Dear Friends,

Only a few days ago I climbed the stage of the local Younger Hall to be inducted as the first Chair in Film Studies at this ancient Scottish University, founded in 1413. I heard my title read in Latin: "PROFESSOIO STUDIORUM IMAGINUM MOBILIAM IN MEMBRANIS LUCIS OPE CAPTARUM." Afterwards, colleagues suggested that I should make sure to get a plate with this inscription for my office door (but I fear it will take a double garage door to display it properly). To sum up the experience, however: even the oldest Universities are opening up to Film Studies, and the arrival of such a new discipline keeps the colleagues in Classics busy figuring out how Film Studies would translate into Latin.

As part of launching the new discipline, the Centre for Film Studies was established in May 2005 with the intention to encourage interdisciplinary collaboration between individual members of staff from a variety of schools. Over the past several months we have been busy setting up the international advisory board (which now includes prominent scholars and film professionals based in the UK, USA, the Netherlands, Hong Kong, Germany, Italy, Australia, and New Zealand). Another priority has been to forge relationships with relevant institutions and organisations, and we have specifically stressed on forging links with film festivals, as you will see from the festival reports included in this first issue of our Newsletter (Pordenone, London, Thessaloniki). We had visits from filmmakers like Kenny Glenna (Jasmin), Alexandre Askoldov (The Commissar, see David Fleming’s report), from screenwriter Izrael Horovitz (New York), as well as from film scholars John Ildo (Stirling), Joanna Dovilos (California), and John Orr (Edinburgh). Just last week we saw the publication of the special issue of the Scottish Media Education Journal which features research on film at St Andrews (see page 6). Members of the Centre presented at a range of conferences in Amsterdam, Southampton, Istanbul, Oslo, Nottingham, and London. In other news, David Martin-Jones recently received a grant from the prestigious Carnegie Trust, and my own work on the cinematic representations on Sarajevo was published in Cahiers du cinéma’s new encyclopedia La Ville au Cinema. In the near future we will be giving talks at the Universities of Glasgow and Warwick (Belén Vital), King’s College (David Martin-Jones), at the festivals in Wiesbaden and Malaga and at events in Leeds and Oxford (Iordanova), as well as at the silent film festival in Nottingham (Petrie).

Our most important undertaking, however, is the planned international conference Cinema at the Periphery (June 13-18, 2006), which will feature a range of invited speakers. Confirmed guests include Dudley Andrew (Yale), John Caughie (Glasgow), Pam Cook (Southampton), Kristian Feigelson (Paris III), Faye Ginsburg (New York), Mette Hjort (Lingnan), Sheldon Lu (UC-Davis), Laura Marks (Simon Fraser), Bill Marshall (Glasgow), Hamid Naficy (Rice), Patricia Pisters (Amsterdam), Duncan Petrie (Auckland), and more. The conference’s intention is to explore the growing intellectual and cultural wave of production addressing the notion of the ‘periphery’, manifested through a range of terms in film studies - accented cinema, transnational cinema and minor cinema - all addressing the growing trend to conceptualize the cinema beyond the boundaries of the nation-state.

The idea for an interdisciplinary symposium on cinema and peripheries grows out of our interest in various aspects of marginal and peripheraly positioned cultures and cinematic traditions. Our own expertise is in one or more ‘peripherally’ positioned cinematic traditions as well as in issues of transnational cinema and film and national identity. Being located in Scotland means that this is not simply an academic concern, but a lived reality, as Scottish representations of the local, national and global question the very notion of ‘centre’ and ‘margin’.

Our inspiration comes from the realization that in recent years, international cinema has produced a large body of work that foregrounds questions of transnationality, place, space, passage and migration. There is a concerted move towards exploring faraway places, in interacting with barely known peoples, and in making new localities imaginarily. In these films, previously entrenched spatial divisions gradually dissolve; ‘centre’ and ‘periphery’ no longer figure as firmly fixed grid coordinates, devolving and in so doing enabling new forms of representation. The hierarchical position of ‘place’ as ‘centre’ is subverted and changed in films that come from a variety of locations traditionally interpreted as peripheral (remote, dependent, subaltern, minor, small or insular). In this context of increased sensitivity to location, movement also acquires new symbolic dimensions. The relationship between centre and periphery is no longer a hierarchical one, where a ‘centre’ seeks to subsume its ‘margins’, and not even one of ‘margins’ struggling toward a centre by virtue of some actively functioning ‘centrifugal’ force. What was formerly deemed ‘fringe’ today is seen as empowered with a fresh vitality that challenges the traditional narratives of locale and movement and replaces them with vibrant takes on setting and on the journey itself. Compelling new stories, evolving around improbable protagonists in unlikely places, come into being. The films that we will explore in Cinema at the Periphery subvert traditional hierarchies of location; the key themes of these narratives are defined by a growing awareness of instability and change, by incessant journeying and border-crossing, where in an era of globalization, the location of the periphery stretches towards the infinite.

