

Mircea Eliade's Journalistic Writings

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Opting for Culture

By

Mihaela-Diana Lupșan

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M. D. Lupșan

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

The title of this book may meet with resistance from those who associate culture with *ex cathedra* lectures, treatises, exegeses or at least manifestos through which phases of the history of ideas have been initiated. Mircea Eliade was, however, an intellectual “traitor”, as Julien Benda might have defined him, who left the ivory tower to become involved in the destiny of his people as a representative of a generation of reforming thinkers: distinguished intellectuals, accomplished professionals, but those who sensed in the emerging media discourse a direct way of communicating with various and numerous social categories.

Unlike other writers who used to capture the events, typologies and customs of the society in which they lived, Mircea Eliade takes his reader on an ancestral journey so that the return to the past can produce the need to liberate the being from the empire of history, following the discovery of the ultimate meaning of existence. Given that Eliade succeeds in conveying through his work answers to a wide range of problems of a reality in perpetual change – something which he tackles with a rare spontaneity and through various themes – I believe that it’s topical to approach a subject that has at its center a personality whose systems of thought transcend temporality and come to the aid of the contemporary in search of the profound meaning of individual existence.

The theme of this book is relevant in the context of the literary evolution of the 20th century, but I would point out that it borders on another field of overwhelming importance, culturology, thus giving the book a multidisciplinary character. The latter aims to challenge the contemporary philologist, the one who, reading Mircea Eliade, has not paid attention to the impact that this outstanding personality of the 20th century literary landscape had in the cultural promotion of Romania. At the same time, the work is addressed to any reader who, for various reasons, has not come into contact with Mircea Eliade’s work or whose readings do not form a whole on the basis of which he can attribute to the writer the true merits he had in changing the course of the evolution of the nation’s culture. Last but not least, the book is addressed to those who have the goodwill to look into his immeasurable work in order to complete this study with other assumptions or personal interpretations. This book is the fruit of numerous readings; it was begun during my master’s program and continued out of a passion for

a writer who revealed different facets of his personality, constantly surprising and fascinating me at the same time.

The hypothesis of this book is that the individual finds his identity and place in the world as a result of his actions, which are based on intrinsic values and extrinsic values resulting from the sum of the individual's unmediated experiences. Meaningful actions will provoke true hierophanies that postulate, as Eliade argues, the camouflage of the sacred in the profane. The human being aspires to contact with the sacred, a contact that will make it possible for man to emerge from the incidence of history by penetrating universality, where he relates his own system of values to the great system of values promoted through novel productions. Man emerges from history once he finds his freedom, and this is identified with the dignity with which he propels his creative possibilities into universality. In a universal code, it's possible to achieve dialogue between the cultures and civilisations of the world, not for the sake of uniformity, but for the acceptance of particular forms of artistic expression.

After a long period of research, I have found that studies devoted to Mircea Eliade tend to highlight either his role as a **writer** or as a **historian of religions**. Despite the fact that much has been written about Eliade and his creations, as Mircea Handoca¹ has also observed, Eliade is a protean personality. There is thus good reason and ample ground for the reading enthusiast to find a new side to the scholar, particularly since his vast activities in the fields of culture include history of religions, orientalism, ethnology, sociology, and folklore, which is not to mention his strictly literary output, although we all know that he was a novelist of the first rank, who also made a creative contribution to drama. In this book, I will focus on his **essays**, **memoirs** and **journalism**, and the other literary works will be discussed tangentially, only if they help us to define the dimension of the scholar's personality. As I will show throughout the book, essay writing and journalism are closely related, since some of the articles published in the journals of the time were collected in volumes and published as collections. On the other hand, the memoirs will reveal the biographical and cultural itinerary of an author who left his mark on several metropolises. Although during the fifth decade of the last century Mircea Eliade was invited to give

¹ Numerous exegetes have written studies on Mircea Eliade's wide-ranging creation, but significant information that has served me in my scholarly endeavour since my student days has been provided by Mircea Handoca – through his writings but particularly through his *Files*, the volumes that summarize the vast correspondence between Mircea Eliade and various cultural personalities, and the *Bibliography*, which has been a veritable starting point for outlining the effervescent personality of the young Eliade, the leader of the young generation.

lectures at the universities of Amsterdam, Padua, Strasbourg, Munich, Freiburg, Lund, Uppsala, etc., I will mention, in chronological order, only the cities where he was intensely active, either as a cultural attaché, writer, or historian of religion: Bucharest (his birthplace), Rome (1927), Calcutta (1928), London (1940), Lisbon (1941), Paris (1945), and Chicago (1957).

The main objective of this book is to highlight a constant concern of the writer: the defense, shaping and promotion of the culture, civilization and spirituality specific to our nation, in order to launch them into universality. Why is this cultural personality topical? Because, as Eliade confessed, he wrote literature in order to harmonize his actions with his soul, and scientific prose in order to communicate “ceea ce mi se pare a fi util, și chiar important, pentru o mai corectă înțelegere a condiției umane”², thus being so close to his readers and answering questions that we are now asking. From the thinker's point of view, a writer's spiritual fulfilment is achieved only after exhausting the creative possibilities whose purpose is to mark a socio-cultural event in the evolution of literary history.

