

# *The Power and The Truth. A Film. A National Project*

**Ion INDOLEAN**

*Babeş-Bolyai University, Faculty of History and Philosophy*

E-mail: ion.indolean@ubbcluj.ro

**Abstract:** This article tries to understand what type of film is approved by the Nicolae Ceauşescu regime and how it is promoted, through various propaganda channels. In this sense, we choose to discuss the film made by the artistic couple Manole Marcus - Titus Popovici, *The Power and The Truth* (1972), and we resort to a content analysis to understand the way it was made. We are also interested in the echoes of the film in the press of the time and how with the help of newspaper articles the authorities inoculate the idea that this film is the most important cinematographic achievement of the moment, a benchmark for political productions to be made from that point on.

**Keywords:** Cinematography, Political Film, Nicolae Ceauşescu, Manole Marcus, Titus Popovici, Propaganda

**Rezumat:** Articolul de față încearcă să înţeleagă ce tip de film este agreat de către regimul Nicolae Ceauşescu şi în ce fel se promovează acesta, prin diversele canale de propagandă. În acest sens, alegem să discutăm filmul realizat de cuplul artistic Manole Marcus - Titus Popovici, *Puterea şi Adevărul* (1972), şi recurgem la o analiză de conţinut pentru a înţelege felul în care este realizat. De asemenea, ne interesează ecourile filmului în presa vremii şi cum cu ajutorul unor articole comandate de autorităţi se inoculează ideea că acest film reprezintă cea mai importantă realizare cinematografică a momentului, un etalon pentru producţiile politice care trebuie făcute din acest moment încolo.

**Cuvinte cheie:** cinematografie, film politic, Nicolae Ceauşescu, Manole Marcus, Titus Popovici, propagandă

In 1972, when it was released, the subject of *The Power and The Truth* (original title: "*Puterea şi adevărul*") represented a premiere for the history of Romanian cinematography. Conceived as a contemporary epic, easy to understand and with a strong moral message, the film directed by Manole Marcus and written by Titus Popovici tells the story of a young politician, Mihai Duma (Ion Besoiu), who instigates the abusive arrest of the engineer Petre Petrescu (Amza Pellea), an immoral act commissioned by the Communist Party's fictional Prime-Secretary, named Pavel Stoian (Mircea Albulescu).

This article will try to reconstruct the production process of this film and explain its importance for socialist Romanian society, as well as explore its impact on the cinematography of the 1970s and 1980s. Given that it was a project of great importance for the new power in Bucharest, led by Nicolae Ceaușescu, the main question of this article is why and in what way the authorities of the early 1970s wanted *The Power and The Truth* to be produced and then delivered as the event-film of the moment. At the same time, the study seeks to argue that the film heralded a specific genre dedicated to the investigation against Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's political regime and inspired a series of similar endeavors within Romanian cinematography. In this context, the new authority wished to ensure that the film would be received in accordance with the intentions with which it was conceived and made, those of challenging and distancing themselves from some past actions, considered abusive, ordered during the period between the taking over of power by the Communists in the mid-1940s and the death of Gheorghiu-Dej in 1965. In order to succeed with its ideological plan for this film, the Communist Party's propaganda apparatus used the potential of the specialized printed medium and pointed out quite clearly, with the help of *Cinema* magazine, the way *The Power and The Truth* had to be seen and received by the broader public in order to shape its opinions. After this moment, a series of other similar films on the same generous topic would be produced in the years to come.<sup>1</sup> This means *The Power and The Truth* proposed a standard to be followed – or, in other words, a prototype, a mold for the productions circumscribed to this genre in the making.

### Historical background

To better understand the situation of the mid-1960s to early 1970s in Romania, one needs to set out some important moments in Nicolae Ceaușescu's career prior to becoming the Communist Party's Prime-Secretary.

The existing literature suggests that Ceaușescu became in 1952 a member of the Central Committee (C.C.) of the Romanian Workers' Party (in original, "*Partidul Muncitoresc Român*", PMR) – while only 34 years old – and then, on 19 April 1954 he was promoted as secretary of the C.C. and a supplant member of the Political Bureau.<sup>2</sup> In 1960, he was reconfirmed in these two important positions. Meanwhile, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej was Prime-Secretary of the Romanian Workers' Party.

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<sup>1</sup> Examples include *Clipa* (*The Moment*, Gheorghe Vitanidis, 1979), *Orgolii* (*Pride*, Manole Marcus, 1980), *O lumină la etajul zece* (*The Light on the 10th Floor*, Malvina Urșianu, 1984), *Imposibila iubire* (*Impossible Love*, Constantin Vaeni, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Adam Burakowski, *Dictatura lui Nicolae Ceaușescu 1965-1989* [The Dictatorship of Nicolae Ceaușescu 1965-1989] (Iași: Polirom, 2016), p. 71.

According to Adam Burakowski, before 1965, the organizational function within the C.C. helped Ceaușescu in building his own system of feudal relations, promoting his devotees and removing from office the supporters of the other members of the Party and State leadership.<sup>3</sup> This strengthened Ceaușescu's position when on March 19<sup>th</sup> 1965 Gheorghiu-Dej suddenly died due to liver cancer. Three days later, Ceaușescu was appointed as the new leader of the Party and thus managed to defeat the other contenders as the head of state. Shortly after he climbed to the top of Romania's political hierarchy, the new Prime-Secretary ordered, on October 21, 1965, the establishment of a rehabilitation commission for the formerly important Party member Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, a victim of the struggles within the Party hierarchy in the 1950s. This was a strategic move through which Ceaușescu could and did attack all his political opponents, now his underlings within the hierarchy. They were the party activists who had been involved in the trial and execution of Pătrășcanu, between 1948 and 1954. At the same time, the rehabilitation of Pătrășcanu, a supporter of the left, but also an intellectual, could serve Ceaușescu well by improving his image and enlisting the support of the intelligentsia, until recently abused, deported, arrested, sent to the enforced labor camps (the Danube channel) or reeducation centers or even killed.<sup>4</sup> It was a time when this social segment was allowed and even invited to officially join the Communist Party.

According to historians such as Vladimir Tismăneanu<sup>5</sup> and Cristian Vasile,<sup>6</sup> the removal of politicians who were important in the Dej regime and who no longer corresponded to the new situation became a frequent occurrence. Ceaușescu gradually acquired all political power, following some clever decisions. The Prime-Secretary promoted a series of close-knit, young minions he had worked with before 1965. To (t)his power consolidation, whose bases were cemented between 1965 and 1967, he added the favorable moment of the Prague spring 1968, when he publicly opposed the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia. This was seen by the world as a courageous act that elicited the sympathy of Western Society<sup>7</sup> and which, discreetly, allowed Ceaușescu more freedom nationwide. He was able by that time to discard or demote even some of the collaborators who

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<sup>3</sup> Burakowski, *Dictatura*, p. 69.

<sup>4</sup> Mihai Bărbulescu et al., *Istoria României* [The History of Romania] (București: Editura Enciclopedică, 1998), pp. 502-509. The subchapter entitled *Munca forțată* [Forced labor].

<sup>5</sup> Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate; o istorie politică a comunismului românesc* [Stalinism for eternity; a political history of Romanian communism], (Iași: Polirom, 2005), p. 251.

