

Eliade, a disciple of Kālidāsa

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Abstract: *A careful reading of Mircea Eliade's short stories reveals that they are true palimpsests. Eliade learned the process of writing "in layers", perhaps from Kālidāsa whose plays - Vikramōrvaśīyam, Mālavikāgnimitram and Śakuntalā - constitute a (trans)implementation of the dramatic art treatise Nāṭyaśāstra. Considered the Fifth Veda, Nāṭyaśāstra is not only a very extensive drama art treatise, but also one of metaphysics, created by the gods in order to save mortals from moral decay and thus contribute to their spiritual restoration. Some of Eliade's fantasy novels conceal a book about theater, but this book, in turn, conceals another, of spirituality. In some letters, Mircea Eliade called his fantastic prose "novella", meaning "novelty", or more precisely "news". We can thus consider that each individual novella renders the (same) spiritual message of "awakening", "enlightenment", "salvation".*

Keywords: *Eliade; Kālidāsa; Nāṭyaśāstra; short stories; indian theater;*

Introduction

Eliade possessed a very vivid theatrical instinct, herein "theatrical", meaning the "instinct of transfiguration" - "that demon or that angel who does not spare us even when we sleep" - about which the director Nikolai Yevrinov spoke. A reading that impressed him, an event or a meeting that marked him, a memory, the beauty of nature - of the "decor" - or of some historical vestiges, engendered in Eliade "dramatizations", sometimes taking elaborate forms. In some letters or in the *Journal*, Eliade often said he "sees" the beginning of a novel, or an episode of a novel.

Despite his erudition in the field of the history of religious beliefs and his extraordinary interest in myth, ritual (understood as a "mysterious scenario") and symbol, whose theatrical potential he was passionate about, Eliade remained, however, anchored in a very "settled", in fact, banal model. (The fact demonstrates, once again, the insufficiently-aware and overwhelming influence that Aristotle - or rather the Aristotelian-Horatian formula that the French theorists of the seventeenth century retrieved, ready masticated, from the Italians - had on theatrical and, at the same time, European literary consciousness.) And perhaps Eliade would not have been Eliade if the many oppositions that had troubled him and tried to harmonize had not been added to this ambivalence in terms of dramaturgy. Insignificant author, when it comes to plays - which still contain suggestive images and interesting ideas - Eliade turns out to be a very

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ingenious playwright in his novels and, in fact, no less in novels, where certain episodes seem to be designed and staged by an experienced theater director or even film director.

Along with the natural disposition towards dramatization and the creative spirit that Eliade demonstrated in all areas of his work, I must refer once more to the influence that Indian thought and life had on him, reminding Rabindranath Tagore and Kālidāsa. One of the things that Eliade seems to have particularly taken from the discussions with Tagore at Shantiniketan is that for a Hindu, reading means "staging", that is, (*trans*)*posing* on the life stage. It means, *achieving, translating into act* the thing that the reader was writing in the book. The Indian reader was really making a "projective" reading, it did not stick to the "letter", for him the word meant *achievement*. In other words, the Indian reader is not merely reading a text or imagining it as a mental "film", but is trying *to live*, in his own life, like heroes, gods and ancestors. As for Kālidāsa, this poet had played the role of a genuine spiritual guide, who had helped Eliade assimilate "not only the Sanskrit language, but also the critical angles of the Indian eye and ear" and to know even more closely the mentality and spirit of this great nation. Both Tagore's projective reading and certain structural features of Kālidāsa's plays would leave their imprint on Eliade's creative thinking, resonances of which were found in the novellas in particular.

Claude-Henri Rocquet was absolutely right when he said that a book about theater is concealed in Eliade's work and that, in his prose, theater is "an intermediate place between the ordinary and the incredible world". Even more - that the theater would be the metaphor of passing through time, the symbol of Eliade's whole work. Indeed, Time and the means of abolishing it were, for Eliade, a constant, if not obsessive, reflection theme, boosting both his scientific research and his literary creation. The study of spiritual beliefs and techniques (yoga, shamanism, alchemy), as well as his interest in theater, respectively in the show, had the same common denominator – transcending the time, liberation.

It is curious that Eliade, so concerned with poetry, rite, myth and show, does not speak explicitly about Indian theater, nor about the famous dramatic art treatise *Nāṭyaśāstra*, nor about any performance he witnessed during his stay in India, except for the evocation of Holi celebration, from Santiniketan, and the drama played on that occasion. Maitreyi Devi instead mentions in his autobiographical novel *Love does not die*, an episode in which, together with his parents and Mircea Eliade, he witnessed a show, performed at Calcutta by the famous dancer Uday Shankar, which would have produced a strong impression on the Indian young man at that time, who "ran out of words, the whole night played the piano and could not sleep at all (...) and then repeated "India! This is India!"². And perhaps it had been, because the intense emotion experienced on that occasion that would resonate, as far back as, in 1979, the year Eliade completed his novella *Nineteen Roses*: "It reminded me of the Salome dance in the play by Oscar Wilde, which I saw when I was a young woman in Berlin. But it also reminded me of the Indian dances, of the performances of Uday Shankar ..." ³ says the central character of A.D. Pandele, under the fascination of the strange performance given by his alleged son, Laurian Serdaru with his fiancée, Niculina.

