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OUR CULTURE.
ILLUMINATED
THROUGH THE
EMOTION OF
FILM.**

LUX FILM DAYS

**3 EUROPEAN FILMS
23 LANGUAGES
27 MEMBER STATES**

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CINEMA HAS
THE POWER TO MOVE US.**

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CSAK A SZEL (*Just the Wind*) by Bence Fliegauf, **IO SONO LI** (*Shun Li and the Poet*) by Andrea Segre and **TABU** by Miguel Gomes are on the programme of the first edition of LUX FILM DAYS, which is being organised at the instigation of the European Parliament.

Taken together, these three remarkable films reflect the richness, depth and beauty of the European cinema. Each has its own take on the questions facing our society, approaching them realistically or imaginatively, harshly or delicately, from a contemporary or nostalgic viewpoint.

Go and see these films or see them again and then discuss on luxprize.eu the problems of discrimination against the Rom minority (**CSAK A SZÉL**), immigration and, in this context, the conflict between shared traditions and individual aspirations (**IO SONO LI**), and finally the (political) state of the world and, within it, our own emotional intimacy (**TABU**).

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3 EUROPEAN FILMS

CSAK A SZÉL, IO SONO LI, TABU

What are the LUX Film Days?

Screenings of 3 films in 23 languages in 27 countries of the EU in the same time period - autumn 2012. The aim is to share the diversity and richness of European cinema with the largest number of Europeans possible and to debate in situ and on-line the topics depicted by the films competing for the LUX Prize 2012. Subjects common to all of us, that are our stories, our culture.

What is the Public Mention?

The Public Mention is the people's vote. A possibility to share your opinion, your stance on the LUX films and their themes. Simply visit our website or facebook page and express your view.

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CSAK A SZÉL (JUST THE WIND)

A film by Benedek (Bence) Fliegauf

Hungary, Germany, France. 2012. 95'

With Lajos Sárkány (Rio), Katalin Toldi (Birdy) Gyöngyi Lendvai (Anna), György Toldi (the grandfather)

Grand Jury Prize, Berlinale 2012

1. A SUMMARY

Between two jobs, an invalid father and two teenagers to raise, Birdy tries to better manage the problems arising from her hectic days. Her goal: to make enough money as quickly as possible to be with her husband who has emigrated to Canada. Times are hard in Hungary for Roma; a family of them has just been decimated by gunfire whilst they slept.

It is through the daily tensions of this family that Hungarian director Benedek Fliegauf has chosen to expose the viewer to the many forms, however insidious, that a hatred so rooted in prejudice may assume. Following alternately the journey of Birdy, the mother, and her two children, Anna and Rio over the course of a single day, he paints a realistic portrait of the Roma community far removed from the folklore representations of our imagination; emphasising the precarious economic circumstances that characterise their living conditions and the marginalisation that they are the victim of - whether social or geographical - with an isolationism that is sadly redolent of segregationist regimes. All the denounced discrimination in this film should lead the viewer to a salutary awareness, specifically of an era characterised by a revival of intolerance towards ethnic minorities, as well as a broader reflection on the values that European society wishes to assume through its treatment of Roma and other minorities.

2. PERSPECTIVE: THE ROMA SITUATION IN EUROPE

Originally from northern India, the Roma settled in Europe from the Middle Ages. Bearers of a unique culture and lifestyle, they present themselves as artisans - weavers, tinkers, coppersmiths, blacksmiths - musicians, horse breeders, and traders. Their way of working day to day, based on daily prospecting and regular soliciting from the population, sharply contrasts with the habits of the farming community, in that their work is seasonal and is motivated in the long term by the stockpiling of assets or reserves. Despite these differences, the two groups however have relationships based on exchange; each providing tools and utensils, veterinary care, music or temporary manpower to others, who in turn provide food. For a long time, the Roma were able to make a living from their economic activities, but the culture shock caused by their arrival, fairly quickly promoted the emergence of many stereotypes that still feed the climate of exclusion they are victims of.

Today, the Roma population is estimated to be between eight and twelve million, the majority of which is permanently established in Central Europe and the Balkans, where their economic situation is deplorable. Between 60 % and 80 % of Hungarian Roma of working age are unemployed. More than 60 % of Romanian Roma live below the local poverty line and 80 % have no formal qualifications. In Bulgaria, 60 % of Roma living in the city are without work - a situation even more severe in the countryside. In some communities in Slovakia, all adult Roma are destitute. Generally living in unsanitary slums, Roma also experience catastrophic debt that forces them to put themselves under the thumb of unscrupulous moneylenders.

In 2005, eight countries - The Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, and Serbia and Montenegro - pledged to eliminate discrimination against Roma, but this commitment has not been translated into reality by any concrete action on the ground, in fact to the contrary. In Hungary, a recent law requires recipients of social benefits (a majority of Roma are recipients) to carry out general jobs in public areas (street cleaning, maintenance of parks and forests), while attacks against them multiply. In Bulgaria, anti-Roma protests are at the initiative of parties from the extreme right, and sometimes with the complicity of the police. Everywhere - in Romania, Slovakia, and The Czech Republic - walls are built to isolate Roma neighbourhoods from the rest of society, giving rise to ghettos.

In Western Europe, the Roma situation is also alarming. Most live in extreme poverty. In France, the number of Roma in detention is dramatically increasing, and everyone remembers the mass expulsions that took place in 2010. In Denmark and Germany, the authorities also recently conducted a violent expulsion of Roma. In Italy, Roma camps were burnt on the outskirts of Naples in 2008; two years later government authorities asked Europe for permission to expel them...In summary, the Roma, whose territorial legitimacy is denied under the pretext of nomadism, which is more fantasy than reality, represent a population otherwise abandoned, less forgotten, by Member States and their institutions. Their future and their fate is now of particular concern and must remain at the centre of debates, so as to build a Europe that is fairer and more tolerant of its minorities.

3. FICTION SERVING AS A UNIVERSAL MESSAGE

Although the pre-title sequence introduces a film inspired by a precise reality set in a clear location - Hungary - at a specific time - 2008 and 2009, the fiction that emanates from *Just The Wind* contains no spatiotemporal reference, which gives it a really **universal feel**.

Going beyond a documentary of the tragic events alluded to, the film raises more general questions on the **prejudice** that members of the Roma community are subject to, the mechanisms that lead to **racial hatred** and their **irrational acts** that result from this. It is a reflection on the part of humanity that distinguishes us from the rest of the living world; a reflection that is given a very practical slant in a science lesson that we witness alongside Anna, which deals with the specific characteristics of the human brain.

Facing up to racial hatred and its dramatic consequences, the director opposes three **emblematic reactions** that he represents in the paths of the characters that we follow alternately throughout the film. Through Birdy's escape plan, the suppression of Anna and the self-shielding of Rio, we see three attitudes that are all linked, more or less directly to 'disappearance'.

3.1. THE SPACE AND TEMPORALITY OF THE FILM

The temporality of the story corresponds, roughly, to a twenty-four hour day implicitly cut into three main sections: **morning, afternoon and evening**. This period of cyclical time span is sometimes chosen as a conventional means of structuring a story (whether in text or film) whose purpose lends itself to universality, and is often associated with a symbolic or metaphorical dimension. If this dimension is perhaps not noticeable in *Just The Wind*, it is detected in the approach of Bence Fliegauf and his concern to decontextualise the facts mentioned in the prologue with the probable intention of attracting attention to a worrying situation in a much wider sense.

In the same sense, we can say that the places where the action takes place in the film, even if they are in Hungary, remain indefinite. The action takes place in two distinct areas: a 'social' area — a quite large village we do not know the name of — and the 'savage' area of a forest. The two places are relatively far apart and linked by a road that apparently little traffic passes along.

