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## MIRCEA ELIADE - AESTHETIC MEANINGS

## Abstract

*The main aim of this dissertation is not to clear up the whole labyrinth of Eliade's creation, but to shade some of the aesthetic aspects of the literary writings of this Romanian thinker. The aesthetic notes, and not only these, are to be viewed as an impulse; at the same time they may be considered as an open door for all those who are fond of Eliade's both artistic and philosophical work.*

„...Some people say tonight, midnight sharps, the skies open. I'm not sure understand how they could open, but this is what they say: on Midsummer night the skies open. But maybe they open only for those who know how to look at them...”

Mircea Eliade – The Forbidden Forest

The main aim of this dissertation is not to clear up the whole labyrinth of Eliade's creation, but to shade some of the aesthetic aspects of the literary writings of this Romanian thinker. The aesthetic notes, and not only these, are to be viewed as an impulse; in the same time they may be considered as an open door for all those who are fond of both of Eliade's artistic and philosophic work. Mircea Eliade, an historian of religions - as we know him - is also a *philosopher of the beginnings*, a rhapsode of the world's separation from the Chaos. He writes about the origin of Man and above all, about the hierography of spirits. If we agree that each genuine creation reflects a beginning it means that we may talk about “a beginning of all beginnings” (*illo tempore*). This refers to a cosmogonical way of thinking that materializes it. The collision of cultures, of civilizations, the return of the present into the past constitutes the constancy of Eliade's work. He tends to judge the past with great indulgence because his intention is both to compare and join it to the present, although he doesn't ignore the forces that rule the world. All the great scientists and artists have noticed, motivated and asserted the running of the values from the past, through the present

to the future. The regression to the elementary doesn't mean a refuge in barbarousness, but the will to maintain the essence of a certain type of civilization; this regression signifies the nostalgia for the fundamental; it is a reference to the *arhe*, to the *beginnings*. The archaic civilization Eliade aspires to and whose structure he maintains is not a barbarous one but a primordial one, a one that hasn't degraded. The aspiration to archaism doesn't mean an involution or a demoting, but the representation of the perfect, absolute and archetypal model. The nostalgia of the archetype signifies the *anamnesis* we also meet in Platon's writings and it supposes the *myth of the eternal return* without which we cannot understand Eliade completely.

In a certain stage of Eliade's work, the feeling of consubstantiality **Being- Universe** is lost; the crisis of the modern way of thinking whose explanation is (according to Eliade - the author) the loss of “faith” is associated with an acute feeling of alienation. The way of thinking doesn't reveal the divine reason anymore, but the absurd of existence. This stage of Eliade's creation is dominated by the image of the **Demon** (*Isabel si apele diavolului*) whose revolt is proportional with the tormenting melancholy of the lost paradise. The **Demon** we meet in Eliade's creation suffers because he has lost the conscience of temporality. His statute - that a **Demon** - is given by the fall under the degradation law. This is because the **Time** means, signifies an estrangement from that innocent look of the *beginnings*. In other

words, the **Demon** discovers the **Time** as a fundamental evil he will try to rectify either by existence or by creating compensatory universes.

Accordingly, Eliade's literary creation is both a highly advanced and aestheticized expression of a "primitive" vision of humanity; this is characterized both by steadiness and recurrent images. So we may seize a profound intuition of the mythical original time, that is endlessly recurrent. This time is an equivalent of the transhistoric eternal present, which is regenerated at fixed intervals, like a ritual. Mircea Eliade's "primitivism" lives by itself, thinks, imagines under the specter of the eternal return, of the cyclical periodicities. It may be framed in a given order of knowledge, to which any "new" show is in fact an "old" one. Eliade resorts to a narrative technique which is based on the idea of a temporal paradox, the facts remaining in a space of probability which allows numerous assumptions. In the same time, this type of technique introduces us in an ancient world, with a strong esoteric tradition, a place where "the poetry of the coloured street" joins with "the poetry of a mysterious existence" in the depths of the mythical beginnings.

