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LIVING WITH THE TRUTH: THE
FILMS OF VĚRA CHYTILOVÁ

// BY ETHAN WHITE //

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CZECH REPUBLIC // ARTS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

ACADEMIC DIRECTORS //
EVA VALENTA AND LUKE BOUVIER

ABSTRACT //

Despite a career spanning five decades and numerous different sociopolitical atmospheres, Věra Chytilová's films present a remarkably consistent outlook on contemporary life. This paper traces the defining characteristics of Chytilová's work: her strong moralistic criticisms of contemporary society, her motif of paradise, which establishes a potent symbolic basis for said moral criticisms, and her relentless pursuit of new forms and desire to experiment with film language. This final point is also inextricably linked to her moral stance, as the bulk of her work was produced under the authority of a Communist regime that frowned severely upon work of an avant-garde or experimental nature. Indeed, all three of these aspects are intricately interconnected in Chytilová's films, serving the director in her pursuit of that rarest of commodities in both communist and capitalist countries: the truth.

The artist may, and indeed must express only what he knows and what concerns him, because he thinks it should be changed. We want to create a new social morality and in the same breath we—artists—lie. Lying in art should be outlawed... what more could we lose as artists, if we lost truth?

--Věra Chytilová¹

As the only female director to emerge as a part of the Czechoslovak New Wave, Věra Chytilová's tenacious personality was uniquely suited to the task. As Stanislava Přádná notes, this personality "goes far beyond the traditional female creative type due to a particular rigidity, far from the common attributes of both the 'gentler sex' and defiantly inaccessible feminism."² Such a rigidity manifests itself both onscreen, in her pointed and perceptive critiques of society, as well as off-screen, in her strenuous efforts to get her films approved, shot, and released.

The scope of Chytilová's cinematographic achievement over the past five decades encompasses far too much for the confines of this text; a serious study would require a thorough knowledge of the history of Czech feature filmmaking and Czech documentary filmmaking, not to mention a solid understanding of Czech history and the dynamics of Cold War Europe on both sides of the Iron Curtain. One could write an entire book about her most well-known film, *Sedmikrásky* (*Daisies*, 1966), and any attempt to tackle the entire output of a filmmaker with such a complex, challenging, and individualistic body of work would prove to be a daunting task, although certainly rewarding.

Given such a situation, this paper aims to map what I consider to be the defining characteristics of Chytilová's work: her strong moralistic criticisms of contemporary society, whether it be the liberal spirit of the 60s or the stagnant atmosphere of

¹ Quoted in Josef Škvorecký, *All the Bright Young Men and Women: A Personal History of Czech Cinema*, trans. Michael Schonberg (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Ltd., 1971), 112.

² Stanislava Přádná, "Restless Filmmaker," 35th International Film Festival Karlovy Vary Catalogue, (2000), 77.

“normalization” that followed; the motif of paradise, which permeates her work, establishing a potent symbolic basis for said moral criticisms; and her relentless pursuit of new forms and desire to experiment with film language. This final point is also inextricably linked to her moral stance, as the bulk of her work was produced under the authority of a Communist regime that frowned severely upon work of an avant-garde or experimental nature. Indeed, all three of these aspects are intricately interconnected in Chytilová’s films, serving the director in her pursuit of that rarest of commodities in both communist and capitalist countries: the truth.

// The Moralist Within //

Everyone does what they can to avoid thinking. Laziness is the most basic human trait. People don’t want to think—they can’t make the connection between entertainment and thought. They want immediate kicks. People will not be human until they get pleasure from thought—only a thinking person can be a full person.

--Věra Chytilová³

At the beginning of *Sedmikrásky*, two bored teenaged girls decide that since the whole world is spoiled they’ll be spoiled too and thus embark upon a game of “*vadí-nevadí*” (matters-doesn’t matter). The trail of destruction they leave in their wake, while intentionally humorous and rendered through a colorful and exhilarating manipulation of film language, is ultimately troubling. Their exploits are often misinterpreted as “liberating,” but when one peels away the exterior layers of laughter and girlish good looks, a shallow, selfish core is revealed. As Zdena Škapová states, the girls in *Sedmikrásky* are not supposed to serve as examples of emancipation, but rather, “a

³ Quoted in “Biography of Věra Chytilová,” on the *Daisies* DVD, published by Facets Video.

warning of a wrong direction that emancipation could trend towards.”⁴ In Chytilová’s own words, the girls represent the “shallowness of a certain way of life, the dangerous need for human prestige that leads to holding a pose perhaps until death, the incapability to be oneself and also the inability to be happy.”⁵

Of course, in holding people to such strict standards, Chytilová is obligated to punish those who do not rise to the challenge of becoming “full people.” In the final sequence of the film, the girls discover a sumptuous banquet laid out in the grand fashion of the privileged. Predictably, the girls erupt into a frenzy of consumption and destruction, sampling everything in sight, tossing that which they cannot stuff into their mouths around the room, traipsing across the fully laden table in the manner of fashion models, and swinging from the chandelier. Consequently, Chytilová lifts them from their perch and drops them into a river, where they thrash about and shout for help. A title reads that if they were given a second chance, it would look something like this—then the girls are shown wrapped in suits of newspaper, hurriedly tidying the results of their destruction, arranging the broken plates and glasses, and piling horrible globs of the once-airborne food atop platters, all the while whispering about how they will make things right and work will make them happy. Finished, they lie down on the table, and declare they are “really truthfully happy.” Then the chandelier crashes down on them, and Chytilová cuts back to the documentary war footage which frames the film.

Peter Hames notes that:

the interesting thing about this conclusion is that disaster only strikes *after* the two girls have decided to be “happy” and exhibit “correct” attitudes. Conformity, if based on apathy and lack of

⁴ Zdena Škapová, “Daisies,” publication forthcoming as part of an anthology edited by Peter Hames.

⁵ Věra Chytilová, “*Sedmikrásky*,” *Film a doba* 12, no. 4 (1996), 169.

conviction, is ultimately more destructive than any of the girls' stupid excesses. It is such an apathy when faced with the world's injustice that allows and permits the wars of the twentieth century. It is the conclusion of a moralist.⁶

Hames is correct in pointing out that the girls' conformity is severely punished, but it is important to recognize that the actions of the two girls throughout the entire film have been based on this conformist attitude. The girls do not autonomously decide to be spoiled—it is the *whole world* that is spoiled, and thus they shall be also. No wonder, then, that in the same scene where they make this decision, they move their limbs jerkily, like puppets, and exaggerated screeches on the soundtrack make them sound like poorly oiled robots.

