

UMBERTO ECO

VRAŽDA V CHICAGU / MURDER IN CHICAGO

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Ion Culianu, mladý (štyridsaťjedenročný) vynikajúci profesor histórie náboženstva na Divinity School chicagskej univerzity, vstúpil dvadsiateho prvého mája 1991 do kabínky záchoda na svojej katedre. Vo vedľajšej kabínke sa niekto postavil na toaletu, namieril berettou 25 na jeho hlavu a zabil ho.

ENGLISH



Ion Culianu s priateľkou Ericou Schluntz

Ako poznamenal okresný patológ Robert Stein „nie je ľahké zabiť niekoho jediným výstrelom z beretty 25 z takej vzdialenosti“. Bolo teda jasné, že ide o profesionálneho vraha.

Polícia nemala žiadne stopy. Najprv uvažovala o možnostiach, ktoré by mohli prichádzať do úvahy v podobnom prípade: homosexuálne pozadie, nespokojnosť nejakého študenta alebo pokus o vlámanie. Culianu však nebol olúpený, bolo známe, že je šťastne zasnúbený s Hillary Wiesner a navyše bol tento vynikajúci a šarmantný mladý vedec nesmierne populárny medzi študentmi. Ukázalo sa však, že ako rumunský exulant vystupoval otvorene proti Ceausescovmu režimu. Culiana mohol zabiť člen nejakej fanatickej sekty, s ktorou bol v kontakte, alebo bývalý agent smutne preslávenej rumunskej tajnej služby Securitate. V každom prípade, chicagská polícia dosiaľ nemá vinníka.

Minulý rok som v Bukurešti po skončení prednášky na istú tému dostal prvú otázku z publika na celkom inú té-

On May 21, 1991, Ion Culianu, a young (forty-one) and brilliant professor of the history of religion at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, stepped into the stall of the restroom of his department. Someone in the adjoining stall climbed onto the toilet seat, aimed a Beretta 25 at the professor's head, and killed him. As the Cook County medical examiner Robert Stein remarked, "To kill with one shot from a 25 at that distance, that's not easy." Which immediately suggested a professional killer.

The police had no leads. First, they considered the explanations any investigator would think of: disgruntled student, homosexual involvement robbery attempt, *cherchez la femme*. But Culianu had not been robbed; he was known to be happily engaged to Hillary Wiesner, a brilliant and charming young scholar; and he was immensely popular with his students. It emerged, however, that he was a Romanian exile openly opposed to the former Ceausescu regime and to its successors. Culianu could have been killed by a member of some fanatical sect with which he was in contact, or by surviving agents of Romania's notorious secret service, the Securitate. In any event, the Chicago police still have not found the guilty party.

Last year in Bucharest, after I gave a lecture on a quite different subject, one of the first questions asked by the audience was: "Is it true that you were acquainted with Ion Culianu? How do you explain his death?" I replied that I had exchanged a few letters with him, that I admired his work very much and he had demonstrated a flattering interest in mine; and so a cordial friendship had developed, though I had actually laid eyes on him only two or three times, always on public occasions. The last time had been when my novel *Foucault's Pendulum* was being published in New York. At a roundtable discussion of the novel, Culianu was in the audience with Hillary Wiesner and was invited to take part. After that I didn't see Culianu again. When I learned of his death, I took another look at the inscription in the author's copy of his *Out of This World*, which I had received a short time before. The date was April, 4, 1991. And this was all I could say in Bucharest. About his death I knew only what everyone else knew, namely that nothing was known.

I sensed the audience's disappointment. They wanted me to talk about Culianu, to reveal something further to them; and I realized that, especially for the younger gene-

mu: „Je pravda, že ste poznali Iona Culiana? Ako si vysvetľujete jeho smrť?“ Odpovedal som, že som si s ním vymenil niekoľko listov, obdivoval som jeho prácu a on tiež prejavoval úctivý záujem o to, čo robím. Rozvinulo sa medzi nami srdečné priateľstvo i napriek tomu, že som ho videl len asi dva alebo trikrát a to vždy na nejakom verejnom podujatí. Naposledy to bolo pri príležitosti vydania mojej knihy *Foucaultovo kyvadlo* v New Yorku. Počas diskusie za okrúhlym stolom sedel Culianu spolu s Hillary Wiesner v hľadisku a bol prizvaný do diskusie. Odvtedy som ho nevidel. Potom, keď som sa dozvedel o jeho smrti, nahliadol som do tiráže jeho knihy *Out of This World*. Dátum bol zo 4. apríla 1991. To je tak asi všetko, čo som mohol v Bukurešti povedať. O jeho smrti som vedel len to, čo ktokoľvek iný, teda, že zatiaľ nie je objasnená.

