

THE LIGHT OF THE BOOK IN FILM FORMULAS

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Abstract

Nowadays, when we are dominated by the image empire, valuing books by means of the great audio-visual possibilities of the film offers significant perspectives. In film, due to the three components (image, literary commentary, musical score), the iconographic material (manuscript, photography, painting, scheme, etc.) gains movement, spatial and sound volume – a process that enlarges the ideal background, facilitates the assimilation and valuing of the views exposed in the book. As an argument – the documentary films of the film-maker Pavel Bălan, the one who successfully inaugurated two film cycles: *The light of the book*, the one that included the films *The echo of the old boilers*, *The light page*. And the second cycle – *The forefathers of our past* with the movies: *Varlam*, *Anastasiu Crimca*, *Dosoftei*, *Petru Movilă*, *Dimitrie Cantemir*. Together with the achievement of his films, P. Bălan makes a name for himself as a great book author, historiographer and photographer. Starting from the album book – *Poliptic Moldavian* (1985, The State Prize of Moldova), followed by another five valuable historical and cultural books, ending up in 2016 with his last book *Pray for the nation*, an authentic identity card of our national identity. These two creative hypostases belonging to P. Bălan allow us to understand the book valuing process by means of film language.

Keywords: cinematic language, literary commentary, filmic image, four gospels, bibliographic heritage, image conservation.

In the world filmology the correlations between literature and cinematographic art were analysed from the perspective of the screening process of the literary works. The correlations between the book, designed as object and spirit, and the art of the film were included neither in the interests of film theoreticians and critics nor in those of the men of letters. One reason for this is the lack of researchers/ film-makers capable of activating, at the same time, in these two completely different art genres: the book (about science, history, art, culture, etc.) and the nonfiction film with its language and artistic-aesthetic potential.

At present, valuing the book through the enormous possibilities of the film image offers significant perspectives. In the film, due to the

three components (image, literary commentary, musical score), the iconographic material on the book page (manuscript, photography, painting, scheme, etc.) gains movement, spatial and sound volume – a process that deepens the ideal background, facilitates assimilation and the capitalization of the concepts and visions exposed in the book, making them accessible to a large number of consumers. As argument in favour of these ideas we present the documentary films of the film-maker Pavel Bălan, a person who first made a name for himself as image director and later on as movie director, successfully inaugurating two film cycles: *The light of the book*, which included the films *The echo of the old boilers*, *The light page*. And the second cycle – *The forefathers of our past* with the movies: *Varlam*, *Anastasiu Crimca*, *Dosoftei*, *Petru Movilă*, *Dimitrie Cantemir* (the author of the image).

At the same time with the development of his films, P. Bălan works as a book author, historiographer and photographer. Starting from the album-book *Poliptic Moldavian* (1985, The State Prize of Moldova), followed by another five valuable historical and cultural books (*Popular traditions in the Moldovan architecture*, *The icon of our soul*, *Stephen the Great*, *The Church Adormirea Maicii Domnului*, *Citadels of the Soul*, *Monasteries and Hermitages from Republic of Moldova*), and ending up in 2016 with his last book *Pray for the nation*, an authentic identity card of our national identity.

In the cycle *The light of the book* Pavel Bălan and Nicolae Dabija, the authors of the literary commentary, persuade us of the greatness of our old literature. Written in Slavonic, Greek and Latin, it influenced the literature from all orthodox countries. The books written in Moldova serves as models for the writers from other countries. For example, Gavril Uric's school,

imposed in all the Slavonic world the so-called "Moldovan izvod" and Eustatie's songs from Putna are played even in our century in churches from Green all the way to Russia...

Besides explaining the role of the book in the spiritual life of a civilisation, the place of the old book in the popular culture, the authors also approach a series of acute problems. Because of its harsh history, Moldova during various times is deprived of its national thesaurus, which even today can be found among strangers: Moscow, Sankt-Petersburg, Kiev, Lvov, Odessa, Warsaw, Oxford, Paris, Vatican, Istanbul, Athos mountain etc. Some tremendously significant books for our history and culture were burned, stolen or hidden.