What is remarkable in Bence Fliegauf's film is not so much the choice of these places to anchor the story as the way he perceives the invisible, but very real, border between the two groups. Indeed, whereas it is possible to easily transfer the oppression of an urban ghetto to the screen by, for example, using visual clues such as a material enclosure, it is much more complicated to convey the apartheid that the Roma community is subjected to in an unmarked space like a forest, which is traditionally associated by positive values linked to ecology. Faced with this lack of visible signs, the soundtrack will therefore take over and play an important role in the division of the space. Natural sounds, greatly amplified - birds singing, the movements and cries of insects, the distant barking of a dog, rustling leaves and branches - in the film become strong markers of the space reserved for the Roma community. This aural boundary isolates it from the rest of the population, and also creates between the Roma and the natural world of the forest a form of implied association that they are away from 'civilisation'.



3.2. RACIAL PREJUDICE AND HATRED

'Racism is nothing more than a series of fatal errors in reasoning' said Bence Fliegauf in an interview. The discussion that takes place between two policemen at the home of the brutally murdered Lakatos family can explain this remark while crystallising the key elements that allow for a reflection on racial hatred, the prejudices that nourish it, the facts used to justify the crimes it leads to and more or less overt tolerance of the authorities towards them.

During the conversation between the two men, the local police deplore the fact that the attackers have taken out an integrated family whose members were not parasites, on the contrary, they worked hard, had a bathroom and their children were in school. The policeman then expresses the difference he makes between legitimate violence - that would justify an offence committed against the indigenous society - and blind hatred, undifferentiated, and without justification. 'I know exactly what family they should have taken out,' he says to his colleague. He evokes a family of thieves, who did not hesitate to attack an 82 year old lady to steal a carton of eggs and a little money. He could point out the house himself, but nobody asked him. 'I'm lucky that you're here. Next time you can show them which family to execute! Bullets are too expensive to shoot Roma children at random', his colleague responds. And the other concludes: 'But Roma children have an annoying tendency to grow...So it is too late! It is as simple as that. Finally, someone has done something. I am the law here. If it was your neighbourhood in Budapest, You would enforce the law!'

Laxity often seems to be the rule for criminal acts committed against the Roma community. This is certainly the direction that Bence Fliegauf's investigation takes from the outset, linking the police to an attitude of non-compliance with respect to the murdered family. Throughout the duration of their conversation at the Lakatos' home, we see them peel and eat pistachios that they find at the scene. This behaviour is particularly casual in view of what has happened in the house and ostensibly replaces the investigation that they were supposed to be doing, showing a lack of consideration for this type of victim.

Beside this very explicit scene, it is often through trivial or simple gestures that the Hungarian director makes us perceive prejudice, hostility and even hatred against Roma in an underground manner. For example, early in the film, the driver of the bus that takes Anna to school does not stop at its stop but around thirty metres further away, honking and forcing the girl to catch up with it on foot, before boarding the bus. A little later, when she enters an empty classroom before the lesson starts, the caretaker comes to find her to ask her if she knew that they stole a computer and eight mice in daylight. Without openly accusing her, he of course implies that she could be guilty of this crime. The whole demeanour of Anna (head down, shoulders hunched) shows that she understands this tacit accusation, and she obviously cannot object to it as it would make things worse. Similarly, when after working at the school, Birdy is doing her hair; this same caretaker enters the room and complains of a bad smell: "You smell like death!" he tells her, pushing his fan in her face. After Anna, it is her mother who undergoes a profound humiliation from this prejudiced and hostility-filled man.

However, not all the native Hungarian community holds such a racist attitude. The supervisor of a team responsible for maintaining the verges of major roads gives Birdy a bag of old clothes, showing a little compassion or empathy for this woman who works hard to support her family. Much more unexpected and even somehow enigmatic, the school caretaker who is trying to humiliate Roma invites Anna to leave her mobile phone on charge in the class and later the moneylender who came to get a debt payment from Birdy leaves a watermelon on the table. Are these acts of pure condescension, or should we interpret this small part of humanity flowing from the vilest of beings as any sign of hope or faith in human nature, indicating the possibility of a change ?

3.3. THREE CHARACTERS REACTING IN THREE DIFFERENT WAYS

Just like Bence Fliegauf's film, recent events have shown that the legal authorities practically ignore the Roma when it comes to offering them protection or ensuring they receive justice. Through its three main characters, the director describes how this neglected sector of society is left to its own devices to escape the pogroms.

Birdy is doing everything she can to move to Canada as soon as possible: she holds down two jobs, refuses to pay off her debt to a loan-shark insisting that he can have the house after she has gone. 'I'd rather die than go back,' she replies as if she had already moved when he mentions the possibility that her plan might not come off ... For her, this move is all about the hope of a better life, a move that she sees as imminent, despite the several months of delay mentioned by her husband who is already living there, when he talks to his daughter over the Internet. This determination somehow helps her to overcome both the fear and the hold that certain characters have over her through exploitation and humiliation, such as the school caretaker (her 'boss') or the loan-shark coming to demand his money back, two people she is not afraid of challenging or putting in their place despite the risks. Her absolute belief in a better future somehow takes her out of the present and therefore out of the undeniable danger that prevails in her environment. This faith gives her the strength to move forward despite all the obstacles in her path yet at the same time, it exposes her even more to possible reprisals which she can no longer even see.

While Birdy seeks to see through her plan to be reunited with her husband in Canada along with her children as quickly as possible, **Anna**, for her part, seems more inclined towards integration: she attends school regularly, she studies for her English lessons, she fetches water from the pump for her morning wash; she takes Zita to the lake with her to wash her hair, she asks whether the young girl has been to school... Despite the murder of the Lakatos family and the fear that inhabits her, she does not appear to want to give up her ways. It is significant, moreover, that when she is chatting to her father over the Internet, she shows no desire to join him but, on the contrary, wants him to come back and protect them. Her personal strategy is less about fleeing and more about living her life totally unobtrusively so as to attract the least amount of attention on her and her family. So she does not react to the caretaker's provocations, who tacitly accuses her of stealing a computer from school; in general, she only speaks the bare minimum, keeps her head down, responds obediently to the demands of her classmates without really having any true friendships with any of them. This way of existing without being noticed also leads her to questionable attitudes when it comes to morals, as is the case when she quietly leaves the girls' changing room without intervening or alerting the school authorities when a classmate is desperately trying to escape the clutches of some young lads trying to rape her.

Where his mother makes every effort to escape and his sister chooses to live as a shadow of herself, **Rio** decides meanwhile to protect the entire family by creating a secret hideout in the heart of the forest. As shown in the conversation he has with a young man from a vigilante group, he says that he has no need for weapons as the 'bunker' is merely a temporary solution should something happen before they leave for Canada. Unlike Birdy, moving towards her goal against all odds, the teenager seems to be aware of the risks that his family faces while it remains in this rural corner of Hungary. He is the only one of the film's three protagonists not to leave the woods to go to the village. Having ditched school, he seems to have no contact with the Hungarian ethnic population, seeking only the company of members of the community around the same age as him. In fact, we see him going to a dark ramshackle of a house where a number of young people while away their time playing on PlayStation. Later on, he goes to the lake, where he meets some other friends messing around in the water...

The paths chosen by these three characters are therefore exile, passive and silent 'integration' and withdrawal into one's own community, which generally speaking are presented in the film as the three possible attitudes to the crimes committed against the Roma, none of which are entirely satisfactory, as they force the individuals concerned to turn their back on the day-to-day life that they should be able to enjoy.



