

ELENA ABRUDAN

THE ODYSSEY OF M. ELIADE'S HEROES.
A MEDITATION ON TIME

Elena Abrudan

Babes-Bolyai University, Faculty of Political Science, Administrative and Communication Science, Department of Journalism and Digital Media, Cluj, Romania.

Email: abrudan@fspac.ro

Abstract: The present research focuses mainly on highlighting and analyzing the space-time dimension in Mircea Eliade's works of fiction. The paper also presents the considerations made by the author on this topic in his scientific papers. The detailing of the concepts related to the myth highlights the presence in contemporary prose of cosmogony, eschatology, and calendar myths. We show that the two temporal subsystems, cosmogony and eschatology, blend harmoniously with two spatial subsystems, the vertical and the horizontal, to demonstrate that temporal symbolism exists only in terms of spatial symbolism. The demonstration of the mythical character of the space-time structure is based on the revelation of the sacredness of the mythical space and time and on the sacred-profane opposition, inside this dimension of contemporary prose. The paper highlights aspects that demonstrate that the use of mythical structures and their understanding are different in contemporary prose culminating in changing their meaning, with the transition to postmodernism. This passage is marked by the change of the symbolic code with the naturalistic one, the postmodern writers using the same mythical motives and structures as the modern ones but giving them a different meaning. The research reveals a certain parallelism between the scientific works and Mircea Eliade's prose, by illustrating the concepts related to time and space, and by depicting in his short stories and novels the sacred camouflaged in history and the heroes' attempt to find a privileged space in order to succeed in coming out of profane time.

Key words: mythology, myth, space-time dimension, initiation, sacred, profane, contemporary fiction, modern hero.

1. Myth and mythical thinking

Towards the end of 20th century, mythology was reconsidered, and proved to be an archaic but viable form of creative fantasy having the dominant role of spiritual culture in primitive societies, in which it consolidates the syncretic unity, still poorly differentiated, between unconscious poetic creation, archaic religion and representations about the world. Their differentiation will occur as religious feelings and poetic genres develop. An example in this sense can be considered the transition from archaic myths about ancestors and cultural heroes, to stories and religious myths that tell us about a creative God. At the same time, the myth is a symbolic description of the model of the world, through the story, about the appearance of different elements of the world in its entirety or of some objects and about the creations of the first humans.

In the spirit of the conclusions formulated by Mircea Eliade in his book *Aspects du mythe*, published in 1963, (*Aspects of a myth*) it must be specified that all these events and phenomena are permanently perceived as true; so, the myth relates something that really happened in the beginning and therefore, knowing the myth means knowing the origin of things, which can thus be dominated and controlled. The author states that it is not about an external, abstract knowledge, but about a ritual experience, through the recitation of the myth, during a ceremony or by performing the ritual that stages the events related in the myth. Living the myth means remembering and updating the events, the reiteration of the mythical time, that is, of the sacred time, when something new, significant, and full of force was manifested in the world (Eliade, 1978, 19-23).

At the beginning, mythical thinking was a form of knowledge of the environment. The main indicator of this form of knowledge is the conferment of cosmic dimensions on the main aspects of the surrounding world and human life. This particularity of mythical thinking is manifested in the way in which the fundamental mythical structures - the space-time dimension and initiation - can be perceived and understood. I make a few clarifications in this regard.

If we consider space-time dimension, the cosmic model of the world assumes that space is a succession of elements (mountains, forests, sun, moon, stars) springing from chaos as a result of motion, and time is structured, cyclical, emerged from time primary, static. To understand this model, it must be emphasized that the myth explains the existing cosmic and social order so that it is supported, eliminating the inexplicable elements. That is why the myths were recited during the performance of rituals that were repeated regularly, being directed towards the adaptation of the individual to the social environment and towards the harmonization of the relations between the community and

the natural environment. Due to the rituals, the archaic model of primordial time, of the first creation, as opposed to linear time, was completed with the cyclical model of time, with events that are repeated regularly. As a result, mythical time can be encountered in three aspects, depending on the mythology or philosophy to which we refer. I detail these aspects following the demonstration made by Mircea Eliade in his works, regarding this issue.

2. Aspects of mythical time

The mythical time of origins, found in archaic mythologies, is the time when supernatural beings manifested; it is the time of the beginnings, pure, full of strength, with all the possibilities intact. The eternal repetition of the exemplary gestures of the gods signifies an actualization of that sacred time in order to benefit from its regenerating qualities; it does not presuppose a pessimistic vision of existence, of life, on the contrary, the eternal return to the sources of the sacred and the real saves human existence from death and nothingness (Eliade, 1997, 70-73).

