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Moral Universalism in the East: Anti-Fascist Humanism and the Memory of the Holocaust in Zoltán Fábri's Film *Late Season* (1967)

In his study “Holocaust and Trauma: Moral Universalism in the West,” cultural sociologist Jeffrey Alexander reveals the historical process, in which the cultural significance of the Jewish genocide changed from a war atrocity into a historically unique, unprecedented, and distinctive event.¹ The uncertainties implicit in the historically and geographically fixed formation of moral universals, i.e., whether or not “post-Holocaust morality” is actually universal, has been of interest to Alexander ever since the first appearance of his study in 2002. In the conclusion, entitled “Is the Holocaust Western?”, he contends that “this universalization has primarily been confined to the West.”² However, Alexander himself applies universally his theory of the social construction of moral universals, which is based empirically on Western examples, specifically the postwar history of the USA. He postulates that even in the case of atrocities in East Asia or Africa, moral universalism should proceed in the same way as the memory of the Holocaust. Thus, if in other cases of historical suffering cultural trauma does not form, he interprets this as a blocking and abrogation of the normative trauma process.³

Yet it is not only the Western world that has attributed general moral significance to the Nazi genocide. As Martin Jay observed, Alexander “underestimates in his narrative of this American-centric universalization important counterexamples,” such as “the continuing power of an alternative universalization in the Soviet bloc.”⁴ In what follows, I attempt to reconstruct antifascist humanism as

1 Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Holocaust and Trauma: Moral Universalism in the West,” in *Trauma: A Social Theory*, by J. C. Alexander (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 31–97.

2 Jeffrey C. Alexander, “On the Social Construction of Moral Universals: The ‘Holocaust’ from War Crime to Trauma Drama,” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 58.

3 Jeffrey C. Alexander, “Culture Trauma, Morality and Solidarity: The Social Construction of ‘Holocaust’ and Other Mass Murders,” *Thesis Eleven* 132, no. 1 (2016): 3–16.

4 Martin Jay, “Allegories of Evil: A Response to Jeffrey Alexander,” in J. Alexander et. al., *Remembering the Holocaust: A Debate* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 107–108.

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an “alternative universalization” in the Soviet bloc. Bearing in mind that anti-fascism was not exclusively “Eastern,”⁵ I provide a transnational analysis of a film produced in the Eastern bloc, where de-Stalinization enabled a public discourse on questions of history and memory. The film, *Late Season*, is the work of one of the best-known Hungarian directors of the 1950s and 1960s, Zoltán Fábri (1917–1994). In this movie, released in 1967, the director, then at the peak of his career, responded to developments in the international film world more than in any of his previous work, creating his own “Holocaust film.” *Late Season* was made at a historical juncture that proved to be decisive in terms of the cultural history of the Jewish genocide, proving that the aesthetics of anti-fascist film not only paralleled but well preceded filmic representations of the Holocaust considered today as canonical, such as the 1978 American TV series *Holocaust*. Just like other anti-fascist movies at the time, *Late Season* reflected on the problem of the “burden of history” in general and on the legacy of the Jewish genocide in particular.

For a long time, an exhaustive exploration of the “Eastern” social construction of moral universals was difficult due to the fact that scholarship on the history of memory was obsessively driven by the antagonistic opposition between Holocaust memory and anti-fascism as the ideology of state socialism. Fortunately, recent scholarship has successfully challenged the “myth of silence”⁶ surrounding the Holocaust.⁷ Also, a new field of anti-fascism research has emerged

5 Hugo García, Mercedes Yusta Rodrigo, Xavier Tabet, and Cristina Clímaco, eds., *Rethinking Antifascism: History, Memory and Politics, 1922 to the Present* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016); Michael Seidman, *Transatlantic Antifascisms from the Spanish Civil War to the End of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Kasper Braskén, Nigel Copsey, and David Featherstone, eds., *Anti-Fascism in a Global Perspective: Transnational Networks, Exile Communities, and Radical Internationalism* (London: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2021).

6 David Cesarani and Eric J. Sundquist, eds., *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence* (London: Routledge, 2012).

7 Máté Zombory, András Lénárt, and Anna Lujza Szász, “Elfeledett szembenézés. Holokauszttól emlékezés Fábri Zoltán Utószézon c. filmjében,” *Budapesti Könyvszemle* 25, no. 3 (2013): 245–256; Richard S. Esbenshade, “‘Anti-Fascist Literature’ as Holocaust Literature? The Holocaust in the Hungarian Socialist Literary Marketplace, 1956–1970,” in *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry. Volume 31: Poland and Hungary: Jewish Realities Compared*, ed. François Guesnet, Howard Lupovitch, and Antony Polonsky (London: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2019), 409–426; Tamás Scheibner and Máté Zombory, eds., *Holokauszttól és államszocializmus. A történelem terhe a hatvanas években* [Holocaust and State Socialism: The Burden of History in the 1960s], *Múltunk* LXIV, no. 2, special issue (2019): 4–135. See also Kata Bohus, Peter Hallama, and Stephan Stach, eds., *Growing in the Shadow of Antifascism: Remembering the Holocaust in State-Socialist Eastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2022).

in the framework of memory studies.⁸ This conjuncture enables us to leave behind the antifascism vs. Holocaust memory paradigm and, instead of searching for the Western Holocaust canon in the Eastern bloc, to look at how anti-fascism, by its own cultural logic,⁹ constructed a morality based on the historical memory of the Jewish genocide.

In line with this, my starting point is not that there was no discussion of the Jewish genocide in the Eastern bloc, but that it was discussed differently. I will reconstruct how moral universalism worked in the cultural framework of anti-fascist humanism. First, I describe Hungarian film production in the 1960s and Zoltán Fábri's artistic credo, followed by a discussion of the aesthetic and social characteristics of his filmography. Then, I analyze the film *Late Season* and its Hungarian and international reception, followed by an examination of the role that the Cold War played in the making of the film and its reception.