<sup>6</sup> Cristian Vasile, *Viața intelectuală și artistică în primul deceniu al regimului Ceaușescu*, [Intellectual and Artistic Life in the First Decade of Ceaușescu's Regime] (București: Humanitas, 2014), p. 30

<sup>7</sup> Bărbulescu et al., *Istoria României*, p. 537.

had facilitated his ascension. For example, such "victims" were Vasile Patilineț and Grigore Răduică, who, after working on the commission for the rehabilitation of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, could have become dangerous because they "knew too much".<sup>8</sup> Ceaușescu set out a scheme called *personnel rotation* (in original, "*rotația cadrelor*"), ensuring that no one became too strong or independent. Consequently, almost all of his collaborators from the Central Committee period ended up in unimportant positions.<sup>9</sup>

In July 1971, returning from a diplomatic visit to China and North Korea, Ceaușescu presented the famous *July Theses*, which would lead to a cultural revolution in the country. This maneuver was rendered possible because of Romania's stronger diplomatic ties with the People's Republic of China, who wanted to gather information about the situation of the Warsaw Pact.<sup>10</sup> Romania's goal was to obtain the role of mediator between the United States, China and the USSR. In fact, many of the socialist countries pursued this diplomatic international position.<sup>11</sup> After returning from the Asian countries, Ceaușescu underlined that Beijing leaders could proudly claim that everything was produced by them in their country.<sup>12</sup> The leader from Bucharest was looking to emulate this Eastern model. The July Theses set out more clearly the break-up at the declarative level with the Soviet Union and a pursuit of strengthening the national character of the state.<sup>13</sup> Ceaușescu wanted to implement this Cultural Revolution in a more subtle way, by persuading his own population and without making an enemy out of USSR. He tried to preserve appearances and resorted to a double standard in his internal and external attitudes and affairs. He sought to abandon brutal and forceful actions, especially those specific to the so-called *obsessive decade* – this syntagm refers to the 1950s and represents a metaphor forged by Ceaușescu's propaganda – and to promote his ideas so that they would be voluntarily accepted by the population and nomenclature. This liberalization in all areas of activity, and especially in culture, was still closely supervised by the Party's ideologues.<sup>14</sup> In fact, the Administration just gave the impression of cultural and social liberty.

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<sup>8</sup> Burakowski, *Dictatura*, p. 217.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Mihai Croitor, *România și conflictul Sovieto-Chinez (1956-1971)* [Romania and the Sino-Soviet Conflict (1956-1971)], (Cluj-Napoca: Mega, 2014), p. 4.

<sup>11</sup> Burakowski, *Dictatura*, p. 178.

<sup>12</sup> București, ANIC, CC PCR Cancelarie DS 72/1971, *Stenograma ședinței Comitetului Executiv al CC al PCR din ziua de 25 iunie 1971* [Verbatim Report of the Executive Committee of the CC of the PCR on 25 June 1971], pp. 2-18.

<sup>13</sup> Katherine Verdery, *Compromis și rezistență: cultura română sub Ceaușescu*, (București: Humanitas, 1994), pp. 21-22.

<sup>14</sup> Burakowski, *Dictatura*, p. 101.

In order to promote these new Cultural policies, Ceaușescu also used the propagandistic potential of cinema. Officials in charge of cultural production sought to commission films on contemporary subjects, which should portray a prosperous Romania, and also historical films, which would assign Ceaușescu the position of heir to what in Romanian is known as "românitate" – meaning the Romanian character of the Romanian nation. Therefore, the Studios produced epic historical films like *Dacii* (*The Dacians*, Sergiu Nicolaescu, 1967), *Columna* (*Trajan's Column*, Mircea Drăgan, 1968), *Mihai Viteazul* (*Michael the Brave*, Sergiu Nicolaescu, 1971), *Nemuritorii* (*The Immortals*, Sergiu Nicolaescu, 1974), *Vlad Țepeș* (*Vlad the Impaler: The True Life of Dracula*, Doru Nastase, 1979), *Mircea* (*Proud Heritage*, Sergiu Nicolaescu, 1989) etc. These films speak about brave and patriotic indigenous historical leaders fighting against foreign enemies who wanted to alienate our native traditions and habits.<sup>15</sup>

At the borderline of these two cinematographic genres (contemporary, respectively historical subjects), an equally important one was born, characteristic of a totalitarian system that attacked previous values to validate its present, as compared to a condemned and condemnable past. This subgenre, which can be called the *investigation and proscription of the Gheorghiu-Dej regime*, lies on the border between historical and contemporary topics because it speaks about a past event but from a present point of view. These films try to depict negative moments from the previous regime in order to show that the Romanian nation is now living a better life and has to overcome fewer restrictions and persecutions.

This is why *The Power and The Truth* opened, both chronologically and as an ideological model, this subgenre of political films condemning the recent past. The film does not belong to the films on contemporary subjects because it talks about a past reality and it was conceived according to the exigencies of

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<sup>15</sup> A competent analysis of these movies is made by Aurelia Vasile, *Le cinéma roumain dans la période communiste. Représentations de l'histoire nationale* (Volume 1) [Romanian Cinema During the Communist Period. Representations of National History (Volume 1)], PhD Dissertation, Manuscript, Université de Bourgogne, UFR Sciences humaines. Université de Bucarest, Faculte d'Histoire, 2011. Vasile analyzes the films *Tudor*, *Dacii*, *Columna* and *Mihai Viteazul*.

Other authors who have written about historical films produced in communism are:

Cristian Tudor Popescu, *Filmul surd în România mută. Politică și propagandă în filmul românesc de ficțiune (1912-1989)* [The Deaf Film in Mute Romania. Politics and Propaganda in the Romanian Fiction Film (1912-1989)] (Iași: Polirom, 2011);

Călin Căliman, *Istoria filmului românesc 1987-2000* [The History of Romanian Film (1897-2000)] (București: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 2000);

Bogdan Jitea, *Dizidență și conformism în cinematografia lui Nicolae Ceaușescu* [Dissidence and conformism in the cinema of Nicolae Ceaușescu], PhD Dissertation, Manuscript, Facultatea de Istorie, Universitatea din București, 2012.

a historical film, but this does not automatically include it among the historical epics, because its subject is too close to the present, a mere two decades before the 1970s, to truly give a sense of the historical past. This unique character turns *The Power and The Truth* into a serial head for this distinct, newly created genre. A strong argument in favor of this point of view is linked to the fact that some other films with the same purpose of accusing the Dej regime would be produced in the following years: *Clipa* (*The Moment*, Gheorghe Vitanidis, 1979), *Orgolii* (*Hubris*, Manole Marcus, 1980), *O lumină la etajul zece* (*The Light on the Tenth Floor*, Malvina Urșianu, 1984), *Imposibila iubire* (*Impossible Love*, Constantin Vaeni, 1984).

### **Assembling the Power and the Truth**

A cinematic tale such as *The Power and The Truth*, dedicated to Party life, inside which some (past) official practices are highlighted and criticized, was completely unthinkable before 1965, during Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej's ruling of the country. But when Nicolae Ceaușescu came to power, things slightly changed. There were several reasons why the new Prime-Secretary wanted such a movie.

First, *The Power and The Truth* could be a fruitful source of incriminating various abusive practices ordered by Dej along with certain other officials. At the same time, Ceaușescu could validate, by comparison, his own attitude and image as a progressive leader interested in publicly debating the Party's failures and trying to overcome them. At the same time, *The Power and The Truth* opened this new genre in Romanian cinematography, that is to say the "political film", which created the illusion of freedom of expression in a society normally stifled by silence where such topics, i.e. politics were forbidden.

At official level, the preparation of this project began no later than 1968.<sup>16</sup> In the report prepared for the meeting of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party (P.C.R.) on May 23, there was a script entitled "Road without detours" (in original, "*Drum fără ocoluri*").<sup>17</sup> The story was written by Titus Popovici and Francisc Munteanu and was to be directed by the latter. In the project sheet, we can identify details of the narrative of *The Power and The Truth*. But at that moment (1968), the project

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<sup>16</sup> We say "no later than", because the idea might have been planted even earlier in the minds of the new political decision-makers led by Nicolae Ceaușescu. We have reason to believe that, in fact, Ceaușescu wanted this film right from the first days as Prime-Secretary, since he set up the Commission for the rehabilitation of Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu a few weeks after taking over power.