The mythical-philosophical conceptions of the Eternal Return were presented by Eliade in a book published first in French, *Le mythe de l'éternel retour*, in 1949. This perspective on time presupposes a pessimistic view of existence, because the gods are no longer accessible through cosmic rhythms, the religious significance of repeating exemplary gestures is lost, and man no longer has access to a primordial state. In this case, Mythical time is a cyclical, desecrated, frightening time, resembling a circle that revolves non-stop around its own center, repeating itself endlessly. The Eternal Return from Indian philosophy was an extreme position of the elites, for whom existence presupposed death and rebirth to infinity, in increasingly degraded forms, due to the law of universal causality, called Karma. Time was assimilated to the cosmic illusion named Maya, and the return to existence meant the endless prolongation of suffering and slavery. Since the wear and tear of time could not be stopped, the only escape from the existential cycle was to come out in the timeless, in the favorable moment of enlightenment, a moment comparable to mystical ecstasy or revelation. It presupposes the understanding of reality at once, after a long journey through innumerable existences. In Greece, the myth of the Eternal Return was taken to extreme by philosophers of the late age. The Pythagoreans, the Stoics, the Platonists admit that, within each repeated cycle, the same situations are reproduced, that no event is unique. They will appear every time the circle turns on itself (Eliade 1994, 70-113).

The historical time on which the history of the Jews, the prophets, and God is inscribed shows us that in Judaism, the idea of cyclical time is

outdated. Yahweh manifests itself in historical time, which is irreversible. In Christianity, the valorization of historical time continues, which has been sanctified by the presence of Christ. It is about a well-specified historical period, the one in which Pilate of Pontus ruled. The historical event is valued due to the revelation of the sacred, produced by the events that took place in the Holy Land, during the life, death, and Jesus' resurrection. We notice that there is no temporal symbolism other than spatial symbolism, it is implicit in it. In other words, the unlimited power of updating the sacred space occurs under the rule of the will to transcend time, of tireless return to the beginnings, that happens as Mircea Eliade says in a book published first in French, *Images et symboles*, in 1952 „in a primordial and timeless moment, in a sacred time interval” (Eliade, 1997, 70).

3. The sacred and the profane

It is time to present Eliade's view on sacred. We remind here that, starting from the analysis made by Rudolf Otto in his book *The Idea of the Holy*, published in 1917, Mircea Eliade wrote a book that became an international bestseller, *Le Sacré et le Profane* published in 1956. He states that „the sacred and the profane are two ways of being in the world, two existential situations assumed by man throughout its history”. Being the opposite to the profane, the sacred is “the manifestation of something that is different, of a reality that does not belong to our world, in things that are an integral part of our natural, profane world... The sacred is saturated with being. Sacred power means reality, permanence, and efficiency. “The desire of the religious man to be part of reality, to feel saturated with power is, therefore, as natural as possible”. Man's attempt to live as long as possible in a sacred universe means the transition from ordinary temporal duration to sacred time, and the transition is possible because “by its nature, sacred time is reversible, in the sense that it is in fact a mythical time primarily brought back to the present”. This is the re-actualization of a sacred event that took place at the beginning of time, the repetition of a creation. Any creation being imagined as taking place at the beginning of Time, in principle, and cosmogony being the archetype of any creation, it also means the creation of cosmogonic time, which “serves as a model for all sacred Times; if the sacred Time is that in which the gods manifested and created, it is clear that the creation of the World is the most comprehensive and great divine manifestation”. Cosmogony is always taking place in the Center of the World, so in a sacred space it receives a spatial determination, which explains the fact that the nostalgia of eternity is sustained by the nostalgia of paradise, by man's desire to be in a perfect world, “fresh, pure and strong, as it came out of the hands of the Creator” (Eliade, 1995, 13-81).

Mircea Eliade convincingly demonstrates that the penetration of man into the sacred depends on participating in the actualization of the sacred force of myths through the initiation rite and then through participation in repeated rites. He realizes the syncretism of the profane with the sacred because, practically, he begins to live in the two worlds. In Mircea Eliade's opinion, expressed in his book *Patterns in comparative religion*, the sacred and the profane do not oppose each other but are different levels of a unitary culture and intertwine due to a mysterious situation named „coincidentia oppositorum”. The realization of this complex state depends on the presence or absence of the mythological ritual situation (Eliade, 1958, 410-436).

Specialists agree that initiation is one of the most significant spiritual phenomena in human history, because it marks the entire life of the individual. In his book *Naissances mystiques*, published in 1959 in French, M. Eliade appreciates that, through initiation, man becomes open to the life of the spirit and participates in the culture in which he was born, because any initiation represents the revelation of the sacred, and for the primitive world “the sacred means not only everything we understand through religion, but also the whole of the mythological and cultural traditions of the spirit”. The Romanian scholar also states that initiation includes a triple revelation: of the sacred, of death and sexuality, the last two also entering the sphere of the sacred; initiation representing a fundamental experience, through it man transcends the natural way of being and accesses the cultural one, he becomes able to fully assume the way of being (Eliade, 1995, 10- 14).

