

## Mircea Eliade's vision-generating text on drama and performance

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**Abstract:** *In the short fantasy stories, which are part of the cycle of performance and cryptography, as well as in Mircea Eliade's novels, the systematic presence of artists can be noticed, but especially that of the actors, as well as the numerous references to theater. The novel *The Forbidden Forest* contains, already crystallized, the Romanian writer's conception of theater. Eliade's interest is mainly directed towards a new type of playwriting and towards spectacular performance, because he makes a very clear difference between writing and acting. The writer considers dramatic art a place of debating artistic, philosophical, religious ideas, but is convinced that the theatrical play can offer the possibility of a different approach to them and a different understanding of the world - one that can trigger enlightenment and human spiritual liberation.*

**Key-words:** *Eliade; fantastic prose; theater; drama; performance; director; time*

### 1. Introduction

The In 2007, I set out to celebrate the Centenary of Mircea Eliade's birth, with a marathon consisting of (re)reading his work, because I always kept in mind his statement that: "only all my writings can reveal the meaning of my work"<sup>2</sup>. Among the books read this year 2007 was *The Trial of the Labyrinth*, in which the question asked by Claude-Henri Rocquet, in the afterword, was, for me, the decisive impetus to write a study dedicated to Mircea Eliade<sup>3</sup>. In that afterword, Claude-Henri Rocquet, struck by the systematic presence of actors and theater in Mircea Eliade's short stories and novels, wonders if anyone has devoted a doctoral thesis or a study to this topic. He states that such an approach would lead to a book in which "theater would be the metaphor of the passage through time, the symbol of Eliade's entire work and perhaps, of his life" and which could be entitled "Introduction to a dramatic art and technique fit for our time"<sup>4</sup>.

This is, in fact, the title that Ieronim Thanase - the director who appears in several of Eliade's short stories - would like to use for the book on the theory of the dramatic performance that he is preparing to publish, in a stealthy manner, under the name of Anghel Dumitru Pandelescu.

### 2. Purpose

My study therefore started from the rhetorical question of Claude-Henri Rocquet and consisted, on the one hand, in a quasi-archaeological and, at the same time, quasi-detective approach to de-nicheing and putting together the component parts that make up the book about

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<sup>2</sup> Mircea Eliade. 2007. *Încercarea labirintului. Convorbiri cu Claude-Henri Rocquet*. Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> Anca-Daniela Mihut. 2020. *Mircea Eliade's outlook on performance in the context of the theatrical doctrines of the 20th century or „Introduction to a dramatic art and technique fit for our time"*, doctoral thesis. Cluj-Napoca: Doctoral School for Linguistic and Literary Studies, Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University.

<sup>4</sup> Claude-Henri Rocquet. *Postfață*, in Mircea Eliade. *Încercarea labirintului. Convorbiri cu Claude-Henri Rocquet*, ed. cit, p. 191 and p. 189.

theater “hidden in the pyramid or in the labyrinth” of Mircea Eliade's work and left in a potential state. On the other hand, the same approach aimed at placing this projected "book on theater" in the context of European theatrical art of the 20th century.

In that study, I considered it more appropriate to talk about Mircea Eliade's "notion of the show", because, although he also discusses the process of elaborating dramatic creation, his interest is mainly towards spectacular performance. He makes a very clear difference between writing and acting. In other words, the difference between a play and a show.

### 3. Methodology, objectives

I structured my study into four chapters that illustrate the research process in which I went through four major stages of study. The first stage consisted in extracting and reconstructing the ideas related to the performance and the dramatic text that Mircea Eliade expresses through his characters (in the novel *The Forbidden Forest* and the “theatrical” short stories). The second was the selection of references to the performance and the dramatic text that Mircea Eliade makes, in journals, memoirs, correspondence and interviews, as well as in scientific writings. The third stage - but, in fact, almost simultaneous to the first two - was to highlight the echoes that Indian thought and culture had on Mircea Eliade. Specifically, to highlight the analogies between Indian thinking about the sacred and the performance, as well as between thinking about the sacred and the function that Mircea Eliade assigns to fantastic prose. The fourth stage consisted in comparing Eliade's notion of performance with the theatrical theories and practices of the 20th century, based on the common denominator of the preoccupation with the Indian culture and religious and aesthetic thought of Eliade and some show creators such as K. Stanislavski, V. Meyerhold, A. Tairov, N. Evreinov, A. Artaud, J. Grotowski, Peter Brook, Eugenio Barba, whose directorial poetics materialize the suggestions and ideas left in Eliade in virtual form. After exposing a series of characteristic aspects of some religious techniques - yoga, shamanism, alchemy, I followed the way in which these spiritual techniques were adapted or reconverted into acting training techniques, used, for example, by the directors mentioned above.

