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**FICTIONAL WORLDS IN IOAN PETRU CULIANU’S LITERARY
WORK**

Abstract

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In the introduction of his most famous book, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, Ioan Petru Culianu (1950-1991) - historian of religions, philosopher of culture, philologist and publicist - wrote that this work is "a seed of fantasies for an unknown collector ". In a more careful analysis, his entire work can be categorized as: a vast concern of cataloging the "maps" of the human mind, in an attempt to discover and to explain both those related to the human reason and imagination. Thus, for Gregory Spinner, Culianu was, above all, a "historian of imagination".

Unfortunately, the reception of the scientific and of the literary work is just at the beginning. The state of the research is summarized in several papers and studies in collective volumes, which we mention briefly below: 1) Ted Anton, *Eros, magic and the assassination of Professor Culianu*, the 2nd edition, Polirom, Iași, 2005 (a journalistic presentation of the biography of Ioan Petru Culianu, with emphasis on his assassination and signaling possible paths for discovering the author of the odious crime); 2) Elemire Zolla, *Ioan Petru Culianu*, Alberto Tallone Editore, 1994 (the first monography on Culianu); 3) Matei Călinescu, *About Ioan P. Culianu and Mircea Eliade: Memories, Readings, Reflections*, Polirom, Iași, 2002 (the first systematic attempt to present the relationship Eliade - Master - Culianu - apprentice) and *Interrupted Dialogues, The correspondence Mircea Eliade - Ioan Petru Culianu*, the 2nd edition, Polirom, Iasi, 2013, Andrei Oistoreanu respectively, *Religion, politics and myth. Texts about Mircea Eliade and Ioan Petru Culianu*, Polirom, Iași, 2007; 4) Nicu Gavriluță, *Culianu, the games of the mind and the multidimensional worlds*, Polirom, Iași, 2000 (a rather uneven work in the exposures and the conclusions it contains but which has the merit of promoting and applying Culianu's methodology in the Romanian cultural space); 5) Sorin Antohi (ed.), *Ioan Petru Culianu. The Man and the work*, Polirom, Iași, 2003 (includes indispensable studies to understand the life and the work of Ioan Petru Culianu, going from the main directions of the history and of the philosophy of religion - gnosticism, mystic ascension, magic and so on - to the literary and journalistic-essayist work 6) the various studies, preface and post-preface on Culianu's books published and re-edited, signed by the young researcher Eduard Ircinschi, specialized in the history of Gnosticism; 7) Horia-Roman Patapievic, *The Last Culianu*, Humanitas, Bucharest, 2010 (the most profound analysis of Culianu's religious-cultural conception, where he attempts to decipher the last period of his bio-bibliography marked by the attempt to discover a *mathesis universalis* for the spiritual creation of man); 8) several other works such as: Marcello De

Martino, *Mircea Eliade esoterico. Ioan Petru Culianu e i "non detti"*, Settimo Sigillo, Rome, 2008; Olga Gorshunova, „Terra Incognita of Ioan Culianu”, in *Ètnografičeskoe obozrenie*, 2008, n ° 6, p. 94-110 (in russian); Dorin David, *From Eliade to Culianu*, Eikon, Cluj, 2010.

Taking into account the above mentioned, we have to specify a paradoxical fact: although the books of Ioan Petru Culianu - published in the series of Complete Works at the Polirom publishing house - are sold very well (at one point even an occult advertising campaign was spoken in this sense ...), yet their reception still remains quite harsh. This thing is true of Culianu's literary work, although not even the scientific-academic work is an exception.

However, the studies devoted to Ioan Petru Culianu's work have steadily highlighted his triple hypostasis – of historian of religions, writer and publicist. At Culianu there is a close connection between the scientific and the literary work; he admits himself in an interview, all the exegetes of his work have been notified. But is Culianu right, when he says that the literature has been written to illustrate ideas about the academic study of the philosophy of religions? We think it's more a proof of modesty. Not all of his literary work falls into this pattern (the most eloquent example: "Hesperus"), although it is no less true that in all his literary writings we find magical and religious themes and motives.

