

THE AESTHETIC OF THE “LIVING MAN” AND THE CONFLICT OF REPRESENTATIONS

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Abstract: The paper The Aesthetic of the “Living Man” and the Conflict of Representations analyses the play A Spiritual Adventure by Mircea Eliade, published for the first time in 2012. It is the first fictional text the Romanian author wrote in exile, which incorporates Eliade’s concepts of authenticity and representation as shown in the texts written in Romania, and also modifies the authorial vision through a tragic dimension, an indirect reflection of personal historic experience. This is why the access to the meaning of the works composed during this new creative stage will be ciphered in a manner that Eliade called “the real concealed by appearances”. The first section of the paper deals with the genesis of the text and with Eliade’s vision of theatre, as reflected in his diary entries; the second refers to authenticity, present in the extra-artistic aesthetic and the artistic representation, as well as to their specific rapport of appearance and the relationship between them. The third section analyses the stake of the work, the theme of the creative life lived by modern man in history and the ways to assume an authentic human existence into the world, meant to renew him and redeem his spirit; the reification strategies of an “aesthetics of authenticity” are the problematization and disproof of the codes for traditional cultural and literary representations, as well as the representation of man in his hypostasis of product, producer, and consumer of culture. The fourth section refers to the conflict between aesthetic visions and representations.

Keywords: living man, appearance, representation, disproof, authenticity

1. The Genesis of the Text

On October 3 1946, Mircea Eliade put down the biographical circumstances that triggered the vision of the play *A Spiritual Adventure*¹ and the state of tension which finally led him to write it: “For some time now, before going to sleep, I have been tempted by the play I 'saw' one evening while I was strolling alone along the empty terraces of Estoril, in December 1944². Sometimes, the temptation is so strong that it keeps me with my eyes wide open in the dark more than an hour, following the personae around, listening to them, trying to perceive their visages as clearly as possible. If I started working on it, I think I would complete it in a couple of days. But I promised myself not to undertake anything else until I have finished the first chapter of *Prolegomena*”³.

¹ The four-act play *A Spiritual Adventure* was written in Romanian and is still in manuscript form. It was Professor Mac Lincott Ricketts who first translated it into English and published in "Theory in Action", Volume 5, no. 1, January 2012. Our paper quotes from the English version.

² The text of *A Spiritual Adventure* distanced itself from the initial version against its author’s will; it was supposed to be titled *Eurydice*, but the plot altered “in a way that was not convenient” – as noted by the diarist on October 16, in Mircea Eliade, *Jurnal / [Journal]* (I-II), Humanitas, Bucharest, 1993, p. 90; only on October 30 did he come up with the title *A Spiritual Adventure* (see *Ibidem*, I, p. 93)

³ *Ibidem*, I, p. 90

On October 16 1946⁴, Eliade finished writing the play “in his head”; on November 10⁵, he edited, copied and proofread it, and was at the time “dissatisfied with Act I, pleased with Act II and III, and enthusiastic about Act IV”; on November 12⁶, he reviewed and completed it. Reading the play again in 1951, Eliade would be disappointed⁷ on account of its “awkward tone”, despite the interesting subject.

Although aware of his lack of “calling for playwriting”⁸, Eliade revisited the “‘theatre’ question” in his prose, because it “afforded him the possibility to bring forth a ‘new way’ of making the most of the drama show”, whose “secret” lies in the “techniques by which actors and viewers are projected into a ‘space-time’ continuum, inaccessible to daily experience”, and through which the “human condition is surpassed”⁹.

Eliade's concern for theatre is oriented toward both avant-garde theatre and the initiatory experience of the sacred; in his [*Journal*], he speaks about Artaud's theatre and its spectacle as of a “spiritual exercise”¹⁰, involving the psycho-physiological communion of its troupe, who broke with the contingent space and scandalized the viewers; thus, during the “concentrated time of the show”, the actor purifies himself, “leaves the historical time (chronological present) and enters a different temporal rhythm”, a karmic one, “embodying and existentially updating so many human types”. Perceived as such, the dramatic show, as ritual related to the myth of Dionysus, the Orphic religious rituals and the cult of the dead¹¹, becomes an image of the cosmic game, enveloped in stage symbolism and invested with sacredness.

