

Utopian Landscapes and Ecstatic Journeys: Friedrich Nietzsche, Hermann Hesse, and Mircea Eliade on the Terror of Modernity

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Abstract

Against the background of fascism and the disasters of two world wars, during the first decades of the twentieth century many European intellectuals were formulating negative responses to “modernity” and to what they regarded as the decline of human civilization. Often, these intellectuals sought for alternatives to the modern *conditio humana* and looked for solutions in religion, art, or philosophy. Friedrich Nietzsche’s conceptualization of the Dionysian and the Orphic is of particular importance for such a discourse of modernity. After introducing Nietzsche’s contribution as a referential framework, the article compares two representatives of this intellectual discourse: Hermann Hesse and Mircea Eliade. At first glance, Hesse, the writer and poet, does not seem to have much in common with Eliade, the scholar of religion and writer of novels. Upon closer examination, however, there are remarkable similarities in their work and their evaluation of the modern human condition. For Hesse, it was art, music, and literature that provided the antidote against the predicaments of modern culture. Eliade shared Hesse’s search for an alternative to the modern condition and found it in the pure religion outside of time and space, in the *illud tempus* of the *homo religiosus*. For him, it was shamanism in particular that provided a model for a contact with the absolute world of truth untouched by the “terror of history.” The article argues that these dialectical responses are part and parcel of the project of European “modernity” itself, rather than representing an “anti-modern” claim.

Keywords

Friedrich Nietzsche, Hermann Hesse, Mircea Eliade, religion, literature, nature, art, shamanism, ecstasy, intellectualism, fascism, war

Introduction

At the end of the nineteenth century, European culture found itself in an accelerated process of transformation. In the realms of science, politics, philosophy, art, society, and economy rapid changes challenged the worldviews and interpretational frameworks that had been established during Enlightenment and Romanticism. The optimistic teleological expectations that had characterized the mindset of the larger part of the nineteenth century made place for a much more sober evaluation of the project of modernity. Public intellectuals were part of this discourse. Having been introduced into European languages only in the late nineteenth century, the term “intellectual” carried different connotations in different countries; particularly in Germany and France the term was linked to antagonistic interpretations of national cultures, paving the way for the German *Kulturkampf* during the first decades of the twentieth century.¹ These differences notwithstanding, intellectuals throughout Europe were often united in their critical evaluation of “civilization” and modernity. The catastrophic events of the two world wars reinforced and intensified this utterly apocalyptic diagnosis of the “decline of the West” (Spengler 1999 [1923]).² As a response to war, fascism, and totalitarianism intellectuals and artists erected imaginal landscapes and utopias that would serve as a free port for the tormented spirit of freedom, truth, and beauty.

It is these contexts that I want to engage here. Using Hermann Hesse and Mircea Eliade as my main protagonists, I will demonstrate that intellectual utopias and counter-worlds fostered interpretational frameworks that influenced both the academic study of religion and the transformation of religious discourses in general during the twentieth

¹) See Beßlich 2000; on the emergence of the concept of “intellectual” see Carey 1992; Hübinger 2001 (with its use in Max Weber). On the specific type of intellectual religion see Kippenberg 1989 (on Weber’s notion of *Intellektuellenweltflucht*, or “intellectual escapism,” see *ibid.*:199–200).

²) The German *Zivilisationskritik* was a critique of technology and industrialization, but at the same time it applied rules of technology to understandings of nature and the interpretation of the modern *conditio humana*; on these issues see Rohkrämer 1999 who focuses especially on Walther Rathenau, Ludwig Klages, and Ernst Jünger. On Oswald Spengler see Rohkrämer 1999:285–293. On German reform movements see Repp 2000.

century. Over against a modernity that was interpreted as mirroring the worst image of the *conditio humana*, these intellectual utopias set up a land of truth and beauty in which the free spirit could find its dwelling place. While Hermann Hesse projected these landscapes into the metaphysical realm of true art and music, Mircea Eliade prescribed the “other world” of shamanism and the *homo religiosus* as antidotes against the afflictions of his time. Both approaches have been influential and it is not by chance that both Eliade and Hesse — side by side with Joseph Campbell and Carl Gustav Jung — entered the pantheon of the so-called New Age movement.

To better understand the place of Hesse and Eliade within this development and within the triad of art, nature, and religion that informs their contributions, it is important to provide a referential framework for our analysis. And there is no better point of departure for us here than the huge impact of Friedrich Nietzsche.

Friedrich Nietzsche and the Triad of Art, Religion, and Nature

In the discourse that is the topic of this article, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) plays an important role. Nietzsche combines in his work the heritage of Romantic philosophy with an existential questioning of the human condition that was to become so influential in the twentieth century.³ With his training as classicist Nietzsche was well prepared to link philosophical considerations with the reception of ancient mythology. In this regard, his interpretation of the Dionysian was of particular importance. As Max Baeumer remarks:

The tradition of Dionysus and the Dionysian in German literature from Hamann and Herder to Nietzsche — as it has been set forth for the first time from aesthetic manifestoes, from literary works, and from what today are obscure works of natural philosophy and mythology — bears eloquent witness to the natural-mystical and ecstatic stance of German Romanticists which reached its final culmination in the works of Friedrich Nietzsche. (Baeumer 1979:189)

³) That is why Jürgen Habermas gives his chapter on Nietzsche the title “Entering Postmodernity: Nietzsche as a Hub” (“Eintritt in die Postmoderne: Nietzsche als Drehscheibe”; see Habermas 1998:104–29).

