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Locarno Film Festival

CONCORSO INTERNAZIONALE
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A FILM BY HANA JUŠIĆ

LOGLINE

Teresa comes into a firmly structured community of shepherds with the simple goal to fit in – she brings them turmoil instead, but she also brings the freedom.

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A cinematic still from a film showing two women in a rugged, mountainous landscape. The woman on the left is wearing a light-colored blouse with a red shawl draped over her shoulders. The woman on the right is wearing a dark blue, high-collared dress with intricate lace detailing. They are both looking off to the right with serious expressions. The background is a blurred, rocky, and hilly terrain under a bright sky.

SYNOPSIS

A Chilean woman, Teresa, comes into a firmly structured and isolated mountain community of Croatian shepherds in the early 20th century, claiming to be the widow of their émigré brother. Her arrival heavily changes the dynamics between the members of the community and brings unrest, but Teresa also brings freedom.

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DIRECTOR'S BIO



Hana Jušić

Born in 1983; obtained her MA degree in Film and TV Directing at the Academy of Dramatic Art in Zagreb. She previously graduated in Comparative Literature and English Language and Literature from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in 2007, and enrolled in the Postgraduate Doctor's Study of Literature and Film. She has written and directed several short films before directing her feature film debut, *Quit Staring at My Plate* in 2016, a Croatian-Danish co-production supported by Eurimages. The film premiered at Venice Days 2016, after which it traveled to over a hundred festivals. It received over

thirty awards including: FEDEORA for Best European Film at Venice Days, Best Director Award at Tokyo International Film Festival, Grand Prix at Crossing Europe Festival in Linz, Best Feature Film Award at Seminci in Valladolid, Best Actress Award at Vilnius International Film Festival, among others. Besides *Quit Staring at My Plate*, her screenwriting credits include two feature films and the TV series *The Last Socialist Artefact* (2021) that she co-wrote with two other writers. The series premiered at Series Mania, winning the Best Series Award in the Panorama program.

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DIRECTOR'S FILMOGRAPHY

<i>Quit Staring at My Plate</i>	2016	Feature
<i>No Wolf Has a House</i>	2015	Short
<i>Short Circuits</i>	2013	Short (co-directed with Sonja Tarokić)
<i>Terrarium</i>	2012	Short
<i>Gnats, Ticks and Bees</i>	2012	Short
<i>The Chill</i>	2011	Short

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A man and a woman in traditional Balkan attire stand in a field of sheep. The man is on the right, wearing a white shirt, dark trousers, and a purple cap. The woman is on the left, wearing a dark, long-sleeved dress. They are looking at each other. In the background, there are many white sheep and a few bare trees under a blue sky.

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

I was drawn to this story most of all by the way in which the rough reality of the shepherds' world is reflected in our times as an ever-present echo in the creation of modern society out of the smaller and almost primordial communities. In the reverberations of that echo, I wanted to talk about the women who are on the margin of that world even more than it is usual for their gender, about the women

who, in the end, from the margin assigned to them, stick their tongues out at patriarchy. Also, in this film, I wanted to explore what true human solidarity and empathy mean within the frame of rigid value systems, which are based on the feverish desire to belong or possess. In doing that, the very impossibility of communication is also of crucial importance, as a motif which generally intrigues me in my

work (because language is always inadequate). Maybe because they are deprived of the conventional means of communication, Teresa and Milena, and Teresa and Ilija really "see" one another. Such a "displaced" view allows them to save each other at least for a moment, or rather to help one another, since it is obvious that God will not help.

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INTERVIEW WITH HANA JUŠIĆ

***God Will Not Help*, set at the beginning of the 20th century, is a bit of a departure compared to your previous work. Why did you want to travel back in time?**

I traveled in time, but not in space – this story is happening right next to the city where I shot *Quit Staring at My Plate!* It was funny: someone from the Croatian Audiovisual Centre said *God Will Not Help* could be its prequel [laughter]. It reminded her of that family.

