

THE NOVEL OF TRANSITION: SUBVERSIVE TEMPORALITIES IN EARLY POSTCOMMUNIST ROMANIAN LITERATURE

DORIS MIRONESCU*

This article analyses the novel of transition as a subgenre of contemporary Romanian literature, arguing for its relevance in a discussion of how post-communist literary works reflect the social reality of their time. The focus is on novels written in the narrow period between the 1990s to the mid-2000s, by authors who lived through the experience of transition and sought to capture it literarily; their works, I argue, form together the nucleus of a novelistic subgenre. The notion of literary subgenre as coined by Franco Moretti (Moretti 2000) is helpful in this instance, as it stresses the importance of novelistic subgenres as markers of social change. A subgenre, Moretti believes, is relatively short-lived and is characterized by its dependence on the shadow of recent social phenomena that permeate and organize its imagination. In Moretti's perspective, a successful novelistic subgenre usually lasts some three decades and it is characterized by a specific choice in theme and motifs, which triggers certain stylistic and compositional features. This style-theme unity generates a dynamic of its own, which feeds successively form and content, but which cannot last too long, since either the stylistic devices become outdated, or the subject becomes historically irrelevant.

Two main directions of study of the Romanian postcommunist novel emerged, one dominated by the economically-driven vision of world literature as a system, one and unequal, in articles inspired by Moretti and the Warwick Collective (Stan 2023, Contea, Pietraru 2024), and one paying tribute to memory studies (Mironescu A. 2016, Mironescu A., Mironescu D. 2020), which also subscribes to an integrated vision of world literature, but sees the world integration of literature more as a result of the revolution of information, communications and media in the 21st century. While the first is concerned with the literary reflection of global economic inequalities masked by a prevailing neoliberal consensus, and integrates the plight of former socialist countries with others coming from the Global South, the second is more geoculturally narrow and focuses on regional phenomena, such as East-European postcommunist transitions to a market economy. In this article, I propose to take a different approach from both of them.

* „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași / „Alexandru Philippide” Institute of Romanian Philology, Romanian Academy, Iași Branch, Romania (dorismironescu@yahoo.com).

I will seek to discuss the novel of transition in relation to the concept of temporality (Hartog 2015), with a view to a pluralized vision of how modernity works, such as the one exposed by Susan Stanford Friedman (Stanford Friedman 2015). Stanford Friedman sees modernity, in opposition to the, in her opinion, overly unified and Eurocentric image proposed by the Warwick Collective, as a plural and distanced reality, a „planetary phenomenon across the millennia”, taking place wherever a “transformational rupture and rapid change” at the scale of geohistory took place (Stanford Friedman 2015: IX). The most recent transformational rupture which took place at a global scale was the 1970s–1990s transitions (Robbe 2023), in the wake of colonialism and after the fall of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. In Romania, unlike other former Socialist countries, the dominant ideological narrative in postcommunism was that of an interrupted modernity, a breach in the national continuum that was operated by the intervention of a “foreign” communism after the Second World War (Petrescu C., Petrescu D. 2014). Transition was, as a result, invested with the hopes and ideals generally attached to modernity, such as progress, liberty, and a homegrown form of individualist liberalism, returning to old national aspirations to “catch up” with the West.

The French historian François Hartog describes temporalities as bearing “the multiplicity of social times, the many-layered, overlapping, and desynchronized times, each with its own rhythm” (Hartog 2015: 16). There are societies living concomitantly in very distant temporal frames, for instance rural countries neighboring high-tech capitalist societies, and there are narrow groups of people sharing a specific experience of temporality no other group in their vicinity has, for instance the circles of veterans of the same war. Also, temporality reflects a particular experience of time, one that multiple individuals in a specific historical situation have, sometimes without having the comfort of knowing that they belong to the same group. For instance, the feeling of disempowerment in the face of seemingly overwhelming events that escape the control of the individual, a frequent feeling in times of postrevolutionary social turmoil, is indicative of an emerging temporality that dissents from the official representation of the freedoms promised by neoliberal ideology. Transitions illustrate the superposition and concurrence of temporalities by their very existence: they confront nostalgia for privileges lost by some with expectations for liberation or retribution by others; they open up the claustrophobic, univocal (totalitarian or colonial) past to the plurality of political life and of diverse media; finally, they conflate divergent expectations for the future and create new categories of “winners” and “losers” in the process.

