

Books reviews

Andrei GORZO *Bunul, răul și urâtul în cinema*

Editura Polirom, Colecția „Cinema”, 2009, 360 p.

The Film Critic as Entertainer

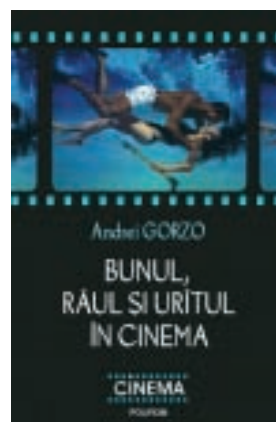
Andrei Gorzo is one of our best film critics in the younger generation, with an intense activity in some of the major Romanian magazines and reviews, especially in *Dilema veche*. His most important film reviews are gathered in *The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly in Cinema* (*Bunul, răul și urâtul în cinema*, Polirom, 2009). The title is an intelligent paraphrase after Leone's famous *Il buono, il brutto, il cattivo* and can be seen as an allegory for what a film critic's mission is about: the right selection of values in contemporary filmmaking and the clear separation between what is good and what is wrong among the vast bulk of movies that surrounds us every day.

This judgmental role is skillfully played by Andrei Gorzo, who never leaves unpunished any flaw, error or mediocre production, even if he deals with contemporary Romanian cinema. Like Alex Leo Șerban, Gorzo formulates even harsher but very right judgements regarding many contemporary Romanian films. An extensive article is dedicated to the top ten of most famous Romanian movies of all time, where Gorzo analyses each film's relevance for contemporary audience and for the history of Romanian cinema. According to some statistics, the popular Romanian cinema produced during the Communist years proves to be still demanded by a large sector of the audience today, which of course is a surprise, having considered the quality of these films and their outdated outlook. This sounds like a provocation and the young critic decides to re-examine all these films in order to detect what elements are still viable today, a good opportunity for the critic to reveal his ironic style and his good sense of humour. It would have been very useful the grouping of the reviews in different sections, one for the Romanian films, another for American blockbusters and the other for European cinema.

Most of the films reviewed in Gorzo's book appeared between 2005 and 2009, a period when Romanian cinematography was acquiring style, uniqueness and fame due to the efforts made by the young filmmakers such as Cristian Mungiu (*4 Months,*

3 Weeks and 2 Days), Cristian Nemescu (*California Dreamin'*), Nae Caranfil (*The Rest is Silence*) and Radu Muntean (*Boogie*).

They all receive very favorable reviews, in



contrast with the films made by the older directors such as Horațiu Mălăele (*Silent Wedding*) or Nicolae Mărgineanu, with *Exchange* (*Schimb valutar*, 2008). The first is blamed for having made a kitsch film and the latter for its unconvincing and conventional realism, although both films are better than Radu Gabrea's *Der Gekopfte Hahn*. But in each case Gorzo detects the flaw with clear-cut precision, formulating the artistic error which desintegrates the illusion of the whole fictional world of the film in question.

Many of Gorzo's reviews are meant to entertain his public, as if the critic imagines himself in front of a large impatient audience who must be educated and taught to detect the flaws of the films they see, but with the help of the critic's humorous eloquence. Andrei Gorzo focuses a great deal upon the feedback he might receive from this large audience, carefully detecting what they might prefer and what movies should be avoided in order to develop an important critical ability, and that is taste. Gorzo seems all the time aware that film criticism is a rhetorical art, often addressing his audience directly. He uses various strategies to entertain his readers: one of them implies the creative and humorous rendering of the film synopses especially when the films discussed are considered almost complete failures (for example *Second-Hand* by Dan Pița, *Azucena* by Mircea Mureșan or *Legiunea străină* by Mircea Daneliuc).

The formal aspect of these reviews has the same pattern probably due to the fact that most of them were published in *Dilema*

veche. This weekly imposes a fixed number of characters for each review, resulting in rather short articles and therefore the critic must write very condensed texts, with no space for digressions, for minute analyses and usually reduced to the following: a few introductory words about the trend and the genre of the film, about the director's previous artistic attempts, a short synopsis of the film and the final critic evaluation of the movie. This final part is of most importance for Andrei Gorzo, who very much relies on his personal taste, as a classic film critic should do. From the very first lines of the review we can guess the final verdict from the style (ocasionally sarcastic or ironic), Gorzo being also a gifted prose writer.

No matter how harsh and sharp are his critical assertions, each review is a manifest of the critic's passion for cinema. This is also stated in the long opening confession from 2005 which is not only a biographical account of his relationship with moving pictures from an early age, but also an emblematic description of the profile of a film critic, consumed by his passion for cinema, for analyses of the movies. The very essence of the seventh art – believes Andrei Gorzo – is its perfect integration in our everyday life with a unique intensity that radically differentiates the film from the other art forms (every film we watch happens to us as if it were part of our life).

