

*Portraits IV*

LITERALLY ARCHITECTURE !

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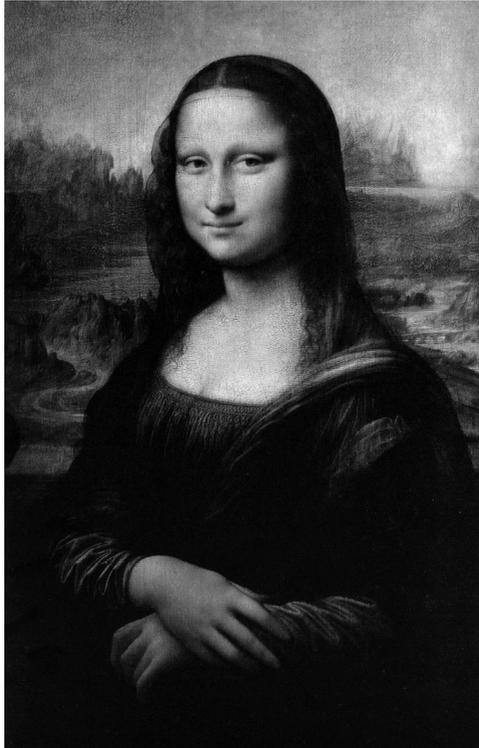


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## Prologue



Leonardo da Vinci, *Mona Lisa* (1503)

[...] le portrait d'une femme par un grand artiste ne cherchera aucunement à donner satisfaction à quelques unes des exigences de la femme [...] et mettra au contraire en relief les désavantages qu'elle cherche à cacher et qui, comme un teint fiévreux, voire verdâtre, le tentent d'autant plus parce qu'ils ont du "caractère" [...]. Maintenant déchue, située hors de son propre type où elle trônait invulnérable, elle n'est plus qu'une femme quelconque en la supériorité de qui nous avons perdu toute foi. Ce type, nous faisons tellement consister en lui, non seulement la beauté d'une Odette, mais sa personnalité, son identité, que devant le portrait qui l'a dépouillée de lui, nous sommes tentés de nous écrier non seulement: "Comme c'est enlaidi!", mais: "Comme c'est peu ressemblant!". Nous avons peine à croire que ce soit elle. Nous ne la reconnaissons pas. Et pourtant il y a là un être que nous sentons bien que nous avons déjà vu. Mais cet être-là, ce n'est pas Odette; le visage de cet être, son corps, son aspect, nous sont bien connus. Ils nous rappellent, non pas la femme, qui ne se tenait jamais ainsi, dont la pose habituelle ne dessine nullement une telle étrange et provocante arabesque, mais d'autres femmes, toutes celles qu'a peintes Elstir et que toujours, si différentes qu'elles puissent être, il a aimé à camper ainsi de face, [...] le large chapeau rond tenu à la main, répondant symétriquement à la hauteur du genou qu'il couvre, à cet autre disque vu de face, le visage.

Marcel Proust, *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, sous la dir. de Pierre-Louis Rey, Collection Folio Classique, Gallimard, 1988.

*[...] not only will the portrait of a woman by a great artist not seek in the least to give satisfaction to various demands on the woman's part [...]. It will on the contrary emphasise those very blemishes which she seeks to hide, and which (as for instance a sickly, almost greenish complexion) are all the more tempting to him since they show "character" [...] Fallen now, situated outside her own type in which she sat unassailably enthroned, she is now just an ordinary woman, in the legend of whose superiority we have lost all faith. We are so accustomed to incorporating in this type not only the beauty of an Odette, but her personality, her identity, that standing before the portrait that has thus stripped her of it we are inclined to protest not simply "How plain he has made her!" but "Why, it isn't the least bit like her". We find it hard to believe that it can be she. We do not recognize her. And yet there is a person there on the canvas whom we are quite conscious of having seen before. But that person is not Odette; the face of the person, her body, her general appearance seems familiar. They recall to us not this particular woman who never held herself like that, whose natural pose never formed any such strange and teasing arabesque, but other women, all the women whom Elstir has ever painted, women, whom invariably, however they may differ from one another, he has chosen to paint thus, in full face, [...] a large round hat in one hand, symmetrically corresponding, at the level of the knee that it covers, to that other disc, higher up in the picture, the face.*

Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past, within a Budding Grove* translated by C.K. Scott Moncrieff and Terence Kilmartin, Copyright Chatto & Windus and Random House Inc., 1981.



Egyptian hieroglyphics (3000 BC)

[...] The IS OF IDENTITY. You are an animal. You are a body. Now whatever you may be you are not an "animal", you are not a "body", because these are verbal labels. The IS of identity always carries the assignment of permanent condition. To stay that way. All name calling presupposes the IS of identity. This concept is unnecessary in a hieroglyphic language like ancient Egyptian and in fact frequently omitted. No need to say that the sun IS in the sky, sun in sky suffices. The verb TO BE can easily be omitted from any languages and the followers of Count Korgybski have done this, eliminating the verb TO BE in English. However, it is difficult to tidy up the English language by arbitrary exclusion of concepts which remain in force so long as the unchanged language is spoken.

THE DEFINITE ARTICLE THE. THE contains the implication of one and only: THE God, THE universe, THE way, THE right, THE wrong, if there is another, then THAT universe, THAT way is no longer THE universe, The way. The definite article THE will be deleted and the indefinite article A will take its place.

THE WHOLE CONCEPT OF EITHER/OR. Right or wrong, physical or mental, true or false, the whole concept of OR will be deleted from the language and replaced by juxtaposition, by AND. This is done to some extent in any pictorial language where two concepts literally stand side by side. These falsifications inherent in the English and other western alphabetical languages give the reactive mind command their overwhelming force in these languages. Consider the IS of identity. When I say to be me, to be you, to be myself, to be others - whatever I may be called upon to be or to say that I am - I am not the verbal label "myself". The word BE in the English language contains, as a virus contains, its precoded message of damage, the categorical imperative of permanent condition. To be a body, to be an animal. If you see the relation of a pilot to his ship, you see crippling force of the reactive mind command to be a body. Telling the pilot to be the plane, then who will pilot the plane?

The IS of identity, assigning a rigid and permanent status, was greatly reinforced by the customs and passport control that came in after World War I. Whatever you may be, you are not the verbal label in your passport, anymore than you are the word "self". So you must be prepared to prove at all times that you are what you are not. Much of the falsification inherent in the categorical definite THE. THE now, THE past, THE time, THE space, THE energy, THE matter, THE universe. Definite article THE contains the implications of no other. THE universe locks you in THE, and denies the possibility of any other. If other universes are possible, then the universe is no longer THE it becomes A. The definite article THE is deleted and replaced by A. Many of the RM commands are in point of fact contradictory commands and a contradictory command gains its force from the Aristotelian concept of either/or. To do everything, to do nothing, to have everything, to have nothing, to do it all, to do not any, to stay up, to stay down, to stay in, to stay out, to stay present, to stay absent. These are in point of fact either/or propositions. To do nothing OR everything, to have it all, OR not any, to stay present OR to stay absent. Either/or is more difficult to formulate in a written language where both alternatives are pictorially represented and can be deleted entirely from the spoken language. The whole reactive mind can be in fact reduced to three little words - to be "THE". That is to be what you are not, verbal formulations.

I have frequently spoken of word and image as viruses or as acting viruses, and this is not an allegorical comparison. It will be seen that the falsifications of syllabic western languages are in point of fact actual virus mechanisms. The IS of identity, the purpose of a virus is to SURVIVE. To survive at any expense to the host invaded. To be an animal, to be a body. To be an animal body that the virus can invade. To be animals, to be bodies. To be more animal bodies, so that the virus can move from one body to another. To stay present as an animal body, to stay absent as antibody or resistance to the body invasion.

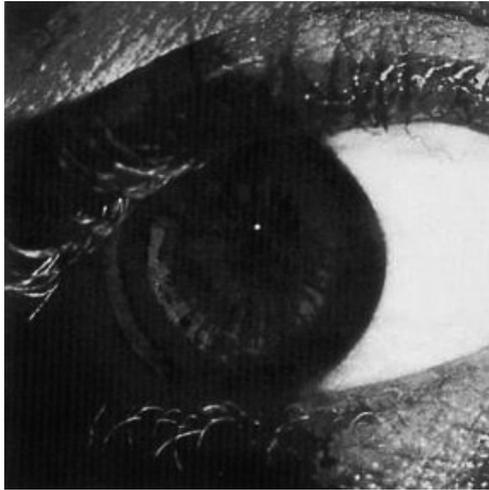
The categorical THE is also a virus mechanism, locking you in THE virus universe. EITHER/OR is another virus formula. It is always you OR the virus. EITHER/OR. This is in point of fact the conflict formula which is seen to be archetypical virus mechanism. The proposed language will delete these virus mechanisms and make them impossible of formulation in the language. This language will be a tonal language like Chinese, it will also have a hieroglyphic script as pictorial as possible without being to cumbersome or difficult to write. This language will give one option of silence. When not talking, the user of this language can take in the silent images of written, pictorial and symbol languages. [...]



Fra Angelico, *The Decapitation of Saints Cosmas and Damian* (1442)

(...) Si les personnages d'Angelico n'ont d'yeux pour rien ni personne, c'est évidemment pour mieux solliciter les nôtres.

Parce que la psychologie n'a pas encore été inventée, le seul sens de l'image est celui de sa structure. rien n'est caché, l'idée préside, indifférente aux contingences réalistes. La signification n'est pas dans les regards (ni ceux des yeux ni ceux de l'âme) mais dans les territoires qu'ils délimitent.



O. M. Ungers  
Morphologie  
City Metaphors

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## Entwerfen und Denken in Vorstellungen, Metaphern und Analogien

Offensichtlich vollziehen sich alle Denkprozesse in zwei verschiedenen Richtungen. Jede beansprucht für sich, der einzig richtige Weg zu sein, durch welchen Denkanstöße hervorgerufen werden, sowohl in der Wissenschaft, der Kunst und auch in der Philosophie. Die erste ist gemeinhin bekannt als empirische Denkweise. Sie beschränkt sich auf das Studium physischer Erscheinungen. Sie bezieht sich auf Tatsachen, die gemessen und beurteilt werden können. Die intellektuelle Sicht konzentriert sich auf getrennte Elemente und isolierte Tatsachen, die von direkten praktischen Erfahrungen abgeleitet werden. Das Denken ist strikt limitiert auf technische und praktische Prozesse, wie sie sehr deutlich formuliert sind in den Theorien und Methoden des Pragmatismus und der Verhaltenslehre.

Die andere Richtung des Denkens sucht Erscheinungen und Erfahrungen, welche mehr beschreiben als nur eine Summe von Teilen und so gut wie keine Aufmerksamkeit auf die einzelnen Elemente verwendet, die ohnedies beeinflußt und verändert werden durch subjektive Anschauungen und umfassende Vorstellungen. Der Hauptbezug oder die wesentliche Bedeutung ist nicht die Betrachtung der Wirklichkeit wie sie ist, sondern die Suche nach einer übergeordneten Idee, einem allgemeinen Inhalt, einem zusammenhängenden Gedanken oder einem Gesamtkonzept, das alle Teile zusammenbindet. Es ist bekannt unter dem Begriff der "Gestalttheorie" und wurde sehr deutlich entwickelt während der Zeit des Humanismus in den philosophischen Abhandlungen des morphologischen Idealismus.

Kant postuliert, daß Wissen seinen Ursprung in zwei fundamentalen Komponenten hat, der Intuition und dem Denken. Nach Kant ist all unser Denken auf Imagination bezogen. Das bedeutet, es beruht auf unseren Sinnen, denn der einzige Weg, Objekte zu begreifen, ist der durch die Vorstellung. Der Intellekt ist unfähig, sich irgend etwas vorzustellen, und die Sinne können nicht denken. Nur durch die Kombination beider kann Wissen entstehen. Die Vorstellung muß allen Denkprozessen vorangehen, denn sie ist nichts anderes als die Synopse, das übergeordnete Prinzip, das Ordnung in die Vielfalt bringt. Wenn wir akzeptieren, daß Denken ein Vorstellungsprozess höherer Ordnung ist, dann - so argumentiert Kant - beruht alles Wissen auf der Imagination.

In neueren philosophischen Betrachtungen ersetzt Hermann Friedmann Kants Konzept der Imagination und des Denkens als die fundamentalen Komponenten von Wissen mit dem Argument, daß der visuelle Sinn, die Vision, und der Tastsinn, die Haptik, zwei

## Designing and Thinking in Images, Metaphors and Analogies

Apparently all thinking processes happen in two different ways. Each is claimed to be the only way in which thought processes occur in science, arts and philosophy.

The first is commonly known as the empirical way of thinking. It is limited to the study of physical phenomena. The actual concern is with facts that can be measured and justified. This intellectual concern concentrates on separate elements and isolated facts, deriving from direct practical experience. Thinking is strictly limited to technical and practical processes as they are most strongly formulated in the theories and methodologies of pragmatism and behaviourism.

The other way of thinking seeks out phenomena and experiences which describe more than just a sum of parts, paying almost no attention to separate elements which would be affected and changed through subjective vision and comprehensive images anyway. The major concern is not the reality as it is but the search for an allround idea, for a general content, a coherent thought, or an overall concept that ties everything together. It is known as holism or Gestalt theory and has been most forcefully developed during the age of humanism in the philosophical treatises of the morphological idealism.

Kant postulates that knowledge has its origin in two basic components: intuition and thought. According to Kant all our thinking is related to imagination, which means it is related to our senses, because the only way to describe an object is through imagination. The intellect is incapable of perceiving anything, and the senses cannot think. Only through a combination of both can knowledge arise. Imagination has to precede all thinking processes since it is nothing less than a synopsis, an overall ordering principle bringing order into diversity. If we accept that thinking is an imaginative process of a higher order, then, argues Kant, it means all sciences are based on imagination.

In more recent philosophical debates, Herman Friedman replaces Kant's concept of imagination and thought as the basic components of knowledge with the argument that the sense of sight-the vision-and the sense of touch-the haptic-are the two competing polarities, and that all intellectual activity happens either in an optical or haptic way. Friedman argues that the sense of touch is non-productive; it measures, is geometrical, and acts in congruity. The sense of sight, however, is productive; it interpolates, is integral, and acts in similarities. The sense of sight stimulates spontaneous reactions of mind; it is more vivid and more far-reaching than the sense of touch.



miteinander streitende Polaritäten sind und daß alle intellektuellen Aktivitäten sich im optischen oder im haptischen Bereich abspielen. Friedmann argumentiert, daß der Tastsinn nicht produktiv ist. Er mißt, ist geometrisch und handelt in Kongruenzen. Das Sehen jedoch ist produktiv. Es interpoliert, integriert und handelt in Gleichnissen. Der visuelle Sinn stimuliert spontan das Erinnerungsvermögen. Er ist lebendiger und weitreichender als der Tastsinn. Die Haptik geht vom Spezifischen zum Allgemeinen, die Vision vom Allgemeinen zum Spezifischen. Der visionäre Prozeß, dessen Gegebenheiten auf der Vorstellung beruhen, beginnt mit einer Idee, betrachtet ein Objekt in allgemeinsten Weise, um eine Vorstellung oder ein Bild zu finden, aus dem sich mehr spezifische Eigenheiten ableiten lassen.

In jedem menschlichen Wesen steckt ein starkes metaphysisches Bedürfnis eine Realität zu schaffen, die durch Vorstellungen strukturiert ist und in welcher Objekte ihre Bedeutung durch Visionen erhalten, eine Realität, die nicht - wie Max Planck glaubt - existiert, weil sie meßbar ist. Vor allem hat die Frage der Imagination und der Ideen als ein Instrument des Denkens und der Analyse Künstler und Philosophen beschäftigt. In jüngster Zeit ist dieser Prozeß des Denkens unterbewertet worden durch die Überschätzung quantitativer und materialistischer Kriterien. Es liegt jedoch auf der Hand, daß das, was wir im allgemeinen Denken nennen, nichts anderes ist als die Anwendung von Vorstellungen und Ideen auf eine gegebene Zahl von Fakten. Es ist nicht nur ein abstrakter Prozeß, sondern ein visuelles und sinnhaftes Ereignis. Die Art, wie wir die Welt um uns begreifen, hängt davon ab, wie wir sie wahrnehmen und empfinden. Ohne eine übergeordnete Vision erscheint uns die Realität als eine Menge unabhängiger Phänomene und bedeutungsloser Tatsachen, mit anderen Worten: total chaotisch. In solch einer Welt würde man wie in einem Vakuum leben. Alles würde von gleicher Bedeutung sein; nichts könnte unsere Aufmerksamkeit anziehen; es würde keine Möglichkeit geben, unseren Verstand zu gebrauchen.

So wie die Bedeutung eines ganzen Satzes anders ist als die Bedeutung einer Summe einzelner Worte, so ist die schöpferische Vision die Fähigkeit, eine charakteristische Einheit einer Reihe von Tatsachen zu erfassen und nicht nur sie zu analysieren als etwas, das zusammengesetzt ist aus einzelnen Teilen. Das Bewußtsein, daß die Realität durch sinnliche Wahrnehmung und Imagination erfaßt wird, ist der wahre schöpferische Prozeß, denn er erreicht einen höheren Grad von Ordnung als die einfache Methode des Testens, Messens, Prüfens und Kontrollierens. Das ist der Grund, warum die traditionelle Philosophie der permanente Versuch ist, ein gut strukturiertes System von Ideen zu schaffen, um die Welt zu

The sense of touch proceeds from the specific condition to the general, the sense of vision from the general to the specific. The visionary process, whose data are based on imagination, starts out with an idea, looking at an object in the most general way, to find an image from which to descend to more specific properties. In every human being there is a strong metaphysical desire to create a reality structured through images in which objects become meaningful through vision and which does not, as Max Planck believed, exist because it is measurable. Most of all, the question of imagination and ideas as an instrument of thinking and analyzing has occupied artists and philosophers. Only in more recent history this process of thinking has been undervalued because of the predominance of quantitative and materialistic criteria. It is obvious, however, that what we generally call thinking is nothing else than the application of imagination and ideas to a given set of facts and not just an abstract process but a visual and sensuous event. The way we experience the world around us depends on how we perceive it. Without a comprehensive vision the reality will appear as a mass of unrelated phenomena and meaningless facts, in other words, totally chaotic. In such a world it would be like living in a vacuum: everything would be of equal importance; nothing could attract our attention; and there would be no possibility to utilize the mind.

As the meaning of a whole sentence is different from the meaning of the sum of single words, so is the creative vision and ability to grasp the characteristic unity of a set of facts, and not just to analyse them as something which is put together by single parts. The consciousness that catches the reality through sensuous perception and imagination is the real creative process because it achieves a higher degree of order than the simplistic method of testing, recording, proving and controlling. This is why all traditional philosophy is a permanent attempt to create a wellstructured system of ideas in order to interpret, to perceive, to understand the world, as other sciences have done. There are three basic levels of comprehending physical phenomena: first, the exploration of pure physical facts; second, the psychological impact on our inner-self; and third, the imaginative discovery and reconstruction of phenomena in order to conceptualize them. If, for instance, designing is understood purely technically, then it results in pragmatic functionalism or in mathematical formulas. If designing is exclusively an expression of psychological experiences, then only emotional values matter, and it turns into a religious substitute. If, however, the physical reality is understood and conceptualized as an analogy to our imagination of that reality, then we pursue a morphological design concept, turning it into



interpretieren, wahrzunehmen und zu verstehen, wie es auch andere Wissenschaften getan haben. Es gibt drei Grundebenen, physikalische Phänomene zu begreifen:

1. die Entdeckung der reinen physikalischen Fakten,
2. der psychologische Eindruck oder die psychologische Aufnahme in unserem Inneren, und
3. die imaginative Entdeckung und visuelle Rekonstruktion der Phänomene, um sie zu konzeptualisieren.

Wenn z. B. das Entwerfen, der Entwurfsvorgang, als reine Technik verstanden wird, dann sind die Ergebnisse ein pragmatischer Funktionalismus oder mathematische Formeln. Ist Entwerfen ausschließlich der Ausdruck psychologischer Erfahrungen und Versuche, dann zählen nur emotionale Werte, und Entwerfen wird zu einer religiösen Ersatzhandlung. Wenn jedoch die physische Realität verstanden und begriffen wird als eine Analogie unserer Vorstellung von dieser Realität, dann verfolgen wir ein morphologisches Entwurfskonzept und verwandeln Tatsachen in Phänomene, die wie alle realen Konzepte ausgedehnt oder verdichtet werden können. Sie können als Polaritäten gesehen werden, die sich widersprechen oder sich auch gegenseitig ergänzen, die als reine Konzepte auf sich selbst beruhen wie ein Kunstwerk. Deshalb kann man sagen, wenn man physikalische Phänomene im morphologischen Sinne betrachtet wie Gestalten in ihrer Metamorphose, dann können wir es einrichten, unser Wissen auch ohne Maschinen und Apparate zu entwickeln. Dieser imaginative Prozeß des Denkens findet Anwendung auf alle intellektuellen und geistigen Bereiche menschlicher Aktivitäten, wenn auch die Vorgehensweise in den verschiedenen Disziplinen unterschiedlich sein mag. Es ist immer ein fundamentaler Prozeß der Konzeptualisierung einer unabhängigen diversen und daher unterschiedlichen Realität durch den Gebrauch von Vorstellungen, Imaginationen, Metaphern, Analogien, Modellen, Zeichen, Symbolen und Allegorien.

### **Imagination und Vorstellung**

Wahrscheinlich erinnern wir uns alle noch an die Geschichte von dem Mann im Mond, der die Phantasiewelt unserer Kindheit beherrschte und in uns phantasievolle Vorstellungen von einem alten Mann hervorrief, der ein Bündel auf dem Rücken trug, und dessen Gesicht sich je nach der Klarheit der Nacht änderte. Er hat so manchen geheimen Wunsch erfüllt, und er war der freundliche Begleiter vieler romantisch Verliebter. Bevor menschliche Intelligenz es fertigbrachte, sein Geheimnis zu lüften, war er das Ziel so vieler Sehnsüchte, daß er ein Teil unseres Lebens wurde,

phenomena which, like all real concepts, can be expanded or condensed; they can be seen as polarities contradicting or complementing each other, existing as pure concepts in themselves like a piece of art. Therefore we might say, if we look at physical phenomena in a morphological sense, like Gestalten in their metamorphosis, we can manage to develop our knowledge without machine or apparatus. This imaginative process of thinking

applies to all intellectual and spiritual areas of human activities though the approaches might be different in various fields. But it is always a fundamental process of conceptualizing an unrelated, diverse reality through the use of images, metaphors, analogies, models, signs, symbols and allegories.

### **Image and perception**

Probably all of us remember the story of the man in the moon which occupied our childhood fantasies, producing all sorts of images of an old man, carrying a bundle on his back, and whose face used to change depending on the clarity of the night. He helped to fulfill secret wishes, and he became the friendly companion of romantic couples. Before human intelligence managed to uncover his secret, he was the subject of so many desires and wishes that he became part of our life while existing only in our imagination.

Not only about the moon, but also about the



das nur in unserer Vorstellung existierte. Nicht nur mit dem berühmten Mann im Mond, sondern mit dem gesamten nächtlichen Firmament hat der menschliche Geist ein lebhaftes Phantasiebild geschaffen. Es hat wahrscheinlich eine sehr lange Zeit gebraucht, um den weiten nächtlichen Himmel zu strukturieren und seine chaotische Realität in ein zusammenhängendes System von Bildern zu verwandeln. Lange bevor die Wissenschaft in der Lage war, das Weltall zu kalkulieren und zu messen, die Schwerkraft, die Intensität und die Schnelligkeit oder Geschwindigkeit des Lichtes, der Sterne und alle relevanten Einzelheiten zu registrieren, lange bevor dies geschah, beruhte das Verständnis ausschließlich auf bildhaften Übereinstimmungen. Anstelle einer Reihe von Fakten basierte das Wissen auf einer Reihe von Vorstellungen. Das Firmament wurde mit Figuren und Phantasieformen angefüllt, wie von Orion, Kastor und Pollux, der Große Bär u.a. Solche Sternbilder besitzen eine sinnhafte Realität im menschlichen Bewußtsein. Daraus kann man schließen: Realität ist, was unsere Vorstellung als solche begreift. Im allgemeinen Sinne beschreibt die Vorstellung eine Reihe von Tatsachen in einer Weise, daß die gleiche visuelle Vorstellung mit den Voraussetzungen wie auch mit der Vorstellung selbst verbunden ist.

### Metaphern

Wir benutzen im täglichen Sprachumgang ständig Metapher-Ausdrücke, ohne diesem Umstand Bedeutung beizumessen. So sprechen wir z. B. vom Fuß des Berges, dem Bein des Stuhles, dem Herzen der Stadt, dem Arm des Gesetzes usw. Wir benutzen viele Worte, die lebendige Metaphern sind, obwohl sie als allgemeine Ausdrücke bestehen. Die Alltagssprache ist voll von spezifischen Ausdrücken und Redensarten, wie z. B. der Zahn der Zeit, der Wald von Masten oder der Dschungel der Großstadt. Metaphern sind Transformationen von aktuellen Ereignissen in eine figurative Ausdrucksform, die Anschaulichkeiten hervorruft und einen mehr beschreibenden und illustrativen Charakter haben anstelle einer rein abstrakten Wahrnehmung von Vorgängen. Gewöhnlich handelt es sich um einen Vergleich zwischen zwei Ereignissen, welche nicht gleich sind, aber in einer anschaulichen Art miteinander verglichen werden können. Der Vergleich wird meist durch einen schöpferischen Gedanken gefunden, der unterschiedliche Objekte miteinander verbindet und ein neues Bild erfindet, in welches die Charakteristiken beider einfließen. Die Bedeutung von Metaphern beruht auf dem Vergleich und der Gleichartigkeit von meist anthropomorphem Charakter, wie dem menschlichen Körper als Metapher für die Form einer romanischen Kathedrale oder die Gestalt des Universums. Entwerfer benutzen die Metapher als ein Instrument gedanklicher Art, das der Klarheit

whole firmament the human mind created a vivid fantasy. It probably took a long time to structure the wide starry sky, and to develop a coherent system within a chaotic reality long before science was capable of calculating and measuring the orbits, the gravity, the intensity and speed of light of the stars and to register all relevant data. Before that, understanding was based entirely on imaginative concepts. Instead of a set of facts, knowledge referred to a set of constellations derived from perception .. The firmament was filled with figures and images, such as the Orion, Castor and Pollux, the Great Bear, and others. Those star images represented a sensuous reality in the human consciousness. Therefore we might conclude: Reality is what our imagination perceives it to be. In a general sense, an image describes a set of facts in such a way that the same visual perception is connected with the conditions as with the image itself.

### Metaphors

In everyday language we are constantly using metaphorical expressions without paying any attention to them. For instance, we talk about the foot of the mountain, the leg of a chair, the heart of the city, the mouth of the river, the long arm of the law, the head of the family and a body of knowledge. We use many words that are vivid metaphors although they exist as common expressions. In addition to the words, everyday language abounds in phrases and expressions of metaphorical character such as: straight from the horse's mouth, the tooth of time, or the tide of events, a forest of masts, the jungle of the city.

Metaphors are transformations of an actual event into a figurative expression, evoking images by substituting an abstract notion for something more descriptive and illustrative. It usually is an implicit comparison between two entities which are not alike but can be compared in an imaginative way. The comparison is mostly done through a creative leap that ties different objects together, producing a new entity in which the characteristics of both take part. The meaning of metaphors is based on comparison and similarities most often of anthropomorphical character, like the human body as a metaphor for the shape of a romanque cathedral or the conformation of the universe. Designers use the metaphor as an instrument of thought that serves the function of clarity and vividness antedating or bypassing logical processes. "A metaphor is an intuitive



und Lebendigkeit dient, indem es logische Prozesse umgeht und ihnen entgegengesetzt ist. "Eine Metapher ist eine intuitive Begrifflichkeit von Gleichartigkeiten in Ungleichheiten", wie Aristoteles es definiert.

## Modelle

Unter einem Modell wird gemeinhin eine Person verstanden, die als Prototyp eine ideale Form verkörpert. Allgemeiner gesehen ist ein Modell eine Struktur, ein Muster, nach dem etwas geformt wird. Ein Künstler malt seine Gemälde nach den Formen oder Prinzipien seines Modells. Ein Wissenschaftler bildet seine Theorien natürlicher Ereignisse auf der Grundlage eines Konzeptes oder eines Plans, der als Modell dient. Dies ist um so mehr der Fall, wenn die Komplexität einer Sache zunimmt oder die wissenschaftliche Sphäre so schwierig wird, daß jede Art von Beobachtung versagt. In der Chemie oder der Physik z. B. werden Modelle benützt, um die Positionen von Atomen in Molekülen zu zeigen, oder es werden biologische Modelle verwandt, um organische Formationen zu demonstrieren, in denen jedes Organ seine Funktion in Beziehung zum System als Ganzem hat. Solche Modelle dienen als Instruktionen für die technische Auseinandersetzung mit der Realität. Allgemein gesprochen ist ein Modell eine theoretische Komplexität in sich selbst, welche entweder eine visuelle Form oder eine konzeptionelle Ordnung in die Bestandteile komplexer Situationen bringt. In solch einem Modell ist die äußere Form Ausdruck der inneren Struktur. Es zeigt die Art, wie etwas zusammengesetzt ist. Ein Modell zu machen, bedeutet Zusammenhänge in einer gegebenen Kombination und in festgelegten Dispositionen zu erkennen. Das geschieht gewöhnlich mit zwei Modelltypen: visuelle Modelle und Denkmodelle. Sie dienen als konzeptuelles Instrument, um unseren Erfahrungsstruktur zu verleihen und daraus Funktionen abzuleiten oder ihnen eine Absicht zu geben. Mit diesen beiden Modellen formulieren wir eine objektive Struktur, die Annahmen in etwas mehr Gewißheit und deshalb mehr Realität verwandeln. Es ist nichts anderes als ein formales Prinzip, das es ermöglicht, die Komplexität der Erscheinungen in besser geordneter Weise sichtbar zu machen, und die - anders gesehen - ein schöpferischer Ansatz ist zu einer strukturierten Realität, die sich an der Kenntnis des Modells ausrichtet. Nicht zuletzt ist das Modell eine intellektuelle Struktur, die Ziele setzt für unsere schöpferischen Aktivitäten. Gerade so wie der Entwurf von Modellgebäuden, von Modellstädten, von Modellgemeinschaften und anderen Modellbedingungen die Richtschnur sind für folgerichtige Aktionen.

perception of similarities in dissimilars," as Aristotle defined it.

## Models

A model is commonly understood as somebody who poses as a prototype representing an ideal form. In a more general sense a model is a structure, a pattern, along the line of which something is shaped. As an artist paints his painting after the lines of a model, a scientist builds his theory of natural events on the basis of a concept or a plan which acts as a model. This is all the more so when the complexity of something increases or the scientific sphere becomes so minute that any kind of observation would fail. In chemistry or physics, for instance, models are built to demonstrate the position of atoms in molecules, or biological models are used to represent the organic formation in which every organ has its function in relation to the whole system. Such models serve as instructions for technical intrusion with the reality. Generally a model is a theoretical complexity in itself which either brings a visual form or a conceptual order into the components of complex situations. In such a model the external form is the expression of an internal structure. It shows the way something is put together. To make a model means to find coherence in a given relationship of certain combinations and fixed dispositions. This is usually done with two types of models, visual models and thinking models. They serve as conceptual devices to structure our experience and turn them into functions or make them intentional.

By means of these two models we formulate an objective structure that turns facts into something more certain and therefore more real. It is nothing else than a formal principle which makes it possible to visualize the complexity of appearances in a more ordered way, and which in reverse is a creative approach to structured reality along the knowledge of a model. Not the least the model is an intellectual structure setting targets for our creative activities, just like the design of model-buildings, model-cities, model-communities, and other model conditions supposedly are setting directions for subsequent actions.



## Analogien

Als Le Corbusier ein Gebäude mit einer Maschine verglich, sah er eine Analogie, die vorher niemand gesehen hatte. Als Alvar Aalto den Entwurf einer organisch geformten Vase mit der finnischen Landschaft verglich oder den Entwurf für ein Theater in Essen mit einem Baumstumpf, tat er dasselbe. Und als Hugo Häring mit anthropomorphen Vorbildern entwarf, tat auch er nichts anderes, als eine Analogie zu sehen, wo niemand vorher eine gesehen hatte. Im Laufe des 20. Jahrhunderts wurde es erkennbar, daß die Analogien in weitestem Sinne eine viel größere Rolle spielten in der Architektur als die einfache Erfüllung funktioneller Bedürfnisse oder die Lösung rein technischer Probleme. Alle Entwürfe der Konstruktivisten z. B. müssen als eine Referenz an die dynamische Welt der Maschinen, die Fabriken und Industrieteile gesehen werden, denen sie analog sind. Melnikov hat einmal eine Serie von Entwürfen für Arbeiterclubs in Moskau geschaffen, die Analogien sind zu Kolben, Zylindern, Gängen und Zahnradern.

