



Walerian Borowczyk: Cinema of Erotic Dreams

Jeremy Mark Robinson

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WALERIAN BOROWCZYK by JEREMY MARK ROBINSON Walerian Borowczyk (known as 'Boro') is one of cinema's one-offs. Quite simply, there is no filmmaker quite like Borowczyk. Borowczyk's films have an astonishing, magical quality. They reach a place very rare in contemporary cinema, and are quite unlike the films of any other auteur. Borowczyk's films create their own space, with imagery, sounds and music of a really exceptional power. Jeremy Robinson discusses each Borowczyk film in detail, sometimes going through scenes shot by shot. Fully illustrated, with stills from Borowczyk's movies, and from the history of erotica, a bibliography, filmography and notes. 252pp. The text has been updated for this new (2nd) edition. www.cmoon.com EXTRACT FROM THE INTRODUCTION Goto: Island of Love was the first Walerian Borowczyk film that made a big impression on audiences and critics, winning a number of prizes. I first saw Goto: Island of Love in 1982, at Bournemouth Film School, when we watched 16mm prints as part of our film history programme. You could see there was an astonishing vision at work here. I remember above all the creation of a visceral, idiosyncratic and original world. If I had to single out some films, I'd cite Blanche, Immoral Tales, Behind Convent Walls, The Beast and Goto: Island of Love, for their painterly sense, the use of props and costumes, and the incredible attention to detail. Very stylish, mysterious, poetic. Not forgetting the acute awareness of the history of religion and literature. Borowczyk produced some of the most memorable images in European cinema, the equal of Ingmar Bergman, Sergei Paradjanov or Andrei Tarkovsky. I reckon there's one absolute Walerian Borowczyk masterpiece, and that's Goto: Island of Love. That can rank alongside the great films in the history of cinema. I'd put Immoral Tales in the masterpiece class too. The other Borowczyk films are often as fascinating, often more grotesque - certainly more sexually explicit - but probably not as wholly satisfying as Goto: Island of Love - from a conventional critical standpoint. But The Beast, Blanche, Behind Convent Walls, and Love Rites would count as extraordinary films by most standards. They may not be quite up there with Persona (Ingmar Bergman) or 8 1/2 (Federico Fellini), but taken together they form a group of works that mark Borowczyk out as a maverick original. Similarly, Borowczyk isn't a filmmaker celebrated by critics or filmmakers, like Akira Kurosawa, Ingmar Bergman, Orson Welles, Federico Fellini, Jean Renoir or Sergei Eisenstein, and his films don't make critics' top ten lists. For detractors, Borowczyk's films were better when they concerned ideas rather than the senses - philosophy not sex. You probably won't know many other people who've even heard of Walerian Borowczyk, let alone seen one of his films. His reputation as a producer of European arty porny films (art-as-porn films or porn-as-art films) is probably all that many people will have heard of him (movies with sex and nudity do seem to travel well, crossing borders). Needless to say, Borowczyk's films are not shown regularly on television (in Britain at least), even by channels which boast of their open-mindedness and international film broadcasts. I can think of maybe one occasion when Goto: Island of Love was shown in the U.K. in 25 years, but I may be wrong about that. Similarly, you won't see Borowczyk's films at the cinema nowadays, even rep and arthouse and independent cinemas rarely screen his films. It's mainly home video releases (and, later, home DVD releases) that's enabled Borowczyk's films to reach a contemporary audience (the porny and arty elements make them perfect for niche marketing to the cognoscenti). And you'll have to hunt to find them all. You won't find The Beast next to Back To the Future and Bad Boys on the 'B' shelf in your local video store.

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Donna Muniz:

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