

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Nadezhda Mihailova [Marinchevska], Institute of Art Studies, BAS (professional field 8.4. Theatre and film art)

for the competition for Professor in a professional field 8.4. Theatre and film art and academic specialty "Film Studies, Film Art and television" (Bulgarian short feature film) for the needs of "Cinema, Advertising and Show business" department, published in SG no. 38/24.04.2020 with candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sc. Petia Alexandrova

I. Eligibility. National Minimal Academic Position Requirements.

From the attached reference it can be seen that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sc. Petia Alexandrova not only meets the minimal national requirements and the requirements of NBU, but also significantly exceeds the required points in sections B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I. The total number of points of Alexandrova covers twice the requirements.

II. Research (creative) activity and results:

The monographic work of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Sc. Petia Alexandrova *Short-form films: Advantages and challenges. Models and practices of Bulgarian short features* (ISBN 978-954-8594-83-7) is the first comprehensive and in-depth study of short feature film in Bulgaria. The text focuses mainly on film production after 1989, but at the same time is placed in a broad historical context – national and global. The analysis of the Bulgarian short film is carried out with extreme precision and completeness and even just the study and systematization of such a huge, empirical material is a significant contribution of the monograph. Quality of the text are the constant parallels to a large amount of feature films, which outline significant characteristics in the overall film process of film production in Bulgaria.

Methodologically, the short feature film in Bulgaria is considered in aesthetic, sociological and communicative aspect, with special attention paid to the social and cultural functioning of "short cinema". The interdisciplinary methodology fully corresponds to the complex nature of the phenomenon.

The relevance of the book is due to the fact that in recent decades, short film has increased in production dozens of times worldwide. This type of cinema, which usually stays out of the sight of critics and theorists, occupies an increasingly prominent place in the field of filmmaking – both

as an aesthetic phenomenon with its own specifics, and as an incubator for young talent. *The Cinema in Shadow* is still poorly researched and Bulgarian short film is considered for the first time as a substantive object.

The book is structured in four main chapters. The first one motivates the research methodology and pays attention to terminological and theoretical issues. Assoc. Prof. Petia Alexandrova analyzes in detail the partially overlapping concepts: "short film", "independent", "experimental", "alternative", "avant-garde", "underground", "art project", etc. The refinement of the theoretical concepts is one of the essential contributions of the research. The author systematizes different approaches in defining the object, which is quite a voluminous work, as even the standard notion of "duration" varies in a very wide range. Petia Alexandrova analyzes the short/independent film in various contexts – from the American usage as an opposition to the mainstream to the traditional Bulgarian interpretation as in the "Experimental Film Studio" founded in 1974 in Sofia. She pays attention to the types and subtypes of short film, as well as its historical development.

The second chapter *Social Being* focuses on the productional, financial, distribution and other aspects of short film. The "production-distribution-screening" process is considered from the specific angle of the short film. Alexandrova identifies a number of fund sources for "cheap cinema", such as television, traditional state and municipal institutions and funds, but also draws attention to new forms, such as "crowdfunding" and "crowdsourcing". Particular attention is paid to the access of the short film to the audience. An important aspect here is the festival life of the work. The analysis of various internet sites, platforms and portals for cinema in our country expands the scope of the research and gives an idea of the short film alternative way of functioning in the society. Media reflection and audiences are also a subject of the study. The author manages to present the dynamics and constantly changing parameters in the short film's social life in opposition to the more conservatively developing processes in feature film. It is this dynamic that is a prerequisite for the emergence of new, creative or alternative forms in film language. The contribution of this section has a practical value for young authors entering the profession.

In the third chapter *History and Models* Assoc. Prof. Petia Alexandrova makes a thorough historiographical analysis of the Bulgarian short film, finding that it was through the short film form in the 60s and 70s of the twentieth century that the "the renewal of the genre characteristics of Bulgarian comedy" were laid. Constant parallels with European and world practice expand the

scope of the analysis. The Bulgarian cinema of the transition is considered in a broad perspective, as Petia Alexandrova also emphasizes student cinema, renewal of technologies, reduction of production costs, digitalization of the processes, etc. Aesthetically, she defines some subtypes of short cinema – film adaptations, short stories, omnibus films, hybrid forms, etc., again placing the Bulgarian practice in the world context. Of particular interest is the analysis of omnibus films (anthology films, portmanteau films, composite films) as a series of related shorts that manage to capture the "spirit of the times" by comparing different points of view of their authors.