The concept of a game, like the one initiated at the beginning of *Sedmikrásky*, appears throughout Chytilová's work. As Ivana Košuličová points out, "The game is used to express the passivity [and] general immobilization of contemporary society and the formulation of the destructive principles... [It] becomes a tool for the presentation of an empty lifestyle and a stymied existence."⁷ *Kopytem sem, Kopytem tam* (*Tainted Horseplay*, 1988) is an interesting continuation of the moral theme of *Sedmikrásky*; in the film, a trio of disillusioned young men attempt to escape from their dead-end lives through drinking, promiscuity, and creating theatrical disturbances wherever they go. This game "allows the characters to forget about the realities of their lives,"⁸ at least, that is, until one of the three falls ill and is diagnosed with AIDS. As two of the young men themselves note in the film, speaking directly into the camera,

⁶ Peter Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, (University of California Press, 1985), 221.

⁷ Ivana Košuličová, "The void behind the mask: Game-playing in the films of Věra Chytilová," *Kinoeye* 2, no. 8 (200?). Location: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/08/kosulicova08.php>

⁸ *Ibid.*

“Horseplay only ends in trouble.” Unlike *Sedmikrásky*, in which the punishment Chytilová delivers is swift and decisive, in *Kopytem sem, kopytem tam* the director shows the process of these people’s relationships disintegrating after it is revealed that one of them has contracted AIDS without specifying exactly who has the disease.

In *Faunovo velmi pozdní odpoledne* (*Faun’s Very Late Afternoon*, 1983) Chytilová removes the youthful antics from the film entirely, instead focusing on an elderly man whose “Fear of responsibility [hides] behind his seducer pose,”⁹ as he continues to act the part of a virile young Don Juan despite his advancing age (which brings to mind Chytilová’s quote about “holding a pose perhaps until death”). Like the young men in *Kopytem sem, kopytem tam*, Faun creates an alternate life for himself out of his denial of reality, which in this case is his advanced age and inevitable death. His punishment takes the form of a pathetic, drunken attempt to “find love” with his young secretary and the subsequent arrival of his boss; she is a former schoolmate and current admirer of Faun’s, and in his intoxicated state he confuses her image with the specter of Death.

In typical contradictory fashion, what one would assume to be Chytilová’s most potent attack on the repressive atmosphere of “normalization” actually constitutes her most significant appeal for personal responsibility in the face of institutionalized hardship. *Panelstory aneb Jak se rodí sídliště* (*Prefab Story, or The Genesis of a Community*, 1979) takes place during the construction of the one of the high-rise apartment buildings known as *paneláky*, a common sight on the outskirts of Prague and other major cities in the former Soviet sphere of influence.

⁹ Ibid.

Inside and around these “bleak grey buildings [with] small box-like apartments where nothing works and unpaved roads where the inhabitants [struggle] in the mud or dust,”¹⁰ lurk construction workers who represent the epitome of the “normalization” work ethic—that is, when they’re not stealing or sleeping with someone’s wife, they hardly work at all. But, as Andrew James Horton notes, “despite all this criticism of the estates themselves and the people who have built them, Chytilová really directs her vitriol at the people who live in the *paneláky*.”¹¹ The general attitude amongst the inhabitants of these buildings is depicted as dishearteningly nasty and selfish, a trait that finds its representative apotheosis in the character of a little boy who does little else besides destroy and steal—a pre-teen version of the girls from *Sedmikrásky*.

But Chytilová also presents us with a positive example of courage and responsibility in the form of Sofya, a pregnant teenager. In the course of the single day in which the film takes place, all of her illusions about human decency are shattered; in addition to the pervasive rudeness of the community, her friend who claims to be happily married is revealed to be just as miserable as everyone else and she overhears her mother’s licentious affair with an actor who lives in the building. Yet despite all this, she resolves to keep her baby and do her best despite the negative atmosphere that surrounds her, presenting a “very strong moral challenge for the spectator because [she] can’t idealize life anymore.”¹²

¹⁰ Škapová, “Daisies”.

¹¹ Andrew James Horton, “Against destruction: Věra Chytilová’s *Panelstory* (*Prefab Story*, 1979),” *Kinoeye* 2, no. 8 (200?). Location: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/08/horton08.php>.

¹² Zdena Škapová, personal interview, 8 November 2004.

Škapová observes that the film “seems to end like almost all of her films, with a very thin stream of hope, which I wouldn’t say is optimism, but some hope, like there are still some people who, in spite of all they know and how everything looks disastrous and hopeless, will try again, to live our way, a different way, and to do something different and do it better.”¹³ Here lies the heart of Chytilová’s moral and ethical stance—although she might appear to be a complete pessimist or misanthrope due to her highly critical tone, in actuality her films champion a high moral standard amidst a deluge of lies, hypocrisy, greed, and destruction. In Chytilová’s view, there is hope, but she demands that people take personal responsibility for their actions.

Of course, such an opinion is hardly shocking or original, but what raises Chytilová’s work above the level of tedious sermonizing is her fanatic dedication to the truth, in all aspects of her art. and nowhere is this more evident than in the highly allegorical *Ovoce stromů rajských jíme* (*The Fruit of Paradise*¹⁴, 1969). Hames claims that the film, with its reliance on the audience’s reading of Chytilová and Ester Krumbachová’s¹⁵ formal innovations and cinematographer Jaroslav Kučera’s powerful images, “defies any realistic interpretation.”¹⁶ Yet I would argue despite the film’s aesthetic acrobatics, its narrative (such as it is) is grounded firmly upon a perceptive and heartbreakingly honest evaluation of the difficulties inherent in our relationships with both each other and ourselves.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ A more complete translation of the title reads “We Eat the Fruit of the Trees of Paradise,” the omission of the verb being rather damaging to a proper reading of the film, in my opinion. Cf. Škvorecký, *All the Bright Young Men and Women*, 110-111, 264.

¹⁵ Krumbachová’s contributions as both co-screenwriter and art director of *Sedmikrásky* and *Ovoce stromů rajských jíme*, in addition to her work on numerous other significant films of the era, are significant enough to warrant detailed investigation, and it is with much anguish that I must relegate her to an decidedly insufficient footnote.

