

**UP TO ADAM (AND EVE): THE FILM ADAPTATIONS
OF MIRCEA ELIADE'S FANTASTIC FICTION¹**

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Abstract

This article investigates the cinematic adaptation of Mircea Eliade's prose in three Romanian films: *Miss Christina* (1992, director Viorel Sergovici; 2013, director Alexandru Maftai), *I am Adam!* (1996, dir. Dan Pița) and *The Snake* (1996, director Viorel Sergovici). Eliade's literary work is deeply infused with mythological structures, reflections on the sacred and profane, and metaphysical inquiries of human existence. These characteristics render his narrative both captivating and complex for cinematic interpretation, as filmmakers face the challenge of converting symbolic, abstract, and frequently philosophical prose into a format that depends on visual and auditory elements. The research begins with the assertion that Eliade's works should not be assessed merely on the basis of fidelity, but rather as interpretive endeavours that re-mediate and re-contextualize literature for diverse audiences, eras and cultural contexts. The article employs an interdisciplinary approach grounded in five major theoretical frameworks within adaptation studies. The foundation for examining the interplay between narrative, medium, and audience reception during the transition from prose to film is established by Linda Hutcheon's adaptation theory

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(2006). To interpret visual metaphors, cultural codes, and the dialogic aspect of adaptation, Robert Stam's intertextual and semiotic model (2005) is employed. The discourse on fragmentation, nonlinearity, and ontological instability in cinematic portrayals of Eliade's mythic time is directed by Gordon Slethaug's postmodern perspective (2014). Alex Piñar's methodological view (2019), which encompasses textual, contextual, and interdisciplinary elements, provides a robust framework for the comparative case studies. Lastly, Deborah Cartmell's pedagogical and cultural lens (2005) sheds light on how adaptation functions as a means of cultural transmission, influenced by national identity, historical trauma and ideological transformation. Through close readings of the films, this article tries to identify significant adaptive techniques. In *Miss Christina*, both Sergovici (1992) and Maftai (2013) contend with Eliade's fusion of Ghotic ambiance, eroticism and myth; however, Maftai's interpretation places a stronger focus on trauma, memory and gendered violence, thereby situating the film within the larger cultural discussion of the post-communist era. Conversely, *I am Adam!* (1996) poses a distinct challenge as Pița weaves together various Eliade narratives into a mosaic format, emphasizing themes of identity, exile, and metaphysical duality. The disjointed narrative underscores Eliade's preoccupation with the fluidity of reality and the boundaries between the sacred and the profane, while also mirroring the confusion experienced by Romania in the 1990s. In *The Snake* (1996), Sergovici transforms Eliade's allegorical narrative into a cinematic parable exploring temptation, illusion, and moral complexity. By utilizing surreal visuals and symbolic duality, the film highlights psychological and spiritual disorientation, providing a reflection on freedom and limitation in a society transitioning from authoritarian rule. The comparative analysis indicates that these adaptations serve not only as retellings but also as cultural re-mediations that engage with collective identity, memory, and national trauma. While *Miss Christina* (1992, 2013) emphasizes themes of gender, desire and intergenerational conflict, *I am Adam!* (1996) prioritizes the concepts of confusion and ontological uncertainty, and *The Snake* (1996) provides a more allegorical exploration of temptation and freedom. Collectively, these films demonstrate the variety of strategies that can be employed to translate Eliade's mythic universe into the language of cinema. In conclusion, the article illustrates that adaptation theory offers essential frameworks for comprehending the ways in which Eliade's literary works have been reinterpreted in Romanian cinema. By placing these films within the context of theoretical discussion and cultural history, the research contends that Eliade's cinematic adaptations are valuable

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not only as artistic reinterpretations but also as cultural artifacts that embody Romania's process of identity negotiation during the late and post-communist periods.

Keywords: Romanian cinema; myth; postmodernism; allegory; identity negotiation.

1. Theoretical framework

This paper is based on a qualitative, comparative, and interdisciplinary framework grounded in adaptation studies, narrative theory, and cultural semiotics. We were concerned about how Romanian filmmakers adapted Mircea Eliade's work for the screen, because his prose is full of mythical and metaphysical components, and how this is addressed through the years of cinematic adaptation that span over three decades.

The selection criteria for the films in question (*Domnișoara Christina* [Miss Christina] – both adaptations (1992, 2013), *Eu sunt Adam!* [I am Adam!] (1996), and *Șarpele* [The snake] (1996)) are rooted in the intertextual connection to the original (Eliade's prose), their particular adaptation strategies, and their contextual production periods (pre- and post-communist Romania). Jointly, they represent a diverse range of approaches to adapting literary myth into visual narratives. While the films are Romanian productions and were released under their Romanian titles, throughout this paper, the English titles will be used for consistency, as the paper is written in English.

Our analysis combines and integrates a series of theoretical perspectives, based on the theory of adaptation. Regarding narrative and medium transformation, Linda Hutcheon's theory of adaptation (*A Theory of Adaptation*, 2006) serves us in terms of foundation for this research in terms of narrative, medium, and reception, which can be transformed through the adaptation act; the author emphasizes the adaptation process as *repetition* and *re-creation*, drawing attention on the *multimodal* nature of the film that adds layers of personal perspective. We are using her text in order to understand narrative restructuring of the original/ source text, as

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her model revolves around changes in narrative technique, mode of engagement, and audience reception. Still remaining in the methodological sphere, Alex Piñar (*Literature and Adaptation Theories: Methodological Approaches*, 2019) triad – text, context and interdisciplinarity – provides for us another foundation when analysing the case studies (the three films mentioned above), because his research insists on textual aspects (narrative structure, dialogue, character transformation), contextual factors (such as the historical context of the production, reception and censorship), and interdisciplinary dimensions (in our specific case, mythology and religious studies).