### 4. Content

This paper analyses the novel *The Forbidden Forest*, which I considered to be the text generating Mircea Eliade's vision of drama and performance.

*The Forbidden Forest* is a key novel, moreover, a figurative novel. Most of the important characters are not only themselves, but also "figures" in the sense still enshrined in the biblical interpretations of the Church Fathers. Surprisingly and significantly, the most transparent "figures" are linked to the theater, thus mirroring the importance that Eliade attaches to it. Thus, the triptych Dan Bibicescu - Cătălina Palade - Petre Biriș, who have passionate discussions about theatrical issues, has an obvious figurative significance, as shown by Ion Vartic<sup>5</sup>. This network of characters - to which is added, for example, the much evoked Ciru Partenie - infuses, as Erich Auerbach would say - the “figurative realism” of *The Forbidden Forest*. Consequently, the director Bibicescu is the figure of Haig Acterian, quite easily recognizable by a series of biographical elements, similar to events in the life of the director, i.e. the friend of the young Eliade. Then, Bibicescu himself or those in his entourage make, in

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<sup>5</sup> Ion Vartic. 2007. *Noaptea de Sânziene*, in *Dicționar analitic de opere literare românești*, II. Cluj-Napoca: Casa Cărții de Știință Publishing House, p. 637.

relation to him, references to Gordon Craig and the way of playing Shakespeare, author to whom Haig Acterian dedicated a book in 1938<sup>6</sup>, thus bringing, for the first time, in the Romanian culture, an analytical vision of the plays by the great English playwright<sup>7</sup>. So Bibicescu not only physiognomically evokes Haig Acterian, but also reproduces his entire interwar biography, centered on the dramatic story of his directorate at the National Theater in Bucharest (from the autumn of 1940 to January 1941). Finally, in Bibicescu's theatrical theories, however, both Haig Acterian's theoretical preoccupations and Eliade's ideas about performance can be recognized. In Cătălina Palade we can recognize the actress Sorana Țopa, whose turbulent relationship with Mircea Eliade - marked by violence, emotional turmoil and dramatic upheavals - is known from the very Memoirs of the author. The philosopher Petre Biriș, a partner in heated discussions on theatrical topics with Bibicescu and hopelessly in love with Cătălina, is the figure of Emil Cioran, also exposed by the label that the character himself puts on, namely that of "private philosopher".

As for Ciru Partenie, there has been speculation about possible identities camouflaged<sup>8</sup> under the aura of this rather mysterious character; he is present, to a larger extent, in the evocations made by the other characters of the novel than in episodes in which he participates directly. But one of these episodes is exactly that of his death, similar, in my opinion, to that of the director Soare Z. Soare (1894-1944). Ciru Partenie is killed in the street, by mistake, by the police who were chasing a legionnaire and who had mistaken him – they, too! - for Ștefan Viziru. On the night of August 23-24, 1944, although there was still a state of war in Bucharest, Soare Z. Soare, who was in a car traveling at high speed, forbade the driver to stop at the signal made by the sentry on the road. Probably mistaking the passengers for some German officers, the sentry fired upon the vehicle, thus fatally injuring the director. Another similarity is that, like Ciru Partenie, Soare Z. Soare is also a playwright.<sup>9</sup>

