

(EN) SUMMARY OF THE DOCTORAL THESIS ENTITLED:

ROMANIAN SOCIALIST LITERATURE'S FILM.
CINEMATOGRAPHIC ADAPTATIONS AND
INTERMEDIAL EXPLORATIONS AFTER 1989

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The doctoral thesis entitled *Romanian Socialist Literature's Film. Cinematographic Adaptations and Intermediary Explorations after 1989* is based on the premise that literature and cinema produced during the socialist period and after 1989 artistically reflect a socio-political and cultural-artistic totality, forming a reticular ecosystem that legitimizes their comparative research. At the same time, it is considered that, in the Romanian space, there are relatively few studies that address imagological intersections, medial (dis)continuities or symptomatic nodes. This doctoral thesis, through a historical, hermeneutic, but also intermedial approach, analytically unravels the way in which cinematographic adaptation in Romania in the 1990s processes Romanian literature produced during the socialist period.

Following the politics and aesthetics of post-1989 film adaptations of literature written during the socialist period, this intermedial conversation aims to reveal how two cultural eras (including socio-political or economic distinct ones) communicate from the point of view of structuring fictional narratives. Organically, from the investigation of the ways in which posterity

relates to the communist regime, certain networks or recurrences arise in terms of the imaginary, some of them specific to narrower time intervals, not to the entire period. It thus traces the way in which an existential and cultural memory is edited, starting from the premise of interdisciplinarity, by including literature and cinema under the umbrella of what we call *adaptation studies*.

The work includes metacritical sections devoted to the reception of films, metadiscourse analysis, with the aim of facilitating the tracking of how criticism ideologically (and aesthetically, and theoretically) structures the reception of moving images in relation to adapted literature, the latter already having a stabilized, even culturally institutionalized reception. The theoretical concepts of *adaptation*, *fidelity* and *intermediation* are explored, that is, the way in which the panorama of the literary-cinematic transition was put into discourse (by or not relating the exegete to the source text). Through, in particular, the three key concepts and by closely examining the films, texts and related metatexts, the thesis offers an overview of the socialist period, as it is reflected: a. in the films after 1989, which have as their starting point texts from Romanian literature published between 1948 and 1989, b. in the specialized critical discourse after the Revolution, c. in the selection of certain authors and titles to the detriment of others, by directors and producers.

In the first decade after the Revolution, after the so-called regaining of freedom of expression, heavily exploited during the transition period, filmmakers chose to revitalize through adaptation literary works belonging, as expected, predominantly to writers "inconvenient" for Power - perhaps, out of a justified need for "revenge", but also texts by a few "partisans" of the Regime, writers conformist from the point of view of the socialist cultural policies to which they aligned themselves. Thus, the research examines and includes an integrated perspective according to which, through the cinematic adaptations after 1989, Romanian literature written during the socialist period is re-edited (in the sense of audiovisual editing) by amplifying its anti-communist character, operated by most directors. The recurrence of significant imaginary elements, of types of class relations and, implicitly, of power relations is identified; finally, by assuming a point of view favorable to the observation by the spectator of the contrast between what socialism wanted to appear, respectively how it was felt, understood, processed, seen by the citizen. Beyond the preference for popular authors or, on the contrary, disliked during the communist regime, "(potential) enemies of the people", in the panorama of adaptations a preferred direction is clearly distinguished, the anti-communist one. Literary texts published in the period 1948-1989 – from

short prose to novels or plays – serve as a pretext for emphasizing the implicit or explicit anti-communist tendency, manifested on multiple levels and with different tones – depending on the periods and post-'89 directions, by the directors. It is observed that, whether we are talking about the "favorites" of the Regime or the "marginals", filmmakers highlight in their audiovisual products, in line with - or in complementing, never against - the literary source, the existence and undeniable role of details that proclaim post factum the refusal to legitimize a repressive totalitarian regime through art. The directorial poetics compatible with the anti-communist ideologies of the transition offer a fertile field of investigation, a vantage point of media re-editing, which indicates both the major social and cultural role of literature produced under socialism, and a new regime of its visibility, through audiovisual post-processing.

