

**Lénárt, András. *Mozgóképes múlt – Közelítések a film és a történelem kapcsolatához* [Cinematographic past. Approaches to the relationship between film and history]. Pécs: Kronosz. 2024. 250 pp.**

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András Lénárt, the author of *Mozgóképes múlt – Közelítések a film és a történelem kapcsolatához* [Cinematographic past. Approaches to the relationship between film and history] is a historian and a well-respected researcher in Hispanic Studies. He is the author of monographs on the film politics of the Francoist dictatorship (*A spanyol film a Franco diktatúrában: Ideológia, propaganda és filmpolitika* [Spanish film during the Francoist dictatorship. Ideology, propaganda and film policies] (2014)) and the image of history in the films of Latin American countries (*Film és történelem Latin-Amerikában. A 20. század a filmtörténet tükrében* [Films and history in Latin America. The 20th century through the perspective of film history] (2020)).

Lénárt's newest volume steers the reader towards the frontiers of history and film studies, predominantly examining the role of films in shaping history and the effect of historical events on cinema. It is easy to see how important the role of cinema has been since its birth in the collective memory of a nation or a larger community and how its memory is being shaped, but, as Lénárt points out, films representing a national community can have a considerable influence on the reputation this community has in the eyes of others. It should never be forgotten, though, that the cinematographic representation of the past or the present is always the fruit of a creative process, which is mostly determined by the historical (personal and social) circumstances of the given moment. It is for that reason that the papers collected in the volume investigate the multifaceted relationships of films and historical circumstances while handling the cinematographic artwork primarily as mementos of a certain point in time, whose comprehensive analysis allows for the more accurate uncovering of the past.

In his previous work, András Lénárt studied Spanish and South American examples, but in the present volume, he compares these with Hungarian cases, looking for parallels between the film politics and the film production of the Francoist dictatorship (1939–1975) and Hungarian state socialism (1945–1989). Four engaging chapters of the volume discuss various aspects of this system of relations, pointing out the similar film concepts (schemata) produced by the

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similar operation of dictatorships in two different countries. At the same time, the volume also explores from a more general perspective the correspondence between film politics and the way dictatorial states operate. Separate chapters focus on Nazi and Soviet film politics, the cinematographic representation of the Spanish Civil War, the influence of the development of and the crackdown following the Prague Spring of 1968 in the Central-Eastern European region, the propagandistic and censorial aspect of the American film industry in the 1940s and 1950s, and the cinematic representation of the relationship of humans and nature in the past and present. (This last chapter probably stretches the comprehensive concept of the whole volume to some extent, while its inclusion indicates the direction the author's research may be taking at a time when there is a growing interest in academia and elsewhere in how the degradation of the environment could be worsened, halted or, possibly, reversed.)

One chapter compares the film politics and film production of Hungarian state socialism and the Francoist dictatorship, analyzing the first decades of the two regimes, the era of stronger societal control. Drawing a parallel between the two dictatorships is an intriguing endeavor, as the former is a right-wing nationalist system, which relies on the military and the church, while the latter is a left-wing Communist (anti-clerical) dictatorship relying on the presence of a foreign occupying force. Despite these differences, Lénárt argues convincingly in his volume that the propagandistic and ideological use of films and the closely censored content resulted in simplified plot lines, one-dimensional characters, and the avoidance of figurative film devices in order to craft more easily comprehensible messages in both countries' film production.

In another chapter, Lénárt studies the parallels between the Spanish and Hungarian dictatorships in a somewhat relaxed, more liberal stage and indicates that in both dictatorial systems, the signs of "softness" could be well detected in films becoming more and more explicit. Less restrained cultural policies assured the background for this change. More precisely: in Spain, José María García Escudero arrived on the scene as the general director of cinematography and theater in 1962, whereas in Hungary, the more extensive and comprehensive use of the so called "tolerated", as opposed to the expressly "forbidden", category was introduced in the cultural scene of the 1960s and 1970s, as controlled by the de facto minister of culture György Aczél. The similarities laid out in the volume did not point to an amicable relationship between the two (dictatorial) countries; on the contrary, a separate chapter outlines the process of how Hungarian Communists had been used in Spanish films as cautionary tales during the Francoist regime or how the victims of Communism had become heroes having fled to Spain from Hungary. This latter case is illustrated by *Los ases buscan la paz* [Aces looking for peace] (by Arturo Ruiz-Castillo, 1954), a particularly popular film about László Kubala. The film tells the true story of the celebrated Hungarian soccer player of FC Barcelona with some propagandistic overtones: the viewer is shown how this great football talent had to flee Hungary because of the way Communism made it impossible for him to stay, and how he managed to find a new home and a hospitable homeland in Spain (a right-wing dictatorship) after countless adventures in several different countries along the way.

