



28. Settimana Internazionale  
della Critica di Venezia

world premiere



# CLASS ENEMY

(Razredni sovražnik)

by **Rok Biček**

# Synopsis

Due to a huge difference in the way they perceive life, the relationship between students and their new German language teacher becomes critically tense. When one of the students commits suicide, her classmates accuse the teacher of being responsible for her death. Emotions run so high, the entire school and the parents becomes involved, but everyone has their own reason for seeing the situation in black and white.

#### La Repubblica about CLASS ENEMY:

*"Inspired by Haneke and Mungiu, the 29 year old director creates a thriller-like tension, playing with hidden potentially explosive everyday details: one wrong word or gesture could cause the situation to escalate."*

#### Press screening:

Thur, August 29, 11.30, Casino

#### Public screenings:

Fri, August 30, 14.00, Sala Darsena  
Sat, August 31, 19.30, Casino

## Interview with the director

by Špela Barlič (President of the Slovenian Critics' Association)

### INSPIRATION

The story is based on true events I experienced at grammar school, when a third-year girl committed suicide. This was followed by a spontaneous rebellion by her classmates against the school system and teachers, which started calming down after about a week. The rebellious students did not have a specific enemy to fight against, since they could not directly blame anyone for the death of their classmate. Lighting candles on the school stairs, reading a manifesto on the school radio and boycotting classes became the means of giving vent to personal frustrations. At the same time the incident inspired me ten years later. During a more detailed research of these events I found out a lot about the mutual relationships of the main participants and tense situations going on between them back then. This served as a strong framework for the story and as the basis for most of the scenes in the film.

### REBELLION

As far as the story is concerned, I was not interested in the real reason for the girl's suicide. This event was the triggering moment that pulled the story forward. I was interested in the dynamics of the relationships between the schoolmates, the way they used a personal tragedy for their rebellion, and the ease with which they blamed a professor. I was fascinated in how the classroom as a group protagonist unites around a single idea, but when the system crumbles, they argue between themselves. That is a classic pattern of revolutions, which need a common enemy to bring the group together. At the moment when the enemy has been conquered and the goal achieved, the group falls apart.

The one who experiences the greatest transformation is Luka, similarly as those who settle scores after revolutions. Who were the partisan execution-

ers who committed the mass killings of their opponents after World War II? Probably people who had gone through a difficult experience, which had marked them deeply. Emotionally wounded people had turned into insensitive and vengeful individuals. Of all the students Luka's frustration is the most severe. He cannot deal with the loss of his mother, therefore he channels the negative emotions into a rebellion against an apparent enemy. The burden carried by Luka is the spark which ignites the fire. Had the teacher of German not existed, he would have had to make him up.

### CHARACTERS AND CAST

The character of the teacher is inspired by my high-school mathematics professor, who was very demanding and, understandably, hated among the students. However, when I talk about him with my former classmates today, most of us see him in a positive light. I learned most "mathematics" from his explanation why it is so very important to figure out what the graph will look like just by looking at its function. "When you are doctors in the emergency room," he said, "you will have to quickly infer from a few symptoms what is wrong with the patient – before you actually put him on the operating table, truly open him up and check what is wrong." Our math professor was not one of those who demonstrate authority for its own sake. Instead – similarly as Robert – he wanted to teach us how to think and prepare us for life.

The characters in the script were created in two ways. With the co-writers we built on the true situations and by blending the character traits of the real actors we came up with nine characters, representing the outline of the whole class. My assistant and I then searched for these characters among the today's secondary school students. While I focused on those who volunteered themselves, she paid at-

tention to those who remained in the background. In this way we found the girl who played Sabina. You have to look for those “unnoticeable” characters; otherwise you end up only with one type of people – those who feel the need to perform. In our film we also needed those who are shy. I like young actors not to act, but to live the characters their own age. The costumes, which were actually their personal clothes from the real life, also helped us achieve this.

The characters of the professors were created while keeping certain actors and their character traits in mind. This brought certain energy to the shoot, which I’m interested to see in actors. I’m fascinated by the way of acting where the actors base the acting on themselves, not on something they imagine in advance – so that they don’t act but live the life of their characters. I want to bring out what is the deepest, most genuine, most hidden and thus also most precious in them. The opinions among the professional actors about this way of working vary, though. The film *Ajami*, directed by Scandar Copti and Zaron Shani in 2009, which I saw at the student festival in Tel Aviv three years ago, had a profound influence on me. The after-screening discussion with Yaron Shani about his way of working with the non-professional actors in his film was the key reason why I decided to take such a step. Unlike *Ajami*, where all actors played themselves, in *Class Enemy* I used a combined approach. Because of this decision it was very important how to choose the cast. I think that the combination of non-professional and professional actors is only interesting if you can take advantage of the energy created between them. I think we succeeded in doing it, since the friction I needed between Igor Samobor and the young actors was already established at the first day of shoot, when they met each other. Namely, purposefully I hadn’t confronted them on any of the rehearsals before the shooting started. I wanted the professor to remain a perfect stranger for them, so that they couldn’t establish any friendly relations with him, which could affect their acting on the subconscious level. Perhaps this approach seems unusual, but in my case it turned out to be very efficient, which is why I intend to keep working in this manner in the future.

