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## Imagining and Reimagining History through Fiction and Film (I)

During the twentieth century and in the early decades of the following century, history has been often imagined and reimagined through works of fiction inspired by actual historical events as well as through films, many of which have become iconic. Fantasy literature, apocalyptic and postapocalyptic narratives, and films based on the same topics are mainly concerned with presenting and analyzing ages and historical periods, major historical processes: the Antiquity, dominated or consolidated by political and military personalities who are now prototypes of mentalities; the Middle Ages, heavily reinvented with the tools of oversimplification and binarism of the fantasy genre; the discovery of the Other through exploration and voyages; „the long modernity”, or the civilization model of the Euro-Atlantic space; the empire-national state antithesis; the moral and societal backlash of the twentieth century; the motif of dooming power; the new millennial anxieties.

The cultural display which can be analyzed is very generous and goes beyond the factological historical imagining. Themes such as those of the end of history and humanity are more and more frequently tackled, especially in popular culture, against the backdrop of the global crises which have had an impact on our world. The new political mythologies and uchronia are more and more present in imagining human history. Thus, the cultural motif of historical time travel or the individual return in history as a way to interfere with decisions and events which caused tragic global moments and changed the direction of human progress seems justified by the simplified and untraditional explanation of historical determinism. More often than not, these narratives include the idea that event history can be triggered by a detail, by chance, by chaos.

The process of rethinking from the perspective of the social justice carried by the figure of the Saviour, presenting the Multiverse as our world's chance of survival are cultural phenomena specific to the latest decades of cultural production. Cultural products about historical time and the end of history gain more and more influence and credit in the popular culture of our time. As a result of this reductionist cultural process, full of clichés and dominated by such genres as fantasy, science fiction and horror, people nowadays frequently regard human history as a doomed universe.

There are, on the other hand, films which faithfully reproduce the historical context. See, for example, the ever-lasting popularity of „period drama” and the way such adaptations imagine and reinvent Elizabethan England or Victorian Britain, „la Belle Epoque”, Tsarist Russia and the „golden ages” of national or global histories, by means of scenic design and image expressiveness. But the most interesting adaptations are those which borrow narratives from a certain historical and cultural space and extrapolate them in a civilization that has no clear temporal or cultural connection with the template. This is meant to demonstrate mainly the universal character of some major historical and moral themes (such as, especially, the destiny of Shakespeare's plays or the works of Russian literature, which determined successive cinema re-adaptations).

Unfortunately, in the past several years, climate change, natural disasters, the restrictions and transformations imposed by the system with a view to resource preservation, the decline of consumerist society, corruption, the uncertainty about the future of the human species and of the planet, regional conflicts and the tense geopolitical context, deeper socio-cultural gaps, as well as millennial fears are stimuli for the fictional and sci-fi film production and their propensity for apocalyptic themes and postapocalyptic survival.

Traditionally, our journal encompasses a Miscellanea section, as well as one for reviews of scientific books, presentations of scientific conferences and international film festivals.

We welcome proposals for *Brukenethalia. Romanian Cultural History Review* until April 2, 2022, and after the selection has been made, we welcome the full paper no later than June 5, 2022.

Proposals shall be submitted in accordance with our guidelines stated in the *Guide for Authors* to: [mihaela\\_grancea2004@yahoo.com](mailto:mihaela_grancea2004@yahoo.com); [alexandru.munteanu@brukenthalmuseum.ro](mailto:alexandru.munteanu@brukenthalmuseum.ro).



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MUZEUL  
NAȚIONAL  
BRUKENTHAL

EDITURA MUZEULUI NAȚIONAL BRUKENTHAL  
Sibiu / Hermannstadt 2022



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### A. STUDIES

Dana PERCEC	<i>The Making of a Myth: Isabella, the Fair or the She-Wolf of France...</i> 667
Maria BARBU	<i>The Violence of Delight: Reimagining the History of America in the Novels of Abel Posse.....</i> 677
Andreea ȘERBAN	<i>Shakespeare's Macbeth on Screen: Witches and (Fe)Male Otherness.....</i> 695
Veaceslav MIR	<i>Residences of Monarchs: Film Portrayal of Palaces as Centres of City's Soft Power.....</i> 707
Andra Tatiana ENĂȘOIU	<i>Outlander. Rewriting and Fictionalizing the History of Scots.....</i> 715
Georgeta FODOR	<i>From Woman to Allegory: Queen Marie's Representations in Films... 723</i>
Mihaela GRANCEA	<i>Places, Habits and Objects. Historical Reconstruction in the Films Stone Wedding (1973) and Lust for Gold (1974).....</i> 745
Ciprian MARINUȚ	<i>Issues Concerning Women's Sports in Transylvania in the Interwar Period.....</i> 753
Georgeta GHIONEA	<i>Film Advertising and Screenings in Interwar Oltenia.....</i> 767
Dragoș BUCUR	<i>Temporality, Messianism and Utopia in Jewish Romanian Interwar Literature: Ury Benador's Ghetto Twentieth Century.....</i> 781
Cristina CHEVEREȘAN	<i>Philip Roth's the Plot Against America and the Cyclicity of History....</i> 789
Irena ŠENTEVSKA	<i>Nazis in Space: Laibach and the Iron Sky Films.....</i> 797
Georgiana TUDOR (BODEANU)	<i>Conversion and Stories About the Past in Chinua Achebe's Arrow of God.....</i> 819
Gabriela GLĂVAN	<i>The American Nightmare: Radical Youth, Terrorism and Gun Violence.....</i> 827
Ion INDOLEAN	<i>Social Reintegration in the Romanian Films of the 1970s and 1980s... 835</i>
Gelu TEAMPĂU-LUCA	<i>The Idea of National Unity in Romanian Comic Books during the Communist Period.....</i> 845
Radu TODERICI	<i>Cultural Heritage, History and Art Institutions: a Survey of Recent Documentaries about Art Museums.....</i> 867

Laura STANCIU *The Glass Bead Game in Romanians' Spring: Five Transylvanian Immortals in the Communist Era*..... 877

Valeria SOROȘTINEANU *A Historical TV-Series for Erdoğan*..... 885

Maria GRAJDIAN *"I Love, herefore I Am": Dismantling the Cartesian Dichotomy and Unifying the Self in Ghost in the Shell*..... 899

## B. MISCELLANEA

Mihaela VLĂSCÉANU *Towards a Conceptual Approach of Death in the Eighteenth-Century Province of Banat: an Overview of Memento Mori Art*..... 913

Ionuț Mihai HORADRON *Names and Naming in the Bihor Region: a Case Study on the Villages Bicaciu and Răbăgani*..... 939

Valentin TRIFESCU *Aspects of Cultural Regionalism in Interwar Alsace*..... 947

Adrian VIȚALARU *From Neighbours to Allies: Cultural Propaganda of Romania in Poland (1919-1926)*..... 957

Alexandru-Ionuț DRĂGULIN *Democratisation Through Euro-Atlanticism in Post-Communist Romania: How Much Synergy?*..... 965

## C. REVIEWS

Georgeta FODOR *Laurențiu Vlad, Istorii românești ale ideii de Europa, secolele XVII-XXI (imagini, note, reflecții) [Romanian Histories of the Idea of Europe, 17th-21st centuries (images, notes, reflections)], Iași, Editura Institutului European, 2021, 344 p*..... 979

Bogdan POPA *Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin, Rapidismul. Istoria unui fenomen sportiv [Rapidism. History of a Sports Phenomenon] București, ProUniversitaria, 2020, 352 p*..... 982

Valeria SOROȘTINEANU *Sabina Fati, Călătorie pe urmele conflictelor de lângă noi. Kurdistan, Irak, Anatolia, Armenia [A Journey Following the Conflicts Near Us: Kurdistan, Iraq, Anatolia, Armenia] București, Editura Humanitas, 2022, 448 p*..... 985

Ion INDOLEAN *Christina Stojanova, Dana Duma (eds.), The New Romanian Cinema Edinburgh University Press, 2019, 344 p*..... 987



## **A. STUDIES**



# THE MAKING OF A MYTH: ISABELLA, THE FAIR OR THE SHE-WOLF OF FRANCE

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**Abstract:** *The paper looks at the creation of the negative myth surrounding Isabella of France, wife of Edward II and Queen Consort of England, a process of vilification which started two centuries after her death, in the Tudor theatre, and lasted until well into the twentieth century. The myth presents her as an embodiment of evil, an adulterous, scheming and cruel woman, responsible for her husband's demise. It is only in recent years, as a result of feminist historical revisionism and a new perception about queenship and agency, that her image started to be rehabilitated, in both fictional and nonfictional works. At the same time, the paper justifies the association between Isabella of France's portrayal and the evocation of the she-wolf, an animal whose perception traditionally attracted only negative connotations in western iconography.*

**Keywords:** *agency, feminist historical revisionism, mythmaking, queenship, she-wolf, western iconography.*

**Rezumat:** *Studiul se apleacă asupra construirii mitului negativ din jurul Isabellei de Franța, soția lui Eduard al II-lea și regina Angliei, un proces de înfierare a acestui personaj istoric care a început două secole după moartea ei, în teatrul elisabetan și s-a perpetuat până în secolul XX. Mitul o prezintă ca pe un prototip al femeii malefice, adulterine și colportoare, răspunzătoare de declinul și moartea soțului ei. Doar în ultimii ani, grație revizionismului istoric de sorginte feministă și unei noi percepții asupra regalității feminine și agentivității, memoria ei a fost reabilitată, în opere de ficțiune și în documentare și biografii. De asemenea, studiul oferă o explicație pentru asocierea imaginii Isabellei de Franța cu lupoaica, un animal a cărei percepție a fost eminamente negativă în imaginarul occidental.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *agentivitate, lupoaică, imaginar occidental, mit, regalitate feminină, revizionism istoric feminist.*

## Introduction: a story of wolves

In the early days of intersectional animal studies, bringing together endangered animal species and historical and cultural instances of vulnerable and marginalized femininity, Diane Antonio (in Adams and Donovan, 1995, 213-230) reminds us that wolves and women are connected beyond the mere circumstantial evidence. Natural sciences as well as anthropology help us understand the reasons behind the persecution of women and wolves, culminating, in the western world, with the witch hunts. The systematic campaigns to exterminate the wolves, which led to their extinction in many European regions, were carried by religious and lay authorities, just like the persecution of women accused of being the devil's accomplices.

Equally relevant is the detail that, of the wolf pack, the she-wolf is charged with negative overtones whose symbolism is alarmingly close to womanhood, to moral features and even to professions associated with women. The most obvious example is the dualism of the *lupa* in the Roman imagology. The Capitoline she-wolf is reminiscent of the nurturing qualities of the

animal, which, according to legend, suckled the twins Romulus and Remus, and is also evidence of martial symbolism, dully attributed to the founders of the Roman Empire. But *lupa* was, at the same time, a sign of female promiscuousness, denoting a prostitute, and her workplace was known as the *lupanar*, in the same Roman cultural imagination and vocabulary.

Antonio draws our attention, however, that the observation of nature would contradict folklore and social practices based on symbolic exclusion. The life in a pack displays more numerous examples of gender equality than the history of human groups, with young she-wolves claiming and securing the alpha status for obvious and important physical qualities. The young she-wolf is a very good hunter, is fast, has a great capacity to adapt and remarkable survival skills.

Psychologist Clarissa Pinkola Estes (2006, 15) takes her cue from these observations of the natural world, arguing in her influential book about the connection between "profound femininity" and the wolves' history. She too notices that young and healthy wolves display similarities of personality and behaviour with young and healthy women: they have

extraordinary vitality and an impressive inclination for self-sacrifice. But, despite the fact that they have demonstrated the strongest attachment and loyalty to the group, they have been hunted down mercilessly, along the logic of scapegoating. The perception of wolves and women as savage, vile, uncontrollable, and devious is the result of overlapping cultural strata and the alteration of the positive, original, often pre-Christian significance of human-animal connections.

### A she-wolf in queen's clothing

It is interesting to note that, while wolves (and she-wolves) have been connected with dual, ambiguous femininity since ancient times, it is only in the sixteenth century that this association is stabilized, on the Elizabethan stage. Shakespeare evokes the figure of the she-wolf, combining it with negative images of foreign rule, cruelty and androgynous queenship in the history of *Henry VI* Part III. The play chronicles the first stage of the War of the Roses, when the Lancaster House fought against the Yorkist faction to keep the crown on the head of the weak and mentally unstable King Henry. The main defender of the Lancastrian claim is Margaret of Anjou, queen consort, who, upon ordering the execution of her archenemy, Richard Duke of York, finds herself labelled as "She-wolf of France, but worse than wolves of France" (I, 4, 551).

The iconography of the she-wolf in relation to allegedly disruptive and determinedly foreign queenship takes firm ground in English literature in the eighteenth century, when poet Thomas Gray portrays Margaret of Anjou's compatriot, Isabella of France, in similar terms. In his poem *The Bard* (1757), Gray introduces the French queen thus: "She-wolf of France, with unrelenting fangs, / That tear'st the bowels of thy mangled mate", alluding to an apocryphal story about King Edward II's mysterious death in prison, allegedly by impaling. In these lines, Gray mixes two different literary sources, Shakespeare's she-wolf in Queen Margaret's clothing and Christopher Marlowe's tragedy, *Edward II* (1594). Marlowe based his play on Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland and Ireland*, the first historical document which overtly criticized Isabella's behaviour, accusing her of disloyalty to the king and implicitly of high treason. Consequently, Marlowe's epithet about Isabella is "unnatural" and "false", by which he means a queen and a woman who falls short of the age's expectations about her duties.

What these duties consisted of is the focus of a collection of essays on the topic of queenship and power, edited by Kavita Mudan Finn and Valerie Schutte (2018). While most queens were consort and only very few were regnant, some of the shared – and very important – expectations from both categories were motherhood and wifely devotion, i.e. a confinement to domesticity. Historical documents, when they did narrate about queens, focused less on the individual persons and more on the institution of queenship, a social, spiritual, and political standard from which divergence was sanctioned. Royal female roles did not include agency, whether in the family circle and the institution of marriage, or in terms of political authority. Sketching the figure of Margaret of Anjou, the authors argue that the French queen plays, in Shakespeare's first tetralogy, "a historically disproportionate role in shaping the political landscape and the attitudes of those around her" (Finn, Schutte, 2018, 163) since "her actions as a self-described revenger destabilize the English landscape". Even in men, revenge was depicted as toxic on the early modern stage, so a woman nurturing such impulses could only be considered, as Marlowe does about Isabella, "unnatural".

If the sixteenth century was the first moment when the she-wolf became associated with queenship, it is only in recent years that this iconography is held to be self-evident. The she-wolf as a genetic notion for troublesome medieval and early modern English queenship is capitalized by two historical accounts of the lives and actions of Empress Matilda, Eleanor of Aquitaine, Joanne of Navarre, Anne Boleyn, or Katherine Howard. Elizabeth Norton (2009) contrasts the queens prior to the Norman Conquest with the medieval ones, arguing that the degree of agency allowed in these consorts differed in various historical moments, depending on the king's presence and involvement in domestic affairs. More specifically, the historian's point is that a greater similarity existed between the role attributed to Anglo-Saxon and early modern queens, in contrast to the role of medieval consorts. This situation is justified by the fact that English kings in the Middle Ages possessed vast lands on the continent and their political and military duty kept them away from home for long periods of time, leaving their wives to act in their name, as rulers by proxy. Therefore, medieval English queens were expected to display a higher degree of agency and involvement in state affairs. In contrast, Anglo-Saxon and early modern queens were expected to be only wives and mothers

because the kings had a more local rule and needed little, if any, replacement and support from their spouses.

Bringing all the queens together under the tag of the she-wolves, Norton argues that these women were usually neglected by chroniclers, who paid little attention to them as individuals, usually portraying them in a reductionist manner, along the “saintly vs. notorious” binomial. The former were those who didn’t deviate from the rule of fertile motherhood and intercession. The latter were all the others. But, with the benefit of hindsight, we can argue that at least some of those accused of cruelty, unnaturalness, or witchcraft might have been partially or entirely innocent. According to Norton, the reason for this ambiguity is the chroniclers’ focus on “the subject of female power” (Norton, 2009, 8), not on the queens’ biographies. Rather than unnatural, these women were, more likely, “unsuitable” for the role (like Henry VIII’s four out of six wives), or “sorely tried” (like Isabella of France).

Another historian who resorts to the label of she-wolves is Helen Castor (2011). She restricts her categorization to those consorts who were not expected, by their contemporaries, to rule in their own right, even if the male holders of authority (husbands, fathers, sons) were incapacitated – too old, too young, or ill. Vilified in their own time, they did what Finn and Schutte call an evolution of the perception of queenship, “challenge[ing] traditional concepts of royal male authority” (Finn, Schutte, 2018, 2) and the patriarchal framework of power and patronage. Castor agrees with other feminist historians, who consider that the medieval and early modern chroniclers’ disinterest in women as individuals and no understanding for their experiences makes it hard for contemporary researchers to reconstruct their real stories. A good example is provided by the biography of empress Matilda, one of the first notorious female monarchs: “We know little about [her], but a lot about how she acted and reacted amid the dramatic events of a turbulent life, how she was seen by others, whether from the perspective of a battlefield or that of a monastic scriptorium” (Castor, 2011, xiv). So we can only rely on “the collision between personal relations and public roles that made up the dynastic government of a hereditary monarchy” (Castor, 2011, xv).

### Fangs and faithfulness

In Shakespeare’s chronicle plays, the she-wolf, a solitary figure, is opposed, in heraldic

symbolism, on the one hand, by a pack of wolves, and, on the other, by the lion. A she-wolf, as I argued above, stands for foreign, dangerous, disruptive queenship. The pack is equally unflattering, as it suggests the group of courtiers, enemies, usurpers constantly threatening the throne and weakening legitimate rulership. The more powerful and evocative opposition is that between the she-wolf and the lion, an image analysed by Nicole Mennell (2021, 231) in a study about the intersection between animal studies and the cultural interpretation of the Elizabethan theatre. There are several lion kings in Shakespeare’s plays, the most famous being Henry V, victorious against the French in the battle of Agincourt. In *Henry VI, Part II*, significantly, it is Margaret of Anjou, the she-wolf, who attaches the lion’s label to the powerful men around her. Addressing her incompetent and catatonic husband, to warn him against the danger of stronger and more active men, the French queen says: “Small curs are not regarded when they grin, / But great men tremble when the lion roars; / And Humphrey is no little man in England” (III, 1, 18-10). Henry VI is denied the association with the heraldic animal his formal position would entitle him, the lion’s qualities being attributed, instead, to the Duke of Gloucester, younger brother, but more deserving ruler. The king is only rewarded with the position of an inferior dog breed, the cur, and a small one at that.

During the early modern period, another royal figure that drew the playwrights’ attention was Isabella, daughter of King Philip the Fair of France. When it comes to the facts about Isabella’s life, the biography is, with very few exceptions and contradictions, that of a medieval princess. Born in 1295, she was betrothed to the heir of the English throne at the age of eight, thus growing up with the knowledge that her future was that of being Edward’s wife and England’s queen. She went to England at the age of twelve and, despite her husband’s bad habit of taking male favourites, especially Piers Gaveston, the first years of her marriage must have been conventional, if not happy, the queen giving birth to four children, two boys and two girls. After Gaveston’s execution and his replacement by a more ambitious and scheming family, the Despensers, Isabella’s dissatisfaction, at least in terms of her influence in the king’s circles and her financial stability, can be easily guessed. When she departed for France, in 1325, to mediate between the English and the French crowns, she was likely to experience a sense of liberation and

compensation. Roger Mortimer, rebel baron, was in exile in Paris and their encounter, amorous or not, resulted in a political alliance that was consolidated when Isabella's son, Edward, was also dispatched to Paris. Their return to England, with an army provided by their new in-laws in Hainault (Prince Edward had been betrothed to Philippa of Hainault) was saluted by the English people, who were dissatisfied with King Edward's recklessness and selfishness. While it is not clear whether Isabella did play a role in her husband's assassination, what is certain is that her regency, with Mortimer at her side, was similarly chaotic with that of her husband. After Edward's heir was born and the young king reached the age of majority, he had Mortimer executed for treason, while for his mother he found a more merciful punishment. She was urged to renounce her authority and position at the court and to live, for the rest of her life, in comfortable seclusion.

Interestingly, Isabella of France is ignored by Shakespeare, even if, theoretically, her portrait would have exposed the same incumbrances as the foreign queen from whom she is separated by the One Hundred Years' War, Margaret of Anjou. Marlowe's Isabella is like Shakespeare's Margaret in the sense that her ambitions destabilize the throne and bring about political unrest in the country, but also unlike Margaret because she is not an androgynous creature. It goes without saying that her unnaturalness is her defining feature, but Marlowe also provides mitigating circumstances. According to Barbara Wooding (2011), in *Edward II*, the playwright shows sympathy with Isabella's unhappiness, allowing her to confess sincere love for her husband ("Heavens can witness, I love none but you", 1112) and enabling her son to commute her sentence to exile, for being a creature who inspires more compassion than hatred ("I shall pity her", 2654). Wooding believes that "Isabella's character constantly emphasizes the personal affliction inherent in the wider political dissent and protest" (Wooding, 2011, 1).

In the eighteenth century, when Thomas Gray revisits the troubled reign of Edward II, the anti-French feelings that dominated British politics and cultural life caused Isabella's image to deteriorate severely. No mitigating circumstances are granted the queen with a beastly personality, who might have ordered her husband's gruesome death, by impaling. In the poem, she is an animal literally, with fangs tearing at the men's flesh. Victorian morality could only continue the established tradition of viewing Isabella critically because she cheated on her husband with Roger

Mortimer. The best-known example is provided by Agnes Strickland who, in the twelve volumes about the *Lives of the Queens of England*, written between 1840 and 1848, places all consorts in two categories: good and bad women. Isabella's affair turned her into a wanton character, which was, seemingly, evidence enough for another, more serious, transgression and sin: her husband's murder. For the bourgeois standards of Agnes Strickland, Isabella could only be judged in these terms, moralizing and dogmatic rather than based on historical facts: "no queen of England has left such a stain on the annals of female royalty, as the consort of Edward II, Isabella of France" (2011). It is somewhat ironic that Strickland condemns Isabella while extolling the virtues of "good" queens, among whom we find Isabella's daughter-in-law, Philippa of Hainault. Apart from the fact that the latter was wife to Edward III, thus providing sufficient contrast with the she-wolf only by virtue of her marital status, Philippa can be argued to have given historians sufficient examples of positive queenly behaviour, especially as mother and intercessor. In the first capacity, she gave birth to thirteen children, of whom five sons lived into adulthood. As intercessor, she is remembered for her mercy during the siege of Calais, at the peak of the One Hundred Years' War, when the lives of those about to be executed by her victorious husband were spared at her request. It can be said that the major difference between the two queens was that Philippa, while exercising influence, did it in a more discrete and conventional manner. This must be the reason why her life and career as queen consort have been regarded, ever since the fourteenth century, as a success, with a biographer recently going as far as to call her "mother of the nation" in the subtitle of a book (Warner, 2019).

It is worth saying that Isabella's perception by her contemporaries and immediate posterity was more neutral and less explicitly negative than the developments of the early modern and modern periods. Miniatures, illuminated manuscripts, or stained-glass details in monumental artistic commissions of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries depicted her in conventional positions, as a woman, as a queen, or as a mother. She is standing beside her son when he pays homage to his French uncle, Charles IV, or between her brothers and her father, in a family portrait. Even in the visual representations that carry a political message, such as the illustration in which she takes part in Edward II's arrest, her role is presented as passive, the queen watching the whole scene from a window, in the right corner of

the manuscript. As Laura Slater (2021) points out, reputation was built (or lost) at the intersection between artistic and political language, so “motivated spectators” could read such depictions as being more critical than they looked at first sight. A good example she offers is the pictorial composition of the east window of the St Lucy Chapel of St Frideswide’s Priory in Oxford, created during the years of Isabella’s rebellious regency, after Edward II’s demise. The upper panels of the window are a conventional display of secular and religious motifs, with two crowned figures, male and female, accompanied by the heraldic symbols of England and France, receiving a gift from an angel sent from heaven (Slater, 2021, 260). Apparently, this proves due recognition of royal authority, as the figures are likely representations of Isabella and young Edward III. But the lower half of the composition is more ambiguous and disturbing, as it contains fantastic, hybrid creatures, some animal-like, others naked or almost naked. A sphinx-looking woman on the French side of the window could be interpreted as a symbol of lust and uncontrolled bodily temptations, because, in medieval iconography, the sphinx was often likened to the ape. Also on the French side, below, a lupine creature, with a dog’s (or wolf’s) head alludes to monster-like behaviour and aggressiveness. The interpretation of the ensemble could be generic, in accordance with the Chain of Being theories, which placed humans standing in the middle, struggling to rise above a lower, animal realm, devoid of spirituality, aspiring for a superior status through redemption. At the same time, even if there is no clear indication that the hybrid female figures are in any way connected to the crowned woman above, one cannot fail, as Laura Slater does, to make connections with Isabella’s dwindling reputation (Slater, 2021, 285).

While contemporary depictions of the queen were not overtly critical and early modern, eighteenth and nineteenth century representations were entirely negative, it is only in the twentieth century that the first attempts to rehabilitate Isabella begin. Possibly the first such text belongs to Hilda Johnstone, in the 1930s, who accuses historians of unfairness. The queen’s five years of transgression (from 1325 to 1330) come after twenty years of being a god daughter, wife, princess, and queen, and before another twenty years of discretion and religious devotion: “Surely we need not fix our whole and sole attention upon the grisly spectacle of the wolf tearing its prey” (Johnstone, 1936, 208), Johnstone concludes.

From the mid-twentieth century onwards, Isabella’s story oscillates dramatically between the she-wolf iconography and the defence/glorification of a personality who had been called by her contemporaries, like her father before her, “the Fair”.

### History and poetic licence in Isabella’s afterlife

French writer Maurice Druon titled the fifth volume of his *The Accursed Kings*, saga of the Capetian dynasty, *The She-Wolf of France* (1959). He thus capitalized on a long tradition of vilification and slander, in name only. In fact, the novel consecrates twentieth-century tendencies to romanticize Isabella’s biography by exonerating her of one, out of two, major sins. While her affair with Mortimer is over-emphasized, her greed, cruelty and agency in her husband’s murder are countered by the image of a mere victim and pawn. A still young and attractive woman at 33, when she fled to France and was reunited with Mortimer and her son, Isabella is pictured by the French writer as a wronged wife, dispossessed of her rights by a weak and petulant Edward as well as by a conspiracy of the Despenser family. Mortimer is a knight, who, Lancelot-like, rushes at his lady’s rescue with the sole aim of restoring her honour. In effigy, their love story is likened by Druon to the medieval romances of Marie de France, thus displacing the guilt and shifting the focus from adultery and political ambition to courtly love and symbolic vassalage.

Druon acknowledges the negative side of Isabella’s afterlife by describing her as petite but determined, with little, sharp teeth like those of a small predator. But he also mitigates this image by showing Isabella full of remorse, after she falls in love with Mortimer, not so much for her husband’s sake, but at the thought of the role she played in the repudiation of her sisters-in-law, Blanche and Margaret of Burgundy. In reality, married for six years in 1314, Isabella visited France and considered herself entitled to denounce her brothers’ wives when she suspected them of infidelity. In the novel, a decade after this episode, she prays for forgiveness realizing that, after experiencing genuine, albeit illicit, passion, she wouldn’t have betrayed these women.

The French writer’s epic series begins with the infamous day of 13 October 1307, when, upon King Philip IV’s orders, the Knights Templar are dispossessed and executed as heretics. If that was only a few months before Isabella’s departure for England, to be married and crowned queen, her connection with this event, like that of all her

family members, is reiterated several times. Her unhappy union with Edward, her violent regency upon her return to England, at Mortimer's advice, her lover's demise and her own forced retirement are presented, in the novel, as examples of the Templars' curse, which affects the entire Capetian dynasty. This supernatural element is yet another example of mitigation the French writer uses in weighing Isabella's guilt.

Druon's approach is shared by Helen Castor's retelling of Isabella's life. The historian evokes the queen's passive role played in her arranged marriage, the neglect by her husband, the attraction for Mortimer, stemming from loneliness and frustration, the takeover of power under less fortunate auspices and the tragic end of her rule and relationship with Mortimer in the spirit of the Shakespearean "star cross'd lovers". Isabella is considered a pawn in the political ambitions of men like her father, who married her off to England to secure a peace truce. She is also presented as a victim, whose actions came to be seen in a negative light because she went against the conventions of her time, even though her behaviour was justified by her desire to act in her son's best interest. Isabella is compared to Margaret of Anjou, not only because they were two young French princesses whose marriages had more political than sentimental relevance, two consorts who wanted the best for their sons, but also because literary posterity was unusually harsh with them, applying the nickname of the she-wolves. Isabella and Margaret are both described as brave and remarkable, Isabella's epithet being reinforced visually by the reproduction of a contemporary, fourteenth-century illustration which shows the queen landing in England with an army, with her small son (who was actually a teenager) by her side, dressed in a silver suit of armour, an accolade of the Amazonian myth of the warrior woman.

This approach, displayed by other nonfictional and fictional works inspired by Isabella's life, is criticized by Katherine Warner, who, in her 2016 biography of the "rebel queen", warns readers against "dogmatic assertions" about the she-wolf's actions, which may say more about the writer who made them than about Isabella herself (Warner, 2016, 47). For Warner, a woman who lived seven hundred years ago can only be a mystery, so we may know *what* she did, but we can't possibly know *why* she did those things. The presentation of the events of her life in a "soap opera"-like fashion tends to minimize her own bad choices by maximizing other characters', especially Edward II's, negative side. Blaming her

errors of judgment on romantic infatuation or sexual attraction makes her one-dimensional and shallow, thus doing her no more justice than the previous traditions of vilification. Warner argues that the events of Isabella's life cannot be twisted to fit modern tastes and values (such as the idea that women found the strength to escape abusive relationships and the will to discover their bodies and desires) simply because this would be an anachronistic perception of medieval realities (Warner, 2016, 47).

For the historian, Edward II, and men of high social status in general, were similar pawns in marital alliances, and to depict royals as victims of a political game "gives a disagreeable impression of fragile, submissive" individuals. Warner goes on that Isabella, "having no concept of marrying for love", cannot be sympathized for not making a choice she would have very likely ignored – she would have probably refused to marry a "latrine cleaner", Warner comments ironically, only to demonstrate she had this liberty (Warner, 2016, 61). Another fallacy Warner identifies in standard biographies of Isabella or Edward II is the tendency to perpetuate one sexual prejudice or another: picturing the king as the "bad and immoral homosexual" and explaining Isabella's affair as a natural preference for the "good heterosexual" is as "problematic" as calling her an adulteress and a murderess (2016, 53). It is true, the historian admits, that Edward II's reign was disastrous and he was the first king to suffer the shame of being deposed, but this is not justification enough to add an abusive, perverted personality to these political flaws.

In film, the prejudices identified by Warner are repeated and even augmented, with a high degree of poetic license. *Braveheart*, the 1995 epic historical drama about the life and death of William Wallace, the Scottish hero, perpetuates the cliché of the "sorely tried" wife and mother (in the words of Elizabeth Norton, 2009, 8). Conversely, *Knightfall*, the historical fiction television series of 2017-2019 about the Knights Templar, is tributary to the she-wolf model representation of Isabella of France.

*Braveheart* starred Mel Gibson in the role of the medieval Scottish leader who opposed English tyranny in the name of national independence. The epic drama directed by the same American film star enjoyed great box-office success, received many awards, but was also criticized for a number of historical inaccuracies. Characterized on IMDb as "distractingly violent and historically dodgy", the film blends action and romance with spectacular effects. Despite its many acclaims,



film critics and especially historians disagree with the producer's idea of reviving the interest in Scottish history at the very cost of Scottish history itself. Alex von Tunzelmann, starting from the voiceover which, in the early moments of the movie announces that "Historians from England will say I am a liar", concludes that the entire production is "a great big steaming haggis of lies" (von Tunzelmann, 2008, 1).

The film presents a history of Scotland in the late thirteenth century, twisted as to suggest that the Scottish king had no issue (even if his sons were living) and that Wallace was a poor peasant (even if he was a noble landowner). As von Tunzelmann puts it, "This isn't going at all well, and we're only three minutes in" (von Tunzelmann, 2008, 1). Not good is also the notion that Scottish warriors painted their faces in blue and wore kilts in Wallace's time: the former idea is a millennium too late, while the latter is a few centuries too early.

As for Isabella of France, her presence in the film is deemed bizarre by the reviewer. He is right if we take into account the fact that she was only ten when Wallace was executed and that she arrived on English soil as Edward's betrothed only three years after the Scottish hero's death. But the film also suggests that Isabella was sent by her father-in-law, King Edward I, to negotiate with the Scottish rebel. Apart from the fact that Edward I was already dead when Isabella married his heir, the idea of this young woman being effectively used in parleys is less bizarre than it may seem. After all, she was sent to England to marry the future king in an effort to secure the Anglo-French alliance and, years later, her husband sent her back to France, to her brother's court, to negotiate a peace between the two countries and the terms on which tribute and homage were to be paid.

In *Braveheart* (1995), Isabella is played by the French actress Sophie Marceau, who portrays the queen as a beautiful, lonely, and sad figure. Her wistful grace and fragility are indirectly explained by a scene which shows her husband, Edward, wearing baby-blue tights and flirting with a young page. The "bad homosexual" vs. "good heterosexual" pair is replicated here, the historical Mortimer being replaced by a fictional projection of Wallace, brutal avenger of the Scots, oozing aggressive and rudimentary virility through all his muscles. Isabella's affair with Wallace must have been deemed acceptable by the producers in light of her century-long proclaimed promiscuousness. But, more fantastically, the film suggests that Edward III, one of the most successful English

monarchs, the fourth longest ruling king in English history, was Wallace's offspring. As Kathryn Warner argues, commenting on the notion of Edward III's illegitimacy speculated by some biographers, "That Edward II was not Edward III's father says more about modern binary concepts of sexuality than it does about history" (Warner, 2016, 63). Despite the alarming number of discrepancies, the American drama helped to boost Scottish tourism and, as argued by Lin Anderson (2004), turned out to be "a politically influential movie", contributing to the return of the Scottish Parliament in the mid-nineties, three hundred years after it had been dissolved.

In 2017, History channel commissioned Don Handfield and Richard Rayner to create a television series about the fall of the Knights Templar, the wealthiest and most powerful order – and interest group – in medieval Europe. *Knightfall* dramatizes roughly the same events incorporated by Maurice Druon in his story about Philip the Fair and his conflict with Jacques de Molay, Grand Master of the Temple. But, despite its historical documentary purpose, the series has been rated, by Rotten Tomatoes among others, as inaccurate. Ironically, on this site, the series comes second in historical inaccuracy only to *Braveheart*! And if we judge by the portrayal of the she-wolf, we could argue in favour of *Knightfall* occupying the leading position. Suitably full of gore for a depiction of fourteenth-century France, with tortures, executions, blood, and crucifixes, the series surprises reviewers with... cleanliness: "every interior is immaculately cleaned and the bleaching budget for the Knights Templar's white robes must be astronomical" (Fienberg, 2017, 1). For the same reviewer, the story is closer to King Arthur or Robin Hood than the epic of this religious order's dissolution. For Allison Keene, despite being "deadly serious" in its efforts to present the grim reality of the time, the film often gives the impression of anachronism (Keene, 2017, 1).

Critics don't see eye to eye about the portrayal of female characters in the series, some regarding them as "more complex and spirited" than the men (Fienberg), while others conclude that "A lot of what goes into making period pieces like this feel modern is the updated proto-feminist heroines" (Keene, 2017, 1). Indeed, much of the focus in the first series, apart from the Knights Templar seeking the Holy Grail, is Princess Isabella's betrothal. King Philip's plan to secure a marriage for the sake of France's political alliances is regarded as selfish and evil by both his

wife, the queen, and his daughter, who insists to be allowed to marry for love. Queen Joan, historically a significant monarch in her own right, as Queen of Navarre and reliable ally for King Philip, is, in *Knightfall*, a still young woman, estranged from her husband, starting a passionate affair with a man twice out of her reach, Landry the Templar, her husband's best friend and a sworn monk. As Isabella, in Maurice Druon's *Accursed Kings*, feels secretly connected to other women in love, Queen Joan in *Knightfall* wants to help her daughter follow her heart rather than her duty. Isabella's famous promiscuousness, of which so much has been written, is presented in this docufiction as a family trait, passed on from mother to daughter.

Princess Isabella (Sabrina Bartlett) is a nubile, whimsical, spoilt young lady, who refuses to marry Prince Edward of England for the sake of a boy she fancies more, the Catalan Prince Lluís. The same above-mentioned and much speculated loose morals of Isabella of France are suggested when she consents to have premarital sex with Lluís, her mother covering for her when this becomes a serious state matter. If this was not enough, it turns out Isabella has only pretended to be in love with Lluís, in fact plotting with the villain of the story, royal counsellor de Nogaret, to annihilate him by means of a spectacular (and explosive) weapon, the Greek fire. In the second series, Isabella's only role, now played by a more sophisticated and slightly more mature Genevieve Gaunt, pointing at the very embodiment of the *femme fatale*, is that of sinking even further into immorality, and dragging other women with her in the process. Margaret of Burgundy is portrayed as an innocent woman and faithful wife, who is drugged by Isabella, determined to stage an orgy that would discredit her and thus remove her from the palace and from royal favour. If, historically, Isabella's role in her sister-in-law's demise was criticized because of her righteousness and

hypocrisy, in this televised drama, the she-wolf is utterly evil, because no justification can be found for her actions.

## Conclusion

The study should end by returning to an observation made by Hilda Johnstone almost a century ago, about the unfairness of historical accounts when it comes to female personalities in general and to Isabella of France in particular.

Less than five years of acting against the family's and the society's expectations shed a bad light on more than fifty years of biography and damaged more than five hundred years of posterity. In Johnstone's words, "Historical memory [...] has fastened upon that short, revolting and exciting episode in her long life", "of a brief and brutal revolution". So it is only natural to wonder, as the English historian does, "Ought we not to look back behind it for possible provocation, and beyond it for further activities? May we not view her in other connections?" (Johnstone, 1936, 208) The emphasis lies on the modal verbs used in these rhetorical questions, *ought* and *may*, which suggest a moral obligation. The act of revising the story of the Middle Ages with a focus on the relationship between queenship and power is a work of adjusting the operations that had been carried, in *history* rather than *herstory*, i.e. by male chroniclers and decision makers rather than by women. These operations tailored the historical material by excision, conflation or minimization, and the contradictory, ambiguous portrait of the she-wolf is an ideal illustration of how these actions affected both hindsight and prospective view.

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# THE VIOLENCE OF DELIGHT: REIMAGINING THE HISTORY OF AMERICA IN THE NOVELS OF ABEL POSSE<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** *It is said that Alexander the Great wept when he heard that there were an infinite number of worlds, for he had yet to become the master of one. Man's quest for conquest and domination goes back as far as human history itself, that is, his pursuit of happiness and pleasure has always been linked to vice and violence, and one place where this has been particularly evident is in the history of the discovery and colonization of the Americas. From here, the Argentinian writer Abel Posse writes The Dogs of Paradise (1983) and Daimon (1978), reimagining essential aspects about figures such as Christopher Columbus and Lope de Aguirre. The aim of this article is to examine Posse's way of rewriting the history of the Americas, while analysing the reasons why the desire of Europeans to destroy and feel superior because they can hurt "the other" was present in all key moments of human evolution. Historical and anthropological research such as the works of Tzvetan Todorov, Serge Gruzinski, Corin Braga, or Hugh Thomas, as well as philosophical concepts by G.W.F. Hegel, René Girard, Friedrich Nietzsche, or Blaise Pascal are drawn upon to show that history in Posse's novels was not only reinvented, but also forever changed by the Europeans' violent conquests in the New World.*

**Keywords:** *historiographic metafiction, Latin American literature, Abel Posse, violence, conquest, alterity.*

**Rezumat:** *Se spune că Alexandru cel Mare a început să plângă atunci când a aflat că există o infinitate de lumi, deoarece încă nu reuşise să cucerească nici măcar una dintre ele. Dorinţa omului de a cuceri şi a domina a fost prezentă în toate etapele istoriei umane; altfel spus, fuga sa continuă după fericire şi plăcere s-a împletit întotdeauna cu viciul şi violenţa, iar un loc în care acest lucru a fost mai mult decât vizibil a fost istoria descoperirii şi cuceririi Americii. Pornind de aici, scriitorul argentinian Abel Posse scrie The Dogs of Paradise (1983) şi Daimon (1978) şi rescrie aspecte esenţiale despre personalităţi ca Cristofor Columb şi Lope de Aguirre. Această lucrare îşi propune să exploreze metodele prin care Posse modifică istoria Americii şi să analizeze, în acelaşi timp, motivele pentru care plăcerea europenilor de a distruge şi de a se simţi superiori deoarece îl pot răni pe „celălalt” a fost prezentă în toate momentele cheie ale evoluţiei umane. Cercetări istorice şi antropologice precum cele scrise de Tzvetan Todorov, Serge Gruzinski, Corin Braga sau Hugh Thomas, precum şi concepte filosofice prezentate de G.W.F. Hegel, René Girard, Friedrich Nietzsche sau Blaise Pascal vor fi folosite cu scopul de a demonstra că istoria nu a fost doar rescrisă în romanele lui Posse, ci şi modificată pentru totdeauna de cuceririle violente ale europenilor în Lumea Nouă.*  
**Cuvinte-cheie:** *metaficţiune istoriografică, literatură latino-americană, Abel Posse, violenţă, cucerire, alteritate.*

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## The Earthly Paradise and Humanity's Attempts to Find It

The history of the earthly paradise and the numerous attempts of people to find and regain it during their lifetime have strongly influenced the collective imagination over the course of human evolution. The earthly paradise, described as the ideal place where Adam and Eve lived happily, in peace, abundance and harmony with nature until the moment of original sin, is the Judeo-Christian version of a long series of sacred gardens and utopian islands prevalent in the Western imagination. In his *Garden of Eden in Myth and Tradition*, which follows his research on people's fears and the ways they protected themselves from the dangers of this world or the other, Jean Delumeau writes a *History of Paradise* and "revives the dreams of happiness" (1997, 5) that has prevailed in the Western culture between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries.

Starting from the very late Antiquity as a pagan myth, then suffering the Christian conversion in the Middle Ages and finally being rationalized more and more until becoming nothing else than a fiction in the Modern Era, this theme has been the guiding reason of many journeys which lead, instead, to the discovery of other new territories. However, for the purpose of this research, the only relevant ones will be those whose destination was the western edge of the world, more specifically those which followed the western route in search of the Indies or the earthly paradise and, as a result, reached Latin America.

"The nostalgia for the Garden of Eden, missionaries' belief that the eschatological times are near, the will of spreading Christianity and the desire of finding more gold, precious stones and other rare products conjugated for pushing travellers, monks, sailors and conquerors towards distant horizons" (Delumeau, 1997, 198).

Travelling west, the explorers believed that they would circumnavigate the earth and thus reach the Far East, where the medieval geographers located the earthly paradise. The New World they discovered between these two extremes confirmed, at least at first sight, their hopes of the existence of this blessed land. A privileged climate, fruits delicious enough to awaken Eve's longing, abundant rivers and exotic birds that had preserved the ability to communicate with humans (the parrots) were only some of the elements due to which the Europeans

believed they had finally reached the place where the grace prior to the original sin has been preserved.

Among the most ardent supporters of this idea was Christopher Columbus, the Genoese explorer who was inspired by the messianic atmosphere that prevailed in Spain at the end of the Reconquista, as well as by his inferiority complex, to believe that he was the bearer of a divine mission: In addition to pragmatic reasons such as discovering new territories and a new direct trade route that would connect Spain with the Far East to facilitate the transport of spices and establish diplomatic relations with the supposedly Christian emperors on the other side of the ocean, Columbus also took upon himself the responsibility of Christianizing the natives he encountered in these territories, thereby also fulfilling the wishes of the Catholic kings of Spain (Braga, 2004, 291–294).

However, the admiral's ambitions did not end there. Being well acquainted with the documents circulating in his time (such as those of Ptolemy, Pierre d'Ailly, Paolo Toscanelli, Marco Polo, Pliny, or Sir John Mandeville) and making no distinction between the empirically proven evidence and those that existed in the collective imagination due to tradition, he also carried with him on his expeditions the desire to find the earthly paradise. His third voyage (1498–1500, associated with reaching the South American coast near the Orinoco River and the Gulf of Paria) is significant in this sense, because Columbus explains some miscalculations regarding the height of the North Star and the pear shape of the Earth by the fact that his ship accidentally began to climb the mountain on whose summit was Paradise. In fact, "as a Don Quixote of his times," Columbus wanted to launch a crusade to liberate Jerusalem, a goal that was easier to achieve and finance by following the western route toward the Orient, taking advantage of the vast amounts of gold believed to be found along the way, and forming an alliance with Prester John and the Mongols. In this way, paradoxically, "it was Columbus' medieval thinking that led him to discover America and inaugurate the modern era" (Todorov, 1982, 10–12).

## The Spatiotemporal Framework: Spain at the Beginning of the Renaissance

To complete the analysis of the contextual aspects necessary for discussing Abel Posse's books, we must also present the historical

characteristics of fifteenth-century Spain, namely the period corresponding to the reign of the Catholic Monarchs (Ferdinand II of Aragon and Isabella I of Castile, 1474–1504) and their close ties with Columbus. History remembers these two because their reign marked the beginning of the Spanish Golden Age: during this period, the Muslims are defeated and the Reconquista is finished, Spanish power spreads to the south of Italy, the northern coast of Africa and the Atlantic Ocean, the New World is discovered, and so on. In addition, Ferdinand and Isabella set themselves apart from other Western European monarchies by the absence of absolutist rule: the couple renounced many signs of kingship, thaumaturgical power, or pompous rituals, and granted their subordinate kingdoms independence in matters of government, laws, currency, or military affairs (Kamen, 2005, 5–16).

However, the liberties granted by the Catholic Monarchs in the religious sphere were not so great. Although for a long time Spain represented a world characterized by the coexistence of many cultures, ideologies and religions, the Inquisitions transformed it into a society of persecution whose state wanted to convert Muslims and Jews to Christianity. Faced with the choice of either going into exile or adopting a new religion, these two ethnic groups suffered along with all those whose religious practices did not conform to Catholic dogma and were therefore catalogued as heresies (Kamen, 2005, 58–64).

But another major reason that the Spanish empire grew so large by the mid-seventeenth century that “from its rising to its setting the sun never ceased to shine for one instant on its lands” (Kamen, 2005, 23), was Columbus and his discoveries in this New World. Following a cumulus of factors such as the Spanish Monarchs’ interest of navigation and commerce, Castile’s and Aragon’s geographical position and the Treaty of 1479 which gave Spain the monopoly on discoveries in the unexplored areas of the “Great Western Ocean,” Columbus’ belief that there must be new territories in this part of the world resonated with Spain’s desire to extend its Catholic influence throughout the world (Prescott, 1904, 260–267). As a result, Columbus received official permission to voyage on April 17, 1492, and a few months later, on August 3, 1492, he bid farewell to the Old World and set sail to discover the New.

### ***The Dogs of Paradise: Context and Historical Basis***

After analysing all these documents, which establish a historical, cultural and social context, it is time to turn to the first novel chosen for study. Published in 1983, *The Dogs of Paradise* is the second volume of Abel Posse’s “Trilogy of the Discovery of America,” next to *Daimon* (1978) and *El largo atardecer del caminante* (1992). The writer broadly preserves the coordinates of the historical truth, but the changes he brings reflect his specific style and give the whole story a psychoanalytical touch. The end of the Middle Ages is here characterized as a time when „the world was panting heavily, lacking the air of life” and when an “ill melancholy” seemed to have swallowed up the whole of Spain (Posse, 1995, 11–15), plunging it into a deadly stupor from which only the accession of Isabella and Ferdinand could save it. The previous state of affairs – where people were “contaminated by hatred of life and sick of organized fear, rejection of the body and terror towards their instincts” (Posse, 1995, 59) – was to be replaced by the life drive of the Renaissance spirit. “Now the Empire was born together with an imperial Catholic Church that forswore the ballast of fierce and fanatical Christianity” (Posse, 1995, 79) and from which “that lethargy, that clutter of terrorized underdevelopment that had protected Europe from any heroism for at least six centuries — that is, from Charlemagne — were going to perish” (Posse, 1995, 46). Taking this ideology to the extreme, the Catholic Monarchs will close “the Christian wound” for good by persecuting the Jews and getting rid of the collective medieval fear of the body and its instincts, while also changing their attitude toward death: “Yes, we have to die, but let’s die of too much living!” (Posse, 1995, 16).

As for Columbus’ motivations for the expeditions that made him famous, Posse emphasizes the passion and longing he has felt for the earthly paradise since he learned about it in his childhood. As time goes by, he becomes more and more convinced that this mystical place lies somewhere beyond the Tropic of Capricorn and can be revisited, that the world is a sphere, despite the sailors’ belief that the Earth is flat, and that the edge of the Ocean-Sea (and thus the Indies) can be reached. Moreover, Posse places the explorers’ obsession with the earthly paradise in the larger context of the reasons why Columbus is also accepted by Ferdinand and Isabella, underscoring the importance of this religious phantasm in the

collective mentality of the Renaissance. Along with the end of the Reconquista, in Spain “began the cycle of the sea, although the fire of the pyres was still burning. Once the holy war was over, the salvation of the whole world should have necessarily followed” (Posse, 1995, 102).

Consequently, it is important to note how Columbus distanced himself from the frivolous ambitions of the Crown and the Jews who wanted to be led to the New Israel, and he took a noble goal as the ultimate goal, a goal that corresponds to his status as a descendant of Isaiah:

“the return to Paradise, the place without death. He knew that Jehovah’s siege on the unexperienced Adam could be broken. The wall could be jumped. Jehovah had not said his last word, and anyway, eventually, he would be impressed by man’s courage and skill and he would restrain the Exterminating Angel. In short: Prometheus will come and save the bleeding and sad Christ” (Posse, 1995, 97).

Thus begin the long and controversial expeditions of Columbus in America, represented in the novel in the form of a single voyage that lasts ten years, between 1492 and 1502. We know from several historical sources that his first expedition is extremely successful: what Columbus reports about the temperate climate, the fertility of the soil, the beauty of the landscapes, and the unknown species of plants and animals, as well as the samples he brings home as proof of his claims, astonish the entire Spanish court and convince many adventurers to join the explorer on his further voyages and start a new life in the colonies (Prescott, 1904, 321, 335). In the next sections, I will focus on how Columbus interprets and describes the new world he encounters, thus performing a first act of reductionist assimilation of Indigenous realities, as well as on the contrast between the initially admiring but later brutal attitude of the colonizers and that of the natives, which is respectful and entirely in line with the Christian principles preached by the Catholic invaders.

### **“*Purtroppo c’era il Paradiso...!*” Defiling the Most Sacred Place on Earth**

The linguistic level is the first on which the desecration of the New World takes place. Lacking specific and meaningful terms to describe what he sees, Christopher Columbus is forced to translate the diverse flora and fauna of the

Americas and reduce them to the species already present in Spain. The whole of Europe is slow to come to terms with the new discoveries. Unlike the Portuguese and their conquests in Africa, the Spanish have no information about the existence of America and its inhabitants, so they are suddenly confronted with a discovery that changes even Western society’s perception of itself. The Old World is at an impasse when it receives the revelations about the new world, and man’s need to keep relying on standard images to cope with the shock of the unknown justifies the reshaping of the new territories according to the administrative and social structures of the homeland (Elliott, 1992, 8–15).

At this point, we must mention all four zones where difficulties in assimilating the unknown from America occur, because they all reflect a reason for which the problem eventually turns into the “relocation and reconstruction of a world into another” (Posse, 1995, 182). First, there is a process of observation that inevitably involves comparisons and classifications that are made in relation to the realities in Spain. Second, the unknown must be translated and described in such a way that those who have not personally seen it can access it. A process that, in turn, implies the use of reductionist formulations and an interpretation filtered through the Western belt of world perception. Next comes the process of disseminating all this information and imagery, a step complicated by the fact that the Spanish and European publics were not prepared to understand, assimilate, and accept the idea that such places, beings, or ways of life existed in this newly discovered part of the world. Add to this the prejudices and the specific interests of each social category from the group of colonizers, and ultimately everyone tries to reconstruct the Spanish model according to the characteristics they know (Elliott, 1992, 17–18).

This essential role that tradition and the Spaniards’ previous experiences and expectations played in interpreting the New World to the detriment of scientific and empirical explanations is all the more evident in the case of Columbus, since we must remember how much he relied on medieval documents from the beginning of his voyages. Since his vocabulary is not large enough to describe the full range of colours, sounds, or rituals he sees in the islands, Columbus makes use of medieval cosmographies and views the unknown reality through the symbolic system of a certain “magical thinking,” to transform America into “a materialization of all the phantasms initially projected upon the miraculous lands of



Asia or the fantastic islands from the Western Ocean” (Braga, 2004, 296). Everything that Columbus sees corresponds to the descriptions of the oriental Eden and the way he was already prepared to perceive the new territories, so we can claim that “the expedition of exploration becomes a fulfilled prophecy and a successful quest” and that what the dogma has theoretically forbidden until now becomes possible in empirical reality, because Columbus believes that he is the bearer of the divine will, so he can enter Paradise (Braga, 2004, 300).

The final dimension of the linguistic destruction of the New World is that of the names Columbus chooses for the islands. The Genoese navigator prefers to ignore the names used by the Native Americans for these territories and employs those that correspond to the new sovereign institutions of the colonies: the Catholic Church and the Spanish monarchy. Among the most important names are San Salvador, Santa Maria de la Concepción, Fernandina, Isabela, etc., each of them referring to a superior authority in whose name Columbus begins his expeditions and representing a symbolic takeover of these islands (Todorov, 1982, 21).

So far we have seen how Columbus discovered America and conquered new territories for Spain, how he believed to have found the earthly paradise and to have been welcomed in the Kingdom of Heaven, how he united the Occident with the Orient, death with life, and offered the possibility of a symbolic and psychological rebirth (Braga, 2004, 301–302). The next section will look at the actual relations between the Spanish and the Native Americans, as well as the violent clashes between the cultures and ways of life of these two populations. In doing so, we will find that the actions of the conquistadors essentially testify to an imperialist colonialism that does not succeed and does not even seek to establish a sign of equality between itself and alterity by portraying “the other” as the forever different and inferior.

### **A Violent Civilizational Clash: The Spanish Meet the Natives**

Posse’s narrative also gives readers a unique opportunity to see the clash of these two cultures from the perspective of the natives, underscoring their moral superiority over the colonizers. They say that “humans are a joke of the gods” (Posse, 1995, 32), which means that there is no point in trying to conquer other peoples, especially when those peoples have a religion that tells them to

hate war and material wealth, to love their neighbour as themselves, and not to kill, steal, or covet other people’s wives. On the other hand, it is worthy to note the Europeans’ duality: they are initially fascinated by the behaviour and appearance of Native Americans, seeing them as inhabitants of the earthly paradise and as “noble savages,” but it soon becomes clear that “they have entered this Eden to either take advantage of Adam’s innocence and transform him into their slave, either exterminate him, if he refuses” (Braga, 2004, 298).

Posse, however, takes a different stance towards Columbus, separating him from the group of sailors who end up desecrating the entire sacred space. This, however, does not stop him from respecting historical truth and emphasizing the cruelty and violence with which Native Americans were killed or forced to adapt to Western culture. Todorov signals here the association made between their physical and spiritual nakedness. The natives are described negatively as people without any cultural traits (customs, traditions, religion) and are thus completely manipulable, although this condition corresponded to the Adamic state and consequently should have positive connotations. Another Eurocentric interpretative grid is applied in the question of systemic values: Spaniards do not realize that gold does not represent an absolute value in itself, but only functions in their exchange system. As a result, they equate any foreign system with total non-existence of a system, proving once again the primitiveness of the natives (Todorov, 1982, 26–28).

But the real violence takes place when the two different types of religious practices clash. According to Gruzinski, it is impossible for Catholics to accept the integration of their Christian images with the pagan rituals and local traditions of the natives, so they end up demonizing the entire New World with this argument. Even if they do not find in the islands the idolatrous population, they expected because of all the interpretations they have projected onto the American space in order to understand, dominate, and acculturate it, the tensions between the dogma they have grown up with and the Indigenous realities are too strong for the Spaniards not to yield to them (1994, 16–22). Indeed, the problem is that “the Catholic Church and the Amerindians do not place the real within the same limits.” Thus, if the latter consider dreams, hallucinations, or drunkenness as sources for reaching higher spiritual states, the former reject them and consider them mortal sins.

According to these considerations, Indigenous cults and rituals are demonized, morally condemned, and aesthetically rejected, and their images are reduced to the level of idols (Gruzinski, 2007, 188–190). Undoubtedly, the rigidity and dualistic structure of the Christian worldview clashes violently with the plurality and uniqueness of Native American thought, an aspect that will contribute decisively to their mass destruction in just a few decades.

We only have to look at some figures to realize how critical the situation was: of the total of about 13.5 million Native Americans living in the Americas in 1492, hundreds of thousands were killed at the very beginning of the Spanish colonization, and the number of victims went into the millions by 1942, when only 5.9% of the Indigenous population was still alive (Rosenblat, 1945). On the other hand, Todorov identifies here three main aspects that caused the mass deaths: the actual killings, the hard labor, the mistreatment and abuses that the natives had to endure, and the European diseases against which they had no antibodies (Todorov, 1982, 86). However, Abel Posse focuses only on the first two in order to highlight the contrast between the “good savage” who is baptized and openly welcomes the newcomers and the men of the “civilized societies” who exploit the naivety of the natives, brutally colonize them and impose their domination, starting from the social level to the religious and cultural level.

But after all these considerations, a question arises: was the conquest of America driven only by the desire of the Spaniards to dominate, to become rich, and to extend the influence of the Catholic Church? At first glance, it would seem so, as Columbus’ crew consisted of adventurers, persecuted Jews, thieves, criminals, and convicts who “were running from the Spanish Hell,” its rules and restrictions, with Columbus being the only one seeking paradise (Posse, 1995, 110). Posse, however, goes further in depth, highlighting another explanation that is directly related to the earthly paradise and the Adamic state that man seems to have definitively lost.

Despite Columbus’s efforts to remove his men from the sphere of *to do* and to reteach them the joy of simply *be*, they cannot break away from the occidental obsession with occupying the environment and subjugating it to their own interests. They forget their original connection to nature and destroy everything because boredom and banality quickly set in in a world where evil and sin no longer exist, while nudity and sexual freedom are the natural state of things. Ultimately,

the characters in the novel admit to their condition and the impossibility of perceiving the world in any other way than Christianity has taught them over so many centuries: “Sinning is our essence, guilt is our sign. Our life has no other purpose than to seek salvation through the sacraments of our Holy Mother, the Church. Stop the adventurers from saying that there is another Paradise than the Celestial one, which awaits us after death, after a life of obedience! [...] We are free, [...] but free will is the cause of sin” (Posse, 1995, 201). Columbus, in turn, understands that “man destroys what he loves the most, he is afraid of returning to the primordial harmony, he chooses the pleasure of pain and he prefers Hell instead of Heaven, like most of Dante’s readers” (Posse, 1995, 221).

Finally, this study also considers the role that fictions and the beliefs to which we attach the value of absolute truth play in the composition of human actions. The questions humanity asks itself about birth and life determine its obsession with sexuality and violence. The projection of inferiority onto their enemies and the identification of occidental values as the only possible values lead Spaniards to “see reality only in black and white and use violence in order to eliminate the black and impose the white,” using for this purpose any action that “attacks, hurts or punishes the other through spoiling their stories” (Huston, 2008, 102–107).

*The Dogs of Paradise* illustrate how “human alterity is both revealed and refused” once Columbus reaches America (Todorov, 1982, 35) and how people return to their basic instincts to seek pleasure through violence once there is no authority to control them. After the Reconquista was rejected from within and the victory of Granada led to the expulsion of the Moors, this alterity becomes more present than ever outside the Spanish borders as the New World is discovered. But if it can be said that the desire to impose the true faith is the reason for both the destruction of Arab culture and the spiritual conversion of Native Americans, it is still important to remember that the first action radically expels the heterogeneous from the Iberian Peninsula, while the second irrevocably reintroduces it, albeit in a dissimulated form (Todorov, 1982, 35).

In the following part of my essay, I will focus on another novel by Abel Posse, *Daimon*, which I will place in the larger context of the expanding Spanish empire and the expeditions of the conquistadors. I will also analyze in detail how the character of the protagonist, Lope de Aguirre,

stands out from all the other seekers of El Dorado and the lands of the Amazonians by approaching the natives and rejecting the dogmatic restrictions of Christianity.

### **Discovery vs. Conquest. Disputes About the (II)legitimacy of Using Violence Against the Natives**

Once the second wave of conquistadors reached the New World, in the sixteenth century, the unknown territories from beyond the Ocean-Sea became lands destined for agricultural use. We can mention Vasco Núñez de Balboa in Colombia, Pedro Arias de Ávila in Panama, Diego Velázquez de Cuéllar in Cuba, Juan Ponce de León in Florida, Francisco Pizarro González in Peru or Hernán Cortés in Mexico, but all these names and historical episodes underline one and the same thing: The focus shifted from discovery to conquest and colonization, while the paradise projected by Columbus on the islands turned into an inferno from which the natives could not escape for a long time. Against the religious background in which the Inquisition considers the idea of searching for Eden and the Adamic state on earth as heresy, the desire to discover and know the *terra incognita* becomes a desire to conquer, colonize and exploit it, while the Spaniards begin to give the natives all kinds of monstrous characteristics to justify their cruelty (Braga, 2004, 326, 338). If Columbus travelled to India with medieval religious fantasies and a desire for geographic expansion, his followers continued his efforts with economic and political projections.

However, there was also the opposite attitude, and that belonged to the priests, whose mission of evangelization presupposed peaceful coexistence with the natives and economic and political cooperation with them, a concept that was in complete contrast to the practice of the conquistadors, who resorted to any kind of violence to quickly enrich themselves and impose their system of power or values. Bartolomé de las Casas, the bishop who was most active in protecting the natives at this time, mentions the long series of laws enacted in Spain to limit the power of Europeans over the natives, but it took a long period of constant effort before some of them took effect. For example, there were the Burgos Laws (1512), which attempted to regulate the number of maximum work hours for Native Americans and provide them with the food they needed, both materially and spiritually (Las Casas, 2004, 24). Then there were the New Laws

(1542), which proclaimed the absolute freedom of the king's vassals, prohibited slavery and forced labour, and demanded clear rules for the operation of the *encomienda*, namely the labour system on which "collaboration" between the Europeans and the natives was based (Thomas, 2011, 479–480). However, the colonies were still too far away for these laws to be fully respected, so polemics continued to be heated throughout the sixteenth century.

A notable case is the Franciscan missionary Toribio de Benavente, also called Motolinía, who arrived in Mexico in 1524 and justified the forcible conversion of the natives with the biblical episode of the ten plagues that God sent to punish Egypt. Similarly, the Catholic God punished the pagan natives by sending the Spaniards, who brought smallpox, massacres, famine, the obligation to work and pay taxes in terrible conditions, the construction of modern cities, the destruction of existing customs, slavery, and so on (Todorov, 1982, 87-89). But probably the most famous dispute was the one that took place in Valladolid in 1550–1551 between the humanist Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda and the bishop Bartolomé de las Casas.

The former divided his discourse into several parts: He spoke about the barbarism of the natives and their implicit inferior state, drawing on Aristotle and his theory of inequality as the natural state of humanity, on the basis of which he created a series of opposing terms to describe the relationship between the Spaniards and the natives: good-evil, reason-instinct, soul-body, humans-animals, men-women, adults-children, perfection-imperfection, strength-weakness, virtue-vice. Then Sepúlveda argued for the absolute necessity to stop the monstrous and bloody rituals that the pagans performed in their religious practices, thus saving the future innocent victims from death. Finally, he justified the wars to conquer the non-believers by saying that this was necessary to pave the way for the missionaries to evangelize. Thus, the Spaniards had the right to impose their own version of the "good" on "the other" (Todorov, 1982, 98-100).

Continuing with our analysis, it becomes increasingly clear that Renaissance man knew how to view the world only through his own interpretive grid and felt the need to correct reality with the sword and the gun in those places where it did not agree with what his subconscious had recognized as the absolute truth. From a broader perspective, it can also be observed that man turned into a demigod and began to create new worlds even before Nietzsche proclaimed the

murder of God at the hands of the modern world. During the years of maximum expansion of the Spanish Empire, these new worlds were created by colonizing (and implicitly destroying) the existing ones or those that were so different that they were not understood or accepted by the Europeans. Creation, then, is doubled by destruction; as Walter Benjamin says, “there is no document of culture that is not, at the same time, a document of barbarity” (2002, 197) and it invalidates the illuminist ideal in which nature spontaneously evolves into civilization. But then another question arises, which Bishop Las Casas also addresses in the sixteenth century: Is it our duty to civilize “the savages” or not?

Las Casas’ speech proves to be much more tolerant of the problems Sepúlveda points out. He argues that the barbarism of the natives is only true in relation to the lack of revelation of Christ. Other elements that might lead them to be characterized in this way (such as being cruel and inhumane, not being able to write, and being guided by primary instincts) might be more applicable to the Spaniards. Las Casas also acknowledged the idolatry of the natives, but he denied the right of Catholic kings to punish the sacrileges of a non-Christian population or to forcibly attempt to Christianize them, as this was a clear violation of free will. Finally, the bishop acknowledged the fact that native rituals claimed numerous innocent victims, but he did not want to replace something bad with something worse: Since the Catholics’ attempts to stop the sacrifices neither brought peace nor stopped these practices, they should indeed be stopped, since they were a vice rather than a virtue, and therefore their punishment only increased the injustice that already existed (Braga, 2004, 335-336). Furthermore, murder was not considered a crime in Native American religion, so their rituals only demonstrated their deep respect and devotion to their gods (Thomas, 2011, 500).

Although this debate was extensive and well-constructed, it did not solve the problems of the colonies and even in the nineteenth century the issue was not exhausted, as G.W.F. Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* shows. The philosopher speaks of the impossibility of defining ourselves without a clear idea of who “the other” is, so that “the self-consciousness must proceed to supersede the *other* independent being in order thereby to become certain of *itself* as the essential being” (1977, 111–118). In other words, man will tend to repress that which is alien to him and perceive otherness as an inessential object or as an absolute negation precisely because his consciousness, in a

life-and-death struggle, must be able to place the consciousness of the other on a lower level and at the same time elevate his own certainty “of being for himself, in relation to others and in relation to himself” to the rank of absolute truth.

This whole dialectic is very well applied by Hegel to the relationship between master and slave, which can easily explain the endless amount of violence in the colonies. The Spaniards, feeling the need to subjugate the natives in order to impose their own subjectivity on them, use all those methods of takeover that we have already discussed, and their self-consciousness reaches an independence and a level of truth precisely because they deprive the natives of freedom and make them dependent on the will and power of decision of their absolute master, the white man.

### **South America: The Land of Cannibals, Amazonians and Mountains of Gold**

The violence of contact between Europeans and Native Americans was not the only aspect that was reinforced with the arrival of the second wave of explorers and conquerors in the Americas. Something similar happened with the myths and stereotypes they projected onto the territories or people they encountered, and the direction in which the collective imagery took these images in the sixteenth century reflects not only the continuity of medieval fears of monstrous species and an inverted world order, but also the political and economic interests of Renaissance man.

One of these legends is that of the cannibals, which has persisted since the expeditions of Columbus due to his frequent misinterpretations: Expecting to find such creatures on the islands, he unthinkingly conflates the terms used by the natives of the Caribbean islands to describe themselves (“*caníbales*, *canimas*, *caribes*”) with the idea of “consumer of human flesh” (Taylor, 2007, 49). With Ferdinand de Saussure’s terms, the original relationship between signifier and signified is broken and brutally replaced by European concepts, and the original meanings of “inhabitants of the Caribbean” or “the brave ones” are completely lost in the acculturation process. When the stories about the cannibals reached the ears of the Spanish authorities, there was also one of the first decrees on the problem in 1503. The “Cannibal Law” gave the colonizers the right to capture and sell any Native American cannibal, which in a way also legalized slavery and aroused

the interest of the conquistadores to mark the natives in this way.

Another famous myth was the one about the Amazonians. The most important expedition in this sense was that of Francisco de Orellana (1541–1542), the first explorer to cross the Amazon from one end to the other. Since on this journey he was attacked several times by tribes of warriors, Orellana gave to this river the name of the famous figures from the classical tradition, realizing another linguistic falsification of the realities from the New World. What is interesting about this act of assimilation, however, are the numerous cultural implications that accompany it: On the one hand, it reflects Europeans' deep fear of an inverted social order in which women take the lead (which also justifies the problem of perceiving such communities as savage and uncivilized); on the other hand, the story feeds the enriching dream of the conquistadors who set out to explore the Americas, since some versions of the myth associated the land of the Amazonians with territories full of riches of all kinds (Taylor, 2007, 50).

And finally, to push “rush for gold” even further, the third most sought-after legend in the islands was El Dorado. Here the novelty was that the myth did not belong to the Western imagination, nor was it associated with similar realities from Europe, but was based on rumours that the Spaniards began to hear from the natives around 1520–1530. The ritual

“was practiced for a long time near the sacred lake Guatavita, near Bogota. A local king, in a certain day of the year, anointed his body with resin and then rolled himself in gold dust. He would climb up gilded and shining in a boat and throw offerings of gold, emeralds and other precious things into the middle of the water, after which he would bathe himself in the waters of the lake. All the while, the crowd on the banks cheered, sang and danced. Between 1531 and 1617, the Europeans searched hard for the land of “*El Dorado*” - the golden king - who, like that of Prester John, migrated over the years from one region to another, namely from today's Colombia to the Orinoco and Guyana” (Delumeau, 1997, 51).

The initial meaning of the El Dorado myth thus referred to this specific ceremony, but as the sixteenth century progressed, the story became more general, describing a wondrous area full of riches and vast amounts of gold. Thus, one can

see how a simple local legend was the reason for the dozens of expeditions launched by the conquistadors to find the area in question (Taylor, 2007, 51), and how the words of a few locals caused the deaths of hundreds of thousands more people because the Spaniards spared no one who could not give them information about the exact location of this miracle.

Among the adventurers who set out for the Amazon in search of the mysterious El Dorado was Pedro de Ursúa, whose subordinate, Lope de Aguirre, is also the protagonist of the novel that Abel Posse wrote at the beginning of his trilogy about the discovery of America: *Daimon*. However, before proceeding to the actual analysis of the volume, it is important to look at the real life of Aguirre, highlighting both the unique elements that distinguish his journey across the American continent from all others, and the historical, cultural and biographical background on which the Argentine writer builds his fiction, giving Aguirre the role of a controversial hero even after his death.

### **Lope de Aguirre, America's First Revolutionary and Liberator**

As one of his most interesting biographies states, Lope de Aguirre was the first conquistador to impose local government in South America and negate the authority of Spanish institutions overseas. However, due to his insanity, mass murders, and far too violent approach, he failed in his revolutionary attempts and history has only preserved the name of Simón Bolívar as the liberator of the American colonies (Balkan, 2011, 15). Born in 1510, Aguirre was surrounded from the beginning by the fervor of the new century and the waves of adventurers who set out for the New World, driven by the fever of gold, conquest and wealth that they believed would guarantee them the prosperity of a new life. Lope arrives in America in 1534 and begins to make a living like thousands of other Spaniards: He tames horses and robs Native American graves in hopes of finding gold. However, both “trades” will play a very important role in the later development of the conquistador, because “turning turbulent behaviour into energy he can control will be a skill that will also serve him in subjugating the people around him,” and the riches he will never be able to fully enjoy, since he will be forced to cede part of them to the Spanish Crown, will fuel his hatred for their unjust rule in the colonies (Balkan, 2011, 23).

Meanwhile, expeditions in search of El Dorado managed to find the famous Lake Guatavita in 1545, but the quantities of gold found at the bottom of the lake, although large (3,000–4,000 pieces), were far from meeting Spanish expectations. Ironically, the Native Americans from whom the whole legend came had already been wiped out by another tribe by the time the Europeans reached the place, so all that remained of El Dorado was a chimera projected onto an unknown territory, like all the other collective fantasies that had led the explorers through the New World until then. However, despite repeated failures and terrible conditions in the Amazon jungle, the Spaniards did not give up turning their attention to new and unknown territories with the same goal, and in 1559 it was Aguirre's turn to embark on such a voyage under the command of Pedro de Ursúa (Balkan, 2011, 27).

Disillusioned by the endless years in which men like him did all the work of colonizing and organizing the territories while the rewards went exclusively to a handful of governors, nobles, and priests, he, like many others, was outraged by their abuse of power and was ready at any moment to participate in a revolutionary movement. Aguirre easily found his place among the groups of traitors, thieves, and criminals that the authorities could hardly wait to get rid of and who were themselves still under the fascination of the riches of El Dorado (Balkan, 2011, 30–33). It was not long, however, before the adventurers' impatience came into conflict with Ursúa's insistence on continuing their advance through the jungle, despite the small amounts of gold they had found and the growing hostility of the Native Americans. If we add to this Ursúa's increasingly pliant attitude toward his military duties and the true purpose of the expedition, it is easy to understand why the spirit of rebellion in the camps and the group's hostility toward their leader began to grow. And when the character traits of Lope are considered, it becomes even clearer why he became the leader of the insurgency (Balkan, 2011, 45–54).

Aguirre, who was ugly and already old by 1560, had made a habit as a young man of covering up his physical inferiority with a flamboyant behaviour, an always high and persuasive tone of voice, and an iron will that did not allow him to leave any matter undone. Although he was uneducated, Aguirre was a highly intelligent, strong and energetic man who never shied away from his work and had no problem manipulating others. On the other hand, because of his frequent physical and verbal

violence and his lack of respect for God and religion, he was soon perceived as a devil, monster, and madman that no one could resist (Balkan, 2011, 42, 55). This is evident in Aguirre's stirring speech to his people. Weighing the hardships, hunger, diseases, and disappointments of the last few weeks against Ursúa's empty promises, Aguirre convinces more and more people that El Dorado is a mere myth and that the true riches lie in Peru, where they should return as soon as possible. Thus, Ursúa is killed on the first day of 1561, and in the new year Fernando de Guzmán (in theory) and Lope de Aguirre (behind the scenes) take over the leadership of the rebel group (Balkan, 2011, 55–61).

The seeds of revolution had already begun to germinate: Lope was determined to stop targeting territories that would be taken by the crown anyway, and instead go to Peru, depose the governor there, and establish his own system of government under the leadership of Guzmán. To this end, Aguirre uses his authority and powers of persuasion to build a growing team of loyal men (including black slaves, whom he frees in exchange for supporting his cause), while cold-bloodedly murdering anyone he believes is working against him. Moreover, he also renounces all legal, juridical, and national ties to Spain by disgracing King Philip II and choosing his own king in Guzmán (Balkan, 2011, 65–79). However, this façade was not to be maintained for long, as Aguirre's growing distrust also led to Guzmán's assassination, and the former's elevation to supreme leader of the expedition ushered in a new stage in its history. The revolutionary group henceforth bore the name *Marañones* (a derivation of the local name of the river on which they sailed, the Amazon), and the intention of its members was to wrest the territories that rightfully belonged to them – and especially Peru, because “God created Heaven for the deserving, but the earth - for the powerful, and Peru - for Aguirre” (Balkan, 2011, 145) – from the corruption that had ruled them until then. Indeed, the superiority complex that characterizes Lope comes into play again here, but in this case, it takes a darker turn than in Columbus.

Aguirre's self-chosen titles may illustrate this idea: In addition to being “Prince of Liberty” and ruler of the “Continental Kingdom” (“*Reyno de Tierra Firme*”) and the Province of Chile, “King of all South America from the Isthmus of Panama to the Strait of Magellan,” he also takes the name “Wrath of God.” Behind this is Aguirre's idea that he must lead his people by all means to a just

world, where merit stands above paternalism imposed from above and where bloodshed is absolutely necessary. Moreover, his god was not a gentle god who showered the Spanish kingdom with his goodness, but an angry god who would purify the corrupt world and establish a new order through Aguirre. Again, it is perhaps not entirely appropriate to ascribe a messianic complex to the conquistador, but it is certain that if not divine will, then his iron will mandate him to fight to the death for what he believed was the right thing to do.

Finally, Aguirre's relationship with God was thoroughly complicated, reflecting the deceptions through which life had led the Spaniard for half a century. Like the King of Spain, God had abandoned him in his most difficult moments, leaving him with only the alternative of turning to the devil (Balkan, 2011, 92–94), an aspect that Abel Posse will explore at length in his novel. And since theft, murder, and destruction were the only means by which Aguirre could get closer to his goal, the devil emerges as a vivid term both for the way Lope is perceived in the story and for that supernatural force that seems to take possession of all conquerors who set foot in the Americas.

Aguirre's band's forced march through the jungle ends when the group reaches the point where the Amazon flows into the sea. But the chain of violence and the murders of those who do not seem to obey him fully - or who do not recognize his right to conquer the natives - continue (and even escalate) on the remaining part of the way to Peru. And despite the riches they gradually find outside the jungle, which they associate with the true El Dorado (because they had already been collected and prepared for transport to Spain), there are also ominous signs of the success of the revolution sparked by the "wrath of God." when the conquistadors on Margarita Island failed to demolish the wooden column (*el rollo*) that had been erected by the Spanish authorities in all the conquered territories as a symbol of power and justice (Balkan, 2011, 109–110). Moreover, rumours of Lope's plans and atrocities continued to spread and eventually reached the king, who mobilized and dispatched troops against the revolution that threatened the stability of the colonies.

Toward the end of his adventure and his life, Lope de Aguirre becomes increasingly bitter against the beings he sees as a threat to his authority: "God, the saints, the King of Castile and all of his vassals" (Balkan, 2011, 141) appear in blood letters on the list of his future victims.

This religious association, which makes the king the bearer of divine will through Catholicism (something also seen earlier in the discourse of Columbus' men), explains even better the total rejection of that gentle and benevolent God of whom the missionaries preach. Later, Aguirre's letter to Philip II reflects his controversial views in detail, and the fact that it represents America's first declaration of independence is important enough for Abel Posse to include it in his narrative.

By explaining the reasons for the revolution, a series of ugly realities in the colonies that he could not have known from faraway Spain, and details about the steps his expedition had taken so far, Aguirre once again shows that his goal was to remake the New World on the model of ancient Spain (full of heroes and warriors who were not corrupted by greedy priests and judges), and that his violence was not only inferior to that of the Crown, but also necessary and justified because he was dealing with a power far more powerful than himself. He also dispels the myth of the riches of the Amazon and describes in detail the dangers and terrible conditions that applied to all journeys to the legendary El Dorado. In doing so, he attempts to lift the veil from the eyes of the king and all those who saw no fault in the way the colonies were run (Balkan, 2011, 148–153).

However, the end of this extravagant spirit was to be as violent and full of despair and rebellion as his entire life. Surrounded by enemy troops and betrayed by all his men, Aguirre ceases to believe in anything other than birth and death, even killing his own daughter Elvira to "free" her from the miserable life that would have awaited her, and finally dies on October 27, 1561, killed by the king's troops and symbolically by those who did not understand how corrupt the patronage system was in the New World. Thus, although he did not achieve his revolutionary goal and only Simón Bolívar gained recognition for a similar goal, Lope de Aguirre still enjoyed undeniable fame that gave him the heroic immortality he had always desired (Balkan, 2011, 157–171).

On the one hand, this is the point where the true story of Lope de Aguirre ends. On the other hand, this is also the point where Abel Posse's fiction begins, as he imagines a great story that continues the Spaniard's life and makes him the protagonist of an "Eternal Return of the Same Thing," a spatiotemporal spiral that makes him witness over four hundred years of Spanish history. The next section, however, will focus on fragments that illustrate Aguirre's attitude toward the New World, the differences in mentality he

perceives between Europeans and natives, and the way in which the Christian God becomes the promoter of a compulsive “doing,” while the pagan demon frees the conscience from guilt and teaches it to simply “be.” Thus, Pose’s novel brings to light the same polemic between the death instinct and the life instinct as *The Dogs of Paradise*, but the main character is at a different stage than Columbus in his relationship with the Spanish authorities and the deity, which underscores a certain evolution in the story of the conquest of unknown territories.

***Daimon and the “Wrath of God”: “Doing” Because You Cannot “be” and Challenging the Limits Imposed by Western Reason***

“America. Everything is spleen, sap, blood, panting, systolic and diastolic, food and dung, in the unforgiving cycle of cosmic laws that seem to be newly established” (Posse, 2008, 11). The opening words of the novel reflect the same atmosphere described in *The Dogs of Paradise*: a revitalized time filled with the zeal of discovery, beginning with the Renaissance and the end of the Dark Ages. The age of “resurrection, with a hunger for life that can only come from the grave” (Posse, 2008, 19), provides the perfect setting for someone like Aguirre – who “believed only in the will of doing, in the fiesta of war and the fervour of delirium” (Posse, 2008, 7) – to achieve his goals. Similarly, in Evan L. Balkan’s biography, Aguirre is portrayed as a charismatic leader who acts on laws that reflect the natural laws of survival in the jungle for thousands of years, as well as a historical figure with an interesting combination of traits-paranoia, megalomania, resistance, audacity, insanity (Balkan, 2011, 118, 124). In Pose’s version and in a later life, Aguirre manages to find all the places he could not discover in his historical existence on Earth.

The reasons and the coordinates of the new journey are communicated to Philip II (who, in reality, had not answered Aguirre directly either) through a second letter that underlines the definitive rupture that had taken place in the meantime between the world of the ruler and that of the “rebel madman” in the Americas. The latter urges the king “to stay with his God, for I prefer my Demon. And if, after fifteen centuries of so much Christ, we are as we are, I invite him to try the demon’s side and see what happens”! (Posse, 2008, 26). However, this was not a simple pact with the devil, in which Lope denied his God and chose the path of the demon because it could offer him defiance, the luxury of rebellion, a certain

way to bring heaven to earth, and a true existence in which only the body, the present, and the adventures matter (Posse, 2008, 36), but a broad gallery of aspects that underscore the bitter irony that some of the bloodiest massacres in human history were carried out with the cross in hand.

To the natives, Europe appears as “a frightening but dangerous assembly of outcasts from heaven and the original unity, from which neither man nor beast have any reason to leave,” a group of angry, petty people who are always unhappy because they cannot comprehend the balance and order of things. “Their god, the symbol of sacredness, seemed to be made of two crossed woods on which bodies were nailed: an instrument of torture,” and “the white ones inclined to spread a preventive and general death.” They were not able to bring peace or tolerance, because “someone, once, in their constructive and unhappy lands, has told them that it was not possible *to be* without *doing*: for we were not born to be, but to make our being” (Posse, 2008, 32–34). And this mentality will become increasingly evident as Aguirre’s group moves deeper into the heart of the South American continent, where it repeatedly encounters realities that seem to make a mockery of Europeans’ attempts to rationalize them.

A first shock occurs on a temporal level, because the expedition through the jungle seems to be a return to the origin of the world, thanks to the fossils from other geological eras that the adventurers find there. Then, America radiates a vitality far too great for the Europeans, who feel repelled by the overgrown vegetation of the jungle, which gives them “a fearful dread, the anguish of impotence.”

“The intense life from here gave a sense of frustration to the Europeans, who worked orderly, intoxicated by the biblical vocation to assert themselves on Earth [...]. In America, everything was existence, so that human work – condemned, Adamic, post-paradisiacal – ran up against the wall of free existence, which seemed to them unnatural, subversive” (Posse, 2008, 45–46).

Third, on a spiritual level, the excessive beauty and novelty of the places discovered sometimes had the effect of making the Spaniards forget themselves and fall into a “numinous ambience” that was not approved by the clergy of the group, who knew that “beauty is the working residence of the unholy.” When he is asked to urgently approve liturgies to break the spell and restore the



pervasive guilt of the Christians, Aguirre sees the gap between the two worlds widening. And this is also observed by the natives, who discreetly observe their progress and conclude that the whites “were the victims of a playful god, who amused himself by punishing them through giving them precisely what they wanted.” On the other hand, in addition to this idea appearing in exactly the same words in *The Dogs of Paradise* (Posse, 1995, 35, 141), Posse also emphasizes here the utterly corrupt nature of the Europeans who came to America only to do what no law would allow them to do at home:

“they said they had come to bring institutions and customs like those of their own kingdom, but in reality they had come to get rid of them: they abused women, killed, indulged in all sorts of vices. It was obvious that they could not perceive liberty without crime” (Posse, 2008, 58–59).

Since the novel is divided into chapters bearing the name of a particular tarot card, it is also important to remember that this stage of the journey falls precisely in the sign of the Devil, the card of war and debauchery, of the earth and resistance to the order that men have attributed to the will of God. For two years, the expedition leads the adventurers through a whole series of lands populated by so-called “monstrous races,” which they add with relative ease to the territories incorporated into the Marañon Empire. But then comes the encounter with the much desired (yet feared) land of the Amazonians, where the balance of power is reversed, at least initially, and the Spaniards become prisoners of princesses waiting to be impregnated. For the Christians’ fascination with this mystical realm was deeply rooted in their “bodily desires, atrociously delayed by their own implacable beliefs. Many of them had defied the abysmal monsters of the Ocean-Sea, like St. Brendan’s whale, with the unutterable ambition to see a woman naked and to be able to open, to bite and to taste her, as you do with a ripe pear” (Posse, 2008, 69).

Sin, unapologetically associated with bodily pleasures, is thus exposed in the territory of the Amazons, where the female god is worshipped by means of a giant stone phallus and “men who had always galloped silently and with a slightly vengeful rage over women’s bodies [...] now discovered a new time, destined for bodies” (Posse, 2008, 78), while at the same time being initiated into the slow art of kissing. At the same time, the Spaniards’ long stay makes the Amazon

queen realize that “men feared valiantly for their own happiness,” that they did not know why they needed so much gold – they could have never understood that “gold was the artifice with which the civilised bought the satisfactions to which the primitives constantly and foolishly arrived” (Posse, 2008, 80–81), as Todorov had indicated in his book, and that they were in a constant frenzy for land, weapons, and material wealth that never gave them enough satisfaction anyway.

Here an excerpt from Blaise Pascal’s *Thoughts* would be relevant, as it states:

“when it sometimes occurs to me to think of the chase of men, of the dangers and troubles to which they are exposed, at court, in war, from which so many quarrels, passions, reckless and often wicked actions are born, I discover that all the unhappiness of people comes from one thing, namely because they don’t know how to stay alone in a room” (Pascal, 1998, 208).

What the French philosopher proposes coincides with Nancy Huston’s later ideas and can be translated to mean that, for the same reason that lies behind the impossibility of simply “being,” Western man will always invent fictions to propel him forward and through which he can fill the emptiness of existence with meaning. These can begin with the small habits that are part of the individual routine and extend to the traditions and religions that control the functioning of the whole world. At the same time, throughout history, some of the narratives of this kind that have left the deepest impression in human development have been precisely those that became visible in the case of the conquistadors: the illusion that gold brings happiness, that glory is won through violent conquest, and that the European is superior to the native in every way.

Following the same logic, Aguirre’s men (like Columbus’ men) grow weary of the serenity, peace, and harmony of the paradise they had stumbled upon in the middle of the jungle and turn to the cruelty, violence, rudeness, and conceit that characterized them deep down. The free and peaceful love to which the natives invited the Europeans is replaced by rape, and the main objective of the stay – the impregnation of the princesses – disappears completely from the list of interests of the Europeans. Angry and disappointed, Aguirre also notes the tragedy of Western man, doomed to run endlessly in search of happiness and never realize when he finds it:

“When you have everything, you want nothing! When you can look, you don’t see! When you have it within your reach, you do not touch!” (Posse, 2008, 87).

The protagonist thus leaves the Amazon and continues his expedition to the supposed golden heart of the American continent. In the process, he also discovers that the colonizers have a terribly pernicious and desecrating influence on the territories and populations they have taken over. “The power of the Crown lies in trade,” and so the bewitched plants of the sorcerers of Mexico “were no longer to bring sacred visions, but to enrich the sad subsistent pharmacopoeia of the Europeans,” the Native Americans were used as specimens for experiments in the Spanish universities, and the ill-will that had always been typical of the conquistadors now seemed to combine with science to exploit, torture, and further oppress “the inferior.” The culmination of Posse’s criticism lies in a quote from Voltaire: “It is Christianly forbidden to kill. We can only kill in masses, under the national flag and to the sound of trumpets” (Posse, 2008, 109–115).

Having reached this point of analysis, we cannot continue without introducing the French philosopher René Girard, who explains in detail in *The Scapegoat* the ideological reasons for collective persecution and why society always resorts to violence when its hierarchical system is threatened. As a rule, “during crises which weaken natural institutions and encourage the formation of crowds, i.e. spontaneous popular agglomerations, capable of replacing weakened institutions entirely or exerting decisive pressure on them,” what actually happens is “the complete destruction of the social itself, the end of the norms and differences which define cultural rules.” A first aspect that leads to persecution is that the cultural factor “is eclipsed through non-differentiation.” People’s reaction to this crisis is not to blame themselves, but either society as a whole (an action that does not concern them at all) or other individuals who, despite their weakness, seem to them to be particularly harmful (Girard, 2000, 19–22). In other words, a well-organized hierarchical structure is so deeply ingrained in the collective subconscious of Western man that any destabilization of this order produces a terror that he can only control by finding victims to blame for the crimes that cause this destabilization by eliminating hierarchical differences (Girard, 2000, 30).

Thus, the violent clash between Spanish and Native American cultures can also be explained by a contrary theory, which asserts that it is not

the differences that prevent peaceful relations between the two populations, but the very absence of those differences. It turns out that alterity is far less different than the Europeans needed it to be to justify their massacres and violent conquests, especially when the natives are so receptive to Christian principles that they become even more devout Catholics than the missionaries. This invalidates their system for structuring the world, and through its cracks one begins to see the horror of the one who can no longer project his self onto the “other” and be superior to him because the “other” is no longer different from him as an individual and is not inferior to him.

In *Violence and the Sacred*, René Girard discusses the ritual of religious sacrifice, the only one in which the two concepts are inseparable in the title and which functions within religious communities because it is used as a means to protect the whole society from its own violence (Girard, 1995, 7). At the same time, “sacrifice is violence without the risk of revenge” because the social law that does not allow the use of violence against an individual without exposing oneself to the reprisals of others is overridden, once again emphasizing the sacredness of the victim (Girard, 1995, 19). Finally, the reasons for these sacrifices also have much to do with the fact that in primitive societies, “the misfortunes that violence is likely to unleash are so great and the remedies so random that the emphasis is on prevention” (Girard, 1995, 25), and that religion is the preferred domain for these practices. All of this is in sharp contrast to the kind of violence that secular societies like Europeans resort to, but the problem will be even more pronounced in the case of the colonies, where the devastation they will wreak will outweigh the cruelty of any bloody ritual practiced by the natives.

Tzvetan Todorov speaks of “societies of sacrifice” and “societies of massacre,” thus placing Native Americans in the first category and the European colonizers in the second (Todorov, 1982, 93–94). On the one hand, sacrifice is a religious crime that takes place in the name of official ideology, in the public square, and with the participation of all, a ritual that illustrates the power of society over the individual and the cohesion that exists within it thanks to religious practices that have survived for so many millennia. The identity of the sacrificed is determined by strict rules, because the victim must not be a stranger or a member of the same society; they are usually inhabitants of neighbouring countries who speak the same language as the “executioners,” but have an

independent leadership. In addition, the personal qualities of the victim also count, so that the death of a warrior is valued more highly than that of a common man.

The massacre, on the other hand, is just the opposite, revealing the weaknesses of a society and the disappearance of the moral principles that held the group together. It takes place far from the centre of the community (in the case of the Spaniards, preferably in the American territories, where no laws are observed) and is therefore closely linked to colonial wars waged far from the metropolises. This great distance between cultures makes it easy to associate victims with beasts, and the lack of concern for their individual identity also allows them to be killed without remorse.

“If sacrifice is a religious crime, then slaughter is an atheistic one,” and here Todorov draws a thoughtful parallel with Ivan Karamazov, who believes that everything is permitted when God is dead. In the same way, away from royal power and Spanish or Catholic laws, all prohibitions fall away, and man takes off his social, civilized mask and reveals his savage nature, which is nevertheless woven into a modern fabric. There is nothing primitive in the barbarism of the colonizer, but a supposed lack of morality that allows him to kill whenever he wants and because he is far away from the metropolis, in the colonies where any legal, moral or juridical restriction is removed.

Against the backdrop of all these ideological polemics, Lope de Aguirre continues his journey through time and through the jungles of America as he describes the increasingly harmful effects of the expansion of the Spanish Empire on the colonies. The revolution started by the protagonist continues under King Philip V (1700–1724), whose troops manage to conquer the coasts of the continent and the seas surrounding it, exploiting and trading everything they find there, but they fail to win the people to their side (as Aguirre did), nor to reach the heart of the New World, the essence that lies in the eternal rebellion against the conquerors. The American territories belonged “rather to the Devil than to the Lord” because the emissaries of the Catholic God had abused them, but the excessive bureaucratization that monopolized even the realm of conquering expeditions (“assassinations and tortures now fit within the sober framework of the law”) shows the change in value system, the way in which “the progress of the times had pushed aside the world of the Marañon Empire with a nudge” and the fact that, by the eighteenth century, there was “nothing

left of Man, of Manhood, of the Conquistador” (Posse, 2008, 120–127).

In the end, however, Posse grants Aguirre the chance to fulfil the dream of all explorers and find the mythical land of the El Dorado prince. In response to the reports of the natives who told the conquistadors about this place, the land was built with huge dunes of golden sand, in which the Spaniards bathed as if spellbound for about a month. Afterwards, however, just as after the first weeks in the “Terrestrial Paradise,” they “get tired of all the splendour” and realize that they cannot possibly transport all the gold to Europe, “the only place where such wealth made sense” (Posse, 2008, 154–157). The mirage of El Dorado is thus shattered, once again confirming the idea that Western man is always chasing fantasies that he projects onto the undiscovered territories, only to soon become bored with what he has been longing for and turn his attention elsewhere. At the end of this vicious circle and the first part of the novel (entitled “The Warrior’s Epic”), Lope de Aguirre once again becomes a traitor and abandons his men to the Incas. He abandons all the material wealth he has accumulated so far and returns to Europe to seek fulfilment in love.

The rest of the volume is no longer of interest to the research direction of this thesis, but there are several other points Posse notes that fit well into a conclusion of this essay. At the same time, they are also useful in a sequence that traces the evolution of New World realities over the next several centuries (with an emphasis on the role that the myths in whose name so many expeditions were undertaken still play in the modern and postmodern era) and that makes the transition to the post-humanist current and to the times when technology enables the creation of another “New World” when the whole world is already mapped. In this context, it is important to note that gold is gradually losing its value, is being converted into banknotes and is less in demand for export than sugar, livestock, timber or other commodities. The “degrading reality of the inferno of exploitation” is also becoming more apparent, and “the desire for gain substantially alters the original divine harmony” (Posse, 2008, 286), as economic and political interests in the colonies erase any vitality, mythic faith, or sacred practices that had characterized America’s attempt to abolish Western reason.

As imperialism stretches its arms even further and discovers, conquers, and controls more and more Indigenous cultures, victory begins to come at an ever-increasing price for Europeans as natural landscapes disappear. Nonetheless, the

“American dream” of success continues to motivate emigrants from around the world to venture to this continent and “like the Conquistadors of old, to do what they could neither do nor be” (Posse, 2008, 293) back home. And if the problem with Renaissance man was that he “invented his own misfortunes” (Posse, 2008, 253) and wasted his life preparing for the future rather than truly living in the present, in the postmodern era it is easy to anticipate how “man of the future” will continue to act as if there were no God to restrain his instinctual urges, thus perpetuating the same violent behaviour toward the “other” and using technology this time to create a world where anything goes.

## Conclusions

“Take a circle, caress it and it will turn vicious,” said Mr. Smith in one of Eugène Ionesco’s most famous plays, *The Bald Soprano*. Just like him, at the end of this journey through American colonial history, we can say that humanity was not (and probably never will be) a peaceful species. Wavering between the desire for rational progress and the inability to overcome his primal instincts of conquest and the violent imposition of superiority over “the other,” man has been trapped for millennia in a vicious cycle perpetuated precisely by his own actions. In this essay, I have attempted to trace the contours of this circle, the edges of this downward spiral that

regularly self-destructs, while at the same time connecting it to Abel Pose’s historical metafiction and to his comments on Europeans’ habit of destroying the culture and histories of antiquity and thus forever rewriting its history.

The steps I took to support my thesis began with an analysis of the ways in which collective fantasies such as the earthly paradise were projected onto newly discovered spaces, helping to justify their adoption by those who constructed the projection in the first place. Subsequently, the second part will show how these religious fantasies gave way to economic and political fantasies, the vice of material enrichment and the accumulation of territories for commercial purposes, thus justifying even more than before the violent conquest of people who stood in the way of Western development. To conclude this study, I would like to reiterate the importance of addressing such issues in today’s world, where more and more people seem to act every day as if there were no higher authority watching or condemning them. When we consider all the political conflicts and wars of today, it becomes clear that whether man lived in the 1500s or in the twentieth century, he still could not stop listening to the part of him that drove him to the violence of delight.

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## SHAKESPEARE'S *MACBETH* ON SCREEN: WITCHES AND (FE)MALE OTHERNESS

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**Abstract:** *Witches and witchcraft have always held sway over people's imagination. Catering to King James I's interest in the occult, Shakespeare's Macbeth also includes such characters who, together with Lady Macbeth, have often been blamed for causing Macbeth's downfall. What this paper aims to do is to explore how two recent film adaptations – directed by Justin Kurtzel (Macbeth, 2015) and Joel Coen (The Tragedy of Macbeth, 2021) respectively – exploit the ambiguity and androgyny of Shakespeare's "weird sisters", casting them either as a collective character or as a singular/plural entity, in order to show the causes of Macbeth's transformation from a military hero into a merciless tyrant. The paper also takes into account the racial implications of casting a white or African-American actor as Macbeth, as well as at the different portrayals of Lady Macbeth impacting the couple dynamics: although she appears as a femme fatale in both films, she uses different techniques to persuade her husband to commit regicide.*

**Keywords:** couple dynamics, film, otherness, Macbeth, Shakespeare, witches.

**Rezumat:** *Vrăjitoarele și vrăjitoria au avut mereu o mare influență asupra imaginației oamenilor. Satisfăcând interesul pentru ocultism al regelui Iacob I, piesa Macbeth a lui Shakespeare include și astfel de personaje care, împreună cu Lady Macbeth, au fost mereu considerate a fi cauza căderii lui Macbeth. Lucrarea de față își propune să exploreze modurile în care două adaptări cinematografice recente – în regia lui Justin Kurtzel (Macbeth, 2015), respectiv a lui Joel Coen (Tragedia lui Macbeth, 2021) – exploatează ambiguitatea și androginitatea „surorilor ursitoare”, reprezentându-le fie ca personaj colectiv, fie ca o entitate singulară/multiplă, pentru a arăta cauzele transformării lui Macbeth dintr-un erou militar într-un tiran nemilos. Lucrarea ia în considerare și implicațiile rasiale ale distribuirii unui actor afro-american în rolul protagonistului, precum și diferitele reprezentări ale lui Lady Macbeth care afectează dinamica de cuplu: deși apare ca o femeie fatală în ambele filme, aceasta recurge la tehnici diferite pentru a-și convinge soțul să comită regicidul.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** alteritate, dinamica de cuplu, film, Macbeth, Shakespeare, vrăjitoare.

### Introduction: Shakespeare's 'original' witches

Although they appear only episodically in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the witches are perhaps its most intriguing characters, with a crucial – yet unexplained – role in the protagonist's development and transformation into a tyrant. In Shakespeare's play, they appear in four scenes, but scholarship has recently proven that two episodes involving the witches singing and dancing, or their brief meetings with Hecate (Act III, Scene 5 and Act IV, Scene 1), were later interpolations by Thomas Middleton (cf. Daileader, 2010, 12-13; White, 2018, 15) most likely inserted in order to make up for the lost parts of the play (Brînzeu, 2022, 190).

Interestingly enough, although modern scholarship has come to widely debate the role of the "witches" in Macbeth's downfall, Shakespeare's characters do not refer to themselves as such, but rather as "weird sisters" in most editions of the play. Margreta de Grazia and

Peter Stallybrass (1993, 263) explain that editors usually "provide a footnote associating the word [weird] with Old English *wyrd* or 'fate'." The Folio version, however, records instead three times the "weyward Sisters" and another three times the "wayard Sisters" (de Grazia, Stallybrass, 1993, 263-264; cf. Brînzeu, 2022, 195). Brînzeu further clarifies that, in 1733 Lewis Theobald modernized "weyward sisters" into "Weird sisters" to be in agreement with Shakespeare's main source of inspiration for the play (Raphael Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland*, where the "weird sisters" have a single appearance and make the first predictions to Macbeth and Banquo), as well as to associate them with the Scandinavian Norns or Fates. Theobald's opinion was later shared by other Shakespeareologists such as Samuel Taylor Coleridge, George Kitteridge or Kenneth Muir.

Nonetheless, in addition to this possible spelling modernization of "weyward", de Grazia and Stallybrass (1993, 263) also note that "the

Folio's 'weyward' could be modernized as *wayward* [...] a simple vowel shift that effects a striking semantic one, transposing the sisters from the world of witchcraft and prophecy (conjured up by Theobald's 'weird') to one of perversion and vagrancy." Moreover, Ayanna Thompson (2010, 4) convincingly argues that the sisters' "weywardness" "seem[s] to stem in part from their Scottishness – a sort of seventeenth-century joke about King James's ethnicity". Thompson also adds that it is the witches "who most clearly verbalize how racially inflected the play is" in their cauldron incantation of Act 4, Scene 1, where they mix "liver of blaspheming Jew" (4.1.1573), "[n]ose of Turk and Tartar's lips" (4.1.1576). Such readings will open the line of "problematic" screen adaptations of the "Scottish play" in the latter half of the twentieth century and early twenty-first centuries (cf. Moschovakis, 2008, 2, 46-52). Essentially, Moschovakis reads "problematic" as an interpretation that "problematiz[es] our moral preconceptions and judgments" (2008, 2), that is the opposite of the traditional dualistic view of morality measured on a good/bad scale.

Before we turn to these film adaptations, we must address the appearance of the witches in Shakespeare's play. The play opens with the three witches' conversation about their next meeting "In thunder, lightning, or in rain?" (1.1.2) We thus infer that they inhabit a natural albeit uncanny, peripheral space (Bladen, 2014, 85, 93), dominated by fog and dimness; they are in tune with the weather, which they can control (Bladen, 2014, 85), and they threaten the cosmic order where everything is connected into a tightly ordered hierarchy (Robert West in Brînzeu, 2022, 196). Furthermore, the scene functions as a frame for the rest of the play, turning the sisters into a metatheatrical device, embodiments of our gaze, as they – like the spectators – carefully observe the events and become "agents of surveillance" (Bladen, 2014, 93).

When Macbeth and Banquo meet them in Act I, Scene 3, Banquo wonders "*what* are these..." (1.3.139, emphasis added), while Macbeth asks them not "who", but "*what* are you?" (1.3.148, emphasis added). It thus becomes evident that the two military heroes must see some frightening creatures that are far from the deities of destiny. Banquo describes them as unearthly, demonic apparitions: "So wither'd and so wild in their attire,/ That look not like the inhabitants o' the earth,/ And yet are on't?" (1.3.140-42). Their ugliness is rendered in very graphic imagery: they have "chappy finger[s]" and "skinny lips", they

look like women but with beards (1.3.144-47). Even if the beards may well be a metatheatrical reference to the actual male actors playing the parts, the beards also stand for the weird sisters' androgyny, a stereotypical description of witches in Shakespeare's time, which is all the more necessary to support the hermeneutics of indetermination that will be developed by a fearful, wife-dominated Macbeth (Brînzeu, 2022, 200). Unsettled by their predictions, Macbeth refers to them as "imperfect speakers" (1.3.171), instruments of temptation – and later, when he goes to seek their help a second time, as "secret, black and midnight hags" (4.1.1599) and "filthy hags" (1.4.1687).

As Chernaik (2014, 41) aptly points out, the witches are "liminal figures, between solid material reality and unlicensed imagination". They are associated either with the elements (1.3) – in particular with earth, for Banquo, and with air, for Macbeth – or with animals and body parts (both animal and human) in the cauldron scene (4.1). White (2018, 98) succinctly summarizes the witches' description, noting that "Like water but living on land, materially visible and yet vanishing into thin air, bearded women played in the theatre by boys, the sisters defy all categories of classification and remain obdurately ambiguous in their very nature as in their relation to the past and future." In other words, the sisters' androgynous appearance, their ambiguous gender, also extends to the ambiguity of their source(s) of knowledge.

As regards Lady Macbeth, in Shakespeare's play, she is often aligned with the coven of witches as malign forces (Chernaik, 2014, 50), "pervert[ing] her wifely duties" by "providing deadly hospitality" to her guests (Kemp, 2009, 95) and dominating her husband with his imperfect manhood (cf. 1.7.512-542). Her invocation of the spirits to "unsex" her (1.5.190-91) equates her attempt to eliminate all physical and emotional traces of femininity (suggested by the milk, the blood/menstruation and remorse), "to perform medieval Scotland's default gender identity [...] with all the social privileges it confers", and to adopt the masculine qualities of aggression and violence "valued in Scotland's warrior society" (Drouin, 2014, 335, 336). In the play's context, where the contrast between (evil) femininity and triumphant masculinity – as well as between black and white imagery – is expanded throughout the play, whiteness is devalued "as bloodless effeminacy or cowardice" (Daileader, 2010, 17), if, for example, we consider Lady Macbeth's references to her husband, who is "too full o' the



milk of human kindness" (1.5.361), who "wear[s] a heart so white" (2.2.730), or Macbeth's own mention of "pale-hearted fear" (4.1.1648) and his insult of a servant bringing bad news "thou cream-faced loon" (5.3.2257)

### Film adaptations of *Macbeth*

Relying on various interpretations of evil as ambition, corruption or tyranny (Moschovakis, 2008, 4-5), *Macbeth* has been one of the most frequently staged plays, as well as one of the most widely adapted plays for the screen. A simple International Movie Database search (IMDB 2022) can reveal no less than 49 titles explicitly connected to Macbeth or Lady Macbeth and covering a wide range of genres: from drama and tragedy, to film noir, gangster movies, post-apocalyptic films, animated versions, spin-offs, and even documentaries. Since this paper is primarily concerned with the representations of the witches and their uncanny otherness, Table 1 concisely presents them in relation to the most successful, impactful, problematic and critically acclaimed film adaptations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* over the last 75 years all around the world (cf. Bladen, 2014; Chernaik, 2014; Kapitaniak, 2014; Lehmann, 2014), beginning with Orson Welles' 1948 screen adaptation of his initial "Voodoo" play and ending with the most recent production, released in 2021, by director Joel Coen. For a better distinction between male and female directors' approaches, the films are divided into two categories and will be briefly discussed below with a focus on the weird sisters' representations.

Men directors in general seem to have placed themselves in two opposite positions in relation to the witches: they have either capitalized on the witches' supernatural abilities and demonic connections, or have stripped them of any supernatural elements, focusing more on the sisters' marginalization, poverty, health/skin issues, age and sexuality. Male directors also seem to be divided when it comes to the individuality of the witches. Traditionally, in most twentieth-century films, the weird sisters appear as old ugly crones (e.g. Welles, Polanski, Nunn), sometimes sexualized (e.g. Polanski). Occasionally, especially in non-English cultural contexts, the three sisters are reduced to one mysterious creature, whose gender is either indeterminate (Kurosawa), or more obviously masculine (Abela). Commenting on the adaptations filmed at the turn of the century and in the first decade of the twenty-first, Kapitaniak

(2014, 56) and Bladen (2014, 65) record that in such productions the witches have undergone a significant change particularly in terms of age and body image (they are younger and more attractive, but also more unsettling), a shift that is accompanied by a modernization of the setting, which is moved to a different moment in time and/or outside of Shakespeare's original Scotland. Moreover, while most directors retain the weird sisters as a collective female character (e.g. Wright, Arnold, and Goold, and more recently Kurzel and Coen too), others replace them partly or entirely with male characters who still linger on the fringes of society (e.g. Morrisette's hippy boys, or Brozel's rubbish bin men). Still other directors – again particularly outside the UK and USA – employ instead two corrupt policemen (Bhardwaj), or one homeless woman (Maake) with the same role and unsettling effect.

By contrast, women directors – as notes Courtney Lehmann (2014, 323) – "tend to make highly personal, distinctly non-commercial Shakespeare films" and to exploit the use of costumes and make-up to show the dramatic events that affect women's relationships. Although few and far between, female filmmakers have approached the witches completely differently from their male counterparts. In all five adaptations directed by women, the weird sisters reflect some of the society's most disturbing issues at the time of the film's making; the witches are thus gay men involved in Soviet espionage (Stenholm) or obsessed with fashion and consumerism (LiCalsi), homeless children squatting in a failed government housing project (Woolcock), extremist youngsters (van Hoorn), or even disembodied voices commenting on the exploitation of Africa and women's bodies (Menkes). Concluding her analysis of these films, Lehmann (2014, 332) writes that women filmmakers seem to assume the role of the witches, "turn[ing] Shakespeare's play inside out to expose the place where film crosses over from art to an intervention", and raising awareness of stringent issues.

Given the long heritage of *Macbeth* productions both on the stage and on film, it is hard for contemporary directors to come up with something new, to shock audiences with their take on various aspects related to the development of the plot, the character of the witches, of Lady Macbeth or of Macbeth himself. Yet they still manage to find creative ways to do just that.

**Just how many weird sisters/ witches are there?**

The two most recent adaptations – by Justin Kurzel (2015) and Joel Coen (2021) – seem to pay special attention to the collective character of the witches. What both films have in common is also the pushing of the occult to the margins and its association with Macbeth's corrupted or distressed mind. While in Kurzel's adaptation, the sisters inhabit an external, terrestrial but always peripheral space, mostly observing the unfolding of events, in Coen's version, they initially inhabit an aerial space, then terrestrial, only to finally become internalized, or Macbeth's inner demons luring him on the path to perdition. As a result, it is perhaps no surprise that the cinematic techniques differ especially in terms of the angles preferred by each director: Kurzel favours angles which situate the characters on the same level, with only a few exceptions of higher/ aerial shots or upward looking ones focused either on the witches or on Lady Macbeth; such shots are meant to indicate the alterity of the women in a world dominated by men. Contrastingly, Coen shows a preference for vertical movements, especially but not exclusively in relation to the witch(es), suggesting the characters' metaphorical upward/downward movement between various levels of goodness and evilness.

#### *Kurzel's all-female family*

Justin Kurzel's version of *Macbeth* presents the witches as a cross-generational 'band of sisters' (to nod in the direction of Shakespeare's *Henry V*), three adult women dressed in black, reminiscent of Shakespeare's play, but accompanied by a black-clad girl and a baby bundled in white. The witches' first appearance, as they stand silhouetted against the barren wind-swept mountainous landscape, follows an initial sequence in which the Macbeths are shown as vulnerable, grieving parents, mourning the death of their infant son. Watching the funeral from the distance, this all female group of outcasts provide an unsettling contrast to the childless Macbeths. At the same time, the image suggests that the witches draw their power from the death of children. Scholar Victoria Bladen (2017, 129-137) extensively comments on the film's obsession with children, particularly the contrast between the living children who often appear on screen and the Macbeths' childlessness. In Bladen's reading, the recurrent imagery of children links fertility to politics; the fact that Macbeth does not have an heir, that he has no empathy, and that he is a child murderer are signs indicative of his unfitness to rule. As regards the weird sisters,

Bladen also writes about Kurzel's associating them with "unsettling music, in a minor key and slightly discordant, with dominant strings" (2017, 130), a score that would signal their presence throughout the film's narrative arc, "suggest[ing] that their influence and/or surveillance is pervasive" (2017, 134). Indeed, they appear more times in the film than they do in the play.

Returning now to the witches' first appearance in the film, it must be mentioned that it takes place before the intertitle which sets the context in medieval Scotland, ravaged by civil war and disloyalty. The sequence then shows in close-ups the three mature witches speaking the familiar opening lines ("When shall we three meet again?") without making eye contact with one another, nor with the viewers for that matter, which creates a very disquieting effect. A brief shot focuses on the youngest witch holding a strange voodoo doll type of toy/ charm, just as one witch utters "When the hurlyburly's done,/ When the battle's lost and won", showcasing the witches' uncanniness. The Macbeth child's funeral and the witches create a frame for the rest of the story, intimating that both (dead) children and the witches will symbolically dominate the development of the plot. Later, the witches also witness the first battle, while Macbeth notices them through the hellish red haze, their presence indicating a close connection to violence, death and war.

When Macbeth (Michael Fassbender) and Banquo return from the battle and meet the witches, their questions are directed especially at the youngest witch, who seems to have distanced herself from the others, as if to welcome the two warriors; she is the first to touch Macbeth as she takes something from a small pouch hanging around his neck and adds it to her strange doll. One witch lovingly caresses his face, while Macbeth is greeted with his own and the other two titles soon to become his. That the predictions end with a panoramic shot of a coronation scene followed by an extreme close-up of Macbeth's upper face suggests that the weird sisters have successfully planted the image into Macbeth's mind. Although he begs for more information, the witches turn and walk away without paying him any heed. It is significant to mention here that the young witch walks holding hands with two of the old ones, creating the illusion of a harmonious nuclear family, which is all the more painful to Macbeth who wistfully watches them disappear in the fog.

Subsequently, as the plot develops, the sisters are briefly internalized, turning into reminders of

the prophesies spoken to Macbeth, and haunting his thoughts on the night of the regicide. Macbeth's troubled state is rendered through a juxtaposition of his memories of meeting the witches with hallucinations of a dead boy soldier holding a bloody dagger. Furthermore, when Macbeth sends murderers to kill Banquo and Fleance, the young boy witnesses his father's death and runs away in the forest, being watched over by the youngest witch, who seemingly helps Fleance escape, an episode which suggests that the witches have more agency in the fulfilment of the prophesy than Shakespeare originally gave them.

When Macbeth seeks the witches for a second round of prophesies (4.1), he travels to a heath on horseback, wearing only a white night shift. While the young witch picks up flowers, the three older ones sit around a small cauldron, pressing seeds and plants; they give him further forecasts about his future and prepare a potion for him to drink, which gets Macbeth into a trance. It is during this state that the last prophesy – namely, that he will not be killed by any man of woman born – is delivered by the boy soldier who died in the first battle scene against Cawdor. When Macbeth comes round, the witches have again vanished without a trace. It is noteworthy to mention here that, under the influence of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, director Kurzel approached Macbeth as a warrior suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, so that the hallucinations before Duncan's murder and the trance are consistent with the behaviour of a soldier exposed to violence and slaughter and practicing them on a daily basis (Barnes, 2015).

During the final battle scene, as Macbeth and Macduff fight in the midst of yet another hellish red haze, with soldiers watching from a distance, the group of witches approaches to witness Macbeth's defeat and death. The scene alternates in close-ups the witches' faces staring in the distance, making no eye contact with each other or with the viewers, and the men engaged in combat, as Macbeth becomes aware of the double meanings of the weird sisters' prophesies. As Macbeth kneels and dies in an almost praying position, the witches turn and leave the battlefield, disappearing in the reddish fog. The very last shot of the film shows Fleance running on the battlefield into the red haze too, in juxtaposition with Malcolm walking up to the throne, suggesting that the story of betrayal and civil war will be resumed in the future.

*Coen's three-in-one witch*

By contrast to Kurzel's version, Joel Coen makes use of the weird sisters in different ways to create an unsettling effect in the viewers. It should be noted from the start that, unlike Kurzel, Coen employs black and white cinematography, a sparse, minimalist décor, as well as a racialized cast (Macbeth himself, Seyton, and the entire Macduff family are played by African American actors). The play's contrast between good and evil, black(ness) and white(ness) is simultaneously heightened with the help of the cinematic technique, but also blurred through the racialized characters.

The film opens with the appearance of "when" in big capitalized letters against a black background, as the disembodied whispering and slightly distorted voices of the witches utter their famous introduction lines. The next shot provides a stark contrast of smokey whiteness and three crows circling above, but as the smoke dissipates, we realize we have been fooled into believing we were looking upwards, when in fact, we were looking downwards. Thus, the reversal of values implied by "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" is ingeniously and graphically rendered by the direction of the camera shots. The next sequence shows the Sergeant walking as if through the desert towards Duncan's camp in order to impart news of Macbeth's victory and noticing the three crows flying in a circle high above. The black birds symbolically recall the witches, who – similar to Kurzel's film – act as agents of surveillance, monitoring from above the developments that occur on land. Having heard the news about his 'valiant cousin', Duncan also looks upwards and notices two ominous crows disappearing into the smoky air.