Vycítil som, že poslucháči sú sklamaní. Chceli, aby som im čosi odhalil, povedal o ňom viac, pričom som si uvedomil, že hlavne pre mladú generáciu Rumunov sa Culianu stal mýtom alebo politickým symbolom. Zistil som, že okrem jeho akademickej práce sa o ňom vie len veľmi málo. No teraz, po prečítaní knihy Teda Antona *Eros, Magic, and Murder of profesor Culianu* viem o ňom viac. Je to detailná rekonštrukcia zločinu s veľkou publicitou, ale riešenie, ktoré naznačuje autor má celkom isto politické pozadie. Zároveň je to kniha o mýte, pričom sama prispieva k jeho publicite.

Posudzujúc podľa počtu ľudí, ktorých Anton kontaktoval, pracoval na knihe veľmi precízne. Keď sa dozvedel, že som bol v kontakte s Culianom, poprosil ma o fotokópie našich listov a prípadne ďalšie informácie. Ak to isté urobil aj s ostatnými, ktorí poznali Culiana a podľa všetkého to robil, musíme jeho snahu o rekonštrukciu histórie jedného človeka označiť za veľmi svedomitú, priam pedantskú. Aj keď kniha nie je určená odborníkom, Anton zosumarizoval Culianove teoretické postoje a zachoval význam jeho myšlienok. Vyskytlo sa tam niekoľko drobných chýb, napríklad označenie Mikuláša Kuzánskeho za básnika alebo odmietnutie Borgesových *Fikcií* ako „detektívnych príbehov“ a istý zmatok pri porovnaní kolies pamäte od Raymondusa Lullusa s podobnými od Giordana Bruna. Pokiaľ ide o bibliografiu, nakoľko som schopný hodnotiť ju, nazdávam sa, že je dokonalá (uvádzajú sa tam aj Culianove menej dôležité práce).

Veľkú časť knihy tvoria zrekonštruované dialógy medzi Culianom, jeho priateľmi a známymi. Literárna veda považuje za jedno z kritérií, odlišujúcich historickú prácu od fiktívnej, výskyt dialógov. Existujú však knihy s dialógmi, ktoré nie sú úplnými fikciami a tento žáner by som nazval skôr fiktívnym životopisom. Mám na mysli napríklad niektoré práce Roberta Gravesa. Aby mohol autor podať živší obraz postavy, rekonštruuje dialógy, ktoré v skutočnosti neodznali. Takéto niečo môžeme akceptovať v prípade, ak

ration of Romanians, Culianu had become a myth. Or perhaps a political symbol. I realized that, beyond his academic work, very little was known about him. Now, having read Ted Anton's book, I know more, Eros, Magic, and the Murder of Professor Culianu is detailed reconstruction of a much-publicized crime, but the solution that the author suggests certainly has political significance. At the same time this is also a book about a myth, which contributes to the propagation of that myth.

To judge by the number of people he contacted, Anton worked scrupulously. When he learned I had been in touch with Culianu, he asked me for photocopies of the letters we had exchanged and for any other information I might have. If he did the same, and apparently he did, with others who knew Culianu, his efforts to reconstruct the man and his story must be considered conscientious, even rigorous. Though the book is aimed at a non-specialist audience, when Anton summarizes Culianu's theoretical positions he does so without distorting the writer's thought. Some misstatements could be pointed out, such as the definition of Nicholas of Cusa on page 109 as "a poet" or the dismissal of Borges's *Ficciones* as "detective stories." But in a work of this nature, these are venial sins. As far as I can judge, the bibliography (which lists even Culianu's minor works) seems impeccable.