When Nietzsche began to study Dionysus he could make use of interpretational frameworks of this god's role in the ancient world — usually in relation to Orpheus and Apollo — that were well established in the nineteenth century.⁴ The link between Orpheus and Dionysus was an ambivalent one; some regarded Orpheus as a follower of the Thracian god, some as his antipode because he took on the characteristics of Apollo. Jane Harrison thus remarked: “Orpheus reflects Dionysus, yet at almost every point seems to contradict him” (Harrison 1922:455). In some sense, Orpheus is related to both divinities. “For Orpheus is truly a reconciler of opposites: he is the fusion of the radiant solar enlightenment of Apollo and the somber subterranean knowledge of Dionysus,” as Walter Strauss notes with reference to J. J. Bachofen and K. Kérenyi.⁵ Nietzsche's own theory is ambivalent, as well: “on the one hand we see in Socrates the opponent of Dionysus, the new Orpheus who stands up against Dionysus”;⁶ on the other hand, “the *old cruel pre-Homeric* world [...] still draws its wavy furrow in Orpheus Musaeus and their ascetic priestly atonement. On everything that is to be found there the *Dionysian* stream builds forth” (Nietzsche 1999, vol. VII:404, italics in the original; see also I:121–2).

For Nietzsche, the tension between the Dionysian and what he conceptualized as the Apollonian became the major interpretational tool for ancient history, and even for human culture as such. The basis for this theory is laid out in *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (1872), which was turned down by his fellow classicists but which was enthusiastically embraced by the composer Richard Wagner. Two years earlier, in his essay *Die dionysische Weltanschauung*, Nietzsche for the first time used the opposition “Apollonian–Dionysian” for his interpretation of Greek tragedy. Here, Dionysus represented untamed nature, a wild and ecstatic cult that had come from “Asia” to Greece. Nietzsche's description of this cult is worth quoting:

⁴ Nietzsche's claims that he was the first who would deal with Dionysus in a philosophical way were “intentional rhetorical exaggerations” (Baeumer 1979:166). On the importance of Orpheus for Enlightenment discourses on nature and art, see von Stuckrad 2003:66–75; on the context of Nietzsche's Dionysian interpretations, particularly with regard to Victor Hugo, Rainer Maria Rilke, Erwin Rohde, and Thomas Achelis, see von Stuckrad 2003:93–123.

⁵ Strauss 1971:18. It is by no means clear, however, whether this reflects the actual historical situation in antiquity.

⁶ Nietzsche 1999, vol. I:88. In this article, all translations from German are mine.

Dionysian art [...] is based on the play with intoxication/ecstasy [*Rausch*], with rapture [*Verzückung*]. There are two powers in particular that trigger the self-forgotten ecstasy [*Rausch*] of the naïve man of nature — the drive of spring and the narcotic drink. Their impacts are symbolized by the figure of Dionysus. The *principium individuationis* in both states is broken; the subjective disappears entirely against the force of the general-human, even the general-natural that is breaking forth. The festivals of Dionysus do not only create a bond between humans, they also reconcile the human with nature. (Nietzsche 1999, vol. I:554–5)

Hence, the conscious transgression of borders is a central characteristic of Dionysian experience of the world. By giving up their individuality the participants become part of the group community; at the same time they experience the mystical power of nature. Enthusiastically Nietzsche wrote:

In ever bigger droves the gospel of “world harmony” is rolling from place to place: singing and dancing the human being expresses himself as a member of a higher, ideal community: he has forgotten how to walk and to speak. Even more: he feels enchanted and indeed he has become something else. Just as the animals talk and the earth gives milk and honey, something supernatural is sounding out of him. He feels as a god; what used to live in his imagination only, now he feels in himself. (I:555)

For Nietzsche, the strength of Greek culture was the fact that the Greeks did not simply give in to or run away from the existential threat of their social and cultural world by the confrontation with the Dionysian cult from Asia — the “raw unleashing of the lower drives” that is “a pan-Hetarian animal life” (I:556) — but that they brought the Dionysian into a rational order. “It was the Apollonian people that put the all-superior instinct in the chains of beauty” (I:558). Greek rationality (*Geist*) is a sublimation of the driving force of the Dionysian melting with nature; the Greeks had cast their emotions into the form of the tragedy, which would become the highest refinement of the *conditio humana*. What started as a threat had developed into an enormous cultural power because it was dialectically turned into art.⁷ Consequently, in *Die Geburt der Tragödie* Nietzsche exclaimed: “And forsooth! Apollo

⁷ The philosophy of nature as part of this dialectic, implying a philosophy of life, may stem from Schelling; see Kein 1935.

could not live without Dionysus! The ‘Titanic’ and the ‘Barbaric’ in the end were just as necessary as the Apollonian!” (I:40)

There can be no doubt that due to his antipathy against the bourgeois attitudes of the academic world Nietzsche had a strong preference for the Dionysian. But ultimately he was looking for a synthesis on a higher level.

In this composite Nietzschean deity, Apollo, it is true, more and more loses his name to the other god, but by no means the power of his artistic creativeness, for ever articulating but the Dionysian chaos in distinct shapes, sounds and images, which are Dionysian only because they are still aglow with the heat of the primeval fire. (Heller 1952:109)

In the Apollonian Nietzsche saw the rational clarity that comes from the sphere of the dream — together with ecstasy (*Rausch*) the second basic condition of true art. “Apollo, as the god of all creational powers, is at the same time the divinizing god. He, with his root meaning ‘the shining one,’ the god of light, also rules over the beautiful appearance of the world of fantasy” (I:27). This does not refer to the deceptive appearance of dreams but to the clarity of sight that sees the truth behind the veil. As an explanation, Nietzsche made use of Schopenhauer’s philosophy. In *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1819), Schopenhauer had described a “Will” that acts at a deep and hidden level in history, and that as the ultimate mover of life is responsible for everything in the world. The Will, then, objectifies itself in the acting of nature, as well as in the acts of human beings. It can be experienced particularly in music because music is the direct objectification of the World’s Will in man.

Hence, Nietzsche extrapolated from an historical situation in antiquity — to be sure, a situation full of imaginative projections — the basic condition of human existence. Dionysus becomes the Dionysian, Apollo becomes the Apollonian.

