

## **MIRCEA ELIADE AND THE PROPHETIC ALLOTROPY IN THE ARTICLES OF YOUTH**

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*Abstract: In some of the articles published during 1927-1928, but also after returning from India, Mircea Eliade displays a type of messianic and prophetic discourse. The discussion of the „experiences” of his generation, as he would confess later, might be placed in a scheme of the modern, secular prophetism. Of an impetus and an analytical force especially specific to the young age, influenced by professor Nae Ionescu, young Eliade would undertake the analysis of the past and the observation of the future. He would propose solutions for the revival of the spirit, such as edification through culture, existentialism, orthodoxy etc., themes that, after decades, he would characterize as no dogmatic and no programmatic. Articles published in "Itinerariu Spiritual" or others original from the journal "Cuvântul" will be the basis of our research – a diagram of the prophetic discourse of Eliade between 1927-1928, framed in a pattern of the modern prophetism.*

**Keywords:** *Mircea Eliade, prophetism, existentialism, culture, orthodoxy*

### **"Foreseeing the chances"**

In the wake of the Romanian 1989 Revolution, the subject Mircea Eliade regains interest in the local debate, and the views are quite opposite. One view that wasn't too much under light so far is the one in which Mircea Eliade is depicted as *the prophet of the Romanian nations* [1]. Taken from the title itself, this statement is presented in the foreword to a Romanian edition published at Roza Vânturilor publishing house in 1990. The two volumes gather articles written by Mircea Eliade were united under a common theme: Romanian prophetism. The foreword to the first volume, written by Dan Zamfirescu, envisages a portrait of the prophet in the person of Mircea Eliade and an emulation of attributes: an epitome of Moses to lead Romanian people through wilderness, the one to bring the idea of man's re-birth as a new man, or the great chance that Romanian people had to penetrate eternity by his writings. Among other prophets that imprinted the prophetic „genetic code”, such as Hașdeu, Eminescu, Iorga, Goga, Nae Ionescu or G. Călinescu, considers Dan Zamfirescu, Mircea Eliade is the only one that *foresaw the chances* [2] of the Romanian people when catastrophe stroke the public spirituality. This rather fundamentalist conception is based upon the biblical imagery of the prophet and his role in the public sphere.

Starting from this point of view, leaving behind the fundamentalist approach, we build our approach on the hypothesis that we could trace a prophetic attitude, especially in the early writings of Mircea Eliade. To demonstrate it, we have to answer questions such as what is the modern understanding of the prophet, what is the main topic of the prophetic discourse and what context brings forth prophetic attitude. Answered all these, we may then deepen our investigation into a given period of time: youth articles (1927-1928), before departure to India; finally, we would see what the specific form of the prophetic discourse is in the articles of youth that Mircea Eliade wrote.

### **Modern prophetism**

One of the finest understandings of the modern prophetism belongs to Northrop Frye. In his *Great Code*, Frye argues that modern prophetic authority, which holds the place of the old divine authority, comes out from a *cultural pluralism* [3]. The artist speaks from his inner

authority, given the fact that no vision has been given to him, and he may speak only by his *creative imagination* [4]. Moreover, the prophet *sees the man in a state of alienation, caused by his own wanderings, at the bottom of a curve in the shape of U* [5]. We may say, thus, that prophetic attitude is a part of the existential side of a writer. When the writer takes position in his writings towards social phenomena, he gives the writings a prophetic function; being read, these writings have effects upon the reader and it is supposed that he will take action accordingly.

The context in which appears the prophet is a time of crisis. On the basis of the present state, he brings forth past values and presents a script for the future. On the ground of a modern spiritual crisis, the figure of the prophet incarnates among elites. „The mystique of the intellectual” - that is the role given to the elites to modernize the country and to have a catalyst influence upon the public space, led to its splitting: *in elites and masses, in superior people, creators, the only capable of leading the society and the common people, that should obey the first ones* [6], as Dana Parvan-Jenaru observed. Over the time, the elites that got involved in the change of the history using as well the arms of the literature wore, given the case, different names, such as modern prophet, *soter*, mystagogue, even a *nissus formativus* etc.

