

ALENA PROKOPOVÁ / 28. 1. 2021

Adelheid

Having premièred on 6 April 1970, *Adelheid* is nevertheless an integral part of Czechoslovak filmmaking of the 1960s – in its subject matter and adaptation, as well as its treatment of a historical theme. At the same time, the film caps and concludes the period of František Vláčil's work marked by relative freedom – a decade opened by the director with his 1960 poetic drama *The White Dove* (Holubice).

In *The Devil's Trap* (Ďáblova past, 1961), *Valley of the Bees* (Údolí včel) and *Marketa Lazarová* (both 1967), Vláčil focused on themes from older Czech history (18th century, Middle Ages) whereas in *Adelheid*, he returned to what was then the recent past. In his choice of historical themes, Vláčil was indisputably influenced by the author of the respective works of literature, Vladimír Körner: after *Valley of the Bees* and *Adelheid* (which was made based on a novella inspired by a film synopsis not authorized for realization in the mid-1960s), Vláčil and the cinematographer František Ulrich intended to make into a film Kröner's short story *Revelation on the Mother of God according to Saint John* (Zjevení o ženě rodiče podle svatého Jana). Körner wrote this dark story of a Tatar invasion of Bohemia immediately after the Soviet invasion of August 1968 – and it was the consequences of the occupation that interrupted the adaptation process of *Revelation*. In protest against it, Vláčil returned his Communist party membership card. (We also „owe“ the visually striking, dark atmosphere of *Adelheid* to the infamous crushing of the Prague Spring, due to which the shooting was postponed from the end of summer to autumn and winter.)

As a result, the ideologically unreliable Vláčil was not allowed to direct his next feature film – *Smoke on the Potato Fields* (Dým bramborové natě) – until 1976. The director once again cooperated with Vladimír Körner for the medium-length children's film *Sirius* (1974) and the Čapek-esque *Shades of Fern* (Stín kapradiny, 1984). Vláčil returned to the immediate post-war period with his *Shadows of a Hot Summer* (Stíny horkého léta, 1977) and *The Little Shepherd Boy from the Valley* (Pasáček z doliny,

1983); however, in these films his views were limited by the ideological demands on dramaturgy of the time and shaped by other authors – Jiří Křižan and Ladislav Fuks. Based on his own story taking part in a similar space-time, Körner wrote a screenplay for *End of the Lonely Farm Berghof* (*Zánik samoty Berhof*), directed by Jiří Svoboda in 1983.

In *Adelheid*, the then 43-year-old Vláčil and 30-year-old Körner were more interested in the relationship of the two main heroes than in the context of the time. After *Valley of the Bees* and *Marketa Lazarová*, this is yet another tragic love story typical of Vláčil driven „by the conflict of dogma and life“^[1] and the hero's longing to find a replacement for the dead home fires. The misunderstanding between the former Czech member of the foreign resistance movement Viktor Chotovický (Petr Čepek) and the German Adelheid Heidenmann (Emma Černá), though, also stems from the conflict of desire and incompatibility. A short annotation in *Film a doba*^[2] quotes Vláčil himself, who said that the protagonists „weren't able to communicate as they didn't know the language. But they couldn't have communicated had they know it either, as they were like two sides of the same coin.“

A tired and traumatized war hero, Viktor lacks constructive enthusiasm and patriotic eagerness against the beaten enemy. In a remote corner of the North Moravian borderland, he is looking for a replacement for his destroyed home, assuming he has found it in the house of a former Nazi and with his daughter. Marie Mravcová^[3] sees a balladic tone in their relationship, mainly due to the fact that Viktor as a Czech goes beyond the moral standard of the time by showing love to a German woman. However in the end – as mentioned by Vláčil himself^[4] – Viktor actually kills Adelheid, and with her his hope for a future. The hopeless message would have had a different tone could the final shot of the cross have resonated with a German priest in the church; this scene was in the screenplay and, according to Petr Gajdošík, it was probably even shot.^[5]

In Kröner's original synopsis of *Adelheid* from the mid-1960s, the inhabitants of the borderland village played a greater role – but a different one than in previous Czech films dealing with the period. Jiří Krejčík's *Border Village* (*Ves v pohraničí*, 1948) and Otakar Vávra's *Arrival* (*Nástup*, 1952) had a standardized background and goal-directed ideological schemes. Even though already Jiří Weiss's *The Stolen Border*

(Uloupená hranice, 1947) and Martin Frič's *Return Home* (Návrat domů, 1948) presented a more realistic perspective on the post-war events, as late as in the mid-1960s Körner heard, in relation to his synopsis, that „the time is not yet ripe for settling accounts and reassessing the expulsion of Germans“.[6] In spite of this, the Czechoslovak New Wave authors felt the urge to modify the view of the victors, such as for instance in Ján Kadár and Elmar Klos's *Death Is Called Engelchen* (Smrt si říká Engelchen, 1963) or in Jan Procházka's radical views in (*Long Live the Republic* [Ať žije republika, 1965], *Carriage to Vienna* [Kočár do Vídně, 1966]), to which their director Karel Kachyňa added *The Little Sugar House* (Cukrová bouda, 1980), conforming to the normalization period.

The fact that official critics didn't want to and couldn't understand the relativisation and revision of the ideological canon of the time can for instance be seen in a review of *Adelheid* by Jiří Hrbas, a critic of the *Rudé právo* daily.[7] He criticizes Vlášil (and the Barrandov Studio dramaturgy, for that matter) for making the story of the heroes disconnected from the time and society, and for failing to move audiences, leaving them embarrassed instead.

Probably without embarrassment, we can see the relationship of the heroes in *Adelheid* as a direct reflection of the time the film was made in – also thanks to other „Sudetenland“ films. Juraj Herz's *Habermann* (Habermannův mlýn, 2010) and Jiří Chlumský's *Seven Days of Sin* (7 dní hříchů, 2012) try to illustrate the shortcoming of the Czech national character through the stories of individuals. Across the spectrum of nations and political parties, what prevails is greed and selfishness, moving private animosity, jealousy and revenge to the level of political vengeance. In the new „Sudetenland“ opuses, trust in any ideology or political power is indeed paving the same road to hell as their cynical abuse.

Adelheid (Czechoslovakia, 1969), director: František Vlášil, screenplay: Vladimír Körner and František Vlášil, director of photography: František Uldrich, music: Zdeněk Liška, editor: Miroslav Hájek, cast: Petr Čepek, Emma Černá, Jan Vostrčil, Pavel Landovský, Jana Krupičková et al. Filmové studio Barrandov, 99 min.

Notes:

[1] Fiala, Miloš, Vlášil, Körner, *Adelheid*. *Film a doba*, 1969, No. 12, pp. 642–645.

[2] Körner – Vláčil – Uldrich, Adelheid. *Film a doba* 1969, No. 4, p. 213.

[3] Mravcová, Marie, *Vladimír Körner: Adelheid*. Česká literatura 1945–1970, Praha: Státní pedagogické nakladatelství, 1992.

[4] Körner – Vláčil – Uldrich, Adelheid. *Film a doba* 1969, No. 4, p. 213.

[5] Gajdošík, Petr, Adelheid, DVD review

(Bontonfilm), http://www.nostalghia.cz/webs/vlacil/clanky/dvd_adelheid_cz.php.

[6] Körner – Vláčil – Uldrich, Adelheid. *Film a doba* 1969, No. 4, p. 213.

[7] Hrbas, Jiří, Adelheid Františka Vláčila. *Rudé právo*, 1970, No. 31, p. 5.