

Films: Selected Shorts

Lidové noviny, May 25, 1936

Strange Food

It can happen to anyone: a man finds himself at a more or less festive board, with food placed in front of him which he has never eaten before. Usually it is some nasty marine mess, something in a shell or crustacean armor; and damn it, how are you supposed to eat the thing? With a fork? Knife? Fingers? In a situation like this the banqueter doesn't want to give himself away; so he looks around him, but as if something had just struck him at that very moment, and then launches into an animated conversation with his neighbor. (Why doesn't someone else begin eating, for heaven's sake?) Oddly enough, at that same moment, practically all the others seated at the table also fall into animated conversation with their neighbors; only one gentleman, who doesn't have anyone to talk to, begins reluctantly pursuing this strange delicacy around his plate with a fork. (Aha! Evidently a fork won't do!) Finally someone present makes the first stab at this mysterious course, more or less successfully; at this, everyone seizes the appropriate silver with relief and begins to eat, acting as if they had eaten this particular dish all their lives.

At the Banquet Table

This also can happen to anyone: a man spatters gravy or spills red wine, making a stain on the white tablecloth by his place setting. (Damn! Right in front of me!) (Hasn't anyone else spoiled the tablecloth yet? No, no one. What's the matter with them?) (I'll place my fork over the stain.) (Oh, no, now that waiter's taken it away.) (Then I'll set a roll on top of it.) (That bungling waiter's taken the roll away, too!) (Then I'll put my napkin there.) (Yes, but everyone else is still eating!) (Well, then, I'll just place my hand over it, like this.) "No, thank you, I don't care for fruit." (Great God, when will these gluttons finish?)

Man in a Dinner Jacket

A man is invited out for an evening in society; it will no doubt be formal. But upon arriving he discovers that the others are wearing grey suits, pinstripes, and similar attire; it's a wonder they didn't come in woolly slippers or gym pants! If only one of them, at least, had also worn a dinner jacket, then I wouldn't feel so alone! They'll laugh at me for being so dressed up.

Whereupon the conduct of the only man afflicted with a dinner jacket develops in one or the other of two possible ways: either he chats away heartily and behaves as nonchalantly as possible, to show that wearing a dinner jacket is nothing, really nothing at all out of the ordinary for him, and that he even goes around in one at home; or else he maintains to the very end the kindly but somewhat distant reserve of a man who knows that he alone is properly dressed, but who doesn't want to make the others feel too uncomfortable.

Sportswear

At times it happens the other way around, and a man wearing a grey or checked suit finds himself amongst others in dinner jackets and black ties. At first he is a bit insulted that he wasn't notified in advance, but then he begins to behave somewhat flamboyantly, even eccentrically, just as if he were shouting: I don't give a damn for your formality, I am a democrat and I hold you in contempt, you stuffed shirts; and furthermore, long live the revolution!

Greeting by Mistake

A gentleman going down the street suddenly gives a start; surely that is what's-his-name over there! So he bares his teeth in an enthusiastic smile and is on the verge of sweeping his hand to his hat, in order to doff it with an authoritative gesture. And at that moment, the man whom he has taken for what's-his-name turns toward him an unfamiliar and rather startled face. In that instant the hand flying up to the hat wavers, changes direction, and decides upon some inconspicuous action such as scratching behind the ear, while the enthusiastic smile hurriedly distorts itself into a vague grimace. (My good man, whatever are you thinking? That wasn't meant to be a greeting!) (You bet it wasn't. I've never seen you before in my life!)

Supposedly Being Greeted

A man is going along the street and suddenly someone greets him. (Who is it?) So he lifts his hat, and at that point encounters a rather offended look on the face of the unknown greeter. (How could you imagine that I was greeting you? That was someone else, you ninny!) So our man replaces his hat with a great show of indifference. (So MANY people greet me! It's annoying, but what can I do?)