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## Zbyněk Brynych: Zigzags of Film Directing

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### Abstract

This article analyzes the creative path of one of the most famous Czechoslovak directors – Zbyněk Brynych (1927 – 1995): from his first experiments with newsreels to the “thaw” period; from his masterpieces of the 1960s to his emigration to the FRG, where (in the late 1960s and early 1970s) he directed several largely experimental films; from the period of his return to Czechoslovakia, where he became actively involved in the subject of “normalization”, to the final period, when he spent the last years of his life making detective series on television in the FRG.

Thus, from one of the leaders of the Czechoslovak New Wave of 1960s (*Transport from Paradise, ... and the fifth horseman is Fear, I, Justice*), Zbyněk Brynych in the 1970s – 1980s turned into a rather ordinary director of ordinary films (*What Color Is Love?, The Night of Orange Lights, Romance for a Crown, Anger, Accused and Suspect, Who Comes at Midnight, The Halftime of Happiness*).

The author concludes that the example of Zbyněk Brynych’s winding creative path shows that the adaptation of an artist to the rules and opportunities of different periods of societies and countries can lead both to outstanding results and to the fading of the author's potential and desire to experiment.

**Keywords:** Zbyněk Brynych, film studies, Czechoslovakia, cinema, film, movie, cinematography.

### 1. Introduction

The creative path of the famous Czechoslovak director Zbyněk Brynych (1927–1995) was difficult and winding. He was self-taught, without any special cinematographic education. In the 1950s, he worked for a long time as an assistant director and made documentaries, some of which were more reminiscent of some *Daily News* or educational instructions.

He made his first full-length film in 1958, when the “thaw” period had already begun in Czechoslovakia.

### 2. Materials and methods

*Object of study.* The social and cinematographic situation in Czechoslovakia in the period from 1958 to 1985 was chosen as the object of our research.

*Subject of study:* evolution of cinematographic work of the famous Czechoslovak director Zbyněk Brynych (1927–1995).

*Research methods:* comparative analysis, generalization and classification, induction and deduction.

### 3. Discussion and results

*Zizkov Romance/Zizkovská romance.* Czechoslovakia, 1958. Director: Zbyněk Brynych.

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*Zizkov Romance* is a melodrama about the love of the plasterer Mirek and the driver Helena. It was very similar in its lyrical intonation to the Soviet "thaw-lyrical" films.

*Five out of a Million/Pet z milionu*. Czechoslovakia, 1959. Directed by Zbyněk Brynych.

The melodrama *Five out of a Million* was staged in a similar vein, consisting of several short stories: black-and-white lyricism with likeable characters and simple love stories...

However, in his next film, *Skid*, Zbyněk Brynych drastically changed both the genre and style.

*Skid/Smyk*. Czechoslovakia, 1960. Director: Zbyněk Brynych. Distribution in Czechoslovakia: 1.7 million viewers.

*Skid* is a spy noir in which the protagonist, an emigrant, with his face altered by a car accident, returns to socialist Czechoslovakia at the turn of the 1960s. He pretends to be a clown, but his real goal is not circus acts, but connections with a spy nest...

*Skid* begins with a long drive through the night streets of the FRG: flickering neon signs, jazz music. Then a nightclub with striptease (of course, within the limits permitted by the Czechoslovak caesura of those years). A bar counter. Whiskey and soda. A play with shadows and reflections, provocative glances of spectacular women... Something similar was often encountered in the 1960s in films exposing the bourgeois way of life, shot in the GDR, but Zbyněk Brynych found his own intonation, in which one could sense hidden irony: about the genre, about stereotypical characters.

Film critic Alexey Gusev wrote that from the point of view of the genre (or, at least, what is convenient to call a genre), *Skid* is both a spy film and a circus movie. Two genres that can never meet under any circumstances... The world on the brink of the Cold War, permeated with spy networks, turns into a world revue with a big fake gun within the framework of one short plot (Gusev, 2018).

Here, however, there seems to be some exaggeration, since several years earlier in the Soviet film *The Mystery of Two Oceans* the spy and circus theme was presented in one of the most key episodes, when a cunning circus spy killed his twin brother in order to take his place on a secret submarine.

