

IOAN PETRU CULIANU AND *SCOPTOPHILIA*

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Ioan Petru Culianu had a complex personality. He was a scholar, invited to give lectures in various universities in USA and Europe and he was the appreciated author of erudite books and publications in various languages. He read, he studied, he lectured, he published but that was not all. He did not isolate himself from the world, rather he was well aware of what happened around him and throughout the world. He could not forget how much politics affected his life, and therefore he tried to use his analytical power and his investigative talents to decipher the meaning and the consequences of contemporary events. Born in Romania, where the Russians imposed a communist dictatorship, he always struggled for freedom. Freedom to think, freedom to study, freedom to write, freedom to travel. Yet very soon he found out that he could not enjoy any of these freedoms. So, he defected in order to be free and to study. The Romanian government condemned him for refusing to come back to Romania, and this hurt him very deeply. He could never forget that his native country rejected and banished him and for what? For trying to become a real scholar, a writer and a teacher? And yet, in spite of all adversities he became all these: a scholar, a writer and a professor.

How can one find the truth? How can one separate the good from the evil? These were the important questions for which Culianu wanted to find answers. The strange coexistence of good and evil in the world and the difficulty to identify which is which, has drawn him to study dualist concepts, dualist philosophy and dualist religion, becoming a recognized specialist in the latter.

The history of religion, anthropology, philosophy and history in general, as well as literature, helped him learn more about man and humanity of the past. The present, seemed to him different, dominated mostly by politics. He used his inquisitive mind to understand it and whenever he reached important conclusions or uncovered some hidden aspects he told others about them. It is interesting to notice that in his first article, published in *Lumea Liberă Românească* on December, 9, 1989 he wrote: «... *the days of Ceaușescu are numbered; his family will not remain in power much longer, the steam roller of history will crush them all... and this should happen sooner and faster*». About two weeks later, Ceaușescu and his wife were executed. As many other Romanians, Culianu was very enthusiastic about the December Revolution of 1989 in Romania. In his next article in *Lumea Liberă* of January 6, 1990, which was entitled “The future of Romania in 11 points”, Culianu presented what he considered the most important and necessary changes in order for Romania to become a democratic state:

1. *In Politics* – the self dissolution of the Communist party, followed by a Parliamentary system with many political parties.

2. *In Economy* – to support and stimulate private property, to develop modern agriculture and the usage of internal energy sources, Romania should offer guarantees to banks and large multinational enterprises in order to develop the industry, using the romanian working force. Transformation from a state controlled economy to a free market economy.

3. *The Army* – should be based on the recruiting of young people on a short term basis as in other European countries. The old army system, the ideological apparatus of the communist era should be dismantled completely.

4. *In Justice* – a new democratic constitution should be elaborated in Romania and an increase in the number of judges and lawyers for an adequate judicial system.

5. *The press* – should be free and owned by private individuals or groups, but certainly not by the state.

6. *TV and Radio* – should be privatized, the state should not control even the official channel which could only be used in case of emergencies or when there are special announcements to be transmitted to the whole country.

7. *The police* – should be reformed and supervised by the judiciary system.

8. *The secret police* – should be reorganized following the model of similar institutions from other democratic states: working to maintain democracy and discover the plots against democracy and the security of the country, but certainly not to be used to spy or harass the people.

9. *The minority problem* – should be solved as in other democratic states by giving the same rights to all ethnic groups as the ethnic romanians enjoy, i.e. the rights to travel, emigrate, study in their ethnic language, own property, etc. Dual citizenship should be accepted.

10. *Education, scientific research, culture* – private schools should be accepted and encouraged. The universities should accept anyone fulfilling the entrance examinations, without discrimination of social rank or party affiliation. Research institutes should be maintained and supported in all fields. In the field of culture also complete privatization should be encouraged: publishing companies should be free to organize private enterprises for the publication of books, journals and reviews, without governmental interference or restriction.

11. *Religion* – all religious worship should be free for private choice as long as the constitution and the laws remain respected. The Romanian Orthodox Church, which was so compromised by its support of dictatorial regimes in the past, should not be privileged by the state. In addition to these ideas, Culiănu also recommended the organization of a special office in Romania to facilitate the repatriation of the Romanians living abroad, who wanted to go back.