In the case of initiation rituals, the encounter with the sacred presupposes a series of trials to which the novices are subjected. In his book *Mystical Births*, Mircea Eliade shows that most initiation trials involve a ritual death followed by a resurrection or a new birth because, for archaic thinking, death expresses the idea of the end, and cosmogony, the idea of creation, making, and building. Death corresponding to the temporary return to chaos is the expression of the end of a way of being, and the rebirth and symbolic repetition of creation implies a re-actualization of the primordial event, of god's creative energies. Thus, through ritual, the world was restored to the state from the moment it was created, the gestures performed by the gods were reproduced; the individual, the society and the entire cosmos became pure, powerful, efficient and with all possibilities intact, as they were in the beginning (Eliade, 1995, 36-57).

4. The poetics of mythology in the Eastern and Western Literature

It is time to remember that in Eastern European mythology death is

valued positively, because it signifies the transition to a higher existential status, which demonstrates the close connection with the authentic archaic myths, which survived and were transmitted through folklore in literature. Therefore, we will formulate some considerations regarding the differences between the poetics of mythology imposed by the modern Western European mythological novel and that of the Eastern European novel. These differences are explained by the gap of socio-economic and cultural development, by historical evolution, very late in Eastern and Southeastern Europe, where myth is closer to modern prose being taken from folk sources that have better preserved the archaic layer, mythological elements, and archaic atmosphere.

In the Eastern European space, it is particularly important to express the correlation of cosmogonic myths with the mythology of the moments of passage in human life, in the sense that any passage is a renewal. Heroic myths consist in telling the events of supernatural beings and involved going through a scenario between different spatial movements sprinkled with clashes or events, essential being the initiatory structure of this itinerary, at the end of which the hero could be reborn in another condition. The initiation scenario is important insofar as it provides the hero with access to another status, to another way of being, superior. It ends with the symbolic or real death of the character, which is capitalized in a creative sense, by transferring it to another world.

In Western European literature, the myth lost some of its sacred message. However, the mythical-ritual carcass, transmitted through legends and fairy tales, which was filled with another similar content, was kept very accurate. Although it does not neglect the creative value of death, the most important seems to be the real or imaginary journey of the hero who often follows itineraries transmitted through the myths of antiquity or biblical events. There is another aspect that differentiates the Western mythological novel from the Eastern European one. The disruptive and destructive factor towards the human personality, regardless of belonging to a certain geographical area, was the invasion of industrial/postindustrial civilization with all that it entails: alteration or destruction of the natural environment, urban development, depreciation of ethical and aesthetic norms, confusion of values. The heroes react to this situation in the same manner, by withdrawing from these destructive forces, by trying to rediscover the essence of their personality, to find themselves in a smaller space now, but the way to solve this situation is different. Forced to a precarious existence, lonely and almost unable to communicate with his fellows, the Eastern European hero continues his pilgrimage to places reminiscent of the vast spaces where the initiatory itineraries of ancestors and gods took place, while lamenting the degradation of natural space, but trying to fight this situation. He fights a double struggle - that with himself and with others, in the attempt to regain the personality lost or altered by objective factors. The Western

hero has less nostalgia for the original state of nature. The hero's attention is directed more towards his own person, he seeks to fulfill his personality by finding another existential dimension within him and the limited space in which he moves. There is a transfer of the search from the outside to the inside, from the wide spaces of the pilgrimage of mythical heroes, Odysseus, for example, to a city, for example, Dublin, to a garden or, that is, in an ordinary man in James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*. The proportions change, the character is no longer a hero, but an ordinary man, just to mark the confidence that myth is part of our lives, that he is not an external event or the prerogative of privileged beings. In M. Eliade's opinion, the life of the most insignificant man can become an Odyssey, a chain of trials. Therefore, the search is transferred to the environment of the modern man, the city, and speaks about the condition of the modern man. It is, in principle, the same search, through which the modern hero aspires to outline the true dimension of existence, in order to have the feeling of unity with the world and their fellows, but this search takes place in different spaces and times and sometimes appealing to the same myths but transmitted differently. In the modern Western novel, approaching or moving away from authentic myths over time contributes to the transformation and degradation of the myth. Therefore, in western fiction there is a process of desecration of myth, the lack of metaphysical thrill, supplemented by irony, grotesque, and humor. On the contrary, the main goal of Eastern European writers is to portray reality, which, most of the time, it has all the qualities of the mythical world, a world saturated by sacred and miraculous phenomena. The way in which one enters this world and the extent to which the heroes manage to fulfill their destiny gives complexity and a specific dynamism to writing. This way of writing literature can be called Mythical Realism. We need to clarify, I am using the term *Mythical Realism* to designate the way of mythicizing reality in the writings of Eastern European space in comparison to *Magical Realism* for Latin-American Literature (Gabriel Garcia Marquez e.g.) and *Postmodern Realism* for North American and Western Literature, in which we recognize mythical structures and motifs as elements of structuring the narrative (Saldivar, 1991). In my opinion, the works that fall into this way of artistic creation are modern in a broad sense, because the depicted world is chaotic, the existence of the hero is tragic, and the new reality discovered by chance or revealed to the hero in extreme situations is an alternative to the real world in which the hero lives, situations specific to modern aesthetics.

