

# Cosmin POPA

## Cine-adrenalin @TIFF15

The 15<sup>th</sup> edition of the Transylvania International Film Festival, one of the largest festivals in Eastern Europe, took place in Cluj-Napoca (Romania) in 27 May-5 June 2016.



Transylvania International Film Festival. TIFF.15. The festival that could be called, year after year, “another kind of festival”. Cranes that carry people above other people’s heads, concerts that become the soundtrack of the Brownian motion in downtown Cluj, the city that swells with dialects and spectacular attendance – everything added remarkably to the appeal of the festival.

This year, TIFF outperformed itself with an increasing desire to stand out at world scale. Two hundred and forty-eight films from 64 countries generated more than 80,000 tickets in the ten days dedicated to cinephilia. More than one thousand guests, directors, actors, producers and other professionals in the industry, journalists and Romanian or foreign critics attended the special screenings and events in the more than 20 special places of the festival.

If we were “The Usual Suspects” we would learn in “EducaTIFF” how to travel from “Shadows” with the “Berlin-Bucharest Express” to “No Limit” and then ask “What’s Up, Doc?” beneath the bewildered eyes of our

### **Cosmin POPA**

Babeş-Bolyai University  
email: [cosmin.gabriel.popa@gmail.com](mailto:cosmin.gabriel.popa@gmail.com)

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"#Animal" sidekick. A sacrifice for "Cinema, Mon Amour" during a "Supernova". These were just some of the special TIFF sections this year.

"The Romanian Days section will have, straight from Cannes, two of the three Romanian films displayed there: Cristi Puiu's *Sieranevada* and Bogdan Mirică's *Dogs*. Other films also have their world premiere. I'm talking about Gabriel Achim's film, *The Last Day*, then *In Search of the Lost Father* - Ionuț Teianu, Sorin Luca's *Dream Images*, *Two Lottery Tickets*, a comedy by Paul Negoescu, and last a film made by a young man from Cluj. I think it's the first time that the feature film section of the Romanian Days is showing a film directed by a graduate of the "Babeș-Bolyai" University, one of my former students, Ion Indolean, film critic", declared Tudor Giurgiu, the festival director, in the first TIFF conference of this year.

The "Focus" changed this year also, with a view on Lithuania, Lebanon and Croatia. Some screenings occurred in the presence of the important filmmaker Šarūnas Bartas, whose films were often seen in Cannes. We should also mention here the sections dedicated to the filmmakers Chantal Akerman, Šarūnas Bartas and Zeki Demirkubuz or the wonderful and extremely unusual Sion Sono retrospective. A TIFF edition that seemed more concerned with the importance of the film, of the filmmakers, of cinephilia, of film education and not only on the dry projection of the selected films.

The opening of the festival was marked by the renowned French street arts group "Transe Express" and their provocative performance "Mobile Homme". The artists were suspended for whole minutes above the Unirii Square spectators and executed acrobatics at a height, with trapeze artists suspended on cranes. The festival films opened with the world premiere of the new film by Nae Caranfil who stays true to his pleasure and passion for filmmaking and music. The metaphorical line of the film is kept by the diegetic theatre performance. The myth of a modern Orpheus is implemented realistically by the characters' embodiment, the father (Teodor Corban) looks like Hades himself ("the devil himself"), Eurydice (Maria Obretin) is the depressive wife and, of course, Tony (Laurențiu Bănescu) who descends in an inner inferno. Will he save Eurydice or won't he? Will he look back?

In the Unirii Square Open Air section other films that were displayed were "Mad Max: Fury Road" – one of the most important films made the last year, the famous "Taxi Driver" – a film that does not or should not require any presentation, "Baahubali: The Beginning" – the first part of the two and perhaps the most expensive Indian film up to now; "Truman" – a film shown at the great festivals of Toronto, San Sebastian, London and which received about 5 Goya awards in 2016.

"Truman" (2016), directed by Cesc Gay, is a film like a long "goodbye" said by Tomas (Javier Camara) to his friend Julian (Ricard Darin). An inner voyage of the two protagonists who seek a form of coming to peace with the events. "Each person dies as best he can." Everything happens following a semi-improvised, semi-scheduled journey by which the two rediscover the strength of their friendship, which does



not need words, explanations, important discussions, one in which distance did not matter and money are not an issue, one that bleeds tacitly with understanding and acceptance. All these aspects seem to turn around Truman, an old dog that will remain without a mater because all potential adoptive parents are afraid that he will die quickly. He is like Julian's alter ego, with whom he will part with difficulty. Cesc Gay manages to create characters who become universal, a friendship that impresses the audience and also a content that bears a message that is more than important: "Relationships are everything that matters in life."

