

IOSUD – UNIVERSITATEA „DUNĂREA DE JOS” DIN GALAȚI

Școala Doctorală de Științe Socio-Umane



PhD THESIS

Summary

DAN LUNGU'S PROSE

PhD student,

IANI (CHIRILUȚĂ) GILDA-DANIELA

Scientific leader,

PROF. UNIV. DR. ANTOFI EUGENIA-SIMONA

Seria U 2: Filologie – Română nr. 35

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SUMMARY

Key-words: *Dan Lungu, writer's profile, directions of reception, the (meta)novel formula, thematic particularities, super-orality, new authenticity, histrionics, the art of polyphonic characters, the narrative games of memory, the plurality of narrative, the resources of humour, the deconstruction of the fantastic, the fictionalization of the diverse fact.*

The PhD thesis entitled *Dan Lungu's Prose* proposes a thematic and investigative incursion into the meaning-producing narrative structures applied to the literary prose of a contemporary writer, with national and especially international visibility, significant for the dynamics of Romanian literary forms and their impact in cultural spaces abroad.

What we propose is, in essence, an exercise of applied hermeneutics that identifies the elements that give specificity to Dan Lungu's literary prose - with all the risks assumed, given the fact that we are dealing with an active writer, who can change / resize his options and tools of work at any time, the dense and well represented critical bibliography, and the many interviews granted by the writer, over time, which is likely to guide the reading in a particular direction, favored by Dan Lungu himself. An exercise, therefore, which preserves (as far as possible) the specificity of each literary text analysed, but which also makes it possible to outline some convergent data of the writing and thus to configure a strongly personalised model of writing.

In fact, there is a consensus, from this point of view, at the level of specialized critical discourse, which we will highlight and which represents one of the encouraging premises of our approach, which we intend, however, to overcome through an analysis algorithm that brings together, on the one hand, the opinion of the writer himself on his literary prose - the interviews, his (non)specific situation - through the ideology of creation, the explicit assumption - or the declared disjunction - of a belonging to a direction, grouping, literary formula, the specialized critical reception - in the country and abroad, the impact on the reading public and, on the other hand, the mechanisms of narrative and semantic articulation of Dan Lungu's literary prose. The analysis algorithm thus constituted owes its operationality and the convergence of all these criteria,

perspectives and working tools to Dan Lungu's writing itself, in which all the other aspects reverberate, or are specularly reflected.

In other words, we intend to experiment with the functionality of this reading and interpretation algorithm in relation to a representative corpus of texts, and then to extend it to all of the prose writer's literary writings.

Therefore, the main objective of the choice of the theme of this work consists in a hermeneutic approach applied to the narrative structures of Dan Lungu's literary writing, in (re)discovering the (re)constructive valences of this complex writing, investigated in its fundamental data, out of the desire to expand the possibilities of analysis and reception of his creations, and even to change the perspective of the usual criticism on the universe of the work of a prose writer who refines, modifies and widens the range of formal and aesthetic possibilities of language. Often perceived as a professional and mature prose writer, a captivating and powerful writer who belongs to the so-called "generation of the decrepit", Dan Lungu opts for a literature with (over)realistic tendencies, as well as for subtle, copiously satirical miniatures, all of which become an effective tool in the constant attempt to legitimize - and especially to promote - his own work. For the Romanian cultural space, Dan Lungu's prose can be considered an invitation to re-evaluate the modern cultural tradition, which would give it a better position in the national literary field, in addition to the international one.

After a preliminary perusal of the specialized critical bibliography, (de)motivating in itself, since the profile of the writer and of his texts is continuously recomposed, with the theoretical-methodological tools of the multiple oriented, polyvalent critical discourse, we will experiment a possibility of (relatively) new reading/interpretation of Dan Lungu's novels.

Therefore, the innovative character of the present paper resides in the operationalization of a complex, dynamic and flexible algorithm of analysis, and of a critical instrument that we consider adequate to the specificity of Dan Lungu's literary writing, the thematic analysis and the exploration of the narrative structures producing meanings, corroborating each other in order to discover the deepest meanings of the artistic universe of the writer's prose, with the additional aim of illustrating a possible identity profile. We would also like to mention that, to our knowledge, there is no compact, multi-oriented study at the moment, which could be usefully

extended to the whole of Dan Lungu's literary writing, and especially flexible in relation to the external dynamics - of the narrative, and internal - of the play of meanings - of his prose.

In the research, a wide range of theoretical material was consulted in order to outline the literary context of the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, as well as critical studies, literary reviews, articles and reviews, which portray the overall picture of Dan Lungu's prose and the main directions of its reception. Emphasis was also placed on theoretical studies in the field of specialized criticism, in direct connection with our analysis needs, carried out by representative theorists for the current Romanian literary space, among whom we mention Adrian Marino¹, Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu², Dan C. Mihăilescu³, Eugen Simion⁴ and Mihaela Ursă⁵.

We have identified the writer's appetite for a number of peculiarities of present-day existence, such as post-December everyday life (a very Romanian model of living, with little money, small bathrooms, a bare fridge and quarrelsome neighbours day after day), corroborated - and reflected in the ironic variations of the types of writing, some of them in the most straightforward slang, attributes that make reading difficult and at the same time enjoyable. Dan Lungu exercises his irony by combining the typical characters (the pensioner, the husband, the worker) with paradoxical situations that can be found in the "sensational" section of any newspaper (a world made up of distorted memories, nostalgia, fantasies, frustrations, stereotypes, eccentric projects and fantasies), as well as the multi-emantic textual game, whose apparent gratuitousness fits perfectly with the narrative path that Dan Lungu's literary prose illustrates.