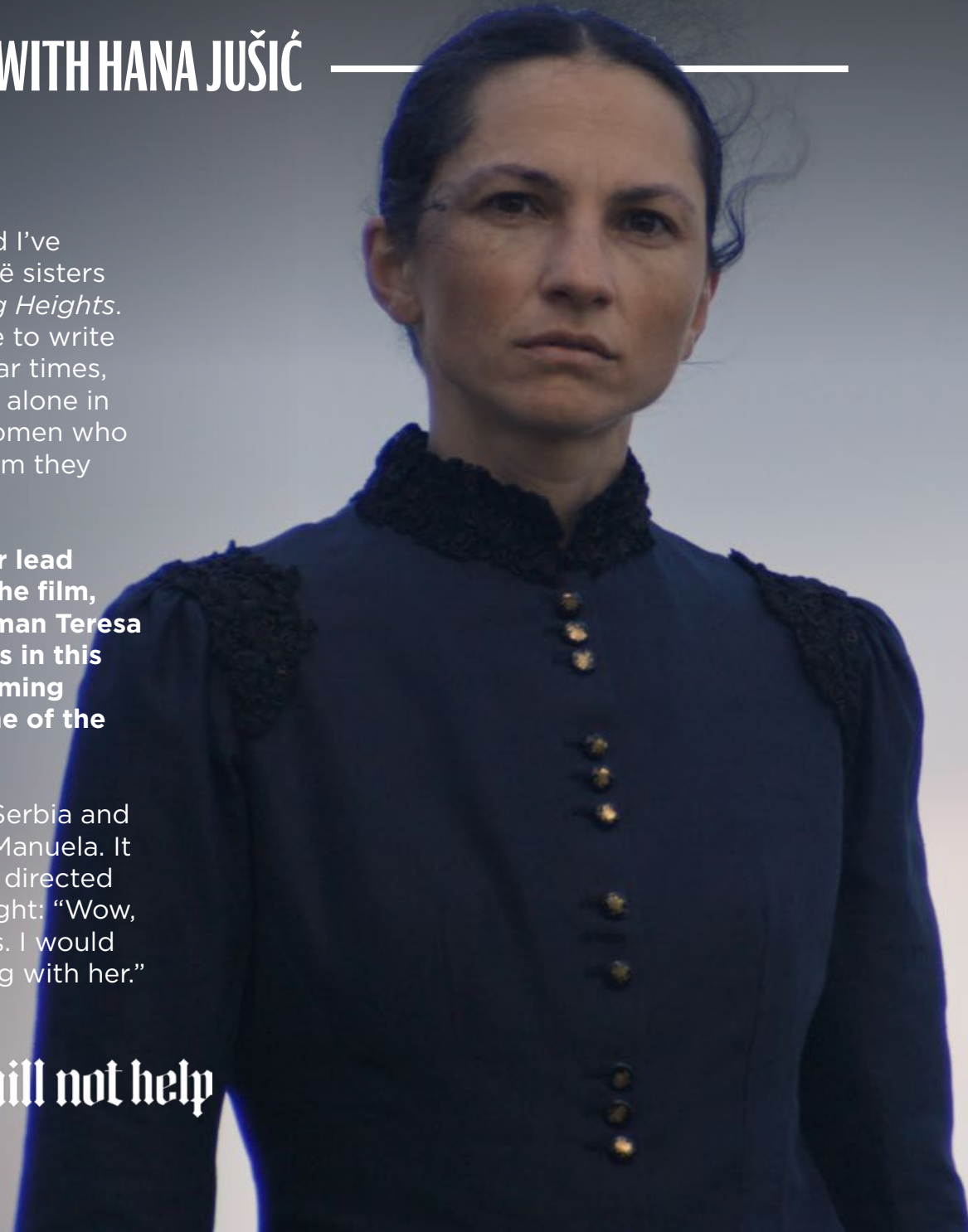
When I finished traveling with *Quit Staring at My Plate* [Jušić' feature debut, showcased at multiple film festivals], I couldn't think of anything to write about. I told this very personal story, which often happens when people make their first film, and I went: "What next?!" I used

to study literature, and I've always liked the Brontë sisters – especially *Wuthering Heights*. I thought: "I would like to write something set in similar times, about people who are alone in nature." And about women who have something in them they cannot express.

How did you find your lead Manuela Martelli? In the film, she plays Chilean woman Teresa who suddenly appears in this mountain village, claiming she's the widow of one of the brothers.

I went to a festival in Serbia and saw a short film with Manuela. It was called *Valparaiso*, directed by Carlo Sironi. I thought: "Wow, I really like this actress. I would like to make something with her."