The problem of the existence and circulation of the Romanian bibliophile values in the Republic of Moldova became a highly significant one after the country's annexation to the Czarist Russia and later on to the Soviet Union, the most important Romanian spiritual institutions being eradicated.

The totalitarian regime ignored or completely neglected the value of these spiritual documents, being in favour of destroying them as they were of no interest for the Soviet science. Therefore, the bibliophile thesaurus, that belonged to many churches from the east side of romanity disappeared ... often irreversibly.

The author considers that the books that still exist or at least their copies should be brought home and offered to our scientists and men of letters for investigations. A feeling of sorrow and grief for this treasure spread somewhere in the world or lost forever gets you down when you look on the screen at those pages from the heavy manuscripts, drawings and ornaments full of wisdom, together with the inspired idea of the author of the literary commentary: "*I have a feeling that our old books will soon get out of the libraries and archives and they will start looking for us, they themselves hitting the road. Because books also have a soul, a proper soul, which started to be in pain for some time, especially because of the indifference of those they were once written for with tears, stemming from pains and hopes. I hear the books coming...*".

We realize the great value of the 1595 Four Gospels after seeing the movie *Pages of light*, based on this unique work from our culture. The

film brings to light an authentic work of graphic art, the well-known Four Gospel, executed by one of the apprentices of Anastasie Crimca, composed of 321 miniatures, each illustrating the biblical text. Among them, 300 are placed freely within the texts of the book, making a common body with it.

From the darkness of the frame, offering light it slowly comes down towards us the sweet cover of the Four Gospel, spoiled with gold and silver, decorated with expensive stones and enamel medallions – the work executed by the archimandrite Neofil at the Saint Mountain for the Nou Neamț Monastery in Chițcani.

Thanks to the artistic intuition and skilfulness of P. Bălan, who "artistically" managed to use, in a creative manner, the possibilities of the cinematic language, the images of the anonymous drawer obtained filmic plasticity, came to life, having the aura of an old mystery which can now be discovered on the white colour of the screen...

The authors persuade us that in the same manner as Dosoftei secularized the psalms, the miniaturist of the Four Gospels "grounded" the biblical text, illustrating and anchoring it in a practical environment. In its picture pages the authors of the film also discover the *Miorița* ballad – aspect used by the movie director as the climax of the film *Pages of light*.

This book represents an authentic illustrated encyclopaedia of our nation, painting in a divine chromatic the life of the individual from birth to death. Using splendid film images, the author persuades us that that Great Anonymous, who painted the incredible miniatures of the Four Gospels, identified itself with the history, destiny and mythology of his people.

The images of those particular films contain some mysteries gradually deciphered by the author in front of the spectators. Taking into account the significance of the cognitive substance in such movies, the author also awards great attention to the literary commentary, from which we gather a series of truth that can easily be remembered due to their simplicity and profoundness. For example, from the movie *The light of the book* (author of the literary commentary – Nicolae Dabija) we find out that: "... books are a sign of light about the fact that we existed and that

we still exist”, “it is as if you forever see those times, when so many things were required to be said, that the paper started to burn ...”, “the book can be mutilated, burned, destroyed, but it never dies, because there is a much more powerful flame than the destructive one – the fire that guards it. And this is the love feeling for the book, passed by from father to son...”.

Varlaam’s *Homily*, Dosoftei’s *Psalter in verses*, Nicolae Milescu-Spătaru and Dimitrie Cantemir’s *Manuscripts*, Ion Creangă’s *Primer* and other valuable book become “the leading actors” of the movie *The Echo of the old homilies*, where the authors seem to intrigue, tempt or urge us to profoundly enter the mysteries of the old books and to understand their eternal and invaluable value.