I believe there is a moral duty to refer to the family of writers to which the Romanian thinker belongs, following the line of Dimitrie Cantemir, B. P. Hasdeu and Nicolae Iorga, especially as I have noticed that immediately after the writer's death, countries such as France and America dedicated more homage studies to him than his country of origin. In June 1987, for instance, the Georges Pompidou Centre in Paris organized a *Homage to Mircea Eliade* with a strong resonance in the cultural world, and a few days later, in America, the International Congress of the Romanian-American Academy was organized, a large-scale event involving illustrious cultural personalities from the Sorbonne to pay tribute to the internationally recognized writer. In fact, for his contributions to local culture, he was appointed a post-mortem member of the prestigious Romanian Academy³ on 3 July 1990. Furthermore, I believe that Eliade's work has had, due to specific historical events, a greater impact abroad [for example, *Le Mythe de l'éternel retour* (*The Myth of the Eternal Return*) was published in France from 1949, and in Romania only since 1991]. The timings of the publication of some important volumes of the author were also limited by a delay in

² “[W]hat seems to me to be useful, and even important, for a more correct understanding of the human condition.” (Handoca, M., 1998, p. 8.)

³ On 8 July 1970 he was made a Corresponding Member of the British Academy.

translation. Cezar Baltag,⁴ Maria Ivănescu, Cezar Ivănescu,⁵ Mariana Noica⁶ and Rodica Gabriela Chira⁷ made essential contributions to counteract this.

In addition to the above-mentioned aspects, it can be noted that three decades after the writer's death, both his work and his personality are still being presented to the contemporary reader in a fragmentary way, because of the countless articles published in the journals of the time that lie in libraries. The present book aims to bring to light a large number of these articles, which highlight Mircea Eliade's struggle to spread culture internationally. In this journey, I have focused on his biography, in order to have a frame – not ornamental, but functional – of the passion with which Eliade fought for culture, both at home and in exile. I have taken a close look at his preoccupations and activity in order to relate them to the dialogue he had with society in the days in which he lived. As regards the sources of documentation, I would like to point out that in addition to a considerable number of articles that are part of his oeuvre, I have drawn on a series of studies on Mircea Eliade, as well as on his correspondence, in order to gain a better knowledge and understanding of the purpose of each activity undertaken by the researcher; of the process of literary, scientific or journalistic creation; and of the artist's attitude towards the political and socio-cultural context.

The research work involved rigorous documentation, all the more so as the writer has been the subject of countless studies, so that in this book I have drawn on the complex research of my predecessors and the information contained in a number of critical and historical volumes or theoretical works. The bibliographical sources accumulated over several years of intensive research are intended to provide the reader with either support for future research, leaving open the possibility of completing the present book, or a conclusive opinion on the process of reception of the message promoted by Mircea Eliade (rather than that of his work itself).

⁴ Thanks to Cezar Baltag's translation, the *History of Religious Beliefs and Ideas* was printed by the Scientific and Encyclopaedic Publishing House. Volume I appeared in September 1981, Volume II in December 1986 and Volume III in the summer of 1988.

⁵ The Ivănescus translated from French *From Zalmoxis to Genghis-Khan*, and the volume *Essays*, which contains *The Myth of the Eternal Return* and *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*. The latter has a foreword by Cezar Ivănescu.

⁶ Thanks to Mariana Noica, in December 1992 the *Treatise on the History of Religions* was translated from French.

⁷ The translation from French of *The Sacred and the Profane* is thanks to Rodica Chira.

The research methods applied in this book are: documentation, analysis and comparison. They have made it possible to systematize and structure all the information, following a logical plan, which has undergone slight modifications from the time of its proposal to the present.

INTRODUCTION

This book started from some ideas inspired both by my own readings of Mircea Eliade's journalistic writings, and by the acquaintance with modes of perception in the work left behind by the great historian of religions, which are often controversial or inviting to in-depth research. Journalism has lately enjoyed a rise in publicity as well as a more earnest interest from literary historians and theoreticians, being the subject of exegesis in Romania and abroad, both in the form of critical commentary, as in the case of Mihai Posada's book, *Mircea Eliade's Journalistic Writings* (Posada M., 2006), or following the protocols of academic discourse, such as the recent doctoral thesis defended by Ana-Maria Fomin at the "Stefan cel Mare" University of Suceava (2013), worked out under the supervision of Professor Mircea A. Diaconu, and whose title, *Mircea Eliade – the Paradigm of a New Humanism* (Fomin, A. M., 2013), echoes that of a previous book by Professor David Cave released by the University of Chicago Press (*Mircea Eliade's Vision for a New Humanism*). Cave's humanistic frame for the understanding of Mircea Eliade's work is, however, only one of the hypostases assumed by the celebrated historian of religions in the bulk of the exegetic writing that came into print in the West around the turn to the new millennium. At the other pole, there is a frequent association of Mircea Eliade and Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysics; Eliade is included among the precursors of postmodernist complaints about everything being de-centered, profane, and shallow in an age of surfaces (Rennie 2001: XV). Having stated plainly that the sacred does not mean believing in God and spirits (*Ordeal by Labyrinth*), searching for patterns in comparative religion rather than for hierophanies and messages from a world beyond, Mircea Eliade encourages Bryan Rennie, the editor of a collection of essays published in 2001 (*Changing Religious Worlds: The Meaning and End of Mircea Eliade*, State University of New York Press) to see in his critique of the times the need for the order of values created by myths (cultural narratives); for ritual, instead of modern randomness and fragmentarianism, and for sacred space – rather than one where there is no *nomos*, no law, no judgement (*ibidem*).

