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TU NE TUERAS POINT Italy/Yugoslavia/France 1961 132 mins Colour 35mm
 (NON UCCIDERE)
 (THOU SHALT NOT KILL)

Production Company: Moris Ergas/Lovcen Film (Belgrade)/Gold Film Anstalt (Vaduz).
 Producers: Moris Ergas, Aleksijc Obradovic. Director: Claude Autant-Lara.
 Assistant Director: Ghislaine Autant-Lara. Script: Jean Aurenche. Adaptation:
 Jean Aurenche, Pierre Bost, Claude Autant-Lara. Photography: Jacques Natteau -
 Dyaliscope. Camera Operator: Juro Tucar. Editor: Madeleine Gug. Art Director:
 Max Douy. Music: Song "L'Amour et la Guerre" composed and sung by Charles
 Aznavour; poem by Bernard Dimey. Sound: Dragica Gojcovic. In the original
 languages spoken by the characters, with English sub-titles.

Cast: Laurent Terzieff (Jean-François Cordier), Horst Frank (Adler), Suzanne Flon
 (Madame Cordier), Mica Orlovic, Marjan Lovric, Ivo Jaksic, Vladete Dragu-
 tinovic.

Prix du Centre International d'Etudes Juridiques, Venice.

Suzanne Flon awarded the Volpi Cup for Best Performance by an Actress, Venice Film
 Festival, 1961.

Under the French law there is no provision for the category of the
 conscientious objector except prison, unlike the United States or
 Britain where objectors are assigned to constructive activity.

The sentence for a conscientious objector in France is one year's
 imprisonment. At the end of that time, he is asked whether he
 wishes to perform his military service, and if he remains faithful
 to his convictions of not wishing to bear arms against his fellow
 man, he is re-sentenced again to a year's imprisonment.

This can continue indefinitely.

How the Film Was Made

Autant-Lara got the idea for THOU SHALT NOT KILL when he read about the
 double trial by a French military court of a young French soldier charged with
 being a conscientious objector and a German priest who, while in uniform, had
 executed a French resistance fighter during the war. The Frenchman was a devout
 Catholic who felt it against his beliefs to bear arms. The German was a priest
 who still deeply felt the horror of having shot down a fellow man, even though
 he had obeyed an order from a superior officer. The priest was released, but the
 conscientious objector was sentenced to the standard penalty of one year in prison.

Shortly afterwards, Autant-Lara met the wife of one of the officers who had
 been a member of the court martial board, who with other officers had discussed the
 cases during dinner at her home. Some of the officers emphatically wanted the law
 regarding objectors modified; others felt that an objector could not be sincere,
 and even if he were, he was a bad example for the other men.

Together with screen writers Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost, Autant-Lara
 set to work investigating the background of these two trials. They met and talked
 with many of the people involved in the affair, including the two principals.

For nine years the picture was shelved, since no distributor could be found to release the film. Finally Autant-Lara met Italian producer Moris Ergas, who was most enthusiastic about it. However, the Italian government refused to grant authorization to make the film on Italian soil. The problem was solved by shooting the picture in Yugoslavia. The Yugoslav authorities welcomed the tiny company of actors and technical crew, and put their own actors, technicians and studios at the complete disposition of the French director. All the actors with the exception of Laurent Terzieff, Suzanne Flon and Horst Frank were Yugoslavians.

Although the authorities couldn't have been more helpful, recollects Autant-Lara, strange things happened:

"I'd been using one group of about twenty students to play the seminarists in the court scene, and one morning, instead of twenty boys in their late teens, twenty workmen in their thirties turned up. The interpreter explained that the students had an examination that day, so the studio thought they'd send over twenty hands from a nearby factory."

After four long, extremely difficult months of production, THOU SHALT NOT KILL was completed, and was accepted for entry in the Venice Film Festival held in August 1961. The international jury awarded Suzanne Flon the coveted Volpi Cup for the Best Performance by an Actress, in her role as the mother.

Even with the success of the Venice Festival and favourable reviews from international film critics, the film continued to have its difficulties. THOU SHALT NOT KILL was forbidden to be shown in both France and Italy, although the Mayor of Florence, declaring the film to be of great humanitarian value, presided at a private showing in his city.