As to other doctoral thesis about Ioan Petru Culianu¹, in our thesis the accent falls on literature as literature at the writer Culianu. The fundamental question: how did

¹ By strictly limiting our literary work, we mention here two of the last contributions: Raul Popescu, *Ioan Petru Culianu - The Destiny of a Work*, PhD thesis sustained in 2014, under the guidance of Prof. Univ. Dr. Ovidiu Moceanu, Transilvania University of Brasov, Faculty of Letters, Department of Literature and Cultural Studies. A revised version was published under the title: *Ioan Petru Culianu. The hypostases of a heretic*, Eikon, Bucharest, 2017. The second contribution: Adriana Dana Listeş Pop, *Ioan Petru Culianu / publicist and erudite. Intertextuality and discursivity*, PhD thesis sustained in 2015, under the guidance of Prof. Univ. Dr. Stefan Borbely, "Babes-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Letters. There were two books in which some sections overlap completely: Adriana Dana Listeş Pop, *Introduction to the work of Ioan Petru Culianu. The Thinking System*, Casa Cărții de știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2015; Adriana Dana Listeş Pop, *Transtextuality and liminality in the prose of Ioan Petru Culianu*, Casa Cărții de Știință, Cluj-Napoca, 2016. Other PhD thesis: Emilia-Mariana Spătaru, *Two models of cultural hermeneutics: Nikolai Berdiaev and Ioan Petru Culianu*, University from Bucharest, The

the author created his fictional worlds? It is the theme that it is at the heart of his creation as a *writer*, and only then as a scholar, philosopher of culture, historian of religions, and so on.

Trying to find the intrinsic relation between humanity, fiction and literature, our research is on a hermeneutical line that promotes *reality* (sic!) and the value of the fictional universes. It is a line on which some essential papers and studies are written, of which we must necessarily remember the one of Thomas Paul, *Fictional Worlds*². Over time, the "world of fictional worlds" has gained more and more consistency, being approached by literary researches either in general terms or by referring to an author and the universe imagined by him. As an example, here are some of the most recent contributions: Lubomir Doležel³, Brian McHale⁴, Laura Mesina⁵, Corin Braga⁶ and others.

Our study has as the subject of its research the literary work of Ioan Petru Culianu (1950-1991), especially the way in which he illustrated the fictional universes. Of course, this approach necessarily implies the narratology, in the sense that Tzvetan Todorov⁷ had proposed the term: the study of the storytelling mechanisms, with its two dimensions, a *thematic one* (the analysis of the narrative contents) and another *formal*

Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, the Doctoral School of Literary and Cultural Studies, sustained in 2013 under the guidance of Prof.dr. Antoaneta Olteanu; Balon-Ruff J. Zsolt, *Ioan Petru Culianu, Monographic study*, "Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of History and Philosophy, Doctoral School of Philosophy, sustained in 2013 under the guidance of Prof. univ. Dr. Egyed Péter; Liliana Turica (Sonea), *Ioan Petru Culianu and the problem of the relationship between mind and reality*, Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of History and Philosophy, Doctoral School of Philosophy, sustained in 2013 under the guidance of prof. Dr. Rodica Marta Vartic.

² Toma Pavel, *Fictional worlds*, translated by Maria Mociornița, Minerva, Bucharest, 1992

³ Lubomir Doležel, *Heterocosmica. Fiction and Possible Works*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1998; Idem, *Possible Worlds of Fiction and History. The Postmodern Stage*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2010.

⁴ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist fiction*, translated by Dan H. Popescu, Polirom, Iași, 2009

⁵ Laura Meina, *The medieval Imaginary. Forms and theories*, European Institute, Iași, 2015

⁶ Corin Braga (coord.), *The morphology of the possible worlds. Utopia, anti – utopia, science-fiction fantasy*, Tracus Arte, Bucharest, 2015.

