



**„OVIDIUS” UNIVERISTY OF CONSTANȚA**  
**DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF HUMANISTIC SCIENCES**  
**DOCTORAL FIELD PHILOLOGY**

**PHD THESIS**  
**FANTASTICUL ELIADESC**  
**SUMMARY**

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**CONSTANȚA**

**2025**

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## SUMMARY

Keywords: fantastic, myth, symbol, sacred, profane, hierophany, unrecognizable, mystery, esoteric, archetype, metaphysical, numinous, revelation, transcendence, ambiguity, otherness, symbol, initiatory, labyrinth, threshold, ritual.

This paper studies Eliade's fantastic, analyzed from a thematic, symbolic, and comparative perspective, in relation to representative fantastic works by Mihai Eminescu and I.L. Caragiale. The research aims to highlight the specificity of Mircea Eliade's vision of the fantastic, as well as the continuities and differences from the previous Romanian literary tradition. This paper takes as its starting point the analysis of the fantastic in Mircea Eliade's prose, approached from an interdisciplinary perspective that combines thematic reading, symbolic interpretation, and literary comparison. The study is built by referring to representative fantastic texts from the works of Mihai Eminescu and I.L. Caragiale, with the aim of highlighting the specific way in which Eliade reconfigures the Romanian fantastic tradition, preserving certain constants, but also introducing elements of conceptual and imaginary rupture.

The work primarily aims to investigate fantastical themes and motifs that have been less valued by literary exegesis, insisting on the symbolic function of recurring elements such as flowers, illness, heat, coffee, the city invested with mythical meanings, the labyrinthine structure, and the symbolism of thresholds. These motifs are interpreted not only as simple narrative components, but as essential mechanisms through which the experience of the fantastic becomes plausible, favoring the characters' access to dimensions of the sacred, to blissful spaces, to forms of otherness, or to dislocations of the ontological order.

From a methodological perspective, the research is based on an analytical reading of an extensive corpus of Mircea Eliade's fantastic short stories, complemented by a comparative analysis of selected texts from the works of Eminescu and Caragiale. The interpretation of symbols is carried out using tools specific to hermeneutics and literary criticism, supported by consultation of symbol dictionaries and relevant theoretical studies. The approach integrates several directions of analysis: the hermeneutic reading of recurring mythical and symbolic motifs, the phenomenological approach to the concept of the fantastic, as defined and theorized in Romanian and international criticism, as well as the thematic analysis of symbolic structures that are repeated in the texts of the three authors. Through this methodological combination,

the paper proposes a coherent perspective on the fantastic in Romanian literature, highlighting both the individuality of each author and the common core of meanings that structure this type of literary discourse.

The main purpose of the work is to interpret fantastic themes and motifs that have been less addressed by specialized criticism, with an emphasis on the symbolism of flowers, illness, heat, coffee, mythologized urban space, the labyrinth, and thresholds. These elements are analyzed as significant structures of the fantastic experience and as ways of accessing the sacred, otherness, or the ontological ruptures specific to Eliade's universe.

Why did I choose "Eliade's Fantastic" as the theme of my doctoral thesis? To what extent could the field of meanings and symbols of texts that have polarized the attention of so many researchers be further explored? The answer lies in the desire to build, on the basis of the most consistent and spectacular results of previous critical reception, a vision of my own, capable of further highlighting some of the multiple and complex meanings of Eliade's texts.

Through its ambiguity and polysemy, this genre of literature constantly invites readers to change their perspective, to observe the multifaceted aspects of the text and to discover new inter- and metatextual connections.

Fantasy is a phenomenon and a literary genre that has sparked the interest of many writers, among whom Mircea Eliade is a distinct voice. With each reading, his texts reveal other meanings that seem to come from unknown realms, the fantastic artifice electrifying us through the state we experience, through a kind of "lump in the throat" that we feel, not because we are afraid (although some definitions see it as an aestheticization of fear), but because we experience a state of bliss that perhaps only archaic man felt in the face of cosmic miracles, a true revelation that primordial man had in the face of creation. Through the spontaneous initiations experienced by his characters, contemporary profane beings who come face to face with the sacred and the timeless (*illo tempore*), we are allowed to take a revealing look at the great mysteries of existence.

Reading Eliade's fantasy short stories and novels, we feel a beatific thrill, perhaps stemming from the "unrecognizable miracle," from the indescribable feeling experienced with our whole being in the spiritual journey of the characters. We too immerse ourselves in the meanders of their labyrinthine, initiatory journey, participating with an inexplicable curiosity, like the ultimate meaning of the ontological experience lived by the characters in the moment of sacred revelation. The first question that the researcher of Mircea Eliade's literary work asks is: how can we adapt our sobriety in the face of texts that present inconceivable things and that

do not obey common sense? The contingency ratio of the sensitive experience with the "supernatural openings to the sacred" paradoxically elongates in the form of "moments" that themselves become, for a moment, "eternities" (the moment that unites and separates at the same time), potentially closing the horizon of knowledge in the form of perplexities or, as we also subscribe to, leaving the question open, especially since such a (contingent) relationship between the real and the unreal addresses us directly.

