Czech Film in Exile (Český film v exilu)

By Jan Uhde

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In Czech Film In Exile, Jiří Voráč turns to a topic painfully relevant for the cultural history of his country, yet ignored by his compatriot researchers for years. In the stifling times of the pre-1989 Communist dictatorship, the subject of the exile culture was strictly taboo. More surprising was that it continued to be neglected for almost fifteen years after the "velvet revolution" and subsequent democratization. Among the reasons may have been the geographic fragmentation, linguistic diversity and disorganization of the sources which had to be researched in countries on several continents. Another factor may have been a sort of ideological inertia among some of the Czech academic community, which did not seem to consider its own film exile a worthwhile academic subject.

For Voráč, a film historian at Brno’s Masaryk University, the question of film exile, which included directors such as Miloš Forman, Ivan Passer, Vojtěch Jasný and Emil Radok, has been of ample significance. His well-researched book offers a summary of the inter-war migration, the WWII and the post-1948 emigration waves. Its focus is on the post-invasion (1968) exile, the most numerous and also most productive one. He examines all of its main branches: Europe, North America and Australia. Besides the feature fiction, documentary, animated and TV productions are also discussed. The very centre of Voráč’s attention are the films of Forman, Passer and Jasný. Particularly commendable is the author’s inclusion of the Czech community TV in exile, which was especially active in Canada, and whose activities included the first Czech-language TV performance of Václav Havel’s satirical play Audience in 1979, then still banned by the Communist regime. Voráč’s history of the Czech film exile no doubt represents a valuable contribution to the Czech historiography of cinema.

Author Information

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His professional and research interests focus on Singapore cinema; the identification and distancing mechanisms of the film viewer; the non-authored modifications and manipulation of films; and specific aspects of film history, including the Central European cinema.

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