

The most satisfying cinema makes unwitting storytellers of its audience, by which I mean that it leaves space for the viewer to create and engage with the film both during and after. It is an invitation to bring the colour of personal memories to the viewing experience. It is cinema that demands engagement rather than passivity. Matjaž Ivanišič's *Oroslan*, an examination of a life as repository of stories, does all of this and more in a brooding account of loss within a small community.

Based on 'And That's Exactly How It Was', a short story by Slovenian writer Zdravko Duša, *Oroslan* first gives a sparse account of the aftermath of the death of a man named Oroslan, whose life fitted into the rhythms of the village. Daily meals are prepared in a bilious, steamy kitchen, then packaged into containers to be delivered to those who, for whatever reason, can't or won't cook for themselves. When a neighbour notices that Oroslan's containers sit untouched by his door, she raises the alarm at the local bar, Oroslan's second home. Two men are dispatched to check, and it soon transpires that he died alone from an epileptic fit.

In a series of chapters that are starkly divided by punctuating black-screen edits, the film starts to give shape to the dead man through the memories of those who knew him. A man who is revealed to be his brother talks about the passing of two of his relatives, Oroslan and a girl who drowned years earlier. Another man talks admiringly of Oroslan's butchery skills and his approach to payment for services: 'Never for money, only for meat.' But there are no flashbacks and – deliberately – we are never shown his face. To know Oroslan, the audience must create him for themselves from a combination of the stories told about him and imagination drawn from personal experience.

Ivanišič set the film in a Slovenian minority community in Hungary, and uses the villagers as actors, participants and – to a certain extent – co-creators. They were given lines to read but also contributed memories and stories specific to the locality. The result is both a portrait of a man and a portrait of a community. Oroslan – an epileptic, a skilled butcher, a hard worker, an enthusiastic drinker who preferred pubs to churches – may be physically absent from the film, but in bearing witness through memories, his family and neighbours ensure that even after death, he lives on. And in doing so, the picture reflects on the medium itself. For what is cinema if not captured memories given permanency?

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