

Gordana P. Crnković: *Post-Yugoslav Literature and Film: Fires, Foundations, Flourishes*. New York, London, New Delhi, Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2014. [First published 2012 by Continuum International Publishing Group. Paperback edition first published 2014 by Bloomsbury] Illustrations. Bibliography. Index. x + 301 pp. \$120 (cloth), \$34.95 (paper).

At first sight, Crnković's book *Post-Yugoslav Literature and Film: Fires, Foundations, Flourishes* could leave the impression of being merely an informative overview of select films and books from post-Yugoslav cultural production, or even as a collection of essays loosely connected by this temporal and geographical label. However, this is actually an argument-driven book, very carefully composed, with a hidden plot and topics selected in such a manner that the films and books Crnković discusses act as steps in the development of the argument. This is most obvious from the placement of the three chapters entitled 'Foundations', which remind the reader of some of the high points of Yugoslav cultural past (Dušan Makavejev, Meša Selimović, Ivo Andrić and Miroslav Krleža): if their function was only this, one would expect them to be placed at the beginning of the book – not, as they actually are, at the beginning, in the middle, and at the very end. Instead of treating them merely as background, Crnković includes Andrić and Krleža as representatives of a sentiment, or of an intellectual attitude, or of ways of seeing reality which her book aims to bring to light. Historians and political scientists interested in Yugoslavia and its successor states will be puzzled by her choice of works to be discussed: writing about Yugoslavia and the post-Yugoslav cultural sphere has been for a quarter of a century marked by academic conformism resembling a night in which all cows are black: if a book could not be labelled as nationalistic, it was of no interest to scholarship. Crnković, however, chooses films and books which are not only anti-nationalistic, but which reflect on the nationalism of the 1990s and offer insights equal in value, and sometimes even superior to those offered by social scientists. Thus she discusses Alenka Mirković's memoir (or novel?) *91.6MHz* in such a manner that the book reveals 'a clear primacy of doing over talking' – of Vukovar's community knit together by doing things instead of being engaged in Habermasian communicative rationality, in the making and remaking of shared, community-wide meanings – which in the early 1990s becomes fertile ground for rumours, distrust and eventually the community's breakdown. Milcho Manchevski's film *Before the Rain* brings to light another important insight: that the forceful application of rigid, pre-given private or social notions onto another person or group, precludes the possibility of actually hearing and listening to that other person or group, as well as the symbolic division between life-affirming listening and aggressive non-listening. From the same perspective Crnković discusses six Bosnian films – *Armin*, *Snow*, *At Uncle Idriz's*, *All for Free*, *The Summer in the Golden Valley*, and *Grbavica, the Land of My Dreams* – which all emphasise different ways of being an individual, and healing and productive ways of dealing with one's own and collective past. It is notable that Danis Tanović's celebrated film *No Man's Land* is not on this list: composed entirely of stereotypes, both those that Bosnians have of foreigners and foreigners of Bosnians, this film has nothing substantial to contribute to Crnković's discussion of seeing the world from an individual point of view. The same individualist attitude, open to hearing and listening to the other person or a group, Crnković traces in Jurica Pavičić's novel *Plaster Sheep*, which brings to light some aspects of Croatia's 'Homeland War' which do not fit into the officially approved version of history. Her discussion of Ante Tomić's novel *Nothing Should Surprise Us* demonstrates how rich this novel is, both historically and intertextually, and how infinitely superior it is to its own film version, Rajko Grlić's *The Border Post*, which is merely an allegory made along the lines of Croatian nationalist ideology in the 1990s. Individualism, openness to the other, and to inconvenient truths which approved national versions of history try to sweep under the carpet, are complemented by the humour and scepticism of Vinko Brešan's films *How the War Began on My Island*, *Marshal Tito's Spirit*, *Witness*, and *Will Not End Here*. The chapter 'I am You and You are Me. On Liberating Anti-Nationalism' uncovers the underground presence of Serbian culture in Croatia at the time when Serbian books were purged from Croatian libraries, exemplified by the unbroken interest in Djordje Balašević's music and Danilo Kiš's literature, as well as by the rejection of the official linguistic nationalism which the Croatian public demonstrated by its reaction to the appearance of subtitles in Srdjan Dragojević's film

The Wounds. By the time the reader reaches the chapter on Maja Weiss' film *The Border Guard*, which is so thorough, comprehensive and convincingly written that it can be offered as a model film analysis, it is already obvious which values, incorporated in selected books and films from the post-Yugoslav period, Crnković sees as healing and productive, and what her criteria were in choosing these specific works to be discussed in a book on cultural anti-nationalism and on dismantling the conformist nationalist pattern. The chapter on Miroslav Krleža's novel *On the Edge of Reason*, the third of the 'foundations' chapters, which chronologically precedes all other discussed works and which may have been expected at the beginning of Crnković's book, thus comes as its natural conclusion and as an effective restatement of the book's argument: Krleža's novel is an apotheosis of non-conformism, or rejection of ideological and collective truths, of confidence in one's own judgement even if it is not shared by anyone else. It is comforting that Crnković sees this attitude exemplified in so much of post-Yugoslav cultural production. *Post-Yugoslav Literature and Film: Fires, Foundations, Flourishes* is an excellent book which redirects scholarly interest in ex-Yugoslav cultures towards a new territory: not only towards a new production, but also towards a new agenda in approaching it.