"Namaste": Representations of India in Sega's spiritual travelogue

ADRIANA RADUCANU

A survey of all the Romanian writers who either focused on or were influenced by the age-old traditions, sacred texts, and mythology of India in their work would make in itself the subject of a book-length study, which is not the aim of the present article. Nevertheless, the claim that India plays a significant role in Romanian literature should be substantiated, especially since, in its turn, it will serve to contextualize the actual topic of the present work. Hence, in the first part I will briefly survey Mihai Eminescu and Mircea Eliade's works, in view of their relevance in supporting the central position that India holds in Romanian literature. In the second part my focus will be a contemporary work by Sega (the pen name of Octavian Segarceanu): *Namaste: A Novel of Spiritual Adventures*, whose depiction of India as perceived by the post-modern consciousness of the contemporary man is shaped by a network of multiple (and often antagonistic) cultural influences.

Mihai Eminescu, whom the Romanians fondly styled as "the Evening Star of national poetry" (based on his authorship of the eponymous poem) is the undisputable national poet, a belated European Romantic, still relatively unknown to an international audience, due to his frequently acknowledged untranslatability. His poetry displays a wide range of influences, ranging from Schopenhauer to Buddhist, Christian, agnostic, and atheist themes. Although his India was only "of the mind and spirit", not of the body – he never travelled there – it constitutes an indisputable marker of his entire oeuvre. In his fascination for the faraway country, Eminescu was influenced by Schopenhauer (arguably the 19th century philosopher with the highest investment in Indology), and by his own Hindu studies in Berlin (1872–1874), a city which was then at the forefront of Oriental scholarship. He also befriended the Jewish folklorist Moses Gaser who had elaborated the "theory of east-European folklore as Indian mythology by-product" (Terian 2017, 46). Towards the end of his life, Eminescu translated Franz Bopp's 1845 *Critical Grammar of the Sanskrit Language*. All these various influences and points of interest led towards an interesting act of cultural appropriation in relation to Hindu spirituality, with Eminescu adopting many of the motifs found in its legends, myths, and sacred texts which he treated as "domestic material" (Terian 2017, 48). Moreover, in a century when national consciousness had yet to be shaped, Eminescu evaded a certain anxiety of influence, at both the national and personal/esthetical level, by granting India a crucial place in his

oeuvre, so that the "Indian intertext" (Cretu 2017, 71) of his writings is extensive and visible at a cursory glance. *Memento Mori*, besides being an "enormous Oriental panorama" (71), is also the poem which presents India as both the key to an ontological and national problem connected to the conundrum of establishing origins, as well as a solution for the creative dead end that he experienced as a poet (Terian 2017, 47). *Venus and Madonna* echoes Kalidasa's *Sakuntala* (Bhose 1978, 49); *A Dacian's Prayer* expands the boundaries of the nation and weaves the theme of the Dacian "autochtonism" into the typically Romantic canvas of "genealogic fantasies" which allocate "the Romanian people a culturally prestigious and venerable ancestry" (Cretu 2017, 71); *Return, One Wish Alone Have I, Kamadeva* (a re-written and modified version of the original *Page Cupid*), *Gloss, The First Epistle*, and *The Legend of the Evening Star* are heavily influenced by Buddhist spirituality, with a sense of cosmogony derived from the *Vedas, Hymns of Creation* (Bhose 1978, 47–52). Similar spiritual influences also inform Eminescu's prose, with *Poor Dionis, Wasted Genius, Archaeus, and Pharaoh Tla's Avatars* dwelling heavily on "the Buddhist notion of reincarnation" (Cretu 2017, 71). Eminescu's opus is marked by a harmonious symbiosis between the Hindu cultural space, and Western and autochthonous motifs. These mixed influences on the Romanian poet's work justify its reading as a "space", a "cluster of related cultures", a "spatialized cultural web" (Terian 2017, 50) with India at its core. Paradoxically, in the 19th century, India enabled the Romanian national poet to find the world, more specifically India's influence on the world (also on Romanian literature) while romantically looking for the nation and attempting to establish its roots.

