

## Only a groomed woman deserves her name: Fashion, emancipation, and stardom in the Czechoslovak film musical *The Lady of the Lines*

Šárka Gmitterková & Miroslava Papežová

NECSUS 6 (2), Autumn 2017: 123–141

URL: <https://necsus-ejms.org/only-a-groomed-woman-deserves-her-name-fashion-emancipation-and-stardom-in-the-czechoslovak-film-musical-the-lady-of-the-lines/>

**Keywords:** Czechoslovakia, dress, emancipation, fashion, socialist, stardom

It has been 50 years since the release of the Czechoslovak film musical *Dáma na kolejích* (*The Lady of the Lines*, Ladislav Rychman, 1966). In 2016 the city of Prague together with the local public transport company organised a commemorative event in the heart of the capital. Jiřina Bohdalová, the iconic actress, who embodied the main part of Marie Kučerová, reenacted bits of her starring role. Dressed in a uniform of a tram conductor she sat behind the steering wheel of a retro looking vehicle, recalled her co-stars, and introduced the movie prior to the evening's open air screening. Although both the star and the streetcar are very important for the film, there was one crucial element missing. Costuming was central to Marie's story and heavily supported its message about female independence. The Czechoslovak socialist regime consistently promoted the idea of woman's liberation and gender equality, but mostly in the sphere of work. *The Lady of the Lines* departed from these earlier romanticised visions of a woman with a day job and instead promoted an image of a strong powerful heroine through her glamorous look. With newly-purchased designer garments Marie gains her long lost self-confidence, power, and sexual allure. While this Cinderella formula is a well-established cinematic convention, the context of socialist fashion, lifestyle, and female emancipation complicates this fairy tale scenario.

*The Lady of the Lines* delivers a rather contradictory message. It highlights the importance of personal style and grooming, presenting a seductive vision of a glamorous, empowered lady as accessible to any working class woman. Yet the film also points to the limits of such a position. The extravagant musical form, the bitter finale, and pages of period lifestyle magazines tell a very different story of a limited transferability to everyday reality. Therefore in the first section we are going to introduce the specific context of Czechoslovakia in the 1950s and 1960s, focusing on the rhetoric and tensions surrounding female emancipation and fashion. While in the former decade the regime tried to fulfill many communist doctrines, it also struggled with numerous shortages. The situation resulted in necessary economic reforms, consequently leading to a rather liberated era.

Following these general observations, the second segment focuses on discerning the pleasures and tensions in *The Lady of the Lines*, specifically in its costuming strategies. Drawing on Richard Dyer's notions of entertainment as a form of pleasurable escape from the social and ideological inadequacies we bring forward the utopian aspect of the designs. The volume, textures, colors, lines, and an emphasised totality of the looks, which included wigs, accessories, and a sense of adequate demeanor for each style – all of these aspects pointed to the impossibility and unattainability of such a concept. In order to negotiate these conflicted tendencies casting proved to be essential. The third and final section thus investigates Jiřina Bohdalová's multifaceted stardom, with special attention dedicated to her attitude towards fashion, dress codes, and costuming. Considered for the main part of Marie from the start of the project, the actress presented the leading lady both ways – as an ordinary woman next door as well as an exceptional star.

Film costume analysis represents a growing area in film and media studies. The existing literature on the topic covers the importance of dress in the movies for national,[1] gender,[2] or star[3] identities; its influence on generic conventions[4] or narrative motives such as the power of female transformation;[5] also looking beyond the text itself, on the evolution of the profession of costume designer.[6] With that being said, only a limited number of books and collections on Eastern European fashion and lifestyle in general have been published so far. Djurdja Bartlett traces the evolution of socialist fashion imagination and everyday reality in the whole Eastern bloc from the early 1920s up to the 1960s, while Czech fashion historian Konstantina Hla-

váčková centers on local development. The edited volume *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* brings forward the notion of agency the citizens had to demonstrate in order to access the desired objects.

However, work on Czechoslovak film costuming remains virtually non-existent.[7] At the same time, many remarkable yet marginalised personalities dressed local cinema throughout the years[8] and, as our case demonstrates, even individual films offer compelling cases for detailed scrutiny. *The Lady of the Lines* endows clothing with a potential for articulation of subjectivity and the dress thus becomes a tangible means of gaining some control over the social order.[9] Such a vision, underscored by the star casting and the ongoing debates about women's place in society proved to be too daring for the Czechoslovak socialist regime even in the liberated decade, as the abrupt ending of the film demonstrates. Therefore we would like to invite scholars to consider the role of costuming in socialist cinemas throughout the years and whether and how existing paradigms can be modified vis-a-vis specific contexts.

