

## REPRESENTATIONS OF EVIL IN THE NOVELS *MISS CHRISTINA, THE SNAKE AND ISABEL AND THE DEVIL'S WATERS* BY MIRCEA ELIADE

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**ABSTRACT.** *Representations of Evil in the Novels Miss Christina, The Snake and Isabel and the Devil's Waters by Mircea Eliade.* The present article analyzes some representations of evil in the novels *Miss Christina, The Snake and Isabel and the Devil's Waters* by Mircea Eliade. In particular, we draw attention to the evil that directly refers to the mysterious dimension and, therefore, outlines a perception that exceeds the mundane experience of everyday life. In this sense, the emergence of unfathomable aspects and phenomena can only be explained in an imaginary approach. This type of representation of evil is perceived within the limits of a manifestation of the supernatural, in an unveiling of the evil through ill-fated, Mephistophelean characters or in the potentiation of "heresies" in the folkloric imaginary. The paper aims to examine how this evil, most often related to some almost occult experiences and fueled by local folklore, is capitalized in the fantastic prose of Mircea Eliade.

**Keywords:** *mysterious, fantastic, magical, imaginary, representation, evil, devil*

**REZUMAT.** *Reprezentări ale răului în romanele Domnișoara Christina, Șarpele și Isabel și Apele diavolului de Mircea Eliade.* Articolul de față analizează unele reprezentări ale răului în romanele *Domnișoara Christina, Șarpele și Isabel și apele diavolului* de Mircea Eliade. În mod deosebit atragem atenția asupra răului care se referă nemijlocit la dimensiunea misterioasă și se înscrie, prin urmare, într-o percepție ce depășește experiența din domeniul cotidianului. În acest sens ajungem să vorbim de aspecte și fenomene stranii care pot fi explicate doar într-o abordare imaginară. Acest tip de reprezentare a răului este perceput în limitele unei manifestări a supranaturalului, într-o dezvelire a maleficului prin intermediul unor personaje nefaste, mefistofelice sau în potențarea unor „eresuri” din imaginarul folcloric. Or, acest rău, legat de cele mai multe ori de niște experiențe aproape oculte și alimentate din folclorul autohton, este valorificat în proza fantastică a lui Mircea Eliade.

**Cuvinte-cheie:** *misterios, fantastic, magic, imaginar, reprezentare, răul, diavol*

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**Introduction.** The representation of evil as a mysterious entity in the prose of Mircea Eliade, and especially in the works mentioned in the title of this study, highlights the connection between the perception of evil in the folkloric imaginary and the capitalization of this manifestation in literary creations as an element that causes astonishment (mystery) and fear of something “incomprehensible”. We refer to that “evil” which manifests itself as an instance of the mysterious, of the magnificent. As regards the concept of mysterious, what we have in mind is the acceptance of Rudolf Otto, who considers it to be a distinct element of the manifestation of the sacred. Rudolf Otto proposes the concept of *mysterium* which, taken in a general sense, expresses “only a “mystery”, in the sense of something strange, incomprehensible and obscure. The *mysterium* itself is, in relation to our understanding of the term, only a concept which, by virtue of a certain analogy, gives us the possibility of designating the thing, but without really exhausting it” (Otto 33). By and large, according to Rudolf Otto, the term *mysterium* does not have a different meaning from the adjective “mysterious”, this being rather the expression of the astonishment and incomprehension in relation to the “completely different”, which in principle is something that causes fear, for instance, the demonic creature. This experience is also called a *numinous* experience (a form of manifestation of the sacred from which the moral dimension is drawn, a power that can be felt without being understood, namely it refers to the display of a formless power). In fact, mysterious feelings are quite prominent in Mircea Eliade’s prose works, such as *Nights at Serampore* (1940), *The Forbidden Forest* (1955) or even in *Marriage in Heaven* (1938), whose characters are involved in a mirage and a welter of strange events.

The evil of mysterious nature is manifested in Eliade’s prose in various unnatural occurrences and in the image of the other, of the stranger who comes from a different dimension. The mystery is expressed through the other’s own way of being. What defines otherness is grasped through a process of knowledge and understanding of things and phenomena that go beyond the existential spheres, belonging to a sphere of the phenomenal and the supernatural. If a thing is perceived as having special value, then the immediate reality begins to have other valences. As Mircea Eliade puts it in *Le sacré et le profane*, “Pour ceux auxquels une pierre se révèle sacrée, sa réalité immédiate se transmue au contraire en réalité surnaturelle” (18). Because the longing is represented in a supernatural reality, evil (the devil) can be perceived as an expression of God’s otherness, while existentially, the devil manifests itself as an unfortunate accident. To imagine what is impossible to imagine, that is, what transcends the limits of understanding the ordinary world, becomes essentially either a purely playful activity of thought focused on metaphysical meanings, or a probing into mystical or even occult abysses, as, for example, in the novels of J. K. Huysmans, *The Damned* (1891)

and *Against the Grain* (1884). In Huysmans's novel *The Damned* – in fact, a deeply occult approach to the topic, submerged in the swirl of black magic and hedonism – the image of the devil is very close to that of the Middle Ages.