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INTERVIEW WITH HANA JUŠIĆ

But it didn't make sense at first. She's from Chile. I'm Croatian and I work with Croatian actors. It was back in 2017 and I wasn't even sure I'd make another film. And yet I started to write about this character, thinking of Manuela Martelli, convinced that nothing would come out of it.

I wasn't censoring myself or worrying if this story was relevant. And then I filmed it – eight years later. Maybe sometimes it's better to do something without thinking about the final result. When it feels right, just do it.

You talk about a stranger here – an outsider who shows up in an isolated village. The situation is different today, people get to travel more, but they don't always welcome foreigners with open arms, either.

Back then, many people from southern Croatia left the country, heading to Argentina or Chile. Most of them never came back. To those left behind, it was as if they died. No one thought about them anymore. I wanted to explore this. For them, the fact that Teresa actually comes from there and speaks another language... It's

something they can't fathom. It's as if she came from another dimension! She's slowly learning their language, but that was one of the biggest challenges in the script. They understand each other and yet they don't. I didn't want things to get silly: I didn't want her to suddenly speak fluent Croatian after three days, or for everyone to switch to English like in some 1980s movie. I came up with this concept that people just talk to her, they deliver long monologues and don't care if she understands them or not. And many things happen precisely because people misunderstand each other. Both Ilija and Milena see something in her they desire, but it's not who she really is. They fill her up with meaning, because she can't talk to them. They are loners and outsiders as well, and to them, she could be their savior. But to those who are well-adapted to this system, she's a threat.

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As you mentioned, communication is such a big part of the film. How did you figure it out with the actors? Sometimes, they're performing what they are telling her.

When I was writing, I was thinking: "Oh God, how can we make it believable?" But then, during rehearsals, we realized that since Manuela doesn't speak Croatian at all, and the actors don't speak Spanish at all, it would make sense to just act things out. They were already trying to make each other understand certain things. It was fun to see that, imagining how you'd try to communicate with another person this way.

From the very beginning, there's a sense of threat and mystery. Was it something you wanted to embrace and play around with the fears of the villagers, as well

as audience's expectations?

I wanted people to wonder: Is she a witch? I was drawn to that idea, but I didn't like how it's usually executed. It either becomes cheap or predictable: a "witch" is banished or killed. Here, you either believe she's some supernatural being, or you don't. And you still get a story about a woman who's trampled upon by the patriarchal society. I didn't want Teresa to be a victim. I just don't like these kinds of characters. I tried to give her some power. She's in a bad situation, with people who don't trust her, but she's not powerless. I needed her to be very defiant. This way, even when threatened, it still feels like she has some secret knowledge. And that she's able to ruin them. Also, a man will not save you. That's an illusion. Teresa finally realizes that and - I will make it sound very modern - she just goes: "Fuck

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this. I'm leaving." [laughter] This title, *God Will Not Help*, portrays God as a super ego. He won't help you when you're trying to punish yourself and fit in within society, whatever the cost.

Were you referencing local folklore or any particular stories?

I gave Teresa a prayer book, with pictures. They look like folk art but then... they get weirder. Suddenly, these pictures don't belong in a prayer book anymore. I did some research on folk beliefs from that era, and they had a very strong belief in witches. They were a part of their world. When one of the villagers, Stanko, talks to Teresa, he uses expressions used to scare the witches away. Then again, the whole concept of "witches" was often used as an excuse. Men would have affairs and argue it was because a witch came to them.

It's hard to understand if they really believed in it or just used it whenever it suited them.

In any period film, people need to feel like us, but also a little bit different. Did you think about that?

I struggled with that at the beginning, because I really wanted us to be able to connect with them emotionally. One important element was the language. I used a countryside version of what we hear today in that area. I interviewed older women who live there and played it to the actors, but these women were born in the 1940s. I didn't use the language from the period I'm describing in the film, because it would feel too distant.

I wanted my characters to have a bit of that modern sensibility, too. There's a certain hierarchy in this

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society and the way it functions – to find out more about it, I talked to older shepherds about their grandfathers. I ended up with a mix of old and new. It’s believable, I think, but it doesn’t just blindly follow some ethnographic layout.

In modern stories, we’re stuck in cities and small apartments. A film like this allows you to have space. Did you try to make your own “eastern”?