<sup>17</sup> București, ANIC, CC PCR Cancelarie DS 88/1968, *Stenograma ședinței Comisiei ideologice a CC al PCR din ziua de 23 mai 1968* [The Verbatim of the Meeting of the CC of the CC of the 23rd May 1968 Ideological Commission], p. 204.

had not reached its full grandiose scale. Things would escalate, its importance would increase and the director appointed to sign it would change, as we shall see in 1971-1972. Initially, in 1968, the film seems to have been narratively poorer and more ideologically schematized: it only considered the brief presentation of the path trod by a communist, "from a simple activist, in 1944, to the secretary of a county committee, in our time",<sup>18</sup> a fact which allowed "the outlining of an ample picture of the development of socialist Romania".<sup>19</sup> Although the objective of this project was indeed a political one, the 1968 version of the film did not benefit from a powerful and conflictual narrative, being rather lifeless and too conventional. At the same time, there were no critical references to the Dej regime, because the narrative was kept neutral, while it sedately followed the development of an activist's career. In the form to be presented four years later, *The Power and The Truth* contained not only extra tension, but even serious polemics and accusations against the previous regime. From a purely expositive narrative about the development of socialism during the first two decades in Romania, the Popovici-Marcus creative couple would be able to build a wide-ranging political debate. It is important, however, to note that, from the very beginning, this project was intended to be made in a "wide-screen, color"<sup>20</sup> format, according to the 1968 report. This attests the importance of the project for the officials, who seemed to invest a lot of hope in *The Power and The Truth*. Probably, the change and radicalization of their attitude and views, regarding Dej, occurred while acknowledging the need to validate their own regime and following their increased political power. However, in order to validate themselves, the authorities understood they must dissociate themselves in a very concrete way from Gheorghiu-Dej's regime – not just by ignoring past events, but also by confronting them publicly.

Half a year after the meeting of the C.C. of P.C.R. on May 23, this project was further developed. On January 29, 1969, during a formal meeting held at the top of P.C.R., politicians such as Nicolae Ceaușescu, Paul Niculescu-Mizil, Manea Mănescu, Leonte Răutu, Dumitru Popescu, Pompiliu Macovei and Ion Brad debated the possibility of actually producing this film. The meeting demonstrated the importance attributed to it. There was a moment during the conversation when, not fully convinced by the script written by Titus Popovici and Francisc Munteanu, Niculescu-Mizil took the floor and argued that such a subject required further debate inside the political apparatus, suggesting that it was something that went beyond

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<sup>18</sup> București, ANIC, CC PCR Cancelarie DS 88/1968, *Stenograma ședinței*, p. 204.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

cinematography and artists' area of competence.<sup>21</sup> Ion Brad and Dumitru Popescu supported this position, explaining that scriptwriters had tried indeed to respect the historical truth, which is why they should be appreciated, but their approach was incorrect or rather inaccurate, so they would have to work some more on the subject. Niculescu-Mizil was not very specific when he asserted his opinion, but we can think that in fact the inaccuracy he mentioned was related to the fact that the script did not render the events in the way the new power wanted them to be presented. Ceaușescu intervened and demanded that two moments had to necessarily be included in the film: the Comintern's interference in Romania's internal affairs led by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and the destruction, after the death of the Soviet leader, of a Stalin statue placed in Romania – as a symbolic gesture of defiance against Moscow's influence.<sup>22</sup> However, in the final version of the film, the two moments would not appear. This may mean – as historian Aurelia Vasile speculates<sup>23</sup> – that, at that moment Ceaușescu did not have the full powers that he would acquire later and that other politicians' opinion was as important as his.

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Filming for this production began in 1970. After a few months, its officials publicly announced the existence and importance of the film which was still to come. In *Cinema* magazine, issue 3/1971, *The Power and The Truth* was presented in an ample reportage<sup>24</sup> entitled "A modern epopee" – which evidently spoke about the grandeur of the film. The text expressed the delight that one could "finally" speak, here, in Romania, about "a political movie".<sup>25</sup> Director Manole Marcus shared his thoughts, but he seemed fairly cautious and careful, perhaps fearful of saying something which would not be in total agreement with the Party's position:

"We make this film with passion because it's about our generation [...] we see what was and is fundamentally positive, but also the negative aspects and the mistakes we have made."<sup>26</sup>

Marcus then continued by pointing out the historical and political importance of *The Power and The Truth*:

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<sup>21</sup> Aurelia Vasile, *Le cinéma roumain*, p. 188. Apud București, ANIC, CC PCR Cancelarie DS 10/1969, *Stenograma ședinței Secretariatului CC al PCR: 29 ianurie 1969* [Verbatim Report of the PCR CC Secretariat Meeting: Jan. 29, 1969], p. 34.

<sup>22</sup> We have not been able to identify what statue it is or where it was located. București, ANIC, CC PCR Cancelarie DS 10/1969, *Stenograma ședinței Secretariatului CC al PCR: 29 ianurie 1969* [Verbatim Report of the PCR CC Secretariat Meeting: Jan. 29, 1969], p. 34.

<sup>23</sup> Aurelia Vasile, *Le cinéma roumain*, p. 189.

<sup>24</sup> *Cinema* magazine, 3/1971: 4-7.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



"[...] the film will be presented in the year we celebrate the 50th anniversary of our Communist Party. It will have more of a romantic character but also a strongly realistic one."<sup>27</sup>

Here, Marcus succeeded in doing two things at the same time: under the guise of a contradiction (would the film be elusive or accurate, we can't tell from his statement), he was really trying not to fully compromise himself by a very positive speech regarding the film and its subject. Marcus cautiously adopted a rather sober, neutral and vague attitude. He concluded with a remark that tended to explain the position of the Party rather than his own, a position he accepted mechanically, although perhaps he did not believe in it:

"We do not have «negative characters» and «positive characters» in this film. In a way, everyone is right, though not always. However, there are no demonic characters. Even those who are seriously mistaken have good intentions. They all came out very pure from the bourgeois prison, with the ardent desire to do everything until the end of their lives, to succeed in the idea of justice and freedom to which they had already given their youth."<sup>28</sup>

Again, we can see in Marcus' words the fear of committing political errors: he chose a negation ("We do not have") instead of promoting the film through an affirmation.<sup>29</sup> The director, perhaps unconsciously, mentioned the negative character in the first place. When he first alluded to the "negative" characters, we can speculate that he did not have a good opinion about them and, in fact, of the whole political system presented in *The Power and The Truth*. But because a certain position was imposed on him, he tried to believe in his heroes and absolved them of any faults. He explains their mistakes through a perhaps insane, but pure desire of doing everything in a very short time. So the only thing that could be imputed to an abusive and brutal leader like Pavel Stoian was not being too organized, but rather politically unprepared, therefore making serious errors of judgment. By adopting this neutrality, director Manole Marcus did not fall into total submissiveness, but managed to maintain himself in the sphere of the professional carrying out a contract without wanting to thoroughly evaluate his superiors' arguments and hidden agenda. He could always say, in his defense, that he was just a soldier following orders.

## **Ideology**

The special attention paid by the Communist Party to *The Power and The Truth* was interrelated to its sociopolitical and cinematographic mission.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> *Cinema* magazine, 3/1971: 4-7.

<sup>29</sup> Because the statement would have sounded like this: "we have only ambiguous, indecisive, opportunistic characters in this film..." which would have not worked well for the regime.