1. Purpose

² Maitreyi Devi. 1992. *Love does not die*, Bucharest, Romanian Publishing House, p. 122.

³ Mircea Eliade. 1992. "Nineteen Roses", in *Fantastic Prose*, vol. V (*In the Shadow of a Lily*), edition and afterword by Eugen Simion. Bucharest: Romanian Cultural Foundation Publishing House, p. 15.

Although Eliade does not mention anywhere in his work the fact that he knew the *Nāṭyaśāstra* treaty and only makes vague references to Kālidāsa, the models of the dramatic art treaty and the work of the Indian poet can be found in his fantastic novellas. The article is intended to mirror the similarities between Kālidāsa's three plays and Eliade's "theatrical" novels.

2. Research methods

A first stage of study was to browse the fantastic novels of Mircea Eliade, then read the plays of Kālidāsa. In a second phase, it was necessary to undertake studies necessary to understand the aesthetics and specificities of the Indian theater, such as those of the researchers Lyne Bansat-Boudon, Madeleine Biarreau, Charles Malamoud, Sylvain Broquet.

3. Contents

3.1 Eliade's contact with Kālidāsa

Among the few references to Indian theater that Eliade makes, however, is the reference to Kālidāsa. In his talk with Claude-Henri Rocquet, speaking of Indian art, Eliade stated that he had known Bengali music, that he was especially interested in folk art and plastic art - painting, monuments, temples - but that he had also very much liked Kālidāsa, which "was his favorite" and valued his poetic genius. He believed that, despite a difficult Sanskrit characterizing Kālidāsa's style, he was the only poet whose work he could penetrate⁴. This information is detailed in a letter of 18 May 1930, addressed to Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, whom Eliade asked to support his case before the "Honor of the Foreign Exchange Commission" in order to extend the *study scholarship in India*. The letter is, rather, a presentation of his activities and research, among them, the *study "verse with verse", two hours a day, together with Professor Dasgupta* (s.n.), of the works of Kālidāsa. Eliade stressed that "this genius is still unknown as the world in Europe, although it is not in anything inferior to a Horace or Shakespeare." He then went on to say that one of the reasons he studies this Indian poet is that he wants to assimilate "not only the Sanskrit language, but also the critical angles of the Indian eye and ear", for "only then will I be able - Eliade said - to learn how to appreciate and refuse as an Indian. Only in this way will I be able to attack Indian metaphysics in adulthood⁵."

3.2 Kālidāsa, between reality and fiction

The life of Kālidāsa - the "devoted slave of the goddess Kālī" -, the most famous Indian poet, is shrouded in mystery, the dating of the period in which he lived is still a subject of controversy, maintained by the opposition between the two concepts - the Western one, which

⁴ Mircea Eliade. *The labyrinth test. Talks with Claude-Henri Rocquet*, French translation Doina Cornea. Bucharest: Humanitas, p. 56.

⁵ Mircea Eliade. 1999. *Europe, Asia, America... Correspondence*, vol. I. Bucharest : Humanitas, 1999, p. 9.

sees things through the prism of history, and the Indian one, which measures them through the prism of tradition. There is even a theory of the existence of several poets who may have born this name. However, based on a series of material testimonies, some scholars have reached a consensus that this great poet once lived in the 4th-5th century after Christ in Madhya Pradesh, today a state of Central India. Scholar Lyne Bansat-Boudon says that "if that Kālidāsa of fiction, reduced to the status of a linguistic sign, is a character lacking in consistency and reality, if the historical person of the poet skips [a precise dating], his being must be sought in the work"⁶.

The creation of Kālidāsa - in which all of India is recognized - is made up of two great epic poems - *Raghuvamśa* ("The Tribe of Raghu") and *Kumārasaṃbhava* ("The Birth of Kumāra"), an elegiac poem *Meghadūta* ("The Messenger Cloud")⁷ and three plays, of which the best-known, *Śakuntalā*, was translated into English by William Jones in 1789, in the following century, it enjoyed great success in European intellectual and artistic circles and aroused the lively interest of some 20th century directors. When Eliade says that "this genius is not known enough to much of the Europe", he refers, of course, not only to *Śakuntalā*, but to the poet's entire creation made up - according to exegetes - of works which, although they can be seen as autonomous, constitute an ensemble welded by themes, processes, *topoi* and even characters communicating with each other. ("I say "plays" in plural, because although they can be read and represented separately, they only discover their true meaning when they are performed in group"⁸, will the writer A. D. Pandele from Nineteen Roses say.) Probably at the time when he was reading Kālidāsa, Eliade was impressed by this aspect, and now, in perspective, he can be considered a common feature of the works of the two authors.