The next scene cuts directly to the witches' second meeting (1.3). The sequence begins with an aerial shot on a crouching female body dressed in black; as the camera zooms in on the body, we also hear croaking sounds approaching, recalling the previously shown crows circling high in the air. The crouching witch (masterfully played by Kathryn Hunter) looks upwards and begins a dialogue with the other two, but it is still she who answers, suggesting that she in fact embodies all three witches, as if in a case of split personality disorder. As the unsettling conversation progresses, the disquieting feeling increases and becomes visual, the witch contorting her body to use her feet instead of her hands and turning her arms backwards as if possessed. Reciting the chorus lines about "The weird sisters, hand in hand [...] Thus do go about, about" (1.3.131, 133), the witch stands up and begins shaking her

arms; these slight movements overlap with wing flapping noises, clearly indicating that the weird sisters are shapeshifters that can take the form of crows. As she recites the last line – “Peace! the charm’s wound up.” (1.3.136) – the witch wraps herself in a black cloak and looks upwards into the foggy air. The next cut shows Macbeth and Banquo returning from the battlefield in a shockingly good mood: we first hear Macbeth’s laughter, and only afterwards does he comment on the “foul and fair” atmosphere. Although Banquo’s lines remain faithful to the playtext, addressing the weird sisters in the plural, we are only shown one witch, which, upon an expansion of the shot, is shown to have two reflections in a dark puddle (perhaps of blood) against the background of a deserted battlefield ridden with broken spears and military banners. In another uncanny and deeply unsettling twist, after giving Banquo his prophesy, the two reflections materialize next to the initial witch so that she seems to have multiplied out of the blue. As Macbeth asks for more details, they slowly turn away from the two men and slowly vanish into the fog, only to return as three crows flying threateningly at Macbeth and Banquo.

The ominous crow returns in the banquet scene, this time suggesting Banquo’s ghost, flying erratically around the hallways and challenging Macbeth’s self-control. Whereas Macbeth sees the ghost of Banquo attacking him, his wife and the other guests see the black bird desperately trying to exit the castle. As in Shakespeare’s play, it is Lady Macbeth who takes charge of the situation by opening the window so that the bird can fly out.

In Coen’s version of 4.1, the scene begins with the disembodied voice of the witch announcing “’Tis time”, while the word “tomorrow” appears in big capital letters against a black background, just as “when” did at the very beginning of the film. The next sequence features Macbeth waking from a deep sleep because of a noise; he looks left to see a branch hitting the window, and then upwards to see the three identical witches sitting above him on huge beams that recall a prison window overlooking a narrow patch of dark and cloudy sky, visible from among the castle walls. The scene relies on a strong feeling of physical entrapment, further accentuated by Macbeth looking upwards when addressing the witches, while they look downwards when talking to him. When Macbeth says that he wants to hear more prophesies from the witches’ masters, they contort their bodies again in order to produce the various ingredients of the cauldron scene, which they

throw into a pool that has magically materialized at Macbeth’s feet. Gradually, after all the disturbing ingredients have found their way to the ‘cauldron’, the child apparitions reveal themselves to Macbeth on the water surface, each warning him about Macduff, about the warrior not born of woman, and about Birnam Wood. After the prophesies are delivered and the witches caution Macbeth to seek no more, the pool water mysteriously dries up, the witches disappear, and there is a lingering effect that we, like Macbeth, have experienced a hallucination and that the witches are figments of Macbeth’s imagination. What Coen skilfully achieves in this scene is to show viewers that Macbeth has internalized the weird sisters, who become voices trapped inside Macbeth’s own head, speaking about his innermost fears and telling him what he desperately wanted to hear.

### **Lady Macbeth, *femme fatale***

Often aligned with the witches because of the invocation of the spirits to “unsex” her and endow her with the masculine qualities of determination, strength, aggression, and violence, Lady Macbeth also plays an instrumental role in Macbeth’s downfall. Even if both films depict her as a *femme fatale* who uses different techniques in order to persuade her husband to kill Duncan, they render the Macbeths’ relationship as strained for different reasons: while they share in the grief of losing a child but still remain passionate in Kurzel’s film, their marriage is at break point with only the murder plotting keeping them together in Coen’s production.

The second time we meet Lady Macbeth (Marion Cotillard) in Kurzel’s adaptation after the initial funeral sequence, it is for the spirits invocation scene (1.5), which takes place in the chapel, as she holds the Cawdor ribbon. Set in a clearly Christian context, in front of a crucifix surrounded by trees, symbolic of the biblical tree of knowledge that Eve was tempted to taste from, Lady Macbeth’s appeal receives blasphemous and deeply disturbing connotations, while she is thus clearly associated with sin, death and sterility. As Bladen (2017, 132) also writes, her slightly distorted voice aligns her with the witches, while the candle-lit chapel further contributes to the blasphemous effect and her “deliberate decision to sin”. To the right of the crucifix and the trees, there are two panels depicting an angel weighing the worthiness of human souls and their subsequent fall towards hell, resumed in the second panel as a further fall alongside demons

into the deeper levels of hell. As she begins her invocation of the spirits, the camera moves behind her, then constantly alternates a high angle of her kneeling position with close ups of the Last Judgment scene depicted in the panels and of her shadowed face, implying that she too has fallen and is now an instrument of evil and darkness.

Later, in the persuasion scene, she reveals the plan of killing Duncan while Macbeth sexually takes control of her body. As he works to satisfy his body's needs and release his frustration and fears, she holds his head between her hands trying to make him absorb the plan deemed infallible if Macbeth can only muster the courage to carry it through. The fact that she persuades him with the help of sex and a potential pregnancy nods again to the film's obsession with children and paternity linked to political power, giving Macbeth new hope for the future. The Macbeths' passionate but strained relationship is further emphasized by the passionate kisses they share immediately after Duncan's murder and after the decision of having Banquo and Fleance killed.

Lady Macbeth's attire is also significant and plays on the black/white symbolism suggested by the playtext. From the beginning of the film, at her son's funeral and up to Macbeth's coronation, she wears black indicative of her initial mourning and grieving for a lost child. From the coronation moment and to her death, all her dresses are white, symbolic of a new – albeit barren – beginning, and in stark contrast with her blackened conscience due to her moral involvement in the regicide. Also significant is the fact that, before the banquet scene, as Macbeth has a PTSD episode and reproaches her childlessness to her, she is wearing a white dress and pearls in her hair; seemingly virginal, Lady Macbeth's attire suggests sterility, a blank white sheet, which foreshadows her later obsession with the bed.

Macbeth's own cruelty receives a new angle when he himself sets fire to Macduff's wife and children tied to the stakes, while Lady Macbeth unsuccessfully tries not to cry, remembering the loss of her own child(ren) but dares not challenge her royal husband's authority in public. The scene marks a break in the scheming couple's dynamic, showing Lady Macbeth as more humane and empathetic than her spouse. The next time Lady Macbeth appears, she is already broken, deeply affected by the Macduff children's deaths, reciting her final monologue in the same chapel where she initially invoked the spirits. A side shot shockingly reveals that she has been talking to her dead infant son, while the following sequence

shows her in a dishevelled state walking on a heath, as if towards the witches, who are watching her from the distance, and repeating "To bed, to bed". Left ambiguous, her line overlaps the marital bed, the confinement bed, and the death bed of her son as well as her own. The scene alternates middle shots and close-ups of a tormented Lady Macbeth and the four witches with the baby, whose presence again painfully mocks Lady Macbeth's childlessness. A subsequent cut shows her bedridden and lifeless despite Macbeth's insistence with the doctor to find a cure for her illness, and his own attempt at bringing her back to life.

Unlike Kurzel's film, where we watch the Macbeths in intimate moments of intercourse, sharing passionate kisses as well as the grief of losing a child, in Coen's adaptation the couple is denied intimacy. Coen's Macbeths are coldly distant "so that their partnership feels like a marriage on the brink, one where murder has become a tired Macbeth's way of salvaging his relationship." (Campbell, 2021) Michael Billington (2022) also records the Macbeths' "collapsing relationship", pointing out that the severance occurs when an utterly dismayed Lady Macbeth passes Banquo's killers on the stairs. However, similar to Kurzel's version, Coen also positions Lady Macbeth as a *femme fatale*, particularly through the "presentation of the shadowy backrooms where husband and wife scheme together" (Billington, 2022).

The first time we see Lady Macbeth in Coen's adaptation, she walks the hallways of the castle, reading her husband's letter, which she then burns in order to keep the news secret. Holding the burning letter in her hand, she heads towards a balcony, from where she entrusts the burning letter to the night wind, following it with her eyes. When we see her next, she is informed about the imminent arrival of Macbeth and proceeds to her invocation of the spirits to unsex her, just as she goes to sit and then lie down on her marital bed. The scene takes a more sexual – albeit somewhat sadistic – turn, as the camera focuses in close-up on her face contorted by the intensity of her entreaty and her malevolent thoughts. The shot darkens only to reveal a sleeping Lady Macbeth woken up by the arrival of her husband who sits looming by her side, as if he were an embodiment of the spirits she earlier invoked. They eventually share a rather cold embrace, while discussing the arrival of King Duncan and already suggesting Lady Macbeth's plan to have him murdered.

The persuasion scene takes place on one of the castle's hallways, as they stand near a window overlooking the inner courtyard, with Lady Macbeth trying to reason with her husband about his imperfect manhood. In stark contrast to Marion Cotillard's Lady Macbeth, who uses sex to manipulate her husband, Frances McDormand's female protagonist is mostly calm and coldly reasonable. Her reference to the baby she has nursed eliminates all trace of maternity and empathy, constructing Lady Macbeth into a hard-hearted creature with the iron will of a soldier trapped in the feeble body of a woman. The Macbeths' relationship begins to deteriorate beyond repair the moment Lady Macbeth finds out he killed the servants. Surrounded by men and approached by Macbeth, the horror of her husband's deed, in contrast with his calm voice, is evident in her enlarged eyes and then in her fainting right into Macbeth's arms. Although she remains strong through the banquet scene, after Macbeth's last meeting of the witches, most likely in a hallucinatory trance, Lady Macbeth starts losing her hair, traditionally associated with femininity, but now a more graphic symbol of her mind, which also signals her diminishing role.

Considering the racialized cast of Coen's adaptation, most likely influenced by Welles' 1936 theatrical "Voodoo" production, the physical blackness of Denzel Washington's Macbeth may be read as a telling sign of the protagonist's ambition, corruption and overall evil nature. Nevertheless, the fact that Macduff too is played by an African American actor blurs the line between good and evil, between loyalists and traitors, since Macduff abandoned his family and property instead of protecting them. Moreover, Macduff is also a traitor, as Lady Macduff explains to her eldest son while trying to justify her husband's choices.

Another compelling twist that Coen brings to the story is related to the character of Ross, who seems to have access to secret information just like the witches do. For example, Coen's Ross joins the hired murderers in their wait for Banquo; it is Ross who tells the murderers Fleance has escaped only to go and look for him on his own. It is also Ross who informs an upset Lady Macduff of her husband's abandoning her and their children, just as he observes a group of riders approaching. He then meets with Macduff himself telling him that his family was doing well when he left them, only to apparently reluctantly reveal that they were killed at Macbeth's orders. Ross's role suggests again that he knows about upcoming events and that he acts as a substitute for the

witches, overseeing the fulfilment of their prophesies. It is also implied that he is instrumental in Lady Macbeth's fall down the stairs and subsequent death. Furthermore, it is Ross who, after finding the crown that Macbeth lost in his fight with Macduff, presents it to Malcolm together with Macbeth's severed head. In the very last scene, Ross is shown paying an old man who lives in a derelict house and retrieving Fleance. The two ride together down a hill, into a steep valley, from where a murder of crows flies up, towards the screen and to the right, connecting Ross explicitly to the shapeshifting witches and bringing the film full circle, by multiplying *at infinitum* the image of the three crows in the opening scene, hinting at the future repetition of betrayal and murder for power.

### Conclusions

In short, this paper has tried to show how the characters of the weird sisters have been adapted for screen in several iconic, as well as problematic adaptations of Shakespeare's Scottish play. The general trend has been for the witches to be represented in increasingly more disturbing ways, usually as a group in British and American contexts, but as uncanny individuals in other cultures around the world. Significantly, the two most recent adaptations tackle the witches in previously unexplored ways: whereas Justin Kurzel shows them as an all-female family, whose children constantly mock the Macbeths' childlessness, Joel Coen's rendition uses a single witch who can both physically multiply into three and shapeshift into crows. Essentially, both movies align another character with the weird sisters: on the one hand, there is Kurzel's Lady Macbeth through her blasphemous invocation of the spirits in a Christian chapel, surrounded by religious imagery suggesting divine punishment as well as a conscious choice to sin; on the other hand, there is Coen's Ross, an ambiguous character, whom viewers are encouraged to perceive as an alter ego of the witches themselves, another proof of their ability to shapeshift.

Interestingly, both productions cast Lady Macbeth as a *femme fatale* to a certain extent. Kurzel has her manipulate Macbeth to commit the regicide during intercourse, while Coen turns her into a cool cold-hearted rational mastermind. The Macbeths' relationship is strained in both adaptations yet for different reasons: whereas in Kurzel's film the couple is still united by their grief at the son's death as well as by a sort of desperate sexual passion, in Coen's version their

marriage is on the brink of severance and it is (the planning of) the regicide that gives them one last, though fleeting, reason to stay together. Moreover, Coen's racialized cast blurs the fluid boundaries between good and evil, between honest and disloyal characters, or between the playtext's stark contrast between black and white. The black/white contrast is also echoed in Kurzel's film particularly in the colour-coded costumes of Lady Macbeth.

All in all, it is the weird sisters who remain the most intriguing and ambiguous characters, without whom Macbeth's development into a tyrant may not have been the same, or, at least, not as exciting to watch. Whether an all-female family of soothsayers or a single individual who can shapeshift and multiply at will, *Macbeth's* witches have come a long way since the early seventeenth century, reflecting our contemporary concerns, but retaining their uncanny and unsettling role.

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Table 1. Representation of witches in film adaptations of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* / Reprezentarea vrăjitoarelor în ecranizările *Macbeth* de Shakespeare

Year (imdb.com)	Director (men)	Film title	Country	Representation of the "weird sisters"/ witches
1948	Orson Welles	<i>Macbeth</i>	USA	Three old crones in rags, practitioners of black magic
1957	Akira Kurosawa	<i>Throne of Blood</i>	Japan	The Forest Spirit, a mysterious androgynous creature + supernatural qualities
1971	Roman Polanski	<i>Macbeth</i>	UK, USA	Two old women + one young and deformed, practitioners of demonism
1979	Philip Casson, Trevor Nunn	<i>Macbeth</i>	UK	Two old women + a younger woman
1999	Alexander Abela	<i>Makibefo</i>	Madagascar	A witchdoctor who is also a shapeshifter (snake)
2001	Billy Morrisette	<i>Scotland, PA</i>	USA, Canada	Two hippy boys + one pretty clairvoyant girl
2003	Vishal Bhardwaj	<i>Maqbool</i>	India	Two corrupt policemen
2005	Mark Brozel	<i>Shakespeare Re-told: Macbeth</i>	UK	Three rubbish bin men
2007	Geoffrey Wright	<i>Macbeth</i>	Australia	Initially, three delinquent schoolgirls; then, three young <i>femmes fatales</i>
2008	Norman Maake	<i>Entabeni</i>	South Africa	A homeless woman dressed in rags
2009	Brandon Arnold	<i>Macbeth</i>	USA	Three young and pretty girls with skin and intellectual issues due to a nuclear disaster
2010	Rupert Goold	<i>Macbeth</i>	UK	Three sinister nurses in a military hospital
2015	Justin Kurzel	<i>Macbeth</i>	UK, France, USA	Three mature witches as parental figures, accompanied by a young girl and a baby
2021	Joel Coen	<i>The Tragedy of Macbeth</i>	USA	Three identical old women who can shapeshift
Year	Director (women)	Film title	Country	Representation of witches
1951	Katherine Stenholm	<i>Macbeth</i>	USA	Three men in drag, serving as communist spies
1996	Penny Woolcock	<i>Macbeth on the Estate</i>	UK	Homeless children living in a derelict building
1996	Nina Menkes	<i>The Bloody Child</i> (documentary)	USA	Haunting disembodied voices
2001	Allison LiCalsi	<i>Macbeth, the Comedy</i>	USA	Three homeless gay men dressed in designer clothes and obsessed with brand names
2005	Netty van Hoorn	<i>Growing Up with Macbeth</i> (documentary)	Netherlands	Youngsters with extreme views and no empathy



# RESIDENCES OF MONARCHS: FILM PORTRAYAL OF PALACES AS CENTRES OF CITY'S SOFT POWER

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**Abstract:** *Residences of the monarchs promote ideas of power and prosperity through architecture, arts and crafts. Palaces of Versailles and Tsarskoye Selo were centres of Paris and St. Petersburg soft power during their heydays. That is reflected in the movies filmed in those palaces, especially when the historical context of their symbolic significance is provided during the plot. As a result of analysing historical movies, the conclusion is that historical cinema becomes believable filmed only in authentic interiors, while credibility is also one of the main factors of soft power.*

**Keywords:** *urban history, city's soft power, Versailles, Tsarskoye Selo, baroque palace.*

**Rezumat:** *Reședințele regale promovează ideile de putere și prosperitate prin arhitectură, arte și meșteșuguri. Palatele de la Versailles și Țarskoe Selo au fost centre ale puterii intangibile din Paris și St. Petersburg în perioada lor de glorie. Acest lucru se reflectă în lungmetraje filmate în acele palate, mai ales atunci când contextul istoric al semnificației lor simbolice este oferit în timpul povestirii. Ca urmare a analizei filmelor istorice, concluzia este că cinematograful istoric devine credibil filmat doar în interioare autentice, întrucât credibilitatea este, de asemenea, unul dintre principalii factori ai puterii intangibile.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *istorie urbană, puterea intangibilă a orașului, Versailles, Țarskoe Selo, palatul baroc.*

## Introduction

Cinema requires impressive decorations and staging to keep the viewer's attention on, especially when it comes to the residences of monarchs. The luxuriously decorated halls and ballrooms of the palaces are excellent evidence of the soft power they contained, although we apply this concept retroactively. The concept of soft power, developed in the 1980s by Joseph Nye, represents a way of influencing and achieving desired results through voluntary participation, which can be also summered as non-military methods of influencing at different levels, promoting certain ideas and creating a certain impact on the public (Nye, 2004, 32).

Palaces have always been created not just to impress citizens and the diplomatic corps; palaces have always had much broader tasks. The palace was de facto the capital of the state during the stay of the monarch, presenting both its own subjects and foreigners the best examples of national and foreign art, economic power capable of granting the opulence of the court.

Palaces of Versailles and Tsarskoye Selo were centres of the city's soft power during their heyday in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. That is greatly reflected in the movies filmed in those palaces, especially when the historical context of their symbolic significance is provided during the

plot. In the case of Versailles its soft power was concentrated on attracting the best national craftsmen and artists to create a palace that embodies the absolute monarch, leading the venerable Kingdom of France. In the case of Catherine Palace its soft power was concentrated on attracting foreign specialists to create a palace that glorifies the young Russian Empire. Not a single film about the French or Russian monarchs who ruled in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries is complete without filming in the interiors of the mentioned palaces. Historical cinema becomes believable filmed only in real interiors, while credibility is also one of the main factors of soft power.

## The language of cinema and the reflection of history

The emergence of cinematography was a turning point for artistic creativity. This synthetic type of new art made it possible to perpetuate in an unchanged form and content a look at various phenomena and events. Not surprisingly, since its inception, cinema has been used to reflect and reinvent history. Already at the dawn of cinematography, directors were attracted by this new kind of art, capable of capturing or illustrating any historical events as clearly as possible. The history of the Palace of Versailles in

cinematography begins as early as 1896, in the film *Fontaines de Versailles* (Versailles, 2021, 1). At the same time, there are many newsreels depicting various palaces of Russian emperors: the most famous footage of the chronicle is associated with the Coronation celebrations of May 1896 (Reuters / British Pathé, 1896). But the history of the Catherine Palace in cinematography begins as early as 1913, in the footage Pathé's Weekly, No. 46 (IMDB, 1913).

Gradually, a whole language of cinema began to take shape, a separate type of chronotope appeared, in which visual aesthetics began to play a significant role, uniting all other components of the film. In some ways, cinema became similar to baroque opera, where the richly decorated scenery played the role of a link between the viewer, the plot and the stage, providing an immersive experience. Cinema had the same role in global structural transformation of culture, as it had the invention of opera in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Martin, 1997). The most effective way to ensure that the viewer is immersed in any historical time is to use authentic interiors that are silent witnesses of some great historical events. During the film production, it is almost impossible to reproduce the costumes of different eras with the historical accuracy: due to the high cost of such an approach to creating costumes, as well as sometimes visual inexpressiveness for the average viewer, as well as physical inconvenience for the actors (Weinstein, 2001). The language of cinema embellishes reality and everyday life. What cinema cannot embellish are the interiors of the royal residences. When newsreels were just emerging as a genre, in order to emphasize the solemnity of the moment and enhance the propaganda effect and shape the monarch's image, palace interiors were often chosen for filming. Also, the palace could serve as a backdrop for a meeting with, for example, soldiers, as it was often done in the case of Nicholas II. So even performing simple everyday actions, a balance between a magnificent autocrat and a person with his own weaknesses and interests was still maintained (Wortman, 2013, 97).

The Versailles and the Tsarskoye Selo were chosen for the study for a reason. It is almost impossible to surpass the visual luxury of the chambers of these palaces: it is unthinkable to imagine what can replace the original Hall of Mirrors and the Apollo Salon in Versailles, as well as the Great Hall and the Amber Room of the Catherine Palace. These buildings, constructed in the 17<sup>th</sup> and the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the era of the

maximum flourishing of arts and crafts, are the best scenery for filming movies about the events that took place in these palaces. The luxury of the 18<sup>th</sup> century interiors is so impressive that even to create fantasy royal residences, directors often turn to historical heritage. The most striking example of such an approach are the interiors of the Theed Royal Palace on the planet Naboo from the Star Wars cinematic universe, which were filmed in the Palace of Caserta (Bowen, 2005, 8), probably one of the largest palaces built in Europe in the 18<sup>th</sup> century (UNESCO, 1997), which perfectly matches the megalomaniac scale of the palace of Theed and its symbolic significance of excellence and greatness of Theed's civilization.

### Palace as a symbol

Although the palace as a phenomenon exists in some or another form throughout the development of civilization, in different periods the palaces had different functions, including symbolic ones. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the palace finally acquired a symbolism similar to its original etymological meaning. The etymology given to the Palatine Hill in Rome (Chambers, 1874, 359) hints at the original function of the palace: "a house eminently splendid", royal, noble, magnificent (Johnson, 1766, 270).

Of course, during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, various stunning palaces were built. However, such palaces often had a defensive function: they were well fortified and could withstand a siege (Chao, 2019, 39-59). This left a certain imprint on the architecture of the palaces and their decoration. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century palaces finally lost their defensive functions and were built exclusively as residences for the idle life. One striking example of the partial transformation of a medieval castle into a Baroque palace is the Palazzo Madama in Turin, designed by the architect Filippo Juvarra (Telluccini, 1928, 19). In addition, palaces became symbols of the absolutism development as a state doctrine: the monarch surpasses the church in power, the secular prevails over the ecclesiastical, indulging the development of the baroque and rococo art. Simplicity is completely alien to these styles; they represent the pinnacle of sophisticated human genius, decorating the entire space with elaborate patterns, leaving no free space between the details. Baroque is easy enough to criticize for later generations due to a lack of understanding of this pretentious theatricality, which accompanied a person in the palace all the time and sunk into oblivion along with the Old Regime in France,

and then with the subsequent anti-monarchist revolutions in Europe.

An absolute monarch could not decide the fate of the state in a stuffy city, still subject to medieval orders. Paris, with its narrow streets reminiscent of the horrors of the Fronde, could not be the home of Louis XIV. “L'état, c'est moi”, so the construction of a new world of absolutism in its stunning scenery is possible anywhere the monarch wishes. Louis XIV chooses the village of Versailles to build his fabulous palace (Ayers, 2004, 334), and Peter I goes even further and decides to build a new capital, on the outskirts of which will be created an initially modest summer residence, in the village of Sarskaya Myza (Lemus, 1980, 9-18). During the 18<sup>th</sup> century, both capitals and both royal residences will compete in luxury, being symbols not only of state power and the power of the monarch, but also symbols of cultural development and exchange. Each interior of these palaces will carry a certain symbolism: wealth, military victories, outstanding discoveries, absolute power and the ability to rule brilliantly. Royal residences were supposed to impress the people, confirming the God-given absolute power of the monarch, and to capture the imagination of the nobility and foreigners, demonstrating the height of artistic and engineering thought. Thus, the royal palace in the 18<sup>th</sup> century became the centre of the soft power of the city, even being at some distance from it.

### **Palace as the centre of soft power in the city**

Despite the fact that the soft power concept emerged only in the late 1980s, it is perfectly applicable for the earlier historical periods. The concept of soft power is a way of influencing and achieving desired results through voluntary participation, driven by cooperation, sympathy and attractiveness, as opposed to hard power, which implies coercion. The author outlined that soft power is “getting others to want what you want – [it] might be called indirect or co-optive power behaviour. It is in contrast to the active command power behavior of getting others to do what you want” (Nye, 1990, 30).

Palace as the “centre of gravity” of a city, can attract curious visitors or qualified professionals just through its image (Van der Borg, Russo, 2005). According to the author of the concept, soft power is based on culture and diplomacy (Nye, 2011), where the paramount importance has a special place, attractive for living and creation.

Notwithstanding the possibility of obtaining the necessary funding and other necessary

conditions, artists dreamed of getting a job in the palace to perpetuate their art. Baroque vanity played an important role in the palace as the centre of the city's soft power: both Versailles and Tsarskoye Selo were full of talented people, but only a few were successful. Over the centuries, apparently, nothing has changed. Emotional intelligence and the ability to be at the right time in the right place gave rise to great artists: André Le Nôtre, Jules Hardouin-Mansart, Bartolomeo Francesco Rastrelli, Antonio Rinaldi and many others who shaped Versailles and Tsarskoye Selo as we see them now.

Palace has become as well the centre of diplomacy at all levels: international, regional and urban. As a “capital” within a capital, the palace promoted its agenda of cultural diplomacy: cultural values and cultural diversity, sometimes including the linguistic diversity, its image, as well as the export or import of educational services. Of course, Versailles pursued a policy of the superiority of all French, it was difficult to imagine conversations at court in a language other than French. Preference has always been given to artists, architects, composers and craftsmen from France, to preserve and develop traditions, and even create new crafts. Thanks to this approach, we owe Versailles the creation of the Sevres porcelain manufactories, the development of lace production in Chantilly and the formation of the French art school. At the same time, the exact opposite approach reigned in Tsarskoye Selo: Western-style artists simply did not exist in the Russian Empire, so the country's elites actively imported both talented artists, architects, composers and craftsmen, as well as art objects. At Russian court nobility preferred to speak French, German, Dutch, everything foreign was only welcomed and actively promoted by Peter I, both to old-fashioned nobility, who advocated the preservation of traditions, and to peasants (for example, a decree to shave beards in a European manner (Complete collection of laws of the Russian Empire, 1830, 282).

All of these processes are constantly reflected in cinema in one way or another. Not a single film about the French or Russian monarchs who ruled in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries is complete without filming in the interiors of the mentioned palaces. Historical movie becomes believable only when it is filmed in authentic interiors, while credibility is also one of the main factors of the soft power.

### Palace of Versailles: cinema reflects history

The Palace of Versailles boasts one of the most impressive filmography of any royal residence in Europe, with over 200 films. According to the official website of Versailles, the first film in the palace was filmed as early as 1896: "Fontaines de Versailles" (Versailles, 2021, 1). We are talking about a film shot by Gaumont, which pictures the Bassin de Latone fountain. It's more of a sketch than a movie, testing new technology in the gardens of the palace. The next important milestone in the cinematic life of Versailles comes in 1913, when the interiors of the palace were filmed in the film *Vues cinématographiques* (Versailles, 2021, 3). In this case, we are talking more about a documentary than a feature film.

The genuine history of cinematography at the Palace of Versailles begins with the 1923 film *L'enfant-roi* by Jean Krimm (Versailles, 2021, 4). The film tells us about the dramatic events associated with the French Revolution and the capture of the young Dauphin of France in the Temple (de Bourmont-Coucy, 1953, 13). Director decided to shoot those full of tragic events on the Queen's Stairs and in the courtyard of the palace. These recognizable interiors enhanced the dramatic effect of the exalted acting manner that was demanded in the silent films of the 1920s.

The cinematography of the 1930s was rich in historical films and even led to a new wave of tourism to Europe. Hollywood became the epicentre of historical cinema dramas. *Romeo and Juliet* premiered in 1936, starring Norma Shearer and Leslie Howard, caused a flow of tourists in Verona. Almost 90 years after the premiere, the film is sustaining a completely made-up story of Juliet's house (D'Anniballe, 2010, 92) and especially the never-existed balcony (Marini, 2003) as centre of Verona's soft power.

In the history of cinema, there are two wildly successful films associated with Versailles and both are about Marie-Antoinette. The first of these was filmed in 1938 in Hollywood, there also starred MGM superstar Norma Shearer. Of course, the film was filmed entirely in the sets, and not in the original interiors of Versailles. However, the great designer Adrian Adolph Greenburg, also known as just Adrian, approached the process of creating costumes very responsibly, going to study the original dresses and portraits of Marie-Antoinette in Versailles and Schönbrunn. More than 2,500 costumes featured in the film were inspired by the original 18<sup>th</sup> century embroideries. At the same time, Adrian adapted Marie-Antoinette's dresses to 1930s fashion in

order to fully show Norma Shearer's beauty to the audience (Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1987, 5). For creating 98 sets, the art department documented 11,000 photographs sent from Versailles, collected 2,500 books and visual elements and bought rooms full of 18<sup>th</sup> century furniture (Berry, 2002, 77). This approach cost MGM a lot of money, but the film became truly iconic, marking the beginning of the creation of the world-famous mythologized image of the Queen of France Marie-Antoinette. Of course, that image had little in common with the genuine historical figure, just like the interiors of the Palace of Versailles, created by MGM artists. However, it was the Austrian Marie-Antoinette who became the hallmark of France in popular culture, eclipsing Louis XIV himself. Marie-Antoinette has become almost synonymous with Versailles thanks to the cinematic myth. Such a strong associative array is an excellent example of the consolidation of the soft power of the city around the royal residence as its centre.

In the next decade, French filmmakers also decided to resort to the theme of the reign of Marie-Antoinette and her life in Versailles. In 1946, the film *L'affaire du collier de la reine*, directed by Marcel L'Herbier, was released. Although there is a clear visual homage to the 1938 film, the scenes in the palace were filmed in the original interiors of Versailles and Trianon. The film became the classic of French cinema.

An important milestone for the image of Versailles in cinema was the film *Si Versailles m'était conté* directed by Sacha Guitry. First of all, this film highlights an innovative approach: Versailles becomes the main character, against which the characters of Louis XIV, Louis XV and Louis XVI are only allowed to develop, with their families, favourites, intrigues and fate that haunts the inhabitants of the palace. The stunning visuals reveal a new side of Versailles to the viewer: a golden cage from which it is impossible to get out alive. Each of the inhabitants of the palace is unhappy in its own way, but this is compensated by the surrounding luxury. The rich colours inherent in the films of the 1950s due to the specifics of colour grading only further emphasize the contrast between the grandeur of the palace and the people who inhabit it, even if they are members of one of the greatest dynasties of Europe.

After the *Si Versailles m'était conté*, the palace again becomes just a backdrop for events in various films, and the paradigm of the image of the palace shifts towards an attractive and

adventurous, dangerous place where no one can be trusted.

In 1965, appeared the film *Angélique et le Roy*, directed by Bernard Borderie, just one of many movies about Angélique. The adventurous film about the Marquis of the Angels and her romance with Louis XIV clearly illustrates that Versailles is the centre of attraction for the nobility from all over Europe due to its luxury, created by the best artists of France. However, in the film, Versailles appears at the same time as a place full of danger and treachery.

In 1988, two masterpieces of world cinematography were filmed in Versailles, based on the Choderlos de Laclos novel. In both *Vatel* directed by Milos Forman and *Dangerous liaisons* directed by Stephen Frears interiors play an important role, emphasizing the pretentious naivety of the gallant age, which is not at all as simple as it seems. The interiors of Versailles make a special impression in the film *Dangerous liaisons*, where the outfits of the main character Marquise de Merteuil, played by Glenn Close, exactly repeat the outfits of the Marquise de Pompadour from the paintings by Francois Boucher, some of which are also kept in Versailles. This subtle parallel between the main intriguer of France of the Louis XV era and the fictional marquise is only emphasized by the impeccability of the original decoration of the chambers of the Palace of Versailles, designed in the rococo style. The interiors of the palace help to create the illusion of an easy existence in luxury, hiding the soul-corroding boredom of the inhabitants of the nobility palaces.

Versailles again plays the role of a luxurious backdrop in the film *Marie-Antoinette* directed by Sofia Coppola. Compared to the 1938 film, this film is visually more believable due to the use of original interiors. At the same time, the sad story of the queen itself has again shifted towards a love triangle to please the viewer. For the younger generation, it was this film that became an iconic one and removed the film with Norma Shearer from the pedestal. Kirsten Dunst has forever become the personification of Marie-Antoinette, bored and rebellious in Versailles, trying on countless shoes and dresses, taking a break to eat cakes. Despite the stereotypical depiction of the Queen, the Palace of Versailles was given proper reverence in the film, becoming the epicentre of events.

The series *Versailles* completes the analysis of the palace filmography. The first season, directed by Jalil Lespert and Christoph Schrewe, was filmed in 2014 and the final third season was

filmed in 2017. In the series, Versailles appears as the main idea of demonstrating royal power. Through the construction of the palace, the young Louis XIV proves to himself and to everyone around him that he is the state himself, and the palace is the personification of his will to rule. Almost all the actions in the series develop in the palace interiors. The culmination is the opening of the Hall of Mirrors as a symbol of the apogee of absolute power. The palace again becomes the central character, and not the backdrop for the narrative, proving that the embodiment of the fantasy of the Baroque era is an act of consolidating soft power that can elevate the ruler to an unattainable height.

### **Catherine Palace: cinema reflects history**

Like the Versailles, the Catherine Palace has often appeared in films. However, no detailed statistics on the number of films shot in its interiors could be found. In particular, it is known that in the archives can be found the footage of the Catherine Palace in the issue of *Pathé's Weekly*, №46 from 1913 (IMDB, 2017) showing the military parade in Tsarskoye Selo. The parade was personally received by Emperor Nicholas II accompanied by Tsarevich Alexei. Just as in the case of the first films shot in Versailles, here we are talking more about a historical newsreel rather than a feature film.

The first genuine movie, which was shot in Tsarskoye Selo in 1938, was *Man with a Gun* directed by Sergei Yutkevich. The film has a pronounced revolutionary propaganda character and is dedicated to the events of the October Revolution of 1917. The palace has been given a secondary role as a lair for ideologically alien elements that cling to the remnants of the former greatness of the Russian Empire.

From the point of view of the period we are considering, the Catherine Palace and Tsarskoye Selo become the filming locations for movies about the empresses of Russia, who ruled in the 18th century, only in the 1990s, after the fall of the USSR. This phenomenon can be explained from an ideological point of view, as well as by the fact that most of the interiors of the Catherine Palace were destroyed during the Second World War (Morgan, Orlova, 2005, 74) and it was simply impossible to shoot there because of the lengthy restoration work that continues to this day (Platova, 2021, 36-43). But in the 1990s, along with the flourishing of interest in the Russian Imperial Family and the pre-revolutionary history

of Russia, the palace became a very popular filming location among filmmakers.

An important milestone among the historical films shot in Tsarskoye Selo is the series of films about gardes-marines. In particular, we are talking about the second film *Vivat, gardes-marines!* from the series, filmed in 1990 by director Svetlana Druzhinina. The film tells about the arrival of the poor Anhalt-Zerbst princess Sophia-Augusta-Frederika to the Russian Empire to marry the future Emperor Peter III. Young princess is struck by the wealth of the palace and court of Empress Elizabeth Petrovna: she understands that a bright future awaits her, but she finds herself involved in a number of complex political and love intrigues. The magnificent halls of the palace simultaneously emphasize the greatness of the country where the young princess arrived, and her loneliness in the new homeland, where she is easily lost against the experienced courtiers.

In the same 1990, another film was released, also dedicated to Catherine II: *The Royal Hunt* directed by Vitaly Melnikov. Here we already see Catherine, nicknamed the Great. And everything in the film is meant to convey her greatness: from the outfits to the interiors of the palace and the scope of her deeds. The Pugachev's Rebellion has already been suppressed, but a new adventurer has arisen before the Empress - Princess Tarakanova, posing as the daughter of Empress Elizabeth Petrovna and claiming the throne of the Russian Empire. While watching the film, it becomes quite obvious that the director was inspired by the great Visconti films shot in historical interiors. However, as in the case of the film *Vivat, gardes-marines!*, the luxury of palace interiors only emphasizes the economic state of the country and cinema industry after the collapse of the USSR. There can be easily observed the poverty and awkwardness of the costumes, contrasting with the splendour of palace interiors.

A completely different approach is demonstrated in Michael Anderson's two-part film *Young Catherine*, released in 1991. The film covers the periods from Catherine's youth to her accession to the throne. The scenes of the film, filmed in the Catherine Palace, turned out to be incredibly spectacular. The procession scene in the Great Hall of the Catherine Palace impresses the viewer with its scale and genuine luxury of the Russian Baroque. The double-height hall with 13 windows on each side, with an area of about 1000 square meters, occupies the entire width of the palace. Permeated with sunlight, playing on the gilding and mirrors, the hall is the personification of the artistic genius of Rastrelli. The architect

created the illusion of boundless space: the alternation of large windows with mirrors visually expands the boundaries of the gallery, the painting of the plafond, depicting a colonnade along the perimeter, over which figures soar, reveals the space in height (Snazina, 2010, 239-242). The plafond by the Venetian decorator Valeriani, consisting of three independent compositions, personifying the "Allegory of Russia", "Allegory of Peace" and "Allegory of Victory", only enhances the impression of the endless space of the hall (Roosevelt, 1994, 8-12). Against this background, Elizabeth Petrovna, dressed in brocade robe à la française, represents her newly born grandson Pavel Petrovich to the courtiers as the symbol of Russia's bright future. The financial possibilities of Hollywood made it possible to create very believable costumes that made the right impression in palace interiors. In the *Young Catherine*, the Catherine Palace plays an important role, being a reflection and even an allegory of the empire, great and alluring.

Surprisingly, the most successful Russian TV series about Catherine the Great, *Catherine*, premiered in 2014, was not filmed at all in the interiors of Tsarskoye Selo. This certainly affected the visual quality of the material, the series lacks credibility due to the apparent inconsistency of the interiors with the time and events described. In addition, the main poster of the series depicts Catherine in the palace, however, we see the extremely popular image of the Diana Gallery in the Palace of Venaria Reale in Turin. This type of Baroque has practically nothing to do with the intricate and over-decorated Elizabethan Baroque that reigned in the architecture and arts and crafts of Russia when the future Empress Catherine II arrived there. This once again proves how important it is to use original interiors to create a coherent and believable image of a historical character in a movie.

## Conclusions

Historical movies are an important part of the cinematography that can popularize history as a science by awakening curiosity in certain historical events and personalities. However, for such an awakening it is important that the cinema more or less accurately reflects historical facts and be believable. Of course, the dramaturgy of cinema requires certain concessions to historical truth for a more expressive visual range. That is why great palaces are relatively little associated with their creators, reflecting only the essence of



the ruler. In cinema, Versailles is associated with the story of Marie Antoinette, not Louis XIV, just as the Catherine Palace is associated with the story of Catherine II, not Elizabeth Petrovna.

From this point of view, the image of the palaces of the monarchs perfectly complements the portraits of the rulers, since the palace carries a symbolic meaning. This is not only a symbol of power, but also a reflection of the aesthetic tastes of the monarch, which tells a lot about her or his personality. The palace in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was the centre of the city's soft power, attracting a wide variety of individuals. The palace is teeming with courtiers, adventurers, conspirators and the lust for power. At the same time, the baroque palace is

the concentration of the best craftsmen of decorative and applied arts, artists, architects, musicians who create this amazing space, reflecting the greatness of the ruler. The palace is to some extent a magnetic entity, attracting only the best and most interesting to adorn itself. Cinematography very clearly reflects these processes of the soft power consolidation in the palace. In order to create a better and more believable visual range, outstanding interiors that really witnessed the events described, created by outstanding artists of their time, are needed to reflect the greatness of human thought and human power.

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## OUTLANDER. REWRITING AND FICTIONALIZING THE HISTORY OF SCOTS

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**Abstract:** *Diana Gabaldon is a historical fiction writer, whose novels have been adapted into the 2014 phenomenon, Outlander. This essay analyses both the books and TV series in terms of historical accuracy and sets up to understand the significance of historical fiction for a modern audience. In doing so, it is important to take into consideration the “Outlander effect” that this TV series has created and to research facts on how popular historical fiction pieces can impact the economy and tourism of a country.*

**Keywords:** *historical fiction, Outlander, Diana Gabaldon, period drama, Scotland.*

**Rezumat:** *Diana Gabaldon este o scriitoare de ficțiune istorică, ale cărei romane au fost adaptate în fenomenul din 2014, Outlander. Acest eseu analizează cărțile și serialul din punct de vedere al acurateții istorice și își propune să înțeleagă importanța ficțiunii istorice pentru un public modern. Pentru a face asta, este important să luăm în considerare „efectul Outlander” pe care acest serial l-a creat și să analizăm date reale prin care se arată impactul ficțiunii istorice populare asupra economiei și turismului unei țări.*

**Cuvinte cheie:** *ficțiune istorică, Călătoria, Diana Gabaldon, serial de epocă.*

### Objectivity and Subjectivity in Historical Writing. Revisiting British History

History has always been a reliable source of inspiration for writers and filmmakers alike. This literary subgenre has been especially popular among 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>-century writers, but lately, the trend of revisiting history for artistic purposes has been revived once more. With series like *Game of Thrones* or *The Witcher* that draw inspiration from past events, history has ignited interest even in those who are not passionate about it.

The creators behind these shows acknowledge and are well aware of the audience's interest in the past, specifically in that of the United Kingdom. There is an unlimited source of inspiration and a guaranteed source of storytelling for writers, directors, or producers. This subgenre of historical fiction has come to define not only those pieces that retell the past by adding some fictional elements to it but also those writings or films that are set in the past and that convey the atmosphere and fashion of a specific era. *Downton Abbey* is a proper example for demonstrating how productions set in the past and inspired by some true events fall under the umbrella of historical fiction writing due to the world presented in them.

A.S Byatt argues that the novel actually “took its roots in historical documents” and that is why it “has always had an intimate link with history” (Holton, 2006, 137). Just as painters often took sculptures as references when studying the human body, writers also relied on the past as a source of

inspiration and as a tool to make character introspections. Psychologically speaking, the novel has long moved away from the simple necessity to entertain – as its whole purpose was thought to be in the past, and it has reentered itself “as a vehicle of moral, social, historical, and philosophical instruction”. (Stevens, 2010, 3) Established writers like Shakespeare, Walter Scott (who was thought to have been the first to romanticize the history of Scotland), Lev Tolstoy, and Victor Hugo have all relied on historical accounts to retell their stories. History has proved to provide a complex world of moral, social, political, and philosophical ideas for both the writers and the readers, who could easily add or subtract from these stories to convey specific concepts.

By embellishing the atmosphere, language, and setting in general of a historical moment, the author differentiates themselves from the historian. The narrator throws light upon specific events by making the audience better understand the context.

“For these books certainly do succeed in evoking the soul of the period of which they treat. They’re creating the legendary and mythical atmosphere which scientific history neglects (...)” (Williams, 1922, 360).

This is one of the reasons why people might prefer to read or watch historical fiction stories, rather than non-fiction or documentaries. It also

allows the writer to fill in the gaps using their imagination where history lacks accuracy or where specific data is missing.

Unlike history, the historical piece of fiction comes not as an objective retelling of specific past events, but rather throws light on those events to demonstrate to the audience “the complexity and multifarious quality of the past” (Holton, 2006, 230). This whole approach of the narrative process implies specific objectivity or subjectivity of the events presented. For instance, going back to a source of a historical event to better understand it and its overall influence over a specific moment in time would automatically imply a subjective interpretation of that event, not only an account of the event as it was originally rendered. It is thus converted into a literary text, with two different interpreters: the historian and the common reader.

That is why there are so many different opinions on some of the world’s most prolific figures in history. Anne Boleyn for example is depicted many times as either a victim or a schemer; Thomas Cromwell is made into either a hero or a manipulative villain, all depending on the intention of the writer/ filmmaker, their own subjective stance, and their understanding of specific records of the past. Hilary Mantel has certainly done extensive research before writing *Wolf Hall*, but her depiction of Thomas Cromwell as a sympathetic wise character has still been heavily criticized. History itself is many times inconclusive because large numbers of these records are being altered or not trustworthy.

“Every time the author writes, “He thought that . . .” or “She felt that . . .”, she’s making it up. We never know what people thought or felt, unless they kept frank and full journals. And the world is full of people who lie to their own diaries” (Mantel, 2009).

The idea that history should be objective is idealistic when it is most of the time moulded by things such as nationalistic pride, propaganda, or simply historical context. When referring to British history, for example, one cannot overlook the many centuries of conflict between the English and the Scottish, with each of them vilifying the other as they saw fit or convenient. Colonization is another example where objectivity is lacking and where history is shaped depending on which document one is reading and at what point in time. This leads to the general questioning of history’s accuracy and ability to differentiate between fact and fiction based on the

interpreter’s views, feelings, and socio-cultural background.

“The most scrupulous historian is an unreliable narrator; he brings to the enterprise the biases of his training and the vagaries of his personal temperament, and he is often obliged, in order to make his name, to murder his forefathers by coming up with a different take on events from the one that held sway when he himself learned the discipline; he must make the old new, because his department’s academic standing depends on it” (Mantel, 2009).

### **Historical Accuracy and Inaccuracy in Diana Gabaldon’s *Outlander***

Whether historical fiction writing should be accurate or not has been discussed many times before. Some critics believe that this subgenre is responsible for teaching the younger generation about the past and that it should be done truthfully, especially since many of these young people turn to historical dramas or historical fiction to understand the past. Many of them do not do further research on the historical accuracy of the events presented and take both the facts and the fiction as truth. Others agree that historical fiction is fiction after all and that the role of a fiction writer should be separated from that of a historian or a documentarian. The public should be aware that although rooted in real events, historical fiction is fiction after all and should make a distinction between fiction and fact.

“One way of looking at the hybrid nature of the genre is to see it as a mixture, of verifiable history, and of fiction- which need be true only to the reader’s experience of life; but all other realistic fiction claims to be true at least to the social history of the present or the recent past” (McEwan, 1987, 1).

The audience is most of the time interested in specific events, historical characters, or the atmosphere of a period in the past and that is why they turn to fiction rather than reality. The writer comes as gap filler and uses this curiosity to stir the audience’s interest in their own piece of writing (Matthews, 21). This allows for both real events and fictional ones to play out and keep the audience both documented and entertained while leaving room for further research if interested.

*Outlander* is one of the longest and most popular current historical fiction series out there. Although Diana Gabaldon has started writing the first book in the late 1980s, the series is still not finished, with the ninth novel being released on November 23, 2021, and a tenth one being currently planned out. The series has become so successful because of its 2014 Starz TV series adaptation, created by Ronald D. Moore that is still ongoing. The TV series has been received with an appraisal by both the public and the critics, being highly appreciated for its impeccable choice of costumes, soundtrack, casting, and the decision to tell the story from a female perspective. Diana Gabaldon's historical fiction novels successfully reimagine the history of Scotland for contemporary audiences through knowing when to stay true to fact and when to add fiction and by letting the readers know when certain events have been altered. The writer has stated several times that her novels are heavily researched and that they are as historically accurate as possible given one's ability to stay accurate when history itself is not always precise:

"The history/historical detail in the books is as accurate as history is—i.e., what people wrote down wasn't always either complete or accurate, but they did write it down. (...) When I have to deviate from the historical record—rare, but it happens—or find that I've made a mistake or overlooked something, I'll note that. The books have Author's Notes at the back, and there are two *Outlandish Companion* books that provide additional material and commentary, as well" (Donvito, 2022).

The fantasy element of it all – time traveling through the stones - is introduced in such a way that it does not disturb the two historical narratives happening at once: the events taking place after the Second World War and the ones around 1743 Scotland – with the last season shifting towards the American Revolution. The writer has chosen the 1940s as Claire's starting point specifically for making time travelling to the 18<sup>th</sup>-century more believable (Gabaldon, 1999). The heroine's ability to time travel through the stones actually comes as a rescue in understanding and rewriting the history of Scots because of her predefined knowledge of the history of the British people and her ability to filter these events from a modernist point of view. She is also a nurse who has experience with wars, so she fits well within Scotland's Jacobite rising era.

When asked how she made this time-traveling plot believable, the author replied that:

"History is all the truth that's written down. If you're good with all the little details of everyday life, really diligent with the historical record, people will follow you over a cliff. So the time travel is incidental" (Morton, 2022).

As the author has many times stated in her interviews, the public is not always looking for perfect historical accuracy when watching or reading historical fiction. They are rather interested in the overall atmosphere conveyed through specific details, often "*looking for a transporting or immersive experience*." (Donvito, 2022) Criticizing a historical fiction piece only for its accuracy or inaccuracy of presenting real historical events should not be the main priority of any critic or researcher. It should be taken into consideration mainly for observing how the plot and timeline have been constructed, how well the fictional and non-fictional parts work together, and why a narrative piece falls under this subgenre. This allows for the quality of the writing to be analyzed, its construction of plot and characters rather than its historical accuracy.

However, it was very important for both Diana Gabaldon and the creators of the TV series to stay as close as possible to the real events to make a believable Fantasy story. Dr. Tony Pollard, a professor from the University of Glasgow worked as a historical advisor on the sets of the show.

"I read all of the scripts at an early stage and provide comments on issues related to the accuracy, sometimes offering alternative scenarios if there's a more authentic way of illustrating something" (BHT Staff, 2022).

Being a historical fiction writer himself, Dr. Pollard was the right choice for helping mend the relationship between fact and fiction when it came to adapting the story for the screen.

The books and the show follow the history of 18<sup>th</sup> century Scotland very closely for a few seasons, with characters based on real historical figures such as Charles Stuart, King Louise XV, and even the famous Geillis Duncan, Claire's fellow time travel friend making an appearance. Some of these characters follow a very accurate historical timeline, while others – such as Geillis Duncan or Jamie Fraser, being loosely based on other personalities of the time and events that did not necessarily take place that way or in those

specific years. Geillis, for example, was based on a teenager who was tried as a witch during Scotland's witch trial. (Boyle, 2021) This is one of the historical permitted (and accepted by the public) inaccuracies in Gabaldon's books, given the fact that witches were tried in 1722 in Scotland, but her witch trial takes place 20 years later.

Another fictional element is the introduction of Craigh Na Dun, the place where Claire travels through the stone circle. Even though the place does not exist in real life, it was inspired by Scotland's Clava Cairns, "*a well-preserved Bronze Age cemetery near Inverness in the Scottish Highlands*" (Katie & Catherine, 2017). Intertwining fact and fiction is of utmost importance for any historical fiction piece and it is what ultimately makes the difference between historical fiction and documentary, especially in a historical fiction piece that also introduced fantasy at its core.

The beauty of *Outlander* also lies in its ability to juggle these two historical timelines. Claire is a modern woman with a modern point of view, trapped in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in a world dominated mainly by the male figure. The placing of a feminist character from the future in the past helps with understanding the reality of 18<sup>th</sup> century Scotland and it brings it closer to the contemporary viewer who might have a hard time relating to the views of the characters and events from the past. Many of the costumes especially from season two were not accurate to that period's fashion specifically because Claire comes from a different world.

"It's not supposed to be. We want to imagine that Claire goes into a dress salon in Paris in the 18th century and says, 'Take this off! Move this! Why don't we put the flowers down here like this?' She is a modern woman" (Donvito, 2022).

Claire also impacts a lot the decisions and ways of thinking of other characters by modernizing their points of view through her outspoken ways. Jamie comes to see things very "Avant la Lettre" for an 18<sup>th</sup>-century Scottish man, accepting Claire's time travel story, treating her as an equal, and fighting for the same values as hers.

The Battle of Culloden is an important historical moment both for the history of Scotland and for the TV series plot. Claire, who already knows what is to come tries to help Jamie and the

Jacobites to change the future and win the battle, but they ultimately fail.

"Dr. Tony Pollard, the historical advisor on the TV show, is careful to point out that the Jacobite Wars were far more complicated in real life, with civil conflicts and more nuanced religious differences than those presented in the show" (*The History Press*).

Many of these Jacobites were not Catholic as the show presented them for artistic reasons and many of these battles were between the Scotts rather than between the Englishmen and the Scotts. Although simplified and slightly romanticized in the TV series - where it seems like due to a nationalistic feeling most Scottish men were united in this rising unlike, in reality, the Battle of Culloden represents a moment of utmost importance for the Scottish nation. Since the story is told from Claire's point of view, an Englishwoman – often called a "Sassenach" because of it, who fights for the Scottish, it is only natural to assume a negative stance against the Englishmen, who are often portrayed as persecutors throughout both the novel and the TV series.

The audience also gets to meet Bonnie Prince Charlie, portrayed as a very colourful character in the series. Chairman Michael Nevin took issues with the portrayal of the Prince in the series, stating that "*these portrayals are a travesty of the man he must have been*" (Newsroom, 2019). His main problem was the effeminate way in which Prince Charles Stuart is often unfairly depicted.

"The popular picture of the Prince as an effeminate weakling is a hangover from eighteenth century Hanoverian propaganda. There is no way that such a man could have mobilised the support he did, or completed the gruelling odyssey from the Highlands to Derby and back" (Newsroom, 2019).

But once again, when history itself fails to be objective, fiction writers have no choice but to make up for the loss of accurate facts. Bonnie Prince Charlie remains, nonetheless, a very important figure for both the novel and the TV series.

Another aspect related to the Culloden Battle was finding a solution for the male protagonist to survive. Thus, Diana Gabaldon drew inspiration from a real-life Jacobite soldier who survived the Battle of Culloden. She helped Jamie escape the

same way the 19 wounded Jacobites did after the war when they chose to hide in a farmhouse.

“They were all executed after two days under the command of the Red Coat’s, except for one man, of course. This man was “a Fraser of the Master of Lovat’s regiment, who survived the slaughter” (Avina, 2019).

Perhaps one of the biggest inaccuracies that many people have complained about was the colours of Jamie’s tartans. He is supposed to be a part of the Clan Fraser of Lovat, a clan that existed in real life. Their tartan colours were bright red, blue, and green in real life, while in the show they were changed to grey and blue. When researching the real-life Scottish clan or when visiting the *Outlander* filming locations in Scotland, many people were confused to find the real colours of the kilts. The costume designer behind the show mentioned that:

“historically, fabrics are created from the environment people live in. So what we did was research all the plant life in the area of our story and basically came up with: What colours would we be able to produce living where they lived?” (Donvito, 2022).

Making these types of artistic choices when it comes to respecting the real history behind a fictional piece ought to be rooted in reality.

### **The *Outlander* Effect and the Importance of Historical Fiction for Rediscovering the Past**

The importance of writing historical fiction for a contemporary audience also brings in the problem of why people enjoy reading and watching historical fiction novels/ films/ TV series in the first place. Diana Gabaldon, in her *Outlandish Companion*, tried to answer this question by drawing comparisons between the things she wrote about in her books and what people could be drawn to specifically when it comes to the *Outlander* world. While some people would enjoy history in general and would be interested in such a story because of its historical element, others would love to experience directly the lives of the characters, while being entertained:

“Many like the sense of connection, of rediscovering their own heritage. A good many enjoy the curious details: the botanical medicine, the medical procedures, the how

and why of daily life in another time. But by far the most common element that people enjoy in the books is simply the characters—readers care for these people, are interested in them, and want to know more about them” (Gabaldon, 1999, 34).

This is important especially since Gabaldon also uses her texts to draw attention to problems that have persisted for dozens or hundreds of years like rape, homosexuality, gender equality, or domestic violence. The series often depicts R-rated explicit scenes portraying these problems with the intent to throw light on what it meant to be an 18<sup>th</sup>-century woman in Scotland or England and although the show romanticizes the idea of being Scottish, it never depicts falsely the condition of women (or even men because Jamie is also raped in one scene where he is in jail) in that era. Ultimately, all these problems lead to the positive development of the characters and they allow the audience to draw their own moral conclusions regarding the possibilities of forward-thinking in two different historical eras. *Outlander* enables the observation of both lower and high-society classes and of two different points in time very far from one another. The public is drawn in even more because the series takes as central proud Scottish male character that often appears to mingle in the political events of kings and queens, but that comes from a very different background. Having Claire beside him, a woman who already knows most things that are to come, Jamie is most often found not trying to change the future, but prepare for it. This makes for an interesting storyline from the audience’s point of view.

This is opposed to non-fiction texts like biographies and documentaries that usually present historical situations in a detached and objective way, without adding dialogue or narration. People read historical fiction because they can experience the feeling of living in a specific era, wearing specific costumes, and being witnesses to conversations that no one knows if they actually took place or not. It seems like people’s need to take a subjective stance when it comes to historical events fuels their interest in those events. Most people do not empathize with Henry the 8<sup>th</sup>, but they do want to sympathize with Catherine de Aragon or with Anne Boleyn by knowing more about their personal sides of the story and by reimagining their thoughts or feelings. While Thomas Cromwell is presented as a villain in *The Tudors* TV series, he is seen as a good and wise man in Hilary Mantel’s *Wolf Hall*.

All these controversial personalities and events that take place in the past not known by the audience represent a real point of interest for the public. They stir the curiosity of finding more about the past and the need to care for these characters as Gabaldon has stated.

Since *Outlander* the TV series has first appeared it has shifted the interest of a large number of viewers from all around the world towards Scottish history. A professor at the University of Glasgow mentioned in a Scotsman article that “*the globally successful Outlander series has triggered more interest in Scotland and its history than any other cultural artefact in recent years*” (Campsie, 2019). The university planned to do an *Outlander* academic conference in 2020 which was postponed due to the pandemic, but which will be held at another date. The conference will revolve around Scottish culture and customs, history, politics, and other elements present in the show.

In 2013 an official gathering was created called the Outlandish Vancouver, where fans of the book and the show could meet to talk about it. The convention grew larger along the years and began to bring in actors from the TV series and the writer herself as guests and people could actually meet them and ask questions. As their website states, people became so interested in the show that “*in 2016, Outlandish Vancouver hosted Adhamh O Broin to meet with fans and to teach a Gaelic seminar*” (Outlandish Vancouver). This only proves the positive influence this subgenre has on the contemporary audience and its importance for rediscovering the past.

Jenifer Johnston, a fan of the show who was present at the 2017 convention, wrote an article in The National where she described her experience. “*It’s noisy – English, French, Dutch, Australian and American voices all chatting. And women, it’s only women, maybe 300 of them*” (Johnston, The National). She talks about how devoted the audience actually is and how the story has started a phenomenon called “The *Outlander* Effect” everywhere on Social Media and on the Internet which mainly refers to all the positive effects the TV series has had on Scotland’s tourism industry: “According to numbers from VisitScotland, *Outlander* has increased tourism by an average of 67 percent at the sites mentioned in the books or used in filming” (Mailman, 2020).

Fans all over the world have developed a new interest in Scotland’s history and culture. There have been created visiting tours specifically designed for seeing the castles and locations from the film, where different merchandise can also be

purchased and where decorations from the original scenes have been added. Scotland has become very important for the TV series’ fans especially because almost the entire series was filmed in different Scottish locations.

“Astonishingly, all the locations for *Outlander*, excepting South Africa, were filmed in Scotland. The VisitScotland website features 42 shooting sites up through Season 4, and after Season 5 ends, its locations will be added, too” (Mailman, 2020).

Diana Gabaldon has actually been awarded the Thistle Award for bringing in so many people to the Highlands and for helping the tourism industry through her books before she had even been to Scotland (Mailman, 2020).

Some of the most visited locations include Inverness, the Culloden Battlefield, the Covenanter Hotel – where Claire and Frank stay when they first arrive in Scotland, the Falkland Palace, or Doune Castle. It was surprising for the Scottish people who worked at these spots to see the increase in tourists due to the show. The Culloden Battlefield, for example, used to be filled mostly with visitors passionate about history, while now:

“twice as many people were asking where the Fraser stone is. You have to think, either it’s a very fertile clan and there are twice as many Frasers as there were last year, or something else has happened. Diana [Gabaldon] was that something else” (Mailman, 2020).

The Covenanter Hotel in Falkland, Fife has been redecorated to follow an *Outlander* theme and it has introduced the possibility to eat there even if you do not stay the night, so *Outlander* fans can experience the TV show feels. Some filming locations were too old to be opened to visitors or were not safe enough for the public, but the *Outlander* effect helped fund many of these places’ restoration plans with many fans raising funds themselves for these locations to be repaired. One such location is Preston Mill, located in East Linton near Edinburgh, a place where many significant scenes were filmed. The public has made some generous donations for the mill to be restored, raising £12,000. The historical importance of the mill surpasses that of its use as a filming location for the TV series, but it was saved because of it nonetheless proving the



importance of rediscovering the past through fiction.

*Outlander* is not the only case when a fictional piece has become a phenomenon or when it has raised the public's interest in history. Younger generations are turning more and more often to books, films, and TV series that tackle the past in a more interesting way than documentaries do. *The Crown*, for example, is one of the most recent examples of historical fiction that has drawn the attention of generations of all ages towards the history of England and its royal family. This renewed interest in history could also come from finding out which elements are true and which are fictional from a story, with the audience being much more willing to research their own historical

facts and the true stories behind the shows, films, or books. The same goes for *Outlander*, where fans become interested in the real history of Scotland, in drawing comparisons between places from the filming locations and the real historical sites, between the historical figures in the TV series and the real ones, and in learning more about the customs of the country. This historical fiction subgenre is indisputably important for both creators and consumers, and it has proven to be significant not only for those passionate about history, but also for creating the passion *per se*. This leads to the rediscovery of specific customs, countries and cultures that in turn help with the economy of those countries through the tourism business.

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# FROM WOMAN TO ALLEGORY: QUEEN MARIE'S REPRESENTATIONS IN FILMS

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**Abstract:** *In a general overview of Romanian history, we can note that there are not so many female figures that survived the test of history. This certainly has to do with the long-standing male view of history. Of the few, Queen Marie stands out. She is the most famous, admired and almost revered during the Great War. For this reason, truth and legend soon merged in the idealized figure of the Queen. She becomes a symbol of the country's devotion and a real icon for Romanian women. The present approach focuses on how the figure of the Queen appears in documentary and art films. We aim at both a quantitative and a qualitative analysis. We will address the question of how her image and deeds are presented to the general public, and, of course, in what context and with what aim. We will also try to look at the matter from a gendered perspective, as far as the sources allow, in order to understand how the perception of the Queen was influenced by a gendered background.*

**Keywords:** *Queen Marie, propaganda, films, gender stereotypes, World War I.*

**Rezumat:** *În istoriografia română nu există prea multe personaje feminine care să fi supraviețuit testului istoriei. Atare fapt se poate explica și prin perspectiva masculină, androcentrată, de studiere a trecutului. Dar, dintre cele câteva personalități feminine păstrate în memoria colectivă, regina Maria iese în evidență. Ea este cea mai cunoscută, admirată și aproape venerată personalitatea mai ales în anii Marelui Război. Din acest motiv, adevărul și legenda reginei Maria au fuzionat curând generând o figură aproape idealizată a reginei. Ea devine simbolul devotamentului față de țară și cauza națională, o veritabilă icoană, model de urmat pentru românce. Prezentul studiu se concentrează pe analiza modului în care personajul reginei apare în filmele documentare și artistice. Ne-am propus atât o analiză cantitativă, cât și calitativă a producțiilor cinematografice din perioada 1917-2019 cu scopul de a urmări modul în care imaginea și faptele ei au fost prezentate publicului larg și, desigur, în ce context și cu ce scop. Vom încerca, de asemenea, să abordăm problema și dintr-o perspectivă de gen în sensul aprecierii măsurii în care reprezentarea reginei a fost influențată de raporturile de gen ale perioadei dar și de viziunea pe care regina a avut-o vizavi de acest aspect.*

*Studiul urmărește să demonstreze faptul că regina, prin utilizarea mijloacelor media avute la dispoziție dar și prin scrierile sale a modelat profund ceea ce va deveni mitul reginei, o imagine alegorică, nu lipsită însă de onestitate. De asemenea, demonstrăm și faptul că filmele atât cele documentare cât și cele istorice au folosit în bună măsură această imagine „standardizată” a reginei, o preluare cu foarte puține adaosuri sau tentă de originalitate.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *Regina Maria, propaganda, filme, stereotipuri de gen, Primul Război Mondial.*

In 1927 Olga Sturdza gave the city of Iași the sculpture “The Union.” The monument’s main figure was a woman representing the allegory of Great Romania. She was hugging her three daughters. These were also allegories, of the three united provinces: Bessarabia, Bucovina and Transylvania. Romania’s features were actually those of Marie, the Queen of Romania! (Figure 1). This is one of the monuments dedicated to the Queen during the interwar period. They were tributes to the Queen’s restless efforts during the World War I years, as well, as for her role in achieving the international recognition of the Great Union. These public monuments are just

one medium proving that a myth, that of the Queen of all Romanians, was emerging.

That there is a “fascination” for Queen Marie the journals of the time also prove. They are rich in articles dedicated to the Queen. As well, there were several societies having the Queen as their spiritual patron. Admiration for the Queen is also evident in the memoirs written by her contemporaries.

In fact, the Queen is one of the few women personalities who stepped into the pantheon of the Romanian national heroes. She gained this place due to her deeds. And, for a limited period, the Queen was right at the top of the totem. Moreover, Queen Marie stands out when

compared with other women from this mythology. Compare the Queen with Elena Cuza, the wife of Alexandru Ioan Cuza; Oltea, Stephen the Great's mother or Teodora, the wife of Michael the Brave (Boia, 2011, 335). As I said before, these historical figures are all included in the national mythology, but they have a rather marginal position. They are there in correlation with their husbands' or sons' actions. They do not stand out for independent decisions. Moreover, they do not elude the gender conventions and limits of the time: they are protective, kind, and composed. Due to these features, they make sure that their partners or children act as such as well. When compared to them, Queen Marie does not appear as an ordinary woman, wife, and mother. She looks like a character who surpasses all the conveniences of the time. She crossed over the limits imposed on her due to her status as the Queen of a country but also as a woman.

The Queen's myth emerged in parallel with that of Ecaterina Teodoroiu. It is interesting how the same historical context gave us two female personalities. In both cases, the process of mythologization began during their lifetime. Their contemporaries saw them as genuine symbols of effort, sacrifice, and fidelity to the national cause. Thus, their actual characters started to gain mythical value during their own lives.

In fact, there is nothing unusual in the logic of the mythologization process. We do not necessarily have to speak of an "invention" of the character, because myths are not usually "undeserved". They can isolate and amplify real facts or invest them with a surplus of significance (Boia, 2011, 337). Moreover, myths are not static.

It is also worth mentioning that myths are not rigid or fixed in features, nor do they act with the same force over time. The myths of Queen Marie and Ecaterina Teodoroiu present convincing arguments. For example, Ecaterina's grew during the communist period, helped also by her presence in the history textbooks. But that of the Queen underwent a process of iconoclasm, evidenced in the Queen's disappearance from the collective memory (Manual, 1986). This happened through the destruction or interventions on public monuments, as well, as her absolute absence from the history textbooks (Ciula, 2021).

The Queen's transformation from woman, mother, and Queen to an allegorical character is observed not only in written culture or art. It is present in Romanian and foreign cinematographic productions, as well.

Thus, the present study integrates the historiographic approaches that support the value and importance of using the historical perspective

of analysis of cinematographic productions (Burke, 2001; Grancea, 2006; Șendrea, 2020). In fact, the potential of film as a historical source, like photography, has long been realized. The problem is how to use this type of historical source. It is necessary to find a sort of "textual," historical criticism, in order to take into account the specific features of this means of communication (Burke, 2001, 155). Based on these sources, we have set several research goals. To see the frequency and perspectives in which the Queen appears in Romanian documentaries and historical films. To appreciate the extent to which the mythical figure of the Queen inspired the film producers, we focused on the films' contribution to the perpetuation of a stereotyped image of Queen Marie. We were also concerned with the correspondence between the real and the imaginary. That means the extent to which the movie character of the Queen was actually inspired by her writings and deeds. I argue that Queen Marie has made the most of the mass media promotion of the time. She was attentive and wilfully pursued a genuine political image, using skilfully controlled propaganda. It played a major role in shaping her mythical image. I claim that the Queen built, or at least contributed, to the emergence of her own myth! She knew how propaganda worked! But we do not refer to propaganda in a negative sense: it did not seek to be manipulative but was rather a necessary tool. She used it to encourage, gain support, and persuade her husband, the Romanian politicians, and people, to do everything they could to achieve the country's goals.

There is also a gender dimension to this approach. We searched in the documents and historical films to see whether they reflect the specificity of the gender relations of the period, as we know for sure that the Queen manifested her frustration about this.

Our approach is both qualitative and quantitative. We were interested in both the number and the type of films dedicated to the Queen, or ones in which the character of the Queen appeared. Thus, our analysis included: documentary and fiction movies, historical films, dramas, etc., depending on how the producers presented them. An important aspect of film analysis, from a historical perspective, is to bear in mind that they actually present a vision of the producers. "Film makers have their own view of the events" (Burke, 2001, 156). After all, it is an act of creation that generates a *forma mentis*. It is a similar process to what an exhibition does to the items in its collection. A museum can alter their original meaning, and so can movies to real events

or personalities. It is precisely due to the power of the image that the film becomes an indispensable source for such a subject. The film is the most popular means of satisfying the need for the imaginary. It can locate even unlikely events in a real and believable setting (Grancea, 2006, 687). Caution is required because cinematic memory is the most manipulative of all forms of memory retention (Şendrea, 2020).

From a chronological perspective, the analysis evaluated the films from the interwar period to the recent past. We based the analysis on several criteria. The historical context was one of these. We also looked for possible links between these films and the commemorations of certain historical events. I argue that this can explain or cause a revival or recoil of interest in the Queen's personality. In addition, we looked at the possible connections between documentary and artistic films.

An important component of the analysis was the hypostasis in which the character of the Queen appears in the movies. It could be either salient or be secondary; and they might or might not be feature films. The analysis included all the films inspired by World War I; any film omitted is only accidental with regard to the selection of films we made.

We completed the list of cinematographic material with "secondary" historical sources. We focused on two other main sources: on the one hand, there are the Queen's writings. *Însemnări zilnice*; *Jurnal de război* and *Povestea vieții mele*; and on the other, there are such contemporary sources as memoirs, press articles postcards, public speeches, photographs, etc. We used the first type as a "comparative tool." We wished to see the Queen's perspective at certain moments and the choice and selections made by the film producers and screenwriters. The second type of source was important to assess the general public's fascination with the Queen. Also, they were important to appreciate the mythical potential of the Queen.

### **The Myth of Queen Marie: Mother of the Wounded, Empress of All Romanians, Queen of Romania**

By the end of the nineteenth century, the pantheon of national heroes was largely established (Mihalache, 2020, 263), and the list will be "updated" for the twentieth century. It will mostly include political and military personalities. One should not forget that there were two world wars and lots of heroes! What will change compared to previous periods will be the public

dissemination of these heroes. The fact is mainly due to the new means of broadcasting – photography, cinema, radio, and television. They changed people's daily habits. Due to these media, the cult of heroes became more present than ever in the most modest locations of the country. But the mission stayed the same: to personify commendable ideals (Mihalache, 2020, 263). Queen Marie may also be included in this category. She will be among the heroes – leaders – although she has never held any political office. Typologically speaking, she could also be included in the category of providential rulers, thus, with a huge potential for becoming a mythological figure. This type of hero, as defined by historian Sorin Mitu, is the expression of a huge hope, of a psychological need at the level of the social imaginary that develops a public cult (Mitu, 2020, 308). And the Queen expressed all these and even more. For instance, after the War ended and the Paris Conference started, Queen Marie turned into a saviour hero, mainly because of her role in convincing the leaders to accept Romania's territorial gains. She became a hero as she succeeded where no men did; and the gender perspective of the time also helped amplify her legendary aura. She succeeded in what had been only a men's domain: politics and diplomacy.

The myth of the Queen is part of the dynastic myth. It became one of the historians' "favourite" subjects. Thus, for the present study, we make only some general remarks about it. They are necessary to understand the existing film productions, testifying to the "fascination of the Queen." By this expression, we understand people's and scholars' interest in her. The Queen was and still is a subject of scientific research, but also a didactic and fictional one. It is a great endeavour to attempt to centralize all the texts that address the subject. They take different forms: scientific materials, books, and articles; and then there are editorial projects, for instance, the re-editing of the Queen's writings (including those for children). This is a direct outcome of the celebration of the centenary of the Great Union. Also, the Queen reappears in history textbooks, not to mention as a character in historical children's fiction (Antonescu, 2019).

These are evidence of the Queen's inclusion in Romanian historical mythology, and as we said, she is among the few female characters included in the historical record of Romania. These publications appeared after 1990, at first sporadically, only reaching their peak in the centennial years around 2018. Also, the scientific works dedicated to her prove the Queen's "fascination." This study can also fall into this

category. The words of Ion Bulei best express the need of historians to recover her historical destiny. It is a need motivated by the same mythologized dimensions of the Queen: "It is hard to write about such a subject... It is a subject that has been written about a lot. And most of all, the Queen herself did... if we try to do it, it's for the passion that Queen Marie stirs in us. We liked Marie. It continues to fascinate us, Romanians. We are truly delighted by the metamorphosis of this princess. Half English, half Russian, she turned into a Queen more Romanian than the Romanians. She loved them and their country to the point of being one with them and with it" (Bulei, 2019, 7).

Ion Bulei, however, only repeats the opinion of the majority of Queen Marie's contemporaries. What gives Queen Marie a special place in the gallery of great personalities is her behaviour during the war years. This is how she gained the admiration of everyone. And the admiration turned into a cult. All admired her, whatever their social class or gender. Intellectuals and peasants, men and women, were fascinated by the Queen. See, for example, the words of such intellectuals as Constantin Argentoianu or I. G. Duca. Argentoianu's testimony is significant for another reason, too. He was a cynic, unwilling to admire his contemporaries, and not too tender toward the Queen (Boia, 2011, 337).

"Due to the way she influenced Romania's entry into the war in 1916. And, again, in 1918, when Ferdinand did not ratify the disastrous Treaty of Bucharest, mostly thanks to the Queen. Argentoianu concludes: 'she became the founder of Great Romania and one of the greatest figures in our national history'" (Argentoianu, 1995, 157; Boia, 2011, 337).

The Queen was an extraordinary presence in the public space even before the outbreak of World War I. Yet, her mythologizing process begins during the war years. This is explained by her active involvement in charitable actions as well as in political and diplomatic spheres. But her case is not exceptional. After all, in every historical stage, there is a certain type of heroism modelled by the demands of reality" (Grancea, 2006, 700). During the war years, Queen Marie acquires hyperbolized dimensions. The soldiers call her "the Mother of all wounded" or "the Queen of all Romanians." Soldiers keep her photos in their diaries. They write her poems like that of Alexandru George. The poem is in *Caietul Spitalul 355 al Cercului Finanțelor, Industriei și*

*Comerțului din București, 1916–1918* [The Notebook of the Hospital 355 of the Finance, Industry, and Commerce Circle from Bucharest] (Figure 2): "Neadormită flacăra de aur / Te văd trecând prin lagăre cu milă, / Smulgând durerii prăzile căzute / Și cântece punând pe buze mute / Viață dând făpturii de argilă / O, toate aceste flori și toate aceste Cântări le-aud, le văd urcând spre Tine / Neadormită inimă de aur / A neamului meu - toate în urcare / Vor dăinui în semn de închinare" (George 1916–1918). We consider that her contemporaries were already aware of the trend toward the Queen's mythologization. A testimony appears in the magazine *Cultul eroilor nostri* [The Cult of Our Heroes]. This was the official publication of the society "Mormintele eroilor căzuți în război" [The Tombs of the Fallen Heroes]. Queen Marie was the patron of the Society. An author wrote in one of the issues:

"An almost religious cult for the Queen of our country makes us feel proud to know that, from now on, for the new heroic deeds the future demands of us, she will always be at the command post. She who, from the height of the throne, has symbolized the embodiment of the holiest national dreams. Thus, gaining the boundless love of all her people" (*Cultul*, 1921, 2).

The Queen herself was also aware of this emerging myth. The words she wrote in her memoirs are strong evidence of this. This is what she wrote after a visit to a hospital: "Everyone salutes me with an emotional joy. When I ask them if they are suffering, they say to me 'Yes, I suffer, but it does not matter – May you become the Empress of all Romanians!'" (Maria Regina, 2016, 116).

World War I and the subsequent years, with the climax in the Queens' visit to the United States of America, is the period of the development of the mythical figure of the Queen. She began to be regarded as a hero. Thus, she can be seen as the first woman in the pantheon of national personalities who perfectly corresponds to the typology of the hero, indeed, more than Ferdinand did and often in opposition to his instability. The Queen was presented, sometimes, as having all the virtues that tended to be lacking in the King. Yet, the "fascination of the Queen" would not last long. The destiny of the Queen's myth was ended first by her own son, King Carol II of Romania, and then by the communist regime. The latter erased royalty from the history of Romania. Today, the Queen's figure returns, but the myth can no longer have the force it had in its

beginnings (Boia, 2011, 340). This is an evolution that we will actually see reflected in the film production as well. Yet, the last film dedicated to her in 2019, *Maria: Regina României* [*Queen Marie of Romania*] proves the Queen's extraordinary potential as a fictional character. So, we can say without a doubt that Queen Marie, the real woman, has long been surpassed by the allegorical figure. Her myth is still challenging the creative imagination of contemporary artists and writers.

*Regina Maria: Ultima romantică, prima femeie modernă* [Queen Marie. The Last Romantic, the First Modern Woman] is the title of the documentary film made by Sorin Ilieșiu in 2011. We use this characterization of the Queen because it best defines her personality. She lived and acted at the end of an era and the beginning of a new one in a context that determined a redefining of gender roles. This characterization also shows the methods, approaches, and policies of the Queen in public life and matters. For instance, she knew how to capitalize on the potential of the new mass media. But, at the same time, she let herself be seduced, in a romantic spirit, by art and beauty, a complex personality whom we know only in the version she "directed." Thus, she was the first producer of a documentary about her life.

The aim of this study was to search the extent to which the myth of Queen Marie is present in films. The analysis of the film productions was based on several criteria. We searched for the historical context of their production. We also looked at the directors' and screenwriters' motives for choosing such a subject. We looked to see if there was any scientific documentation or other expert analysis. We also paid attention to the actors who chose to play the roles, as we consider that they shape their characters by their own personality. Their interpretation might change the public's perception of a certain historical character. We were also interested in the broadcast media: cinemas or/and television, as we were in the targeted audience and its reactions. In this regard, film reviews and press articles, in general, were also surveyed.

We based our research on the methodological framework employed by historians like P. Burke (Burke, 2001), Grancea (Grancea, 2006; Grancea, Grădinaru, 2020), and Stănculescu (Stănculescu, 2011). We will not insist on it here, but we point out those aspects that have been useful in our research. We have structured the film analysis into three categories: the first category includes documentary films and newsreel; the second one includes feature films dedicated to World War I.

In these films, the Queen is only a "secondary" character. The third is the category of historical films in which the Queen was the main character. We also followed and delimited the analysis on chronological grounds. First, we considered the films produced during the interwar period, and in particular, the newsreel genre. This includes live scenes with the Queen. The majority, though, are from the War years. They are the most important ones as they will become one of the primary sources for all the films dedicated to the Queen. The second period was the communist one. During the communist regime, we witness a real iconoclasm against the Romanian royal family. The third period was that of the films produced after the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu's regime. After 1989 we can talk about a "rebirth" of the general public's interest in the monarchy.

We also considered a comparative perspective. We compared the films about Queen Marie with the ones about Ecaterina Teodoroiu. She was the other female character with mythological accents. Her legend arose in the same historical context as the Queen's. Moreover, they are the two female personalities who gained this mythical aura in their lifetime. We are also aiming to prove that, during the communist period, Ecaterina Teodoroiu became a kind of "counterweight" to the Queen. She was the historical personality accepted by the communist ideology and became the personification of the women's contribution to the war effort.

The research also focused on other aspects, though these should not be regarded as marginal in the present study. For instance, we paid attention to the moments in the Queen's biography that sparked the filmmakers' interest. These might reveal what favoured the Queen's allegorization. We investigated the character of Queen Marie in foreign and Romanian productions, although the list is selective, being limited by context. We were interested to see how she is presented. Was the Queen portrayed as a representative of the West, an Englishwoman, or rather as a "Romanian" as she appears to be in the Romanian collective imaginary?

The film analysis started from the image of the Queen as she was (re)imagined, based on the existing historical primary sources. We considered mainly the Queen's autobiographical writings.

Because we are talking about "an image-making process" the analysis followed a certain order. The newsreels were the first. We looked at them to see how the Queen appeared to her contemporaries. We tried to see if these recordings shaped and inspired later films. We did

the same with the perspectives in which the Queen appeared in these productions. The analysis also targeted both their value as historical sources and as sources of artistic inspiration. We underline their significant value as the sources that shaped the image of the Queen and not only for her contemporaries. It is a vision of the Queen echoing over time until nowadays. In fact, this is also the function that these newsreel-type documentary journals had. The Romanian film was born under the sign of the documentary, the newsreel at the end of the nineteenth century (Stănculescu, 2011, 5). And World War I was the headline event of such newsreels. Through them, the Queen made her appearance on the silver screen. On November 15, 1916, the Photographic and Cinematographic Service of the Romanian Army was established, and in 1917 more than 50 reports had already been filmed. They were then used for the editing of two documentaries: *Frontul român* [The Romanian Front] and *În jurul ultimelor lupte de pe frontul român* [Sometime Around the Last Fights on the Romanian Front] (Căliman, 2014, 45).

Nicolae Barbelian produced the first documentary film about the War in 1921. What he did was to use the films created by the Photographic and Cinematographic Service of the Romanian Army. The result was the production *Războiul nostru* [Our War], in four series (Căliman, 2014, 47). They became primary historical sources, but also sources of inspiration for historical films. Eventually, they ended up being “recycled” by film producers. Such was the case in the productions *Datorie și sacrificiu* [Duty and Sacrifice] (1925) and *Ecaterina Teodorescu* (1930) in which we see the same sequences filmed during the War (Șendrea, 2020).

For the present study, from the category of newsreel in which Queen Marie is the main character we studied the productions made between 1917 and 1934. Most of them can be classified as war journals or newsreel. These are the films made between January and December 1917 and broadcast internationally in the Pathé Journal. In these newsreels, Queen Marie is filmed while visiting the hospitals. She is comforting the wounded soldiers by giving them flowers, photographs, or cigarettes. Another iconic scene is the one when the Queen is reading to them. They are all the images that stereotyped the Queen’s representation until today. This is the result of the fact that they were also distributed through other media such as photographs in the form of postcards. They were also published in the press of the time. The Queen always appears dressed in the outfit that became her “official” one

during the war, that is the Red Cross uniform. Most of these scenes will then be integrated into the production of *Războiul nostru* by Nicolae Barbelian.

Because we are in the era of silent film, the text that introduces the sequence in the documentary is also relevant to the way the Queen is perceived by contemporaries. “Queen Marie is in the midst of the wounded soldiers. She is comforting and encouraging the heroes.” A second sequence depicts the Queen alongside the King at a ceremony to decorate the war heroes. In the film, the scene is set after the troops re-entered Bucharest. This choice suggests that the decoration of soldiers and veterans took place in the context of the reoccupation of the capital. It is most likely a collage of two films in which the Queen decorated the soldiers. This claim is based on the fact that in the two foregrounds, the Queen’s clothing is a little bit different. The choice of the scenes selected is to be noted. This also prompts us to discuss the “authenticity” of a documentary movie. Although a documentary film is perceived to be true to reality, one should not exclude subjective or producer “intervention” (Șendrea, 2020). It is about how “memories are perpetuated and exploited post-factum. The scenes from the War lend authenticity, but there is also a reverse contamination: the fiction replaces memory, fictionalizing it” (Șendrea, 2020). This is how it happened in the two sequences in which the Queen appeared. The montage was premeditated. It was made so in order to associate the effort and sacrifice of the soldiers with the reward of heroism. Only after the victory are heroes decorated by the King and Queen. However, the option of filmmaker Nicolae Barbelian to include the sequences of Queen Marie in this film, is significant. By doing so he contributed to the modelling of the Queen’s idealization with a certain assurance.

The year 1922 and the moment of the coronation was also the subject of a newsreel. It also became one of the most used images of the Queen. We should also note the coronation ritual in which King Ferdinand was the one who placed the crown on the head of the Queen, whilst he crowned himself. The event is described by the Queen in her diary:

“Nando, who put the heavy crown on my head, while all the bells rang [...] while everyone in attendance cheered with all their strength and all the military bands sang the national anthem. I think it must have been a beautiful image, and I hope that her Majesty and I played our part well



and showed what we could best in our overwhelming garments” (Mandache, 2011, 143; Maria, Regina, 2006, 314).

The moment is of great importance for arguing that the Queen was a master of using propaganda. From the ritual to the royal clothes and the jewellery she wore, everything was planned in a masterly way by the Queen. From Hannah Pakula’s point of view, Queen Marie gave herself entirely to her innate theatrical sense (Pakula, 2019, 399).

“She could do so as there was no precedent of the coronation to limit her. She asked all the women of the royal family who were part of the procession to dress in gold, and the others to wear purple and silver. ‘I don’t want a modern coronation like any other Queen. Let mine be entirely medieval’” (Pakula, 2019, 399).

The coronation was a statement meant as a challenge all those contesting their royal authority. For she and Ferdinand were in the “absurd situation” of attending a coronation boycotted by Transylvanian politicians (Pakula, 2019, 398). So, the Queen knew how to handle the situation by the power of the image.

Another newsreel with historical value is the documentary about the Queen’s visit to the United States of America, in 1926. The selection of the filmed moments is part of the extraordinary promotion that this visit had. The Queen’s entourage promoted it as a private visit. Yet, it ended up being an important public event for the Americans, hence the extraordinary publicity she received (Ilie, 2017, 153). The analysis of the scenes showed the enthusiasm of the Americans who welcomed the Queen. This may be an argument in support of the efficiency of the “advertising campaign.” It led us to conclude that the “fascination of the Queen” was not limited to Romanians only. This is an idea to remember when trying to explain the interest of some foreign filmmakers in Queen Marie’s biography. The newsreel has a strong propagandistic tinge. It also reveals the Queen’s potential as an “extraordinary film character” (Ilieşiu, 2011), a potential that was intuited considering some journal chronicles of her visit. For instance, the Illinois State Register, in Springfield, noted: “she said she wasn’t going to America to be filmed... Maybe her wish is not to be a movie star, but she certainly speaks as one” (Ilie, 2017, 157).

Another newsreel of the Queen dates from 1928. It shows her attending a children’s feast,

wearing a national garment. This is a clothing option that the Queen often appealed to. It was one of the ways she used for showing her solidarity and the community of belonging to the Romanian people (Fodor, 2017, 160). This image is also very often promoted through photographs, which added to the shaping of the Queen’s image in films. We can see either in documentaries or feature films images or scenes with the Queen wearing this outfit. In fact, the film directors included this type of picture in their film productions too.

There is also a documentary-newsreel type film about the journey of Queen Marie and Princess Ileana to the East (Egypt, Syria, Palestine) in 1930. The film was made by the director Vasile Gociu, very active in the field of fiction films, but in documentary films, too (Căliman, 2017, 49). However, the visit is not of the magnitude of the one in the United States, nor was it of similar interest for the subsequent movies. It is a video testimony to a private journey. Though it includes the Queen’s solemn moments of welcome, they are far from the scale of the excitement of the receptions during the United States visit. This perhaps has to do with the fact that in 1930 the Queen’s fascination was fading. There are several reasons that can be given for this. In 1927, King Ferdinand died; in 1930, Carol II reclaimed his royal rights; and Princess Ileana was suffering due to a public scandal caused by her fiancé. The film shows a former Queen, far from the idealized image contemporaries were used to. Perhaps this is a reason why film producers did not re-use the material in their films.

As previously mentioned, the interest in Queen Marie goes beyond the national arena. This explains the footage taken by foreign filmmakers and journalists. For instance, three years after the visit she made to the United States, a team from Fox Movitone News came to Romania. On this occasion, the Queen recorded a video interview about the trip from 1926. This is the first time we can hear the voice of Queen Marie. It is in the South Carolina University’s archive. “Camera interviews – Queen Marie of Romania at Home” is also significant. It is a British Pathé production from 1934. It was made in the gardens of Bran Castle and its surroundings. The Queen appears dressed in the popular costume, iconic for the image the Queen chose to exhibit to her contemporaries. The interview also includes sequences of everyday activities. Yet, we no longer have the image of the powerful, strong-willed Queen, actively involved in public life. The interview shows the mother-Queen, withdrawn in

the private space, living an 'ordinary' life, visiting the local market, and interacting with the locals.

The series of journals ends with the films about the Queen's funeral attendances. Funerals are the apotheosis of leaders. They are the moment when the power of propaganda tests itself. Queen Marie had a specific ritual, according to the royal protocol. The filming of the funeral was broadcast internationally, focusing only on the funeral event. It does not include the reaction of the crowds. Yet, it can be searched in other sources such as the press articles of the time. Quoting them here supports the argument that the process of the Queen's mythologizing was in its final phase. See, for example, the title in *Realitatea Ilustrată* [The Illustrated Reality] on July 27, 1938, which reads: "The last journey of the Great Queen... In the sound of the bells, in the overwhelming pain of all the people who loved her and who will never forget her. The Great, the Holy Queen Marie... grieving faces, eyes of tears. The people mourn their Great, Kind, Wise, and Beautiful Queen" (Realitatea, 1938, 1).

This newsreel ends the newsreel series produced in the interwar period. All must be considered landmarks for shaping the Queen's mythological image through films. Therefore, at this point in our analysis, we can reach some preliminary conclusions. The titles of each film are suggestive of how the Queen was perceived in society. We also add a possible interpretation from a gender perspective. The "selection" of the Queen's activities chosen by the film directors are somehow in line with the gender expectations and standards of the time. One can even speak of "specialization" of the roles of the Queen. In the 1917 newsreel, re(used) in the documentary film *Războiul pentru reîntregirea neamului* [The War for the Reunification of the Nation], Queen Marie appears dressed in the Red Cross uniform visiting the wounded soldiers, an iconic hypostasis that the Queen assumed, and which entered the collective mind of contemporaries. Yet, this is specific to society's expectations of gender roles. The Queen, in this position, is given as an example, for other Romanian women. So are the images, which represent the Queen at the graves of war heroes. In fact, during the war and the following decades, the visual media were constantly used by the Queen. She used postcards, photographs, and newsreel. They picture the Queen, almost always dressed in the Red Cross uniform. Thus, she turned into a symbol of women's involvement in the war. These images will contribute to the Queen's mythization, to her veneration taking the shape of a religious cult. Yet, not for long.

Thus, we can say that this visual propaganda, carefully constructed by the Queen and her entourage and involving the most modern visual means, actually contributed to the "allegorization" of the real character. The efficiency of the visual is obvious. See the commemorative monuments built during the interwar period. The artists chose to represent the figure of the Queen on the relief from the Mausoleum of Mărașești. Olga Sturdza sculpted her on the Union Monument in Iași. The Queen is also on the Monument of the Sanitary Heroes from Bucharest and on the Arch of Triumph, etc. (Fodor, 2022, 37, 45, 46). The public image of the Queen dominates the newspapers and magazines as well. They talk about her public activities, the visits to the hospitals, and then to the monuments dedicated to the war heroes. Her visits from 1926 and 1930 are well documented too. Indeed, the differences between the two are significant. They reflect also the deterioration of the Queen's public status. The 1934 interview in which Queen Mary appears in an intimate, familiar posture, rather than as the Queen, is another example indicating that things had changed to her detriment. Funerals will bring her, paradoxically or not, back to the forefront of public life. Public manifestations will prove the power of the myth. At the level of public opinion, the 'fascination of the Queen' had not yet disappeared. But later, the myth will gradually fade, due to the new political circumstances. This process is identifiable in the films. During the communist period, we do not have any documentaries dedicated to Queen Marie. In fact, as it is well known, the Queen became a taboo subject. But the genre of the documentary film did not disappear, on the contrary; for the period between 1948 and 1970 more than 1000 titles appeared (Căliman, 2017, 166). But there was no room left for the royal figures.

The series of documentaries about Queen Marie will be resumed during the first decade of the 2000s. The reason lies in the need and interest in recovering the monarchical period from Romania's past. Sorin Ilieșiu produced the first documentary in 2002: *Pasiunea pentru frumos: Jurnalul Mariei Regina României* [The Passion for Beauty: The Diary of Marie the Queen of Romania]. It is a 15-minute documentary co-produced by the foundation ASPERA, the USA and Video Media Foundation, Romania. Sorin Ilieșiu collaborated with Dan Dimancescu, author, journalist, and film producer. The latter also has a research interest in the history of the Romanian royal family, publishing in 2019 the volume *Regina Maria în America* [Queen Marie in America]. The work focuses on the Queen's

journey to the United States of America (Dimancescu, 2019). As for the director, Sorin Iliesiu, he distinguished himself as a strong personality in the documentary films. He also has a reputation in documentaries dedicated to the royal family. To Queen Marie, he dedicated two such films, the previously mentioned one and *Câte ceva despre regina Maria* [Something About Queen Marie] in 2006 (Căliman, 2017, 658). The director's intention was to evoke the personality of Queen Marie. The declared reason also stands as a strong argument for what was the myth and fascination of the Queen, as she was "considered the most famous, heroic and beautiful woman of her age, the 'last romantic,' and at the same time, one of the first modern women of the 20th century" (Căliman, 2017, 659). The first documentary brings to the fore fragments of the Queen's diary. It is one of the main historical sources used by historians and film producers as well. It is, therefore, the Queen's vision of herself, talking about beauty, her passion for art, and the desire to "revive" the particularity of the Romanian nation. The quotes from the Queen's writings are projected on a selection of vintage images, the "standard" photographs, which we also saw in the war newsreel. The Queen in the nurse's uniform, in hospitals, with the wounded soldiers, or on the front, with the King. The documentary was well-received by the public. It won the special prize at the Dakino International Film Festival, Bucharest, 2003.

Perhaps this success, but also his interest in the monarchy, determined Sorin Iliesiu to make a new, 23-minutes short, documentary. It is also a co-production, with the National Center for Cinema. The voice of Queen Marie was that of actress Maia Morgenstern, the choice of whom was not accidental. Beyond her undeniable talent, her strong personality made her a 'favourite' for the role. For those who know the actress, there could be a resemblance, in character, with the Queen as well. Thus, the image of the Queen is, from our point of view, strongly marked by the actress's performance. She contributed to the (re)shaping of the Queen's image in the collective imagination, all the more so as the film is a first-person confessional narrative; yet in the background we see the face of the actress. So, the Queen has both the voice and image of the actress. This artistic choice does not alter the "legendary" image of the Queen. It has the same features as in the interwar period when it started to evolve. She is presented to the public as the living allegory of the feminine virtues: strong, sensitive, and determined. The emphasis is mainly on biographical references, impressions, thoughts,

and ideas as the Queen wrote in her diary. Sorin Iliesiu was aware of the impact and resonance of the actress. He confessed in an interview: "The collaboration with Maia Morgenstern was exceptional. First of all, I gave her the text she had to read but only a short time before starting the filming. Maia Morgenstern also let her tears free a couple of times while reading the text" (Agenda Liternet, 2006).

The documentary was well received by the public and was also given an award by the Romanian Cultural Institute at the Astra Film Festival, Sibiu, in 2006. Perhaps this success determined him to develop the project a few years later. He produced a feature film: *Regina Maria: Ultima romantică, prima femeie modernă*. The documentary, which retains the same first-person format as the one from 2006, was presented at the Astra Film Festival in 2011. The actress's profile stands against the background of the archive images as in the previous productions. This formula surpasses the typology of documentary films in the strict sense of the word. Thus, it is rather a hybrid film. The distinction between documentary and other cinematographic forms is not very clear. It rather looks like a compilation of archive films rearranged and supplemented with new comments to serve the director's vision (Rotaru, 2018, 112). And his vision is explicitly stated in the title chosen. This is the vision that Iliesiu wanted to offer to his contemporaries, and he succeeded, we would say. It is the same mythologized image of the romantic and modern Queen at the same time living at the watershed between two worlds. The romantic side is seen in the Queen's passion for beauty, for art, in her sensitivity and kindness. Her modernity is seen at the level of perception, for example, of traditional gender roles. She always challenged them through active involvement. Thus, she overcame the traditionally accepted roles of women. She is presented as an emancipated woman, this posture being visible both in her physiognomy and actions. She wears her hair short, garçon-style, and is seen smoking (a rare feature in documentaries about her). The film is what the director wanted it to be.

It is obvious that Sorin Iliesiu is under the "spell" of the Queen's fascination. He confessed:

"Queen Marie is a combination of creativity, magic, femininity, strength, genius (not only artistic but also political), majesty, delicacy, faith, holiness, optimism, religiosity, justice, romance... etc. She has tremendous cinematic potential. Since the invention of

photography until today.... beauty and expressiveness were synonymous with her face and spirit” (Ilieșiu 2011).

The selection of texts and archive images made by Sorin Ilieșiu reflects the standardized and allegorical image of the Queen. It is her public image as modelled by the Queen’s writings. In support of our argument, we refer to the main aspects selected by the producer from the Queen’s biography. He chose to present aspects of her childhood, her relationship with King Carol I, and her accession to the throne. He focused of course on the war years and the ideal of national unity and included her visit to Paris; the coronation ceremony in Alba Iulia; the trip to the United States of America, and the death of King Ferdinand. The film ends with the Queen’s will written at Balchik, in 1933. The message addressed to Romania obviously had a great impact. It is the declaration of her absolute love for the country and its people. As with the 2006 film, Maia Morgenstern’s presence and interventions contribute to shaping the Queen’s image. After all, she plays a role; it’s her perception of the Queen. Maia Morgenstern is also “seduced” by the Queen’s personality, considering her a model in the gallery of Romanian historical personalities. At least, this is what is suggested in an interview from 2013 when, she declared:

“It wouldn’t hurt to know deeply and with heart the biographies of great personalities. We discovered Queen Marie, as long as she let herself be discovered in her diary. With Sorin Ilieșiu we read with delicacy and much discretion page by page... I let the emotion speak.”

Between Sorin Ilieșiu’s productions from 2006 and 2011, there is another film production: *Maria: Regina noastră* [Marie, Our Queen]. We are talking about the documentary film made by Marian Baci. The script and comments belong to Diana Mandache from the Romanian National Museum of History. She is a well-reputed historian in the field of Romanian royal-family history. It is a short 25-minute film, made by Sahia Film, as part of the series *Coroana României: Regii* [The Crown of Romania: The Kings]. The film “recycles” the same images from war reports, the United States visits, etc. as explained by Diana Mandache. Unlike Sorin Ilieșiu’s creations, this documentary has a strong scientific tint. This is due to the interventions of a historian and the use of not only vintage images

but also video recordings of the Queen. As for the portrait of the Queen, it has the same features. It shows the Queen’s active involvement in political life, and includes her efforts during World War I, insisting on the Queen’s major role in Paris. It also covers her visit to the United States. It ends with a very important aspect which is the Queen’s final wish to have her heart buried at Balchik. This choice of including the Queen’s wish, toward the end of the documentary, is part of the aura of mythologization and legend woven around the Queen. Its impact is as strong as Ilieșiu’s option to end the film with the Queen’s testament. So, we are talking about another film that presents the official version of the Queen’s life. But, compared to the previous ones this has a rigorous, scientific character. It is devoid of the emotional and artistic imprint of Sorin Ilieșiu’s productions, albeit the subject and perspective are the same. The allegory of Marie, Queen of Romania, is certainly uppermost in the royal myth from Romanian history. The title also remains significant for the reception and emphasis of the myth. Marie is “Our Queen,” the Queen of all Romanians.

In fact, the first clue to understanding the film is given precisely by the choice of the title. We know that titles actually influence the expectations of viewers even before they have seen any sequence in the film (Burke, 2001, 159).

From 2011 to 2018, no documentary film about the Queen was produced. The situation changed with the centenary of the Great War and the Great Union. This is also visible in the published texts with a similar theme which increased in number. It is largely a matter of “rediscovering” historical personalities according to contemporary interests and imperatives. In 2018, three films of unequal value appeared: *Maria: Inima României* [Marie. The Heart of Romania], a co-production directed by Trevor Poots and producers Jean Florescu and Dan Drăghicescu (Figure 3); *Femeile în război și pace: Regina Maria a României* [Women in War and Peace: Queen Marie of Romania] made by the Bucharest Municipality Museum. It was part of the program Documentary Films: Centenary of the Great Union. The last one, *Înger pe front: Regina Maria* [Angel on the Front: Queen Marie], was produced by the Ilfov County Council through the County Center for the Conservation and Promotion of Traditional Culture, Ilfov in collaboration with Buftea Cultural Center. It was directed by Salex Iatma and benefited from the advice of historian Alexandru Matei. Recently, in 2021, a new documentary, *Marie de Roumanie: L’etonnante reine des Carpathians*, was produced

in France by Benjamin Lehrer and premiered on TV France 3 on 24 January 2022.

*Maria: Inima României*, the co-production directed by Trevor Poots, Jean Florescu, and Dan Drăghicescu is probably the documentary with the greatest media impact. It certainly had a promotion that was superior to all the previous ones: for example, it was broadcast on December 1st on a well-known television channel. It was also available online and in just six weeks it managed to gather over 1.100,000 views (Chesaru, 2019). It also had a national tour, with projections being made in the most important cities in the country. The film is certainly one of the best-documented ones. See the vast archive of documents studied and the impressive list of historians who were consulted in its creation. Among them are Ioan Aurel Pop, Neagu Djuvara (contemporary with the Queen), Matei Cazacu, Diana Mandache, and Radu Comănescu. The producers also worked with foreign historians from Great Britain, the USA, and Russia. Dan Drăghicescu said the research took them almost three years, since it meant studying more than 14 Romanian and foreign archives (Florescu, Drăghicescu, 2019). Unique and of special value is also the testimony of the few living persons who met the Queen. One of them was Leni Shrager, daughter of Henri Shrager, secretary of Barbu Știrbey. She may be one of the last people alive who knew Queen Marie personally. It should also be noted that her Majesty Margareta, custodian of the Romanian Crown, also appears in the documentary. From the perspective of structure and content, the documentary is not different from the already “classical” line. It addresses the main biographical elements and the character and personality of the Queen. It includes also the Queen’s actions during the war, as well, as her determining role in political decisions, and of course, it does not omit her presence in Paris and the American tour. The film ends with the Queen’s testament, in the form of a message to the country. However, it also includes some subjects, not too often mentioned in other documentaries, for instance the effort she made to learn Romanian and the sufferings and the guilt of the Queen at the death of her son, Mircea. This is one of the dramas that deeply marked her and about which the Queen did not hesitate to write. The film includes quotations from the Queen’s writings, as in other documentary films. A number of them refer to her relationship with Ferdinand, to the frustrations she felt about the character, or the decisions made by the King. This is also supported by the historians consulted for the documentary. For instance, Professor Ioan Aurel

Pop argued, in the documentary, that the Queen had extraordinary importance in shaping the personality of King Ferdinand.

There are also fragments from the Queen’s diary that show her dissatisfaction with the gender limitations of the period. They are included in this documentary, as well as in those of Ilieșiu, due to the desire to emphasize the non-conformist features of the Queen: “Why am I not a king? I would go everywhere, I would see everything, I would talk to the soldiers” or “I would like to be a man. There are no men in this country. I am ashamed to be the Queen of cowards”.

“The fascination of the Queen,” her myth appears and is addressed in the documentary also by the title chosen: the heart of Romania. It is also noteworthy that the documentary stresses that the Queen was aware of the “power of image”. She knew how to use all media resources to promote the cause of her country and to strengthen the people’s trust in the monarchy. The photos and vintage footage from the war front with the Queen in the Red Cross uniform, the images with the Queen wearing a folk costume, or the fragments from the Queen’s diary in which she describes the reaction of the soldiers provide strong arguments in this regard. That the myth was already formed at the death of the Queen is confirmed also by Leni Shrager. She described the funeral procession’s journey to Bucharest and recalled that Romanians were kneeling along the railway while the funeral train was passing by.

The use of the press during her stay in Paris and in the U.S. is also pointed out in the documentary. It is used to prove the Queen’s modern vision and that she knew how to lobby for change despite not having any political function. This places her beyond her time. Some of those who feature in the documentary consider that she was, indeed, a modern, (pre)visionary Queen living at the end of la Belle Époque.

*Femeile în război și pace: Regina Maria a României* has Mihai Vișinescu as its producer. Given the historical context, the film focuses on Romania’s involvement in World War I. The documentary is in two parts: the first is about the Queen; the second is dedicated to the women personalities who had a role in the war but who also stood out in the emancipation effort of the Romanian women. The documentary uses the already known images, though they are not necessarily in chronological order if we consider that the film begins with the exile in Balchik, the death of the Queen, and the quotes from her testament. It respects the form of previous documentaries as it includes photos from her youth, wearing folk costume and landscapes from

Romania. These tend to suggest to the viewer the idea of unconditional love for the country and its people. Then follow the biographical references. Afterwards, the attention shifts to the Queen's involvement in World War I, and again, the information is supported by the same photographs of the Queen dressed in the Red Cross uniform. Quotations and excerpts from the Queen's diary are also used. Some of them can be read from a gender perspective, especially those about the Queen's frustrations over the social limitations imposed on women. The documentary emphasizes the Queen's involvement in supporting the morale of the soldiers. She is imagined as the equivalent of Joan of Arc. Here she "shares" this mythical feature with Ecaterina Teodoroiu. We can also see a pronounced tendency toward the dramatic, visible in its use of fragments from the Queen's writings, such as the following: "I was their home, their mother, their faith and their hope" (minute 19). It also insists on the decisive role she had in convincing the King not to sign a separate peace treaty with the Central Powers. Fragments of the Queen's diary are also quoted, to stress the drama of the moment. The producer did the same in documenting the Paris visit and the confrontation with Georges Clemenceau. It ends with excerpts from the 1934 interview and quotes from the Queen's writings on the condition of being a woman and a Queen. It is a documentary made under the aegis of an institution, with a scientific value. It actually depicts a sequence, the most significant one in fact, from the Queen's biography. As for the myth and legendary image of the Queen, it is unaltered.

*Înger pe front: Regina Maria*, the documentary produced by Ilfov County Council, is a short film of about 22 minutes. It is intended to be a historical re-enactment, though not a very plausible one, made on a low budget. The actors, sets, and scenes capture only snapshots of the Queen's life. Again, we have fragments from her biography, the childhood in which Marie is a kind of "Amazon." This is a sort of anticipation of her personality in adulthood. We see a soap-opera version of her first encounter with King Ferdinand I and witness the already notable differences between their personalities. From the War years, there are only a few scenes. The focus is once again on the presence of the Queen among the soldiers. But, despite the limitations, this is the documentary that discusses Mircea's death the most. The event actually supplies the narrative thread of the documentary: Marie's suffering was channelled toward alleviating the suffering of Romanian soldiers. So, the myth remains active in this film. This is achieved especially by

representing the Queen as a sort of saviour angel (see the scene from the beginning when the Queen, in the Red Cross uniform saves a wounded soldier considered dead by his comrades). It is another production that proves that the "Queen's fascination" still exists. It is worth noting also the public's reaction to this documentary movie. Some though are too generous in their appreciation (Națiunea, X).

*Marie de Roumanie: L'étonnante reine des Carpates* is the only foreign documentary dedicated to the Queen. The documentary film was made by Stéphane Bern and was aired on the show *Secrets d'Histoire*. This is a French show that reached its 16th season, whose aim was to bring to the forefront special historical personalities. The episode dedicated to Queen Marie follows the one dedicated to Richard Lionheart. It precedes the one dedicated to King Louis XIV's rival, Louis II of Bourbon-Condé. In the 16 seasons aired so far, Queen Marie is the only personality from Romanian history selected to figure in the series. Among the female personalities, the episode dedicated to Queen Marie stands alongside others. There are episodes dedicated to Joan of Arc, Queen Victoria of England, Catherine II of Russia, Mata Hari, etc. The episode had about 1,922,000 viewers (Gazzano, 2022). The documentary observes the typical structure, by including the biographical elements with an emphasis on her childhood and the personality that was already being shaped; her coming to Romania and the relations with King Carol I and Queen Elizabeth; and information about her passion for art and her artistic sense. It also included information about the relationship and influence of Barbu Știrbey. Other subjects are the war, Mircea's death, and the role and importance of her presence in Paris. The image created by the documentary is like the other documentaries. But this stresses more her unique aura and her exceptionality as a woman and Queen. The producer achieves this by emphasizing her complex hypostases. She was a Queen and a mother, an Amazon and a soldier, a free and emancipated woman challenging the conventions of the time. Although public history material, modelled after the type of a TV series, the documentary benefited from the expert advice of foreign and Romanian historians, such as Radu Albu-Comănescu.

The documentary is historically correct. It used the same images and videos, even though without respecting the chronological sequence of events. Its value in the present context is that it is another proof that the myth of the Queen also exists in

contemporary Western Europe, albeit not as powerfully as in Romania.

In summary, from 1917 to 2022 we have two types of documentary materials: the newsreels and documentary films. For the period from 1940 to 1989, there is no film produced about Queen Marie. This is due to the new ideological context. After 1990 and especially in the 2000s the historical destiny of Queen Marie was rediscovered and recovered. This has to do with the celebration of the centenary of the Great Union. Thus, the documentaries focused on the Queen's contribution to the country's war effort, as well as for obtaining international recognition of it. From the point of view of the content, the themes are the same. We can talk about a standardized documentary form, favouring the perpetuation of the legendary aura of the Queen. All documentaries insist on her personality, suggesting that this was already visible in her childhood. They all suggest that the Queen, since her youth, had an atypical personality, exceeding the times. They all include information about her private life, most commonly discussing such aspects as her relationship with Barbu Știrbey and the death of Prince Mircea. They all used as primary sources the Queen's writings, but one common element to these documentaries is more significant than the others, one that is necessary for understanding the allegorical dimensions of the Queen. That is that her personality was built, in the films, primarily, by antithesis to that of King Ferdinand. The Queen is all the King was supposed to be but was not. We noticed also a tendency of the producers to select from the Queen's biography those moments that reveal the gender tensions of the time. This is evident in the use of those excerpts in which the Queen expressed the frustrations she felt for being a woman. Some producers were more emphatic on this point than others. See for example the count of Saint Aulaire's words that appear on the poster of the documentary *Maria: Inima României*: "There is only one man in Romania and that one is the Queen."

We believe that these documentaries updated and maintained, if not the myth of the Queen, at least the fascination for her. They presented her as a woman, romantic in spirit, but modern in actions and vision of the world, politics, and roles of women in society.

Thus, the documentaries actually reflect the carefully studied image that the Queen built for herself. For this, she used all the visual means offered by the period. Some were old, others were new: travels, visits, photos, postcards, clothing, and cinema. This image is obviously

propagandistic but not dishonest, as evidence of which, we have the testimonies of her contemporaries. This image contributed to the development of the myth of Queen Marie. It lost strength after the 1940s, yet it remains one of the few myths in Romanian historical mythology centred on a woman.

In the second part of our study, we inquired whether the "real" image of the Queen was rendered in historical and artistic (War-inspired) films also. We looked to see if they contributed to the perpetuation of the allegorical figure of the Queen. From a methodological point of view, the approach had the same framework as the first part of the study. The analysis was also organized on chronological and thematic criteria. The analysis included historical films from the interwar and communist periods as well as the films produced after 1990. In this category, we included biographical films and films about World War I. We studied the latter to ascertain the manner in which the Queen appeared, and the type of role awarded: whether it was the main or a secondary one.

### **"Queen Mary, a character with an immense film potential"**

The expression belongs to Sorin Ilieșiu. It sums up a feature of Romanian historical films that dealt with the short list of female personalities who inspired the film producers (literature can also be included here). Thus, from the interwar period, 1921 to 1939, there are four historical films. Two are biographical films dedicated to Ecaterina Teodorescu. Nicolae Barbelian directed the one from 1921. The film was produced by "Societatea Mormintelor Eroilor de Război" [The Society for the Tombs of War Heroes]. It can be included in the World War I commemorative practices (Fodor, 2022). Indeed, the statuary campaign is much more visible, but it will also be added to by this new medium: the film. Ecaterina Teodorescu remained the favourite woman protagonist of historical films until today.

She entered Romanian mythology relatively quickly due to her heroic death, but certainly also because of the exceptional nature of her destiny, for she was a woman who crossed the gender barriers. The war was the territory of men. Ecaterina had the same, if not a more powerful allegorical and legendary potential. The Romanian inter-war society shaped her image, connecting it to the myth of the virgin of Jiu and the merciful image of Queen Marie (Grancea, 2020, 129). Yet, from our point of view, she

“competed” with the Queen and even replaced her myth during the communist era.

The “competition” between the two myths only comes later. Yet, we are not interested in following the manner of representation of Ecaterina. The subject was addressed in an excellent study (Grancea, 2020). However, we refer to these productions to see if and how the Queen appears and whether in an allegorical or mythological way. Moreover, as I mentioned before, Queen Marie and Ecaterina Teodoroiu are the two female personalities remaining to this day among the few female personalities in the national mythology. So, we wished to observe to what extent their myths evolved in parallel and if with similar features or in antithesis to each other. The 1921 film is actually a montage of short scenes, assembled by N. Barbelian, using the newsreel filmed by the Army Film Service. They are the same as those used by the documentaries discussed before. Later, they would be used and reused until exhaustion and banalization. In the 1930 film, directed by Ion Nicolescu-Bruna, the Queen is a secondary character. It includes the same fragments: the Queen visiting the hospitals and the images of her on the war front. Yet they are not very correct in terms of historical accuracy. For example, in the film, it is suggested that Queen Marie met Ecaterina in a hospital in Bucharest and not in the one in Iași (Grancea, 2020, 133). “*Her Majesty, the Queen, visiting a hospital, decorates and raises to the rank of the second lieutenant Ecaterina Teodoroiu*” is the text that introduces the images with the Queen. She is on the screen for about one minute. So, the Queen does not play a leading role. But the integration of the images contributes to the association of their role as heroes. It is worth mentioning that the premiere of the film, at the cinema Femina, took place in the presence of the royal family, the government, and representatives of the diplomatic corps. This denotes the importance that this means of communication and propaganda had gained. Between the productions from 1921 and 1930, there are two other films: *Datorie și Sacrificiu* and *Vitejii noștri* [Our Warriors] in 1926. None of them includes the Queen as a character. As the titles suggest, they are about manly features. Meanwhile, the myth of the Queen grows due to other media such as magazine articles, photos, etc. But the era of the historical film that had just begun was interrupted as suddenly by the crisis of 1929–1933 (Grancea, 2020, 134). The genre would be “rediscovered” during the communist regime, when the historical films of this period would be a favourite genre, not least with the public. See the investigations, for example,

conducted by *Cinema* magazine in 1967. The respondents voted for historical personalities: Mircea the Elder, Stephen the Great, Nicolae Bălcescu, and Ecaterina Teodoroiu. They were all figures consecrated by the nationalist discourse (Grancea, 2006, 695). This is, of course, the broad propagandistic value that the leaders attributed to the cinema. The past was also mystified, “purged” by events and personalities incompatible with the communist ideology. The monarchy and Queen Marie became taboo subjects. So, they would no longer appear in historical films (Columbeanu, 2011).

Thus, the theme of World War I continues to be approached but without the main protagonists. An exception is the character of Ecaterina Teodoroiu, who would be the subject of another film, in 1978. The Queen does not appear in it. Perhaps, from a certain point of view, the scene in Iași could be understood as a masked criticism of the monarchy in general and their way of life. We refer to the scene where Ecaterina leaves the party organized in her honour. It suggests that the girl does not allow herself to be corrupted by members of the high society (Grancea, 2020, 136). All other movies are silent. And we studied all of them: *Nepoții gornistului* [The Cornist's Grandchildren] (1953), *Viața nu iartă* [Life Does not Forgive] (1959), *Pădurea spânzuraților* [The Forest of the Hanged] (1965), and *Baladă pentru Măriucă* [Ballad for Măriucă] (1969). She is a third female historical character, “discovered” by Romanian fiction, see for example Dumitru Almaș' story “Fetița din nuc” [The Girl from the Walnut Tree]. *Prin cenușa imperiului* [Through the Ashes of the Empire] (1976), *Ecaterina Teodoroiu* (1978), *Ultima noapte de dragoste, întâia noapte de război* [Last Night of Love] (1980), *Capcana mercenarilor* [Mercenaries' Trap] (1980), *Întoarcerea din iad* [Return from Hell] (1983), and *Întunecare* [Darkness] (1985). In none of these films does Queen Marie appear.

After 1990, the historical films about World War I continue. They compete with, and will be surpassed by, the number of documentaries. Although in a considerably smaller number, the historical films also reflect the interest in the historical restitution of the Romanian monarchy and Queen Marie. From the perspective of the subject under investigation, the films studied were *Triunghiul Morții* [The Death Triangle] (1999), *Carol I: Un destin pentru România* [Carol I: A Destiny for Romania], a hybrid between a documentary and a historical film released in 2009, and *Maria: Regina României*. In the first two, Queen Marie appears but only as a secondary character. *Triunghiul Morții*, directed by Sergiu



Nicolaescu, was intended to be a glorious and heroic evocation of the great battles of 1917, but it lost its significance in a pyrotechnic and useless excess, and in questionable myth deconstructions that include the placement of Ecaterina Teodoroiu's death not in an attack sequence but in full retreat (Căliman, 2017, 523). As for the presence of Queen Marie, she is "dethroned" by Ecaterina Teodoroiu, who is herself not depicted objectively. She was portrayed as an androgynous character led only by the national cause and nothing else (Grancea, 2020, 137). As for Queen Marie, played by Maia Morgenstern, she is lost against the background of long and lingering battles (Columbeanu, 2011). She appears in the usual scenes, including in a hospital visit. But this scene is introduced in quite a brutal form. Before her arrival, the doctor tells the wounded soldiers: "Without groans, without screams, the Queen is coming!" This is far from the image of the Queen as the "Mother of the Wounded."