But it is entirely possible to agree that *Skid* embodies the very carnivalesqueness on which the Czech new wave will be built... *Skid* is a film at a crossroads; a film that emerged at a turning point, a crisis point, a narrowly passed point in the history of national cinema. ... Its entire structure is wide open, like in old engravings – with the skeleton out. All the joints are visible (Gusev, 2018).

On the one hand, *Skid* is a very instructive, very one-dimensional, very orthodox film about an emigrant, abandoned in his former homeland on a spy mission and suffering a moral crisis, and in the finale there are the expected triumphal fanfares about the fact that the enemy turned out to be wrong, while socialist construction in Czechoslovakia is in full swing... all this has very little to do with the film as such. Because it is only half. And on the other half it is *Here Comes the Cat*. It is this shading of a simple, oak, linear plot with the luxury of the script development and the richness of the direction, which cancel the possibility of any verdict in anyone's favor, that makes this film both so outstanding and so unprecedented (Gusev, 2018).

After the highly successful release of *Skid* (in Czechoslovakia it was seen by 1.7 million viewers) Zbyněk Brynych decided to step away from detective and spy themes for a while and made a black comedy, *Every Crown is Good*.

*Every Crown Is Good/Kazdá koruna dobrá*. Czechoslovakia, 1961. Director: Zbyněk Brynych.

The main character of this comedy inherits a large house. But when he arrives there, he discovers that the house is full of strange people...

Zbyněk Brynych made this film deliberately theatrical and filled with elements of absurdist humor.

But in his next film, *Don't Hide from the Rain*, he returned to the "thaw" lyricism in the spirit of Soviet cinema of the early 1960s...

*Don't Hide from the Rain/Neschovávejte se, když prší*. Czechoslovakia, 1962. Directed by Zbyněk Brynych.

In this film, a young teacher tries to "sow the reasonable, the kind, the eternal" in a small village where people adhere to their traditions. There is a love story here, and some irony...

The film *Don't Hide from the Rain* did not arouse much interest – neither from the press nor from the audience, but the next work of Zbyněk Brynych – *Transport from Paradise* – became one of the main ones in his work.

*Transport from Paradise/Transport z raje*. Czechoslovakia, 1962. Director: Zbyněk Brynych. Distribution in the USSR – from October 21, 1963: 5.4 million viewers in the first year of showing.

This black-and-white documentary drama won the main prize at the Locarno Film Festival. It told the true story of the Jewish ghetto in the Czechoslovak town of Terezin, which the Nazis wanted to present to a delegation of the International Red Cross as a “paradise for Jews”... The Terezin ghetto resembled an ocean liner, designed for three thousand people, but sent out to sea with ten times that number of travelers. It was a death waiting room. Almost three hundred people died daily from hunger and disease alone, and a total of one hundred and forty thousand people passed through this city (Fiala, 1963: 140-141).

Maintaining a “documentary” look (this is where his background as a newsreel director came in handy), Zbyněk Brynych showed how the Nazis were making a propaganda film about how the Fuhrer “gave” the Jews a paradise city, where shops and even a bank were open, where polite SS officers offered their hand to arriving Jewish ladies to help them get off the train...

This is, indeed, a special film. There are many shots in it when it seems that nothing is happening; when a car with two SS men circles through the deserted streets of the ghetto, whose inhabitants are condemned; when the camera stops on houses, streets, people – people whose life here is so ghostly and unreal, people whom the Nazis turn into numbers. But people do not cease to be people even in this “gift city”, which lived a double life: as a demonstration camp for the International Commission of the Red Cross and as an extermination point, a point that was a step before an even more massive extermination of people (Fiala, 1963: 140-141).

Thus, the horror of Nazism does not come from the brutal scenes of torture, which the filmmakers tactfully avoid, but from the reduction of man to a number, from the bureaucratic consistency with which people are counted and weighed in order to be sent to their deaths. Despite its documentary sobriety, focus on concrete actions and realism, *Transport from Paradise*, like Jan Němec’s later *Diamonds of the Night* (1964), is an existential parable about a man caught in a deadly situation. Can we maintain dignity and moral principles even when our lives are at stake? Can we maintain faith in humanity and love in the shadow of death? (Šrajec, 2023).

Overall, *Transport from Paradise* is, in my opinion, one of the most powerful films about the Holocaust. The film is mercilessly strict, devoid of any pathos, sentimentality, straightforward plot and visual moves. And it probably could also be called *Ordinary Fascism*...