In relation to intertextuality and cinematic language, we relied on Robert Stam's model (*Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*, 2005) as a tool for analyzing the network of relations between the original texts of Eliade and their cinematic adaptations through the lenses of cultural discourses. The author argues about the polyphonic nature of adaptations, which involves not only the links between the source text and film production, but also their relationship with other adaptations, cinema genres, myth, and ideological codes. We used Stam's work (2005) to decode the symbolic *mise-en-scène*, visual metaphors, and the references to either literature, history, or myth/religion, with which Eliade's texts are imbued, in accord with Stam's approach that a film adaptation is not a derivative, but rather an interpretative act. In this respect, we turned to Deborah Cartmell's approach (*Adaptations: From Text to Screen, Screen to Text*, 2005) to adaptation as *cultural transformation* and *national identity*. Similar to Stam (2005), the author's endeavour seeks to integrate a pedagogical perspective, sharing that the cultural adaptation process involves educational values, since the films can serve as forms of *identity negotiation* in the broader discourse of national identity, as we can see in newer adaptations such as *Miss Christina* (Maftai, 2013) that touches transgenerational trauma, but also depicts a revival of interest in folklore and myth.

Lastly, Gordon Slethaug's theory of postmodern adaptation (*Adaptation Theory and Criticism. Postmodern Literature and Cinema in the USA*, 2014) is important in our

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understanding and decoding of *I am Adam!* (1996), because it facilitates the analysis of non-linear narrative, memory fragmentation, and ambiguity. Slethaug (2014) also discusses the *fluid identity* concept and dismisses critiques based on fidelity to the text source in postmodern aesthetics.

2. Film adaptations analysis

As we have indicated from the outset of this paper, the films we considered include *Miss Christina* (1992, 2013, both adaptations, directed by different individuals), *The Snake* (1996), and *I am Adam!* (1996). The source material for the first two productions consists of the novels of the same title (*Domnișoara Christina* [Miss Christina], 1936, and *Șarpele* [The snake], 1937), whereas for the final film, director Dan Pița utilized three novels as source texts authored by Eliade (*La Țigănci* [At the gypsies], *Pe strada Mântuleasa* [On Mântuleasa street], and *Uniforme de general* [General's uniforms]; throughout the paper, the English titles of the novels will be used for consistency). Each production also stands out through its casting choices, which significantly shaped the reception and interpretation of Eliade's characters: in the 1992 *Miss Christina*, Adrian Pintea embodied Egor Pașchievici, while Irina Petrescu portrayed Miss Moscu; in the 2013 version, Maia Morgenstern played Miss Moscu, Tudor Istodor took on the role of Egor Pașchievici, and Ovidiu Ghiniță appeared as Nazarie. *I am Adam!* featured Ștefan Iordache as Adam, a performance marked by existential intensity, whereas *The Snake* presented Claudiu Bleonț (Andronic), Gheorghe Dinică (Stere Solomon), and Ilinca Goia (Dorina) in roles that emphasized the ambiguity of Eliade's narrative vision. These were all exceptional Romanian actors whose artistry contributed to the films' cultural impact.

Every cinematic interpretation was examined according to the previously mentioned blended theoretical model, assessed in relation to the narrative framework of the original works of Eliade, alongside the *mise-en-scène*, symbolic motifs, character roles, and audience reception. A special emphasis was given to

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the ways in which myth, ritual, and sacred time were depicted through visual imagery in the film adaptations.

2.1. *Miss Christina* (1992, 2013)

Eliade's novella, *Miss Christina* (1936), presents readers with a supernatural narrative whose topic is rooted in Romanian folklore and erotic mysticism, particularly the myth of the vampire. The storyline follows the male character Egor as he visits the Moscu family estate, which becomes haunted (as do some other family members) by the ghost '*strigoî*' of Miss Christina, a beautiful but long-deceased aristocrat whose eerie presence exerts an erotic and uncanny influence over the household. The central subjects addressed by the author in most of his prose, notably the eternal return and archetypal patterns, are interwoven with gothic elements such as the secluded mansion, dreams and visions that traverse different realms, and ancestral trauma, all the while Egor, the main character, spirals into a state of irrational obsession as the estate collapses around him.

Although both film adaptations remain true to the original text to some degree, they showcase various differences in their reproduction. The central narrative features Egor, the protagonist of the novella, as he visits Moscu's household, which is haunted by the ghost/vampire of Miss Christina. The script delves into themes of the sacred and the erotic, highlighting the tension that arises between reality and the oneiric realm, the decline of aristocracy, and the concept of mythic time. The setting in both films resembles the original source, with the crumbling mansion evoking a gothic ambiance.

In 1992, Sergovici reinterprets the narrative tension utilizing semiotic and atmospheric cinematic language. This adaptation emphasizes gothic features such as low lighting, vintage interiors, and foreboding music to create a decadent ambiance reflective of the text. While Eliade (1936) gradually reveals the story through Egor's internal reflections, Sergovici (1992) substitutes the original introspection with external horror tropes, transforming subtle implications into a visual spectacle.

In terms of narrative restructuring, the 1992 film preserves the core love triangle involving Egor, Sanda, and

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Christina, yet it condenses or omits various subplots and dialogues. This is a typical practice, given the constraints of the medium, and it aligns with Piñar's narratological theory (Piñar, 2019, pp. 45-47), which posits that adaptations require a reconfiguration of narrative time and perspective due to the limitations imposed by the medium. The erotic tension between Egor and Christina is heightened, taking on a near sensationalist quality in contrast to the original text, where ambivalence prevails. The portrayal of the vampire is made literal in the film, thereby diminishing some of the ambiguity of Eliade's novella.

