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MAD LOVE

The Films of Evgeni Bauer

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PO Box 128 • 38 George Street • Harrington Park, New Jersey 07640
Phone: (201) 767-3117 • Fax: (201) 767-3035 • Email: milefilms@aol.com • www.milestonefilms.com

Mad Love: The Films of Evgeni Bauer.

The Films: *Twilight of a Woman's Soul* (1913), *After Death* (1915) and *The Dying Swan* (1916). Director: Evgeni Bauer. Russia. 1913-1916. Black & White and Tinted. Silent with music scores. Total Running Time: 145 minutes. ©2002 British Film Institute.

BACKGROUND

He was D.W. Griffith, Edgar Allan Poe and Johannes Vermeer all rolled into one. He is perhaps the greatest film director no one has ever heard of. During his brief five-year career involving 86 films (26 of which survive), Evgeni Bauer created masterpieces of macabre society dramas, darkly obsessed with doomed love and death. Astonishing for their dexterous camera movements, risqué themes, and a superb mastery of sets and lighting, Bauer's films are wonders to behold.

For seventy years, Evgeni Bauer's films were buried in the Soviet archives — declared too “cosmopolitan” and bizarre for the more prurient Soviet regime. But with the fall of the Iron Curtain, Bauer's work has risen like the glorious phoenix out of the ashes of time.

Twilight of a Woman's Soul (1913) is Bauer's first surviving film and already shows his masterful use of deep-focus photography. *After Death* (1915) is adapted from a story by Turgenev and is imbued with one of Bauer's favorite themes: the psychological hold of the dead over the living. *The Dying Swan* (1916) takes a sardonic view of popular morbid obsessions including a chilling dream sequence. Restored by Gosfilmofond (the Russian state archive) and with brilliant new scores commissioned by the British Film Institute, *Mad Love* is a must-have collection for anyone in love with film and interested in discovering the crown jewels of cinema.

Bonus Feature: A 37-minute documentary essay on Evgeni Bauer by Russian film scholar Yuri Tsivian.

EVGENI BAUER (1865-1917)

Notes on Evgeni Bauer by Rachel Morely:

Since the rediscovery of his films at the eighth *Festival of Silent Cinema* (Pordenone, 1989), the pre-Revolutionary Russian director Evgeni Bauer has come to be seen as a figure of fundamental importance, not only in the history and development of Russian film, but also in world cinema.

A student of the Moscow College of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, Bauer worked as a magazine caricaturist, a portrait photographer and was well-known as a theatre set designer when he entered cinema in 1912, as scenic director on Drankov and Taldykin's *The Tercentenary of the Rule of the House of Romanov* (1913). Bauer directed films under both them and for Pathé before joining Khanzhonkov's rival company at the end of 1913, where he remained until his premature death in 1917. Despite the brevity of his cinematic career, Bauer directed at least 82 films, of which 26 are known to be extant. These include the early *Twilight of a Woman's Soul* (1913) and *In Pursuit of Happiness* (1917), the film on which he was working at the time of the fall which led to his death. The range and number of Bauer's surviving films make it possible to gain a sense of the recurrent features of style and theme that make a 'Bauer film' instantly recognizable and to trace the development of Bauer's method and thematics.

Bauer's directorial style is highly visual and uses all aspects of *mise-en-scène* expressively. Concerned to overcome the cinema screen's flatness, he built spacious sets and enhanced their depth and stereoscopic quality by dividing the space into different planes with carefully placed columns, furniture, curtains or plants. His sets are so distinctive that the Soviet *avant-garde* director Lev Kuleshov, who worked as art director on Bauer's *In Pursuit of Happiness*,

talks of 'the Bauer method' of set building. Although no doubt partly intended as impressive backdrop, Bauer's sets and the objects he places within them are more than mere ornament and function to highlight aspects of character and theme. Bauer's actors, too, are carefully posed, both in relation to the camera and to each other, like models for a painting. Bauer continually experimented with lighting, camera angle, types of shot and ingenious ways of making his camera mobile. As with his sets, however, technical innovation is never simply to impress, but always contributes to mood, characterization and theme.