Humanism and Anti-Fascism: Fábri's Artistic Credo

The 1960s, particularly after 1963, were in many respects an unrepeatable golden age for Hungarian film. The thaw in Communist cultural policy was coupled with the desire of filmmakers to assume a role in public life, the cult of auteur films, and high audience numbers. In addition, the nationwide movie theater network made films available to everyone and the spread of television was yet to threaten the status of cinema. After the Stalinist dictatorship and the re-organization following the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, film production was decentralized.¹⁰ The basic experience of film in the 1960s was that of the thaw. On the one hand, cinema became an important domain for the regime's consolidation and legitimacy, on the other, it gave a freer hand to filmmakers eager for autonomous artistic expression. It became possible to touch on public social problems with the language of cinematography. In this period, Hungarian filmmaking became part

⁸ Zoltán Kékesi and Máté Zombory, "Antifascist Memory Revisited: Hungarian Historical Exhibitions in Oświęcim and Paris, 1965," *Memory Studies* 15, no. 5 (2022): 1087–1104.

⁹ Andreas Agocs, *Antifascist Humanism and the Politics of Cultural Renewal in Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

¹⁰ Balázs Varga, "Tűréshatár. Filmtörténet és cenzúrapolitika a hatvanas években," in *Művészet És Hatalom. A Kádár-Korszak Művészete*, ed. Tamás Kisantal and Anna Menyhért (Budapest: JAK–L'Harmattan, 2005), 116–138.

of the international film scene.¹¹ The post-Stalinist regime made no secret of seeing the production of internationally acclaimed artworks and films as a source of legitimization. The forums for these were predominantly important international film festivals, which were attractive not only for increasing the international recognition of the country, but also for the opportunity to acquire hard currency through distribution contracts.¹²

Zoltán Fábri encountered the new waves of the 1960s as an established and recognized director. Ever since the nomination of his third film, *Merry-Go-Round*, for the Palme d'Or at the 1956 Cannes film festival, Fábri had already been known internationally. His movies were regularly featured in international festivals. By 1967, three of his films had been shown in Cannes and two had won prizes in Karlovy Vary; he had won the special prize in Locarno, the first prize in Moscow and Rome, and had received prizes in Boston and Venice.

Fábri was a humanist artist, whose great theme was repressive violence. As he explained, the examination of everyday reactions to the historical borderline situations of violence threatening human dignity became a mania for him, a theme to which he returned time and again.¹³ The archetype of violence against human beings in Fábri's films was fascism. He first dealt with this topic in his fourth feature film, *Professor Hannibal* (1956), set in the increasingly fascist Hungary of the late 1930s. In Fábri's films, the problem of violence against human beings often develops in the context of the relationship between past and present. In *Darkness in Daytime* (1963), the protagonist is forced to recall events in 1944, when he tries to save his young Jewish lover using his daughter's identity papers, unaware that his daughter was involved in the communist resistance and was wanted by the authorities. When his lover is captured with his daughter's fake papers, he must make a fateful moral decision. In the director's interpretation, the film deals with the repercussions of the crimes of fascism. As he put it in an interview, "A number of my contemporaries bear the psychological wounds caused by fascist violence, and though they may live their lives today as others do, their entire behaviour as human beings is determined by that old experience."¹⁴ The ef-

11 Balázs Varga, "Párbeszédnek kora. Történelmi reflexió a hatvanas évek magyar filmjeiben," in *Hatvanas Évek Magyarországon*, ed. Rainer M. János (Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2004), 427–446.

12 See Dorota Ostrowska, "Three Decades of Polish Films at the Venice and Cannes Film Festivals: The 1940s, 1950s and 1960s," in *Beyond the Border: Polish Cinema in a Transnational Context*, ed. Ewa Mazierska and Michael Godard (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 77–94.

13 István Zsugán, "Az emlékezés kényszere. Interjú Fábri Zoltánnal," in *Szubjektív magyar film-történet 1964–1994* (Budapest: Osiris-Századvég, 1994 [1976]), 335–337.

14 László Kürti, "A Nappali Sötétség után," *Filmkultúra* 23, March–April 1964, 116.

fects of the past, he continued, are manifest in the film as flashbacks and as “a responsibility that racks the soul,” ruining the protagonist. Fábri’s humanism confronts historical, archetypically fascist constraints with human agency. According to a key line from *Darkness in Daytime*, which Fábri himself frequently quoted: “I hate times in which people have to be saints, martyrs, or heroes in order to remain human.”

But history “repeats” itself only insofar as the violence and oppression tangible in the present is seen in the light of the morally borderline situations of the past. In connection to *Late Season*, Fábri put the problem of the burden of history as follows: the film is about the “absolute villainy, the most loathsome insult that has struck humankind since the beginning of history: fascism, which we rightly thought that, being a terrible trauma of humanity, once we had survived it, there was only one way to evaluate it. And how many places in the world, in how many forms, does it rear its head? Are we justified in remaining indifferent to it?”¹⁵ As an absolute example of a system doing violence to the human being, fascism is expressed as a primal scene that is repeated in many varied forms in the present. In Fábri’s vocabulary, fascism, as one outstanding example of historical atrocity, is a generalized symbol for absolute evil. His humanist perspective expresses fascism as a general human problem, an understanding of which provides the key to the struggle against violence in the present.

Aesthetics and Politics: Confronting the Past

From the second half of the 1950s, Fábri positioned himself in relation to developments in international film and found his reference points in Western cinematography. For inspiration in the visual representation of the effect of the human soul’s vulnerability, he drew on the techniques of modern film. The cinematographic solutions of modernist aesthetics influenced Fábri in two fundamental respects. First, non-chronological editing made it possible to portray the reconstructive, associative, non-linear organization of the act of remembering, and thus avoid a chronological presentation. “This novel method of film dramaturgy, which gives the artist the opportunity to move in various levels of time without any kind of technical trickery,” he noted, considering the filmic innovations of the last ten years in relation to *Darkness in Daytime*.¹⁶ The second decisive formal solution proved to be the

¹⁵ István Nemeskürty, *Fábri Zoltán – a Képkalkotó Művész* (Budapest: Szabad Tér Kiadó, 1994), 165–166.

¹⁶ Kürti, “A Nappali Sötétség után,” 117.

depiction of the processes of consciousness, which “brings to the surface the world inside a person, the problems, the mass of conflicts, in all their complexity, in all their intricacy.”¹⁷ Historical time relates to the present through the temporality of human consciousness. The film frames function as the images of consciousness, and the relationship between past and present is represented as an issue of guilt. As a result, the movie does not conjure up the past trauma as it happened, but examines the lasting effect the trauma has on ordinary people, and thus on humanity. Through the lingering effect of the past event, fascist violence is still relevant and pertinent in public life.