Sergovici (1992) conceptualizes eroticism as sacred, aligning with Eliade's notion of sacred eroticism, wherein Christina "embodies" both a goddess and a ghost, representing a remnant of ancient feminine mystery. The perspective further underscores the idea of mythic time, as Miss Christina's presence disrupts the conventional flow of chronological time, marking the passing into the sacred one. Nevertheless, this adaptation maintains Eliade's exploration of initiation and the sacred, especially through Egor's gradual loss of rational control. According to Hutcheon (2006, p. 9), the adaptation serves as a *transcoding* of the novella's mythic themes into a visual language that embraces emotion and atmosphere.

A decade later, Maftai (2013) reinterprets Eliade's fiction through a modern cinematic perspective, integrating refined visuals, CGI-enhanced effects, and placing greater emphasis on psychological horror and erotic symbolism. Although it preserves the fundamental storyline, this adaptation excels in cinematic stylization, vibrant colour schemes (perhaps also due to the evolution of cinematographic instruments), and a meticulous mise-en-scène to convey psychosexual tension between the characters of the triad. In contrast to Sergovici's straightforward horror imagery, Maftai's adaptation (2013) emphasizes ambiguity and psychological discomfort, aligning more closely with the original text and its atmosphere.

Building upon Hutcheon's concept of adaptation as "a creative and interpretative act of appropriation" (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 4), Maftai (2013) reshapes the gothic and mythical components of the novella to modern themes such as trauma,

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repression, and potentially forbidden desires. The protagonist, Christina, is now more akin to modern *strigoi*/vampire archetypes (alluring, lethal, enticing), featured in additional dream sequences and exhibiting heightened sexual tension.

A significant aspect of these adaptations, rooted in Eliade's original work, is found in the intersemiotic translation of symbols, a notion put forth by Roman Jakobson (1959). This concept describes intersemiotic translation as 'an interpretation of verbal signs through nonverbal sign systems' (Jakobson, 1959, p. 238). Consequently, the meaning derived from one semiotic system (verbal language) is transposed into another, which in this instance employs visual and auditory codes. Grasping this process enables us to comprehend how Eliade's symbolic and mythic frameworks are interpreted and transformed from literature into cinema. Repeatedly, we refer back to Stam's semiotic framework (2005) and Hutcheon's focus (2006) on medium-specificity to facilitate our understanding.

Stam (2005) contends that to comprehend the creation of meaning, it is essential to examine the transformation of symbols as the medium shifts, particularly from paper to the big screen. Therefore, images, sounds, and cinematic codes take precedence over dialogue. Hutcheon (2006, pp. 34-35) emphasizes that various media possess distinct strengths; thus, while literature excels in exploring inner thoughts, film is more adept at conveying emotions through performance, so when a narrative transitions from paper to screen, it undergoes creative transformations that pertain to medium-specificity.

The novella *Miss Christina* (1936) is replete with symbolic motifs. One notable example is the mirror, which serves as a liminal portal between different realms. In the film adaptation, the mirror is not directly translated; instead, it is reinterpreted, as Hutcheon highlights, necessitating a creative and formal shift due to the nature of the medium. The mirror acts as a boundary separating the realm of the living from that of the dead, depicted on screen as a reflective surface that obscures the distinction between reality and hallucinations. Another instance of semiotic translation is the ethereal presence of Miss Christina, which is portrayed on screen not through internal monologue or

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descriptive narration, but rather through mise-en-scène, costume design, and non-diegetic sound effects such as whispering voices and ethereal music. These elements collectively evoke a sense of otherworldliness and intrusion for the audience, to translate Eliade's metaphysical suggestions into sensory cues, bridging literature's conceptual density with cinema's affective immediacy.

Miss Christina represents the archetype of a death demon (*strigoi*), which some critics, in the light of Jungian theory, depict as a vampire avatar of the anima (Giovanni Magliocco, 2011). She embodies both seduction and monstrosity, captivating Egor (and the audience) in a spell of intrigue. Maftai's adaptation situates the viewer in a realm of visual complicity, presenting perspectives that reflect Egor's confusion. Cartmell's gendered perspective uncovers how the film both preserves and interrogates the novella's patriarchal concerns regarding female agency. Christina transcends being merely a menace to Egor's rationality, as she serves as a representation of suppressed historical and sexual trauma.

The film adaptation effectively translates Eliade's symbolic framework and metaphors into signifiers that are compatible with the cinematic medium. It is important to recognize that this process transcends mere technicality; it is fundamentally interpretative. As Stam (2005) agrees, film adaptation entails intertextual and intermedial negotiation, wherein meaning is reconfigured to align with the demands and limitations of the new medium. Consequently, the adaptation – whether we discuss Sergovici's or Maftai's – takes the symbolic significance, reworks and reinvents it, and conveys it through cinematic language, presenting it to the audience in a novel perspective.

The endeavour represents a comprehensive transformation of the symbolic universe within the novella, rather than merely a reimagining. This reconstruction is achievable through alterations in imagery, sounds, and atmosphere, participating in a semiotic translation process that both honors and mirrors the essence of Eliade's text, while simultaneously granting creative freedom and interpretative independence to the screenwriter and director of the films.

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Seen through the lens of a postmodern perspective, another significant element addressed in the 2013 adaptation is the portrayal of generational trauma, which denotes the psychological scars transmitted through families or communities, often unarticulated yet profoundly experienced. It is important to recognize that Maftai's film subtly presents the haunting not simply as a supernatural occurrence, but also as a manifestation of unresolved familial trauma, embedded within the gothic environment illustrated by the dilapidated mansion and its residents, as well as in the decline of the aristocracy (as depicted by Eliade in the original narrative – the uprising of peasants that led, in the end, to the murdering of Christina). The Moscu family estate – the haunted residence – serves as a representation of inherited trauma. The house transcends its role as a mere backdrop for the narrative; it acts as a psychological repository for suppressed memories, especially those associated with violence, mistreatment, and gendered power relations.

