



WILL HEAVEN FALL UPON US? A BÉLA TARR RETROSPECTIVE

The Turin Horse (A Torinói ló)

THE TURIN HORSE (A TORINÓI LÓ)

Director: Béla Tarr

Co-director: Ágnes Hranitzky

©: T.T. Filmműhely, MPM Film, Vega Film, zero fiction film

Production Companies: T.T. Filmműhely, MPM Film, Vega Film, zero fiction film

Executive Producers: Werc Werk Works, Elizabeth G. Redleaf, Christine K. Walker

Produced by: Gábor Tényi, Marie-Pierre Macia, Juliette Lepoutre, Ruth Waldburger, Martin Hagemann

Line Producer: Gábor Tényi

Written by: László Kraznahorkai, Béla Tarr

Director of Photography: Fred Kelemen

Editor: Ágnes Hranitzky

Art Director: Sándor Kállay

Costumes: János Breckl

Music: Mihály Víg

Sound Mixer: Gábor Erdélyi Jr

Cast:

Mihály Ráday

Erika Bók (*Ohlsdorfer's daughter*)

János Derzsi (*Ohlsdorfer*)

Mihály Komos (*Bernhard, neighbour*)

Ricsi (*horse*)

Hungary/France/Switzerland/Germany 2011

155 mins

Digital

WILL HEAVEN FALL UPON US? A BÉLA TARR RETROSPECTIVE

The Turin Horse A torinói ló

Sat 24 Aug 19:50; Sat 31 Aug 17:20

Sátántangó

Sat 24 Aug 23:00 BFI IMAX

Autumn Almanac (aka Almanac of Fall)

Őszi almanac

Sun 25 Aug 15:45

With thanks to

Charlotte Saluard and Jamie Mendonça at Curzon Film

CURZON

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

A contemporary review

The inevitable question confronting any artist of stature as the twilight years close in: will the inspiration fade away; and if so when? And concomitantly: should I call time, and if so when? Some directors have of course produced great work near or right up to the end; others, arguably a larger cohort, have ploughed on (are ploughing on) regardless of – perhaps blissfully unaware of – pronounced creative decline. Manoel de Oliveira, who wrote and directed bewitching films in his 104th year, seems like some magnificent but bewildering freak of nature.

Despite being only a little more than half Oliveira's age, the Hungarian Béla Tarr, another monumental figure in the history of cinema, has nevertheless decided that *The Turin Horse* will be his final film, and that after eight features – including the seven-and-a-half-hour *Sátántangó*, his undisputed pinnacle – he feels he's now said everything he has to say. *The Turin Horse* in fact opens with another creative terminus that colours everything after it: a spoken prologue over a black screen relating the apocryphal tale of Friedrich Nietzsche's encounter with a horse being beaten by its owner on a Turin street in 1889, leading to a negative epiphany that instigated a breakdown and the end of his writing career.

The first images we see – the most striking in the whole film – fix on a horse, seemingly chosen for its air of bedraggled melancholy, pulling a cart driven by the Moses-like patriarch Ohlsdorfer, while the camera circles it almost caressingly. Is this the same horse? Or some symbol of earthly suffering à la *Balthazar*? Ohlsdorfer, lame in one arm, barely subsists on an isolated farm with his daughter, on whom he depends for fetching well-water and feeding and dressing him, each ritualised routine repeated several times with slight variations in camera angle and perspective. Ohlsdorfer feels more sharply etched owing to his bigotry, irascibility and anxious wolfing of food. Father and daughter speak little, and both spend inordinate amounts of time staring silently out of the window, shrouded in utmost misery, at a storm-tossed, empty world outside.

The film is shot in black and white and divided into chapters denoting six consecutive days, during which a slow but implacable dismantling of their universe takes place, akin to some muted horror film. At first the horse refuses to move and eat, disrupting their work patterns at a stroke; then the primary life and energy sources are snatched from them. It's like some inverse, entropic parody of God's creation; the seventh day here will presumably open up a void, or usher in death. Mid-point, a neighbour drops in to decry the world's ruination, delivering a brilliantly scripted speech bristling with apocalyptic warnings and nihilistic pronouncements about God's 'ghastly creation'.

As with all Tarr's later, allegorically inclined films, it's open to multiple interpretations, but given this is the director's swansong, it's tempting to regard it as a staging of, a meditation on, creative impasse or artistic decline. Apart from the link to Nietzsche's predicament, there are obvious metaphors – the drying of the well, the dying of the light; by the same token, the horse's refusal to move or eat seems symbolic of some severed link with the world, a closing down of options. If it's almost certainly Tarr's most stripped-down, cloistered, concentrated film, it also feels like his most introspective and personal work.

SIGHT AND SOUND

Never miss an issue with **Sight and Sound**, the BFI's internationally renowned film magazine. Subscribe from just £25*

* Price based on a 6-month print subscription (UK only). More info: sightandsoundsubs.bfi.org.uk

SIGHT AND SOUND

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

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

Another tendency when directors sign off for good: the rush to declare the last film a masterpiece; and so it's proved here. After two viewings, and despite having long been a fanatical Tarr acolyte, it's difficult to concur. Some magic seems to have definitively gone, as it had in the previous film *The Man from London* (2007). There are very very few images or scenes here reverberating with that mysterious, mesmerising charge and intensity that Tarr and his collaborators could seemingly summon at will in his greatest films. The misery can feel laid on a bit too heavily at times, and the repetitions – of musical motifs, but principally the characters' routines – produce only a wearying sense of diminishing returns.

And yet, and yet... let's face it, it's still head and shoulders above almost everything else out there, with one saving grace in particular: a shared apprehension of rupture, closure – the sense of an ending – that brings Tarr into much closer alignment with his characters and their plight than he's arguably ever been before, making this his most direct and overtly compassionate film.

Kieron Corless, *Sight and Sound*, June 2012

Béla Tarr on 'The Turin Horse'

Was the Nietzsche story the origin of The Turin Horse?

I'll tell you the truth. In 1985, Lászlá [Krasznahorkai] gave a reading in a theatre in Hungary. At the end he read the text which is now the prologue of this movie, and the last question of course is, 'What happened to the horse?' We were sitting and thinking how we could do something with this question – because everyone knows the Nietzsche story, and everyone's listening to it for Nietzsche, but nobody listens for the horse. I was always curious: what could happen to the horse?

I got the impression that the film is not really about the horse but about Nietzsche's silence. It's almost a silent film.

Not only Nietzsche's silence – the silence of everybody. These people have a daily life. I wanted to show how it's difficult to be – how being is so hard, and so simple.

The locations look very similar to the landscapes of Sátántangó. Was it shot in the same part of Hungary?

No, *Sátántangó* was shot on the plain, the lowland. Here there are some hills and a small valley. I found just the valley with this lonely tree and I thought, 'I need a house here.' We built the house – it's real stone and wood. Everything is real, including the oven. But it's not that strong, because we knew we only needed it for one year. Afterwards, everything started collapsing.

The film is very far from a tendency of rural cinema to be romantic or sentimental.

That's very far from me. In this case I could show you these people love each other, but this love is quite dry and simple – no emotions, nothing expressed, everything is hiding. He needs her, he needs the horse, and they need each other. Kundera talks about 'the unbearable lightness of being' – I wanted to talk about the heaviness of being.

It feels as if you're taking all your cinema and boiling it down, purifying it. It's a minimal version of your cinema, distilled.

Like a good spirit, you have to boil it and in the end, you have the real essence. This is the essence. This is the essence of my life and my films, and that's all.

Béla Tarr interviewed by Jonathan Romney, *Sight and Sound*, June 2012