

Childhood

Born in Bucharest, he was the son of Romanian Land Forces officer Gheorghe Eliade (whose original surname was Ieremia)[3][4] and Jeana née Vasilescu.[5] An Orthodox believer, Gheorghe Eliade registered his son's birth four days before the actual date, to coincide with the liturgical calendar feast of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (see March 9 (Eastern Orthodox liturgics)).[4] Mircea Eliade had a sister, Corina, the mother of semiologist Sorin Alexandrescu.[6][7] His family moved between Tecuci and Bucharest, ultimately settling in the capital in 1914,[8] and purchasing a house on Melodieii Street, near Piața Roșie, where Mircea Eliade resided until late in his teens.[7]

Eliade kept a particularly fond memory of his childhood and, later in life, wrote about the impact various unusual episodes and encounters had on his mind. In one instance during the World War I Romanian Campaign, when Eliade was about ten years of age, he witnessed the bombing of Bucharest by German zeppelins and the patriotic fervor in the occupied capital at news that Romania was able to stop the Central Powers' advance into Moldavia.[9] He notably described this stage in his life as marked by an unrepeatable epiphany.[10][11] Recalling his entrance into a drawing room that an "eerie iridescent light" had turned into "a fairy-tale palace", he wrote,

"I practiced for many years [the] exercise of recapturing that epiphanic moment, and I would always find again the same plenitude. I would slip into it as into a fragment of time devoid of duration—without beginning, middle, or end. During my last years of lycée, when I struggled with profound attacks of melancholy, I still succeeded at times in returning to the golden green light of that afternoon. [...] But even though the beatitude was the same, it was now impossible to bear

because it aggravated my sadness too much. By this time I knew the world to which the drawing room belonged [...] was a world forever lost." [12]

Robert Ellwood, a professor of religion who did his graduate studies under Mircea Eliade, [13] saw this type of nostalgia for the past as one of the most characteristic themes in Eliade's life and academic writings. [14]

Adolescence and literary debut

After completing his primary education at the school on Mântuleasa Street, [15] Eliade attended the Spiru Haret National College in the same class as Arșavir Acterian, Haig Acterian, and Petre Viforeanu (and several years the senior of Nicolae Steinhardt, who eventually became a close friend of Eliade's). [16] Among his other colleagues was future philosopher Constantin Noica [4] and Noica's friend, future art historian Barbu Brezianu. [17]

As a child, Eliade was fascinated with the natural world, which formed the setting of his very first literary attempts, [4] as well as with Romanian folklore and the Christian faith as expressed by peasants. [7] Growing up, he aimed to find and record what he believed was the common source of all religious traditions. [7] The young Eliade's interest in physical exercise and adventure led him to pursue mountaineering and sailing, [7] and he also joined the Romanian Boy Scouts. [18] With a group of friends, he designed and sailed a boat on the Danube, from Tulcea to the Black Sea. [19] In parallel, Eliade grew estranged from the educational environment, becoming disenchanted with the discipline required and obsessed with the idea that he was uglier and less virile than his colleagues. [4] In order to cultivate his willpower, he would force himself to swallow insects [4] and only slept four to five hours a night. [9] At one point, Eliade was flunking four subjects, among which was the study of Romanian language. [4]

Instead, he became interested in natural science and chemistry, as well as the occult, [4] and wrote short pieces on entomological subjects. [9] Despite his father's concern that he was in danger of losing his already weak eyesight, Eliade read passionately. [4] One of his favorite authors was Honoré de Balzac, whose work he studied carefully. [9] [4] Eliade also became acquainted with the modernist short stories of Giovanni Papini and social anthropology studies by James George Frazer. [9] His interest in the two writers led him to learn Italian and English in private, and he also began studying Persian and Hebrew. [20] [9] At the time, Eliade became acquainted with Saadi's poems and the ancient Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh. [9] He was also interested in philosophy—studying, among others, Socrates, Vasile Conta, and the Stoics Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus—, and read works of history—the two Romanian historians who influenced him from early on were Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu and Nicolae Iorga. [9] His first published work was the 1921 *Inamicul viermelui de mătase* ("The Silkworm's Enemy"), [21] followed by *Cum am găsit piatra filosofală* ("How I Found the Philosophers' Stone"). [9] Four years later, Eliade completed work on his debut volume, the autobiographical *Novel of the Nearsighted Adolescent*. [9]

University studies and Indian sojourn

Between 1925 and 1928, he attended the University of Bucharest's Faculty of Philosophy and Letters in 1928, earning his diploma with a study on Early Modern Italian philosopher Tommaso Campanella. [22] In 1927, Eliade traveled to Italy, where he met Papini [23] and collaborated with the scholar Giuseppe Tucci.

