MIRCEA ELIADE'S LITERARY TOPOGRAPHIES OF BUCHAREST

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Abstract: This study looks into Mircea Eliade's literary topography of Bucharest, the city of the writer's birth and of his imagination. Starting from the centrality of Bucharest and its " inexhaustible mythology", the reading journey through the city of Eliade's heart takes its readers to a metropolis boiling with new ideas and theories, but also sinking into an anguished sense of futility and despair. However, this is just one of the several "plateaus" (in Deleuze and Guattari's terms) of Eliade's chart, which connects" rhizomatically" with the sacred plateaus of a "de-terriorialized" and mythically "re-territorialized" city. Under the sign of the labyrinth and the archetypal figure of Ulysses as the eternal wanderer, Eliade explored a space which lies in connection with the whole world of his youth but also with an ancestral world in its most essential and enduring aspects. His first novel ***Romanul adolescentului miop / The novel of the Short-sighted Adolescent,*** *his city novels* ***Întoarcerea din rai / Return from Heaven***, ***Huliganii / The Hooligans*** *and his fantastic novellas set in the sacred triangle of Mântuleasa, Popa Soare and Pache Protopopescu streets chart a literary map where a Bucharest of the young artist's mind, a Bucharest scarred by World War I and a transhistorical Bucharest meet on a Möbius strip.*

Keywords: topography, Bucharest, axis mundi, mindscape, rhizome / rhizomatic, plateau

"The fascination of a journey is not only in the spaces, shapes and colours – the places you take in – but also in the number of personal 'times' you recover. The older I grow, the stronger my impression that these journeys occur simultaneously in time and space."
Mircea Eliade, *Încercarea labirintului / Ordeal by Labyrinth*

Bucharest - *axis mundi*

Mircea Eliade considered Bucharest to be the centre of a space which, with all its alternations of "striations" and "smooth" surfaces[1], lay under the sign of Bucur, a legendary shepherd, who would not stay put but travel with his sheep. In an article published in 1935, Eliade pleaded for the central and radiating power of Bucur's essentially Romanian spirit. Since he believed in signs and in the creative destiny of humankind, the historian of religions consecrated "the space, roads, axes", which he called the "roots"[2] (Eliade 1990a: 86) of the Romanian capital city, as a sacred topography. For a young intellectual who had already swallowed the library of the world, who had been to India, where he had studied Sanskrit and discovered the roots of human civilization, the cosmopolitan atmosphere of Bucharest in 1933, 1934 and 1935 could not be but fertilizing. Eliade evoked all the major creative spirits of our culture preceding his generation (Eminescu, Hasdeu, Kogălniceanu, Cantemir, Vasile Pârvan) as the most scholarly minds that were Romanian by dint of their contacts with other cultures.

[1] The distinction made by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus. Capitalism and Schizophrenia*
[2] All quotations from "Bucureşti, centru viril" in *Profetism românesc* are my translation.

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Like most of the articles written and published by Eliade in the early 1930s, this one dates.[3] Its author is interested in defining the Romanian national spirit in its most essential characteristics in a historical context which projected it onto a much larger canvas. For Eliade, that canvas was as large as the whole world. Nonetheless, his strong conviction was that, even after rummaging a library in its entirety, an authentic Romanian would continue Bucur's spirit, which he saw as a *spiritus loci* that imbued the sacred geography of the country. In other words, to Eliade's mind Bucharest was an *axis mundi*:

Bucharest has this mission of assimilating and configuring, of eliminating the toxins and suppressing the impotent. Never mind that so many sterile and unworthy people go up the ladder. This is not the criterion set up by Bucharest, the city which, more than any other Romanian city, may take the command of space. (Eliade 1990a: 88)

Bucharest fades into a mindscape

Eliade's "portrait of the artist as a young man" *Romanul adolescentului miop / The Novel of the Short-sighted Adolescent*, equally a *Bildungsroman* and a *Künstlerroman*, like Joyce's *A Portrait*, is set in a Bucharest whose geographical contours fade into the space of a mind inhabiting an attic room. In that novel of Eliade's adolescence and early youth, the enclosed space of the room is a metaphor of the young man's inner universe. Both time (the first decades of the 20th century until 1928, when the last installment came out) and space (the Bucharest of those years) lose substance and de-solidify into a space of the mind, i.e. a mindscape. The world of that mind is peopled by books and ideas. The "atmosphere" and "furniture" of Eliade's adolescent bear close resemblance to Joyce's young artist in *A Portrait.* As a matter of fact, what the two writers did in the first decades of the 20th century was to outline the portrait of the young modernist artist, the birth and development of his soul, against the backdrop of the city (be it Dublin or Bucharest), which becomes the blueprint of his mind.