Thus, in the stories *In curte la Dionis*, *Incognito la Buchenwald*, Eliade suggests the continuity of Orfeu and Euridice's myth. The myth is modified; Leana (Euridice) is the one who, using the songs she sings, tames the wild beasts. Orfeu (a poet called Adrian) is an amnesic. Euridice sings for him, having the feeling she fulfills this way a sacred duty: the one of taming people who have lost their sense of spirit. The song (the music) is a way that leads to delivery, it suggests in the same time the idea of return to *illo tempore* not only by producing the art but also by its "consumption". This is also the significance of the short stories *Uniforme de general*, *Nouasprezece trandafiri*, *Incognito la Buchenwald*.

Therefore, even if we can't ignore the sure nuances, we think that the returning to the past

is also necessary and welcome in any field of science.

### 1. Hierophanies and Aesthetics

As far as I am concerned, I think that we cannot find a single domain of Romanian - and maybe not only Romanian - spirituality in which the elaborated cults (no matter how sophisticated they may seem) aren't an echo, a prolongation of the folklore stock. The myths, legends, creeds are at the very basis of culture, philosophy, history. By denying such a relationship we would make impossible the very understanding of the confrontation notions between the moments of time, of some generations' contribution related to others. We refer precisely to such an inspiration from the Romanian folklore: in the Midsummer Night the skies open. This intensifies the literary creation of the author, revealing its originality and freshness; the originality consists in experiences of "breaking at an ontological level". We can also notice the concern of seeing the *sacred* into the *profane*, the manifestation of the archetype, of the mythical in the common aspects of life.

The freshness comes from the **hierophanies** succession (manifestation of the *sacred*) and occultations, through which people are revealed the permanent existence of the *sacred*. The Romanian philosopher is obsessed with both the Midsummer Night and the myth, the symbol of midsummer. Eliade wrote about the first one, (the Midsummer Night) that "*it maintains ... all its enchantments and prestiges. Something happens and this day seems to me not only the longest one but simply and solely other than the yesterday one or the tomorrow one. One day, in Portugal, I had imagined a kind of story about the miracle of regeneration and eternal youth got in a Midsummer Night. "I had imagined" aren't the most suitable words. For days in a row I have lived under the spell of this mystery. "I was living with the hope that something would happen to me or something was about to reveal itself to me." ("își păstrează ... toate farmecele și toate prestigiile. Se întâmplă ceva și ziua aceasta mi se pare nu numai cea mai lungă, ci pur și*

*simplu alta decât cea de ieri sau cea de mâine. Cândva, în Portugalia, imaginasem un fel de poveste cu miracolul regenerării și tinereții veșnice dobândite într-o noapte de Sânziene. Imaginasem e puțin spus. Multe zile de-a rândul am trăit parcă sub vraja acestui mister. Trăiam așteptând să mi se întâmple ceva, să mi se dezvăluie ceva.”*<sup>1</sup> Simultaneously, in a radio conference at Bucharest (3<sup>rd</sup> of July, 1937) M. Eliade was referring to the great importance of midsummer for **Homo religiosus** from the ancient times. As part of the traditional, agricultural societies, the rustic holidays begin with “*the dances that last until St. John’s Night - the middle of summer – and this is also when the couples get engaged. The man’s life keeps up with the sun. And the love grows together with the quarter of the Moon.*” (“*dansurile ce țin până în noaptea Sfântului Ioan – miezul verii – și (...) tot atunci se logodesc perechile. Viața omului ține pasul soarelui. Și dragostea crește o dată cu pătrărul lunii.*”)<sup>2</sup>

Thus, these cosmic **hierophanies** (Midsummer Night or midsummer aren’t doing anything else but revealing a special structure of the nature’s sacrosanct aspect or, better said, a modality of the **sacred** experienced in a specific way of existence in the Universe. The lunar symbolism connected heterogeneous facts as birth, evolution, death, resurrection; the cosmic darkness, life before birth and existence after death followed by a lunar rebirth (“the light coming out of the darkness”) on this very basis the religions man became aware of both his own way of existing in the Universe and the chances of surviving and rise again. We don’t have to forget that the Moon shows the religions man not only that Death is close to life, but also that Death isn’t irreversible; it is always followed by a