The trio of women, comprising Madame Moscu, Christina, and Simina, can be read as a lineage of individuals impacted by historical events. Christina, a striking young woman who was allegedly murdered out of jealousy during a period of political upheaval, has not been granted the peace she deserved. Her spectral existence can be seen as a symbol of unresolved historical and familial trauma that has been transmitted to Simina. In turn, Simina appears to embody this unarticulated trauma. As the youngest family member, she exhibits mental fragility and is physically influenced by Christina's lingering presence. It is possible that her condition indicates an inherited or projected trauma, potentially associated with sexual abuse or manipulation, as evidenced by her interactions with Egor (the film recreates the moment in which Simina compels Egor to kiss her, and subsequently, due to the inadequacy of his kiss, she forces him to kiss her shoe, serving as a representation of her dominance and power over him). This adaptation employs subtle dream sequences and visual parallels between Simina and Christina, which seem to underscore the concept of generational trauma being passed down. Sandra, the niece of Christina, is portrayed as bearing the burden of her mother's guilt,

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jeopardizing her own well-being by nourishing the vampire. Madam Moscu experiences remorse, believing Miss Christina was murdered, as she articulates, “she died in my place”.

Eliade’s novella delves into the notion of sacred eroticism and suggests that the female protagonist, Christina, derives pleasure from men (as Nazarie narrates the tales of the peasants to Egor). Nevertheless, Maftai translated the sacred erotic into cinematic form while simultaneously depicting sexual trauma as a psychologically unsettling experience. Consequently, we can consider Christina as a representation of erotic power and exploitation, as she exerts her influence in her interactions with Egor and manipulates Simina for her own purposes. Christina embodies a seductive yet controlling presence, both disconcerting (due to her inherent nature) and coercive, exhibiting predatory behaviour. In the film adaptation, Christina’s actions manifest as breaches of consent, illustrated through dream intrusions, physical contact while Egor is asleep, and psychic domination. Maftai (2013) presents Christina as both a victim (caught between the worlds of the living and the dead, unloved or eternally in search of someone to love her as she is) and a perpetrator (she haunts individuals, manipulates children and adults alike, and possesses them), thus rendering female agency as inherently paradoxical.

In this case, the ambivalent nature of this character is represented visually through variations in lighting (gentle amber contrasted with icy blue) and camera angles that oscillate between elements of horror and allure. Concerning the lighting and color symbolism, it is noted that the director tends to employ a soft purple hue during the scene with Christina, which symbolically reflects the scent of violets experienced by other characters at the moment of her appearance.

2.2. *I am Adam!* (1996)

I am Adam (1996), directed by Dan Pița, adapts three of Eliade’s short stories (*At the Gypsies*, *On Mântuleasa Street*, *General’s Uniforms*) into a surreal triptych structured around the character called Adam, as a symbolic figure that transcends time, memory, and even dreams. The adaptation deconstructs the

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seemingly linear narrative progression and highlights metaphysical exploration, portraying Adam as a soul that roams the world and the boundaries of spiritual realms. The film adaptation addresses the topic of identity dissolution and instability, as Adam's reality becomes increasingly blurred and the lines of time appear to vanish. While the short story *At the Gypsies* provides a framework for understanding and representing cyclical existence, *On Mântuleasa Street* adds layers of communist-era surveillance and promotes the idea of storytelling as a means of salvation (both physical and spiritual). This directing style aligns with Slethaug's postmodern adaptation theory, demonstrating techniques such as nonlinearity, temporal fragmentation, and ontological ambiguity, in an effort to reflect Eliade's narrative style.

It is important to acknowledge that this particular form of film adaptation can be challenging for viewers who have not previously engaged with Eliade's writings, hence the low score on platforms such as IMDb. This difficulty arises because the film's director intricately compresses and intertwines three textual sources within a nonlinear, layered framework. Consequently, it is essential for the audience to be familiar with the original sources to grasp the underlying symbols depicted in the cinematic universe. In this context, we can reexamine adaptation as a creative act of appropriation (Hutcheon, 2006) and as an instance of postmodern intertextuality (Slethaug, 2014).

The character, which is under interrogation, repeatedly reinterprets the unsuccessful violoncellist Antim (*General's Uniforms*), the teacher Zaharia Fărâmbă (*On Mântuleasa Street*), and the piano instructor Gavrilescu (*At the Gypsies*), embodying a synthesis of the Eliadean hero, who remains ensnared in the complexities of history. This Adam, the central figure in Pița's adaptation (1996), represents the individual who challenges the mechanisms of a totalitarian regime, a soul yearning for transcendence. The contrast between these fantastical narratives he recites and the political reality (as illustrated in the short story *On Mântuleasa Street*) accentuates the sacred-profane dualism, and during the time the character recounts, the distinction between narrative and reality fades away,

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demonstrating what Piñar (2019) refers to as a semiotic and cultural approach to adaptation.

The challenge in understanding this adaptation stems from its composition. While the narrative framework of Eliade's novellas is relatively straightforward, albeit predominantly nonlinear, Pița's film (1996) presents itself as a collage of episodes, chaotically assembled fragments, with abrupt transitions between temporal and narrative threads. Nevertheless, amidst these complexities, the director successfully reconstructs the essence of the original texts as a cinematic discourse of internal (and political) resistance, where storytelling emerges as the final sanctuary for humanity. In the novellas, the sacred represents the ultimate destination of the absolute; conversely, in the film, the concept of the absolute is diminished to a metaphor, serving as a protective mechanism against terror and a denial of identity erasure within an oppressive regime. Storytelling assumes both a soteriological and psychological function, as 'telling a/the story' equates to the paramount act of identity affirmation and spiritual resilience.

