



The Long Strange Trips of Wojciech Jerzy Has

One Room Tenants

One Room Tenants Wspólny pokój

Director: Wojciech Jerzy Has

Production Company: Zespół Filmowy 'Kamera'

Screenplay: Wojciech Jerzy Has, Stanisław Dygat

Based on the novel by: Zbigniew Uniłowski

Director of Photography: Stefan Matyjaszkiewicz

Editor: Zofia Dwornik

Art Directors: Jerzy Skarzynski,

Wojciech Krysztofiak

Costume Designers: Jerzy Skarzynski, Alicja Waltos

Music: Lucjan Kaszycki

Sound: Bohdan Bienkowski, Jan Kalisz

Cast:

Mieczysław Gajda (*Lucjan Salis*)

Gustaw Holoubek (*Dziadzia*)

Adam Pawlikowski (*Zygmunt Stukonis*)

Ryszard Pietruski (*Mieciek*)

Anna Łubieńska (*Miss Leopard*)

Beata Tyszkiewicz (*Teodozja*)

Irena Netto (*Mrs Stukonisowa*)

Zdzisław Maklakiewicz (*Józef Bednarczyk*)

Halina Buyno (*neighbour*)

Zuzanna Helska (*Felicja*)

Krzysztof Litwin

Poland 1959

94 mins

Digital (restoration)

While *The Noose* (1957) was set in the then present and *Farewells* (1958) in 1939 and 1944, Wojciech Has's third feature *One Room Tenants* (also known as *Roomers* and *Roommates*) goes back further, to the multicultural melting-pot that was early 1930s Warsaw, with particular attention paid to its since-vanished Jewish community. This was the first clear sign in one of his films of what would become such a recurring interest (particularly apparent in 1973's *The Hourglass Sanatorium*) that it was widely assumed that Has must have had Jewish ancestry. Although this appears not to have been the case; he merely had a life-long fascination with the culture, vividly reconstructed here both in exterior and interior spaces (a Jewish-run café hosts one of the first prolonged conversations).

At least seven people occupy the single room in Sarg Street being rented out by the landlady Mrs Stukonisowa (Irena Netto, who played a near-identical part in *Farewells*), although it's not always easy to distinguish between residents and regular visitors. Her two sons, aspiring poet Zygmunt (Adam Pawlikowski, a familiar face from late-1950s Polish cinema; he was also in *Farewells* and Andrzej Wajda's *Ashes and Diamonds*) and Communist activist Mieciek (Ryszard Pietruski) are among the tenants, as are new arrival Lucjan Salis (Mieczysław Gajda), law student Józef Bednarczyk (Zdzisław Maklakiewicz), and an unnamed medical student (Krzysztof Litwin) who's the brother of Teodozja (Beata Tyszkiewicz), who shares a barely cordoned-off space to the side with Felicja (Zuzanna Helska).

Despite the mixed company, there's pretty much no privacy (the room is only ever partitioned with hanging washing), with the tenants casually using each other's property from the off, much to Lucjan's visible discomfiture. Some of them work, usually out of short-term financial necessity, but most are students and/or self-styled intellectuals, sporting lofty creative/philosophical ambitions that seem unmatched by visible willingness to put any effort into achieving them beyond scribbling trite aphorisms like 'What will become of us? We are God's ankle weights'. Instead, they behave like Parisian *flâneurs* or American beatniks, strolling around Warsaw affecting an air of sophistication, which their friend Dziadzia (a scene-stealing Gustaw Holoubek, in his third consecutive Has film) has attempted to realise in physical form via a beard so ostentatiously sculpted that a middle-aged female acquaintance asks him if it has a specifically erotic purpose. The same may be true of his incongruous straw boater and long-stemmed pipe; this is a man who firmly believes in dressing to impress, even if the impression that he actually gives is some distance removed from what was presumably intended.

