

**FAME AND ROMANCE
THE CINEMATIC VOICE OF *THE DYING ANIMAL*¹**

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Abstract

This paper depicts the contrast between Philip Roth's novel *The Dying Animal* and the 2008 film adaptation, *Elegy*, directed by Isabel Coixet. Focusing on themes such as fame, aging and the construction of identity, especially in the celebrityhood context, the comparison between the novel and the film highlights how literary cynicism can be replaced by emotional accessibility in cinema works. Roth's novel presents an introspective and at times wicked picture of desire and mortality through the main character's, David Kepesh, perspective, while the film softens the narrative, thus transforming it into a liberating love story. The film's depiction of David Kepesh as a vulnerable man differs from Roth's portrayal of a man consumed by lust and power. Furthermore, another central element of the analysis is represented by the female character, Consuela. In the novel, she is largely objectified and serves as a muse for Kepesh, while in the film she is depicted as a confident woman, remodeled in order to align with contemporary values and cinematic conventions. This change reflects the main goal of the film adaptation: to make Roth's sometimes

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IMAGINARUL ȘI ADAPTĂRILE TEXTULUI LITERAR

uncomfortable narrative more acceptable to a wider audience. In addition to this, it is examined how intertextual references such as Yeats' *Sailing to Byzantium*, which is present in the novel serves as a reflection on aging, one of the most important themes in the novel. These references emphasize sensitive themes in the novel and offer a poetic meditation of fame, art and mortality, elements which are neglected in the film. Finally, the ideological and structural differences between the novel and the film are presented. Moreover, the novel's ending is characterized by ambiguity and unresolved issues, while the film offers emotional closure and catharsis. Centering the analysis on Andrew Gordon's and Debra Shostak's works, the paper finally suggests that *Elegy* reframes Roth's unsettling critique on fame and intimacy, into a mainstream narrative, altering the philosophical message and essence of the original work.

Keywords: fame; identity; Philip Roth; cinematography; *Elegy*.

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between literature and cinematography is sometimes the subject of critical debate. Adaptations are able to place a literary work into another environment, to reshape, reinterpret and sometimes change meaning. This entire process can build up tensions between textual fidelity and cinematic creativity underlining the importance of authorship and the changeable nature of cultural values. Thus, Linda Hutcheon (2013) emphasizes that film adaptations should not be judged by their fidelity to the source because "adaptation is repetition without replication" (Hutcheon, 2013, p.7). They should be perceived as products with their own ideological and aesthetic meaning. Moreover, Robert Stam's theory of adaptation is another valuable source when it comes to book adaptations. Stam (2005) argues that adaptations should not be judged by their "fidelity" to the source text (Stam, 2005, p.5). Instead, they should be perceived as creative transformations that reimagine literature within the cinematic environment. Thus, research on Philip Roth highlights the challenges of translating his bold narrative voice into film, especially because of the provocative nature of his themes, such as sexuality, mortality, fame and so on and so forth. Therefore,

IMAGINARUL ȘI ADAPTĂRILE TEXTULUI LITERAR

critics such as Andrew Gordon and Debra Shostak examine how Philip Roth's works discuss issues of aging, masculinity and desire, however relatively few studies focus on how these themes transform when it comes to cinematic adaptations. While the focus is on Roth's depiction of death and desire through the main character, David Kepesh, in the novel, studies of the film adaptation *Elegy* (2008) underline the emotional openness and gender dynamics. While Roth's novel is characterized by cynicism, isolation, and male desire, Isabel Coixet's film reshapes the story into one centered on vulnerability, intimacy, and redemption. Therefore, this study explores how *The Dying Animal* and *Elegy* differ in their approach of fame and romance. This comparison between the literary voice and its cinematic version shows how themes such as aging, celebrity and identity change when adapted from page to screen.