It was during his student years that Eliade met Nae Ionescu, who lectured in Logic, becoming one of his disciples and friends.[24][4][7] He was especially attracted to Ionescu's radical ideas and his interest in religion, which signified a break with the rationalist tradition represented by senior academics such as Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, Dimitrie Gusti, and Tudor Vianu (all of whom owed inspiration to the defunct literary society Junimea, albeit in varying degrees).[4]

Eliade's scholarly works began after a long period of study in British India, at the University of Calcutta. Finding that the Maharaja of Kassimbazar sponsored European scholars to study in India, Eliade applied and was granted an allowance for four years, which was later doubled by a Romanian scholarship.[25] In autumn 1928, he sailed for Calcutta to study Sanskrit and philosophy under Surendranath Dasgupta, a Bengali Cambridge alumnus and professor at Calcutta University, the author of a five volume History of Indian Philosophy. Before reaching the Indian subcontinent, Eliade also made a brief visit to Egypt.[26] Once there, he visited large areas of the region, and spent a short period at a Himalayan ashram.[27]

He studied the basics of Indian philosophy, and, in parallel, learned Sanskrit, Pali and Bengali under Dasgupta's direction.[28] At the time, he also became interested in the actions of Mahatma Gandhi, whom he met personally,[29] and the Satyagraha as a phenomenon; later, Eliade adapted Gandhist ideas in his discourse on spirituality and Romania.[29] In 1930, while living with Dasgupta, Eliade fell in love with his daughter, Maitreyi Devi, later writing a barely-disguised autobiographical novel Maitreyi (also known as "La Nuit Bengali" or "Bengal Nights"), in which he claimed that he carried on a physical relationship with her.[30]

Eliade received his PhD in 1933, with a thesis on Yoga practices.[31][4][32][7] The book, which was translated into French three years later,[33] had significant impact in academia, both in Romania and abroad.[7] He later recalled that the book was an early step for understanding not just Indian religious practices, but also Romanian spirituality.[34] During the same period, Eliade began a correspondence with the Ceylonese-born philosopher Ananda Coomaraswamy.[35] In 1936-1937, he functioned as honorary assistant for Ionescu's course, lecturing in Metaphysics.[36]

In 1933, Mircea Eliade had a physical relationship with the actress Sorana Țopa, while falling in love with Nina Mareș, whom he ultimately married.[37][6][7] The latter, introduced to him by his new friend Mihail Sebastian, already had a daughter, Giza, from a man who had divorced her.[7] Eliade subsequently adopted Giza,[38] and the three of them moved to an apartment at 141 Dacia Boulevard.[7] He left his residence in 1936, during a trip he made to the United Kingdom and Nazi Germany, when he first visited London, Oxford and Berlin.[39]

Childhood

Born in Bucharest, he was the son of Romanian Land Forces officer Gheorghe Eliade (whose original surname was Ieremia)[3][4] and Jeana née Vasilescu.[5] An Orthodox believer, Gheorghe Eliade registered his son's birth four days before the actual date, to coincide with the liturgical calendar feast of the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste (see March 9 (Eastern Orthodox liturgics)).[4] Mircea Eliade had a sister, Corina, the mother of semiologist Sorin Alexandrescu.[6][7] His family moved between Tecuci and Bucharest, ultimately settling in the capital in 1914,[8] and purchasing a house on Melodieii Street, near Piața Rosetti, where Mircea Eliade resided until late in his teens.[7]

Eliade kept a particularly fond memory of his childhood and, later in life, wrote about the impact various unusual episodes and encounters had on his mind. In one instance during the World War I Romanian Campaign, when Eliade was about ten years of age, he witnessed the bombing of Bucharest by German zeppelins and the patriotic fervor in the occupied capital at news that Romania was able to stop the Central Powers' advance into Moldavia.

[9] He notably described this stage in his life as marked by an unrepeatable epiphany.[10][11] Recalling his entrance into a drawing room that an "eerie iridescent light" had turned into "a fairy-tale palace", he wrote,

"I practiced for many years [the] exercise of recapturing that epiphanic moment, and I would always find again the same plentitude. I would slip into it as into a fragment of time devoid of duration—without beginning, middle, or end. During my last years of lycée, when I struggled with profound attacks of melancholy, I still succeeded at times in returning to the golden green light of that afternoon. [...] But even though the beatitude was the same, it was now impossible to bear because it aggravated my sadness too much. By this time I knew the world to which the drawing room belonged [...] was a world forever lost." [12]

Robert Ellwood, a professor of religion who did his graduate studies under Mircea Eliade,[13] saw this type of nostalgia for the past as one of the most characteristic themes in Eliade's life and academic writings.[14]

Adolescence and literary debut

After completing his primary education at the school on Mântuleasa Street,[15] Eliade attended the Spiru Haret National College in the same class as Arșavir Acterian, Haig Acterian, and Petre Viforeanu (and several years the senior of Nicolae Steinhardt, who eventually became a close friend of Eliade's).[16] Among his other colleagues was future philosopher Constantin Noica[4] and Noica's friend, future art historian Barbu Brezianu.[17]

