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**HUNGARIAN–SOUTH SLAVIC FILM RELATIONS:
AN INTRODUCTION**

**Венгеро-южнославянские связи в области киноискусства
Введение**

Аннотация

Настоящая статья является частью более крупной работы, посвященной венгеро-южнославянским киноотношениям, введением к этой еще незавершенной работе. После изложения теоретических и концептуальных соображений в статье делается попытка интерпретации и таких понятий, как национальное и транснациональное кино, а также обозначены типы венгеро-словенских, венгеро-хорватских и венгеро-сербских киноотношений. Значит, из южнославянского сообщества мы выделяем словенскую, хорватскую и сербскую культуру, в частности, культуру кино. В статье упоминается положение киноискусства в Боснии и Герцеговине, в Болгарии, в Северной Македонии, а также говорится о венгерских аспектах фильмов этих стран, но основной акцент делается на кинокультуре трех граничащих с Венгрией стран.

Ключевые слова: *венгерская кинокомпаративистика, словенская кинокомпаративистика, хорватская кинокомпаративистика, сербская кинокомпаративистика*

This study is an introduction to a larger work on Hungarian and South Slavic film relations. After reviewing theoretical and conceptual considerations, the paper attempts to interpret the concepts of national film and transnational film, and it also outlines the types of Hungarian–Slovenian, Hungarian–Croatian, and Hungarian–Serbian film relations. Thus, of the Southern Slavic communities, the study focuses on Slovenian, Croatian, and Serbian cultures and film. Films from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, and Northern Macedonia, and their Hungarian aspects will also be referenced, but the primary target is the film culture of the three countries neighbouring Hungary.

Relations constitute a comprehensive concept, and the meaning cannot be fully captured. The best that can be done is to record the nature of the relational system of each culture and to clarify the point of view in each chapter and in each discussion of each type of relationship. The discussion will therefore become a mosaic because, on the one hand, one aspect of the contacts will be highlighted in each chapter; on the other hand, from the point of view of the impact, it is justified to separate the Hungarian–South Slavic vs. the South Slavic–Hungarian directions, even if this necessitates complex interrelations. However, the selection of a single element of these relations may only be a necessary consequence of the self-limitation imposed by the method since we will often see examples of multiple identities, in-betweenness, multifaceted national, linguistic, and territorial ties among the authors, and it is precisely these cultural interconnections that characterise the region under study.



In the literature, parallelism and interaction are the most common terms, so it is worth building on these terms to discuss the rich material available. However, the connections are not systematic, and they do not form a series, and this also applies to literary connections that have developed over the centuries. These connections are isolated, occasional, but by no means random and meaningless, and in spite of being fragmented as a whole, they give an accurate account of the nature of the cultures living side by side: each culture individually and the region as a whole. In general, the influences that can be directly detected and proven are fewer in the material; instead, there are similarities and a variety of features mostly determined by genetic or geographical factors. Connections, overlaps, and parallels will emerge in this way, the causes of which are less visible, but whose results may be clearer. The relationships between authors and films are not expressions of certain regularities but merely the statement of a general and unspecified fact, as István Fried has argued in several works on comparative literary history. István Fried associates the idea of dialogue with all this: “It is perhaps a matter of the fact that during the confrontation of different literary lines of development, not only similarities and differences emerge but, above all, 'national literatures' (or national literary phenomena) that are perceived as structures closed from one another can enter into a dialogical relationship with one another” [FRIED 1998: 9]. The notion of dialogue should be expanded here and in the future towards cultural polyphony, crossing boundaries, transitions, and interferences as it appears in the title of this quoted essay. In this sense, the long-debated horizon of the study of contact can be replaced by the approach of regional comparative literature, complemented by aspects of imagology – the latter being mainly present in the chapters that examine the presence of Hungarian elements in the films of neighbouring countries and summarise Slovenian, Croatian, and Serbian references in Hungarian films. The traces of contact, however, should be viewed in the light of typological contexts since these contexts show the nature and the benefits of the contacts. However, the picture will not be complete because the sheer volume of film material makes this impossible, and also because most Slovenian, Croatian, and Serbian films have no connections to Hungarian films and vice versa. Below, therefore, I will not be juxtaposing four parallel national film histories since only a small segment of Slovenian, Croatian, and Serbian film history is visible from the perspective of Hungarian film history; just as the film corpus of the three South Slavic nations contains limited Hungarian traces and references.

