

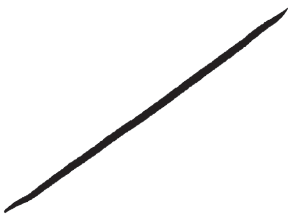
SCREENWRITING, INDUSTRY, AND POWER. REVIEW OF STEVEN MARAS, *SCENARIUL DE FILM.* *ISTORIE, TEORIE ȘI PRACTICĂ*

Scenariul de film. Istorie, teorie și practică
by Steven Maras (Author)
Iași: Polirom 2023 (416 pp.)
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Translated into Romanian by Lucian Georgescu
(coord.) and Andreea Borțun,
with a Preface and notes by Lucian Georgescu.
Foreword to the Romanian edition by Steven Maras.

Original title:
Screenwriting: History, Theory, and Practice
by Steven Maras (Author)
London: Wallflower Press, 2009 (256 pp.)

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Abstract: The review explores the translation and significance of Steven Maras's *Screenwriting: History, Theory, and Practice* into Romanian, emphasizing its relevance within the global academic and filmmaking landscape. Maras's theoretical approach, influenced by Foucault and cultural studies, offers insights applicable beyond Hollywood, including to Romanian filmmaking practices. Despite differences between Hollywood and Romanian cinema, Maras's work prompts critical reflection on power dynamics, institutional influences, and the visibility of screenwriters. It aids teaching by focusing it towards understanding screenwriting as a blueprint for production, highlighting the industrial dimensions of the craft.

Keywords: textbooks, screenwriting, Hollywood, industrial relations, discursive power, Steven Maras, Romanian translation.

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Translations canonize. This phenomenon is particularly notable when the translated text belongs to a specialized academic field and is easily accessible in its source language, English. In the context of film studies, the discipline to which Steven Maras's book belongs, English represents the hegemonic language of transcultural academic communication. It is the language in which academic publications are widely read and in which publishers with a global reach offer their titles. Additionally, English is the language of Hollywood and of the world's dominant film culture, familiar to people worldwide who are interested in the mechanics of the film industry.

These considerations highlight why the translation of Maras's book into Romanian is both significant and canonizing. This significance is heightened by the fact that the book's topic and academic circulation do not typically lend themselves to translation. Maras analyzes Hollywood, a film industry with limited collaboration with Romania. Hollywood operates with different traditions, budgets, and work practices compared to those in Romania. Additionally, Maras's writing and the organization of his book, while accessible, are not structured like a textbook on American cinema or screenwriting, and thus not so easily useable in class. Further contributing to its canonization is the fact that the Romanian edition of *Screenwriting* is published by a top Romanian publisher, Polirom, in a carefully groomed edition and with a comprehensive critical apparatus provided by Lucian Georgescu. These qualifications do not apply to other Romanian translations of books on screenwriting.

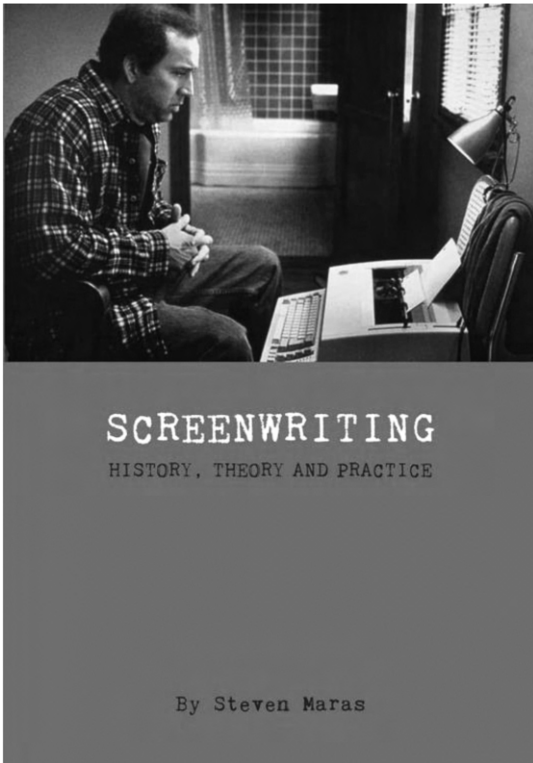
In addition to the global interest in Hollywood and its significant influence on the filmmaking profession, the international relevance of Maras's book lies

in its method and thesis. Maras applies Foucault's archaeology of knowledge to film studies. Although he frequently references David Bordwell and his formalist method, Maras's approach diverges from and even challenges the formalism typically associated with traditional film studies, which often struggles to explain the social construction of style and the aesthetic experience. Maras's approach aligns more closely with cultural studies. From this perspective, the book provides broader insights applicable to Romanian filmmaking practices and any film industry—that is, to organized practices involving collective work, division of labor, budgets, and salaries.

In other words, there is a historical relevance to Maras's book, which offers close readings of primary twentieth-century documents related to screenwriting in the American film industry. However, its true international appeal lies not only in its insights into American industry writing practices, work relations, and self-understanding, but also in the monograph's reflections on how the processes of writing for the screen, thinking about it, formatting it, and pitching it are influenced by power relations. From this perspective, the book serves as a useful tool for both practitioners and commentators of filmmaking, including those in Romania, to better understand their participation within broader institutional structures and to appreciate the cultural and negotiated dimensions of industrial relations.

Another argument that supports the special worth of Maras's book is that, within Romanian film culture, it completes a small portfolio of translations of books on or related to screenwriting. In screenwriting classes, mainly two translated practice-driven texts from English with international relevance have been used as textbooks. These books are considered classics in various contexts, both written and spoken, such as newspaper articles and classroom discussions. One of these is Robert McKee's 1999 edition of *Story: Substance, Structure, Style, and the Principles of Screenwriting*. It was translated into Romanian by Ana Răduleț in 2011 under the title "Story. Conținut, structură, metodă și principii scenaristice" and published by Filmtett in Cluj. This publisher also provided a Hungarian translation of the book, "Story: A forgatókönyv anyaga, szerkezete, stílusa és alapelvei," Hungarian being another teaching language in some Romanian universities.

