

Film

**THE FILM *THE GOLDEN TRAIN* (1986) – POLISH – ROMANIAN
CO-PRODUCTION OF A MISSED OPPORTUNITY?¹**

Wojciech ŚWIĘCH

Independent researcher, Poland

e-mail: wojtek_swiech@tlen.pl

Abstract

In the past, there was no extensive co-operation between Polish and Romanian cinematography. In the 1980s, a film entitled *The Golden Train* (referring to the common history of both nations during World War II) was produced with great fanfare. The joint project involved, for those times, huge financial resources. It is necessary to refer to the political situation at that time to understand why it was decided to implement this project in the final form. The artistic vision presented in the film, which refers to a real situation, may arouse great controversy. However, the creators involved in the production of the film probably had their own reasons. In the 1980s, it was not necessarily possible to officially disclose the factors that influenced the artistic expression of a work. In the post–World War II period, cooperation between Polish and Romanian cinematography acquired particular significance and deserves closer examination. The text presents, among others: an outline of formal issues (provisions of bilateral agreements) that preceded the production of the film and is based on sources held in the Archive of New Records in Warsaw (Archiwum Akt Nowych w Warszawie¹) and the State Archive in Warsaw (Archiwum Państwowe w Warszawie). The collection of documents regarding the Polish – Romanian co-production has historical value but reflects the spirit of a bygone era. While the artistic value of the films produced in that period is open to debate, the cinematography of the time constitutes a valuable source for understanding the cultural relationships that existed then. The purpose of this article is to examine whether filmmakers from Poland and Romania made proper use of the opportunities offered by their cooperation. It also seeks to identify the factors that shaped the reception of the film directed by Bohdan Poręba (1934–2014) among Polish and Romanian audiences. It seems that the choice of the film director was not accidental and was motivated by issues that the Romanian audience may not have been aware of. Bohdan Poręba was a rather controversial figure who, even in the Polish People’s Republic, provoked strong reactions, not all of them positive. The director could certainly have counted on greater leniency from institutional censorship, which played a huge role in limiting artistic freedom throughout the Soviet Bloc. The ambition of this article is also to provoke a broader discussion in Poland and Romania about the place in the culture of politically engaged film production created during the existence of the Soviet Bloc.

Keywords: Bohdan Poręba; Polish and Romanian cinematography; *The Golden Train*; co-production; history and fiction.

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1. Introduction

After World War II, Poland and Romania were part of the same political bloc. It seemed, therefore, that cooperation between the two countries would develop in various fields. However, there was no broader cooperation that would stand out in Central and Eastern Europe. This was probably due to the Romanian approach, which sought some independence within the bloc of communist states. The early 1980s brought unexpected events in Poland and the development of the movement associated with the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union “Solidarity”. For this reason, the introduction of martial law in Poland was met with satisfaction in Romania, as it was in line with the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of individual socialist countries, which was proclaimed by the Romanian Communist Party (Partidul Comunist Român, abbreviated as PCR). On the other hand, Nicolae Ceaușescu made it clear that he disliked the increasing importance of the military in Poland’s political life. “The Genius of the Carpathians” was probably aware that the armed forces could be the only force that could remove him from power, so he saw the solutions adopted in Poland as a precedent that was dangerous for him (Dubicki, 2020, pp. 112-113).

In June 1984, the Romanian president and General Secretary of the Romanian Communist Party visited Poland, which was reported more extensively in the Romanian press (especially in the official voice of the PCR, i.e., the daily newspaper *Scînteia*) than Ceaușescu’s previous visit to Moscow. During this visit, the special political and economic ties between the two countries within the Warsaw Pact and the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance were emphasized (Dubicki, 2020, p. 113). A few months before Ceaușescu visited Warsaw, documents regarding the production of a Polish – Romanian film titled *The Golden Train*² were signed (*Współpraca z Rumuniq w sprawie filmu „Złoty pociąg”*, 1984–1986, pp. 50-52). It can be assumed that the film cooperation between the two countries, for which a large amount of money was planned to be allocated from the Polish side, was to be one of the elements to convince the Romanian party comrades that the Polish People’s Republic was still based on the ideological principles of the common bloc.

The purpose of this article is to evaluate the feature film titled *The Golden Train*. It is important to answer the question whether the filmmakers properly used the opportunity to show Polish – Romanian relations in the difficult times of World War II. In this context, it is worth asking why the cooperation took place in a specific way and why it was decided to select certain filmmakers for the film’s production. It is also worth paying attention to what circumstances could have distorted the perception of the film among viewers, especially Romanian ones.