The jottings in the [*Journal*] demonstrate that the vision and composition of *A Spiritual Adventure* occurred in conjunction with tragic biographical elements (his wife's death in November 1944, World War II and his break with his home country by assuming the exile in France) as well as with his scientific and philosophical preoccupations at the time (he was writing the *Prolegomena* to the *Morphology of religions*, the new French version of *Yoga* and *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*).

Finally, while writing the play, Eliade also mentioned the difficulty to break away with his “poisonous passion for erudition” and his intellectual communication with the friends who, one way or another, kept his ties with his home country¹² or with the places where he lived “in freedom”, as if in paradise. Two such discussions are worth mentioning in relation to Eliade's preoccupations at the time. The former (November 1st), held with a “young Romanian”, refers to the importance of the “Criterion” group between 1933-1937, similar to the existentialist vogue in contemporary Paris. The latter (October 28) refers to a dialogue with the former director of the French Institute in Bucharest and to the problem that

⁴ *Ibidem*, I, p. 94

⁵ *Ibidem*, I, p. 95

⁶ *Ibidem*, I, p. 94-95

⁷ *Ibidem*, I, p. 204

⁸ *Ibidem*, II, p. 153

⁹ *Ibidem*, II, p. 154

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, I, p. 602

¹¹ *Ibidem*, I, p. 306

¹² Between October 1 and November 13, Eliade quotes the following people in his journal: Mihail Șora, Mihail Sebastian, Emil Cioran, Nicolae Herescu, Anton Golopenția, Octavian Vuia, George Ulieru (entries for Romania), Bostanian (entry for Spain) and Ananda Coomaraswamy (entry for India).

concerned him, the destiny of the elite and the “restoration of Western man”, who “must become incarnate and truly occupy the body he possesses, in an act of self-incorporation”.

2. Authenticity, Extra-Artistic Aesthetics, and Artistic Representation

Eliade's theory of authenticity means much more than the literature of experience and the use of a narrative technique. It is because the soteriological value of discourse practice bestows ontological meaning upon knowledge, which makes it a “technique of the real” and an initiation into one's own destiny¹³. Similar to other previous novels by Eliade, *A Spiritual Adventure* is a text that fulfills an ontological function outlining the pathway to the truth of being, in a process of inner clarification. This play is also a turntable of Eliade's literature which, on the one hand, incorporates his vision of authenticity and representation in the novels written in Romania, while, on the other hand, it alters the vision from the “Romanian” period (the comic and fantastic vision), incorporating the tragic as an indirect reflection of personal historical experience into the dramatic, the familiar mood of his literature. This is why access to the meaning of this vision will be ciphered in a manner which he called the “camouflage of the sacred into the profane” in the history of religions. This text, still in manuscript form¹⁴, is the first in the category of “mythical” texts written in exile¹⁵, both expressing the same state of mourning, present in the [*Portuguese Journal*]¹⁶, lamenting for the loss of two loves: Nina Mareş and Romania.

The actual experiences from Eliade's literary text reflect man in his double hypostasis, as product of historical events, placed on the coordinates of materialistic determinism, but also as a result of commitment to a certain cultural history¹⁷, which searches for answers to fundamental questions to man: the meaning of life and death, his position in the universe, surpassing the human condition etc. This is why in Eliade's representation of the world the ancient hierarchical thinking intersects with the horizontal one, while the written text itself initiates the reader¹⁸ with a view to acknowledging the “real concealed by appearances”¹⁹. The theme of modern man's creative life against the background of history and the paths toward the assumption of an authentic human existence into the world, that renew man and save him spiritually, represent the stake of Eliade's discourse. Consequently, in the reification strategy of an “aesthetics of authenticity” utmost importance is given to the problematization and disproof of the codes for traditional cultural and literary representations, both mimetic and psychologizing, as well as to the representation of the “new” man in his hypostasis of product, producer, and consumer of culture.

¹³ The writing of this play shares the same meaning with the writing of the novel *Întoarcerea din rai* [*Return from Paradise*] (1934); Eliade wrote in his *Memorii* / [*Autobiography*]: “Pavel Anicet had to find the solution to his problem in order to help me find a solution to mine. I had to write *Return from Paradise*.” (Humanitas, Bucharest, 1991, I, p. 281); see Sabina Finaru, *Eliade prin Eliade* / [*Eliade through Eliade*], Univers, Bucharest, 2006, p. 80-97.