### **Be reasonable, Mrs. Kučerová: The context of fashion and gender politics in 1960s Czechoslovakia**

Although the Czechoslovak communist regime in the 1950s declared the emancipation of women, it was only through the right to work. However, such rhetoric obscured the fact of women being actually obliged to participate in the developing of socialist society. As a result of the Second World War and the 1948 communist putsch, Czechoslovakia suffered from a critical lack of food, clothes, everyday goods, and workers on the labor market. The former regime thus required engaging almost every adult person in order to help build a 'better tomorrow and world peace'. Women faced huge pressure to leave their kitchens and take on regular day jobs. Such ostensibly emancipatory movement, outwardly presenting itself as an advance and progress compared to many Western countries, was in fact using Czechoslovak women for fulfilling socialist doctrines. The regime, clearly preferring class over gender, relied on women and their potential, but in no way liberated them.[10]

Films of the early 1950s also reflected these outlined changes in women's roles and status. The state socialist mode of production,[11] tying filmmaking to a general, top-down sanctioned plan, prioritised female-friendly topics.

However, these titles were far from domestic melodramas or star-centered vehicles. Focusing on socially and ideologically-aware heroines entering jobs in areas previously governed by men, such as mechanical engineering or construction, the storylines only mildly hinted at the possible difficulties of such a process. The solution – in fact happy ends – offered a schematic fix to otherwise complicated issues of work integration, time management, and household labor division.

Despite all the appreciative rhetoric, working wives and mothers were not freed from the daily catering to the needs of their families. The Czechoslovak legal system did transform women's status under the state socialist regime but in no way revised the male role as a nurturer. Consequently, the Czechoslovak woman entered the 1960s with a so-called triple burden, forcing her to cohere positions of a worker, a mother, and a housewife. As a result of these extensive demands the birthrate started to decline, signaling to the regime the necessity to think about the dilemma between a woman's economic and maternal role.



Fig. 1: Marie in her tram conductor uniform.

When the all-female choir sings 'Be reasonable, Mrs. Kučerová', urging the heroine to see beyond her current actions, *The Lady of the Lines* gently points to the still necessary balancing out of individual needs and the family unit, therefore the greater good of the collective. Marie Kučerová, the main protagonist, embodies all the aforementioned stresses and tensions. In her bluish-gray oversized uniform and with no sign of makeup, she epitomises the typical look of a socialist woman. Marie does not care if she looks plain and lacks charm, because she puts her family first, despite having a regular day job. In one of the early musical numbers we see her tired but smiling while driving a tram and thinking about her children, shopping, cleaning their flat, cooking, and preparing her own birthday party. She does not think this is too

much for a single person to carry out until she sees her husband embracing and kissing a young glamorous blonde on the street.

Contrasting with prewar fashion culture of couture salons, innovative designs, and luxurious materials, the uniformity and drabness of Czechoslovak garments in the first half of the 1950s stemmed from the authoritative ideological regime and lifestyle conforming to socialist principles. As such, dress should have merely assisted workers in achieving better results. The society based on proclaimed social and gender equality was dominated by ready-to-wear clothing, lacking any distinguishing or adorning potential. Fashionable or luxurious apparels were perceived as bourgeois anachronism, undesirable, and not suited for building socialism. Moreover, the egalitarian worldview likened these kinds of goods to individualism – an undesirable trait within a regime striving for collective progress. Thus, only minimally varied, unisex, and uniformed looks became the norm. A smiling woman wearing a pinafore and a headscarf or blue work overalls became a role model worth following. While images of optimism and abstract joy were in tune with the regime's preferences, everyday fulfillment of these promises fell short. Contrary to the visions of an abundant future stood real present struggles with shortages of clothes, fabrics, and textiles. The period press thus taught readers how to re-sew old clothes, how to mend them, and thus to secure their longevity, and the art of knitting and crocheting in order to create the desired or needed garment themselves.[12]

After the 20<sup>th</sup> Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in 1956 the previous ideological pressures loosened and Czechoslovak society commenced a liberalising process, albeit slowly and cautiously. In 1957 the local fashion journal *Žena a móda* (Woman and Fashion) announced the return to world fashion.[13] Due to the implemented economic reforms, the system loosened its ideological grip throughout the next decade. Although still a socialist regime with strong ties to the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia in the 1960s became less centralised, more market oriented, and open to Western influences, including fashion culture and lifestyle. In 1966, for the first time, Prague witnessed a Christian Dior fashion show,[14] followed by the beauty competition Miss Diorling.[15] However, these impeccably tailored luxurious designs of both foreign and domestic origin were almost impossible to buy.[16] Local department stores still offered an only limited range of ready-to-wear clothing, and the latest trends displayed in fashion magazines served rather as an inspiration for private dressmaking. Therefore we might say that instead of their previous functioning as an unwelcomed symbol of status, gender, and

change, fashionable garments and their limited accessibility gradually became a safety valve maintaining the status quo.

