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## All is vanity – Evald Schorm (II)

On 15 December this year, Evald Schorm, the film, stage and television director who was unafraid of asking his audience questions without simple answers, would celebrate his 85th birthday. He was an existentialist philosopher and a great moralist of the Czechoslovak cinema's New Wave.

„An honest, straightforward, thorough person is a creature that can only become a propman in Barrandov, at best. Evald Schorm, for instance, won't make a film of his own in his entire life. He'll be glad to end up in TV. He's a man so upright that all people without exception talk about his prospects in film industry only in a tragic tone.“ [\[1\]](#) (Pavel Juráček)

Luckily, the sceptical prophecy of Pavel Juráček remained unfulfilled. Although Evald Schorm had worked for the Short Film Prague company since 1961 and only became an employee in Barrandov in 1968 (and officially remained one until 1981, when he left to work for Laterna Magika), in his 1960s filmography, we count a total of 5 feature films. From 1976 until the end of the normalization era, four of those could not be screened in Czechoslovak cinemas at all. The fifth had never entered distribution until the end of the communist era in 1989.

„While his first documentaries say yes to life, in his *Každý den odvahy (Courage for Every Day)* and *Návrat ztraceného syna (The Return of the Prodigal Son)*, Schorm tried to put his finger on how to live.“ [\[2\]](#) (Radka Denemarková)

Schorm's experience of a documentarist transpires in all his feature films, seamlessly mingling fiction with facts that reflected Czechoslovakia's socio-economic development. At the same time, Schorm's characters usually represent a certain social segment and as a result, his movies can be watched, similarly to his previous survey documentaries, as sociological studies of certain phenomena (dying ideals of building socialism, rising number of suicides, the weakening influence of religion).

Most Schorm's characters are defined by a contradiction between their disposition to be happy socialist citizens and their inner insecurity that prevents them from becoming a part of the majority, as they are too much aware that they need more than others do to be happy (a family, wealth, employment). In general, we find them in the middle of a search. A search for a deeper substance of existence, which comes hand in hand with getting to know oneself. That is why Schorm can be included in the critical-realistic branch of the New Wave. Even his more stylized films from the late 1960s, such as *Farářův konec* (*The End of a Priest*) or *Den sedmý, osmá noc* (*Seventh Day Eighth Night*) bore a striking impression of authentic reality.

„We were trying to build up the film from its individual scenes so that the whole would express our sense of life, that in the limits set by the story, the final picture would be as complex as possible; we wanted to reach certain monothematicism “[\[3\]](#) (Antonín Máša) *Každý den odvahy* (*Courage for Every Day*, 1964) was Schorm's first full-length film, portraying a man going through a crisis of values. Schorm had been asked to write the script by the Novotný-Kubala creative group as early as the beginning of 1961. They had planned it to be a film about young people from a small town. That was why Máša had started to visit schools, dormitories and workplaces and why he had made acquaintances of Public Security officers specializing in youth crime. A comparably thorough preparation, typical rather in documentaries, later preceded most Schorm's feature films.

The shooting of *Každý den odvahy* went on from April to July 1964. The premiere took place in January 1965, but for the reasons stated below, Schorm's debut could not enter distribution until September. Workman Jaroslav Lukáš (played by Jan Kačer, in whom Schorm found the ideal protagonist of sensitive and estranged characters) believed in communist ideals. Following the end of the stalinist cult of personality, those, however, gradually vanished. For Jarda, as for many protagonists of Schorm's documentaries from working environment, or for the English „Angry Young Men“, the meaning of work and the deeper purpose of existence are inseparably interconnected. A dogmatic socialist „engagé“, a used-to-be „hero of socialist labour“ finds himself amidst a personal crisis and is forced to the activity that all Schorm's heroes have in common: search. He starts looking for a new purpose of his existence, a new reason to carry on the fight, despite the loss of support. Similarly to other Schorm's work, the crisis of an individual is also a crisis of the entire

society. This non-schematic drama, however, does not offer a clear-cut solution to this on-going struggle. That was why the audience reproached it that compared to its predecessors depicting working environment, the film on the one hand did show how people truly lived, but on the other, it didn't tell them how they should live.

