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F i l m P o l s k i

presents the film by Jerzy Kawalerowicz.

# AUSTERIA

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## A U S T E R I A

Screenplay	- Tadeusz Konwicki, Jerzy Kawalerowicz, Julian Strykowski, - based on Julian Strykowski's novel
Direction	- Jerzy Kawalerowicz
Photography	- Zygmunt Samosiuk
Music	- Leopold Kozłowski
Settings	- Jerzy Skrzepiński
Sound	- Jerzy Blaszyński
Film editor	- Wiesława Otocka
Production management	- Urszula Orczykowska, - Zygmunt Wójcik

### S t a r r i n g:

Franciszek Pieczka	- Tag
Wojciech Pszoniak	- shamiz
Jan Szurmiej	- cantor
Ewa Domańska	- Kasia /Kathy/
Liliana Głabozyńska	- Yevdokha
Gołda Tencer	- Blanca
Marek Wilk	- Bum
Wojciech Stankiewicz	- tzaddiq
Szymon Szurmiej	- Wilf
and others	

Production: Polish Corporation for Film Production  
"Zespoły Filmowe", "K A D R" Film Unit, 1982  
35 mm, colour, 2938 m, 179 mins

### A SYNOPSIS OF THE FILM

The year is 1914, the first day of the war. The rumbling of cannons can be heard from a distance. A ritual ten of Hasidim flee the onrushing frontline. They ride in a ladder wagon, their tzaddiq and shamiz sitting in the middle. Following them is another wagon packed with their wives and children. Two separate groups, like in the synagogue. The wagons come to a halt in front of an austeria, a Ga-



lician inn which is near a road leading to town. The inn-keeper Tag, and old Jew, is only nodding his head at that sight. He alone is not running away, because it makes no sense for him. The Hasidim are followed by other fugitives, also heroes of the story. They go on foot. After they've moved on, a baroness whisks past like a phantom in her coach and with her flash memories of a grand ball, pearls and Franz Josef, the Austria-Hungary emperor who picked the pearls from the floor. Then comes an ominous silence, and then again the drone of cannons is audible. The only people who remain in the austeria are old Tag, his daughter-in-law Mina, his granddaughter Lolka and his mistress Yevdokha - a cow girl.

Old Tag locks up the inn like a bastion. At the last moment he lets in a Hungarian hussar who has strayed from his cavalry regiment. Almost at the same moment a battle thunders by the inn, the cavalry rushes on, shrapnel is whining around. The tumult of the battle which sets the window panes ringing recedes into silence. Old Tag's prayer merges with an appearance of Yevdokha who comes out of water naked, like a sin.

At dusk the fugitives return by the same way by which they attempted to escape. By running away they have not escaped. The first to reappear is a young lad Bum carrying in his arms the dead body of his beloved Ashia. The fair-haired girl is the first victim of the war in the local community.

Her death, her corpse lying with its feet to the door, as befits the Jewish custom, will tell on the reactions, fates and ecstasies of all those who return to find in old Tag's austeria a haven against the ominous night of the war. And all of them must return because they are fated to.

There they are back again: Ashia's father Wilf and her stepmother Blanca, Bum's parents - Kramer and his wife who disliked Ashia, Jewish burghers from the town, and, finally, the blessed tzaddiq himself with his ritual 10-strong entourage and the shamiz. The latter are followed into the chamber, by their wives and children, like in the Biblical caravan of Jacob. The austeria fills up with people and their dramatic experience - the tragedy of Bum and the thoughts of old Tag: "Bum, do you think I believe in God? ...., but one must believe, I would say, not quite believe, but doubt in God".

During that eerie night, old Tag interweaves his fate and thoughts, his faith and despondency with all those Jews who have filled his inn like Noah's ark. On that night the austeria lives with their lives, exposes their characters, it resounds with the loud prayers of the Hasidim and the singing of psalms by a cantor, the son of a cantor.