In my opinion, Mircea Eliade best embodied the spirit of his time. Our historicist approach to his discourses and discursive negotiations – proceeding through documentation, contextualized interpretation and

comparison – places him among the canonical modernists of the last century. No culture evolves in isolation, which means that the exegetical vision should also open itself up to the international horizon within which the personalities of inter-war Romania made a name for themselves. Salvation through the contribution of a reforming generation was also the belief of the Bloomsbury Circle centered around the Woolf residence. E. M. Forster's proposal to create an international intellectual elite became a reality through the creation of the PEN Club. These words written by Forster in the essay "Two Cheers for Democracy" could just have likely been Eliade's: "Cred în aristocrație, totuși; (...) nu o aristocrație a rangului și influenței, ci o aristocrație a celor sensibili, angajați și îndrăzneți"⁸ (Forster, 1951, p. 69).

I would rather, though, compare the journalist Eliade with the ideologist of the liberation movement in India, Mahatma Gandhi, who understood the role of the press in the reformation of society, set up periodicals, campaigned for the Dalit caste known as 'the Untouchables,' and wrote articles that are the subject of many books on humanistic philosophy. Also, I will analyze Mircea Eliade, therefore, in the context of the modernist movement characterized by a nationalist ethos – one which accompanied the international policy that led to the collapse of dynasties, of empires, and to the setting up of nation-states – as well as through concepts such as the collective unconscious; the turn to the imaginary of primitive man; of indigenous motifs in art (see Gauguin, Brancusi, Picasso); and of renewal, a breaking with the past, a search for the religious spirituality of the beginnings of mankind which could have bestowed fresh energy on a decaying Western civilization (Oswald Spengler).

Not only in the historical context but also in terms of the genres practiced was Mircea Eliade synchronous with the developments in the great centers of culture. The first half of the last century was characterized by the emergence of the consumer society, the assertion of masses on the map of power relations, and, especially, the emergence of new channels for the distribution of cultural works. Speaking of the media (mass media), anthropologist Marshall McLuhan alleged that they had acquired such an important role that they had become "an extension of man" (McLuhan, 1964).

Shelley Fisher Fishkin, for example, demonstrates in *From Fact to Fiction: Journalism and Imaginative Writing in America* (Fishkin, 1985) that all the great writers of the period (Dos Passos, Hemingway, Faulkner

⁸ "I believe in aristocracy, though — if that is the right word, and if a democrat may use it. Not an aristocracy of power, based upon rank and influence, but an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky."

...) were journalists and that the language of the media was reproduced or imitated in their works. Unlike the media of the digital age, when the images transmitted by television and publications can be simulacra, the press of modernism, the photography and the news transmitted held a certain guarantee of authenticity. The adoption of this medium by first-rate writers was not without consequences, however, with journalistic discourse becoming more complex, more expressive.

In Mircea Eliade's case, it is very difficult to set apart the writings that fall exclusively into the journalistic genre, because, according to contemporary practice in the early twentieth century, the author himself published the same writings as newspaper articles, but also as memoirs or journal entries. It may be said that his writings that went into the media come closer to philosophemes or meditations. They are essays in the generic tradition starting with Montaigne and Francis Bacon, continuing with the Victorians – who gave up on the stiff philosophical treatise in favor of the fragmentary and free, imaginative character of the essay – and ending with the philosophemes of Jacques Derrida. While they had tamed philosophy by giving it the garb of argumentative-imaginative discourse, Eliade's generation redirected the essay to periodicals. The fact that, in *Maitreyi*, Eliade inserts a metadiscourse on journalism and the media through a character who conceives of fictional literature as a work of newspaper documentation – but which is also an implicit comment on the difference between fictional discourse, shaped by memory and retrospective interpretation, and the daily notes jotted down under the pressure of momentary impressions – shows Eliade as a writer intensely aware of the importance of mastering the conventions of each literary genre.

Anticipating the conclusions of the book, I will say that Eliade's journalistic writings are crossed by the same currents as the rest of his work, because the cutting edge of his intelligence, the energy of expression, the expressive language, and the enormous trust in culture as the essence of the human condition – a belief shared with Lucian Blaga – can be detected in any of his works irrespective of genre. That is what also impressed Professor David Cave: a “repetată inițiere în descifrarea sensului”⁹ (Cave, 1993, p. VII), is all of his writing “de la jurnalism la teodicee, de la limbajul literar la discursul erudit.”¹⁰ (ibidem.)

