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# Mircea Eliade Remembered

## Abstract

*Mircea Eliade died on April 22, 1986. He was a recognized pioneer in the systematic study of the history of religions. Few scholars in our times have come close in erudition to Eliade's. Ever since childhood he aspired to knowledge with an extraordinary intensity and passion. A walking encyclopedia, he was as well versed in philosophy, world literature, theology or depth psychology as he was in such fields as orientalism, anthropology, and zoology, including entomology (the study of insects), one of his favorite childhood pastimes. This author who knew Mircea Eliade for many years reminisces about the man and his life. A brief vita of the savant is also provided in an appendix.*

## Introduction

On December 18th, 1985 a fire broke out in Mircea Eliade's office in Chicago. Given the circumstances, it is surprising that only a few manuscripts were destroyed; more the result of the firemen's waters than the fire itself. Among the papers badly damaged was the last chapter to the volume 4 of *A History of Religious Ideas*, soon to be published by the University of Chicago Press.

In the fire Eliade detected a bad omen. His mood changed. He related to his wife Christinel that he was too drained and too crippled by arthritis to dare rewrite that chapter.(1) And indeed, close to his death he could not even write his own name legibly.

As the months went by he withdrew more and more to his room, away from social contacts, and he remained basically bed-ridden. To make matters worse, he suffered a stroke a few months after the fire. Furthermore, an undetected lung cancer was diagnosed post-mortem.

Yet, in spite of everything, Mircea did not seem to anticipate his imminent death. Christinel tells me he left her no guidelines or directions as to how to dispose of his unpublished works, and, more specifically, what to do with his diary of later years (three of his journals up to the year of 1978 are already in print) (Eliade 1973b, 1977, 1981a).

This leaves Christinel in a delicate predicament because her husband took great liberties in sharing uncensored thoughts and feelings about himself and the people he met or knew well. She is considering waiting a period of ten years before anyone will be permitted to read or edit his last journal.(2)

Mircea's death came to us as a shock even if we sensed that he was not going to survive his stroke. Yet when I heard the news of his death that Tuesday morning I remained dazed, not knowing how to react. It took me a while to come to grips with reality.

For days I could not sleep, not being particularly aware I was mourning Mircea's death. I even "forgot" to send Christinel words of support and condolence. It was after his memorial service the following Monday that reality set in. As the weeks went by I began to reminisce about him.

### **Mircea Eliade: The Man**

I remembered the days when I first heard of Mircea while yet an adolescent in Europe. "Mircea Eliade" was a household name for years. My older brother had read all of his books. I first met him in person in Chicago in the late 1960s. My father had received an offer to teach Old Testament at the Chicago Theological Seminary which is located on the University of Chicago campus where Mircea taught at the Divinity School. Inasmuch as we were a French-speaking family, it did not take long for the Lacocques, French philosopher Paul Ricoeur and his wife Simone, and the Eliades (who also spoke French fluently) to grow close to one another.

Paradoxically, knowing him in person did not lead me to first read Eliade's inspiring work. I owe this desire to Maslow's (1970, 1971) study of self-actualizing individuals. He often referred to one of Eliade's best known books, *The Sacred and the Profane* (1959), whenever he described these individuals' experiences of awe and mystery. Maslow (1966) in fact borrowed Eliade's heuristic concepts of "the sacralization and desacralization of life" to distinguish mental health from psychopathology.

From my first encounter with him onwards, Mircea Eliade struck me as one of the most humble, respectful, and attentive men I ever met. There was a *presence* about him which left me in awe. Once one came to know him it was obvious he was an extraordinary man. Rarely can one meet a scholar as well read, and in so many fields. This erudite man was

equally well versed in philosophy, theology, depth psychology, anthropology, sociology, and ethnology as he was in orientalism, world literature, or zoology, not to mention his beloved childhood passion: entomology. He was truly a walking encyclopedia. What is so remarkable about this genius is that he displayed no signs of pretentiousness. I concur with Long (1986) who, during Mircea's memorial service, said of the Romanian-born scholar that he possessed "the most remarkable modesty and sweetness."

Already as a child, this savant was possessed with an unquenchable thirst for knowledge. He would read whatever he could lay his eyes on. By his teens Mircea Eliade had developed a study pace of the highest intensity. Throughout his life he devoted all of his time to reading, writing, and studying, taking only a few hours of sleep. He anguished continuously about lost or wasted time. Therefore, sleep, like death, were enemies to conquer (see, for example, his war-against-sleep experiment below).(3)

As a youngster, Mircea Eliade describes himself as oppositional, undisciplined, and disliking school. The only thing that mattered was his passion for reading and knowledge. He already had read the school textbooks, so there was little about the student life that could stimulate his interests.