The analysis of the psychological processes of ordinary persons fits perfectly with his humanist understanding of the individual and of history. Yet Fábri's confrontational films have no shortage of sociological references: human nature is shown through belonging to a community. In one interview, he stated that in our time “the surviving criminals and the surviving victims of the fascist war live together in one human community, with forced tolerance, sometimes by custom, in small and large groups, with amity towards one another, because this is the only thing we can do on the basis of our historical lessons. But can this go hand in hand with neglecting to remember and to remind, particularly if in several places in the world certain perceptible and non-latent tendencies give us reason to do so?”¹⁸ Consequently for Fábri, filmmaking has a social mission, confronting us with the past, and thus helping us to prepare to make the right decision in borderline situations in the future.

When dealing with fascism as the historical archetype of repressive violence, Fábri's filmic art inevitably addressed the paradox of anti-fascist aesthetics, which consists of “the necessity of engaging with fascism as a fascinating and powerful irrational force, and the problem of how to represent it without being seduced by it.”¹⁹ *Late Season*, a film dealing with fascism as a historical atrocity more directly than any of Fábri's other works, features strategies of anti-fascist aesthetics: a dialectical approach, a combination of historical documentation with modernist modes of representation, and a confrontational reception model. I will frame the analysis of the film according to these features. The most important impact on *Late Season* in this regard, as we shall see, was beyond doubt Alain Resnais's cinematography (besides Fellini's *8 and ½*, Fábri cited *Hiroshima, mon amour* as a defining experience for his film).

17 István Szabó, “Egy gondolat igézetében. Beszélgetés Fábri Zoltánnal,” in *Filmkultúra 1965–1973. Válogatás*, edited by Bíró Yvette (Budapest: Századvég, 1991 [1965]), 25.

18 Nemeskürty, *Fábri Zoltán*, 166.

19 Jennifer Lynde Barker, *The Aesthetics of Antifascist Film: Radical Projection* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 133.

In Fábri's *ars poetica*, accordingly, confrontation with the past is not commemorative. The weapon for the fight against fascism is analysis: an analysis from many different aspects of what systematic violence does to social beings in morally borderline situations where there is no right choice. This is far from entertainment or the enjoyment of beauty. The film is supposed to trigger a reaction, to transfer the burden of history to the viewer, who should wrestle with it after leaving the cinema.

A Film about Remembrance and the Holocaust

Late Season is based on György Rónay's 1963 novel *Evening Express*, a "petit-bourgeois Eichmann case," as the author put it.²⁰ The protagonist, a retired apothecary assistant Kálmán Kerekes – whose conscience is already unquiet, only to be completely upset by the news of the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem – starts to collect evidence for his increasingly probable trial. "It will not be a commemoration," writes Rónay in his diary, "but partly a self-justification of the protagonist, his defense plan before the expected court hearing – the living past, actually and authentically in the present (not merely as a writer's technical trick)."²¹ Accordingly, the novel's temporal composition is non-linear. The three strata of time (1944, 1946, and the present) only loosely follow the division of the chapters, and the text contains several unlabeled temporal switches.

The film retains Rónay's idea, which ponders how the catastrophe could be passively observed. It is thus about the silent accomplices, the "bystanders," who are distinguished from the culprits punishable by the enacted laws. In autumn 1944, in answer to the police chief's question of whether there are still any Jews in the town, the assistant apothecary names Mr. and Mrs. Szilágyi – his kind, discreet employers. All this happens under extreme psychological pressure: Kerekes answers the question of his former childhood classmate, assuming the police chief knows that by dispensing drugs Kerekes had been helping the resistance and had thus committed "treason." "Unless the Szilágyis are Jews . . ." groans Kerekes in the film's betrayal scene. This all fits perfectly with Fábri's idea of the ordinary person compelled to be the subject of history.

²⁰ György Rónay (1913–1978) was a poet, writer, translator, and literary historian, a representative of Neo-Catholic literature. From 1945, he served as editor, later editor-in-chief, of the Catholic literary and scholarly periodical *Vigilia*.

²¹ György Rónay, *Napló* (Budapest: Magvető, 1989), 671.

More striking, however, are the conceptual differences between the two works. The makers of *Late Season* departed markedly from the novel's concept in three respects. At the center of the film, instead of the past living in the present, they placed remembrance; instead of the war, they placed the Holocaust; and they drew a parallel between the genocide of the Jews and the threat of nuclear war.

From a Guilty Conscience to a Trial

The counterpoint between the presence of the past and memory can be found in the relationship between the characters. The former is represented by a group of pensioners, who spend the late summer at the resort of Lake Balaton, playing jokes on each other to help the time pass: Péter Holl, the former police chief of the town, who served his prison sentence and works as a petrol pump attendant (in the novel he disappears in 1944); Alfréd Zorkay Strób, the retired Curia judge; Bonta, the former state secretary; Sodits, the retired teacher; Dezső, the chauffeur, who, it transpires at one point, is none other than General Rudolf Drasitz Drapp, a fictional military commander, the “legendary hero of the southern front”; and Henrik Lauffer, a former horse dealer. In this group, which represents Hungarian society, the former perpetrators and victims live side by side. The latter are embodied in the figure of Lauffer, whose family was killed in Auschwitz. The protagonist Kerekes, a former apothecary assistant, is also part of the group.

Set before this social background, and in contrast to it, we see Kerekes's tribulations with memory. It all begins with a practical joke, when friends at the resort send Kerekes a summons, ostensibly from the county police station, to question him as a witness “in a certain matter.” While for the rest of the group the ongoing Eichmann trial is nothing more than a magazine sensation, it stirs Kerekes's guilty conscience. The prank prompts him to travel to the scene of the deed for the first time since 1944, to find out what happened to the employers he unwittingly reported. The others follow him and up the prank by chasing him. In this sequence, with plenty of burlesque elements, the link to the past appears as an associational relationship of memory images and fantasies led by desires and resistance. Through the editing, the authors make associative temporal jumps in the non-linear story, and the filmic image represents the protagonist's interior world. The reconstructive nature of memory is hinted at by the dramaturgical solution of having Kerekes return to 1944 in his 1961 appearance. The first part of the film contains various modern film techniques: stop action photography, rotational editing, freeze framing, and fast motion.