We can therefore be deferential or indifferent to what is contrary to common sense. It is, after all, a matter of choice. "To be possible" means to accept a purely mental experiment, in which the fantastic is shared from the concrete and vice versa. The concrete and the abstract, the possible and the impossible come into tension and reach their point of maximum intensity in the realm (topos) of the latter. The result of this confrontation reveals that the impossible ends up coinciding indecisively with the possible (actuality). The possible and the impossible thus enter into an impossible unity and a zone of indistinctness, which is typical of the fantastic text.

The work is structured in four chapters. The structure of the work is designed to lead the reader from the theoretical foundations, through the analysis of data and the argumentation of results, to conclusions and recommendations.

The first chapter, entitled *The Concept of the Fantastic*, establishes the theoretical framework of the research and clarifies the notion of the fantastic from a literary and critical perspective. It presents the main directions of interpretation of the fantastic, both in Romanian and European criticism, emphasizing how the phenomenon has been received and conceptualized over time. The chapter addresses the poetics of the fantastic, inventories Romanian and European theories of the fantastic, and identifies the major thematic directions of the genre. Finally, Mircea Eliade's conception of the fantastic, seen as a way of revealing the sacred camouflaged in the profane, is analyzed, and theoretical conclusions are formulated that will underpin the applied analyses in the following chapters. This chapter serves as the theoretical basis for the entire thesis. The theoretical framework is based on the definition of the fantastic, the main critical theories, the way in which fantastic literature has adapted certain influences taken from various fields, subsequently refined in fantastic prose, the thematic direction, and the specificity of Eliade's fantastic. For Mircea Eliade, the fantastic becomes a way of revealing the sacred in the profane, through a break at the ontological level. I began my analysis of this concept with the etymology of the term, focusing on a single etymological source, namely the Greek word *phantasia*, in order to legitimize the idea that the fantastic is

born from the midst of fantasy, which imposes it as a particular aesthetic product, as Adrian Marino pointed out in his *Dictionary of Literary Ideas*.

An attempt to define the fantastic involves a return to the fundamental relationship between art and reality, to Aristotle's theory of *mimesis*. In *Poetics*, Aristotle specifies the difference between history and poetry, between the mission of the historian who recounts explicit facts—which can be verified—and that of the poet who depicts facts that can happen, as Ovidiu Ghidirmic points out in *Romanian Prose and the Vocation of the Fantastic*. Over time, the study of fantastic literature has given rise to an extremely diverse theoretical corpus, in which researchers from various fields—comparative literature, philosophy, aesthetics, psychoanalysis, semiotics, art history—have attempted to define the specificity of the genre. The fantastic thus appears as a territory of questioning, anxiety, and hesitation between the real and the unreal, and its theories reflect not only aesthetic conceptions, but also cultural mentalities and historical eras.

An initial register of definitions corroborates the terrifying and unsettling nature of the fantastic. Roger Caillois sees it as a "significance of unease and rupture," speaking of a "permanent and universal fantastic." Louis Vax, along the same lines, considers that the central element is the terrifying, that indescribable thrill that arises from a dispute between the real and the possible. Marcel Brion emphasizes the anguish of everyday life, which transforms the familiar order into a disturbing space. Marin Beșteliu defines the fantastic through its terror-generating conflicts, while H. P. Lovecraft shifts the focus from the work to the reader's experience, stating that the fantastic resides in the reader's experience of fear. In a similar vein, P. G. Castex identifies two fundamental registers—the miraculous and the realistic—showing that mystery brutalizes reality, and moments of nightmare or delirium release the fears of being.

One of the most influential theories belongs to Tzvetan Todorov, who bases his definition of the genre on the idea of the reader's hesitation between a natural and a supernatural explanation of the events narrated. This line of thought is nuanced by Stanislaw Lem, who argues that hesitation cannot last forever: the reader may waver, but in the end is forced to decide, even if they may later change their impression based on new unusual elements.

René de Solier studies the art of Bruegel and Hieronymus Bosch to show how the fantastic transpires in monstrous images and anomalies inserted into realistic structures. For him, fantastic art is an ambiguous synthesis between the real and the imaginary. In another vein, Marcel Schneider sees the fantastic as a phenomenon that springs from illusion, delirium, and hope, especially the hope of salvation. Other theorists emphasize playfulness and fictional

construction. Irwin describes it as a resonance of the impossible and of play, which produces perpetual delight. Brian Attebery explores the relationship between the fantastic and science, showing that fiction functions as a system for organizing narratives that reflect attitudes toward technology. Manlove believes that fantasy arises from the frenetic play of the mind, linked to national identity and the psyche. Christine Brooke-Rose proposes a rhetoric of the unreal, starting from the crisis of contemporary reality, in order to outline a "fantastic realism" open to a new classicism.