In summer 1870, with the reevaluation of the stylistic characteristics of art — the Apollonian and the Dionysian — into metaphysical powers of life, Friedrich Nietzsche made the decisive step in his intellectual biography. From now on he held the key in his hand that he thought he could use to understand the trade secret of cultures, their history, and future. (Safranski 2000:59)

Or, as Walter Kaufmann puts it: “For Nietzsche a meta-historical perspective was at stake” (Kaufmann 1982:178).

We have seen already that Nietzsche, like Schopenhauer and other Romantics, found the essence of the world in music. Music was the link to the ultimate primordial reality which he now tried to conceptualize with the Dionysian. While in antiquity the Apollonian refinement of the wild rage and the sublimation of the animal drive in man was the task of the tragedy, in his own epoch Nietzsche found a similar task realized in the musical dramas of Richard Wagner. Wagner’s projects offered a true experience of art and an antidote against the increasing intellectualism and commercialization of music in the nineteenth century (see Kruse 1987:287–293; Safranski 2000:79–103). Of course, this experience of music must not be mixed up with simple pleasure of listening; it means listening to the “ventricle of the World’s Will” (“Herzkammer des Weltwillens”; see Nietzsche 1999, vol. I:135). This music does not aim at superficial beauty but at making contact with the “monstrous” (“das Ungeheure”) and the “deep.” To his close friend Erwin Rohde Nietzsche wrote on 28 October 1868, after having listened to the overture of Wagner’s *Meistersinger*: “Every fiber, every nerve twitched; for a long time I haven’t had such a long-lasting feeling of rapture [*Entrücktheit*]” (Nietzsche 1923:58). “*Entrückung*,” “*Extase*,” “*Rausch*”: these are the three terms that not only for Schopenhauer and Nietzsche but subsequently also for Rohde and others became the master key for interpreting Greek “irrationalism” (see von Stuckrad 2003:96–116).

Shortly after his experience with the *Meistersinger* Nietzsche got in touch with Wagner and began to present the latter’s music — until the end of their friendship in 1878 — as the quintessential example of the Dionysian-Apollonian initiation. In *Die Geburt der Tragödie* he wrote: “The tragedy sucks the highest orgiastic feeling of music into itself” (“Die Tragödie saugt den höchsten Musikorgiasmus in sich hinein”; I:134) — a sentence, by the way, that predates the notion of “peak experience” by almost one hundred years. In contrast to those who stick to the surface of music and stylize that experience as a “pleasure of art” (“*Kunstgenuss*”) — a species of bourgeois people he was to meet at the *Bayreuther Festspiele* — Nietzsche addresses those who, like himself, have “music as their native language”:

To those real musicians I pose the question whether they can imagine someone who would be able to perceive the third act of ‘Tristan and Isolde’ without any aid of text and image, simply as an incredible symphonic movement, and who would not breath out his life in a cramp-like spreading of all wings of his soul [*ohne unter einem krampfartigen Ausspannen aller Seelenflügel zu verathmen*]? Someone who put his ear at the ventricle of the World’s Will, who felt the raging desire for being [*das rasende Begehren zum Dasein*] as a roaring river or as a most sublime creek pouring into all veins of the world — and who would not immediately break? Someone who would endure to hear, in the poor glass cover of the human individual, the echo of countless cries of lust and pain from the ‘wide space of the worlds’ night’ — and who would not at such a shepherd’s round-dance of metaphysics flee inescapably to his original home? [*Er sollte es ertragen, in der elenden gläsernen Hülle des menschlichen Individuums, den Wiederklang zahlloser Lust- und Weherufe aus dem „weiten Raum der Weltenmacht“ zu vernehmen, ohne bei diesem Hirtenreigen der Metaphysik sich seiner Urheimat unaufhaltsam zuzufüchten?*] (I:135–6)

These sentences mark the red thread that links Romanticism to early twentieth-century German literature, such as Thomas Mann’s *Tod in Venedig* and Hermann Hesse’s *Das Glasperlenspiel*, a link that I will explore in the next section. It is important to note that Nietzsche in his later works tried to overcome the closeness to Romantic metaphysics by accepting only the “will for power” (“*Wille zur Macht*,” the continuation of the “raging desire for being”) as the basic motive of all being. But with this tactic Nietzsche could not solve the problem that he himself ontologized as a category what was not verifiable empirically. “He gives the monstrous a face, and what is more: he pushed a *causa prima* under it. This is exactly what Nietzsche wanted to avoid” (Safranski 2000:300–1, with reference to Nietzsche 1999, vol. VI:97).

Although there can be no doubt that Nietzsche gave important new impulses to the philosophy of the late nineteenth century, he stood with one foot in the Romantic tradition. This is also true for the Orphic discourse of the time. With his combination of art, music, and the look into the “true reality” beyond the deceptive surface Nietzsche walked well-trodden paths. An example of this is his description of the “two worlds” that he derived from his interpretation of the Pre-Socratics — a world of deception on the one hand, and an invisible “real” world on the other. The real world, however, must not be interpreted idealistically, but as the working of the ultimate real. Here, Heraclites’

duality, as Hubert Cancik notes, “is lifted in a ‘polar monism’” (Cancik 1995:76).

The role of nature also belongs to this discursive texture. I have already noted that the Dionysian festivals marked a reunion of the human with primordial nature.⁸ In his fourth *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung* Nietzsche elaborated this aspect. About the music of the “German masters” he wrote:

This music is a return to nature, and at the same time it is purification and transformation of nature; because in the soul of the most loving human beings the necessity for such a return emerged, and *nature that is transformed into love is sounding in their art* (Nietzsche 1999, vol. I:456, italics original).