The scene also seems to be implausible in which the Queen meets Ecaterina Teodoroiu and judges her to be "a frail ...girl...". What appears to be suggested, though it is not so pronounced, is that the Queen actually leads from the background. See, for example, how scenes like the discussions with General Berthelot are treated. Her anger also bursts out when the King tells her about a possible departure to Russia. Atypical, with a tendency to deconstruction, is the scene that shows the royal couple hearing the news about the victory in Mărășești. King Ferdinand is at the office while the Queen, very relaxed, along with her female entourage, plays cards.

In *Carol I: Un destin pentru România* directed by Sergiu Nicolaescu, the Queen is a secondary character. However, the way she is presented, and her words, create the impression of a princess, eager to take over the throne and power. It is not the archetypal image of Queen Marie, but a duplicitous image of an arrogant princess. This is the impression created by the scene in which King Carol I talks about the end of the war he wants to outlive. Marie, with an angelic smile on her face, thinks that there is another possibility. These are the words: "Where does it say that you must live until the end of it, these things can have another end, can't they?" It is a somewhat ridiculous episode, and, considering that it is one of the last scenes in the film, it has even more impact on the viewers. It is the one with Princess Marie in the foreground, smiling at the audience when hearing the news that she will become the Queen (Columbeanu, 2011). And the news is given to her by Prince Barbu Știrbei so, it is not the image that we have become accustomed to. And,

although it takes just a few seconds its impact is rather negative. Should we consider it a deliberate choice to deconstruct the myth?

The box office film that brought the myth of the Queen back to the forefront is the one from 2019. The co-production has a Hollywoodian look. Perhaps that is why it had a major impact on the media and the general public. This film is for the historical films what Trevor Potts' documentary is for the series and the quality of the documentaries about Queen Marie. This film can be considered the first in which the myth of Queen Marie is actually exploited. This is because they chose her exclusively as a film subject. The ratings are overwhelmingly positive; and the number of viewings is impressive, too, if we consider that it was broadcast in cinemas. By December 26, 2019, when it was in cinemas, it had already had an audience of 139,081 people. The film was broadcast on commercial television and is also available online, thus, contributing to the "resuscitation" of the myth. But it is rather a nostalgic echo. Film critics are divided. Ionut Mareș, for instance, wrote in the Metropolis newspaper:

"Sweet feminism... the film is quite different from the New Wave and old, supposedly historical films by Sergiu Nicolaescu and it looks more like a British television production, only they speak Romanian... The only real quality of the film... is the pathos in making a portrait as powerful as possible, even though the Queen is imagined almost exclusively as a positive character...' (Mareș, 2019).

From the perspective of the Queen's constructed image, the film is a story about women's empowerment (Mareș, 2019), a powerful Queen who unhesitatingly assumes a unique mission for a Queen and a woman.

What is different from the historical films analysed so far is that it is actually the first historical film dedicated to the Queen. It is also one of the few dedicated to a woman (except those dedicated to Ecaterina Teodoroiu). The film resembles documentary films, but obviously without their scientific rigor. Yet, it does not turn too far away from the historical truth. What stands out, as unique in this production, is the option to exploit only one episode of the Queen's life: her presence in Paris. And her role in pleading successfully for Romania's cause during the negotiations at the Paris Peace Conference. Perhaps this choice is because it is the episode that proves the extraordinary character of the

Queen. If we think that we are talking about a foreign production, the choice of this theme is explicable. For sure, the Western Europeans knew Queen Marie only in this historical circumstance. Then there will be the famous visit in 1926. Certainly, the documentaries previously produced were a source for creating the Queen's film character. The selection from the Queen's writings is similar to these. For instance, the film includes the same fragments that have a feminist tendency. They reflect the Queen's frustrations about the impossibility of acting as political men did. Note also the fact that the Queen's personality is almost always shaped in antithesis to the figure of the King. On the one hand, there is the strong, determined woman against the hesitant, uncertain, and unstable figure of King Ferdinand.

If we think of the myth of the Queen, it includes two main features: the Queen as the "Queen/Empress of all Romanians," and as the "Mother of the Wounded." On the other hand, this film explores another feature: that of the 'Saviour Queen'. This is part of the myth of the saviour hero. In this case, the Queen is the one who succeeds, despite all the odds, where no Romanian politician did. There are also feminist accents and scenes in which the gender relations and stereotypes of the period are included. This is also due to the use of the Queen's writings. In the meeting with Georges Clemenceau, Queen Marie behaves as expected, that is, according to the feminine stereotype. She uses the power of tears to impress and persuade the politician. But there is also something of the archetype of the fatal woman. One is visible in her famous statement, "I ask for the lion's share, your Majesty. The lioness came to see her cousin, the Tiger". Likewise, the scene in which Lloyd George uses ironic and misogynistic tones. After a few moments of weakness in which she lets herself be intimidated, the Queen manages to impose herself and to dominate him. Even in relation to Woodrow Wilson we see how the Queen uses her "feminine powers." This time it is an allusion to another gender stereotype: the women's plot against men. Edith Wilson and the Queen seemed to work together to convince him to support the cause of Romania. The breakfast scene shows a "women's plot" in which the two ladies try to manipulate the president.

The film is therefore the Queen's "road to success" and international recognition. This is opposed to the attitude of Romanian politicians who consider her trip a failure and a waste of resources in a time of crisis, of a Queen is disillusioned for the moment, but who then gets

the recognition she deserves, and appreciation from Ferdinand. The film ends, and here we also have the (re)usage of contemporary newsreels, with the moment of the coronation in Alba Iulia.

Perhaps it recalls one of the Queen's milestone interventions: the one that transformed her from a real person into an allegorical one.

The results of our research prove that Queen Marie left to her contemporaries and posterity many written and visual resources. They all contributed to the modelling of her aura as an allegorical figure. She was the one who shaped the historical truth into a myth. Both documentary and historical films re-present the vision from the newsreels. They also perpetuated it. This explains the "omissions," too. Few productions address, for example, the delicate relationship of the Queen with her mother, especially after the outbreak of the War. Few discuss the death of her youngest son Mircea; the difficult relationships with her son Carol; or the last years of her life. The productions tend to follow a pattern outlined since the 1920s without any effort to "discover" more of the real Queen Marie. It is as Maia Morgenstern said: the films show us a Queen Marie "as she allowed herself to be discovered". It is also worth noting the preference of the Romanian filmmakers for the Queen and Ecaterina Teodoroiu. Although they are not the only ones fighting in the war. These two share, up to a point, the same attributes of a hero. They are presented as two doubles of Joan of Arc. Indeed, they have a different historical and film destiny. It was determined by the political evolution of Romania. In the context of the royal dictatorship and then the establishment of the communist regime, the Queen's image tended to fade.

In the 1990s we witnessed the rediscovery of the Queen's personality. Both as a historical personality and as a documentary and historical film character. This scientific and artistic interest proves that the "fascination of the Queen" did not disappear. Indeed, the myth, as Lucian Boia claimed, lost its force (Boia, 2011, 340) but did not vanish. The Queen's fascination remains, because "heroes do not end, only their storytellers. And, therefore, by writing about them, we can continue or stop, without ever exhausting the subject" (Mihalache, 2020, 268).

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS / LISTA ILUSTRĂȚIILOR

**Figure 1.** Olga Sturdza, The Union Monument, Iași, Queen Marie.

**Figure 2.** The poem dedicated to the Queen from the *Caietul Spitalul 355 al Cercului Finanțelor, Industriei și Comerțului din București, 1916–1918*.

**Figure 3.** The poster of the movie *Maria: Inima României*, 2019.



**Fig. 1.** Olga Sturdza, The Union Monument, Iași, Queen Marie (postcard, <https://mvu.ro/>)



**Fig. 2.** The poem dedicated to the Queen from the *Caietul Spitalul 355 al Cercului Finanțelor, Industriei și Comerțului din București, 1916–1918*, pp. 1–2 (<https://mvu.ro/>)



Fig. 3: The poster of the movie *Maria: Inima României*, 2019



**Table 1.** List of documentary and historical films / Listă cu filme documentare și istorice

No	Title	Year of release	Type
1.	<i>Vizita reginei Maria la spital</i>	1917	Newsreel
2.	<i>Războiul pentru reîntregirea noastră</i>	1920	Newsreel
3.	<i>Vizita în SUA</i>	1926	Newsreel
4.	<i>La sărbătoarea copiilor</i>	1928	Newsreel
5.	<i>Interviul Fox Movitone News</i>	1929	Newsreel
6.	<i>Serbările Unirii</i>	1929	Newsreel
7.	<i>Camera interviews – Queen Marie of Romania at Home</i>	1934	Newsreel
8.	<i>Funeraliile reginei</i>	1939	Newsreel
9.	<i>Pasiunea pentru frumos: Jurnalul Mariei Regina României</i>	2003	Documentary film
10.	<i>Câte ceva despre regina Maria</i>	2006	Documentary film
11.	<i>Maria: Regina noastră</i>	2010	Documentary film
12.	<i>Regina Maria: Ultima romantică, prima femeie modernă</i>	2011	Documentary film
13.	<i>Maria: Inima României</i>	2018	Documentary film
14.	<i>Femeile în război și pace: Regina Maria a României</i>	2018	Documentary film
15.	<i>Marie de Roumanie: L'etonnante reine des Carpates</i>	2021	Documentary film
Historical film			
1.	<i>Ecaterina Teodoroiu</i>	1921	Historical film
2.	<i>Datorie și sacrificiu</i>	1925	Historical film
3.	<i>Vitejii neamului</i>	1926	Historical film
4.	<i>Ecaterina Teodoroiu</i>	1930	Historical films
5.	<i>Nepoții gornistului</i>	1953	Drama
6.	<i>Viața nu iartă</i>	1959/60	Drama
7.	<i>Pădurea spânzuraților</i>	1964/65	Historical film
8.	<i>Baladă pentru Măriuca</i>	1969	Historical film
9.	<i>Prin cenușa imperiului</i>	1975/76	Drama
10.	<i>Ecaterina Teodoroiu</i>	1978	Historical film
11.	<i>Ultima noapte de dragoste întâia noapte de război</i>	1980	Historical film
12.	<i>Capcana mercenarilor</i>	1980/82	Drama
13.	<i>Întoarcerea din iad</i>	1983	Drama
14.	<i>Întunecare</i>	1983/85	Drama
15.	<i>Triunghiul morții</i>	1999	Historical film
16.	<i>Carol I: Un destin</i>	2009	Historical film
17.	<i>Maria: Regina României</i>	2019	Historical film





## PLACES, HABITS AND OBJECTS. HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION IN THE FILMS *STONE WEDDING (1973) AND LUST FOR GOLD (1974)*

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**Abstract:** Starting of 2021 Roșia Montană/Goldbach/Verespatak, an old mining town from the interwar period, from the Apuseni Mountains of Transylvania, has been listed as UNESCO Worldwide Patrimony. At the same time, the locality has been listed on the List of World Heritage in Danger. Roșia Montană had become a ruin starting with the communist period and the national-communist urban systematization, then, in the 2000s, by the project Roșia Montană Gold Corporation S.A. (RMGC) that supposed the destruction of historical sites and the environment. The old town, expression of Transylvanian interculturality, was historically and architecturally the proof of such a social-cultural interference. The analyzed films were shot in Roșia Montană before its destruction, reconstituting the historical and habitual background of the settlements life before the world wars. As such, the film adaptations directed by Mircea Veroiu and Dan Pița remain in our conscience not only as cinema masterpieces, but also as historical documents. Typical streets, secular buildings in the mountain town exist only in the films *Stone Wedding* and *Lust for Gold*, as they disappeared from immediate reality.

**Keywords:** Roșia Montană, Transylvanian interculturality, historical reconstructions, historical patrimony, film adaptations.

**Rezumat:** De curând, din 2021, localitatea Roșia Montană/Goldbach/Verespatak din Munții Apuseni ai Transilvaniei, vechi târg minier până în perioada interbelică, figurează pe lista Patrimoniul Mondial UNESCO. Totodată, așezarea a fost listată și în rândul Patrimoniului Mondial în pericol (List of World Heritage in Danger). Începând din comunism, ca urmare a sistematisării urbane național-comuniste, dar mai ales, de la începutul anilor 2000, prin proiectul Roșia Montană Gold Corporation S.A. (RMGC) care presupunea distrugerea siturilor istorice și a mediului, localitatea a devenit o ruină. Vechiul târg, expresie a interculturalității transilvănene, era prin arhitectură și situri o dovadă a existenței unei astfel de vechi interfeerențe socio-culturale. Filmele analizate de noi, prin faptul că au fost turnate în localitate înainte de alterarea acesteia, prin faptul că au reconstruit cadrul istoric și habitual al târgului din perioada antebelică, rămân în conștiința noastră nu doar în calitate de capodopere cinematografice, ci, mai ales, ca documente istorice. Străzi tipice, clădiri seculare din orașul de munte nu mai există decât în filmele *Nunta de Piatră* și *Duhul Aurului*, deoarece au dispărut din realitatea imediată.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** Roșia Montană, interculturalitate transilvăneană, reconstrucție istorică, patrimoniu istoric, adaptări cinematografice.

### Introductory aspects

Nowadays the place Roșia Montană in the Apuseni Mountains is a depopulated location, predestined to ruin. The historical patrimony disappears gradually due to an economic-political devastating conjuncture (see the effects of the Gold Corporation Project). With it, proof of existence of an intercultural community in modern Transylvania fades away. The analysed films – *Stone Wedding* (1973) and *Lust for Gold* (1974) – are masterpieces of incontestable

value<sup>1</sup>, preserving images of a mining town of the beginning of the 20th century. The traditional centre of the location, the central market, where there were concentrated the most significant elements of the community, offered the scenography of the films. In fact, a relationship between the narrative text, space prospection and actual filming is visible in these films. As a rule, the decor dictated the filming. Emotions were rendered through successions of

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<sup>1</sup> Both mid-length films of *Stone Wedding* were bought by the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

gross plans and close-ups, insisting on objects and human faces, through soundtrack.

In 1970, the debutant directors Mircea Veroiu and Dan Pița intended to make a feature film of three hours in order to reconstitute as faithfully as possible the world described by Ion Agârbiceanu.<sup>2</sup> The original texts offered information about the human behaviour in the doomed world of gold. In I. Agârbiceanu's stories the dialogues overwhelm the narration, the descriptions are brief and dry. That is why we consider the stories of the priest-writer only artistic challenges, pretexts for two directors at their beginnings. From our perspective, film adaptations are much livelier than the literary sources; they are troubling, bearing universal messages. Mircea Veroiu and Dan Pița produced a tetralogy in 2 referential films for the European cinema. The film *Stone Wedding*<sup>3</sup> comprises mid-length films *Fefelega* (directed by M. Veroiu)<sup>4</sup> and *At a Wedding* (directed by D. Pița).<sup>5</sup> The second film, *Lust for Gold*<sup>6</sup>

includes two mid-length films: *Mârza*<sup>7</sup> (directed by Veroiu) and *Lada/ The Chest*<sup>8</sup> (directed by Pița). The four mid-length films were filmed in July-September 1970. *Stone Wedding* premiered on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January 1973, while *Lust for Gold* on the 28<sup>th</sup> October 1974. The two films are different from the artistic expression point of view. The mid-length films produced by Veroiu are focused on the essentialization of artistic expressions, tragic existentialism, detailing in black and white as a technique used with virtuosity to express the contrasts of life under the sign of loneliness and death (Stanculescu, 2011, 22). On the other hand, in Pița's films, humour and tragedy succeed, as the chosen topics are far from reflection; his films are concentrated on epic narration and heroes' portraits (see especially *At a Wedding*).

The exceptional historical reconstruction, plasticity of image and subliminal messages regarding the effects of breaking the moral norms are elements that ensure the unified character of the films. On the other hand, the ethicist approach, as well as hints at ethnographic traditions were complying with the ideological commandments of the era. Nevertheless, the films, especially the *Stone Wedding*, were affected by censorship, alterations, delaying the broadcast (Stanculescu, 2011, 23).

<sup>2</sup> Ion Agârbiceanu (1882-1963), was a Greek-Catholic priest in 1906-1910, in Bucium Șasa, Țara Moșilor. He published stories in the journal *Ramuri* in 1907, fragments from stories that will consecrate him. The literary narrations published in the prose collection *În întuneric/ In the Darkness* (1910) are the expression of a conscience crisis. The Christian ethics practiced by the author clashed in the town space, a transition space between rural and urban, with inhabitants consumed by the lust for gold and dedicated to pre-Christian traditions.

<sup>3</sup> *Stone Wedding* (script written and directed by Mircea Veroiu and Dan Pița; actors in main roles: Leopoldina Bălănuță, Mircea Diaconu; image: Iosif Demian; scenography: Radu Boruzescu and Helmuth Stürmer;

<sup>4</sup> Maria, nick-named Fefelega, is a widow that worked a lot for her children. But they died, one after another, before reaching teenage hood. She is striking to save her last child, her beautiful Păunița, who lives in an impeccable house, with dolls. When her daughter died, Fefelega sold her horse to dress up her daughter in a wedding gown, according to tradition.

<sup>5</sup> This is a broken wedding. A poor girl is taken into marriage by an elder son of a wealthy man. The wedding takes place in the yard of the wealthy man, where around 200 people gathered to celebrate. A cetera player and a drummer are invited to play, the latter being a deserter. The bride and the cetera player gaze intensely at each other and the drummer suggests in a song a plan to escape. After the lovers escape, the drummer is killed by the rich embarrassed relatives. The final ballad of the film explains that the two lovers knew each other and were in love since

childhood (unlike the story that describes a *coup de foudre*).

<sup>6</sup> *Lust for Gold* (script written and directed by Mircea Veroiu and Dan Pița; actors: Eliza Petrăchescu, Ernest Maftei; cameraman: Iosif Demian; Music: Dorin-Liviu Zaharia; scenography: Radu Boruzescu and Helmuth Stürmer; montage: Dan Naum.

<sup>7</sup> Vasile Mârza is a poor miner that became a gold thief. The narration that inspired the script writers - *The Spirit of Baths* - doesn't have a fabula, only several characters that convey in a dialogue the local mythology about the spirit of gold.

<sup>8</sup> The story *Lada/ The Chest* is the fable of a marriage of convenience. The widower Clemente marries a much younger woman. He needs new sources to maintain his social status though he was known to be rich within his community. There was a rumour that the widower had a chest full of gold. The new wife became obsessed by the content of the chest. When the widower fell sick, the wife neglected him and waited impatiently for him to die in order to discover that the chest is full of stones. The pressure and the unpleasant surprise drove the woman mad. The script changes some details: the widower fakes the sickness, triggering a mechanism that leads to wife's death.

### The whistle and the gramophone. Archaism versus modernity

Seduced by the atmosphere of the place at the beginning of the '70s that conserved its intercultural identity<sup>9</sup>, the filmmakers insisted on conveying the socio-cultural and historical contexts of a former mining town in the mountains. They tried to reimagine the geo-symbolical and anthropological space of the town in the Apuseni Mountains, represented especially by Roşia Montană, a significant mining town (Abrideanu, 1928; Roman et al., 1982, 9-100; Paşca, 2010, 81-96) in pre-industrial era. One proof is the hydro-technical works of the first half of the 18th century conserved until the 20th century. These are stamp mills that functioned like water mills and were used to sort out the ore; when the water flow was insufficient for these tools, the dam of an artificial lake was opened. Tăul cel Mare/ The Big Lake was built in 1908 and is mentioned in the ballad that ensures the soundtrack of *Fefelega*.

In full Jugendstil, the town was a dynamic and multi-cultural setting; the urban structure before the First World War was according to the typology of industrial settings that preserved the tradition of the premodern habitat. The town had buildings (mainly houses) spread across a valley (Valea Roşiei), and a centre, with a central square.

The position of houses in the 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries was determined by the ethno-cultural and religious principles. Then, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the social hierarchy determined a new distribution in the habitat. The elite of the town was formed by the investors in the gold exploitation (owners of several stamp mills) from old families of miners who had inherited fortunes across generations, mining specialists and managing staff (Austrians, Italians, Slovaks, Czechs) and gold thieves who were searching for honourable positions.

The rich people built big houses inspired by the urban architecture of the era. The film presents old houses of the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, monuments of traditional architecture (houses with cellars, one floor and a large porch in the *roşieni* area; houses with two rooms and pantry

in the *lătureni* area, a close area to the centre), and also houses inspired by central-European urban buildings. The same emphasized influence is visible in the lay and religious buildings of Roşia Montană. We refer to specific Austrian baroque decorations on buildings, as well as Victorian era influences. The filmed houses include the Hungarian school or Vuzdugan House (1835), the German school (1830-1850), the Orthodox Church Dormition of Mother of God (1781, founded by Mihăilă Gritta, the famous goldsmith of the Apuseni area); Unitarian Church (1796) and the Reformed Church (1800). These churches dominate the Central Square.

The city hall, cinema hall, headquarters of the insurance society and subsidiaries of banking institutions, delivery rooms and clubs were situated in the historical centre. In fact, the centre was receptive to the architectonic innovations specific to the urbanization of the era. However, the directors ignored these buildings that showed the capitalist prosperity of the town, inter-cultural solidarity of the miners' world, social places that proved the synchronicity of life related to the modern world. We refer to delivery rooms, pharmacy, banking institutions, cinema hall (1900-1918), two restaurants and the amphitheatre that housed popular parties. If these were filmed, it would have contradicted the status of rural setting, the status of Roşia Montană in the communist period. Moreover, that could have showed the difference between the urban past and the recent rural status. Nevertheless, we may observe the town as an urban space with stone and illuminated streets, a summer garden where the fanfare was playing, providing the musical leitmotifs of the film *Stone Wedding*. The same fanfare played at funerals (see *Lada/The Chest* in *Lust for Gold*). In reality, there were several fanfares in Roşia Montană that were playing in the entire region of the Apuseni Mountains (at Abrud, Zlatna, Bucium).

Among the houses filmed by the two directors that resisted the urban systematization in national-communism and the post-communist decline of the settlement, we mention David Francisc house, with complicated hardware (18th century), then the houses on the central street in Brazi neighbourhood, called the Sicilian street. The most houses with one floor and monumental gates, with neo-classical plastering around windows, with intricate hardware, social-

<sup>9</sup> Although in the communist period the status of the settlement was of village, the former town wasn't heavily affected by systematization and the post-communist decline.

professional emblems<sup>10</sup>. Especially the houses of the 18th century had flying buttresses and/or surrounded by stone fences<sup>11</sup>. The houses with one floor, specific to the 18th and 19th century are placed with the front facade or one of the secondary walls to the street. This architectural element forms together with the monumental gate a common front (as in Saxon and Maramures communities). This typology is represented by Vuzdugan house (no. 392) or Păun house (no.372), both situated in the Berg neighbourhood (though tendentious and propagandistic, see Popoiu, 2004, 23-24). The social status of the owner was visible in the one floor houses, in their decorations and especially the monumental gate.

A source of inspiration for the historical reconstruction was a documentary *Mineritul în Țara Moșilor, Munții Apuseni/Mining in Țara Moșilor, the Apuseni Mountains* (directed by Paul Călinescu, 1939), which reproduces the lifestyle in the inter-war era, preserving elements of the economic, social life of the beginning of the 20th century<sup>12</sup>. These images reconstituted a world considered archaic and they determined the directors and the operator Iosif Demian to film black-and-white (sometimes with grey reflexes, sometimes white) to treat objects as museified artefacts (antique furniture, interior decorations) and to manifest interest for pre-Christian rites of passage. The interference between the traditional customs seen in the Romanian wedding in *At a Wedding* and the receptivity toward the modern music that the wedding guests were listening at the gramophone. This type of interference generates humoristic moments, such as sequences of dances in the film. Dressed in their best clothes, the local people were dancing on traditional music specific to the area – *țarinele*<sup>13</sup>. Țarina from Găina Mountain is a dynamic, rhythmic and elegant dance reproduced in the film. After this regional dance, the wedding guests look

curiously at the gramophone and start dancing clumsily on the new music. In fact, miners' parties in Roșia Montană and the surrounding area (such as Abrud and Bucium) were animated by fanfares. Thus, every party started with the *Hymn of Miners*, and ended with *Iancu's March*, *Ivangogod or Leighte Kavallerie* (Roman et al., 1982, 101). When a miner would die, all fanfares reunited and sang the funeral march *Eroica* by Ludwig van Beethoven *Kavallerie* (Roman et al., 1982, 101).

Although it was a relatively small community, the town lived under the standards of the urban life like in Central Europe. The economic and cultural delay toward the western provinces of monarchy started to be overcome before the Austro-Hungarian dualism (Balog, 2007). Even widow Maria (nick-named Fefelega) lived in a white beautiful house, situated in the mythical symbolical place “*at the edge of the abyss, on the verge of the lake.*”

The directors presented to cultural press the way they solved the relation between the filmic image and (historical) reality. Mircea Veroiu stated that the actors transformed reality into images:

“maybe the manner in which you imagine reality may reimagine that reality [...] I don't believe that the documentary is necessarily a realistic film and the feature film would not be realistic because of the gross reason that it remakes reality” (Pană, 1972).

In order to render adequately the historical reality in *Fefelega*, the set designer reconstituted a “*stamp mill, which seemed to contribute to the documentary feel*” (*Ibidem*)<sup>14</sup>. The way in which the group of people was filmed around the stamp mill reminds the news report “*of a workday 70 years ago at a stamp mill made by us nowadays. This a documented manner...*” (*Ibidem*) More explicitly, Dan Pița tells about the fact that before reaching Roșia Montană he had “*a certain way of filming in mind*” (*Ibidem*), but the:

“atmosphere, the places and especially the people in their clothes and their behaviour introduced me to a different world that I felt nearer than the cut-out that I had brought with me. Then, the setting done by

<sup>10</sup> We visited the town in 2011 and saw the degrading houses. See Grancea, 2011. One of the mentioned historical monuments is present in Vulpe et al. 2011, 253-274.

<sup>11</sup> We discovered traces of such fences in our second fieldwork in 2018, at the wooded and gone wild limit of the Roman-Catholic cemetery.

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1\\_-nL4pHwmY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_-nL4pHwmY) (Accessed on 27. 04. 2017).

<sup>13</sup> See the Romanian traditional dances „Țarina de la Abrud”, „Țarina lui Ciucă Todor”, „Țarina de la Buciumani”, „Țarina de la Găina”.

<sup>14</sup> It reminded us the afore-mentioned documentary.

Radu Boruzescu and Helmuth Stürmer, music by Dorin Liviu Zaharia and the framing proposed by the cameraman Iosif Demian introduced me to a different reality that we can call the reality of filming. Then I did everything to adapt without altering a thing of the authenticity of the topic and the place” (*Ibidem*).

The films became places of memory, they museified a community, which after December 1989 was destroyed by the unaltered and malevolent spirit of gold that corrupted both governors and inhabitants.

### Story and film adaptation

Whereas the stories of the writer-priest are visibly ethicist, the films mostly elude the finalities with moral stakes. Thus, *The Chest* contains a powerful subliminal message. The film has neither positive characters nor divine punishment. The “pedagogy” of narration is ignored. Agârbiceanu’s story is explicitly focused on the characters’ portraits, on dialogue. In the film, the suspense is gradually built, through sounds, images and music. Beyond the clichés of horror films, presented in black humour key, the viewer gets clues about the evolution of events, clues among symmetrical events: a funeral, a wedding, another funeral, another wedding. Thus, we may conclude that the biblical morals of the writings are transformed into “*poetry of a damned universe*” (Stanculescu, 2011, 22) by the films.

More than that, the filmic masterpieces present the interference between the ancestral rites of passage at weddings and funerals, the modern habits specific to La Belle Époque. More specifically, the films expose aspects of cultural consumption specific to the urban life. In all the films the consumer goods originated even from Vienna. We refer here to clothes and shoes worn by the rich people, but even by those from the middle class on holidays. Toys, jewellery, cologne, velocipedes were among other goods sold by the local merchants. The funeral carriage looks like any other specific vehicle to the urban setting. The viewer finds out about the casino where the poor and the rich were squandering or rounding their fortunes. There were also itinerant street photographers and a birder fond of velocipede riding. These characters enlivened the life of the town.

There are rare details about the life of the poor people, only at the beginning of the *Stone Wedding* there are aspects of a working day of those who worked at the mines. These are suggestive images, dominated by the noise of the hydraulic installations that sorted out the ore. The white faces of the workers are seen through suffering, among the mechanical gestures and perfect symmetries of objects. *Fefelega* is a silent tragedy that points out to the lack of community’s compassion, the loneliness of the poor (widows, orphans) exploited or tricked by the wealthy.

*Stone Wedding* is focused on the aesthetic expression, on essentialization and symmetry, revealing the dryness of the human nature compared to the poetry of objects. The very short sequence of pre-Christian Romanian wedding rites presents the mythological insertion in an exaggerated manner. It is obvious that the film-makers appeal to the basics of Romanian spirituality in an exaggerated manner, in the opinion of communist film critics:

“*Stone Wedding* marked a return to the essence of the national being, to a fundamental profundity lost among the waves of servility, political engagement, historical distortions and daily poverty. The diptych created by Veroiu and Pița is maybe the most ‘national’ Romanian film, as the camera pervades the territory of a trans-temporal culture, enlivening feelings rooted in archetypal models, appealing to signs that encompassed a profound Romanian symbolic thinking” (Ilieșiu, 2010, 111).

However, the mythical motives inserted in the films have a universal character (see the European mythology of gold, Indo-European psychopomp symbols). We shouldn’t ignore the directors’ statements regarding their artistic demarche: “*the films are not only narration, but music, setting, image, ethnographic customs, poetry of a tragic world.*” (Ichim, 1973, 4)

The two films *Stone Wedding* and *Lust for Gold* represent a search for a lost world, in which the tragedy and black comedy were daily events, while the typologies were specific to gold mining towns. Although the films preserve the ethical finality of Agârbiceanu’s stories, the films offer complex images of human interference. The nationalist schism was inexistent, ethnical identity was less significant

than in other urban communities. Social identity, greed or poverty is more important in the world of gold. Thus, after this analysis focused on the

topic of historical reconstruction through films, we do not exaggerate when stating that these films had become a “place of memory”.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS/ LISTA ILUSTRĂȚILOR

**Figure 1.** Fefelega in Mircea Veroiu's mid-length film *Fefelega, Stone Wedding* (1973)/ Fefelega în mediu-metrajul lui Mircea Veroiu *Fefelega, Nunta de piatră* (1973)

**Figure 2.** Maria's daughter dressed as a bride at her funeral in Mircea Veroiu's mid-length film *Fefelega, Stone Wedding* (1973)/ Fiica Mariei (Fefelega) în veșminte de mireasă la înmormântare în mediu-metrajul lui Mircea Veroiu *Fefelega, Nunta de piatră* (1973)

**Figure 3.** *At a Wedding*, directed by Dan Pița, *Stone wedding* (1973)/ *La o nuntă* în regia lui Dan Pița, *Nunta de piatră* (1973)

**Figure 4.** *The Chest*, directed by Dan Pița, *Lust for Gold* (1974)/ *Lada*, în regia lui Dan Pița, *Duhul aurului* (1974)



**Fig. 1.** Fefelega in Mircea Veroiu's mid-length film *Fefelega, Stone Wedding* (1973)/ Fefelega în mediu-metrajul lui Mircea Veroiu *Fefelega, Nunta de piatră* (1973)



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**Fig. 3.** *At a Wedding*, directed by Dan Pița, *Stone wedding* (1973)/ *La o nuntă* în regia lui Dan Pița, *Nunta de piatră* (1973)



**Fig. 4.** *The Chest*, directed by Dan Pița, *Lust for Gold* (1974)/ *Lada*, în regia lui Dan Pița, *Duhul aurului* (1974)



## ISSUES CONCERNING WOMEN'S SPORTS IN TRANSYLVANIA IN THE INTERWAR PERIOD

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**Abstract:** *The development of the sports movement was one of the most important features of the interwar period in Romania, and in this respect, Transylvania stood out as one of the most active regions. The new and modern phenomenon of sports led to an exponential increase in the number of sports clubs and associations, a rise in participation in competitions, and to a growing popularity of sports among enthusiasts and spectators. However, there is a great discrepancy between men's and women's sports, both in terms of the level of diffusion in society, and organization and participation in competitions, which is visible in Romania and at the international level. The main purpose of this article is to present some of the most important aspects of women's sports in interwar Romania and to illustrate the gender discrimination that existed in sports at that time. On the other hand, this study tries to highlight the fact that Transylvanian associations and clubs, and the female athletes in them played a pioneering and developing role in the women's sports movement in Romania. The first argument to support the importance of the role of Transylvanian sportswomen is the fact that they were pioneers in terms of the presence of women in the Olympic Games. Then I will show that female athletes from Transylvanian clubs contributed to the first Romanian medals in important international table tennis competitions and achieved valuable results in various national and international competitions in tennis, the most gender-equal sport at that time. Finally, as a unique element, we will present the case of a young woman who was so enamoured with soccer that she was captain of a men's European football team but was maliciously compared to today's cheerleaders. The main source for this article will be the press of the time, because studies and research on Romanian women's sports in the interwar period are very rare. When this article refers to Transylvania, it should be understood in the broadest sense as including Ardeal, Banat, Crișana, and Maramureș.*

**Keywords:** *interwar Romania, women's sports, gender discrimination, Olympism, sports regionalism.*

**Rezumat:** *Dezvoltarea mișcării sportive a fost una dintre caracteristicile importante ale perioadei interbelice în România, iar Transilvania s-a remarcat ca una dintre regiunile foarte active din acest punct de vedere. Noul și modernul fenomen sportiv a avut ca efect înmulțirea exponențială a numărului de societăți și cluburi sportive, creșterea gradului de participare la competiții și sporirea popularității sporturilor în rândul practicanților și spectatorilor. A existat însă o discrepanță majoră între sportul masculin și cel feminin, atât ca grad de difuzare la nivelul societății, cât și din perspectiva organizării și participării la competiții, vizibilă și în România, și pe plan internațional. Scopul principal al acestui articol este de a prezenta unele dintre cele mai importante aspecte ale activității sportive feminine din România interbelică și de a ilustra discriminarea de gen existentă la nivelul sportului în acele vremuri. Pe de altă parte, acest studiu încearcă să pună în lumină faptul că asociațiile și cluburile din Transilvania și sportivele din cadrul acestora au avut un rol de pionierat și de dezvoltator în mișcarea sportivă feminină din România. Primul punct pe lista argumentelor pe care le vom prezenta pentru a susține importanța rolului jucat de sportivele din Transilvania este că acestea au fost deschizătoare de drumuri din perspectiva prezențelor feminine la Jocurile Olimpice. Apoi, vom arăta că sportivele de la cluburile din Transilvania au contribuit la primele medalii românești la importante competiții internaționale de ping-pong (tenis de masă) și au avut rezultate valoroase în diverse competiții naționale și internaționale la tenis, disciplina cea mai echilibrată în privința egalității între sexe în sport. În fine, ca un element inedit vom prezenta cazul unei tinere care a fost atât de îndrăgostită de fotbal încât a fost căpitan al unei echipe masculine care practica sportul rege, dar a fost comparată, în mod răuvoitor cu animatoarele din ziua de azi. Sursa principală a acestui articol o va constitui presa vremii, întrucât studiile și cercetările asupra sportului feminin românesc din perioada interbelică sunt foarte rare. În acest articol ne vom referi la Transilvania în sensul larg al termenului, incluzând Ardealul, Banatul, Crișana și Maramureșul.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *perioada interbelică România, sport feminin, discriminare de gen, olimpism, regionalism sportiv.*

## Perspectives on Women's Sports in the Early 20th Century

The first modern Olympic Games were held in Athens, Greece in 1896 with 241 athletes from 14 countries. It was the largest international sporting event of its time, and the Athens competitions set the tone for a spectacular evolution of the sporting phenomenon, although the number of participants was small by today's standards. From the point of view of women's sports, however, the history of the Olympic Games began with discrimination, because women did not participate in these first Olympic competitions in the spirit of ancient Greek tradition.

A first step in balancing the gender distribution in sports was taken at the 1900 Olympics in Paris, when the first women participated in Olympic competitions. But it was only a symbolic presence, as only 22 of the 997 athletes were women. The first Olympic title for women was won by Britain's Charlotte Cooper in tennis, one of the first sports to include women in competition. Apart from the 1904 and 1932 Olympics in the United States, where the number of participants was lower than in previous editions, the number of athletes registered to participate in the other Olympic Games increased significantly with each new edition at the turn of the century, a sign that international competitions were becoming more popular and important. The same was true for female representation, but the ratio of male to female participation was extremely unbalanced.

Today, the International Olympic Committee boasts of its commitment to gender equality in sport, which is set forth in its Statutes in Chapter I, Rule 2.8. Since 1991, any new sport wishing to be included in the Olympic competition program must also offer events for women. At the Rio 2016 Olympic Games, 45 percent of participants were women (<https://olympics.com>).

The situation of women's participation in international competitions in the interwar period was similar in the world championships of various other sports. For example, women did not participate in the world gymnastics championships until the 10th edition in Budapest in 1934, although the first edition had taken place in 1903, and in fencing women did not compete until the 7th edition in 1929, although the first edition had taken place in 1921. In soccer, the first women's World Cup was not held until 1991, while the first men's World Cup was held in 1930. An exception to the rule was table tennis, where in the first World Cup held in London in 1926, women competed in singles and mixed doubles, while

men's doubles and team competitions were also held.

Under these circumstances, it is not surprising that gender discrimination was and still is one of the topics that sports historians discuss extensively, along with other important areas of research such as the role of sports in the fascist regime, sports in communist societies, workers' sports in the 1920s and 1930s, the Olympic Games, the intersections of sports with politics, and issues of race and ethnicity (Guttmann, 2003, 365).

However, there were also approaches from other perspectives on women's sports in the interwar period that did not refer to gender discrimination. For example, an article on the situation of women's sports in France in the interwar period addresses the emancipation of women through sports despite the alarming predictions of medical professionals about women's participation in sports. The study identified two different views on how women should exercise their bodies and analysed different feminist tactics, discourses, and strategies of the time, which were mostly moderate but sometimes radical or egalitarian (Castan-Vicente & Bohuon, 2020, 235). Another study of women in Britain shows that the practice of various sports and the appropriation of physical culture were seen as emblems of modernity and that women who practiced sports in the pursuit of beauty and health embodied civic virtue. The article argues that a modern female body achieved through sports was part of women's liberation in the interwar period. (Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 2011, 299).

With the caveat that the possibilities for research on women's sports are many, I conclude by mentioning another article that shows how sports contributed to the creation of new experiences and manifestations of femininity in Argentina in the first half of the 20th century. Women who played sports embodied a new model of femininity, a new type of modern, healthy, and active woman that challenged the traditional image of women in Argentina. The practice of sports also helped redefine the way women interacted with society, expanding their social circles and personal relationships (Anderson, 2015, 700).

## Women's Sports in Romania in the Interwar Period

The impact of the growing popularity of the Olympic Games and other international competitions was also felt in Romania. According to the official statistical yearbooks of the Romanian sports organizations for the years 1930, 1938–39, 1939–1940, 1943, 1963–66, 1993–2002,

sports in the interwar period was at one of the highest levels in Romanian history. If in 1930 more than 330 clubs and sports associations were officially registered with the sports authorities throughout Romania, in 1938 no less than 1499 clubs were registered as active. This peak of almost 1500 clubs was not reached again in Romania until 2003. The closest to this popularity was in 1985, when 1410 clubs were active throughout the country (*Anuarul sportului*, 2003, 122). It should be noted that:

“many clubs existed only formally, rarely active and often only locally, because they had to face material problems. In the 1930s and 1940s, only 0.75 percent of the population of Greater Romania (18,052,896 inhabitants in 1930 and 19,933,802 inhabitants in 1939) practiced one or more sports in an organized way. However, there are no statistics by age groups, gender, or ethnicity” (Popa, 2013, 214).

A starting point for analysing the situation of Romanian women's sports in the interwar period can be a document containing the statutes of the Romanian Sports Club of Deva, founded on June 1, 1919. (SJHANR, 106/1920, f.1–12). This document, in “Chapter 5. Members of the Club”, illustrates one of the actual, but not necessarily general, views on sports at that time. Thus, one of the provisions refers to the fact that only men can be members of the club. “A member of this sports club can only be a strong, independent man with a clean past and, above all, present.” (SJHANR, 106/1920, f.1–12). It is not clear whether only for this reason or for many others, but it is certain that this Romanian Sports Club in Deva had a short life and disappeared in 1924 without any notable activity.

Another, less restrictive perspective is offered in a 1925 article, which speaks of the first athletics competitions for women in Braşov, which were the first manifestations of women's sports after tennis and handball. The commendable initiative came from the Colţea Braşov Club, whose athletics department was headed by the outstanding sportsman Captain Cristescu. The author believes that these events should not be relegated to a newspaper corner, and that sports are as necessary for women as for men. The arguments put forward in support of this idea are interesting and well structured, but also highlight the changing role of women in Romanian society:

“Today, women have shortened their dresses and hair, simplified their clothes and adapted

them as much as possible to those of men. (...) Today girls run, swim, play tennis and dance to the barbaric sounds of jazz. The changing conditions of life demand from women the same occupations as from men. (...) They are required to work side by side with men. If they lead the same existence physically and mentally as men, it is only natural that they strengthen their muscles by warming them in the soothing fire of sport. Physical exercise will give them, as it does men, the balance necessary for a healthy mind in a vigorous body” (Pegasus, 1925, 1).

A more general overview of the organizational and competitive situation of Romanian women's sports, with emphasis on athletics, can be found in another article published in *Gazeta sporturilor* [The Sports Gazette], the only sports newspaper in existence at the time. The approach of the second edition of the Women's National Athletics Championships and the creation of the Central Commission for Women's Sports in March 1926, as well as the rapid dissolution of this body, led to the question of whether women's sports in Romania had reached a significant level of development (OLUC 1927, 1–2). The realities presented tend to argue in favour of a no, but also show that the life of Romanian women's sports owes much to the sports clubs in Transylvania, Banat, and Bukovina. Thus, it can be seen that women's sports in Romania were active in five disciplines: tennis, winter sports, swimming, hazena (handball) and athletics. Unfortunately, the above-mentioned sports, apart from the first two, were practiced only in the new regions, the former Habsburg territories. Swimming was practiced in clubs in Timișoara, Arad, Târgu Mureș, Cluj and Oradea. Hazena found followers in Timișoara, and Cernăuți. Athletics was among the sports practiced in Timișoara, Arad, Sibiu, Braşov, Cluj, Mediaş, and Odorhei. The conclusion was that women's sports had a rather modest situation, although in tennis and swimming both regional and central forums had included events for women in their programs (OLUC 1927, 1–2). When analysing the competitions and performances, the results were among the most worrying, but on the other hand, the monopoly of the Transylvanian clubs on the women's sports movement was again noted:

“Since the women's athletics movement in our country is so young, one can count on one's fingers the competitions that date back more than four years. The oldest achievements date back to 1923.

Improvements in results can be noted only in the jumping and throwing disciplines. Braşov, represented by Olimpia, Sibiu by HTV, Arad and Timisoara are leading – not to say monopolizing – the women's athletics movement through their local athletics clubs" (OLUC 1927, 1–2).

Finally, in a table of records summarizing the performances achieved so far, only female athletes from clubs in Transylvania and Banat appear, namely from Chinezul Timişoara, CA Arad, HTV Sibiu, Olimpia Braşov, and Odorhei (OLUC, 1927, 1–2).

One of the possible explanations for the situation of women's sports in the world and in Romania in the interwar period lies in the attitude of the Church. Thus, the *Observatore romano*, the Vatican's official newspaper, campaigned against women's gymnastics competitions, polemicizing with a sports newspaper that challenged it to prove that these competitions were necessary for women's health, grace, motherhood, and education. The publication, which exclusively reflected the views of Pope Pius XI, expressed the hope that public sports exercises for women would be banned (Roşianu, 1933, 1–4).

### **The First Women to Represent Romania at the Olympics Came from Transylvanian Clubs**

Despite this less favourable situation, both at the national and international level, Transylvanian club athletes have lived their passion for sports and, in some cases, fulfilled their dreams. And one of these dreams was certainly the participation in the Olympic Games. In this context, it should be noted that athletes from Transylvanian clubs proved to be pioneers for the presence of women at the Olympic Games. The athletes Bertha Jikely from the Sibiu Gymnastics Society (HTV) and Irina Orendi from Olimpia Braşov went down in the history of Romanian sports as the first female athletes to compete for our country at the Olympic Games. The event took place in 1928 at the competition in Amsterdam, where Romania had the smallest delegation in history, with only 22 athletes, except for the 1900 edition in Paris, where only one Romanian athlete competed. Irina Orendi competed in the high jump and finished 20th with 1.35 m, not qualifying for the final. Berta Jikely competed in the discus throw and finished 18th with 28.19m, missing out on the final.

The results of the other Romanian representatives at the 1928 Olympics were also modest, so the media coverage was negative. Without addressing the female athletes directly,

but with a general address to all those who represented Romania at the 1928 Olympics, an article in *Gazeta sporturilor* notes the lack of training as the main problem of our country's athletes:

"Sport, as it is practiced today, has ceased to be anything other than a science and an art. Of course, the basis is still strength or agility, but that is not enough; you need something else, and that something else is training. When I say this word, I mean all its elements, perseverance, tenacity, order and, above all, technical knowledge. (...) It seems that not all nations have understood this, which is why the general classification of athletics competitions at the Olympic Games shows that the nations that excel in systematic training efforts are at the top" (Ott. 1928, 1).

The tradition of female representation of Transylvanian clubs at the Olympic Games was continued at the 1936 edition in Berlin by two more athletes, both from Transylvanian clubs, namely Thea Kellner and Gerda Gantz, who were active in the Braşov Athletic League. In order to support their participation in the 1936 Olympic Games, it was necessary to raise funds, among other things. One of the actions to support the Olympians was carried out by the representatives of the Braşov Athletic League, at the initiative of Professor Lucian Moldovanu, and resulted in the collection of 30,000 lei from various institutions and companies to support the trip to Berlin. "Ionescu Crum will compete in the long jump, Ludovic Gall in the marathon and Ms. Gerda Ganz in fencing" (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 2113, 1936, 2). The support of the athletes was seen as a convincing example of how the Braşov municipality supported sports. The decision of the Municipal Council of Braşov, which, on the proposal of mayor Dr. Priscu, unanimously approved a grant for the trip to Berlin of the athletes Ionescu Crum and Ludovic Gall and Ms. Ganz in fencing, was a moment in which the daily disputes were overcome. In full consensus, the opposition and the government, the Romanians and the Saxons voted for a grant that is a credit to the city of Braşov and that will allow some of the best athletes to travel to Berlin (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 2119, 1936, 1).

In addition to Gerda Gantz, who was on the list of athletes who received financial support for the trip, Thea Kellner, another athlete from Braşov, also participated in the fencing competition of the 1936 Olympics. The two athletes were the only

Romanian representatives in the women's competition at the 1936 Olympics, continuing the tradition started by athletes from Sibiu and Braşov at the 1928 Olympics. Their athletic performances were modest, as both were eliminated from the competition in the first round. Commenting on the fencing results, Professor Camil Mortun, correspondent of *Gazeta Sporturilor* in Berlin, drew a parallel between the dilettantism of the Romanian athletes and the masked professionalism of their opponents. He pointed out that Italy and Hungary, the countries with the best results in fencing, had already selected their athletes for the Olympic Games two years ago and trained them intensively under the supervision of the most renowned coaches. The representatives of Poland and France were military men, fencing instructors who had no other profession than handling weapons. The Romanian representatives, on the other hand, were one hundred percent amateurs who trained one hour a day after their work. To have these dilettantes compete against foreign aces was therefore considered neither sporting nor humane. But Olympic amateurism is such a thorny problem that it is futile to try to unravel it (Mortun, 1936, 1).

### **First International Women's Medals for Romania**

From the pride of representing the country in the Olympic Games to the prestige of achieving the first great successes in women's sports, I will now move from athletics and fencing to table tennis. Conceived as a board game for small, enclosed spaces, ping pong developed into a sports discipline and found its way into Romanian society through Hungarian influence. Jewish and Hungarian sports associations and clubs adopted the sport with great interest, and table tennis was one of the sports in which Romania achieved significant international success during the interwar period. Ping pong was not officially renamed table tennis until 1940 to emphasize the difference between a game and a sport (Popa, 2013, 180).

Table tennis reached the level of hosting world-class competitions in 1926. At that time, a European Championship was held in London, which was later named the first World Table Tennis Championship. In the first edition, athletes from Hungary, Austria, England, India and Wales stood on the podium. Romania did not register its first participation with a men's team until the 10th edition in 1936 in Prague, Czechoslovakia. The competition was marred by poor organization and inferior tables, but the debut of the Romanian

national team was a success. The team of Victor Vladone, Marin Goldberger and Farkas Paneth, all from clubs in Cluj, won the silver medal after losing the final to Austria.

The unexpected debut performance was the starting point for a series of three new world medals for Romanian table tennis in the following world championships in the interwar period. All three medals went down in the history of Romanian sports as the first international trophies for women's sports in our country. Thus, Romania won a new medal at the 1937 World Cup in Austria, the first with female participation. The Romanian team consisted of Angelica Adelstein, married Rozeanu (Aurora Bucharest), Gabriela Nagy (CSAE Cluj), Geza Eros (Sporting Bucharest), Farkas Paneth (Haggibor Cluj) and L. Krebs (CSAE Cluj) (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 2305, 1937, 1), and one of the two women of the delegation contributed to the only medal won by our team. The Romanian team scored with the mixed doubles of Angelica Adelstein and Geza Eros, who won the bronze medal. Both players, who won the first medal for Romania in mixed doubles, played for clubs in Bucharest.

The last two medals of Romanian table tennis in the interwar period were won one hundred percent by the contribution of the female representatives in the 1939 World Championships in Cairo. The international participation in the competition in Egypt was low due to the pre-war tensions and the venue, only five women's teams and 11 men's teams were on the starting list. The two Romanian medals, silver in the women's doubles and bronze in the women's team, were won by Angelica Adelstein and Sari Kolozsvari, athletes from Aurora Bucharest and CSAE Cluj, respectively. "In the girls' category, we had the misfortune that of the five participating countries, two were among the best in the world (Germany and Czechoslovakia) and Romania finished third (G.A. 1939, 1-4). The "Corbillon Cup" for women went to Germany and the "Swaythling Cup" for men went to Czechoslovakia. The Romanian women's team, consisting of Ms. Adelstein and Ms. Kolozsvari, won twice and lost two games, placing third among the five participating countries. The Romanian women defeated Egypt and Palestine 3-0 and 2-0 but lost to Germany and Czechoslovakia by the same score of 1-3 (*Universul sport*, no. 77, 1939, 10). Then Adelstein and Kolozsvari reached the final in the women's doubles and did not win, as almost the entire Romanian press erroneously reported, and a telegram published in *Nemzeti Sport* reproduced. The two Romanians lost to the German pair of Gertrude Pritzi and Hilde Bergmann after a more

even match than the score of 3:0 shows. In the semifinals, Adelstein and Kolozsvari defeated the pair Marie Kettnerova (Czechoslovakia) – Samiha Naili (Egypt) 3–1 (*Universul sport*, no. 78, 1939, 11). In the men's competition, the Romanian representatives did not manage to reach the podium in any of the four disciplines.

### **A Sport Open to Women, with Good Results for Transylvania**

In order to get a more comprehensive and detailed picture of the situation of women's sports in Transylvania in the interwar period, I will make a brief case study of the participation and performance of Transylvanian women in tennis competitions. Tennis was one of the first sports to open for women's participation in competitions, both internationally and in our country. The 22 women who participated for the first time in the Olympic Games in Paris in 1900 competed in tennis, sailing, croquet, horseback riding and golf, out of a total of 20 sports, and of these five sports with women competing, tennis had the most participants.

In Romania, the first official tennis championship, organized by the Federation of Sports Societies in Romania, took place in 1912. In the interwar period, tennis was played more in Ardeal, Banat and Bukovina, and the sporting connection with the centre was rather difficult. The first two attempts of rapprochement took place in 1922, when representatives from Bukovina participated in the national championship and a team from Bucharest played in the competitions in Arad. (*Ecoul sportiv*, no. 18, 1922, 2). At that time, due to industry and trade, tennis was played mainly in wealthy cities. The most popular were the cities of the former Habsburg possessions such as Arad, Timișoara, Petroșani, Oradea, Satu Mare, Baia Mare, Cluj, Turda, Aiud, Târgu Mureș, Brașov, Sibiu, Sf. Gheorghe, and Miercurea Ciuc. But also in Bucharest, Craiova, Ploiești, Sinaia, Galați, and Brăila there were clubs with a sufficiently developed activity (Popa, 2013, 177–178). Field tennis was called one of the few sports that could be played by both men and women. This sport of elegant manners was the concern of the authors of social treaties, who warned that a well-trained player would not insist too much on dubious shots (Popa, 2013, 177–178).

The presence of women in tennis competitions in Romania during the interwar period was documented by the first articles dedicated to the sport in the first sports newspaper of the interwar period, *Ecoul sportiv*. Thus, at the tennis competition during the traditional Easter

tournament in 1922, there were also women's competitions, and in the singles final Nini Golescu triumphed (*Ecoul sportiv*, no. 30, 1922, 1). The results of the Romanian championships organized by the F.S.S.R., published in the same weekly, show the conduct of the women's singles and doubles competitions, as well as the mixed doubles. Only players from Bucharest clubs participate, but none from Transylvania (*Ecoul sportiv*, no. 40, 1922, 2). Around the same time, news was published about the international competition organized by the Club Athletic Oradea in August, which also included men's and women's singles and doubles competitions, as well as a mixed doubles. Local champions as well as players from Czechoslovakia and Hungary were announced to participate in these competitions (*Ecoul sportiv*, no. 41, 1922, 2).

The tennis union between the Old Kingdom and Transylvania took place only five years after the Great Union of 1918, at the 1923 National Championships. For the first time, many participants from the provinces took part in this competition, especially from the clubs in Arad, Cluj, Lugoj, and Cernăuți. The list of participants also included Ms. Czell from Arad and E. Schlosser from Petroșani, opening the way for duels between Transylvania and the Old Kingdom in women's sports. In the women's singles the most awaited duel was between the national champion Nini Golescu and the two representatives of the province (*Ecoul sportiv*, no. 22, 1923, 5). In this first joint tennis tournament in the old and new territories of Romania, a special interest was paid to the players of the province, who graced the national championships with their presence for the first time. In the women's competition, Ms. Czell showed herself as an experienced player with a lot of style but limited herself to defensive play. Ms. Schlosser, on the other hand, was admired for her perseverance and attentiveness. As a result, Ms. Hanard could not break her resistance and Ms. Simone Ghica managed, just barely, to win the battle in the third set. In the end, despite the efforts of the players from the province, the winner in the women's singles was Nini Golescu from the Romanian Tennis Club (TCR) Bucharest. The Transylvanian representatives of women's tennis still made it to the podium in the mixed doubles, where the pair from Arad, consisting of Lupu (national champion in men's singles) and Ms. Czell, lost the final to Nini Golescu – Roman, both from TCR Bucharest (*Ecoul sportiv*, no. 23, 1923, 6). At the 1924 National Championships, the players of TCR Bucharest were once again very successful in the women's competition: they took the first two

places in the singles and won the final in the doubles. The Transylvanian sportswomen made it to the doubles final, where the pair Florica Stefanescu (TCR Bucharest) – Fullop (CA Timisoara) was defeated by the pair Golescu–Ghica (TCR Bucharest) (*Ecoul sportiv*, no. 109, 1924, 1). The story of the domination of athletes from the capital over those from Transylvania was repeated at the National Championships in 1925, when Nini Golescu defeated her colleague from TCR Bucharest in the individual final and retained the title of Romanian champion (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 109, 1925, 1).

The first national tournament in which there was a balance between players from the Old Kingdom and Transylvania was the National Championship of 1926. In this competition, for the first time, two sportswomen from the two regions of the country faced each other in the final of the women's singles. The more experienced Florica Stefanescu (TCR Bucharest) defeated the young Lenke Ziszovits (CA Oradea) and kept the national title in the women's singles in the capital. The same player from Oradea was also in the final of the mixed doubles with Gheorghe Lupu (Arad) and in the final of the women's doubles with Nini Golescu (TCR Bucharest). The player from Oradea lost both matches (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 235, 1926, 1). The National Championship of 1926 marked the first appearance of Lenke Ziszovits from the Athletic Club of Oradea on the national tennis scene, who was to become one of the most important players of the interwar period. It is thus the moment of a first presentation of this athlete from the Jewish community of Oradea, who was to shine in many editions of the national championships of that period:

“Lenke Ziszovits was born in Petroșani in 1909. She learned the sport of tennis in her hometown under the tutelage of E. Schlosser, one of the best players in the country. Since 1923, as a student of the Commercial School of Oradea, she became a player of the tennis section of the Athletic Club of Oradea. (...) In her first participation in the national championships in 1926, she won three silver medals” (Maroti, 2011, 290).

These three medals proved to be a flash in the pan, at least at the 1927 National Championship, which was dominated by TCR Bucharest representatives in both the men's and women's events (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 365, 1927, 2).

The first gold medal in women's singles of the Romanian National Tennis Championships with

Transylvanian roots was won at the 1928 edition of the competition. The achievement belongs to Elisabeta Schlosser, originally from Petroșani but member of TCR Bucharest, who defeated Ms. Brandenburg from Brașov in the final. The two singles finalists also won the women's doubles against the TCR Bucharest pair Caracostea – Steriade. In the mixed doubles final, the Brandeburgs from Brașov lost to the Botez – Caracostea pair from TCR Bucharest (*Gazeta Sporturilor*, no. 515, 1928, 4).

The first national championships, organized in 1929 by the Union of Romanian Tennis Societies (forerunner of the Romanian Tennis Federation), brought a touch of modernity to this traditional tournament. The advertisement alerting the spectators to the existing score filled a gap and proved to be a happy inspiration but moving the competition from June to October did not go down well with the players (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 688, 1929, 1). The 1929 edition of the National Championship was a poor year for women's tennis due to low participation, with only three players in the first category and five players in the second. The leading players Schlosser, Caracostea and Ms. Ziszovits were absent, the first for personal reasons and the last two because of illness. In the women's singles, one player was absent, and the singles final was won by Fullop from CA Timișoara against Marton (TCR Bucharest). This victory meant the first national title in women's singles for Transylvania. The two finalists in the singles also triumphed in the women's doubles, while Fullop also lost the mixed doubles final (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 689, 1929, 2). In the first ranking of Romanian women players, published in 1929, the first two places belonged to two sportswomen from Petroșani, registered with clubs in Bucharest and Oradea, namely: E. Schlosser (TCR Bucharest) and Lenke Ziszovits (CA Oradea) (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 585, 1929, 1).

### Five National Championship Titles and a Royal Distinction

The National Championship of 1930 was considered by the press of the time as the first truly national championship in terms of regional representation:

“Never was the number of participants higher than this time. The Federation of Romanian Tennis Clubs made the greatest sacrifices to bring to Bucharest the first group of players from the provinces, both from Transylvania and from the Old Kingdom, from Banat and Bukovina. This

year we will have a truly national championship. The women's team will be very well represented by the champions from Cluj, Oradea, Arad and Timișoara" (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 822, 1930, 1–4).

On the list of registered players, there was a numerical balance between the athletes of the clubs from the Old Kingdom (Bucharest – 10 players, Galați – 4, Ploiești – 3) and Transylvania (Cluj – 4, Oradea – 2, Arad – 1, Târgu Mureș – 1, Lugoj – 1). Among the women, only Transylvania and the Old Kingdom were represented, with the numerical situation being 7–7 as follows: Bucharest – 6, Ploiești – 1, respectively Cluj – 2, Oradea – 3, Arad – 1, Timișoara – 1. The accumulation of the numbers on the entry table resulted in over 40 participants in the individual competitions and over 20 pairs in the combined competitions (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 823, 1930, 1). Looking at the representation by gender, at least 27 percent of the total 55–60 participants were women. This percentage is much higher than the percentage of women in the Olympic Games, both at the international level and from the point of view of the Romanian delegations, a sign that tennis was one of the sports with maximum openness to women. Also, in terms of results, the situation was balanced between Transylvania and the Old Kingdom. In the individual competitions, athletes from the two regions shared the national titles, with the trophy being won by a player from Bucharest in the men's competition and Lenke Ziszovits (CA Oradea) for the first time in the women's competition. "Cantacuzino and Ziszovits are emerging players who have made enormous progress from a year ago until today" (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 826, 1930, 2).

At the National Championships in 1931, Transylvanian clubs were in the lead among women. Lenke Ziszovits triumphed in singles against veteran Nini Golescu and in doubles with E. Schlosser against Aslan (Bucharest) – Clara Somogyi (Arad). (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 977, 1931, 1–2). It was the second national title of Ziszovits' career and the first appearance of Clara Somogyi on the national podium. The two athletes would dominate the fourth decade of 20th-century Romanian tennis, with the former winning five national titles and the latter four.

The first competition with massive participation among women in 1932, in which Transylvanian clubs also participated, was called an ethnic competition by the press. The tennis championships of the German clubs of the country were held on the courts of the KSTSV in Brasov and a record number of participants competed: 64

men's singles, 24 women's singles, and 32 mixed doubles. Athletes from the following clubs participated: Turnverein Bistrita, HTV Hermanstadt Sibiu, Turnverein Bukarest, Turnverein Medias, Turn und Sportverein Cernauti, KSTSV Brașov (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 1097, 1932, 2).

At the 1932 National Championships, Lenke Ziszovits won her third consecutive national women's title after a victory over the same rival from the previous year, Nini Golescu. The Transylvanian player won the match thanks to a cut game and a strong and precise first serve. (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 1115, 1932, p. 5). And in the other two finals with female participation, Transylvania cut itself the lion's share. In the women's doubles, the couple Somogyi (Arad) – Fulopp (Timisoara) defeated the pair Ziszovits – Nini Golescu. Finally, in the mixed doubles event, Golescu – Poulief (Bucharest) won against Somogyi (Arad) – Botez (Bucharest). (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 1115, 1932, p. 5).

From 1933 to 1936, in four consecutive editions of the National Championships, the women's singles event had the same protagonists: Lenke Ziszovits (CA Oradea), married Popper, and Clara Somogyi (Arad). The 1933 edition, the first Transylvanian duel in the final of the women's singles, brought victory to the athlete from CA Oradea, who won her fourth consecutive national title. The victory was a surprise in view of the previous direct results this year, as the player from Arad had won twice during the season in Timisoara and Eforie, but based on the final, Lenke's victory was legitimate (Ghețar 1933, 1–2). Ziszovits Popper was a little less trained, but with a clever game she managed to take revenge on her younger opponent (A. 1933, 1–2). The great results earned the sportswomen of CA Oradea an important award from the Romanian royal family:

"Between 1930 and 1938, Lenke Ziszovits won the title in women's singles five times, in 1930, 1931, 1932, 1933 and 1938. She also won the title of national champion in women's doubles four times: in 1930 and 1933 with N. Golescu, in 1931 with E. Schlosser and in 1935 with M. Berescu. For her successes, King Carol II awarded her the Cultural Sports Merit Award in 1937. She was the first woman in Romania to receive this distinction" (Maroti, 2011, 291).

The next four editions of the national women's competition were dominated by Clara Somogyi, who won three consecutive finals against her rival Ziszovits Popper in 1934, 1935, and 1936, and one



against a young player from Reșița in 1937. Thus, Clara Somogyi won her first national championship title in the women's singles of the 1934 National Championships by defeating Popper after a great and extremely close fight (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 1469, 1934, 1). In the 1935 edition of the National Championships, Ms. Somogyi won again after a very close and exciting fight. Although she was supported by the audience, Popper had to admit defeat to a more resistant opponent. The result can be considered fair, and the winner fully deserved the victory (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 1836, 1935, 1). In the same year, in the mixed doubles event, the pair Somogyi – Schmidt won against the Roncea – Reti team (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 1838, 1935, 1). Ms. Popper also managed to win a national title, winning the women's doubles event alongside Beretzki (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 1839, 1935, 1).

In the 1936 National Championships edition, the same final took place in the women's singles, Somogyi-Popper, but this time the victory went more easily to the player from Arad, who won her third consecutive national championship title. Honed by her participation in various competitions abroad, Somogyi showed her full range of shots from the back court and at the net, revealing an international class (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 2179, 1936, 1). The mixed doubles final went to Somogyi – Schmidt (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 2180, 1936, 1).

After four consecutive years in which the battle was between Clara Somogyi and Zissovits-Popper, the final of the women's singles at the 1937 National Championships changed one of the protagonists. The winner Clara Somogyi met one of the revelations of the tournament, Ms. Strobl, the blonde star from Reșița, who had secured the sympathy of the audience after defeating Ms. Unanian (TCR Bucharest) in the semifinals. In front of the packed stands on the central court, the younger player was overwhelmed by emotions and Somogyi took the title of national champion for the fourth time in a row (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 2535, 1937, 1–6). In the final of the mixed doubles, the pair Somogyi – Schmidt, the winners of the two previous editions, successfully defended their title (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 2536, 1937, 1–6).

Clara Somogyi, who had moved to Hungary, was absent from the 1938 National Championships, and two players from Oradea, namely the multiple national champion Popper-Zissovits and the star of the 1938 season, Magda Berescu, who was then a member of TCR Bucharest, qualified for the final in the women's singles. The victory of Popper-Zissovits was considered unexpected, as the loser was considered

the favourite according to the results of the year. After losing the first set 1:6 and the second set 0:2, the superior experience of Popper-Zissovits came into play and brought her six games in a row, winning the second set 6:2. The decisive set was more even, but thanks to her consistency and technique, Popper-Zissovits regained the national title, making it five wins in the competition (Manole, 1938, 1). Finally, the domination of Transylvanian sportswomen in the national championship ended in the fourth decade of the twentieth century in the 1939 National Championships. In the women's singles, veteran Popper-Zissovits and junior Mary Gerliczy, both from CA Oradea, qualified for the semifinals, but lost to TCR Bucharest players Magda Berescu and Mrs. Werteim (Teslaru, 1939, 1–6), so that the national title left Transylvania for the first time since 1929 and returned to the Old Kingdom.

### **Popper – a Tragic Fate, Somogyi – a Champion in Hungary, Too**

Multiple national champions Lenke Popper-Zissovits and Clara Somogyi have also participated in many international tournaments, where they have achieved some of the most valuable performances. An international tournament with many foreign players on the starting lists was held in Oradea in 1930. Of the total 170 participants, over 20 athletes were named from Czechoslovakia, Austria and Hungary. As for the results, Popper-Zissovits (CA Oradea) won in the women's event, followed by players from Bratislava, Budapest and Arad (Grădinaru, 1930, 4). Popper-Zissovits represented Romania in many other international competitions in Austria, Czechoslovakia, France, Germany, and Switzerland. Her greatest achievements were her medals at the Balkan Tennis Championships in Athens in 1930, 1931, and 1932. At the 1930 tournament, she won the silver medal in the women's singles and team events. In 1931, she finished second in women's doubles and won the gold medal in the team competition. In the third edition in 1932, there was only the team competition, and Popper-Zissovits helped Romania win a silver medal (Maroti, 2011, 292). The CA Oradea athlete had a tragic fate because she belonged to the Jewish community. The nightmare began in 1940, when the Vienna Dictate forced Romania to cede Northern Transylvania to Hungary. At that time all the property of the Jews was confiscated, and they were resettled in ghettos. Among those who died in the deportations was Lenke Popper-Zissovits (Maroti, 2011, 292).

The international achievements of Clara Somogyi, multiple national champion of Romania, were mentioned in a retrospective article about the international activities of Romanian tennis in 1935, signed by the Secretary General of FRT: "Clara Somogyi participated more than satisfactorily in the international championships in Hamburg, Zopot and Warsaw" (Iconomu, 1935, 3). Then, when she returned to the country in 1937 to participate in the national championships, the player from Arad, who was already playing for a club in Budapest, pointed out some of the valuable results she had achieved internationally:

"I went to Budapest to improve my sewing skills, and with the permission of the federation I joined the BEAC club. This year, as an athlete of the Hungarian club, I had nice successes in Italy, Austria and Germany. Moreover, I learned a lot during the 18 competitions I participated in" (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no. 2533, 1937, 1).

After a ten-year career in Romania, Clara Somogyi moved to Budapest in 1938 and played as a representative of Hungary. She won two national titles in Hungary and reached the quarterfinals of Rolland Garros and Wimbledon in 1939.

### **Woman Footballer in Her 30s Treated with Malicious Intent**

Perhaps one of the most telling examples of how women's sports are perceived by a large segment of the population is the unique case of a female soccer player. Her existence was reported in a news item in *Gazeta sporturilor* about a soccer match between Mica Brad and Victoria Ineu. In a short, uncommented text, the correspondent from the region informed that the match in the Mica sports arena in Gurabarza attracted many spectators to the stands thanks to the fact that the visiting team, Victoria Ineu, had Ms. Sigeti as a centre-forward. The audience followed the match with great pleasure and admired the young soccer player, who performed admirably as the team captain (*Gazeta sporturilor*, no 1240, 1933, 4). The information from the area generated so many comments in the editorial office of the *Capital* newspaper that one of the columnists felt inspired and obliged to write something about the matter. And although *Gazeta sporturilor* is one of the promoters of sport in all its aspects, the article casts an extremely unfavourable light on the young woman's audacity to play soccer in a men's team. The presence of the athlete on the field could not be understood as a consequence of her passion for

the sport but was interpreted as a ploy by the club from Ineu to attract spectators and strengthen its coffers, plagued by the financial crisis. And not to change the text at all, here is a generous quote:

"It's not a new floozy. (...) But Miss Sigeti is destined to represent a moment in the life of sport: the beginning of a most interesting metamorphosis... The Victoria Club of Ineu, struggling with the crisis and looking for a solution to balance its treasury, came up with an unexpected idea. Soccer as it is currently played tends to be destructively monotonous. Something innovative needs to be found, the bigwigs at Victoria in Ineu told themselves. They did not think twice and after a series of deliberations (...) they found the solution. They introduced Miss Sigeti as the team's center forward. The offensive strategy is thus led by a representative of the fair sex. From a technical point of view, the consequences of this intervention will not be great. But the imagination of the Ineu club will be enlivened to an unexpected degree. For one thing must not be overlooked. Miss Sigeti is a funny blonde with an enormous number of admirers, followed by almost all the gentlemen of Ineu. All those who used to walk along the pier on Sundays or look for Miss Sigeti at the cinema now come to the sports arena, where her contribution has become a blessing. And soccer in Ineu is flourishing" (LIS 1933, 1).

The author of the article goes further with the irony and suggests that innovations from Ineu should be imported to Bucharest: "Would not it be better, instead of night soccer, promotion cups and other attempts to increase the attractiveness of the games, to cede the position of centre-forward to an adoring nosh? And since we have Miss Romania in several editions and from different publishers, would not it be interesting to introduce them to a Bucharest team?" (LIS 1933, 1).

### **Conclusions**

I started this article with a provision in the bylaws of a sports club stating that only men can be members of the club and play the sport and ended it with a biased editorial about a woman on a men's soccer team. Along the way, we touched on questions about the changing role of women in interwar Romanian society and some of the participations and achievements of Transylvanian women athletes in major international competitions. I also found out that women's sports

in Romania in the 1920s and 1930s were active in only five sports, namely tennis, winter sports, swimming, hazena (handball), and athletics, which were mainly practiced in Transylvania and Banat. The situation improved a little after 1930, when the first volleyball and basketball competitions for women took place.

From the analysis of the representation of Romanian women's and men's sports in the Olympic Games of the interwar period, it can be concluded that the situation was very unbalanced. The four female appearances of Transylvanian club athletes were a drop in the bucket when considering the general representation of Romania at the Olympic Games in the interwar period. In the three editions of the Olympic Games in which Romania was represented in the interwar period, the Romanian delegations included 107 men, while the four women who participated in two editions represented only three percent of the total 111 participants. Over time, the situation has changed, and today two female athletes and one male athlete hold the record for the most participations of Romania in the Olympic Games. Athlete Lia Manoliu participated in six editions of the Olympic Games between 1952 and 1972, while Sorin Babi in shooting and rower Elisabeta Lipa also

participated in six editions of the Olympic Games between 1984 and 2004.

Looking at Romania's performance in the World Table Tennis Championships in the interwar period, we note that of the four medals, two were won by women, one by a mixed team and one by men. From the regional point of view, as far as the achievements of women in this sport are concerned, we note that the representatives of Transylvania contributed to two of the three medals won.

From the point of view of tennis, a sport we looked at more closely, one of the conclusions would be that the participation of women was lower than that of men, but not as drastic as in other sports, where the presence of female athletes was not encouraged or was attributed to obscure interests as in soccer. As for the representation and performances of Transylvanian clubs in national and international tennis competitions, it can be said that they were very good. After being somewhat overshadowed by the athletes from the Old Kingdom in the first national championships after the sporting unification, held between 1923 and 1929, the Transylvanian women athletes did very well between 1930 and 1939.

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**Table 1.** Ratio of female to male participation in the Olympic Games in the interwar period / Raportul dintre participările feminine și cele masculine la Jocurile Olimpice în perioada interbelică

<b>Olympic Games</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
1900 Paris	997	22
1904 St. Louis	645	6
1908 London	1971	37
1912 Stockholm	2359	47
1920 Antwerp	2561	65
1924 Paris	3089	135
1928 Amsterdam	2883	277
1932 Los Angeles	1332	132
1936 Berlin	3963	331

## FILM ADVERTISING AND SCREENINGS IN INTERWAR OLTENIA

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**Abstract:** *The present study starts from the analysis of some advertisements (commercial advertisements) that were either depicted in the local press of Oltenia or circulated in this historical region as they appear, for instance in archival sources and memoirs. After analysing this series of examples that defined the leisure activities in the above-mentioned region, we dwell on the interwar period, when the people of Oltenia, be they “young” or in their “golden years”, went to the cinema. I seek to identify, based on the advertisements discussed, the locations where the cinematographic screenings took place, the productions that were running in the interwar Oltenia, as well as the way in which the film sphere was integrated into the interwar daily life of Oltenia.*

**Keywords:** *interwar period, Oltenia, cinema hall, film, actor.*

**Rezumat:** *Studiul de față, pornește de la analiza unor reclame (reclame comerciale) surprinse în presa locală din Oltenia sau care au circulat în această regiune istorică, surse arhivistice, memorialistică, și nu numai. Din șirul exemplelor care au marcat petrecerea timpului liber, în regiunea studiată, ne oprim la perioada interbelică, când oltenii, fie ei „tineri”, fie „trecuți de prima tinerețe” mergeau la cinematograf. Vom încerca să deslușim, pe baza reclamelor studiate care au fost locațiile dedicate proiecțiilor cinematografice, ce producții rulau în Oltenia întrebelică, precum și modul în care sfera filmului a fost integrată în cotidianul interbelic oltenesc.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *perioada interbelică, Oltenia, cinematograf, film, actor.*

Once the First World War ended, the interest of businessmen in the film industry increased. New studios and new cinema halls appeared while the existing ones were modernized, being equipped with high-performance equipment, as well as with well-trained specialists in the use of the new technology. Interwar Romanian cinema promoted historical-heroic themes. Cinema lovers were able to enjoy screenings such as *Vitejii neamului* (1926), *Iancu Jianu*<sup>1</sup> (1927), *Haiducii* (1929) and *Ecaterina Teodoroiu* (1931). The scripts of these films used to depict especially facts and stories from the life of the Romanian people (Scurtu *et al.*, 2003, 752). In 1927, The Romanian Film Industry shot the film *Lia*, a romantic drama written by Mircea Filoti and directed by Jean Mihail (Despa, 2016), the poster promoting Lilly Flohr. Other members of the cast were Mia Teodorescu, George Vraca, Aurel Costescu Duca, Ion Armășescu (Rosen, 1927). Nonetheless, the first Romanian film

production, with audio-video correlation was *Ciuleandra* (1930), an adaptation of the novel by Liviu Rebreanu (Scurtu *et al.*, 2003, 751).

During the period in question, Romanian film productions, as well as those made in the USA, Germany, Great Britain or France, ran in over 200 cinema halls in Romania<sup>2</sup>. Noticing the major impact on the civil society, the Ministry of Interior and the Press Directorate informed, in 1926, the county prefectures about the need for control over the films that they were going to run in the cinema halls. Therefore, the films had to have the approval of the Prefecture of the Capital Police. Based on the Law for the organization and administration of national theatres and the control of performances in Romania, the Ministry of Cults and Arts issued a regulation on the concession, establishment, construction, installation and operation of cinemas in Romania, which was published in the Official Gazette, no. 27 of 6 February 1927 (SJAN Vâlcea,

<sup>1</sup> Made by the Clipa-Film Production House, the film *Iancu Jianu* was shot in a single year, in *Realitatea ilustrată*, year II, no. 37/1928, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> In Oltenia, in 1931, 16 cinema halls were recorded, distributed as follows: 3 in Vâlcea County; 9 in Dolj; 2 in Mehedinți; one hall each in Gorj and Romanați, in *Boabe de grâu*, year II, no. 1/1931, p. 56.

collection of Vâlcea County Prefecture, file 15/1927, f. 5). In 1931, the Ministry of Labour, Health and Social Protection established that in:

“In each cinema, a film on cultural novelties must run. The film will be short, of at least 300 meters... The purpose of the cinema is to be not only commercial but also cultural. As such, we will watch over the strict application of the educational film showing, the functioning of your cinema being conditioned by the daily fulfilment of this obligation” (*Boabe de grâu*, 1931, 56).

In this paper, I have attempted to offer, without claiming to have exhausted the topic, a historical incursion through the analytical research of the data related to the sphere of cinemas in interwar Oltenia. In the publishing environment of Oltenia, the publication *Oltenia Economică* circulated periodically. Through the large number of advertisements related cinematography, it strengthened our idea that *the cinema* represented a perfect entertainment opportunity for all age categories. Information on the history of cinemas in the historical region was supplemented with news from the *Orizont* (Rm. Vâlcea) and *Protestarea* (Craiova) newspapers, the *Arhivele Olteniei* publication, and documents extracted from the archives of Rm. Vâlcea National Archives County Department, and other different reports and memoirs.

By orienting our research towards the area of Vâlcea, it was discovered that the first film caravans reached the city of Brezoi around 1919, but they were received “with reticence due to the fact that, they were thought to cause blindness” (Efrim, 2008, 66). Brezoi city was among the first places in Vâlcea County to offer films to the inhabitants. An explanation for this is that, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, among the forestry societies that carried out their activity on the Lotru Valley, Brezoi was one of the most populated localities due to the opportunities it offered for finding jobs. In this context, in the city, the local employers brought many workers from Transylvania (Romanians, Saxons, Hungarians) for whom the employers’ associations and the local authorities tried to ensure a minimum of civilized conditions for working and living. Therefore, for the purpose of “screening films around 1920 a cinema functioned in a wooden building, which

disappeared a year later (1921), in a fire” (*Ibidem*).

In the city of Drăgășani, from the same county of Vâlcea, it should be noted that the first piece of information on the presence of a cinema hall dates back to 1921, when the local administration was requested the president of the provisional commission of Vâlcea County to communicate whether “the cinemas in Vâlcea pay half of the price for the electricity service” (Istocescu *et al.*, 2004, 180), compared to the fees for the other consumers. It is apparent from the address submitted to the President that the cinema was operating on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October 1921 and that it had also registered a petition asking for subsidized electricity required for its functioning. On February 8, 1922, G. Șerbănescu, from the above-mentioned city, communicated to the local administration, in the context of the appearance of competition, that he built “...according to the authorization given by the Communal Council, its own cinema and theatre hall” (*Ibidem.*) and demanded priority in terms of choosing the days and hours for performances since “[a]t the time “when my cinema - Traian - began to function there was no other cinema in the city” (*Ibidem.*).

From a document dated 4 February 1922, we find out that Gustav Lerch, a merchant from Drăgășani, addressed a petition to Constantin Adamiade, the president of the interim commission of the city, requesting electricity “necessary for the operation of the cinema in Mr. M. Amzulescu’s cinema hall, for Thursdays and Sundays” (SJAN Vâlcea, collection of Drăgășani Police Commissariat, file 10/1943-1944, f. 97). In his turn, Adamiade, asked the head of the power plant, in the city to supervise the installation of the projection device and to make the necessary connection “... that he may be given electricity”. Due to these circumstances, the head of the plant, Anton Cernescu replied, on 4 February 1922, that “[s]ince the installation is not fitted with the necessary equipment for a cinema and as the cinema lamp requires a high amperage, it is impossible for us to provide electricity, because we have another cinema in the city and, as it is well known that the engine of the plant does not work, we can only allow each one to function in turn ... or a movie theatre to show from 6-8 o’clock, and the other from 10-12 in the evening, on the same day” (*Ibidem*). Two days later, on 6 February, Cernescu submitted a report stating that he could no longer “supply electricity to the cinema as long as the head of the big engine was broken” (*Ibidem*). Faced with such a situation, the owners of the two



cinemas agreed and established an alternative program.

From the memoirs of Nicu Alexie, a man from Drăgășani who “laughed a lot and cried a little”, as he himself confesses, we find out that, on summer days, the films shown in the cinema hall of the restaurant<sup>3</sup>, owned by M. Amzulescu, and managed by Gustav Lerch, were announced “... through colourful posters and enlarged photos, nailed to the shutters of the restaurant” (Alexie, 2005, 34). At the same time, “the owner sent the porters of the fair to cross the main streets with large placards, invariably shouting and calling: The last farewell show!” (*Ibidem.*). About “The first and true cinema hall”, in the *city between the vineyards*, Nicu Alexie also informs us. It was organized by I. Petrescu and functioned at first in Tudorică Iliescu’s houses, later in the centre of Drăgășani, in a warehouse of the St. Nicholas Cooperative. In his cinema were shown “the films of Charles Chaplin and Keaton, the films with Laurel and Hardy, and with the wonder child, Shirley Temple” (*Ibidem.*).

We focused our research on another city in Vâlcea County and we discovered from the *Report of the Board of Directors* of Călimănești resort, dated March 21, 1927, that the “bazaar place” was demolished, “being in such a bad state that it could no longer be repaired... and in its place began the construction of a beautiful bazaar hall, with an auditorium (theatre, cinema, celebrations), overlooking the Olt river” (SJAN Vâlcea, collection of the Society for the Exploitation of Govora-Călimănești Baths, file 39/1926-1927, f. 17).

Interesting data exists about the cinema hall in Govora (Figure 1) resort in a report found in the archive of the *Society for the exploitation of the Govora-Călimănești Baths*, dated 1928, from which we find out that, in the above-mentioned city, “the construction of a theatre-cinema and celebrations place was started on an area of 537 sqm, it was partially finished and roofed. It is to be completed in the course of next years, depending on the means we will have at our disposal” (*Ibidem.*). The functionality of the construction bears the imprint of the architect Virginia Andreescu-Haret (the first woman architect in Romania), as

indicated by a note on one of the interior walls, the work being subsidized by the Govora-Călimănești Society. The theatre-cinema hall opened in 1932. With a capacity of almost 400 seats, on the ground floor and balcony and a stage of a considerable size, the hall underwent, several modernization works after 1932, among which we mention here the following: the installation of lamps in 1934 (*Report of the Board of Directors and the report of the censors of the Govora-Călimănești Society, dated March 16, 1935, 1935, 7*); the endowment with new sound equipment for the projection devices, in 1935; changing the floor boards in the hall in 1937 (*Ibidem.*). The building *satisfied* the highest demands, but, unfortunately, it was open to the public only in the summer season (June 1-September 15), and the lack of a heating system brought great damage to the beautiful edifice in time (*Ibidem*, 8; Ecaterinescu, Geiculescu, 2010, 271-272).

Both at the cinema in Govora and at the one in Călimănești, the projection equipment was provided by the Romanian representatives of the famous Parisian film house *Pathé Frères*. For the sum of 2,500 lei, a representative office won the auction organized on this occasion, to the detriment of the bidder trader Toma Niculescu from Rm. Vâlcea<sup>4</sup>. Ticket prices were approved by the Ministry of Public Instruction. In this respect, in 1938, the beneficiary company asked for a favourable opinion for the following prices: 20 lei on the ground floor, respectively 15 lei, on the balcony. The provenance of the shown films became diversified as well, as they were purchased from several film houses: BDC Film, Pathe Norton or Metro Goldwyn Mayer, which were sending 10 films per week. The rental price for the films that were running in the cinema was 4,000 lei, among them being films such as: *Orlov*, *D. Schafer*, *Țarevici*, *The Wig*, *The Siren of Seville* (SJAN Vâlcea, collection of The Society for the Exploitation of the Govora-Călimănești Baths, file 3/1929-1930, f. 54; Dinescu, 2017, 231). During the Second World War, the hall was mainly used for cinema shows that were presented for both the few visitors and the wounded cared for in the requisitioned hotels.

As the cinema projection was quickly embraced by the people of Vâlcea as one of their preferences, our short journey is continued with the most

<sup>3</sup> The operator at the cinema at the restaurant M. Amzulescu was Carol (Iosef) Richter, in SJAN Vâlcea, collection of Drăgășani Police Commissariat, file 10/1943-1944, f. 97.

<sup>4</sup> Participating in the auction, Toma Niculescu from Rm. Vâlcea offered the equipment for the cinematographic projections and the necessary installations at the price of 3,000 lei.

important cinemas in the county residence, Rm. Vâlcea. After World War I, at the cinema Andreani Cinema<sup>5</sup>, movie enthusiasts were able to see famous films of the era, such as *Long and Short*, *Charlot*, *Laurel and Hardy*, in the era of sound films, musicals like *Sun Valley Serenade*, *Intermezzo* with Ingrid Bergman and Leslie Howard, adaptations of world literature, such as *The Miserable*, *The Man in Grey*, *Rebeca*, *Love Story*. On the big screen, famous actors could be admired, among which *Harry Bauer*, *Jean Gabin*, *Gretta Garbo*, *Rudolf Valentino*, *Asta Nielsen*, *Gloria Swanson*, *Douglas Fayrbanks*, *Maria Iacobini*.

The exponential growth of film lovers led to the commissioning of the "Regal" cinema at the Splendid Hotel<sup>6</sup> where famous movies could be watched, especially around the winter holidays. In 1927, in the hall with 150 seats on the ground floor, *Success at any price* could be watched, starring *Douglas Fayrbanks*, (25<sup>th</sup> of December), as well as *The Americano*, with the same actor (December 26), and on December 27, the actor Barattoff could be admired in the film *Gypsy Love*. In the other months of the year the performances occurred three to four times a week, "only in the evening at 9-11 o'clock and on Sunday a matinee" (SJAN Vâlcea, collection of Vâlcea County Prefecture, file 15/1927, f. 5).

Cinephiles from Vâlcea were delighted by various outstanding productions of interwar cinematography in the building of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Vâlcea Regiment, too, which had a specially arranged hall in the courtyard of the barracks, and which was equipped with an "Ernemann"

device. In the hall with 180 seats, there were two performances a week, on Saturdays and Sundays (*Ibidem.*). The cinema was equipped with two *Pathé Frères* devices, and an electric transformer of 5 horsepower each, the *Allgemaine* brand. The program was three to four times a week, in the evening, between 9 and 11 PM, and on Sunday, at the matinee.

In 1924, the "Alexandru Lahovari" High School in the city also received its own cinema. In a high school room, two or three films a week were screened. The success "was enormous and was amplified after the appearance of sound film" (SJAN Vâlcea, collection of "Alexandru Lahovari" High-School, file 42/1927, f.n.). Here are some movie titles that were shown in this room, as well as in the others in the city: *Second Youth*, *The Dark Angel*, *The Garden of Allah*, *Knight of the Night*, *San-Francisco*, *Little Lord*, *Hidden Message*, *Queen of the Jungle*, *Madam Butterfly*, *As You Like It*, *Girl Dorm*.

In Turnu Severin, Mehedinți County, the cinematographic show appears before 1900, and in 1914 approving a project for the construction of a modern cinema was already being discussed. Until the outbreak of the World War I, the cinematographic performances were presented in the "Public Garden", as well as in the "Iron Gates" and "Regal" venues of the city (Pajură, Giurăscu, 1933, 137). Immediately after World War I, the Theatre Cultural Society began to function in Turnu Severin, founded at the initiative of a group of teachers from the city. Its purpose was the construction of a building, a real monument that was to have seven large halls, three of which overlapped in the eastern wing ("I. G. Bibicescu" Library, the cinema and the restaurant), three superposed halls in the sunset wing ("Dr. C. I. Istrati" Museum, a festivities hall and a supplementary room), and between these two buildings a theater hall was to be erected.

In the cinema hall<sup>7</sup> (Figure 2) of the Palace of Culture, inaugurated in 1924, the first film seen was the Romanian film *Țigăncușa dela Iatac* (Costescu, 1933, 733). Since what was taken into account was "the great importance and the great educative role of the cinema, it was sought to make itself accessible to anyone, organizing here, even special matinees for the pupils of the schools from T. Severin, with an entrance fee of 5 lei per person" (*Ibidem.*). At the cinema "that was self-administrated" ran, between 1924-1925, not less than 121 films, with 125,134 spectators. From the

<sup>5</sup> Andreani Theatre and Cinema was located on Tudor Vladimirescu Boulevard, Rm. Vâlcea. The building of the Andreani Theatre was erected at the end of the 19th century, more precisely between 1893-1894. Inside, the auditorium had a capacity of 272 seats, upstairs there were 20 lodges, and on the ground floor there were 16 benches on the two sides of the hall. The benches and lodges were separated by wooden panelling, very well shaped and processed, painted in colours that are pleasing to the eye. The balconies and lodges were flanked by garlands of pleasantly smelling flowers. In 1912, the *Andreani* hall was also equipped for the screening of films (Tărtăreanu, 1971, 2).

<sup>6</sup> The owner of the Regal cinema building, located at the corner of Traian Street, no. 109, and Tudor Vladimirescu Boulevard, Rm. Vâlcea was C. Ionescu, and Vasile Săndulescu was the owner of the cinemas.

<sup>7</sup> The cinema hall had 450 seats and a spacious stage.

company's report, "Theatre", drawn up in 1925, we also find out the benefits of the cinema that had "the lowest entry fees in the whole country" (Buracu, 1925, 502), managing to "take most of the workers out of the pubs" (*Ibidem.*). In the inner courtyard of the Palace of Culture functioned the Cinema Garden (Figure 3), with a capacity of 800 seats and 14 lodges, and at the date of inauguration (1925) it was classified "as a new important sight of the city of T. Severin" (*Ibidem*, 745). Noteworthy is the concern of the society's administration to promote the screened films, advertising being done not only through the usual posters, but also in the local press. In fact, in Turnu Severin, it is important to note the publication in 1922, and later between 19 April and 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1923, of a magazine called *Cinematograf*, which announced the scheduled films, as well as of the magazine *Filme* (1919-1922). Unfortunately, the idea did not prove to be economically viable, both publications ceasing their activity a short period after their issuing.

Watching films screened in the "Apollo" cinema (Iorgu Petrescu Hall) was a form of entertainment enjoyed by the inhabitants of Caracal (former residence of Romanați County), where they were running "sensational" films, with exaggerated titles and advertisements, as in Bucharest (Constantinescu, 1923a, 240; Constantinescu, 1924b, 270). Between 1920-1924, among the cinema halls of Oltenia, there was also the one in the amphitheatre of the high school in the same city (Caracal) where they were running films appropriate only for students (Constantinescu, 1924b, 270).

In 1924, the cake maker Gh. Căldărușe "was building at his own expense", next to Tudor Vladimirescu High-School, in Tg. Jiu, Căldărușe Theatre-Cinema. To equip the cinema, which had "400 seats, 2 lodges and a waiting room of 349 m<sup>2</sup>", the owner purchased a projection device with sound film amplifier (Șerban, 2009, 295). The inauguration film was *Mascatul* (*Ibidem*).

Attracting the public to the cinema in Craiova was made in the interwar period with the help of local publications. Browsing the periodical *Protestarea*, one can find out that at the Apollo Theatre - Cinema, which had "the nicest and the most elegant hall, with modern comfort", the films were "...of current interest. Snapshots and battles from the war taken on the spot" (*Protestarea*, 1919, 2). An attractive offer, for an afternoon at the cinema, can also be

found in *Economic Oltenia*, where we find out that at the "Apollo Theatre - Cinema"<sup>8</sup> in 46 Union Square were running for the first time "the most grandiose films, immediately after Bucharest, so that they can be appreciated in their true value", and the offer of 9 June 1922 is the premiere of "...the most powerful film of the season *Son of Tarzan*". In the same year (1922), on Justice St, Cinema Lux, which was administered by Giuseppe De Pastore, was the meeting place "of the art-hungry public". Here "[t]he most select and sensational works of the most distinguished artists" could be watched.

The competition and the desire to attract as many audiences as possible began to be noticeable starting with the appearance of the sound film. Thus, the premieres could be seen at the "Central" cinema, built in the interwar period by the architect G. M. Cantacuzino, at the Select Cinema (Figure 4) or at the Modern Theatre - Cinema, where the movie goer enjoyed "[e]xtraordinary luxury and editing" (*Oltenia Economică*, 1926, 3) because "[w]hat can be of more interest than seeing the greatest masterpieces being depicted on canvas, in which the greatest artists from all over the world make their debut. However, the viewer was not always fully satisfied, either because of the venue, or because of the projection devices, or because of the selection of the films. We believe that we do a special service to our readers, recommending them to visit the Modern Theatre-Cinema in Craiova, where they will find the most comfortable place, specially arranged for the theatre, the films of the greatest operas of our time being projected by the most superior movie houses" (*Ibidem*).

Information from the analysed sources can also be found on the performance hall of Carol I College, transformed, enlarged and ceded to the National Theatre, and which had, during the period, one of the "most modern and beautiful performance halls in Oltenia" (*Realitatea ilustrată*, 1934, 23). Browsing the *Archives of Oltenia* periodical, in the section called the *Cultural Movement in Craiova*, one can find out the

<sup>8</sup> The building where the "Apollo Theatre - Cinema" functioned was built around 1900 by Iancu Pleșea. On the ground floor of the building, it functioned the candy shop and the café managed by G. Andronescu, and after his departure, the brewery N. Bazilescu, in Dinică Ciobotea, *O descriere a centrului comercial permanent din Craiova de la sfârșitul secolului XIX și din prima jumătate a secolului XX*, in *Destin de istoric. In Honroem Dinu C. Giurescu*, Târgoviște, Cetatea de Scaun Press, 2012, p. 70.

impressions left by the premieres of the end of 1932 from this cinema. *Ura! avem un copilaș!*, a comedy by Arnold and Bach, a German film “with a luxurious décor and impressive performance”, its showing being motivated only by the fact that it “brings money”, the second film, called *Marșul nupțial*, “one of the most successful works of Bataille”, in which Lady Jianu-Loboda and Lady Benescu starred (Fortunato, 1932, 379).

In the first half of the 20th century, the possibilities of spending leisure time in Oltenia diversify. In addition to going to church and the usual family visits, visiting fashion stores or

beauty parlours, going to different exhibitions or walking in the park are becoming new viable options. The theatre and cinema halls represented the most pleasant, places of meeting and party, during the studied period. The press of the time, the archival sources, as well as the stories of the memorialists do not satisfy the appetite of those who want to find out more. Therefore, any detail, any description, any newly discovered information, is useful to us, as long as we fill the gaps in the local history, in this case of the cinema projection and the advertisement that accompanied it, in the interwar period.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS / LISTA ILUSTRĂȚILOR

**Fig. 1.** Govora Cinema/Cinematograful Govora

**Fig. 2.** Turnu Severin Cinema/Cinematograful Turnu Severin

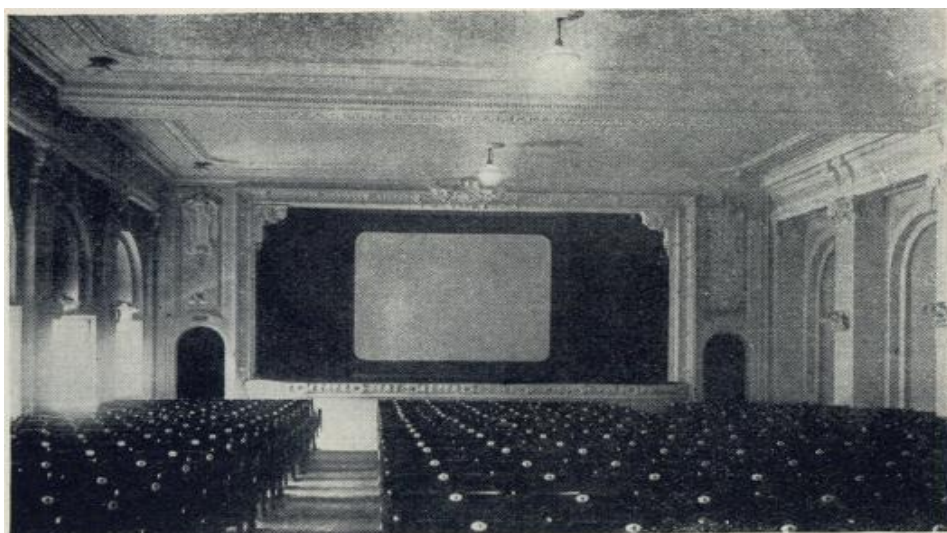
**Fig. 3.** Turnu Severin Cinema Garden/Grădina de cinematograf, Turnu Severin

**Fig. 4.** “Select” Cinema Entrance, Craiova/Intrare Cinematograful „Select”, Craiova

**Fig. 5-17.** Cinema Advertisement (Source: “Oltenia Economică”)/Reclamă cinematografică (Sursa: „Oltenia Economică”)

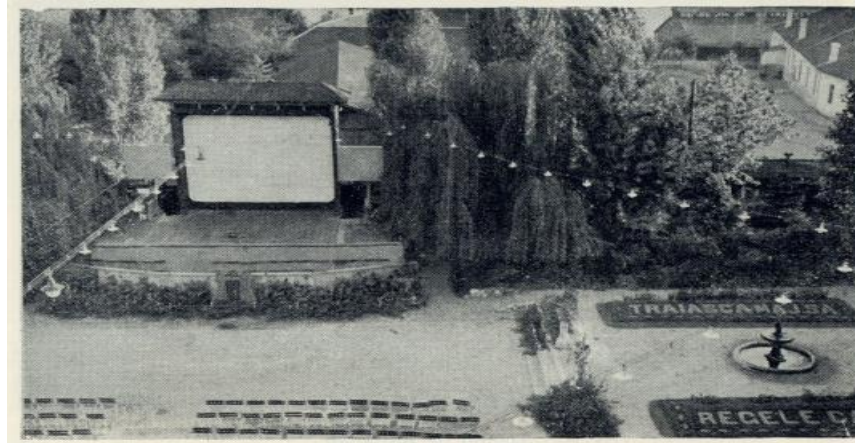


**Fig.1:** Govora Cinema. Source: *Vâlcea în imagini și documente*, available online on: <https://valceainimagini.blogspot.com/2021/01/baile-govora-cinematograful-parc.html>, site accessed on: Mai 8, 2022.



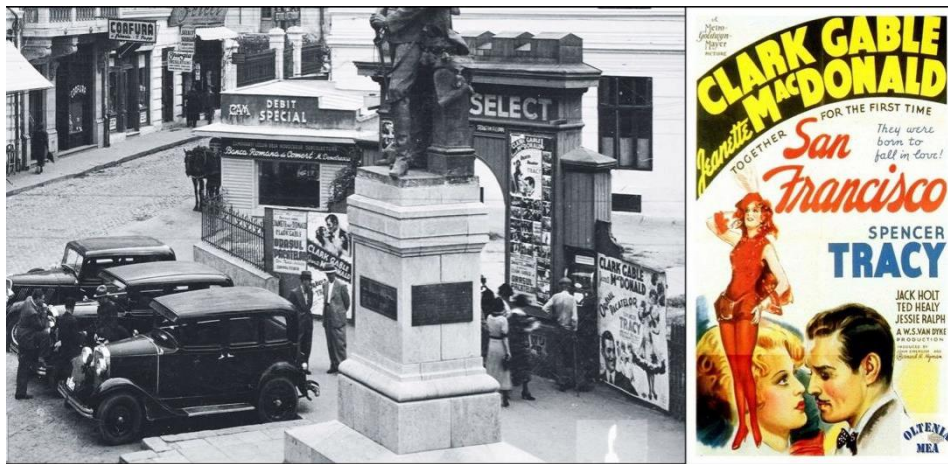
**Fig. 2:** Turnu Severin Cinema.  
Source: *Realitatea ilustrată*, year IV, no. 12/ December 1933, p. 743.





**Fig. 3:** Turnu Severin Cinema Garden.

Source: *Realitatea ilustrată*, year IV, no. 12/ December 1933, p. 745.



**Fig. 4:** Select Cinema (entrance), Craiova.

Source: <https://olteanul.ro/craiova-de-ieri/>, site accessed on: Mai 8, 2022.



**Fig. 5:** Cinema advertisement. Source: *Oltenia Economică*, year I, no. 8/1924, p. 3.



**Fig. 6:** Cinema advertisement. Source: *Oltenia Economică*, year II, no. 12/1925, p. 3.

**Teatrul MODERN Cinema**

**Duminecă 21 Iunie 1925**  
Opera Complectă  
Unicul film de atracție pentru Doamne și Domnișoare este  
**Ofițerul de Gardă**  
Sublimă dramă de dragoste în 8 acte după celebra piesă a lui  
**F. MOLNAR**  
În acest film se poate admira luxul dela Balul Palatului  
Imperial, unde peste 200 toalete din cele mai moderne,  
cum și fastul obișnuit al ofițerilor din întreaga gardă im-  
perială, vor produce admirația femeilor  
În rolul principal **MARIA CORDA**  
Interpreta principală din filmul Domnița Robilor

**Joi 25 Iunie 1925**  
Opera Complectă  
**Strigătul Pasiunii**  
(Il Richiamo)  
Superbă dramă de dragoste în 6 acte  
În rolul principal cea mai  
înbătă artistă **Maria Iacobini**  
**La sfârșit Regele Comicilor**  
**ZIGOTO**

Fig. 7: Cinema advertisement. Source: *Oltenia Economică*, year II, no. 19/1925, p. 2.

**Teatrul MODERN Cinema** **Sala și Grădina Teatru APOLLO Cinema**

**Duminecă 12 Iulie 1925** **Joi 16 Iulie 1925**

Nou. Premieră.—Opera Complectă  
FILM DE ARTĂ FRANCEZ  
**NUNTA ROSINEI**  
(LE MARIAGE DE ROSINE)  
Sublimă comedie dramatică în 5 acte de  
**PIERRE COLOMBIER**  
INTERPREȚI PRINCIPALI:  
Jean Aronson și Lily Green, (D-a) André Lefevre și Jean Debilly.  
spectacolul însoțit de  
**Moda Feminină dela Paris No. 11**  
se termină cu  
**PATAJENUL** Promisiuni por-  
veste în 3 acte

Nou. Premieră.—Opera Complectă  
**NOPTILE DECAMERONULUI**  
Grandioasă reconstruire cinematografică în 10 acte  
după nemuritoarea operă a celebrului scriitor Italian  
**BOCCACCIO**  
Interpretați de marii artiști Englezi, Ameri-  
cani și Germani în frunte cu frumoasa artistă  
**XENIA DESNY**  
La acest film veți admira: Lumină Lunetă asupra  
Veneției, Magia Orientului, Spectaculul Pastelui, Mi-  
racolul iubirii, Triumful Credinței.

Numai Duminecă 12 Iulie se mai poate vedea  
Cel mai frumos Film Francez  
**ARMELE VEGHIAZĂ**  
După cunoscuta scriere „VILE D'ARMES”  
De luni 15 până Miercuri 15 Iulie  
**Peripețiile Căsătoriei Prințesei Olga**  
Superb film în 6 mari acte cu simpatia  
HARRY LEIDKE și ALFRED ABEL

De Joi 16 până Duminecă 19 Iulie  
**SURCOUF** REGIE  
COMBARILOU  
Mare dramă în 8 mari acte.—Film de Artă Franceză Public  
Interpretați de cei mai de seamă artiști ai Teatrului Parisien.

Fig. 8: Cinema advertisement. Source: *Oltenia Economică*, year II, no. 22/1925, p. 3.

**Sala și Grădina Teatru APOLLO Cinema**

**Azi Sâmbătă 8 și mâine Duminecă 9 August**  
Se mai poate vedea Superbul VANDEVILLE  
**Amor în Zăpadă cu Pat și Patachon**  
Cu Incepere de Luni 10 August  
Se va reprezenta  
Opera completă  
**O Isbândă Fatală**  
Sguduitoare dramă modernă în 6 mari acte,  
În rolurile principale:  
**Gloria Swanson și Antonio Moreno**

**Joi 13 August**  
va rula  
**PELERINUL**  
cu Celebrul Artist  
**Charles Chaplin**

Fig. 9: Cinema advertisement. Source: *Oltenia Economică*, year II, no. 26/1925, p. 3.



**CINEMATOGRAFELE APOLLO ȘI MODERN**  
**CU ÎNCEPERE DE AZI**  
 va rula cel mai mare film din lume  
**STĂPÂNIA**  
**LUMEI**  
 cu frumoasa și celebra artistă  
**MIA MAY**  
 Bine cunoscută din cele mai de seamă filme ca  
**MONUMENTUL INDIAN**  
 Această grandioasă operă cinematografică care a obținut cel  
 mai mare succes în toată lumea, are o montare de o frumusețe  
 nemai văzută, întreaga acțiune petrecându-se în cele 5 continente:  
**Europa, Asia, Africa și America**  
**OPERA COMPLECTĂ**  
 care se compune din 48 acte, se va reprezenta numai în 4 părți  
 a câte 12 acte fiecare și pentru ca Onor. Public să poată vedea  
 întreaga înscenare în cel mai scurt timp s'a hotărât următoarea  
 ordine de rulare:

Cinema „APOLLO”		Cinema „MODERN”	
Luni	14 Septemb. partea I	Luni	14 Septemb. partea I
Marti	15 „ „ „ I	Marti	15 „ „ „ I
Miercuri	16 „ „ „ II	Miercuri	16 „ „ „ II
Joi	17 „ „ „ II	Joi	17 „ „ „ III
Vineri	18 „ „ „ III	Vineri	18 „ „ „ III
Sâmbătă	19 „ „ „ IV	Sâmbătă	19 „ „ „ IV

Reprezentările încep fix  
 la ora 2<sup>1/2</sup> - 5<sup>1/2</sup> - 8<sup>1/2</sup>

Onoratul Public amator de spectacole mărețe este invitat  
 să nu lipsească de aceste reprezentații unde poate admira  
 pe lângă jocul sublim al artiștilor și splendidele priveliști ce se  
 desfășoară în fața ochilor cu vederi și obiceiuri din lumea întreagă.

Fig. 10: Cinema advertisement. Source: *Oltenia Economică*, year II, no. 31/1925, p. 3.

**Teatrul MODERN Cinema**  
**Premieră. — Operă Complectă. — Film de artă francez**  
**Sfârșitul unui Don Juan**  
**50 ANS DE DON JUAN**  
 Roman de dragoste în 8 acte, după scrierea D-rului MARKUS  
 Pentru soși.... Pentru amanși.... Pentru toată lumea....  
 Interpretat de cel mai de seamă artiști, în frunte cu **LEON MATHOT**  
**La sfârșit, COMEDIE în 2 acte cu JULOT.**

Fig. 11: Cinema advertisement. Source: *Oltenia Economică*, year III, no. 5/1926, p. 3.

**Teatrul APOLLO Cinema**  
 Numai Duminică 7 și Luni 8 Martie 1926  
**TENORUL DUCESII (KAMMERMUSIK)**  
 IN ROLURILE PRINCIPALE CELEBRII ARTIȘTI  
**Henny Porten și Livio Pavanelli**  
 Cu începere de Marți 9 Martie, Marele Film  
**GOSTA BERLING**  
 După romanul publicat în ziarul Universul  
 al Doamnei Dr. **SELMA LAGERLOF**

Fig. 12: Cinema advertisement. Source: *Oltenia Economică*, year III, no. 6/1926, p. 3.

**Teatrul A P O L L O Cinema**

Numai 2 zile Vineri 23 Aprilie (Sf. Gheorghe) și Sâmbătă 24 Aprilie 1926

Celebru artist și acrobat mondial **Harry Piel** alături de somitățile Teatrelor Parisiene  
**D-rele Marguerit Mady și Denise Legeay** Apar în extraordinarul film  
**Mai repede ca Moartea**  
**(FACE ALA MORT)**

---

Duminică 25 până Miercuri 28 Aprilie 1926  
**Marele film al sezonului**  
**CARARI INCRUCIȘATE**  
 al cărui titlu s'a stabilit prin concurs cu premiu de 5000 lei  
 l'a câștigat D-na ALICE JAMANDY  
 În rolurile principale celebri artiști Mondiali  
 Lee Parry, Angelo Ferrari, Ernst Atoffman, Hans Mierendorf

Joi 29, Vineri 30 Apr., Sâmbătă 1 și Duminică 2 Mai  
**Celebrii Artiști Danezi**  
**Pat și Patachon**  
 În cea mai extraordinară creațiune a  
**MARELUI CIRC REGAL**  
 7 mari acte — Opera Completă — 7 mari acte

Fig. 13: Cinema advertisement. Source: *Oltenia Economică*, year III, no. 13/1926, p. 3.

**Teatrul M O D E R N Cinema**

cu începere de Joi 22 Aprilie 1926  
 OPERA COMPLECTĂ  
 Azi premiera marelui film  
**DOMNIȘOARA**  
**CU PROTECȚIE...**  
 Extraordinară Capo D'Operă în 8 mari acte  
 în rolul principal celebra artistă  
**ROSSI OSWALDA**  
 La sfârșit o frumoasă comedie —

Duminică 25 Aprilie 1926  
 OPERA COMPLECTĂ  
**B A I A D E R A**  
 Grandioasă dramă în 8 acte cu  
**Norma Talmadge**  
 La sfârșit:  
**MALEC AVIATOR**  
 Comedie în 2 acte

Fig. 14: Cinema advertisement. Source: *Oltenia Economică*, year III, no. 13/1926, p. 3.

**Teatrul A P O L L O Cinema**

Pentru deschiderea stagiunii de vară direcțiunea prezintă Onor. Public

Ultimul succes al Capitalei **OPERA COMPLECTĂ** Cel mai PICANT Film

**FETE CE NU POT FI IUBITE**  
 Mare dramă din viața modernă în 6 acte cu  
**ELLEN KURTI și OLAF FYORD**  
 Acțiunea se petrece la Paris, Nisa, Riviera. **ELLEN KURTI** schimbă 38 de toalete. Cel mai modern film de lux  
 extravagant. Premiera în Capitală a ținut afișul timp de 3 săptămâni. Orchestra specială JAZZ-BAND va acompania filmul  
 Ca completare Comedie în 3 acte cu **MONTY VÂNĂTOR**

Fig. 15: Cinema advertisement. Source: *Oltenia Economică*, year III, no. 15/1926, p. 3.

**Cinematografele APOLLO și MODERN**

AZI GIGANTICUL FILM AZI  
 Fala Cinematografiei Mondiale. — Cel mai frumos film al secolului

**MICHEL STROGOFF** **CURIERUL**  
**ȚARULUI**  
 după nemuritoarea capo d'operă a lui JULES VERNE

În rolurile principale: **IVAN MOSJOUKINE, NATALIE KOVANCO, M. Chakatouny, M. Gaidaroff, M. Henri Debian,**  
 Regia **TOURIANSKY** M. Gabriel de Gravonne, M-me Jeane Brindeau, etc. Monopol Lux-Film, Sărindar 16 Buc.

Fig. 16: Cinema advertisement. Source: *Oltenia Economică*, year IV, no. 14/1927, p. 3.





**Fig. 17:** Cinema advertisement. Source: *Oltenia Economică*, year XI, no. 1-4/1934, p. 29.



# TEMPORALITY, MESSIANISM AND UTOPIA IN JEWISH ROMANIAN INTERWAR LITERATURE: URY BENADOR'S *GHETTO TWENTIETH CENTURY*

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**Abstract:** Due to its testimonial value, interwar Jewish literature has long been an ethical way of accessing history, subject to further fictionalizations and reimaginings. Even more, from Walter Benjamin's Theses on the Philosophy of History, several Jewish thinkers such as Jacques Derrida, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, and Michael Löwy have reflected on a special relationship between Jewishness and history. The paper proposes an examination of the way temporality, political engagement, messianism, and writing intertwine in Jewish Romanian interwar literature, focusing on Ury Benador's 1934 novel *Ghetto Twentieth Century*.

**Keywords:** Jewish Romanian literature, temporality, antisemitism, Ury Benador, literature of the ghetto, messianism.

**Rezumat:** Având în vedere valoarea ei testimonială, literatura evreiască din perioada interbelică a fost de-a lungul timpului o modalitate etică de a pătrunde în istorie, devenind ulterior subiectul unor ficționalizări și reimaginări. Chiar mai mult, începând cu Tezele lui Walter Benjamin despre filozofia istoriei o serie de gânditori evrei precum Jacques Derrida, Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi sau Michael Löwy au meditat asupra unei conexiuni aparte între cultura evreiască și istorie. Această lucrare propune o investigația a modurilor în care temporalitatea, angajamentele politice, mesianismul și scriitura se întreta în literatura evreiască de limbă română din perioada interbelică, oprindu-se cu precădere asupra romanului *Getto Veac XX* (1934) de Ury Benador.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** literatură evreiască de limbă română, temporalitate, antisemitism, Ury Benador, literatura ghetoului, mesianism.

Given the original profoundly anti-Semitic context in which it was created, the study of Jewish literature of the interwar period embodies a necessary restitutive dimension that implies reflection on the complex relationship between literature and history. Even more, through their testimonial value, numerous texts from this period blur the boundaries between history and fiction. Regarding Jewish Romanian literature, an important moment, bearing in mind those aspects, could be considered the posthumously publication of Mihail Sebastian's *Journal* in 1996. Alongside the 1934 novel *For Two Thousand Years* and the volume of essays *How I Became a Hooligan*, published in 1935, the *Journal* allowed for a re-examination of the interwar period, shattering to some extent the golden age status that this period had in the public consciousness during the communist regime, by exposing the anti-Semitic atrocities and the involvement of many Romanian intellectuals in the far-right movements. After the translation of the *Journal* and the novel first into French in 1998 and then into English in 2000 and 2016, it can be said that Mihail Sebastian is an important Romanian author nowadays in the context of world literature, generating further interest in the study of the situation of the Jews in

interwar Romania and even in the fictionalization of the subject. In this sense, Lionel Duroy's 2018 novel *Eugenia* should be mentioned. The French author reconstructs Sebastian's story from the perspective of a fictional character, Eugenia, a literature student from Iași who recalls her romantic relationship with Sebastian after his death, has access to his diary, and knows his writings and the circumstances in which they were written. The novel thus integrates Sebastian's *Journal* intertextually, resulting in a complex dialogue between the two authors. Because of its accurate portrayal of the historical context, it was well received by both the French and Romanian literary press. More recently, Romanian writer Tatiana Niculescu has written a very well-documented biography of the author, drawing on both his autobiographical novel and his *Journal*, entitled *Alone: The Life of Mihail Sebastian* (2022). It goes without saying, then, that Sebastian's writings are of great importance to our cultural understanding of what it meant to be a Jewish intellectual in interwar Romania, and the further reconstructions and reinterpretations also highlight the connections between history and literature. Unfortunately, not all Jewish Romanian authors benefited from such a fruitful reception.

Some authors, such as Sebastian, Max Blecher, or Benjamin Fondane, who achieved national and international recognition, are relatively marginal figures of the interwar Jewish-Romanian period, who proposed distinctive literary formulas and managed to individualize themselves. A distinct group of writers, which should also be mentioned due to the monographic value of their works, are the representatives of the so-called “literature of the ghetto.” The term was used by the Jewish Romanian literary critic Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu and refers to writers such as Isac Peltz, Ury Benador, Ion Călugăru, and I. Ludo, who described Jewish peripheral neighbourhoods or *shtetls* in their works from the 1930s (Crohmălniceanu, 1972, 334). What distinguishes these authors from the autobiographical novel approach is their active desire to portray all aspects of the life of the Jewish communities in Romania, and moreover, an interdependence between Jewishness and the articulation of the chronotope. In this sense, we will try to direct our analysis not only to the way history can be thought in these writings, but also to the way they articulate temporality. In this paper I will refer mainly to Ury Benador’s 1934 novel *Ghetto Twentieth Century*, which best exemplifies the literary direction.