The chapter on the director László Vajda uncovers an important yet lesser-known link between Spanish and Hungarian film cultures. Having completed his studies in Germany, Vajda set out on a promising career in Hungary as one of the country's innovative and inventive directors. With his fellow young directors, they were the first to "introduce the problem of unemployment as a topic in Hungarian films, and they were the ones who created the prototype

of female figures who were interpreted then as masculine" (126, my translation). However, even though he had directed several prominent movies in his home country in the 1930s, he was forced to leave Hungary due to the rise of antisemitism. First, he fled to Benito Mussolini's Italy, then, a few years (and a few films) later, he found his new homeland in Spain. A curious paradox of his fate is the fact that while he was constantly running away from fascism, he ended up in a country with an extreme right-wing ideology. He also directed popular genre movies in Spain. These were not propaganda films, but they also did not challenge Francoist ideology. Apart from countless popular movies, he directed *Marcelino pan y vino* [Marcelino, bread and wine] in 1955, one of the most celebrated Spanish movies of all time.

The cinematography of the United States is not only cited in the volume as an example of the impact of the propagandistic and censorial principles of autocracies in the 1940s and 1950s, but it also showcases a riveting case of film diplomacy in one chapter. Walt Disney, the celebrated animated film director, was commissioned by the American government at the beginning of the 1940s to improve the reputation of Latin American countries in the American public discourse through his films. The antecedent and reason were that the American government was intent on establishing a better, friendlier relationship with its Southern neighbors in the midst of rising tensions of the Second World War, and, in order to transform and improve the negative stereotypes about South American countries, the government called upon, among others, film directors. So, Walt Disney and his staff set out on a study trip of several months to South America in 1941 at the request of the American government. The results of the trip were the popular Disney Studio movies like *Saludos Amigos* [Greeting, Friends] (Norman Ferguson, 1942) and *The Three Caballeros* (Norman Ferguson, 1944). In these movies, the famous cartoon characters, Donald Duck and Goofy, take virtual and "real" trips to the countries of Latin America. Even though these movies still contain plenty of stereotypes, they try to present an attractive and interesting picture for the American audiences about the culture and everyday life of their Southern neighbors. In the short term, the Disney movies undoubtedly lived up to the expectations; as Lénárt writes, they definitely contributed to the temporary improvement of the relationship among American countries. Disney's cartoon characters became cultural ambassadors of Latin American countries in the United States.

One of the most exciting chapters of the volume analyzes Roman Polanski's film titled *Death and the Maiden* (1994). The plot takes place in an unnamed Latin American country, where, after years of a dictatorship, people are witnessing a period of democratic transition. The protagonist, Paulina, was tortured during the time of dictatorship because she was unwilling to name her love, Gerardo, a lawyer in the Opposition. As a result of a banal accident, Gerardo invites a stranger to their home, whom Paulina recognizes as her torturer. The man denies any links to the cruelty of the dictatorship, but Paulina has no doubts about his guilt, which is why she takes the stranger captive. The complex analysis uncovers cultural and social contexts and argues convincingly that the lack of accountability and the compromise of the old and the new order to ensure a peaceful transition can lead to repressed traumas, both on the individual and collective level. Even though the dictatorship has ended, Paulina's fear has not, as she can feel her past torturers' presence in the society surrounding her: they are present and can attack her at any given time, even in the shape of a stranger showing up unexpectedly in her own home. Without honestly facing the past, social peace can hardly be imagined. According to András Lénárt, this particular message of the film could resonate well in the Central-Eastern European

region, or, as a matter of fact, in Hungary, where the bloody traumas of the 20th century and the sins of the left- and right-wing regimes have not been processed, and this can have a major impact on the present.

In summary, through a series of exciting and compelling papers, the volume *Mozgóképes múlt* [Cinematographic past] analyzes the complex relationship of film and history primarily in dictatorial and, secondarily, in democratic contexts. The volume is remarkable from the point of view of Hungarian studies as it analyzes the correspondences of 20th-century Hungarian film and history in an international, more narrowly, a Hispanic context. The studies in the volume highlight the similarities and commonalities in specific historical periods, despite the existing ideological differences at the intersection of the films and the political powers of the two countries and regions. What is more, using the Hungarian model as a baseline, András Lénárt also attempts to shed light on the process and essence of the consolidation and liberalization of the Spanish dictatorship. The chapters of the volume use important examples to illuminate how films can shape the image a nation or a community has of its past or of itself. This is a particularly important lesson in Hungary, where, during the 20th century, the institutional system of film production and its capacity to shape reality were frequently controlled by political power.