábelská jízda na koloběžce* when portraying the meaningful act of the boy, which nevertheless did not liberate him from his solitude, or in the final image of the boy stroking the small, terrified animal in *Králíček*, in which futility met together with the need for action. And we find this also in the work of Arnošt Lustig: the aspiration to transcend the depiction of a single tragic time, even the most tragic periods of human history, in order to present an image of a person at any time — within the contours of an individual human fate it is always the individual who is the centre of attention, who makes history and about whom history is made. Because problems of homesickness, return to childhood in the form of recollections, fear of death, abandonment, old age, the bestial within man, soulless obedience, but also the desire for happiness, beauty, the fulfilment of a dream, all are framed by the question concerning the endurance of man, who despite all adversity goes on — and lives and feels and thinks and creates and writes and builds: all of this is timeless in human life.

war such as *Smrt si říká Engelchen* (Death is Called Engelchen, 1963) drew 1 256 000, *A pátý jezdec je Strach* (And the Fifth Rider is Fear, 1964) 66 100, or *Vyšší princip* (though this was shown in cinemas from 1960 onwards) 2 248 500 and *Romeo, Julie a tma* (Romeo, Juliet and Darkness, also in cinemas from 1960) 1 491 000 viewers. The Oscar winning films *Obchod na korze* (The Shop on Main Street, 1965) drew 809 100 viewers and *Ostrře sledované vlaky* (Closely Watched Trains, 1966) 1 583 200. Other of Němec's films generated even less interest from audiences: his film *O slavnosti a hostech* (The Party and the Guests, 1966) drew 42 200, and *Mučedníci lásky* (Martyrs of Love, 1966) 112 500. The film *Perličky na dně* (1965), containing the short story 'Podvodníci' (Imposters), which Jan Němec directed, was seen by 132 800 viewers from its premiere in 1966 until the end of 1970 (Havelka 1976, pp. 286–296). The best attended films of the 1960s were *Poklad na Stříbrném jezeře* (Treasure of the Silver Lake, 8 329 600 viewers, premiere 1964), *Vinnetou* (Winnetou, 8 690 400 viewers, premiere 1965) and *Vinnetou — Rudý gentleman* (Last of the Renegades — 8 177 200, premiere also 1965), of Czech films this was *Limonádový Joe aneb Koňská opera* (Lemonade Joe, 1964) by Oldřich Lipský, which drew 3 797 000 viewers to cinemas in the period of 1964–1970 (ibid., p. 289, 309).



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