⁹ “[R]epeated initiation into the decoding of meaning.”

¹⁰ “[F]rom journalism to theodicy, from literary language to scholarly discourse.”

I.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT: MODERNISM AND NATIONALISM

In an article published in 2014 in the *Journal of Political Ideologies* (Conversi, 2014), Daniele Conversi from the Universidad del País Vasco comments on the quasi-consensual association of the two notions, modernism and nationalism, through the mediation of a third term, that of ideology. Both the concept of ideology and nationalism are then identified as a product of the French Revolution. Defined as the “science of ideas” by Destutt de Tracy and as partisanship by Napoleon, the latter being resentful of opposing ideologies, ideology remains essentially political and a group phenomenon. As for nationalism, it should be distinguished from what Conversi calls “ethno-symbolism” – a set of defining signifying practices for ethnicities in ancient, pre-modern times. Modern notions of progress, development, and advancement “were conceived within national borders and in a world of nation-states.” In pre-modernity, kings substituted themselves in the speech of the entire national territory (e.g., France). They were the object of a cult; they were the center of religious, idolatrous representations. The fight against the old regime took, in a desacralized regime, the form of an alliance between the state and culture, between ideology and representation. The individual left and was replaced by the citizen: *La Patrie* was a notion in the name of which people died on the battlefield, volunteers were enlisted, and the rural masses were brought under the control of the urban elites. Favored by the Industrial Revolution, nationalism offered the possibility of the exercise of authority by the centralized state, the regulation of institutions, and the elaboration of government policies. Where Cromwell’s soldiers read the Bible, the French masses were exposed by the Jacobins to the widespread circulation of publications that had the role of nationalization, of forming a consciousness of belonging to a certain people with a certain historical destiny – among other things, that of liberating other nations, which carried Napoleon’s troops across Europe. From that moment on, the way was opened for a flurry

of reform programs supported by ideological groups rather than independent thinkers and addressed to the nation through the media.

In 19th century England, for example, there were those who saw progress in the reform of institutions – Parliament, universities, economic policies – known as utilitarians, grouped around the *Monthly Repository* newspaper, and the self-styled group of Cambridge Apostles, who invested in education, expecting university reform to emancipate consciences for a spiritual revitalization of a society immersed in skepticism, atheism, materialism, and utilitarianism.

The two desiderata were merged, in Eliade's time, according to the model offered by American progressives, who denounced the moral crisis of politicians and their corruption, hoping that the reform of the university curriculum would produce minds capable of redirecting society in the right direction. Lester Frank Ward opposed liberal *laissez-faire* politics, advocating responsible state intervention and institutional reform alongside the curricular and disciplinary renewal of university programs – a direction in which he was supported by the authority of John Dewey. As far as Mircea Eliade is concerned, I can say that his most fierce polemic, delivered in a heated tone that reveals the pathos of a feverish patriot, is in relation to the public authorities and the country's leadership from the Great Unification until around the 1930s. The state is blamed for a crime against the nation, and the arguments put forward by the critical and stinging voice are as follows: politicking has infiltrated administration and education thereby sabotaging culture and the natural evolution of society. The ultimate reproach – “surparea lentă a statului românesc modern”¹ (Eliade, 1937 b, p. 3) appears as a leitmotif in many of the articles published since the mid-1930s. It's either directly named or suggested by the presentation of some painful realities. An early such reality is related to the burial of the nation's values by the indifference of the political class: the fall into oblivion of the autochthonous values promoted in the article *Lenița Cocos's Country* (Eliade, 1932 c, p. 1), which speaks of a blind country, as it doesn't observe the ruin of the castle of Câmpina. The degradation of the castle that belonged to B. P. Hasdeu, one of the personalities Eliade praises, acquires hyperbolizing values when it's compared with culture itself. Just as the castle was forgotten, Hasdeu's work was condemned to oblivion, but Eliade will take care of this aspect, bringing back to light the emblematic encyclopedist with the publication of *Anthology* (1937). As for the contemporary moment, Eliade blames the leadership for exposing culture to derision in academia, responding to the state's actions with a mocking tone,

¹ “The slow collapse of the modern Romanian state.”

behind which was hidden an overwhelming pain: “Dacă e vorba să ne batem joc de cultură să o facem până la capăt.”² (Eliade, 1932 d, p. 1). Two years later, with his concern about the development of the academic environment, he took the dispute with the state leadership to another level: he strongly demanded the establishment of “instituții științifice, tehnice, laboratorii și biblioteci”³ (Eliade M. , 1934 h, p. 196). The problem of non-existent material resources was also raised by Eliade and put in relation to his boundless confidence in the strengths of the Romanian intelligentsia. The article *Can't the Cell Hold Out?* is not a rhetorical question, but a response to Titu Maiorescu's categorical statement about the fate of the Romanian *cell*. Maiorescu claimed that the Romanian cell could not resist under the pressure of a constant scientific effort, full of abstract formulas. Eliade establishes from the outset that he cannot define *the cell*, perhaps precisely because the Romanian context has not been given the necessary framework to bring out what Maiorescu had called the *cell*, but he recalls the merits of students who went to other countries where they achieved exceptional results, but for whom, on their return home, the conditions for a job commensurate with their merits were not created. The results of these students bear witness to the fact that there is a possibility that this cell can develop a prodigious intellectual and creative capacity, but it must be supported in order to reveal its full potential:

Cel mai prost student german sau englez – ca să nu mai vorbim de americani – învinge în două luni un student român excelent, în orice ramură de studiu care nu implică numai inteligența sau imaginația, ci mai ales informația. Poți fi deștept, poți fi muncitor, poți avea toate calitățile – eforturile tale sunt anulate foarte simplu numai pentru că adversarul tău, oricât de mediocru ar fi el, lucrează într-o bibliotecă sau un laborator ca lumea, iar tu lucrezi cu două cărți și trei eprubete. Și cât timp rămâne starea aceasta deplorabilă – pe care eu aș numi-o crimă împotriva statului și aș pedepsi-o cu moartea – toate eforturile sînt inutile. Intelectualii români au pierdut plecarea.⁴ (Eliade M. , 1934 g, p. 6)

² “If we’re going to make a mockery of culture, let’s do it all the way.”

³ “Scientific, technical institutions, laboratories and libraries.”

⁴ “The worst German or English student – not to mention the Americans – beats an excellent Romanian student in two months, in any field of study involving not only intelligence or imagination, but especially information. You can be clever, you can be hard-working, you can have all the qualities – your efforts are simply nullified because your opponent, however mediocre he may be, works in a library or a proper laboratory and you work with two books and three test tubes. And as long as this deplorable state remains – which I would call a crime against the state and punish with death – all efforts are useless. The Romanian intellectuals have lost their way.”

Romanian students have nowhere to train, since even the Academy Library does not receive funds for its proper development: “Pentru orice se găsesc bani în țara românească, numai pentru Academie – creierul și inima Țării – nu se găsește”⁵ (Eliade M. , 1934 a, p. 3). It’s not scarcity, but financial mismanagement that is the problem leading to the compromise of the elite: “Nu mai putem răbda să vedem mâncându-se energii și ratându-se talente sub ochii noștri”⁶ (Eliade M. , 1934 a, p. 3). A year later, Eliade repeats the above-mentioned problems in his article *Romanians Abroad* (Eliade M. , *Romanians abroad*, 1935, p. 6), outlining a major problem of culture: the work of the Romanian elite was not being disseminated, which had negative repercussions on the country’s image in relation to other European countries. Also to the detriment of scholars is the problem of a lack of scholarly works in libraries. All the while, Romanian politicians seem to be waging an intense battle to defeat culture (Eliade M. , 1934 f), endangering Romanianism through “vanitățile, orgoliul, libertinajul și iresponsabilitatea conducătorilor de astăzi ai destinului unui neam întreg”⁷ (Eliade M. , 1937 e, p. 3). The rhetorical duels of politicians remain empty for the society in a state of numbness: “Trăim cel mai bîcîsîcîc climat intelectual din cîte a cunoscut România”⁸ (Eliade M. , 1934 m, p. 3), full of “demagogie și diversiuni.”⁹ Romanian politics was made on paper, more precisely on the paper of newspapers that announced the so-called problems of the nation targeted by politicians in order to solve them: “Dacă ar fi să te iei după ce scriu ziarele (...) și crede că toată lumea politică românească nu face altceva decît să discute probleme și imperative «colective»”¹⁰ (Eliade M. , *Pre-Revolutionary Demagoguery*, 1935, p. 3). Despite these objective observations and his lamentation of the state of Romania’s culture, Eliade does not lose hope in the Romanian *cell*, no matter how many obstacles the “blind pilots” put in its way. History and outstanding cultural personalities are living icons of Romanian creative power:

⁵ “For everything money is found in the Romanian country, only for the Academy – the brains and heart of the Country – there is none.”

⁶ “We can no longer bear to see energies being eaten up and talents being missed before our eyes.”

⁷ “...the vanities, pride, libertinism and irresponsibility of today’s leaders of the destiny of an entire nation.”

⁸ “We live in the most nefarious intellectual climate Romania has ever known.”

⁹ “[D]emagoguery and diversions.”

¹⁰ “If you were to take it after writing the newspapers (...) and he believes that the entire Romanian political world does nothing but discuss «collective» issues and imperatives.”