*Ghetto Twentieth Century* was published the same year as Sebastian’s *For Two Thousand Years* and a year after Peltz’s *Calea Văcărești*, which describes the eponymous Jewish neighborhood in Bucharest. Compared to Sebastian’s novel, *Ghetto Twentieth Century* was rarely mentioned as a book about Jewishness, and was well received at the time as a complex portrayal of customs and traditions in Jewish communities. The Jewish life of Brăila depicted by Benador is poles apart from Peltz’s, who received harsh reviews from the Jewish press, considering him an assimilationist due to his representation of a more acculturated community (Constantinescu 1934). In his *Unconventional Dictionary of Jewish Romanian Writers*, Al. Mirodan notes that Benador became known in Romanian literary life not for his psychological novels or for his writings on Beethoven, but simply for “his marching on everyday ground, with his eyes open and his notebook in his hand.” Mirodan also refers to *Ghetto Twentieth Century* as a “general picture of Jewish life in Romania,” and imagines that Benador possessed a symbolic map of the Jewish world that he kept near his desk, constantly checking to make sure he had included every

aspect of the ghetto (Mirodan, 1986, 144).<sup>1</sup> This remained the way Benador’s book was perceived for a long time, but it is important to point out that his detailed depiction of Jewish customs was not just a mimetic act, but rather a programmatic decision by the writer. As Camelia Crăciun notes in analysing the specifics of the different Jewish communities, Brăila was a “cosmopolitan, middle-size city, in which diverse communities concurred in different socio-economic fields.” Therefore, the identitary aspect was only one possible model among others, which explains Sebastian’s distanced view on Jewish themes, especially since Brăila was also his hometown (Crăciun, 2018, 69). We can further mention that in the ethnic specificity of Benador’s description, Brăila has more in common with a *shtetl*, as depicted by Ion Călugăru in his 1936 novel *The Childhood of a Ne'er-do-well*, than with the actual place of reference or with the brief episode in which the narrator returns to Brăila. The entire chronotope of Benador’s novel is ethnicized, with every temporal allusion doubled or replaced by a religious reference, such as, “[s]hortly after the 1900 Purim” (Benador, 1934, 29) or “[o]nly shortly before Hanukkah did a letter arrive” (Benador, 1934, 62). The title of the novel can also be seen as a spatio-temporal metaphor, which is intentionally elliptical and emphasizes the fact that for Benador the entire twentieth century is a ghetto. It is also important to note that for Benador the ghetto is not simply a spatial coordinate, but a spiritual, internal one, as emphasized in the book by the protagonist’s words (Benador, 1934, 105) and also by the author in an interview after the novel’s publication (Sasu, Vartic, 1985, 332). In this sense, the ghetto acts as an instance that can create or cancel conflicts that have strong effects on the perception of history and temporality in a fraternal sense.

*Ghetto Twentieth Century* tells the story of Baruch Landau, an alter ego of the author, and follows him from the young age of 5 to his late teenage years. Historically, the action takes place mainly between 1900, when the Landau family moves from Dorohoi to Brăila, and until 1916, when the period of neutrality during World War I ends in Romania. As Baruch comes of age, he is tormented by the fact that he is forced to choose between his political identity and his Jewish one, or between his two political interests: Zionism and socialism or anarchism (as the commitment to the two political movements often overlaps). This

<sup>1</sup> All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

constant theme intensifies toward the end of the book, where the war is perceived as a distant event, while the character is still conflicted by his ambivalent political leanings, and the writing becomes increasingly fragmented: “Suddenly it was as if a disk was spinning in Baruch’s head [...] The war far away, socialists, Zionists, manuscripts, Mira... Mira... Manuscripts... The disk stopped spinning, or it spins so fast that everything gets mixed up and there’s nothing left? Nothing. Nothing. Only he, Baruch, lonely, small and abandoned” (Benador, 1934, 284). The inner conflict is not resolved, and this becomes clear when one re-reads the prologue of the book. In the first few pages, the novel deviates from the otherwise chronological narrative and shows two moments from Baruch’s future in 1925 and 1930. In the first, he seems to be in a similar state as he is at the end of the novel, in 1916. In 1930, he is a wealthy businessman, a financier of a publishing house, who has disappeared. His mysterious disappearance is represented by a newspaper article inserted into the novel by means of a textual artifice. In the fictional newspaper article, the editors speculate about where he might have hidden and advance two possible places: “[o]ne suspects an escape to Soviet Russia, which would even be understandable in view of certain affinities,” and “[w]e also take up the rumour of a departure for Palestine. This would be the beginning of the long-awaited journey to the first Canaan” (Benador, 1934, 6). The two places represent Baruch’s conflicting political affiliations, and the uncertainty also reflects his inner conflict. In this sense, Benador’s character can be seen as representative of a complex profile similar to that of the Jewish intellectual from Central Europe described by Michael Löwy in his study *Redemption and Utopia. Jewish Libertarian Thought in Central Europe. A Study in Elective Affinity*. As the subtitle announces, Michael Löwy proposes a study of elective affinities, a term originally used in the thirteenth century by Albertus Magnus, popularized by Goethe’s novel and then adapted by Max Weber in sociology. According to Löwy, elective affinity represents “a very special kind of dialectical relationship that develops between two social or cultural configurations, one that cannot be reduced to direct causality or to ‘influences’ in the traditional sense. Starting from a certain structural analogy, the relationship consists of a convergence, a mutual attraction, an active confluence, a combination that can go as far as a fusion” (Löwy, 2017, 6). The two cultural configurations that the author analyses are Judaism, specifically Jewish

messianism, and libertarian utopian thought (understood as a radical political vision influenced by romantic thought and political ideologies such as anarchism, socialism, or communism). At first glance, Jewish messianism and utopian thought may seem contradictory, as the author points out, “especially since the cultural ethno-centrism of the Jewish religion was poles apart from the militant universalism of revolutionary utopias” (Löwy, 2017, 14). The contradiction seems to occur between the facts that messianism belongs to a transcendental and religious tradition, while utopian thought is more associated with the atheistic tradition of materialism and Marxism. However, Löwy demonstrates, following Gershom Scholem, shows that this supposed contradiction is a confusion between Christianity and Judaism, because “for Jewish (as opposed to Christian) messianism, redemption is an event which necessarily takes place on the historical stage” (Löwy, 2017, 17). Moreover, the affinities between the two paradigms can be identified as core structures. According to the author, certain structural similarities can be identified if we consider that Jewish messianism contains two tendencies: restitutive and utopian. The restitutive aspect consists in “the re-establishment of a past ideal state, a lost Golden Age, a shattered Edenic harmony,” while the utopian aspect is represented by the striving for “a radically new future, to a state of things that has never existed before” (Löwy, 2017, 16).

Amongst the Jewish thinkers analysed by Löwy, Walter Benjamin is the one in whose case the elective affinity between the two currents of thought reached the point of an authentic fusion. This is significant insofar as the conjecture in this state also implies “a new way of perceiving historical temporality” (Löwy, 2017, 95). In the case of Benador’s protagonist, the two currents of thought still seem incongruent, hence the internal conflict. Baruch Landau is in search of a radical event that would change the course of history. He envisions a future in which there will no longer be a “Jewish problem” and humanity as a whole will be transformed. This messianic attitude, which probably goes back to his religious and Hasidic upbringing, brings him to Zionism. He is not satisfied with the political movement, since it restricts him in its ideals, which concern only the Jewish people. Even more, he perceives Zionism as an attack on Yiddish culture, with which he feels strongly connected. It is precisely in this sense that he makes contact with socialism and anarchism, which he sees as advocates of utopias that transcend the limitations of the Jewish people

but achieve the same result as Zionism. In this way, his messianism connects with the radical socialist or anarchist utopias. He still suffers from the fact that he cannot separate Zionism from messianism and Jewishness from socialism or anarchism. The way he envisions a utopia and a radical new future that will solve the problems of the Jewish people and humanity as a whole is characterized by the elective affinity between the two currents of thought, which unfortunately puts him in a precarious position, since he is criticized from both sides. This creates doubts in Benador's character that lead him to find other solutions. At certain points he seeks refuge in literature or spirituality, as can be seen from this fragment: "Finally, we do not need emancipation, because we are freer than our masters. Let us lock ourselves back into the ghetto, *into a spiritual ghetto*" (Benador, 1934, 181). With this statement he only makes himself more ridiculous and is left isolated, conflicted and confused.

Unfortunately, we can say that Benador's reception in some ways follows that of his character. The messianic element of his writing was noted from the beginning, but it was only associated with Zionism when the novel was first published and even later, after his death. In his 1934 review of *Ghetto Twentieth Century*, the interwar literary critic Pompiliu Constantinescu mentions a certain "messianic atmosphere" as a key element in the construction of the novel, but he immediately associates it with "a Zionist creed." The critic considers the messianic aspect "a problem that exists almost exclusively within the confines of Jewishness." Therefore, he deliberately does not address the subject in his review, as he is only interested in the "artistic level" (Constantinescu, 1934, 4). In a 1983 interview for the *Unconventional Dictionary of Jewish Romanian Writers*, Shaul Carmel says the following about his relationship with the writer: "It's hard for me. I only believed Benador a single time. When he was a Zionist." In response to the same questions, S. Galeriu is more nuanced, stating that Benador was a "more complex character than it seems" and "with all his fluctuations" a "good Jew" (Mirodan 1986, 147).

However, it is important to note at this point that *Ghetto Twentieth Century* is an unfinished project. The book published under this title should have been only the first volume of a trilogy, later rethought as a tetralogy. In this sense, the development of Baruch Landau over the next volumes should have reflected the elective affinities, the process of merging between the two currents of thought that Benador achieved, but for

which he was severely criticized by the Jewish community. The subsequent volumes never appeared, but through short fragments and various interviews published by Benador, we can reconstruct some aspects of the ambitious project, which are also central to his conception of temporality and history, strongly influenced by the elective affinity between messianism and radical utopia.

The last page of Ury Benador's novel reads: "Here ends the novel *Germinations* from the trilogy *Ghetto Twentieth Century*. To be continued 2) *Mud and Darkness* 3) *Hollow Uprise*." Since the following volumes were never published, some speculations were made. For example, Ovidiu Morar states that [probably due to the antiemetic tensions of those years, the project was eventually abandoned and only the first part was published" (Morar, 2006, 110). Camelia Crăciun also states in her 2018 study that Ury Benador remained an unknown author possibly because of the "profound mystic subtext" of his writings. Therefore, even though Benador's novel was the most successful book of ghetto literature, "it was never republished, unlike the novels of Isac Peltz and Ion Călugăru, which were much more easily accepted into the canon" (Crăciun, 2018, 207). Recently, in 2022, a new version of *Ghetto Twentieth Century* "adapted to the contemporary Romanian language" was published by Publisol, as part of a collection that includes several reprints of twentieth-century literary works. In the preface to the new edition, Ovidiu Pecican mentions that, according to the information given to him by Cora Benador-Freiberg, the author's youngest daughter, at least the second volume was completed by Benador during his lifetime. Unable to publish it, Benador tore up every page of the manuscript on his deathbed and gave it in that state to his first-born daughter, Ella Marcovici. After her death, the manuscript was never found (Pecican, 2022, 14). What is often overlooked is the fact that three editions of the novel were published during Benador's lifetime. This information is found in the author's note to the first (and only) volume of his complete works, published by EPL in 1968 (Benador 1968). The information also appears in the *Analytical Dictionary of Romanian Literature*, coordinated by Ion Pop. In the article dedicated to Benador's novel, Silvia Tomuș notes that "from the *Ghetto Twentieth Century* only the first volume *Germinations* was published in 3 editions, 1934, 1937 and 1947," the last version "containing a dialogue between the author and the editor" (Tomuș, 2007, 341). The information is



partially inaccurate, as the second edition was also published in 1934 due to the fact that the first edition was printed only in small numbers. The complicated history of the novel's edition is significant because in both the 1947 third edition and the 1968 note to the complete works volume, Benador states that he reconstructed the series as a tetralogy in 1945, adding the fourth volume "*The Red See* (epilogue with triple signification)" (Benador, 1968, 357). Even more insightful in this sense is the 1947 edition. Entitled *Conversation Between the Author and the Director of the Publishing House*, the afterword is rather a pseudo-dialogue since Benador's interlocutor speaks only twice in the 25 pages, and mostly repeats the author's words. This fact leads us to believe that the editor could be considered a textual instance. In fact, self-referential artifices such as this are specific to Benador's entire *oeuvre* and even to the way he has shaped his literary career. Whether or not we consider this interpretive thesis, the afterword contains numerous references and fragments to what would have constituted the subsequent volumes of the tetralogy. Therefore, this text should be analysed in the context of the novel, since it undoubtedly constitutes its continuation.

In the case of several Jewish Romanian writers of the interwar period, their political involvement played a key role in their reception. They were complex, often seemingly divergent, and usually reduced to simple antagonistic formulas. As we have already seen, Ury Benador was criticized by members of the Jewish community for renouncing Zionism. After the fall of the communist regime, his reception in Romania was also negatively affected because of his collaboration with the regime. One could point out that the 1947 edition and the reorganization of the structure of the series was simply the author's effort to associate himself with the new regime. In our view, this would be an oversimplification, considering that the elective affinities between various political movements were already evident in the first volume of the novel published in 1934. Regarding the new perception of temporality associated with the fusion of messianism and radical utopia, I would like to refer to what Benador describes as a fragment of the chapter "Carousel" from what would have been the fourth volume of the tetralogy.

The short excerpt tells the story of a young poet from Kyiv, Wladimir Simsinovich Soifer, son of the bookbinder Șimșan Șoifer, who leaves Brăila for Russia in 1917 to participate in "changing the face of history and humanity"

(Benador, 1947, 330). In 1937, Wladimir meets an old man whom he mistakenly believes to be his grandfather, although he knows that he has long since passed away. Being unfamiliar with Jewish practices and ritual objects (*kippah*, *tallit*, and *tefillin*), he interrupts the old man's prayer to ask him his age, assuming he could be his grandfather. The old man, after finishing his prayer, answers that he is five thousand eighty-seven years old, 87 of his own lifetime and 5,000 of his people's. Inspired by this episode, Wladimir writes a cycle of poems entitled *Carousel*. These are shown to his father, who gives them to a "leftist" neighbour, Krasnoselsky, to read. The neighbour considers them counter-revolutionary because they run through history like a "carousel." A trial ensues, but the Ukrainian poet Yury Novichov defends Wladimir and suggests that he be charged for the outdated poetic form, not for the message, which he does not consider counterrevolutionary. At this point, the narrator delves into a meditation on poetry and socialism. Finally, Wladimir is caught in a twilight landscape; a final poem from the *Carousel* cycle is quoted at the end of the fragment, delegating the writer's poetic voice to the protagonist, a procedure used several times in *Ghetto Twentieth Century*.

Based on this parable, we can say that at the moment of writing this epilogue, when Benador was planning his tetralogy, his perspective on his Jewish and political identity was concretized and a new way of thinking was formed, which also imposed a new way of perceiving temporality, similar to that of Walter Benjamin analysed by Michael Löwy. Walter Benjamin's final text, the 1940 *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, consists of 18 short paragraphs in which the author formulates a unique perspective on temporality, combining aspects of Judaism with dialectical materialism. Probably the most suggestive element for his conception is found in the last thesis, in which the author states the following: "We know that the Jews were prohibited from investigating the future. The Torah and the prayers instruct them in remembrance, however. This stripped the future of its magic, to which all those succumb who turn to the soothsayers for enlightenment. This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future turned into homogeneous, empty time. For every second of time was the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter" (Benjamin, 2007, 264). Thus, by revealing an internal paradox, Benjamin articulates a dialectic between the past and the future, but with certain reservations, as he is

aware that this articulation of concepts is at odds with Jewish tradition from certain points of view. As Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi notes, the commandment to remember is central to Jewish tradition, and despite the fact that memory is always fragmentary, the Tanah text does not hesitate to impose a constant obligation to remember and memorize. The verb *zakhar* (לִזְכֹּר = to remember) appears one hundred and sixty-nine times in the biblical text. Moreover, as Yerushalmi points out, “[o]nly in Israel and nowhere else the injunction to remember felt as a religious imperative to an entire people. Its reverberations are everywhere, but they reach a crescendo in the Deuteronomic history and in the prophets” (Yerushalmi, 1996, 9). However, the past-future dialectic that Benjamin outlines, however, is already at work in the Jewish tradition. In *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Jacques Derrida proposes a comparative reading of Benjamin and Yerushalmi in which he highlights the juxtaposition between the promised future and Judaism’s deeply rooted obligation to remember the past: “As if God had inscribed only one thing in the memory of one single people and of an entire people: in the future [l’avenir], remember to remember the future [l’avenir]” (Derrida, 1995, 45). Through this reversal but also through the Derridean distinction between *future* (predictable future) and *avenir* (a future-to-come), the dialectic outlined by Benjamin becomes even clearer and the common point where Jewish messianism and Marxist thought meet becomes visible.

In this sense, we can connect the fragment from the fourth volume, in which Benador describes the course of history through the metaphor of the carousel, to the past-future dialectic at the intersection of Jewish messianism and utopian thought. In both Benjamin and Benador, the merging of the two currents of thought leads to a new perception of temporality. Of course, Benador’s text is not a theoretical text and the comparison has its limitations, but it is certain that with this later afterword to the first volume of *Ghetto Twentieth Century*, he announces a new perspective on temporality marked by the fusion of his political and Jewish identities. One might add that Benador justifies

the reconstruction of the series as a tetralogy as follows: “I do not consider the possibility of publishing a book like *Ghetto Twentieth Century* without changes after a quarter of a century to be particularly important, because the prophecy is ultimately nothing more than a piece of memory directed toward the future. This does not mean that we accept the sceptical and suspicious ‘history repeats itself.’ It is precisely the distinction between ‘history repeats itself’ and ‘prophecy is a memory directed toward the future’ that necessitated a fourth volume aimed at a different conclusion than the third volume” (Benador, 1947, 329). It is this new perception of temporality, created by the fusion of messianism and radical utopia, that puts an end to the inner conflict. Benador’s writing is no longer characterized by contradictory perspectives, but by content. The inclusion of the specific excerpt from the fourth volume is similarly motivated, as a response to the criticism he received from the Jewish community for his “double” commitment even in the early years: “I give this excerpt primarily for certain Jewish readers who believe, or want others to believe, that radical democratic regimes require Jews to kill or deny their belonging and attachment to the Jewish collective” (Benador, 1947, 330).

Of course, the reasons for which Benador did not publish the following volumes are unknown. Probably the contrast between the socialist utopia he envisioned, and the way communism was implemented in Eastern Europe after World War II deeply disappointed him and prevented him from completing the project as restructured in 1945. Nevertheless, even in this form, compiled from scraps, short fragments and confessions, *Ghetto Twentieth Century* remains an important document of interwar Jewish Romanian literature. Not only does the novel represent a way of accessing a fragment of history and understanding the life of the Jewish community in interwar Romania, but it also articulates a specific perspective on temporality characterized by an intertwining of messianism and radical thought.

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## PHILIP ROTH'S *THE PLOT AGAINST AMERICA* AND THE CYCLICITY OF HISTORY

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**Abstract:** *Philip Roth's 2004 The Plot Against America is a powerful piece of experimental writing, wherein dystopia goes against the historical grain, in order to provide critical insight and perspective. As such, the novel will be investigated in terms of the narrative that it construes as a grim, counterfactual version of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century American history. On the one hand, the author's personal Newark background is invoked and revived: the presented Jewish community faces alienation, suffocation, rejection, threats and betrayals in and from the open society that allegedly shelters and integrates multicultural values in its triumphant frame of solidarity. On the other hand, ideals and ideology coalesce to produce a distorted view of patriotism and national evolution. The proposed paper's aim is to observe and illustrate how the author juggles with the 'self vs. other' rhetoric, foregrounding political scenarios and strategies to question their ethical underpinnings and impact on the American Dream. While the farcical and mischievous Roth may take pleasure in exploring the preposterous potential of extreme beliefs and radical enactments thereof, the established analyst of the 20<sup>th</sup> century American phenomenon draws attention to the inevitability of democratic involutions under totalitarian circumstances of strict control over language, culture and their manifestations, as well as to the recurrent mechanisms and pathologies of power.*

**Keywords:** counter-history, propaganda, rhetoric, scenario, verisimilitude.

**Rezumat:** *Cartea din 2004 al lui Philip Roth, Complotul împotriva Americii, e o puternică mostră de scriere experimentală, în care distopia evoluează în răspărul istoriei, pentru a oferi o bună cunoaștere și perspectivă critică. Ca atare, romanul va fi analizat din punctul de vedere al narațiunii pe care o construiește drept versiune întunecată, contrafactuală a istoriei americane de la mijlocul secolului XX. Pe de o parte, Newark-ul din care autorul însuși se trage este invocat și readus la viață: comunitatea evreiască prezentată se confruntă cu alienarea, sufocarea, respingerea, amenințările și trădările din și din partea societății deschise ce se presupune că ocrotește și integrează valorile multiculturale în cadrul triumfal al solidarității. Pe de altă parte, idealurile și ideologia fuzionează pentru a produce o viziune distorsionată asupra patriotismului și evoluției naționale. Scopul lucrării propuse este de a observa și ilustra modul în care autorul jonglează cu retorica 'sine vs. celălalt', aducând în prim-plan scenarii și strategii politice pentru a le pune în discuție substraturile etice și impactul asupra Visului American. În vreme ce unui Roth neastâmpărat și pus pe farse i-ar putea face plăcere explorarea potențialului revoltător al convingerilor extreme și a punerii lor radicale în practică, analistul consacrat al fenomenului american de secol XX atrage atenția asupra inevitabilității involuțiilor democratice în circumstanțe totalitare de control strict asupra limbajului, culturii și manifestărilor acestora, cât și asupra mecanismelor și patologiilor recurente ale puterii.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** contra-istorie, propaganda, retorică, scenario, verosimilitate.

### Introduction

Philip Roth's 2004 *The Plot Against America* explores what interaction with, detachment from, and discrimination against what is mentally construed as the 'radically other' may mean in any society that, in times of socio-historical crisis, finds itself shaped by the transformative and performative power of public and/or private discourse. The novel's narrative pretext is counterfactual, as its plot revolves around imagining the effects of a deeply and aggressively anti-Semitic regime in the 1940s United States. In

a frighteningly convincing attempt at recreating reality and bringing the hidden side of human nature to the fore, Roth falls back on his personal experience of growing up in Jewish Newark, focusing on the constant pressure and conflicting influences that he, like the innocent protagonist, Philip, has been both confronted with and witness to.

Although not necessarily transparent to either the child and his peers, or to their parents' generation, all caught up in a swirl of transformations and adaptations, the mental configuration of the American society on the

move towards a new world conflagration was hardly as stable and solid as it might seem in retrospect. Roth chooses to highlight the alternative, to examine the possibilities, to point out various vulnerabilities, shortcomings and insecurities of a system that, underneath its inclusive, multicultural, tolerant surface, continued to harbour resentment, inflexibility, intolerance – all handy ingredients for disaster and rupture.

### **Private and Public (Hi)Stories against the Grain**

One of the most notorious literary explorations of (self- and) socially-induced catastrophic thinking and its disquieting anxieties, *The Plot against America* starts off with the interplay of remembrance and projection, which the author will creatively toy with throughout the entire novel. “Fear presides over these memories, a perpetual fear. Of course no childhood is without its terrors, yet I wonder if I would have been a less frightened boy if Lindbergh hadn’t been president or if I hadn’t been the offspring of Jews” (Roth, 2020, 1). From the very beginning, thus, Roth places his counterfactual plot in the familiar frame of the biographically-infused Newark. A Jewish family (allegedly his own, should the manuscript pass, indeed, for a memoir) faces the disastrous consequences of a Nazi-sympathizer, Charles Lindbergh’s, election to office instead of Franklin D. Roosevelt, subsequently changing the known course of 20<sup>th</sup> century American history.

The narrative filter is (alter-)Roth’s own, as a child growing up to witness Lindbergh’s joining the isolationist America First Party, while assiduously expressing his admiration for Hitler, his actions and doctrine, “calling Germany the world’s ‘most interesting nation’ and its leader ‘a great man.’ And all this interest and admiration after Hitler’s 1935 racial laws had denied Germany’s Jews their civil, social, and property rights, nullified their citizenship, and forbidden intermarriage with Aryans” (Roth, 2020, 6). It is hardly surprising, then, that Philip’s story is one of growing negativity, suspicion and, ultimately, hatred of the American V.I.P. who crosses over from popular hero and protagonist of the first solo transatlantic flight, to the purportedly non-interventionist Nazi supporter who secures the Republican nomination, which “assaulted, as nothing ever had before, that huge endowment of personal security that I had taken for granted as an American child of American parents in an

American school in an American city in an America at peace with the world” (Roth, 2020, 7).

One of the first challenges Philip must face is precisely the scary transformation of the once respected Lindbergh, who had been an equal inspiration to the Roths, as to the rest of the nation. Occupying a central place in “the gallery of family anecdotes that generate a child’s first cohesive mythology” (Roth, 2020, 5), the daring aviator inscribed himself in the Roths’ microhistory, as his steps towards progress overlapped with Mother’s pregnancy with Philip’s brother, the talented Sandy, who “would later record this moment with a drawing illustrating the juxtaposition of those two splendid events” (Roth, 2020, 5) What the author does in this introductory part of the novel is to interweave a semi-fictional micro-history with the recorded macro-History, thus creating a web of facts and il-/de-lusions that will further support the dystopian fantasy. Thus, the evolution of the atmosphere in the household is tightly connected to that of the soon-to-be leader of the nation. The solar moments of happiness and trust in a common future are overshadowed by Lindbergh’s growth into a tragic hero after the brutal – and shockingly public – loss of his child.

As many a time in Roth’s writing, public and private lives clash, while intimacy and exposure become part of a social game of appearances that feeds on sensationalism and turns empathy into intrusion. The writer revisits the real-life context of the era, wherein the Lindberghs fled America in order to protect themselves and a potential future child from a similar fate “and to recover some measure of the privacy they coveted”. The move to England and the subsequent travels through Europe are, thus, prefigured as the roots of an evil about to unleash (which is the point where imagination takes over). “Lindbergh began taking the trips to Nazi Germany that would transform him into a villain for most American Jews” (Roth, 2020, 6). While, before these sequence of episodes, young Philip’s Newark community grounded its well-being in its appurtenance to the American nation, what the novel highlights is a gradual ghettoization and a rather steep decline in status, as well as the quick change in group representation: from friend to foe and, therefore, menacing other.

Thus, alongside the protagonist-family, one plunges, abruptly and evidently, into a world that is already shaped by the radicalization of preconceived notions and ideals, and critically lacks any authentic dialogue and preoccupation for mutual understanding, respect, tolerance.

Philip's immediate family is in the spotlight: the father, Herman, the mother, Bess, his elder brother, Sandy, a painful example of ideological brainwashing. The increasingly estranged aunt, Evelyn Finkel, literally marries into the Lindbergh regime by her unholy alliance with Rabbi Bengelsdorf, which brings her as close to absolute cynicism as dancing with Ribbentrop at a White House dinner, blinded by the illusive lights of notoriety. Cousin Alvin, Herman's nephew, is outraged by Lindbergh's hypocritical anti-war position and even loses a leg after fleeing to Canada, to fight Hitler on the British side. The foreground of the story is occupied by the family members' different, subjective, and highly emotional perspectives upon the initially potential and ominous, afterwards literal and disastrous presidential term, while Lindbergh gradually ascends to power after winning the Republican nomination and, subsequently, the elections. The Rothian parade of inner and outer demons is, by now, about to begin.

Alongside the aforementioned individual responses to the unexpected, belligerent transformation of their status quo, the inexperienced narrator records, unknowingly, the loss of the American immigrant dream, the resentment and the fury of people who, like Philip's parents, feel betrayed and abandoned by the very democracy they helped build and which they trusted to ensure their harmonious cohabitation at the heart of the United States. In dismay, they watch an increasingly aggressive discourse occupying the foreground of public debate and generically vilifying the Jewish minority as a constructed enemy. As the radio industry dominates mass communication, it is via a broadcast speech that the entire country hears what may easily be perceived as an accusation and a condemnation: it "names among the 'most important groups who have been pressing this country towards war' a group constituting less than three percent of the population and referred to alternately as 'the Jewish people' and 'the Jewish race'" (Roth, 2020, 13). The ensuing metamorphosis of the community from a homely gathering of Newark neighbours into a raging mob is dramatic:

"What shocked a child most was the anger, the anger of men whom I knew as lighthearted kibbitzers or silent, dutiful breadwinners who all day long unclogged drainpipes or serviced furnaces or sold apples by the pound and then in the evening looked at the paper and listened to

the radio and fell asleep in the living room chair, plain people who happened to be Jews now storming about the street and cursing with no concern for propriety, abruptly thrust back into the miserable struggle from which they had believed their families extricated by the providential migration of the generation before" (Roth, 2020, 16–17).

As psychological and historical investigation have always ranked high among Roth's *fortes*, there is little wonder vis-à-vis the fact that individual trajectories are imagined and skilfully presented as inevitably subsumed to the generic evolution of the American nation, parallel to which they evolve in the minutely construed, counterfactual scenario. Typical of the author's layered ex- and in-cursions into the meanders of the American mind, this inherently comparative unfolding of private and public, individual and communal events plunges the reader into witnessing an open confrontation between pervading, insidious terror and false glory and glamour. The radicalization of views and the distortion of feelings are retraced and analysed in retrospect by the grown-up Philip-narrator, who relives the childhood trauma he still struggles to work through.

### **Constructing the Enemy Within: America's Others**

As per usual in Roth's epic constructions, one will get caught up in an intricate web of side-events, possible intrigues, (un)predictable versions of the master narrative. "Nightmare and history are thus conjoined in a book that simultaneously interrogates how history is made, demonstrating that the construction of fiction and history are far more similar than they were generally considered to be in the 1940s" (Stinson, 2009, 44). The experimental blend of factual and counterfactual, real and imagined circumstances is a technical procedure which falls into place with the writer's consistent concern with capturing or imagining a multiplicity of (authorized) voices, angles and reactions, alternative to what is, oftentimes restrictively, presented as historical fact(s).

In doing so, as emphasized by Siegel:

"Roth submits his counterfactual history, not as a tendentious fictional commentary on 'real life,' but as a true history that challenges and supplements our notion of

American identity as defined by the cause and effect of actual events that comprises its factual history. Roth demonstrates that the identity of a nation cannot be encapsulated in a chronicle of actual events, but that the innumerable potential plotlines that do not come into being largely on account of historical contingency reveal the plurality that comprises any given place at any given time” (Siegel, 2012, 131).

What does, then, the book set out to reveal about Americanness and its (dis)contents, one of the major topics that run through and define Roth’s work as a whole? Via the convoluted discourses captured in *The Plot against America*, the novel does not only prove the complexity of coexisting narratives and their worrisome, simultaneous plausibility. It also highlights the discomfiting idea that, despite the U.S.’ official position during the Second World War, its opposition to and eventual defeat of the Nazi regime, anti-Semitic sentiments were not at all foreign to Americans. In his designated role as party spokesman, prior to his candidacy, Lindbergh criticizes the American involvement in the World War, under the mischievous guise of pacifism.

“‘My intention in running for the presidency,’ he told the raucous crowd, once they had stopped chanting his name, ‘is to preserve American democracy by preventing America from taking part in another world war. Your choice is simple. It’s not between Charles A. Lindbergh and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. It’s between Lindbergh and war.’ That was the whole of it—forty-one words” (Roth, 2020, 30).

Reducing political action to irreconcilable binary oppositions, flaunting extremism and generalization as examples of good practice, Lindbergh manages to appal his opponents by openly castigating “the Jewish race”: an abstract, indistinguishable mass, which he opposes to the presumed benefit of the rest of America, and which he increasingly blames for national and international catastrophes. In doing so, he resorts to the echoing voices of his chosen emissaries, among whom Rabbi Bengelsdorf – the perfect proselytizing tool, from among the Jewish-American community members themselves. Conflict, alienation, tension are the deviously anticipated results of the *Europe vs. America*

rhetoric he employs in his campaign speeches, making Lindbergh’s election palatable to the rather naïve part of the Jewish-American electorate, while also “koshering him for the goyim” (40), as pointed out by the highly sarcastic, yet perceptive, Alvin.

“‘This is not America’s war,’ Bengelsdorf announced, and the crowd at Madison Square Garden responded with a full minute of applause. ‘This,’ the rabbi told them, ‘is Europe’s war.’ [...] Of course, the Nazi harassment and persecution of its German Jewish population is a cause of enormous anguish to me as it is to every Jew [...] But how will this cruel fate that has befallen them in their own land be alleviated by our great country going to war with their tormentors? If anything, the predicament of all of Germany’s Jews would only worsen immeasurably—worsen, I fear, tragically. Yes, I am a Jew, and as a Jew I feel their suffering with a familial sharpness. But I am an American citizen, my friends’—again the applause—‘I am an American born and raised, and so I ask you, how would my pain be lessened if America were now to enter the war and, along with the sons of our Protestant families and the sons of our Catholic families, the sons of our Jewish families were to fight and die by the tens of thousands on a blood-soaked European battleground?’” (Roth, 2020, 38–39).

Such calculating public speeches and cunning addresses (on Lindbergh and his supporters’ part) are predicated on an un-hyphenated Americanness that replicates Hitler’s *Weltanschauung*. As they bellicosely come to the fore of official presidential discourses, it becomes progressively evident that the writer points at the fact that, while dormant, or simply less vocal, the inborn and deeply harboured anti-Semitic beliefs of the 1940s may have easily surfaced under slightly different circumstances. This is exactly what he creates via his alternative scenario. Should the United States, indeed, have pledged non-intervention to both Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, what might global affairs have looked like? What would have been the (smaller-scale) fate of the Weequahic neighbourhood, alongside all other Jewish-American communities’ across the country? In order to fathom this out and provide plausible answers, the book’s parallel narratives address the essential dichotomies of micro-/macro-history,



family/nation, American/un-American, as the successive, basic units of the society are closely observed in their respective, concentric circles.

### **History Reimagined. Downfalls and Pitfalls**

In postmodern fashion, using fragmentariness as a tool and means of creating suspense, Roth focuses, inevitably, upon what appears to be a rather traditional theme: the fall of individuals and communities. This mirrors an even more radical and unnerving fall: that of the American Dream of inclusiveness, mutual cultural appreciation, and respect. By oftentimes overlapping and intertwining reality and fabrication, "Roth blurs the frontier between [...] "the historical fact" and "the historical imagining." This is a strategy of distortion and coincidence that he will use all along. History AND (not or) counterhistory at the same time, which might explain why this novel appears both "dreamlike [and] creepily plausible" (Yardley) (Chard-Hutchinson, 2009, 147).

Indeed, as a perfect illustration for the aforementioned interaction, one of the novel's emblematic passages connects history, narrative, individual and collective destinies. Philip recollects, with bitterness and detachment, a series of inevitable, and all the more excruciating, changes. As the Lindbergh regime settles in, the initial disbelief and resistance are replaced by despair, disillusionment, and dissolution of hope:

"A new life began for me. I'd watched my father fall apart, and I would never return to the same childhood. The mother at home was now away all day working for Hahne's, the brother on call was now off after school working for Lindbergh, and the father who'd defiantly serenaded all those callow cafeteria anti-Semites in Washington was crying aloud with his mouth wide open—crying like both a baby abandoned and a man being tortured—because he was powerless to stop the unforeseen. And as Lindbergh's election couldn't have made clearer to me, the unfolding of the unforeseen was everything. Turned wrong way round, the relentless unforeseen was what we schoolchildren studied as "History," harmless history, where everything unexpected in its own time is chronicled on the page as inevitable. The terror of the unforeseen is what the science of history hides, turning a disaster into an epic" (Roth, 2020, 113).

Blending the novel's epic with meditations that far surpass its mere plot, this passage is meant to rearrange expectations and beliefs about history as a coherent, predictable, linear development of logically and chronologically orderly sequences (as it may appear to be whenever read, reminisced, or rendered retrospectively). By closely looking into the predicaments of individuals who get caught up in the momentary swirls of immediate occurrences, Roth records thoughts, emotions, anxieties that are all part of the evolution of a family, a community, a society. The evident bias, the unleashed subjectivity, the highly personal(ized) versions of truth that concur demonstrate that, in fact, there is not and there can hardly be any unidirectional, orderly, foreseeable history, narrated in a single authoritative and believable voice, at the very point that people find themselves trapped in the middle of unfolding events.

The result of such a complex and challenging situation is, at philosophical, ideological, and even practical levels, the questioning of the very notion of history, its stabilizing qualities, and its reliability as a grand, representative narrative. The fictional Roth parents are struggling with their own family tragedy, watching powerlessly, in disbelief, a United States on the verge of the abyss caused by Lindbergh's ideological proximity to the likes of Hitler, Mussolini, Hirohito, who presumably all respect his non-interventionist policies. Meanwhile, the propaganda machine has cleverly exploited the crisis of the American mind, already exasperated and exhausted by the significant depression caused by the previous global conflagration, which the citizens are now firmly determined not to relive.

Presented with a necessary amount of detachment, many of the actions and reactions that surface in the novel are not so much excusable, as they are understandable in context. Roth's ample observation, his multiple, small and large-scale case studies, reveal the overbearing weight of chance and circumstance in a universe that is, evidently, out of control. The father, Herman, the initial pillar and opinion-maker of the Roth family, starts out as a firm believer in American equality and inclusiveness, but is reduced, step by step, to a powerless and meaningless victim. Both the household and the neighbourhood's decline into insecurity, spite and chaotic behaviour, and the cruel scenes experienced by the family on its trip to Washington emphasize Herman's disheartening defeat in his utopia of American good will.

Deeply impressed by the Lincoln Memorial and its symbolic homage to one of the pillars of the emancipated American nation, Herman is shocked by a stranger's side-remark, "Thank goodness we have President Lindbergh" (Roth, 2020, 64). To his mind, the mere presidential office is the only comparison that could ever be made between the two leaders of the nation. When evicted from the hotel room they had reserved long ahead, allegedly due to overbooking, Herman's American creed is not just disregarded by the manager, but also mocked by the police officer called in to settle the dispute. "I was with my family at the Lincoln Memorial. They have the Gettysburg Address up on the wall. You know what the words are that are written there? 'All men are created equal.'" "But that doesn't mean all hotel reservations are created equal" (Roth, 2020, 70). While trying to regain dignity, appurtenance, and equality upon taking his family to the cafeteria, Herman is the protagonist of a scene that resonates with a similar one in *The Counterlife*: instead of the allusion to a particular type of (allegedly Jewish) smell, he faces another type of labelling. "Loudmouth Jew. And for the second time in less than forty-eight hours" (Roth, 2020, 78).

While the militant Herman's confidence in the American ideals he has tried to instil in his family crumbles to pieces, the author never neglects the symbolical and, to a certain extent, moralistic dimension of his novel. The mechanism of parallelism functions throughout, as another patriarchal trajectory, Lindbergh's, eventually collapses in a downward spiral.

"His fall is described as regression, with the father hero reverting to childhood, and that notion of regression also applies to the metaphorical image of the Father of the Nation, a president gone wild, the one who wishes the Jews dead and uses his heroic image to promote antisemitism or uses antisemitism to promote his heroic image. The other result is the nation's reverting to savagery" (Chard-Hutchinson, 2009, 146–147).

Indeed, what Roth's analogous explorations of the involution of the dream-family and of the dream-society achieve is a gradual and thoroughly convincing deconstruction of the fairy-tale-like, utopian image of American openness and integration. Via various means of foreshadowing, the disaster is prefigured from the very opening scenes, when little Philip still harbours the

patriotic feelings which have been inspired by his parents' unadulterated belief in the generosity of their once-adoptive homeland.

"I pledged allegiance to the flag of our homeland every morning at school. I sang of its marvels with my classmates at assembly programs. I eagerly observed its national holidays, and without giving a second thought to my affinity for the Fourth of July fireworks or the Thanksgiving turkey or the Decoration Day double-header. Our homeland was America. Then the Republicans nominated Lindbergh and everything changed" (Roth, 2020, 4–5).

As the author includes all the relevant details and visible symbols of patriotism, there can be hardly any doubt as to the Roth's full appurtenance to America, their appreciation and embracement of its cardinal values, founding myths, essential holidays and, overall, cultural and civilizational, national ethos (and even pathos). Nevertheless, the counterfactual scenario casts the shadow of extremism over them, as well as over the entire nation, disrupting any predictability, in terms of both personal stories, and the overall direction in which the country moves. As his brother grows estranged after his Kentucky escapade in the Just Folks program, which the former sees as an opportunity to observe and blend into the authentic lifestyle of the 'fathers of the nation', young Philip almost wishes that Sandy's obliviousness to the Jewish-American predicament were just a mere case of intentional passing, or make-believe, problematic as that itself might be.

"...if only Sandy had told me he was leading a double existence! If only he was making the best of a terrible situation and masquerading as a Lindbergh loyalist to protect us! But having seen him lecturing an audience of Jewish adults in that New Brunswick synagogue basement, I knew how convinced he was of what he was saying and how he gorged on the attention it brought him. My brother had discovered in himself the uncommon gift to be somebody, and so while making speeches praising President Lindbergh and while exhibiting his drawings of him and while publicly extolling (in words written by Aunt Evelyn) the enriching benefits of his eight weeks as a Jewish farm hand in the

Gentile heartland—while doing, if the truth be known, what I wouldn't have minded doing myself, by doing what was normal and patriotic all over America and aberrant and freakish only in his home—Sandy was having the time of his life” (Roth, 2020, 183–184).

What the author makes clear in such passages is the true extent of what could have easily become a menacing, large-scale hallucination: a delusion of grandeur predicated on the all-American values of hard work, individualism, and the myth of upward mobility. The dangerous pursuit and construal of happiness on the moving sands of racial, ethnic religious and cultural bias is not at all foreign to historical struggles, and the author employs a well-calibrated arsenal of discursive weapons to fictionally illustrate and philosophically denounce the dangers of giving in to the *divide-et-impera* tactics of manipulation and oppression, which are known to have wreaked unbearable havoc, suffering, and segregation before. The evolution of events in the novel strays from the factual history of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century in America, nevertheless closely mimicking the set of strategies and mechanisms behind the grim trajectory that had led The Old Continent to the unrepresentable, yet undeniable, Holocaust. Although, this time, the background is The New World, the cynical games and mind-traps, the endless ambitions, the ruthless provocations, the common penchant for tragedy and exhaustion, the diffusion of critical thinking and humane acting in times of crisis are as evident as they are frighteningly similar to the dark cycles of the rather recent and recognizable past.

Via postmodern art and artifice, Roth forces the reader to step into uncomfortable shoes and walk a very thin mental and ideological line. He, thus, warns that a reenactment of individual and collective trauma can never be ruled out, as long as its causes have not been fully understood, its episodes have not been fully confronted or articulated, and its scheme of operation has not been completely dismantled and eradicated. As each of the inevitably limited perspectives and discourses that the reader gets insight into captures a different type of emotion and reaction to what is depicted as the steady transformation of American democracy into a rhetorically skilful dictatorship, Roth fulfils his purpose of examining history in the making. The characters struggle with their unfinished narratives from within, as no one truly knows what to expect and projections distort or, in some cases, even replace reality. It is

evident, however, that Roth's fictional, alternative universe, takes into account all kinds of unfulfilled historical possibilities, including and culminating with the one of an American Holocaust.

## Conclusion

Via a counterfactual, perplexing, revolting, yet ominously believable plotline and a cast of characters whose dissonant voices echo a multiplicity of historically-identifiable views and arguments, the writer challenges the reader to think the unthinkable. By employing introspective, speculative thought, he succeeds in dislocating the preconceived and quite comfortable, though unfortunately self-sufficient idea that something like that could not have happened in the United States. As pointed out by Scanlan,

“Although it always invents, an eloquent alternative history also compels us to remember what popular memory erases. Lindbergh's once-forgotten anti-Semitic speeches resonate in *The Plot against America*. We may not believe that Lindbergh would have signed a pact with Hitler, but we can hardly deny that in 1940 respectable Americans could openly voice anti-Semitism without significantly damaging their reputations” (Scanlan, 2011, 518).

There can hardly be any motivated rejection of such a presupposition. On the contrary, the signs of the concrete possibility of rooting such an apparently preposterous scenario in the American mind are present from the inception of the narrative, and this is precisely the speculative niche *The Plot against America* sets out to occupy. A thorough close-reading of the novel is bound to reveal in even further depth not just Roth's ominous creativity, but also his careful documentation, the intricate, subtle interweaving of verifiable historical fact with admirable fictionalization-as-*reductio ad absurdum*. The ultimate purpose is the creation of a *mise-en-scène* that functions as a striking cautionary tale, particularly when projected and read against the background of the successive waves of extremist discourses and actions that appear to dominate a Third Millennium which has yet to learn the lessons of the once unimaginable past.

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## NAZIS IN SPACE: LAIBACH AND THE *IRON SKY* FILMS

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**Abstract:** *Laibach describe themselves as “Engineering” (on Facebook), as “Mental Health Service” (on Instagram) and as “Diagnostic Center” (on Tweeter), as “engineers of human souls” (in many interviews) and for more general explanation as a music and cross-media group from Slovenia which has developed a “Gesamtkunstwerk” – multi-disciplinary practice in all fields ranging from art to popular culture. This paper focuses on their contribution to the Finnish dark SF-comedy Iron Sky (2012) about Earth’s destruction in a space conflict with Nazis based on the dark side of the Moon. The first part of the article discusses Laibach’s history of interrogation of the relations between art and totalitarianism, during the four decades of their existence, both in socialist Yugoslavia and independent Slovenia. The second part discusses Iron Sky’s concept and production. The third part looks at Laibach’s contribution to the film’s soundtrack. The fourth part discusses the themes well developed in Iron Sky (convergence between political marketing and political propaganda; duplicity in international politics dominated by the US; political and military struggle over natural resources), but largely overlooked by film critics in favor of more ordinary filmmaking topics such as the script, humour, acting or production values. Laibach made a multi-layered and refined contribution to this, in many respects unique filmmaking endeavour. In the format of a lowbrow B-movie soundtrack they used music to demystify both the European historical legacy of racism and imperialist conquest, and the contemporary political causes for war and mass destruction, epitomized by the post 9/11 geopolitics of the US.*

**Keywords:** *Laibach, Iron Sky, film music, political satire, United States, Nazism, imperialism.*

**Rezumat:** *Laibach se descriu pe ei înșiși ca "Engineering" (pe Facebook), ca "Mental Health Service" (pe Instagram) și ca "Diagnostic Center" (pe Tweeter), ca "ingineri ai sufletelor umane" (în multe interviuri) și, pentru o explicație mai generală, ca un grup muzical și cross-media din Slovenia care a dezvoltat un "Gesamtkunstwerk" - o practică multidisciplinară în toate domeniile, de la artă la cultură populară. Această lucrare se concentrează pe contribuția lor la comedia neagră SF finlandeză Iron Sky (2012) despre distrugerea Pământului într-un conflict spațial cu naziștii staționați pe partea întunecată a Lunii. Prima parte a articolului discută istoria Laibach de interogare a relațiilor dintre artă și totalitarism, pe parcursul celor patru decenii de existență, atât în Iugoslavia socialistă, cât și în Slovenia independentă. A doua parte discută conceptul și producția Iron Sky. Cea de-a treia parte se ocupă de contribuția Laibach la coloana sonoră a filmului. Cea de-a patra parte discută temele bine dezvoltate în Iron Sky (convergența dintre marketingul politic și propaganda politică; duplicitatea în politica internațională dominată de SUA; lupta politică și militară pentru resursele naturale), dar în mare parte ignorate de criticii de film în favoarea unor subiecte mai obișnuite din domeniul cinematografiei, cum ar fi scenariul, umorul, interpretarea sau valorile de producție. Laibach a adus o contribuție multistratificată și rafinată la acest demers cinematografic, în multe privințe unic. În formatul unei coloane sonore de film de serie B de joasă speță, ei au folosit muzica pentru a demistifica atât moștenirea istorică europeană a rasismului și a cuceririi imperialiste, cât și cauzele politice contemporane ale războiului și distrugerii în masă, întruchipate de geopolitica SUA de după 11 septembrie 2001.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *Laibach, Iron Sky, muzică din film, satiră politică, Statele Unite, nazism, imperialism.*

### An abridged terrestrial history of Laibach

Laibach was formed on June 1, 1980, in the small industrial town of Trbovlje in central Slovenia. The date was set symbolically as it marked Trbovlje’s most important municipal holiday commemorating a violent confrontation

between the pro-communist industrial workers and miners of the so-called Red Districts of Zasavje (Trbovlje, Zagorje and Hrastnik) and members of Orjuna (Organization of Yugoslav Nationalists in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) in

June 1, 1924. As noted by Teodor Lorenčič, former collaborator of Laibach: “in a contradictory, paradoxical sense, there are certain similarities between Orjuna and Laibach.” (2021, 22). The group initially identified with the both sides in this confrontation:

“Orjuna was a pro-Yugoslav and unitarian nationalist and anti-communist, but also anti-fascist organization, which consequently contributed to the creation of another rebel organization, T.I.G.R. (full name Revolutionary Organization of the Julian March T.I.G.R.), a militant anti-fascist and insurgent organization. T.I.G.R. was established in response to the Fascist Italianization of Slovene and Croat people in the former Austro-Hungarian territories which were annexed to Italy after World War I, and were known at the time as the Julian March” (Laibach, 2021).

This organization is considered to be one of the first organised anti-fascist resistance movements in Europe. Nevertheless, Orjuna also took on some fascist elements - they wore their uniforms and had a paramilitary look that was openly reminiscent of Italian fascists. This dualism of Orjuna and their conflict with the pro-communist workers in Trbovlje inspired Laibach's origins and concerns.

“This date - June 1 - and the conflict between the pro-Yugoslav Orjuna and workers of Trbovlje - who were in principle employees of the German and Austrian factory owners - clearly represents the paradox that Laibach internalized when it was created” (Laibach, 2021).

Laibach's career started with a ban of their first public presentation in Workers' Cultural Centre in Trbovlje, as part of the exhibition *Alternative Slovenian Culture*, due to “incorrect and irresponsible” use of symbols (black crosses) in posters and artworks (Megla, 1995, 35). They were accused of disturbing public peace and order, security and morals (Štrajn, 2015, 28).

In accordance with the practice of contemporary industrial music bands, in this period Laibach understood their sound “as a force in the form of terror with therapeutic effects” (Jeklić, Soban, 2015, 40). They shared the audience and venues with the Slovene punk rock

movement but subsequently distanced themselves from the punks to cultivate a new audience with their militarist imagery, elusive manifestos and totalitarian rhetoric. Laibach's reflection of German influence on Slovenia's culture and language involving the use of Nazi imagery was one of the most provocative aspects of their work.

Controversies surrounding early Laibach peaked in 1983 with two events. At the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the highbrow festival Music Biennale in Zagreb, at the “Moša Pijade” Workers' University, Laibach joined forces with the English groups Last Few Days and 23 Skidoo for a 5-hour performance *We Forge the Future (Mi kujemo bodočnost)* which included video monitors as part of the stage installation. Beside Laibach's video material, they screened the 1971 propaganda film *The Revolution Is Not Over Yet (Revolucija še traja)*, dir: Milan Ljubić which celebrates the successes of socialist Yugoslavia. Extracts from different speeches by Josip Broz Tito, leader of socialist Yugoslavia, were also used. At certain points in the film, while Tito was giving a speech “a pornographic scene on Super 8 film was repeatedly projected, so that both scenes were superimposed. Understandably, this resulted in a scandal (Jeklić, Soban, 2015, 46).

The ensuing inter-republic campaign included an anti-Laibach statement from the Croatian League of Socialist Youth. Laibach responded with a letter published in the Slovene youth journal *Mladina* in which they stressed that their work never resorted to “commentary of concrete political events” (Laibach, 1983a, 29). A few months later Laibach accepted the invitation to appear at the cultural-political program *TV Weekly* hosted by journalist Jure Pengov. Instead of an ordinary TV interview they staged a meticulously directed performance in Ljubljana's ŠKUC Gallery dressed in Yugoslav military uniforms. The ensuing public outrage resulted in the ban of public performances under the name Laibach by the Ljubljana committee of the League of Socialist Workers, which remained in effect until February 1987. Laibach reacted with another statement published in *Mladina*, in which they referred to their activities as critically unveiling “fascist tendencies in the contemporary society” and, accordingly, to themselves as a “distinctly antifascist-oriented” group (Laibach, 1983b, 17).

Banned in Slovenia, Laibach embarked on their first Occupied Europe Tour, which ran intermittently until 1985 across both halves of Cold War Europe. Besides cities in Yugoslavia, Laibach initially performed in Vienna, Budapest,

Kraków, Warsaw, Toruń, Wrocław (few months after the suspension of the martial law in Poland), West Berlin, Copenhagen, Hamburg, The Hague, Amsterdam, Eindhoven, Maastricht and London, failing to qualify for border crossing at Komárno and perform their illegal concerts in Czechoslovakia (Lorenčič, 2021, 70). The group tested the audience's tolerance and responses ignoring the ideological borders and dramatizing the military and cultural colonization of Europe.

In 1984, together with the theatre group Scipio Nasica Sisters Theatre (active in 1983-1987) and the visual arts group IRWIN (founded in 1983) Laibach founded the artistic collective NSK - Neue Slowenische Kunst (NSK, 1991; Erjavec, 2003; Borčič, 2015). Other, subsequently established subdivisions of the collective included, among others, the design department New Collectivism and the theoretical Department of Pure and Applied Philosophy lead by philosopher Peter Mlakar. Mlakar's speeches as prologues to Laibach concerts, highly politically charged and specific to the locations, provoked the audiences with the very fact that they were being forced to listen to his opaque orations.

Besides the Yugoslav economic system of worker's self-management, another important reference for NSK was the legacy of the Yugoslav partisan movement in World War II. Like Laibach's, NSK's German name worked with the trauma of more than one thousand years of German political and cultural hegemony over the small Slovene nation. NSK's recognizable eclectic iconography was largely borrowed from the past, from Eastern and Western European avant-garde art movements to socialist and national-socialist realism (Borčič, 2013).

In the complex cultural and political situation of the late-socialist 1980s in Slovenia and Yugoslavia (which was approaching its imminent demise), where new social forces were competing for empowerment and resources, NSK as protagonists of the Slovene alternative cultural scene found themselves in 1986 collaborating on the high-profile theatre production *Krst pod Triglavom* (*Baptism under Triglav*), produced by Slovenia's major cultural venue "Cankarjev dom". Directed by Dragan Živadinov, leader of the Scipio Nasica Sisters Theatre, and conceived by the various branches of NSK, (including Laibach who contributed the music score), *Krst* was the largest Slovene theatre production to have taken place, conceived as an abstract dramatization of the roots of Slovene national identity. It was also a major step towards the normalization of Laibach's

status in Slovenia as the tacitly and openly supportive cultural institutions helped Laibach maintain public presence, although the group was banned from performing in Ljubljana under this name. In response to this situation, the agenda the 12<sup>th</sup> Congress of ZSMS (Alliance of Socialist Youth of Slovenia), held in the town of Krško in April 1986, also included the demand for legalization of Laibach's name and activities. It had already been clear that the ban was more damaging to the Slovene authorities than to Laibach. Members of NSK collectively ended the year with a friendly visit to the USSR (Laibach, 2022).

Laibach's true international success commenced when the famed British label Mute Records signed them and released their 1987 album *Opus Dei*, commercially successful enough to qualify for MTV airplay. Meanwhile, they kept Mute Records' legal team busy with resolving such issues as Laibach's use of John Heartfield's swastika, symbol still prohibited from public display in West Germany. Laibach came to challenge the conventions of Western music industry, including the stylistic and political norms under which music was produced and disseminated. With their next album released by Mute, the "Nazified" version of *Let It Be* (1988), Laibach questioned the Beatles' canonical status on both sides of the Iron Curtain (Monroe, 2005, 233).

After their 1987 concert in Amsterdam, that year's European City of Culture (the project was launched in Athens two years earlier) Laibach gave many contributions to EU's European Capital of Culture project. Also in 1987, at the invitation of Peter Zadek, the intendant of Deutsches Schauspielhaus in Hamburg (Germany's largest theatre), Laibach were invited to participate in Wilfried Minks' production of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. This staging included references to Rudolf Hess (Third Deputy of the Third Reich who committed suicide in the same year) and his solo attempt to negotiate peace with the United Kingdom in May 1941. Laibach's contribution divided the German audience and media: some of them saw the group as neo-fascists, despite the theatre's track record of radicalism (Monroe, 2014, 537).

With their overall attitude and imagery, Laibach caused distress across Yugoslavia, but only in Slovenia the condemnation revolved around the group's name, as it activated a very disturbing set of associations especially for those with still vivid memories of what that name had

symbolized in the past. In socialist Ljubljana Laibach was a taboo word, an unspeakable name associated with Nazi oppression and domestic collaboration in World War II, but this debate brought that word in constant public circulation. Laibach thus initiated some of the first serious discussions in Slovenia about Germanization and collaboration with the Nazis, which predated the wider historical reassessments of the war period in the coming decades. Though Ljubljana was called Laibach for more than eight centuries (until 1918), names such as Danzig (Gdańsk) and Königsberg (Kaliningrad) are still used by German nationalists and exiles who challenge the legitimacy of the territorial changes following World War II and are thus perceived as a threat. Slovene territories occupied by the Nazis were the only parts of Yugoslavia to be directly incorporated into the Reich proper and Slovenes were systematically Germanized rather than merely oppressed. Laibach questioned the post-war Slovene identity and self-perception of the nation as de-Germanized and free from foreign domination thanks to the National Liberation Army, the Yugoslav partisans (Monroe, 2005, 166).

Laibach's continuous presence in the public consciousness throughout Yugoslavia also had to do with their indirect involvement in the so-called Poster Scandal, the event which shook socialist Yugoslavia in the last years of its existence. Laibach's membership partly overlapped with that of the NSK design group Novi kolektivizem (NK), which had already been collaborating with the Alliance of Socialist Youth of Slovenia (ZSMS). In 1987 NK were commissioned by ZSMS, among other tasks, to design the official poster of the 1987 Day of Youth, a mass annual symbolic celebration of Josip Broz Tito's birthday (May 25) dedicated to young people of Yugoslavia. NK used a Nazi propaganda painting (Richard Klein, *A Heroic Allegory of the Third Reich*) and replaced the Nazi symbols with those with anti-Fascist connotations. When the source was revealed to the Belgrade newspaper *Politika*, the public outrage in Yugoslavia reached massive proportions. (Stepančič 2015) NK's provocation was widely perceived as a symptom of Slovenia's separatist tendencies which undermined the foundations of Yugoslavia's socialist federation, and Laibach were seen as collaborators in this misdeed. The Poster Affair subsequently acquired a status of historical event on Slovenia's way towards political independence (Strlič, 2009). Laibach's "illegal" period in Slovenia effectively ended when the Slovene label ŠKUC Ropot

released their album *Slovenska akropola* on April 27, 1987. The launch coincided with the national holiday which commemorates the establishment of the Slovene Liberation Front (Osvobodilna fronta) in 1941.

Amidst the turmoil surrounding the internal political conflicts and gradual disintegration of socialist Yugoslavia, Laibach continued to provoke Yugoslav audiences to reflect on the current goings-on in the country. They began their 1989 concert at Dom sportova in Zagreb with the sounds of *gusle*, an instrument strongly (though not exclusively) associated with Serbian folklore and heroic epics. By the end of the month Peter Mlakar was giving a speech "to the Serb nation", paraphrasing the Serbian strongman Slobodan Milošević, opening the concerts at the SKC Belgrade which also included showing a Third Reich propaganda film *The Bombing of Belgrade*. Laibach did not return to the Yugoslav capital until 1997.

In autumn 1990, Laibach marked the seminal event of the German reunification with the commemorative *Kraftbach* remix (3. Oktober) of their 1987 hit *Geburt Einer Nation* (cover of Queen's 1985 single *One Vision*), claimed by Laibach as one of their trademark "new originals". But this was also the year preceding Slovenia's formal secession from Yugoslavia, announced by the referendum held on December 23, 1990 where more 88% of the electorate voted for a sovereign and independent state. Three days later, Laibach were back in Trbovlje to celebrate their 10-year anniversary (the event was titled "10 Years of Laibach – 10 Years of Slovene Independence"). Their first public performance in their symbolic hometown took place in the industrial setting of the Trbovlje Power Station, a local landmark with the tallest smokestack in Europe (360m), with temperature reaching -15 degrees Celsius. Describing this concert John Honderich wrote in the *Guardian*: "With apparently fascistic banners and 1940s clothes, the whole effect is of a ritual or rally. It is highly unpleasant and can be genuinely disturbing, and also for those who can relate to it, very beautiful" (quoted in Monroe, 2005, 184).

In 1991 NSK also decided to declare independence by founding the NSK State (in Time). NSK's virtual, utopian state designated its own conceptual territory, working with the institutionalized presence of state symbolism and artefacts in the cultural realm. Besides, it symbolically challenged the denial of cultural repression by the state under capitalism, the narrative which attributes censorship only to



authoritarian communist regimes. In the following years NSK State issued passports, visas and postage stamps, had its own visual identity and symbols, opened embassies and consulates in countries all over the world, and far surpassed the Vatican in the number of citizens. As the self-declared founding fathers of the NSK State members of Laibach were among the first holders of its passport.

Asked in 1992 whether the West was more totalitarian than the East, Laibach replied: "The Eastern ideological (communist) totalitarianism occurred exclusively as a reaction to the economic colonialism and totalitarianism of the West; as a political system totalitarianism is a typical phenomenon of West European nihilism, which operates with the power of financial capital" (Monroe, 2005, 224). Accordingly, in 1992-93 Laibach embarked on their most ambitious and technically most elaborate, *Kapital* tour, returning to their avant-garde and experimental approach from the early and mid-1980s and retaining an element of the unexpected. At the same time, they remained actively concerned with the events surrounding the collapse of Yugoslavia and the ongoing civil war. Their most memorable performances in this period took place in 1995 during the siege of Sarajevo by Serb forces in the Bosnian War (which lasted from April 1992 to February 1996). For two days (November 20 and 21) The National Theater in Sarajevo was proclaimed territory of the NSK State. During the event NSK issued regular and diplomatic passports, some of them later used by several individuals to actually escape from the starved and exhausted city. In the same month Bosnian peace talks were convened in the U.S. Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio. The first Laibach concert took place as the Dayton Peace Agreement was being finalized and the document was signed one hour before the start of the second concert.

The next twenty years in Laibach's history (Jerman, 2020, 40-48) saw hectic activity on promoting their albums *Jesus Christ Superstars* (1996), *WAT* (2003), *Volk* (2006), *Laibachkunstderfuge* (2008), and *Spectre* (2014) across Europe and North America (including Mexico). In 1997 they opened in Ljubljana the program European Month of Culture and performed in many subsequent cultural capitals of Europe. With their concerts they participated at the world exhibition EXPO 2000 in Hannover, opened film festivals and other cultural events and exhibited their artworks in Seattle (2005),

Birmingham (2006), Erfurt (2007), Łódź (2009), Zagreb (2011), Labin (2014), Dortmund (2014), Ljubljana (2015) etc. They performed at a forest near Kalce in Slovenia (2000), New York's Town Hall (2008), Tate Modern's Turbine Hall in London (2012) and a coal mine in Velenje, Slovenia 200m below the ground (2012) - to name but a few unconventional venues in their extensive record.

Their work in theatre resumed with the productions *Europe Today* (2011, Slovene National Theatre, Maribor; dir: Haris Pašović), *The Power of Darkness* (2012, Düsseldorfer Schauspielhaus; dir: Sebastian Baumgarten) and *The Dark Ages* (2015, Bavarian State Theatre, Munich; dir: Milo Rau). Their symphonic opus was expanded by *Olav Tryggvason* (2014), their interpretation of Edvard Grieg's unfinished opera performed at the Ultima Oslo Contemporary Music Festival.

In summer 2015, the whole world was made aware that for the first time in its history North Korea would welcome a western rock band – and that it would be no other act than Laibach. In the media coverage across the globe Laibach were seen as going to North Korea to entertain a brainwashed and utterly unpredictable audience in the most totalitarian and isolated society in the world (Simoulin, Traavik, 2018). In Slovenia, Laibach's "collaboration" with Kim Jong-un's regime stirred much public debate informed by local knowledge of their philosophy and history (Šentevska 2020). After their North Korean expedition Laibach continued to create music, tour, participate in exhibitions, art projects and theatre productions, and prepare a large-scale collaboration with the Tehran Symphony Orchestra, until it was postponed due to the outbreak of Covid-19. The epidemic (only) partly disrupted their 40-year anniversary program held in Ljubljana and Trbovlje in autumn and winter 2020.

### **The (botched) launch into the *Iron Sky***

*Iron Sky* is a 2012 Finnish-German-Australian comic-SF action film directed by Finnish filmmaker Timo Vuorensola. The concept for the film came from Jarmo Puskala (*in a sauna far far away*) and the story was developed by Finnish television writer Johanna Sinisalo, author of the award winning "Troll" novel *Not Before Sundown* (2000). The screenplay was finalized by Michael Kalesniko, Ryan Healey and Timo Vuorensola. To this offbeat saga of a colony

of Nazi Germans who, after their defeat in 1945, fled to the Moon, founded the Fourth Reich, built a space fleet and returned in 2018 to conquer Earth, Laibach contributed the soundtrack.

“Towards the end of World War II the staff of SS officer Hans Kammler made a significant breakthrough in anti-gravity. From a secret base built in the Antarctic, the first Nazi spaceships were launched in late ‘45 to found the military base Schwarze Sonne (Black Sun) on the dark side of the Moon. This base was to build a powerful invasion fleet and return to take over the Earth once the time was right” (Paur, 2010).

In 2018 an American mission with two astronauts lands on the Moon. One of the astronauts is African-American male model James Washington, whose only task is to feature in a campaign to re-elect the US President, a character modelled on former governor of Alaska and 2008 Republican vice presidential nominee Sarah Palin. The other astronaut does not survive the encounter with the Moon Nazis, whereas Washington is taken captive and examined by a Nazi scientist Dr Richter. When he obtains Washington’s “kick-ass cellphone”, he discovers that it has more computing power than the 1940s style computers of the Fourth Reich. The Moon Nazis want to use the powerful gadget as a control unit to complete their giant space battleship appropriately named *Götterdämmerung*. Dr Richter eagerly demonstrates this *Wunderwaffe* (Wonder Weapon) to the current Führer, but the phone’s battery is quickly exhausted. (The Führer’s name Wolfgang Kortzfleisch was borrowed from Joachim von Kortzfleisch, a Wehrmacht general and staunch supporter of Hitler who was shot by a US patrol shortly before the end of the Second World War.)

The Moon Nazis live in a hopelessly outdated society. They drive 1930s Volkswagens, wear uniforms based on the historical designs and spacesuits inspired by Otto Dix’ 1924 painting *Sturmtruppe geht unter Gas vor* (Höppner 2014, 6). They use giant computers, but they have mastered space flight, and are therefore somewhat reminiscent of the Martians in H. G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds*. James Washington, who has been “Aryanized” by Dr Richter by means of an “albinizing” drug, joins Nazi commander Klaus Adler in embarking on a flying saucer (Reichsflugscheibe) on a mission to collect more small computers on Earth. (“Come on man, I

thought you wanted me to take you to Mac store or something” says Washington to Adler at some point). Adler’s main ambition, however, is to become the new Führer and to rule the world. Upon landing on a marijuana field in upstate New York (fiercely defended as “private property” by an armed landlady), Adler and Washington discover that Dr Richter’s daughter Renate (Earth specialist and schoolteacher - *Mondjugendunterführerin*) has secretly embarked on their flying saucer. In a nod to James Bond, Renate keeps calling Washington “Washington James Washington”.

Upon reaching New York City, Washington, Renate and Adler hijack a Volkswagen minibus (ein Kleinbus) from a bunch of African-Americans playing street basketball. They need a ride that would get them to the “President of the United States of the Americas”. Washington, wearing a Moon Nazi uniform, approaches the “homies” as a “peace loving brother” in an attempt to borrow the vehicle without getting anyone killed by Adler. They promptly respond to Washington’s look and Adler’s actions by taking out their weapons and shooting at the moving minibus. Only then Washington realizes that he looks “like a polar bear” i.e. as a full-fledged “Arian”. Renate and Adler abandon him after he connects them with Vivian Wagner, who is in charge of the President’s re-election campaign. They join and energize the campaign using their Moon Nazi rhetoric. Washington, albinized and broke, ends up homeless on the streets of New York, shouting at the passers-by that the “Moon Nazis are coming.” Nobody seems to pay attention.

After three months, Kortzfleisch lands on Earth and launches the Moon Nazi invasion (Meteorblickkrieg), in order to wipe out the entire human race (which he refers to as “sub-human”). He is, however, confronted and killed by Adler and Vivian. On a New York rooftop, in a nod to Walter Moers’ comic *Adolf Kortzfleisch* bids farewell to Adler with a message “See you in Valhalla” (Kopanski 2018, 190). Adler declares himself the new Führer and returns to orbit in Kortzfleisch’s flying saucer. After a brief sexual encounter, he abandons Vivian Wagner, saying: “Farewell, fashionista! I have a planet to conquer... Good luck with the rest of your life!” (a life which he apparently plans to annihilate). Renate is persuaded by desperate Washington that Adler intends global genocide. The Moon Nazis indeed launch a mass attack on the Earth with a fleet of giant Zeppelin-like spacecraft (Siegfrieds).

They tow asteroids as missiles and launch flying saucers at New York City, where the Statue of Liberty is the first casualty of their attack.

The U.S. Air Force confronts the flying saucers with modest success. An international security council is assembled to discuss the Moon Nazi crisis. US President appoints Vivian Wagner as commander of the secretly militarized spacecraft USS *George W. Bush*, which carries nuclear and directed-energy weapons. Vivian is now “packing dozens of mega-tones of nuclear warheads” aimed at “Klaus’ Kraut ass”. Her remark: “Hell hath no fury, Herr Adler” reveals her primary motivation in this business – personal revenge of a sexually frustrated and rejected woman. (“Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned” is a quote from William Congreve’s 1697 tragedy *The Mourning Bride*). It is soon discovered that all other nations (except Finland) have also, contrary to Outer Space Treaty of 1967, armed their spaceships (Fritzsche, 2022, 26). Dispatched against the Nazi fleet they wipe out the Siegfrieds.

Klaus Adler is back on the Moon with the tablet computer stolen from Vivian, intent to activate the *Götterdämmerung*. Thanks to Washington’s skills acquired in the computer game *Wing Commander*, Renate and Washington are able to travel in Adler’s flying saucer to the *Götterdämmerung*. Washington goes to disable the engines while Renate seeks out Adler. On board of USS *George W. Bush* Vivian ignores the presence of women and children in the Moon Nazi fortress, saying: “The United States of America does not negotiate with terrorists”. Her subordinates exchange doubtful glances and then launch a nuclear attack. The Earth spaceships approach the *Götterdämmerung* which dwarfs them all. Adler commands the *Götterdämmerung* to destroy parts of the Moon, in order to expose Earth to his line-of-fire. During the battle Washington disconnects Vivian’s tablet from *Götterdämmerung*’s control panel and Renate kills Adler before he can fire at Earth. *Götterdämmerung* crashes into the Moon, but Renate and Washington manage to escape separately. They reunite romantically at the damaged Moon base, where Washington reverts his skin pigmentation back to normal, and their kiss confuses a group of Nazi survivors.

US President congratulates Vivian from the Security Council session. Vivian reveals the presence of large tanks of potential energy source Helium-3 on the Moon, and the President

immediately assumes sole claim on the discovery. Other delegates are enraged, a brawl ensues and the Earth spaceships turn on each other. The final moments of the film show the Earth in an international nuclear war. At the very end of the credits, Mars is revealed with an artificial satellite in orbit.

In his analysis of *Iron Sky* Stefan Höppner discussed the “familiar elements”, mainly adopted from conspiracy theories and speculative fiction, used by the Finnish filmmakers to develop the story. The conspiracy theory body of references certainly includes the UFO sightings skyrocketing in the post-war United States, fuelling rumours that the flying saucers were not extraterrestrial, but based on secret Nazi technology now developed by the US. These were likely inspired by experiments with round flying wing planes (real-life Operation Paperclip) which assembled in America more than 1600 German scientists, engineers and technicians, notably aerospace engineer Wernher von Braun.

According to Höppner the “connection also figures prominently in Thomas Pynchon’s paranoid masterpiece *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973)”. In an alternative version of “this scenario, a surviving faction of the Nazi regime is said to withdraw to a part of Antarctica that a 1939 German expedition had explored and named Neuschwabenland... This variation was likely inspired by a little-known, but highly influential Sci-Fi novel from 1897, Kurd Lasswitz’ seminal *Auf zwei Planeten*, in which Martian spaceships launch their largely peaceful takeover of Earth from bases at the North and South Pole”. Höppner points to the “rich tradition in speculative fiction, where many texts describe Hitler’s survival, return, or alternate turns in his biography” (Timur Vermes, *Er ist wieder da*, 2012; Éric-Emmanuel Schmitt, *La Part de l’autre*, 2001; Stephen Fry, *Making History*, 1996; Norman Spinrad, *The Iron Dream*, 1972). In Spinrad’s satire Hitler had emigrated to America in 1919 and become a “successful sci-fi writer who only applies his ideology to his books.” (Höppner 2014, 14) Other titles describe a world in which Germany and its allies emerged victorious from the war (e.g. Philip K. Dick, *The Man in the High Castle*, 1962). In the literary tradition of Nazi space travel Robert A. Heinlein’s juvenile novel *Rocket Ship Galileo* (1947) is also a likely reference for *Iron Sky*’s plot. Here, an American nuclear physicist and three young scientists believe to be the first humans on the Moon, but their spaceships are

destroyed by Nazis who are already there and see themselves in permanent war with the US.

They, too, plan to attack the Earth with nuclear weapons. An entire subculture of so-called Nazisploitation films culminated in films like *Ilsa, She Wolf of the SS* (1974) or *SS Experiment Love Camp* (1976). Such films “turn history into easily recognizable clichés, re-enacting the audiences’ pornographic and sadomasochistic fantasies... *Iron Sky* is by no means an extreme Nazisploitation film, but it certainly builds on the genre”. (4) In a cinematic sense “exploitation” refers here to the “technique of ‘exploiting’ a serious topic such as the Holocaust, the inquisition, the slavery system, prostitution or simply life in prison to reduce it to pure sexual or violent content.” (Stiglegger, 2012, 27) Other recent examples of Nazi presence in a diverse array of films inspired by lowbrow genres “include Joseph Lawson’s adventure *Nazis at the Center of the Earth* (2008), Uwe Boll’s adventure fantasy *BloodRayne: The Third Reich* (2010), Joe Johnston’s *Captain America: The First Avenger* (2011), and David Sandberg’s Kungfu production *Kung Fury* (2015) that includes a Kung Führer” (Fritzsche, 2022, 28).

*Iron Sky* playfully engages in a mockery of the Nazi race politics, science and prejudice. James Washington is referred to by Dr. Richter as “dummer Neger”, whose “brain structure” is supposed to be different from Arian. “Let’s open up his skull and measure the brain” he suggests enthusiastically in an attempt to perform an essay in craniometry. In return, Washington calls his tormentor “mini-Mengele”, but is eventually *albinisiert* by him. Before they were formally introduced, on account of his skin colour, doctor’s daughter Renate addressed Washington as “Mr. Untermensch”. Renate and Adler’s relationship is based on the plans for a future “legal union”, officially approved with a confirmation from the Department of Racial Purity (Rassehygienischer Paarabgleich) that their genetic match is 97%. “Wie romantisch”, says Renate. It is science that demands from them to unite physically. According to Adler, their destiny is to “produce perfect offspring for the [Moon Nazi] people.”

Vuorensola’s film also abounds in references to iconic images from the Nazi period, such as the burning Zeppelin from the 1937 Hindenburg disaster. Reinhard Kopanski has noted the presence of Nazi leaders’ famous speeches in modified forms, such as Hitler’s Reichstag speech following the attack on Poland (*Seit 5:45 Uhr wird jetzt zuruckgeschossen!* - Adler: At 5.45

we’ll start firing back!) and Goebbels’ 1943 Sportpalast speech (*Wollt Ihr den totalen Krieg?*) (Kopanski, 2018, 187) *Iron Sky* also flirts with Nazi esoterica: the Moon Nazi fortress is called Schwarze Sonne (Black Sun). This symbol, used after 1945 in right-wing, esoteric and neo-Nazi circles was originally a floor ornament in the castle of Wevelsburg, intended by Heinrich Himmler to be a centre for the SS. In the Director’s Cut version of the film (203) there is a scene in the Führer’s headquarters with a metallic Black Sun inside a cogwheel on the wall. The cogwheel may be read as a reference to Laibach, namely to their logo featuring a black cross inside a cogwheel (189), otherwise referring to the coal mining imagery of their hometown Trbovlje. Vuorensola also used the stylized V symbol from Laibach’s 2006 album *Volk*, but not for the Moon Nazis, but as a logo in the US President’s re-election campaign which replaced the Nazi swastikas. The analogies between the Moon Nazi state and the contemporary US are also communicated through costume design devices, such as extensive use of the imperial eagle both on the uniforms of the Moon Nazis (*Reichadler*) and on the spacesuits of the American astronauts (the bald eagle of the Great Seal). For example, the logo of the “Liberty” mission on Washington’s chest contains a depiction of an eagle carrying the US flag (to the lunar surface).

Höppner notes “an additional layer to *Iron Sky*: Not only does it recycle familiar low-brow and ‘illegitimate’ clichés of fascism, it simultaneously exposes them as clichés, thus removing them even further from historical reference. Here, *Iron Sky* resembles its more sophisticated contemporary, Tarantino’s *Inglorious Basterds* (2009)” (4-5). This author also points out the filmmakers’ decision “to go against what they felt to be the conventional path: to have the heroic American astronaut fight its way out of the moon base, return to earth, and mobilize the American military to destroy the evil moon base. Instead, they decided to tell the story from a ‘Nazi perspective’.” According to the visual effects producer Samuli Torssonen “playing like if this was a typical American movie... would have been really boring so we really wanted to have this Nazi perspective” (15).

Released in April 2012, *Iron Sky* was one of the most expensive Finnish films ever made, co-financed (crowdfunded) by numerous individual supporters. *Iron Sky* thus belongs to a new wave of film productions (such as Jessica Mae Stover’s *Artemis Eternal*, Matt Hanson’s *A Swarm of*

Angels, Brett Gaylor's 2008 *RiP!: A Remix Manifesto* and Nicolás Alcalá 2013 *El Cosmonauta*), produced in collaboration with an on-line community of film enthusiasts creating participatory cinema. The film thus became primarily a social media phenomenon. "We didn't have the money, the knowledge, the script, the actors, the equipment. Anything. We turned to the World Wide Web for help and started asking people if they could help us. If anyone had a camera, an idea for a script, a desire to act...", Vuorensola explained at a press conference preceding the premiere of *Iron Sky* in Ljubljana (Kopina, 2012). Such approach stems directly from the Finnish filmmakers' previous endeavours, primarily *Star Wreck: In the Pirkinning*, 2005 fan film which (mainly) parodied the *Star Trek* and *Babylon 5* franchises. Produced by five friends in a small apartment, with a help of 3000 volunteers from around the world, and after 7 years of collaborative effort, *Star Wreck* became the most successful feature-length Internet-distributed film of all time (and Finland's most-viewed movie ever). The community of helpers and supporters had already been attracted with the earlier *Star Wreck* episodes (mainly short animations). Drawing from the *Star Wreck* experience, *Iron Sky* was made using the collaborative filmmaking website *Wreck-a-Movie* (also Creative Commons based). As a collaborative film production platform *Wreck-a-Movie* was created in response to the current situation in which consumers demand more personal experiences with the media, to the point of taking part in the very creation of the media content.

In an ambitious attempt to shake up the world of science fiction, Vuorensola's team envisaged an entire *Iron Sky* universe on a par with the mega SF-franchises such as *Star Wars* (films and TV, merchandise, franchise). In this universe *Iron Sky* was supposed to be the initial part of the Moon Nazi trilogy, followed by sequels *The Coming Race* and *The End Game* (where human survivors would reach planet Mars). The TV galaxy would focus on a multi-season series which would explore the "black hole" of conspiracy theories. The Game galaxy included the video-game *Iron Sky: Invasion*, released several months after the premiere of *Iron Sky*: the players here act as a space pilot, joining forces with either the Nazi invaders or Earth's defence force. *Iron Sky: the Game* provided more opportunities to shoot at spaceships on your iPhone/iPod Touch/iPad devices. *Iron Sky: the Board Game* was conceived

as a middleweight strategy game, where the team of Reich players invades the Earth and the defending team of United World Confederacy players organize defence, balancing two resources: money and political power.

*Iron Sky* universe was also supposed to provide unlimited quantity of toys (Moon Nazi soldiers) and other licensed products, including books and graphic novels. The first issue of the comic book based on *Iron Sky*, *Iron Sky: Bad Moon Rising* (written by Mikko Rautalahti and illustrated by Gerry Kissell) was a prequel which focused on how the Nazis ended up on the Moon, and how Wolfgang Kortzfleisch (portrayed in the film by Udo Kier), became *Der Überführer*.

With a budget of 17 million euros, the sequel *Iron Sky: The Coming Race* was the most expensive Finnish live-action film ever made. It was crowdfunded through Indiegogo and released in January 2019. In comparison to *Iron Sky*, Laibach's involvement with the soundtrack was much reduced and shared with Finnish composer Tuomas Kantelinen and members of the Finnish band Sunrise Avenue. It included a "provocative start" with the opening credits song *The Coming Race* ending with Milan Fras' (Laibach singer) "heavily accented voice growling, 'Let's make Earth great again'" (Murray, 2019) as an obvious tribute to the James Bond music legacy (and parody of Reagan and Trump campaign slogans). The end credit song *Surfing Through the Galaxy* was Laibach's *country & space* dedication to and interpretation of John Carpenter's song *Benson Arizona*, from his 1974 film *Dark Star*. Laibach also re-used the track *Vor Sonnen-Aufgang* from their 2017 album of theatre music *Also Sprach Zarathustra* and contributed some Bach/Emerson, Lake & Palmer-inspired background to the scene of chariot race in Hollow Earth.

Namely, in this chapter of the *Iron Sky* saga the adventure moved from the Moon to the centre of the Earth. Twenty-nine years after the nuclear holocaust in *Iron Sky* (2047), Neomenia, the former Moon Nazi base has become mankind's last refuge. (It's swastika shape has now been transformed into a dollar sign). The last survivors of the nuclear war which rendered Earth inhospitable struggle the overpopulation side by side with the remaining Moon Nazis. Jobsism, a cult formed around the teachings of Steve Jobs has become the Moon base's official religion. The story, drawing from themes adopted from the neo-Nazi esoterica and organizations such as Tempelhofgesellschaft, revolves around Obi Washington, daughter of James Washington and

Renate Richter, and her quest to reveal the truth behind the creation of mankind in the depths of Hollow Earth. “Her Star Wars nod of a name is one of many gratuitous hat-tips to better and more successful cultural properties” (Monks Kaufman 2019). To save humanity and recover the Holy Grail Obi and her companions must fight the Vril, an ancient shapeshifting reptilian race, and their army of dinosaurs. “The Vril are apparently pretty nostalgic for their earliest days on Earth, and have given their city [Agartha] a decidedly *Flintstones*-inspired aesthetic”. The Vril were, of course, inspired by the 1871 novel *The Coming Race* by Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton “who famously inspired a long-running contest for deliberately terrible writing” (Nelson 2019). The Vril have been parading around as world leaders throughout history and include not only the President of the United States (the unnamed lady responsible for the nuclear war in 2018), but also Wolfgang Kortzfleisch, Adolf Hitler, Steve Jobs, Mark Zuckerberg, Stalin, Putin, Caligula, Genghis Khan, Margaret Thatcher, Idi Amin, Osama bin Laden, Kim Jong-un, Pope Urban II and long-time Finland’s president Urho Kekkonen (among others). Using an old Nokia 3310, Obi hacks into an enemy iPhone to destroy the Vril spaceship. In a mid-credit sequence, it is revealed that Mars has been colonized by the Soviet Union.

The *Iron Sky* sequel fared even worse with the film critics than the original film. Although some of them saw it as colourful, crackpot and nerdy, they noted the absence of “love and affection of its predecessor”, including “a sense of discipline or focus” (Faisal Al-Jadir, *Film Inquiry*), even proclaiming the film “a bore and a mess” (Joey Magidson, *Hollywood News*), (*Rotten Tomatoes*, Critic Reviews for *Iron Sky: The Coming Race*). In Finland the film had less than one-fifth of the viewers of the previous film and became a massive financial failure. The production suffered from repeated delays and copyright disputes with animators and visual effects specialists, which ended in a Finnish court denying that copyright even existed in the subject matter of the case (apart from one 3D model, the Japanese spaceship).

Instead of becoming a democratic platform for creative exchange between independent film enthusiasts and a community-builder, the *Iron Sky* franchise fell prey to the corporate logic of volunteer workforce exploitation. Eight months after the release of *Iron Sky: The Coming Race* the main production company Blind Spot Pictures declared bankruptcy.

## Laibach’s space program

Reviewers of the soundtrack album *Iron Sky O.S.T.* (Mute Records, 2012) give us a glimpse into the complexity of musical and cultural references employed by Laibach in their contribution to *Iron Sky*. For example, the “frequent dramatic interludes” were seen as “not dissimilar to something like an overwrought Bernard Herrmann soundtrack for a classic Hitchcock film or to Brian DePalma’s *The Untouchables*” (music by Ennio Morricone). “‘A Good War Blues (Klaus and Vivian)’ is the kind of symphonic ersatz big-band jazz perfected by Barry Adamson; ‘125’ Later Ragtime’ is like Scott Joplin score for a grainy silent movie edited down to a mere fragment... ‘Under the Iron Sky’ is a moving cinematic ballad [that] has the huge sound of a Shirley Bassey 007 title track mixed in with symphonic industrial fear” (Smith, 2012).

“As Laibach do not believe in originality, it is no wonder that the beginning of the theme ‘Ready to Face the Music (Counterattack)’ inevitably resembles the famous Imperial March from the Star Wars soundtrack (which would be interesting to hear as performed by Laibach)” (Pavlović, 2012).

The Moon Nazis anthem ‘Kameraden, Wir Kehren Heim’ (Comrades, We’re Returning Home) was Laibach’s “adapted” patriotic anthem *Die Wacht am Rhein* written in 1840 by Max Schneckenburger and composed in 1854 by Karl Wilhelm. Laibach replaced the verse ‘Lieb Vaterland, Magst Ruhig Sein’ “famous” for the La Marseillaise scene in *Casablanca* (1943) “with an authentically parodied ‘Heim ins Reich’ [back home to the Reich] lyrics” (Kubanek, 2012):

“Motorenlärm am Firmament, und gleißend  
hell der Himmel brennt:  
Ins Reich, ins Reich, ins deutsche Heim!  
Wann wirst Du wieder Heimat sein?  
Unser Vaterland, die Ähren stehen,  
unser Vaterland, wir heimwärts ziehen:  
Eisern - und treu dem Volk, das Land  
befreien!  
Eisern - und treu dem Volk, das Land  
befreien!  
Der Weg ist frei, der Sturm vergeht,  
die Fahne sanft im Winde weht:  
An Donau, Elbe, Pegnitz, Rhein,  
werden wir zu Hause sein!”

The 'Space Battle Suite', somewhat expectedly, blends Wagner (*Walkürenritt*) with Pink Floyd ('On the Run' from the 1973 album *The Dark Side of the Moon*). About the overall *Iron Sky* soundtrack one commentator noted:

"Alongside the usual borrowings of *Ride of The Valkyries*, there are plentiful robbings from *Götterdämmerung*, *Siegfried* and *Rheingold*. It ends on the prelude to *Parsifal*. If you have an encyclopedic knowledge of The Ring Cycle and a leaning to geekery (the two do kind of fit together...) this lends itself to hours of trainspottery fun" (McGibbon, 2012).

In his analysis of Laibach's use of Wagner's music in the *Iron Sky* soundtrack, Reinhard Kopanski noted that most of the references come from the Ring cycle, but also include passages from Wagner's operas *Lohengrin* and *Tannhäuser und der Sängerkrieg auf Wartburg* (Kopanski, 2018, 192). In addition to names such as Vivian Wagner or Siegfried and Brunhilde (Moon Nazi schoolchildren), the frequent references to Wagner in *Iron Sky* are perhaps best crammed in the war message: "This is the Siegfried fleet flagship *Tannhäuser* speaking – we have reached orbit and are prepared to launch the Valkyries" (190).

Kopanski focused on three motifs borrowed from Wagner by Laibach, which he referred to as the Siegfried motif, the death motif and the Valkyries motif. The Siegfried motif appears twice: 1) it accompanies the film title emerging from the lunar landscape and the tracking shot which leads to the Moon Nazi fortress, 2) it accompanies the first appearance of the White House in the film. Laibach thus used the Siegfried motif to introduce the centres of power in the film "which amounts to (musical) equation of both conflicting parties." (193) Wagner used the "death motif" in *Götterdämmerung* when Hagen murders Siegfried and later in Siegfried's funeral march. Laibach associated this *leitmotif* with the character of super-villain Klaus Adler: whenever he appears in the film (even on a photograph) this melody is somehow present. Laibach thus transformed this marker of (heroic) death for Wagner into a marker for a bringer of death (on a mass scale). The swing variation of

this motif accompanies the sexual encounter between Adler and Vivian.

The same motif also accompanies Vivian's nuclear attack on the Moon Nazi fortress (mainly) in personal revenge on Adler for this doomed affair. The Valkyrie motif is the only one exclusively "assigned" to the American side and connected with Vivian Wagner; it accompanies her outbursts of anger and her commanding role in the space battle. Kopanski thus saw Laibach's intervention as demystifying with regard to the works by Richard Wagner, who is still considered by many as an epitome of German and European high culture. According to this reading, Laibach's use of the *Ride of the Valkyries* is particularly ironic: this motif, "repeatedly used by the National Socialist regime for propaganda purposes in newsreels to accompany reports of military success, becomes the musical epitome of the National Socialist defeat". (198)

'Renate's Message of Peace' conveys that seemingly "some factions of the *Götterdämmerung* moon colony have outgrown their fascist origins to achieve some kind of utopian transcendence. It also gives Laibach the opportunity to play with a wide variety of styles, including some deranged Henry Mancini-style big band swing and technoid frippery which wouldn't have sounded out of place on a console game in the Nineties" (Fontenoy, 2012). On this "epic musical journey" the audiences were "taken through wartime ballroom waltzes, undulating and perilous orchestral scores and the dizzying hypnosis of propaganda rallies" (McCracken, 2012).

Film critic Špela Barlič noted that Laibach - with their crude industrial sound in which old and new elements resonate together, with their criticism, grim sense of humour and stage theatricality – naturally made the first music association with the concept of this film:

"And it should be acknowledged that they have produced a truly superb soundtrack, a perfect match for *Iron Sky*'s Wagnerian pomp, biting irony and retro-avantgarde style. Had you a long time ago fallen in love with the spacecraft dancing to Strauss' *Blue Danube* in Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), you would definitely be amused by the swaying of the American conquest rocket to a lofty and zither-accompanied Oberkreiner [Gorenjska] waltz, conceived by Laibach for the opening scene of *Iron Sky*" (Barlič, 2012).

Barlič also noted the meta-film references on the narrative level, as the film borrows from other titles dealing with Nazism in different ways – in addition to *The Great Dictator* and *A Space Odyssey* this includes “for example hints at the film *Dr. Strangelove* (Stanley Kubrick, 1964) and *Downfall* (Oliver Hirschbiegel, 2004) to name just a few of the most obvious” (Barlič, 2012). Other Slovene commentators emphasized the contribution of domestic talent to the soundtrack, especially Laibach’s “masterly collaborator”, composer Slavko Avsenik Jr and “legendary zither player Miha Dovžan (who was active in films even as an actor, decades ago at the times of the dynamic international-Yugoslav film co-productions)” to the opening song ‘Take Me To Heaven’ (Smasek, 2012, 14). The song was composed by Ivo Dovžan and according to a Croatian critic it “combines Mediterranean notes, jazz and waltz with an emphasis on klapa [multipart] singing” which may recall scenes from a 1978 film by Croatian director Lordan Zafranović *Occupation in 26 Pictures* (Bedić, 2012). While a British commentator discovered in it “faux-Beverly Sisters harmony” (Shirley, 2013), the same song, accompanied by “Dirndlchor und Zither”, took a German commentator “literally” *up to the mountains* to the “acoustic Obersalzberg”, Bavarian mountainside retreat best known for Adolf Hitler’s Berghof residence and the “Eagle’s Nest” mountaintop. Another association by the same author with the overall *Iron Sky* soundtrack was “Florian Silbereisen [German schlager singer] for dictators” (Kubanke, 2012). Other Slovene contributors included vocalists Severa Gjurin and Mina Špiler (Melodrom), producer / composer Iztok Turk and Croatian female vocal group Putokazi (Njegovan, 2012). In addition to Tomi Meglič of the Slovene band Siddharta, whose track B-Mashina covered on Laibach’s 2003 album *WAT* was used as an ‘Iron Sky Prequel’, Laibach collaborated with Finnish film composers Joonas Naskali and Tapani Siirtola, members (with singer Kaiti Kink) of the Kaiti Kink Ensemble.

Other commentators also emphasized Laibach’s trademark affinity for self-citation and noted more and less overt borrowings from their 2006 album *Volk* (“cover versions” of the national anthems *America* and *Germania*), 2008 album *Laibachkunstderfuge*, music for the 1987 theatre production of *Macbeth*, 1989 single *Across the Universe*, their “industrial hip-hop” (*Hymn to the Black Sun*) from the 1992 album *Kapital* in *Iron*

*Sky*’s ‘Peace Lovin’ Brother Rap’ or their 2003 track *Tanz mit Laibach* playing off-screen in a Neo-Nazi club. On the one hand, Laibach’s eclectic approach was judged by less impressed critics as a “cocktail with a predictable taste”, namely a mixture of “grandiose Wagnerianism, militaristic clichés and political sensationalism” (Bedić, 2012). On the other hand, Laibach were seen as excellent music comedians with intellectual affinities; their contribution to *Iron Sky* was described as a “grandiose contemporary opera with spoken-word narration and a few sung arias” and some of the tracks were compared to the works of Schönberg, Holst, Schubert and (of course), Wagner (Horvi, 2012).

Laibach were certainly no strangers to Wagner’s grand opus. In collaboration with RTV Slovenia Symphony Orchestra and conductor Izidor Leitingner, on April 18, 2009 they performed in the prestigious Gallus Hall of Cankarjev dom in Ljubljana their *Volkswagner Suite*, in which they used (among others) elements of Wagner’s operas *Tannhäuser*, *Die Walküre* and the symphonic poem *Siegfried-Idyll*. Conceived as a crossover between jazz forms (Miles Davis), Wagner and contemporary electronics, the genesis of the suite was described as follows: “Arrangements: 8 months, score writing: 4 months, rehearsals: 2 weeks, applause: 5 minutes.” “You could say that we’ve tackled Hitler more than Wagner”, explained Laibach, “trying to understand Hitler’s position...Through Hitler, who was the father of Volkswagen and a big fan of Wagner” the Volkswagen Beetle as a pop icon also entered this Laibachian equation. Laibach described the *Volkswagner Suite* as “more popular” because they tackled it “through jazz, a genre that is basically derived from folk music” (A.J. 2009), but a genre also despised in the Third Reich as *Negermusik*. Unlike the *Iron Sky* soundtrack, Laibach based the *Volkswagner Suite* on Wagner’s original scores only to a limited extent: they rather referred to jazz arrangements such as those by pianist Stan Kenton who gave Wagner’s music “a pop-cultural makeover” (*Verjüngungskur*) (Kopanski, 2018, 199).

Such material was further recontextualized and mixed with Laibach songs - “in the case of the *Siegfried-Idyll* Milan Fras sang the lyrics of the song *Das Spiel ist aus* from the album *WAT* – this form of *Bearbeitung* has a deconstructive effect”. Despite the different approaches to Wagner’s music in *Iron Sky* and *Volkswagner Suite* Laibach achieved “similar results, namely



an ironic demystification of Wagner's music (and person)". (200)

Laibach, who sometimes refer to themselves as an "elite SS formation of popular culture" (Nad 2012), initially planned an experimental electronic score for *Iron Sky*, but as the narrative and visual direction of the film grew more concrete they changed their plans. The film was becoming a B-movie in a guise of a big-budget film, so they decided to contribute a more straightforward movie soundtrack. They decided to use in their music the already existing Wagner references in the film. According to Laibach spokesman Saliger, the very roots of film music were associated with Wagner, which is why his music provides perfect basis for sci-fi and Hollywood film scores (Schäfer 2012, 38). "As the main source we simply decided to use Wagner, partly because the film is full of references to Wagner, and partly because, in a sense, Wagner was the first composer of soundtracks. Cinema as a medium is a perfect *Gesamtkunstwerk*, Wagner would have loved it" (Wertmüller, 2012).

According to Laibach, in Germany both Wagner's supporters and opponents agree that his music is superb. But it is "also undisputed that Wagner is the spiritual father of Nazi ideology, especially anti-Semitism. Wagner coined the terms such as 'Jewish problem' and 'final solution', by which he meant the annihilation of the Jews and Judaism". As a symbol of the Nazi era Wagner was a living proof that pure music does not exist, even in its purest form, and that, finally "art is always mixed up with politics." As noted by Saliger, the creators of *Iron Sky* are obviously obsessed with *Star Wars* and pop culture, hence all the references from other sci-fi movies. But *Iron Sky* is not really about Nazis. It is a satire that consists of many stereotypes, indeed a subversive film which intelligently jumps to another level of criticism of today's society in general and USA in particular (Schäfer, 2012, 39).

In *Iron Sky*, Renate Richter, the blond Moon Nazi schoolteacher, uses in the classroom a ten-minute edit of Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1940) convinced that it is a genuine Nazi propaganda film and an homage to Hitler. For her, the famous scene with the globe demonstrated Hitler's supposed care about mankind. "*The Great Dictator* by Charlie Chaplin. It is one of the world's most famous short films, which illustrates in just ten minutes his wish that one day, the entire world would be held in the great Führer's wise and gentle hands. Any questions?" says Renate to her Mondjugend pupils. James Washington

disabused her of her error by taking her to a full-length showing of the film in the Cinema Vertov movie theatre in New York. After watching the film they end up in a fight with a bunch of Nazi skinheads which Renate mistakenly took for good boys, "loyal to the Reich and their mothers", who wear swastikas as a "symbol of love".

Washington thought that *The Great Dictator* was "bullshit", but Renate is genuinely shaken, both by the length of the film and the fact that Chaplin was "mocking the Führer". As noted by Daniel Lukes, Laibach's 2003 track *Tanz mit Laibach*, "which reprises D.A.F. (Deutsch Amerikanische Freundschaft)'s *Der Mussolini*, altering the names of Hitler and Mussolini to Chaplin's Ado Hinkel ('Adenoid Hinkel' in the film) and 'Benzino Napoloni', provides one among many keys to Laibach's adoption of comedy as aesthetic, political, ideological tool" (Lukes 2013, 74). Laibach disclosed that *Iron Sky* as a whole was, in a sense, a paraphrase of Chaplin's *The Great Dictator*, "a very important film for Laibach" and if they were to choose a film to create a soundtrack for or appear in, that would be Jacques Tati's 1967 *Playtime* ("Laibach za Nadlanu.com" 2012).

Laibach further explained their attitude towards Chaplin's film: namely, *Iron Sky* is a complex and multilayered film although at first sight it may appear hollow and superficial. It is "intimately Laibachian" (intimamente Laibachiano) because of the irreverent and courageous way in which it tackles political and social issues that only apparently belong to science fiction. It bears resemblance to *The Great Dictator*, a film which used irony to communicate "over-identification" (subversive affirmation), even in terms of structure and narrative.

Chaplin directed *The Great Dictator* in 1940, and although it was banned in various European countries, it announced Hitler's demise. Asked to comment on the decision of the British film distributing company Revolver Entertainment to screen *Iron Sky* only for one day in London (under pressure from fans the screening was extended), Laibach made more parallels with *The Great Dictator*: while Chaplin's film was still in production, the British government announced that it would ban its screening in the UK as it wanted to maintain good diplomatic relations with Nazi Germany. Nevertheless, by the time the film was completed, Britain had already entered the war against Germany and the film was very well received, partly because of its propaganda value, eventually becoming Chaplin's most successful

film. "Perhaps Revolver is using the same strategy, it sure has the weapons." In the same interview Laibach pointed to the fact that from its beginnings the medium of cinema relied on mass perceptions and had been used either to educate or serve as propaganda. According to Laibach, the best films are those in which these layers of meaning are well hidden. In this way, the viewers simply believe that the film's purpose is pure entertainment or aesthetic pleasure. (Wertmüller, 2012)

At a press conference in Ljubljana director Timo Vuorensola (who is also singer in the Finnish industrial-ambient-noise band *Älymystö*) explained to the Slovene media how Laibach influenced his work on *Iron Sky*. The initial idea for the film came (of course) in "this ridiculously small sauna in Timo's apartment" in Tampere, amidst alcohol vapors, from Jarmo Puskala, the 'nerdy' community manager in his team (*Iron Sky Signal* 2015). According to Puskala the director replied: "Okay, but we need Udo Kier to play the Führer and Laibach to do the music. Then we laughed..." (Höppner, 2014, 14) At that moment this was an impossible task but remained stuck in the filmmaker's head, not only regarding the music, but regarding the overall approach to the film. When Laibach accepted the invitation Vuorensola was ecstatic. Together they hoped to create not only the soundtrack, but a completely new world which resonates through music ("Laibach potpisuju" 2012).

In 2006, when Vuorensola started to work on *Iron Sky*, Laibach released their album *Volk* (where they presented their versions of the national anthems of Germany, USA, Great Britain, Russia, France, Italy, Spain, Israel, Turkey, China, Japan, Slovenia, Vatican and the NSK State). The album had a great impact on the young director with its blend of irony, political commentary, comedy and gravity. Vuorensola said that Laibach's music in *Iron Sky* was the "heart and soul" of the film because it connected the otherwise good visuals, actors, action and script into a single "package". Initially he wanted to accomplish what Ridley Scott had accomplished with Vangelis' music for *Blade Runner* (1982) and he talked extensively about this with Laibach. They also wanted something more than an ordinary "soundtrack", they also wanted something exceptional. In Vuorensola's opinion the music finally became a character in itself – they had Klaus, Renate, Laibach... (A.J. 2012)

In his study on Laibach Simon Bell noted that in the film *Iron Sky* "the complexity of Laibach's

discourse functions as a meta-narrative that illustrates the facile nature of the depiction of Nazis in popular culture" (Bell, 2014, 298). In an interview with this author Timo Vuorensola, who declared himself as a fan of Laibach, explained in more detail his artistic interchange with Laibach:

"Why did you choose Laibach and their music?

It was the first thought after hearing the concept for the film - something in the wicked, dark comedy of Nazis on the moon stroke me directly in the same nerve as Laibach does. But it wasn't before I heard their album *Volk* in 2006, buying it off randomly from a store not even knowing it was just out. The album made the biggest inspirational impact on *Iron Sky* when we started to draft out the story and the feel and look of the film. (471) Germania had a strong impact on me when working on the film, and it has nice melancholy accompanied with a message I felt was important.

What is your general impression of Laibach – what do you think of them?

I think they are one of the most important bands around, and I've always respected their absolute taste. I love them." (472)

### An Iron Curtain on the Dark Side of the Moon

As noted by Špela Barlič, despite massive support from the fans *Iron Sky* met with negative reactions - "many of them no less bizarre than the film itself." Such responses to this film, which "could never have been made in Hollywood, anyway" generally fell into three categories: from puritans who found it distasteful to make fun of Nazism (and who overlook the difference between making fun of anti-Semitism, entirely absent from this film, and mocking Nazism); from ever-paranoid conspiracy theorists who even saw elements of pro-Nazi propaganda in this film, and from reserved critics who focused too much on the clichés and the goofy "surface", missing out the more profound messages of the film. Notwithstanding that Germans can also laugh and enjoy *Iron Sky*, because the Nazis no longer come from Germany, but from the Moon. (Barlič, 2012)

According to the web site Rotten Tomatoes *Iron Sky* did not fare well neither with critics nor with audiences, receiving 40% and 37% approval respectively. Film critics had found fault with almost anything in the film, from script to acting,

one of them even labelling *Iron Sky* as “crypto-fascist space junk” (Kryptofaschistischer Weltraumschrott) (Erk, 2012). Others had good things to say about its production values and, in fewer instances, about its irreverence and political satire. For example, Brian Orndorf (*Blu-ray.com*) noted that in spite of “some ill-advised turns of tonality, *Iron Sky* remains intriguing, submitting a lively sci-fi vision with a pronounced historical playfulness, keeping the feature eager to please and out to awe”.

While some critics, like Louise Keller of *Urban Cinefile*, found the film “bold, brave and over-the-top”, others complained about the lack of “[b]alls, that core factor found in the best political satires” (Matthew Pejkovic in *Matt’s Movie Reviews*). Glenn Dunks of *Tresspass* found the film “just not smart enough to truly work”; the “jokes are spasmodic, as satirically weightless as playing golf on the moon” (Philip French, *Observer*) and the film is “just not nearly as funny or cruel as its killer premise suggests” (Andrew Pulver, *Guardian*). According to Tara Brady of *Irish Times* *Iron Sky* only confirms that “[h]istory tells us that you can’t fake trash classics and you can’t manufacture a cult”.

Other critics quoted on *Rotten Tomatos* looked favourably upon the intertextual references to “everything from Star Wars to Dr Strangelove, Raiders of the Lost Ark, and a Sarah Palin-style US President” (Graham Young in *Birmingham Post*) and acknowledged *Iron Sky* as “an ancestor to the Mel Brooks genre spoof movies... (in its own cheap, camp, determinedly silly way)” (Rob Beams in *What Culture*). However, *Iron Sky*’s production design and visual effects were seen as “so standout”, that they threatened to “betray the film’s delightfully kitschy B-movie premise” (Anders Wotzke, *Moviedex*) (*Rotten Tomatos*, Critic Reviews for *Iron Sky*). *Iron Sky* was also seen as a “knowing, if lightweight piece of camp, which delights in jokes offering American imperialism as a continuation of Nazism”, which “in the long tradition of cinematic Nazi comedy film (from *The Great Dictator* and Ernst Lubitsch’s *To Be or Not to Be* [1942] to Mel Brooks’ *The Producers* [1968] and *To Be or Not to Be* remake [1983]) reiterates the ongoing flipside to tragic cultural workings-through of Nazism: the comedic world of dancing Hitlers and ‘Hitler Discovers’ memes” (Lukes, 2013, 74).

Špela Barlič also noted that *Iron Sky*’s imaginary world is “imbued with elements of film noir” (Barlič, 2012). Samantha Nelson described it as a “mashup of *Independence Day*, *Wag the Dog*

and *Star Wars*” (Nelson, 2019). Kit MacFarlane likened *Iron Sky* to the anti-Nazi satires of the comedy team Three Stooges, but ultimately rejected the film as “being very, very stupid and not particularly funny” (MacFarlane, 2012, 35). *Iron Sky* was also described as a “dark science fiction comedy that plays with Finland’s history of being oppressed by Sweden, Russia, and most of all the Nazis, and continues *Star Wreck*’s trend of mocking totalitarian regimes” (Anders, 2008).

This part of the article looks deeper into the *Iron Sky* themes which were largely overlooked by the film critics.

### Political marketing - How to re-elect a US president using cunning race politics

The story of *Iron Sky* starts from a presidential campaign publicity stunt. In 2018, the US dispatch the “Liberty” Moon mission, which upon landing displays two re-election banners with a portrait of the enthusiastic President and her campaign logo *Yes, She Can*. “Originally, the president was to be George W. Bush’s “alcoholic” daughter Jenna, but ultimately, a Sarah Palin-like character proved to be more rewarding” (Höppner, 2014, 14). The crew member James Washington, an African-American male model, is completely unaware of the mission’s secret agenda and believes himself to be hired for the job on account of his good looks. He thinks that the other crew member (Sanders) is there just to take photos of him. In the White House, during the President’s routine workout we discover how this publicity stunt came about, through the following dialog between the President and her campaign leader Vivian Wagner:

“President: Don’t try to play dumb with me. It was your bright idea to send those idiots to the moon. Talk about disaster...”

Vivian: Not to be the contrarian, Madam President, but I’m pretty sure it was your idea.

President: It was my great idea have they succeeded, now it’s your stupid idea. Got it? I didn’t hire you for stupid ideas, I hired you because of your Midas touch.

The President complains that, with elections just weeks away, her ratings are now ‘in the toilet’. Now she needs a ‘miracle’ to get her re-elected:

President: Actually how was sending those two astronauts to the Moon, supposed to get me re-elected, exactly?

Secretary of Defense: We haven't been to the Moon for fifty years. One of them was black. Thought it would look good.

President: Look good how?

Secretary of Defense: Like I said, one of them was black. Just think of the opportunity we wasted years ago with that errand boy, Powell, Alan Powell?

President: Colin Powell.

Secretary of Defense: That was close."

Vivian Wagner is a brand name in the PR business, which adorns a high rise in downtown New York City. The building also serves as a carrier of the banner in which the President hugs James Washington geared in his space suit. The image is accompanied with a slogan *Black to the Moon? Yes, She Can*. As a corporate power figure Vivian is also bitchy and overbearing in her demeanour towards her employees. Her Hitlery character traits explode in "Vivian's Untergang", comic rendering of the scene in *Downfall* where Hitler (Bruno Ganz) hysterically reprimands his commanders for the failure to defend Berlin from Russian troops. Vivian attacks her department heads for failing to deliver "the miracle" the President is expecting to save her campaign.

### **Political propaganda - How to re-elect a US president using (Moon) Nazi rhetoric**

The "miracle" literally falls from the sky and arrives in front of her office building (during her smoke break) in a Volkswagen minibus. Washington, Adler and Renate kidnap Vivian and she is subjected first to Adler's Nazi-style bullying and then to Renate's propaganda rhetoric. Vivian is impressed both by Renate's speech and Adler's sex appeal and agrees to take them to the President, now as her collaborators in the election campaign. When Adler and Renate are introduced to the President during her workout, Renate delivers the following speech:

"This is very simple. The world is sick and we are the doctors. The world is anemic, but we are the vitamin. The world is weary, but we are the strength. We are here to make the world healthy once again. With hard work, with honesty, with clarity, with decency. We are the product of loving mothers and brave fathers. We are the embodiment of love and bravery. We are the gift of both God and science. We are the answer to the question. We are the promise

delivered to all mankind. For that we raise our hand, to one nation" (gives a Nazi salute).

After we see Renate typing a speech on her old Moon Nazi typewriter, the President takes over. "We are the people who carry children on our shoulders, the same way that our fathers carried us and their fathers carried them. We are the one people united and strong. We are the one people with certainty, moral certainty. We are invincible and we have no fear. Because the truth makes us one", says the President in a campaign speech accompanied by some Laibach's uplifting *Bearbeitung* of Wagner. On a New York street Renate watches the giant screens on which the President declaims her own words and is genuinely fascinated by the scene.

In a spacious limousine Vivian and Adler have a further discussion of the President's campaign strategy, over glasses of wine. Vivian is convinced that "what she needs is a good war. A war always makes a President popular". A product of the election campaign is also the front page of an unnamed magazine featuring the President and Adler against the waving American flag. Adler's figure is slightly larger than the President's and the headline reads: Klaus Adler Presents New World Order.

In the sequel *Iron Sky: The Coming Race* we find out that the unnamed lady presiding over the US is not actually a human being but belongs to an ancient alien species of reptilian shapeshifters. In the White House she is thrilled when the Moon Nazi launch their attack on Earth:

"President: It's wonderful... It's brilliant. I'm a wartime president now. All presidents who start a war in their first term always get re-elected. I thought I was gonna have to bomb Australia or something. But now you bring me real... Who are these guys anyway?

Vivian: Nazis. From the Moon.

President: Real live Nazis? Holy shit, this just keeps getting better and better... They are the only guys we've ever actually managed to beat in a fair fight. I'm just like Franklin D. Roosevelt, only no, I'm not spastic.

Vivian: I knew you'd be excited. So, if you're a Roosevelt, then who's your General Patton or, you know, MacArthur?

President: Mister Secretary of Defense, do you have any thoughts on this?

Secretary of Defense: Send her.

Vivian: Me?

Secretary of Defense: You're the miracle worker. Apparently you dodge bullets too.

Vivian: I wouldn't know...

President: What to wear? Ha, you'll think of something. You always do."

### **Duplicity in international politics dominated by the US**

In *Iron Sky*'s mock version of the UN Security Council the following exchange takes place in the early stage of the invasion of the Moon Nazis:

"India: I swear we do not have nothing on the Moon.

Japan: It is not ours.

China: It is not us.

United Kingdom: It's bloody well not ours.

North Korea: I confess... The spaceships are ours. Our beloved leader designed and built them himself. [Everybody bursts out laughing.] What is so funny?

US Secretary of Defense (while entering the room with the US President): All right, North Korea. Sit down.

Preparing for her presentation US President shows an image of a Nazi swastika and the representative of India instinctively covers his ring adorned with a Hindu swastika. He gets attacked by another representative (probably of Germany): 'So, it was you India, I knew that...'

India: No, no... This is a sign of peace.

Now the US President raises her voice:

'Just cut it out, you morons! These thugs are Nazis. And I mean real McCoy. They've been hiding out on the Moon just waiting to pounce. Now, my question is, what are y'all planning to do about it? Cause we just happen to have a little something up our own sleeve...'

The response from the US to this international crisis is "tomorrow's exploration ship *USS George W. Bush*" commanded by Vivian Wagner. In *Iron Sky* she embodies the symbiotic relationship between political propaganda and military power. This symbiosis is further emphasized in the interior of the spaceship where elements of Vivian's re-election campaign for the President are screened on a monitor aboard the *USS George W. Bush*. However, the "exploration ship" which is in fact a nuclear warship, cannot resist the Nazi

invasion alone. It is soon revealed that other countries also have things up their own sleeves. Australia, Canada, UK, Japan, Switzerland and many other countries join the space battle with their vehicles:

"This is a direct violation of the international space treaty that you all signed, every single one of you', objects US President. 'That is supposed to be destroyed', she points to the Russian spaceship *Mir*. 'This is an outrage. You're all liars, just like my ex-ex-husband...'

Russia (laughing): Calm down, lady... Calm down.

President: Don't you lady me, pinko. OK, who didn't arm their spaceships?

Findland (played by *Iron Sky* producer Tero Kaukomaa) is the only person in the room who raises his hand.

President: Oh, great... You all gave me your word.

The Middle-Eastern-looking representative to the UWC who previously noted that the US sometimes mixed military tests with natural resources activity now objects that she broke hers.

President: We always break ours, this is what we do..."

### **Political and military struggle over new energy resources**

At the very beginning of the film it is revealed that the "Liberty" Moon mission's role in the *Yes, She Can* campaign is just a cover for the true purpose of the mission – search for sources of Helium 3 on the lunar surface. Astronaut Sanders, who is in charge of this part of the mission, discovers both Helium 3 and a Moon-Nazi exploitation facility thereof. He reports his discovery to Houston, but is shot by *Nachrichtenübermittlungs-Oberführer* Klaus Adler within the first four minutes of the film.

US Secretary of Defense reports in New York to the United World Confederacy about the outcome of the "Liberty" mission, but encounters scepticism from other representatives concerned that the US have a secret agenda that they are not willing to share with other nations, be it a military test or natural resources activity:

"Is there any chance that you are looking for Helium 3 up there?', asks the Middle-Eastern-looking representative. 'Helium 3?

You just made that up didn't you? Ha, ha, that's so silly...', responds US Secretary of Defense. In an attempt to convince the UWC that the elections were the sole purpose of the 'Liberty' mission he tells the representatives: 'Well, believe what you like, we had New York senators spend hundred-of-millions on campaigns to get elected the dog-shit-posts'."

After her military victory over the space Nazis Vivian Wagner is commended by the US President for being "foxy and salacious, all the way." Vivian is, however, unaware of what Helium 3 is and why the Moon Nazis had "15 to 20 giant towers that appear to be full of that stuff":

"Secretary of Defense: That's ours.

President: It is? Why?

Secretary of Defense: Helium 3 will make the U.S. independent of all energy needs for the next thousand years.

President (to the representatives to the UWC): Yes, it's ours. Hear me out... The moon is American soil. Moon flag, stars and stripes. Who beat the moon Nazis? We did... Ultimately, it's just like WWII and who won that? We did!

Russia: You lie!!!

President: You don't believe me? Watch the movies. Movies don't lie.

Russian representative takes off his shoe and throws it at the President.

President: Not the shoe, Jesus!"

Amidst the ensuing commotion Secretary of Defense orders Vivian Wagner to defend and hold the Helium 3 Moon reserves "at all costs". Vivian: "But against who?" Secretary of Defense: "Against everybody!!!" (Secretary of Defense then takes off his suit and joins the fight in the headquarters of the United World Confederacy).

The Earth is subsequently destroyed not by the Moon Nazis but by the nuclear war over the reserves of Helium 3.

## Conclusion

The Finnish filmmaking team behind the *Iron Sky* franchise had envisaged their space saga as a satire on the US post 9/11 geopolitics. Although the films draw from B-movie aesthetics and lowbrow sources and do not aspire at arthouse merit, they satirically tackle serious social issues such as racial intolerance, prejudice and violence and the totalitarian aspects of contemporary societies. The US are seen as both a source and a metaphor of the social ills shared globally (racism, inequality, homelessness, distribution of power in the wrong hands and for the wrong reasons, irresponsibility of the over-privileged...), even in countries like Finland.

This article has focused on the best developed themes (convergence between political marketing and political propaganda; duplicity in international politics dominated by the US; political and military struggle over natural resources) in which *Iron Sky* explicitly staged the transfer of the villain role from the Nazis (the usual 'bad guys' of European history and Hollywood films) to the contemporary US political and media elites. The collaboration between the *Iron Sky* team and the Slovene multimedia "anartist" collective Laibach is extremely interesting in the light of Laibach's history of constant interrogation of the relations between art, politics, ideology and totalitarianism. Laibach who "always took Nazism seriously" made a complex, multi-layered and well elaborated contribution to this unique filmmaking endeavour, using music to demystify both the European historical legacy of racism and imperialist conquest, and the contemporary political causes for war and mass destruction (currently demonstrated by the war in Ukraine).

