

Sickening love – The Medal of Honour

Movie Reviews

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When Tudor Voican wrote the script of **The Medal of Honour**, maybe he thought of all the old people in this world. Rather, of all those people who linger out in a quiet resignation, along with their families, which do not visit them anymore, spending their small delights on the building stairs: to be able to pay the rent has become an extreme sport that makes them madly obsessed with keeping their building administrators at their doors, walking on their tiptoes for fear they might give themselves away. Ion I. Ion, the protagonist performed by Victor Rebengiuc, has the misfortune that this entire tern existence to be messed up by a letter from the Ministry of National Defence, in which he was announced that he received a medal of honour for bravery acts in the Second World War.

The script does not lead us on false tracks, Ion I. Ion is self – consistent with himself as he makes a claim in order to find out why did he get this medal, not knowing whether he did remarkable things or not. The stake, in case of really deserving it, is to impress his son whom he hasn't been talking to for 7 years because he denounced him at the militia in 1989 in order to stop him from leaving the country. Is he a good or a bad character? Does he have strength of mind or is he indulging himself in hypocrisy? The director, Calin Peter Netzer, brings out to us a man who wanders about because he cannot stand to get a medal that he does not deserve. He does not indulge himself with the idea that 'if I went to war and I risked my life, I deserve a medal anyway, even if not for bravery in action!' But still, when the medal is taken away from him, Ion I. Ion gets another one from a hockshop, thus preparing himself for the visit of his son who was coming from Canada. His force of character starts to decompose itself the moment he receives the greetings from the president, Ion Iliescu, and tells him he voted him, even though he had voted Vadim.



The story attacks the need of people for recognition and, in the particular case of Ion, the desperate need to regain his son's love and attention. This oscillation between honesty and hypocrisy makes the character a tragic one, a poor comedian with one eye smiling and the other one crying. Victor Rebengiuc had the opportunity to make this movie to have the importance that the actor himself gives to it. The terrifying silence of his wife (Camelia Zorlescu) would show a different man, if it were not for the different emotions written on his face, the monologue full of guilt and frustrations, his gestures and looks. It would have been a comedy with a cohesive script that would captivate and touch you, but just that.

At the festal dinner, given in the honour of the son returned from Canada, Ion looks like an icon in the head of the table while his nephew is playing with his medal. The director's inspiration had two meanings: on one hand, the vivid chat of the neighbours invited to dinner, on the other hand, the tensed silence between Ion and his son (Mimi Branescu), actually a different dialogue that intermingled with the real dialogue, as the child was creeping under the table.

We have to mention here **Tertium non datur**, Ion's guiding principle. The movie of Lucian Pintilie, in which Victor Rebengiuc is a Romanian general, comes with **The Medal of Honour** in the sense that both speak about honour, about strength of mind, but also about love, either a healthy or a sick one. The two stamps with aurochs head, so valuable, belong to some men that live their experiences at opposite poles: one gets it in obscure ways, through crimes and steeling and he does not keep himself away from showing it off to everybody and to brag about it like one would brag about a medal, the other one inherited it from his mother and keeps it to his chest like a valuable amulet. For him, it has a sentimental value (see Radu Beligan who throws on the table the plastic hand) and its mock leads to interior breakdown. I would say that in **The Medal of Honour**, Ion shows the two aspects of the human being, due to his memorable projection in the final scene.

The Medal of Honour seems a black comedy but, actually it has an existential vision that puts it above stereotypes, among the rare and valuable movies of the big screen.

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