Theni "Baahubali: The Beginning" turned out to be one of the films that border on the ridiculous because of their extreme approaches, a different story of the prodigal son who comes to save his people from the tyranny of his step brother. People laughed a lot and faced the cold for almost three hours, to be able to see the financial performance on screen.

The frequently discussed patriarchy and male infatuation are ironically and intriguingly approached in "Chevalier" (2016) by Athina Rachel Tsangari (director of "Attenberg", a point of reference of the "Greek Weird Wave"). Six wealthy men spend their vacation fishing in the middle of the Aegean Sea. Since they are isolated, they invent various games to escape boredom. The purpose needs to be mentioned: to be the best "in general". The concept is so vague that it becomes hilarious. Thus, during the film, we witness the surreal humor of virility down to instinctual stages. "Chevalier" is a ridiculous Olympiad, a subtle and intelligent performance of the human condition, a metonymic game for the real problems of the present day Greece.

"United States of Love" (2016) is an intelligent title for the film that talks about the forms of love, about the drama of the Polish woman of the 1990s and about the craft of capitalism and the promise of the American dream. Nevertheless, director Tomasz Wasilewski creates a kind and careful portrait of the woman who vibrates, struggles, becomes the animal emptied of power in front of a rush of desires. In an age dominated by profound changes and future uncertainty, four women find themselves caught in love. Prisoner in a tedious marriage, Agata (Julia Kijowska) longs viscerally for the young Catholic priest of the parish. Iza (Magdalena Cielecka), principal of the town's secondary school, tries to save by any means possible the relationship with the recently widowed doctor. And then there's the obsession of Renata (Dorota Kolak), retired teacher, with her neighbor Marzena (Marta Nieradkiewicz). Left alone after her husband left abroad, young Marzena wants to become a model and thus is trapped by a sick disadvantage of capitalism. The film structure is complex, timeless, with brief leaps back in time, as a comment to the reliving of those times. It is split in three episodes, of almost equal lengths, which describe the dimensions of four different forms of love. With Oleg Mutu's splendid image, Tomasz Wasilewski creates private scenes and moments, claustrophobic domestic spaces, different perspectives and emotional masks.

The loss of memory is one of man's greatest fears. Nevertheless, sooner or later, one encounters a time when all the memories burn like one Christmas light after the other. Paul (Mathieu Amalric), an anthropologist travelling for studies, leaves the exotic lands of Tajikistan to return to the Paris of his youth. The path is marked by forays into the precise and slightly inexact world of childhood and adolescence memories: the nightmare of a depressive mother, the prankish brother, the trip to Russia, the departure for faculty, the friends, the crazy parties, the loves and sexual escapades. They say, however, that one never forgets one's first love. Arnaud Desplechin's "My Golden Days" emphasizes the power of nostalgia, of the uncertainty of memory and the strength of the burning desires of youth, which leave unhealed wounds. A coming-of-age film defined by the storyline of adolescent love.

At the other end of the world, in an apocalyptic landscape where rules are not clear, where you work for or against the government, very few things can keep you afloat. "Frenzy", Emin Alper's second film, after "Beyond the Hill", is a psycho-social drama in which the desaturated image, the wonderful acting, the paranoid characters and the apparently chaotic events create a time bomb ready to explode. After twenty years spent in jail, Kadir (Mehmet Ozgur) is released earlier. There is only one condition: to report any kind of potentially terrorist activities or individuals. He will find details in the residents' garbage, not before the attempt to rebuild the relationship with his brother Ahmet (Berkay Ates), the little brother. He is a dog catcher who shoots the stray dogs at the outskirts of the town. No wonder that, after such a long time, Kamir is only a stranger to Ahmet, in a society dominated by suspicion. With a subjective structure, "Frenzy" does more than provide a complex view of terror; it also creates

an allegory of the effects of terror on a society dominated through fear. With the contribution of Răzvan Rădulescu (credited as consultant), Emin Alper directs a "Frenzy" that is so much more; it signals the potential seed of hatred that can prompt a man to walk each and every day looking over one's shoulder.