Information about the conference and registration forms will be available from our web-site at the end of January 2006. This newsletter became possible through the collaboration of our PhD students. I would like to express special thanks to David Fleming who acted as an editor, and to Karen Drysdale, our secretary.

We hope to be bringing this newsletter to you twice a year. In the mean time, for information on on-going events and research activities, visit http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/modlangs/filminstudies/

Dina Iordanova, Director
New Scottish Cinema Conference

New Scottish Cinema Conference, 04-05 Nov 2005, Huston School of Film and Digital Media, National University of Ireland, Galway.

This November the Huston School of Film and Digital Media gathered together film scholars, practitioners and industry professionals in the lively and accommodating small city of Galway, to discuss the recent emergence of a New Scottish Cinema. Since the mid-1990s Scottish cinema has notched up a number of international hits, from runaway commercial successes like Trainspotting (1996), to highly regarded art festival works by auteurs Peter Mullan (The Magdalene Sisters (2002)), Lynne Ramsay (Ratcatcher (1999)), and David Mackenzie (Young Adam (2003)). The same period has seen the consolidation of much of the funding and production infrastructure around Scottish Screen in Glasgow. A number of international productions and co-productions have also shot on location in Scotland, from Rob Roy (1995) to the recent George Clooney production, The Jacket (2005), and even famous Bollywood hits like Kuch Kuch Hota Hai (1998). Serious scholarship on Scottish Cinema has responded to this challenge, with several books by Colin McArthur and Duncan Petrie, and a recent dossier dedicated to New Scottish Cinema in the Film Studies journal Screen. In such a context, a conference on New Scottish Cinema was extremely timely, its major strength being its ability to bring together academics and industry insiders.

The academic debate was extremely productive, including notable contributions from McArthur and Petrie (widely recognised as the "father" and "elder brother" of Scottish Cinema Studies), along with papers by John Hill, Sarah Street and Martin McLoone, all renowned for their works on British and Irish cinema. Existing debates surrounding filmic representations of Scotland were recontextualised, with a focused exploration of exactly "whose" identity New Scottish Cinema represents.

Discussion encompassed international co-productions shot in Scotland; considerations of national and transnational identity; cross-cultural reception of New Scottish Cinema in the global marketplace; and the strategic deployment of different aesthetic styles. The problems of filmmaking in a small country were also examined in relation to a number of other international cinemas - including New Zealand, Denmark, Iran, Soviet-era Hungary, and South Korea - further stressing the international dimension of the New Scottish production context. The most lively debate arose over the need for scholars working in the field to engage with popular culture, especially issues of gender, and representations of Scotland produced by Scotland’s trans-Atlantic diaspora. Here the voices of Jane Sillars (University of Stirling) and David Stenhouse (BBC Scotland) clearly stood out, suggesting fresh and interesting new approaches to broaden the field.

A welcome extra dimension was added by the perspectives of a diverse range of industry professionals and practitioners, such as Steve McIntyre, the former Chief Executive of Scottish Screen, BBC producer David Stenhouse, David McKay the actor (My Name is Joe (1998)) and low budget filmmaker, and Gaelic animator and art critic Catriona Black. The second panel of the first day consisted of autobiography-led exposes of several "forgotten" histories of filmmaking in Scotland (independent low budget productions, animation, and video art), reinforcing the diversity of creativity in Scotland during the last twenty years of cultural devolution. The debates that followed explored the correlation between recent scholarship on the politics of representations of Scotland and the commercial agendas created by Blairite Britain’s focus on the creative industries. Many such discussions continued into the early hours of the morning as participants swapped resolutely through Galway’s bustling restaurants and bars.

