

IOAN PETRU CULIANU'S LITERARY JOURNALISM AND THE GAME OF CONCEALING AND REVEALING INFORMATION

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This paper analyzes the short stories published by Ioan Petru Culianu in a range of periodicals issued in Romania and abroad such as: Cronica, Luceafarul, Erato / Harvard Book Review, Exquisite Corpse, Achab, Leggere and Agora. The first category of short stories written within the country was published in the communist period, included in the volume The Art of Fugue. The second category of literary journalism consists in the short prose pieces published in the cultural and literary magazines abroad, brought together in the volume La Collezione di Smeraldi published in Italy, reprinted in Romania under the title The Diaphanous Parchment. The Last Stories. The theories of fictionality consider the lack of truthfulness to be the main characteristic of fiction, meant to immerse the reader into a different reality by using specific narrative discursive processes based on the reading complicity understood as a "suspending disbelief" strategy in the way Coleridge coined it. In his early short stories, Ioan Petru Culianu seems to make concessions on plausibility expressing reality as a symbolic representation of the objective reality encoded into symbolic objects functioning as leitmotifs, while in the maturity stories he makes a shift towards more authentic fictional narratives built on historical characters such as John the Cappadocian, Horemheb, Ibn Gubair, and Raymundus Lullus. The paper aims to point out the way Ioan Petru Culianu's literary journalism plays the game of concealing and revealing information depending on the society he lived in, considering that in the first category of his short narratives written in the communist period the author builds imaginary worlds where he seeks refuge from an unbearable reality, whilst the maturity short narratives become revealing, being conceived as warnings or predictions. Going through his literary journalism, the reader can see Ioan Petru Culianu evolving from a vulnerable young creator, retractable and sensitive to a mature writer, self-confident, motivated by the intent to recover and improve the reality of the native country he escaped from.

Keywords: Literary Journalism, Narrative Discursive Processes, Suspension of Disbelief, Concealing and Revealing Game

Ioan Petru Culianu used to write pieces of short narratives while he was studying in high school and at the university, stories that were published in the cultural magazines *Cronica* and *Luceafărul* issued in Iasi and Bucharest. These texts were included in the volume titled *The Art of Fugue / Arta fugii* proposed for publication to the Eminescu Publishing House in 1971, rejected by the censorship committee of the time, finally published in 2002 by Polirom Publishing House. This "broken debut" as it was called by Dan Silviu Boerescu caused a great disappointment to young Culianu, experience which motivated him to seek refuge abroad. After he left the country, Ioan Petru Culianu wrote short prose pieces published in cultural and literary magazines issued abroad, brought together in the volume *La Collezione di Smeraldi* published by Jaca Book, Milan in 1989, reprinted in Romanian language initially under the title *The Diaphanous Parchment / Pergamentul diafan* by Nemira in 1993 and *The Diaphanous Parchment. The Last Stories / Pergamentul diafan. Ultimele povestiri* by Nemira in 1996. The stories' translations were signed by Gliga Mihaela, Mihai Moroiu and Dan Petrescu, the last edition of the volume being issued by Polirom Publishing House in 2002.

In the study titled *The Concepts of the Literary Science*, literary fiction is defined by Henryk Markiewicz as a "figment of imagination", etymology derived from the ancient science of rhetoric, where *fictio* represented the act of resorting to a fictitious argument. According to Markiewicz, fictionality is the main feature of the literary text and the act of creation represents the action of investing the written message with specific meaning followed by the emotional encoding resulting in the "mental product" understood as the manifestation of the author's imagination (Markiewicz, 1988, 135-137). The author of a literary text is the transmitter, his literary product is the message, and the reader is the receiving court, caught in the act of investing the communicated message with multiple meanings, onto which the reader is projecting its own feelings and emotions. Literature has a cognitive role through the information communicated to the reader into whom it activates by means of "pre-scientific or extra-scientific" a kind of intuitive knowledge, within which the objective reality is replicated and reconstructed in linguistic form (Markiewicz, 1988, 141, 143).