In the second part of the film, the representation of the past receives another role, with an emphasis on narration and re-enactment. Late one night, the desperate Kerekes asks his friends to hold an unofficial trial against him. He wants to at last be sure of his guilt or innocence. Exhausted and under the influence of alcohol, the reluctant old men eventually toe the line. Zorkay is given the role of judge, Lauffer is the witness for the prosecution. Eager for evidence, the accused demands a confrontation with the petrol pump attendant, or the former police chief. The scene is an open reference to Dürrenmatt's short novel, *Die Panne* (*A Dangerous Game*, or *Traps* in the US). The whole thing is a drunken prank, yet deadly serious. In a grotesque manner, justice is carried out and remembrance takes on a social form. The characters assume their old roles under the former regime of 1944. Kerekes confesses to sending the Szilágyi couple to death, but Holl, although he remembers, proves to be uncooperative in the confrontation and denies ever blackmailing the former assistant. Without a dead body, the judge is at a loss with what to do with the accusation of murder: "What would a single 'unless' do? Nothing! It's a joke!" However, in response to the judge's verdict of not guilty, the "prosecutor" Lauffer confronts the old men with the truth: "Do you know what you are? Accomplices! Murderers!" and then he gives the closing speech for the prosecution. Crucially, this happens outside the context of the mock court: now the accused is not just Kerekes, but the others too, and Lauffer speaks to all of them as an eyewitness on behalf of all Holocaust victims. The scene ends with Lauffer asking for the death penalty "in the name of the felt soles, the soap bars, and the lampshades"²² "as punishment for this 'unless,'" referring to the wording Kerekes used in his answer to the police chief's question about the Jews of the town.

Picture and Dream Image

Another conceptual difference between the novel and the film relates to what is being remembered. *Late Season* is a "Holocaust film." In the novel, the police chief has the Szilágyi couple executed in the town's main square, as a deterrence in response to the discovery of a bomb and a resistance sabotage campaign. Their indirect involvement in the resistance (providing the movement with medicine)

²² This is a reference to the victims of the Holocaust, which was a commonly used emblem of Nazi barbarity in the early postwar period, when factual knowledge about the Holocaust mingled with fear and uncertainty.

has turned them into martyrs. In the film, by contrast, the Szilágyis are persecuted solely for being Jewish.

In *Late Season*, the visual representation of the Holocaust has a dialectical structure. On the one hand, Fábri uses archival footage, clearly separated from the rest. Kerekes runs from the pranksters pursuing him, taking refuge inside a cinema where the newsreel about the Eichmann trial is being screened: “In the Dock.” This is a mock newsreel; in actual fact, the Hungarian news used only images from the courtroom. In the newsreel, the courtroom scenes frame footage taken from Alain Resnais’ 1955 film *Night and Fog*, showing people being herded into wagons, a concentration camp, prisoners, corpses, a crematorium, and a mass grave. The narration, which tells us that “the Nazi mass murderer is also responsible for the extermination of Hungarian Jews” is the work of the filmmakers: they relied on motifs taken from Rónay’s novel. This pseudo newsreel made using old documentary footage and contemporary news is a “film within a film” addressing the problem of documenting the Holocaust as a historical atrocity. It is not only an aesthetic claim for the authenticity of real-time film footage as realistic, but also an anti-fascist claim about the social role of documenting atrocities.

The other strategy used in representing the Holocaust in *Late Season* is an integral part of Fábri’s filmic art. He used powerful, expressive montages in various vision-scenes in his earlier films too. In *Late Season*, a sequence presents the surrealist vision Kerekes dreamed on the night of the trial, where, led by Lauffer, he sets out to look for the bodies of the Szilágyis. In the dream composition, Kerekes is stigmatized by the yellow star on his coat and looks for the Szilágyis among the 666,666 dead and the lampshades mentioned in Lauffer’s speech for the prosecution. The sequence ends in a gas chamber scene, where Kerekes is holding a bar of soap in his hand and he himself is placed among the naked victims waiting for the “shower.” The gas chamber scene is composed to represent the protagonist’s inner world. Its main element is the line of telephone kiosks, in which we see Kerekes after the newsreel of the Eichmann trial, as he searches for his former employers in the telephone book in order to gather evidence about their fate (and thus about his own responsibility). Thus, the scene is decidedly stylized, eschewing realism. This representational strategy portrays the Holocaust through the metaphor of hell, as a projection of the spiritual world of the protagonist. This can be seen as an aesthetic claim in favor of the artistic authenticity of representing the Holocaust as historical atrocity.

As a common strategy of anti-fascist film aesthetic, *Late Season* destabilizes authenticity by relating historical documentation to the artistic expression by modernist techniques of representation. Positioning the spectator in a representa-

tional space of authenticity, the film at the same time asserts and questions the possibility of representing historical atrocity.²³

Auschwitz and Hiroshima

On the one hand, Fábri's film constructs the "absolute villainy," which he mentioned in interviews only as fascism, quite clearly as the Holocaust, and universalizes its significance as an archetypical example of violence against human beings. Yet on the other hand, his film does not depict the Holocaust as incomparable in relation to other acts of anti-human aggression. The moral universalism of *Late Season* places the present threat of nuclear war in parallel to the Nazi genocide. As in *Hiroshima, mon amour*, this parallel unfolds between the characters: Kerekes and his counterpoint, the figure of the Red Woman, who is not part of the novel. Like Kerekes, she is also troubled by guilt, and she bumps into the apothecary assistant in certain key scenes of the film. First, she appears in the pharmacy's window when Kerekes struggles with his memories trying to enter in his former workplace: his silhouette in the window overlaps with her image. She is there at the glass telephone kiosk next to the one in which Kerekes is looking for the Szilágyis' number. Both are driven by their inner fears and traumatic hallucinations: she thinks that Kerekes is an agent of her husband sent to take her home; for Kerekes, the Red Woman represents the nameless accuser, who "knows everything" about his deeds.

"This woman is just as driven as the main protagonist, but the reason for her determination comes from the present day: the most current of illnesses, radiation sickness, which killed her seventeen-year-old son, whose memory has driven her to distraction," said Fábri in a 1967 interview.²⁴ The film does not show how this happened, the spectators only know it from the account of the Red Woman. According to Fábri's interpretation, the Red Woman becomes Kerekes's conscience, and the two characters are mirrors for one another's anxiety (in fact Kerekes holds a mirror to the woman in one scene). Unable to cope with the loss, the Red Woman is haunted by the trauma of losing her son at the age of 17 because of leukemia. By linking Hiroshima with Auschwitz,²⁵ Fábri moved beyond the com-

²³ See Barker, *The Aesthetics of Antifascist Film*.

