

## BOOK REVIEWS



Visconti, José Luis. *La senda tenebrosa. Una aproximación a la imagen de la mujer en el cine argentino (1907-2007)*. Buenos Aires: Ediciones Simurg, 2009.

The title of this book portends some ominous facts potentially harmful for women. The first part was copied from *La Senda Tenebrosa* (The Dark Passage), a Hollywood film of the late 1940's. The author, José Luis Visconti is a journalist, a social communicator and a poet born in Buenos Aires. His main objective is to describe diverse types, stereotypes, and images of women in society, and their representation in Argentinean movies from the

1990s to 2007. Visconti provides, from a socio-historical perspective, a detailed representation of the role of women in society, as seen from a masculine leading perspective. The events presented confirm the success and/or failures women go through with the continuous manipulation of men, their own complicity, and the nuance of older women.

The detailed representation is embedded in eleven sections: one introduction, seven chapters, a conclusion, plus one addendum, bibliography and movie analyses. The introduction targets the sixties as a decade with similar characteristics as the nineties, and extends to recent years. Events appear in films before and after the political and military *coup d'état* of 1976, which brought strong restrictions and allowed the fabrication of movies oriented only towards "adult male entertainment." The absence of reflection towards the significant role of women in society remains as the main feature in films of this time. Women walked a long road paved with constant discriminatory attitudes, segregation, and permanent submission to the patriarchal system in Argentinean society. Acts and visuals of domestic violence, and the use of a woman's body only as an image of consumerism filled up movie theatres during the decade of the eighties. In addition, a detailed selection of films presents several, social, economical, and political events, besides women; for example *Tiempo de revancha* (1980), and *El arreglo* (1983), examine corruption, moral integrity, and the war of the Falkland Islands.

The recovery of democracy brought about "el destape," in *Los gatos* (1985) returning to feminine nudity in films about prostitution and lesbianism. During the decade of the nineties foreign capital from Spain and the U.S. empowered the Argentinean film industry, and continued to sustain the traditional role of women as subjects of dominance. In *Enfermero de día, y camarero de noche* (1990), men's sexual fantasies dominate the scene, while women seem to be the sole objects of their fantasy. A slim feeling of women's vindication is shown in *Ya no hay hombres* (1991), where the protagonist Ana leaves an inconvenient relationship and finds a new one; this action anticipates a renovation of themes.

The "New Argentinean Movies" (1995), meant a change of perspective and thematic approach depicting "absence" and family as new values to consider (204-211). Moreover, films directed by women, Rosalía Polizzi, Lita Stantic, and especially Maria Luisa Bemberg, who had been

working since the eighties, established a site for women in the Argentinean film business, by re-writing themes describing the masculine universe. The new millennium brought several films with women entering relationships specifically for economical reasons.

The text shows deep a investigation and an honest social concern in and around the three hundred and sixteen analyzed films. However, the historical chronological approach bends to the literary narrative, causing the reader to constantly search dates backward and forward; a yearly list of analyzed films is posted at the end of the book, but it does not include the page numbers where they appear. Regardless of this fact, the book covers each field of women's discrimination and marginalization. The continuous manipulation men exercise on women with their complicity, and that of other women recalls M. Foucault's theory of power.<sup>1</sup> Visconti remarks that the history of mankind has been generally characterized by the dominance of men over women, making them subordinates to masculine power. These points bring echoes of *The Division of Labor in Society* (1893), a major work by French sociologist Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), where oppression by groups of power is effective by imposing social order.

Dominance, as a structural strategy of power, pretends to construct subtle modifications to take place in the normative aspects of the marginalized group (women), while the ones who are empowered (men) maintain their higher positions; then, subjugation persists. Visconti suggests that a process of conscientious and sincere realization should take place on the side of the oppressed. However, he foresees difficulties in men, as they are not ready to give up their primacy; and in women, who need to liberate themselves of dominance and its impositions. He recommends feminist groups must become active in this area, since it is necessary to understand that women have suffered for centuries from ideological indoctrination.

In conclusion, the book is an enriching piece because it analyzes movies from 1990-2007, and calls for a reflection on the situation of women in contemporary Argentinean movies, and the extended "machismo" in society. It affirms that the role of women has been to accompany the masculine character, not only in movies, but also in real life. While this is a

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<sup>1</sup> *The History of Sexuality (Vol. I)*, Michel Foucault indicates the technology of power possess an unlimited number of strategies to keep people as subordinates. It refers to capitalistic societies and their political and socio-economical practices.

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solid fact, circumstances should change to grant women adequate and unbiased treatment in society and in the world.

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