In the meantime, the 1966 spectacular film musical *The Lady of the Lines* treated glamorous appearance and couture fashion as vehicles for female emancipation. After witnessing her husband in the arms of another woman, Marie withdraws family savings, treating it as her second income for years of selfless household care. With enough cash on her hands, she splurges on designer garments, accessories, and wigs. Her suddenly glamorous look opens previously denied positions and provides the heroine with unprecedented power. Marie is able to punish her partner, visit elegant bars and night clubs, flirt with other men, and set an inspiring example to other women. However, *The Lady of the Lines* concludes with Marie literally waking up from her illusion. Throughout the film we have witnessed her daydream, a merely shocked reaction to her unfaithful husband. The shopping, the glamour, the leisure, the plenitude – all of this disappears when the film returns to Marie in her dark blue, shapeless uniform, wiping away her tears. Therefore, while celebrating pleasures exuding from personal grooming and sophisticated looks, *The Lady of the Lines* also reminds us that these pleasures were still subjected to regulation and constraint.

### **The burgundy dress, the lilac, or the grey?: Costuming the musical *The Lady of the Lines***

Czechoslovak cinema of the 1960s is mostly associated with the new wave phenomenon and personified by artistic auteurs such as Věra Chytilová or Miloš Forman. Nevertheless, prioritising this aesthetic project overshadows the existence of other industry factors, namely the development of genre production – mostly comedies, thrillers, or musicals. The last category became the domain of the screenwriter Vratislav Blažek and the director Ladislav Rychman. In 1964 they created *Starci na chmelu* (The Hop-Pickers), a film musical inspired by the Romeo and Juliet story but set on a socialist hop-picking brigade. The movie, the first domestic appearance of the genre, turned into a huge success and Rychman and Blažek became to be known as ‘fathers of the Czechoslovak film musical’.[17] However, this genre label is rather slippery in this specific period and geographical context. If we consider musicals as integrated forms, closely tying up song and dance sequences with the flow of narrative, then locally-produced musicals do not fit in with

the category. Despite having a strong tradition of spectacular revue films or operetta adaptations as well as new hybrid forms of short music films, the musical was considered to be a Western import; a position protruding from the slow adoption of the word musical into the Czech language as 'muzikál'.

*The Lady of the Lines* was Blažek and Rychman's second cinematic collaboration and they tried to evade the musical label this time. Several reasons induced such caution. First, this genre did not have a strong reputation among state representatives for its association with youth culture and Hollywood entertainment.[18] Instead, Rychman and Blažek framed their new film as a revision of traditional song and dance stage forms. Second, *The Lady of the Lines* introduced protagonists in their early thirties, married with kids, day jobs, and a different lifestyle than the teenage couple from *The Hop-Pickers*. Despite reservations towards the genre, domestic cinema strove for crowd-pullers such as Blažek and Rychman's previous film. Although only 77 minutes long, *The Lady of the Lines* is remarkably spectacular, not only in terms of costuming but also for its extensive set designs, soundtrack, orchestrated dance routines, and widescreen format. *The Lady of the Lines* thus had high production values, with a final budget reaching almost six million Czechoslovak crowns. More than doubling the average 2,5 million spent on a movie in 1966, *The Lady of the Lines* had been the most expensive production at that time.[19] Even daily production reports stressed the centrality of costuming for the film, and the final price for clothing swallowed almost one sixth of the total expenses.[20]

*The Lady of the Lines* main costume designer was Jan Skalický. In the 1960s, Skalický created garments for only nine films, while his costume designs dominated the theatrical sphere, which was (and still is) a common trait in local film costuming practice.[21] In the case of *The Lady of the Lines*, Skalický was hired primarily for designing Marie's new wardrobe. His creative input protrudes mostly from the totality of the looks, building the dramatic character from elaborate wigs down to the shoes, thus underlying the impossibility of Marie's fantasy. Skalický entered the project in the later phase, during the first days of the actual shooting. The previously assigned designer Jiří Janeček had to leave the production due to his disagreements with the leading star Jiřina Bohdalová. Moreover, according to the production reports, Janeček lacked experience for the successful managing of such an extensive project.[22] Under his supervision, the production continually struggled with shortages of luxurious fabrics, furs, and accessories. As production notes suggest, Skalický not only completed the garments in time and in tune with

the star's preferences, but his international contacts secured locally unavailable pricy fabrics and furs.[23]

Marie's confrontation with her husband's affair spirals the utopian fantasy of the world dominated by her daring, gorgeous looking alter ego. Richard Dyer's observations on the role and function of entertainment in capitalist society can be transferred to 1960s Czechoslovakia, despite being a particular space and time and offering a specific take on the musical genre. For one, entertainment does not merely reproduce and express patriarchal capitalist values since it rests on the performance qualities of many subordinate groups in society, such as women and gays. Second, it offers something better to escape into, therefore it values an idealised future more than an unsatisfactory present – a sensibility trait entertaining genres share with communist doctrine. Finally, entertainment does identify inadequacies and absences in society and offers temporary, utopian solutions.[24] In *The Lady of the Lines* these issues pertained to women's positions and status in 1960s socialist society, the scarcity of a wide range of goods and services, and consumerism installing barriers in a would-be classless culture. Since dresses served as an important expressive, aesthetic, and narrative device, they articulate and negotiate all the outlined problems.