„One would have to have gone to at least 10 courses in psychotherapy to get the film,“ [4] (an unnamed officer of the National Security Corps). The film had been originally meant to open and end with a quotation from Kafka's fable *The Vulture*, but it had to be replaced with the words of Jerzy Andrzejewski from his *Ashes and Diamonds*, which was also one of the reasons that the film, criticized for its „hopelessness and vanity“ [5], entered distribution with almost a year of delay. [6]

Some of its critics reproached the film its excessive seriousness, convulsiveness and over-insistence on its theses (similar objections were made against Schorm's following work). Yet in 1965, the bitter psychological drama won the Czechoslovak Film Critics' Award, a success which, however, newspapers were not allowed to report on. In Pesaro, Italy, the film won both the main prize and the audience award, and it also took the Grand Prix award at the festival in Locarno, Switzerland. Next came its screening during the Cannes Critics' Week. The audience there was even less prepared for the scepticism, pervading throughout *Každý den odvahy*, than the critics, the number of people who came to see it was only slightly above 360 thousand. [7] It was probably due to a mix of factors, including the oppressiveness of the film, the provocative amount of nudity, violence and popular language, not to mention its restricted distribution. One week after its premiere in the Paříž cinema in Prague, Schorm's debut only appeared in a few marginal theatres. *Každý den odvahy* is reminiscent of Schorm's documentaries not only due to the existential subject, but also its non-moralizing, observing style, applied also by Schorm's contemporaries, Miloš Forman or Ivan Passer, who, however, used it for a different final effect and with a greater degree of detachment. Whilst the work of both Forman and Passer is recognizable by their individual handwriting, Schorm's films are linked by his general interest in contemporary society, moral and philosophical dimension and his approach to characters, rather than a common style.

In 1965, a team of directors created a collective collage of short stories, *Perličky na dně* (*Pearls of the Deep*), based on Bohumil Hrabal's prose of the same name. Schorm was the author of its only color segment, the almost surreal *Dům radosti* (*House of*

Joy).<sup>[8]</sup> Two insurance agents come to a house of naïve painter Nulíček, whose character allowed Schorm to re-open the subject of the close link between creative work and life, between what we do and who we are. The story was mainly cast with non-actors (Václav Žák, who played Nulíček, was an actual painter) and it combined a raw representation of rural life with an expressive visual stylization adjusted to the theme of artistic work and the „palaverer“ nature of the protagonist, which was Hrabal’s trademark. In the review by Jiří Janoušek, Schorm’s contribution was met with superlatives. He considered it to be a „triumph of fantasy lightness.“<sup>[9]</sup> In another review, Gustav Franci took the house from the title as a symbol, „in the same manner as the characters of the clerks are symbolic, too, reacting so differently to the apparition of naïve art’s pure beauty.“<sup>[10]</sup> Three years later, Schorm made another similar segment for a collage film, this time for *Pražské noci (Prague Nights, 1968)*, a mild horror triptych inspired by old Prague legends. Schorm’s contribution was based on Jiří Brdečka’s story *Chlebové střevíčky (Shoes Made of Bread)*, telling the legend of a countess who commissioned shoes made of bread for a ball during famine.

„Insecurity is always felt the most strongly when there’s a lack of criteria for moral and philosophical values,“ <sup>[11]</sup> (Evald Schorm)

After the nihilistic portrayal of sobering-up from the post-revolutionary communist enthusiasm in *Každý den odvahu*, Schorm followed up with a drama rather psychological than political. Schorm wrote *Návrat ztraceného syna (The Return of the Prodigal Son, 1966)* based on his own idea, developed with the help of the theatre and literary critic Sergej Machonin and doctor Milan Morávek (who was cast in the role of the psychiatrist), an expert consultant who had given Schorm advice also when making *Zrcadlení (Reflections)*. They based themselves on statistical information about an extraordinarily high suicide rate in the 1960s Czechoslovakia.<sup>[12]</sup> This time, the individual going through a crisis, whose portrayal is Schorm’s diagnosis of the society as a whole, is architect Jan Šebek (played by Jan Kačer), who has opted for suicide as an evasion from his unhappiness. His attempt failed and he now tries to re-integrate in the society that had frustrated him so much. His return is assisted by his wife Jana (Jana Brejchová), her parents, and a psychiatrist working at the Bohnice mental hospital, where most of the film is set. Unlike Jan, however, his entourage doesn’t blame society for his desperate act, but only himself and himself

alone. It is more convenient for them to label him as a sick person than to accept their share of the blame.

