



# Walkover

+ Q&A with Jerzy Skolimowski (Wednesday 29 March only)

## **'Walkover' reviewed at Cannes**

Like the main festival, the Fourth International Critics' Week was not unduly burdened by masterpieces this year. But there was one film which justified the whole week: Jerzy Skolimowski's *Walkover*. Skolimowski, a product of the Lodz school, has already directed one feature film – *Rysopis* – but he is best known as the co-scriptwriter of *Knife in the Water* and *The Innocent Sorcerers*. It is easy enough to describe the tone of *Walkover*. Anyone who knows the two films Skolimowski co-authored will recognise the same coolness, that of the uncommitted outsider in a very committed society. His hero is the man who doesn't want to sing party songs, who doesn't want to be on factory committees, the man who is thrown out of university because he is a 'disturbing element'. The hooligan, to use that much beloved Slav term.

Andrzej is about to turn 30. After being thrown out of his engineering college, he has made a kind of living going round the country participating in boxing matches for 'beginners'. After 50 or so of these combats, people have begun to catch on to the fact that he is no longer a beginner. Arriving in a new town, an ex-schoolmate (actually the girl who denounced him years ago) tries to persuade him to take a job in the local factory. He cannot resist entering the semi-finals of another of these beginners' contests, and he wins yet again. The girl, however, has failed in her first job, and Andrzej decides to skip town with her, especially since the finals that night will put him up against a much tougher opponent. The end of the film succeeds in being at once surprising, logical, and ambiguous.

Much harder to describe is Skolimowski's style. The photography is silvery grey and sharply fuzzy. Although the film (which lasts 74 minutes) is made up of only 34 shots, the effect is excitingly disjointed, syncopated. It would seem that Skolimowski's method is entirely paradoxical, not to say dialectical. From a combination of opposites comes a new synthesis. *Walkover* is extremely subjective: from time to time the action stops while the hero confronts the camera in what can only be termed soliloquies. And yet the author also manages to achieve, through the clear-eyed rigour of his approach, a kind of desperate objectivity. This is all the more remarkable in that Skolimowski not only wrote and directed the film, he also boxed it: that is to say, he plays the principal character.

**Richard Roud, *Sight and Sound*, Summer 1965**

## **A contemporary review**

The central character from *Identification Marks: None* (again played, and now boxed, by Skolimowski himself) has reached his 30th year without settling for any of the unappealing roles that his increasingly bureaucratised society has to offer. On the eve of his birthday ('A birthday is the best time to think of death'), he is still drifting in circles, perennially fighting in boxing bouts for 'beginners' and carrying off the same inevitable prizes – wrist-watches and

transistor radios that he tries without much success to sell on a glutted market – too old to pass much longer for a beginner, and not good enough to take on more established fighters. Appropriately, it's the passing of the years and the emergence of a new younger generation that provides *Walkover* with its theme, linking Skolimowski's essentially baroque and superficially energetic incidents through a common mood of imminent defeat. (Indeed, a recurring couplet suggests that aggressive energy is itself no more than a foolhardy attempt to compensate for the passing of youth.) Death hangs, as often as not unmentioned, in the air – from the railway suicide which neither of the principals appears to notice, to the car crash which interrupts Andrzej's abortive dinner date with Teresa and sends him off on a manic, freewheeling run through the town, to the old man's dog that is given a piece of cake for its birthday and promptly drops down dead. All the old things are being replaced: 'A year ago there were goats grazing here', an elderly worker tells Andrzej as he makes his tour of the massive steel structures; while the factory manager, shifting uneasily behind his vast desk, observes that 'young people are terribly gifted nowadays', Andrzej and Teresa no doubt representing as great a threat to him as the new generation of boxers does to Andrzej.

Also permeating the film is the idea of the arbitrary unfairness of redundancy: a 30-year-old president would be the youngest in the world, but a 30-year-old boxer is a has-been. Nor is age the only source of ambiguity: the hero's feeling for Teresa combines an inseparable mixture of love, hate and indifference; and on their visit to Teresa's old convent, the miracle-working priest of her childhood turns out, like his miracles, to be a complete fraud. As in Skolimowski's subsequent films, it's the brittle tension between energy and despair that gives *Walkover* its dramatic life, and the visual element (only 34 takes) that provides the excitement: the city's ugly, rising industrial skyline; the hero's leap from the moving train; the frantic ride back to the factory. Skolimowski's caustic metaphor for the human condition ('I'll show you how to fight just to fight, when you've nothing left to fight for') is never less than exhilarating.