The last part *Topics, Representatives and Analysis in the 21st Century* is a kind of core of the book. Petia Alexandrova examines the creative processes and authors for decades. The performance of the most prominent directors such as Nadezhda Koseva, Svetla Tsotsorkova, Petar Valchanov and Kristina Grozeva, Kamen Kalev, Dragomir Sholev, Pavel Vesnakov, Nikolay Todorov, Ventsislav Zankov, Hristo Simeonov and many others goes far beyond a critical view of the works. In the vast ocean of titles, Alexandrova manages to outline certain trends that range from realistic cinema to surrealism and the absurd. An overall picture of the short film production in the context of the whole Bulgarian cinema from the post-totalitarian era is presented. Here are some of Petia Alexandrova's conclusions: *Achieved*: mastered format, unusual ideas in the plot or construction, use of actors and non-actors and their natural combination in the film, mastering the restrictive "closed space", etc. *Insufficient*: experimental films are quite few, often repetitive motifs and plots emerge, repetitive titles appear, originality is sometimes missing ...

The peculiarities of short film – short stories, cheap and fast production, lack of "heavy" crew, small number of characters, etc. – create an opportunity for the emergence of a new type of thematic scope and design. The potential for creating an alternative to the full-length cinema is there. However, the result is not always acceptable. Bulgarian feature short films in most cases do not seek to be radical in their aesthetic pursuits, they are rarely avant-garde or experimental. Although most short filmmakers are still students or young directors, their ability to offer an alternative film language or other kind of radical screen provocation is not clearly visible in general. Despite this observation, however, Petia Alexandrova highlights the talented authors who (perhaps!) will manage to form a "new wave" in Bulgarian cinema in the next decade. They demonstrate their own, recognizable style and their inclusion in the "big cinema" will probably lead to the emergence of new trends. In any case, however, short film "definitely enriches and

diversifies the practices of making, showing, distributing and the overall functioning of the film process."

Petia Alexandrova's book *Short-form films: Advantages and challenges. Models and practices of Bulgarian short features* is a significant scientific work based on a huge amount of empirical material (about 250 titles in the filmography) and is the first comprehensive study of the Bulgarian short film. The text fills up a gap in our film studies and contributes to the encyclopedic knowledge. The original concept and scientific precision give high value to the research. Petia Alexandrova finds a great potential of the future film development in the short film, in its dynamics and ability to make rapid changes in aesthetics, production and distribution. This potential remains to be realized.

For the competition Assoc. Prof. Petia Alexandrova also suggests 18 publications which are indicative of the author's broad erudition not only in the field of Bulgarian cinema, but also in the field of world film process and history, as well as in the fields of literature and theater. The various texts testify to Petia Alexandrova's ability to work at different levels – from the in-depth theoretical research ("Bulgarian omnibus films", "The big cinema on the small screens", "For the usage of intellectual property in the Bulgarian short film", "Since childhood the media "entertain" us with violence and suspicious victories", etc.) through historical studies ("I hear your voices", "Pickford and Fairbanks"), genre analysis ("Antiuopia in Russian, or forward to tomorrow"), the in-depth study of the festival life and its impact on the film process ("Bulgarian short feature film and the Jamieson Awards", "Bulgarian presence at the Moscow Film Festival", etc.) to current but significant artistic and social analyzes ("Citizens vs media. The case with the film "Botev is an idiot" ("In class with Botev"), etc. The publications of Assoc. Prof. Petia Alexandrova, regardless of whether they are quickly written on a specific topical occasion, or are a result of a long study, invariably show her in-depth knowledge of cinema – the result of more than thirty years of professional activity. At the same time, it should be emphasized that the 18 publications proposed in the competition are only part of the author's publishing activity.

