

## Internal and External Intertextuality as a 'Total Novel' Formula in *Noaptea de Sânziene* by Mircea Eliade

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### Abstract

*One of the possible grids of analysis of Mircea Eliade's novel Noaptea de Sânziene (The Forbidden Forest) is intertextuality, which aims at tracing the presence of a text within another text, in view of relating the author's creativity and the reader's vigilance.*

*The fictional world of the novel in focus provides the reader with the image of a few intellectual characters which live their personal experience through the fundamental myths of the European space (Ulysses, Percival, Tristan and Isolde), feeling that the modern man relives the experiences of the mythical one. The quotation of a few lines from Dante's *Inferno* comes to reinforce the idea that the protagonists are in search for identity in the maze of their lives, seen as an archetype of the world. War, death, and the world's decay, which take place under their eyes, are expressed using the principles of Hindu philosophy: the world goes through a sombre age named *kali-yuga*, a form of dissolution which is a requisite for its (re)creation.*

*This mixture of direct references to representative European literary works and allusions to Hindu philosophy supports Eliade's efforts in creating the first total novel in Romanian literature, a work which provides the informed reader with a journey through literary spaces.*

**Keywords:** *European literary myths, Hindu philosophy, intertextuality, modern man, mythical man*

Written a decade before the concept of intertextuality was invented as such, the novel *Noaptea de Sânziene* (1948-1954) is a Romanian demonstration (*avant-la-lettre*) of intertextual narrative. Challenging the new theories on the novel and on the death of the author, Mircea Eliade aims at producing a grandiose novel, a generous epic with a powerful plot and many characters journeying along absurd and controversial destinies. The novel was written with the purpose to offer the European literature a new kind of writing, the mythical narrative, "*o istorie în care se manifestă semnele cosmice și se prelungesc, sub înfățișări profane,*

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*întâmplările sacre*" (Simion 2011: 246) [a history in which the cosmic signs manifest and in which sacred episodes are prolonged in profane appearances]. While reading the novel, the informed reader finds him/herself in a constant dialogue with world literature, from ancient to contemporary, the internal and external intertexts alluding to the mysteries of Ancient Greece, British legends, French Existentialism, but also Hindu philosophy.

On the one hand, the internal intertextual game allows the author to insert essayistic parentheses, quotations and collages of world literature in the storyline, resulting in a text which absorbs other texts, but remains, at the same time, centred on a predetermined trajectory, thus becoming an advanced proof for Michael Bakhtin's 1968 theory that *"tout texte se construit comme un mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte"* (Bakhtin in Universalis 1994: 516) [any text is constructed as a mosaic of citations, any text represents the absorption and the transformation of another text]. Literary criticism asserts that Eliade makes use of "cultural myths" in the construction of the novel so as to help these texts get out of history and become eternal through repeated readings of more generations, thus materializing another Bakhtinian theory, one which holds that *"tout texte se situe à la jonction de plusieurs textes dont il est à la fois la relecture, l'accentuation, la condensation, le déplacement et la profondeur"* (Bakhtin in Universalis 1994: 515) [any text is placed at the intersection of other texts, being, at the same time, their re-reading, accentuation, condensation, shift and depth.].

The in-depth reading of the novel shows that *Noaptea de Sânziene* focuses, for the most part, on the mythical narrative centred around the protagonist, Ștefan Viziru, a hunter for signs and symbols, who walks a path to knowledge at whose end he will discover his true self. This personal quest of the character is related to many famous myths, the most obvious of which are the myth of Percival, that of Tristan and Isolde, and that of Ulysses, charmed by Circe, the witch.

Starting from the idyll between Ștefan Viziru and Ileana Sideri, Eliade constructs a remake of Tristan and Isolde's tragic story. When Ștefan meets Ileana, he is already married to Ioana, who was previously engaged to Ciru Partenie, a famous writer, a doppelganger of the protagonist, but also of the author. *"Între cele două personaje funcționează un principiu al interdependenței. Ei vor pieri unul prin celălalt, pentru că, totdeauna, dublul trebuie să sfârșească prin moarte"* (Ichim 2001: 131) [There is