But soon it became obvious that the Romanian Revolution did not produce the expected changes in Romania. The very next day following the anti-governmental demonstration of January 28, 1990, the miners were brought to Bucharest to support a pro-governmental demonstration, however the miners started to beat the supporters of opposition parties. These miners were directed by persons with walky-talkies, where to go and whom to ruffle up, and thus they became the most efficient force to destroy and intimidate the opposition. The violent actions of the miners were called “mineriades” by the people. The second time, the miners were brought to Bucharest on February 18; the government claimed that it had knowledge of a “coup d'état”, yet everyone knew there was no such plot. And again the miners beat and intimidated members of the opposition parties and their supporters. Nevertheless, those who wanted democracy in Romania continued to hold meetings and to demonstrate against the government. Romania was at that time in full preparation for parliamentary and presidential elections.

The population of Timișoara issued an important declaration, intended to define the goals of the December Revolution as a popular uprising, not only against Ceaușescu, but also against communism. Among other things it required that the former high ranking communists be banned from candidacy in the upcoming elections. The students and the intellectuals of Romania strongly supported the Timișoara declaration. The students even

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blocked the University Square in Bucharest, declaring it a “neo-communism free zone”, where they held meetings every day and also showed clips of footage from TV archives of Iliescu and Ceaușescu together. On April 24, 1990, the police attacked and beat the students in the University Square under the pretext that they had stopped traffic. Yet more and more people gathered in the square, angry at police brutality, which was politically motivated. From April 25 on, for 30 days the University Square held uninterrupted anti-communist meetings.

The “mineriades” and the other non democratic governmental actions clearly showed the world that the new Romanian government was not supporting democracy. On the contrary, it has used any means to crush its opposition, without any scruples or consideration. Culianu, who believed in the Revolution and initially supported it enthusiastically, became very angry when he understood the whole ploy of “the Revolution” and considered it as a “coup d'état”, organized and conducted by the Securitate under KGB orders, to topple Ceaușescu and install other communists to power. The idea was that the KGB was afraid that the “esprit révolutionnaire” would inflame various unhappy nationalities within the Soviet Union, dismantling it too fast and leading to civil war. Also by stopping the Romanian anti-communist efforts, the Russians may have hoped to delay the reunification of the Romanian provinces occupied in 1940 by the soviets after the conclusion of the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact. It appears that their strategy succeeded. Although since then, the USSR has been dismantled, the Moldavian Republic as well as Bucovina and Hertza regions still remain separated from Romania.

Culianu, who understood the subtle chess play of the KGB, saw that the Romanian Securitate was nothing more than an instrument used by the KGB to accomplish its devilish goals. This secret police has gathered many talented and educated people under its command, equipped them with most sophisticated instruments and methods of spying, controlling, intimidating and terrorizing the citizens of Romania, destroying lives, corrupting the minds and souls of the young, and the culture and the humanist traditions of Romania.

It was this organization that Culianu rose to denounce with all his power and intelligence. He called the Securitate stupid, because this powerful secret police organization either helped Ceaușescu to ruin Romania for 25 years, or it obeyed the KGB orders to support world communism, but it never struggled to support the real interests of the Romanian people. And because he succeeded to understand, not only the goals of the Securitate but also how it works and who controls it, he was eliminated. Why him? many have asked. First of all, because he was very successful and could not be corrupted, thus representing a role model for the young people. He was the example that intelligence, courage and hard work are much more powerful than terror, brutal force and corruption. He has shown that to have a future, Romania had to overpass fear. By destroying fear, people destroy their chains, opening the door to their creativity which cannot exist without freedom. Freedom was one of the things he valued most. It is always among the goals of his novel heroes; freedom and intelligence in search of knowledge and the defense of the civilization in a dualistic world, in which the forces of good struggle with the forces of evil.

His capacity to observe and his great intellectual curiosity were among Culianu's greatest talents. One cannot help but be amazed discovering the great number of papers, publications, books and conferences on various themes, in various languages written or presented by Culianu. He was interested in the history of religions, the interpretation of myths or witchcraft, understanding physics and metaphysics. But also he was interested in literature, politics, ideology, and of course in the fate of his native country, where he still had a mother, a sister and many relatives and friends.

In view of the above interplay of interests, it was only natural for him to select the title “Scoptophilia” for a column published in *Lumea Liberă Românească* (henceforth, *LLR*), which contained a series of articles on the most diverse subjects.