²⁴ István Zsugán, "A rettegés embertorzító közérzete ellen. Fábri Zoltán," in *Szubjektív magyar filmtörténet 1964–1994* (Budapest: Osiris-Századvég, 1994 [1967]), 66.

²⁵ Ran Zwigenberg, *Hiroshima: The Origins of Global Memory Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

memorative representation of historical atrocity. Instead of representing the uniqueness of the Nazi genocide of the Jews, he counterpointed it with a contemporary threat of atrocity in a common anti-fascist framework.

In sum, Fábri's film is about the "late season" of war criminals, in which history presses down on society like a burden. The characters are literally pursued by the past: Kerekés by the old pranksters – the "old world"; Lauffer by a man, who turns out to be the son of his former business associate, asking for information in order to apply for compensation; the Red Woman by her husband, who would take her home, and put an end to this mad flight from reality. *Late Season* is an anti-fascist film, because it interprets the problem of the "past that does not pass" as an effect exercised on the present by fascism, understood as a symbol of absolute evil. The film focuses on the Jewish genocide, which it portrays as a constitutive feature of fascism, but not as a singular historical event with unique significance. The paradigmatic nature of fascism as the "absolute villainy" lies in its being the ultimate borderline situation of violence done to humans. After all, as Fábri put it, "It was this system that deformed and dehumanized to its utmost extreme the man, who is born to freedom. The memory of this period lives, or haunts, as a fatal trauma in everyone who experienced it; whether as a victim, a perpetrator, or a silent accomplice."²⁶ *Late Season* deals with the latter, stating that a potential killer lurks in everybody, who under the influence of soul-crushing social pressure may do something they would otherwise be incapable of. Fábri's humanism raises the moral significance of the Holocaust to a general level and draws a comparison with another form of aggression against humankind – the Cold War nuclear threat.

The Antimimetic Reception Model of *Late Season*

Late Season's genre is difficult to define. It starts out as a comedy and ends as tragedy, solemn scenes and burlesque alternate, and the entire film is characterized by a grotesque tone. As Fábri explained in an interview:

It can be seen as a clownish prank. Perhaps as something else too. These days television viewers see serialized Grand Guignols, mysterious phantoms, and when these are on the air, the streets are deserted, everyone is glued to the screen. But from the gates of the Spandau prison [in Berlin, where Nazi war criminals sentenced at the Nuremberg Trials were incarcerated] from time to time also phantoms emerge, major war criminals who have served their term and are awaited by a line of luxury cars and torchlight processions, and

²⁶ Zsugán, Zsugán, "A rettegés embertorzító közérzete ellen," 65.

world magazines offer them astronomical sums for their appalling memoirs. Eichmann too, with a good contract in his pocket, was working on his memoirs when he was captured by the Israeli secret police. If they had been published, they'd be bestsellers on the book market. The world's hunger for sensation is insatiable. It demands shock. Well, *Late Season* meets this requirement too. It could even be classed as a horror.²⁷

In this view, the grotesque is a kind of sign of the times, as if in its filmic form it simply follows the peculiarities of the topic, and the director follows the demands of the contemporary public.

One crucial function of the grotesque, however, is alienation, the recurrent frustration of the viewer's identification with the character – a significant part of the film's reception model. While in the novel Rónay grants a mercy killing to Kerekes, who, driven to distraction and paranoia, throws himself in front of the evening express, in the film, although Kerekes tries to kill himself, he fails. In contrast to the novel's relentlessly tragic but cathartic denouement, the film provides no solution: it ends with Kerekes slumping across a table in the pub with the old men, and the camera zooms in to a magazine hanging on a hook; on the cover is Eichmann sitting in the glass booth. The film ends with the first frame. As a characteristic of anti-fascist aesthetics, the film intends to initiate action in the spectators. After seeing *Late Season*, Rónay wrote a letter to the director in which he said that in connection with the filming, he had most reservations about the conclusion:

The final frames, acted slightly differently from the "line" followed throughout, from the relentless harshness, could have given if only in mood, to a limited extent, the absolution which in the novel I did not give to the wretched Kerekes, nor did I wish to. But there is no absolution, and this is as it should be, and once more artistically courageous. The viewers should leave with this lack of absolution, Kerekes's guilt, or at least the problem of Kerekes's guilt. If only for one night, when they will be forced to think it all through and concede that what they have seen is not a "fiction film" (this is not just playing around!), but they have been instructed to confront for once what they did, or what they did not do – "unless" they are to deny their humanity.²⁸

Though *Late Season* extends the significance of the Holocaust, it does not base its universality on the idea of uniqueness. Its moral universalism does not sacralize the Holocaust as an incomparable catastrophe, but makes it a parable of violence against human beings. By its formal language, the film prevents a mythologized reading of the Holocaust, that is to say, it frustrates its generalized reading as a struggle between good and evil. In addition, with its tragicomedy and alienating

²⁷ Quoted in Nemeskürty, *Fáabri Zoltán*, 167.

²⁸ Quoted in Nemeskürty, *Fáabri Zoltán*, 170.

effects, it prevents the viewer's identification with the characters, or, to use an expression of Terrence Des Pres, the film is "antimimetic."²⁹ Its intention is not to trigger catharsis, but horror, which the audience experiences in the context of the on-screen analysis of psyche and society, prompting them to relate it to themselves. Rather than catharsis through identification, the reception model of *Late Season* is self-scrutiny triggered by alienation.

"Striving Absurdly for the Absolute"

For contemporary views of *Late Season's* antifascist humanism, it is worth surveying the reviews of the film in Hungary and abroad. In Hungary, the film premiered on February 23, 1967. Its topic was taken for granted and was seen as a logical continuation of Fábri's oeuvre. As an article in the official party paper put it: "With the sincere shock of a humanist, [the film] warns us of the soul-deforming operation of the machinery of violence and fear."³⁰ At the same time, the film achieved its aim and triggered a lively controversy. According to the aesthetician Miklós Almási, it was a genre-creating "debate film," which instead of providing an answer "merely forces each person to clarify his own personal solution in 'close combat' with the film."³¹ The debate centered around the responsibility for the Holocaust, specifically on whether the film exonerates the average Hungarian embodied by Kerékes³² or prompts him or her to take responsibility.³³

The anti-fascist humanism of *Late Season* was thus qualified as legitimate by the reviewers. Its evaluation hinged on whether its formal language endorsed, or on the contrary, undermined the legitimate auteur's program. Aside from its formal eclecticism (slavish copying of international masters vs. *bravura d'auteur*), the film's grotesque-ironic tone sparked controversy. Those rejecting the film expected catharsis, which however the film denies, as the grotesque tone extinguishes any identification with the protagonist.³⁴ At the same time, many reviewers thought the grotesque heightened the drama,³⁵ and that it was an authentic expressive tool for

29 Terrence Des Pres, "Holocaust Laughter?" in *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. Berel Lang (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1988), 216–233.