an interdependence principle at work between the two characters. They will perish through one another, as the double must always end in death.]. On the Midsummer Night of 1936, when, according to ancestral beliefs, Heavens open, Ștefan meets Ileana in the woods of Baneasa and cannot forget her ever since. Starting with that magical night, he feels that fate shows him signs and, consequently, begins his quest for them. Their next encounters are very rare, but, “*atunci când se întâlnesc, Ștefan și Ileana discută mai puțin despre dragoste, cât despre timp și eliberare prin moarte*” (Simion 2011: 235) [every time they meet, Ștefan and Ileana speak not about love, but sooner about time and deliverance through death.]. The novel spans over twelve years, a period in which the two lovers meet only a few times, searching in vain for one another. Along these years, Ileana gets married to a certain Tony, who will later die in an accident, a fate shared by Ioana and Răzvan (Ștefan’s wife and son), during the bombing of Bucharest, in 1948. However, for twelve years, Ștefan is looking for Ileana, without being able to find her. He lives the impossible experience of loving two women at the same time and feels as if he had lived someone else’s life, that he could have lived his own destiny unless he had met Ioana who had taken him for Ciru Partenie. For twelve years, Viziru is looking for his destined one wandering between Romania, London, Portugal and France. The reference to Tristan and Isolde is not arbitrary: Ileana sees Tristan’s myth in their idyll:

*atunci, în 1936, îmi repetam ca să îmi bat joc de mine și ca să mă trezesc, îmi repetam că e ridicol, că parcă ar fi ca în Tristan și Isolda...Ștefan, pentru mine, a fost ca în Tristan și Isolda. În noaptea aceea mi-ai dat, poate fără să vrei, fără să știi, mi-ai dat să beau o otrăvă, mi-ai otrăvit sângele, mi-ai otrăvit sufletul , și eu n-am mai trăit ca oamenii vii și treji, ci așa cum trăiesc umbrele, cum poate că trăiesc morții, numai din amintiri, din acele nefericite, scurte, dezastruoase sferturi de oră pe care mi le dădeai tu, apărând cu un buchețel de lăcrămioare ca să-mi spui că ești îndrăgostit de mine, dar îmi spuneai asta o dată, cel mult de două ori pe an, și în restul prețioaselor minute pe care mi le dăruiai, îmi vorbeai de mașina cu care ar fi trebuit să vin și n-am venit ( Eliade 2010, II: 356).*

[back in 1936, I kept repeating, just to mock myself and to make me wake up, I kept repeating to myself that it was ridiculous, that it was like in *Tristan and Isolde*... Ștefan, for me, it really was like in *Tristan and Isolde*. That night you gave me, perhaps unwillingly, you gave me poison, you poisoned my blood, you poisoned my soul, and since then I couldn’t live like living, awaken people anymore, I’ve lived as shadows live, as dead people do, perhaps, only with memories of those

unfortunate, short, disastrous fifteen minutes you used to give me, showing up with a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley to tell me that you were in love with me, but you only used to tell me that once a year, two times at the most, and, during the other precious moments you gave me, you were speaking of the car that I should have come with and I didn't.]

Understanding that the twelve years have been an errancy doubled by a search of his self, Ștefan eventually admits that he also repeats Tristan's implacable destiny: "*Am știut de la început, de când te-am zărit, că te iubesc, că am să te iubesc toată viața, că mi-ai fost ursită, că am băut împreună din aceeași otravă* (Eliade 2010, II: 357) [I've known since the beginning, since I first laid my eyes on you, that I loved you, that I was going to love you all my life, that you have been destined to be mine, that we drank the same poison.]. Exactly twelve years after their first encounter, on another Midsummer Night, Ștefan meets Ileana again in the forest of Royaumont (France) and, as they are both freed from their past, fulfil their destiny in a wedding in Heavens. The car in which they travel has an accident and, while falling into the abyss, they understand that their love will be fulfilled in death: "*Simți în acea unică nesfârșită clipă, întreaga beatitudine după care tânjise atâția ani, dăruită în privirea ei înlăcrimată. (...) Știuse că acea ultimă, nesfârșită clipă îi va fi de ajuns*" (Eliade 2010, II: 359) [In that unique, endless moment, he felt the whole beatitude he had longed for for so many years, offered to him in her weeping eyes. (...) He knew that this last, endless moment would be enough]. One may note that Ștefan, this "witness and hermeneut" character, finds his double in death, "*căci nuntirea în momentul de trecere spre eternitate deschide o taină, cea a fuzionării spiritului cu materia, ce anulează limitele ființei, iar întoarcerea spre origini coincide cu o naștere, cu o <<înălțare>>. Moartea este mireasă absolută, crăiasă a lumii. Nunta presupune prin calitatea sa de coincidentia oppositorum, o aspirație spre androgynism - stare originară a lumii*" (Ichim 2001: 165) [as the wedding during a passage to eternity reveals a mystery, that of the fusion between spirit and matter, which annuls the limitations of the being, and the return to origins coincides with a birth, with an 'ascension'. Death is the absolute bride, the queen of the world. Through its *coincidentia oppositorum* quality, the wedding presupposes an aspiration to androgyny - the original state of the world]. Ștefan longs for this original state. Along his entire existence, he has been searching for his own path to the Centre, for his redemption and freedom. He knows that humankind preserves this beatitude of the