In this perception, evil corrupts the human being by destroying spiritual balance. Thus, the soul no longer relates directly to the divinity by seeking fundamental answers as to its own discomposure, but resorts to a negative authority. Man seeks answers for his discomposure, exclusively in an illusory dimension offered by an entity of evil that manifests itself in demonic images, as is very well illustrated in *Faust* (1808, the first part of the tragedy, followed later by the second part in 1831) by J. W. Goethe – a mythical image of man's temptation to accede to the metaphysical world, of the aspiration to know the hidden and mysterious essence of the universe at any cost. The encounter with the demonic instance impels the human being to assimilate some mysteries, which are, for that matter, part of a taboo and camouflaged area of knowledge. Thus, evil is represented by an equivocal paradigm in which the fascination with and the fear of the mysterious prevail over rational logic and take the form of strange appearances largely perceived by exacerbated artistic sensibility.

In what follows, I aim to undertake an exegesis of some of Eliade's novels, highlighting the images and representations of evil, as well as their correlation with the Romanian folkloric imaginary, by analyzing primarily the characters with typically evil characteristics. We take the term "exegesis" to mean a methodological approach that emphasizes interpretation, in our case the interpretation of some novels from the oeuvre of Mircea Eliade. We do not intend to focus particularly on the interpretation (*hermeneia*) of the literary text proper, in its entirety, but only on the exegesis of some representations of evil in Eliade's novels. Exegesis is also called by Adrian Marino "applied hermeneutics", about which he says the following: "The original meaning is the same: hermeneutics is an exegesis (communication, explanation of meanings, texts, etc.). Practice has introduced, ever since the Middle Ages, a dissociation, which is preserved to this day: hermeneutics refers to the principles and rules of interpretation, it is the science and the methodology of interpretation, while exegesis is the practical application of hermeneutic rules, the actual, real interpretation applied to texts. Hermeneutics is the theory of exegesis; exegesis – applied hermeneutics" (Marino 39). Our approach also largely resorts to the methodological tools specific to imaginary research in the sense proposed by Gilbert Durand. This allows us to make a comparative analysis of the novels *Miss Christina, The Snake and Isabel and the Devil's Waters*. This methodological approach will enable us to identify the mythological substratum, thus achieving an interpretation that can refer to the religious factor, philosophy, anthropology or "other spheres of human expression" (Remak 31). Of course, there is a series of very well-known exegeses that come with unique approaches to Mircea Eliade's prose, such as:

*Mircea Eliade – un spirit al amplitudinii* by Eugen Simion, *Traversarea cercului. Centralitate, inițiere, mit în opera lui Mircea Eliade* by Grațiela Benga, *Mircea Eliade. Poetica fantasticului și morfologia romanului existențial* by Gheorghe Glodeanu, *Eliade prin Eliade* by Sabina Fânaru, *Eros și thanatos. Eseu despre Mircea Eliade* by Liliana Bahnă and others. For the most part, the rhetoric of these exegetes focuses on mythical expressions and the symbolic load of some key images that allow the reception of Eliade's prose in a broader framework than that of criticism or literary history, highlighting, at the same time, some of Mircea Eliade's insights as a mythologist and historian of religions. A substantial contribution to the interpretation of symbols that encode latent meanings in Mircea Eliade's prose is that of Doina Ruști, *Dicționar de simboluri din opera lui Mircea Eliade*, which tactically addresses the mythical substratum, as well as the relationship of some themes or motifs with the religious factor. Although we cannot refer to exegesis that implicitly address the manifestations of evil and its valences in Mircea Eliade's prose, it is worth noting the study *Imaginea nefratelui în literatură* by Simona Maria Drelciuc, which analyzes the manifestations of evil in the novel *Miss Christina*, as well as the way in which these representations alternate with elements of Romanian folklore and with the literary imaginary (Drelciuc 305-311). Thus, due to his mythical load, the figure of the devil in Mircea Eliade's prose is one that fascinates, but also one that can shake the psychic integrity of the characters. Constituting itself as an emanation of the superstitious supernatural, the image of the devil investigated in our study is under the sign of the mysterious fantastic regime.

For the most part, this is a fantastic regime with superstitious and enigmatic implications, in which battles are waged against the dark, infernal forces, often leading the characters to the brink of madness, as E.T.A. Hoffmann very well captures this phenomenon in *The Devil's Elixirs* (1815). The problem in this type of fantasy short stories and novels resides in the mysterious involvement of the main characters in magical rituals or experiences that largely arouse the forces of a realm beyond the ambit of ordinary perceptions, as can be very well seen in the novel *Miss Christina*. Therefore, the type of fantastic that we will analyze is related to the irrational. It is difficult to fathom through explanations of ordinary reality by rational means. This type of representation of evil – fed by the folkloric imaginary and archaic beliefs – is found, for instance, in enchantments, curses and sorcery.