Es wird gesagt, daß wissenschaftliche Entdeckungen darin bestehen, Analogien zu sehen, wo der andere nur nackte Tatsachen sieht. Nimmt man z. B. den menschlichen Körper, so sieht ein Chirurg in ihm hauptsächlich ein System von Knochen, Muskeln, Organen und Zirkulationssystemen; ein Fußballtrainer sieht die Leistungsfähigkeit; ein Liebhaber hat eine romantische Vorstellung von dem Körper, und ein Geschäftsmann kalkuliert die Arbeitskraft, ein General die Kampfkraft usw. Architekten wie Cattaneo, Häring, Soleri u.a. empfinden den menschlichen Körper als eine Gestalt, die analog ist zu ihren Plänen - sei es für Gebäude oder Städte. Sie konstruieren eine Abhängigkeit durch Analogien von einem zum anderen. Die Analogie errichtet eine Gleichartigkeit oder die Existenz von gleichartigen Prinzipien zwischen zwei Ereignissen, welche normalerweise völlig unterschiedlich sind. Kant betrachtet die Analogie als etwas, das unerläßlich ist, um das Wissen zu erweitern. Durch die Anwendung der Methode der Analogien sollte es möglich sein, neue Konzepte zu entwickeln und neue Zusammenhänge zu erkennen.

## Zeichen, Symbole und Allegorien

Fast unsere gesamte Kommunikation basiert auf Zeichen, Symbolen, Signalen und Allegorien, die nicht nur die meisten Aspekte unserer täglichen Routine ausmachen, sondern meistens oder sehr oft auch religiöse und metaphysische Systeme tragen. Die Benutzung eines Autos z. B. ist nur möglich durch den regulierenden Effekt von Verkehrssignalen, -zeichen und -symbolen, und ohne sie würde Autofahren ein sehr

## Analogies

When Le Corbusier compared the edifice with a machine he saw an analogy where nobody saw one before. When Aalto compared the design of his organically shaped vases with the Finnish landscape, or his design for a theater in Germany with a tree stump, he did the same; and when Haring designed with anthropomorphic images in mind he again did just that-seeing an analogy where nobody has seen one before. In the course of the twentieth century it has become recognized that analogy taken in the most general sense plays a far more important role in architectural design than that of simply following functional requirements or solving pure technical problems. All the constructivist designs for instance, have to be seen as a reference to the dynamic world of machines, factories and industrial components to which they are analogous. Melnikov once produced a series of designs for workers' clubs in Moscow which are analogies to pistons, tubes, gears and bearings.

It has been said that scientific discovery consists in seeing analogies where everybody else sees just bare facts. Take, for instance, the human body: a surgeon perceives it mainly as a system of bones, muscles, organs and a circulatory system. A football coach appreciates the performance capacity of the body, the lover has a romantic notion about it, a businessman calculates the working power, a general the fighting strength, and so on. Architects, like Cattaneo, Haring, Soleri and others perceive the human body as a Gestalt which is analogous to their plans either for buildings or cities. They draw an inference by analogy from one to the other. The analogy establishes a similarity, or the existence of some similar principles, between two events which are otherwise completely different. Kant considered the analogy as something indispensable to extend knowledge. In employing the method of analogy it should be possible to develop new concepts and to discover new relationships.

## Signs, symbols and allegories

Almost all our communication is based on signs, signals, symbols and allegories which structure not only most aspects of our daily routine but also are most often carriers of religious and metaphysical systems. Riding in a motorcar, for example, is only possible because of the regulating effect of traffic signals, signs and symbols, and it would be a most daring and deadly adventure without them. The modern scientific world is full of complicated symbolic



verwegenes und wahrscheinlich katastrophales Abenteuer sein. Die moderne wissenschaftliche Welt ist voll von komplizierten symbolischen Codes und Systemen, von synthetischen Zeichen und Symbolen, welche vorteilhafter sind, weil sie objektiver und kürzer sind als die normale Sprache. Aber hinter der objektiven Welt repräsentieren Symbole auch eine metaphysische Welt als magische Erleuchtungen und kultische Symbole in verschiedensten Religionen, wie das Rad des Lebens im Buddhismus, der Fisch als Symbol der Christenheit und der Phönix als ein Zeichen der Regeneration in der alten Mythologie.

Während Zeichen auf etwas hinweisen, das sie darstellen - wie Worte künstliche Zeichen für Ideen und Gedanken sind -, sind Symbole die Durchdringung von Geist und Vorstellung, die durch Mysterien, Tiefe und unerschöpfliche Interpretation charakterisiert sind. Um etwas Abstraktes auszudrücken und zu visualisieren, benützt man transzendente oder geistige Symbole oder Allegorien. Die Durchdringung zwischen Symbolen oder Allegorien ist fließend und kann nicht streng getrennt werden. Allegorien werden als eine Dimension der kontrollierten Indirektheit betrachtet und haben eine doppelte Bedeutung. Die ursprüngliche Bedeutung des Wortes gibt die Richtung seiner Entwicklung an. Es kommt vom griechischen Wort "alios" und "agorein", das bedeutet "anderes Sprechen" und suggeriert eine mehr doppeldeutige und hintergründige Sprache. Die Methode der Allegorie wird in der Kunst gebraucht, wenn sie mehr einen thematischen Inhalt und Ideen ausdrückt als Ereignisse und Tatsachen. Der bleibende Eindruck, der bei einem allegorischen Vergleich entsteht, ist etwas Indirektes, Ambivalentes und manchmal sogar Emblemhaftes, das zwangsläufig nach einer Interpretation verlangt. Die Allegorie hebt den Nachdenkenden auf eine Bedeutungsebene und versorgt den Entwerfer mit einem Mittel, das weit über die pragmatische Repräsentation hinausgeht. Insbesondere Kunst und Mythologie machen weiten Gebrauch von Allegorien, beide in subjektiven Vorgängen und in der Vorstellung. Oft werden Personifikationen benutzt, um abstrakte Ideen und Ereignisse sichtbar zu machen, so der Tod als Sensenmann, die Gerechtigkeit als Frau mit verbundenen Augen, die Glücksgöttin auf einem drehenden Rad sitzend, selbst in Allegorien wie John Bull als dem Repräsentanten für die britische Nation, dem Michel für die deutsche und der Marianne für die französische Nation sowie dem guten "Uncle Sam", der für Amerika steht. Dies allegorische Mittel jedoch war in der Vergangenheit nicht nur von größter Bedeutung für die Repräsentation des Kosmos in der antiken Welt oder für die Spekulation über die Natur des Universums im Mittelalter, es spielt auch eine bedeutende Rolle in der modernen Literatur,

codes and systems of synthetic signs and symbols which are more advantageous because they are unambiguous, distinct, and shorter than regular language. But beyond the objective world, symbols also represent a metaphysical world as magical illuminations and cult symbols in various religions, such as the wheel of life in Buddhism, the fish as a symbol of Christianity, and the phoenix as a sign of regeneration in ancient mythology.

While signs point to something that they represent, as words are artificial signs for ideas and thoughts, symbols are a penetration of mind and image characterized by mystery, depth and inexhaustible interpretation. To express and visualize something abstract, transcendental or spiritual either symbols or allegories are used. The transition between symbols and allegories is flexible and cannot be strictly separated. Allegory is regarded as a dimension of controlled indirectness and double meaning. The original meaning of the term suggests the direction of its development, it comes from the Greek word "alios" and "agorein" which means an "other speaking" and suggests a more deceptive and oblique language. The method of allegory is represented in art whenever it emphasizes thematic content and ideas rather than events and facts. The abiding impression left by the allegorical mode is one of indirect, ambiguous and sometimes even emblematic symbolism which inevitably calls for interpretation. The allegory arouses in the contemplator a response to levels of meaning, and provides the designer with a tool that goes beyond pragmatic representation. Particularly art and mythology make wide use of allegories, both in subject matter and in its imagery. Quite often personifications are employed to visualize abstract ideas and events, such as death as reaper, justice as the blindfolded woman, the goddess of luck sitting on a flying wheel; even in allegories like "John Bull" as the representative of the British nation, "Michael" for the Germans, "Marianne" for the French, and good old "Uncle Sam" who stands for America.

The allegorical mode however has not only been of major importance in the past as representing the Cosmos in the ancient world or speculating on the nature of the Universe in the Middle Ages, it also plays a significant role in modern literature, exhibiting incomprehensible and unconceivable dimensions rooted in the depth of the unconscious as in Beckett's "Waiting for Godot" or in Kafka's novels.

What all that means-thinking and designing in images, metaphors, models, analogies, symbols and allegories- is nothing more than a transition from purely pragmatic approaches to a more creative mode of thinking. It means a process of thinking in qualitative values rather than quantitative data, a process that is based on



urn begriffliche Dimensionen zu erfassen, die in der Tiefe des Unterbewußtseins wurzeln, wie in Becketts "Waiting for Godot" oder in den Novellen Kafkas.

Die Bedeutung des Denkens und Entwerfens in Bildern, Metaphern, Modellen, Analogien, Symbolen und Allegorien ist nichts anderes als der Übergang von rein pragmatischen Denkansätzen zu einer mehr kreativeren Methode des Denkens. Es bedeutet einen Prozeß des Denkens in qualitativen Werten statt in quantitativen Daten, einen Prozeß, der mehr auf der Synthese als auf der Analyse basiert - nicht so verstanden, daß analytische Methoden abgelehnt werden, sondern mehr in der Richtung, daß Analyse und Synthese alternieren, so natürlich wie das Einatmen und Ausatmen, wie Goethe es ausgedrückt hat. Es ist als ein Übergang der Denkprozesse vom metrischen Raum zum visionären Raum kohärenter Systeme zu verstehen, von Konzepten gleicher Beschaffenheit zu Konzepten der Gestaltfindung. All die unterschiedlichen Methoden, die hier beschrieben worden sind, sind Teil eines morphologischen Konzeptes, das als eine Studie der Formation und Transformation zu verstehen ist, seien es Gedanken, Tatsachen, Objekte oder Bedingungen, wie sie sich selbst in sensitiven Experimenten oder Erfahrungen ausdrücken.

Diese Vorgehensweise soll nicht als Ersatz für qualitative Wissenschaft stehen, die die Erscheinungsformen, die uns bekannt sind, in Funktionen zerlegt, um sie kontrollierbar zu machen, sondern es ist so zu verstehen, daß sie gegen den zunehmenden Einfluss der Verwissenschaftlichung gerichtet sind, die für sich ein Monopol der Erkenntnis beansprucht.

Deshalb sind die Städtebilder, die in dieser Anthologie gezeigt werden, nicht nach Funktionen und meßbaren Kriterien analysiert, Methoden, welche normalerweise angewandt werden, sondern sie sind auf einem konzeptuellen Niveau interpretiert, das Ideen, Vorstellungen, Metaphern und Analogien zeigen soll. Die Interpretationen sind im morphologischen Sinn begriffen, weit offen für subjektive Spekulationen und Transformationen. Das Büchlein zeigt einen mehr transzendentalen Aspekt, der dem tatsächlichen Entwurf zugrunde liegender Gedanken . Anders ausgedrückt zeigt es das allgemeine Prinzip, das gleich ist in ungleichen Situationen oder unter ungleichen Bedingungen. Drei unterschiedliche Ebenen der Realität werden herausgestellt: die faktische Realität - das Objekt; die konzeptuelle Realität - die Analogie; die begriffliche Realität - die Idee, gezeigt als Plan, als Bild und als Begriff.

synthesis rather than analysis. Not that analytical methods are opposed but more in the direction that analysis and synthesis alternate as naturally as breathing in and breathing out, as Goethe put it. It is meant to be a transition in the process of thinking from a metrical space to the visionary space of coherent systems, from the concepts of homology to the concepts of morphology. All of the different modes described are part of a morphological concept which is understood as a study of formations and transformations whether of thoughts, facts, objects or conditions as they present themselves to sentient experiences.

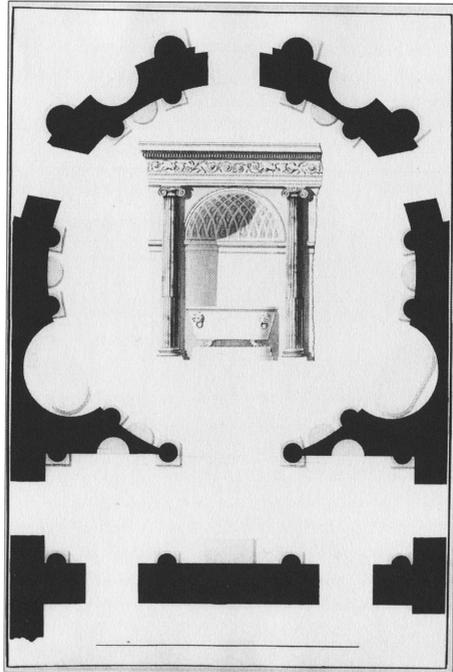
This approach is not meant to act as a substitute for the quantitative sciences which break down forms, as we know them, into functions to make them controllable, but it is meant to counteract the increasing influence of those sciences that claim a monopoly of understanding.

Therefore, the city-images as they are shown in this anthology are not analysed according to function and other measurable criteria-a method which is usually applied-but they are interpreted on a conceptual level demonstrating ideas, images, metaphors and analogies. The interpretations are conceived in a morphological sense, wide open to subjective speculation and transformation. The book shows the more transcendental aspect, the underlying perception that goes beyond the actual design. In other terms, it shows the common design principle which is similar in dissimilar conditions. There are three levels of reality exposed: the factual reality-the object; the perceptual reality-the analogy; and the conceptual reality-the idea, shown as the plan-the image-the word.



William-Hogarth, *The Beggar's Opera*, London (1822)

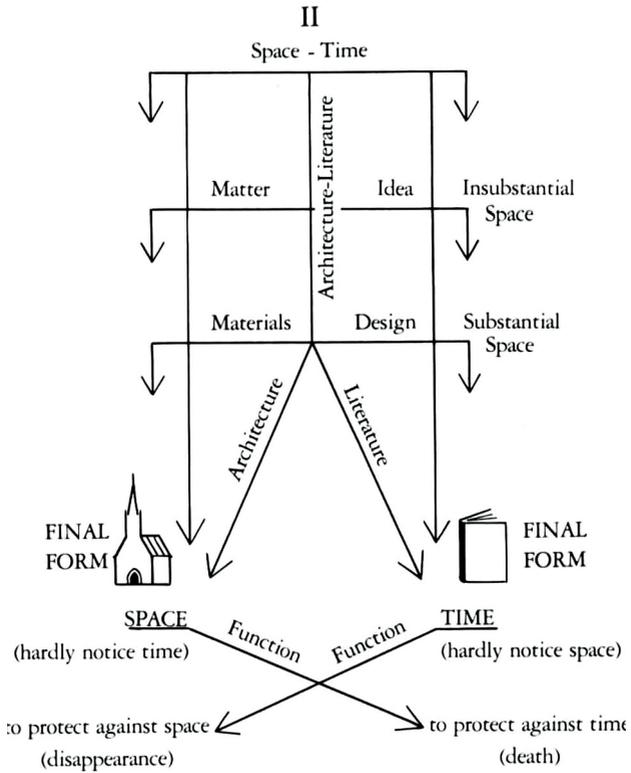
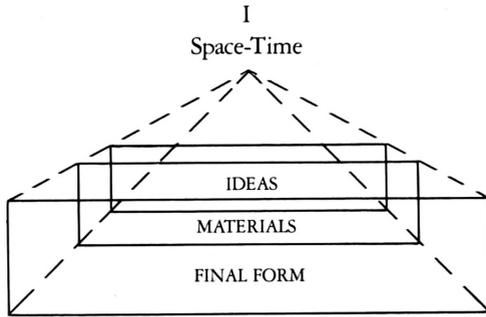
## Introduction



Potocki, *Laurentine Villa*, plan and elevation detail of round room

(...) Mais pour revenir à la beauté neuve que Dostoïevski a apportée au monde, comme chez Vermeer il y a création d'une certaine âme, d'une certaine couleur des étoffes et des lieux, il n'y a pas seulement création d'êtres, mais de demeures chez Dostoïevski, et la maison de l'Assassinat dans Crime et Châtiment, avec son dvornik, n'est pas aussi merveilleuse que le chef-d'oeuvre de la maison de l'Assassinat dans Dostoïevski, cette sombre, et si longue, et si haute, et si vaste maison de Rogojine où il tue Nastasia Philipovna. Cette beauté nouvelle et terrible d'une maison, cette beauté nouvelle et mixte d'un visage de femme, voilà ce que Dostoïevski a apporté d'unique au monde (...).

*(...) As, in Vermeer, there is the creation of a certain soul, of a certain colour of fabrics and places, so there is in Dostoievski creation not only of people but of their homes, and the house of the Murder in Crime and Punishment with its dvornik, is it not almost as marvellous as the masterpiece of the House of Murder in Dostoievski, that sombre house, so long, and so high, and so huge, of Rogojin in which he kills Nastasia Philipovna. That novel and terrible beauty of a house, that novel beauty blended with a woman's face, that is the unique thing which Dostoievski has given to the world, and the comparisons that literary critics may make, between him and Gogol, or between him and Paul de Kock, are of no interest, being external to this secret beauty. (...)*



## THE ANALOGICAL TRADITION OF LITERARY ARCHITECTURE

*We cannot articulate our feelings  
without a language that tradition  
and civilization offers to us  
for the selection of symbols.  
E. H. Gombrich*

In *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (1849), John Ruskin makes, I think, one of the most eloquent statements on behalf of architecture that we find in nineteenth-century English writing. His tribute has special importance with respect to the concerns of this book. Ruskin not only brings together in one passage themes and theories shared and expressed by the writers we have been discussing; he also does so in such a way as to suggest and I hope affirm the motives that have impelled me, and values I have held by in my critical and appreciative pursuits. Speaking of "The Lamp of Memory," Ruskin writes:

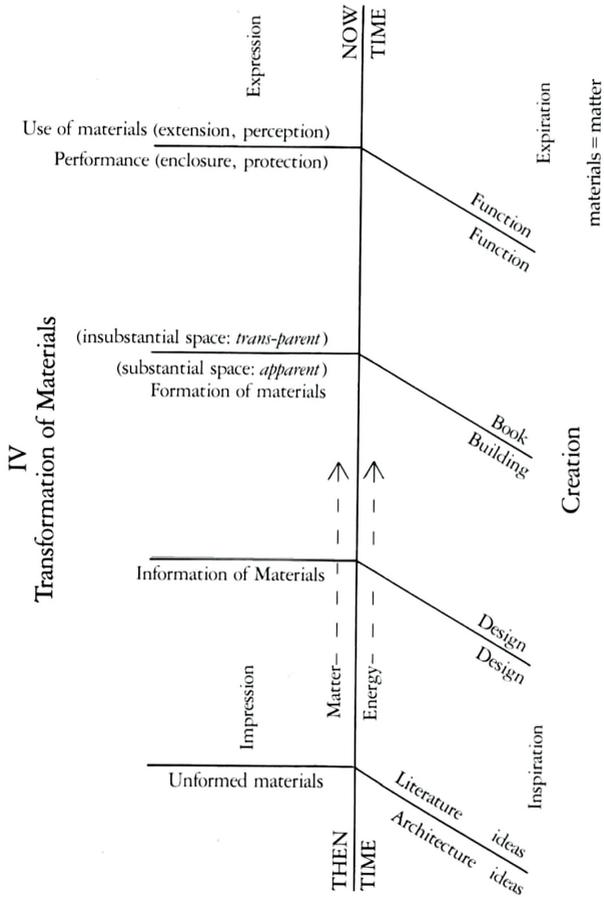
*It is as the centralisation and protectress of this sacred influence, that Architecture is to be regarded by us with the most serious thought. We may live without her and worship without her, but we cannot remember without her. How cold is all history how lifeless all imagery, compared to that which the living nation writes, and the uncorrupted marble bears' how many pages of doubtful record might we not often spare, for a few stones left one upon another! The ambition of the old Babel builders was well directed for this world: there are but two strong conquerors of the forgetfulness of men, Poetry and Architecture; and the latter in some sort includes the former, and is mightier in its reality; it is well to have, not only what men have thought and felt, but what their hands have handled, and their strength wrought, and their eyes beheld, all the days of their life.'*

Ruskin distinguishes for us, before he reintegrates, the two arts we have been discussing: literature (Poetry) and architecture; he adds, then, that these two arts, independently and interdependently, "conquer forgetfulness," or to restate positively, enable us to remember the past. Literary Architecture has been about the two arts which Ruskin distinguishes and compares as they find expression in the writings of Walter Pater, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Marcel

Proust, and Henry James; it has also been about that special service to memory which literature and architecture, separately and as analogues, perform and which Ruskin celebrates. If we wish to speak of influences, we can scarcely do Ruskin justice enough: not only does he announce to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the importance of architecture, but he enables those writers after him to discover and proclaim for themselves the richness of architecture for their lives and their art.

Architectural places- literary and physical- echo and resonate in the life of our mind. Literature and architecture are separate art forms; and we must qualify their relationships with care, in the same manner Ruskin qualifies them when he says "the latter [Architecture] *in some sort* includes the former [Poetry]" (italics mine).

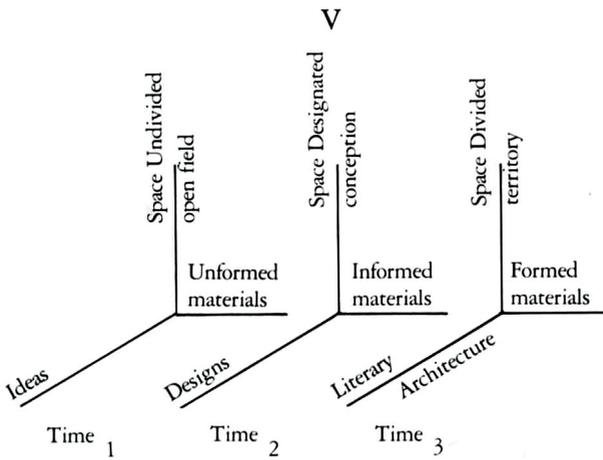
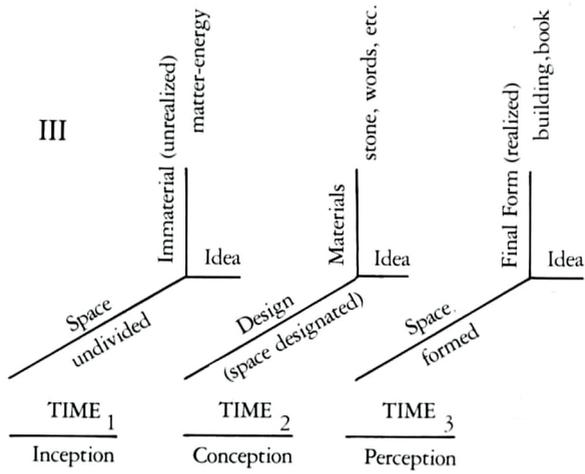
Their separate existence is a consequence of material *form* and time-life within contexts of separate traditions; and, if we wish to speak on the level of form, we must say that the two arts hold no intrinsic or necessary similarity: the one is an art of stone or concrete, the other of letters and words. This proposition is in sufficient, however: it does not raise the cloak of form (express materials) to see basic and elemental underpinnings: both literature and architecture are composed of space, time, matter, energy, this last being a holding-tension, the stress-release bond which constrains matter into form, assigning it place and preventing its explosion into random disconnectedness. Literature and architecture are compositions; they require artist-doers. We persist, of course, in thinking of each art as outward, existing in the solidity it discovers in this final form; but each has an inward motive - Hopkins's and Proust's "essence," James's "germ" - such that outwardness represents conversion from idea-matter into matter. This is embodiment. I have drawn some diagrams to show the relationships between space-time, idea, matter (material), and form. The first diagram (I)



indicates that space-time is common to all three stages of the art activity; in this representation, we may think of space-time as a sea in which characteristic creativity occurs, but I think it important to see that sea also as the possibility and power of connection. Diagram II represents where-when architecture and literature diverge in form and then again in function. Diagram III shows idea as constant, from inception to perception; IV shows energy-matter as constant throughout the transform act; and V shows literary architecture in three space-time intervals. What distinguishes literary from architectural art, then, is not elements (particularity) but the proportion-combination of elements: architecture celebrates space through enclosure, converting an open field into territory (this is the marking of boundaries); literature celebrates time through expansion, quickening the open field with images (this is the opening of dream). But even here we must not be deceived by particularity of proportion or emphasis—either space or time—for the distinction is false: we cannot have the one without the other. Despite differences in form, architecture and literature each partake of the other's dominant element. Pater, Hopkins, Proust, and James choose the architectural analogue for literature so that they may emphasize the spaciousness of literary art despite the insubstantiality of that space. They extend literature, but its where, unlike architecture's, becomes air unbounded. Space—we may think void—is important: it is the area through and the vehicle by which the alive or the quick is realized. As such, it is positive. Space is where time is. In literary art (language), syntax is the most apparent space—place and place-force; in architecture space is the hollow center (Proust's hermetically sealed silence of past or Hopkins's "womb-of-all, home-of-all, hearse-of-all night"). It resonates and records past or potential activity and is necessary for the life of the art. It is also necessary for life: there cannot be movement, life, which we may make analogous to or see as time, without space. The functions of literature and architecture respect the space-time conditions of the arts themselves, of insubstantiality or substantiality: literary art sets in motion (time) our activities of conceiving and perceiving (our transparent dreams or thoughts); architecture moves the other way, representing a conversion from no-thing into something, an activity human, but more importantly natural, in the manner of the universe. It provides space as shel-

ter and space as interior scape or environment. When we think of space in art-life as hollow, this space is death-in-life, the life a field without the center figure, self. Death-in-life is the necessary converse for life, which actually is life-in-death, being-in-field (universe) or being-in-void. (For being we may also read architecture, literature, thought.) Solidity or permanence, in this sense, is illusion. Solidity depends, for its illusion, on its time-life. Architecture wears its time slowly (in an analogous system, physics, it undergoes slow configurational change); once we see its time—we go to Rome to see decay and ruin, to Milan to see ghost-admitting frescoes—it assumes a (fertile) transparency much like our fugitive thoughts. So, too, once our thoughts (fast configurational change) are embodied in written language, their time-life slows, such that they relinquish their quick transparency-as-thought and seem to endure, as if they were like architecture, substantial.

Substance is, in our senses, our security or refuge from time-death; but architecture as substance is protection of another sort, from uncontrollable (since not self-generated) weather. Weather is kinetic energy, what we should also think of as encounter or experience, while architecture is potential energy. Being-out-of-doors is being without shelter, without either thought structure protection (filters) or physical protection. Being-in-weather requires the nakedness of exposure. Hopkins, of the four writers I discuss, ventures outside the most, into weather—the charged void-and death—the hollow center; Proust follows Hopkins in order of daring but clings for security to a reconstructed past rather than the immediate; Pater, we feel, once risked exposure, but frightened, he too returns to sentimentality, to reconstructed and fortified enclosures; James, no less fearful than Pater, ventures out into the near-loss of control of his late novels, but, like Pater, returns to safety, wanting to construct against death, not like Hopkins, through or with it. James's novels slow into museums or stiffen into mausoleums, whereas Proust's and Hopkins's quicken to building-as-activity, Hopkins's actually working as breaths of being, making and unmaking. I do not wish to say that Proust and Hopkins are therefore the better; but I have thought that they are braver and in some way larger. Their literature spans more, exposes more, and re-creates more of the *extended* world we live in, Pater and James



more of the *intended* world we live in. In the end, no matter the scale: each writer is a visionary, each a life-builder.

Pater coins the term *literary architecture*; Hopkins uses architectural terms and concepts to describe and make his poetry; Proust constructs *A la recherche du temps perdu* as a Gothic cathedral; and James writes in and about a house (space) of fiction. The architecture of these writers is not just an analogue taken-up but a process for generating a whole range of analogues. It is now an actual creative and a transform-memory process, literary architecture. The close study of literary architecture provides an unanticipated model of the mind in activity, expressing in act, as vital structure, *how it fuses space-time* and recovers buried memories in and for the construction of art. We should not tease ourselves into believing that literary architecture depends upon or presumes a common spirit of the age which marries the two arts, whether we name that spirit a Hegelian *Zeitgeist* or an "*air de famille*." Rather, literary architecture says something about the way Pater, Hopkins, Proust, and James view and work their literary creations. This book has been concerned with architecture as art-model and procedure for literary art and with the implications for creativity and perception architecture provides. What, I have asked, may be accomplished at certain times in history or in certain literary works by architecture when painting, sculpture, and music are available as alternative identities. Tradition and civilization offer to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries four sets of parallels or analogues. Architecture figures in each: architecture [and the] human body; architecture [and the] mind; architecture [and] memory; architecture [and] literature. What occurs in the nineteenth century and onwards is a blurring of sorts: these once discrete parallels - used not only by writers but by architects and philosophers - feed in to one another so that literature, architecture, and memory share and assume new and complicated meanings as the indistinguishable fusion literary architecture. While two sets of these parallels have been formalized into what we have already called *traditions* (*ars memoria* and what a few scholars have called *ut architectura poesis*), the other two have been ignored: the relation between architecture and

the body and architecture and the mind. Taken altogether, the four represent something in many ways less special but never less important than the formal traditions: the continual search to explain what we mean by metaphor, or, said more simply, *how* we mean. Classical rhetoricians needed to describe structure in periods and could turn to architecture, while architects who needed to describe character and style in architecture could turn to rhetoric. Terms and concepts are borrowed naturally; and the language of comparison becomes a rich metaphorical governing all our expression, sometimes in such a way as to lead us to think that all language is metaphorical. I have said that these particular sets of metaphors have something in common-architecture. One possible consequence can be this: when we read, we look for specific effects attained in the use of the architectural analogy for writing and recalling. I hope that my observations have some value in heightening the pleasure we can take in our readings.



Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus - Pliny The Younger (61-112 AD)

I  
*Epistulae*  
(1st C. AC)

THE  
LETTERS  
OF  
*PLINY*  
THE  
CONSUL:  
With Occasional REMARKS.

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By WILLIAM MELMOTH, Esq;  
THE NINTH EDITION,  
REVISED AND CORRECTED.

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V O L . I .



L O N D O N :  
Printed for J. DODSLEY, in Pall-Mall.  
M.DCC.XCVI.

*The Letters of Pliny the Consul*, 9th edition, revised and corrected, William Melmoth, printed for J. Dodsley, London (1796)

Gaius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, usually known as Pliny the Younger, was born at Como in 62 A.D. He was only eight years old when his father, Caecilius, died, and he was adopted by his uncle, the elder Pliny, author of the "Natural History." He was carefully educated, studying rhetoric under Quintilian and other famous teachers, and he became the most eloquent pleader of his time. In this and in much else he imitated Cicero, who had by this time come to be the recognized master of Latin style. While still young he served as military tribune in Syria, but he does not seem to have taken zealously to a soldier's life. On his return he entered politics under the Emperor Domitian, and in the year 100 A.D. was appointed consul by Trajan and admitted to confidential intercourse with that emperor. Later, while he was governor of Bithynia, he was in the habit of submitting every point of policy to his master, and the correspondence between Trajan and himself, which forms the last part of the present selection, is of a high degree of interest, both on account of the subjects discussed and for the light thrown upon the characters of the two men. He is supposed to have died about 113 A.D. Pliny's speeches are now lost, with the exception of one, a panegyric on Trajan delivered in thanksgiving for the consulate. This, though diffuse and somewhat too complimentary for modern taste, became a model for this kind of composition. The others were mostly of two classes, forensic and political, many of the latter being, like Cicero's speech against Verres, impeachments of provincial governors for cruelty and extortion toward their subjects. In these, as in his public activities in general, he appears as a man of public spirit and integrity; and in his relations with his native town he was a thoughtful and munificent benefactor.

The letters, on which today his fame mainly rests, were largely written with a view to publication, and were arranged by Pliny himself. They thus lack the spontaneity of Cicero's impulsive utterances, but to most modern readers who are not special students of Roman history they are even more interesting. They deal with a great variety of subjects: the description of a Roman villa; the charms of country life; the reluctance of people to attend authors' readings and to listen when they were present; a dinner party; legacy-hunting in ancient Rome; the acquisition of a piece of statuary; his love for his young wife; ghost stories; floating islands, a tame dolphin, and other marvels. But by far the best-known are those describing the great eruption of Vesuvius in which his uncle perished, a martyr to scientific curiosity, and the letter to Trajan on his attempts to suppress Christianity in Bithynia, with Trajan's reply approving his policy. Taken altogether, these letters give an absorbingly vivid picture of the days of the early empire, and of the interests of a cultivated Roman gentleman of wealth. Occasionally, as in the last letters referred to, they deal with important historical events; but their chief value is in bringing before us, in somewhat the same manner as "The Spectator" pictures the England of the age of Anne, the life of a time which is not so unlike our own as its distance in years might indicate. And in this time by no means the least interesting figure is that of the letter-writer himself, with his vanity and self-importance, his sensibility and generous affection, his pedantry and his loyalty.



