



**ORDINARY PEOPLE, EXTRAORDINARY LIVES
THE CINEMA OF MÁRTA MÉSZÁROS**

Nine Months (Kilenc hónap)

SPOILER WARNING The following notes give away some of the plot.

Márta Mészáros' first film in colour shocked some contemporary audiences with its final documentary scene. Pushing the boundaries of traditional family, Juli (Monori) has to be resourceful to juggle study, work and single parenthood. Jan Nowicki plays János, whose love might be guided more by social compliance than personal passion. This often uncompromising drama of mismatched aspirations places domesticity and work as characters alongside the individuals.

bfi.org.uk

With the international acclaim that followed *Adoption*'s Berlin Film Festival Golden Bear, Márta Mészáros then made international co-productions, shot in colour and starring non-Hungarians like Jan Nowicki (with whom Mészáros had a lengthy relationship), Marina Vlady and Isabelle Huppert. A common factor in *Nine Months* (1976), *The Two of Them* (1977) and *The Heiresses* (1980) is the extraordinary Lili Monori, who became the quintessential Mészáros protagonist via riveting studies of complicated, conflicted and frequently unsympathetic young women.

Monori's fearlessness as a performer extended to her giving birth for real in *Nine Months* (Mészáros, having gone through the process more than once herself, was disinclined to soft-pedal its treatment here), and her often stormy relationships with Nowicki's characters (her boss in *Nine Months*, an alcoholic in *The Two of Them*, a principled army officer in *The Heiresses*) are counterpointed by electrifying double-acts with her female co-stars.

Michael Brooke, *Sight & Sound*, Summer 2021. With thanks to Márta Mészáros, Jákob Ladányi and the Hungarian National Film Archive.

Lili Monori represented a completely different style of acting, she acted differently, she existed differently to other actresses. She is unchecked, she lives with every fibre of her being, she suffers or delights if needs be – it's not acting. I feel very close to this style of play. I like it when an actor can cry and laugh in the same scene. ... When I told her that I wanted to make a film with her it turned out she was pregnant. This is exactly what the film is about. I wanted her to give birth in front of the camera. It came as no surprise when she agreed.

Marta Meszaros: *My Diary*. Budapest, Pelikan Konyvek, 1993 quoted in Eszter Fazekas, *Restored Films of Márta Mészáros*, National Film Institute Hungary – Film Archive

A contemporary review

Beginning with shots of a blazing furnace and ending with a full-frontal birth sequence, *Nine Months* provides a sensitive but unequivocal illustration of the forces that determine the female condition.

Its dumpy, phlegmatic heroine, veering from the passionate to the rational with weary stoicism, finds scant comfort in solitude but even less in the company of the man who insists she abandon it for his sake. Yet in the icy courtyard where he begs her to come for a drink, a side of meat, recently butchered, steams with red warmth; it is flesh, as usual, that wins the battle, and the film's love scenes, intense and intimate in persistent close-up, directly communicate the girl's physical needs. Undoubtedly she is right to avoid matrimonial imprisonment with the charming but limited János and his vindictive family, but the film doesn't deny the raw reality of the new baby, its birth punctuated by the memory of János and his furnaces; the final images of motherhood have a frozen neutrality.

This is the sixth full-length feature by Jancsó's filmmaking wife Márta Mészáros (although the first to find distribution in Britain), and while its support of women's liberation is made vividly clear, the argument is the more successful for these ambiguities. The film in fact provides no easy solution to the dilemma of independence-versus-dependence, and while its male characters seemingly get the best of the bargain, they are finally in as much of a conventional trap as the hapless Juli.

However, she is far from being a conventional victim, given Lili Monori's performance; apart from one decorous tear provided just a touch too neatly on cue, her solemn gaze – interrupted occasionally by amazing flashes of vulnerability – conveys a wealth of texts, reducing the need for propaganda to a minimum. Her nine-month purgatory is honourable, real and genuinely touching.