Ann Swinfen, in her book *In Defense of Fantasy*, discusses the nature and purpose of modern fantasy, analyzing both the technique of secondary worlds and their philosophical, moral, and religious foundations. In a more applied area, Aharon Appelfeld and Philip Roth approach the fantastic through the prism of traumatic historical experience (Nazi camps, deportations from Transnistria), revealing the role of the double, the imaginary, and the unreal in the representation of collective memory.

Rabkin reformulates Caillois' distinction, shifting the "scandal" of the fantastic to the narratological level, that is, to the mechanisms of storytelling. The fantastic always presupposes a rupture in the usual order (Caillois, Vax, Brion). It is defined by hesitation and ambiguity (Todorov, Lem). It can be seen as the art of anomaly and imagination (Solier, Schneider). It has a playful and fictional dimension (Irwin, Attebery, Manlove). It can involve a moral, religious, or historical foundation (Swinfen, Appelfeld, Roth).

The second chapter, entitled *Biography and Scientific Works. Sources of Eliade's Fantastic*, traces the relationship between Mircea Eliade's biography, his scientific activity, and the genesis of his fantastic literary work. Essential biographical landmarks are presented—his childhood in Bucharest, his formative experiences, his student years, his exile—not in a descriptive manner, but as elements with symbolic and archetypal value, which contribute to the configuration of the fantastic imagination. Childhood is interpreted as an imago mundi and as an archetypal model of reference to the sacred, while the urban space of Bucharest appears as a labyrinthine space, laden with mystery, hierophanies, and camouflaged gateways to alternative realities. The chapter also analyzes Eliade's main scientific works (*Yoga, The Myth of the Eternal Return, Shamanism and the Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy, The Sacred and the Profane, Fragmentarium, The Island of Euthanasius*, etc.) as thematic, symbolic, and conceptual sources of fantastic prose. It demonstrates that Eliade's fantasy is inextricably linked to his thinking as a historian of religions and his existential experience of exile. Mircea Eliade's childhood, spent in the heart of Bucharest at the beginning of the 20th century, was a formative

period for his entire personality. The urban atmosphere, the contradiction between accelerated modernization and the reminiscences of tradition, instilled in him an early sensitivity to the tension between reality and mystery, a theme he would later transpose into fantastic prose. The child's fascination with extraordinary events was born out of his delight in exploring the streets of Bucharest, with their picturesque slums, but also with the vestiges of the historical past. His experiences in the familiar world of his family—with his father an officer and the orderly atmosphere of the home—were combined with the urban bustle, where the sacredness of religious holidays coexisted with the profane life of the capital.

In his journals, Eliade often evokes childhood as a stage of initiation, of self-discovery (atman): his first readings, his passion for imaginary adventures, the pleasure of inventing stories. The family library, where he discovered volumes of science, literature, and history at an early age, stimulated his openness to the encyclopedic universe. It was also during these years that his curiosity for unusual phenomena and the occult manifested itself, which would later consolidate his interest in alchemy, magic, and myth.

The child Eliade also lived intensely the daily rhythm of the city, with the noise of trams, the hustle and bustle of markets, and the human diversity of cosmopolitan Bucharest. This direct experience of urban reality later gave rise to his talent for inserting the fantastic into everyday life: seemingly mundane places such as a boyar house (in La Țigănci) become gateways to another dimension.

Thus, his childhood in Bucharest was not just a biographical backdrop, but an imaginary matrix from which the fundamental symbols of Eliade's work would later emerge. The city of his childhood, with its mysteries and mirages, prepared him for the great intellectual and spiritual discoveries of adolescence and adulthood. India, shamanism, comparative mythology, and personal experiences with ascetic disciplines have a direct influence on Eliade's fiction. Eliade's "sacred" biography explains and restructures his work, which is transmitted, mythologized, and universalized. The writer is not only the builder of fantastic worlds, but also proposes an anthropological and philosophical vision of the human condition. This chapter also presents some of Eliade's scientific and essayistic works, which are essential in tracing the coordinates of Mircea Eliade's work and intellectual destiny, as they represent the theoretical, methodological, and hermeneutic foundation on which his entire literature is built, but also the instrument through which he offered universal culture a new perception of man and the sacred.

Thus, his entire fantastical prose seems like a "metaphysical poem," configuring a space different from the real world, epiphanic, but not frightening, rather full of revelation and light,

projecting us into a sacramental, mythical time. Eliade makes "yesterday" a noun, not an adverb. He is in a race against time. He seeks to transcend time so quickly that what he experiences in the present and what he expects from the future is already a memory (in the archive of the soul), already melancholy and nostalgia, a flight after paradise lost. Why? Because Eliade, like any introspective person, carries in his soul, as Giorgio Agamben says in his work *State of Exception*, "the wound of the non-spirit." Hence the need to wander through all the cultures of the world that can offer him compensation. Eliade has no preconceived plans, only "flashes" of words through which he expresses the feeling of an experience marked by the wound. Wound, not annulment, infinity is realized, not exhausted, in the (in)quality of an experience.

