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Öszi Almanach
(Autumn Almanac)
(HUNGARIAN-COLOR)

Variety Aug 29, 1984
Locarno, Aug. 18.

A Hungarofilm Presentation of a Mafilm Production. Written and directed by Béla Tarr. Camera (color), Sandor Kardos, Ferenc Papp Buda Gulyas; editor Agnes Hranitzky; music, Mihaly Uigh; art direction, Agnes Hranitzky. Reviewed at the Morettina Film Center, Locarno, Aug. 17, 1984. Running time: 122 MINS.

Cast: Hedy Temessy, Miklos Szekely, B. Erika Bodnar, Pal Hetenyi, Janos Dezsi.

Bela Tarr, who was awarded a special mention in Locarno two years ago for his "Prefabricated People," returns now with an even more painful, scorching and unsettling image of Hungarian society. Unlike his previous effort, shot in black and white and creating a strong naturalistic impression of images taken in actual dwellings of the Hungarian proletariat, this one is located in a sort of hellish limbo. The entire movie is claustrophobically restricted into one apartment strewn with decadent remains of a bourgeois interior, lighted in a bizarre way, the frame usually divided between reddish tinges on the one side, and blue-grey ones on the other, all this briefly observed when the camera is not practically shoved down the characters' throats, as it directs its pitiless eye at the very pores of the actors' skins, without allowing them a moment of respite.

Tarr has already shown in the past his predilection for this style, known as pseudo-documentary, but he takes it here one step further, into the realm of the abstract, in order to analyze the strange relations between two women and three men sharing the same quarters. An older woman owns the place and lives there with her son, who covets her money. Since she is ailing, a young nurse has moved into the premises, to administer to her daily shots, and she has brought with her a man who is her avowed lover. Joining the party is an older man, a teacher who obviously is seeking refuge from some money troubles he has.

It is hard to imagine a company of humans so dependent on each other, and yet capable of exuding more hatred and deviousness, people whose only escape from solitude is failure. For a young man (Tarr is 29) this image of human desolation brought to its climax is truly frightening.

Still, as talented as the director is at his craft, and as dedicated as his actors and his technical crew are, watching this fivesome taking each other apart relentlessly for over two hours, may well be too trying an experience for an average audience. Even those in the know will find it an anguishing moment that goes on nearly forever. — *Edna.*