

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

Ioana Cosma, PhD

DAN PIȚA (1938 -)

LIFE

Dan Pița was born in Dorohoi, Romania, on October, 11th, 1938. His father was a military man, decorated for his achievements on the Russian front, and his mother a housewife. His father was also passionate about cinema and Dan Pița inherited this passion.

Since he was a child, Dan was interested in medicine and aviation. He attended the Sanitary Institute where he studied medicine in Bucharest and later was admitted to the Ion Luca Caragiale Institute of Drama and Cinema, in the Directing Department. During his days at the Institute, he made a few shorts. He graduated in 1969 and in 1970 made his debut with *Water as a Black Bull*, a documentary about the floods that year. He was married twice, to actresses Carmen Galin and Irina Movilă, but neither marriage worked out.

During the Communist era, he directed mostly historical and parabolic movies. His movie *Sand Cliffs* was banned for alluding to the Communist regime. After the revolution in 1989 Pița started his own production company, Solaris, directing movies the about communist and the post-revolutionary eras.

He is considered one of the best Romanian film directors and has received numerous awards during his career.

Awards

In 1986, he received Honorable Mention for *Paso Doble* at the Berlin International Film Festival. The next year, he was invited there as a member of the jury. In 1992, he received The Silver Lion for his film *Luxury Hotel* at The Venice Film Festival. On December 1, 2000, he received the Commandor title, a national award for merit.



FILMOGRAPHY

Paradis (Paradise) (1967) - short
O după-amiază obișnuită (A Common Afternoon) (1968) - short

La vie en rose (La vie en rose) (1969) - short

Apa ca un bivol negru (Water as a Black Bull) (documentary, 1971) – codirector

Nunta de piatră 2 (Stone Wedding 2 – At a Wedding) (1972) - short

August în flăcări (August in Flames) (1973) - TV [director? yes]

Duhul aurului (The Spirit of Gold) (1974) – with Mircea Veroiu

Filip cel bun (Filip the Good) (1975)

Tănase Scatiu (Tănase Scatiu) (1976)

Profetul, aurul și ardelenii (The Prophet, the Gold and the Transylvanians) (1978) – TV

Dincolo de toate (Beyond Everything) (1978) - with Nicolae Mărgineanu - docudrama

Bietul Ioanide (Poor Ioanide) (1980) - feature

Pruncul, petrolul și ardelenii (The baby, the oil and the transylvanians) (1981) - TV

Concurs (Contest) (1982)

Faleze de nisip (Sand Cliffs) (1983)

Dreptate în lanțuri (Justice in Chains) (1984)

Pas în doi (Paso Doble) (1985)

Autor anonim, model necunoscut (Anonymous Author, Unknown Model) (1989) - short

Noiembrie, ultimul bal (November, Last Ball) (1989)

Rochia albă de dantelă (The White Lace Dress) (1989)

Hotel de lux (Luxury Hotel) (1992)

Pepe și Fifi (Pepe & Fifi) (1994)

Eu sunt Adam! (I am Adam!) (1996)

Omul zile (The Man of the Day) (1997)

Femeia visurilor (The Dream Woman) (2005)

Second hand (Second hand) (2005)

Ceva bun de la viață (Something Good from Life) (2011)

Kyra Kyralina (Kyra Kyralina) (2013)