2. Bohdan Poręba – The Voice of Regime Power

Bohdan Poręba (born Jerzy Bogusław Poręba) is a highly controversial figure in Poland. A film and theatre director, screenwriter, politician, and publicist, he remains a figure full of paradoxes in the history of Polish cinematography. Poręba is remembered primarily for his film full of patriotic emotions entitled *Hubal*³ (Mazurek & Zaremba, 2008) from 1973. It is a Polish war film depicting the fate of Major Henryk Dobrzański (pseudonym: Hubal) and his cavalry unit, the last regular unit of the Second Polish Republic that did not lay down its arms after the defeat of the September Campaign. The reviews for this film are mixed. Some have called this production “a monumental work” (Jasina & Kozłowski, 2019, p. 72), but even in the 1970s,

²In Polish: *Złoty pociąg*, in Romanian: *Trenul de aur*.

³In English: *Hubal*, in Romanian: *Ultima luptă*.

opinions emerged that *Hubal* had become a manifestation of “pseudo-documentary” or “fantasy adventure cinema” (Maron, 2015, pp. 128-129).

Bohdan Poreba (born 1934 – died 2014) also referred to the subject of war more than 10 years later in a film made together with a Romanian film studio. Considerable financial resources were allocated for co-production at that time.

Poreba openly declared his support for communism and, as an artist, he largely represented the official ideological line of the regime, a view widely shared in Poland (Stelmach, 2020, p. 162; Marszewski, 2021, p. 42). The director was part of a group of artists who were associated with the regime, but they belonged to the so-called national communist movement, which referred to Polishness, the cult of the military, the soldier’s ethos, and romantic tradition (Maj, 2013, p. 19). However, the director claimed that he did not look at the Polish United Workers’ Party⁴ through the prism of ideology, but saw it as a structure in which, as an artist, he could strengthen the national trend and contribute to introducing a strong Polish character into cinematography (Poreba, 2011, pp. 233-234).

Years later, the director claimed that he joined the communist party in 1969 to fight the Sovietization of Poland, because he was anti-Soviet, although not anti-Russian. Poreba never hid his national views (Mazurek & Zaremba, 2008; Poreba, 2011, pp. 392-394). It is therefore not surprising that in the 1980s the director was one of the founders and main ideologists of the Patriotic Union “Grunwald”. The association, which had a national-communist rather than a strictly dogmatic character, combined anti-German and anti-Semitic elements. The organization avoided rather, entering the fields of political activity, because it was within the competence of the PZPR (Gasztold-Seń, 2013, p. 179). The main goal of the association was to attack the opposition from nationalist and anti-Semitic positions. In this form, it was useful to the state authorities led by General Wojciech Jaruzelski.

Therefore, the choice of Bohdan Poreba for the Polish – Romanian co-production was not accidental. Nicolae Ceaușescu’s way of exercising power in the years 1965-1989 can be described as national communism. Romanian communists tried to emphasize their independence from Moscow in foreign policy (Petrescu, 2009, pp. 530-536). There is a fairly common opinion that the Romanian authorities had an anti-Soviet attitude (Gheorghe, 2015, p. 65). The regime was not openly anti-German or anti-Jewish. However, the way Ceaușescu treated Romanian citizens of Jewish and German descent showed a lot about his attitude towards those nations. The dictator believed that Jews and Germans, along with oil, were Romania’s best export commodities. In the case of people, the authorities based in Bucharest accepted not only cash settlements, but for reputation purposes, also barter (Cârstocea, 2014, p. 22). For this reason, Poreba, who tended to approach artistic issues through a “nationalist filter” (Guzek, 2011, p. 11), may have appeared the most suitable choice for cooperation with Romanian cinematography, over which Ceaușescu exerted overwhelming influence.

It is no coincidence that Bohdan Poreba, in an interview for the Romanian press in 1987, claimed that the task of his filmmaking unit was to promote the values of the modern Pole defined according to the expectations of the regime at the time (Maj, 2013, p. 19), who should respect tradition and be able to draw conclusions in order to be responsible for his own fate and that of the Polish nation both nowadays and in the future (Modorcea, 1987, p. 9). In the interview, the director excessively and artificially raised the importance and rank of the political values he proclaimed. With his work prior to *The Golden Train* the director guaranteed an interpretation of history in line with the guidelines of the Ceaușescu’s regime.

⁴In Polish: Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, abbreviated as PZPR, in Romanian: Partidul Muncitoresc Unit Polonez.

The director's views were consistent with the PCR's assumptions. In the first half of the 1980s, Nicolae Ceaușescu declared that all cultural, artistic, and educational activities had to permanently reflect not only the heroic work of people but also their desire for knowledge and their characteristic moral virtues. Cinematography was also to play a role in this plan, creating films inspired by the life of Romanian nation. The films were to depict not only the great epic of the present and the bright future of socialist Romania, but also draw inspiration from the past (Ceaușescu, 1984, p. 5).