But we should not conclude that Nietzsche is arguing for a Romantic understanding of nature that looks for an emotional unity with the love of the cosmos. For him, nature needs purification through music because in its basic state nature is pure dreadfulness.⁹ Although the “deeper human beings [...] in all periods have felt pity with animals exactly because they suffered from life and yet did not have the power to turn the thorn of pain against themselves and to understand their life metaphysically” (I:377), this compassion is more the pain that comes from the awareness of man’s own animal condition, an awareness of the fact that the human being only in rare and distinguished moments is able to transcend the “horizon of the animal”:

It is as if man is intentionally formed back and is cheated out of his metaphysical precondition; even as if nature, after having longed for man and having worked on him for so long, now shudders back from him and prefers to go back into the unconsciousness of the drives. O, nature needs understanding but is terrified of the understanding that it actually needs. (I:378–9)

⁸) Habermas, who discusses the continuities as well as the discontinuities between Nietzsche and the Romantics, says with regard to Nietzsche’s understanding of art: “Art opens the way to the Dionysian only at the price of ecstasy — at the price of painful de-differentiation, the overcoming of the individual’s borders [*Entgrenzung*], the melting with an amorphous nature both inside and outside” (Habermas 1998:117). On the reception of this discourse in modern Western shamanism see von Stuckrad 2002.

⁹) That is why Nietzsche in his first *Unzeitgemäße Betrachtung* strongly attacks David Friedrich Strauß (see Nietzsche 1999, vol. I:193–200).

Even if we sometimes may think that it is “more necessary not to gather our thoughts” (I:379), Nietzsche points out that a memory of that state of understanding is still present within us. That memory can be regained through the influence of distinguished people. “These are the real *human beings, those not-any-longer animals, the philosophers, artists, and saints*; at their appearance and due to their appearance nature, which never jumps, makes its only leap — that is a jump for joy” (I:380, italics original). Consequently, nature comes to its teleological destination in human consciousness, even if that consciousness remains broken because of the impossibility to really contain the monstrous in it.

This conception had an enormous impact in the twentieth century. Though simplifying matters a bit, Safranski is right when he concludes: “Nietzsche’s ‘Dionysus,’ Heidegger’s ‘Being’ [‘*Sein*’], and Adorno/Horkheimer’s ‘nature’ are different names for the same thing — for the monstrous [*das Ungeheure*]” (Safranski 2000:360). But with reference to the cultural discourse of modernity we can add another dimension of Nietzsche’s impact, namely the ambivalence of the post-Enlightenment philosophy that Odo Marquard described as follows:

In the context of the ‘depotentialization of transcendental philosophy’ the decline of the aesthetic approach, i.e. the disenchantment of the Romantic nature, means the empowerment of the instinct nature. As a consequence of this fate of the transcendental approach reason and Self are bowing to exactly that non-Self which they wanted to conquer the most. (Marquard 1987:209, italics original)

By way of conclusion, we can say that Friedrich Nietzsche had a marked influence on the shamanic-Orphic discourse of modernity because he offered a new interpretational framework to the reception of ancient Greek mythology. His concept of the ecstatic *Rausch* by means of music, the function of the ego that transgresses its boundaries and enters the absolute and the monstrous, ultimately becoming the Self, and finally his philosophy of nature provided subsequent generations with a key for interpreting the metaphysical dimensions of reality, music, and shamanism. These interpretational schemes entered the intellectual discourse of the first half of the twentieth century; their traces can be seen in literature, as well as in the academic study of religion.

Hermann Hesse and the Laughter of the Immortal

Hermann Hesse (1877–1962) belongs to the leading intellectuals who explicitly reflected on the societal, political, and cultural transformations that shook Europe during the first half of the twentieth century. Throughout his mature work, Hesse wrestled with the consequences of totalitarianism and fascism and tried to find an antidote against the horrors of his time. It is particularly in *Der Steppenwolf* and in his late masterpiece *Das Glasperlenspiel* that he formulated his utopia of purity, beauty, and truth. An analysis of these novels will reveal how Hesse contributed to the dialectical discourse of terror and the search for eternal truth that united many intellectuals of his generation.

Der Steppenwolf

In his novel *Der Steppenwolf*, first published in 1927, Hermann Hesse presents the life of an intellectual who is trying to find an exit from a world that is ruled by superficiality, terror, and loneliness. The protagonist, Harry Haller (H. H., maybe a reference to Hermann Hesse himself), finds inside his own soul the truth of the world which he has to accept — despite the longing for death and his disgust for the “surface” — before he can ultimately enter the world of perfection and immortality. Hermine who, like Harry, has “one dimension too much,”¹⁰ becomes the mirror of his own soul, the dangerous depths of which he consciously has to plumb before he can put the pieces of his personality together again and to enter the land of eternity. About this understanding he says:

My soul breathed again, my eye saw again, and for a few moments I glowingly began to understand that I only have to pull together the shattered world of images, that I only have to turn my Harry Haller Steppenwolf life into a complete picture, in order to enter the world of images myself and to become immortal. Wasn't this the goal that every human life attempted to reach?¹¹

¹⁰ Hesse 1974:165; see also p. 183. One may compare this notion with the poem “Entgegenkommen” that is printed in *Das Glasperlenspiel*. In that poem Hesse ironically suggests to simply cut one dimension to avoid the danger of understanding the deeper truth: “Denn sind die Unentwegten wirklich ehrlich, / Und ist das Tiefensehen so gefährlich, / Dann ist die dritte Dimension entbehrlich” (Hesse 1972:473).

