

ACADÉMIE BULGARE DES SCIENCES  
INSTITUT D'ÉTUDES BALKANIQUES & CENTRE DE THRACOLOGIE

# ÉTUDES BALKANIQUES

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Marian Țuțui, *Studii de film românesc și balcanic*. București, Noi Media Print, 2021, 215 p. ISBN 978-606-572-122-7

The recent book by Prof. Marian Țuțui entitled *Studii de Film Românesc și Balcanic* (*Studies on Romanian and Balkan Film*) compiles together 23 articles written in the course of almost two decades (2006–2021) for different important journals and collective volumes that reveal the specific interests and the professional evolution of their author. For the scholars working in the field of Balkan Cinema Studies, the name of Marian Țuțui is a synonym of the passion connected to the regional film culture in its various hypostases. Graduated from the University in Bucharest as an expert in Bulgarian and Romanian philology, the future researcher began his career in the National Cinematheque in which he discovered the alluring world of the seventh art. The knowledge attained in this institution as well as the successful collaboration with the colleagues from the rest film archives on the territory of the Peninsula defined his strong motivation to tackle with Balkan film.



Later Marian Țuțui prepared a PhD dissertation and logically his monograph *Orient Express: The Romanian and Balkan Cinema* (Bucharest: Noi Media Print, 2011) based on it, appeared. Participant in many academic conferences and projects, prolific author who publishes in Romanian and English, he also devoted time and tremendous efforts to teach at Hyperion University and to build up the emblematic hedonistic Divan Film Festival in Cetate – a small picturesque village situated on the bank of Danube.

As the title indicates, the book *Studii de Film Românesc și Balcanic* is divided into two main parts – the first one discussed topics concerning the national cinema but the second one – the aspects of the common regional film history and present day.

In *Liviu Ciulei and the Forest of the Hanged* Marian Țuțui analyzed the cult screen adaptation of the Liviu Rebreanu's classical novel *Forest of the Hanged* (*Pădurea Spînzuraților*) realized in 1965 for which Liviu Ciulei received 'the best director' prize in Cannes (1965). Putting the movie in the context of the long-established tradition of the screen adaptations in Romanian cinema, the researcher emphasized that this literature work had a very inmost meaning because it was inspired by the terrible death of the writer's brother executed after being caught trying to cross the frontline. The plot narrated the story of the protagonist Apostol Bologa during the WW1 and his experiences in Transylvania that was still part of Austro-Hungary. In fact, the novel reconstructed the complicated inter-ethnic relations within the Empire and their dynamics in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the adaptation Liviu Ciulei made some alterations but as a whole his interpretation remained faithful to the original spirit of the work.

In the next article *Don't Lean Out the Window* (*È pericoloso sporgerși*) the scholar explored a comedy from 1993 shot by the famous director Nae Caranfil that could be described as a nostalgic gaze on the near past (80<sup>-ies</sup>). This movie radically distinguished from the visual style of the majority Romanian films dealing with the communist epoch in which prevailed dramatic and tragic stories depicted in gloomy colours. Irrespective of the clear artistic differences between the representatives of the *Romanian New Wave* and Nae Caranfil, Marian Țuțui identified the influence exerted by the above-mentioned filmmaker on the following movies: *Occident* (d. Cristian Mungiu, 2002), *Tales from the Golden Age* (*Amintiri din Epoca de Aur*, d. Cristian Mungiu, 2009) and *California Dreamin'* (*endless*) (d. Cristian Nemescu, 2007).

*Ion, What Is It Like on a Building Site?* (*Ioane, cum e în construcții?*) is a short essay about the documentary film made by Sabina Pop in 1983 that was presented in the retrospective „Spring After Winter” within Berlinale (2009) in reference to the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall and in this programme were included movies heralding the collapse of the communist regime.