¹⁶ Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 224

“Generally speaking, the film is about the unequal struggle between a man and a woman. And over it all is the question of the ability to accept the truth—whether a person would actually be capable of living with the ideals he advocates, capable of deserving them. It is much easier to fight for truth than to live with it,”¹⁷ said the director in the autumn of 1967 while working on the screenplay with Krumbachová. The finished product centers on a love triangle that develops at what appears to be a health resort, involving a woman (Eva), her unfaithful husband (Josef), and a charming bachelor (Robert).

Hames says that “To seek a fully coherent explanation of the relations among Eva, Robert, and Josef is to pursue an endless enterprise,”¹⁸ and from a psychological perspective this is true. As it stands the characters are like the girls in *Sedmikrásky*, they are “portrayed as typecast, void of psychological depth or any sign of individual characteristics... [Chytilová] works with ‘models’ personifying and exhibiting schemes and stereotypes of human behavior.”¹⁹ Thus their actions are not exactly ‘coherent’ in that they are not justified by dramatic evidence, but I would argue that this places them *closer* to the way real people act because, simply put, people aren’t rational. Her attraction to the perpetually blood-red clad bachelor is not explained, but what truly perceptive comment on interpersonal relationships is going to claim people’s attractions are open to any explanation, or state that people rationally?

Additionally, since the film is concerned with both truth and the nature of relationships, we must take into account that other people, even those we know best,

¹⁷ Antonín J. Liehm, *Closely Watched Films: The Czechoslovak Experience*, (New York: International Arts and Sciences Press, 1974), 246.

¹⁸ Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 226.

¹⁹ Škapová, “Daisies”.

always remain an unknowable quantity. When Eva asks Josef if he will ever tell her the truth as they sit under what is visually suggested to be the Tree of Knowledge, he laughs and does not reply. A more involved scenario plays out in Eva's relationship with Robert.

Although no effort is made to formulate Robert as a psychologically defined character, we do receive a certain amount of information about him, as the object of Eva's attraction. Visually he is associated with the Devil; directly after the stylized prologue that invokes the biblical Garden of Eden, Eva is shown eating an apple and noticing Robert for the first time. Chytilová then places Robert curled up in the branch of a tree like a serpent, and shows a tiny actual snake similarly wrapped around Eva's hand. We are also shown his charming interactions with women, although we do not actually see him seduce any of them, and we watch him lead an absurd game on the beach involving a red balloon but apparently no rules at all. Verbally we are told he is a bachelor who has been coming to the vaguely spa-like area for years and can do whatever he likes, and later we learn he is a serial killer who marks his (exclusively female) victims.

Eva's fate is to a certain extent established at the outset of the film, when she takes a bite of the apple that falls into her hand as she and Josef sit under the aforementioned tree—she has eaten the fruit, and thus must obtain knowledge (note that Josef, unlike the biblical Adam, refuses her offer of the apple and is under no such obligation). Since the eating of the famous apple is irrevocably linked to the serpent or Devil, and thus to Robert, it follows that Eva's pursuit of knowledge must run through him. And as the pursuit of this knowledge is also linked to the workings of human relationships, it necessarily follows a twisting, convoluted, and not entirely logical path.

For brevity's sake I will analyze only the moments I feel are important to Chytilová's conception of knowledge and truth and Eva's pursuit thereof.

In an interview with Antonín Liehm, Ester Krumbachová told him that "Life can be broken up into small segments: first you learn what is going on, then you learn what is happening to you, and finally you learn who you are. Only then can you begin to find out what you can do, and you learn that it really doesn't amount to very much."²⁰ As we shall see, the structure of Eva's search for the truth follows a similar format.

The first significant moment occurs when Eva breaks into Robert's house after recovering his key on the beach. The notion that Eva's quest must run through Robert is subtly reinforced in the art design by the rotting apple core that sits in a dish on the table. Eva's discovery of Robert's briefcase and its contents (women's lace and stamps of the number six) is something like a naïve youngster coming across a brilliant piece of philosophy—she plays with it, but doesn't really know what it means. Interestingly, this scene is intercut with shots that return to Robert's absurd games on the beach—what Eva is up against on her quest is being established. Recalling Chytilová's disdain for people's laziness and mindless activity, we can deduce that Robert, as personification of "evil" or the Devil, seeks to prevent people from obtaining the knowledge that he safeguards, and it is he who must be overcome if knowledge is to be obtained.

An important conversation occurs when Eva goes off with Robert in the rowboat. This occurs after the scene in which it is revealed to Eva that Robert is the killer, and also after she tells Josef about it in front of Robert. Out on the water, she asks Robert if he's afraid of her because she tells the truth; he replies that they're friends. Eva declares that friendship can't exist without trust and that Robert has to kill her. When she asks him

²⁰ Liehm, *Closely Watched Films*, 277.

how he does it, he tells her she mustn't be afraid. This convoluted exchange not only references the nature of relationships (both explicitly and in its irrationality) but also hints at a component of Chytilová's moral structure: the fear of death. If we remember the message of *Faunovo velmi pozdní odpoledne*, we know that coming to terms with our fear of death is one of Chytilová's requirements for becoming a so-called "full person."

The scene on the sandy peninsula where Robert confronts Eva, with the intention of shooting her with his pistol, resumes the dialogue between truth and death. This follows a poetic chase through the woods in which Eva and Robert are connected by a long red scarf, Robert transforms Eva's pink dress into a bright red one, taking the rose blossom she has worn on her chest in the process, and the two kiss. On the sand, Eva incredulously asks why Robert wants to kill her now that she loves him, to which he replies, "I love you too, that's why we're here." Eva promises her love, and Robert claims it's the first time he's believed someone. Eva shivers and Robert gives her his coat, leaving his gun in the pocket. Robert then says, "You're the only one that came of her own free will." Eva says that's the last time *she* believed someone, prompting Robert to shout "You're a lie!" A gunshot rings out and Robert drops to the ground. Standing above him, Eva pulls the gun and her rose from his pockets.

