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'ILLUSIONS' IN GAZDAG TRIBUTE

The UCLA Film Archives' tribute to Hungary's remarkable Gyula Gazdag continues Saturday at 7:30 p.m. in Melnitz Theater with "Lost Illusions" (1982), based on the second part of Balzac's "A Great Man in Embryo."

It is a masterwork, with a novel's scope and characterization, by a mature film maker whose acceptance of the political realities of the society in which he lives does not

SPECIAL

SCREENINGS

By KEVIN THOMAS,
Times Staff Writer

mean that he's stopped criticizing them. (It's not for nothing that the film begins on Aug. 20, 1968, the very day of the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia.) The Budapest of "Lost Illusions" is not, however, the familiar one of housing shortages and economic hardships but of a beautiful and sophisticated city, a magnet to the young and ambitious as much as New York or Los Angeles is.

Among those drawn to it is a youthful writer (Gabor Mate) quick to grasp the need for the right connections. Bright and charming, he's soon won an influential critical post and commenced an affair with a fledgling actress (Dorottya Udvaros), as determined yet as essentially naive as he is. In "Lost Illusions" Gazdag brings alive the treacherous world of the arts and the media with a crisp, detached wit. "Lost Illusions" will be followed by "Package Tour" (1984), a documentary, unavailable for preview, on a group tour of Auschwitz consisting almost entirely of concentration camp survivors.

Gazdag's diploma film, the 14-minute documentary "The Long Distance Runner" (1968), reveals that right at the start he was amused by the pomposity of bureaucrats, who in this case prepare an elaborate yet disappointing greeting for runner Gyorgy Schirilla, a national hero, as he arrives from Budapest to the small town of Kenderes, where he is to cut a ribbon at the opening of a new restaurant.

"The Long Distance Runner" commences Sunday's evening's program of four documentaries. It will be followed by the 14-minute "Happy New Year" (1974), a survey of the way in which Hungarians celebrate the New Year, and the 41-minute "Selection" (1970), which records how an oil refinery's Communist Youth Union goes about choosing a rock group to sponsor. Neither of these were available for preview.

For "The Banquet" (1982), the 84-minute film which concludes the evening, Gazdag gathered together a group of elderly residents of the village of Veszto, which in 1944 had declared itself an independent Soviet republic, a year before Hungary's liberation. "The Banquet" is an amusing reminder of how varied individual memories can be, and on a more serious level, of how difficult it is to ascertain the truth of the past in the absence of historical records. At the outset there's no agreement whether its "president," Imre Rabai, apparently long deceased, was even a communist! (Film critic J. Hoberman's excellent notes for the Gazdag tribute are especially helpful in providing crucial background for "The Banquet.") (213) 825-2581.

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