OFFICIAL SELECTION
UN CERTAIN REGARD
FESTIVAL DE CANNES
WHITE GOD
a film by KORNÉL MUNDRUCZÓ

Kornel Mundruczó's sixth feature film
WHITE GOD
is a cautionary tale between a superior species
and its disgraced inferior.
Outcast and betrayed,
"man's best friend" rebels
against their former master...
From the director of DELTA, JOHANNA and TENDER SON.

# SYNOPSIS

# WHITE GOD
## een film van Kornél Mundruczó

**Vanaf 4 december in de bioscoop!**
2014 • 119 minuten • Hongarije • Hongaars gesproken • Nederlandse ondertiteling

Om het fokken van rashonden te stimuleren, heft de overheid een zware belasting op het houden van bastaards. De dertienjarige Lili wordt om die reden door haar vader gedwongen haar hond Hagen op straat te zetten. Lili krijgt spijt en struint heel Boedapest af op zoek naar Hagen die inmiddels de wreedheid van mensen heeft ontdekt.Hij sluit zich aan bij een groep zwerfhonden die zich klaar maakt voor een opstand tegen alle baasjes. Hun wraak zal zonder genade zijn. Lili is de enige die deze oorlog kan stoppen.

WHITE GOD is de zesde speelfilm van de Hongaarse filmmaker Kornel Mundruczó. De film oogstte veel lof tijdens de première op het filmfestival van Cannes. De internationale filmpers omschreef de film als een apocalyptische fabel waarin de scènes van de hordes losgeslagen straathonden symbool staan voor de politieke en culturele spanningen in het Europa van vandaag en maakte de vergelijking met klassieke thrillers als BIRDS en PLANET OF THE APES.

WHITE GOD won tijdens Cannes 2014 de hoofdprijs in het programmaonderdeel Un Certain Regard. De twee honden, Luke en Body, die de rol van Hagen vertolken werden bekroond met de speciale prijs Palm Dog.

*"It is a fantasia of canine madness that looks sometimes like a horror-thriller based on something by James Herbert or Stephen King - and sometimes like a tribute to Hitchcock's The Birds. Except that this time it's The Dogs."*
******* The Guardian***

# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

*superiority has truly become*
*the privilege of white, Western civilization and*
*it is nearly impossible for us not to take advantage of it*

It's no secret that after the films I've made thus far, I am turning towards genre experiments. The first installment of these is White God, inspired mostly by preposterous and increasingly rancorous present-day social relations. In my view, parallel to the questionable advantages of globalization, a caste-system has become more sharply defined: superiority has truly become the privilege of white, Western civilization, and it is nearly impossible for us not to take advantage of it. Yes, us. After all, we are the members of this privileged mass. Hence, I would like to create a film which allows a glimpse of the passions raging on the other side, criticizing our detestable self-confidence, full of lies and lopsided truths, set on domesticating the minorities while actually wishing only to destroy them, hypocritically denying inequalities, not believing in either peace or in peaceful cohabitation.

Nevertheless, I have chosen animals as the subject instead of minorities. I did this, because I wanted to focus freely on this sensitive subject; as freely and with the least amount of taboos as possible. Therefore, I tell the story of animals, a dispossessed species that was once man's best friend. But man has betrayed them, and in turn, they revolted against their former masters and companions in order to validate their existence.

The film can be described by mingling the words adventure, revenge, rebellion, and heroism. I would like the topoi of vengeance films and the allegorical qualities of animal stories to merge in this film in a dynamic, thrilling, and undeniably emotive way.

There is no question that when faced with betrayal and friendship, the audience must take sides. I would like Lili, the thirteen year-old girl, to be our mirror. Through her actions, we will be confronted by the mechanism of confabulations. Her coming of age will be the alarming example of what we hope never to raise our children to become. Still, because Lili is a courageous girl with a pure heart, in the end, she is brave enough not to step in line … our line; the line of fathers and parents. She has the courage to rebel and contradict, to lay down her arms, even at the possible cost of her own life.

My goal is for us to root for Hagen and Lili together. For Hagen to fight back; for Lili to understand that Hagen's rebellion is just. By way of this, we too can be cleansed and return home with the knowledge that the decision is in our hands: we have the choice not to become phony, deceitful adults.

This film interweaves melodrama with the characteristics of adventure and vengeance movies. My intention was to demonstrate that mankind and beasts share the same universe. Only if we are able to position ourselves in the place of different species do we have the chance to lay down our arms.