The internal dynamics of Dan Lungu's literary narrative goes through a series of stages, which imposed the structure of the research approach of the present work. Our analysis focused on the main themes of the writer's creation, completed with a diachronic approach aimed at measuring and highlighting the transformations through which this type of writing passes, at the level of the thematic-formal choices of the writer himself. Starting

¹ Adrian Marino, *Biografia ideii de literatură*, Editura Dacia, Cluj Napoca, 2000.

² Ovid S. Crohmălniceanu, *Amintiri deghizate*, Editura Nemira, București, 1994.

³ Dan C. Mihăilescu, *Literatura română în postceaușism*, vol. II, *Prezentul ca dezumanizare*, Ed. Polirom, Iași, 2006.

⁴ Eugen Simion, *Cronologia vieții literare românești, perioada postcomunistă, VII, 1996*, Ed. Muzeul Literaturii Române, București, 2015.

⁵ Mihaela Ursă, *Optzecismul și promisiunile postmodernismului*, Ed. Paralela 45, Pitești, 1999.

from the idea that every author projects himself - in one way or another - in the fictional worlds he elaborates, the work aims to discover those thematic networks that give coherence to Dan Lungu's work. In this respect, the strategies of auctorial projection at the level of writing will also be considered, starting from Raymond Federman's statement that "every novel is based, to some extent, on the author's own experiences, whether lived or imagined, then transposed into the lives of the characters."⁶

Last but not least, our analytical approach aims to investigate the fundamental directions of Dan Lungu's novels reception, in order to place the author's prose on the trajectory of the evolution of the current Romanian literary prose.

This paper is, therefore, an attempt to explore how Dan Lungu's works have contributed and contribute to the evolution of contemporary Romanian literature, how they reflect the social and cultural changes in the Romanian space of today, to inventory and comment on the main directions of reception of Dan Lungu's work, both in the Romanian and international space, to outline the specific features of this novel writing and, last but not least, to highlight the elements of originality of the writer's prose. The chosen motto, "*The seven wonders of communism: In Romania everyone has a job. Although everyone has a job, no one works. Although nobody works, the plan is made over 100%. Although the plan is made over 100%, the shops are empty. Although the shops are empty, everyone has something to eat. Although everyone has something to eat, no one is satisfied. Although no one is satisfied, everyone applauds.*"⁷, we believe that it exactly identifies Dan Lungu's main concern, namely the attempt to find a justification for a well-known state of mind, i.e. the paradoxical nostalgia after communism of a large part of Romanian society nowadays. The impact of the writer's training as a sociologist is decisive from this point of view.

The research methods on which we have focused involve the systematic study of the artistic structures that Dan Lungu opts for and which aim, mainly, but not exclusively, at exploring the technical aspects of this prose - narrative formula/formulas - narrators, narrative perspectives, narrative discourse, character construction, stylistic-semantic resources, etc. Then, the method of thematic analysis is added, oriented towards the systematization and analysis of

⁶ Raymond Federman, *Îndoita vibrație. Zâmbete în Washington Square*, Editura Univers, București, 1989, p. 32.

⁷ Dan Lungu, *Sînt o babă comunistă!*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2010, p. 77.

some themes of social and cultural predilection, such as the post-communist transition, the changes that occurred in the post-december Romanian society or some aspects related to identity and belonging - given the phenomenon of the exodus of Romanians who left to live in the West. In addition, the perspective of a necessary internal inetrtextuality relates Dan Lungu's writings to each other, thus allowing the investigation of narrative marks and specific themes in diachrony, in order to identify the lines of force of this writing, which give coherence and internal unity to the whole.

Chapter I, *Dan Lungu - literary (self)portrait*, reveals the autobiographical profile of the writer, mainly outlined through interviews. This part of the work is dedicated to the identification of the main data and to the analysis of his profile as a prose writer, highlighting - for the explicit benefit of the subsequent analysis - some details of his biography, particular moments of his creative activity, some observations concerning the artistic laboratory of the epic universe, the particular conditions of creation, as well as the writer's opinions regarding the socio-cultural context of our days. We considered this biographical incursion necessary in order to facilitate access (for the interested reader) to a range of information and details that will help to (re)discover the (re)constructive values of a complex writing. This brief background also serves to identify the origins and sources of the unmistakable stylistic imprint of the writer and, at the same time, to place the thematic analysis of his work on a coherent interpretative path.

In fact, the main theme of his writings is the search, recognition and rediscovery of the self in a world strongly attacked by the communist regime. All this has led to the construction of characters that represent - in their own way - scriptural projections of the author in a constant search for new points of reference and motivations for life, in the context of the overturning of value systems, of the profound changes that have occurred at all levels of public and private life. We can say that his childhood years were deeply marked by the forced industrialization of the communist period, and as a sociologist and writer, Dan Lungu analyzes throughout his work a regime that obsessed him and consecrated him at the same time: "That's right, my novels have a strong adherence to the post-communist reality, capturing the new social phenomena, human typologies and the changes in mentality. All pigmented with humour and irony. Beyond their aesthetic stakes - I am always attentive to style and construction - my books have a documentary effect and, not infrequently, in their substrate, propose models of analysis. One of the most successful phenomena I wrote about when there was very little talk about it was the paradoxical

nostalgia after communism. It appears in my debut novel, *Chickens' Heaven*, and is dealt with at length in I'm a Communist Old Woman, after which Stere Gulea made a film with Luminița Gheorghiu in the lead role. The following novels also captured the Romanian transition from different angles and accidentally, but The Driver from Oz is the book that completes the panorama of Romanian post-communism begun in the first two novels.”⁸

Of a major importance for the present research is also the way in which Dan Lungu's work was received. **Chapter II, Directions of reception and critical perspectives on Dan Lungu's literary prose**, starts by highlighting the most important lines of reception of Dan Lungu's work, both in the Romanian and international cultural space. We considered that a presentation of the directions of critical reception of his literary work is necessary in order to propose, in turn, taking into account the existing interpretative accumulations, an algorithm of interpretation of a hybrid (meta)text, with an obvious (sometimes explicit, often implicit) reflexive character, sometimes syncretic, in the sense that techniques from other arts are experimented, such as cinematography, directors' jargon, reportage, or radio theatre.