**The novel *Miss Christina*.** It is in this sense that we could very well analyze the fantastic novel *Miss Christina* by Mircea Eliade. Published in 1936, the novel is a type of fantasy that is built on an archaic substratum of the Romanian imaginary folklore, capturing in the narrative structure magical elements, mysterious deeds and a world under the sign of the curse. Referring

to the novel *Miss Christina*, George Călinescu stated the following: "The writer's program seems to be to translate some notions of magical folklore into several hermetic stories. If in the other novels the method of penetration was a discussion around experiences, here it is the initiation; in an obvious way, the author's intention, always of a cognitive nature, is grasped only by the one who tears the mythical veil" (Călinescu, *Istoria literaturii* 959).

The novel *Miss Christina* reveals the folk elements from archaic beliefs and some occult representations about the world and the realm of the dead. Anchored in a plausible spatial-temporal framework, the novel's action takes place in an almost esoteric register, in which the male characters come into contact with the forces of the world beyond the borders of the vivid and the viable. These characters, who have come rather to withdraw away from everyday disorders, are involuntarily engaged in an initiation ritual of access to a sacred dimension. The presence of fantastic elements such as mysticism, mirage and strangeness in the epic scheme of the novel *Miss Christina* is actually characteristic of the Eliade's fantastic works from his youth. Commenting on the fantastic works Mircea Eliade wrote after 1936, Mihai Gheorghiu observes that the youthful fantasy, which also includes the novel *Miss Christina*, "is focused on the magical game of illusion, the picturesque or the strange" (Gheorghiu 117).

Strange phenomena enter the reality of everyday life primarily through mundane situations. In addition to the difficult atmosphere or the strange movements noticed during the night, Professor Nazarie also confesses to Egor a series of mysterious legends from the peasants in the village about the Moscu family mansion or about Miss Christina's past, a fact which further amplifies the general fear the guests at the mansion are seized by. Still, Egor's state of fear remains within the limits of a state controlled by a well-balanced psyche, for which the temptation to know the mystery surrounding him remains far greater than the fear caused by Nazarie's frightening accounts. Although he is overwhelmed by fear and dread, Egor "marvels at his lucidity; he is so close to Mr. Nazarie, to a man he embraces and who, to his horror, looks at him with serenity, as he analyzes him. He didn't dare to look at the park, though. For a moment, Mr. Nazarie's outstretched arm had terrified him more than all his frightening words. Maybe he sees something there too, Egor thought; maybe he sees the same thing as Simina... And yet he was still lucid; only a very slight uneasiness terrified his soul" (Eliade, *Domnișoara* 77). The fact that Egor keeps his calm and lucidity, and respectively ignores the advice given by Nazarie to leave the mansion urgently, is due to another rather important factor besides the temptation of the mystery. It's about the love for Sanda. Despite the threat of evil, Egor feels the need to show tenderness and care for Sanda, directly threatened by the evil force caused by the haunting of Miss Christina's spirit. Although the characters are aware that they have been

living under the threat of a dead being for thirty years, they largely feel the atrocities and the harm produced during the life of Miss Christina. This evil is felt in the general atmosphere of the novel in the form of a strange state that the male characters can hardly explain: "Such a woman in a house leaves traces [...]" (concluded Mr. Nazarie) "That's why I felt pressed, anxious, depressed..." (76). The "path of debauchery and cruelty" that Miss Christina had taken during her life, unleashed, after her death, an evil specter that haunts the mansion of the Moscu family. Basically, according to the archaic imaginary, the undead represents the punishment of a soul seized by evil forces and its condemnation to exile. Victor Kernbach argues that "Subsequent superstitions everywhere consider the undead death's cursed to leave their graves at night to wander the world" (591). The terrifying atmosphere in the Moscu family mansion is the product of the emanation of evil in the figure of the undead. This evil is materialized not only in the strange atmosphere of the mansion, it also acts on the physical and mental integrity of those who lived there permanently. Thus, Mrs. Moscu has to provide her with a creature from which Miss Christina's undead can suck blood; little Simina is involved in all sorts of strange arrangements; and Sanda is put to bed just because a man is in love with her.