¹¹ “Meine Seele atmete wieder, mein Auge sah wieder, und für Augenblicke ahnte ich

The home of the soul — and here Hesse writes in a Platonic way — is beyond space and time. As Hermine points out:

It is the realm beyond time and deception [*Schein*]. There we belong, there is our home, there our heart yearns for, Steppenwolf, and therefore we long for death. [...] O Harry, we have to toddle through so much dirt and nonsense to come home! And we have nobody to guide us, our only guide is homesickness. (Hesse 1974:168)

Thus, Hermine lets Harry Haller see “the sacred beyond, the eternal, the world of everlasting value, of divine substance” (“[d]as heilige Jenseits, das Zeitlose, die Welt des ewigen Wertes, der göttlichen Substanz”; 1974:169). It is this world on which his life is focused and yet he can reach it only by acknowledging that the world’s horrors are his own and by learning to laugh about them. The “laughter of the immortal” (“das Lachen der Unsterblichen”), particularly the laughter of Mozart, becomes the icon of the soul’s return to its eternal home. “And ‘eternity’ was nothing else than the redemption from time, a kind of return to innocence, a retransformation into space” (1974:169). These sentences reveal the close links between Hermann Hesse and Mircea Eliade, two intellectuals who longed for an escape from history into the eternal land of truth. Alluding to the political reality in Germany and to the increasing radicalization after World War I, already in 1927 Hesse lets his protagonist prophecy:

Two thirds of my compatriots read this kind of newspapers, read every morning and every evening these tunes, and every day they are worked on, warned, incited, made unhappy and angry. And the end and aim of this all is another war, is the next, coming war that will be even more dreadful than this one. (1974:129)

The fictitious editor of the *Steppenwolf* makes clear in his introduction that the “illness of the soul” (*Seelenkrankheit*) that tortures Harry Haller is “not the quirk of an individual but the sickness of the time itself, the

glühend, daß ich nur die zerstreute Bilderwelt zusammenzuraffen, daß ich nur mein Harry Hallersches Steppenwolflieben als Ganzes zum Bilde zu erheben brauche, um selber in die Welt der Bilder einzugehen und unsterblich zu sein. War denn nicht dies das Ziel, nach welchem jedes Menschenleben einen Anlauf und Versuch bedeutete?” (Hesse 1974:155).

neurosis of the generation Haller belongs to, and that affects by no means only the weak and inferior individuals but especially the strong, most intelligent, most gifted.” Therefore, the *Steppenwolf* is “a document of the time” (1974:27).

Harry Haller embarks on a journey through the imaginary world of his interior self. The novel uses the image of the “magic theater” to allude to that journey. The theater is shown to Harry by Pablo, a musician who is superficial at first sight but who actually belongs to those artists that have ascended to immortality. Pablo addresses Harry in an interesting way:

You are longing to leave this time, this world, this reality, and to enter into another reality that is more suitable for you, a world without time. Do that, dear friend, I am inviting you. In the end, you know already where this world is hidden, that it is the world of your own soul you are searching for. Only inside of yourself this other reality exists that you are yearning for. I can give you nothing that would not already exist inside yourself, I can open for you no other room of images than that of your soul. (1974:190–1)

The outer landscapes in the *Steppenwolf* are mirrors of inner landscapes.¹² Very similar to the concepts prominent in modern esotericism — therefore it is small wonder that Hermann Hesse is highly esteemed by the so-called New Age movement — we see a tendency to regard the exterior world as deceptive surface and to construct the internal parallel worlds as the ultimate realm of truth and understanding. “The premise is that the unconscious holds the answer to all questions,” as Wouter J. Hanegraaff (1996:255) notes. With reference to the movement of transpersonal psychology he concludes that those worlds of angels and demons can be seen as realms of the human unconscious; “this collective unconscious is in turn identified as an objective transpersonal realm accessed in the holotropic mode of consciousness. This is how the ‘gods’ that seemed to have been banned from heaven reappear — without losing any of their power — from the depths of the human psyche” (Hanegraaff 1996:252).

¹²⁾ For other examples of this literary motif — from Karl Philipp Moritz’s *Anton Reiser* to the “New Wave” in Science Fiction — see von Stuckrad 2003:257–63.

To be sure, Hesse — or Eliade — did not take the step of the transpersonal psychologists. Harry Haller's interior worlds cannot serve as a model for the collective unconscious, quite the contrary: they represent the world of the spirit, or *Geist*, that is only accessible to people "with one dimension too much." Therefore, the appropriation of Hesse by the New Age movement is ultimately based on a misinterpretation. But the *Steppenwolf* is a good example of the Platonizing line of tradition in Western culture that assumes the existence of parallel worlds and engages their mutual relation and mirroring.¹³ It is this *Reich des Geistes* that Hesse envisioned as the antidote to the terror of history.

Das Glasperlenspiel

In his late masterpiece *Das Glasperlenspiel*, published in 1943, Hesse brought this line of thought to fruition. After having worked on the novel between 1930 and 1942, Hesse himself regarded *The Glass Bead Game* as the sum of his writings. That he dedicated the work to the "Oriental Travelers" (*Morgenlandfahrer*) makes it clear from the outset that the author addresses the transhistorical community of intellectual seekers, artists, and musicians that were the heroes of earlier works such as *Der Steppenwolf* or *Die Morgenlandfahrt* (1932). The Glass Bead Game is a symbol of the highest form of intellectual realization, in which the "cult of music" plays a significant role. "With this cult of music ('in eternal transformations the secret power of song is greeting us here on earth' — Novalis) the Glass Bead Game is closely related" (Hesse 1972:15). Programmatically Hesse notes as the "editor" of the book:

The pose of classical music means: knowledge of humanity's tragedy, acceptance of the human fate, bravery, cheerfulness! Whether this is the grace of a minuet by Händel or Couperin, or the sensuality that is transformed into a tender pose such as with many Italians or with Mozart, or the quiet, composed acceptance of dying such as with Bach, there is always a 'despite,' a courage for death, a knightly manner, a sound of superhuman laughter in it, of immortal cheerfulness [*von unsterblicher Heiterkeit*]. Such should be the sound of our Glass Bead Game, as well as of our entire life, activity, and suffering. (1972:44; see also pp. 84, 347, 418–9, and 518)

¹³) On the Platonism in *Das Glasperlenspiel* see also Götz 1978.

