

Book Reviews

Cortínez, Verónica and Engelbert, Manfred (2011) *La Tristeza de los Tigres y los Misterios de Raúl Ruiz*, Editorial Cuarto Propio (Santiago), vii + 358 pp. \$15.99 ebk.

The film *Tres Tristes Tigres*, directed by Raúl Ruiz (1968) and based on the eponymous play by Chilean playwright Alejandro Sieveking, has received scant attention in either, the scholarship on the late Ruiz, or in histories of Chilean cinema. This co-authored study more than compensates for that lack by recapturing the film's plot and mise-en-scène, and presenting the film project as a portal through which to deepen our understanding of contemporary Chilean film culture and everyday life in Santiago during the Eduardo Frei presidency (1964–1970). The film, which was Ruiz's first feature-length effort, is a prime example of what the authors aptly call Ruiz's *cine de indagación* (cinema of inquiry) and experiments with *surreachilismo*, a special Chilean brand of surrealism less historically abstract than its European counterparts. It follows five characters as they muddle, stumble, and struggle through a long weekend filled with bar-hopping, remunerated sex, work evasion, and employee-employer confrontations, immersing us in the *bohemia* of Santiago and displaying the surfacing frustration of the lower middle class. The authors highlight the ways in which the film tackles sexual

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politics at a time when such issues figured only marginally on the progressive screen. The film won the first Chilean National Prize for a film in 1968, and it made its European debut at the 1969 Locarno Film Festival.

Rather than launching into a conventional textual analysis that simply takes the plot and the film format as a given, the authors painstakingly compare archival copies in various formats (from 35 mm to DVD) from around the world, select what they defend as a director's cut, and discursively recreate the film through a scene by scene interpretive description of the action, as it unfolds (Chapter 6). Production stills and frame enlargements add to the commentary on Ruiz's camera direction and sound mixing. The reader will find a summary of Ruiz's editing scheme and the lyrics to the *boleros* featured on the film's soundtrack in the book's appendices.

The main contribution of this book, in addition to making the film available to the reader 'in print', is its discursive reopening and historical documentation of the first phase of Ruiz's career and, concomitantly, a period of Chilean cinema, that has remained lost in the shadow of dictatorship and exile. Chapters 1 and 5 are especially valuable in that they (respectively) map the global reach of, and political and infrastructural support for, the 1960s cinematic 'boom' in Chile, setting the stage for the international reception of the documentary-oriented cinema of the Unidad Popular. They also reveal Ruiz's protagonism in articulating links between Chilean cinema and its counterparts in Brazil and Argentina. What emerges in these chapters is not an image of Ruiz as 'apolitical' (for not embracing the *cine de liberación*), but rather finding his own path to a nationalist, consciousness-raising cinema informed by world literature (James Joyce, Nicanor Parra), popular culture, and avant-garde theater (Eugène Ionesco) and film aesthetics (Jean Cocteau and François Truffaut in particular). The book closes with a meditation on the thematic and structural links of *Tres Tristes Tigres* to Ruiz's last film, *Mistérios de Lisboa* (2010).

If the book falters, it is perhaps in the authors' extension of their 'psychomachy' thesis laid out in Chapter 7 (with different characters in *Tres Tristes Tigres* representing drives associated with the Id and the Superego, etc.). There, they attribute the film's characterisation and core plot structure to Ruiz's own 'family romance', caught as the only child in the changing winds of two contradictory parents. Even though the internal logic of the psychoanalytical reading might be sound, the importance of this line of analysis for elucidating the film and its moment, and Ruiz's personal character, is unconvincing. Another potential hindrance is the length, if not the copiousness of the footnotes, which constitute an entire 'subregion' of the text. While many of the notes helpfully correct the historical record, and demonstrate the authors' thoroughness in working with primary sources, including oral histories, many others lead us into significant digressions from the main analysis, rendering the 'to and fro' from the body of the text tedious at times. Finally, in the last chapter, the sympathetic reader is inclined to hope for more than a hint at the immediate aftermath of *Tres Tristes Tigres* in Ruiz's career, such that we might envision the transition into his filmmaking during the Allende government. In fairness, perhaps that is the subject of another book, which the authors have just published – a two-volume history of Chilean cinema at the end of the 1960s (Cortínez and Engelbert, 2014).

Catherine L. Benamou
University of California, Irvine

Reference

Cortínez, V. and Engelbert, M. (2014) *Evolución en libertad: El cine chileno de fines de los sesenta*. Editorial Cuarto Propio, Santiago.