

TOPOLOGICAL STRUCTURES IN MODERN LITERATURE

"There's an eagle on the red house;
it rains but doesn't get wet.
Count its little feathers,
they must be thirty-two exact."

This is an old German children's poem. Mark each syllable of the poem with a line on paper and you'll reach this conclusion: there have to be thirty-two. For centuries, mathematical analysis of literary works was reduced to demonstrations of this kind. Literary science understood and used mathematics only as the art of counting. Already in antiquity many authors limited themselves to asking how many little feathers this or that literary eagle had. Ernst Robert Curtius authored a surprising chapter on numerical composition. The enormous abundance of data he collected clearly shows the importance of the role that certain arithmetical orders played in ancient and medieval Latin literature. Of course, Pythagorean number mysticism and symbolism are implicit in this compositional skill. Later, biblical images were added to these elements: the number three alludes to the trinity; the number seven, to creation; the number thirty-three, to the years of Jesus's life, etcetera. The composition of many classical poems and treatises is based on these numerical relationships and others even more complex. Dante's work still abounds in such references, and there is no lack of erudite essays that seek to decipher them. But a hidden arithmetical structure has also been attributed to more modern works, rightly or wrongly. Such hidden laws of construction have been thought to be found in Goethe and Novalis. Recently the Germanist Kurt Weinberg published a thick volume on Kafka's work, populated with numerical games. It is often difficult to say what is method and what is scholastic madness in these obscure interpretations. In any case, the mathematical basis is primitive: it is medieval, rather than modern.

Only very recently have new forms of mathematical analysis been attempted. In the last ten years, scholars of Mannerism have discovered an aspect that had remained ignored since Leibniz's time: the relationship between poetry and combinatorial art. And it wouldn't be difficult to show with examples from contemporary works the aesthetic possibilities and also the dead ends that present themselves in this field. On the other hand, progress achieved by information theory brings two mathematical

disciplines into play: statistics and probability calculus. Applying them to literary texts raises considerable methodological difficulties and we must admit that for now they are mere possibilities. Moreover, they pose a philosophical problem I don't intend to solve: the problem of whether it is possible to measure literature.

For my part, I don't aspire to proceed with mathematical exactitude. Nor do I intend to take measurements. When I employ some elementary principles and concepts from a mathematical discipline like topology, I will be committing a usurpation, a theft. More than a mathematician, I am a highway robber. And since above all I will allow myself to explain what I understand by topology, I ask those who know mathematics to cover their ears and think that here we won't be talking about Hausdorff and Brouwer, but about Sterne, Clemens Brentano and Borges.

Topology investigates the general properties of spaces. It doesn't take into account measurable dimensions, like straight lines or angles; instead it seeks to determine whether a space is closed or open, bounded or unbounded. It deals with the relationships between the totality of a space and its parts; with its dimension and the relationship between interior and exterior. Concepts like execution and union, like circumstance and margin are very important. With respect to their topological properties, a sphere the size of the earth and a soccer ball are no different. Nor does it matter if the ball is deflated. On the other hand, the topological quality changes when the sphere or ball has one or more holes. Differentiating various kinds of knots or representing the curved surface of the earth on the surface of a paper are simple topological problems. The cloverleaf at highway interchanges is a topological solution to the problem of establishing a road network without crossings. In short, topology allows us to compose a general theory of the labyrinth, and I may already remind you here that the labyrinth has become a central metaphor in modern literature.

Moreover, the concept of space, as applied here, is not limited to the three-dimensional corporeal world. As we know, in mathematics we can speak of n -dimensional spaces. In this case, n can have any value and it doesn't matter whether the space is constituted through numbers or bodies or events or spheres of reality or any other element. This peculiar neutrality of the concept of space makes it possible to reason topologically even outside mathematics. Psychologists have taken advantage of this

possibility: there exists a discipline called topological psychology that has achieved excellent results in researching perceptions and learning and orientation processes in children.

I want to begin with a very simple text, which I translated for you:

A dog ran to the kitchen, / there he stole a bone, / The cook killed him / with a thick ladle. / Many dogs came. / They made him a grave / and on a black stone with tears they wrote: A dog ran to the kitchen, there he stole a bone... etcetera.