Eliade's position in the world republic of letters is more prominent than Eminescu's, due to his many writings in French or English, and in spite of his problematic reputation, admittedly scarred in some circles by his political sympathies and/or affiliations.[1] The eminent historian of comparative religions discovered the tangible, geographical India when he obtained a scholarship to study Sanskrit between 1929 and 1931. The India of the mind and spirit had been there longer, since his high school years when he had gradually discovered alchemy, Orientalism, and the history of religions. While at university, Eliade's interest in the East continued, in "the old Orient as the new one. Gandhi, but also Tagore and Ramakrishna" (2007, 26).[2] The subcontinent was, as he stated in 1961, the very locus of the essential, exemplary, paradigmatic man, the only place which "possessed the merit of having added a new dimension in the Universe: that of existing free" (Eliade 1993, xx). This search for essence and permanence which he thought belonged to India will later on be opposed to another, also arguably inspired by India, i.e. the seductive nostalgia of and desire "to be different every hour, to bathe very day in different waters, to not ever repeat anything, to not remember anything, to not continue anything" (Eliade 1991, 168).

India features prominently in Eliade's widely diverse oeuvre: two volumes of fiction, *India* (1934) and *The Maharajah's Library* (1934), his PhD thesis: *Yoga. Essai sur le origines de la mistique indienne* (1936), the novels *Isabel and the Devil's Waters* (1930), *The Dying Light* (1934), *Maitreyi* (1933), and *Building Site: Indirect Novel* (1935), where he turns some episodes of his Indian diary into fiction, *Soliloquii*

(1932), a volume containing his personal philosophy, also derived from his Indian notes, fantastic novellas such as *Nights at Serampore, Doctor's Honigberger's Secret, Shambala, Agartha,* as well as numerous radio interviews and letters. In this article I will only focus on a few aspects of his representations of India that confess to the plurality, the montage structure of the country that fascinated him almost to the point where he considered forsaking essence/identity in favour of identification. These aspects, as will be revealed later on, find their counterpart in Sega's spiritual travelogue, hence my reasons for what otherwise may be suspected to constitute a random process of selection.

Eliade's physical India is a land of *petit récits* (in Lyotard's formulation) of striking contrasts, of slums, lepers and rich areas in the immediate vicinity of good schools (in Calcutta and Madras). It is also a country where male handsomeness sometimes surpasses the Hellenic ideal, whereas the female one escapes any attempts at generalizations, due to its geographical diversity. The climate can be extreme but in the South, the traveller is fascinated by the enigmatic charm of winter nights, which remind Eliade of the *Arabian Nights*, in which the only desired company is neither God nor woman, but the soul itself: "This is why India's poets and thinkers seem so strange: they spend too much time with themselves" (1991, 42).

Far from being interested in and experiencing only the superfluous of the exotic (although, I would argue, this is inescapable given the subject matter), Eliade displays a constant interest in the esoteric of India, the religious rituals of the Himalayas, Hardwar, and Rishikesh; he travels to these sites of pure spirituality in order to encounter the uncontaminated world, free from the Anglo-Indian eclecticism that has left its imprint onto the many regions he had visited. Quite predictably for a multicultural universe like India, this search for origins and primordial beliefs is intermediated by a meeting with Swami Shivananda in whose Rishikesh ashram Eliade spent six months. Dubbed "the Western guru", mainly but not only because of his contribution to "exporting" the yoga teachings to the Western world, Swami Sivananda also makes an appearance in the novella *Nights at Serampore*; it is from him that the zealous novice learns the most precious lesson of Hindu spirituality, namely that everything is *maya,* illusion. It is also the lesson that demands expiation in order for the self to truly reach self-achievement. As an avid traveller and researcher of everything Indian, Eliade feels torn between the desire to re-fashion himself as an Indian and the opposing one, the desire for cultural and spiritual self-preservation. India, the young Eliade feels, has the uncanny, almost demonic power to convert him spiritually, to annihilate him, hence the necessity to "protect myself against all this magic around me. From the language I learn, to the philosophy I think and the décor whose rhythm I make mine, everything is foreign, profoundly foreign to my soul […] The adventure is a double-aged knife; that is why I enjoy it so much" (Eliade 2008, 326). For Eliade, India also means significant romantic and erotic encounters with two women. One of them is Maitreyi, immortalized in the eponymous novel (1933, published posthumously in English as *Bengal Nights,* 1993), who was the daughter of his host, Surendranath Dasgupta, a prominent Indian scholar of Sanskrit and philosophy in the first half of the 20th century. Jenny, the other significant woman in Elia-

de's life in India, is the one in whose arms he found temporary solace after Maitreyi's father strongly opposed their relationship and banned him from his house.