As the second day drew to a close discussion turned to the future of Scottish cinema, and indeed, the study of Scottish cinema. Key roles were taken by Robin McPherson (Skillset Screen Academy), McIntyre, McArthur, Petrie and Stoneman, in discussing the need for a discursive space for promoting Scottish film culture - including the relative merits and shortcomings of the Edinburgh Film Festival for promoting Scottish film; the persistent lack of a magazine dedicated to film production in Scotland; the issue of distribution in the context of DVD, the multiplex, and on-demand television; and the challenges facing production under a changed tax system. However, with plans for a Scottish cinema retrospective to be screened in Edinburgh, further conferences on Scottish Cinema, and an anthology on Scotland and cinema, there was a definite feeling that progress was being made.

The launch of Jonathan Murray’s invaluable book-length study of publications on Scotland and cinema, That Sinking Feeling: A Researcher’s Guide to Scottish Cinema (free to anyone who contacts Scottish Screen), provided conclusive proof of the already consolidated depth of this growing field.

By Dr David Martin-Jones
University of St Andrews.
Alexander Askoldov screening and visit

In two cities over a period of two nights Alexander Askoldov’s 1967 film The Commissar screened to sell out audiences in both St Andrews and Dundee. The screenings and talks by the director were part of a joint initiative set up and organised by both the St Andrews Centre of Film Studies and the Dundee Contemporary Arts Cinema. The powerful film, now almost forty years old, retains an ability to speak to and engage with modern audiences and offered them an ostensibly timeless narrative that seems all too apt and applicable to today’s terror and war torn world. The Commissar displays an unusual degree of cinematic technical flare and competence and delightfully utilises various different modes of cinematic address which range from Surrealism through to graphic Realism. The stunned silence displayed by the Scottish audiences at the film’s powerful and silent conclusion served to illustrate that the narrative’s ability to shock and delight audiences has not diminished over time: indeed it was only after the auditorium lights went up again that the audience’s contemplative silence was eventually broken and replaced with resounding and appreciative applause. The Commissar was originally made to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the revolution and is considered today an avant-garde masterpiece. The film initially suffered from severe censorship problems and copies of the film were banned to the Soviet vaults, the film’s negative was also ordered to be burnt as the film’s content was deemed to ‘slander the revolution.’ Later, in the 1980s during the glasnost period, when the majority of banned Soviet cinema was eventually released and screened The Commissar remained locked in the vaults and unscreened. Subsequent to this, Askoldov displayed an enormous amount of personal courage and audacity and through strategic protesting eventually worked to secure the film’s final release. The Commissar was not only ‘rediscovered’ then in 1988 but went on to receive a Special Jury Prize at the International Berlin Film Festival which helped secure the film’s status as an international masterpiece.

Askoldov took time out before the screening of his film to mingle and spend time with a group of interested Film and PhD students from St Andrews who revelled in the opportunity to chat informally and discuss their own various projects and areas of interest with the famed director. Of particular interest were Askoldov’s discussions surrounding the circumstances and conditions of The Commissar’s production and its subsequent banning, as well as offering an informed and insightful look into the Soviet film scene during what the director considers to be one of its most lively and vibrant periods.

PhD student Vlastimir Sudar, who is currently researching a thesis on the Yugoslav director Aleksandar Petrovic, was offered an especially rare and welcome opportunity to quiz a friend and contemporary of Petrovic. Askoldov gladly discussed his personal relationship with Petrovic and was delighted to offer privileged insight into the artist’s life, work, and motivations.

After the screening Askoldov also opened up the floor to the auditorium and took a series of questions from interested viewers and assembled Scottish filmmakers. Speaking through an interpreter at all times Askoldov discussed some common misconceptions surrounding The Commissar, dismissing any assertions that the film was merely dissident art that critiqued the political system of the time and stated it was rather meant to be understood as a work about the ‘soul of the people and their problems.’ The Commissar, he stated, is a film that examines the horror and absurdity of all war, and was intended to interrogate a core Soviet idea of the time that actively asserted that the 1917 revolution and civil war was in fact a ‘good war.’ The central Jewish family of the narrative, Askoldov explained, are simply a metaphor, they can stand in for any sufferers from any time, and accordingly within the narrative audiences are shown a surreal narrative flashback that places the 1920’s Russian Jews of the story inside the Nazi Holocaust and Final Solution. The character of the Commissar however is no metaphor, and she - Askoldov states - is not transplantable and is to be understood as a ‘purely Russian figure.’ She is a character who could only exist in this particular National cinema and was designed to be celebrated and understood in such a way. National cinema is important to Askoldov and such depictions of unique national characters, like that of the Commissar, are part of the reason why diverse National cinemas should be enjoyed and celebrated. Askoldov further pleaded for people in the audience to encourage and support their own National cinemas. The Commissar was Askoldov’s one and only film, the price he had to pay as a filmmaker for producing a perceived anti-Soviet text with Soviet government money. ‘Was it worth the sacrifice?’ Askoldov was asked by an interested audience member; this he did not know, but he did know that he ‘had to make this film’, and that he was ‘compelled’ to do so... and the fact that almost forty years on he was able to witness his film being screened to sell-out international audiences made him very happy.