In sub-chapter **II.1. Opinions, value judgements and critical summaries. The relevance of Dan Lungu's work in the Romanian cultural space**, we have systematised and analysed the critical assessments for and against, and even the polemics around Dan Lungu's non-conformist literary writing. All this is useful for understanding the author as a personality, but also for understanding his work; a large part of these critical appraisals highlight elements of unquestionable specificity of his literary prose, such as the spoken nature of the novels, the verve of orality and the omnipresence of the logoreic universe.

Not a few, however, were also clearly unfavorable opinions, assumed as such by critics such as Dan C. Mihăilescu, Daniel Cristea-Enache, Nicolae Manolescu or Alex Ștefănescu, who appreciated Dan Lungu's prose, either as having "burlesque Macondo arborescences" or as having "burlesque Macondo arborescences",⁹ either as a "body without engine",¹⁰ or "a prose

⁸ Interview by George Forcoș, May,30th, 2022, <https://www.b1tv.ro/eveniment/interviu-exclusiv-scriitorul-dan-lungu-despre-romanul-soferul-din-oz-cu-ajutorul-lui-intram-in-lumea-politico-interlopa-de-la-inceputurile-democratiei-romanesti-si-o-descoperim-la-firul-ierb-1160329.html>.

⁹ Dan C. Mihăilescu, *Gît golaș de România*, în *Literatura română în postceauism. II. Proza. Prezentul ca dezumanizare*, Editura Polirom, 2006, p. 244.

¹⁰ Dan C. Mihăilescu, cit. art.

of a dry and at the same time inflexible realism, not at all impressionable",¹¹ in a "white, neutral style, close to that of the minutes",¹² or even "a cheap challenge that does not impress us any more."¹³

Assuming an obviously favourable perspective on Dan Lungu's literary prose, other critical opinions - numerous and especially relevant - appreciate it for the novel type of narration anchored in the core of reality, in everyday life, "for the exploration of diverse, polychrome mentalities and forms of social existence (*The Chickens' Heaven, I'm a Communist Old Lady!*, *How to Forget a Woman, The Little Girl Who Played God*), for the resources of comedy, the carnivalesque nuance of narrative angles, the spectacular exposure of trauma, the fictionalisation of events and characters through the prism of orality, all of which are features of an overflowing, picturesque, unusual narrative universe"¹⁴, as Iulian Boldea states. Also, Marius Miheț, Cosmin Ciotloș, Bianca-Burța Cernat, Mihaela Ursă, Andrei Terian, Nicoleta Diaconeasa, Eli Bădică, Mircea Iorgulescu, Paul Cernat, Silviu D. Constantinescu are just a few of the critics who analyse the narrative construction of his works, talking about the author's "multipurpose capacity to reinvent himself each time", about the fact that his novels are true "files of existence, that make you laugh out loud or feel sad", an "exercise in understanding patterns of thought", or "the expression of the logopathic mania of the post-communist street in Romania", in which "the focus falls expressly on the single occupation of this microuniverse: *logopathy*".¹⁵

We ended our incursion into the realm of Dan Lungu's criticism and literary reception in the Romanian cultural space with his answer, given during an interview with Raluca Codru, regarding the way he himself relates to critical opinions of all kinds - "Surely there are pros and cons. The first negative criticism was very painful, but then I got used to it. I understood that it's normal, in a pluralistic world, people have different tastes, it would be a shame to please everyone, it would be abnormal. First of all, you learn about the relativity of values. It's a lesson that is formidable for a writer, because afterwards you can use it in the writing of your future novel. Some reproaches are very welcome, which have to do with style, with your attitude as a

¹¹ Daniel Cristea-Enache, *Concert de deschidere*, Editura Fundației Culturale Române, București, 2001, p. 280.

¹² Daniel Cristea-Enache, op.cit, p. 281.

¹³ *Idem*

¹⁴ Iulian Boldea, *Vrăjirea și desvrăjirea realității*, revista Apostrof, anul XXX, 2019, Nr.5, (348).

¹⁵ Ciprian Handru, *Mahalaua în proza română contemporană*, Vatra, January, 7th, 2022, <https://revistavatra.org/2022/01/07/ciprian-handru-mahalaua-in-proza-romana-contemporana/#more-9302>.

writer. Criticisms that are made with pertinence and good faith are absolutely welcome for the author, and those that are solipsistic are unusable for the reader and the author."¹⁶

In subchapter ***II.2. Dan Lungu's literary prose in the international cultural space – the informed critical reception and the impact on the public***, we could see that the writer has made a name for himself abroad, especially in Western Europe, primarily due to his participation in the cultural program called Belles Etrangères in 2005, followed by many other cultural events, honored with awards and distinctions such as "Book of the Month" in Germany, which propelled him into a position of successful prose writer, representative of the new wave of successful Romanian writers. Access to the great "republic of letters", in the words of Pascale Casanova¹⁷, the fact that he has achieved a significant level of cultural notoriety has been guaranteed by the numerous translations of his books and by comparisons with world-famous names such as Nabokov, Fernando Velázquez, Clara Sánchez and Cormac McCarthy.

From the systematic and meticulous analysis of the specialized critical reception and public success at national and international level, a whole set of arguments has emerged, without doubt, which explains the stable position and favorable image Dan Lungu has in the European literary space. His prose, seen as a wonderful exercise in style, as a sounding board for contemporary Romanian society, is (also) successful with foreign audiences.¹⁸ Summarizing the whole critical material, it can be noticed that Dan Lungu's work is distinguished by an obvious originality, both in terms of the construction of the novels and in terms of the style used, the realization of the characters, the themes addressed. The author is considered by foreign literary critics, but also by the local one, as a prose writer who has created a unique epic universe and who, starting from a series of data of reality, specific to the Romanian space in (perpetual) transition, captivates the reader.

