



The Chambermaid

 PICTURE TREE
INTERNATIONAL



Genre period drama, romance
Length 100 mins
Language Slovakian, Czech, German, Hungarian
Producers Bright Sight Pictures (SK), CINEART TV Prague (CZ)
Director Mariana Čengel Solčanská
Screenwriters Mariana Čengel Solčanská, Hana Lasicová
Cinematographer Ladislav Janošťák
Costume Designer Katarína Štrbová Bieliková
Architect Tomáš Berka
Make-up Artist Martin Blizniak
Editor Ondrej Azor
Music Composer Vladimír Martinka
Country of Origin: Slovakia, Czech Republic
Production Company: Bright Sight Pictures (SK), CINEART TV PRAGUE (CZ)
Domestic Distributor: Continental film (SK) CinemArt (CZ)
World Sales: Picture Tree International

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LOGLINE

Just before WW I. Two young women, born the same year into a different social world, become friends and shyly discover their love in a rigid society, world dominated by men and conventions

SHORT SYNOPSIS

Just before World War 1, the fifteen-year-old poverty-stricken Anka from a small Slovak town arrives in Prague to be a maid in a wealthy family. She meets Resi, the daughter of a noble family, who was born and raised to be an adornment and a trophy - of the house, of her family, of Austria-Hungary. Anka and Resi, two girls born in the same year, but at the other ends of the social ladder, find a soulmate in each other. They become best friends, lovers and the only light in a male-dominated world.



THE DIRECTOR

Mariana Čengel Solčanská

Mariana Čengel Solčanská is one of the most successful and influential Slovak directors and writer. She directed six feature films and a handful of mid- and short length films.

She is experienced in shooting various genres – from fairy tales to dramas. Her political thriller films *The Kidnapping* and *The Scumbag* had a massive social and political impact and gained record breaking box office in Slovakia.

Mariana Čengel Solčanská is also a novelist, she wrote six novels so far. She's married with one child and lives in Bratislava



Director Statement

The storyline of *The Chambermaid* is set between 1912 and the spring of 1919. Unlike the original novel, the film story is more consistent and focuses on the homosexual preference of two young women. This phenomenon was an utter taboo subject during the period this story takes place in. The given historical period, i.e. years before the First World War, the war years and a short post-war period will define the visual aspect of the film for the most part. This time span, accompanied by the gradual switch from the old world into a new one, even in minimal indications, but still changes the atmosphere of the period of Austro-Hungarian monarchy's end. While the changes (people, manners, fashion, technical revolution, and art) are striking all around out there, the people in the manor house are still trying to stay in the old order. But similarly to the monarchy, this house cannot resist the changing spirit of the time. These changes can very pleasantly complete the storyline of our film and give each new period a special feeling. We plan to focus on these details through which we will portray the emotion from the change of time and the development of characters and the story.


In terms of realization, this film is based on intimacy, detail and tension. The quality of production elaboration is crucial for us. The cast is represented by Czech and Slovak actors and we are engaging the best Czech and Slovak professional crew as well.

Our story is told through the optics and limited view of the main character, the chambermaid Anka. She finds the poetics and beauty in the details, such as when the sun beams rest on the polished windows and dissolve into rainbow colours, when geraniums bloom, when dough rises, when a compote turns out well, when you can slide on a waxed floor or when a noble child falls asleep on Anka's breasts. Sex scenes and nude bodies are portrayed with secrecy, obscuring more than they reveal.

What is exposed are the feelings and inner worlds of the characters. We want to look at events and space through Anka's eyes. It will not be her subjective view, but the camera will be constantly following her, we will watch her in the long one-shot compositions and the mise-en-scène of surrounding objects and characters will be shown as involuntary and accidental, although in reality it will require precise preparation.

To achieve this feeling, we want to use wide angle optics with shorter focal length, so that even in interiors we feel that the image is full of information. This way the camera can be close to Anka and at the same time it can do a medium shot, or detail and see the large space around the actor. We put great emphasis on the quality of interior design, costumes and props, as they must correspond to the lavishness (or, conversely, poverty) of the period environment. On the one hand we want to create a plain and ornament-free world of maid's room, on the other hand a garish world full of unnecessary and obsolete relics of the monarchy and its gradual transformation into the interwar reality when women's hats no longer have stuffed birds or crepe roses on the top, long skirts are no longer dragged in the mud and horses are replaced by cars.