In the first part of the novel *Miss Christina*, evil only causes mystery and is manifested by an "unseen power" that haunts without causing certain significant disturbances in the perception of reality by characters from outside the Moscu family. Evil is felt through a terrifying presence of an exponent from the other world that transcends the space and time of immediate, empirical reality. Egor "realizes that he was trying to fool himself, because he *knew* the exact moment when Miss Christina had left the room. He had felt her terrifying presence disappear from the space; he had felt it from his blood, from his breath" (Eliade, *Domnișoara* 83). The intrusion of evil with its serious consequences on the psychic factors of the male characters in the novel *Miss Christina* takes place only in a nocturnal setting and, in the first stage, in the dreamlike dimension. The character with evil qualities is introduced in the mysterious atmosphere of the fictional world of the novel due to Simina's strange confessions. The past of a being from the afterlife bursts into the dream of a child who takes dreamlike details as facts that reflect everyday reality. Miss Christina's profile is first outlined by Simina's seemingly naive clues. Even the stories reproduced by Simina, who claims to be told by her nanny, are nothing more than an escape into the tangled world of fairy tales and myths that intertwine the narrative layer of the novel to convert the fantastic setting into the dimension of everyday life. In fact, this is a fairly common procedure in Mircea Eliade's fantastic prose. In a commentary on the fantastic in Eliade's' prose, Marius Lazurca is of the opinion that Mircea Eliade "introduces into the strategies of fantastic prose the rhetorical

instrument of the contrast between sacred and profane, as the most platitudinous characters most appropriately outline the absolute and incomprehensible surprise of hierophany. But the common framework of extraordinary events is even more than a simple ingredient of the narrative: more than the neutral background of the narrative: more than the neutral background of a revelation, it is – claims Eliade – the significant horizon of the intervention of parallel universes” (Lazurca 102). The figure of the character Simina contributes to the outline of the obscure picture of the short story so far that she herself becomes an exponent of evil. Moreover, Sorin Alexandrescu claims that Simina takes the evil attributes of Miss Christina: “It is obvious, for that matter, that Simina has not only the minor role of an intriguing valet, but, moreover, that she *becomes* Miss Christina (a second, now metaphorical “incarnation”), in a diurnal variant that completes the nocturnal seduction of the other” (Alexandrescu 163). Not in vain did Egor consider Simina to be a little witch, because some last twitches of the undead manifested in her or the tension favorable to the materialization of the fear caused by the presence of Miss Christina was created. Professor Nazarie’s cautionary remark to this naughty little girl not to play with the knife lest the angel should run away from her becomes a well-founded occasion for Egor to consider her as a component of the awakening evil: “If it were possible, this little witch would burn us alive now...” (Eliade, *Domnișoara* 102). In the same vein, Monica Borș remarks: “Simina is part of the series of those demonic characters (Manoil, the Devil, the Snake, etc.), under whose mask lies the ‘fabulous dragon-like instinct’ and whose role is to tempt (her play is also facilitated by the fact that, in the artist’s view, ‘the boundary between animate and inanimate’ is extremely lax, and that, endowed with the ‘grace to transform reality into image’, it has the ability to ‘take the metaphor as reality’)” (98).

Another important element of the novel is the painting of Miss Christina, according to the details suggested by the narrator, by the painter Mirea. Being an embodiment of the physical beauty of Miss Christina, the painting created the illusion of an enchanting incarnation of an innocent, almost virginal being. However, the face in the painting animated a breath of life, of a life which seemed to establish a relationship of communication with each male character. The female face in the painting fascinated and disturbed at the same time that the teacher “Nazarie felt terror like a claw pressing on his chest. Miss Christina was smiling from Mirea’s portrait as if she was looking at him deeply” (Eliade, *Domnișoara* 61). Egor, a painter himself, who was far away from the portrait, “was struggling to realize where so much melancholy and fatigue flowed in her soul, in front of this virgin who looked him in the eyes, smiling familiarly, as if she had chosen only him from the whole group, to tell him only about her endless loneliness” (61). The perfection of the face in the painting is reminiscent of

some romantic motifs in which beauty was perceived as something frightening, something that has a demonic character. The engagement, in the narrative, with Eminescu's poem "Evening Star", is visible when Miss Christina speaks to Egor in her dream, referring to the words Cătălina addressed to the Evening Star. All this deepens even further the nocturnal phantasm. In Mircea Eliade's novel, the male character becomes the one who falls prey to flying over the being from the world beyond, and the female character is the one who launches the perspective of knowing the transcendental world. Returning to the animated face in Mirea's painting, it seems to have a special symbolic charge. The painting tangentially illustrates not only the aesthetic aspect, but also the possibility of revealing a metaphysical depth following an act of contemplation of the artistic product (Miss Christina's painting). In this case, the picture in the Eliade's narrative is not only the interface of the painted being, but also a portal from the profane to the sacred. Like the portrait in Oscar Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890), Miss Christina's painting encrusts part of the original matrix of the human depicted in it. Therefore, both the painting of Miss Christina and that of Dorian Gray absorb the evil being and take over the attributes of the characters controlled by evil, while transforming them into demonic forces. Thus, the defeat and annihilation of evil has to begin directly with the destruction of the picture.