The lack of truthfulness seems to be the main characteristic of fiction, meant to immerse the reader into a different reality by using specific narrative discursive processes based on the reading complicity understood as a "willing suspension of disbelief" strategy in the way Samuel Taylor Coleridge coined it in the volume titled *Biographia Literaria*: "It was agreed, that my endeavors should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic, yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" (Coleridge 2009, 239). Samuel Taylor's Coleridge concept emerged at the end of the eighteenth century when the educated nobility started to appreciate the scientific approach in culture. In those times, Coleridge used to have long discussions with Wordsworth analyzing writing techniques based on the "faithful adherence to the truth of nature" as being opposite to the strategy of "giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colors of imagination" (Coleridge 2009, 238).

In his literary journalism, Ioan Petru Culianu exercised both techniques, his early short stories being written using "the modifying colors of imagination" approach, while the late stories created abroad stick to a more "faithful adherence to the truth of nature". Thus, Culianu's literary journalism plays the game of concealing and revealing information depending on the society he lived in. As the communist Romania was subjected to the censorship control, the only means of literary expression a young writer could use was the symbolical codification being forced to make concessions on plausibility, whilst in the democratic societies he lived afterwards he was able to write more authentic and revealing short narratives built on historical characters.

The literary text is a large construction formed by constituents categorized by Markiewicz as narrative, general and fictional sentences held together by the tropes that give the message the literarity attribute. Markiewicz considers the lack of veracity an intrinsic characteristic of fiction, obvious in the presence of fictitious characters and events, the fictitious composition being explained as having no relationship whatsoever with historical or objective reality. Fiction introduces the reader into an artificial environment where the natural laws are annulled, where "everything is possible" by creating complicity with the reader in reading, performed by literary conventions, the ultimate purpose being the catharsis, the purification by emotions. In his early fiction, Ioan Petru Culianu represents the objective

reality coding it through symbolic objects functioning as leitmotifs, while in the maturity fictions, the author creates realistic fiction built around historical characters (John the Cappadocian, Raymundus Lullus, Bochart de Saron, Rene Descartes, Ibn Gubair, Horemheb, etc.). If in his youth fiction Ioan Petru Culianu builds imaginary worlds where he seeks refuge from an intolerable reality, the maturity prose is deeply rooted into historical reality, functioning as warnings or hints on the present similar cases. Reading his short fictions, the reader notes Culianu's evolution from a young, vulnerable creator to the position of a mature writer, decided to get involved and make changes in the country he escaped from.

The Concealing Short Stories Published in the Communist Romania

Ioan Petru Culianu made his debut with the story titled *And I laughed Foolishly Without My Own Permission* published in *Cronica* in the 4th of March 1967. In the following period, between the 4th of March 1967 and the 20th of November 1969, Culianu published fourteen stories in Romanian cultural magazines, mainly in *Cronica* and *Luceafarul*. The stories were composed by young Culianu starting from high school years and contain literary themes that are to be found in the short narratives written later overseas in Romanian, English, French and Italian languages. Much of the short prose written by Culianu is a fictional extension and a literary codification of the scientific theories treated in his studies. Two of the main theories his prose is based upon are the cognitive approach in the human mind-brain-computer analogy and the multidimensionality theme reached through mind control and peculiar mental abilities. The topics are treated in most of its scientific studies, particularly in the works *Out of This World: Otherworldly Journeys from Gilgamesh to Albert Einstein* and *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance. 1484*. Culianu studied cognitive sciences with great interest, reason why he founded the scientific journal *Incognita: International Journal for Cognitive Studies in the Humanities* issued between 1990 and 1991.

Gabriela Gavril coined the concept of the *nuclei* of Culianu's system of ideas that originated in the short stories published by the scholar in the Romanian periodicals. These stories would be a hermeneutical filter that can be used in the analysis of the subsequent literary creations and scientific studies. Gabriela Gavril thinks that the texts written in Romania contain "the germs of Culianu's entire thinking" obvious in the studies on Gnostic mythology which the author has built its future work (Antohi 2003, 366). Also, Gabriela Gavril senses certain "correspondences" between his youth short narratives and the short prose written abroad in the theme of the conventionalized future, the theme of the "obsession of the unaccomplished reality" as well as the mirror and the memory themes. These "obsessions" will become "the fundamental nuclei of his later scientific work" (Antohi 2003, 366).