The lighting solution will bring a feeling of old world's elegance that passes through the feeling of permanent tension resulting from the war to eternal twilight. The period in which *The Chambermaid* takes place is characterized by the interweaving of gas and paraffin lamps with electric lighting. Households are beginning to use tungsten fibre as the source of light in electric lamps. These historical facts will define the atmosphere of night streets and interiors.

A close-up photograph of a woman with her hair styled up, wearing a large, white, ruffled lace headpiece. She is looking downwards with a somber expression. The background is dark and out of focus, with some warm, bokeh light spots on the right side.

The manor house interior and its luminous atmosphere will be carried out in several light installations. Daylight will characterize the season and the given time shift. We are going to work with the atmospheres of a cloudy day, a sunny summer day or a spring day, while we will involuntarily metaphorically demonstrate the twilight of monarchy by lighting inducing permanent twilight (together with stratifying mess, chaos and neglect) into manor house. The viewer will feel the nature of the historically gloomy circumstances in which the manor house finds itself. The hint of female conspiracy and the need to conceal it and cover their backs must be visible in each shot.

This *mise-en-scène* will be rather cost-saving with emphasis on expression and dialogue. Some images, mostly difficult psychological situations will be situated in a stylized dreariness, so that the coldness of the interpersonal relations between the household members and the bleakness of the possible solutions are apparent. The camera will seemingly adapt to the actors, it will see what they can see. The atmosphere of the film will be defined by the shooting style. We will avoid the purposeless handheld camera. Whenever the *mise-en-scène* requires it, we will shoot the longest possible sequences of action with precisely composed single-shots, using intra-image editing.

We will respect the architecture of the premises and the size of the windows and we will consciously work with them at construction of lighting sets. The colour palette will be moderate and more or less monochromatic. Costumes and decorations will be muted in terms of colours with the conscious omission of synthetic colour tones. Artistically, it will evoke real authenticity in the final visual. We are planning to use classic visual and optical methods where we can. The idea is to work with the actual reality in front of the camera as much as possible. It means that the chroma key screen for digital animations in post-production work will be used only sparingly.

Anka doesn't speak much in the story, her answers are brief. The film's story is linear and yet fragmental. The days look all the same, they are indistinguishable from one another. Years pass in the same manner. Time is only slightly reflected on people's faces, changes in fashion, on carpets worn thin and fading curtains. The camera in the film gives importance to the same things that fascinate the maid. It takes over her optics, sees what she can see in the same way. Secrets that are hidden from the maid, are hidden from the camera, too. However, it can see female intimacy, childbirth, death or crying. The music will combine elements of classical orchestration and situational composition. Piano in the salon versus the maid's Hungarian folk song. Both audio and video post-production will be challenging, but we will undoubtedly create a film that is going to enrich European film industry because we aim to create a comprehensive, enmeshed and historically and humanly accurate picture.

The Chambermaid is not just the story of Anka, a "bastard" from a small town full of prejudices. Her story is highly relevant even today, when Europe has become home to new citizens, to refugees from countries where women have the same position like European women had a hundred years ago. History again functions as a textbook. A film about our history should not only act on emotions, but also point to an ongoing problem of the weaker sex, such as constantly being in someone's service, continual silence and expected obedience.

The Chambermaid offers a deep immersion into the human soul and at the same time an insight into the European pre-war politics seen by ordinary people, who were shocked by the presence of war itself and the decline of Europe they once knew. It is a story that is based on personal drama but does not forget to show the dramatic plot line of an important era in the history of Europe.

A woman in a dark, ruffled historical dress is shown in profile, looking down. She is in a dimly lit room, possibly a hallway or a room with a staircase, as indicated by the wooden railings and steps visible in the background. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows, creating a somber and intimate atmosphere.

LONG SYNOPSIS

The Chambermaid is a feature romantic historical drama. The main character is Anka – a fifteen-year-old girl who must leave her house in Banská Štiavnica after her stepfather moves in with his own children. Anka says goodbye to her mother who she'll never see again and arrives to Prague in order to become a chambermaid in a wealthy family. Sparkling capital city of Austria-Hungary pulsates with ethereal life, that will remain hidden from Anka forever, as she'll be a maid in a house of a noble family. Its colourful interiors contrast with dark small corridors, in which the invisible servants spend their days and nights. Anka can only wondrously watch this world in which she must do the laundry and take care of morning urine.

However, on the other side of social ladder is not everything shipshape either. The eldest daughter of the Gracious Lord is Resi, who was born in the same year as Anka.

She's barely an adult now but her mother, a noble lady originally from Czech Bohemia, forces her to obey the social expectations. The arranged wedding with a good parti supposed to be a ticket from her golden cage, but the reality of marriage is not what Resi imagined.