new birth (“a mystical birth”). For example, in *Noaptea de Sânziene* it didn’t happen just an ordinary accident at the midnight, but an initiation; it was a passing into another life, an exit from time and space. The last minute lived on Earth by the two (Ileana and Stefan) lasted for an eternity. The solar **hierophanies** express the religions values of the autonomy and power, of sovereignty and intelligence. The sun reveals a way of existence in a permanent motion and in the same time it involves the lack of participation in evolution. In Calcutta’s stifling heat M. Eliade wrote his first novel *Isabel și apele diavolului*, this is a novel of some individual life experiences, which converge on explaining the original fundamental sacrality and in which the characters who bathe into the “devil’s waters” test the evil, the sin in order to surpass it, to come out of it stronger.

If in the ancient literature the beautiful was created consciously, by ornamenting the speech, at the Romanian philosopher this implies, as we have already seen, the invention of some special and temporal separate fictional universes (*La tiganci, Nouasprezece trandafiri, În curte la Dionis*). “Both from the moral and the metaphysical speculation on nature and man” Eliade made the appearance of the sublime’s determinations possible; among these we can emphasize the magic of never-ending horizons and the grandeur of the endeavors. M. Eliade uses miraculously the initiatic scenarios in which even the most common elements (like the car in *Noaptea de Sânziene* or the elevator in *Pe strada Mantuleasa*) have an archetypal value.

On the literary ground Eliade differentiates the **beautiful** from the **sublime**. While the **beautiful** is, as we asserted before, natural and “invented”, the **sublime** is hidden, latent. The philosopher distinguishes between an ideological sublime (as a representation of the infinite, the **sacred**) and a practical sublime (superior from the point of view of influence in a real corrupted, **profane** world) which he identifies at an existential level with the extraordinary and the surprising. The writer

<sup>1</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Fragments d’un journal*, Gallimard Publishing House, 1973, Paris, p.106.

<sup>2</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Vacanța intelectualului II*, in Mircea Eliade, *50 de conferințe radiofonice: 1932- 1938*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001, p.255-256.

evolves from the theme of the brave aspiration to the infinite - always threatened by defeat to the expression of the human being's Promethean unchaining from a highly profane world.

Besides the cosmic *hierophanies* M. Eliade's work abounds also in a whole series of space *hierophanies* (Anisie's orchard from *Pe strada Mantuleasa*, the hovel professor Gavrilesco enters in *La tiganci*, the inn and the hotel from *In curte la Dionis*, Băneasa forest and Ștefan's secret chamber in *Noaptea de Sanziene*) which aren't producing "just a break in the homogenous space but also the revelation of an ultimate reality, which opposes itself to the non-reality of the huge surrounding area" ("doar o ruptură în spațiul omogen, ci și revelația unei realități absolute, care se opune non-realității imensei întinderi înconjurătoare")<sup>3</sup>. These inner-selves, more or less complex, develop in the life experiences the writings suggest a type of reaction centered on highlighting aesthetically dimensions of life fact. The permanent calling of humanity for the sublime takes place in the field of some confrontations which aren't catastrophic if we think of the implacable disappearance of a human value; both the fear and the anxiety coming from the relative physical incapacity (*profane*) are followed by the awareness of the force through which the ideal (the *sacred*) can rise above the immediate events.

The aspects that may be considered for other authors as being a kind of trip made out of aesthetic curiosity, are totally different when we talk about Eliade. For him, the narrative becomes the dramatic necessity of the leap into the non-being, the obsession for the objectification, for the absolute. Consequently, the *hierophany* doesn't do anything except for revealing, in all its profoundness, the absolute of the "fixed point"; the calling of the religions man is to live in the *sacred* (the *sacred* meaning for him power and reality).