Eliade fought vehemently against anyone or anything restricting his being. He rebelled against the laws of nature, for instance, by forcing himself to eat caterpillars, worms, or soap. This was his way to prove to himself he was "absolutely free" (Eliade, 1981b). His rebellion against nature even led him to devise an experiment to eradicate the biological need to sleep. He was then eleven years old. As his life-long motto was "we are cursed to consume time uselessly" (Eliade, 1981b, p. 291), he felt sleeping was a waste of time and too intrusive on his beloved studies. Each night he decided to retire to bed a few minutes later than the night before. He would then set the clock to awake a few minutes earlier than the preceding day. When he won a whole hour from his sleep-time he stopped to get accustomed to the new daily pace. Once comfortable with the change he returned to the above-mentioned experimental pattern. And so it went. He managed to get his sleeping time down to four hours a day. He could not, however, break his record as he began experiencing terrifying symptoms of disorientation, dizziness, and blurred vision.(4) Yet Eliade basically kept his new sleep pattern his entire life.

This was an individual who experienced an ontological need to stay in a perpetual creative motion and he was unyielding, even in adulthood, about letting anyone or anything interfere with his passionate, ongoing drive to read, write, and study. By the age of eighteen he had already published one hundred papers. The topics varied from traveling logs to the

Carpathian mountains in Romania, to book reviews and contributions to the history of religions. By the age of thirty he saw his twelfth book in print. In 1980 when Allen and Doeing's book summarizing Eliade's voluminous work came off the press, there were no fewer than one thousand documents and manuscripts outlined. By his death in April of 1986 he had published at least fifty books, and there are many yet to come, such as his last journal covering the years of 1979 to 1986, the second volume to his autobiography, the fourth volume to *A History of Religious Ideas*, and a sixteen-volume encyclopedia on world religions which he edited (soon to be published by the Macmillan Company).

School, as we saw, provided no stimulation for Eliade. He had read the textbooks long before they were taught. So, for a long time he did not attend his classes and roamed the streets with friends. He even falsified school reports so as not to get in trouble with his parents. In due time he was threatened with expulsion from school if he did not improve.

What was missing for this unusually precocious child was simply stimulation and inspiration. He felt that his life at school was devoid of meaning and purpose. Eventually, and fortunately, given the above-mentioned expulsion threats, he became enthused about two classes at school. These were to leave an indelible mark on him and shape his vocational path. The first was Mr. Mazilu's Romanian language class for which he wrote a paper with his reflections on the coming of Spring. While writing this class assignment he discovered that words and expressions came easily, effortlessly. He detected a new joy and passion. To top it all, writing was a rapprochement and identification which those authors like Honoré de Balzac and Giovanni Papini whom he read and idealized with a passion.

Fiction-writing was to become a life-long hobby and Mircea Eliade considered the said school paper as the starting point to his career as a novelist and writer. As Allen and Doeing (1980) have shown in their impressive book compiling all of Eliade's works up to 1979, published and unpublished, many of these are devoted to fiction-writing. Few people seem aware that ever since young adolescence, Mircea Eliade began writing novellas, short-stories, a personal diary, plays, and even a musical opera. (He was a gifted piano player in his youth). Unfortunately many of these works were never translated from Romanian. Not being recognized and appreciated as a novelist disappointed him greatly because he believed his fiction writings, which as a rule contained autobiographical data, revealed a fundamental part of himself. The following quote by a colleague of his at the University of Chicago reflects well how sensitive he was about such writings: "If he gave me a novel, he would be very insulted if three days later I had not read it and was not able to discuss it, whereas if he gave me a technical book on religion, a year later would do" (Marty, 1986b, p.1).

The other class which was to have a lasting impact on Eliade was Mr. Moiescu's biology class. This teacher introduced him to the notion that there are many secrets or mysteries in Nature which can be deciphered. He began to understand why porcupines have quills and why male birds of many species are more brilliantly decorated than their female counterparts:

The world no longer was seen to be a conglomeration of unrelated creatures and happenings, rather, it showed itself to be the result of a unique and irresistible will. As she revealed herself to me in Moiescu's lectures, "Nature" was animated by a single impetus: That of creating and maintaining life, in spite of all obstacles and disasters. (Eliade, 1981b, p. 38)

Already as a young child Eliade was convinced that a splendid calling lay in front of him. First, because he had been the only one among his two other siblings breast-fed by a gypsy woman (he was the second-born child). This "souvenir" brought forth ongoing fantasies of specialness and grandeur. And secondly, in the name "Eliade", he saw the Greek word *helos*, meaning "sun" [a symbol for knowledge, wisdom, consciousness as well as of the creative (and destructive) powers of the sun or God], and in "Mircea" he detected the Slavic word *Mir* which means peace (Eliade, 1981b, 1982).