Kornél Mundruczó

# INTERVIEW WITH THE DIRECTOR

*Only if we are able* to position ourselves *in the place of* different species *do we have the* chance to lay down *our arms.*

***Who is the White God? What does the film's title mean?***

I wanted to place the film in a perspective where we understand that the dog is the symbol of the eternal outcast whose master is his god. I was always very interested in the characteristics of God. Is God really white? Or does each person have their own god? White Man has proved countless times that he is only capable of ruling and colonizing. The linked words of the title harbor many contradictions, and that's why I found it so fascinating.

***This film is different from your earlier works in many ways. Could you explain what your incentive was?***

After ten years of work, I felt that a period has come to a definite end. Actually, Tender Son was the closing sentence of that chapter. I grew up in a way, and so I came to the end of teenage filmmaking. I felt that I was more interested in thoughts that demanded a different form. As a result of massive cultural decline, it was my overt desire to speak to a much wider audience and this required new form. Over the course of our work, I was confronted by several open questions, and the fact that I was able to answer them without repeating myself, in itself made me happy. But of course, this too is a Mundruczó film, from start to finish.

***How much was the present political state of Hungary a context in this film?***

The film is much more a criticism of a once and future Hungary, where typically a narrow stratum rules over a greater mass. This is becoming increasingly true for Europe as well. A cluster of the elite reserves its right to power while, as if in a political reality show, politicians are stars that we vote on and off. These are very dangerous tendencies. If we don't pay attention, one day the masses will rise up.

***What sort of Budapest did you wish to portray?***

I felt that I had to get rid of the post-Soviet, melancholic Eastern European topoi which characterized our films for the past decades. Eastern Europe exists in the midst of massive chaos, mutability, and instability; planning ahead is impossible. I was searching for spaces and images that represented this. I tried to create a new Budapest, which expresses a current relationship to the city's history.

***What prompted the idea to use dogs to depict those who are eternally outcast? What inspired the story?***

In art, it is always very difficult to find the means of describing timeless truths in a new way. Coming into contact with the literature of Coetzee was a revelatory experience. His works called attention to the fact that there is a layer below even the most outcast of all, consisting of another species of intelligent, rational beings that can be exploited in any manner by humans: animals. That's when I started wondering if it was possible to shoot a film with a dog? The task was as daunting as it was inspiring. Also, for a while, I had wanted to make a film with a young girl as a main character. In the film, a girl on the brink of adolescence must lose her innocence in the same way the dogs do. It is a mirror-story in which one strand of the story cannot exist without the other.

***What was it like working with the dogs, and what happened to them later?***

It was a therapeutic experience. It was like coming into contact with Mother Nature herself or even a bit of

the Universe: it was the big picture. It was infinity. It was a shooting process where we had to adjust to them, and not the other way around. The film is an outstanding example of the singular cooperation between two species. It was also an uplifting experience because each dog that appeared in the film came to us from shelters, and after the shooting ended, they were all adopted and found new homes.

***How did the other members of the cast prepare for joint work with the dogs? How did the actors react to this idea?***

There were no problems what-soever. But indeed, the joint work did require a different kind of attention and presence from the actors. While cooperating with the dogs, we adhered to the instructions of the US-Guide in all cases. Each scene had to be playful and painless for the animals. In a sense, the dogs became actors and the actors became dogs.

***Your script-writing team was also modified for this film. Did this have something to do with the fact that you wanted to use a new tone?***

Yes, but I've been working with this team in the theater for a while already. Kata Wéber and I have been creating social melodramas in recent years which helped bring new content into our work. Viktória Petrányi has been my co-writer and producer for a long time too. Working in a team has always been very important to me.

***The film is constructed using various elements from different genres. To what extent was the mingling of stereotypes from melodrama, adventure, and vengeance movies a conscious decision?***

It wasn't so much a mingling, but rather a new way of interpreting. It seems to me that in our disintegrating Eastern European world, these genres are present in society too. Some people's lives are soap operas while others' are thrillers. They alternate in everyday reality just as easily as we change TV channels at home. Lining up the genres to serve one bigger idea seemed like an exciting course to take. Is it really possible to infuse stereotypes with real thoughts? At times, these layers brush so closely that they penetrate each other. But all this can only be bound together by one main idea. It should never be a parody.