The film's other triumph, appropriately enough for Ms Mészáros first essay in colour, is the golden, Breughelesque brilliance of the photography by János Kende, with its magnificent long shots of the misty landscapes of industrial Hungary. The style, fortunately, owes nothing to Jancsó (bar one intricately serpentine movement inside the house that reveals decorators in every room), but the eye for detail is as acute. As a result, this account of bleak loneliness contains a reassuring array of consolations.

Philip Strick, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, November 1979

NINE MONTHS (KILENC HÓNAP)

Director: Márta Mészáros
Production Company: Hunnia Játékfilmstudio
UK Distributor: Essential
Production Manager: József Bajusz
Production Supervisor: Ferenc Szohár
Production Assistant: Imre Vargo, Gyula Szóvári, Ágnes Sarkadi, György Fék, Sándor Ducsay, Krisztina Szöllösy, Mária Papp, Péter Brill, Mihály Sütton, Jeno Habermann, Adrienn KarÁly, Klári Farkas, Ferenc Ormos, István Kudela, Marek Sieranski, Valdemar Wieckowski, Márta Jankovits, Ádám Csillag, Ottó Mesterics, Jozsef Nedobai
Assistant Director: Ferenc Jeli
Screenplay: Gyula Hernádi, Ildikó Kóródy, Márta Mészáros
Story Editor: Miklós Vásárhelyi
Director of Photography: János Kende
Lighting: Károly Ledniczky
Editor: Andrásné Kármentő
Art Director: Tamás Banovich
Construction: Éva Martin
Costumes: Judit Schäffer
Music: György Kovács
Sound Recording: György Kovács

Cast

Lili Monori (Juli Kovács)
Jan Nowicki (János Bognár)
Gyula Szersén
Roszich Dzsoko (Istvan)
Kati Berek (Juli’s mother)
Géza Bodó
Hedvig Demeter
Mária Dudás (sister-in-law)
Tibor Fehér
Zoltán Hermann
Sarolta Jancsó
Olga Koós (Janos’ mother)
Emil Kovács
Péterné Lakatos
Lajos M. Szilágyi
Ferenc Somló
Ildikó Szabó (tailoress)
János Szili
Gyongyi Vigh (Juli’s friend)

Hungary 1976
90 mins

ORDINARY PEOPLE, EXTRAORDINARY LIVES
THE CINEMA OF MÁRTA MÉSZÁROS

The Two of Them/Two Women (Ők ketten)

Wed 14 Jul 20:50; Mon 26 Jul 18:10

The Girl (Eltávozott nap) Fri 16 Jul 20:50

Binding Sentiments (Holdudvar) Sat 17 Jul 15:20

The Heiresses (Örökség)

Sun 18 Jul 15:20; Tue 27 Jul 20:30

Don’t Cry, Pretty Girls! (Szép lányok, ne sírjatok!)

Sun 18 Jul 18:40

Riddance (Szabad lélegzet) Wed 21 Jul 21:00

Adoption (Örökbefogadás) Thu 22 Jul 20:30

Diary for My Children (Napló gyermekeimnek)

Sat 24 Jul 14:10 (+ pre-recorded extended intro by Márta Mészáros);
Wed 28 Jul 17:50

Diary for My Loves (Napló szerelmeimnek)

Sat 24 Jul 17:30; Sat 31 Jul 20:30

Diary for My Father and Mother
(Napló apámnak, anyámnak)

Sat 24 Jul 20:45; Sat 31 Jul 14:40

Nine Months (Kilenc hónap) Sun 25 Jul 12:30



In cultural partnership with



Hungarian Cultural Centre, London

The restorations in this season were made from the original camera negatives, original magnetic tape sounds and positive prints, supervised and presented by the National Film Institute Hungary – Film Archive. The restorations were carried out at the NFI Film Archive and Filmlab.

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.
We’re also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

Join the BFI mailing list for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at www.bfi.org.uk/signup

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at bfi.org.uk/join

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on player.bfi.org.uk

A selection of titles from this season will be available on BFI Player from 22 July