The Glass Bead Game offers a direct way to the revelation of eternal truth. At times, this is turned into highly esoteric language:

Suddenly I understood that in the language, or at least in the spirit of the Glass Bead Game, in fact everything meant everything, that every symbol and every combination of symbols did not lead to this place or that place, not to single examples, experiments, or proofs, but into the center, into the secret and the interior of the world, into primordial knowledge [*Urwissen*]. Every change from major to minor in a sonata, every transformation of a mythos or a cult, every classical, artistic formulation was, as I understood in the flash of that moment, considered really meditatively, nothing else than the direct way into the interior of the world's secret, where in the movement of inhaling and exhaling, between heaven and earth, between Yin and Yang the sacred is happening eternally [*sich ewig das Heilige vollzieht*].¹⁴

It is impossible to discuss the many dimensions of *Das Glasperlenspiel* in detail here.¹⁵ What is important for my argument is the fact that Hesse imagined the world of the Glass Bead Game as a powerful alternative to the intellectual situation of the modern world in general, and the totalitarian and fascist political climate of his time in particular. Hesse acknowledged that fact in a number of letters. To Salome Wilhelm he wrote on 27 January 1947: "I was sufficiently protected against the actual reality as long as I worked on the *Glasperlenspiel*, as long as I could retreat into this work as into an inviolable magical space [...]" (Michels 1973/1974, vol. I:275). Eight years later he confessed:

In order to create a space in which I could find refuge, refreshment, and courage to face life, it was not sufficient to conjure up a bygone past and to depict it lovingly [...]. Despite the sneering present times I had to make visible the realm of the spirit and the soul as existent and undefeatable; thus, my poetry became a utopia, the image was projected onto the future, the terrible present was banned into an endured past. [*Ich mußte, der grinsenden Gegenwart zum Trotz, das Reich des Geistes und der Seele als existent und unüberwindlich sichtbar machen, so wurde meine Dichtung zur Utopie, das Bild wurde in die Zukunft projiziert, die üble*

¹⁴ 1972:125. See also the poem *Das Glasperlenspiel*, included in the novel, that expresses the same idea and that ends with the verses: "Sternbildern gleich ertönen sie kristallen, / In ihrem Dienst ward unserm Leben Sinn, / Und keiner kann aus ihren Kreisen fallen, / Als nach der heiligen Mitte hin" (1972:484).

¹⁵ For the background and interpretation of the novel see particularly Michels 1973/1974; Pfeifer 1977; Bartl 1996:93–154; Seeger 1999; Zimmermann 2002.

[*Gegenwart in eine überstandene Vergangenheit gebannt.*] (Letter to Rudolf Pannwitz from January 1955; Michels 1973/1974, vol. I:296)

Repeatedly in his letters, Hesse referred to the intellectual line of thought that was particularly strong in German Romanticism and that built on the Platonic tradition, envisioning the “land of truth” as the ultimate place of human knowledge.¹⁶ But the concretization of this utopia in novels such as *Der Steppenwolf* and *Das Glasperlenspiel* was only possible against the background of the Hitler regime and the experience of exile — both literally and metaphorically.¹⁷ Hesse envisioned as “Castilia” the intellectual community of the Glass Bead Game; he projected the utopian Castilia into the future as the ultimate escape from the present history.

Such an interpretation of the present *conditio humana* and the search for a realm of truth, beauty, and consolation was shared by many intellectuals of Hesse’s generation. The exiled poet remained in contact with these intellectuals, from Thomas Mann¹⁸ to Carl Gustav Jung and other members of the *Eranos* circle.¹⁹ Therefore, it is not surprising to find

¹⁶ Referring to the *Glasperlenspiel*, Hesse wrote that “there are two or three dozen people for whom my idea was not only fun and pleasure but some sort of air for life [*Lebensluft*], consolidation, and religion [*Religiönchen*]; and for those few people [the book] was written — and particularly for myself” (letter to Ernst Morgenthaler from May 1934; Michels 1973/1974, vol. I:89). See also Hesse’s letter to Carl Gustav Jung from September 1934 (*ibid.*, vol. I:95–7). In a letter to Helene Welti (dating 28 December 1934) Hesse refers directly to the Romantic authors Novalis, Schelling, and Baader (*ibid.*, vol. I:100) which once more demonstrates the intellectual framework that I am using for my interpretation.

¹⁷ On *Das Glasperlenspiel* as an *Exilroman* see Bartl 1996:142, with a revealing comparison between Hesse’s novel and Thomas Mann’s *Der Zauberberg*. For the argument of the present article, I also refer to Robert Ellwood’s conclusion that “the fundamental motif of Eliade’s life, certainly after 1945, but really all the way through, was the theme of exile” (Ellwood 1999:97).

¹⁸ Thomas Mann’s role in this discourse is beyond the scope of this article. On his ideas of *Kultur* vs. *Zivilisation*, his speculations about “the new generation beyond modernity” (1909) and his vision of “an Apollonian ecstasy” (1914) see Beßlich 2000:162–191.

¹⁹ On Hesse’s friendship with C. G. Jung — Hesse underwent an analysis with Jung in 1920 and he was actively involved in the Asconan counterculture — see Noll 1994:233–8 (“Hermann Hesse’s Initiation into Wotan’s Mysteries”). On the *Eranos* circle, see Wasserstrom 1999 and Hakl 2001.

many parallels between Hermann Hesse and Mircea Eliade, to whom I now turn.

Mircea Eliade and the Escape from History

Much has been written on Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), Romanian author and intellectual, who became one of the most influential scholars of religion in the twentieth century.²⁰ Eliade's oeuvre is characterized by a remarkable plurality of genres, comprising academic, literary, and biographical publications. Because the genres are intertwined they should not be studied separately. It was Eliade himself who noted that such an "oscillation between research of a scientific nature and literary imagination"²¹ had always been of crucial importance for him.