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## CONVERSION AND STORIES ABOUT THE PAST IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *ARROW OF GOD*

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**Abstract:** Chinua Achebe is known for being one of the founding fathers of postcolonialism, because of his endeavour to tell stories of an African dignified past in order to complete the colonialist version. Beginning with a discussion about the educational function of stories, both history and literature, we analyse the process of religious conversion in the novel *Arrow of God* to show how the author succeeds in invalidating a historical bias through fiction.

**Keywords:** religious conversion, Chinua Achebe, history, postcolonialism, education.

**Rezumat:** Chinua Achebe este recunoscut ca unul dintre fondatorii postcolonialismului datorită încercării sale de a povesti un trecut demn al africanilor prin care să completeze versiunea colonialistă. Începând cu o discuție despre funcția educațională a poveștilor, în acest caz, istoria și literatura, am analizat procesul convertirii religioase în romanul *Săgeata lui Dumnezeu* pentru a arăta cum autorul reușește să demonteze o prejudecată istorică prin intermediul ficțiunii.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** convertire, Chinua Achebe, istorie, postcolonialism, educație.

### Introduction

Chinua Achebe (1930–2013) was a writer, professor, journalist, and politician who fully embraced his African, Nigerian identity. He belonged to the Igbo ethnic group, lived almost his entire life in Nigeria, and gave voice to African culture and history in his novels.

He was a contemporary of Léopold Senghor (1908–2001), Damas and Césaire, the founding fathers of *négritude*.<sup>1</sup> Even though they did not collaborate, their attitudes were considered, intentionally or not, starting points for colonial and postcolonial studies, that included the use of history. Although they did not collaborate, their attitudes, whether intentional or not, were considered a starting point for colonial and postcolonial studies, which included the use of history.

Achebe did not join any socio-cultural movement himself, but as early as 1948-1953, during the years he attended what is now the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, he expressed himself as an avid critic of the perception of Africa expressed in Joseph Conrad's "Heart of

Darkness."<sup>2</sup> He shared with these movements an appreciation and promotion of African cultural values and history in all their diversity and multiplicity of perspectives. Chinua Achebe, while criticizing Senghor's inability to distance himself from European culture in order to truly promote African culture and make it accessible to the present (Achebe, 1988), was convinced of the validity of his tiger metaphor because tigers do not speak (Achebe, 1988). The author sees the act of speaking as the greatest measure of humanity. However, he accepts the temporal necessity of various social movements such as "negritude," "African Democracy," "African way to socialism," without losing sight of the need to get rid of such props (Achebe, 1988). For this reason, Achebe opens the problem of dialog between two cultures, placing historical truth above all.

The Nigerian author indicts the European monolog that views African history from a single point of view guided by interests and prejudices and proposes instead a genuine conversation mediated by the novel as the voice of African culture and history, regardless of its language.

In order to analyse Achebe's solution to the conversation in his novel *Arrow of God*, this article will interrogate the process of religious conversion, as religion is still a crucial factor in

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<sup>1</sup> A socio-cultural movement that sought to gather the African diaspora in France to fight against the colonial view of Africa and Africans, but also to introduce African culture and history to the world.

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<sup>2</sup> In 1975, he reiterates the subject and delivered the conference talk titled "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*."

Nigeria and for the Igbo people today. The contact between Igbo religion and missionary Christianity will provide a different perspective of African history. We will also question whether the novel intends to be a mouthpiece for African culture.

### Stories about the past and history

In “Cultural Diversity in Igbo Life: A Postcolonial Response to Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God*,” the novel is read from a postcolonial perspective as an alternative history to break “the long narrative hegemony of Europe” (Sosyal, Dergisi and Sazzad, 2021), which is validated until it meets the author’s own conception and theory about telling a story or history. From Achebe’s perspective, prose is primarily pedagogical, as he discusses in his essay “The Novelist as a Teacher” (Achebe, 1988). The novel and literature are the easiest means of reaching the people, especially when it is said that Africans do not have much literature because they were educated in the languages of the former colonialists, and the only literature available was that of the Europeans. He deplored the distance from historical truth in Joseph Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness” but did not necessarily approve of the erasure of such history, which only tells a promoted perspective for political interest, as long as there were exceptions to colonialist views even in Conrad’s time, although in 1988, the history of Dom Alonso, a respectful king of the Congo from around 1500,<sup>3</sup> did not appear in history books. The problem it raises is that of the practice of reading a canonical text from a canonical perspective. The text was praised only for its disapproval of the effects of colonialism, but no scholar dared comment on the fact that Conrad’s history itself treats the Africans before Achebe as inhuman. The history reflected in *Heart of Darkness* should not be replaced by an alternative, but rather supplemented by the multitude of real historical perspectives.

Chinua Achebe introduces a historical-ethical perspective of reading that was not absent in the practice of reading but was limited to commentaries or press reviews. Peter Burke argues that “one major reason for the reaction against the grand narrative of western civilization was an increasing awareness of what it left out or made invisible” (2004), but another important reason for the rise of postcolonialism and feminism that can be mentioned is the need for social justice, which Gayatri Spivak mentions:

“But a just world must entail normalization; the promise of justice must attend not only to the seduction of power, but also to the anguish that knowledge must suppress difference as well as difference, that a fully just world is impossible, forever deferred and different from our projections, the undecidable in the face of which we must risk the decision that we can hear the other” (1999, 199).

Without entering the Marxist debate about social justice, I want to emphasize the educational task of such an ideal. Both stories and history imply narrativity, which has troubled so much of history as a discipline that it can only be interpreted as a kind of discourse consisting of a mixture of imagination and reflection on reality.<sup>4</sup> Narrativity alone became the definition of human nature, as in Nancy Huston’s *Tale Tellers*, and the core of such discussions might be what Chinua Achebe thought when he meditated on John 1:1, namely whether people create stories and stories create people; or rather, whether stories create people and people create stories (Achebe, 1988, ch. 4). Either way, the question implies the belief that stories have a lot to say in the formation of people through education.<sup>5</sup> In the era of rationalist thought, literature was considered fiction and history was considered a science with an education purpose, among others.<sup>6</sup> In the second half of the twentieth century, Jerzy Topolsky still held to education as the basic function of history, but also pointed out that “[t]here is an ever-growing need for the promotion of theoretical research in history” (Topolsky, 1976, 676). Ultimately, his intuition proved correct when Kerwin Lee Klein discussed the historical turn toward theory in *From History to Theory* (2011). We assume that there has been a shift in objects between history and fiction in terms of satisfying people’s need for texts to serve an educational purpose. To clarify, an educational purpose can be associated with any text, but not all in the sense of popular education. Once history felt the need to become more theoretical, works of fiction became explicitly educational in the sense that they

<sup>4</sup> Again, a discussion that needed to be mentioned, but will not be elaborated upon.

<sup>5</sup> Even Homer’s *Iliad* had a pedagogical purpose in its orally transmitted time (Paideia).

<sup>6</sup> History served as “the foundation of a pedagogy of virtue and as a kind of archive of experience useful for statesmen, diplomats, soldiers and other servants of the public weal” (White, 2005, 149).

<sup>3</sup> History reckoned in Portugal’s archives.

invoked a historical foundation.<sup>7</sup> It is during this period that Achebe gave the go-ahead to postcolonialist criticism. Marxism, postcolonialism, feminism, globalism, futurology, ecologism, etc., as social movements, produced works of fiction explicitly aimed at educating people who were claiming their rights based on injustices in historical data or dark predictions about the future in order to change the presupposed future. Hayden White claims that historical novels are “an art worthy of serving political needs of our time” (White, 2005, 154). While history is becoming more theoretical and historians are still criticized for limiting their interest to a particular field, works of fiction seem freer<sup>8</sup> to take sides and instruct.

Chinua Achebe, for example, only began to take on the educational role of his literature after his readers wrote to him on the subject. He wanted African children to stop being ashamed to use the word *harmattan* instead of *winter* (Achebe, 1988, ch. 4), he tried to legitimize African culture by its own means, first for the self-esteem of Africans, and only then for the world.

On the one hand, history is not a definitive construct and is deeply influenced by the present, as Neagu Djuvara states, “the work of the historian is never a definitively built structure, but a brick in an ever-collapsing edifice [...]; an edifice that historians are doomed to continue building, as in the myth of Sisyphus” (Djuvara, 2006, 145).<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, works of fiction are definitive constructs and strongly influenced by the author’s imagination. If the author’s imagination chooses to stick to one cause and devote themselves to teaching, perhaps this fact reveals the search for a stable educational point that our ever-changing world has abandoned along with the other fundamentalist ideas.

### Conversion or religious change?

Religion plays a central role in the African cultural system, including Nigerian culture and the Igbo people depicted in Achebe’s novel.<sup>10</sup> Its

importance is underscored by the presence of missionaries in Africa even before the manifestation of colonial tendencies. Thus, Christianity played a paradoxical role in African religious history: during the colonialist excesses, it was a means of enslaving people in the name of Christ, while in the second half of the twentieth century, Christianity was used in the process of emancipation through the theology of liberation. *Arrow of God* represents an apparent process of conversion to Christianity by missionaries, whom we will interrogate to see the extent to which African/Igbo culture succeeds in speaking on their behalf and affirming their identity through the voice of the narrator.

Echoing Geertz’s observation that “our view of Asian and African religions as such is oddly static; we do not expect them to prosper or decline; we do not expect them to change” (Geertz, 1977, 170). I would even go so far as to show that the Igbo in Achebe’s novel do not suffer an “internal conversion” to Christianity, but that their own religion changes according to an inner characteristic. For this reason, I would analyze the presupposed conversion using the seven-stage scheme identified by Christopher Lamb and M. Darrol Bryant: “context, crisis, quest, encounter, interaction, commitment and consequences.” (Rambo, Farhadian, 1999, 23-24).

In “The Narrative of Conversion in Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God*,” Olakunle George looks at conversion not from a religious perspective but from the perspective of a socio-political movement in the making of history (Olakunle, 2005), aspects that we will also highlight in our analysis.

Briefly, the novel *Arrow of God* (1964) tells the story of the chief priest of Umuaro, Ezeulu. He tries to mediate relations between his tribe and the newly arrived whites but fails to anticipate the severity of an internal crisis in the community. Therefore, in a moment of great social unrest, the members of the Umuaro tribe no longer find support in their great god Ulu and send their offerings to the missionaries’ church. This raises the question of whether conversion really occurs, and if so, to what extent?

In “Achebe the Orator: The Art of Persuasion,” Chinwe Christiana Okechukwu contends that religious conversion occurs because the chief priest, Ezeulu, is unable to master sophistry, dialectic, and political rhetoric, and because Mr.

<sup>7</sup> Around the middle of twentieth century.

<sup>8</sup> For there are still discussions about the purity of art, but the recognition of the artist as a social activist gave room for a development in this direction.

<sup>9</sup> My translation.

<sup>10</sup> In modern times, religion still plays a major role in Nigeria: “A survey of people’s religious beliefs carried out in 2004 by ICM poll for BBC program revealed that Nigeria is the most religious nation in the world” (Orji, 2008, 22). For more on the situation of religions in Africa, see Cyril Orji, *Ethnic and Religious Conflict*

*in Africa: An Analysis of Bias, Decline, and Conversion Based on the Work of Bernard Lonergan*, Marquette University Press (2008).

Goodcountry, the Christian missionary, is a skilled orator. We do acknowledge a communication problem between Ezeulu and his community, but the grand narrative of oral African culture that prevails at the end of the novel sustains a different kind of dialog than it follows. Under these circumstances, the religious phenomena would have strong cultural implications and suggest an autochthonous side to the (hi)story.

### Context

Cyclical time as understood by the Igbo civilization includes the birth and death of gods as natural phenomena subject to the succession of seasons and the passage of time. The great god Ulu played an important role in the founding of the Umuaro community. Just as some independent regions united into a single state under the influence of Christianity, the six villages of Umuachala, Umuneora, Umuagu, Umuezeani, Umuogwugwu, and Umuisuzu united under the name Umuaro and in the name of Ulu. Before this, they “lived as different peoples, and each worshipped its own deity” (Achebe, 1989, 14). Considering that the Igbo religion allows for this phenomenon, the creation of the great god Ulu unites the six villages in the face of the threat of Abam and his armies and “[f]rom that day they were never again beaten by an enemy” (Achebe, 1989, 15). This could be interpreted as an old conversion of the tribe or a religious change within the Igbo religion. The micro-narrative is a *mise en abyme* for the plot of the novel and for the great conversion at the end, which could be seen as an internal religious change from the perspective of Igbo religious philosophy.

In short, the conversion of the ancestors took place as follows: in the “context” of war; there is a “crisis” of the fact that the six villages cannot withstand the Abam’s attacks; the medicine men gather to look for a solution, the “quest”; after more rituals, they propose Ulu as a common deity, “exploration”; the moments of “interaction” and “commitment” are concentrated due to the state of despair. At this point, an Ulu chief priest and two sacred places were established, one to pray in the later Nkwo market and the elders’ gathering place and a river to symbolize the flow of life supported by Ulu. The “consequences” are that since the moment of conversion, creation of Ulu or religious change, the Umuaro community lived a good life without war. It must be admitted that the internal tensions between the six villages, once

independent and competing with each other, are still felt.

Moreover, the creation of Ulu was a moment of great revolution (change) in the religious history of the Igbo tribe. He represented the first supreme god. Before him, each deity had its own attribution and not even one stood above the other. As a result, the six villages faced the political challenge of uniting without a common ruler. The chief priest had only religious attributes and his supremacy applied only to the rituals. For several generations, the assembly of elders of the six villages had maintained a political role in a mild oligarchic organization designed to debate major decisions affecting any of the villages.

Moreover, a key feature of the Igbo religion is that its adherents worshipped all deities equally. Even though Ulu was the supreme god, “[a]ll the people must placate all the gods all the time!” (Achebe, 1988, ch. 6), unlike, for example, the Greek pantheon, where people had a preference for one god or another at different times and places and became involved in wars between gods. Achebe comments, “[i]n Igbo religion such selectiveness is unthinkable” (1988, ch. 6).

Some considerations should be made to even begin to understand the modernity of Igbo religion. On the one hand, most African religions had a supreme creator god who created the world and still controls it. Therefore, people had no difficulty interpreting the abstract figure of the Christian God or the Islamic Allah without losing the richness of their own traditional religion. On the other hand, the Igbo religion’s characteristic of allowing the creation and death of gods makes it indestructible as long as the Igbo religion itself, no matter which god they abandon or adopt, does not lose its purpose unless they renounce all their deities. This fact was understood by Mr. Goodcountry, who instigates Oduche, one of Ezeulu’s sons, to kill a sacred python of the god Idemili. Oduche was sent by his father to learn the ways of the white man in order to better understand his mission to mediate relations between the two communities. Unfortunately, Ezeulu had not foreseen that the boy is not strong enough to preserve his traditions and by his mere presence in the white man’s school and church, the child initiates the phase of “exploration” for his community.

In a word, if there is a single Igbo deity worshipped alongside the Christian God or Allah, the Igbo religion cannot culturally die, but rather change, as Geertz has suggested. Furthermore, the Igbo religion seems to view conversion as a natural phenomenon within its polytheistic

framework, distancing itself from monotheistic or polytheistic religions that operate on the principle of “all or nothing.” This inner religious knowledge significantly changes the perspective of interpreting African history when there is a quest for historical truth.

The equidistance between all deities and people is reflected in the Igbo social order, which resembles an incipient form of democracy, a situation that fits Geertz’ observation that “religion shapes social order” (Geertz, 1977, 199). In the traditional Igbo community, people were organized into age groups formed by men who were born around the same time (usually around three years). They organized their own meetings and had a specific role in society. For example, the young Otakagu age group had to help build a road on behalf of the white man. When Obika, another son of Ezeulu, was whipped by the white man, the Otakagu gathered to discuss how best to respond to such an act. They talked not only about the aggressiveness toward Ezeulu’s son, because everyone accepted that he was late even if the punishment was too harsh, but also about the inappropriate presence of a person from the Akaknma generation at their meeting and the fact that they had not been paid for their work as other men from other villages had been. Thus, their meeting seemed almost like a syndicalist meeting, where workers discuss their rights and look for the best way to demand their right to be paid for their work.

One social problem in the Umuoaro community that worries Ezeulu, the head priest, is the rumor that another tribe has killed their god. He fears that the rumor may encourage people to disobey Ulu, and his fear may mark the beginning of the second stage.

### Crisis

In the conversion episode depicted in *Arrow of God*, this phase is the most detailed and developed. The conversion of the Umuaro group transcends the two stages of “crisis” and “exploration,” with the “quest” stage almost non-existent, which again raises the question of the validity of a conversion to Christianity. In this sense, the process under study approaches the Igbo intra-religious phenomenon like the phenomenon of religious change in European culture.

The following event triggers the crisis. He, the chief priest, and Ulu, the supreme god, demand the truth from their followers so that they will oppose the tribe’s intention to start an unjust war.

The white man tries to prevent the battle. Then the priest of Ulu talks to him about the unfair cause of the dispute without taking the side of his tribe. The “crisis” comes to a head when the white man pays tribute to Ezeulu for telling the truth, even though it is his tribe’s fault. The chief priest seems to sense that he has more in common with the white man than with his tribe, since they share the value of truth. Thus, Ezeulu enters the “exploration” phase and sends Oduche to the white man’s school. Instead, the tribe is not interested in “exploring” the shared values with the white men; they do not want to know them. Moreover, the members of Umuaro feel betrayed by their priest or perhaps by their god, which adds to the intensity of the “crisis.” However, for the members of the tribe, truth is a fundamental value that is important for community cohesion, and they are reluctant to share the value of truth with strangers. Not to mention that the only thing known about the white man was his power.

It must be admitted that Ezeulu was aware that all important decisions were made in the assembly of elders, although he himself chose to speak the truth before the white man, under the compulsion of being the man of truth before Ulu. The conflict seems to be between a particular person of the group, the group and the god. Is it an abuse of power on the part of the head priest, who has transformed his religious role into a political one in order to represent Ulu? Based on these doubts, the six villages eventually rose in rebellion against Ezeulu. Another rumor may have been an unconscious desire by Ezeulu for the white man to select a member in other villages and empower him as judge and ruler over the others. A tendency to test his power was evident early in the novel: “Whenever Ezeulu considered the immensity of his power over the year and the crops and, therefore, over the people he wondered if it was real” (Achebe, 1989, 3).

Nevertheless, the chief priest was the first to try to adapt to the changes in his environment, the first to try to understand the unknown in order to control history for his tribe. On the one hand, the main problem remains that he acted alone, outside his community. On the other hand, the Umuaro community would never have agreed to accept this challenge. Thus, his efforts proved fruitless and Ezeulu seemed to be deep in an illusion. He confused his enemies and acted against his tribe, although he was supposed to act against the white man or with the white man for the tribe, as he hoped. This hubris of the priest before his community brings the “crisis” to an irreversible point.

As in Okperi, another region, the Igbo tribe could not conceive of a supreme ruler. Power was never in the hands of a single person, but in councils and assemblies. As we mentioned earlier, each age group had its own council. Thus, if the white man placed one in charge over the others, he tended to become a petty tyrant over his people. This fact was largely fulfilled in Africa's colonial history and is recalled in the novel as a counterpoint to the consequences Ezeulu was trying to avoid.

Finally, the climax of the "crisis" is represented by the chief priest ordering a punishment whose authorship is difficult to attribute to him or to Ulu, the chief god. The white man asked Ezeulu to visit him. Although he gathered the elders to decide together whether it was better to leave his *obi*<sup>11</sup> or to send a delegation instead, the council decided that he could go because the Umuaro community did not want to mess with the white man. An unfortunate chain of events led to him being suspended for two months. During this time, he was able to see the full moon but could not perform the ritual of eating the sacred sweet potatoes because he was outside of Umuaro. So, under the pretext of performing the ritual, he decided to postpone the harvest for two months. The people were starving, and a great rift was created between Ezeulu and Umuaro.

### Decision

This phase is highly compressed. Out of desperation and hunger to survive, the community sends their children with the offerings prepared for Ulu to the mission church, Christ, where Mr. Goodcountry promises the protection of the Son of God in exchange for the offerings.

### Consequences

The end of the novel deserves full quotation:

"So in the end only Umuaro and its leaders saw the final outcome. To them the issue was simple. Their god had taken sides with them against his headstrong and ambitious priest and thus upheld the wisdom of their ancestors—that no man however great was greater than his people; that no one ever won judgement against his clan.

If this was so then Ulu had chosen a dangerous time to uphold that truth for in

destroying his priest he had also brought disaster on him- self, like the lizard in the fable who ruined his mother's funeral by his own hand. For a deity who chose a moment such as this to chastise his priest or abandon him before his enemies was inciting people to take liberties; and Umuaro was just ripe to do so. The Christian harvest which took place a few days after Obika's death saw more people than even Goodcountry could have dreamed. In his extremity many a man sent his son with a yam or two to offer to the new religion and to bring back the promised immunity. Thereafter any yam harvested in his fields was harvested in the name of the son." (Achebe 1989, 230)

In the "context" of Igbo religion and philosophy, the Umuaro tribe's acceptance of Christ does not necessarily mean that the group converted to Christianity, but rather that they accepted a new, stronger god who cares about the harvest and the life flow of the villages. It could have been Christ, or another god created by the medicine men, as was the case in the past. The object of the ritual has changed, not the rite itself. They no longer bring the yams to Ulu, but to Christ. For the tribesmen, this is a normal fact typical of their polytheistic background. If they welcome Christ as the supreme god instead of Ulu, it does not mean that they would give up the other gods. Consequently, conversion in *Arrow of God* has its limits and cannot be called such because of the complexity of the process. In the above quote, the Igbo religion seems to dominate its constant renewal phenomena, a purely religious change. Moreover, the interpretation of the community absolved Umuaro of any guilt, only Ezeulu was punished by his God for the hubris against them.

### Conclusion

Religion as a cultural system becomes even stronger after the challenge presented in the novel. The religious practices of the Umuaro do not change, they receive the Christ instead of Ulu and integrate him among the other deities that must always be appeased in the same way. Paradoxically, the missionaries were apparently successful, while the Igbo religion flourished in actuality. The novel succeeds in giving African culture its own voice.

From a cultural point of view, the interaction between two cultures can only be fruitful; political

<sup>11</sup> House.



relations, or the lack of them, are the ones that destroy and ruin, while history, in Chinua Achebe's case through the novel, tells all the stories and portrays the contact between all the participants. Through this novel, the author explicitly refutes the historical prejudice that Africans too easily embraced Christianity. In other words, if historical (fictional) prejudice can be invalidated by works of fiction about the past, where is the reality? Perhaps in the present, which is constantly reshaping the history of the past.

Stories that attempt to instruct on a historical basis are really talking either about the ideal of

humanity today or about a past with all its imperfections in order to restore a sense of humanity and dignity, as Achebe explains: "I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them" (Achebe 1988, ch. 4). But there will be a time in the future when historians and novelists will tell a different story about our present, and perhaps our efforts will seem highly idealistic or unfair to them.

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## THE AMERICAN NIGHTMARE: RADICAL YOUTH, TERRORISM AND GUN VIOLENCE

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**Abstract:** *The figure of the young domestic terrorist has become a constant presence in the culture of today's Western world, especially in the United States of America. Although school shootings haven't been acknowledged as a form of terrorism, their strategies, means and purpose are the same – to terrorize, to induce paralysing fear and to create chaos and instability in communities and the private lives of their citizens. The Columbine school shooting of April 20, 1999, is considered emblematic for what this type of violence means in the American world. Literature both anticipated and mirrored the archetypal character of the young terrorist – in his 1997 novel American Pastoral, Philip Roth created the character Merry Levov as the embodiment of the American nightmare – the daughter of a prosperous family, loved and well-educated, raised in a peaceful environment, grows up to join a terrorist organization and participates in the killing of four people. This paper intends to explore the avatars of this anti-hero and the connection between real historical events and their fictional projection.*

**Keywords:** *terrorism and literature, Columbine shooting, gun culture, school shootings, adolescent terrorists.*

**Rezumat:** *Figura tânărului terorist domestic a devenit o prezență constantă în climatul culturii occidentale, mai ales în Statele Unite ale Americii. Deși atacurile armate din școli nu sunt considerate de facto forme de terorism domestic, strategiile, mijloacele și scopul lor este același – de a teroriza, de a induce frică și instabilitate în comunitățile și în viețile private ale cetățenilor. Atacul armat din 20 aprilie 1999 de la liceul Columbine din Littleton, statul Colorado, este considerat emblematic pentru ceea ce reprezintă această formă de violență în lumea americană. Literatura deopotrivă a anticipat și a oglindit figura arhetipală a acestui personaj – în romanul său din 1997, Pastorală americană, Philip Roth a creat personajul Merry Levov ca întruchipare a coșmarului american – fiica unei familii prospere, iubită de părinți, crescută într-un mediu pașnic, se înrolează într-o organizație teroristă și participă la asasinarea a patru oameni. Lucrarea de față își propune să exploreze avatarurile acestui antierou, precum și legătura dintre evenimente istorice reale și proiecția lor ficțională.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *terorism și literatură, atacul de la Columbine, cultura armelor, atacuri armate în școli, adolescenți teroriști.*

The lexicon of violence is particularly poor when it comes to domestic terrorism and gun violence. Although distinct acts of murderous hate, they both fit the basic definition of what constitutes terrorism: they create terror, regardless of the reason that stands behind it, its motivation, means and impact. Although terrorism is more widely covered by the press when it occurs, gun violence is more frequent and deadlier. They both define a particular area of the American imagination of violence and my intention in this paper is to find their common ground and dialect and reflect on the way perpetrators become part of a dark mythology that generates antiheroes and emulators. I intend to explore literature (more specifically, Philip Roth's character Merry Levov

of *American Pastoral*) and recent historical events (with specific reference to one of the cornerstones in the American history of mass shootings, the Columbine case of 1999).

In his comprehensive exploration of terrorism reflected in literature, *Unspeakable: Literature and Terrorism from the Gunpowder Plot to 9/11*, Peter C. Herman connects the issue to a concise, yet problematic concept – that of the unspeakable. He argues that “terrorist violence usually combines two opposing principles: terrorism speaks [and] terrorism is unspeakable” (Herman, 2020, 5) thus generating a paradox mirroring two irreconcilable parties: those who commit abominable acts that cannot be justified under any circumstances, trying to articulate, therefore

“speak,” and those who endure the effects of such terrible language. Although gun violence (particularly school shootings, discussed here) doesn’t fit the various definitions of terrorism that have been given in recent decades, as it does not usually involve a political dimension, it is, fundamentally, meant to generate terror and to erode social cohesion and stability.

Two definitions are important in this discussion: the first one, given by the U.S. Department of Defense – “terrorism is the calculated use of violence or threat of violence to inculcate fear, intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious or ideological” (qtd. in Herman, 2020, 3). No less than 73 definitions of terrorism were available by 2004 (3), creating a vast area of significance for this eminently modern phenomenon. The apparent lack of ideological motivation in many school shootings do not completely exclude the act from the realm of terrorism, but rather calls for a closer analysis of the components that generally characterize it. I shall focus on the mirroring between history and literature, that is between the archetypal impersonations of the terrorist, as agent of chaos and violence, essentialized by Philip Roth in *American Pastoral* (1997) and the real-life perpetrators of the numerous cases of mass shootings in US schools in recent years. I shall reflect on the impact of the events of April 20, 1999, when Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris killed twelve students and a teacher and wounded twenty-one other people.

Despite the taxonomical difficulties concerning mass shootings, they can be integrated into the same architecture of social violence and terror, and the perpetrators that commit them can also be integrated into the same archetypal gallery as terrorists. An aspect that deserves special attention is the fact that, in many cases, terrorist acts and gun violence are committed by young people, challenging the notion of youth as an eminently positive value in Western imagination. Philip Roth further dismantles these preconceptions in a memorable scene in *American Pastoral*: Merry Levov, aged eleven in 1963, sees on TV the self-immolation of Thích Quảng Đức, the Buddhist monk who protested the persecution of Buddhists by the government in South Vietnam. Roth is, indeed, one of the masters of modern literature who wrote about young terrorism, but the theme is far from being exotic to Western fiction and film. William Shakespeare, Joseph Conrad, Henry James, Don DeLillo, John Updike, Mohammed Moulessehoul, Yasmina

Khadra, Stephen Spielberg, and Nadeem Aslam are just some of the most prominent figures that come to mind when discussing terrorism in literature and film. It has become part of the very fibre of the past half century, a widespread phenomenon that has shaped recent history and dramatically altered its course.

Roth’s novel, written and published before Columbine, 9/11, and the many tragic events that led to the loss of hundreds of innocent lives of school children and teachers, is, in many ways, prophetic and premonitory. It centres on the Levov family, a well-to-do mélange of a successful sportsman, Seymour “The Swede” Levov, turned businessman and a former beauty queen, Dawn Dwyer. They live peacefully in a suburb of Newark, New Jersey, yet their daughter, appropriately named Merry, does not follow in their footsteps. She is angry, frustrated, over-eats and suffers from a stutter. Far from being remarkable in any way, unlike her parents, who are remarkable in almost every way, Merry literally has no voice. Later, as a teenager, she found it – she becomes part of the Weathermen Underground terrorist organization, blows up the post-office in her native village of Old Rimrock, killing two people, then becomes a fugitive. Dumbfounded and broken, her father wonders and obsesses if he or her mother had done something wrong to derail her. He cannot fathom what grave mistake they could have made to lead to such consequences, and the corrosive guilt devastates him.

“The television transmitting the immolation must have done it. If their set had happened to be tuned to another channel or turned off or broken, if they had all been out together as a family for the evening, Merry would never have seen what she shouldn’t have seen and would never have done what she shouldn’t have done. What other explanation was there?” (Roth, 1997, 89)

Roth’s uncomfortable questions concerning Merry’s radicalization reverberate dramatically in public consciousness each time a school shooting occurs in the U.S. The long list of places where blind tragedy struck without warning, yet all have been connected to Columbine, seems endless: the W. R. Myers High School shooting (occurring eight days after Columbine), the Heritage High School in Conyers, Georgia (one month after Columbine), the Santana High School shooting of 2001, the Dawson College shooting of 2006, the

Emsdetten school shooting (2006), the shooting in Jokela, Tuusula, Finland, the Virginia Tech shootings of 2007 and the Sandy Hook massacre of 2012 (the two deadliest school shootings in the U.S.), and many others. The perpetrators of these shootings ostentatiously declared their admiration for Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris, trying to copycat their murderous deeds and even surpass their atrocity. Indeed, when the FBI was asked about the reason behind the decision to destroy the so-called “basement tapes”, the answer was simple – Eric Harris openly invited other shooters to “join him in infamy” (CNN, 2019). Despite these measures, the fame of the Columbine adolescent shooters grew exponentially as underground communities – or what is now called a “fandom”, the fans of a star, public figure, etc. – proliferated with the advent of social media. In his 2009 study of rampage shootings as political acts, sociologist Ralph Larkin argues that “the Columbine shootings have attained a mythical existence and have influenced subsequent rampages (Larkin, 2009, 1309). In an earlier book, from 2007, *Comprehending Columbine*, he sets out to answer the most difficult and relevant question about the devastating events of April 20, 1999: why they happened, what are the reasons that motivated Klebold and Harris’ actions. Larkin’s study “examines personal, local and societal factors that propelled Harris and Klebold to attempt to kill 500 of their fellow students and destroy their high school” (Larkin, 2007, 2). The author synthesizes five major issues that can be invoked and discussed in connection with Columbine, but which can easily be extrapolated to the general discussion about school shootings and mass violence committed by the young:

1. “The presence and tolerance of intimidation, harassment, and bullying within the halls of Columbine High School and on the streets of the larger community;
2. Religious intolerance and chauvinism in Southern Jefferson County;
3. The rise and popularity of paramilitary culture in Western states in the 1990s;
4. The culture of celebrity in postmodern America. Subsumed within these four major themes are the roles of video games, television, rock-n-roll music, adolescent subcultures and mental illness” (Larkin, 2007, 15–16).

What has become increasingly obvious in the years since Larkin published these two important

works is the issue that he seems to omit – a rather lax gun control legislation and the facile access of most U.S. citizens to weapons, including, indirectly, children and adolescents. Many organizations, protests, civic actions and political debates have contributed to a change in the mental landscape of America’s relationship with firearms. Domestic mass shootings and terrorism are greatly favoured by this violence-tolerant climate, one in which the media seems to normalize otherwise unimaginable acts of brutality. Gun violence has become part of everyday life in many American states, and anti-gun organizations and movements have repeatedly warned about the consequences of weak or absent political will for change. However, as domestic shootings and gun violence have become constant occurrences in today’s America, the archetypal image of the young domestic terrorist (shooter, bomber, mass killer) has often become part of the cultural discourse, in literature, film and the arts. As Don De Lillo wrote in his novel *Mao II*, “[t]here’s a curious knot that binds novelists and terrorists. ... Years ago I used to think it was possible for a novelist to alter the inner life of a culture. Now bomb-makers and gunmen have taken that territory. They make raids on human consciousness. What writers used to do before we were all incorporated” (De Lillo, 1991, 41). When understood in terms of speech and discourse, as Herman proposed, terrorism (to which gun violence could naturally be added) resorts to extreme acts that prove the actual failure of communication, of discourse as a socially cohesive element). Literature and terrorism are both rhetorical products (Zulaika & Douglass, 1996, 23) but they speak radically different dialects: terrorism speaks its own irrational language, while literature rewrites its stories and tries to at least ask the important questions that such extreme violence triggers.

If the story of the tragic, austere Merry Levov is part of the massive edifice of Roth’s novel, the stories of gun violence and school massacres are more fragmented, less cohesive and more difficult to restore in objective terms. They are written by journalists, activists, survivors, parents of the aggressors, and other involved parties that were more or less affected by the inhumanity of these acts. I consider it deeply symbolic that a novel narrating the demise of the American Dream (Safer, 2006, 80), is connected, through one of its protagonists, to one of the most painful and incomprehensible aspects of contemporary American history. In more than one way, the American Dream, born out of a desire for

harmony, order and coherence dies when any of these fundamental elements is invaded by chaos, the irrational and death.

Roth's novel has been read as an elegy for a lost American way that crashed under the enormous weight and pressure of the events that challenged America in the latter half of the twentieth century, but, on an individual level, it was read "as the tragic losses of Seymour 'Swede' Levov during the years following World War II" (81), being at the same time "a family epic about social breakdown and freakout" (Gitlin, 2003, 63). These last two issues are, without doubt, the concepts that best define the character of Merry Levov. She is the all-American child born into a middle-class affluent family, surrounded by her parents' exclusive love and attention, as their only child. As the narrative of similar disasters goes, in many real-life situations when the children of happy, modest and peaceful families commit atrocities, nothing seems to have triggered such absurd and inhumane behaviour. Yet Merry is, indeed, "the anarchic centre of the novel" (Parrish, 2000, 91), the breaking point of the American Dream. Her acts remain incomprehensible to family, friends and the community of Old Rimrock, the quiet, idyllic village where nothing evil had ever happened. Roth's character bears the easily recognizable mark of classical tragedy, where the irrational erupts uncontrollably, overpowering and mysterious like the wrath of some vengeful Gods, punishing humans for their hubris. To her perfectly integrated Jewish American father, Merry is "the daughter who transports him out of the longed-for American pastoral and into everything that is its antithesis and its enemy, into the fury, the violence, and the desperation of the counter-pastoral—into the indigenous American Berserk" (Roth, 1997, 86). She is also "the major disruption of the hero's American Dream" (Safer, 2006, 87).

Despite the resemblance in attitude and means, the archetypal figures of Merry and the Columbine young perpetrators do not mirror each other perfectly. Merry's political agenda is evident and all-encompassing. The many possible triggers that culminated in her joining a terrorist organization, detonating bombs and ultimately killing four people, are, except for the incestuously ambiguous kiss her father gave her as a little girl, fundamentally political. Yet, if we accept that school bullying and problematic gun control are political issues at core, then Columbine can be read and understood through a political lens. These sons and daughters are the

offspring of those who believed in the utopia of the American Dream, making it possible and tangible. In Roth's dark historical fantasy, it is no wonder that The Swede cannot either understand or accept what his daughter had done. When, after five years on the run, she finally accepts to meet her father, Merry is an ascetic Jain who refuses to eat, for fear that she might kill the innocent microscopic life flourishing on food. The angry young woman who had killed four innocent citizens chose an extreme form of apparent penitence. Listening to her furious rant, now whispered through the voice of a wannabe saint, the Swede, smelling her unwashed body (Merry refuses to kill the microorganisms on her skin as well), vomits all over his own adored and departed child. As Roth tragically concludes, the bomb "detonated his life": it "might as well have gone off in their living room" (Roth, 1997, 69). The "far from the tree" phenomenon has been explored by Andrew Solomon in his impressive exploration of the relationship between parents and children with an unusual life story *Far from the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity*. In the tenth chapter, dedicated to children who committed crimes, Solomon interviewed Tom and Sue Klebold, Dylan Klebold's parents. In a confession that is both raw and impressive, the Klebolds shared their experience as the parents of one of the notorious Columbine killers, giving insight into what could have turned their son from a shy, goofy teenager with a meditative propension to the enraged assassin who wanted to blow up his school and kill as many of his peers as he could. After they watched the basement tapes and saw their son spewing hatred against minorities, Jews, fellow students (Sue Klebold identifies as half-Jewish), his parents were puzzled and hurt, as they couldn't imagine their son cultivated such antisocial, psychotic beliefs and plans. In a memoir that tells her story as Dylan's mother, Sue Klebold admits plainly: "I hadn't known what Dylan was thinking and planning" (Klebold, 2016, 248). Her opinion is that it is possible that children hide important personality traits from their parents, despite living under the same roof and sharing many family moments on a daily basis. As they watched the basement tapes in horror, Sue Klebold had a startling revelation:

"I saw the end product of my life's work: I had created a monster. Everything I had refused to believe was true. Dylan was a willing participant, and the massacre was not a spontaneous impulse. He had

purchased and created weapons that were designed to end the lives of as many people as possible. He shot to kill. For the first time, I understood how Dylan appeared to others. When I saw his disdain for the world, I almost hated my son. I wanted to destroy the video that preserved him in that twisted and fierce mistake. From then on, no matter how lovingly he would be remembered by those who knew him, the tapes would provide a lasting contradiction to anything positive that could be said about his character. For me, it's a smothering emptiness" (Klebold qtd in Solomon, 2012, 593).

Her words echo the thoughts of the Swede, as he tried to make sense of his daughter's murderous acts:

"Five years pass, five years searching for an explanation, going back over everything, over the circumstances that shaped her, the people and the events that influenced her, and none of it adequate to begin to explain the bombing until he remembers the Buddhist monks, the self-immolation of the Buddhist monks. ... Of course she was just ten then, maybe eleven years old, and in the years between then and now a million things had happened to her, to them, to the world. Though she had been terrified for weeks afterward, crying about what had appeared on television that night, talking about it, awakened from her sleep by dreaming about it, it hardly stopped her in her tracks. And yet when he remembers her sitting there and seeing that monk going up in flames—as unprepared as the rest of the country for what she was seeing, a kid half watching the news with her mother and father one night after dinner—he is sure he has unearthed the reason for what happened" (Roth, 1997, 152).

In the twenty-three years since the actual events, an enormous body of commentaries, books and discussions have been generated around Columbine. School shooting incidents continued with terrifying regularity, and, it is clear now, more than ever, that school shootings "need to be understood from a constellation of contributing causes, none of which is sufficient in itself to explain a shooting" (Muschert, 2007, 68). There is no single cause of such extreme violence,

and no single event could be pinned as the seed of all violence and horror in such cases. Philip Roth reiterates his implicit belief that evil can be born in loving families, in peaceful neighbourhoods, as it is nurtured by complex realities and contexts. A consistent body of scholarship on school shootings agree that the investigation of such homicidal acts must consider the fact that "monocausal explanations are inadequate, and [...] school shootings must be understood as the outcome of numerous interacting risk factors" (Böckler et. al., 2013, 2). The authors build on approximately the same argumentative structure that Larkin invoked in his work:

"the existing body of empirical and analytical research would suggest that it is high time to turn attention to the violence-affirming setting in its entirety. This includes:

1. Structures and factors influencing the socialization of children and adolescents (socio-structural, cultural/media, familial)
2. Institutional circumstances of school life and study ([country-]specific school climate and culture).
3. Individual biographical and ensuing psychodynamic background, factors, and influences." (2)

All these elements have been thoroughly discussed in connection with Columbine, yet the key to the event remains elusive, even more than two decades later. The basement tapes (with their implicit reference to Bob Dylan's 1975 album) offered an important glimpse into the psychological state of the two perpetrators. As confirmed by the few who had the opportunity to watch the short homemade films Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold made in the basement of the Harris residence, Eric's homicidal tendencies resonated profoundly with Dylan's suicidal depression, but besides the boys' altered state of mind, what remains problematic is their access to guns (provided by a third party, an adult) and to materials that could be used in order to make explosive devices. Their desire for ultraviolence is exacerbated by their shared belief that they were bullied and looked down on by their peers. As they were preparing their vengeance, they made lists with the names of the ones they wished dead. Many of them, although present on school grounds on April 20, were not killed by the duo, even if they crossed paths with them. Harris and Klebold killed randomly, without hunting down those they had declared war on.

Their plan was complex, yet simple and devious – the two young men decided to rely on artisanal bombs, leaving gun use as a background strategy – in case the death toll generated by the bombs was insufficient, they would shoot the survivors. They waited for the explosions to go off at a specific moment, carefully monitoring the time while sitting in separate cars in the school parking lot. As time passed, they realized their initial plan had failed and they had to implement their backup plan. The propane bombs they had prepared for their so-called “Judgment Day” didn’t go off because the detonators they had bought were defective. Only the pipe bombs Eric Harris had made exploded, enough to create panic and chaos on the school premises. The bomb squad that came on the ground as first responders confirmed that, before the shootings, there was an explosion on South Wadsworth Boulevard, where a diversionary bomb detonated. They had made two more propane bombs, placed in the cafeteria and brought other explosives, later found in the vehicles they drove to school. In less than 30 minutes, they killed thirteen people, then killed themselves in the library. Their deaths are almost never included in the total number of Columbine victims, despite Sue Klebold’s plea for a general shift of perspective – in interviews as well as in her memoir, she argued that the same pathology that killed the 13 victims killed her son as well.

Around March 15, 1999, weeks before the fateful day of April 20, Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris started making the basement tapes in the basement room of the Harris family, while his parents carried on with their lives. Eric’s father was well-aware of his son’s behaviour problems, as, upon hearing that there was a shooting ongoing at Columbine High, he called 911 and told the responder that his son may be connected to the developing events at his school. The disturbing content of the basement tapes is startling from another perspective, too. Not only did they wish others would copycat their deeds, but they repeatedly mentioned that they were acting upon an irrepressible calling, like an urge that they had to satisfy. In an ironical twist of words, Harris quotes from Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*: “Good wombs hath borne bad sons.”

Dave Cullen (2009) goes through a massive amount of data concerning Eric and Dylan, their families, parental relationships, rapport with teachers, classmates and friends, like a detective trying to penetrate the mystery of a senseless murder. Cullen follows in the footsteps of Capote and true crime writers in order to create a story rooted in facts, based on real documents and

witness accounts. Despite its honest intention to raise awareness and tell the story in its truth, there is an element of glamorizing the actual events in this story. Obsessed with his legacy, Eric Harris was hoping that his life and deeds would become the stuff of fantasy and film. In an obviously infantile manner, he saw himself and Klebold (nicknamed Vodka) as Romantic heroes, a two-men army set to wage war against everyone else. Impressed to obsession by Oliver Stone’s film *Natural Born Killers*, Klebold and Harris wanted their story to be turned into film, too, and their figures sanctified. The journals they kept were raided by law enforcement, revealing a disturbing reality – the affable Dylan had long been cultivating suicidal ideation, in a hidden part of his emotional life that nobody knew of. Although acute and mounting into a major crisis, his depression was not hard to detect, given that anyone had set out to look for its symptomatology. At the other end of the spectrum, Eric Harris was a self-obsessed narcissist, nourishing a fantasy of fame, although posthumous. On the fateful morning of April 20, a day they used to call “our little Judgment Day,” Harris orchestrated the final recording, containing their goodbyes and apologies to family and loved ones, further proof that he was the mastermind behind the events.

Many authors and commentators wondered what turned Columbine into a “cultural watershed” (Larkin, 2009, 1311–1312). Paradoxically, it was the media that made the boys (in)famous, and, as the internet became readily available to almost everyone, the stardom that has been created around the two Combine boys grew out of control. Ralph W. Larkin further details:

“Harris posted his writings on the Internet, developed “wads” (shooting environments) on the Internet for Doom video game players, and constructed the Trench Coat Mafia Web site. There he posted rants, essays, descriptions of vandalism that were perpetrated by him and several friends, hate lists, death threats, and other miscellaneous documents. He and Dylan recorded their lives on video. They taped themselves testing their weapons in the Colorado mountains and made a film in which they starred as professional hit men who were hired by a bullied student to kill his “jock” persecutors. They recorded the so-called basement tapes, in which they revealed the



reasons for the shooting, said goodbye to their parents, and vented their theories of revolution. Fourth, the shootings changed behaviours of school officials, police departments, students, and would-be rampage shooters” (Larkin, 2009, 1311–1312).

Klebold’s meditations resonate with Merry’s newfound spirituality: “This is a weird time...weird life, weird existence...I think a lot. Think...Think...that’s all my life is, just shitloads of thinking...all the time...my mind never stops...I am in eternal suffering...hoping that people can accept me...that I can accept them” (Klebold in Böckler, 2013, 46). Eric Harris was hungry for fame, in search of social recognition, nourishing bad thoughts and terrible acts of revenge for the lack of it: “It’ll be very hard to hold out until April. If people would give me more compliments all of this might still be avoidable...but probably not. Whatever I do people make fun of me, and sometimes directly to my face. I’ll get revenge soon enough” (Harris in Böckler, 2013, 43).

Since Columbine, specialized governmental bodies and institutions implemented strategies for the prevention of school violence. Despite the

legislative framework that imposed stricter regulations with the purpose of enhancing physical security in public schools (as it is the case in Texas), the insufficient funding of such initiatives makes the whole action fall short when it comes to the actual prevention of school shootings. It has been repeatedly proposed (and the conversation became even more heated after the significant mistakes Texan law enforcement made during their intervention in the May 2022 Uvalde shooting) that each school should have an active shooter plan and a distinct set of regulations that may be of help in case a shooting occurs on school grounds. At that moment, the Texas Education Agency received a total of \$100 million every two years, to be used for equipment, training and programs. A quick division of the lump sum to the number of active students in Texas at that moment shows that, in fact, \$10 is allotted to each student for gun violence prevention (McCullough, McGee, 2022), a sum that signals insufficient importance given to the prevention of school shootings. In the asymmetrical mirroring between literature and history, the first proves more coherent and comprehensible.

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## SOCIAL REINTEGRATION IN THE ROMANIAN FILMS OF THE 1970S AND 1980S

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**Abstract:** *Starting with the official ideas expressed by Nicolae Ceauşescu, this paper explores the way in which Romanian cinema relates in the '70s and especially in the '80s to the subject of the socio-ideological recovery of the state's enemies. We are generally talking about young people in delicate moments of their existence, attracted to outrageous behaviour by bad entourage. To follow the way this attitude changes in just a few years, I first refer to how films in the '70s try to punish their anti-heroes, and then I swing to the next decade, when not sanction, but recovery of enemies becomes the main subject of this type of narrative. The article tries to understand why this mutation occurs and how it is actually applied.*

**Keywords:** *Nicolae Ceauşescu, cinema, propaganda, 1970s-1980s, ethical socialism, social reintegration.*

**Rezumat:** *Pornind de la indicații oficiale rostite de Nicolae Ceauşescu, articolul explorează felul cum cinematografia românească se raportează, în anii '70 și în special '80, la subiectul recuperării socio-ideologice a inamicilor statului. Vorbim, în general, despre tineri aflați în momente delicate ale existenței lor, atrași la teribilisme de enturaje nefaste. Pentru a urmări felul cum se modifică atitudinea creațiilor cinematografice în doar câțiva ani, întâi mă refer la felul cum înțeleg filmele anilor '70 să își pedepsească anti-eroii, apoi pendulez spre următorul deceniu, când nu sancționarea, ci recuperarea inamicilor devine subiectul principal al acestui tip de narațiuni. Articolul încearcă să înțeleagă de ce se produce această mutație și cum se aplică în mod concret în cinematografia momentului.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *Nicolae Ceauşescu, cinematografie, propagandă, anii 1970-1980, socialism etic, reintegrarea socială.*

### Historical background

After World War 2, the establishment of communism in Eastern Europe brought major changes both in the structure of the countries' institutions and in the attitude they adopted towards the general population. This massive rethinking of how society should function also affected cinema, which would later become an essential tool of propaganda.

Film's power of penetrating minds was familiar to Lenin and implicitly to communism as early as the 1920s. One of the established researchers who emphasize this fact is Cristian Tudor Popescu; he is citing Romanian programmatic documents from the 50s, which explain Lenin and Stalin's ideas: cinema has "exceptional possibilities for the spiritual enlightenment of the masses [and] it helps working people around the world to find out the truth about the Land of Socialism." (2011, 62)

Dina Iordanova highlights that "under state socialism, film production and distribution worked within a specific framework of cultural administration. Each country had a government body in charge of film-making [and] film

financing was centralised and came exclusively from the state". (2003, 21)

In this context, the entire communist bloc uses film to convey the ideals of its policy makers. Having the necessary time to build a solid film production system throughout the '50s and '60s, the administration in each communist country reaches in the '70s and '80s a degree of control and organization that allows it to widely transmit its own ideology. This doesn't mean that every country operates in the exact same way. There are visible differences towards the freedom of filmmakers and the way film production is ideologically integrated in the general communist discourse.

Bogdan Jitea identifies how this control occurs in Albania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria (2012, 61-65). Albanian structure of communist film production is extremely rigid; the decisions are taken directly at the highest political level, and not in the administrative structures of cinema. This means that filmmakers have little to no freedom to direct the stories they want, being constrained to make very didactic films, which can't penetrate other European markets.

Yugoslavia is at the opposite end of the spectrum, its cinema being decentralized and pretty autonomous. The '70s see their film industry being free to establish direct relation with Western countries and this attracts international success.

Bulgaria is somewhat in the middle of these two approaches or attitudes, being, in Jitea's opinion, the closest to Romania's case. The state monopoly is being replaced by three "autonomous" production centres. They are chaired by the Artistic Council, and additionally subordinate themselves to the State Committee for Culture and Art.

Iordanova adds the Polish, Hungarian, East Germany and Czech cases to the discussion (Iordanova, 2003, 25). Poland runs four main studio spaces and has some relations with Western market, Hungary, as well, with three studios; East Germany has a very large studio near Berlin (DEFA), while Czechoslovakia owns the largest studio in all Europe (Barradov). All of these countries' governments give more creative freedom to their filmmakers than Romania.

### **Romanian case – more of an internal, national target**

Being somewhat a curious case, Romanian cinema in the '70s and '80s is not very successful internationally, being more interested in national stories with communist proletarian heroes. This reality is based on the ideas repeatedly stated by Nicolae Ceaușescu, who calls all forms of culture to assist the ideological struggle, cinema (also) must be used as a cultural weapon and thus show the population that the political regimentation is useful even later than never:

"The press, radio and television, all the media, literature, theatre, cinema, the other arts, which address the masses of millions of people, must address, in the spirit of the party's ideology, the existing problems in our society, to take a firm stand of the various negative aspects, to put in the foreground the propagation of the revolutionary principles and conceptions of our party about the world and life. They must arm the youth of the homeland, the whole people with the theory of revolutionary struggle, developing in them the firm determination to overcome all difficulties, to ensure the unwavering progress of our homeland on the highest

peaks of progress and civilization" (Ceaușescu, 1982, 54).

Alongside the *good* citizens, the country's leaders are trying to attract people who are less willing to adhere to communist rigors. In order to convince even the undecided or maladapted, propaganda uses the positive cinematic presentation of individuals who have made mistakes, but now want to rehabilitate themselves in front of society. It is the classic story of the wandering son who finally understands the benefits of respecting socialist norms and rigors, "our party's revolutionary principles and conceptions of the world and life" (Ceaușescu, 1982, 54).

If the '70s favour, at least on a cinematic level, more visibly threatening narratives, where the harshest (punitive) measures are taken against the scoundrels, in the next decade things undergo a curious change: the films nuance their discourse and become – from a warning or accusation tool – a prevention guide and even a good practice textbook on how communist society can accept anyone. This mutation is also taking place on the background of a growing adherence of the population to the Communist Party – at least at the official statistical level: "At the 13th Congress, the number of party members is 3,400,000, with more than 580,000 more than at the previous Congress" (Ceaușescu, 1984, 59).

Unlike the discursive cinematic line of the '70s, the '80s bring a paradigm shift, in the sense that the narratives on the screen cease to contain unfavourable paths of some undesirable individuals – paths that end obviously and without exception badly (by death or arrest) – and choose to present these *enemies of the people* in the moments of their attempt to morally recover. They, indeed used to be caught up in wrongdoing and therefore were severely punished, but can now enjoy the generosity of authority, which gives them one last opportunity for purification.

This cinematic approach, therefore more inclusive than the previous one, is all the more interesting as in real life the shortage of products is more and more accentuated. Commodities such as heat, food, electricity are becoming a luxury for the general population (Verdery, 1994, 115), a context in which tensions in society inevitably increase and control through propaganda must be intensified.

The official discourse seeks to be friendlier, offering an alternative reality that does not actually exist. The restrictions and shortcomings of everyday life, total control, seem to be

countered by noble propaganda ideas, but which have no equivalent in everyday life. In this context, Nicolae Ceaușescu veiledly promises that the repression will decrease in direct proportion to the ideological conformity of the population:

“Of course, in accordance with the stage of development of the economy and social life and as the process of democratization of the state deepens and improves, of the greater participation of the masses of the people in the management of society, the repressive functions of the state will diminish more and more” (Ceaușescu, 1984, 44).

We don't even have to read between the lines to understand the firm message given by the Bucharest leader. Apparently convinced that his country is on the right track and absorbed by own ideas, the Prime secretary of the Communist Party demands full support. He seeks to convince the whole population of his good intentions and emphasizes that the formation of the *new man* must be intensified without interruption, because there are still people who do not share the views of power:

“At the same time, it is necessary, as I mentioned, to carry out an intense political-educational work, to train the new man. The multilateral activity of all working people, of resolutely combating the various manifestations and obscurantist mentalities about work and life, will have to be intensified. Let us not forget for a moment that various foreign conceptions, mentalities of the old bourgeois-landlord society, continue to manifest, that not all citizens have definitively broken with the mentalities and practices of the past, that, unfortunately, they still influence even some young people” (Ceaușescu, 1984, 59).

### **Different decades, different cinematic approaches**

In this context, it seems normal for the propaganda to test various cinematic approaches (and not only) to find the most appropriate one in an attempt to reduce the number of enemies of the system. Of all these practices, the most fruitful seems not to be the idea of forced obedience, but the method of recounting exemplary positive cases, with which one can empathize.

When well-constructed, this approach can be very successful, having the potential to sincerely attract undecided viewers.

To observe this paradigm shift between, I will start chronologically. First, I will briefly recall how enemies of the state are constructed in the 1970s. Then, I will look closely at the same thing over the next decade, to understand how those who were not yet ideologically convinced, because they may not have had the necessary opportunity, get back on track.

By doing this, I hope to understand how, and why this discursive mutation occurs. I will also make some qualitative considerations, in order to conclude whether or not the value of these films gives them the strength to penetrate the masses' psyche.

I am interested in how the narratives in question can be read and what the authorities want to convey through them. If films with enemies in the '70s point out that any perpetrator will be punished, next decade nuances the message: iniquities will continue to be punished, only their perpetrators can get a chance to re-educate themselves in front of the system. They can be recovered.<sup>1</sup>

What do these films tell us? That, in the end, everyone will understand the benefits of community integration. The anti-heroes become aware – as the change within them shows – of the positive aspects of accepting official precepts and rigors. To make this metamorphosis credible, the scripts put them through real obstacles; nothing happens easily. They find themselves in a position to choose between malicious acquaintances – who try our heroes, entice them, as in the biblical parables – and their new, but not so fascinating, proletarian colleagues. Only by resisting the temptations of the past can these protagonists truly be cleared. For the government, it is not enough for them to change only superficially, but the transformation is required to be total.

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<sup>1</sup> It would be interesting to identify in the official sources if the preponderance of the punishments of law changes between the two decades and to what extent this reality influences what type of subjects are exposed cinematographically. According to Nicolae Ceaușescu's position, the first secretary is of the opinion that even in the 1980s there is still that type of enemy associated with the bourgeois era and the Dej regime. This indicates that – according to the official opinion – the old defects have not completely disappeared within the [Romanian] people.

### Punishing the delinquent in the '70s films

In the official directives sent at the meeting of the Ideological Commission in 1968 – where it is actually drawn what kind of films the authorities order for the next period – we record, among other topics, the subject of parasitism of those who do not work and do not want to socially fit in: “the parasites; satire on that category of graduates of higher education institutes who, refusing to be assigned to production, live on their own or on behalf of their parents”. (ANIC, DS 88/1968, 189)

At a broader level, this includes all those who in one way or another cannot or do not want to follow the rules imposed by the government. This may be due to their entourage, wrong models, momentary terribleness or a desire to get through life more easily.

What unites the antagonists of films such as *Illustrate cu flori de câmp*/*Picture Postcards with Wild Flowers* (Andrei Blaier, 1975), *Accident* (Sergiu Nicolaescu 1977), *Septembrie/September* (Timotei Ursu, 1978), *Ora zero/Hour Zero* (Nicolae Corjos, 1979), *Cine mă strigă?/Who's calling me?* (Letitia Popa, 1979), *Zbor planat/Glided Flight* (Lucian Mardare, 1980), is the unconsciousness demonstrated in the face of socialist norms and rigors, alongside an inability to integrate. Their attitude is a magnet for serious problems, and the fact that they do not want to recover ideologically attracts them to imprisonment or, even worse, death.

These deeply moralizing films are meant to warn those who seek to circumvent the law. More interesting is that some of the antagonists end tragically not through the intervention of state bodies, but because of the hand of fate. Negative outcomes seem to happen naturally. They represent – in the logic of these scripts – the harmful consequences of non-compliance with socialist norms. I have written extensively in my doctoral research on this subject (Indolean, 219-250), so I will further develop on the ideas presented there, to see what kind of enemies the films of the '70s build and what ways they find to punish them.

*Postcards with Wild Flowers* is a “pro-life propaganda film” (Grancea, 2018, 825) and in the same time a warning for those who think about breaking the law.

The film talks about a taboo subject at the time: abortion, outlawed in 1966 by Decree 770, out of an official desire to increase the population. The film presents a fatal case: after a failed attempt at illegal abortion, a young woman dies.

Laura from Bucharest arrives in Giurgiu to have an illegal abortion, which “is only suggested in the movie” (Grancea, 2018, 827), and is greeted at the train station by Irina, a young woman with high morals who does not know what her mother and her friend, Didina, are involved in. The film contrasts Laura's superficiality with Irina's rationality. The first is confident and exalted, only in fact childish and gullible; she dies as a result of complications, sent on a road without return by her married lover, Titel. Irina is shy, but much more mature, and tries in vain to prevent abortion, therefore commits suicide because she cannot live with this collateral sin. The way she is constantly humiliated by Didina doesn't help her as well. Grancea points out that “the language of negative characters is a way of portraying them and a source that generates smiles, as they use the common language, vulgar phrases, especially with those weaker than themselves” (Grancea, 2018, 827). This delineates the negative characters and gives the viewer an additional reason to detest them. The guilt for Irina's complicity in not taking action when she could is too big of a burden. She remains inert and does not address the authorities even if she knows that a crime is taking place.

Such films, however, avoid attributing punishment to the rule of law and prefer to blame it on relentless fate. More effectively, this choice has a double meaning: first, it conveys the idea that no one can escape the ruling even on the rare occasions when state bodies fail to detect the crime; secondly, it points out that in this well-oiled society, which works on its own, things will always be in favour of communist doctrine and ideals.

The adventure of the supreme antagonist from *Accident* (1977) ends in the same disastrous way. Following a minor car accident, Tudor refuses to stop, manages to escape the city, but loses control of the car; Maria, one of the other two passengers, seems death. Dan, her boyfriend, is on this road without escape; the two men flee the scene of this presumptive murder. The film builds a portrait of a punk who doesn't want to follow the rules. Fate fatally punishes Tudor, and the fugitive takes the blame at the last moment, when he understands the gravity of his deeds. The film suggests that structurally dishonest individuals will pay one way or another. This total enemy – played by George Mihăiță: long-haired and insensitive, wandering and now a fugitive, a former prisoner – steals cars, hurts the feelings and trust of those close to him, blackmails for money; it is the quintessence of absolute evil, the irretrievable that in fact does not even want to be recovered. The

end is moralizing: he dies, although the agent played by Sergiu Nicolaescu tries to bring him on the right path. The chronic lack of luck of the one who opposes the good running of society is obvious.

The initial accident is caused by stupid carelessness and by the fact that the driver puts on a show on western music, instead of paying attention to the road. The script suggests that this kind of unfortunate event is attracted only by those people who do not conform and live outside the system, stealing, making small arrangements, preferring not to work honestly; it is a decadence blamed on the Western world, whose cultural products that reach the Romanian market give a negative example.

The other offender, Dan, repents and admits his mistake, because he's not a bad man like Tudor. On the contrary, the collective where he works appreciates him and tries to find mitigating circumstances. Surely in the middle it must have been a mistake. Under these circumstances, Dan seems acquitted. The script promotes the practice of denunciation as something beneficial for everyone: the *rat* fulfils his public role, whereas the one who is *snitched* in due time can be recovered in the eyes of the authorities, especially if his mistake is rather involuntary. Here, however, we do not see how Dan will bounce back and be a good citizen; variations on the process of social recovery will be imagined in the next decade.

Vali from *September* (1978) is also a rebel who cannot straighten up. He does not work, but prefers to make small commissions at the limit of the law; he spins in a vicious circle that has infected him to the point of non-compliance with social norms. In his crazy race, which leaves behind innocent collateral victims, he realizes too late that he has done wrong and dies with the desire to repent. Without being structurally bad, being associated with the underworld becomes fatal to him and is a public warning. Critic Adina Darian talks about this:

“rush so characteristic of young people – to succeed; and haste becomes – absurdly, a brake on his way, urging him to turn first to expedients, then to dishonest means to satisfy his ambition, initially not at all reprehensible, that of being a student, but which he did not know how to support by working” (Darian, 1978, 8).

Beyond stealing, Vali actually becomes a total enemy because he is lazy and prefers not to sweat

for his aspirations. This parasitism seems an even greater sin than the theft itself. Although employed, he bunks work. A driver on the dump truck of a hydroelectric power plant site, he is the type of young man who lives against the rules: he is either absent from work or he is looking for all sorts of easy earnings. Mariana, the foreman's daughter, is in love with him and hopes to change him for the better. Things get from bad to worse when a number of former detainees arrive on the construction site, in order to be re-educated. Vali starts colluding with them and eventually this will cost him his life.

The structure of the script distinguishes the honest worker from the delinquent who corrupts others. The film rigorously establishes these two ways of living: the first requires sacrifice and hard work but is full of long-term satisfaction, while the second is really easy and interesting, it gives birth to ephemeral euphoria, but it is equally fatal.

This type of malicious people who do not meet the requirements and expectations of the government must be avoided at all costs. Too proud to be recovered, they come into conflict with heroes who try to build socialism.

This is also the case in *Hour Zero* (1979), where in addition to the father and son, conscientious line repairers at the Bucharest Transport Company (ITB), there are enough people with reprehensible intentions; the film divides the characters into two groups: responsible proletarians and parasitic *bişniţari*.<sup>2</sup> Mihai – Marin Căruntu's son – gets involved with the wrong people and takes part in a road accident with serious consequences, fleeing the crime scene. Jorj lured him into this situation.

Jorj is the exponent of the opportunistic class that actually controls an entire criminal group. The car that caused the accident was found less than an hour after the event. A witness helps the investigators with information, so the taxi dispatcher tells all the taxi drivers to look for Mihai. Things can still be resolved. It's hard to believe that in a city as big as Bucharest, people know Mihai as they do in rural areas, where everyone knows everyone. But let's get over this inaccuracy and say that Mihai is not a bad man, he was only in the wrong entourage, of Jorj, a pretentious, predestined, unhealthy name, of Western (French) and bourgeois nature.

Mihai's symbolic rupture with the grey world occurs when he hits Jorj in the mouth, because he

<sup>2</sup> *Bişniţar* (from the English *business*) – also known as *gheşeftar* (from the German *geschäft*) – is a Romanian term for a person who practices petty business, making personal profits in dishonest ways.

bribed him with money to say he provoked the accident, which disqualifies Jorj irreversibly. The classic moment follows, when the whole criminal group is arrested.

### What changes in the '80s films?

As I pointed out, all these films are built similarly and have tragic, moralizing endings. Their eminently painted antagonists are so absorbed in sin that they cannot be recovered. Around them we find misguided individuals, who can still escape. There is still hope for them, so next decade's cinema zooms in on their social recovery. *Ana și hoțul/Ana and the Thief* (Virgil Calotescu, 1981), *Singur de cart/On Watch by Himself* (Tudor Măărăscu, 1983), *La capătul liniei/At the End of the Line* (Dinu Tănase, 1982), *Râdeți ca-n viață/Laugh! That's Life!* (Andrei Blaier, 1984) contain a common premise: unlucky people or trapped in the nets of bad entourage – who have done them much harm, seek at all costs to show the community that they have changed for the better. Captives of a fatidic past, but eager to be accepted and trying to settle down more comfortably in life, they fight with themselves to get rid of old mistakes and replace them with the typical communist altruism. It is a more nuanced story, where the authority no longer wants to sanction mistakes, but tries to eliminate them by persuasion.

Nicolae Ceaușescu emphasizes this desire to fight for the salvage of recoverable cases. The 80s bring intensification in this sense, I don't know how much on a practical level, but especially in a discursive aspect:

“At the same time, it is necessary, as I mentioned, to carry out an intense political-educational work, for the formation of the new man. The multilateral activity of all working people will have to be intensified, to resolutely combat the various manifestations and obscurantist mentalities, backward-thinking to work and life. Let us not forget for a moment that various foreign conceptions, mentalities of the old bourgeois-landlord society, continue to manifest, that not all citizens have definitively broken with the mentalities and practices of the past, that, unfortunately, they still influence even some young people” (Ceaușescu, 1984, 59).

In order to construct these narratives, focused not on punishment, but on the recovery of some

delinquents, the films contain a series of details that are intended to be convincing. First of all, we are talking about an initial take on the terrifying and rebellious spirit of these heroes, who begin their stories as the screenwriters of the last decade left them. The heroes have doubts about the socialist ideal, but this is about to change.

Mihai from *Ana and the Thief* (1981) is a newly released prisoner, caught between two worlds. On the one hand, he would be tempted to start a normal life, as a good citizen, so he arrives at the factory, seen as a place of purification of the mistakes of the past, of the soul. On the other hand, he still feels connected to his former “pârnaie” (translated as *joint*, slang for *prison*) colleagues – as he says. Mihai is interested in making money, although it is not clear what he could buy with a financial excess in the communist system (we are in the '80s, when the market situation is characterized by the profound shortcomings mentioned in the introduction of this article). He has the potential data to be an exceptional individual: good-looking, robust, intelligent, energetic and therefore capable of important achievements at the factory.

This idea of the factory as a healing place appears as well in *On Watch by Himself* (1983). Imprisoned for causing a car accident in which both his parents died, Pavel is released and is trying to socially reintegrate. The road he travels is as winding as Mihai's, except for other reasons. If Mihai is still attracted to committing crimes (as an element that keeps him tied up), Pavel has only positive thoughts and wants to integrate at all costs, only he is terribly unlucky: nothing works, everything goes against him. The struggle he is waging is with himself.

The same happens in *Laugh! That's Life!* (1984): three young people, juvenile delinquents, are sent to the construction site under the pretext of moral recovery. Until the end of the story, they show solidarity, moral principles and manage to teach their superiors a lesson, which initially give them no chance.

Like the biblical parables, these young people face various obstacles in order to receive society's approval. What do they need to mature? A mentor to channel their vigour in the right direction.

### The mentor, the challenges

The mentor appears in different forms: in *Ana and the Thief* he comes from the ranks of the workers – Crijan (Amza Pellea) is the father figure who will educate Mihai in communist spirit, will take him under his protective wing and



will offer him even his daughter, who eventually becomes the partner of the former thief, now a new man. He avoids the fate of Nelu from *Glided Flight*, who died because he could not get away from the past. This happy end resembles fairy tales, where the emperor's daughter represents the trophy and the reward for the hero's deeds of bravery. In a deeply traditional society, the princess has little choice but to rejoice when she is chosen for marriage. Her condition is automatically linked to the personality of the man she gets to *belong to*, being somewhat seen as an annex or extension of him.

In *Laugh! That's Life!*, the foreman (Gheorghe Dinică) embodies the typology of the providential, a model for the three lost youngsters, a father figure: although he is dying, his ultimate goal of ending the dam is the definition of altruism.

In *On Watch by Himself*, the older model is not so clear – or at least does not appear under the umbrella of a single man, but is rather delivered collectively and consists of the sum of the elderly around the hero. This respect for the elderly is also part of traditional societies.

By emulating these new acquired qualities, our heroes are not only re-educated, but they also get to take the initiative, becoming models for society as well. For example, for the protagonists of *Laugh! That's Life!*, only a few days of work on the site attract an incredible change. They mature, stop singing or waste time. They want to establish themselves in a place and contribute to the smooth running of society. They are determined to fight hard to gain honourable status. They are also capable of sacrifice: near the end, one of them is trapped in a water storage that raises its level – a stone has caught his foot. The head of the construction site asks everyone to help lift the boulder. *One for all and all for one*: delinquents have been assimilated into the group, earning respect, so their colleagues risk their physical integrity to help them.

The same positive transformation happens to Pavel from *On Watch by Himself*, who honourably embraces his worker status. In charge of checking the rules, he finds himself in a difficult situation: some of his older colleagues – representatives of a retrograde mentality, which Nicolae Ceaușescu often condemns in his speeches – attend a wedding on Friday and return on Tuesday, so Pavel does not complete their timesheets for these days. They ask him “to do what others have done before you. To tick off those days as well because we will work for them”. But the young man is relentless. He now has high morals. The film suggests that, despite his past mistake, he is now

acting with more socialist nobility than those around him. Therefore, the film emphasizes that anyone can erase their past with the right attitude and even if the improvement does not happen immediately, the individual will ultimately be able to accomplish a *new man* status.

Mihai from *Ana and the Thief* is also beginning to demonstrate exceptional qualities: team spirit, initiative in critical moments. For example, when a machine crashes, he knows what to do and repairs it: that's when we find out that he started a technical college, but he didn't finish it, because a momentary weakness sent him to prison. The young man had potential and good initial intentions, but he got into trouble: drunk, he stole a car, ran away from the police, and then went into the sea with it.

In a world dominated by heavy industry, this motif of the accident caused by the careless use of a car is another element that connects the stories and becomes a theme in the cinema of the period.

In addition to the examples already provided, a similar premise and incident also appears in *At the End of the Line*: one of the two newly released protagonists, Cicea, was also arrested for stealing a car. This felony seems serious enough to become fundamental to the narrative, but not too extravagant to give ideas to potential criminals.

Cicea is released from prison alongside his colleague, Crișan, a former model worker who as well carelessly handled a machine, which led to the death of a colleague.

These two unlucky men take the first train and go to the end of the line, seen as a symbolic place where they want to start a new life. It is an important gesture introduced in the story: they get here with the hope no one knows them, but bear the bad luck and the deeds they committed. There are things that cling to them irreversibly and from which they can no longer get rid.

When Cicea steals the car of an Italian woman staying at the hotel where he is denied a stay, the script makes the character relapse – showing that he did not understand what he had to from the time spent behind bars.

Unlike the other heroes, Cicea fails to become a model citizen again, for several reasons. First of all, he seems too rebellious: still young, non-conformist despite the alleged re-education he endured in prison, he is prone to conflict. Disrespectful, impulsive, he represents the anti-communist model, he embodies everything that contradicts the precepts imposed by the Party. Secondly and most important, the paternal figure of his model is embodied by this former prisoner: Crișan has rebukes of conscience for the work

accident, which makes him unable to exercise with strength and credibility the role of mentor for the younger generation. He refuses to take a similar job in the factory of the city where he stops, because he does not want to repeat his mistakes. If he seems to have understood pretty much from the whole incident, Cicea is prone to repeated mistakes and, worse, keeps the older Crişan in the same state.

The fact that Cicea is seen with empathy attracts the ban of the film at the time, and this offers us a counterexample in relation to the other three productions of the '80s (*Ana and the Thief*, *On Watch by Himself*, *Laugh! That's Life!*). The problem with *At the End of the Line* – in relation to the official discourse, is not that it does contain at some point certain non-conformist positions towards communism, but the fact that it does not overturn them in the end, through an outcome that would demonstrate the superiority of communist ideals, which prevail against any doubt(ers).

If well thought out, this change in the mind of the hero, which occurs slowly and in spite of all the difficulties, is meant to consolidate the official message. What matters is not the negative opinion towards communism expressed in the beginning, but what speech the hero ends the story with. The more consistent and credibly constructed the difference between the beginning and the end, the bigger the transformation of the hero, the more a film can help the propaganda.

### The hero's rough start

In this sense, *Ana and the Thief* is as well contesting some of the system's rules, but only up to a point: Mihai would not want to enter the factory, he hesitates, but in the end he will choose the right path. Initially he has a totally disinterested attitude, having nothing to lose. Party secretary Petrescu does not have a white tie and shirt, he is an open-minded man, not an obtuse figure like the ones before him; he is a friend and has a good word: "Listen, in this factory, with a tradition of proletarian struggle, we, in addition to industrial products, are building something very important", to which Mihai "The new man?! I know the slogan. Leave it...", but the boss tells him he's not right. Asked what he is good at, Mihai first answers evasively, "at anything", then, after insistence, he climbs on a plate from the factory and starts performing: "I'm good at the artistic brigade. At our place, at Vinalcool, at our place, at Vinalcool, we fulfilled the plan, we fulfilled the plan, we worked with enthusiasm, we worked with enthusiasm. But

there are still some, from some sections, who instead of working hard and with enthusiasm, waste time! But the team has taken a stand. So: at our place, at Vinalcool, at our place, at Vinalcool... at Vinalcoool!", after which he makes an ironical bow.

From a *prick*, Mihai gradually becomes a new man, and this is because he begins to accumulate moral goods that are worth fighting for: a social status, friendship with foreman Crişan, love of his daughter *etc.*

The same preliminary ironic attitude appears in *Laugh! That's Life!*: the three juvenile delinquents start their work by making fun of it; only later the script overturns their beliefs and mocking attitude. The first minute of the film shows Angela overturning a traffic sign, as an offensive gesture against the system, followed by another five or ten childish pranks of her fellows. These details introduced in the story are meant to create a contrast between the beginning and the end. With the help of these gimmicks, the film seeks for a relevant demonstration.

The discourse is similar in all the examples provided in this article, precisely because it is based on a classic narrative formula, where the protagonist begins with certain (negative) opinions about the official position, and along the way the example of new colleagues makes him understand that he lived a lie all this time.

Precisely because they are aware of what they end up fighting for, Pavel, Mihai, Angela, Bogdan and Manea are socially rehabilitated, which is not the case with Cicea and Crişan. *At the End of the Line* is also banned because the authorities believe that anyone can be rehabilitated, and such a film challenges this strategy. As Nicolae Ceauşescu states at Mangalia, the country doesn't need films that "distort the reality of our society, the working people, the youth or other categories of working people in our country", but a cinema "that presents the essence, the model of the man we have to build"<sup>3</sup> (Ceauşescu, 1983, 184-185).

### How persuasive are these films?

Beyond – or alongside – official intent, one question remains: are these (so much-desired by the power) films well enough made to convince the people?

I will refer to the ideologically agreed-upon examples of the 1980s, namely *Ana and the Thief*, *On Watch by Himself*, *Laugh! That's Life!*, and I

<sup>3</sup> The intervention is also available in audiovisual format here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRgIoDZSqOM>

will try to briefly explain how, depending on their level of quality, they succeed or not to penetrate the collective mind. In order to establish more clearly whether these products can impose the ideas for which they militate, I will carry out the discussion within certain criteria.

I am interested to see if (1) the heroes are imprinted in the viewer's memory and manage to convey emotion and empathy; (2) the narrative structure is well arranged on the screen; (3) the authors convincingly construct the initial situation of the story and the change to socialism in the end; (4) the personalities of the dishonest individuals who revolve around our hero, respectively the solar personality of the mentor(s) are well made up.

*Ana and the Thief* is superior to the other two titles in all respects: Mihai becomes a memorable character with whom we can easily empathize, his story is made credible by the convincing attempts he is subjected to – such as the disappearance of a colleague's watch, who blames him unfoundedly, only to later accept the blunder committed –, the antagonist and the mentor respectively have the depth to play substantial roles in fighting from distance in trying to transform our hero.

*On Watch by Himself* starts from an interesting premise, but is not backed up by a solid development of the story; the protagonist Pavel really encounters some tense moments, with significant potential, such as the extremely heated controversy regarding ticking off his older colleagues, only that the artistic strengths are few and scattered in such a way that they get lost in a

rather dull approach, with fade, even if not caricatured secondary characters.

Under the border of the embarrassing falls *Laugh! That's Life!*, a project that through almost everything that fails to succeed prejudices the official propagandistic desires; the involuntary humour, the falsity of the situations, the superficiality of the construction of the characters, inadvertently put an insurmountable mental barrier for the public.

## Conclusions

Despite some artistic shortcomings of these productions, the intention to bring those less convinced spectators to the socialist doctrine remains clear.

At least on a theoretical level, by producing cinematic socialist parables, the government is trying to consistently impose its ideology.

It is extremely interesting how, depending on the moment, attitudes get changed, discourses refine and narratives are nuanced. The official requirements are clear and we can see them in these three cinematic examples accepted by authority in the '80s, through which they want to show that anyone can be recovered. On the other hand, we can see that non-compliant directors disappear, being banned or blocked.

The new man is also being built with the help of the films of the time and no one should be left behind, because anyone can ideologically and socially recover. What is important is that one wants to do it and seek in his vicinity for the right example.

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# THE IDEA OF NATIONAL UNITY IN ROMANIAN COMIC BOOKS DURING THE COMMUNIST PERIOD

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**Abstract:** *This paper deals with the idea of Romanian unity, independence and identity as it was formulated during the Communist period in the medium of comic books. By selecting relevant and expressive material and analysing it in the context of general ideological imperatives operating in other media channels using quantitative, but mostly qualitative methods (content and artistic analysis, identification of cultural and ideological tropes and ideas), this paper aims at presenting the form propagandistic messages took in comic books in order to persuade and enrol the young public into official discourse.*

**Keywords:** *ideology, history, national identity, communism, popular culture.*

**Rezumat:** *Acest articol investighează ideea unității, a independenței și a identității românești așa cum apare formulată în timpul comunismului, în mediul benzilor desenate. Prin selectarea unui material relevant și expresiv și prin analizarea acestuia în contextul imperativelor ideologice care funcționau și în alte canale mediatice, făcând apel la metode cantitative, dar mai ales calitative (analiză artistică și de conținut, identificarea tropilor și a ideilor culturale și ideologice), acest articol urmărește să prezinte formele pe care le-au adoptat în banda desenată mesajele propagandistice pentru a convinge și a înregimenta publicul tânăr în discursul oficial.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *ideologie, istorie, identitate națională, comunism, cultură de masă.*

## Introduction

The study of comic books<sup>1</sup> is rather scarce in the Romanian landscape, although recent important contributions have been made, mostly concerning their production and consumption during the Communist period, as subsumed to the still growing field of post-socialist studies. Historical perspectives have provided the necessary overview of comics production in Romania and the vital interpretations and correlations with other fields of study and with other areas of social, economic, political and cultural life (see mostly Niță, Tomuleț, 2004; Niță, Ciubotariu, 2010a; Niță, 1992); for a complete lexicon of artists and writers involved in the Romanian comic book scene, see Niță and Tomuleț (Niță, Tomuleț, 2005). More specialized

approaches have been pursued by researchers in various fields, investigating comic book production, their cultural relevance and function. For valuable insights into the way ideology shapes spatial perception and personal and group identity via comic books see Ilovan (2020) and Ilovan (2021); for an analysis on ideological functioning patterns in the medium of comics see Teampău (2015) and, focusing on the last decade of Ceușescu's regime, see Hațegan (2016) and Hațegan (2017); for a historical and anthropological approach regarding alterity in Romanian comics of the same decade see Precup (2015); for an identification of censorship mechanisms in Romanian comics during Communism see Teampău (2012b) or, for an overview of historical comic book production during Communism in Romania see Teampău (2012c).

It is to be noted that Romania never had a comic book industry comparable to the American, the Francophone and the Japanese scenes. There are Romanian comics and their studying is very important (also keeping in mind that some Romanian artists even managed to be a part of the American and French comics industry, such as

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<sup>1</sup> For practical purposes I use comics as defined by McCloud (1990, 9): "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer". The debate on this particular definition is another topic and does not represent the focus of this paper.

Mircea Arapu, Sandu Florea or Valentin Tănase), but their smaller production and weaker social relevance influence the appropriate methodology. That is to say that theoretical and conceptual tools which operate in the study of large scale comic book producing cultures is not really helpful in the Romanian case. For example, strictly statistical and other quantitative approaches cannot provide exhaustive studies and qualitative approaches need to be integrated into the analyses. Even more so is the case in investigating an artistic field, in which “hard science” tools prove their epistemological limitations (and this is not to say that they are irrelevant, but that they are not enough). Of course, the dangers of purely subjective evaluations have to be avoided, in spite of occasional exact and revelatory insights they may bring on the table. For a long period of time, after the fall of the Communist regime, the main public discourse on comics fell into this category, household names of Romanian intelligentsia talking about the subject solely based on personal memories, aesthetic preferences and anecdotic examples. In other words, comics were not taken seriously in the academia and occasional efforts to untangle the intricacies of this subject were rather marginal to mainstream scholarly interests.

Another aspect that is mandatory in the study of comics is their intimate connection to other fields. Comics are never created out of nothing and in a vacuum. Their plots, tropes and symbolism are closely interconnected with the larger social, cultural, historical, economic and even political contexts. It is true that comics are a form of art, accepted as such, after many decades of rejection and misjudgement from the part of the cultural and political establishment (see, for example, the trial of horror comics in the US during the '50s). But they are not only that. Due to their exclusively visual nature, to their laconic and usually clear message and schematic narrative strategies, and not least due to their modes of distribution (Couperie even asserting that the history of comic books is in fact the history of their modes of distribution (apud Blackmore, 1998, 15), comics are ideal carriers of commercial and ideological load, be it official or subversive.

Following that, the researcher in the field of comics has to at least be aware of the researches in areas connected to his/her topic, since cultural phenomena cannot be explained by only resorting to one discipline and one methodology. The notion of “cultural competence” proposed by Bourdieu even since the '70s (apud Barnett, Allen, 2000, 147) proves to be useful in this endeavour,

since comics also require a certain degree of “qualified” perception and evaluation, which the reader gains after getting acquainted with the certified norms and habits of consumption. It is doubtful that a person, however intelligent or cultured, might be able to decipher comics at a first glance, without having gotten accustomed to these rules in the first place (for example, the way movement and sounds are represented in a static graphic medium, or the role and the function of the bubbles, the relation between image and text or between images, the meaning of certain established visual markers for emotions and ways of speech etc.). We only need to consult McCloud's (1993) outstanding work to understand the vastness and the subtleties of the comic book field.

Of course, most people who are not comic books aficionados know the medium in correlation to other media, such as film, cartoons or video games, abundant in cultural references which firstly appeared in comics (and it suffices to point to the superhero paradigm in order to provide the best example). It is not an exaggeration to state that our present cultural milieu is penetrated by comic book tropes to such a degree that most of us take them as natural facts and cannot even discern their origin, function and behaviour. Not only certain notions and syntagmas which have been created in particular comic book environments are used today in everyday speech (“spider senses”, “hulking up”, “superpower”, “x-ray vision” etc.), but we have reached the point in which we risk mistaking (comics) fantasy for reality (news outlets also abound in stories about people who either dress, act and think of themselves as being actual superheroes, or expect such characters to show up and save the day).

Even more so than other media, comic books have succeeded in shaping the (at first American, and following the process of globalization, the human) culture and even the mind, despite social, cultural, judicial or political authorities opposing this state of affairs. At certain points, comics are perceived as the epitome of the American cultural profile, be it considered juvenile, unsophisticated and blunt, or rather honest, optimistic and energetic (the most relevant example that can be provided here is the impact comics had on the morale of American troops sent across oceans in the Second World War, in Europe and into the Pacific (for more on this subject, see Wright, 2001, 34).

In this paper I focus on Romanian historical comic books, following the idea of national unity and the ways it was represented in this medium. My intent is not to offer an exhaustive account on this topic, meaning that I shall not take into account every single instance that deals with Romanian national unity, since most of them just repeat the same official tropes in more or less articulate, attractive and efficient ways. Although comic book production during communism was not truly abundant, many such products can be disregarded as simply fails from an aesthetic, narrative and even ideological point of view. I shall only select relevant and influential comic books and strips, which were disseminated in very popular almanacs, reviews or books, and benefited from a national reach (such as *Cutezători*, *Vacanța cutezătorilor*, *Almanahul copiilor*, *Luminița*, *Șoimii patriei* etc.). Due to ideological framings, these products have been issued mostly during the last decades of Romanian Communism, when comic books have gained a bit of cultural respectability, aesthetic prowess and discursive relevance, as a result of international collaboration in this field, mostly with the well-known French review *Vaillant/Pif* (issued by the French Communist Party).<sup>2</sup>

I shall present the most efficient<sup>3</sup> titles in carrying on with official messages aimed at a younger public and I shall identify the discursive practices which conveyed them. Presenting all these cases as if they were singular occurrences is not useful though, since the anecdotal, however interesting and revealing it might be, it does not reveal the intricacies of an artistic field imbued with ideology, nor does it reveal the greater discursive scaffolding which permeated all areas

of social and even private life. Therefore, the analysis of historical Romanian comics needs to always refer to the official scholarly historical framework of the chosen period, given the strict surveillance of the field by the propaganda apparatus (historical comics could almost never escape or satirize the official ideology, as opposed to humorous or sci-fi comics, which sometimes could smuggle subtle hints aimed at criticizing the status-quo).<sup>4</sup>

The idea of Romanian unity in all provinces which ended up being a part of the modern state of Romania and all throughout known history was, arguably, the most important ideological trope during the last couple of decades of communism. Starting with Ceaușescu's own version of "cultural revolution" from 1971, following the Chinese model, and mostly with the imposing of "protochronism" (the idea of Romanian pre-eminence in almost all areas of scientific and artistic life) as the official historical paradigm in 1974, all cultural products which dealt with history and historical ideas and concepts had to follow this official stance. Comic books were just a small piece in this huge nationwide propagandistic edifice and played their part very well, simplifying the message and converting it into easy to understand and to memorize slogans, aided by the child-friendly visual aspect.

### Romanian historical comics

As stated above, Romanian comics did not reach such a level of relevance for the society as a whole, and neither were they truly innovative as it relates to storytelling or artistic quality, despite some notable contributions. They were either not allowed to reach such a status due to censorship (Teampău, 2012b), or they were simply not good enough to coagulate a veritable field and a solid fanbase in Communist Romania. This situation laid on the fact that Romania did not have a "tradition" of comic book production and consumption, even though occasional strips had entered the public arena since the end of the 19th century. It is important to note that all writers and artists involved into the Romanian comic book

<sup>2</sup> In fact, Romania provided important logistical support for this review, having published many of its issues and of other titles under its editorial umbrella, such as *Corinne et Jeannot* or *Rahan* (Niță, Tomuleț, 2005, 305). To be noted that if at first this publication was a financing source for the French Communist Party, during the 60s and 70s, later on it only sustained itself due to the collaboration with Eastern states, such as Romania, Bulgaria or Hungary, the fall of communism also causing its bankruptcy (Niță, 2001, 37). For a broader discussion on this topic, see Teampău, 2012a.

<sup>3</sup> In this case, efficiency involves the quantity of almanacs/magazines/albums published for each issue, the public reach (local, regional or nationwide), the credentials (household writers and artists) and the distribution (consumers could get subscriptions to magazines such as *Cutezători* or *Luminița*).

<sup>4</sup> Some novels, poems, plays, songs or comics managed to carry towards the public such elements which eluded censorship due to their vagueness and equivocal interpretation and, extremely rarely, due to the censoring organ's lack of vigilance or even acceptance (these "hidden" messages used to be popularly called "lizards" and provided delights to the aware consumer).

scene had other jobs and even though they sometimes got lucrative settlements (see, for example, Niță, Ciubotariu, 2010b), they did not rely solely on this activity in order to earn their livelihood. Comics were not regarded as an artistical field in a true sense, capable of providing veritable aesthetic delights, but rather as a form of juvenile entertainment and also as a useful tool of indoctrinating the young public into the official ideology forged and transmitted by the ruling party. Given the scarcity of other youth entertainment possibilities and the aspect the message takes in comic book form (visually suggestive and/or appealing, concise, clear, memorable, motivating), the Communist Party took advantage of these features and made use of comics in order to disseminate the ideological imperatives by other means than highly regulated institutions (such as schools).

Censorship paid much attention to the final product, sometimes actively interfering with the images, the texts or the symbolism and the meaning of the stories (for example, figures of authority such as policemen were not to be presented in a bad or demeaning light; the last page of a story in which some cosmonauts caught a spy on a Russian spaceship had to be redrawn, under the pretext that on a Soviet spaceship there can never be a spy (Niță, Ciubotariu, 2010b). Party ideologues were even more scrupulous when dealing with historical comics, the richest segment of the Romanian comic book scene during Communism (along with adventure, humorous, sci-fi and social comics, as they were categorized by Niță, 1992, and Niță, Ciubotariu, 2010a).

Historical comics were constantly monitored by the ruling party because they had to strictly fit the official historical narrative, built in academic spheres under harsh ideological instructions and disseminated via learning institutions (schools, universities), cultural and entertainment products (books, paintings, films, comic books, songs), public events, ceremonies, rituals and monuments (parades, festivals, discourses, statues, official holidays and celebrations). As Magda Cârneci puts it, once the Central and East European countries fell under the Communist influence brought by the Soviet Union, “the artistical field was drastically subordinated to a way of existence profoundly marked by the repressive primacy of totalitarian ideology” in which artistic evolution became too distinct from the international evolution of modern art and was dominated by specific socio-cultural norms (Cârneci, 2013, 11).

Of course, this assertion needs to be contextualized, since historians split the 45 years of Romanian communism into three main periods: the brutal imposing of the new regime and the building of the Socialist society (from the end of the Second World War until the beginning of the '60s), the “normalizing” period, in which the regime sought to consolidate Socialism (from the beginning of the '60s up to the mid '70s) and, finally, the last period of stagnation and decadence (which finishes at the end of the ninth decade of the 20th century). Magda Cârneci also states that these periods are operational in the field of arts too, each having its own features, purposes and functioning mechanisms: the first period being characterized by *totalitarian art*, a so-called “Socialist realism”, the second by the emergence of an *alternative art* alongside *official art* in the context of a relative ideological defrost and the third by the perpetual distancing of the two creative lodes (Cârneci, 2013, 12).

As a medium, comics were forbidden in Romania during 1949 and 1953, being considered a manifestation of the Western corrupt and worthless mentality, a sort of “Capitalist filth”, as they were categorized in the USSR. After Stalin’s demise, comic books started to appear again, but very scarcely and only as graphic adaptations of politically accepted novels, such as *Timur și băieții lui* [*Timur and his boys*], which was the graphic conversion of Arkadii Gaidar’s novel *The Commander of the Snow Fortress*, dealing with the childhood of a boy during the collectivization phase in the land of the Soviets (Niță, Ciubotariu, 2010b, 17). Edmond Baudouin, a comic book creator of Romanian origin, also observed that Communist leaders perceived comic books as a purely American invention which constituted a threat to the party’s ideological purity and, as a consequence, they were prohibited (cf. Martin, 2006).

All (very few) comic books which dealt with historical events, situations or personalities followed the official ideological imperatives of the time: vehemently negating national and individual sentiments, promoting internationalism etc. “The new history” created by Mihail Roller sought to practically destroy the shared symbolism of the recent act of Romanian unification, framing it as an imperialist manoeuvre and substituting national unity with class struggle as the motor of history (the relations with the West have been dropped out in favour of immersing Romanian history into the Slavic space



and the role of the Church was replaced with militant atheism) (Boia, 1997, 67-68).

Under the pressure of the “Soviet pantheon” and the Stalinist mythos, the whole Romanian identity structure was blown to pieces, even the difficult issue of ethnic origin being avoided, class struggle and revolutions getting imbued with foundational value (the Dacian kings were blamed for having created their state on slavery, while the Roman conquerors were seen as the ancient equivalent of present-day Capitalists) (Boia, 1997, 108). Former national heroes and leaders (mostly recent ones, the kings and the Brătianu dynasty) were expelled in favour of more revolutionary figures, such as Gheroghe Doja, Horea, Cloșca, Crișan, Tudor Vladimirescu and mostly Nicolae Bălcescu, seen as the leader of the 1848 revolution (which he surely was not) and the unnamed leaders of class struggle milestones, from Dacian rebellions to the Bobâlna peasant uprising; it is true that some rulers still benefited from ideological clemency, as it happened with Ioan Vodă due to his animosity towards high gentry, Ștefan cel Mare or Dimitrie Cantemir due to their sympathy towards the Russians (Boia, 1997, 261).

Comics started being produced in larger quantity only after 1965, the year of Ceaușescu’s access to political power, and mostly after 1970. The focus moved again on the nation, seen as a metaphysical reality, out of the reach of historical turbulences. The fore-blamed personalities were recovered and integrated into the national mythos (with the notable exceptions of the Romanian modern kings, the Hohenzollerns who, paradoxically, were the ones leading the state when it gained its national sovereignty and unity). The coordinating principle was the idea of correspondence between the past and the present. In a veritable mythical setting, national history was seen as a mental and factual continuum, shaped by the same concepts, interactions and ideals regardless of the era, the context or the persons involved.

In a very elaborate propaganda construct, myth and legend blended in with historical reality, many made-up or undocumented events and figures being integrated into official historical discourse as factual. A plethora of virtuous outlaws, peasants, soldiers, underground communist fighters or brave children filled the drawn pages with their adventures and, not seldom, discourses. Sometimes it was clear that the story was just the result of imagination, that it was about the graphic interpretation of fairy tales, sagas or epic ballads, but many times the

boundaries between reality and fantasy got blurred or even suppressed. For an untrained eye and a non-critical reading, as it was the case with the younger public, these imagined events and characters proved to be much more influential than actual history and some of them reached exemplary status, shaping individual and group mentality even after the readers grew up. Everybody knew of the same “heroes”, of the same events and of the same catch-phrases, which circulated the same formulas and references, involving constant struggle towards general well-being and morality, bravery, self-sacrifice, grandiose historical tradition, trust in the wisdom of the class-aware leaders and so on.

Another shared feature of the language used in popular culture propaganda products (and it has to be said again: regardless of their aesthetic qualities!) which dealt with historical topics was anachronism. In all such products, be it films, plays, novels, poems or comic books, the characters (or the narrator) made use of roughly the same concepts, tone and linguistic formulas, until one had difficulties in identifying the specific period they were placed in. Dacians, princes and knights from the Middle Ages, modern revolutionaries, soldiers and officers in the World Wars or contemporary communists and pioneers, all talked about “nation”, “progress”, “class struggle”, “emancipation” etc., using these notions invariably, as if the Romanian people were always aware of their function, structure, purpose and historical mission. It was presented as a natural fact that Romanians were the carriers and the purveyors of a unique historical and even anthropological unshakable essence. The question of Romanian ethnogenesis was not considered an issue, the official discourse extending the concept of the “nation” deep into the past, so as to legitimize the present political status-quo. Romans and Dacians were not distinct people living during Antiquity, but a sort of proto-Romanians, fulfilling their historical destiny of creating the illustrious people who inhabited these (also self-conscious) lands.

The language used in comic books and in all popular media which circulated historical themes outlined an official bellicose stance, which alluded to a besieged fortress mentality, in which the political and social order was permanently under the attack of foreign or domestic enemies. Romanians were presented as having ever lived in a constant state of threat, at the crossroads of great nefarious empires and other hostile cabals, never reaching a state of peacefulness (this explaining

any unfulfilment Romania, as a country, experienced, the perfidious foreign powers or the domestic destabilizing agents relentlessly working against its national interests). History got filled with cases of aggressors, spies, traitors, all working for foreign entities (in fact, a list of well-established long-time enemies included the Romans in the first phases of the conquest, the Teutonic Knights, the Tatars, the Ottomans, the Habsburgs, the Germans during WWII, and occasionally the Persians, the Macedonians, the Hungarians, the Polish and so on, but never the Russians though). The official discourse was structured on a kind of dichotomy, in which there was no room for historical context and dynamism, the involved actors being metaphysically defined as monolithic and unchangeable, fulfilling their destiny in a straightforward manner. The conflicts Romanians got involved in were always of a defensive nature, and therefore virtuous. The need of permanent vigilance towards external and internal threats justified any action, past or present, and this paranoid mentality got fuelled by media channels (even industrial and agricultural fields used terms such as “campaign” or “assault” when talking about economic plans) and educational institutions (pupils in schools had to take classes such as *The Preparation of Youth for Homeland Defence*, each school was structured in groups, brigades and units, and the signs of honour and distinction closely followed military fashion: medals, epaulettes, lanyards and so on).

Another thing that has to be said before presenting the selected material is that if in the first period of Romanian Communism the scarce historical comic book production insisted, as it was expected, given the ideological internationalist milieu, on masses and mostly nameless characters, during the Ceaușescu's regime this situation changed and great historical figures were again put into the forefront, as an attempt to establish a connection not only between past and present, but between important names of Romanian history and Ceaușescu himself. These figures possessed the same virtues at all times (bravery, intelligence, dignity, patriotism, compassion, fairness) and they passed them over time, until reaching the highest point of what being a Romanian meant, a status reified in the person of Ceaușescu, the “fatherland's most beloved son”, as he was often referred to. These past favoured leaders (because there were also not favoured ones, such as the Phanariot rulers or the modern Romanian kings, as it was stated above) were only presented in a good light, their

accomplishments being exploited and their shortcomings (which were, in some cases, no small matter) always explained away or simply ignored. Romanian history was outlined in a Hegelian matrix as a relentless and logical development along the guiding lines of class struggle, national sovereignty and independence.

In this overview of Romanian historical comics which deal with the idea of national unity and independence, the selected material shall be classified following a thematical chronology and not a creative chronology. For the subject of this paper it is more important to underline the ideological selection rather than the strict mechanical phases of production. Furthermore, things did not drastically change within the major periods of the communist regime (in some cases years and even decades were non-existent as it relates to official discourse, meaning that something which was issued in 1975 could as well be discursively completely functional in 1988).

### **Antiquity: The first episodes of the fight for independence**

The oldest reference about the struggle for independence of the people's residing in what is today Romania involves the Persian king Darius' campaign in Dobrudja during 514 BC. It is true that he did not encounter Romanians, but Dacians (also referred to as Getae or Getae-Dacians). They were commonly considered to be our direct ancestors and so it came naturally to project their situation, attributes and action onto present-day Romanians. Their virtues were glamorously and repetitively listed so as to never be overlooked. A short graphic story from 1986, entitled *It happened 2 500 years ago* begins with these phrases:

“This year we celebrate 2500 years from the first battles the Getae-Dacian people fought in order to preserve their liberty and independence. In the year 514 before common era<sup>5</sup>, a huge Persian army, led by Darius I, entered Dobrudja, on Getae-Dacian territory. Before trespassing Dacia's border, many nations bowed down to Darius. But our valiant ancestors, with their legendary bravery and their great love of this land, rose fiercely to battle. The news of their bold

<sup>5</sup> This secularized formula avoided the religious reference embedded in the “Before Christ” tag and it was the norm during Communism.

struggle circumnavigated the ancient world, astonishing the scholars of that age.” (Figure 1)



Fig. 1: Darius' campaign on the left bank of the Danube.

The technique of creating good comics, in which drawing and text are intertwined in intelligent and attractive ways, was cast aside due to ideological imperatives, and as a result the written text took too much space, unbalancing the page layout. Beyond the rudimentary technique, what strikes most is the ossified tone and content of the narration. Dacians were not only fearless, strong and just, but also cognizants of medical science and the practitioners of a lived natural philosophy. The metaphors they used as a response to Darius' imperialist demands ("soil and water", as it was commonly known) were present in other media, for example in the *Dacians* film from 1970<sup>6</sup>, although in the time of Decebalus, more than six centuries later.

Historical facts are blurry in this regard, not many actual vestiges of the Persian campaign in the North of the Danube remaining as proof (what is certainly known is that Darius marched against

Scythians whom he wanted to incorporate into his empire and not necessarily against Dacians). Although the Persian campaign was considered to be successful, the political implications were not harsh, mainly due to geopolitical reasons (the Persians fearing a possible alliance of the tribes from the North and the South of the Danube), but that did not stop the official discourse placing Darius' reluctance on the bravery of the Dacian fighters. The main historical source is Herodotus, and his quotation on the Getae as being "the bravest and the fairest of the Thracians" gained huge traction in the official historiography (but it has to be mentioned that the well-known quotation was incomplete and the full paragraph painted a much less flattering image of the Thracians as a whole). The empty factual space is covered by legend, and therefore historical fantasy could express itself freely, operating with characters, facts and events which do not require rigorous certifying.

#### Other episodes from Antiquity

The next great moment in Romanian historical comics was the Macedonian campaign from around 300 BC, under the command of Alexander's general, Lysimachus. The invaders were also astonished by the bravery, the sense of freedom and justice the inhabitants of these lands possessed. They were not only surpassed in terms of strength and will at an individual level, but also outsmarted by these people who were always equal and true to themselves. We may deduce that the only chance all the conquerors stood resided in their numbers.

In this phase we encounter the first of the great Dacian kings, Dromichaetes, who played an important part in the discourse of popular history. A valiant, strong, just and, not in the least, very handsome man, he initiated the glorious Dacian kings triad, followed (but not in immediate succession) by Burebista and Decebalus. Historical accounts also give proof of his great diplomatic abilities, which served him well in the conflict against the Macedonians.<sup>7</sup> Preserving

<sup>6</sup> Their emissaries brought a mouse, a frog, a bird and a set of arrows as gifts to the invading army leader. The decoding of the message revealed a dire warning: "if you are not able to hide under the ground as mice do, in the water as frogs or in the sky as birds, you will not be able to escape our arrows".

<sup>7</sup> Having captured Lysimachus and his captains, he did not humiliate them, but offered a big feast at which the Macedonians were served using the most expensive kitchenware, while the Dacians used wooden tools, displaying the relation between a great conquering power and a humble peaceful people. Lysimachus was set free, thus a strong alliance being established between the Macedonians and the Getae, which was strengthened even further by Lysimachus' daughter marriage with Dromichaetes. This episode was



their political and spiritual freedom by use of diplomacy and, if needed, force, was considered to be a main feature of the Romanian (and their Dacian ancestors) people, which manifested itself throughout the entire known history, culminating with Ceaușescu, a would-be diplomat of global importance.

#### *Burebista and Decebalus*

Burebista was, arguably, Ceaușescu's most loved historical figure. Maybe due to the fact that he was the first to ever unify Dacian tribes and establish, "the first centralized and independent Dacian state", as it was known in Romanian nationalist-communist historiography; a vast military and political powerhouse of the time, feared by the Romans themselves. The fact that he was not conquered added to his symbolic importance, although the later Decebalus might have been a stronger and more important king (but since he lost the wars against the Romans and committed suicide in the process, he was a lesser candidate for the historical projection of the great absolute leader, as Ceaușescu thought of himself).

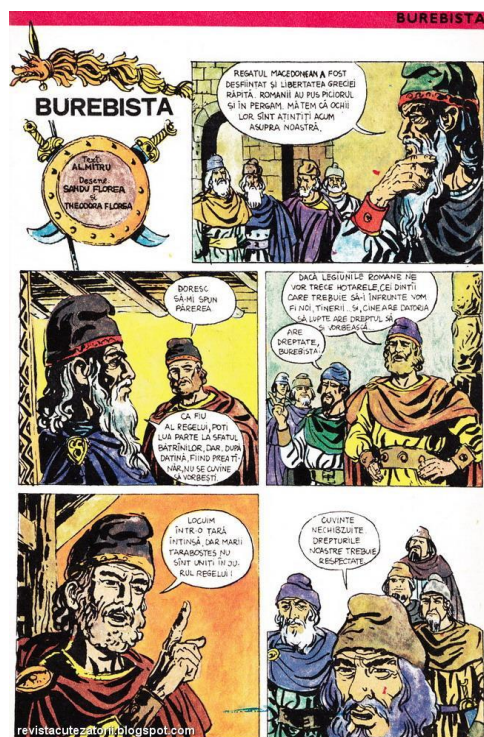


Fig. 2: Burebista facing the great Dacian nobility, the *tarabostes*.

In 1980 there was instituted a rather peculiar celebration: 2 050 years from the creation of "the

first centralized and independent Dacian state" under Burebista's rule. Not caring about the odd number for a celebration and neither for historical precision, this expression of blatant protochronism was set to assert the preeminence of Romanians as direct descendants from the Getae-Dacians in the face of their neighbours, who had their own interpretation of historical facts and their own ideological priorities. Also, the Dacian ruler who kept his independence in face of the Roman power (in the absence of direct conflict, though, since Rome was itself immersed in inner turbulences at the time) was an ideal model for Ceaușescu, who wanted to keep his independence from another great and capricious entity, the USSR. The festive stance engulfed all media channels, via documentaries, artistic movies, books (such as *Carmen Saeculare Valachicum. 2 050 de ani de la crearea primului stat dac centralizat și independent sub conducerea lui Burebista*, which pompously claims to select documents aimed at presenting the historic saga of the Romanians from the most ancient times to present day), comic strips, stamps, coins and even grandiose official festivities. Burebista was, by consequence, the most drawn historical figure, in no less than five comic strips and books.

Decebalus also benefited from a visible presence in Romanian popular culture, being also considered a brave and dignified leader, and his unfortunate demise did not diminish his symbolic stature. His resistance to conquest and refusal to accept a vassal status imposed him as a tragic historical figure whose sacrifice marked the beginning of Romans colonizing Dacia and, therefore, giving birth to the Romanian people. This over-simplified version of ethnogenesis was pushed into popular culture via all possible channels, being taught in schools as the only possible variant.

Other lesser known Dacian leaders (such as Dapix) got a part in the graphic medium, but did not reach a notable presence. What is worth noting is that on many occasions Dacians were said to consider other tribes as "barbarians" (the Celtic tribes of Boii and Tauriscii or tribes of Germanic origin, for example), clearly claiming belonging to the Classic civilization, mostly represented by the Greeks and the Romans. Not on few instances they even resorted to making fun of Romans for their technological or cultural backwardness (for still using wooden plows instead of metal ones, as the Dacians did). The supposed medical prowess of the Dacians, their deep philosophical stance and their serenity in accepting life and death as

common knowledge, being exploited in all forms of Romanian popular culture.

they came (being said to always smile when dying in battle - a much floated cliché in movies, books and comics) granted them a superior status among the peoples of the Antiquity. Of course, nothing which risked altering the positive image of the Dacians could penetrate the rigorously monitored medium or popular culture for that matter.<sup>8</sup>

What also stands out after reading the comics on this subject is that Dacians did not seem to change their attitude, their way of talking, dressing and acting, seemingly being immutable as a natural given. On the other hand, the various invaders also seem to exhibit the same automatic attitudes and habits, their uniforms being the only visible mark of distinction. However, conquerors coming from great civilisations, such as the Persians, the Macedonians or the Romans benefited from a more positive light than other sporadic invaders (the “barbarians”) and were at times considered strong, cultured and just, beyond the inherent evil of imperialism.

## The Middle Ages

### *The early years*

The complex and difficult issue of Romanian ethnogenesis was discursively set: the Romans and the Dacians intermingled and gave birth to a new people, who inhabited these lands continuously even after the Aurelian retreat started in 271, and in the face of countless invasions which lasted for more than a millennium. Even if historical sources were extremely scarce in this regard, the official doctrine never accepted any deviance from it. The early attested principalities were all taken as proof of Romanian ethnic and cultural continuity, resisting or integrating all migrationist elements that came across their territories (regardless of the obvious ethno-linguistic variety in the names of the first known knezes and voivodes: Litovoi,

<sup>8</sup> In a successful book which popularized the history of the Dacians, the great historian Hadrian Daicoviciu cites the Latin historian Iordanes, who noted that the Dacians used to cross the Danube river and pillage the adjacent areas, which constituted a great annoyance to the Roman rule and offered a valid incentive for conquest and submission (Daicoviciu, 1968, 229). Of course, these raids were considered to be justified as preemptive strikes against Roman imperialism in the perpetual fight for national sovereignty. In the second edition of the book, passages alluding to the habitual raids South of the Danube were taken out, though (Daicoviciu, 1972).

Seneslau, Farkas, Glad, Menumorut, Basarab and so on).

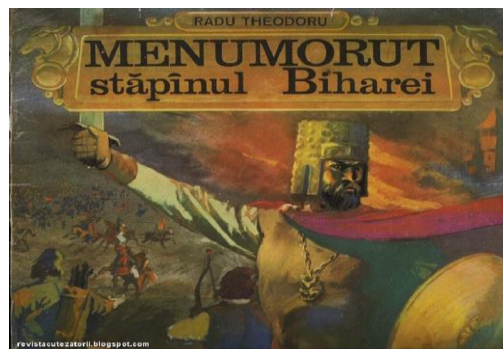


Fig. 3: Menumorut wearing a well-known Dacian helmet.

This undisputed idea of continuity was confirmed not only by the conscience of belonging to the same nation and by the bond with local geography, but also by the same spiritual and cultural stream, almost identical to that of the Dacians'. Characters used to dress and talk just like their ancestors, as if time did not change the eternal soul and profile of these people (for example, Menumorut, a prince from the Western parts of Romanian provinces, is portrayed as wearing a well-known golden Dacian helmet, which was also worn by Dacian kings in other comic strips, movies, stamps or illustrations – Figure 3). Some of the more talented writers of the genre, such as Radu Theodoru or Dumitru Almaş, who became household names in historical fantasy, managed to bestow their craft in creating local and temporal atmosphere, using vocabulary and phrasing borrowed from old chronicles, but in combination with the vehement ideological theses and the empty catchphrases, a sense of artificial inadequacy imbued the final result. A rather poor editing strategy (once again, too much text in and between images, always the same fonts, unbalanced spatial distribution of bubbles on the pages, poor colouring, unrealistic dynamics, proportion and perspective inconsistencies etc.) contributed to this feeling of distant affectation.

Although these small medieval principalities were scattered all over the land of former Dacia and many did not have ties with each other, they were all seen as instances of Romanian identity and resistance. They were thought to share a national or at least a cultural and historic consciousness, aware of their belonging to the same ethnic entity.

### *The medieval triad*



Out of the Romanian medieval princes depicted in comics in different narrative and artistic qualitative degrees (Menumorut, Litovoi, Basarab I, Vlad Țepeș, Ioan-Vodă, Iancu de Hundedoara etc.), three stand out in the official hierarchy and got the most abundant material: Mircea cel Bătrân (The Old), Ștefan cel Mare (The Great) and Mihai Viteazul (The Brave). Not being contemporaries, but ruling some centuries apart, they were the guardians of Romanian (relative) independence and (hesitant) unity (although they did not live in the same provinces)<sup>9</sup>.

Mircea cel Bătrân was also a historical figure Ceaușescu loved and in a reversed discursive strategy, in which the past was embellished in order to match present ideological imperatives, played the role of an avatar of the Communist supreme leader. Having reigned for a long time (for more than two decades, in two rounds, between 1386-1394 and 1397-1418), he managed to enlarge Wallachian territory to its biggest expansion while remaining independent (although he was a vassal of the Hungarian king and by the end of his reign he accepted to pay tribute to the Ottomans) and to impose Wallachia as a relevant regional actor.



<sup>9</sup> Occasional conflicts between Romanian provinces, be them direct or by proxy, were not often discussed in popular culture. Informed people may have known about Moldavia and Wallachia sometimes being at odds with each other (in the times of Vasile Lupu and Matei Basarab, for example), but that was not an issue presented to the younger public. As long as comics were involved, Romanians always shared a sense of belonging.

Fig. 4: Mircea cel Bătrân and his sage advisors preparing the defence against the ever-threatening Ottomans.

Initially, the title “the Old” (which did not refer to his age or the duration of his reign, but had the purpose of distinguishing him from his successors, just like in the case of Alexander Dumas – the Father as opposed to Alexander Dumas – the Son) was supposed to allude to his great wise and just rule. In the last years of the communist regime, though, his surname was changed to “the Great”, in an attempt to avoid the projection of “old age” to Ceaușescu himself.

Ștefan cel Mare was the next revered Romanian historical figure, although he only ruled Moldavia (1457-1504). His long reign and his ability to preserve Moldavia’s independence at the crossroads of great external pressuring factors (the Ottomans, Poland, Russia, Hungary) also made him a suitable candidate to be an honourable forerunner to the enlightened present-day ruler. He was seen as possessing an impressive sum of virtues and was often portrayed as a true Renaissance prince, who could speak foreign languages and was cognizant of philosophical ideas (an image which historians reasonably doubt). His rigorous faith was not the focus of any story, though, even though he was mentioned to have patronized the construction of many churches and monasteries.<sup>10</sup>

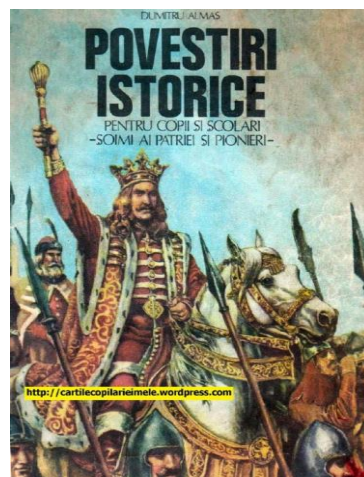


Fig. 5: Ștefan cel Mare proudly leading his army.

<sup>10</sup> Theological and faith-related concepts were present in stories (church, priest, angels, the Bible, God and so on – with less explicit references to Jesus Christ, though), as they could not have been avoided in order to reconstruct a believable historical atmosphere, but they were mostly linguistic automatisms, alluding to a sort of inherited and lived, yet not very thoughtful, religious stance.

Mihai Viteazul (the Brave) who ruled Wallachia from 1593 to 1600 and all three Romanian provinces for a short period in 1600 was, in some respects, the most revered historical figure of the (late) Middle Ages. His turbulent reign was cut short by treason and cowardly assassination, but not before he accomplished what was claimed to be “the centuries-long dream of Romanians”, their unity in a single political organism (Figure 6). Romanians’ self-awareness and political acumen were never questioned, just as a well-known natural fact which preceded each single individual and group (and maybe even the whole people, since the Dacians shared the same concepts and purposes).

In all these three cases the official discourse insisted solely on accomplishments and successes, not mentioning, grossly downplaying or even inaccurately presenting any failure as a minor or contextual happening. The voivodes were never weak, unsure of themselves, fearful or stupid. They never fled the battlefield (rarely they would resort to regrouping) and they always got personally involved in conflicts, taking actual part in combat (and they always looked powerful, strong and handsome while doing it). This imperative of always portraying the leader in a positive and aggrandizing light made them all seem alike, devoid of real character depth. They were pictured in the same poses, the same situations and positions, and they were always circulating the same tropes and catchphrases, a feature which in time became irritatingly artificial and tiring (but was also the norm in all other media channels).



Fig. 6: Mihai Viteazul defeating the eternal menace of Ottoman invasion.

Other princes also got their own books, series and strips in the comics medium, even if not to the same degree as the three major ones, who became constant references in Romanian popular culture. Vlad Țepeș (the Impaler) was favoured due to his bravery (personally leading the famous night-attack on sultan Mehmet the Second's encampment, a manoeuvre which, in fact, missed its purpose of killing him) and strict lawfulness (crime was supposed to have been drastically reduced by his draconian measures). His troubled character (his legendary bloodthirst and cruelty bordering insanity having inspired the all-time horror story *Dracula*) and his problematic reign (having spent many years in Hungarian prisons, losing and regaining the throne between 1448 and 1477, being at odds with former allies) made him a rather difficult figure to manage and therefore his depictions were temporally, spatially and thematically limited.

An interesting case is provided by the album dedicated to Ioan-Vodă cel Cumplit (the Terrible), later renamed “cel Viteaz” (the Brave), in a move to clean negative references in Romanian history. In his short and very troubled reign (1572-1574) he found himself involved in many social conflicts, especially against the great boyards, which in the end cut short his reign and his life (in a horrid manner). This struggle with the aristocratic class and his friendship with the Cossacks brought him ideological sympathy even in the first decade of Romanian communism, when the most part of princes of the past were blamed for the sin of nationalism and the main focus was shifted from the process of nation-building to class struggle. This particular album (Figure 7) stands out in the Romanian comic book scene, being one of the very few with a “bad” ending and actually staying close to (known) historical truth. Beyond the fair take on history, the graphic story manages to build a complex, humane and tragic main character, proving once more that comic books are a viable artistic medium and can actually function even in ideologically restrictive contexts.