Hames concludes that, "To search for truth whether or not personified in a romantic ideal (i.e. Robert) is to court death."²¹ This is true, but going further, we can say that to *obtain* that truth, one must overcome that which would cause death, and therefore Eva must defeat Robert, who is not only a murderer, but also a facilitator and representation of everything that goes against Chytilová's moral code: laziness, mindlessness, promiscuity, and so on. Hames claims that "it is clear that Eva has not fired

²¹ Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 226.

the gun,”²² (from the spectator’s point of view it’s impossible to tell), and yet the gun, along with the rose, is in the pockets of the coat she is wearing. She may not have pulled the trigger, but she is responsible for his death, and we can only assume that from Chytilová’s point of view, this represents a victory, albeit a murky one. After all, Eva was the only one who pursued Robert, and he still intended to kill her—it is the logical conclusion to her quest for knowledge, and she could not have obtained the truth any other way. According to the director’s moral code, living with Robert would be perhaps the most reprehensible act imaginable.

Obtaining the truth, of course, implies the loss of innocence. Fleeing the scene, Eva struggles to climb over the wall and back to the “garden” area. Encountering Josef, she tells him not to ask for the truth and sheds her red dress for a black one. She then “she proffers and twirls a red rose in front of the camera lens—an invitation to a romance that will no longer be innocent,” which Hames interprets as her “wish to give up the search for truth.”²³ But Eva already *has* the truth—what we see here is the beginning of the struggle of living with it. And given Chytilová’s rigid moral standard, how could she possibly consider maintaining one’s innocence a *good* thing?

Accordingly, Josef walks away, leaving Eva to twirl her rose alone. The film ends on a shot of an empty field of waving grain, filmed in stark black and white. The message is clear: living with the truth will be a lonely task.

// We Eat The Fruit... //

I have often been accused of being a cynic, simply because I refused to believe everything I was told. I think that Hitler showed quite clearly

²² Ibid., 226.

²³ Ibid., 226.

what happens when humanism is replaced by grandiose goals and projects. Concentration camps, the occupation—those were fantastic realities which showed people as they really are. That’s why it’s no longer possible to get down on your knees and offer up thanks to God. Gods have vanished, and so have myths and illusions about the goodness of man.

--Ester Krumbachová²⁴

All this talk of truth and morality of course leads to the motif of paradise in Chytilová’s work. As with the concept of truth, the most important details can be found in *Ovoce stromů rajských jíme*, but a detour into an exploration of this motif in Chytilová’s other films will help situate her complex and flexible deployment of this loaded symbol. This is no easy task when one takes into account that this theme appears across all five decades of her career as a constantly evolving structuring principle.

Jan Bernard suggests that the first appearance of paradise in a Chytilová film occurs in her medium-length graduation feature, *Strop (The Ceiling, 1962)*, which explores the alienated life of a fashion model named Marta.²⁵ In deference to an exceptional piece of film description, I quote Jíří Cieslar at length:

A few seconds later, Marta, without a single word, is taken by her arrogant lover to his apartment. They have an argument, and she finds the courage to leave him. Then comes a subtle, but in my opinion, distinctive cinematographic moment: in the morning, after an aimless nocturnal walk through the streets of Prague, Marta walks along a tree-lined avenue in the Hvězda park, and then she goes through a gate in a wall into the light. She looks into the landscape. Her sunlit face almost touches the stone wall with its most delicate textures of coarse surface. The image becomes a metaphor. The face and the stone are so close, as if in this natural touch Marta experiences something real or original for the first time, something which the metropolitan life has not had the chance to destroy. A moment of liberation? Who knows. But something has—maybe—opened.²⁶

²⁴ Liehm, *Closely Watched Films*, 277.

²⁵ Jan Bernard, personal interview, 7 December 2004.

²⁶ Jíří Cieslar, “‘Now I don’t know how to keep on going’: The early films of Věra Chytilová,” trans. Hana Kulhánková, *Kinoeye* 2, no. 8 (200?). Location: <http://www.kinoeye.org/02/08/cieslar08.php>.

Here Chytilová uses a paradise-like garden as a symbol of spiritual rejuvenation, albeit in a rather simplistic way. In his personal history of Czech cinema, *All the Bright Young Men and Women*, Josef Škvorecký recounts his first meeting with Chytilová, in which she asked for help on what would eventually become *Strop*. Škvorecký found the script to be “a rather tedious moral tale, considerably tributary to socialist-realistic ‘philosophy’ [...] a ‘progressive’ modification of an identical theme which had once been a favorite of some of the worst Catholic writers,”²⁷ a reference to the idea of a return to the country and its simple folk healing the corrupted city resident.

In contrast, what appears in *Sedmikrásky* just a few years later is a testament not only to the power and flexibility of the paradise image, but also to Chytilová’s fruitful collaboration with Ester Krumbachová (as evidenced by the quote above). Immediately after the opening credit sequence featuring war footage and the scene in which the decision to be spoiled like the rest of the world is made, one of the girls slaps the other into a meadow containing a small, stylized tree heavily laden with apples. They perform an idiotic, childish dance around the tree, and one of them grabs what should be an apple. Hames observes that the girls “have picked the forbidden fruit and their fall is preordained. However, they have picked a peach. Their downfall will not produce knowledge but a mushy exercise in self-gratification.”²⁸

Thus, instead of a destination, Chytilová employs the paradise image in *Sedmikrásky* as a point of departure for the rest of her argument, a sort of shorthand for what is known in Judeo-Christian society to represent man’s downfall, giving in to temptation, taking the Devil’s advice, and so on. It also introduces the theme of eating,

²⁷ Škvorecký, *All the Bright Young Men and Women*, 99-100.

²⁸ Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 213.

which of course the pair does ravenously for the rest of the film. The constant snacking in their room and the ploy of getting older men to take them out to dinner represent part of a logical progression which culminates in their apocalyptic destruction of the banquet. Tellingly, during the one possibly romantic moment in the film, the girl interrupts her enamored suitor to ask if there's anything to eat.

Sedmikrásky also features a return to the country, which Hames labels a “search for meaning,” but the girls are completely ignored by the lone farmer they encounter. Likewise, a group of bicyclists dressed as workers passes them by entirely. The search for meaning is fruitless, and what follows is the complete destruction of both their interior and exterior environments (i.e. their relationship with each other and the world in general), thus linking the paradise theme back to morality, discussed above, and forward to form and film language, which I will come to later.