Giovanni Paolo Panini, *Picture gallery with views of modern Rome* (1759)

EPISTULAE  
Letters of Pliny

XXIII. TO GALLUS

You are surprised, you say, at my infatuation for my Laurentine estate, or Laurentian if you prefer it so. You will cease to wonder when you are told the charms of the villa, the handiness of its site, and the stretch of shore it commands. It is seventeen miles distant from Rome, so that after getting through all your business, and without loss or curtailment of your working hours, you can go and stay there. It can be reached by more than one route, for the roads to Laurentium and Ostia both lead in the same direction, but you must branch off on the former at the fourth, and on the latter at the fourteenth milestone. From both of these points onward the road is for the most part rather sandy, which makes it a tedious and lengthy journey if you drive, but if you ride it is easy going and quickly covered. The scenery on either hand is full of variety. At places the path is a narrow one with woods running down to it on both sides, at other points it passes through spreading meadows and is wide and open. You will see abundant flocks of sheep and many herds of cattle and horses, which are driven down from the high ground in the winter and grow sleek in a pasturage and a temperature like those of spring.

The villa is large enough for all requirements, and is not expensive to keep in repair. At its entrance there is a modest but by no means mean-looking hall; then come the cloisters, which are rounded into the likeness of the letter D, and these enclose a smallish but handsome courtyard. They make a fine place of refuge in a storm, for they are protected by glazed windows and deep overhanging eaves. Facing the middle of the cloisters is a cheerful inner court, then comes a dining-room running down towards the shore, which is handsome enough for any one, and when the sea is disturbed by the south-west wind the room is just flecked by the spray of the spent waves. There are folding doors on all sides of it, or windows that are quite as large as such doors, and so from the two sides and the front it commands a prospect as it were of three seas, while at the back one can see through the inner court, the courtyard, then more cloisters and the hall, and through them the woods and the distant hills. A little farther back, on the left-hand side, is a spacious chamber; then a smaller one which admits the rising sun by one window and by another enjoys his last lingering rays as he sets, and this room also commands a view of the sea that lies beneath it, at a longer but more secure distance. An angle is formed by this chamber and the dining-room, which catches and concentrates the purest rays of the sun. This forms the winter apartments and exercise ground for my household. No wind penetrates thither except those which bring up rain-clouds and only prevent the place being used when they take away the fine weather. Adjoining this angle is a chamber with one wall rounded like a bay, which catches the sun on all its windows as he moves through the heavens. In the wall of this room I have had shelves placed like a library, which contains the volumes which I not only read, but read over and over again. Next to it is a sleeping chamber, through a passage supported by pillars and fitted with pipes which catch the hot air and circulate it from place to place, keeping the rooms at a healthy temperature. The remaining part of this side of the villa is appropriated to the use of my slaves and freedmen, most of the rooms being sufficiently well furnished for the reception of guests.

On the other side of the building there is a nicely decorated chamber, then another room which would serve either as a large bed-chamber or a moderate sized dining-room, as it enjoys plenty of sunshine and an extensive sea-view. Behind this is an apartment with an ante-room, suitable for summer use because of its height, and for winter use owing to its sheltered position, for it is out of reach of all winds. Another room with an ante-room is joined to this by a common wall. Next to it is the cold bath room, a spacious and wide



chamber, with two curved swimming baths thrown out as it were from opposite sides of the room and facing one another. They hold plenty of water if you consider how close the sea is. Adjoining this room is the anointing room, then the sweating room, and then the heating room, from which you pass to two chambers of graceful rather than sumptuous proportions. Attached to these is a warm swimming bath which everybody admires, and from it those who are taking a swim can command a view of the sea. Close by is the tennis court, which receives the warmest rays of the afternoon sun; on one side a tower has been built with two sitting rooms on the ground floor, two more on the first floor, and above them a dining-room commanding a wide expanse of sea, a long stretch of shore, and the pleasantest villas of the neighbourhood. There is also a second tower, containing a bedroom which gets the sun morning and evening, and a spacious wine cellar and store-room at the back of it. On the floor beneath is a sitting-room where, even when the sea is stormy, you hear the roar and thunder only in subdued and dying murmurs. It looks out upon the exercise ground, which runs round the garden.

This exercise ground has a border of boxwood, or rosemary where the box does not grow well—for box thrives admirably when it is sheltered by buildings, but where it is fully exposed to wind and weather and to the spray of the sea, though it stands at a great distance therefrom, it is apt to shrivel. On the inside ring of the exercise ground is a pretty and shady alley of vines, which is soft and yielding even to the bare foot. The garden itself is clad with a number of mulberry and fig-trees, the soil being specially suitable for the former trees, though it is not so kindly to the others. On this side, the dining-room away from the sea commands as fine a view as that of the sea itself. It is closed in behind by two day-rooms, from the windows of which can be seen the entrance to the villa from the road and another garden as rich as the first one but not so ornamental.

Along its side stretches a covered portico, almost long enough for a public building. It has windows on both sides, most of them facing the sea; those looking on the garden are single ones, and less numerous than those on the other side, as every alternate window was left out. All these are kept open when it is a fine day and there is no wind; when the wind is high, the windows only on the sheltered side are opened and no harm is done. In front of the portico is a terrace walk that is fragrant with violets. The portico increases the warmth of the sun by radiation, and retains the heat just as it keeps off and breaks the force of the north wind. Hence it is as warm in front as it is cool behind. In the same way it checks the south-west winds, and similarly with all winds from whatever quarter they blow—it tempers them and stops them dead. This is its charm in winter, but in summer it is even greater, for in the mornings its shade tempers the heat of the terrace walk, and in the afternoon the heat of the exercise ground and the nearest part of the garden, the shadows falling longer and shorter on the two sides respectively as the sun rises to his meridian and sinks to his setting. Indeed, the portico has least sunshine when the sun is blazing down upon its roof. Consequently it receives the west winds through its open windows and circulates them through the building, and so never becomes oppressive through the stuffy air remaining within it.

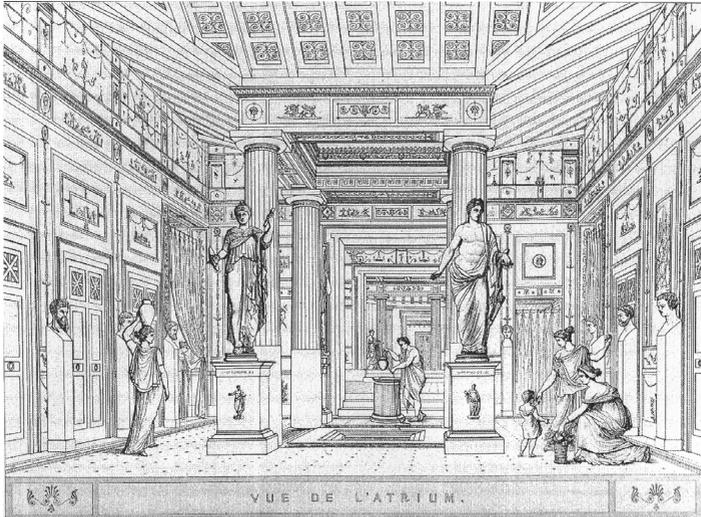
At the head of the terrace and portico successively is a garden suite of rooms, my favourite spot and well worthy of being so. I had them built myself. In this is a sunny chamber which commands the terrace on one side, the sea on another, and the sun on both; besides an apartment which looks on the portico through folding doors and on the sea through a window. In the middle of the wall is a neat recess, which by means of glazed windows and curtains can either be thrown into the adjoining room or be cut off from it. It holds a couch and two easy-chairs, and as you lie on the couch you have the sea at your feet, the villa at your back, and the woods at your head, and all these views may be looked at separately from each window or blended into one prospect. Adjoining is a chamber for passing the night in or taking a nap, and unless the windows are open, you do not hear a



sound either of your slaves talking, or the murmur of the sea, or the raging of the storms; nor do you see the flashes of the lightning or know that it is day. This deep seclusion and remoteness is due to the fact that an intervening passage separates the wall of the chamber from that of the garden, and so all the sound is dissipated in the empty space between. A very small heating apparatus has been fitted to the room, which, by means of a narrow trap-door, either diffuses or retains the hot air as may be required. Adjoining it is an ante-room and a chamber projected towards the sun, which the latter room catches immediately upon his rising, and retains his rays beyond mid-day though they fall aslant upon it. When I betake myself into this sitting-room, I seem to be quite away even from my villa, and I find it delightful to sit there, especially during the Saturnalia, when all the rest of the house rings with the merry riot and shouts of the festival-makers; for then I do not interfere with their amusements, and they do not distract me from my studies.

The convenience and charm of the situation of my villa have one drawback in that it contains no running water, but I draw my supply from wells or rather fountains, for they are situated at a high level. Indeed, it is one of the curious characteristics of the shore here that wherever you dig you find moisture ready to hand, and the water is quite fresh and not even brackish in the slightest degree, though the sea is so close by. The neighbouring woods furnish us with abundance of fuel, and other supplies we get from a colony of Ostia. The village, which is separated only by one residence from my own, supplies my modest wants; it boasts of three public baths, which are a great convenience, when you do not feel inclined to heat your own bath at home, if you arrive unexpectedly or wish to save time. The shore is beautified by a most pleasing variety of villa buildings, some of which are close together, while others have great intervals between them. They give the appearance of a number of cities, whether you view them from the sea or from the shore itself, and the sands of the latter are sometimes loosened by a long spell of quiet weather, or--as more often happens--are hardened by the constant beating of the waves. The sea does not indeed abound with fish of any value, but it yields excellent soles and prawns. Yet our villa provides us with plenty of inland produce and especially milk, for the herds come down to us from the pastures whenever they seek water or shade.

Well, do you think that I have just reasons for living here, for passing my time here, and for loving a retreat for which your mouth must be watering, unless you are a confirmed town-bird? I wish that your mouth did water! If it did, the many great charms of my little villa would be enhanced in the highest degree by your company. Farewell.



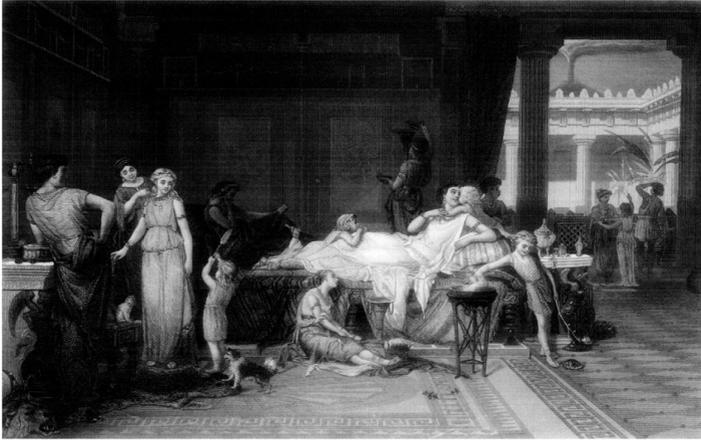
Bouchet, *Laurentine Villa*, interior of Atrium (1852)

THE VILLAS OF PLINY:  
FROM ANTIQUITY TO POSTERITY  
By Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey

FOUR CARDINAL POINTS OF A VILLA

Apart from Pliny's Letters describing Coma, two other villa letters stand in a class by themselves. Their exceptional quality stems in part from their unusual length. Whereas most of his writings average a dozen or so sections, these comprise twenty-nine sections in the one case and forty-six in the other, making them the longest of the entire Pliny correspondence. The other exceptional feature is their singular preoccupation with villa architecture. Nothing in Roman literature can compare with their complexity, not even the scattered references elsewhere in Pliny to such villas as those near Lake Coma. Pliny addressed the first of these two letters to a certain Gallus, perhaps Clusinius Gallus, according to some commentators. The second and even longer letter names Domitius Apollinaris as its recipient. Salutations to each correspondent make clear the literary character of the exercise. The letter to Gallus opens with the purported description of a villa belonging to Pliny on the Italian coast near Ostia. The letter took the traditional form of an invitation to spend a relaxing few days in the country - Pliny himself had responded enthusiastically to such an invitation to visit Junius Mauricus at his villa near Formiae. Pliny's letter to Apollinaris, less blunt in its message, concludes by evoking as precedents the famous ekphraseis by Homer and by Virgil describing the armor of Achilles and of Aeneas. Just as the Aeneid sought to imitate Homer's passage, so Pliny implied that he sought inspiration from the Virgilian and Homeric descriptions of works of art. For Pliny the villa letter had obviously become much more than a message of welcome. He had turned it into a medium for expressing his fondness for and understanding of the allied arts of architecture and horticulture. The letter to Callus sets the scene believably enough at a Latian seaside spot called Laurentinum, hence the name "Laurentine Villa" that centuries of subsequent readers have attached to this property. In the letter to Apollinaris the location shifts to a spot near the source of the Tiber River in the foothills of the Apennine Mountains of Tuscany, hence the name Tuscan Villa, or Tuscos meos, to use Pliny's own term. Another letter mentions Tifernum (modern Città di Castellol) as the nearest town. Thus the

word Villa never appears in direct connection with either place-name. The geographical location itself Signified the house, and in course of time the name of its owner has become synonymous. There are in effect only one Laurentine Villa and one Tuscan Villa in the history of architecture. At the end of the letter to Gallus, however, Pliny did employ the diminutive villula to stand for Laurentinum, much to the confusion of later interpreters. He must have meant this as an endearment, because the house was anything but small and modest, as we will see. It was Pliny's way of playing down the size of a place noted by some recent writers for its "lavishness" and "fantastic" quality.' In general the Latin word villa connotes a house in the country, built on a sizable plot of land and often intended by its wealthy owners as a seasonal, part-time habitation. Already in Roman Republican days the villas belonging to a single person tended to proliferate. Plutarch in his Lives likened the consul Lucullus to "Xerxes in a toga" because of the oriental profligacy of his expenditure on his marine establishments with their fish hatcheries. The same biographer quoted Lucullus as justifying the number of his villas with the exclamation; "Do you think me more stupid than cranes and storks that I do not change my residences with the seasons?" Plutarch also recorded the famous incident of the Apollo dining room, when Cicero tried to put to a blind test the fabled epicureanism of his friend Lucullus. By a ruse, Lucullus avoided being cornered. He Specified that the meal should take place in his Apollo triclinium, which he knew had the most sumptuous menu prescribed for it (Plutarch. Life of Lucullus 41.5-6). Cicero had little reason to play the moralist in the affair; he is credited with having eight villas of his own, including his favorite at Tusculum outside Rome, besides smaller ones on the coast. In his letters he often grumbled about his self-imposed political retirement. But if he had to be bored, he certainly chose pleasant and varied surroundings for his exile. Like Cicero, Marcus Terrentius Varro set himself up as a judge. Whether he did so in good conscience is another matter. He too possessed country estates aplenty. That did not stop him from including in his *De re rustica* a diatribe against the senselessness of luxury villas. He wrote a mock Platonic dialogue, set it in the Villa Publica on the Roman Campus Martius, and good-humoredly named the fictive debaters Mr. Sparrow, Mr. Magpie, Mr. Peacock, and so forth (*De re rustica* 3.1.2-11). It is all reminiscent



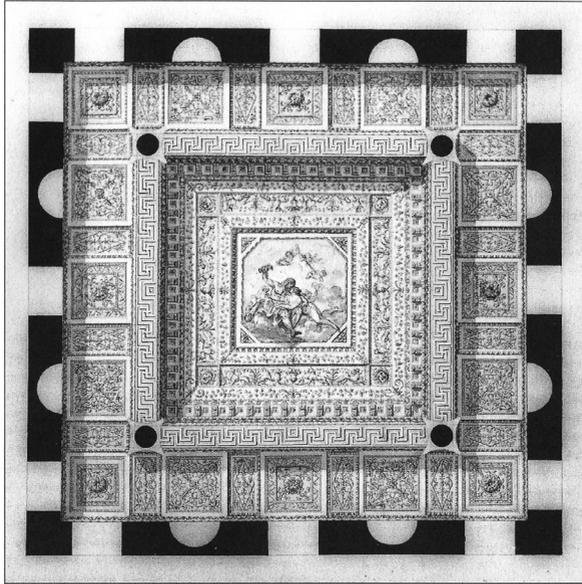
J. Coomans, House of the Tragic Poet Sallust, engraved and printed by Illman Brothers

of Aristophanes' comedy *The Birds* with its jokes at the expense of architects or city planners, and it is almost as funny. But Varro's debate about the meaning of villa had a serious side. A villa is defined as a place where pleasurable relaxation (otium) may mix with profitable forms of husbandry (negotium), such as the selling of game birds. The good old agrarian days are nostalgically preferred to the palatial villas of Lucullus, which are a drain on the well-being of the state. Costly revetment in marble, such as Lucullus employed, was to be despised in favor of the plain stucco that had covered the farming villa at its inception.

By the time of Pliny, a century and a half after Varro, the opprobrium attached to luxury villas had abated, or even dissipated, so frequent had they become. Pliny circumspectly avoided boasting about the luxury of his establishments; sizable they obviously were, but not rich, to judge from his silence about ornamental painting or sculpture. Pliny let down his guard only on a couple of occasions in his description of the Tuscan Villa. He discussed an outdoor dining pavilion, or stibadium, where the white marble benches offset the columns of green Carystian marble imported from an island in the Aegean. Earlier in the same letter he described one of the bedrooms in the villa, decorated with a marble revetment below a painted frieze of birds amid branches, speaking as if he had in mind his uncle's anecdote about the celebrated still life of grapes by Zeuxis, which live birds mistook for the real thing. In another of his letters to Caninus Rufus, Pliny criticized a former consul for doting on his villa to excess by adorning it with books and statues. Nevertheless Pliny, himself a consul, senator, and busy trial lawyer, subscribed to the time-honored custom of living in different villas at different times of the year. Those at Como stood on inherited lands, and Pliny refused to part with them at any price for sentimental reasons, even if they were not particularly profitable. He complained about having to trudge around the estates meeting tenant farmers and trying to settle their disputes, to the detriment of his literary pursuits. The Tuscan property in the hills lent itself primarily to a summertime and autumn routine. The Laurentine Villa served for winter and spring. All this and more Pliny pointed out in two letters to the same friend, Fuscus Salinator, a fellow lawyer. In the first, Pliny recounted his daily rounds in Tuscany, then in the second he went on to discuss his activities at Laurentinum. Thinking

back on the letters to Caninus, Voconius, Gallus, and Apollinaris, it is obvious that Pliny liked writing pendant letters as much as he liked living in pairs of houses.

Despite the unprofitable prospects at Como, Pliny's other estates did bring in some revenue. In Tuscany the principal cash crop was grapes. Letters regarding the harvest in the fall, the sale of the year's vintage, and the fairness of Pliny's dealings with middlemen show how seriously he took these matters. To Apollinaris he stressed the extensive rows of vines, but to Julius Naso he pointed out the risk of hail damage. In the next breath, however, he wrote with relief that the crop at Laurentinum had come in for him to fall back on. He alluded, seemingly tongue-in-cheek, to the figs that flourished in the sandy soil of Laurentinum's kitchen garden. But in reality the harvest he reaped came from his writing. Pliny was pretty much a gentleman farmer; neither villa could have provided for much beyond his own needs and those of his numerous servants and slaves. The question of staffing a villa brings to mind a significant omission on Pliny's part. Clearly he had slaves as well as freedmen and freedwomen, but he ignores their housing except to state that it was more commodious than average. He probably considered a letter an unsuitable place to catalog his worldly goods or list his retainers. His patrician correspondents would have known such mundane details anyway from their own experience. The net effect, however, is to deny the letters the dimension of human animation. An unnatural hush hangs over the villas, except during the boisterous merrymaking at the Saturnalia, as described to Gallus. Whatever the real statistics, the otium/negotium balance sheet remained an intellectual and moral goal to strive toward. Varro's writings, those of Vitruvius, and the hints in Columella's guide to property management all provided the necessary background to understanding this dichotomy, but Pliny expanded enormously upon it. His analyses of the Laurentine and Tuscan villas set the ground rules for the basic definition of a villa. His writings immediately establish the main points of reference-cardinal points, as it were. They help us grasp what the villa concept meant and to some extent continues to mean, in both an architectural and a social context. The notion of cardinal points also tallies well with Pliny's own scientific method of description, which never failed to refer to the compass rose.



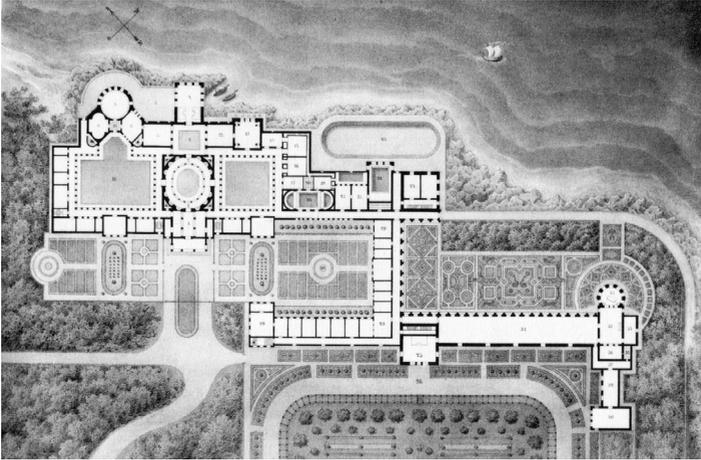
Potocki, *Laurentine Villa*, ceiling of triclinium

He oriented his villas according to the prevailing winds and to the rising and setting of the sun. These constant astronomical and meteorological indicators have not changed appreciably since Pliny's day, and they have therefore added immediate comprehensibility for readers over the ages. Such fundamental considerations as orientation still lie at the heart of any intelligent client/architect discussion about the merits of a building site in the countryside. But despite this semblance of science and practicality, conclusive physical evidence of the remains of the villas has so far eluded discovery, thereby casting doubt on their true location and even their reality. In this chapter I have selected four cardinal points to consider in depth. I shall trace them starting from Pliny's Laurentine and Tuscan villas and moving onward to others that in some way relate directly to the Plinian prototypes or that demonstrate the validity of his criteria in subsequent periods. The four cardinal points or criteria thus elucidate the basic desiderata that have motivated villa owners and designers from ancient times to the present. Each will be initially illustrated by one of the restitutions prepared by Karl Friedrich Schinkel (b. 1781) in the 1830's and published as color lithographs in the month before his death on 9 October 1841. With greater than usual artistry, Schinkel's four prints highlight these four cardinal characteristics: to see and be seen; room to breathe; openness and movement; house and garden.

#### To See and to Be Seen

Pliny's letters to Callus and Apollinaris begin with brief salutations, followed directly by descriptions of the seacoast near Ostia or the Tuscan hill country. The Laurentine Villa enjoyed a variety of prospects, including views of the Mediterranean. On the opposite side from the sandy shore where Pliny went for strolls, a rich pastureland stretched off to a backdrop of the distant low-lying Alban Hills. The general ambience is brilliantly portrayed in Schinkel's imaginary restitution of the marine villa. Its somewhat hazy silhouette is mirrored in the unruffled Mediterranean waters, heightening the miragelike quality of the building. A sailboat drifts by in a gentle puff of wind. Schinkel's viewpoint differs from Pliny's, which favored the entrance facade on the landward side, reached from Rome by either of two well-paved roads,

the Via Ostiense or the Via Laurentina. Pliny made a point of mentioning those routes to stress the villa's relative seclusion, yet ease of access. It had a private side looking out to sea, as shown by Schinkel, and a public side facing the road. Pliny could enjoy the feeling of remoteness but still arrive at the villa after a day's work in Rome in time to spend the night. He elsewhere recommended convenience and good roads as the key characteristics to look for when buying a country property. Villas might act as havens, but they ought not to be inaccessible or so large as to tax the energy and resources of a scholar-bureaucrat turned farmer. On the coastline the Laurentine Villa stands out, drawing attention to itself as a work of tasteful architecture. From the public road passersby would also have enticing glimpses of it, perhaps shielded by a screen of trees. The villa hides coyly but reveals itself for the delight of its owner and his guests. In the guests it is supposed to arouse feelings of admiration tinged with envy. One cannot help coveting Pliny's possessions. In fact he concluded his letter by guessing that poor Gallus, stuck back in town, was already dying to visit the house after having only read about it. Seen in this dual sense, a villa such as the Laurentine is like a beacon by the shore that attracts attention as its prospects radiate in all directions. Lest this analogy seem restricted to the marine villa, the principle applies just as strongly to the Tuscan situation of its counterpart. There the villa nestles on the slopes of a natural amphitheater, as Pliny described it to Apollinaris. A fertile plain extends below, with the Tiber winding through it, partly navigable at this point except during the height of the summer drought. The main residence is positioned to profit from these views and from the southerly prevailing breezes. They can play in and out of the long colonnade that stretches across the entire south façade, creating a shady zone away from the glare of the midday sun. The view down into the river valley compares to a carefully composed landscape picture, according to Pliny. He added that the villa sits partway down the slope and therefore is more easily accessible than it might sound. The pristine architecture, unstained by the smoke of cities or salt from the sea air, stand, out brightly for the traveler to spy from a distance against the green vineyards behind. This is no remote chalet or mountain eyrie, but a tantalizing blend of the near and the far. Precisely this quality of the remote yet accessible seems to have inspired



*The Fall of the House of Usher*, Douglas Percy Bliss, wood engraving (1938)

Andrea Palladio (1508-80) when he designed the most famous and influential villa of all time, La Rotonda.

(...)

Readers through the centuries have puzzled over Pliny's vague use of architectural terminology. Rarely did he specify the internal decoration or architectural framework except as already noted about the Tuscan Villa, in the painted room next to a small inner courtyard planted with four plane trees. On one point, however, he allowed no ambiguity. At every step along the way of his literary house tours, he referred his correspondents to the orientation of the principal rooms: whether they enjoyed the prevailing winds; whether they were suited to winter or summer use; whether they were secluded or noisy. Extending this principle, Pliny singled out the views from his villas, as when he stated that the howl-shaped hills at Tuscany resembled a beautiful painting: "You would be much delighted, were you to take a prospect of this place ... as you could scarce believe you were looking upon a real country, but a landscape painting drawn with all the beauties imaginable." In Pliny's mind, no rigid barrier existed between the real and built worlds; on the contrary, everything aimed at reducing that artificial division by any architectural means possible. Pliny's villas created a sense of openness and movement. The colonnades, *cryptoporticus*, and *enfilades* of rooms through which in his imagination he guided Gallus and Apollinaris encouraged leisurely strolling from space to space. Schinkel's restitution of the Laurentine plan suggests the complicated series of movements necessary in passing through the galleries, *loggias*, *pergolas*, and bow-fronted rooms, all proclaiming an openness to the surrounding countryside. But the various twists and turns are harmonized by Schinkel's use of a sinuous line to link them all in a single movement. Outdoor terraces and promenades in the gardens further blur the distinction between interior and exterior. The door and window surrounds themselves frame views of the seashore so as to reinforce the association between real views and the painted ones Pliny mentions. Earlier in the first century Statius had resorted to such framing devices in

his poem extolling the delightful views from the Neapolitan marine villa of Pollius Felix - a happy man indeed, as his name suggests. From the Capo di Massa promontory he enjoyed the silhouettes of Cape Sorrento and Cape Miseno appearing through different windows, like the scenic lookout points along the modern Amalfi Drive as it twists its way along this same coast. Pliny could relate to Statius's description, having spent some of his youth at Misenum across the bay. He said that his three-sided Laurentine dining *triclinium*, like Pollius's, dominated three different expanses of the sea.<sup>30</sup> This Laurentine *triclinium* stood in the path of the occasional southwest gale, which at times sent the salt spray beating against the walls. An adjacent group of rooms, by contrast, protected from the wind in the lee of the house, formed a kind of *solarium* ideal for winter. The *cryptoporticus* in the garden Pliny devised so as to keep off the southwesterers by means of shuttered windows. But by opening them in calm weather, he could "have a thorough draft of the west wind, which prevents all bad effects arising from the stagnation of unwholesome air." No less importantly at the Tuscan Villa, the free movement of air figured right from the beginning of the letter to Apollinaris. The thermal system of *downdrafts* prevalent in the mountains creates convection currents, giving rise to refreshing gusts. In the middle of one wing of the villa the text describes a perfect dining gazebo, open to the "wholesome air" from the Apennines. These frequent references to winds, *vistas*, and crisscrossing axes demonstrate how vital Pliny considered them to the success of a villa. Proper alignment to distant landmarks, to prevailing breezes, and to the rising or setting sun dictates the overall form a villa must take. Obviously it must be more supple than rigid to pliantly comply with so many overlapping climatic and picturesque considerations. The onrushing, wavelike motion of Pliny's prose, captured nicely by Schinkel's Laurentine plan, hardly gives the reader time to catch his breath. Pliny professed unawareness of the conceptual difficulty his letters pose. They must be followed very closely so as not to lose the thread leading one through a virtual labyrinth of interior and exterior spaces.

Pierre de la Ruffinière du Prey, *The Villas of Pliny: from Antiquity to Posterity*, Chapter 1: Four Cardinal Points of a Villa, University of Chicago Press (1994)



Pierre Ambroise François Choderlos de Laclos (1741 - 1803)

II

*Dangerous Liaisons*  
(1872)



*Les liaisons  
dangereuses*  
par  
*Choderlos de Laclos*

*Présenté par André Malraux*

*Texte intégral.*



Choderlos de Laclos, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* (1782)

In a pair of sumptuous drawingrooms, one in a Parisian mansion, the other in a chateau on a luxurious estate in the countryside surrounding Paris, two aristocrats are very bored. The Marquise de Merteuil decides, therefore, to construct a little intrigue for her own amusement and the amusement of her former lover, the Vicomte de Valmont. The Marquise is aware that a young girl of good family, Cécile Volanges, has only just left the convent so that she can be married to the Comte de Gercourt. Now, the Marquise has a bone to pick with this particular Comte, and so she suggests to the Vicomte that he seduce and debauch Cécile to create a scandal and humiliate Gercourt. Valmont accepts the Marquise's proposal somewhat coolly, since he already has his eyes on another prey, the highly religious Présidente de Tourvel, the chaste wife of a member of Parliament. But, never one to refuse a challenge, Valmont suggests that he and the Marquise enter into a slightly different bet: if he can obtain written proof that he has slept with the Présidente, the Marquise must yield herself to him.

Meanwhile, Cécile has been presented to society, and in society she meets the charming and gentle Chevalier Danceny. Danceny becomes Cécile's music teacher and slowly, with a little coaxing from the Marquise de Merteuil, the two young people fall in love. During this time, Valmont is out in the country on his aunt's estate, trying to turn the Présidente de Tourvel's head. He has very little luck in this department despite his use of every known trick in the book. Then, as coincidence would have, Cécile's mother, Madame Volanges, who corresponds regularly with the Présidente de Tourvel, happens to say some rather unflattering things about Valmont in a letter which Valmont just happens to steal and read. And thus it is that Valmont resolves to seduce the little Volanges as revenge for her mother's only too accurate trash-talk.

Cécile's "seduction" would be more accurately termed "rape," but the girl is persuaded to enter into a bizarre student-teacher relationship with Valmont, so that for a while she is being courted by Danceny and "loved" nightly by Valmont. During his time as Cécile's teacher, Valmont is also able to win the heart of the Présidente de Tourvel.

However, the Marquise de Merteuil is not so easily pleased. Rather than encourage the Vicomte de Valmont to meet the conditions of their original agreement, she mocks him for having fallen in love with the Présidente de Tourvel. Valmont's pride does not withstand these attacks very well, and to avoid compromising his reputation as a good-for-nothing gigolo, he leaves the Présidente cold, with no explanation. Cécile fares no better, after a particularly rough night in Valmont's room, she miscarries his child.

Now things are really looking bad for everyone involved. The Présidente de Tourvel removes herself to a convent where she proceeds to die of grief and shame. Merteuil and Valmont are never able to reconcile their little snit and can only agree to go to war with one another. Danceny learns that Valmont seduced Cécile and challenges him to a duel; and Danceny wins the duel. Valmont hands over his correspondence with the Marquise to Danceny on his deathbed; all of society learns of her schemes and machinations. The Marquise is forced to flee town and, like a wicked old witch, is never heard from again. Full of regret for her activities with Valmont, Cécile returns to the convent from whence she came, with the intention of becoming a nun.



Illustration of Pierre Choderlos de Laclos' *Dangerous Liaisons*, Letter 44 (1796)

## DANGEROUS LIAISONS

### CÉCILE VOLANGES TO SOPHIE CARNAY, AT THE URSULINES OF ...

You see, My dear friend, that I keep my word to you, and that bonnets and frills do not take up all my time; there will always be some left for you. However, I have seen more adornments in this one single day than in all the four years we passed together; and I think that the superb Tanvillej will have more vexation at my first visit, when I shall certainly ask to see her, than she has ever fancied that she afforded us, when she used to come and see us in fiocchi.k Mamma has consulted me in everything; she treats me much less as a schoolgirl than of old. I have a waiting maid of my own; I have a room and a closet at my disposition; and I write this to you at a very pretty desk, of which I have the key, and where I can lock up all that I wish. Mamma has told me that I am to see her every day when she rises, that I need not have my hair dressed before dinner, because we shall always be alone, and that then she will tell me every day when I am to see her in the afternoon. The rest of the time is at my disposal, and I have my harp, my drawing, and books as at the convent, only there is no Mother Perpétue here to scold me, and it is nothing to anybody but myself, if I choose to do nothing at all. But as I have not my Sophie here to chat and laugh with, I would just as soon occupy myself.