> It is only now, when I meditate on my 'secret' life in India, that I understand its meaning. Ultimately, my Indian existence was changed (better said, deleted) because of having met two young girls: M. and J. If I hadn't met them, or if because of meeting them I hadn't allowed myself to be dragged towards irresponsible adventures, my life would have been completely different. Through M. I forfeited the right to become integrated in "historical" India; through J. I lost everything that I thought I had created in the Himalayas: my integration in spiritual, transhistorical India. But I understand (at last) that it had to happen like this. The two girls were placed in my path by *maya* to force me to come to my senses and find my own destiny which was: cultural creation in Romanian language and in Romania. Only after the era of frenetic, intense activity, between 1933–1940, I had the right to 'detach' myself from the Romanian moment – and start to think and write for a larger public and from a universal perspective (456).

As detailed in this candid confession, written at the end of an impressive academic career which had spanned decades, India played a significant role in Eliade's personal and professional life. It helped shape his lasting beliefs, his capacity as *homo religiosus*, and his development as a scholar. The sheer diversity of teachings and experiences that it munificently provided confirmed its status of (cultural) space as mediating and engendering the Romanian writer's universality.

Sega (Octavian Segarceanu), the best-selling author of the spiritual travelogue that constitutes the focus of the present article, although attracted to writing since childhood, only started publishing short sketches in the *Transylvanian Gazette* after 1990. He worked as a copywriter in publicity for seven years, became the deputy creator director at McCann Erickson, Romania, and made commercials as a freelance director. Over the years he accumulated social status, money, various prizes and fame. In spite of his worldly success, realizing that his own life had come to nurture an existential lack, he left for India in 2008. This resolution resulted in a year of geographical/spiritual peregrinations, which took him from Osho's ashram in Pune (depicted in the first novel *Namaste: A Novel of Spiritual Adventures in India*) to the place of Buddha's birth in Nepal (the main topic of *Namaste: A Novel of Spiritual Adventures in Nepal*). The present article will focus on the autobiographical/spiritual travelogue *Namaste: A Novel of Spiritual Adventures in India*, the first in a trilogy to be completed within the near future.

The narrative depicts a country situated at the very core of the identity creation of man and author alike. In this context, the faraway space provides the uncanny background for an ambiguous process of becoming, characterized as both a fundamental shift from but also movement towards the re-appraisal of the familiar ties. I will initiate my analysis with a brief explanation of the concept of "ontological rebellion" as I consider it to define the narrative substance of Sega's passage. Then I will proceed towards an analysis of the complex manner in which the story confirms and/or challenges it. Expressed differently, I will weigh "ontological rebellion" against its counterpart "hauntological rebellion"[3] and the (im)possibility of becoming with/in the absence of private ghosts. In Paul Schmidt's words:

> Ontological rebellion involves a diametrical shift in orientation aiming at rejection of very basic internal modes of existing within the concrete individual. Ontological rebellion enters the realm of possibility only after a metaphysical rejection of the concept of a fixed human nature and a historical rejection of legal-political systems. It is the most drastic form of rebellion, not just a change in one's manner of living arising from the rejecting of external social and material conditions but an altering of the core of one's being. Having rejected metaphysical truths and social historical principles, man now exhumes the depth of his being to reject himself, again and again, seeking to create himself (1971 [Hill 2011, 61]).

The grand design of this existential refashioning is based on the aspect of human nature which qualifies as innate insubordination; humans are reluctant to acknowledge the necessity of obedience to "anything stuck and unlimited", opting for metamorphosis over fixity, for "being-able-to-be" over "simply being", for "projection and striving toward an ever-more towards an unknown and the not-yet", in view of their complex ontology as a "knot of relationships throbbing in all directions" (Buff 1993 [Hill 2011, 62]). Ontological rebellion re-told – as in *Namaste* – can but gain from the candid tone of remembered adventures, meant towards the attainment of the "metaphysics of the concrete, that is, the autobiography of one's feelings". Strictly methodologically:

> The first person grammar is the language for such a task, which stands in sharp contrast to the traditional metaphysics of the abstract. The language of the concrete is marked by four features: 1. The first person singular; 2. The unity of the present-time-to-me, which is a single whole made up by other single wholes; 3. The living-space of my feeling and my bodying; 4. The expression of my concreteness in my bodying. The goal of ontological rebellion is being reorientation (Hill 2011, 62).

"Narrativity of the self" accompanies "ontological rebellion"; in Alasdair MacIntyre's words, made famous by his After Virtue, stories must be lived before they are told. Nonetheless, the purpose of pre-lived stories departs from the idea that the role of the narrative is to merely report the events of our lives; rather, as Ricoeur would put it, the narration of experiences serves for a purposeful reconfiguration: "Fictions are not simply arbitrary […] inasmuch as they respond to a need over which we are not the masters, the need to impress the stamp of order upon the chaos of existence" (1984–1988, 2, 77).