Chapter III, entitled ***Peculiarities of the short prose - narrative levers, fictional worlds and stylistic tools***, is dedicated to the analysis of Dan Lungu's short prose, both in its anticipation of specific narrative procedures and fictionalization tools, resumed and developed in novels, and in its discursive autonomy. In other words, in his short prose, Dan Lungu experiments with a series of literary procedures, types of narrators and narrative perspectives, characters, language,

¹⁶ Raluca Codru, *Dan Lungu: „Creierul scriitorului lucrează mereu”*, Cuzanet, March, 22nd, 2009.

¹⁷ Pascale Casanova, *The world republic of letters*, Harvard University Press, 2004.

¹⁸ Silvia Mitricioaei, *Ceaușescu a căzut dar România mai există*, Revista Echinox, October, 3rd, 2010.

structures and specific themes, which will be the object of our in-depth analysis. In our research approach we will capture and analyse aspects related to *super-orality* and *the new authenticity*, *the fantastic character of (meta)fiction* and the *deconstruction of the fantastic*, *the plurality of narrative*, *the art of polyphonic characters*, *histrionics*, *linguistic dexterity*, *dramatic character*, etc.

In sub-chapter ***III.1. Superorality and the new authenticity***, the (re)sources of a striking orality are examined, which gives a new freshness and a particular colouring to the writing, clearly innovating at the level of the refunctionalization of the discourse assumed by the characters not only as a way of elaborating them, but especially as an instrument of (re)construction, with an increased degree of verisimilitude, of the fictional worlds of short prose. The novel thus gains an added objectivity, a process to which the complex technique of making caricatured characters with traits that, as they are reflected in the consciousness of the other characters, are hyperbolised, contributes. In our demonstration of super-corality and *the new authenticity*, we started from the novella *The Wife at Seven o'clock*, from the volume *Boys of the Gang*, a volume that brings together texts in which Dan Lungu proposes an interesting link with the literary generation associated with Desant '83¹⁹. The writers in the Desant '83 group are famously concerned with experimental, or "composite," literature ²⁰ the self-reflective one, of textualism, of metaroman, that is, of literature about literature, of literature that comes before the public (and) with the offer of its own creative laboratory. Taking up and adapting these aspects to his own literary ideology, Dan Lungu writes, for example, *Nevasta de la hora siete*. So why is *this piece of short prose* special? Firstly because it experiments with and recalibrates all aspects of his previous prose, even the styles and themes of Desant '83. Secondly, because the short story, which is part of the volume *Boys in a Gang*, published by Polirom in 2005, was published in the prestigious *Best European Fiction 2013* anthology²¹, published by the American publisher

¹⁹Gheorghe Perian, *Desant '83*, Vatra, November, 7th, 2016, <https://revistavatra.org/2016/11/07/gheorghe-perian-desant-83/>.

²⁰Victor Cobuz, *Proza compozită românească după 2000 (III)*, Observator Cultural, No. 1047, 28.01.2021, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/proza-compozita-romaneasca-dupa-2000-iii/>.

²¹ The first Romanian writer published in this anthology was, in 2011 edition, with the story *După găște*, published in *Celealte povești de dragoste*, Polirom, 2009.

Dalkey Archive Press, then in its fourth edition and dedicated to European literature, with the participation of writers from thirty-two countries.²²

It is obvious that Dan Lungu experiments and ultimately turns his books into real writing laboratories. Most theorists disagree with the absolute synonymy between experiment and the experimental novel on the one hand and metafiction on the other. But the fact that Dan Lungu innovates the genre of the novel, writing in a completely different way than has been written before, gives his books the (implicit) status of metaliterature. The issue of metaliterature and its application to Dan Lungu's prose remains open and meaning-generating, going far beyond the scope of this thesis.

Subchapter ***III.2. The fantastic component of the fictional worlds and the plurality of the narrative*** analyses the model of reality proposed by Dan Lungu. The world acquires a fantastic and mysterious component in the sense that each character contributes to the mystery of reality through their own existence. We have analysed, as an example, the novella *De vorbă cu Sopron*, in which a little girl tells about the world of grown-up people, who are, from the child's perspective, fantastic creatures from a fairy tale, or the novella *Un conseil amiesc*, in which the prose writer dons the garb of a sophisticated narrative puppet, a female philosophy professor, who depicts an authentic post-communist world, in an era of Romanian education in which nothing is really taught anymore, in which students are only interested in sex, money, football and music, many of them coming to school with mobile phones more expensive than the teacher's one-year salary. The fact that the writer experiments with every possible type of narrator in these short stories is an argument for the idea of the metaroman associated with Dan Lungu's short prose. In a debate on the issues raised by this great metaroman, of post-communist transition, which Dan Lungu's prose represents, we should take into account, alongside fragmentation, iconoclastic character, fantastic character, hybridization or mixing of literary forms, narrative chameleonsim and narrative plurality - as distinctive features that contribute to the shaping of a specific metafiction.

²² News from December, 21st, 2012, on <https://www.mediafax.ro/cultura-media scriitorul-dan-lungu-selectat-in-antologia-americana-best-european-fiction-2013-10407208>.