Andrei Gorzo's criticism relies heavily on thematic explanations, avoiding unnecessary technicalities, never neglecting the reader, with a very sharp sense of selection and taste.

(Andrei Simuț)

Noul cinema românesc. De la tovarășul Ceaușescu la domnul Lăzărescu / From Comrade Ceausescu to Mister Lazarescu

Editura Polirom, Colecția „Cinema”, 2011, 272 p.

The new wave in Romanian cinema

The Romanian cinema is showing a visible growth in the last decade, mostly due to the New Wave, which has already established a solid base, if we are to consider the fact that since Cristi Puiu's road opening movie *Marfa și banii* (*Stuff and Dough*) there has been a significant resurgence of film productions. Ever since then many movies have been made, some of which have received international prizes, while others are less known internationally. Yet, we cannot really refer to a local audience for the Romanian cinema.

As Cristina Corciovescu says in the Preface of "*Noul Cinema Românesc. De la tovarășul Ceaușescu la domnul Lăzărescu*" (*The New Romanian Cinema. From Comrade Ceausescu to Mister Lazarescu*, Cristina Corciovescu (coordinator), Magda Mihăilescu (coordinator), Polirom, 2011), the book continues a series started in 2010, with the publication of "*Cele mai bune 10 filme românești ale tuturor timpurilor stabilite prin votul a 40 de critici*" (*The 10 Best Romanian Movies of all Times, Established by the Vote of 40 Critics*, Polirom, 2010). The choice of the number 10, is linked with the chronological evolution of the New Romanian cinema, does not necessarily have as a "justification as a Pythagorean infused symbolism". It is more likely an intent to continue the series since in this book the same two coordinators, Cristina Corciovescu and Magda Mihăilescu, invite 10 people from the Romanian movie industry and criticism to discuss the "new wave" and to express their opinions about it. Erudite connoisseurs of the Romanian and international "seventh art" discuss the Romanian movies produced in the last decade, considering as a starting point, as previously said, *Marfa și banii* (*Stuff and Dough*), nominated at Cannes for the Grand Prize of the Critics' Week.

The present book proves that in Romania there is a new wave of movies, and a new wave of valuable directors, which approach similar themes, use similar shooting techniques and start with or arrive to similar elements. To prove these things, each of the 10 critics focus on one singular element which they afterwards search and emphasize in (almost) all the Romanian movies of the new wave. Some of them move forward and include movies prior to '89, which discuss the same issues, such as immigration, inter-human relationships etc. Most of the times, they refer to their subjects with black humor, something customary from our culture and, of course, Romanian cinematography.

In most of the cases, the authors discuss different parts of different movies, bring examples, underline a certain component based on which they make analogies and show



the similarities between them. "Except for two notable exceptions, there is no recent Romanian movie that doesn't benefit from the services of a scene that happens at a table, with two or more characters, at home or at the restaurant, with the family or with friends, more or less important for the economy of the story", Mihai Chirilov says. As we see, the Romanian cinematography follows a singular pattern which is adapted depending on the case. Intended or not, each of the 10 critics sees different aspects of the same movies, maybe in an attempt not to discuss the same elements. Whatever the case, two people cannot have identical views, theme expressed in the movie *Vantage Point* (Pete Travis, 2008) where more people witness the same murder, and each of them narrates it differently.

If we return to the movies analyzed in this book, most of the objects of interpretation are Romanian productions, made after 2001, yet we find some interpretations of relevant foreign movies, such as *Easy Rider*. Besides the very well known ones, such as *Moartea domnului Lăzărescu* (*The Death of Mister Lazarescu*, Cristi Puiu, 2005) or *4 luni, 3 săptămâni și 2 zile* (*4 Months, 3 Weeks and 2 Days*, Cristian Mungiu, 2007), other movies, which are less known to the Romanian audience, even to the "loyal" one, are presented as well. Some of these movies might be just as valuable, such as *Francesca* (Bobby Păunescu, 2009) or *Cea mai fericită fată din lume* (*The Happiest Girl in The World*, Radu Jude, 2009). Besides the main text, the book also contains a very useful chronological

table of the most important moments of the last decade, where the dates of the premiers of the New Wave movies are shown, as well as the prizes received.