From a methodological point of view, the data were collected in the form of an inventory of films released after 1989 that have Romanian literature under communism as an explicit reference. In order for the practical approach in this paper to provide a functional interpretation grid, a substantial chapter is dedicated to the theoretical component. Within this, it is followed how studies on adaptations are theorized by specialists and a series of essential visions relevant to cinematographic practice are inventoried – visions promoted, predominantly, in foreign environments –, while also proving their applicability in the local environment. Given the purpose of clarifying the critics' claims, which are evident from the discourse on artistic products in the corpus, the pursuit of terminological trends in critical texts aims to lead to the observation of differences in vision on the adaptation process itself.

In the cinematic landscape of the 1990s, in which there is talk of the appearance of approximately 60 films, a considerable percentage, approximately 20% – as indicated in the corpus of the work – is represented by adaptations of Romanian literature published between 1948-1989. In this "extremely poor cinema of the 1990s", the aim is to demonstrate, through analysis, the insistence on the *avant la lettre* anti-communist character, in the case of many of the literary productions. The adaptations, beyond the merit of encapsulating the revolutionary ferment existing in past works – the majority – at the time of their appearance, through the filter of Censorship, have the quality of recreating, from various perspectives (including and favoring that of the revolted intellectual), the taboo dimension of life in Romanian totalitarian society. The activation of the latent subversive potential of texts, which is operated by most directors who deal with the

process of intermediation, adaptation, can be considered a phenomenon in itself of the decades after the Revolution in which a *post-communist anti-communism*¹ would be put into practice.

First, interdisciplinary methodologies related to literary and audiovisual studies are used. The historical methodology that is used, facilitates the placement and understanding of the artistic products addressed in the context in which they appeared, as well as their interpretation according to the circumstances in which they were received. The aim is to understand the correlative relationships in the construction of the artistic imaginary specific to a certain author (writer, director or critic), as well as the social and ideological consequences that certain artistic decisions had. Being about texts published in a repressive regime and the existence in the cultural landscape of the 1990s of some active directors, both before the Revolution, multiple sources are used to verify the credibility of the data, the real-fictional correspondences, in the same context of the years in which art could be used for propaganda purposes or, on the contrary, for the veiled transmission of the truth.

Since the thesis focuses on adaptations, the transition of a written text into the audiovisual medium, implicitly, the way in which the intentions suggested by the first artist (the author) were appropriated by the second (the director), specific tools for adaptation studies are used, especially in the analytical part of the work. The transformation process is explored, both at the micro level (the way in which the ideas, symbols, and stakes of the text are reflected in the film), and at the macro level (the way in which the adaptation succeeds or fails to enter into dialogue with other works or with the entire cultural and political context in which it appears).

In the case of both chronicles and films and books, the reading is carried out contextually, and the approach includes a hermeneutic component, indispensable for an in-depth approach to the researched products. Understanding and correlating the socio-political and cultural background of the appearance of books with that of the creation and dissemination of films implies, equally, the investigation of related levels: linguistic, ideological, historical, identity or psycho-affective. Methodologies specific to memory studies are also integrated, since one of the central stakes is represented by the pursuit of the way in which a collective consciousness is constructed through discourse. Through this type of approach, the aim is to understand the editing frameworks, reflect the tension between the practice of ideological repression and artistic creativity, analyze and

¹ Syntagm postulated by Daniel Barbu, in *The Absent Republic: Politics and Society in Post-Communist Romania*, Bucharest, Nemira, 1999.

highlight the way in which the process of fictionalization of films takes place in relation to the source texts and the entire socio-political context specific to socialism. Societal memory is built after 1989, inevitably, also through cinema, and post-Revolution films have the power to (re)ideologize, through the intermedial expansion practiced, the art created during the communist regime.

The interpretative framework offered by the integration of the intermediality studies perspective facilitates a holistic approach, within which each audiovisual product addressed can be viewed as an integral part of a system that includes the previous, historicized textual reference. The emphasis falls on mapping the cultural horizon of adaptations seen as a set of relationships, established between artistic products and between periods that communicate (with each other).

