

OPINION

By Prof. DSc Nikolay Iordanov

On the competition materials for acquiring the academic position of Professor in Film Studies, Film Art and Television (History of Bulgarian Cinema and Cinema Culture), professional field 8.4. Theatre and Film Art, for the needs of the Screen Arts Department, Institute of Art Studies – BAS) announced in the State Gazette (issue 47 / 04.06.2024) with one candidate Assoc. Prof. DSc Alexander Donev

After a thorough study of the publications provided by Assoc. Prof. DSc Alexander Donev, namely habilitation work – monograph: *Zlatan Dudow. The Straight Path to Cinema. From Tsaribrod via Sofia to Berlin*, Institute of Art Studies (BAS, 2023, ISBN:978-619-7619-25-6, 200 p.), seven academic studies and articles, as well as the evidential material on the professional, academic research and expert-consulting activities of their author to date, I can conclude the following:

Assoc. Prof. DSc Alexander Donev is an extremely active professional in the field of film studies, but his interests and activities also extend into the fields of theatre studies and general cultural history. He has expertise in the fields of film theory and history, as well as film production, film distribution and film criticism.

The habilitation thesis of Al. Donev *Zlatan Dudow. The Straight Path to Cinema. From Tsaribrod via Sofia to Berlin* studies an unexplored period in the life of the German film director of Bulgarian origin Zlatan Dudow, namely the years of his formation as an individual and professional in the spheres of theatre and especially cinema. In fact, the study itself does not use national determinants; rather, it examines Zlatan Dudow's presence in European film and theatre life in the twentieth century. For the earliest years of his life, there is very little documentary evidence. This is precisely the great challenge facing the researcher, which he resolves through the method of biographical reconstruction by reference to archived documents, letters between Zlatan Dudow and Brecht, Zlatan Dudow and Boyan Danovsky, and critical publications by Zlatan Dudow himself in the journal *Nasheto Kino* in 1924-1925, a talk by Peter Uvaliev on BBC Radio about Zlatan Dudow's most significant film, *Kuhle Wampé*, further research into his places of residence, other studies on the subject, memoirs, photographs, etc., and through logical correlations between biographical facts and the context of the era. At the same time, the introductory chapter *Zlatan Dudow - Overlooked and Underestimated* presents Zlatan Dudow's creative development in his communication and collaboration with leading film and theatre artists and intellectuals such as Bertolt Brecht, Siegfried Krakauer, Theodor Adorno, André Bazin and many others. The text is based on in-depth archival research in the holdings of the State Archives Agency, the Archive for Cinema and

Media Art of the Academy of Arts in Berlin, the French National Archives, the archives of the French Cinematheque and the Paris Prefecture. These research efforts, which arouse respect after reading the text, have been carried out to delineate the profile of an inquisitive and creative personality, a profile that goes beyond the stigmatizing notions imposed by his other researchers to date. Carefully and objectively, the author seeks to analyze the complex sociocultural atmosphere in Bulgaria, Germany, France, and the GDR after World War II, as well as the life, professional, and political decisions that Zlatan Dudow made. The author's strong desire to move away from a clichéd presentation of this historical figure as a convinced communist in his younger years (typical of pre-1989 film historians) and to consider him as a real thinking and acting man facing difficult existential and professional choices. In this respect, for example, the statement of the author of p. 123 of the study: "...if with Brecht the opposition is bourgeois - anti-bourgeois, with Dudow in 1924 it is generally humanist: between moral and immoral."

I see the contributions of the presented habilitation thesis in several directions. First, a thorough and conscientious empirical study of archival documents and biographical facts has been carried out, which outlines the creative path and aesthetic profile of a historical figure, part of the history of European cinema. The socio-cultural context of theatrical and cinematic life in Europe in the two decades preceding World War II and in the first years after its end is presented, highlighting Zlatan Dudow's active collaboration with leading creative figures in Germany and France. The film *Kuhle Wampe* (1931) was seen as a vivid manifestation of socially and politically engaged filmmaking, a precursor of neorealism. This observation is also the main point of Alexander Donev's work, which aims to rehabilitate and at the same time to constitute the historical significance of a work of cinematic art whose authors were Zlatan Dudow, Bertolt Brecht and Ernst Otwald (Al. Donev explains in detail the reasons why Zlatan Dudow's name is present only as a director and absent from those of the screenwriters, emphasizing his authorship in the conception and creation of the film's script.) At the same time, Zlatan Dudow's connections with the Bulgarian cultural milieu are revealed - his letters with his closest Bulgarian friend, the director Boyan Danovsky, written in the late 1930s and mid-1940s, as well as his articles in the magazine *Nasheto Kino* in 1924-1925, etc., are studied and analyzed. Last but not least, the contribution of the presented work to the reconstruction of the cultural life in Zlatan Dudow's hometown of Tsaribrod, the cultural center of the Western outskirts torn away from Bulgaria after the 1919 Treaty of Neuilly, as well as to the intellectual atmosphere in the Third Highschool for Boys in Sofia in the years between 1919 and 1922, where among Zlatan Dudow's teachers we see the names of Tsvetan Radoslavov and Ivan Anderychin.

Some of the studies and articles presented (such as *Heimat und Ausland. Slatan Dudows Wanderjahre 1919-1946.*) expand the notion of Zlatan Dudow as an artist divided between his existence in his native culture and his professional realization abroad. Some of the presented publications are devoted to another interesting figure with contributions both to Bulgarian cinema and Bulgarian theatre - Vasil Gendov,

who also represents a lasting interest for the research efforts and an important source of interest for Assoc. Prof. Al. Donev for the last 3-4 years. Along with this we see publications on the problems of film production and distribution in Bulgaria, both in historical and contemporary aspects - thematic fields that are closely related to the professional career of Al. Donev, and to which he shows a marked attention as a researcher. In all the presented publications the author's undoubted erudition on the discussed issues is evident, as well as his ability to systematize the accumulated knowledge (from research, from his personal experience) and to present it to his readers in an understandable language. The list of citations to his publications only proves the interest they have received in other research and publications in these fields.

The presented list of participation in academic conferences after obtaining the academic position of Associate Professor (10 in number), most of them international and held abroad, show active participation in the public debate and a desire to bring the accumulated knowledge to the widest possible range of researchers.

Looking at the materials provided by Al. Donev we can outline his profile as a conscientious researcher, as a sought-after expert, as an active participant in the international exchange of knowledge through numerous publications, participation in academic conferences, joint research and public debates. The evidence provided fully meets and even exceeds the minimum requirements of the NACID and the Regulations on the Conditions and Procedures for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and for Holding Academic Positions at the Institute of Art Studies, BAS.

These arguments, and my personal impressions of his work, give me reason to recommend with conviction to the esteemed scientific jury to propose to the Scientific Council of the Institute of Art Studies to elect him to the academic position of "Professor".

29.10.2024

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