Reading Mircea Eliade's prose about theatre in reverse chronological order, first the fantastic short stories and only later *The Forbidden Forest*, I was struck by the clarity with which he already synthetically exposed, in this novel, his ideas about drama and performance. It might have been natural for his theory on performance to crystallize progressively, during the approximately fifteen years he wrote "theatrical" prose: *Goodbye! ...* (1965), *Two Generals' Uniforms* (1971), *Incognito at Buchenwald* (1973) and *Nineteen Roses* (1978-1979). It turns out, however, that his theory is already coagulated in the years in which he writes the novel (1949-1954) and that the ideas about drama, performance, director and actor, which constantly concern him - even obsessively, I might say - then appear disseminated, re-questioned and subsequently developed in the prose that followed. It could be said that *The Forbidden Forest* and the "theatrical" prose form a true cycle, like an ouroboros, in which ideas and characters concerned with theater, the function and the significance of the performance appear recurrently. Discussions about theater and performance in his final "theatrical" prose, *Nineteen Roses* both arise and have their continuity in those of *The Forbidden Forest*, a fact that made me think of

<sup>6</sup> Haig Acterian. 1995. *Shakespeare*. Bucharest: Ararat Publishing House.

<sup>7</sup> The remark regarding the novelty of Haig Acterian's approach belongs to Marian Popescu, who authors the preface to the new edition of the book by the Romanian director, published in 1995.

<sup>8</sup> The character seems to include in itself several „figures”, which simultaneously refer to both Eliade and Mihail Sebastian, see in this regard Marta Petreu. 2011. *De la Junimea la Noica*. Iași: Polirom Publishing House, p. 376 and subsequent.

<sup>9</sup> Ioan Massoff. 1981. *Teatrul românesc. Privire istorică*, VIII. Bucharest: Minerva Publishing House, p. 193, pp. 226-227. Ioan Massoff. 1985. *Între viață și teatru*. Bucharest: Minerva Publishing House, p. 151.

the Crab Rondeau<sup>10</sup> by Guillaume de Machaut<sup>11</sup>, significantly entitled *Ma fin est mon commencement*. Perhaps not coincidentally, the play written by Anghel Dumitru Pandele, during his stay at the Camp of Ieronim Thanase, is entitled *At the beginning was the end*, and also uncoincidentally, to the young actors, who were looking for the beginning of an experimental show, the same Ieronim Thanase explains that the meaning of existence can be revealed through the "*Show without beginning and without end*", that is, through the exit from Time. Thus, the lighthouse-idea of Eliade's work - that of liberation from temporal conditioning - is expressed not only at the ideational level, but even at the level of articulation - albeit involuntary - of his prose in a circular "network". In fact, Alexandru Ciorănescu shows that "the writer's position towards the art of writing is identified with that of the rite towards myth. When he resumes the interrupted manuscript, to continue a commenced narrative, Eliade does not think about the subject. His preoccupation is ritual: the resumption of the narrative thread lies in the breakaway from time, with the direct return to the timeless state of the previous chapter. Writing is an ascetic state and, by its nature, ecstatic, which enriches the reader and represents a kind of salvation for the author, by coming out of time".<sup>12</sup>

One feels the feverishness with which Eliade turns the problems of the performance on all sides - a feverishness like that of one who seeks an answer to a torturous question, like one who, feeling captive, seeks a saving way out. Obviously, for Eliade, the performance is no longer a (merely) aesthetic concern, but a vital and soteriological one. At first glance, both in *The Forbidden Forest* and in the subsequent "theatrical" prose, we could say that the favorite themes are, naturally, the performance conceived as an autonomous universe and the world / life seen as a performance. But the constancy with which he returns to the idea that the performance is the favorite way of temporal and historical deconditioning of man, makes one understand, very soon, that the central theme of these prose is, in fact, that of Time, and that Eliade's true burning concern and desire is to escape its grip and to (re)acquire immortality - "a desperate effort to find the bliss of childhood, to reintegrate a lost Paradise"<sup>13</sup>, as Petre Biriș tells Ștefan Viziru, the central character of the novel *The Forbidden Forest*. Bibicescu's theory of theater, built around the action of time, intersects with the turmoil and obsession related to the possibility of Ștefan Viziru's escape from Time, who, as we know, is an alter ego of Mircea Eliade. Eliade's desire for immortality is even more evident, however, in the truly pathetic statements that Ștefan Viziru makes in another episode of the novel: "For many years I have wondered if there really is no means to get out of Time, to live, at least discontinuously and in eternity (...) Because I do not want to die. (...) I don't want to grow old, to mineralize my soul, and one day die. I want to live forever, a young man, as in our fairy tale *Youth Without Old Age and Life Without Death*. I think I have this right: to ask for my share of immortality ...", he says. If for Viziru, the Sambô room, Shakespearean sonnets and painting are ways or, at least, attempts to evade the destructive effect of time and the terror of history, for Dan Bibicescu, the actor, director and ardent disciple of Gordon Craig, obsessed, in his turn, by the issue of time, the performance seems to be the saving solution. Therefore, in a complementary way to