You can imagine how this song continues and also that it never ends. I hope you don't look down on it. To me, at least, it seems much more interesting than the verses about the eagle with its thirty-two little feathers. At first glance it would suffice to note that the meaning of this latter text is that of an endless repetition. Whoever wants to give it a special name could call it cyclical and recurrent, thereby already resorting to two mathematical concepts. But this doesn't fully describe the structure of the narration. For the recurrent verses are not placed one next to the other. When the story about the dog who ran to the kitchen appears for the second time, it is not located next to the first story but in the first one. Let's imagine narrative space One as a circle; narrative space Two will then be like a second circle located somewhere within the first. And narrative space Three will be inside Two; Four, inside Three and so on. We can say that the children's poem describes and constitutes at once an infinite and periodic succession of interlaced spaces. The boundary of these spaces is given respectively by the colon that follows the words "with tears they wrote." This is not just the end of a stanza, but a margin that differentiates between various degrees of fiction. And what's dizzying in this configuration is not so much its potential infinity as its increasing degree of abstraction. For with each repetition, the story moves further and further away from the originally narrated event. So that you don't think my investigations are reduced to a couple of children's poems, I want to read you a few sentences from a novel published in 1962:

"Turmann—thus begins Ernst Augustin's first book, *The Head*—really lived, he lived among gas towers and tenements and went for a walk through a current of reality. But in his house, and in his dresser, he had a little sandy square with gas towers and small tenements and in this sandy square lived a man named Asam, who from there went for a walk through a current of reality; but

in his house, and in a very small dresser, he likewise had a little sandy square, in which a man would go for walks among gas towers and tenements convinced that he existed."

In this text the iterativity is interrupted by an ironic phrase. The number of fictional spaces is reduced to three.

The topological scheme of both compositions shows that in them there is a narrative space that differs from all others, that is, the first one. The words "A dog ran to the kitchen" mean, in their first appearance, something different from what they mean in each of their repetitions, although these are literally identical to it. Its narrative space includes the following ones, but is not encompassed by any other. It borders directly with the non-fictional world, with the "external world," that is, with the world in which there really are dogs and kitchens.

This boundary between the internal space of fiction and the external space of reality naturally defines the literary fact and, in sum, every aesthetic configuration. That boundary makes the work what the work is. But it is difficult to define and its nature seems very problematic to me. Writers don't accept that boundary without reservations. Literature has always tried to relativize it. And it can achieve this in two apparently opposite ways: either when the margins of the work are reinforced, that is, when they are duplicated or multiplied, or when they are broken or, in a word, when one tries to suppress them.

We have already analyzed extreme examples of multiplication. The poem about the dog who ran to the kitchen seems infinite: the iterativity "inward" conceals the external boundaries and in fact it is impossible to resolve how the first verse should be read. For example, one could suppose that it, in turn, is an inscription on a stone written by other dogs. Similarly, Augustin provokes a categorical insecurity: he tries to deceive us about the fact that between "our" reality and that of the novel there exists a difference in principle, insofar as he calls one into question through the other. If we surrendered to his logic, fiction would gain credibility precisely to the extent that reality would lose it.

But both texts take to extremes a very old artifice: that of the framed narration, as in *Il Decamerone*, which tries to separate a narrative space Two from reality through a narrative space One.

If the process continues, other interpolations will be obtained and the topological image of the composition will resemble the cross-section of a cell with several nuclei, as for example in Tieck's *Phantastus*. This scheme admits infinite variants and complications. There is an extremely complex topological structure in Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*; only through detailed analysis can its construction be unraveled. And to describe it, one must resort to graphic exposition. Moreover, Sterne himself returned again and again to his composition, and added to his book, as a "stained symbol," a marbled page, that is, a topological model par excellence. Here, the governing principle of new narrative spaces is not iterativity, but digression. As in the simple children's song, Sterne's structural scheme becomes theme. But digression not only creates new spaces of fiction: it also has a temporal dimension. And the topological model is thus duplicated: in the play with various temporal spaces and in the play with narrative spaces.