3. Bilateral Cooperation in the Field of Culture, Including Cinematography

Before moving on to issues related to the film titled *The Golden Train*, it should be mentioned that on 26 November 1964, the Agreement between the Government of the Polish People's Republic and the Government of the Romanian People's Republic concerning cultural and scientific co-operation was signed in Warsaw (*Umowa o współpracy kulturalnej i naukowej (Polska–Rumunia)*, 1964). On 10 August 1965, the ratification documents of the agreement in question were exchanged in Bucharest⁵ (*Oświadczenie rządowe w sprawie wymiany dokumentów ratyfikacyjnych (Polska–Rumunia)*, 1965). Article 5 of the 1964 Agreement stated:

The two Contracting Parties shall promote co-operation in the spheres of literature, theatre, music, plastic arts, films, folk arts and mass cultural work through the exchange of delegations of cultural workers, artistic performances, the exchange of exhibitions, the inclusion of certain works by the playwrights and composers of each country in the theatrical and musical repertoires of the other country, and the exhibition of films (*Umowa o współpracy kulturalnej i naukowej (Polska–Rumunia)*, 1964).

Cooperation with Romania in the field of cinematography for many years did not go beyond organizing cultural events. The Polish People's Republic was much more involved in joint projects with other countries of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (Szczutkowska, 2014, pp. 302-314). In the 1970s, the Polish Film Days were held annually in Romania. Bohdan Poręba took part in this event in 1976, and the Romanian audience had the opportunity to see his film titled *Jarosław Dąbrowski* (Szczutkowska, 2021, p. 89). The next year in a press report from the Polish Film Days, Edmund Żurowicz announced that the first Polish – Romanian film, titled *A Train with Gold*⁶, would soon begin production. At the time, it was known that the project would tell the story of the transport of Polish gold through Romania at the beginning of World War II. Among the filmmakers of the planned action film, only Ion Grigorescu was mentioned, who had already prepared the script (Żurowicz, 1977, p. 4).

On 17 November 1983, an Agreement was concluded in Bucharest between the Ministry of Culture and Art of the Polish People's Republic – the Supreme Board of Cinematography, and the Centrala România-Film (Romania-Film Central) Headquarters of the Council of Culture and Socialist Education of the SSR for the years 1983-1985. This document included a chapter titled "Co-operation in the field of production". Pursuant to the Agreement in question, the parties were to support joint production of films. The films were to be produced directly by specialized cinema companies in both countries, subject to management approval. For the purpose of film co-production, the Agreement required prior confirmation from the

⁵This agreement was repealed on 1 March 1995.

⁶In Polish: *Pociąg ze złotem*, in Romanian: *Un tren cu aur*.

competent authorities and the conclusion of a separate agreement (*Współpraca kinematografii polskiej z rumuńską*, 1977–1986, pp. 2-5). It may seem that the Polish side did not have high hopes for cooperation with Romania. An interview with a member of the Polish government responsible for the film industry was published on 24 November 1983 in *Trybuna Ludu*. Jerzy Bajdor, in the official and nationwide press organ of the Polish United Workers' Party, mentioned cooperation with the USSR and Czechoslovakia, as well as promising projects with Hungarian and Bulgarian cinematography (Zaryczny, 1983, p. 4).

On 9 February 1984, an agreement was signed in Bucharest between the Supreme Board of Cinematography in Warsaw, represented by the Deputy Minister of Culture and Art, Jerzy Bajdor, and the Centrala România-Film (Romania-Film Central) Headquarters, represented by the General Director, Mariu Stanciu, for the co-production of a feature film entitled *The Golden Train*. The contract precisely defined the implementation periods for each phase of the film. The preparatory period was to end by 31 July 1984, and the final acceptance of the film was to be made no later than 28 February 1985 (*Współpraca z Rumunią w sprawie filmu „Złoty pociąg”*, 1984–1986, pp. 50-52).

As mentioned earlier, the script for the film was proposed to the Polish side by Ioan Grigorescu (Tronowicz, 1986, p. 13). At the time of production, the Romanian screenwriter had already written books on Polish topics, including one about his time in Poland from 1956 to 1958 as a correspondent for the Agerpres press agency (Grigorescu, 1961). Considering Grigorescu's roles in cinematography and television during the Ceaușescu regime (Grigorescu, 2019, p. 335), it must be assumed that he was well-versed in the Polish film community. Therefore, it is difficult to believe that the Romanian side did not have a significant influence on the choice of Bohdan Poręba as director of the joint film co-production.