Thus, in Joyce's novel what meets the eye is a city coloured by Stephen Dedalus's readings in a series of walks in which "the rainladen trees of the avenue invoked in him, as always, memories of the girls and women in the plays of Gerhard Hauptmann /…/." (Joyce 1993: 190) As Seamus Deane argues in the introduction to the 1993 American Penguin edition of Joyce's novel, pacing the same streets every day becomes "a mnemonic device for his reading." (Deane in Joyce 1993: xii) Indeed, the verb used for these associations of city landmarks with Stephen's readings is "foreknew", which suggests that the young artist took those walks along the city streets for the very reason that his mind had already formed a pattern in which a certain site evoked in him "the cloistral silverveined prose of Newman", "the dark humour of Guido Cavalcanti", "the spirit of Ibsen" or a "song by Ben Jonson." (Joyce 1993: 190) This transformation of the city into the projection of an artist's mind, which turns its real-life topography into a topography of the mind gives Joyce's novel its markedly modernist twist. It is precisely that twist that made Joyce's city novel such a departure from the realist Victorian novel, which offers its readers an "*illusion* of reality." Joyce's departure

[3] "Bucureşti, centru viril" / "Bucharest, a Virile Centre" is a title that many readers of our times may find irritating. However, Eliade's ideas and arguments need to be judged in the context of their time. The author accounts for virility as "resistance against disappointments, humiliations, defeat", as "awareness of its own strength, authentic and unmediated endurance." (Eliade 1990: 86) In this sense, it is worth mentioning that the word "virtue", with its meaning of "moral excellence and righteousness; goodness", certainly on Eliade's mind when he wrote the article, is rooted in the Latin "virtus", meaning "manliness" but also "excellence, goodness" (http://www.thefreedictionary.com/virtue)

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from realism led him to the fictional trick of turning the elements of that *reality* into an illusion and thus giving them a sense that the only *reality* there is can only be one's mind's projection.

In Eliade's novel, the city vanishes and the mind, in the solitary confinement of the attic room, builds a diary around the frustrations of school life, dreams, illusions, friendships, but especially around the books he is reading. In fact, books, their authors and their characters are more important to Eliade's adolescent than anything or anybody else in the world. His novel is filled with "a Nietzschean heroism tinged with Ibsen's ethic flavour and especially with Papini's stylistic colours." (Eliade 2009: 22) Fueled with readings, Eliade's adolescent strongly believes in the mind reigning supreme. Walking up and down the classroom aisles, in the name of this supremacy, the protagonist performs some sort of mnemonic "ritual" in which Joyce's Stephen is engaged in a similar way:

Every Monday morning, I feverishly do my walking rounds along the classroom aisles thinking of Ibsen's *Brand*. This gives me courage. I frown and I see myself as Brand braving the tempests. As Brand could not be understood, I cannot be understood by the German teacher. We match. Maybe we're soul mates. When I walk along the aisles, I feel it so well. (Eliade 2009: 74)

Rehearsing and twisting his sentences for the best stylistic effect, Eliade's adolescent writes that "in Bucharest I was stifled by 'the foul smells and passions'" (Eliade 2009: 87), but the phrase "the foul smells and passions" is not his own, it is a remark made by a pedagogue, who also calls the city "this hell of temptations." (Eliade 2009: 87) Pondering on it, the adolescent deems Bucharest to be just "harmless and dirty." (Eliade 2009: 87) However, "there are days when the streets are kindled by plenty of sunlight and our bodies long for other bodies." (Eliade 2009: 154) In a manner which translates the Impressionists' techniques in painting, Eliade suggests that light and angle of perception can transform an object and change one's moods.

