Hanna Paulouskaya, "Entry on: Scarecrow [Чучело (Chuchelo)] by Rolan Bykov, Vladimir Zheleznikov", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/853. Entry version as of November 22, 2026.

Rolan Bykov , Vladimir Zheleznikov

Scarecrow [Чучело (Chuchelo)]

Union of Soviet Socialist Republicks (USRR) (1984)

TAGS: Antigone Heracles Hercules Hydra Venus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Scarecrow [Чучело (Chuchelo)]
Studio/Production Company	Mosfilm
Country of the First Edition	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)
Country/countries of popularity	Union of Soviet Socialist Republicks (USRR)
Original Language	Russian
First Edition Date	1984
First Edition Details	*Чучело* [Chuchelo; Scarecrow]. Directed by Rolan Bykov. Screenplay by Vladimir Zhelezniakov and Rolan Bykov. Cameraman Anatoly Mukasei. Moscow: Mosfilm, 1984, 127 min.
Running time	127 min
Date of the First DVD or VHS	3 May 2011, “Azimut”
Awards	1986 – USSR State Prize (Rolan Bykov, Anatoly Mukasei); 1986 – Laon International Film Festival for Young People (Grand Prix – Rolan Bykov); 1987 – Vichy European Children and Youth Film Festival (Grand Prix – Rolan Bykov; Best Actress Award – Kristina Orbakaitė).
Genre	Children's films, Feature films
Target Audience	Crossover (12+)
Author of the Entry	Hanna Paulouskaya, University of Warsaw, hannapa@al.uw.edu.pl

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Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk

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Creators



Rolan Bykov by Igor Vereshchagin. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons, licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 (accessed: January 4, 2022).

Rolan Bykov , 1929 - 1998
(Director)

Rolan Bykov (Ролан Быков) was an actor, director and screenwriter highly involved in cinema for children and youths. He studied at the Boris Shchukin Theatre Institute (1951) and started his career in children and youth theatres (actor in the Moscow Young Generation Theatre, 1951-58; director in the Leningrad Theatre of Lenin's Komsomol 1958–1960). From 1960 he started to work for cinema at the Mosfilm studio. He was the secretary of the Union of Cinematographers of the USSR (1986-90), the head of the "All-Union Center of Cinema and Television for Children and Youth" (1989–1992). From 1992 he was the president of the International Fund for the Development of Cinema and Television for Children and Youth (the Rolan Bykov Foundation). He was a member of the Administrative Council of the General Assembly for Children's and Youth Cinema at UNESCO. Bykov received many awards and other signs of honour.

Sources:

Bykov, Rolan, *Я побит – начну сначала! Дневники* [I'm Defeated – I'll Start Over. Diaries], comment. E. Sanaeva, Moscow: Astrel, 2010.

Profile at kino-teatr.ru (accessed: September 30, 2019)

Bio prepared by Hanna Paulouskaya, University of Warsaw, hannapa@al.uw.edu.pl

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Vladimir Zheleznikov , 1925 - 2015
(Screenwriter)

Vladimir Zheleznikov (Владимир Железников) was a writer, screenwriter and producer, who specialised in children literature and film. He studied at the Maxim Gorky Literary Institute (1957). He worked for a popular children's magazine Murzilka. He started working for cinema in 1960. From 1988 he was the art director of "Globus" [Globe] film studio, a company producing movies for children.