A slight similarity between the early and later writings of Ioan Petru Culianu is visible in the thematic identity given by the recurrent thematic elements of time and space relativity and its mind projection, bidimensionality, four-dimensional space, fractal life theme and the binary decision-making process, the glass-case and the reflective mirror motifs functioning as the surface of consciousness symbol in which the reality is reflected reversed, dematerialized, chaotic.

The story titled *The Art of Fugue* contains the theme of the reflective glass showcase working as the image of the inner emptiness where the character is reflected "by contracting

himself into his own inner emptiness”. The window glass is “greenish” and covers a light bulb, a set of old keys and an announcement written in red where the letters are movable, so the eye can see the “letters leaned towards left”. The alienated self, the continuous introspection worsen by the existential trauma exacerbated by a suffocating political regime is expressed by deconstructing and reconstructing the reality within his mind, where the political system is rejected using a combination technique and an encoding strategy similar to a computational process. The introjected reality is a dimension of Baudelairean aesthetics of ugliness, of the macabre psychotic, of the relentless reification.

This seized reality is mocked in the text *Serene Atmosphere*, a transparent bookish protest which accused the assumed false happiness, ingested as a drug, regardless of the frustrations felt by the population: “Passersby were bathed in dreamy lights and anyone walking down the street at the end of this fall was immediately drunken by the serene, enchanting and wonderful atmosphere that wrapped all and everything” (Culianu 2002, 28). The stored frustrations were channeled against young people, who were attacked and accused of being rude troublemakers. In the story *Evening, Against the Wall*, one of the characters describes young people as a “social plague” and states that he slapped a young shaggy within the tram for the impudence of being elbowed by him. In the eyes of the young character, the grown ups are affected by the credulity disease manifested through the “inviting tendency to believe without evidence”.

The narrator-character is immersed in a suffocating reality, created from collages of people “dripping” on the streets and collages made of urban bits that are “empty and cold” (*Instead of the Beginning: Always a Beginning*) currently caught in the industrialization process. The city rhythm is set by the “factory noise” (*Moving Objects*). The matter is liquefied, it drains or comes together as granules, and it is finally decomposed. The elderly maintain the presence of death talking about the latest deaths during the conversation with the young S.C. in the story *Evening, Against the Wall*, inducing him the feeling that “everything is grotesque, disgusting, hallucinating”, in a space decorated with “burdening, heavy and mismatched, dreary furniture”. Gray colors are infused in the nature, buildings and textiles: “gray sky”, “gray buildings”, “gray clothes”, “gray background”, “gray stripes of dirt”, color which absorbs human beings that “get dissolved crisscrossed in a desert color”.

The story *Evening, Against the Wall* is representative because it is built on the binary decision making process and fractal life theme, where the character S.C. practiced the game of recalling possibilities, where the decision maker’s choices are spatially symbolized by a forked road “subjected to time” that the young S.C. “can walk either to the right, or to the left” and it is impossible for the young man to know “what it could have been if he walked the other way”. The bidimensionality motif can be found in the same text, the image of a girl on a magazine is perceived by the viewer as a succession of “simple bidimensional blots” which causes the girl’s photography the “bidimensionality illusion, the lack of depth”.

Death is infiltrated into reality; its presence is heavy in a “retirees’ society exclusively concerned with serious life issues”, where the young man feels trapped, “robbed of his freedom”. The time is fractured, displaced, the young man is overwhelmed by the “helplessness and anger” shown by refusing to feed himself as a consequence of the desire to come one with the nothingness, with the void, clear intentional denial of the existence.

Buildings' walls make the characters feel cloistered, sick of "the imprisonment disease inside the bricks" (*Traces*). Another metaphor of captivity is the glass which appears in the story *Glass Buckle* where the author deals with the "fantastical slaughtering houses of the courts". Character P. is enclosed in glass walls where he was lured by a woman and his every wrong action causes the glass to break in terrible noises and sounds of "sinister grins". "The glass deities" looked like "cynical goblins" and "passive archangels" who isolated him on a "fantastic realm of shadows", a purgatory of "always sharp tortures".