The third chapter, entitled *The Fantastic Contract in Eminescu, Caragiale, and Mircea Eliade*, takes a comparative approach and analyzes how the fantastic narrative contract is constituted in I.L. Caragiale, Mihai Eminescu, and Mircea Eliade. The first part defines the concept of the fantastic contract and explains the mechanisms through which the reader accepts the break with the plane of reality. This is followed by an analysis of the relationship between myth, philosophy, and the fantastic in Eminescu and Eliade, with an emphasis on the archetypal figure of the initiate and the initiatory journey. Texts such as *Archaeus* and *The Death of Ioan Vestimie* by Eminescu are examined in parallel with Eliade's fantastic short stories and novels (*On Mântuleasa Street*, *The Stone Diviner*, *Miss Christina*), highlighting the presence of the sapiential character, the theme of death, the double, and the ontic experience. The chapter also includes an analysis of shamanic elements in Eliade's prose, correlated with his theoretical works on shamanism, as well as a section dedicated to the fantastic in Caragiale's folklore. The conclusion of the chapter emphasizes the continuity of the Romanian fantastic tradition and the originality of Eliade's synthesis. Each writer has a certain vision of the fantastic. In Eminescu, the fantastic takes on a romantic and metaphysical tone, as a way of probing the infinite and cosmic mysteries (for example, in the short stories *Sărmanul Dionis*, *Archaeus*, *Moartea lui Ioan Vestimie*). For Caragiale, the fantastic has a folkloric but also realistic tone, leaving the reader to oscillate between natural and supernatural explanations.

For Eliade, contact with the reader is initiatory. Reading becomes a form of ritual, Eliade's texts transporting the reader into a sacramental, tempting, not frightening universe, which confirms the idea that modern man can recover archetypal values, and that acceptance of the fantastic implies entering another ontological dimension, shrouded in sacredness. Thus, the paper aims to analyze the initiatory journeys of the arche and the shaman in *The Death of Ioan Vestimie*, *Poor Dionis*, *The Captain's Daughter*, *The Stone Diviner*, highlighting bridges

between archaic traditions, the Christian dimension of the narrative, and Eminescu's influences, in dialogue with interpretations of myth and initiation. A comparative analysis of the fantasy texts *The Death of Ioan Vestimie* and *Miss Christina* highlighted both the particularities of each character and common themes, such as the perception of death, the relationship to memory, and the human condition. Similarities were also observed in the way the authors build narrative tension and symbolism associated with death, which allows for a deeper understanding of the cultural and literary function of this motif in the two works.

The fourth chapter, the most extensive in the thesis, is devoted to the thematic and symbolic analysis of the fantastic prose of Mihai Eminescu, I.L. Caragiale, and Mircea Eliade. The chapter starts from the delimitation of the concepts of theme and literary motif and follows the way in which they structure the fantastic universe of the three authors, with an emphasis on the originality of Mircea Eliade's synthesis.

A first subchapter is devoted to the myth of the labyrinth, interpreted in relation to the idea of the threshold as a space of passage between the profane and the sacred. The threshold is understood as an optional passage, whose crossing leads the characters to alternative realities and ontic experiences. Through the labyrinth, the threshold, and the limes, a distinction is made between the present (deactivated) and the new present. I have encountered this symbol in several fantasy novels (*La țigănci*, *Dayan*), emphasizing the idea that the specificity of the threshold in Eliade's work lies in the fact that it constitutes a point or a limit at which one can stop, stand, or step over. It is a concept that offers a multiplicity of perspectives, the most interesting aspect being that it preserves the differences between the natural and the supernatural, between the human and the divine, between myth and reality. In Eliade's work, when the issue of the threshold becomes indispensable, it is clear that he is not satisfied with the meaning presented by the terminology of everyday speech, meaning he seeks to establish it in his own style, starting from the postulate that the "Faustian" man is always willing to enter the world of the spirit, assuming an intermediate time through which he translates it to himself, mentally, through the oxymoron "ecstasy/belonging." Eliade's characters are ecstatic about the world that is revealed to them, towards which they take only one step away from reality (the profane). They create the impression that they belong to this world, adapting to it in an easy way that amazes the reader. They are not afraid, they do not insist on the different ontological regime of the world that opens up to them.

Eliade bases his threshold instances on what is inherent to the human condition: curiosity. Curiosity leads, in principle, to knowledge, on the basis of which all ontological fields are arranged, regardless of their source.