THEMES

Class The theme of class is important in almost all of Dan Pița's movies. *Poor Ioanide* depicts the nobility at the start of its demise, right before the onset of Communism, which made them all social outcasts. Prior to the Communists taking control of Romania, princes and princesses, counts and countesses were the governing elite. In *Contest* the director mocks the communist-era working class in Romania. The movie portrays this class in several ways with humour. Dan Pița depicts the pettiness, carelessness, lack of empathy, and disloyalty of party members through his characters. He also emphasizes their opportunism, obsession with rules and unreasonable demands, and general incompetence. In *Paso doble* class is thematized throughout the film. The director is interested in exposing the goals, dreams, and brutal realities of this class. The majority of the characters in the film, including Mihai, Ghiță, and Maria, are from the working class. Dan Pița seeks to highlight the challenging and substandard living circumstances this class experienced—they all shared a dorm, had limited resources, and infrequently attended college. In *Sand Cliffs*, The director draws attention to some of the social divisions of the time, when, for example, doctors lived in luxury and workers in abject poverty. In *Justice in Chains*, the struggle between the aristocracy (*boyars*) and impoverished peasants (*haiduks*) is examined. The class of leaseholders, who operate as intermediaries between the boyars and the peasants and steal substantial quantities of money and land from them, is in the middle. The aristocracy is shown to be haughty, cunning, and corrupt. The group of *haiduks* composed of Pantelimon, Ion Radu, and Năstase, serves as the representation of the peasants. With *I am Adam*, the director demonstrates how the intellectual class was maligned and subjected to harsh treatment throughout the communist era. He also alludes to the mistreatment of the previous aristocracy and high bourgeoisie who were imprisoned, expelled, or evicted. Through the role of Major Iosif in particular, the film makes a direct attack on the communist upper class. *Filip the Good* presents a synthesis of the different subtypes of the working class in the early 1970's. At the start, they were all people who believed in the ideals of Communism and wanted to play a part in the construction of a better future for the country. However, those in power corrupted and destroyed those ideals. In *Kyra Kyralina*, the high bourgeoisie seem a little bit decadent, and Kira's family may have failed because of it. As a result, the director demonstrates how a class that was once wealthy and powerful has been reduced to ashes as a result of its vice and immorality.

Crime In *Poor Ioanide*, Ion Gavrilcea is a vicious criminal who works to overthrow the monarchy and install Hitler and Nazi rule in Romania. He is a member of the Nazi party there. They begin committing crimes under the Monarchy alongside Max Hangerliu, a prince, and Tudorel, Ioanide's son. In *Contest*, despite the lighthearted tone, the director clearly sought to convey a dismal side of humanity, as evidenced by the occurrence of crime. *Sand Cliffs* examines the relationship between obsession and fact, fiction and reality, through a crime. The doctor appears to be a victim of his inability to differentiate between the two. In the film *Justice in Chains*, the *haiduks* are Romanian brigands in the 19th century who robbed from the wealthy to return to the underprivileged what was rightly theirs. As a result, the crime depicted in the film is somewhat just. In *Paso doble*, there are two crimes. In the first, Mihai deceives two ladies into thinking he is truly interested in them. Ghiță's killing of Mihai by beating is the second crime. *Luxury Hotel* deals with crime and punishment on two different levels. The rebels and their punishment come first. Alex kills the manager, which is the second example. *Pepe and Fifi* is evocative of the gratuitous violence that was prevalent in Romania after the Revolution, when hooligan gangs would beat one another to death. Pepe's death is a sign of things to come for Romania, whose youth are being murdered by hooligans and criminals. The vengeance in *Kyra Kyralina* problematizes the issue of justice and demonstrates how the children's misfortune is a result of their father's unjust behavior.

Power/Leadership In *Contest*, the genuine leader is mocked since his authority is undermined by his wife's infidelity (and everyone knowing it), as well as by his poor organizational and physical skills. The Kid is the group's true leader, but everyone challenges him because they don't know anything about him and perhaps because they are jealous. In *Sand Cliffs*, Dr. Hristea is a power-obsessed man who never admits to being second best because doing so would destroy him. In order to assert his dominance over Vasile, he begins pursuing him like a crazed man. He is obviously a man seeking power. The character of Coroiu has immense power in *Justice in Chains*. However, with all his power, he is never able to apprehend Pantelimon since that man is more cunning and intelligent than any of the police who are chasing him. Coroiu is an example of the ruthless, corrupt, and powerful *boyar* who has no qualms about robbing the peasants and allowing them to suffer in the misery. In *Luxury Hotel*, the manager serves as a visual

