

The ensemble is completed by a Scandinavian duo. The Swedish actress Lena Olin beautifully brings the older Estafania to life. But it is Danish director Bille August who probably tops all the *schauspielerischen Leistungen* with his cinematic exposition of the beauty of Lisbon, foregrounding the romantic aura of the city via its narrow alleys and beautiful villas. The full color shots evoke an indelible aesthetic impression, contrasting starkly with Switzerland's rainy Bern.

The Philosophy

Pascal Mercier quotes from the writings of Amadeu Prado as a device to exposit his own comprehensive philosophy. Philosophy is of course much better suited for a book where the logic and argumentation can be fully fleshed out in prose. In his writing he explores the eternal topics of mankind, God, religion, death and eternal life, the role of chance, free will, recognition of one self and others and time and space. In this philosophical prose lies the particular strength of his book. A movie is admittedly a rather limited medium for such explorations. To compensate for this, herein is a small selection of aphorisms which may provide insight into Bieri's philosophy:

Es ist ein Irrtum zu glauben, die entscheidenden Momente eines Lebens, in denen sich seine gewohnte Richtung für immer ändert, müssten von lauter und greller Dramatik sein, unterspült von heftigen inneren Aufwallungen. Das ist ein kitschiges Märchen. ... In Wahrheit ist die Dramatik einer lebensbestimmenden Erfahrung oft von unglaublich leiser Art. Sie ist dem Knall, der Stichflamme und dem Vulkanausbruch so wenig verwandt, dass die Erfahrung im Augenblick, wo sie gemacht wird, oft gar nicht bemerkt wird. Wenn sie ihre revolutionäre Wirkung entfaltet und dafür sorgt, dass ein Leben in ein ganz neues Licht getaucht wird und eine vollkommen neue Melodie bekommt, so tut sie das lautlos, und in dieser wundervollen Lautlosigkeit liegt ihr besonderer Adel.

Der wirkliche Regisseur unseres Lebens ist der Zufall – ein Regisseur voll der Grausamkeit, der Barmherzigkeit und des bestrickenden Charmes.

Wenn es so ist, dass wir nur einen kleinen Teil von dem Leben können, was in uns ist – was geschieht mit dem Rest?

Das Leben ist nicht das, was wir leben; es ist das, was wir uns vorstellen zu leben.

Wer möchte im Ernst unsterblich sein? Wer möchte bis in alle Ewigkeit leben? Wie langweilig und schal es sein müsste zu wissen: Es spielt keine Rolle, was heute passiert, in diesem Monat, diesem Jahr: Es kommen noch unendlich viele Tage, Monate, Jahre [...] Würde, wenn es so wäre, noch irgend etwas zählen? Wir bräuchten nicht mehr mit der Zeit zu rechnen, könnten nichts verpassen, müssten uns nicht beeilen [...] Es ist der Tod, der dem Augenblick seine Schönheit gibt und seinen Schrecken. Nur durch den Tod ist die Zeit eine lebendige Zeit.

Nicht nur in der Zeit sind wir ausgebreitet. Auch im Raum erstrecken wir uns weit über das hinaus, was sichtbar ist. Wir lassen etwas von uns zurück, wenn wir einen Ort verlassen, wir bleiben dort, obgleich wir wegfahren. Und es gibt Dinge an uns, die wir nur dadurch wiederfinden können, dass wir dorthin zurückkehren.

THE GERMAN SOCIETY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Friday Film Fest Series



Nachtzug nach Lissabon

By Bille August

March 20th, 2015

• 6:30 PM •

Film, Food & Discussion

Non-Members \$15, Members \$12

The German Society of PA

611 Spring Garden St.

215-627-2332

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**The Philadelphia
Cultural Fund**

Nachtzug nach Lissabon (2013)

Credits:

Director: Bille August
Production: Andreas Knoblauch
Written by: Greg Latter/Ulrich Herrmann
Based on: Nachtzug nach Lissabon by Pascal Mercier
Music: Annette Focks
Cinematography: Filip Zimbrunn
Production Co: Studio Hamburg Filmproduktion/C-Film AG/Cinemat
Length: 111 minutes
Cast: Raimund Gregorius – Jeremy Irons
Mariana – Martina Gedeck
Jorge O’Kelly – August Diehl
(young), Bruno Ganz (older)
Amadeu do Prado – Jack Huston
Adriana do Prado – Beatriz Batarda (young), Charlotte Rampling (older)
Father Bartolomeu – Filipe Vargas (young), Christopher Lee (older)
Estafania – Melanie Laurant (young), Lena Olin (older)
Judge Prado – Burghart Klaußner
Joao Eca – Marco d’Almeida (young), Tom Courtenay (older)

Commentary: Karl Moehlmann

The Author

Pascal Mercier is the pseudonym of Swiss writer and philosopher **Peter Bieri**, born 1944 in Bern. He studied Philosophy, Classical Philology and English Studies in Heidelberg and London and earned his doctoral degree for his work on the philosophy of time. Since 1993, he has taught philosophy at the Free University of Berlin.