3.3 Re-memorization through love and theater

The image of a coherent system becomes even more obvious when the three pieces of Kālidāsa are put together: *Mālavikāgnimitram* (*Mālavikā* and *Agnimitram*), *Vikramōrvaśīyam* (*Ūrvaśī* conquered by *value*), *Abhijñānaśākuntalam* (*Śakuntalā* or *Śakuntalā* or *Recognition ŚakuntaleiLOSS*). Lyne Bansat-Boudon, translator of Kālidāsa, states that "thus constituted in a constellation with recurring motifs, in a system organized by a network of correspondences, the three dramatic works of Kālidāsa trace a kind of human comedy crossed, naturally, by gods, but human, beyond all, illustrated in fact the lunar⁹ tribe that culminates with Bharata, son of Duṣyanta and Śakuntalā, the child marked with the signs of universal royalty and destined by its very name - by "Supporter" of the world - to make dharma reign"¹⁰.

⁶ Lyne Bansat-Boudon. 1996. *Introduction*, in Kālidāsa, *Le théâtre de Kālidāsa*, traduit du sanskrit et du prākṛit, présenté et annoté par Lyne Bansat-Boudon. Paris : Éditions Gallimard, p. 29.

⁷*Ibidem*, p. 28.

⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Nineteen Roses*, ed. cit., p. 46.

⁹ In Hindu mythology, gods and heroes belong to the two main dynasties: the solar one - Suryavaśaṃ - and the lunar one - Chandravaśaṃ. The god Chandra is the ancestor of a long lunar dynasty from which some of the characters present in the three plays of Kālidāsa are drawn.

¹⁰Lyne Bansat-Boudon, *op. cit.*, p. 53.

Each of these plays is based on a love story - *Mālavikāgnimitram* illustrating love-desire (*kāma*)¹¹, *Vikramōrvaśīyam*¹², passionate love, and others *Śakuntalā Love- fulfilled*¹³ - yet they are more than just "love plays".

It seems important to me to mention here that in Sanskrit, the word *smara* means, on the other hand, "love", "memory" and "hearing"¹⁴, this synonymy highlighting the different reading levels of these plays, levels that will constitute a scholarly network of meta-comments, which amplifies and creates a special configuration of the fictional space. The theory of transmigration - a mechanism that always concerns the individual soul and never a group of souls - makes the remembrance of the personal past a very important theme. According to this theory, at each birth, the memory of previous lives - though important for the present incarnation - is erased by a gust of wind encompassing the soul. Thus, through a virtuous life, and especially through a very severe ascesis, man can receive the gift of remembrance. Those who practice yoga, an austere life and severe discipline can reach enlightenment - *jātsimara* - that is, to the memory of past lives. Ordinary mortals, who live a moral life and are concerned about their spiritual evolution, can also receive the gift of being "visited by images of the past" or having the "surprise of recognition". Orientalist Charles Malamoud stated that "an emotion experienced in the present moment can grow, becoming more intense and noble, when doubled by the memory of an analogous emotion, felt in the same circumstances"¹⁵.

Remembrance, an important poetic resource, present in both devotional texts and in Hindu poetry and dramaturgy, will be exploited by Kālidāsa, especially in *Śakuntalā*, whose plot is based on the Amnesia-Anamnesis mechanism. Therefore, put, from its beginning, under the sign of aesthetic¹⁶ pleasure - the *race* - synonymous with "rest and abiding in Himself (*ātmaviśrānti*)" , *Śakuntalā* also illustrates "an aesthetic of memory" through the very subtle game between love - subjective memory and universal, absolute love-memory; between "self-memory and memory itself"¹⁷. Starting from the commentary of the *Śakuntalei* made by Rāghavhatza and that of the *Nāṭyaśāstri*, undertaken by the Abhinavagupta, Lyne Bansat-Boudon shows that Dushyanta even though he forgot *Śakuntalā* (who had lost his ring, that is, the sign of recognition), he did not forget Love. From a dramatic point of view, this means that

¹¹*Mālavikāgnimitram* is the story of King Agnimitra who falls in love with a maid, Mālavikā, imprisoned, out of jealousy, by his first wife, Queen Dhāriṇī. After all, it will turn out that Mālavikā - who is also a very talented actress - is the daughter of the king, so worthy of becoming one of the wives of Agnimitra.

¹²*Vikramōrvaśīyam* tells the story of love between King Vikrama and the celestial nymph Urvashi, who must return to heaven with the gods. The play illustrates the attempts the two lovers go through until their love is fulfilled.

¹³*Śakuntalā* is the story of King Dushyanta, who meets the heroine - the adopted daughter of the hero Kanva - in a forest, during a hunting party. The two are married, but when he returns to his palace, Dushyanta forgets his wife because of a curse cast by the wise Durvasa. *Śakuntalā* will lose in a river the ring that his husband had given him as a token of recognition, so he, gripped by amnesia, regards her as a stranger when she appears to him. Sad and discouraged, *Śakuntalā* will give birth to a boy in a Himalayan forest. A fisherman finding the lost ring of *Śakuntalā* in the water takes it to the king who, remembering the one he had not recognized, goes in search of his wife. Retrieving her, he brings her back to court with the child who is predicted to rule the world. The son of the two lovers is none other than Bhārata, the ancestor of the Indian nation.