**Jan Dawson, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, December 1971**

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## WALKOVER (WALKOWER)

*Director:* Jerzy Skolimowski

*Production Company:* Zespół Filmowy 'Syrena'

*Production Manager:* Jerzy Nitecki

*Assistant Directors:* Henryk Kluba, Daniel Szylit,

Mieczysława Taraszkiewicz

*Screenplay:* Jerzy Skolimowski

*Director of Photography:* Antoni Nurzynski

*Editor:* Barbara Krzyczmonik

*Art Director:* Zdzisław Kielanowski

*Music:* Andrzej Trzaskowski

*Sound:* Mikołaj Kompan-Altman

## Cast

Aleksandra Zawieruszancka (*Teresa*)

Jerzy Skolimowski (*Andrzej Leszczyc*)

Krzysztof Chamiec (*director*)

Elżbieta Czyżewska (*secretary*)

Andrzej Herder (*Pawlak*)

Joanna Jedlewska (*pretty girl*)

Tadeusz Kondrat (*old man*)

Franciszek Pieczka (*activist*)

Stanisław Zaczyk (*priest*)

Henryk Kluba (*Rogala, trainer*)

Teresa Belczyńska (*Miecio*)

Krzysztof Litwin, Janusz Klosinski, B. Dec, Stanisław Przedwojski,

A. Turcewicz, J. Fedorowicz, S. Kaminska, S. A. Turcewicz,

Mieczysław Waskowski, S. Tym

Poland 1965

74 mins

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## OUTSIDERS AND EXILES: THE FILMS OF JERZY SKOLIMOWSKI

**Jerzy Skolimowski in Conversation** Tue 28 March 18:30

**The Shout** Tue 28 March 20:45 (+ intro by Jerzy Skolimowski);

Wed 5 Apr 20:55; Fri 28 Apr 18:30

**Walkover (Walkower)** Wed 29 Mar 18:20 (+ Q&A with Jerzy

Skolimowski); Sat 8 Apr 18:10

**Moonlighting** Wed 29 Mar 20:45 (+ intro by Jerzy Skolimowski);

Sun 9 Apr 13:00; Sat 15 Apr 18:20

**Hands Up! (Reçe do góry)** Fri 31 Mar 20:45; Mon 10 Apr 15:40

**Barrier (Bariera)** Sat 1 Apr 18:20; Tue 4 Apr 20:50 (+ intro by season

curator Michael Brooke)

**EO** Sat 1 Apr 20:50; Wed 5 Apr 18:20; Fri 21 Apr 20:50;

Sat 22 Apr 18:20; Thu 27 Apr 20:45

**Dialogue 20-40-60 (Dialóg 20-40-60)** Sun 2 Apr 12:30; Sat 15 Apr 20:45

**Deep End** Sun 2 Apr 15:40; Mon 10 Apr 18:30; Wed 19 Apr 20:55

**Le Départ** Sun 2 Apr 18:30; Mon 17 Apr 20:40

**Identification Marks: None (Rysopis)** Mon 3 Apr 21:00; Sun 9 Apr 18:40

**Outsider and Exile** Tue 4 Apr 18:15

**The Lightship** Sat 8 Apr 12:15; Fri 14 Apr 20:40

**11 Minutes (11 minut)** Sun 16 Apr 12:30; Sat 29 Apr 20:30

**Four Nights with Anna (Cztery noce z Anna)**

Sun 23 Apr 12:40; Fri 28 Apr 20:50

**Essential Killing** Sun 23 Apr 18:40; Sat 29 Apr 14:40

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*EO* will be available on BFI DVD and Blu-ray from 3 April (available to pre-order at the BFI shop). *Identification Marks: None* and *Hands Up!* will be available on a 2-disc BFI Blu-ray from 24 April

*Walkover* and *Barrier* will be released on Blu-ray by Second Run later this year