4. GREAT DRAMATIC TENSION

What is particularly striking in the staging of *Just The Wind* is the way in which the director manages to maintain a palpable dramatic tension from the very beginning to the very end of the film. So, although barely articulated, the fear aroused by the constant feeling of being hunted down — the term used for those committing the crimes is 'hunters', which conveys the imagery of a people living on their 'animal' instincts — is put across empathetically to the viewer, who can almost relate to the daily anguish of the Roma. Several highly effective cinematographic mechanisms are at work here to create such an atmosphere.

4.1. CREATING A SENSE OF ANTICIPATION

Before the prologue and the film's pre-credit sequence, there is a short text referring to a series of dramatic events that actually took place in Hungary in the not so distant past. From the outset, this announcement establishes a climate of tension that will be meticulously maintained throughout the film, forcing the viewer to be constantly on the alert.

4.2. THE OMNIPRESENCE OF DANGER

The director quite remarkably manages to put across the sense of danger in some of the most innocuous of shots. There are many examples of this in the film. So at the beginning, when Birdy is working with her public space maintenance team, a close up shot of an edge-cutter at work is brought into view for a long time while the sound field is invaded by the amplified noise produced by the tool. Set against a backdrop announcing the murders committed against the Roma, such an instrument in these circumstances takes on the appearance of a dangerous weapon that could be involved in further violence.

Later, the shot closing in on Anna crouched in the woods to urinate emphasises the increased vulnerability of this young girl, who is constantly looking around her worriedly, as if danger could suddenly erupt from the immediate surrounding area. In the same way, the non-verbal signs of fear that occur throughout the film also play their part in maintaining a strong dramatic tension: when waiting for the bus to go to school, Anna, alone on the edge of the forest looks on guard with her arms crossed, as if to protect herself; when Rio is going to his hideout along a forest path parallel to this road, he notices a car slowing down and slowly drawing level with him as if to intimidate him. Probably to avoid any challenge, the teenager does not dare look the driver in the eye, preferring to cast a very furtive sidelong glance in his direction; continuing to walk on while clearly holding his breath, he eventually stops and crouches down until the vehicle disappears, which eventually happens after a seemingly endless pause.

Finally, the film's slow pace, which alternates sequences according to how the three main characters' day pans out, constantly gives us a sense of foreboding that something is about to happen, which, nonetheless, only happens at the very end of the film: talking very little, Birdy, Anna and Rio move silently about and their journeys are followed at length by Bence Fliegau's camera, sometimes focusing on their neck or their shoulders, sometimes on their feet or silhouette, sometimes even on the tyre that Rio - somewhat mysteriously - pushes in front of him. The heavy silence that surrounds all these long scenes of movement also serves to heighten the climate of tension and menace that inhabits the film.

4.3. THE LACK OF INFORMATION

The film is generally characterised by a lack of information which, in this context, is particularly unsettling for us, as spectators of the film. Faced with situations that we are unable to control or that we do not immediately understand, we cannot be sure what will happen next. This process forces us to remain on constant guard. Where has Rio been when, during the prologue, which takes place at the end of the night, we see him emerge from the bottom of the screen on his way home? Who are the people he is watching from afar singing on a



grave? Who has died? Who are the people who interrogate Anna as she leaves the forest on her way to school? All these unexplained situations remain enigmatic at least initially, thus heightening the dramatic tension. But while the ambiguity is gradually dispelled over the following scenes in most of these situations - and we soon realise that the men that Anna comes across are part of her community and more specifically part of the vigilante group responsible for keeping an eye on the place - the film shows a number of situations that remain deliberately unexplained and therefore totally **enigmatic** and open to personal interpretation.

In *Just The Wind*, the **grandfather's character** seems to be there to further deepen the mystery that still hangs over the family's history. Unable to express himself in words, the old man remains silent throughout the film, merely groaning when his daughter demands his attention.

On another level, **Birdy's past**, mentioned very briefly on three occasions during the film remains quite impenetrable. The first reference to this past is during a telephone conversation that in all likelihood she is having with her second employer having finished her work cleaning public areas. 'No, I've not been drinking... The bus was late', she says to whomever she's speaking to. We are reminded of this laconic and relatively anecdotal remark, however, at the end of the day, when she is walking through the village on her way home and a customer at the bar starts bawling at her. This man once again makes a reference to a troubled past, recalling the good old days when she used to come and drink with customers and engage in prostitution. However, the situation escalates into a fight between the men, enabling her to dodge the obscene advances of her attacker. Lastly, the third reference to Birdy's past is about the large debt that she owes the loan-shark who comes to see her in the early afternoon. Why does she owe him money? Was all this money used to help her husband move (so he would not have to pay back anything)? Or has she already made one attempt to emigrate with her children that went wrong? 'This time it's for good ...' her son goes on to say when the observer from the vigilante group underlines that they should have already gone the previous year.

Even though there are obviously no fundamental issues associated with Birdy's past, the lack of transparency surrounding her personal history serves to maintain a certain pressure around this closed and uncommunicative character, thereby suggestive that danger may be just around the corner.

Finally, **what happened to Rio** after his family was murdered will never be revealed, even if the viewer senses through audio clues in the film that the young lad is also dead, killed by the 'hunters' while trying to escape no doubt to take refuge in his hideout. A single shot fired into the night followed by an abrupt stop in the noises associated with the young lad running and breathing heavily, which would have us believe that the shot hit its target. And you can imagine that, like the pig corpse that he actually came across earlier in the day, he too is lying somewhere waiting to be found, which is obviously not yet the case as only the bullet-riddled bodies of his grandfather, mother and sister are dressed at the morgue. This open ending to Rio's fate — who might actually 'only' be seriously injured and lying unconscious — maintains the dramatic tension well beyond the final scene, which haunts the viewer's imagination in a tormenting and persistent manner.

WATCH DEBATE

5. QUESTIONS OR SITUATIONS FOR DISCUSSING THE FILM

WHO KILLED BIRDY AND HER FAMILY?

The director, Bence Fliegau, was deliberately vague about the identity of the killers. Were they people that we saw in the movie? Probably, but nothing is certain... Imagine what work the investigators might carry out: who will they question? Why? What could the killers' motives be?

REACTIONS OF THE VICTIMS' FRIENDS AND FAMILY

After the murder of Birdy's family, imagine what reactions the following characters might have:

- the school caretaker;
 - the young observer who works for the vigilante group;
 - the supervisor of the team cleaning roadsides;
 - the loan-shark;
 - the young Goth girl that Anna designed a tattoo for.
-

DESTINIES HANGING BY A THREAD

In a context characterised by a lack of information and therefore widely open to interpretation, we can imagine that chance facts may have had an influence on the course of events and therefore an impact on the outcome of the film. So, can you imagine what might have happened if:

- the shuttle that Birdy was waiting for had not arrived an hour late;
- Rio had not found or had to bury the corpse of a pig belonging to the Lakatos family;
- Anna had reported the teenagers who assaulted a classmate in the changing room?

What about the life and survival of the Roma? What are their chances of controlling their own destiny?

Vinciane Fonck
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IO SONO LI (SHUN LI AND THE POET)

a film by Andrea Segre

Italy, France. 2011. 96'

With Zhao Tao (Shun Li), Rade Sherbedgia (Bepi), Marco Paolini (Coppe), Roberto Citran (the Lawyer), Giuseppe Battiston (Devis)

1. SUMMARY

Shun Li, a young Chinese woman who works in a textile factory on the outskirts of Rome, is one day transferred to Chioggia, near Venice, to work as a waitress in a café frequented by a number of elderly fishermen, including Bepi (known as 'the poet'), a Yugoslav immigrant who arrived 30 years previously. Bepi and Shun Li strike up a friendship despite the disapproval of the local Italian and Chinese communities

'Shun Li and the Poet', the first full-length drama by documentary film-maker Andrea Segre, is a restrained and sensitive depiction of an encounter between different cultures.