¹⁴ Charles Malamoud. 2002. "The Counters of Memory in the Brahmanian India". *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales*, no. 5 (57th year), pp. 1151-1163, Editions de l'EHESS.

¹⁵*Ibid*, p. 1153.

¹⁶ In the dialog held in the *Prolog*, with the actress who assists him, the Director refers, several times, to the experience of aesthetic pleasure, specific to the Indian theater - "song conducive to pleasure", "plunging into the delicious water" - and regarding the song intoned by his colleague, he will say: "Very well sung, ma'am! The surrounding audience whose moving thinking was chained to song resembles a painting." (Kālidāsa, *Śakuntalā* , in *Le théâtre de Kālidāsa*, traduit du sanskrit et du prakrit, présenté et annoté par Lyne Bansat-Boudon, Paris, Éditions Gallimard, 1996, p. 98).

¹⁷ Lyne Bansat-Boudon, *op. cit.*, p. 67.

the king will regain his memory, and from an aesthetic point of view, it signifies the purification of memory from the residues of subjectivity and the universalization of feeling, respectively. "To affirm the forgetfulness of the beloved and, symmetrically, the memory of love, is to define the aesthetic experience as an absolutely extraordinary state to which the viewer accedes after getting rid of his ego and the spatial-temporal limits that circumscribe it,"¹⁸ explains Lyne Bansat-Boudon, thus shedding light on a mechanism that is known to us from the Eliade's prose in which we can most often identify him. According to this dynamic, such heroes as - Gavrilescu, A.D. Pandele, Adrian etc. - forgets his girlfriend, but does not forget love. As the characters advance in their anamnestic process, the girlfriend's figure begins to take shape again and reappear from the fog of amnesia.

Lyne Bansat-Boudon describes the process of anamnesis as presented in theatrical aesthetics, considered a sublimation of Indian psychology. Clarifying it can be extremely helpful precisely for understanding what the elite characters are going through, and also the narrative mechanisms that underlie the fantastic novels. Lyne Bansat-Boudon therefore states that 'the eight fundamental feelings (*sthāyibhāva*) which ensure the completeness of mental activity are conceived as being consubstantial to human nature. They are from the beginning present in the heart of man where they remain in the latent state in the form of traces or impregnations (*vāsāna*) that have marked previous existences. Immutable and asleep potential that awaits only an object or occasion to be awakened - that is, the "substantial" or "inflammatory" causes, as the theory calls them. Thus, it recalls "[those] tender passions of previous lives, [which were] stored in the heart". Passions inscribed in the heart of beings, passions sublimated in their turn in the aesthetic experience (...). The instrument of this sublimation is generalization or universalization, the first stage of an aesthetic process that Indian theory analyzes in detail. A generalization that can be defined as a way of memory: if the spectator makes the experience of Love, it means that the ostentatious materiality of the theater - first, the figure of the actor, always perceived as a character and the distance it instills - rips him out of subjectivity. He will remember Love, not a love that would only be his or of someone known to him. Thus, Abhinavagupta describes the process at the end of which the spectator makes the experience of aesthetic emotion, that is, the way in which [a feeling] - *sthāyibhāva* -, [for example] fear (*bhaya*) - will be purged to become that *rasa* which corresponds to it - that is, the Terrible (*bhayānaka*): "Fear itself - a fear which no longer delimits either time or space, consequently, different from the [ordinary] experiences of fear, as for example: 'I am afraid' or 'My enemy, my friend, someone who I don't care about is afraid', which we admit as an obstacle-free perception because it gets directly into the heart — is the *rasa* of the Dancing Terrible, as though it were right under the eyes of [the spectator]."¹⁹

The detailed description given here by the French researcher makes it possible to the characters from Eliade's novels to understand those states of fear - sometimes quite difficult to be justified. I refer herein, for instance, to that fear that A. D. Pandele feels when reconstructing the scene lived in 1938, that is, when the passions sublimated, sleeping in his heart risked being awakened, provoking him to remind him not only of the love for Eurydice, but of the Universal, Plenary Love. His anamnesis is "orchestrated" by the actors Niculina and Laurian - perceived as multiple characters due to the numerous disguises they go through and which go as far as changing the color of their hair or ages.

¹⁸*Ibidem*, p. 66.

¹⁹*Ibidem*, p. 67.

