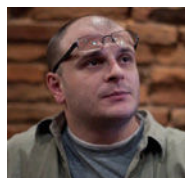


## A Postmodern Road Movie: Alexa Visarion's *The Green Moon*

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**Abstract:** In this article, Dr. Tomuș is analyzing *The Green Moon*, one of Alexa Visarion's latest movies. Although the author very clearly warns the reader that it was never the director's intention to create a road movie, there are a series of elements in the film that all lead to this interpretation. Besides the most important and eloquent fact, that the characters are all undertaking a journey of initiation, the author of the article also identifies other elements that will support his theory: the family, as a nucleus, is breaking down, some of the characters are suffering from a strong Oedipus complex and there is an overwhelming need to find their inner selves. The problems regarding the mechanization of everyday life and of its consequences is also analyzed by the author.

**Keywords:** road movies, postmodernism, globalization, characters, sexuality, music.

### Introduction<sup>22</sup>

In the following article, I intend to analyze *The Green Moon* (a Romanian movie directed by Alexa Visarion, that was launched in 2010) by means of a genre that developed starting with the '50s: the road movie. I will also prove how this genre, that widely developed starting with the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century, is suitable for the Romanian reality of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and how its director, Alexa Visarion, was able to depict characters that are doing much more than travelling in search of their selves. Being more than a journey of initiation, the trip Visarion's young characters will undertake is meant to help them find a lost self and a taste of the harsh reality that surrounds them. Again, I will prove how one of the newest theories concerning characters in road movie applies to *The Green Moon*: it is more and more often stated that such characters will start their journeys as a result of the breakdown of the family unit and that we are witnessing the destabilization of male subjectivity and masculine empowerment.

### The road movies: a short theoretical approach to the genre and its connections to *The Green Moon*

Road movies are a special cinema genre that started to develop in the early '50s, although it has foundations earlier in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Derived mainly from the 'western' genre, in which a certain hero would undertake a journey in a vast and immense space, often populated with landmarks that were easy to recognize for the general audience, road movies supposedly bring forward more than just a simple journey that certain characters will initiate. For the American cinema (and also for other cinemas), this particular genre implies a special and particular relationship between the hero and his mean of transportation, by which he

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is almost totally dependent. What would Bonnie and Clyde do without their powerful and safe car, used for their getaways from bank robberies? Still, Alexa Visarion's *The Green Moon* does not insist in this particular direction, of the 'mechanization' of everyday life, out of different reasons: firstly, it was never the director's intention to include his movie into this genre of road movies. The inclusion of *The Green Moon* in the road movie genre is an individual consequence of the way the energies were developed in the movie and of a personal interpretative key for the whole content of meanings depicted in the film.

Furthermore, in *The Green Moon* there is no personal connection whatsoever between the characters and their means of transportation (the car). I truly believe this is due to the postmodern paradigm in which Alexa Visarion intended to place his movie, which will dilute this mechanical detail. The film's characters are not heroes, so they don't need special means of transportation: they all are regular young people using regular cars. The social and cultural paradigm in which they are living in and with which they are interacting will exclude the possibility of their car being an actual character, so this aspect needs to be an everyday one, one that will not distinguish itself from so many others.

#### **Premises for undertaking a journey in *The Green Moon***

At the film's opening, during the credits, we are confronted by a moment of interesting distraction: Răzvan, one of the main characters, is standing in the middle of a very busy city road, intensely watching the roof of a very tall building. As he keeps watching the roof, a police car shows up out of nowhere and people start to gather fearing that somebody is ready to commit suicide by jumping from the roof. Next, we find him in a small café, enjoying a piece of cake, in a very child-like manner, waiting for his friend Șerban, who just opens the door. All this is happening while Placebo is playing, *A Friend in Need is a Friend... indeed!* We are facing the very premise of the film, as the characters' attitude towards the world is both childish and naïve, but, on the other hand, the dialogue that they will start is full of complex and profound meanings. As they will talk about suicide and their future trip to Brașov, we find out Șerban is homosexual and is meeting men online, making Răzvan suspicious of all of his new acquaintances, and also worried that he might be HIV positive.

I find this moment to be defining for the whole film, as it sets up the premises for almost everything that will take place in the next 90 minutes, give or take. Almost all of the problems of young people are concentrated in this short opening scene in a no-name

café in the city, while they are receiving text messages and talking about making cheap phone calls. The whole context resembles a foundation on which the rest of the film will be built: the camera filming from the outside, through the glass of the shop makes us think about an aquarium-like approach, in which all the characters may very well be subjects, not real people. Thus, the whole 'artificiality' of the movie will extend starting with this set up, in the middle of the large city, crowded with people that are having their own individual problems and dilemmas.