30 Vera Létay, "Utószezon," *Népszabadság*, February 26, 1967.

31 Almási Miklós, "Milyen film az Utószezon? Egy műfaj, és egy vita margójára," *Kritika*, no. 5 (May–June 1967): 3–7.

32 László B. Nagy, "Az önvizsgálat zsákutcájában," *Élet és Irodalom*, February 25, 1967.

33 See István Örkény, "Tragikomédia a bűnről és a bűnhődésről," *Filmkultúra*, no. 1 (1967): 29.

34 See Ervin Gyertyán, "Utószezon," *Filmvilág*, March 1, 1967.

35 See György Kárpáti, "Utószezon," *Lobogó*, March 8, 1967.

the social problem with which it dealt.³⁶ The national daily *Magyar Nemzet*, which by the way features in the film, summed it up as follows: *Late Season* “strives absurdly for the absolute. It puts the viewer through hell, with no attenuating of the spectacle, nor does it allow us, while quasi enjoying the opus, to attenuate things, or for our attention to wander; indeed, it rather plunges each one of us into a cauldron of Dantesque penitence heated up by his own sins.”³⁷

Questions of formal language arose with especial vehemence in regard to the film’s representation of the Holocaust. Critics were silent about Fábri’s relational, even dialectical solution, which puts the authenticity of the archival footage in a relationship with the psychological authenticity of the surreal fiction. Reviewers were concerned solely with the vision of the gas chamber and were extremely divided about this Holocaust representation. Unfavorable reviews considered the scene morally unacceptable. Literary historian and magazine editor Anna Földes doubted whether “the depiction on the cinema screen of the undepictable” in other words “forcing of the hell of the death camp onto the screen [was] artistically and psychologically acceptable.”³⁸ Similarly, according to the author for a journal of literary criticism, “the terrible reality of the deportations and gas chambers has no poetry, nor can it. These images of inhumanity humiliate art, and all the more so the memory of the former victims.”³⁹ The revulsion may have been caused by the fact that, insofar as we give a realist reading to the dream scene, the predominantly bodily representation of the extras is unable to convey the ideas we have formed of the reality of the gas chambers. Accordingly, the weekly of *The Hungarian Writers’ Union* wrote of a “naked revue of well-heeled extras,”⁴⁰ while the regional daily *Zalai Hírlap* mentioned “a scene far more reminiscent of nudist bathers than of the tormented prisoners condemned to death, herded into the gas chambers.”⁴¹ Several reviewers phrased their displeasure as simply tastelessness.⁴²

From today’s point of view, stranger are the appreciative comments about the gas chamber vision. The evening paper *Esti Hírlap* considered it a “memorable, splendid sequence,”⁴³ while according to the weekly cultural magazine *Film Színház Muzsika* “the visions appear with especially terrible authenticity in this

36 Almási, “Milyen film az Utószezon?”

37 László Zay, “Utószezon. Magyar Film,” *Magyar Nemzet*, February 23, 1967.

38 Anna Földes, “Utószezon,” *Nők Lapja*, March 25, 1967.

39 Fenyő, István. “Utószezon,” *Kortárs*, no. 5 (1967).

40 B. Nagy, “Az önvizsgálat zsákutcájában.”

41 J. A., “Gondolatok egy filmbemutató kapcsán,” *Zalai Hírlap*, March 5, 1967.

42 See B. Nagy, “Az önvizsgálat zsákutcájában,” Gyertyán, “Utószezon,” Kárpáti, “Utószezon.”

43 László Bernáth, “Utószezon,” *Esti Hírlap*, February 22, 1967.

photographic style.”⁴⁴ The Catholic weekly *Új Ember* mentioned the “masterly pictorialness of the sequence shot in the realm of the dead,” remarking that “the rude naturalism of the gas chamber scene is a break in style with the dreamlike environment.”⁴⁵ The political and literary journal *Látóhatár* emphasized that the film “gives no emotional charge to the moral message, which it expresses intelligently, nicely, with fine suggestiveness,”⁴⁶ while the regional daily *Dunántúli Napló* praised the “fantasy-born, horrifying lampshade scene,” “which signals the inhumanity of fascism with terrible novelty.”⁴⁷ Finally, the regional daily *Fejér Megyei Hírlap* respected both the authentic depiction and the scene’s role in the dramaturgy: “And when we feel almost physical pain, Fábri claws into our nerves and our consciences with cruel honesty, by a splendidly composed vision sequence, by the authentic presentation of the horror of the gas chambers, by the ‘lampshade-making workshop’ edited in, and by plunging us into the forest of marble tombs preserving the names of hundreds of thousands of martyrs.”⁴⁸

Late Season’s international renown was due to its being shown at the 28th Venice International Film Festival, in spite of Hungary not selecting it among the recommended works to enter into the competition. Luigi Chiarini, the artistic director of the festival, selected the film personally. The movie won the Venice International Film Festival’s San Giorgio Prize for the most human progressive film, according to the jury’s citation for its humane content and its message of responsibility. The Cineforum 1967 prize was awarded “for its humanity, for its timely imaginative language, in which the grotesque does not degrade the elevated, and for its fine confession of individual responsibility, for taking a stand against violence and impatience.”⁴⁹ Fábri was awarded the grand prize of Venice for the film’s conscience-stirring effect and humane sense of responsibility, while Antal Páger won the Cinema Nuovo prize for his acting in the main role.

