

FILM

Persona Non Grata

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Krzysztof Zanussi's "Persona Non Grata" (Poland, 2005, colour, 117 mins) has debut of Victor (Zbigniew Zapasiewicz) crying over his wife, Helena's dead body, draped in black. This contrasts with the smiling face of Helena, appearing alongside the credit flow titles, Helena had died of a stroke in Moscow. There is a large flower bouquet from Oleg Russian Ambassador (Nikita Mikhailkov) in Montevideo, Uruguay. The Polish prayer rings out; "From sudden and unexpected death preserve us O Lord." Victor who is the Polish senior Ambassador, in Montevideo, protests against the world, life and everyone. At the Warsaw Ministry of External Affairs, there is a secret note describing Victor as drunk and unreliable. In Montevideo, Victor feels that everything was crumbling, and there was dust all around. He has differences with Lipisicki, the deputy counsellor. Helena's photo is in the sitting room, and Peter plays the piano. He keeps drinking, and finds a proper space for keeping the urn, with his wife's ashes.

Victor entrusts Oxiana, the Russian wife of a junior Polish official to look after functions. A friendship develops between Peter and Oxiana, and Victor gifts to Oxiana, frocks and gowns of his late wife. The official agenda includes obtaining helicopter contracts with Uruguay, and the case of enhancement of rent of the hired consular building. Victor ponders over national identity and social cohesion. There are diplomatic reverberations following seizure of 3 kgs of cocaine from Helena's coffin, flown from Moscow. Victor's life is cluttered by numerous delegations, air tickets and flights, solidarity, the Pope, President Regan, Gorbachov, and the bell boy in the hotel. At a night club Victor offers passports to two Polish dancers and one Ukraine dancer. Steadily Victor realizes that the flight for freedom, is without knowledge of what money was all about. An army officer from Uruguay is invited to Poland.

There are suspicions on Oxiana when documents on the rented premises are removed from file, and numbered photo copies of sensitive documents fail to follow serials. Principles were twenty years ago, and people became unprincipled when country and personal interests were at stake. There is a betrayal of trade secrets, as the Russians are also bidding for the helicopter deal. Victor stares at the fishes in the aquarium, and gives sedatives to his dog. The Italians win the helicopter contract.

Victor asks the Russian diplomat, Oleg if he had any relationship with late Helena. He sees Helena's apparition. By the sea coast he scatters Helena's ashes, and pitches the empty urn in the waste dump. After playing the piano, Victor drops dead. Fax messages keep arriving from Warsaw. Zanussi's film is a blend of critical observations and satire. In the midst of international diplomacy and underhand dealings, the solitude and loneliness of a diplomat emerges. But the

script completely excludes USA and Bratain, as the chief architects of covert diplomacy. The exercise remains conceptual, and the images are feeble and without any courage. The film was screened at the last Kolkata Film Festival (Nov, '06). □□□