“Scoptophilia”, he explains, is a greek word that was invented by Sigmund Freud to define voyeurism. However, correctly translated, it means the pleasure to see or observe, and this is the sense given by Culianu. This “pleasure to see” is a rather obsessing wish of Culianu to find the truth, to go beyond the appearances with the observation and analysis, to compare, to make references, to detect similarities, to discover intentions, to draw conclusions, and to learn. And something else: those 26 articles, included in *Scoptophilia*, are a testimony of Culianu's love and constant interest for his native country, his pain and anger because his fatherland rejected him. He suffered and was angry that the people of Romania were time and again, continuously betrayed. His criticism reached a high level of sarcasm, sadness, and pessimism when he saw the same malevolent forces of the Securitate once again stopping the progress in Romania and contributing to the consolidation of the communists in power. His love and hate is the attitude of a passionate lover, betrayed by his beloved.

His articles are powerful pamphlets, almost each of them is an allegory, a parable, a story containing a message, a call to action. No wonder then, why the communists and the Securitate were worried, and yet they did not attack him in the open, for he was a successful professor and the celebrated disciple of Eliade, one of the most respected Romanian personalities. They sent him menacing anonymous letters trying to scare him. At the beginning, he did not pay attention to these letters, rather he continued to voice his criticisms against any totalitarian ideology, from the right as well as from the left. He had already condemned not only the communists, but also the Iron Guard violence and its fanaticism. This inspired the Securitate to send him threatening messages in Romanian, using Iron Guard phraseology written with an old orthography to create the impression that these messages were coming from legionaire organizations. Nevertheless, Culianu continued to write his weekly *Scoptophilia* articles. But he started to become worried, yet he did not go to the police or discuss about these letters.

On December 2, 1990 he gave an extended interview to Gabriela Adameşteanu for the magazine 22. His criticism of the Securitate and the neo-communist government of Romania was open, sharp and almost sarcastic.

Nevertheless, at the end of December he wrote his last *Scoptophilia* article: “Adio” (*LLR* No.116, Dec.22/90). His decision not to continue the *Scoptophilia* was determined not only by the threats he continued to receive, but also because in Romania the situation was totally different from what he had hoped. Nobody knew what to do, and even some of his friends started to waver and become ambiguous and confused. Yet more and more people contributed with articles and studies, therefore he felt that his temporary absence will not affect *Lumea Liberă*:

The principal subjects presented in *Scoptophilia* were:

1. Criticism of the elections;
2. Necessity for a fundamental political change in Romania;
3. Criticism of “mineriade”;
4. Denunciation of the Securitate, that malevolent force which was destroying Romania;
5. Discussion about Patriotism;
6. Comments about the Iron Guard;
7. Free market economy;
8. Comments about various cultural themes and events;
9. A discussion about the position of women in the Romanian society;

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10. Presentation of various personalities.

Since these articles did not follow a specific plan, they can be presented in any order.

The first article of *Scoptophilia* was published in the *LLR*, No.90 June 23/90 with the title: "Horror films". Here Culianu commented on the Steven Spielberg's film "Gremlins II". In this film, little monsters, the gremlins, who are very similar to the gargoyles of the middle ages, have invaded the palace of the billionaire Clamp, threatening humanity. But at the end of the movie, all the little monsters disappear, being transformed into some greenish mud. This is so, as Culianu said, *«because in America all things end well»*. By comparison, at the opposite pole lies Romania where everything ends bad, since for 53 years developed macabre scenarios of vengeful bandits, rotting corpses in the streets, ending with the occupation of Romanians by Romanians, as Paul Goma so plainly expressed. What should be done, asks Culianu, and he answers: if we take the example of Steven Spielberg, where everything ends well, we see that the little monsters are exterminated by men before they can infest the world.

«But in Romania there are so few real humans and those few are so vulnerable, that they themselves could easily be exterminated. Their only salvation is to find each other and organize together. But more importantly, they must give up their fear that once they escape from the patronage of the state they will die of hunger and remain without any means to support themselves. What happened in Romania was definitely like an horror film, but that need not continue. The new situation will force Romania to tolerate private property and free business initiative, and these in turn will bring freedom and prosperity to the country. Now is the time for these intelligent and hard working people to succeed. They could manufacture anything, because there is a lack of everything in Romania».

Culianu's advice to his countrymen was to take the economic monopoly from the state and the hands of those who want to maintain the odious tyranny, because these are monsters and *«in the world there is no place for monsters»*.