<sup>10</sup> The „crab” type songs (usually canons, but also rondeaus), also called of „recurring” or „retrograde” type, are the musical layout in which two musical lines, complementary and symmetrical to each other, form a musical structure akin to a palindrome.

<sup>11</sup> Guillaume de Machaut (approx. 1300-1377), French poet and musician, secretary to Jean of Luxembourg, is regarded as the last of the troubadours and one of the main exponents of the new musical style called *Ars Nova*. He mainly composed virelais, rondeaus, ballads, mottetoes and a polyphonic mesa.

<sup>12</sup> Alexandru Ciorănescu. 2017. *Est Deus in nobis*. in *Mircea Eliade. Întâlnirea cu sacrul*. volume drawn up and curated by Cristian Bădiliță, in cooperation with Paul Barbăneagră. Bucharest: Vremea Publishing House, p. 142.

<sup>13</sup> Mircea Eliade. 2010. *Noaptea de Sânziene*, I. text curated by Mircea Handoca. Bucharest: Litera Internațional Publishing House, col. „Biblioteca pentru toți”, p. 169.

Bibicescu's theory, Mircea Eliade, through his epic alter ego, finds the solution of getting out of time, by means of the ceremonial-type performance. Although upset by his removal from the direction of the theater, Bibicescu is determined to persevere and continue writing. He confesses to Cătălina that he has solved "all the problems regarding the theater", that he sees everything very clearly and that he plans to write an extraordinary play, entitled *Time is money*, in which the only main character would be Time, while the fifty secondary characters would be people. Then, in a discussion with Ștefan Viziru, Bibicescu confesses to him not only his intention to write a pure drama "as Shakespeare wrote" (Haig Acterian had published, in 1938, the Shakespeare monography) but he also lets him in on a secret that only he seems to have and that refers to how Destiny and Time could work in favor of man and not against him. This miracle solution is the performance itself - "the great super-temporal bliss<sup>14</sup> which is allowed to us", as Bibicescu likes to say. The explanations he offers to Viziru reflect Mircea Eliade's already cohesive theory about drama and performance: "Destiny. It is just a dramatic aspect of Time (...) Destiny is, in fact, the part of Time that History allows us. So it is something very limited ... (...) Destiny is that part of Time in which history imprints its will on us. That's why we have to resist it, run away from it, take refuge in the performance. I have a whole Theory of the Performance, which I define as concentrated Time. In a word, the Performance forces Time to manifest in the form of Destiny - so that it can be exorcised. (...) To exorcise Destiny, this is the function of the Performance. Forcing it to show up *next to you, on stage*, in a concentrated time - and allowing *you to escape, to remain a spectator, to get out of Time ...*"<sup>15</sup>.

In order to achieve such a performance, Bibicescu probes several ways. Here, one of the echoes of Eliade's direct contact with his colleague and friend Haig Acterian appears, as the director Dan Bibicescu creatively develops the theory regarding the text that Gordon Craig exposes in his programmatic volume, *About the Art of Theater*<sup>16</sup>. Consequently, avoiding the definitively structured plays, Bibicescu - anticipating the direction of the creative director - rewrites, adapts, completes spectacularly in his own way or even conceives scenarios, which cannot be completed and which only make sense through the performance. The most significant example is the ritual theater script entitled *The Return from Stalingrad*, inspired by the religious processions from the Moldovan villages, by means of which the dead who fell on the front were greeted. Bibicescu, concerned with the possibility of "suggesting the myth through modern means"<sup>17</sup> of representation, conceives this scenario "with its roots in history, and yet having a mythical dimension" as a dramatization of "a myth of death, half pagan, in the middle of the 20th century". Through this spectacular myth of death, Dan Bibicescu announces, twenty years before, Tadeusz Kantor's Theater of Death, obsessed with the "relationship of the living with the dead", in an "unforeseen spectacle" and "in an ambiguous ceremony"<sup>18</sup> (needless to say, in the theorizing of the Theater of Death, Kantor also starts from a certain idea of Gordon Craig.) The need for such a ritual theater in the contemporary era is synthetically stated by Bibicescu. The detailed explanation appears only later, in the short story *Nineteen Roses*. Also here, Eliade argues why a new type of director is required for such a performance. This will be Ieronim

<sup>14</sup> Here, there is a clear reference to the state of bliss and enchantment - *rasa* - the ultimate purpose of Indian theater performance.