The East and the West meet and coexist, and the relationship between national and universal is expressed through a strictly individual solution. It is about individual artistic creation, which acquires universal significance and value by overcoming national limitations. The main function of the old myths consisted precisely in introducing the individual in the circuit of natural and social becoming; the belonging of the

individual to a group, to a community, to nature was something natural, in the order of things. However, the contemporary man of the industrial society is an alienated, depersonalized individual. The revolt against this uniformity, the consciousness of totalitarian isolation and oppression were more alive to the Eastern spirits than to their Western confreres. Myth was a true moral refuge against dictatorship. The miraculous world of myth was a possible alternative to everyday gray, a true model of attitude towards an aggressive reality, and the access to it could be obtained mainly, by making a connection between the past and the present.

5. Experiences of temporal ruptures

Mircea Eliade is the Romanian author who illustrates the most complex individual experience of heroes as an exit from profane time and space. The transition to another dimension is constituted as a meditation on time and is integrated into his more general conception of the dialectic of the sacred and the profane. I will not repeat everything that has been written about the scientific and artistic work of Mircea Eliade, but the studies of Ioan Petru Culianu, Eugen Simion, Adrian Marino and Sorin Alexandrescu come to mind as valuable resources on Mircea Eliade. Our intention is to focus on the stories and novels that focus meditation on time as a limiting factor of the human condition. I believe that almost all the fundamental motives of the works of the history of religions and of the epic ones relate to the problem of time is found in a brilliant artistic manner in his fantastic writings. Mircea Eliade's short stories inscribe an original chapter in universal fantasy literature. He is one of the writers interested in a mythological fantasy, of folk origin, whose originality consists in a serenity that largely excludes fears and tragic feeling, riddles, and chance. This way of revealing through fantasy the inexhaustible beauty and fecundity of life is purely Romanian. Romanian literature is one of the few in which the fantastic has never become grotesque, tragic, gloomy, being on the contrary a better and more beautiful alternative to everyday reality.

The short stories recount experiences of temporal ruptures that give the characters the intuition of the sacred or even the transition from the profane world to one that has all the attributes of the sacred. Like the chosen ones from the archaic societies, the heroes of Mircea Eliade, through different ways, intentionally or accidentally, live the major event of the revelation of the sacredness of the world and the possibility to move to another spatial-temporal dimension. Divine or infernal, this dimension represents another world, whose characters, gradually or unexpectedly, insinuate themselves into everyday life.

In the novel of the same name, *Domnișoara Cristina*, (1935, București:

Cultura nationala) Miss Christina is a power from the other world, that is, an undead who, coming from another time, insinuates herself into this world through her nocturnal appearances with the promise of passionate love for painter Egor, the guest of the mansion of her family. Unfortunately her presence brings also in present the tragic events of her life and death, disturbing the normal course of life. Restoring order can only be achieved by applying a magic ritual, traditional in the South of the country. In short story *Șarpele*, (1937, București: Ciornei) (*The Serpent*), a group of friends make a trip visiting an island near Bucharest. The young Andronicus knows very well the history of this place, and are telling them mysterious stories, insisting on his feeling that he lived in that place from the beginning. As a demonstration of that, one night through an act of magic he brings in front of his friends a reptile that seems to be his mythical ancestor. The short story *Secretul doctorului Honigberger*, (1940, București: Socec) (*The Secret of Dr. Honigberger*) describe the attempts to explain the mystery of disappearance of Dr Zerlندی who is made invisible through esoteric practices learned from the writings of Dr. Honigberger, who lived time ago in Brasov. Studying oriental texts, the character wanted to leave Bucharest in order to settle in Shambala, a miraculous country that is somewhere in northern India. After several unsuccessful attempts to understand and solve the mystery, as a specialist of oriental religions, the author was invited to decipher the unexpected disappearance of dr. Zerlندی. Reading the journal of Dr. Zerlندی, the author understand that he disappeared, but he had no will and forces to comeback in present time. We gradually understand that Shambala is an imaginary realm, an inaccessible geographical space, which can only be known after a spiritual preparation and traveling in time. In the short story *Nopti la Serampore*, (1940, București: Socec)(*Nights at Serampore*), the past bursts into the present time without any warning; thus, while studying in Calcuta, the narrator and his friends were visiting an acquaintance having a house near Serampore. One night, as they crossed the forest, it seems to them that they have gone astray. Entering the house of a wealthy man, they are suddenly witnesses, at an event from another century. But next morning they are in their bungalow, and nobody believes the story of the event they lived during the night. An initiate, named Swami Shivananda, to whom the author reveals his fantastic adventure, reminds him that in the phenomenal world everything is just an illusion, nothing is real and, consequently, everything becomes possible. These kinds of events are usual in Mircea Eliade's fiction.