Nevertheless, in this book there is a great deal of reconstructed dialogue between Culianu and his friends and acquaintances. In literary theory, one of the criteria for distinguishing a work of fiction from a work of history is the presence of dialogue. Still there are books with dialogue that are not outright fiction, a genre I would call fictionalized biography. I am thinking, for example, of some works by Robert Graves. In order to give us a vivid image of a character, the author reconstructs dialogue that may not have taken place exactly as described; we may accept this but we demand that the writer's reconstruction be based on documents which, if they do not confirm those conversations, at least do not render them implausible. Anton's book surely belongs to this genre, and it makes fascinating reading for those who have never heard of Iona Culianu. But Graves wrote fictionalized biographies of people dead for hundreds of years, about whom we thought we already knew a great deal (especially the circumstances of their death), and he did so in an attempt to explore their psychology. The case of Culianu (and of Anton) is different: the fiction-like form serves to make us understand a character about whom we discover we knew very little, and to venture a hypothesis concerning the reasons for his death.

I will not attempt to describe everything that Anton says in this book. What interests me more is not what

sú dané dialógy založené na dokumentoch, ktoré ich síce priamo nepotvrdzujú, ale ani nevylučujú. Antonova kniha patrí do tohto žánru a pre tých, ktorí o Ionovi Culianovi nikdy nepočuli, je to fascinujúce čítanie. Graves však písal fiktívne životopisy ľudí, ktorí zomreli pred stovkami rokov, o ktorých sme si mysleli, že už vieme dosť (predovšetkým o okolnostiach ich smrti), pričom jeho snahou bolo preniesť do ich psychiky. V prípade Culiana (a teda Antona) je to iné. Fikcia tu slúži jednak na pochopenie postavy, o ktorej sme zistili, že vieme málo a jednak ako pomôcka pre vlastné hypotézy ohľadom jeho smrti.

Nemám v úmysle komentovať všetko, čo Anton hovorí. Nezaujímá ma totiž, čo je v knihe napísané, ale prečo to bolo napísané. Predpokladajme, že Culianu bol len historikom náboženstva, ktorý sa počas svojho života zaoberal teologickými dišputami medzi prívržencami reformácie a protireformácie. V tomto prípade (a jedine v tomto) by sme obsah Antonovej knihy mohli zhrnúť nasledovne:

Mladý Rumun, narodený a vychovaný v komunistickom režime chce uniknúť stiesňujúcim hraniciam osobného sveta. Obdivuje dielo veľkého historika náboženstva a svojho krajana Mirceu Eliadeho, ktorý v tom čase žije vo Francúzsku a Spojených štátoch. Mladík je témou fascinovaný a spolu so svojimi priateľmi si vytvára vlastný intelektuálny svet (ako hovorí Anton „našiel možnosť zmysluplnej rebélie, ktorú nemusel prejavovať navonok“). Mladý muž je pod tlakom inkvizitného prostredia režimu, ktorý ovláda krajinu (neustále, ho vypočúva smutne preslávená rumunská tajná polícia Securitate). Nakoniec sa mu podarí vybaviť štipendium, ktoré ho privádza do Talianska a potom do Francúzska, kde pokračuje vo svojom výskume.

V tom čase mu udelia profesúru v Holandsku a napokon na Divinity School chicagskej univerzity, kde je Eliade prominentným profesorom. Počas týchto ciest podstupuje známe utrpenia, typické pre exil: snaží sa skontaktovať so svojím vysnívaným Eliadem, čo sa mu po mnohých ťažkostiach a nevysvetliteľnej zdržanlivosti zo strany Eliadeho nakoniec podarí. Stáva sa jeho spolupracovníkom a životopiscom. Popritom mladý vedec, ktorý vedel len málo o tom, čo sa dialo v Rumunsku pred jeho narodením, zisťuje, že Eliade bol údajne spojený s extrémistickou pravicovou antisemitsky a pronacisticky orientovanou rumunskou organizáciou Železná garda. Pýta sa svojho učiteľa na túto temnú stránku jeho minulosti, dostáva však len nejasné potvrdenie a zakrátko zisťuje, že Eliade bol naozaj úzko spojený so Železnou gardou. Napriek tomu však Culianu stále dúfa v možnosť dokázať, že Eliade nebol členom organizácie a nepatril ani k antišemitom ani k nacistom.