This film rightfully earned high marks from the Czechoslovak press (Kopaněvová, 1965: 136-139; Pitterman 1963: 11; Strusková, 2009; Tunys, 1962: 22-23; Zalman, 2008).

*Place in the Crowd/Místo v houfu*. Czechoslovakia, 1964. Directors: Zbyněk Brynych, Václav Gajer, Václav Krška.

In the film *Place in the Crowd* Zbyněk Brynych once again returned to the “thaw” motifs of a contemporary theme, although with elements of satire, when a 16-year-old boy is assigned to agitate in favor of shock agricultural work...

The film *Place in the Crowd* caused rather disappointment among the public, who highly rated *Transport from Paradise*, since much more was expected from the director...

*Constellation of the Virgo/Souhvězdí panny*. Czechoslovakia, 1965. Director: Zbyněk Brynych. Distribution in Czechoslovakia: 0.8 million viewers.

This army comedy tells the story of a soldier waiting for a love date with his girlfriend... This film would probably have been quite ordinary compared to other Czechoslovak films of the mid-1960s, but Zbyněk Brynych dared to include two very bold erotic scenes for those times (built mainly on close-ups of the heroine’s face) with the participation of Jaroslava Obermaierová. But here it is necessary, however, to clarify that the Czechoslovak censorship of the mid-1960s already differed quite significantly from the strict rules of the 1950s – early 1960s, and Zbyněk Brynych did not fail to take advantage of this... And, most likely, this was the main reason that the film was seen in Czechoslovakia by 0.8 million viewers, which for a film without a sharp adventure intrigue is a very good attendance rate.

... and the fifth horseman is Fear/... a paty jezdec je Strach. Czechoslovakia, 1965. Director Zbynek Brynych.

...1941. Prague. The main character is a Jew, a doctor by profession, who during the occupation is forced to work in a warehouse where the Nazis transport confiscated Jewish property. He is forbidden to practice medicine, but he decides to help a wounded underground fighter, realizing that he is exposing himself to mortal danger...

Many film scholars call the parable ... *and the fifth horseman is Fear* (the title itself contains a reference to the four horsemen of the Apocalypse) the pinnacle of Zbyněk Brynych's work.

This is probably his most perfect and tragic work. The Master's work, imbued with Kafkaesque motifs, where the nightlife of a doomed ghetto, a house with a spiral staircase and colorful residents appears...

Unlike *Echelon from Paradise*, with its collective hero and multiple narrative lines that create a mosaic picture of the ghetto, ... *and the fifth horseman is Fear* is a portrait of the inner ghetto, paralyzing and dehumanizing man... Contrasting lighting, camera angles, unnaturally amplified sounds and noises, or choppy editing create a claustrophobic, paranoid atmosphere of a city where no one trusts anyone, and the only thing that unites people is fear (Šrajer, 2025).

Like *Transport from Paradise*, ... *and the Fifth Horseman is Fear* was highly praised by the film press (Brdečka, 1965: 68-69; Pittermann, 1965: 7; Přádná, 1998: 72-73; Žalman, 2008: 222 and others) and received a number of prizes at international film festivals (in Italy, Argentina and elsewhere).

In this film, Zbyněk Brynych, after a rather long break, once again turns to the sophisticated black-and-white visuals that were characteristic of *Skid*. Unusual angles, panoramas, graphically verified close-ups, metaphorical expressionist images, quotes from Dante's *Inferno*...

*Transit Carlsbad*. Czechoslovakia, 1966. Director: Zbyněk Brynych. Film distribution in Czechoslovakia: 0.4 million viewers.

After a masterpiece that required full creative dedication ... *and the fifth horseman is Fear* Zbyněk Brynych decided to take a breather at the Karlovy Vary resort (by the way, he was born there in 1927), where he filmed the spy movie *Transit Carlsbad*, which allowed him, as in *Skid*, to play with the form and appearance of the characters, this time on the big screen.

Almost the entire film was shot in the most luxurious hotel in Karlovy Vary, the Grand Hotel Pupp (although in the 1950s – 1980s it was called the Grand Hotel Moscow).

According to the plot, agents of several Western intelligence agencies are hunting for a famous scientist living in a luxury room of this hotel...