Qualitative analysis methods (especially in the hermeneutic approach dedicated to texts, films, chronicles and the relationships between them) are combined with quantitative elements (in some places, in the pseudostructuralist investigation – in the sense of demonstrating the membership of a set of interrelated and interconditioned parts – of certain recurrences of the imaginary, in the creation of inventories of authors, works, symbolic elements, types of relationships). In order to carry out the comparative approach, of a clear ideational panoply, but also to postulate some functional categories, for reasons of scientific relevance, the option of establishing categories and subcategories is opted for, through a focused examination of the corpus, to the detriment of taking over already made classifications. The attribution of material for each dominant is followed by a final phase of abstracting the results.

In the analysis of the doctoral thesis, the delimitation of certain categories does not aim to legitimize or, on the contrary, discredit directors, depending on their activity in relation to Power, before 1989, nor their works. However, a few filmmakers are distinguished who, by choosing certain authors, by operating a certain type of literary canon at the level of adaptations, but also by their own imprinted vision, offer a relevant perspective on the way in which the socialist era is perceived or chosen to be projected, *post factum*.

The paper postulates three distinct categories of adapted writers. The first is that of authors who are part of a so-called socialist cultural "star-system": prestigious, important names, of interest to the Party, subtle, watched writers, whose works present a potential risk (for example: Petru Dumitriu, Mircea Eliade, Paul Goma, Marin Preda). The second is that of official, conformist authors, the so-called "comfort zone" of the Party: authors integrated and compatible, to a large

extent, with the cultural mechanisms of the communist regime (Ion Băieșu is such an example). The third category is that of marginal writers, who have become "uncomfortable", through the diffuse opposition they have cultivated in relation to Power, through the distancing that has come through the structural dystopian (Bujor Nedelcovici), intrinsically-stylistic ironic or subversively-ludic (Ioan Groșan) channel, or even through the actual distancing, through the author's exile.

Each of the cinematographic adaptations addressed, and, implicitly, each of the Romanian literary texts targeted, has a significant role in achieving the main objective of this work, namely, examining the way in which the past is edited, the form taken by the discourse intended to contribute to the cultural (re)mediation of one of the most difficult periods in recent history, dominated by restrictions, among others, in the social and artistic environment, motivated by ideology. One of the hypotheses from which the present thesis starts, namely the fact that, through the audiovisual editing operated by the directors, after 1989, a tendency to emphasize the implicit anti-communist character of literary works, a post-communist anti-communism, was imposed in the guild, is confirmed in the case of most of the cinematographic products discussed. The conclusion is nuanced, however, through the prism of the way in which the artists' critical reporting on the years of socialism is carried out, in the process of adapting the source texts. The evolution of discourse reflects a succession of distinct stages in the restitution of an image meant to contribute to the shaping of a collective consciousness. From the blunt perspective of the early years of the 1990s, in which the filmmakers' vision is characterized by a tendency to break the taboos of subjects forbidden under communism, by a directorial policy dominated by the appetite for excess (visual, sound, technical, thematic, stylistic), to the interest in rendering compensatory universes and solutions of an inner, even mystical nature, alternatives to the problem of the individual constrained by the external environment – towards which it is tended in the second part of the last decade. This direction is also extended in the 2000s, a period in which a new paradigm shift can be observed, a detachment within some of the cinematographic adaptations, in which the comic perspective is exploited, namely the restitution of the socialist past in an ironic, humorous key.

Correlated with these three postulated categories – those who were part of a so-called system of "stars" of the Regime (who benefited from appreciation, with or without ideological compromise, or who were recognized for their talent and who represented interest precisely by the fact that they vehemently opposed the Power, from inside or outside the country), those considered

official writers (through the prism of the socialist cultural policies promoted, who worked in favor of the party) and those marginal ones, who expressed opposition to the system, along the way (who wrote or published their texts in exile, respectively those who resorted to subtle strategies, to allusions and symbols, to humorous representation, so that their works would pass censorship, without creating suspicions of criticism against the party) –, several categories of filmmakers are also established within the work, depending on the thematic interests in the films and the preferred policies. First, we can talk about filmmakers who, regardless of the chosen subject, stand out by adopting a policy of excess, ostentatiously exposing, in their films, previously tabooed imaginary elements (for example: religion, sexuality, the depths of the human psyche, dysfunctions at a societal level), in complex approaches to revealing the lesser-known dimension of the Romanian socialist regime. Second, we highlight directors who explore in cinema important historical events for Romania, from periods towards which hostility was manifested by the socialist leadership, therefore forbidden in certain decades (the annexation of the Quadrilateral by the Romanians, collectivization, the construction of the Danube-Black Sea canal, forced Sovietization). The relationship to the dominant imaginary elements of the era varies from one director to another, the essential aspect that distinguishes them being the difference in tone: from directness and lack of empathy, to detached, nostalgic-ironic approaches to the past.