Există ceva în România pe care nici o gafă politică și nici o tragedie istorică nu o va putea suprima. Există forța creației, (...) peste puțină de secat... Avem cel puțin mângâierea că istoria noastră nu a rămas în întregime pe mâna miniștrilor și a bancherilor.¹¹ (Eliade M., Simple comment, 1935, p. 2)

The articles published by Mircea Eliade are symptomatic of that unfortunate period in his native culture. It is not known whether they had any influence in the political world, but such a critical and bitter voice against actions taken or – worse – not taken at the right time, certainly wanted a resonance on behalf of all intellectuals who were waiting for a change. The change that Romania was waiting for had to take place in the bosom of culture and not follow the slogan of the French writer Charles Maurras, “La politique d’abord!” For Romania, Eliade identified the basic mission – the consolidation of culture: “Mesianismul nu poate porni în nici un caz de la «politique d’abord»”¹² (Eliade M., People Without a Mission?, 1935, p. 3). Only culture could raise the country to the level of its neighbors across the border,¹³ who were superior to Romanians only by the simple fact that they were not sabotaged by power while, on home soil, the “confuzia planurilor și, deci, confuzia valorilor”¹⁴ (Eliade M., The Paradoxes of the Political Primacy: A Chess Game in the Trenches, 1935, p. 3) was perpetuated.

Mircea Eliade publicly asserts himself shortly after the end of the First World War, which had led to the collapse of European dynastic alliances and the creation of nation-states, including the reunited Romanian state. Mircea Eliade’s discourse on the national issue is complex and nuanced. On

¹¹ “There is something in Romania that no political blunder and no historical tragedy can suppress. There is the force of creation, (...) beyond the possibility of drying up... We have at least the consolation that our history has not remained entirely in the hands of ministers and bankers.”

¹² “Messianism can in no way start from a «politique d’abord».”

¹³ A mediocre Hungarian writer had won an international award, which accentuates Eliade’s regret that precious Romanian works were being presented abroad: “I have been writing for years about the crime of Romanian propaganda abroad” (Eliade M., 1936 d, p. 8). On the other hand, Romania had opened its cultural doors to personalities towards whom Eliade could not express high sentiments, which leads to the irony of the conference held at the Athenaeum by the French writer. See Eliade, 1927 b, p. 2. A few years later, Eliade speaks of this opening of the cultural state in terms of assimilation: “We are not intransigent, because we do not feel inferior. Whoever wants to assimilate is welcome. Whoever doesn’t, is free to keep his needs and his nation” (Eliade M., Romanianism and Inferiority Complexes, 1935, p. 3).

¹⁴ “[C]onfusion of plans and, therefore, the confusion of values.”

the one hand, he seems to join the ethno-symbolic party, refusing to draw a firm line of demarcation between modernity and what preceded it. In *Protohistory or the Middle Ages*, he downplays the concept of historicism put into circulation by the 19th century, considering that the evolution of peoples is more about destiny, symbols, religions, and mythologies – in a word, prehistory. Invoking “interesul elitelor de astăzi pentru preistorii, rase, religii, mitologii, simboluri”¹⁵ (Eliade M. , 1937 h, p. 9), Eliade might have had Oswald Spengler’s *Decline of the West* in mind as well as Worringer’s aesthetics or Ezra Pound’s poetry. However, continuity doesn’t cancel out historicity, the existence of distinct cultural phases. Even if he seems to discover “originea «conștiinței naționale» pe continent”¹⁶ (Eliade, 1939 c, p. 28) in Joachim of Fiore (12th century), he is also perceived as an opponent of the universalist, ecumenical Catholicism, oppressing the multitude through the rigor of its rituals. It’s interesting that William Butler Yeats speculated on Fiore’s suggestions regarding the coming of the third kingdom, of the Holy Spirit, and after that of the Father and the Son in his end-of-the-century aestheticism – an international phenomenon – while Eliade sees in the Calabrian monk the first Italian patriot, aware of the distinct identity of his people and of his chosen destiny, despite the repeated blows of the barbarian waves. In his *Note on Patriotism*, in the volume *Fragmentarium*, Eliade also argues for the contribution of the French Revolution to the genesis of the concept, adding a racial component: the aristocrats were hated because they were considered foreigners, invaders of Germanic origin. The Goddess of Reason was French, along with which the notions of “national values” and “ethnic values” were now circulating. Peoples are born through culture, out of the opposition between the barbarian and the ethnic body, legitimized by symbolic systems. Like Nicolae Iorga or Constantin Rădulescu-Motru,¹⁷ Eliade cannot separate economic reforms from reforms in culture, and also like the editor of the publication “European Idea”, Eliade uses Western models as a yardstick

¹⁵ “[T]oday’s elite interest in prehistories, races, religions, mythologies, symbols.”

¹⁶ “...the origin of «national consciousness» on the continent.”

¹⁷ Eliade appreciates the “Romanianism” promoted by Constantin Rădulescu-Motru through the series of articles published in the “Royal Foundations Magazine”, placing it “on the central axis of Kogălniceanu and Eminescu’s Romanianism.” Bringing him closer to Constantin Rădulescu-Motru’s vision is his confidence in the creative success of the nation, but he keeps alive his sense of reality: “He is optimistic and confident in the continuous progress of the Romanian people and is at the same time weighty, lucid, critical in his nationalist judgment” (Eliade, Mr. Rădulescu-Motru’s Romanianism, 1935, p. 6).

when defending his generation, invoking their appreciations by foreign personalities.