One of the most significant texts in the first part of the book are the

articles *The Romanian Wave, a New Cinematic Genre?* and *A Reconstruction without Nostalgia of Interwar Romania: An Unforgettable Summer*. Marian Țuțui explained in depth the characteristics of the *Romanian New Wave* phenomenon comparing its aesthetics with the *Italian Neorealism* and thus he put the movies belonging to the quoted brand in a wider European cinematic context. The author has a paradoxical conclusion: in comparison with the Romanian dramas, the Italian neorealist ones seem melodramas.

In *A Reconstruction without Nostalgia of Interwar Romania: An Unforgettable Summer* the researcher focused his attention on Lucian Pintilie's film co-production *An Unforgettable Summer* (*O vară de neuitat/Un été inoubliable*, 1994) that received warmer reception abroad than at home and even was nominated for the Golden Palm in Cannes. Expectedly, the film resurrected a chapter from the autobiographical novel *Family Chronicle* (*Cronică de familie*, 1957) by Petru Dumitriu. The writer shared the story of his own parents Captain Petru Dumitriu (featured by Claudiu Bleonț) and Marie-Thérèse Von Debretsy (Kristin Scott-Thomas) whose destiny led them in Southern Dobrudja on the Romanian-Bulgarian border. Lucian Pintilie conveyed successfully the image of the inter-war Romania and the contradictory relations

between Romanians and Bulgarians in this historical moment. According to Marian Țuțui the filmmaker "felt the need to provide an example of 'post-communist re-balkanization of the Balkans'. This explains why the director was fascinated in the early 90<sup>-ies</sup> by an almost forgotten episode from the Romanian history".

Quite interesting facet from the research field of the scholar was his systematic work dedicated to the so-called *Romanian western*. Marian Țuțui recognized the process of cultural transfer and domestication of the American popular model in the late 50<sup>-ies</sup> in its two variants (genuine western and spaghetti western). The time in which this genre bloomed in Romania were 60<sup>-ies</sup> and 70<sup>-ies</sup> but there was similar development in the other Balkan countries for example in Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. The author defined *Captain Lechi* (*Kapetan Lesi*, 1960, Yugoslavia, d. Živorad 'Žika' Mitrovic) and the Bulgarian films *Manly Times* (*Mazhki vremena* (1977, d. Eduard Sachariev) and *The Judge* (*Sadiyata*, 1986, d. Plamen Maslarov) such as representatives for the local western genre.

In the article *4 Oscars and 8 Nominations for Romanian Hebrews*, the film historian made a comprehensive overview linked to the Jewish filmmakers having Romanian roots who achieved international recognition.

The second part of the book *Balkan Film Studies* included heterogeneous texts varying on circumstantial accounts, for instance *What is Balkan Cinema?* to case studies on concrete themes: *A Well-Adapted Cinematic Genre in the Balkans: Melodrama*, *The Visual Heritage of the Manakia Brothers in the Balkan Countries*, *The New Bulgarian Documentary* and so on.

Taking as a starting point the theoretical paradigms created by Eric Hobsbawm, Edward Said, Maria Todorova, Vesna Goldsworthy and Dina Jordanova, Marian Țuțui outlined the sphere of the Balkan Film Studies that is relatively new academic discipline constructed in the 90<sup>ies</sup> as a result of the constant visual flow connected to the wars in former Yugoslavia. The Romanian scholar joined the critical voices from the region which accentuating on the responsibility of some local filmmakers who seriously contributed to the reputation of the Balkans as an almost wild areal within the civilized Western Europe.

