



Waiting for the Dawn

The selections that follow are taken from Professor Eliade's lecture "Waiting for the Dawn," delivered at the University of Colorado on October 26, 1982.

Discovering the East

It has been remarked that one paradox characteristic of the post-war period is the coexistence of a tragic, neurotic pessimism with a robust, candid optimism. A great number of scientists, sociologists, and economists draw increasing attention to the imminent catastrophes which menace our world—not only our Western type of culture and socio-political institutions but mankind in general and even life on this planet. On the contrary, other authors, less numerous but equally energetic, exalt the great scientific discoveries and the fantastic technological conquests accomplished, or underway, in recent decades. . . . Although they approach their subjects from opposing positions, these thinkers illustrate different aspects of the same cultural process. . . .

Tragically pessimistic or utterly optimistic, both trends of thought proclaim the imminent end of our world. Both predictions—Apocalypse or Golden Age—have a religious structure, in the sense that they partake of a religious symbolism. Of course, the representatives of these two opposite trends are not aware of the religious implications of their despair or of their hopes. What is significant is that all believe in the inevitability and the imminence of *our* world's end.

I do not have the competence to discuss such different and contradictory predictions. Instead, I will examine a series of recent signs indicating,

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re or less clearly, that historically, culturally, and spiritually we are ering, or ready to enter, a new era. As I have repeated on many asions, the most significant event of our century is not the "proletarian olution," but the active presence in history of Asia and of the imitative world"—the Third World. In the perspective of cultural ory—the only one which interests us here—the discovery of Asiatic l archaic spiritual traditions already bears significant consequences i will effect considerably more in the future. The mystique of the letarian liberation is of a Judeo-Christian origin and interests primarily Western world. The discovery (or re-discovery) of the value and ificance of non-Western spiritualities represents a *cultural innovation*, it launches a dialogue and an interrelationship with *the others*, that the representatives of Asiatic and archaic traditions.

shall not insist on the first consequence of such encounters with ental spiritualities. One could cite the wide interest, both in Europe l in the United States, in Yoga and Hinduism, in Zen and different ldhist schools of thought and meditation techniques, in Tantra, in *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, in the *I Ching* and Taoism, etc. Certainly, many cases these reflect a kind of *fad*; the understanding of the *hermetic* meanings and messages of such traditions is sometimes in- quate and purely emotional or, even worse, erroneous and counterfeit. roover, we must keep in mind the risk of pseudomorphoses, of cultural nation and spiritual sterility, for such hazards confront any encounter h new, foreign, or unknown spiritual worlds. Nevertheless, the number Americans and Europeans who seriously study such texts is increasing adily. Furthermore, even a superficial infatuation with fashionable ental" vocabulary, ideas, and meditation techniques constitutes a itive cultural phenomenon: it helps to "deprovincialize" the Western ditions.

The creative results of encounters with oriental spirituality are, for moment, rather modest. But if we recall the impact of Japanese nting and African art on European artists during the second part of nineteenth and early twentieth century, there can be little doubt as he positive results of contemporary encounters with oriental traditions. is time, however, we will not witness a repetition of the nineteenth- ury failure to assimilate the "Oriental Renaissance" prophesied by openhauer. Although he read the Upanishads only in a very ap- ximate Latin translation (the *Oupnekhat*, 1801-1802, by Anquetil- perron), Schopenhauer was so deeply impressed that he compared revelation of "Indian wisdom" to discovery of the authentic Greek itage which stimulated the Italian Renaissance. During the fifteenth ury the newly discovered works were passionately read by philoso- ners, theologians, and artists alike, whereas, unfortunately the Sanskrit

and Pali texts attracted almost exclusively the interest of philologists, linguists, and historians. We must also keep in mind that at that time, a number of specific Indian and Indo-Tibetan philosophical systems and ascetic techniques—for instance, Yoga, Tantra, Mahayana—were either neglected or misunderstood.

In the last thirty years the situation radically changed. On the one hand, many inaccessible oriental works were translated and competently interpreted; on the other hand, such works are read by an increasing number of artists, philosophers, and scientists. The impact of Zen and Tantra on many young American writers and artists is too well known to insist upon. It is reported that Robert L. Oppenheimer began to study Sanskrit after reading some classical Upanishads; he admitted that their cosmology was the only one which made sense to a contemporary physicist. It is also reported that, in his old age, Heidegger read *Isa Upanishad* for the first time and remarked that he would like to have written in such a "style."

I do not need to recall the passionate interest of C. G. Jung in the *I Ching*. For the moment I would like to point out the title of the recent best-seller: *The Tao of Physics* (Berkeley: 1975) by the high-energy physicist, Fritjof Capra. One could say that the "wisdom of the East" begins to impress itself on the representatives of Western genius. But the phenomenon is even more complex: It involves the whole contemporary *Zeitgeist* which makes possible such *rapprochement* between the old Chinese conception of the universe and the most recent scientific discoveries. The Romanian-born French philosopher Stephane Lupasco has elaborated a new logical system of metaphysics. Marc Beigbeder, his most gifted interpreter, compares Lupasco's system to the dynamic complementarity of yin and yang and claims that the yin-yang complementarity is the only existing model which approached Lupasco's. As an old friend and admirer of Stephane Lupasco, I may add that he did not know anything about Taoism; most probably, he discovered the existence of Tao, yin, and yang by reading Beigbeder's book on his philosophy.