„For Schorm, suicide was an absolute evasion. Evasion from responsibility for the life we were given. In his both documentaries, as well as feature films, he was looking for answers to how to get over the suffering, fear and anxiety and to avoid that final temptation.“ [13] (Radka Denemarková)

This reflection on what can make a socialist man kill himself works with similar motifs as *Každý den odvahy* (replacing ideals with material goods), but in addition, it offers a rather intellectual hero who is able to reflect on his situation and go in greater depth than Jarda (Jan Kačer created a similar character in Hynek Bočan's *Nikdo se nebude smát /Nobody Will Laugh*, 1965/). Jan, a character comparable to the estranged heroes of Michelangelo Antonioni, Ingmar Bergman and other existentialist directors, is a person who above all needs to deal with himself, with the necessity to make compromises in life, with being condemned to freedom. Unlike Jarda, Jan therefore does not look for a solution in the outside world, but within himself. What he and Jarda have in common, however, is the search. The search for reasons why he lacks will to live, why he cannot be happy despite the fact he has not suffered any tragedy or bad health and is not in material need. He is cursed with his mere unwillingness to accept the hypocritical social game and pretend that he is happy with how people live and for what. He doesn't find his place in the world that surrounds him, he doesn't know what his mission is. He feels like a useless man from Russian novels (where Schorm was looking for inspiration throughout his career).

„My main aim was to ask several questions that contradict each other. It is their unravelling, deciphering, that shows the meaning of things, and it can be a little different for everyone.“ [14] (Evald Schorm)

With Jarda, his feeling of deception and frustration of the inability to make himself useful, amounts to aggression which boils over during a bar fight in the end of *Každý den odvahy*. The hero, having openly expressed his disillusion, is collectively beaten up. *Návrat ztraceného syna* culminates in a similar manner, with a scene where a wild mob hunts the protagonist who they mistaken for an escaped murderer of several women. The mob believes itself to be in the right because of their numerical

superiority. In Schorm's films, a person guilty of refusing general social norms becomes an offender and is hunted like an animal. „Schorm's formally most conventional work, *Každý den odvahy*, caused the greatest controversy in the early 1960, while *Návrat ztraceného syna* remains one of the most intense and meditative films of the New Wave. They were not created in a vacuum, but they both reflected the significant progress of sociopolitical changes and they contributed to it. “[15] (Peter Hames). For many, *Návrat ztraceného syna* was a confirmation that Schorm put the ideas of his films above their style, that drew much smaller attention than it was the case in the films of Schorm's contemporaries, Věra Chytilová or Jan Němec.

Whenever possible, Schorm filmed in real life and used a telephoto lens so that the viewer's contact with characters was not disturbed by the background. He took the same economic approach to editing. The comprehensibility of the message had the highest priority. In the *Mladá fronta* newspaper, Svatoslav Svoboda pointed out the purely functional use of expressive means in Schorm's films: „With Schorm, the idea is always at stake. The idea is what it is always about, even if that can cause a serious damage to the artistic form itself. “[16] In one of his interview, Schorm himself reflected on the ponderousness of his narrative style, but given his strong self-criticism and a tendency to underestimate himself, his words need to be taken with reserve. „I express myself with difficulty and imprecision and the film language causes me a lot of trouble.“ [17] The bleak subject and a certain stiffness of expression also took their toll on the audience's interest. Only 173 000 people came to cinemas to see *Návrat ztraceného syna* , almost two times less than for *Každý den odvahy* [18] „If *Návrat ztraceného syna* was a search for reasons to stay alive, then *Pět holek na krku* (*Five Girls Around the Neck*, 1967) is an overt search for reasons to commit suicide. [19] (Jan Bernard)