### Context of Mircea Eliade's youth articles

The context in which Mircea Eliade wrote his articles of youth bore prophetic fruits. The interwar period had known diverse approaches in what concerns the mode of manifestation of the prophetic attitude. If in the Romantic period this attitude would have rather a militant and patriotic aspect, at the end of the 20th century and at its beginning, the prophetic attitude will be manifested especially when denouncing the social discrepancies and the poor condition of the peasantry; meanwhile, in the interwar period this prophetic attitude will deepen, but in another sense. The Romanian forty-eighters fought for the ideals of The 1848 Revolution, the writers around the turn of the century militated for civil rights and for union. But the interwar writers didn't have a political or social ideal. The Great Union had been accomplished, the civil rights, at least apparently, had been given, and the rhythm of the occidental civilization fully seized the Romanian society. In all these, the crisis of the interwar intellectual wouldn't be an outside one, as much as an inner one.

On the basis of this inner crisis, the prophetic attitude will manifest itself in many domains of the Romanian spirituality: the philosophical essays of Emil Cioran, Eugen Ionescu or Constantin Noica would be strongly influenced by the occidental irrationalism wave and by the morphology of cultures, meanwhile the literary life was split among two major tendencies: traditionalism and modernism. The analysis of the irrational currents brings forth a prophetic attitude in the existentialism of the *Criterion's* generation, the occidental philosophy of nihilism and pessimism, but also in the traditional orthodoxy.

In the landscape of interwar Romania, myth of decline and progress, end of the world and the resurrection of the new man - spiritual or "superman", with influences from Italian fascism, will complete an imaginary proclaiming the bankruptcy of bourgeois values and need to implement originating elements - by orthodox Orientalism, by neo-Thomism, back to the Middle Ages etc. During this prophetic energy consumption to proclaim the death of culture due to alienation, there is an attempt to updating the origins of civilization by the myth of a golden age, but also propel a future utopian and delusional.

Criticism of the present is divided between denouncing the social discrepancies, the invasion of alienating and decomposing civilization, crisis of culture and religious landmarks

(Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism competed Western neo-Thomism or atheism). The future is depicted both in retrograde terms and in terms of progress:

- Rationalist-modernists see the civilization as an exponent of progress and thus deadlock out coming;
- Antimodernist-traditionalists see in the Byzantine Orthodox religion and archaic village model the true source of nation's rebirth;
- A third category, also from the spiritual area, talks about regeneration through culture, in which the ideal is the intellectual building in order to access the superhuman knowledge;
- A fourth category is "framed" in the sense that the writers propose a *sui-generis* criticism of the society, which is rather an individual manner of revolt.

Literary prophetism dresses now the coat of the uprooted that laments his fate and the misfit that cannot find himself in a desecrated world, immoral and amoral, superficial and without ideals. Probing the interior of being to collective abyss, study of the nation's origins, patriarchal village image as a golden age, criticism of cultural elite or political class, lack of authentic experiences, removal from deity and its mystical seeking, but also other aspects will complete an imaginary in which the prophetic attitude, mostly secularized in the spirit of Nietzsche, spiritualized in a cultural way, or religious - of personal search of divinity, are some of the contextual aspects in which the writings of Mircea Eliade appeared.

### **Mircea Eliade – prophetic attitude**

Given the information above, to trace the prophetic attitude in Eliade's articles we would seek the following elements: a personal authority that speaks for itself and for the multitudes, a present that is been criticized, and means to escape into a better future. The articles that we will analyze are depicted from the first volume of *Profetism românesc*, to which were added unpublished articles or reviews that would tackle the issue of prophetism.

Before the exile period, the articles that Eliade wrote in the journals of the time cover two branches: one is cultural; the other is mystical and religious. If in the pre-departure period to India, Mircea Eliade would configure as a possible script a picture of spiritual development by synthesis, Orthodox mystic, cultivation of authentic experiences, in a second phase of its publishing after returning from India, Mircea Eliade will speak more about the Romanian nationalism, and now the means of transcending contingent and enter eternity is creation.