6. The revelation of the sacred

The topics of other short stories are also constituted by signaling some hidden relations between ordinary life and powers from another

world, by the interference of reality with the dream or truly miraculous situations, related to the sphere of the fabulous folklore. The mentioned exegetes of Mircea Eliade's work remarked that the support of the specific Eliade's vision in his fiction is what the writer calls *the unrecognizability of the miraculous*, which presupposes that the sacred is camouflaged in the profane. The fact that it is hidden under the multitude of insignificant aspects of everyday reality makes it difficult to recognize the sacred in the modern, totally desecrated world. The sacred and the profane reality are so mixed that they are no longer distinguishable and are revealed as a premise of the imaginary in the fantastic prose of Mircea Eliade. What characterizes the fantasy of the post-war short stories is the unusual character of the experiences of the characters. Less extraordinary or spectacular than those in *Miss Christina* or *Nights at Serampore*, these experiences culminate in revelations that reveal the absolute. In various ways, the sacred is revealed to some common people. They participate in events that, without being thrilling, seeming even trivial, tear them out of the ordinary, out of the profane and projected them into another realm, full of meaning, because it represents the absolute real. In this case, the revelation of the sacred is equivalent to an awakening of the heroes. They begin to look at the world with different eyes and see or understand things that are inaccessible to others. Mircea Eliade's fiction thus becomes a prose of knowledge, revealing, often leaving the profane universe to enter the realm of the sacred. This transcendence has, in the writer's vision, the meaning of recovering the lost paradise. In the volume *La Nostalgie des origines*, (1971, Paris: Gallimard,) (*The Quest: History and Meaning in Religion*), Mircea Eliade argues and demonstrates that humanity has lived since the beginning of history with the nostalgia of paradise, namely with the desire to escape from the real world, banal and corrupt and reintegrate somewhere outside this time and space (Eliade, 1994, 141-176).

The short story *La Țigănci*, (1963, Madrid: Destin) (*With the Gypsy Girls*) reveals a parallel universe, different and independent of the Bucharest, where the main character's adventure took place. The transition to death is marked by repeated transitions from the historical time to the mythical, eternal time, and begins with the confused Gavrilescu's desire to discover and to enter the gypsy garden. It is a green, cool and timeless space, but he can't recognize it as the world beyond. Gavrilescu tries to return to the world he knows, but he returns in another time, where everything was changed, the people and the world he knew disappeared. He is confused and being in the gypsies garden he have to pass an initiation ritual, but he fails trying to solve questions. Finally, in transition to death Gavrilescu was assisted by his former girlfriend, Hildegard, who is his guide to the world beyond.

The short story *Pe strada Mântuleasa* (1968, Paris: Caietele inorogului) (*Mantuleasa Street*) presents the miraculous stories narrated by an old teacher while he was being investigated by the state security regarding

the identity and fate of some citizens he had known as children, at the school where he taught. This way, we found out that children who live and play on Mântuleasa Street learn to recognize the signs that indicate enchanted places, namely the center of the world that connects the three areas, underground, terrestrial and celestial, a center through which one can enter another realm, where heroes can recover their true identity. In the same way in another short story *În curte la Dionis* (In the Court at Dionysus) (Madrid, 1977) we discover the true identity of Adrian and Ileana, who are the incarnation in present time of the pair Orpheus and Euridice. In the story (*The three Graces*) (Paris, 1976), Aglae, Italy, Frusina are the three Graces, and the last one, as the avatar of Proserpine is a young woman in summer and a grandmother in winter, changing her age following the natural rhythm of changing seasons.