⁷ Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction into the fantastic literature*, translated by Virgil Tănase, Univers, Bucharest, 1973

one (analysis of the way of the narrative representation, of the narrative discourse). Thus, the logic of the actions, the relations between the characters, the processes of narrative construction, the narrative temporality, the perspectives of the narration, and so on, are considered.

In our opinion, the narratological analysis of the fictional worlds appearing at Culianu is much more valid compared to other research approaches based on foreign methods of literary research. (We remind in this respect the doctoral thesis of Simone Galatchi, *Ioan Petru Culianu: Literature as an initiative approach*, where the literary work of IP Culianu is analyzed from a psychoanalytic perspective.) We confess that we were initially tempted to imitate the researches undertaken in the analysis of the fantastic at Mircea Eliade. Specifically, I was aware that the Eliade model contributed not only to the formation of the researcher Culianu but also of the writer Culianu. (Culianu's interest in Eliade's literary work was a confessed one, having a plan of writing a work on "Mircea Eliade the writer." The plan of this project has been preserved.) However, at a closer analysis I gave up this easy assumption, discovering that, just as there was a "break" between Eliade and Culianu at the level of the scientific work, there is also a "level difference" between the two regarding the literary work.

The starting point of our research was the very way in which Culianu himself understood the nature and the role of his literature. This is the theme of the first chapter.

Regarding the description and the analysis of the actual fictional worlds that appear in Ioan Petru Culianu's literature, I start from the "real" world and I go to the world of the possible universes, that means, from an existential matrix (Romania) to the alternative world, after a "classical" SF scenario (from Hesperus). In other words, we will expose the fictional worlds starting from their proximity to what is meant by real, to conclude with an imaginary universe by definition, that of (science) fantastic.

Although he has chosen the way of exile, Romania has never disappeared from Culianu's concerns. The realities of his native country are found in his literary writings, whether they are novels, stories, essays, or articles of a political nature.

In general, Culianu's tone is acidic, attacking, sometimes with virulence, the faults of the Romanian people. He denies the sustained thesis, among others, by Mircea Eliade, that of the "Romanian bad luck", and shows that at the basis of the slow economic development is the Orthodox spiritual ethos.

Although he left the totalitarian system established in Romania by the communist regime, Culianu did not hesitate to carry a true spiritual war with this. His politi-

cal articles centered on the idea that the communist ideology represents a "spiritual genocide", a "sin against the spirit". The Revolution of December 1989 led to Ceausescu's fall but, in Culianu's opinion, represented a fantasy episode - a scenario developed by the KGB's supercomputer and conducted with the help of the Romanian Security. Consequently, he denounced the abuses of the regime that followed, headed by Ion Iliescu, and developed a program of Romania's economic and cultural recovery (some of which are current today).

The virulent and critically, sometimes ironic tone we talked about is reflected at Culianu in the way he reported to some Romanian cultural personalities: Mihai Eminescu, the "national poet" of the Romanians, Horia Stamatu, the representative figure of the Romanian exile in the 20th century, and Mircea Eliade, the world renowned scholar and the "master" of Ioan Petru Culianu.

The portrait he has made to Eminescu is in full opposition to the hagiography generally promoted by the Romanian studies. After Culianu, Eminescu promoted a right-wing ideology with long-term harmful effects in the Romanian culture (if he had lived in the twentieth century he would have been ... Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, sic!). Eminescu's creation possesses a dreamlike character but also a sickness on, reflecting, for example, the voyeurism that the poet would have shown during his lifetime.

Horia Stamatu was also analyzed from the perspective of his political past, and of his sympathy for the Legionary movement (it is, in a more alluvial, even cryptic style). If, in the case of the former, Culianu denounced the "impossible confession", he was not as intransigent to Mircea Eliade, as, all his life, he was probably grateful for all-round support. This fact, however, did not coincide with the absence of the critical spirit of Eliade's work, the "eliadian" hypostasis applied by some to Culianu being only partially valid. In fact, Culianu himself stopped, in a fictional manner, but with many real biographical elements, on his relationship with the master Eliade, in the novel "The Selena's River".