As mentioned before, the creators of the national film productions under study did not necessarily learn from each other but, rather, the similar phenomena emerged as a result of similar circumstances. The four national film productions do not create natural unity in this form, but centuries of geographical closeness and coexistence of the nations and cultures have created networks; thus, one of the main aims of this publication is to examine these networks. Therefore, some chapters do not provide a synoptic view of the four countries. That is because certain relations do appear in the films of one country and another, and this creates a two-way interaction with two participants. This is worth tracking even if the traditional view of an analysis based on two countries or national cultures is considered to be outdated in the literature.



With regard to the geographical area under study, it is worth noting that the very nature of the multiple layers of relationships makes it difficult to avoid the danger of arbitrary mapping, i.e. the element of artificial separation and segregation is inherent in any mode of negotiation. Therefore, below, the quadrilateral area of Hungarian, Slovenian, Croatian and Serbian cultures will be considered for investigation. The study will take a close look at the four countries' and four languages' system of relations and networks of cultural creations and their authors. This discussion can hopefully help better understand the four film cultures, which can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the nature of the four national film cultures and the region itself.

It also seems true, however, that Slovenian–Croatian–Serbian bilateral and regional networks are stronger than those linking all three filmmaking communities to Hungary since they go back to closer forms of coexistence and are founded and supported by their linguistic proximity, as Roman Jakobson states: “The similarity of the Slavic languages greatly facilitates the development of linguistic and, consequently, cultural interactions, i.e. research, translation and adoption. The emergence of hybrid cultures has played a major role in the history of Slavic languages and literatures, both at the level of society and the individual” [ЯКОБСОН 1987: 62].

At the same time, it is worth looking at connections in terms of the dynamics of collaboration and opposition. In one of his studies, István Ladányi talks about how these cultures, on the one hand, are close to each other and live symbiotically, and, on the other hand, they define themselves as the opposition of each other [LADÁNYI 2014: 170]. Therefore, studies talk about points of intersection of cultures and sections where not only cooperation but also rivalry and even hostility play a role.

There is one more factor that determines intercultural contacts beyond geographical proximity and community, and that is the presence of national minorities on both sides of the borders: ethnic Hungarians in Prekmurje, Croatia, and Vojvodina, ethnic Slovenes in Porabje, and ethnic Croatian and Serbian communities living in Hungary. However, the situation of ethnic Hungarians living along the borders or in the diaspora in the three neighbouring countries presents a different picture in terms of their geographical location, their proportion in relation to the majority societies, and their sociological characteristics. From this point of view, the orientation and presence of Serbian filmmakers in Vojvodina is particularly interesting, as it links the film scene of Vojvodina, which is already characterised by lively cultural ties, to Serbian film culture.

Therefore, if we go beyond majority–majority contacts across national borders and take into account the majority–minority factor and regionally emerging contacts, a new dimension of contacts can be outlined: the relations defined, mediated, and represented by minority communities in the countries under discussion will particularly be important. Cultural contacts can thus be transnational and linguistic as well as regional. It is also worth placing national minorities in neighbouring countries in another context, namely, the centre–periphery axis. The characteristics of this contextual system are examined in the chapter on Slovenian films that focus on the Prekmurje region.

Film history or film theory naturally uses comparative aspects, since the parallel observation of phenomena is one of the basic operations of film analysis. However,



systematic comparative film studies are lacking, and the literature on the parallel discussion of Eastern and Central and Eastern European film cultures is scarce. One of the first attempts is contributed by Péter Gerencsér who expresses the need for comparison within the framework of an analysis of the transnational features of Slovak cinema. His view is in line with what this study will try to argue: “The field of film comparative literature can draw in many ways on the existing theory and practice of literary history research” [GERENCSÉR 2017: 37]. Péter Gerencsér uses the term In-Between Europe in this study.