The writer believes that regaining the original state is a chance offered to even the most insignificant people if they manage to evade temporality. Virtually, everyone can go back to mythical times by producing or consuming art. Most of Mircea Eliade's characters are artists trying to save themselves through art. We remember that in *With the Gypsy Girls*, Gavrilescu was a piano teacher, or that in another short story, *On Mântuleasa Street*, in Fărâmbă's stories (the meaning of his name is *slice*), the narration is set from his repeated evasions to the past. The artist is invested with initiatory powers; he can lead the reader towards the exit from the daily life by the fact that he triggers the anamnesis, the return to the beginnings and implicitly the knowledge of the essential things. The revelation of the truth never seems to be total because while some aspects are revealed, others are hidden according to the dialectic of the sacred which presupposes that by the simple fact of showing oneself, the sacred is hidden. Therefore, in the story *On Mântuleasa Street*, Fărâmbă's narratives are read differently by different readers and reconstruct the image of the existential labyrinth in which Fărâmbă entered, of the trials he must pass, but also the image of the textual labyrinth of the mythical narrative written by the old man containing descents and floors, layers, and ambiguities, which testify to man's inability to recognize the sacred camouflaged in the profane, but also to the writer's modernity/postmodernity.

7. Foreboding of the sacred

Mircea Eliade has a specific way of to announce the appearance of the sacred. Since it is hidden under the usual manifestations of reality, the writer introduces certain signs that allow the characters and the reader to gradually approach the revelation of the absolute. One of these signs is the unbearable heat which announces the approach of an exceptional situation. In fact, the whole ambiance is intentionally constructed in such

a way as to contrast sharply with the unusual event that will follow. Therefore, in the story *On Mantuleasa Street*, the calm and quiet aspect of Bucharest, the heat of the street precedes Zaharia Fărâmbă's entry into the old building looking for a former pupil; or in the story *With the Gypsy Girls'* Gavrilăscu's entrance into the cool garden of the gypsies comes after a long and hot day, when the hero feels confused. (We stopped at these two characters, because they present the means to reach another world, albeit differently.

Entering the building on Mântuleasa Street, Fărâmbă represents, according to him, a part of Borza I. Vasile's family, namely, the most precious part: childhood. It is known that childhood symbolizes the state before falling into error, the Heavenly state of natural simplicity and spontaneity. Therefore, Fărâmbă's attempt to recreate the mythical world by building the narrative according to the rules dictated by his investigators fails. The order that the investigators want to imprint on the story is external and has nothing to do with the laws according to which the mythical reality from Fărâmbă's narrative is constituted. The confusions and contradictions perceived by others are elements that are subject to other laws, from another world and can lead to the revelation of some truths. The lack of communication between the two worlds, the everyday -modern/postmodern world - and the mythical world, leads to a lack of understanding and the need to return to events that seemed essential, or to clarify aspects that escape a dry and accurate reading of profane, uninitiated readers. Therefore, at the end of this short story, Zaharia Fărâmbă is again in front of the building perceived as a labyrinth, hardly enduring the heat and the suffocation of a hot summer day, suggesting a possible beginning of the story and, at the same time, a new attempt to enter the world of myth.

The attraction of the gypsy garden is also the temptation of another world, eternal, timeless, in which laws other than those of our profane world act. Gavrilăscu's entry into the cool garden signifies his passage to death, death being the most important rite of passage in human life. It is known that the rites of passage involve the initiation of the hero by passing tests. The hardest attempt seems to be in Gavrilăscu's case the guessing of the gypsy between the three girls or the wandering through the labyrinth of rooms, ended with the dream in which the hero sees his death in the profane world. Gavrilăscu misses the attempts because he cannot break the habits of the profane world; he is always confused and remembers Hildegard, his unfulfilled love. We know that the memory of the past ensures the knowledge of the past and the ability to predict the future. But it works only in the profane world that knows the three dimensions of time: past, present, and future. In the plane of eternity, however, the memory of the past violates the laws of the sacred, and of the other world. That is why Gavrilăscu, (like Făt-Frumos, the hero of well-known Romanian fairytale *Youth without old age and life without death*), will

return in the footsteps of memory in our profane world, but too late, when everything had changed in the world he had known. That was why the girls were frightened to hear him talk about Hildegard: they knew that he was wandering in a time and a world degraded by the passage of time; they knew that what had lasted only a moment in their garden could last for years in profane time. Dazed, confused, not understanding what is happening to him, Gavrilescu returns to the gypsies. But he cannot escape the pressure of time, he is always interested in the time and tries to deduce the time according to old habits, without suspecting that the gypsy garden is the crossing point between two worlds, and the old woman Baba is a kind of Cerberus who guards the entrance to the other world. Therefore, Gavrilescu does not perceive the futility of his preoccupation with fixing time in a space that escapes becoming. Like any sacred space, the other world is inaccessible, difficult to penetrate, but also attractive through the aura of mystery that surrounds it. We understand that Gavrilescu is instinctively afraid of passing into another world, although he is tempted by it, and his efforts not to break away from profane space and time make it difficult to enter the eternal world. In this pause between life and death he needs help and Hildegard is waiting for him to lead him, to leave together in a carriage led by a real Charon who crosses Gavrilescu beyond, in an eternal space and time.