As a child, Eliade was fascinated with the natural world, which formed the setting of his very first literary attempts,[4] as well as with Romanian folklore and the Christian faith as expressed by peasants.[7] Growing up, he aimed to find and record what he believed was the common source of all religious traditions.[7] The young Eliade's interest in physical exercise and adventure led him to pursue mountaineering and sailing,[7] and he also joined the Romanian Boy Scouts.[18] With a group of friends, he designed and sailed a boat on the Danube, from Tulcea to the Black Sea. [19] In parallel, Eliade grew estranged from the educational environment, becoming disenchanted with the discipline required and obsessed with the idea that he was uglier and less virile than

his colleagues.[4] In order to cultivate his willpower, he would force himself to swallow insects[4] and only slept four to five hours a night.[9] At one point, Eliade was flunking four subjects, among which was the study of Romanian language.[4]

Instead, he became interested in natural science and chemistry, as well as the occult,[4] and wrote short pieces on entomological subjects.[9] Despite his father's concern that he was in danger of losing his already weak eyesight, Eliade read passionately.[4] One of his favorite authors was Honoré de Balzac, whose work he studied carefully.[9][4] Eliade also became acquainted with the modernist short stories of Giovanni Papini and social anthropology studies by James George Frazer.[9] His interest in the two writers led him to learn Italian and English in private, and he also began studying Persian and Hebrew.[20][9] At the time, Eliade became acquainted with Saadi's poems and the ancient Mesopotamian Epic of Gilgamesh.[9] He was also interested in philosophy—studying, among others, Socrates, Vasile Conta, and the Stoics Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus—, and read works of history—the two Romanian historians who influenced him from early on were Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu and Nicolae Iorga.[9] His first published work was the 1921 *Inamicul viermelui de mătase* ("The Silkworm's Enemy"),[21] followed by *Cum am găsit piatra filosofală* ("How I Found the Philosophers' Stone").[9] Four years later, Eliade completed work on his debut volume, the autobiographical Novel of the Nearsighted Adolescent. [9]

University studies and Indian sojourn

Between 1925 and 1928, he attended the University of Bucharest's Faculty of Philosophy and Letters in 1928, earning his diploma with a study on Early Modern Italian philosopher Tommaso Campanella.[22] In 1927, Eliade traveled to Italy, where he met Papini[23] and collaborated with the scholar Giuseppe Tucci.

It was during his student years that Eliade met Nae Ionescu, who lectured in Logic, becoming one of his disciples and friends.[24] [4][7] He was especially attracted to Ionescu's radical ideas and his interest in religion, which signified a break with the rationalist tradition represented by senior academics such as Constantin Rădulescu-Motru, Dimitrie Gusti, and Tudor Vianu (all of whom owed inspiration to the defunct literary society Junimea, albeit in varying degrees).[4]

Eliade's scholarly works began after a long period of study in British India, at the University of Calcutta. Finding that the Maharaja of Kassimbazar sponsored European scholars to study in India, Eliade applied and was granted an allowance for four years, which was later doubled by a Romanian scholarship.[25] In autumn 1928, he sailed for Calcutta to study Sanskrit and

philosophy under Surendranath Dasgupta, a Bengali Cambridge alumnus and professor at Calcutta University, the author of a five volume History of Indian Philosophy. Before reaching the Indian subcontinent, Eliade also made a brief visit to Egypt.[26] Once there, he visited large areas of the region, and spent a short period at a Himalayan ashram.[27]

He studied the basics of Indian philosophy, and, in parallel, learned Sanskrit, Pali and Bengali under Dasgupta's direction. [28] At the time, he also became interested in the actions of Mahatma Gandhi, whom he met personally,[29] and the Satyagraha as a phenomenon; later, Eliade adapted Gandhist ideas in his discourse on spirituality and Romania.[29] In 1930, while living with Dasgupta, Eliade fell in love with his daughter, Maitreyi Devi, later writing a barely-disguised autobiographical novel Maitreyi (also known as "La Nuit Bengali" or "Bengal Nights"), in which he claimed that he carried on a physical relationship with her.[30]

Eliade received his PhD in 1933, with a thesis on Yoga practices. [31][4][32][7] The book, which was translated into French three years later,[33] had significant impact in academia, both in Romania and abroad.[7] He later recalled that the book was an early step for understanding not just Indian religious practices, but also Romanian spirituality.[34] During the same period, Eliade began a correspondence with the Ceylonese-born philosopher Ananda Coomaraswamy.[35] In 1936-1937, he functioned as honorary assistant for Ionescu's course, lecturing in Metaphysics.[36]

In 1933, Mircea Eliade had a physical relationship with the actress Sorana Țopa, while falling in love with Nina Mareș, whom he ultimately married.[37][6][7] The latter, introduced to him by his new friend Mihail Sebastian, already had a daughter, Giza, from a man who had divorced her.[7] Eliade subsequently adopted Giza,[38] and the three of them moved to an apartment at 141 Dacia Boulevard.[7] He left his residence in 1936, during a trip he made to the United Kingdom and Nazi Germany, when he first visited London, Oxford and Berlin.[39]