Take for example Marie's shapeless uniform of a tram conductor, strongly contrasting with all the following dreamy fashionable pieces. The square suit does not just underline Marie's later transformation into an attractive woman, but also points to existing limits in a socialist society. Dressed as an ordinary working class woman, she is not welcomed, but after proving her solvency through the display of cash is merely tolerated in a couture salon. The proclaimed socialist class equality is undermined as Marie experiences negative judgment stemming from her work apparel, announcing to the salon assistant that she is not rich enough to be his customer. However, later the film reverses this motive of the representative potential of certain looks. When interrogated at a police station about her suspicious demeanor in a nightclub, the police officer mistakes Marie for a prostitute, as a tram conductor would not be able to afford such an expensive leopard fur coat.

Apart from the ability to signal and break down class barriers, the costumes in *The Lady of the Lines* also equips the heroine with far more identities than those sanctioned by the state, as a mother and an employee. Crucial in this respect is the scene of the fashion show, which offers Marie not only a glimpse of her future adornments, but also adequate demeanor comple-



menting each of the presented outfits. In contrast to contemporary customised fashion shows, where models present the garments without any expression, dresses in *The Lady of the Lines* are showcased as a literal wardrobe of identities. Through the sophisticated choreography, different female personalities are performed: the tomboy adventurer, the vamp in black, the sporty gal, the provocative seductress, the sophisticated lady, etc. Completing her transformation, Marie tops her new polished look by purchasing colorful wigs and visits a beauty salon, because, as she sings: ‘Only a groomed woman deserves her name.’ Throughout the film, Marie puts on her customised couture garments and experiences previously denied positions and feelings – from being a fierce leader, through polished lady, up to femme fatale openly seducing other men.



Fig. 2: Marie's new wardrobe and total look.

Marie's revolt against established gender positions is on par with the spectacular volume of clothing on display. ‘The burgundy dress, the lilac, or the grey?’, sing the all-female audience during the fashion show. The abundance of garments later continues in Marie's tiny flat, stuffed by her latest purchases, which are arranged, hanged, or laid out in every possible corner. Throughout the film she does not wear any outfit more than once, contrasting her present hedonism with previously forced modesty, aptly conveyed in her statement about not wanting to wear one outfit for years anymore. Moreover, Marie does not just simply wear the dresses, but puts on a show while wearing, adjusting, or putting them on. Demonstrating her newly acquired self confidence Marie parades herself in a lace coat over lingerie; she expertly combs the wigs, rearranges the shoulder straps, touches her hat, or slowly takes her long gloves off.

Although such a bold vision was facilitated by male authors, Marie is by no means objectified as a to-be-looked-at object. Rychman and Blažek never

confirmed that *The Lady of the Lines* addressed mostly female audiences, yet, as the wide coverage by women's lifestyle magazines testifies, the film catered to female sensibilities and cultural competencies. For example a popular Czechoslovak weekly *Květy* published three articles concerning the film: the on-location shooting report, and two interviews with the star, plus the actress appeared twice on the cover both as herself and as Marie.[25] These articles and photographs highlighted the main topics and pleasures to be found in the film, namely a fresh take on the issue of female emancipation and the articulation of selfhood through dress. The movie thus invited an admiring and aspirational gaze not gendered as male. But the portrayal of Marie as a female friendly character and a negotiation of the tensions between the celebration and unattainability of the film's vision were in the end secured by casting.

### **Nobody asks of her to look like Lollobrigida: Jiřina Bohdalová as starring lady**

As numerous profiles, reviews, and memoirs confirm,[26] Vratislav Blažek conceived the movie as a perfect vehicle for Jiřina Bohdalová. Now 86 years old, the actress is a household name, a true pop cultural icon and a national symbol. Many factors support her exceptional stardom – from the mere longevity of her career, spanning almost six decades, through her unique cultural and social capital, topped by nicknames or titles of television shows, books, and articles dedicated to her persona. Her surname gave origin to a persistent, familiar sounding abbreviation: 'Bohdalka', underlining her relatability and resulting in claims such as 'our Bohdalka' or 'Bohdalka the phenomenon'.

The 1960s gave rise to and solidified her stardom. Richard Dyer's observation on the paradoxical nature of female stardom, simultaneously exposing and masking social and ideological contradictions,[27] found an excellent example in Bohdalová's career. A naturally born comedienne, Bohdalová always seemed to tick both of the boxes: a folksy entertainer and a gifted dramatic actress. Not only did she star in films and on stage, but was a crucial figure in television entertainment up to the mid-1990s. She also liked comparing herself to major international stars such as Shirley Temple (as a little girl), Elizabeth Taylor, or her ultimate ideal: Giulietta Masina. However, as her inclination towards comical performances suggests, some attributes

seemed to clash with the more traditional notions of stardom. Bohdalová certainly possessed talent and charisma, but lacked physical attractiveness and sexiness in tune with 1960s preferences. Numerous descriptions rendered her as petite, with a slender body, yet giving away the impression of a chubby figure.[28] Although the actress was always willing to discuss her family background, namely her working class origins, household tips, and career, she remained silent on her love life and especially on her marriage to another star of the 1960s, Radoslav Brzobohatý.