In fact, the plot itself did not bother Zbyněk Brynych much in this film. Together with the cameraman of his previous film ... *and the fifth horseman is Fear* Jan Kališ, the director embroidered intricate visual patterns on the background of the palace interiors, sometimes getting carried away by the panorama of the central street of Karlovy Vary, filmed with a hidden camera... A special feature of the film *Transit Carlsbad* was that there was almost no Czech speech, since the characters spoke mainly in French, English and German... This was presented with irony and a touch of parody (with a clear hint of "Bondiana"), which, however, the mass audience might not have felt...

*Time of First Love/Tempo první lásky*. Czechoslovakia, 1966. Director: Zbynek Brynych.

For their own amusement, while working on the film *Transit Carlsbad*, Zbyněk Brynych and his cameraman Jan Kališ also shot a short melodrama *Time of First Love* in the same luxury hotel.

It was the story of a one-night stand between a young elevator operator and a millionaire's daughter...

Once again, there was a game with black and white visuals, close-ups of characters and ironic hints. But this time, with a sad intonation of primo amore illusions scattered throughout the plot...

*Dialogue 20-40-60/Dialogue*. Czechoslovakia, 1968. Directors and screenwriters: Jerzy Skolimowski, Peter Solan, Zbyněk Brynych.

At the height of Czechoslovakian "socialism with a human face" and the "Prague Spring", Zbyněk Brynych directed one of the short stories of *Dialogue 20-40-60*, filmed by three directors in the distinctly black-and-white style of the "new wave".

In this experimental dramatic comedy, the plots and actors were different, but the dialogues were the same. It was a kind of look at the relationships between women and men of different generations.

The best of these short stories – the third one – belonged to Zbyněk Brynych: he got the older age of the characters, who acquired the necessary psychological depth on the screen, which was not at all hindered by a certain theatricality...

In the same year 1968, Zbyněk Brynych carried out another of his own projects, related to the theme of the Second World War – *I, Justice*. This time, based on the material of "alternative history".

*I, Justice/Já, spravedlnost*. Czechoslovakia, 1968. Directed by Zbyněk Brynych. This film received a special jury prize at the Trieste Fantasy Film Festival.



In the course of the plot of this science fiction film, representatives of a mysterious Organization kidnap a certain doctor in 1946 and bring him to a patient who turns out to be... Adolf Hitler... But it soon becomes clear that the doctor is not needed to cure the Fuhrer, but, on the contrary, to prolong his suffering...

The role of Hitler in this film was very convincingly played by the German actor Fritz Diez (1901-1979), well known to Soviet viewers for his role as the Fuhrer in the films *Liberation*, *17 Moments of Spring*, *Selection of Target*, and *Soldiers of Freedom*.

This time, Zbyněk Brynych staged a fantastic, sometimes grotesque drama about resistance to power, about the creeping indoctrination of ideologies and about the limits beyond which the desire for justice turns into personal revenge (Křipač, 2016).

The main character, a doctor, becomes a kind of alternative to his colleague from Zbyněk Brynych's film ... *and the fifth horseman is Fear*. Only he, overcoming himself, dared to help the underground fighter, and this one, on the contrary, despite the pressure of the Organization, sends Hitler to the other world so that he can avoid endless psychological and physical torture...

Brynych's films *Transport from Paradise*, ... *and the fifth horseman is Fear* and *I, Justice* were shot by different cameramen: Jan Čuržík, Jan Kališ and Josef Vanis, however, their black-and-white visuals have something in common: asymmetrical compositions, close-up portraits conveying the smallest details of facial expressions of faces without make-up. All this helps to create an expressionistic atmosphere of cruelty, devastation and the need to make a choice...

Film scholar Jan Žalman (1911-1990) wrote about it this way: We can accept or not accept this style, the defining value of which is the expressive tension of the image, and in which the atmospheric element plays a dominant role, but this in no way cancels out its objective aesthetic quality, not to mention its emotionality. In any case, it is a style adequate to the inner state of the soul and creative nature of Brynych, with the help of which he expressed what no one had expressed before him, and which not only led him personally to the most remarkable results in his directorial career, but also significantly enriched his stylistic palette (Žalman, 1968: 368).