2. A CHINESE WOMAN IN ITALY

Shun Li, who has come to Italy to work in a textile factory on the outskirts of Rome before being sent to Chioggia, near Venice, to work as a café waitress, is in the hands of a shadowy Chinese (mafia?) organisation, which has paid for her flight and residence permit. She is required to repay the money by working for the organisation for an indeterminate period. The fact that she has left a young son in China who cannot come out to join her until her debt has been fully repaid makes her even more vulnerable.

In Chioggia, where she is employed as a café waitress, she comes **into close contact with the Italian populace**, most of them elderly fishermen. Shun Li has probably never before encountered Italians at such close quarters. A small group of friends, Bepi, Coppe, 'the lawyer' and Moustache regularly go to the Osteria Paradiso to drink, talk or play cards. They take the new waitress under their wing, explaining to her what the orders mean and how to serve them, while gently making fun of the fact that she neither understands nor speaks Italian very well. Their attitude towards this solitary young foreign woman is one shown by the stronger to the weaker, a mixture of gruff kindness protectiveness, indulgence and good natured teasing, unlike two younger clients, Devis and his friend, who **treat her with undisguised contempt**.

As time goes on, **the fishermen become friendlier**, sample Chinese cooking with varying degrees of appreciation and invite Li to join them for a drink to celebrate Coppe's retirement. However, it is Bepi, the Yugoslav immigrant of 30 years standing, who establishes a genuine rapport with Li on discovering that her father was a fisherman like him. She shows him photographs of her father at work and of her son, whom she misses and whom she hopes will soon be able to join her. She also mentions the traditional poetry festival, to which she is particularly attached. Bepi, who occasionally turns his hand to poetry himself, is intrigued by the Chinese tradition of floating lanterns on the river to commemorate the celebrated poet Qu Yuan. Li and Bepi are also political soul mates – Bepi having known Communism under Tito in Yugoslavia. A friendship slowly burgeons between them, both of them alone and in a foreign country. Bepi offers Li the use of his telephone to call her son in China and invites her to his fishermen's hut perched on stilts in the lagoon. Witnessing her sadness at not knowing when she will see her son again, he takes her in his arms.

That is all it takes to **upset the balance** and destroy Li's acceptance by the Italian community. Rumours begin to run wild that she is having an affair with Bepi, that she is in the pay of the Chinese mafia, which is sending women to **seduce** and marry elderly Italians in order appropriate their estate. The Chinese are everywhere. It's an invasion, a new form of imperialism. The Chinese also disapprove of the friendship between Li and Bepi because of these very rumours, accusing Li of giving the Chinese a bad name in Italy and forbidding her from speaking to Bepi except to wait on him in the café. Under pressure from their respective communities, they are unceremoniously forced apart.

In this way, an inoffensive young woman who is vulnerable, foreign and alone, unable even to speak the language properly, suddenly becomes a **threat** to Italian society. The film is a remarkable depiction of **crossing a line** and thus changing the way we look at each other. The burgeoning friendship between Li and Bepi is suddenly no longer acceptable, since it is seen as threatening to exclude all others and remove Bepi from the group to which he belongs. The individuals themselves are also seen in a different way. Li is no longer regarded as an insignificant waitress but as a symbol or forerunner of imperialist China. Bepi, who is otherwise never allowed to forget his origins, suddenly comes to represent wealthy Italian society, despite the fact he owns nothing more than a scooter and a fisherman's hut!

While the audience, who probably identify with Li and Bepi, might consider this unfair, it is simply an example of the **stereotyping**, of which we are all at some time or another guilty. Faced with what (sometimes wrongly) appears to be a threat² – in this case the possibility of Li marrying Bepi for his property – individuals become swallowed up in the prejudices which typecast their communities, in this case the Chinese, who are perceived to be invading the world and out to rob us of everything we have. Once the rumours have begun to spread, Devis prevents Bepi from entering the café with the remark 'Watch out for the Chinese mafia', as if Li alone represented a danger.

The press² regularly refers to Chinese investment abroad. Vigorous Chinese growth rates cannot fail to impress nations lagging behind. Hence what comes to define a country or community is suddenly applied to individuals also, irrespective of their own qualities and faults. A moment of tenderness between Bepi and Li is interpreted as a relationship and possibly a future marriage, as if Li herself personified the fantasies and fears of each community with regard to the other.

'*Shun Li and the Poet*' could thus be interpreted as a **warning against stereotyping**, which, in certain circumstances, leads us to consider people not as individuals but as representatives of a community or culture with all its defects or presumed intentions.

3. CONTRASTS AND COMPLEMENTARITIES

The end of the friendship between Li and Bepi, which also reflects the disruption of relations between the Italians and Chinese on the one hand and between the native Italians and Bepi on the other, could be interpreted in various ways. It might be argued that their rapprochement threatens to undermine the little community of Chioggia. Indeed, Italian society, as depicted in the film, appears to be based on all kinds of oppositions and extremes, which nevertheless balance each other out establishing a status quo. By narrowing down such differences, Bepi and Li alter the equation, thereby threatening the social equilibrium.

The film opens with a depiction of a traditional ceremony in honour of the poet Qu Yuan. It appears at different moments during the film and, while the concept of **yin** and **yang** is never explicitly mentioned, it fits in naturally with certain scenes. In a letter to her son, Li compares the sea, which in Italian is masculine – never still and rocked by the winds and waves – to the calm and mystery of the lagoon, which is feminine. The two concepts represent two aspects of the same thing. 'Shun Li and the Poet' can therefore be seen in **terms of contrast**, which is by no means lacking in this film.

There is the contrast between the Chinese and Italians of course, with their different languages, cultures and cuisine. This does not however prevent them from coexisting amicably and the market scene where a Chinese is seen haggling over prawns can be interpreted as representing the possibility of getting along together despite differences.

There is also the contrast between men and women. The patrons of the café are all male and Li is alone behind the bar. The only woman who enters the café (and promptly leaves again) is Devis' furious wife, who has come to leave her son with his father so that she can take their younger child, who is sick, to the doctor.

While we see the men working on the fishing boat, women are much less in evidence. It would appear that the two live in parallel worlds which never really meet.

There is also a contrast between young and old. While the group of elderly fishermen is relatively homogeneous, they are not the same as Devis and his friend, neither of whom show Li the slightest courtesy, engaging in dubious activities and obviously never short of cash. Bepi himself is at odds with his own son, who cannot comprehend his outdated lifestyle (no cars, no lifts and no microwaves) and who regards Bepi as older than he really is. He would like his father to live closer to his own home in Mestre in case 'anything should happen', to which Bepi retorts, 'I am alone, not dead!'

The young and the old thus have different attitudes to life, the young adopting a modern, no-time-to-waste and

¹ 'The lawyer' observes, 'Things are getting dangerous.'

² For example in September 2012 *Le monde diplomatique* published an article by Michael T. Klare entitled 'Is China imperialist?'



materialist outlook, while the old remain attached to the values of tradition, simplicity and friendship (at the beginning of the film, set among the Chinese community, the same contrast can be observed between respect for tradition — the celebration of poetry by Shun Li — and the disrespect shown by the gamblers...)

There is also a contrast between work and rest. The work of the fishermen requires strength and skill. Devis does not appear to work, spends his time racing speedboats and boasts of being able to earn a great deal of money quickly and effortlessly. When Coppe's friends are celebrating his retirement, they invite one of the Chinese to join them but he declines because he has work to do: 'Working, always working,' the fishermen reply. The theme of work and inactivity is omnipresent in the film and could even be generalised in terms of the contrast between an ageing Europe, which appears to be entering period of repose (not to say recession) and China with its vigorous growth and boundless energy.