Motivating the genesis of *Itinerariu spiritual* in a 1965 article published in the journal *Cuvântul din exil*, Mircea Eliade [7] confessed that he wanted to discuss his *experiences* (existentialism influenced by Nae Ionescu) and not treating them in a dogmatic or programmatic character, but just through the eyes of a younger generation that he felt the need to lead.

The twelve articles that compose *Itinerariu spiritual*, published between September-November 1927 in the pages of *Cuvântul*, propose a number of solutions that propel youth to the forefront of spiritual change. Concepts like "lived life" and "updating Spirit", distance from epistemological knowledge and option for Orthodox Christianity, critique of dilettantism and superficiality over the areas of spiritual creation, the opposition love-hate inherited from his teacher Nae Ionescu, a new type of dilettantism by an energy hub - synthesis, existentialism, building through culture-, mysticism and orthodoxy as a haven, are the main elements discussed in the itinerary that wants to be a *guide*.

*Anno Domini* article, with its apocalyptic touch, is making the balance of the achievements in terms of spiritual creation of the previous year. Young Eliade feels oppressed by the burden of lack of valuable creations and, through a *hic et nunc* imperative, challenges

the youth to one jubilee year, the year of the Lord, in which the creation should be significant. Furthermore, the prophetic call covers a wide range: *We have the duty to precipitate the experiences, to stir up the conflicts, to touch effectively the frameworks among which no one could snatch us. We have the duty to live an intense spiritual life, consumed, restless, and integrated without restraints. And this could not be accomplished without infinite and continuous disclaim* [8].

New issues of unpublished articles in the volumes called *Romanian Prophetism*, aspects that Eliade debates in the journal *Cuvântul* and are pertaining for our analysis will be added. For instance, in the "Glose pentru ei" series, Eliade speaks of various types of glory that mankind recognizes, some unreal, as opposed to true glory of a spiritual nature, which is foreign to contemporary society. This comes amidst the discussion of a *conspiracy of silence* which, considers young Eliade, is behind the younger generation. The virulent reaction is unequivocally, with an iconoclastic fervor to tear down the *idols of glories* [9], raised by ignorance. Clarifications from *Dilettantism în jurul misticismului* contribute to the understanding of mysticism Eliade had at the time. His criticism is directed at those who use a mystical vocabulary *without experience, familiarity with mystical religions, elements that attract misunderstanding, perversion, devaluation of the specific content* [10]. Eliade's conception at the moment envisages genuine religious experience, as originally seen at Nae Ionescu, his mentor.

Another article that contributes to understanding the prophetic attitude in the years 1927-1928 is of Mircea Eliade's book review of Julien Benda. Here, Eliade shows how the principles of Julien Benda in his book *La Trahison des Clercs* apply to local intellectuals. Three would be, in his view, the mistakes of the last generation of indigenous intellectuals: *dilettantism indulgence, neglect to perversion of ethical values and pure spirituality ignorance of theology and metaphysics*. The indifference of the elite led to the following cultural phenomena, says Eliade: *rule of mediocrity, incompetence valuing, belittlement of scientific vocabulary, dissociation of the elite and ignoring or misunderstanding of all forms of thinking* [11]. In the same place, Eliade speaks about ethics, in a specific manner: *Ethical conscience of the last generations was not anchored to a metaphysical sense, but pragmatic. Rather a social guide than an individual value. Ethics goes down, to moral and social criticism, and then politics. Brilliant example is the activity of Nicolae Iorga, started prophetic-cultural, matured in an ethical purity accessible to the masses, ended up in politics. The value of ethical ascetics is not met in our society* [12], he concludes. Eliade reminds the Romanian intellectuals a second sin: *neglecting pure spirituality, perfect, substantial*. Experientialism of Unamuno and Papini, enhanced especially because of Nae Ionescu's influence, will appear here as genetic point of original values, subject to the theological thinking, which develops smart and authentic spirituality. To Parisian influence he opposes a true source of culture to be sought by intellectuals, concluding that the true value of a culture is given by the teleological meaning that it provides to human existence.