*America or the Missing Man/Amerika oder der Verschollene*. FRG, 1969. Director Zbyněk Brynych. TV.

In a black-and-white drama (based on the unfinished novel by Franz Kafka) with elements of satire, a young man named Karl emigrates to the United States, where he meets a wealthy "sponsor"...

This was the first film by Zbyněk Brynych, made after he, like some other famous Czechoslovak filmmakers, emigrated to the West in protest against the suppression of the Prague Spring in August 1968. Zbyněk Brynych went to the FRG, but as it turned out, for a short time...

With the film *America or the Missing Man* Zbyněk Brynych established himself as a professional director, capable of working in Germany in the short timeframes of television production, and he was allowed to debut in the "big cinema" of the FRG with the film *O Happy Day*.

*O Happy Day / She's 17 and Anxious*. FRG, 1970. Directed by Zbynek Brynykh.

So, at the beginning of 1970, Zbyněk Brynych shot another author's project: the surrealist film *O Happy Day*, consisting largely of self-quotes: a long drive through a night city with neon advertisements, an abundance of dark night shots, a play with color, angles and optics...

The film takes its name from the pop/gospel song *Oh Happy Day* by the *Edwin Hawkins Singers*, which is heard throughout the film.

According to the plot of this film, the 17-year-old heroine, vegetating in some Catholic boarding school with strict nuns, wants to escape from the guardianship of the boarding school and her parents in order to "learn about life." And she learns about it: night clubs, "weed", fashionable music and eroticism, photo collages reminiscent of Warhol's works...

Despite all the "psychedelia" and the riot of color changes (this was Brynykh's first color film, where he boldly experimented with the color scheme), this picture reflected a very serious generational conflict and teenage rebellion, which, of course, was helped by the bright music of Peter Thomas...

Despite the participation of West German star Nadja Tiller, *O Happy Day* was relatively low-budget, which helped him recoup the producers' costs, and they financed his next film project, "Angels with Scorched Wings."

*Angels with Burnt Wings/Engel, die ihre Flügel verbrennen/Angels Who Burn Their Wings*. FRG, 1970. Director Zbyněk Brynych.

...Munich, 1970. A 16-year-old teenager kills his mother's lover (played colorfully by Nadja Tiller), considering her promiscuity as a betrayal. His peer – she was only witness to this murder –

invites the boy to her apartment. Her mother (in rhyme with the heroine of Nadja Tiller) changes lovers like gloves, and the girl (actress Susanne Uhlen in this role looks like Mia Farrow's heroine from *Rosemary's Baby*) eventually also kills her mother's next lover... Holding hands, the teenagers try to escape from the angry crowd pursuing them... In this way, Brynykh turned *Agels...* into a kind of Romeo and Juliet story of the criminal world in a cruel society...

*Angels with Burnt Wings* is the second color film by Zbyněk Brynych, in which he apparently wanted to once again show off all facets of his formal mastery. Original editing, modernist visuals using the then fashionable zoom lens, sophisticated play with color, distortion of the characters' faces in mirrors... The cinematographer of his four previous films, Josef Vanis (1927–2009), constructed bizarre frame compositions and created an unsettling thriller atmosphere...

If you do not take into account the rather boldly filmed (for 1970, of course) erotic scenes, it may well seem that *Angels with Burnt Wings* is a production of the GDR, exposing the vices of the bourgeois way of life. However, this is only a superficial comparison, since Zbyněk Brynych's film was very different from the political detectives of the GDR, directed against the machinations of ideological opponents from the FRG and the Western world as a whole: not only in its expressive visual and musical series, but also in the director's detached and ironic approach to the Freudian plot of this film. Just one telephone conversation is worth it, in which one of the characters checks the list of invitees to some event and asks for the surname of one of them in syllables: "Bry-nych" – with two "Y"s...

At the very end of 1970, Zbyněk Brynych released an even more ambitious project: a co-production of three countries (Germany, Italy and France) called *The Females*.

*The Females/Die Weibchen/Femmine carnivore*. Germany–Italy–France, 1970. Director: Zbyněk Brynych.

The plot of this film is clearly reminiscent of *Alice in Wonderland*, only for an adult audience: a young woman ends up in a special women's sanatorium located somewhere in a German resort, where mysterious and at first completely inexplicable events occur...