The international reception of *Late Season* was unequivocally positive. Like their Hungarian counterparts, critics saw the choice of theme as a continuation of Fábri’s oeuvre. Aldo Scagnetti argued that “the crisis of conscience examined by Zoltán Fábri gains broader, almost eternal interpretation, if we follow a constant leitmotif in the Hungarian director’s works; the grinding away, the wearing down

44 Jenő Illés, “Utószezon. A büntudat filmje,” *Film Színház Muzsika*, February 24, 1967.

45 Lajos Bittei, “Utószezon,” *Új Ember*, March 5, 1967.

46 Zoltán Hegedűs, “A büntudat komédiája. Néhány szó az Utószezonról.” *Látóhatár*, no. 3–4, (April 1967).

47 E. H., “Utószezon. Új magyar film,” *Dunántúli Napló*, 26, 1967.

48 Antal Kátay, “Utószezon,” *Fejér Megyei Hírlap*, February 25, 1967.

49 László Zay, “Több kitüntetést kapott az Utószezon velencében,” *Magyar Nemzet*, September 9, 1967.

of people's inner selves, caused by peremptory violence and the terror of fascism, which leads even the most defenseless of individuals to unexpected, irrational deeds.⁵⁰ Georges Bratschi held a similar view, calling the film "nearly a masterpiece."⁵¹ The reviews concurred that *Late Season* is not an easy film, and does not entertain, because "it is a mirror thrust aggressively before the viewer's face."⁵² They found that one thing contributing to this disturbing nature was the unusual formal language. According to the critic of *Feuille d'Avis de Lausanne*, "The mixing of genres is so intimate, we feel like laughing and this is awkward, but if we give in to laughter all the same, a second later we regret it."⁵³ It is reminiscent of the films of Resnais and Fellini, writes Gian Luigi Rondi, but "without plagiarism, with strong, decisive individuality" and the irony with respect to the characters does nothing to reduce the scale of the tragedy.⁵⁴ Reviews of the film were unanimous in their praise of Antal Páger's interpretation.

Cahiers du cinéma wrote about *Late Season* in its section on the Venice Film Festival. In his review, Jean-André Fieschi pointed out that the film "is particularly surprising for the risky dosage it tries to bring about between tragedy and derision, buffoonery and message."⁵⁵ For him, *Late Season* had an unusual relationship between theme and filmic solutions, and "does not shrink from a type of caricature all the more appalling because it is of a subject where normally restraint is required, be it sincere or affected." At the same time, it was clear to him that this simply reflects the director's intentions. He wrote: "What numbs the critic is the extent to which all this is deliberate, calculated, graded by Fábri." In the end, Fieschi decided that rather than condemning the film, "the criteria of good taste should be seriously re-examined in the context of a work that abuses them with such assurance: indeed, here Fábri assumes an audacity close to pure recklessness, because the film, at least ideologically, cannot satisfy anybody." In conclusion, rather than condemning the film's "inept ideological-formal delirium," he recommends critics describe its "very real strangeness."

In 1969 the Bundesrepublik television broadcast Fábri's film, under the title *Die Vorladung* (The Summons). *Die Welt* called it a masterpiece, a film "whose geologi-

50 *L'Ora Palermo*, August 30, 1967, quoted by Nemeskürty, *Fábri Zoltán*, 172.

51 *La Tribune de Genève*, August 31, 1967, quoted in Nemeskürty, *Fábri Zoltán*, 173.

52 This quote in Hungarian translation comes, without the source indicated, from the dossier on the reception of *Late Season*. *A film dossziéja*, Archive of the National Film Institute, NF 2087, n. d., 2.

53 *Feuille d'Avis de Lausanne*, November 1, 1967, *A film dossziéja*, 5–6.

54 *Il Tempo*, Rome, August 30, 1967, quoted in Nemeskürty, *Fábri Zoltán*, 173.

55 J. A. F., "Utoszezon (Arriere-Saison) de Zoltan Fabri (Hongrie)," *Cahiers du cinéma* 195 (November 1967): 27–28.

cal strata testify a great diagnostician of the time, and a great director.”⁵⁶ German reviewers, like the Italians, wrote admiringly of the tone of the film, which they did not find to be at odds with its theme. The *Münchener Merkur* praised not only the fact that “over and over it enthrals with the carelessness with which it mixes shock and grotesque humor,” but also the concept of drawing a comparison between the Holocaust and nuclear war, because the film “creates a general atmosphere of guilt (the old man’s) and madness (that of a young woman).”⁵⁷ *Deutsche Welle* too pointed out the daring novelty of the grotesque tone, stating that over the past 20 years there had been countless attempts to explain the unexplainable: what was Auschwitz? “In *Late Season* the talented Hungarian director has attempted to approach the theme from a completely different angle. And it should be added that unprecedented courage and great self-assurance was needed to approach the drama of the deportations from this angle, the angle of the grotesque. But this courage was well-founded, and well-rewarded.”⁵⁸

Even from this incomplete description of the reception of *Late Season*, we can draw the conclusion that the moral universalism of Fábri’s humanist anti-fascist film proved to be a legitimate experiment. This is shown by the unequivocally positive reception abroad and the fact that even negative Hungarian reviews objected to the failure of Fábri’s authorial program due to the formal language of the film. The film was interpreted as a clearly humanist work, confirmed by the many citations for the Venice Film Festival prizes as well as reviews. At the same time, in some respects, there is a significant discrepancy between the Hungarian and international reception. While abroad the grotesque tone and the film’s aesthetic grammar, in general, was seen as unequivocally positive, in Hungary critics were divided on both these issues. This difference may derive from the fact that in Hungary, a former axis country with a significant Jewish minority in the 1960s, the audience was involved in the problem posed by *Late Season*, both historically and in the present time. Here the ironic-grotesque tone applied in representing the Holocaust was qualified partly as morally unacceptable, partly as valid. Fábri made his film at a turning point in the social history of sensitivity to human suffering. The canon of visual representation of the Holocaust was not yet fixed, so the possibilities for authenticity remained open. The period was characterized by a plurality of moral universes of historicity.

56 *Die Welt*, November 21, 1969, In, *A film dossziéja*, 7.

57 *Münchener Merkur*, November 21, 1969, *A film dossziéja*, 8.

58 *Deutsche Welle*, November 22, 1969, *A film dossziéja*, 9.