2. CELEBRITY AND SEXUAL POWER IN *THE DYING ANIMAL*

The first part of the article examines how the novel *The Dying Animal* by Philip Roth connects with the concept of celebrity culture or the cult of celebrity in literature, and how the theme of fame influences the self-development of the main character, David Kepesh. Roth's depiction of the main character presents similarities to other characters in postmodern literature, for example Bill Gray, Don DeLillo's main character in *Mao II*. Thus, the intellectual, in this case David Kepesh, becomes the personification of celebrity. Both Roth and DeLillo explored the way celebrities, especially the ones famous for their art or academical success, become consumed by their own fame, being unable to control it. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the novel, David seems to be in control of his actions and his status as a famous person. For him, the status as a recognized cultural and literary critic paves the way for power, especially over women. Fame allows him to live a life of seduction, outside the traditional or even moral frontiers established by society. Even though, the relationship between "master and pupil" (Trendel, 2007, p.56), professor and student, in our case, seems to be a source of inspiration for many writers, for example: Henry James, Herman

IMAGINARUL ȘI ADAPTĂRILE TEXTULUI LITERAR

Hesse, Eugène Ionesco, J.M. Coetzee and so on and so forth, this leitmotif started a wave of criticisms towards Roth's writings (Trendel, 2007, p.56). As Philip Roth became fascinated by this theme, he wrote a trilogy about David Kepesh and his lust for his students, *The Dying Animal* being the last novel, or novella in the trilogy.

Regarding the concept of fame or celebrityhood, Trendel (2007) underlines some important aspects regarding the master's individuality. The word master has Latin origins, meaning chief, head, teacher or overseer. The Latin root itself is connected to "magis", which means "more" or "greater". Therefore, a "magister" or a "master" is someone in a position of authority, greater knowledge or even in charge of others (Online Etymology Dictionary). Even though the word master has Latin origins, Trendel (2007) highlights its Greek traits stating that in Greece teaching flourished on "colossus-like masters" (Trendel, 2007, p.57) who were able to establish the progress of thinking. In addition to this, the concept of celebrity is similar to the concept of master. Celebrities must possess the same qualities in order to influence other people to adore and admire them. They need to show superiority, exceptional traits, to inspire others and keep their audience spellbound in order to maintain their status as celebrities. All types of art, especially literature and music, engage with human emotions, and David Kepesh demonstrates mastery of both. He plays the piano, he is an expert in literature, he is well-educated, charming and a guru of cultural trends, he is very capable of keeping his students spellbound. Not only did he enchant his students, but a great number of other people as well, for this intellectual man is constantly invited to radio broadcasts and TV shows to talk about the latest trends in literature (Trendel, 2007, p. 57). In this case, a new question arises, is David so charming because of his intellect or because he is famous? The answer is given by the main character himself who is also the narrator of the novel:

Over the past fifteen years, being cultural critic on the television program has made me fairly well known locally, and they're attracted to my class because of that.

IMAGINARUL ȘI ADAPTĂRILE TEXTULUI LITERAR

In the beginning, I didn't realize that talking on TV once a week for ten minutes could be so impressive as it turns out to be to these students. But they are helplessly drawn to celebrity, however inconsiderable mine may be. (Roth, 2001, p.5)

The main character is aware of the power his celebrityhood generates, therefore, he uses it to seduce former students of his, young women mesmerized by his charm, taking advantage of the fame he possesses. For him celebrity represents an advantage. However, when anxiety develops because of his relationship with Consuela, a former student, much younger than him, fame started to feel like a burden. He is not sure if he wants to be seen with one of his former students by the media. At the same time, she does not want to be in the spotlight, being different from all the girls her age who are drawn to celebrity. The relationship between David and Consuela is described by Trendel (2007, p.59) in the platonic view upon pedagogy, stating that the purpose of education is the control of others by the rational part in humans. In this sense, Consuela is seduced by David, her thoughts are controlled, and she is manipulated. However, she is more mature than he thought, and Consuela takes David by surprise when she demonstrates that she has her own beliefs and identity. Moreover, it seems that the view upon pedagogy is constructed on the same grounds as the concept of celebrityhood. They both imply that there is a dominator (the master, the celebrity) and a servant (the pupils, the crowds) (Trendel, 2007, p.59). Nevertheless, regarding the concept of fame, an exchange takes place in the relationship between the celebrity and the crowds, or the fans. They both dominate and serve, being difficult to determine which one dominates and serves more.