Yevdokha keeps the night alive with her sensuality which throws old Tag into a fit of jealousy. As he restlessly moves about the premises he stumbles upon Blanca and the hussar in a love embrace who are being eagerly watched by Yevdokha. Eventually, Tag and the Hasidim clash in a conflict over respect for the memory of Ashia and her dead body left to lie in state in Tag's chamber. The fanatical Hasidim are lost in prayer, wishing to fend off thoughts of trouble with songs and dances. They want to remain oblivious to the threatening night, to the expected cruelty of the cossacks who may raid the inn at any time. Their beliefs tell them they must not stay with a dead person under one roof for the night, but, on the other hand, they cannot walk out because their fear of the cossacks is even greater.



Therefore, they want to drown their fear and sense of helplessness in songs and dances. Old Tag interrupts their songs and dances twice. And it is only when a priest arrives that he leaves the chamber. The priest is his friend since the childhood years and he comes to save Tag and his family against a likely cossack raid.

Meanwhile, the Hasidim relieved of old Tag's continued presence, begin their ritual dance in which they forget everything, a dance to distraction and complete exhaustion. And they no longer care when Tag intervenes after returning to the chamber. Tag's remonstrance with the tzaddiq is all in vain. Deafened by their own singing, they are dancing with growing passion and violence. It is only when the youngest Hasid suffers a fit of hysteria that the shamiz feels compelled to break off the dance. Exhausted, the Hasidim drop down on benches and tables and only one old deaf Hasid is dancing on with his eyes closed because he has not heard what is happening. Old Tag cuddles him like a baby. The eyes of the two old bearded Jews well up with tears. This emotional moment stimulates Tag's imagination and he sees himself appear in the synagogue on the Day of Judgement with a chunk of pork in his hands. That blasphemous protest against God breaks him down.

Meanwhile, Jews and exasperated Blanca are circling about the inn's courtyard. Blanca wants to enter the barn, but Yevdoka blocks her way. The church bell sounds the alarm. The town is set ablaze. And at that point Bum steals Ashia's body away, forcing the priest to help him. At the news of the fire in the town the burghers get on a wagon and move off for their deserted homes, like moths attracted to the light, in disregard of their families.

Running after them is Kramer's crying wife, Blanca, and her husband. They are running for they



destiny never to return. Old Tag enters the chamber where exhausted Hasidim are lying asleep. The cantor, the son of a cantor, wants to wake them up, but Tag shakes his head in disapproval: What for? Of what help can they be?

Cossacks stop Bum and the priest as the two are taking Ashia's body to the cemetery. Bum scuffles with them, but they overpower him and set fire to the cart with Ashia's body. By that they stampede the horse to a breakneck gallop across fields. Trailing the horse is the blazing torch of the cart. Tag walks into his chamber to find out that Ashia's body is no longer there. And again in his imagination he pictures himself in the synagogue where, wrapped in the tallith and wielding Torah in his hands, he is calling out the words of the Bible. That passionate vision experienced by Tag interlaces the rites of Purim with those of Yom Teruah and Yom Kippur. In a procession celebrating the saving of the Torah, Jews, each clad in the white tallith, enter the square where Bum is facing the gallows. Says Tag to Bum "Jewishness is resting on one column like on one leg, that means on learning. Love thy neighbour as you love thyself; this is our entire wisdom". In a silence following those words appears the baroness in her coach and offers pearls in return for the boy's life.

Old Tag comes to lie down in his bed by the side of half-naked Yevdokha. He wakes her up saying: "I am afraid, Yevdokha, I am old, old". The girl cuddles him with her naked arms. At that moment the priest enters the barn and tells them without looking at them: "They want to hang Bum". Tag makes the decision to go with the priest to the town and save Bum. Yevdokha is trying to stop him, sensing that "the old devil" will never come back. The Hasidim rush out into the austeria's courtyard and begin their ritual chanting and morning dance, refusing to realize the foreboding of that dawning day, the fire of the town and the war. Their song and dance is in praise of the Lord. Dancing they move across a meadow to bathe in pure water of the river. Dancing, they strip off their clothes and jump naked into the



river: "How delightful it is to be a Jew!". They frolic and splash water about, shouting down themselves and everything around. "Halli-Yuh" Halli-Yuh!" - resounds the Hasidic song. A burst of machine-gun fire cuts their song. Another burst and another. The white bodies are submerging under the purple surface of the water. The purple river, the purple wavelets break on blackened, jagged piles protruding from the bottom.