Paradise exists in *Sedmikrásky* as a counterpoint to the events of the film, a nonexistent ideal against which Chytilová uses to accentuate her critique of contemporary life. Likewise, in *Panelstory*,²⁹ the concept of paradise emerges in the image of the *panelaky*, which Horton says “were planned as utopias of social equality and material comfort which would live up to Communism’s aim to improve people’s material circumstances.”³⁰ These alleged “shop-windows of Communism”³¹ create an evocative backdrop for “the most obvious example of Chytilová’s career-long interest in the theme of destruction nullifying either an act of creation or a state of paradise.”³²

²⁹ Interestingly, the English translation of the film’s full title reads *Prefab Story, or The Genesis of a Community*, in what seems to be an unintentional Biblical reference. See Horton, “Against destruction,” n. 1.

³⁰ Horton, “Against destruction”.

³¹ Škapová, personal interview, 8 November 2004.

³² Horton, “Against destruction”.

Bernard connects the idea of paradise in *Panelstory* to one of the only other characters to whom Chytilová assigns positive traits, the old grandfather.³³ We learn he is selling his home in the countryside and moving into his family's apartment, thus reviving the theme of the moral paradise of the country and providing a counterpoint to the dystopia that of the *paneláky*. Throughout the entire film the grandfather is the only one who seems to care about anyone beside himself—for instance, he constantly inquires about the old woman who just sits in her window all day long, and is repeatedly told to mind his own business. Bernard and Škapová both note that he represents a an older generation,³⁴ thus providing a link to the 1930s and the time of the first Czechoslovak Republic. As Keith Jones points out, the filmmakers of the Czech New Wave were profoundly influenced by the ideas of the 20s and 30s; “Czechoslovakia was a rich, fashionable, thriving country, and obviously the arts were at their peak then, and so part of the arts scene in the 60s was rediscovering [those years].”³⁵ In the era of normalization such references could no longer be as direct as they were in the 60s, forcing filmmakers like Chytilová to make more subtle connections, as with the grandfather in *Panelstory*,

Another work by Chytilová contains a direct mention of paradise: *Raj Srdce* (*Paradise of the Heart*, 1992), which takes its name from a tract by the seventeenth-century philosopher Jan Amos Komenský (Comenius) entitled “The Labyrinth of the World and the Paradise of the Heart.” A short film made in the style of a home movie, it juxtaposes footage of Chytilová's one year-old granddaughter Anička playing, eating, and getting into mischief with a soundtrack combining readings from Komenský about proper child education and dialogues in which two parents constantly argue. In addition to forming a

³³ Bernard, personal interview, 7 December 2004.

³⁴ Ibid., and Škapová, personal interview, 8 November 2004.

³⁵ Keith Jones, personal interview, 2 December 2004

strong moral statement on the responsibility of parents to create a proper environment for their children, the film subtly jabs at the simplistic and commonly held notion of one's childhood being a sort of paradise to which many people long to return. Another component of the soundtrack is the distorted voice of a television announcer, who speaks about the first Gulf War in Iraq and the atrocities in the Balkans, at which point a skull appears on the screen beneath the word "labyrinth" in French—the point being that while one person might be experiencing paradise, the world remains a labyrinth for most.³⁶

Not so obvious is the idea of paradise in films like *Kopytem sem, kopytem tam* and *Faunovo velmi pozdní odpoledne*. Although no visual representations appear and no direct mentions of paradise are made, the previously discussed notion of game-playing in these works ties into the theme of paradise in that they are both fabrications of an alternate, better, more comfortable reality, created by people to relieve themselves of the responsibility of living life consciously, in the present. Personal responsibility is diverted to society's ills, the Devil, Eve's eating of that apple, and so on. Since as Košuličová states, Chytilová's games "always lead to the destruction of human existence and the world,"³⁷ we can clearly see that the paradise theme is very closely related to the game structure; we might even regard them as branches of the same tree.

This leads us, once again, to consider *Ovoce stromů rajských jíme*; as was the case with Chytilová's formulation of morality and the truth, the film poses significant problems of interpretation that nonetheless reward investigation. Putting aside the

³⁶ My thanks to PhDr. Zdena Škapová for translating and help to explain *Raj Srdce* to me, as the film is not available with English subtitles. Although the analysis remains mine, her assistance was invaluable and greatly appreciated.

³⁷ Košuličová, "The void behind the mask".

elaborate poetic abstractions of the prologue, the main action of the film takes place not in paradise or the Garden of Eden, but in a reality that we can consider close to our own, or which at least comments upon it (we should also note that the man and woman who appear in the ‘paradise’ of the prologue are different than the husband and wife of the film proper). The setting of the film is easily overlooked—it appears to be some sort of spa resort, with a restaurant, a garden/forest area, and some houses or cottages for the guests, plus a sandy beach nearby. In a way, the space as a whole resembles what Chytilová comes to some ten years later in *Panelstory*—a human attempt at creating a sort of utopia, a worry-free zone where the troubles of “reality” need not bother those who inhabit it. The same conscious motivation (or propagandistic justification, depending on one’s inclination) that prompted the construction of countless *paneláky* may not be present in this spa, but both areas derive from the same urge.

That said, the setting of *Ovoce stromů rajských jíme* does contain traces of paradise elements, which are manipulated as symbols by Chytilová: the tree beneath which Eva and Josef sit and nap, providing a direct link to the prologue, and the wall where Eva first comes into contact with Robert, representing the perimeter of what we might call the hotel’s “imitation of paradise.” This imitation, of course, is hardly the real thing: for all its plant life, the interior of this area is a remarkably dingy brownish-green; Eva must climb over the wall to retrieve food for her and Josef; and when Eva attempts to plant a vegetable patch inside the walls, she is confronted with terribly inappropriate soil that surely will not produce anything.

All of this solidifies Chytilová’s use of the paradise theme as a counterpoint to our actual reality. The ideal of paradise aligns quite nicely with Chytilová’s moral message—

both are lofty ideals that strikingly contradict the realities of everyday life, and it is somehow not surprising that a moralist with the fervor of Chytilová would fixate on what is the most prevalent idealist theme in European culture. Jones comments:

The theme of paradise lost has been a big inspiration down through the ages [of Judeo-Christian society], and Chytilová's interest in apples and in certain types of characters and certain types of anti-utopian humanist messages all stems from a very close reading of that theme throughout European culture. [...] It's in a sense a very postmodern attitude, mixing irony and reverence and respect and destruction all at the same time.³⁸

Such a sophisticated usage of this theme is commendable when considering the coinciding moral message of Chytilová's work—one could easily see these films I have been describing lapsing into shallow one-sided sermons that expect unrealistic things of people. But as Přádná declares, “She holds close to the earth even in parables and allegories, loyal above all to the feature most characteristic of her: the moralist within,”³⁹ and that part of her morality, the which holds so close to the earth, is what balances her work so delicately over the gap between perceptive, constructive criticism and one-dimensional scolding.