Furthermore, the novel examines how fame can alter human interactions by reducing individuals to objects. The artist's quest of beauty is representative of western literature, and the author offers his own alternative (Trendel, 2007, p.61). Consuela Castillo, the student seduced by David, is the icon of objectification in this novel. She is not described in terms of her intellectual potential but in terms of physical appearance. She

IMAGINARUL ȘI ADAPTĂRILE TEXTULUI LITERAR

represents the object of David's desires the same way celebrities are the objects of admiration for their fans. Observed in this perspective, it can be suggested that Roth critiques how fame leads to objectification, to transactional personal relationships, emphasizing Guy Debord's theory regarding the patterns of celebrity worship (Debord, 1970, p.24). The theme of objectification, both sexual and intellectual, is present in every corner of the novel. David objectifies Consuela, his lover, treating her beauty and youth as symbols of vitality in contrast to his aging body. This contrast mirrors the way society often objectifies celebrities and famous people, valuing them not for their work or their true selves but for their external or physical qualities.

In the novel, David is aware of the dynamic forces in his relationship with Consuela. He knows that his status, when it comes to fame and intellect, help him in manipulating Consuela, yet the fear of irrelevance as he grows older dominates his thoughts. This impasse is another important theme in the novel, as it represents the starting point of David's contemplation on life and death. In addition to this, Zoe Roth (2012) states that Consuela, as the symbol of David's longing, represents his artwork, allowing him to create a sacrificial scene and to enjoy the "volupté of death" (Roth, 2012, p. 96). Thus, the mimesis of art does not protect the main character against the possible realities of living and dying. The question of death occupies David's mind especially when his friend, George, passes away and when he finds out about Consuela's cancer. However, this question is represented diversely in this novel, as death is represented in multiple forms. The first one is aging, the second one is the object of the main character's desire, and the last one is loss. In other words, Consuela represents both desire and death. Thus, Roth (2012) expands on her argument implying that the breakdown of mimesis challenges not only the connection between desire and death, but also the entire system of representation within the novel (Roth, 2012, p.96). In the novel, the artist's muse symbolizes death, whereas in the context of celebrity, death is often tied to the artist. Just as the artist preserves the muse's immortality, the public ensures the artist and his work live on forever.

3. POP-CULTURE AND YOUTH CULTURE IN *THE DYING ANIMAL*

The second part of the article delves into the pop-culture theory and uses it to explore Roth's reflection on youth culture in postmodern society. In the novel Consuela represents the concept of youth, beauty and vitality that mirrors the American society's obsession with the celebrity culture. Modern pop-culture theorists like Guy Debord argue that in a spectacle-driven society, youth and physical beauty become commodities (Debord, 1970, p.24). However, what is pop culture and what is the link between it and celebrity culture? Marcel Danesi (2019) explains the concept, stating that defining the term is more complex than it initially appears (p.14). To begin, it helps to understand culture itself, which anthropologists describe as the way communities organize and stabilize daily life through shared beliefs, rituals, art, language, symbols, food, music, and other forms of expression associated with a specific group at a given time. Traditionally, culture has been divided into "high" and "low" categories, with high culture seen as more impactful on human life, while low culture is often viewed as purely recreational or even trivial. Pop culture, however, does not make such distinctions. Emerging in the 1920's due to increased affluence, pop culture grew as people across all classes had more purchasing power, and its influence spread through the media-technology-business networks. Since then, pop culture has shaped societal evolution, and we often label significant periods of social change using pop culture references, such as the flapper, swing, hippie, disco, or hip-hop eras. These terms exist alongside political and technological markers like the Kennedy era, the television era, or the social media era (Danesi, 2019, p.14).

Moreover, Danesi (2019) states that the subject of celebrities is a key focus in pop culture studies. Andy Warhol (1930–1987) famously remarked that everyone would eventually have their "fifteen minutes of fame," though he was actually referring to people's desire for fame. Warhol observed a society shaped by constant exposure to media stars and recognized that