Further, Marian Țuțui explored the discursive cinematic models in terms of the Peninsula – American and Western European – that have been rapidly internalized and reproduced in many Balkan movies. The deeply entrenched clichés presented the region quite simplistically: backwardness of the habitants, violence, corruption practice, dominance of

the patriarchal social order, oriental traditions, Gypsies and ethnic enmities. Looking for the essence of Balkan Cinema, the researcher discovered six general features typical of it: *political film* reflecting the intricate local history, *the quick-tempered characters* possessing peculiar ethos, *the symbolism, fantasticalness* evolving from the dreams, *the black comedy* and *the road-movie*. Marian Țuțui discussed that the famous ‘ethno’ style launched by Emir Kusturica and other directors became an easily recognizable label and if Balkan filmmakers preferred to exploit another artistic pattern, they often were perceived as unauthentic and secondary. Moreover, in order to reinforce his arguments, the Romanian scholar quoted Jurica Pavicić’s words: “according to this colonial logic, love stories, crime stories or even straight storytelling are Western domains, and ‘the third world’ should refrain from this, and cultivate so-called its ‘own voice’”.

Marian Țuțui identified several local genres: *the fustanella* (rural melodrama), *the movies with outlaws* (haidouks) and *the partisan film*. He elaborated in detail the topic about melodrama in *A Well Adapted Cinematic Genre in the Balkans: Melodrama* commenting from a comparative perspective the development of the genre in the region and concluded that in the socialist coun-

tries melodrama disappeared because of imposing of socialist realism but in Greece and Turkey it survived and was a representative form of the mainstream cinema.

Applying the same approach, the author studied in *The First Balkan Genre: Films on Outlaws* another trend in Balkan Cinema: the emergence of the movies with haidouks during the 20<sup>-ies</sup> of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that demonstrated sustainable presence in the whole film history of the region. Marian Țuțui noted that they could be considered as a subgenre of adventure film in Serbia, Romania and Hungary. In contrast, in Greece, Bulgaria, North Macedonia and Albania the adventurous dimension of these movies was overwhelmed by the historical one in which the emphasis was put on the struggle for emancipation from the Ottoman Empire.

One central theme in the work of the Romanian scholar is the topic of the Manakia brothers. In the text *The Visual Heritage of the Manakia Brothers in the Balkan Countries*, the researcher scrutinized the pretensions expressed by the majority of the Balkan countries to integrate the Manakia brothers in their specific national context. However, Marian Țuțui persuasively proved that they were artists belonging to the whole region.

The film historian changed the focus of his attention in the following articles *Aristocrats and Villains of Balkan Origin in Western European and American Films* and *Eight Australian Films about the Balkans* in which he discussed the stylistic devices, the plots and the iconic repertoire used by Western filmmakers in order to construct their own image about the Peninsula.

The success of two fiction feature films – *The Forest of the Hanged* ('best director' prize in Cannes, 1965) and *The Peach Thief* (nomination for Golden Lion, Venice, 1964, d. Vulo Radev) brought an unprecedented assertion for Romanian and Bulgarian cinemas, usually neglected and underestimated in juxtaposition with the cinematic achievements of the rest of Eastern European countries such as the USSR, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Poland and Hungary. Marian Țuțui explored it in the article *Two Mirrors of the First World War: The Forest of the Hanged and The Peach Thief*. It is worth being said, that the Romanian scholar has a long-lasting interest in Bulgarian Cinema and the essay *The New Bulgarian Documentary* is a clear evidence of it. Analyzing the movies made by leading directors such as Adela Peeva and Andrey Paunov, the author expressed his position that comedic documentary could be accepted as an authentic Bulgarian brand.

In the last text entitled *Divan Film Festival or the Story of a Great Small Festival of Cinema and Culinary Art* Marian Țuțui shared his unique and exiting experience from the years when he was director of the above-mentioned cultural event held in Cetate, Romania. This festival was totally dedicated to the cause of Balkan Cinema and cuisine and turned out in a symbol of the mutual affection and profound understanding towards the Balkans beyond the usual prejudices and dominating attitudes.

Summarizing, I would like to say that the Marian Țuțui's book *Studii*

*de film românesc și balcanic* will be interesting for everybody tempted by Balkan cinema and culture because the author is often challenging with his original statements and raises many important questions whose clarification lies ahead.

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