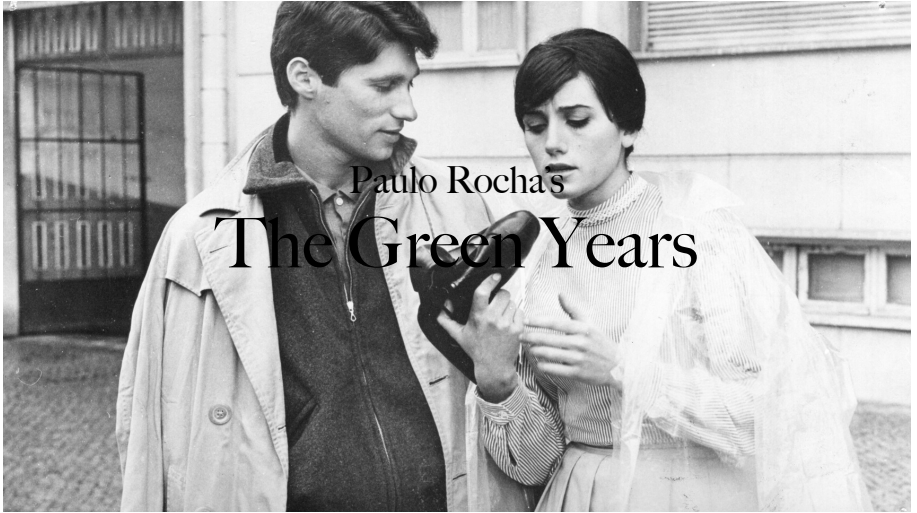


Acropolis Cinema
presents:



August 7 - 13, 2020 - Acropolis Virtual Cinema

ABOUT THE FILM

Nineteen-year-old Julio heads to Lisbon from the provinces and gets a job as a shoemaker for his uncle Raul. But when he meets Ilda, a confident young housemaid who becomes a regular shop visitor, his working-class values collide with the bourgeois trappings of modern life. Never before released in the U.S., Rocha's debut film, gloriously shot in black and white, is an extraordinary and haunting coming-of-age film. Winner of Best First Film at the 1964 Locarno Film Festival. *New restoration supervised by Pedro Costa!*

89 min. | Portugal | 1963

Troubled Love by Ela Bittencourt

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Paulo Rocha, the key figure of Portuguese modern cinema, was 28 when he filmed his virtuoso black-and-white debut, *The Green Years* (1963). It's a film so mature, with such musical verve and pictorial elegance, we can only marvel at the energy that was in the air in Europe in the 1960s, when the continent's new waves were taking shape. Rocha's is a case of maturity arrived at quickly, namely after his cinema studies in Paris, and then his apprenticeships under the masters Manoel de Oliveira and Jean Renoir, as assistant director on Oliveira's features, *The Bread* (1959) and *Act of Spring* (1963,) and Renoir's *The Elusive Corporal* (1962).

In *The Green Years*, two young lovers, a shoemaker, Júlio (Rui Gomes), and a maid, Ilda (Isabel Ruth), are transplants to Lisbon. Though at times nostalgic for their villages, they're mostly dazzled by the brisk pace, suaveness and the attractions of this modern city. Modernity—and the clash between urbanity and countryside—lends the film its primal energy. In this sense, Rocha is in step with such European directors as Agnès Varda and Michelangelo Antonioni, whose early films, *La pointe courte* (1955) and *L'Éclisse* (1962), contrasted the rushed, glitzier lives of city folks with the languid rhythms of hinterlands, but also with the bitter struggle for survival experienced by country folk and recent city arrivals alike.

The film's early vignettes show Júlio naively learning his way around Lisbon, seeking help from passersby to locate an address or open a door with a buzzer, mesmerized by the smartly dressed girls in cafes and the luxurious shop displays. One silly blunder leads him to Ilda who, with her natural good humor and practicality, becomes his chaste sweetheart and guide.