¹⁴ Mircea Eliade wrote all his literary works exclusively in Romanian.

¹⁵ Eugen Simion, op. cit., p. 50

¹⁶ Mircea Eliade, *Jurnalul portughez și alte scrieri* / [*The Portuguese Journal and Other Writings*], (I-II), Humanitas, Bucharest, 2006

¹⁷ Mircea Eliade, *Jurnal* / [*Journal*], ed. cit., I, p. 355

¹⁸ In this respect, Eliade notes in his [*Journal*]: “Truth be told, in my case, the obsession for the metaphysical and the biological leaves no room for any other problems.”, I, p. 22

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, I, p. 299

In Nicolai Hartmann's *Aesthetics*²⁰, human nature and interpersonal relations are “impregnated with the aesthetic”; even though they are both situated outside art, they are endowed with ontological depth because our consciousness capitalizes on them in their capacity as support for the assets that engender the aesthetic attitude (be they utilitarian, moral, magic or religious etc.). The “living man as object of beauty” acquires aesthetic value through contemplation; this presupposes the capacity to capture intuitively the moral values and qualities from the outer appearance and behaviour, in a global representation of the “soul icon”, perceived as an “aesthetic appearance rapport”. “It is in the essence of appearance”, Hartmann claims, “that something real may also appear in the likeness of something unreal”²¹. This rapport appears as interpretation at the pole of reception and is characterized by the transparency of the “front plane” (the outer form) for the manifestation of the “back plane” (the inner form), beyond which lies the intentionality of human and artistic action, in an unreal plane. Therefore, the human relations/mores as part of human interiority are not restricted to the ethical contents but, in their sensible appearance, are perceived aesthetically by their degree of adequacy (greater or smaller) between the outer and the inner form, as an expression of interior plenitude; when the aesthetic sentiment of form detaches itself from life’s natural sentiment, dominating the vital values of the organic being, there appears the understanding of spiritual beauty²².

Referring to the extra-artistic aesthetic, Vasile Morar²³ is of opinion that in the matter of inter-subjective relationships the falling in love is similar in form to art; the two are similar in at least two aspects out of the four identified by Tudor Vianu in his [*Aesthetics*]: the isolation and the idealization of the lover's appearance. Meanwhile, in the joy caused by the other's presence, the falling in love asserts a quantum of sacredness, as stated by Kant²⁴. This quantum of sacredness belongs to both moral conscience and aesthetic sensibility, and is a triumph over the vital plane.

3. Man as Cultural Product, Producer, and Consumer: Denying the Codes of Representation

In Eliade's literature, the aesthetics of authenticity has at its core the “living man as object of beauty”. It targets the authentic inter-subjective communication of the souls that open in their relationships to ethical and aesthetic values, and achieve, together with the vital values (physical and psychological), the integral being, who harmonizes the contradictions between the physical/biological dimension and the metaphysical/spiritual dimension, both of them genuinely inherent to the human condition. To modern man, this signifies the retrieval of a “cosmological dimension”²⁵, with a view to securing spiritual salvation. Thus, authenticity amounts to a moral, ethical, and aesthetic content which pleads directly for a new humanism.

²⁰ Nicolai Hartmann, *Estetica* / [*The Aesthetics*], Univers, Bucharest, 1974

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 150

²² *Ibidem*, p. 151

²³ Vasile Morar, *Estetica. Interpretări și texte* / [*The Aesthetics. Interpretations and Texts*], in ebooks.unibuc.ro/filologie, p. 1

²⁴ Immanuel Kant, *Critica rațiunii practice* / [*The Critique of Practical Reason*], Editura Științifică, Bucharest, 1972, p. 171

²⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Jurnal* / [*Journal*], ed. cit. , I, p. 79

This is why this contents is hypostatized in the characters' romance in *A Spiritual Adventure*, which takes various material shapes (from carnal and sentimental love to idealized and consumerist love, all the way to complete love) and interpersonal forms (engagement, matrimony, adultery, divorce).