Indisputably, Sega's abrupt departure for India accompanied by the incumbent (albeit temporary) severing of ties with the familiar and the ordinary circumstances of his life stems from a restlessness, a dissatisfaction with the here and now, common for the contemporary man. As he confesses in a TED interview, what prompted his decision was the encounter with *The Book of the Ego*, written by Osho, an Indian guru with a controversial reputation.[4] In my reading, throughout the narrative, Osho becomes a synecdoche for India; the very setting of *Namaste: A Novel of Spiritual Adventures in India* is Osho's ashram in Pune. Significantly, the name "Osho" comes from "ocean", it suggests infinity (Sega 2011, 54); I would also argue that like "Osho who never cared about convincing anyone" (54)[5], India also preserves its neutral, 'liquid' quality, becoming what neophytes are able or willing to metamorphose it into, taking the shape of the personal vessel in which its ineffable substance is poured.

Sega initiates and continues his journey as an individual subjected to two equally important types of cultural "stimuli"; the first, his Romanian, cultural and literary tradition, the second, a tissue of Western films and books which will be instrumental for his mental contextualization and re-territorialization of India. Throughout the narrative, national and international 'cultural texts'[6] take turns in providing fitting comparisons to life-encounters. As a Romanian, even before landing in India, he imagines the monsoon to have the fragrance of the linden tree which is Eminescu's undisputed tree in the national and cultural repository. One of the first natives he encounters is an old man with a bamboo cane, a charlatan who poses alternatively as a musician, biologist, journalist, old law professor, and who sports an Eminescu haircut (Sega 2011, 24). Another Eminescu intertext is linked to the practice of meditation in the dark, with its connotations of death and rebirth. Sega even coins the term "endarkenment", the opposite of "enlightenment", to signify the practice and the urge to die "in the absence of light, dissolve in the endless black, move on to the foetus position", in order to be born again (152). Sega's paradoxical embracement of darkness, the comfort provided by the state of non-being and detachment from life may easily be read as a specific cultural reference to Eminescu's *Evening Star* (the hero of the eponymous poem), who at the end of the poem, following a failed love-story with a mortal princess also rediscovers eternal safety in his dark universe, remote from the fragility and falsity of the human world. Furthermore, Sega's preference for darkness as engendering authentic self-transformation also resonates with Eliade's famous statement in *Isabel and the Devil's Waters*, his first novel written during his stay in India: "Light does not come from light, but from darkness."

Alternatively, and typically for the contemporary adult, with a vested interest in the mesmerizing Hollywood world and in Western culture generally speaking, Sega also sees himself at the beginning of his journey to India as a young Gerard Depardieu, running in slow motion, to Vangelis music, in water that comes to his ankles, passionately kissing the land of the West Indies (Sega 2011, 10). An old woman obsessively re-reads K. Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* in a thinly veiled reference to Sega's own world on the verge of collapse and possible reconstruction (57); an Indian driver, wearing dark sunglasses at night is mentally addressed by Sega as "You ugly motherfucker" (from the film *Predator*) (91); the beloved ashram chef looks just like Eddie Murphy (133); a gorilla refusing a banana brings to his memory *The Jungle Book* musical's infectious refrains (180); unpleasant body odour is kept at distance with the help of the guava fruit which becomes Sega's "Preciousss, My Preciousss…" (Golum's endearing term for the much coveted ring in *Lord of the Rings*) (185), and the examples could go on. The above-mentioned similes, descriptions, symbols and metaphors belonging to local and universal cultural landscapes not only live in Sega's novel, but are lodged there in what Derrida might call "a host of ghosts".

The encounter with and depiction of the condensed version of India, encompassed in Osho's ashram, covers various aspects, ranging from obsessive preoccupations with women's physical appearance (which Eliade also dwelled on in his India), and their availability as casual sex partners, to complaints about the hardships of active meditation and the inherent difficulties of jobs that he feels unqualified for but which he

has to perform, as part of the Work as Meditation programme. However, very early in the novel, the author guides the readers into his narrative of becoming, and clarifies the main three coordinates that will shape his quest. These are: religion, politics, and love and/or sexuality, detailed in the chapter titled "The Electric Switchers" which tells the story of the almost sleepless night spent in a hotel, before being admitted into the world of the ashram. Hours of tossing and turning provide an opportunity to perform an honest dissection of his past, and prefigure an autobiography of his feelings, in a candid tone, which foreshadows the upcoming style of the narrative. The rhythm kept by his constant switching the lights on and off marks the erratic flight of thoughts and memories, ranging from the spiritual greyness of communist times with their "sheep-comrades" (Sega 2011, 30) briefly enlightened by the secret ritual of Bible readings with family and friends, to his unfulfilled and frustrating love life, to the even more vexing search for self-definition through religious allegiances.