Written by the film director  
Jerzy Kawalerowicz

#### JERZY KAWALEROWICZ ABOUT THE FILM "AUSTERIA"

The perished world of the Polish Jews has long awaited to be revived and perpetuated in the film work. That original community, with its culture, thoughts, philosophy, customs, inimitable charm and poetic quality deserves a lasting memorial in world culture. I have always believed that Poland is the only place where it is possible to make a film that would be adequate to the subject. There live still people here who remember that perished world, there are still artists who have the visual shape of the murdered civilisation etched on their minds, who still recollect the sounds and melodies of those times.

As I set about this film I was aware of the fact that the subjects of the Jews of eastern Europe had been and would be still taken up by various artistic quarters. We remember productions such as "The Gofaden Dream" or "Tevvy the Milkman" and other sentimental farces or musicals. Such productions, based on the cliché convention, replay melodramatic stereotypes of manners, thus catering to the demand for stories which the audiences and the critics are fond of.

We, however, undertook to make an entirely different film, one that would be more comprehensive and profound, corresponding to the rank of the subject matter and our considerable possibilities in this respect. We wished the film to be a great metaphor



a passionate and dynamic fresco presenting a world of the Jews moments before its tragic holocaust. That is why we elected as the basis Juliusz Strykowski's book "Austeria" which had evoked an interest around the world owing to its original, singular approach to the theme. Hence, the film I have made is removed from the traditional sentimental story-telling. In what can be termed a dynamic shorthand I strive to reconstruct the world of dreams, mental habits, and philosophical postures of the East-European Jewry in the face of ultimate menace.

I have put this fresco within the framework of the Day of Judgment - in literal and metaphoric sense. In a matter of one day and one night I strive to portray, perhaps even too brutally, the attitudes of people to things ultimate evoked by any war with its spectre of destruction. Such an approach to the theme is more universal. This portrait of a murdered Jewish world should prompt a more general reflexion on the danger that the man of the present day senses with equal intensity.

"Austeria" does not merely retrace the history of a Jewish community with the vivid folklore of its customs and culture, Hasidic beliefs and unique Jewish humour, but it is primarily the portrait of a world from not too distant past, a perished world which we today can glimpse only in reflected light.

I have made the dramatic and visual form of the film subordinate to its philosophy. By fusing into one whole the real events of onrushing war, the individual happenstances of human destiny, which I show with stress on the predatory and the bloody, the poetic world of Jewish fancies and legends full of metaphor, tragic lyricism and original beauty, by interlacing human passions, both earthly and vital, as well as the multivocal motifs of the dreams, hopes and yearnings of a community persecuted by their fellow creatures - I believe that we have created in effect a work with topical contents which every viewer today should find intelligible.



**JERZY KAWALEROWICZ - film director**

Born 1922 in Gwoździec. In 1946 completed Film Preparatory Course and in 1948 graduated from Academy of Fine Arts in Cracow.

Assistant director: Forbidden Songs /Zakazane piosenki/, The Last Stage /Ostatni etap/, Hearts of Steel /Stalowe serca/ and others. From 1955-1968 organizer and artistic director of Film Unit "Kadr". From 1972 on artistic director of the new Film Unit "Kadr".

Co-script-writer of all his films:

Directing debut:

1951 - Village Mill /Gromada/, co-dir. with K. Sumerski, awarded for directorship Karlovy Vary, 1952

Later films:

- 1954 - Night of Remembrance /Pamiętka z Celulozy/
  - Under the Phrygian Star /Pod Gwiazdą Frygijską/, Karlovy Vary Award, State Award, 1955
- 1956 - Shadow /Cień/, Award of Polish Film Critics "Syrenka" /Mermaid"/
- 1957 - The Real End of the Great War /Prawdziwy koniec wielkiej wojny/
- 1959 - Night Train /Pociąg/, Venice Award for actress Lucyna Winnicka and the director, London Award
- 1960 - Mother Joan of the Angels /Matka Joanna od Aniołów/, Cannes Jury Special Prizes 1961, "Crystal Star", Award of the French Film Academy for Lucyna Winnicka, Award at Sao Paulo, prizes in Holland, Cordoba, Panama, Minister of Culture and Arts Award, Readers' Cup - 1961
- 1965 - Pharaoh /Faraon/, Collective State Award - 1st degree, "Gold Duck" Award of "Ekran" readers, Prague Award, nominated for the OSCAR in 1967
- 1968 - Game /Gra/, TV film
- 1969 - Maddalena, made in Italy
- 1977 - Death of the President /Śmierć Prezydenta/, Special Jury Award in Gdańsk, 1977; "Silver Bear" - West Berlin Festival 1978; FIPRESCI Award in Cordoba, 1978
- 1980 - Chance Meeting on the Ocean /Spotkanie na Atlantyku/
- 1982 - Austeria
- 1966-78 - President of the Polish Film Authors' Association, now **honorary President.**