by David H Fleming
Pordenone Silent Film Festival 2005

The 24th annual silent film festival Giornate del Cinema Muto was held, for logistical reasons, once again in the nearby town of Sacile, and was attended by some 600 film scholars, archivists, critics, journalists, academics, film makers, and sheer enthusiasts of the medium. The main themes were Japanese silent cinema, the French "realist" movement associated with André Antoine, and the continuing complete survey of the films of D.W. Griffith, which has now reached the features of 1916-1919, with the latest restoration of Intolerance (1916) and the later Hearts of the World, A Romance of Happy Valley, and Broken Blossoms. The Japanese films were perhaps the highlight, with 4 films by the neglected master Mikio Naruse, and single works from Heinosuke Gosho, Kenji Mizoguchi, Hiroshi Shimizu, and Yasujiro Ozu (the superb Woman of Tokyo), plus some early documentaries and newsreels.

The French films were more of a mixed bag, with some excellent: Julien Duvivier's Au Bonheur des Dames (1930), Jacques Feyder's Craquequibile ((1923), Jean Epstein's La Belle Nivernaise (1923), Antoine's own L'Hirondelle et la Mésange (1920)—two films set on barges that interestingly anticipate Jean Vigo's L'Atalante—and the astonishingly "modern" Germinal of 1913 that could easily be mistaken visually for an Italian neo-realist work of the 1950s. Less successful were most of the other films directed by Antoine himself, such as Le Coupable (1917) and the turgid Les Freres Corses (1915). A major disappointment came with the widely publicised "rediscovered" Beyond the Rocks (1922), the only film to co-star Rudolph Valentino and Gloria Swanson, a poorly directed work that created no erotic spark whatever between the characters. The film most enthusiastically applauded by the audience was the Australian The Sentimental Bloke (1919), partly for the superbly appropriate score written by Jen Anderson specially for the film and played by her group "The Larrikens".

Although all films were, as always, given musical accompaniment, usually on the piano by such internationally known specialists as Phil Carli, Neil Brand and Gabriel Thibadeau, there was more emphasis than usual on smaller instrumental groups such as this one, as well as the full orchestral accompaniment to the opening and closing night films. And another regular feature that may be of interest to post-graduate students in Film was the Collegium, attended daily by some dozen students, where they heard presentations by several of the major scholars in silent cinema such as David Bordwell and Tom Gunning. Overall, if not the best Giornate I have attended, it was certainly worthwhile and richly rewarding for the Japanese films in particular.

By Prof. Graham Petrie
On Gender and East Asian Cinema: A Study Day at the University of Nottingham

In October the Institute of Film and Television Studies at the University of Nottingham organised a study day on ‘Gender and East Asian Cinema’ designed as a highlight for the 2005 East Asian Film Festival (17-23 October). This was a one-off whole-day event that brought together reputable scholars of East Asian films and postgraduate students from various countries to present their work on the gender issue of East Asian Cinema, an academic area which has not yet reached its full development.

Thanks to the organisation efforts by Dr. Julian Stringer and two PhD students, Sabrina Yu and Yan Ying, the event proved to be a great success. Five panels were assembled for different aspects of gender study, namely Masculinity Revisited, Gendering Japan, The Subject of Stardom, Reframing Femininity, and In the Mood for Love which filled three different time slots with two individual talks given by scholars in between panels. There were altogether 21 pieces of work presented on films that span from the 1950s to the present day in China, Hong Kong, South Korea and Japan. A roundtable discussion on studying gender and East Asian Cinema concluded the day on a perfect note.

Many presenters offered a completely fresh look at the films discussed. For example, Chi-Yun Shin, co-editor of New Korean Cinema, gave an insightful report on the feminisation of the spoiled city boy in the film The Way Home (2002). Dolores Martinez, Pro-Dean of SOAS University of London, revisited Rashomon (1950) from an anthropological perspective and brought to the fore the issue of male domination. Sue Clayton, a filmmaker, talked about the Buddhist representation in Asian Cinema and her filmmaking experience in Bhutan. Among the films discussed, Wong Kar-wai’s works were the most popular and a panel was dedicated to his film In the Mood for Love (2000) which gained the director multiple international awards. I was personally honoured to be chosen as one of the presenters on that day and delivered a paper examining the politics of male representation in Fruit Chan’s Hollywood Hong Kong (2002).

