



REQUIEM FOR THE DEAD FOREST

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Vidas Rasinskas' film "Requiem For The Dead Forest" continues the best traditions of the poetic cinema. This is an auteur movie created by using specific, purely cinematic means that not only raise the issues of the relationship between humans and nature, but also reveals to us the problems of "ecology of soul" and "ecology of spirit". The director poses an enormous artistic task; his film is an evidence of intellectual work and deep personal experience.

To be able to tell a story without using words is the prerogative of the true directorial talent. The skillfully created sound-visual image allows us to not only enjoy the atmosphere of the film, but also to perceive the essential author's thoughts. It's like the director is following the precept of A. Tarkovsky by creating his artistically-perceived image of existence: "Juxtaposing a person with an environment that is boundless, collating him with a countless number of people passing by close to him and far away, relating a person to the whole world: that is the meaning of cinema". (Article "Sculpting in Time").

The system of visuals and singularity of personal authorial seeing of our world creates a special spiritual space in the movie.

The beginning of the film is the creation of the world. Proficient structure of editing, counterpoint of image and sound, perfectly selected musical theme create, before us, a picture of wild nature, nature without man. Man here is an extraneous. The flow of images creates a meditative effect. There is complete immersion into the sensory-visible world of the film.

With the appearance of a person on the screen the environment changes, the world emerges from the fog, it is weaved out of it, it is unsteady, uncertain and anxious. The rhythm of the film changes as well.

The protagonists of the movie are two women. They do not have any real interaction nor do they have a dialog.

Using the method of silence the author sharpens up the sensuous perception of space and the people in it. There is a space-pause that creates a dramaturgy of states and invisible internal experiences. Thus the challenge of acting becomes more complicated.

The device of silence helps to reject the extraneous and enables us to watch the objects on the screen in their true nature. The inner states of the characters and their interactions with the environment come to the front line. The silence uncovers falsehood and one is no longer capable of hiding something that could easily be hidden behind words. Strengthening the expression of the visuals requires maximum contribution from the actresses while facing the silent close-ups.

The use of silence in the film is not a goal unto itself. It serves as an important concept of the author: the impossibility of a dialogue between two different women representing two different worlds, two cultures and two opposite relationships to the environment.

An important feature of auteur poetic cinema is the ability to escape from the reality of domestic story and bring it to the metaphoric level.

Usually the theme of nature and man in cinema is revealed through the opposition of pure nature to artificial civilization that eventually destroys both. But the devastating impact of the impending urban civilization to the wilderness is quite obvious; it transfers the problem to the area of social issues that has been journalistically solved by "ecological cinema". However, here the author's task is more difficult and cannot be solved in one blow. Complex structure of the solution of this task by complicated cinematic language we can find in the unique classical-philosophical films of Robert Bresson.

The means of the film by Vidas Rasinskas are much simpler, however, the declarations are equally deep and serious. Poetic cinema usually uses techniques that bestow upon the individual objects symbolic meaning and open the routes to the unknown.

How is this challenge overcome in Vidas Rasinskas' film?

The author solves it by using dramaturgic interaction between a protagonist and space around her.

Since the film does not have verbal dialogue, the author is forced to use other means to reveal the interactions of the characters with each other and with the environment. Let us reflect on the entire sequence of wonderful sound-visual images.

The White Woman walks in fog and hears a squeaking sound that is indeterminate and irritating because neither the protagonist nor we can identify its source. After that the American Indian Woman appears on the squeaking wheelchair. But at this point the sound's role for the plot does not end.

The White Woman runs away from the American Indian Woman but the sound of the squeaking wheelchair pursues her when she tries to hide from it. In this way the sound acquires a metaphoric meaning. It is something that disturbs the American Indian Woman, that she tries to reject and ignore. The sound becomes a sign of a troubled world and the effort to escape from it speaks of her reluctance to see the issues.

The movement of the characters within the frame and its accompaniment by the sounds fill up the plot with new content and the squeaking sound of the wheelchair becomes a sign of the alarmed conscience of the White Woman and her guilt towards the American Indian Woman. Thus, purely by cinematic means, the dramaturgical challenge of relationship between main characters is solved.

On the other hand, this method serves an unachievable goal of breaking away from the domestic anxiety of the character of the film to a symbolic anxiety and painful conscience, both representatives of our civilization in front of nature, history and the painful extinction of the indigenous people of the Earth.

It is not a coincidence that the protagonists of the film are two women as the representatives of the primordial nature giving and preserving life on the planet. But the American Indian Woman is injured and the other, White Woman, is as if deprived of her true femininity; she absorbs masculine qualities. Her clothing is like that of the military and this emphasizes it.

The routes of the protagonists come apart.

The American Indian Woman remains in the world of nature trying to save it and to postpone the impending disaster. But she is disabled like nature, and there is little hope of saving it in this culturological formation since it needs to protect and aid itself. But the effort of the American Indian Woman helps her to find peace. The individual and the environment here are identical and in harmony.

The relation of the other protagonist to the environment is different. The White Woman belongs to the world of concrete homes, railways and highways that lead to nowhere. The landscape surrounding her is dead.

This contrast of nature and dead civilization emphasizes the conflict between the two characters and the two sociocultural systems. It tears the story out of the daily routine and transforms into the register of philosophical reflections on life.

And the movement of the protagonists in the space of the film is the movement of the author's thoughts. Both protagonists make their way through rejection and denial to understanding and redemption.

An important episode of the film is at the Hill of Crosses. After walking through the dead forest of dry lifeless trees, the White Woman comes to the hill of repentance, faith and hope. Here the author uses the dramatic means of "timeless effect" when before her appears the majestic picture of untouched wilderness that is replaced by the dead space of dumpsters, concrete structures, withered grass and dead trees.

The spiritual space of the movie creates a special chronotope where the past, present and future merge into one and the claim made by the director's theme of "ecology of soul" and "ecology of spirit" appears in full power. The brothers Strugatsky wrote that the future is carefully neutralized present. The White Woman's adoption of the guilt and her search for redemption is our route as well.

The Christian civilization that has destroyed the natural world is yet capable of cleansing it and this rings of hope. The important thing is that "Requiem for the Dead Forest" would not become the "Requiem for the Lost Live" on the planet Earth...