The thematics of Bauer's films are as startling as their technical mastery. Often described as the work of a 'woman's director', they display a persistent concern with gender relations, even when addressing issues of class. Indeed, taken *en masse*, they offer a critique of the misogynistic attitudes of the patriarchal pre-Revolutionary Russia society in which Bauer locates their action. Bauer's female characters are consistently shown to be emotionally stronger and more engaging than their male counterparts. Moreover, when characters suffer, as they invariably do in Bauer's melodramas, it is the female protagonists who earn the sympathy of both director and viewer. Bauer does not, however, propose simple solutions to the dilemmas faced by his protagonists. While in some films he subverts the melodramatic stereotypes that make women the victims of their patriarchal male counterparts, his female protagonists are still victims as often as, if not more often than, they are victors. There are no clear winners in Bauer's battle of the sexes, and the overriding impression left by his films is of a society riven by gender anxieties, in which the problems of modernity and changing gender roles are far from resolved.

Notes on Evgeni Bauer by Philip Kemp

For many years, pre-Revolutionary Russian cinema was terra incognita. It was as though cinema in Russia had sprung fully formed and fizzing with socialist fervor from the heads of Eisenstein, Pudovkin, Dziga Vertov and their colleagues. Although the industry was a relatively late starter, the first all-Russian feature film, **Sten'ka Razin**, dates from 1908 and a rich crop of work emerged from the Tsarist years: over 2,000 films, of which nearly 300 survive. After the Revolution, however, these early movies were suppressed and forgotten (but carefully preserved by the state archive Gosfilmofond). Not until the dying days of the Soviet regime did they come to light again. And when they did, they revealed a previously unknown genius of the cinema - Evgeni Bauer.

Bauer's career as a filmmaker is all the more remarkable in that it lasted a mere four years - from 1913 until his death from pneumonia in June 1917 at the age of 52. In that time he directed over 80 films, of which more than a quarter is currently known to survive. From them it is evident that he possessed an instinctive grasp of the language and mechanics of cinema. Bauer had a sense of cinematic space, an insight into the creative use of light and an audacity in the handling of the camera that set him far ahead of more celebrated innovators of the period such as DW Griffith or Victor Sjöström.

Evgeni Frantsevich Bauer was born in 1865 into an artistic and theatrical family. His father was a famous zither virtuoso and his sisters were actresses. After studying at the Moscow College of Painting, Sculpture and Architecture, Bauer worked as a caricaturist, a satirical journalist, a photographer and a theatrical impresario. However, he was best known as one of Russia's leading theatre designers, and it was as a set designer that he first entered films, working for the producer Aleksandr Drankov.

Drankov, by all accounts, was a born huckster with few scruples and an eye to the main chance. Bauer directed four films for him (all now lost) before moving to the outfit run by Drankov's chief rival, Aleksandr Khanzonkov, a far more cultivated and artistic individual. In this more congenial environment Bauer's talents flourished and developed. He soon became Khanzonkov's star director, as well as a major shareholder in the company for which he made all his subsequent films.

In their preoccupation with doomed love and death, haunted dreams and premonitory spirits, and their predilection for unhappy endings, Bauer's films are colored by his contemporary Russian audience's taste for Symbolism and

Decadence. Underlying the fashionable gloom, though, is a distinctly critical view of Tsarist society. The well-off and the bourgeoisie are generally depicted as idle, selfish and heartless. If these attitudes are rarely made explicit, it is no doubt because Bauer wished to avoid falling foul of the restrictive Tsarist censorship.

In the freedom that followed the February Revolution of 1917, Bauer was able to express his views more openly. In both **The Revolutionary** and **The Alarm**, the last films he was able to complete, he showed his sympathy for the revolutionary cause, and, had he survived, Bauer would surely have become a major figure in Soviet cinema. His premature death meant that his work, along with that of his colleagues of the Tsarist era, was largely dismissed as 'bourgeois escapism'. Nonetheless, his influence remained strong, even if indirect, as his assistant and disciple Lev Kuleshov went on to become not only a leading director, but the greatest cinematic theorist and teacher of the Soviet era.