In subchapter ***III.3*** The ***Inexhaustible Resources of Humour***, we identify and analyse the sources of an absurd humour, on the one hand, but which hides an ineffable sadness, of a slightly lyrical humour, very sensitive, on the other hand, corrected at the same time realistic and psychological, by analysing the novels *Give me a break, I'm sweaty, I wonder if these are the famous condoms* and, last but not least, *Boys of the gang*, a (possible) parody of *Childhood Memories*. Dan Lungu's prose resizes the peculiarities of Creanga's prose, the parody of his style affecting all the dimensions of the narrative - *orality*, everything is told orally by a narrator nicknamed Franzelă; the *universality of the characters* - all the characters are neighbourhood boys from anywhere in the world, from any periphery; *dramatic character* - the text is peppered with real funny sketches, and highlights a real repertoire that the little boys put into practice especially when Paganel leaves home, making phone calls to those in the phone book with funny names; the *paremiological background* - this is a communist ghetto paremiological background introduced, as in the case of Ion Creanga, by expressions such as "that word", "that word - you're as full of tricks as a paper mill"; the *refinement of language* - the text is worked in filigree, with the refinement of a jeweller, there is not a single word used casually, the sonority of each one and its sonorous proximity being carefully studied; *Fantasy* - the characters are projected, as in *Childhood Memories*, on a plane of the everyday but also on a fantastic plane. In other words, "Dan Lungu has placed great reliance on narrative and language, on the comic of all shades and tastes, on the empathy of the reader charmed, whether out of melancholy or for other reasons, by the chain of naive, gratuitous and sometimes even strange and farcical happenings. Dan Lungu's prose has acquired depth and complex aesthetic stakes, the impersonal discourse of the narrator opening many more loopholes of interpretation."²³

Subchapter ***III.4. The (de)construction of the fantastic – fictional hypotheses and hypostases, narrative permissiveness and stylistic registers***, tries to demonstrate why the prose writer always returns to the short prose: because it is as if he returns to his sources, or to the bedroom thing, because it has a special and very serious relationship with writing. We have subjected to our analysis the short stories *The old man, Ceaușescu and the plan* - in which we find an "overturned" version of the Miorița ballad, a secularized Mioritic myth, analyzed in all modern meanings, carefully deconstructed, *The Bulldozerist*, in which the narrative space is

²³ Poetica Argoului unor „Băieți De Gașcă”, marca Dan Lungu, article published at the International Conference Comun/Lexic Specializat (Ediția a XI-a), 2018.

suddenly deconstructed, after a logic other than causal, as if events happen in a flash, and the periods of the narrator's existence are compressed into a single moment of attention, Five, five and a half - in which a teenager lives an imaginary love story, and is happy being in possession of a fake marriage certificate, *From the Darkness*, in which the world of children left alone at home for so long, that they feel like orphans, even if they have living parents, with whom they live in the same house, is shown, etc.

Reading Dan Lungu's text, we can say that we are dealing with an example of non-figurative art, the language itself becoming the stake of the entire creation. Marius Chivu, the most recent anthologist of the prose writer, uses the metaphor of the plant root to describe Dan Lungu's short prose. He suggests that the short prose is the one that rediscovers Dan Lungu, being considered the most resistant part of his work, like the root of a plant, because that's where he draws his creative energy.²⁴ It is difficult to separate the short prose from the novels, as the author seems to be writing the same book, perpetually reconfigured: "There are small incidents or details, of a special nature, that function as real jokes. Which overcome the stage of imperfections of a reality that regenerates and turns into cracks, through which you can see the hole or the possibility of another reality. I'm interested in the details that destabilize balances, disturb surfaces, the stumbles or coughs that disenchant speeches, the flickers that involuntarily undermine worlds and force us to start over with the question "who are we?". There is a point where reality tips over into illusion, where decisions leave the daily routine, are betrayed, remain without object."²⁵

Chapter IV, entitled *Discursive-narrative (re)compositions of the real in Dan Lungu's novels*, begins the analysis of the corpus of the selected texts, from Alex Goldiș's statement: "Dan Lungu's novel is a very good social narrative, which parodically exploits the mental clashes of today's world. Whether they are understood temporally (as a relationship between the communist world and the post-revolutionary one, in I am a communist grandmother!) or geographically-politically (as an opposition between the Western world and the autochthonous

²⁴ Marius Chivu, *Viață cu amanuntul*, Dilema Veche, nr. 822, 21-27 noiembrie 2019, disponibil la adresa <https://dilemaveche.ro/sectiune/la-zii-in-cultura/carte/viata-cu-amanuntul-628960.html>.

²⁵ Bogdan Crețu, *Pîlpîri speculative*, Observator Cultural, Nr. 952, 21.12.2018.

world, in The Girl Who Played with God), the contradictions of society Romanians are exposed by Dan Lungu with an unusual intelligence of capturing symptomatic details.”²⁶

Therefore, in subchapter ***IV.1. Chickens' Heaven - the fictionalization of the miscellaneous fact and the recomposition of reality as a (re)narrated history***, it is demonstrated how Dan Lungu exemplarily gradates the tension of the epic, making, from the history of nothing, a history of fictional suspense, mixing, in the fabric of the diverse fact, the sensational and the catastrophic, equally . The novel *Raiul găinilor* - a fake novel of rumors and mysteries, published in 2004, by the Polirom publishing house, and reached its third edition in 2010, was, in fact, Dan Lungu's first great literary success, the volume being for four in the top of the sales list, and the German edition being declared in Germany, in December 2007, the book of the month. *Raiul gainilor* was the book that propelled Dan Lungu into the Romanian and international literary world. Mircea Iorgulescu, the one who wrote the foreword to the novel *Raiul găinilor*, appreciates that "Dan Lungu builds in *Raiul găinilor* an epic metaphor in everything comparable to the cinematic one proposed by Emir Kusturica in the memorable vision of the underground in *Underground*. The novel, with its desolate, sordid and atrocious world captive in the endless tunnel of transition, marks a moment in Romanian prose today and equally in the evolution of the author himself, who moves from the provocation exercises in his books so far to a vision of whose satirical violence is doubled by an endless compassion."²⁷