## 2. The Aesthetics of Mystery

Mircea Eliade has opened "the eyes" of knowledge, of the world's comprehension in details and in a tight existential connection; he did this even in his early period, by writing short stories and novels of an intellectualized fantastic whose expression is not a far cry from the concerns and acquaintances of the great thinker. **Coming out of time**, the existence of the **mythical aspect** or the sacred one in the most common aspects of life as well as the presence of two parallel levels (*coincidentia oppositorum*) are the most wide-spread themes for Eliade. They both are generating mystery.<sup>4</sup> The same symbols are to be noticed in a lot of ingenious happenings whose characters are common people. Eliade's symbolism abandons the principles of rationalistic aesthetics in order to rehabilitate the intuition (we may say that the author is not so fascinated by the connotative virtues of the poetic language). If some other authors find the essence of the aesthetically object in the visible appearances Eliade considers them to be the signs of a more profound reality which belongs to the spiritual universe of the human being.

In order to go deeper and to better explain the **mystery** of Eliade's creation I would try to draw a parallel between his work and Howard Philips Lovecraft who, however surprising it may seem, I think it's eloquent enough. Both of them have created a mythical center to intensify the creative faculties (for Lovecraft the parental house which is situated on the famous address 10, Barnes Street, Providence and for Eliade an equally famous address is that of the attic no. 1, Melodieii Street). Both of them stands out by an early "encyclopaedism" as well as by a strange cultural passion shared between two apparently antagonistic areas: between fantastic, myth, alchemy, literature. Both of them are fascinated by the mythology and natural sciences alike. Both of them retire in a

<sup>3</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Sacrul și profanul*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 2000, p.17.

<sup>4</sup> Eugen Simion, *Scriitori români de azi*, vol.1, David-Litera Publishing House, Bucharest-Chișinău, 1988, p.241.

sort of Noah's Ark (a cultural one), in a sacred space which is auspicious to inner knowledge. The comparison stops here, because Eliade opens his soul to the world naturally, while Lovecraft takes refuge in an inner universe, opposite to "vulgarity". From this point, the two writers remarks are going separate ways. While H.P. Lovecraft finds the **mystery** in the outside world, in a spiritual reality, populated by "ghosts", Eliade's **mystery** is totally different. At Lovecraft the **mystery** irrupts from the "terror", by aggressing and generating fear which maintains both an alert and frightening atmosphere; in Eliade's writings the **mystery** is rather calm, like a natural element of everyday's life. Not even the most savage facts (the someone's disappearance, the revelation of living in another times don't favor or produce "the fear" of existence to the reader. Only in *Domnisoara Christina* Eliade unleashes somehow the aggression of some demoniac forces, being influenced probably by the plot based on the idea of the possible contact between phantoms and living people. We meet here, besides possessed little girls, young people who live "with a helpless despondency the feeling of death" ("cu disperare neputincioasă sentimentul morții"). In his other writings the **mystery** "dazzles, but it doesn't shake us with fear and it doesn't unbalance the being" ("tulbură, dar nu cutremură și nu dezechilibrează ființa")<sup>5</sup>. M. Eliade's **mystery** is one of the spiritual balance, of the spiritual tranquility. Eliade doesn't emphasize the terrifying element, his writings being centered on conjuring up the vastness of the Universe, on suggesting the **mystery** and the "outside" space. The fantastic element in M. Eliade's writings evolves together with the **mystery** without merging into it, the mystery being revealed but not explained. In most cases (*O fotografie veche de 14 ani*, *Douasprezece mii de capete de vite*, *La tiganci*) the **mystery** it's almost imperceptible. We could say that Eliade's

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, p. 242.

**mystery** is "pleasant" to a certain extent as long as the **mystery** may induce "pleasure". Eliade's aestheticism stays under the sign of **Time** (one **sacred** and the other one **profane**) which materializes a return to naturalness; it also constitutes the free and natural act of inner life. We may say about Eliade that he is characterized by overtaking simple entities and by releasing perception from the illiberal mental patterns. He also challenges all the modalities of things comprehension and the intense living of the immediate. This comprehension manner belongs only to the artists, because as we are about to see in story *La tiganci* "art represents a way in the opposite direction, a return to the depths, in this very spot where the things that have existed once lay still unknown, by us, showing us the pathway" ("arta înseamnă un drum în sens opus, o întoarcere în adâncuri, în acel loc unde ceea ce a existat cândva zace, încă neștiut de noi, indicându-ne calea de urmat")<sup>6</sup>.