Modernism was a movement of literary coteries, such as the Medici circle had once been, the circle around the Earl of Essex or the Apostles of Cambridge – they had in common knowledge, philosophies, aesthetic principles. Mircea Eliade's circle, however, was closer to groups of reformers who were aware of their social agenda, heterogeneous in their formation (interdisciplinary, as we would call it today), following the Enlightenment model (Le Club de l'Entresol), or the Bloomsbury group at the Woolf residence. Eliade himself abandons the model of the rentier writer – individualist, locked up in his *ivory tower*, posing as a star – by acquiring a wide range of knowledge, mastering the language of natural sciences or economics as well as philosophy. The issue of the *ivory tower* deserves further attention, as it sheds light on the thinker's pendulum swinging between the two missions of the intellectuals of the time: by the beginning of 1935, Eliade was taking a stand against writers and philosophers “măcinați zilnic de sterpe lupte politice”¹⁸ (Eliade M., *Ivory Tower*, 1935, p. 3), because of the waste of creative energy: “Aproape totalitatea personalităților creatoare ale României moderne și-au consumat energia în politică”¹⁹ (Eliade M., *Ivory Tower*, 1935, p. 3). The Romanian intelligentsia had been monopolized by ideological missionaries to the detriment of the lofty artistic mission: “S-a crezut că generația de după va fi o generație a «turnului de fildeș». Dimpotrivă. După un început majestuos și «spiritualist», generația tânără s-a înregimentat în luptele politice”²⁰ (Eliade M., *Ivory Tower*, 1935, p. 3). The second mission, to which he began to devote himself from 1935, was a socio-historical one. This mission was subordinate to the ethical and civic one being carried out through politics.

To Zaharia Stancu²¹ bordered in his critics against Eliade's confreres at the petty calculation of their income, Eliade responds by listing the merits

¹⁸ “...swept daily by sterile political struggles.”

¹⁹ “Almost all the creative personalities of modern Romania have consumed their energy in politics.”

²⁰ “It was thought that the generation that followed would be a generation of the «ivory tower». On the contrary. After a majestic and «spiritualist» beginning, the young generation has become enmeshed in political struggles.”

²¹ Zaharia Stancu's position on the financial problems of the young generation of writers is well known. It is a generation that Stancu derides, but one that Eliade defends in his article in response to Mr. Stanca. In “Generation in Powder,” Eliade raises the issue of the financial aspects of a writer's life, comparing the intellectual climate in Romania with that in countries such as France, Germany or Italy. Another

of a group that was not to be confused with “o cafenea literară, o echipă sportivă, nu un club antisemit”²² (Eliade M., 1928 a, p. 1), but who ought to be recognized as having brought about a revolution in the thinking of the time through professionalism to international standards, disciplinary renewal and the introduction of new concepts, such as “ortodoxia, autenticitatea, neo-realismul, primatul spiritualului, primatul colectivului, omul nou, libertatea civilă și libertatea interioară, românismul, etc.”²³ (Eliade M., 1936 a, p. 3). Seized by *proletkult* ideology, some concepts must be remembered in the sense given by Eliade. Authenticity, for example, defined in *Oceanography* in contrast to originality, means giving up the pretense of living in a world created by the proud self and immersing oneself in one’s own authentic self, uninfluenced by the outside. However, just as a globule of blood is the common substratum of organic life, so the authentic self carries within it the information of the whole. This is the collective soul, the self in which dwells what is universal in man, not in the masses – those gregarious agglomerations manipulated by the demagogues of the Russian Revolution. In the same way, Romania specifically is as such projected into universality.

Very original at that time was Eliade’s definition of the new man. In *Glosses for the new man (Oceanography)*, Eliade proposes a polarity: *the history that is made and the history that is being consumed*. The process described seems to be a transposition of the wave function of quantum physics. Any system is an interference of states – virtual and realized (the latter resulting from the interference of all). Likewise, philosophers Giles Deleuze and Felix Guattari speak of existence as alternation between flows of matter and energy and plateaus (Deleuze, 1987) – provisional patterns in phases of civilization, that are “deterritorialized” by new intensities arising

representative of the generation, Mircea Vulcănescu, offers enlightening comments on the impact of the Romanian political economy on creative activities. The exchange between Eliade and Stancu was of particular interest to us because it highlights the problems faced by the writers of the time (Eliade was one of the most virulent defenders of culture during that era). We will deal with these issues in more detail in the first section of the third chapter: “The history of a journey: the stages of Eliade’s journalism.” N. C. Anghelescu intervenes in the polemic between Mircea Vulcănescu and Zaharia Stancu: “Here we are, thanks to Mr Stancu, two millennia back in the pre-Christian era, when the function of publican was placed on the same level as that of Pharisee or scholar and, as such, attracted public opprobrium on the person who exercised it” (Anghelescu, Around the diurnal diaries of the young generation, 1936, p. 2).

²² “...a literary café, a sports team, not an anti-Semitic club.”

²³ “[O]rthodoxy, authenticity, neo-realism, the primacy of the spiritual, the primacy of the collective, the new man, civil liberty and inner freedom, Romanianism, etc.”

within them. Returning to Eliade's essay: Fashion is also a form of history, it's history that *is being consumed*; it's life that is being realized in a form stopped in place, in the promotion of which very many causes have collaborated, which very many forces have fed – but which *is now being realized*, that is, consumed.