As is evident from the process of inventorying texts published during the years of Romanian communism, which were adapted for cinema after 1989, the directors appealed to both works in which the writers proved to be followers of the socialist regime, as well as hostile to it. The biographical details mentioned in the subchapters intended for parallel text-film analyses highlight the relationship between writers and Power, which, in most cases, was not a constant one, throughout their entire lives, but underwent mutations, depending on certain constraints or, on the contrary, privileges, which the authors had. The three categories of adapted writers postulated do not imply the assumption that the respective hierarchy would function carried over to their entire lives or bibliography, but it is considered that the division is justified and relevant strictly regarding the texts that were recovered in subsequent cinematographic efforts. In establishing the categories, the opinions, both consensual and polemical, of critics are also considered, regarding the place where the writers were placed in the literary and ideological constellation, from the point of view of their relationship with Power.

In the cinematic panorama of the 1990s and the extension after 2000, from the point of view of thematic interests, a series of directors stand out who, in their intermediate approaches, chose to bring the socialist period back to the public's attention, most of them imbuing their films with an anti-communist perspective. Critics highlight the fact that it is equally surprising and expected to return, through art, to the period of the almost fifty years of totalitarian regime that Romania experienced. At the same time, what is pointed out by some of the exegetes and verified in the analyses in this paper is whether and to what extent, in the film adaptations, as is the case with most films (which are not screen adaptations) from the 1990s, the directors restore the years of communism from a critical perspective, or whether we can speak, in some cases, equally, about a conciliatory, tolerant (re)mediation towards the period in question.

Indulgent perspectives on communism are rarely revealed in adaptation films, and if this approach is nevertheless subtly outlined in the case of a few films, this becomes possible in productions made at a greater temporal distance, such as, for example, the case of Titus Muntean's 2009 *Cinematic Caravan*. As demonstrated in the paper, cases such as the adaptation of Ioan Groșan's text are exceptions, since, even almost 30 years after the year of the change of the totalitarian regime to the democratic one, there are situations in which the anti-communist perspective imprinted by film directors is as virulent as in the first years after the Revolution. Stere Gulea's *Moromeții 2*, and even *Moromeții 3*, retain their explicit anti-communist character – a direction harshly criticized in recent studies. Within these, in the logic of the theoretical approach in this paper, one can observe an implicit adherence of many of the critics to a discourse that addresses the issue of the fidelity of films to the source texts – a controversial perspective, in adaptation theories and in the vision of specialists in the field. It also becomes relevant how a certain status of directors during communism proved to have an impact on the narrative perspective that they used in the films following the fall of the Iron Curtain, after the entire so-called “Eastern bloc” initiated the transition to democracy. The cases of the two directors mentioned are illustrative by their antipodal location, from the point of view of perspective. Even if, in the case of both, we can speak of anti-communism, Gulea's critical approach is one dominated by sobriety, and Muntean's appears as tolerant, empathetic, and imbued with humor.

The motivation for these differences in vision, both extrinsic and intrinsic, has its source in the directors' experience with the two different ideological regimes: the aesthetic component (the degree of freedom in expressing the artistic vision) and the economic component (support,

financing of filmmakers' endeavors). Some directors manage to obtain freedom of expression during communism, speculating contexts with the potential to deliver the desired message, in a veiled, parabolic form, of "lizards" - in the sense of Lev Loseff, namely, truths with the potential to destruct state policy. Others operate within the limits of the system, which is why they cannot be included in the category of filmmakers "persecuted" during the Regime. Most often, these are the ones who return after 1989 with explicitly or implicitly anti-communist visions, which could be justified by the attempt to balance their work in post-communism, after the compromises imposed on them by the working context before 1989.