Movie fans could not miss "Hitchcock/Truffaut" directed by Kent Jones, a documentary that relies on the Truffaut's famous book on Hitchcock. The feeling imparted by the documentary comes close to childish infatuation. A (miraculous) handful of directors like Martin Scorsese, David Fincher, Wes Anderson, James Gray, Kyoshi Kurosawa, Richard Linklater, Araud Desplechin and others, who come to care talk passionately about what Hitchcock and Truffaut did for the history and importance of world filmmaking. Then we can hear the two engaged in conversations mediated by a translator, but it looked as if this was not needed, they were already speaking the film language, they could understand each other more than what could be seen at first sight.

The cine-concerts tasted differently this year. The music sounded like in Catholic cathedrals wherein the echo is endless, and the films did not tremble beneath another soundtrack. Zone Libre revisite 2001 – reconsiders Kubrick Space Odyssey in an electrifying note, *The Passion of Joan of Arc* seems to have color in the organic music of Touve R. Ratovondrahety, *The Shadows of Forgotten Ancestors* cannot part with the music of A Hawk And A Hacksaw, and British Sea Power dotted the I's.

A more than notable presence was Cristi Puiu's *Sieranevada*. A derisory performance that keeps you caught up for approximately three hours without feeling that you are missing something. A memorial service kept forty days after the father's death; at the service, a family like any other (perhaps more numerous) puts on display their pain, their fear, anxieties, joys, opinions, principles, private thoughts, loneliness in an unstoppable vertigo. During this time, we are literally walking with the characters in the apartment, we are listening to their conversations, we are the most silent fly on the wall. While several weeks before Cristian Mungiu established the desire of reinvention, Cristi Puiu establishes his maturity, another filmmaking refinement that surpasses the previous Cristi Puiu.

Not very far away, in a world in which rules are written differently, in which the law looks at things rather than interfere, man seems to have the freedom to do anything, to use his instincts for survival or for domination. With *Dogs*, Bogdan Mirică manages to create a thriller with western elements, wherein the austere atmosphere, the emptiness and imminent evil talk about how people are not better than animals. Roman (Dragoș Bucur), a young man from Bucharest, arrives at his deceased uncle's house firmly intent to sell the inherited property. Not far from the frontier with Ukraine, the night hides illegal activities. Old Hogaș (Gheorghe Visu), the officer on duty, warns Roman about the real legacy of his uncle and his "boys". The charismatic and ruthless Samir (Vlad Ivanov) is the new boss who will hang on to the land on which he lives. However, Roman does not give up so easily. Roman is the new dog,

the city dog that does not yet know with whom he's dealing. At first, he barks from beyond the fence, but once he crosses the barrier, he finds himself on a territory already dominated by Samir and his boys. Vlad Ivanov plays Samir, the bad dog, the alpha dog, the hyena. He is the boss, left after the death of old Alecu, and now he feels threatened by the newly come Roman. Hogaș, the officer, is the old and sick dog that runs quickly toward the inevitable, while agent Ana is the inexperienced, always hungry pup, who is not necessarily interested in the order of things. We are in "no man's land", where someone else can only be met at long distances, where there is not ear to hear the screams, where wild animals wander freely. In this desolate landscape, subject to the mentality of the plainsman, Bogdan Mirică lets loose characters that are thirsty for affirmation. In fact, it seems that it stood out in TIFFF and was awarded the festival grand prize.

The award festivities celebrated the entire career of the actresses Carmen Galin, who received the Excellence Prize, and Lujza Orosz who received the Prize for her entire activity. They were joined, with some delay, by actress Sophia Loren, whose presence in the festival was more than spectacular. The award of the best director went to Avishai Sivan for the film *Tikkun* (2015). After a sort, the film suffers from the lack of rhythm and of some form of dynamism that one seeks in the film industry, even when someone eats soup for ten minutes. There is, however, the excellent cinematography by Shai Goldman with some moments when it becomes remarkable. The special prize of the jury went to Runar Runarsson's *Sparrows*, and the FIPRESCI award to Gabriel Mascaro's *Neon Bull*. Gabriel Achim's *Last Day* received the prize of the Romanian Days for the feature film section. And in the same section, the prize for debut went to Ion Indolean and his film "Discordia".

The closing festivities, the awards, the champagne glasses that clinked proved that TIFFF.15 was the heart of a city that breathes films for at least ten days per year. An injection of film adrenalin that could cure asthenia.