The beings that inhabit this space suspended in the absurd dimension are zoomorphic hybrids, "monstrous animals, yellow striped tigers and yellow lionesses and colored monkeys" engaged in rivalries, crimes, rapes and murders. The text *Imagine the Army in Gulf* reproduces a crime committed by the assassin character who receives instructions from an unknown person. The assassination is well executed, the killer escapes due to the lack of evidence, and the case is classified as theft. The story *Traces* brings into discussion a man's severed head, a hand, a pair of feet cut off, a baby thrown by his mother into the boiling water. In the same story, the character living in the box 68 is a perverse, lewd pensioner, whose hair smells like "unsatisfied desire and food".

The despair is expressed by the metaphor "history crazed by reality" and by turning the space upside-down, so that the lamp on the ceiling becomes the cup on a waiter's tray, who is using a type of occult force, centrifugal force or the glue force (*Traces*) to keep it that way. The text *Light* presents the "hopeless" running, finished in falls and tumbles. The four-dimensional and the reversal sides of the space themes are noticeable in the same story in the reversed sides of the room scene, the ceiling with the floor, after the intervention of the "charlatan" waiter. In the text entitled *The Late Repentance of Ioan Petru Culianu or the Last Adventure of the Writer* published in the afterword of the volume *The Diaphanous parchment. The Latest Stories* (Culianu 1996, 205-219), Dan Silviu Boerescu noticed a tendency for "random connections" prefigured in the early literary journalism, which contains the core theme of the maturity literary journalism.

The story *Imagine the Army in Gulf* shows an immaterial space without consistency where the Borgesian influence is already present: "You will be hindered in the ascent by the presence of an indefinite absence manifested by the weightlessness of the element where you go forward, usually thick, almost viscous. You will suffer from too much weight in the universal absence of weight in the historical decor increasing from a cave of thought, unpopulated and sinister as a rare air vibrating atomic ruin" (Culianu 2002, 45). The motif of the history as a system created by the human mind emerges in the same story, through the metaphor of "the historical decor increasing from a cave of thought".

In the text *Evening, Against the Wall*, published in the 26th of August 1967 the Borgesian spatial immateriality is present in the metaphor "he resumed their movement in some other's time, almost spirit, almost immaterial". Young S.C. feels the constant attraction of the ineffable as a compensatory universe and tries to control the surrounding imperfect reality making a refuge into his mind, refusing to conform to the world driven by a "master dictating small and large movements, feelings and even passions". This paragraph makes the reader think that young Ioan Petru Culianu had an intuition, sensing the dictatorial personality of the former president Nicolae Ceausescu.

The cat theme is treated in the text *The Rabid Cat* recurring in the two short stories about Jormania being centered on the fear and the anguish the character feels when followed by “the gray red striped” cats. The cats are “unleashed”, “rabid” and keep following him at a constant distance of two meters, causing him horror and urging him to continuously run, so the character is “always running” in “uncharted places” with “the gray-red lightning on his trail” in an “already objectified” atmosphere (Culianu 2002, 67-68). The constant and paranoid surveillance felt in this totalitarian regime is expressed in the metaphor of the rabid cat which follows the young man everywhere, maddening him.

The main theme of the literary journalism published by young Culianu in the country is the fugue theme as a metaphor of escaping from an unpleasant reality. In the explanatory text inserted in the volume *The Art of Fugue*, Teresa Culianu-Petrescu argues that the central leitmotif in the early stories is the art of fugue. These “aestheticized fugues” are at the same time a “guiding principle of the existential and artistic avatars” of Ioan Petru Culianu (Culianu 2002, 18). The illusory running as a hint to the impossibility of escape is given in the text *The Cardboard Horse Mane*, a static origami running, an optical illusion working as a metaphor of the limited individual perception: “Running with its cardboard owner, the paper stretch distancing the ends from each other” (Culianu 2002, 69). The paper ends are “glued” or “sunk into glue” over which “fine lint and dust” have fallen. The next story titled *Divine Domestication* features a man and a horse carrying a cart full of papers on the outskirts where they are set on fire. While burning, “the paper is struggling longer than an animal” leaving behind a skeleton, outlining “shapeless shadows” in the human mind.