In fact, the men generally seem fearful of anything erotic; at an early stage Lucjan looks distinctly uncomfortable as the medical student tells him a steamy anecdote. Miłosz Stelmach has noted that the more sexually explicit aspects of Zbigniew Uniłowski's 1932 source novel were substantially toned down, but suggests that this was only partly due to late 1950s film censorship codes – he also claims that Has and co-writer Stanisław Dygat (author of the source novel that fuelled *Farewells*) were more interested in depicting existential crises than reproducing the novel's all-out realism. Lucjan attempts a hesitant romance with Teodozja, but it unsurprisingly gets nowhere, while Miss Leopard (Anna

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The Long Strange Trips of Wojciech Jerzy Has

The Saragossa Manuscript + intro

Rękopis znaleziony w Saragossie

Tue 1 Apr 18:40

The Moose Pętla

Wed 2 Apr 20:00 (+ pre-screening discussion);

Wed 16 Apr 18:15

Farewells (aka Lydia Ate the Apple) Pożegnania

Fri 4 Apr 18:10; Fri 18 Apr 20:40

One Room Tenants Wspólny pokój

Mon 7 Apr 20:45; Fri 18 Apr 18:15

Goodbye to the Past Rozstanie

Fri 11 Apr 20:50 (+ intro); Mon 21 Apr 16:10

The Doll Lalka

Sat 12 Apr 19:50; Sat 19 Apr 12:00

Gold Dreams Złoto

Mon 14 Apr 20:50; Wed 23 Apr 18:00

The Hourglass Sanatorium

Sanatorium pod klepsydrą

Thu 17 Apr 18:00

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This retrospective is presented in partnership with the ICA, which will also be hosting exclusive screenings of Has' works.



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Łubieńska, so nicknamed on account of her preferred form of fur coat) allegedly insisted that any affair with Dziadzia be strictly platonic – or, to use her quoted term, 'metaphysical'. (Although we learn very quickly indeed that if Dziadzia is the sole source of a particular story, its veracity is to be regarded with immediate suspicion.) And when Miss Leopard unexpectedly reciprocates Lucjan's apparent interest in her, at least on a physical level, he immediately tries to back out of it by nonchalantly claiming 'I did it out of boredom'.

As in *The Moose*, images of clocks, the sound of them ticking, and the abiding impression of inexorably passing time cast a long shadow over the proceedings, with everyone conscious that their own time may be running out – literally in two cases, as not everyone will make it to the end alive. (In the opening scene, Lucjan reads out a quotation, 'Time is passing, it won't stop. That fact scares even the clock.') In his writing on the film, Stelmach quotes the film critic Maria Kornatowska, 'Death is the fundamental subject for Has, starting with *The Moose*, his debut, through to *The Tribulations of Balthazar Kober* [his last film]. We deal here with the death of a character, an era, and a certain world. His films seem to be about something, the characters move in a particular direction, have their desires and pursuits. In reality, however, from the very first shot, they belong to the land of the dead. Their fate is doomed.' Which pessimistic but evidence-backed assessment can apply just as much to those left alive at the end, as they'll have been made fully aware of the essential pointlessness of their existence.

In terms of *mise-en-scène*, Has continues the approach already on display in *The Moose* and *Farewells*: long, flowing takes, with much use of Wellesian deep focus (like his almost exact contemporary Andrzej Wajda, Has revered *Citizen Kane*, and would later make a point of screening it to students when teaching at the Łódź Film School). As ever, the film was meticulously storyboarded in advance, which amongst other things led to some beautifully judged dissolves. This was the first Has film to be lit by Stefan Matyjaszkiewicz, who cut his professional teeth as camera operator for Wajda and who would subsequently shoot most of Has' films over the next few years. The music is almost invariably diegetic, played in cafés and nightclubs or simply overheard being casually performed in Sarg Street by an itinerant violinist or accordionist. If the characters in *One Room Tenants* seem perpetually unsure about where their lives are heading, this is emphatically not true of their director, whose steely control of the material rivets the attention even when the narrative is at its most lackadaisically diffuse.

Michael Brooke, season curator