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The Story of Little Mook & The Dress

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The Story of Little Mook
Die Geschichte vom kleinen Muck

Production Company: Deutsche Film (DEFA)
Distributor: VEB Progress Film-Vertrieb (Easy Germany)
Director: Wolfgang Staudte
Screenwriters: Peter Podehl, Wolfgang Staudte, based on the fairy-tale by Wilhelm Hauff
Art Director: Artur Günther
Cinematographer: Robert Baberske
Composer: Ernst Roters
Editor: Ruth Schreiber
Duration: 100 minutes
Genre: Family, Fantastic, Fairy-tale
Cast: Thomas Schmidt, Johannes Maus, Silja Lesny, Friedrich Richter, Trude Hesterberg, Alwin Lippisch
Year: 1953

Synopsis:

Street children harass the dwarfish and hunchbacked Old Mook (Maus). He locks them up and obliges them to listen to his story - the story of Little Mook. Orphaned at a young age, Little Mool (Schmidt) searches for the merchant who sells 'good fortune' With magical slippers and a magical walking stick, he becomes the chief messenger and treasurer at the Sultan's (Lippisch) court. The Sultan's fraudulent and avaricious advisors frame him and have him ousted from the palace. His discovery of magic figs enables him to take revenge on the conniving and corrupt court. Little Mook leaves behind the magic objects and lets them be buried in the desert. After listening to the story of Little Mook, the children all want to help Old Mook, and make a human 'elephant' that carries Old Mook through the little Middle Eastern town.

Critique:

Based on Wilhelm Hauff's nineteenth century tale of the same name, *The Story of Little Mook* is a widely celebrated East German children's classic made by the famed director Wolfgang Staudte. Maxist themes of class struggle and critique of capitalism are woven into the film in a subtle manner. since it is entertaining and politically appropriate yet not propagandistic, the film became a model for future fairy-tale film-making in the DEFA studio'

Staudte changed the original ending, where Mook lives 'very rich but lonely, for he despises other human beings' Such a misanthropic attitude towards society would not be politically and socially permissible for the GDR. Staudte changed it by having Mook remain true to the lower-class Little Mook voluntarily leaves behind the keys to rising into the upper-class - the magical objects - when he returns to the life of the working-class. This new ending

is more consistent with Mook's disinterest in wealth and power, which is shown throughout the film. With his magic gold-detecting staff, he could have abundant gold at his disposal, and he has theoretically found his 'good fortune.' However, Old Mook tells his audience that he has not found the latter, indicating that wealth and power do not amount to 'good fortune' for him. Mook is ready to find his good fortune with his own hands, without the help of anything magical. This ending prepares the (East German) audience for the daily reality that they face, where no magical slippers or stick are available, and honest and hard work is expected' In the East German context, the pursuit of wealth and power is relegated to being capitalistic in nature, and the values of friendship, love and work ethics are instead promoted.

Embodied in Little Mook, the lower-class is depicted as good-natured, smart and generous. In contrast, the upper-class is described as extremely greedy and insatiably covetous. Princess Amarza. (Lesny) is the only uncorrupted member of the palace' Her indifference to riches stands in stark contrast to the courtiers, who resemble Mook's treasure-finding cane that is drawn to gold like a magnet. For the princess, love is the real treasure. The theme that love has no monetary value and wealth comes from true love is prevalent in all East German fairy-tale films.

Old Mook has told a rags-to-riches story where Little Mook initially suffers a great deal of injustice at the hands of other bullying kids, the schoolmaster, the relatives, the gypsy woman and the corrupt advisors to the Sultan. Little Mook has made a fool out of the Sultan and his evil staff, and helped the princess marry her true love. Children rejoice in Mook's final victory over the corrupt court, and are deeply moved by his integrity and strength of character in abandoning the magic objects in the desert and starting a working life. He chooses to become one of 'us', a blameless proletarian like his listeners, although he could have lived a luxurious life. For that decision, he is embraced and hailed as a hero by the working-class children. Although there is no change in social structure at the end, the listeners of the story still go away with the sense that the poor have triumphed.

The children fall in love with Little Mook who becomes a figure with whom they can identify. Staudte changed the original frame story by having Old Mook himself narrate. By changing the third-person narrative to a first-person narrative, the authenticity of the tale increases. The children take the story of Little Mook to be Mook's autobiography. His life story has generated immense respect for him. During the narration of the story Old Mook stops twice at cliffhanging moments and the children are hooked to his story. The narrative strategy Old Mook uses resembles that of Scheherazade, who tells the king half of a story every night, and in the end saves her life. Here, we observe a similarly redemptive and edifying power of narration. Staudte shows his confidence in the life-changing effect of storytelling and in the educational capacity of literature and film.