Čo však môže v skutočnosti mladý človek vedieť o vtedajšej ľavici a pravici, keď v rokoch svojho dozrievania ignoroval politický vývoj západného sveta. Podľa Antona aj Culianu najprv sympatizuje s pravicou, ale vo svojich ne-

the book says but why it was written. Let us suppose that Culianu was "only" a historian of religion who had concerned himself throughout his working life with the theological disputes between Reformation and Counter-Reformation. In this case (and excluding all the rest) Anton's book could be summarized in this way:

A young Romanian born and educated under the Communist regime tries to escape the oppressive confines of his personal universe. He discovers the work of a great historian of religion, his compatriot Mircea Eliade, who has lived for some time in France and the United States. The youth becomes fascinated by the subject and with a few friends-constructs his own private intellectual world (as Anton says, "he found the possibility of meaningful rebellion for him-not outward, but inward"). The young man feels oppressed by the inquisitional climate of the regime that rules his country (he is repeatedly questioned by members of the notorious Romanian secret police, the Securitate), and finally he manages to obtain fellowships that take him first to Italy, then to France, where he carries on his research.

At this point he is given a position as professor in Holland, and finally at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, where Eliade is a prominent teacher. During these travels he undergoes the familiar sufferings of an exile: he seeks some contact with his hero Eliade, achieves it only after many difficulties and some inexplicable reticence, but at last becomes Eliade's collaborator and biographer. In all this, the young scholar, who knew little of what had happened in his country before his birth, discovers that - allegedly - Eliade had been associated with the Iron Guard, an extreme-right-wing Romanian organization, anti-Semitic, with Nazi sympathies. He questions the master about this dark aspect of this past, receives only mumbled admissions, and before long realizes that Eliade was indeed close to Iron Guard circles. Still Culianu keeps hoping that he can prove that Eliade was not an actual member of the organization and was surely neither a Nazi nor an anti-Semite.

But what can he know of left and right, this young man who throughout his formative years was kept ignorant of political developments in the Western world? At first, according to Anton, Culianu himself displays interest in the cultural ambience of the right, but later his works and his writings testify to his democratic vision. Eventually he will insist that the Iron Guards were "the most secret, the most bombastic, the most mystical and bungling fascist organization of pre-War Europe."

After the death of his mentor in 1986, Culianu distances himself from him, not least in his scholarship, developing his own theory of history, while he remains sensitive to what is happening in his native country. While

skorších dielach sa hlási k demokratickému presvedčeniu. Nakoniec bude trvať na tom, že Železná garda bola „najtajnejšou, najbombastickejšou a najmystickejšou podlou fašistickou organizáciou predvojnovoj Európy“.

Po Eliadeho smrti v roku 1986 sa Culienu aspoň v prácach od učiteľa dištancuje, vytvára si vlastnú teóriu histórie, ale stále sa zaujíma o vývoj v Rumunsku.

Za Ceausescovej vlády píše Culienu niekoľko vedecko-fantastických (alebo skôr politicko-fantastických) príbehov, v ktorých predvída spôsob zvrhnutia komunistického režimu. Ale ani po jeho páde v decembri 1989 nie je Culienu spokojný. Verí, že udalosti, ktoré viedli k pádu Ceausescovho režimu, neboli revolúciou ale skôr štátnym prevratom, ktorý umožnil starým vodcom zostať pri moci a naďalej je presvedčený, že v novom prostredí našiel bývalý komunistický režim prirodzeného spojenca v starej extrémistickej pravici. Neťaží sa mu vyjadrovať tento svoj názor v článkoch a rozhovoroch, ktoré ako zjavné alegórie a satiry sú oveľa provokatívnejšie, než akékoľvek politické vyhlásenie. Vtedy ešte pravdepodobne nevie, alebo to len začína tušiť, že mnohí bývalí členovia Železnej gardy, ktorí po roku 1940 opustili Rumunsko, sa usídlili na stredozápade, konkrétne v okolí Chicaga, Detroitu a Toronta. Asi si neuvedomuje, že jeho ostro ironické literárne fantázie berú niektorí ľudia veľmi vážne a považujú ich za oveľa väčšie nebezpečie, než priamy politický útok najmä preto, lebo vychádzajú v novom rumunskom časopise *Lumea Liberă*. Hoci nemá monarchistické sklony, stretáva sa s bývalým kráľom Michalom a dospieva k presvedčeniu, že návrat monarchie môže pomôcť krajine nastoliť ústavnú stabilitu.