The other textbook is Syd Field's *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, translated in 2016 by an influential documentary filmmaker and professor Copel Moscu, with the Romanian title "Scenariul de film" for the publisher Asociația Cultură și Imagine. At the time of writing this review, other translations are being completed, with the explicit purpose of serving as textbooks, further enhancing the picture presented here. One should add here that these translators are involved in university-level teaching of screenwriting.



Furthermore, the translation of Maras's book is endorsed by I.L. Caragiale UNATC, the Romanian film school in Bucharest. This endorsement suggests that the teachers and their institution may have influenced the selection of books that best serve their teaching interests, indicating that the decision to translate and canonize certain works is driven by university-level teaching needs. This context also highlights that, in Romania, screenwriting is seldom taught outside of film schools. Creative writing programs are rare in Romania; I myself had the experience of teaching an introductory screenwriting course in one such program, which is now defunct.

As one can see from the above, translations of books on screenwriting into Romanian are from English. Even though Romanian film culture differs significantly from Hollywood, translation choices into Romanian seem to favor books that pay tribute, with some variations, to Hollywood as industry and its three-act feature film format. This is despite the fact that the Romanian cinema does not produce many high-quality features following the Hollywood format.

The trio of translations invoked here has also another aspect in common. They are not the newest books in their field, a field that indeed has a significant yearly output. This aspect can be related to canonization in the sense that translation tends to choose books that have stood the test of time. One can further argue that canonization might be associated with a certain style of writing for the screen. Despite calls for change made by their authors, these books still adhere to a way of understanding storytelling that has been defined by Bordwell and others as the classical mode of narration for the screen. Furthermore, the original release dates of these books might also reflect a style of teaching screenwriting in Romanian film schools. Syllabi in screenwriting seem to rely on sources and practices that have endured over time, rather than embracing innovation. This

occurs even in a context where AI tools are changing the way we understand writing and originality in general, and, presumably, the way screenwriting will be taught in the future.

To conclude, Maras's book provides a unique contribution to this landscape primarily because it is not a practice-driven textbook. While it can certainly be effectively used in class, its more theoretical and expansive approach suggests its utility not only in a screenwriting class but also in courses on film history, literary studies, and even economic history, as previously suggested. However, the latter scenario is less likely, as literature programs tend to focus on more finalized forms of writing such as novels and plays and economics classes prefer to case study on other industries and services.

In a screenwriting class, I would argue that Maras's book is best assigned toward the end of the semester, when students are in the process of completing a larger script. Maras's insights are invaluable for prompting students to reflect on their work and on their future profession in the film industry, even if Romanian film practices diverge from those of Hollywood. Students, and indeed any reader, can gain a deeper understanding from this translation of the industrial dimension of screenwriting, the draft- and unfinished nature of any literary text, the complex position of the screenwriter as an author, and more broadly, the relationship between authorship and the institutionalization of art.

Maras's book can also prompt readers to reflect, even outside of Hollywood contexts, on the cultural and institutional factors contributing to screenwriters' lower pay and lesser prominence in the credit sequence. It also aids in understanding the issues surrounding auteur-driven film criticism and scholarship, which is often practiced uncritically in Romanian film culture, and, more broadly, the arbitrary dominance of the dramatic feature film in our cultures.

Moreover, the book can influence the preparation of course syllabi. Often, screenwriting is taught as the process of crafting a final draft of a text on paper, with the emphasis primarily placed on showcasing the artistic talent of the individual whose name appears on the title page. However, the focus on screenwriting as a blueprint and an outline for production, and its role in controlling production, is often not sufficiently highlighted in Romanian filmwriting classes. In this sense, Maras's book helps teaching because it reveals that the textual genre of screenwriting follows a specific stylistic grammar not necessarily because it must, but because it aligns with standardization requirements imposed by an industrial production process.

Employing Maras's book in teaching also helps thus students and practitioners understand how power structures and institutions influence approaches to screenwriting in Romania. Unlike in some other contexts, Romania

lacks a functional market for screenplays written on spec. Often, the screenplay is authored by the director themselves, who is institutionally linked not only with a producer but also with the financing agencies of the Romanian state. These institutions convene juries tasked with determining which projects are deemed “better” (the evaluation criteria of which should be discussed in detail elsewhere).

These juries represent the main readers of Romanian screenplays. Similar observations arise when filmmakers pursue international funding for various aspects of filmmaking, such as film production, script development, or co-production. The screenplay holds varying significance for different stakeholders involved, but Maras’s book adeptly underscores the nuances in understanding the function of a screenplay and the screenwriter’s identity, and the way they are informed by the prevailing power structures within which they function.



Steven Maras

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Associate Professor **Steven Maras** joined the Media and Communication program at University of Western Australia from Perth in 2015.

Since he began teaching in 1989 he has held senior positions at the University of Western Sydney (1995–2005) and the University of Sydney (2005–2015). He has been a visiting scholar at the Australian, Film, Television, and Radio School in

1998, the School of Cinema-Arts, University of Southern California in 2002, and at the School of Journalism, Fudan University, Shanghai in October–November 2012.

A graduate of Curtin University in Western Australia (1988), Steven Maras studied Honours at Murdoch University, and received his PhD in Communication Studies from Murdoch University (1994). Steven is open to inquiries regarding postgraduate supervision in any of his areas of key research, including media ethics, screenwriting, and communication theory.