The plot of the story *La tiganci*, a masterpiece of Romanian fantastic prose, is set in the old Bucharest, shown as a city drowsed by heat. In such a torrid day Gavrilescu starts his unusual adventure. He is just a modest piano teacher. While he was coming back home from his lessons, in the tram he realized he had forgotten his briefcase containing scores at Mme Voitinovici, on Preoteselor Street. He was forced to interrupt his ride. After a few hesitations he arrived "at the gypsies", in the cool garden which he had passed by so many years without noticing it. Here it comes "the hazard, the accidental (forgetting his briefcase) for the character to grasp the existence of the mystery (the quoted garden)" ("hazardul, accidentalul - uitarea servietei - pentru ca personajul să ia act de existența misterului - grădina citată").<sup>7</sup> The link between the profane land Gavrilescu comes

<sup>6</sup> Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time*, translated from the French by C.K. Scott Moncrief and Terence Kilmartin. Revised by D.J. Enright with an Introduction by Harold Bloom, Everyman Publishers plc., London, p.217.

<sup>7</sup> Eugen Simion, *op. cit.*, p.231.

from and the mythical one he enters is mediated by one of the gypsy women. Gavrilesco is helped to make his way in the new territory because he isn't initiated. He is introduced in a room with a strange semidarkness as if "the windows were blue and green". The hovel Gavrilesco entered after he had paid the necessary fee represents "a place where, in many traditional societies takes place the initiation. Its part is preserved also for M. Eliade's character" (un loc în care în multe societăți tradiționale se desfășoară inițierea. Rolul lui se păstrează și în cazul personajului lui M. Eliade)<sup>8</sup>. The insight in the hovel brings back his memory, makes the communication with the past easier. He is asked to play the guessing game with the three girls (a Gypsy, a Greek and a Jewish) and he always finds the wrong answers. He tries to escape by telling "the tragedy of his life" but he is brought to reality; he isn't allowed to disappear in the past or to lose the way of memory. His arrival "at the Gypsies" equalizes with the returning in another emotional time; "in that very moment he feel so happy as of he would have been a young man again and all the world would have been his" ("în acea clipă se simți deodată fericit, parcă ar fi fost din nou tânăr și toată lumea ar fi fost a lui")<sup>9</sup>. But, being faced permanently with the mysterious world of the hovel, the feeling of happiness disappears and all that's left behind is a state of absolute uncertainty. His groping in the dark among mirrors, screens, pieces of furniture reminds us of the labyrinth's myth. This is a way of initiation in order to enter, without losing his way, in the world of the dead. The labyrinth he struggles to come out of is "an uncertain state of both dreaming and wakefulness. The enumeration of the strange and unwanted obstacle-objects begins with two indefinite pronouns: "something", "somebody", ("again somebody, something, a creature or an object impossible

to specify...)" ("din nou cineva, ceva, o ființă sau un obiect cu neputință de precizat...")<sup>10</sup> meant to mark both the easy passing from a shape to another.

The final conclusion is that "from life to death the passing is imperceptible; sometimes dreaming, sometimes pleasure (Gavrilesco's experiences in the "hovel") constitutes the waiting-room of death" ("de la viață la moarte trecerea este imperceptibilă, uneori visul, alteori plăcerea - experiențele lui Gavrilesco în "bordei"- constituie anticamera morții")<sup>11</sup>. Actually man lives concomitantly or successively in the universes. From both of them he is "warned", in both of them he is put to the "test" without even knowing it. Coming out of this waiting room the teacher perceives the signal of the history (the rattling of the tram) which makes him rediscover the old lady (the Cerberus) who stays at the frontier between the two worlds. In the same time with this "resurrection" Gavrilesco merges with the daily reality which is, in fact, a false one. The teacher believes that everything is just a confusion caused by heat. He is convinced he remained "at the gypsies" just a few hours, but when he leaves the place, he finds out that there were twelve years since he was gone, without a trace. As we notice, at Eliade almost his entire artistic creation starts from the supposition and the nostalgia of "another world", which is situated beyond "apparent reality". Almost all his stories describe events which are extraordinary for everyday experience and to "our" world.

