

Falling Leaves

OTAR IOSSELIANI

1966

It had been observed that if you were waiting for the rebirth of Soviet cinematography in the 1960s, it might be better to wait for its appearance not in Moscow but in the republics of the Soviet Union, where freedom found itself an easier road. The gorgeous Georgian film - Falling Leaves in English - actually refers to the time of year in Georgia when grapes are heavy on the vine. And the film itself starts with documentary footage from the 1930s onwards of wine making.

This goes on for about 10 minutes, and when it seems you are getting bored, gradually you begin to catch the unusual in people and things, a life that already passes the border of realistic representation and that is filled with humour, halftones and detailed observations. In every shot of this film, there is beauty. But not the poetic beauty that the title might suggest, but the poetry of everyday life. To see this, you have to know that life very well, and as importantly, you have to love that life and be able to communicate that love to your audience.

'Otar Iosseliani is a little ironic and sarcastic. But his smile is kind, he loves the earth of his homeland and the people living on her. The poetic and at the same time vibrant atmosphere of Iosseliani's film is like a human organism, rejecting a foreign heart, an organism that already will not accept foreign artificiality.' - Cinema Journal, 1968

Notes from the director Otar Iosseliani: 'The author of the first

version of the screenplay was actually a former engineer. When he had finished studying for his screenwriting diploma, he wrote a story about a young engineer, and called it "Familiar Faces". The conflict that takes place in his story, situated in a factory where they produce transformers, is about how the young engineer finds a way of cleaning the mechanism of the transformers in a radical and innovative new way. Because of the appearance of this innovation, he comes into conflict with the retrograde: all the meetings, the expertise, the people who are enemies of new ways of doing things, etc. All this conflict happens in the background of the private life of the progress-obsessed hero. In the foreground are agreements and disagreements with his mother, his sister, his family. The hero's name was Levan. My assistant, Lali Mzhavia, put together a list of factories and workshops, where we could possibly shoot this story and make it not about transformers. We stumbled across a winemaking factory... those huge wine-making vats, the aesthetic pleasure, the drinking, the culture, and added to that the age of the skill. We re-wrote the film in this new shape. The first thing I allowed myself to change was the name of the hero. I changed his name from Levan to Niko. It is a well-known fact that screenwriters always believe their vision is disfigured in the final version of a film. Our film was censored. I was the only one responsible for that. After this experience, I never worked with other people's texts. It means I take the responsibility totally on myself. Like that things are simpler.'