IMAGINARUL ȘI ADAPTĂRILE TEXTULUI LITERAR

celebrity status doesn't always belong to real people—it can also apply to products or fictional characters, like cartoon figures or superheroes. Some of Warhol's most iconic celebrity subjects included both commercial items, such as Campbell's soup cans and Coca-Cola bottles, and famous individuals like Elvis Presley, Elizabeth Taylor, Mao Zedong, and Marilyn Monroe (Danesi, 2019, p.121). Moreover, Danesi marks a distinction between fame and celebrity. He states that scientists can be famous, but they do not automatically become celebrities unless they capture the interest of both the general public and the mass media. A well-known example is Albert Einstein, who was famous for his scientific work but also became a celebrity due to the media's fascination with both his achievements and personal life. Like a movie star, Einstein has been depicted in comic strips, on T-shirts, greeting cards, and other pop culture merchandise. Another intellectual who received similar media attention was Sigmund Freud, though such cases are rare. Celebrities are more commonly entertainment figures, like movie actors or pop stars. This trend became evident early on during the rise of film and radio, when actors and radio personalities became subjects of interest for magazines and newspapers (Danesi, 2019, p.121). In pop-culture relationships between older men and younger women, or older women and younger men are often glamorized, a trend which is criticized and explored in *The Dying Animal*. David Kepesh embodies this cultural trope where his fame grants him access to younger women. Roth presents the deeper psychological and emotional consequences of such a relationship while the pop-culture's glamorization of such relationship obscures the emotional damage it leaves behind.

Furthermore, the novel highlights the immaturity with which human relationships are treated in the postmodern America when young people would do anything for five minutes of fame. Young women are drawn to celebrity, David is the quintessence of fame, therefore, they would let themselves be seduced by him hoping for something more. Young people usually set the tone for new trends. The novel tries to emphasize that there is a close relationship between pop-culture and youth culture, there is a dynamic between them (Danesi, 2019, p.22).

IMAGINARUL ȘI ADAPTĂRILE TEXTULUI LITERAR

Thus, if the trend involved entering into a sexual relationship with a professor known for hosting the same party every semester to lure another young woman, then everyone was quite enthusiastic about it. The feeling of enthusiasm comes from the need to feel close to the person they admire. They knew David appeared on television and on the radio, they watched and listened to him, they were charmed. Youth is worshiped in the novel. Consuela's body, the representation of youth, is worshiped in the novel. The realization of aging comes with regrets as the main character spent his entire life avoiding the realities of aging, love and loss (Cherolis, 2006, p.14). These are the repercussions of fame and celebrityhood, the loss of privacy and intimacy to be himself. This is how David avoided realities and maintained his image of a happy divorced man with a great career intact. Pop-culture and youth culture are continuously moving, David observes that society sees an aging man as a dying man, and therefore it does not have much to offer to such an individual (Cherolis, 2006, p.14).

The idea of losing his fame, young admirers, and, by extension, his vitality, leads him to increasingly reflect on his age and mortality. Furthermore, a theme which is to be taken into consideration regarding its relationship to consumerism is the theme of loss. The society depicted in the novel reflects the worst aspects of consumerism, where the pain of loss is not mourned but denied, and instead of being a private matter, death is turned into a spectacle that quickly becomes a profitable commodity. Also, Kepesh's use of the term jealousy represents an analogy for various types of loss, showing a deeper loss of control over his feelings, over his life, over his celebrity status (Cherolis, 2006, p.15). His relationship with Consuela is affected by his fame as she does not want to be in the spotlight, therefore in order to keep the relationship David must respect her own terms. The worship of youth is also represented through an elegy on aging. "To those not yet old, being old means you've been. But being old also means that despite, in addition to, and in excess of your beenness you still are" (Roth, 2001, p.36). Cherolis (2006, p.16) argues that the word "been" emphasizes clear boundaries placed on the past. Furthermore, the term "beenness" refers to a state

IMAGINARUL ȘI ADAPTĂRILE TEXTULUI LITERAR

anchored in the past, representing the experience of living on the margins and aging within society. The protagonist observes life from an outsider's perspective, where the desires of his youth persist, even though society expects such desires to fade with age. What should be confined to the past remains present for David. Despite his marginalized status as a dying animal, desire still endures for him (Cherolis, 2006, p.16). The importance of youth culture in pop culture is visible in these remarks as young people are the ones who have control over one's status as a celebrity, therefore, the main character venerates this power and wants it back.

