

Ida

(2013, Pawlikowski, Poland)

Component 2: Global Filmmaking Perspectives (AL)

Component 2: European Film (AS)

Core Study Areas

Key Elements of Film Form

Meaning & Response

The Contexts of Film

Rationale for study

Ida is a beautifully crafted and eerily-engaging road movie that connects huge historical issues to personal guilt and tragedy. It is a demanding yet incredibly rewarding film to study. Film students will be immediately engaged in the strikingly attractive aesthetic and powerfully personal nature of the narrative, even if some of the historical and cultural contextualisation escapes them at first. It is a film that becomes more powerful and more hauntingly beautiful after repeat viewings and contextual study.

STARTING POINTS - Useful Sequences and timings/links

0.00.00-0.04.59

The opening sequence in which we are introduced to life in the convent.

0.49.12-0.55.06

The exhumation of the bodies in the woods.

CORE STUDY AREAS 1 - STARTING POINTS - Key Elements of Film Form (Micro Features)

Cinematography

The use of 'locked-off tripod, static framing' such as in the montage of static frames used to show the daily life of the convent which communicate not only the strict codes of behaviour and ritual expected in the convent but also the rationale and motivation for Ida's persona and her behaviour in the film. The highly aesthetic nature of these static frames

becomes memorable and contemplative images offering poetic pleasures as well as narrative drive.

The use of high contrast black and white, 1.33 ratio stock such as in the final shot of *Ida* contemplating leaving the convent to create stunningly composed and beautiful frames, offering pure visual pleasure and depth of character information.

The use of cinematography when the bodies are exhumed in the woods creates a haunting effect. The use of static framing and stark graphic matching in the establishing shots create a cold, grim aesthetic. The sense of dread is heightened by the use of long takes forcing us to watch the grim scene unfold.

Mise-en-Scène

Although the performance of the nuns in the convent sequence (0.00.00-0.04.59) at the beginning of the film seems repressed and lacking individuality, more active spectatorship may interpret this as a sense of comfortable ease with each other. The graphic matching of posture and gesture together with their faint smiles, creates a possible reading that the nuns are happy. This may be important to some spectators in the film's resolution when spectators actively seek to understand why *Ida* returns to the convent.

When the bodies are exhumed the neighbour confesses in a naturalistic performative style which is filmed in a single long take whilst he is stood in the grave. The use of purely diegetic sound and hesitation in his delivery creates a powerfully emotional end to the sequence as Wanda carries away the child's bones.

Later we see *Ida* at a Jazz concert and then having sex (1.08.31 - 1.15.33) where a more naturalist performance is evident possibly signifying an emotional and individualized side to *Ida*'s character. Her expressiveness may be interpreted as showing how far her character has changed, and, how she becomes more physically aware of her own body and possibly her sexuality.

Editing

In the montage sequence showing the nuns in the

convent at the beginning of the film we see the strict codes of behaviour that Ida lives within at the convent. The use of montage and graphically expressive editing creates metaphorical allusions to the constraints placed upon individuality and the suppression of physical action.

The opening sequence makes use of graphic matching and elliptical editing to illustrate the repetitive routines of convent life. The time scale is not clear but the sense that this is a consistent daily routine is established in the montage of similar shots and a consistent rhythm of shot duration.

When the bodies are exhumed in the woods the use of editing reinforces the sense of dread. The use of long takes forces us to watch the grim scene and the film does not cut away to relieve the horror of the scene. As the killer confesses a naturalistic performance in a single long take, centrally framed in the grave cutting, eventually, to the sight of Wanda holding the skull creates a grim climax to the scene.

Sound

The use of Jazz music, specifically John Coltrane's 'Naima', used during the midnight encounter between Ida and Lis to show the complications of Ida's personality but also to create a sensual aural aesthetic effect at odds with the often stark aesthetics of the *mise-en-scène* and cinematography.

Visual cues dominate Ida in generating responses, particularly the use of *mise-en-scène* and cinematography, but there are some very important subtle uses of soundtracking. Some elements of the narrative are ambiguous and metaphorical which invite active spectatorship but there are moments when themes of death and guilt are clearly cued, such as in the exhumation in the woods.

The absence of music initially gives us no immediate cues of what to expect or how to respond as they walk into the woods, creating tension. The use of an elegiac fragment of organ music as the bodies are discovered reinforces the drama, Wanda's desolation and creates associations of death for the spectator. The fading out of the music and the use of silence creates a powerfully emotional climax. As she drives away, we hear orchestrated operatic music that suggests her fraught mental state and foreshadows her, later, suicidal intentions.