Evgeni Bauer — Partial Filmography

- 1) Korol parizha (1917) (The King of Paris) Completed by Olga Rakhmanova
- 2) Za Shchast'em (1917) (For Luck)
- 3) Nabat (1917) (The Alarm)
- 4) Revolutsioner (1917) (The Revolutionary)
- 5) Umirayushchii Lebed (1916) (The Dying Swan)
- 6) Grif starovo bortza (1916) (Griffon of an Old Warrior)
- 7) Zhizn za zhizn (1916) (A Life for a Life)
- 8) Koroleva ekrana (1916) (Queen of the Screen)
- 9) Sestry sopernitsy (1916) (The Rival Sisters)
- 10) Vozmezdnie (1916) (Retribution)
- 11) Yuri Nagornij (1915/1916)
- 12) Grazy (1915) (Daydreams)
- 13) Posle smerti (1915) (After Death)
- 14) Tysiacha v toraia khitrost' (1915) (The 1002nd Ruse)
- 15) Leon Drey (1915)
- 16) Deti veka (1915) (Children of the Age)
- 17) Obozhzhenniye krylya (1915) (Singed Wings)
- 18) Pesn torzhestvuyushchej lyubvi (1915) (Song of Triumphant Love)
- 19) Ditya bolshogo goroda (1914) (Child of the Big City)
- 20) Kholodniye dushi (1914) (Cold Showers or Frigid Souls)
- 21) Slava nam, smert vragam (1914) (Glory to Us, Death to the Enemy)
- 22) Nemye svideteli (1914) (Silent Witnesses)
- 23) Zhizn v smerti (1914) (Life in Death)
- 24) Slezi (1914) (Tears)
- 25) Volnaya ptitsa (1914) (Freed Bird)
- 26) Sumerki Zhenskov dushi (1913) (Twilight of a Woman's Soul)
- 27) Krovavaya slava (1913) (Bloody Glory)

Vera Alexeyevna Karalli (1888-1972), star of *After Death* and *The Dying Swan*

Vera Karalli (1888-1972) joined the Bolshoi in 1906 and was appointed Ballerina in 1914. Vera became one of Serge Diaghilev's first dancers when she joined the fledgling Ballet Russes de Monte Carlo in 1909. Some of the other members of the legendary troupe were Michel Fokine, Anna Pavlova, Tamara Karsavina, Ida Rubinstein, Vaslav Nijinsky, Adolph Bolm, Mikhail Mordkin, and Theodore Kosloff. Karalli danced with Diaghilev again in 1919-20, performing mostly in *Le Pavillion d'Armide*, *Thamar*, and *Prince Igor*. With the help of Evgeni Bauer and Pyotr

Chardynin, she became one of Russia's first film stars, alongside Vera Kholodnaia, another Bauer favorite. Karalli lived in Paris from 1938-1941 and then moved to Vienna where she remained until the end of her life.

Vera Karalli: Filmography

Die Rache Einer Frau (Germany, 1921). Director: Robert Wiene
La Nuit du 11 septembre, (France, 1919) Director: Bernard-Deschamps
Korol parizha (*The King of Paris*, 1917) Director: Evgeni Bauer
Nabat (*The Alarm*, 1917) Director: Evgeni Bauer
Umirayushchii Lebed (*The Dying Swan*, 1917) Director: Evgeni Bauer
Grif starovo bortza (*Griffon of an Old Warrior*, 1916) Director: Evgeni Bauer
Posle smerti (*After Death*, 1915) Director: Evgeni Bauer
Drakonovskij kontrakt (1915) Director: Pyotr Chardynin
Lyubov statskovo sovietskoi (*Love of a State Councilor*, 1915) Director: Pyotr Chardynin
Obozhzhenniye krylya (*Singed Wings*, 1915) Director: Evgeni Bauer
Natasha Rostova (1915) Director: Pyotr Chardynin
Krizantemi (*Chrysanthemums*, 1914) Director: Pyotr Chardynin