A very interesting aspect that the French researcher points out is that not only the characters of the play are likely to go through amnesic episodes, this can happen even to the stage Director. For example, at the end of the *Śakuntalei* prologue, which was suddenly struck by amnesia, he consults the actress who was assisting him regarding the play to be performed. He thus seems to admit that he no longer knows where he is or what he has to do. Since the play has even begun, such a return has the purpose of canceling time and reality. The game whereby he suggests that he forgot the stage protocol, that he forgot his status as an actor and stage Director wants to show that even himself succumbed to the enchantment and that he is merely a spectator: "a spectator among all the others, or rather the spectator par excellence, incarnating with anticipation, the emotion that the audience will have at the end of the performance: a state of rapture, in the true sense of the word, that makes his spirit roam as the antelope make the hero run the very moment he is making his entrance into the scene at that moment"²⁰. The director says to the actress, "The enticing charm of your song has taken me away, like the gazelle that carries King Dushyanta into his madding fled."²¹.

3.4 A mythical theater with and about actors

The sources from which Kālidāsa is inspired are the epic—as in the case of the *Śakuntala*, in which he resumes an episode from the first book of the *Mahābhārata*—and, to a greater extent, from Vedic sources, as is the case with the plays *Vikramōrvaśīyam* and *Mālavikāgnimitram* respectively.

Lyne Bansat-Boudon shows that the reshuffled episode, which illustrates the love story between Dushyanta and Śakuntalā, becomes a pretext for celebrating both love and - through the birth of their son, who will reign over the whole universe - social and cosmic order (*dharma*). The story of the two lovers points towards a "golden age" - *kṛtayuga* - apparently detached from the action and atmosphere of the Great War that *Mahābhārata* relates. However, the episode forms the basis of the epic, namely showing that from the love of Śakuntala and Dushyanta will be born Bhārata, ancestor of the Kaurava and Pāṇḍavaḥ lineage, brothers and rival cousins, and therefore the very title - the *Mahābhārata* - is justified, which translates into *the Great War of the Bhārata lineage*. In this way, faithful to the teachings of the *Nāṭyaśāstra* treaty and the recommendations of Brahmā, the creator of the theater, Kālidāsa finds its inspiration in myth - *itihāsa* - rather than in the epic itself, understanding here by "myth" the "generating formula of narratives, images and rituals"²². In other words - and as Eliade would say - the poet creates an extension of the myth. So does Kālidāsa in the case of the play *Vikramōrvaśīyam* in which the love story between Urvaśī and Purūravas is recounted, first staged in the dialogued anthem *Ṛigveda* and which we then meet in the final chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, as founders of the theater descended on earth for the benefit of mortals. At the same time, in *Mālavikāgnimitram*, the love between Mālavikā and Agnimitra has a mythical correspondent, in that of the heroes Śarmisthā and Yayāti.

²⁰*Ibidem*, p. 65.

²¹ Kālidāsa. 1996. "Śakuntalā". In *Le théâtre de Kālidāsā*, traduit du sanskrit et du prākṛit, présenté et annoté par Lyne Bansat-Boudon. Paris : Éditions Gallimard, p. 99.

²² John Scheid, Jesper Svenbro. 1994. *Le métier de Zeus*, Paris, la Découverte, p. 11, apud Lyne Bansat-Boudon, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

In addition to their mythic size, these three plays share a number of characters, places, and dramatic processes. First of all, Kālidāsa evokes innumerable times - in the blessings of the prologue (*nāndī*) or even in the text of the play - Indra, the initiator of the theater²³ and Śiva, the "prince of dance". Along with the kings Purūravas (in *Vikramōrvaśīyam*) and Dushyanta (*Śakuntalā*), who belong to the same lunar dynasty, the common characters of these plays include the nymph Menakā, the celestial mother of Śakuntala - just evoked in the drama that has her daughter as main heroine, but present in *Vikramōrvaśīyam* - and the messenger of the gods, Nārada, - which we know from Eliade's *rêve éveillé*. In *Śakuntalā*, Nārada appears at the end of the sixth act, only evoked by Dushyanta, as messenger; instead, in *Vikramōrvaśīyam* he appears at the moment of the denouement, at the end of the fifth act, when he consecrates the union of Purūravas and Urvaśi, and consecrates their son Āyus as crown prince.

As for the places, Hermakūta, the "golden peaks" mountain in the Kimpurusa region (which had been flown over, in the end of the *Śakuntala*, by King Dushyanta, in the celestial chariot led by Mātali, Indra's coachman) reappears at the beginning of the play *Vikramōrvaśīyam*. Here he is given as a meeting point between Apsaras, the celestial nymphs, and Purūravas, the king gone in search of Urvaśi, kidnapped by the demon Keśin.

Other correspondences are also established through the dynamics of some scenes. In *Śakuntalā*, two episodes in which we see Dushyanta driving in his chariot respond, as if in the mirror. The first takes place at the very beginning of the play, when the king, hunting, chases a gazelle, and the second, finally placed, captures Dushyanta's race among the clouds, guided by Indra's coachman to meet his wife in heaven. Purūravas' race, set in search of Urvaśi, from the beginning of the play *Vikramōrvaśīyam* creates a sense of continuity with the scenes from the previous play. These cavalcades, as well as go-back to the celestial nymphs - Apsaras - evoke the picture of a huge baroque scene in which the tumultuous action unfolds both horizontally and vertically, and the human and divine characters fly driven by the invisible leverage of the scenic mechanisms.