Modern Bucharest – a European city

When he returned from India in 1931, enriched by its spirituality, with an essay about Yoga ready for publication and a novel (*Maitreyi*) which made him famous when he was only twenty six years old, Eliade found a Bucharest that needed to be part of European culture. Together with Cioran and other young intellectuals, he set up a group called "Criterion". In *Încercarea labirintului / Ordeal by Labyrinth*, Eliade recalled that, animated by a zest for innovation which had been simmering in the cultural capitals of Europe, their generation would organize conferences on the most topical issues of culture from politics through literature and film to philosophy, ideology and psychoanalysis: Gandhi, Gide, Chaplin, Lenin, Freud were names around which new ideas revolved.

As Eliade accounts for it in his dialogues with Claude-Henri Rocquet, the atmosphere of the Criterion was one of cultural emulation and strong motivation: Eliade and his friends launched new theories, such as existentialism, in 1933; they talked about the new philosophies of Kirkegaard, Heidegger and Jaspers, and about the new art of Picasso. They aimed to integrate that new culture into the very fabric of society, and by doing so they felt "engaged in a campaign against the fossils" (Eliade 1990b: 69), i.e. the generation of their parents and mentors. Like Ortega y Gasset and Miguel de Unamuno in Spain, their generation wanted to address a large public. They felt they could promote the new culture by publishing their articles in magazines and not in scholarly reviews, and they could do it by virtue of their youth, which did not fear any consequences for their careers. Eliade implies that there was courage and enthusiasm in this attitude, which made their generation a ferment of the

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Europeanization of a Bucharest which, "but for this participation, would have run the risk of getting stuck in provincialism." (Eliade 1990b: 70) This may translate an awareness of what T. S. Eliot called "the mind of Europe" in his 1919 essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent", which made the intellectuals of all the capital cities of Europe dread provincialism. Joyce, on whose *Finnegans Wake* and *Ulysses* Eliade confessed he drew in order to write another (rather unsuccessful) novel, had a lifelong obsession with Dublin's provincial paralysis. It was the same apprehension of a state of provincial entrapment that drove most of the creative minds of Europe and America, including Joyce, to Paris. If it was not Paris, then any capital city in the early decades of the twentieth century had to open itself up to its spirit of restless innovation and experiment.

In *Ordeal* Eliade acknowledged the influence of Huxley's *Point Counter Point* upon the first two novels *Întoarcerea din rai / Return from Heaven* and *Huliganii / The Hooligans* of his projected trilogy. The challenging conversations of Huxley's characters in a London infused with the same new ideas are echoed by Eliade's Romanian intellectuals. Although the atmosphere at the Criterion was one of actively promoting the new culture, its reflection in Eliade's novels gives a bitter taste of ineffective intellectual fuss and sheer sterility, which brings them much closer to Huxley's fiction than to the real-life Poundian "make it new" enthusiasm of the Criterion. To a very large extent, *Return from Heaven* and *The Hooligans* are Huxleyan novels of ideas consisting in more often than not inflamed polemics around a crisis *Zeitgeist*. Like the polemics in Huxley's *Point Counter Point*, the boisterous discussions in Eliade's novels portraying a cosmopolitan society lead nowhere, or sadly, in the case of Pavel Anicet, to suicide as the only solution in the face of despair.

In *Return from Heaven* Pavel Anicet imbibes this restless but sterile spirit of revolt against the old as naturally and as readily as he imbibes the alcohol. Observing his friends talk and get drunk in one of the many discussion scenes in the novel, Anicet glosses that "it is a genuine art – knowing how to waste time intelligently, consuming it without being aware of it."[4] (Eliade 1992: 108) Thinking these to himself, Anicet continues imbibing, and when he is challenged to speak he is reluctant to communicate his ideas. Without saying it, the young man thinks that maybe his female interlocutor "wants him to speak about the psychology of modern love, about scientific sexuality, Freud and Lawrence, something to turn her on, something to shock her maybe?" (Eliade 1992: 108) The scene epitomizes the characters' sheer sense of frustration and inner emptiness, which alcohol, though consumed for its supposedly oblivion-inducing effects, only makes even more intense. The sense of waste and the imbibing habit fall into a pattern of the self's modern dissipation which plagues the characters in the novels of Lawrence, Joyce, Fitzgerald and Hemingway. Eliade captured that mental cast of his own "lost generation", who lived in a cosmopolitan city that had emerged from a devastating world conflagration, bearing the visible and invisible scars of its atrocities, which made the war itself feel like a crack in history. It was that crack that made the young generation feel so utterly different from that of their parents. It was also that crack that illuminated myriads of other fissures.