Literature is significant with regard to temporality, not only because of the modern writers’ preoccupation with time, but mostly for its concern with interiority and the way in which individuals experience time. Literature provides a window to the general perceptions of temporality at work in a society; literary success is, from this point of view, not just an indication of the mastery attained by an author, but an attestation of the convergence between the authors’ and their readers’

understanding of a common temporality. More to the point, the fact that similar representations of postsocialist transitions emerge concomitantly in a series of Romanian novels indicates the similarity of their authors' perception of temporality and the probability that this perception might in time become canonical for a wider, future readership.

In contrast with the temporalities vehiculated by the most powerful ideologies of the 1990s, a conservative and a future-oriented one, the literature of the time creates a third temporality, cautious and ironic, which I call *subversive temporality*, given its evasiveness and disengagement with political realities. It may seem paradoxical to find such a disengaged position in authors from a heavily challenged social period, but the paradox may be explained in two ways, one being the tradition established under communism for literary subversiveness rather than for open dissidence, and the other the incapacity of writers in postsocialism to capture live what was happening. In what follows, I will explore the distance between the temporalities of transition and the way they are subverted in the novels of transition.

THE MAKING OF A SUBGENRE

The novel of transition appears as one of the more self-evident examples of literary subgenres which emerged in Romania's postsocialist period. It deals with the immediately contemporary social life of Romania, in a period sharply defined by the fall of Nicolae Ceaușescu's communist dictatorship in 1989 and the accession to the European Union in 2007. A series of novelists sought to describe and, as such, 'explain' the social confusion, violence and feeling of liberation of these years, at the very time that "transition" unfolded. However, the subgenre is not to be identified with all of the Romanian novels written in this period, and it is not the only subgenre available for categorization. One can argue that the novel of transition is also written outside the narrow temporal frames here provided, since social memory exerts itself over longer periods of time. I should add that, from a Morettian perspective, the Romanian novel of transition that I propose to study here is restricted to the initial phase of manifestation of a full subgenre. Indeed, its temporal range is a little longer than a decade (1995–2007). However, I set out here to discuss the novel of transition in its most narrow incarnation, as it was practiced during the period predating accession to the European Union, as not just a reflection *on*, but also a reflection *of* the times of trouble and turmoil themselves. With all its supposed social relevance, the novel of transition is not the most prominent novelistic subgenre of postsocialism, not even quantitatively. It is heavily challenged for this position by the "novel of communism", which, some might argue, occupies the central canonical position in this period, thanks to the extensive and prestigious work of authors such as Radu Aldulescu or Mircea Cărtărescu. Other subgenres in the same epoch may be considered the "novel of the revolution" (Ghiță 2013), the "neoliberal novel" of the 2000s (Stan 2020),

and the “post-transition novel” (Cordoş 2012, Mironescu D. 2021), or the wider genre of the “novel of memory” (Mironescu A., Mironescu D. 2020).

The emergence of the novel of transition is not simultaneous with the beginning of the transition period, not surprisingly, because authors needed to absorb the novelty of the postcommunist social reality in order to proceed to reflect on it. This is why the first notable transition novel is probably Petre Barbu’s 1995 *Dumnezeu binecuvântează America* (*God Blesses America*), and the bulk of the subgenre starts to appear just after the year 2000: Petru Cimpoeşu’s *Povestea Marelui Brigand* (*The Tale of the Great Bandit*) and then *Simion Liftnicul* (*Simeon the Liftite*) in 2001, Ovidiu Nimigean’s *Mortido* in 2003, Dan Lungu’s *Raiul găinilor* (*Chicken’s Heaven*) in 2004, Bogdan Suceavă’s *Venea din timpul diez* (*Coming from an Off-Key Time*) in 2004, Barbu again in 2006 with *Blazare* (*Depression*), and Lungu again in 2007 with *Sunt o babă comunistă!* (*I’m an Old Communist Biddy!*). Most of the authors belong to a cohort that made their literary debut in the 1990s, either because they delayed their entrance into the literary scene to avoid to compromise with the communist censors, or because they had just come of age after 1989. In any instance, they all tend to situate themselves on anticommunist positions, though they formulate their stance ironically rather than vengefully. They also tend to discuss the social problems of the 1990s in terms of a troubled national psyche, or a lack in national character, although they distance themselves vividly from the nationalist literary tradition.