Once granted access into the ashram, Sega becomes part of a microcosmos of foreigners and natives alike, all enticed by the promise of a re-making of the self, of achieving a magnified existential authenticity of being through rituals, tasks, and a general demand to surrender the notion of a fixed identity.[7] In "Masks", the facilitator asks the newly-arrived from Spain, Ireland, France, Switzerland, USA, Germany and India to perform some national dances and then urges them to abandon the masks which they had been made to wear, so as to "abandon the falsehood taken for truth" (50). This willed-for cultural amnesia can be read in Hill's words as a step and a stage of "ontological rebellion":

> Forgetting is a temporary form of dispensing with certain voices, slogans, and rites of the community. Indeed the would-be cosmopolitan wants to open the gates of community and let the radical Others in; he wants to hybridize the community and rid it of any form of purity that is associated with race, culture, tribe or nation. The moral cosmopolitan, if necessary, will put the existence of every culture at risk, even her own. Like the foreigner who is free of ties with her own people, she feels completely free … forgetting is an act of defiance. The ontologically rebellious person has no respect for this and that memory out of a sense of misguided nostalgia (Hill 2011, 96).

Related to but also superseding the forgetting of social conditioning, Sega's spiritual re-fashioning also requires another type of daily dis-remembering, preached by different sages; paradoxically, given the heterogeneity and the reliability of its sources, the urge to forget reinforces its counterpart, the urge to stay attached to certain automatisms of belief. Jiddu Krishnamurti (whom both Sega and Eliade mention in their writings), Father Arsenie Boca (martyred by the communist regime), and Osho share the common belief that: "To live completely wholly, every day as if it were a new loveliness, there must be dying to everything of yesterday. Otherwise you live mechanically, and a mechanical mind can never know what love is or what freedom is" (Krishnamurti 1969 [Hill 2011, 101]).

As previously stated, Osho functions as a synecdoche for India, but the author questions the validity of this act of substitution to the very end. For example, in the "Demons" chapter, the guru appears to the neophytes on a large screen, wearing a ridiculous costume resembling "a gala kimono" (Sega 2011, 41), assorted with an

even more ridiculous hat, and delivers a lengthy speech, largely incomprehensible to Sega who is both numbed and repelled by the inauthenticity of this grotesque display. This exposition into nothingness – as far as he is concerned – is followed by the audience enthusiastically producing a cacophony of animalistic sounds which throw Sega into an existential terror at being surrounded by "devils", "demons speaking in tongues" (42). Automatic defence mechanisms die hard though, so he instinctively finds refuge in grasping the cross around his neck, in a Christian gesture meant to keep the evil at bay. In a postcolonial reading of E. M. Forster's *A Passage to India* and Eliade's *Bengal Nights,* Basu claims that:

> One desires the archaic and the exotic insofar as it remains the other, but insofar as it retains its ontological difference the encounter with it is liable to be marked by frustration, failure, lack […] Passages to India are often passages into the unconscious, a site of covert desire which could reveal a secret of the Western self not apparent or available to it. A structuring principle of such texts is that the other is denied a speaking part, and registers itself as an absence (2001).