The myth of the labyrinth is identified in works such as *La Țigănci*, *Pe strada Mântuleasa*, *Noaptea de Sânziene*, *Un om mare*, *Uniforme de general*, but also in texts by Eminescu (*Sărmanul Dionis*) and Caragiale. In Eliade's work, the labyrinth takes on a special symbolic frequency and depth, being associated with descensus ad inferos, mystical death, and spiritual regeneration, as in *La Țigănci*, where confrontation with the labyrinth implies a descent into the depths of being.

Another subchapter analyzes illness as a form of initiation, starting from mythical models (Zalmoxis, Genghis Khan), to demonstrate that physical suffering becomes a threshold of spiritual transformation. Texts by Eminescu (*Moartea lui Ioan Vestimie*, *Sărmanul Dionis*) and numerous short stories by Eliade (*O fotografie veche de 14 ani*, *Dayan*, *Cele trei grații*) are analyzed, in which illness facilitates access to another dimension of existence. Illness becomes a symbolic ritual that opens the way to introspection, revelation, and contact with the sacred, functioning as a vehicle of initiation. The fantastic appears when illness takes on the character of a sign or message from a transcendent reality, emphasizing the ambiguity between profane life and the sacred dimension.

Thus, Eliade transforms illness from a strictly medical phenomenon into a narrative and theoretical tool, through which characters undergo initiatory experiences, transcending the usual limits of existence and approaching the mystery of the sacred.

For Mircea Eliade, illness is a palliative for the sadness experienced in an increasingly superficial world, insensitive to the past, to roots, to archaism, to myths, in which man can no longer glimpse the flashes of sacredness among the residues of the profane. Through illness, man knows himself and God better, understands his purpose in the world, and has a chance to change: to believe in the miracles of divinity, to see himself as a miracle, to decipher the hidden signs in the world in which he lives. In his scientific works, Eliade links illnesses to the shamanic vocation. Not everyone can have a metaphysical experience, only a chosen person, someone with a pure soul, who is wise and gifted. Illness awakens nostalgia for abolished religious behaviors. Anarchy is latent in every person, and doctors can do nothing about it. Cucoaneș begins to hum incomprehensible songs, shouting his desires in an esoteric language, assimilating himself with an archetypal model. Man, through the temptation of the "serpent," sought uniqueness. He lived in eternity. What is eternity? Plotinus tells us in *Enneads*: it is the

moment that stands still within itself. Did (man) want to see what lies beyond eternity? Yes, and he discovered death, time, decay. This is the wound of the non-spirit. Man, created in the image of God, has strayed from the meaning of creation. Illness is a deviation, a confusion like that of the Tower of Babel (an idea supported in *The Three Graces*), but also a possibility to connect with the archaic meanings of existence.

A separate subchapter is dedicated to the symbolism of heat, associated with light, knowledge, and openness to the Spirit. If in Caragiale heat has a realistic-ironic function (*Căldură mare*), in Eliade it becomes a harbinger of an ontic adventure, as seen in *La Țigănci*, *Pe strada Mântuleasa*, or *La hanul lui Mânjoală*. Heat is an ambivalent motif; it can suggest vital energy, but also degradation. It represents a state of transcendence of everyday reality. It appears as an area of anomie within reality. Many of Eliade's fantastic texts have heat as their central motif. Through it, a connection is woven with a mysterious world, the center of which is reached by crossing thresholds that make the leap from the profane to the sacred, from the known to the unknown. The warmth in the short story *La țigănci* (*The Gypsies*) awakens the man who has just gotten off the tram, reactivates him, makes him curious, eager to know what lies beyond the gate of the gypsies' garden.

The man's curiosity to see what the gypsy women have to offer structures an entire analogical field, which relates his almost compulsive impatience to the unbearable heat that overwhelms him. The desire to enter that space functions as a brief disconnection, an attempt to escape from the suffocating daily routine dominated by the heat. The character thus seeks to "sovereignly inspect" what is happening there, asserting for the moment the illusion of control and detachment. Through these anomalous spaces, activated by a mental exercise, he operates on everyday reality, which thus becomes mysterious and undergoes a process of reactivation.

To the extent that a fantasy is "alive," it constitutes, in relation to immediate reality, a profound "anomos." From this perspective of "anomos," Eliade perceives the "non-actual" world, which he translates as an expression of the secret and authentic life of man. The restoration of life is revealed to the author precisely through the discretion of these modalities and through the absence of those places where everyday reality suspends itself, exempting itself from its own determinations by suspending its decidable character. Heat enters into a relationship with a primordial time, being an archetypal spiral of initiatory, hierophanic experiences. Reality is affected by an area of anomie (heat) to which a symbol is assigned.

