



**ORDINARY PEOPLE, EXTRAORDINARY LIVES  
THE CINEMA OF MÁRTA MÉSZÁROS**

# The Two of Them (Ők ketten)

**SPOILER WARNING** The following notes give away some of the plot.

Both compromised by inadequate marriages, two women become entangled in a friendship that transcends age and social class. Monori and Nowicki, in roles that were written for them, reunite to play a destructive couple. It's their passion, despite their difficulties, that shows Mari (Vlady) the hidden tragedy of her own marriage. Meanwhile, silently, the troubled couple's child (Czinkóczi, seen later in the Diary films) bears uncomfortable witness to the lies of adulthood.

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In *The Two of Them*, Mari (Marina Vlady), a seemingly happily married middle-aged woman, who runs a centre for maladjusted young mothers, befriends the young, rebellious Juli (Lili Monori). Where Mari is steady and calm, Juli is impulsive and not a bit arrogant, attributes which make it easy to dismiss her.

Juli is married to a bright but hopelessly implosive alcoholic, Bodnár (Jan Nowicki). Yet at no point does Mészáros present her as a victim. Thanks to Juli, Mária begins to see the cracks in her own marriage and worldview, and their friendship, their transindividuality within the greater context of the women's home, allows them to move forward.

*The Two of Them* is then very much a film about a clash, of generations, values and attitudes, as seen from women's point of view. The most suggestive is the scene between Juli and Mari's conservative, emotionally distanced husband, in which Juli's bluntness and her firm belief that Mari's need for self-determination has lain dormant meet with smug hostility.

Is it because Juli defies the status quo, but hasn't articulated how to build on this knowledge? An accusation that, to some extent, echoes Whit Stillman's exasperation [during an event at 2019 Berlinale] that he cannot see what Jovana Reisinger's short *Pretty Girls Don't Lie* (2018) and Susanne Heinrich's *Aren't You Happy?* (2019) collage-like, deconstructive tactics lead to – a comment that goes to the heart of what we expect from cinema. In Mészáros's case, I think we can say that her fictions help us see the injustices in the imbalance of power, and acknowledge that historical truth lies on young Julia's side.

**Ela Bittencourt, *Sight & Sound*, March 2019**

A story of a friendship between two women of different classes and of their respective marriages. For 20 years, Mari has been living in a seemingly happy, harmonious marriage, and has been appointed director of a hostel for woman workers in the country. She gives shelter to the younger woman – her marriage with an alcoholic husband is an obvious mess. Mari, under the impact of her incipient friendship with Juli, is just beginning to realise that her

domestic bliss of 20 years was in fact merely a formal, conventional pretence, a sham, a cloak under which she gave up her individuality.

Beside her two main actors, Lili Monori and Jan Nowicki, Márta Mészáros invited great international actors to this semidocumentary-like feature production; this is the only film shot together by the legendary Russian singer-actor Vladimir Vysotsky and his French love Marina Vlady. At the same time, the director discovered eight-year-old Zsuzsa Czinkoczi, from the rural farm near Kecskemet whom she cast in the role of Zsuzsi, Juli's daughter.

**Eszter Fazekas, *Restored Films of Márta Mészáros*, National Film Institute Hungary – Film Archive**

## **A contemporary Review**

‘Nothing’s true! You all tell lies’, claims the neglected Zsuzsi at the end of *The Two of Them*. It’s a fair accusation from the child who has seen her father in the worst stages of alcoholism and can’t be expected to sympathise with the reassuring report that he’s ‘getting along fine’. But as the trio of disconsolates run through a chilly dusk to the severe silhouette of their hostel home, we are left with the understanding that lies, too, can be necessary.

The conclusion is disturbingly honest, and represents not a reversal but an extension of Márta Mészáros’ previous film *Nine Months*. Where this first account of the early relationship of Juli and Janos (from which, mysteriously, Juli’s son has now disappeared) concerned itself with a determinedly candid heroine who pays the price for her honesty, *The Two of Them* concludes bleakly that solitude is poor compensation for being in the right. Here, the characters deceive themselves, recognise the deceit, and are resigned to continuing the sham. They have no choice, not particularly because it’s a man’s world – they inhabit very much a female environment – but because their lives and emotions have worked out in no other way.