On 18 June 1984, the Polish side decided to send the film into production. However, the production of the film quickly encountered obstacles (*Współpraca z Rumunią w sprawie filmu „Złoty pociąg”*, 1984–1986, p. 51). Already on 27 June 1985, in Warsaw, the parties concluded an annex to the co-production agreement for the film. Polish side, among others took note of the extension of the Romanian part of the film material with the necessary scenes with a length of approximately 200 screen meters highlighting more specifically the political affairs of the Romanian side of the presented period. Moreover, the parties agreed that they would make every effort to complete the production of the film according to the Romanian side's plan by the end of 1985, and the Polish side stated that it would complete production by the end of the first quarter of 1986 (*Współpraca z Rumunią w sprawie filmu „Złoty pociąg”*, 1984–1986, pp. 54-55). At that time, information appeared in the Romanian press about the ongoing production of the film *The Golden Train* (Panait, 1985, p. 24).

It should be mentioned that at the end of 1985 the Agreement between the Supreme Board of Cinematography and the Centrala România-Film expired. At the beginning of 1986, there was no Cultural Agreement Implementation Plan for 1986-1987. No new agreement has been signed between the Polish and Romanian cinematography. However, the Polish side assured that further cooperation was on the same terms and conditions as those provided for in the previous agreements. At that time, in matters of co-production, the parties cooperated only on the completion of work on the film *The Golden Train*. On the occasion of the 22 July holiday (the National Day of the Rebirth of Poland—the most important state holiday of the Polish People's Republic, celebrated annually until 1989 to mark the proclamation of the manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation, a Soviet-backed authority opposed to the London-based Polish government-in-exile), the Romanian side was to organize a ceremonial premiere of the film *The Golden Train* in Bucharest. A delegation consisting of two people was supposed to leave Poland for this ceremony (*Współpraca kinematografii polskiej z rumuńską*, 1977–1986, p. 9). Ultimately, the world and Polish cinema premiere of the adventure-thriller film directed by

Bohdan Poręba, according to the database of The Leon Schiller Polish National Film, Television and Theatre School in Łódź, took place on 2 March 1986 (*Złoty pociąg*). However, documents indicate that the film's pre-release screening (the committee's acceptance of the film, i.e., its final form) took place in Poland on 19 February 1986. The co-production was released for distribution by official letter dated on 10 December 1986 (*Złoty pociąg: Zespoły Polskich Producentów Filmowych*, n.d., pp. 11-12). The film was presented in September 1986 at one of the film festivals in Poland (*11. Festiwal Polskich Filmów Fabularnych w Gdańsku*, n.d.). Jarosław Grzechowiak, a Polish film expert, points to the film's premiere date on 2 March 1987 (Grzechowiak, 2023, p. 586).

The co-production was shown in Romania for the first time on 17 March 1987. However, the version presented to Romanian viewers was shorter because several scenes of the film were deleted ("*Trenul de aur*", *povestea reală a tezaurului polonez*, 2020).

4. The Reception of *The Golden Train* in Poland and Romania

It should be emphasized that the script and plot of the film are fiction. The transport itself (in the sense of activity) of Polish gold from the Polish Bank through Romania refers to real events from World War II. The historical facts related to Romania's involvement in the action certainly did not have such a dramatic, adventurous or sensational tone as the film entitled *The Golden Train*. A reliable source for understanding the fate of Polish gold reserves, all of which were evacuated from Poland in September 1939, is Wojciech Rojek's monograph *Odyseja skarbu Rzeczypospolitej: losy złota Banku Polskiego 1939–1950* [The gold Odyssey: The fate of Bank Polski gold 1939-1950] published in 2000 by Wydawnictwo Literackie. The author of the mentioned monograph conducted thorough research in the archival resources of many countries (Rojek, 2000). The book was also published in Romania in 2017 under the title *Odiseea Aurului. Destinele Aurului Bank Polski 1939–1950*, translated by Anca Irina Ionescu and issued by the Oscar Print publishing house in Bucharest. Anyone interested in history, even at the basic level of the national core curriculum for secondary schools in Poland, must quickly realize that the film is full of historical inaccuracies that make the film production ridiculous. In the artistic community, Poręba was and still is considered a person who used the issue of World War II for purely ideological purposes. At best, this director treated the tragedy of war as a chance for a spectacular topic, giving the opportunity to make his presence known and, consequently, for a quick career (Replewicz, 2009, p. 17). Using contemporary language, Poręba's tabloidization of the events related to the evacuation of Polish gold comes to mind.

Romanian actor Mitică Popescu, who played Commissioner Munteanu, stated in an interview that the Polish audience received the Polish – Romanian co-production very positively at its premiere ("*Trenul de aur*", *povestea reală a tezaurului polonez*, 2020). However, the facts do not seem to confirm this, because in Poland the film was not considered an outstanding work among the public. The film was nominated for the Golden Lions, the main prize at the 11th Polish Film Festival in Gdańsk in 1986 (*11. Festiwal Polskich Filmów Fabularnych w Gdańsku*, n.d.), but it rather served as a background for other films taking part in the main competition. Despite the critical reviews from festival viewers, Bohdan Poręba believed in the film's success among cinema audiences (Sas, 1986, p. 1). In the press, even those associated with the regime in Poland, it was suggested that the film titled *The Golden Train* could only appeal to a youth audience because of the special effects with allegedly fast-paced action and surprising plot twists (Klemiato, 1986, p. 6).