representation of the movie's central theme of power. He stands for total authority, and everyone submits to him. In one scene in the elevator, he even assumes the role of God, who considers the world to be overpopulated and full of vermin and views his purging it as an act of compassion. In *I am Adam*, Inspector Dumitrescu/Alex and the other inspector/Darvari are perfect representations of the idea of power. Each represents the ruthless, cold-blooded Security Inspector who questions brutally and is cunning enough to extract the truth from the web of lies and deceit.

Disloyalty/Betrayal In *Contest*, it looks that the participants are being unfaithful to their leader and boss, as well as to one another and to Jenica's employer. The competitors have no real loyalty to one another. Nobody will go looking for or look after one of them if something horrible occurs. In *Justice in Chains*, Coroiu and the police are taken to Pantelimon's hiding place by Ion Radu. Pantelimon is encircled and unable to leave the house. However, Pantelimon is wiser this time and bombs the house as he flees from them. *Paso doble* shows how in communist Romania, a man was essentially forced to marry a woman if he dated her and had sexual relations with her. In spite of his newfound love for Maria, this is the reason Mihai consents to marry Monica. Knowing that Maria would never accept Monica's presence, he lies to her about it. Additionally, he simply does not want to lose. However, this is an impossibility in Romania, thus he gets penalized for attempting to be unique.

Being the offspring of a bourgeois or aristocratic family was viewed as a crime in *I am Adam*. As a result, the three former students of Adam created new identities for themselves in order to be accepted and to have good positions in the communist system. *Kyra Kyralina* contains two instances of implied betrayal. Leonard and his mother are to blame for one of them. It's fascinating how initially these two characters—Leonard's mother and Ibrahim—are portrayed as giving people. The so-called well-intentioned individuals who 'assist' Kyralina and Dragomir solely to further their own agendas are the ones who betray them.

Friendship/Loyalty In *Justice in Chains*, the friendship between Pantelimon, Năstase, and Ion Radu is beautifully honored throughout. Despite the fact that they are completely different from one another, the three are driven by the same ideals—correcting the injustice done to peasants. The friendship between Mihai and Ghiță is a major theme in *Paso Doble's* plot. They are indeed the best of friends and share a lot of interests, including music, work and sports (Mihai practices boxing, while Ghiță practices fencing). They appear to like and detest the same people, too. As we can see in the scenes where they are disc jockeys, they work as a true team. In *The White Lace Dress*, Marta and Doina grow to be an impregnable team that can fend off the attacks and encroachments of the outside world. In the film, there is a sense of female strength that surpasses that of men, as well as a sense of female strength gained through camaraderie and sharing in one another's pain. The bond between Pepe, Fifi, and Carol is also tenderly portrayed in the film. Brother and sister Pepe and Fifi live next door to their friend Carol who uses a wheelchair because he is unable to walk. The importance of caring and friendship is highlighted throughout *Kyra, Kyralina* by the affection between Kyra, Dragomir, and Kyralina. They enjoy their time together as Kyra dresses her daughter and looks after her son. Dragomir and Kyralina are there for their mother and attempt to stop the Rotary when he strikes Kyra. When the kids' mother is gone, they look out for one another.

Love Love is *Paso Doble's* driving force. On the one hand, there is Mihai's affection for Monica and Maria, followed by Maria and Monica's adoration for Mihai. Ghiță's love for Maria comes last. Through Maria's comments, the film demonstrates how men and women experience love differently. In *November, Last Ball*, the central theme is love. Prince Cantacuzin and Daria are deeply in love with one another, but they don't come clean about it until Daria's marriage, at which point it's too late. Prince Cantacuzin is actually sick with love for Daria; he sees her everywhere, he dreams of kissing her or dancing with her, and he has flashbacks of her with her brother. The fundamental theme of *The White Lace Dress* is also love. Love is present in all of its varied manifestations, as shown in the characters' actions and speech. In one way or another, the movie's primary protagonists are all romantically involved. Doina is the only woman Dr. Iuga has ever loved. Valeriu Serban views Doina as the pinnacle of female beauty. Mitică has a simple, innocent affection for Doina. Doina, on the other hand, has various loves for all three of them.