***The camera action, the photography work has also changed in relation to your earlier films. To what extent was this a conscious decision, and how much did it owe to the unpredictability of your 'actors?'***

I used similar camera motion in my earlier work too, but in this film I worked with a very young director of photography: Marcell Rév. Images have different meaning to him than they do to our generation. In addition, we wanted to tell this vast fairytale with lots of infused reality. But realizing this wasn't only up to us. Because of the dogs' unpredictability, we didn't know as much about the scenes beforehand as we used to know. We needed to adapt to this, almost as if we were shooting a nature documentary. I might also mention that I don't have any great desire to create form. This would quickly lead to the creator's own death, which isn't a very stimulating thought. The model of finding the right form for each film is much closer to my way of thinking.

***What emotions would you like to incite in your audience as they watch the film?***

Because this is a strongly moral film that poses strongly moral questions, the audience must arrive at moral statements. But for me, the most important thing is still to get their hearts racing while they watch.

***Why did you choose the Hungarian Rhapsody as one of the film's main motifs?***

Tom and Jerry is an important reference familiar to the whole world. So it's a catchy tune. At the same time, the fact that it is well known leads to the emptiness of the work. I was looking for music that would serve as an emblem for Hungary and also for something that has passed. In the film, a crestfallen conductor has the kids play this piece. It is juxtaposed with the fury of the dogs. It is the same fury that is closely related to the rhapsody's truth. But I was also stirred by the sight of a trumpet-playing girl, who – as in fairytales – is able to understand animals. Zsófi Psotta represents this on the screen with amazing conviction and talent.

***The film was made with a very young cast and crew. Was this a conscious decision?***

From many aspects, yes. But it was also due to constraints, because hardly anyone from my generation was available. The idea for the film came suddenly and everyone was already in the middle of other work by the time we called them. But I've changed a lot too in the past few years, and I wanted to be refreshed by the risky challenge this film posed. And that's exactly what happened. The task was new for even the most experienced dog trainers and crew members. No one had ever shot a film with 250 dogs before. Usually, dogs are only around in films to snatch a birthday cake off the table.

***After playing a main role in The Frankenstein Project, you act in this film too. Will you always be appearing in your own films from now on?***

I don't plan on it. This was an unfortunate accident that I didn't regret. The actor who was to play the Afghan cancelled at the last minute. I couldn't get anyone to replace him. Honestly, I like acting, but I like it better in other people's films.

***What are your future plans? Are there things you'd consciously carry on into your next films?***

For me, this is the beginning of grownup filming, but I'd also like to continue telling fairytales. And the atmosphere of a new Eastern Europe is also important to me, because the Eastern European soul is the same as it was, but everything has changed around it. I believe it is my task to give an account of this.

***The last forty minutes of the film displays images never seen before. Why was this essential?***

These are the moments when masses revolt. This is Europe's current fear: the uprising of the masses. And they are right to be afraid. I was searching for iconic images to represent this, so we would see the direction we are taking when we refuse to place ourselves in the position of another species, the adversary, or the minority. I wanted to show their perspective. Art must never give up its critical stance. It must hold a mirror up to the face of society.

## PROTON CINEMA

Proton Cinema is a Budapest-based independent film and theatre production company. Established in 2003 by producer Viktória Petrányi and director Kornél Mundruczó, the company's aim is to provide space and opportunity for creative people who want to see the world and have it seen.

Beside film and theatre production, Proton creates and organizes events and helps young artists realize their first projects. The company participates in projects that experiment with combining motion picture and other forms of art.

Proton works with an 'island' philosophy – forming groups of the members of its team and tailoring them for the projects it works on.

In 2008, Proton Cinema launched its service production department with a team of professionals who offer their expertise matching production values to the needs of the content.

One year later the company expanded its activities and started to manage independent theatre performances of Kornél Mundruczó.

## POLA PANDORA

In 1999 Karl Baumgartner and Reinhard Brundig founded PolaPandora to produce Leos Carax' film POLA X. 15 years later the company still exists and has since produced the fine Arthouse films LE CHIAVI DI CASA by Gianni Amelios (2004), ON THE PATH by Jasmila Zbanic (Berlinale Competition 2009), THE EXCHANGE by Eran Kolirin (Venice Film Festival 2011) and 2012 again a film by Leos Carax HOLY MOTORS (Festival de Cannes Competition). In the same year Michael Weber became a partner at Pola Pandora. The first two films under his Management, WHITE GOD and LE MERAVIGLIE by Alice Rohrwacher will both premiere in Cannes 2014. LE MERAVIGLIE will be in Competition and WHITE GOD in Un Certain Regard.