The last words of the off-screen commentary in Chytilova's documentary *Praha, Neklidné srdce Evropy* (*Prague, Restless Heart of Europe*, 1988) are: “Why should we not be heading towards the top of human abilities? We want to be worth something, don't we?”⁴⁰ This attitude is evident throughout all of her work, as I hope should be clear by now, but perhaps nowhere more than in her relentless experimentation with the forms and language of the film medium.

³⁸ Jones, personal interview, 2 December 2004.

³⁹ Přádná, “Restless Filmmaker,” 77.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Cieslar, “Now I don't know how to keep on going”.

// Automatic Threat //

Not just in the dramaturgical sense but in the philosophical and existential sense, we wanted to have real characters, real people, acting like puppets. We wanted the viewer to really grasp the meaning of the film. And that meaning was a protest against destruction. The destruction, in any sense of the term, in our lives. Destruction is going on in our lives and especially in our relationships. So, we wanted to use film language to show this.

--Vera Chytilová on *Sedmikrásky*⁴¹

The prologue that opens *Ovoce stromů rajských jíme* is a one of the most radically inventive and beautiful scenes in all of Chytilová's work, and serves as a perfect example of the intersection of morality, paradise, and experimentation in her films. A naked male and female pair representing Adam and Eve has close-ups of flowers, leaves, and plant life projected onto their white skin, creating a stylized harmony between humans and natural life. On the soundtrack, a chorus chants passages from the book of Genesis. The couple are shown in various poses against sheer rock, and standing waist deep in water, where they tentatively embrace in the shimmering mist of Kučera's hallucinogenic imagery. Although the warnings of God and the temptations of the serpent are loudly voiced by the chorus, the intent is clearly to evoke the actual state of paradise and not the distance between it and reality. It does highlight that difference in the main body of the film that follows, however. So paradise and experimentation are clearly represented; the link to morality leads us to consider the role of experimentation in all of Chytilová's work.

"In the West, formal innovation can, to some extent, be ignored. In Eastern Europe, it automatically poses a threat to the art establishment,"⁴² says Hames. Even

⁴¹ Quoted in Horton, "Against destruction".

⁴² Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 187.

during the relatively liberal years of the Prague Spring, filmmakers in Czechoslovakia had to struggle to realize visions that did not please the establishment, let alone the official restrictions and unofficial bureaucratic shenanigans that emerged during “normalization.” But, to quote Hames again, Chytilová’s “importance lies in her recognition of the critical impact of formal innovation.”⁴³ These two conflicting statements bring up a number of questions: What were these formal innovations? How did Chytilová reconcile her dedication to innovation with the limits imposed on her by the regime? Where does Chytilová’s moral standpoint factor into all this?

Earlier I mentioned Josef Škvorecký’s low opinion of the moral message of the screenplay for *Strop*, which might have seemed somewhat at odds with the reverence Jíří Cieslar held for the very same film. Chytilová had approached Škvorecký in the hopes that he could contribute some philosophy to the screenplay, which he ultimately did not do. However, Škvorecký relates, “Věra in the end stubbornly made the film, but instead of the injection of even the wisest philosophy, she did something much more clever. Although the schematic morality remained, the director blunted it by completely shifting the emphasis to form; and a very formalistic form at that.”⁴⁴ Thus emerges an early example of Chytilová’s linking of formal experimentation to her morality—her innovation scatters a straightforward moral interpretation and encourages the audience to create their own meaning.

In *Sedmikrásky* we find a much more refined and complex articulation of these ideas; indeed, they permeate the film at every level. In the director’s own words:

We decided to let ourselves be bound by nothing. Absolutely nothing. We would free ourselves of all the implications of the

⁴³ Ibid., 228.

⁴⁴ Škvorecký, *All The Bright Young Men And Women*, 101.

story and keep only the dialogues, very precise and very evocative, which would remain absolutely fixed. These dialogues assured us of a base, they guaranteed that we would not abandon the meaning of the film, they were in a sense the guardians of that meaning.⁴⁵

Here, in a nutshell, lies the balance between Chytilová's experimenting and her moral stance, paradox though it is—eliminate all restrictions but preserve the meaning. The other main collaborators on the film speak in similar terms: Krumbachová notes that the film was improvised to a great degree,⁴⁶ and Kučera speaks of his desire “to use color concepts to disparage a lot of things; I had no intention whatever of arousing an esthetic impression of beauty. But somewhere, early in the game, it turned out that the structure of things with respect to each other created esthetics whose results I didn't expect at all.”⁴⁷ Thus at a very basic level, we find the experimental traits of *Sedmikrásky* to be determined by the very process of making the film itself and the imaginations of three of the Czech New Wave's talents let loose, but bound together by a core meaning.

The process finds its way into the theater, as well—in a certain sense a viewing of *Sedmikrásky* is an act of improvisation, as “Chytilová argues that the spectator should be free to interpret the film in his own way as an active collaborator in the creation of its meaning.”⁴⁸ Here we can see why a film like *Sedmikrásky* would make the authorities nervous—obviously a totalitarian state has no interest in its subjects forming their own opinions. Additionally, the common reading by Western viewers of *Sedmikrásky* as a “feminist,” with the two girls serving as examples of liberated modern women who subversively attack symbols of patriarchy, evidences the film's openness to alternative interpretations. One must remember that just because *Sedmikrásky* is open to

⁴⁵ Quoted in Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 212.

⁴⁶ Liehm, *Closely Watched Films*, 281.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 254.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 212.

interpretation does not mean all interpretations are correct⁴⁹ for it is true that the “rigid, stylized dialogue does not necessarily safeguard the meaning unless the spectator chooses this possibility.”⁵⁰

But even film critics like Peter Hames are not immune; during the girl’s unsuccessful trip to the country in search of meaning, in which they are ignored by the farmer and the men on bicycles, they retrace their steps and discover the strewn-about remnants of armfuls of corn they stole from the farmer’s field. Hames says, “their existence is confirmed by the destruction and debris they have left behind. Superficially critical of their nihilism, Chytilová seems to take their side as they march down the street chanting defiantly: ‘We are.’”⁵¹ It is doubtful Chytilová is taking the girls side, of course; as with the rest of the film, the girls’ actions must be approached as absurd. Besides, what does it say about them when the only confirmation of their existence they can conjure up is the traces of their own destructive tendencies?