And yet, the idyll has a caveat. The story is framed by Júlio's uncle, Raúl (Ruy Furtado) in the voiceover. Greek-chorus like, Raúl warns, "The city has devoured many but hasn't laid a hand on me." Knowing his place as a "country hick," Raúl, who works in civic construction and proudly claims many a Lisbon stone to his name, also knows his place. There's a touch of wounded pride in his assertion that he lives alone on the city's outskirts, in rustic, cramped quarters, with basic amenities, because he's taking his time (presumably, to move up).

The tough lot that's hardened Raúl will break the quiet, hot-headed Júlio. From blissfully touring the closet of Ilda's employer, admiring the tons of shoes, the television set and fancy tea-set, to the crushing realization that he and Ilda don't make enough money to live on their own, it's a vertiginous drop. *The Green Years* is indebted to neo-realism, but its finale's rapid unraveling strays from psychological veracity: one day Júlio sulks after a dance, jealous, another he wants to marry Ilda in a possessive quest, yet another, he leashes out at her.

The film is sustained by the rhythm and elegance of its conceits. Luc Mirot's stunning, limpid cinematography, offsets the drama, and vividly captures Lisbon's cultivated albeit weary beauty, as well as the consumerist entrapments, and the gap between the rich and poor, that give rise to the lovers' bitterness. Composer Carlos Paredes's song "The Green Years" runs through the film: a wistful, nostalgic refrain. The music, which increasingly alternates between the languid song and a brisker tempo, evocative of the city rush, itself mirrors Júlio's growing impetuosity. In one remarkable sequence, as Júlio broods and the two lovers start to drift apart, the music's subtle wavering itself seems to carry the weight of a tragedy foretold.

Rocha will again use music brilliantly in his second feature, *Change of Life* (*Mudar de Vida*, 1966). When Adelino (Geraldo del Ray) returns to his village from the war in Angola, he finds that his beloved, Júlia (Maria Barroso), has tired of waiting, and married his brother, Raimundo (Nunes Vidal). In the dramatic early scene, while flute notes soar on the soundtrack, the two lovers walk towards each other in the woods. Their bodies' slowed, disoriented turns and fearful, delicate steps entwine with the forest's static vertical landscape—a figuration so gorgeous it's one of the most memorable scenes I've seen of passionate, forbidden yearning in cinema.

Similarly to Varda's *La pointe courte*, *Change of Life* is firmly rooted in the routines and the precariousness of fishermen's lives: Men tending to the nets and laboring on boats, women collecting bounty on shore, the toil, sweat and anguished fear of hunger or a death at sea. Manuel Carlos da Silva and Elso Roque's lush black-and-white cinematography gives way in some scenes to blanched-out vapors, fogs wafting off the sea and enveloping the land. It's a perfect complement to the low, hot-breathed susurrations between the lovers, as Adelino warns the increasingly frail and troubled Júlia: "Never again will you have peace." The dialogues, written by another master of Portuguese cinema, António Reis (of *Trás-os-Montes*, 1976, among other films), have a fiery back-and-forth energy to them, often leaping over the music.

While *The Green Years* presents innocence as spent, or lost, *Change of Life* moves from mourning, when Adelino sees that Júlia will never consider being with him, over her family, to a more hopeful note: Adelino recovers some appetite for life when meeting another unhappy loner, the young girl Albertina (the same Isabel Ruth who shines so brightly as Ilda in *The Green Years*). Albertina's rebellious disposition and past heartaches bind her to Adelino in new mysterious ways, to the point where he sheds his passivity, and embraces change.

Rocha's talent for exploring heated passion with uncanny mixture of fire and restraint—the sensuous pulling back that the gracefulness of his compositions so often instills—has made him one of the most remarkable directors to approach the eternal subject of troubled, wounded love. We're all the richer for now being able to appreciate these gorgeous, melancholy films. ♦



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