The concepts outlined in *Itinerariu spiritual* about orthodoxy will be developed in the article *Despre cuvinte și despre cetezanță*, in which Eliade answers to his critics and shows them once again what actually he understands by orthodoxy - not a dogma inherited, but rather a sense that finds the young man after living experiences: *Sense which means hierarchy of values, spiritual balance among economic woes, creative mood. Orthodoxy does not mean local grimace, no renunciation of freedom, or ignorance. But simply a religious experience capitalizing on human companionship, life, and cosmos. So: Ethics and nosology, politics and metaphysics. This explanation towards orthodoxy is accompanied by criticism of superficiality in all areas of spiritual Romanian knowledge* [13].

Even if he was a young himself, Eliade behaves like a sage, and his prophetic advice addresses mostly to the searches of the younger generation, bringing solutions: *an effort to reach an inner equilibrium and a genuine mystical contemplation* [14]. This spirit of empathy with his young generation, trying to build it through the power of spirit and giving it a messianic mission was present in many countries during the interwar period. The frequent student riots in this period make proof of groups that, in search of landmarks, adopt a rather violent discourse and many times prophetic when addressing the older generation and the general lack of solutions to the crisis of conscience. Petăr Dănov and the White Brotherhood from Bulgaria militated for the Slavic messianic; Klaus Mann depicted the struggles of the German youth, while the Americans woke up especially after the 1930s and the economic crisis. In Romania, besides the moment 1927 when Mircea Eliade published his itinerary in the spiritual field and fought for cultural mission with 27' Generation, we have another two manifests: Legion of the Archangel Michael published its programmer based on Christian fundamentals, but ideologue, and also a youth group published "The White Lily Manifest" in *Gândirea* journal. After several years, another youth group will be formed in Transylvania, called *Chemarea tinerimii române*. Their call prolonged older prophetic voices, concerning especially rural issues, but the prophetic tone was explicitly vivid in numerous articles.

What young Eliade meant by his youth calling we may find in his own answer, called *Sensul itinerarului spiritual*, in which he points his choice towards a prophetic attitude, even if he doesn't call it specifically prophetic:

- Orthodoxy as *one of the meanings* that the young generation would find *at the end of experiences*;
- The surname of "chosen generation" was given because of the childhood period that was in time of crisis; the survival, he says, is due to *a happy settlement of these crisis*;
- Among the values of the young generation he counts the moral regeneration, that is ethics and spirituality;
- One of the conditions to be creative is to have in front *a spiritual meaning of the man and existence*;
- The final remark embodies a vivid prophetic tone concerning his generation, which he calls "the last", that is *the only generation creator of personalities, for the fact that it solved the biggest crises*; besides the messianic mission of his generation, Eliade concludes that orthodoxy is the only way to give the man *sublime meaning of life* [15].

### **Prophetic allotropy and Mircea Eliade**

What we meanthere by prophetic allotropy is the embodiment of a broader prophetic attitude depicted in the interwar period, subject to a bigger research. In this article we found one of the shapes that it took: cultural mission and spirit revival of the younger generation - personal, then collective. Be it religious or secular, this subject renewal is one of the major aspects that Hebrew prophets pointed to. A new man, in the image of God, they said. A new young intellectual, rooted in universal knowledge, cultivating the idea of an exceptional man, awoken from the elder's numbing and prepared for action, Eliade said. We may answer, thus, according to the examples given from the articles in study, that Mircea Eliade embodied a modern prophetic attitude in his articles of youth: he saw the present crisis in the cultural field, identified himself with the generation he was a part from, legitimated himself with a



personal authority and spoke in the name this authority; his creative imagination proposed as major prophetic scripts cultural building, spiritual renewal and a call to general action.

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