Similar to his entire literary prose, the four-act play *A Spiritual Adventure* is structured according to several planes: the real plane (where the erotic plot appears at thematic level), the magical plane (the most developed one, which interrelates the thematic plane and the fictional storyline; the circularity of the life-art relationship and the critique of the world's representation), and the mythical plane (inextricably linked to the creator's vision). They are organized concentrically and develop parallel scenarios surrounding the main characters, Ștefania, Tudor Manciu, and Mihai Barbura. At the play's end, these planes are unified into a symbolic/potential plane, belonging to a second degree reality, wherein the themes of salvation and achievement of freedom are joined together. In the reader's mind, they relativize previous representations of life, of man and his knowledge, disclosing not only the impossibility of understanding them but also their boundless richness and beauty; both literary texts by Eliade and his essays on the aesthetics of authenticity rely on this form of relativization. Between the planes of fictional reality and the strata of artistic and human representation (that Hartmann spoke of) there is a subtle parallelism, extremely telling for the so-called *intentio auctoris*.

The thematic storyline is seconded by a fictional storyline which problematizes the original creative vision of literary tradition, transformed into a degraded aesthetic code, by imitation and overuse; turning this vision into a cliché is subjected to critique/disproof, while, on the other hand, the literary text proposes a change of paradigm for the literature of the future, adapted to postmodern man, the inhabitant of a mobile globalized society, thus marked by tensions caused by multiculturalism²⁶, undermined by skepticism, and threatened by nothingness, by loss of its memory and values.

Thus, the change of perspective regarding the fiction's dominant feature starts from the question "How can I interpret the world?"²⁷, and targets precisely the ontological dimension of characters. The playwright-author feels that at the intersection point between his play's fictional present and the legacy of literary tradition he failed to find answers to the already written play; this is why he searches for these answers in the reactions of his female characters, whom he integrates into patterns. In Act I, the ironic attitude toward "predestined language", the leitmotifs and the gestures of erotic seduction described by Manciu for Lucia, giving her a picture of Ștefania and Barbura taking a stroll, represent a parody of the Romantic aesthetic code, turned into a cliché: "Manciu: *Only Ștefania is not what is called a woman. She's something more – and something less, at the same time (...) I believe they've told each other their life stories. That's the way it usually happens. Confessions, deep, liquid looks, the first prolonged hand-holding...*" (I, p. 8, 12)

But the polemic moves from the horizon of expectation of the regular consumer of literature, which the young playwright satisfies and cynically satirizes at the same time, toward the producer; the discourse of the implied author parodies Manciu's speech in Act II,

²⁶ Virgil Nemoianu, *Are postmodernismul substanță? / [Has Postmodernism Any Substance At All?]*, in „Convorbiri literare”, February 2011, no. 2, p. 11

²⁷ Brian McHale, *Ficțiunea postmodernistă / [Postmodernist Fiction]*, Polirom, Iași, 2009, p. 30

when he confesses his attraction to Ștefania, the “spiritual woman” and embodiment of Dante’s Beatrice type, and his would-be attachment to the culture of chastity and sacrifice: “Manciu (taking a firm step closer to her): *I believed (...) that you were an ethereal apparition, suave, descended from somewhere in the dreams of a poet. And from the dreams of a mediocre poet, at that, who was ashamed of his body, ashamed of his desires! (...) I’d succeeded in that detestable performance that enchants you women (...) That’s why you liked me then: because I embodied your ideal of spiritual nobility*” (II, p. 26). Imagining the world in forms/appearances, the artist discovers that her purpose in this world leads to a tragic predicament, experiencing infernal decomposition, disillusionment and disgust. At the end, he finds the response he had been long searching for, the response that would “crush Ștefania” and make her “to fall on [her] knees and beg for mercy”: “Manciu: *You’re known in all the bars, you’ve lived the life of a hysterical and sentimental slut – and you call this a «spiritual adventure»?! (...) But, you know, that’s been done before. It’s nothing new. And it’s rather vulgar... Alcohol, sex and philosophy...*” (IV, p. 54, 56).

The relativizing and aesthetically innovative perspective is also upheld by the way in which Eliade deconstructs the relationship between his characters and their structure. They appear to be experiencing a generalized conflict with one another, both at thematic surface level and at deep fictional level. The strategy of undermining and derealizing the characters’ representation contains a certain imprecision in delineating their true identity: an obscure genius crowned with a laurel wreath, whose life is surrounded by contradictory rumours (Mihai Barbura); an orphan girl with an unknown surname who becomes a subject for gossip on account of her change in behaviour at the end of the play; a successful writer and a Don Juan whose relation with the women in his life is at best ambiguous, before he disappears without a trace (Manciu).