In the mirror there are also placed two kissing scenes - the one between Śakuntalā and Dushyanta, from the end of the third act of the *Śakuntalei*, and the one between Mālavikā and Agnimitra, from the fourth act of the play *Mālavikāgnimitram*.

Lyne Bansat-Boudon states that the play *Chalita*²⁴, which Mālavikā performs, could be an indirect echo of the history between Purūravas and Urvaśi, not as it appears in *Vikramōrvaśīyam*, but in the *Brhatkathā* version, in which the two are condemned to be separated. The play *en abyme*, performed by Mālavikā, would thus correspond to the action in *Vikramōrvaśīyam*. Another observation the French researcher makes is that the play *Vikramōrvaśīyam* can be read at two levels - the love story of the main characters, also constituting the myth of the origin of the theater for people, as it is related in *Nāṭyaśāstra*.

Thus, "Kālidāsa's theater goes beyond the general definition of theater as "poetry made to be seen and heard" : perhaps a unique feature in the tradition of Indian theater, allowing it to be deciphered at a second level, as a poetic that can be seen and heard"²⁵.

Throughout the three plays, Kālidāsa will refer several times to this treaty whose recommendations follow them faithfully, as can be seen at careful reading. For example, in the

²³ See *Nāṭyaśāstra*, ed. cit., p. 42.

²⁴ Lyne Bansat-Boudon translates this title with "Le sincère artifice", the equivalent of "The Sincere Stratagem".

²⁵ Lyne Bansat-Boudon, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

second act of the play *Vikramōrvaśīyam* are explicitly evoked the eight "savors" or *rasa* - an essential concept of Indian theater - which were entrusted to Urvaśī by Bharata, the mythical author of the theater and master of this celestial nymph. The third act begins with a dialogue between two disciples of Bharata, Gālava and Pallava, who comment on Urvaśī's performance of *Lakshmi's Engagement*. Pallava particularly appreciates the way Urvaśī was "absorbed" into every single "flavor", but notes that she misspelled the text, uttering instead the name of the character Purushottama that of her lover, Purūravas, which will attract Bharata's curse and her banishment from Heaven. Even though Bharata remains an unseen protagonist in this play, he plays a very important role, being the one who, at the end of the second act, separates the two lovers, and then, through the nymph's exile, reunites them at the beginning of the third act.

References to the *Nāṭyaśāstra* treaty explicitly appear on several occasions in the *Mālavikāgnimitram*. From the beginning of the first act we learn that Mālavikā, in the service of Queen Dhārini, is an actress. And another very good one, as its master, Gaadāsaṇ, will say: "it is intelligent and exceptionally endowed. That passion wherewith she learns the game from me / This child - as it seems to me - /As she progresses, she teaches it to me, in turn"²⁶.

In the first act it is also announced the dispute between the two masters of dramatic art, Gaadāsaṇ and Haradatta, who are to present their demonstration to the Court, the arbitrator and judge being called Kauśikī, an ascete and confidant of Queen Dhārini, considered a very erudite connoisseur of theatrical art. She will say that since "the essence of this Theater Treaty is at stake"²⁷, any plea is useless. In the second act we will witness the show offered by Mālavikā. Lyne Bansat-Boudon points out that in both *Vikramōrvaśīyam* and *Mālavikāgnimitram* repetitions and performances, respectively, become a driving force of amorous²⁸ intrigue. It is a mechanism that we will find, for example, in a few hundred years, in the play *Les acteurs de bonne foi*, a real theatrical poetic in which, with an amazing dramatic virtuosity, Marivaux puts into action the problem of the fragility of the border between presence and appearance, between reality and fiction, between actor and spectator, reflecting on the theater. The plays of Kālidāsa in which the actors speak about their own craft, in which the masters of the theater debate about the principles of interpretation and theatrical mechanisms, and in which the performances - *en abyme* - become the occasion of some scholarly aesthetic and metaphysical discussions (and, at the same time, the "wheels" in the dramatic gear), echoed over time in the plays of Shakespeare, Molière, Goldoni or Pirandello.

In the fourth act of *Vikramōrvaśīyam*, even after the miraculous appearance of Nārada is celebrated by a lightning bolt sweeping through the cloudless sky, King Purūravas gives a description of the show through a "vegetal metaphor" - a concentrated definition of theater as a total art in which the actor-dancer's play, set in motion by song and music, is suggested by the movements of the "tree of desires"²⁹.

So, even at a first reading, it is very clear that beyond the love story, these plays make up a theatrical poetics - a theatrical treatise "hidden" in the dramatic work of Kālidāsa. And perhaps "implicitly" would be a more appropriate term than "concealed", since in Kālidāsa the references to theatrical practice and the *Nāṭyaśāstra* treaty are, in fact, obvious, the aesthetic considerations

²⁶ Kālidāsa, 1996. "Mālavikāgnimitram". In *Le théâtre de Kālidāsa*, traduit du sanskrit et du prākṛit, présenté et annoté par Lyne Bansat-Boudon. Paris : Éditions Gallimard, p. 316.