It is not yet five o'clock; I have not to go and join Mamma until seven: there's time enough, if I had anything to tell you! But as yet they have not spoken to me of anything, and were it not for the preparations I see being made, and the number of millinersl who all come for me, I should believe that they had no thought of marrying me, and that that was the nonsense of the good Joséphine.m However, Mamma has told me so often that a young lady should stay in the convent until she marries that, since she has taken me out, I suppose Josephine was right.

A carriage has just stopped at the door, and Mamma tells me to come to her at once. If it were to be the Gentleman! I am not dressed, my hand trembles and my heart is beating. I asked my waiting maid if she knew who was with my mother. "Certainly," she said, "it's Monsieur C---." And she laughed. Oh, I believe 'tis he! I will be sure to come back and relate to you what passes. There is his name, at any rate. I must not keep him waiting. For a moment, adieu....

How you will laugh at your poor Cécile! Oh, I have really been disgraceful! But you would have been caught just as I. When I went in to Mamma, I saw a gentleman in black standing by her. I bowed to him as well as I could, and stood still without being able to budge an inch. You can imagine how I scrutinized him.

"Madame," he said to my mother, as he bowed to me, "what a charming young lady! I feel more than ever the value of your kindness." At this very definite remark, I was seized with a fit of trembling, so much so that I could hardly stand: I found an armchair and sat down in it, very red and disconcerted. Hardly was I there, when I saw the man at my feet. Your poor Cecile quite lost her head; as Mamma said, I was absolutely terrified. I jumped up, uttering a piercing cry, just as I did that day when it thundered. Mamma burst out laughing, saying to me, "Well! what is the matter with you? Sit down, and give your foot to Monsieur." Indeed, my dear friend, the gentleman was a

shoemaker. I can't describe to you how ashamed I was; mercifully there was no one there but Mamma. I think that, when I am married, I shall give up employing that shoemaker.

So much for our wisdom—admit it! Adieu. It is nearly six o'clock, and my waiting maid tells me that I must dress. Adieu, my dear Sophie, I love you, just as well as if I were still at the convent.

P.S. I don't know by whom to send my letter, so that I shall wait until Joséphine comes.

PARIS, 3RD AUGUST, 17 --.



THE MARQUISE DE MERTEUIL TO THE VICOMTE DE VALMONT,  
AT THE CHÂTEAU DE ...

Come back, my dear Vicomte, come back; what are you doing, what can you be doing with an old aunt, whose whole property is settled on you? Set off at once; I have need of you. I have an excellent idea, and I should like to confide its execution to you. These few words should suffice; and only too honored at my choice, you ought to come, with enthusiasm, to receive my orders on your knees: but you abuse my kindness, even since you have ceased to take advantage of it, and between the alternatives of an eternal hatred and excessive indulgence, your happiness demands that my indulgence wins the day. I am willing then to inform you of my projects, but swear to me like a faithful cavalier that you will embark on no other adventure till this one be brought to an end. It is worthy of a hero: you will serve both love and vengeance; it will be, in short, one *rouerie* the more to include in your Memoirs: yes, in your Memoirs, for I wish them to be printed, and I will charge myself with the task of writing them. But let us leave that, and come back to what is occupying me.

Madame de Volanges is marrying her daughter: it is still a secret, but she imparted it to me yesterday. And whom do you think she has chosen for her son-in-law? The Comte de Gercourt. Who would have thought that I should ever become Gercourt's cousin? I was furious.... Well! do you not divine me now? Oh, dull brains! Have you forgiven him then the adventure of the Intendant? And I, have I not still more cause to complain of him, monster that you are?

But I will calm myself, and the hope of vengeance soothes my soul.

You have been bored a hundred times, like myself, by the importance which Gercourt sets upon the wife who shall be his, and by his fatuous presumption, which leads him to believe he will escape the inevitable fate. You know his ridiculous preferences for convent education and his even more ridiculous prejudice in favor of the discretion of blondes. In fact, I would wager, that for all that the little Volanges has an income of sixty thousand livres, he would never have made this marriage if she had been dark or had not been bred at the convent. Let us prove to him then that he is but a fool: no doubt he will be made so one of these days; it isn't that of which I am afraid; but 'twould be pleasant indeed if he were to make his *débuts* as one! How we should amuse ourselves on the day after, when we heard him boasting, for he will boast; and then, if you once form this little girl, it would be a rare mishap if Gercourt did not become, like another man, the joke of all Paris.

For the rest, the heroine of this new romance merits all your attentions: she is really pretty; it is only fifteen, 'tis a rosebud, *gaucher* in truth, incredibly so, and quite without affectation. But you men are not afraid of that; moreover, a certain languishing glance, which really promises great things. Add to this that I exhort you to it: you can only thank me and obey.

You will receive this letter tomorrow morning. I request that tomorrow, at seven o'clock in the evening, you may be with me. I shall receive nobody until eight, not even the reigning Chevalier: he has not head enough for such a mighty piece of work. You see that love does not blind me. At eight o'clock I will grant you your liberty, and you shall come back at ten to sup with the fair object; for mother and daughter will sup with me. Adieu, it is past noon: soon I shall have put you out of my thoughts.

PARIS, 4TH AUGUST, 17 --.



*Dangerous Liaisons*, movie, directed by Stephen Frears (1988)

LES LIAISONS DANGEREUSES  
THROUGH THE EYES OF ANDRÉ  
MALRAUX

Since its resurrection in the early twentieth century after a long period of near oblivion, Choderlos de Laclos's novel *Les Liaisons dangereuses* has come to be regarded as possibly the best French novel of the eighteenth century and one of the outstanding works of European literature. Not surprisingly, there is now a substantial body of critical commentary devoted to the work and among this, interestingly enough, a number of essays by notable French literary figures of the twentieth century such as Jean Giraudoux, Roger Vailland and André Malraux. The present discussion concerns André Malraux's contribution which provides a particularly illuminating account of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, but which, while endorsing the favourable modern response to the work, presents some important challenges to aspects of prevailing critical opinion. Malraux's essay on *Les Liaisons dangereuses* has been published in a number of contexts. It first appeared in a volume entitled *Tableau de la littérature française* published by Gallimard shortly before World War II (Gide, 1939: 417–28).<sup>1</sup> Malraux republished it in 1970, together with studies of Goya and the revolutionary leader Saint-Just, in a work entitled *Le Triangle noir*, adding a preface which included additional reflections on Laclos. The essay has also been used on a number of occasions as a preface to post-war editions of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*. Malraux's analysis has become quite well known and critics have often cited it with approval. As early as 1959, one academic commentator praised Malraux's 'profound analysis' of *Les Liaisons dangereuses* (Cherpack, 1959: 513), and in 1978 another spoke of Malraux's 'famous article' (Rosbottom, 1978: 64), while a third wrote that Malraux's essay had been 'a milestone in the reversal of French critical opinion of *Les Liaisons dangereuses*' (Free, 1978: 9). This climate of general approval has continued to the present day, and despite occasional dissenting voices on specific points of interpretation, Malraux's analysis seems to enjoy continuing respect among most academic commentators. Curiously enough, however, the essay has seldom been considered in any detail, most critics limiting themselves to relatively brief references or perhaps a short quotation.<sup>2</sup> In large measure, therefore, the essay remains unexplored territory and one

might still legitimately ask precisely what Malraux's arguments are. If his account throws valuable light on *Les Liaisons dangereuses*, as critics have said, in what respects is this so? The present article responds to this question. The answer it gives endorses the favourable critical view of Malraux's analysis, but it suggests, nonetheless, that important aspects of what he has to say have not been fully appreciated. Malraux certainly admires *Les Liaisons dangereuses* but his reasons for doing so diverge in important ways from those offered by many contemporary commentators. Ultimately, as we shall see, he invites us to see the work in a perspective that is considerably more thought-provoking than the one in which it is conventionally viewed. In his introductory comments in *Le Triangle noir*, Malraux offers some brief observations on the cultural transformation that took place in Europe in the century or so preceding the publication of Laclos's work in 1782. A key feature of Enlightenment Europe, Malraux writes, was its 'radical abandonment of Christianity', a process that had commenced a century earlier but whose significance only became fully evident in the course of the eighteenth century (Malraux, 1970: 10). In one sense, of course, this observation is hardly new. It is a commonplace that the discoveries of Newton and the writings of thinkers such as Locke, Hume and the French philosophes, ultimately led the eighteenth century, or at least a major part of its intelligentsia, to embrace rationalist and materialist accounts of the universe, relegating religious faith to a marginal role at best. Malraux, however, is thinking of something of more direct and personal concern than scientific laws and philosophical arguments. He is thinking of the implications of this cultural transformation at the level of individual psychology, and his focus is not science or philosophy but art – and, in the present context, literature. In the field of literary creation, Malraux argues, a key consequence of the radical abandonment of Christianity was the disappearance of the sense of passion and fatalité essential to the tragic hero. In the Christian world, he writes, 'It was less important to know why a man had killed another man than to know if the dead man had been saved.' Each person's life was 'a field of combat in which the Devil was the protagonist', and it was the outcome of this internal struggle, not the psychology of relationships between men and women, that



Pierre Cailleteau, *Hôtel de Montmorency-Luxembourg*, Paris (1710)

counted first and foremost (Malraux, 1970: 27). The suggestion is not, Malraux adds, that previous writers had been unaware of the psychology of human interaction, but simply that they regarded it as secondary. The crucial concern had been the struggle for the individual's soul, and one can readily see how this general schema applies not only to Christian thought, with its exhortations to imitate Christ and ward off the Tempter, but also, as Malraux suggests, to the view of the world embodied as late as the seventeenth century in works such as the tragedies of Corneille. In this later context, the struggle is, of course, no longer with the Devil, traditional Christian faith having lost much of its hold; but there remains, nonetheless, an aspiration to 'higher' values, such as fidelity, honour and gloire, and a struggle to resist the temptation of their ignominious opposites. Stated more generally, there is still, despite the waning of Christian faith, a powerful notion of transcendence – a belief in something of greater and more enduring value than life's passing pleasures. In Malraux's terms, there is still the world of passion and fatalité – the world, for example, of Racine's *Andromache*, who resolves to die rather than marry her dead husband's mortal enemy, or of Corneille's *Horace*, for whom patriotism must prevail over personal attachments; or, to choose an example from English literature, the world of *Romeo and Juliet*, who, young though they are, forsake everything rather than abandon a certain ideal of love. The eighteenth century, Malraux argues, replaced passion in this sense with mere desire – the simple wish to possess and enjoy. The point is vital to his analysis. Europe's radical abandonment of Christianity, he suggests, transformed more than its understanding of the physical and social world; it also altered individual men and women's affective life – the realm of human psychology – and here the sense of transcendence faded as rapidly as it had elsewhere, with consequences no less radical. Enlightenment thought, in short, undermined much more than Christian theology; it also transformed European sensibility, replacing passion with desire. This meant a major shift in literature's centre of gravity. Now it was more important to know why a man had killed another than it was to know if the dead man had been saved. Or, in less dramatic terms, since the object of desire was usually the other person, or his or her possessions, or his or her good opinion (merited or not), interactions between men and women (how one might entice

someone into bed, induce them to part with their money, or persuade them of one's worth and consequence) became more important than any internal struggle within the individual. Once again, the claim is not that previous writers had been unaware of these aspects of human psychology. (One has only to think of Iago's deception of Othello, or the various forms of trickery practised in Boccaccio's *Decameron*.) But human interaction, in its multifarious forms, now became the very cloth from which literature was cut. Strictly speaking, as Malraux points out, passions had not disappeared, but their nature had changed and they were shown in a different light: now they were simply a person's distinguishing psychological characteristic, their obsession, their *idée fixe*, and thus a blind spot open for exploitation, or possibly an object of comic derision. In the world of desire, in short, an individual's passions simply become facts to be noted: they might well prove important as a means to gain an advantage but they are not important in themselves. These elements of Malraux's analysis throw valuable light on the directions taken by European literature over the course of the eighteenth century. They help explain, for example, the episodic nature of so much of the century's fiction, clearly evident in a picaresque novel such as *Gil Blas*, but equally important, if less immediately obvious, in works such as Richardson's *Pamela* or Marivaux's *La Vie de Marianne*. The point can be clarified by means of a contrast. Underlying a Cornelian or Racinian tragedy is an attempt to unify life – a resolve, pivotal to the action, to forsake the world of transitory pleasures in the name of a higher value. The trajectory of such works is tied inescapably to a key moment of decision – a situation to which the tightly focused, time-limited domain of the stage play is, of course, very well suited. Increasingly impervious to higher values, however, the eighteenth century is much more at ease in the world of transitory concerns; and since the world of desire is, in principle at least, endlessly renewable, its literature proceeds not by unification but by proliferation.<sup>3</sup> Hence the attraction of the novel, especially the sprawling, episodic novel in which constraints of time and place play a much reduced role. Hence also the 'social' nature of so much of the century's literature. 'No matter how profound it may be', Malraux writes, 'the Christian experience of the world always culminates in solitude' (1970: 27), the focus, as we have seen, always on the hero's



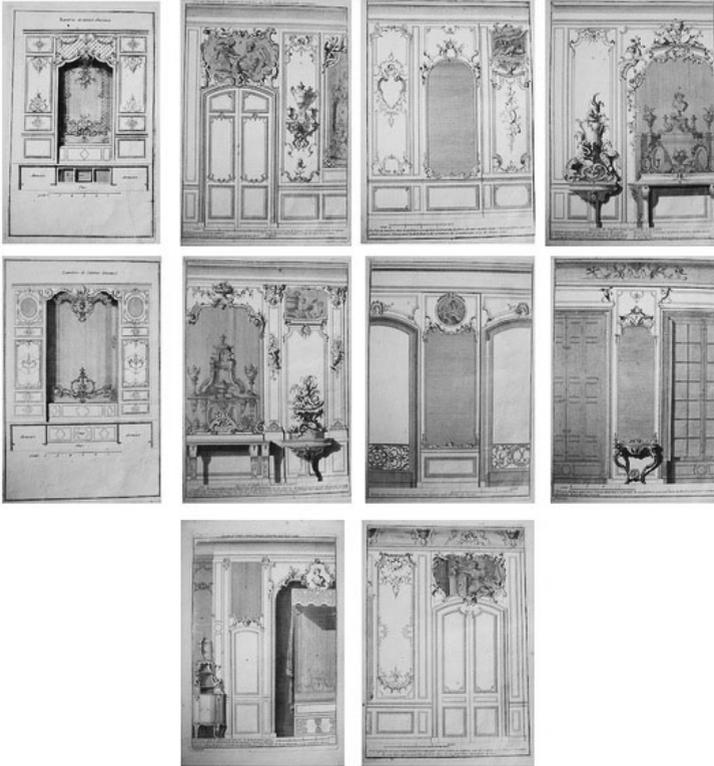
Paul Lacroix, Chromolithography depicting an 18<sup>th</sup> century Parisian Interior (1876)

internal struggle. In the world of desire, by contrast, interest shifts to relationships between men and women, who now, as Malraux writes, 'act upon one another' (1970: 26), the novel deriving its sustenance from the varied contests between those who desire and those who (or whose possessions or good opinion) are the objects of desire. (...)

Early in his essay, Malraux describes *Les Liaisons dangereuses* as an 'an architecture of lies' – a carefully calculated series of manoeuvres designed to mislead and entrap. Ultimately, the marquise de Merteuil and the vicomte de Valmont themselves become casualties of the events they set in motion, and a little more will be said about the novel's denouement at a later stage. For the present, it is instructive simply to reflect on Malraux's observation as it stands. The first thing one might say, perhaps, is that deception is nothing new in Western literature. It occurs frequently in Shakespeare, for instance (Iago is probably Shakespeare's most infamous deceiver), and is a common means of gratifying desire in the literature of Laclos's own century: Lesage's *Gil Blas* has scarcely set foot outside his native Santillane before falling victim to trickery, and Tom Jones is repeatedly wrong-footed by deceivers seeking to profit at his expense. What, then, is new about *Les Liaisons dangereuses*? What role does deceit play here that it has not already played in the literature of Laclos's predecessors?

For the marquise de Merteuil and the vicomte de Valmont, Malraux argues, deception and the manipulation of others have become, in effect, a way of life – almost ends in themselves. Iago manipulates Othello because he is consumed with envy and resentment; *Gil Blas* is tricked by a flatterer who wants to inveigle money out of him; and Tom Jones is deceived to ruin his

chances with his beloved Sophia. But while Merteuil and Valmont also have desires to satisfy, in their case these are secondary. Merteuil's plan to disgrace Cécile Volanges is certainly motivated by her desire to settle scores with her former lover, Gercourt, but as Malraux points out, this is 'mere information' for the reader. It provides the necessary trigger for Merteuil's action, and thus for a major part of the plot, but there is no question of a genuine hatred of Gercourt or of a reaction similar, for example, to Mme de Tourvel's profound grief after her betrayal by Valmont (Malraux, 1970: 35, 36). Fundamentally, Merteuil deceives not for revenge but because she wishes to live in a world in which she controls the actions of others, and the same applies to Valmont. True, Valmont is attracted to Mme de Tourvel and eventually seems to develop a kind of love for her – even if, as Merteuil tells him, it is merely the kind of love a sultan might feel for his favourite sultana (Laclos, 1979: 326); but ultimately Valmont deceives for the same reason Merteuil deceives – so that he will always act in accordance with what he calls his 'principles',<sup>6</sup> and those principles, like Merteuil's, only secondarily concern the satisfaction of desires. First and foremost they concern a particular state of mind – a state of mind akin to that of a skilful general on a field of battle whose aim is not simply to vanquish but never to lose control of his enemy's movements.



18<sup>th</sup> century French Interior Design

## THE INTENTIONAL FALLACY

I am going to very intentionally commit the intentional fallacy, because the New Criticism game is especially problematic when dealing with a novel like *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. I say this for two reasons.

The first reason that *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* demands the use of intentional "fallacy" is: we cannot accurately describe it in modern literary terms-- rather, we cannot be assured of our own accuracy of judgment, because fiction was a very different medium during the lead-up to the Revolution. Formal restraints and literary tropes were present, but they were not considered an end unto themselves. That is, one did not write fiction for the sake of fiction, but to make a point, or to instruct, or lampoon well-known socialites and aristocrats with barely disguised caricatures, or masquerade as a work of non-fiction (like the slanderous, anonymously penned *Life of Mme du Barry*). It is useless to apply modern literary terms like "tragic hero" to a denizen of such a novel, because an anachronistic appellation denies the character his or her rightful place. This would place the character in a box which the author-- the creator-- never imagined. Their actions can take on false meanings through the misapplication of literary terms.

Secondly, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* is intentionally stripped of any vestige of the author's voice. It is written in letters and only letters, and none of those letters are from Choderlos de Laclos. There is a brief epilogue from an unnamed source, but (unlike many of the textual interjections with which writers of the time liked to pepper their books) the speaker in the epilogue does not self-identify as the author; in fact, he or she appears to inhabit the world of the novel, speaking of the characters' fates as though they were real people. Nor does the novel contain any trace of autobiography: Laclos was a strict moralist and a serious political thinker, whereas his characters are childishly self-centered and appear to have no idea that anything exists outside their Paris salons, country houses, and the plush carriages which carry them between the two. Moreover, the state of France at the time would have been difficult to ignore, full as it was of angry, starving workers on the brink of revolution; real fear may account for the characters' utter devotion to the small dramas of their social milieu and complete political apathy. Conversely, Laclos may have wanted to chronicle

the libertines' small, upper-class sexual revolution and/or to display libertine society's deliberate amorality as part of a much larger structure of cruelty and oppression. (It is questions like these which demand that attention be paid to the artist's milieu and possible intentions.)

All we receive is Laclos' interpretation of his characters' thought processes. There is little background and almost no physical description, and Laclos expects his readers to know the world which he describes quite intimately. Towards a deeper understanding of the novel's influences and place in its own society, an invaluable understanding for modern readers, I hope to accurately describe the French libertine culture in pre-Revolutionary France, as seen through contemporary novels and plays (such as those of de Sade, Moliere, and Crebillon fils) and through historical research on these last lustful gasps of the ancien regime.

## THE PLACE OF A PORNOGRAPHIC/ PHILOSOPHIC BOOK

A libertine novel offers sharp and much-needed social criticism and satire in the form of an erotically charged narrative that is structured to draw in the reader, sometimes against his will, even to the point of sexually stimulating its reader; it can be philosophical, pornographic, or both at once. Darnton, citing L'escole des filles, says: "The early novel celebrated love, both refined... and crude... Works that in retrospect seem central to the history of pornography also belonged to the rise of the novel as a genre..." (*The Forbidden Best-Sellers of Pre-Revolutionary France*, 86)

To the modern reader, it seems counterintuitive to put philosophic and pornographic tracts in the same category. Enlightenment-era French readers and publishers, however, did just that. We often think of philosophy as stuffy or academic, but useful to personal development, a sort of medicine in print. Our concept of pornography assigns it completely opposing values and qualities. It is trashy and exciting, but useless, offering no intelligent analysis and ultimately rendering itself a waste of time. A modern pornographic work could be defined as a direct portrayal of a sexually exciting act or situation; it is internally devoid of the criticism that defines philosophy, and created solely to provoke a physical response in its watcher or reader.

Things were different in 1782, when Laclos



Jean François de Troy, *A reading of Molière* (ca.1728)

published *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. Darnton writes of the eighteenth-century reader, who 'did not... distinguish a genre of "pure" pornography from erotic fiction, anti-clerical tracts, and other varieties of "philosophical books."' Pornography may or may not have changed since the Enlightenment. However, given the ambivalent nature of pornography in any society, it is more useful to consider the place and function of written sexual material. If we think of books and pamphlets in terms of their potential threat to the established order, it suddenly makes perfect sense that eighteenth-century treatment of philosophy and pornography resulted in their mutual conflation. We make a false distinction when we try to identify *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* as either a sexy book or a serious social-critique book. It is a perfect synthesis of presently opposing themes, yet not a synthesis: these themes had not, at the time he was writing, been separated and set against one another, Athena battling Aphrodite. *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* was not written as pornography, philosophy, or a synthesis of the two. It was, rather, a novel written to express the social conditions of his age.

#### LACLOS' USE OF THE EPISTOLARY FORM

The epistolary novel is at once hermetically sealed and deeply violated; it is a form that will always place the reader far outside the course of events, while at the same time intruding upon secret after secret, confessed by the very characters who wish to preserve their secrecy. I say "hermetically sealed" because there is no textual evidence of a single author, but the book presents itself as a packet of stolen letters-- in the sheet form in which most books came, unbound yet with the author's distinctive handwriting smoothed over by the anonymous letterpress, they would be indistinguishable from the real thing. Therefore we have a packet of letters that straddle the line between fact and fiction: a bundle of love letters and a complex ovel all bound up together and sold to a scandal-

hungry public. As Françoise Meltzer notes in her essay *Laclos' Purloined Letters*, "Reflexivity, or that characteristic of a work which points the finger back at itself by consciously alluding to the tools of its medium, is apparent in the epistolary genre in its direct allusions to ink, paper, pens, writing desks or the lack thereof, waiting for the mail, asking for new addresses, and so forth." (*Laclos' Purloined Letters*, p. 516)

One of the "tools" which Meltzer forgets to mention is that of genesis. That is, why do these letters exist in the first place? Why are the characters separated, and therefore forced to communicate via writing? The strict epistolary form, consisting only of letters, enforces a constant set of separations between close friends, lovers, and family members; these generally are the people who would bother to write to one another. Though the period did produce great public letter-writers like Voltaire, most correspondence was limited to family and friends. Therefore, the form in which Laclos decided to write his novel reflexively informed a number of plot and character points.

As mentioned, there must be sets of characters that are close enough to write to one another, and preferably close enough that the characters can attempt intimacy and the trust of their correspondent. We see the importance of trust and comfort demonstrated early on: the first letter of the novel is written by Cécile, a charmingly naïve fifteen-year-old, to her close friend at the convent she has just left. There are eleven letters from Cécile to Sophie Carnay, all of them in parts I and II, diminishing in frequency and eventually discontinued as Cécile is drawn into a social milieu which she cannot expect her friend to understand.



Honoré de Balzac (1799-1850)

III  
*Father Goriot*  
(1835)

LE  
**PÈRE GORIOT**

PAR  
M. DE BALZAC.

*All is true.*  
SHAKSPEARE.

TOISIÈME ÉDITION, REVUE ET CORRIGÉE.

Premier Volume.



PARIS.  
LIBRAIRIE DE WERDET,  
49, Rue de Seint-Germain;  
SPACHMANN, ÉDITEUR,  
24, rue Coquenard.

1855.

Honoré de Balzac, *Le Père Goriot*, Librairie de Werdet, Spachmann Éditeur; Paris (1835)

The story takes place in Paris in the year 1819, in a decrepit, dirty, ill-smelling boardinghouse on the left bank of the Seine.

Mme. Vauquer, a stingy old widow who owns the place, rules over her tenants. They are people with modest means and desires, like Mlle. Michonneau, the old maid; Poiret, a puppet-like human being; and a young orphan, Victorine Taillefer. Three tenants stand out in this company: Eugène de Rastignac, a young student from the provinces, of noble origin, but poor and eager to try his luck in the capital; Vautrin, the “strong” man, bon vivant and humorous, but mysterious and alarming; and Père Goriot, a retired merchant, who seems to be suffering from a mysterious sorrow.

Rastignac soon discovers that strange events are taking place at the seemingly respectable boardinghouse: Old Goriot pressing silver dishes into ingots, Vautrin furtively returning to the house in the middle of the night in spite of the bolted doors, Goriot being visited by pretty girls whose bills he pays.

Rastignac is going to find out the solution of one of the mysteries. Pursuing his ambitions, he manages to be introduced into Parisian high society with the help of his influential cousin, Mme. de Beauséant. Everything seems to be working according to his plans, but for mentioning the name of Goriot, he finds himself shut out of the Countess de Restaud’s salon, the meeting place of the cream of society. Crestfallen over his first faux-pas, he learns from Mme. Beauséant the secret of Père Goriot’s life. The old man has ruined himself and has accepted a miserable life in order that his two daughters might be wealthy. Anastasie has married a nobleman, Count de Restaud; Delphine an Alsatian banker, Baron of Nucingen. Goriot, welcomed as long as his fortune had lasted, found himself ostracized by his sons-in-law when he became poor.

Vautrin, who has sensed ambition in Rastignac, cynically offers him a bargain: The young student should win the love of the fair Victorine, whose father is extremely rich but who has disowned her. As the only obstacle to Victorine’s inheriting the fortune is her brother Frederic, Vautrin for the sum of 200,000 francs would manage to get rid of young Taillefer, thus insuring Victorine’s and Rastignac’s fortune. Rastignac is indignant, but one feels that he is secretly tempted by the proposal.

After Rastignac’s failure in high society, he will try, aided by his cousin, to conquer the “middle world.” He is introduced to Mme. de Nucingen and, with the help of Goriot, soon becomes her lover. In the meantime, Vautrin has started his Machiavellian plan and has Victorine’s brother murdered. Everything seems to be in his favor when Mlle. Michonneau, a spy for the police, discovers Vautrin to be an escaped convict and has him arrested. This ends the detective story.

Goriot’s daughters come to him for help. Their husbands have discovered their affairs and are trying to ruin them. In a pathetic scene, the two daughters show their monstrous egoism and pride. Père Goriot is afflicted by a stroke. He soon becomes delirious, muttering incoherent words, revealing also his extreme love for the daughters who have left him, one to go to a dance, the other to protect her fortune.

Goriot dies blessing his daughters, with only Rastignac and Bianchon, a medical student, at his bedside. Rastignac attends to the funeral arrangements and, after saying a last goodbye to Goriot in the graveyard overlooking Paris, declares war on the capital: “Beware, Paris, here I come” and goes to Mme. de Nucingen’s for dinner.



*"Aux uns, il faisait horreur; aux autres, il faisait pitié." Le Père Goriot.*  
Father Goriot, Engraved by A. Baulant (1840-50)

## FATHER GORIOT

Mme. Vauquer (nee de Conflans) is an elderly person, who for the past forty years has kept a lodging-house in the Rue Nueve-Sainte-Genevieve, in the district that lies between the Latin Quarter and the Faubourg Saint-Marcel. Her house (known in the neighborhood as the *Maison Vauquer*) receives men and women, old and young, and no word has ever been breathed against her respectable establishment; but, at the same time, it must be said that as a matter of fact no young woman has been under her roof for thirty years, and that if a young man stays there for any length of time it is a sure sign that his allowance must be of the slenderest. In 1819, however, the time when this drama opens, there was an almost penniless young girl among Mme. Vauquer's boarders.

That word drama has been somewhat discredited of late; it has been overworked and twisted to strange uses in these days of dolorous literature; but it must do service again here, not because this story is dramatic in the restricted sense of the word, but because some tears may perhaps be shed *intra et extra muros* before it is over.

Will any one without the walls of Paris understand it? It is open to doubt. The only audience who could appreciate the results of close observation, the careful reproduction of minute detail and local color, are dwellers between the heights of Montrouge and Montmartre, in a vale of crumbling stucco watered by streams of black mud, a vale of sorrows which are real and joys too often hollow; but this audience is so accustomed to terrible sensations, that only some unimaginable and well-nigh impossible woe could produce any lasting impression there. Now and again there are tragedies so awful and so grand by reason of the complication of virtues and vices that bring them about, that egotism and selfishness are forced to pause and are moved to pity; but the impression that they receive is like a luscious fruit, soon consumed. Civilization, like the car of Juggernaut, is scarcely stayed perceptibly in its progress by a heart less easy to break than the others that lie in its course; this also is broken, and Civilization continues on her course triumphant. And you, too, will do the like; you who with this book in your white hand will sink back among the cushions of your armchair, and say to yourself, "Perhaps this may amuse me." You will read the story of Father Goriot's secret woes, and, dining thereafter with an unspoiled appetite, will lay the blame of your insensibility upon the writer, and accuse him of exaggeration, of writing romances. Ah! once for all, this drama is neither a fiction nor a romance! All is true,—so true, that every one can discern the elements of the tragedy in his own house, perhaps in his own heart.

The lodging-house is Mme. Vauquer's own property. It is still standing in the lower end of the Rue Nueve-Sainte-Genevieve, just where the road slopes so sharply down to the Rue de l'Arbalette, that wheeled traffic seldom passes that way, because it is so stony and steep. This position is sufficient to account for the silence prevalent in the streets shut in between the dome of the Pantheon and the dome of the Val-de-Grace, two conspicuous public buildings which give a yellowish tone to the landscape and darken the whole district that lies beneath the shadow of their leaden-hued cupolas.

In that district the pavements are clean and dry, there is neither mud nor water in the gutters, grass grows in the chinks of the walls. The most heedless passer-by feels the depressing influences of a place where the sound of wheels creates a sensation; there is a grim look about the houses, a suggestion of a jail about those high garden walls. A Parisian straying into a suburb apparently composed of lodging-houses and public institutions would see poverty and dullness, old age lying down to die, and joyous youth condemned to drudgery. It is the ugliest quarter of Paris, and, it may be added, the least known. But, before all things, the Rue Nueve-Sainte-Genevieve is like a bronze frame for a picture for which the mind cannot be too well prepared by the contemplation of sad hues and



sober images. Even so, step by step the daylight decreases, and the cicero's droning voice grows hollower as the traveler descends into the Catacombs. The comparison holds good! Who shall say which is more ghastly, the sight of the bleached skulls or of dried-up human hearts?

The front of the lodging-house is at right angles to the road, and looks out upon a little garden, so that you see the side of the house in section, as it were, from the Rue Nueve-Sainte-Genievie. Beneath the wall of the house front there lies a channel, a fathom wide, paved with cobble-stones, and beside it runs a graveled walk bordered by geraniums and oleanders and pomegranates set in great blue and white glazed earthenware pots. Access into the graveled walk is afforded by a door, above which the words MAISON VAUQUER may be read, and beneath, in rather smaller letters, "Lodgings for both sexes, etc."

During the day a glimpse into the garden is easily obtained through a wicket to which a bell is attached. On the opposite wall, at the further end of the graveled walk, a green marble arch was painted once upon a time by a local artist, and in this semblance of a shrine a statue representing Cupid is installed; a Parisian Cupid, so blistered and disfigured that he looks like a candidate for one of the adjacent hospitals, and might suggest an allegory to lovers of symbolism. The half-obliterated inscription on the pedestal beneath determines the date of this work of art, for it bears witness to the widespread enthusiasm felt for Voltaire on his return to Paris in 1777:

*"Who'er thou art, thy master see; He is, or was, or ought to be."*

At night the wicket gate is replaced by a solid door. The little garden is no wider than the front of the house; it is shut in between the wall of the street and the partition wall of the neighboring house. A mantle of ivy conceals the bricks and attracts the eyes of passers-by to an effect which is picturesque in Paris, for each of the walls is covered with trellised vines that yield a scanty dusty crop of fruit, and furnish besides a subject of conversation for Mme. Vauquer and her lodgers; every year the widow trembles for her vintage.

