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REVIEW

Idealization

Emil Loteanu's *Queen of the Gypsies* (*Tabor ukhodit v nebo*, 1976)

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The Soviet film *Queen of the Gypsies* by Emil Loteanu is a Mosfilm production from 1976. Being a film from an "official" studio, one expects conformity with the ideals of the regime at the time. Based on a novel by Maxim Gorki, the film tells the romantic story of a group of gypsies in the end of the 19th century in the Austrian-Hungarian occupied province of Basarabia. In a context where gypsies are marginalized, the film romanticizes the idea of "gypsyhood", therefore making it palatable for the larger public it is addressed to.

The love story that is central to the film is permeated with clichés concerning gypsies – the men are horse stealers, the women have clairvoyant and special powers. However, gypsies are not represented in a negative manner – they sing and dance beautifully, and music plays an important role in the film. The Austrian-Hungarian elite are the villains; the gipsies are the victims, which just confirms the conformity of the film to official Soviet cinema, since it is the West who is the enemy. The gypsy horse stealer Zobar is the (anti-)hero who falls in love with the clairvoyant and seductive Rada. The nomadism of the group of gypsies is key to the plot, where the men in love are forced to displace in order to find their beloved, who, in turn, do not clearly correspond to their intentions. The film ends in a tragedy, which corroborates its melodramatic mise-en-scene.

Still, what is most interesting about *Queen of Gypsies* is its history. Though it is a Russian film, it was made by a Moldovan director, and most of the gypsy characters are played by actors of Gypsy origin. This brings up the question of realism versus idealization- the choice of a gypsy cast could be an attempt to bring some kind of realism to the film, but it does not escape idealization. The gypsies are outlaws who – however wonderfully they sing and dance-, are clearly employed against the context of the Elitist Austrian Hungarian enemy.