Neither did the third full length film by Evald Schorm, *Pět holek na krku* (*Five Girls Around the Neck*, 1967). a psychological drama set in the world of teenagers, lack the social criticism dimension. It was based on the novel for teens of the same name written by Iva Hercíková, who was also Schorm's co-writer of the script. The film about the „the first love and the first betrayal“ follows the story of 15-year old Natasha (Andrea Čunderlíková), the daughter of a high-ranking Communist Party official, who fails to integrate amongst her revengeful classmates. It is another variation on the motif of the inability to deny a part of oneself in order to blend in

with the rest of the society, where great emphasis is placed on the group. Nataša fails to obediently accept the order she disagrees with, and is therefore often ridiculed and humiliated. The story of the teenage girl is ironically interspersed with excerpts from Weber's opera *Der Freischütz*, telling the story of a hero who wins a struggle for his soul, unlike Nataša, driven by her bullies to a suicide attempt. Schorm was a big admirer of *Der Freischütz*, a work that offers what is missing in real life: hope and consolation. The reality that Schorm decided to show unvarnished in his films, is however much more cruel than that. Great ideals have no weight and heroic actions end in misunderstanding and rejection.

„If I should be extremely pretentious, I would have one wish: to inspire, at least for one moment to move others to think, but in a manner that the film would be eventually derived from everyone's autonomous thinking, that it would get closer to the music, that everyone would be able to think for themselves and even to get separated in a way from what is going on on the screen and move closer towards the inner music of imagination, desire and dreaming, and to correspond with the film only through that inner music. [20] (Evald Schorm)

With this film, Schorm dispelled the fears of those who had seen the adaptation of *Pět holek na krku* only as an obliging gesture towards the audience. He successfully transformed the teenage novel into a questioning about the meaning of human existence and an expression of doubt and distrust, the two fundamentals of his lifelong attitude. He was not obliging with the audience, quite the contrary, he tried to „grab them by the throat“ and confront them with uncomfortable topics such as the genuineness of lives they were living.

„Usually we care so much about aesthetics: We desire to have things served all smooth and prefabricated. And creative work, art, is only supposed to be a dessert after a good dinner. But I go for a bone in the throat. The element of destruction integrated in all creative work, that is the catalyzing moment forcing you to decipher your unknown.“<sup>21</sup>

Unsettling reshaping of genre conventions, the audience's only points of reference, and refusing the escapist function of art, these were the characteristics of Schorm's work that emerged on the surface even more strongly in his only comedy. *Farářův*

*konec* (*End of a Priest*, 1968) was the first film Schorm made as an employee at Barrandov Studios. Although it was his most successful film with the audience, the elements of a popular comedy are not a purpose, but a means.

„If an author wants to work with me, I try to base myself mainly on him and let him develop the way he thinks and feels as much possible.“<sup>[22]</sup> (Evald Schorm)

The author of the original story, and also of the script he himself wrote and offered to the director, was Josef Škvorecký himself; he even played a minor role in the film alongside his wife Zdena Salivarová. <sup>[23]</sup> Škvorecký took inspiration from a newspaper report from the 1950s, describing a case of an imposter from a small village in East Bohemia who had successfully pretended to be a priest for 8 months. Already in April 1967 the scenario was printed under the title *Konec faráře* in the *Sešity pro mladou literaturu* youth publications. Its realization, however, was delayed due to the tightening of cultural policies after the 4th Union of Czechoslovak Writers' congress in June 1967, where Václav Havel had read a letter from filmmakers to the Minister of Culture, containing a response to deputy Jaroslav Pružinec's criticism of films *Sedmikrásky* (*Daisies*, 1966) and *O slavnosti a hostech* (*A Report on the Party and the Guests*), in which Pružinec had accused them of not fulfilling the ideals of communism. That was why Škvorecký started to negotiate the realization of the script with American producer Phil Stein. In the meantime, political atmosphere in Czechoslovakia had changed and work on the film could start at home.

The tragicomical farce built up on New Testament foundations tells the story of a Verger (Vlastimil Brodský), warmly welcomed by villagers as their new priest. After a short initial hesitation, the hero accepts his unexpected role of a church official, as it grants him immense power. In a parallel to Karel Kachyňa's more serious *Noc nevěsty* (*Nun's Night*, 1967), Schorm's film tells a story about a clash between two ideologies. The local teacher promotes the idea of scientifically based atheism, but after the arrival of the fake priest, people start to turn away from him. The teacher, an impersonated caricature of communist fat cats, then starts looking for a way to better his concurrent who has won the villagers over with the fact that instead of clinging to dogmas, he offers true values.