A straight path beneath the walls on either side of the garden leads to a clump of lime-trees at the further end of it; line-trees, as Mme. Vauquer persists in calling them, in spite of the fact that she was a de Conflans, and regardless of repeated corrections from her lodgers.

The central space between the walls is filled with artichokes and rows of pyramid fruit-trees, and surrounded by a border of lettuce, pot-herbs, and parsley. Under the lime-trees there are a few green-painted garden seats and a wooden table, and hither, during the dog-days, such of the lodgers as are rich enough to indulge in a cup of coffee come to take their pleasure, though it is hot enough to roast eggs even in the shade.

The house itself is three stories high, without counting the attics under the roof. It is built of rough stone, and covered with the yellowish stucco that gives a mean appearance to almost every house in Paris. There are five windows in each story in the front of the house; all the blinds visible through the small square panes are drawn up awry, so that the lines are all at cross purposes. At the side of the house there are but two windows on each floor, and the lowest of all are adorned with a heavy iron grating.

Behind the house a yard extends for some twenty feet, a space inhabited by a happy family of pigs, poultry, and rabbits; the wood-shed is situated on the further side, and on the wall between the wood-shed and the kitchen window hangs the meat-safe, just above the place where the sink discharges its greasy streams. The cook sweeps all the refuse out through a little door into the Rue Nueve-Sainte-Genievie, and frequently cleanses the yard with copious supplies of water, under pain of pestilence.

The house might have been built on purpose for its present uses. Access is given by a French window to the first room on the ground floor, a sitting-room which looks



out upon the street through the two barred windows already mentioned. Another door opens out of it into the dining-room, which is separated from the kitchen by the well of the staircase, the steps being constructed partly of wood, partly of tiles, which are colored and bees waxed. Nothing can be more depressing than the sight of that sitting-room. The furniture is covered with horse hair woven in alternate dull and glossy stripes. There is a round table in the middle, with a purplish-red marble top, on which there stands, by way of ornament, the inevitable white china tea-service, covered with a half-effaced gilt network. The floor is sufficiently uneven, the wainscot rises to elbow height, and the rest of the wall space is decorated with a varnished paper, on which the principal scenes from Telemaque are depicted, the various classical personages being colored. The subject between the two windows is the banquet given by Calypso to the son of Ulysses, displayed thereon for the admiration of the boarders, and has furnished jokes these forty years to the young men who show themselves superior to their position by making fun of the dinners to which poverty condemns them. The hearth is always so clean and neat that it is evident that a fire is only kindled there on great occasions; the stone chimney-piece is adorned by a couple of vases filled with faded artificial flowers imprisoned under glass shades, on either side of a bluish marble clock in the very worst taste.

The first room exhales an odor for which there is no name in the language, and which should be called the odeur de pension. The damp atmosphere sends a chill through you as you breathe it; it has a stuffy, musty, and rancid quality; it permeates your clothing; after-dinner scents seem to be mingled in it with smells from the kitchen and scullery and the reek of a hospital. It might be possible to describe it if someone should discover a process by which to distil from the atmosphere all the nauseating elements with which it is charged by the catarrhal exhalations of every individual lodger, young or old. Yet, in spite of these stale horrors, the sitting-room is as charming and as delicately perfumed as a boudoir, when compared with the adjoining dining-room.

The paneled walls of that apartment were once painted some color, now a matter of conjecture, for the surface is incrustated with accumulated layers of grimy deposit, which cover it with fantastic outlines. A collection of dim-ribbed glass decanters, metal discs with a satin sheen on them, and piles of blue-edged earthenware plates of Touraine ware cover the sticky surfaces of the sideboards that line the room. In a corner stands a box containing a set of numbered pigeon-holes, in which the lodgers' table napkins, more or less soiled and stained with wine, are kept. Here you see that indestructible furniture never met with elsewhere, which finds its way into lodging-houses much as the wrecks of our civilization drift into hospitals for incurables. You expect in such places as these to find the weather-house whence a Capuchin issues on wet days; you look to find the execrable engravings which spoil your appetite, framed everyone in a black varnished frame, with a gilt beading round it; you know the sort of tortoise-shell clock-case, inlaid with brass; the green stove, the Argand lamps, covered with oil and dust, have met your eyes before. The oilcloth which covers the long table is so greasy that a waggish externe will write his name on the surface, using his thumb-nail as a style. The chairs are broken-down invalids; the wretched little hempen mats slip away from under your feet without slipping away for good; and finally, the foot-warmers are miserable wrecks, hingeless, charred, broken away about the holes. It would be impossible to give an idea of the old, rotten, shaky, cranky, worm-eaten, halt, maimed, one-eyed, rickety, and ramshackle condition of the furniture without an exhaustive description, which would delay the progress of the story to an extent that impatient people would not pardon. The red tiles of the floor are full of depressions brought about by scouring and periodical renewings of color. In short, there is no illusory grace left to the poverty that reigns here; it is dire, parsimonious, concentrated, threadbare poverty; as yet it has not sunk into the mire, it is only splashed by it, and though not in rags as yet, its clothing is ready to drop to pieces.



François Gérard, *Portrait of Louis XVIII of France in Coronation Robes* (19th C.)

EXPOSITIONS: LITERATURE AND  
ARCHITECTURE IN  
NINETEENTH-CENTURY FRANCE  
By Philippe Hamon

THE BOOK AS EXPOSITION: TEXTS AND  
THEIR MONUMENTS

Literary exposition/description tended to follow the same logic in its various textual manifestations. Just as Haussmann's Paris tended to organize itself as "a city in the shape of a cross," which brings to mind Baudelaire's "intersections of enormous cities"-so too did literary description tame its ever-expanding and unfolding lexicons and lists-as in the "etc." of any descriptive system-by recourse to reticulated systems involving the distribution of temp/as like points on a compass (indicating "to the right," "to the left," "in front," "behind," "under," and "above") or by involving techniques of focalization that shift attention back and forth between the container and the contained or between the frame and the framed. This is readily apparent in the opening exposition of *Le Père Goriot*, where Balzac speaks of the "bronze frame which is the only one appropriate for this story." This outer frame in turn contains an entire series of inner frames which run-in descending order-from the city of Paris through the district of Montagne-Sainte Geneviève, the Vauquer boardinghouse, the boarding-house garden, its interior, Madame Vauquer, and her dress to the petticoat beneath her dress. The circle and the aisle establish the trail the reader will follow; they provide ways of ordering or "shelving" various items and make it possible to make one's way through a latent lexical or thematic field. This kind of itemization lies at the very essence of any description and is particularly at work in the specifically literary practice of exposition-that is, the inclusion of an opening or inaugural passage at the outset of a work that, just like a universal exposition, provides an informative summary that prepares the reader's orderly progress through the material that is to follow. As that place where texts begin, the exposition is therefore structurally related to the fundamental gesture of the augur and the architect, that is, the inaugural tracing of the temp/urn. The formal and stylistic specifics of such expository practices should not be overlooked. Exposition comes into play in both literary and nonliterary works whenever the text shifts over into a descriptive dominant, in other words, whenever it starts filling out a list or nomenclature that it postulates as pre-existent somewhere outside the

text and which is thus easily fleshed out, a list that is considered a useful means of compiling knowledge about the world, about language, or about the text that follows or precedes it. All this takes place regardless of the location of this list, the nature of its referents, their quantity, their function, their finality, or their linguistic definition: an exposition can be any length whatsoever; it can serve to render a story legible or simply function to jolt the reader or to provide the illusion of the real; and it can make use of any linguistic material it pleases, such as numbers, words, proper nouns, verbs, or adjectives. The list of fish species in Verne's *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*, or the comparable list of character portraits and histories in Balzac, the list of phonemes that Rimbaud parades by the reader in his well-known sonnet "Voyelles," the various lists of classes and fundamental notions included in the first lesson of Auguste Comte's *Cours de philosophie positive*, the lists of famous monuments (as in the celebrated coach scene in *Madame Bovary*), the list of France's regions featured in the "Tableau de France" that introduces Michelet's *Histoire de France*, the list of all the activities of a locomotive mechanic in Zola's *La Bête humaine* - all these lists are products of this expositional writing, whatever the particular genre of the text or the factuality or "fictiveness" of its component items. The textual practice of exposition thus takes sets of items and puts them into order (or, in the case of ironic texts, into disorder) calling upon the essentially paradigmatic semiotic competence of both the reader and the author, a competence that involves classification, hierarchization, actualization of lexicons, organization, equation, and imposition of formal or thematic closure. The practice of exposition can constitute a literary genre in and of itself (for example, the expose, the Parisian tableau, or the descriptive prose poem). Or it can constitute a non autonomous part of a larger textual whole that it is supposed to render more readable. But by excessively itemizing the various components of a given setting or milieu, or by providing a level of information that appears to exceed what is necessary to the preliminary understanding of the narrative's chain of events, expositions run the risk of either delaying that actual narrative, over elaborating the explicatory and enumerative elements of the text to the detriment of narrative, or, to borrow Flaubert's expression, of overdeveloping the plinth of the statue to the detriment of character and plot. Many critics found fault with the lengthy expositions found at the outset of the works of Balzac and the Goncourts (Manette Salomon, the eponymous



Gabriel Metsu, Dutch Painting: *A young woman seated in an interior, reading a letter* (1629-1667)

heroine of one of the brothers' novels does not appear until chapter fifty). Expositions tend to occasion an apologetic metalanguage on the part of the narrator who steps forward to justify the very exposition he is engaged in. The first part of Balzac's *Le Père Goriot* ends:

"The exposition of this obscure yet appalling tragedy is now concluded," and the first part of his *Ursule Mirouët* in turn ends: "If one must apply the rules of stagecraft narrative, Savinien's arrival, which introduces to Nemours the only character whose presence had as yet been lacking in this little drama, concludes this exposition." Such an apologetic posture can also be found at the beginning of a text, at the threshold where a stage direction or some explicatory comment always seems in order on the part of the author/architect who is guiding the reader through the aisles of the work. For example, in *La Vieille Fille*, Balzac writes: "To make [X's] importance understood ... it is necessary to expose two serious incidents that were troubling the city." These laborious excuses often reveal something about the work involved in constructing the text itself. Such an example appears in Sue's *Latreumont*. As the clausula of the third part of this six-part novel, he writes:

*Such is the long and perhaps overly meticulous exposition of the principle characters of this drama: LATREUMONT, VAN DEN ENDEN, THE CHEVALIER DE ROHAN, AUGUSTE DES PREAUX, MADAME LA MARQUISE DE VILHARS, AND MADEMOISELLE RENEE-MAURICE D'O. Now although the events described in this exposition occurred five years before the advent and outcome of this adventure, which is based on a true story, the author felt that this final and bizarre occurrence, aside from what we judge to be the historical reasons that demand its inclusion, would be of interest precisely because of its strangeness (the narrator then goes on to give a twenty line summary of the entire exposition) .... If the reader will allow an ambitious comparison (not with regard to the material facts, which I have attempted to outline, but rather having to do with the methods used to attempt this difficult work, which is too great a task for the author of these lines) ... we can compare the first part of the story to a pristine river whose indifferent waters reflect here and there the various sites they visit in their vagabond course: poor cities and splendid palaces, rustic manors and feudal towers .... And then, extending the simile in the second part of the story, this river, after innumerable detours, grows ever more rapid and narrow, deeply gauging its bed*

*between wild and desolate banks, will soon change into an impetuous torrent that leaps furiously through all kinds of rocks, debris, and ruins, finally engulfing itself in a bottomless abyss.*

Like the work of Balzac, this somewhat awkward and overly modalized text ("perhaps," "the author judged," "felt," or "believed") refers to the vocabulary of the theater ("this drama"), the original source for the term exposition as well as for the terminology of transparency (which as we have seen, Zola uses extensively in his critical and theoretical metalanguage); in addition, it refers via the extended metaphor of the river, to problems involving the rhythmic dominant: exposition announces itself by a slower rhythm different from the main story even when it tells its own summarized story. The particular awkwardness of this passage also alerts the reader to a vicious circle of explanation: the initial delaying tactics of the exposition are accentuated by the fact that it is accompanied by a proliferation of self-justifying commentaries, and even by summaries that synthesize it if it is particularly long. This passage also locates the site of a sort of narrative competition; the exposition of causal and chronological antecedents runs the risk of being more engrossing than the denouement.

There is a great deal of architecture in the opening passages of nineteenth-century novels, particularly after 1850 when the realist and naturalist avant-gardes started to establish themselves. It is an architecture that provides both the means and the pretext for an expository text, an architecture that, like the crystal palaces that housed expositions, provides the background for some cardinal functions: laying out and displaying useful objects (i.e., information), putting items on view, and directing traffic through them. Moreover, the presence of such com-posed objects—which are also composite architected buildings and places-in the expositions of a given work, a chapter, or a sequence, conveys the very idea of the composition of the literary work itself. The expression: "The house is composed of ... and of ... " shows up frequently in the works of Balzac and others. Finally, a certain number of preferred technemes concentrated in expositions (such as partitions, walls, doors, thresholds, mirrors, or closed spaces that open up) permit the writer the most economical, swift, efficient, and above all realistic way of distributing a certain number of informational file cards in the very first pages, as it were, to air a number of items and make them



Joseph Mallord William Turner, *Boulevards in Paris* (1835)

legible. Airing can of course be a term of hygiene as well as classification: the exposition/description is the circulatory and informational form of hygiene adopted by the naturalist text. Thus it is enough to situate a character in an interior comprised of a chamber with a door or a window that opens out onto the world in order that this character be entrusted with the task of rendering his habitat via his very gaze. By recourse to familiar phrases like “he caught sight of ...,” “she knew well ...,” “before her eyes ...,” “she contemplated ...,” “before him lay the ...”), “his gaze fell upon ...,” and “at her feet noticed ...,” the text need only station the character by a window or threshold in order to situate the environment. A physical description of the character can be in turn arranged merely by having him or her pass before a mirror or before the eyes of a second character entering the room. Finally it is enough to bring characters into contact either with an object that prompts their memory or with other characters who share their memories in order to provide basic information about the characters’ personal backgrounds or past histories. In realist novels, this kind of introductory topos, with all its various partitions, furnishings, entryways, and exits, often takes the form of a belvedere-like structure situated at the center of the environment that is being described, or it takes the form of a liminal space along the lines of a vestibule or a threshold. The analyses of both Barthes in *SIZ* and Serres in *L’Hermaphrodite* demonstrates how the boundary-like window in Balzac’s *Sarrasine* distributes, via the gaze of the narrator who is positioned there, the contents and characters of the novella. There are further examples, such as the view from the “astrologer/poet’s” “garret” in Baudelaire’s poem “Paysage,” which opens the “Tableaux Parisiens” section of *Les Fleurs du mal*, the view from the fifth-floor window “at the corner of the mansard roof” which sets into motion the exposition of Zola’s *La Bête humaine*, or, in the opening passage of Manette Salomon, the “opened dome” of the “belvedere” in the *Jardin des Plantes*, a vantage point from which the painter Anatole exhibits the vast panorama of Paris to the tourists. Thus situated in time and space, both the character and the reader become available to the events or the plot that will follow. The explanatory exposition is a novelistic procedure that situates its initial character in a kind of photographic box. This

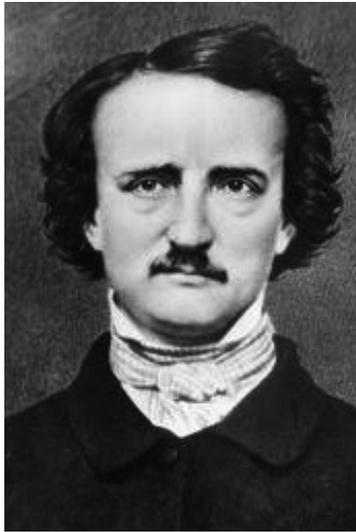
device allows the novelist to introduce a certain number of the novel’s traditional components—portraits, biographies, and descriptions of interiors and exteriors. This operation can be carried out by relying on a stationary character who does not move from a particular observation post: Saccard at his restaurant window in front of the *Place de la Bourse* in the beginning of *L’Argent*; Roubaud at his window opposite the train station in *La Bête humaine*; and Gervaise at her window on the boulevard in *L’Assommoir*. The operation can also be carried out by characters in motion who insert themselves gradually into an unexplained world whose various sectors are invested with increasing significance as they make their way through the milieu by means of “ambulatory descriptions.” This type of description, which was perfected by the Goncourts and by Coppée in his *Promenades et intérieurs*, progressively saturates the world to be described with partitions, thresholds, and rooms representing in material form the various subdivisions of the author’s own card catalogue of society. Hence, the extraordinary yield of the theme of the character who has newly arrived on a given scene and whose naive and innocent eye over the course of the very first pages is homologous to the naive gaze of the tourist and the exposition visitor who discover and are in turn discovered by the world. The *homo novus* setting out to conquer Paris, the country bumpkin arriving at the capital, the Parisian in the provinces, the traveler entering a city for the first time, the new student in school or the new employee on the job—all of these types are illustrated in the literature of that century: the “newly graduated” Frederic Moreau traveling up the Seine at the outset of *Education sentimentale*; Denise, the young girl from the provinces and new employee at the novelty shop in *Au des dames*; Florent hired as the inspector of *Les Haïles in Le Ventre de Paris*; Charles Bovary the new student in the class at the beginning of *Madame Bovary*; the anonymous traveler who arrives in Verrières “for the first time” in the opening pages of *Stendhal’s Le Rouge et le noir*. In the preface to *The Tragic Muse*, Henry James speaks of the “panoramic and processional” technique of some of his own novels such as *The Princess Casamassima*, whose preface describes how the city of London suggested to him a character who he refers to as the “pedestrian prowler.”

Philippe Hamon, *Expositions: Literature and Architecture in Nineteenth-Century France*, University of California Press (1992)



*"Enfin toute sa personne explique la pension, comme la pension implique sa personne" Le Père Goriot.*  
Madame Vaucher. Illustration: Bertall, Publisher: Bridgeman Art Library

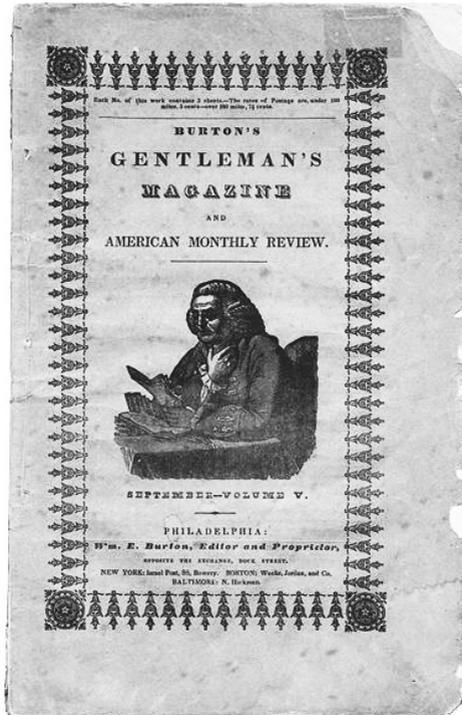
“The events of human life, whether public or private, are so intimately tied to architecture,” he announces, “that most observers can reconstruct nations or individuals in all the truth of their habits from the remains of their public monuments or by examining their domestic relics” (CH ro:6S7). This is more or less the same rule he had already invoked by calling the *Maison du chat-qui-pelote* “one of those valuable houses that enable historians to reconstruct old Paris by analogy” (CHR:39); and variations of its formula - whereby places entail the persons who inhabit them and vice versa - would of course be reiterated again and again in defense of the descriptive detail for which the *Comédie humaine* is famous.



Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849)

IV

*The Fall of The House of Usher*  
(1839)



Edgar Allan Poe, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, published in the September 1839 issue of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*

An unnamed narrator approaches the house of Usher on a “dull, dark, and soundless day.” This house—the estate of his boyhood friend, Roderick Usher—is gloomy and mysterious. The narrator observes that the house seems to have absorbed an evil and diseased atmosphere from the decaying trees and murky ponds around it. He notes that although the house is decaying in places—individual stones are disintegrating, for example—the structure itself is fairly solid. There is only a small crack from the roof to the ground in the front of the building. He has come to the house because his friend Roderick sent him a letter earnestly requesting his company. Roderick wrote that he was feeling physically and emotionally ill, so the narrator is rushing to his assistance. The narrator mentions that the Usher family, though an ancient clan, has never flourished. Only one member of the Usher family has survived from generation to generation, thereby forming a direct line of descent without any outside branches. The Usher family has become so identified with its estate that the peasantry confuses the inhabitants with their home. The narrator finds the inside of the house just as spooky as the outside. He makes his way through the long passages to the room where Roderick is waiting. He notes that Roderick is paler and less energetic than he once was.

Roderick tells the narrator that he suffers from nerves and fear and that his senses are heightened. The narrator also notes that Roderick seems afraid of his own house. Roderick’s sister, Madeline, has taken ill with a mysterious sickness—perhaps catalepsy, the loss of control of one’s limbs—that the doctors cannot reverse. The narrator spends several days trying to cheer up Roderick. He listens to Roderick play the guitar and make up words for his songs, and he reads him stories, but he cannot lift Roderick’s spirit. Soon, Roderick posits his theory that the house itself is unhealthy, just as the narrator supposes at the beginning of the story.

Madeline soon dies, and Roderick decides to bury her temporarily in the tombs below the house. He wants to keep her in the house because he fears that the doctors might dig up her body for scientific examination, since her disease was so strange to them. The narrator helps Roderick put the body in the tomb, and he notes that Madeline has rosy cheeks, as some do after death. The narrator also realizes suddenly that Roderick and Madeline were twins. Over the next few days, Roderick becomes even more uneasy. One night, the narrator cannot sleep either. Roderick knocks on his door, apparently hysterical. He leads the narrator to the window, from which they see a bright-looking gas surrounding the house. The narrator tells Roderick that the gas is a natural phenomenon, not altogether uncommon.

The narrator decides to read to Roderick in order to pass the night away. He reads “Mad Trist” by Sir Launcelot Canning, a medieval romance. As he reads, he hears noises that correspond to the descriptions in the story. At first, he ignores these sounds as the vagaries of his imagination. Soon, however, they become more distinct and he can no longer ignore them. He also notices that Roderick has slumped over in his chair and is muttering to himself. The narrator approaches Roderick and listens to what he is saying. Roderick reveals that he has been hearing these sounds for days, and believes that they have buried Madeline alive and that she is trying to escape. He yells that she is standing behind the door. The wind blows open the door and confirms Roderick’s fears: Madeline stands in white robes bloodied from her struggle. She attacks Roderick as the life drains from her, and he dies of fear. The narrator flees the house. As he escapes, the entire house cracks along the break in the frame and crumbles to the ground.



Douglas Percy Bliss, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, wood engraving (1938)

## THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER

*Son coeur est un luth suspendu;  
Sitôt qu'on le touche il résonne.*

De Béranger.

During the whole of a dull, dark, and soundless day in the autumn of the year, when the clouds hung oppressively low in the heavens, I had been passing alone, on horseback, through a singularly dreary tract of country, and at length found myself, as the shades of the evening drew on, within view of the melancholy House of Usher. I know not how it was—but, with the first glimpse of the building, a sense of insufferable gloom pervaded my spirit. I say insufferable; for the feeling was unrelieved by any of that half-pleasurable, because poetic, sentiment with which the mind usually receives even the sternest natural images of the desolate or terrible. I looked upon the scene before me—upon the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—upon the bleak walls—upon the vacant eye-like windows—upon a few rank sedges—and upon a few white trunks of decayed trees—with an utter depression of soul which I can compare to no earthly sensation more properly than to the after-dream of the reveller upon opium—the bitter lapse into every-day life—the hideous dropping off of the veil. There was an iciness, a sinking, a sickening of the heart—an unredeemed dreariness of thought which no goading of the imagination could torture into aught of the sublime. What was it—I paused to think—what was it that so unnerved me in the contemplation of the House of Usher? It was a mystery all insoluble; nor could I grapple with the shadowy fancies that crowded upon me as I pondered. I was forced to fall back upon the unsatisfactory conclusion, that while, beyond doubt, there are combinations of very simple natural objects which have the power of thus affecting us, still the analysis of this power lies among considerations beyond our depth. It was possible, I reflected, that a mere different arrangement of the particulars of the scene, of the details of the picture, would be sufficient to modify, or perhaps to annihilate its capacity for sorrowful impression; and, acting upon this idea, I reined my horse to the precipitous brink of a black and lurid tarn that lay in unruffled lustre by the dwelling, and gazed down—but with a shudder even more thrilling than before—upon the remodelled and inverted images of the gray sedge, and the ghastly tree-stems, and the vacant and eye-like windows.

Nevertheless, in this mansion of gloom I now proposed to myself a sojourn of some weeks. Its proprietor, Roderick Usher, had been one of my boon companions in boyhood; but many years had elapsed since our last meeting. A letter, however, had lately reached me in a distant part of the country—a letter from him—which, in its wildly importunate nature, had admitted of no other than a personal reply. The MS. gave evidence of nervous agitation. The writer spoke of acute bodily illness—of a mental disorder which oppressed him—and of an earnest desire to see me, as his best and indeed his only personal friend, with a view of attempting, by the cheerfulness of my society, some alleviation of his malady. It was the manner in which all this, and much more, was said—it was the apparent heart that went with his request—which allowed me no room for hesitation; and I accordingly obeyed forthwith what I still considered a very singular summons.

Although, as boys, we had been even intimate associates, yet I really knew little of my friend. His reserve had been always excessive and habitual. I was aware, however, that his very ancient family had been noted, time out of mind, for a peculiar sensibility of temperament, displaying itself, through long ages, in many works of exalted art, and manifested, of late, in repeated deeds of munificent yet unobtrusive charity, as well as in a passionate devotion to the intricacies, perhaps even more than to the orthodox and easily recognizable beauties, of musical science. I had learned, too, the very remarkable fact, that the stem of the Usher race, all time-honored as it was, had put forth, at no period, any enduring branch; in other words, that the entire family lay in the direct line



of descent, and had always, with very trifling and very temporary variation, so lain. It was this deficiency, I considered, while running over in thought the perfect keeping of the character of the premises with the accredited character of the people, and while speculating upon the possible influence which the one, in the long lapse of centuries, might have exercised upon the other—it was this deficiency, perhaps, of collateral issue, and the consequent undeviating transmission, from sire to son, of the patrimony with the name, which had, at length, so identified the two as to merge the original title of the estate in the quaint and equivocal appellation of the “House of Usher”—an appellation which seemed to include, in the minds of the peasantry who used it, both the family and the family mansion.

I have said that the sole effect of my somewhat childish experiment—that of looking down within the tarn—had been to deepen the first singular impression. There can be no doubt that the consciousness of the rapid increase of my superstition—for why should I not so term it?—served mainly to accelerate the increase itself. Such, I have long known, is the paradoxical law of all sentiments having terror as a basis. And it might have been for this reason only, that, when I again uplifted my eyes to the house itself, from its image in the pool, there grew in my mind a strange fancy—a fancy so ridiculous, indeed, that I but mention it to show the vivid force of the sensations which oppressed me. I had so worked upon my imagination as really to believe that about the whole mansion and domain there hung an atmosphere peculiar to themselves and their immediate vicinity—an atmosphere which had no affinity with the air of heaven, but which had reeked up from the decayed trees, and the gray wall, and the silent tarn—a pestilent and mystic vapor, dull, sluggish, faintly discernible, and leaden-hued.

Shaking off from my spirit what must have been a dream, I scanned more narrowly the real aspect of the building. Its principal feature seemed to be that of an excessive antiquity. The discoloration of ages had been great. Minute fungi overspread the whole exterior, hanging in a fine tangled web-work from the eaves. Yet all this was apart from any extraordinary dilapidation. No portion of the masonry had fallen; and there appeared to be a wild inconsistency between its still perfect adaptation of parts, and the crumbling condition of the individual stones. In this there was much that reminded me of the specious totality of old wood-work which has rotted for long years in some neglected vault, with no disturbance from the breath of the external air. Beyond this indication of extensive decay, however, the fabric gave little token of instability. Perhaps the eye of a scrutinizing observer might have discovered a barely perceptible fissure, which, extending from the roof of the building in front, made its way down the wall in a zigzag direction, until it became lost in the sullen waters of the tarn.

Noticing these things, I rode over a short causeway to the house. A servant in waiting took my horse, and I entered the Gothic archway of the hall. A valet, of stealthy step, thence conducted me, in silence, through many dark and intricate passages in my progress to the studio of his master. Much that I encountered on the way contributed, I know not how, to heighten the vague sentiments of which I have already spoken. While the objects around me—while the carvings of the ceilings, the sombre tapestries of the walls, the ebon blackness of the floors, and the phantasmagoric armorial trophies which rattled as I strode, were but matters to which, or to such as which, I had been accustomed from my infancy—while I hesitated not to acknowledge how familiar was all this—I still wondered to find how unfamiliar were the fancies which ordinary images were stirring up. On one of the staircases, I met the physician of the family. His countenance, I thought, wore a mingled expression of low cunning and perplexity. He accosted me with trepidation and passed on. The valet now threw open a door and ushered me into the presence of his master.

(...)



unknown architect, *American Gothic house*

## THE HOUSE OF POE

By Richard Wilbur

(...)

Now, I want to devote the time remaining to the consideration of one kind of enclosure in Poe's tales: the mouldering mansion and its richly furnished rooms. I want to concentrate on Poe's architecture and decor for two reasons: first, because Poe's use of architecture is so frankly and provably allegorical that I should be able to be convincing about it; second, because by concentrating on one area of Poe's symbolism we shall be able to see that his stories are allegorical not only in their broad patterns, but also in their smallest details.

Let us begin with a familiar poem, "The Haunted Palace." The opening stanzas of this poem, as a number of critics have noted, make a point-by-point comparison between a building and the head of a man. The exterior of the palace represents the man's physical features; the interior represents the man's mind engaged in harmonious imaginative thought.

In the greenest of our valleys  
By good angels tenanted,  
Once a fair and stately palace  
Radiant palace-reared its head.  
In the monarch Thought's dominion  
It stood there!  
Never seraph spread a pinion  
Over fabric half so fair!  
Banners ye flow, glorious, golden,  
On its roof did float and flow,  
(This-all this-was in the olden  
Time long ago, )  
And every gentle air that dallied,  
In that sweet day,  
Along the ramparts plumed and pallid,  
A winged odor went away.  
Wanderers in that happy vale,  
Through two luminous windows, saw  
Spirits moving musically,  
To a lute's well-tuned law,  
Round about a throne where, sitting,  
Porphyrogene,  
In state his glory well befitting,  
The ruler of the realm was seen.

And all in pearl and ruby glowing  
Was the fair palace door,  
Through which came flowing, flowing, flowing,  
And sparkling evermore,

A troop of Echoes, whose sweet duty  
Was but to sing,  
In voices of surpassing beauty,  
The wit and wisdom of their king,

I expect you observed that the two luminous windows of the palace are the eyes of a man, and that the yellow banners on the roof are his luxuriant blond hair. The "pearl and ruby" door is the man's mouth-ruby representing red lips, and pearl representing pearly white teeth. The beautiful Echoes which issue from the pearl and ruby door are the poetic utterances of the man's harmonious imagination, here symbolized as an orderly dance. The angel-guarded valley in which the palace stands, and which Poe describes as "the monarch Thought's dominion," is a symbol of the man's exclusive awareness of exalted and spiritual things. The valley is what Poe elsewhere called "that evergreen and radiant paradise which the true poet knows ... as the limited realm of his authority, as the circumscribed Eden of his dreams."

As you all remember, the last two stanzas of the poem describe the physical and spiritual corruption of the palace and its domain, and it was to this part of the poem that Poe was referring when he told a correspondent, By the 'Haunted Palace' I mean to imply a mind haunted by phantoms-a disordered brain. Let me read you the closing lines:

But evil things, in robes of sorrow,  
Assailed the monarch's high estate.  
(Ah, let us mourn!-for never morrow  
Shall dawn upon him desolate!)  
And round about his home the glory  
That blushed and bloomed,  
Is but a dim-remembered story  
Of the old time entombed.

And travellers, now, within that valley,  
Through the red-litten windows see  
Vast forms, that move fantastically  
To a discordant melody,  
While, like a ghastly rapid river,  
Through the pale door  
A hideous throng rush out forever  
And laugh-but smile no more.

The domain of the monarch Thought, in these final stanzas, is disrupted by civil war, and in consequence everything alters for the worse. The valley becomes barren, like the domain of



Joseph L. Mankiewicz, *American Gothic interior*, Still from the movie *Dragonwyck*

Roderick Usher; the eye-like windows of the palace are no longer "luminous," but have become "redlitten"- they are like the bloodshot eyes of a madman or a drunkard. As for the mouth of our allegorized man, it is now "pale" rather than "pearl and ruby," and through it come no sweet Echoes, as before, but the wild laughter of a jangling and discordant mind.