The paper explores the motif of coffee in the works of Eliade, Eminescu, and Caragiale, analyzing both its symbolic meanings and the way it contributes to the configuration of a

narrative universe marked by fantastic elements. Coffee is presented as a ritual drink, with a magical and mnemonic role. In Eliade's short stories, coffee functions as a talisman that reactivates memory, suspends profane time, and allows the rediscovery of the authentic self, facilitating contact with the camouflaged sacred. In some texts where this symbol appears frequently (*La țigănci*, *Dayan*, *Pe strada Mântuleasa*, *Nouăsprezece trandafiri*), coffee can represent the connection with life, with time, with the past. The characters' thirst can only be quenched with water, not coffee. In this sense, we can consider that the need to drink water can be associated with the thirst of the dead. Coffee is the drink that helps the characters recover the past, activate their memory. Each sip is a step back into oneself (towards the atman), awakening the memory of everything that man has lost and loved. Coffee remains a drink with magical effects, a means of recovering the past, a talisman of a soul sensitive to the glimmers of mystery, of the sacred, of the real that hides a hierophany. The warmth does not come from the sun, but from the steaming cups, small altars in which we glimpse the waves of time. Coffee reactivates memories, man finds himself again, no longer feeling wounded by time. In the warmth of coffee, thoughts find an indescribable peace, reminiscent of primordial tranquility, when man was not threatened by time

An extensive subchapter is devoted to the floral motif, interpreted as an archetype of the soul and a symbol of paradise. The analysis covers numerous texts by Eliade (*La Țigănci*, *Domnișoara Christina*, *19 trandafiri*, *Les trois grâces*, *Fata căpitanului*), as well as correspondence with Eminescu (*Sărmanul Dionis*, *Cezara*) and Caragiale. Floral symbolism is interpreted with the help of symbol dictionaries and mythology studies, flowers being considered echoes of the Garden of Eden and signs of the permanent possibility of the sacred bursting into everyday life. I have identified a symbolic convergence with the analysis carried out by Jean Delumeau in his work *The Garden of Delights. A History of Paradise*, where the garden is interpreted as an archetypal image of paradise lost. Delumeau highlights the persistence of the motif of the garden and flowers in the European cultural imagination as an expression of the constant desire to recover an original state of purity, harmony, and spiritual fulfillment. In Delumeau's vision, in the Garden of Eden, flowers do not grow, they float. They are born from the morning light, from the sigh of the gentle wind and from the whisper of angels flying by, carrying with them the scent of eternity. Each flower is a blossoming prayer, with petals like mother-of-pearl and colors that no human eye has ever seen. White lilies shine like untouched snow, and roses have no thorns, but thin rays of gold that caress the air instead of hurting it. In the middle of the garden, where the light is so pure that it seems like an extension of the soul, grows a unique flower—the Flower of Forgiveness. It is said that angels stop there

for a moment, let their wings rest, and listen to it open in secret, like a heart learning to love again.

There is no withering there. The flowers in the Garden of Eden know no end; they live from the song of Heaven, from the love that flows like a gentle river through stems, leaves, and ageless petals. For a long time, it was believed that this garden was on earth. In Eminescu and Eliade (*Sărmanul Dionis, La țigănci*), flowers represent a threshold to a transcendental space, an echo of the beauty of Paradise, reminding us that at any moment the sacred can spring from everyday life and connect modern man with archaic societies and privileged spaces.

Therefore, in both Eminescu and Eliade, the floral landscape and the garden are configured as symbolic spaces of nostalgia for paradise, an idea that finds its theoretical foundation in the historical and cultural perspective proposed by Jean Delumeau. This analogy reveals a thematic and symbolic continuity that transcends literary genres, articulating a common vision of nature as a place of mythical memory and aspiration toward the original. Flowers, archetypes of the soul, herald the transition to the transcendent. In Eminescu, the flower composes a paradisiacal universe, in Caragiale, it represents an ironic decorative element, and in Eliade, it is the expression of a hierophany. The archetype (floral, for example) does not have the same meaning as, for example, the archetype in psychoanalysis (Jung). Eliade gives it a particular meaning; it has no eminently literal meaning. For him, the archetype is discovered (extracted) from the *exergue*, which fills the medal. That void participates in the *socratio* (sacramental act). The flower can also participate in the *socratio*, being a threshold to a primordial, paradisiacal space.

The chapter ends with a subchapter dedicated to the mythologized Bucharest found in Mircea Eliade's fantastic prose. The streets, spaces, and urban landmarks present in the short stories are analyzed in correlation with historical and documentary reality, based on the works of Alexandru Ofrim. Bucharest thus becomes a symbolic, labyrinthine, and initiatory space, where the sacred is camouflaged in the profane, a privileged space of modern fantasy, where everyday life is traversed by signs of mystery. The motifs of the labyrinth and thresholds are analyzed as symbolic structures of wandering, initiation, and passage between worlds, playing a central role in shaping the fantastical imagination. Thus, Eliade becomes the creator of an ineffable imaginary space, that of Bucharest, a city that harbors epiphanies and signs, an initiatory center that conceals myths. Here, an extension of Caragiale's epic is created.

The themes and motifs analyzed configure a coherent system of Eliade's fantasy, integrated into the Romanian literary tradition, but surpassing it through an original vision of the sacred, initiation, and the condition of modern man.