Li and Bepi narrow down these differences in the form of a friendship between an (assimilated) Italian and a Chinese, a man and a woman, an older and younger person, a pensioner and a worker. Perhaps the juxtaposition of these contrasts is regarded as a threat to the social order because it overturns too many conventions.

4. MYSTERY AND ECONOMY OF STYLE

Andrea Segre's style is extremely limpid and the film contains scenes presented with great **economy of style** in which the audience learns a great deal very quickly. The opening of the film, for example, gives a full picture of Li's situation even before the title appears on the screen and presents the homage to the Chinese poet which recurs regularly throughout the film.

This reference to the Chinese poet Qu Yuan is followed by first images of the film with small candles being placed on the water by two young Asian women, thereby giving the film a traditional Chinese flavour. However, this scene and the feelings (of peace, contemplation, mystery ...) which it inspires are brutally interrupted by a man abruptly turning on the light (we discover that the scene is set in a bathroom and that the water is in the bath) and displaying utter contempt for the ceremony, declaring, 'We are in Italy now' and proceeding to urinate in front of the two women, making it abundantly clear how much he despises their ancient beliefs. The audience is put in the picture immediately. This is a Chinese community in Italy and an abyss separates the young women attached to tradition and the men playing Mah-jong in a nearby room, drinking and swearing. We then follow one of the two women, Shun Li, who works in a textile factory. She is summoned by the foreman and informed that she will be leaving for Chioggia, near Venice. Shun Li has no choice. Her flight and residence permit have been paid for and she is required to reimburse the full amount. She agrees, returns home and begins in her mind to compose a letter to her son back in China. She misses him but they will soon be reunited. All her work is with this aim in mind - to pay for her son's journey. All this is said even before the title of the film appears on the screen.

Now that the scene has been set, we know that Shun Li is in the hands of a shadowy Chinese organisation to which she owes money and that her son cannot join her until she has paid off her debt. She is attached to Chinese traditions which it is difficult for her to follow in Italy, making it easy to imagine her feelings of isolation and loneliness.

However if the film is extremely explicit in certain scenes such as the one we have just mentioned, there is also **ambiguity** and mystery. For example, there are questions regarding the Chinese organisation to which Li owes money. Li does not know when her debt will be repaid, is awaiting mysterious news which will arrive at some indeterminate time in the future, must obey the organisation, which takes on different forms from a textile factory to Rome to a small café in Chioggia, and is being threatened that she will have to pay her debt from the beginning if she misbehaves. All this implies a dubious, illegal mafia-style organisation. On the other hand, it does not appear to crush individuals as it would if it were totally evil. The conditions of work in the textile factory appear to be acceptable (the women working there are not placed under any pressure,



the noise of the machines is not deafening), the foreman is quite amicable and Li's 'transfer' appears to be by way of promotion for the quality of her work. She is allowed to travel unaccompanied from Rome to Chioggia and, while her accommodation is not particularly comfortable, neither is it squalid. Her work in the café is also perfectly ordinary and does not appear to involve ruthless exploitation (although she does have to wait a long time for her days off). Finally, the organisation is willing to acknowledge that someone else has paid off Li's debt and will allow her son to join her earlier than scheduled.

It is also very difficult to pin down certain characters such as Devis, whose unspecified activities appear to be as dubious as those of the Chinese organisation.

Similarly, the nature of the relationship between Li and Bepi is unclear. Is it love or friendship? What is each of them looking for? The other characters immediately conclude that Bepi is seeking a sexual relationship and that Li is after his money. The audience, who can see that this is a massive oversimplification, is nevertheless left equally in the dark.

Finally, the film presents another great **unsolved mystery**. **Lian**, Li's roommate, does not appear to work and seems to spend her time sitting on the bed reading magazines. However, she mysteriously appears in other settings, particularly in the street after nightfall. What is she doing? Is she prostituting herself for the Chinese organisation³? If so, we may imagine that Lian, unlike Li, may be forced to work under soul-destroying conditions which could end up destroying her. When Li mentions her friendship with Bepi, Lian advises caution. 'The Italians are our customers' she says, which could have a double meaning if we assume that she is a prostitute. Finally, what is the meaning of Lian's final gesture? Perhaps, feeling herself being destroyed by the mafia, which is obliging her to prostitute herself, she decides to sacrifice herself for Li. Perhaps she is setting aside money from her clients⁴ to give to Li before disappearing without a trace.

Thus, while everything seems very clear at the beginning, the film gradually becomes deeper, more troubled and more ambiguous than it at first appears. With regard to both events and individuals, it requires us to abandon our first impressions, which could turn out to be inaccurate, ill-considered and oversimplified.

³ Devis boasts to his friend that he has used the services of an expensive, high-class prostitute, which implies that prostitution is a fact of life in Chioggia.

⁴ In her first letter to her son, Li writes: 'When the chief asks me to sew 30 shirts a day, I sew 10 more for you'. Lian may be adopting the same system, thereby earning more for Li's son.

WATCH DEBATE

5. ISSUES RAISED BY THE FILM FOR DISCUSSION

Why do you think the Italians cannot accept the friendship between Li and Bepi? How does it upset them? Do you agree with the interpretation put forward here that it is sign of Chinese imperialism? Do you have any other theories?

Why do you think that the Chinese cannot accept the friendship between Li and Bepi? Is it simply that, as they say, it will give the Chinese a bad name or could there be some other hidden motives? Why is Li sent to another town when she appears to be willing to obey her Chinese masters and end her friendship with Bepi?

Do you think that this story could have taken place in another setting (your town or country for example) with people of other origins? How would the story have been different?

The film has a bittersweet ending since, on the one hand, Li is reunited with her son but, on the other, Lian has disappeared and Bepi is dead. Is the dominant tone one of happiness or sadness? What do you think is the most likely explanation for Lian's disappearance and Bepi's death?

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TABU

a film by Miguel Gomes

Portugal, Brazil, France, Germany. 2012. 120'

Featuring Teresa Madruga (Pilar), Laura Soveral (old Aurora), Ana Moreira (young Aurora), Henrique Espírito Santo (old Gian Luca Ventura), Carloto Cotta (young Ventura), Isabel Cardoso (Santa), Manuel Mesquita (Mário)

Alfred-Bauer Prize, Berlin International Film Festival 2012

1. BRIEF SYNOPSIS

The first part of *Tabu*, entitled 'Paradise lost' (*Paraíso perdido*) takes place in modern-day Lisbon and concerns Pilar, a 50-year-old member of the Taizé Christian community, who devotes her time to others and to various good causes. In particular, she occasionally looks after her elderly neighbour, Aurora, who suffers from senile dementia and believes that she is being persecuted by her black servant, Santa, and considers herself abandoned by her daughter. However, Pilar's devotion does not seem to evoke any real response either from the people around her or from this elderly woman who retreats into her obsessions.

Aurora's unexpected death then brings out a deeply buried past, in the second part of the film: 'Paradise' (*Paraíso*). Gian Luca Ventura, a long-lost lover of Aurora, reveals to Pilar and Santa the old woman's hidden past, a story of a secret love that brought them together in Africa in a Portuguese colony in the grip of the initial unrest of the fight for independence. Characterised by remembrance, the second part of the film abandons the initial realism in favour of a much more detached, almost dreamlike, aesthetic.

2. FIRST APPROACH

Most viewers will certainly notice the aesthetic and cinematographic originality of *Tabu*, which, notably, is filmed in black and white in an unusual aspect ratio, but they may also question its exact significance: the film is characterised in particular by a break in the narrative which takes us from the present to the past, while shifting our interest from one character to another: from Pilar, the religious woman from Lisbon who is devoted to others, to Aurora, a probably senile old woman whose unexpected and romantic story will be revealed to us by her former lover.