²⁷ *Ibidem* p. 332.

²⁸ Lyne Bansat-Boudon, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 60.

being organically correlated with those of Hindu amorous philosophy. Lyne Bansat-Boudon is of the opinion that "Kālidāsa's first work [*Mālavikāgnimitram*] from the beginning offers one of the keys to his theater. If this is obviously a theater of love, it can also be taken as a theatrical poetics in which it would represent the myth of origin, then practice, and as it is seen, at the end, the aesthetic emotion and its complex theoretization. A poetic, therefore, analogous to that enunciated by the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, but this time, put into action in the dramatic text and in the game that it arouses"³⁰.

Just as the plays of Kālidāsa offer us a stage into action- an "accomplishment", as Tagore would say - of the dramatic art treatise *Nāṭyaśāstra*, Eliade's "theatrical" novels can be read and interpreted in light of the three plays - *Mālavikāgnimitram*, *Vikramōrvaśīyam* and Śakuntalā's works. Thus, it becomes even more obvious that the "theatrical" prose, along with the novel *The Forbidden forest*, can rightly be considered a "false dramatic art treatise", Eliade finding a model for its build-up and, at the same time, for its camouflage, in the work of Kālidāsa, who, during his Indian apprenticeship, had devoted many hours of study.

For example, an echo of the Kālidāsa plays can be found in the novel *Nineteen Roses*, where the writer A. D. Pandele describes the new way in which he will conceive his dramatic creation, explaining to his secretary that "the plays I am now writing are inspired by this theory of dramatic genre, a theory that you will know by reading *Introduction*. They say "plays", in the plural, because although they can be read and represented separately, they only discover their true meaning when they are played in groups. For now, in the first volume there will be four or five plays, but the series will be continued in the next volumes. If I were young, I could have written 60-70 songs and they would all make up *one single work altogether*"³¹

Then the characters of the plays of Kālidāsa themselves share a number of traits with those of the novels of Eliade. The presence of actors and artists - a common feature of the plays of the Indian poet and some fantastic Elite novellas - is to be noted first. Urvaśī and Mālavikā are actresses. At the end of the play *Mālavikāgnimitram*, Mādhavasena, who had fought a battle with the help of King Agnimitra, will give him high-priced jewelry, battle carts, a band of servants and some accomplished artists, the latter gift highlighting the special value that the Hindus gave to the theater.

In *Śakuntalā*, at the end of the list of characters, an interesting indication appears. There are mentioned here "various voices behind the scenes (hermits, bards, forest divinities, oracles, etc.)"³², which can allude to the noises of the show held behind the curtain, in *Farewell!...* Moreover, in all three plays there are numerous vocal interventions coming from behind the scenes, namely the curtain being created like an effect of widening the playing space, the artificial functioning also as a very effective technical solution for solving the "invisibility" of some characters, especially when they are of celestial origin.

On the one hand, there are characters whose destiny is closely linked to the theater, such as King Agnimitra - a great lover of theater, hermit Kauśikī - a fine connoisseur of this art and Purūravas - aesthetic and, by force of circumstances, founder of the theater on earth, a fact mentioned in the last chapter of the *Nāṭyaśāstre* where the performances given in the gynecum of his palace are evoked.

³⁰*Ibid*, p. 62.

³¹ Mircea Eliade, *Nineteen Roses*, ed. cit., p. 46.

³² Kālidāsa, *Śakuntalā*, ed. cit., p. 96.

On the other hand, King Dushyanta, a very fine aesthetic, paints. The scene in which - still separated from Śakuntalā - asks to review the portrait of it, which he himself had painted, highlights - at least, in my view - surprising similarities with the novel *The forbidden forest*, in which Stefan Viziru talks to Biriş and Ileana about his painting, but also with other prose. Here's the scene. She begins with the arrival of the maid who brings the painting to Dushyanta. As the Jester says - through the eyes of whom we will also look at this painting - "the perfection of forms makes the presence of feeling even more charming. Only a little lack of my gaze should not stumble in the depths of the relief"³³. (The observation mirrors, once again, the Indian artists' preoccupation to render, represent, transcribe the experience of feeling, but also the ability to instantaneously immerse themselves in an image, in a "parallel world" of Hindus.) The portrait seems so real that the nymph Sānumatī, who assists, invisible, in the discussion between the king and Jester, exclaims: "What an admirable talent! I really see my friend before me!"³⁴. The jester, seeing three painted women, asks the king which of them was Śakuntalā. Duşyanta responds, quite irritated, that only the look of a fool could not tell it from the others and rushes to urge him: "Guess !" "Guess! Guess what! Which one is the gypsy?"³⁵ I thought I heard one of the girls dancing around Gavrilăscu.)