This study day was also provided a wonderful forum for researchers to exchange ideas and discuss potential collaboration projects. This, I believe, is one of the most important values that the study day offers its participants. It is anticipated that future research projects and works will evolve from this event.

By Ruby Cheung
The City of God brought him international fame. The film follows Ralph Fiennes as British diplomat Justin Quayle, who travels from London to Africa and back again after his wife is murdered. He subsequently uncovers a conspiracy involving pharmaceutical companies, high diplomats and senior politicians, which have consequential effects upon the local population. The film engages with important contemporary issues, examining exploitation of the Third World, and the quiet complicity of the West, again confirming that politics is indeed the ‘in’ subject for contemporary filmmakers.

As was the case in previous years the festival was divided into sections designed to accommodate films from across the globe. As before, the Asian cinema was well represented and the new Japanese film by Takeshi Kitano Takeshis’ was screened, as was Sympathy for Lady Vengeance directed by Korean Park Chan-Wook of Oldboy fame. The explosion of Argentine films from the previous five years seemed to wane, but Mexico stepped up to represent the Latin and South American countries and provided highly original films like Sangre by young director Amat Escalante. French and European cinema was also well represented and veteran director Michael Haneke’s Hidden attracted by far the most attention.

Organized by the British Film Institute the 49th London Film Festival proved a fantastic opportunity for film lovers to catch up with the most interesting global films produced over the past two years. New filmmakers and cinematic trends were on display at the festival and provided audiences interested in the state of the world we live in with some interesting food for thought.

By Vlastimir Sudar

The film that opened the festival was an international co-production, The Constant Gardener, directed by a Brazilian director Fernando Meirelles, whose debut
Thessaloniki Film Festival

Thessaloniki, Greece: November 18-27, 2005

Even though I arrived on a warm November afternoon, the duration of my stay in Thessaloniki consisted of a string of chilly days: so cold in fact that one just wanted to stay inside and watch movies (of which I managed to see about 25) or make the pass to the near Kitchen Bar and order a warming drink (the traditional white retzia wine did not fare particularly well in the frosty ambience of the city).

Now almost entirely taking place in several converted warehouses alongside the foggy harbour (location for the pivotal scene of Theo Angelopoulos' Landscape in the Mist), the festival feels smaller than before. This new compact size comes along with an increased focus on Greek filmmaking (many events did not include provision for English translation) and with the appointment of a new management team (which, I am told, comes not only as a reaction to the change of government in Greece, but also in response of the desire to stress more on the commercial potential of Greek filmmaking, diverging from the taste of the art-house-minded predecessors). The people ousted included president Angelopoulos and director Michel Demopoulos. The new PR face of the festival is diasporic Greek heart-throb Georges Corraface, the new director is commercial producer Despina Mouzaki. The rest of the team are more or less the same, so it is a matter of watching this festival over the next few years to see how things will develop. It may retain its slot as a key cinematic event for the Balkan region, but it may also be taken over by the more dynamic festivals in Istanbul or Sarajevo.

My main interest was the Balkan Survey, curated by anthropologist Dimitris Kerkinos. There was an interesting bunch of films, often pointing at acute social ills like abandoned children and cross-border prostitution (Bulgarian Lady Zee) or at the detrimental effects of war and ethnic strife (Turkish Yazi-Tura). At breakfast with the team of the Bulgarian film I had this uneasy moment sitting face-to-face with the 17-year old actress whom I had watched repeatedly beaten, bruised, and raped on the screen the previous night. Lady Zee features non-professional actors who are said to re-enact their own life stories: so had this young girl indeed lived through the ordeal she had then been asked to re-enact in the film? I did not dare asking. The Greek panorama included some interesting entries, among which I particularly liked the political parable The Photograph (1987) by diasporic director Nikos Papatakis, the documentary on idiosyncratic ethnographer Elias Petropoulos, and the classical existential drama by Kostas Manousakis O fowos (The Fear, 1966). Undoubtedly, The Death of Mr. Lazarescu by Romanian director Cristi Puiu was the single most important film from the Balkans to emerge from this year’s festival (coming here with the un certain regard award from Cannes). Evolving in the course of a single night, the drama shows the gradual deterioration and eventual demise of a disagreeable elderly protagonist as he descends the circles of Hell in an ambulance cruising between various Bucharest hospitals without ever getting the man treatment he needs. The film is yet one of the bleak and gloomy ‘drabness’ series at which post-communist cinemas are so good: it goes deeper than all other films of this kind, however, due to its sophisticated existential dimension.