Excerpts from Reviews of the Film

Paul Rotha in Films and Filming, April 1962

I have reservations about the technical qualities of the film. The script is unnecessarily complicated, with a redundant opening sequence. The direction is, for me, on the slow side. Photography and sets are not very good. But the major acting fortunately redeems the picture. In addition to Laurent Terzieff's impressive performance, Horst Frank's Catholic priest is strongly sincere while Suzanne Flon's interpretation of Cordier's mother, who is proud of her son's passionate integrity, is deeply moving. There is, alas, some awful hamming among the supporting cast.

Good sequences linger in the mind: the prison visit of the mother to her son, the priest's shooting of the resistance worker, the final scene of farewell, the German general's birthday.

As a film-maker and knowing from Autant-Lara himself something of the production problems he had to surmount, I would ask you to make allowance for the technical defects of the handling because of the film's unswerving sincerity, which was shared by all who took part, not least by the cast.

(Autant-Lara) has put his all into THOU SHALT NOT KILL and it is a tremendously worthwhile all. My great hope is that it gets the showing it deserves in this country [England] and the USA and what other countries still believe in and will defend the freedom of the individual. This film may not have the magnificent technical skill of a MARIENBAD but what it says is a thousand times more important.

Roy Armes in "French Cinema since 1946:
Volume One: The Great Tradition"

The film is neatly constructed and the ironic possibilities of the contrast [between the cases of the objector and the priest] are developed to the full but the film is more argument than work of art. The Cordier scenes are handled with sympathy and insight and contain the film's best acting from Laurent Terzieff as Cordier and Suzanne Flon as his mother. But in the scenes with Adler, shot in German, Autant-Lara has not been able to avoid the temptations of oversimplification and caricature. By making all the priests hypocritical the director weakens his case...The film's principal weakness lies in the script. The structure is unadventurous and full of the typical devices of the conventional scriptwriter's cinema...The only real originality lies in the use of songs by Charles Aznavour. Imposed on the opening shots of war-graves, the device is successful but the lyrics at the end are very weak indeed. Elsewhere the film relies almost entirely on dialogue for its effects and for all his evident passion and sincerity, Autant-Lara has not succeeded in making the film more than a somewhat ponderous if well-intentioned tract.

Frank Morriss in The Globe & Mail, May 19, 1962

THOU SHALT NOT KILL is a stark, but nevertheless moving, plea for a world which, in the words of its director, has been slowly turning from the beginning of the century toward a civilization of the militarists. Mr. Autant-Lara is plainly a story-teller rather than a director who is concerned with all the technical possibilities of the cinema. He is observant and straightforward, and he allows himself time to ponder and reflect as he goes along...

The conscientious objector is, in many ways, an all too determined martyr. He allows himself to be signed up for the army before he refuses to don the uniform. He closes, himself, many possible avenues of escape from his desperate situation. He wishes to be made an example and it is the virtue of the script, and the direction, that it makes his idealism shining rather than stuffy. The youth is told that there are many men in prison for the same beliefs, and that nobody knows. "But I know," he says, and this brief remark is, perhaps...the cornerstone of the film's deep sincerity...

It is a movie in which you will become deeply involved from the beginning, and you are almost certain to leave the theatre thinking about the whole question.

The performances by Laurent Terzieff as the conscientious objector, Suzanne Flon as his mother, and Horst Frank as the priest are all superb.

Clyde Gilmour in The Telegram, May 16, 1962

In view of its turbulent history, I wish I could sincerely acclaim it as a flawless masterwork. Falling short of THAT lofty pinnacle, Autant-Lara's troubled opus is nonetheless a deeply stirring and courageous photodrama about human beings with which most viewers will readily and warmly identify. Laurent Terzieff as the objector, Suzanne Flon as his proud and grieving mother and Horst Frank as the priest all give performances of considerable honesty and power.

The screenplay by Jean Aurenche contains one or two irrelevant side-paths which might wisely have been avoided in the interests of force and unity. But the film's "big" scenes, especially the prison meeting between mother and son, unerringly touch the heart and enkindle the mind of a beholder.

Wendy Michener in The Toronto Star, May 22, 1962

You can tell the character of a country by the books it burns, the people it imprisons, and the movies it bans...France has banned THOU SHALT NOT KILL, a French film about a boy who goes to jail for refusing to be a soldier. It was also banned in Yugoslavia where it was made...And there's no getting away from it, THOU SHALT NOT KILL is a propaganda film. Like most people who care too deeply about a cause, Autant-Lara has loaded his dice. His pacifist is far too saintly, while all who do not agree with him are disfigured with human frailties...