The play within the play functions similarly in theater. Here the principle becomes visible, since within the theater a second theater rises, which is as if embedded in the first. The "boundary" between fiction and reality is given here through the margin of the realm of representation. This procedure is also very old, as we know, and if I choose a current example it's because it takes the process very far. I'm referring to Peter Weiss's play about Marat. It's a representation within a representation within a representation. Within the play three spaces can be differentiated: very "internally," the action itself, that is, Marat's assassination; around the assassination, its staging by Sade with the lunatics of Charenton; finally, as the most "external" fictional space and at the same time as boundary with the audience, the box of the asylum director. Between the central action and the spectator situated in the theater there are, then, three prosceniums. Weiss, very consciously, contrasts these different spaces. This results in the ambiguity of the scheme. On one hand, it produces a distancing effect; on the other, it destroys the boundaries between spaces of illusion. The director engages in a dispute with Marat, his hero; the director-spectator interferes in the course of the action from his box. The figures of the action appeal directly to the audience.

There is a one-act play by Ionesco constructed with more virtuosity that takes the device of the play within the play to its extreme, but which has no other theme than that of

virtuosity itself. The play is called L'Impromptu de l'Alma.
This is the beginning:

(Ionesco is sleeping, his head resting on the table among books and manuscripts. He has a pencil in his hand... The doorbell rings. Someone knocks violently at the door and calls: Ionesco! Ionesco! Finally, Ionesco wakes up. He rubs his eyes.)

A MALE VOICE: Ionesco, are you there?

IONESCO: Yes... coming, just a moment! What is it? (He arranges his hair, goes to the door, opens it. Enter BARTHOLOMAEUS I.)

BARTHOLOMAEUS I: Good morning, Ionesco... Lucky to find you... What were you doing?

IONESCO: Working, my dear, working... I was writing.

BARTHOLOMAEUS I: The new play? Is it ready? How curious!

The conversation between Ionesco and his visitor continues. Bartholomaeus I wants to stage the play. They both talk about theater matters. The visitor asks Ionesco to read him part of the new play.

IONESCO: Well, I'll read you something so your visit wasn't in vain. (BARTHOLOMAEUS I settles into his chair.)

IONESCO: The play begins like this: First scene. Ionesco is sleeping, his head resting on the table among books and manuscripts. He has a pencil in his hand... The doorbell rings... Someone knocks violently at the door and calls: Ionesco!

(Ionesco, reading, sits in his chair. Then the doorbell actually rings, and someone knocks violently at the door.)

VOICE OF A SECOND VISITOR: Ionesco, are you there?

IONESCO: Yes... coming, just a moment. What is it? (He arranges his hair, goes to the door, opens it. Enter BARTHOLOMAEUS II...)

BARTHOLOMAEUS II (to IONESCO): Lucky to find you... what were you doing?

IONESCO: Working, my dear, working... I was writing. Sit down!
(He points to a chair for BARTHOLOMAEUS II and sits down himself. Someone knocks violently at the door.)

VOICE OF A THIRD VISITOR: Ionesco! Ionesco! Are you there?

You can imagine how the play continues. If the vicious circle doesn't stop, Ionesco will have to walk to the door as many times as the dog to the kitchen.

Despite the structural similarity with the children's song, Ionesco's play differs on an important point of its topological structure. The external boundary of the drama with reality is "perforated," since in it the author appears as an acting figure. Ionesco's empirical person becomes fiction, and vice versa: the name Ionesco represents something ambiguous that must remain ambiguous.

This scheme is a romantic invention. It is preformed down to its smallest details in *Godwi*, a "rebellious novel" by Clemens Brentano. It's a framed story. A writer named Maria tells Godwi's story, based on letters and notes he has before him. In the second part, Maria himself appears as a character in the novel: he visits Godwi and asks him what the continuation of the novel is, so that the novel can continue. But there's no occasion for this, because the author dies. And then the roles are reversed: Godwi becomes the author, narrates Maria's death and closes the book. But things don't end there: Maria had planned this ending of the work. He tells his hero: "We'll make the second volume together"; and during a walk he observes: "This is the mass into which I fall, on page 146 of the first volume." As in Sterne's work, the play with fictional spaces produces a peculiar chaining of the novel's temporal structure.

The fact that in his novel Brentano calls himself Maria and not, like Ionesco, by his real name, doesn't modify the attempt to break the spaces of illusion and fiction. In both cases the person of the author is used, who is situated neither in the interior space nor in the exterior space of the work. His situation is undefined. As a first-person narrator, the author finds a place in the work; as an empirical I, he remains outside, linked to the space of reality. The public is situated in a similar intermediate position: both narrator and listener, both playwright and spectator can be included in and at the same time excluded from the work. This topological gap has been used

in very varied ways in plays with the space of illusion. Romanticism first sketched the scheme with Tieck's comedy *Puss in Boots*, in which a fictional audience also acts.