As adolescence neared he became convinced he was to become a new voice in Romania. He felt his culture too provincial and narrow-minded. Yet, in spite of his avowed grandiosity, there was another side to Eliade's personality. He felt a deep sense of responsibility to preserve for younger generations religious data from our distant past. His ultimate goal in life was to transmit knowledge and information to others about who we once were, and how that heritage shaped and is still shaping our lives today. Explains Eliade (1982):

I felt the need to tap certain sources that had been neglected until my time, sources that were there, in the libraries, that could be unearthed, but that had no spiritual or even cultural topicality at the time. I told myself that man, and even European man, is not solely man as presented by Kant or Hegel or Nietzsche; that there were other, deeper veins to be mined in the European tradition and in the Romanian tradition. I felt strongly that Greece is not just the Greece of its admirable poets and philosophers but also that of Eleusis and Orphism, a Greece that had its roots in the Mediterranean and Near East of ancient times...

As far as the archaic is concerned, I could see that the world's "traditional" or "primitive" societies were in the

process of vanishing, that in another human lifetime they would be gone, and that the ethnologists and anthropologists studying them were scarcely concerning themselves at all with grasping the coherence, the nobility, and the beauty of such societies, mythological systems, and theologies. (pp. 19, 161; see also Eliade, 1967)

Mircea Eliade was by nature a humanist (e.g., Eliade, 1961, 1986a). His approach to the study of religious behavior resembles that of the person-centered psychotherapeutic approach of Carl Rogers. It is only through empathy, through what Eliade (1973a, p. 107) called "the phenomenological principle of suspension of judgement," that one can truly understand and appreciate someone else's sense of being-in-the-world. I quote from *Ordeal by Labyrinth* (1982):

A "demystifying" attitude is altogether too facile. All archaic or primitive men believe that their village is "the center of the world." To regard that belief as an illusion is easy, but it gets one absolutely nowhere. In doing so, one destroys the phenomenon by failing to observe it on its own level. The important thing, in fact, is to ask oneself *why* those men believe they live in the center of the world. If I try to understand a given tribe, it is not in order to demystify its mythology, its theology, its customs, its representation of the world. I am trying to understand its culture and, in consequence, why those men believe what they do. And if I understand why they believe their village is the center of the world, then I am beginning to understand their mythology, their theology, and, consequently, their mode of existing in the world. (pp. 135-136, emphasis Eliade's)

### A Mystic in Love with Nature

Mircea's love and respect for nature and animals knew no bounds. As a rule in adulthood, for instance, he insisted there be trees and a view to a garden wherever the Eliades settled for a long-term residence.

Nature was to Eliade what oxygen is to life. He was moved by it. His journal entries are filled with his sense of closeness and awe towards it. He was particularly affected by weather changes. When sunny outside he felt happy, rejuvenated, inspired. When cloudy, he predictably responded with opposite moods. "He particularly loved the light of day...", said his wife Christinel, "a sunny day delighted Mircea so much ... he felt happy and energetic... it just revived him."(5)

His love for animals was also notorious. There is a well-known passage in *No Souvenirs* (1977) in which he describes his nostalgia for a return to a paradisaical time when human beings and animals were living in complete harmony. He had a particular attachment to squirrels. In relating to them and feeding them almonds or food he was reminded of that "paradisiac epoch" of distant times. Explains Eliade (1977):

A few weeks ago in Paris, I was speaking about all this to Father Bruno. I think I succeeded in expressing what I really felt when the first squirrel had approached my outstretched hand to take an almond. Every time distrust, enmity, the struggle for life, everything that characterizes the relations between man and beast seems to me to be abolished – even if it is only for an instant – a powerful and obscure emotion takes over inside me. As if the actual condition of man and of the world were cancelled and the paradisiac epoch glorified by the primitive myths were reestablished. Then, *in illo tempore*, before the "Fall," before "sin," men lived in peace with the wild beasts; they understood their language and spoke to them as friends. (p. 114, emphasis Eliade's)