This film had to set an example for society as well as for filmmakers who would continue to make thematically similar films.

That is why the assembly of these new Powers and Truths had to be perfect. The formula was simple: one took the most credible and well-known actors, engaged a capable director without any trace of dissenting or uncooperative personal ambitions, Manole Marcus, and chose the best political scriptwriter, Titus Popovici, who was also a man of the Party:<sup>30</sup> loyal and interested in achieving a good social position. If Popovici was at that moment one of the Party's house writers – with novels such as *Străinul* (The Stranger) or *Setea* (The Thirst) and with scripts for successful movies like *La Moara cu noroc* (The Mill of Good Luck, Victor Iliu, 1957), *Valurile Dunării* (The Danube Waves, Liviu Ciulei, 1959), *Setea* (Thirst, Mircea Drăgan, Mihai Iacob, 1960), *Străinul* (The Stranger, Mihai Iacob, 1964), *Pădurea spânzuraților* (The Forest of the Hanged, Liviu Ciulei, 1965), *Dacii* (The Dacians, Sergiu Nicolaescu, 1967), *Columna* (Trajan's Column, Mircea Drăgan, 1968), *Mihai Viteazul* (Michael the Brave, Sergiu Nicolaescu, 1971) –, Marcus registered fewer achievements in the eyes of the Authority up until that point, having had a rather tumultuous start in his cinematographic career. In 1957, more than a decade before this moment, he should have debuted with a feature entitled *Viața nu iartă* (Life Doesn't Spare), but the film was harshly censored and it was released in cinemas only two years after its preproduction, in 1959.<sup>31</sup> Once this event was over, he seems to have left aside any sensitive subjects and took refuge in topics accepted by the Party. *Nu vreau să mă-nsoz* (I Don't Want to Get Married, 1960), *Cartierul veseliei* (The District of Gaiety, 1964) or *Canarul și viscolul* (The Canary and the Snowstorm, 1969) would give him the status of an introspective director, sensitive to the psychological traits of his characters, but at the same time a non-polemical professional who worked with what he was offered and did not resort to extravagant gestures which could be against the Party's wishes. This adaptable spirit, combined with artistic talent, seem to have represented the main reasons why Marcus got the chance to direct *The Power and The Truth*. He was an experienced filmmaker who knew how to delicately introduce ethical debates and political polemics in his works.

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In chronological order, the narrative of *The Power and The Truth* begins when Romania fought in the Second World War and was led by Marshal Ion

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<sup>30</sup> Anca Vladislav-Mihuț (Hassoun), TITUS POPOVICI. *Studiu monografic (Prozatorul și pericolul joc al extremelor)* [TITUS POPOVICI. Monographic Study (The Author and the Dangerous Game of Extremes)], PhD Dissertation, Manuscript, Facultatea de Istorie și Filologie, Universitatea „1 Decembrie 1918”, Alba Iulia, 2016.

<sup>31</sup> Valerian Sava, *Noul Cinema* issue 4/1993. Mircea Mureșan is also talking about this episode in an interview he gives in *Cinema* magazine, 7/1968: 12-13.

Antonescu along with the Legionary Movement. This means that the narrative takes place somewhere between the end of 1940 and the beginning of 1941. For the Communists, this contrast is opportune and favorable. They used the negative symbolism of the extreme right to validate their own actions. In this way, the suggestion is that they have taken the power from a handful of criminals for the good of the Romanian people. The story of the film continues for more than two decades until the end of the 1960s and includes significant moments such as the arrival of the Soviet Army in Romania, the full takeover of power by the Communists in 1948, the expulsion of King Mihai I, the nationalization of private property, all presented as accomplishments for the country. There are some references – some clearer and some pretty vague – allowing spectators to pinpoint various events within the given chronological span.

If we think of the historical context of the period, we can assume that the heroes of the film are references to the real characters of the time: Duma is Nicolae Ceaușescu, Stoian is Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, and Petrescu is Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu,<sup>32</sup> executed in 1954 at Dej's orders. As we already pointed out, Pătrășcanu was a top member of the Romanian Workers' Party (P.M.R.) until 1948. Back then, a young Ceaușescu didn't have so much political power and was yet to gain decisional capacities. Pătrășcanu's ordeal began with the loss of his seat in the Central Committee at the P.M.R. Congress without being allowed to speak to defend himself,<sup>33</sup> after which he was imprisoned, interrogated and questioned for six years and eventually executed by gunfire at Jilava penitentiary, far away from the public's knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

For *The Power and The Truth*, Pătrășcanu's case is very important. The story works selectively with the historical facts. Duma (Ceaușescu) was no longer just in the middle of the political hierarchy, but instead had a key

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<sup>32</sup> Maria Neagu, 'Tovarășă a murit, dar personajul Elena Ceaușescu trăiește. Ipostaze inedite în filme, cărți, piese de teatru' [The Comrade died, but Elena Ceaușescu's character lives. Unexpected aspects in movies, books, theater plays], *Historia*, 180/2017 (<https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/tovarasa-a-murit-dar-personajul-elena-ceausescu-traieste-ipostaze-inedite-in-filme-carti-piese-de-teatru>), accessed on January 21, 2019.

<sup>33</sup> Presidential Commission for the Analysis of Communist Dictatorship in Romania (chair of the committee: Vladimir Tismăneanu), *Raport Final* [Final Report], (București, 2006), p. 52 ([https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/RAPORT%20FINAL\\_%20CADCR.pdf](https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/RAPORT%20FINAL_%20CADCR.pdf)), accessed on January 21, 2019.

<sup>34</sup> *Raport Final*, p. 163: "Meetings of the Military Tribunal, chaired by the famous General Alexandru Petrescu, are secret, and at the meeting of November 10, 1954 he sentences everyone to death. On 17 December 1954, at Jilava, Eugen Țurcanu and 15 other convicts are executed in the same batch. On June 22, 1955, also in Jilava, Pușcașu Vasile is executed from the same batch, while the sentences of Țanu Popa, Voinea Octavian and other convicts are commuted to «hard labor for life»." It is important to note that the sessions had been secret during the 50s, then they were declassified and the information was available for the public.

position, namely Pavel Stoian's (Gheorghiu-Dej) right hand. Therefore, he protested against the abuse directed at Petrescu (Pătrășcanu) and fought until the truth came to light and was accepted by Stoian, who thus resigned and allowed Duma (along with the new generation) to take over the power and to improve the system's inaccuracies.

As already noted, Ceaușescu became a member of the Central Committee (C.C.) of the Romanian Workers' Party (P.M.R.) in 1952, and on April 19, 1954 he was also appointed as the secretary of the C.C. and a supplant member of the Political Bureau. This date (19 April) is extremely important because Pătrășcanu was executed on April 17,<sup>35</sup> two days earlier. This seems to absolve Ceaușescu, but only from a bureaucratic perspective, of any official involvement in that trial. The new Prime-Secretary could argue that Pătrășcanu started to be persecuted when he was too young and that he was therefore not experienced enough to oppose such abuse. That is why Ceaușescu used, both symbolically and in a concrete way, the assassination of Pătrășcanu, which he attributed to politicians slightly older and better positioned – in relation to the USSR – at that time, such as Alexandru Drăghici, Emil Bodnăraș, Chivu Stoica and Gheorghe Apostol. Ceaușescu used these kinds of details to downgrade Party members like Drăghici, Bodnăraș, Stoica or Apostol, who would slowly lose their political power and position.