CHARACTERS

SENSITIVE Many of the main characters in Dan Pița's movies are sensitive people, either through their artistic inclinations, or though their genuine respect and sensitivity towards the outer world.

Filip (*Filip the Good*) Filip is a sensitive young man. He does not get involved in the monkey business that is going on around him and this is why he does not manage to get a job until late. He is sensitive to other people's needs, like he is with his sister and grandfather. He remains a man of integrity because his sensitivity towards the good.

Ioanide (Poor Ioanide) Ioanide's sensitivity is displayed by his love for all ancient art and history, his fine taste in dressing and his epicurious way of living. His sensitivity stems from his great knowledge of history and literature, which makes him particularly attentive to the historical changes taking place around him, without, however, becoming involved in them.

The Kid (*Contest*) The Kid is a sensitive young man. He is very attentive to his colleagues' needs and is there for them whenever they need him. He participates in the contest in a truly sensitive way, that is, he is empathic and supportive (unlike most of the other characters).

Mihai (*Paso doble*) Mihai's sensitivity is the kind which comes from a passion and love for beauty. He is particularly sensitive to beauty and this is why he is able to fall in love with two women to the same extent. This sensitivity costs him dearly, however. He loses his life over it.

Maria (*Paso doble*) Maria, Mihai's second lover, is equally sensitive. She shares with Mihai the same dislike for ugliness and roughness. She is a delicate, yet strong woman. As with Mihai, Maria's great sensitivity to beauty is the cause of her tragedy.

Prince Cantacuzin (*November, Last Ball*) Prince Cantacuzin is a sensitive man: he likes art, nature, he is dreamy and falls in love passionately and desperately. He is also sensitive to female beauty and this is why he falls head over heels in love with Daria Mazu.

Daria Mazu (*November, Last Ball*) Daria Mazu is just as sensitive as Prince Cantacuzin. She is also dreamy and unhappy in her marriage because she does not like her husband's rough ways and because she is in love with Prince Lai Cantacuzin. When Prince Cantacuzin offers to be her lover, she refuses, being vexed by this proposition.

Doina (*The White Lace Dress*) Doina is a sensitive woman, not only because of her passion and talent for fashion design, but also because she is caring and empathic towards the people around her. She is particularly empathic towards Mitică and Marta, whom she treats so as not to hurt them more than necessary.

Adam (*I am Adam!*) Adam is a sensitive man because he has remained faithful to his old friends. The plethora and detail of his memories are proof of his great sensitivity and love for other people. He loves them so much that he cannot become upset with them, even when they harm him very seriously.

OPTIMIST / NAIVE

Filip (*Filip the Good*) Filip is the incurable optimist, who sees opportunity even in failure. He never gives up, trying out job after job, until he is finally able to find the one that satisfies him. Even when he is criticized and sees things he does not like, he keeps his optimistic perspective on life.

Mitică (*The White Lace Dress*) Mitică is a bit of an optimist, and a bit of a naive person, too. He believes Dr Iuga's innuendoes and suffers terribly from it. When he learns that Doina is ill, he keeps being positive, bringing her flowers and gifts and even proposing to her. He stays hopeful until the very end.

Fifi (*Pepe and Fifi*) Fifi is a naive young woman, who is easily duped by the experienced mafia men she enters into contact with. Being fooled by the glamour of the life they live, she becomes a prostitute for them. She does not realize she is ruining her life and that those people can bring her no good.