JULIAN STRYJKOWSKI, one of the greatest postwar prosaists in Poland, was born on April 27, 1906 in Stryj, a small town in Galicia, where three nationalities and three cultures - Polish, Ukrainian and Jewish lived together. That district town, which absorbed Eastern and Western influence, was rightly called a small Vienna.

Stryj was where Strykowski graduated from a secondary school. Afterwards he moved to Lwów /Lvov/ to study the Polish literature. After earning a doctor's degree at Jan Kazimierz University in Lwów, Strykowski became a secondary school teacher in Płock. For his communist activities in which he involved young people Strykowski was arrested and imprisoned in Lwów. After his release he moved to Warsaw and took a bookseller's job in a science bookstore.

When the war broke out in 1939 he moved to Lwów where he joined the editorial board of the journal "Czerwony Sztandar" /Red Banner" and, later, the Polish section of the Lwów radio. After the outbreak of the Soviet-German war he travelled far into the USSR where he worked first as a worker and then as a proof reader for the weekly "Wolna Polska" /Free Poland/.

He returned to Poland in 1946. Soon he became manager of a news agency in Katowice and afterwards he was posted to Rome as a press correspondent.

In 1954, when the famous Polish writer Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz became the editor-in-chief of the literary monthly "Twórczość" /Creation/, Strykowski was put in charge of the journal's prose section. In time "Twórczość" began to publish in installments Strykowski's excellent novel "Głosy w ciemności" /Voices in the Dark/ which shortly afterwards appeared in book form.

The novel gave a start to a book cycle related to the writer's young years and intended to be a monument dedicated to the exterminated Jewish community of a Galician townlet. But many years had passed before the further books of the cycle appeared on bookshelves. "Austeria" - a novel published in 1966 in book form, but preceded by its series publication in "Twórczość", made a clear reference to "Voices in the Dark", in that it described the gloomy fate of the same community. "Austeria", however, is not stock novel of manners nor one of reminiscences. It is an original artistic vision of not only what has been, but also of what will be, a vision of life in general.

In 1971 readers got acquainted with Strykowski's short stories in a volume entitled "Martwa fala" /Dead Wave/, and then with "Syriusz" /Sirius/ which confronted the narrator with the community of surviving Galician Jews settled on the American continent. In 1973 the writer returned to the motifs of his early works in his novel "Na wierzbach ... skrzypce nasze" /Our Violins ... over Willows/. Finally, the year 1975 saw the latest, but chronologically the first, volume of Strykowski tetralogy. It was "Sen Azrilla" /Azzilla's Dream/. In that novel, an alienated Jew returns to his native town after years to carry into effect his dream of an immutable world. Unfortunately, he cannot succeed. In 1977 came the latest of Strykowski's novels "Przybysz z Narbony" /Arrival from Narbonne/ to deal with Sephardic Jews, a subject removed from that of the previous books in its climate and space. But also here we find many features common to all of Strykowski's works. Another proof of where Strykowski is heading as a writer is his latest piece of prose entitled "Odpowiedź" /The Answer/ dedicated "To the Memory of Martin Buber, the great scholar".



## THE HASIDIM, HASIDISM

The Hebrew word "hasid" means "the righteous one", or "the pious one", or "the just one". That name was adopted by the members of the Jewish mystical religious movement that emerged in the 1330's in Podolia, eastern Poland.