original in its collective unconscious. Yet, since Adam's fall, Man has forgotten that he possessed this knowledge of the world, and this is the reason why Ștefan attempts to regain the lost paradise through a process of anamnesis. One may assume that the protagonists regain the beatitude of the beginning, thus becoming part of the primordial universe through their death in the forest of Royaumont.

Searching for fulfilment through love, Ștefan is actually in search for himself, like a Joycean Ulysses on his way to a personal Ithaca (Bucharest). Like the Greek hero, Ștefan Viziru, in a diplomatic mission to Lisbon, is ensnared by a series of deities, especially by "o Circe de duzină - insațiabila domnișoară Zissu" (Simion 2011: 236) [a trashy Circe - the insatiable Miss Zissu], thus delaying the tryst with destiny. Although he claims that he loves his wife and, at the same time, loves Ileana, Ștefan finds refuge in Miss Zissu's company, a young woman whom he does not love, but from whose arms he cannot escape. The resemblance between Miss Zissu and the nymph Calypso or the witch Circe is noted by Ștefan, who declares to her:

*Ești una din acele două ființe semi-divine: Calypso sau Circe. Iar eu, în acest moment, sunt una din infinitele variante ale lui Ulysse, unul din acele milioane de eroi care repetă, de la Homer încoace, o mai mult sau mai puțin dramatică odisee personală în drumul lor spre casă. (...) Ești probabil, Calypso. Nimfa Calypso, îți aduci aminte, păstra captiv pe sărmanul Ulysse, în insula ei cu patru izvoare și nenumărate specii de arbori. Probabil că aceasta e insula ta. (...) Am să-mi amintesc întotdeauna de tine cu multă dragoste și recunoștință. Așa cum își amintea Ulysse de Calypso în Ithaca. Cum își amintea probabil chiar de Circe, deși voise să-l transforme și pe el în purcel, ca și pe tovarășii lui (Eliade 2010, II : 52-53).*

[You are one of those two semi-divine beings: Calypso or Circe. And I, in this moment, am one of the infinite variants of Ulysses, one of those millions of heroes who repeat, since Homer, a more or less dramatic personal Odyssey on their way home. (...) You're probably Calypso. Calypso, the nymph, if you remember, kept poor Ulysses captive on her island with four springs and numerous species of trees. This is probably your island. (...) I shall always remember you with love and gratitude. As Ulysses, who used to remember Calypso in Ithaca, just as he probably used to remember Circe, too, although she had tried to turn him and his companions into piglets.]

Miss Zissu acquires a clearly formulated mythological function: "Este femeia pasională care stă în calea (calea mitică) a eroului" (Simion 2011: 258)

[She is the passionate woman who stands in the way (the mythical way) of the hero.]. But as soon as the hero becomes aware of his mythological condition, he is disenchanted, and the separation is imminent. Thus, Ștefan returns to Bucharest, near his family, after a long departure, restarting the quest for his own path, for his own destiny.