Bieri published 3 novels under his pseudonym: *Perlmanns Schweigen* in 1995 ; *Die Klavierstimme* in 1998; and *Nachtzug nach Lissabon* in 2004 in German. The latter was published in English in 2008 and became an international bestseller, marking Mercier’s breakthrough as a writer.

Unerhörte Begebenheit

Raimund Gregorius (“Mundus”) teaches old languages at a school in Bern. He is the quintessential recluse, ensconced within his academic world and his unchanging daily life. He is so reliable and predictable that his wife leaves him out of sheer boredom. It seems unlikely that anything could change his life style.

Yet one rainy morning on his way to work the “*unerhörte Begebenheit*” occurs. He sees a young woman standing on a bridge, obviously intent on committing suicide. Gregorius rescues her and takes her to school with him. Yet she simply walks out on him, leaving her red coat behind. Impulsively Gregorius decides to follow her. He fails to locate her, but finds a book in the pocket of the coat with a stamp of the address of



the bookstore in Bern where it was purchased.

The book is in Portuguese, titled *Um ourives das palavras* (Ein Goldschmied der Worte) by Amadeu de Prado. When he consults with the bookseller, they discover a train ticket to Lisbon in the book with the train leaving in 15 minutes. Hoping to find the woman he saved he rushes to the train station, but the woman is nowhere in sight. Acting again on dizzying impulse he decides to board the train just as it is pulling out. It is the night train to Lisbon. As the train wends its way toward that city, he begins to read the book. It resonates with him so much that he becomes obsessed with finding out more about the author of the book, utterly unaware that this decision will change him irrevocably.

In Lisbon, he first meets Amadeu’s sister, the now elderly Adriana. From her he learns that Amadeu died in 1974. Adriana compiled the book from her brother’s notes and letters. With characteristic due diligence, Mundus meets all the surviving friends and collaborators of Amadeu: his priest, his teacher, and even his lover. They tell the gripping story of Amadeu’s life, a life that is deeply intertwined with the story of the resistance movement against the Salazar dictatorship and the “Estado Novo” that ruled Portugal from 1933 until Salazar’s death in 1970. This regime continued under his successor Marcelo Caetano until 1974 when the “Carnation Revolution” finally ended it.

Told by the participants and reenacted as flashbacks, we witness Amadeu’s provocative graduation speech, full of contempt for the regime and the complicit church, his difficult relationship with his father, a well respected judge, his work as a medical doctor and his life changing encounter with the Luis Mendes, aka the “Butcher of Lisbon”, the head of the brutal secret police. This encounter results in Amadeu joining the resistance movement where he falls in love with his best friend’s lover, Estefania.

Thus Amadeu’s life becomes intertwined with the Anti-Salazar conspirators. As Gregorius puts all these stories together like a puzzle, he makes the acquaintance of Mariana, an optometrist whom he meets by chance when she helps him to replace his broken glasses. This budding romance has the potential of changing his life, yet the film leaves this relationship open and unresolved. The book does not even contain such a romance. The script writers also changed the beginning of the story, injecting Gregorius’ utterly unpredictable response to the *unerhörte Begebenheit*.

International Star Ensemble

The cast for this movie has an international flavor. Jeremy Irons is compelling as Gregorius and the American actor Jack Huston (the “Man with the Mask”) is a perfect fit for Amadeu Prado. A quartet of famous German actors adorns the ensemble. Martina Gedeck, renowned for her role in “Das Leben der Anderen”, plays the love interest of Gregorius. The ubiquitous Bruno Ganz is Amadeu’s best friend, Burghart Klaußner plays Amadeu’s stern father and finally August Diehl, known from the movie “Inglourious Basterds” plays the young Jorge.

The cast is further embellished by an English trio. Charlotte Rampling plays Amadeu’s sister when she is older. Christopher Lee plays an older priest and teacher who remembers Amadeu as student in the prestigious Catholic School. Tom Courtenay at age 77 renders an insightful and sensitive portrayal of Mariana’s uncle Joao Eca, an old man at the time of Gregorius’ visit. Joao was part of the resistance and endured brutal treatment by Mendes and the secret police.