I ended up seeing Michael Haneke’s Hidden (Caché) by mistake. It was not my intention to go to a screening of this film, as I knew that sooner or later it would come to the cinemas (whereas at festivals I am usually trying to see features that would never get to a general release). Nonetheless, this seemingly mainstream film by the director of Code inconnu left me shaken. Hidden deserves all the awards it has already received (and is likely to get many more). A simple tale set in the non-descript arondissements of Paris, it tackles the ordeal of an intellectual couple (a plain-looking Juliette Binoche and a weary Danièle Auteuil) who have to face some uncomfortable questions of the husband’s past.

The film is a gripping metaphor of the continuous obligation with which Europe persists in approaching its own colonial past and contemporary racial problems. Like the protagonist of the film, ‘white’ Europe continues dwelling in chronic denial over the roots of the present-day racially-motivated anger, refusing to take responsibility for its own role for the lamentable state of inter-ethnic relations and opting instead to act as an onlooker hiding away in a remote corner of a child’s memory.

I often hear the remark that European cinema is in crisis for good screenplays – well, here is a film which is great because of its brilliant script. It is likely that Hidden will soon become a textbook example of contemporary European cinema, along with such important films like Gianni Amelio’s Lamerica, Lukas Moodyson’s Lilya 4-Ever, Wolfgang Becker’s Good Bye, Lenin! or Fatih Akin’s Head On.

By Dina Iordanova
Istanbul Cool

According to various sources, Istanbul is currently the European city with most buzz. In August 2006 Newsweek’s cover proclaimed it the coolest city in Europe (so cool that it may not need Europe, after all)! Even more recently, in October 2005, lifestyle guru Tyler Brûlé of Wallpaper fame and now a columnist for the Financial Times, placed Istanbul at the cutting edge of contemporary design. “Istanbul has the same type of giddy energy that Barcelona had 15 years ago, when it was just starting to boom”, he claimed. The city’s cornucopia of architecturally and ethnically diverse neighbourhoods, its urban landscapes pierced by the vertical lines of Oriental minarets, the chains of modernist hamams, the brimming restaurants and bazaars, the lavish palaces and the amazing fortresses on the European and Asian sides of the Marmaris create an unrivalled dynamics and buzz. The breezy air of the Golden Horn greeted us on arrival in Istanbul in June 2005. I was coming to be the keynote speaker at the annual Turkish film studies conference, the very first one to open up internationally. The event, which took place over three days in the cozy environment of the French Cultural Centre near the legendary Taksim Square, provided the opportunity to hear interesting presentations and meet important scholars, such as Prof. Nezih Erdogan (Bahcesehir University), Prof. Mahmut Mutman (Bilkent University) and Prof. Cemal Kafadar (Harvard University), as well as my colleague Tim Bergfelder from the University of Southampton. The productive daytime exchanges somehow naturally extended into lengthy evening discussions at the open air terrace of the restaurant overlooking the busy boat traffic on the Bosphorus. The top experience of the visit to Turkey, however, was the unique accommodation. We stayed at the famous 19th century-built Pera Palace Hotel, a historic spot where important figures of Europe’s cultural and political history had crossed paths over many decades. The doors of rooms here featured plates with the names of the famous people who had stayed in those particular quarters. Just on my floor the inscriptions bore the names of Sarah Bernhardt, Agatha Christie, Ernest Hemingway, Eric Ambler, Julio Iglesias, and Jackie Chan.

I brought back to Crail a collection of over thirty Turkish films, recently released on DVD, and have been making my way through them this autumn – from the super sleek sci-fi blockbuster G.O.R.A. (a good rival to Star Wars) through the box-office smash melodrama The Bandit to the early action flicks of Turkish cinema’s iconic star Yilmaz Gurey. My favourite Turkish film, however, still remains Tunc Okan’s masterpiece The Bus, an early precursor to other, better-known films about migratory existential anxiety which came into prominence since this one was made early in the 1970s.

By Dina Iordanova