This oscillation partly originates in the very topic that can be seen as the center of gravitation of Eliadean thinking — a metaphysical interpretation of history that often transgresses the boundaries of academic argumentation.²² Already in his small study *Le mythe de l'éternel retour: archétypes et répétition* (1949), on which he started to work in May 1945 when Europe faced the horrors of the Second World War, he argued for the generalization of archaic concepts of history. In the preface to the French edition that he wrote in 1952 he expressed his conviction that "it is justifiable to read in this depreciation of history (that is, of events without transhistorical models), and in this rejection of profane, continuous time, a certain metaphysical 'valorization' of human existence" (Eliade 1965:ix). There can be no doubt that this is a reaction to the horrors of twentieth-century Europe that Eliade experienced directly. In his search for an escape from history into the *illud*

²⁰ Of the innumerable publications on Eliade, I only mention Dudley III 1977; Ellwood 1999:79–126; Rennie 2001; Allen 2002; Rennie 2007. On Eliade's Romanian roots see Ricketts 1988; on the discussion about his fascist inclinations and involvements see Junginger 2008, particularly Part II.

²¹ From an essay published in 1978, quoted from Carrasco & Swanberg 1985:19.

²² This position is part of a larger development during the first decades of the twentieth century, usually discussed under the slogan of the "crisis of historicism." Space does not allow me to elaborate on Eliade's links with this development in historiography and intellectual culture that was particularly strong in Germany. On the German contexts see Oexle 2007 and Laube 2004; see also Raulff 1999.

tempus — described in *Cosmos and History* and other works — he joined the *Eranos* circle and corresponded in friendly terms with Carl Gustav Jung, Henry Corbin, and other intellectuals of his generation who were looking for “religion after religion” (Wasserstrom 1999).

During the same years Eliade also worked on his large study of shamanism, which was published in French in 1951. Mac Linscott Ricketts, a follower of Eliade and biographer of his Romanian years (see Ricketts 1988; cf. McCutcheon 1997:83–4), provides the information that Eliade interrupted the writing of that book on 21 June 1949 in order to start working on a novel. The novel’s Romanian title *Noaptea de Sânziene* (“The Night of St. John”) alludes to this date (Ricketts 1982; see also Noel 1997:30–8). The summer solstice was a turning point not only for the author but also for the protagonist of this long novel that was published in English as *The Forbidden Forest*. The plot that focuses on the main character Stefan begins on this date of the year 1936 and ends exactly twelve years later with Stefan’s “escape” from history, when he and his lover Ileana are killed in a car accident. Between these dates the novel tells the story of a group of Romanian intellectuals trying to keep up the realm of truth and beauty within the chaos of World War II and its destructive face. The narrative is not without nationalistic overtones of a Romania that experienced fresh impetus between the world wars. Stefan — writer, philosopher, and painter — has a characteristic gift to perceive the hidden dimensions of the ultimate truth behind the deceptive superficial world of history.

The entire novel circulates around the topic of history and time, of imaginative spaces and mysterious synchronicities, and of predestination and fate. From the outset it is clear what is at stake for Stefan: “To escape from Time, to go out of Time. Look well around you. Signs come to you from all sides. Trust the signs. Follow them...” (Eliade 1978:25). This time is plagued by persecution, war, and destruction; but beyond the outer history there is a cosmic time without limits. And for some people, like Anisie — saint, magician, and “emperor” — it is only the time of the planetary cycles and the phases of the sun and the moon that is important.

He accepts no time other than cosmic time, and he especially rejects historic time; for example, the time during which parliamentary elections take place, or Hitler’s arming of Germany, or the Spanish Civil War. He has decided to take account

only of the time in which cosmic events occur [...]. He's content to exhaust the significance of each of these phenomena, living thereby an uninterrupted revelation. [...] For him Nature begins to become not only transparent but also a bearer of values. It's not a case of a regression, let's say, to the animal-like state of primitive man. He's discovered in Nature not that absence of the Spirit that some of us seek, but the key to fundamental metaphysical revelations — the mystery of death and resurrection, of the passage from non-being to being. (Eliade 1978:69)

Anisie is the protagonist's metaphysical teacher, giving him lectures about the essence of time and of history that will have an apocalyptic end for humanity in the near future. "Another war will follow this one, and then another, until nothing of all that has been will remain, not even the ruins!" (Eliade 1978:313). But this, Anisie says, is only part of the truth.

[F]or historic man, for that man who wants to be and declares himself to be exclusively a creator of history, the prospect of an almost total annihilation of his historic creations is undoubtedly catastrophic. But there exists another kind of humanity besides the humanity that creates history. There exists, for instance, the humanity that has inhabited the ahistoric paradises: the primitive world, if you wish, or the world of prehistoric times. This is the world that we encounter at the beginning of any cycle, the world which creates myths. It is a world for whom our human existence represents a specific mode of being in the universe, and as such it poses other problems and pursues a perfection different from that of modern man, who is obsessed by *history*. (Eliade 1978:313, italics original)

At this point it becomes clear that Anisie represents Eliade's conviction that humanity has to transform into a new epoch and that such a transformation can happen only after a return to the mythical *illud tempus*. But maybe he felt like Stefan who held a somewhat softer position: "I too dream of escaping from time, from history, someday," Stefan had replied. "But not at the price of the catastrophe you forecast [...]" (Eliade 1978:314).

In *The Forbidden Forest*, Eliade introduces a concrete way to escape from historical time into mythical non-time. Already in his childhood days the clairvoyant Stefan knew a secret chamber that initiates called *Sambo*. This room "was above us, somewhere overhead on the second floor" (Eliade 1978:74). When Stefan dared to open the room he was struck by an experience of enlightenment.