The third "mineriade" of June 13-15, 1990, was the most violent and devastating for Romania and determined Culianu to write a powerful pamphlet, published in two parts: "The Dialogue of the Dead" (part I and II). In the first part, (*LLR*, No. 91/90) he spoke about a special technique invented by the KGB which was used by the Romanian president Ion Iliescu in order to meet the former president, Nicolae Ceaușescu and tell him about the events that occurred after the latter's death. Namely, how Iliescu had won the elections, how he had used the miners to annihilate and scare his opponents by beating them and destroying their headquarters. Also how he, Iliescu, had used everything that Ceaușescu recommended because he believed in Ceaușescu's methods and his re-election was indebted to Ceaușescu's ideological preparation of the populace. Therefore, Iliescu wanted to thank his former mentor and to decorate him with the most distinguished decoration: the Romanian Star, first class. On the accompanying diploma he wrote: *«to Nicu without whom the Revolution and its victory would have been impossible»*. And so, the two leaders become friends once more, in spite of the fact that Ceaușescu had been executed under the Iliescu leadership.

In the second part (*LLR*, No.96 Aug.4/90) of the "Dialogue of the Dead", Culianu was using a reference to Zoroastrianism to transmit a powerful message about good and evil. Good means to be truthful, to think truthfully, and to act truthfully, because the truth is God. Thus the evil is the lie, accepting lies and supporting actions based on lies. In this pamphlet, Culianu tells about a student who is savagely beaten by the miners and who was left dead in a pool of blood in the street. She was saved by a physician who took her to his home and cared and treated her for two weeks helping her to recover and thus

showing that there still are good people in Romania. While she struggled between life and death during these two weeks, the student had a vision: she had a dialogue with God. She asked God what should be done, and to her amazement God replied that the only chance the Romanians had to be saved was to become all Zoroastrians. *Why? Is the Orthodoxy no good anymore?*» asked the amazed student. And God replied: *«The orthodoxy may be good, but the orthodox people are not, they are the idiots of history and even worse, they are the allies of my deadly enemy: the Lie»*. And thus God gave the full explanation: your country is dominated by evil and could be destroyed if it does not become aware of the Lie. The Evil, the Stupidity and the Lie constitute the protochronist trinity defending the active trinity: the Securitate, the Miners and the Government. But all these are not eternal; you, the good Zoroastrians could unite and fight against them. The pamphlet is thus concluded on an optimistic note; the student recovers and is determined to fight for truth knowing that this means fighting for God.

The “mineriades” were also the subject of another pamphlet by Culianu entitled: “The Fourth of July” (*LLR*, No.92, July 7/90). The pamphlet was written for the celebration of American Independence Day. This was also an occasion for Culianu to remember about the anniversary of his own escape from Romania, which occurred on July 4, 1972. But something spoils these celebrations, and Culianu confessed that for some months he had been realizing that there is something rotten in Romania with or without the communism.

It is interesting to note that at the beginning of 1990, Culianu was convinced that he would be able to organize an Institute for the Study of Religion in Romania. However, by April, after the second “mineriade”, he became sceptical and after the election of Iliescu and his neo-communist group, on May 20th, he understood that Romania had a long way to go to reach democracy and his dream of an Institute for religious studies was an impossibility at this time.

Culianu's comments about Germany were openly expressed in his pamphlet “Ein Echter Deutcher” (*LLR*, No.93, July 14/90). Here, he confessed his joy whenever Germany was confronted with difficulties, *«because Germany had created all the misfortune of this century»*: Germany started two world wars. The Germans have helped Lenin to install the Soviet power in Russia. Germany had invented the most hallucinated, nationalist and racist regime, that of Hitler. And because of WWII, the communist power was extended over Eastern Europe. It affected even his own life, because he was forced to leave his country also as a result of Germany's deeds. *«Therefore, for these and many other reasons, let all these “echte Deutcher” pay»*. It is interesting to mention that among the bad things Germany had done, Culianu mentioned the *«invention of Heidegger»*. About this German philosopher, Culianu commented in his interview of December 2, 1990, with Gabriela Adameşteanu, considering him rather a great stylist and writer, but not a central figure in contemporary philosophy. Nevertheless it is difficult to agree with this opinion, knowing how much Heidegger had influenced philosophy in the last 70 years.