It seems impossible, in principle, to break the frame of fiction to introduce fragments of reality into the work. However, it has been attempted frequently. The simplest method consists of apparently leaving a text open by beginning or ending it in the middle of the story. But this way its boundaries cannot be erased. The boundaries will doubtlessly be uncertain but they won't have disappeared. Interpolations of a non-fictional nature, like those used by Dos Passos and Döblin, leave the frame of fiction intact. This is also valid for the limiting case of assemblage, which consists solely of fragments of reality. In this case the fictional space becomes a simple demarcation, but it exists precisely as demarcation. A literary ready-made would be topologically something defined and its boundaries with reality would remain intact. It's as if the author and the public were the only two attackable parts of the work; the only ones in which a gap could open.

So far I have tried to show the significance that topological models have in the relationship between reality and the literary fact. These patterns have always resulted in fundamental features of the structure of the literary work. But these models can also become the "content" of the narration, as happens for example in the work of Jorge Luis Borges. This author's topological concerns are already suggested in the title *Labyrinths* given to the German translation of his stories (it's actually *Ficciones*: let's note, in passing, that the plural indicates the handling of several fictional spaces). Borges describes spaces of peculiar structure without his description adopting this structure. In the story *The Library of Babel*, he says: "The Universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite, and perhaps infinite, number of hexagonal galleries [...]. From any hexagon, the upper and lower floors are visible: interminably. The distribution of the galleries is invariable." Each of them is linked with those that border it by corridors and stairs. In the corridors there are mirrors. "Men—Borges continues—usually infer from these mirrors that the Library is not infinite (if it really were, why this illusory duplication?)". This is, moreover, an observation that raises elementary questions of set theory. Combinatorial operations can lead to the conclusion that the number of imaginable books can be very large, given the limited number of letters, but not

infinite. Hence arises the following aporia: "Those who judge it [the Library's scope] limitless, postulate that in remote places the corridors and stairs and hexagons can inconceivably cease—which is absurd. Those who imagine it without limits, forget that the possible number of books has limits. I dare to suggest this solution to the ancient problem: the Library is limitless and periodic. If an eternal traveler were to cross it in any direction, he would verify after centuries that the same volumes are repeated in the same disorder (which, repeated, would be an order: the Order)."

Modern literature abounds in descriptions of fictional spaces with disturbing effects. A story by Reinhard Lettau titled *The Labyrinth* deals exclusively with topological paradoxes. Another story already suggests in its title the topological concept of Circumstance; a third story is called *Context* and describes space that flows into itself: "Paint Manig... Sun to the right. The sun enters through a series of closed garden doors that lead to a front garden, which leads to a street, which leads to a narrow street, which leads again to a street, bordered by front gardens behind which there is a series of garden doors, behind which Manig sits with the painter. Now paint Manig."

The structure of this narration recalls that of a peculiar body that has importance for topology: the Klein bottle, which flows into its own interior, so that the external surface cannot be differentiated from the internal one. Some publications from recent years demonstrate that entire novels can be written based on these principles and about these principles. I think above all of Robbe-Grillet's novel *Dans le labyrinthe* (*In the Labyrinth*). As the title indicates, it's a topological novel. A soldier gets lost in a foreign city. His complicated wanderings incessantly return him to certain identical or similar points. Suddenly he enters a restaurant where he finds a child. There is a passage that begins like this:

"The picture with its enameled wooden frame represents a scene in a restaurant... A large number of people fills the entire scene: a crowd of seated or standing guests and, far to the left, the owner, somewhat elevated above the counter... Far to the right, a crowd of men who, almost all, like those seated at the tables, are dressed as workers, and who turn their backs on those seated and crowd together to look at some transparency or portrait hanging on the wall. A little further forward a child is sitting on the floor."

This description leads to a dialogue between the soldier and the child. But it's not clear whether the portrait is in the restaurant or the restaurant in the picture.

Another example is the novel *The Giant Dwarfs* by Gisela Elsner, which was originally titled *The Gap*. This title indicates the topological theme of the work, which combines intermediate spaces, social, physical and temporal gaps. Gisela Elsner doesn't limit herself to treating and developing the theme, but her prose reproduces it at all formal levels: syntactically, in the dialogues and in the arrangement of the chapters. To the aesthetic principle of the gap, of the lacuna, is added a second principle: that of incorporation.