Genre Movies, a Problem

Besides a considerable number of prizes received by the "New Wave", which was and still is known on the international market, Andrei and Codruța Crețulescu find a series of downfalls, amongst which is the lack of a genre movies. Andrei Crețulescu claims that all our directors produce author movies, in which they imprint a strong mark, but still, he believes that "the notions of *genre movie* and *author movie* are not incompatible". Still, the Romanian audience is very limited, accustomed to American "flicks", and they are not willing to give the Romanian New Wave a chance. Codruța Crețulescu continues discussing the same theme, but emphasizes on the lack of comedies. The humor in the Romanian movies, both the ones produced before and after 1989, lacks originality, or is not voluntary, since the directors do not intend necessarily to cause laughter. Most of the comedies, few as they are, are inspired by movies from the west; "movies that have started as dramas, but ended up in the *exclusivist* league of involuntary comedies". Still, we are very proficient in the field of black humor, which is often used, especially by the directors of the new wave. It's a Caragiale type humor, focusing on name, situation, language and action. *A fost sau n-a fost? (12:08 East of Bucharest)* "is placed in a league which is very

characteristic for Romanian cinema, that of the dramas which, if they'd lack the doses of humor they have, would in a way lose some of their dramatic quality..." . Lucian Georgescu notices the absence of road-movies, which are replaced, somehow, with the existence of a road motif or theme which is, though, mostly existential, interior to the character, a road after which the character goes through a series of changes. The road is not exterior; it does not imply a physical motion from one place to another. He also points out that "two authors: one of which is not a part of the New Wave (Daneliuc), and the other one, a *young director*, Cristi Puiu, looks for the secondary sense of the road". Georgescu states another very important thing, even if that means transgressing from one topic to another, namely that "the Turkish in Marian Crișan's movie, a Jarmuschian hero, is probably one of the most important Romanian characters of the decade, exactly because he is the *other*."

Are we emigrating or what?!

An extremely serious problem for the Romania society is the emigration to the West, and that has been an issue for a long time. Going to school abroad, in the cases of wealthier Romanians, or just looking for a better life, these are two of the numerous reasons for which Romanians choose to leave their country. Cristina Corciovescu emphasizes on movies that deal with emigration. The movies that deal with this theme and were produced before '89 were often commissioned by the Party and

were meant to wrongly emphasize solely on the negative aspects, just as Alexandru Tatos says in one of his books: "the directive that *the West and its world are not to be to glamorous* invalidates the heroine's motivation" (Alexandru Tatos, *Pagini de Jurnal*, Albatros, București, 1994, 164), „Both Doina and Andrei were tempted by a profitable marriage and betrayed their love”, Corciovescu writes, referring to the movie *Rătăcire* (*Wandering*, Alexandru Tatos, 1978) and *Trecătoarele iubiri* (*The Fugacious Loves*, Malvina Urșianu, 1974). Referring to movies that deal with the same issue that were produced after '89, the "fragility of the communication between the ones that left and the ones that stayed home" is pointed out, not to talk about the compromises the characters have to do to go west and, most important, to be able to integrate.

Nostalgics?

„The true object of nostalgia is not the absence opposite to the presence, but the past in relation to the present” says Angelo Mitchievici quoting Roland Barthes, discussing afterwards the movie *Cum mi-am petrecut sfârșitul lumii* (*The Way I Spent the End of the World*, Cătălin Mitulescu, 2006); he expresses the fact that we see “the adults, having a paralyzing fear with hysteric episodes inoculated, indifferent teenagers, which don't feel the slightest revolutionary impulse, and the children, for whom everything related to politics is transferred to their magical world”. Afterwards, he deals with *Boogie* (2008), made by Radu Muntean, and observes

the “old story of the great expectations which are not fulfilled”. Subsequently he generalizes and discusses most of the movies belonging to the New Wave saying: “this is what the moviemakers of the New Wave do, they overlap a nostalgic lens and a comical one”. Discussing the same topic we will deal with Marian Tuțui’s text, which groups the movies made in the last decade into two (good and bad) and gives a few examples. Radu Muntean (*Hîrtia va fi albastră / The Paper Will Be Blue*), Cătălin Mitulescu (*Cum mi-am petrecut sfârșitul lumii / The Way I Spent the End of the World*) and Corneliu Porumboiu (*A*

fost sau n-a fost? / 12:08 East of Bucharest) „don’t dismantle the Revolution unveiling a conspiracy or a commando operation, the way Nicolaescu does, but they take off the heroic aura without diminishing the tragic aspects”. On the other hand Sergiu Nicolaescu (*Punctul zero / Point Zero*, 15) and Marius Th. Barna (*Sindromul Timișoara / The Timisoara Syndrome*) are criticized because they use the “sensational aspect of the past references and a pseudo-denunciation of a present where all the ex-security agents are in power”. To end this we might say that “we still have to wait for a true reconstruction of that age.”

(Ion Indolean)