Vitold Alfonsovich Polonskii (1879 — January 5, 1919), star of *After Death* and *The Dying Swan* Vitold Polanskii: Filmography

Bal gospoden' (1918) Director: Viktor Tourjansky
Zhizn za zhizn (*A Life for a Life*, 1916) Director: Evgeni Bauer
Koroleva ekrana (*Queen of the Screen*, 1916) Director: Evgeni Bauer
Posle smerti (*After Death*, 1915) Director: Evgeni Bauer
Obozhzhenniye krylya (*Singed Wings*, 1915) Director: Evgeni Bauer
Pesn torzhestvuyushchej lyubvi (*Song of Triumphant Love*, 1915) Director: Evgeni Bauer
Natasha Rostova (1915) Director: Pyotr Chardynin

Twilight of a Woman's Soul

Sumerki Zhenskoi Dushi. 1913. B&W & Tinted. 49 minutes. Production: Star Film Factory (A. Khanzhonkov & Pathé Frères). Released: November 26, 1913. Director/art director: Evgeni Bauer. Script: V. Demert. Cameraman: Nikolai Kozlovskii. Cast: *Vera Dubovskaia*: Nina Chernova; *Prince Dol'skii*: A. Ugriumov; *Maksim Petrov*: V. Demert. Music by Laura Rossi. Violin: Sophie Langdon. Piano: Jill Crossland. Cello: Miriam Lowbury. Producer: Christopher Austin.

This is Bauer's first surviving film, made very soon after the start of his career as a director. As such, it is an astonishingly accomplished piece of work. Although his use of camera movement is not as audacious as it would soon become, it already exhibits a subtlety and an assurance that suggests an instinctive grasp of filmmaking technique, and the lighting, composition and set design are all masterly.

Right from the start, it seems, Bauer's films were imbued with the highly-charged eroticism that, in visual terms, manifests itself in his elaborate, almost hothouse style of décor. Making use of deep-focus photography that anticipates the work of Welles and Wyler by a quarter-century, Bauer stages his action in depth, often leaving a foregrounded plane in semi-darkness to focus our attention on the more brightly lit area beyond, as in the scenes in the heroine Vera's bedroom. Bauer's use of light is expressive and intricate, as his fellow director, Iakov Protazanov,

noted: 'A beam of light in his hands was an artist's brush.' What other director of the period would have ventured the high-angle shot Bauer uses to express the gaze of the predatory Maxim as he watches Vera approach his lair?

Notes on *Twilight of a Woman's Soul* by Rachel Morely:

Please note that the following contains a plot spoiler

Twilight of a Woman's Soul (1913) is Bauer's earliest extant film. It is also the only surviving Bauer film not shot by Boris Zavelev, the cameraman with whom Bauer collaborated from 1914 until the end of his career in 1917. Here Bauer's cameraman is Nikolai Kozlovskii, who had worked alongside Drankov on the first all-Russian feature film, *Sten'ka Razin* (1908). The consistency of the visual style in the films Bauer made with different cameramen suggests that Bauer himself devised and controlled this aesthetic aspect of his films.

Twilight of a Woman's Soul addresses the theme of gender relations to which Bauer returned time and again throughout his career. It tells the story of one of Bauer's strongest female protagonists, Vera Dubovskaia, a beautiful, idealistic young woman who, disillusioned with the emptiness of her life and its tedious social distractions, enthusiastically accepts her mother's suggestion that she accompany her on philanthropic visits to the poor. On one visit Vera encounters the workman Maksim. Struck by her beauty, Maksim tricks her into returning alone to his garret room, where he rapes her. Vera refuses to be a passive victim, however, and kills her rapist with one of his own tools. Months pass and Vera falls in love with Prince Dol'skii, who soon proposes. After their wedding Vera confesses her past, but her husband recoils from her in horror and Vera leaves him. Years later, during a visit to the opera, Dol'skii recognizes the operatic performer Ellen Kay as Vera. Overjoyed, he attempts reconciliation, but Vera rejects him, and the film closes with Dol'skii's suicide.