As Mari says, ‘It’s not truth, but loneliness I fear most’. She has achieved the independence that Juli had to struggle for in *Nine Months*, and achieved it comfortably except in matters of the inescapable (such as sex, which is also Juli’s problem), but the victory, if such it be, is unrewarding. The melancholy case is loaded, perhaps, by the scripted inadequacies of the male characters, who are portrayed more as insensitive near-rapists than reasoning partners, though one of them has apparently been supportive for 20 years of marriage.

But if *The Two of Them* is less persuasive in its dissatisfactions than the very direct malaise of *Nine Months*, it is handled with equal assurance in style. Once again, Janós Kende’s photography is superb, and the conversation pieces, face-to-face in stark close-up reminiscent of Bergman’s sessions of psychoanalysis, are crisply and emphatically written and edited. There’s a splendid single-shot scene in which Marina Vlady, brewing up a quarrel with her husband, cooks him a breakfast omelette and at crisis point hurls it, frying-pan and all, through the kitchen window – wish-fulfilment with a vengeance for many a galley-slave. The Vlady performance, in fact, is probably the best guide to the film’s elusive centre – it’s a performance, no hair misplaced, no eyebrow incautiously lifted. Watch, for instance, her Garboesque scene with an admirer in the snow, all subtle smiles and lingering glances. As Zsuzsi would say, nothing’s true...

**Philip Strick, *Monthly Film Bulletin*, November 1979**

THE TWO OF THEM/TWO WOMEN (ŐK KETTEN)

Director: Márta Mészáros  
Production Company: Dialóg Filmstudio  
Production Manager: József Bajusz  
Production Supervisor: Ferenc Szohár, Sándor Ducsay  
Production Assistant: Imre Vargo, Gyula Szóvári, Ágnes Sardaki, János Gonda, Margit Balázs, Péter Brill, Ferenc Ormos, Ágnes Petrovics, Mihály Sütton, Julia Jávör, Merek Sieranski, Zoltán Pataki, Ottó Mesterics, Mária Papp, Bertalan Beck, György Kovács, Klára Iványi, Klári Farkas  
Assistant Director: András Sipos  
Screenplay: Ildikó Kóródy, József Balázs, Géza Bereményi  
Story Editor: Miklós Vásárhelyi  
Photography: János Kende  
Lighting: Károly Ledniczky  
Editor: Andrásné Kármentő  
Art Director: Tamás Banovich  
Construction: Éva Martin  
Costumes: Ildikó Szabó  
Make-up: Adrienne Király  
Music: György Kovács  
Sound Recording: György Kovács

Cast

Marina Vlady (Mari)  
Lili Monori (Juli)  
Jan Nowicki (János)  
Miklós Tolnay (Feri)  
Zsuzsa Czinkóczi (Zsuzsi)  
Judit Meszléry  
Kati Kovács  
András Szigeti  
Magda Kohut  
Eva Szabó  
Éva Gúlánýi  
Gyongyi Vigh  
Mónika Kubinyi  
Vladimir Vysotsky

Hungary/France 1977  
92 mins

The restorations in this season were made from the original camera negatives, original magnetic tape sounds and positive prints, supervised and presented by the National Film Institute Hungary – Film Archive. The restorations were carried out at the NFI Film Archive and Filmlab.



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The Two of Them/Two Women (Ők ketten)

Wed 14 Jul 20:50; Mon 26 Jul 18:10

The Girl (Eltávozott nap)

Fri 16 Jul 20:50

Binding Sentiments (Holdudvar)

Sat 17 Jul 15:20

The Heiresses (Örökség)

Sun 18 Jul 15:20; Tue 27 Jul 20:30

Don't Cry, Pretty Girls! (Szép lányok, ne sírjatok!)

Sun 18 Jul 18:40

Riddance (Szabad lélegzet)

Wed 21 Jul 21:00

Adoption (Örökbefogadás)

Thu 22 Jul 20:30

Diary for My Children (Napló gyermekeimnek)

Sat 24 Jul 14:10 (+ pre-recorded extended intro by Márta Mészáros);  
Wed 28 Jul 17:50

Diary for My Loves (Napló szerelmeimnek)

Sat 24 Jul 17:30; Sat 31 Jul 20:30

Diary for My Father and Mother  
(Napló apámnak, anyámnak)

Sat 24 Jul 20:45; Sat 31 Jul 14:40

Nine Months (Kilenc hónap)

Sun 25 Jul 12:30

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