<sup>15</sup> Mircea Eliade. *op. cit.*, II, p. 246.

<sup>16</sup> See the comparison between the „finished” and „unfinished” play, as formulated by Edward Gordon Craig, in *De l'Art du Théâtre*. 1942. Paris: Éditions O. Lieutier, p. 106.

<sup>17</sup> Mircea Eliade, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 153-154.

<sup>18</sup> Tadeusz Kantor. 2014. *Scrieri despre teatru*, selection, foreword and notes by Krzysztof Pleśniarowicz, translation by Sabra Daici, Bucharest: Cheiron Publishing House and The „Camil Petrescu” Cultural Foundation, pp. 74-75.

Thanase, whose encrypted name refers to Antonin Artaud and the ideational affinities between Eliade and the French playwright<sup>19</sup>.

Between the first director, Dan Bibicescu and the third one, Ieronim Thanase, the transition is carried out by "tonight's" director from the ceremonial script *Goodbye!* ... in whose person, in the end, we may also suspect the latter, albeit in a stealthy manner.

Paradoxically, the ritual scripts of Dan Bibicescu - this time of the playwright Dan Bibicescu - require, however, the scenic solutions inspired by the ecstatic techniques of Ieronim Thanase, who is already an initiate.

The natural continuation of Dan Bibicescu's theory regarding the show, understood as a dimension in which "so many events are concentrated and so many destinies are fulfilled"<sup>20</sup>, is that of the actor, who "identifies, in turn, with countless human existences, and suffers, if he is a good actor, just as the character he embodies on stage would suffer in life. This means that he experiences, in a single existence, the passions, hopes, torments and revelations of fifty or a hundred existences...". Thus, the actor is a person who, through the roles he plays, can live successive incarnations. "Every time he takes off a costume, the actor frees himself from a certain way of being,"<sup>21</sup> remarks, for example, A. D. Pandele, in *Nineteen Roses*. The vision of multiple incarnations - possible for the actor, by assuming different roles - as well as the theories about the avatars of being and about metempsychosis, of Indian origin - is, once again, "an expression of the desire to extend beyond death, but also a projection of the inner labyrinth"<sup>22</sup>. Then, the actor, in a subtle relationship with the character he portrays, experiences the double, understood by Eliade as a gateway between the visible and the invisible dimension. The actor is himself and, at the same time, the other, he is also someone else - so, always, a figure! - he is on stage and, equally, elsewhere. The theater is his own double, an idea through which Eliade's theatrical thinking intersects with that of Antonin Artaud. The actor is not a craftsman, but instead becomes an officer who participates in a ritual of "exorcism of Destiny". He is also like the director, associated with the shaman, having the opportunity to get out of reality through imagination and escape techniques. The actor, like the director, is, in this case, a bearer of a secret message, which he reveals through the performance.

The director has, in Eliades' prose, a symbolic meaning, being associated with the shaman, the alchemist, the hierophant. He is a mediator of a secret message transmitted through parables, suggestions - that is, a shamanic teaching - and through the theater performance. Considered to be a "master of experimental theater", the director paves the way for secret initiations in which both actors and spectators participate. His role is to create symbolic bridges between existential levels, to safeguard practices / techniques meant to lead to purification, healing, escape and individual freedom.

On the one hand, directing means storytelling, and Eliade insists on the purifying, healing and saving function of the narrative. Although viewed with caution, this fact, known since Ancient times and present in shamanic thaumaturgical practices, has nowadays become a therapeutic method. Stimulating the creative part of our mind (which is usually neglected in favor of the activity of the rational sphere) by the method of confabulation allows access to the

<sup>19</sup> See in this regard the explanations offered by Ion Vartic, in *Mică introducecere la intrarea lui Artaud în „patria” lui Caragiale*, the afterword of the book Antonin Artaud, *Teatrul și dublul său*, Cluj-Napoca, Echinox Publishing House, 1997, pp. 201-202.