In the foreword titled *The Art of Fugue from the World? As Lonely As the World!*, Dan C. Mihailescu distinguished in Culianu’s early prose an obsessive tendency to escape both in the vertical direction, “the running into itself” through mystery, dream and “the running in time” trying to escape horizontally, spatially and temporally from his childhood Iasi to Bucharest and then abroad. According to Mihailescu, the reality reflected in the first category of short stories written by Culianu is a track on which a sudden “imaginary take off emerges” to a different dimension outlined in the “chimerical scholarly universe” of the student writer. The fugue is a metaphor of translations in space and time, highly cultivated by Culianu in his future prose, especially in the novel titled *The Emerald Game*.

The Revealing Short Stories Published Abroad

Living abroad, Ioan Petru Culianu published short stories in literary and cultural international journals and magazines such as *Leggere*, *Erato / Harvard Book Review*, *Esquisite Corpse*, *Achab*, *Agora*. The two different categories of literary journalism published by Ioan Petru Culianu in his youth and adulthood are marked by thematic identity through the recurring motifs interpreted as “correspondences” by Gabriela Gavril, being understood as “obsessions” which will become “essential core nuclei for his later scientific work” (Antohei 2003, 366). One of the most prominent obsessions of Ioan Petru Culianu was the green gem, the emerald, functioning as a metaphor of the interface to the evanescence of a coveted space-time dimension, a getaway *in spirito* from the communist totalitarianism. This retractable tendency and the perpetual inward search through introspection and the outward search for the proper refuge is the thread that runs through Culianu’s writings from the debut till the end. The emerald is a portal through which human beings have access to multidimensional and

imaginary worlds, it also symbolizes fresh vegetation, life, femininity. This precious stone has the ability to activate the memory stored in the universe, so the shiny emerald waters symbolize the cosmic *pneuma*, *quinta essentia* connecting the macrocosm and the microcosm, the universe and the human mind.

Ioan Petru Culianu believed that his short prose is “very Borgesian” in that it intends to continue the “debates” initiated by Borges in his literary work. In the Romanian writer’s vision, Borges is a great writer “because he has the courage to use literature aiming to achieve a vital and profound debate” on fundamental issues. These clarifications were made by the author in an interview conducted by Gabriela Adamesteanu in December 1990, included in the volume *The Sin Against the Spirit* under the title *Talking to Ioan Petru Culianu* (Culianu 2005, 65-66). At another level, the prose written by Ioan Petru Culianu works as an explanatory approach to the scientific work, following the model of Mircea Eliade, about whose literary creation Culianu said it served as a confession where the author encoded data by building “fictional networks around a historic core”. According to Culianu, Eliade’s approach takes the form of a “militant hermeneutics” contained in an “activist program” of Enlightenment orientation (Culianu 2009, 215-216). More than that, Ioan Petru Culianu’s literature is an interface to his studies, where he encodes references to his scientific theories. In the maturity fiction, Culianu tackles historical fiction built around historical characters (John the Cappadocian, Raymundus Lullus, Horemheb, Rene Descartes etc.). His late short stories are built on the themes of the universe as a computer, the computation principle, fractal life and the binary decision making, quantum leap and the relativity of time and space, extrasensory perception, the intertextuality phenomenon.

Secret order is created on the concept of mental and social intertextuality, on the microcosm-macrocosm interconnectivity, and on the Renaissance concept of the invisible network consisting of pneumatic connections between people. This order is symbolized by the metaphor of the puzzle that constantly rebuilds itself under new forms, in different social and historical contexts, although the final meaning is the same. In the volume *Culianu, the Mind Games and the Multidimensional Worlds*, the author Nicu Gavriluta called this fiction “an anagogic reading” exercised on the writings of John the Cappadocian. Gavriluta also detected similarity and “common ground” between Culianu’s and the Cappadocian’s world view as a system which consists largely in the world substance seen as a “thoughtful essence”. The reality is perceived as a system of thought and as a “huge reflection” in a game played by the universe according to certain rules (Gavriluta 2000, 101). The universe as a computer theme is obvious in the information system generated by the data input, processing and data output following a set of binary generating rules. In this case, human minds that are connected through the phenomenon of intertextuality are symbolized by the puzzle image. The intertextuality is understood as a cognitive transmission mechanism defined by Gavriluta as a “knowledge transfer” process accomplished through written or unwritten information disclosure (Gavriluta 2000, 119).