The same condition of the man in search for the meaning of his existence is transposed into the novel through a different intertext, this time, through the direct quotation of the opening lines of Dante's *Inferno*: "*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita... Una selva oscura...*" (Eliade 2010, II: 338) [*"Midway upon the journey of our life, I find myself into a forest dark"* (translation by H.W. Longfellow)]. These lines come to the character's mind when he goes on a trip to Royaumont forest alongside with a group of students. Eliade's character begins his own quest just like Dante's character, who, in search for redemption, sets out from a *selva oscura* (dark forest) on an imagined journey with many dangers ahead. The intertextual reference to Dante suggests the allegorical dimension of the journey, whilst the mentioning of the critical age emphasises "*momentul simbolic când omul se află în puterea vârstei, devenind apt pentru experiența sapiențială, fundamentală a rostului existenței sale*" (Cojocaru 2005: 100) [the symbolic moment of the mature man who becomes apt for the sapiential, fundamental experience of the meaning of his existence]. In the diary on the novel, Eliade confesses that Ștefan is not always a clearly defined character, exactly because of his role as a witness, "*martor în înțelesul lui Dante, coborând în Infern, trecând prin Purgatoriu, urcând Cerurile - și ascultând, înregistrând, înțelegând mesagiile*" (Eliade in Simion 2011: 268) [a witness in Dante's acception, descending into *Inferno*, passing through *Purgatory*, ascending to *Heavens* - and listening, recording, and understanding the messages].

The same internal intertextuality technique inserts the myth of Percival into the novel *Noaptea de Sânziene*. As his name suggests (Ștefan = crown), Ștefan Viziru is a spiritual leader in search for the Grail, which is why he asks Anisie (a mystic of the chosen ones), a question "*pe care o consideră încărcată cu aceeași forță benefică precum cea a lui Percival: unde este Graalul? Ștefan întrebă: «Cum e Dumnezeu? »*" (Ichim 2001: 155) [which he sees as charged with the same benevolent force as that of Percival's: where is the Grail? Ștefan asks: "What is God like?"]. Ofelia Ichim maintains that "*Ștefan Viziru este, deocamdată, prea dependent de normele timpului istoric, pentru a merita îngăduirea de a pune întrebarea corectă*" (2001: 155) [Ștefan Viziru depends too much on the norms of the

historical time to be allowed to ask *the right question*], which is why he does not receive an answer. Anisie calls him back four years later to talk to him about God's appearance: "Nu cred că aş putea să-ţi răspund la această întrebare, vorbi Anisie. Oricum ți-aş răspunde, nu m-ai înţelege. Este şi o chestiune de limbaj la mijloc..." (Eliade 2010, II: 62) ["I don't know if I can give you an answer to this question", Anisie spoke. "Whatever I'd say, you won't understand me. It's also a matter of language..."]. According to the legend of the Fisher King, Percival saves the castle from decay by asking the king *the right question*, and after that, "*ţinutul întreg se regenerează, apele încep să curgă din nou în albiile lor şi toate pădurile înverzesc*" (Eliade 2003: 184) [the whole land revives, the waters start flowing again in their beds and all the forests green], as the right question "*regenerează şi fertilizează; şi nu numai fiinţa omenească, ci întreg Cosmosul*" (Eliade 2010, II: 61) [revives and fertilizes, not only the human being, but the entire Universe]. Ştefan Viziru feels that he is wandering through a maze, which is the reason why fascism and the war lead to the decay of the world he lives in. This explains his obsession for *the right question*, one able to offer him the world's regeneration through itself, as he wishes to be as the saints are, able to love all people at the same time and live a continuous present. But his soul is tortured and inappetible because he loves two women. Three questions torment Ştefan, guiding his searches. He thinks that he can reach Nirvana by finding the answers to these questions: *what is God like? how can he get out of time? and how can he love two women at the same time?* The wise man Anisie tries to guide him towards the answer to the first question, but, as he is late for the meeting, he loses access to the answers he is looking for. This does not mean that the hero no longer fulfills his quest. As he is half a year late, Ştefan does not find out the answer and, unknowingly, sentences himself to death.

