

CHELMSFORD FILM CLUB

An Independent film society based in Chelmsford

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APRIL Monday 3 November 134 mins

It would be tempting to categorise this movie from director Dea Kulumbegashvili as an 'abortion' one. And yes, Nina (Ia Sukhitashvili) is an obstetrics doctor in trouble for having apparently mishandled a delivery that resulted in the baby's death. She is well-known for supplying under-the-counter contraceptive pills and carrying out unofficial, illegal abortions in outlying villages. The grieving father, furiously and disapprovingly aware of her reputation, is now demanding an inquiry into her alleged malpractice, suspecting that Nina decided that his poverty-stricken family would be better off without another mouth to feed.

However, Nina is herself deeply troubled: she drives around outlying rural areas picking up men with whom she has compulsively violent encounters: like the piano teacher in Elfriede Jelinek's eponymous novel and Michael Haneke's film adaptation. Her own repressed experience of sexual and romantic pain, and possible pregnancy, could be seen to be suggested.

So this is not the usual 'abortion issue' movie in which reactionary, anti-abortion authorities are straight-forwardly criticised and the pregnant woman is awarded compassionate centre-stage status, as in Audrey Diwan's *Happening* (2022). Neither is Nina precisely shown as oppressive or troubled as in Christian Mungiu's *4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days* (2008), or Mike Leigh's *Vera Drake* (2005). *April* is far more detached and affectless. Nina may be helping terrified and victimised young women, but she is not really on a principled mission, but rather acting out her own buried trauma.

Nina works in a modern, up to date hospital, using up to date methods and medical techniques, but the same old male attitudes and prejudices hold sway - effectively unchanged over centuries. Women's bodies are at the mercy of men and Nina's resistance to this is, could it be said, also an agonised and self-tormenting kind of submission?

An unsettling and challenging meditation on sexuality, transgression and resistance.

Our next screening: **THE CRIME IS MINE** on Monday 8 December, the pre-Christmas presentation. Don't forget to use your two FREE guest discount tickets if not already used.