4. CINEMATIC ADAPTATIONS OF FAME AND ROMANCE IN *ELEGY*

The third part of this article compares Roth's novel and construction of the characters and the film *Elegy*, the 2008 adaptation. The comparison is constructed around the theme of fame, romance and celebrityhood. Even though the novel does not necessarily present traits of romanticism, on the contrary, cynicism is more preferred by the author, the film was created to sweeten David and Consuela's relationship. While the novel presents the main character as Don Juan, the film's director, Isabel Coixet, chose to focus on the emotional vulnerability of the main character. At the same time, the novel is a melancholic existential meditation on fame and mortality, and the film's main focus is on the romantic relationship between Consuela and David, transforming the plot into a story about redemption and love. This demonstrates how cinema tempers literary critiques in order to attract broader audiences, changing the raw cynicism of Roth's narrative into a tolerable form of celebrity-centered romantic drama. Thus, the focus shifts towards melodrama.

Andrew Gordon (2017) comments on the presence of the novel in the cinematic industry, especially through the changes made by the director. Calling the novel a "bittersweet May-December romance" (Gordon, 2017, p.63), the critic seems to be dissatisfied with the film adaptation *Elegy*. The director chose to present the film as a story about love and jealousy, loss and

IMAGINARUL ȘI ADAPTĂRILE TEXTULUI LITERAR

aging, ignoring Roth's ruthless narrative which is about the powerful feeling of love capable to ruin a man. Regardless of Isabel Coixet's bright direction of the film and the brilliant acting of Ben Kingsley and Penelope Cruz, the movie does not present the novel as it is, it softens the narrative, the characters and the plot (Gordon, 2017, p.36), suggesting that love wins in the end, which is not what Roth wanted to highlight in his novel. More people criticize the film discrepancy from the novel Gordon notices, presenting examples of reviews in the New York Times magazine where, for example Manohla Dargis stated that the film is exaggeratedly refined compared to the novel which is persistently impolite. Romance is the genre characterized by the evolution of a close emotional bond between two main characters. Even though the word romance can signify several things, in Hollywood it usually depicts a story where two people meet, fall in love, and may start a long-term relationship. Many criticize these films for they often follow the same predictable pattern and plot (Dowd; Cannon, 2021, p.3). In the novel, the narrative depicts the romance genre, however it is seen as deconstructed. Roth presents a story where love is intertwined with lust, aging, mortality and intellectual detachment. The film on the other hand leans more towards the romantic and sentimental side of the story, trying to emphasize the emotional connection between the two of them. This shift allows the film to respect the cinematic romance expectations. Thus, this change brings us to the intersemiotic translation, which is the process of translating meaning across different sign systems, for example from text to film (Jakobson, 1959, p.233) When the novel is adapted into *Elegy* this transformation involves more than just narrative changes, for example: tone, perspective, and semiotic emphasis. Thus, the main character's introspective thoughts filled with philosophical reflections on sex, aging and power transformed into visual performances such as facial expressions, pauses in speech, body language etc.

Another critic mentioned by Gordon is Debra Shostak (2006) who believed that the film and the novel are two completely different entities and genres. While the novel is a shameless confession, the film is, as the title already suggests, an

IMAGINARUL ȘI ADAPTĂRILE TEXTULUI LITERAR

elegy (Gordon, 2017, p.66). An elegy is by definition a song or poem of lamentation (Oxford English Dictionary) for the dead, or youth in this case. The novel has indefinite traits of an elegy from time to time. At some point in the novel Yeats' verses from *Sailing to Byzantium* appear. Only three lines are quoted in the novel, those lines in which Yeats contemplates aging, the decay of the body and the soul's desire for eternal life and artistic performance.

Consume my heart away; sick with desire
And fastened to a dying animal
It knows not what it is (Yeats 191, II. 21-23)

Even though an elegy is typically a poem of lamentation or mourning for the dead, and it transmits grief and great sadness, Roth chose to use these verses in the novel, verses which could be interpreted as an expression of or a reflection on personal loss because of the body's decay. The words "a dying animal" are of great importance as they emphasize the human body's transiency, and the human condition seen from a postmodern perspective. These words might as well represent the human condition when one is famous. Because of the mass' and public's demands, the man becomes an animal trained to entertain them. Yeats poem's presence in the novel is a sign of intertextuality which is representative in postmodern writings (Barthes, 1977, p.148). This contemplation on life and death, the urge to reassure the soul, the comfort of art face to face with physical deterioration are all themes debated in the novel. The main character, David Kepesh dives in the comfort of art, playing the piano to forget Consuela's loss, however, it cannot be stated that he developed his soul while doing that (Gordon, 2017, p. 64).