Eliade's aesthetic approach consists, in fact in catching *time* unawares, *time* which forms the profound substance of any art creation. The evolution being considered the only obvious reality, the present is illusory and then the "real" and "substantial" reality remains the past. That's why the immersion in the subconscious or conscious, this huge reservoir of the past memory, constitutes the highest aim of art. In fact, this is also the "message" that Gavrilesco hands over. His swing

<sup>8</sup> Gh. Glodeanu, *Fantasticul în proza lui Mircea Eliade*, Gutinul Publishing House, Baia-Mare, 1993, p.138.

<sup>9</sup> Mircea Eliade, *La țigănci*, in *În curte la Dionis*, Cartea Românească Publishing House, Bucharest, 1981, p.20.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*, p.33

<sup>11</sup> Eugen Simion, *op. cit.*, p.233.

between “a memory time” and “a history time” (the coming out and the return in the gypsies’ hovel) introduces us in the rhythms of **time** (not necessarily **sacred** but other than the **profane** one) which is a permanent revelation; it is also a creation of undiscovered forms, full of unforeseen situations. For Eliade, the image extracted from the very depths of the soul is always accompanied by the unexpected. This unexpected constitutes the very essence of the literary work..

### 3. Hermeneutics and The Artistic Creation

The spheres of art or culture will remain, probably, the most appealing for the well-known specialists of other disciplines. Some of them are related to the art by practical virtues, others by meditation *upon it*. The convergency of all the concerns has a benefic effect also on personalities and the respective branches. Thus, M. Eliade pleads for a literature of authenticity, based on the concrete, on the experience in the knowledge process. The authenticity is always significant. If we can assume that a text is “true”, we’ll sure be convinced of his significance (this is also the fact which determines his hermeneutical value).

The creative act has a permanent valence of intentionality, namely a project the artist intends to realize and the interception of the literary work is a “decoding” process of its senses and significances. In the 1930s, when both the novelist and the journalist were prevailing on the orientalist, Eliade militated for the interpretation of the literary work according to its fundamental symbols and myths. “*If someone interpreted a modern literary writing by a profane author, revealing some abstruse significances into it we would be able to assume that all his interpretations are strange. They may look like someone has put them there or as if they would have been found unexpectedly. We may ascertain that “the wil”l or the culture of the author aren’t enough, when the main problem is to identify a symbol or a metaphysical principle in a literary writing. The symbol makes his way and clears up in its way all the literary work, with or without the author’s will. So you don’t*

*have to prove that the author knew all along about a hidden signification or a symbolic theme in order to have the right to interpret their work in this light...” (“dacă cineva ar interpreta o operă literară modernă de un autor profan, arătându-I anumite semnificații absconse, s-ar putea spune că toate interpretările lui sunt străine operei, sunt puse sau găsite de el acolo, autorul fiind cu totul străin de asemenea preocupări, el folosind doar întâmplător anumite procedee literare cu valențe simbolice...Se poate constata că voința sau cultura autorului nu prea contează, când e vorba de identificat într-o operă literară un simbol sau un principiu metafizic. Simbolul își face loc și luminează în felul lui întreaga operă, cu sau fără voia autorului. Nu e, așadar, nevoie să dovedești că autorul a știut un sens abscons sau o anumită temă simbolică, pentru a avea dreptul să-I interpretezi opera în lumina lor...”).*<sup>12</sup> We may conclude thus that the symbol “makes his way” in the narrative with or without the author’s will and that “ancient memories” come not from the dark sources (the psychoanalytic point of view), but from a coherent metaphysics expressed by **signs**, **symbols**, **myths** that are not to be detoured by the hermeneut. Like symbols, myths also pounce on the narrative with or without the author’s will. This fact is obvious in the narratives written after 1945. Even in the previous we can see a lot of signs, even there, as Eugen Simion asserted, “*we can see a text (a surface story) and a hidden text you have to discover in order to enjoy the whole significance of the novel*” (“*un text – o istorie de suprafață – și un subtext în care trebuie să pătrunzi pentru a putea descoperi întreaga semnificație a romanului*”)<sup>13</sup> There is in M. Eliade’s writings a visible difference between the two narrative types: the existentialist one leads to a hidden

<sup>12</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Insula lui Euthanasius*, in *Drumul spre centru*, Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1991 p167-168.