The two states of the palace-before and after-are, as we can see, two states of mind. Poe does not make it altogether clear why one state of mind has given way to the other, but by recourse to similar tales and poems we can readily find the answer. The palace in its original condition expresses the imaginative harmony which the poet's soul enjoys in early childhood, when all things are viewed with a tyrannical and unchallenged subjectivity. But as the soul passes from childhood into adult life, its consciousness is more and more invaded by the corrupt and corrupting external world: it succumbs to passion, it develops a conscience, it makes concessions to reason and to objective fact. Consequently, there is civil war in the palace of the mind. The imagination must now struggle against the intellect and the moral sense; finding itself no longer able to possess the world through a serene solipsism, it strives to annihilate the outer world by turning in upon itself; it flees into irrationality and dream; and all its dreams are efforts both to recall and to simulate its primal, unfallen state. "The Haunted Palace" presents us with a possible key to the general meaning of Poe's architecture; and this key proves, if one tries it, to open every building in Poe's fiction. Roderick Usher, as you will remember, declaims "The Haunted Palace" to the visitor who tells his story, accompanying the poem with wild improvisations on the guitar. We are encouraged, therefore, to compare the palace of the poem with the house of the story; and it is no surprise to find that the Usher mansion has "vacant eye-like windows," and that there are mysterious physical sympathies between Roderick Usher and the house in which he dwells. The House of Usher is, in allegorical fact, the physical body of Roderick Usher, and its dim interior is, in fact, Roderick Usher's visionary mind.

The House of Usher, like many edifices in Poe, is in a state of extreme decay. The stonework of its facade has so crumbled and decomposed that it reminds the narrator, as he puts it, "of the specious totality of old wood-work which has rotted for long years in some neglected vault." The Usher mansion is so eaten away, so fragile,

that it seems a breeze would push it over; it remains standing only because the atmosphere of Usher's domain is perfectly motionless and dead. Such is the case also with the "time-eaten towers that tremble not" in Poe's poem "The City in the Sea"; and likewise the magnificent architecture of "The Domain of Arnheim" is said to "sustain itself by a miracle in mid-air." Even the detective Dupin lives in a perilously decayed structure: the narrator of "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" tells how he and Dupin dwelt in a "time-eaten and grotesque mansion, long deserted through superstitions into which we did not enquire, and tottering to its fall in a retired and desolate portion of the Faubourg St. Germain." (Notice how, even when Poe's buildings are situated in cities, he manages to circumscribe them with a protective desolation.)

We must now ask what Poe means by the extreme and tottering decay of so many of his structures. The answer is best given by reference to "The Fall of the House of Usher," and in giving the answer we shall arrive, I think, at an understanding of the pattern of that story.

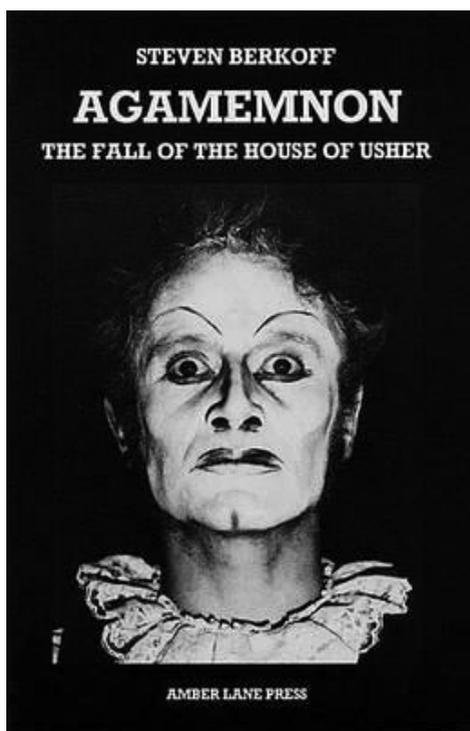
"The Fall of the House of Usher" is a journey into the depths of the self. I have said that all journeys in Poe are allegories of the process of dreaming, and we must understand "The Fall of the House of Usher" as a dream of the narrator's, in which he leaves behind him the waking, physical world and journeys inward toward his moi interieur, toward his inner and spiritual self. That inner and spiritual self is Roderick Usher.

(...)

The hypnagogic state, about which there is strangely little said in the literature of psychology, is a condition of semi-consciousness in which the closed eye beholds a continuous procession of vivid and constantly changing forms. These forms sometimes have color, and are often abstract in character. Poe regarded the hypnagogic state as the visionary condition par excellence, and he considered its rapidly shifting abstract images to be as he put it "glimpses of the spirit's outer world." These visionary glimpses, Poe says in one of his *Marginalia*, "arise in the soul. . . only . . . at those mere points of time where the confines of the waking world blend with those of the world of dreams." And Poe goes on to say: "I am aware of these 'fancies' only when I am upon the very brink of sleep, with the consciousness that I am so."

(...)

Roderick Usher stands for the hypnagogic state, which as Poe said is a teetering condition of mind occurring "upon the very brink of sleep."



Steven Berkoff, *Agamemnon*, Poster from the theater play

Since Roderick is the embodiment of a state of mind in which falling- falling asleep-is imminent, it is appropriate that the building which symbolizes his mind should promise at every moment to fall. The House of Usher stares down broodingly at its reflection in the tam below, as in the hypnagogic state the conscious mind may stare into the subconscious; the house threatens continually to collapse because it is extremely easy for the mind to slip from the hypnagogic state into the depths of sleep; and when the House of Usher does fall, the story ends, as it must, because the mind, at the end of its inward journey, has plunged into the darkness of sleep.

We have found one allegorical meaning in the tottering decay of Poe's buildings; there is another meaning, equally important, which may be stated very briefly. I have said that Poe saw the poet as at war with the material world, and with the material or physical aspects of himself; and I have said that Poe identified poetic imagination with the power to escape from the material and the materialistic, to exclude them from consciousness and so subjectively destroy them. Now, if we recall these things, and recall also that the exteriors of Poe's houses or palaces, with their eye-like windows and mouth-like doors, represent the physical features of Poe's dreaming heroes, then the characteristic dilapidation of Poe's architecture takes on sudden significance. The extreme decay of the House of Usher-a decay so extreme as to approach the atmospheric-is quite simply a sign that the narrator, in reaching that state of mind which he calls Roderick Usher, has very nearly dreamt himself free of his physical body, and of the material world with which that body connects him.

This is what decay or decomposition mean everywhere in Poe; and we find them almost everywhere. Poe's preoccupation with decay is not, as some critics have thought, an indication of necrophilia; decay in Poe is a symbol of visionary remoteness from the physical, a sign that the state of mind represented is one of almost pure spirituality. When the House of Usher disintegrates or dematerializes at the close of the story, it does so because Roderick Usher has become all soul. "The Fall of the House of Usher," then, is not really a horror story; it is a triumphant report by the narrator that it is possible for the poetic soul to shake off this temporal, rational, physical world and escape, if only for a moment, to a realm of unfettered vision.

We have now arrived at three notions about Poe's typical building. It is set apart in a valley or a sea or a waste place, and this remoteness is intended to express the retreat of the poet's mind from worldly consciousness into dream. It is a tottery structure, and this indicates that the dreamer within is in that unstable threshold condition called the hypnagogic state. Finally, Poe's typical building is crumbling or decomposing, and this means that the dreamer's mind is moving toward a perfect freedom from his material self and the material world. Let us now open the door-or mouth-of Poe's building and visit the mind inside.

As we enter the palace of the visionary hero of "The Assignment," or the house of Roderick Usher, we find ourselves approaching the master's private chamber by way of dim and winding passages, or a winding staircase. There is no end to dim windings in Poe's fiction: there are dim and winding woods paths, dim and winding streets, dim and winding watercourses-and, whenever the symbolism is architectural, there are likely to be dim and winding passages or staircases. It is not at all hard to guess what Poe means by this symbol. If we think of waking life as dominated by reason, and if we think of the reason as a daylight faculty which operates in straight lines, then it is proper that reverie should be represented as an obscure and wandering movement of the mind. There are other, and equally obvious meanings in Poe's symbol of dim and winding passages: to grope through such passages is to become confused; to lose any sense of locality, and to have an infinite freedom in regard to space. (...)

Since I have been speaking of geometry-of straight lines and curves and spirals-perhaps the first thing to notice about Poe's dream rooms is their shape. It has already been said that the enclosures of Poe's tales incline to a - curving or circular form. And Poe himself, in certain of his essays and dialogues, explains this inclination by denouncing what he calls "the harsh mathematical reason of the schools," and corraling that practical science has covered the face of the earth with "rectangular obscenities." Poe quite explicitly identifies regular angular forms with everyday reason, and the circle, oval, or fluid arabesque with the otherworldly imagination. Therefore, if we discover that the dream chambers of Poe's fiction are free of angular regularity, we may be



Jan Svankmajer, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, Short Film

sure that we are noticing a pointed and purposeful consistency in his architecture and decor.

(...)

But let us return to Poe's typical room, and look now at its furnishings. They are generally weird, magnificent, and suggestive of great wealth. The narrator of "The Assignation," entering the hero's apartment, feels "blind and dizzy with luxuriousness," and looking about him he confesses, "I could not bring myself to believe that the wealth of any subject in Europe could have supplied the princely magnificence which burned and blazed around." Poe's visionaries are, as a general thing, extremely rich; the hero of "Ligeia" confides that, as for wealth, he possesses "far more, very far more, than ordinarily falls to the lot of mortals"; and Ellison, in "The Domain of Arnheim," is the fortunate inheritor of 450 million dollars. Legrand, in "The Gold Bug," with his treasure of 450 thousand, is only a poor relation of Mr. Ellison; still, by ordinary standards, he seems sublimely solvent.

Now, we must be careful to take all these riches in an allegorical sense. As we contemplate the splendor of any of Poe's rooms, we must remember that the room is a state of mind, and that everything in it is therefore a thought, a mental image. The allegorical meaning of the costliness of Poe's decor is simply this: that his heroes are richly imaginative. And since imagination is a gift rather than an acquisition, it is appropriate that riches in Poe should be inherited or found, but never earned.

Another thing we notice about Poe's furnishings is that they are eclectic in the extreme. Their richness is not the richness of Tiffany's and Soan's, but of all periods and all cultures. Here is a partial inventory of the fantastic bridal-hamber in "Ligeia": Egyptian carvings and sarcophagi; Venetian glass; fretwork of a semi-Gothic, semi-Druidical character; a Saracenic chandelier; Oriental ottomans and candelabra; an Indian couch; and figured draperies with Norman motifs.

(...)

In dream-land, we are "out of SPACE-out of TIME," and the same is true of such apartments or "bowers of dreams" as the hero of "The Assignation" inhabits. His eclectic furnishings, with their wild juxtapositions of Venetian and Indian, Egyptian and Norman, are

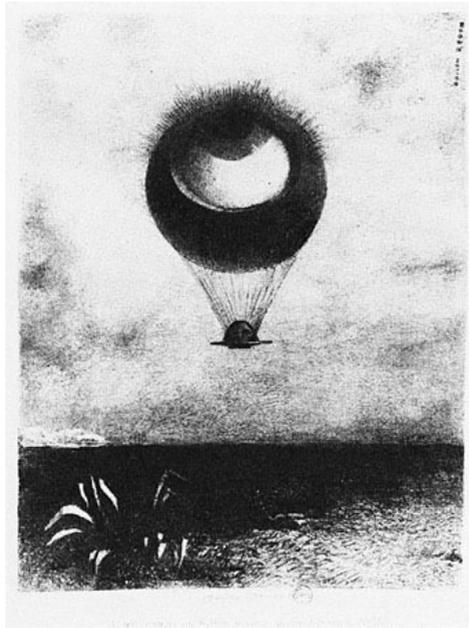
symbolic of the visionary soul's transcendence of spatial and temporal limitations. When one of Poe's dreamrooms is not furnished in the fashion I have been describing, the idea of spatial and temporal freedom is often conveyed in some other manner: Roderick Usher's library, for instance, with its rare and precious volumes belonging to all times and tongues, is another concrete symbol of the timelessness and placelessness of the dreaming mind.

(...)Let us now glance over such matters as li htin , soundproofin , and ventilation. As regards lighting, the rooms of Poe's tales are never exposed to the naked rays of the sun, because the sun belongs to the waking world and waking consciousness. (...)

In some of Poe's rooms, there simply are no windows. In other cases, the windows are blocked up or shuttered. When the windows are not blocked or shuttered, their panes are tinted with a crimson or leaden hue, so as to transform the light of day into a lurid or ghastly glow. This kind of lighting, in which the sun's rays are admitted but transformed, belongs to the portrayal of those half-states of mind in which dream and reality are blended. Filtered through tinted panes, the sunlight enters certain of Poe's rooms as it might enter the half-closed eyes of a daydreamer, or the dream-dimmed eyes of someone awakening from sleep. But when Poe wishes to represent that deeper phase of dreaming in which visionary consciousness has all but annihilated any sense of the external world, the lighting is always artificial and the time is always night.

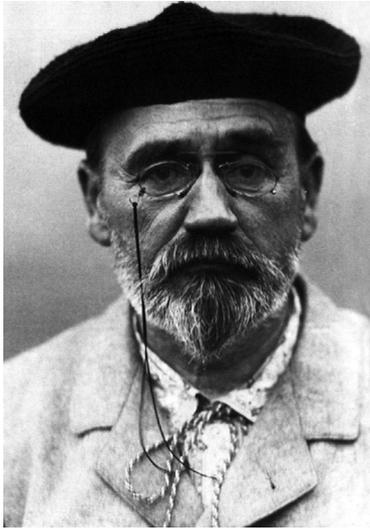
(...)

The one thing which remains to be said about Poe's buildings is that cellars or catacombs, whenever they appear, stand for the irrational part of the mind; and that is so conventional an equation in symbolic literature that I think I need not be persuasive or illustrative about it. I had hoped, at this point, to discuss in a leisurely way some of the stories in which Poe makes use of his architectural properties, treating those stories as narrative wholes.



Odilon Redon, *To Edgar Poe series* (1882)

In fact, we can only conclude that “Usher” functions, literally and metaphorically, as a house of mirrors and secrets that contains other houses within, but which – as a kind of deftly contrived hoax – only discloses Poe’s mastery of “unity of effect” and “pre-established design”: its perfect structure resembles a labyrinth in which all the elements are interconnected but encrypted, since every one takes us back to the other precluding the way out. Thus, interpretations that see the mansion as the double of Madeline, Madeline as a double of the mother, and the mansion as mother, are contested by others that equate the house with Roderick’s body, and its interior with his mind or even with the narrator’s mind. No doubt, these interrelations are suggested by the narrator, when, for instance, he refers to the “equivocal appellation of the ‘House of Usher’ [...] which seemed to include [...] both the family and the family mansion”, and later on in the story when he adds that Madeline and Roderick “had been twins, and that sympathies of a scarcely intelligible nature had always existed between them”. As we can see, his information is not only inconclusive, but equivocal: the narrator, both as the narrative voice and as a character, generates and increases the uncertainty.



Émile Zola (1840-1902)

V  
*Pot-Bouille*  
(1882)

2<sup>me</sup> séries.

PRIX : 50 c.

# POT-BOUILLE

PAR ÉMILE ZOLA



EN VENTE CHEZ C. MARPON ET E. FLAMMARION, ÉDITEURS  
Galerie de l'Odéon, 1 à 9, et rue Racine, 30, à Paris  
ET CHEZ TOUTS LES LIBRAIRES ET MARCHANDS DE JOURNAUX

Émile Zola, *Pot-Bouille*, book cover

*Pot-Bouille* is the tenth novel in the Rougon-Macquart series by Émile Zola. It was serialized between January and April 1882 in the periodical *Le Gaulois* before being published in book form by Charpentier in 1883. The novel is an indictment of the mores of the bourgeoisie of the Second French Empire. It is set in a Parisian apartment building, a relatively new housing arrangement at the time and its title (roughly translating as stew pot) reflects the disparate and sometimes unpleasant elements lurking behind the building's new façade. *Pot-Bouille* recounts the activities of the residents of a block of flats in the Rue de Choiseul over the course of two years (1861–1863). The novel follows the adventures of 22-year-old Octave Mouret, who moves into the building and takes a salesman's job at a nearby shop, 'The Ladies' Paradise'. Though handsome and charming, Octave is rebuffed by Valérie Vabre and his boss's wife Madame Hédouin before beginning a passionless affair with Madame Pichon. His failure with Madame Hédouin prompts him to quit his job, and he goes to work for Auguste Vabre in the silk shop on the building's ground floor. Soon, he begins an affair with Berthe, who by now is Auguste's wife. Octave and Berthe are eventually caught but over the course of several months, the community tacitly agrees to forget the affair and live as if nothing had happened, thereby restoring the veneer of respectability. Octave marries widowed Madame Hédouin and life goes on in the Rue de Choiseul the way it has always done, with outward complacency, morality and quiet.



POT-BOUILLE

CHAPTER I

In the Rue Neuve-Saint-Augustin, a block of vehicles arrested the cab which was bringing Octave Mouret and his three trunks from the Lyons railway station. The young man lowered one of the windows, in spite of the already intense cold of that dull November afternoon. He was surprised at the abrupt approach of twilight in this neighbourhood of narrow streets, all swarming with a busy crowd. The oaths of the drivers as they lashed their snorting horses, the endless jostlings on the foot-pavements, the serried line of shops swarming with attendants and customers, bewildered him ; for, though he had dreamed of a cleaner Paris than the one he beheld, he had never hoped to find it so eager for trade, and he felt that it was publicly open to the appetites of energetic young fellows.

The driver leant towards him.

“ It’s the Passage Choiseul you want, isn’t it ? ”

“ No, the Rue de Choiseul. A new house, I think.”

And the cab only had to turn the corner. The house was the second one in the street : a big house four storeys high, the stonework of which was scarcely discoloured, in the midst of the dirty stucco of the adjoining old frontages. Octave, who had alighted on to the pavement, measured it and studied it with a mechanical glance, from the silk warehouse on the ground floor to the projecting windows on the fourth floor opening on to a narrow terrace. On the first floor, carved female heads supported a highly elaborate cast-iron balcony. The windows were surrounded with complicated frames, roughly chiselled in the soft stone ; and, lower down, above the tall doorway, two cupids were unrolling a scroll bearing the number, which at night-time was lighted up by a jet of gas from the inside.

A stout fair gentleman, who was coming out of the vestibule, stopped short on catching sight of Octave.

“ What ! you here ! ” exclaimed he. “ Why, I was not expecting you till to-morrow ! ”

“ The truth is,” replied the young man, “ I left Flassans a day earlier than I originally intended. Isn’t the room ready ? ”

“ Oh, yes. I took it a fortnight ago, and I furnished it at once in the way you desired. Wait a bit, I will take you to it.”

He re-entered the house, though Octave begged he would not give himself the trouble. The driver had got the three trunks off the cab. Inside the doorkeeper’s room, a dignified-looking man with a long face, clean-shaven like a diplomatist, was standing up gravely reading the “ *Moniteur*.” He deigned, however, to interest himself about these trunks which were being deposited in his doorway ; and, taking a few steps forward, he asked his tenant, the architect of the third floor as he called him :

“ Is this the person, Monsieur Campardon ? ”

“ Yes, Monsieur Gourd, this is Monsieur Octave Mouret, for whom I have taken the room on the fourth floor. He will sleep there and take his meals with us. Monsieur Mouret is a friend of my wife’s relations, and I beg you will show him every attention.”

Octave was examining the entrance with its panels of imitation marble and its vaulted ceiling decorated with rosettes. The courtyard at the end was paved and cemented, and had a grand air of cold cleanliness ; the only occupant was a coachman engaged in polishing a bit with a chamois leather at the entrance to the stables. There were no signs of the sun ever shining there.

Meanwhile, Monsieur Gourd was inspecting the trunks. He pushed them with his foot, and, their weight filling him with respect, he talked of fetching a porter to carry them up the servants’ staircase.

“ Madame Gourd, I’m going out,” cried he, just putting his head inside his room.

It was like a drawing-room, with bright looking-glasses, a red flowered Wilton carpet and violet ebony furniture ; and, through a partly opened door, one caught a glimpse of the bed-chamber with a bedstead hung with garnet rep. Madame Gourd, a



very fat woman with yellow ribbons in her hair, was stretched out in an efsy-chair with her hands clasped, and doing nothing.

“ Well ! let’s go up,” said the architect.

And seeing how impressed the young man seemed to be by Monsieur Gourd’s black velvet cap and sky blue slippers, he added, as he pushed open the mahogany door of the vestibule :

“ You know he was formerly the Duke de Vaugelade’s valet.”

“ Ah ! “ simply ejaculated Octave.

“ It’s as I tell you, and he married the widow of a little bailiff of Mort-la-Ville. They even own a house there. But they are waiting until they have three thousand francs a year before going there to live. Oh ! they are most respectable doorkeepers ! “

The decorations of the vestibule and the staircase were gaudily luxurious. At the foot of the stairs was the figure of a woman, a kind of gilded Neapolitan, supporting on her head an amphora from which issued three gas-jets protected by ground glass globes. The panels of imitation white marble with pink borders succeeded each other at regular intervals up the wall of the staircase, whilst the cast-iron balustrade with its mahogany handrail was in imitation of old silver with clusters of golden leaves.

A red carpet, secured with brass rods, covered the stairs. But what especially struck Octave on entering was a green-house temperature, a warm breath which seemed to be puffed from some mouth into his face.

“ Hallo ! “ said he, “ the staircase is warmed.”

“ Of course,” replied Campardon. “ All landlords who have the least self-respect go to that expense now. The house is a very fine one, very fine.”

He looked about him as though he were sounding the walls with his architect’s eyes.

“ My dear fellow, you will see, it is a most comfortable place, and inhabited solely by highly respectable people ! “

Then, slowly ascending, he mentioned thenarnesof the different tenants. On each floor were two separate suites of apartments, one looking on to the street, the other on to the courtyard, and the polished mahogany doors of which faced each other. He began by saying a few words respecting Monsieur Auguste Vabre ; he was the landlord’s eldest son ; since the spring he had rented the silk warehouse on the ground floor, and he also occupied the whole of the “ entresol “ above. Then, on the first floor the landlord’s other son, Monsieur Theophile Vabre and his wife, resided in the apartment overlooking the court yard ; and in the one overlooking the street lived the landlord himself, formerly a notary at Versailles, but who was now lodging with his son-in-law, Monsieur Duveyrier, a judge at the Court of Appeal.

“ A fellow who is not yet forty-five,” said Campardon, stopping short. “ That’s something remarkable, is it not ? “

He ascended two steps, and then suddenly turning round, he added :

“ Water and gas on every floor.”

Beneath the tall window on each landing, the panes of which, bordered with fretwork, lit up the staircase with a white light, was placed a narrow velvet covered bench. The architect observed that elderly persons could sit down and rest. Then, as he passed the second floor without naming the tenants :

“ And there?” asked Octave, pointing to the door of the principal suite.

“ Oh ! there,” said he, “ persons whom one never sees, whom no one knows. The house could well do without them. Blemishes, you know, are to be found everywhere.”

He gave a little snort of contempt.

“ The gentleman writes books, I believe.”

But on the third floor his smile of satisfaction reappeared. The apartments looking on to the courtyard were divided into two suites ; they were occupied by Madame Juzeur, a little woman who was most unhappy, and a very distinguished gentleman who had taken a room to which he came once a week on business matters. Whilst giving these particulars, Campardon opened the door on the other side of the lauding,



“ And this is where I live,” resumed he. “ Wait a moment, I must get your key. We will first go up to your room ; you can see my wife afterwards.”

During the two minutes he was left alone, Octave felt penetrated by the grave silence of the staircase. He leant over the balustrade, in the warm air which ascended from the vestibule ; he raised his head, listening if any noise came from above. It was the death-like peacefulness of a middle-class drawing-room, carefully shut in and not admitting a breath from outside. Behind the beautiful shining mahogany doors there seemed to be unfathomable depths of respectability.

“ You will have some excellent neighbours,” said Campardon, reappearing with the key ; “ on the street side there are the Jossierands, quite a family, the father who is cashier at the Saint-Joseph glass works, and also two marriageable daughters ; and next to you the Pichons, the husband is a clerk ; they are not rolling in wealth, but they are educated people. Everything has to be let, has it not? even in a house like this.”

From the third landing, the red carpet ceased and was replaced by a simple grey Holland. Octave’s vanity was slightly ruffled. The staircase had, little by little, filled him with respect ; he was deeply moved at inhabiting such a fine house as the architect termed it. As, following the latter, he turned into the passage leading to his room, he caught sight through a partly open door of a young woman standing up before a cradle. She raised her head at the noise. She was fair, with clear and vacant eyes and all he carried away was this very distinct look, for the young woman, suddenly blushing, pushed the door to in the shame-faced way of a person taken by surprise.

Campardon turned round to repeat : “ Water and gas on every floor, my dear fellow.”

Then he pointed out a door which opened on to the servants’ staircase. Their rooms were up above. And stopping at the end of the passage, he added :

“ Here we are at last.”

The room, which was square, pretty large, and hung with a grey wall-paper with blue flowers, was furnished very simply. Close to the alcove was a little dressing-closet with just room enough to wash one’s hands. Octave went straight to the window, which admitted a greenish light. Below was the courtyard looking sad and clean, with its regular pavement, and the shining brass tap of its cistern. And still not a human being, nor even a noise ; nothing but the uniform windows, without a bird-cage, without a flower-pot, displaying the monotony of their white curtains. To hide the big bare wall of the house on the left hand side, which shut in the square of the courtyard, the windows had been repeated, imitation windows in paint, with shutters eternally closed, behind which the walled-in life of the neighbouring apartments appeared to continue.

“ But I shall be very comfortable here !” cried Octave delighted.

“ I thought so,” said Campardon. “ Well ! I did everything as though it had been for myself ; and, moreover, I carried out the instructions contained in your letters. So the furniture pleases you ? It is all that is necessary for a young man. Later on, you can make any changes you like.”

And, as Octave shook his hand, thanking him, and apologising for having given him so much trouble, he resumed in a serious tone of voice :

“ Only, my boy, no rows here, and above all no women ! On my word of honour, if you were to bring a woman here it would revolutionize the whole house ! ”

“ Be easy ! ” murmured the young man, feeling rather anxious.

“ No, let me tell you, for it is I who would be compromised. You have seen the house. All middle-class people, and of extreme morality ! between ourselves, they affect it rather too much. Never a word, never more noise than you have heard just now. Ah, well ! Monsieur Gourd would at once fetch Monsieur Vabre, and we should both be in a nice pickle ! My dear fellow, I ask it of you for my own peace of mind : respect the house.”



Albert Robida, *Le Triomphe du Naturalisme*, caricature of Emile Zola (1880)

TEXTS AND THEIR MONUMENTS:  
RUINS AND GLASS HOUSES  
by Philippe Hamon

The Romantic traveler had a particular affinity for visiting monuments at night. Hugo upon visiting Geneva wrote that: "The moon camouflages the foolishness of architects." These "shadow zones" or sfumato (as Stendhal would say) that plunged objects into real or semantic darkness served to highlight the feats of memory and the author's cultural prowess at interpreting signs, signals, and inscriptions. But Zola's project of "seeing all and telling all" (or Viollet-le-Duc's dictum that "seeing is knowing") could no longer accommodate this kind of obscurity: given the development of the historical and social sciences toward the end of the nineteenth century, the aim was now to arrive at a total elucidation of the real. The whole world was now a crystal palace. Traditional "cabinets de merveilles" (or curiosity shops - ancestors of modern universal expositions) as well as traditional notions of sublimity were based on the assumption that natural phenomena were anarchic, nocturnal, amorphous, monstrous, and indescribable. These phenomena - at least in the eyes of the most optimistic supporters of an exposition mentality - came to be perceived as susceptible to the control of a museum mentality, a logic of techniques, dictionaries, frames, tableaux, descriptive systems, or rhetorical processes in general. This type of reasoning constructs texts as if they were exposition architecture while at the same time conceiving architecture as if it were a spectacle or text through which one moved: as in the case of boulevards, galleries of machines, stores, panoramas, arcades, or museums. Eclecticism and exposition - which juxtapose and set off objects or spectacles, create discontinuities, and organize differentiated moments along the exhibition's various pathways - would replace the traditional sublime, which involves the (cf) fusion of spectator and spectacle - the spectator's possession by the spectacle. Even the sea, an extreme example of nonarchitecture, is mastered either through work and technology, as in Hugo's *Les Travailleurs de La Mer*, Verne's *Nautilus*, or, by museums and their catalogues. Thus, in Michelet's *La Mer*, the author demands that museums be established that would "display" and "fully exhibit" all sea monsters. He also congratulates the nineteenth century ("a great century, a titanic century, the nineteenth century") for managing

to write the book of the indescribable, "the encyclopedia of storms at sea" - the storm being the "sublime" spectacle par excellence. Monsters would be henceforth tamed by the well-lit display case; there is no longer any shadow area or any night. After the play of the sun and moon on Romantic ruins, the harsh, uniform light of modernity is ushered in. Gas lamps, in anticipation of electricity, furnish the bourgeois salon-like the exhibition hall, the boulevard sidewalk, or the department store - with permanent footlights for the display of worldly objects and manners. "The gas lamps in delirium, on ruddy walls" (Rimbaud, "L'Orgie parisienne, ou Paris se repeuple"), gas lamps that "flame and swim" before "vermilion signs" (Verlaine, "Sonnet boiteux") punctuate all the descriptions of the city in the literature of the middle of the century.

The display case exhibited the product of industry as though it were a spectacle. Like the houses described in literary texts, the ideal workplace existed only on paper and tended to take the shape of a glass house or of a "rotating" house, always regulating its own exposures. For the ideal workplace, there was the phalanstery, in which the open gallery always played an important role, where a network of pipes "circulated comfort." In the case of the house, there was the home of the parvenu, the typical residence of a character in transition between social classes, or else there was the vacation home, evoked by various literary works, where the problem of exposure proved equally crucial, embodying and defining in all its different aspects this ideal of transparency. Thus, Victor Fournel constructs a city of 1965 in his ironic and polemical book of 1865, *Paris nouveau et Paris futur*. In this model, exacerbated by Haussmann's urban-renewal projects, the dreamt-of Paris approaches an encyclopedic design both through its concentric traffic and through the aisles that would also be adapted for the Exposition of 1867. Its panoptic design also recalls the phalansteries of Fourier:

*At its center stood a vast square one league in circumference from which there radiated, in every direction, fifty boulevards of equal beauty, like the corridors of Mazas around its chapel. Each of these boulevards was fifty meters wide, and was lined with buildings fifty meters high, with fifty windows on each facade .... Standing in this square, one could spin around and take in all of Paris and its gates at a single glance. Its center was occupied*



Charles Marville, *rue de Constantine*, Paris (1865)

by a monumental, circular barracks, topped by a beacon - an immense and vigilant eye - from which a strong flash of electric light reached over the city each night .... Out-of-town visitors no longer needed guidebooks to find their way around the city; all they needed to do was walk straight down the boulevard upon leaving their hotel; in the evening, they would find themselves back where they started, having thoroughly inspected everything in the first circle .... The next day, they would begin again with the next circle . . . . We had attained the long-sought goal: to remake Paris into a luxury and curiosity item; instead of a merely utilitarian object, it would become a city of exposition.

In this urban design, the city itself becomes a book:

*The fifty boulevards that radiated from the center to the circumference bore the names of the fifty largest cities in France; their fifty gates corresponded to the departments of which these towns were the capitals; ... hence just as the geography and history helped the visitor find his way around Paris, so a walk in the city provided a lesson in history and geography .... Paris was a large, synchrological and chronological mnemotechnical table.*

Fournel here concentrates, although in an ironic mode, all the themes, metaphors, and structures of numerous philosophic, technical, or literary texts of the period, that express some reflection upon the ties between the legible and the visible, knowledge and seeing, and memory and modernity. One can think of the aesthetic of the table or the mnemonic devices found in the pedagogical tours of France published by Bruno and Hetzel - to which we will later return. In Charles Fourier's ideal city-a city which he termed, at various points, "guarantist," "harmonian," or "of the sixth period" - "each street should lead toward a picturesque sight be it a public or personal monument, a mountain, bridge, or waterfall." For such a city, built for the euphoric practice of the gaze, Fourier invents the term "visuism," claiming that the eye of the citizen of a harmonic group would evolve so as to possess full peripheral vision. Similarly, there was the more serious philosophic reverie which took the phenomenon of the exposition as its subject and point of departure, namely, Proudhon's project for a Permanent Exhibition. In response to the question of what might be done with the Palace of Industry

following the Exposition of 1855, Proudhon provides a hyperbolic and quintessential version of the themes of transparency and of display:

*[The 1855 Exposition] was merely an industrial joust undertaken from the sterile, theatrical vantage point of national vanity and commercial arrogance. Once this temporary exposition is over, we must establish a Permanent Exposition .... Today's commerce as a rule establishes absolute secrecy in its operations .... The organizers of the Exposition will replace such excessive secrecy with complete openness .... The report of the annual and biannual Society must divulge everything and fully submit itself to public opinion. Everything must be displayed in plain view of the master, who is none other than the public itself.*

One might note in passing that this policy of telling all would later be the program of realist and naturalist writing.

