

Assessment of Master Thesis

„Communism, Emigration, Commercialism: Reading the Post-New Wave Films of Czechoslovak New Wave Directors“ by Tanya Silverman

Tanya Silverman has written her master thesis on Post-New Wave Films of Czechoslovak New Wave directors. She states in her aim of dissertation that she wants to identify the ways in which films directed by a quartet of famous Czech film directors (Jiří Menzel, Věra Chytilová, Miloš Forman and Ivan Passer) reflect their interactions with social environments after the New Wave of Czechoslovak cinema ended. Her method is to interpret their careers and attitudes towards post-1968 environments through the filming language they use in portraying separated thematic elements of „car culture“, „money as power“ and „censorship“. At the beginning of her thesis she asks her research question concerning attitudes of these directors in their Post-New Wave films towards new environments. Out of this questions she tries to build a portrait of Czechoslovak cinema in Czechoslovakia proper and abroad after the most famous period of Czechoslovak filmmaking ended at the beginning of 1970s. Tanya Silverman uses qualitative analysis based on data taken from films of these directors and from texts that these directors have written or where they were interviewed or otherwise came to word. Her thesis also heavily relies on Post-structuralist „auteur theory“ (Sarris, 2004), (Wollen, 2017). The text that she has to defend could, in my opinion, thus also be read as an analysis of post-1968 Czechoslovakia and the period of the so-called „Normalization“.

Tanya Silverman has chosen an innovative angle of portraying this turbulent period of Czechoslovak cultural environment. Her contribution is boldly written and she uses an appropriate, rich and well-informed language. It is obvious that she is familiar with the topic and that she can put different angles of the subject into historical and political contexts. She has also chosen adequate sources ranging from biographies, online archive sources, trustworthy film magazines to interviews written and compiled by both Czech and American authors. She is naturally well acquainted with the films of these directors as well.

However boldly written this theses may be, the author should elaborate on some of the problems facing every expert text on cultural topics. Tanya Silverman is aware of these limitations (Part 8: „Limitations in the Research Technique“) where she states for the case of Forman’s *„Amadeus“* that „...however, combining a filmic text that harks back to eighteenth-century Austria – and was filmed in 1980s Bohemia – using the prescribed strategy did not induce intended results“ (p.33) and goes further by saying that „...legitimate reservations could additionally be brought forth concerning the dependence on interview statements and memoir texts as keys for understanding the directors standpoints.“ (p.34). This is obviously a problem for every expert text on cultural issues and the author should defend her viewpoint that a moving image could be regarded as a subject matter to scientific research. How come is she certain that these scientific methods could be applied to different pieces of art made by different directors and in different countries? And how could she elaborate on the problems of „oral history“ and its scientific authority which is well represented and has its origins in the city of Prague where she has written her master thesis?

On top of that she should also explain more what she means by „auteur“ theory. The word „auteur“ has been en vogue in cinematic circles for some years and is often overused in texts on film directors. Why does she uses this word and not just „film director“ and is it just a question of contemporary fashion or is the word appropriate for a scientific text? Her theses also lacks an explanation what is meant by the word „culture“ and its position in different

societies. This word has different meanings and is understood differently in Czech Republic, in the United States of America or in Germany (e.g. „drug culture“ or „car culture“ on p. 24 should be further explained). Does she think that „culture“ is „political“, as it may seem from her thesis, or is it just another expression of human kind „per se“? If it is the case she should definitely put her research more into political and historical context. Some of her conclusions in the chapter on censorship (17. Censorship in Czech Contexts) lack basic information on the processes and practice of censorship in former Czechoslovakia, which would help the reader to understand new life challenges for these directors after 1968. It is obvious that the aforementioned film directors were facing a new and harsher environment than in the years of Czechoslovak New Wave.

Furthermore the author should be aware of minor inaccuracies such as the use of the word „Czechoslovakia“ and „Czechoslovak“ and „Czech lands“ (p.15). They should be unified. Otherwise the author herself admits that „mapping“ as a methodology tool is „inherently subjective“ leading into results that are „kaleidoscopic in nature“ (p.24). The reception of Hollywood popular cinema in Nazi Germany also deserves more attention (p.19) in societal contexts of modern European history.

Tanya Silverman has submitted a well-written master thesis. She should be allowed to defend her thesis at state exams at Faculty of Social Sciences. I suggest that her master theses should be evaluated „A“.



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