There is no explicit demise of the subgenre, which continues to be illustrated to this day in Romania, but it has become historicized and acquired a place in the literary canon, as it came to be replaced in the preference of the public and writers by other subgenres. The one subgenre which competes with the transition genre and can be said to have replaced it is the post-transition novel or the post-postcommunist novel, which means precisely the novel written by authors who regard transition as a thing of the past and the transitional paradigm as insufficient for the explanation of contemporary social phenomena. The first notable canonic novel of post-transition is, in my opinion, Florina Ilis’ *Cruciada copiilor* (*The Children’s Crusade*, 2005), an ample, socially-aware novel with a strong metafictional dimension, built around a conspiratorial plot that discusses the question of those too young to remember communism and who may become victims of a society too preoccupied with ghosts of the past to confront its own, home-bread demons. The post-transition novel is mainly concerned with social inequality and the troubles of incomplete modernization, and given its more comprehensive and abstract take on the 1990s period, it tends to approach memory multidirectionally, on a global, post-national scale (Rothberg 2009). There are numerous novels of transition, and they do not stop from being written after Romania’s 2007 EU accession. In fact, the end of transition, much like the ending of Antiquity, doesn’t confine itself to a specific date, say, January 1st 2007. But novels of transition stop being accepted to the core of the canon after this date.

There is a “canon” of the transition novel and it was created by the literary critics of the 2000s, whose syntheses on literature of the time have begun to appear in the 2010s and by the mechanisms of literary canonization available (literary prizes, magazines, quotations, articles in peer-reviewed journals). In this canon feature the authors that I am commenting on: Petre Barbu (1995, 2006), Petru Cimpoeșu (2000, 2001), O. Nimigean (2003), Dan Lungu (2004, 2007), Bogdan Suceavă (2004).

When discussing genre (or what, in order to avoid confusion with classic distinctions of literary theory, I chose to call subgenre), Moretti emphasizes form as a force of canonical capability, more precisely, the way in which it models itself onto the content of the subgenre and molds the content in unique ways. His preferred example is the invention of the „clue” in detective novels of 1890s Britain, an invention which came from trial and error and which was finally selected by a wide audience for reasons difficult to penetrate (Moretti 2000). There are, of course, multiple differences between a popular genre in a country with a sound book market, such as Britain at the end of the 19th century, and a “literary”, cultish genre practiced by ambitious young authors in a society still reeling from the collapse of totalitarianism. When trying to identify the essential formal element of the transition novel, one has to take into account the most common devices used by authors who were recently liberated from the constrictions of communist-era state censorship, but were still interested in preserving the complexity of literary techniques forged by ingenious and subversive authors in the previous decades. This dual exigency is very visible not only in the novels of transition, but in other novelistic subgenres of the period as well. However, given that the novel of transition is an eminently temporal subgenre – as it is concerned with the transitory nature of the historical episode it transverses – it is more relevant than others for a study of literary temporalities and of the way in which they impact society.

TEMPORALITIES OF TRANSITION

But what are the temporalities at play in the transition period in postcommunist Romania? Probably the most outspoken ideological discourses of the era are those emitted by the people in power, the representatives of the government and of the opposition political parties, or by the actors of various international political projects vehiculated at the time. The most authoritative, verging on oppressive for some, was that of the governments in the Ion Iliescu presidencies (1990–1996, 2000–2004), a moderate post-socialist reformism which advocated for a controlled privatization of the economy, in a wannabe welfare state with very few safety nets for the population, while the state itself kept crumbling under the assault of the kleptocracy and of the black market. A large part of the population, judging by the electoral results of these political formations, shared the desire for a “conservative” transition, moderately sliding into a future that may not

be that different from the present, after all. What opposed it was the neoliberal, aggressively future-oriented doctrine, promoted by parties on the right of the political spectrum, a mere promise of indiscriminating “liberty” in a deregulated economy in the early 1990s, which proved toxic during the 1996–2000 liberal-leaning governments, with their mix of incompetence and corruption sponsored by an indiscriminate admiration for the “wisdom of the market” which resembled indifference and callousness toward the population itself. While this ideology would reach its peak in the 2000s, under the presidency of Traian Băsescu (2004–2012), it fueled a general feeling of dissatisfaction with the present in the larger public, which came to judge the 1990s as a mere prolongation of “communism” and leaned into a more and more determined anticommunism that had lost its object of adversity a long time ago. Both ideologies and the temporalities they encouraged in their electorates were scrutinized, studied and critiqued by the authors I am discussing here, who opt to represent another type of temporality, heavily relying on subversive literary tropes.