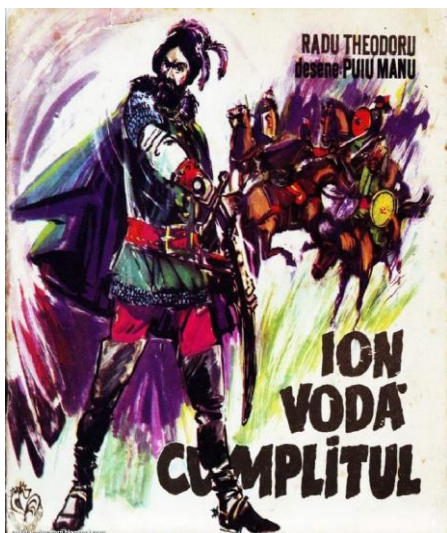


Fig. 7: Ioan Vodă cel Cumplit, one fierce and always angry ruler.

The tragic case of Constantin Brâncoveanu (ruling from 1688 to 1714) was also exploited in popular culture and the episode of his execution, together with his four sons, by the Ottoman authorities was bound to impress and send a clear message to the (young) public. He was painted as a martyr to the national cause, refusing to bow down in the face of the most extreme adversity and choosing a horrible death for him and his heirs, becoming an effigy of national extreme dedication to higher principles and of the will to self-sacrifice. His sons were also the model of submission to parental command and offered perfect examples to the young public, who was supposed to accept and never question the guidance of their symbolic parents, the party elders with the Ceaușescu couple on top, who were leading and guiding the whole nation with strict but benevolent intelligence. Of course, there were no references to Brâncoveanu's faith, and this aspect, of outmost importance in reality, was tacitly overlooked.

Inspired more by literary works than by historical treatises (or more by the Romantic trends in historical science, which had the tendency to glorify past figures and events), Romanian princes were narratively built to satisfy a rather fictional (and to a lesser degree, aesthetic) necessity than factual truth. Their gestures, actions and words in comics were borrowed from the works of great poets, novelists, playwrights (Alexandrescu, Bolintineanu, Delavrancea, Hasdeu, Eminescu, Coșbuc, Sadoveanu and others) and romantic historians (Bălcescu, for example), more than from chronicles. Their personalities were presented as noble and

impeccable and their attested flawed character traits, motives or actions were never referred to or questioned (such as Ștefan's anger issues and him being prone to "draw innocent blood", often killing without a proper trial, as the chronicler Grigore Ureche notes, or Mihai's self-aggrandizing tendencies).

An important part in the Romanian historical comics scene, with ideological implications at the level of national identity and unity, was played by historical fiction, meaning stories in which the characters and the events were not historically certified, but the narrative framework alluded to real contexts. For example, strips dedicated to Căliman Mână-de-Fier (Iron-Hand), a fictional captain in the army of Ștefan cel Mare, or Dan Buzdugan (Figure 8), a fighter for Mihai Viteazul, attracted many readers, due to their high-quality artistic features and entertaining plots and storytelling. In many ways, these purely fictional characters gained more narrative and exemplary weight than characters with real-life correspondents. In addition to these characters, which are created in the comics medium, there are others who are borrowed from traditional ballads, legends and fairy tales, and are put into new stories, some of which go rather far from the originals (Toma Alimoș, for example). Managing these characters seemed easier and more efficient, since historical truth was only a framing reference, allowing for a more casual, dynamic and somewhat slack storytelling. Their *modus operandi* was, though, standardized, and they all talked and acted as expected, using predictable formulas and actions.



Fig. 8: Dan Buzdugan, always putting the Turks to the ground.



## The Modern Era

### *Uprisings and revolutions*

The point of inflection between Middle Ages and modernity in Romanian history was considered to be much delayed compared to the western parts of the continent, due to social, economic and political reasons. The transition to modernity is accepted to have occurred only by the beginning of the 19th century, with the revolution of Tudor Vladimirescu, another tragic figure in the restless history of these lands. His actions and personality were also revered by the hardcore ideologues of the sixth decade of the 20th century, who interpreted his march towards Bucharest as a class-related issue. Later, in the years of national-communism under Ceaușescu, the national aspect of his endeavour was exploited and he became another great precursor of Romania's state unity and independence, in the general context of freedom movements inside eastern empires. His status was enshrined and his effigy became omnipresent once his image was placed on the 20 lei banknote (the national currency).

A few decades earlier, though, in Transylvania, the peasant uprising lead by Horea, Cloșca and Crișan marked an important episode in national history, as well as in national historiography. Again, the uprising was initially regarded as a purely economic and social phenomenon, the early historians of the Communist regime applauding Horea as a progressive leader who fought for serf emancipation and the removal of class privileges and exploitation. Later, the national dimension was brought upfront and Horea became a Romanian educated and wilful peasant, who fought for the official recognition of his fellow countrymen as equals to the other favoured nationalities of the province (Hungarians and Germans). His walk to Wien in order to get an audience with the Austrian emperor Joseph the Second entered the gallery of national myths and even penetrated the folklore (Figure 9).



Fig. 9: Horea, dazzling the emperor with his knowledge of Latin language, which he claims to have inherited from his ancestors, the Dacians and the Romans.

Another type of character has also been activated in order to keep, transmit and personify the necessity of individual and national liberty (from external oppressors, with no references to the philosophy of personal freedom, though) and even national conscience: the virtuous outlaw (haiduk). He was tailored to fit the official ideology having as model real-life (in)famous outlaws (Pintea, Adam Neamțu, Iancu Jianu and others), folk legends and ballads (Toma Alimoș), or being created for graphic stories as well as other popular culture products, such as the movie series around the group of outlaws led by Anghel Șaptecai (Seven Horses). The outlaw was the popular expression of social, economic and political justice, robbing the rich and helping the poor, as well as resisting against foreign intrusion and dominance. In all Romanian provinces, the outlaws struggled against the injustices perpetrated by the political rulers, their acolytes and subservients and it is relevant to note that while the outlaws were overwhelmingly ethnic Romanians, the oppressors were almost

exclusively foreigners (Phanariotes, Turks, Hungarians, Austrians, but never Russians).<sup>11</sup>

The historical moment when Romania got connected to the Western European flux of ideas and social and political actions, was the year of 1848, the time of bourgeois revolutions which swept all over the continent. It was, in many aspects, the manifestation of rapid modernization and emancipation. This moment, prepared by the intellectual elite in a romantic context got romanticized even more by the propaganda apparatus, in all periods of Romanian communism, albeit for different reasons: because of its social implications in the first decades and because of its national ones in the latter ones. The personalities involved in the process were presented as the luminaries who brought justice, freedom and a degree of equity in all provinces. The most promoted figure of the time was Nicolae Bălcescu, seen as the leader of the revolution in Wallachia, which he, a romantic intellectual with poor health was surely not (but he was the most revered historical figure in the ideologically oppressive sixth decade and he kept his high status even after the recovery of other, more nationalist-oriented figures of the past – his image was put on the 100 lei bill, the biggest currency banknote for decades).

The few armed conflicts were disastrous, such as the tragic battle of Dealul Spirii (Figure 10), in which a squad of Romanian firemen opposed the Ottoman troops and got slaughtered. The revolution in Transylvania reached a more relevant military dimension, Avram Iancu managing to amass an army of revolutionaries, but it was spared the bloody faith that stroke its Hungarian counterpart at the hands of imperial troops. As it was presented in comics, the Romanian revolutionaries were collaborating closely, mostly in secret, struggling to accomplish the two-headed ideal, of national independence and unity (Bălcescu went to meet Iancu, Moldavians came to Bucharest). As it was depicted in comics and popular culture, the revolution of 1848 became an entertaining historical thriller.

The act of unifying the first two Romanian provinces of Moldavia and Wallachia in 1859 was seen as a direct result of the 1848 movement, which in this respect was re-evaluated as a success, beyond its initial defeat. This comes unsurprisingly, since the personalities involved in both events were, for the most part, the same. The election in both provinces of Alexandru Ioan Cuza as ruler marked the fulfilment of the first national ideal of unity, even though the new political entity was still under Ottoman overlordship. This act was seen purely as the spontaneous will of the people, disregarding the possible implication of foreign powers (although some were depicted as favouring the act, such as France). Of course, there was no mentioning of geopolitical interests which might have favoured the act, nor the role Freemasonry played in it (although many of the 1848 revolutionaries which were still active in 1859 were well-known members). It also has to be noted that Cuza was the last head of state depicted in comics up to the post-war period, and that comes as no surprise for someone familiarized with Romanian history. To note that Cuza was the third historical figure placed on currency, on the 50 lei bill.



Fig. 10: The battle of Dealul Spirii, 13th September 1848.

<sup>11</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the topic of the outlaw in Romanian comic-books, see Teampău, 2012a.



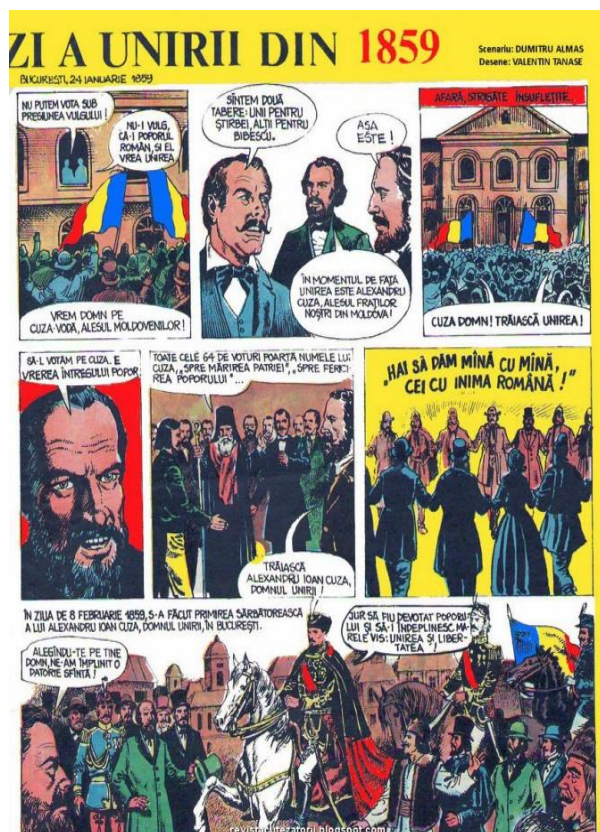


Fig. 11: The celebration of national unity.

The following great act of obtaining national independence via a war against the Ottomans was itself a follow-up to the strengthening of Romanian identity and the creation of a state which filled a power vacuum in this political area, where three waning empires were bordering each other. What has to be noted is that another vital event in Romanian history was completely overlooked: the bringing of a new king from the Hohenzollern dynasty (Carol the First) and his enthroning in the place of Cuza after his abdication. The new head of state was a foreigner (a German) and that was another reason (beyond his aristocratic upbringing) for ideologues to purge him from popular history. Even though he was the person who led the country into obtaining state independence after a bloody war, other personalities took the first role in the entertainment products which dealt with this event, such as politicians and intellectuals, or second-tier military figures, such as major Gheorghe Șonțu or captain Valter Mărăcineanu, fallen heroes in the war, who became effigies of the Romanian spirit. But the most part of soldiers and officers were just imaginary, bearing common names and speaking in standardized phrases, which “sounded” quite artificial in panels of intense conflict (“I won’t let you be ashamed of

me, brave sergeant”, “our banner shines so beautifully” and so on – Figure 12). Without integrating the highest level of political decision in the narrative frame, the storylines seem suspended and lacking true purpose and direction. The fight for independence is presented as having been the sheer will of the people, detached from high politics and diplomacy, but it also feels artificial and unconvincing.



Fig. 12: The struggle for independence required much self-sacrifice.

Another historical event which got much attention, mostly in the first decades of communism, was the peasant uprising of 1907. It was framed as a textbook example of class conflict, but it lacked the national aspect, since the nation-state had been already formed and external threats were at an all-time low. The revolted peasants and the politicians who used the army to defeat them were all Romanians, so the only possible outcome was to put all the blame on the ruling party of the time, the liberal party. Strangely enough, the king was also missing on this occasion which could have provided a good excuse to blame him for the social and economic difficulties of the new state he was leading (but that would have meant that he was there, and the propaganda apparatus decided he should be

ejected from factual history – pupils could actually finish school without even having heard of the Romanian kings from the Hohenzollern dynasty). This event provided another reason to reject economic and social practices of foreign inspiration (liberalism) and the adopting of socialism as the “natural” way history and nations progress (as if socialism itself was not conceptualized and theorized by foreigners).

### *The World Wars*

The First World War was such a shock that it blasted into national conscience and changed forever the perception and the concept of history. It took hold of high and popular culture and many books, films, comic books made it a major topic for decades. In comics it was treated roughly the same as the War for Independence: the head of state (King Carol and then King Ferdinand the First) was missing, the focus being placed on the lower-tier, at the level of soldiers, corporals, sergeants, and some officers, such as lieutenants, captains and majors. Occasionally, high-ranking officers were named, such as general Grigorescu or marshal Averescu, but that was the highest level historical identification went.

More attractive were unique individual cases, such as Ecaterina Teodoroiu, a woman who declared herself to be a man in order to get permission to be enrolled and fight against German invaders. She was a much revered figure, depicted in many products, from films to comics, and such cases were presented as being the reason Romania won the war. In fact, the disastrous situation the country found itself during the war (its territory being reduced to the province of Moldavia, without Bessarabia and North Bucovina, which had been taken by the Russians the previous century) was transformed into a proof of valour for the undefeated Romanian spirit, expressed in the glorious fights of Mărășești, Mărăști and Oituz. These undisputedly great moments of Romanian history got so much praise in popular culture that they covered the general situation and were at times presented as having led to victory by themselves (international context was less present and Russia giving up on war and leaving its allies due to the Bolshevik Revolution was not mentioned).

What immediately followed the war, the final steps of national unity, were seen as the crowning of millennia long efforts of the Romanian people, all the historical provinces forming a single independent state. The accent was placed on the unification of the last two provinces, Transylvania

and Banat, which were taken from the Dualist Empire, an active part to the war and ending up on the losing side (not much was said about Bessarabia and Bucovina, which were taken from the Russian empire, though). The 1st of December 1918 became, thus, the climax of a troubled, yet purposeful history (after the nationalist turn in the official ideology, since in the first decades of communist rule it was seen as an imperial and aggressive act).



Fig. 13: Victory in war, unity and independence, a dream come true.

What differentiates the way the Second World War was depicted in comics refers to the actors involved: the Communists made their entrance in history and took the main part in the developing of all events. The Patriotic Guards, civilians involved in combat, were portrayed as being braver and more knowledgeable than professional armies. The illegal fighters from the interwar period became full-blown political leaders, mastering the ideological discourse as well as the art of combat and any other necessary craft. Recognizable real historical figures were even fewer than in the case of the First World War, no generals or colonels getting into the spotlight, where only middle and low-tier military men were performing (from soldiers to majors at most). Of course, the head of the state was again absent, be it King Michael or marshal Antonescu (for almost a century, Romania seemed to be a leaderless state).



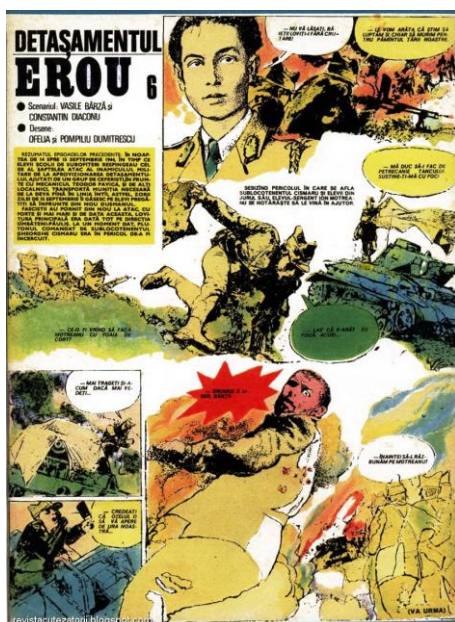


Fig. 14: German tanks cannot match “our hatred”.

Unsurprisingly, the fight of Romanians during the Second World War was only depicted as happening against Nazi Germany, never saying a single word about the first part of the conflict, when Romania was allied with the Axis powers. Judging by how it was presented in comics (and other media, let us not forget it), it would seem that for Romanians the war started on 23rd of August 1944, after switching sides and fighting against their former allies. This date became the national holiday and a moment of yearly grandiose displays of megalomaniac shows all over Romania during Ceaușescu’s regime.

Furthermore, the fight against Fascism was not considered to have ended in 1945, but to continue indefinitely, until its last shreds (real or imaginary) were erased from history. A sort of national paranoia was instituted through propaganda, society needing constant vigilance and preparation for this eternal struggle against foreign insidious agents, remnants from Fascist regimes tirelessly working in the shadows against national order and supported by hostile governments (always capitalist, imperialist and Western, and never socialist or Soviet). Romania was always in danger of losing its independence at the hands of nefarious international cabals and the sole salvation was the retreat and the consolidation of the national fortress led by the “great helmsman”, Ceaușescu himself.

#### *Ceaușescu*

After his visit in China and getting a glimpse of a true and grotesque cult of personality,

Ceaușescu wanted his own version of it. He initiated the Cultural Revolution in 1971 which abruptly ended the short period of relative economic and ideological relaxation (1965-1971). Cultural products were strictly evaluated by party ideologues and they had to comply with official directives, in order to combat the “elements of bourgeois ideology” of Western inspiration, which were corrupting the authentic Romanian cultural and artistic life (Burakowski, 2011, 155). History became one hot topic, as it was a main tool of indoctrination, in order to justify and promote the current state of affairs. In fact, history, as it was publicly disseminated in popular culture, was nothing more than a backward extension of present-day imperatives.

Ceaușescu was the sole guardian of social peace, economic stability and national integrity, on par with the great heroes of the past and even greater, since he could finally enact their (presumed) projects (Figure 15). He was presented as having inherited all of their qualities (and none of their faults) and putting them to good use due to his superior intellect and will. He was a constant reference in all media channels, almost all popular magazines, journals and almanacs having his pictures and quotations on the first pages (regardless of their profile and topic). He was not depicted much in comics (maybe artists feared not being able to flatter him enough in their art), but he was a constant presence in the subtext, in secondary references, such as vocabulary, ideas, discourses and actions. He even resorted to symbolic paraphernalia of power, such as the national flag sash and the sceptre (at least while wearing a modern costume and not armour or crown).

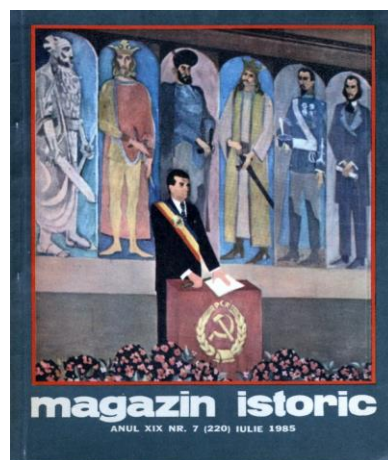


Fig. 15: Ceaușescu as the final and best avatar of the national hero.

## Conclusion

In comic book analysis it is paramount to always be aware of the general cultural (and also political, social and economic) context, since comics are never created in a vacuum, as it has to be incessantly pointed out. Comics can be evaluated from a purely technical perspective, of course, but even then one has to look into adjacent fields and follow influences, causalities and determinations. But comics become relevant mostly due to their narrative and symbolic content (otherwise risking remaining just the hobby of a few extravagant artists). When referring to Romanian comics published during communist rule, we need to be aware of the distinction between various types of comics (historical, social, humorous, sci-fi/fantasy and adventure), in order to clearly identify the factors that influenced it, be it for propagandistic purposes, veiled or explicit satire or purely for entertainment.

Romanian historical comics were among the most strictly ideologically supervised, since history (better said, a specific interpretation of history) became a main tool of indoctrination and nothing could be left unchecked. As in other media channels which dealt with historical topics, comics' function was not mainly educational (maybe even less when professed) and in just a small sense entertaining. Their main purpose was indoctrination and this appears obvious especially

in the cases where ideological imperatives ignored artistic, narrative and even logical necessities.

Furthermore, history, as it was presented in comic books and strips, was selected and interpreted along the lines of present ideological interests, sometimes with blatant counterfactual results and almost always emanating a feeling of speciousness. Inconvenient historical events and figures were grossly misrepresented or simply ignored (Romania's alliance with the Axis powers at the beginning of the Second World War or the modern Romanian kings, for example). The path of historical development towards the present-day status was presented as inexorable, as if it were a predictable natural phenomenon, governed by laws which only the "illuminated" Communist party and its adherents completely understood.

Beyond all that, though, the rather small Romanian comic book scene was the space in which, at times, authors and artists could sneak little, undamaging and mostly playful hints which inserted cracks in the monolithic propaganda edifice in the eyes of those aware (for example, Valentin Tănase, a declared Beatles fan, putting Paul McCartney's visage on a Roman senator or George Harrison's on a construction worker). Comic books are, undoubtedly, a field which needs thorough research in order to fully grasp the intricacies of social and cultural contexts and interactions.

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**LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS**

- Figure 1: Darius' campaign on the left bank of the Danube, taken from <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, last accessed 21st May 2022.
- Figure 2: Burebista facing the great Dacian nobility, the *tarabostes*, taken from <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, last accessed 21st May 2022.
- Figure 3: Menumorut wearing a well-known Dacian helmet, taken from <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, last accessed 21st May 2022.
- Figure 4: Mircea cel Bătrân and his sage advisors preparing the defence against the ever-threatening Ottomans, taken from <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, last accessed 21st May 2022.
- Figure 5: Ștefan cel Mare proudly leading his army, taken from <https://cartilecopilarieimele.wordpress.com/>, last accessed 21st May 2022.
- Figure 6: Mihai Viteazul defeating the eternal menace of Ottoman invasion, taken from <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, last accessed 21st May 2022.
- Figure 7: Ioan Vodă cel Cumplit, one fierce and always angry ruler, taken from <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, last accessed 21st May 2022.
- Figure 8: Dan Buzdugan, always putting the Turks to the ground, taken from <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, last accessed 21st May 2022.
- Figure 9: Horea, dazzling the emperor with his knowledge of Latin language, which he claims to have inherited from his ancestors, the Dacians and the Romans, taken from <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, last accessed 21st May 2022.
- Figure 10: The battle of Dealul Spirii, 13th September 1848, taken from <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, last accessed 21st May 2022.
- Figure 11: The celebration of national unity, taken from <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, last accessed 21st May 2022.
- Figure 12: The struggle for independence required much self-sacrifice, taken from <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, last accessed 21st May 2022.
- Figure 13: Victory in war, unity and independence, a dream come true, taken from <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, last accessed 21st May 2022.
- Figure 14: German tanks cannot match "our hatred", taken from <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, last accessed 21st May 2022.
- Figure 15: Ceaușescu as the final and best avatar of the national hero, taken from Magazin istoric, year 19, no. 7 (220) July 1985.

**LISTA ILUSTRAȚIILOR**

- Figura 1: Campania lui Darius pe malul stâng al Dunării, luată de pe <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, ultimă accesare 21 mai 2022.
- Figura 2: Burebista față în față cu marea nobilime a dacilor, tarabostes, luată de pe <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, ultimă accesare 21 mai 2022.
- Figura 3: Menumorut purtând un bine cunoscut coif dacic, luată de pe <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, ultimă accesare 21 mai 2022.
- Figura 4: Mircea cel Bătrân și înțelepții săi sfetnici pregătind defensiva împotriva mereu amenințătorilor otomani, luată de pe <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, ultimă accesare 21 mai 2022.
- Figura 5: Ștefan cel Mare conducându-și cu fală armata, luată de pe <https://cartilecopilarieimele.wordpress.com/>, ultimă accesare 21 mai 2022.
- Figura 6: Mihai Viteazul învingând eterna amenințare otomană, luată de pe <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, ultimă accesare 21 mai 2022.
- Figura 7: Ioan Vodă cel Cumplit, un domn feros și mereu furios, luată de pe <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, ultimă accesare 21 mai 2022.
- Figura 8: Dan Buzdugan, întotdeauna punându-i pe turci la pământ, luată de pe <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, ultimă accesare 21 mai 2022.
- Figura 9: Horea, uimindu-l pe împărat cu cunoștințele sale de limbă latină, pe care susține că le-a moștenit de la strămoșii săi daci și romani, luată de pe <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, ultimă accesare 21 mai 2022.



Figura 10: Bătălia din Dealul Spirii, 13 Septembrie 1848, luată de pe <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, ultima accesare 21 mai 2022.

Figura 11: Sărbătorirea unității naționale, luată de pe <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, ultima accesare 21 mai 2022.

Figura 12: Lupta pentru independență a cerut multe sacrificii de sine, luată de pe <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, ultima accesare 21 mai 2022.

Figura 13: Victorie în război, unire și independență, un vis devenit realitate, luată de pe <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, ultima accesare 21 mai 2022.

Figura 14: Tancurile germane un pot egașa „ura noastră”, luată de pe <https://revistacutezatorii.blogspot.com/>, ultima accesare 21 mai 2022.

Figura 15: Ceaușescu ca ultima și cea mai bună întruchipare a eroului național, luată din Magazin istoric, anul 19, nr. 7 (220) iulie 1985.



# CULTURAL HERITAGE, HISTORY AND ART INSTITUTIONS: A SURVEY OF RECENT DOCUMENTARIES ABOUT ART MUSEUMS

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**Abstract:** *A couple of documentaries made in the last decades, having as their subject matter famous institutions that preserve and exhibit art, capture in a neutral, objective manner the day-to-day workings of such art institutions and the daily rituals of art consumption. Starting from a comparison with documentaries about art made after World War II, this essay suggests that the more recent documentaries analysed here, directed by Nicolas Philibert, Johannes Holzhausen and Frederick Wiseman, manage to reflect a profound change in recent attitudes about concepts such as cultural consumption and cultural heritage.*

**Keywords:** *Art Institutions; Cultural Heritage; Documentary; Observational Mode; Art Museums.*

**Rezumat:** *Câteva documentare realizate în ultimele decenii, având ca subiect instituții faimoase care se ocupă cu conservarea și expunerea de artă, prezintă într-un stil neutru, obiectiv, mecanismele instituționale de funcționare ale muzeelor, dar și ritualurile consumului de cultură. Pornind de la o comparație cu stilul și conținutul documentarelor despre artă realizate după al Doilea Război Mondial, acest eseu argumentează că documentarele mai recente analizate aici, regizate de Nicolas Philibert, Johannes Holzhausen și Frederick Wiseman, reușesc să surprindă o schimbare profundă în atitudini referitoare la ideile de consum cultural și patrimoniu cultural.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *Instituții de artă; Patrimoniu cultural; Documentar; Mod observațional; Muze de artă.*

## Introduction

Documentary films on visual arts have a history that dates back to the 1920s. Early efforts to record on film the work of famous artists, such as Hans Cürli's film cycle *Schaffende Hände* (*Creating Hands*), started in 1922 (Jacobs 2021, 293), were products of a time when cinema itself was starting to be regarded as an art form, and not merely as entertainment. Directors such as Cürli believed in the social and educational mission of the recorded image. According to Cürli and other like-minded directors, the act of recording living artists was meant to mediate between the art world and the audiences and to preserve an historical trace of contemporary art practices. It is an impulse that characterizes the art documentary for most of its history. Its higher ambition was always to preserve and educate at the same time. Some of its practitioners, such as the Belgian artist and director Paul Haesaerts, thought that cinema was able to make available to mass audiences insights and analyses usually found in academic treatises on art history.

Undoubtedly inspired by the lectures of the famous Heinrich Wölfflin, one of the first art

historians to use in his courses parallel slide projections in order to compare various works of art, Haesaerts theorized in the 1930s its own method, called *cinéma critique* (Jacobs, Vandekerckhove, 2021, 95). This method relied heavily on the possibilities of the cinematic medium to become an analytical, educational tool. Haesaerts used in his landmark art documentary *Rubens* (1948) close-ups, split-screens, visual juxtapositions, rotating images (meant to give a visual sense of the circular compositions of the Flemish artist) in order to show and demonstrate typical traits of the paintings analysed in the film. A significant number of art documentaries, similar to Haesaerts' *Rubens* and sharing Haesaerts' conviction that cinema had the visual capacity to show art in a new light, were made in the 1940s and 1950s, a period that was subsequently labelled "the golden age" of documentaries on the visual arts. Nevertheless, the inherent assumption of these documentaries – that art was in itself valuable, that high art (mainly, painting and sculpture) contained values necessary for the education of the uninformed audiences and that particular works of art were representative for the

genius of their makers – seem, retrospectively, uncritical and elitist. Whether they featured the works of a living, modernist artist or the classic artworks of a canonized artist, their tone was usually eulogistic, while hardly ever trying to assess the role of art from an ideological or political standpoint. To some extent, these documentaries were almost the equivalent of a guided art museum tour. As such, their functions are similar to those that define the modern museum. Through their narratives, through what they chose to show, through their off-screen authoritative narration, they reaffirmed the values of a predominantly Western canon of art, while at the same time reinforcing its legitimacy. Art documentaries, even in their more recent reincarnations, draw attention to the tangible culture, to what is generally labelled as cultural heritage. As museums, they outline a history of this cultural heritage and they give meaning to old and recent developments in the history of the arts.

In the “the golden age” of art documentaries, many films focused mainly on the aesthetical dimensions of art. To some extent, many art documentaries made in the 1980s, a period that saw a proliferation of this sub-genre of films, still saw their main task in terms similar to those outlined by Haesaerts – mainly, to educate and to inculcate in their audiences a sense of shared cultural identity, mediated through cultural values. In recent decades, though, one can notice a shift in this approach. Starting with Nicolas Philibert’s seminal documentary *La Ville Louvre/ Louvre City* (1990), some documentary filmmakers focused less on the educational and cultural dimensions of art and more on institutions that preserve and display art. Directors such as Frederick Wiseman and Johannes Holzhausen were keen to show in their recent documentaries the way these institutions work and the day-to-day routine of the functioning. These recent documentaries not only have a different subject matter, they have a different approach: their tone is neutral, objective, lacking any directorial commentary. Focusing their attention less on the art and more on the various people involved in the functioning of a cultural institution, they give a larger sense of the ways in which cultural values are shaped. What this shift means for our recent understandings of concepts such as art, history of culture and cultural heritage is the topic of this essay.

## Lyrical Modernism and Modern Objectivity

A good starting point for this inquiry is Alain Resnais’ seminal short film *Toute la mémoire du monde/ All the Memory in the World* (1956). This is not a documentary about visual arts; rather, it is an essay about human knowledge, taking as its subject matter the National Library of France. Likewise, it is not the first documentary commissioned by state institutions, showing the day-to-day workings of a national institution – for instance, one can think back to Basil Wright’s equally seminal *Night Mail* (1936). When commissioning it, Julien Cain, the ambitious manager of the National Library, might have had in mind something similar to *Night Mail* – that is, a documentary showing the daily routines of the various people employed by the institution. Nevertheless, as the extensive correspondence between Cain, Resnais and others involved in the making of the film shows, Cain had in mind also a film able to capture something more ethereal: the modernity of this exemplary institution (Carou, 2007, 116). The film was meant to show the modern methods of selection and classification employed by the National Library, but also its status as an embodiment of a modern approach to history, memory and cultural heritage.

Resnais, for his part, managed to make exactly such a film. It was modern, primarily, in its form. Like some other directors moving at that time towards what was subsequently labeled cinematic modernism, Resnais showed a glimpse of the film crew and of one of the cameras used for shooting from the very beginning. Nevertheless, the modernism of the documentary did not lie solely in its acknowledgement of the fictional character of the film. Rather, it lay in its emphasis on order and rationality. The National Library, as captured by Resnais, is an intricate mechanism, working almost like a machine. Its sections are enumerated in the off-screen commentary. Numbers are quoted in order to emphasize its capacity to store and its precise management. Yet, this intricate mechanism administers on the day-to-day basis something more essential, something labelled by the off-screen narration as “treasures” (“trésors”, in French). Here is a list of such treasures, as mentioned in the commentary towards the end of the film, accompanied by a shot of each of these rare books, manuscripts and prints: “There is plenty worthy of attention – more than enough to fill one hundred films. For who is to say which is

the noblest, the finest, the rarest? It is the still unpublished *Journal of the Gouncourt's* manuscript? The *Peresianus Codex*, which nobody knows how to decipher? These Harry Dickson memoirs, unobtainable today? These personal notebooks, to be opened only in 1974? The manuscript of Pascal's *Pensées*? Or the collected works of Émile Zola? The stone of Baghdad and the jewels that surround it? Villard de Honnecourt's sketchbook? Or perhaps... this collection of royal medals? These huge Victor Hugo manuscripts? This binding bearing the arms of Henri II? This, the first book printed in Paris? Charlemagne's *Evangelarium*? *The Revelation of St. Severus*? This Mantegna? This Dürer? This Redon?" By choosing almost at random cultural artefacts belonging to various past centuries and by emphasizing the ways in which they are recorded, stored and preserved with great care, Resnais manages to address at the same time two important and divergent topics: tradition and modernity.

Resnais' model proved to be influential for subsequent art documentaries made in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. *Toute la mémoire du monde* was, to some extent, a mixture of the old and the new. The meaning of the documentary relied heavily on off-screen narration – a feature that was surely characteristic of older art documentaries, made in the previous decades, too. Nevertheless, the narration was characterized at times by irony – for instance, in one of the final scenes, the narrator in *Toute la mémoire du monde* calls the huge amount of books in the inventory of the National Library “a universal memory, abstract and indifferent” – or by overwhelming lyricism. The authority overwhelmingly present in the film was that of the narrator, quick to extrapolate in his remarks from particular case to general rule; the images shown in the film merely served as an illustration for a meaning pre-existing before the shooting of the documentary. Such traits are characteristic for what Bill Nichols identifies as “the expository mode” in documentary films (Nichols, 2008, 34). The great achievement of Resnais' film was its successful mixture of modernist style and lyrical (at times, ironical) content. Where *Toute la mémoire du monde* lacked in irony was in its reverential treatment of history, of the past. The lyrical stances about universal memory, about the overall educational mission of an institution such as the National Library, reinforced to some extent shared views about cultural heritage and its functions. In this instance, the lyrical content of

the film seemed to keep at bay any idea critical of the wider concepts of culture and education.

An art documentary in many ways similar to Resnais' *Toute la mémoire du monde* is John J. Sughrue's *The Louvre: A Golden Prison*. Produced in 1964 by Lucy Jarvis for BBC News and set as a companion piece to a documentary shot in 1963 in the National Gallery, in Washington, *Museum without Walls*, this film was one of the first to show the inner workings of the famous Parisian museum. *The Louvre* fits entirely the definition of Nichols' “expository mode”. It had a voiceover narration, provided by the famous actor Charles Boyer, shot in a couple of scenes in a quasi-tour guide role. It celebrated, via its narration, the cultural heritage to be found in the museum. It was divided in two distinct parts: one emphasized the past, referring mainly to the various historical ages in which the museum gathered its vast collection, while the other focused on the present, on the daily rituals of culture consumption. Notably, in this final segment, *The Louvre* captured the various reactions of the visiting audiences; in this aspect, it was one of the first art documentaries to shift its attention towards the audiences of cultural institutions. In other aspects, it was a somewhat typical product of its time. It did not address in a critical manner the general assumptions about culture, art and cultural heritage. Rather, its narration provides lists of canonical artworks gathered in the museum, linking them to the past monarchical patrons that had the most significant contribution to the collections of the museum – mainly, Louis XIV and Napoleon I. Such lists, similar to the one quoted above from Resnais' film, present themselves as undisputed signifiers of the Western artistic canon; the political context in which these works of art were acquired is almost never mentioned. What the narrator notices about the various works of arts he mentions is their venerable age, their cultural relevance and their impressive quantity. The final shot of the film, showing a little child caught in the act of contemplating an enormous painting, makes the intentions of the film even more obvious. It is a symbolic meeting between the past and the future. High culture, this lyrically-infused scene implies, is relevant because of its educational potential. Art, understood as cultural heritage, has its meanings reinforced through voluntary cultural consumption by every subsequent generation.

By contrast, Philibert's *La Ville Louvre*, shot in the late 1980s, radically departs from such

assumptions. On the one hand, its directorial approach is altogether different. In the taxonomy put forward by Bill Nichols, *La Ville Louvre* would fit in the “observational mode” category (Nichols, 2008, 38). It lacks any voiceover narration and is characterized by an apparent directorial neutrality. Its style is reminiscent of the kind of documentary labelled by its American and Canadian practitioners, since the early 1960s, “direct cinema”. However, rarely do directors associated with the “direct cinema” movement, such as Frederick Wiseman, assume total ethical or political neutrality. While claiming to merely observe the actual events taking place before the camera, they cannot claim absolute neutrality when cutting and structuring their material. The same thing can be said about Philibert. According to Margaret C. Flinn, Philibert’s politics “are not those of prescription or acerbic critique, but rather of ironic exposure” (Flinn, 2014, 167). It is, nevertheless, ironic exposure based on a new and different approach towards its subject matter. Philibert was asked in 1988 by the Louvre’s administration to film the putting in place of a new exhibition, dedicated to the work of French painter Charles Le Brun. Probably the most radical departure from previous art documentaries is symbolized in Philibert’s film by the simple, but inventive way in which he suggests, in the closing credits, the defining features of a cultural institution such as the Louvre: “Louvre City// 1.200 employees// among which 375 guards// and 54 curators working in 7 departments// Egyptian Antiques, Oriental Antiques, Greek, Etruscan and Roman Antiques, Artworks, Sculptures, Paintings, Graphic Arts// 105 workmen: electricians, marble masons, boiler attendants, painters, locksmiths, gilders, picture framers, tapestry workers, restorers of paintings// Physicists and chemists// Cleaners, photographers, doctors// A social worker, 21 fireman and a gardener// 300.000 works of art// 15 km of underground passages// 30.000 m<sup>3</sup> of display surfaces // 2.400 windows, 3.000 locks and 10.000 steps” (translation in English, slightly altered by the author of this essay, Grewcock, 2016, 57). The change in emphasis is obvious: Philibert mentions the considerable number of cultural artefacts owned by the museum, but primarily he focuses on the myriad of workers and specialists employed in the Louvre. The film itself captures the endless toil of these workers and specialists, showing the behind-the-scene activities of such a large institution. It must be added that *La Ville Louvre*

is not the first documentary to show the backstage workings of an art institution; such films were already being made in the 1920s and the 1930s (Jacobs, 2021, 303). Nevertheless, Philibert’s documentary, compared to its predecessors, gives a more palpable sense of the large variety of activities needed in order for an art institution to function. To some extent, work and work relations seem to be the main themes of the film, not the splendour and cultural relevance of the art enclosed in the Louvre. While none of the workers or specialists appearing in the film are named, the final sequences, composed of brief portraits of various employees of the Louvre, is a moving tribute to the anonymous workforce of a cultural institution.

Philibert’s film has its own modernist, stylistic traits. Its lack of voiceover narration, its scarce use of non-diegetic music, its loose, episodic structure convey a certain ambiguity regarding its meaning. Yet, through a scene-by-scene accumulation of motifs and themes, Philibert’s prevailing intentions seem to become clearer. On the one hand, in a manner similar to Resnais’, *La Ville Louvre* manages to capture the modern obsession for efficiency, method and classification; the Louvre as a cultural institution seems to be driven by such impulses for order and rationality. On the other hand, Philibert’s film is also interested in topics such as hierarchy, homogenization and the public display of cultural capital. For instance, Philibert repeatedly films workers operating under the supervision of a manager of the museum. In one crucial scene, a manager admonishes a guard for not wearing the proper uniform while doing his job. In such instances, it becomes clear that *La Ville Louvre* tries to capture the diffuse relations of power that connect the various employees working in a cultural institution. In a late scene in the documentary, one of the managers responsible for the exhibitions muses whether the museum should display more of its paintings; “let us show them we are rich”, he adds. These subtle and candid displays of power and cultural capital, captured by the director, shows the modern cultural institution in an almost Foucauldian light. It is a subtle critique, a shift in focus – from art and its undisputed cultural relevance to the objective, but lucid acknowledgment of the many social actors that shape our modern ideas about art and cultural heritage.

### Before *La Ville Louvre*: Jürgen Böttcher and Thomas Struth

Since 1990, one can find instances of documentaries about art institutions that have a similar, critical approach to their subject matter and that seem to have been influenced by Philibert's work. It is a tempting, but debatable conclusion. For instance, Frederick Wiseman's *National Gallery* (2014) is similar to *La Ville Louvre*, but one can rather argue about Wiseman's influence on Philibert than the other way around; indeed, Wiseman's documentaries about state institutions, made since the mid-1960s, fitting the definition of "observational mode", were probably known to Philibert by the time he started making his own films. On the other hand, as it will be argued in the next section, this recent shift in focus towards institutions and the way they manage cultural artifacts is not restricted to cinema or documentary filmmaking. Neither is this shift the only manner in which cultural heritage has been approached. For instance, Danièle Huillet's and Jean-Marie Straub's *Une visite au Louvre/ A Visit to the Louvre* (2004) is a visual essay about various paintings exhibited in the Parisian museum, composed of several static shots of the paintings discussed and accompanied by an off-screen narration provided mainly by Huillet. This short film seems less interested in the Louvre as an institution and more in the self-reflexive quality of the pictorial and cinematic image. Finally, as the two examples briefly discussed below show, some of the characteristic traits of the recent art documentaries about institutions can be found in documentary films or photographic cycles made before 1990. While they retrospectively seem to anticipate current approaches in documentary filmmaking, seen in their own historical context they are rather extensions of their makers' aesthetic worldview.

A case in point is the short documentary made in 1962 by Jürgen Böttcher, called *Im Pergamon-Museum/ In the Pergamon Museum*. It looks in many ways like the documentary films about cultural institutions later made by Philibert or Wiseman. It focuses mainly on capturing the various reactions of the visitors of the Pergamon Museum, situated in East Berlin. The film has no off-screen commentary and no dialogue, while on its soundtrack, typical for its time, one can hear modern classical compositions. It seems to be a study of audiences as cultural consumers. Their reactions to the museum's collection of historical

artefacts fluctuate, from absorption to amusement and boredom. To some extent, its quasi-sociological take on the status of culture and history for modern audiences is irreverent and ironic. It should astonish no one that this is a film made by an artist deeply attached to the aesthetics of modernism. Böttcher was himself trained as a painter and was an admirer of modernist artists such as Picasso, which at the time were labelled as "decadent" counter-examples in the socialist German Democratic Republic. He started training as a filmmaker in the mid-1950s and he was influenced by Italian neorealist films and by Soviet avant-garde cinema (Allan, 2019, 93-94). Nowadays, he is best known for his fiction film *Jahrgang 45/ Born in 45'* (1966), but in the late 1950s and the early 1960s he made several films for the documentary section of the state-owned DEFA studios. Some of them had art as their focus – for instance, *Drei von vielen/ Three of Many* (1961) profiled the lives of three contemporary East German artists. *Im Pergamon-Museum* and *Drei von vielen*, in different manners, were trying to challenge the dominant assumptions about art in place since the cultural Stalinization of East Germany. Both these films had an ambiguous view of the cultural legacy of the past. In *Drei von vielen*, the past meant the opposite of progress, a rigid version of what socialist art could be, i.e. socialist realism. *Im Pergamon-Museum*, on the other hand, treated the historical artefacts of the museum equally with reverence and subtle modernist irony. As Böttcher seems to make clear through his detached and somewhat subversive approach, a sense of common identity created by appealing to their national history was not enough for modern audiences.

The West German photographer Thomas Struth, on the other hand, made one of his most famous photography cycles, *Museum Time* (1987-2004), with a different aim. A member of the so-called Düsseldorf School of Photography, he took photos of museum and art gallery visitors in many of the most famous such institutions in the world: the Louvre, the Rijksmuseum, the Venetian Gallerie dell'Accademia, the Viennese Kunsthistorisches Museum, and so on. Essential for Struth's conceptual approach were, primarily, the correlations between artworks, viewers and the institutional spaces surrounding them (Bantleon, Haselsteiner-Scharner, 2009, 356). What his photos showed was, first and foremost, people watching art; in doing so, nevertheless, they went beyond capturing contemporary

reactions to canonical art and tried to give a sense of the intricate, symbolic meanings of art consumption. For instance, one famous photo from the *Museum Time* cycle, "Louvre 4, Paris" (1989), explicitly includes in its framing the exuberant decor characteristic for the Salle Mollien, in which Théodore Géricault's *The Raft of the Medusa* is exhibited; thus, according to Katharina Bantleon and Jasmin Haselsteiner-Scharner, Struth discreetly alludes to the imperial past of the exhibiting space in which the famous canvas is placed (Bantleon, Haselsteiner-Scharner, 2009, 359). Of course, the subtle political implications of Struth's work are hardly perceivable at a first glance. His photos rather invite the viewer to acknowledge at first art's representational and meta-representational functions. The fact that art is exhibited in carefully chosen spaces, that a certain kind of art invites a specific kind of involvement from its consumers seem to be the main implication of his project. Nevertheless, a sort of detachment, a sort of disenchantment concerning the act of consuming canonical works of art (most of his photographs captures anonymous audiences in the act of looking at famous canvases) is unmistakably present in his approach. As some of the recent art documentaries discussed here, Struth's *Museum Time* cycle urges the viewer to question the latent meaning of art consumption and its cultural rituals.

### **Multifaceted (Art) Institutions: *Das große Museum, National Gallery, Cathedrals of Culture***

The early 1990s are a very important period for the critical re-evaluation of cultural institutions in general, and of art institutions in particular. A plausible explanation for this phenomenon is the increase and diversification of museums and art galleries, a process dating back to the 1970s (Smith, 2006, 199). By the 1990s, reflecting this increase and trying to critically evaluate the assumptions upon which traditional cultural institutions rested, a number of important texts took aim at many preconceived notions about cultural consumption and the public's general attitude towards cultural heritage. One of the seminal collections of essays that ignited this debate, edited by Peter Vergo and published in 1989, was aptly titled *The New Museology*. Among the essays included in the volume, one penned by Nick Merriman addressed one of the major issues concerning the role of cultural

institutions. Very little was known, Merriman stated, about the demographic composition of the visiting public, and equally little was known about their reasons for choosing to visit a museum or an art gallery. Cultural institutions generally took pride in delivering cultural education meant to be targeted for general audiences. While cautiously assessing Pierre Bourdieu's conclusions about the role of cultural institutions in maintaining and legitimating class and status divisions, based on a personal survey took in 1985 Merriman reached similar results about the imbalances in cultural consumption: "The most frequent museum visitors tend to be of high status, to have received tertiary education, and to be students or in work, while those who rarely or never visit museums tend to be the elderly, those of low status, to have left school at the earliest opportunity, and to be looking after the home or in retirement" (Merriman, 1989, 152). As for the main reasons for frequenting cultural institutions, Merriman used a concept that reflected the modern, class-biased attitudes towards cultural consumption, "leisure opportunity" (Merriman, 1989, 164). Other scholars, such as Eilean Hooper-Greenhill, reached in the early 1990s similar conclusions when applying their own surveys to museums visitors (Hooper-Greenhill, 1994, 60-68). On the other hand, using a Foucauldian framework in order to assess the functions of cultural institutions, Tony Bennett was putting forward the uneasy conclusion that, among all the institutions that stated their mission in terms of universal education, art museums and art galleries were in fact the most reluctant, in their functional logic, to deliver on such a generous promise (Bennett, 1995, 163-173). What was put into question in most of these critical reassessments was a post-Enlightenment ideology, which stated that cultural institutions serve as an universal educational tool, that they shape knowledge in such a way that everyone interested can use this knowledge in order to improve himself/ herself and in order to improve his/ her social and educational status.

One can hardly argue that such critical reappraisals were translated afterwards in cinematic practice, and more specifically into the practice of the directors discussed in this essay. Nicolas Philibert's *La Ville Louvre* predates most of these critical debates, while later documentaries made about art institutions are probably less likely to be informed by such academic assertions. Nevertheless, a general



unease towards the post-Enlightenment ideas that legitimated cultural institutions since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century can be felt even in these cinematic projects. This unease can be seen as a reflection of the cultural debates taking place since the early 1990s. At stake are the usual assumptions of the post-Enlightenment public culture. While the post-Enlightenment ideals imply public participation, democratization of taste and educational relevance of the cultural heritage, many critics of such ideals point out to the socially manufactured character of such claims. To some extent, this is one of the main conclusions derived from documentaries such as Johannes Holzhausen's *Das große Museum/ The Great Museum* (2014) and Frederick Wiseman's *National Gallery* (2014). Nevertheless, such a critical stance is not always present in documentaries about cultural institutions. As we will show below, through a brief analysis of a documentary project released in the same year as the two already mentioned, *Cathedrals of Culture*, critical reappraisals of post-Enlightenment ideals can coexist with contemporary reaffirmation of the same ideals. Cultural heritage, it can be stated, is still a contentious concept. While some documentary directors try to contextualize its meaning and show the many ways in which its aura (to use Walter Benjamin's term) is being constructed, other directors seem to find it difficult to resist conceptualizing it in the usual, post-Enlightenment terms.

Holzhausen's *Das große Museum* loosely follows the preparations for the reopening of the Kunstkammer rooms of the Viennese Kunsthistorisches Museum. Scenes giving a sense of the everyday routines of the museum's staff are interspersed with lengthy shots following administrative or official meetings of the senior managers. It is a coherent, deliberate strategy chosen by the director in order to capture the hierarchies in place in the institution. In one particular scene, a member of the staff even complains that, after been employed for 11 years, she still feels that she and her peers have the lowest status in the institution. Holzhausen makes no direct commentary on this kind of situation, just seems to want to record the hidden dynamics of the institution, the rare moments in which the utopian harmony of the prestigious museum seems to dissipate. A lot of the scenes show restores, handicraftsmen or painters painstakingly working on old canvases or artefacts. These are the kind of sequences that

would ideally make the audiences of the film think about the efforts made to restore the invaluable cultural heritage of the museum. Nevertheless, *Das große Museum* does not focus solely on this aspect. Scene after scene, we get glimpses of the functioning of a complex institution. Holzhausen keeps in the film scenes in which the budget is being discussed or the marketing strategy of the museum is being developed. In one of its later sequences, the film captures the reactions of anonymous auctioneers, bidding for artworks put on sale by the museum. One can argue that this is a disenchanted look at the value of art and cultural heritage, in so many way dependent on its evaluation on art markets and susceptible to shifts in public perception. The educational ideals of the art institution seem to be counterbalanced by pragmatic considerations regarding financial stability and cultural self-fashioning. It is a different look at the inherent rationality of a modern cultural institution, taking into account the many factors that shape the public perception about art and cultural consumption.

Frederick Wiseman's *National Gallery*, on the other hand, seems focused on the many ways the Washington-based institution communicates with its audiences. Wiseman records many tour guides and experts of the museum trying to explain art to the public – in academic sessions, in organized tours of the gallery, even in what seem to be art tours targeted for children. The art institution, as captured by Wiseman, is a transmitter of erudite discourses. Moreover, it seems to be a very self-aware transmitter of erudite discourses. Early on in the film, Wiseman records a debate between managers of the museum, with one of them stating that there is little talk in the institution about the specific needs of the visiting public; a defensive interlocutor replies that focusing primarily on the perceived needs of the public means appealing to the lowest common denominator of taste. It is an emblematic moment, capturing from the very beginning the discreet tension of visions regarding the educational role of an art institution. A sort of honest self-awareness is perceivable in many talks and presentations recorded by Wiseman. In one scene, a tour guide even addresses the tainted origins of many paintings owned by the museum, stating that some of the original patrons of the institution earned their income from trading slaves. These kind of sequences, showing employees of the institution acknowledging contemporary public criticism of art museums,

are interspersed with instances of predictable speeches held by senior managers in front of TV crews, underlining, for instance, the perennial cultural value of Leonardo da Vinci's work. As in his earlier documentaries focusing on institutions, Wiseman captures in *National Gallery* the contradictory discourses that legitimate the various roles of a cultural institution. On the one hand, many presentations and speeches seem to imply that the art preserved in the collections of the museum is perennial and beyond any financial evaluation; on the other hand, as in Holzhausen's case, the films shows an incessant managerial preoccupation for budgetary matters, for marketing and "profile raising". Even in these instances, one of the fundamental tensions of an art institution, between attracting new audiences ("being a part of the popular culture", as one of the managers puts it in the film) and preserving a certain aura of respectability, becomes apparent. As for the audiences of the National Gallery, Wiseman captures their racial and cultural diversity and their different involvement with the art displayed in the museum. Instead of showing mainly audiences enthralled by the experience or keen on participating in the act of cultural consumption, the director films equally the enthusiast and the indifferent. Art consumption, as seen by Wiseman, seems to be more of a modern ritual. Furthermore, in *National Gallery*, it seems to be a ritual shaped by several other factors: public perception, politics, and mass media exposure. As such, art and cultural heritage seem to be at the same time presented in a favourable light (Wiseman's film can be seen, to some extent, as a very instructive take on the modern approaches towards art proliferating in recent years) and approached with a certain ironical detachment. It is an ambiguous position, reflecting to some extent the incessant contemporary debates about canonical art and the way it reflects only in a partial way the cultural achievements of the past.

By contrast, *Cathedrals of Culture*, a 3D documentary film composed of six segments, each focusing on an internationally renowned institution and made by six different directors – Wim Wenders, Michael Glawogger, Michael Madsen, Robert Redford, Margreth Olin, and Karim Aïnouz – feels like an anachronistic return to the thematic and stylistic choices of the 1950s and 1960s. It is an ambitious project, aptly and haplessly subtitled "A 3D Film Project about the Soul of Buildings". Each segment contains voice-

over narration, meant to poetically render what would famous buildings say if they could talk. Despite its visual achievements, the film was poorly received by film critics, mainly because of the self-sufficient, eulogistical tone of its narration. For instance, the segment dedicated to the Salk Institute for Biological Studies, directed by Robert Redford, contains spoken passages such as this one: "Being a scientist is almost a monastic existence. You're devoted to a cause, a belief in something powerful. In the same sense the great cathedrals of Europe provide a place for worship, the Salk Institute provides a home for the worship of science, the worship of nature." In itself, the film is a generous tribute for each building profiled. There are variations in the tone of the voice-over narration – for instance, Austrian director Michael Glawogger chose for his segment, dedicated to the National Library of Russia, to assemble a monologue constituted of passages from classic Russian literature. All of the segments give a sense of the everyday rituals and workings of the institutions they chose to focus on. All of the segments follow, as in *Das große Museum* or *National Gallery*, anonymous workers, warden, and caretakers doing their daily work. All of the segments seem to adhere to the central metaphor of the institution as a micro-society, a metaphor so important for Philibert's approach in *La ville Louvre*. Nevertheless, what seems to differentiate recent documentaries about institutions from *Cathedrals of Culture* is, beyond the choice of having or not having an authoritative voice-over commentary, their specific choice of vocabulary. In the case of *Cathedrals of Culture*, some of the commentaries include words such as "eternity", "devotion", "nature", and "worship" that seem to allude to a quasi-naïve reformulation of Enlightenment ideals about education, culture and science. One can hardly argue that such ideals are nowadays obsolete. However, stating them in a manner that seems oblivious to the many recent critiques inflicted upon the crude and biased optimism of the Enlightenment seems at best anachronistic and at worst reactionary.

The main lesson to be drawn from the failure of an ambitious project such as *Cathedrals of Culture* is that the old, idealistic, post-Enlightenment approach towards cultural heritage and cultural consumption seems nowadays questionable and elitist. There is a point to be made about the unwritten norms of current documentary practice, which favor the "observational mode", objectivity and ambiguity.

Documentaries such as *La ville Louvre*, *Das große Museum* and *National Gallery* fit these generalized standards, while *Cathedrals of Culture* does not. Nevertheless, in the last couple of decades, cultural institutions in general and art institutions in particular have been challenged in multiple ways regarding their cultural and educational mission, their institutional transparency, their inclusion of marginal groups. The idea of cultural heritage has suffered similar alterations. One can hardly look nowadays at patterns of cultural consumption without having to ascertain a mismatch between the post-Enlightenment ideals of cultural homogeneity and accessibility and the complex, contextual ways in which cultural values and preferences are shaped. The fundamental ambiguity of some

recent documentaries about cultural institutions relate to this shift in perception. Art no longer has a value in itself, no longer can justify its existence by claiming its universal educational role. Nicolas Philibert, Johannes Holzhausen and Frederick Wiseman manage to capture, in different measures, the partial awareness of art institutions in the face of such profound challenges regarding their public mission.

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## THE GLASS BEAD GAME IN ROMANIANS' SPRING: FIVE TRANSYLVANIAN IMMORTALS IN THE COMMUNIST ERA

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**Abstract:** *The author analyses the place of memorial houses as landmarks of the communist policy of memory in Romania, along with other categories, such as film, street art, institutional and street onomastics. The analysis is focused on the idea that allows the rethinking of the relation between oblivion-remembering-mystification-history in the Romanian post-communist mentality. The study researches the impact of true symbols of anti-communist dissidence and the way these personalities played a role in building the relationship between ideology and propaganda in the post-totalitarian period. The attitude of the common people and local administrations toward keeping and promoting the historical patrimony of dissidents - Lucian Blaga, Doina Cornea, Iuliu Maniu, David Prodan and Alexandru Todea - is analysed as a functioning indicator of the intergenerational memory and of the mechanism that contributes to a new list of heroes in post-socialist era.*

**Keywords:** *past, trauma, historiography, NGO, volunteering, centralism.*

**Rezumat:** *Autoarea analizează locul caselor memoriale ca repere ale politicii memoriei comuniste din România, alături de celelalte categorii: film, artă stradală, onomastică (instituțională, stradală). Interpretarea este concentrată asupra faptului că toate acestea permit o regândire a raportului dintre uitare-reamintire-mistificare-istorie în mentalitatea României postcomuniste. Studiul cercetează impactul unor adevărate simboluri ale disidenței anticomuniste și măsura în care aceste personalități inspiraționale au jucat vreun rol în construcția relației dintre ideologie și propagandă în perioada posttotalitară. Raportarea oamenilor simpli și al administrației locale la păstrarea și promovarea patrimoniul istoric al disidenților - Lucian Blaga, Doina Cornea, Iuliu Maniu, David Prodan și Alexandru Todea - este analizat ca un indicator al funcționării memoriei intergeneraționale și al mecanismului care contribuie la nașterea unei noi galerii de eroi în perioada postsocialistă.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *trecut, traumă, istoriografie, O.N.G, voluntariat, centralism.*

### Motto

*"Like any grand idea, this game doesn't have a beginning, but, as an idea, it had existed since forever."* (Hermann Hesse)

Our society is in search of role models and benchmarks, especially after the communist era, which was characterized by excessive control, disinformation, imposing unpopular values that gave rise to resentment and disgust<sup>1</sup>.

This is the background of our question: Where and how do we find the heroes of our days – free, brave, dignified and authentic? Could the past and

dissident attitude of some contemporaries or predecessors toward the totalitarian regime recommend them to form this new gallery of heroes? What is the link between the new ideology and the need of our society to identify them? How could we explain the lack of preoccupation of institutions to single out and to highlight the contribution of personalities to remove ultimately the detested communist regime by the majority of the population?

Therefore we start from some awe-inspiring personalities who did not conform to the regime and condemned unequivocally the totalitarian regime, becoming true symbols of the Romanian anti-communist resistance and dissidence (1947-1989). We selected five personalities from different social and cultural backgrounds, still united by a common destiny. There are, however, significant differences between the types of opposition that they showed toward the

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<sup>1</sup> The study develops and completes the considerations of the article "Trecutul prin case memoriale. Despre un itinerar cultural al disidenței anticomuniste în Transilvania"/ "The Past in Memorial Houses. About a Cultural Itinerary of Anti-Communist Dissidence in Transylvania" (Stanciu, 2022c, 997-1007).

communist regime (from the Stalinist in the '50s to the nationalist in the '80s). Even though we may not state that their activity brought about a change in the regime's attitude, the five personalities transformed into symbols of anti-communist dissidence, while their memory is cherished by Romanians. Therefore, we propose a cultural itinerary of anti-communist dissidence in Transylvania, selecting memorial houses that belonged to important personalities in the communist period. The houses were transformed into museums due to the contribution of local authorities (Alba, Bihor, Cluj-Napoca, Sălaj) and Babes-Bolyai University, as well as with the contribution of local people that were involved in keeping the memory of Lucian Blaga, Doina Cornea, Iuliu Maniu, David Prodan and Alexandru Todea.

The memorial museum of Sighet, opened in 1997 and maintained the post-communist attitude and rapport toward Iuliu Maniu and Alexandru Todea. We may add the project initiated by the Greek-Catholic bishop Vasila Bizau from Baia Mare – the *Sanctuary of Romanian Martyrs and Confessors of the 20th Century*<sup>2</sup>. This is a project supported by the yearly pilgrimage to the Cemetery of the Poor in Sighetu Marmăției since 2000.

### How are heroes born? The past seen through memorial houses

The memory of these personalities is honoured by museum collections, by naming schools, streets, placing statues or busts, editing monographs, doctoral theses (Verdery, 2006, *passim*; Rusu, Croitoru, 2022, 91-98). Both Iuliu Maniu and Alexandru Todea are mentioned in textbooks and documentary films (see *Memorialul durerii/ Pain Memorial*) and feature films (*Cardinalul/ The Cardinal* etc.) Lucian Blaga is on the banknote of 200 lei since 2010. All these elements constitute a well-balanced indicator of how we relate to the communist regime, how we remember and how we imagine it, in the terms of Paul Ricoeur and Noah Harari (Ricoeur, 2001, 19-21; Harari, 2017, *passim*). That is to say, a memorial house confesses about the legacy we have and leave to generations to come about the totalitarian regime and the experience the personalities went through. Rediscovering and

honouring the house of our grandparents and parents cultivates the respect toward moral landmarks and dignity of that generation. On the other hand, the reputation these dissidents have and the way we honour their memory (Vladimir Jankélévitch, Paul Ricoeur) (Ricoeur, 2001, 77-119) concerning their undesirable, marginalized, ostracised status during their lifetime can transform individuals into heroes of our days (Mihalache C., 2020, 251-254) through retelling the history of the communist regime.

Do their complex and sometimes contradictory biography and their well-known dissidence allow us reimagine and reconstitute the recent past in the museums and memorial houses? Can these memorial places lead to a debate concerning the rebranding of the totalitarian and post-socialist period? These questions take into account the fact that a nation should be fortified, and memorial houses allow as to discuss the manner in which the memory of these personalities is maintained. These memorial houses also show us how we may invoke the attitude of these anti-communist symbols against some ideological reflexes that are being perpetuated.

Can these role models constitute a pantheon of *anti-communist dissidence*? Could we build a cultural itinerary of anti-communist dissidence starting with these personalities? What would be the perception of paying homage to these new “heroes” (Mihalache C., 2020, 267-268) and how can reimagining of that period serve us now? We know how important the collections in a museum are, as they make us edit brochures, touristic guides, and albums in order to recognize the personalities' merits (Pippidi, 2000, 181, 183, 186). These materials offer information through historical narration, photographs, notes, revealing the ideology of that period and our period. The question is how therapeutical such a cultural itinerary can be? It may constitute an empathic exercise with the past at the individual level (Mihalache A., 2020, 269), allowing us to search for our identity, as in the case of Josef Knecht, the character of Herman Hesse's novel.

From the perspective of cultural history, a memorial house contributes to the construction of a *cultural code* and becomes an inherent element of our *cultural memory*. It influences the way in which we reconstitute the events of the past and it is useful in recomposing memories of some recent personalities that we could have perceived in a personal context.

Becoming a *cultural construct*, a *place of memory* (in some cases a generational memory,

<sup>2</sup><https://www.catholica.ro/2021/03/04/a-fost-infiintat-sanctuarul-martirilor-si-marturisitorilor-romani-ai-secolului-xx/> (Accessed on 6 March 2022).

with an autobiographical connotation), these memorial houses belong and address the so-called “memory of the street” (Mihalache A, 2005, 178-191), which is built in the eyes of the visitor and proposes the rehabilitation of destinies, their instalment in their rightful place in the collective memory by remembering these personalities’ deeds (Rusu, Croitoru, 2022, 98-106). At the same time, fixing their memory in the public conscience permits historians to re-evaluate the totalitarian regime that broke so many lives. This reassessment offers insights into how memory is transformed gradually from our subjective memory into an impersonal, objective and social one.

Thus, the memorial house enters the urban and political landscape, changes the toponymy of the cities to institutes the idea of commemoration. It also has the role of changing the urban memory, forming what Andi Mihalache calls a “historical culture of the Romanian post-communist society” (Mihalache A., 2014, 183-184; Mihalache C., 2020, 261). This is an operation of recycling, given that the past becomes the “legitimate depositary of our true identity” (Mihalache, 2005, 187), offering us the chance to liberate from traumas and to understand and reconnect, communicate easier and more efficiently the experiences of every generation.

As a result, here are some questions that require answers: What is the message of these memorial houses? What is the target audience and who are their patrons? Who are these heroes and how they can help us reset the features of the mentality of nowadays Romanians? Can we establish a relation between memory, identity, imagination, propaganda and ideology while visiting these places of memory? Can we establish the dynamics of this relation in the selected five historical figures?

### A retrospective on the communist dissidence

The analysed memorial houses illustrate the symbol built during the personalities’ lifetime (Fig. 1) Each case represents the legend of dissidence, dignity, the power of the symbol ((Iuliu Maniu, Alexandru Todea, Doina Cornea) or the landmark of intransigence and internationally recognized professionalism (Lucian Blaga, David Prodan).

What do these memorial houses replace? The presence of these historical figures in textbooks is rather shy (except for Iuliu Maniu and Lucian Blaga) and there are no allocated funds for

preserving their memory, with several exceptions (Alba, Bihor, Cluj and Salaj local administrations). There is no policy at the central level, as the institutions that have the responsibility of preserving and valuing the material and immaterial patrimony (the Ministry of Culture, the National Institute of Patrimony) haven’t discovered a way in regaining their credibility in the post-communist period by developing a strategy of promoting the values of anti-communist resistance. The implications and consequences of this reality in our case is that these memorial houses represent places of handling memories in the communist period, even though they don’t have a *museal conception*.

Iuliu Maniu (1873-1953), died at the Sighet prison, is the hero of Romanian dignity, democracy, freedom and anti-communist dissidence in Transylvania (Stan, 1997, *passim*; Ciucă, 2001, *passim*). His origins are from a Greek-Catholic vicar, Iuliu Coroianu, the 1848 professor Simion Bărnuțiu and the memorandist Ioan Rațiu (Stanciu, 2022a, 377), and the significance of this descent and his childhood are felt everywhere in his memorial house, salvaged through the efforts of the Bădăcin local community. At the initiative of the Greek-Catholic priest Cristian Borz, through the public campaign *Salvati istoria națională, salvați Casa lui Iuliu Maniu/ Save National History, Save Iuliu Maniu’s House*, he mobilized factors in the region and supported the donations made by simple people and local authorities (Salaj and Bihor). With support from specialists, he managed to give back to the community this tremendous symbol – Iuliu Maniu’s house - by a grand inauguration, on the 12th of October 2019<sup>3</sup>, in Bădăcin, Salaj. The period in which the house had been restored came to an end; the entire process was due to a great enthusiasm and voluntary effort of simple people (2015-2019) (Borz, 2020, *passim*), reconfirming the popularity and appreciation of the historical party leader.

The memorial house of Lucian Blaga (1895-1961), on Ulița Veche in Lancrăm (Alba county), is the “place where eternity was born”; here, the Transylvanian poet and philosopher spent his first years of life. In 1909, the house was sold, as his mother had to support her children. The house was bought by the Romanian state in 1995, refurbished and transformed into a museum since

<sup>3</sup><https://www.egco.ro/2019/10/14/acasa-la-badacin-acasa-la-iuliu-maniu-inaugurarea-casei-memoriale-dupa-reabilitare/> (Accessed on 5 March 2022).

1998. This is the only memorial house restored and maintained by public administrative funds by local authorities. Initially, it was a section of the National Museum of Unification from Alba Iulia; now it functions under the coordination of the County Council of Alba. The collection and interior objects were Lucian Blaga's in his youth, along with his manuscripts and were donated by friends, collaborators and family members<sup>4</sup>. The house inhabited by the intellectual in Cluj is on Măcinului no. 20 (two rooms) and it cannot be visited. Nevertheless, his personality is honoured by the fact that the Central University Library of Cluj is named after the poet and displays some objects that remind of his activity.

David Prodan (1902-1992), born in Săliște (Cioara, Alba county), followed the Hungarian highschool in Orăștie and graduated the university in Cluj. He became a reference personality for the intellectual milieu in Cluj of the second half of the 20th century due to his intransigency and both human and historiographic demeanour in the communist era (Edroiu, 1995, *passim*; Stanciu, 2020, 7-25). The memorial museum is in Cluj-Napoca, Academician David Prodan no 7, ap. 1, where the historian lived. The house now belongs to Cluj-Napoca city hall<sup>5</sup>, firstly left into ruin, but then transformed into a museum and inaugurated on the 13th of February 2018 by the support of the Direction of Cultural Patrimony of Babes-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca.

The imprisoned and marginalized generation gave many names to streets, squares, and boulevards. The best case scenario is when memorial houses, statues were inaugurated after 1990 and films were released, which help us relate ideologically and aesthetically to these accomplishments. Such a case is Cardinal Alexandru Todea (1912-2002) (Stanciu Bădiliță, 2022, 522-538; Soica, 2017, *passim*), who, after being released from prison (Sighet, Râmnicu-Sărat, Pitești, Dej, Gherla), had a clandestine pastoral activity in Reghin in 1964-1990, at the Greek-Catholic Church (considered illegal on the 1st of December 1948). His cell in Reghin on Apalinei Street no 34 is a true space of pilgrimage from the *Golden Age*<sup>6</sup>, becoming after his death a

memorial house due to the efforts of his close people.

Even though difficultly and much slower than some of us would have preferred, relating to totalitarian era and dissidence finds its balance and equidistance due to the unequivocal historiographical reconstitutions and temporal distance necessary to discern the true information from mystifications and indifference. Such a reparatory gesture was the decision of the city hall of Cluj-Napoca in December 2020 to buy Doinea Cornea's house (on the former Alba Iulia/ now Doina Cornea street no. 16)<sup>7</sup> and transform it into a museum. She was an exceptional personality, with a unique courage to defy the lies of the *Golden Age* (Bădiliță, 2022, 550-559). Doina Cornea stood as a firm intellectual despite the inherent fragility (Cornea, 1991; Cornea, 2006; Cornea, 2009; Jurju, 2017, *passim*), of a flawless lucidity. She was a formidable adversary of the Iliescu regime that tried to compromise her at all costs in the first post-communist years, when the Romanian society faced intolerance and great diversion.

### Utility and pragmatism in the mirror of history or how the past tamed the present

The places of memory, built belated and with difficulty, are symbolical gestures of recovery that reconfigure the collective memory and maintain its health. A memorial house transports you in the context of the era and it can be seen as an antidote to the nostalgic people of the *Golden Age* by facing the visitor with the personality in the "environment of his subsistence" (Mihalache A, 2020, 279-287). The memorial house is a condensed place of lived history that offer the visitor the emotion and experience of being in the intimacy of an exceptional personality that had the courage of dissidence in the totalitarian years (Anton, 2018, 139-149). The memorial house addresses the mind by building in time the link to people's hearts and becoming thus inherent part of a "pedagogy of collective memory" (Mioara Anton); it offers the place of "contemplating a biography" (Mihalache A, 2020, 286) of an

<sup>4</sup> According to <https://viziteazaalbaiulia.ro/bun-venit-pe-ulita-veche-la-casa-memoriala-lucian-bлага/> (Accessed on 25 February 2022).

<sup>5</sup> <https://muzee.ubbcluj.ro/muzeul/muzeul-memorial-david-prodan> (Accessed on 5 March 2022).

<sup>6</sup> The *Golden Age* or the Era of Nicolae Ceaușescu (1965-1989) was named like this by the communist

propaganda (institutions and official press) and it was characterised by Ceaușescu's cult of personality.

<sup>7</sup> <https://m.rfi.ro/social-128409-casa-doinei-cornea-cumparata-de-primaria-cluj-napoca-lucrurile-ei-scoase-la-licitatie>; <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=385981399328962> (Accessed on 5 March 2022).



exceptional person. When we analyse the percentage of nostalgic people for every generation of the post-communist Romania, we see these memorial houses as night lights that (re)create the communist reality in the 2000s mostly with the help of private funds (except for Lucian Blaga and Doina Cornea).

The explanation of this delay, clearly expressed by Andrei Pippidi in 2000, lies in the fact that resistance manifested loudly and violently until the regime of Emil Constantinescu (1996). And that was due to the “personal and emotional relation of some fellow countrymen with their memory and their parents’ memory” that kept “feelings of guilt” and risked to “erase [people] from the conscience of recent history” (Pippidi, 2000, 254-259). That is why the memorial houses represent gestures of gratitude, complementary to the educational system (which can serve the quality of education); they can also become part of a healing strategy toward a regime that provoked fear, aversion and disgust.

Beyond the therapeutic state induced to the visitor, the openness of these memorial houses is encouraging, being a sign of the civil society that regards the past *sine ira et studio*. Another dimension of autobiographical spaces, regardless of the manner of constituting the museal collection, mix of memory and emotion, is evident recognition of the value of absolute symbol (Iuliu Maniu) and the fact that these personalities are recognized as landmarks of culture and authentic identity (Blaga, Prodan) that transcend the communist era. And that despite of the fact that the profile of undesirable personality was perpetuated in the case of Doina Cornea and Cardinal Todea.

If we associate the fashion of cultural tourism (Heike, 2003) of the post-socialist period and the ideology based on the perpetual need of a society to have her heroes (especially since Cornea, Prodan and Todea were survivors of a collective drama), we may grasp the utility of such a demarche that pertains to the *remembrance of communism*. It becomes thus an educational tool assumed by the civil society (less by the educational system), an indicator of the maturity of our society (Wolton, 2019, 37). Undoubtedly, the itinerary may be an indicator of the force of reaction of society toward the major challenge: communism died, but how do we cast it out of people’s minds, especially the generations that don’t learn and have access to the new textbooks? Therefore, the success of such a demarche depends on the attention of handling the past,

doubled by our will to save a generation from oblivion and another from alienation.

In this “game of memory and oblivion”, where these destinies oscillated between betrayal and sacrifice so that descendants would have these personalities removed from their memory (Pippidi, 2000, 238-244, 251), the memorial house becomes a possibility to “redeem the past” (Wolton, 2019, 34), a “place of purification of memory”, as it allows the public to participate directly at the posthumous life of the person (Mihalache A., 2020, 261). A common trait of the selected personalities is that they oscillate between ignorance and adulation in the collective memory so that we assist to a different perception (Wolton, 2019, 31), which unveils the influence of communism on memory and minds. Thus, even if society, the heiress of the communist history, continues to vacillate between a hypertrophied and atrophied memory, because the past influences the future deforming the post-communist present (Wolton, 2019, 12-14), such an itinerary constituted an authentic response to Pippidi’s question: How do we “rehabilitate a deformed, snipped and forbidden truth”? (Pippidi, 2000, 259)

The proposed itinerary may be an occasion for our society to ponder on the recent history and the *Golden Age* when history was *purified* in order to serve the so-called patriotic goals of the communist-nationalist regime. The destiny of these personalities may play an important role for the demystification of communism, given the benchmark they established. Moreover, this gallery of personalities may contribute to the beginning of a new mentality based on the values they had promoted throughout their lives. Any of these memorial houses and all of them together may represent arguments for a change in the attitude toward national values for building a new coherent civic attitude to contribute to the strengthening of national identity. These memorial houses reveal how traumas of the past stimulate us to (re)think the present as they stand for the courage, freedom, dignity and patriotism of their previous inhabitants. We may also mention the patriotism of these personalities, an unaltered one, no retrospective adjustment applied (Niall Ferguson) specific to the historical discourse now and then (Popa, 2020, 215-257). These memorial houses also represent a possibility for the nostalgic people to be addressed in order to reach reconciliation with the communist past. Undoubtedly, the formative value of these places of memory is significant, raising their importance

as the resilience of the communities may be strengthened only by education.

Unfortunately, despite the return to local history and museal localism of the local authorities, a strong mentality refusing to see the dissidents as *heroes* still persists. The reverse situation is offered by the statement that totalitarianism agonizes in the collective historical memory due to the lack of involvement on the behalf of the Ministry of Culture, whose attributions are to preserve and promote the historical patrimony of the country. The lack of a policy of memory, the disinterest manifested in the lack of finances for cultural projects and programmes, the negligence and amateurism of the authorities meant to promote the material and cultural patrimony unveils the indifference toward the recent past. In addition to this, we mention the persisting post-communist mentality of centralism; even when financing sources are identified for some cultural objectives, the common approach is focused on the state.

In the case of Maniu's house, the regional factors were involved in the process of restauration and valorisation – the Greek-Catholic Church, NGOs, private persons (Borz, 2020, *passim*) – so that the locals' attachment to the party leader played an important role in Transylvania if compared to I.C. Brătianu's memorial house. Brătianu's residence in Ștefănești (Argeș) was founded by a presidential decree (15 January 2021) and the headquarters are at Vila Florica, pertaining to a central institution, the Ministry of Culture that decided its rehabilitation by employing public funds of restauration<sup>8</sup>. It must be also noted that the impressive settlements of the liberal leader (on Biserica Amzei Street no. 5-7, Tronson Corp D, Sector 1, Bucharest<sup>9</sup>), which were in a serious state of decay, being in the administration of the National Library of Romania<sup>10</sup>, were restored by governmental funds, with the support of foundations opened to the public in May 2022.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-cultura-24014301-video-fost-inaugurat-muzeul-bratianu-sediul-fostaresedinta-din-stafanesti-familiei-bratianu-muzeul-fost-infintat-prin-lege-promulgata-iohannis-ianuarie.htm>  
<https://www.muzeulnationalbratianu.ro/despre/>  
(Accessed on 5 March 2022).

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.cultura.ro/asezamintele-ic-bratianu-vor-fi-restaurate-prin-cni> (Accessed on 6 March 2022).

<sup>10</sup> *Programul național de construcții de interes public sau social/ The National Programme of Constructions of Public and Social Interest*, which was conducted by the National Company of Investments Ltd.

Thus, Brătianu's buildings were reintegrated into the public cultural circuit of Bucharest while celebrating 100 years after building the neo-Romanian complex<sup>11</sup>. The late attention, yet hopefully redeeming, for the two buildings may be linked to the public and symbolic relation that persists between the Brătianu family and the National Liberal Party (the governing party), which nourishes the nostalgia for a *centralist* conception on history. Nevertheless, neglecting the patrimony because of superficial historical knowledge about the communist period contributes to the persistence of the unhealed past and easy manipulation of people's mentality.

Under these circumstances, the response of the Transylvanian people resided in the involvement of the church, civil society, NGOs, local authorities, people passionate about history and a university, all striving to attract funds to restore and preserve the memorial houses, (re)confirming Corneliu Coposu's declaration in 1995 that "only reputation returns from the grave" (Stanciu, 2022b, 539-549). The incapacity of the state to respond to society's aspirations is evident in its effort to replace the disinterest of the authorities and institutions with the volunteers' involvement in all the afore-mentioned cases: Lucian Blaga, Doina Cornea, Iuliu Maniu, David Prodan, Alexandru Todea. In addition, we cannot neglect the issue of the past representation where the rapport memory – oblivion – remembrance – history is essential and it is comprehensively illustrated in a memorial house with educational, ethical and civic valences, especially in a post-dictatorial era. Moreover, even when the history has the tendency to change the direction or discourse, these museums may reconstitute some traces and remind us to respect the rules.

From our perspective, beyond any interpretative analysis and without fetishizing the destiny of the discussed personalities, the enthusiasm of simple people to contribute to restitution of these historical figures' activity represent an indicator of free thinking and evolution of society relating to the state. At the same time, identification and valorisation of these anti-communist symbols demonstrate timidly the spread at the horizontal level of democratic principles and western values.

<sup>11</sup> <https://b365.ro/asezamintele-bratianu-din-bucuresti-vor-fi-restaurate-un-altar-pentru-ritualuri-de-magie-neagra-era-ascuns-sub-vegetatia-de-pe-cladire-449639/>  
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## A HISTORICAL TV-SERIES FOR ERDOĞAN

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**Abstract:** *The present study aims at analysing the impact of historical Turkish TV-series, taking into account the financial success and the wish of the governing class to rewrite history in a pleasing manner for President Erdoğan and his supporters. We used the existing information in three levels. The first one refers to the main moments of modern and contemporary Turkey, especially related to modernity. The second level is linked to the importance of film for society in general and especially nowadays, when it can become an efficient weapon, getting people accustomed to a political routine and a new history. This new version of history has no ties to reality, being a hyper-reality, as we argue is the Turkey's case. We highlighted the political influence in the imaginary through the film characters or depicted historical events. The third level refers to a synthetic presentation of successful historical TV-series beyond the Turkish borders, serving political aims. Turkey is not part of the European Union, but it managed through soft power to obtain a clear victory by the regime imposed by President Erdoğan.*

**Keywords:** *Ottoman Empire, rewriting history, Turkish TV-series, sultan, Neo-Ottomanism*

**Rezumat:** *Prezentul studiu și-a propus să analizeze impactul serialelor turcești de factură istorică între succesul financiar și dorința actualilor guvernanți ai Turciei de a rescrie istoria, pentru ca aceasta să fie pe placul președintelui Erdoğan și a susținătorilor săi. Am utilizat analiza informațiilor existente prin intermediul a 3 nivele. Primul se referă la principalele momente ale Turciei moderne și contemporanei, cu precădere asupra raportării la modernitate. Al doilea nivel se raportează la importanței filmului pentru societate în general și, mai ales în zilele noastre, când poate ajunge o armă de o mare eficacitate. În acest sens, poate să îi obișnuiască pe susținătorii săi nu numai cu o anumită rutină politică, dar și cu o nouă istorie, în care nu ne mai referim la realitate, ci la o hiperrealitate, cum este și cazul Turciei de astăzi. Am pus accent mai ales pe elementele care scot în evidență capacitatea politicului de a interveni în imaginarul istoric, prin personaje sau evenimente istorice instrumentalizate. Al treilea nivel este o prezentare sintetică a serialelor istorice, care au captat atenția spectatorilor, cu precădere din afara Turciei și care au slujit și unor scopuri politice. Turcia nu este parte a Uniunii Europene dar a reușit, prin ceea ce s-a numit soft power să obțină singura victorie clară, de până acum a regimului impus de președintele Erdoğan.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *Imperiul Otoman, rescrierea istoriei, seriale turcești, sultan, neo-Otomanism*

### Turkey and its history

Unlike the Romanian cinema after 1989, in which history remained almost a taboo topic, Turkey offers an opposite example, politically instrumentalized.

Over the last decade, Turkish TV-series became extremely popular in the Arab world and also in Europe. We are interested in the historical TV-series and their relation to the political world. Beyond the commercial aspect, our interest is to reveal the Neo-Ottomanism reflected in films, one of the directions of Turkish external politics, revitalized by the President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

Two internationally popular TV-series - *Muhteşem Yüzyıl/Magnificent Century* and *Diriliş Ertuğrul/Resurrection Ertuğrul* – were watched by hundreds of millions of TV viewers. The ultimate goal was to raise interest for the history of the country so that books about the love story between the sultan and Roxelana were published, followed by popular books for children about the hero Ertuğrul (Rukye, 2020).

While one of Turkey's objective – the inclusion in the European Union – remained unaccomplished, it led to the desire to prove that it can still be a regional power. The difference was that the state became traditional, eliminating all the elements of a lay state, imposed by the

President Mustafa Kemal, since this pro-European policy didn't prove to be convincing.

The Turkish modernization need was visible in the Tanzimat period (1839-1876), with all its reforms. The main ideas were courageous, such as the law of equal rights of all Turkish citizens in 1869 and creation of an Ottoman community, no political deconstruction involved. Although some administrative reforms were visible, including a lay education, the positive consequences cannot be exaggerated (Mustafa, 1976, 320-323).

For most Turks, it was evident that modernization was not understood outside a traditional frame, thus seriously limiting any reform of European type. Subsequently, it became clear that Christians within the empire or those parts of different sects unaccepted by Sunni Islam supported the same conception, but the dialogue was not that fruitful at the elite level and did not improve the situation. The Young Turks movements in 1865 followed the French model, supporting the replacement of sultan's autocratic rule. It was the only political reform movement in the last decades of the Ottoman Empire focused on the modernization of the Turkish state.

The Ottomanism direction, as it was illustrated in the Constitution of 1876, transformed all inhabitants of the empire in Ottomans. It was difficult to prove that all these citizens were more or less equal related to Islam. The first generation of Young Turks, lead by Midhat pasha, presented the modernist ideas of Western Europe in religious clothes.

Every ethnic/religious community within the empire, except the Muslim one, was tempted to believe in the civilizing idea of equality, but the distance between the Muslim community and the rest became even bigger, given that the Muslims felt under threat (Mustafa, 1976, 343-344).

Other legislative initiatives were related to the primary education, taxes and military service for everyone. Despite the tendency toward a secular state, the religious structure of Islam was untouched, having pre-eminence to the Christian community. The vision of sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909), considered the last sultan that actually ruled the empire, was visibly different, hoping in a restoration of the Ottoman Empire in this way.

Driven rather by economic interests than by saving the rights of Christian subjects in the Ottoman Empire, the great powers did less good

than expected. The Russo-Romanian-Turkish War (1877-1878) and especially the Balkan wars (1911-1913) offered pro and con arguments to both sides. Those who opposed the authoritarian rule tried to prefigure a federalist empire since 1876, which was unsuccessful, as the nationalist direction was too powerful in some autonomous provinces. Moreover, in other provinces of the empire, the local administration didn't actually conduct a sincere dialogue with nationalities, leading to extremists' major influence.

Hundreds of thousands of Turkish refugees sought escape from the Balkans and the Russian Caucasus in Anatolia, radicalizing the movement of the Young Turks, increasingly interested only by the cause of the Turkish people. That was ensured by other societies that initially promoted the lay state and a liberal Constitution: the Society for Union and Progress in 1889, later the Party Liberty and Progress (*Yttihat ve Terraki*), as well as the secret society Vatan/Fatherland, founded by Mustafa Kemal in Damasc (Hesemann, 2016, 115-119).

Though the "red sultan" was dethroned in 1909, all the afore-mentioned societies were linked to him by the common support of the Islam cause. (Hesemann, 2016, 359) The Armenian massacre in 1895 and the Greek massacre in Cyprus in the following year proved the way in which the sultan understood the Turks' right to defend their religion facing what they considered a destructive modernity (Mazawer, 2019, 108).

Generally speaking, the profound reform was stopped by the conservatory force of ulama (Muslim scholars in Islamic theology), while the hope for a glorious future of the state was more powerful than the reality, as many feared losing their wealth and status (Jelavich, 2000, 109).

In the last decades of the 19th century the clash of ideas regarding saving the Ottoman Empire had several attempts. Meanwhile, the fear of the Russian and British Empires led to embracing some theories, such as Pan-Islamism, Pan-Turanism and Pan-Turkism, which have survived to present day Turkey though with few chances of success.

Pan-Islamism was accepted by the sultan, who valued his quality of caliph of the Muslim world, but it offered no manoeuvre space. Essentially, a community for all Muslims was desirable. It is no coincidence that the numerous Muslim community of India is mentioned in TV-series, targeting thus the British Empire (Pan-Islamism, 2022).

Pan-Turanianism referred to the creation of an Euro-Asian state under the Turkish rule, from the Mediterranean Sea to the Chinese Wall, covering states like Finland, Hungary, which was difficult to imagine (Coțofană, 2010, 38). The term was used in the work of the Hungarian scholar Armin Vambery, a friend of the sultan Abdulhamid II, *Schetches of Central Asia* in 1868. In his view, the Turanian race included all the Turk peoples that deserve to be united and freed by any foreign domination. In this case the remark hinted at the Russian Empire (Hesemann, 2016, 123-124).

The poet Zya Gökalp, the father of the Turkish nationalism, chose already to fight for the “*Turk race, uncorrupted by alcohol and a filthy life, which fortified in glorious wars.*” In his dreams, the poet came back to the Persian Book of Kings that mentioned a mythical country of Turks, Turan. Such ideas appeared also in books until the First World War and changed radically the way in which the Turkish nation projected its future (Turanism, 2022).

In his book *La Crise de l'Orient (Burhan-ı Şark)*, 1907, Admet Riza, one of the founders of the Young Turks, pleaded for Pan-Turkism – a predominant nation (Turks), unlike the concept of the popular predominant family (Ottoman) within the empire. Instead of a courageous collaboration with the minorities from the empire, the Young Turks chose to fight for a Turk nation. As a consequence, any act of opposition (real or not) on the behalf of the non-Muslim minorities was labelled as a threat from within, as in the case of the Greeks and Armenians.

There were numerous reasons for extreme reactions in cities, vilayets with cosmopolite populations. For example, Izmir was considered the city of the unfaithful and the political structure of the Armenians was prominent, just as in the Istanbul case, the Armenian bankers and architects raised the modern city. (Pan-Turkism, 2022) That is why a publication in Cairo, *Turk*, considered in 1903 that the main reason for the Turks’ decay was the “*exploiting Armenian race that sucked the Turkish blood*”. Then, there was only a step to Tallat pasha’s reaction in a discussion with the American ambassador in Istanbul, Morghenthau, which led Turkey to enter the First World War. In Tallat pasha’s vision, the decay of the Turkish Empire was due to “*all these different blocks that has always conspired against Turkiye. Because of that, numerous provinces were lost one after*

*another, such as Greece, Serbia, Romania, Bulgaria, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Egypt and Tripoli, so we need to get rid of these foreign people*” (Hesemann, 2016, 142).

Three pashas that ruled in Turkey in its last imperial period were Tallat pasha, Enver pasha and Cevdet pasha, which pushed Turkism even further by the 1915 Armenian genocide and the attacks of the Greeks. These aspects show that during the First World War Turkiye was supporting more its own citizens than the Entente. These citizens didn’t feel safe not even after the instauration of the republic. One of Mustafa Kemal’s close people, who became ministry of justice, Mahmut Esat Bazkurt, was saying the following in 1930: “*The Turk is the only master, the only owner of this country; those who do not belong to the pure Turk race have no right in this country and they are to be Turks’ servants and slaves*” (Insel, 2017, 39).

While Mustafa Kemal imposed a lay authoritarian regime, in which Islam remained a personal issue and westernization was seen as a way to a powerful country, Erdoğan desires an authoritarian regime, accepts economic modernization and relies on Islam, national independence and Ottomanism. (Insel, 2017, 74)

This fear of the others was prolonged when we refer to Mustafa Kemal or political leaders after the Cold War. Thus, nowadays the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople is the only leader of the Greek community in the city, always suspected of “*Byzantine-Orthodox conspiracies against Turkey*” (Tanaşkovic, 2017, 74).

In more discourses Erdoğan addresses the supporters of the governing party *Adalest ve Kalkınma Partisi*/Party of the Justice and Development using the formula: *Osmanlı torunu*/We are the Ottoman’ followers. To what Ottomans is the reference? The ones closer to Europe of the 19th century or those as seen in the party ideology?

In fact, the president was a follower of the traditionalist direction that didn’t depart officially from Islam in the structure of the Turk state, according to Milli Gorus’ doctrine, his mentor’s Necmettin Erbakan. In their vision, the European Union had come to degrade so much that a Catholic and Zionist coup want Turkey’s de-Islamization. As his mentor, Erdoğan expressed his opinion in a speech in 2017 that a group of interests aims at destabilizing Turkey, referring to Jews. We should also take into account the opinions of those who support the

fact that Turkey chose this path just because it was not admitted to European Union (Fati, 2015, 371).

In the end, this behaviour concerning the legacy of an empire may transform the Turkish nation in an easy to manipulate one, when making reference to an idealized past and a lost grandeur because of third parties (Cagaptay, 2022, 25).

Erdoğan is called “our sultan” by his supporters, young Turks near the mosques who are considered representing truly their country. The president’s wish to impose a rewritten version of history became clear (Fati, 2015, 243).

The first presentation of this vision belonged to one of his ministries of external affairs, Ahmet Davutoglu, who in 2009 stated at a Sarajevo conference: “*the Ottomans centuries of the Balkans were a successful story that must be reinvented, as Turkiye is back.*” It was already known that the programme of the Party of Justice and Development included the intention to reconcile the Turks with their own history, the danger coming from the leader and his hyper-realist conception on the topic. In fact, the danger comes from the inability to distinguish the real historical facts and their own conception of history.

For the simple people of Turkey some Ottomans were not Ottomans enough. One edifying example is the yearly reconstruction on a stadium of the conquering of Constantinople on the 29th of May 1453. The present people, armed with wooden swords, near the marching janissaries, simulate the fight; the victory is ensured when the flag is stuck on the surface of punishment, while the crowds cry: “*Allah akbar, Allah akbar!*” (Temelkuran, 2017, 21-22, 67-69).

Other recent actions of President Erdoğan are the transformation of a Byzantine Church Chora in a mosque and especially the transformation of Hagia Sophia from a museum to a mosque on the 24th of July 2020. Europe had no articulated reaction.

Erdoğan turned his back to Europe and launched into diplomacy with Central Asia. The governing party is formed by members of middle studies and income who care about the economic security. There are only a few intellectuals that could be dangerous with their questions, while Islam is the most favourable option and a possible way of reaffirming the

influence of Sunni Turkey in the Orient (Karabekir, 2020).

As a consequence of this neo-Ottoman attitude considered arrogant and condescending, the Turkish external policy didn’t manage to impose itself, especially in the case of Sunnis in Irak and Syria, given the Kurds issue. Moreover, in Egypt, after the coup of General El-Sissi, the influencing capacity reached a low level. The most dangerous aspect is the one that links the Islam revival in Turkey and the Daesh movement in Syria that may use this aspect to spread what a connoisseur of the problem, Pierre-Jean Luizard, called the “daesh trap”, namely the spread of the poison of confessionalism (Luizard, 2016, 144-145).

For the moment, after the Arab spring in 2011, with all its involvement in Syria or Egypt, Turkey is far from its desirable leader role, while its diplomatic relations with Russia don’t offer a chance of stability not even on the short term. On the other hand, Turks are used to think of themselves as conquerors who sieged territories and people. Nowadays, in order to avoid unrecognized topics by authorities, when they are asked about the fate of Armenians or Greeks, they answer invariably that the Armenians and Greeks simply left<sup>1</sup> (Fati, 2022, 54-56).

### Cinema and its history

Is there a link between cinema and history? Undoubtedly, yes! Image and word made the cinematographic art a usual aspect of our lives. In European historiography, in the 90s, historian Marc Ferro, alongside a German historian, were interested in analysing the documentary *Histoire Parallèle*, the way in which the outbreak of the Second World War was perceived, through the news by the French and the Germans.

Then, the study *La Revolution Russe de 1917. Octobre, naissance d'une societe* stated that in the issue of lacking documentation in the west, the Soviet film could offer some elements as

<sup>1</sup> Sabina Fati calls the Turks a people that chose to leave with no memory when she refers to a friend’s description of Izmir by nowadays. The author was negatively impressed by the situation of those who ensured the wealth and beauty of the city in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the decades after the Great War. The cosmopolite character of the city was annihilated by the Greek and Armenian genocide, by the pressure on the Jewish community, followed by the uniformity of the city population from a city with over 50% minorities to under 1% nowadays.



sources of information. For another historian of Annales, Michel Foucault, the film may establish control over the popular memory and to become a risk when “people are depicted not as they are, but as they must remember they are.” Cinema came to be one of the best promoters of History, as it happened in France of the 1977-1985.

Another aspect is the harmfulness of image, the case of the German news that presented cities and houses destroyed by the Germans in Poland as Germans' losses. Meanwhile, Polish Jews became a danger because they left Germany after 1918. Here the documentary *Der ewige Jude* was filmed in 1940. (Schwarzman, 2015)

Historians became suspicious toward image, as the film may be forged, affecting the viewer's emotions. The decisive image of the link between the film and psychology was accomplished by a study of the German historian Siegfried Krakauer, *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* (1920), where a detailed analysis of the film making is offered. The initial script of the two Austrian directors was fundamentally changed by the fact that everything that was happening in the psychiatric asylum, director's crimes and dr. Caligari's, done by a mentally sick, happened only in the deranged mind of Cesare. The German director didn't consider that it was favourable to incriminate a state institution (Fontani, 2015, 18-31).

The academic world of the Anglo-Saxon space discussed the most the usage of cinema, especially of the documentaries as sources of information, starting with 1968. That is the period when important works were published about the methodology of research, such is the case of the historian Paul Smith who edited *The Historian and Film*. The studies of the mentioned book present the historian in the hypostasis of an analyst and consultant, producer and academic interested by the usage of film as a credible source and analysis of historical facts and phenomena.

Other historians of cinema studied from different perspectives so that films of a certain period are analysed linked to the evolution of society that inspires them. The relation between the national film and the British identity or the approach of films from the view of cultural studies (see Jeffrey Richards) is another research direction. A special type of films preserved their importance – propaganda films, as they were analysed by Anthony Aldgate in *Cinema and*

*History* (Smith, 1976; Richards, 1997; Aldgate, 1979).

### Turkish historical TV-series

It became clear that the glorious image of the Ottoman Empire was the centre of Erdoğan's governing programme, combining the political and the financial aspects. We refer to 4 TV-series, taking into account their main motivation:

1. About the founding myths: *Diliriş: Ertuğrul / Ascension: Ertuğrul*
2. About the Ottoman Empire: *Muhteşem Yüzyıl/ Magnificent Century*
3. The clash of civilizations: *Filinta Bir Osmanlı Polisiyesi/Filinta At The Down of a Thousand Years* and *Payitaht: Abdulhamid/ The Capital: Abdulhamid*.

The Turkish TV-series were most suitable for what Turkey wants to become, using soft power, a power of influence that one can obtain not using forceful positions, but rather the tactics used in cultural mass-media by an influencer.

While in 1968 Turkey was selling to the Soviet Union one single serial, the last decades brought hundreds of millions of dollars for the new Turkish TV-series. Turkey is now on the 2nd place worldwide after the USA in producing and commercializing TV-series. A new policy of the state is evident in this respect, starting in the '90s and reaching a peak in the 2000s. The success of the new Turkish productions is due to the collaboration with Hollywood specialists.

Whether other successful TV-series have daily topics, the historical ones are specific and have titles that refer to an era or focus on adventures, action or Islamic topics. An American historian, Josh Carney, interested by the general impact of TV productions on the Turkish society and on the larger audience worldwide, expressed his opinion that, unlike a historical film, the TV-series had a larger impact, as it leaves time to assess some scenes or to clarify history knowledge from the education system. Moreover, there are different expectations from a historical film than from a TV-series from the emotional view and from the depicted events perspective.

The TV-series set in the 13th century - *Diriliş: Ertuğrul/Ascension:Ertuğrul* – known to the Romanian public as *Putere și Glorie*, premiered in 2014, reached astounding success worldwide. It also echoed the success of another Turkish TV-series – *Suleiman the Magnificent*. Technically flawless, with amazing setting and

impressive actor Engin Altan Düzgün, who became famous for interpreting this role, the TV-series had 5 seasons and 105 episodes, directed by Metin Günay, produced by Tekden Film, broadcast by TRT, the main TV post in Türkiye. It was considered the best TV-series of 2014 and it was compared beyond the Turkish borders with the *Game of Thrones*.

The TV-series presents the glorious military campaigns of Ertuğrul, Osman's father, who laid the foundations of the Ottoman Empire. A different world is painstakingly depicted, making reference to the beginnings of the Turks' history. The Turkmen tribe Kay was part of the Oghuz tribes, the big family of the Turkmen tribes. When they settled in Anatolia and started ruling over it through Seleucids (a Turkmen tribe) and then directly.

This is the time when the tribe Kay was led by Ertuğrul and his father, Süleiman Bey. The survival of this tribe meant conflicts with the Byzantines, Mongols and the Seleucid sultanate of Rum. The evolution of Ertuğrul, especially his fights and victories, convince of his military and political qualities despite the fact that the actor confessed that he felt uncertain regarding playing his hero. After reading the book of Dede Korkut, one of the few sources concerning the Kay tribe, the approach of the role became consistent (Ertuğrul, 2022).

The fact that the TV-series has a political motivation is clear due to the motto, repeated in other historical films or TV-series: *"We've been here for a thousand years and we'll be here for another thousand. Allah bless our martyrs. The stories and characters were inspired by our history."*

It is certain that an absolute leader, paying attention to the tribe's needs was desired, especially given the hardships to banish the Byzantines, the Templars, the Seleucids and especially the Mongols. Throughout the numerous episodes, the way in which the characters relate to the Christians remained negative.

Unlike the members of the Kay tribe, the Byzantines and Templar knights are depicted different since Ertuğrul states: *"We fight in the name of Allah's justice!"* The Templars celebrate the alleged death of Ertuğrul, dancing with ladies in an inn, drinking alcohol, they have slaves and their leader, governor Ares participates in animal sacrificing, using their blood to fortify himself. Byzantines' weaknesses and their misunderstandings with the Seleucids

transformed the proto-Turks of Ertuğrul in the best shield against the Mongols. In the same context, the not so cordial relations with the Seleucids are explained, as they formed an empire in the central Asia and conquered a part of Anatolia after the Manzikert battle of 1071, influenced then by the Persian civilization.

What were the expectations of the filmmakers? The producer Mehmet Bozdog stated that despite there are no clear information about that period, the first document appeared 150 years after, he based his production on the fact that history *"has soul... we remodel history"*, a statement that was proven on the political plan. The TV-series was seen as a possibility to strengthen the national feeling, reaching the audience how the Turkish state appeared. President Erdoğan visited several times the film set, having photo sessions with the actors and using the soundtrack in his campaign regarding the constitutional referendum, posing as a successor of the grand heroes of Turkey, among which was Ertuğrul.

The success of the TV-series was huge, especially in the Arab world. Nevertheless, the political leaders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates forbade it, considering it meant promoting a powerful Turkey in the area, part of the Ottoman Empire. Kuwait was an exception, and Erdoğan spared no effort in promoting the serial together with the main actor.

A notable success was registered in Pakistan, where they asked for the subtitles in Urdu dialect. What is more, as a result of the fans' request, the main actor visited the country, as well as Bangladesh. The Turkish ambassador insisted on the important role the TV-series had to strengthen the relations between the Muslim states, which proved once again the Ankara offensive to impose its influence in the Muslim Asia. Not all the comments were moderate, as India analysed the TV-series in this manner: *"a tribe of 2.000 highlanders triumphed. It is inspirational; if you have a creed and the desire to fulfil it, no one can stand in your way."*

Referring to the 180 million Muslims from India, Renuka Narayanan stated that the TV show was not that innocent as it wants to appear: all the episodes make reference to the unfaithful people. As such, Bamsi, Ertuğrul's closest friend only wants to fight them, while the main hero aims at convert to Islam everyone – his enemies, Christians, Mongols (who are amoral and cruel). Thus, the difference between the depicted

history and the real one is difficult to be traced (Narayanan, 2022).

In 1921, based on a law, the access of Turk military forces was granted to guard the grave of Suleiman bey, Ertuğrul Ghazi's father, in Syria. In 2015, the President Erdoğan sent 500 Turkish soldiers who moved the grave to the city Esmesi, in northern Syria, closer to Türkiye (Davies, 2015).

Moreover, 13 soldiers, dressed in highlander clothes of the Kay tribe represent the guard of honour at the Ertuğrul Ghazi grave in Şogut. That is yet another strategy of reinventing proto-Ottomans (TM, 2017).

Until the historical TV-series *Diriliş: Ertuğrul*, a single TV-series had similar success, broadcast in 40 countries and an estimated number of viewers of 200 millions - *Muhteşem Yüzyıl/ Magnificent Century*, 2011-2014, directors: Yagmur Taylan, Turul Taylan, Mert Baykal, Yagiz Alp Akaidin, producers: Timur Savci, Show TV and Star TV. In Romania it was broadcast under *Suleiman Magnificul*.

The exotic topic and especially the setting, costumes, jewellery reconstituted meticulously contributed to the success of the TV show from the very beginning. We consider that producers' great courage consisted in reaching a balance between the official and private life of Suleiman. Inevitably, more space was given to his relationship with Roxelana/ Hürrem, which didn't situate it as a popular TV-series among the governing class, given the fact that the feminine characters were almost equal with the masculine ones. That may be the reason why the producers were threatened with death from the first episodes.

Whereas in many countries where it was broadcasted, it attracted a feminine audience interested by the external aspects of the harem life and the endless plots and scheming, the President didn't let an occasion to remind his supporters which must be the behaviour of historical heroes. He referred to the way Suleiman's life was described – not spending his time in harem, but on the horse, dealing with state policies. Moreover, he considered that too much time was spent in harem with things of no value. After pointing that out to the producers, the next episodes depicted how Quran was read in harem, while the sultan was riding the horse, on his way to a military expedition. The TV-series opened a heated debate concerning the mannered in which historical heroes should be depicted, as heroes or as people with possible

flaws. Even though some people enjoyed the fact that the serial conquered the world, the conservative wing continued to comment upon the history representation of the Ottoman Empire.

What was presented in 139 episodes, 4 seasons had significant consequences – the link between the audience and the actors, as during commercials people commented on the social media or looked up information about the heroes from the show. That re-established the contact between the public and a historical serial. The historical consultant of the TV-series, Gunhan Borek, was amazed by the discussion with the main actor, Halit Ergenc, regarding what would have happened if Suleiman's eldest son wasn't killed (Carney, 2014).

Other sources condemned more explicitly the fact that though a sultan had remarkable accomplishments, he had too much of an appetite for wine and women. In that respect, Erdoğan, promoting Islam values wanted a flawless main hero. There were historians that attempted to present the reality, but faced those who considered that they don't respect the historical truth and throw an undignified view on a sultan that ruled the empire at its height (Afyoncu, 2013, 9).

Halit Ergenc, famous for his role, went even further and participated in the protests in the Gezi Park (2013), alongside another actor, who played the role of Mehmed II in the film *Fetih, 1453*, Devrim Evin. Making reference to the legend around the last Byzantine emperor, Constantine the 11th, the Marble Emperor, the reporter Iulian Comănescu pointed out that even the celluloid sultans prove to be remarkable heroes (Comănescu, 2013).

Among the wealth of literature generated by the TV-series, many books tried to establish a balance between the reality and fiction from the serial, which proved to be difficult, as controversies in Turkey are always present.

Except for the serial *Diriliş: Ertuğrul*, *Filinta Bir Osmanlı Polisiyesi/ Filinta At The Down of a Thousand Years* and *Payitaht: Abdulhamid/ The Capital: Abdulhamid* may be considered the heavy artillery of the Turkish historical TV-series of the last decades, given the state financial support and the discussions from some sensitive topics related to the last century of the Ottoman Empire.

*Filinta Mustafa* was a premiere – the first detective serial, broadcast in 2014-2016, produced by Yusuf Esenkale, Serdar Oğretici, 2

seasons, 56 episodes, Tamer Ciray's book adaptation, *Filinta Galata*. It was broadcast on TRT 1 and up until 2014 it was the most expensive Turkish TV-series, involving many consultants and stuntmen from Hollywood. Following the tradition of this type of serials, there is a motto to the martyrs of this grand nation that ruled the world for centuries and for its descendants who lost their lives serving justice.

Filinta was an officer in Galata, a neighbourhood in Istanbul, alongside his friend, Ali. An Ottoman detective in the 19th century (1850-1900) that wants to help his country and, implicitly, the sultan, against a secret worldwide society, named the Brotherhood, and against a Machiavellic merchant, eager to do anything to get the power, Boris Zacharias.

The main theme of the serial is an empire surrounded by the interests of the grand powers who would do anything, especially to earn wealth. The enemies are plenty: the British Empire, the Russian Empire, Freemasonry, the Jews, the danger is greater since some ideas reached the Ottoman officers (hinting at the Young Turks that don't have a good image in the TV-series).

Beyond Istanbul, especially in the Balkans, the gun warehouses, hidden by Russians in a territory that would become Bulgaria in 1908 are a proof of the immediate danger in the Balkans. The streets, especially the poor ones in the capital, shelter people that may be easy to bribe, while some ideas regarding the constitutional monarchy are nothing but a trap for those eager to take over the power. This TV-series was appreciated by Erdoğan (Filinta, 2022).

The most politically instrumentalized historical TV-series was *Payitaht: Abdulhamid/ The Last Emperor*, considered the last emperor that actually ruled the Ottoman Empire between 1876-1909, when he was dethroned by the Young Turks. The serial comprised 5 seasons, 154 episodes, broadcast in 2017-2021, directed by Serdar Akar, Emre Konuk, Doğan Ümit Karica, Şevki Es, the producing company Es Film and distributed by TRT 1.

The TV-series was announced by a miniseries of 4 episodes - *Ciragan Baskini/ Ciragan Conspiracy* 2014, directed by Oguzhan Tercan, produced by Cem Ozoy. It reconstitutes a real event, the attempt of the opposition to bring back to the throne the sultan Murad V, Abdulhamid II's brother, the only sultan that was a Freemason. The salvation came with the

involvement of the police chief from Besiktaş, who intervenes. The saviour, Yedi Sekiz Hasan Pasha, a real historical figure, an officer with great professional merits, though less educated, was totally dedicated to the sultan Abdulhamid II.

The serial *Payitaht: Abdulhamid/ The Last Emperor* presents throughout 5 seasons the efforts to save the interests of the Ottoman Empire, as well as some undeniable accomplishments of his reign: Hedjaz railway, which facilitated the participation at Mecca and Medina pilgrimages, the victory in the war with Greece in 1897, the fight against Zionist movement and Freemasonry. The Russian and British pressure on the Turkish administration (returning some loans of the Turkish state) convinced the sultan to accept Germany's economic and military help. At least that is the sultan's opinion who mentions in a discussion with Tallat Pasha, Turkey's ruler since 1909, mentioning the strongholds built by his order to defend the capital.

Within the empire, sultan's fight with the Young Turks was the actual debate and stake of this TV-series. The underlined idea is that in order to resist, the Ottoman Empire needed only an authoritarian state. Only the sultan is the main supporter of the empire, since the Turk officers lost their individuality by accepting Freemason ideas, such as constitutional monarchy with no chances of success, as it would suppose a parliament with elected representatives from non-Muslim national minorities not loyal to the Turkish state. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* are also mentioned, along with the faith that Zionism was led by Theodor Hertzl aimed at creating a Jewish state from the river Nile to Euphrates, as well as the Vatican plots, using an assassin of Armenian origins.

One of the sultan's admirers is Gazi Nuri Osman pasha, the hero from Plevna, who dedicates his life serving the state. He is also the topic of a well-known Turkish military march - *Plevne Marşı* – as the lines avoid telling the end of Plevna's siege, focusing on Osman-pasha and another quasi-present theme in the 19th century – the syndrome of the besieged empire by the great unfaithful powers. What is more, commemorating the war of 1877, the actor who played the role of the Plevna hero was a guest of honour at the manifestations organized by the Turkish Army.

What made the debate even more exciting was the fact that members of the former imperial

family returned in 1974 to the country and supported financially this TV-series. Thus, the descendant of Abdulhamid II, Harun Osman expressed the opinion that *“history repeats itself... these foreigners meddle and name the nowadays President a dictator, as they called Abdulhamid the red sultan.”* Moreover, following the same line, President Erdoğan declared that *“the same scheming is used today in the same manner... what the west does is the same, only the time and the actors differ.”* The message of the TV-series was also appreciated by members of the scientific community, and the President’s visit to the film set demonstrated his appreciation.

Undoubtedly, the hero Abdulhamid is presented as a noble leader who did the right thing to protect the Ottoman Empire. His mistakes, known in history as Hamidian massacres, are not accepted. The press, secularism, democracy are masterpieces of the foreign powers, religious minorities and godless liberals. Ultimately, all these eroded the national identity, honour and security. Among all enemies, the most wicked are considered the Jews.

At the end of the TV-series, the dethroned sultan in 1909 has a dream before his death – on a bright hallway there are paintings with the most known sultans who convey their appreciation: Suleiman the Magnificent, Selim III, Mehmed II and Osman Gazi. At the end of this scene, the sultan is in front of his own portrait. His funeral in 1918 describes the sadness of the many who supported him. The TV-series was successful, appreciated for its political message – the nowadays Turks must be aware of the fact that they are descendants of the Ottomans. In Kosovo, it gave rise to controversies concerning the revisionist historical message. (Karabekir, 2020, Hurriyetdailynews, 2018; Abdulhamid, 2022)

The reaction beyond Turkish borders was much harsher and reached topics that were linked to Turkey’s adherence process to the European Union. The analysed TV-series was a contradictory issue for the European report Kati Piri. She was also disturbed by the fact that the Jews were incriminated in many episodes and thus recommended that the authorities should take the initiative to counteract. In her documentation, the TV-series was mentioned, while the funds for Turkey’s pre-adherence were recommended to be used to grant the press and mass-media total freedom of speech.

Such a point of view was not approved by the President Erdoğan and his supporters. As a result, in a discourse in front of the young people in Düzce, he recommended them to watch the show to become aware of how vast and powerful was the Ottoman Empire. At the commemoration of 100 years from the death of sultan Abdulhamid II on the 11th of February 2018, Erdoğan named the sultan a grand visionary, a strategical personality and therefore a character that inspires him.

Furthermore, those who don’t support the president have the impression that the sultan’s attitude toward enemies in the TV-series resembles very much the one of the ironically named “sultan Erdoğan I”. They refer to Erdoğan’s last collaborators, forced to retrieve, such as the ministry of external affairs, Ahmet Davudoglu and Abdullah Gul. Two famous quotes from the serial are: *“If they have a plan, Allah has one as well”*, a quote from Quran, and concerning his enemies, the sultan compares them with *“some thorns that he would cut”* (Rukye Tinas, 2020).

## Conclusions

Unquestionably, we’ve got only partial conclusions to the analysed topic, as both sides continue their confrontation - the traditional Turkey and the opposing one, in an attempt to prove that European belonging is a necessity.

Historical serials benefited of great success, while the Orient mirage had made many women a victim, as the golden doors of the harem seemed more attractive than the ones of the marital home.

The reassessment of the historical image through these TV-series had the starting point in its impact in transmitting several messages. Among those, the most powerful is of the capacity of the Turkish state to reiterate power and influence of the Ottoman Empire, using the impact of the word and image. If we were to name the common character of these TV productions, then it is Allah, while the symbolism is suffocated by the image of the flag, which establishes an organic link between the sultan and the people.

The elite of the former Ottoman Empire is much easier to be accused for an inadequate political behaviour, but most poor people remained on the sultan’s side, with all the hardships they’d been through. That is the case

of the policeman Filinta Mustafa or Yedi Sekiz Hasan Pasha.

Like these heroes, the President Erdoğan is certain of his mission to restore Turkey to its former glory. He considers that it is in the name of the Ottoman Empire, Islam and based on the right of the sword and conquest.

Given the economic success of Turkey and modernization, the promotion of Islam was done with a fervour worthy of the Middle Ages,

especially by the supporters of the governing party. It is also evident that the internal and external policies got used with the modern coating for a traditional interior.

The image of Turkey was cleverly promoted especially in the area of cultural attractiveness and cultural policies. Thus, the historical TV-series have had a decisive contribution to one certain victory of this country as soft power (Nye, 2005).