From a press report of the screening of the co-production (in the presence of some of the creators) on 3 March 1987, in the Polish city of Lublin, it might have seemed that the film was well received:

It's been a long time since we witnessed such a storm of applause as erupted after Tuesday's premiere screening of the film *The Golden Train* at the Kosmos cinema (...). Ioan Grigorescu predicts great success for the film in his country, especially since all Polish films shown in Romania have always been well-received by the audience (*Dramatyczne losy polskiego złota*, 1987, p. 1 - my translation).

It should be mentioned that the film was made by two studios: the Profil Film Unit⁷ and the Centrala România-Film. The first of the mentioned film unit, headed by director Bohdan Poręba, from the beginning of its existence was considered in the film community to support the regime ruling in Poland. It was no secret that the film unit could count on strong support from the state authorities, primarily financial. Poręba therefore implemented cultural and historical policy in accordance with the guidelines of the Polish United Workers' Party⁸ (Grzechowiak, 2022, p. 113). A Polish film director born in Wilno had more creative freedom than most filmmakers in the 1980s (Świąch, 2024, p. 332-333).

For this reason, some actors refused to cooperate with Poręba during the production of the film *The Golden Train*, and the people involved in the production of the work did not feel the pressure of institutional censorship, as Mitică Popescu mentioned in one of the interviews ("*Trenul de aur*", *povestea reală a tezaurului polonez*, 2020). However, Bohdan Poręba's environment was parodied by director Stanisław Bareja – who presented the absurdities of the Polish People's Republic (Świąch, 2023, p. 104) – in 1981 in a film comedy entitled *Teddy Bear*⁹ (Hendrykowski, 2013, p. 345).

It often happened that the official reception of the film did not match the audience's reaction, especially in Poland. This was certainly the case with the film *The Golden Train*. Moreover, one may agree with the view that, from a political perspective, it was appropriate to highlight the assistance Romania provided to Poland in 1939 (Zwierzchowski, 2018, p. 156), although it seems that fictional thriller and adventure elements were added excessively. The film can even be treated as repaying the debt of gratitude to the Romanian nation. Poręba emphasized this repeatedly in the interviews he gave. The director maintained his stance on Romania even after many years:

If it hadn't been for the then prime minister of that country, Călinescu, we wouldn't have saved either the Wawel treasures or the gold for which we were to have a government and an army later. And there would be no Polish army in the West, because our people made their way through Romania and Hungary, and the Romanians, despite being blackmailed by the Germans and having their knife at throats, helped us a great deal (Poręba, 2011, pp. 223-224 - my translation).

However, the Polish press even expressed regret in 1987 that Poręba paid off the debt to the Romanians not with gold, but with the Polish currency, which was devalued at the time, and the co-production was boring and far from a reliable representation of historical events (Niemiec, 1987, p. 37).

Jarosław Grzechowiak, a film scholar and historian of Polish film, in his doctoral dissertation cited remarks made during the film's pre-release screening (the committee's acceptance of the film, i.e., its final form) in February 1986, particularly regarding the film's final scene, depicting the assassination of Armand Călinescu. Polish historian Jan Baszkiewicz stated

⁷In Polish: Zespół Filmowy Profil.

⁸In Polish: Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, abbreviated to PZPR.

⁹In Polish: *Miś*, in Romanian: *Ursuleț de plus*.

at the time that the prime minister was murdered because he ordered the elimination of one of the leaders of the Iron Guard and the Legion of the Archangel Michael, and the motive for the assassin's actions was not the assistance the head of government had provided to the Poles. Even Stanisław Trepczyński, a Polish United Workers' Party activist, expressed the opinion during the pre-release screening that the film should have ended with the scene of the ship departing with the gold rather than with the assassination of Călinescu, which was thus overemphasized (Grzechowiak, 2023, pp. 471-472). The issue of incorrect emphasis placement was also noted in Polish party press. One newspaper from Silesia pointed out that the screenwriter had suggested that the assassination of the prime minister was a direct response to his government's position on the transfer of Polish gold, although the historical truth was much more complicated (Knichowiecki, 1987, p. 3).