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In *The Power and The Truth's* narrative, the **engineer** (Petrescu), who borrows the **lawyer's** (Pătrășcanu) intellectual status, is not executed – like in the real event –, but instead gets a much easier sentence. He is imprisoned for a few years, after which Stoian offers his sincere apologies, admitting in front of his colleagues that he failed in leading the country and therefore retires into the shadow of Duma, a more objective and fair leader.

In this fiction, the punishment remains at the level of detention, for capital punishment would be too difficult to bear on the shoulders of communism, even if it would be attributed to the previous (and abusive) system. This means that past actions are presented in a softened way. They become less serious, less harsh. This is because the Party did not want to compromise, but just to suggest that certain things from the past – serious but not too serious – have meanwhile been removed and they were no longer happening. At the same time, another idea occurs: if Ceaușescu participated – by not opposing it – in the elimination of Pătrășcanu, Duma, his alter ego in the film, initiates the rehabilitation of Petrescu's image, an action by which Ceaușescu does not completely excuse himself, because it would be too much, but he morally dissociates himself from the event. It is as if he's saying he

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<sup>35</sup> Burakowski, *Dictatura*, p. 98.

didn't want that to happen, but he could not do anything at that moment, so he acts now on behalf of Pătrășcanu's memory.

Between the moments of the takeover of power by the Communists in Romania, led here by Stoian, and the ceding of the Prime-Secretary position to Duma – a time span of roughly two decades –, *The Power and The Truth* thoroughly presents the polemics born inside the Party and some of the retrograde mentalities that governed it. We can observe this permanent confrontation between two concepts, portrayed by Stoian and Duma respectively, who would change their attitude towards one another. If, at the beginning Stoian is an example to Duma, who expresses his feelings both openly and by little gestures (2:16:55: "You know that you were an idol for me, a stupid word, but that's what you were, I wanted to be like you, to walk like you, to think like you, to laugh like you."), at the end Stoian loses his leadership aura, because of the mistakes he made.

The two men's physical and psychological individualities are not schematized at all by scriptwriter Titus Popovici. Stoian is a sensitive, but at the same time contradictory man, an unpredictable and insidious beast, who is however capable of affection and friendship. Through this characterological artifice, Popovici manages to achieve two goals.

First of all, he humanizes the protagonist, who slowly becomes an antagonist. Stoian can always hide behind the fact that he is not a bad man and that, although his methods were wrong, he did it only because he didn't understand communism well and because he was poorly informed and advised – we can speculate and add that perhaps also because Moscow's influence dictated certain actions. Otherwise, Stoian has rightly applied the socialist ideology, but, because he did it in a wrong way, he agreed to renounce the power and acknowledged the truth.

Secondly, because of Stoian's complex and contradictory character – because of the fact he was a sentimental person – the public had to forgive him. Scriptwriter Titus Popovici knew how to calibrate the story in this specific way. A good, hearty man who likes interwar sentimental Romanian music<sup>36</sup> (in original, this musical genre is named "*romanțe*" and it is still very

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<sup>36</sup> At Duma's wedding with Ana (Nicolae and Elena Ceaușescu), Pavel Stoian is eager to listen to an old vinyl instead of the socialist songs his comrades usually prefer. It's the famous and so melancholic, as if it came from another time, "Zaraza": "When you come out in the park, lily petals surround you around. / You have sweet passions and shines of sin in your eyes / And you have a feline snake body..." (original: „Când apari seșorita, în parc pe-nserat / Curg în juru-ți petale de crin. / Ai în ochi patimi dulci și luciri de păcat / Și ai trupul de șarpe felin...”). Stoian has a bourgeois startle (doubled by the previous remark, to Petrescu: you have to savor the cognac, not to drink it all at once, as his Party colleague does). We can see that Stoian is living the moment and therefore invites Ana to dance, kissing her on the mouth, half like a parent and half like a lover, with lust and desire.

popular) and wants to do everything in one day, an idealist, but at the same time a person who did not fully understand what communism means and therefore has to step back.

There is even at least a third purpose in the contradictory character of Stoian: once Duma noticed and understood his former superior's mistakes, he would be able to avoid them and history would not repeat itself. Stoian wanted too much to make Romania go beyond its unique label as *Europe's Granary*. He sought to develop the heavy industry, but did it chaotically and without planning (1:12:47 - 1:13:50, Stoian claims the following: "We have been for too long just shepherds and farmers. Now we either build or crack. This construction is as necessary as air and water."<sup>37</sup>). Stoian's words are partly confirmed by official statistics from that period, according to which a strategy had been implemented in Romania to increase the population employed in industry and to reduce the segment of population employed in agriculture. The population employed in industry increased from 19.2% in 1960 to 30.6% in 1975, and the working class in Communist Romania (including foremen) increased from 23.7% of the total population in 1956 to 39.9 % in 1966 and 54.3% in 1977. In absolute numbers, official data showed an increase from 2 212 500 in 1960, to 3 018 700 in 1965 and 4 089 100 in 1972.<sup>38</sup> In theory, nothing is wrong with Stoian's ambitions. But wanting everything at once is unachievable and dangerous. He had no patience, compared to Duma and the technocrat Petrescu, who emphasizes that this strategy cannot be applied at the moment. It is also the opinion of another technocrat, economist Hauser, who dared to warn Stoian that the building site would no longer receive funding, since it was "unprofitable", a term for which the Prime-Secretary promptly admonishes him (2:07:40): "Eeeh, I hear a new word, profitability. Listen, young man, this little word is taken out of the bourgeois vocabulary!".

The forced industrialization of the country was the dream that Stoian did not allow anyone to deny him, which made him use terror instead of arguments. This desire for industrialization would also be in Ceaușescu's agenda. But the film emphasizes the fact that, despite Stoian's good intentions, the context of Dej's government did not justify or allow the implementation of such a plan, while Ceaușescu's coming to power coincided with a new context, favorable to industrialization. This lack of reason defines Stoian. He is presented as a man without vision who did not tolerate qualified professionals in those areas of activity, he wanted to seize only for himself. When professionals brought arguments, they displeased him and therefore he

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<sup>37</sup> The construction Stoian is talking about is a huge dam, important for the economy of the country, because it would produce energy.

<sup>38</sup> *Raport final*, p. 348.

categorically refused them. Under these circumstances, Petrescu's friendly remark, "the enthusiasm of the masses, without scientific analysis, can lead to adventure", which emphasised Stoian's megalomania, became an unbearable insult which the Prime-Secretary could not tolerate. He would use his influence in the Party apparatus to turn Petrescu into a proved imperialist traitor and ultimately to punish him. This coincides with the moment when the film presents, but in a very moderate and vague key, the methods used by Romanian *Securitate* (Department of State Security): the lamp in the eye of the accused (1:51:10), a scene with symbolic connotation. Petrescu's investigation is alluded to only at this single suggestive level. Marcus and Popovici could not rebuild in full the operating methods of the State agents because this would probably be too daring and would not be in line with the will of the political decision-makers, who wanted to admonish their predecessors, but in a controlled way. Obviously, as the action of the film develops, it is demonstrated that Petrescu was framed by Stoian, who was too disturbed by his former colleague's attitude, so he decided that he had to punish him, regardless of the risks and even though he had not erred ideologically, but strictly personally.

1:59:40: "Have you ever seen Mr. Petrescu repent, ignoring his intellectual pride?! We are surrounded by enemies! Objectively, Petrescu behaved like an enemy and I treated him as such. He has to learn a lesson. He's going to be for some time where he belongs, he's going to put a little effort with the pickax, and then we'll see."