The Horemheb’s Late Repentance narrative scenario is built on the universe as a computer theme, and the cynical approach suggests the reader a movement similar to a CD stuck in the computer-universe system that develops and schedules the historic events of the reality. The story is an allegory of the limited options available to people in their lifetime, but it has to do with the meaning of human evolution, conditioned by pre-defined factors. It is

also a reinterpretation of the myth of the eternal return hereby taking the form of the circular time.

The story titled *The Invisible College* uses the theme of the mysterious Library of Alexandria, burned to the ground for so many times, but constantly rebuilt again. The text is structured on the alphabet allegory as the basis of knowledge and on the idea of the letters functioning as text atoms. Their combination can generate textual structures infinitely variable.

The Language of Creation is shaped on the divine language theme that operates on the matter imposing instructions. The story speculates on the cognitive theory of the identity between the language and the human conscious where the human psyche is viewed as an information processor and as a database stored during lifetime. The story's narrative structure is built on the artificial intelligence theme discovered by Raymundus Lullus, the Catalan hermit who lived in the thirteenth century. He found out that the Arabic language is generated by permutations of syllables composed of three letters, anticipating computer operations, the Artificial Intelligence and the idea that the mind "works like a digital machine by making endless combinations derived from a simple set of generative rules" (Culianu 1996, 193). The artificial or digital language consists of serial codes formed by the combinations of numbers 1 and 0 representing the instructions sent from the computer microprocessor that converts all data received in numbers processing them digitally, regardless of its structure - textual data, acoustic data, image or video format. These input data - words, sounds and colors - are converted by the computer into binary information (acc. White 2008, 68). The "music box" purchased by the main character that gave him precognitive abilities, seems to be a prefiguration of the computer and artificial intelligence.

The story *Free Jormania* is based on the same principle of computation according to which the human mind is able to process information and to find the right solution to a problem and "scrolling certain models of the past can sometimes predict the future" (Gavriluta 2000, 71). The two short stories *The Zorabs Intervention in Jormania* and *Free Jormania* proved quite accurate regarding the events of 1989 falling in the category of fiction functioning as warning and forecasting invested by the author with an offensive and combative attribute. Culianu refers to the short narrative *The Zorabs Intervention in Jormania* in his column titled *The King is Dead - Beware of the Survivors* (Culianu 2005, 222-227) where he considers the story as being "the most violent literary attack against the dictator" which was published in March 1989 that, in his view, managed to provide fairly the exact course of events in the Revolution of 1989. Culianu himself explained it as a certain result of a series of logical deductions and a confession of this kind is inserted in the column *Fantapolitics*, where the scholar records his conversation with an Italian businessman on this topic. In the introductory paragraph of the column *Romania's Future in Eleven Points*, the author states that although he lacked complete information, he himself was astonished by the exactness he proved when he "provided almost exactly" the conduct of the 1989 Revolution: "I found out in surprise that, unlike various people more informed than me, I predicted almost exactly the recent events" (Culianu 2005, 72). Culianu also provides details about these stories in the interview given in December 1990 to Gabriela Adamesteanu, where he specifies that, although they are fantastic stories, they are certainly built on real information and

assured the journalist that she “will recognize everything and even everyone, there” (Culianu 2005, 43).

Speaking about Culianu’s intuitional abilities, sometimes considered as some kind of prophetic skills, Oisteanu deemed it as a sixth sense and as a proof of “political great vision” (Oisteanu 2007, 141). For Nicu Gavriluta, the logical inferences of Ioan Petru Culianu are mind “performances” thus making him able to have “predicted the fall of Ceausescu regime” and the ministerial positions of Dan Petrescu and Andrei Plesu, all derived from the principle of computation (Gavriluta 2000, 71).

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