



Literature and Fantasy

"*Literature and Fantasy*" is an excerpt from the Foreword to *Mircea Eliade's* recently published *Tales of the Sacred* and the *Supernatural*, displaying his view of the meaning of art.

That which characterizes us as human and defines us vis-à-vis other orders of nature and God is the instinct for transcendence, the craving to be freed from oneself and to pass over into the other, the urgent need to break the iron band of individuality. Dream, the safety valve of this thirst for transcendence, as well as art, magic, dance, and love and mysticism—these all testify from various angles to the fundamental and fated instinct of human nature for emergence from oneself and fusion with the other, for a flight from limited solitariness and a bounding toward perfect freedom in the freedom of the other.

It seems to me that art is nothing other than a magical transcendence of the object, its projection into another dimension, its liberation through magical realization and creativity. This dimension is difficult to specify, but the intuition of it provokes what is called an aesthetic thrill, which is really nothing but a magical joy at the victorious bursting of the iron band.

It is, I say, the joy felt by the one who contemplates it over the fact that someone else, the artist, has succeeded in circumventing human fate, has succeeded in creating. It is the religious thrill of the creature, but with this difference: while the creature-feeling which we experience in any religious thrill reveals our dependence on God as one of God's creatures, in the case of the artistic thrill the predominant sentiment is

something else: the joy that a *human being* has created, has imitated God's work, has been saved from a destined sterility, has breached those walls of impotence and finitude. On the one hand there is the formula "I am created by God," which inevitably arouses the consciousness of nothingness, of religious fear, of the taste of dust and ashes. On the other hand there is the statement "A human being, like myself, has created, like God," which brings the joy that a fellow creature has imitated creation, has become a demiurge, a force in the creating. That is why one finds so often the spirit of magic in a work of art: it is a projection, through the will and the genius, both magical in nature, of the inner world, the drama of individuality, in a dimension little accessible to the everyday consciousness, but realized and experienced through the artistic act. . . .

The tragic fate, which only a few realize in all its depths, of not being able to go out of yourself except by losing yourself, of not being able to communicate soul to soul (because any communication is illusory, except for love, which is a communion), of remaining terrified and alone in a world which in appearance is so osmotic, so intimate—that tragic fate can only incite an unwearying struggle against itself, an immensely varied combat in opposition to its laws. Hence the magical, artistic impulse of genius which cries that the law is for others, while play and fantasy are for the demon in us, for the artist and the dreamer. We are conditioned by creation and are ourselves created. But that creative and self-revealing instinct transcends creation. We create! We ignore the law and are beyond good and evil. We create through play, and we realize that dimension of dream wherein we enjoy absolute freedom, where the categories of existence are ignored and fate is suppressed. Any revolt against the laws of fate must have the character of play, of the divine. . . .

The magical structure of play and fantasy is obvious. In its "leap" it creates a new space with a centrifugal motion, in the center of which stands, as it were, the demiurge, the creative force of a new cosmos. From it, from this actualization of primordially, everything begins. This leap *outside* indicates the beginning of a new world. It matters little that this world will find its own new laws quickly, laws over which new others will be unable to pass. It remains a magical, demiurgical creation, just as a work of art is a creation even if, when completed, it falls under the domination of physical, social, economic, or artistic laws.

"Literature and Fantasy" is an excerpt from the author's foreword to his collection of short stories *Tales of the Sacred and the Supernatural* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981). It is reprinted here with permission of the publishers and the author.