The secret police, the infamous Securitate was always the enemy number one of Culianu. In the afore mentioned interview as well as in his application for immigration to the USA, he had mentioned that while he was a student in Romania, he had been asked by the Securitate to work for them. But since he had refused, he could not publish any longer, nor could he be successful in that country, so the only solution for him was to defect. He was convinced that a great deal of the guilt for the ruin and misery of Romania was due to the Securitate, which he considered to be completely under the control of the KGB. He reiterates this conclusion whenever he talks about the Securitate and mentions that *«the Romanian Intelligence service is one of the most stupid of all»*. In two of his *Scoptophilia* articles: “The most stupid intelligence“ (part I and II), he based this insight

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on the fact that the intelligence service has maintained the folly of the Ceaușescu regime for almost 25 years. Furthermore, the complete paranoic control of mail and telephone communications and the extended spying on people has been very costly contributing to ruin the budget without producing anything in return. A single order from the KGB was sufficient to topple the regime, but why so many victims? Why so many young people were killed during the revolution? Who killed them? And then, instead of supporting a real change, that could have brought millions of dollars to help the ruined economy, the new slogan of the Securitate was: “*Nobody shall teach us what to do. We, Romanians, do not need foreign assistance. We are smarter and more civilized than others*”. And Culianu asked:

«What is the price the Romanians have to pay for the pride of having the most imbecile Intelligence service in the world? It costs them not only billions of dollars but indescribable misery, starvation, no heating for their homes and AIDS but also a deep shame before the entire world, the shame to have endured and to go enduring the degrading dictatorship of a political apparatus of mental defectives. [...] Any attempt to direct Romania toward democracy and prosperity is stopped by this infamous secret police».

Again the message is that the changes toward better life in Romania could be produced, but only by eliminating the Securitate. This same conclusion is reiterated by Culianu in the interview for the publication 22.

After the Revolution, a new xenophobic attitude was promoted by the neo-communist leaders and the Securitate. Therefore many Romanians living abroad were not welcomed if they wanted to return to Romania, often being accused that they were not “good Romanians” and good patriots.

In reference to patriotism, (LLR, No.97, Aug.11/90), Culianu explained that his native country caused him only suffering, while everyone should expect love and respect from his own country. He thought that the best way to become patriotic was to study and become a good specialist, to work hard and be creative.

As he already wrote in his article on “11 points”, mentioned earlier, the process of democratization in Romania could not be accomplished without a free market economy. In his *Scoptophilia* pamphlet: “Market Economy” (LLR, No.98, Aug.18/90), Culianu reiterated his support for this type of economy considering it the only economy capable of bringing prosperity to his native country. Another occasion for the contrast between a free market economy and state employment was offered by the remembrance of his trip to Cairo, about which he wrote in his article “40 Centuries” (LLR, No.99, Aug. 25/90). In this city, Culianu found an abundance of goods on the market providing anything from food to computers cheaply. But the Egyptian economy was not quite as prosperous, because 60% of the population was employed by the state, and as in Romania, those employees are not so eager to work. In spite of the fact that Culianu found the Egyptian system too bureaucratic, slow and inefficient, he concluded *«it is better in Cairo than in Bucharest»*.

Culianu was at times interested in some types of divination, amusing himself by attempting to foretell the evolution of events. He talked about reality and phantasy in politics in the article “Fantapolitica” (LLR, No.100, Sept.1/90). This is an Italian word and refers to a fantasist explanation of political events. Culianu considered such political fantasy as political scenarios to be later played on computers as simulations for possible political events, similar to a chess game. As an example of *fantapolitica*, he mentioned that in 1986 he has written a story, which was later published in Italy in March 1989, predicting the fall of Ceaușescu without having access to any relevant information

pertaining to such a possibility. Another fascination Culianu displayed, was with parallel universes, so much explored by the science-fiction genra, but also the actual object of study of some physicists.

«Maybe – said he – the KGB had played with various such scenarios on their super-computers, searching for a new evolution of Eastern Europe, and the result is the actual course events. But for some unknown reasons, only foolish variants of such fantapolitica are becoming a reality. Yet, one can only hope that the future will hold better variants».

As in everyday life, one can try to anticipate the evolution of events or situations, but sometimes one succeeds and at other times the forecast is totally wrong.

Culianu had a great love and consideration for his mentor, Mircea Eliade. His first book, published in Italy in 1978, was about Eliade. Since then, he wrote many articles about his beloved professor. Among his *Scoptophilia* articles there is one about Eliade, namely “Eliade Koan” (*LLR*, Spt.8/90). The *Koan*, as Culianu explains, is a short and memorable formula destined to illuminate the novice, and it is mostly used within the context of Zen Buddhism. Considering Mircea Eliade an extraordinary man, Culianu suggested that Eliade's memorable words and deeds should be assembled as precious *Koans*. Eliade's kindness and love for his native country were legendary. He gave his help and support to everyone, never suspecting people of dishonesty.