## THE PROCESS

After the research for the film had been completed, I couldn’t get anywhere for almost a year. The story seemed “too big” for a first film, with a huge number of complex characters, which is hard to control. I had to mature for it, but I lost my way in the process a few more times. Due to the nature of the story, the relationships, as well as because of my lack of confidence, difficult energies were established at the shooting. It wasn’t easy, but when I see the film now I think it has just the energy we were trapped in all along.

I wanted to lead the film characters through the story in such a manner that it would be hard for the viewers to take any side. Probably everyone will end up sympathizing with one of them because of their own views or social position, but I wish the audience to be undecided in the end. This story doesn’t have a winner, as each of the characters continues their lives with a lighter or heavier burden originating in that classroom.

I kept discussing the story and their viewpoints with the young actors. After a bit of safe theorizing we soon started discussing personal experience. This led to the fact that they started taking personal attitudes towards the actions of their characters. I wanted us to explore all the interpersonal relations of our nine characters – from what they think of each other to what they actually do or do not reveal. At the rehearsals it was necessary that everyone became aware of all the feelings and experiences they had repressed. If you want the actors to react in a genuine way, they have to recall those feelings and experiences. Therefore it was important to establish mutual trust. The personal stories they shared with me allowed me to draw out the reactions I needed from them at the shooting. Many of them hated me for that at that moment and would probably not take part in it had they known what was in store for them.

## (INTER)GENERATIONAL DIVIDE

I think film art should address issues that reflect the national as well as global society. In *Class Enemy* this is achieved through the microcosm of secondary-school students, who are an extremely vulnerable

generation. As such they are – knowingly or unknowingly – sensitive to everything happening to them or around them.

The rebellion of the students against the school system, symbolized by the strict professor, is a reflection of the general dissatisfaction in a society that grabs at every reason, justified or not, to rebel against the established social norms. In these extreme situations a rift between two very different generations, which has only been deepened by the tragedy, is revealed in the story. It’s about communication breakdown. In fact Robert does something extraordinary – he analyses the tragedy through the subject matter discussed in the classroom. All of his claims are based on the life and work of Thomas Mann. He thinks about the title of the essay very carefully. He is aware that the reaction will probably not be favourable, but he takes the chance because he hopes to stir up something in someone. And he does: Mojca comprehends it.

Not only today’s students, but also teachers these days are not what they used to be. During the preparations for the shooting I experienced how it is to be on the other side. For two years I’ve taught at one of the Slovenian secondary schools, where I was seen as one of the more demanding teachers. Unlike Robert I did allow some democracy to my students up to a certain point. We had practical classes in filming and editing in modern studios. In such conditions we could have made anything, but a weather report was as far as we got. I didn’t know how to motivate them. I asked them what they were interested in, kept telling them that they have better equipment at their disposal than I’d had at the Film Academy, and that nobody took that much interest in me in the secondary school. I caught myself talking like Robert. Of course it is about a wider social problem, but this is also a family story. All students have families which are often the origin and core of their problems. They are apathetic and don’t have any goals, because they’ve got everything they wanted. Parents think that they are just providing everything they didn’t have, but actually they just stifle their kids. Thus the children no longer acknowledge any authority, but at the same time they also cannot stand up for themselves – they’re just aggressive, because deep down they feel they can’t do anything. If somebody else keeps doing everything instead of you, it might feel

good in the beginning, but gradually you develop a feeling of incompetence. Robert wants the students to stand on their own feet, but obviously you hit a man if they poke you where it hurts the most.

## NATIONAL FRAMEWORK

Any nation occupied by the Germans at any time, which has problems with their youth today, could see itself in *Class Enemy*. I believe every teacher of German in these territories has probably been called Hitler at least once in his career. Had Robert not taught German, he could not have been called a Nazi. His lectures would lose an important subtext. Robert’s words are wise, but since he talks in German, he automatically conjures up an age-old memory in us. The fact that it is a language teacher also opens up other possibilities in terms of the script – you can refer to literature, literary heroes, and make certain parallels. With his opus and life, Thomas Mann is a logical choice for Professor Robert.