Technically, *Twilight of a Woman's Soul* is a highly accomplished *début*. If the opening ball scenes do not exhibit the depth and scale of similar scenes in later Bauer films, they nevertheless show Bauer striving to use space innovatively. In this respect the scenes shot in Vera's bedroom are particularly successful, and they also demonstrate Bauer's skilful use of lighting, props and costumes to create mood and highlight aspects of character and theme. A flimsy gauze curtain, drawn right across the screen, divides the set in two and creates depth. It also, however, serves to symbolize Vera's detachment from the outside world, the sphere of public activity. The space in front of the curtain is in complete darkness; in contrast, the well-lit background where Vera sits appears even brighter, and Vera is bathed in an unearthly light that lends her an aura of saintliness. Her ethereal nature is further suggested by the fragile curtain itself and by the diaphanous gown she is wearing. The whiteness of the curtain and of Vera's dress also evokes associations of purity and innocence, as do the vases of flowers that decorate her bedroom.

The construction of the rape sequence, in which many elements of the *mise-en-scène* function to characterize Vera as the innocent victim of a dangerous male predator, is also extremely sophisticated for 1913. Consider Vera's costume: with her simple dress, shawl-covered head and basket of provisions and medicine, Vera becomes an urban Little Red Riding Hood, while Maksim's predatory nature is communicated through the various camera angles from which Bauer builds the sequence. The camera stalks Vera as she walks nervously along the deserted street towards Maksim's garret; tension mounts when the camera cuts to Maksim's leering face, as he leans out of the window to observe Vera's approach; in the next shot, the camera adopts Maksim's rapacious perspective, looking down on Vera and framing her as his helpless prey, heading unwittingly into his trap.

Although framed as a victim, Vera does not end the film in this way. In her refusal to accept Dol'skii's declaration of love Vera shows that she has achieved not only financial independence and a successful career but also emotional independence. This makes Bauer's first heroine unique among his female protagonists, for none of Vera's successors acquires both forms of independence. In Bauer's 1916 film *A Life for a Life*, also available on *BFI* video, an intertitle informs us that: 'Under the influence of love, a woman forgets everything'. Vera is the exception who proves this rule, being the only Bauer heroine who does not allow love to rule her life.

After Death

Posle Smerti. Alternative title *Motifs from Turgenev*. 1915. B&W & Tinted. 46 minutes. Dolby 5.1. Production: A. Khanzhonkov & Co. Ltd. Released: December 29, 1915. Director/script: Evgeni Bauer. Cameraman: Boris Zavelev. Cast: *Andrei Bagrov*: Vitol'd Polonskii; *Kapitolina Markovna, his aunt*: Ol'ga Rakhmanova; *Tsenin, Andrei's friend*: Georgii Azagarov; *Zoia Kadmina*: Vera Karalli; *Her mother*: M. Khalatova; *Her sister*: Tamara Gedevanova; *Princess Tarskaia*: Marfa Kassatskaia. Music by Nicholas Brown. Performed by Triptych. Violin: Oliver Lewis. Piano: Ruth Herbert. Cello: Jonathan Few.

Adapted from Turgenev's story Klara Milich, *After Death* is imbued with one of Bauer's favorite themes: the psychological hold of the dead over the living. The hero, Andrei, is a reclusive young photographer shadowed by the memory of his dead mother. Dragged protesting to a social event, he meets a young actress (played by the huge-eyed, ethereal Vera Karalli) but spurns her. She kills herself. Seized with remorse and haunted by dreams and apparitions of the young woman, Andrei finds himself drawn inexorably towards the realm of the dead.