Its founder was Israel ben Eliezer born in the Podolian town Okop who went down in history under the cognomen Ba'al Shem Tov, or Besht, for short. Ba'al Shem Tov translates from the Hebrew as "the Master of the Good Name", or "the Man of Good Fame".

Being a plebeian movement, Hasidism took a comparatively short time to attract many followers among Jews living on the former territories of Poland which extended over vast stretches of Ukraine and Belorussia. The movement also had its followers in Romania and Hungary. It struck particularly strong roots in Galicia.

Hasidism appealed to an effective need of the poor Jewish masses who were left unsatisfied by the dry intellectualism of the Talmudists, and who resented the "kahal" oligarchy and the wealthy. The Hasidim also looked to their reformed and ecstatic religious experience for a way of rescue and escape from the cossack pogroms of the 17th century, or the persecution of the Jews during the Swedish invasion of Poland.

The mystical movements among Jews which preceded Hasidism, such as those led by Shabbetai Tzevi in Turkey, or by Jacob Leybovitch Frank in Poland, were short-lived because a majority of their followers became converts either to Islam or Catholicism.

As distinct from them, Hasidism has remained a thoroughly Jewish movement. The ideology of Hasidism is based on the traditional Talmudic Judaism and on the mystical Jewish lore known as "Kabbala".

The Hasidim worship God in the simplified ritual combining with songs and dances which often border on ecstatic.

As recorded by his disciples, the philosophical system of Ba'al Shem Tov, which he presented only in oral form through lectures and discourses, is based on the canon set out in the cardinal Book of Kabbala, known as "Zohar" /"The Book of Splendour"/. Its author, or only redactor, was Moses ben Shem Tov de Léon who lived in Spain in the 13th century. Formally, "Zohar" is a commentary to the Bible which combines the mystical lore with legends /agadot/ or even philosophies. The commentary is told by Simeon ben Yohai, a tannaist who lived at the time of the revolt led by Bar Kokhba.

On the basis of that book, Spinoza's pantheism, and his own thoughts, Israel Ba'al Shem Tov developed a philosophical system which can be summarized as follows:

- 1/ God and the Universe are one. The divine world is in communion with the terrestrial world and Heaven is in communion with Earth.



- 2/ The way to God does not lead through ascetism. According to Ba'al Shem Tov, there are two kinds of medical doctors: one kind are those who treat patients with bitter potions, the other kind recommend sweet potions. Besht himself prefers sweet potions. A weakness of the body means a weakness of the soul. Eating and drinking is also service to God. Bodily pleasure is a step to achieving spiritual pleasure.
- 3/ We need not fast not worry. It is important to live by the light of three things: love of God, love of Israel, and love of Torah.
- 4/ Not just poring over the holy books, but prayer and good deeds bring the man closer to God. Let the man realize that while he is in prayer there is no barrier between him and God, even if the man is haunted by sinful thoughts, because such thoughts, too, are merely a coat under which God resides. The prayer should be marked by great ecstasy, great joy, great piety.
- 5/ Not the fear of God, but faith and confidence should be the guidepost for the man. "Makkom sheyesh jirah, ayn gilab", or: "where is fear is no joy". "Torah is joy and joy is Torah".
- 6/ The centre of the religious life is Tzaddiq. "Zadik" in Hebrew means "the just", "the righteous one", "the perfect person" in every respect. The Tzaddiq is the central point of religious practices such as prayer and a merry feast. The Tzaddiq is the intercessor between the "Shekhina" /God's spirit/ and God Himself. The man's purpose is to become a "temple" where God will feel at home.

Initially, Hasidism was a progressive movement. In the later period, however, it began to ossify. Whole dynasties of Hasidic rebbe's, or leaders, developed into rival courts, which often degenerated to backwardness and obscurantism and fought any Jewish movements for emancipation.

The Hasidic movement from its inception was the target of a campaign that was led against it by the official Orthodox Jewish kahal establishment. It was also fought against by the followers of the Jewish enlightenment called "haskali". The opponents of the Hasidim were called "mitnaggedim" /"the opponents"/.

World War II dealt a mortal blow to Hasidism. Its followers perished along with the Jews who were murdered by nazi Germany. Today small Hasidic groups persist chiefly in the United States and Israel.

Micha'el Friedman