Some of Eliade's philosophical concepts are rendered in the novel through the intertextual relation with Sartre's works. In the context of the historical events, one may read *Noaptea de Sânziene* as a piece of existentialist prose, as Mircea Eliade wrote it while he was in Paris, a city that launched this 'fashion' through Sartre, Camus and Simone de Beauvoir. Existentialism "*apare ca o alternativă, ca o posibilitate de interpretare a istoriei în lumina evenimentelor dramatice care se consumă pe scena ei europeană, însă nu se prezintă ca o alternativă viabilă pentru o situație care depășește în dramatism o clasică l'embarras du choix existențialistă*" (Mitchievici 2010: 22) [appears as an alternative, a possibility of

interpretation of history in light of the dramatic events taking place on its European stage, yet it does not constitute a viable alternative for a situation that is more dramatic than a classical existentialist *l'embarras du choix*]. Ștefan Viziru has a friend, Petre Biriș, a philosophy professor, whose lines make reference to the French existentialism and Sartre. Interrogated by tormentor Duma for an alleged secret message sent across the Iron Curtain, Biriș admits that he wished he went to Paris, to *Deux Magots Café*, to explain to the French philosophers what it meant, in postwar Romania, to be "en situation": "*De ce nu poftiți pe la noi, pe după Cortină, să vedeți cum se pune <le problème du choix> și ce se mai întâmplă cu <le problème de la liberté>? De ce nu veniți pe la noi să faceți cunoștință cu adevăratul <moment istoric>?*" (Eliade 2010, II: 282) [Why don't you come over, behind the Curtain, to see how they posit 'le problème du choix' and what happens with 'le problème de la liberté'? Why don't you come over to make the acquaintance of the true 'historical moment'?). Through Biriș's voice, Eliade sends the disappointment of the Romanians abandoned to Russian totalitarianism to the Western world: "*Am vorbit cu ură împotriva occidentalilor pentru că ne-au abandonat. A fost o greșeală. Ar fi trebuit să-mi dau silința să-i înțeleg și pe ei. Toți ar fi făcut la fel. Când e vorba să te salvezi pe tine, nu te mai gândești la altul; îl sacrifici pur și simplu. Așa a fost de când lumea.*" (Eliade 2010, II: 285) [I've spoken with hatred against Westerners because they abandoned us. It was a mistake. I should have strived to understand them. Everyone would have acted exactly the same. When it comes to saving yourself, you never think of another; you just sacrifice him. It's been like that since forever.].

On the other hand, *Noaptea de Sânziene* establishes, through mechanisms specific to external intertextuality, a rapport with Hindu philosophy writings, which maintain that:

*apusul unei lumi este urmat de răsăritul alteia. Moartea are ca scop un alt început. Paradoxal, contariile se atrag: moartea dă naștere vieții. Conform doctrinei hinduse, un ciclu uman se împarte în patru vârste care înseamnă fazele <unei întunecări crescânde a spiritualității primordiale>. Acum ne aflăm în cea de a patra vârstă, kali-yuga, însemnând <vârsta sumbră>, această vârstă a început cu mai mult de șase mii de ani în urmă. De atunci, adevărurile sacre, cum ar spune Eliade, au devenit din ce în ce mai profane, până când și-au pierdut înțelesul (exceptând doar foarte puținii inițiați, în cazul că aceștia mai există): <Adevărurile, care erau odinioară accesibile tuturor oamenilor, au devenit de atunci tot mai ascunse și mai greu de atins*



(...). *De aceea se vorbește mereu, prin mijlocirea unor simboluri felurite, de ceva pierdut, cel puțin în aparență și în raport cu lumea din afară, ceva pe care cei ce aspiră la adevărata cunoaștere trebuie să îl regăsească; dar se mai spune, de asemenea, că tot ceea ce e ascuns în acest fel va redeveni vizibil la sfârșitul acestui ciclu, sfârșit care va fi totodată, în virtutea continuității ce leagă lucrurile, începutul unui ciclu nou.»* (Ichim 2001: 143).

[the twilight of one world is followed by the dawn of another. Death's purpose is another beginning. Paradoxically, the opposites attract: death gives birth to life. According to Hindu doctrine, a human life cycle consists of four ages which represent the phases of a "rising darkness of primordial spirituality". We are now in the fourth age, *kali-yuga* - the sombre age, which started more than six thousand years ago. Since then, the sacred truths, as Eliade would name them, have become more and more profane, until they lost their meaning (except for very few wise men, should they still exist): The truths, once accessible to all men, have become more and more concealed and difficult to grasp (...) This is why there is so much talk, through the mediation of various symbols, of something lost, at least apparently and in relation to the outer world, something which those who aspire to true knowledge must regain; but it is also said that, anything that is concealed will be revealed again at the end of this cycle, an end which will be, by virtue of the continuity connecting all things, the beginning of a new cycle.]