Furthermore, the author resorts to several *qui-pro-quo* strategies and to the (re)duplication technique, whose function is to contradict and dissolve their apparent identity. Thus, at the level of thematic storyline, the multiple-structure personae in Eliade’s play are performed by the actors who stage the play by dramatist Manciu, while genius composer Mihai Barbura is “substituted” for by commoner Petru Baranda in Act II.

At the level of metatextual fictional storyline, the same function is performed by the intertext. The personae are displayed in their double relation: to a cultural pattern, suggested by playwright Manciu, and to a primal mythological archetype, suggested by the personae’s internal logic, and opposed to the parodistic quotations from the character-author by the implied author.

Besides, the play problematizes the relationship between the characters and the author. Not only do the characters refuse the authoritarian models forwarded by the character-author, but they also replace them with other models, of opposite sense, as suggested by the *intentio auctoris*. It is this authorial intention that opens the possibility for both the characters and the reader to transpose the roles: the apparent Orpheus, torn by grief and death, is, in fact, Dionysus who, having experienced Hades (suggested by the beard he grows), exalts the joy of life and become master of arts²⁸ (composer Mihai Barbura); Beatrice-Eurydice appears to be a bacchant who ultimately turns into a liberated Ariadne (Ștefania); the Don Juan trickster

²⁸ Erwin Rhode, *Psyche*, Meridiane, Bucharest, 1985, p. 239

appears as a Pygmalion, more resemblant of Eurydice after his failure as Orpheus (Manciu): „Manciu (looking at her, unable to control his almost ravishingly obscene stare): *I pity you, I'm repelled, and yet I feel attracted to you! You have something infernally appealing about your body, your expression...* Ștefania: *That's very natural. I frequent Hell so much of the time (...) I've come to thank you, because, due to you, I've known Hell before dying – and because, due to you, I'll be able, in the end, to become again immortal.* Manciu: *Do you sense Orpheus approaching?* Ștefania: *I sensed him long ago. I've sensed him all the time. But he didn't find me... It was too dark, and there was too much water... But now he's caught my hand... And he won't let me go... And this time I won't look back, toward you... I won't lose him again... But I'm sorry about you, leaving you here, in this darkness, in the coldness of death, without love, without light, without hope...*” (IV, p. 56-57)

The same problematization regards the relationships author-actor-spectator and fiction-reality. The “present” receptors in the text are doubles of the characters played by actors and of playwright Manciu (former conductor-manipulator of others' destinies) who, in this capacity, refuses both the “play” suggested by the director and the outer meanings, alien to the characters' true personality and to the authorial intention as well.

Just like in avant-garde theatre, the author suppresses the convention of theatrical staging and lifts the barrier between actors and true characters turned spectators and also between stage and audience; their confrontation, staged as a battle, occurs during the rehearsal before the show, which is witnessed as spectacle by the real audience, who have just been seated and, unable to make any sense of the performance, fill with revolt. This conflict appertains to two different manners of artistic representation: one which generically evokes tragic poesy as literary art and the other which evokes the theatrical play and the performing arts.

Although by virtue of its material dimension the written text is more stable than theatrical staging, it does not evade the contradictions of a reading multiplied by the receptors' horizon of expectation; as such, the receivers' attitude varies: from Ștefania's initially credulous attitude to Lucia's sentimental, George's indifferent or Uncle Dem's hostile attitude (as he plans to sue Manciu for breach of intimacy and honour), all the way to Ștefania's final manipulatory attitude, as she tries, by symmetric reversal, to negotiate the text's partial rewriting so that the author may avoid any inconveniences and they both may be saved from the miserable destiny the playwright has already allotted them.

This maze of hypostases can be construed as an interrogation directed at the process of artistic semiosis and at the author-text-receptor relationship. The builder of this maze leaves behind a discreet Ariadne's thread as part of a strategy by which the confused reader can restore the artistic vision and the play's unity, without extinguishing its meanings: the intertext carrying a parodistic function, the compositional symmetries and parallelisms, and the thematic and typological occurrences in other texts by Eliade; it is these references that guide the receiver toward a plural, tabular reading. Thus, he/she discovers a plurality of possible ways of world representations in the text's different scenarios.