Sources:

Profile at kino-teatr.ru (accessed: September 30, 2019)

Bio prepared by Hanna Paulouskaya, University of Warsaw, hannapa@al.uw.edu.pl

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Additional information

Casting	Lena Bessoltseva – Kristina Orbakaitė, Nikolai Bessoltsev – Yuri Nikulin, Margarita Ivanovna – Elena Sanaeva, Dima Somov – Dmitry Egorov, Mironova (Iron Pin) – Ksenia Filippova, Shmakova – Anna Tolmachëva, aunt Klava – Svetlana Kriuchkova, music conductor – Rolan Bykov.
Adaptations	The film was based on the novel of Vladimir Zhelezniakov of the same title: Vladimir Zheleznikov, *Чучело* [Scarecrow], Moscow: Sovremennik, 1988 (1st ed. 1982).
Summary	The main character of the film is Lena Bessoltseva, a 6th grade pupil who comes from Moscow to a small Russian town to her grandfather Nikolai Nikolaevich. She lives with him and attends school in the town. Lena is a very open, sincere and honest person. She has a funny, clumsy look. She has long braids, a big mouth and a smile. She is very thin. Her classmates laugh at her and call her a scarecrow, “grinning like a Cheshire cat” [“Рот до ушей, хоть завязочки пришей!”]. Her grandfather is also a laughing stock in the town. He is a war veteran, a major, but he wastes his entire pension on buying paintings by his grandfather who was a serf but also an artist. Nikolai Nikolaevich does not care to buy new clothes for himself and looks like a beggar. He is called a “patch-maker” [заплаточник] in the town. At some point the class decides to miss a lesson and to go to the cinema. The students pretend not having seen the announcement

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about changes in lessons. One of the students, Dima, with whom Lena falls in love, meets their teacher and tells her the whole truth. As a result, the class is punished and is deprived of a long-planned trip to Moscow. The class decides to find the traitor. Lena knows that it was Dima who told the teacher everything. When the boy is afraid to admit it, she takes the blame, wanting to protect him. She thinks it doesn't matter much. The class, on the other hand, starts to treat her as the traitor, and to challenge and scare her. As she is a new person in the class, the pupils have no mercy and bully her more and more. At some point, the children put together a scarecrow, dress it in Lena's dress and set it on fire in the ruins of an Orthodox church. All this time, Lena trusts Dima and waits for him to defend her and tell the truth. He promises to do so, but never opposes the class. Having lost hope, Lena shaves her head, comes without being invited to Dima's house for his birthday, dressed in the dress taken off the scarecrow, and shows her shaved head while dancing.

Finally, the truth is revealed – to the grandfather, the teacher and the students. Lena and her grandfather sail off to Moscow. Nikolai Nikolaevich donates his house and paintings to the town, giving the school a picture of Lena's great-grandmother as a child, who looks very much like her and also has a short haircut. At this point the class wants to boycott Dima, but Lena stands up for him. At the end of the film, when Lena and her grandfather take a boat to Moscow, there is a cadet orchestra on the river bank, conducted by the director of the film Rolan Bykov. He looks directly at the camera, acting as a coryphée of a choir of tragedy and a witness to events.

Analysis

It was, probably, the first movie made in the USSR where a whole class as well as their teacher is shown as a mob, destroying the only good person. In this film the whole society is cruel and even if somebody wants to help (Vasiliev), there is no possibility. There is also the adult world that exists separately from the children's world and it cannot interfere in the action. However this adult world acts in the same way – they laugh at people who have different values and do not tolerate differences.

Rolan Bykov in his diaries calls the class "hydra of the collective"*. Shots of the crowd are made in such a way that it looks like an animal made of a few bodies. Such attitude to a collective was considered blasphemy in Soviet culture, where the collective was the highest

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value and every pioneer was reminded about it every time he/she raised a hand above the head in the sign meaning that “the public interests are above the personal.”

The hydra has a main head – Mironova or “Iron Pin” as she is called in the class. The girl is a good pioneer and a very honest person, who believes in the communist values. She believes in the collective and tries to do “the right” things. She is a sort of Antigone ready to follow through. But it seems that she acts according to the law of war, which is not acceptable during peace. This mirrors the problems of the Soviet Cold War generations of children educated on principles of heroism from WW2.

