

Dendrokronologia - synopsis

Mohammed is a cynic, an unbeliever in the common Finnish ideal. He is 23, reaching the end of his national duty, and at a crossroads in his life. He picks up his sister Yasin from the Aino Centre (Aino is an untouched maiden in the Kalevala saga, and a figure not unlike Marianne for France). Her ailment is never disclosed, but as she and Mohammed are half-breed Finns, and here represent Finland - the clue is in the state of the Nation. She has recently picked up a talent - through her dreams - for handicrafts, which distinctly originate in Karelia from long ago.

Mohammed is a passive observer and never lets the world coming through his lens affect him. At the same time, he is lethargic and out of place. He gets an assignment to shoot stills for a Finnish film on location in Karelia. While he is there, he starts communicating with the spirits of the place - or his own hybrid national identity - and comes to a contradicting image of Finland than the filmmakers are searching for.

The contemporary scenes (which are written along themes of and links to the C17th events) are intercut with stylised scenes of the C17th. Towards the end these scenes (the scenes Finns are accustomed to see as 'our common past') are revealed as the mise-en-abyme of the film shoot. Mohammed's assimilating world-view is disrupted, and he ends up at the Aino Centre, only to be exploited by the filmmakers at the end of the film, who have seen the marketing potentiality of a 'coup in identity', the latest thing; 'multicultural Finland'. The Finnish national icon 'Aino' is replaced by the dynamic icon of 'Mohammed', while he's locked at the Centre.

Dendrokronologia - background

The film follows a thematic of relationship- binaries. Firstly, there is national identity and individuality; secondly the film concerns fiction (mythological heritage/genesis) and reality and thirdly, there is an important theme of multiculturalism in contemporary Finland. The theme of nature and man, in the sculpting of Finnish national 'spirit', is shown in magical realist sequences that penetrate the fabric of today's society; the patronage of Karelia as our 'feminine' source of prosperity - Finland's reputation relies on the paper industry and a reputation of clean ecology.

Finland in the 1990s is like Germany was in the late 1980s and 1990s, like France from the 1960s and 1970s and Britain from the 1950s - in terms of having to confront its ethnically and culturally diversifying population. 1995 is also an important year as in January Finland entered the European Union. In 1996, Finland (like Italy) chose their first black Miss Finland.

1617 was a year of great exodus in Karelia, as the tension between the Swedish (Catholic) and Russian (Orthodox) Empires intensified, and the indigenous people became mobilised back and forth en masse for the first time due to political reasons. 1939 - 1945 is the most significant contemporary point of reference to Karelia, as during this period - the winter and continuation wars - Finland lost Karelia and other eastern regions to the Soviet Union.

The film focuses most on the 1617 events though through two particular 'nationality' forming perspectives; the first is the post-1995 contemporary climate, and the second is the late C19th nationalist-romantic project to find the Finns' national 'ethos'. This film is about the ideas of the 1890s being outmoded by the late 1990s, because of the contemporary youth of Finland discovering that the National Romantics' distortion of events like 1617 to their own ends creates the national identity they must assume today. The contemporary reality of Karelia - our genetic and mythological mother - as visited by Finns, is of their raping their own virginal, mythical territory. It's one of hypocrisy at a national level, and one of a resulting confusion in one's own identity and engaging in life.

I should be careful not to specify the siblings as Muslim, they aren't. They are, though, coloured 'Others', treated as the Karelians are at times, when it comes to Social Security benefits and general prejudice. The siblings are experiencing problems in communicating. Petia is from piotr (peter) : from the latin 'petra' signifying stone and foundation. The capital Petrozavodsk, is literally Peter's factory, using the irony of its heavy industry and (Finnish) cultural reputation as virginal and unspoilt.

Dendrokronologia is the field of science that measures the age of trees, and is part of the nature theme; nature as silent character in the film and in our society. It stands there - and is feminised by us - and takes the course of history, on its back, so to speak It is raped by the peoples that make it divine. The scenes given here are from the opening of the film.

Translations -

-Petia (OTS):

(whispers)

Vaan kuitenkin kaikitenki la'un hiihin laulajoille,
la'un hiihin, latvan taitoin, oksat karsin, tien osoitin. Siitpä nyt tie menevi, ura uusi urkenevi
laajemmille laulajoille, runsahammille runoille,
nuorisossa nousevassa, kansassa kasuavassa

This is the 50th - the last stanza of the Kalevala (restored by oral tradition) :the end of the Epic.

***I sing to all those future singers
I showed the path to follow
For larger paths,for greater poems
In the brave new world, in the young generation***

- **Juurikko**. Yasmin: their surname denotes 'roots' .