The Dress
Das Kleid

Production Company: Deutsche Film (DEFA)
Distributor: WEB Progress Film-Vertrieb (East Germany)
Director: Konrad Petzold
Screenwriters: Egon Günther, based on the fairy-tale by Hans Christian Andersen
Cinematographer: Hans Hauptmann
Composer: Günter Hauk
Editors: Ilse Peters (1961), Thea Richter (1991)
Duration: 88 minutes
Genre: Comedy, fairy-tale
Cast: Wolf Kaiser, Horst Drinda, Werner Lierck, Eva-Maria Hagen
Year: 1961/1991

Synopsis:

Two weavers, Hans and Kumpan (Drinda and Lierck), come to a kingdom surrounded by a guarded and seemingly impenetrable wall. By stowing away under a cart, they slip through the city gate. Helped by a kitchen maid named Katrin (Hagen), they are smuggled into the palace, where the emperor orders them to make an amazing outfit that will make everyone fall to their knees. The weavers come up with an ingenious plan to claim that the robe they are making is invisible to those who are stupid or inept. The emperor's immediate servants and ministers are aware that the so-called invisible fabric is a hoax, but they deliberately conceal the fact from the emperor. Unwilling to admit that he cannot see the robe, the emperor heads a procession naked. During the parade, the emperor's kitchen boys present themselves stripped in front of the crowd and tell the hapless emperor that they are dressed as splendidly in royal attire as the emperor himself. The crowd scatters in laughter and the procession ends abruptly. The emperor asks the foreign minister how many people have laughed and orders 80 per cent of the populace to be banished. The minister recommends that the emperor choose a different people.

Critique:

Adapted from Hans Christian Andersen's "The Emperor's New Clothes," Konrad Petzoldt banned comedy *The Dress* is a political satire, in which the ruler becomes a laughing-stock when the naked truth of his incompetence is revealed. The original tale, in which no-one except a small child discovers the ruse, serves as a poignant portrayal of dictatorship, where no opposition exists to point out the absurd notions of the ruling party. It also satirizes the pretentiousness of the nobility, as well as social hypocrisy, conformity and the blind acceptance of authority. Children are associated with innocence, honesty and boldness. They can break the spell because they can speak their mind without fear of shame or stigmatization.

In the film there is also a child who has no qualms about blurting out the blatantly obvious truth. However, the role of the child is marginal. In the film, the people are not depicted as being as gullible as the emperor. On the contrary, they defy the emperor, secretly or openly. A rumour quickly spreads through the city that the weavers have woven nothing at all. When the weavers tell the two businessmen, Fatty and Skinny, that the clothing is invisible to the stupid,

Fatty immediately predicts, gloating that the emperor is going to head the parade naked. During the parade, some onlookers ignore the ceremony and play cards. The procession climaxes when the two kitchen boys want to make the onlookers laugh and decide to imitate the emperor. The clothes have achieved a result exactly opposite to what the tyrannical ruler had intended. Instead of bringing everyone to their knees' he has made everyone turn against him.

After the Berlin Wall was erected, the film was increasingly suspected to be a parody of the East German state as an isolated dictatorship because the kingdom lies behind a thick and solid wall. The censors demanded that some scenes be cut: in an early episode, the guard who wears a moustache was said to resemble Stalin; in the animated sequences, the cloud puffs up its cheeks to blow wind, allegedly mocking the Soviet Party Secretary Khrushchev. In early 1963, the entire 135 cases of negatives were secretly sent to the state Film Archive. The director could not complete the film until the summer of 1990, when it reached the screen 30 years after its making, however, it had already missed the right audience and political context.

The fact that the film quotes 'The Solution' from Brecht's anti-Stalinist *Buckow Elegies* suggests that its subversion was to some extent intended. The brutal repression of the 1956 workers' uprising by Soviet tanks could partially be the reason for the indirect criticism expressed in this very Brechtian film. Hans and Kumpan wish to honestly earn their bread by making clothes for the emperor. However, it is the emperor's ridiculous expectations that make the task impossible, much like the unrealistic expectations that the East German government had for workers to increase production quotas. The affluent and happy image that the patrol guard presents of the city mocks the reality of poverty, mass exodus and the necessity to build the Berlin Wall in East Germany. The crippled minister of justice suggests a paralysed judicial system. The masked soldiers walking on stilts represent the ostentatiously imposing (East German) military. A viewer would also inevitably associate the secret police with the Stasi. The anti-authoritarian attitudes of the people, provocative at the time, foresaw the eventual implosion of the East German state.