



ORDINARY PEOPLE, EXTRAORDINARY LIVES
THE CINEMA OF MÁRTA MÉSZÁROS

Diary for My Loves (Napló szerelmeimnek)

Juli (Zsuzsa Czinkóczi) is determined to be a film director and wants to engage with the new society. This second, inspirational entry in Márta Mészáros' triumphant *Diary* trilogy tells of her life as a factory worker, and her witnessing of the turbulence of Hungarian and Soviet history post-World War II in Moscow. Documentary footage intensifies the drama with characters at the centre of real events.

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The strongest scenes of *Diary for My Loved Ones* come in the form of Soviet and Hungarian newsreel footage – a victory celebration after World War II, Stalin being acclaimed and mourned, mass rallies and meetings laying down the current party line. Among the onlookers at several of these events, we glimpse the movie's main characters, skilfully interpolated into history. That merger is the essence of Márta Mészáros' forceful evocation of the early 1950's, when the Communist world was compelled to come to terms with its Stalinist past.

Walter Goodman, *The New York Times*, 26 September 1987 quoted in Eszter Fazekas, *Restored Films of Márta Mészáros*, National Film Institute Hungary – Film Archive

A contemporary review

In the second instalment of her autobiographical trilogy (the first, *Diary for My Children*, covered the immediate post-war years), Márta Mészáros constructs a bleakly unflattering but remarkably intricate portrait both of her own moody, floundering adolescence and that of the new Hungary that seemed possible after the death of Stalin. Face to face, these two histories partially illuminate each other, so that the young Juli's allegiances to Moscow (where she spent her childhood) as well as to Budapest, her determined independence, her anger at the injustices of the past, and her confused pursuit of a father figure, render her not only a child of the times but also a symbol of an uneasy and unreliable nationalism, fiercely self-critical but with no clear way ahead. Mészáros reconstructs many aspects of Juli's environment that chillingly and economically evoke the period as it was: the factory interlude of exhortation and song, the endless series of committees that judge the conduct and capability of their own contemporaries, the welter of bureaucratic restriction that stifles, misinforms and obstructs. As she clasps the bars that have been shut in her face for the film's final image, Juli appears defeated at last by a world in which, ironically, she no longer has a part to play and which, coldly but without particular malice, has discarded her into exile.

Perhaps because a non-Hungarian audience is less immediately equipped to recognise the film's references to the local Communist figureheads of the 50s (although the pan across to Khrushchev at Stalin's funeral is clear enough), *Diary for My Loves* holds the attention more as an introspective memoir than as a guide to Soviet satellite strategy. Shaped like an inflated soap-opera episode, with some brisk scene-setting at the start and a blatant cliff-hanger

at the end, it has a disconcertingly time-filling quality, as if everything interesting happened in the past or is in reserve for Part III (planned to cover the 1956 Uprising).

Setting aside the historical punctuation, the main evolution of Juli's story in this section consists of her exchange of a mawkishly sentimental view of János ('The only person I really love', she confides to her diary) for an awareness of her emotional independence, prompted partly by the firm news of her father's death, partly by the growing perception of the role of filmmaker as objective onlooker, and partly by the fact that János in the flesh (rather than as romantically iconic prisoner) shows every sign of choosing his own devotees. And as she reaches her early twenties, it must be admitted that Juli is not an ingratiating figure; instead, Mészáros emphasises the intractable abrasiveness of her nonconformist *alter ego*, whose stony and unsympathetic gaze confronts both friend and foe, finding them equally uncongenial. Even when, after a brief (presumably sexual) embrace with András, she weeps at the window, it's unclear whether she has been moved by the beauty of the experience, by disgust at her weakness, or by guilt at having betrayed János.

Disinclined to overstate her case, Mészáros often seems content with this kind of vagueness, plunging into a scene without explanation (an unknown figure hustling up some stairs, a succession of office-door numbers in a corridor) and leaving her audience to catch up as best it can. Sometimes her images are impenetrable (as when Juli fiddles with a bag of sunflower seeds), indulgent (as when three toddlers pose smugly for the camera), obscure (like the silently staring apparition of László Szabó who promptly vanishes into tropical undergrowth), or plainly mis-staged (like the venomous snowball fight), although almost without fail they are also beautiful (like the overhead shot of the cotton pickers).

The importance of cinema in Juli's life also seems to have dwindled by comparison with the Garbo glimpses of *Diary for My Children*; the Odessa Steps sequence from *Potemkin* is studied without much sign of excitement, and Juli's own ventures as a filmmaker, which one would imagine to be of immense interest given her subsequent career, have no place at all except for being roundly condemned when they reach the screen. It is as if Mészáros sternly has no redeeming virtues to offer for her student years or indeed for any of her contemporaries, all of whom, male or female, come across as weak and misguided (even the merriest, Natasha, is discreetly extinguished under a heap of autumn leaves), but would prefer to forget the whole melancholy business if only she could. Perhaps she feels that *Diary for My Loves*, with its rich texture and confident photography, is adequate testimony that she, if not Hungary, was heading in the right direction all the time, and that a triumph is now valid compensation for the inadequacies of the past. If so, following the film's victory at Berlin (it won a Silver Bear in 1987), one hopes the director allowed herself a fleeting moment of satisfaction.

Philip Strick, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, March 1989

DIARY FOR MY LOVES (NAPLÓ SZERELMEIMNEK)

Director: Márta Mészáros
Production Companies: Magyar Filmgyártó Vállalat, Budapest Studio, Budapest Hungarofilm, Magyar Film
Production Manager: Ferenc Szohár
Studio Manager: Gábor Hanák
Collaborators: István Enzsöl, Sándor Faragó, Rudolf Grätzer, Brigitta Kajdácsi, Agnes Kecskeméti, András Maros, Mártha Magdolna, Agnes Mészáros, Miklósné Miklós, Csilla Nógrádi, Erzsébet Rácz, György Simon, Gábor Sipos, Suzanne McLaren, Tibor Szollár, Krisztina Szöllösy, Erzsébet Varga, Imre Varga
Assistant Director: Margit Torzsa
 Casting: Gábor Garami, Sándor Ruzsnyák
Screenplay: Márta Mészáros, Éva Pataki
Hungarian Dialogue: András Szeredás
Director of Photography: Nyika Jancsó
Chief Lighting Effects: Sándor Császár
Lighting: András Bederna
Camera Operator: Árpád Tóth
Editor: Éva Kármentő
Production Designer: Éva Martin
Set Decorator: Gábor Boros

Costumes: Fanni Kemenes
Wardrobe: Mária Avár
Make-up: Edit Basilides
Music: Zsolt Döme
Location Sound Recording: Róbert Juhász
Sound Editor: István Sipos

Cast

Zsuzsa Czinkóczi (*Juli*)
Anna Polony (*Magda*)
Jan Nowicki (*János*)
Irina Kouberskaya (*Anna Pavlova*)
Mari Szemes (*grandma*)
Pál Zolnay (*grandpa*)
Adél Kováts (*Natasha*)
Erzsébet Kútvölgyi (*Erzsi*)
Tamás Tóth (*András*)
Jerzy Bincyczki (*professor*)

Hungary 1987
128 mins

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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

The Two of Them/Two Women (Ök ketten)

Mon 26 Jul 18:10

The Heiresses (Örökség)

Tue 27 Jul 20:30

Diary for My Children (Napló gyermekeimnek)

Wed 28 Jul 17:50

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.

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