- Petia (OTS)

(whispering)

Tuhoa tuomahan, perkele? Vuotten saatoissa verta vuodattamahan. Jo laulut loppuhi, sanat nalvetyvi. Sisaren maito rinnasta kuivettuvi, sapeksi, mustaksi kylvettyvihi.

Text stylized from oral tradition:

Coming to deliver destruction, Beelzebub? Going to shed blood in years to come. That'll end all songs, wither all words of meaning. This will dry the milk from the bosom of our sisters, to seed into bad humour, turn into black poison.

- Female voiceover

Hiidenpoika. Muitten maitten petajia taivaltaapi. Sen jos kohtaapi, lopun aatto haamottaapi. Perkele. Hiidenpoika, sudenpoika...

Stylized text:

Son of the devil. Treading other far-off lands. Meet him, if you will, and this will be the end of you Satan, the son of the devil, the son of a wolf.

The wolf is a traditionally used animal in Finnish and Slavic mythology, as well as building up a reference to the film's WWII scenes referring to Stalin.

Mohammed

Minka takia?

What for ?

Yasmin

No... se on ny alkanu olee iha raivo. Funaa, hei, et ma puhuin puille tuolla! Ma olin iha seis. Mut faija on alkanu ajatteleen Suomee ja kaikkee. Se on IHAN skitso.

(contemporary Finnish slang)

Well, he's just really flipped it. Think about it, I was talking to trees in there! I was really out of it. But Dad has started to think about Finland and stuff. He's mental.

Yasmin

Moi! Olitsa soittamassa mulle? Miten sun matka meni?

Hi! Were you about to call me ?How was your trip there?

Mohammed

Joo, ihan okei. Kuule voinks' ma soittaa sulle huomenna...onks sulla kuin asiat?

Yeah, it was okay. Listen, call I call you back tomorrow...how's things there?

Dmitry Tolonen
Screenwriting the Early Modern
For: Steve Knapper
Drama Dept.

Dendrokronologia

Front titles begin. Cut to:

Radio Voice:

(voiceover) the temperature in your capital, Petrozavodsk, is now +15.1 degrees, and we're heading for a scorcher of a summer... (voice fades out)

Ext. by a lake in Karelia, Northwest Russia. Dusk (1617).

Fade from black to:

A man without a shirt and in white trousers, stands alone by a lake in the Karelian wilderness, looking into the depths of the black surface. His reflection is fading because of the dusk.

Front titles continue:

Title: Dendrokronologia

Cut to:

Same image, but a reflection of a flame appears in the dark waters. Cut to: close-up of hands holding a candle, which self-ignites.

Petia (OTS):

(whispers)

Vaan kuitenkin kaikitenki la'un hiihin laulajoille, la'un hiihin, latvan taitoin, oksat karsin, tien osoitin. Siitäpä nyt tie menevi, ura uusi urkenevi laajemmille laulajoille, runsahammille runoille, nuorisossa nousevassa, kansassa kasuavassa.

He kneels to lay the candle into the waters.

Cut to: he opens his hand, we see that the candle has disappeared.

Fade to white.

Cut to:

Ext. through car windscreen, somewhere in southern Finland. Afternoon(1995).

Radio voice in car:

Mohammed, 23, listens to Gallup interviews on the radio, driving. The interviews concern the nearby elections to join the European Union. Mohammed is half Tunisian, half Finnish. He is near the end of his military service. He does odd jobs as a photographer.

(interview fragments)

...What is the point in joining a foreign body that is going to drain our resources and impose new cultures, which we didn't ask for in the first place? ...

...I..I think that it's a very good thing. The fact that we can go abroad and get cheaper booze...

...the thing about cultural interaction is...

He turns off the radio.

Cut to:

Mohammed pulls into the delicate, manicured courtyard of The Aino Treatment Centre, a facility for 'deprogramming' of victims of religious exploitation. The complex, with its pristine birch trees, streams and meadows, is guarded by high metal gates.

Int. Aino Treatment Centre. Afternoon.

Nurse

Good day. Visiting or dropping off?

Mohammed

I'm here to pick up my sister, she is a patient here... Juurikko. Yasmin - She's been here for, ah...

Nurse

(leading him down a corridor)...um, 'our artist' ...she spends all her time making embroidery. It's quite special, actually. She was one of her group's quietest, and all of a sudden - these patterns.

She says she's never learned it. It comes to her automatically.

Mohammed

...Is she spending more time awake now?

Nurse

You're her brother, aren't you? She often mentions you when she's confused. She had hoped you would come by Easter.

The nurse sits Mohammed down on a bench along the corridor. She indicates to him to wait there.

