

# EXAMPLES OF ETHICAL PARADOX ON THE SCREEN

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*Illustrations: pp.148*

At first glance, everything is as clear as a day. On one hand, we have a person (Elguja Burduli) looking like a criminal with his beard and bad clothes. Against him, is an elegant, well-mannered man (Teimuraz Bichiashvili).

But the first impression does not reflect reality. In director Temur Babluani's debut film *Flight of the Sparrows* (written and directed by Temur Babluani, camera-work: Viktor Andreevski, design: Yuri Kvachadze. 1980), The situation is not like this at all. There is no clear line between good and bad.

The generation that emerged in Georgian cinema in the early 1980's was not trying to speak about themes recommended by the soviet government. In their films, they were not showing people working for the party and displaying them as positive role models. Instead, they focused on so-called "dregs of society." This did not look pleasant at all. It was harsh, unattractive realism. But that was the reality previously avoided and not spoken about in Georgian cinema.

The film is black and white. We see a filthy, noisy, busy train wagon lacking any comfort. The director creates a visual model of soviet life in a symbolic-metaphorical way. A life where people have no privacy and live as a collective.

The movie stands out with a strict, restrained minimalistic manners. It looks like a monochromic artistic sketch.

In this wagon, two absolutely different characters are having a dispute. The person portrayed by actor T. Bichiashvili is artistic, ceremonious. He wants to leave a positive impression on the people in the wagon. This character is constantly trying to be the center of attention and amaze everyone, like an actor onstage.

The man portrayed by E. Burduli views him in a sarcastic way. For him, this character is unbearable. The

people around them seem to sympathize more with the first man. And the first paradox appears here: It turns out that this person, who is perceived as questionable, has a sparrow in his coat pocket. During the film, he is feeding, petting and taking care of the bird. For us the viewers, our opinion of this character completely changes and we see him as a more positive and kinder person. The change occurs in our view on Bichiashvili's character as well. First, we are just as amazed by him as the people in the wagon. Then, the viewer realizes that this man is a liar and not the person he is trying to portray himself as, while the man with a sparrow feels no need to change himself or his behavior in order to look more appealing.

"...Before a living being commits an act, they are already pre-motivated to execute said action..."<sup>1</sup> according to this theory, as a consequent of our personality, we have a preliminary impulse before doing something, which urges us to commit it.

Apparently, the character portrayed by E. Burduli is very sensitive and emotional. He hides these feelings by looking tough and a bit unapproachable on the outside. But, because of his inner personality traits, he is easily irritated and annoyed by the other character's endless bragging.

In my opinion, this man is meant to be director T. Babluani's alter ego, as he is also sensitive in real life and toward it, preferring the harsh truth over colorfully painted lies, no matter how difficult it is to accept it. This is why the line between the hero and the villain is erased in Babluani's works.

Guja (E. Burduli) and Trifona (T. Bichiashvili) are polar opposites when it comes to mentality. On the other hand, Trifona's behavior can be justified. Perhaps, he is lying because he cannot achieve his lifelong dream of becoming someone great and famous. Instead of becoming a well-known opera singer, he ends up as an average

<sup>1</sup> უზნაძე, განწყობის ფსიქოლოგიის, 2009, გვ.280.

painter. He himself might be living in his made-up reality to feel better. It is possible that these lies compensate for the lack of not being able to achieve his goals. At the same time, with this behavior he also manages to make the poor people around him forget about their daily struggles and worries as they listen to his stories and imagine scenes of a better life.

In general, there is no primitive and clear division between good and bad in Babluani's films.

The paradox is already present in the film's title. It is common knowledge that sparrows do not migrate and winter out in warmer lands, but the title claims otherwise. The director suggests another paradox when it turns out that these two characters have some similarities. For example, in the scene where a truck transporting large vessels containing gas catches on fire, they both run to put it out and prevent an explosion, saving the driver without thinking twice and putting their own lives in danger.

When Guja finds out that Trifona is just an average painter instead of a well-known and successful singer, he starts to feel pity for him. In the end, they plan to leave Georgia and go to Russia together, hoping to achieve something and make their lives better there. This is the final paradox of the film, as in the beginning we never thought that these largely conflicting characters would become friends.

Another example of an ethical paradox can be found in the film *Brother* (written and directed by T. Babluani, camerawork: V. Andreewski, design: Nugzar Baidarashvili, music: Iakob Bobokhidze. 1981), also directed by T. Babluani.

A close-up of Paghava (Otar Megvinetukhutsesi), the chief of secret police in one of the regions of Georgia. The events in the film take place in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, when Georgia was a part of the Russian empire. The secret police in tsarist Russia was responsible for state security. The chief's office is always full of people and noisy. The policemen are in and out, bringing in and taking out people they have detained. In this unbearable and horrid environment, only Paghava is calm, collected and confident. He speaks quietly, rarely raising his voice. It is clear that he is a rather clever man who is often deep in his thoughts. He tells one of his employees off by saying

that they are not working here just to detain people, but also to release them when necessary.

Another paradox created by the director is that he gave the role of Paghava to Megvinetukhutsesi. Before this film, the actor was known in Georgian cinema as someone portraying fighters for justice, his characters were more positive.

The policemen bring to the chief a certain Bekar (Archil Samkharadze), beaten and detained. He is a brother of a revolutionary terrorist, Gio (Levan Turmanidze), who has attacked Paghava several times, planning to assassinate him. But Paghava does not treat Bekar badly. Instead, he prefers to speak nicely to calm him down. Before Bekar leaves, Paghava advises him to tell Gio that he needs to leave this place because otherwise, he will have no choice but to detain or kill him.

The character created by the actor and the director completely destroys our stereotypical views of the chief of secret police working for state security. But as the story unfolds, it turns out that the viewer has been lied to and Paghava is using these false personal traits as a mask to deceive others. As Shakespeare says in one of his sonnets, we are only able to see the faces of other humans, but not their hearts.<sup>2</sup>

As the film continues, we stop seeing Paghava as a positive character. In later close-up views, the look in his eyes becomes disturbing. It makes the viewer feel uneasy, it seems that he is staring deep into their souls, and it is impossible to hide from his eyes.

Another interesting scene: a fly buzzing loudly and annoyingly around the chief's office. Paghava pretends to fall asleep in his chair, closing his eyes. Then, with a quick, rapid movement of his hand, he catches the fly, a metaphor created by the director. Paghava seems to capture humans the same way, through deception.

T. Babluani always uses dynamic, expressive ways to show the viewer what he is trying to say. He rejects dull, boring rhythms and long, pointless shots. Two examples to prove this point. One, the film *Brother* begins with three men riding their horses in the mountains. They are arguing and struggling to lead the horses on this dangerous path. This scene gives the film a fast rhythm. The second, in *The Flight of the Sparrows*, Guja, after a fight, is chased by the police across the wagons. During

<sup>2</sup> შექსპირი უილიამ, სონეტები, 2003, გვ. 71.

this scene, we hear the sound of percussion instruments playing a traditional Georgian national dance melody. The wagons are moving, the characters are running, the scene is very expressive, visually effective and fast.

In Babluani's films, he suggests the harsh, unat-

tractive reality of life. Also, he is showing us examples of ethical paradoxes onscreen. As time goes by, the problems exposed in his films become more and more interesting for viewers.

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