To synthesize, Culianu often used the scalpel when referring to the Romanian realities, which does not mean, however, that he was indifferent to them. On the contrary, as the son of exile, he understood his salvation mission to Romania, which he criticized in the negative points precisely from the desire to heal it.

The "Romanian Television", the causes and the context of its production, have been fictionalized in the two stories about Jormanania. It is here that Culianu's premonitory spirit has given him the stature of the geomant even after death. In any case, beyond

the fictional framework, it struck the way in which the author was able to foresee, sometimes in detail, the political state of the country during and immediately after the revolution. Any doubt about the identity of Jormanian - Romania disappears: the data about the Gologan-Mortu presidential couple, whose description resembles the data about the spouses Nicolae and Elena Ceausescu (the alcoholic father of the president, their peasant origin, the lack of culture, long speeches that he held, the vanity, the oppression of the people who deeply detested them, and so on.); the neighboring of Jormanian with the almighty and influential Maculist Empire, separated by the Putan River (Romania neighboring with the USSR, separated by the Prut River); toponymies (Putan-Prut River, Cartan-Carpathian Mountains); elements of the revolution (the reversal of Ceausescu's demonstration against him, the sowing of panic by the placement of stolen corpses from the morgue, the polarization of the new government formed between the need for obedience to Moscow and the desire to move towards democratization through contacts with the West); the association of the representatives of the Orthodox Church, respectively, of the "patriarch Anaghia" with the ideology of the Iron Guard (the "Wood Guard") and the Communist ideology underpinning the establishment of the Security repression (Secan); Finally, the many homonyms end in -an, which have been doubled in real life by a Roman, Voican, Bruican, and so on.

The denunciation of the abuses of the (neo) communist regime established in Romania after 1990 was also made through the sketching of some dream universes, referring to his academic and scientific studies about psychanodia (*Himmelsreise*) and *descendos ad infernos*. They reflect to the highest degree the ludic but ironic spirit that Culianu has sometimes shown when writing literature. His obvious intention was to provoke, so the literary creation had a role of a "shock therapy" (one example: Romanians should go to the block to ... zoroastrianism!).

The novel *The emerald game* is, in our opinion, the culmination of Culianu's fictional creation, the crowning of both academic and scientific research. In a narrative way that could be characterized as having "mannerism", Culianu made here a true fresco of the Florentine life at the end of the late Middle Age. Although apparently we were dealing with a "detective novel," his stake is much higher. Neoplatonism, gnosis, magic, witchcraft, celestial ascension - and the list of philosophical-religious themes that have been Culianu's concerns over time and who find their echo in the novel can continue.

Clearly, proving a ludic spirit, Culianu "plays" with the reader and the clues. Again, it is a "serious" game, because the action is flowing towards a predictable end at

the same time an unexpected outcome. Thus, if the character of the "puppeteer" is difficult to perceive - several variants are advanced and abandoned throughout the narrative - the final configuration of the facts seems to follow an immutable plan, from which, step by step, we find the component elements. But this fact has also been repeatedly stated in the novel: that, despite the desire for supreme freedom, no one can escape the destiny of the stars, but at most, by practicing magic based on the bonds of love, he may know it ...

Regarding the ideological substrate of the novel, we note that the Renaissance was a constant concern for Culianu. After that, what happened in the Renaissance was not, as it is generally believed, following the humanist tradition, a cultural and artistic phenomenon, but it was, above all, the crowning of a very special adventure of knowledge. This adventure of knowledge was illustrated by what we might call the "Renaissance sciences," first of all magic, and embodied by the specific human type of the Hermetic Renaissance - the Renaissance magician. In *The emerald game*, the illustrious illustration of the latter is Marsilio Ficino.

In fact, the figure of the magician and the type of vision on the world that this implies, it is also found in the novel *Tozgreac*, and in Culianu's stories, whether youth or maturity ones. Their analysis has been the subject of the following chapter of our work, ranging from those contained in *The Art of Running* to those in *The Diaphanous Parchment*.