I believe the following incident which occurred in Ascona in the 1950s also highlights beautifully his sensitivity and reverence towards life. The Eliades had just arrived by bus to the Swiss town for the famed yearly Eranos meetings. They were to meet Mrs. Olga Froebe-Kapteyn and Carl Jung. As Christinel Eliade stepped down the bus's steps she uttered a frightful sound at the sight of a snake near her feet. Mircea seeing a "v" shape on its head assumed it was a viper and killed it. The next day, however, he read in the local newspaper that Ascona had many snakes in its midst which looked like vipers because of the "v" on their heads but were in fact non-venomous. Upon finishing his reading Mircea fell into a depressed and guilty mood which apparently took him days to recover from. "That is the kind of man he was," confided Christinel, "people rarely got to see that side of him... he was a very caring and sensitive man. I also remember an incident at a family gathering wherein Mircea was awestruck by a hamster we had purchased. Oblivious to the commotions around him he was gently tapping on the window cage of the furry animal to invite contact with it. I will never forget the expression of wonder and loving involvement on his face." Christinel concludes:

He believed we have removed ourselves too much from nature and animals. . . . You know, he would not even hurt a fly. . . . He would capture it gently in his hands and release it outside [as Albert Schweitzer also used to do in Lambarene]. Even as a youngster, he never killed the insects he caught for study, not even the butterflies he collected.

Professor Eliade was also known for his concern and sensitivity towards people, particularly his students. All in all, as his friends and colleagues repeatedly testify, this was a kind and gentle man. It was, for instance, not unusual for him to give extravagant tips to waiters, taxi cab drivers, or beggars. A one hundred dollars gift was not atypical for him. Having suffered himself from poverty for many years, he liked making a difference for people who struggled as he once did. Even during times of hardship – such as while in Paris in the mid-1940s for instance – he remained sensitive to others' needs. In *Fragments d'un Journal* (1973b), as yet not published in its entirety in English, we are told the following story: While drinking lemonade at a nightclub, he was accosted by a young, disheveled man with long hair. The stranger begged him for one hundred francs. He inquired as to the reason for such a request and was told the money would be used for a vacation. Eliade granted his wish (see entry of 14 August 1947).

### A Life of Trials and Ordeals

Eliade lived through many ordeals in his life. Exiled from his native country since 1942, he had to endure poverty and uprootedness for many years. Also, throughout his adult life he had to contend with accusations of being anti-Semitic – an accusation that saddened him and his wife. Said Christinel:

It is absolutely untrue and unfounded.... He always had Jewish friends not only at the University here [e.g., Edward H. Levi and Jonathan Z. Smith] but in Romania as well. He had a good friend, Nae Ionescu, [his professor of philosophy and mentor at the University of Bucharest] who had, for reasons I do not recall, taken objections to Judaism. But these were not anti-Semitic slurs, they reflected only philosophical – theological differences.<sup>(6)</sup> Besides, Mircea never joined any Fascist party or supported anyone with anti-Semitic views.... You know he was even imprisoned for this accusation. He refused to sign confession papers in exchange for freedom because he was outraged at the charges against him.

In my book, *In and Out of the Labyrinth*, now in preparation, I address in some depth Eliade's alleged "sympathetic" involvement with the Legionary Movement (Iron Guards) as well as his supposed "philo-Nazi" sentiments. There may have been attempts to prove Eliade's anti-Semitism in the past, but to date *none* has come forth with convincing evidence. While it is true that he had close friends belonging to the Iron Guards, he himself never joined. He even published two articles denouncing Professor Nae Ionescu for his overt anti-Semitism and flawed theological reasonings (cf. Eliade, 1981b, pp. 386f; see also the forthcoming vol. 2 to his



autobiography; esp. chaps. 16 and 17). These articles are significant as Ionescu was looked upon as one of the Legionary's most respected and outspoken "representatives" (in spite of never formerly belonging to it).