These two very different characters seem linked somewhat tenuously even though the character of Aurora appears at different ages. While everyone is clearly free to interpret this diptych and *Tabu*'s other aesthetic features as they see fit, some areas for consideration can nonetheless be suggested to aid discussion. There are thus three possible main areas for discussion.

3. THE STORY OF A PASSION

A series of analogies and contrasts can easily be spotted between the two parts of the film, which each feature a female central character (Pilar/Aurora), one who is old, the other in her youth, one guided by her love for others, the other controlled by a much more personal, if not selfish, passion. The romanticism of the colonial 'Paradise' of the past also contrasts with the mundane realism of modern-day Lisbon.

3.1. CONTRASTS

What best defines the first part of the film is undoubtedly its low-key atmosphere and the feeling of an unending wait. For example, one of the first scenes shows Pilar coming to welcome Maya, a young Polish woman, at the airport, but the young woman that she meets says she is only Maya's friend and that Maya was unable to come to Lisbon. It is immediately clear, however, that this is a lie and that the young woman does not want to stay with this older woman – no doubt preferring to stay with friends of her own age. Pilar then waits, seemingly without any anger or bitterness.

Similarly, in the next sequence, she listens patiently and meekly as elderly Aurora explains a dream to her about hairy monkeys and a train ticket inspector whose ticket machine appears to be a slot

machine. The dream is supposed to explain why Aurora has lost all her money in the casino. Next we see Pilar taking part in a demonstration against the UN's passivity with regard to a genocide that is not explained to the viewer. Pilar is full of goodwill, driven by a sincere faith and is devoted to others, but she seems to face an immobile world that does not care about or is indifferent to her presence and her action.

Conversely, the only person that seems to be interested in her, a painter friend, only receives little attention from her, attention that is sometimes even embarrassed when she hangs a painting he gives her before taking it down because she does not actually like it. However, another scene is even more revealing in this regard since we see both of them at the cinema, him asleep and her crying silently while listening to the music on-screen, a Portuguese version of 'Be My Baby' by The Ronettes (1963).

On leaving the cinema, her old friend wishes her happy new year and makes an awkward and embarrassed declaration of love, before giving her a new painting! The tone of this scene wavers between the emotional and the ridiculous, even though it is clear to the viewer that this somewhat ridiculously expressed love is not shared by Pilar. All the scenes in the first part are steeped in the same weighty atmosphere, a reflection of an apparently joyless existence which seems literally to be on hold.

There is then a gripping contrast with the passion of the second part, which is characterised by its rages, its brutal twists and its tragic epilogue. However, there appears to be a series of sometimes tenuous links between these two disjointed chapters.

3.2. LINKS AND ANALOGIES

It should be remembered that the film begins with a rather strange sequence: It shows a Portuguese explorer in the 19th century 'in the heart of the dark continent', driven not by the taste for adventure or a greater will, that of the king or god, but by a gnawing heartache, caused by the death of a woman he loved, before he dies himself, devoured by a crocodile that is now as melancholy as its victim. This prologue, in which we can detect a hint of irony, is revealed to be a film that Pilar is watching, alone in a cinema. This tragic love story, which is set in a colonial context, thus immediately seems steeped in the cinematographic fiction into which Pilar seems willingly to immerse herself – we see her with her painter friend at another screening which is deeply moving for her. Is this a way for the director, Miguel Gomes, to suggest that romantic passion is merely a dream or a fantasy, or even imaginary compensation, for this character who is stuck in a lacklustre mundane life?

This romantic theme then seems to fade even though it is recalled incidentally by Aurora as she describes her dream after her disappointment at the casino. She recalls the friend, the unfaithful wife of the man who is as hairy as a 'monkey', who claimed to be, as the conventional phrase goes: 'lucky at cards, unlucky in love'. However, this incidental reference in a rather absurd dream is easily overlooked by viewers, as, no doubt, is the song heard in the cinema that Pilar listens to with tears in her eyes. It is, however, the same piece – 'Be My Baby' – that is played in the second part of the film by Gian Luca with his orchestra when he has to be separated from his mistress for several months. At that point, the editing emphasises the emotion of the two lovers, Aurora listening to that song on the radio, shaking with great sobs, then in the next shot Gian Luca sitting at his drum kit, his face literally twisted in pain. Love, whether it is actually experienced or only felt in an imaginary way by Pilar in the cinema, thus appears to be an essential vector of intense emotion for the individuals on screen in either part of the film.

More formally, it can be noted that the two parts of the film are cut into clear time sequences, the first in days (from 28 December 2010 to 3 January 2011), and the second in months (from October to August without the year being specified). This insistence on the differentiated passage of time can probably be understood as a way of emphasising the contrast between the intensity of passion that makes time pass more quickly and a mundane life that, conversely, seems to slow it down if not bring it to a standstill.

Consequently, we might wonder whether the titles of the two parts should be taken literally: 'Paradise lost/ Paradise'? At the heart of a rigid, disappointing, inconclusive present, lies the memory of a stronger, more intense, more passionate past. Thus the words of Aurora who, during her last hospitalisation, talks about a crocodile that would hide at Gian Luca Ventura's house, seem just as absurd¹ to Pilar (who replies to her only that she should rest) as to the viewers, but they are soon revealed to be perfectly sensible since they refer to a past that is certainly buried but which was able to taste paradise as forbidden fruit.



4. A PAST THAT DOES NOT PASS

A number of viewers may be shocked by the title of the second part of the film, 'Paradise', in that this very romantic and very melancholic love story takes place in the setting of a Portuguese colony in Africa², soon shaken by the unrest of the war of independence. In particular, we see settlers practising arms drills even though the two lovers, the main characters in this story, do not take part in this training and seem to be secretly detached from that universe.

While the camera shows black people reduced to the level of mere servants or farm workers exploited in the hillside fields, it is difficult to imagine that the paradise in question could have meant anything other than the private world of white people.

4.1. BETWEEN GREAT DISCOVERIES AND COLONISATION

While Portugal is today a European country with only 10 million inhabitants, it was also the originator, from the end of the 15th century, of what the history books still call the Great Discoveries. This era of exploration of the world by brave navigators is still, for Portugal but also for Europe, synonymous with the epic – an epic celebrated in particular by Luis de Camões in his famous *Lusiades*, published in 1572. Certainly, this glorious image of heroism has been questioned many times, particularly because of long colonial wars fought in Africa by the dictatorial Salazar regime, then by the profound changes in Portuguese society following the 1975 Carnation Revolution which established a democratic regime and paved the way for the country joining the European Union. However, this past remains ambivalent, more or less conflicting, more or less hidden but still present.

The prologue of *Tabu* thus reproduces the most conventional imagery of colonial exploration in Africa with this adventurer who, accompanied by a few black porters, disappears alone into the hostile jungle, even though the director's irony is clear and emphasises the whole unreality of the sequence. More significantly, the narrator's voice-over reveals that the character is not motivated in his expedition by the official reasons of colonial endeavour, such as the glory of god or the empire, but by a gnawing heartache that eventually drives him to an almost ridiculous suicide. The white man in the cinema thus appears detached from his own actions which, 'in reality', are part of the whole enterprise of African colonisation with all its violence and brutality.

It is the same detachment that we find in the second part of the film, 'Paradise', where the two main characters become increasingly isolated in their illicit passion. However, more broadly, we note that only the settlers seem to have significant motivations like love, jealousy, friendship and remorse, while the black people are reduced to the role of merely obedient extras. Less explicitly than in the prologue but noticeably nonetheless, the setting reveals, thanks in particular to the detachment of the voice-over, the illusion in which the characters live, their indifference to the real world around them and their isolation in a largely imaginary universe.

In the same context, how can we not laugh at Gian Luca Ventura's orchestra playing, in all sincerity, a global hit with words as romantic as they are conventional, while the country is being turned upside down by a long and violent war?