For these reasons, the Polish recipient of the film may have had the impression that there was a certain idealization of Romania's attitude towards Poland after the September defeat. Already in 1987, Maria Malatyńska stated that the topic of the story of the removal of eighty tons of gold from Poland in September 1939 was a "film virginity". The journalist actually considered it the only value of the mentioned film (Malatyńska, 1987, p. 2). Moreover, there may be doubts as to whether the film's creators, by referring to historical figures, accurately presented the political situation in Romania in 1939. It seems that Poręba's film placed too much emphasis on various aspects, primarily regarding the causes of certain events. It also seems to be an indisputable fact that the director infantilized the story too much and presented certain characters in a caricatured way, especially those from the pre-war authorities of the Second Polish Republic (Zwierzchowski, 2018, p. 156). Bohdan Poręba claimed that the fictional elements in his film did not contradict historical facts. However, it seems that certain boundaries were crossed, and some audiences (especially young people) may have drawn too far-reaching conclusions from the film (Derecki, 1987, pp. 5, 8).

The Polish audience also did not seem delighted with the artistic level of the film. Historical threads were unsuccessfully combined with the rules of action cinema. Even the regional daily of the Polish United Workers' Party published a review unfavourable to the co-production:

The Golden Train is a "talking heads" film. Its characters talk, eat, and sometimes even fight (...). There is no deeper content, hidden allusions, great ideas or messages (...). It is not enough to film the script faithfully. Scene by scene. Word by word. You have to feel the cinema. You have to know the laws that govern it and respect the viewer. Otherwise, film as art loses its meaning. If it were different, all you have to do is give everyone a camera, a tape, and start filming, brother... (Maksymczak, 1987, p. 4 – my translation).

The way some intrigues are presented sometimes borders on ridiculousness or primitivism of the thought structure. For this reason, the script was not rated highly in Romania either. because one local cinema expert expressed the opinion that the film creates such "real" tension (recalling real events) that it seems to have been invented (Căliman, 2000, p. 308). Despite this, Bohdan Poręba stated in one of his interviews that Ioan Grigorescu was an excellent specialist with a recognized international brand (Kazimierczyk, 1987, p. 11).

It seems that at the request of the Romanian side, numerous political considerations were included in the adventure film, which inevitably had a negative impact on the slowdown of the pace (numerous office scenes, although on the other hand the viewer had the opportunity to learn about the intricacies of the politics of the time), the narrative and the structure of the film. On the one hand, in the post-festival discussion in Gdańsk, Poręba even called his film a

western, wanting to emphasize his ambition to create a great adventure (Malatyńska, 1987, p. 2). However, Malatyńska found it difficult to ignore another issue. In the journalist's opinion, in the field of presenting Romanian political arguments, the scenes could only be placed in the genre of... television non-fiction theatre. It is hard to disagree with the opinion of Malatyńska, who wrote in the Krakow press:

Genre indecision has its further consequences. Well, the whole film is extremely long, and when watched, it goes on forever, which in the case of sensation and adventure is an unforgivable mistake (Malatyńska, 1987, p. 2 – my translation).

Romanian critic Tudor Caranfil also stated that despite promises of spectacular action, the film “derails” in the quagmire of diplomatic negotiations, which was not helped by static sequences. This distracts the viewer's attention from the plot and slows down the pace of the film, which was supposedly intended to be an ambitious action film. For this reason, Caranfil rated the film two stars out of five (Caranfil, 2002, pp. 204-205). Maria Malatyńska expressed it more clearly. The Polish journalist even stated that Bohdan Poręba made two films, or rather two shows, which he then decided to edit “blindly”, hoping that somehow, they would be put together into one whole (Malatyńska, 1987, p. 2).

On the other hand, it's worth mentioning that immediately after the film's premiere in Romania, most reviews were enthusiastic. According to Romanian journalist Eva Sîrbu, *The Golden Train* was built on a foundation of historical facts with due care and respect providing the viewer with a picture with a huge emotional charge. The filmmakers created an action film, but with the hope for the impressive power of historical truth. In Sîrbu's opinion, the creators let their imagination run wild, but they did it to appeal to the viewers' interests. Although fiction was limited by the strong framework of reality. This was achieved thanks to the excellent script, executed with great directorial skill and exemplary work by a team of Polish and Romanian filmmakers (Sîrbu, 1987, p. 6).

Mădălina Stănescu in *Cinema* focused on Gheorghe Cozorici, who played the role of Armand Călinescu in the film. According to the journalist, the co-production resulted in a true moral portrait of Prime Minister, who defied the threats and arrogance of the Nazis and defended Romania's sovereignty. Stănescu expressed the opinion that actor demonstrated fearless Romanian dignity through his performance. In the reviewer's opinion, the film *The Golden Train* perfectly showed the courage of the Romanian statesman, who became a true defender of great virtues, humanity and a symbol of brotherly mutual help. The journalist even suggested that Cozorici's seemingly secondary role was actually taking center stage (Stănescu, 1987, p. 6).