So long as the city's streets were there to remind them of something, to mean something for them, and to allow them to connect with their own past, Eliade's "hooligans" felt their vitality and sometimes their good spirits nurtured by its striated space. David Dragu, for instance, feels his ego pleased by the city in its early hours in the morning, when everybody starts to wake up, when the people "gather towards the lit ads, those big red lights, which he glimpses." (Eliade 1992: 84) In another scene of the novel, when he meets Vlădescu in the street, Anicet launches into a plea for "a conception of death as ecstasy, as a means of knowledge" (Eliade 1992: 232). When Vlădescu replies that these are pure theories, that this

[4] All quotations from *Întoarcerea din rai* are my translation.

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is not a question for everybody to raise, and that it is in fact an urge to live and create, Anicet puts an end to their conversation and heads for a shop-window, which has given him the pretext for parting with his acquaintance on loose ends. The fragmented abstract exchange of replies between the two young men is of the nature of Deleuze's and Guattari's theory of the rhizome, and like in the three novellas analyzed in *A Thousand Plateaus*[5], their dialogue of multiplicities suggests the discovery of an impenetrable meaning. One feels that the striated topography of the city generates the rhizomatic encounters in the novel. Anicet feels that its

Streets always have a different odour. Each street has its own special odour, and it seems their light is different, each of its own kind; there are people who look more beautiful or more young on certain streets. There are good streets, and there are bad streets; there are some streets of fantastic presences, while others are frivolous. Each shop-window has a cry of its own, too, which not everybody can grasp. What the hell's gone wrong with me? Vlădescu happened to walk a good street, and that's that! A street where I can speak my mind, a street which reveals something to me in an instant, something for me to hold on to. And a shop-window in front of which to reflect…I'm most lucky today; I'm full of surprises. (Eliade 1992: 233)

Joyce called these surprises 'epiphanies', and in modernist fiction such epiphanic moments, on whose meanings readers ponder, are triggered by walks along the labyrinthine streets of the city, and sometimes the reflections in the shop-windows, which invite further reflections.

This exercise of reflection needs both the space of the city and the space of one's mind. In other words, it is something one practises in solitude, while walking, which gets the characters in a mood of exploring their own inner spaces, as Anicet does, pacing the streets, reflecting on them and on the shop-windows, sliding from their topography into that of his own mind. Thus, this rhizomatic process goes, in Deleuze's and Guattari's terms, from plateau to plateau, which form the rhizome: "a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end." (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 22) Indeed, there is no external end, only this network of rhizomatic connections, carrying the character's mind back and forth, from present to past and back again:

On the street, Pavel Anicet started to grasp the restlessness seizing him as he was listening to the Workshops siren: he recalled the bells of the Metropolitan Church, during the war, signaling the airplanes. It was a strange restlessness, as in a dream; that ongoing noise sounded unreal to him. He seemed to apprehend a deaf state of waiting for dread in the air. Something which changed the odour of the streets, all of a sudden, that taste of the *déja vu déja connu* of Bucharest. It looked like a new city, it looked as if the stones and trees had started to stir. The lit windows were breathing fearfully in the frost. It had started to feel cold. The pavement sounded metallic, like an alien vast city made of concrete and steel.

He thrust his hands in his coat pockets and quickened his steps. A sense of foreboding, that something was going to happen. If the lights went out he would breathe differently, as in 1916; the same sinister foretaste, the same panic. (Eliade 1992: 178-179)

In the last scene of his life, which is also the last chapter of the book, Anicet feels that the red lights of the city fascinate him,"still holding him on to Bucharest. They seemed to be

[5] The three novellas are "In the Cage" by Henry James, "The Crack-up by F. Scott Fitzgerald, and "The Story of the Abyss and the Spyglass" by Pierrette Fleutiaux.