These are Stoian's words, which reflect an oppressive and merciless attitude. When Duma understood the situation, their rupture was unavoidable and irreversible. This narrative structuration of Duma gradually abandoning the loyalty he felt for Stoian is based on the cyclic repetition of *event-meeting-reaction*, which at each new occurrence adds more gravity to the general situation. Every such *event-meeting-reaction* triangle justifies Duma's changing position and further discredits Stoian. Director Manole Marcus and scriptwriter Titus Popovici understood that *The Power and The Truth* must be a very clear film with an easily understandable message, for everyone, regardless of their intellectual training. The story had to be communicated directly, without sophistication. Marcus and Popovici were not interested in poetic artefacts, but wanted a simple narrative with compelling ideas. That's why Stoian would admit that he was wrong and had to reinstate Petrescu in his rights. This helped Stoian leave the scene in an honorable way. It does not matter that the reality was different and Pătrășcanu died.

Near the construction site, Duma's boy enters the frame, screaming "uncle Pavel" (in original, the term is "*nene* Pavel", which means something closer to an *old uncle*), who is no longer a comrade, but a simple "*nene*", a simple

retired politician, who understood in time that he must give the power to those more qualified. It's the symbol of a bright future, based on a falsified story. But a (hi)story in accordance with the political will of the late 60s, told very competently, in order to be understood, believed and accepted.

### Promoting, marketing

One year after the 1971 reportage made during filming, *Cinema* magazine published – in issue 2/1972 – some more materials about *The Power and The Truth*. Information regarding the film and its purpose had to reach the population as quickly as possible, right before its national public release. In this February issue, we find two reviews, signed by Mircea Alexandrescu and Ecaterina Oproiu, and a collective article signed by politicians, such as Valter Roman,<sup>39</sup> scriptwriters, like Ioan Grigorescu,<sup>40</sup> Mihnea Gheorghiu<sup>41</sup> and directors, for instance Malvina Urșianu.<sup>42</sup> All these materials seem and seek to indicate that the film must be seen as a political manifesto.

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<sup>39</sup> Valter Roman was born in Oradea in 1913; his real name was Ernő Neuländer. He was a member of the Slovak Communist Party from 1931 and then part of all the Romanian Communist organizations until his death in November 1983. In the early years of the '70s, when *The Power and The Truth* was presented to the public, he was director of the Political Publishing House and member of the National Scientific Research Council. He is the father of the famous Romanian post-communist politician, Petre Roman.

<sup>40</sup> Ioan Grigorescu was a writer and publicist, the most significant part of his work representing a volume of journalism and travel reports worldwide. In cinematography, he wrote scripts for mediocre films, such as the *Canarul și Viscolul* (*The Canary and the Snowstorm*, Manole Marcus, 1969), *Explozia* (*The Poseidon Explosion*, Mircea Drăgan, 1973), *Cuibul salamandrelor* (*Oil*, Mircea Drăgan, 1976), *Acțiunea "Autobuzul"* (*A bus for death*, Virgil Calotescu, 1978), *Un echipaj pentru Singapore* (*A Crew to Singapore*, Nicu Stan, 1981), *Ringul* (*The Ring*, Sergiu Nicolaescu, 1984). After 1989 he continued to work with Sergiu Nicolaescu and wrote the script for *Începutul adevărului* (*The Mirror*, Sergiu Nicolaescu, 1994), through which the well-known Romanian director tries to discern in front of history and to create a positive image of Marshal Ion Antonescu.

<sup>41</sup> Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității, *Membrii CC al PCR 1945-1989. Dicționar* [CC members of the 1945-1989 PCR. Dictionary] (București: CNSAS, 2004), p. 292. At that time, Mihnea Gheorghiu had for quite a short time finished his job as president of the Council of Cinematography and vice president of the State Committee for Culture and Art (1963-8 April 1968); from June 1, 1966, he also held the position of member of the State Prize Committee and was a member of the National Council of Romanian Radio and Television (March 9, 1971).

<sup>42</sup> Malvina Urșianu is a case of intellectual who tried to make as few compromises as she could and yet to receive permission to direct. She was born on June 19, 1927, in a boyar family in Gușoieni, Vâlcea. Her elders studied in Paris, they were part of the 1848 generation, and her grandfather was a senator and the founder of Department of International Law in Romania. Malvina Urșianu studied Art History not to become a curator – this was a profession she hated – but only because she felt the need to step into cinema on solid grounds (<https://www.cotidianul.ro/in-memoria-unei-mari-doamne-a-ecranului-malvina-ursianu/>), accessed on February 21, 2018.



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In the collective article, "What's your opinion",<sup>43</sup> Valter Roman, a politician, had the most interesting intervention. Roman, a militant of the left in the interwar period, when he fought in Spain on the side of the Republicans, had been forced to withdraw from political life in the early years of Romanian Communism until the early 1950s when Gheorghiu-Dej rehabilitated him, appointing him as director of the Party's Publishing House, an office he kept (along with being a Central Committee member) until his death in 1983.<sup>44</sup> He will be therefore remembered as part of a limited and exclusive group of activists who survived all stages of Communism in Romania. Roman's intervention is the longest in this article. He started enthusiastically and said: "Finally a film. THE FILM!"<sup>45</sup> His rhetoric is simple. By using capital letters when speaking of "THE FILM" *The Power and The Truth*, we see how a man of the system promoted this project as the one made once in a generation, which is capable of changing mentalities. Such exaggerated statements, repeated enough times, became acceptable and accepted by a nation that was forbidden to have or hear another opinion. The lack of measure continued, when Roman called *The Power and The Truth* "Europe's most important political film after the war".<sup>46</sup> What were his arguments when he asserted this, asked Valter Roman in a rhetorical exercise:

"[...] the intimate and profound message of this film: where there is a concordance between power and truth, our socialist society looks the way our classics dreamed of us, as we all of us wanted. When there is a divorce between power and truth, one gets to these human dramas presented in Titus Popovici's film, with force and great sense of balance."<sup>47</sup>

It does not even matter that the movie was signed by Manole Marcus. Popovici was the more resounding name, he was the inside man, anyhow more than Marcus, who could not compete with Popovici's status as the Party's most prominent and valued writer.<sup>48</sup> Valter Roman continued his

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<sup>43</sup> 'Puterea și adevărul - Ce părere aveți?' [The Power and The Truth - What is your opinion?], *Cinema magazine*, 2/1972.

<sup>44</sup> *Raport Final*, p. 45.

<sup>45</sup> 'Puterea și adevărul - Ce părere aveți?', *Cinema magazine*, 2/1972.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> After the successes of the 1950s and 1960s, Popovici also contributed decisively to the Romanian socialist culture of the next two decades, with script for films like *Atunci i-am condamnat pe toți la moarte* (Then I Sentenced Them All to Death, Sergiu Nicolaescu, 1972), *Actorul și sălbăticiii* (The Actor and the Savages, Manole Marcus, 1975), *Pe aici nu se trece* (No Trespassing, Doru Năstase, 1975), *Operațiunea Monstrul* (Operation Monster, Manole Marcus, 1976), the Western series with Transylvanian people, *Ion: Blestemul pământului, blestemul iubirii* (Ion: The Lust for the Land, the Lust for Love, Mircea Mureșan, 1979), *Secretul lui Bachus* (The Secret of Bacchus, Geo Saizescu, 1984). He is probably the writer who most influenced the Romanian cinema of that era.

argumentation and made a plea for the notion of truth, for the propagation of this truth, and for the superior quality of the actors chosen to appear in the film:

"Everything must be done so that the power is in accordance with the truth. In the service of this great call, is the film of Titus Popovici, whose glory was provided by the exceptional director Manole Marcus and five giants of the interpretation: Albulescu, Besoiu, Pellea, Cotescu, and Vrabie, of whom, in my opinion, the first two would deserve the highest possible distinction (worldwide) for interpretation."<sup>49</sup>

We see, once again, Roman forcing the truth. Albulescu and Besoiu are regarded as world-class actors, but this assessment comes only from within the country and has thus no value because it is not validated by any external recognition.