Furthermore, the film's main intention was to keep as much of Philip Roth's novel as possible and at the same time design it to be acceptable and accessible in other media, the intention was to make the film watchable for as many people as possible. Therefore, Gordon (2017) states that for Nicholas Meyer, the screenwriter of *Elegy*, a film is totally different from a novel because it must be dramatic. Hence, the most important

IMAGINARUL ȘI ADAPTĂRILE TEXTULUI LITERAR

question addressed while making the film was related to the consequences of having a sexual relationship with a younger woman for both characters (Gordon, 2017, p.66). Another significant difference between the novel and the film is represented by Consuela's character. In the novel Consuela is simply objectified, her body being the center of everything, while in the film she is a woman with strong personality, she was given more dialogue, therefore Consuela's character is more powerful in the film than in the novel. "It makes her confident and in control" (Gordon, 2017, 68). For example, there is a sequence in the film where she directly confronts David regarding his lack of personality and commitment to their relationship, comparing him to a child jealous of his toys. In the novel this quarrel never happened because Consuela's character is constructed differently. In the novel she is not "analytic" nor "verbally assertive" (Gordon, 2017, p.68). The only time Consuela was vocal in the novel was when David intentionally missed her graduation party. She sent him an angry message in which she said:

You're always playing the wise old man who knows everything. I saw you just this morning on television, playing the role of the one who always knows better, knowing what is good culture and what is bad culture, knowing what people should read and what they shouldn't read, knowing all about music and all about art [...] Mr. Arrogant Intellectual Critic, the great authority on everything, teaching everybody what to think and setting everyone right! Me da asco! (Roth, 2001, p. 59)

In this paragraph, Consuela's outburst of anger reveals the hidden truth about David and highlights his arrogance. The difference between his public persona and his true identity reflecting emotional immaturity is exposed. By calling him "Mr. Arrogant Intellectual Critic, the great authority on everything" Consuela reveals David's need to dominate through knowledge and his attachment to mechanisms of power and dominance. Linking this idea to Pierre Bourdieu's theory regarding cultural capital, David's attitude demonstrates his desire to achieve and use knowledge and fame as a form of social power (Bourdieu,

IMAGINARUL ȘI ADAPTĂRILE TEXTULUI LITERAR

1984, p. 254). As opposed to Raymond's description of intellectuals (1968), David Kepesh does not actually care about his social responsibility or emotional balance, he cares about being part of the high class not to the real intellectual understanding which implies democracy and emotional understanding. David thinks he is in control, he believes he has the authority if he is ignorant. The fact that he tells other people what to read and not to read highlights his need to be in control all the time. The fact that he did not attend Consuela's party intentionally suggests refusal of emotional bond or reciprocity.

Concerning Consuela, the film uses cinematographic techniques to highlight her beauty aligning with pop-culture's visual norms and celebration of youth. Both in the film and the novel, Consuela's body is worshipped, however, the film's use of the camera to linger on her body mirrors the way cinema is able to transform characters into objects of gaze, confirming the characteristics of celebrity culture Roth tries to highlight in the novel. The use of Consuela's body as the object of desire reinforces the theory that celebrities are treated as objects as well, and the audience decides the patterns one must possess to be a celebrity.

Regarding the differences between the film and the novel Gordon (2017) suggests that the film would have been enjoyable if he had not known the intention behind Roth's writing. He emphasized that the film is well-done, well documented, well directed, well-acted and edited. The music which outlines the moods is well chosen and everything is correctly designed according to cinematography's norms in contemporary society (Gordon, 2017, p.66). Nevertheless, attempting to win the public's hearts, Isabel Coixet decided to eliminate some parts from the original story. The removed scenes were indeed controversial. They reflected Roth's skeptical thinking in relation to youth culture, fame and love; because the novel does not suggest that David could be in love with Consuela, but Consuela's body and the beauty of youth. Besides the fact that the director chose to exclude these scenes, the screenwriter, Nicholas Meyer, made some significant changes as well. He followed the well-famous Hollywoodian path trying to solve human relationships in an

