

OPINION

By Associate Professor Kostadin Bonev Kostadinov, Lecturer in Film and Television Directing at Neofit Rilski Southwest University in Blagoevgrad

on the dissertation *The Feature Films of Rangel Valchanov: Transformations of Authenticity* For obtaining Doctoral education and scientific degree in professional field 8.4 "Theatre and Film Art" by candidate Antonia Milcheva, a PhD student in "Film Studies, Cinema Art and Television" at the Department of Cinema, Advertising and Show Business, NBU

Reviewer: Assoc. Prof. Kostadin Bonev

**PhD candidate: Antonia Milcheva
Dyulgerov**

Scientific advisor: Prof. Georgi

I. Aim of the study

The aim of the presented dissertation is to analyze the artistic film directing method of film director Rangel Valchanov as well as to trace the method's transformations over time taking into account the dynamics of social development in Bulgaria in the period from the late 1950s to the changes that occurred in the country in 1989. To this purpose, the PhD student focuses on one main aesthetic category: the authenticity of the specific artistic work of Rangel Valchanov created during the mentioned period.

The dissertee analyses the notion of authenticity in its aesthetic parameters which are far more comprehensive than the understanding of the verisimilitude of the film image and its relation to our perception of the surrounding world.

As a fundamental element of the concept of authenticity in her research Antonia Milcheva points out the positioning of certain film elements forging the screen environment in a way in which the author creates a world different from the one that surrounds us yet a convincing and

impactful one, compelling the viewer in the cinema hall to trust the creator of this world and accept the rules of the game he imposes on him.

It is the claim of the author of this dissertation that the new world thus constructed by the imagination and talent of the filmmaker, commonly called "screen reality", relates to truth in a way that a documentary study might.

II. Subject and object of the study

As I have already mentioned, the object of study in the doctoral dissertation are Rangel Valchanov's films from his debut film *On the Small Island* in 1958 to *Now Where to which is* the last film that Rangel Valchanov made under the prevailing communist ideology. This stretches over a 30-year period starting roughly since the April Plenum of 1956 to the overthrow of Todor Zhivkov in 1989. This is a period marked by distinct social transformations whose influence on Bulgarian art predetermined its shape to the extent that the authenticity of a particular artistic phenomenon was drowned in ideological clichés and prescriptions.

Antonia Milcheva recognizes that to debut in such an environment is a difficult task unless one possesses resistive forces that allow one to carve out a territory for their aesthetic model. Oftentimes this was done in a conspiratory manner, i.e. by mimicry or by outsmarting the powers that be that the rules as laid down in the Communist Party documents have been adhered to, with the ultimate goal of preserving the model that corresponds most fully to the author's understanding of authenticity.

III. Research methodology

The very grouping of Rangel Valchanov's films belonging to the period of the so-called "socialist realism" /1958-1962/, through the period of search for the actual model /1953-1970/, to the fully developed model of authenticity subordinated to the director's fantasy and his idea of the world that surrounds us /*The Patent Shoes of the Unknown Warrior* 1979/ and the attempt to bring the model found into the present /*Last Wishes, Where Are You Going, Now Where* to in the 1980s/ suggests that the research will take into account the individual approach of the author in each of the films listed. Whatever theoretical principles and laws we may formulate about the aesthetic nature of the concept of authenticity, the fact remains that Rangel Valchanov

constructs filmic authenticity from the elements that dramaturgy provides in each piece of work. They are one type in *The Patent Leather Shoes* and entirely different in, say, *The Inspector and the Night*. But there is something that is applicable to all of Rangel Valchanov's films, i.e. you can see his moral model, his idea of good and evil, of high and low. This is the mortar that binds the construction of each of his films, the founding element of Rangel's film authenticity.

The study is methodical and thorough; it traces chronologically the main creative period of Rangel Valchanov and places it in the context of the Bulgarian cinema of that period, thus comparing it with the main trends in the development of European cinema at that time.