The works of Nicolae Milescu-Spătaru, Dimitrie Cantemir, Miron Costin, Ion Neculce, Dosoftei, Petru Movilă and others, similar to some facts of our collective memory, can still be found at a far distance from us, in various cities from Russia or the Ukraine...

Long panoramas on the shelves full of old books from various libraries: The M. E. Saltăkov Șcedrin Library, The Science Academy Library from Moldova, Kiev, etc. Here one can still find the old Romanian book, which is still waiting for its scientists and men of letters to discover it, take it out of anonymity and somehow get it home....

Pavel Bălan shows us, in a slower pace, with a high consistency of information, the six movies from the cycle *The forefathers of our past: Petru Movilă, Varlaam, Dosoftei, Anastasie Crâmca, Vasile Lupu și Petru Rareș*.

With the help of this cycle the film-maker Pavel Bălan makes a first attempt in our cinematography of putting on screen the image of some significant personalities, but less well-known and less “cinematographic”. For example, about Anastasie Crimca we know that he was a servant of the clergy, but the movie presents him to us as a former Bishop from Rome, Metropolitan of Moldova, founder of the Dragomirna Monastery and a great drawer painter, who illustrated with a great deal of dedication numerous religious books.

Erudite and full of sensitiveness his whole work speaks about a national awakening. It is

guided by the idea of the unity of the nation from the three Romanian Countries.

The careful scholar A. Crimca, worrying about the faith of his manuscripts, warns us on a page: “*The one who wants to have it for himself, steal it or sell it to the Holy Monastery, he shall be three times cursed*”. However, this curse did not stop Timuș Hmelnițki, the leader of the Cossacks, who, in 1653, destroys the churches of monasteries from Moldova. He burns villages, plunders *The three hierarchs* monastery in Iași. He also pours lead and javelins on the roost of the Putna Monastery. That is why the organic connection between the image with the sorrowful eyes of a number of saints and the literary commentary regarding the fact that Hmelnițki mocked the unimaginable value of various churches in Moldova offers profound pain. Therefore, alongside the people the books are also in pain, having the same faith...

The author, having not enough “cinematographic” material, explores it to the full (iconographic material, ruins of some citadels and monasteries, frontispieces etc.) using various angles, frame compositions, movements and other operation that belong to the skilfulness of the operator and producer in order to intuitively rebuild, but as lively as possible, the atmosphere of those times in which the film characters worked, defended their country and created. Preserving the same style, the film-maker P. Bălan seeks originality, in the place where it identifies itself with the sublime of the past times, with the characters and visions of its protagonists.

The films are different one from the other in terms of image environment, through their rhythm, which is imposed by the temper and the character of the protagonist, by his activity. A more moderate assembly, composed of lengthier frames is characteristic for the image in the films *Varlaam, Dosoftei, Anastasie Crâmca* and another rhythm, jerkier and more nervous, is created by the author to present the image of the ruler Petru Rareș, presenting his life and reign as a rare historical phenomenon. Using the means and procedures of the nonfictional film, the producer persuades us about the good deeds of this ruler, the heroic devotion and despicable betrayals, legendary affairs and serious mistakes, but also about the support and stimulation of some creations of rare beauty.

In both film cycles we notice that the author continuously searches an inspired style, a poetic breath that would make the visual images complete. He tried to make the literary commentary of his films not to be read as usual, but interpreted with the help of the soul, inviting the film-maker Emil Loteanu and father Mircea Stoleriu from Iași to this artistic act. P. Bălan's idea of avoiding in these films "the omniscient exegetes" with microphones in their hands is welcomed. He allowed the time to talk more using images, music and sound effects. And even if at some points the images seem to be static, they contain an interior movement, a movement of the soul, which is much more valuable.

In another train of thoughts: I had the privilege to see many documentaries dedicated to the book, launched in various studios in the former Soviet or European space. Many of them limit themselves to the presentation of the subject of the book and its graphic illustration. That is why I was surprised that the film *Book – object, book – spirit* belonging to the Romanian film-maker Sorin Ilieșiu, author of the literary commentary – the writer Gabriel Liiceanu, who, using an organic symbiosis between the elements of the film, managed to highlight authentic philosophical, aesthetical and culturological aspects, opening the brackets of some essences and of some profound truths about the spiritual greatness of the book in all times.

