

Evaluation of master's thesis by Edgar Ortiz "The films of Lucrecia Martel"

Edgar Ortiz has chosen for his diploma thesis an up to date theme – Lucrecia Martel belongs among the most innovative contemporary filmmakers despite the fact that her filmography contains only three feature films. He decided to focus on her movies and career in great detail and complexity, thinking both about the specific context from which her movies arise (mainly new Argentine cinema and the socio-cultural context of Argentine history in general) and about the defining characteristics of her work.

The detailed and complex analysis of all three Martel's films are very good. Edgar Ortiz has a talent for perceptive examining of every aspect of them: he discovers meticulously what important choices about editing, camera, lighting, acting etc. Martel and her team did and what effects it has on spectators. His analysis of very specific narrative techniques and sound spaces used in those films are precise and innovative at the same time and they help reader to really understand in what aspects those films differ from "normal" cinema storytelling and working with sound and image. He also interprets in smart way the themes of her different films. As a person not very familiar with Argentine history, I have appreciated especially some revelatory connections to this concrete socio-cultural history hidden under the surface of seemingly psychologically universal and personal stories of movies.

The thesis is also very well written – Ortiz is not only highly perceptive spectator, but he can formulate ideas in a very dense and accurate way. He can on one side very well generalize and on the other side he is capable of very concrete evocations of single moments from Martel's movies which serve as an arguments for his more general claims.

There are also few aspects of the thesis that are a little bit disputable. In the introduction, Edgar Ortiz is citing Martel few times, but he doesn't cite the exact source. I understand the desire to find features that are connecting her films together, but on the other hand some informations seems to be repeated too much (for example reminding the reader about the importance of oral narratives for Martel). I like that all three analysis of movies have the same structure, it helps to compare and connect them at the same time, but I am not sure that the passages about characters are really necessary. They seem sometimes too descriptive (instead of analytical) and even mechanical when Edgar Ortiz is mentioning also the minor characters without having too much to say about them. I think that the interesting informations about the characters could have been included in the discussion of narration and themes and those parts of the text that are just describing the characters could have been skipped.

Generally the text is from my point of view sometimes too much driven by an authorial point of view, i.e. by the opinions of Martel herself about her work. The problem is not only that it can lead occasionally to the lack of critical distance (when Ortiz is lead in his interpretation by her opinions instead of critically examining the films on their own terms) but it is also connected with known methodological mistake when the writer is assuming that the films were done only by Martel alone (there are often expressions like "Martel achieves, Martel decides..." etc.). But movies are collective pieces of art and even in the case of auteur cinema, there are other people – cameramen, editors, scriptwriters, actors, producers etc. – who are influencing the work and who are important co-

authors. (There is a long history of theoretical examining of this cultural tendency to ascribe even collective pieces to a single author and what negative effects it has, see for example a book by Andrew Bennett *The Author*, or writings by Barthes, Foucault and others about this theme.)

Although I have pointed to some slightly problematic aspects of Edgar Ortiz's thesis, they are not affecting the high qualities of the work much. Ortiz wrote very complex, dense, intelligent and well argued text which could be in my opinion even published in some film magazine (in shorten version of course). I recommend to evaluate his thesis with grade A.

2. 10. 2016

Helena Bendová