This oscillation between ordinary and extraordinary qualities influenced Bohdalová's attitude towards various kinds of clothing. The actress never keenly followed 1960s fashion trends. She reached star status in her early thirties, as a mother of a small daughter and thus did not relate to modern youth culture. Her image stood in stark contrast to Olga Schoberová, another period celebrity, whose looks and style were compared to French icon Brigitte Bardot. Bohdalová's personal or off-duty outfits lacked any distinctive traits or fashion sensibility and the star ignored short skirts or bikinis in favor of rather plain apparel. Nevertheless, she succumbed to general popular ideas about luxurious clothing, revolving around the notion of volume and not a particular style. This widespread assumption naturally stemmed from a system defined by a constant lack of luxurious goods. In one of the interviews Bohdalová sees actresses as trendsetters, but when speaking of her own preferences, she stresses quantity, cleanliness, and the ability to modify, repair, and sew the desired garments herself.

The public doesn't like looking at the actress in a dirty skirt, therefore one has to respect the fact that actresses naturally own more skirts and that costs some money. Fortunately, I am able to do a lot of these things by myself, so I don't have to spend a lot. [29]

This statement perfectly encapsulates Bohdalová's conflicting, but in a socialist context extremely compelling, stardom. Of course, as an actress she is likely to have more clothes than any average woman, yet she also presents herself as modest and skillful. Both features were necessary for any socialist woman who wanted to be dressed nicely in a regime constantly battling shortages of cloths, garments, and accessories.

Posh garments were also perceived as rather impractical, merely announcing the higher social status of its wearer rather than having any clearly designated function. Bohdalová, a servant's child, never became familiar with couture clothing and its codes. She tried but failed, as one of her memories

clearly demonstrates. In the first half of the 1960s she visited Vienna for the first time and wanted to be dressed like a lady. Therefore she bought tiny white gloves, which she believed a lady almost never wears. Graciously holding them in her hands, the gloves in her opinion did not have any other purpose than to signify a lady.[30] The story concludes with Bohdalová accidentally throwing the accessory away while peeling a banana on the street. Finally, she reminds readers of her memoir that they should never pretend to be who they are not. The message is clear – Bohdalka is no lady.

Despite her rather reserved attitude towards her own clothing and fashion Bohdalová did enjoy extravagant dresses and designs, but only when tied to her actorly persona. The star always reveled in the transformative potential of dramatic costuming both on screen and on stage. Due to her famous, rather short televised stand-ups, the actress learned to rely on costuming strategies, providing her with an instantly recognisable identity. For example, in a twelve-minute comical sketch on the art of telephoning she performed six different parts, ranging from kids to a grandmother. Framed in medium close-ups, Bohdalová had to immediately convey the age and character of the female with a receiver. Therefore as a small Karlička she wears a polka dot dress with puffed sleeves and a matching bow; her young bored housewife's appearance contrasts a striped apron with an elaborate hairdo; finally, there is a traditionally-adorned grandma, with hunched shoulders covered by a pleated shawl.



Fig. 3: Bohdalová's multiple looks in the sketch on the art of telephoning.

Costuming was thus an important creative tool, helping Bohdalová shape and distinguish her numerous parts, supporting her label of spontaneous and brilliant entertainer. Crucially, her paradigmatic film roles usually contained

moments of putting on a show and the dismantling of her dazzling image. As we have previously demonstrated, this suspicion towards sophisticated and polished looks was in tune with broader contours of her image. In a psychological film *Pršelo jim štěstí* (It Rained Happiness, 1963) Bohdalová embodied Věra, who gets ready for her wedding to a much younger man. The preparations and dressing up spirals into doubts about the whole union. In the end the bride leaves the altar, and the movie concludes with her stripping off her white veil. Similarly, the comedy *Král Králů* (The King of Kings, 1963) features the star as a rather naïve Lenka, almost seduced by fancy clothes and a glamorous lifestyle into corrupting a plan for international revolution. In Bohdalová's most famous film, the psychological drama *Ucho* (The Ear, 1970), we are witnessing both a virtual and literal undressing of the power couple – their kempt looks, marriage, and status. This strong motive of looking under the festive or sumptuous exterior, unmasking the glitz and glam as false, remained a persistent undercurrent in Bohdalová's filmography throughout the decade.



Fig. 4: Giggling Marie in a pastel pink costume.