<sup>13</sup> Eugen Simion, *Mircea Eliade spirit al amplitudinii*, Demiurg Publishing House, Bucharest, 1995, p.46.

metaphysics, indistinctly bound of the idea of Destiny, while the mythical, fantastic one takes us to a very complicated symbols system and requests a certain kind of reading "initiation reading" ("lectura inițiativă")<sup>14</sup> The aim of this kind of reading is especially that of discovering the myths in the text. Thus, Eliade's narratives ask for a hermeneutics and an "attentive" reader, able to notice the signs present in the text and to organize them in "steps" (as the author asserts, in the article on Julien Green, in *Insula lui Euthanasius*) that is in a initiatic order. The artistic comprehension isn't possible from "the outside" because the souls aren't penetrable. We may conclude that in fact we aren't able to see anything excepting our own souls, if we ever get to know it and as a consequence of this fact we may communicate by imagining ourselves in another person's life and intimate life experience. Later, when he devoted his abilities to mythical narratives, Eliade "tried to train his readers even inside the literary work" ("a încercat să-și educe cititorul în acest sens chiar în interiorul operei literare").<sup>15</sup> We think that the notion of "sign" becomes clearer to us if we read the article called *Un inteles al semnelor (Fragmentarium)* it's the one of "limit, distinction, stopping. This doesn't refer to a stopping of life, a formal death, but to the stopping of mind at the frontiers of "esse". Beyond the sign, namely beyond the form and meaning, we may talk about the beginning of the evolution or the nothingness, both of them being aspects of the non - being, "non - esse". (...) The sign is the seal that tells the being from the non - being and helps you in the same time to identify yourself, to be yourself, to become, led by the vital collective stream" ("limită, distincțiune, oprire pe loc. Nu e vorba de o oprire pe loc a vieții, o moarte formală, ci de oprirea minții la granițele lui „esse”. Dincolo de semn, adică dincolo de formă și de înțeles, începe devenirea sau neantul, amândouă aspecte ale

neființei, „non-esse”. (...) Semnul este pecetea care distinge ființa de naființă și te ajută în același timp să te identifice și tu, să fii tu însuși, să devii, purtat de fluviul vital și colectiv”).<sup>16</sup> When it comes to fantastic narrative, the signs show "a split" in the structures of reality, a symbol which cannot be noticed immediately by a logical eye. The sign would be "the messenger of an improved symbol another, spy of miracle" ("mesagerul unui simbol nedovedit, încă o iscoadă a miracolului")<sup>17</sup>

The sense of these signs is to maintain the facts in ambiguity area and to give the one who reads the impression that another type of history proceeds next to him; this history could be in the same time true or false. These signs reveal and hide, come near to the logical reality but also estrange from it.

The artistic phenomenon constitutes a complex interaction relation of the present conscience with the whole experience the creative or the contemplator subject accumulated. This type of relation necessarily supposes the existence of "an aesthetic distance", a distance that could be reduced by a correct hermeneutics. "Eliade practices not only a hermeneutics of meaning, as we often tend to believe, but also one of the symbolic and mental data. (...) This hermeneutics of preliminary data becomes, at Eliade, an exploration of symbolic forms, of myth and of religions language, of arts and technical phenomenon, of alchemist or of fashionable experience etc." ("Eliade practică nu atât o hermeneutică a sensului, cum înclinăm adesea să credem, cât una a datelor simbolice și mentale prelabile. (...) Această hermeneutică a datelor prelabile, trece, inevitabil, la Eliade, într-o explorare a formelor simbolice – a mitului și a limbajului religios, a artei și a fenomenului tehnic, a experienței alchimice sau a celei mondene etc.")<sup>18</sup> In Eliade's artistic creation,

<sup>14</sup> ibid., p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>16</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Fragmentarium*, in *Drumul spre centru*, Univers Publishing House, Bucharest, 1991, p.150.