The same fear and terror emanating from Miss Christina's painting is felt in the dreamlike dimension. In the hope that she will be able to access a being in the body, the ghost of Miss Christina flies over Egor's consciousness, thus trying to seduce him to commit an erotic act. But Egor's resistance causes even more evil. First of all, Sanda suffers, and then her presence becomes much more oppressive, more demonic. It even employs more diabolical forces as a tool of pressure, far beyond those of the undead. Already undermining the boundary between dream and reality from Egor's psychic perception, Miss Christina leaves him prey to total desolation, faced with the terror of the "other", that is, of satanic terror. So "Egor began to feel something, unseen and unknown, around him. It was not Miss Christina's presence. He felt looked at by *someone else*, whose horror he had never tried before. His fear was now completely different; as if he had suddenly woken up in a foreign body, disgusted by the flesh, and the blood, and the cold sweat he felt, which was no longer *his*. The pressure of this foreign body was beyond suffering. It strangled him, sucked his air, exhausted him. *Someone* was looking at him side by side, very close to him, and these looks were not those of Miss Christina" (Eliade, *Domnișoara* 110). In fact, Egor's being had gone through hell. The few moments had been enough to convince him of the sinister power of absolute evil: "There are more frightening things than my approach to you, Egor. I brought you the terror of the *other*, worse and more devilish than me..." [...] "*Someone* was next to you and it was enough to lose you. *Someone* you don't know,

but you will never forget" (110). The meeting with the "numinous" entity (to put it in Rudolf Otto's terms) foreshadows the mystical act of the birth of the hero from the Romanian folk tales. Thus, Mircea Eliade fictionally reconstructs the initiatory route of the hero. The encounter with what scares, a reason reflected in many other myths, symbolizes the testing of the limits that will later constitute the heroic acts. Placing a mythical scenario in a fantastic setting has a special significance for Mircea Eliade. In a note from his diary, Eliade confesses the following: "as myths reveal to us the foundation of the Worlds, of the ways of being (animal, plant, human being, etc.) of institutions, of behaviors, etc. In this sense we can talk about the prolongation of myth in literature: not only because certain structures and mythological Figures are found in the imaginary universes of literature, but especially because in both cases it is about creation or the revelation of some parallel worlds to the everyday Universe in which we move" (Eliade, *Jurnal* 586).

**The novel *The Snake*.** Another representation of evil can be found in another fantastic novel by Mircea Eliade *The Snake* (1937), a novel raised, as Sergiu Pavel Dan claims, "from the sap of the esoteric doctrines of the East" (Dan 49). The novel's fable captures in a nutshell the later preoccupations of the historian of religions. With a rich set of symbolic images, the novel *The Snake* can be seen as the entwinement of philosophical meanings in a metaphysical abyss. Mircea Eliade himself admits at one point that "Without knowing it, I had managed to 'show' in *The Snake* what I would develop later in my works on the philosophy and history of religions, namely that, apparently, the 'sacred' is no different from 'profane', that the 'fantastic' is camouflaged in the 'real', that the World is what appears to be at the same time and a cipher" (Eliade, *Eliade despre prozele* 283). The reconstruction in the novel's fable of some meanings that go beyond the narrative discourse itself speaks a lot about the way in which artistic images can also transmit philosophical depths, not only aesthetic ones.

Therefore, the text of the novel *The Snake* has a polysemantic character, in the act of the interpretation that establishes a large mythical-magical material. The very title of the novel tells us this. The image of the snake, with a rich symbolic load, is quite widespread both in sacred texts and in the most important ancient mythologies. In the Old and New Testaments, the "mythological" "snake" refers to the frightening figure of the satanic. In Romanian folklore, says Mihai Coman, "the snake is a feared and evil presence: first, for the evils that the bite brings to the human being; second, for the mythological threat that the snake represents for humanity and even for the good and balance of the world in general" (208). The figure of the snake in Eliade's novel becomes the demonic instance that incorporates the mythical features of foreshadowing the mystery. Although he appears in a latent hypostasis, his mere presence causes the character's fear and

terror. Moreover, his presence in the middle of the room not only terrifies those present, but awakens in the imagination some latent superstitious meanings from the rich pool of Romanian folklore: “Just as Mrs. Zamfirescu had thought, terrified; this shady serpent is a soul too, coming from who knows what grave. And he has a dead wife, just like everyone else; just like all the people who have dead loved ones, buried for a long time. From there they come, sometimes, hidden under the face of a snake – they come to the vineyards and drink milk left for them, wine mixed with honey... Mrs. Zamfirescu’s horror was very close to veneration. Only if she still had the strength to make a cross, to pray for the souls of the dead. Who knows who is restless in the other world and has sent this filthy serpent, so far away, right into the house... Only it wouldn’t ask for anyone else. Do not ask for a grave, because there are signs of this...” (Eliade, *The Snake* 235-236). The space in which the snake is located is inappropriate for the human imagination. Still, the house represents the sacred space in which there is no room for eruptions or intrusions of the profane. The situation becomes much stranger than the intentional introduction of the snake into the room where the other characters were placed by the wall. It even becomes downright hallucinatory, especially when the snake is used by Sergiu Andronic to perform a sacred ritual. A ritual that was meant to introduce the characters in a magical space of perceptions of everyday reality through the prism of the fantastic. The snake from the middle of the room that Sergiu Andronic holds could also have some symbolic-ritual connotations, such as the figure of the bronze snake raised by Moses in the wilderness (*Numbers 21:9*). In the Old Testament sense, the bronze snake served as an antidote to Jews bitten by venomous serpents sent by God to punish them. In fact, the novel’s fable is a challenge to open the mythical meaning of the “snake” symbol. For Dorina, starting with the dreamlike hypostasis, the word “snake” became taboo, as uttering it was utterly forbidden. Evil can be caused by breaking some prohibitions. The foreshadowing and threat of transcendental evil are camouflaged and maintained in a state of latency precisely because of taboos. The ban on uttering the cursed word comes in the same context in which Andronic’s name should not be pronounced, for otherwise adverse consequences could be triggered.