As we leave these two characters, we learn another detail of the two men. One of them has a sister who is missing. We only know she left for Brașov from a note she had written without explanation. So, after only a couple of minutes into the movie, we have this common denominator: that is the city of Brașov, as a focusing point for all the energies that will coagulate later on into the film. What is even more interesting is that for the audience it is very difficult to know the exact relationship between these two friends – as we will later find out that Șerban is homosexual, and that for Răzvan (the one whose sister is missing), there is a certain ambiguity about him that will be preserved throughout the entire film.

So, very shortly, we will jump to another canvas in the film: the making of the play. This will turn out to be one of the most interesting details about *The Green Moon*, as the director of the play is Radu Afrim who, in his one role, adds a very realistic touch to the whole atmosphere. More than this, this particular method that Alexa Visarion uses, of a real-life character playing a role similar to his own in the film, adds up to a certain Big Brother-like approach to the movie; the scenes with Radu Afrim seem to be taken apart from a reality show, confusing the audience (in a good way) and destabilizing the thin line between reality and fiction. We come to learn that Radu Afrim and his actor are preparing for the opening of the play that is supposed to take place the next day, we also have the excellent opportunity to feel what Afrim needs from his actors: to play beautifully. In a very Hamlet-like dialogue, the director will try to calm down his young actor, as he is nervous for the opening. Again, as in the beginning of *The Green Moon*, we are witnessing the deconstruction of a certain procedure: the first was a pretty common moment in the busy life of a large city, that is the false alarm, and now we have the curtains mechanism behind the stage that is taken apart, torn into pieces, so that we can find out what may be the most important elements in the play the two are working for – beauty and realism.

In a way, the moment with Afrim and his actor is a short, well-deserved break from the idea of the *journey*, as it was beginning to make the audience feel

too comfortable about the evolution of the rest of the movie. The first two scenes (the one in the café and with the one with the two men talking about the sister's disappearance) have the exact same effect as the one had with Răzvan watching the roof of that particular tall building: they made the audience think of a quite realistic plot, with a missing person and with the need to make a trip, only that this proved to be a short detour, as more 'important' things will take place in the film: the making of a play, characters that will talk about art etc. Very rapidly, the audience will find out that all the roads are leading not to Rome, but to Braşov, as more and more sequences in the movie will focus on this important point.

As Alexa Visarion many times stated in interviews or question & answers sessions, his plan, for each film he directed, was to make *the film* that would comprise all his other films. Consequently, *The Green Moon* has a lot of meanings: life, death, love, art, the characters' destinies that are struggling to interact with each other etc. The vague, *policier*-like plot which makes the audience ask where exactly the sister went greatly contributes to the coagulation of the energies in the film, binding all the plans the director created.

### **The Oedipus complex in *The Green Moon*, as a possible start for the road-trip**

As stated in the introductory part of this article, there is a new theory that characters will start their journeys as a result of the breakdown of the family unit and that we are witnessing the destabilization of male subjectivity and masculine empowerment (Cohan and Rae 1997: p. 2). Initially, road movies have been studied and explained through theories pertaining to the motorization of new American and world societies. The old Western movies, in which a certain character would ride his horse throughout the vast immensity of the American frontier have almost phased out from the audience's attention, except for some re-installments. Starting with the '50s, this genre has been replaced by road movies, in which an alpha male is driving along 'infinite' highways, searching for his self, in a journey of initiation. All this is part of the new American dream that has rapidly developed into the new 'world dream': travelling by means of motorization, in a highly mechanized environment. The journey may be undertaken by a single character or by a couple (as in *Bonnie and Clyde*), the movie may be a drama or a comedy (*Dumb and Dumber*), the time may be the present or a dystopian future (*The Road*, *Mad Max*); all kinds of variables may be taken into consideration. Also, the real reason for starting the trip may differ from movie to movie: crime, adventure, the need to survive etc. but they all have in

common the character's need to move, to travel and to find out more about themselves and the world they are living in. Still, we must not forget that *The Green Moon* takes place in a small Eastern European country, Romania, and the action is set in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, during the fall of postmodernism in a very globalized society in which the young characters find they need to struggle more and more in order to understand the world they are living in, with all its problems and crises.