Only someone not burdened by a society may show a mirror to it. Therefore a Chinese immigrant, stating “you Slovenians either kill yourselves or each other” sums up the frustration of the whole Slovenian society. The first half of the statement originates in the fact that we Slovenians are among the most suicidal nations in the world. The second half, however, is rooted in the mass killings immediately after World War II, when the partisans retaliated against the defeated quislings. Both problems are still strongly present in the Slovenian society today, and it looks it is going to stay this way.

## SPACE

The school represents a place of relationships and tension between the personal and public, between the individual and society, and at the same time a place where students are associated in a class, which functions as a group protagonist in the story against the hated teacher of German, who in the conviction of the students is the main culprit for the suicide of their classmate. The struggle between the class and the teacher can take place only within the arena represented by the school. The final scene in

the film, which is at the same time the only 'dream' scene, takes place on a ship taking the students on their school leaving trip to Greece. Here the class is released for the first time from the four walls of the school, and it seems that in this way they are stepping into freedom. At the same time, what awaits them is uncertainty and a reckoning with their desires and plans. This trip marks the end of their path together, and each of them will continue on into life with their own personal baggage.

I spent enough time at the filming location to see how the space functioned. The story is largely based on space. Let's take the example of the radio booth, which was one of the few things we built in the school especially for the film. The actual event took place in the secretary's office. The scene was initially written in this manner, too, until at one of the meetings the production designer mentioned that he had imagined the whole scene in a glass radio booth, because that had been what they'd had at his school. I immediately thought that was a better solution. We placed the students into a glass cube and thus supplemented the scene with a visual contact between the rebellious students on one side and helpless teachers on the other side of the glass. This was an essential upgrade, stemming from our deliberations about space.

## AESTHETICS

My three student films were marked to a great extent by long takes, as I had been affected by *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (4 luni, 3 saptamâni si 2 zile, directed by Cristian Mungiu, 2007). Partly I also used long takes in *Class Enemy*. Due to the large number of characters appearing in the individual scenes, the actors' age, as well as because of how demanding their acting interpretation was, I decided to catch the best and spontaneous moments within individual repetitions and then edit them into the most effective whole. Before the shooting Fabio Stoll, the DoP, and I watched how the school looks during wintertime and how the light travels, so that we could recreate the same conditions in the summer, when the shooting took place. We adapted the plan of the shooting to the movement of the sun, as we wanted to avoid using additional lights whenever possible. Unlike the aesthetics of the film *The Class* (Entre les murs, directed by Laurent Cantet, 2008), I saw *Class Enemy* as a calmer and more precise production, using a combination of colder colour tones to enhance the atmosphere of the film, which is primarily an exploration of the state in which the class finds itself after the classmate's suicide. Here I can point to the film *Hidden* (Caché, directed by Michael Haneke, 2005) as a model, for it uses surgical precision, coldness and indifference to explore human relations, and in this way offers the audience the chance to face the events on the screen objectively, and to come to their own conclusions.



## Technical specs

Production Company:  
Triglav film  
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Aiken Veronika Prosenc, manager/producer

Supported by the Slovenian Film Centre

Genre: **Drama**  
Running Time: **112 Minutes**  
Language: **Slovenian, German**  
Technical specs: **Color, DCP, CinemaScope, 2013**  
Aspect ratio: **1.2:35**

World premiere:  
**30 August 2013, Venice Critics' Week 2013**

## Triglav film (since 2001)

From its inception, Triglav film is focused on cinéma d'auteur type of films. Features and shorts, produced by this independent Slovenian production company, have been awarded on several film festivals. Janez Lapajne's critically acclaimed films are among the most noteworthy achievements of the contemporary Slovenian cinema. Rok Biček, director of *Class Enemy*, entered the world of cinema as a prominent student at Lapajne's PoEtika, an occasional academy for researching the art of film directing (established within the Triglav film in 2004). After theatre release of *Class Enemy* in Slovenia Triglav film team will shift its focus on Janez Lapajne's fourth feature film.

