

LUX

3 FILMS
24 LANGUAGES
28 COUNTRIES

FILM

DAYS

UROK (*THE LESSON*)

Kristina Grozeva and Petar Valchanov
Bulgaria, Greece



UROK (THE LESSON)

KRISTINA GROZEVA AND PETAR VALCHANOV

Nade is an English teacher. She lives with her unemployed husband and their 4-year-old daughter. One day she comes home from work to find a bailiff waiting for her. The mortgage has not been paid because her husband has used the money for something else instead. Nade has 3 days to get the money and pay the bank; otherwise the house will be put up for sale.

And so begins an obstacle-strewn race against time which will put Nade's hitherto model of integrity to the test.

KEY ANALYSIS

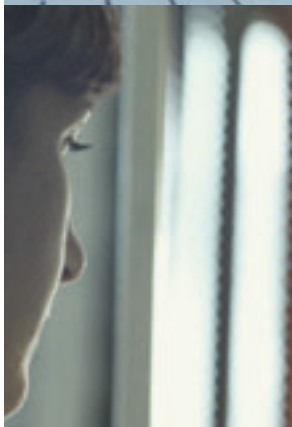
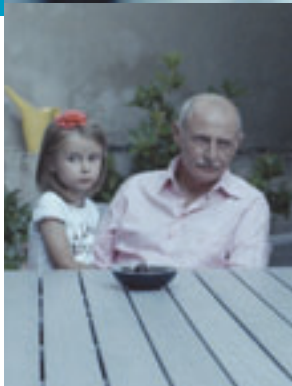
The audience is presented with a character that is experiencing difficulties in both her private life (she has a debt to repay) and her professional life (she is not prepared to allow a theft committed at school to go unpunished). These two apparently unrelated plot strands come together at the end of the film.

A WOMAN OF INTEGRITY

As the film opens, one of the pupils in Nade's class has just had her wallet and lunch money stolen. Nade asks everyone in the class to empty out their bag and lets the victim of the theft conduct a search. When this fails to reunite the girl with her wallet, Nade asks the whole class to chip in to make up for the loss and is the first to put her hand in her pocket. At the end of the lesson, Nade announces that she will give the culprit a chance to redeem him or herself and sticks an empty envelope to the wall so that the money can be returned anonymously. During the next lesson Nade checks the envelope, but all it contains is a cigarette butt, much to the amusement of the class; she warns that she will not allow the theft to go unpunished.

The two opening scenes suggest that Nade has a strong sense of justice and the conviction of providing moral guidance is a key part of her job as a teacher. Nade is there not only to teach the children English, but also to educate them in the strictest sense of the term, to pass on certain values (honesty and justice) and to make sure that they are upheld. She sets great store by this ideal. Her actions and words reveal that she takes the theft personally.

Nade is portrayed as rather strait-laced and fussy, like when she carefully arranges the exercise books so that they are perfectly in line with one another or when she picks up a piece of litter on the street and puts it in the bin; she is always immaculately dressed and even when she visits her mother's grave she takes out a handkerchief to sit on.





As she copes with the problems life throws at her, Nade seems to be very much in control of herself and her emotions. She appears to be able to distance herself from them and evaluate and deal with what is happening in a rational way. Despite a theft in her class, a bailiff who tells her that her house will soon be sold and an employer who refuses to pay her, she resolutely stands her ground, remaining incredibly calm and reasonable. Nade's acute moral awareness and ideals of justice and order, which she upholds with uncompromising vigour and self-control, are her defining features.

THE DEBT



The mortgage has not been paid and Nade's husband has ignored the bank's reminder letters; if the money is not paid within 3 days, the house will be put on the market. Nade's initial attempts to negotiate with the bank clerk are fruitless. All she can do now is try to somehow find the money. She begins by asking for what is owed to her by a man who employs her for translations, but to no avail. She then turns to a money lender.

No sooner has she solved her debt problem than another crops up: the man for whom she does translations has gone bankrupt and has bolted, meaning that she cannot count on receiving her pay at all. She therefore asks the money lender to extend her loan. Repayment takes an unexpected form: he wants Nade to give his nephew a better grade than he really deserves, leaving her to face the same dilemma as the young thief she is trying to identify at the start of the film. The mirror effect prompts Nade to question herself: why did the boy steal the wallet and why is she so determined to punish him?

CINEMATOGRAPHY



Aesthetically, *Uruk (The Lesson)* has much to recommend it. The film has little in the way of dialogue; instead, the audience itself is expected to interpret what is happening. Nade expresses herself using very few words: she is not very articulate and her facial expression remains relatively impassive throughout. It is rather her actions and the situations in which she is placed that allow the audience to reconstruct the character's mental landscape, find meaning behind her actions and understand what is happening and what she does and feels.