Keeping all this in mind, I will concentrate on what I believe it is the most important scene in the film: Răzvan and his mother, Simona, (the former played by Tudor Istodor and the latter by Maia Morgenstern who are mother and son also in real life) are getting together on the street, they are walking together and happily talking to each other, making it difficult for the audience to understand the exact relationship between them. As we don't know yet they are mother and son, we are very smartly induced the false idea they may be lovers, as they are very tender to each other and there is a special chemistry in their dialogue. As she is waiting for him on the street, smoking, he will note that it is not good for her, as she hands him some very beautiful flowers. More than that, she is stopping in front of a shop saying they look so very good together, as they are reflected in the window. Of course, the audience is on the wrong track here, thinking they are actual lovers. Again, director Alexa Visarion uses the same strategy as in the beginning of the film, to mislead the audience into thinking something else. If in the opening, Răzvan made people on the street think somebody is ready to jump from a building, now the director is making us think that we are facing two lovers with quite an age difference. This particular theory might have worked, as it mirrored the other problems in the film (homosexuality, missing persons etc). Still, we find out the two of them are mother and son, things will somehow relax and explain themselves, but, nevertheless, their relationship seems quite strange and worthy of an Oedipus complex that has not been revoked.

Yes, the family, for all the characters in the movie, is on the verge of dissolution: the sister is missing, the audience is having a hard time understanding Răzvan's precise relationship with a certain woman, only to find out later that she is his mother. So, I am getting to this very interesting theory that road trips may also be motivated by the breakdown of the family unit. Let us not forget that even in the ancient Greek myth, Oedipus will leave for a long journey when he finds out from the oracle that he will kill his father and wed his mother. Of course, as he was only a humble mortal, only a human being, he lacked the means to completely comprehend the oracle's prediction and a

long series of mistakes are inaugurated, all leading to the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Nevertheless, we are living in postmodern times for the moment and director Alexa Visarion knows this very well. He also knows that the true meaning of the family, its importance and specific role, is not only in the context of the general society, but also in the spiritual development of common young people (as the characters in *The Green Moon* are).

### **The lack of iconic architectural and geographical elements in *The Green Moon***

So this is the perfect time for trying to wrap all the arguments up and ask ourselves what do we have so far: first, we have some young people, actually kids, that need to start a journey for different reasons (the search for the inner self, the Oedipus complex etc), we have a postmodern and global context for all these kids, that is very well marked in the film by the use of the soundtrack (contemporary rock band Placebo) and we have people talking not precisely about art and theatre, but about all the elements that surround them. The result of all these elements is the journey to Braşov, a very well-known Romanian medieval town, situated right in the middle of the country. Here, Alexa Visarion is very subtle and is not making use of the town's impressive and iconic architecture, as other directors might have been easily tempted to do. The sister that has been missing in the beginning of the movie turned out to be in Braşov to get together with the love of her life and she is pregnant. The specific moment in which she is on the streets of Braşov, looking through a window shop, may very well take place in any other European town. The lack of precise contextualization is benefic and makes us think the characters' drama is universal, not local.

Again, the road from Bucharest to Braşov is one of the most beautiful and scenic highways in Romania and the director may have been very easily tempted to depict large scale panoramas of the mountains that were being crossed, of the spectacular landscapes and of the beautiful villages and small towns through which the young people pass. Nevertheless, Alexa Visarion decided to treat this road as

any other minor route in any other Romanian place, thus focusing on the character development, not on geographical landmarks. The general audience is very well accustomed with American and European (but also Asian and Australian) road movies that are full of such cases. For examples, Oliver Stone's *Natural Born Killers* is literally filled with landscapes of the American West and desert, making the audience pay less attention to the characters and simply enjoying the popular and scenic images which seem to be taken from a TV commercial. Of course, in the case of Oliver Stone, it was his precise intention to create a zapping-like effect of both character development and depiction of the American West, but we all know that such images in road movies greatly contribute to the transfer of the audience in that particular landscape, as this is what audiences really want: the empathy for the characters and also the feeling of participation in their journey, along with them, through landmarks they would know only from documentaries and from commercials. In such cases, road movies are very documentary-like and this is actually not so bad. Alexa Visarion, on the other hand, makes use of a different approach to this technique, choosing not to depict one single well-known Romanian landscape in *The Green Moon*.

### **Conclusion**

As I already said before, it was never Alexa Visarion's intention to make *The Green Moon* a road movie. However, my personal 'reading' of the film identified elements pertaining to this particular genre. All that being said, *The Green Moon* distinguishes itself from other Romanian and European contemporary road movies through its characters motivations for starting their journey. The Oedipus complex, the breakdown of the family and the meltdown of the social relationships, all contribute to the reason for which the young people need to leave and start travelling. Considering all these, the movie is worth watched in this particular key, because it offers a great inside view in the spiritual universe of the new Romanian generation, with their specific needs, thoughts, dramas and attitude towards life.

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