Cut to: close-up of Mohammed's expression as the sister arrives (offscreen). Fade to black.

Int. living quarters in a hut, in Karelia. Night (1617).

Petia (OTS)

(whispering)

Tuhoa tuomahan, perkele? Vuotten saatossa verta vuodattamahan. Jo laulut loppuhi, sanat nalvetyvi. Sisaren maito rinnasta kuivettuvi, sapeksi, mustaksi kylvettyvihi.

Cut to: back view of Petia:

He hears a sound of something moving outside the hut, and turns his head to the camera. Camera speed slows down to show flicker and ends on a still image of Petia.

Slow repetitive musical theme (voice), without words, fades in and continues to next scene.

Female voiceover

Hiidenpoika. Muitten maitten petajia taivaltaapi. Sen jos kohtaapi, lopun aatto haamottaapi. Perkele. Hiidenpoika, sudenpoika...

Cut to:

Ext. Park, fouled with rubbish a after large celebration, Helsinki (1995).

Yasmin sits in the background as Mohammed takes pictures of wasted park.

Yasmin

...I don't know. I was in. Remember? Father says I should start working. Becoming... 'more dynamic'.

Mohammed

Oh yeah? Minka takia?

Yasmin

No... se on ny alkanu olee iha raivo. Funaa, hei, et ma puhuin puille tuolla! Ma olin iha seis. Mut faija on alkanu ajatteleen Suomee ja kaikkee. Se on IHAN skitso.

Mohammed

Casually still facing the other way, snapping pictures.

But you're okay now, right? *(Yasmin is silent)*
Anyway, I'll be finished soon. I'm going to take a bit of time off.

Yasmin

What are you gonna do?

Mohammed

Don't know. I'm going to follow the plot. All this... is ...like this here, garbage. That's what our great hypocritical country is. How long have we believed in it anyway?

Cut to: Mohammed turns to Yasmin and walks to her. He picks up her chin. Close-up of her, smiling, and being distracted by a dog in the background.

Cut to: Yasmin's pov, but there is nothing to look at.

Cut to: Close-up of Yasmin. She looks back up at Mohammed, and laughs.

Ext. Industrial site in Carelia. Cloudy Day (1995).

A large tractor of a Swedish-Finnish company digs in to the soil in the depths of a Karelian forest. We're by a small lake. A new road is being built for tourists to be able to cross the country. The inhabitants have received a nominal settlement to re-locate.

The Tractor driver stops filling the lake with soil. He has discovered something in the swampy waters. It is three dead young women in white dresses.

Cut to: Mohammed, in a crew van, steps out into the cold and takes a picture of the women. The Militia turns up and Mohammed leaves in the van with the film crew he has got an assignment with.

Int. Hotel Room in Petrozavodsk, Karelia. Evening (1995).

The door is open. Mohammed enters the hotel room. 'Satumaa' is playing in the background and he peeps out to the corridor again, before closing the door. He goes to the window and looks out at the city. The electricity goes out. As he turns around, three young women are sitting on his bed and chair at a table, but disappear as the lights come back on again. He finds a copy of Kalevala at the bedside where Gideon Bibles usually sit. This is a Finnish hotel.

Cut to:

Mohammed sits on the bed, rubbing his eyes. He is startled by the telephone. It's Yasmin.

Yasmin

Moi! Olitsa soittamassa mulle? Miten sun matka meni?

Mohammed

(scans around the room and notices a piece of patterned embroidered cloth) Joo, ihan okei. Kuule voinks' ma soittaa sulle huomenna...onks sulla kuin asiat?

Yasmin

Nothing new really. I'm going on a trip with mum. She's calling it 'getting education in me'. Well, anyway, I'll speak to you later, then?

Mohammed

Ok.

Cut to:

Int. Hotel bar, Petrozavodsk. late evening (1995).

Mohammed in the hotel's strip tease bar: There are three Russian dancers on the stage in Catholic schoolgirl uniforms. The music is imported Swedish 1970s disco music given an Orthodox Christian choir treatment.

Cut to: Businessmen from two companies discuss a deal in jovial Russian custom. The first party is Swedish, and is slightly more reserved - this inspires distrust in the Russians. Mohammed passes them and moves to an isolated table at the side.

Cut to: He sits and orders a drink.

Cut to: close-up of Mohammed's face as he is caught in thought.

Cross-fade to:

Ext. Pasture in Karelia. Late afternoon (1617).

The Russians are entering a village held by Swedes. They send ahead their representative to hold short talks with the Swedes - the issue is about dispute of land. He stops by a group of birches to wait for a signal from the clergy of a nearby monastery.