Cold War and Morality

International film festivals were sites of both Cold War networking and collaboration, as well as political rivalry. In Venice in 1967, the situation was tense in several respects.⁵⁹ Two days before the end of the festival, on September 6, 1967, *Variety* ran an article entitled “International and Internal Politics Simmer in Venice Fest Background: Hungarians Brush Anti-Semitism Rap,” which among many political incidents mentioned the case of *Late Season*. The article recalls that on August 23, three days before the festival began, *Variety* wrote that the lead actor in a film addressing the question of guilt and war crimes was a “notorious Nazi.” As a member of the jury, Susan Sontag lamented the fact that Antal Páger, a war criminal, had been given a role in the film, and Israel, which was just breaking off diplomatic relations with Hungary (established already in 1948), raised an objection with the Mostra.⁶⁰ On September 6, *Variety* reported that in the press conference for *Late Season*, in the presence of the actor, questions about Páger’s past were addressed to Fábri, who defended him, saying that Páger “did appear in an anti-Semitic pic, but was not guilty of the other charges and had been cleared in Hungary after he came back from Latin American exile.”⁶¹

By a quirk of fate, it was thanks to the Cold War that Antal Páger (1899–1986) could appear in Fábri’s film. Already popular before the Second World War, he exploited the opportunities of the increasingly “Jew-free” post-1938 artistic scene. He himself featured in propaganda-like opuses of the Christian-national regime, and his daughter was on a wartime propaganda poster. Moreover, after the extreme right and pro-Nazi Arrow Cross Party took power on October 15, 1944, he appeared with the “Leader of the Nation” Ferenc Szálasi, who was executed in 1946 for war crimes. Páger did not wait for the People’s Court to ascertain whether or not this established his guilt. In 1945, he fled from the Red Army to the West. Hungary asked the Allies for his extradition, but in vain, and he was never put on trial. Finally, he and his family settled in Argentina.

59 Riccardo Triolo, “Per Una Storia Della Mostra Internazionale d’arte Cinematografica: Revisione e Studio Della Serie Cinema Conservata Presso l’archivio Storico Delle Arti Contemporanee Della Biennale Di Venezia” (PhD diss., University of Padua [UNIPD], 2011).

60 See Thomas Quinn Curtis’s article in *International Herald Tribune*, August 30, 1967, quoted in Nemeskürty, *Fábri Zoltán*, 172.

61 International and Internal Politics Simmer in Venice Fest Background; Hungarians Brush Antisemitism Rap, *Variety*, September 6, 1967, 2.

Hungarian authorities, who kept émigrés under observation, were aware in the early 1950s that Páger was racked by homesickness,⁶² but the idea of his return was not contemplated until there was a change in the relationship of the Hungarian People's Republic to the diaspora in the West. Similarly to the Soviet Union and other Eastern bloc countries, in the mid-1950s Hungary too embarked on a policy of enabling the return of émigrés in the West. The amnesty decrees issued in 1955, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of liberation, and in 1956, made it possible for Hungarians who had gone abroad after the war to return freely within one year without legal consequences.⁶³ Hungary's intention was both to weaken the hostile Western emigration by syphoning off its loyal elements and to increase its political legitimacy abroad and at home.⁶⁴

A plan for the "voluntary" return of the actor was drafted in January 1955 in the Hungarian Ministry of the Interior. Naturally, there was an examination of his past activity, in which no seriously incriminating elements were found: Páger hailed from a poor peasant background, so he was not seen as a class enemy, nor had he been a member of the Arrow Cross Party. Although he had featured in ideologically disapproved films, he had committed no action against the personal freedom of others. During the lengthy, often petty bargaining, the Interior Ministry made it clear what it expected from Antal Páger: "You must have seen that this year [1956] at the Cannes festival our films have not achieved the results they ought to have done, and clearly you would be able to help us through our current problem."⁶⁵ The Ministry's contact person was referring to the fact that Fábri's *Merry-Go-Round* did not win the Palme d'Or prize. The deal paid off: Hungary's first festival prize at Cannes was indeed garnered by Páger in 1964 for his acting role in the film *Drama of the Lark*.

The popular actor finally arrived in Hungary in late summer 1956. The peculiar coverage of this sensational event was framed within the state policy toward the Hungarian political exile. The press reacted largely positively, supporting Páger's return, because he could put his skills in the service of the homeland, but it would be an exaggeration to celebrate the fact: he should behave modestly and work hard. At the same time, newspapers received letters from angry readers, while reports by agents (particularly in the world of the arts) spoke of a wave of

62 András Lénárt, "Derült égből. Páger Antal visszatérésének körülményei," 2000, no. 11 (2013): 58–69.

63 Ferenc Cseresnyés, "A népi demokráciák hazatelepítési akciói 1954–1956," *Acta Scientiarum Socialium* 45 (2015): 245–259.

64 See Magdolna Baráth, "Attempts to Win and Break up the Hungarian Emigration after 1956," in *East Central Europe in Exile, Volume 2: Transatlantic Identities* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 293–309.

65 Quoted in Lénárt, "Derült égből," 61.

dissatisfaction. The reason for this was not just the lack of either exonerating or condemnatory public gestures, but an antipathy toward those returning from the West, “who, as one investigating officer put it, lived handsomely, while here at home we struggled, starved, and rebuilt [the country].”⁶⁶ To calm tempers, the party Politburo brought a resolution on the withdrawal of the exaggerated promises made to the actor. During the 1956 revolution, Páger remained passive and in 1957 he was given opportunities, first minor roles in theatre and then major roles in film, in an acting world that was forced temporarily to do without important figures because of the role they had played in the revolution. Soon he became one of the most employed film actors: by the time of the release of *Late Season*, he had already acted in 80 films and acted in another 90 after it.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have dealt with one “Eastern” response to the challenge posed by the “burden of history” in the 1960s. The oeuvre of Hungarian director Zoltán Fábri, particularly his film *Late Season*, makes a valid statement on the universal moral significance of the Holocaust at one of the turning points for the history of memory in Europe.

The moral universalism realized in Fábri’s oeuvre is characterized by humanism and anti-fascism. Fascism gains general significance as an emblem of radical evil and becomes a parable of violence against human beings. The Holocaust is one particular example of this “absolute villainy,” which the film under discussion compares to the Cold War threat of nuclear annihilation. In doing so, the film relies on the strategies of anti-fascist film aesthetics of the time, most importantly a dialectical structure, parallel usage of documentary footage, modernist artistic surrealism, and confrontation with the spectators.

In *Late Season*, the relationship between past and present is captured not by commemoration or archives, but by the concepts of analogy and analysis. The need to confront the past is expressed as a problem of the individual’s conscience. The antimimetic reception model of the film is not to give catharsis through identification, but to trigger self-analysis through alienation. Accordingly, the tone of the film is not tragic, lofty, or sacred, but tragicomic and grotesque. The film demythologizes the Holocaust and constantly frustrates identification, unsettling viewers. It prompts them to continue the analysis of the conscience seen in the film on themselves.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Lénárt, “Derült égből,” 63.