The problem of national cinema

In one chapter of his eight-part article *A critique of 'pure film' in contemporary official Serbian film production: The chronic problems of Serbian film*, Miroslav Bata Petrović, the well-known analyst and documentary filmmaker writes the following: “Every contemporary national cinematography must first of all explain its own national characteristics: its history, culture, spirituality, mythology, legends, traditions and, in general, its moral values. It must do so with a high aesthetic quality, forged in a purifying fire of poetic quality and a wide range of authorial signatures and sensibilities” [PETROVIĆ 2013]. In his interpretation of the concept of national cinema, the author draws a sharp distinction between national cinema and the film industry. He claims that the latter has nothing to do with national spirit and national character; moreover, there is no such thing as a film industry in Serbia. According to Petrović, the idea, concept, and practice of national cinema is free from market conditions, and in this sense, its task is to serve national culture. The author lists the components necessary for the functioning of national cinematography – not those necessary for a so-called small country, not even those sufficient for its mere existence, but those that in principle and in general represent a country's cinematographic life. Production base, a statutory system of subsidies, domestic and foreign distribution, a network of exhibitions; well, none of these exist here, says the author. All of this points to the instability of the concept of national cinema, even if we consider that the author's words are too radical and perhaps his thinking may be extreme. However, his point is worth taking further: three factors should be taken into account when defining the concept of national filmmaking: the country's own production base, its legislation for filmmaking, and its distribution network.

A quote from Susan Hayward: “Without wishing to be exhaustive, we can conceptually distinguish seven typologies to describe the national character of a film art” [HAYWARD 2001: 20]. The following is a list of what Hayward calls typologies, and what we call the components of a national film.

The first and last components will be discussed in less detail below, as they emphasise the specificity of a national film, and this study will focus on the links between national film cultures. These components are “narratives” and “film as a representation of the myths of the nation and the national myth”.

The second typology (“genres”) will be mentioned in part, as Hayward is talking about the types of films that are typical of the film offerings of each nation. These genres or film types, which play a leading role in a national film production, can



indeed define the character of a given film production, and their comparison can lead to typological conclusions.

“Codes and conventions” refers partly to content outside the film and partly to content within the film. The extra-filmic aspects concern the production, the making of the film, but also the legal aspects that shape the final product. These will be discussed, not necessarily in the context of how they influence the image of the film, but rather how they define the concept of national film – it is the differences between countries that will be fascinating when examining legislation for filmmaking.

The “codes” within the film refer to the specific cultural heritage traits, the visual representations of the nation. It is about representations that show the characteristics of the country in the film; for example, the presence of mountains in Slovenian films, the Muslim or Orthodox environment, or the importance of the Hungarian language in certain Slovenian or Serbian films.

The fourth, called “the language and morphology of gestures”, also focuses on factors within the film. It refers to the gestures, the emphasis, the mannerisms, and the postures of film actors, i.e. the means of non-verbal communication. According to the author, these are deeply rooted in national cultures, but they should be treated with caution because overemphasizing them can lead to a flat national characterology.

The “film star as a symbol” aspect is based on the recognition that the star is an expression of national characteristics. There is a double connection: on the one hand, the star expresses the aspirations of the community; on the other hand, the audience sees in the actor the qualities that they have or lack.

The question of centre and periphery (the sixth factor highlighted by the author) is discussed in a context that is different from the cited source, where the focus is on the relationship between the USA and national film productions, while this study is discussing a different context: the relationship between Slovenia and the Moravian region and partly Serbia and Vojvodina [cf. HAYWARD 2001: 20–28].

Nationality, as defined above, is present at all levels of film culture, affecting the form of films, the subject matter, the plots, the staff, the institutional system of production and release, the distribution, the reception, and related issues, i.e. factors both inside and outside the film. Literary history and comparative literature have produced a number of results on the national character of any branch of culture. The basic starting point of these sources is that the idea of the nation was the driving force behind the revival of intellectual life during the era of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. This is true even if the concept and idea of “the nation” were at times used to murderous ends: it is the painful experience of the region that the national metanarrative needs the Other as its antithesis.