In terms of genre, this is a cool mix of thriller, black comedy, surrealism, psychedelia, satire on feminist ideas and a horror film about cannibal women, immersed in an atmosphere of challenging public morality, a riot of colors, absurdism, parody (and even the Lumiere brothers' *The Watered Waterer* is parodied there, not to mention the film stories about Frankenstein).

Once again, original editing, non-standard work with sound, use of a wide-angle lens, playing with a zoom lens, distorted faces in mirror reflections, eroticism and provocation.

As a result, this sophisticated film, which can be interpreted as a parable about addiction against which there is no point in rebelling, with an international cast, turned out to be too complex for the mass German and European audience and failed at the box office...

Since all three of Zbyněk Brynych's largely experimental and outrageous films were unsuccessful at the box office and were rather sourly received by the German press, he had to suppress his rebellious impulses as a man who suddenly got hold of previously forbidden "toys" and try to return to television to make a more realistic film. This film was an adaptation of Erich Maria Remarque's novel *The Night in Lisbon*.

*The Night in Lisbon / Die Nacht von Lissabon*. Germany, 1971. Director: Zbyněk Brynych. TV.

In this very traditional drama, the protagonist takes his sick wife out of Nazi Germany...

The film premiered on April 9, 1971. Zbyněk Brynych was not offered a new job in "big cinema", and he decided... to return to Czechoslovakia.

This return took place because in the FRG Brynykh did not film anything that "defamed socialism," Czechoslovakia, or the USSR, and therefore the new Czechoslovak authorities were able to turn a blind eye to his relatively short German emigration and gave him the opportunity to work in the cinema of the "normalization" period.

Moreover, Zbyněk Brynych managed to reach an agreement with the Czechoslovakian authorities that he would have the opportunity to return to Germany from time to time to join the detective series that were being produced there on a conveyor belt.

So, the first Czechoslovak film shot by Zbyněk Brynych after the "German tour" was the war drama *Oasis*.

*Oasis/Oáza*. Czechoslovakia, 1972. Director Zbyněk Brynych.

...1943. In North Africa, the Allies are fighting the Nazis. A truck with a Czech crew – a lieutenant and six soldiers – escapes from the Foreign Legion fortress. They want to join the Allied army...

This was the first color film shot by Zbyněk Brynych in Czechoslovakia. Together with the cameraman Josef Vanis, who had returned with him from West Germany, he tried to create a special atmosphere of a scorched desert landscape and a bright, scorching sun in changing focuses of a wide-angle lens, accompanied by jazz music.

The film did not have much success with audiences in Czechoslovakia, but Zbyněk Brynych managed to prove that he knew how to play by the rules of the “era of normalization” and from now on would not pretend to stage philosophical parables and experimental art house.

*What Color Is Love?/Jakou barvu má láska.* Czechoslovakia, 1973. Director: Zbynek Brynych.

The next Czechoslovak film by Zbyněk Brynych, *What Colour is Love*, was already completely socialist realist and was a run-of-the-mill love story of not very expressive characters...

*The Night of Orange Lights/Noc oranžových ohnů.* Czechoslovakia, 1974. Director: Zbynek Brynych.

The protagonist of another socialist realist drama by Zbyněk Brynych, *The Night of Orange Lights*, celebrates his 45th birthday and drinks heavily. And then, to his own detriment, he gets behind the wheel, hits a passerby and ends up in prison.

The former experimenter and philosopher Zbynek Brynych is simply unrecognizable here – everything is done in a straightforward and flat manner.

This drama was not a success with audiences, just like the didactic film *Teachers Out of School*, which was filmed a little later.

*Teachers outside of school/Profesori za školou.* Czechoslovakia, 1975. Directors: Zbyněk Brynych, Vladimír Blazek, Malian Mucha.

Then Zbyněk Brynych decided to show that he could (if he wanted to) make a box office Czechoslovak film. And he did it with the help of far from any sociality and politics, the musical trifle *Romance for a Crown*, which, in fact, was a success in the cinemas of Czechoslovakia and even made it to the screens of the USSR.

*Romance for a Crown/Romance za korunu.* Czechoslovakia, 1975. Director and screenwriter Zbyněk Brynych. Distribution in the USSR – from December 26, 1977: 9.2 million viewers in the first year of showing. Distribution in Czechoslovakia: 1 million viewers.