Working on the principle of Passion plays, *Farářův konec* evolves on two levels, as a timeless morality and at the same time an easy-to-understand entertainment for large audiences. The significance-loaded, yet simple storyline combined with the effort to tell the same story simultaneously in real world and at the stage of a fairground theatre (Schorm used a similar contrast of theatre and reality in *Pět holek na krku*) result in a chaotic narrative structure that expresses, maybe intentionally, maybe on purpose, the rambling character of the world of the story.

Reviewers at that time wondered about the causes of the formal precariousness and the striking discrepancy between the film's realism and its stylization. Some explained it by the effort to combine Schorm's poetics with that of Škvorecký, others praised the shakiness as a dominant from which the film as a whole is derived. Miloš Fiala described *Farářův konec* as an „interesting attempt at a narration under the form of a farce.“ According to Otakar Váňa, switching between a drama and a farce was meant to move the viewer to look at the depicted situations from opposite sides. Václav Vondra also considered conflict to be the film's defining feature. Some reviewers abroad commented the film's dissonance with criticism, including Yvonne Baby from *Le Monde*, who thought that Schorm was showing a complicated political situation with „a rather intolerant form of a gloomy farce, where seemingly comical elements cause a shock and an unpleasant feeling.“<sup>[24]</sup>

Last shots of *Farářův konec* were completed in mid-August 1968, on the eve of the the Warsaw Pact's invasion in Czechoslovakia. The premiere took place in December of the same year. The comedy that made the audience's smile freeze brought almost 600 thousand people to cinemas.<sup>[25]</sup> In 1969, *Farářův konec* was awarded with the Prize of the Jury at the Annual Awards of Ligna Film Club; it also won the Silver Siren at the Sorrento Film Festival.

If the above mentioned films by Schorm are to a greater or lesser extent open to allegoric interpretation, the apocalyptic *Den sedmý, osmá noc* (*Seventh Day, Eighth Night*, 1969) is a full-blown parable that allows for virtually no realistic understanding. The film shot on Zdeněk Mahler's script in the occupation atmosphere of 1969 illustrates – similarly to *Smuteční slavnost* (*Funeral Ceremonies*, 1969), *Ucho* (*Ear*, 1970) nebo *Zabitá neděle* (*Squandered Sunday*, 1969) – the time of its creation with the depressive mood of absolute hopelessness and also with some of

the topics (abuse of power, mistrust in justice, mass hysteria).[26] A total moral disintegration of a village seized by fear of an invisible enemy was an allegory of the post-invasion events far too manifest to pass the censorship of the time. The film had been shot between June and August 1969. The working copy was finished by December. On the direct order of the Czechoslovak Film's general director Jiří Purš, the copy went straight under lock into the proverbial „vault“. The decision was explained by stating that the film inspired feelings of fear and insecurity. The premiere of the banned working version only took place on 17 May 1990 in Prague's cinema Lucerna. The director had never seen the result of his work. Through naturalistic scenes like from Bosch's paintings, Schorm bares the absurdity of a world that cannot be bitterly mocked any longer. Those who don't join the instinctively acting pack are destroyed. Humanity and rationality are gone. The only one spared is the local madman who cannot be possessed by the general insanity, for he already is insane. [27] A film created partly by improvisation and completed with haste ranges understandably among the least balanced works of Evald Schorm. Yet, it is a chilling and timeless study of human pettiness and cruelty, and it remains especially relevant in times like ours, when society is insecure, divided and agitated by heated emotions.

„Since director Vojtěch Jasný has fallen ill, I ask you and I order you to proceed with the realization of *Psi a lidé* . At the same time, you are ordered to reach an agreement with the head script editor of the Barrandov Film Studios, comrade Toman, on the adjustments of the script as soon as possible. I wish you success.“[28] (Jaroslav Štastný, director of the Barrandov Film Studios).

For many years to come, the tragicomical collage of short stories *Psi a lidé* (*Dogs and People*, 1971) was the last full-length film Evald Schorm could make. The film, whose naivist artistic expression was co-created by Ester Krumbachová, shows four different forms of relationships between people and their four-legged friends. Originally, Vojtěch Jasný was supposed to direct the film. The latter had however managed to escape to Austria via Yugoslavia. The Barrandov Film Studios' director Jaroslav Štastný ordered (sic) Schorm to finish the film. Although Jasný had begun to work on the film and was also the author of the script, within the limits of possibility, Schorm was able to adapt it to his own temperament. He emphasized the topics present in his previous work (a man defined as a being by his relations to others), while depicting the local color of the village. He remained faithful to his naturalistic

view of the world and shifted the poetic stories on friendship between people and dogs towards gloomy parables on human cruelty and recklessness. The obligatory „norm-setting“ review of the film for *Rudé právo*, the regime’s propagandist newspaper, was written by Jiří Hrbas, who hadn’t found „deeper meaning“ in it and had had little understanding for its „grotesque and bizarre conception.“ [29]