The alternation real (biographical elements from Culianu's experience in exile) - imaginary (fiction) is present everywhere in the novel *Tozgreac*, but also in the works of the two volumes mentioned. Certainly, the magical characters appearing in the novel continue the reflections on the function of the magician in Culianu's scientific works. In the novel, we find both the Muslim mystic and the rabbi wonderworker, the magician's representative being a mysterious old man, who emerged after a magical invocation.

Thus, the book cannot be reduced to a simple police scenario. There are also dense pages of philosophical speculation in *Tozgreac*, dealing with issues such as the world, the relation view-viewer, the interdependence public-spectacle, the illusions, the programming and the deprogramming (manipulation), the barrier, etc .

Regarding John Petru Culianu's cycle of stories, he covers topics such as the illusion (Maya), the dream, the escape from the material world, the origin of the evil, the time. In our analysis we have shown that there is an indissoluble link in his literary creation both between the novels and the stories, and between the latter. The connection

is at the level of the approached themes - magic, manipulation of people and of the world, and so on - and of the same characters who transmigrate in different spaces and temporal periods (Toz grec, Mekor Hayyim, and so on). This thing creates a unity of the fictional worlds in the entire work of Ioan Petru Culianu, because in their generating mechanism cannot be ignored the works and the studies with an academic-scientific character.

The penultimate chapter of the thesis stops on the novel *Hesperus*, in which we find the fictional universe, imaginary by excellence - one of the SF type. The main thesis focuses on the world as a product of the human mind, as a phantasmagoria, but we find in this novel some of the "classical" themes of the science fiction genre: utopian worlds, trans human engineering, seemingly unlimited technological progress, and so on. Placed in a distant future, in a period of post-atomic earth, the action takes place within the two antagonistic worlds: on the one hand, Hyperborea, the underground civilization, and on the other, Hesperus, the civilization on the surface. Both are the fruit of an experiment to pursue the total extinction of desires from the human being, as they were considered aggressive and, consequently, antisocial.

It was rightly said that the novel *Hesperus* is a knot that connects the thinking system of Ioan Petru Culianu through a series of links that lead us to the written prose in the country, but also to its future stories, scientific studies and even political articles. For example, the author's definition in the *Art of Transformation*, formulated in a fictional writing at the early 1980s, will be the cornerstone of works such as *The Dualist Gnosis of the West* or *The Tree of Gnosis*, where religions, but also everything related to civilization and culture, is described as having a unique origin (and, in Culianu's view, incontestable): the human mind. As a synthesis, in the novel *Hesperus*, it is speculated the idea that *the world is a dream, a phantasmagoria, a creation of the human mind*.

The last chapter of the paper has focused on a unique process in the Romanian literature: the textualization and the fictionalization of a writer's biography in a very short time since his death. In Culianu's case, the assassination became a myth, which turned the author into a (literary) character. Authors such as Ted Anton, Norman Manea, Claudio Gatti, Caius Dobrescu, Ruxandra Cesereanu, and others. have exposed both Culianu's exceptional and at the same time tragic destiny, as well as his original conception of the world, of the mind-body relationship, the way in which mankind can be manipulated by "magic operations", and so on.

There are common elements among all these fictional worlds, though there are many differences. Ioan Petru Culianu is a complex writer, above the quality of simply "illustrator" of some scientific-academic themes. It is also more than an imitator, a simple copy of Eliade, who, in turn, was also a scholar, and a writer. There are fundamental differences between the two: one is a modern writer (Mircea Eliade), the other a post-modernist one (Ioan Petru Culianu).

We cannot know what kind of scientific and literary work would have produced "the last Culianu," a phrase proposed by Patapievici to describe the change of paradigm happened to Culianu shortly before its tragic ending. Also, we cannot know what place Culianu the writer will occupy in the history of Romanian literature. In the end, everything is a " game of the mind" ...