Although the present reading is not informed by the lens of postcolonial theory, I find Basu's argument relevant to my study. Osho does indeed speak but the message appears to Sega compromised by the orchestrated artificiality of the show. Moreover, the "frustration, failure" and "lack" caused by the encounter with Osho as Other almost become Conrad's "horror" in the "Demons" chapter. Hence, this first "exposure" to the very guru who authored his presence in India, mediated as it is by technology, translates the grotesque carnivalesque into inescapable existential dread for the man who came determined to question the limits of belief. Another layer is added by the political undertones which problematize even more this extreme form of adulation. The participants chanting the name "Osho", almost in a state of trance, uncomfortably resemble the rituals of the Ceausescu personality cult in Romania. The enthusiastic yet depersonalized incantation, actually the whole practice of active meditation focuses on the idea of self-refashioning as a "New Man" (Sega 2011, 95) which was also the aim and the purpose of the totalitarian Romanian regime. The New Sannyasins are supposed to give up their past and their conditioning, acquire a new Sanskrit name and become free men; this "birthing" and "baptising" in one occur in a festive ceremony which to Sega appears to replicate the one in which Romanian children were "promoted" and became part of an organization titled "The Motherland's Hawks", actually an early procedure of indoctrination into absolute submission to the Party (106). A videotape that Sega watches testifies to the in-rivalries between the Old Guard of sannyasins and the present Inner Circle, and reveals a structure of power uncannily reproducing that at the level of the Romanian communist party. As noticed by Sega, two worlds colluded in 1970; the one in which Osho, simply dressed, with "an incandescent look" delivers his endless speech to a Western audience enthralled by his words which "sparkle like diamonds", and the one in which "in a different part of the world another enlightened being was speaking in front of the grand national assembly about the dawns of the Golden Era. In the meantime, the era collapsed over the people and their hopes, the promised gold turned to dust, and the enlightened one was sacrificed for Christmas, like a pig" (206).

The symbolic juxtaposition of Osho/Ceausescu interrogates the boundaries of "ontological rebellion" and its falling short of becoming "hauntological rebellion" because politics, with its enduring, traumatizing memories, is all pervasive and it sustains the inescapable contingency of identity. Paradoxically, Sega's memories of growing up in the haunting, incapacitating world of communist Romania are accompanied by his memories of also growing up in the cultural cradle provided by Christian Orthodoxy, its secret existence/influence notwithstanding. Towards the end of the volume, in an exemplary narrative twist, Sega ponders on the very origins of his adulthood rebellion as shaped by the desire to break free from the shackles of an imposed religious identity. This ontological insubordination is triggered by the sight of a figurine representing the Buddha, contemplated in the house of a childhood friend and the subsequent account provided by his father about the Buddha being "the only one who came to life 2500 years ago" while "we are sleeping and dreaming of golden eras, of the peaks of progress and civilization, damn it" (245).

It is Sega's mother who reinforces the necessity to preserve local cultural and religious allegiances. Hers is the voice of the Symbolic with all its incumbent restrictions, urging her son to forget about the Buddha, and "say your prayers to Our Lord, Jesus Christ who doesn't like the Buddha, a very proud man who thought of himself as God" and therefore deserves Hell whereas "we'll go to paradise because we are the Lord's obedient sheep" (245). Hers is also the voice that endorses culturalism. In David Bromwich's words:

> The thesis that there is a universal need to belong to a culture – to belong, that is, to a self-conscious group with a known history, a group that be preserving and transmitting its customs, memories and common practices confers the primary pigment of individual identity on the persons it comprehends. This need, culturalism says, is on par with the need to be loved by a father and a mother, and with the need for a life of friendship and associates (2014, 11).

Sega's experiences in the ashram, indeed his very presence there noticeably challenge the limitations of culturalism; however, the memories of the maternal voice foreboding damnation as the price for even contemplating different ways into faith, reinforced by those of Father Arsenie's stern belief that meditation with its emphasis on immediacy at the expense of eternal redemption is a "gate to hell" (Sega 2011, 95) still retain their grip on him. They are reflected in Sega's own misgivings about the potential evil quality of some of the ashram ceremonies. His barely contained anxiety echoes Eliade's when confessing to the inescapable fascination and sense of endangerment that India poses to his spiritual being. Crushed under the combined weight of both domestic religion and an overactive, cinematic-inspired imagination, Sega pictures "satanic rituals, bloody sacrifices, savage orgies in the moonlight, all culminating with us, depersonalized disciples abandoning ourselves in the Master's arms", whereas "the facilitator invokes devilish forces from the centre of a pentagram with candles in the five corners" (79). In his religious quest, Sega is thus trapped between two conflicting desires; the desire for space for personal growth and the desire to surrender to the familiar norms of his previous religious existence. In Kristeva's words: "To worry or to smile, such is the choice when we are assailed by the

strange: our decision depends on how familiar we are with our own ghosts" (1991, 91).