Meanwhile, Nicolae Mateescu, in *Luceafărul*, recognized *The Golden Train* as a significant achievement among adventure films. In the journalist's opinion, the creators of the co-production referred to history, but did not fall too much into a didactic manner. Therefore, the film has not lost its proper rhythm and conciseness. According to Mateescu, the significant value of the work was to show the nobility of Romanian politics, which remained faithful to the brotherhood of both nations. However, a reviewer for a cultural and literary magazine pointed out that the film starred Romania's most prominent actors, while the Polish side cast lesser-known actors in the roles (Mateescu, 1987, p. 5).

5. Film Production Controversies

A few years ago, reports emerged suggesting that Romanian cinematography in the 1980s was marked by an obsession with staying within budgetary limits. This is indicated by the report found in archival resources on the co-financing agreement for the Romanian-Polish

co-production, i.e. the film *The Golden Train*. Regarding the proposal to change the size of the film's budget, information was found in Romanian archival documents:

As regards the expenditure estimate, the level of expenses proposed shall not be endorsed and it is recommended that the cost estimate should be reconsidered after the completion of the filming stage in Romania (Turcuș, 2017, p. 19).

However, there is a common opinion that the Polish side for the production of the film allocated huge financial resources, i.e. 143,100,000 old złoty (Grzechowiak, 2022, p. 124). The cost of co-production was originally estimated at 48,000,000 old złoty (*Złoty pociąg: Zespoły Polskich Producentów Filmowych*, n.d., p. 22), and then at 95,000,000 old złoty, which turned out to be insufficient. The film crew then claimed that during production, it turned out that the literary material contained in the shooting script was much larger than previously thought. Therefore, the film had to be divided into two parts. It was argued that considering the film's two-part format, which required expensive staging and numerous widely separated shooting locations, the costs were not particularly excessive and were fully justified (*Złoty pociąg: Zespoły Polskich Producentów Filmowych*, n.d., p. 18).

However, in Polish cinemas, the film was watched by only 190,000 viewers, which resulted in box office revenues of 13,546,000 old złoty (Grzechowiak, 2022, p. 124). A commentary on this situation can be found in a Polish press report from March 1987 about the film: "The audience is most excited when the subtitles appear: 'End of Part One' and 'Part Two' – and this audience revival is rather unfavorable to the film (Młynarz, 1987, p. 4 – my translation).

Therefore, it can be said that the work aspired to be a super-production, i.e. a very expensive film that was supposed to be a blockbuster, although it certainly did not have a star cast (at least when it comes to Polish actors).

In the years 1984-1987, the Profil Film Unit made 16 films, of which the Polish – Romanian co-production was the most expensive. It must be emphasized that the above-mentioned unit created in 1986 the film *On the Niemen*¹⁰, directed by Zbigniew Kuźmiński, which cost 70,897,000 old złoty, but in Polish cinemas it had box-office earners of 304,132,000 old złoty (5,733,000 viewers). The film *Alabama* (1984), directed by Ryszard Rydzewski, was certainly a success. It was produced by the Profil Film Unit for 28,625,000 old złoty, and its box-office earners in Polish cinemas amounted to 83,303,000 old złoty (1,216,000 viewers) (Grzechowiak, 2022, p. 124). However, the Polish – Hungarian co-production made in 1985 by the Zodiak Film Unit¹¹ and Hunnia Filmstudió, i.e., *H.M. Deserters*¹² directed by Janusz Majewski, was a success. The adventure comedy attracted over 6 million viewers in cinemas (Zajiček, 1992, p. 297) – it was the highest-attended film of the season. The production, produced together with Hungary, also received an award called Golden Duck (awarded by the *Film* magazine) in the category: best Polish film for 1986 (C.K. Dezerterzy).

Bohdan Poręba's film titled *The Golden Train* once again gave critics in Poland arguments for opinions that have been voiced for many years. The Profil Film Unit has been incurring huge losses since its beginning, and this could not be changed by occasional box office successes. The regime authorities had long been aware that Poręba's political views were correct from their point of view, which was not matched by the appropriate level of artistic skills (Grzechowiak, 2019, pp. 155, 159). Poręba, as the artistic director of the Profil Film Unit, failed in many aspects of film production organization, which was consequently particularly

¹⁰In Polish: *Nad Niemnem*, in Romanian: *Pe râul Neman*.

¹¹In Polish: *Zespół Filmowy Zodiak*.

¹²In Polish: *C.K. Dezerterzy*, in Romanian: *C.c. Dezertori*.

evident in economic matters. The director's megalomaniacal ideas demanded enormous financial outlays without producing tangible results (Grzechowiak, 2023, pp. 251, 318-321). It was no different in the case of the Polish – Romanian co-production. The remarks that appeared in one of the local newspapers in Poland were significant:

Poręba's films, so lavish and made with such great expense, simply have poor attendance. Recently, the director even felt the need to explain himself, he appeared on television, talked about the budget of his films, but he spoke in an extremely convoluted way and probably didn't seem to convince anyone to watch his latest work (Młynarz, 1987, p. 4 – my translation).