¹ Many viewers do not remember these words (though it is not the mention of the crocodile) and consequently believe that the name Ventura only appears when Aurora spells it out with her fingertips on Santa's palm (who then copies it on a piece of paper that she gives to Pilar). However, lying on a stretcher, Aurora talks of Gian Luca then of Ventura, without it being understood whether it is the same person or if the crocodile actually existed.

² The film was shot in Mozambique, a former Portuguese colony, which has been independent since 1975 after a long war, which began in 1962. The Mount Tabu that is mentioned in the film does not exist and Mozambique is not referred to as such.

4.2. AN AMBIGUOUS PRESENT

The same consideration of about the colonial representation in Tabu leads us to question the first, apparently more realistic, part of the film, which is the time of a 'Paradise lost'. The relations between old Aurora and her servant or carer, Santa, are brought to the fore. Several contrasting traits between these two characters can thus be easily seen: one is now very elderly, suffering from dementia, having once had a sizeable fortune which is now largely squandered – as shown by the fur coat that she is preparing to pawn; the other is younger, without great financial means, perhaps having recently arrived in the country – she learns how to write by reading a Portuguese version of Robinson Crusoe, while this famous novel by Daniel Defoe illustrates, as we are well aware, the superiority of the white man over 'indigenous' people, in the image of Friday who became the devoted servant of his master Robinson. We can see a relationship of control, even though it is in the form of the relationship between master and servant.

However, the distance between people seems just as great as somewhat indirectly shown by the 'madness' of Aurora, who believes she is being persecuted by her carer, whom she does not hesitate to treat as a monster or a witch – we recall the second part of the film, in which young Aurora dismisses a slightly mystical cook who, in addition to her pregnancy, had predicted a lonely and bitter end for her.

The world of individuals seems just as isolated, and we know nothing of Santa's real feelings. She seems just as impenetrable as the black people were in colonial times, mere extras in the second part of the film. While Pilar tries to convince her to care for Aurora better, Santa replies by saying she is an obedient servant who only answers to the old woman's daughter (who probably pays her salary).

Some viewers will undoubtedly find such an interpretation forced and will note that the colonial situation is only barely evoked in the film as a faintly sketched setting. Miguel Gomes's film does not restrict itself merely to illustrating a thesis, even metaphorically. Its aesthetic aspect, which is established in particular the visible contrast between its two main parts, should therefore be better considered.

5. AN AESTHETIC DETACHMENT

Those viewers who are least aware of the cinematographic aesthetic will note several very obvious features of Tabu such as the use of black and white or a relatively narrow aspect ratio (1.37:1)³, which is now unusual in cinema. Cinema enthusiasts will surely recall that Manuel Gomes's film has the same title as a great classic, the last film by Friedrich Murnau, which dates from 1931 and consists of two main parts: 'Paradise' and 'Paradise lost' (in the English version), so identical to Gomes's film but the other way round. Furthermore, as the title suggests, Murnau's silent film also tells the story of a forbidden love, although the setting is very different since the action takes place on the island of Bora Bora in Polynesia. Several images from Gomes's film seem to be directly inspired by, if not pastiches of, its predecessor, such as the brief shot where we see Gian Luca blow into a conch, an image repeated several times by Murnau, or even the Super 8 film shot by Aurora's⁴ husband beside a waterfall, which cannot fail to recall one of the first sequences of the original Tabu where the two lovers meet for the first time beside a similar waterfall.

5.1. CLASSIC HOLLYWOOD?

The style of Gomes's film – particularly when we consider the prologue and the second part – has less in common with that of the German film-maker than with classic Hollywood films supposed to take place in Africa. The most distinctive characteristic of the two African episodes is certainly the absence of audible dialogue, a very unusual process that clearly harks back to the silent era of cinema. In reality, the soundtrack of Gomes's film is very elaborate. If we pay attention, we can hear that the dialogue is essentially 'faded', while some of the ambient sounds and the accompanying music are clearly there! Furthermore, old Gian Luca's voice-over, as well as old Aurora's as she reads the letters from her youth, can also be heard and play a vital role in helping us to understand the story.

This approach is original enough to be easily noticed by all viewers – for example, we hear the sound of the gunshot fired by Aurora but no sound of the row between the two men that precedes it. The director is skilful enough, particularly in using voice-overs, to avoid the process being perceived as completely artificial. As the second part is presented as a memory remembered in images, the absence of dialogue will be perceived by most viewers as a sign of the reconstituted nature of these images. The references to silent film, the 'art of the

³ This is the ratio between the width and the height of the image: the 1.37:1 (or 4:3) aspect ratio therefore refers to a relatively square image, while since the end of the 1950s, mainly to deal with competition from television, cinema has preferred a wider image (1.66:1 or 1.85:1), or even very a wide image such as CinemaScope (2.66:1).

⁴ The first name of Miguel Gomes's heroine perhaps also alludes to another famous film by Murnau, Sunrise (1927), which translates into Portuguese as Aurora.



past', will reinforce this impression even though the events shown take place much later, most likely in the 1960s, judging by the characters' clothing and the musical references.

We also note various, more ironic features that encourage viewers to take a step back to consider the characters and events. This is particularly the case in the prologue, where the bombastic words of the narrator (who, for example, calls the explorer a 'melancholy creature'), the posture of the character literally overcome with pain, the piano music with slightly mechanical notes, and the almost absurd role played by the crocodile, which becomes an instrument of suicide, convey a spirit of mockery, if not black humour, that marks the whole sequence.

The irony is less evident in the second part of film, which has a melancholic tone imparted by Gian Luca's sombre voice. However, at several points we see hints of mockery with regard to the characters on screen. For example, when the two lovers are separated, their tear-stained faces with the excerpt of 'Be My Baby' playing seem close to caricature, although their emotion can be clearly shared. Some attitudes such as the Aurora's determined walk in the bush, with a gun in her hand, the murder of Gian Luca's friend by Aurora (the camera switching 90 ° as if taking the point of view of the dead person) or even the husband slapping the lover who has just been thrown to the ground in the dust may seem artificial, almost comical. Movements similar to those of classic American silent film can also be recognised here. Finally, there are sometimes barely perceptible details like the photo session of the musical group perched in the tree, a session that lasts a little too long, or Aurora's involuntarily obscene gesture when she spreads her hands apart to show the supposed size of the disappeared crocodile, or even the crocodile's name, Dandy, a supposedly romantic name according to Gian Luca but which today is a comical reminder of the famous Australian film *Crocodile Dundee*. The whole story of the little crocodile, which repeats that of the prologue in an unconventional way, appears to be a kind of MacGuffin, a red herring intended to maliciously mislead the viewer.

The work on the soundtrack and the favoured use of voice-overs, the traces of more or less subtle irony as well as the diverse but obvious cinematographic references certainly help make the whole second part 'unreal', forcing the viewer to take a step back from the events shown on screen. It thus remains to examine the direction in the first part of the film, which is seemingly dealt with in a more realistic manner.

5.2. A FRAGMENTED REALITY

At first glance, the aesthetic of the first part does not seem to be very striking, immersed in the rainy greyness of the winter months, while the space seems narrow, the characters being confined to their apartments, filmed most often in medium shots (which contrast with the many long shots in the second part, often open shots on broad landscapes). The editing of these different sequences is also significant, each of them being presented in a discontinuous, almost disjointed, way, like an unfinished sketch. Thus, after going to look for Aurora in the Estoril casino and after hearing her describe her dreams without interrupting or reacting, Pilar finds herself in her apartment, plunged into darkness while the sound of heavy rain can be heard outside; there is the muffled sound of a mobile phone ringing, intriguing Pilar who, after some hesitation, discovers the device in the refrigerator!

