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An Interview with Agnieszka Smoczynska, Director of *The Lure*

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Abstract

This is an interview with Agnieszka Smoczynska, Director of *The Lure* (2016).

Author Notes

Rubina (Ruby) Ramji is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Cape Breton University. After serving as a Chair of the Religion, Film and Visual Culture Group for the American Academy of Religion and then on the steering committee, Rubina continues to serve on the Executive Committee for the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion as President and is the Film Editor of the *Journal of Religion and Film*. Her research activities focus on the areas of religion, media and identity, religion in Canada, and religion and immigration.

An Interview with Agnieszka Smoczynska, Director of *The Lure*
By Rubina Ramji



The Lure is a Polish film that screened at the 2016 Sundance Film Festival in the World Cinema Competition. It won the top World Cinema prize. *The Lure* can be described as a rock opera, a horror movie and fairytale story about mermaids all rolled up into one. Rubina Ramji, Film Editor and reviewer for the *Journal of Religion and Film* had the opportunity to interview Agnieszka Smoczynska about her feature film.

When discussing the element of the mythical mermaids, Ramji indicated that they were treated extremely poorly by most of the people they met on land; they were prostituted, their singing abilities were used to make money by a local band and the bar where they were forced to

work for free made hand-over-fist in money when they performed. Their personal dream was to go to the United States, a fantastical place filled with sparkling water, pristine beaches and palm trees. Director Agnieszka Smoczyńska acknowledged that they indeed were a metaphor for the “immigrant,” as many Polish people wanted to go to America, to have a better life.

For Smoczyńska, the mermaids represented innocence. She didn't want to hide their otherness. Even though they were half-human, they were also fishy and smelly. She wanted to create a modern package of the siren myth, cruel beings that ate humans and led them to their deaths with their siren call. When asked where she got her images of the mermaids from, she explained that in the 14-16th centuries, mermaids were considered sisters of dragons. They were half ugly, and she wanted to reproduce that in her film, making Golden and Silver beautiful faced beings with bodies covered in mucous and slime – in fact, this represented the bodily fluids that young girls encounter as their bodies come of age: they menstruate, they ovulate, their bodies start smelling and feeling different.

Ramji asked Smoczyńska about the bars and nightclubs that existed in 1980s Poland: it turns out that her mother ran two clubs and so she spent much of her youth in such places. They were spaces filled with erotica, vodka and sadness. Agnieszka encountered the tense feelings of sexuality in these clubs, but didn't feel like she was taken advantage of herself. She saw how vodka was used by everyone to numb themselves, to the point where they didn't care about the hard life they lived under Russian rule. She said that vodka was given to the Polish people to keep them from rising against their sordid lives under the Russians. The use of music in *The Lure* was used to visualize sensitivity and harmony.

Although some of the characters in the film used the mermaids as objects, there was also a sense of unfulfilled motherhood. Although the majority of the humans in the film treated the

mermaids atrociously, Golden chose to remain with the humans and evolve, as both human and animal. For this, she was willing to pay the price with her life. Her sister Silver chose to return back to the ocean, as she could not live amongst the cruelty and viciousness of humans.

Agnieszka Smoczynska provides a glimpse into the past, at a time when life in Poland was cruel and so people were cruel. Bars were her mother's livelihood, so she doesn't see them as a place that was horrible – *The Lure* captures her youth well; it expresses life for the Polish people living under Russian rule, the sadness of humanity and the cruelty of life she saw around her daily, and the innocence of her own youth – and her loss of it.