By this stage, Bauer's technical mastery was at its height. One shot, early in the film, is a tour de force of fluid camera movement. As the ill-at-ease Andrei is led into a fashionable salon, Bauer's camera moves quietly with him, panning, tracking and dollying in an unbroken three-minute take that involves dozens of extras and captures in its tension the nervous anguish of the antisocial hero. Apparently, the camera was mounted on a plank supported across two bicycles; a primitive enough device, but yielding under Bauer's direction a result unmatched by any other filmmaker of the period or some years after.

Notes on *After Death* by Rachel Morely:

Please note that the following contains a plot spoiler

As its alternative title – *Motifs from Turgenev* – suggests, *After Death* (1915) is a free adaptation of 'Klara Milich' (1882), a short story by the nineteenth-century Russian writer Ivan Turgenev. Bauer sets his film in his own century, however, and in doing so adds an extra dimension of meaning to Turgenev's story of a haunting, transforming it into a bleak commentary on the state of gender relations in Russia in the late Imperial age.

The film is dominated by the relationship between hero and heroine, played by Vitol'd Polonskii (1879-1919) and Vera Karalli (1888/89?-1972). A former ballerina, Karalli turned to cinema in 1914 when her dancing career was interrupted by injury. Considered one of the most talented and beautiful actresses of her generation – so beautiful that she was allegedly used in the plot to lure Rasputin to his death – she was one of the acknowledged 'Queens' of the pre-Revolutionary screen, and Polonskii one of the 'Kings'. Paralyzed by the portrait of his dead mother and dominated by his fussy aunt, Bauer's infantile hero Andrei has no romantic experience of women and little inclination to acquire any, and it is his encounter with Zoia, an actress and unconventional 'new woman', that sets in motion the film's dramatic action. Zoia's sexual attraction to Andrei is obvious from their first encounter, and she makes no attempt to hide it. Nor is she afraid to act on her attraction, for she writes to Andrei, requests a *rendezvous* in a park, and boldly declares her love. Horrified by her forwardness, Andrei rejects Zoia's advances, and she poisons herself during a stage performance. On learning of Zoia's death, however, Andrei falls passionately in love with the young woman. He obtains a photograph of her and, as his obsession begins to grow, his mind is haunted by Zoia's unattainable image until eventually, sapped by his visions and the fainting fits they cause, Andrei expires in his bed.

As a contemporary reviewer of *After Death* complained in 1916, Andrei's dreams and visions of Zoia so dominate the second half of the film that they begin to become 'monotonous'. It also becomes increasingly difficult to take them seriously. This is perhaps what Bauer intended, however, in order to ensure that Andrei inspires ridicule rather than pity in the viewer. Bauer's ironic treatment of his hero is also clear from the nature of his visions and dreams. The Zoia Andrei imagines bears little resemblance to Zoia in life. Rather than the confident and independent 'new woman' Bauer shows her to be, Andrei's fantasy-Zoia is an out-dated icon of idealized femininity, more revealing of Andrei's attitudes to women than of Zoia herself. That Andrei can love Zoia only after her death, when he is free to re-imagine her as he chooses, clearly suggests the extent of the fear that an autonomous new woman such as Zoia could inspire in the essentially patriarchal male of the early twentieth century.

Many sequences in *After Death* illustrate Bauer's technical mastery in their skilful use of lighting to create mood and contribute to characterization and theme. Particularly interesting is his innovative use of an over-exposed shot during Andrei's first Arcadian vision of Zoia, which bathes the actress in an idealizing ethereal light but drains her face of all expression and individuality. Bauer's inventive and innovative use of camera movement is also evident throughout the film. In his stimulating essay contained on the *BFI DVD* and video *Mad Love*, Russian film historian Yuri Tsivian analyses the long sequence at Princess Tarskaia's *soirée* where Tsenin introduces the reluctant Andrei to the other guests. He shows how Bauer, by combining tracking shots, pauses and pans to left and right, succeeds in making his camera speak of Andrei's social alienation by having it follow Andrei's uncomfortable progress through the grand salon, mirroring the 'chilling steadiness' of the scrutiny to which the guests subject the recluse. *After Death* also contains one of the earliest uses of the close-up in Russian film. At the end of Zoia's recital, Bauer's camera frames the actress's face in an extreme close-up that highlights her mesmerizing eyes, as they stare directly into the camera. Against all rules of cinema, the unblinking actress then steps deliberately towards the camera, a bold gesture worthy of the emancipated 'new woman' Zoia attempts to be.