The new man is the one who lives in the coherent state (with a term borrowed from wave function theory) of the system, i.e., the totality of possibilities (prior to decoherence in a certain realized state). History is first experienced mentally, spiritually, by the elites and then understood politically (what was merely intuited becomes real, becomes the new power, the new law to which the common man shows obedience). For Alexander, the homeland was the world of the good, and the foreigners, the bad; the leap from barbarian to Greek was his revolution. Fiore was the forerunner of the Renaissance and Rousseau, of the French Revolution, etc. Eliade's exhortation for the intellectual to look inside things is, we could say, existentialist in tone; he "reads in the dark", that is, in the absence of external authorities, of pre-existing truths. Thought is his expression for this (Luciferic, according to Blaga) leap into a new logic, a new creation. The homeland, therefore, was to be the realization of a mental project, all the phases of civilization were the factual realization of such experiments of life in the laboratory (laboratory of human experiments).

Like the circle around William Johnson Fox, the editorialist of the *Monthly Repository* in the previous century, the Criterion Association held thematic debates, public conferences, to which Eliade added his radio lectures. N.C. Angelescu explained the end of liberalism, of the international mechanism of regulating the value of the national currency by calculating the gold cover. The era of laissez-faire liberalism had passed, governments had to take protectionist measures to protect the **national economy**. N. C. Angelescu draws three significant typologies for the 19th century: "le jeune homme pauvre – al lui Octave Feuillet – un merituos vlăstar al aristocrației"²⁴ (Angelescu, Around the diurnal diaries of the young generation, 1936, p. 2), "marele industriaș, – le maître des forges al lui Georges Ohnet"²⁵ (Angelescu, Around the diurnal diaries of the young generation, 1936, p. 2) and "economistul distins"²⁶ (Angelescu, Around the diurnal diaries of the young generation, 1936, p. 2). Angelescu chooses to talk about political economy, an area too little understood by the general public, but which has wide-ranging social ramifications. Inflation and deflation were causing an imbalance in the national economy, which was

²⁴ "Le jeune homme pauvre - by Octave Feuillet - a meritorious aristocratic vassal."

²⁵ "...the great industrialist, - le maître des forges by Georges Ohnet."

²⁶ "...the distinguished economist."

felt by the entire population, through the emergence of two social phenomena: “șomaj și paralizia vieții economice”²⁷ (Angelescu, Around the diurnal diaries of the young generation, 1936, p. 2). Eliade proved countless times that he was a journalist involved in the problems of society, also addressing the subject of the declining economy reflected in “numărul șomerilor, de licențiații pe drumuri, de învățătorii în mizerie”²⁸ (Eliade M., 1933 n, p. 1). The image of the Romanian intellectual had deteriorated, and Eliade began a campaign to encourage his fellow intellectuals,²⁹ in parallel with reprimanding the authorities for their lack of concern for pressing social issues. These are the manifestos of a thinker who sensed the socio-cultural syncope in which Romania was deepening. The *distinguished economist* was supposed to be in charge of overcoming the economic syncope, but he did not implement economic structures appropriate to the state, failing to increase capital even with the introduction of the “taxei scontului”³⁰ (Angelescu, Around the diurnal diaries of the young generation, 1936, p. 2) and its reduction. It can be said that post-war inflation created the effect of an economic crisis. Furthermore, “tendențele revalorizatoare din 1925”³¹ (Angelescu, Around the diurnal diaries of the young generation, 1936, p. 2) led to the devaluation of the local currency, and the citizen of 1932 was the main character of an economy with a Sisyphian character: “să vărsăm sume considerabile în valute străine în sacul fără fund al deficitului balanței de plăți, sume pe cari azi le plătim cu atâta greutate”³² (Angelescu, Around the diurnal diaries of the young generation, 1936, p. 2). The author of the article concludes that the principles of economics established by Adam Smith have been violated, but these deviations from the rule are understandable in the new context: “spre deosebire de economia liberalistă care găsea o aplicare universală – economia nouă este în primul rând națională și trebuie concepută și aplicată ca atare”³³ (Angelescu, Around the diurnal diaries of the young generation, 1936, p. 2). This is one among of the effects produced by nationalism: the need to identify an organic economic structure specific to each individual state. The distinguished economist saw the splendor of liberalism as dead.

²⁷ “...unemployment and paralysis of economic life.”

²⁸ “...the number of unemployed, of licensed on the street, by teachers in misery.”

²⁹ See: Eliade M., Take Heart!, Romanian Writers, 1935, p. 3.

³⁰ “[D]iscount tax.”

³¹ “[T]he revalorising tendencies of 1925.”

³² “...to pour considerable sums in foreign currencies into the bottomless sack of the balance of payments deficit, sums which today we pay with such difficulty.”

³³ “...unlike liberal economy which had a universal application – the new economy is primarily national and must be conceived and applied as such.”