

Mihai Gavril DRAGOLEA

Cătălina Simion-Călin. *Autorul de film și Cinematograful Exilului* [The Exiled Film Author and the Cinema of Exile]. Editura UCIN, 2018.



Cătălina Simion-Călin is a graduate of the National Theatre and Film University “I.L. Caragiale” in Bucharest. She holds a bachelor’s degree in film directing and a master’s degree in film montage. She completed her Ph.D. in film directing, and published *Autorul de film și Cinematograful Exilului* [The Exiled Film Author and the Cinema of Exile] (2018). Simion-Călin has some practice in film directing as she has experience with short films, documentaries, advertisements, and theatre plays. She currently works as a Lecturer in Film Studies at the Faculty of Film and Television at the National Theatre and Film University. She is also one of the coordinators of the locally well-known student film festival Cinemaiubit.

In *Autorul de film și Cinematograful Exilului*, we are introduced to the world of Romanian and foreign film directors in exile. Simion-Călin starts and concludes her discussion with the work of Ovidiu, a Roman poet exiled in Port Tomis, currently the city of Constanța, arguing that *any author would manifest suffering when they are taken away from their home* (337). From this main premise the book seeks to identify those authors who have been in exile, and the ways they adapt to this condition. From Wim Wenders and his peculiar way of seeing the American world,

Mihai Gavril DRAGOLEA

Babeș-Bolyai University
dragolea.mihai@yahoo.com

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through Latin American politically exiled directors such as Miguel Littling and Raúl Ruiz, to the grand masters of cinema like Charles Chaplin and Alfred Hitchcock, and the European exiles from a war-torn continent seeking freedom in America (e.g., Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, Miloš Forman, Roman Polanski). The author also identifies directors who are exiled within their own home countries, such as Iranian Abbas Kiarostami, and depicts their inner struggles.

Autorul de film și Cinematograficul Exilului is divided into five main chapters: “Contemporary perspectives on exile,” “The European exile in the Hollywood fortress,” “The film auteur in exile,” “Poetic auteur,” and “The influence of exile in the creation of great directors.” The last chapter focuses on film directors such as Alfred Hitchcock, Miloš Forman, Roman Polanski and Radu Mihăileanu, all of whom created in self-imposed or forced exile. The first chapter, “Contemporary perspectives on exile,” introduces the methodological tools the author uses in her analysis, the premise of understanding what the exile means for the soul of a creator, an artist. Simion-Călin is very close to Kiarostami’s belief regarding the capacity to create outside one’s own country, which is expressed in the following: “Once you uproot and move a fruit tree from the place where it grows, it will never blossom again. Hence you are robbing the tree of its fruit” (129). Throughout the book the author also expresses a critical view regarding Hollywood’s influence on auteur cinema. She does so by quoting Andrei Konchalovsky’s opinion on what it means to be a foreigner in Hollywood, which the Russian film director considers an imperialist system. For Konchalovsky, Hollywood is nothing else other than an international corporation which does not have much to do with the American way of life, and which is yet another consumable good, much like Coca-Cola (257). These are the working premises the author uses in her reading of the theme of exile, and cinematographic creations of exiled directors.

In the second chapter, “The European exile in the Hollywood fortress,” the author starts her analysis with the works of Wim Wenders. Simion-Călin observes how Wenders’s fascination with American cinema starts in his college days, reflected in his statement that “the Yankees colonized our subconscious” (92). This is a strange fascination as Wenders’s films foreground the space of America, while preserving views which are clearly European in nature. This means that all his film characters appear to be faithful copies of himself – introspects, quiet people, being far from the classical character of the American film that can be flashy, expansive, depressing, obviously in one situation or another (105). Wenders’ fascination with American cinematography may be found in the camera movement, the choice of shooting locations, and in the preference for technological development, but not in the main themes of his films and in his characters. This mix of copying certain phenomena specific to the American cinematography, and adapted to the naturally acquired observational style, resembles “a pendulum, swinging between documentary and fiction, between road movie and poetic philosophical adaptation” (107). Wenders seems to be the

perfect case for the author's monograph as he is fascinated with the American way of life, but cannot make it work within his own artistic way of expression. He works with America as a place but not as a soul for his characters.

Another example used by the author in her monograph is Miloš Forman, the Czech director who made it big in Hollywood by understanding the ways in which the industry works, which made him change some aspects of his work. Simion-Călin analyses Forman's works with an emphasis on *Amadeus* (1984), one of his best-known films reflecting on his way of adapting to the new rules of the American psyche. Within *Amadeus*, the main character played by the American actor Tom Hulce, traits which are very close to some of Forman's old characters [from his Czechoslovak films; MȘ] may be found: he is always laughing, he is sensible. He is observed during many social events and although the action is a period piece, influence of the Czech New Wave is visible in many scenes within the film.