In the summer of 1935, to cite another example, he published a book called *Hooliganii* (The Hooligans). As he explains in his autobiography the book was written in the midst of strong anti-Semitic sentiments in Romania, and yet he did not make derogatory remarks about Jews. Explains Eliade (1981b):

In the then-current meaning of the term, "hooligans" referred to groups of anti-Semites, ready to break windows or heads, to attack or loot synagogues, to burn books. None of this happened in my novel. The political context – that is, more precisely, the anti-Semitic connotation of hooliganism – was entirely absent. (p. 301)(7)

Being labelled "anti-Semitic" was by no means the only accusations Eliade ever had to endure. Besides having to defend himself legally against alleged "pornographic" writings in his younger days, he also had to contend with another accusation which arose toward the end of his life: Lyndon Larouche and his followers publicly accused the Eliades of delving into occultism and witchcraft. Larouche supporters had gone to the media, and they even protested with banners and signs in front of the Eliades' Hyde Park home. Continues Christinel:

They accused him of being a high priest and me of being a witch mainly because he had written a book on occultism [*Occultism, Witchcraft and Cultural Fashions* (1976)]... With all these ridiculous accusations and others over the years of our marriage I begged him to defend himself and bring evidence to exonerate himself. But he always refused.... He said it would be for naught if he tried to redeem himself because you do not change minds that are biased and already preset in their ways.

### Concluding Remarks

As I describe it in more detail in *In and Out of the Labryinth*, Eliade was enigmatic and difficult to know intimately. This is an observation he concurred with, judging by his published self-disclosures and interviews (Eliade 1973b, 1977, 1981a, 1981b, 1982). Personally, I remember Mircea as a reserved and humble man who, with pipe and whiskey and soda by his side, listened attentively to conversations. He typically seemed content to observe the back and forth commotions around him without intruding. He rarely spoke about his life or his work. When he did so he revealed only bits

and pieces about his personal feelings or beliefs. This reservation applied also to politics and his private religious convictions.

Upon hearing my observation that her husband seemed typically introverted whenever I saw him, Christinel interpreted his "aloofness" as follows: "You came to know him toward the end of his life.... He used to be much more outspoken years ago but later in his life he was not feeling well.... He was often preoccupied with his health." Besides, Christinel added, her husband was by nature a humble and reserved man. Mircea Eliade's humility is in fact notorious and often acknowledged (Cioran, 1969; Long, 1986; Marty, 1986a; Paul & Simone Ricoeur, personal communication, May 17, 1986).

As far as I am concerned I loved him the way he was. This is not to say that I would not have welcomed knowing him personally better. I would have loved, for instance, to have heard him talk about his encounters with Carl Jung in the 1950s, about the Eranos meetings at Ascona, Switzerland, and its distinguished guests who were invited there, or, for that matter, hear his impressions on the host and mastermind of these Eranos meetings, Mrs. Olga Froebe-Kapteyn. In due time I learned to answer these questions on my own through reading his and others' published accounts on Carl Jung and the Eranos meetings (e.g., Eliade, 1960, 1986b; Jung, 1975; Proff, 1966).

I, for one, feel a void in my life. I miss him and think about him often. This was a man I loved dearly. Perhaps the words of Rabbi Israel ben Eliezer (1700-1760), founder of the Jewish Hassidic movement and also known as the Baal-Shem Tov, are most fitting in ending this remembrance:

Every man should behave according to his "rung." If he does not, if he seizes the "rung" of a fellow-man and abandons his own, he will actualize neither the one, nor the other.... Everyone has in him something precious that is in no one else. (in Buber, 1967, p. 18)

Mircea Eliade no doubt behaved according to his "rung." Therein lay his greatness.

Grateful acknowledgements are made to Professor Paul Ricoeur and his wife, Simone, for sharing with me their reflections and recollections about Mircea Eliade. Appreciation is extended as well to Professor Mac Linscott Ricketts for having read and for having made helpful comments on this paper. I am also deeply grateful to Christinel Eliade for her unwavering support during the writing of this paper and for granting me interviews during delicate times of sorrow and mourning.

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## APPENDIX

## Mircea Eliade: A Brief Vita

Mircea Eliade was born in Bucharest, Romania on March 9, 1907. Upon graduating from high school, he entered the University of Bucharest where he studied Italian philosophy. He received his B.A. in 1928. Soon after that, he fell in love with India and received a scholarship from the Maharaja Mahindra Chandra Nandry of Kassimbazar to study Sanskrit and Indian philosophy for five years. He studied at the University of Calcutta under Professor Surendranath Dasgupta. He left Calcutta in September of 1930 to live six months in the ashram of Rishikesh, in the Himalayas. There, he practiced meditation and Yoga techniques under the tutelage of Swami Shivananda.