With *Chickens' Heaven*, Dan Lungu introduces the reader to a forgotten world, a world of the former communist camp, on a street bordered by a garbage ravine and broken by a barely glimpsed city, a peripheral place where nothing happens, a street with the smell of garbage, but with a botanical name - *Strada Salcâmilor* - a metaphor for post-December Romania. This street consumes, however, some destinies of particular relevance for the entire post-December Romanian space. *Strada Salcâmilor* has a special narrative and fictional status, because it can react as a single person, that's why we can consider it, without fear of making a mistake, a character in itself. Here, on this street, all the stories of nea Mitu from *Tractorul Șifonat* are very topical and are listened to with interest, because everyone identifies with them. At *Tractorul Șifonat* everyone and everything is discussed, any diverse fact becomes an event to be commented on, but not every diverse fact can be impactful news for the drunk community. The

²⁶Alex Goldiş, *Satul glocal*, Vatra, nr. 1-2, April, 11th, 2019.

²⁷<https://polirom.ro/ego-proza/1541-raiul-gainilor-fals-roman-de-zvonuri-si-mistere.html>.

ordinary people of this space become the strange and strange characters of the novel,- Milica, nea Mitu, Relu Covaliu, Vera Socaliuc, Costel Spătaru, Aurora Spătaru -, they are small stars of the community they belong to, through which Dan Lungu can afford to build, from the living resources of the post-communist world, an artistic language that brings together, and coordinates in an unprecedented stylistic synthesis, all the registers, from the style administrative, literary, publishing to the licensed, slang, many of the figures of speech being taken from the benches of the communist period, which people called themselves on street corners, or in the unbearable queues for basic food.

Chickens'Heaven is a difficult novel to tell. The fact that it cannot be told easily proves that the center of gravity of the novel lies not in the epic, but rather in the way the novel narrative is constructed. The characters of this novel are ordinary people, caught in humorous situations, the main method of bringing them to life being, most of the time, caricature.

In subchapter **IV.2. I am a communist old lady! - from the "optimism on curlers" to the retrospective of communism**, the novel *I am a communist old lady!*, published for the first time in 2007, at the Polirom publishing house, is analyzed. The novel is currently in its fifth edition, one of which is an anniversary edition.²⁸ Internationally, the novel has been translated into over fifteen languages, being, according to the author, in an interview given to Ionuț Baias, "a novel that caught many opportunities, a lucky novel, that resonated with very different audiences and with professionals from the most different areas of the arts"²⁹.

Belonging to communism is the keystone, the source of all the moral ambiguities in Dan Lungu's novel, as the prose writer himself testifies in an interview: "First of all, I wanted to understand. To understand without being unfair, without judging without measure. To understand without legitimizing atrocities and crimes. It's complicated, it's like tightrope walking"³⁰.

²⁸ „It is an illustrated edition with images from the performances based on the book and from the two films, one artistic and the other documentary, but, more than that, with interventions by many of those who contributed to the success of the book – translators, directors, actors , cultural managers, etc." Interview by Ionuț Baias, *Cât se mai citește în România: „Statisticile sunt din ce în ce mai negre”*, September, 2022, <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-cultura-25806371-cat-mai-citeste-romania-statisticile-sunt-din-mai-negre-interviu-scriitorul-dan-lungu.htm>.

²⁹ Ionuț Baias, cit. art.

³⁰ Interview by Cati Lupașcu, *Dan Lungu, scriitorul care a dat o nouă dimensiune succesului. Cioplitorul de povești*, revista cariere.ro, December, 20th, 2022, <https://revistacariere.ro/leadership/work-life-choices/dan-lungu-scriitorul-care-a-dat-o-noua-dimensiune-succesului-cioplitorul-de-povesti/>.

The meanings constructed through the novel *I am a communist old lady!* circulate throughout Dan Lungu's prose, given the fact that the characters who wear them are, themselves, representative of the entire Romanian post-December space, as we find it in all the novels of this writer. Basically, the "communist lady" who wants to save her past, to start a new business in the old communist workshop that was scrapped, behaves like a Don Quixote who fights with tin weapons against universal evil, in the name of a nostalgic ideal , of an ancient humanity. There is an unexpected sense of genuine life that emanates from the book, as if the sentences already have life, or take their energy from outside them. Humor, overflowing with every phrase, deepens the text, makes it more complex, giving it a new dimension - other than the strictly factual one. Another relevant feature of this prose is the fact that the novel, on (any) new rereading, keeps its freshness, you feel like you are reading it again, for the first time. This sensation is justified, among others, by the narrative consistency, by the depth of the epic. The meta-novel dimension of the writing also brings into discussion the problem of the relationship between reality - that seen through the eyes of Dan Lungu, of course - and fiction. The reality experienced by Mica - the protagonist of the novel, is slightly dystopian, as if the character lives in a crystal bubble because no one understands her, not even her daughter, who does not know what to think about her mother's nostalgia for communism.

"Optimism on curlers" designates, in this context, an ineffable species of humor. The expression belongs to Mica and can only be understood by those who lived in the Ceaușescu era. The topic is very current and, as Dan Lungu remarks - it is collective, which gives it an extra objectivity. Objectivity is associated, here, with authenticity - in the sense that the writer "plays" this character and becomes a histrion of Mica's biographical confusions, following her in all her intimate moments. "The communist old lady" should be understood as a confused personality ³¹, who tries to find his balance in a time of crisis. The woman, who feels a paradoxical nostalgia for (the world led by) a dictator, is, in fact, an absurd expression of a deep mutation, which took place in the depth of a human being, with relevance for an entire generation of Romanians. and the novel, the writer states: "The communist old lady is emblematic of the paradoxical nostalgia

³¹ Mihaela Ursă, *Baba comunista c'est moi!*, revista Apostrof a Uniunii Scriitorilor din România, Anul XVIII, no. 6, p. 28.

for a difficult period in our history, for the losers of post-communism, for the disappointed of the transition period. In this sense, her experience synthesizes a type of emotion and reporting to the past that marked all of Eastern Europe after the fall of the dictatorships. At the same time, it embodies sincerity, honest identity struggles and a nuanced look at the recent past, without trying to justify the unjustifiable. He is a simple but relevant person. The book has a terrible resonance among all generations and all ideological orientations, because, I say, it is deeply human and balanced. Then there is something else this novel has: a strong convertibility in various branches of art, from film to theater and ballet, which made the main character enjoy great popularity, not only with the reading public"³².