The citations of Assoc. Prof. Petia Alexandrova are in publications such as "Art Readings" (referenced in Web of Science), "Problems of Art" (referenced in Erih +), monographs and peer-reviewed publications. The quotations testify to Alexandrova's high scientific authority and go beyond the national requirements for the academic affiliation Professor.

Assoc. Prof. Petia Alexandrova is a leader and active participant in many national and international projects. It is noteworthy that Petia Alexandrova's projects are multifaceted and cover various fields – from scientific research, through student and organizational projects to editorial and expert practices. In this regard, Alexandrova's activity and energy should be acclaimed.

III. Teaching activities

Petia Alexandrova is a longtime lecturer at the New Bulgarian University. She has taught numerous courses in the Departments of “Cinema, Advertising and Show Business” and “Media and Communication”, such as *The Language of Cinema; Arts and Media; Management of Art Projects; Writing for Media Culture, and History. practices in world cinema; Mass media and culture; Cinema as a universal language; Society in the frame; Arts and modernity* and others. In the e-learning module "MOODLE NBU" Alexandrova has uploaded original teaching materials for 13 courses for bachelor and master programs, as well as links, videos and additional texts. Her monographs and publications are also available to students.

Her active work with students includes both the scientific guidance of graduates and the academic mentoring of many students (30), as well as practical work on projects, students' inclusion in festivals and press centers. Working on the project "Student Internships" Petia Alexandrova has assisted the signing of contracts between NBU and Bulgarian Telegraph Agency, Bulgarian National Radio, Bulgarian National Television and Sofia Film Fest.

The appreciation of Assoc. Prof. Petia Alexandrova by the students is confirmed by their high rating – 4.47 (out of 5) for the last 12 years.

Petia Alexandrova's teaching activity is also carried out under contracts of NBU with foreign higher education institutions – Moscow State Linguistic University, Russia and Connecticut College, USA.

Petia Alexandrova is also the research supervisor of two doctoral students.

IV. Administrative and public activities

Petia Alexandrova is a regular participant in the Departmental Council, head of the practical program "Access to Information and Public Communications", director of the Program Council (2015-2017) and a member of the same council after that; she is a member of the Faculty Council and the Academic Council of the NBU. She also participates in the Quality Committee of the Board

of Trustees from 2017. The participation of Assoc. Prof. Petia Alexandrova in these councils and committees is a proof of her competence in terms of academic work, courses, programs, etc.

V. Personal impressions

I have known Petia Alexandrova for many years in her professional activity as a film critic, researcher and teacher. She is an extremely correct and well-meaning colleague, always contributing to the cheerful atmosphere in communication. My impression of our joint work – first as a doctoral student at the Institute of Art Studies of Ars, and later as an external member of the Screen Art sector – is for an erudite scientist who contributes to Bulgarian film studies not only through her own work but also through questions and adjustments to the work of others. Petia Alexandrova generously donates new and original ideas when discussing the works of her colleagues, which makes her an indispensable member of any research team. It is the ability to work in a team that distinguishes her from many other colleagues. Her work on the NSF-funded project *Post-Totalitarian Bulgarian Cinema – Models and Identities* highlighted her qualities in the scientific debate, conducted by listening to the arguments and scientific arguments.

I know Petia Alexandrova also as a long-term editor with precise requirements for the quality of the texts, and as a sought-after expert – a festival selector or a member of numerous local and international juries and art commissions. Her calm and objective assessment has always cooled the hot passions of filmmakers and contributed to productive work. I have also seen Petia Alexandrova to communicate with students at various film festivals, where she has tutored their practice. The individual attention to each of them, as well as her delicate, cheerful character have always managed to overcome the shyness of the young people and to integrate them into the professional community.

Conclusion: The candidate's contributions give me reason to believe that *Assoc. Prof. Dr.Sc. Petia Alexandrova has all the necessary qualities to be a Professor in NBU. I vote YES.*

Sofia, 16.08.2020

Prof. Dr. Nadezhda Marinchevska