I will confess that reading the dissertation in question was the first time that I looked at Rangel Valchanov's early films through the prism of Italian neorealism. In the years of doctrinaire rules and conventions, to shuffle the established model like Rubik's cube, to change the accents and bring them as close as possible to one's own idea of artistic justice, which is exactly what Rangel Valchanov did in his first three films, is indeed drawing energy from the Italian cinema of truth. The dissertation quotes Roberto Rossellini: in the "new cinema" authors speak about the world that surrounds them "in a ruthlessly concrete way". This is how Rangel Valchanov's acting discoveries Georgi Naumov and Kornelia Bozhanova appear. And so does the world of Rangel Valchanov that we know from his films.

In his 1960s films, *The Inspector and the Night* and *The Wolf*, Rangel Valchanov expands the territory of his explorations. In these two films he seeks authenticity in the compaction of the psychological depth of the images. His 1960s films add skepticism to the enthusiasm and youthful audacity of his first films. An irony bordering on mockery. As Antonia Milcheva correctly perceives, dealing with the truth is a lonely business. In these two films, another of the elements that make up the authenticity of Rangel Valchanov's model is evident, namely his unmistakable choice of actors (Georgi Kaloyanchev and Nevena Kokanova in *The Inspector and the Night*, Ilka Zafirova in *The Wolf*).

The PhD student confidently traces the stages of Rangel Valchanov's artistic development to arrive at the film that marks the construction of an aesthetic model in which the director builds a parallel reality that is solely his: *The Patent Shoes of the Unknown Warrior*. The world Rangel

Valchanov shows us in this film is bizarre, strange, frightening but real in the way only a dream can be.

Antonia Milcheva traces the author's agonizing struggle to realize his dream film: the vicissitudes in Bulgaria, the vicissitudes in Czechoslovakia, then again in Bulgaria.

In this most personal but also most universal film of his, the backstage voice of the protagonist narrator occupies a special place blending childhood memory with the author's contemporary message, creating an epic about times and events that have been and will never be again, resembling a song from a village songbook.

As the doctoral student concludes, "This makes *The Patent Leather Shoes* one of the most authentic author universes in Bulgarian cinema."

IV. Contributions

It is my opinion that this dissertation has achieved its aims as stated at the outset. Tracing Rangel Valchanov's films over a period of 30 years marked by ideological and creative constraints provides evidence to formulate a pattern of authenticity which marks Rangel Valchanov's films in this period.

The notion of authenticity itself has been explored and formulated in the context of Rangel Valchanov's work.

The doctoral student puts forward the proposition that the author's conception of the world, his understanding of truth and truthfulness is the main element which can make the audience in the hall believe in the film reality constructed in front of their eyes.

Another contribution is that the work of one of the brightest Bulgarian filmmakers has been examined and reviewed from the point of view of today.

V. Critical remarks and recommendations

The proposed dissertation proves the doctoral student's ability to think analytically and to derive conclusions that have not been the subject of previous research. Beyond its research significance, I believe that this study of the artistic method of an author of Rangel Valchanov's stature will be of interest to cinema students and cinema lovers alike.

The doctoral dissertation entitled *The feature films of Rangel Valchanov: transformations of authenticity* is sufficient guarantee for the future development of PhD student Antonia Milcheva.

I have no further remarks or recommendations.

V. Conclusion

I give an unequivocally positive assessment of the candidature of PhD student Antonia Milcheva for the Doctoral educational and scientific degree in professional field 8.4. Theatre and Film Art, scientific specialty Film Studies, Film Art and Television.

Date:

Reviewer:

Assoc. Prof. Kostadin Bonev, Bulgarian film director, lecturer in film directing at the South University Neofit Rilski in Blagoevgrad and in dramaturgy for documentary cinema at NATFA "Krastyo Sarafov" Sofia, winner of national and international awards.