4. The Conflict of Visions and Aesthetic Representations

The characters involved in the fictional conflict belong to the specific typology of Eliade's prose and exemplify two artistic visions: the former is canonical and fatalistic,

materialized in Tudor Manciu, an avatar of Master Manole²⁹ and, beyond him, of the demiurge-trickster and of the creator, who resorts to conventions as prescriptions and “magical keys”, while the latter is authentic, original, and optimistic – an expression of beatitude and genius, as illustrated by Mihai Barbura, a hypostasis of the Dionysian creator.

Tudor Manciu models his art and love affairs in a Procrustean manner, acting authoritatively, even despotically, in his two relationships, as lover and as artist; he limits the freedom of choice for the woman he loves both in real life and in his play, by anticipating the lovers' tragic destiny and thus suppressing the values of lived experience shared by the “living man”, the actual being. The faculty of dramatic sight which transforms ethical life into aesthetic material³⁰ affects Manciu's moral sensibility, which engenders the cold, skeptical and ironic attitude as well as his failure in love and creation. It is only near the end that he understands that the sole fruit of this doubly joint love for his feminine creation, Ștefania, is none other than Pathos, just like in Pygmalion's myth. His work is indifferent to truth³¹ and inauthentic as the molding of the stable matter of words addressing fantasy lacks the “ethos of confessing” the real: the “authentication of mystery” in Barbura's genius, achieved by the physical detail of the beard, and the embodiment of the authorial vision about him are both deprived of the very stratum of the actual being, depicted by Eliade in the double Petru Baranda. Relating the characters' psychological contents to cultural models, the author suppresses from their representation the perceptiveness capacity, evoked in their real appearance, while Manciu's written dramatic text becomes confused, incomprehensible to its receptors: “Manciu: *It's not a matter of how you feel or don't feel, but how you appear in the eyes of the others. The beard prolonged somehow the legend of Mihai Barbura, and it guaranteed the authenticity of the mystery. In my eyes, for example, you were the man who had lived three years in near absolute solitude, waiting for your bride. Well, as you look now, I can't believe in you (...)* Baranda (serious): *But what difference does it make if someone seems or doesn't seem something, if he has or doesn't have something? (...) It's obvious that you both are living in abstractions! ... Because, in fact, the only thing that counts is to be yourself, to be real.*” (III, p. 37)

Thus, the aesthetic of authenticity aims at this very ontological stratum, suggested by the title of the *Symphony in E Major*, which makes a reference to the verb *to be*³², as well as by the connotative values of the anthroponym Barbura, which evokes the semantic circle of organic life. This is why his appearance is that of a “serene, calm, confident, even optimistic genius”, despite all the personal tragedies that befell him. Explaining the existence of the “living man” as an *alias* of Mihai Barbura, Petru Baranda does not speak about representational conventions, but about the transparency of representation that assures the intelligibility of form and its capacity to be communicated to the receptor.

The title of Manciu's play, *A Spiritual Adventure*, suggests a barren individual experience of the artist, based on canonical imitation and ethical-aesthetic sacrifice; the

²⁹ The protagonist of an ancient Romanian ballad which transfigures the artistic myth of sacrifice for creation's sake (Master Manole builds his beloved wife Ana in the walls of his monastery so that they won't cave in anymore).

³⁰ Cf. Nicolai Hartmann, *op. cit.*, p. 159

³¹ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 166

³² In Romanian, *e* is the short form of *to be* in the Present Simple Indicative Mood, 3rd person, singular.

repetition acts vampirically and indiscriminately upon models, persons, and characters, whom it brings into tragic dead-end situations, as cultural clichés that embody their very significance. This is why the more Manciu pushes Ștefania into Barbura's arms the more she feels she loves Petru with another woman's love: "Ștefania (in the same tone of voice): *Why did you say that I'm not myself, but the other one? Why did you say that I resemble her? (...)* Barbura (in a different tone): *And yet, we couldn't live in that dream of theirs, until the end. I've asked their forgiveness, but it was, indeed, beyond our powers... I told them that we aren't like them, that we two are mortals... and we live on earth. I will beg their pardon for our having to separate from them, and from now on we will live our own lives only. Your life and mine...*" (II, p. 32)

The theatrical representation breaks Manciu's illusion of demiurgic omnipotence and reveals to him that the author of the dramatic text gets to mold only half of the literary work's meaning as well as half of the representation contents, since the performing arts and the actors co-operate to create fiction³³, while the spiritual contents is achieved directly in a different form of appearance, which functions according to another convention (the stage convention); the actors' play in Manciu's dramatic text – "fugitive materials" that objectify the characters – cannot but communicate the lack of seriousness specific to acting, and not the appearance relationship between the outer form and the soul contents of persons/personae, while the author is incapable of acknowledging his own ideas.