IMAGINARUL ȘI ADAPTĂRILE TEXTULUI LITERAR

optimistic manner. Thus, by the end of the film, David and Consuela are still together, and George's wife believes that she is the only woman his deceased husband loved. However, the situation is entirely different in the novel, as Roth did not try to solve any of these problems regarding his characters' relationship. In addition to this, Gordon presents Debra Shostak's opinion regarding the film, stating that *Elegy* the movie and the concept alters the disturbance of death and "death of desire" (Shostak, 2006, p.81) using the power of human love. This statement seems opposite to Roth's novel. The novel is not about love, the novel highlights the insecurity that human relationships develop. It is about impossible situations, decisions which have consequences which cannot be solved that easily. The novel is about human traumas and humans' agony in front of desire and aging (Gordon, 2017, p.66). Moreover, comparing the film and the novel, it is clear that the film's main concern is to highlight the idea of happy ending and "love conquers all" (Gordon, 2017, p.66). Thus, the film focuses on the redemptive power of love, portraying David not just as an individual destroyed by his pursuit of fame and youth but as a person capable of emotional strength. This representation of the main character in the film disagrees with the main character in the novel who is actually very distant and not at all emotionally available. In the novel David is consumed by his own decadence while in the film he finds redemption through love.

The novel's ending compared to the film's, raised multiple questions and remarks among critics. The entire narrative is called "an apocalyptic discourse" (Shostak, 2006, p.177) because of the philosophical introspective thoughts of the main character, thus, the ending was not surprising to anyone. However, some tried to figure out why Philip Roth decided to end the novel in such a manner. In addition to this, Shostak (2006) states that David West designs his reflections about the theories of narrative endings connected to Frank Kermode's theory. Therefore, through this framework, West exemplifies how David Kepesh's close connection to desire adapts to the apocalyptic expectations of transformative conclusions which are a key element in narrative fiction. In this sense, West arrives at

IMAGINARUL ȘI ADAPTĂRILE TEXTULUI LITERAR

the surprising conclusion that Kepesh represents the fundamental contradiction between narrative and desire, relying on his desire to remain unfulfilled as satisfaction eliminates the possibility of further storytelling (Shostak, 2006, p.177). In other words, the unresolved nature of Kepesh's journey mirrors the real-life experience that desires, existential questions, and emotional battles do not have easy outcomes. Roth's choice to leave the novel with an open-ended conclusion, with no clear resolution, emphasizes the complexity and uncertainty of the human condition.

5. CONCLUSION

The contrast between the novel and the film adaptation reveals how pop-culture is able to reshape literary narratives into emotionally consumable products. At the same time, the film's inspiration is Roth's provocative critique of aging, desire, death and fame, and the film sweetened it and created an emotionally resonant version for broader audiences. Roth's novel delves into concepts such as pop-culture and fame presenting them through youth, beauty and celebrity culture's perspective. His sexual relationships with younger women serve as both rebellion and submission to a culture believing that being wanted and being important are synonyms. *Elegy* transforms these harsh truths into a more emotionally accessible narrative, aligning itself with cinematic conventions that favor redemption and romance over ambiguity and discomfort. In the film, Kepesh becomes a tragic romantic figure, a man capable of change, vulnerability, and emotional intimacy. The film thus filters Roth's cynical tone through a lens shaped by Hollywood's tendency to soften moral complexity for relatability and mass appeal.

In this way, *Elegy* becomes a product of the pop culture Roth critiques. The raw, unsettling nature of *The Dying Animal* is softened, and the philosophical meditations on aging and irrelevance are eclipsed by emotional closure and romantic redemption. Where Roth leaves readers with unresolved questions and a protagonist trapped in self-delusion, the film offers a clear resolution suggesting that emotional connection

IMAGINARUL ȘI ADAPTĂRILE TEXTULUI LITERAR

can redeem even the most narcissistic lives. This reflects a broader trend in media where complexity is often sacrificed for relatability, and fame is framed not as critique but as aspiration.

Thus, the film adaptation does not only reinterpret Roth's work, it places it within the ideology of pop culture. *Elegy* reshapes *The Dying Animal* from a sharp examination of the costs of relevance in a youth-driven culture into a bittersweet tale of love and loss. In doing so, it alters not only the characters but the very message of the story, offering comfort where Roth intended challenge.

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