<sup>20</sup> Mircea Eliade. *op. cit.*, I, p. 253.

<sup>21</sup> Mircea Eliade. *Nouăsprezece trandafiri* (Nineteen Roses), *op.cit.*, V, p. 49. See also Mircea Eliade, *Încercarea labirintului* (The Trial of the Labyrinth), pp. 103-104.

<sup>22</sup> Doina Ruști. 2005. *Dicționar de simboluri din opera lui Mircea Eliade*. Bucharest: Tritonic Publishing House, p. 65.

abysses of "unknown knowledge" (...) voicing deep inner processes, which in everyday life remain hidden from our consciousness"<sup>23</sup>, thus stimulating the body's self-healing mechanisms, according to Paola Santagostini, a psychosomatic psychotherapist. Ieronim Thanase, the theoretical-director in Eliade's "theatrical" prose, confesses that: "somewhere I made a mistake; somewhere, I don't know where, in a role that I played badly, in an erroneous staging ... But when I discover the cause (...) the healing comes naturally". Later, he will say: "I finally identified the mistake I had made on the evening of August 11, 1964<sup>24</sup> (...) and, just as I had expected, I was healed in that very moment."<sup>25</sup>

To tell a story is to return to the primeval reality; it means rebuilding the world, and a new "making" involves restoring it, healing it. The story is an allegory of the search for the center, as without reaching the center, it is not possible to exit the labyrinth. Saying it and, especially, *playing* it, can bring forth the hidden message, whose decryption process is healing and liberating. So, in this case, the director becomes, in the light of Eliade's notion of performance, a thaumaturg, but also a hierophant, who trains the actors and spectators in a healing and restoring ritual.

On the other hand, directing means building an autonomous, original fictional universe, which has led - since the end of the 19th century - to the legitimation of directing as an independent art. The creation of a parallel world, of a new universe, governed by its own laws, is a desire and an ambition very well illustrated by Eliade's short stories of fantastic nuance, written between 1965 and 1979. In Eliade's view, one of the functions of the performance is to transpose the actors and the spectators into another space-time dimension. In these fantastic prose writings, the writer suggests that a new kind of reality may exist, one conceived as a refuge from dramatic events, but also as a dimension in which revelation and miracles become possible. Although there is no explicit dramatic intentionality, these short stories can all be understood as scripts, in which the narrative events are arranged in a *mise-en-scène*, the performance arising naturally, from the text, as Sorin Alexandrescu notes<sup>26</sup>. The script, whether it is a mythical script<sup>27</sup> or a story (always lived or told by a character<sup>28</sup>) - means a "hidden pattern" whose meaning can be discovered through the performance. The creation of the performance goes, in this case, beyond the aesthetic intention, because the creation of a new

<sup>23</sup> Paola Santagostini. 2008. *Cum să te vindeci cu o poveste*. Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, p. 7.

<sup>24</sup> It should be noted that here and in *Goodbye! ...* (unintendedly or, perhaps, intentionally) Eliade refers to the number 11 and the year 1964. The number 11 has a rich symbolism, from which we note its aspects related to the inner struggle and excess (10 + 1 denoting an exceeding of the state of plenitude) which entails rupture, error, but which can also mark the beginning of a rebirth, namely the beginning of an initiation (Jean Chevalier, Alain Gheerbrant. *Dictionnaire des Symboles*, Paris, Éditions Robert Laffont). According to a numerological practice, if we add the figures of these dates - 11 and 1964 -, we will obtain the integer number 2 or the dyad. This is "the first even and feminine number and appears as the root of the idea of Duality, of opposition between self and non-self (Outer Universe)", as shown by Matyla C. Ghyka. 1998. *Filosofia și mistica numărului*. Bucharest: Univers enciclopedic Publishing House, p. 17). We can speculate here that getting out of the *hybris*, restoring balance and overcoming a dual thinking helped Ieronim Thanase to regenerate and regain the connection with the Center.