— Rachel Morley, *School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, January 2003.*

The Dying Swan

Umirayushchii Lebed. 1917 B&W & Tinted. 49 minutes. Production: A. Khanzhonkov & Co. Ltd. Released: January 17, 1917. Director: Evgeni Bauer. Script: Zoia Barantsevich. Cameraman: Boris Zavelev. Cast: *Gizella, a mute dancer*: Vera Karalli; *Viktor Krasovskii*: Vitol'd Polonskii; *Count*: Valerii Glinskii; *An artist*: Andrei Gromov; *Gizella's father*: Aleksandr Kheruvimov; *Glinskii's friend*: Ivan Peristiani. Music by Joby Talbot. Violin: Jonathan Carney. Cello: Philip Shepard. Piano: Joby Talbot. Producer: Christopher Austin.

This was one of the last films Bauer made before the February Revolution that brought the Provisional Government to power. Taken from a novel by Zoia Barantsevich (who also scripted), it suggests that Bauer was perhaps growing a little impatient with the dilettantish obsession with morbidity popular at the time. Certainly the film's treatment of its lead male character - an artist striving to depict death on his canvas - is more than a touch sardonic. A friend, looking at the painting its creator describes as 'a miracle of art', exclaims: 'But it is untalented - terrible!' Perhaps Bauer found it difficult to take seriously a man who, amid the carnage of World War 1, agonizes 'Where can I find death? Real death?'

Whatever the weaknesses of the novelettish story, Bauer's visual handling of his subject is as sublime as ever. Dreams always found him at his best, and the film includes a chilling vision in which the heroine, a mute dancer (Vera Karalli again), sees herself led by a forbidding, nun-like figure to a cell where disembodied hands clutch at her from the darkness. And when she first enters the artist's studio, the camera tracks back before her as she passes through successive planes of light and darkness, vividly expressive of the opposing forces of life and death struggling for her.

Notes on *The Dying Swan* by Rachel Morely

Please note that the following contains a plot spoiler

This remarkable late Bauer film borrows both its title and its starring actress from the world of ballet. Created for Anna Pavlova, the famous Russian prima ballerina, by the *Ballets Russes* choreographer, Mikhail Fokin, **The Dying Swan** (1907) was interpreted by many other ballerinas, including the star of Bauer's film, Vera Karalli (1888/89?-1972). A dancer with the Russian Imperial Ballet, Karalli turned to cinema when her dancing career was interrupted by injury. Her first film role was in Petr Chardynin's 1914 drama *Chrysanthemums* and in 1915 she made several films with Bauer, including **After Death**, also available on BFI Video and DVD. Considered one of the most beautiful screen actresses of her generation – so beautiful that she was allegedly used in the plot to lure Rasputin to his death - Karalli was a big box office draw. When her interpretation of Fokin's dance also proved successful, Bauer conceived the idea of creating a film scenario around it, and the enormous success this film enjoyed with contemporary viewers was probably due in no small part to Karalli's performance of **The Dying Swan**, in her role as the mute ballerina Gizella. When Karalli briefly toured with the film, performing Fokin's dance both before and after the showing, the reviews became even more enthusiastic.

Bauer's film also features a decadent artist, Count Glinskii, who is obsessed with capturing the image of Death on canvas. The pursuit of this ideal drives Glinskii to the brink of despair, but, on watching the heart-broken Gizella perform **The Dying Swan**, he sees in her the ideal image he seeks; the artist falls in love with the ballerina and persuades her to pose for him. Ultimately, however, the young woman cannot live up to Glinskii's ideal. Before the portrait is finished, Viktor – the faithless lover whose betrayal had broken her heart – re-enters Gizella's life, offering love and marriage. Elated, Gizella runs to her last sitting with Glinskii, but her happiness threatens to ruin his masterpiece, for in her life-affirming joy she no longer embodies his ideal. The desperate artist is therefore impelled to kill her: he strangles Gizella, completes his portrait and gazes calmly and tenderly at her beautiful corpse. Unlike Nedelin, the male murderer in Bauer's earlier film **Daydreams** (1915, also available on BFI Video), Glinskii displays no awareness of the horror of his act. Here Bauer pushes the logic of his analysis of gender relations to its terrible extreme.