Another obscure entity of this novel is the strange figure of Sergiu Andronic, a character who comes from nowhere and pursues some occult goals. Sergiu Andronic appears in front of the group of travelers like the mysterious character of Ion Creangă, the Bald Man, in order to fulfill an initiatory desideratum in which he trains the characters from the profane community. Thus, they arrive in the midst of some bizarre events embroiled in an amalgam of superstitions that upset and frighten them at the same time. In this regard, the researcher Nadejda Ivanov observes: “The mysterious encounter with Andronic immediately frees the

characters from the rhythms of the history, from the bondage of civilization and even from the domination of their own 'demons', manifested in the violent anxieties of their inferiority and imperfection, offering them, in exchange, self-oblivion. The chain of spiritual unhappiness and trouble is broken, stopped, once a man who fills the whole car with an incomprehensible joy appears in front of them. The inexplicable happiness of the characters is defined as a spontaneous reaction of the contact with the sacred" (95). The enigmatic character infiltrated in the party group shows an equivocal behavior and arouses suspicion. The image of the stranger, the hypostasis in which Andronic appears, largely provokes suspicion, not as a possible evil that should be isolated, but as an enigmatic figure that fascinates and scares at the same time. It is frightening because it is shown, as Matei Călinescu claims, as "an impersonal force, a principle, the manifestation of a sacred force" (124). Talking to a snake and still commanding it largely denotes a supernatural trait. In this way, an attempt is made to create another reality, in which the fantastic is established through the "mysterious" Andronic. Through such gestures performed by Sergiu Andronic, the ceremonial of a magical ritual is foreshadowed. This fascinates and triggers a fear of the unpredictability of transcendental powers. Although his behavior seems to be out of place and disturbs the other characters, while illustrating man's approach to a supernatural instance, he is not expelled from the group. He continues to impose himself, a fact treated by Captain Manuilă as charlatanry, precisely because the supernatural irrupts in a deeply trivialized daily life and in circumstances with too many insignificant attributes. Andronic's image oscillates between the wizard and the charlatan, between the representation of evil and good, between the spiritualist who summons evil spirits and the power that has the capacity to drive them away. He provokes the unseen powers in defiance of generally accepted principles, as they contradict the laws of reality, managing to lay open the transcendental enigmas to Dorina. Andronic infiltrates the party group as it is beginning to get dark outside, which suggests that he could disappear at sunrise. His demonic nature is foreshadowed by the hallucinatory details he offers in connection with a shady incident that took place inside the monastery. The mysterious story of Arghira's death in the monastery's cellar, "beautiful from the milk", is in fact an overlap of the profane over the sacred space. Sergiu Andronic's way of speaking about things inaccessible to the simple human being and especially about events that took place in another temporal register that he was present in is specific to the demonic characters from the great works of world literature. Andronic's strange statement, "I know these walls, as if I had been here since the beginning of all time" (Eliade, *The Snake* 224) reveals not only his preeminence for other characters and things nearby, but also the possible hierophanies or instantiations of the profane. This fact contradicts the characters' usual perception of plausible facts, thus causing a

disagreement between what is stated and what cannot be possible. It is a fact that can be observed in the statements of another demonic character, Woland, from Mikhail Bulgakov's novel *The Master and Margarita* (1967), who introduced himself as the one who had witnessed the discussions between Pilate and Jesus, who had talked to great philosophers from different timeframes and who cannot find plausible explanations at the moment of enunciation.