Adam (*I am Adam!*) In spite of his immense suffering, Adam keeps a positive outlook until the end of the movie. Although he is interrogated and tortured by his former students, he does not seem frightened or

desperate about it. At the end, we see him play the cello once more, in front of an audience that treated him very ill.

AWARE Many of Dan Pița's characters are aware of the psychological intricacies and problems of mankind.

Doina (*The White Lace Dress*) Doina is not only aware of the seriousness of her illness, but also of the human nature of those surrounding her. For instance, she does not fall prey to Șerban's advances because she knows he is a vain man (and, of course, because she loves Mitică). She does not become upset with Dr Luga because she knows that he is acting for her own good.

Dr Luga (*The White Lace Dress*) Dr Luga shares with Doina the same awareness towards Doina's illness and human nature. Differently from Doina, however, Dr Luga has an added element of inhuman lucidity which almost scares Doina. He does not let himself be sentimental; he is a doctor who needs to act and behave promptly and scientifically.

Ștefan (*Sand Cliffs*) Ștefan is Dr Hristea's friend and he is aware of Dr Hristea's great flaw of character – perfectionism and the need to impose his will on everyone and everything. Ștefan talks to Dr Hristea about this on several occasions, but Dr Hristea is unresponsive to his friend's bequests.

Mihai (*Paso doble*) In spite of his rashness and impetuosity, Mihai is fairly aware of the situation he lives in—the bad conditions of living in Romania—but he tries to make the best of this. One of the instances when we witness his awareness is when he reacts disapprovingly to Monica's father's sermons.

Carol (*Pepe and Fifi*) Of the three friends, Carol is the most aware. Carol is aware of the problems Fifi is getting into and he tries to warn her as well as her brother about them. He tells them not to work for the American but neither heeds his advice. He is also aware of the bad political situation in post-revolutionary Romania and goes out in the street to criticize it.

LOYAL

Năstase (*Justice in Chains*) Năstase, one of the *hajduks*, is loyal to his chief, Pantelimon. He follows Pantelimon's orders and accompanies him in all his adventures, because he believes in Pantelimon's ideals. This eventually turns into his demise, but he remains loyal to Pantelimon until the end.

Mitică (*The White Lace Dress*) Mitică remains loyal to Doina, even as he learns about her serious illness. He pays her frequent visits at the hospital and marries her just before her death. He truly loves Doina and not for once does he betray her trust. He stays on to raise their children.

Dr Luga (*The White Lace Dress*) Dr Luga is equally faithful to Doina. He remains faithful even beyond all hope, knowing that Doina will never love him and that she is about to die. She is the only woman he has ever loved and he has never been with any other woman ever since.

Dragomir (*Kyra Kyralina*) Dragomir is loyal to his family. Even when Kyralina is kidnapped and taken away from him, even after he has travelled for years abroad, he still returns to look for his sister and mother. He remains loyal to them and tries to help them, but unfortunately, there is nothing that can be done anymore.

DISLOYAL

Ion Radu (*Justice in Chains*) Ion Radu, after years of following Pantelimon in all his quests, finally gives in and, for fear of losing his life and for money, betrays Pantelimon and Năstase. His act of disloyalty is portrayed in the movie as an act of Judas and Ion Radu remains framed in this stance in one of the movie's last scenes.

Mihai (*Paso doble*) Although he is full of good ideals and intentions, Mihai somehow manages to be disloyal. He cheats on Monica with Maria, which leads to a tragedy. He loses his life over this act of disloyalty. Mihai's indecision in choosing between the two women is what aggravates the situation.

Alex/Darvari (*I Am Adam!*) Adam's former students and current police inspectors, Alex/Darvari are disloyal to Adam. Although they had spent good moments together in the past and Adam has kept only

good memories about them, they have no problem in torturing Adam now, in order to defend their newly acquired position.