Shamanism, Hallucinogens, Initiation

Significantly, at least in the United States, the most *creative* encounter was with archaic—as a matter of fact, prehistoric—spiritual values. For the first time in his (not so long) history, modern man became contemporary with his paleolithic and neolithic relatives, that is to say, he understood and reiterated their mode of being in the world. Indeed, the recent discovery of shamanism by artists and the youth-culture constitutes, in itself, a fascinating episode in the history of ideas. Only

thirty years ago shamanism had a rather limited interest even for specialists—i.e., anthropologists and historians of religions. When, in the forties, I began studying Siberian and Central Asian shamanism, only two monographs on the topic existed; today there is a considerable bibliography in most of the Western European languages. A generation ago shamanism was considered to be either a psychopathic phenomenon, a primitive healing practice, or an archaic type of black magic, but contemporary scholarship has convincingly demonstrated the complexity, the rigor, and the rich spiritual meaning of shamanistic initiations and practices.

The "existential" interest of American youth in shamanism and shamanistic techniques was abundantly illustrated by the reaction to Carlos Castaneda's books: *The Teachings of Don Juan* (1968), *A Separate Reality* (1971), *Journey to Ixtlan* (1972), *Tales of Power* (1974), and *The Second Ring of Power* (1977). These books not only became best-sellers, but also created a "para-shamanistic underground movement," especially in California. In another connection, professors of theatre like Theodore Kirby, rightly detected in shamanism one of the origins of drama. Moreover, shamanistic techniques are employed in experimental performances of the so-called "Alternative Theatre." Along the same line, a handsomely published volume—*Stones, Bones and Skin: Ritual and Shamanistic Art* (Toronto: 1977)—contains a number of articles on some contemporary artistic creations produced by utilizing shamanistic techniques. One may add other examples of poets and musicians who relate their works to shamanistic mythologies and methods.

Probably such interest was incited in great part by the fascination of the youth-culture with hallucinogens, especially LSD. I will not discuss here this serious and intricate problem. What strikes an historian of religions is the fact that the "trips" obtained through hallucinogens have an "ecstatic" structure and are acknowledged as such by some users of LSD. Evidently, without a spiritual preparation, the "trips" cannot become a "mystic experience." But it is important to notice that a part of contemporary youth tries to reactualize an archaic, prehistoric technique, even if the results are, medically speaking, more or less disastrous.

In traditional societies, the future shaman *begins* by being ill. The syndrome of his mystical vocation is characterized by strange and even pathological behaviour: he easily loses consciousness, takes refuge in the forests, throws himself into water or fire, wounds himself with knives. But this is a "*maladie initiatique*." The future shaman's psychopathological crises do not belong to ordinary symptomatology; they are of an *initiatory pattern and meaning*. His physical pains and psychomental disorders represent a series of initiatory ordeals; his symbolic death is always followed by a "resurrection" or a "rebirth," manifested



his radical cure and by the appearance of a new, more structured, stronger personality.

Such an "existential" interest in shamanism and the awareness of the psycho-mental risks involved in hallucinogens, may have another consequence in the near future: helping contemporary Western man undergo sickness (both physiological and psycho-mental) as a series of *initiatory ordeals*. In other words, any affliction would be considered "realized" as an "occasion" for the integration of personality and spiritual transformation: that is to say, the contemporary equivalent of additional initiation.



Literary Imagination and Religious Structure

This essay presents Mircea Eliade's conception of the alternating modes of the creative human spirit, the "diurnal," rational mode of scholarship and the "nocturnal," mythological mode of imagination and fantasy.

In one of his lesser known books, *The Philosopher and Theology*, Etienne Gilson wrote the following: "There are times when a person must have the courage to provide the critics with an easy method of getting rid of him." Well, I suppose I must have this courage because, instead of discussing literary imagination and religious structures *in general*, I will speak also of my own literary activity and its relation to my work as a historian of religions.

Now, in the Anglo-American academic milieu, not so long ago, it was rather unwise for a scholar to be also known as a writer of fiction. (Poetry was usually accepted; somehow, it was not taken seriously.) One of the luminaries of neo-positivism, Professor Ayer—the only living philosopher to be called a "second Hobbes"—thought that he could not better discredit Jean-Paul Sartre and the existentialist philosophers than by entitling his devastating critique of them in the journal *Mind*: "Philosophers-Novelist."

As you know, Bertrand Russell became famous for his inexhaustible and imaginative audacity, not only in philosophy and mathematics, but also in ethics, in politics, and in his understanding of personal freedom

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