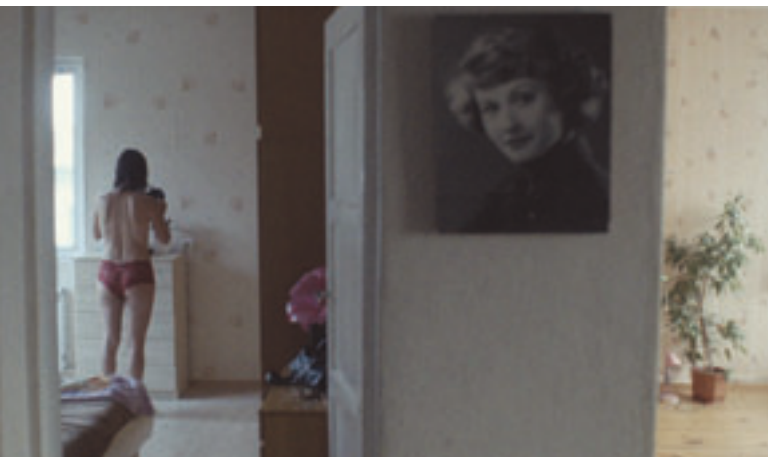
The film moves in step with its main character: at times brisk, dynamic and to the point, at other times slower, allowing for reflection and questioning. In this way, Nade can be compared to the Dardenne brothers' *Rosetta* (Belgium, 1999) or the character of Thierry in *The Measure of a Man (La Loi du marché)*, Stéphane Brizé, France, 2015). Like Nade, both characters face predicaments and silently observe their environment. The film is shot in what could be described as a documentary style in the service of a social critique that decries the tendency towards individualism and the triumph of money over moral values and ideals.



SOME POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

The film's title, *Urok (The Lesson)*, clearly refers to the main character's job. However, Nade's story and the financial difficulties that she must surmount invite us to seek other, less obvious, interpretations. How can the title be interpreted? Who is giving the lesson to whom in this scenario?

Nade is an ambiguous character who may seem unlikeable to some because of her strictness, her lack of a sense of humour and her apparent reserve... On the other hand, she may appeal to others because of her moral code, her dignity and the way she deals with difficult situations. What do you think of the character? Do you think that her idea of justice is universal?





QUESTION

The theme of debt features heavily in the film: Nade is in debt first to the bank and then to the money lender, Nade's father 'owes' his wife a gravestone, the thief 'owes' money to the class, the employer 'owes' Nade her pay. Debt racks up interest — think of it as a kind of service charge. Interest comes in the form of money, of course, but debt can also bring moral and psychological costs. The moral cost may be phenomenally high, humiliatingly so; the debtor ends up in a state of quasi-enslavement to the creditor. Can you take this idea further, drawing parallels with national debt?

Anne Vervier

les grignoux



DIRECTOR: Kristina Grozeva, Petar Valchanov

SCREENPLAY: Kristina Grozeva,
Petar Valchanov

CAST: Margita Gosheva, Ivan Barnev,
Ivanka Bratoeva, Ivan Savov, Deya Todorova,
Stefan Denolyubov

DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY:
Krum Rodriguez

PRODUCERS: Kristina Grozeva,
Petar Valchanov, Konstantina Stavrianou,
Rena Vougioukalou, Magdalena Ilieva

PRODUCTION: Abraxas Film Ltd, Graal Films
and Little Wing

YEAR: 2014

DURATION: 105 minutes

GENRE: Drama

COUNTRY: Bulgaria, Greece

ORIGINAL VERSION: Bulgarian





OUR STORIES ILLUMINATED THROUGH THE EMOTION OF FILM

The European Parliament is pleased to present the three films competing for the 2015 LUX FILM PRIZE:

MEDITERRANEA by Jonas Carpignano
(Italy, France, United States, Germany, Qatar);

MUSTANG by Deniz Gamze Ergüven
(France, Germany, Turkey, Qatar);

UROK (THE LESSON) by Kristina Grozeva and Petar Valchanov
(Bulgaria, Greece).

These multifaceted stories, which are the result of the great dedication and creativity of talented young European film directors, will be screened during the fourth edition of the LUX FILM DAYS.

LUX FILM PRIZE

Culture plays a fundamental role in constructing our societies. With this in mind, the European Parliament launched the LUX FILM PRIZE in 2007 with the aim of enhancing the circulation of European films across Europe and sparking Europe-wide debate and discussion of major societal issues. The LUX FILM PRIZE is a unique initiative. While most European co-productions are shown only in their country of origin and are rarely distributed elsewhere, even within the EU, the LUX FILM PRIZE gives three European films the rare opportunity to be subtitled in the EU's 24 official languages.

The winner of the LUX FILM PRIZE will be voted for by the Members of the European Parliament and announced on 25 November 2015.

LUX FILM DAYS

The LUX FILM PRIZE has also given rise to the LUX FILM DAYS. Since 2012, the LUX FILM DAYS have brought the three films competing for the LUX FILM PRIZE to a wider European audience.

Through the LUX FILM DAYS, we invite you to enjoy an indelible cultural experience that transcends borders. From October to December 2015, you can join an EU-wide audience of cinema-lovers in watching *Mediterranea*, *Mustang* and *Urok (The Lesson)* in one of the EU's 24 official languages. Don't forget to vote for your favourite film via our website <http://luxprize.eu> or our Facebook page!

AUDIENCE MENTION

The Audience Mention is the LUX FILM PRIZE people's choice award. Vote for *Mediterranea*, *Mustang* or *Urok (The Lesson)* and you will be entered into a competition for the chance to attend the Karlovy Vary international film festival in July 2016 — at the European Parliament's invitation — and announce the winner of the Audience Mention award.

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