This aesthetic principle also becomes theme. With a kind of obsession the book formally reiterates all imaginable variants and combinations of two elementary statements, whose basic form is this:

1. Something is contained in something; 2. Between something and something, there is still something.

The two themes of the gap and incorporation intertwine and very complicated models can be elaborated.

The narrator is on the bank of a river, between two bridges. In front of him, there is a man. From one of the two bridges, something falls into the water. The text says: "What did you throw into the water?, I asked a rower who, with his oar raised to seat height in the middle of the river lets himself drift toward the left bridge... What? What?, says the rower. He turns toward him, turns his head toward me and then, with his face turned toward the left bridge, lets himself drift toward the left bridge, without answering my question, the question of the one opposite, without a second question to my question, to the question of the one opposite, in case the one opposite asked something, since I heard nothing and the rower understood nothing, and lets himself drift to the left, perhaps because he believes that the one opposite and I have asked each other the question, and not I to him. For the one opposite and I don't see the rower, we see each other. I go toward the bench where I had been sitting until now. While I walk, I turn toward the one opposite to see if he, while walking, turns toward me and I see him turn toward me, while walking, perhaps to see if I turn toward him, while walking. And walking we see that we both

turn."

Such prose has a sort of peculiar greed, but it doesn't develop at random. It grows systematically like a giant molecule that is built through a kind of polymerization. In the space between bridge and bridge, between the "I" and the "one opposite" new spaces and intermediate spaces can always be interpolated; between question and answer, new questions and new answers; in the gap between main clause and subordinate clause, other parts of the sentence pile up, in which new gaps open, etcetera. All communication runs the risk of suffocating in its own difficulties; each question launches a bundle of "retro-questions."

Gisela Elsner's prose is an extreme case because it surpasses the limits of evidence. To analyze it exactly we would need an algebraic instrument. I want to cite as a final example a text whose topological scheme is limited to visible physical three-dimensional space. Its structural principles are symmetry and reflection. This shouldn't surprise us, because the mirror motif is akin to that of the labyrinth in all Mannerist literature. We have already found a sample of the motif in Jorge Luis Borges. We find it again in Alain Robbe-Grillet. I quote a paragraph from his book *Snapshots*:

On the table there is only the egg, the tray and the coffee pot. To the right, before the window, is the mannequin. Behind the table, on the mantelpiece, a large quadrangular mirror in which half the window is reflected (the right half) and, to the left (that is, to the right of the window), the image of the wardrobe with mirror door. In the wardrobe mirror is reflected, in turn, the window, now completely (that is, the right wing to the right and the left wing to the left). On the mantelpiece, then, three half-windows can be seen that follow one another almost without interruption. They are (from left to right): a left half, a right half and a right half reversed... Moreover, in the mirror above the mantelpiece two mannequins can be seen: one of the thinnest, far to the left, before the first wing of the window, and another before the third (the one at the far right). Neither appears from the front; the right one shows the right side; the left one, somewhat smaller, the left side... The three mannequins are in a row. The one on the right is exactly in the same line as the coffee pot on the table. In the belly of the coffee pot shines a deformed image of the window... The line formed by the wooden pillars between the two wings suddenly

widens downward until it becomes a diffuse stain. It is, perhaps, again the shadow of the mannequin.

At this point I will interrupt the analysis to try to present the results. What does this curious accumulation of topological sketches in modern literature mean? And first of all: does it mean something? It should be kept in mind that both questions cannot be answered by resorting to mathematical reasoning, at the risk of falling into a vicious circle. Moreover, there must be a reason for this phenomenon. It is too widespread for us to believe in casual coincidences.

A constant in all the texts I have cited, from children's songs to the most artificial texts, is the presence of the ludic. This reminds us that play is both an aesthetic category and a mathematical category. From both perspectives the theory of the ludic has been elaborated, bringing together authors as different as August Wilhelm Schlegel and John von Neumann and even historians like Huizinga and psychologists like Piaget.

But the category of the ludic is too broad to determine the phenomenon that concerns us. What these texts transmit to us has nothing to do with games of struggle, chance and hands. But anyway there is a series of games of a topological nature. Simple toys like the doll within the doll and other more complex ones are structurally related to the little verse about the dog who ran to the kitchen and to the prose of gaps and incorporations by Gisela Elsner.