Yes! I wanted to make an “eastern.” We were surrounded by all this nature, doing location scouting for years. With my DOP Jana Plečaš and costume designer Katarina Pilić, we’ve travelled the area for five or six years. We knew it so well, but this kind of nature isn’t exactly inviting. It’s windy, it gets very hot or very cold. Everything

was so difficult, and, in the end, we couldn’t showcase its beauty as much as I wanted. But yes, my intention was to make it clear that these people are surrounded by wilderness. Nature always threatens them. It can easily eradicate everything they’ve built. It was so exciting to make this film. I always used to think in terms of “family drama.” I mean, this is also one: there’s still a family at its core. As much as I wanted to escape it, the main dynamics here aren’t that different from *Quit Staring at My Plate* – or even my own family. Still, it was so liberating to leave contemporary settings and today’s problems behind. I felt free. Now, when I’m thinking about my next film, I am so open – it could even be a crime story. I already got some books from the library used by people who study criminalistics.

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ABOUT THE PRODUCER



kinorama

Kinorama is a production company specializing in the production of feature films, founded in Zagreb in 2003. Kinorama has produced 40 feature-length films, most of which are co-productions, a number of shorts, and three TV series. Some films were top box office hits in

cinemas, and all of them were screened at numerous festivals around the world, Cannes, Venice, Berlin, Toronto, Karlovy Vary, among others. Kinorama's producer Ankica Juric Tilic was awarded the Eurimages Co-production Award at the European Film Awards' ceremony in 2019.

PRODUCER'S CONTACT DATA

Kinorama
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ankica@kinorama.hr
www.kinorama.hr

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SPECIFICATION

ORIGINAL TITLE: BOG NEĆE POMOĆI

INTERNATIONAL TITLE: GOD WILL NOT HELP

GENRE: Drama

RUNNING TIME: 137 min

YEAR: 2025

WORLD PREMIERE: Concorso internazionale:
Locarno Film Festival 2025

COUNTRIES OF PRODUCTION: Croatia/Italy/
Romania/Greece/France/Slovenia

CO-PRODUCERS: Ada Solomon & Diana Caravia,
Ines Vasiljević & Stefano Sardo, Yorgos Tsourgiannis,
Didar Domehri, Aleš Pavlin & Andrej Štritof

ORIGINAL LANGUAGE: Croatian, Spanish

COLOR: Yes

ORIGINAL ASPECT RATIO (DCP): 1:1,85

SOUND FORMAT (DCP): 5:1

WORKSHOPS / RESIDENCIES / MARKETS:
Cinefondation Residence 2020 - Cannes Film Festival;
Torino Film Lab 2020/21 - ScriptLab;
Venice Gap Financing Market 2022

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CREW

Director	Hana Jušić
Screenwriter	Hana Jušić
DOP	Jana Plećaš
Editor	Jan Klemsche
Production Design	Laura Boni
Costume Design	Katarina Pilić
Sound on set	Nikos Exarhos
Sound design	Marius Leftărache
Hair & Makeup	Marija Gorogranc Petrushevska
Music/ Composers	Stavros Evangelou Iris Asimakopoulou Vasilis Chontos

CAST

Teresa	Manuela Martelli
Milena	Ana Marija Veselčić
Ilija	Filip Đurić
Nikola	Mauro Ercegović Gracin
Stanko	Nikša Butijer

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PRODUCTION COMPANY

Kinorama

Ankica Jurić Tilić

Croatia

CO-PRODUCTION COMPANIES

Micro Film

Ada Solomon
Diana Caravia

Romania

Nightswim

Ines Vasiljević
Stefano Sardo

Italy

Horsefly Films

Yorgos Tsourgiannis

Greece

Maneki Films

Didar Domehri

France

Perfo Production

Aleš Pavlin
Andrej Štritof

Slovenia

ERT

Greece

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Croatian Audiovisual Centre, Eurimages, Italian Ministry of Culture (MIC), Romanian Film Center CNC, Hellenic Film & Audiovisual Center - Creative Greece | Co-Production Window, European Union - NextGenerationEU, ERT S.A., Filming in Croatia, Aide aux Cinémas du Monde - Centre national du Cinéma et de l'Image Animée - Institut français, Slovenian Film Centre, Viba Film, HRT, Re-Act

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