There is much in this film besides Karalli's performance of **The Dying Swan** that is visually striking. The sequence in which Gizella discovers Viktor's unfaithfulness features a shot of breathtaking depth and distance: as we look down on Gizella from Viktor's terrace, our view extends past her, down the steps to where her fickle lover arrives with another woman in his carriage, and then beyond to distant buildings and trees. The beautiful outdoor shots in the first part of the film also illustrate Bauer's skilful use of natural light and shade to create atmosphere and reveal character: the bright sunlight that bathes Gizella, who dresses in white gowns and flower-bedecked hats, conveys her innocence and *naïveté*; the false-hearted Viktor, however, appears more often in shade.

Bauer's humor and irony are also in evidence, especially in his portrayal of Glinskii. In great comic tradition, Bauer discourages the viewer from taking him seriously by giving the artist a down-to-earth foil, in the character of his friend. He also undermines him by visual means, filling his studio with ugly - and absurd - anatomical paintings and a skeleton, which, grinning grotesquely, remains in his studio throughout the film. This note of parody does not lessen the impact of the film's final tragic twist, however, which develops out of an extraordinary nightmare sequence. It begins, against the background of dramatic lighting effects, with an innovative dolly-out shot that drags the viewer into the space of Gizella's nightmare, where a ghostly nun predicts her death and disembodied hands grasp at the cowering ballerina. At the moment of her death, this terrifying image flashes through Gizella's consciousness and, of course, onto the screen. The film closes with a disturbingly eroticised image of the dead ballerina, in her pose of **The Dying Swan**.

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Milestone Film & Video

Milestone enters its twenty-first year of operations with a reputation for releasing classic cinema masterpieces, new foreign films, groundbreaking documentaries and American independent features. Thanks to the company's work in rediscovering and releasing important films such as Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep*, Kent Mackenzie's, *The Exiles*, Mikhail Kalatozov's *I Am Cuba*, Marcel Ophuls's *The Sorrow and the Pity*, the Mariposa Film Group's *Word is Out* and Alfred Hitchcock's *Bon Voyage* and *Aventure Malgache*, Milestone has long occupied a position as one of the country's most influential independent distributors. In November 2007, Milestone was awarded the Fort Lee Film Commission's first Lewis Selznick Award for contributions to film history. In January 2008, the Los Angeles Film Critics Association chose to give its first Legacy of Cinema Award "to Dennis Doros and Amy Heller of Milestone Film & Video for their tireless efforts on behalf of film restoration and preservation." And in March 2008, Milestone became an Anthology Film Archive's Film Preservation honoree. In 2009, Dennis Doros was elected as one of the Directors of the Board of the Association of the Moving Image Archivists and established the organization's press office in 2010.

In 1995, Milestone received the first Special Archival Award from the National Society of Film Critics for its restoration and release of *I Am Cuba*. Manohla Dargis, then at the *LA Weekly*, chose Milestone as the 1999 "Indie Distributor of the Year." In 2004, the National Society of Film Critics again awarded Milestone with a Film Heritage award. That same year the International Film Seminars presented the company its prestigious Leo Award and the New York Film Critics Circle voted a Special Award "in honor of 15 years of restoring classic films." Milestone/Milliarium won Best Rediscovery from the Il Cinema Ritrovato DVD Awards for its release of *Winter Soldier* in 2006 and again in 2010 for *The Exiles*.

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Milestone Film & Video
PO Box 128
Harrington Park, NJ 07640
Phone: (800) 603-1104
Email: Milefilms@aol.com
www.milestonefilms.com