Around Christmas of 1931 he returned to Romania to fulfill his army duties. In 1933 he received his Ph.D. from the University of Bucharest with a dissertation on Yoga which he soon published in French. He married his first wife, Nina Mares, in 1934. Following his doctorate he was appointed Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Letters of the same University. His close attachments to friends and colleagues sympathizing with the Legionary Movement led eventually to accusations of himself belonging to it (in spite of never being a member). His attachment and devotion to Professor Nae Ionescu, his *Maestru* and guide, considered by many *the* ideologist to the Legionary Movement, did not help matters any. As the right-wing Movement began to lose its (short-lived) prestige, anyone associated with it was subjected to discrimination, ostracism, imprisonment, and in some cases, even to death by firing squad. First, Eliade lost his teaching job at the University in June 1938. He was accused of pro-Legionary sentiments. He was then imprisoned. Through the help of a relative of his first wife holding an influential political post, he was however soon released. (He was also of extreme poor health which facilitated his return to freedom). By now Eliade's "bad" reputation had gained momentum and he could neither find gainful employment nor publish freely. He struggled with poverty and intellectual isolation for a while until he decided to leave his native country.

He accepted the post of cultural attaché at the Romanian Royal Legation in London, and left Bucharest on April 4th, 1940. He returned to his homeland only once: in the summer of 1942 for two weeks. As England broke diplomatic relations with Romania on February 10th, 1941, Eliade left for Lisbon for five years, also as cultural attaché. His first wife died of cancer in 1944, leaving to his care her daughter, Adalgiza. In 1945 he and his stepdaughter left Portugal for Paris, France. He struggled there with unemployment and poverty. At the invitation of Professor Georges Dumezil, he taught (without stipend) at the Sorbonne's Ecole des Hautes

Etudes. He met his second wife, Christinel Cottesco, in 1948 in Paris and married her in 1950. That year he was also invited to lecture at the Eranos meetings at Ascona, Switzerland, where he met Carl Gustav Jung for the first time.

He remained in Paris until 1956. In October of the same year he delivered the Haskell Lectures at the University of Chicago – and became regular professor of History of Religions at the same University the following year. In 1962, he was appointed the Sewell L. Avery Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago.

Mircea Eliade died in Chicago on April 22nd, 1986. He is survived by his wife, Christinel, and stepdaughter, Adalgiza Tattaresco.

## NOTES

1. Professor Ioan P. Culianu, per Eliade's request, will edit the book for him. This was not the first time Eliade had lost manuscripts to fire. In his *Journal* (1973b, p. 119) he relates the following incident: on April 22, 1950 Eliade's cleaning lady inadvertently burnt sixty to seventy letters, as well as a pile of manuscripts and notes which the scholar had laid on his waste basket. He had removed them temporarily from his desk to make room for a cup of tea. She misread his intentions and took for granted these papers were to be disposed of. . . . A similar accident occurred a few years earlier while Eliade lived in Cascaes, Portugal (cf. Eliade, 1977, p. 81).
2. Christinel has recently changed her mind and is authorizing its publication. It should be noted that while we have many data about Mircea Eliade's personal and professional life through his two autobiographies – vol. 2 covering the years 1938 to 1960 will soon be published by Harper and Row – and especially through his published journal entries, the *Journal* as we know it represents but a third, perhaps even a fifth of the original manuscript.
3. Dr. Mac Linscott Ricketts has submitted a book for publication covering Eliade's pre-exile years (1907-1942) entitled *Mircea Eliade: The Romanian Years*.
4. He suffered from a nearsightedness so severe that he had been warned by his doctor not to read so much or so intensely lest he eventually lose his sight – advice Eliade did not heed.
5. This and all other quotes by Christinel Eliade come from private interviews with the author held in Chicago on the following dates: September 5, 1986, February 1, 1987, and April 5, 1987.

6. Mircea Eliade had a very close Jewish friend named Mihail Sebastian (a.k.a. Joseph Hechter). The latter was a prolific writer and had asked Nae Ionescu – Mihail's mentor in spite of the professor's known extreme right political stance – to write a preface to his novel *De Doua mii de ani* (For Two Thousand Years, published in 1934). Against his friends' advice, Eliade among them, Sebastian trusted his professor not to use the preface towards political means. To the dismay of his friends, and to Mihail Sebastian in particular, Ionescu took advantage of the said preface to outline his convictions about the Jewish Question. In a nutshell, he held that the Jews deserved their lot of perennial victims to persecutions because of their repudiation of Jesus Christ as the Messiah.
7. On the controversy surrounding Eliade's past see also Cuianu (1984a, b). While articles such as his do not answer all questions about the Romanian-born scholar's "dark years," they nonetheless clarify many heretofore "murky" issues. An unpublished English translation of the above paper in German is available through Professor Cuianu or this author.

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