After all, the Jester, as he describes the content of the painting, recognizes the king's lover. Duşyanta praises the perspicacity of the Jester, but puts him to another attempt - that of detecting a sign that betrays his passion for Śakuntalā. The Jester's silence in the mix makes Dushyanta reveal his secret himself. On the edge of the drawing, invisible to an unwanted eye, there is a stain (not a stain!) but left by the king's sweaty finger. And a little later, a drop of the same sweat of his hand turned — in contact with the pigment — into a tear that can be seen on the face of his girlfriend. In other words, the fire of the king's passion appears sublimated in tears and sweat. Water and fire. ("These spots are discolored by the sun and deepened by moisture, discolored by the sun and damp.... If you *knew*, if you knew *how* to look at them, how to look at *these stains*... Here you have the exemplary model of the union of oppositions... Water and Fire...is the same light hidden everywhere in all things, no matter how ugly, in any stain of dampness on a wall, in any splash of mud..."³⁶.)

Then, Dushanta tells his servant, "Caturikā, this scene, an object of my delight, is not yet half-painted. Go and get my paintbrush." The Invisible Witness of the Discussion, Nympha Sānumatī, intuitively that Dushyanta would like to paint all the spots walked by Śakuntalā, which the king immediately confirms, beginning to unravel the scenes he intended to paint to the Jester. In an *aparté/soliloqui*, the Jester says: "I foresee that he will fill the picture with a lot of hermits with their beards hanging". Then Dushyanta, looking at her painting, says that she intends to change the ornaments of the beautiful Śakuntalā with more delicate ones. The multitude of characters that the melancholic king is preparing to paint, his determination to modify the appearance of his beloved, decorating it otherwise, suggests that this painting is a real *work in progress*, painted in successive layers, like Stefan Viziru's painting in the Sambô room. ("There is only one canvas... There is only one and the same canvas for all the paintings. That's why I

³³ Kālidāsa, *Śakuntalā*, ed. cit., p. 192.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ Mircea Eliade, *La țigănci*, ed. cit., p.

³⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Incognito at Buchenwald*, ed. cit., p. 71.

said I had to explain... the last painting, I painted it on the same canvas that I painted all the other paintings"³⁷.)

The jester, who contemplates the painting together with Dushyanta, observes how Śakuntalā, gracefully hiding his face, though immobile, seems to tremble. He realizes that the cause of the beautiful Śakuntalā's anxiety is a bee that circles her, taking her as a flower. "Let this shameless character be stopped!" the concerned king shouts, noting the bee near his beloved. The jester, entering the game of Dushyanta, talks to the bee, which he tries to steer away from Śakuntalā, but finds that the small flying bee "belongs to a stubborn race". The king, increasingly angry, threatens the bee with her capture and imprisonment in a lotus. Fearfully pretending to hear the terrible sentence, the Jester then suddenly returns and, in the *soliloqui*, laughs, exclaiming, "But he is insane! And I, in turn, became crazy, sitting next to him." Wanting to end the king's troubles, he cries to him, "It's just a painting!". "How! A picture?" the king said, as if suddenly awakened from the trance in which he had been floating for a few moments, "tasting, with the soul pervaded by it/Happiness to see it as if it had been offered to his eyes". Bursting into tears, Dushyanta reproaches the Jester for the cruelty of having given her memory, thus making her lover turn again into a portrait.

This last part of the scene illustrates, as cannot be better, the way in which fiction, namely the work of art, reactivates the feelings ("this is the purpose of all arts to reveal the universal dimension, that is, the spiritual significance of any object, or gesture, or chance, no matter how banal or ordinary"³⁸), as well as the mechanism - so typical and easy to reach of the Hindus- of immersing in an image (or text), realization or dramatization, in the soul and in life, of those seen (or read) - as Tagore says.

Conclusions

A theater in the prolongation of mythology, a theater that causes anamnesis by the force of feelings, a theater populated by actors and artists - which together with recurring places and images make up a network of correspondences - a theater that is meditated and achieved in the soul of the reader and spectator, a dramaturgy that refers to an ancient theatrical art treaty put into action through the show and reveals, in its folds, another metaphysical treatise are, I think, enough considerations that allow us to infer that Eliade had met *Nāṭyaści āstra* through the work of the Indian poet. Filtered through Kālidāsa's complex and subtle interpretations, this theatrical metaphysical guide probably left a strong mark on Eliade, nourishing his imagination, and becoming for him a theme of meditation that over the years *he realized* in his work. It is not, therefore, by chance that in his prose we will find echoes of the "new *Green*", which can be considered, rightly, an "introduction to a dramatic art and technique suitable to the times" experienced by the gods who invented it in order to save mankind. I mean, first of all, a spiritual guide, camouflaged under the metaphor of theater, a guide upon which it is appropriate to ponder on.

³⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Night of Sânziene*, vol. I., ed. cit., p. 130.

³⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Nineteen Roses*, ed. cit., p. 53.

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