The most complex and successful extensive writing of Mircea Eliade is the novel *Foret interdite* (1955, Galimard) (*The Forbidden Forest*), a mythical novel, an initiatory novel. Mircea Eliade specifies related to this novel, that he wanted to camouflage a certain symbolic meaning of the human condition. And the entire behavior of the main hero, Ștefan Viziru, follows the principle of man's conscious attempt to get out of time. An economist by profession, a senior civil servant, Viziru has a phobia of history; he would like all things to remain as it seemed to him that they were in childhood, which is in Mircea Eliade's fiction the symbol of the paradisiacal world of the beginnings. The hero's preoccupation is related to the ability to free ourselves from the terror of history to the way to escape from the present time while keeping us alive. It seems to him that if the only salvation is death, human existence loses all meaning.

Other characters of this novel have diametrically opposed opinions. Petre Biriș, his friend, declares that he is at peace with History, which he wants to live. Anisie, a gardener near Sighișoara (a medieval town in Transylvania) claims that the year must adapt to the cosmic rhythms: day/night, the rise and fall of the moon, seasons. He retreats to his garden, a timeless Eden, a patch of primitive world in which he feels free, in control of himself, living a simple life with his whole being, in accordance with the laws of nature.

Trying hard to get out of the profane time in this life and whenever he wants, Viziru organizes for himself a privileged space, a room that he transforms into a trans-historical and timeless space. Retreat into this

space allows him to live in eternity without completely escaping from History. She reminds him of Sambo - the childhood room where he felt he lived differently, in a continuous, inexplicable happiness. However, the withdrawal of the character from history is illusory, ephemeral, history entering his secret room: he hosts a legionnaire, is arrested, and sent to the camp, as a diplomat lives the horror of the bombing of London, loses his wife and child during a bombing in Bucharest.

The exit from Time is made for Biriş and Ștefan Viziru on the path they wanted to avoid. Biriş dies in the cellars of the Security, and Viziru dies together with Ileana, his ex-girlfriend known in 1938, in the Băneasa Forest, also on the night of the Sânzienne flowers, in a forest near Paris. Ileana's car becomes a real Charon boat for both of them. This last chapter is an artistic transfiguration of the Romanian tradition that in the longer day of the year, girls called Sânzienne dance a folk dance in order to celebrate the beginning of summer and the richness of the earth. Also, it is a transfiguration of the popular belief that on this shorter night of the year, the heavens open for those who know how to see and understand the promises of this miraculous night. From this perspective, all the hero's previous attempts to get out of time and all the unpleasant events of his life are just stages of the transition to death. So, at midnight there was not a trivial fatal accident, but a passage, an exit from time and profane space. The last moment lived by the two on earth lasted like an eternity, because Eternity can be grasped in a single moment. But preceding death, it no longer gives the hero a chance to return. For Ștefan Viziru, the experience of leaving time is personal, unique, and incommunicable.

I should also add that, according to Eugen Simion, in his novel *The Forbidden Forest*, Mircea Eliade wants to synthesize the essential themes of his literature and to experiment with a major epic method, the formula of which appears in Ciru Partenie's diary, Ștefan Viziru's double: it is about the rediscovery of the mythical narrative, which can be "A history in which the cosmic signs are manifested, and the sacred events are prolonged, under profane fraternities. A narrative in which the reader discovers myths in the ordinary facts of life". Mircea Eliade thinks of the rebirth of all modern literature by rediscovering myths; he wants this literature to depict the sacred camouflaged in history. Thus, the mythical narrative can have an initiatory and recovering function, by revealing to the man, who has forgotten his mythical origins and can help him in the desperate moments of history to save him through the story. Reading has the same role and function as reciting the myth during the ritual: that of updating the sacred with all its attributes. This means that the mythical narrative can express the metaphysics and the existential condition of man who cannot live without myths. This literature is accessible due to the direct narration, significant because it reveals the sacredness, fascinating through mystery, magic, and symbolism. Even without allowing the recognition of all symbols, myths, rites under profane

camouflage, it offers a new mythology whose nostalgia suffers the man desecrated by history (Simion, 1995, 156-170.).

Mircea Eliade's fiction shows us that there is a certain way in the Eastern European space to perceive reality, to interpret it and to give an answer to existential problems by people with certain features of their spiritual and psychological profile. Mircea Eliade believes that the representation of death in folklore is the best research tool for knowing reality (Eliade, 1991). Consequently, this space is characterized by an intense circulation of legends and motifs that speak of death, of a sacrifice serenely accepted by the hero convinced that death is only a passage; it is the possibility of transcending its world and time through amazing adventures.