These novelists use many sophisticated devices for capturing and subverting the temporalities of transition: techniques of oblique narration such as untrustworthy narrators, fantastic episodes, metaliterary reflections, the sensational and the grotesque. They write about the new social realities (dire poverty, an explosion in homelessness due to unemployment, drug abuse), new social roles (European community activist, intermediaries for funding from Western societies, provincial politicians, bankers and investors, or simply small business owners), new gadgets, voices in the media etc. and the persistence of old forms of conformity to a social order that doesn’t exist anymore. The social connection between the inhabitants of a block of apartments (in Cimpoescu 2001) or of a periphery street (in Lungu 2004) is shattered by old suspicions and new social distances, and a kind of miracle needs to be performed in order for the old bond to be revived, if even fleetingly. A shoemaker, in Cimpoescu’s novel, retreats to the lift of the block and starts proselytizing. The unnamed narrator in Nimigean’s fake policier *Mortido* goes about town killing indiscriminately old Securitate informants and heroes of the anticommunist resistance, intellectuals and taxi drivers, and even infants for injuries that may or may not exist (Nimigean 2003). A family is destroyed in Barbu’s *God Blesses America* after the fall of communism and no one manages to survive their fascination for the remote and fantasized USA (Barbu 1995). In Suceavă’s *Coming from an Off-Key Time*, a Securitate officer comes back to office transformed into a cat by mysterious hostile forces, but still manages to give reports of the turbulence in the religious scenery of 1990s Bucharest (Suceavă 2004). A former commercial complex from the communist times starts sliding West across the continent in Barbu’s *Depression* and is used as a Museum of Tragedy, Despair and Death by wealthy Western patrons, healing Romanian’s crumbling economy as a result (Barbu 2006).

Two critical concepts have truly stuck to this generation: one was “*mizerabilism*” (“filthy-ism”), promoted by adversaries of the young novelists of

the 1990s, and taken up by them with pride, as an allusion to their kinship with naturalism (Iovănel 2021: 403); the other was magical realism, or a tendency to let realism spill into the fantastic with a nonchalance that never really marks a departure from realism. “Filthy-ism” refers to these novels’ relative lack of prudery, their plastic description of sexuality, sometimes their verbal truculence, which may be taken both as a sign of liberation from the absurd limitations imposed by censorship before 1990 and as a tendency to adhere sympathetically to the poverty and destitution of the new era, to its apparent lack of hope, to its social despondency. The authors try to profit from the absence of political censorship and at the same time invest their heavy legacy of intellectual sophistication and literary craftsmanship; the result is often a sophisticated novel that deals in verbal violence to describe violent realities.

Magical realism, which critic Dan C. Mihăilescu called “Bulgakovianism” (Mihăilescu 2006: 310), designates the literary mode at work in subverting temporalities in the novel of transition. The satirical approach to the fantastic allows the authors more space for literary play, but it also helps them connect the diverging planes of social critique and metaphysical problematization, to evade the insufficiently attractive terrain of social and political commentary and reach the “high” altitude of allegory. Novelists of transition evade social description by discussing “mentalities” indebted to the decades-long persistence of an absurd political regime. As one commentator put it, they are “rather nostalgic of meta-narrations, not skeptical toward them” (Terian 2007). Magical realism covers a very important requirement: it helps authors contemplate the “chaotic” transition period from the heights of allegory, and thereby give it an explanation. Satire is the main mode employed here, as it can accommodate the literary sophistication required in a frame that, dealing with immediate social realities familiar to the reader, tends to veer into the fantastic, the allegorical, and the parable to reach for their unitary “meaning”. This is usually a reference to their lack of ontological substance and existential authenticity, caused by the fact that they come from an illegitimate recent past, one that represents a historical fraud.