The way in which wise man Anisie approaches the problem of war suggests his affinity with Hindu philosophy. When Ștefan pays him a visit to discuss the question of war, he answers serenely:

*Până la urmă toată lumea va intra în război (...) De încercarea asta nu va scăpa nimeni. Lumea veche a intrat în descompunere. Și procesul de descompunere se accelerează cu cât trece timpul. Războiului ăsta îi va urma un altul, și apoi un altul, până ce nu va mai rămâne nimic din tot ce-a fost. Nico măcar ruinele! Doar, la urmă de tot câțiva supraviețuitori. Ca să poată lua lucrurile de la început și să încerce să le facă mai bine.(...) viitorul imediat nu pare a fi deloc încurajator. Căci viitorul acesta se prevestește ca o serie de războaie și catastrofe pustiitoare care vor spulbera tot ce a clădit istoria în ultimii mii de ani. Și, pentru omul istoric, pentru acel om care se vrea și se declară exclusiv o ființă creatoare de istorie, fără îndoială că perspectiva unei anihilări aproape totale a creațiilor lui istorice este catastrofală. Dar mai există și o altă umanitate în afară de umanitatea creatoare de istorie, umanitatea care a locuit în paradizele anistorice; lumea primitivă sau lumea preistorică. Lumea pe care o întâlnim la începutul oricărui ciclu., lumea creatoare de mituri, lumea pentru care existența umană înseamnă un mod specific de a fi în Univers și, ca atare, avea alte*

*probleme și urmărirea o altă perfecțiune decât cea urmărită de omul modern, obsedat de istorie. Am toate motivele să sper că anihilarea civilizației noastre, la al cărei început asistăm deja, va încheia definitiv ciclul în care ne aflăm integrați de câteva mii de ani și va îngădui reapariția celui alt tip de umanitate, care nu trăiește ca noi în timpul istoric, ci numai în clipă, adică în eternitate (Eliade 2010, II: 56-57).*

[In the end, the whole world will go to war. (...) No one will escape. The old world has started to decay. And the decaying process is accelerated as time passes. This war will be followed by another, and then by another, until nothing will remain as it used to be. Not even the ruins! Only, at the very end, a handful of survivors. So that they could start everything from the beginning and try to make things better (...) The close future does not look encouraging at all. For this future forebodes a series of wars and devastating catastrophes which will sweep what mankind has built for thousands of years. And, for the history man, for that man who considers himself a creator of history, it is beyond doubt that the perspective of the total annihilation of his historical creations is catastrophic. But there's a different humanity, apart from the history-creating humanity, a humanity that inhabited the ahistorical paradises: the primitive or prehistorical world. The world that we encounter at the beginning of any cycle; the world of myth-creators, the world to which human existence is a specific way of being in the Universe and which, as such, had different problems and aimed to a perfection different from the one desired by Modern Man, the man obsessed with history. I have all the reasons in the world to believe that the annihilation of our civilisation, whose beginning we're already witnessing, will end for good the cycle in which we have lived for thousands of years and will allow the emergence of the other kind of humanity, one which does not live like we do, in the historical time, but only in the moment, that is, in eternity.]

Apart from these abundant allusions, quotations and parentheses, one may also identify in Eliade's text intertextual connexions with Romanian folklore, with biblical writings, or with the proustian *Remembrance of Things Past*. Nevertheless, none of these are too consistent in the novel. What is beyond doubt, however, is that Eliade proves, through these intertextual games, the way in which a literary work "reads history and inserts itself into it" (Kristeva in Universalis 1994: 517).

One may conclude that intertextuality proves a hybrid product in this novel, reading and writing at the same time, a product which reveals the energy of the circulation of texts inside this mobile structure

that is world literature. Eugen Simion maintains that *Noaptea de Sânziene* is “*primul caz de roman total din literatura română: frescă istorică, roman politic, roman sentimental, roman intelectual, roman de moravuri, și, nu în ultimul rând, roman mitic.*” (2011: 248) [the first total novel in Romanian literature: historical, political, sentimental, intellectual, of manners, and, last but definitely not least, mythical], which is possible owing to the multiple possibilities that the author is provided with by the intertextual game.

#### Note

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