

Death as a Hidden Gem in Mircea Eliade's "The Trenches"

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Mircea Eliade's "The Trenches" (*Șanțurile*) is a World War Two story in which death is a reintegration into the divine. This Romanian language story is a variant of the legend in which Alexander found a gem that enabled him to see in darkness. In this venture into the fantastic, Romanian mountain villagers search for a hidden treasure at a juncture where legend momentarily demonstrates "the function of the unreal." Affirming his belief in a Romanian nationalism that coalesces around a mythical Dacian past, Eliade belongs to a literary tradition that includes the poet Mihai Eminescu and the playwright Vasile Alecsandri. [Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: <http://www.transformativestudies.org> ©2023 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]

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"In the history of peoples... only *creative acts* have importance. Only from them can another man learn anything. And what is the virtue of learning, if not to learn about an aspect of eternity?"²

"The Trenches" (*Șanțurile*)³, a Romanian language short story by Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), the distinguished historian of religions, is set during World War Two, immediately after Romania switched sides from the Axis to the Allies in August 1944. The story concerns a search for a buried treasure that turns out to be a juncture between Heaven and Earth. In accordance with a Dacian worldview, death reintegrates the characters

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² Mircea Eliade, "The Fact," *Imagination and Meaning*, eds. Norman J. Girardot and Mac Linscott Ricketts, (New York: Seabury Press, 1982): 83. <https://doi.org/10.1086/488844>

³ Mircea Eliade, "The Trenches," tr. Mac Linscott Ricketts, unpublished manuscript. <https://doi.org/10.1086/488844>