Another feature of the hydra in the movie is the influence of fashion and mass culture (“vulgarity” [пошлость] in the definition by Bykov)**. Shmakova, another class leader, is distinctive for her stylish clothes and sneaky character. Other pupils also express a desire to dress nicely and have money. This feature is supported by tracks of contemporary western (Shocking Blue) and Soviet (Alla Pugachëva) music clashing with classical music played by the cadet orchestra.

The hero fighting with the hydra is Heracles. However Lena’s character resembles more a loving Christ, brave Jeanne d’ Arc or simple Ivan the Fool. The problem that Bykov raises is how to remain a hero while fighting with monsters. How not to become a monster after the fight? As Bykov writes in his diary he wrote while making the film:

> "The idea of good with fists is a demagogic shapeshifter. The power of good is in the very good, the victory of good is not in suppression, not in destruction, not in capture. Here is another way of victory, good wins when it remains good – this is its victory. The parade of victory for good is impossible." (1983)***

Lena has hard times and often cries, but she is still kind and sincere till the end of the movie. She does not allow the class to boycott Dima and stops it.

The motive of Lena is love****. When Lena appears for the first time we hear music of the song *Venus* by the Shocking Blue that was extremely popular in the Soviet Union and even got its “Russian” name *Shisgara* – made of “She is got it”. At some point Lena dresses her hair in a grownup style and goes through the city trying to feel

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like a beauty, a “goddess”.

The narration of the movie is very simple and symbolical. The scarecrow set on fire in the church ruins resembles a cross. It recalls also the trials of witches and heretics*****. Bold head girl is a symbol of slavery or of walks of shame of French adulterous women after WW2. For a Soviet young audience it would resemble, most probably, someone with typhoid or a war victim. Children’s longing for Moscow is a kind of longing for New Jerusalem or a fairytale king’s palace.

* Rolan Bykov [Ролан Быков], *Я побит – Начну сначала! Дневники* [Ia pobit – Nachnu snachala. Dnevniki; I’m Defeated – I’ll Start Over. Diaries], comment. E. Sanaeva, Moscow: Astrel, 2010, 191–192, 201.

** Bykov, *Я побит*, 201.

*** Bykov, *Я побит*, 253.

**** Bykov, *Я побит*, 192.

***** Cf. Bykov, *Я побит*, 254.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Antigone Heracles Hercules Hydra Venus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Character traits Child’s view Conflict Emotions Fashion Girls Good vs evil Heroism Individuality Love Morality Oppression Punishment Relationships Sacrifice School Small town life Society Teachers Teenagers Truth and lies Values Violence
Further Reading	Arkus, Lubov', [Аркус, Любовь], “Приключения Белой Вороны” [The Adventures of a White Crow ("Prikliucheniia Beloĭ Vorony")], *Chapaev internet magazine*, chapaev.media (accessed: September 30, 2019).

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Bykov, Rolan [Быков, Ролан], *Я побит – Начну сначала! Дневники* [I'm Defeated – I'll Start Over. Diaries (Ia pobit – *Nachnu snachala. Dnevniki)*], comment. E. Sanaeva, Moscow: Astrel, 2010.

Bykov, Rolan [Быков, Ролан], "До и после Чучела" ["Before and After the Scarecrow" ("Do i posle Chuchela")], *Yunost* 9 (1985): 84–105.

Zheleznikov, Vladimir [Железников, Владимир], "'Чучело' продолжается" ["'The Scarecrow' is being continued" ("'Chuchelo' prodolzhaetsia")], interviewed by T. Korotkova, *Izvestiia*, October 26, 2010, chapaev.media (accessed: September 30, 2019).

Addenda

Release dates in other countries:

Finland – April 25, 1986, "Linnunpelätin",

Hungary – November 6, 1986, "Bocsáss meg, madárijesztő",

Argentina – May 7, 1987, "El espantapájaros",

USA – June 1987,

Japan – September 8, 1990,

GDR – 1987, "Vogelscheuche",

etc.

Other credits:

Cameraman – Anatoly Mukasei.

Music by Sofia Gubaidulina.

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