In the same collective article,<sup>50</sup> Ioan Grigorescu, the scriptwriter of some modest films of the period,<sup>51</sup> suggests that *The Power and The Truth* brought "here, finally, a film able to be evoked when talking about the birth of the long-awaited Romanian film school".<sup>52</sup> Then he praised Popovici and Marcus, about the latter saying that he has a vocation for political film and that he has "demonstrated through his whole creation that politics and art are notions that can merge with success in a work based above all on talent, on daring, on unswerving consciousness that, in Romanian cinema, we have something to say, something that is uniquely ours".<sup>53</sup> Grigorescu was quite clear when he associated art and politics, a position also found in Nicolae Ceaușescu's speeches. At the same time, we can observe the obsession for *our work*, the claim that *we* too – that is, *us*, the Romanians – can create at the highest level. The public was asked to become almost an accomplice, but in a positive way, with the creators. Thus, the film became a national project.

In the same article,<sup>54</sup> screenwriter Mihnea Gheorghiu also offers the context in which this film started and praised the Ninth Congress of the Communist Party,<sup>55</sup> pointing out how important it was for unmasking certain

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<sup>49</sup> 'Puterea și adevărul – Ce părere aveți?', *Cinema magazine*, 2/1972.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Until that moment, Ioan Grigorescu had written only one feature film script for *Canarul și viscolul* (*The Canary and the Snowstorm*, 1969), directed by Manole Marcus. We can speculate that Grigorescu had somehow returned Marcus's favor, when he accepted to write eloquently about *The Power and The Truth*.

<sup>52</sup> 'Puterea și adevărul – Ce părere aveți?', *Cinema magazine*, 2/1972.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Vladimir Tismăneanu (*Jurnalul Național*, 23 iulie 2005) <http://jurnalul.ro/editorial/ceausecu-si-congresul-al-ix-lea-al-pcr-40725.html>, accessed at January 21, 2019. At this Ninth Congress, the speakers insist on the importance of collective leadership and condemn the crimes

past abuses. He praised "the attitude taken by our politicians against these sad circumstances known to many of us and which the Party's documents have presented and explained with great moral principledness".<sup>56</sup>

Malvina Urșianu concluded this collective article<sup>57</sup> and did it in an ambivalent way. A sober director, who has always argued that she has kept herself away from political games and has made her films as she felt, without propaganda and political indications, Urșianu considered that *The Power and The Truth* had "a script written by History and rewritten by Titus Popovici, with an impressive political responsibility and an incredible rigor".<sup>58</sup> This intervention can be seen on the one hand as consonant with the previous positions, but at the same time it can hide an ironic-dissident attitude towards the film, which – Urșianu seems to have suggested – presented a history rewritten by Popovici. That is, we are not talking about actual history, but of a re-interpreted, manipulated one.

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The critic Mircea Alexandrescu entitled his text "An ethical debate"<sup>59</sup> – a phrase with which he situated himself on the side of those who promoted the film as an essential work for a country which abandoned old ideological ideas and synchronized with the rest of the world, especially with the other socialist countries, but also with Western civilization, where remarkable movies were produced. This is a fact also recognized by the country's officials. For example, in the Ideological Commission meeting of May 23, 1968, Dumitru Popescu suggested that Romanian cinematography should make a model out of *Judgment at Nuremberg* (Stanley Kramer, 1961),<sup>60</sup> and Niculescu-Mizil proposed two other American projects, *Inherit the Wind* (Stanley Kramer, 1960) and *The Born Losers* (Tom Laughlin, 1967),<sup>61</sup> not before saying that in world cinema – not just the socialist one – the great films were the ones who fought for an ideology and for solving certain problems.<sup>62</sup>

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of the Dej regime against communist personalities – not against the political and cultural elite of the country, or against the peasantry.

<sup>56</sup> 'Puterea și adevărul – Ce părere aveți?', *Cinema* magazine, 2/1972.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Mircea Alexandrescu, 'Puterea și adevărul – O dezbatere etică' [The Power and The Truth – An ethical debate], *Cinema* magazine, 2/1972.

<sup>60</sup> Aurelia Vasile, *Le cinéma roumain*, p. 162. Apud București, ANIC CC PCR Cancelarie DS 88/1968, *Stenograma ședinței Comisiei ideologice a CC al PCR: 23 mai 1968* [The Verbatim of the Meeting of the CC of the CC of the 23rd May 1968 Ideological Commission], p. 72.

<sup>61</sup> Aurelia Vasile, *Le cinéma roumain*, p. 162. Apud *Stenograma ședinței Comisiei ideologice a CC al PCR*, p. 87.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

In his text, Alexandrescu made a series of *ethical* considerations about the film and regarding the previous decades, the 1950s and 1960s, two decades that he compared with the everyday reality of his time – we mean the beginning of the 1970s –, which he considered to be better. The author suggested that the abuses have been erased and the people had better lives. *The Power and The Truth*, argued the critic from *Cinema* magazine, "comes from us, out of our struggle, our joy, triumphs and pains, from our aspiration to consolidate a new social order",<sup>63</sup> being a project in which, stated Alexandrescu, "liberation is the crucial event"<sup>64</sup> from which it all starts. In the logic of this argumentation, the "working class takes over the power",<sup>65</sup> a salutary but difficult act that, opined the journalist, "calls for battle, abnegation, devotion, initiative and spirit of sacrifice",<sup>66</sup> attitudes and actions doubled by "the fierce fighting against any attempts of preventing this takeover",<sup>67</sup> concluded Alexandrescu his opening idea. With these words, Alexandrescu started a debate about the nuances of Communism as it was assumed by the leaders in Bucharest, pointing out that the *evil* (Dej) and the *good* (Ceaușescu) communist are different, not in the general view – both have been driven by the same Marxist principles and fought side by side for a common cause. The difference between them is the following: Duma-Ceaușescu had the honest ability "to translate into active thinking the conception of the world, the ability to adapt ideas to the realities",<sup>68</sup> whereas Stoian-Dej applied them criminally. Stoian and Duma were, according to Alexandrescu, "old combatants and old communists. The ideas unite them, their translation in facts, the way they apply them, their working methods, divide them day by day".<sup>69</sup> The author insists on this contrast between the two heroes and returns to it systematically: "the cause, the ideals, the goals are unequivocally the same, but the position of the characters is nuanced"<sup>70</sup> [over the passing of time]. Pavel Stoian "gradually evolves into a position of isolation, with his unilateral discretionary acts, unfiltered by the confrontation with those around him",<sup>71</sup> while comrade Duma is the only one who has the courage to confront and resist him. Their quarrels make Stoian accept reality, but only at the end, when evil has already been done. Alexandrescu also explains the double role of Duma. In a concrete way, he has the dramatic

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<sup>63</sup> Mircea Alexandrescu, 'Puterea și adevărul – O dezbateră etică', *Cinema* magazine, 2/1972.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

function of the hero who repairs the situation and has now stepped up to being the rightful leader of the country.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, in a metaphorical way, suggested Alexandrescu, Duma is the one "who must remove those painful mistakes of the past in order to make possible the full application of the idea of socialist democracy and the truth of the revolution".<sup>73</sup>