Flawed by exaggerations, the film still has considerable emotional impact by virtue of its courage, sincerity and storytelling skill. It's impossible not to be affected by the prison scene, for instance, when inmates and visitors shout at each other across a guarded corridor and try to reach out through the wire mesh screens. Or by the performance of Suzanne Flon as the mother brimming over with loss and pride.

Whatever else THOU SHALT NOT KILL may mean for the rest of the world, it won't really be consummated until it meets the French audience it was made for.

Bill Davidson in "CJBC Views the Shows", May 27, 1962

I have only praise for the film THOU SHALT NOT KILL...

It is based on a true story, and is unfavourable to the Army, the Church and the Courts. Not unfair, just unfavourable. It deals with the fundamental conflict between personal conscience and the demands of society.

Artistic honesty, that is what impressed me about this film. I kept waiting to be cheated. But I wasn't...It would have been easier for the director if the young man had been intense, with a strong personality. But he isn't. He is almost passive. A funny looking guy. Or, if he was particularly intelligent. But he isn't. Or if he was a mystic à la Joan of Arc. He isn't that either. If he was deeply religious. He begins that way, but before the film is over he loses that prop as well. Certainly we could understand him if he was a crusader, if he wanted to gather converts around him and gain notoriety. But this is a very ordinary but unusual young man, in that he is not at all involved with the world's conscience, but only his own. His whole being is obsessed with one final moral concept - Thou Shalt Not Kill. And he will not, in fact can not, compromise...

I don't think it matters whether or not you share this young man's uncompromising conviction that it is wrong to kill no matter what the provocation. This film is still one of the cinema's rare efforts to move the conscience of us all, and to reflect on one of the deepest moral issues of our time.

Robert Russel in "Exchange", A Canadian Review of Contemporary Thought, February-March, 1962

THOU SHALT NOT KILL is a detailed examination of murder in uniform. Among other things, it presents the case of a conscientious objector in a sympathetic manner. It has consequently been subject to government suppression, interference and calumny, all over Europe. Nonetheless, it managed to get a screening at the Venice Festival in 1961 and, until the French government intervened, was to have received the Lion d'Or as the best film of the year...THOU SHALT NOT KILL was written and prepared for shooting ten years ago...But the film is no mere anachronism. Its powerful originality, its impeccable logic, its universal simplicity, its scrupulous honesty, place it in a class by itself, outside of time...THOU SHALT NOT KILL (like the song that introduces, holds together and ends the film) is a ballad - the ballad of a free man who acts as he will...It is a courageous, distinguished, deeply human document.

The Director

Claude Autant-Lara was born in 1903 in Luzarches, a tiny village near Paris. After a classical education in France he attended the Mill Hill School in England for two years.

On his return to France he enrolled in the Ecole des Beaux-Arts and from there moved on to doing set designs; then became interested in movie-making and was assistant to René Clair on two of his early films.

Autant-Lara began directing short films at twenty. One of these, *CONSTRUIRE UN FEU*, was an early wide-screen experiment, varying the screen-shape (horizontal or vertical) according to the image, and at one point using two screens simultaneously. Unfortunately this film was held up and then ignored with the coming of the talkies, and later was destroyed.

In 1930 he was hired by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer to make French versions of American films in Hollywood. He returned to France in 1932, then went to London in 1936 to direct *MY PARTNER MASTER DAVIS*, and during the war went to London again to act as liaison officer-interpreter between the Free French and the British Army.

His first post-war film, *LE DIABLE AU CORPS*, starring Gérard Philipe, brought him international success.

Since then Autant-Lara has made a succession of films starring some of France's greatest actors. As well as his more serious features, he has made a number of commercially successful comedies.

Roy Armes in "French Cinema since 1946:
Volume One: The Great Tradition" (1966)

Though he established a secure claim to fame with *LE DIABLE AU CORPS* in 1947, Claude Autant-Lara has not enjoyed the kind of constant critical support usually accorded to directors whose careers are a continual struggle against producers and censors. In a sense this is a tribute to Autant-Lara's talents as a polemicist, the way in which for the last twenty years he has consistently attacked the comfortable myths and assumptions of bourgeois life...