And just then, at that moment I understood what *Sambo* was. I understood that here on earth, near at hand and yet invisible, inaccessible to the uninitiated, a privileged space exists, a place like a paradise, one you could never forget in your whole life if you once had the good fortune to know it. Because in *Sambo* I felt I was no longer living as I had lived before. I lived differently in a continuous inexpressible happiness. I don't know the source of this nameless bliss. (Eliade 1978:75)

In this timeless mythical room of sacred cheerfulness — quite comparable to Hermann Hesse's notion of *unsterbliche Heiterkeit* — Stefan was no longer able to move his tongue; he did not feel any hunger or thirst and he “lived, purely and simply, in paradise” (*ibid.*).

As an adult Stefan hired an additional secret room in his hotel where he could work as a painter. He created mystical pictures, drawn on the canvas but invisible for others, and it is by means of art that he again entered that ecstatic mystical state. “Painting, I had no past” (Eliade 1978:58). At this secret place, time had a different quality. “When I returned home, sometimes very late at night, I seemed to be returning from a journey to a distant place. I seemed to have come from another city where the customs were different and where I met other kinds of people” (*ibid.*). This mode of time, Stefan added, felt more real to him than the time at home or at the Ministry.

Clearly, *Sambo* is a literary adaptation of the topics of ascent of the soul, the contact with the “other world,” the motif of the journey, and the function of art and ecstasy that Eliade engaged in his academic book on shamanism which he was working on at the same time. What is more, the primacy of ascent, making the issue of descent to the underworld a secondary one in his understanding of shamanism, has a clear parallel in his shamanism study. As Daniel Noel puts it: “The escape from history sought by Stefan is an escape *upward*, reversing the ‘fall’ *into* history.”²³

²³) Noel 1997:32. Noel continues: “[I]t is only the elevated spaces of the novel's world that offer any hope of a way out of the history that so tormented Stefan, Ileana, Biris, Anisie, and the other characters — as it tormented their creator and his fellow Romanians in the period between 1936 and 1948” (*ibid.*:34). For a critical response to Noel cf. von Stuckrad 2003:134 note 283.

The novel culminates dramatically with the death of the lovers Stefan and Ileana. The car accident was predetermined long before, but their love triumphs over death. Eliade lets the novel end with the sentence: “He had known that this last moment, this moment without end, would suffice” (Eliade 1978:596). Hence, the Orphic dimension of the triad of love, art, and death is a prominent element of *The Forbidden Forest*, as it was part and parcel of Eliade’s interpretation of shamanism.

It is noteworthy that in his academic book on shamanism Eliade called Orpheus a “‘Great Shaman’: his healing art, his love for music and animals, his ‘charms,’ his power of divination. Even his character of ‘culture hero’ is not in contradiction to the best shamanic tradition.”²⁴ After having reviewed a number of parallels in the ancient world — from Hermes Psychopompos to Er the Pamphylian — Eliade argued that the “‘situation of man’ remains constant.”

The enormous gap that separates a shaman’s ecstasy from Plato’s contemplation, all the difference deepened by history and culture, changes nothing in this gaining consciousness of ultimate reality; it is through ecstasy that man fully realizes his situation in the world and his final destiny. We could almost speak of an archetype of “gaining existential consciousness,” present both in the ecstasy of a shaman or a primitive mystic and in the experience of Er the Pamphylian and of all the other visionaries of the ancient world, who, even here below, learned the fate of man beyond the grave. (Eliade 1972a:394)

Anisie in *The Forbidden Forest* could not have summarized Eliade’s position more precisely. These sentences by far transgress the limits of historic or scholarly argument. They reflect Eliade’s existential questioning of the human condition after World War II. The Orphic myth was a blueprint for his presentation of shamanism as a technique that is most suitable even for modern mankind to renew its bond with the ultimate reality *in illo tempore*.²⁵

²⁴ Eliade 1972a:391; see also Eliade 1972b:34 where he addresses the “ecstatic experiences of Orpheus” that were “‘shamanic’ in type.”

²⁵ On Eliade’s interpretation of shamanism see von Stuckrad 2003:129–135. This applicability of shamanism to modern seekers is a major reason for the fact that Eliade — via Carlos Castaneda and Michael Harner — became an influential source of religious practice in modern Western shamanism; see von Stuckrad 2003:*passim* and Znamenski 2007:165–203.

Conclusion

The discourses that I have engaged in this article reveal the strong anti-nomian character of European modernity. Rather than describing Nietzsche's, Hesse's, or Eliade's response to modernity as an "anti-modern" critique, it makes more sense to interpret their reaction as an inherent dialectic of the discourse of European modernity. Despite some tendencies in eighteenth-century Enlightenment to prioritize rationality and science, the fascination for an ecstatic approach of ultimate truth and the search for a science that would include the living ontological dimensions of nature have remained as prominent as before, albeit in a new form. This dialectic also generated the interpretational framework of art, nature, and religion that we see at work in Nietzsche, Hesse, and Eliade. Nietzsche's revaluation of ancient myth in the light of modern philosophy served as a blueprint for intellectuals in the first half of the twentieth century. The traumatic experiences of two world wars, interpreted as a radicalization of the problematic status of humankind, fostered the search for an alternative utopia in which beauty, truth, and eternal bliss would prevail.

With Hermann Hesse and Mircea Eliade — perhaps less so with Friedrich Nietzsche — we also see that these utopias can take on a concrete form as a "land of truth" and knowledge that can be accessed directly. While Nietzsche envisioned such a land metaphorically through the experiential dimension of music and the Dionysian in general, Hesse and Eliade pictured a visionary landscape in which the true philosophers dwell. Hesse's *Kastilien* and Eliade's *Sambo* are concrete places of refuge for the tormented modern intellectual.

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