On the individual scale of the Parisian townhouse, the habitat of a *homo novus*, such as Zola's parvenu Saccard in *La Curée*, offers a showcase for the same themes and metaphors. Saccard's home is described as having a

*huge glass conservatory embedded in the very flank of the house and connected to the ground floor through the French windows of the drawing room .... [It was] a large construction, new and utterly pallid, ... a small scale version of the new Louvre .... Strollers in the park would top and look .... Sheers of glass so wide and clear that they were like the windows of the new department stores were there to display its vast interior to those outside. Petits-bourgeois families gawked at the stunning riches: corners of the furniture, bits of upholstery, and patches of ceiling. The sight paralyzed them with admiration and envy, right in the middle of the pathways.*

Significantly, this "new" man's residence imitates Lefuel's new Louvre, the object of harsh criticism at the time of its construction. The house also mimics the novelty shop featured in Zola's *Au Bonheur des dames* as well as the fresh produce stands of Les Haïles in Zola's *Le Ventre de Paris*. The profusion of fruits and vegetables in the latter novel is paralleled by the small-scale gathering and display of every plant in the world in Saccard's conservatory. As evidenced by the wordplay of the inhabitants of the Vauquer boarding house in *Le*



Jean Béraud, *La Soirée*, oil on canvas (1880)

*Père Goriot* - in which the suffix -rama was added to any term introduced into the conversation - all of modern reality seemed predestined in the shape of panoramas and dioramas.

In this organization of a legible space that coincides with a visible space, display cases, partitions, or streets at once connect and separate classes of the real. Thus, the various characters from the working or middle class, high society or demimonde, like items on the writer's filecards, shape the exposition-text on all levels. Most notably, Zola's novels feature a careful montage of all the living spaces of his characters, who are governed by a very dense grid of lines of sight that tend to cover the whole of the novel's referent. Each character continually sees and meets everyone else from windows, connecting doors that are either open or ajar, in shadow play from behind screens or curtains, or from belvederes or garrets. Mademoiselle Sager, the spying gossip of *Le Ventre de Paris* who is the novelist's transparent double or stand-in (she knows everything about the characters who in turn know nothing about her) spends her time on the thresholds of stores, at the corners of intersections, or most often, at her upper-story window from where she can observe the living spaces of the other characters. For Mlle. Sager, as for all gossips - and the journalist or news monger is but a variant of her - Paris is a glass house:

*Before her ... lay the square, the three faces of the houses, pierced by their windows into which she sought to penetrate her gaze; she seemed to grow taller and move along each story seeking visual footholds from each window until she reached the oeil de boeuf windows of the garret floors; she stared at the curtains, reconstructing a drama out of a simple appearance of a head between two shutters and ended up knowing the stories of the tenants in each of the houses, without having seen anything more than their facades.*

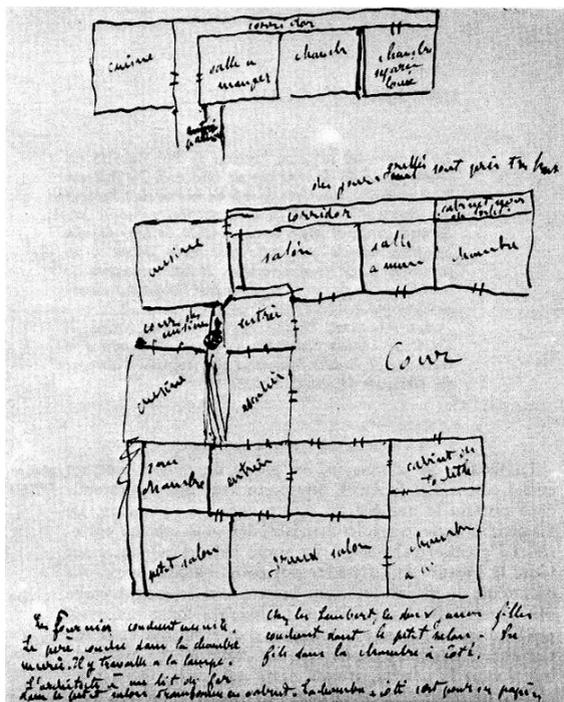
Because Zola's works impose a strict unity of place, the cast of characters tends to converge on a highly confined living space. Sometimes this space is vertical, with all the characters living on different floors of the same building (as in *Pot-Bouille*), or inhabiting the same huge barracks (as in *L'Assommoir*). Sometimes the space is horizontal, with the characters living at the four corners of the same intersection, and thus enabling them to spy on each other (as in the case

of *L'Assommoir*, which is set at the crossroads of the exterior boulevards and rue de la Poissonniere, or *Le Ventre de Paris*, at the corner of Pirouette and Rambuteau). The very term *carreau* - which in the case of the mine in *Germinal* applies to the bank where extracted materials are deposited and in the case of Les Hailes in *Le Ventre de Paris* refers to the space where fruits and vegetables are displayed and sold - recalls the *carreau* of window panes, casements, or shop windows that stage the spectacle.

In such a world dedicated to general transparency, secrecy - one might venture to say narrative - has no place. Zola, on two occasions wrote mystery novels; the plot of *Le Ventre de Paris* hinged on the question: "Who is Florent?" just as *La Bête humaine* asked: "Who murdered Grandmorin on the train?" Yet Zola was unable to maintain the suspense for the reader who knew from the first page the identities of both Florent and Grandmorin's killer. It is as if Baltard's covered markets on the one hand and the glass architecture of the railway station on the other had exposed both novels to too harsh a light. Edgar Allen Poe, instead, would know how to make the excessive exposure of the hidden thing the province of efficient modern dissimulation. In "The Purloined Letter" for example, the police are baffled until Inspector Dupin's intervention, despite the various searches of premises and interrogations.

The ideal leisure home, the seaside vacation house, observes the same logic of the same metaphor of «seeing it all." This variation on the *locus amoenus* was already established by Pliny the Younger's description of his country house by the sea in his famous letter which, incidentally, was reproduced in 1852 in the very serious-minded *Moniteur des architectes*. The home described in the letter, with its curving portico, galleries, carefully regulated exposures, organized play of light, belvederes, and meticulously positioned windows was a veritable machine for analyzing both time and space. This logical tool for understanding land and sea, leisure and work, air and ground, can be related in its logical functions to the house whose carefully regulated exposures Michelet describes in *La Mer*:

*Oh to be able to build the house of the future ... It must not be shaded from the sun, rather it must gather up the sun like a precious object. Let's set aside ridiculous playthings such as imitation chapels*



Layout of an apartment in the tenement of *Pot-Bouille*, drawn by Émile Zola

*and Gothic churches, which make for impractical lodgings. The side of the house which faces land must be perfectly sheltered, and one must be able to forget the commotion of the sea, in order to find peace. To address these ... needs I would choose the form least susceptible to wind: the semicircle or crescent. The convex part would allow for a diverse panorama on the sea and would afford a view of the sun moving from window to window while receiving its light at all times .... There would also be a crescent-shaped gallery for use during bad weather ... with flowers, an aviary, and a small, seawater pool in which [the woman of the house] could store those small curiosities that fishermen would give her to take home.*

This ideal panoramic house, a model of universal exposition in that its exposures open out onto the universe, acts as a shifter for a series of binary oppositions: sea/land, open/closed, good weather/bad weather, inside/outside, concave/convex, leisure/work (in this passage, the latter is represented by the fisherman). Furthermore it realizes the dream of total acclimatization - which Michelet foresees as the science to be invented by the nineteenth century - not to mention miniaturization illustrated by the aviary and the saltwater pool where marine samples gathered from the neighboring sea would be collected. In his poem "Promontoire," Rimbaud would in a sense rewrite the ideal belvedere, by creating a seaside site composed of a "villa and its outbuildings," "tremendous views of modern coastal defenses," "outside laundries surrounded German poplars," and "circular facades of the 'Royals' or 'Grands' of Scarborough or Brooklyn" with "windows and terraces full of lights."

Of course the body, which inhabits protective envelopes such as skin or clothing, did not escape this logic of transparency and exposition, which is in turn legitimated by the discourse on hygiene and medicine as well as the obsession with comfort, a criterion that signals the satisfactory acclimatization of the inhabitant to his habitat. Hygiene and comfort (both terms appear frequently in Rimbaud's poetry) can both be reduced to nothing more than the regulation and control of exposure to natural agents such as air, sun, wind, and seasons on the one hand and, on the other, to optical instruments of science (microscopes) and their accompanying elucidating theories such as physiology, physiognomy, psychology, and theories of

heredity that underlie much of the literary discourse of the nineteenth-century. Once again in *La Mer* Michelet gives a modern heliotropic and hygienic twist to the ancient idea of "exposing a child": "A child must be lightly dressed so as to always be in contact with fresh air. Air and water, nothing more." He also suggests that city dwellers acquire suntans:

*This rich color should not be considered an illness of the epidermis, rather it manifests the skin's healthy and deep saturation of sun and life. I have a wise doctor friend who used to send pale Parisian and Lyonnais clients to bask in the sun. He himself used to expose himself to the sun by lying on a rock for hours on end.*

For the person immersed in nature, the tan is the equivalent to the patina left on edifices immersed in history. The importance of patina for Ruskin in particular and for antiquarians in general is well known; if they protest against the excessive restoration of monuments, it is because the patina constitutes the mark of truth.

Exposure to natural agents is carefully specified in Professor Sarrasin's ideal city, France-Ville, in Verne's *Cinq cents millions de la Bégum*. The city is located

*near a mountain range that blocks the winds from the north, south, and east, leaving only the Pacific breeze to cleanse the surrounding atmosphere, ... and situated [at the mouth] of a small river whose fresh, sweet, and limpid water, oxygenated by repeated rainfall and the rapidity of its flow, arrives perfectly pure to the sea.*

Here, we have a collective variation on Michelet's seaside house: Michelet's crescent-shaped house whose convex side is exposed to the sea complements the crescent formed by the protecting mountains around the city, whose concave side is exposed to the sea. The dream of miniaturization (and therefore of control over the world) that is found in Michelet's *La Mer* corresponds to the abundance of mines and quarries of all sorts near Verne's city, just as both works share a vision of the alliance of opposites (as in Verne's "oxygenated water"). Even the brick houses of France-Ville (as opposed to the compact stone of ancient monuments) permit the salutary ventilation of the interior of the walls and partitions, since they are pierced through with



Julien Duvivier, *Pot-Bouille*, film poster (1957)

openings. Aside from the “total freedom allowed architects in matters of ornamentation ... no house will be taller than two stories high, since air and light must not be monopolized by some to the detriment of others.” Interestingly, the beneficial exposure of the site is accompanied by exposure to the beneficial laws of the city. Moreover, these two types of exposure can be read as metaphors for the “glass-house” style of writing, as well as for the salutary pedagogic communication of which the author dreams: “Upon arrival, each citizen receives a small brochure, where the most important principles for a life based on science [hygiene] are exposed in simple and clear language.”

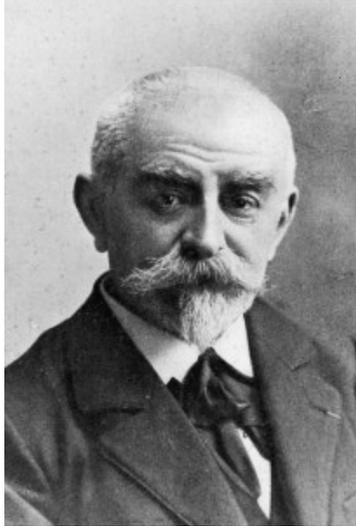
Such ideal sites, cities, or houses are not confined to the specialized discourse of science fiction, philosophical essays, nor architectural theory. The components of an “exposition mentality” (as opposed to Hugo’s “church-portal mentality” in *Notre-Dame de Paris*) can also be found in literary texts. Sometimes exposition mentality is seen on a small scale in a character’s momentary action, posture, pose, or pause; it can also be encountered at the level of a room or window some character or other will traverse. But as always, architecture remains the locus, the means, the metaphoric vehicle or pretext for organizing the world’s itineraries, spectacles, scenes, classifications, and regulations.

Proust’s work features many examples of aquarium-like dwellings and ambiguous belvederes. He created complex sites whose exposures are both contradictory and borderline by juxtaposing water and land, night/day, and private/public. He achieved these effects by making numerous comparisons to the exposition and by “mounting” several exhibition scenes. For example, his preface to Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies* compares San Marco in Venice to an “exposition palace”; Bergotte’s famous death-scene takes place at an exhibit of Dutch paintings while admiring “a little patch of yellow wall” in Jan Vermeer’s *View of Delft*.

The Guermantes’s townhouse also brings to life images of a veritable painting exhibit in the narrator’s mind:

*From the strange trigonometrical point at which I had positioned myself, ... I watched from a little room, which had seemed to me to be a good lookout post, for the arrival of [the Guermantes’s] carriage ... . The extreme proximity of the houses with their windows looking across at one another over a common courtyard makes each casement the frame in which a cook sits dreamingly gazing down at the ground below, or, further off, a girl is having her hair combed by an old woman with a witch-like face, barely distinguishable in the shadow; thus each courtyard provides the neighbors in the adjoining house, suppressing sound by its width and framing silent gestures in a series of rectangles placed under glass by the closing of the windows, with an exhibition of a hundred Dutch paintings hung in rows.*

We will see later on that this is an example of Proust’s rewriting of a commonplace of lyrical exposition, which cuts across the literature of the entire century: The observer behind his window watching the observed behind her window. Elsewhere in Proust, the narrator’s grandmother’s Balbec room transforms itself into a prism. The narrator’s doctor has recommended that the boy not be exposed to “the blazing sun” while at the sea. Choosing to follow this advice regarding “hygiene” he decides to accept invitations for excursions inland. While waiting, he goes to his grandmother’s room, which he describes as an intermediary place between immobility and excursion. This site for assessing “different exposures” to different “sides” (*côtés*) - a key Proustian term if ever there was one-and for synthesizing space and redistributing impressions, is described as a prism-like locus situated between single and multiple exposure. [...]



Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848-1907)

VI  
*Against the Grain*  
(1884)

# Against the Grain

(A REBOURS)

A NOVEL WITHOUT A PLOT.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF  
KARL JORIS HUYSMANS.

*THE BOOK THAT DORIAN GRAY LOVED  
AND THAT INSPIRED OSCAR WILDE.*

*"IT WAS THE STRANGEST BOOK HE HAD EVER READ."*

LIBRAIRIE DU PALAIS-ROYAL  
GROVES & MICHAUX

1926

*Against the Grain*, Librairie du Palais-Royal, Groves & Michaux (1926)

Joris-Karl Huysmans is a French writer whose major novels epitomize successive phases of the aesthetic, spiritual, and intellectual life of late 19th century France.

Huysmans was the only son of a French mother and a Dutch father. At 20 he began a long career in the Ministry of the Interior, writing many of his novels on official time (and notepaper). His early work, influenced by contemporary naturalist novelists, include a novel, *Marthe, histoire d'une fille* (1876; *Marthe*), about his liaison with a soubrette, and a novella, *Sac au dos* (1880; "Pack on Back"), based on his experience in the Franco-German War. The latter was published in *Les Soirées de Médan* (1881), war stories written by members of Émile Zola's "Médan" group of naturalist writers. Huysmans soon broke with the group, however, publishing a series of novels too decadent in content and violent in style to be considered examples of naturalism.

The first was *À vau-l'eau* (1882; *Down Stream*), a tragicomic account of the misfortunes, largely sexual, of a humble civil servant, Folantin. *À rebours* (1884; *Against the Grain*), Huysmans's best-known novel, relates the experiments in aesthetic decadence undertaken by the bored survivor of a noble line. The ambitious and controversial *Là-bas* (1891; *Down There*) tells of the occultist revival that occurred in France in the 1880s. (...)

*Against the Grain*, in both its style and its subject, the work epitomizes the decadence of late 19th-century French elite culture. The protagonist, Des Esseintes, exhibits the debilitating symptoms of neurasthenia, a generalized psychosomatic disorder that came into vogue during that period. The condition necessitates his temporary retirement from Paris to his country estate at Fontenay, where he sets his course "against the grain" of ordinary life. Cloistered in luxury, Des Esseintes contrives a regimen of exquisite sensualism. He devises a "mouth organ" from which he sips "harmonic" combinations of liqueurs. He cultivates exotic flora and arranges to have the shell of a live tortoise inlaid with jewels. His overly refined tastes encompass perfumes, monastic music, visionary painting, and the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé. Unchecked indulgence only deepens his malaise, however, prompting his doctor to order him back to Paris. The story ends there, with an appeal by Des Esseintes for pity from a God he only vaguely believes in. Although the author intended the work for a select group of readers, it has become a sourcebook on fin-de-siècle aestheticism.



Auguste Leroux, gravées à l'eau-forte par E. Decisy, sur bois par Clément. Paris, A. et F. Ferroud (1920)

## AGAINST THE GRAIN

### CHAPTER 2

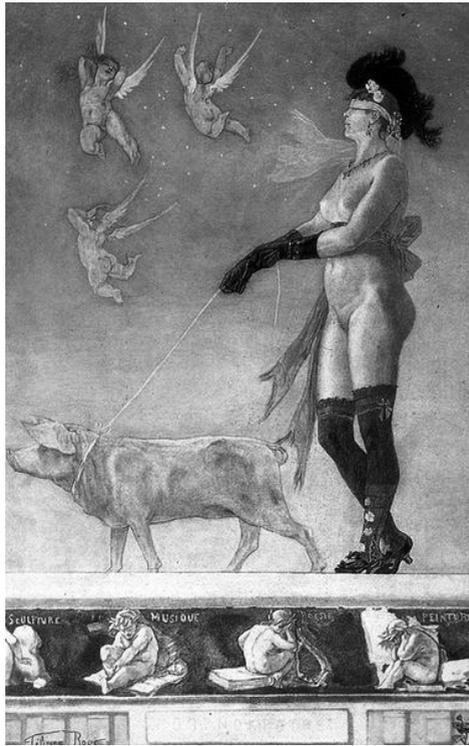
More than two months passed before Des Esseintes could bury himself in the silent repose of his Fontenay abode. He was obliged to go to Paris again, to comb the city in his search for the things he wanted to buy. What care he took, what meditations he surrendered himself to, before turning over his house to the upholsterers! He had long been a connoisseur in the sincerities and evasions of color-tones. In the days when he had entertained women at his home, he had created a boudoir where, amid daintily carved furniture of pale, Japanese camphor-wood, under a sort of pavillion of Indian rose-tinted satin, the flesh would color delicately in the borrowed lights of the silken hangings. This room, each of whose sides was lined with mirrors that echoed each other all along the walls, reflecting, as far as the eye could reach, whole series of rose boudoirs, had been celebrated among the women who loved to immerse their nudity in this bath of warm carnation, made fragrant with the odor of mint emanating from the exotic wood of the furniture. Aside from the sensual delights for which he had designed this chamber, this painted atmosphere which gave new color to faces grown dull and withered by the use of ceruse and by nights of dissipation, there were other, more personal and perverse pleasures which he enjoyed in these languorous surroundings,—pleasures which in some way stimulated memories of his past pains and dead ennuis. As a souvenir of the hated days of his childhood, he had suspended from the ceiling a small silver-wired cage where a captive cricket sang as if in the ashes of the chimneys of the Château de Lourps. Listening to the sound he had so often heard before, he lived over again the silent evenings spent near his mother, the wretchedness of his suffering, repressed youth. And then, while he yielded to the voluptuousness of the woman he mechanically caressed, whose words or laughter tore him from his reverie and rudely recalled him to the moment, to the boudoir, to reality, a tumult arose in his soul, a need of avenging the sad years he had endured, a mad wish to sully the recollections of his family by shameful action, a furious desire to pant on cushions of flesh, to drain to their last dregs the most violent of carnal vices. On rainy autumnal days when melancholy oppressed him, when a hatred of his home, the muddy yellow skies, the macadam clouds assailed him, he took refuge in this retreat, set the cage lightly in motion and watched it endlessly reflected in the play of the mirrors, until it seemed to his dazed eyes that the cage no longer stirred, but that the boudoir reeled and turned, filling the house with a rose-colored waltz. In the days when he had deemed it necessary to affect singularity, Des Esseintes had designed marvelously strange furnishings, dividing his salon into a series of alcoves hung with varied tapestries to relate by a subtle analogy, by a vague harmony of joyous or sombre, delicate or barbaric colors to the character of the Latin or French books he loved. And he would seclude himself in turn in the particular recess whose décor seemed best to correspond with the very essence of the work his caprice of the moment induced him to read. He had constructed, too, a lofty high room intended for the reception of his tradesmen. Here they were ushered in and seated alongside each other in church pews, while from a pulpit he preached to them a sermon on dandyism, adjuring his bootmakers and tailors implicitly to obey his briefs in the matter of style, threatening them with pecuniary excommunication if they failed to follow to the letter the instructions contained in his monitories and bulls. He acquired the reputation of an eccentric, which he enhanced by wearing costumes of white velvet, and gold-embroidered waistcoats, by inserting, in place of a cravat, a Parma bouquet in the opening of his shirt, by giving famous dinners to men of letters, one of which, a revival of the eighteenth century, celebrating the most futile of his misadventures, was a funeral repast. In the dining room, hung in black and opening on the transformed garden with its ash-powdered walks, its little pool now bordered with basalt and filled with ink, its clumps of cypresses and pines, the dinner had been served on a table draped in black, adorned with baskets of violets and scabiouses, lit by candelabra from which green flames blazed, and by chandeliers from which wax tapers flared.



To the sound of funeral marches played by a concealed orchestra, nude negresses, wearing slippers and stockings of silver cloth with patterns of tears, served the guests. Out of black-edged plates they had drunk turtle soup and eaten Russian rye bread, ripe Turkish olives, caviar, smoked Frankfort black pudding, game with sauces that were the color of licorice and blacking, truffle gravy, chocolate cream, puddings, nectarines, grape preserves, mulberries and black-heart cherries; they had sipped, out of dark glasses, wines from Limagne, Roussillon, Tenedos, Val de Penas and Porto, and after the coffee and walnut brandy had partaken of kvas and porter and stout. The farewell dinner to a temporarily dead virility—this was what he had written on invitation cards designed like bereavement notices. But he was done with those extravagances in which he had once gloried. Today, he was filled with a contempt for those juvenile displays, the singular apparel, the appointments of his bizarre chambers. He contented himself with planning, for his own pleasure, and no longer for the astonishment of others, an interior that should be comfortable although embellished in a rare style; with building a curious, calm retreat to serve the needs of his future solitude. When the Fontenay house was in readiness, fitted up by an architect according to his plans, when all that remained was to determine the color scheme, he again devoted himself to long speculations. He desired colors whose expressiveness would be displayed in the artificial light of lamps. To him it mattered not at all if they were lifeless or crude in daylight, for it was at night that he lived, feeling more completely alone then, feeling that only under the protective covering of darkness did the mind grow really animated and active. He also experienced a peculiar pleasure in being in a richly illuminated room, the only patch of light amid the shadow-haunted, sleeping houses. This was a form of enjoyment in which perhaps entered an element of vanity, that peculiar pleasure known to late workers when, drawing aside the window curtains, they perceive that everything about them is extinguished, silent, dead. Slowly, one by one, he selected the colors. Blue inclines to a false green by candle light: if it is dark, like cobalt or indigo, it turns black; if it is bright, it turns grey; if it is soft, like turquoise, it grows feeble and faded. There could be no question of making it the dominant note of a room unless it were blended with some other color. Iron grey always frowns and is heavy; pearl grey loses its blue and changes to a muddy white; brown is lifeless and cold; as for deep green, such as emperor or myrtle, it has the same properties as blue and merges into black. There remained, then, the paler greens, such as peacock, cinnabar or lacquer, but the light banishes their blues and brings out their yellows in tones that have a false and undecided quality. No need to waste thought on the salmon, the maize and rose colors whose feminine associations oppose all ideas of isolation! No need to consider the violet which is completely neutralized at night; only the red in it holds its ground—and what a red! a viscous red like the lees of wine. Besides, it seemed useless to employ this color, for by using a certain amount of santonin, he could get an effect of violet on his hangings. These colors disposed of, only three remained: red, orange, yellow. Of these, he preferred orange, thus by his own example confirming the truth of a theory which he declared had almost mathematical correctness—the theory that a harmony exists between the sensual nature of a truly artistic individual and the color which most vividly impresses him. Disregarding entirely the generality of men whose gross retinas are capable of perceiving neither the cadence peculiar to each color nor the mysterious charm of their nuances of light and shade; ignoring the bourgeoisie, whose eyes are insensible to the pomp and splendor of strong, vibrant tones; and devoting himself only to people with sensitive pupils, refined by literature and art, he was convinced that the eyes of those among them who dream of the ideal and demand illusions are generally caressed by blue and its derivatives, mauve, lilac and pearl grey, provided always that these colors remain soft and do not overstep the bounds where they lose their personalities by being transformed into pure violets and frank greys. Those persons, on the contrary, who are energetic and incisive, the plethoric, red-blooded, strong males who fling themselves unthinkingly into the affair of the moment, generally delight in the bold gleams of yellows and reds, the clashing cymbals of vermilions and chromes that blind and intoxicate them. But the eyes



of enfeebled and nervous persons whose sensual appetites crave highly seasoned foods, the eyes of hectic and over-excited creatures have a predilection toward that irritating and morbid color with its fictitious splendors, its acid fevers—orange. Thus, there could be no question about Des Esseintes' choice, but unquestionable difficulties still arose. If red and yellow are heightened by light, the same does not always hold true of their compound, orange, which often seems to ignite and turns to nasturtium, to a flaming red. He studied all their nuances by candlelight, discovering a shade which, it seemed to him, would not lose its dominant tone, but would stand every test required of it. These preliminaries completed, he sought to refrain from using, for his study at least, oriental stuffs and rugs which have become cheapened and ordinary, now that rich merchants can easily pick them up at auctions and shops. He finally decided to bind his walls, like books, with coarse-grained morocco, with Cape skin, polished by strong steel plates under a powerful press. When the wainscoting was finished, he had the moulding and high plinths painted in indigo, a lacquered indigo like that which coach makers employ for carriage panels. The ceiling, slightly rounded, was also lined with morocco. In the center was a wide opening resembling an immense bull's eye encased in orange skin—a circle of the firmament worked out on a background of king blue silk on which were woven silver seraphim with out-stretched wings. This material had long before been embroidered by the Cologne guild of weavers for an old cope. The setting was complete. At night the room subsided into a restful, soothing harmony. The wainscoting preserved its blue which seemed sustained and warmed by the orange. And the orange remained pure, strengthened and fanned as it was by the insistent breath of the blues. Des Esseintes was not deeply concerned about the furniture itself. The only luxuries in the room were books and rare flowers. He limited himself to these things, intending later on to hang a few drawings or paintings on the panels which remained bare; to place shelves and book racks of ebony around the walls; to spread the pelts of wild beasts and the skins of blue fox on the floor; to install, near a massive fifteenth century counting-table, deep armchairs and an old chapel reading-desk of forged iron, one of those old lecterns on which the deacon formerly placed the antiphony and which now supported one of the heavy folios of Du Cange's *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis*. The windows whose blue fissured panes, stippled with fragments of gold-edged bottles, intercepted the view of the country and only permitted a faint light to enter, were draped with curtains cut from old stoles of dark and reddish gold neutralized by an almost dead russet woven in the pattern. The mantel shelf was sumptuously draped with the remnant of a Florentine dalmatica. Between two gilded copper monstrances of Byzantine style, originally brought from the old Abbaye-au-Bois de Bièvre, stood a marvelous church canon divided into three separate compartments delicately wrought like lace work. It contained, under its glass frame, three works of Baudelaire copied on real vellum, with wonderful missal letters and splendid coloring: to the right and left, the sonnets bearing the titles of *La Mort des Amants* and *L'Ennemi*; in the center, the prose poem entitled, *Anywhere Out of the World—n'importe ou, hors du monde*.



Félicien Rops, *Pornocrates*, Decadentist Movement (1896)

## AGAINST THE GRAIN (À REBOURS)

By Havelock Ellis

In trying to represent the man who wrote the extraordinary books grouped around "A Rebour's" and "En Route," I find myself carried back to the decline of the Latin world. I recall those restless Africans who were drawn into the vortex of decadent Rome, who absorbed its corruptions with all the barbaric fervour of their race, and then with a more natural impetus of that youthful fervour threw themselves into the young current of Christianity, yet retaining in their flesh the brand of an exotic culture. Tertullian, Augustine, and the rest gained much of their power, as well as their charm, because they incarnated a fantastic mingling of youth and age, of decayed Latinity, of tumultuously youthful Christianity. Huysmans, too, incarnates the old and the new, but with a curious, a very vital difference. Today the rôles are reversed; it is another culture that is now young, with its aspirations after human perfection and social solidarity, while Christianity has exchanged the robust beauty of youth for the subtler beauty of age. "The most perfect analogy to our time which I can find," wrote Renan to his sister amid the tumults of Paris in 1848, a few weeks after Huysmans had been born in the same city, "is the moment when Christianity and paganism stood face to face." Huysmans had wandered from ancestral haunts of mediaeval peace into the forefront of the struggles of our day, bringing the clear, refined perceptions of old culture to the intense vision of the modern world yet attained, but never at rest, never once grasping except on the purely aesthetic side of the significance of the new age, always haunted by the memory of the past and perpetually feeling his way back to what seems to him the home of his soul.--The fervent seeker of those early days, indeed, but *à rebours!* (...)

Yet we can by no means altogether account for Huysmans by race and environment. Every man of genius is a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth, mirroring the world in his mind as in those concave or convex mirrors which elongate or abbreviate absurdly all who approach them. No one ever had a keener sense of the distressing absurdity of human affairs than M. Huysmans. The Trocadero is not a beautiful building, but to no one else probably has it appeared as an old hag lying on her back and elevating her spindle shanks

towards the sky. Such images of men's works and ways abound in Huysmans' books, and they express his unaffected vision of life, his disgust for men and things, a shuddering disgust, yet patient, half-amused. I can well recall an evening spent some years ago in M. Huysmans' company. His face, with the sensitive, luminous eyes, reminded one of Baudelaire's portraits, the face of a resigned and benevolent Mephistopheles who has discovered the absurdity of the Divine order but has no wish to make any improper use of his discovery. He talked in low and even tones, never eagerly, without any emphasis or gesture, not addressing any special person; human imbecility was the burden of nearly all that he said, while a faint twinkle of amused wonderment lit up his eyes. And throughout all his books until almost the last "l'éternelle bêtise de l'humanité" is the ever-recurring refrain. (...)

In 1884 "A Rebour's" appeared. Not perhaps his greatest achievement, it must ever remain the central work in which he has most powerfully concentrated his whole vision of life. It sums up the progress he had already made, foretells the progress he was afterwards to make, in a style that is always individual, always masterly in its individuality. Technically, it may be said that the power of "A Rebour's" lies in the fact that here for the first time Huysmans has succeeded in uniting the two lines of his literary development: the austere analysis in the novels of commonplace things mostly alien to the writer, and the freer elaboration in the prose-poems of his own more intimate personal impressions. In their union the two streams attain a new power and a more intimately personal note. Des Esseintes, the hero of this book, may possibly have been at a few points suggested by a much less interesting real personage in contemporary Paris, the Comte de Montesquiou-Fezensac, but in the main he was certainly created by Huysmans' own brain, as the representative of his author's hyperaesthetic experience of the world and the mouthpiece of his most personal judgments. The victim of overwrought nerves, of neuralgia and dyspepsia, Des Esseintes retires for a season from Paris to the solitude of his country house at Fontenay, which he has fitted up, on almost cloistral methods, to soothe his fantasy and to gratify his complex aesthetic sensations, his love of reading and contemplation. The finest pictures of Gustave Moreau hang on the walls, with the fantastic engravings of Luyken, and the strange visions of



*Palais Rose - Residence actuelle du Comte Robert de Montesquiou. Les Vitrines.*

Odilon Redon. He has a tortoise curiously inlaid with precious stones; he delights in all those exotic plants which reveal Nature's most unnatural freaks; he is a sensitive amateur of perfumes, and considers that the pleasures of smell are equal to those of sight or sound; he possesses a row of little barrels of liqueurs so arranged that he can blend in infinite variety the contents of this instrument, his "mouth-organ" he calls it, and produce harmonies which seem to him comparable to those yielded by a musical orchestra. But the solitary pleasures of this palace of art only increase the nervous strain he is suffering from; and at the urgent bidding of his doctor Des Esseintes returns to the society of his abhorred fellow-beings in Paris, himself opening the dyke that admitted the "waves of human mediocrity" to engulf his refuge. And this wonderful confession of aesthetic faith—with its long series of deliberately searching and decisive affirmations on life, religion, literature, art—ends with a sudden solemn invocation that is surprisingly tremulous: "Take pity, O Lord, on the Christian who doubts, on the skeptic who desires to believe, on the convict of life who embarks alone, in the night, beneath a sky no longer lit by the consoling beacons of ancient faith."