Allegory is the key-form of the novel of transition, the definitory literary device used by all these authors. It indicates the high aspirations of the novelists seeking to encapsulate the world of transition in a single literary work, and at the same time their desire to be validated by qualified literary critics rather than by the larger public. It indicates their refusal of social realism: the over-the-top scenes and grotesque episodes featured add to the impression of chaos and confusion in society. This feeds into the idea of „(semi-)peripheric irrealism” used by Contea and Pietraru (2024: 227) to argue that Romanian postcommunist novels respect the rule of uneven development in the integrated world literature. But the novels of transition chose irrealism also because they refuse to chime in to the ideologies of the time and because the only alternative they imagine is that of subversiveness. Faced with a reality that veers into the grotesque, novelists employ particular and sectorial temporalities, oftentimes with religious

significance, a fact which explains the “magical” component of these novels’ “realism”. Religious life, service and practice are some of the most often cited temporalities alternative to the modern world, but it is obvious that it is not in virtue of their exposing some form of “fullness of time” (Champion 2018: 1) do they feature in the satiric novels of the 1990s. In Cimpoeșu’s 2001 novel, Simeon the shoemaker has an epiphany and imitates his ancient namesake by ascending at the last floor of the block and sermonizing from the elevator. His absurd action sheds light onto the ridiculous actions of his neighbors, who go about their petty affairs, schemes and ambitions. By abruptly interrupting his neighbors’ rhythm of everyday life, Simeon distorts the temporality they live in, in order to expose its lack of substance. The same can be said of Barbu’s 2006 novel *Depression*, where a commercial complex from the communist times, transformed into a derelict ruin filled with filth, becomes a museum of communism. While the devastated building is symbolic as a place at the margins that gathers society’s residues, the fact that it becomes a museum is also significant, since museums possess a temporality of their own. But here, as well as in Cimpoeșu’s novel *Simeon the Liftite*, the function of alternative temporalities is merely to subvert the dominant temporality of the everyday in the transition period. In Suceavă’s 2004 novel *Coming from an Off-Key Time*, entire episodes are dedicated to the confrontation between apocalyptic gangs that claim direct inspiration from a divine or national figure, but their spiritual commitment is nothing more than a “fad” in the plurivocal circus of transition.