## Triglav film filmography (selection):

- 2013 **Class Enemy** (Razredni sovražnik) by **Rok Biček** – feature film
- 2012 **Who's Afraid of the Big Black Wolf?** (Kdo se boji črnega moža?) by **Janez Lapajne** – short fiction
- 2009 **Personal Baggage** (Osebna prtljaga) by **Janez Lapajne** – feature film
- 2007 **Swamp** (Močvirje) by **Luka Puš** – short fiction
- 2006 **Short Circuits** (Kratki stiki) by **Janez Lapajne** – feature film
- 2004 **Death** (Smrt) by **Sonja Prosenc** – short fiction
- 2004 **Life** (Življenje) by **Rok Biček** – short fiction
- 2002 **Rustling Landscapes** (Šelestenje) by **Janez Lapajne** – feature film



# Team

Directed by **Rok Biček**  
Written by **Nejc Gazvoda**  
**Rok Biček**  
**Janez Lapajne**  
Cinematography **Fabio Stoll**  
Edited by **Janez Lapajne**  
**Rok Biček**  
Sound Editor  
and Sound Re-Recording **Julij Zornik**  
Mixer  
Recording Mixer **Peter Žerovnik**  
Set Designer **Danijel Modrej**  
Cosumer Designer **Bistra Borak**  
Make Up Artist **Petra Hartman**  
Gaffer **Sebastijan Skvarča**  
Colorist **Willi Willinger**  
Producers **Aiken Veronika Prosenc**  
**Janez Lapajne**  
Produced by **Triglav Film**  
Supported by **Slovenski Filmski Center**  
Technical Support by **Filmski Studio Viba Film Ljubljana**  
Languages (Dialogue) **Slovenian, German**  
Subtitles **Italian, English**  
Projection **DCP**  
Duration **112 Minutes**  
Speed **24 Fr/Sec**  
Ratio **Cinemascope Color**

# Cast

Robert **Igor Samobor**  
Zdenka **Nataša Barbara Gračner**  
Saša **Tjaša Železnik**  
Nuša **Maša Derganc**  
Matja **Robert Prebil**  
Luka **Voranc Boh**  
Tadej **Jan Zupančič**  
Sabina **Daša Cupevski**  
Mojca **Doroteja Nadrah**  
Špela **Špela Novak**  
Maruša **Pia Korbar**  
Primož **Dan David Mrevlje Natlačen**  
Nik **Jan Vrhovnik**  
Chang **Kangjing Qiu**  
Sonja **Ester Dvornik**  
Janitor **Peter Teichmeister**

and others



# Biographies



## Rok Biček (director)

Already as a student, Biček's work revealed a rare confidence, backed up by a clear esthetic favoring long shots, specific color schemes and dramatic subjects narrated in an almost low-key, off-hand, but always controlled style. Like the filmmakers who inspired him, such as Michael Haneke, Christian Mungiu and Andrey Zvyagintsev, Biček plays with the potential danger lurking in small, everyday details. A gesture, a glance or the wrong word can have the potential to spark a fire. His graduation short *Duck Hunting* (2010) from the Ljubljana Academy of Theater, Radio, Film and Television was instantly acquired by ARTE. Shot in the faded colors of autumnal Slovenian wetlands, two sons pick up their father from jail, taking him on a duck hunt that quickly turns into a Greek tragedy.

### Filmography

- 2013 **CLASS ENEMY**, feature
- 2010 **DUCK HUNTING**, short, winner Best Short, Wiesbaden goEast festival, acquired by ARTE TV
- 2008 **A DAY IN VENICE**, short, nominated for Best Short Film, Ljubljana International Film Festival
- 2007 **FAMILY**, short documentary, Award International Innovative Film, International Filmfestival of the Vienna Film Academy

## Fabio Stoll (Cinematographer)

Fabio Stoll was born in 1984 in Frankfurt a.M. Germany. From 2005 to 2008 he studied Media Dramaturgy at Mainz University. He worked as an assistant camera and camera operator for theater and television productions. Since 2008 he has been studying Documentary Film and Cinematography at the University of Television and Film Munich. *Class Enemy* is his feature film debut as cinematographer.

### Filmography

- 2013 **GUERRILLA K...CHE**, documentary feature
- 2013 **CLASS ENEMY**, feature
- 2012 **FALLEN**, fiction short (Jury Award Stony Brook Film Festival, USA)
- 2012 **WITHOUT BREATH**, documentary short (also as director) (Hamptons International Film Festival).



## Igor Samobor (lead actor)

Igor Samobor is one of the most renowned theatre actors in Slovenia and he received numerous awards for his acting achievements. In 2012 he received the Borštnik Ring Award, the highest award for lifetime achievement in Slovene theatre.

### Important film roles

- Feature film **Ljubljana the Beloved** (2005) by Matjaz Klopčič (leading role of Italian soldier during the Second World War)
- Feature Film **Installation of Love** (2007) by Maja Weiss (leading role of a video artist)
- Short fiction film **Every Breath You Take** (2008) by Igor Šterk; Short Competition Programme at Venice film Festival
- 2008 Feature film **9:06** (2009) by Igor Šterk (leading role of criminal police investigator); Competition Programme at Montreal Film Festival 2009



# CLASS ENEMY

(Razredni sovražnik) by **Rok Biček**

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