All this testifies, yet again, to the high moral standard Chytilová demands of others. As Škapová notes, the director deplors “passivity and resignation in the search of knowledge.”⁵² Thus, to create a film in which the audience is free to act as a collaborator in the construction of meaning is to demand engagement. Laziness is not allowed.

On the other hand, Chytilová never hesitates to act as she sees fit, others and their interpretations be damned. For instance, the core of meaning which she sought to

⁴⁹ Of course this reading does not hold up under any sort of scrutiny; to provide but one example, Škapová notes that the girls “take great pleasure in manipulating others, especially the majority of the male characters, and this is what Chytilová accuses males of rather frequently.” Surely it is a cruel and juvenile brand of feminism that liberates women so that they might irresponsibly destroy just like they men they criticize. Cf. Škapová, “Daisies”.

⁵⁰ Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 222.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁵² Škapová, “Daisies”.

preserve is reflected in the film language of *Sedmikrásky* itself. Following Hames: “The ‘cut-up’ structure, which relies heavily on montage, derives directly from a critical approach to the theme of consumption as destruction.”⁵³ Earlier I mentioned the interior and exterior destruction that ensue after the girls’ absurd search for meaning in the country. In their room, which represents personal relationships, the girls begin attacking each other with scissors and the film image disintegrates into tiny overlaid pieces, like bits of paper, in time with the rhythmic snipping of the blades. The film image remains intact during the destruction of the banquet scene (the exterior world), but since Chytilová is not bound to any sort of linear narrative, she can throw the girls from their perch atop the swinging chandelier into the water, then pluck them out of the water and place them back in the room in order to pass harsh moral judgment on their conformity. The girls are not bound by any rules, and neither is Chytilová; this is the result.

Chytilová’s final two films from the sixties are closely linked in their radical experimental attitudes. Hames declares that unlike *Sedmikrásky*, *Ovoce stromů rajských jíme* “does not have the same passionate attack and finds its justification in a search for formal and visual beauty in its own right.”⁵⁴ But if we take into consideration Hames’ own comment about the nature of formal innovation Communist countries, as well as the lengths to which he goes in his attempts to describe the film, we can only conclude that formal and visual beauty *are* the passionate attack.

Of course, all of Chytilová’s attacks can be grouped under the banner of truth, and since, to an even greater extent, *Ovoce stromů rajských jíme* “is a film that requires the

⁵³ Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 222.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 223

audience to construct its own meaning, its own comprehension of ‘truth,’⁵⁵ it holds even closer to Chytilová’s demanding moral standard at the same time as it pushes her own pursuit of truth further and further. As much as I have struggled to describe this truth in the preceding passages, the visual poetry of Robert and Eva’s tumbling dash through the woods, connected by a blood-red scarf, is far beyond anything I might be able to write, and the experience of watching the entire film can be described only as indescribable.

Chytilová’s use of allegorical structures finds its apogee in *Ovoce stromů rajských jíme*; allegory, by its very nature, would form an integral component of any film that seeks to involve the spectator in such a fashion. Hames comments that “there is no evidence of direct political or social comment in the film. Nonetheless, given Chytilová’s concern with “truth” in her earlier work, it reveals a pessimistic outlook to posit the destruction caused by knowledge. The search for truth in the late sixties led merely to its repression.”⁵⁶ Though there is not any overt political criticism, but I would venture to say that the film’s complex meditations on difficult issues such as truth, knowledge, the need for detective work, and male/female relationships (let us not forget Czechoslovakia’s relationship to the Soviet Union—Robert might be dressed in blood-red for a reason, and when Eva falls in love with him, her dress takes on the bright hue favored by Communists everywhere), not to mention the general atmosphere of confusion the film fosters, *Ovoce stromů rajských jíme* could be said to capture, if not the atmosphere of Czechoslovakia in the late 60s, then probably the mental state of its inhabitants.

Thanks to the events of August 1968 and the “normalization” that followed Chytilová was forced to curtail her more radical experiments with form when she was

⁵⁵ Ibid., 226

⁵⁶ Ibid., 226.

allowed to return to filmmaking after a forced hiatus of some six years. Bernard observes that Chytilová was able to get quite a bit of experimental work done during the 70s and 80s by using small pieces of her previous techniques and relying heavily on allegory; although these films may seem relatively conservative, the difference opens up when one compares them to the output of the mainstream Czechoslovak film industry over the same period.⁵⁷ Jones credits her with “standing witness to something which nobody else really managed to do in the same way... in the very margins of what was allowable.”⁵⁸

Chytilová has spoken of *Sedmikrásky* as a “philosophical documentary in the form of a farce,”⁵⁹ and this concept of “philosophical documentary” could be very easily applied to many of her feature films during the “normalization” period. In *Panelstory*, for instance, “the shortcomings of the estate and its residents are perfectly blended, with each one augmenting the other, to create a symbolic moral space—an area distinct of its geographic reality that acts as a signifier for both social decay and a series of individual personal crises of morality.”⁶⁰ Her demands on the audience remain as great as ever—rather than explaining the dichotomy between the utopian vision of the *paneláky* and the truth of everyday life, “Chytilová challenges us to look for the original idea by confronting us with the harsh reality of the situation.”⁶¹

Panelstory utilizes little allegory; it is remarkably blunt for a film made ten years after the outset of “normalization,” and as a result it was banned immediately after its release.⁶² Other works of Chytilová’s from this era, such as *Faunovo velmi pozdní*

⁵⁷ Bernard, personal interview, 7 December 2004.

⁵⁸ Jones, personal interview, 2 December 2004.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Hames, *The Czechoslovak New Wave*, 211.

⁶⁰ Horton, “Against destruction”.

⁶¹ Škapová, personal interview, 8 November 2004.