A teenager invites a girl his age on a date... But this is only the beginning of a musical story... But there won't be any real intelligible story after that, and the film will smoothly transition to a concert of the stars of the Czechoslovakian pop scene of that time.

Film critic N. Tselikovskaya wrote in the year of the release of *Romance for a Crown* in Soviet cinemas that everyone, of course, knows that the value of art is in no way connected with the price expressed in monetary units. ... In the film by Czechoslovak filmmakers, just one miserable crown works real miracles: not one song or one romance, but an entire vocal program, sung by popular stars of the Czechoslovak stage, sounds from the screen, turning the film into a kind of musical revue. And all this, mind you, for just one crown, which the film's hero, Fil, received as a lucky gift. ... Karel Gott himself sings the famous hit *Maestro Paganini* at Fil's personal request, and how he sings! His lesser-known colleagues sing no worse than Karel Gott, who is popular in the Soviet Union... (Tselikovskaya, 1977).

The final Czechoslovak period of Zbyněk Brynych's work gives the impression that he simply served "normalization" in order to be able to occasionally film ordinary detective stories for German television, which brought him good money in hard currency.

It seems that when he made his Czechoslovak films of the late 1970s and mid-1980s, he not only cast aside all his former ambitions as an auteur, but also had no desire to create a more or less box-office spectacle. Very boring socialist realist dramas and slightly less boring detective stories – that's what the Master put on the conveyor belt, alas, having decided to become an ordinary craftsman...

*Anger/Hněv.* Czechoslovakia, 1977. Directed by Zbynek Brynykh.

Industrial drama *Anger* is a dull tale of conflict in a mine... This is perhaps Zbyněk Brynych's weakest film. Everything is bad in it: the socialist realist plot with banally written characters, the acting, and the lackluster visual design.

*Accused and Suspect/Stíhán a podezrelý.* Czechoslovakia, 1978. Director Zbyněk Brynych.

Apparently tired of socialist realist dramas, at the turn of the 1980s Zbyněk Brynych decided to film detective films in Czechoslovakia in the spirit of his German television series.

In the film *Accused and the Suspect*, the police find a woman's body and her husband becomes the main suspect.

Alas, this film has no trace of the former style of Brynykh's spy films of the 1960s (*Skid* and *Transit Karlsbad*). Everything is done flatly, inexpressively, without fire...

*Who Comes at Midnight/Who Comes Before Midnight/Kdo přichází před půlnocí*. Czechoslovakia, 1979. Director Zbynek Brynych. Released in the USSR from March 19, 1982.

According to the plot of the next detective story by Zbyněk Brynych – *Who Comes at Midnight* – an attack is carried out on a cash-in-transit vehicle with a large sum of money. The bandits, having wounded the cashier and the driver, escape, taking with them a million crowns...

This film was made more dynamic than *Accused and the Suspect*, but some plot twists were too conventional, and the characters' personalities were too ordinary.

*The Halftime of Happiness/Poločas štěstí/Halbzeit des Glücks*. Czechoslovakia, 1984. Director Zbyněk Brynych. Distribution in the USSR from January 31, 1987: 0.2 million viewers.

The main character of this drama has lived his entire life in a provincial town, delivering coal to familiar addresses.

This film, permeated with nostalgia for the past, reminded viewers of the first feature films by Zbyněk Brynych, shot during the “thaw” period, although it was deprived of the lyrical mood inherent in them.

Zbyněk Brynych's last film shot in Czechoslovakia was the detective film *Ants Bring Death*. It was a story about how the secret services eliminated drug trafficking, which brought “goods” from West Berlin to Karlovy Vary.

*Ants Bring Death/Mravenci nesou smrt*. Czechoslovakia, 1986. Director: Zbyněk Brynych.

In this film, Zbynek Brynych allowed himself to “shake off the old days” a little, adding irony and parodic notes to the banal plot.

For the remaining ten years of his life, Brynykh worked only on German television, carefully, professionally, but in an ordinary way, filming detective stories.

#### 4. Conclusion

Thus, the example of the tortuous creative path of Zbyněk Brynych shows that the adaptation of an artist to the rules and possibilities of different periods of societies and countries can lead to both outstanding results and to the fading of the author's potential and the desire to experiment.

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