Almost all sources, however, argue that national readings are inadequate because it is easy to see the multiple cultural embeddedness of the works of art, the authors, the worlds they represent, and ultimately the recipients. For example, in one of his works, István Fried uses the term “transnationality of self-identity” in relation to operetta composers, i.e. in the context of music and cultural history, when examining the identity constructions of their authors [FRIED 2014: 151]. The networks created by these works are essentially called *texts* in the literature – alongside the terms



“Monarchy–text” or “Galicia–text”, which have taken root in the literature, we can create the concept of “Hungarian–Slavic film text” as an interpretative auxiliary term, even if the vocabulary in this form creates a less solid and outlined framework.

The existing and narrow nature of national frameworks is summed up by a writer of American origin who has lived in Slovenia for several years: “Pure national categories, which are in any case relatively recent phenomena, have long been flawed, because we have always been more mixed, more hybrid, than we have admitted. Yet everything is organised on a national level, from sport to commerce to literature” [DEBELJAK 2022: 101].

Transnational phenomena will be considered on a national basis, since variance, deviation, transition, and blending can be understood from this self-image, and all this offers to explore polyphony, linguistic transgression, and the space of cultural interaction. Our concept of the cinematic field must be dynamic and open in order to be able to follow accentual phenomena, alternative and hyphenated identities, and mixed cultural phenomena in their colourfulness. At the same time, the literature stresses that the national and the transnational are not placed in opposition.

The transnational film

The transnational approach thus takes the national film as a starting point, but also expands beyond it [cf. EZRA and ROWDEN 2006: 4]. The intertwining of cultures is also clearly visible in a historical perspective. In his study titled *Transculturality: The puzzling form of cultures today*, Wolfgang Welsch has a chapter called “Transculturality – already in history”. In the last paragraph, he writes the following: “For someone who knows their European history – and art history in particular – this historical transculturality is evident. Styles developed across the countries and nations and many artists created their best works far from home. The cultural trends were largely European and shaped a network linking the states” [WELSCH: 1999]. The fascination with mixing and crossing borders that Welsch mentions is therefore not new, and the volumes on the history of relations cited above and discussed below present it in a way that is consistent with Welsch.

It is important to note that there is a constant multidirectional movement between the national and the transcultural: the national idea constantly receives momentum, while elements of the quest for integration are also present. It is interesting to observe this in the countries that changed their regimes, as well as in the countries that pursued controversial and contentious but successful integration policies after the break-up of Yugoslavia, such as Slovenia. Another example is Hungary and then Croatia joining the EU, also the introduction of the euro in Slovenia and Croatia, and the NATO membership of several countries in the region, but also the doubts and counter-arguments that accompanied all these processes.

All countries in the region are relatively small in terms of population and area. It is worth citing two ideas from László Sziklay's study called “Special aspects of the comparative study of Central and Eastern European literatures”. According to him, “the typological comparison of literary and artistic phenomena should not be limited to the 'great' literatures” [SZIKLAY 1987: 45]. Although Hungarian–South Slavic relations are



limited to small film productions, I believe that there is nothing more important than the small elements and what binds these nations together, such as living in the same region. We will see that microregions play a major role in the examination of film material.

In addition, “among the peoples listed [i.e. the Hungarian, Polish, Czech, Slovak, Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Romanian and Ukrainian] there is not a single nation that does not live in a state directly next to another or does not coexist with each other in the same state, symbiotically” [SZIKLAY 1987: 50]. Since the study was written, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union have disintegrated as states, but cultures still bear the traces of the community they shared in the past, and new forms of collaboration have emerged.

