*“American Sniper”, USA,* 2014. Director: Clint Eastwood. Starring: Bradley Cooper, Sienna Miller.

**“Fuck this place”**

Clint Eastwood does not leave behind his creative and original spirit, after the projection of this film that some consider --- perhaps for its realism, perhaps because the setting is Iraq– a patriotic and war-related sermon, as many other war films popularized and filled with worn-out clichés.

However, there are no patriotic sermons or clichés, or expected resources, except the laconic dialogues, bitter and cracking like a whip.

The result reveals the purest and hardest in the art of filmmaking, set in the “**fucking place”** of a war. For example, it almost goes unmentioned that we are in Iraq. Thus, “dragging along” any political connotation that could appear as a “message”, is not part of the film.

The lead character, Chris Kyle, born in Texas, is the eldest son of a hunter who possesses a violent and rough nature, is narrow-minded yet a man with a good heart. His son seems to be straight as a die, we could say he *is* the messenger of the film: a sniper for the special operations force, who holds the conviction that he is on the side of the good guys.

Kyle is a member of the Navy SEAL, a force that comprises sea, air and land teams. We are at the top of the pyramidal structure supporting fighters. Is he then an exemplary full-blooded Republican? Or is he rather a child of 9/11. The mission Chris is supposed to have, or thinks he has, and actually does have and carries out, turns him into a worn out and faded hero, and although his comrades call him “Legend”, he sees his comrades dropping dead by his side, or tries to go beyond the limits of this war that swallows him like termites eating wood. In any case, Clint Eastwood, places the focus of his story on just that.

Despite this brief advance that sets the frame for action, the final result is neither a cheap nor a simple film. Neither is the portrait of this Legend, the pinpoint accurate sniper – who will fail and will have to turn his target 180 degrees at a crucial point of the plot: that is what Chris (Bradley Cooper: good performance) has become: a fighter that kills and takes risk, takes risk and kills (takes 160 lives) yet he’s not proud of his task.

He is convinced that by killing he protects his own people. With this film, Eastwood does not discredit two of his previous productions “Flags of our Fathers” and “Letters from Iwo Jima”, (two beautiful samples of anti-war films, produced in 2006). In them, Eastwood delivers the American and the Japanese perspective of the last war, and American Sniper could be added to consolidate a trilogy about war. The type of movies Eastwood crafts, as usual, have an excellent dramatic structure. The main character shows mixed feelings at times: doubts about shooting certain targets (a woman, a child), consulting his superiors who abandon him with the obscure order “It’s up to you”.

The film is divided into four acts, which represent similar descents to hell; these are tours to the war front, which, like “pictures on an exhibition” or through a series of accomplished actions, accumulate into the thousand journeys in which Chris stood out as an exceptional sharp shooter.

However, the effects of war are taking the toll on his body, revealed in his rising hypertension, in his more frequent panting, in small details pointing to an estrangement that gradually fades out his character, like the sea patiently eroding a cliff. The film depicts Chris’ growing negligence; he cannot keep his promises to go back home, he forgets his wife and children. It will become difficult for Chris to get back to his no longer peaceful home and also to enlist for a fifth or sixth return to the war front, as he did before.

The film has an impressive and moving sobriety; the road wheel tracks, filmed as they almost smash the streets, sidewalks, floors, alongside the roaring of machine guns, the blasting of bombs and shooting, merge into a suffocating sound track which together with the noise of tanks, in and out of battlefields (even in a garden, where children are playing, and where Chris breaks down with images brought forth by his memories).

The sound track becomes an additional character. Worth mentioning are the assault trucks, a missile carrier which can hardly lift a child and when it partially succeeds in the end, lets him fall again and he survives.

The exposure of the whole SEAL squad to a Syrian sniper that causes havoc among his comrades corresponds to the inverted image of Chris; now everybody is exposed to “another Legend” that is a new challenge. The film approaches the end going deeper into the character’s loss of balance; he becomes blind to his inner world and his surroundings. His return to a lost family peace is exceedingly uncomfortable, full of failure and desperation and Chris will no longer be able to fight for life.

***Juan Carlos Capo***