In some of the text-film pairs addressed, the way in which the post-1989 directors choose to reconstitute the image of the communist past is implicitly conditioned by previous biographical experience. The types of dominant perspectives identified in the adaptation films that are part of the corpus of the doctoral thesis are synthesized by generic labels: *fatalistic perspectives* – which emphasize the illustration of the irremediable impact that the actions of the communist years had on the (psyche) of the individual, but also on the entire society (many of them appear, in the first part of the 1990s: in Mircea Daneliuc, in *Passions after Pitești*, in Visarion Alexa, in *The Guilty*, in Laurențiu Damian's *The Road of Dogs* or even in Horia Popescu, for the idea of a damaged, malformed human psyche); *critical-realistic perspectives* – in which everyday reality is lucidly exposed or in which reality is opposed by compensatory universes, dreamlike visions (in films that appeared until the end of the decade of the 1990s, with expansion in the 2000s: in Coppola, for example, or in Nicolae Mărgineanu, in all three films discussed, in Dan Pița, in *I am Adam!*, in Ioan Cărmăzan, in *The House from the Dream*, or even in Marinescu and Gulea, who exploit the idea of reality, through the prism of reflective characters); detached perspectives – on the one hand, through playful-ironic or satirical approaches to the realities of communism (Titus Muntean's *Cinematographic Caravan* or Lucian Pintilie's *The Oak*) and, on the other hand, through distancing oneself from the socialist imaginary and by choosing to represent other historical periods (also in Lucian Pintilie, in the adaptation of *An Unforgettable Summer*).

The theoretical component of the work, which tests the way in which the conceptual apparatus postulated by international specialists in the field of cultural adaptation and intermediation studies is instrumented in the Romanian critical space, facilitates the understanding, on the one hand, of the perspective from which the intermedial process (the transition from text to film) is viewed, in the autochthonous perimeter, and, on the other hand, of the way in which critical

discourse is constructed. The hermeneutic and contextual approaches (which aim to observe the way in which a cultural consciousness is constructed through discourse) are carried out in parallel with the critical and metacritical approaches. The latter reveal the conceptual repertoire favored in the Romanian scientific space, at the level of the humanities, providing, at the same time, a relevant interpretative grid for the way of understanding the adaptation process related to each pair of artistic products, in particular, but also with regard to the phenomenon, in a general sense. By assuming an analytical practice that leads to treating the artistic products approached as autonomous, self-contained works (despite the claim to/reference to a consecrated literary text), the way of constructing the discourse about the socialist era, both in literary and audiovisual narrative, is subject to observation, with an emphasis on discrepancies, correspondences, intertexts and, above all, by operating a contextual reading.

As demonstrated, the anti-communist perspective is present, in different forms and levels, in all the adaptation films that appeared after the Revolution. The directors who are part of the corpus of this work affiliate themselves with a tendency that, as the criticism postulates, was manifested in the case of most of the cinematographic productions of the transition, from the 1990s and even from the period after it. It can thus be observed that in the audiovisual products after 1989 that are based on texts published during the years of communism there is (within the limits of the permissiveness of the literary work) a tendency to accentuate a hostility towards the period before the Revolution, from the perspective of the socio-political and ideological context of the present of the production of the screen adaptations.

The perspective generically called "anti-communist" reveals itself in an original way, in relation to the established style of each director: *through a vehement opposition*, reflected in the creation by the filmmakers of an imaginary of deflation, *by offering alternatives* to the oppressive, restrictive everyday environment, manifested by the exploitation of the mystical component, of compensatory universes or *by the critical, reflexive distancing* from the period in question, characterized by the imprinting of a detached perspective and by the adoption of an ironic, humorous tone. Even in situations in which the opposition between the ideological vision before 1989 and that after the Revolution is not evident, it is relevant, by omission, reflecting a certain appetite for the socialist imaginary given by the biography and, at the same time, by the filmographic history of the director, or by some of the stages of the production process and the regime in which they were carried out, as we have shown in the previous chapters. The differences

in tone and perspective therefore stem from objective reasons (economic conditions, relationship with production houses, expectations from the audience), but especially subjective ones (the director's biography, experience with the Regime, his own hermeneutic approach to the text, preference for a particular writer). In an antiphrastic expression, also taking over the subtitle of an important article about the cinema of the 1990s, in the cultural landscape of democratic Romania, anti-communism seems to have become "our secret recipe"².