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more his than they used to be, closer to his body and soul" (Eliade 1992: 297) than his lovers or friends. He looks at Bucharest smiling, thinking that the city is becoming beautiful, and he likes the thought, looking at the trams passing. He likes the lights, and he notices that

…he had no memories, that the streets he was walking reminded him of nothing. I'm beyond personal memory, that sentimental memory – he reflected, feeling happy. /…/

He quickened his steps as if he had had an appointment. He had no thoughts, he felt nothing. He was living a nameless plenitude, a simple, continuous, calm joy. (Eliade 1992: 297)

That moment, when Anicet is disconnected from the reservoir of vitality which is the city, with all its joys and frustrations, he feels empty without and within, ready to commit suicide, which is the very last scene in the novel, as Spandrell's death is the last but one scene in Huxley's *Point Counter Point*

And then suddenly there was no more music; only the scratching of the needle on the revolving disc. (Huxley 2004: 568)

This process by which the characters internalize the city, absorbing the colours, odours and atmosphere of its streets and reflecting them back on the city means charting it according to the blueprint of their minds. Guys Debord called it 'psycogepgraphy', which "sets for itself the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, whether consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behavior of individuals." (Guys Debord in Harald Bauder and Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro 2008: 23) The idea itself of purposeless loitering and "botanizing on the asphalt" (Benjamin 1983: 36) relates to Baudelaire's concept of the *flâneur*, theorized in *Le peintre de la vie moderne*. It is this nineteenth century French tradition of urban intoxication, i.e. the characters' subjecting themselves to the stimulus overload of the city, which first the Surrealists and then the Situationists directly referenced and further developed in the twentieth century. The meeting of André Breton and Louis Argon in 1918, before Breton's *Manifesto of Surrealism* (1924), produced what could be described as psychogeographic accounts of their wanderings through the streets of Paris. Both Breton's *Nadja* and Argon's *Paris Peasant* employ techniques of an eradication of plot, superseded by automatism and more often than not sexual desire, with which Eliade was surely familiar when he wrote his novels in the 1930s.

In *Ordeal* Eliade stated that in *Return from Heaven* and *The Hooligans* he wanted to portray his generation, i.e. youngsters who "were hooligans in the true sense of the word, young people preparing a spiritual, cultural and if not 'political' revolution at least a real and concrete one. Therefore, the characters were young professors, writers, actors." (Eliade 1990a: 65) Like so many emblematic characters in modernist fiction, Eliade's protagonists fight "the commonplace, the moral of truisms"[6] (Eliade 2006: 179) but also their own complacent selves. Like in Huxley's *Point Counter Point*, they talk a lot. Indeed, talking seems to be their sterling talent. If, in Huxley's novel there's a Molly d'Exergillod, who "would have had to be a talker by marriage if she had not already been one by birth", for whom "nature and environment had conspired to make her a professional athlete of the tongue" (Huxley 2004: 111) and all the other characters seem to be there to cross words with her and with one another, in Eliade's *The Hooligans* the highest virtue of the characters is the same rhetoric swiftness. The discussion topics (love, sex, politics, ideologies, etc.) are the same, arguments and tempers flare, and if we were not reminded now and then that Huxley's

[6] All quotations from *Huliganii* are my translation.

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novel is set in a rather abstracted London and Eliade's in a cosmopolitan Bucharest of taverns and cafés we may read the characters' conversations as taking place in a transcultural setting of no definite national colour: a Bucharest whose colours, smells and sounds, whose car and human traffic remind of Paris or London, or a London whose atmosphere gives one an eerie feeling that it might as well be Paris or Bucharest.

The "sacred geography" of Bucharest

In *Ordeal* Eliade confessed that

Any native land is a sacred geography. For those who left it, the city of their childhood and adolescence always becomes a mythical city. For me Bucharest is the centre of an inexhaustible mythology. Due to this mythology I managed to know its true history. Maybe mine too. (Eliade 1990a: 34)

As Sorin Alexandrescu accounts for it in his preface to Andreea Răsuceanu's book *Mircea Eliade's Bucharest* (epub version), "we have known for a long time that Mircea Eliade set his 'realist' narrative in a certain spot of Bucharest and his 'fantastic' one in another." Throughout the book, Răsuceanu speaks about a "magical triangle" of three streets: Mântuleasa, Popa Soare and Pache Protopopescu. It is in this triangle that the characters' itineraries and experiences of initiation are set in "La ţigănci", "Pe strada Mântuleasa", "În curte la Dionis".