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS/ LISTA ILUSTRĂȚILOR

**Fig. 1.** President Erdoğan visiting Ertuğrul / Președintele Erdoğan în vizită la Ertuğrul  
<http://independentpress.cc/erdogan-praises-ertugrul-tv-series-for-reacquainting-world-with-ottoman-history/2019/05/21/>

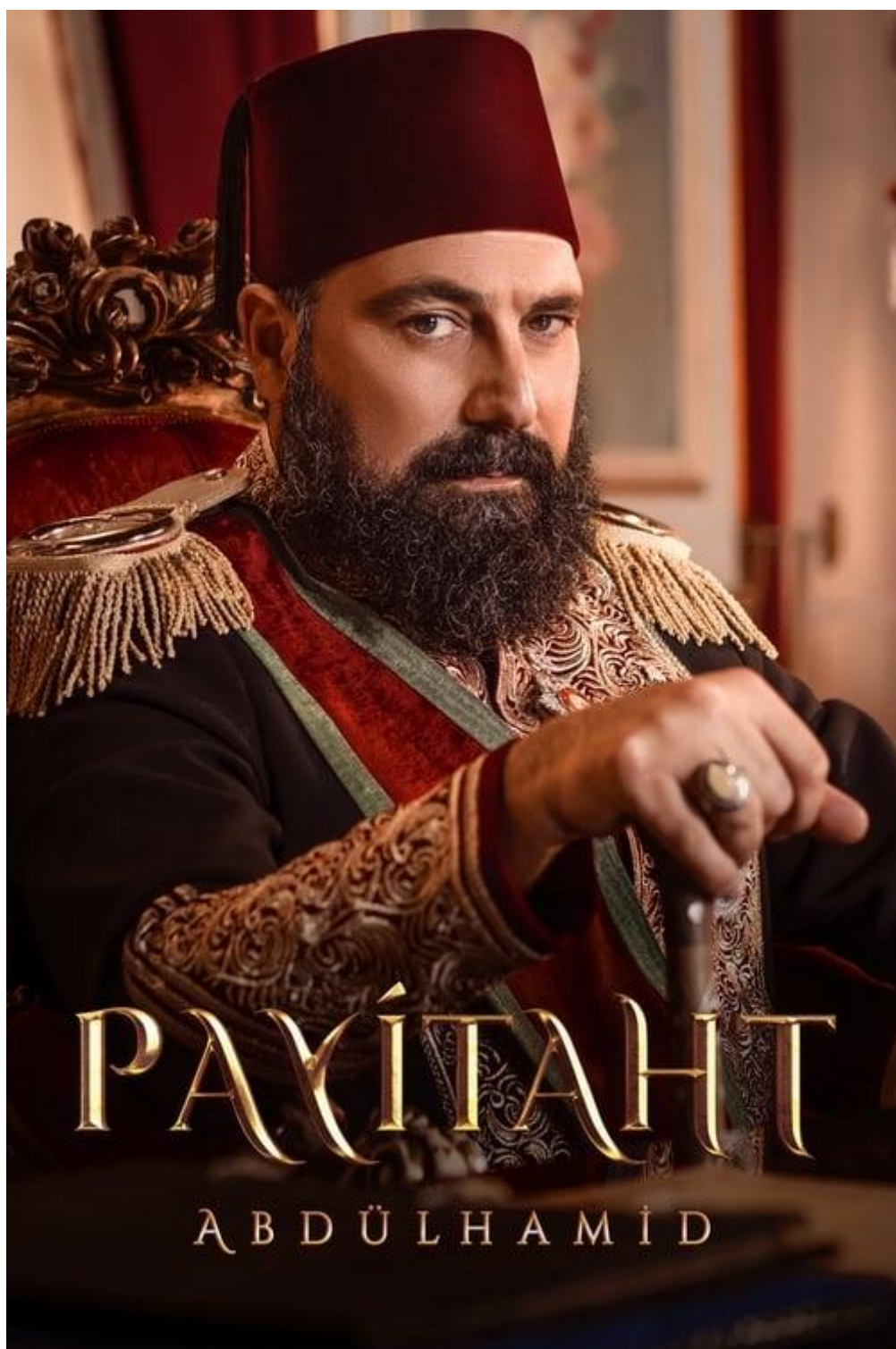
**Fig. 2.** A sultan for Islam/ Un sultan pentru islam  
<https://www.themoviedb.org/tv/70788-payitaht-abd-lhamid>

**Fig.3.** Every era with its sultan/ Fiecare epocă cu sultanul ei  
<https://www.digi24.ro/stiri/externe/mapamond/erdogan-a-vizitat-fosta-bazilica-sfanta-sofia-din-istanbul-1340325>



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**“I LOVE, THEREFORE I AM”:  
DISMANTLING THE CARTESIAN DICHOTOMY AND UNIFYING THE SELF IN *GHOST IN THE SHELL***

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**Abstract:** *This paper observes critically the construction mechanisms of identity in two media manifestations of the Ghost in the Shell franchise: the animated movie released in 1995 in Japan and the Hollywood live-action movie released in 2017. Of particular interest is the Cartesian dichotomy between “mind” and “body” and its philosophical problematization as well as its adaptation to late-modern inquiries resulting into the unification of the two dimensions of the human being into one monolithic entity by employing “love” comprehended as “self-love” in the quest for individual significance and fulfilment. The current analysis draws on extensive fieldwork in Japan and wide-ranging literature research which allowed cross-culturally motivated comparisons.*

**Keywords:** *identity, mind-body dualism, Japanese animation, Hollywood cinema, postmodern love.*

**Rezumat:** *Lucrarea de față analizează critic mecanismele de constituire a discursului identitar ce apar în două produse de mass-media aparținând conglomeratului Ghost in the Shell: filmul de animație lansat în 1995 în Japonia și filmul de acțiune lansat în 2017 la Hollywood. În mod particular, accentul cade pe dihotomia carteziană dintre “minte” și “corp” precum și problematizarea filosofică a acesteia și adaptarea ei la cerințele modernității târzii, rezultând în unificarea celor două dimensiuni ale ființei umane într-o entitate monolitică prin utilizarea iubirii: aceasta este conceptualizată ca și iubire de sine ce însoțește fiecare individ în căutarea propriei semnificații și împliniri existențiale. Cercetarea de teren extinsă și accesul la literatură exhaustivă au permis procedee comparative ce transcend diferențele culturale dintre cele două filme.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *identitate, dualismul corp-minte, animație japoneză, cinematografie hollywoodiană, iubire postmodernă.*

## **1. Introduction: the binary self and the fallacies of identity construction**

For centuries, the clear-cut separation between rationality and emotionality or between the mind and the body has been an open debate among intellectuals, artists, educators, and more recently, among mass-media influencers, politicians, entertainers. This paper approaches phenomenologically the *Ghost in the Shell* franchise from the perspective of the annihilation of identity as soul/body dichotomy and its (re-)unification as a harmonious entity. What started as a cyberpunk *seinen manga* (comics for young male readers in Japan) in 1989, written and illustrated by Masamune Shirow (born as Ōta Masanori in 1961), developed gradually into a typical *anime* franchise (*anime* being defined in its narrow understanding as a subcategory of Japanese animation with specific features such as “fan service”, heavy technological insinuations, a blending of temporal dimensions, ambivalent sexualisation of the female body and

questionable references to masculinity, individual empowerment and national supremacy, stretching historically from late-1970s until mid-1990s): the eponymous cult-movie from 1995 directed by the likewise cult-director Oshii Mamoru<sup>1</sup> (born 1951) followed in 2004 by *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* under the same directorial signature, augmented in 2002 and 2020 by the TV animation series *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* respectively *Ghost in the Shell: SAC 2045* and the OVA (original video animation) products *Ghost in the Shell: Arise/Alternative Architecture/The New Movie* in 2015. In parallel, the video games industry took over the topic since 1997. In 2017, a live-action movie was released by DreamWorks in cooperation with Paramount Pictures and other companies under the direction of Rupert Sanders with music by

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper, personal names are employed according to the conventions of the country of origin: first name followed by family name (Western system) and family name followed by first name (Japanese system).

Clint Mansell and Lorne Balfe and featuring Scarlet Johansson in the lead-role.

The goal of this paper is to observe critically the concept of “identity” as displayed in the *Ghost in the Shell* franchise with the re-formulation of the Western notion in the original Japanese script until its re-semanticization in the Hollywood production. At the core of the analytical pursuit, Ludwig Wittgenstein’s “language game” turns into “identity game”, a playful dynamization of an initially static vision of identity, enhanced by cross-cultural references and late-modern epistemological uncertainties. Additionally, Robert Greene’s pragmatic elaborations on the “laws of human nature” serve as the necessary link between theoretical hypotheses and practical lessons for everyday life.

To this outcome, I shall proceed in three steps: firstly, I shall succinctly describe the theory of identity as a liquefied phenomenon in late modernity with “love” as a potential tool for its re-solidification. I draw on theories of language as well as on debates on the versatility of the identity concept in modernity related to the position of the self within the all-too-consuming mechanisms of consumption, longing and fulfilment. Secondly, I analyse the animation movie *Ghost in the Shell* (『攻殻機動隊』 *Kôkaku kidôtai*, literally “Mobile Armored Riot Police”) released in 1995 as a Japanese-British international co-production, produced by Kodansha, Bandai Visual and Manga Entertainment and with animation provided by Production I.G.. It was directed by Oshii Mamoru 押井 守 (born in 1951) with music by Kawai Kenji 川井 憲次 (born in 1957) on a script by Itô Kazunori 伊藤 和典 (born in 1954) based on the manga publication by Shirô/Shirow Masamune 士郎 正宗 (born as Ôta Masanori 太田正典 in 1961). For the sake of brevity and clarity, in this paper, only the animation movie from 1995 is taken into account from the Japanese franchise. Thirdly, the live-action movie *Ghost in the Shell* from 2017 is critically observed with particular focus on the identity construction and the reverse journey of initiation pursued by the main character enacted by Scarlett Johansson. The *Conclusion* with wrap up major elements – both common and contrasting – in the attempt to formulate an alternative theory of identity based on love as the missing link between rationality and emotionality since times immemorial.

Methodologically, I draw on 20 years of empiric-phenomenological fieldwork on Japan, Japanese animation as well as in the slippery domain of Japanese mass-media. The

phenomenological experience is socio-culturally contextualized, emulated in animation as a discursive mass-medium and a performative display of an authentic self and resistance against conformity, uniformity and the alleged superiority which comes from their association, hence revealing the highest level of existential transcendence: the consumerist strategies visible in the Japanese society of late modernity turn out to be plain symptoms of a forever-postponed confrontation with the individual reality, and not a sustainable solution in terms of personal fulfilment and/or social cohesion. I observe the multiple layers of animation as representative of Japanese mass-media and of Hollywood cinema as a Western phenomenon caught in the stress-ratation between arts and mass-media, embedded in bureaucratic structures of administration and self-organization such as release politics, the economic supervision of brand-related consumption, the socio-cultural management of producers and consumers as well as the products themselves and their meta-narrative concatenations.

The sources consist of extensive fieldwork with long-term participatory observation and empirical data-collection resulting from archive research of Japanese documents and informal discussions with Japanese producers and with Japanese and Western fans and other consumers of products of popular culture, domestic and international. This complex endeavour allowed unexpected insights into the mechanisms of production, consumption, perception and processing of media phenomena in Japan. Taking into account the fact that the Japanese media industry is extremely vivacious and almost painful in its superficiality with a calculated momentary impact on audiences, the persistence and longevity of the problematic of identity throughout decades without interruption is a powerful reminder that determination, hard-work and persistence are worthy assets in the hierarchy of human values – although not always forthrightly advertised as such.

Moreover, the quest for individuation and self-actualization – top-priorities in Maslow’s pyramid of needs (Maslow, 1954) – appear more than ever intrinsic quests in individual humans’ journeys towards discovering and fulfilling their true potential: what seemed in the past the privilege of distant elites, has become in recent decades the existential pursuit of millions of citizens all-over the world. Demystifying love and unifying identity into a coherent whole has turned from a delusional gesture of self-

aggrandizement into a quotidian quest with unlimited possibilities.

## 2. Theoretical hypotheses: self, identity and love

The liquefaction of identity in late modernity claims the conceptualization of subjectivity and individuality as a “language game” (Wittgenstein, 1984; Lyotard, 1979) at the crossroads of multiple potential realities to be amalgamated into one sole dimension of perception and processing: If “the unitary subject is no longer unified” (Kondo, 1990, 43), the re-unifying force is love. If the objectivization of the human being an entity of desire and site of projection – to employ Julia Kristeva’s (1974, 273) terminology – transformed the human being from a model of divine imagination and presence into a mirror of scientific projections, it seems possible that every individual abandons the sphere of his/her own identity and accedes to the public space; he/she metamorphoses into a symbol for something which he/she cannot possibly be and must obey the limits, rules and circumstances imposed upon oneself from the outside. Like Don Quixote in another spatial and temporal culture – who, in the second part of the novel meets persons having already read the first part of the novel, and who must be faithful to the book which he has himself become and protect it from misapprehensions, counterfeits and apocryphal continuations, to paraphrase Michel Foucault (1966, 73) – the human being in his/her turn must follow his/her own discourse and transform oneself into an object of the process which he/she him-/herself as a subject had originally created.

Within the capitalist logic of consumerism, excess and spectacular, love emerges in the interplay of power and seduction (Greene, 1998, 2001). The first half of the equation of this new paradigm of love is power: In Foucault’s classical theory of power (see Foucault, 1969), developed from Kristeva’s understanding of Freudo-Marxism as a means to establish hierarchies of oppression and submission within the capitalist system and expanded subsequently by Butler’s interpretation of the body’s physicality and its necessary consideration in the evaluation of socio-cultural negotiations, power implies violence and coercion, in best case scenario involving a cunning cost-reward calculation (Greene, 1998, 109; Butler, 1990, 21, 1993, 54, Hooks, 2000, 41). In late 1990s, Robert Greene elaborates on the interchangeability of subject and object within the balance of power while

pondering on the semantic transfer of morality as more often than not a great barrier on the way to becoming an apt player on the historical stage. If power is essentially amoral, deception appears as the most potent weapon in one’s arsenal, and patience is the crucial shield; playing with appearances and mastering the art of clever disguise are not only key-components in the acquisition—and preservation—of power, but also key-tools in observing the environment and carefully choosing the battles to fight. The way Japanese ideologues and creators of popular merchandises integrate this strategical thinking in their public policy becomes, ultimately, the way they relate to consumers and educate them to come back, eternally, faithfully, for more reinforcement of the same familiar existential models (see Flax, 1990, 143; Bauman, 2000, 11; Baudrillard, 1983, 25).

The second half of the new equation of love is seduction: it is true that people and institutions are constantly trying to influence others, to tell them what to do, what to think, how to act, what to feel, by means of covert or overt power mechanisms – and just as often humans tune them out, resisting their attempts at persuasion or coercion (Greene, 2001, 23; Mestrovic, 1997, 31). There are moments in our lives, though, when all humans act differently – when they are in love. This is a sort of spell: Humans’ minds are usually preoccupied with their own concerns, but when in love, they will become filled with thoughts of the one they love. They grow emotional, lose the ability to think straight, act in foolish ways that they would never do otherwise. If this goes on long enough, something inside them gives way – they surrender to the will of the loved one and to their desire to possess them. This is the moment when the seductive power of subliminal indoctrination through artistic works gains control over consumers and potential admirers (Bolton, 2018, 73; Azuma, 1999, 55). It is both pointless and futile to try to resist such power, to imagine that it is evil or ugly: within the mechanical system of the entertainment industry, the power relationships between producers and consumers, between performers and audiences, provide at a closer look the practical tools in extrapolating theoretical concatenations to real-life actions with successful results: like business management, the management of emotions pertains insights into the seductive power of propaganda which bypasses the rational processes of distance and re-calculation (Greene, 2018, 16; see Luhmann, 1996).

The emergence of a new identity paradigm based on love calls for a fresh, dynamic manipulation and restructuring of emotional values as well as the simultaneous fundamental reconsideration of the position of femininity within the spectrum of late-modern cultures of assimilation and diversification. This dialectic handling of the self and of the other requires the re-evaluation of humanity from ruthless competition and relentless expansion towards playful togetherness and compassionate integrity.

Moreover, the overcoming of the capitalist human ideal (“[someone] who is prudently restrained in the office and wildly anarchic in the shopping mall”, Eagleton, 2003, 28) and the turning of the spotlight towards more normative concerns like the integration of the individual within the community, the importance of the family, the nostalgic depiction of one’s homeland, the enhancement of money and career as a means of making a living and not as an ultimate existential goal, and the moderate patriotism – however contested they might be elsewhere – gradually lead to the constitution of a re-solidified identity paradigm as self-reflexive project to harmoniously unify lucidity and courage, hard-work and perseverance, honesty, respect and humility: this might be the core structure of the *homo amans*, the loving human, calling for a (more) affectionate relationship with the self and the other(s).

In the process of identity stylization in contemporary Japan, the female cyborg body appears simultaneously as the essence of the Japaneseness and as a chaos-driving force within the traditional patriarchal order despite her traditional, familist education, due to the powerful symbols she is loaded with (see Haraway, 1991, 92; Brown, 2006, 12; Ivy, 1995, 121). However, for the creation of a singular, univocal, autonomous identity paradigm compatible with late-modern challenges, such a disturbing instance is inevitable. The disorder permanently insinuated by the female cyborg body in the tension between androgyny and recurring biological intermissions mirrors the instability and volatility of the Japanese modernity as a reputed monolith. Eventually, at the pinnacle of its spectacularly hybrid modernity, the female body is becoming what generations of male-dominated historians have debated upon: the self-conscious icon of consumption and destruction, a unique synthesis of mind as spirit and physical-technological ambivalence, emblematically symbolized by the ambiguous,

fascinating and mysterious character of Kusanagi Motoko.

### **3. *Ghost in the Shell* animation movie (1995): the bi-dimensional self**

Unlike other media-versions of the *Ghost in the Shell* franchise, the animated movie employs a series of strategies aimed at attracting and convincing Western viewers of the credibility of the main theme: the depth of the identity problematic underneath its popularity as a question for reality shows, science fiction movies and philosophical debates. To this outcome, a complex intellectual discourse under the pretext of the mystery plot located in the near-future Japan, is constructed which compels audiences to think and feel at the same time (Oshii, 2004a, 2004b; Ruh, 2004).

Moreover, the main character’s detached almost aloof attire strikes a painful chord within audiences’ habit to identify with the protagonist, even more so as Major Kusanagi Motoko is openly playing with her ambivalent appearance while leading her team into fearless – and to a certain degree morally dubious – missions (Silvio, 2006, 128; see Wells 1998). There are, essentially, two levels on which this strategic discourse is being developed, superficially divergent, but, in fact, with both conducive towards the same goal: the unification of the self into a harmonious even though complex structure.

The first level comprises human identity as a juxtaposition of rationality and emotionality. The Cartesian vision of this inner separation has been impacting the Western world and its global sphere of influence for centuries, only to be questioned by *Ghost in the Shell*’s futurist, pan-Asian landscapes of a humanity in which cyborgs and humans not only co-exist – or must learn to co-exist as humans are increasingly technologically enhanced –, but they collide in their quest for a life worth living (see Bauman, 2000, 11; Bhabha, 2004, 143; Castells, 1997, 147). This refers less to the material dimensions of existence such as money, work, social status, family environment, friends, and rather to the definition of “life” and “worth living”. The main character’s fluid persona combines a mechanical femininity transcending the androgynously enticing body which rejects traditional categorizations of beauty or attractiveness and an abstract intellect which futilely searches for the boundaries between mind, soul, spirit. Throughout the entire movie, key-scenes reveal her quest for an unequivocal answer to who she



really is: the initial visual display of her “birth” as a robot; the wild chase through the market and streets of the metropolis finalized with the capture of the trash-collector and the thug, both hacked by the Puppet Master and therefore beyond the control of their own free will and rationality or desires; the diving into the quiet yet menacing depths of the harbour waters in which Motoko briefly mentions “that part of the month” in the English translation (while in Japanese original the words *seiri-chû* 生理中 “during menstruation” are employed) as a possible reason for her subtly inconsistent behaviour. The climax is, naturally, the final battle in the museum of natural history with its open display of the tree of life and of the evolution of the species and their indissoluble connection as well as reliance on each other. Reduced to a fractured upper torso and her head, Motoko confronts the Puppet Master and submits to his requests in a gesture of supreme self-love: in the immensity of the network, there are more answers than questions.

Her “rebirth” as a doll due to Batô’s mastery leads to the second level of artificial separations addressed in *Ghost in the Shell*: Kusanagi Motoko’s intersectionality of femininity and cyborg. In the specific context of the animation movie and its release by mid-1990s in Japan, both femininity and cyborg stand for freedom and power as projections of an anxious, overwhelmed and directionless society (Inoue, 2004, 22; Satô, 1992, 55; Sugimoto, 2013, 122; see Fuller/Goffey, 2012; Grajdian, 2019). Kusanagi Motoko decisively pulverizes traditional notions of gender comprised as femininity or masculinity and human/non-human in her synthetic stature; simultaneously, she delivers valid alternatives of freedom and power in what would turn into late-modern interpretations: on the one hand, freedom is the ability of a self-sufficient, self-reliant lifestyle with full responsibility for one’s choices and the consequences of those choices (Barber, 1996, 33; Bauman, 2003, 86; Giddens, 1991, 52); on the other hand, power is the capacity to live life fully emerged in the present moment, ready and willing to contribute to the world as well as self-aware of one’s impact (Arendt, 1976, 41; Giddens, 1992, 135; Miegel, 2005, 118-121).

From this perspective, freedom and power are immutably necessary parts of the late-modern individual – as long as that very individual finds a way to harmoniously bring them to a common denominator. What has started as a political difficulty metamorphoses into Motoko’s personal endeavour towards locating her unique self in the name of self-love: discovering these two terms of

her identity, Motoko is able to leave behind her dual structure as woman and cyborg and to unify it under the sign of the two parameters, freedom and power. Again, by mid-1990s Japan, femininity and cyborg were the two big “others” threatening to disrupt traditionally mediated visions of relentless progress, unconditional obedience and infinite growth, all of which would prove, ultimately, unsustainable, self-destructive, and meaningless. By breaking away from these two existential paradigms and even more by elevating them to the status of alternative *modi operandi*, Major Kusanagi Motoko’s character shows that the prevailing *status quo* is simply one among many ways of seeing and living life, and by no means the only way to do so (see Matthews, 2000; Lamarre, 2018). With one move of animated images and penetrating sounds, the female cyborg body escapes sexualisation, ignores objectification, bypasses centuries of conditioning and alienation while simultaneously imposing fresh existential paradigms.

Eventually, it is the empowered enlightened love located in the sublime which brings all these ontological separations back into one monolithic whole, greater than its parts: the unitary, freshly solidified – or re-solidified – self. In Kusanagi Motoko’s presumably artificial intelligence resides the core of unlimited and limitless potentialities, should she choose the incommensurability of the network (see Augé, 1992; Kinsella, 2000). In Batô’s gesture of bringing her back from the “incommensurability of the network”, a daunting explanation – as daunting as Kawai Kenji’s music overflowing and configuring the entire animation movie – finds its way into the consciousness of audiences: in love, towards one’s own self and towards the others, there are answers, if one really wants to find them, equally with the unifying force which solely love can bring into existence. As to be shown further below, it is precisely this unifying force of love which drives and pushes forward the main character in the live-action movie version of *Ghost in the Shell*.

#### **4. *Ghost in the Shell* live-action movie (2017): reverse rites of passage and the quest for self**

Unlike Kusanagi Motoko in the animation movie, Mira Killian, her corresponding character in the live-action version of the *Ghost in the Shell* franchise, knows that she has a past as a refugee child whose parents had been killed when the boat they were on capsized in the harbour, and

only she – or better said, her brain, her “ghost” – has survived. Later on, it turns out that these were fake memories implemented into her cerebral set-up so that her sense of justice in the name of gratitude towards those who had saved her and had given her a new life with a new beginning and a new purpose is ramped up. Again, unlike Motoko, Mira is fully aware of her past as a human – and this is the existential conclusion to which she arrives at the end of her reverse journey of initiation: “Our humanity is our virtue.” Finally, unlike Motoko, Mira does not take things as they come, but she asks questions, she seeks answers, she thinks for herself. To Motoko, things happen: she is passive in her expectations of what comes next and fulfils her duty without questioning its validity. Mira makes things happen, she is curious, innovative, full of initiative: she quests for the reasons beneath what she is told to do and disobeys orders even if this means to break the rules of her function. She knows she is human in a manufactured body and keeps this faith alive. Motoko does not possess this awareness: neither is she sure of her own human origins or whether there is something left out of them in her new configuration nor does she really care despite the deeply existential inquiries she finds herself pursuing.

One could say that this is the major difference between Motoko and Mira: Motoko evolves very little, if at all, throughout the development of the plot, while Mira grows tremendously from a “weapon” as she is initially defined by the contractors who have invested in her, to a human being, self-aware of her profound, indelible humanness covered in a highly technological “shell”. In accordance with Western conventions of narrative lines, it is at the end of her trajectory that Mira finds her own self and therefore turns from “Mira Killian” into “Motoko Kusanagi”. Only when the origin story of her physical presence is completely delivered, Mira’s identity becomes “embodied”, she is suddenly less than a “shell” attached to a “ghost”, so that the “ghost” finds its inner equilibrium and peace: beneath her steely, almost invincible body, those who have once loved her recognize what makes her “her” (see Beauvoir, 1949; Barthes, 1957; Riesman, 1950). Not only her mother and her cat, but also her former lover Hideo-now-turned-Kuse: it is probably one of the most emotionally charged scenes in late-modern cinema the one towards the end of the movie in which Hideo-now-turned-Kuse and Motoko-now-turned-Mira lay almost fatally injured on the ground and he looks at her with loving eyes in the midst of violent fires as if

he is trying to see beyond her new looks the young woman he once loved – and who once loved him. His last words “I will always be with you in your ghost” are arguably among the most inspirational aka heart-breaking farewell words ever uttered in the history of star-crossed lovers: the hope which turns into awareness that someone might remember us with love, warmth and respect is what makes death and separation less final, less painful, less agonizing. The words of Dr Ouelet, Mira’s scientific creator and a mentor-like character, “We cling to memories as if they define us, but truly they do not. What defines us is what we do.”, metamorphose into a new credo which has the strength to convey the essence of her future missions in the name of justice, not retaliation.

Interestingly, it is in her connection and re-connection with the two mother-figures in the movie – Dr Ouelet respectively her biological mother – that allows Mira to explore her identity as a human being and as a woman – something Motoko does not do. It is as if in the encounter with motherhood – symbolical or real –, Mira can both acknowledge the limitations of her new life as an ultra-performant cyborg and accept them without resentment. This delivers her the inner determination to move on and to serve in the name of technology which made her possible rather than try to revenge and destroy it. Impossible motherhood for her enhances her presence as a mass-media character with the vital force of relatability through universality in an era in which childlessness as a life-choice and not as a physiological or social inevitability appears to be increasingly the norm (see Fox/King, 2002, 18; Lamarre, 2009, 51).

Moreover, the mother-daughter relationship – be it symbolical as the one with Dr Ouelet who eventually sacrifices herself so that Mira can live and have a chance to a life in dignity or be it real as the one with her biological mother once she finds her due to Dr Ouelet’s help – is freshly redefined in terms of hierarchy and motivations, which then inspires and motivates Mira to move forward as a complete entity: motherly love is not so much about bringing a new little human into the world, but rather about allowing that new little human to become what he/she is meant to be, to support him/her in his/her quest for an own purpose, in his/her exploration of the unlimited potentialities, to guide him/her through the various experiments which open unique avenues for the future (see Bauman, 2001, 52; Žižek, 1998, 154). It is, again, a progressive vision of motherhood and more generally of parenthood



which promotes procreation in the name of progress, not in the name of self-preservation.

On a similar token, Mira's interactions with her superior Chief Aramaki Daisuke and her team-mates, more particularly Batô, are based on mutual recognition and respect which then lead to trust and cooperation rather than hierarchical structures of power, as they were in the original animation movie. There is, naturally, a long way from the mid-1990s Japanese vision of friendship, sacrifice, self-reliance, and mid-2010s Hollywood understanding of these same values; nevertheless, in light of such transformations, Mira's character gains warmth and depth as well as universality, so that femininity and cyborg-existence transcend the fear of technology and unknown and can co-exist as preconditions for Mira/Motoko to emerge from the turmoils of her past and to fulfil the function she is supposed to fulfil in the world (see Anderson, 1998; Fuller, 2007). In this reading, technological enhancement becomes a metaphor for the end result of necessary rites of passage in the progression towards adulthood with all the losses which inevitably accompany the process. Rather than blind obedience, without questions or remorse, adulthood is a state of being in which responsibilities and freedoms intertwine and condition each other, in a fascinating "game" which leads to the formation of the human character as a conglomerate of flexible yet coherent networks of desire, effort and acceptance.

## 5. Conclusion: "love" and the multi-dimensionality of the unified self

The fear of technology and of the monsters the loss of control over technological development might bring to life is arguably among the oldest and most prevalent terrors humanity shares despite its multiple differences in the metaphysical realm of grasping the world. On the one hand, there is the irresistible fascination of the unknown, of the "forbidden fruit", of "what lies beyond the borders of what is possible right now"; on the other hand, there is the paralyzing anxiety in front of definitive dissolution, nothingness and total darkness, without anyone remembering or perhaps even celebrating our existence. Between these two extremes, there is a large spectrum of "pain tolerance" which enables – or hinders – the exploration of the "not yet possible". It goes without saying that expansion through experimentation is the standard procedure to

move forward towards potential futures, both as an individual and as a collective, and to make them happen by means of self-fulfilling prophecies and their relentless mechanisms of innovation, counter-resistance and irreverence.

A possible explanation for the domestic and international success of the *Ghost in the Shell* franchise, even though neither producers nor consumers actively addressed it as such, resides in its uncanny display of the power which comes from confronting one's fears rather than carefully avoiding them and the sense of liberation which accompanies such an endeavour. In both cases analysed in this paper, the focus is on the main character, either as a solid entity complete in itself and programmed with specific functions who does not question its existence and mission despite theoretically deep interrogations she expresses at times, or as a rather confused, recalibrated and cybernetically enhanced presence who oscillates between trusting her creators and superiors and disobeying their instructions or orders in the name of a reverse journey of initiation towards her own previous self from before she had been transformed into what she is currently.

In the initial animated movie, Major Kusanagi Motoko does not have a past. She seems to come from nowhere and, while she is keenly aware of the humanly alluding vitality of her "ghost", of that part of her entity which cannot be physically possessed, she does not question the concatenations between her armoured "shell" and what it is supposed to protect. In the Hollywood version, Mira Killian is fully aware that she had been a human being before her brain having been rescued and encapsulated into the technologically protective "shell", and therefore she occasionally navigates around the questions of who she truly is. The distance between acknowledging that the metaphysical and the physical dimensions of the human entity are somehow interconnected, as this has been done in the 1995 release, and the tender exploration of this interconnectedness with the subsequent permission to unify them, thus transcending the fears of the technological intrusion into our lives, as the 2017 movie is trying to showcase, equals the courage to devote ourselves to the next level of breaking the boundaries of the planetary habitat towards intergalactic travel.

The biggest merit of the animated movie – and possibly of the entire Japanese franchise – is to pull the centuries-old debate in Western philosophy and religion between the materiality of the body and the spirituality of the mind out of

its self-pitiful sufficiency and to inject it with the Eastern vision of a unified self which requires both a physical and a metaphysical side in order to harmoniously, plenarily lead a fulfilled existence. In doing so, director Oshii Mamoru and its team in cooperation with international distributors delivered a work of animation which infiltrated the impermeable, opaque, over-saturated space of the duality of the human being and allowed fresh rays of different perspectives to enter the public discourse. On this basis of an increasing awareness of the imploding Cartesian discourse, the live-action movie from 2017 built a narrative of reverse quest on the premise of the necessity to integrate the two levels of being into a whole compatible with the requirements of the late-modern variant of Western Enlightenment.

The means to attain this compatible whole is “love”: in the 1995 version of *Ghost in the Shell*, “love” is conceptualized as an abstract connection dissolving time and space in the infinite network controlled – or better said: manipulated – by the Puppet Master. Without a past to rely on, Motoko dares to see in the potential of connecting with the Puppet Master the answer to who she might be and the reasoning for her existence beyond her mission in Section 9. “Love” appears as a unifying force which goes above physicality and spirituality and leaves behind traditional concepts of “body” and “soul” or “mind” while transforming itself into a magma-like phenomenon encompassing everything. Enabled by technology, this form of “love” is a democratic advancement which brings all existence to one common denominator, indiscriminately, infinitely, eternally.

In contrast to this, in the 2017 version of *Ghost in the Shell*, “love” takes the concrete forms of motherhood and voluntary friendship or comradeship which ignite Mira’s quest and support her throughout her journey towards her past – a reverse journey, to be sure, but one which allows her to gain individuality as well as insights into what makes her “her”. This pragmatic approach towards “love” regards technology as a means to an end, not as the end itself, as it was presented in the animation movie. It also reflects the firm belief in the ability of humans to face prejudices and preconceived ideas and to challenge them into new realities.

Long regarded as the foundation and sole function of female subjects, motherhood becomes one of the multiple choices to be made and is, in addition, loaded with the powerful significance of symbolical exchange: motherly love does not refer exclusively to the biological connection

between a mother and her child, but can – and must, and should – harness the power of intergenerational exchange, as this happens between Dr. Ouelet and Mira. Technology here serves as the missing link in the long, presumably endless, chain of forward-oriented progression: in their interaction, the age-old relationship between master and disciple is reiterated, with the master willingly leaving the stage once the necessity emerges for the disciple to move on freely. Lastly, “love” as friendship or comradeship is the ultimate form of interhuman correlation as it transcends gender, profession, level of consciousness (human, non-human, almost human, half-human, etc.), geography and history and facilitates productive evolution. It is not bound by hierarchical conventions, anatomic needs, ideological tendencies or aesthetic considerations; in the name of friendship and for those one can count on in times of need and can share the joy in times of relief, “love” metamorphoses into “self-love” as “love of the self”, the highest level of individual actualization or individuation, as Abraham Maslow (1954) respectively Carl Gustav Jung (1970) envisioned it: a process of physical-psychological integration of one’s multiple layers into a cohesive whole self; in the description of Erich Fromm, an existential space of actions, thoughts and feelings in which:

“the productive orientation is expressed in love, which is the experience of union with another person, with all men, and with nature, under the condition of retaining one’s sense of integrity and independence. In the experience of love the paradox happens that two people become one, and remain two at the same time. Love in this sense is never restricted to one person. If I can love only one person, and nobody else, if my love for one person makes me more alienated and distant from my fellow man, I may be attached to this person in any number of ways, yet I do not love” (Fromm, 2010 [1956], 43).

The experience of the unification of the self in an act of love as “the active concern for the life and the growth of that which we love” (Fromm, 2006, 76), one’s own self included, is what brings order into the technological fear of chaos – rather than of the chaos itself – and brings up the only answer to being human, to pursue a life of sanity and prosperity.

The bi-dimensionality of Motoko's identity – a “ghost” in a “shell” over which she has little control and of which she knows nothing whatsoever – deepens in Mira's multi-dimensional identity which includes a past she starts to investigate, a caring mother and a real-life love-story, ideals in which she used to believe in and fight for, as well as a future in which there will be many more like her, with privileges to acknowledge, responsibilities to assume and freedoms to protect. From this plurality of identities unified into a complex self, Mira emerges as a coherent structure in herself, flexible yet compact, able to employ technology as a faithful ally in humanity's efforts towards

further advancement of history and geography. It is a profoundly humanist faith in the skill to form alliances for mutual advantages rather than to conquer and subdue in one-sided pursuits of progress, containing the tender seeds of a world-view in which peace and affluence are or at least become possible for all those involved as well as for those to come later on. The solution is, as Julia Kristeva famously put it decades ago, “the subject of and in love” (1974, 683) which has found its inner unity between its “ghost” and its “shell”.

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## **B. MISCELLANEA**





## TOWARDS A CONCEPTUAL APPROACH OF DEATH IN THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PROVINCE OF BANAT: AN OVERVIEW OF *MEMENTO MORI* ART

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**Abstract:** *This paper examines the way death was perceived in the eighteenth-century province of Banat and how the concept of memento mori was represented in the artistic manifestations of the period, especially in monumental and funerary sculpture. We propose an investigation of the visual expression of these monuments as part of the social practice of commemoration in the Habsburg province of Banat. We also aim to define the social and visual expression of death in ex-voto statues, epitaphs, gravestones, symbols commemorating intercession, a corpus of monuments studied from a conceptual perspective to analyse the artistic vocabulary with an insight into the Roman-Catholic denomination.*

**Keywords:** *Baroque, memento mori art, sepulchral monuments, commemorative art, Banat, Eighteenth century.*

**Rezumat:** *Prezentul articol este o abordare care investighează modul în care era percepută moartea în provincia Banat din secolul al XVIII-lea și modul în care conceptul memento mori a fost ilustrat în manifestările artistice ale perioadei, mai precis în sculptura monumentală și funerară. Investigăm expresia vizuală a acestor monumente ca parte a practicii sociale de comemorare specifică provinciei Banat. Ne propunem să definim expresia socială și vizuală a morții în statuile baroce (ex-voto), epitafuri, pietre funerare, simboluri care evocă intercesiunea, un material investigat din perspectivă conceptuală și a analizei vocabularului artistic cu un studiu de caz realizat asupra confesiunii romano-catolice.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *baroc, memento mori, sculptură funerară, monumente comemorative (ex-voto), Banat, secolul XVIII.*

### Introduction

It has been noted that the inescapable mortality of human beings is a subject that needs to be studied from different perspectives (Ariés, 1974, 1991; Murdoch, 2000; Sánchez, 2021). It is the interdisciplinary approach that shows the true dimension of such a complex phenomenon. Therefore, we will document, analyze and reinterpret the attitude of the living toward death in the eighteenth-century Banat, providing an overview of the visual representations of *memento mori* and metamorphosis. The visual expressions we examine correspond to the functions of these monuments, which are true indicators of the oft-quoted theological doctrine: “they were made for consoling the survivors, preparing them for the afterlife by reminding of their own mortality, setting the deceased as moral examples, and displaying the honour of the dead, thus re-confirming the social order” (Mérat, 2012–2013, 209).

Specifically, from the theoretical-conceptual investigation of *ars moriendi* in the eighteenth-century province of Banat and the frameworks that define this evolution, to the stylistic study of

the concept of soul salvation in visual form, the article will focus on the local sensibility and iconographic repertoire of monuments found in urban and rural contexts that have memento mori implications. *De arte moriendi* was the theme widely used by the Dominicans and Franciscans in Transylvania (Albu, 2022, 255) and we emphasize this idea in the context of the Franciscans of Banat. From the corpus of monuments studied, only those that had the greatest visual impact on the design of the imagery of death were selected. Since “death was the fulchrum of Christian religion” (Ricasoli, 2015, 456), new additions to the gestures and expressions are to be discovered by the present study.

The *vanitas* quality of the representations in Baroque sculpture of Banat is explored from different angles, with art history methodology adding new perspectives to a topic that has received little attention in studies dealing with the subject due to a narrow selection of iconographic themes (Vlăsceanu, 2005).

In a century of contradictions and dissociative realities, that is, in the 1700s, the resting place of the dead included gnoseological realities that can

be described as values of modern civilization in its debut. The artistic discourse on funerals is characterized by experience and permanence, because death is one of the most ubiquitous themes dealt with by artists of all times. Dealing with some of the most common aspects found in the Roman Catholic milieu of the eighteenth-century imperial province of Banat, the purpose of the investigation is to explore and find new meanings of the Baroque monuments in Banat. The role of the late expression of the style in the construction of the history of the genre will also be examined.

### **Towards a conceptual investigation of death**

The conceptualization of death becomes obligatory at the beginning of this study, as the idea of death found artistic representations in different times and spaces. The study begins with an introduction to the topic and analyses the Catholic milieu of Banat, where figurative representations tend to be found, albeit very rarely and iconographically reduced in comparison to the analogous phenomena in Transylvania and Hungary, where these expressions proliferated especially after the iconoclastic void and the ban on relic veneration and the cult of martyrs, promoted by the Reformation (Sabău, 2004, 26–27; Mérai, 2012–2013).

Considering the repeated scholarly engagement with the philosophy of the inexorable by L. Febres, J. Huizinga, E. Male, and A. Chastel, as well as more recent work, especially that of M. Vovell, the notion of death dates to antiquity, when a sense of the macabre emerged that inaugurated seminal contemporary studies of thanatology (Vovell, 2000, 9). In Romanian historiography, the careful studies of Mihaela Grancea have highlighted the cultural significance of the subject, broadening research from a conceptual perspective to a historical-analytical and contemporary literary approach (Grancea, 1998, Grancea, Csapo, 2005; Grancea, 2008, 2010, 2014, 2020). In addition to art history studies, an important analysis of the treatment of death and burial in eighteenth-century Banat is examined in those sources that offer scholarly insight into the subject. C. Bogdan emphasizes the importance of studying iconography, which decodes an important facet of mentalities (Bogdan, 2004).

According to Grancea:

“the deceased is part of the memory, of the public discourse, even serves a cause, while

the cemetery is highly symbolical, a place where layers of society condense and display an axiological approach. That is the place that envisions *loca sancta* – the cemetery contains social, commemorative, pedagogical, therapeutic, and especially religious-symbolical functions” (Grancea, 2014, 67).

The artistic phenomenon of Transylvanian thanatology in the same period reveals the visible facet of death, as the studies and authors approaching the subject from a quantitative perspective add information to the iconographic landscape. Since most studies on the modern history of death approach the subject from an anthropological perspective (Gennep, 1960), we tend to explore the concept and define the characteristics of Baroque monuments related to *memento mori* symbolism from different perspectives.

From these different perspectives and methodological approaches applicable in the analysis of the subject, we will focus only on the relationship between death and art, more specifically on a fragment of Baroque monuments that reflect the ideas about death, ritual, church space, chapels and related images. The chapels were usually centrally planned and vaulted, the architectural structure becoming a deliberate visual reference of the *loca sancta*, with the dome understood as a symbol of resurrection and the form translated as a symbol of heaven (Bialostocki, 1976, 44; Koutny-Jones, 2015).

In Central Europe, the visual culture of commemoration became increasingly elaborate, theatrical and widespread, between the late sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, and was also widespread (Mérai, 2012–2013, 121).

For Hungary and the principality of Transylvania, the most reliable source documenting burials and related practices in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is Peter Apor's 1736 *Metamorphosis Transsilvaniae*, a complex analysis of the practices that developed in Transylvania and Hungary after these provinces came under Habsburg rule (Apor, 2003).

The most significant collection of *memento mori* imagery that survives from early modern Central Europe was public missionary work in the eighteenth-century province of Banat, where it was used as a moralizing combination of text and image and disseminated in rural areas, such as the villages where Catholic orders spread the faith in an organized way.

## Death in art history: An overview

Art history studies point to the fact that death was a constant presence, and the way artistic manifestations reflect and interact with its visual forms construct the imagology of the subject.

The signs of the apocalypse are reflected in the sculpture of the Catholic Church facades of the Middle Ages. In this period, life was characterized by the awareness of the inevitability of death (Grancea, 1998, 2020), and the images encouraged the faithful to prepare for their end and the Day of Judgment. The art of this period (Romanesque and Gothic), which had both moral and didactic intentions, bears the signs of change in the way the two cycles of Christ's existence (life and death) are represented and explained, that is, image and logos. The *Majestas Domini* scene on the church portals recalls the vision of Ezekiel and the Day of Judgment. Among the symbols of the fragility of life is the skull, which ruminates the concept. *Danse macabre* scenes have also influenced reflexive intent. Such concepts represent in a symbolic way the idea of resurrection and each historical period has its own orientation to the theme, because "death was a spectacle, and the world was its stage."

Romanesque funerary monuments (of the Gysant type) found expression in Etruscan models, while Gothic sarcophagi reintroduced nature into art, along with a more humanistic view of the sufferings of Christ. The Renaissance changed the paradigm and reintroduced Christ as Savior or Redeemer, as seen in Michaelangelo's Last Judgment *Dies Irae* scene in the Sistine Chapel in Rome. The Man of Sorrows found new iconographic expression in the Baroque period as the *Salvator Mundi*, who takes upon himself the sins of all mankind. With a pictorial language that explains fatality, the funerary sculpture of the High Baroque found its true expression in the works of Bernini, while in the Late Baroque, when Neoclassicism emerged with great force, there are no more exaggerations, but a return to cohesion.

## Memento mori art in Banat

In Banat, the written sources on this subject mention the members of the religious orders who spread their ideas, which confirms the influence of the Counter-Reformation on the development of art. Religion was a theme in the politics of the 1700s in Banat, where the Catholic orders asserted themselves and spread their victorious vision in the world, staging a society that was considered

divinely organized and therefore very festive and programmatic. Among these orders, the Jesuits, the Franciscans of Bosna Argentina, the Brethren of Mercy and the Piarists began to take on a new role as promoters of the new vision. Since the Jesuits were the first to come to the province of Banat, they developed programs for church typologies and decorations, rules that supposedly covered all areas, the organization of the sacred space of the cemetery, as one of many (Kovács, 2011). In St. Ignatius of Loyolla's *Exercitia spiritualia*, death was the theme of one of his meditations (Ricasoli, 2015, 456) and contributed to the organization of ideas to train the senses of the Catholic faithful worldwide. Catholic religious orders set up cemeteries based on the *Rituale Romanum* and the *Pontificale Romanum* (Konschitzky, 2006; Călin, 201, 90).

During the Middle Ages, the practice of burial around the church became a subject of debate and was transformed into a rule that established the positive aspects of such practices, although the ancient ritual was completely opposed to this, and all cemeteries were located outside the city walls. There are references to the new topography of these cemeteries that point *ad sanctos* to the new burial location:

"Ecumenical councils of the Catholic world in the Middle Ages, held in Braga (563), Mayence (813) and Nantes (900), decided on the rules of burial as they were to be practiced only in churchyards, rules that were applied in Transylvania under Ladislau and later adapted to chapels built ad hoc, under the patronage of pilgrims, cemeteries and the late Jacobus Major" (Sabău, 2005, 25).

A telling indication of this was the case of the Franciscans and their participation in the creation of a new patron saint for Timișoara, when they approached the central authority in 1729 and asked for the redemptive qualities of Saint Nepomuk. Charles VI granted their request and the cult for martyr saints was reintroduced, although there were no contradictions as in Protestant Transylvania, where the iconoclast movement forbade such manifestations. In Banat, the cult of martyr saints was still in its infancy, with their qualities and faith being expressed through iconographic means of expression that depicted their martyrdom.

Ideas about death take shape as religious ideas influenced the commemoration of the dead, reflected in the production of monuments with

moral-didactic potential. The *ex-voto* statues of Timișoara contain formulas calling for intercession, an artistic language common for the period. The gestures and postures of doctrinal descent recall the mortality of humanity in the face of natural disasters, famine, war, and epidemics: Mary interceding for humanity is on the plague column (1741), or the plague saints Sebastian, Roche, Carlo Borromeo, David, and Barbara, who use ellocal gestures to remind us of the transition and intercede for humanity. In the *ex-voto* of Jean de Hansen, whose wife succumbed to the plague, we find a similar gesture pattern to that which drove the construction of plague columns as a concept in Central Europe. The iconographic implications have a commemorative intent, and each saint depicted is part of a repertoire invoked for his martyrdom (who suffered a terrible death for his Christian faith). A distinction must also be made between the concepts of good death and bad death. Individuals were prepared to face their own mortality with dignity and hope through these symbolic representations. These concepts reflect the social experience of death, even though the plague columns were not funerary monuments but continued a medieval tradition of confronting the inexorable through doctrinal examples.

The provisions of the Council of Trent (1545–1563) revised the rules and established new regulations in accordance with canon law: “henceforth no one shall be buried in the church” (*in ecclesiis vero nulli deinceps sepeliantur*), rules that were not followed as the large number of church burials continued and were orchestrated in the eighteenth century. This practice came to an end when the tombstones found in the churches of Europe and also in Transylvania extended beyond the church walls. The church was to remain “a place for the living and the dead,” as decreed by the Habsburg court in Vienna, in the sixteenth century. The resting place for Catholic churchmen remained the crypt built under the pavement, as in the case of the Catholic Cathedral of Timișoara and the Franciscan Church of St. Nepomuk, where bishops were laid to eternal rest.

The time of Empress Maria Theresa (1740–1780) can be described by opulence and superfluous images of death, *Danse Macabre*, *memento mori*, *carpe diem*, *fortuna labilis*, which will be in complete contradiction with the revolution of her son Joseph II in terms of burial practices. The Viennese cemeteries of this period were located in the center of the city, near St. Stephen’s Cathedral, the St. Ruprecht’s Church, and the Abbey of the Scots, a practice that also

came to an end during the reign of the reforming emperor Joseph II. He forbade funerals in churches and stopped the construction of crypts in the centre of the city, which were overcrowded during epidemics. In this regard, Joseph II had regulations issued throughout the Empire in 1788 regarding the status of public cemeteries. This was followed in the nineteenth century in the Principality of Transylvania by a document that specified the modernization of these resting places, as well as the way in which the body and the burial place should be treated, as they reflected “the level of civilization at that time.” In 1854, rules were imposed regarding various cults and the care of the living, even stating that the cemetery was a socio-cultural institution, with the establishment of an apparatus for the administration of the dead and the relocation of cemeteries outside the city, with chapels dedicated to those who died of contagious diseases such as plague, cholera and typhus. Thus, the cemetery became an image of the Edenic garden and a pantheon of many cults (Grancea, 2008, 2014, 7). In 1876, the compendium of laws *Corpus Juris Hungarici* will establish multiconfessional cemetery regulations (Rotar, 2007, 512).

#### (Figure 1, 2)

The funerary monuments of Transylvania for the period in question are very different from what can be found in recent studies concerning Banat: Elaborate examples such as the cenotaph of Samuel Dobosi (who died in 1759) from the Evangelical Church of Sibiu are one of the most representative examples of Baroque funerary sculpture. The epitaph of the Schullenberg family made after 1737 in the same church or the monument of Damian Hugo de Virmond in the Franciscan Church of Sibiu show the consecrated typology with “dynamic forms and visual rhetoric” (Sabău, 2004, 317–320). This vision was adopted as a means of self-glorification and communication of noble status. In Transylvania, as already mentioned in the case of Banat, hereditary nobility with political functions and large agricultural holdings was absent in the 1700s. Nevertheless, one can find examples of middle/small nobles who were buried in the churches or in the chapel of their manorial estate (Bara, 2015, 107). From the complex approach of the *pompa funebris* of the Hungarian nobility, P. Apor mentions the medieval custom found in the case of the so-called alter egos, the embodiment of the deceased as two knights (Bara, 2015, 109). The presence of the impersonators or alter egos

was first documented at the funeral of King Charles I of Hungary, also known as Charles Robert, in Székesfehérvár in 1342. In this case, the king was personified by three armoured men who emphasized his chivalric, military virtues and royal dignity (Kantorowicz, 1957; Szabo, 1989, 70; Bara, 2015, 115; Vlăsceanu, 2021). Such complex funeral ceremonies were not documented for the Banat province, as the aristocracy originating from Hungary will build and use large latifundia only in the nineteenth century. Another important element of Baroque funeral ceremonies were the *castra doloris*, an important decorative source for the allegory of death and body substitution. These were ephemeral architectural structures used for ideological purposes, figuratively representing the body of the deceased as a “natural body.” After the ceremony, they lost their role, as their existence is usually attested by written sources or, more rarely, by engravings (Ariès, 1991, 173). A recent study has addressed this issue and concludes that:

“In the case of imperial burials, *castra doloris* were erected not only above the actual catafalques of the emperors in the churches of Vienna, but above several symbolic catafalques in the various churches of the Habsburg Hereditary Lands, including Hungary and territories under Austrian Habsburg rule, contributing to their spread among the funerals of the aristocracy. They took various forms and were decorated with allegorical statues, emblems, verses and inscriptions carrying important religious and political messages, and referring to the victories and virtues of the deceased” (Bara, 2015, 117).

I must state that no such buildings have been preserved for the province of Banat, not even documented in written sources. It can be assumed that some fragments in the form of figural representations or groups of putti were considered as elements to decorate these catafalques, since so many fragmentary representations are preserved in the Catholic diocese of Timișoara, without any mention of their inventory number or place of origin. Since the aristocracy fled Banat during the invasion of the Turks in the seventeenth century, the clergy did not make use of such paraphernalia.

The most important stylistic-formal features, typical of the High Baroque, lie in the lavish decoration, the exuberant prototypes of monuments and rhetorical gestures and iconography, and the most important aspect, the

portrait of the deceased, which was realized with great expressiveness. It is a feature that is also missing in the repertoire of funerary or monumental art from Banat. The two epitaphs of the Franciscan, later Piarist church of St. Nepomuk in Timișoara are epitaphs of high artistic value, containing *memento mori* scenes and dedicated to the imperial high officials Johannes de Soro and David von Huebner. Both epitaphs were realized in a simple way and without exaggerated iconography with signs and symbols (Vlăsceanu, 2012). Both stand as examples of funerary art commissioned by the two officials as silent witnesses of a dramatic century in the history of Timișoara Banat. Some stylistic considerations should be revisited here, as they are truly representative of the genre and are very rare in the funerary art of Banat compared to the artistic phenomena in neighbouring Transylvania or Hungary. St. Nepomuk's Church in Timișoara served as a necropolis for bishops and administrative officials. These two epitaphs were placed on the north wall, as can be seen in the black and white photo taken by a Piarist student in 1911.

### Facing the implacable disappearance

Is there an appropriate visual expression of the Baroque in relation to the *memento mori* scene? How can the lack of ostentatious tombs in Banat be explained, if not by the peculiarities of this eighteenth-century province, where hereditary nobility could not develop as it did in Transylvania and Hungary. The province of Banat, classified as a *Kronland*, was in fact the private domain of the monarch, an imperial province where the nobility was not encouraged to come and flourish. This will change only in the nineteenth century with the settlement of noble families who build castles, churches and noble tombs on their large latifundia. In the imperial Banat, the successful experiment refers not only to the nobility with privileges, which was forbidden to come and prosper, but also to the formation of guilds (the most important factor in the artistic development of each province), the category that was also kept away from the establishment of powerful associations, as one of the key concepts of the absolute principles of government (Duțu, 1997, 122).

We can find a particularly original composition in the Catholic milieu of the Banat province, where no pomp and exaggeration in form and design appear, as in the case of the two epitaphs of professional military men (D. Johannes

Sebastian of Soro and David von Hübner) (Figure 3) whose epitaphs adorned the side apse of St. Nepomuk's Church in Timișoara. David von Hübner was a mining advisor in the Banat administration. The chronograph mentions that he died on April 2, 1760 and was followed two years later by his wife Maria Anastasia (née Claner), who died on April 22, 1762. This is the only epitaph with figural decoration, where the unknown author used allegory (Jaworski, Deleanu, 1996, 187) to express the iconography of the epitaph. The bas-relief scene in the lower register (snapshot of an eighteenth-century *funeralia*) indicates the sadness of the moment. Above a coffin, a woman mourns the departure of her husband to the afterlife. The eulogy cartridge is framed above by two volutes, reminiscent of a classical temple facade, where the weave motif is the only plastic ornamentation, and a draped cloth decoratively inserted flanks the Latin epigraph.<sup>1</sup> The viewer is invited to contemplate and honour the deceased by the ancient formula *memento eorum sta viator*. It ends with the ancient Roman formula *ora pro eo*, a formula calling for intercession:

O HOMO  
SISTE CRADUM  
SEPULCHRUM INSPICE  
IN QUO  
SPEC TABILIS PRÆNOBILIS AC  
EXIMUS  
DOMINUS  
DAVID DE HUBNER  
NATUS ANNO 1693 DIE 27 IANUARÏ  
FIDE  
ORTHODOXÆ RELIGION PIUS  
SACRÆ CÆSAR APOST  
MAJESTPERHUNYINF  
METALL FODINAR CONSILIARIUS  
SPE  
IN DEUM FIRMUS  
ÆTATIS SUÆ 67 ANNORUM MEN Z  
ET 6 DIE RUM  
CHARITATE  
DEI ET PROXIMI ORNATUS  
ANNO ð 760 DIE 2 APRILIS  
MERITIS PLENUS OCCUBUIT  
ET DEIN  
MARIA ANASTASIA NATA DE  
CLANER  
CONSORS EIUS CHARISSIMA  
ÆTATIS SUÆ 58 ANNORIO MEN Z ET  
22 DIER

ANNO 1762 2 DA APRILIS PIE DEFU  
NC  
INHAC SACRÆ DE TUMULATI  
REQUIESCUNT  
MEMENTO EORUM

The second epitaph belongs to D. Joannes Sebastian of Soro, the 10th commander of Timișoara garrison, who died on January 10, 1761, and received an honorable burial. This epitaph is not decorated, we can assume the existence of a coat of arms, a bas-relief scene placed at the top and completely missing today. The inscription ends with the simple Roman formula: *Ora pro eo*.

STA VIATOR  
MONUMENTUM INSPICE  
QUO  
ILLUSTRISIMUS DOMIHUS D  
IOANNES SEBAST  
COMES DE SORO  
IATUS AÑO ð 688 DIE 23. MAI  
ÆTATIS SVÆ  
ANNOR 77 MENS 7 DE DIERI 8  
DEO DEVOTUS  
SACR: CÆS: RECIE QVEAPOST:  
MAIEST: LOCUMTENEIS  
MARCHALLUS COLLONELVS  
PEDEST RECIM Æ FORTALITÏ  
TEMESVARIENSIS COMENDANS  
SACO DOCA CLARUS  
AИИО ð 761 DIE 20 IANUARÏ IN HAC  
ECCLESIA  
MERITIS PLEÑUS SEPULTUS EST  
ORA PRO EO

Although hereditary nobility was absent in the provincial countryside of Banat in the eighteenth century, there were rare cases of conferring titles of nobility. Johannes de Soro was one of these new noblemen, as he received his nobility title of count from Francisc I, without a coat of arms, which in our opinion was reason enough not to show any iconography on the epitaph (Petri, 1947, 1834–835).

Another funerary monument that has been studied for its content related to the theme is the obelisk erected by the Franciscans in front of the church of St. Katherine in Timișoara, which today stands in the Heroes' Cemetery on the Lipovei Road, as we mentioned in one of our previously published case studies (Vlăsceanu, 2002–2003). The obelisk is a decorative monument that also has a funerary and commemorative connotation, and the idea of erecting a prop for visual rhetoric

dates to the Romans, who were the first to bring Egyptian obelisks to Rome and place them in the city's squares as symbols of victory and conquest. During the reign of Pope Sixtus V (sixteenth century), some of these obelisks were excavated and repositioned to fit the ideas of the new Rome as a Catholic renewal, bearing the same iconology as in antiquity (Minor, 1999, 49–50). These ancient monuments became part of the master plan for the renewal of Rome, as they resumed the symbols of power and celebrated the victory of the Catholic Church over pagan Rome.—an interesting concept, is not it? A pagan monument used for Christian purposes was not a novelty, but a concept used and reused for such a purpose. In this way, the Baroque revisited ancient concepts to celebrate its visual celebration of faith and piety at a time when religious reform was sweeping through Europe and changing the political map.

Who were the artists and craftsmen who created the custom-made funerary monuments of the 1700s? We do not know and we try to find the answer in one of the most important documents for every Catholic provincial parish of Banat, namely the *Protocollum defunctorum*, in which the profession of the deceased is noted very clearly and reflects the social classes. One such example is the profession of Johann Dorfmeister, a well-known Austrian sculptor who died in Sasca Montană (Caraș County). In the register of the church, which he decorated with a high altar typical of the late Baroque, it is indicated that he was a *sculptor viennensis*.

The obelisk erected in 1763 in honor of St. Katherine<sup>2</sup> (Figure 13) is another typical example of a monument with signs and symbols of veneration, an *ex-voto* of the Catholic order, which played an important role in the Catholicization of Banat. The obelisk is classical with volumetric spirals arranged around the inscription. It is simple, but it represents the concepts of *fortuna labilis* and *memento mori*. The obelisk is made of bricks layered with mortar, eroded by natural factors, so that today the inscription is no longer visible. Moreover, these inscriptions have been documented by historiography and can be presented to offer some reflections on the hermeneutics of the text:

*TrophaVM solo acVatae saCrae aeDis  
Catharinensis, In qVa saCrIfICCare deo  
fLorente EVgenIo CaroLo SeXto  
DoMinante signo Reformatos Fratres  
coepisse Minores /*

“A monument erected to commemorate the destroyed church of St. Katherine, where during the years of development under Eugene and Charles V, the Reformed Brethren (of St. Franciscus) served God.”

In a textual analysis we find two chronograms hidden in the text. One starts with *trophaeum* and ends with *Catharinensis*, indicating the year 1763 when the monument was erected, and the second from “in” to “dominante” refers to 1717, the year when the Franciscans moved to Palanca Mică (where the church was placed to mark the old existing church that had the same patronage since the Ottoman occupation in the Middle Ages). The second inscription contains another chronogram about the year 1756, when the new Franciscan church was built:

*SeD MarIa TheresIa apostoLICI RegnI  
Coronata RegIna hos In PraesIDIo LoCat  
PatroCInIo aMbIt*

The third inscription reads: *Defunctis  
quorum hic cineres ac ossa recondo,  
aeternam requiem ore et corde precare  
Viator*

“dedicated to the deceased whose bones and ashes rest here, you passers-by pray with loud voice and soul for eternal peace”.

The Baroque monumental sculpture that furnishes the city squares (bears the signs of commemoration, since the main column of the monument is in fact an obelisk, crowned by the Trinity group crowning the Virgin as *Regina Coeli* (Unirii Square, Timișoara, 1741) and the Immaculate Conception on the obelisk of Libertății Square with bas-relief scenes referring to the life and death of the city's patron saint in the eighteenth century, Saint Nepomuk. The obelisk stands in both cases as a column that connects the two worlds, animated in the lower register by the saints who suffered martyrdom: Sebastian, the early Christian martyr, Roche, Charles Borromeo and Nepomuk, Barbara, “patron saint of the good death” of the miners in Banat, David, who carries the skull of Adam, a symbol that forms a visible parallel between the Old and New Testaments, since Adam is the forerunner of Christ, a symbol repeated by most of the crosses erected for the deceased, as a sign of *memento mori* and allegory of death (Vlăsceanu, 2021). The concept of “good death” needs to be reinterpreted, as Jean de Hansen's *ex-*

*voto* monument commemorates the plague victims and the examples of the *ars moriendi* are didactic and moralizing. The good death and the bad death are metaphors, allegories of the *vanitas vanitatum* cycle: David with the skull, Barbara with the triple tower (allegory of faith and the Holy Trinity), because death was not the end, but an episode in the metamorphosis of life. We tend to focus the *sensus allegoricus* on the spectacle that death provides, the *theatrum sacrum* being an important artistic backdrop for it. Borrowing from ancient humanist ideology is the Stoic thesis of virtue values that help humanity cope with bad faith. Here we find the theological virtues *Sapientia* (Wisdom) personified by an intercessory triad: *Fides* holding the chalice and the Bible (Faith), *Spes* with its consecrated symbol “*Ancora mea Christus*” (Hope), and *Caritas* (Mercy). These virtues were frequently depicted on funerary monuments of the Middle Ages and Renaissance and were heavily used by Baroque sculptors for the endless expressions that pay tribute to the perennial symbols of antiquity. The sculpture of the side altar of the Catholic Cathedral in Timișoara illustrates the concept of making the invisible visible through rhetoric, as virtues accompany the votive images (Vlăsceanu: 2000-2001:159-164; Vlăsceanu: 2021; Vlăsceanu, 2022).

The House of Austria revived the power of the Counter-Reformation and found a new meaning in the ideas of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Gravestones decorated with symbols are preserved in the cemeteries that were built in rural Banat around the typified churches. The repertoire is not very complex, and they should be mentioned and illustrated as evidence: Aluniș (Figure 5), Bulgăruș (Figure 7), Bulci (Figures 6,8), Grabaț, Lovrin (Figure 9), Frumușani, Gottlob, Zăbrani, Orțișoara (Figure 10), Dudeștii Vechi, Carani, Periam, Zăbrani (Figure 12). The cemeteries of Banat preserve a well-organized structure, to which other burial places were added in the following centuries. The Josephinian topography of 1763–1787, mapping the rural Banat, shows the settlements and indicates the correct position of each cemetery (Călin, 2014). Among the most common symbols indicating the Roman Catholic faith of the deceased, we identified the following: the willow tree (symbol of mourning and unhappy love), the eye of God inserted in a triangle (symbol of the Trinity), sometimes surrounded by rays of light, the body of Christ on the cross (sometimes the body is not present and only the cross is seen), the monograms of Christ and JHS (*Jesus Hominum*

*Salvator*), the skull at his feet (symbol of Golgotha, where Adam found his resting place), the holy water pot as a symbol of the Eucharist.

The theoretical-conceptual approach to the Baroque artistic phenomenon would be incomplete if we did not point to a study that documents and analyses the heritage of these cemeteries in rural Banat and decodes their messages in time and space (Ciobotă et al., 2012; Ciobotă et al., 2015). As places of remembrance, these rural cemeteries still preserve gravestones decorated with symbols related to the inscription, which shows the complexity of visual ideas.

The typology of Christian gravestones reflects, over time, how the recipient of the body was formed on its final journey (typology), the style of the period, and decorative and figurative additions, the latter with a specific iconography and iconology.

From a stylistic point of view, the decorative repertoire of the tombstones consists of cornices with helical motifs, acanthus leaves and bellflowers, made at a level of craftsmanship that is important for the historical information they can offer. There is a heterogeneous decorative repertoire with influences from different artistic periods: the rose symbol of *vanitas* replaces the macabre symbols so often depicted in the Baroque.

The concept of *propaganda fide* becomes visual to refer to and educate the colonists of rural Banat by means of signs and symbols, recurring images of faith and piety, with a repertoire addressed to them through allegories. One of these allegories is the skull on the crosses carved in stone, which refers to Adam who, like Christ, found his final resting place on Golgotha. This symbol is a clear parallel between the Old and New Testaments, as such practices were used to emphasize the importance of a burial place or figure. In the ornaments of such stone crosses, eschatological symbols predominate, Christ becomes the intercessor, and the monument, an object of divine revelation that follows a pattern of moralization, descends. Christ on the cross, the Man of Sorrows *Vir dolorum* with the skull at his feet is the typical representation of these monuments, as I have already mentioned. Another symbol often placed at Christ's feet is the chalice; thus the artist suggests the Eucharistic semantics of the representation. This was one of the most copied models, as it reflects the idea of the resurrection of the dead and life after death, with Christ being the Saviour. The symbol was often placed on the tombs of members of the clergy.



The Catholic doctrine of the Trinity took the visual form of the triangle with the eye inside, the eye of God, and the arrows protruding above and below (Periam, 1782, Figure 11). The arrows represent the good deeds done by the deceased during his life and are a symbol of knowledge. Behind this symbol is a whole concept presented by the stonemasons on the cross, which refers to the Day of Judgment and clearly has eschatological connotations.

These are all simple patterns that, from a stylistic point of view, herald the transition from Baroque to Neoclassicism. The late Baroque repertoire lasted until the first decades of the nineteenth century, when Neoclassicism was completely obsolete. Art historians agree that the reign of Joseph II marks the beginning of the revival of classicism in art. A promoter of simplicity, despite his mother's exuberance in the art she commissioned, he inaugurated an almost iconoclastic period, enlightened by new ideas and reflections that dealt with Ignatius de Born's work, *Monachology*, a treatise in which he ridiculed both the nobility and the clergy.

The other religious media in the eighteenth-century Banat, for example, the Orthodox Romanians and Serbs decorated their stone crosses with geometric or plant motifs (wayside crosses of the Serbian church in Timișoara), dating from the eighteenth century, are characterized by sobriety, pointed frontons or mouldings, the memorial inscription (epitaph) presents a repertoire of symbols associated with the deceased.

## Conclusions

The study examined the local, provincial sensibility of the eighteenth-century Banat, reflected in the artistic movement of the eighteenth century, in which clear signs and symbols of the *memento mori* can be seen. The typology and stylistics of these monuments, originating from Central Europe, continued to carry out a visual reform in the context of broader social, cultural and political events.

Banat art in the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth century was a deliberate visual form of expression that was both urban and rural. As epidemics raged constantly, including

wars and famines, we surveyed the phenomenon and drew the following conclusions:

A realignment of dynamics occurred in the relationship between the living and the dead, as burial grounds expanded and cemeteries were established outside the fortifications (the case of Timișoara, where the epitaphs of David von Hübner and Johannes de Soro were repositioned and inserted into the new cemetery outer wall (today the Heroes' Cemetery on Lipovei Road. This happened after the plague of 1736 and was encouraged by the decrees of Joseph II, which prescribed new measures to combat the spread of epidemics.

These creations from the era of the beginning of modernity in Banat are evidence of the cosmopolitanism of that time, as they reflect the artistic specificity of the society for which they were created. Certain ideas reappear, as is often the case when analysing the heritage of such necro-images, from high quality works to second-rate works, this domain found expression as a cultural product of a particular era, in this case the entire eighteenth century, with identifiable characteristics compared to the expressions found in Transylvania and Hungary, regardless of the Protestant, Lutheran or Calvinist tradition.

A familial commemoration at gravesites was common for the time, and the repertoire of symbols was part of the artisans' palette, evoking the presence of the deceased on earth and entry into heaven through purgatory, a visual form that recalled the identity of the deceased.

When one examines the implications of eighteenth-century *memento mori* art, in which old symbols were given new meanings, as a practice of the early Christian period, when the vocabulary of terms was dominated by pagan constructions, one finds the true gnoseological dimension of the inquiry.

The most important change occurred when the transcendental character of the representations that prevailed in the Middle Ages was lost in favour of a more contemplative approach about the inexorable end (Albu, 1977, 176–177).

The rhetorical devices of the studied monuments can be understood as the visual encoding of a society that was undergoing a profound process of metamorphosis, in which sensibility prevailed over intellectual thought and iconography reflected a moral-didactic semantics.

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### LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS / LISTA ILUSTRĂȚIILOR

1. Detail of Empress Maria Theresa's grave from the Capuchin Imperial Crypt in Vienna, image source: [https://www.google.ro/search?q=cripta+capucinilor+viena+maria+theresa&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=A9sHNN0qFcjNDM%252C2LT2ndr3Xwiq1M%252C\\_&vet=1&usg=AI4\\_-kQZbh8jt2qXQ8LEX4UpUE0oy50xng&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj5r\\_qXpO\\_wAhUahf0HHbRk](https://www.google.ro/search?q=cripta+capucinilor+viena+maria+theresa&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=A9sHNN0qFcjNDM%252C2LT2ndr3Xwiq1M%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_-kQZbh8jt2qXQ8LEX4UpUE0oy50xng&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj5r_qXpO_wAhUahf0HHbRk)
2. Empress Maria Theresa and Emperor Joseph II, her son's grave, Capuchin Imperial Crypt in Vienna, imagesource: [https://www.google.ro/search?q=cripta+capucinilor+viena+maria+theresa&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=A9sHNN0qFcjNDM%252C2LT2ndr3Xwiq1M%252C\\_&vet=1&usg=AI4\\_-kQZbh8jt2qXQ8LEX4UpUE0oy50xng&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj5r\\_qXpO\\_wAhUahf0HHbRk](https://www.google.ro/search?q=cripta+capucinilor+viena+maria+theresa&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=A9sHNN0qFcjNDM%252C2LT2ndr3Xwiq1M%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_-kQZbh8jt2qXQ8LEX4UpUE0oy50xng&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj5r_qXpO_wAhUahf0HHbRk)
3. Epitaphs of David of Hübner and Johannes de Soro, Franciscan/Piarist Church of St. Nepomuk, Timișoara. (demolished in 1911) *apud* Piarist Order Archive Budapest.
4. Epitaph of David von Hübner (detail of the actual conservation stage and position, inserted in the exterior wall of the Heroes Cemetery, Lipovei Avenue, Timișoara)
5. Gravestone in Aluniș (Timiș county), the end of the eighteenth century (picture credits: W. Konschitzky, *apud* Catholic Diocese Archive Timișoara).
6. Gravestone in Bulci (Arad county), picture credits: W. Konschitzky *apud* Catholic Diocese Archive Timișoara.
7. Gravestone in rural Banat, the cemetery of Bulgăruș (Timiș county), the late eighteenth century (*apud* Catholic Diocese Archive)
8. Gravestone in rural Banat, the cemetery of Bulci (Arad county), the late eighteenth century (*apud* Catholic Diocese Archive)
9. Stone-carved cross (Lovrin cemetery, early 19th century) *apud* Catholic Diocese Archive Timișoara)
10. Stone-carved cross (Orțișoara cemetery, early 19th century) *apud* Catholic Diocese Archive Timișoara)
11. Stone-carved cross in Periam cemetery, 1789 (*apud* Catholic Diocese Archive Timișoara)
12. Stone-carved cross in Zăbrani cemetery, early 1800. (*apud* Catholic Diocese Archive Timișoara)
13. The obelisk of St. Katherine's Church (Lipovei cemetery) St. Katherine's obelisk (Lipovei cemetery) *apud* [https://www.google.ro/search?q=obeliscul+sf+ecaterina+lipovei&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj5xO7pse\\_wAhWZg\\_0HHWhMD7UQ\\_AUoAnoECAEQBA&biw=1920&bih=979#img=QCI5Y\\_bovSUzjM](https://www.google.ro/search?q=obeliscul+sf+ecaterina+lipovei&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj5xO7pse_wAhWZg_0HHWhMD7UQ_AUoAnoECAEQBA&biw=1920&bih=979#img=QCI5Y_bovSUzjM)



**Figure 1.**

Detail of Empress Maria Theresa's grave from the Capuchin Imperial Crypt in Vienna, image source:

[https://www.google.ro/search?q=cripta+capucinilor+viena+maria+theresa&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=A9sHNN0qFcjNDM%252C2LT2ndr3Xwiq1M%252C\\_&vet=1&usg=AI4\\_-kQZbh8jt2qXQ8LEX4UpUE0oy50xng&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj5r\\_qXpO\\_wAhUahf0HHbRk](https://www.google.ro/search?q=cripta+capucinilor+viena+maria+theresa&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=A9sHNN0qFcjNDM%252C2LT2ndr3Xwiq1M%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_-kQZbh8jt2qXQ8LEX4UpUE0oy50xng&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj5r_qXpO_wAhUahf0HHbRk)





**Figure 2.**

Empress Maria Theresa's and Emperor Joseph II, her son's grave, Capuchin Imperial Crypt in Vienna,

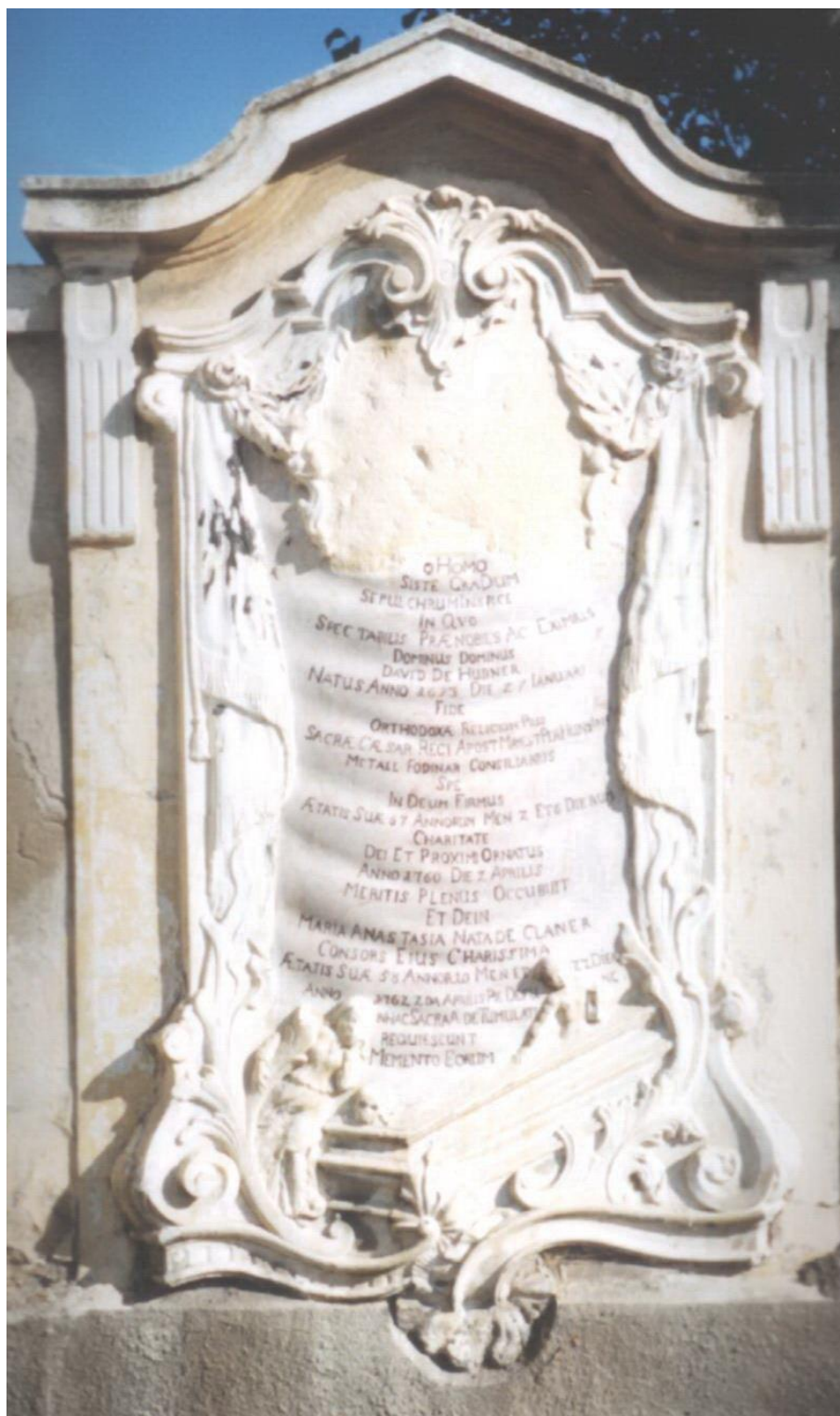
imagesource:[https://www.google.ro/search?q=cripta+capucinilor+viena+maria+theresa&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=A9sHNN0qFcjNDM%252C2LT2ndr3Xwiq1M%252C\\_&vet=1&usg=AI4\\_-kQZbh8jt2qXQ8LEX4UpUE0oy50xng&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj5r\\_qXpO\\_wAhUahf0HHbRk](https://www.google.ro/search?q=cripta+capucinilor+viena+maria+theresa&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=A9sHNN0qFcjNDM%252C2LT2ndr3Xwiq1M%252C_&vet=1&usg=AI4_-kQZbh8jt2qXQ8LEX4UpUE0oy50xng&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj5r_qXpO_wAhUahf0HHbRk)



**Figure 3.**

Epitaphs of David of Hübner and Johannes de Soro, Franciscan/Piarist Church of St. Nepomuk, Timișoara.  
(demolished in 1911) (picture credits: Piarist Order Archive Budapest)





**Figure 4.**

Epitaph of David von Hübner (detail of the actual conservation stage and position, inserted in the exterior wall of the Heroes Cemetery, Lipovei Avenue, Timișoara)





**Figure 5.**  
Gravestone in Aluniș (Timiș county), the end of the eighteenth century (picture credits: W. Konschitzky *apud* Catholic Diocese Archive)





**Figure 6.**  
Grave stone in Bulci (Arad county), picture credits W. Konschitzky, *apud* Catholic Diocese Archive  
Timișoara





**Figure 7.**

Gravestone in rural Banat, the cemetery of Bulgăruș (Timiș county), the late eighteenth century  
(picture credits: Catholic Diocese Archive)





**Figure 8.**  
Gravestone in rural Banat, the cemetery of Bulci (Arad county), the late eighteenth century (picture credits: Catholic Diocese Archive)





**Figure 9.**  
Stone-carved cross (Lovrin cemetery, the early nineteenth century), picture credits: Catholic Diocese  
Archive Timișoara)





**Figure 10.**

Stone-carved cross (Orțișoara cemetery, the early nineteenth century), picture credits: Catholic Diocese Archive Timișoara)





**Figure 11.**  
Stone-carved cross in Periam cemetery, 1789 (photo credits: Catholic Diocese Archive Timișoara)





**Figure 12.**  
Stone-carved cross in Zăbrani cemetery, early 1800 (photo credits: Catholic Diocese Archive)





**Figure 13.**

St. Katherine's obelisk (Lipovei cemetery) *apud*

[https://www.google.ro/search?q=obeliscul+sf+ecaterina+lipovei&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj5xO7pse\\_wAhWZg\\_0HHWhMD7UQ\\_AUoAnoECAEQBA&biw=1920&bih=979#imgrc=QCI5Y\\_bovSUzjM](https://www.google.ro/search?q=obeliscul+sf+ecaterina+lipovei&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj5xO7pse_wAhWZg_0HHWhMD7UQ_AUoAnoECAEQBA&biw=1920&bih=979#imgrc=QCI5Y_bovSUzjM)



# NAMES AND NAMING IN THE BIHOR REGION: A CASE STUDY ON THE VILLAGES BICACIU AND RĂBĂGANI

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**Abstract:** “What is your name? Who are your parents?” These are the questions we find even nowadays in the Bihor area. We aim at studying onomastics in the Bihor region at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century-beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The entire Bihor area could not be included in this study; therefore, we propose a case study on Orthodox communities from Bicaciu and Răbăgani. The first one is situated in the field area of the Bihor county and the second in the Beiuș Valley, in the Crișul Negru river basin. We analyse both masculine and feminine names, insisting on three questions: What are the most frequent names? Are there similarities between the two communities? What were the factors taken into account when choosing the names? On the other hand, we are to analyse the surnames as well, linked to the following questions: Where do they come from? How were they formed? Are there common surnames in both communities? We attempt to answer all these questions, using the parish registers, especially the christening register. They offer the most precious information on the tendencies in the so-called onomastic fashion. Moreover, we may easily notice the changes produced in the preferences for a name or another.

**Keywords:** onomastics, names, surnames, christening, Bihor region.

**Rezumat:** „Cum te cheamă? Al cui ești?” Sunt întrebări pe care le regăsim și astăzi pe buzele bihorenilor. Ne-am propus să studiem onomastica din spațiul bihorean de la sfârșitul secolului al XVIII-lea și prima jumătate a secolului al XIX-lea. Întreg spațiul bihorean nu putea să fie inclus în acest studio, de aceea, am recurs la un studiu de caz realizat pe comunitățile ortodoxe din satele Bicaciu și Răbăgani. Primul - așezat în partea de câmpie a județului Bihor, iar al doilea - în Depresiunea Beiușului, în bazinul Crișului Negru. În studiul nostru vom analiza atât prenumele masculine, cât și cele feminine, insistând pe trei întrebări: Care sunt cele mai frecvente prenume? Există asemănări între cele două comunități? De ce factori s-a ținut cont în momentul alegerii prenumelui? Nu vom trece cu vederea nici numele de familie: De unde provin? Cum s-au format acestea? Există nume de familie pe care le regăsim în ambele comunități? La toate aceste întrebări vom încerca să aducem răspunsuri cu ajutorul registrelor parohiale, mai cu seama la registrul botezaților. Acestea oferă cele mai prețioase informații despre tendințele din „moda” onomasticii. Și putem observa cu ușurință schimbările care s-au produs în preferințele pentru un prenume sau pentru altul.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** onomastică, prenume, nume, botez, spațiul bihorean.

## Research preliminaries

A space, a community, a “world” speaks to contemporary society and even to future society through onomastics. It characterizes well a community, regardless of the perspective – religious, collective mentality, belonging to an ethnical group or to a historical time and space. Onomastics tells a lot about people’s behaviour and their interactions, as well as the relationship of the community to a neighbouring one, to a stranger or to power.

Our study focuses on onomastics of the villages Bicaciu and Răbăgani, both situated in the Bihor county, at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century - beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. What were the reasons for opting for these two villages? When we decided to approach onomastics of the two communities, the main criterion was their geographical position. The first village is situated in the Bihor field, closer to the Hungarian border, while the latter in the Beiuș Valley, on the West Hills, in the Crișul Negru river basin. The geographical position contributes to different neighbouring

communities that may influence onomastics as factors that might help us in a comparison. It would point out the similarities and differences concerning the so-called onomastic fashion of the two communities. Another very important criterion is represented by the sources that we have in order to accomplish the research. Under these circumstances, we resorted to the help of parish registers of the christened new-borns. We used three parish registers for Bicaciu – the first for the period 1794-1805 and other two for 1824-1848. We used one parish register for Răbăgani from 1780 to 1843.

The research was carried out on two levels. Firstly, we analysed the names new-borns get when they are christened, then their surname and the way of forming it. In the first part of the study we analyse the feminine and masculine names. We tried to direct the research from general to particular in order to see the most frequent names, preferences in the onomastic fashion of the two localities. Over 90% of the christening names identified in both communities came from the Synaxarion of the Orthodox Church or from the Bible. The masculine names were more diversified than the feminine ones. A simple explanation consists in the fact that the masculine names are more numerous in the Holy Scriptures than the feminine ones. The day and the month played a crucial role in choosing the name for a baby. For example, Dimitrie, Mihail, Gavril, Parascheva, Eva, Varvara are specific to autumn months, while Vasile and Ioan for January. At the same time, Gheorghe is specific for the spring period and Petru, Pavel or Ilie for the summer season. The second factor is linked to the names transmitted from one generation to another within a family so that the baby got the name of the father or mother, sometimes their godfathers.

### **Masculine onomastics**

In Bicaciu in 1794-1804 and 1824-1848, 550 births were registered, 310 were boys, out of which we could identify the christening names of 294. In Răbăgani, 323 births were registered in 1789-1843, out of which 191 boys. We identified 189 names received at the christening. Both communities used 34 names for their new-born boys. Aurelia Stan stated that Ioan was the most popular name in the villages on the Sebeş Valley (Stan, 1958, 60). That is also true in the two analysed localities, together with its derived names – Onu or its Hungarian equivalent, Ianoş.

The same tendency is registered in Chiueşti village, Cluj county, in 1811-1871 (Civil Registers Chiueşti). The top five preferences of the two analysed villages are: Ioan, Vasile, Teodor, Petru and on the fifth place are Dimitrie and Flore.

Nevertheless, each community has its own specificity when it comes to the fashionable tendencies and the frequency of the masculine names. In Bicaciu the most popular name was Ioan (46 boys were christened with that name), while in Răbăgani the first place was occupied by Vasile (38 boys). The name Ioan is on the third place in terms of spread, while on the second place is Teodor. In Tămaia village, Satu Mare county, in 1773, the name Ioan was outnumbered by Teodor and Vasile (Ghitta, 2014, 319). On the other hand, we need to take into account the fact that the analysis of onomastics in Tămaia was done based on registering the heads of households in 1773. There are similarities and differences between the two communities regarding the most frequent masculine names. The top three of masculine names was occupied by Ioan, Teodor and Vasile, but the order is different in each of the analysed communities. In Bicaciu the order is: Ioan, Teodor, and Vasile on the same frequency level as Dimitrie, while in Răbăgani the order is: Vasile, Teodor and Ioan.

One can notice that in both localities the name Ioan is registered in its Hungarian version despite the fact that the villages are in different areas of the Bihor county. However, the frequency is twice reduced in Răbăgani, while in Bicaciu it appeared 20 times. This is due to Bicaciu's geographical position near the Hungarian border and closer to Oradea. In Bicaciu, another frequent name is Zaharia (21), while in Răbăgani it was not used. This could be explained by the presence of the priest Zaharia Popovici in Bicaciu, who inspired the onomastic fashion. In addition, the name Mihai is identified 17 times in Bicaciu, with the highest frequency in 1840-1848; 11 boys were christened Mihail between 1824 and 1826. In 1794-1799 and 1830-1839 the name was not used.

Every locality has its own peculiarities concerning onomastics. In Răbăgani, for instance, there are names that were not in parish registers of other villages. This is the case of the following names: Nicoară, Jurju, Mistrin, Iova and Miron. Another name that appeared twice in Răbăgani is Paşcu. Two of these names originate from the Banat area, being taken from the

Serbian population - Iova and Mistrin. In that period many inhabitants of the Beiuș area migrated in summer to Banat region, especially during the harvest. Moreover, many children were sent as servants to that area (Bălan Mihailovici, 2009). It is obvious that the economic reasons allowed the interaction between two areas that were different from geographical and cultural points of view.

Bicaciu village has its own traits. Here we identified masculine names, such as Aron, Atanasie, Ignat, Lazăr, Luca, Moise and Pahomie. They were cases when these names were identified once, twice or even five times (Moise). Although in this category of special traits we may also add the names Gavril, Ilie and Ștefan, quite spread in Bicaciu; a peculiar aspect is that these names were unused by the parents of Răbăgani in 1789-1843. A special situation is represented by the name Nicolae, present in both communities, but with a higher frequency in Bicaciu compared to Răbăgani.

At the beginning of our research, we expected that the names would be quite spread, but it proved to be a reduced distribution of names in both communities. We identified, for example, the name Lupul in both communities, but Ursul not even once in any of the villages. Nevertheless, in Tămaia village at the end of the 18th century the name Lupul was quite popular – there were eight persons with this names, the same frequency as Vasile, while Ursul was mentioned once (Ghitta, 2014, 319). Under these circumstances, we analysed the names of the parents, the fathers of the babies christened at the end of the 18th century and the first decade of the 19th century both in Bicaciu and Răbăgani. In Bicaciu at the end of the 18th century we identified three persons with the name Lupul (Civil Registers Bicaciu 1794-1805)<sup>1</sup>, while in Răbăgani only one person.

The name Ursul was found twice in Răbăgani and not even once in Bicaciu. Ursul is undoubtedly a profane name, with significance in the collective mentality, with an anthropogenic function, symbolizing the power and vigour of the animal. The new-born was endowed with the power and vigour of the bear when christened with the name Ursul. On the other hand, we are not aware if the name Lupul was taken over in the Orthodox Synaxarium or it was a profane name with the same significance

as Ursul. The disappearance of these names in the first half of the 19th century may be due to the bigger control of the church in traditional society (Ghitta, 2014, 319). In addition to this, it seems that the name Lupu migrated to the surname, at least in Răbăgani.

### **Feminine onomastics**

Regarding the feminine onomastics, there are many similarities between the two communities, but also several differences. The most frequent feminine name was Maria. Nevertheless, the frequency of this name differs from a community to another. While in Bicaciu we identified 78 girls named Maria in the researched time frame, in Răbăgani the number of girls christened Maria is lower – only 27. There is a significant difference between the number of new-borns of feminine sex between the two communities. There were 230 christened girls in Bicaciu and only 125 in Răbăgani. One explanation of the large number of girls named Maria resides in the number of born girls in two villages.

However, we should remark the difference between the first and the second name. On the second place concerning the most frequent name is Floare, 35 girls bearing this name. In Răbăgani the number of girls named Maria is almost the same as those named Raveica. We could thus conclude that Maria was the most spread name in Romanian areas, but there were exceptions in some periods and communities where the name Maria was not very popular. For example, in Tămaia village the name Ioana and Maria had almost the same frequency (Ghitta, 2014, 321-325). In Bicaciu, the third and the fourth place are occupied by Marta (20) and Ana (19). In Răbăgani the places three and four are occupied by the names Eva (22) and Floare (20). We also notice that in both communities there is the same frequency in using the feminine names. In addition to the mentioned popular names in Bicaciu we add Eva (15 christened baby girls).

But there were many differences regarding the feminine onomastics in the two analysed communities. While in Răbăgani the name Raveica occupied the second place, in Bicaciu there were four girls christened with this name. The same situation, but in reverse is true about the name Marta; in Bicaciu this is the third most popular name and in Răbăgani the name was not very frequent (only one baby girl got this name in 1789-1844). Elena, Ioana, Varvara and

<sup>1</sup>Bețanu Lup, 1794, 1, Bondacu Lup, 1796, 4, Turcuș Lup, 1797, 10.

Veselina are names identified in both communities and their frequency is similar. In Răbăgani, the name Varvara was identified eight times, while in Bicaciu six times. The name Veselina in both villages was identified once. There are many differences concerning the onomastic fashion. Maybe the biggest one constitutes the name Ana. In Bicaciu, the name was among the most popular (19 baby girls), while in Răbăgani there was none.

In order to have a clear image of the onomastic fashion in Răbăgani, especially in the case of the name Ana, we analysed mothers' names, as well as the godmothers that were in the register. In 1789-1843 we identified three mothers named Ana. The first one was in 1830, Morar Ana (Civil Registers Răbăgani 1789-1843, 33), and the second in 1833, Hețe Ana (Civil Registers Răbăgani 1789-1843, 38), and the third in 1840, Vlădic Ana (Civil Registers Răbăgani, 1789-1843, 50). It is clear that these women were not born in this village, but became inhabitants through marriage.

Even though we stopped with the research with the onomastic fashion for Răbăgani in 1843, we analysed the register in 1844-1853, but we could not extract data to use it in our research. We resorted to this because we wanted to see and analyse better the evolution of what we called the *onomastic fashion* in Răbăgani. In this way, we could better understand the way changes are made and how preferences for one particular name can be explained. In the case of the name Ana, after half a century when it was not used in Răbăgani village, in 1847 the first baby girl with this name is christened, then another in 1850, then another one in 1852 and two in 1853. We were unable to identify the factor of this change. The girls' mothers or godmothers were not named Ana.

In Bicaciu there were also other names used: Anastasia, Anisia, Elisabeta, Evdochia, Firoanda, Parascheva, Sofia, Teodora and Teodosia (derived from the masculine name Teodosie). In Răbăgani we identified four names that confer originality to the community, two of them being exceptional. The first two are Marina and Rafila, of Christian origin. The other two represent the creative spirit of community: Petrușe is a feminine name, derived from Petru. This type of names was not specific to the Bihor region, as they are found in Tămaia village (for example, Ursa is derived from the profane name Ursu, as another researcher mentions – Ghitta, 2014, 319). In 1843 we identified a baby girl

christened Armanca (*Social Register Bihor, Răbăgani*, 1789-1843, 54). Armanca may be a name that identifies the ethnical origin or it could be of Slavic origin, especially from the Serbian space. We are not aware if the name was used before 1843 in Răbăgani (it was not identified in 1844-1853), but it is found in the 20th century in Coșdeni village<sup>2</sup> (a neighboring village of Răbăgani).

### Names and naming

We encountered numerous forms and variations of names if we were to compare the past and present forms. It is obvious that communities had different ways in deriving names. For example, Ioan was sometimes Ioanu, the final "u" from names and surnames was frequent enough in both villages. This was also the case of Ștefanu. Another derived name from Ioan was Onu, more frequent in Răbăgani than in Bicaciu. In the case of Dimitrie, every village had a specific form. In Bicaciu the most frequent was Dimintrie, while in Răbăgani, Dumitru or Mitru forms were used, the form used nowadays as well. The same situation is noticed in the case of Mihail, found as such in Bicaciu, while used as Mihai in Răbăgani. There are also Gheorghe and not Gheorghe, Moisie or Mosie instead of Moise. Alongside Teodor, other forms such as Todor/Todoru and Toderu were used. The identified forms for Vasile were Văsălie or Vasilie.

In the case of feminine names, the forms were not very diversified. The names Maria remained unchanged. The only identified form was Marișca, but it was very rare. The name Ana in Bicaciu also had a derived form – Anuța, but it was not very popular. The same happened with Ioana and its derived form Ona, very rarely used. We also find Todora from Teodora, Varvura from Varvara, Dreana from Medreana, Ileana from Elena, Parasca from Parascheva and Sofie from Sofia.

### Surnames

In his study *Românii din satul Tămaia la 1773/ Romanians from Tămaia Village in 1773*, Ovidiu Ghitta classified the formation/ creation of surnames, a method that can be applied well to the two communities analysed. It is clear that

<sup>2</sup> We identified Vlădic Armanca, born in 1898, died in 1947, in the Orthodox cemetery of Coșdeni.

every case is special, but we can apply *grosso modo* the same criteria for the classification.

We have to clarify that for Bicaciu we analysed the surnames only between 1794 and 1805. The register for that period is a printed one, a fact that enabled us to study and extract data. Another aspect refers to the larger diversity of names that we had in Bicaciu compared to Răbăgani. For Bicaciu we identified over 30 surnames, while in Răbăgani only 19. We categorized them according to their creation: after nicknames referring to behavioural peculiarities, father's name, occupation and place of origin. In Bicaciu, the most surnames are in the first and last categories.

1. Surnames resulted from nicknames, physical appearance or behavioural specificity:
  - a. Bicaciu: Țuțu, Ruțe, Magu, Jurcaț, Petrișe, Poga, Poderu, Pențu, Bogarie, Bondicu.
  - b. Răbăgani: Mihuța, Hora, Hețe, Folțiu, Aralia, Race, Hirlișu and Sila.
2. Surnames linked to place, formed adding the suffix “-an” to the name of origin places or toponyms from the Hungarian language:
  - a. Bicaciu: Căpanu/ Copanu (Copăceni), Perșan, Bețanu, Gherman, Topanu (Topa), Sușmanu (Șumugiu), Dumbrăvan (Dumbrăviță), Olteanu, Silaghi (sălăjean).
  - b. Răbăgani: Olteanu, Blaj/ Blăjanu.
3. Surnames derived from father's name or without a suffix:
  - a. Bicaciu: Avram, Balint, Laza, Zaharia.
  - b. Răbăgani: Dance, Gabor, Laza, Lup/ Lupul.
4. Surnames connected to occupation:
  - a. Bicaciu: Popa, Popovici, Haraga (clopotar/ bellman), Olariu.

- b. Răbăgani: Vlădic, Morar/Morariu and Popa.

Alongside the mentioned surnames, we also came across some peculiar surnames that symbolize the ethnical origin or the place of origin. For example, in Bicaciu this was the name Turcuț. We must mention the common surnames identified in both communities: Popa and Popovici, Laza, Olteanu. Additionally, the surnames linked to the place of origin in Răbăgani are not that many as in Bicaciu.

## Conclusions

Onomastics from the two analysed villages of the Bihor region was shaped by the Orthodox Church but the degree in which the church imposed its control is unclear. It is possible that the Christian names became more frequently used in time without the church interfering in the process of names' selection. At the same time, generally speaking, we may affirm that the most popular names were Ioan and Maria. However, we should take into account the fact that each community has its own specificity, it shows originality regarding the onomastic fashion. This may be easily noticed in the two communities we studied. Thus, the village of Răbăgani does not align with the general interpretation, being a peculiar case. In addition, each village had its own fashionable names in the same analyzed period. It is difficult to establish the factors that produced or have produced the onomastic changes within a community, but they existed and functioned differently in each case. It is, nevertheless, obvious that the geographical position, the interaction with other communities or with the urban space played a role in this matter.

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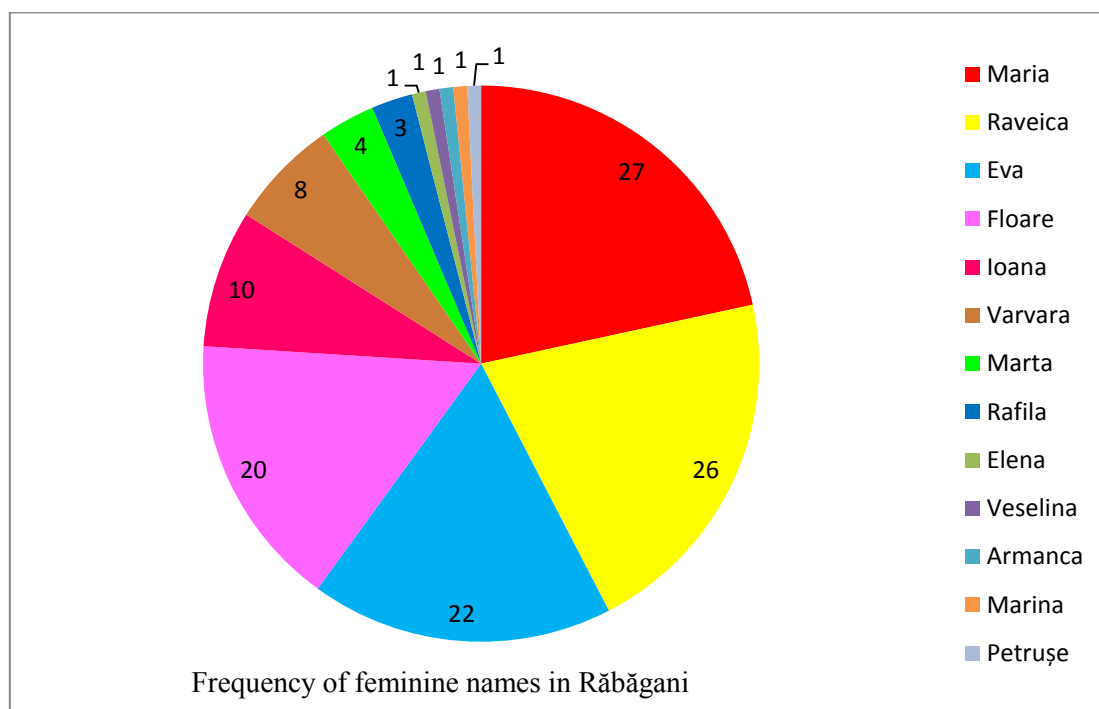
### LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS / LISTA ILUSTRAȚIILOR

**Fig. 1.** Frequency of feminine names in Răbăgani/ Frecvența prenumelor feminine în Răbăgani

**Fig. 2.** Frequency of feminine names in Bicaciu/ Frecvența prenumelor feminine în Bicaciu

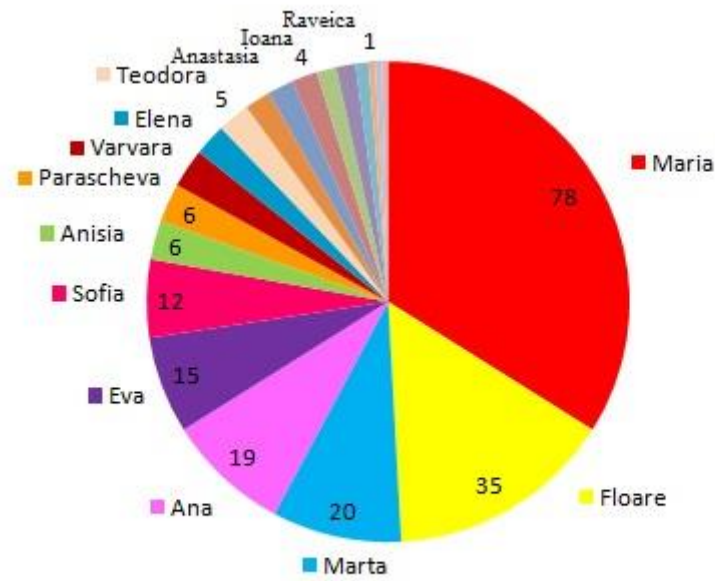
**Fig. 3.** Frequency of feminine names in Bicaciu and Răbăgani/ Frecvența prenumelor feminine în Bicaciu și Răbăgani

**Fig. 4.** Frequency of masculine names in Bicaciu and Răbăgani (the name Ianoș was separated from its Romanian equivalent, Ioan, to point out the frequency of the Hungarianized name) / Frecvența prenumelor masculine în satele Bicaciu și Răbăgani (Prenumele Ianoș a fost pus separat de echivalentul său din limba română, Ioan, pentru a evidenția frecvența prenumelui maghiarizat)

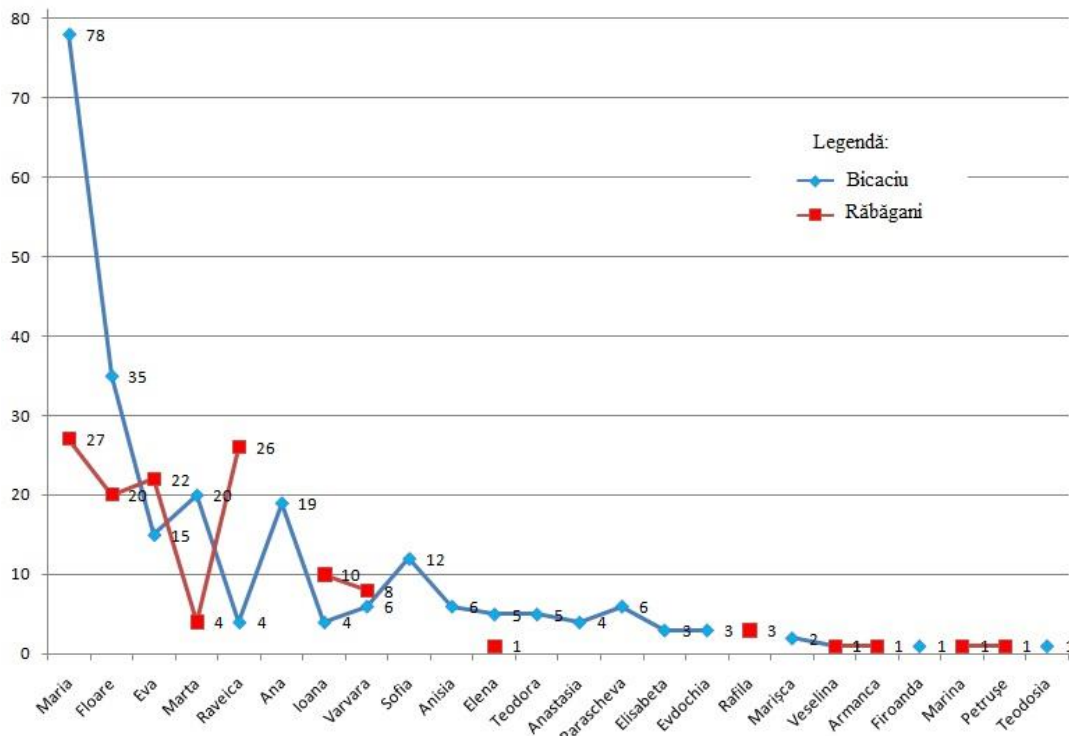


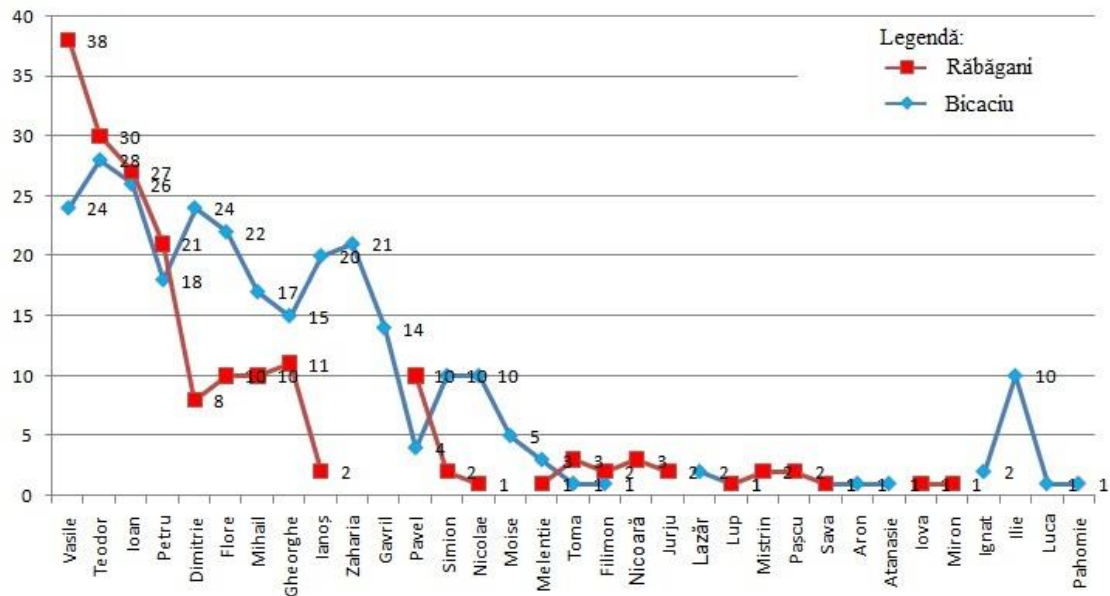
**Fig. 1.** Frequency of feminine names in Răbăgani/ Frecvența prenumelor feminine în Răbăgani.





Onomastică feminină Bicaciu

**Fig. 2.** Frequency of feminine names in Bicaciu/ Frecvența prenumelor feminine în Bicaciu.**Fig. 3.** Frequency of feminine names in Bicaciu and Răbăgani/ Frecvența prenumelor feminine în Bicaciu și Răbăgani.



**Fig. 4.** Frequency of masculine names in Bicaciu and Răbăgani (the name Ianoș was separated from its Romanian equivalent, Ioan, to point out the frequency of the Hungarianized name) / Frecvența prenumelor masculine în satele Bicaciu și Răbăgani (Prenumele Ianoș a fost pus separat de echivalentul său din limba română, Ioan, pentru a evidenția frecvența prenumelui maghiarizat).

## ASPECTS OF CULTURAL REGIONALISM IN INTERWAR ALSACE

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**Abstract:** *In the present study we have tried to make an introduction to the identity problems of Alsace, seen as a border province between France and Germany. Issues related to the history of collective identities, the history of culture, the history of literary criticism and regionalism were addressed herein. The research was based on French-language authors from the interwar period.*

**Keywords:** *Alsace, collective identities, regionalism, interwar period.*

**Rezumat:** *În prezentul studiu am încercat realizarea unei introduceri în problemele identitare ale Alsaciei, văzută în calitatea ei de provincie de frontieră dintre Franța și Germania. Au fost abordate aspecte care țin de istoria identităților colective, istoria culturii, istoria criticii literare și regionalism. La baza cercetării au stat autorii de limba franceză din perioada interbelică.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *Alsacia, identități colective, regionalism, perioada interbelică.*

Modern Alsatian identity has developed in a double referential relationship, being influenced by the presence of two major national cultures and civilizations (except neutral and non-unitary Switzerland), which have bordered it on both sides. In this regard, the Alsatian essayist Michel Deutsch noted at one point that:

“En réalité l’Alsace est ce qu’il est parce qu’il se trouve pris en tenaille entre deux cultures, deux conceptions idéologiques qui se sont longtemps durement combattues dans leurs volontés d’hégémonie. L’individualisme universaliste des Français et la communauté culturelle et historique des Allemands se sont violemment affrontés mais ont également cohabité en Alsace, au point de s’incarner si on peut dire dans deux langues (l’alsacien-allemand et le français) et dans les religions (la catholique, la protestante et la juive). Il était naturel aussi que se soit créé là un champ de tensions – au sens de la physique! Mais un bref rappel historique devient ici nécessaire”<sup>1</sup>.

Alsace must be seen as both as a territory of confluences and contrasts. The Alsatian identity was established in this framework, assimilating, as needed, the guiding characteristics of the two major neighbouring national cultures.

In trying to define what is specifically Alsatian, one has taken into account what is considered to be French and what is considered to be German. Between these frameworks, Alsatian intellectuals tried to find a middle, yet personal ground as a way to define what is characteristic of Alsace. The process of developing the Alsatian identity was articulated by a series of successive *closings* and *openings*. The openings were made to both French and German culture, with Professor Marc Lienhard talking about the existence of an *open identity* in Alsace (Lienhard, 2011). The closings were made with the intention of preserving and defending one’s own cultural and identity specificity. In fact, even if the opinions were pro-French or pro-German, the idea stands out that Alsacians cannot be fully French or fully German.

In his book on Alsace, Paul Acker brought to the attention of French-speaking readers some

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<sup>1</sup> “In reality, Alsace is what it is because it is trapped in the vise of two cultures, between two ideological conceptions that have long clashed, in their will for hegemony. The universalist individualism of the French and the cultural and historical community of the Germans clashed violently, but at the same time they cohabited in Alsace, to the point of incarnating,

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so to speak, in two languages (Alsatian-German and French) and in religions (Catholic, Protestant and Jewish). It was also natural that a field of tension was created – in a psychic sense! Thus, a short historical recollection becomes necessary in this case”. (Deutsch, 1993, 49-50).

details about the identity condition of Alsatians in early twentieth-century Germany. Going beyond the pro-French perspective from which the state of affairs was viewed, the existence of a specific Alsatian identity fund finally penetrates, over which came, with greater or lesser success, the national influences from the East Rhine or the West of Vosges. In this regard, Acker noted:

“Voilà donc, brièvement résumé, en quoi cette nouvelle génération, qui vivait au milieu des Allemands, se reconnaissait, pour aussi dire chaque jour, différente d’eux. Ces jeunes Alsaciens ne peuvent pas être Français: ils seront donc Alsaciens, et rien qu’Alsaciens, puisqu’ils ne peuvent pas être vraiment Alsaciens que s’ils gardent, comme une des parties constitutives de leur caractère propre, ce que forme le patriotisme français: «Ils sentent, a écrit Maurice Barrès, ne pas pouvoir vivre, s’ils cessent de se donner la culture que les fit tels qu’ils sont... Replié sur lui-même, bloqué entre la France et l’Allemagne, ne pouvant pas être Français, ne voulant pas être Allemand, l’Alsacien se retrouve tel que ses aïeux et la terre tendent à le créer: il pense et il agit en alsacien cultivé à la française»”<sup>2</sup>.

Going beyond the biased and anti-German conclusion, it is significant that in 1912, Paul Acker considered that Alsatians must constantly refer to the two national and cultural paradigms that framed Alsace like the plates of a scale: “Une continuelle comparaison entre la civilisation française et la civilisation allemande s’imposait à l’Alsace et tournait le plus souvent au désavantage de l’Allemand”<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> “This is a brief summary of how this new generation, who lived among the Germans, found themselves, every day, as being different from them. These young Alsatians cannot be French: therefore they will be Alsatians, and only Alsatians, because they cannot be Alsatians only if they continue to maintain what French patriotism represents, as one of the constituent parts of their own character: ‘They feel,’ wrote Maurice Barrès, ‘that they cannot live if they cease to give to culture what made them what they are.’, the Alsatian is as his ancestors and the land tend to create him: he thinks and acts in Alsatian, but being cultivated in the French way” (Acker, 1912, 60-61).

<sup>3</sup> “A continuous comparison between French and German culture prevailed in Alsace, and most of the

According to Acker, Alsatian identity was built largely on opposition to and denial of the German nation. According to the author, the Alsatians of the German Empire were not treated equally by the Germans, hence an inferiority complex determined by the position of rapport specific to the balance of power between master and subject. Under these tense conditions, the game of depreciating labelling came into play, with the Germans being presented as true representatives of the old retrograde world, while the Alsatians always had a taste for freedom and equality, qualities that bring them closer to France and the model it offered. Thus, Paul Acker argued that:

“En même temps, que l’Alsacien se découvrait, pour les mœurs, si différent de l’Allemand, il se découvrait aussi différent sur le terrain politique. L’Allemand respecte instinctivement l’autorité; ses chefs, préfets, officiers, sont en quelque sorte encore féodaux, exerçant leur pouvoir avec le mépris d’un suzerain pour ses serfs; il y a encore des castes en Allemagne. L’Allemand, en général, accepte avec une soumission facile ce vieux régime, ravi, dès qu’il a une pareille autorité, de la faire durement sentir à ses subordonnés. L’Alsacien, lui, est démocrate: il le doit à son passé, à l’histoire de ses villes libres qui se gouvernaient elles-mêmes à la façon de petites Républiques; il le doit à l’union intime de l’Alsace et de la France [...] En face de l’Allemagne, l’Alsace représente la foi dans l’égalité, la haine de l’arbitraire, la conscience de la dignité individuelle. [...]”<sup>4</sup>.

time it fell to Germany’s disadvantage.” (Acker, 1912, 57).

<sup>4</sup> “While the Alsatian was discovering himself, through his habits, so different from the German, he was also discovering himself as being different in the political field. The German instinctively respects authority; his managers, prefects, officers are to some extent still feudal lords, exercising their power with the contempt of a suzerain for his servants; there are still castes in Germany. The German, in general, readily accepts this old regime, and is delighted, as soon as he has such authority, to make his subordinates feel it harshly. The Alsatian is a democrat: he owes this to his past, to the history of his free cities, which were self-governing in the manner of small republics; due to the intimate union between Alsace and France [...] Opposite Germany,

In some cases, the definition of Alsatian identity was made by highlighting characteristics that can be considered neither French nor German. According to some intellectuals, Alsatians have always believed in a community that is not organically integrated into any centralized political-administrative system. Rather, the Alsatians were presented as a marginal, peripheral identity community, conscious of its own exteriority and eccentricity. In other words, the perspective of reading the provincial and national territory consecrated by Émile Baas, in his famous book *Situation de l'Alsace* (Baas, 1946), placed Alsace, symbolically, somewhere outside France proper, the author taking over and capitalizing on the consecrated perspective of ordinary Alsatians, who described those who came from France as "immigrants" from the "*Intérieur*".

Even in highly subjective texts, in which the authors lean more towards a national camp or another, the vision in which the *closings* on one's own identity and the *openings* to otherness are presented, considered to be proper to the Alsatian way of being, is kept. But on the other hand, the definition of Alsatian identity was also made by opposing one of the neighbouring nations. In this regard, in 1932 Jules Koch argued that:

"C'est une particularité de l'Alsace que d'être fortement attaché à son sol natal, de vivre parfois trop retiré sur sa glèbe, de ne jamais en perdre à l'aventure et même de se fixer et de s'adapter rapidement sur une terre étrangère, mais jamais rien perdre d'ailleurs de son caractère, aux qualités comme aux défauts francs. L'Allemand est migrateur et instable par nature. L'Alsacien se rapproche davantage en cela du Français, casanier mais colonisateur, et si l'émigration alsacienne fut plus forte que celle d'autres régions françaises, cela s'explique par les circonstances, l'instabilité politique, les changements de souveraineté et aussi par le fait que la population y est plus dense qu'ailleurs"<sup>5</sup>.

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Alsace represents faith in equality, hatred for arbitrariness, awareness of individual dignity [...]" (Acker, 1912, 58-60).

<sup>5</sup> "It is specific to Alsace to be very attached to its native soil, to live sometimes too secluded on its land, to never get lost in the adventure and even to root in a foreign territory and quickly adapt to it, without ever losing its character, both in terms of its own qualities

*Alsatian identity does not have to be understood singularly. It consists of a complex puzzle marked by the individuality of each human settlement.* As noted, the Alsatian is an "instinctive patriot" who cares deeply about his land, local traditions and the entire heritage passed on to him by his ancestors (Odilé, 1934, 136). Thus, within Alsace, a form of local patriotism developed that animated the various towns and villages. Each Alsatian human settlement entered into a competition with its neighbours, thus giving rise to a competitive spirit that stimulated performance in various fields such as fine arts, culture, industry, crafts, agriculture, etc.

The side effects of local patriotism include the manifestation of immeasurable pride or a certain isolationist attitude, as a self-defensive reaction, whose mission is to preserve and protect the entire set of local cultural and artistic values. On the other hand, there were also phenomena of assimilation of foreign elements, which had the role of vitalizing the already existing local fund and bringing a dose of freshness and novelty to it. In the sense of the above, at one point, the well-known Alsatian intellectual Ferdinand Dollinger noted that:

"On a accusé les Alsaciens de se replier sur eux-mêmes, de témoigner à tout nouveau venu une méfiance voisine de l'aversion. C'est se méprendre, et le reproche n'est pas fondé. Sans doute, la fierté ombrageuse des petites républiques urbaines et les rivalités d'une multitude de microcosmes ont engendré parfois un esprit de clocher qui, la différence de langue aidant, a pu résister un temps au grand souffle de la Révolution française. Mais le particularisme que les Alsaciens ont professé plus tard ne fut que la défense de leur personnalité. Au vrai, jamais peuple ne fut plus accueillant, n'accepta plus volontiers les apports propres à renouveler le sang et à élargir la

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and defects. The German is migratory and unstable by nature. In this respect, the Alsatian is closer to the French, domestic but still colonizing, and if Alsatian emigration was greater than that of other French regions, this is explained by the following: different circumstances, political instability, exchanges of sovereignty and, of course, also by the fact that the population is denser than elsewhere". (Koch, 1932, 586).

vision. [...] Les villes, libéralement, accordaient le droit de cité à tout étranger respectueux des usages et habile au travail [...]”<sup>6</sup>.