The links between the different sequences are therefore tenuous, often problematic, as the events are cut in a way that may appear random or arbitrary, leaving the feeling of events on hold. This fragmented, inconclusive, uncertain reality contrasts with the classical aspect of the story of the second part, in which events are linked equally quickly and coherently. 'Paradise lost' thus appears as a world threatened by insignificance and absurdity, of which Aurora's 'madness' is only an exaggerated form. However, more specifically because this madness is only seemingly real and it is the trace of a buried history that is not perceived by the other protagonists, the image-based fiction in the second part of the film appears perhaps to be more 'real', aesthetically, and certainly more intense than this grey and mundane reality.



However, it is certainly up to each viewer to make that choice, to decide whether the paradise of a cinematographic passion is worth more than the prose of everyday life. Without prejudging everyone's opinion, you will notice that the second part of the film, which seems to imitate classic Hollywood cinema, as mentioned, includes at least one scene that would have been impossible in that genre of films (because of the prudish standards of the Hays Code), and which illustrates the physical love uniting Aurora and Gian Luca. This scene, underscored by the sombre voice of Gian Luca, who explains how much this passion transformed him, is dealt with frankly, without irony or any other form of detachment, and culminates in the young woman looking to camera, thus directly questioning the viewer. Perhaps here we see here the film-maker's preference for the intensity of a lost love, even though he emphasises several times the irreducible role of fiction in this cinematographic reconstruction.

WATCH DEBATE

6. QUESTIONS OR SITUATIONS FOR DISCUSSING THE FILM

- The two main parts of the film Tabu are titled 'Paradise lost/Paradise' (*Paraíso perdido/Paraíso*): these titles are certainly worthy of examination. Should they be taken literally or are they slightly ironic? What is the meaning of the film's title, *Tabu*? What is actually 'lost' between the two parts of the film?

- The historical background of the film, which takes place in a Portuguese colony (today independent), can also be examined: does it change the meaning of the love story or does it only appear as a secondary and unimportant setting? It should also be considered how this past reappears or shows through in the first part of the film 'Paradise lost' (*Paraíso perdido*), the events of which taken place in modern-day Lisbon.

- The two main parts of the film are characterised by a contrasting aesthetic. Some viewers will certainly recognise influences or references from other older films. What do these references mean? Can we mention irony, detachment, *mise en abyme*? Finally, will viewers have noticed the soundtrack work, particularly in the second part? Does the process seem original, adequate or perhaps artificial? Are the various musical selections relevant or remarkable?

Michel Condé
Les Grignoux (Liège, Belgium)
www.grignoux.be





À perdre la raison
Joachim Lafosse
(Belgium, France, Luxembourg,
Switzerland)



Barbara
Christian Petzold
(Germany)



Cesare deve morire
Paolo and Vittorio Taviani
(Italy)



Crulic - drumul spre dincolo
Anca Damian
(Romania, Poland)



Djeca
Aida Begic
(Bosnia, Herzegovina, Germany,
France, Turkey)



L'enfant d'en haut
Ursula Meier
(France, Switzerland)



Louise Wimmer
Cyril Mennegun
(France)



Csak a szél
Bence Fliegauf
(Hungary, Germany, France)



Io sono Li
Andrea Segre
(Italy, France)



Tabu
Miguel Gomes
(Portugal, Germany, France, Brazil)

**A Torinói Ió**

Béla Tarr

(Hungary, France, Switzerland,
Germany)**Essential Killing**

Jerzy Skolimowski

(Poland, Norway, Ireland,
Hungary)**Habemus Papam**

Nanni Moretti

(Italy, France)

**Le Havre**

Aki Kaurismäki

(Finland, France, Germany)

**Mistérios de Lisboa**

Raúl Ruiz

(Portugal)

**Morgen**

Marian Crisan

(France, Romania, Hungary)

**Pina**

Wim Wenders

(Germany, France, UK)

**Attenberg**

Athina Rachel Tsangari

(Greece)

OFFICIAL SELECTION, COMPETITION

**Play**

Ruben Östlund

(Sweden, France, Denmark)

OFFICIAL SELECTION, COMPETITION



LUX 2011
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
FILM PRIZE
WINNER

**Les neiges du Kilimandjaro**

Robert Guédiguian

(France)



Bibliothèque Pascal
Szabolcs Hajdu
(Hungary, Germany, UK)



Indigène d'Eurasie
Sharunas Bartas
(France, Lithuania,
Russian Federation)



Io sono l'amore
Luca Guadagnino
(Italy)



La bocca del lupo
Pietro Marcello
(Italy)



Lourdes
Jessica Hausner
(Austria, France, Germany)



Medalia de onoare
Calin Peter Netzer
(Romania, Germany)



R
Michael Noer, Tobias Lindholm
(Denmark)



Akadimia Platonos
Filippos Tsitos
(Greece, Germany)
OFFICIAL SELECTION, COMPETITION



Illégal
Olivier Masset-Depasse
(Belgium, France, Luxembourg)
OFFICIAL SELECTION, COMPETITION



LUX 2010
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
FILM PRIZE
WINNER



Die Fremde
Feo Aladag
(Germany)



35 Rhums
Claire Denis
(France, Germany)



Ander
Roberto Castón
(Spain)



Ein Augenblick Freiheit
Arash T. Riahi
(Austria, France)



Katalin Varga
Peter Strickland
(Romania, UK, Hungary)



Lost Persons Area
Caroline Strubbe
(Belgium, Hungary, Netherlands,
Germany, France)



Nord
Rune Denstad Langlo
(Norway)



Pandora'nin kutusu
Yesim Ustaoglu
(Turkey, France,
Germany, Belgium)



Eastern Plays
Kamen Kaley
(Bulgaria, Sweden)
OFFICIAL SELECTION, COMPETITION



Sturm
Hans-Christian Schmid
(Germany, Denmark, Netherlands)
OFFICIAL SELECTION, COMPETITION



LUX 2009
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
FILM PRIZE
WINNER



Welcome
Philippe Lioret
(France)



Il resto della notte
Francesco Munzi
(Italy)



Revanche
Götz Spielmann
(Austria)



Sügisball
Veiko Õunpuu
(Estonia)



Svetat E Golyam
I Spasenie Debne Otvsyakade
Stephan Komanda
(Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary,
Slovenia)



Sztuczki
Andrzej Jakimowski
(Poland)



To Verdener
Niels Arden Oplev
(Denmark)



Wolke 9
Andreas Dresen
(Germany)



Delta
Kornél Mundruczó
(Hungary, Germany)
OFFICIAL SELECTION, COMPETITION



Občan Havel
Miroslav Janek and Pavel Koutecký
(Czech Republic)
OFFICIAL SELECTION, COMPETITION



LUX 2008
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
FILM PRIZE
WINNER



Le silence de Lorna
Jean-Pierre & Luc Dardenne
(Belgium, France, Italy)



California Dreamin'
Cristian Nemescu
(Romania)



Exile Family Movie
Arash T. Riahi
(Austria)



Das Fräulein
Andrea Stacka
(Germany, Switzerland)



Import/Export
Ulrich Seidl
(Austria)



Iszka Utazasa
Csaba Bollók
(Hungary)



Kurz Davor Ist Es Passiert
Anja Salomonowitz
(Austria)



Ploshcha
Yury Khashchavatski
(Belarus)



4 Luni, 3 Saptamini Si 2 Zile
Cristian Mungiu
(Romania)
OFFICIAL SELECTION, COMPETITION



Belle Toujours
Manoel de Oliveira
(France, Portugal)
OFFICIAL SELECTION, COMPETITION



LUX 2007
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
FILM PRIZE
WINNER



Auf der anderen Seite
Fatih Akin
(Germany, Turkey)

WWW.LUXPRIZE.EU

WATCH
DEBATE
VOTE



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