Subchapter **IV.3. How to forget a woman - and the narrative memory games** analyzes the novel published in 2009, by the Polirom publishing house, from the writer's confessed desire to detox from communism: "I have always had an obsession with a romance novel. It's an old idea. I was glad to get rid of novels about communism so I could go back to a romance novel. This novel, *How to Forget a Woman*, is not exactly what I wanted, I wanted a novel one hundred percent love, and what came out is half love, half about love."³³ It came out, after all, "first of all, a novel about memory: what happens to memory and how it is restructured in the case of a sentimental biographical fracture. Things are not very sharp, [...] they are slippery, subtle, nuanced."³⁴ Besides the main theme of the book, the writer also addresses the area of neo-Protestantism, for whose configuration in the novel he had to document himself in a special way. Even so, he states - "But I like how the structure turned out, it's like a Moebius strip."³⁵ Moreover, "To some extent, I describe in the book my own sensations, which I had when I first met neo-Protestants. 10 years ago, when I entered such a community, I was shocked. The sensations in the book are my sensations from 10 years ago."³⁶

³² Interview by de Sever Gulea, *Dan Lungu: Cred că dușmanul reușitelor este stresul, nu lenea contemplativă*, bloglibris.ro, June, 29th, 2022, <https://blog.libris.ro/2022/06/29/dan-lungu-cred-ca-dusmanul-reusitelor-este-stresul-nu-lenea-contemplativa/>.

³³ Interview by Ovidiu Şimonca, *Să-ți amintești de o femeie, ca s-o uiți*, Observator Cultural, Nr. 469, din 9.04.2009, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/sa-ti-amintesti-de-o-femeie-ca-s-o-uiti/>.

³⁴ Ovidiu Şimonca, cit. art.

³⁵ <https://www.cartepedia.ro/carte/carte/dan-lungu/cum-sa-uiti-o-femeie-editia-206514.html>.

³⁶ Ovidiu Şimonca, cit. art.

As the editor says, the novel *How to Forget a Woman* is a book full of "humor and unbridled fantasy",³⁷ „o carte despre dizolvarea mizantropiei și recucerirea inocenței, despre toleranță, despre cum se poate vorbi despre Dumnezeu în ziua de azi.”³⁸ The protagonists of the novel, Andi and Marga, are young journalists who work in the editorial office of the same newspaper, from a small provincial town. The two met at a party, in a strange circumstance, and have currently been living together for a year and a half. Although things seem to be going well between them, one day Marga disappears, leaving only a goodbye note. Without having a rational explanation for Marga's decision, Andi uses all kinds of strategies to forget her. Andi's life becomes more and more complicated also due to the fact that he meets a group of neo-Protestants. The ending of the novel is not necessarily happy, but just different than, perhaps, we would have expected. Because, unfortunately, Andi cannot forget Marga - as the writer himself states, "forgetting does not mean that he has deleted and removed information from the chips. To forget means, in Andi's case, to get rid of an obsession, to get out from under the fascination of a woman who follows him, to feel free. Finally, he feels free."³⁹

Given that Marga is absent from the entire book, her relationship with Andi unfolding only in Andi's capricious memory, Dan Lungu believes that what should remain in the reader's mind from their relationship, i.e., "a lesson in unbearable lightness of being, as Kundera would say. Or a testimony about the irrationality of relationships between people. They are not very clear, rational. We wrap them in all kinds of conventions, we categorize them, but their foundation is purely irrational. I have never understood how two complete strangers meet, stay together for a while and then get married. Incredible: two people who have never met meet and get married. I find this type of meeting profoundly irrational."⁴⁰

And this novel is full of orality, dramatic character, brands and signs of the fantastic, as is very evident, again, the histrionics of the author, who (plays) all the characters.

Quite unusual, a special emphasis falls on the memory of the characters. This is the only way to explain a significant amount of memories present in the text, many of them coming from the childhood of the characters, often with a traumatic impact. We could talk about a true poetic (art)

³⁷In Lire, by Matei Visniec, 25 februarie 2013, RFI.ro - In Lire <https://www.cartepedia.ro/carte/carte/dan-lungu/cum-sa-uiti-o-femeie-editia-206514.html>.

³⁸ <https://www.cartepedia.ro/carte/carte/dan-lungu/cum-sa-uiti-o-femeie-editia-206514.html>.

³⁹Ovidiu řimonca, cit. art.

⁴⁰Ibidem

of memory, which could be called mimesis of remembering, a perfectly justified name for the narratological art that centers on memory and the aesthetic and recuperative capacities of flash backs, or even introspection. Moreover, *How to forget a woman* is not the title of an ordinary novel, but it is a mnemonic title (to be explained here, in parentheses, the meaning of the term), in litotes, which actually says something else – how to forget a beloved woman who does not let you forget Or, more precisely – how to survive an impossible oblivion?

In this novel there are some paradoxical reflections on memory, of an unexpected lyrical intensity, even if the main character is a provincial journalist, without much education, a guy who mainly communicates in editorial jargon. Despite this narrator with a limited culture, Dan Lungu creates, through his voice and through the filter of his thinking, pages of obviously reflective character, and true poetry of the soul.