To Hindus Osho is a convivial, parental figure, revered as a God, while "Westerners drop by Osho on their way from Goa to Varanassi, Darjeeling or Nepal, for a spiritual cure" and both become "as glad as children […] we are all Osho's children" (Sega 2011, 67). Sega further meditates on Mother India who equally embraces her progenies, regardless of where they come from and what their quest is. This Eastern perception of the world of the ashram as a topographical fosterer of togetherness and harmony, generosity of spirit and body has its counterpart in the Westerners' scepticism; their lucid, demystifying gaze ruthlessly tears the attractive, mystical veil covering the world of the ashram and exposes it for the commercial enterprise that it truly is. Tarika, the German, warns Sega that "everybody is cooked here eventually" (76), David, the Dutchman, impassively assesses the ashram as a world of "escapism, dissimulation, cheap niceties" and those who fall under its spell as "know-it-alls in their crypto-fascist ego trip", as programmed founders of an industry, a sect, a profit-oriented ruthless capitalist corporation (127–128). In the name of profit, the ashram has converted into "Osholand", a self-contained country within a country, permanently accessible to all who after retirement are willing to sell everything they possess and settle down as CG-s (contributing guests). Significantly, such a CG is for Sega a geographical and cultural ghost, a sixty year old Romanian surgeon, who after having met Eliade in the USA who introduced him to Krishnamurti's teachings, decided to convert all his earthly possessions into an ashram room worth a hundred thousand euros. From the newly named Dhyan Basera, Sega learns that far from being "an asylum", Osho's ashram is actually "a kindergarten for adults" where the inhabitants can "take the first step after having crawled for a lifetime" (176). In Kristeva's formulation, the fellow Romanian whom Sega encounters in the ashram and who might signpost an outline for his own path is the archetypal "foreigner", who is "free of ties with his own people", "available", "freed of everything", who "has nothing" and "is nothing", but is "ready for the absolute, if an absolute could choose him" (1991, 12).

Eliade's "ghost" most significantly intrudes on Sega's narrative in the chapter titled "Myth of the Eternal Return," which is also the famous title of one of the books that consecrated the Romanian comparatist of religions as a scholar. Sega's symbolic appropriation of his eminent predecessor's title (and concept) renders his recapitulation of the diverse experiences which the ashram/Osho as India had provided for three months. As one of the final chapters, it yet again underlines the ambiguity of the encounter with India, with its various archaic and historical aspects. On the one hand, although the narrator/author strongly rejects this eventuality, there is a sense of the imminent threat of being re-swallowed up by the world of the ashram (all who visited it once developed an all-consuming craving); on the other hand, he calmly renounces the comforts of the almost-Westernized world of the ashram, suspecting it of diluting "the real India": "I look around and all I see is inflated egos, hidden behind *sannyas* names and well-camouflaged by the large simplicity of large, white or red robes" (Sega 2011, 252). Such final doubts are reinforced by Osho's former driver turned personal mentor, and explained as originating in Sega's true condition, that

of a "Christian monk" (252), who in spite of his willingness to look into the Other remains fundamentally unable and/or unwilling to leave behind his past religious ties and through them, his whole identity. At the end of his stay in the ashram the author himself admits to not having been able to re-fashion himself as a Buddha, or a Zorba or even as a sannyasin; at the same time, although the weight and the value of his past may avert absolute freedom, the existential fetters once fully acknowledged cannot prevent new spiritual flights, encounters and ways of being. The next stop is Himalaya (271), a destination inspired by a Japanese woman, an unlikely mentor in more ways than one.

Similarly to Eliade's Indian experience, Sega's stay in the ashram, apart from its political and religious aspects also includes his love/sex-life. Nevertheless, in spite of many flirtatious moments, with many (and only) Asiatic women bearing delicate flowers' names, and which confess to an undisputable fetishism of preference, the encounters are mostly anecdotal, irrelevant in their repetitiveness. The narrator/author's imagination sarcastically dissects his erotic preferences and objectifies the Asian woman in cinematic/anime terms, imagining her as a "robot-woman", which can become anything to any willing partner. Yoko is the only notable exception and also the Japanese version in India of Sega's former love interest in Romania. The two women mirror each other in their sceptical appraisal of Sega's erotic enthusiasm, which he mistakenly takes for love. Moreover, Yoko is also Eliade's Maitreyi and Jenny in one, albeit with a reversed signification. While Eliade confesses to having failed to integrate into historical and transcendental India through Maitreyi and Jenny respectively, Sega's Yoko challenges him to expand the limits of his transformation by attending the much more demanding Vipassana meditation course and travelling to Himalaya. Yoko becomes unavailable as a sex partner after only one night of carnal bliss; however, she is the inspiration behind Sega's decision to extend his exploration of the mind, spirit and body by traveling to Nepal and eventually returning once again to India.