Film-making for him is very much a team effort and since 1947 his collaborators have seldom varied: the scriptwriters Jean Aurenche and Pierre Bost, the designer Max Douy, composer René Cloerec and editor Madeleine Gug... Jacques Natteau joined the group in 1949 as cameraman and became director of photography some six years later. Autant-Lara has never written his own scripts and has relied largely on Aurenche and Bost for his material...

A militant atheist of extreme left-wing views, he rejects everything connected with the Church, the Army and the Bourgeoisie... *TU NE TUERAS POINT* is Autant-Lara's most direct and forceful assault on the whole military mystique. In it he probes the hypocrisy of senior officers and generals and pours contempt on the military mind itself as it is revealed in its elaborate rituals. In a similar way bourgeois attitudes are attacked in almost all Autant-Lara's films...

Claude Autant-Lara's reputation has declined since the early fifties and lately his serious works have been outweighed by a mass of purely commercial films. But since he was first given the freedom to make the type of film he wanted he has unflinchingly expressed the views he holds deeply. This, as he has reached an age when most men come to terms with life, and works in a national cinema in which concern with society is rare, is a considerable achievement.

Claude Autant-Lara: Filmography

Active in the cinema from the age of sixteen.

Designed decor and costumes for films of Marcel L'Herbier - LE CARNAVAL DES VERITES (1919), L'HOMME DU LARGE (1920), VILLA DESTIN (1921), DON JUAN ET FAUST (1922), L'INHUMAINE (1923), LE DIABLE AU COEUR (1927); Jacque Catelain - LE MARCHAND DE PLAISIR (1923); and Jean Renoir - NANA (1926). Also assistant to René Clair for PARIS QUI DORT (1923) and LE VOYAGE IMAGINAIRE (1925).

Short Films

FAIT DIVERS (1923), VITTEL (1926), CONSTRUIRE UN FEU (1927-8), LE GENDARME EST SANS PITIE, UN CLIENT SERIEUX, MONSIEUR LE DUC, LA PEUR DES COUPS, INVITE MONSIEUR A DINER (1932).

Feature Films

BUSTER SE MARIE (1930), LA PERTE, PUR SANG, LE PLOMBIER AMOUREUX (1931), L'ATHLETE INCOMPLET (1932) - in Hollywood;

MY PARTNER MASTER DAVIS (1936) - in England;

CIBOULETTE (1933), L'AFFAIRE DU COURRIER DE LYON (1937), LE RUISSEAU (1938), FRIC-FRAC (1939), LE MARIAGE DE CHIFFON, LETTRES D'AMOUR (1942), DOUCE (1943), SYLVIE ET LE FANTOME (1945), LE DIABLE AU CORPS (1947), OCCUPE-TOI D'AMELIE (1949), L'AUBERGE ROUGE (1951), episode L'ORGEUIL in LES SEPT PECHES CAPITAUX (1952), LE BON DIEU SANS CONFESSION (1953), LE BLE EN HERBE, LE ROUGE ET LE NOIR (1954), MARGUERITE DE LA NUIT (1955), LA TRAVERSEE DE PARIS (1956), EN CAS DE MALHEUR, LE JOUEUR (1958), LES REGATES DE SAN FRANCISCO, LA JUMENT VERTE (1959), LE BOIS DES AMANTS (1960); TU NE TUERAS POINT (1961) - in Yugoslavia; VIVE HENRI IV, VIVE L'AMOUR and LE COMTE DE MONTE CRISTO (1961), LE MEURTRIER, LE MAGOT DE JOSEFA (1963), JOURNAL D'UNE FEMME EN BLANC (1965), LE NOUVEAU JOURNAL D'UNE FEMME EN BLANC (1966), one episode in LE PLUS VIEUX METIER DU MONDE (1967), LE FRANCISCAIN DE BOURGES (1968), LES PATATES (1970), LE ROUGE ET LE BLANC (1971) ...

- Notes compiled by Helen Arthurs

Footnote

From Coffee House News, Toronto, June 30, 1962

France plans to give legal status to conscientious objectors (a possible result of the film THOU SHALT NOT KILL).

Recently, the French Consulate in Toronto informed the compiler of these notes that in France today a conscientious objector would still be imprisoned.