Alsatian particularism was largely built around what we call *Heimat* in German, a term that, when translated into another language, loses its consistency and symbolic power. In fact, Alsations generally considered themselves attached to the region or “their little homeland.” Feelings of belonging to a community and a defined geographical area were multiple, without excluding each other. Local patriotism coexisted just as well with regional patriotism. The two forms of patriotism were articulated especially around the linguistic, confessional particularities, but also around that peasant instinct, which always felt attracted to the native land (Vonau, 1968, 7-8).

Moreover, the Alsations were also considered good patriots in the classical sense of the term, without forgetting their places of origin. Among them, high officials, illustrious generals and various men of culture and philanthropists (Koch, 1932, 588-589) stood out in France. From this strange situation, at first sight, what Émile Baas called *the Alsatian paradox* was born. In this regard, the Alsatian intellectual noted the following:

“Il se ramène essentiellement à un paradoxe, qui tient dans l'apparente antinomie entre le patriotisme français du peuple alsacien et la personnalité provinciale de l'Alsace, différemment dans son tempérament, dans ses mœurs, dans sa langue, et partiellement dans son histoire, du reste de la France.

<sup>6</sup> “I accused the Alsations of withdrawing from themselves, of showing to any newcomer a distrust close to aversion. It is a misunderstanding and the reproach is unfounded. Undoubtedly, the distrustful pride of the small urban republics and the rivalries of a multitude of microcosms sometimes generated a bell-ringing spirit, which, aided by the difference in language, was able to withstand for a time the great breath of the French Revolution. But the particularism that the Alsations later professed was only the defense of their personality. In fact, there has been no more hospitable people who would gladly accept the right relations to refresh the left and to broaden the worldview. [...] The cities, in a liberal way, granted the right of citizenship to any foreigner who respected the local customs and who was skilled at work”. (Dollinger 1929, 114).

Voilà le nœud de notre problème. // L'Alsacien est cet homme paradoxal qui veut, d'une volonté indissoluble, rester intégré dans la communauté française et pourtant garder intact son patrimoine linguistique, ethnique et historique différent du patrimoine français. Ne cherchez pas si c'est là chose possible ou situation insoluble. Ces questions de valeur n'ont pas encore de sens, à ce point de notre enquête. Nous devons d'abord constater ce qui est en fait. Or, ce qui est, c'est ce paradoxe né d'un indiscutable amour patriotique pour la France, allié à une volonté farouche de garder une personnalité provinciale qui, dans l'ensemble, diffère sur bien des points du reste de la France. Tout est là. Nous allons, si vous le permettez, développer cette double attitude parallèle et paradoxale”<sup>7</sup>.

Baas's lines, written during the war, with a high dose of subjectivity and a pronounced sense of hostility towards the Germans, are of particular importance to the topic of our research. The constituent elements of what was called *le paradoxe alsacien* (described by a double and parallel attitude) were also the basis of what was called in the interwar period *le malaise alsacien* (*Alsatian discomfort*). Precisely this paradoxical identity attitude, developed in two directions, is not exactly compatible and functional; when the two were joined, that caused a state of identity discomfort that disturbed a large part of the Alsatian intellectuals and some other people. The multiple and repeated tensions between French

<sup>7</sup> “It essentially comes with a paradox that lies in the apparent antinomy between the French patriotism of the Alsatian people and the provincial personality of Alsace, different in its temperament, morals, language, and in part in its history from the rest of France. Here is the crux of the matter. // The Alsatian, a paradoxical man with an indissoluble will, wants to remain integrated in the French community, while keeping intact his linguistic, ethnic and historical heritage which is different from the French heritage. Do not bother to seek if this is possible or unresolved. These valuable questions do not yet make sense at this point in our research. We must first find out what it really is. What it is, is the paradox born of an indisputable patriotic love for France, combined with a ferocious will to maintain a provincial personality which, as a whole, differs in many respects from the rest of France. It's all about that. If you allow us, we will develop this double parallel and paradoxical attitude” (Baas 1946, 7-8).

centralism and the resistance of the Alsatian regional identity / identities gathered around the dialect, denomination, morals, traditions and conscience of a provincial past have, on the one hand, prevented Alsatians from fully integrating into France and to maintain a traumatized and unbearable regional identity, and on the other hand, for the French public opinion to perceive the autonomous political actions in Alsace as separatist actions (Ritter, 1985, 61-62).

Like Pierre Klein, we can say that Alsace's misfortune was perhaps that it was always in the winners' camp, which gave it the status of a defeated region (Klein, 2004, 14). Under these conditions, the province between the Vosges and the Rhine was sometimes treated as a spoils of war. Jean-Noël Grandhomme rightly wondered if Alsace was considered a colony by the French authorities after 1919, which increased salaries by a third for "Interior" (France) officials who came to work in Alsace (Grandhomme, 2011, 785). But the treatment of Alsace as a colony annexed to the French state was only a detail of all the Alsatians' dissatisfaction with the way the Parisian authorities operated. The process of reintegrating Alsace into French structures involved many more tactical mistakes by the central administration (Deltour, 2003, 118).

The successive changes in the borders have had another significant effect, grasped by Pierre Klein: "Or l'Alsace n'a quasiment jamais existé en tant que collectivité et n'a jamais eu les moyens d'exister autrement que dans les limites fixées par d'autres"<sup>8</sup>. In these conditions, we can say that the birth and consolidation of the Alsatian identity were determined from the outside by the two great rival nations, which permanently claimed Alsace.

The violent detachment of Alsace from the German core provoked after the First World War, destabilized the entire economic, agricultural and industrial system of the province. In addition to the pain and great losses caused by the rupture of old economic ties with Germany, it was equally painful and costly to (re)adapt to the economic and production structures of France (L'Huillier, 2001, 493-495).

In an attempt to capture what broadly represented "le malaise alsacien" (Alsatian discomfort), Geneviève Baas claimed that:

"C'est l'ensemble des problèmes posés par le rattachement de l'Alsace à la France dans la période consécutive à l'euphorie de l'armistice: on a noté un malaise partout où l'on sentait un heurt entre le particularisme local et les décisions centralisatrices émanant du gouvernement français. Ce conflit s'est rapidement polarisé autour de trois types de problèmes: problèmes administratifs, problème linguistique, problème religieux. L'état de malaise s'étend dans la province entre 1919 et 1924. En effet, après 1924, ce qui n'était jusqu'alors qu'un malaise deviendra une crise politique et échappe en tant que telle à cette étude"<sup>9</sup>.

In 1918, after almost half a century of German rule, Alsace became part of France with a well-defined regional personality, as Germany offered Alsatians the opportunity to cultivate and perpetuate their own traditions, dialect, and deep religious character. As Geneviève Baas noticed, after the First World War Alsace wanted to be very Alsatian and French, to the same extent. The Alsatian identity discomfort was completely derived from this double, which was impossible to achieve, because France received Alsace in a social and political climate in which French was imposed as a single language, administrative centralism annihilated all autonomist tendencies and traditional state secularism excluded any confessional interference in the public domain (Baas, 1972, 17).

Moreover, from the time of the German administration, Alsace also came to the French state with a well-established tradition of autonomy, which, following the exhaustion of the short-lived enthusiasm after the end of the Great War, began to reappear in the consciousness of political and cultural Alsatian elites (and not only in them) (Baas, 1972, 26). After the impact of

<sup>8</sup> "Alsace has almost never existed as a community and has never had the means to exist other than within the limits set by others". (Klein 2004, 12).

<sup>9</sup> "On the whole, regarding the problems raised by the annexation of Alsace to France, from the period following the euphoria of the armistice: I found discomfort everywhere where I felt a friction between local particularism and centralist decisions emanating from the French government. This conflict quickly polarized around three types of issues: administrative issues, language issues, religious issues. The state of discomfort stretches across the province between 1919 and 1924. In fact, after 1924, what was until then only a nuisance, will become a political crisis and therefore goes beyond the thematic area of this study". (Baas, 1972, 9).



French centralism, the memory of lost liberties and extended autonomy reappeared with even greater intensity as, in the last phase of the German administration, Alsace-Lorraine was to lead its own destinies, through a regional parliament, which ensured extensive freedoms within Germany (Baechler, 1972, 16).

It is obvious that the Alsatians did not like the uniform of the German army. In this way, they turned out not to be very good Germans. Well-known Napoleonic-era generals Jean-Baptiste Kléber and Jean Rapp, originally from Strasbourg and Colmar, respectively, are known to have opened up a whole tradition among Alsatians of fighting under the French flag. Before 1914, it was common for hundreds of young Alsatians to enlist in the French Foreign Legion each year to escape enlistment in the German army. At the same time, even at the level of the military elite, the number of Alsatian and Lorraine career officers in the German army remained visibly low (Grandhomme, 2005, 216). The same feeling of reluctance, even hostility, was felt in the context of World War II, when, through a phenomenon of “parasite” memory, Alsatian soldiers in the German army became aware of their status of *malgré-nous* (in spite of ourselves), although in reality, such a thing could not be said, because they were not forcibly incorporated into the army, as in the First World War, but were incorporated by virtue of the fact that they were “proper” citizens of Germany (Grandhomme, 2005, 218).

Even secular, centralist and anti-clerical France did not seem to the Alsatians the solution to all their problems. Dissatisfied to the end with both national alternatives proposed by the Germans or the French, the Alsatians preferred to indulge in a middle ground situation, being aware that the solution of the problem in favour of one party or another would also be decided on the territory of Alsace. In this regard, professor Jean-Noël Grandhomme rightly argued that: “Surtout, en dehors de quelques cercles d'exaltés, personne ne souhaite plus une revanche dont l'Alsace-Lorraine serait le premier champ de bataille”<sup>10</sup>.

In his famous book on Alsace, Frédéric Hoffet discussed the existence of a *double sense of belonging of the Alsatians*, both to the German nation and to the French nation. But this double sense of belonging was an alternative, because the Alsatians simply exchanged one patriotism for

another, depending on the historical context. This attitude took on masochistic connotations for Hoffet, because the Alsatians always needed a leader, as they were not able to overcome their peripheral identity status. So, “[...] L'Alsacien a l'amour inné du chef. Son respect de l'ordre établi, de la hiérarchie, de l'armée, le pousse irrésistiblement vers des attitudes réactionnaires [...]”<sup>11</sup>.

In October 1918, when the French troops entered Alsace victoriously, the local population received them with sincere enthusiasm. It was, in fact, a moment of release from all the tensions and spiritual feelings accumulated during the war, which, in those days, were in its last phase of development. Of all the propaganda made for the maneuvering of the Alsatian masses, of which an autonomous propaganda, a neutralist propaganda and a revolutionary propaganda were distinguished, the one that won the case and which was absolutely imposed with the arrival of the French troops in Alsace was that of the “spontaneous plebiscite” of the Alsatian population, which gladly received the arrival of the “liberating” French army (Baechler, 1972, 141).

Although in 1918 only 2% of the Alsatian population was fluent in French and only 8% had a relative knowledge of the language (Maugué, 1970, 47), this did not preclude the existence of a widespread French-speaking pro-Alsatian current. In fact, the practice of the Alsatian dialect and fidelity to France were not antinomic, and favourable examples can be found in history in this regard, such as the case of “golden periods”, i.e. the Revolution or the French Empire (Grandhomme, 2011, 787). However, the shock and the cultural misunderstandings came immediately after the drawing of the territorial borders, when Alsace was definitively included in the composition of the French state. The period of compatibility between the two geographical and cultural entities, after almost half a century of separation, caused, on the part of the Alsatians, a state of identity discomfort. Both France and Alsace had to truly rediscover themselves after creating an idealized image of each other. As Bruno Deltour noted:

<sup>10</sup> “Apart from a few exalted circles, no one wants a rematch whose first battlefield will be Alsace-Lorraine” (Grandhomme, 2005, 216).

<sup>11</sup> “The Alsatian has an innate attachment to having a leader. His respect for the established order, for the hierarchy, for the army, pushes him irresistibly towards reactionary attitudes [...]”. (Hoffet 1951, 88).

“[...] La France retrouvait son Alsace mythique, celle «heureuse» dépeinte par Hansi des villages tricolores ou – dans une version allégorique – de la belle au bois dormant s’éveillant à l’arrivée de son prince, le jeune libérateur français. Mais derrière l’idylle, l’image d’une Alsace tout entière attendant et ne vivant que pour la France correspondait à une réalité plus platement contingente: après 1870, l’Alsace devait enfin pouvoir s’épanouir mais ce ne fut pas si simple. [...]”<sup>12</sup>.

The transition from one language to another has been difficult, especially in the field of regional literature in Alsace. Changing the language of literary expression has not been easy. Most Alsatian writers focused on cultivating and capitalizing on local and regional identities, continuing to write in German or the Alsatian dialect (Bergner, 1932, 480-481) in the first decade after becoming part of France. Thus, among the Alsatian writers, a *littérature du terroir* or a *Heimatliteratur* was cultivated, in which the history of Alsace and the local geography were drawn on. Historical literature was very successful at the time, with Alsatian writers seeking to identify periods of glory in the regional past, thus keeping awake the awareness of the existence of an Alsatian identity with its own past<sup>13</sup>. In his study of Alsatian literature, Georges Bergner noted that:

“Les ouvrages historiques absorbent donc la presque totalité de la littérature alsacienne. Ils composent une spécialité: les Alsatiques. Qu’aucun détail n’échappe aux investigations! Que l’exigence la plus rigoureuse préside à ces études! Rien n’est

futile, rien n’est négligeable. Et ces bénédictins relèvent les moindre indices, poussent leurs recherche à l’extrême, persévèrent jusqu’à résoudre les énigmes au premier abord les plus obscures”<sup>14</sup>.

Alsatian literature of the third decade of the twentieth century drew on regional topics and history. We can distinguish a noticeable double closure both at the thematic level and in terms of language of expression. In fact, a literature on Alsations and for Alsations was written in the 1920s and the following decade. The subjects were mostly inspired by Alsatian history, and the language in which the various novels, plays, or poems were written was German; moreover, the various dialects were successfully adapted to cultured writing. In this way, the features of cultural regionalism and, in particular, those of regionalist literature are distinguished. The target audience was very well established from the beginning, both by the restrictions imposed by the subjects of regional interest of the literary creations, and by the limitations imposed by the knowledge of the Alsatian dialects. As Camille Schneider said, the use of dialect in the writing of literary texts was intended to capture all the features “d’une population et de son terroir”<sup>15</sup>. However, as the same author observed, these characteristics varied from one department to another, from one valley to another, from one village to another, and from one dialect to another (Schneider, 1937, 116). In this way, an extremely large fragmentation of the Alsatian literature written in dialect was achieved, the receiving public able to fully understand the artistic production being even more restricted, due to the limitations imposed by the knowledge of different dialects. In fact, Alsatian regionalist literature was an unpretentious literature of national or European spread. In this regard, the historian and literary critic Georges Bergner stated that:

<sup>12</sup> “France found its mythical Alsace, a “happy” one, as drawn by Hansi in tricolor villages or – in an elegoric version – that of the Sleeping Beauty, waking up to the arrival of her prince, the young French liberator. But behind the idyll, the image of an entire Alsace waiting and living only for France, corresponded to a reality never before possible: after 1870, Alsace was finally able to flourish, but this was not so simple.” (Deltour 2003, 118).

<sup>13</sup> A similar phenomenon occurred in the case of minority literature in interwar Transylvania, the Hungarian writers, grouped around the Cluj magazine *Erdélyi Helikon*, writing a series of novels and short stories with historical or local Transylvanian topics. We mention here the writers Károly Kós, Miklós Bánffy and Áron Tamási. (Trifescu, 2016, 100-102).

<sup>14</sup> “Historical works thus absorb almost all Alsatian literature. They compose a specialty: “Alsatian writings”. No details are missing from the investigation. The most rigorous requirement presides over these studies! Nothing is futile, nothing is negligible. And these Benedictines reveal the slightest clues, pushing their research to the extreme, persevering until they solve obscure riddles at first sight.”. (Bergner, 1932, 483).

<sup>15</sup> “of a population and its territory”.

“Si donc l’on envisage l’ensemble des ouvrages de ces dernières années, on constate que, par leur objet, elles demeurent strictement régionales, sans tendre à l’universel et ne prétendent par conséquent à aucune expansion”<sup>16</sup>.

All this regional and regionalist literature from the interwar period developed in a hostile political climate, in which the centralist authorities in Paris did everything possible to francize Alsace and erase the Alsatian and German identity and linguistic background of the province (Finck, 1990, 12-13, *passim*).

Alsatian regional literature did not develop only under the idea of closing in on its own local identity and its own past. Several literary critics and writers grouped around the literary societies *l’Arc* and *l’Homme de Fer* promoted the dialogue and cohabitation between German and French culture, as well as the pacifist spirit to overcome conflicting reactions (Schneider, 1937, 110-111). However, these promoted literary (and at the same time cultural and civic) attitudes which were more limited to the theoretical level of literary criticism, transformed into true ideologues, and less to a proper literature, qualitatively and quantitatively relevant. Referring to *l’Arc* group, Camille Schneider said the following:

“[...] C’est en 1924 que se forma l’Arc, dont le nom indique le but et la tendance. Ses membres, écrivains des deux langues et de dialecte entendaient cultiver l’idée de l’Alsace intermédiaire, de l’Alsace servant de pont entre deux nations civilisatrices. Une très belle anthologie constitue le document de ce mouvement fort intéressant et qui n’a peut-être sombré que parce que bientôt il accueillit plus de critiques que de vrais travailleurs littéraires [...]”<sup>17</sup>.

The interest of Alsatian intellectuals was not limited to strictly literary aspects. In addition to the research and cultivation of local and regional history, as much attention has been paid to Alsatian folklore. The discovery of the Alsatian village was made in this way in all its aspects, and in the interwar period important collections of legends and peasant stories, written mainly in German came out (Schneider, 1937, 115-116). This interest in the recording, research and then artistic exploitation of the heritage of peasant traditions is not at all isolated for that historical period. It follows the openings made in the eighteenth century and especially in the nineteenth century, in the context of the awakening of national consciousness.

Literature, as an exponent and vehicle of regional culture, thus joined a wider scientific and cultural interest, on which occasion the peasant artistic productions in the field of minor arts, peasant industrial art or music were analysed and capitalized (Thiesse, 2001, 23-66; Peer, 2001, 89).

In other words, Alsace, as a “*d’entre-deux*” province, has struggled to manage its identity problem, always swinging between one attraction centre or another. In the end, from this complicated and always uncertain situation resulted the characteristics of the regional border identity. It was *a multiple identity, variable in intensity and changeable in employment of a national nature, which provoked a painful sense of commitment, hard to bear, very well defined by the expression “le malaise alsacien”*.

Translated by Ana-Magdalena Petraru.

<sup>16</sup> “If we consider all the books of the last years, we find that, through their subject, they remain absolutely regional, without tending to the universal and consequently do not claim to have any expansion”. (Bergner, 1932, 484).

<sup>17</sup> “In 1924 the Arc was formed, whose name indicates its purpose and inclination. Its members, writers in two languages and in dialect, understood to cultivate the idea of an intermediate Alsace, of an Alsace serving as a bridge between two civilizing nations. A wonderful anthology is the document of this very interesting movement, which probably collapsed because it soon hosted more critics than real literary creators.” (Schneider, 1937, 110).

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# FROM NEIGHBOURS TO ALLIES: CULTURAL PROPAGANDA OF ROMANIA IN POLAND (1919-1926)

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**Abstract:** *At the end of World War I, Romania and Poland had common borders and common security objectives. Therefore, in March 1921, an alliance treaty was signed between Romania and Poland, with the main goal of working together in the face of the Soviet threat. Within this framework, relations between Romania and Poland have developed, both in the political-military and economic realms. But what happened in the area of cultural ties? Did the signing of the alliance treaty foster the cultural relations between Romania and Poland? Did the Romanian state have a strategy of “cultural propaganda” in relation to Poland? The establishment of the alliance between Romania and Poland did not attract an increased investment of the Romanian state in the development of relations with Poland from a cultural standpoint. Romania's cultural propaganda in Poland was, in terms of means, techniques and financial investment, below the level of Romania's actions in the relationship with Czechoslovakia, and at a much lower level compared to Romania's involvement in the relationship with France, Great Britain or the activity in Switzerland.*

**Keywords:** *cultural propaganda, alliance, diplomacy, interwar, Romania, Poland.*

**Rezumat:** *La finalul Primului Război Mondial, România și Polonia aveau graniță comună și obiective de securitate comune. De aceea, în martie 1921, între România și Polonia a fost semnat un tratat de alianță, având ca țel principal conlucrarea în fața amenințării sovietice. În acest cadru, relațiile dintre România și Polonia s-au dezvoltat, atât pe segmentele politic și militar, cât și pe cel economic. Ce s-a întâmplat însă în domeniul legăturilor culturale? Încheierea tratatului de alianță a dinamizat raporturile culturale dintre România și Polonia? A avut statul român o strategie de „propagandă culturală” în relația cu Polonia? Constituirea alianței dintre România și Polonia nu a atras și o investiție sporită a statului român în dezvoltarea relațiilor cu Polonia pe dimensiunea culturală. Propaganda culturală a României în Polonia a fost, ca mijloace, tehnici și investiție financiară, sub nivelul acțiunilor României în relația cu Cehoslovacia și la un nivel mult mai scăzut în comparație cu implicarea României în relația cu Franța, Marea Britanie ori cu activitatea din Elveția.*

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *propagandă culturală, alianță, diplomație, interbelic, România, Polonia.*

## Introduction. Objectives and conceptual delimitations

At the end of World War I, Romania and Poland had common borders and common security objectives, which explains why official diplomatic relations between the two states were established in June 1919. Aleksander Skrzyński, Undersecretary of State at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (later Foreign Minister and Prime Minister), was appointed (in June) Minister Plenipotentiary of Poland in Bucharest. A month later, in July 1919, the Romanian authorities appointed as Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to Warsaw an experienced diplomat, Alexandru G. Florescu. In this context, it is worth noting that the first legation created by Romania after the war was the one in Warsaw, which shows the importance that Poland had in

Romania's foreign and security policy (Anghel, 2008, 58-65).

Even though Romania avoided giving military support to Poland in the war against Soviet Russia (1919-1920), the leaders in Bucharest and Warsaw decided that the strategic interests of the two states in relation to Moscow converged, which led to the signing of an Alliance Agreement (to be renewed after five years) and a Military Agreement on 3 March 1921. The alliance between Romania and Poland had as its central objective the pooling of the two states' resources in the face of the Soviet threat (Nowak, Walczak, 2020, 285-298).

Within this framework, relations between Romania and Poland have developed in the political, military and economic realms. For example, a new military convention was signed on 16 September 1922, which stipulated that the

alliance would only become operative in the event of unprovoked aggression from the East (USSR) against one contracting party, in which case the other party would commit to immediate war (Nowak, Walczak 2020, 341-346). On 2 July 1921, a trade convention was signed in Bucharest between Romania and Poland, regulating economic relations between the two allied states, which granted each other the most-favoured-nation clause (Anghel, 2008, 154; Dascălu, 1991, 24). Romanian-Polish ties were also strengthened by a series of visits of a political and symbolic nature: the visit of Marshal Iózef Piłsudski to Romania (September 1922) and the visit of the Romanian royal family to Poland (June 1923). However, in the new European geopolitical context of the mid-1920s, the alliance agreement was renewed in a different form from that of 1921. In fact, on 27 March 1926, a Treaty of Guarantee was signed between Romania and Poland, which took the form of a general pact of guarantee modelled on the Pact of the League of Nations. And yet, it is believed that the technical arrangement (and its annexes) of the March 1926 treaty “left unchanged the scope of mutual guarantees towards the USSR” (Nowak, Walczak, 2020, 20, 509-527).

Therefore, the present study analyses a period of relations between Romania and Poland that integrates two main sequences: a first sequence (1919-1921) - the initiation of diplomatic relations and the search for a common security formula; a second sequence (1921-1926), which represents, in fact, the first stage in the history of the alliance between Romania and Poland. However, our aim is to analyse to what extent the political collaboration and then the creation of the Romanian-Polish alliance also generated a close collaboration in the cultural field. In other words, to what extent the “alliance of hearts”, which transformed Romania and Poland into “one people with two flags”, according to the expression of Marshal Iózef Piłsudski (Anghel, 2008, 191, 197), can also be verified at the level of cultural relations. At the same time, we also consider the fact that an alliance becomes stronger the closer the ideological and cultural rapprochement between the allied states. Therefore, an important factor in increasing the cohesion of an alliance is also based on “popular support”, the way in which the citizens of an allied state perceive the culture, traditions and historical links with the other allied state(s), assuming that they are part of a common cultural space, that they share common values and that there is a tradition of cooperation on various levels (Walt, 2008, 57-93; Snow, 2009, 3-11).

Taking these elements into account, in our study we aim to answer the following questions: Did the signing of the alliance treaty foster the cultural relations between Romania and Poland? Did the Romanian state have a strategy of “cultural propaganda” in relation to Poland? What kind of initiatives and actions were carried out by the Romanian state institutions to make known in Poland the culture, traditions and political realities of Romania?

This analysis is based, from a methodological point of view, on the following definition:

“Cultural propaganda is a long-term process intended to promote a better understanding of the nation that is sponsoring the activity (...) Such activity involves the dissemination of cultural products - films, magazines, radio and television programs, art exhibitions, traveling theatre groups and orchestras - as well as the promotion of language teaching and a wide range of 'educational' activities, such as student exchange schemes. Over a period of time, these activities are designed to enhance the nation's image among the populations of other countries, with a view to creating goodwill and influencing the policies of their governments through the pressure of public opinion” (Cull *et al.*, 2003, 101; Taylor, 2003, 256).

According to this perspective, “the aim of cultural propaganda, as opposed to political propaganda, is to create sympathy on a long-term basis through a range of techniques designed to make that sympathy profound, rather than aiming for a desired short-term action on the part of the audience” (Corse, 2013, 8).

### **Attempts to organize Romanian cultural propaganda in Poland**

In 1921, the Polish scholar of Romanian philology, Stanisław Wędkiewicz (professor at the University of Kraków), who worked in the Polish legation in Bucharest, observed that “in Poland very little is known about the cultural development of the Romanians and their literature is almost completely unknown” (Wędkiewicz, 1921, 18-19). We find similar assessments in the daily notes made by the young historian Petre P. Panaitescu, who, while in Kraków, noted in May 1923: “several teachers asked about my article in *P(rze)gląd W(spół)czesny*, and were surprised, not knowing that there was a Romanian literature” (Panaitescu, 1974, 114).



These are just a few of the many remarks made at the time about the fact that the two neighbouring states, allied since 1921, also had to act in the field of developing cultural ties so that the political-military alliance could be strengthened. On this subject, N. Iorga observed in 1923 that: "Diplomacy has fulfilled its tasks. It is now the turn of those who are in charge of organizing intellectual exchanges" (Jeglinski, 2016, 42).

Looking at the documents issued by the Romanian legation in Warsaw and the literature we see an interest in the development of cultural propaganda in Poland after the conclusion of the alliance between the two states (Anghel, 2011, 185-187). Until then, the political and military aspects of the relations between the two states had been the focus. Romania's foreign propaganda efforts were also directed towards supporting the Romanian state objectives at the Paris Peace Conference (Ureche, 2015, 28-29).

In this regard, the report sent to the Romanian Foreign Ministry in April 1922 by Alexandru G. Florescu, Romania's plenipotentiary minister in Poland, represents a first coherent proposal for the organization of Romania's cultural propaganda in Poland. The head of the legation in Warsaw drew attention to a fact considered of prime importance: "In Poland, in particular, our propaganda must be supervised, systematized and accentuated". The Romanian diplomat told Foreign Minister I. G. Duca, that in order to strengthen friendship with Poland it was necessary for the Romanian state to act without "sparing any means" (AMAE, Romania 471, 43-44). At the same time, Romania's actions in the field of cultural propaganda were necessary in a context where the Hungarian cultural presence in Poland was more visible than the Romanian one. Florescu proposed several directions for the development of cultural ties between Romania and Poland. One important direction was the encouragement and financing by the Romanian authorities of visits between students, journalists, parliamentarians, merchants, industrialists (AMAE, Romania 471, 44), who could contribute to mutual knowledge, but could also lead to collaboration. He therefore proposed involving the Romanian authorities in such visits. In addition, Florescu believed that in order to get to know Romania better, a "cinematographic propaganda" was needed (AMAE, Romania 471, 44). The projection of images and photographs of Romania was also intended to help attract Polish tourists to Romania. The organization of a series of conferences by "first-class people" could also contribute to the strengthening of Romanian-Polish relations.

Romanian Foreign Minister I.G. Duca was interested in Florescu's ideas, but the financial problems facing Romania made it difficult to take concrete action in the field of cultural propaganda regarding the relationship with Poland (AMAE, Romania 471, 49). The situation did not change radically in the following period. On August 30, 1923, Florescu noted that the legation did not have propaganda funds, but since there were no major tensions in relations between Romania and Poland, the diplomatic mission did not have to intervene to 'place' articles in Polish newspapers (AMAE, Romania 471, 200).

Nevertheless, the Romanian legation in Poland received maps and brochures (in French), useful for getting to know Romania and promoting Romanian perspectives on controversial issues (the minority question; the situation in Bessarabia). Thus, an initiative of the Romanian authorities was to send copies of the post-war map of Romania drawn up by General Constantin Teodorescu to diplomatic missions (especially in the Allied states and the major powers). As the Romanian legation in Poland had distributed the first batch of maps received, the Foreign Ministry decided, in May 1922, to send another 50 copies to Warsaw (AMAE, Romania 471, 52), while another 10 copies were sent to the Nordic countries (AMAE, Romania 471, 54).

The legation in Warsaw has been trying since 1922 to publish issues dedicated to Romania in Polish magazines. Lack of funds, however, was an impossible obstacle to overcome. For example, in August 1922, Florescu proposed to the Foreign Ministry to get involved in providing material and financing an issue dedicated to Romania in the weekly *Świat*, as special issues dedicated to Czechoslovakia and Hungary had been published (AMAE, Romania 471, 61-62). The Ministry's management made the diplomat Vasile Stoica responsible for collecting the articles and documentary material. But Stoica's conclusion was: "Nobody wants to collaborate for free" (AMAE, Romania 471, 61). It was only in 1925 that special issues dedicated to Romania were prepared for printing, based on the links established with two magazines (*Świat* and *Gazeta Administracji i Policji Państwowej*) and using promotional material brought from Bucharest (AMAE, Polonia 9, 235-236).

The same desire to strengthen relations with Poland through a better "mutual knowledge" was also assumed by Florescu's successor at the head of the legation in Warsaw, Alexandru Iacovaky. At the beginning of 1925, he too was campaigning for the development of cultural relations, in particular through reciprocal visits and the

organization of “popular conferences and lectures” (AMAE, Polonia 52, 165).

In the last months of 1925, the cultural propaganda activities of the Legation were better organised. The new secretary of the legation, Mircea Babeş, published articles in Polish magazines and gave a conference on “Economic Romania and Polish-Romanian economic relations” (AMAE, Polonia 9, 265).

These were the solutions proposed and, at times put into practice, by the Romanian diplomatic representatives in Warsaw to boost cultural relations between the two countries and to improve and enhance Romania's image in Polish society. Florescu's or Iacovaky's opinions were similar to the proposals of other Romanian diplomats accredited in various capitals of the world, or to the vision of scholars such as N. Iorga. This is why many actions of Romanian cultural propaganda in relation to Poland followed the paths suggested by Romanian diplomats accredited in Warsaw but were within the tenets of the time.

#### **Creation of Romanian-Polish friendship associations and societies**

Friendship associations and societies represented another level of interaction in relations between two states. Such structures could be a vehicle for cultural propaganda or for strengthening economic and political ties between nations.

In the summer of 1923, the “Society of Friends of Romania” was founded in Warsaw. Two representatives of the association came to Alexandru G. Florescu asking for support from the legation. However, the Romanian diplomat did not agree, objecting that the initiators of the “Society of Friends of Romania” had to inform the Romanian diplomatic mission and the Polish authorities before setting up the society. In his report to the Romanian Foreign Minister, Florescu noted that the society was made up of officers in reserve, which could have led to criticism from the foreign (especially German) press about the militaristic nature of the Romanian-Polish alliance (AMAE, Polonia 52, 97-98). The Romanian Foreign Minister agreed with Florescu's decision, asking him not to give support to this association created without the consent of the legation (AMAE, Polonia 52, 104). Lacking the support of the Romanian legation, but also of the Polish authorities, the association disappeared (Dascălu, 1991, 193).

In January 1926, in the context of the discussions for the renewal of the alliance

between Romania and Poland, the Vice President of the Seym, Leon Pluciński, initiated the process of creating a Romanian-Polish association that would contribute to the strengthening of scientific, literary, and artistic ties between the two countries. This initiative is closely linked to the visit of Polish parliamentarians to Romania. Leon Pluciński was the leader of the delegation that visited Romania in November 1925. Pluciński's initiative, which was joined by several Polish politicians and cultural figures, took shape. On 22 January 1926, the “Polish-Romanian Friendly Association” was founded. The event was attended by about 50 people, including representatives of the Polish Foreign Ministry and Romanian diplomats accredited in Warsaw (Anghel *et. al.*, 2003, 66). However, it seems that this Association was not active for a long time either, being rather a “conjuncture organization”, created to demonstrate the interest of a part of the Polish elite in the continuation of the alliance and ties on many levels with Romania.

#### **Romanian-Polish collaboration in the field of press**

A first meeting between Romanian and Polish journalists took place in Poland in 1921. But the visit of Romanian journalists was organized by the Polish authorities, who were trying to build links with the main Romanian newspapers. This action was examined by the Romanian legation in Warsaw. Florescu noted that the Romanian delegation did not include representative journalists, but the Romanian guests were “well treated” by the Poles. Florescu therefore suggested that the Romanians should return the courtesy by inviting a delegation of Polish journalists to Romania (AMAE, Romania 471, 44). However, it was not until 1924 that Polish journalists visited Bucharest (Jeglinski, 2016, 18-19). However, what was at stake was the development and institutionalization of this collaboration. Based on the idea of creating the “Little Entente of the Press” (an association between journalist from Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia) in 1925 (Dascălu, 1982, 106), an attempt was made to set up a body to facilitate a permanent collaboration between Romanian and Polish journalists.

This time the initiative came from the Romanian government, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Press and Propaganda Department) (AMAE, Polonia 52, 57-158). Romanians wanted to set up a Romanian-Polish Press Association, which would contribute to a better presentation/representation of the

collaboration between the two allied states. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Bucharest wanted the official initiative for the creation of such an association to come from the representatives of the press, so as not to give the impression of political interference. In November 1925, the Romanian legation in Warsaw presented the project to the Polish authorities, and the Romanian Journalists' Syndicate sent a telegram to its Polish counterparts, informing them of the project to create an association. However, the decisive role was played by the press directorates of the Foreign ministries in Bucharest and Warsaw, which supported the organization of a constituent conference in Galați, between 6 and 8 May 1926. The result of this meeting, which was attended by journalists from both countries, was the creation of the "Romanian-Polish Press Committee", which began operating in 1927. Through the Press Committee, articles were published in important newspapers of the two countries. The Romanian section of the Press Committee received financial support from the Press and Propaganda General Directorate created in 1927 (Dascălu, 1991, 199), which shows the involvement of the Romanian government. One of the Romanian journalists participating in the Galați meeting, Ion Clopoșel, editor of the magazine *Societatea de Mâine*, noted that the meeting "fulfilled its official task of preparing the ground in a very satisfactory way, by highlighting to us and to the public the mutual duties of Poland and Romania to create a solid economic and cultural alliance, in addition to the political alliance of the governments" (Clopoșel, 1926, 371).

#### **Cultural propaganda through the involvement of cultural personalities: N. Iorga**

A vector for the development of cultural relations between Romania and Poland since the early 1920s was Nicolae Iorga (Jeglinski, 1985, 113-129; Jeglinski, 2016, 33-51). A university professor, member of the Romanian Academy and politician, N. Iorga wrote about Romanian-Polish relations in the Middle Ages and in the Modern Age (Iorga, 1921), and was an advocate of the creation of an independent Poland (Jeghinski, 2016, 14-15) and of political, cultural and scientific rapprochement between the two nations. Even though *Neamul Românesc* (the newspaper Iorga edited) was in favour of closer Polish-Romanian relations, Iorga's works were known in Poland and he was given special treatment during Pilsudski's visit to Romania in 1922 (Anghel,

2008, 190), Iorga's first visit to Poland took place in June 1924.

Iorga's itinerary included the universities of Warsaw, Wilno, Poznań, Kraków, and Lwów, as well as meetings with Polish politicians (AMAE, Polonia 52, 120-124; Jeglinski, 1985, 119-121; Dascălu, 1991, 217). Intensely covered in the newspaper *Neamul Românesc*, but with good reviews also in the Polish press, Iorga's trip had the merit of making known in Poland, besides Iorga's personality, various aspects of Romanian history and cultural life. However, the visit was made at the invitation of the Polish government and Polish cultural institutions (Iorga, 1924, 159; Jeglinski, 2016, 43), without the Bucharest executive branch being involved in this "cultural tour". Also, we can admit that Iorga created his own network in the academic field in Poland. As recognition of his scientific contributions, but also as an appreciation of his role in the strengthening of Romanian-Polish relations, Iorga was elected in 1923, and in 1924 he was awarded the title of honorary member of the prestigious Academy of Sciences in Kraków (Jeglinski, 1985, 121; Mareș, 2021, 91).

However, N. Iorga's involvement in political life and his opposition to the National Liberal Party government (1922-1926) made the Romanian authorities sometimes avoid involving Iorga in cultural propaganda.

#### **Romanian language courses in Poland**

Iorga also had the merit of directing young, promising Romanians such as Grigore Nandriș and Petre P. Panaitescu towards the study of Polish language and history. Iorga also encouraged other Romanian professors to study in Poland and to cultivate their passion for Polish culture. This category includes, for example, the mathematician Petre Sergescu, who had been married since 1918 to the Polish writer Marya Kastarska (Sergescu, 1925, *passim*).

At the same time, Iorga was an advocate of establishing "mutual chairs of history and literature" at Romanian and Polish universities, as was the head of the Romanian legation in Warsaw. Florescu considered that the creation of Romanian language lectureships would have been a way to carry out cultural propaganda in Poland, as other states (especially Hungary) were doing. Apparently, under the auspices of Stanisław Wędkiewicz, the first Romanian language lectureship was established in December 1921 in the Department of Romance Philology at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków (Jeglinski, 2016, 41). First the practical courses were held by

Grigore Nandriș and then, in the academic year 1923-1924, by P.P. Panaitescu (Panaitescu, 1974, 122, 124; Dascălu, 1991, 219). In January 1922, a lectureship of Romanian language and literature was also created at the University of Lwów. Emil Biedrzycki worked as a lecturer of Romanian language in Lwów (Jeglinski, 2016, 41).

The creation of these lectureships was more of a local initiative. An important role was played by university professors interested in Romanian language and culture, such as Stanisław Wędkiewicz. Political and economic interests also contributed to the creation of the two lectureships, where young Romanians with successful academic careers, contributed to the strengthening of cultural/scientific ties between the two countries.

In Romania, Polish language lectureships were established in the 1930s (1933 - Bucharest; 1934 - Cernăuți), although Polish language courses had been organized at Romanian universities and research institutes since the second half of the first interwar decade (Jeglinski, 2016, 78-79).

### School trips and parliamentary visits

School trips were considered important ways of improving mutual knowledge between Romanians and Poles, as well as a means of "cultural exchange". Apparently, a group of teachers from Poland came to Romania on a trip in 1922. These teachers were grouped in an association and made trips to several southern and western European countries. Based on the experience of meeting the Polish teachers, a group of Romanian teachers and students from the "Spiru Haret" High School in Bucharest, supported by the Romanian authorities, but also by the Polish authorities, made a trip to Poland in April-May 1924 (Lefteriu, 1924, *passim*). As the organizers reported, both in articles published in Romanian newspapers and in a brochure, the trip was a success. However, in the following years such initiatives were not repeated (in 1928 a student trip to Poland took place).

Another way of building bridges of cooperation between Romania and Poland was through visits by groups of parliamentarians. This type of political interaction was used frequently at the time. Thus, at the invitation of the Polish Parliament, a group of Romanian parliamentarians visited Poland in August 1924 (Orleanu, 1924, *passim*). The practical consequences of this visit are difficult to assess, apart from the brochure praising the situation in Poland signed by G. Orleanu. However, on the basis of reciprocity, in 1925 the Bucharest Parliament invited the Warsaw

Parliament to send a delegation to visit Romania. In November 1925, as the date for renewing the Romanian-Polish alliance approached, a delegation of Polish MPs visited Romania. It seems that the visit was a success (although the Polish press did not report extensively on the event) (AMAE, Polonia 52, 201-203), since the Polish parliamentarians publicly thanked the Romanian Minister Plenipotentiary in Warsaw for the way they were welcomed in Romania (Anghel *et. al.*, 2003, 63). An immediate result of the visit was, as already mentioned, the creation of the "Polish-Romanian Friendly Association". However, the Romanian side obviously wanted to draw attention to the need for continued Polish-Romanian cooperation, taking into account the fact that relations between Poland and the USSR seemed to have been downgraded in 1926 (Anghel *et. al.*, 2003, 86-90).

### Conclusions

Romania was more attentive to the movements of the revisionist states acting, in the field of political propaganda and cultural propaganda, in order to counter the actions that cast doubt on Romania's new borders. That is why many of the foreign propaganda initiatives are aimed at responding to attacks/denigrations by Hungary, the USSR or preparing various diplomatic meetings. For example, Romania was concerned with cultivating a good image in Switzerland and especially in Geneva, where the League of Nations was based.

This was at a time when Romania's foreign propaganda was directed by the Press and Propaganda Department, which until 1926 operated within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From 1st January 1927, the laboriously structured Press and Propaganda General Directorate came under the government's authority (Ureche, 2015, 33-39).

The Romanian state maintained a Press Office attached to the Legation in Paris, which was reorganized in 1925. At the same time, cultural propaganda in Great Britain was carried out through the involvement of a cultural adviser (Marcu Beza). From 1924, as a consequence of N. Titulescu's actions (Romania's minister plenipotentiary in London), the Romanian Legation financed the organization of two courses on Romania at British universities. Moreover, several works on Romanian history or on the problem of minorities in Romania were translated and disseminated in Great Britain, France and other Western European countries. Also, in Czechoslovakia, for example, thanks to the

involvement of the Romanian government and the Romanian legation in Prague, a special supplement of a cultural magazine dedicated to Romanian literature was published in 1923 and, then, the Association of the Press of the States of Little Entente (Ureche, 2015, 249-252) was created.

In this framework, we note that the intensity of Romania's cultural propaganda in Poland increased towards the end of the period under analysis. The Romanian authorities were interested in promoting the image of a "reliable ally" and "friendly state" in order to create a favourable ground for negotiations aimed at extending the Romanian-Polish alliance. Also, we must mention that the visits of the heads of state played a role in creating an image of "unity within the alliance", but their cultural effects were short-term.

The establishment of the alliance between Romania and Poland did not attract an increased investment of the Romanian state in the development of relations with Poland from a cultural standpoint. For example, the Romanian authorities neither encouraged nor financed the translation of important works of Romanian literature during this period, nor translated propaganda brochures into Polish. Therefore, Romania's cultural propaganda in Poland was, in

terms of means, techniques and financial investment, below the level of Romania's actions in the relationship with Czechoslovakia, and at a much lower level compared to Romania's involvement in the relationship with France, Great Britain or the activity in Switzerland.

However, between 1919 and 1926, cultural relations can be divided into three stages: 1919-1921 - period characterized by disparate contacts, difficult to document; 1921-1924 - interval in which concrete initiatives are observed, with a more active presence on the Polish side; 1925-1926 - years in which we note an increase in the involvement of the Romanian authorities, showing a greater interest in the cultural dimension of relations with Poland (sending materials - brochures; photographs; financing events; creation of the Romanian-Polish Press Association).

After the signing of the treaty in March 1926, a new stage was reached, both in terms of political-military relations and cultural relations. From 1926 onwards, in addition to the Warsaw legation, a press attaché (the first was Lucian Blaga) functioned, which made Romania's cultural propaganda in Poland more active in the 1930s, compensating to some extent for the tensions at the political level between the two allied states.

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# DEMOCRATISATION THROUGH EURO-ATLANTICISM IN POST-COMMUNIST ROMANIA: HOW MUCH SYNERGY?

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**Abstract:** Two important political processes characterise Romania's development after 1989: democratisation and Euro-Atlantic integration. Romania underwent a difficult transition that began with its exit from diplomatic, social, and cultural isolation, and continued with its gradual reintegration into the community of democratic states. At the same time, its integration into Euro-Atlantic structures was considered the primary foreign policy goal and the surest way to ensure respect for democratic values. This article aims to answer the question: How important was joining NATO and the European Union for preserving Romania's democracy? By presenting the most important moments in the country's post-communist history, the study shows that foreign intervention into the domestic political regime must be accompanied by domestic stability and a cultural model based on freedom of thought, creation, and expression.

**Keywords:** democratisation, Euro-Atlanticism, cultural diplomacy, political stability, national brand.

**Rezumat:** Două procese politice majore caracterizează evoluția României după 1989: democratizarea și integrarea euro-atlantică. România a avut un parcurs sinuos, început prin ieșirea din izolarea diplomatică, socială și culturală, apoi continuat prin reintegrarea treptată în comunitatea statelor democratice. În paralel, integrarea în structurile euro-atlantice a fost considerată obiectivul primar al politicii externe și modalitatea cea mai sigură de a garanta menținerea adeziunii la valorile democrației. Acest articol își propune să ofere un răspuns la întrebarea: Cât de importantă a fost aderarea la NATO și Uniunea Europeană pentru a menține România în grupul țărilor democratice? Prin prezentarea celor mai semnificative momente din istoria post-comunistă a țării, studiul demonstrează că intervenția externă în regimul politic autohton trebuie însoțită de stabilitatea politică internă și de un model cultural întemeiat pe libertatea de gândire, creație și exprimare.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** democratizare, euro-atlantism, diplomație culturală, stabilitate politică, brand național.

## Cultural diplomacy in the post-Cold War era

The return to democracy in the communist countries of Europe after the fall of the USSR brought with it a completely new form of diplomacy. For Romania, as for the other former communist countries, the last 3 decades have meant not only the transition to democracy and a market economy but, equally important, integration into international organisations. Democracy and Euro-Atlanticism have been two pillars of Romanian diplomacy, and, as this article shows, these concepts emerged together with cultural diplomacy.

In Romania's contemporary history, cultural diplomacy was used as a propaganda tool by the communist regime. The officials used a selection of nationalist myths and cultural stereotypes to exclusively promote their collective interests, in effect as in a Stalinist dictatorship. But after 1989, cultural diplomacy was conceptualised and partially depoliticised.

To explain the connection between democracy, Euro-Atlanticism and cultural diplomacy, a summary of the latter concept is necessary.

Cultural diplomacy is the association of cultural issues and diplomatic behaviours, which are much more of an abstract concept. Culture is either the essence or the method of diplomacy, and cultural diplomacy is the manifestation which can be defined as "the deployment of a state's culture in support of its foreign policy goals or diplomacy" (Mark, 2009, 5).

The importance of culture in diplomacy is undisputed. As former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright once said in an interview: "it is the time to show how the values we preach in the political arena are embodied in our culture—and time to listen to what the cultures of the rest of world are saying about us" (The Aspen Institute, 2010). The world today is witnessing major changes with significant adjustments like the emergence of a new international balance of power. The evolving situation will either gradually or sometimes very quickly have an



impact on shaping the international order and system. With a variety of development models, the international community has increased its appreciation of cultural diversity and has made much greater efforts to foster cultural relations with other states. At the same time, economic globalisation, the rapid development of information technology and its widespread use have done much to promote intercultural learning.

Since 2000, the concept of cultural diplomacy has slowly but significantly received more attention. Three reasons could explain the increasing use of this term, which has received a lot of attention in academia and politics: cultural diplomacy. First, Joseph Nye developed the concept of “soft power”, a controversial and frequently discussed concept in contemporary debates on the nature of power. More and more attention are being paid to types of “soft power”, and cultural exchange is no exception. “Soft power” can be seen as a substitute for traditional forms of power (military action and economic sanctions). It also emphasises peaceful means to achieve goals and build trust. As Nye notes, the two are inextricably linked. Nye also identifies culture as one of the three sources of a nation’s soft power, the other two sources being political values and foreign policy; these three sources of soft power are considered to be fully in line with internationally recognised credibility and moral authority (Nye, 2004, 36). This is most evident in popular culture, including food, fashion, tourism, and entertainment.

In modern times, American political scientist Milton Cummings defines it as “the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture among nations and their peoples in order to foster mutual understanding, which can also be more of a one-way street than a two-way exchange, as when one nation concentrates its efforts on promoting the national language, explaining its policies and point of view”, or ‘telling its story’ to the rest of the world” (Cummings, 2003, 1). Jessica Gienow-Hecht and Mark Donfried consent that “cultural diplomacy often denotes a national policy designed to support the export of representative samples of that national culture in order to further the objectives of foreign policy” (Gienow-Hecht, Donfried, 2010, 15).

Second, the rapid progress of globalisation has accelerated the rise of cultural diplomacy and other forms of cultural flow. As one school argues, “globalisation is not just an economic matter but is concerned with issues of cultural meaning. While the values and meanings attached

to place remain significant, we are increasingly involved in networks that extend far beyond our immediate physical locations” (Barker, 2012, 6). Globalisation is also an increasingly important aspect of international relations, as globalisation and advances in communication technology have reshaped the power dynamics between different social actors. For example, the globalisation of electronic communication provides people with a convenient method of exploring the world’s cultures with almost no spatial or temporal limitations. Therefore, a state’s diplomatic efforts can be used efficiently and effectively through niche targeting.

Thirdly, in the face of increasing religious conflicts, it is becoming more and more urgent to understand and respect different religious cultures. The transition of international society from the bipolar situation of the Cold War to the vagaries of the current multipolar world has had a profound impact on the way states seek to construct and project their national image and identity. Cultural, religious, and ethnic factors now play an increasingly important role in defining a state’s image and sense of identity.

In the academia, cultural diplomacy needs a higher level of attention. According to Simon Mark, “cultural diplomacy has been almost entirely ignored by the discipline of international relations. General texts on diplomacy, which might be assumed to include cultural diplomacy, barely mention, or discuss, the practice” (Mark, 2009, 9). Additionally, in accordance with the research report published by EUNIC (European Union National Institutes for Culture), “on the whole, cultural diplomacy at the academic level is still relatively uncharted territory, and there is a lack of training specific to the subject. Programs that explicitly deal with cultural diplomacy usually borrow content from more consolidated disciplines, including political science, international relations, and public communication” (EUNIC, 2016, 2).

When analysing the purposes of cultural diplomacy, in accordance with the research by the EUNIC, “cultural diplomacy preferred by most scholars and diplomats that it should be based on dialogue, collaboration, and co-production, whose main purpose is not to influence decision makers but rather to change attitudes and behaviours” (EUNIC, 2016, 3). Cultural diplomacy is pursued for various purposes. In this study, firstly, one of the purposes of cultural diplomacy is to influence the decision makers of other states, especially the policy makers. Secondly, the enrichment and development of culture to enhance mutual

understanding and cooperation, while important, is not the main purpose of cultural diplomacy. However, the main purpose of cultural diplomacy is to use cultural diplomacy as a facilitator to safeguard and promote national cultural interests, and then to implement a state's external cultural strategy. To achieve this goal, cultural diplomacy must therefore attract the attention of decision-makers. Third, this research is consistent with another goal of cultural diplomacy, namely, to change attitudes and behaviours at home and abroad. Fourth, it is also a goal of cultural diplomacy to use a state's efforts to build friendly relations with other states. Unimportant frictions or minor but annoying conflicts can be circumvented or even avoided through the effects of cultural diplomacy.

After the end of the Cold War, there was an increased awareness of the importance of cultural identity because, in the global arena, there are very few states that would provoke a war unless there were serious political problems or major military movements in motion. When a conflictual situation arises, the states at the centre of these conflicts must find a way to resolve the disputes and conflicts peacefully to avoid wars if at all possible. Furthermore, globalisation also promotes a harmonious multicultural landscape throughout the world. In this regard, the application of cultural diplomacy in resolving international conflicts has gradually become a relatively interesting and hotly debated topic. For example, the possibility of communicating through the channel or arena of culture, values and ideas that are in stark contrast to the traditional concept and application of hard power.

Moreover, the European Union is one of the pioneers that discovered the great power of cultural diplomacy. The European Union has always prided itself on being a place of cultural diversity, characterised by the value of community. The common cultural heritage of EU countries has gradually inspired many countries in the world to rethink their cultural policies. In 2008, the Council of the European Union emphasised the importance of culture in the international society: 1. Intercultural dialogue can help bring individuals and peoples closer together, and aid conflict prevention and the process of reconciliation, especially in regions which facing politically precarious situations; 2. Cultural exchanges and cultural cooperation, including in the audio-visual sphere, can help establish relations based on partnership, strengthen the place and the role of civil society, foster processes of democratisation and good governance and

promote human rights and fundamental freedoms; 3. Culture, an essential component of the knowledge-based economy, is also a sector with strong economic potential, in particular with regards to cultural and creative industries and sustainable cultural tourism; 4. Europe's place in the world, from an artistic, intellectual and scientific point of view, depends to a considerable extent on the dynamism of its cultural creative work and on its cultural exchanges with third countries; 5. Cultural ties between Europe and the other regions of the world can be important for the development of intercultural dialogue and the setting up of common cultural projects; moreover, the Union has to ensure the promotion of its cultural and linguistic diversity (The Council of the European Union, 2008, 2).

Although the Council of the European Union has not explicitly referred to the concept of cultural diplomacy in this document, the five points listed above not only demonstrate the importance of cultural diplomacy, but also inspire other states to follow the path of cultural diplomacy.

In line with these arguments and the emphasis above, the importance of cultural diplomacy in building trust and shaping image has been confirmed by many scholars and policy makers. When states realised the importance of soft power, especially after the Cold War, presenting a good image of the state in international society became a popular trend and many governments became aware of the importance of systematic image building. Gradually, national image or national branding became a significant part of public diplomacy, and recently there has been more emphasis on the use of cultural diplomacy to present a state's national image, "not simply showing aspects of a state's cultural face to the world, but a more managed, considered and strategic presentation of national image" (Mark, 2009, 7).

It is not difficult to understand why building a positive national image and establishing trust with others is considered the most important practice of cultural diplomacy. In international society, there are various types of competition between states for foreign investment, funding, attracting talent or skilled migrants, and so on. A positive national image is at least partly helpful in this process. States have gradually come to believe that their chances of competing successfully can be improved if they project a positive national image to overseas audiences. The emphasis on national image in cultural diplomacy usually focuses on a state's cultural distinctiveness, but also on its

economic, technological, and innovative achievements, which in particular show a country's modern economic face (Mark, 2009, 9).

### **The limits of cultural diplomacy**

Cultural diplomacy can be a lubricant in various spheres of international society. However, when considering the characteristics of this concept, as Goff argues, "cultural diplomacy is neither unambiguously effective nor necessarily a force for good. It has limits" (Goff, 2013, 420).

First, cultural diplomacy needs a relatively long period of time to become effective. This trait could lead state actors to abandon support for cultural diplomacy programmes. They would be more inclined to invest in more tangible results in the economic sphere rather than wasting a lot of time waiting for the results of cultural diplomacy to be measurable. Arndt notes that "the dividends of cultural diplomacy may not be paid for a decade or two" (Arndt, 2005, 14). Goff also suggests that "cultural diplomacy plants a seed; as such, it may take root over time. It is possible that cultural diplomacy efforts will yield no fruit whatsoever" (Goff, 2013, 421). Unlike other simple and straightforward methods, some states place more emphasis on the proportionality of effort on the side of inputs to the expected return on the side of outputs in economic and political terms. If the inputs and outputs are not directly proportional, if the foreign culture clashes strongly with the local culture, some states will reduce their commitment to cultural diplomacy programmes or even abandon cultural diplomacy programmes.

Secondly, assessing the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy is quite difficult. Many scholars agree with this argument: for example, Goff considers that "it would encounter great difficulties when assessing whether cultural diplomacy has had any sort of effect or not" (Goff, 2013, 421). Milton Cummings writes that "a certain degree of faith is involved in cultural diplomacy" (Cummings, 2003, 3). Thirdly, cultural diplomacy is not a panacea. Cultural diplomacy will not change policy outcomes. It needs a long period of time to promote mutual understanding. A state cannot fully rely on the functions of cultural diplomacy to resolve serious conflicts and frictions between nations. Territorial disputes, political interventions and military tensions make cultural diplomacy more challenging at certain times. It is certainly possible to track the number of cultural diplomacy programmes in a state and the number of

participants involved; however, it is extremely difficult to identify and assess the impact on these participants.

### **Key moments in Romanian politics after 1989: towards Euro-Atlanticism**

The miners' actions combined arbitrary violence with mass propaganda and manipulation. The context of the suppression of civil society protests on 13-15 June 1990 was tense, surprising a disoriented population that had no access to information and a government apparatus - the National Salvation Front (FSN) - that, despite its promise of only ensuring the transition to democracy and not interfering in politics, later decided to transform itself into a party. With full control of the state, the FSN resorted to illegal coercion and suppressed the right to freedom of expression and pluralism of ideas.

The vast majority of the population had a misconception and misunderstanding of what was happening in University Square in the capital at the time and declared their partiality to the FSN leadership. The reason for this attitude was ignorance of democratic principles and values, which Romanian society had not experienced for 45 years. The Human Rights Watch report states that "Romania was in any case a country without democratic institutions, with a population unfamiliar with the principles of democracy" (Human Rights Watch, 1990).

The Human Rights Watch World Report 1990 - Romania, published on 1 January 1991, mentions that Romanians were on the road to democratisation, although the new power installed in December 1989 had stumbled. According to the report, in the first months of 1990 many independent newspapers, associations and political parties were founded, and Romanians began to make use of their new freedom of expression and association. However, the initial euphoria of the revolution quickly ended when opposition to the rule of the National Salvation Front Council led by Ion Iliescu and Petre Roman grew louder, and large numbers of Romanians took to the streets demanding the resignation of the leadership. The year 1990 was marked by frequent and numerous anti-government demonstrations and numerous outbreaks of violence in different areas (Human Rights Watch, 1990).

The durability and long-term impact of the movement in University Square was due to the ideological coherence of its members, personal political socialisation, and innovative discourse in

relation to the FSN “offer” and unequivocal condemnation of communist totalitarianism. The comparison between the political offer of the FSN and the alternative of the demonstrators in University Square shows the polarisation and the impossibility of compromise.

Freedom of expression, equality, condemnation of the cult of personality are among the attributes of the University Square movement, and “as the activities were repeated, as the space was taken possession of, as the ceremonial roles were defined”, the participants “are now conceived and presented as a homogeneous, united group, distinct from what lay outside their universe” (Coman, 1994, 36).

The next step in Romania’s foreign policy was highly controversial. An important requirement, which Romania only partially fulfilled, was to aim for a higher level of credibility. This goal was necessary because, on the stage of international relations, the Soviet Union still existed as a state and the representatives of the Romanian state mentioned that they would continue foreign policy relations with the Warsaw Pact states.

The Western states decided that Romania had pursued a vague foreign policy. Some negative assessments of the policy pursued by the government were also made for electoral purposes. According to some historians, Romania sent positive signals to the West in the first months after 1989. For example, Romania asked to join NATO as an observer, based on the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation that Romania under Ion Iliescu was to sign with Gorbachev’s USSR. The West understood this treaty as a negative signal for what Romania wanted (Hlihor, 2006, 341-342).

The credibility of the Foreign Ministry had to be clarified with the help of the provisional government led by Petre Roman. It was also normal that in 1990 there were tendencies towards a wavering foreign policy because Romania was trying to implement requirements that it had not known before. So, we can say that some personalities who headed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not know how to implement integration efforts on the international stage. Romania moved closer to the developing countries, to the extent that it combined its principled positions with their positions. This did not satisfy the socialist states, which continued to hold unique positions and wanted a clearly defined stance.

The term of Emil Constantinescu and the mandate of the Democratic Convention (CDR) brought for the first time in post-communist

Romania a political experiment other than that of the National Salvation Front. With a government programme that envisaged radical reforms at home, especially in the economic and social spheres, the CDR wanted to achieve what the part of society that anticipated the future of Europe and the world, namely Euro-Atlantic integration.

During its time in office, CDR took numerous steps to increase Romania’s visibility on the European and global political stage. One of the inspiring decisions that played an important role in the country’s accession to NATO was the provision of military bases for the North Atlantic Alliance forces in the war in Yugoslavia. This was a crucial point after which Romania regained the sympathy of the West, but in domestic politics electoral support for CDR was significantly reduced. The reason for this was that anti-Western networks of influence remained at the forefront, networks that constantly misinformed the population and resorted to narratives with a nationalist, xenophobic theme, informally intoxicating the public with ideas that resembled Ceausescu’s isolationism. A large part of the press, controlled by members of the former Securitate who were now members of the PDSR, also contributed massively to this loss of popularity of the Convention: “The sympathy of the section of public opinion attached to anti-Western, anti-NATO and anti-American sentiments was skilfully speculated by the political forces and the reactionary press” (Pavel, Huiu, 2003, 367).

President Constantinescu’s role, however, was decisive in foreign policy. He managed to impose a change of direction that even the political opponents of the PDSR did not reverse, namely the orientation towards Euro-Atlanticism, in spite of the fact that Romanian society never fully understood its meaning: “Far from being a complete failure, however, this policy was inconsistent. And international success has far outweighed domestic success” (Pavel, Huiu, 2003, 449). President Emil Constantinescu’s foreign policy focused on adherence to Euro-Atlantic values, but the civil society and public opinion did not understand this, as evidenced by the majority rejection of NATO support in Yugoslavia at that time.

The arrears in the democratisation process would surface in the form of conflicts between the President and the Prime Minister over the conditionalities imposed by the European Union and assumed by the Romanian state: “Immediately after 2007, the coexistence of the president and the prime minister and, above all, of

the oppositional president-parliament majority will be discursively determined by the attitude to the “fight against corruption” and the relationship with the European institutions. Thus, after 2007, a split between pro-Europeanisation and anti-Europeanisation is affirmed in the public sphere, which is practically a product of politics and presented as such to public opinion” (Goşu, Gussi, 2019, 22).

A series of events led to a gesture of power, the suspension of President Băsescu, the external consequences of which marked the country’s new status as an EU member. It was indeed a shock wave in domestic politics that decisively changed the course of the government and the relations between the three powers - legislative, executive, and judicial. Officials from the EU institutions, non-governmental organisations, numerous think-tanks, and other external observers analysed the measures with an obvious dose of surprise.

The entire suspension procedure of President Traian Băsescu, which was carried out in the first half of 2007, took Romania off the European course. EU accession should have been followed by the launching of the integration process, but this did not start as Romanian society had expected. The parliamentary agenda did not include activities dedicated to European integration, but rather the suspension of the country’s president, which had negative consequences for the state and society.

The second presidential suspension in 2012 took place in a similar political context, an all-out conflict between the president and the parliamentary parties. The year 2012 began with street protests against President Băsescu under the pretext of supporting the Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Health, Raed Arafat, who had resigned on 10 January. At the same time, the head of state’s popularity had reached its lowest point and was steadily declining. The social-liberal union between the PNL and the PSD (an alliance that violated the political order established in the parliamentary elections) took full advantage of this artificially created situation.

Both the Western media and European Union officials expressed concern about Romania’s drift away from liberal democracy. EU Justice Commissioner Viviane Reding was quick to respond, condemning the Ponta government’s actions and explicitly linking the violation of democratic principles such as the rule of law and the independence of the Constitutional Court to Romania’s prospects of joining the Schengen area. The most influential intervention, however, came from the President of the European

Commission, Jose Manuel Barroso, who called on the Ponta government to follow an 11-point “to-do list”, which the press dubbed “Barroso’s eleven commandments”. Barroso’s demands emphasised in particular the need for the government to restore the powers of the Constitutional Court and to apply the quorum for participation in the referendum on dismissal (Euractiv.com, 2012).

The European Parliament also reacted sharply to developments in Romania: Parliament President Martin Schulz, although himself a Social Democrat, warned, like Prime Minister Ponta, of the dangers of disregarding fundamental laws, through the use of emergency decrees, to the detriment of democratic procedures (Spiegel Online, 2012). The leader of the European People’s Party (EPP), Joseph Daul, given his centre-right affiliation similar to that of President Băsescu, was even harsher in his criticism, calling the president’s suspension the implementation of “the rampant authoritarianism of Prime Minister Victor Ponta and the USL sales coalition” (EPP Press Release, 2012). As a result, the institutions of the European Union reacted quickly, condemning Romania’s undemocratic deviations, and calling for a swift reversal of these changes.

The 2012-2015 and 2017-2019 periods largely saw measures to undermine the rule of law, which greatly delayed the process of European integration. Foreign policy was also a mirror image of domestic politics: the attachment of the ruling elites to European values and coordination with the political directions of the European Union declined drastically. Not infrequently, leaders in Bucharest contradicted those of the EU institutions on the rule of law and the fight against corruption. Political scientist Dan Pavel’s phrase, “well-tempered democracy” (2010), shows that in Romania’s case it was not a sudden drift away from democracy, as was the case in Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia. From the beginning, Romania had a much more difficult path to democratisation than the other ex-communist states.

### **How developed is Romanian cultural diplomacy?**

In the case of Romania, the development of cultural diplomacy is closely linked to the Euro-Atlantic doctrine and internal democratisation. One of the most controversial issues in Romanian politics and diplomacy in recent years has been the country’s image. Soon after the fall of communism in 1989, this issue became part of the public debate on the international perception of

the Romanian people, on the way Romania is portrayed in the international press, or on the country's position in the process of Europeanisation. The context in which nation branding is invoked in Romania is linked to the country's democratisation process, which began after the anti-communist revolution.

One of the challenges of cultural diplomacy is to make a country positively visible abroad with cultural content in order to create sympathy and trust. This is not possible if countries do not rely on a parallel campaign of public relations and reputation management embedded in a comprehensive public diplomacy strategy. For this reason, the next section analyses nation branding, a component of the new public diplomacy, because cultural prestige is not enough to change a country's image if it is not accompanied by a series of initiatives that make that image coherent. All in all, I see cultural diplomacy as the foundation for every other strategy because the intellectual dialogue that culture offers is the key to opening all other doors.

Nation branding was also related to a debate on Romania's image as an individual country and within the European Union. Therefore, the issue of Romania's country image has triggered an intense debate in the media about the government's advertising campaigns, the way the international press portrays the country and the actions of migrants.

Another aspect related to nation branding in transition countries is national identity. The post-communist transition provided a discursive frame of reference within which the need for nation branding could be legitimised. In this regard, "nation branding was charged with two tasks: it had to first create the new national identity and then communicate it to the outside world" (Kaneva, 2012, 113).

As far as the institutional framework is concerned, in Romania the Ministry of Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are responsible for promoting the country's culture.

Peter van Ham highlights that "the emerging brand state is not a branded new state, but a political player that promotes itself more assertively than before" (Van Ham, 2008, 128). Countries are in constant competition to position themselves as political and economic leaders, and while public and cultural diplomacy can support this goal, it is not possible without a strong nation-branding strategy. We have already addressed the question of whether or not it is appropriate to use corporate techniques to manage states and present them internationally. Nevertheless, the public

relations component of diplomacy acts as a liaison between these two realities because states and corporations face the same challenges: globalisation, identity, values, and power (van Ham, 2008, 127). Philip Cerny notes that, notwithstanding this panorama, the state is still the main actor in this globalisation process and that its main concern is to remain relevant to its citizens (Cerny, 1997, 251). In the context of this statement, it is important to remember that marketing itself is nothing else but "the conscious and planned practice of signification and representation" (Firat, Venkatesh, 1993, 246) and states have traditionally used diplomacy to represent themselves externally, though the interesting thing about today's context is that they are not only doing this by traditional means but also by branding their personality.

The idea of developing a strong and coherent framework in this area is to better portray a country's image in the world or to maintain its positive image in the world through soft power. This technique has proven useful for younger or smaller countries that do not receive enough attention from the media and world audiences, or that have limited resources to raise their profile and international prestige (Budnitsky, 2012, 64). We could also place middle-income countries here, as in our case studies. Mădălina Monica Lambrea affirms that in transitional countries like Romania, national identity is useful as a starting point for developing a national brand within a new political reality in order to (re)fit in globally (Lambrea, 2014, 1-4).

Romania has also presented an image of instability due to its chaotic transition process. In the country's recent history, three different prime ministers were appointed within one year (2012) and two national recall referendums (2007 and 2012) were held against former president Traian Băsescu. President Klaus Iohannis (2014-2019, 2019-2024), whose election campaign focused on an anti-corruption platform, has strengthened the work of Romania's National Anti-Corruption Directorate since 2002. The scandal even touched the brother of ex-president Traian Băsescu, as well as former ministers and members of parliament, and sent an international signal for change and the collapse of the old structures.

It is important to stress that nation branding has two components, external and internal, and to be successful, both components must be taken into account. Externally, a country's goal is to be strengthened politically and economically by gaining customers for its products and services, and internally it is to make their citizens feel

better and more confident about themselves by giving them a sense of belonging and clear self-concept” (Kulcsar & Young-ok Yum 2012, 194). In this context, van Ham says that branding implies power and identity and that is why the imagination of a country’s people is so important in projecting that country’s image internationally. One of the challenges Romania faced during the transformation was to create a new country not only politically, but also spiritually. All this “intertwined with post-communist identity struggles (and) what kinds of identities were marked as ‘shameful’ or as ‘desired’ became a central area of contestation in nation branding initiatives” (Lambrea, 2014, 131).

This was accompanied by the wave of privatisation which, due to the free market model, provided fertile ground for corruption and insecurity, which in turn left the population without the benefits of a centralised economy. This situation led to a deterioration of living conditions, forcing many people to migrate, and subsequently causing serious brain drain problems. This happened at a time when the country needed professionals and intellectuals more than ever to shape its future. Among other side effects, this led to restrictive visa measures against Romanians, which began to shape a negative image of them in the world. Against this background, Romania decided to develop various strategies to change the situation. Attempts of Romanian nation branding can be divided into two periods: 1996-2006, in which the country tried to distance itself from the negative background of communism and lack of democracy, although this period passed without achieving an improved country image in the world; 2007-2014, in which, after joining NATO (2004) and the EU (2007), the issue of nation branding is more frequently brought into the discussion.

This section analyses four nation branding campaigns initiated by the Romanian Government after 1989: *Romania Simply Surprising* (2004), *Romania Land of Choice* (2009), *Explore the Carpathian Garden* (2010), and *Discover the Place Where You Feel Reborn* (2014). The nation brand is investigated as a sign functioning as a dual code: one dominated by the advertising convention and one of social experiences.

### ***“Romania Simply Surprising”***

Since 1996, the Romanian government has promoted Romania’s image abroad, and one of the first initiatives was the “Eternal and Fascinating

Romania” project. However, it is only since 2005 that the “issue of Romania’s country image has been the subject of an institutionalisation process” (Beciu, 2011, 110), so that the government has taken responsibility for promoting the country internationally, working with consultancy agencies to initiate campaigns such as *Romania Land of Choice* (2009) and “*Explore the Carpathian Garden*” (2010). The latter campaign triggered a reaction from the media, which criticised the government for its lack of professionalism. Moreover, nation branding is not only a concept but also a kind of public issue (Cheregi, 2015, 296), which “moves from the realm of institutional and professional discourses to the realm of the public sphere and, more generally, to public discourses, including everyday life” (Beciu, 2013, 43).

In 2003, the Romanian government therefore launched “the country’s first long-term branding campaign” (Kaneva, Popescu, 2011, 196). The campaign “*Romania - simply surprising*” presented tourist attractions such as Bucharest, Transylvania, the monasteries of Bukovina and Maramureş, and the Black Sea coast. It consisted of five TV commercials: one ‘main’ spot and four ‘explanatory’ spots (Kaneva, Popescu, 2011, 198).

The tourist destinations of Bucharest, the Danube Delta, the monasteries of Bukovina and the Black Sea coast act as characters in the campaign “*Romania - simply surprising*”. As Lotman argues, “any reality that is drawn into the sphere of culture begins to function as a sign” (Lotman *et al.* 1978, 229). These signs are doubly coded: On the one hand, they have a code dominated by the conventions of advertising (each place is linked to a particular story, images are chosen to support national myths); on the other hand, tourist destinations as signs have a code dominated by the social experiences of people visiting Romania (fashion shows, bucolic nature, smiling women, symphony concerts). The nation-branding campaign aims to attract the governments of other countries, potential tourists, potential investors and also citizens. The main ad of the campaign “*Romania Simply Surprising*” ends with a large screen showing images of the Carpathian Mountains. A smiling woman jumps off the screen and invites people to visit Romania with an open hand gesture. The screen showing images of the Carpathian Mountains has its own function in the commercial, completing Romania’s tourist destinations. The woman jumps from the screen to the inside of the Romanian Athenaeum, thus connecting the two signs.



Overall, national identity discourses are constructed in “Romania Simply Surprising” campaign by appealing to traditions (the Romanian *salba*, the fisherman casting a net into the Danube), history (the peasant boy shooting a flaming arrow), architecture (Bucharest as “little Paris”) and religion (the semantron played in the monasteries of Bukovina). In a way, elements of neoliberal ideology are addressed by presenting the legend of Dracula and a cosmopolitan Bucharest as a tourist destination. In this respect, there is a relationship between nation branding and neoliberal ideology, considering that nations are perceived as brands in the age of globalisation. This happens because of the capitalist logic that emphasises competitive markets. In the case of the Romania campaign, simply surprisingly, the competitive advantage is achieved through Francophile aspirations, international myths (the saga of Dracula), culture and tourism (the tourist destinations of Bucharest, the Danube Delta, the monasteries of Bukovina and the Black Sea coast). Moreover, Bârdan and Imre (2012) consider that we are dealing with “vampire branding” in the advertising of Romania, as the Dracula story is used several times in tourism campaigns. One possible explanation for the use of the Dracula myth in nation-branding campaigns is that they aim to attract a Western audience.

### ***“Romania Land of Choice”***

In 2009, the Ministry of Tourism, in collaboration with the advertising agency ADDV Euro RSCG and co-branded with BRD - Groupe Societe Generale, launched the campaign “Romania Land of Choice”. The videos were aired on CNN and Eurosport to promote Romania as an international tourism destination. Three brand ambassadors were chosen to represent the country’s image: Gheorghe Hagi, Nadia Comăneci and Ilie Năstase. The campaign consists of two TV spots: the official tourism commercial and the mock commercial featuring the same three brand ambassadors.

The Romania Land of Choice campaign presents different stories about Romania, presented by three celebrities who act as translators, linking different elements of the same sphere. In this cultural space, national identity discourses are constructed by appealing to the psychological profile of the Romanian people (the “mioritic” space, the inalienable matrix of the national spirit, celebrating Romanians), traditions (a Romanian village house), religion (monasteries in Bukovina), geography (pastoral landscapes, the

Carpathian Garden) and modernisation (images of Sibiu, the European Capital of Culture). Moreover, the campaign defines Romania’s national brand by using language from commercial discourses (“One country, so many experiences”, “Country of choice”, “This is Romania”). In fact, the campaign title “Land of Choice” is a clichéd representation of what capitalist economies like to say and thus also speaks to neoliberal ideology. This is related to the “marketisation of public discourse” (Fairclough, 1993), so that Romania’s national brand is part of a strategy in which the capitalist logic of the market is an important element. Furthermore, the commercial presents the country in a European context by insisting on images of Sibiu, the European Capital of Culture 2007.

### ***“Explore the Carpathian Garden”***

Three years after Romania joined the EU in 2007, the Ministry of Regional Development and Tourism launched the tourism branding campaign “Discover the Carpathian Garden” at the Shanghai World Expo to create a positive image of Romania. The development of Romanian tourism was financed with European funds (75 million euros until the end of 2013), for example from the European Regional Development Fund. The Spanish agency Asesores en Turismo y Hotelera Recreacion - Taylor Nelson Sofres designed the new national brand with the green leaf logo. Romanian bloggers have criticised the logo because it resembles the logo of the British company Change Transport. The information first appeared in a blog with the headline “Discover the differences between the two images. The Ministry of Tourism steals images for the logo of the national brand”. The Romanian media quickly spread this information and debated the need for a national brand. Citizens had the opportunity to express their opinion about the campaign, as the media paid a lot of attention to the nation-branding issue.

This campaign was followed by a series of documentaries, also supported by Prince Charles of Wales, who promotes causes such as the traditional way of life in Transylvania and protected ecosystems. This author believes that this campaign has finally captured a true element of Romanian reality, but still needs to be translated into a sustainable strategy of public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, and nation branding, as all these elements are intertwined. The Romanian Tourist Board has described the spots as follows: “The country is the heart and

soul of Romania, where peasant culture remains a strong force and the mediaeval way of life prevails like nowhere else in Europe” (Romanian Tourism, 2021).

At the centre of the Romanian national brand are the advertising discourses (which present Romania as an adventure, a takeaway experience), while on the periphery is the semiotic world of the audience. “Discover the Carpathian Garden” addresses potential tourists, inviting them to visit Romania and experience “nature”, “authenticity”, “uniqueness” or the “mystical”. On the other side is the international audience, who will decode the advertising message according to their own social experiences. The commercial focuses on experiences, presenting the mediaeval festival of Sighișoara and the plays of the National Theatre Bucharest and inviting potential tourists to enjoy them.

Furthermore, the description of the “Discover the Carpathian Garden” campaign shows that national identity discourses are constructed by appealing to traditions (children in folk costumes, a man making a clay pot), religion (painted monasteries), modernisation (pictures with Transfăgărășan, the asphalted mountain road, crossing the southern part of the Carpathians), geography (the Carpathian Garden), architecture (the Peleş Castle, the mediaeval Sighișoara, the Snagov Monastery) and the psychological profile of the Romanian population (the Merry Cemetery - a place where death is represented in a cheerful way). In this cultural space, elements of neoliberal ideology are addressed through commercial discourses (“for everything Romania has to offer”, “to the experience you will take away”, “Romania, explore the Carpathian Garden”), reinforcing the clichéd representation of the capitalist economy as an offer. The experiences of the mediaeval festival of Sighișoara, the visit to Peleş Castle, a masterpiece of German neo-Renaissance architecture, and the sight of the humorous epitaphs in the Merry Cemetery invite the Western audience to “explore the Carpathian Garden”.

### ***“Discover the Place Where You Feel Reborn”***

Compared to the other three nation branding campaigns, here we have a first-person narrator describing his own experience: “Here, in these places, I wish I was born. Every time I discover the traditions and culture of these places, I feel alive, I feel reborn. Romania, explore the Carpathian Garden”.

Moreover, the campaign is mainly aimed at the internal audience to encourage Romanians to visit their country. The analysis of the campaign “Discover the place where you feel reborn” shows that national identity discourses are constructed by appealing to traditions (a man making a traditional clay pot, the presence of Romanian “evil fairies” known as “ielele”), religion (painted monasteries, a nun playing the semantron), culture (the Endless Column of Brâncuși) and architecture (mediaeval Sighișoara, Bran Castle) are appealed to. In this cultural space, elements of neoliberal ideology are addressed through commercial discourses (“Romania, explore the Carpathian Garden”) that reinforce the clichéd representation of the capitalist economy as an offer.

### **Conclusions**

According to the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the main objectives of cultural diplomacy activities are the development of relations with other states, both bilaterally and multilaterally, through culture, education, science, technology, media, youth, sports, and cultural tourism; the promotion of Romanian cultural values, the building and consolidation of Romania’s image/reputation abroad (Ministry of Foreign Affairs).

Intergovernmental agreements and programmes in the fields of culture and education provide the legal basis for various cultural and educational projects and exchange programmes.

As part of the efforts to promote Romanian values and expertise at the international level, the Ministry, on the basis of Law 590/2003 on the Agreements of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, constantly strives to develop and update the legal framework between Romania and other states in the fields of culture, education, youth, sports, tourism and mass media, by initiating, negotiating and signing bilateral documents at the intergovernmental level - agreements and executive programmes - which contribute to the intensification of bilateral cooperation in areas of interest. To date, more than 170 agreements and programmes have been concluded.

Summarising the main moments of the post-communist history, which was characterised by a combination of stagnation and progress in democratisation, it can be said that Romanian cultural diplomacy was strongly influenced by political factors. Internal instability was reflected in the impossibility of creating a sustainable national brand, undisputed by public opinion, that would reflect the main values of local culture. EU accession has led to free movement of goods,

people, services, and capital, but as far as the movement of cultural values is concerned, this chapter has not been strategically addressed. A more visible contribution of cultural practitioners and the de-politicisation of cultural diplomacy are needed to take advantage of the country's opportunities.

In summary, Romanian cultural diplomacy has been broadly synchronised with Euro-Atlanticism

and democratisation. The abandonment of nationalist-communist myths and the updating of the strategy to promote Romanian culture were fulfilled goals. On the other hand, cooperation between state institutions and the private sector is needed, as well as an academic framework for discussion in order to restore a hierarchy of cultural values that corresponds to historical truth.

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## **C. REVIEWS**



## BOOK REVIEW

**Laurențiu Vlad, *Istории românești ale ideii de Europa, secolele XVII-XXI (imagini, note, reflecții)* [*Romanian Histories of the Idea of Europe, 17th-21st centuries (images, notes, reflections)*], Iași, Editura Institutului European, 2021, 344 p.**

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The volume is published within the European studies collection of the European Institute Publishing House<sup>1</sup>. The author is a well-reputed researcher in the field of historical imagology and the history of mentalities. It was edited in an appropriate context considering the present political, social, and cultural evolutions. It is at a time when European unity is challenged by centrifugal tendencies and exacerbated claims of nationalism. This editorial project might provide useful insights for understanding these evolutions and trends.

The book restitutes, in a scientific manner, the dilemmas and the debates existing in Romanian society on the directions and models to be followed for its modernization. The approach covers a generous time span, from the seventeenth until the twentieth century. The volume also includes an analysis of the representations of “Europe” in the works of Romanian intellectuals from the modern era.

Moreover, the work has a special scientific value as it is a synthesis of this research topic that turned into a real independent field of research. To this aspect, the author consecrates the first chapter of the book. It is the idea of “Europe” in Romanian culture: a theme of interest in Romanian historiography before and after 1990. At the same time, the book should be seen as a “personal” synthesis, as the author notes in the book’s introduction. It represents the result of a research direction outlined almost 25 years ago and partially materialized, through studies published in journals and collective volumes. So, the book should be read as the research result of this subject. It also reflects the teaching concerns and experiences of the author. Professor Laurențiu Vlad, lectured for more than 15 years on the history of the idea of Europe at the

University of Bucharest, as well as at Lucian Blaga University of Sibiu. In fact, the teaching values of the volume are obvious. Thus, it is also useful as a teaching material due to the author’s choice to include, after each chapter, selections from historical sources relevant to the topics he addressed.

Therefore, this is a synthesis volume with pronounced research and didactic valences. It targets researchers as the first chapter, dedicated to the state of the art, is very useful for any similar thematic approach. It is also addressed to professors and students at the university level. Moreover, the structure, the style, and approach, based on rigorous documentation, give a special value to this volume.

From a thematic point of view, the book falls within the area of history of ideas and mentalities. It is, in fact, a conceptual history of the idea of “Europe” in Romanian culture.

The book has five chapters, “histories” and “prehistories,” as the author calls them. They reconstruct the idea of Europe in Romanian culture, in its historiographic and historical dimensions. As we mentioned earlier, the first chapter focuses on the state of the art. It synthesizes the most significant scientific contributions before and after 1990. The author focuses on both the directions of approach and the critical analysis of the most important works on the subject. Thus, the author, using the chronological and comparative methods, studied the main contributions of Adrian Marino, Vlad Georgescu, and Alexandru Duțu, as well as of some precursors of this topic, perhaps less known, such as Pompiliu Eliade or Eugen Lovinescu. The same method was used in the analysis of the scientific literature published after 1990. For this aim, a preliminary selection was necessary, due to the fact that after 1990 the interest in this topic has experienced a spectacular, but justifiable interest. For the period

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<sup>1</sup> A Romanian version of this book review was published in *Acta Marisiensis. Seria Historia*, 3, 2021.



after 1990, two were the selection criteria: the authors that were for the Westernization/modernization of Romanian society and their opinions about European culture and the place of the civilization among those of Europe. Other selective elements include the debates on the place of Romanian civilization in relation to the Western one, stoning between two dimensions, marginality or full integration. The author selected and surveyed those approaches that debated the historical dimension of European ideas and consciousness. For the period after 1990, the main analysis focused on the works of Alexandru Duțu and Adrian Marino, but also on authors such as Razvan Theodorescu or Gheorghe Ceașescu. In general, they are authors with studies and articles published in various cultural journals. We appreciate the author's focus on the professional formation of the university professors—also authors—who led courses on European history, mostly humanists, historians, philologists, and philosophers. According to Laurentiu Vlad, this situation is because in the early 1990s they were the representatives of the only socio-human fields that still existed in the universities. Thus, they had the inclination and the necessary readings for such academic initiatives and scientific approaches.

The second chapter opens with the origins and first interests manifested by Romanians for the idea of Europe. They were ordered chronologically. The chapter includes an analysis of the writings of Romanian chroniclers and intellectuals who have formulated, either explicitly or tangentially, projections of Europe in its many hypostases. We also note that in this chapter the author did not narrow down the analysis to “consecrated” authors such as Grigore Ureche, Miron Costin, Radu Popescu, and Ion Neculce. He also included lesser-known authors such as Ioan Dobrescu, Zilot Româul, and Nicolae Stoica de Hațeg. The analysis criteria were the same as in the previous chapter: chronologically, and thematic. Thus, the result was a rigorous synthesis of the image of Europe - geographical, religious, confessional, and cultural. A space either admired or blamed, and accused of corrupting the Romanian specificity. Therefore, we appreciate that Laurentiu Vlad inventoried not only the representations of an idealized Europe, a model to follow, but also those who saw the West as a harmful source, as a potential danger to Romanian identity. As a consequence, the author placed Zilot Româul,

Ioan Dobrescu, and Grigore Andronescu among the exponents of the anti-Europeanism movement.

If the first two chapters follow the synthetic, historiographic, and historical approach, the next three chapters take the form of study cases. The third and the fourth chapters focus on two journals *Albina Românească* (1829–1849) and *Ideea Europeană* (1919–1929). We value the author's choice to promote the need to reconsider the printed press among the historical source. Interspersed, but also in the form of a case study, in the fourth chapter the author analyses the European models and references of Barbu Catargiu as reflected in his political speeches and writings from 1855 to 1862. However, the vision of Romanian scholar is projected on a brief analysis that Laurențiu Vlad performs on the main Western European models that influenced Romanian civilization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It is preceded by short biographical notes but also by references to the English, French and German models. He also argues his assumptions through analyzes of contemporary authors who also addressed this issue, from Lucian Boia and Aurel Filimon to Pompiliu Eliade and others. The author's intention with these case studies was to move beyond theorizing and to exemplify the way in which the Western model with its “geographical” specificities appears in Barbu Catargiu's view. This option is based on the fact that he was the first prime minister of the government of the United Principalities.

Indeed, we consider that perhaps useful for the complexity of the debates on European models would have been a comparative analysis of the vision of the conservative Barbu Catargiu with that of a liberal. However, this is partly found at the end of the chapter in the form of conclusions, where the author summarizes the main points of view on Europe, both of conservative intellectuals such as Apostol Arsache, Constantin N. Brăiloiu, Alexandru Lahovary, Titu Maiorescu, etc. as well as that of other leaders, who affirmed themselves at the beginning of the twentieth century. Certainly, Laurentiu Vlad chose this case study both in terms of the personality and involvement of Barbu Catargiu in political life but also in the context of the period in which he lived, that of modernization and Europeanization of the Romanian Principalities. The analysis highlighted the conservative perspective, specific to an exponent of conservatism, as France does not appear as a

functional political model of constitutional stability given the recent revolutionary past of this state.

Chapter five, the last, includes the analysis of the journal *Ideea Europeană* in the first interwar decade. This choice was argued by the author's desire to highlight how elements of continental political and cultural identity shaped the national imaginary. The subject has a special place in the economy of the work, but also of the theme in general, due to the fact that 1918, through the act of the Great Union, imposed a (re)definition of the vision on Europe and its dimensions as a model for the new Romanian state. The chapter was structured around themes and cultural and political personalities that published in the journal, specifically during the period when it was run by Constantin Rădulescu-Motru. Laurențiu Vlad insisted also on the circulation and profile of readers, thus, underlining its encyclopaedic, cosmopolite, and European character.

The pages of the publication include the interventions of some Romanian intellectuals such as Virgil I. Bărbat, Cora Irineu, and Marin Ștefănescu as well as European scholars the likes of Henri Barbusse, Giovanni Papini, etc.

Therefore, through the selected case studies on Barbu Catargiu and Constantin Rădulescu-Motru and those on the journals, we believe that the author achieved his aim of rendering, in chronological succession and thematic approach, the evolution of the idea of Europe, of the consciousness of "belonging or not to the Western civilization."

We welcome this cultural history endeavour with strong teaching values, the crowning of a scientific project started several decades ago, today fully matured, a reflection of the completely formed historian and professor that is Laurențiu Vlad.

## BOOK REVIEW

**Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin, *Rapidismul. Istoria unui fenomen sportiv*  
[*Rapidism. History of a Sports Phenomenon*]  
București, ProUniversitaria, 2020, 352 p.**

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To many readers, this book comes with a soundtrack, as it might evoke the wholeheartedly chants of the Rapid Bucharest fans. The present reviewer confesses Ozzy Osbourne's "Mama, I'm Coming Home" as his soundtrack.

Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin is a sports historian, currently affiliated with the National University of Physical Education and Sport in Bucharest. He has chosen a provocative, however difficult, topic to study: a phenomenon known as "Rapidism". The term was not coined, but borrowed from the supporter vocabulary (14). By choosing this made-up word as his main concept, Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin aimed to study the "symbiosis between supporters and club" (15), transgressing a perhaps expected sports club history, i.e., trophies and statistics (13).

The book is focused on the history and social impact of the football team. One must not forget that Rapid Bucharest was from its beginnings a multi-sports club. The author, therefore, employed several comparisons with other sections. Some were thriving at national and even international level (volleyball, water polo, women athletics, and women handball) at times when the football team was either not delivering, or simply playing in the lower tiers.

In the first chapter, Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin provides a brief overview of the history of the establishment of the Romanian football. Research still needs to be done, particularly for the pre-World War One decade, but the bases for future contributions have been thoroughly laid.

The second chapter follows the actual founding of the Bucharest sports club of the Romanian Railways (CFR), on 11 June 1923 (36-38). Both the name Rapid as well as the now traditional burgundy shirts were adopted in 1935-1936. CFR/Rapid Bucharest was not the sole railway workers club (56), but part of a national network, which survived and grew during the communist regime. The construction and

inauguration of the own stadium (in itself analysed by Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin as a 'place of memory, 85-88) was linked both to the late-1930s sports and youth policy as well as to the economic force of the national railway company. During the interwar, the football team started several traditions (technical strikers, spectacular football, better results in knock-out competitions). But the strongest such interwar "tradition" was the idea that state authorities would do any abuse in their power to prevent Rapid Bucharest to win. The entire book is built around this idea, and the many oral history interviews enhance this approach.

This idea was challenged by Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin in the third chapter, "Rapid and Communism". As a working-class team, and with many communist party leading figures railway workers themselves, an initial political support for the team existed (102-103). At this point, a critique is due: an analysis of the 1945 match between Rapid (again under the name CFR Bucharest) and the Soviet club Dinamo Tbilisi would have strengthened the demonstration. However, soon after, Rapid was somehow abandoned in favour of the Soviet model of 'department-backed' teams. The army and the popular police (*miliția*) were allowed to create own clubs, on the expenses of traditional ones. The latter were forced to merge to provide some basis for the former, or move to different cities, or simply be dismantled. According to Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin, the survival of Rapid Bucharest attracted all the supporters from these disappearing teams. Anti-system and anti-communist attitudes consequently enlarged a supporter base, which was anyways never limited to a district or profession (115). Artists and intellectuals were to be found among these supporters, regardless of the historical time (156, 312-313). The already mentioned network of railway linked sports clubs provided both

personnel for the team, as well as new contingents of fans.

The fourth chapter covers the short time in which the Romanian communist regime was more liberal. Coincidentally or not, in 1967 Rapid Bucharest won its maiden title. The celebrations of the supporters were not hindered in any way by the authorities, despite the street parties and chants, which obviously indirectly mocked the political regime itself (190).

The years between 1972 and 1989 were considered by Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin as a “Time of Unity”. The criteria for the selection of 1972 were the changes in the team, not political events. The description of the network of the Rapid Bucharest supporters is noteworthy. The stadium was a meeting point for all social categories. Supporters contracted friendships and exchanged services (from haircuts to medical advice) solely on the ground of belonging to a community defined by football (206-207). Match programmes were transformed into a vehicle of identity construction and social critique (236). A supporters’ league was legally created in 1983 (240). However, the team was not able to deliver on results and was relegated in conditions, which again made the supporters talk of political persecutions. A short chapter is dedicated to the Revolution from 1989 and the death of several rugby players, in conditions still unclear (273).

In the last two chapters of the book, Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin discusses the post-1989 evolutions of Rapid Bucharest. This part is perhaps the expected 1990s and early 2000s mixture of capitalism, rise of racism, politicisation of football, meteoric rise and heavy downfall of the club. The author avoided sensational or ultimate judgements, and presented the changes of the society by looking at the transformation of football. Two aspects are worth mentioning. The first was the rise of Internet as a meeting point instead of the actual stadium or nearby pub (306). The second is the appearance of groups of female supporters (318), in opposition with the failure of women football in the 1960s and 1970s (319).

The “Conclusions” drawn by Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin follow the general direction of the book. The role of the railways was essential until late in the 1990s (341). The anti-system attitude of the team was backed by supporters from an incredibly large base, in both numbers and demographics (342). As the author points out, Rapid Bucharest was, from the point of view of the club and its fans, “everywhere at

home”, whilst being “alone against everybody” (343).

Some general remarks, both critical and appreciative, are noteworthy. The migration of supporters from the dismantled interwar teams to CFR/Rapid Bucharest after 1948 would have required a citation. The anti-system attitude is a definitory identity trait, and the chants of the crowds support this perspective, which protrudes from almost every page. The description of football matches sometime has to overcome the lack of other archival, press, or oral history sources, particularly for the post-1989 until present era. But nobody may blame the author of this book, and any of the extensive non-academic Rapid Bucharest literature, for the lack of documents from the archive of the Ministry of Transportations. The comparisons with other Eastern European cases (foremost for the communist times) invite to a reflection on the common and divergent points of the regional history. For many years, the history of sport was ‘abandoned’ to journalists, enthusiasts, or former athletes writing an autobiography. In the past two decades, ‘professional’ historians have turned their attention towards this phenomenon. As Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin’s book proves, the amount of data, stories, ultimately of rough sources gathered by the above-mentioned enthusiasts is instrumental in writing a monograph of a football club. But ultimately the archive materials, press articles, and the wealth of secondary literature quoted provide this monograph with an undeniable scientific value.

For Pompiliu Constantin’s take on *Rapidism* is a book for many types of readers. Diehard fans shall remember, have confirmed/denied, or newly learn of legends of the past. Historians, social and sports scientists have a share of their own. The tearjerking portrait of Tudorică, the trumpet player, speaks of exclusion versus the integratory, healing, power of the community (160). The mysterious death of Dan Coe highlights both the reality and the myth of the powerful control of the secret political police on the daily life during the communist regime (232). The failure of coach Dumitru (Tache) Macri to reform the team based on scientific data should trigger further research on this topic, also for other sports disciplines (208-209).

The main importance of Pompiliu-Nicolae Constantin’s *Rapidism* lies, arguably, in the transgression of the usual chronological limits of historical approaches. Rapid Bucharest and *Rapidism* as a phenomenon started soon after the

emergence of 'Greater Romania', continued in communism, survived the post-1989 transition, all with different fortunes. As sport mirrors the society, all historical eras have had their impact and still have their consequences on Rapid Bucharest, the supporters and their creation, *Rapidism*.

## BOOK REVIEW

**Sabina Fati, *Călătorie pe urmele conflictelor de lângă noi. Kurdistan, Irak, Anatolia, Armenia*  
[A Journey Following the Conflicts Near Us: Kurdistan, Iraq, Anatolia, Armenia]  
București, Editura Humanitas, 2022, 448 p.**

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Sabina Fati has had a fruitful publishing activity, being well-known for her analysis and editorials on political, diplomatic and international relations topics. After graduating the Faculty of Political Sciences within the National School of Political and Administrative Studies in Bucharest, in 2004 she earned her doctoral degree in History with a thesis on Transylvania at the Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, under the guidance of Alexandru Zub. She was visiting professor at the Bucharest University (2008-2015), the Department of Sciences and Communication. After she was in charge of the Romanian section of the radio Europa Libera, she is currently writing reports and political analysis for the Romanian section at Deutsche Welle.

Among the published books we mention *A Province in Search of a Centre. Centre and Periphery in the Political Discourse of the Elites in Transylvania 1892-1918* (Fati, 2007), *Russians Are Coming! 5 Perspectives on a Dangerous Vicinity* (Fati, 2018), *Alone on the Silk Road. 80 Days, 15.000 km, 2.500 Years of History* (Fati, 2015), *Around the Black Sea in 90 days, Seven Countries, Eight Borders and a Coup d'État in Prime-Time* (Fati, 2016).

The last 2 books cover a complex topic from the geographical and historical perspectives – the Middle East situation, the way the countries from that area connect/ disconnect to the idea of modernity nowadays.

The book published in 2022, *A Journey Following the Conflicts Near Us: Kurdistan, Iraq, Anatolia, Armenia, with the author's photographs*<sup>1</sup> represent the synthesis of the previously published books that focused on the

human reality around the Black Sea or the one along the Silk Road. The afore-mentioned books refer to the historical and political changes that took place in that region, the imposed instability as an old or newer axiom (Fati, 2022).

It can be observed from the beginning that Sabina Fati's books rediscover a type of writing – travel book, between the diary and the war reportage.

The author confronts the new realities on the road of 10.000 Greek mercenaries, led by Xenophon in 401 B.C., described in *Anabasis*, while the road seems difficult nowadays for reasons that are related to borders, conflicts, misunderstandings and a lot of suspicion. The journey took place in 2021 and the first observations of the author refer to a closed, inflexible world, resigned and less empathetic. Among the multiple topics covered in the dense pages of the book, we were drawn to Türkiye and internal/ external conflicts, as well as the motifs of friend/ enemy and the relation to others.

Blocked in their adherence process to the European Union, especially due to lack of recognition of genocide toward national minorities – Greeks and especially Armenians – Turkey showed no desire to admit it. The state refused to recognize the genocide at the fall of the Ottoman Empire and during the Republic ruled by Mustafa Kemal, who was preoccupied by the Kurd massacre. The present day Türkiye led by President Erdoğan refuses to acknowledge the genocidal acts. At the author's questions regarding those who inhabited the cities with Greek and Armenian typical houses, the invariable answer is that the inhabitants left and the Turkish population remained.

This refusal of a dialogue made Turkey seem a country with no memory (Fati, 2022, 59). Although a series of Turkish intellectuals

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<sup>1</sup> *Călătorie pe urmele conflictelor de lângă noi Kurdistan, Irak, Anatolia, Armenia, cu fotografiile autoarei*, București, Editura Humanitas (2022).

discovered and assumed their Armenian descent, the process was individual for those named crypto-Armenians (Fati, 2022, 137).

Organized in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in tribes and answering obediently the orders from Istanbul in order to finish the Armenian genocide in 1915, the Kurds became a target after 1930 for those who wanted a levelling of the Turkish nation, led by Mustafa Kemal. The fight is as fierce nowadays, especially in the recent years concerning the Kurd issue, now involving communities difficult to neglect, beyond the Turkish borders – in Syria, Iraq, Iran.

Founding an autonomous Kurdistan in Iraq and Kurd autonomy in Syria are great steps forward, but reliance on economic factors forced the Kurds in Iraq to sell petrol to political enemies or the Turks who became economic partners, eager to diminish their reliance on the Russian petrol (Fati, 2022, 172).

Turkey's intervention in the Middle East in the context of the Arab Spring in 2011 targeted the reinstallation of diplomatic influence in the former Ottoman provinces. In the problematic areas, where they already faced U.S.A. and Russia, the Turks wanted to limit the organization plans of a Kurd state. (Fati, 2022, 318) Unlike Turkey, Syria and Russia offered to the Assad regime military support of mercenary type, with intimidating attacks on civil targets, considered rehearsal scenarios for the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Turkey's desire of influence faced the wish of the Arab world to be independent despite its unsolved issues, while modernity has only an economic importance. Iran, for example, doesn't seem eager to give up its position, while the

Turkish official return to Islam does not represent a proof of power in the larger context.

Many tragic stories of the communities in the visited cities are as many proofs of the elite's incapacity to win the support of the minorities not by simulating democracy and installing *de facto* dictatorial regimes, supporting allegedly patriotic discourses. As a consequence, the author empathizes with those who live in this political sphere, suffering: intellectuals, women, ethnic minorities or Syrian refugees.

An ever repeating image resurfaces in the visited cities on Xenophon's path – the remnants of antique cities within closed archaeological sites that can be visited slipping a tip to a security guard, totally oblivious to the surrounding reality.

The author came to the end of her journey, in Bagdad and Mosul: the first is the shadow of a previously glorious city and the second, conquered at a certain point by the Islamic State. Furthermore, the fact that the American response to the 9/11 attacks was also called *Anabasis* is mentioned. Just like in the case of the Greek mercenaries, the Americans who entered Iraq could not bring stability to the area, a fact that had dramatic effects for many who remained to face the imminent danger (Fati, 2022, 394).

Sabina Fati's book poses more questions at the end than before starting the journey. As a result of the many involved parties a final answer is not possible. The final conclusion is made up of several provisional conclusions. "Is the conflict included in the peoples' DNA responsible for the situation? – the author asks. It would be too sad.

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Christina Stojanova, Dana Duma (eds.), *The New Romanian Cinema*  
Edinburgh University Press, 2019, 344 p.**

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We have before us an extremely ambitious volume, which aims to cover the New Romanian Cinema (NRC) from all directions and perspectives – modernism, minimalism, intermediality, intertextuality, aesthetics, ethics, gender, genre, national versus transnational. Divided into these thematic chapters, the studies vary both in approach and – dare I say – consistency. Before I explain myself, I start by asking if there was a need for a volume focused on post-2000 Romanian cinema and, if the answer is yes, what could such a new approach bring? At the same time, from what perspective could the films of the well-known Romanian directors be examined in such a way as to find things that have not yet been said?

With these questions in mind, the editors Christina Stojanova and Dana Duma try to build perspectives through which to connect the contemporary Romanian film to the current cultural, aesthetic, ethical theories.

The hypothesis of the volume, as well as its structure, falls into the trap of collective volumes written by authors who probably did not have the opportunity to agree on common approaches. This is not automatically a minus, because the multitude of perspectives can attract more diverse readers. Some articles cite other articles in this volume, so it is very possible that at least some authors have read the articles of their colleagues. However, as a general note, the coagulation of parts is forced in some places.

As Claudiu Turcuş points out in his own volume review (2020, 228-230), Stojanova and Duma do not clearly establish the period discussed. The Romanian new wave lasted a little less than ten years, and the invited authors discuss films before and after this period, sometimes going to the communist production. Some of them also discuss about a New Romanian Cinema and sometimes refer to the multi-award winning wave, other times they include in this phrase contemporary Romanian films in general (everything that means post-communist film). So,

the volume lacks a clear and necessary temporal delimitation, because the Romanian society has changed very quickly, it has undergone essential transformations in the three free decades - a phenomenon reflected on the films made as well.

To reduce the feeling of a disparate approach, the editors try to find what could convincingly unite authors with quite different concerns and approaches. The result is an eclectic volume.

Most authors point to Dominique Nasta as a solid landmark, although her 2013 study (*Contemporary Romanian Cinema: The History of an Unexpected Miracle*) has serious problems with content and ideas, and the analysis often lacks depth. I will briefly explain why I do not agree with this volume. Nasta starts from the premise of a “miracle” of today’s Romanian cinema and suggests that Romania has no cinematic tradition, that NRC was born out of nothing, superficially covering the precursors of communism, the unlikely existence of a Romanian film school. I will give a concrete example: she evaluates the ‘60s positively due to the appearance of Lucian Pintilie or Liviu Ciulei and presents without explaining in detail the change that occurred when Ceauşescu took over the power. He omits that Ciulei made all three of his feature films before 1965, which means that Nasta is approximate when he uses periodizations. The author gives the impression that she needs the part of mass communist cinema to compare it especially with the post-communist art film, an attempt to prove this *imaginary miracle*.

### Topics of discussion

The volume has six thematic parts.

The first part considers the different forms of minimalism found in Romanian films, from story, to sound, to aesthetics or filming places. The second part captures references and cultural / historical connections, directing methods that contemporary Romanian films propose. The third part discusses the ethics and aesthetics of NRC

and how the issue of moral positioning (with its various facets) is an important part of these films; this could include manipulation that can be done through audio-visual medium. The fourth part discusses gender, genre issues. The fifth part – and perhaps the most solid one – focuses on the importance of the geographical space where these stories take place, the way in which the national note is presented cinematically in order to be globally understood.

The last part consists of a single, comprehensive article: the history of Romanian cinema from its beginnings to the present times; a brave and very careful dissertation, which should not be missing from any profile school in Romania. Although she has to greatly reduce the length of the analysis of the moments discussed, Christina Stojanova manages a nuanced, true to reality, accurate journey, skilfully identifying and analysing those essential points in Romanian film production – such as, chronologically: *The Independence of Romania* (1912), with contemporary correspondent *The Rest is Silence* (2007); the role played by the state in the interwar period, along with the struggle for the survival of domestic productions forced to withstand Western imports; the communist beginnings, the improvement / modernization of the infrastructure that came with the nationalization; the influence of literature on certain communist successes (for example, *Forest of the Hanged*); the socialist context in the Eastern bloc in which this new cinematography is developing, with new, revolutionary principles; the paradigmatic role – but also the programmatic one, I would add – of a film like *Răsună valea* [*Reverberating Valley*] (1950); the controversial personality (at least for the government) of some directors such as Liviu Ciulei, Lucian Pintilie, Dan Pița, Mircea Daneliuc; the masters of the national epic: Sergiu Nicolaescu, Doru Năstase, Lucian Bratu, Mircea Drăgan, screenwriter Titus Popovici; the paradigm shifts between communist decades. These points are logically followed by the retrospective of the 1990s and then the international imposition of young filmmakers - the new wave, which the author does not insist on, given that the other articles in the volume mainly discuss this fruitful period. It is an article that demonstrates a very good knowledge of Romanian cinema, with its intrigues, structure and organization, always changing, always surprising, always dependent on the political environment, on those who decide how and what projects are financed.

## Landmarks

As I pointed out, the volume tries to conceptually connect contemporary Romanian cinema to the great international theories of today. The introduction conveys the idea that any new wave proposes a major aesthetic break with the existing tradition – an idea that many of the articles try to verify.

## Part 1

**Dominique Nasta** seeks to find common features in the movies of the new wave, which “unflinchingly address terminal situations by resorting to subtractive strategies, opting for reduced time frames, simple set-ups and repetitive” (28); it is a common problem of many theorists who thus reduce the nuances of some films to find inaccurate unifying elements. The strongest part is the one dedicated to sound design: minimalist, but carefully done, the sound often appears on several layers and amplifies the story: “Mungiu, Puiu and Porumboiu do refute flashbacks, modes of traditional editing, framing and staging, and any form of non-diegetic musical scoring” (28). The author overbid in some places and tries to find additional meanings where they do not exist. The article too fragmented and broken into too many pieces; this leads to a lack of exploration of substantial details contained in the films discussed. This sufficiency leads to a confusing article, which seems less developed than it could have been.

**Irina Trocan** discusses how we can understand minimalism in NRC and the nuances of this cinematic approach. Her hypothesis is clear. The article examines some Romanian films through the magnifying glass of their minimalism, and the short study on *Aurora* shows how Cristi Puiu deconstructs a type of conventional story, namely the crime made of passion movie (42). Without rambling or opening up not carried to the end ideas, the article could still have developed further in the direction of content analysis and presented in more detail those details that transform films such as *The Death of Mr. Lazarescu*, *Police, Adjective*, *The Treasure*, *Tuesday*, *After Christmas* in minimalist approaches (47-48).

**Ioana Uricaru** is the only theorist-practitioner who publishes in this volume. The author discusses the many reasons why music does not appear in NRC movies. One reason has to do with the refusal to lend to certain mainstream practices, the idea of working in a minimalist way. The directors are limited to using the music in the

credits parts (beginning-end), with the help of which they want to convey something about the imagined story between these two covers. Uricaru discusses her own experience, the co-production of a film: often the funding comes from several national funds, which requires the main producer to attract in the project – in different departments – professionals from the countries where the money comes from. The sound department (both the diegetic sound and the score) becomes a favourite area for foreign collaborators, as a large part of the team must know the language of the main country. However, the problem arises when the directors do not plan to use a classical soundtrack, but work without music. The discussion she proposes is unique. The most solid content analysis of the article occurs, ironically or not, in the discussion about the presence of a song in the film *Police, Adjective* (56-58). It is about the moment when the protagonist hears the play listened to by his wife and begins to challenge the logic of the lyrics. Uricaru emphasizes the creativity of Corneliu Porumboiu.

## Part 2

**Ágnes Petho** resumes ideas about a type of cinema faithful to long takes, generally static or quasi-static, with frames designed in the style of large paintings. She attributes this practice to Porumboiu, whom she places in a long tradition of directors (including Carl Theodor Dreyer), about whom Béla Balázs and David Bordwell theorized in detail. The author likens Porumboiu's approach to that of Dutch Baroque painters and often uses the term "tableau vivant" to explain the mise-en-scène artistically exploited by the director. The author's analysis is nuanced, dense, and full of careful associations and references. The article is not content with a general approach, but explains certain practices: "Porumboiu insists on the dull, repetitive actions in the frame (eating, speaking on the phone, passing the time around TVs that nobody is actually watching). What really counterpoint the rigidity of these pictures are the dialogues with their colourful language (the ironic puns, allusions, and so on) and the visual gags based on the repetition and incongruence of elements within the given frame." (69).

**Melinda Bloss-Jáni** discusses the work of Nae Caranfil, a director detached from the aesthetics of the Romanian new wave, with 'appetite for artifice' (96), who builds much more theatrical, consciously artificial films, so that this aesthetic does him a disservice in the context of a generation of directors interested in minimalist realism. The author emphasizes that Caranfil's

style appears in the context of Romanian cinema at a time when it does not enjoy the success it deserves: "while the modernist aesthetics of the new wave cinema codifies, figurates the real, Caranfil's latest films radicalise reality in the form of hyperreal, meta-cinematic tales, showcasing cinema that stands but for film itself" (100).

**Liviu Lutas** analyses those pieces from Cristi Puiu's films that can be seen as moments of "remediality", "representation of one medium in another" (107); in *Stuff and Dough: Get Shorty* movie poster, the "reference to the Romanian music group from the 1980s, Star 2000, and to its lead singer, Petre Geambașu, who is compared to Frank Sinatra" (112); the appearance on the screen of some books printed in the '70s and '80s for a collection known in the Romanian collective memory (Biblioteca pentru toți [Library for all]); in *The Death of Mr. Lăzărescu*: the TV channels the protagonist watches, his second first name (Dante) sends to 'Divine comedy' and in general all the first names (Dante, Remus, Lazarus, Anghel, Virgil, Mioara), "through both explicit and implicit forms of remediation, these deliberate mythological references elevate the story to another, universal level of signification" (115); in *Aurora*: the sound on the radio, perfectly intelligible, with Mitică Dragomir, the president of the Romanian football league, also a politician, as a sign of the lack of trust in authority manifested by the protagonist (116-117), Viorel's final explanation for his murder, which resembles Meursault's speech in Albert Camus's novel *The Stranger*. The author's considerations are slightly forced, especially since Puiu reiterated the lack of additional meanings to his stories. At the same time, the examples found are few in number and not very consistent.

## Part 3

**Christina Stojanova** discusses how time flows (and is felt), as well as the representation of evil in the NRC – both its reasons and consequences. What is the source of negative characters and bad people? It belongs to "post-communist kleptocratic structures" (130). The paper opens many topics of discussion, lists many films, but does not seem to finish what it set out to do.

The historical discussion proposed by **Ioana Uricaru** has certain problems, probably due to insufficient training in this regard. The statements he makes are not nuanced enough ("In 1971, Ceaușescu visited China and North Korea and was thrilled with the spectacle of their version of communism, which he then tried to implement

upon returning to Romania” – the theory of some historians is that Ceaușescu had this predilection beforehand) or unproven by bibliographic references (“It took a number of years for the country’s political class and for the people as a whole to finally accept that they had been abandoned by the Allied powers, and this deep, unforgivable betrayal became the founding trauma of post-war Romania.”) (138). Beyond these issues, the author presents an interesting hypothesis: the lack of audio-visual information from the last years of communism – when the television program had been drastically reduced and dramatically controlled – led to “this demand and need for media (including cinematic) discourse to reconverge with the reality of experience is one of the fundamental engines of New Romanian Cinema’s approach” (139). The need for *truth* facilitated the birth of a realistic approach, concerned with the factual, immediate reality, both now and in the past. The author also makes an important distinction, starting from *12:08 East of Bucharest*: in the collective memory, the hour 12:08 of December 22, 1989 became very important; the moment divides history into two: *before* and *after*. Surprised on television, the fall of the communist regime has many facets: „images from cameras in the street were eventually put in opposition to those produced by the official mass media, thus coming to signify two irreconcilable political points of view” (140). In the context of the struggle for truth, „the films of New Romanian Cinema emerged in this context as a conscious project of recovering the Real” (p. 143).

**Kalling Heck** discusses „how the effects of austerity disproportionately affect those in difficult economic situations [...] ultimately demanding that this audience witness the cruelty of austerity” (151). His theory is that the lack of money in Romanian society attracts a certain type of filmmaking, minimalist, Godard type, and represents a central theme for some films: in *Beyond the Hills*, this situation forces a series of problems that lead to Alina’s death.

#### Part 4

**Dana Duma** starts from Laura Mulvey’s theory on how the female body is objectified in society, implicitly in film, and talks about the types of female representations found in contemporary Romanian cinema: „Like their predecessors from the Nouvelle Vague and from other European ‘new waves’, the directors belonging to the New Romanian Cinema attempt to avoid stereotypes in depicting women. They do

not limit themselves to use them as decorative props, but offer them a decisive role in the narrative structure.” (167).

**Andrea Virginás** wonders if there are genre films in Romania, in the context of a ‘small cinema’ that does not produce “genre films because they lack serious financial and industrial resources” (181).

#### Part 5

**Mircea Deaca** has a surprising and at the same time suitable approach for the specifics of Romanian films, in which people sit at the table, live in the kitchen, where they eat, talk, quarrel. The author analyses in detail the geometry of the frames filmed in this small space, which often brings the characters even closer physically. He identifies characters and personalities who transit and / or populate this space. The kitchen predisposes to assume certain roles and hypostases, sometimes predictable (submissive woman, man in charge), sometimes unusual. It is a solid article, which emphasizes the Romanian specific present in these films, a local specific that crosses the barrier and becomes globally intelligible. “The kitchen as dramatic stage, discussed so far, reveals a cultural model of the larger contextual drama of urban alienation and moral dilemmas, of anti-heroes, abandoned or domineering fathers, and of incessantly nurturing, domesticated mothers.” (209)

**Marian Țuțui, Raluca Iacob** discuss how Romania’s position on the map influences the type of stories and characters proposed by the directors, analysing how this geographical location imposes a certain humour, a certain vision of the world and life. “Romania’s historical, cultural and geopolitical peripheral position towards Western Europe, and its ideological entrenchment under communism, created conditions of dependency, aggravating rather than decreasing the disparity with the centre of global power. Romanian films reflect these conditions by focusing on minor destinies of ordinary people in everyday situations, as they face numerous challenges in a society in continuous transformation.” (213). The authors explain how marginality is described by authentic and profound stories of marginalized inhabitants.

**Doru Pop** draws attention to the process of globalization of Romanian cinema, which is beginning to convey an international language: characters, events, narrative structures, genres, all begin to be subordinated not to the national specific, but to the global one. The examples he offers validate a trend in the direction of local

cinema with commercial values (*#Selfie*). This does not mean that the most valuable films have lost their local scent (*Beyond the Hills*): “While the films discussed above demonstrate a clear disengagement from national themes, locations and historical relevance, the core of what is called ‘national cinema’ is alive and well in Romania.” (231). In search of wider contexts and audiences, Romanian filmmakers are gradually becoming part of transnational cinema. The chapter proposes a framework to explain the reorientation of recent Romanian cinema and to predict its possible future evolutions.

### Conclusion

This volume is worth reading, being a solid project, with some problems (probably) imminent in the collaboration of such a large number of researchers with different opinions and approaches. Editors Christina Stojanova and Dana Duma manage to build attractive thematic files, despite the fact that some seem incompletely covered. Articles such as those written by Ioana Uricaru, Mircea Deaca, Marian Țuțui, Raluca Iacob, Doru Pop propose unique directions for future research of the New Romanian Cinema.

### REFERENCES / BIBLIOGRAFIE

#### Chapters in books

**Turcuș 2020**

Turcuș, Claudiu, “Rereading New Romanian Cinema: Minimalism, intermediality, and ethics”. In: *Studies in Eastern European Cinema*, 11:2 (2020), pp. 228-230.