The part of Marie in *The Lady of the Lines* partly adheres to the outlined principle. The spectacular presentation of the heroine in an array of showy outfits is smashed by the final awakening from the illusion. Marie still suffers from her husband's infidelity, and the film does not give us any hope of her benefiting from her daydreaming. Her Cinderella scenario in *The Lady of the Lines* thus seems unsustainable, subverted by a number of factors both stemming from and transcending Bohdalová's star image. Let us not forget that Bohdalová's status indeed stood out, as she was perceived as a phenomenal actress and a star. For the most part the film shows her in this flattering light, although the alluring vision is encircled by scenes featuring the weary unhappy heroine. The portrayal of Marie partly relies on Bohdalová's ability to

instantly act out different facets of Marie's character in accordance with her current outfit. The dark blue, shapeless uniform of a tram conductor makes the heroine unsure and hesitant; in her leopard prints she is beastly vindictive or openly seductive; in a pastel pink costume Marie giggles like a crazed teenager. Although one of the characters from the film claims that socialist housewives are not required to resemble sexpots such as Gina Lollobrigida, other scenes and apparel frame the working class woman as a superstar. The scene contrasts the bare chested husband with the heroine dressed head to toe in figure-hugging black apparel, decorated only with a thin golden string. Her face is fully eclipsed by the *Vogue* cover with Sophia Loren. Lying on a plush white carpet, sensuously contrasting with her dark outfit, she receives phone calls from admirers. Here we find Marie on top of her power, not questioning nor forced to explain her actions. Adorned in the most flattering outfit of the whole film, the lady clearly enjoys the attention and appreciation surrounding her.



Fig. 5: Framing the socialist woman as a superstar.

In spite of their lack of experiences with domestic stardom due to its denial in the previous decade, the critics instantly recognised Bohdalová's star appeal as a crucial aspect in *The Lady of the Lines*. 'Her immense popularity subverts the belief that in our country star cult is non-existent', [31] claimed one of the period reviews. Other writings symptomatically oscillated between praising Bohdalová's gleaming appearance and domineering presence while expressing concern over whether her flamboyant look does not suppress her acting skills. As the film revealed conflicting positions of a common Czechoslovak woman torn between work, family, and herself, Jiřina Bohdalová's portrayal of Marie exposed contradictions resonating in period notions of stardom – the mere fact of its existence, the discrepancy between beauty and talent, and between fashion statement and purposefully dramatic costuming.

## Conclusion

The musical *The Lady of the Lines* speaks and signals volumes on period assumptions concerning gender, lifestyle, and glamour. Marie's bittersweet dream about her own private empowerment made its subsequent way onto stages, with contemporary theatres still featuring the comedy. However, despite being a crowd-puller of summer 1966, the film later ceased to inspire the same cultish following as another female-centered project of the period: *Vražda ing. Čerta* (The Murdering the Devil, 1970). It may be because of the finale, since the abrupt, dismantling closure does not fit in with the rest of the vibrant, lively, and joyful vision, and yet such an ending is inevitable. Although offering viewers such a seductive vision only to smash it throughout the last minutes may seem harsh, as we have demonstrated, it is perfectly in tune with period sensibilities and attitudes surrounding female emancipation and fashion. While the former was still necessarily tied with notions of work, albeit slowly opening up for revision, the later seemed to be designated only to pages of fashion and lifestyle magazines. The models featured may have represented a beauty ideal and garments suited for foreign export, but the real women, only rarely pictured, or the most popular stars of the period, were far from the imagined. 'We are no goddesses', claimed the title of an article in the popular weekly *Vlasta*, subverting myths concerning the amount of time consumed by housework.[32] The pictures show average local women, worn out but smiling, captured during carrying out various household duties. The Czechoslovak lady of the 1960s was still defined primarily in relation to her labor.

*The Lady of the Lines* tried to shift the balance more in favor of looks, because, in the film's view, only a groomed woman deserves her name. Such a claim may today seem obsolete, however in 1960s Czechoslovakia grooming also promised leisure and a much needed off duty time. Apart from the state-approved identities of a worker and a family nurturer, further notions of the self could have been easily facilitated by dress. After previous decades of uni-sex and uniformed looks, in the 1960s women gravitated towards expressing their femininity rather than to the latest fashion styles.[33] Costuming in *The Lady of the Lines* aptly demonstrates this trend, because Marie's outfits do not conform to any period fashion trend as much as to a general idea of glamorous, hyperfeminine clothing. The leopard coat, the white robe trimmed with soft fur, the aggressive black and red ensemble – all of these garments also contain elements of theatricality and showiness.

In the first two sections three different modes of sartorial expression, e.g. clothing, fashion, and film costumes,[34] collapsed into a single category of individualistic couture statement departing from the domineering schemes. However, in the final section dedicated to Jiřina Bohdalová's stardom we had to separate fashion statement from costumes created solely for the purpose of telling fictional stories. Her case interestingly demonstrates that despite not having a strong sense of fashion or dress codes, actresses can relate to and enjoy the transformative potential of clothing through costuming. While the act of dress-up may have been undermined by her films, Bohdalová as an actress always seemed to rely on the expressiveness of her fictional characters' wardrobes. In acting out the unstable identities of Marie Kučerová, torn between being a selfless mother and a dame of the world, Bohdalová and the whole film accidentally created, as one of the period critics noted, an advertisement for a deceptive illusion.[35] This is an illusion of socialist female emancipation, adorned in satin and furs.