## FILMPARTNERS

Filmpartners is one of the leading Hungarian film production companies with 25 award winning feature films, documentaries and more than 800 television commercials. The company produces high quality creative content since 20 years and is proud to be one of the biggest private financier and fundraiser in the local film industry.

Recent productions: MIRAGE, MY WOMEN, BIBLIOTHEQUE PASCAL, HUNKY BLUES, TRANSMISSION, DELTA, OVERNIGHT

## CHIMNEY

We are storytellers at heart and use our film and communication expertise to produce over 6000 films for more than 60 countries every year. We specialize in a new and unique approach that covers each step of the creation process, from conception all the way through development, production, and world-class post-production.

Founded in Stockholm in 1995, our success has come from a belief in working with the most talented within an environment that fosters creativity, innovation, and joy. Through our focus on quality over quantity, we help clients achieve entertaining and impactful moving images across all media, including feature films, documentaries, music videos, TV commercials, internal communication, B2B, and web-based film. We're aiming to be the world's best with every project.

## KORNÉL MUNDRUCZÓ

Kornél Mundruczó was born in Hungary in 1975. PLEASANT DAYS, his first feature film, was awarded the Silver Leopard in Locarno in 2002. His second feature film, JOHANNA – a filmic opera adaptation of the story of Joan of Arc – was presented in Cannes Un Certain Regard in 2005. DELTA was In Competition at Cannes 2008 and was awarded the FIPRESCI prize. In 2010, TENDER SON – THE FRANKENSTEIN PROJECT was also presented in Cannes Competition.

## FILMOGRAPHY

2014 WHITE GOD
feature, 119 min.

2010 TENDER SON –
THE FRANKENSTEIN PROJECT
feature, 105 min.

2008 DELTA
feature, 92 min.

2005 JOHANNA
feature, 83 min.

2005 LOST AND FOUND –
SHORT LASTING SILENCE
short, 20 min.

2004 LITTLE APOCRYPHA NO. 2
short, 15 min.

2003 JOAN OF ARC ON THE NIGHT BUS
short opera, 24 min.

2002 LITTLE APOCRYPHA NO. 1
short, 5 min.

2002 PLEASANT DAYS
feature, 85 min.

2001 AFTA – DAY AFTER DAY
short, 25 min.

2000 THIS I WISH AND NOTHING MORE
graduation film, 78 min.

## CAST

Lili:
ZSÓFIA PSOTTA

Hagen:
LUKE AND BODY

Daniel (father):
SÁNDOR ZSÓTÉR

Old Man:
SZABOLCS THURÓCZY

Bev:
LILI MONORI

Music teacher:
LÁSZLÓ GÁLFFI

Elza (mother):
LILI HORVÁTH

## CREW

Director:
KORNÉL MUNDRUCZÓ

Screenplay:
KATA WÉBER
KORNÉL MUNDRUCZÓ
VIKTÓRIA PETRÁNYI

Producer:
VIKTÓRIA PETRÁNYI

Co-producers:
KARL BAUMGARTNER
MICHAEL WEBER
VIOLA FÜGEN
FREDRIK ZANDER
GÁBOR KOVÁCS
JESSIKA ASK

Executive producer:
ESZTER GYÁRFÁS

Associate producer:
MALTE FORSSELL
ALEXANDER BOHR

Line producer:
JUDIT SÓS

Cinematographer:
MARCELL RÉV

Editor:
DÁVID JANCSÓ

Costume designer:
SABINE GREUNIG

Sound:
THOMAS HUHN and
GÁBOR BALÁZS

Music:
ASHER GOLDSCHMIDT

Production designer:
MÁRTON ÁGH

Production manager:
GÁBOR TÉNI and
FRIEDERIKE SOPHIE
STEINBECK

Animal coordinator /
technical advisor:
TERESA ANN MILLER

Hungarian lead trainer:
ÁRPÁD HALÁSZ

Make-up / hair supervisor:
OLIVER ZIEM-SCHWERDT

## DISTRIBUTIE NEDERLAND

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1074 HP Amsterdam
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## TECHNICAL DETAILS

production year: 2014
length: 119 minutes
color

## PERS & MARKETING

Voor meer informatie over de film kunt u contact opnemen met **Film Incompany**

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