<sup>17</sup> Eugen Simion, *Mircea Eliade spirit al amplitudinii*, Demiurg Publishing House, Bucharest, 1995, p.109.

<sup>18</sup> Ștefan Afloarei, *Cum este posibilă filosofia în estul Europei*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 1997, p.249).

hermeneutics maintains its existential nature, being given itself out as - according to I.P.Culianu - "the main sustenance and deliverance technique" ("în tehnica principală de subzistență și de eliberare").<sup>19</sup>

"The only meaning of existence is to find a sense for it" ("Singurul sens al existenței e de a-i găsi un sens.")<sup>20</sup>. According to I.P. Culianu, in the first two fantastic cycles of his work in which the miracle irrupts in the world "the meaning is transcendent unlike the hermeneutics itself" ("sensul este transcendent față de hermeneutica însăși"), and in the third cycle "the meaning is established by the hermeneutics" ("sensul este stabilit de hermeneutică").<sup>21</sup> Through the hermeneutics the mystery and the enigma "are devised" and the "myth" is created.

The conclusion we draw from here is only one: in order to survive in a world full of symbols we have to practice hermeneutics. We always have to unravel mysteries, because by decoding them the uncertain isn't dissipated; on the contrary we thus create it, the decoding process being the "mechanism that produces mysteries" ("mecanismul producător de mister")<sup>22</sup>.

There are some personalities whose appearance resembles, more than that of the others, to the **Idea**, to the very essence of it, that is. We may assert that M. Eliade strengthens this belief. The Romanian writer, whose age you cannot tell by his literary work, because he seems to have the age of the legend and that of the myths, remained in the literature as a great master of the fantastic prose. Above everything, he was a real philosopher of fiction, the story telling being one of the oldest spiritual-aesthetic necessities. A progressive master of the artistic material and of instincts' automatism,

he inculcated upon his narrative vision a **mythical** intensity.

Mircea Eliade has a special place both by the method and by the proportion of the research, in the vast process of revalorizing the ancient way of thinking. Even if nowadays tendency is to eliminate the myth from our existence, Eliade proceeds to this in another way. He recognizes that his intention is "to identify the presence of the mythical in the human experience" ("să identifice prezența miticului în experiența umană").<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the rebirth of art would be possible by rediscovering the myth. In *Proba labirintului* the writer defines literature as a daughter of mythology and the interest for the narrative as being a part of the men's way of being in this world. The Romanian philosopher has no doubt that the **mythology** may be considered the teacher of life (*magistra vitae*), a guide both for thinking and facts, and also for action. We cannot but agree with such an opinion, knowing that, in the last analysis, mythology not only explains how things really were, how they happened, how they crossed certain ages, but also why they occurred this way and not differently. **Mythology** is seen as a bridge between past and present, and which is naturally prolonged in the future.

Therefore, Mircea Eliade **worships mythologies** and he has the calling for myth. In other words he has the calling for some primordial representations, with symbolic values and a strong gnoseological load. He aims at the expression in eloquent shapes of some basic forms and ideas, which refer to the existential condition and to the relation man-nature, man-universe and man-his inner self. They also refer to the fundamental questions about the complex problems of the life and death's meanings. These are often fabulous, hyperbolically representations. In part are representation of a surrealist structure, but they start from the suggestion made to the

<sup>19</sup> Ioan Petru Culianu, *Mircea Eliade*, Nemira Publishing House, Bucharest, 1995, p.256.

<sup>20</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Solilocvii*, Humanitas Publishing House, Bucharest, 1991, p.111.

<sup>21</sup> Ioan Petru Culianu, *op. cit.*, p.256.

<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*, p. 257.

<sup>23</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Fragments d'un journal*, Gallimard Publishing House, 1973, p.315).

author by the great **myths** and epics of the humanity. Consequently, the things that may seem shallow for others, become profound when we talk about the Romanian writer. Mircea Eliade reaches, moved by mysterious callings, the ultimate limit of myth, that pure ideative zone in which the relationships ancestor-descendant is bathed in the sparkling waves of the primordial fire.

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