

Contemporary Literature and Cinema in the European Southeast and the Question of Balkan Identity

The course is designed as an overview of Bulgarian contributions to the narrative arts of fiction and cinema today. If at all, Bulgaria is known for its folklore, choirs, opera singers and two Christos (Yavashev and Stoichkov), but its literature is rarely translated and its cinema is seldom screened. The course will of course demonstrate why such an attitude is unjustified but much more important question is what stands behind this selective (non-)presence: what are the likely cultural and historical, aesthetic and stylistic, marketing and publicity issues for such a notorious absence.

The course will be in two parts, five weeks each.

The first cycle will focus exclusively on the best Bulgarian literary production for the last half a century:

1. Introduction in Bulgarian cultural history, literature and arts
2. Ivaylo Petrov, *Wolfhunt* (and *Before I Was Born and Afterwards*)
3. Georgy Gospodinov, *The Physics of Sorrow* (and *Natural Novel*)
4. Milen Ruskov, *Thrown into Nature* (and the film *Summit*, available on HBO, after the eponym novel) and Vladislav Todorov, *Zift* (and *Zincograph*) and the movies *Zift* and *The Color of the Chameleon*.
5. *Passion, or The Death of Alice* by Emilia Dvoryanova, *Party Headquarters* by Georgi Tenev, *The Same Night Awaits Us All: Diary of a Novel* by Hristo Karastoyanov, *18% Grey* by Zahari Karabashliev, *Mission London* and *The Black Box* by Alek Popov, *Nine Rabbits* by Virginia Zaharieva, *Mothers* by Theodora Dimova

The second cycle will be focused on the best Bulgarian cinema of the last half a century.

1. Methodi Antonov, *The Goat's Horn*,
2. Georgy Djulgerov, *Advantage*,
3. Rangel Valchanov, *The Unknown Soldier's Patent Lather Shoes*
4. Kristina Grozeva, Petar Valchanov, *Lesson*; *Glory*; Bojina Panayotova *I See Red People (Je vois rouge)*
5. Conclusion: Wrapping up the question of Balkan identity in Bulgarian contemporary narrative arts

All these books and movies pose the question “Who are we, where do we come from and where do we go?”. All of them address the identity question by asking themselves what makes “us” different – what makes us “us”, if such thing does actually exist. Balkanness is not on the surface, national and social identities seem to be more apparent markers. Yet I’ll demonstrate that the Balkan aspect is crucial for both the formation, the conceptualization and the understanding of Bulgarian storytelling now and then.