<sup>25</sup> Mircea Eliade. *Nouăsprezece trandafiri (Nineteen Roses)*, *op. cit.*, V, pp. 50, 90.

<sup>26</sup> Sorin Alexandrescu. 1969. *Dialectica fantasticului*, studiu introductiv la vol. *La țigănci și alte povestiri*. Bucharest: Editura pentru Literatură Publishing House, pp. XXXIX - XLII, XLVIII.

<sup>27</sup> For example, the orphic myth in the novel *In Dyonisus' Court*, the myth of the sacrifice in the theater play *Ifigenia*, the ascension myth in the play *The Endless Column*, the myth of God's death in *Goodbye!...*, the cosmogonic myth in one of the plays by the playwright Anghel Dumitru Pandele, a character in the short story *Nineteen Roses* etc.

<sup>28</sup> For example, the story of the juggler that Antim Manolache (from *Two Generals' Uniforms*) keeps repeating. Antim is looking for his purpose, and this search makes him ask questions about the meaning of life and art. He has the feeling that the answer he is looking for is enciphered in the juggler's story, which he tells everyone he meets, in the hope of understanding its meaning. Always telling the story, he regenerates the universe, enters another existential cycle, marked, each time by another woman, however without him being aware of it..

universe offers, in fact, the possibility of entering an alternate reality, in which messages camouflaged in immediate reality can be decoded, the meanings of events can be understood or where there can be trials to which man is subjected in the everyday, historical dimension. Just as in Ionescu's plays, starting from a bourgeois setting, in which absolutely innocuous characters evolve, the signs gradually and discretely appear, becoming increasingly evident, showing the abnormality of the dramatic situation which will eventually prevail, in the same way, in Eliade's short stories, the transition from one facet of reality to another is almost imperceptible and, most of the time, occurs through a temporal level rupture, suggested by a small accident suffered by the character in question. The scheme or mechanism of passing / sliding in times and spaces of different quality is a well-known one, being, in fact, the basis of any show in which the spectator is imperceptibly removed from the time and reality of his daily life, during the reality of theatrical illusion. In his capacity as creator of universes, the director is, thus, by the power of his imagination, akin to the magician or the fakir, who, like the Doctor from *Mântuleasa Street*, is able to do "unbelievable things". But even Ieronim Thanase, the reference character of some of Eliade's fantasy prose pieces, who, as we have seen, possesses the qualities of a thaumaturge and a hierophant, is no stranger to his preoccupations with magic. In the short story *Nineteen Roses*, this is revealed, by Eusebiu Damian, who becomes increasingly concerned about the mysterious changes in the life of A.D. Pandele and who says: "I found Ieronim's ideas again, by reading, that very night, the manuscript of the *Introduction*. But as I read, I realized that the argument was much more complex and nuanced. Thanase recalled the magical origins of the arts, described in detail several gymnastic and psychophysiological techniques and showed their role in the history of dramatic performance (...) But, in fact, I was interested in one thing: what will A.D.P. create, inspired by these theories and what will happen to him, the man, obsessed as he seemed to be with the secret of the three days of Christmas, spent in Sibiu, in 1938"<sup>29</sup>. In the short story *Nineteen Roses*, there are many references to self-suggestion, magical rites, sleight-of-hand, trance, and the way Eliade describes both the unique performances of the mysterious Niculina and Laurian Serdaru, and the performances of swimmers trained by the same Serdaru, as well as the theatrical performances at Ieronim Thanase's camp is not much different from the way he portrays the illusionist episodes, created by Suren Bose and Swami Shivananda, which the characters from *Nights at Serampore* go through.

But just as parallel realities can be created, they can also be undone. Many of Eliade's characters experience a significant, traumatic event that causes them amnesia or leads to the annihilation of a performance, regarded as an independent universe. A disappearing performance is, in fact, a disappearing world. "Something intervened. Something insignificant, really. (...) Something intervened and the performance disappeared. It returned to nothingness", says, for example, Ieronim Thanase to Vladimir Iconaru<sup>30</sup>. Or, in *Nineteen Roses*, Anghel Dumitru Pandele, the central character of this short story, states that "until a few days ago I could not have guessed that something had happened then; something that radically changed my life ... (...) I would have been today, I am not afraid to say, a great playwright. But something intervened, something I can't remember, but which played the role of a trauma"<sup>31</sup>.

