Marta Pszczolińska, "Entry on: Sisyphus [Syzyf] by Zdzisław Kudła", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Katarzyna Marciniak. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1408. Entry version as of July 12, 2026.

Zdzisław Kudła

Sisyphus [Syzyf]

Poland (1970)

TAGS: Cupid Eros Sisyphus Zeus

We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Sisyphus [Syzyf]
Studio/Production Company	SFR (Studio Filmów Rysunkowych)
Country of the First Edition	Poland
Country/countries of popularity	Poland
Original Language	silent movie (Polish credits)
First Edition Date	1970
First Edition Details	*Syzyf.* Directed by Zdzisław Kudła. Studio Filmów Rysunkowych, 1970, 7 min.
Running time	7 min
Format	35 mm (205 m)
Available Onllne	Syzyf at dailymotion.com (accessed: April 23, 2021).
Genre	Animated films, Short films, Silent films
Target Audience	Crossover (teenagers 16+)
Author of the Entry	Marta Pszczolińska, University of Warsaw, m.pszczolinska@al.uw.edu.pl
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Creators

Retrieved from Wikipedia (accessed: February 25, 2022), author of the photo Jacek Proszyk, CC BY-SA 4.0 licence.

Zdzisław Kudła , b. 1937
(Director)

Zdzisław Kudła (born 1937) is a director of animated films, alumnus of the Faculty of Fine Arts at ASP (Academy of Fine Arts) in Cracow. Since 1963 associated with the SFR (Cartoon Studio) in Bielsko-Biała, starting from the bottom of the employment scale. Eventually, he led the company between 1992 and 2010, until his retirement. He transformed the studio according to new animation standards and resolved its economic problems. He directed or co-directed animated educational films (*Żywa wystawa* [A Live Exhibition], 1971; *Kłopoty z wykresem* [The Problem With a Graph], 1972; *Wystarczy iskierka* [A Spark Is Enough], 1977), cartoons for children (*Bolek i Lolek* episodes, *Struś i słoniątko* [The Ostrich and the Baby Elephant], 1974, *Porwanie w Tiuturlistanie* [Kidnapping in Tiuturlistan], 1986, *Gwiazda Kopernika* [Copernicus' Star], 2009) and animated films aimed at more mature audiences (*Arena* [Arena], 1968; *Syzyf* [Sisyphus], 1970; *Bruk* [Paving-Stones], 1971; *Szum lasu* [The Hum of the Forest], 1972). He was awarded prizes many times at various festivals in Poland and abroad, for example, for *Bruk* at the festivals in Barcelona, Montreal and Oberhausen. SFP – the Society of Polish Filmmakers gave him a lifetime award for the totality of his artistic endeavours.

Sources:

polishfilmla.org (accessed: April 15, 2021).

sfp.org.pl/osoba (accessed: April 15, 2021).

sfp.org.pl/wydarzenia (accessed: April 15, 2021).

Bio prepared by Marta Pszczolińska, University of Warsaw, m.pszczolinska@al.uw.edu.pl

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Additional information

Summary

In a sepia-coloured reality, an ancient god, presumably Zeus, wakes up on a cloud, pulls up a jug out of thin air and swallows a huge gulp. Suddenly, he hears a noise, and there is a large tremor. It is Sisyphus and his boulder, far below. The merciless god laughs at Sisyphus' failures and constant labour. He starts off his day by making an armchair and desk appear and then proceeds to pour out a few drops from his jar to torment Sisyphus, who fails to catch and drink the liquid. The condemned continues his useless work while Zeus entertains himself by fashioning a naked woman out of the smoke coming from his pipe. Sisyphus grapples with the boulder again. Zeus answers a phone call but is afraid that Sisyphus could end his work while not being supervised, so he beats him up with his staff causing him to fall again. The exhausted man struggles with his penance again. This time, he is tickled with a feather by Eros/Cupido when he is almost at the top of the mountain; his next attempt is interrupted by a raven or a crow sent by Zeus.

Meanwhile, the god browses through a magazine with half-naked women, stretching comfortably on a sofa. The determined Sisyphus cleverly uses the god's inattention and, instead of pushing the boulder up, starts throwing it towards the top. Each throw diminishes the mountain until the moment Sisyphus can reach the top himself. The liberated man descends from the mountain into a flourishing land full of colours and variety.

Analysis

This short animation reinterprets the motif of Sisyphus' punishment, seen as a story of a man and his problems. The action begins when the ancient myth ends – when Sisyphus' mythical cleverness and tricks led him to receive his punishment and the eternal pointless penance. The following film scenes show the character at work – his constant, monotonous activity seems wholly useless and boring, though performed with great effort, involvement and perseverance. Despite wearing ancient garments placing the character in a distant past, one can understand the image as a metaphor of everyday human existence: grey, dull, hard, full of obstacles, predetermined and controlled by superior forces. However, the new happy ending of Kudła's reinterpretation gives hope for change. Thanks to Sisyphus' persistence and ingenuity, his refusal in accepting his fate, the

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protagonist flattens the mountain, finally redeems himself, and regains freedom and life. The optimism of the final scene is highlighted not only by colours and the changing of the animation style into one resembling stained glass but also by playing the different music – triumphant trumpets accompany Sisyphus when he reaches the summit, and mild, gentle strings facilitate his descent.

Although first in order of appearance, the second character portrayed is Zeus. Not named, he is recognizable by his high position and attributes – a long sceptre and a thunderbolt. The god is presented as a kind of guard or official/bureaucrat. He has special powers but uses them to torment the convict beyond his punishment –he enjoys watching Sisyphus' failures and makes his penance harder just for fun. The viewer sees the god mocking the man. His jeering laugh evokes the topos of *Deus ridens* and his mean behaviour of a god toying with humans – the topos of the gods' plaything. What is more, Zeus can also be regarded as a loafer, a symbol of idleness against the background of a man at work – he is busy entertaining himself by fantasizing about attractive women or looking through magazines while Sisyphus labours without a moment's rest. Zeus' lust for women, of course, is regarded as one of his character traits, but, on the other hand, it can symbolize his pointless life, filled with distractions – the desk, armchair, sofa, phone or men's magazines are all products of the contemporary world.

Reducing the elements of narration to a minimum focuses the viewer's attention on the characters and their dissimilarities. The antagonists – Zeus and Sisyphus – are accompanied by many other contradictions, like up – down, good – evil, esteem – contempt, malice – kindness, boss – worker. What is novel in treating the myth of Sisyphus is the message – there is no customary moral, while the viewer is meant to empathise with the poor condemned as if he were an innocent victim unjustly punished.

The lack of dialogues and the simplified narrative convention emphasizes the role of sound effects and music.

Cupid Eros Sisyphus Zeus

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Character traits Freedom Punishment Success and failure

Further Reading

Camus, Albert, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe. Essai sur l'absurde*, Paris: Gallimard, 1942. (accessed: May 21, 2021).

Czaja, Justyna, *Nowe szaty mitu*, Filmoteka Szkolna. Lekcja 37, available at: filmotekaszkolna.pl (accessed: May 21, 2021)

Addenda

Production Team:

Director: Zdzisław Kudła,

Assistant Director: Romuald Kłys, Franciszek Pyter,

Screenplay: Marek Neyman,

Music: Zenon Kowalowski,

Sound: Mieczysław Janik, Otokar Balcy,

Montage: Alojzy Mol.

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