The adaptation process must be understood as a whole, within the broad mechanism that includes the literary text, the resulting film, the literary levels developed in the audio-visual environment, the ways of rendering, of cinematic interpretation of certain elements of the text, the vision of literature, the vision of the film, the competition of the perspectives of directors and critics regarding the definition of adaptation, etc. For multiple reasons, aligned with the trends of the years when the films appeared or opposed to them, justifiable or not by the biographies of the directors or by the status of the writers, from the perspective of the way of relating to socialist cultural policies, adaptation efforts prove to be essential for the cultural field and, especially, the interdisciplinary one approached, from several points of view.

First, it helps to understand the imaginary interests of directors (and, implicitly, of the public), in the period after the Revolution. Second, it contributes to the creation of an inventory of authors, who became or remained relevant after '89, who were or were not frequented, alike, after the change of regime, and to the shaping of an image of the competing mentalities in the post-December Romanian space, revealed precisely through the prism of these choices. Third, it contributes to highlighting the extent to which, in the critical discourse about films in the Romanian cultural space, the theoretical tools offered by studies related to the fields of adaptation and intermediality are used. Equally, it provides an overview of the degree of conceptual update and preferences of Romanian exegesis, as well as revealing the usefulness of a certain type of toolkit for approaching cultural objects from the native space, in the specific context, with effects in terms of reflecting the societal level. Fourth, it helps illustrate how the vision of directors changed when

² With this phrase, I refer to the title of the documentary made by Alexandru Solomon in 2010, "Capitalism - our secret recipe", which aims to describe the transition period in Romania, from communism to democracy (with an emphasis on the original meaning that, in the Romanian space, the two ideological attributes received). Equally, I take the title of the chapter written by Claudiu Turcuș, in the anthology coordinated by Andrei Gorzo, to which reference has been made repeatedly in this work.

moving from a restrictive to a permissive regime, from socialism to democracy. Cinema has the potential to de-ideologize and, at the same time, re-ideologize literature.

This work makes a significant contribution in terms of increasing openness in research for the interdisciplinary component, in the field of humanities and beyond. The integrated approach of literature and cinema, as well as other associated forms of representation, favors the in-depth understanding of different artistic currents and historical periods, manifested within the same cultural, socio-political and ideological area and which refer to a common imaginary. Interdisciplinary approaches favor the establishment of functional grids for understanding and structuring phenomena manifested on different disciplinary levels, but which converge towards a core of common meaning.

In the present research, adaptation (seen as a product, but also as a process) proves to be a mechanism that facilitates the recomposition of the ideational panorama regarding the recent past. Through the fusion of literary and audiovisual means, the necessary context is created for the analysis and mapping of mental aspects and societal particularities, at the intersection between the socialist period, the first decade after the Revolution, and the present of the beginning of the third millennium. In Romanian literature, there were writers interested in cultivating textual ambiguities, which functioned as openings towards a polemical imaginary against communist ideology. It is revealed that this context, of the subversive character of the works, facilitated the possibility for directors to reread, with the help of the instruments of cinematography, the imprints of cultural memory represented by literature. At the same time, from here arose the possibility of achieving one of the main goals of this work, namely the establishment of textual typologies and cinematic adaptations, together with observing the way in which the past is recovered by filmmakers – in tune with the intentions of the author of the text or, on the contrary, by nuanced perspective, polemicizing with it.

The approach taken in this paper also provides an opportunity to continue the investigation. This starts from a question: when the adaptations produced after 1989 are analyzed, in an ideological key, and the degree of de-ideologization imprinted on the films is tracked, compared to the source texts and the communist context, is it not implicit that the very construction of a new, audiovisual, “democratic”/ “capitalist” perspective represents a process of re-ideologization? Likewise, is the anti-communist perspective imprinted on the films entirely due to the

disappearance of Censorship and the change of regime, or can it be justified by a specificity of the film of adaptation to the environment and of the director, of adaptation to the context?