„I want to work as well as I can. If only I can. And I want to spend my time working, not debating.“ [30] (Evald Schorm)

In the 1960s, the ever closer links between theatre and film manifested themselves among other films through film directors’ work for theatres. Since 1965, there had been stage productions directed by Juraj Herz, Jaromil Jireš, Jiří Krejčík, Jiří Menzel or Antonín Máša.. Evald Schorm’s first theatre work was *Zločin a trest (Crime and Punishment)* on the stage of Činoherní klub (the Drama Club) in Prague in 1966: „I was given the opportunity to do theatre work by the director of the Drama Club in Prague, Jaroslav Vostrý, who entrusted me with directing a dramatization of *Crime and Punishment*. Which means that the impulse for stage direction came from the outside. I myself wouldn’t dare. But the theatre work was one of the most beautiful jobs I have had.“ [31] The stage directions of Evald Schorm included dramas for both big stages and clubs, adaptations of domestic and foreign authors, both moderns and classics. In his work for theatre, he used his film techniques, and vice versa, he incorporated theatre into his films. 1966 was also the year of Schorm’s first collaboration with *Laterna Magika*, Prague’s progressive multimedia stage. At the time, he was working on a script for director Ladislav Rychman’s program *Revue z bedny (Revue from a Box)* when Rychman approached him with the reference to the medium length revue collage *Gramo von balet* (1966), mentioned in the previous article.

„Today. we can only guess the real reasons of his (Schorm’s) cutting off of full length features for so many years, but the underlying cause was probably the position of Ludvík Toman. For some unspecified reasons, the latter hated Schorm to such an extent that, under his era (1970–1982), the possibility of Schorm working for the studios was practically out of the question.“ [32] (Štěpán Hulík)

Even though Schorm had never openly got involved in politics, his pessimistic view of people, his scepticism and critique of the socialist society's morals didn't fall into what was again considered „normal“ after the post-invasion purges. He was expelled from Barrandov and he also had to leave the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts (FAMU), where he had worked as an assistant professor at the directing department. In April 1973, his films *Každý den odvahy*, *Návrat ztraceného syna*, *Farářův konec* and *Psi a lidé* were removed from distribution. In August 1976, the same fate awaited *Pět holek na krku*. Schorm found solace in music and the creative work he was still allowed to do for theatre. It was during the normalization era, when he was prohibited from filmmaking, that he could (or rather had to) fully develop his parallel stage career. In less than twenty years, he directed about seventy dramatic shows and several operas. Regardless of the high level of his theatre work, this was Schorm's only way out of the dire situation. He had lost the very possibility to make free choices about his actions, the possibility his film heroes strive for so much and that serves as a foundation for the thoughts of existentialist philosophers. Schorm's desire to fulfill his own existence would be significantly restricted for many years on, a fact having a strong impact on his health.

„Sometimes, in private life or at work, or both at the same time, some knotted points come up, when you feel locked up from all sides and need to get an orientation.”

(Evald Schorm)

From 1972 to 1974, Evald Schorm worked as a guest director mostly in Brno, Ústí nad Labem (stage of Činoherní studio), Cheb, Gottwaldov and Liberec. Starting from the season 1975/1976, he was re-allowed to work as a director in Prague. That meant that he could return to Laterna Magika and work on *Láska v barvách karnevalu* (*Love in Carnival Colors*, 1975). At the same time, he started a cooperation with Semafor and Na zábradlí theatres. After a rather long pause, he was filming another documentary, *Etuda o zkoušce* (*Study of a Rehearsal*). presented in the first part of the article. Schorm's second program for Laterna Magika was his internationally acclaimed *Kouzelný cirkus* (*Wonderful Circus*, 1977). He was also the author of the idea. Schorm's original production of Dostojevski's *Brothers Karamazov* (1979) for the Na zábradlí theatre (Theatre on the Balustrade) became legendary. Thanks to a TV record of the show, broadcasted three years later, the audience was re-introduced after a long time to the work of Evald Schorm.[34]