## Authors

Šárka Gmíterková is a Ph.D. candidate at the Department of Film and Audio Visual Culture, Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic, where she is writing her thesis on prewar versus postwar Czech film stardom. She regularly presents her research outcomes in the Czech film studies journal *Illuminace*. Her work was published in *Journal of Celebrity Studies* and in the upcoming volume *Popular Cinemas in Central Europe: Film Cultures and Histories*.

Miroslava Papežová is a graduate student at the Department of Film and Audio Visual Culture, Masaryk University in Brno, Czech Republic, where she is completing her thesis on Czech film songs in the 1960s. Her work was published in the journals *Illuminace* and *Cinepur*.

## Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank Igor Gmíterko for his kind help with the research for this topic.



## References

- Bár, P. *Od operety k muzikálu: zábavněhudební divadlo v Československu po roce 1945*. Praha: KANT, edice Disk, 2013: 196-205.
- Bartlett, D. *FashionEast: The spectre that haunted socialism*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2010.
- Bohdalová, J. *Měla jsem štěstí na lidi*. Praha: Moutfield, 2006.
- Brownie, B. and Graydon, D. *The superhero costume: Identity and disguise in fact and fiction*. London-New York: Bloomsbury, 2016.
- Bruzzi, S. *Undressing cinema: Clothing and identity in the movies*. London: Routledge, 1997: 3-34.
- Cook, P. *Fashioning the nation: Costume and identity in British cinema*. London: BFI, 1996.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Nicole Kidman*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012: 39-72.
- Crowley, D. and Reid, S.E. *Pleasures in socialism: Leisure and luxury in the Eastern Bloc*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2012: 3-51.
- Dezortová, V. 'Mistr převleků', *Xantypa*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1996: 80-85.
- Dyer, R. *Only entertainment*. London: Routledge, 1992: 17-34.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Stars*. London: BFI, 1998: 60-85.
- Grossová, L. 'Dialog s BB', *Filmové novinky*, 1966, No. 8.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 'Zelenou Dámě na kolejkách', *Květy*, Vol. 16, No. 24, 1966: 17-19.
- Hájková, V. 'Račte si všimnout, nejsme žádné bohyně', *Vlasta*, Vol. 21, No. 35, 1967.
- Havelka, J. *Čs. filmové hospodářství 1966-70*. Praha: Československý filmový ústav, 1976: 164.
- Havelková, B. 'Tři stadia genderu v socialistickém právu' in *Vyvlastněný hlas: proměny genderové kultury české společnosti 1948-1989*, edited by H. Havelková and L. Oates-Indruchová. Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství, 2015: 45-81.
- Hlaváčková, K. *Czech fashion 1940-1970: Mirror of the times*. Praha: Olympia, 2000: 34-44, 99.
- \_\_\_\_\_. *Móda za železnou oponou: společnost, oděvy a lidé v Československu 1948-1989*. Praha: Grada Publishing, 2016.
- Kopecká, S. *Fenomén Bohdalka*. Praha: Sláčka, 2011.
- McDonald, T.J. *Hollywood catwalk: Exploring costume and transformation in American film*. London-New York: Bloomsbury, 2010.
- McLean, A.L. *Costume, make-up and hair*. London-New York: I.B. Tauris, 2016.
- Mihálik, P. 'Dáma na koľajniciach', *Smena*, Vol. 19, No. 247, 1966: 4.
- 'Módní linie 1957', *Žena a móda*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1957: 11.
- Moseley, R (ed.). *Fashioning film stars: Dress, culture, identity*. London: BFI, 2005.
- \_\_\_\_\_. 'Dress, Class and Audrey Hepburn: The significance of the Cinderella Story' in *Fashioning film stars: Dress, culture, identity*, edited by R. Moseley. London: BFI, 2005: 109-120.
- mš. 'Čtenáři, váš rozhovor', *Květy*, Vol. 16, No. 32, 1966.
- Musilová, M. 'O americké konfekci', *Žena a móda*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1967: 23.
- 'Novinky na filmovém plátně', *Pravda*, Vol. 47, No. 233, 1966: 3.
- Paulicelli, E. *Italian style: Fashion and film from early cinema to the digital age*. London-New York: Bloomsbury, 2016.
- Ptáčková, V. and Diego Rivera Příhodová, B. and Rybáková, S. *Český divadelní kostým. Czech theatre costume*. Praha: Pražská scéna: Institut umění–Divadelní ústav, 2011: 93-94.
- Rinke, A. 'Eastside Stories: Singing and Dancing for Socialism', *Film History*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 2006: 73-87.
- Roach, M.E. and Eicher, J.B (eds). *Dress, adornment and the social order*. New York: John Wiley, 1965: 187.
- Street, S. *Costume and cinema: Dress codes in popular film*. London-New York: Wallflower, 2002.
- Svorenová-Királyová, B. *Žena 20. století ve světě práce: pohled na zaměstnanou ženu v moderním světě*. Praha: Práce, 1968.
- Szczepanik, P. *Továrna Barrandov: Svět filmařů a politická moc 1945-1970*. Praha: NFA 2016: 31-41.