Therefore, the original mysterious evil in the novel *The Snake* is only a hypothesis, a premise propagated in the night space of the forest, a possibility to reconstruct a transcendental scenario. The restoration of the initiatory route in which the characters devoid of sacred elements are introduced denotes the essential features of a cosmogonic scenario of recreating the world, of returning to the primordial state. Due to the wedding ritual with Dorina, the demonic Andronic follows a path leading him to the heart of a new Eden. In the same vein, the researcher Lăcrămioara Berechet says that "Andronic is symbolically a hypostasis of Abaddon, Apollyon, angel of the Deep, where he calls his mystical wife, Dor-in-a. The text builds a sound isotope, meant to de-stress the cleavages: the devil can be saved and redeemed through love. The eschatological salvation of Andronic (in the text the devilish adjective is attributed to him) supports the scheme of the inductive myth of the text. The fallen angel returns with his mystical wife to Eden, as an angel of God (*Nous*)" (248). The image of a devil who can access a new ontological status, that is, mercy and salvation from his own demon (the condition of Evil), can be identified in other proses of Eliade's youth, included in the cycle *The Holy Devil, The Sixteen Dolls and Me* (1927), written under the influence of Goethe's work *Faust* and of Nae Ionescu's lectures on *The Problem of Salvation in Faust*, delivered in early 1925. Even the symbolic image of the game initiated by Sergiu Andronic transfigures the playful perspective into a magical one. Participants are thus challenged to enter the dark realm of the psyche to identify in the depths of the unconscious the source of opposites and contraries. In this way, evil is signified more amply by an ontological "character" (metaphysical experience) than by an existential "cliché" perceived in a phenomenological sense. This is a "character" that Sergiu Andronic tries to change through an erotic-mystical experience.

**The novel *Isabel and the Devil's Waters*.** Another way of perceiving evil, especially through the prism of a metaphysical struggle, is identified in Mircea Eliade's debut novel, *Isabel and the Devil's Waters* (1929). Published in the spring of 1930 with the subtitle "spiritual adventure novel", it reveals the author's almost magical obsession with the figure of the devil. The devil appears in the perception of a "metaphysical struggle" and of the voluptuousness that characterizes a young man's existence and psychic sensitivity. The image of the devil is projected from an intimate and deeply personalized perspective of the

narrator. With some philosophical problems extended here and there in theological meanings, the novel *Isabel and the Devil's Waters* captures, as the character himself says, "a strategic metaphysics of the devil" (Eliade, *Isabel* 67).

Although it does not have the features of Eliade's fantastic prose written in later youth, this novel reveals a broad literary perspective on the problem of evil. Placed under the sign of fictional representation, the devil becomes, in this case, not a naive projection of the one from the Romanian folklore imaginary, but a much more perfidious one, with Mephistophelean overtones. It is the representation of a devil engaged in a cunning fight with the character who is caught in the grip of a spiritual experience. Thus, an awareness of the "reality of evil" is, according to the protagonist, one that can confirm the existence of the devil not only as a mythical or illusory figure, but as an entity of otherness: "The second great event was the identification of the 'other', the one who prevented me from creating, the one who dried up my genius. My intimacy with the devil began on that very day. I think that few moderns have believed more sincerely and fought the devil more persistently than I have. Maybe many have accused me of being superstitious. I have always proved to them the existence of the devil through the reality of evil. If the devil were an imagination, a notion, a fear, an antiquity, a myth, evil would be aerial and misty, evil could not be embodied" (Eliade, *Isabel* 66). Just like in the great mystical experiences, the devil becomes, for the "doctor", a personal matter, a "revelation" (appearance) which he captures in his own intimacy. A devil who actively participates in the creative process of the protagonist, like the devil in Thomas Mann's novel *Doctor Faustus* (1947), becomes a component part of the protagonist's personality who wants fame at any cost, who follows the model of the old *Faustian* myth and resembles a genius who derives his creative power from an inhuman, demonic sap.

The spiritual adventure of the novel *Isabel and the Devil's Waters* is intertwined with a disturbing feeling of incomprehension caused by the protagonist's longing to create, which will lead him into a labyrinthine search for himself. This adventure leads to his writing a book on the "strategic metaphysics of the devil", due to which the connection with the devil passes from an ideational stage, i.e., passes from the psychic intimacy of the protagonist, to his (devil's) appearance as a distinct person. In the "doctor's" reflections, evil was a possibility that materialized in the figure of a devil depicted in dreams or in psychic intimacy. After the publication of the book, the devil becomes a reality that already shattered all the mythical representations about the world and the mysterious essence of the universe: "a few months after the publication of *Metaphysics*, at the height of the commotion I would notice his breath, a man who looked like a devil. I shook, rubbing my eyes. No, it wasn't a hallucination. He was a man who looked like a devil. *And he was not like my devil*, the real devil, the devil being an enemy and fighting

against God. I do not know what happened in my blood when the man who looked like the devil approached me, touched my body, grabbed my hand and whispered to me: 'I have been summoned so I've come'." (Eliade, *Isabel* 68-69).