The sinister atmosphere that permeates Eliade's *On Mântuleasa Street* resonates with the climate of terror cultivated by the Romanian communist regime in the late 1940s and early 1950s, epitomized by the infamous Pitești Experiment (1949-1951). This program of "re-education", carried out through systematic torture, humiliation, and enforced betrayal, sought to annihilate individuality and religious or intellectual resistance in order to reconstruct prisoners as loyal instruments of the Party (Ierunca, 1981; Deletant, 1999; Cesereanu, 2004; Oprea, 2010). While Eliade's novella cloaks its critique in the form of a fantastic narrative, its subtext recalls precisely this assault on memory, identity, and spirituality that marked the Stalinist era in Romania. The terror of Pitești, though not directly named, is making the text legible as a coded reflection of the violence inflicted upon Romania's young intellectuals. In this respect, Pița (1996) film, which draws extensively on Eliade's novella, amplifies this subtext through its visual language, foregrounding the oppressive mechanisms of surveillance, coercion, and ideological

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control that mirror the historical trauma of the communist “re-education” system.

Within this framework, the character Anca Vogel operates as an allegorical embodiment of the Party’s intrusive authority, often interpreted as reflecting the figure of Ana Pauker (although there is no direct evidence that Pauker personally designed or supervised the Pitesti program, the repression was part of the broader apparatus of Stalinist terror that she supported and helped consolidate). Vogel’s ideological rigidity, pervasive surveillance, and coercive presence extend the mechanisms of state control into both the private and the intellectual sphere, symbolising the suffocating reach of the communist apparatus. Eliade’s use of this character amplifies the subtext of repression, linking the fantastic narrative to the lived realities of that time, where individuals were subjected to psychological manipulation and forced conformity. In Pița’s film (1996), Vogel’s traits are visually and narratively intensified: her commanding gaze, controlling gestures, and interactions with the protagonist render the oppressive surveillance and coercion palpable on screen. By translating Vogel’s symbolic authority into cinematic language, the adaptation makes tangible the historical trauma represented in the short story, allowing viewers to perceive the ideological violence and moral intimidation that underpinned the regime’s “re-education” programs. In doing so, the film not only conveys Eliade’s critique of totalitarian control but also situates it firmly within a visual and affective register accessible to contemporary audiences.

The visual aesthetic and fragmented temporality are significantly shaped by the manner in which the director utilizes chiaroscuro lighting, extended takes, and theatrical set designs to accentuate the dreamlike atmosphere. Visual components merge with specific sound effects generated by the blending of classical music and ambient sounds. The environment is frequently characterized by intentional anachronisms, defying realism. These stylistic dichotomies strengthen the film’s postmodern philosophy and underscore the complex temporality conveyed. The fragmented temporality is facilitated by Pița’s editing techniques: transitions between different eras, image

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juxtapositions, and abrupt changes in ambient color produce a disorienting effect, allowing the audience to experience the perspective of the main character. These directorial decisions are far from arbitrary; they try to evoke Eliade's concept of the sacred interrupting the mundane reality, where conventional time fractures to unveil a mythic dimension. Adam, as the central character, the archetypal first man (the selection of name is evident and embodies the concepts of reincarnation and cyclical time), serves as a conduit for these temporal disruptions and guides the audience through time and a striking initiation rite.

Concerning intersemiotic strategies, instead of faithfully translating the textual events, Pița (1996) adapts Eliade's metaphysical concerns: the discrepancy between sacred and profane time, the function of ritual and the concept of the eternal return, and the presence of archetypal figures. Visual metaphors, including masks, labyrinthine spaces, and the window motif (which implies both inner and outer vision), play a crucial role in the film's adaptation strategy.

Stam argues that we need to look beyond mere fidelity, asserting that "the language of criticism dealing with the film adaptation of novels has often been profoundly moralistic" (Stam, 2005, p. 3). Stam warns us about the reductive practice of measuring the film in question against a *pure* original, singular Eliadean text, a benchmark that remains contentious; this is particularly pertinent here because the film is based on three of the author's short stories, amalgamating them into a hybrid narrative. Instead of a direct translation of the plot, the director engages in a dialogic process, articulating Eliade's more significant themes through the medium's forms. Thus, the adaptation enters into conversation not only with Eliade's originals, but also with the broader cultural and historical discourses of 1990s Romania.

In Stam's dialogic sense, the film's substitutions of cinematic form for literary devices are significant meaning-making strategies. Where Eliade's prose uses narrative voice to collapse dreams and reality, the director employs visual and auditory techniques. A notable example is a sequence that evokes the short story *At the Gypsies*, where Pița (1996) substitutes the

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author's complex narrative voice and seamless transitions between the realms by utilizing varying light levels and a subdued, almost sepia tone. This approach enables the audience to see mythical time rather than just experiencing it through their mental imagery while reading, with the visual metaphor condensing temporal instability into a sensory experience.

Other sequences that incorporate intersemiotic strategies and recontextualization focus on the montage through various juxtapositions of urban decay, surreal and ritualistic imagery, reflecting but not mirroring entirely the descriptive passages of Eliade's prose. Pița's work serves as a cinematic reference, highlighting the liminality present in Eliade's fiction while also redirecting the audience's attention to the post-communist Bucharest landscape, which is notably absent from the original text. According to Stam, this represents the adaptation's *thematic amplification*, wherein the film preserves the symbolic core tension between the sacred and the profane yet situates it within a new socio-political discourse regarding Romania's identity. It seems that Pița (1996) aims to emphasize that even after the early years of communism (as depicted in Eliade's prose *On Mantuleasa Street*), there is little change in the treatment of individuals, so nobody is free from the wheel of time. Consequently, by deviating from strict fidelity and concentrating on these intermedial substitutions and the *intertextual dialogics* of adaptation, the 1996 film emerges as both an interpretation and a reimagining of Eliade's mythic universe.