In subchapter **IV.4. The little girl who played God - from the (de)(re)construction of reality to a Bildungsroman à rebours**, we begin the analysis of the corpus of the selected texts from Alex Goldiș's statement: the novel "is a book that addresses an unfortunately very current issue, namely the traumas produced among families who experience the drama of separation , when parents choose to go to work abroad, leaving their children at home. It is an ambitious novel from the point of view of composition as well, because it alternates the plans of events and the narrative perspectives. A powerful book, of disturbing authenticity, which manages to happily dose lyricism and psychological analysis."⁴¹

The fact that most of the characters in this novel are female, gave the prose writer the opportunity to get into their shoes through different types of speech, which he rendered convincingly, the novel's polyphony being seen as a pluralism of voices: "Without a doubt, language is a way of access to the interiority of the characters, to their psychology and social status, which means that it can illustrate a point of view on the world. On the other hand, getting into the skin of the character means, from my point of view, much more, and this can only be done with the help of empathy. In the absence of the latter, we only get caricatures, schematized profiles. Emotions, thoughts, ways of reacting, attitudes, values and not least language form a whole, which has its divisions, but it is functional. With the help of empathy you can have a perception of this whole. [...] Empathy, which is a kind of affective imagination, helps me a lot.

⁴¹ Article by Paula Scînteianu, on March, 30th, 2015, <https://www.ziaruldeiasi.ro/stiri/a-fetita-care-se-juca-de-a-dumnezeua-de-dan-lungu-cea-mai-buna-carte-a-anului--92037.html>.

In the end, I think that convincingly getting into the shoes of the characters is a facet of the talent of a prose writer. In poetry, talent looks completely different.”⁴²

This time we are in front of a "social novel, well documented and interesting in terms of the issue itself, in that it reconstitutes in literature the phenomenon of Romanian emigration (with all its implications for the families left at home), of Romanians looking for jobs and earning money abroad in the early 90s."⁴³

In this novel, we can also talk about an internal histrionics of content, because histrionics becomes the implicit literary theme of the isolation and loneliness of a little girl left without a mother at home. Despite all the sweets she receives, so beautifully packaged in packages sent home, arrived by Atlasib coaches, the little girl imagines a "play of God" which, in essence, is a form of histrionics that she can have - and has - dangerous consequences for the child.

As a formula, the novel has an obvious dramatic character - it is full of gestures, physiognomy in motion and settings, being conceived as a huge theater play in which this child left alone at home, who plays by God, is the director. The little girl manages to reach dangerous places by herself, such as, for example, the roof of a block of flats. Everything is a game, but this game can turn into a tragedy. "The game of God" is a way of looking at and understanding the world, as only a child knows how to do it, in a totally and completely playful, naive and metaphorical way.

The narrative technique in this novel counterpoints sequences from the mother's universe and the universe of the little girl, who yearns for her. The chapters are marked by numbers - one, two, three... a moment, precisely to mark the fact that one chapter is the girl's, and the next is the mother's.

The existence of Rădița is emblematic for this city, and for a whole generation of children left alone at home, orphans - masters of a world where their grandparents can no longer move. It is a country of children without parents, a real apocalypse of orphans, absurd, but authentic and alive.

⁴² Interview by Alina Purcaru, *Pentru mine, Fetița... este în primul rând un roman despre copilarie*, Observator Cultural, No. 753, December, 19th, 2014, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/pentru-mine-fetita-este-in-primul-rind-un-roman-despre-copilarie/>.

⁴³ Adina Nițoiu, *Mizele sociale ale romanului*, Observator Cultural, No. 761, February, 27th, 2015, <https://www.observatorcultural.ro/articol/mizele-sociale-ale-romanului/>.

The end, of a cruel reality, confiscates everything that happened until then in the novel - everything becomes useless, futile, absurd, and the details that seemed significant now come back into focus with a different meaning. Practically, everything is reduced to zero - the work, the isolation, the resistance of Letiția Cosoi in Italy, in order to get the money necessary for the survival of the whole family, become completely useless, all the waiting for the little girl, all this game of hope, trying to collect pennies of ice cream to go to Italy, to see her mother, all the play of illusions she experiences when she sees a woman on the street who looks exactly like her mother, everything turns out to be in vain. Everything is deconstructed and rebuilt, permanently, and the power of thought and all the energy of this little girl are simply futile. The tragic fairy tale, basically, which has this deeply unhappy little girl as its protagonist, is completed by a unique Bildungsroman - with all the meanings turned upside down, a training and education novel that collides with a terrible truth. After the experience at the end of the novel, "the little girl who played with God" will never be a child again, but a traumatized soul for life.

Rădița from *The little girl who played God* is the most complex "doll" ever created in Romanian literature - never before could a child become such a complex character as the protagonist of this novel. Asked if Rădița exists in reality, if he had a "Root" in his family, Dan Lungu stated, in an interview, that he did not have a Rădița in his family, but he always wanted a child narrator, who would observe the world better. The root is a literary bet - that is, the result of a literary and profoundly human experiment.⁴⁴

Our research approach proposes, in summary, an integrative and coherent perspective on Dan Lungu's literary prose, based on a complex analysis algorithm, intended to cover all its compartments and peculiarities, in the sense of flexibility and an analytical itinerary likely to be extended, usefully, to all the prose literary works of this writer, whom we consider particularly representative of the dynamics of the current Romanian literary space.

⁴⁴ Dan Lungu with the poet Radu Vancu, at a meeting with the readers at Humanitas bookshop, Sibiu, in Capital Cultural, January, 31st, 2017, <https://capitalcultural.ro/dan-lungu-ca-scriitor-ai-o-realitate-foarte-complicata-jurul-tau/>.

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