What distinguishes such games from all others and, I believe, constitutes their foundation of existence, is not only their spatial character, but the fact that they force the player to deal with space and to know how to move in it. That's why I want to mention orientation games. It has been claimed that play is an activity distinguished by not being profitable. This is a half-truth. It's possible that all games have a biological meaning, that they are a kind of training. This vital training, which has already been observed in animals, becomes, in humans, social training. For orientation what matters primarily are not geometric relationships, but topological relationships. Psychology confirms this priority of topological relationships: they are the first ones children learn.

But this learning process occurs dialectically. It could be assured that all orientation presupposes disorientation. Only

those who have experienced being lost can free themselves from it. That's why orientation games are, at the same time, disorientation games. In this lies their charm and their danger.

The labyrinth is made so that whoever enters it gets lost, so they wander. But at the same time it implies a call to the visitor to reproduce the plan according to which it is built, and thus solve the confusion. If they succeed, they will have destroyed the labyrinth: for whoever has unraveled it, there is no longer a labyrinth.

The dialectic of orientation and disorientation can be followed through all topological texts. It is very simple in the children's song and in Ionesco's brief *divertissement*; it is precarious when proposed as a model of the world. The moment a topological structure presents itself as a metaphysical structure, the game loses its dialectical balance and the literature it produces becomes a means to demonize the world, to show it as a world that is in principle impenetrable, and also to show communication—whatever its genre—as something impossible. The labyrinth thus ceases to be a challenge to human intelligence and establishes itself as an impenetrable representation of the world or society. The game disappears before the reader accepts it as such. But with this it ceases to be a game; for the open ending belongs to its nature.

The dialectic of orientation and disorientation can occur through a series of oppositions that are modifications of the same fundamental relationship, but which allow critical approach to different ludic texts. When the game of orientation is engaged through spaces of fiction and reality, which fit together or break each other as in Tieck, Brentano, Ionesco or in Augustin's novel, the opposition of illusion and disillusion is always present. The critical and orienting moment in this case is disillusion; the ludic text degenerates to the extent that the illusionist moment gains more weight. A corresponding relationship to that moment occurs between the rationality and irrationality of ludic texts. The rational structure is precisely a feature of their aesthetic quality. When the text lacks rigor, its literary value is doubtful. On the other hand, successful models show a tendency to convert the most lucid rationality into irrationality. In Borges's texts this conversion can always be verified. They work similarly to a *trompe-l'oeil*, that is: as *trompe-raison* and it seems they were made so that reason would lay down its arms before them.

Two concepts, finally, may help us draw the final consequences. Since Brecht, *Verfremdung* (alienation/estrangement) has gained currency as an aesthetic concept. Perhaps it's time to remember that Brecht understood this as a critical procedure. Today *Verfremdung* is usually considered the opposite, a kind of mystification. The conversion of one into the other is not always easy to explain. Robbe-Grillet's novels, for example, can be interpreted either way. They are critical insofar as they expose the fragility of our orientation in the world. The soldier's movements in *The Labyrinth* are, literally, "estranged" movements, that is, they have been made strange. But at the same time, this strangeness shows itself as an insurmountable strangeness, one of principle: the orientation process is interrupted and, like the figures in the restaurant painting, becomes static. The soldier's game has disappeared; but this means it is no longer a game, but mystification.

As a reply to the virtuoso game of disorientation with Robbe-Grillet's mannequin we can cite this topological text that is already almost two hundred years old:

When a house burns, one must try above all to save the right wall of the house that is on the left and the left wall of the house that is on the right, for if for example one wanted to save the left wall of the house that is on the left, then the right wall of the house that is on the left is on the right and consequently, since the fire is on this wall and the right wall is on the right (for we have supposed that the house is to the left of the fire) the right wall is closer to the fire than the left one and could burn, then, the right wall of the house, if it is not saved before the fire reaches the left that is being saved; consequently something that is not saved could burn, and could certainly burn before something could burn even though it also wasn't saved; consequently one must leave this one and cover that one. To learn this let's note: When the house is to the right of the fire it's about the left wall, and if the fire is on the left, then it's about the right wall.

Lichtenberg, for it is his text, was not unaware of the charm of the labyrinth, but he didn't succumb to it. He never would have accepted obscurity as illumination: Whoever takes one for the other will have no right to be surprised if the roof, invaded by fire, collapses on their head.

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