Tudor Manciu is a character similar to Manoil from [*The Dying Light...*], or to the doctor from [*Isabel and the Devil's Waters*]³⁴; he is a Don Juan, a cynical experimenter, because love is a game of seduction; his social status as fashionable author helps him dominate his partners (mostly actresses) and, after brief erotic interludes, he gets involved into their sentimental life and conducts their destiny according to a plotline invented by him. As such, his partners play cultural models whose repetition is ontologically fatal to them: these models range from "sentimental goose", to Beatrice and "hysterical slut". Experiencing a devious Pygmalion complex, Manciu fails his "role of a lifetime" as he models his lover not according to his desire, but after a foreign (Dantesque) model, which turns her into an abstraction, into a cultural ghost. He intends to make use of his cultural competence in a demonic manner, subordinating it to mean individual purposes. His demiurgic pride, his will to control other people's lives and to obtain artistic recognition by cheating place him in the trickster category, among the so called "sarcastic buffoons", as labeled by Ștefania (III, p. 25), who, just like Manoil, asserts the metaphysics of vacuity and death. Manciu wants to steal the secret of geniality from Barbura and commands Ștefania to tempt him (I); when the two get married, Manciu determines to find out his life's secret, pushing the woman to commit murder, inoculating her with the idea of adulterous love, and eventually causing their final separation. And then, having failed the "role of a lifetime", he wants to become the consoler, the surrogate of the lost husband, a phantom of former love.

The severing of ties, the departure and his refusal, upon return, to change the play's ending after a suggestion by Ștefania (who becomes like him), represent the stages of an

³³ Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 122

³⁴ Characters in Eliade's novels, *Isabel și apele diavolului* [*Isabel and the Devil's Waters*] (1930) and *Lumina ce se stinge...* [*The Dying Light...*] (1934).

initiatory journey of understanding his own life and identity, which saves him from the demonic web of previously devised intrigues; he assumes the ascetic ideal and thus recovers his human coherence, his self-harmony and transparency in relation with his way of representing the world; meanwhile, Ștefania acknowledges his attitudinal transformation in the loftier register of his style and vocabulary, which become “more serious” (IV, p. 52). His old antinomical relation with the world now becomes antagonistic. This relation becomes manifest in Act IV, when the artist appears to be playing an altered role, both in relation with his work (as a receptor) and with the woman he loves, by reversing the initial situation, as he changes from Don Juan into an ascetic, and Ștefania, from Beatrice into a bacchant, who believes in a delivering mythical and ontological transformation. Thus, symmetrically, during her last confrontation with Manciu, she too refuses to “return to the play” and chooses a path different from his: the path of physical appearance, the only path she was never in possession of: “Ștefania: *No, there’s nothing new about it. All these things have been said from the beginning of the world... But from the beginning of the world, there has also been love. And if you have someone who loves you, he will continue to love you, always, whatever may happen to you, forever, even if you have died... if that man who loves you will descend into Hades after you, and take your hand, and bring you back...* Manciu (sarcastically, overly-dramatic): *Eurydice!!... Orpheus and Eurydice!* Ștefania: *No. Not only them. They’ve just shown the way. They were at the beginning...*” (IV, 56-57).

For Manciu, art continues to be a magical practice, an Orphic initiation through which the creator asserts the power of illusion; this is why the character Manciu from his play believes that access to geniality is the result of a state of grace that can be “injected”, or “revealed”, by “personal contact” with a mystical initiator (IV, p. 48). At the end of the play, the author pulverizes the relationship(s) of the characters he depicts in union in Act I, and everybody takes his/her different route which updates their potential identity, authentic dimension, and inner freedom of spiritual re-invention. In the process of recovering this identity, their rupture from one another restores the individual understanding of their journey and, through self-assumed distance their self-contemplation as complete beings. However, the *mise-en-abyme* of the play’s title by the title of Manciu’s play muddles the meanings of the dramatic text and invites the receptor to recommence reading.

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