<sup>29</sup> Mircea Eliade. *Nouăsprezece trandafiri* (Nineteen Roses), *op.cit.* V, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> Mircea Eliade. 1992. *Uniforme de general* (Two Generals' Uniforms), in *Proză fantastică*, IV. Bucharest: Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> Mircea Eliade. 1992. *Nouăsprezece trandafiri* (Nineteen Roses), in *Proză fantastică*, V. Bucharest: Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, pp. 47-48.

One of the constant ideas that pervades the Eliadesque fantasy prose - especially those that bring to the forefront the figure of the artist and especially the "theatrical" ones - is that through the act of human creation, the founding gesture of divine Creation is updated symbolically. We can infer here an echo of the old *Deus Pictor* motif, so present in the European artistic and devotional painting and literature of the 16th and 17th centuries.

As Victor Ieronim Stoichiță points out, in an extensive study dedicated to visionary painting<sup>32</sup>, the motif of the "finger of God" is based on an Old Testament tradition that often symbolizes divine power, but especially the divine ability to work miracles (as in Exodus 8:15). It can also signify the ability to create immutable laws (in Exodus 31:18 and Deuteronomy 9:10 it is said of the tablets of the law that they come from "the finger of God"). Thus, in this explanation, two elements are stated that can be found in Eliade's conception of spectacular creation: power, the ability to work miracles (understood as the ability to generate illusion, but also healing and restoration) and the establishment of immutable laws.

Therefore, both the conception and the annihilation of a performance, understood as an autonomous universe governed by its own laws, is an act of manifestation of the power of a creator who, in this case, is the director. We could say - keeping, of course, the proportion - that, in the same way that, by the "magic" gesture "*fiat*"<sup>33</sup>, God generated the whole cosmos, the demiurg-director can also establish, according to the divine model, with the help of the imagination and through an essential gesture, the performance's microcosmos.

We understand, thus, that the director is the holder and keeper of some mysteries concentrated in a founding myth, which he has the power to update through a ritual (consisting of gestures, incantations, imagination exercises, psychophysical techniques, etc.), which is, after all, nothing other than the performance.

## 5. Conclusions

Mircea Eliade's "book about theater", which we talked about at the beginning of this article, totals a little over thirty pages and consists of a collection of passages from his work - especially from the novel *The Forbidden Forest* and some of his short fantasy stories, which I like to call "theatrical". In this camouflaged book, the ideas are articulated in a cohesive theory that highlights, mainly, the illuminating, restorative, healing and liberating functions of the performance, conceived as the main way to escape from time and history.

There are also ideas in this "book about theater" regarding

- the need to establish a theatrical community, seen as a place of retreat, silence and initiation, as a consecrated place, which allows the restoration of the degraded being and values;
- the need for asceticism, understood in the true sense of the word - that of *askesis*, i.e. exercise practiced diligently, by virtue of a solid knowledge, with the aim to operate a substantial transformation in man and actor / artist;
  - finding the language of the theater in which corporality plays a key role;
  - the establishment of a "polyphonic" dramaturgy, corresponding to the complex nature of the human being;
  - establishing (rediscovering) a theatrical space that allows communion
  - transforming the subconscious into an infinite source of creativity.

<sup>32</sup> Victor Ieronim Stoichiță. 2011. *Experiența vizionară în arta spaniolă a Secolului de Aur*. Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, p. 117.

<sup>33</sup> Victor Ieronim Stoichiță, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

All these ideas will be stated, in various ways, in all the important directorial doctrines of the 20th century that will "overthrow the theater"<sup>34</sup>, as Haig Acterian had remarked. All this Eliadesque "theatrical theory" in potential state, will become "visible" through the new dramaturgy, the new performance practice and the new type of actor training that the "directors of the future" put into the theatrical practice of the 20th century and to which they continue to find new ways of expression in the 21st century.

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<sup>34</sup> Reference that appears in a letter to his wife, Marietta Sadova, dated October 8, 1934, when he was at the Volta Congress, in Rome, in Haig Acterian. 1994. *Dragoste și viață în lumea teatrului*. Bucharest: Arta grafică Publishing House, p. 116.

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