- Švanda, P. 'Teror ponížené duše', *Film & doba*, Vol. 12, No. 11, 1966: 612-613.
- Valtrová, M. Vratislav Blažek: hráč před Bohem a lidmi. Praha: Achát, 1998: 93-116.
- 'Váš rozhovor s Jiřinou Bohdalovou', *Květy*, Vol 16, No. 38, 1966: 20-22.
- Vávrová M. 'Christian Dior poprvé v Československu', *Žena a móda*, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1967: 6-9.
- Žena a móda*, 1951, Vol. 3, No. 3.

## Websites

- <http://web.nfa.cz/CeskyHranyFilm/cz/obsah/index.html> (accessed on 30 July 2017)
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0kcFhz9z\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0kcFhz9z_Y) (accessed on 30 July 2017)

## Notes

- [1] See Cook 1996 and Paulicelli 2016.
- [2] See Bruzzi 1995 and Street 2002.
- [3] See Moseley 2005.
- [4] See Brownie & Graydon 2016.
- [5] See McDonald 2010.
- [6] See McLean 2016.
- [7] Only a historical overview of stage costumes has been published. See Práčková & Příhodová & Rybáková 2011.
- [8] As the personal archives of Ester Krumbachová are in the process of opening up for research, we will soon have a better understanding of the work of one of the crucial costume designers of the 1960s. However, designers such as Fernand Vácha, J. M. Gottlieb, or the actual working conditions of these personalities are yet to be analysed.
- [9] Roach & Eicher 1965, p. 187.
- [10] Havelková 2015, pp. 53-55.
- [11] Szczepanik 2016, pp. 31-41.
- [12] Hlaváčková 2000, p. 99.
- [13] *Módní linie 1957*, p. 11.
- [14] It is not surprising that Dior was introduced to Czechoslovakia in the middle of the decade, since his style was reproduced on the pages of Soviet fashion magazines and even popularised by films in the mid 1950s. Crowley & Reid 2012, pp. 20-21.
- [15] Vávrová 1967, pp. 6-9. Although the competition was covered by two fashion and lifestyle magazines, the winner ceased to become a household name. The same goes for local beauty pageants, which were held annually in the second half of the 1960s. The crowned queens did have only limited visibility in lifestyle periodicals.
- [16] Musilová 1967, p. 23.
- [17] Bár 2013, p. 196. Overall, we are able to identify only around ten feature length films containing song (and possibly dance) sequences throughout the decade. Labeling them as musicals would dissolve their generic heterogeneity. For example, *Konkurs* (Talent Competition, 1963) borders

on documentary as it records authentic talent auditions; *Fantom Morrisvillu* (The Phantom of Morrisville, 1966) parodies horror conventions; and *Šíleně smutná princezna* (The Incredibly Sad Princess, 1968) is a fairytale.

- [18] Bár 2013, p. 198. To similar issues pertaining to musicals in the GDR cinema, see also Rinke 2006, p. 75.
- [19] Havelka 1976, p. 164.
- [20] Archive Barrandov Studio, Scripts Collection, the collection The Lady of the Lines, The Final Costs Account 31.12.1966.
- [21] Dezortová 1996, pp. 80-85.
- [22] Archive Barrandov Studio, Scripts Collection, the collection The Lady of the Lines, The production report of The Lady of the Lines.
- [23] Ibid.
- [24] Dyer 1992, pp. 17-26.
- [25] See Grossová 1966, pp. 17-19; mš 1966; and 'Váš rozhovor s Jirínou Bohdalovou' 1966, pp. 20-22. On the other hand, the more cinephile-oriented *Film & Doba* published a rather sharp critical review. See Švanda 1966, pp. 612-613.
- [26] Confirmed by the authors as well as the star. Valtrová 1998, p. 112; Bohdalová 2003, pp. 218-219.
- [27] Dyer 1998, pp. 60-85.
- [28] Kopecká 2011, p. 76; Bohdalová 2003, p. 129.
- [29] Grossová 1966.
- [30] Kopecká 2011, pp. 133-134.
- [31] 'Novinky na filmovém plátně', p. 3.
- [32] Hájková 1967.
- [33] Bartlett 2010, p. 12.
- [34] For a detailed distinction between dress and fashion see Moseley 2005, pp. 1-2.
- [35] Mihálik 1966, p. 4.