In 1981, Schorm became an employee of Laterna Magika and he continued to have regular collaborations with the stage until 1987. In 1984, the stage also finally gave him the opportunity to run an adaptation of Bohumil Hrabal's *Příliš hlučná samota* (*Too Loud a Solitude*), a prose he had been vainly striving to turn into a film based on a script he had co-written with Hrabal. After he proved himself still apt for film direction having made *Etuda o zkoušce*, Schorm received several new film job propositions, but none that wouldn't be in conflict with his firm moral attitude (which, among other things, prevented him from approving the Soviet invasion and from publically repenting for his pre-invasion opinions). In 1987, script editor Roman Hlaváč offered Schorm a theme by doctor and translator Jaroslava Moserová-Davidová. At the time, the seriously ill director was well aware it could be his last chance to direct a film, and took it. After a forced pause of seventeen years, he made his seventh and last full length film *Vlastně se nic nestalo* (*Killing with Kindness*, 1988). The premiere of this intimate drama about a complicated relationship between a mother (Jana Brejchová) and a daughter (Tereza Brodská), and as Stanislava Přešná put it, a film muted due to the „lost years and wasted energy“, [35] only took place after Evald Schorm's death. A hereditary disease defeated him on the day before his 57th birthday, 14 December 1988.

„Every civilized society (just like everyone, I guess) must examine its flaws and face them.“ [36] (Evald Schorm)

It actually seems natural that the man, having tried his whole life to find his place in the world, had made film as ambiguous and contradictory as a mind of an introspected man who desires to live a fulfilled life, a man who isn't indifferent to what the world is like, a man who keeps looking. Evald Schorm analysed modern society with accuracy and toughness, but without moralizing. He didn't offer a solution for the bleakness of the present state of things, but he didn't excuse it either. As a contemplative person, he mainly invited others to think and to have an (inner) dialogue on questions many of which still have the same weight today as they had in the 1960s. Schorm used the particular to reveal the general. That is also why his films are still so alarming. The inability to make a connection with the outside world, to communicate with others or to enjoy what we have, is something we still deal with. Hypocrisy, egoism, shallowness, giving in to mass hysteria and abusing of human fear are things we see around us regardless of the current government. It is up to us to choose

whether to speak up or remain silent. Schorm's films invite us to do the former and also warn us of what will happen if we go for the latter.

„It's best to be silent. It's all for naught, anyway. All is vanity. But you have to suffer a lot before you lose everything.“[\[37\]](#) (Evald Schorm)

It's all far more complicated – Evald Schorm (I.)

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## Notes:

[1] Juráček, Pavel, *Deník (1959–1974)*. Praha: Národní filmový archiv, 2003, p. 21.

[2] Denemarková, Radka, *Evald Schorm. Sám sobě nepřítelem*. Praha: Nadace Divadla Na zábradlí, 1998, p. 12.

[3] Hofmanová, L., Bloudění a jistoty (Hovoříme s Antonínem Mášou). *Divadelní a filmové noviny* 1964, vol. 8, no. 4 (13 October), p. 8.

[4] From contemporary reactions of cinema operators showing *Každý den odvahu*. Morava, Karel, Nejde jen o odvahu. *Divadelní a filmové noviny* 1965, vol. 9, no. 14-15 (23 February), p. 15

[5] Draft of measures concerning some Czechoslovak films, put forward by Pavel Auersperg on 21 May 1965 to the Secretariat of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. In Cysařová, Jarmila, *FITES a moc*. Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1997, p. 69.

[6] In order to be screened in Prague's Film Club in October 1964, the film had to be shortened from 1000 meters to a „commercial length“. See in Denemarková, Radka, *Evald Schorm. Sám sobě nepřítelem*. Praha: Nadace Divadla Na zábradlí, 1998, p. 44.

[7] The film was introduced together with *Ruka (The Hand, 1965)* an animated parable by Jiří Trnka. Bernard, Jan, *Odvaha pro všední den. Evald Schorm a jeho filmy*. Praha: PRIMUS, 1994, p. 34.

[8] At first, Schorm was also offered to direct Hrabal's *Ostře sledované vlaky (Closely Watched Trains, 1966)*, an offer he refused, however, as well as Věra Chytilová after him. In the end, the adaptation was directed by Jiří Menzel.