Culianu, who knew Eliade's publications very well, was in a position to clarify recent accusations about his mentor's sympathy in his young years for right wing ideology, that was promoted in Romania by the Iron Guard, in the 1930's. Actually he presented his conclusion on the subject in the interview with Gabriela Adameşteanu, published in April 1991, in the magazine 22. The conclusions of Culianu were that Eliade in the earlier 30's, started as a democrat writing against Mussolini and Hitler, but later under the influence of his professor, Nae Ionescu, Eliade slipped to the right. But Eliade was not an anti-semitic, neither his literature, nor his behavior and writings ever contained any trace of racism or fascism. He had remained all his life the same honest man, a great scholar, a beloved teacher and a remarkable writer. He never lost his confidence in people, never hated people, even those who took advantage of him and then turned against him to make a name for themselves.

Other personalities admired by Culianu were also presented in the *Scoptophilia* articles. Among these are: Elie Wiesel, Moshe Idel, Umberto Eco, François Furet, Andrei Codrescu and Grazia Marchianò.

For Elie Wiesel, one of the survivors of Auschwitz, where his father was killed, Culianu had a great deal of respect. In his article about Wiesel (*LLR*, No.102, Sept.15/90), Culianu mentioned that through his writings and actions, Elie Wiesel tried to draw attention to all human sufferings and tragedies, to stop and prevent them. His voice was risen against the forces of evil and oppression in the name of truth, justice and freedom. For the Romanians, Elie Wiesel had particular importance, since this Nobel Laureate was born on Romanian soil, at Sighet.

The position of women in the Romanian society is commented by Culianu in his article “The Slumber of Death” (*LLR*, No.103, Sept.22/90). Here he started from the observation that in Romania *«the women, who are half of the population, are treated as minorities»*. He commented in continuation, that the Romanian women have not waked-up from a deadly slumber, the consequence of the biblic curse and of millenia of Mediterranean civilization. The communist regime treated her even worse: she was not more than an animal, used to carry heavy burdens. She had to take a job, bear children and carry for the chores of the house. And yet she voted to maintain her miserable

situation. Here Culianu refers to the fact that the majority of women voted for Iliescu. Nevertheless, he is convinced that sooner or later the women will wake-up, then one can expect big changes in Romania.

In the article “A Unique Chance” (*LLR*, No.105, Oct6/90) commenting about the poet H.S. (Horea Stamatu) Culianu has used this opportunity to present his views against fascism and Iron Guard. Culianu did not like the poetry of H.S. nor his ideology. Being born in 1950 Culianu had no knowledge about Iron Guard, therefore he asked H.S. to send him books and information about it. But after studying the material, he disliked the Iron Guard even more. He had long debates with H.S. about Iron Guard, the tragic nationalistic movement, which started by promoting high moral standards and ended in violence, rebellion and killing jews and political opponents. From the subsequent exchange of letters between Culianu and H.S. we learn that Culianu rejected the totalitarian ideology professed by the guardists. His judgement reflects the opinion of post-war generation, who has a better perspective to understand the disastrous consequences of the ideology of the pre-war generation.

In “The Hell and the Civilization” (*LLR*, No.106, Oct.13/90), Culianu talks about Moshe Idel, who was also born in Romania, at Târgu Neamț in 1947, and he still speaks Romanian, although he lives in Israel, and is professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, the best interpreter and specialist of the Kabbala. Idel left Romania in 1963, because there was no possibility to study religion in a communist country. Everyone comments how lucky he was to get out from Romania. The question remains, how long will people consider it lucky for others to leave their native land? And something else, who is a Romanian if not a person born in Romania and speaking Romanian? About his own family, Culianu mentioned that they came from Greece in 1830, and included figures like Neculai Culianu, a member of the famous cultural association Junimea, and Petre Bogdan, the rector of Iassy University. But what about Moshe Idel? Culianu concluded that: *«as long as a person such as Moshe Idel will not have the possibility to leave Romania and come back as he pleases, Romania will remain an inferno, to be avoided and denounced forcefully»*.