Dostáva niekoľko varovaní: telefonáty, listy, zastrašujúce incidenty, vlámanie do domu. Niektoré si nevšimá, iné ho znepokojujú. V tej chvíli si myslí, že sa už dlhšie nemôže vyhýbať politickej zodpovednosti. Spôsob jeho zabitia bol typický pre metódy východoeurópskych tajných služieb. Anton píše: „Postup, akým zastrašovali Culienu sa zhoduje s postupom, ktorý novinárovi P. Bacanovi popísal bývalý plukovník *Securitate*: najprv príde list, potom telefonát, neskôr sa k nemu vlámu alebo ho niekto navštívi. Ak spisovateľ ani potom neprestane, zabijú ho.“

Rumunské úrady odmietajú tvrdenia, že by mali vedieť o nejakých politických motívoch súvisiacich s jeho vraždou. Je však podozrivé, že v novinách *România Mare*, ktorých pozadie sa ťažko odhaľuje a kde nájdeme starých komunistov spolu s bývalými členmi extrémistickej pronacistickej pravice, sa píše o „vzříi, vykvasenej z Culienuvho fekálneho mozgu“. Tieto noviny tiež napísali, že jeho smrť by sme si mali pripomenúť nasledovným epitafom: „Uchopený erosom a mágiou renesancie, blúdiac na onom svede, môže Culienu konečne dokončiť svoj výskum“. (...)

Ceausescu is still in power, Culienu writes some stories in the science (or rather, political) fiction genre; they prove prophetic, foretelling the way the Communist regime will be overthrown. But even after it falls, in December 1989, he is not satisfied. He believes that the series of events that have caused Ceausescu's end were not a revolution but rather a *coup d'état* that has allowed the old leaders to remain in power, and he is further convinced that in the new climate created in Romania the old Communists have found natural allies in the heirs of the old extreme right. And he never tires of expressing these views, both in a series of articles and interviews and, repeatedly, in his stories, which are transparent allegories, satires more provocative than any political statement.

Perhaps he doesn't yet know that many Iron Guardists who had abandoned Romania in the 1940s have settled in the Middle West, particularly around Chicago, Detroit, and Toronto; or perhaps he only begins to suspect it too late. Perhaps he doesn't realize that some of his literary fantasies, written with an edge of irony, are taken with great seriousness by certain people who consider them more dangerous than a direct political attack, all the more so because they are now published in a new magazine, *Lumea Liberă*, widely circulated in his homeland.

Though he harbours no monarchist notions, Culienu meets former King Michael of Romania and becomes convinced that the return of the monarchy can perhaps restore a constitutional stability to the country. He receives many warnings: phone calls, letters, threatening incidents such as a break-in at his house. Some of them he dismisses; others worry him; perhaps at a certain point, he thinks, he can no longer avoid some sort of political role. He is killed in a manner typical of the methods of Eastern European security services. Anton writes:

“The sequence of Culienu's harassment also followed a formula described by a former Securitate colonel to journalist Petre Bacanu: letters first, then telephone calls, then a break-in or personal visit. Then, if the writer did not stop, he was killed.”

The Romanian authorities deny that they are aware of any political motive for his murder; but it is suspicious that Romania Mare, a paper in which, in an association hard to disentangle, old Communists are to be found along with old members of the pro-Nazi extreme right, should speak of the “fermented vision of Culienu's fecal brain” and that his death should be commemorated there with an epitaph such as the following: “Captivated by eros and magic from the Renaissance and trips ‘out of this world’ (Culienu) finally has the possibility to do his investigations.” (...)

Z anglického originálu preložil Alexander Klein, člen Výberového vzdelávacieho spolku