⁶² Horton, “Against destruction”.

odpoledne and *Kopytem sem, kopytem tam*, touched on less sensitive issues, and continued in the director's experimental tradition. Their layers of symbolism and allegory leave the films open to varied interpretations while at the same time Chytilová's strident moral messages remained accessible for public consumption. In *Faunovo velmi pozdní odpoledne*, for instance, one could choose to broaden the depiction of the aging, pathetic Faun, who lives in denial of his own mortality, to cover an entire generation—Chytilová certainly provides enough images of dead leaves placed in the context of Prague's skyline—which can be seen as prophetic considering the impending collapse of Communism. True to form, Chytilová constructs these films in such a way that audience participation is crucial—what one obtains from them depends on how deep one is willing to dig in search of the truth.

In *Raj Srdce*, which was made shortly after the just-mentioned collapse, it is no accident that one parent speaks Czech and the other Slovak—a reference to the impending separation of what are currently two independent republics. The film is also a prescient appropriation of home video technology for the purposes of art, well before the technique found mainstream success in the form of “reality” television and films like *The Blair Witch Project*. These layers exist in addition to the previously discussed themes of paradise and individual responsibility for one's offspring.

// Thinking Through Film⁶³ //

⁶³ “To situate Chytilová in a Czech context, one has to take a look at the typical widely varied responses, from respectful adoration as the first lady of cinematography—for her unconventional film vision and inspiring though (she is able to ‘think through film’)—all the way to the censure found in the plentiful adjectives applied to her: aggressive, ironic, sarcastic, provoking, unkind, inflexible, impatient, ferocious, intolerant, strict, arrogant, etc. In reality, behind these hides a will identical to her obsession to make her own way through to a journey's end, the courage to grapple with problems, endurance, fanatical demands on herself, resistance to moral laxity and sloppy

What I wanted to say was that man creates something with one breath and with the second breath destroys it. I wanted the audience to be aware of how the behavior of man is contradictory. It's not a critical reaction to the regime; it's more actually a view of human moral behavior. I think every form of behavior has a moral aspect to it.

--Věra Chytilová on *Panelstory*⁶⁴

The value of Chytilová's work does not lie solely in its contribution to the film medium. It is true, as Horton notes, that "in view of the differing political and social circumstances under which she operated, Chytilová has retained a remarkable unity of subject matter and interest in experimental style,"⁶⁵ but her significance reaches further than this. The concept of "philosophical documentary" again comes to mind; as Jones remarks, "she revealed a lot of truth about what happened during normalization, ... it's astonishing to watch them now and see how real and how close to the truth they get, because [standard] documentaries wouldn't have been allowed to show such raw corruption."⁶⁶ The main tenet of Chytilová's philosophy, of course, is an unwavering dedication to the truth. Thus it should come as no surprise that her work is not merely "art for art's sake"—it's art for everyone's sake, encompassing all realms of human existence, from personal creations (*Raj Srdce*) to critiques of entire communities (*Panelstory*), from warnings against destruction (*Sedmikrásky*) to creations of immense beauty (*Ovoce stromů rajských jíme*), and from youth (*Kopytem sem, Kopytem tam*) to old age (*Faunovo velmi pozdní odpoledne*). All this exists under the banner of a fierce moral standard that urges humanity toward its highest potential at any price.

work. But this does not mean that she is always successful nor that she has never doubted herself." Příkladná, "Restless Filmmaker," p. 78.

⁶⁴ Horton, "Against destruction".

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Jones, personal interview, 2 December 2004.

Bernard sees Chytilová's morality emerging in part from the Czech New Wave's general desire to "change the world, to do different films, create something new, [and] tell the truth about reality,"⁶⁷ which reads like a sort of unofficial manifesto for the director's entire career. Chytilová's fellow Czech Antonín Liehm, in his book of interviews conducted before and after that fateful turning point in the history of the Czech lands, eloquently states how important a principled, moral, *artistic* stance can be:

The significance of the philosophical and, above all, moral approach can be better understood if we think in terms of an opposition within a Stalinist or neo-Stalinist system at the moment the ideology is disintegrating. Since the ideology is no longer tenable or applicable—indeed, much of it is incomprehensible—it is the ethics, the moral standpoints, that come to the forefront. The ethics become the language of politics, and the moral standpoints become the political criteria. Criteria as simple as truth or falsehood, honesty or dishonesty, brutality or the inability to be brutal, cowardice or bravery, obstinacy or malleability, and so forth, come to coincide exactly with ideologically and politically defined positions. The strength and weakness of the Czech political opposition is precisely in the fact that its politics did coincide with its ethics, and its moral criteria with its political ones. But this is probably the only way, in a situation in which the political structure and media are not democratic, to arrive at any political criteria whatsoever. And this is also the reason why art, sensitive as it is to ethical problems, can become the direct instrument of politics. And why the establishment interprets every moral attitude to be a political one, every moral postulate to be a political challenge. In this context the establishment is undoubtedly justified in this interpretation.⁶⁸

And while Chytilová would probably discourage speaking of her work as political⁶⁹, to consistently take a moral stand in direct opposition to a stagnant, oppressive, and thoroughly regime is not something that can be easily dismissed.

⁶⁷ Bernard, personal interview, 7 December 2004.

⁶⁸ Liehm, *Closely Watched Films*, 270-271.

⁶⁹ Jones, personal interview, 2 December 2004.

RESEARCH EVALUATION //

My research methodology is fairly standard for film criticism: book and article research, conducting interviews, and above all, viewing the films themselves. The drawbacks of this methodology exist primarily in the difficulty of obtaining materials in English. There is more information out there, but it is all in Czech.

In terms of bias, I was forced to write with the assumption reader is somewhat familiar with Chytilova's films, because I have limited space for extensive description. For the same reasons, I also assume that one has a familiarity with Judeo-Christian mythology and a working knowledge of Czech history. As this is a film criticism paper and much of it is based on subjective interpretation, there is little chance for error, although the possibility exists that my sources could be mistaken or I myself could misread or misinterpret some facts. The main problem with error exists in the difficulty of obtaining works that have been translated into English. In a couple of instances I have been forced to rely on an incomplete translation or paraphrasing of some aspect of a film, or in the case of *Raj srdce*, an entire short film.

I think the true value of my work comes from my work on *Ovoce stromů rajských jíme* because I have encountered very little writing outside of Peter Hames' book that makes a serious effort in analyzing this film. While I value Chytilova's other films, in looking over what I've written it appears that much of the work I did on those films was most useful in the context of trying to make sense of *Ovoce stromů rajských jíme*. My research into the theme of paradise in Chytilova's work is also fairly interesting—again, it is widely acknowledged but rarely examined in close detail in the writing I have encountered.

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