CORE STUDY AREAS 2 - STARTING POINTS – Meaning & Response

Representations

In *Ida* we see the world of the convent contrasted with 1960s Poland, both 'worlds' are represented as restrictive and liberating at different points in the film, which invites an active response. Ida chooses to go back to the convent which creates a complex resolution and invites spectators to actively debate her possible motivations.

Later on in the film we see Ida getting ready to go out to a Jazz concert, longer takes are used in the cinematography creating a more naturalist performance. This shows a more emotional and individual side to Ida's character. The fact that she chooses to go back to the convent at the end creates a complex resolution to the contrasts in her character.

Pawlikowski has talked about how he was attempting 'to recapture the Poland of my childhood' in the film. Candidates may use contextual knowledge of Pawlikowski's early life in Poland, in the 1960s, to show how exciting and surprisingly (considering the context of Communist rule) anarchic its subcultural communities were. The use of music, Ida's costume/ make-up and her performance when dancing with Lis all show this more bohemian representation of Poland during the resolution. The State freedoms afforded to music, theatre and some forms of art in 1960s Poland are clearly shown during Lis' gig, how he teaches her to dance and when they make love which contrasts to austere representations of Poland at other points in the film. Such contextual information may also be used to show a greater understanding of the character of Lis and his 'beatnik' persona.

Aesthetics (i.e. the 'look and feel' of the film including visual style, influences, auteur, motifs)

There is great tension between expressive and realist aspects of the film in the scene in the woods when the bodies are exhumed which create a haunting and emotionally powerful response. The use of static framing and stark graphic matching in the establishing shots of the scene that show the characters going to the grave create a cold and grim aesthetic. The sense of dread and suspense are heightened.

Pawlikowski has called the film 'a meditation on identity, faith and responsibility'. His wish to explore the role of religion in Polish society, and the filmmaker's views on this, may be seen in

the aesthetic styles of the film. In the final shot of the film we see Anna, perhaps unexpectedly, returning to the convent. The contrast between the aesthetic representation of convent life and Poland outside the convent may help us understand the motivations of the protagonist in greater depth and the way in which Ida seems to decide to reject the possibilities of a secular life in communist Poland in returning to her faith and responsibilities.

Pawlikowski's use of stylistic austerity, particularly in his use of cinematography and editing, may be linked to influences from the films of Bresson and Dreyer. Whilst the filmmaker has refuted any imitation of their styles he does acknowledge a shared interest in 'contemplative' cinema and has suggested the use of 4:3 aspect ratio and shooting in black and white may be the key reasons why critics have made these links.

CORE STUDY AREAS 3 - STARTING POINTS - Contexts (Two from Social, Historical, Political, Technological, Institutional)

Social

Ida can be seen as a reflection of the complex role of Poland and Polish people during the Holocaust. Candidates may bring historical information about WW2 to bear on a discussion of the narrative and sequences such as the climax on the farm or the resolution of the film. Knowledge of the controversial reception in contemporary Poland may be drawn on to inform debate.

Historical

Candidates may use contextual knowledge of Poland in the 1960s to show how exciting and surprisingly (considering the context of Communist rule) anarchic its subcultural communities were. The State freedoms afforded to music, theatre and some forms of art may be used to explore sequences such as the nightclub/concert and the contrasts that this sequence

creates in the film. Such contextual information may also be used to explore the character of Lis and his 'beatnik' persona in the scenes when he is first picked up by Wanda and Anna and in the sequence when Anna and Lis spend the night together.

Political

Poland and Communism. The experience of Poland under communism may be used by candidates to explore the representations of Poland as a repressive and/or paranoid nation and to discuss how their understanding of scenes such as the introduction of Wanda and her role as a state prosecutor have been enhanced or enriched.

Technological

In an era of digital film and editing and the innovative choices these technologies afford filmmakers, Pawlikowski has chosen an old-fashioned aspect ratio and film stock to shoot in. 4:3 ratio (sometimes referred to as 1.33 framing) and black and white stock are uncommon in contemporary cinema. The director and his cinematographer were told to 'stop being silly' by the film's producers but they persisted because they wanted to recapture the aesthetic style of 1960s Polish cinema and because they wanted to make a modern audience, 'feel uncertain, to watch in a different way'.

Institutional

Candidates may refer to the resolution of the film to show an understanding of how the financing and production influenced it. The film is an Independent production that received vital initial funding from the Polish Film Institute and investor Eric Abraham because of Pawlikowski's reputation. This gave the freedom and time to develop a very distinctive cinematic style as seen in the highly unusual 'lower-third' framing, the jump cut to morning and the lack of expositional dialogue during the resolution.