It should be remembered that at that time there was institutional censorship in the Polish People's Republic (Mielczarek, 2010, pp. 29-49). Previous attempts to express criticism in this regard ended with the censorship suspending the publication of the press article (Grzechowiak, 2023, pp. 320-321). It seems that in 1987 the regime authorities lost hope that Bohdan Poręba's form of communication would reach the Polish cinema audience. The fact that such open criticism of the director's work was allowed, even in a regional daily, was significant. This probably indicated the scale of the disaster, which the authorities of Poland had no intention of covering up at any cost.

6. Conclusions

Considering the above, it is difficult to say that the film *The Golden Train* was an outstanding film work. It seems that this happened because creators from Poland and Romania had completely different goals. Bohdan Poręba wanted to create, above all, an action film, while the Romanian side was particularly interested in presenting its political arguments in the context of the international situation at that time. Moreover, the film, in a way, became a victim of the director's political involvement. Bohdan Poręba was associated by many people with the ideology of national communism, which influenced the perception of his work. It is an indisputable fact that the director was ostracized for many years, which was related to his controversial political involvement and had an impact on Bohdan Poręba's activities in cultural life. However – according to Piotr Zwierzchowski and Krzysztof Kornacki – the approach to the Polish director's work is completely incomprehensible in the field of historiography. The "Bohdan Poręba's School" (or rather the Profil Film Unit that he led) is "a mine of knowledge" and topics related to the Polish People's Republic (Zwierzchowski, Kornacki, 2014, pp. 29-30). It would also be extremely valuable to undertake a broader discussion on the role and importance of the film *The Golden Train* in Romanian cinematography, taking into account in particular the realities of filmmaking during the rule of Nicolae Ceaușescu. Polish and Romanian film critics assessed the film similarly in some respects. However, it seems that the Romanian audience (the so-called average recipient) received the film *The Golden Train* better. According to official data from the Romanian Film Center, the film was seen by 2,376,136 viewers in Romania, which seems to be a good result considering the country's population (Centrul Național al Cinematografiei, 2025). The different perception (and reasons for it) of Polish – Romanian co-production in both countries may also be the subject of further research. It seems that Polish audience was primarily outraged by the huge prevalence of fictional themes over historical facts. The production was also hampered by the director's views, which had previously alienated many viewers. Bohdan Poręba proposed a co-production that was characterized by a surplus of form over content and improperly placed emphasis. On the other hand, Romanian audience had the opportunity to see the country's most prominent actors on screen at the time. Screenwriter

Ioan Grigorescu also had a strong reputation in Romania. Furthermore, the film portrayed Prime Minister Armand Călinescu in a very positive light, giving him the characteristics of a noble politician with chivalrous virtues.

It seems that the Polish side decided to jointly produce a film with Romania for one simple motivation. The authorities of the Polish People's Republic wanted to warm up relations with Nicolae Ceaușescu, who felt a bit concerned about the events in Poland in the first half of the 1980s. For this reason, a specific form of political corruption was decided upon, with no financial means spared for the production of the film. If the joint film production did not bring financial success, it could ensure the gratitude of comrade Ceaușescu, who could use the cinema screen for propaganda for internal purposes.

The Polish – Romanian co-production was useful for the Profil Film Unit, which once again, under the pretext of creating supposedly ambitious historical cinema, obtained huge funds from the state budget, although Bohdan Poreba's achievements from previous years were rather questionable. At the same time, in the 1980s, filmmakers who tried to show the breakthrough moments in Polish history that were taking place at that time were limited (Święch, 2025, pp. 57-86).

The Polish People's Republic invested in Polish – Romanian relations through film, which brought results in the following years, even after the political changes in both countries. Ioan Grigorescu soon wrote the script for a film directed by Manole Marcus titled *Marea sfidare*¹³, also about the Romanian government's help to Poles after the outbreak of World War II (Constantin, 2021, p. 144; Dubicki, 2022). Grigorescu then served as Romania's ambassador to Poland from 1993 to 1998 (Grigorescu, 2019, p. 335).

Bohdan Poreba's film titled *The Golden Train* has earned its place in the Romanian culture (Bădoiu, 2018, p. 61). The co-production was broadcast on the worldwide Romanian TVR International (Societatea Română de Televiziune). On the 80th anniversary of the Polish exile to Romania, an exhibition related to the transportation of Polish gold was presented in Wieliczka in 2019. The Romanian Cultural Institute had taken patronage of the event. On this occasion, a screening of the co-production titled *The Golden Train* also took place (Institutul Cultural Român, n.d.). Poles and Romanians therefore perceive the co-production of the 1980s through a different prism.

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¹³In Polish: *Wielki bunt*, in English: *The great defiance*.

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