In the third chapter, "The European exile in the Hollywood fortress," Simion-Călin analyses how the historical events of the beginning of the twentieth century influence the development of cinema in America and Europe. The two world wars that took place on European territory will make many film directors search for better future in the United States, and for this reason European trends such as German expressionism and French impressionism will leave their mark on American cinema. However, there are directors who remained in Europe, such as Jean Renoir, Jean Cocteau, John Grierson, Sergei Eisenstein and Dziga Vertov, and turned their national and European cinescapes into a great laboratory of art film. Meanwhile, in the United States a new generation of filmmakers such as Orson Wells, Frank Capra and Walt Disney define the classical Hollywood style. While the American system focused on production and distribution of motion pictures, the European system was more attentive to the author, and the artistic value of the films produced. Simion-Călin quotes David Bordwell who argued that "European art film is more than just a genre because the roots of its stylistic convention are in total opposition to Hollywood's rules of cinema" (154). Bordwell claims that films such as *L'Aventura* or *Persona* were made as the rejection of Hollywood narratives, and ambiguity and realism was favoured over classical narrative structures and make-believe worlds. It was during the 1950s that the European art film became an alternative to Hollywood film mass production.

Simion-Călin makes quite an interesting remark in her criticism of industry-based art. She argues that the non-auteur Hollywood film production does not leave any space for a deeper message, one that would make the viewer more engaged in the narrative from an emphatic or intellectual standpoint.

For Simion-Călin art film "enriches the soul, cultivates the spirit, asks questions about human existence and purpose. The director does not provide answers or solutions, they make viewers aware of them, thus becoming the voice of an inner consciousness" (173). For the author, the films d'auteur represents an exile from mass production. This would be a

valid statement if directors such as the Coen brothers would not exist within the American mainstream, or newer directors such as the Safdie brothers, who produce economically successful films, while also offering a philosophical, cynical commentary on the world they know best. In the following subchapters the author uses various film examples in order to solidify her view on the mechanism of Hollywood films versus the inner world of film auteurs.

The first such case is *Casablanca* (1942). Directed by an exiled Hungarian director Michel Curtiz (formerly known as Mihaly Kertész), the film is a war melodrama that deals with the topic of exile. The whole action concerns exiles who are fleeing from Europe, through Casablanca to Lisbon, and then to the United States. The love story in the film does not have a happy end in the classical Hollywood manner: it seems to be sacrificed for the greater good of the world. By sacrificing individual love for a deeper meaning of love, one against the hate of extremist political views such as Nazism, the director makes a comment on the current state of affairs in the world. Having lived through difficult times in Europe, Michel Curtiz can make such a commentary and direct it so well, that the viewers can identify with the drama of the characters while grasping the commentary the director made. The art film, or non-block buster films feature themes that are universal and complex, themes that the viewer will ponder upon after watching the film. For example, a Coen brothers' film will always deal with existentialism and chances, and the viewer will identify these themes, and through the narrative will observe them come to play in the characters' life. After such an experience, many who watch these films will have a deeper understanding of their own lives and circumstances. This are the traits that Simion-Călin praises in the films made by exiles.

A peculiar case study the author exposes is that of internal exiles. A number of filmmakers, from different countries who, without leaving their native country, continued to make films in extremely difficult conditions, using various subterfuges to avoid censorship. Through their films, these directors conveyed realities of countries closed off to the rest of the world (206). One of such filmmakers is Abbas Kiarostami, one of the founders of the Iranian New Wave. The director mixes facts with elements of fiction in his films, making a direct commentary regarding his own reality, the one he experiences in his home-country. His dramas and characters have a very local feeling, but the visual poetics, editing and themes make them universal. The commentary he makes with his stories is at the same time universal and directed towards the political system oppressive towards the freedom he portrays.

Within the last two chapters of the book the author gives special attention to the works of Charlie Chaplin and Alfred Hitchcock, each in his own, well deserved, sub-chapter. Charlie Chaplin managed to create a peculiar character aesthetics alongside the poetics of exile. His persona Charlot is a vagabond, a person who is never welcome by the society he finds himself dealing with. Hence Chaplin's character is condemned to a continuous search for a better place (269). The author finds this main theme in films like *Gold Rush* (1925), where Charlot seeks the good fortune that will grant him his desired house, or in *City Lights* (1931) where

he also seeks a better life. Simion-Călin observes that while for Charlie Chaplin America is a stage where he can perform, his character remains British in America. Charlie Chaplin never obtained the US citizenship, which may represent a sign of his stance on exile. His character is imbued with British characteristics: he is shy, well educated, striving for elegance and high morals. The source of his comedy is the clash between British-European set of traits and the rawness of America's people.

Simion-Călin makes a similar argument regarding the works of Hitchcock. For example, the author describes how Hitchcock's British stage of making films was one of experiment and learning, while the American one is where he could shine and work professionally. For Hitchcock the exile represented an epitome of his career, of his skills as a director (282). However, similar to Chaplin, he never abandoned his British soul. Hitchcock is a master because he understands the universal language of cinema very well, and uses it to showcase British crime stories, characters, and plots. Hitchcock is the master of suspense, which as a concept was brought to Hollywood by the expressionist filmmakers of the 1920s. For Alfred Hitchcock the American studios made his films known worldwide, while his inner workings remained deeply rooted in British way of life.

Simion-Călin concludes that, starting with Ovid, artists in exile create languages of their own, unlike any other home-grown productions. The suffering of being away, often stranded on distant, foreign lands, finds its way into the art of the film auteur, generating new ways of cinematic expression, new themes and characters, as well as new understandings of foreign cultures. The directors discussed in *Autorul de film și Cinematograful Exilului* are all exceptional because they embrace their exile, and imbue their narratives with peculiar ways of dealing with new environments they find themselves in.