Umberto Eco was another friend admired by Culianu, who has similar feelings toward his Romanian friend. Umberto Eco had written enthusiastically about Culianu's book *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* and had asked Culianu and Moshe Idel to present the English version of “Foucault's Pendulum” to the American public on November 5, 1989 in New York. In the two parts of the *Scoptophilia* article “Umberto Eco and the Library of Alexandria” (Part I *LLR*, No.107, Oct.20/90, Part II *LLR*, No.108, Oct.27/90), Culianu, who was very fond of secret societies and mysterious events, was trying to explain the key to the mystery of Eco's *Foucault's Pendulum*. This was a good opportunity for Culianu to show not only his talent in hermeneutics, but also his erudition and profound knowledge of middle age society.

Culianu met François Furet at Eliade's (*LLR*, No.110, Nov.10/90). The French historian was also professor at the University of Chicago, and a good friend of both Mircea and Christinel Eliade. François Furet was a historian, who succeeded to provide a new interpretation of the French Revolution. After a debate that extended for many years, his book, *Penser la Révolution Française*, succeeded to defeat the marxist interpretation of the French Revolution. Furet had shown that the French society in the years preceding the revolution was no longer a feudal society, rather it had already evolved, creating a large middle class for many years and thus changed the relationship between the monarchy and other members of the society. The starting of the revolution was due, according to Furet, to the activity of various political clubs, an idea already

formulated by another historian, Auguste Cochin. The various clubs intended to build an ideal society, similar to a utopia.

Among the *Scoptophilia* articles, one can find various themes and interesting notices, some reflecting thoughts, comments on events or lectures by Culianu. One of these articles was a comment about the tribunal of the Inquisition, which had been considered by the public opinion as the most odious tribunal of history (*LLR*, No.109, Nov.3/90). Culianu has mentioned that such opinion has been immortalized in the writings of the American scholar Henry Charles Lea, eventhough after the end of the 1960's, when the Spanish Inquisition has opened its archives to the public, the truth about the tribunal has appeared as a big surprise. There were a lot less executions that was previously believed. The studies of Gustav Henningsen and John Tedesche, have shown that this inquisition was very well organized and documented, leaving for posterity an archive of 40000 cases, of which only 1.8% actually ended with the execution. Therefore, Culianu concluded that in modern times one must avoid comparing the communist judiciary system and communist secret police with the Spanish Inquisition. The inquisition was a better and fairer tribunal.

Culianu was a very active intellectual, he also has participated in editorial activities, being even the editor in chief of the international journal *Incognita*. He talked about it in the *Scoptophilia* article: "The Grandeur and Decadence of Structuralism" (*LLR*, No.111, Nov.17/90). This title was chosen because *Incognita* encouraged a structuralist view, although Culianu said, he rather considered that his publication promoted the idea of cognitive studies by a multidisciplinary approach. Culianu confesses that, in general, he accepted sharing especially the views of Derrida, while disagreeing with some of Levi-Strauss ideas.

Since Culianu had good relationship with many members of academia from Europe as well as from USA, he intended for *Incognita* to be a tribune of new ideas. Unfortunately *Incognita* died with Culianu.

Each new article by Culianu was a surprise not only for its incredible diversity, but also for the interesting analyses, the breath of knowledge and the subtlety of the conclusions. He was fluent in six languages and he read and studied continuously. He also liked to discuss his readings and write articles, comments, interpretations and criticisms. After reading the "La cognizione estetica tra Oriente e Occidente" (Esthetical Knowledge between the Orient and Occident) by Grazia Marchianò, Culianu wrote enthusiastically about this distinguished professor and chair of the Esthetics Department of the University of Siena (*LLR*, No.112, Nov.24/90). His interest in Grazia Marchianò stemmed from her being an indianist and a remarkable specialist in esthetics, but also for the difficulties she had encountered due to her political views. On the one side, she was criticized by the communists, who had great influence in the universities in the past, on the other, the Christian Democrats, the main political party in Italy also did not support her.

Presently, with the loss of communist power and the disfavorable position of the Christian Democrats, Grazia Marchianò succeeded to be promoted and have her contributions appreciated. She was organizing various conferences on esthetics and became the editor of a very interesting publication, *Abstracta*. Culianu found her studies remarkable because of «*the abundance of information and originality of analyses of old and forgotten cultures*».