References:

- Alberes, R-M. 1968. *Istoria romanului modern*. Translated by Leonid Dimov. București: ELU.
- Angelescu, Silviu: 1999. *Mitul și literatură*. București: Univers.
- Auerbach, Erich. 1967. *Mimesis. Reprezentarea realității în literatura occidentală*. Translated by I. Negoitescu. București: ELU.
- Blaga, Lucian. 1992. *Despre gândirea magică*. București: Garamond.
- Boia, Lucian. 2000. *Pentru o istorie a imaginarului*. Translated by Tatiana Nochi, București: Humanitas.
- Bradbury, Malcom. 1983. *The Modern American Novel*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Caillois, Roger 1975. *Eseuri despre imaginație*. Translated by Viorel Grecu. București: Univers.
- Chevalier, Jean, Gheerbrandt Alain. 1994-1995. *Dicționar de simboluri, mituri, vise, obiceiuri, gesturi, forme, figuri, culori, numere*, vol.1-3, București: Artemis.
- Compagnon, Antoine. 1998. *Cele cinci paradoxuri ale modernității*, translation by Rodica Baconsky. Cluj: Echinoc.
- Culianu, Ioan, Petru. 1995. *Mircea Eliade*. Translated by Florin Chirițescu and Dan Petrescu. București: Nemira.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1978. *Aspecte ale mitului*. București: Univers.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1996. *Domnișoara Cristina*. București: Minerva
- Eliade, Mircea. 1991. *Drumul spre centru*. București: Univers.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1994. 1997. *Imagini și simboluri*. București: Humanitas.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1981. *În curtea la Dionys*. București: Cartea Romanească
- Eliade Mircea. 1963. „La Țigănci” in *Nuvele*. Madrid: Destin

- Eliade, Mircea. 1995. *Nașteri mistice*. București: Humanitas.
- Eliade, Mircea . 1991 a. *Noaptea de sânzien*. București: Minerva
- Eliade, Mircea. 2003. *Noapți la Serampore*. București: Humanitas
- Eliade Mircea. 1994. *Nostalgia originilor*. București: Humanitas.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1981. „Pe strada Mântuleasa”. *In curte la Dionis*. București: Cartea Romaneasca.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1958. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. London: Sheed & Ward
- Eliade, Mircea. 1995. *Sacru și profanul*. București: Humanitas.
- Eliade, Mircea. 1940. *Secretul Doctorului Honigberger*.
- Eliade, Mircea. 2003. *Șarpele*. București: Humanitas
- van Gennep, Arnold. 1996. *Riturile de trecere*. Iași: Polirom.
- Glodeanu, Gheorghe. 1993. *Fantasticul în proza lui Mircea Eliade*. Baia-Mare: Gutinul.
- Hăulică, Cristina, 1991. *Textul ca intertextualitate, Pornind de la Borges*. București: Eminescu.
- Lucian Boia, Anca Oroveanu, Simona Corlan-Ioan. Editor. 1999. *Insula.Despre izolare și limite în spațiul imaginar*. București: Centrul de Istorie a Imaginarului și Colegiul Noua Europă.
- Marino, Adrian. 1980. *Hermeneutica lui Mircea Eliade*. Cluj-Napoca: Dacia.
- Meletinski, E.M., 1994. *O literaturnykh arhetipakh*, Moskva: R.G.G.U.
- Meletinski, E. M. 1995. *Poetika mifa*. Moskva: Vostochnaja literatura.
- Muthu, Mircea. 1999. *Dinspre Sud-Est*. București: Libra.
- Otto, Rudolf. 1992. *Sacru. Despre elementul irațional din ideea divinului și despre relația lui cu raționalul*. Translated by Ioan Milea. Cluj-Napoca: Dacia.
- Petrescu, Liviu. 1996. *Poetica postmodernismului*. Pitești: Paralela 45.
- Propp, V.I., 1970. *Morfologia basmului*. Bucuresti: Univers.
- Saldivar, José David. 1991. „Postmodern Realism” in *The Columbia History of the American Novel*. Edited by Emory Eliot. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Simion, Eugen. 1995. *Mircea Eliade spirit al amplitudinii*, Iași: Demiurg.
- Telegin, S.M. 1994. *Filosofia mifa, Vvedenie v metod miforestavratzii*. Moskva: Obshchina.
- Vultur, Ioan. 1987. *Narațiune și imaginar. Preliminarii la o teorie a fantasticului*. Bucuresti: Minerva.
- White, John, J. 1971. *Mitology in the Modern Novel. A study of Prefigurative Techniques*. New Jersey: Princeton University Pres.