At this point we can recall the concept of world literature created by Goethe in 1827: the concept of world literature is linked to the need of the so-called small peoples to contribute their own achievements to universal culture. Eckermann recalls the thoughts of his conversation partner, the great poet as follows: “National literature does not matter much nowadays, it is the age of world literature.” Also, the following are the notes of the day in which Goethe speaks of a Chinese novel: “People think, act, and feel in the same way as we do, and very soon we feel that they are like us, only that everything is done more clearly, more orderly, and more virtuously” [ECKERMANN 1989: 258 and 259]. From the concept of world literature, the introduction of the handbook with a similar title takes us in one step to transnationality: “The slogan of world literature is the literary intermediateness that links national literatures” [Pál 2005: 18]. World literature, and of course universal cinema, is thus first and foremost a process of communication, an intellectual space in which cross-cultural transitions take place. National film productions hardly exist in isolation, which is perhaps even more striking in the case of film than in the case of literature. However, the term world cinema has perhaps not taken root as a concept because film is seen as a transnational phenomenon in itself. In relation to the inherently international character of film as a form of expression, this study aims to only make one point here: transnational practices have been encouraged by international forms of support that have favoured co-productions (the controversial results of co-productions are discussed in several chapters).

Types of relations between film productions

In the following, some concepts from Dionýz Ďurišin's book *Comparative literary research* will be used as a basis for our film comparative study system. There will be some gaps, but it is precisely the examples and gaps that provide the map of Hungarian–South Slavic relations.

Ďurišin's book basically takes two steps: on the one hand, it provides a systematic overview of the types of relations, and on the other hand, it offers methodological suggestions on how to detect and interpret similar, parallel, related or deviant and different phenomena and trends. This can provide a foundation for a comprehensive approach, on the basis of which typological conclusions can be drawn about the characteristics of the four investigated film productions.



With regard to the two main types of relations, the author says: “we must distinguish between literary similarities determined by genetic (contact-based) relations and literary similarities (analogies) induced by typological relations” [ĐURIŠIN 1977: 58]. “While genetic or contact focused research is concerned with the study of different forms of literary reception, typological research is concerned with the study of literary analogies (parallels) or dissimilarities”; the latter ones “refer to relations of a much looser, non-genetic nature, not determined by direct contacts” (123), i.e. they do not assume direct effects between authors and pieces. As discussed above, most of the Hungarian–South Slavic film relations will be of the latter kind, i.e. direct, primary relations between films will be less frequent. Analogies primarily shed light on the common features and regularities of the phenomena being compared, while differences reveal particularly specific features, national and individual characteristics – by this logic we can get closer not only to national characteristics but also to the systematic nature of differences. Typological correlations are linked to similar social arrangements, as indicated above. Analogies, parallels, and overlaps will be examined in the chapter on road movies in Central and Eastern Europe, but we can also refer to typological connections in other chapters. It is thus not only the case, then, that “there are specific links between particular groups of national literatures that reflect different forms of historical ‘coexistence’ of different peoples” (186), but also that the similar socio-political situation of each community has resulted in related cinematic forms of expression and worldviews. The shared life experience of the community reinforces affinities, which have called and continue to call forth transnational syntheses (187), different forms of community (187). Ultimately, geographical or regional aspects play a decisive role in all this, from which the factors of the political system cannot be separated.

Two important components of the common denominator between film cultures should be distinguished if we are to move towards the formulation of typological patterns. The first is the volume of film productions, which I have argued above is not a qualitative finding, but rather a key to the scale and weight of regionality in world film. The other is the discontinuity of the historical process which has given rise to renewed waves of tradition and innovation. For the first component the examined productions that have brought Hungarian and South Slavic film production onto the international cultural scene provide the example, while the second component highlights the difficulties of the differentiation of individual film productions.

Returning to what Đurišin calls genetic or contact relations, a contact focused study also has something to say about Hungarian–South Slavic relations, since the phenomena of effect and influence, appropriation, imitation, stylization, visual analogies, reminiscences, stimuli, parody and travesty are present in the studied films, even if they are mostly indirect. Intertextuality is the strongest in Hungarian films that echo the solutions of Emir Kusturica’s films, and the exciting range of connections is further provided by the performances of actors who appear in films from several countries. Some of the films in this latter group may be related to films that are worth examining through the lens of imagology: a map of neighbouring countries emerges from these films. A separate chapter is then devoted to what is called



minority-related films, which reveal the most complex layers of relations. In connection with these and also with the other films that do not contain minority aspects, it is worth asking whether Hungarian–Slovenian, Hungarian–Croatian and Hungarian–Serbian relations have any special, different features that can be viewed in pairs.

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