The world back then had very strict social norms. The maids would have to keep quiet and tidy the house, the noble ladies would give birth and take care of the children, grant their husbands everything and not be concerned about politics or other male topics. Not long after the wedding, Resi finds out that her relationship will not be any different. Gustav takes her attention – and her body – for granted. Resi's love and affection towards Anka, even physical, is a rescue and when she finally gives birth to Gustav's child – a daughter – she convinces her mother that Anka should become her nurse, so that the two of them can be together more often.



Soon after Resi comes back from her honeymoon, the First World War breaks forth and changes the lives of everyone living in the mansion forever. Resi's father is the high-ranking official who finds a partner to talk to in his son-in-law, not caring about any war opinions from the ladies in the house. Gradually, the male residents are called off to the War, leaving only women, children and the Gracious Lord in the mansion.

Paradoxically, the War is the happiest time for Anka and Resi. Both young women become best friends, soulmates, lovers, even for only a little while. But nothing lasts forever and when their relationship is no longer a secret, Anka is forbidden to ever see both Resi and her daughter who Anka raised from the baby. Without Anka and after Gustav's arrival from the War, Resi falls into despair.

The story ends shortly after the War does. Gustav wants to try his luck abroad, taking his wife with him. Resi must obey but decides to act radically - she leaves her only child with Anka. Only that way, she can be sure her daughter will be well and at the same time, she can give Anka the living proof of her love. When the Austria-Hungary falls apart, so do the residents of the mansion. Everyone who survived the War comes home, into the new homeland or travels abroad in search for new, better life.

Anka goes home to Banska Stiavnica, too. After years living in the mansion, she comes back into now empty, small country house where she'll raise the noble daughter of her one and only love.



THE PRODUCERS

BRIGHT SIGHT PICTURES

We provide creative, production and marketing support to various audiovisual works, mostly targeted on director-driven projects. We believe in creativity, transparency, novelty and sustainability. Our goal is to cultivate artistic freedom while maintaining a commercial sensibility.

Currently, we work on postproduction of a romantic comedy *Avalanche of Love* (d. Jakub Machala, release May 2022), period historical drama *The Chambermaid* (d. Mariana Čengel Solčanská, release October 2022), pre-production of a documentary portrait *As Long As I Live* (d. Roman Ďuriš) and development of a series *Little Big League* (d. Jakub Machala). We're also Green Screen Ambassadors for sustainable filmmaking in Slovakia.

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THE PRODUCERS

Radka Babincová producer, Bright Sight Pictures

Radka has worked as a project development manager in one of the largest production companies in Slovakia and also in the production of several films and series. She studied at the prestigious UCLA in Los Angeles.

She is a co-founder and producer of Bright Sight Pictures. Radka's goal is to use her production and management skills and bring new original stories and support the visions of the authors.

Simona Bago Móciková producer, Bright Sight Pictures

Simona's experienced in production, distribution, and marketing field. She worked as a strategist and exhibitors' relationship manager in a theatrical distribution company, copywriter, and digital marketing manager. She co-founded production company Bright Sight Pictures.

Simona's passionate about storytelling, behavioral sciences and she's also a Green Screen Ambassador for sustainable filmmaking in Slovakia. Her goal is to cultivate artistic freedom while maintaining a commercial sensibility and engage audiences with socially responsible marketing that makes difference.

Viktor Schwarcz producer, CINEART TV PRAGUE

Viktor is one of the most skilled and successful film producers in Czech Republic. He has produced roughly 90 feature films, TV serials and films made to order. His films are regularly nominated or awarded on the worldwide as well as local film festivals.



KEY CAST

Anka / Dana Droppová
Resi / Radka Caldová
Líza / Vica Kerekes
Gracious Lady / Zuzana Mauréry
Kristína / Anna Geislerová
Gustav / Cyril Dobrý
Gracious Lord / Karel Dobrý
Janci / Peter Nádasdi
Štefan / Lukáš Pelč
Grandmother / Gabriela Dolná
Widover / Marko Igonda
Anka's Mother / Mariana Čengel Solčanská

CREW

Director: Mariana Čengel Solčanská
Screenplay: Hana Lasicová, Mariana Čengel Solčanská
Producer: Bright Sight Pictures, CINEART TV Prague
Cinematographer: Ladislav Janošťák
Costume Designer: Katarína Štrbová Bieliková
Architect: Tomáš Berka
Make-up Artist: Martin Blizniak
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WORLD SALES

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