Time and again Eliade argued that the most banal objects and places in our everyday life "camouflage" the fantastic. This is so because in spots like this "triangle" there is a fissure in the homogenous space, a "striation" of the kind theorized by Deleuze and Guattari. In *The Sacred and the Profane* Eliade opposed the profane homogeneity of the modern to the orderly existence of the sacred around a fixed centre which governs it. For the moderns, in Eliade's terms, the "World" is abolished, and instead of it there are "only some fragments of a shattered universe, an amorphous mass of an infinite number of more or less "neutral" "places" within which the individual moves, goaded by the chores of an existence integrated in an industrial society."[7] (Eliade 2005: 21) However, despite this modern tendency to live in fragments and in linear time, Eliade contended that the literature of T. S. Eliot and James Joyce, whom he considered the most representative writers of their time, "is deeply marked by the nostalgia of the myth of the eternal return, and eventually by the nostalgia of *abolishing time*."[8] (Eliade 1999: 147) Likewise, Eliade himself sought to breach the homogeneity of modern Bucharest and abolish the objective dimension of time mechanically measured by the clock by creating a magic pocket in space and time, a fantastic triangle of streets where the mythical dimension broke into the reality of the present.

In *Ordeal* Eliade stated that "the transhistorical is always camouflaged by the historical, and the extraordinary by the commonplace." (Eliade 1990a: 151) The moderns could achieve the "discovery" of that camouflaged dimension of reality through L.S.D. consumption, which gave Huxley his "visio beatifica" (Eliade 1990a: 151) in which "he discerned shapes and colours as Van Gogh did when he saw his famous chair." (Eliade 1990a: 151-152) However, it is not the consumption of drugs or hallucinogenic substances *per se* that opens up the subject to the experience of the sacred but, as Eliade explained in his dialogues with Rocquet when he evoked the experiences of Castaneda, what really matters is "to do it in a consecrated space, [which is] oriented, qualified, and [when one is] in a certain spiritual

[7] All quotations from *Sacrul şi profanul* are my translation.
[8] All quotations from *Mitul eternei reîntoarceri* are my translation.

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mood, in the presence of the master. In a certain position, the smoker will have a vision; in another position, he won't…" (Eliade 1990a: 136)

Therefore, it is the spot, the mood, the ritual and the context of the ritual that open the gates to the mythical dimension. Exactly what "hard" meaning the experience of the characters' initiation into the sacred has is something being discovered and never truly revealed. Both the characters and the readers need to enter a Coleridgean "suspension of disbelief".

Comparing the topography of Bucharest with Eliade's fictional topography, Andreea Răsuceanu shows that the block of flats in "Pe strada Mântuleasa" and also its number (138) are "fictional inventions, and any identification is out of question, taking into account the fact that the last time when Eliade "traversed" Bucharest was in 1942, while the short story was written between 1955 and 1967." (http://www.romlit.ro/pe_strada_mantuleasa_la_numarul_138) As the critic argues, this means that Eliade transfigured Bucharest with the aid of memory in order to reveal not something that he wanted to pass for verisimilitude, but something more essentially true. Thus, the space itself in its archetypal dimensions seems to be more "real" than real-life Bucharest. Instead of being in and of its time and space, it is, in Deleuze's and Guattari's terms, "de-territorialized" and "re-territorialized" in fiction.

Replying to the rather inaccurate remarks made by literary critics with regards to his text "La ţigănci", Mircea Eliade wrote in his *Diary*:

I feel that an essential thing has been misunderstood: this short story does not "symbolize" anything, which is to say it does not transform immediate reality into a cipher. The short story sets up a world, a universe [which is] independent of the geography and sociology of Bucharest around the years 1930-1940. (Eliade 1993: 585)[9]

In a manner redolent of Joyce's approach to the aesthetics of the novel, Eliade speaks about an epiphanic quality of his writing as an act of creation. When a fantastic world like that is created in fiction, its very nature of invented topography, which actually essentializes Bucharest's real-life topography, compels its readers to a hermeneutic act of shedding light upon its revealing function.

Gheorghe Glodeanu argues that the two parallel plots in the short story "În curte la Dionis" are narrative techniques by which Eliade signaled how "the sacred is camouflaged in the profane embodied by the topos of the Bucharest between the two world wars." (Glodeanu 2009: 218) The amnesia of one of the characters in the story triggers a labyrinthine quest where the apparently profane topos of the hotel is invested with a much deeper sacred significances. It is in this particular chronotope (in Bakhtin's terms) of the short story that the conflict of the *coincidentia oppositorum* in the text takes shape: Adrian's mythically charged stories are misunderstood by Orlando's pragmatic profane spirit, which makes Adrian's eschatological theories look loke the plot of a shrewd spy. Petre Culianu read this text as a synthesis of Eliade's creation:

All the elements of Eliade's literary creation are here in this short story, in an elaborate orchestration: the impossibility that the miracle should be recognized, the anti-hero suffering from a psychic regression, 'the destiny's' ritual of initiation, the mythical union of two beings who, through a 'wedding in heavens', reintegrate the primordial perfection, etc. (Culianu 1995: 249)[10]

[9] My translation
[10] My translation

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When he wrote about lies in fiction, Mario Vargas Llosa argued that, although they seem to lie, works of fiction of all kinds are truer to life than life is in any of its transitory instances. Firstly, their essential truth lies in the fact that literature represents reality through a necessary process of selection: out of all the possible ways of telling a story, only one version is chosen. Thus, *what* is described or narrated becomes the *description* or the *narrative.* Secondly, there is the question of time: while real life – a chaos of stories - passes, without any of its stories ever beginning or ending, "the life of fiction is a simulacrum in which that dazzling disorder becomes order: organization, cause and effect, beginning and end." (Llosa 2006: 10) Therefore, in the works of fiction "life has a meaning which we can perceive because they give us a perspective that real life, in which we are immersed, permanently withholds from us."[11] (Llosa 2006: 10-11)

Ulysses and the labyrinth

Eliade made all the major human experiences (living, writing and reading) fall into the archetypal pattern of journey. All the spaces ever visited can return to you when you tap into any spot that contains them: "a street, a church, a tree…Then, all of a sudden, time in its entirety is regained." (Eliade 1990a: 91) To living one's life in fragments, which is the predicament of the modern individuals and their society, Eliade opposed meaning and purpose:

In general, one lives life in fragments. One day, in Chicago, passing by the Institute of Oriental Studies, I felt the continuity of this time which begins with my adolescence and continues in India, London, and the rest. It is an encouraging experience: you feel you haven't wasted your time, you haven't wasted your life. Everything connects, even the periods I used to consider unimportant, like, for instance, the military service, which sank into oblivion, everything connects, and all of a sudden we see we've been led by a purpose – an *orientatio.* (Eliade 1990a: 158)

As far as the archetypal figure of the wanderer is concerned, Eliade took Ulysses to be

…not only the prototype of the modern man, but also of the man looking forward into the future, because he is the type of the restless traveller. His journey is a journey towards the centre, towards Ithaca, in other words towards himself. He is a good sailor, but fate – or rather the series of initiations which he must turn into victories – always forces him to delay his return. I think the myth of Ulysses is very important for us. There will always be a Ulysses in any of us; like him we look for our selves, hoping to find that, and then, of course, returning to our country, our home, we find ourselves again. (Eliade 1990a: 85-86)

The writer in exile managed to find his way out of the maze by writing, and as Deleuze and Guattari argued, writing means "surveying, mapping, even realms that are yet to come." (Deleuze and Guattari 2005: 4-5)

The "radicle-chaosmos" BOOK and the mythological function of reading

In *One Thousand Plateaus* Deleuze and Guattari distinguish between what they call a "root-book", which is the classical type on the one hand, and "the radicle system, or fascicular root" (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 5) on the other, by which they mean a system of multiple roots, illustrated by Joyce's works. In their rhizomatic schema of thinking, which explodes

[11] My translation

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any binaries, chaos and cosmos merge in the same way as the rhizome connects the plateaus, and the essential image and binder is the book:

The world has become chaos, but the book remains the image of the world: radicle-chaosmos rather than root-cosmos. (Deleuze & Guattari 2005: 6)

To a mind like Eliade's, whose thinking conceived binaries in terms of *coincidentia oppositorum*, this formula may make sense. His own account is that "literature is the daughter of mythology and it has inherited something of its functions: that of telling stories, telling about something significant that happened in the world." (Eliade 1990a: 141) For Eliade, the most essential and deep significations were always related to a space which he invested with archetypal meanings. He called it home wherever he could find it in the world, and when the world fell short of it, he invented it in writing.

According to Eliade, reading has a mythological function "especially because it allows the modern individuals an 'escape from Time', which resembles that facilitated by myths. Whether they "kill" their time with a detective novel or they step into the alien temporal universe of any novel, the modern individuals are projected, by reading, outside of their personal time interval and integrated into other rhythms, living in another 'history'." (Eliade 2005: 155)

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