Taking us curious through the unordinary images from the development of the book, starting from the letters carved in "stone pages" and up to the luxury ones, the natural leather covers, the authors aim to present some essential truth or some significant and up to date questions. G. Liiceanu, notices in the film: *"The opening of the book represents the beginning of its redemption from an improper state... The true book, keeping inside the promise of a secret, is opened with the confirmed hope that it possesses the miracle of its unravelling. The book is incapable of urging its readers, it is both warehouse and grave. This is exactly why we should always ask ourselves the question: How does the spirit of the book pass by in the world? How do ideas become true characters in order to escape from the covers of the book and to spread joy, terror or hope around them?"*

The film contains a spiritual reverberation, stemming from the interior world of the authors, and especially from the experience and sensitivity of the film-maker Sorin Ilieșiu, creating on the basis of some amorphous objects a lively product, with definitive artistic qualities. Here, the aesthetics of the cinematographic art dictated a reanimation of the pieces, which were static in their nature, challenging S. Ilieșiu to prove his operating mastery, using the most diverse procedures and methods from the nonfictional film cinematographic language in order to correlate in an unique tone those very diverse pieces as nature, highlighting their messages and cognitive or artistic significances. Or, as he himself shall confess about the significance of these objects in the book *The hell sold as paradise: "The objects presented in the film, art objects or with artistic connotation, contain a particular story regarding the way in which they were conceived and exposed. Filming the objects-stories meant, on the one hand, their cinematographic valuing and, on the other hand, the presentation of some latent hypostases, apparently invisible of the objects-stories. Therefore, due to the filming manner and the assembly concept, an image with a larger number of meanings occurred"* (ILIEȘIU, 2012). This fact reminds us of the essence of cinematographic art, which due to its power of synthesis, usurped the role of the more important functions of the other forms of art, successfully assimilating their social, moral, cultural, aesthetic and communicative success.

The films about the book, as well as the films about art, distinguish themselves due to their polyfunctionality. This represents an autonomous aesthetic product, developed on the basis of already polished works. Therefore, this audiovisual product, aside from its functions, also assimilates those of the original work, the book, subjugated to the cinematographic language, meaning already interpreted also by the film authors.

In dependence with the character of the opera, these can be of aesthetic, scientific, moral, cognitive, didactic or entertaining order and up to the most superior states that relate to the human psyche: relaxation, euphoria (the feeling of happiness) or even catharsis. One cannot ignore the educational and training qualities of these types of films.

In most of the cases in the film dedicated to the book the aesthetic and the cognitive functions are being highlighted. Today, in the era of the image, valuing books through films has become the most important function of the film dedicated to the field of bibliophily.

The conservation function of the film by means of the image of the books is equally significant, due to the high performance media in the cinematographic industry and this has become an accessible process.

A significant function of the cinematographic language in a film dedicated to book graphics also consists in challenging and guiding the evolution of the physical processes in the conscience of the spectator through framing, the movement of the camera, assembly, sound score. The significant plan, for example, influences or even stimulates the comprehension process, the assimilation of conceptual valences of the graphic work and, in the general, the whole perception act, preceded by the one of the personal interpretation.

After 1990 significant activities appeared on behalf of specialists regarding the valuing of the old book heritage. Here we can perfectly include the activity of film-markers and we especially mention the efforts made by Pavel Bălan for whom the Film and the Book or the Book and the Film have become a sort of religion in which he believes with all his being.

As the aesthetician Julien Neri rightfully writes: "*The cinema and television actively take part in the major artistic phenomena of our times which are, among others, the revival of the values and of the significant works from the past*" (NERI, 1972). It is certain that among these works we can include the films and books of the film-maker, historiographer and scholar Pavel Bălan.

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