The success as well as the failure of a nation depends on more than the intelligence, moral strength and determination of its members. Very often, factors such as natural calamities or invasions and dominations by other nations contribute to the ruin of a nation's chances for success. Romania had endured a great deal of adversities during her

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long and tragic history. Many other nations had similar or even greater misfortunes than Romania. And yet, adversities and misfortunes can not be used as an excuse for lack of progress and civilization. This was the important message of the article entitled "Arcadia", published in the *Scoptophilia* series on December 1, 1990.

In this article Culianu exemplifies his conclusion, by presenting the tragic history of the Cajun people of Louisiana. The Cajun people are the descendents of French colonists, who settled in Arcadia, a French colony in 1604 in Canada, known today as Nova Scotia. Later, they had established other settlements, and by 1699, Pierre Le Mayne Sieur d'Iberville founded the French colony in Louisiana. After the many wars, the victorious British forces, who took Canada from the French, began deporting the French settlers of Arcadia. Some of them succeeded to escape and settle in the wetlands of the South of Louisiana. Fine observer, Culianu remarked that the deportation (what today is known as "ethnic cleansing") and racism were not invented by Hitler. Such practices were cultivated by some other nations, including the British empire. After the purchase of Louisiana by the USA from Napoleon, the Cajuns became Americans, yet living in such remote and inaccessible areas they managed to maintain their language and customs practically unaltered for some 100 years. Today, the discovery of oil deposits in their province greatly improved their standard of living, yet they have remained the same industrious people, loving their freedom and continuing their traditions and language, eventhough they all also speak English. In spite of their earlier misfortunes, their big chance was to live in a free and democratic society, a chance not shared by the Romanian people.

Nevertheless, Culianu considers that there is no excuse for the Romanians if they do not struggle and fight with all determination for freedom, dignity and a better life.

Culianu could not bear to see stupidity, dishonesty, total submissiveness and shovoinism, neither in a person nor in a nation. Therefore, he became angry anytime he encountered these attitudes. And sometimes he has harsh words of criticism for his countrymen.

Even big personalities like Eminescu, without whom one could not understand the Romanian culture, was criticised by Culianu. But not all criticism is well founded. In reality, if one wants to understand Eminescu and his political philosophy, one has to analyse him within the context of the 19th century situation and the struggle of Romania to find her own identity. Various other generations of Romanians have extracted from Eminescu only isolated ideas and conceptions, separated from context and interpreted according to the situation and the interests of their own group, in their historical time. Today we see how much Eminescu's views were abused and distorted. While Eminescu was neither shovinistic, nor antidemocratic and neither marxist or socialist, he loved his country and its people and wanted justice and fairness for all.

One can detect the bitterness in Culianu's remarks, when he observes how much Eminescu and even Eliade were used by the communist regim, which has emphasized their less accomplished and less favorable side, to fit a communist, propagandistic goal ("Euphorisme" *LLR*, No.114, Dec.8/90). Talking about Jews, Culianu condemnes vigorously the antisemitism in Romania and recommends to his countrymen to follow a last century politician, P.P.Carp, who advised Romanians to learn from the Jews, if they wanted to be successful.

Having a great admiration for Elie Wiesel, a man who escaped from the concentration camp and became a revered personality, a great writer, teacher and a Nobel Laureate, Culianu uses him as an example of success, in spite of the tremendous adversities.

On the same line of thoughts, in his article “Euphorisme”, he expresses his admiration for the Jews, who knew how to transform the most terrible misfortune in their history – the holocaust – in their great success: the formation of the State of Israel.

One feels his anger also when he talks about Romania in comparison to Israel. In Romania, the great chance opened to Romanians by the December 1989 revolution and elimination of Ceaușescu, was transformed by them in a big misfortune: the election of the Neo-communist regime of Iliescu.

At the end of December, Culianu wrote his last *Scoptophilia* article: “Adio” (LLR No.116, Dec.22/90). In a few words, Culianu summarized the scope of his *Scoptophilia*, which presented «*certain ideas and motives*» along with «*the perpetual evils of Romania; the lack of confidence in the political and non-political forces from the open and from behind the scenes, who lead and guided her at present; the lack of confidence in the political maturity of Romanians. The hope that they will wake-up from this muddy dream in which they float for fifty years*». But more than this, he confessed that through these *Scoptophilia* articles he had also «*fulfilled a civic duty*». What other civic duty had he fulfilled if not to draw the attention of his countrymen to the dangers and the enemies of Romania, and to suggest the way toward progress, prosperity, freedom and democracy, back to the European tradition and culture.