In these paragraphs, the critic from *Cinema* magazine used the slogans of the moment in such a way that his text can be situated at the border between film review and political lecture. At one point, he evoked the "golden distribution"<sup>74</sup> (an idea similar to that outlined by Valter Roman), which goes hand in hand with the sphere of Romanian exceptionalism and with the idea that *The Power and The Truth* is a great-great movie. Here is how a very carefully chosen *golden distribution* validated such a project. It's the kind of distribution gathered with great effort, the best actors – who can convince their public with their talent, presence, with the image that they created over time. It is the image of stars, but in a communist world where individualism is not allowed; they are stars indeed, but stars that rise above the common man's image not for their own sake, but for the socialist cause. They are those actors raised by the State, who invested in them, who kept them precisely for such a significant moment. They put themselves in the service of the system that created them and joined this generational project with which the authority wanted to move things in the right direction. This generation, of creators of the film, is the generation of Romanians born in the interwar period, but who have grown up amid the abuses that had happened during the *obsessive decade*. Therefore, they now truly believed in a better future that would eliminate the mistakes of the past. They were grateful that they were finally allowed to complain about the system. They could condemn it. They were allowed to openly remember past events that were wiped out of collective memory in the moment they occurred. Self-criticism was deployed in order to achieve a contrast: *back then* the situation was bad, but *now* it's good. The secret of the movie's triumph lies precisely in its *convincing* character and the ability to persuade by manipulating the events. *The Power and The Truth* wanted to *convince* its public. It had to do so. This was its purpose. That's why it was produced. It did not even matter that a contradiction was created: why did a film that was allegedly organic, that was presumed to come naturally, which was born out of necessity, need to be rendered convincing, since things were supposed to be just as the script presented them. The film, viewed without knowing the historical context, can

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

indeed be convincing. And Alexandrescu's text presented the way it had to be *properly* received. These details, pinpointed by the author – like the fact that all of the heroes started with the same values, that they were friends and comrades, but they became opponents because of some principles –, were capable of certifying *The Power and The Truth* in the eyes of an inexperienced or innocent viewer and present Popovici as a fine and competent scriptwriter.

Mircea Alexandrescu concluded by noting that the audience reacted "with much sensitivity and maturity to the film made by Titus Popovici and Manole Marcus".<sup>75</sup> It is an idea on which Ecaterina Oproiu's argument was to be built, in her very suggestively entitled text "...the public's exam as well".<sup>76</sup> If Alexandrescu was particularly interested in the ethical dimension of the film, Oproiu indicated the concrete relationship that must be established between the film and the public. The spectator was thus invited to become (if we use a somehow post-modernist term) a *spect-actor*.<sup>77</sup> The public also took an exam, suggested Oproiu: would he/she be able to accept this new reality, which had been hidden for so long at the official level? The abuses of the Dej period were not discussed during the Dej regime, so the discourse established by *The Power and The Truth* sought to update the historical paradigm and re-establish past events in accordance with the new political desire. Oproiu noted that *The Power and The Truth* "is a debate that does not fit – and does not even want to fit – into the perimeter of cinematography".<sup>78</sup> Let's remember it is the same idea Niculescu-Mizil had on January 29, 1969, during the formal meeting held at the top of P.C.R. But Oproiu tried not to completely compromise herself (like all the cultural actors linked to this film: Manole Marcus, even Alexandrescu, Malvina Urșianu etc.) and addressed the issue in such a way that her discourse, very likely commissioned by the power, was rendered less inappropriate than it could have been, considering the situation. Aware of

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Ecaterina Oproiu, 'Puterea și adevărul – ...și un examen al publicului' [The Power and The Truth – a public's exam as well], *Cinema* magazine, 2/1972.

<sup>77</sup> Brazilian writer Augusto Boal proposed in the 1970s this term, *spect-actor*, in the context of setting up the so-called Theater of the Oppressed. This is a type of theater that uses interactive techniques of co-opting the public in the artistic creation process. In this context, the *spect-actor* is also a spectator and an actor, and may be part of an invisible theater that he is not aware of. This type of theater can also represent the daily life of the ordinary citizen. Boal argues that Aristotolian ethics is in fact the oppression of the masses in favor of the privilege of the ruling class. Boal points out that the State promotes the *tragi-drama* in order to perpetuate its own existence. He sees in governments a paradigmatic example of the power which subdues its population. If we take the example of *The Power and The Truth*, we can find the scheme proposed by Boal. The state commands a political film to further subdue its population, while it makes it believe that there is freedom of speech and the freedom to protest against abuses.

<sup>78</sup> Ecaterina Oproiu, 'Puterea și adevărul – ...și un examen al publicului', *Cinema* magazine, 2/1972.

having to deliver the disguised lie in small doses, she stated that "it would be unfair to say that the discussion of the political film is starting now".<sup>79</sup> With this kind of affirmation, she tried to exculpate herself of some ideas she was about to formulate. According to the desire of the system, which Oproiu was forced to take notice of, *The Power and The Truth* was the political film that surpassed the ones before it and thus imposed new standards inside this cinematographic genre. Oproiu believed that the film proved "courage in its highest form"<sup>80</sup> because it tackled problems "in a frontal manner, discusses them, not whispering, but openly, from the stand, with a big, with an unusual and emotional frankness".<sup>81</sup> The author then continued: "The idea of [politically, n.n.] engaged art has never been more convincing"<sup>82</sup> and "the viewer has never been asked so convincingly to take part in the creating of a movie".<sup>83</sup> Oproiu took refuge behind the first person plural ("us" or "we") or simply behind impersonal formulations. At the same time, she also used a lot the term "*convincing*", like Alexandrescu. The film wanted, it demanded, and therefore would be convincing. It had to be convincing, intrinsically and then extrinsically, by promoting *The Power and The Truth* as a convincing film made by the leaders and members of a convincing system which were building a convincing world. That is why the author invited the public to go beyond its previous status and to understand the film by throwing their own talent in the game: "This film will be born through us, only through us, the public, through our capacity of understanding and participation. So far, we have talked about the talent of being a filmmaker. It's time to talk about the talent of being a spectator".<sup>84</sup>

## Reverberations

The example of *The Power and The Truth* would be taken by other filmmakers and Studio directors, who would imagine and create films that would incriminate certain aspects of the social and political life during the Dej regime. Although none would rise to the size and grandeur of the film signed by Marcus and Popovici, these productions would be born in the process of validating Ceaușescu's regime. *Clipa* (*The Moment*, Gheorghe Vitanidis, 1979), *Orgolii* (*Hubris*, Manole Marcus, 1980), *O lumină la etajul zece* (*The Light on the Tenth Floor*, Malvina Urșianu, 1984), *Imposibila iubire* (*Impossible Love*, Constantin Vaeni, 1984) were all produced at a time when the economy and,

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<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

implicitly, the well-being of Romania began to suffer so much that the shortcomings could no longer be hidden. These films sought to recall the hardships and privations of the period before 1965 and could be taken as an alarm signal or a warning to the population, who should not complain because, otherwise, dark abusive times could always come back.

In official documents, *The Power and The Truth* was presented as a "substantial ethical debate".<sup>85</sup> This description is succinct, but extremely important. It has the role of positioning the film above other productions made at that time, simply because the others are not explicitly mentioned. *The Power and The Truth* is the most important cinematographic Romanian project of the early 1970s and, at the same time, an ideological model for the next political films to be made. For Romanian Communism, it remains a unique project that was born once in a generation.

This entire context, of making and promoting *The Power and The Truth*, retained the mechanism through which the authorities positively enhanced and influenced the public reception of a very important film for a generation that thought and even anticipated that the future could indeed be better. Half propaganda, half hope, *The Power and The Truth* opened the series of Romanian political films that investigated and proscribed the Dej regime, obtaining a contrast by which Ceaușescu's regime was a better, if not the best solution.

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<sup>85</sup> Cluj-Napoca, Biblioteca Centrală Lucian Blaga, Colecții speciale, Fond Monica Maisner, DS 4, f. 9.