[9] Janoušek, Jiří, Perličky na dně. *Film a doba* 1965, vol. 11, no. 9, p. 487.

- [10] Franci, Gustav, Filmové perličky na dně. *Divadelní a filmové noviny* 1966, vol. 9, no. 11 (12 January), p. 5.
- [11] Hepnerová, Eva, Návrat ztraceného syna. *Kino* 1966, vol. 21, no. 26 (29 December), p. 3.
- [12] Ptáček, Luboš, *Panorama českého filmu*. Olomouc: Rubico, 2000, p. 143.
- [13] Denemarková, Radka, *Evald Schorm. Sám sobě nepřitelem*. Praha: Nadace Divadla Na zábradlí, 1998, p. 61.
- [14] Hepnerová, Eva, Návrat ztraceného syna. *Kino* 1966, vol. 21, no. 26 (29 December), p. 3.
- [15] Hames, Peter, *Československá nová vlna*. Praha: KMa s. r. o., 2008, p. 126.
- [16] Cit. in Bernard, Jan: *Odvahu pro všední den. Evald Schorm a jeho filmy*. Praha: PRIMUS, 1994, p. 62.
- [17] Ibid., p. 102.
- [18] Ibid., p. 48.
- [19] Ibid., p. 80.
- [20] Evald Schorn je slavný. *Filmové a televizní noviny*. 15 November 1967, vol. 12, no. 10, p. 8.
- [21] Ibid.
- [22] Ibid.
- [23] Škvorecký and Schorm agreed on the collaboration when working on Němec's *O slavnosti a hostech*. They waited for their co-written script to be approved for two years.
- [24] All quotations see in Bernard, Jan: *Odvahu pro všední den. Evald Schorm a jeho filmy*. Praha: PRIMUS, 1994, p. 110-112.
- [25] Ibid., p. 95.



[26] After *Farářův konec*, Schorm wanted to make a film based on Austrian psychologist Viktor Frankl's *Man's Search for Meaning*, a story set in a concentration camp at the end of the German occupation in 1945. Antonín Máša would have been the author of the literary material for the film. Instead, having regard to the situation at the moment, Schorm decided to make a film using the script written by Zdeněk Mahler in the days following immediately after the arrival of the tanks.

[27] The original version of the script ended with an arrival of a tank with its gun pointing to the camera, not the eventual shot of the madman, who was the only one to go through the whole hell without harm.

[28] Letter of Jaroslav Šťastný to Evald Schorm, cit. in Denemarková, Radka, *Evald Schorm. Sám sobě nepřítelem*. Praha: Nadace Divadla Na zábradlí, 1998, p. 115.

[29] Hrbas, Jiří, Pestrý výběr žánrů. Nové filmy v našich kinech. *Rudé právo* 1971, vol. 51, č. 220 (16 September), p. 5.

[30] Evald Schorn je slavný. *Filmové a televizní noviny*. 15 November 1967, vol. 12, no. 10, p. 8.

[31] Adamec, Otakar, Evald Schorm v rozhovoru s Otakarem Adamcem. *Mladá fronta*, 8 January 1967. No. 8. p. 3.

[32] Hulík, Štěpán, *Kinematografie zapomnění: počátky normalizace ve Filmovém studiu Barrandov (1968–1973)*. Praha: Academia, 2011, p. 221.

[33] Hepnerová, Eva, Návrat ztraceného syna. *Kino* 1966, vol. 21, no. 26 (29 December), p. 3.

[34] For further information on Schorm's stage direction see e.g. memoirs of Jana Schmid in Lukeš, Jan, Lukešová, Ivana (eds.), *Mlčenlivý host Evald Schorm*. Plzeň: Dominik centrum s.r.o., 2008, p. 29-34; or the second half of Denemarková, Radka, *Evald Schorm. Sám sobě nepřítelem*. Praha: Nadace Divadla Na zábradlí, 1998.

[35] Přádna, Stanislava, Vlastně se nic nestalo. *Kino* 1989, vol. 44, no. 8 (11 April), p. 15.

[36] Evald Schorn je slavný. *Filmové a televizní noviny*. 15 November 1967, vol. 12, no. 10. p. 8.

[37] Ibid.