It is our belief that Pița (1996) is looking to recreate, among other things, the journey an individual undertakes to restore their former condition, a notion that holds true when considering the ramifications of an oppressive regime (the former conditions equal freedom in this case). Consequently, the visual imagery at the end of the film, where Adam, the protagonist, appears to navigate through time, is portrayed at various stages of his life. Furthermore, this ending genuinely embodies Eliade's concepts concerning the role of ritual and its diverse forms as a game or a spectacle that serves to erase historical time, thereby granting the individual the opportunity to return to their origins. This is why we contend that the

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character is named Adam, symbolically linking the lineage of humanity to the first man (as per *Genesis*, marking the inception of the world). The trauma illustrated is essential for initiation, and in Adam's case, it acts as a trigger that opens the gate to *exit* historical time. The stage and the accompanying music as mythical operators are also needed, since Adam represents a synthesis of three of Eliade's characters, all of whom are artists or creators (notably, Zaharia is a creator who spins tales). The suffering he endures, the relentless inquiries from the inquisitor, the shackling, and a form of waterboarding (as portrayed in the film), prepare him for transcendence. Adam embodies the concept of a contemporary *homo religiosus*, a modern individual who retains within his subconscious the history of beginnings. His escape, a labyrinth (of tales), is replete with symbols he must identify and interpret.

As we have mentioned before, our interest extends to adaptations that are based on intertextuality and read in a postmodern key, rather than solely focusing on fidelity and its limitations. Slethaug emphasizes the postmodern and intertextual strategies employed in adaptations, asserting that they possess "value, validity and integrity not dependent upon the originals" (Slethaug, 2014, p. 8). This viewpoint aligns well with *I am Adam!* (1996), as the film does not aim to serve as a faithful rendition of a singular Eliadean text; instead, it constructs a collage of narratives, visual elements, and various interpretations of temporal layers. By interweaving these motifs, Pița (1996) fabricates an intertextual tapestry. We observe that the film montage resonates with postmodern sensibilities. Temporal disjunctions, characterized by sudden transitions in dream sequences, historical flashbacks, and ambiguous present moments, forge a nonlinear narrative that reflects Eliade's concept of cyclical time. However, the director's interpretation places great emphasis on uncertainty and temporal coherence. This approach encourages the audience to engage with the uncanny, not just as a thematic element, but as an intrinsic formal characteristic of the film itself.

As we stated before, we are also interested in reading the adaptation based on intertextuality and in a postmodern key, not

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just in terms of fidelity and beyond fidelity. Slethaug emphasizes the adaptation's postmodern and intertextual moves, citing that it has "value, validity and integrity not dependent upon the originals" (Slethaug, 2014, p. 8). This perspective fits good with *I am Adam!* (1996), since the film refuses to function as a faithful translation of a single Eliadean text, but creates a collage of narratives, visual textures, and different translations of the temporal layers. By weaving all these motifs together, Pița (1996) creates an intertextual fabric. The film montage is attuned to postmodern sensibility. Temporal disjunctions – the abrupt shifts in dream sequences, historical flashbacks, and unclear present moments – create a nonlinear story that echoes Eliade's cyclical time, yet the director's version stresses more on uncertainty, cinematic ellipses, cuts, and cross-fades that disrupt spatial and temporal logic. This strategy invites the viewer to experience the uncanny not only as a thematic concern, but also as a formal condition of the film itself.

Mise-en-scène serves a significant intertextual function: the combination of costume, set design, and lighting intertwines traditional elements with modern urban decay, resulting in an aesthetic that is neither entirely historical nor completely contemporary (for instance, the costumes worn by the girls in the intimate scenes with Adam appear excessively *contemporary* for the era that the script seems to depict). This blended visual landscape reflects the textual hybridity of the script, which approaches Eliade's dichotomy as a dynamic, evolving concept rather than a static metaphysical dualism. Additionally, we observe potential metafictional elements that bolster Slethaug's assertion that the adaptation is making its own cultural, ethical, and aesthetic statements, suggesting that in the post-1989 context, Eliade's investigation of myth and ritual emerges as a process through which society is reconciling its fragmented identity and historical consciousness. Consequently, we can contend that this adaptation transcends a mere post-modern re-inscription of Eliade's themes and issues; rather, it represents a reconfiguration of the sacred for modern audiences in a desacralized world.

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The theoretical framework we utilized acquires additional significance when the adaptation is perceived against the backdrop of Romania's communist history. The stifling interiors, bureaucratic hallways, and halls in which hundreds of people are interrogated, and depersonalized authority figures (nameless men in grey suits, faceless clerks) possess both political and metaphysical implications. The film actually commences with a scene depicting, from various angles and perspectives, numerous men seated at desks, engaged in the act of confessing in writing across thousands of pages. In Eliade's writings, these spaces and figures serve to superpose the protagonists with those who remain uninitiated (or individuals who have yet to awaken from dreams' entanglement); in Pița's interpretation, they also evoke the architectural and mechanisms of state surveillance during the communist era. This layering reinterprets the mythical threshold as an allegory for ideological confinement and systemic control.

In this context, Stethaug's concept of adaptation as culturally contextualized proves to be particularly significant. By reinterpreting Eliade's sacred-profane dialectic through a visual lens imbued with the recollections of authoritarianism, *I am Adam!* (1996) converted myth into a political allegory. The recurring appearance of specific images and the persistent merging of temporal limits suggest a society that is haunted by its history, incapable of completely dissociating its current identity from the frameworks and traumas of the preceding period.

In this reading, the uncanny is perceived not merely as a metaphysical disruption but also as a historical one, representing the disquieting persistence of repressed memory within the post-communist Romanian consciousness. Film instances where reality intertwines with dream or myth can be interpreted as allegories for collective memory: the past (trauma, verbal and physical violence, censorship, and ideological conditioning) incessantly intrudes upon the present, obscuring the distinction between what is recollected and what is experienced. By incorporating Eliade's mythic patterns into imagery and scenarios reminiscent of the communist and immediate post-communist period, Pița (1996) employs adaptation as a means for

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cultural introspection. This reinforces Slethaug's claim that adaptations possess value, validity, and integrity not dependent upon the originals" (Slethaug, 2014, p. 8), in this context, value resides in the manner in which the film reinterprets mythic content into a politically charged reflection on historical memory and the reconstruction of identity in a society emerging from years of oppressive rule.