RUTHLESS

Atanasiu (*Filip the Good*) Atanasiu is the type of ruthless, opportunistic man, who will do anything to secure a good position for himself in society. He has no qualms about firing people and mistreating them should they interfere with the state of things such as it was dictated by the communist regime.

Gavrilcea (*Poor Ioanide*) Gavrilcea is a ruthless Nazi and a criminal. He eliminates all unwanted people, even those in his entourage, should they become an obstacle to his climb up the social ladder. He steals, lies and kills for the sake of his own good; he is almost savage in his ways, as Ioanide accurately described him.

Coroiu (*Justice in Chains*) Coroiu is a ruthless man, who is also driven by personal interests in order to track and kill Pantelimon. He is jealous of Pantelimon because the latter had slept with Coroiu's former wife. Thus, Coroiu is ruthless in his way of pursuing Coroiu in order to kill him.

The hotel manager (*Luxury Hotel*) The hotel manager is also a ruthless man. He is a mass killer and persecutor. He only seeks to have absolute control of the hotel and for this he kills all the people who oppose any one of his ideas. He is not even impressed by those that might be his own children.

The American (*Pepe and Fifi*) The American is ruthless. He is a pimp and he uses innocent young people, as he does with Pepe and Fifi, to make black-market money out of a country that has only recently awoken from a social nightmare. He treats Fifi with coldness in spite of her affection and offering.

ADVENTUROUS / PLAYFUL

Simona (*Filip the Good*) Simona, Filip's sister, is an adventurous young woman. She has a steady lover, and several other lovers at the same time. She runs from home all the time, with one or the other of these lovers, only to return back home once the affair has come to naught.

Pica (*Poor Ioanide*) Pica is adventurous. In her mother's words, she resembles her father in his adventurous ways. She gets into a relationship with a dangerous man, which eventually costs her her life. In spite of her father's warnings, she keeps seeing him.

Pantelimon (*Justice in Chains*) Pantelimon is an adventurous man. Guided by his ideals, he fights the oppression of the *boyar* regime, risking his life all the time. Cirled by the militia on several occasions, he manages to escape. He does so even at the end, when there seems to be no hope left for him.

Kyralina (*Kyra Kyralina*) Kyralina is a playful young woman. She likes to dance, to play, to walk in forests and to entrance her suitors. Her playfulness is eventually her downfall, as she gets kidnapped and taken to a brothel by one of these same suitors.

Mihai (*Paso doble*) Mihai is playful. He likes to try out different things, from DJ-ing to fencing. He makes jokes and pokes fun at persons who are too serious. He never seems to take anything too seriously and this is why he gets into trouble with his double affair with women who are each serious about their relationship with him.

Pepe (*Pepe and Fifi*) Pepe is adventurous. He boxes and he like to take risks. For instance, he accepts the American's job, even knowing the American is conducting illicit business. He is caught by the police and has to admit his mistake.

UNHAPPY

Elvira (*Poor Ioanide*) Elvira, Ioanide's wife, is an unhappy woman. She knows Ioanide is cheating on her, but she does not act in any way to stop it. She has resigned herself to a life of loneliness and melancholy. She is even more unhappy when her children are both killed.

Cristina (*Sand Cliffs*) Cristina, Dr Hristea's lover, is an unhappy woman. She is mainly unhappy with the way Dr Hristea treats her and she reproaches him for all sorts of things because of her unhappiness.

She is unhappy because Dr Hristea does not seem to know how to take care of someone other than himself.

Daria Mazu (*November, Last Ball*) Daria Mazu is a very unhappy young woman. Ill-treated by her family, married to a man she does not love, she falls in love with Prince Cantacuzin. Although he shares the same feelings, their impossible love makes Daria an unhappy woman.

Kyra (Kyra Kyralina) Kyra is an unhappy woman because of the dreadful life she has with her husband. He beats her every time he comes back home. He abuses her and her children. Eventually, she becomes crippled by him, losing her sight forever.