I did not delve deeply into the analysis of symbols and archetypes that have been written about extensively, in order to show that the sacred is camouflaged in the profane and that some elements belonging to the reality we "encounter" daily (flowers, warmth, coffee, the street, thresholds) can conceal mysteries. In this paper, I set out to take a closer look at recurring symbols, themes, and motifs, as well as symbolic networks (heat, coffee, flowers, thresholds, the street, mythologized Bucharest) in the works of Mihai Eminescu, I. L. Caragiale, and Mircea Eliade, with the aim of highlighting both continuities and differences in vision between the three authors. The initial intention was to identify a larger number of connections between these symbols and to analyze them comparatively, looking at how they are re-semanticized from one author to another and, in some cases, from one work to another within the same creation.

I believe that this objective has been achieved to a certain extent, as I have managed to identify and comment on the symbolic meanings of the elements mentioned, to make associations between texts, and to highlight the specific way in which each author integrates them into their own literary universe. For example, I analyzed the function of flowers, warmth, or transitional spaces as elements with symbolic value and looked at how they contribute to the construction of the fantastical atmosphere and meaning.

However, in retrospect, I appreciate that the analysis could have been more nuanced and more coherently oriented towards the dimension of the fantastical. Although the symbolic elements have been identified and interpreted, I would have liked to integrate them more firmly into a perspective that highlights their role in triggering, sustaining, or obscuring the fantastic, especially in the case of Mircea Eliade's prose and Bucharest mythologized as a space of rupture between the real and the unreal. In this sense, the connection between symbols and the fantastic remains partially explored, even if it is present at the interpretative level.

Future research directions may focus on extending the analysis to other Eliade works, especially novels. At the same time, research may continue by exploring other symbols: the hat, the mirror, the elevator, the slum, time.

Despite the difficulties encountered, I believe that choosing this topic was an inspired decision. Although the fantastic has been intensely analyzed over time, this research has given me the opportunity to highlight its profound meanings and to observe the existence of a genuine literary dialogue between the three writers analyzed. Even though one of them belongs to a

different generation than the great classics, it can be seen that the orientation towards the fantastic is present in all three, configuring itself as an aesthetic and existential constant, which has transfigured their life experience into a form of literary beauty.

It can be said that fantasy represented a means of escaping the constraints of reality, a strategy for spiritual survival, and a form of cultural resistance. Through it, writers attempted not only to circumvent the limitations imposed by context, but also to recover the possibility of happiness and inner freedom.

Therefore, the paper fulfills the proposed objectives at a descriptive and comparative level, but leaves open the possibility of further study, which would more systematically examine the function of symbols in the economy of the fantastic and the relationship between the everyday and the extraordinary in the literary universes analyzed. I used as bibliography the works of literary historians and theorists who have studied the phenomenon of the fantastic, the scientific, essayistic, and journalistic works of Mircea Eliade, in order to understand the coordinates of fantastic prose, some prose texts by Mihai Eminescu, Ion Luca Caragiale, and Mircea Eliade, as well as critical texts referring to them.

In order to define the concept of the fantastic, Marina Cap-Bun's study, a synthesis of theoretical resources on the concept of the fantastic, was the starting point for addressing the issue of the fantastic.

Many other remarkable studies, such as the one by critic Lăcrămioara Berechet, shaped my vision and were a valuable source of inspiration for reading Eliade's texts. The monographs by Florin Țurcanu and Mac Linscott Ricketts have contributed to my endeavor to trace Eliade's path through time and history, but also to reveal the direction of Eliade's fantasticism.

The originality of this work lies in its comparative approach to texts by Eminescu, Caragiale, and Eliade, identifying lesser-explored symbols: flowers, warmth, coffee, illness, and thresholds. The study proposes a reconfiguration of the fantastic, opening up new directions of research on motifs, symbols, and archetypes, traced in a fantastic movement that unfolded in different literary eras, from Eminescu and Caragiale to Mircea Eliade. The results of the research contribute to a better understanding of the evolution of fantastic prose and highlight its specificity in the national and European context.

Therefore, from this perspective, we consider it stimulating to find, albeit in a highly intellectualized form, in the transition between two worlds—the sacred and the profane—the basis for an analogy with Christianity, a latent relationship with a Christian view of the sacred. Such an analogy has not yet been formally addressed. This connection is not doctrinal, but

