



Wakolda, the German doctor

Director: Lucía Puenzo
Country: Argentina
Date: 2013

A review by Carlos Aguilar for Indiewire:

In the quest for perfection humanity has gone to great lengths to alter and manipulate physical processes or unaesthetic features. Striving to improve and increase the species' adaptability is the basis for evolution. Traits and defects are passed on through generations engraved in the DNA. Aware of this, and in an attempt to justice their heinous crimes and bless them as 'scientific purification of the Aryan race', the Nazis fabricated their own branch of Social Darwinism. They pursued a type of homogenous beauty based on phony symmetrical genetics, with which they aimed to craft a special breed of super humans.



Rid of any genetic imperfections or miscegenation these individuals would become the pinnacle of their efforts. Spearheading this research and its consequential experimentation was Josef Mengele, a physician and one of the most notorious German SS officers. Following Germany's defeat the world was learning of the horrors that took place in the concentration camps. Many Nazi officers and supporters, Mengele included, escaped to South America to avoid facing justice. Lucía Puenzo's magnificent historical fiction film *The German Doctor* tries to reconstruct the time the so-called "Angel of Death" spent in Argentina and the moral implications of the unexplored complicity of the locals.

Set in 1960 against the breathtaking scenery of the Patagonian town of Bariloche, the story focuses on a family that serendipitously crosses paths with Mengele (Alex Brendemühl) on their way to the family owned hostel. Upon meeting Lilith (Florencia Bado), the family's daughter, the doctor is instantly captivated by the girl's size and physical features. She is a 12-year-old girl that appears extremely underdeveloped and fragile for her age. He immediately considers her the perfect specimen to test his theories, and to his advantage she seems to be equally intrigued by the foreign man. Her pregnant mother, Eva (Natalia Oreiro), fluent in German, seems to like the doctor who easily gains her trust, despite her husband Enzo's (Diego Peretti) noticeable suspicion of his intentions.

Once in Bariloche the doctor convinces the family to let him rent a room at their place, clearly part of his plan to stay close to his interest. The city exudes a heavily German influence, including Eva's old Nazi-supported school where she enrolls Lilith and her two siblings. There, her tall and blond classmates of German descent bully the young girl because of her size. This represents a prime opportunity for Mengele to interfere. He persuades Eva to let him inject Lilith with hormones that will make her grow, and he provides her with pills to help with her pregnancy, all of it behind the patriarch's back.

Mindful of Enzo's growing uneasiness towards him, the conniving German doctor shows interest in the man's passion for designing dolls. With Lilith's father now distracted with his own project, Mengele has free range to experiment after discovering Eva is expecting twins. Increasingly curious about the doctor's stories, Lilith begins reading about the Aryan pseudo-mythology in her school's library where she meets photographer Nora Eldoc (Elena Roger). As the family starts to grapple with the motives behind the

doctor's unsolicited help, Eldoc will prove to be a crucial character when the Israeli secret police, the Mossad, comes hunting down the runaway Nazis.

Conceived with incredible moral complexity and a mysteriously alluring tone, the film doesn't simply crucify Mengele as the source of all evil, but it instead questions the willing collaboration of others. There is a shared responsibility for his acts occurring between him and the participants. He doesn't kidnap Lilith or forces Eva to accept any treatment, but they grant him permission. In the same manner, the replication of artificial beauty is not only expressed via Mengele's vision of what Lilith and the twins can become, but also in Enzo's obsessive interest in creating the perfect human-like doll.

“Wakolda”, Lilith's rag doll made by the native Mapuche Indians is not good enough in his eyes, and it must be improved. Just like with Mengele's grueling fixation with engineering a utopian race, all individuality must be suppressed and replaced by identical flawlessness. This absurd aspiration is shared by both of the their enterprises. Such tacit complicity mirrors that of the entire community, which aware of the numerous Nazis and their supporters, prefers to let them live in obscurity.



Puenzo's fascinating period piece, based on her own novel, revisits familiar stories of Nazism with a particular focus on the Argentinean involvement. Executed with outstanding attention to detail, a prodigious ensemble cast, and splendid cinematography, the film is a window into a time lost in history. Despite the secrecy surrounding the doctor's time in her country, the writer/director incorporates the facts available to formulate her own informed version of the story. Her great artistic achievement might be the most plausible retelling of the events one might ever get to see. Evoking a sense impending danger, The German Doctor is a challenging and enthralling masterwork.

From: <http://blogs.indiewire.com/sydneylevine/foreign-oscar-entry-review-the-german-doctor-wakolda-argentina-lucia-puenzo-foreign-language-oscar-submissions-academy-awards-2014-international-film-business>