To sum up, novels of transition produce mixed, “undecided”, blurred temporalities by employing allegory and magical realism next to unmistakable references to the Romanian social reality of the 1990s. On the one hand, these novels declare their adherence to the period they write about by abundantly (and usually ironically) citing major political events, cultural disputes, brands and media personalities. Many of the neighbors in Cimpoeșu participate in the pyramid game Caritas (1992–1994) and are fascinated by the rumors around the new firebrand intellectual Horia-Roman Patapievici, whose fame was indeed massive in the 1990s. The elder couple in Dan Lungu’s *I’m an Old Communist Biddie!* is scolded by their daughter for hesitating to vote for the progressist liberals in the 2000 parliamentary elections, and for siding with the corrupt parties who bankrupted their old workplace. The cold-blooded killer in Nimigean’s *Mortido* listens on the radio to a 1990s tune by musician Gabriel Cotabiță. But these references are usually given in order to further disqualify the seriousness of the social representation in the novel, by drawing attention to their characters’ lack of taste, intellectual acuity, or political awareness. The novels fail to construct a stable chronotope and refuse to provide the readers with a realist “chronicle” of the period, opting instead to evade into a magical and provisional reality, into parody and allegory. This is why the temporality in these novels is suspended, “mystified” and is projected in an irreality, thereby accentuating the feeling of disempowerment of individuals and the arbitrariness of their quotidian lives.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barbu 1995 = Petre Barbu, *Dumnezeu binecuvântează America*, București, Editura Nemira.
- Barbu 2006 = Petre Barbu, *Blazare*, Iași, Editura Polirom.
- Cimpoeșu 2001 = Petru Cimpoeșu, *Simion Liftnicul. Roman cu îngeri și moldoveni*, București, Editura Compania.
- Contea, Pietraru 2024 = Bogdan Contea, Iulia Pietraru, *The Post-Communist Novel of Transition as Realism of Transition. Thematic Precedents in Romanian and East-Central European Literature*, in „Studia Universitatis Babeș-Bolyai. Series Philologia”, 2, p. 207–228.
- Cordoș 2012 = Sanda Cordoș, *Lumi din cuvinte. Reprezentări și identități în literatura română postbelică*, București, Editura Cartea Românească.
- Ghiță 2013 = Roxana Andreea Ghiță, *Poetica și poietica revoluției de la romantismul german la anul 1989 în romanul contemporan din Germania și România*, București, Editura Muzeului Național al Literaturii Române.
- Hartog 2015 = François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity. Presentism and Experiences of Time*, translated by Saskia Brown, New York, Columbia University Press.
- Iovănel 2021 = Mihai Iovănel, *Istoria literaturii române contemporane: 1990–2020*, Iași, Polirom.
- Lungu 2007 = Dan Lungu, *Sunt o babă comunistă!*, Iași, Editura Polirom.
- Mihăilescu 2006 = Dan C. Mihăilescu, *Literatura română în postceausism. II. Proza. Prezentul ca dezumanizare*, Iași, Polirom.
- Mironescu A. 2016 = Andreea Mironescu, *Postcomunismul ca spațiu al amintirii. Considerații conceptuale*, in „Transilvania”, 1, p. 34–39.
- Mironescu A., Mironescu D. 2020 = Andreea Mironescu, Doris Mironescu, *The Novel of Memory as World Genre: Exploring the Romanian Case*, in „Dacoromania litteraria”, VII, p. 97–115.
- Mironescu D. 2021 = Doris Mironescu, *Romanul românesc al post-tranziției. Trei perspective*, în Jana Palenikova (ed.), *Podoby sucasneho rumunskoho romanu*, Bratislava, Univerzita Komenskeho v Bratislave, p. 111–131.
- Moretti 2000 = Franco Moretti, *The Slaughterhouse of Literature*, MLQ, 61(1), p. 207–227.
- Nimigean 2003 = Ovidiu Nimigean, *Mortido*, Iași, Editura Versus.
- Petrescu C., Petrescu D. 2014 = Cristina Petrescu, Dragoș Petrescu, *The Canon of Remembering Romanian Communism: From Autobiographical Recollections to Collective Representations*, in Maria Todorova, Augusta Dimou and Stefan Troebst (eds), *Remembering Communism. Private and Public Recollections of Lived Experience in southeast Europe*, Budapest, CEU Press, p. 43–70.
- Robbe 2023 = Ksenia Robbe, *Remembering Transition in Contemporary South African and Russian Literatures. Between Melancholia and Repair*, in Ksenia Robbe (ed.), *Remembering Transitions: Local Revisions and Global Crossings in Culture and Media*, Berlin, De Gruyter, p. 285–311.
- Rothberg 2009 = Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory. Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, Stanford, Stanford University Press.
- Stan 2020 = Adriana Stan, *Genres of Realism across the former Cold War Divide. Neoliberal Novel and Self-Fiction*, in „Dacoromania litteraria”, 7, p. 116–125.
- Stanford Friedman 2015 = Susan Stanford Friedman, *Planetary Modernisms. Provocations on Modernity Across Time*, New York, Columbia University Press.
- Suceavă 2004 = Bogdan Suceavă, *Venea din timpul diez*, Iași, Editura Polirom.
- Terian 2007 = Andrei Terian, *Sticla cu otravă*, in „Ziarul de Duminică”, 13 iulie, <https://www.zf.ro/ziarul-de-duminica/sticla-cu-otrava-3077599>, consultat la 15 septembrie 2024.

**THE NOVEL OF TRANSITION: SUBVERSIVE TEMPORALITIES
IN EARLY POSTCOMMUNIST ROMANIAN LITERATURE**

ABSTRACT

In this article I analyze the novel of transition as a subgenre of contemporary Romanian literature, arguing for its relevance in a discussion of how postcommunist literary works reflect the social reality of their time. Drawing on the notion of subgenre as it was defined by Franco Moretti, I focus on novels written and published in the narrow period between the 1990s to the mid-2000s by authors who experienced the transition and sought to render it in their literary works. My focus lays particularly on temporalities in transition and on how they are captured and subverted in literature. In contrast to the temporalities vehiculated by the most powerful ideologies of the 1990s, one conservative and the other future-oriented, the literature of the time creates a third temporality, a cautious and ironic one, which I call *subversive temporality*, given its evasiveness and disengagement with political realities. I conclude by proving that this literary behavior is both an aftereffect of the subversive strategies of the literature written in late communism, and a reflection of the feeling of disempowerment in the face of rapid, overwhelming social change.

Keywords: *novel of transition, post communism, subversion, temporalities, magical realism, Romanian literature, contemporary literature.*