2.3. *The Snake* (1996)

Sergovici's 1996 film *The Snake*, adapted from Eliade's novella bearing the same name, acts as a prime example of a faithful yet interpretative adaptation that retains the structural integrity of its source material while rearticulating its emotional and aesthetic dimensions for a late 20th-century Romanian audience. The film preserves the complete character roster of Eliade's universe and adheres closely to the narrative structure of the novella; however, its cinematic language, reminiscent of Sergovici's previous work *Miss Christina* (1996), embraces a mystical and ambiguous tone that amplifies the thematic concerns of Eliade, transforming them into a visual and sensory experience. This adaptation is not just a transposition, but a re-interpretation that operates within the framework described by Hutcheon (2006) and McFarlane (1996).

Hutcheon describes adaptations within her framework as "repetitions without replication", emphasizing that these works must engage in *creative reinterpretation* instead of simply copying the source (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 7). In retaining the plot and characters of the novella, Sergovici (1996) fulfils the aspect of repetition. However, the *mise-en-scène*, visual pacing, and tone, characterized by subdued dialogue, prolonged silence, and atmospheric lighting, compose a reinterpretation, influencing how the audience experiences Eliade's enigmatic story.

Hutcheon (2006) asserts that adaptations resonate with new audiences in different contexts. *The Snake* (1996), released in post-communist Romania, arrives at a pivotal moment, when Eliade's previously censored works were experiencing a resurgence. We contend that Sergovici's faithful adaptation can be interpreted as a reclamation of cultural heritage, serving as a

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cinematic preservation of narrative identity during a period when Romania was redefining its connection to its literary history and identity. The re-inscribing elements employed by the film's director, in line with the aesthetic of 1990s Romanian cinema, correspond with Hutcheon's concept of adaptations as "deliberate, announced and extended revisitations" (2006, p. xiv), wherein meaning is not merely transferred but *re-coded* for a new audience, thereby transforming the film into a nuanced commentary on the cultural reawakening regarding issues of transcendence, destiny and the irrational. In this regard, the adaptation does not only revisit Eliade's narrative; rather, it repositions it within the context of a nation's quest for spiritual continuity and identity, followed by decades of ideological suppression. With these thoughts in mind, we agree with Hutcheon: "An adaptation is not vampiric: it does not draw the life-blood from its source and leave it dying or dead, nor is it paler than the adapted work. It is rather a work that is second without being secondary" (2006, p. 176). By this measure, *The Snake* (1996) stands as a *second work* that reanimates the novella's blend of eroticism, mystery, and the uncanny in a visual register evocative of Sergovici's style.

The director recontextualizes the original writing by utilizing the specific affordances and limitations of his chosen medium. In relation to intersemiotic translation, although the adaptation retains all the characters from the novella and its fundamental sequence of events, the manner of engagement undergoes a significant transformation: the mystical ambiguity expressed through Eliade's writing is rendered into a visual language characterized by dimly lit settings, gradual tracking shots, and a subdued colour scheme reminiscent of Sergovici's previous film, *Miss Christina* (1992). The result is an experience in which the "telling" becomes a "showing", a shift highlighted by Hutcheon that calls it a change from *telling mode* to *showing mode*, which necessarily alters reception (Hutcheon, 2006, pp. 22-25).

In Eliade's text, the mystical is intricately woven into the language of the narrator and the inner lives of the characters; conversely, in Sergovici's film (1996), the mystical emerges

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through the *mise-en-scène*, with shadows appearing to have a life of their own, a soundscape that harmoniously combines diegetic natural sounds with non-diegetic elements. This adaptation stages the uncanny in ways only cinema can, thus validating Hutcheon's views regarding adaptations as creative reinterpretations, shaped by medium-specific possibilities (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 52).

Several scenes caught our interest. For example, a notable moment occurs when Andronic reveals the presence of a snake during the dinner party (following his game in the forest). Sergovici (1996) employs a low-angle close-up of Andronic in this dinner scene, which visually enhances his authority and enigmatic control. This marks a transformation from Eliade's prose, where such power is expressed more subtly through dialogue and narrative tone. Conversely, in the adaptation, the camera's intensified focus on Andronic's facial expression, combined with the dim candlelit scene and the facial expressions of the other characters, creates an amplified sense of mystery. This is further intensified by Andronic's enigmatic call of the snake, as if he were conversing in the snake's language.

The static framing combined with the nearly sepia-toned color palette imbues the film with a historical and almost timeless quality, resonating with the concept of re-coding (for a new medium) suggested by adaptation critics, where visual texture serves as a conduit for the uncanny. Eliade's initial depiction of the monastery space (along with all its historical narratives) is reimagined into a cinematic architecture of shadows, enabling Sergovici (1996) to intertwine the sacred and sensual through contrasts: as the dinner scene unfolds, the interspersed sensual imagery reveals concealed desires, a cinematic technique absent in Eliade's solely verbal medium. The lightning transitions convey various meanings: a blue hue is used when the snake emerges, to evoke the silvery moonlight, followed by close-ups of most characters, and then a pinkish light to illustrate the women's innermost desires. By superimposing instances of imagined sensuality onto the presence of the snake (which also appears in the interstitial frames), Sergovici (1996) establishes what Hutcheon (2006) refers to as *palimpsestuous*

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layering, wherein the audience simultaneously engages with both the original narrative's social ritual and the underlying erotic tension. This approach does not undermine the source material but instead re-inscribes it for a visual audience, broadening the novella's psychological depths into a domain of sensory immediacy that is distinctive to film.

