

Alexe, Maria Rada

(Technical University of Civil Engineering, Bucharest, Romania)

Bucharest – a mark of spiritual identity in Mircea Eliade's work

Reading literature one may discover that a deep and miraculous connection exists between a writer and a certain town. Wandering from Romania to India or from Chicago to Japan, settling in Himalaia, Paris and Chicago, Eliade's soul has kept a secret connection with Bucharest, the town of his childhood and young ages.

When he left Bucharest in 1945, Eliade was not aware that he will never return. In his Journal he mentioned several times that he loves Bucarest, he loves to live in it. Confesing the way in which he started *The Forbidden Forest*, considered by the writer himself as his masterpiece, Eliade mentioned that in the novel he tried to recreate the havenly atmosphere of the town of his young ages.

Staring with his first novel, an autobiographical one, *Novel of the Nearsighted Adolescent*, Mircea Eliade expressed his attitude as a writer in favour of autenticity as a way of mirroring reality[Eugen Simion 2006, p.20]. That why in his fiction the reader can discover a real town, with real streets, some of them having the same names today, landmarks or just old misterios, houses that can be discoveredⁱ due to the writer's descriptions. A town, with precise geografical details like Bucharest University, the most important boulevards of the city, Spiru Hartet High School, Obor Marketⁱⁱ, is recreated as a pefect setting for Eliade's proze.

A certain chronology may be established. There is a first stage, after Mircea Eliade came back from India, in the , '30s when he tried to mirror Bucharest society in certain realistic novels like *Return from Paradise (Întoarcerea din rai)*, *The Hooligans(Huliganii)* *Marraige in Haven(Nuntă în cer)*.In those books the realistic aspect is underline, but there are certain signs that lead in to the fantastic and

mysterious side of the town. At the time Eliade's fame was more that a prose writer than that of an orientalist and philosopher, but it is obviously that his philosophical ideas had a deep influence on his vision upon the town. The second stage is that of the prose written during his exile. In Paris or later on in USA, Eliade settled the action of his prose in Bucharest. Among the most representative are *The Old Man and the Bureaucrats*, (*Pe strada Mântuleasa*), *With the Gypsy Girls (La Țigănci) In Dionysus' Court (În curte la Dionis)* *Forbidden Forest (Noaptea de Sânziene)* and the last of his novel: *The Cape* also known as *Youth without Youth (Pelerina)*

His beloved town is presented in different ways. In each season it has another image. In *Marraige in Haven* the reader may be impressed by the beauty of the clear cold winter scenery or by the melancholy of the sunsets. The most frequent image is that of a town in strong sun light, during beautiful hot summer days when the border between reality and the fabulous, hidden image of the city can be easily crossed. Considering Eliade's feelings for the magic of the Midsummer's night we can say that summer atmosphere gives a special identity to the image of the town.

His vision about Bucharest is a perfect illustration of the philosopher's crucial idea about the battle between the sacred and the profane in modern world. A realistic image at the debut of his writings, that real town became just a shell, a superficial cover, under which different strata are hidden. Behind the image of the contemporary town, the reader discovers, the archaic image of a fabulous life, Bucharest before the First World War and the magic and fantastic town of the 18th, where Romanians, Turks, Greeks, Armenians lived together in perfect harmony, despite the political disputes. Sometimes there is even an oldest stratum full of magic and mystery, with mysterious connections with the presents. Only some of the characters can reach those image of the town. These aspects are illustrated in his prose written in exile, but mainly in *The Old Man and the Bureaucrats*, or in *Youth without Youth*.

Describing his town Eliade had a singular attitude compared to his contemporaries. They hated the town and considered it evil and ugly. He loved it and recreated Bucharest, adding to the realistic image lots of symbols, guidelines to the town identity. As Eliade underlined several times a novel or a short story should always be interpreted according to the revealed symbols.

When he continued to use Bucharest as a background of his prose the writer's attitude was once again a different compared to his contemporaries. In the '50 and the '60 European novelists started to discover new way in writing, when Eliade turned back to archaic visions and popular magic, used as way of recreating a spectacular city.

Today more than ever one may say that modern society has forgotten to *read* the signs, to understand the hidden magic. Have we lost the way to the miraculous world that Eliade has revealed to us? Has the profane won the battle with the magic? The answer can be given by watching the images of 21st. century Bucharest, photos made by two young artists, after a thorough lecture of Eliade's prose. The photo gallery that illustrates the paper is a proof that magic is around us, ready to be discovered by those that still have a sensible soul and the necessary guidelines. Magic town exists, but we may lose it if we do not fight against those who want to destroy it.

REFERENCES

1. **Eliade Mircea** – *Maitrey, Nuntă în cer* (prefață Dumitru Micu),Editura pentru literatură, Bcurești, 1969(*Maitrey, Marriage in Haven*)
2. **Eliade Mircea** – *Pe strada Mântuleasa*, editura Fundației Culturale Române, București 1991(*The old man and the Bureucrats*)
3. **Eliade Mircea** – *Memorii*, editura Humanitas, București, 1991
4. **Eliade Mircea** – *Noaptea de Sânziene*, editura Univers Enciclopedic, București, 1999(*Forbidden Forest*)
5. **Simion, Eugen** – *Mircea Eliade Nodurile și semnele prozei*, editura Junimea, Iași 2006

ENDNOTES

ⁱ The Photo Gallery presents such a house situated on Calea Victoriei

ⁱⁱ Bucharest oldest and largest market