Therefore, the meaning of the life of a "creator" is shattered once he can't see the world in terms of ideational representations, which is also imputed by the critics of the books of the protagonist: "Everyone believed it (the book) imagined, poetic, unreal, piece of dream and thought nourished with dreams" (Eliade, *Isabel* 68-69). The "doctor" thought of the problem of evil from an ideational position and not from that of one who ascertains phenomena and things. But then again, the problem of evil approached from the perspective of metaphysics and in a transcendental sense was the only way to penetrate the abyss of mythical fascination. The basic thesis of his book on the metaphysics of the devil speaks of "That evil that goes beyond will, human being, destiny, law. That unexpected, immense evil that no one fights, because everyone was born near him, breathed with him and enjoyed his works. The devil is a creator as vast as God. If the devil were not great and real, our life would have no meaning" (66). Once this problem is no longer approached in a metaphysical, imaginary plan, then the "PHILOSOPHER" / "ARTIST" no longer sees the point of living for the sake of creation. Despite their grandeur and beauty, the mysteries (even that of evil, that is, of the *numinous*) lose all meaning, becoming unimportant: "I saw as a superstition, a self-deception, everything that was myth and law in my existence" (66). When the devil no longer has any mythical or imaginary charge, then he becomes an empty devil, a devil who no longer fascinates, a devil who can no longer open mysteries of knowledge (the one who "gave him with rare thoughts"). So for the "doctor," "the devil (ceased to be) a creator as vast as God." The maze of mystery surrounds the mythical image of the devil, which has become a mere figure of evil embedded in a man who appeared to be a devil, but a devil that is different from the real" enemy and antagonist of God."

Once he perceives the devil as empty, the protagonist's power to create and be creative ends: "Everything that was big has become small" (Eliade, *Isabel* 68). His life, "since then, has been limited to nothing" (68). This is exactly what he emphasized (warned) in his book: "If the devil were not great and real (in the metaphysical sense), our life would have no meaning" (68). Thus, the perception of the devil, both in the metaphysical and existential sense of what was shown to him in the incarnation of a human being, ceased to be an imaginary representation in the protagonist's life, because, after all, the "doctor", giving up the contemplation and the creation of the imaginary (artistic) world, he also gave up the devil: "giving up the devil, I gave up everything that remained large and high in my soul" (68). The protagonist of the novel is not only becoming a simple man without spiritual aspirations, without artistic aspirations. He has "cultivated nothing since then, with

anger; the freedom and power to create and destroy trifles" (68). It is only after a child is born that he regains a new meaning of his existence, "Now I have something to live for; for my son" (185), thus creating something, but already without the help of the devil. The problem of the devil's salvation in his book on the devil's metaphysics becomes a matter of his own salvation, a reconciliation with his Self, and a deliverance of the protagonist from the power of evil that enslaved him to bodily pleasures and sins: "The devil can no longer blur me, from now on. Because I have an heir. He was born and he is alive, he is alive, and he is mine... I am no longer barren, I am no longer cursed, because a virgin has endured that for me. And my baby is born of a virgin (Isabel)" (185).

**Final considerations.** The symbolic charge of evil from the other dimension is represented in the novel *Miss Christina* as an entity that refers to the vast, terrifying forces of primordial narratives, myths or folk creations. In this context, we cannot speak of "evil" as *nature* in the perception of the literary imaginary, but only as an *expression* (to think about it) reflected in fictional constructions, without making any commitment to affirm or refute the existence of evil. The only commitment remains to be the one that can produce delight (specific to the work of art that Aristotle talks about in his *Poetics*). This will later replace man's thirst for knowledge, thus offering him an alternative to understanding the mysteries that contradict his capacity for knowledge and allowing him to overcome the existential condition, to access the order of the transcendental and to identify with the "Transcendental" itself: "you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (*Genesis 3:5*). Such an image of the devil that promises to reveal mysteries boils down to a forced acquisition of characteristics that essentially exceed his mythical attributes. However, instead of revealing the mysteries of the universe, the doctor in *Isabel and the Devil's Waters* has access only to the mysteries revealed by the demonic character or through mystical-magical rituals.

In conclusion, the investigation of the perception of evil and its representations in Mircea Eliade's novels *Miss Christina*, *The Snake* and *Isabel and the Devil's Waters* led me to interpret some images and symbols from a wider perspective, so as to understand the existential dimension of the characters. I found that some of Mircea Eliade's characters either live under the threat of evil (manifested under the guise of a ghoul, an expression of the evil specter that haunts the folkloric imaginary during the night), or are caught in the spell of the enigmatic "stranger", in the figure of Sergiu Andronic. Evil is felt as a terrifying presence from the other dimension of immediate reality, reminiscent of the past evil encapsulated in *Miss Christina* or in the mythically expressed figure of Sergiu Andronic. Thus, the terror and strange events in the novels *Miss Christina* and *The Snake* contribute to the configuration of an initiatory path of the hero's birth, in which the characters

access a dimension of the sacred. On the other hand, the image of the devil in *Isabel and the Devil's Waters* has a metaphysical meaning and role, since it becomes the main character. The mysterious representation of evil alludes to the larval state, namely the state of stagnation in the ontological and existential evolution of the "doctor" (narrator), manifested largely in his hatred of himself, of his wife Isabel and of the outside world. Through Redemption from the power of evil, Eliade symbolically reconstitutes redemption in the Christian sense. Therefore, the analysis I undertook highlights an aspect less frequently addressed in the literary exegesis of Mircea Eliade's novels, as I found that the evil represented by a mysterious entity has links both with the Romanian folkloric imaginary and some philosophical implications or theories espoused by the historian of religions.

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