rather manifests itself through the specific way of perceiving the sacred as a primordial reality, accessible through breaks in profane time and through a permanent tendency to return to the beginnings. The recurrence of the myth of creation, of an Adamic state or of original innocence suggests an ontology in which the fall, the wandering, and the possibility of return take on profound symbolic meanings. In this context, certain enigmatic characters—such as the wise old man in *Dayan*—seem to function as liminal figures, situated at the border between the visible and the invisible, between immediate reality and a parallel plane of meaning. They do not fully belong to the empirical world, but act as mediators or guides, facilitating access to a hidden dimension of existence. Such figures, also found in other texts by Eliade (such as *Pe strada Mântuleasa*) or Eminescu (*Archaeus*), suggest a recognizable but transfigured historical reality, in which the fantastic becomes a way of saving the sacred through concealment, and transcendence subtly insinuates itself into the very fabric of everyday life. Consuming "portions" of fantastic texts does not only mean enhancing the experience of folding in on oneself. Eliade's fantasy is much more complex. He highlights fragments of light ("light" and "sun" being symbols found in these texts) that sparkle in the imperfection of humanity. "Unfulfillment" is humanity's great and only flaw. In their overwhelming majority, texts labeled as fantastic render, *ex silentio*, the foundation of the human essence on the basis of its incompleteness. There is a "remnant" of the "unthinkable" at the level of humanity as a whole. This remnant or residue places humanity in an eon of incompleteness and, as a result, it appears unfulfilled. Here, I have correlated with Lucian Blaga's *Trilogy of Culture*.

I noticed that the fragments of light in Eliade's work indicate emptiness, showing it to us as it is. Interestingly, as I said, it "sparkles on our flaws," flaws that we do not admit, even to ourselves. Crossing the threshold, where another "eon" of lived or future life opens up to us, signifies that in his mental exercise, Eliade assumes that unfulfillment or failure remains, regardless of the number of eons in which we are carried. The fragment of light sparkles like a force over his "lost" life, so that, paradoxically, this loss and this lost one do not ask him to be "remembered" or fulfilled. They remain in his being as something forgotten and, precisely because of this, they are unforgettable. These ideas are found, for example, in works such as *Dayan* or *La țigănci*.

There is a tendency to believe that this void, this incompleteness, manifests itself in the form of an appearance in a fantastic setting in the form of a reward or punishment. We exclude such an interpretation outright, since Eliade operates by bringing the sacred into crisis with the profane. This crisis marks the distinction between the sacred and the profane. The initiates are

rewarded by entering a beatific world, whose archetypal meaning is recovered through anamnesis, from which they drink the light of revealed mysteries, while the uninitiated are thrown into the real world, darkened by amnesia. The term sacred (*sacer*) refers to the sacramental act (*socratio*) by which a person of high social standing dedicates their life to the infernal gods in order to maintain their position. In ancient vocabulary, the expression *homo sacer* underwent semantic changes due to this type of sacrament, so that it came to designate the individual repudiated by the community. Because of his "collusion" with the infernal gods, he ends up being defamed. Forgiveness, with the consequence of returning to the community, will force him to lead a profane existence. Eliade was certainly familiar with this perspective, as it seems to have been the leitmotif of his entire corpus of "fantastic" texts—the sphere of the sacred is on the verge of collapsing into the profane, and man passes, already sacred from the beginning. Looking at this context, we believe we can open a parenthesis for a discussion, as we announced, regarding possible subtle analogies with Christianity. Christianity, even if it was not openly embraced by Eliade, constituted an extremely fertile ground, an aspect that cannot be neglected. The fact that *sacer* originally referred par excellence to pagan sacrifice, the messianic event introduced a separation whereby the sacrificial machine of Christianity replaced the dual connection (man-god) with the persons who make up the Trinity. This discordant remnant of the old, archaic world and the new, modern world forms the subject of Eliade's corpus of fantastic texts. He observed that in the "new world," God became a paradigm of sovereign power, so that, at least between the 4th century AD and the 18th century, the heavenly monarchy was dislocated into the earthly one. The old *arche*, this performative fiat, survived through readaptation. Eliade recognized the need for mystery and knowledge, offering both the reader and the researcher the possibility of identifying postulates based on meanings and symbols intended to unlock the dichotomies of thought.

In conclusion, this paper demonstrates that Eliade's fantastic is distinguished by a complex symbolic construction, in which seemingly marginal themes acquire revelatory value, contributing to a deeper understanding of the relationship between literature, myth, and the experience of the sacred. The fantastic in Eliade appears not only as an unexpected or supernatural event, but as an encounter between the real and the imaginary, which transforms everyday experience into an experience charged with meaning. Ordinary things, such as coffee, warmth, flowers, or thresholds, become symbols of the passage of time, the fragility of life, and the important moments that the characters go through.

The urban space is not just a backdrop, but actively contributes to the fantastical atmosphere, making it more credible and palpable. The subtle transition between the real and the imaginary draws the reader in and makes them notice that the fantastical can be hidden in seemingly mundane details.

Thus, the fantastical in Eliade is more of an amplification of our perception of the world than a break from reality. By combining familiar elements with symbols and motifs laden with meaning, his texts invite reflection and create a rich narrative experience that goes beyond the simple story, offering a deeper understanding of life and the urban world.

Through the comparative perspective it proposes, this research makes an original contribution to the study of Romanian fantasy and to the reinterpretation of Mircea Eliade's work in the context of the national literary tradition.

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