

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

This course provides an overview of Bulgarian contributions to the narrative arts of fiction and cinema today. Bulgaria is known for its folklore, choirs, opera singers and Christo (Yavashev and Stoichkov), but its literature is rarely translated and its cinema is seldom screened. This course shows why this attitude is unwarranted, but also what stands behind it: what are the likely cultural and historical, aesthetic and stylistic, marketing and publicity issues for such a notorious non-presence.

The course focuses exclusively on masterpieces: 5 books – (Ivaylo Petrov, *Before I Was Born and Afterwards*, Vera Mutafchieva *The Case Djem*, Yordan Radichkov, *Fierce Mood*, Georgy Gospodinov, *The Physics of Sorrow* and Milen Ruskov, *Thrown into Nature*) and 5 movies (Methodi Antonov, *The Goat's Horn*, Georgy Djulgerov, *Advantage*, Rangel Valchanov, *The Unknown Soldier's Patent Lather Shoes*, Yavor Gardev, *Zift*, Kamen Kalev, *Eastern Plays*). All these books and movies pose the question “Who are we, where do we come from and what is our destiny?” All of them address the question of identity and try to grasp what makes “us” different – what makes us “us” (if there is such thing). Balkanness is not on the surface, national and social identity seem to be more apparent markers. I argue that the Balkan aspect is crucial for both the formation and understanding of Bulgarian narratives past and present. The mystery of Balkanness as the internal other of Europe will thus appear as an optics towards a European self-perception.