Sega's *Namaste* demonstrates that in the new millennium the Romanian literary interest in India is showing no signs of abating, and is moreover reinforced by the deeply personal aspects of the encounter. Eminescu's India "of the mind and spirit" opened a powerful vein of inspiration in Romanian literature and marked the birth of a national tradition with universal undertones. Eliade's India, rendered in its mosaic-structure, became one "of the mind, body and spirit", a country whose detailed representations added impressive new layers to this tradition and became a powerful catalyst for a lifetime's work. Sega's spiritual travelogue continues Eliade's encounter, depicting an India which is both the 21st century avatar of his illustrious predecessors' depictions, and of the universal cultural influences residing in the restless consciousness of the postmodern man.

NOTES

[1] I am referring to Eliade's eight or ten pro-Legionary articles, his close association with Nae Ionescu – a Legionary supporter (Ricketts 1988, 882), and the incriminating testimonies of his close friends Eugene Ionesco who considered him "very guilty" (Calinescu 2010, 106–107) and Mihail Sebastian who reproached him for his "catastrophic form of naiveté" in sympathizing with the Romanian right-wing (Sebastian 2000, 14).

[2] This and all the following quotations from Eliade are my own translations from Romanian.

[3] I was of course inspired by Derrida and his concept of "hauntology", when I coined this conceptual sibling to "ontological rebellion". I consider "hauntological rebellion" to represent the move towards freedom from the spectres of the past, an act of disobedience intended to support the forging of a new identity.

[4] For a very interesting and recent portrayal of Osho and his followers, see the 2018 Netflix documentary series Wild Wild Country. In his review for the Guardian, Sam Wollaston succinctly enumerates the various ways Osho is perceived: "The great guru, spiritual teacher and mystic. Or the dangerous cult leader, master criminal and terrorist, depending on which side you were on. Or maybe simply a hippy with a long, wispy beard, a collection of dodgy outfits and a penchant for Rolls-Royces". Sam Wollaston, "Netflix's take on the cult that threatened American life", Guardian, April 11, 2018 (https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2018/apr/11/wild-wild-country-review-netflixs-take-on-the-cult-that-threatened-american-life).

[5] This and all of the following quotations from Sega are my translations from Romanian.

[6] By "cultural texts" I mean mostly films and literary works; philosophical references are also there, but their proper analysis would exceed the limits of the present study.

[7] As the author explains on the back cover of his novel, Namaste is composed of two words in Sanscksrit, "nama" and "te", translated as "I bow to you." Nama means "that which does not belong to me" and it represents giving up your own ego in favour of the other's. Actually, this is a false etymology. Namas means "obeisance" or "bow". It is derived from the Sanskrit root "nam" which means "to bow".

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Mihai Eminescu. Mircea Eliade. Hauntological/ontological rebellion. Octavian Sega. Post-modernism. East/West.

India has occupied a prominent place in the Romanian literary and cultural landscape since the 19th century and it continues to do so in ours. The claim of an almost-tradition of representations of India in Romanian literature can be easily sustained via a perusal of the works of Mihai Eminescu (the national poet) and Mircea Eliade (the famous comparatist of religions). India enabled the former to surpass a certain anxiety of influence, at both ontological and aesthetic levels and came to constitute a cultural *axis mundi* for the latter, a powerful catalyst for a lifetime work. This article will focus on Octavian Segarceanu's (Sega) spiritual travelogue, *Namaste: A Novel of Spiritual Adventures in India* (the first in a trilogy) and argue that in the Romanian contemporary literary landscape he is one of the most prominent continuators of writings either alluding to or focusing on India. His spiritual travelogue depicts a country perceived by the post-modern consciousness of the contemporary man, acknowledged as a network of multiple (and often antagonistic) cultural influences, but also a country echoing his predecessors' works. An act of ontological rebellion inspired Sega, the copywriter turned writer to question basic, internal modes of existing and to focus not only on being but being-able-to-be. In so doing, the present article argues that the author/foreigner/wanderer both turns the readership into witnesses to the candid autobiography of his feelings, as well as surveys the makings of a cosmopolitan identity, situated at the crossroads between West and East, film and literature, philosophy and faith.

Assoc. Prof. Adriana Raducanu, Ph.D.
English Language and Literature Department
Faculty of Arts and Sciences
Yeditepe University
Inönü Mahallesi, Kayişdağı Cd. 326A
34755 Ataşehir/Istanbul
Turkey
araducanu@yeditepe.edu.tr
adiarna@hotmail.com