McFarlane's (1996) contributions to adaptation studies stress the intercultural and temporal mediation inherent in this film. In the instance of *The Snake* (1996), the adaptation serves as a cultural conduit linking interwar Romanian modernism (the literary period of the novella) with the fluid and uncertain identity of post-1989 Romania. Sergovici's *mise-en-scène*, featuring rural landscapes, dim interiors, and lingering close-ups, creates an environment where mythic temporality eclipses historical time, resonating with Eliade's focus on the sacred as an ever-present dimension that breaches the profane reality. Nevertheless, these instances are not mere *transfers* but rather what McFarlane terms as *adaptation proper*. This transcends mere aesthetic fidelity; it embodies cultural recontextualization, enabling the mystical ambiguity of Eliade's fiction to resonate with a society grappling with the rationalists' legacies of communism and a renewed interest in spiritual and esoteric traditions. Sergovici (1996) does not only process direct transfers from Eliade; instead, he employs strategies that visually encode the uncanny and the tension between the sacred and profane, which are central to the author's text. In the context of post-1989 Romania, these stylistic choices also reflect, as we stated before, a revived interest in the metaphysical and mystical themes that were previously suppressed during the Communist regime, illustrating how adaptation operates both as an interpretative act and a negotiation with cultural history.

In consideration of cyclical time and Hutcheon's concepts of *repetition and creation* (2006, p. 8), it is evident that Sergovici (1996) reiterates Eliade's fundamental motifs while simultaneously crafting a new layer of significance by presenting Arghira's untold story. Through the use of monochromatic, black and white sequences, he effectively differentiates between the past and the present, indicating to the audience that Dorina

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represents the reincarnation of Arghira. The *mise-en-scène* portrays Andronic as a monk, constantly negotiating between spiritual discipline and carnal temptation. The sensual undressing of Dorina/Arghira, set against a backdrop of icons and ecclesiastical chanting, exemplifies what Stam refers to as the *dialogical* nature of adaptation (Stam, 2005, p. 3), a dialogue not only with Eliade's text, but also with Christian iconography and the cinematic representations of desire. The director implies that Andronic yields, leading to the consummation of their love. This vision expands what Eliade leaves unsaid, resonating with Cartmell's assertion that cinema often fills in "the silences of literature" (Cartmell, 2005, p. 169).

The plot culminates in tragedy: Arghira is killed, and Andronic flees into the forest, disrobing himself of his monastic identity. The doubling of Dorina/ Arghira foregrounds Eliade's motif of cyclical time and reincarnation. In the dream sequence, Dorina meets her past selves, including an avatar echoing Helen of Troy, while Andronic is framed as Paris offering the apple. This moment explicitly invokes the myth of the androgyne and the Adam and Eve pairing. Slethaug reminds us that adaptations operate through intertextual layering, being "a nexus for, and mosaic of, context, writing/directing subjects, originating texts and intertexts, discursive practices and viewers/readers" (Slethaug, 2014, p. 6). Here, Sergovici (1996) layers Eliade's mythological structures with classical motifs to situate Dorina as both Eve and Helen, perpetually chosen yet perpetually doomed.

The telepathic conversation between Andronic and Dorina (exclusively depicted in the film) emphasizes the mystical atmosphere. When Andronic menaces Dorina with the threat of eternal loss ("Throughout your life, you will seek me, yet you will never find me"), the Edenic paradise collapses. Andronic's summons resonates with that of Miss Christina's in Sergovici's earlier adaptation of Eliadean texts. Just as the author highlights the descent from primordial unity, the director portrays the disintegration of the androgyne couple.

The concluding scenes propel the story into the future (the audience's present time). Another incarnation of Dorina is lost and drives through the pouring rain, once more

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encountering Andronic, who offers to guide her to the monastery. This cyclical return mirrors Eliade's concept of cyclical time, wherein existence undergoes perpetual repetition. In Hutcheon's terms, adaptation here is not a re-telling but a *palimpsest of temporalities* (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 9), encouraging the viewers to *read* the film as both a continuation and a transformation of Eliade's mythic imagination.

3. Conclusions

The film adaptations of Eliade's prose (*Miss Christina*, *I am Adam!* 1996, and *The Snake*) highlight how myth, symbol and philosophical motifs are transformed when transposed into cinema. Rather than simple transfers of content, these films exemplify what Hutcheon (2006) terms as palimpsestuous nature of adaptation, where texts are rewritten through the affordances and limitations of a new medium.

Each director interprets Eliade's symbolic universe in a unique manner. Sergovici's *The Snake* (1996) privileges allegory and existential stillness, transforming narrative action into a philosophical reflection. In contrast, Pița's *I am Adam!* (1996) fractures time and identity, connecting Eliade's mythic archetypes with the concerns of post-totalitarian memory. Maței's *Miss Christina* (2013) reinvents sacred eroticism through gothic imagery, exposing the underlying currents of sexual and generational trauma. These divergent strategies confirm Stam's (2005) claim that adaptation is a semiotic process: symbols alter their meanings as they transition across different codes, whether through visual framing, montage or sound design.

These films demonstrate that Eliade's narratives persist not through strict adherence but via cultural and aesthetic transformations. As Slethaug (2014) suggests, adaptation is a form of reinvention that produces new meanings for new audiences. In post-communist Romania, the adaptation of Eliade emerged as a method to process collective memory, address trauma, and reconnect with myth.

Collectively, the adaptations reinforce the notion that Eliade's prose is amenable to various cinematic interpretations.

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Each film points to distinct elements of his mythopoetic vision, demonstrating how literature transitions to film as both a continuity and a disruption. In this process, they remind us that adaptation transcends mere reproduction; it is a creative endeavour that recontextualizes narratives for evolving historical and cultural landscapes.

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