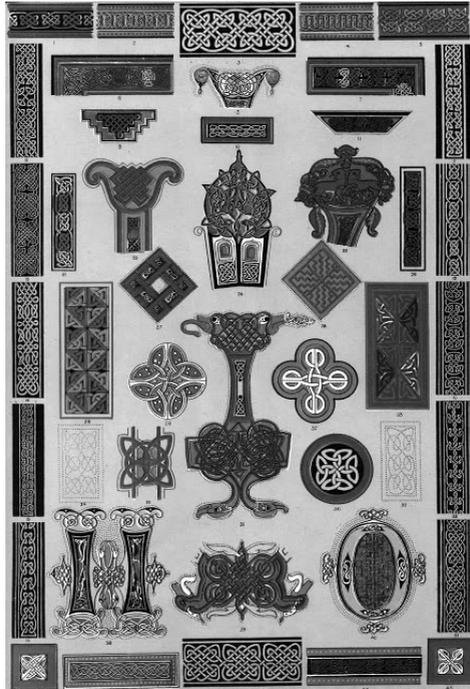
"He who carries his own most intimate emotions to their highest point becomes the first in file of a long series of men"; that saying is peculiarly true of Huysmans. But to be a leader of men one must turn one's back on men. Huysmans' attitude towards his readers was somewhat like that of Thoreau, who spoke with lofty disdain of such writers as "would fain have one reader before they die." As he has since remarked, Huysmans wrote "A Rebus" for a dozen persons, and was himself more surprised than any one at the wide interest it evoked. Yet that interest was no accident. Certain aesthetic ideals of the latter half of the nineteenth century are more quintessentially expressed in "A Rebus" than in any other book. Intensely personal, audaciously independent, it yet sums up a movement which has scarcely now worked itself out. We may read it and re-read, not only for the light which it casts on that movement, but upon every similar period of acute aesthetic perception in the past.

The aesthetic attitude towards art which "A Rebus" illuminates is that commonly called decadent. Decadence in art, though a fairly simple phenomenon, and worldwide as art itself, is still so ill understood that it may be worthwhile to

discuss briefly its precise nature, more especially as manifested in literature. Technically, a decadent style is only such in relation to a classic style. It is simply a further development of a classic style, a further specialization, the homogeneous, in Spencerian phraseology, having become heterogeneous. The first is beautiful because the parts are subordinated to the whole; the second is beautiful because the whole is subordinated to the parts. Among our own early prose-writers Sir Thomas Browne represents the type of decadence in style. Swift's prose is classic, Pater's decadent. Hume and Gibbon are classic, Emerson and Carlyle decadent. Roman architecture is classic, to become in its Byzantine developments completely decadent, and St. Mark's is the perfected type of decadence in art; pure early Gothic is classic in the highest degree, while later Gothic, grown weary of the commonplaces of structure, is again decadent. In each case the earlier and classic manner—for the classic manner, being more closely related to the ends of utility, must always be earlier—subordinates the parts to the whole, and strives after those virtues which the whole may best express; the later manner depreciates the importance of the whole for the benefit of its parts, and strives after the virtues of individualism. All art is the rising and falling of the slopes of a rhythmic curve between these two classic and decadent extremes. (...)

A style of decadence is one in which the unity of the book is decomposed to give place to the independence of the page, in which the page is decomposed to give place to the independence of the phrase, and the phrase to give place to the independence of the word." It was at this time (about 1884) that the term "decadent" seems first to have been applied by Barrès and others to the group of which Verlaine, Huysmans, Mallarmé were the most distinguished members, and in so far as it signified an ardent and elaborate search for perfection of detail beyond that attained by Parnassian classicity it was tolerated or accepted. Verlaine, indeed, was for the most part indifferent to labels, neither accepting nor rejecting them, and his work. (...)

Des Esseintes' predilections in literature are elaborated through several chapters, and without question he faithfully reflects his creator's impressions. He was indifferent or contemptuous towards the writers of the Latin Augustan age; Virgil seemed to him thin and mechanical,



ORNAMENT

Jones Owen, *The Grammar of Ornament: Celtic Ornament* (1856)

Horace a detestable clown; the fat redundancy of Cicero, we are told, and the dry constipation of Caesar alike disgusted him; Sallust, Livy, Juvenal, even Tacitus and Plautus, though for these he had words of praise, seemed to him for the most part merely the delights of pseudoliterary readers. Latin only began to be interesting to Des Esseintes in Lucan, for here at least, in spite of the underlying hollowiness, it became expressive and studded with brilliant jewels. The author whom above all he delighted in was Petronius—who reminded Des Esseintes of the modern French novelists he most admired—and several eloquent pages are devoted to that profound observer, delicate analyst, and marvellous painter who modelled his own vivid and precise style out of all the idioms and slang of his day. After Petronius there was a gap in his collection of Latin authors until the second century of our own era is reached with Apuleius and the sterner Christian contemporaries of that jovial pagan, Tertullian and the rest, in whose hands the tongue that in Petronius had reached supreme maturity now began to dissolve. For Tertullian he had little admiration, and none for Augustine, though sympathizing with his “City of God” and his general disgust for the world.

But the special odour which the Christians had by the fourth century imparted to decomposing pagan Latin was delightful to him in such authors as Commodian of Gaza, whose tawny, sombre, and tortuous style he even preferred to Claudian’s sonorous blasts, in which the trumpet of paganism was last heard in the world. He was also able to maintain interest in Prudentius, Sedulius, and a host of unknown Christians who combined Catholic fervour with a Latinity which had become, as it were, completely putrid, leaving but a few shreds of torn flesh for the Christians to “marinate in the brine of their new tongue.”

Des Esseintes is no admirer of Rabelais or Molière, of Voltaire or Rousseau. Among the older French writers he read only Villon, D’Aubigné, Bossuet, Bourdaloue, Nicole, and especially Pascal. Putting these aside, his French library began with Baudelaire. (...)

The scanty collection also included Verlaine, Mallarmé, Poe, and Villiers de l’Isle-Adam, whose firm fantastic style and poignantly ironic attitude towards the utilitarian modern world he found entirely to his taste. Finally, there only remained the little anthology of prose-

poems. Des Esseintes thought it improbable that he would ever make any additions to his library; it seemed impossible to him that a decadent language--“struggling on its death-bed to repair all the omissions of joy and bequeath the subtlest memories of pain”--would ever go beyond Mallarmé.

We have to recognize that decadence is an aesthetic and not a moral conception. The power of words is great, but they need not befool us. The classic herring should suggest no moral superiority over the decadent bloater. We are not called upon to air our moral indignation over the bass end of the musical clef. We may well reserve our finest admiration for the classic in art, for therein are included the largest and most imposing works of human skill; but our admiration is of little worth if it is founded on incapacity to appreciate the decadent. (...)

To Huysmans the world has ever been above all a vision; it was no accident that the art that appeals most purely to the eyes is that of which he has been the finest critic. One is tempted, indeed, to suggest that this aptitude is the outcome of heredity. He has been intensely preoccupied with the effort to express those visible aspects of things which the arts of design were made to express, which the art of speech can perhaps never express. The tortured elaboration of his style is chiefly due to this perpetual effort to squeeze tones and colours out of this foreign medium. The painter’s brain holds only a pen and cannot rest until it has wrung from it a brush’s work. But not only is the sense of vision marked in Huysmans.

We are conscious of a general hyperaesthesia, an intense alertness to the inrush of sensations, which we might well term morbid if it were not so completely intellectualized and controlled. Hearing, indeed, appears to be less acutely sensitive than sight, the poet is subordinated to the painter, though that sense still makes itself felt, and the heavy multicoloured paragraphs often fall at the close into a melancholy and poignant rhythm laden with sighs. It is the sense of smell which Huysmans’ work would lead us to regard as most highly developed after that of sight. The serious way in which Des Esseintes treats perfumes is characteristic, and one of the most curious and elaborate of the “Croquis Parisiens” is “Le Gousset,” in which the capacities of language are strained to define and differentiate the odours of feminine arm-pits. (...)



Gustave Moreau, *Salomé* (1876)

Huysmans very exquisitely represents one aspect of the complex modern soul, that aspect which shrinks from the grosser forces of Nature, from the bare simplicity of the naked sky or the naked body, the "incessant deluge of human foolishness," the eternal oppression of the commonplace, to find a sedative for its exasperated nerves in the contemplation of esoteric beauty and the difficult search for the mystic peace which passes all understanding. "Needs must I rejoice beyond the age," runs the motto from the old Flemish mystic Ruysbroeck set on the front of "A Rebours," "though the world has horror of my joy and its grossness cannot understand what I would say." Such is decadence; such, indeed, is religion, in the wide and true sense of the word. Christianity itself, as we know it in the western church, sprang from the baptism of young barbarism into Latin decadence. Pagan art and its clear serenity, science, rationalism, the bright, rough vigour of the sun and the sea, the adorable mystery of common life and commonplace human love, are left to make up the spirit that in any age we call "classic."

(...)

Christianity once fitted nearly every person born into the European world; there must needs be some to whom, in no modern devitalized form but in its purest essence, it is still the one refuge possible. No doubt conditions have changed; the very world itself is not what it was to the mediaeval man. For the mediaeval man, - as still today for the child in the darkness, - his dreams and his fancies, every organic thrill in eye or ear, seemed to be flashed on him from a world of angels and demons without. The average man of those days--not the finer or the coarser natures,

it may well be-- might be said to be the victim of a species of madness, a paranoia, a systematized persecutorial delusion. He could not look serenely in the face of the stars or lie at rest among the fir-cones in the wood, for who knew what ambush of the Enemy might not lurk behind these things? Even in flowers, as St. Cyprian said, the Enemy lay hidden. There was only one spot where men might huddle together in safety--the church.

Huysmans, notwithstanding a very high degree of intellectual subtlety, is by virtue of his special aesthetic and imaginative temperament carried back to the more childlike attitude of this earlier age. The whole universe appears to him as a process of living images; he cannot reason in abstractions, cannot rationalize; that indeed is why he is inevitably an artist.



Antón Pávlovich Chéjov (1860-1904)

VII  
*Uncle Vanya*  
(1897)

**Uncle Vanya**

by Anton Chekhov

Adapted by David Mamet

from a translation by  
Vlada Chernomordik

SAMUEL FRENCH

Antón Chéjov , *Uncle Vanya* (1897)

Anton Chekhov, major Russian playwright and master of the modern short story. He was a literary artist of laconic precision who probed below the surface of life, laying bare the secret motives of his characters. Chekhov's best plays and short stories lack complex plots and neat solutions. Concentrating on apparent trivialities, they create a special kind of atmosphere, sometimes termed haunting or lyrical. Chekhov described the Russian life of his time using a deceptively simple technique devoid of obtrusive literary devices, and he is regarded as the outstanding representative of the late 19th-century Russian realist school.

During the years just before and after his Sakhalin expedition, Chekhov had continued his experiments as a dramatist. His *Wood Demon* (1888–89) is a long-winded and ineptly facetious four-act play, which somehow, by a miracle of art, became converted—largely by cutting—into *Dyadya Vanya* (*Uncle Vanya*), one of his greatest stage masterpieces. The conversion—to a superb study of aimlessness in a rural manor house—took place some time between 1890 and 1896; the play was published in 1897. Other dramatic efforts of the period include several of the uproarious one-act farces known as vaudevilles: *Medved* (*The Bear*), *Predlozheniye* (*The Proposal*), *Svadba* (*The Wedding*), *Yubiley* (*The Anniversary*), and others.

*Uncle Vanya*, drama in four acts by Anton Chekhov, published in 1897 as *Dyadya Vanya* and first produced in 1899 in Moscow. Considered one of Chekhov's theatrical masterpieces, the play is a study of aimlessness and hopelessness.

Ivan Voynitsky, called *Uncle Vanya*, is bitterly disappointed when he realizes that he has sacrificed and wasted his life managing the country estate and business affairs of his former brother-in-law, Serebryakov, who, Vanya discovers, will never be anything more than a pedantic second-rate academic. Sonya, Serebryakov's daughter and Vanya's assistant, silently endures her unrequited love for a local physician. Vanya attempts to shoot Serebryakov but misses, and little changes. Neither of them can give up the work, however meaningless, to which they have devoted their lives.



Antón Chéjov with cast of *The Seagull*, Moscow (1899)

UNCLE VANYA

ACT I

A country house on a terrace. In front of it a garden. In an avenue of trees, under an old poplar, stands a table set for tea, with a samovar, etc. Some benches and chairs stand near the table. On one of them is lying a guitar. A hammock is swung near the table. It is three o'clock in the afternoon of a cloudy day.

MARINA, a quiet, grey-haired, little old woman, is sitting at the table knitting a stocking.

ASTROFF is walking up and down near her.

MARINA. [Pouring some tea into a glass] Take a little tea, my son.

ASTROFF. [Takes the glass from her unwillingly] Somehow, I don't seem to want any.

MARINA. Then will you have a little vodka instead?

ASTROFF. No, I don't drink vodka every day, and besides, it is too hot now. [A pause] Tell me, nurse, how long have we known each other?

MARINA. [Thoughtfully] Let me see, how long is it? Lord—help me to remember. You first came here, into our parts—let me think—when was it? Sonia's mother was still alive—it was two winters before she died; that was eleven years ago—[thoughtfully] perhaps more.

ASTROFF. Have I changed much since then?

MARINA. Oh, yes. You were handsome and young then, and now you are an old man and not handsome any more. You drink, too.

ASTROFF. Yes, ten years have made me another man. And why? Because I am overworked. Nurse, I am on my feet from dawn till dusk. I know no rest; at night I tremble under my blankets for fear of being dragged out to visit some one who is sick; I have toiled without repose or a day's freedom since I have known you; could I help growing old? And then, existence is tedious, anyway; it is a senseless, dirty business, this life, and goes heavily. Every one about here is silly, and after living with them for two or three years one grows silly oneself. It is inevitable. [Twisting his moustache] See what a long moustache I have grown. A foolish, long moustache. Yes, I am as silly as the rest, nurse, but not as stupid; no, I have not grown stupid. Thank God, my brain is not addled yet, though my feelings have grown numb. I ask nothing, I need nothing, I love no one, unless it is yourself alone. [He kisses her head] I had a nurse just like you when I was a child.

MARINA. Don't you want a bite of something to eat?

ASTROFF. No. During the third week of Lent I went to the epidemic at Malitskoi. It was eruptive typhoid. The peasants were all lying side by side in their huts, and the calves and pigs were running about the floor among the sick. Such dirt there was, and smoke! Unspeaking! I slaved among those people all day, not a crumb passed my lips, but when I got home there was still no rest for me; a switchman was carried in from the railroad; I laid him on the operating table and he went and died in my arms under chloroform, and then my feelings that should have been deadened awoke again, my conscience tortured me as if I had killed the man. I sat down and closed my eyes—like this—and thought: will our descendants two hundred years from now, for whom we are breaking the road, remember to give us a kind word? No, nurse, they will forget.

MARINA. Man is forgetful, but God remembers.

ASTROFF. Thank you for that. You have spoken the truth.

Enter VOITSKI from the house. He has been asleep after dinner and looks rather dishevelled. He sits down on the bench and straightens his collar.

VOITSKI. H'm. Yes. [A pause] Yes.

ASTROFF. Have you been asleep?

VOITSKI. Yes, very much so. [He yawns] Ever since the Professor and his wife have come, our daily life seems to have jumped the track. I sleep at the wrong time, drink wine,



and eat all sorts of messes for luncheon and dinner. It isn't wholesome. Sonia and I used to work together and never had an idle moment, but now Sonia works alone and I only eat and drink and sleep. Something is wrong.

MARINA. [Shaking her head] Such a confusion in the house! The Professor gets up at twelve, the samovar is kept boiling all the morning, and everything has to wait for him. Before they came we used to have dinner at one o'clock, like everybody else, but now we have it at seven. The Professor sits up all night writing and reading, and suddenly, at two o'clock, there goes the bell! Heavens, what is that? The Professor wants some tea! Wake the servants, light the samovar! Lord, what disorder!

ASTROFF. Will they be here long?

VOITSKI. A hundred years! The Professor has decided to make his home here.

MARINA. Look at this now! The samovar has been on the table for two hours, and they are all out walking!

VOITSKI. All right, don't get excited; here they come.

Voices are heard approaching. SEREBRAKOFF, HELENA, SONIA, and TELEGIN come in from the depths of the garden, returning from their walk.

SEREBRAKOFF. Superb! Superb! What beautiful views!

TELEGIN. They are wonderful, your Excellency.

SONIA. To-morrow we shall go into the woods, shall we, papa?

VOITSKI. Ladies and gentlemen, tea is ready.

SEREBRAKOFF. Won't you please be good enough to send my tea into the library? I still have some work to finish.

SONIA. I am sure you will love the woods.

HELENA, SEREBRAKOFF, and SONIA go into the house. TELEGIN sits down at the table beside MARINA.

VOITSKI. There goes our learned scholar on a hot, sultry day like this, in his overcoat and goloshes and carrying an umbrella!

ASTROFF. He is trying to take good care of his health.

VOITSKI. How lovely she is! How lovely! I have never in my life seen a more beautiful woman.

TELEGIN. Do you know, Marina, that as I walk in the fields or in the shady garden, as I look at this table here, my heart swells with unbounded happiness. The weather is enchanting, the birds are singing, we are all living in peace and contentment—what more could the soul desire? [Takes a glass of tea.]

VOITSKI. [Dreaming] Such eyes—a glorious woman!

ASTROFF. Come, Ivan, tell us something.

VOITSKI. [Indolently] What shall I tell you?

ASTROFF. Haven't you any news for us?

VOITSKI. No, it is all stale. I am just the same as usual, or perhaps worse, because I have become lazy. I don't do anything now but croak like an old raven. My mother, the old magpie, is still chattering about the emancipation of woman, with one eye on her grave and the other on her learned books, in which she is always looking for the dawn of a new life.

ASTROFF. And the Professor?

VOITSKI. The Professor sits in his library from morning till night, as usual—

“Straining the mind, wrinkling the brow,

We write, write, write,

Without respite

Or hope of praise in the future or now.”

Poor paper! He ought to write his autobiography; he would make a really splendid subject for a book! Imagine it, the life of a retired professor, as stale as a piece of hardtack, tortured by gout, headaches, and rheumatism, his liver bursting with jealousy and envy, living on the estate of his first wife, although he hates it, because he can't afford to live in town. He is everlastingly whining about his hard lot, though, as a matter of fact, he is extraordinarily lucky. He is the son of a common deacon and has attained the professor's chair, become the



son-in-law of a senator, is called "your Excellency," and so on. But I'll tell you something; the man has been writing on art for twenty-five years, and he doesn't know the very first thing about it. For twenty-five years he has been chewing on other men's thoughts about realism, naturalism, and all such foolishness; for twenty-five years he has been reading and writing things that clever men have long known and stupid ones are not interested in; for twenty-five years he has been making his imaginary mountains out of molehills. And just think of the man's self-conceit and presumption all this time! For twenty-five years he has been masquerading in false clothes and has now retired absolutely unknown to any living soul; and yet see him! stalking across the earth like a demi-god!

ASTROFF. I believe you envy him.

VOITSKI. Yes, I do. Look at the success he has had with women! Don Juan himself was not more favoured. His first wife, who was my sister, was a beautiful, gentle being, as pure as the blue heaven there above us, noble, great-hearted, with more admirers than he has pupils, and she loved him as only beings of angelic purity can love those who are as pure and beautiful as themselves. His mother-in-law, my mother, adores him to this day, and he still inspires a sort of worshipful awe in her. His second wife is, as you see, a brilliant beauty; she married him in his old age and has surrendered all the glory of her beauty and freedom to him. Why? What for?

ASTROFF. Is she faithful to him?

VOITSKI. Yes, unfortunately she is.

ASTROFF. Why unfortunately?

VOITSKI. Because such fidelity is false and unnatural, root and branch. It sounds well, but there is no logic in it. It is thought immoral for a woman to deceive an old husband whom she hates, but quite moral for her to strangle her poor youth in her breast and banish every vital desire from her heart.

TELEGIN. [In a tearful voice] Vanya, I don't like to hear you talk so. Listen, Vanya; every one who betrays husband or wife is faithless, and could also betray his country.

VOITSKI. [Crossly] Turn off the tap, Waffles.

TELEGIN. No, allow me, Vanya. My wife ran away with a lover on the day after our wedding, because my exterior was unprepossessing. I have never failed in my duty since then. I love her and am true to her to this day. I help her all I can and have given my fortune to educate the daughter of herself and her lover. I have forfeited my happiness, but I have kept my pride. And she? Her youth has fled, her beauty has faded according to the laws of nature, and her lover is dead. What has she kept?

HELENA and SONIA come in; after them comes MME. VOITSKAYA carrying a book. She sits down and begins to read. Some one hands her a glass of tea which she drinks without looking up.

SONIA. [Hurriedly, to the nurse] There are some peasants waiting out there. Go and see what they want. I shall pour the tea. [Pours out some glasses of tea.]

MARINA goes out. HELENA takes a glass and sits drinking in the hammock.

ASTROFF. I have come to see your husband. You wrote me that he had rheumatism and I know not what else, and that he was very ill, but he appears to be as lively as a cricket.

HELENA. He had a fit of the blues yesterday evening and complained of pains in his legs, but he seems all right again to-day.

ASTROFF. And I galloped over here twenty miles at break-neck speed! No matter, though, it is not the first time. Once here, however, I am going to stay until to-morrow, and at any rate sleep quantum satis.

SONIA. Oh, splendid! You so seldom spend the night with us. Have you had dinner yet?

ASTROFF. No.



Chéjov. White Dacha (1901)

UNCLE VANYA  
THEMES, MOTIFS, AND SYMBOLS

THEMES

The Wasted Life

Uncle Vanya is thematically preoccupied with what might sentimentally be called the wasted life, and a survey of the characters and their respective miseries will make this clear. Admittedly, however, it remains somewhat difficult to organize these concepts into a coherent theme as they belong more to the play's *nastronie*, its melancholic mood or atmosphere, than to a distinct program of ideas.

One obvious characteristic of the play is that almost all the characters are consumed with lethargy, boredom, and regret over their unsatisfactory lives. They bemoan their old age, mourn the years that they have wasted in drudgery, pine over lost loves, and muse bitterly over what might have been if their lots had been different. They thus suffer from a sense of loss without knowing exactly what has been forfeited. Throughout the play, their private reflections burst through the surface of the everyday, giving way to torrents of unhappy introspection.

Uncle Vanya, the eponymous hero (an eponym being a real or imaginary person for whom something is named), is deeply embittered over having spent his life toiling for the benefit of Serebryakov, a once-worshipped scholar that Vanya has discovered to be a charlatan. Astrov, the region's doctor, laments the onset of age: his hard years in the country have left him numb to the world. Vanya's mother Maria pathetically fends off her unhappiness by studying pamphlets. Yelena, Serebryakov's wife, finds herself bound to a miserable husband whom she does not love. As for himself, the professor, having retired from public life, feels consigned to the tomb that his estate represents. Finally, his homely daughter Sonya has resigned herself to a loveless, monotonous life, awaiting the peace that death will bring. For all these disparate reasons, Uncle Vanya's characters feel trapped in their hopeless existences, mourn unrecoverable losses, and harbor deep resentment for those around them: the result is a volatile household in which all, to quote Yelena, has gone to "rack and ruin."

Inseparable from the theme of wasted lives is one we might sentimentally dub that of the impossible love. We can best appreciate the significance of this theme by first briefly

considering the play's generic context. As discussed in the Context, Uncle Vanya is a revision of an earlier Chekhov play; in some sense it is thus also a rewriting of the conventional melodramatic plot that he heavily relied upon. Like most works of turn-of-the-century melodrama, *The Wood Demon*—Vanya's precursor—is organized around a structure of erotic intrigue involving three couples, the plot putting them through passionate seductions, arresting complications, desperate hand-wringing over hopeless romances, and a happy ending. Vanya also repeats this structure of erotic intrigue, but, he does so with a marked difference. The seductions are awkward and stilted, boorish and bungled, the players are indifferent to, oblivious to, or repulsed by each other, and, ultimately, their games leave everyone in a miserable situation. What we are charting here then is both a subversion of genre as well as an erotic subplot that is consistent with the thematic concerns of loss, regret, and the wasted life discussed above.

To make his remarks more concrete, we can survey the fate of Uncle Vanya's couples here. One consists of the decrepit Serebryakov and his beautiful wife Yelena. At best "fascinated" by the professor long ago, the latter does not love her husband, as she feels "incidental" in her married life. Nevertheless, Yelena remains with her husband—whether out of conscience, convention or inertia remains unclear. Our second intrigue involves Yelena and the desperate and crude Voynitsky, who hopelessly makes advances on her throughout the play (perhaps in some fantasy of liberating them both from their bondage under the professor). With Yelena, Voynitsky is consumed with thoughts of what might have been if he had married her before his bitter enemy did. Yelena rejects him wholeheartedly, finding in his declarations of love an impulse to destroy her. Third, we have the homely, gentle Sonya who loves Dr. Astrov and enlists Yelena as her advisor and helpmate: yet, Astrov is entirely indifferent to Sonya and her love-worship.

Ironically, Astrov does, however, find himself drawn to Yelena, and Yelena, herself, is attracted to Astrov as well. Their relation probably structurally resembles one from conventional melodrama, posing a younger, impassioned hero who by all counts should rescue the beautiful wife from her unhappy marriage (indeed, in *The Wood Demon*, Uncle Vanya's precursor, their intrigue takes on this form). Astrov and Yelena's courtship, however, is decidedly unromantic, made abrupt



*Uncle Vanya*, Soulpepper Theatre Company, Toronto (2001)

and disjointed through indirect action and Astrov's boorishness, and based on little more than a vague sense of fascination on both sides. Ultimately they part ways with regret, left to muse on what might have been. Their interaction recalls Yelena's sense that she is but an incidental character in her love affairs and Astrov's lament that he has "no relationship" with anyone. Indeed, the strangeness and alienated quality of their affair lies in the absence, on this stage, of the erotic relation as conventionally conceived.

## MOTIFS

### Estrangement

Throughout the play, a number of characters will describe themselves and others as "strange" and "eccentric," alien and in "exile," evoking a sense of alienation from both those around them as well as from their own persons. These motifs of estrangement are central to understanding the characters' sense of themselves and the events on and off-stage.

Motifs of estrangement occur above all in reference to the brooding philosopher of the play, Dr. Astrov, whose intelligence and visionary plans for forest conservation make him an "eccentric" in the provinces and whose increasing age has estranged him from himself. Moreover, estrangement also describes the constant introspection that brings him to these personal reflections. Indeed, one could argue that self-reflection requires a certain attempt to "make oneself strange," to take a position from which one can meditate on what is conventionally considered the most familiar—one's inner life.

A number of other characters experience themselves as strange as well. In moving to the provinces, Serebryakov suffers from an estrangement in space: on the estate, he feels as if in "exile" or as if having landed on some "alien planet," utterly uprooted from life as he knows it. His wife Yelena will describe herself as an "incidental character" in all aspects of her life, betraying a self-alienation in feeling inconsequential in one's own existence.

### The Land

Early in the play, when Voynitsky first moans about his wasted life, his mother remarks that "[s]omething useful ought to have gotten done"—meaning that Voynitsky should have dedicated himself to some socially-conscious

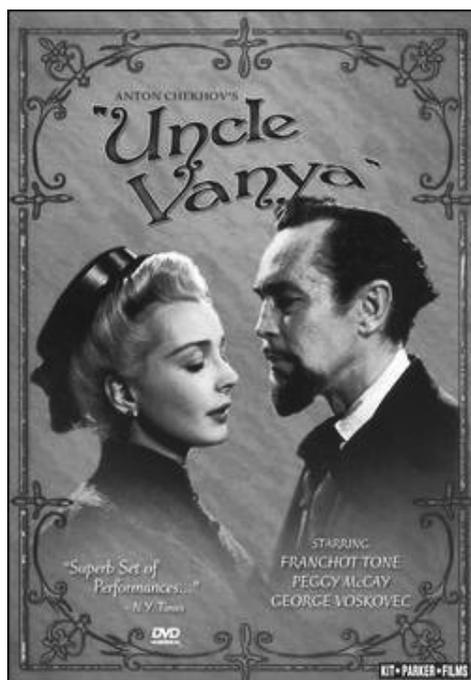
cause that might alleviate suffering. Such a cause would lend purpose to his meaningless existence. Of course, Maria's comment is ironic in light of the useless activities of those in the household. Indeed, the only socially conscious cause of the play is that of the land, and the foremost crusader for preserving the land is the outsider, Dr. Astrov.

The motif of the land first appears in Act I, when Sonya and Astrov deliver impassioned speeches defending conservation. For the lovelorn Sonya, repeating Astrov's teachings, the forests glorify the earth. By moderating the climate, they lighten the human war with nature, allowing for a more graceful, refined, and noble populace. On his part, Astrov decries the barbaric destruction of Russia's forests; rather than destroy, man should make use of his capacity for reason and creation. The work of conservation puts the climate under Astrov's power; it will enable him to ensure his legacy. Such utopian dreams make Astrov an eccentric, a strange visionary in a play where most characters have either given up their aspirations or are entirely indifferent to such concerns. Astrov clings to his utopian vision against the wanton destruction of the region, the ruin of the land being ever in the play's background. In Act III, Astrov more methodically charts the land's degeneration while describing his cartogram to Yelena, attributing this ruin to man's brute struggle for survival. Yelena, of course, is utterly uninterested. Indeed, ultimately even Astrov abandons his preserves, falling idle as he spends more time at the estate. For translator Eugene Briscow, the destruction of the land parallels the ruin in the characters' lives.

### Indirect Action

As noted in the Context, Chekhov pioneered the "indirect action" play, using understatement, broken conversation, off-stage episodes, and absent characters to catalyze tension and evoke unseen events that intervene into the action on-stage. Importantly, however, indirect action comes into play in an entirely realistic fashion. Often the effect is thus one of disorientation, estranging the viewer from the supposedly realistic spectacle before him and making him aware of the crafted nature of the work. Thus, along with considering the characters' sense of themselves through alienation, we can perhaps extend the motif of estrangement to the staging of Uncle Vanya as well.

One finds such a wide variety of examples



Uncle Vanya, Chejov, Franchot Tone, John Goetz (1958)

of this technique throughout the play that it becomes difficult to discuss them synthetically. Thus we will consider one example at length—the encounter between Yelena and Sonya at the end of Act II—as it is perhaps here in the play that the effects of indirect action are most obvious. In this scene, the two women share an emotional reconciliation that appears to come out of nowhere. Though they certainly have not been friendly to this point, we have had no intimation of their conflict. At the same time, their sudden reconciliation remains wholly feasible.

Because this conflict has been constructed indirectly, their encounter functions as an unsettling hysterical outburst. The hysteria continues with Sonya's ensuing inexplicable jubilation, and Yelena's impulse to play the piano. Thus the scene presents an explosion of affect—indeed, it is one of the few instances of joy in the play—separated from any clear cause or idea. This separation again refers back to the motif of estrangement as the characters are stricken with emotions that do not correspond with their situation.

#### The Pseudo-Climax

As discussed in the Context, Chekhov's late plays reject the classical Aristotelian plot line, in which rising and falling action frame an immediately recognizable climax and give way to a denouement. The play's pseudo-climax—a bungled murder in Act III—is perhaps the defining element in Uncle Vanya's rejection of the traditional plot.

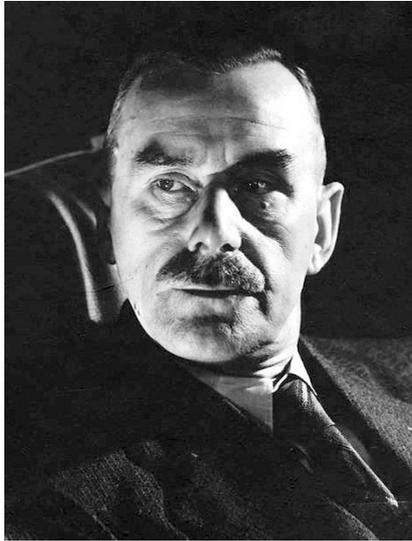
In this scene, the audience takes part in all the trappings of a climatic turning point—a household meeting, a detailed explanation of how Sonya and Voynitsky have sacrificed their lives for the professor, a final confrontation between Voynitsky and Serebryakov, the sounds of off-stage violence, and so on. At the same time, Chekhov botches all the climax's elements. The “revelations” of this scene have already been rehearsed in Voynitsky's many laments—the audience does not learn anything particularly shocking. Along with going over old ground, the action of this climax ends in anti-climatic failure: Vanya farcically bungles Serebryakov's murder (recall the struggle with Yelena in the doorway

and the missed shot at point blank range). The villain is not killed; no catharsis ensues; the act that would assume tragic proportions ends with a laugh.

A number of critics have interpreted this tragicomic scene according to Vanya's character and the theme of the wasted life. Being a lifelong, laughable failure, Vanya must botch his attempt at murder and end in bitter resignation. Unable to execute this final, potentially glorious act, Uncle Vanya is less the tragic hero than a broken man, a laughingstock. Serebryakov even denounces him as a “nonentity” in this scene, a man who has done nothing and will be quickly forgotten.

#### Symbols

Uncle Vanya does not rely heavily on symbols though one could, however, identify a number of the objects on stage as symbolic. The chickens from Act I, for example, might represent the idly chattering members of the household. We cannot forget Astrov's “colossal” and “asinine” moustache, which materializes (right under his nose, so to speak) his heavy sense of alienation from himself. One might also recall Voynitsky's bouquet of autumn roses from Act III, a peace offering he intends to give Yelena until he sees her in Astrov's arms. These “lovely” and “sad” roses that do not reach their destination readily represent Voynitsky's hopeless love. Finally, one might consider the map of Africa, bizarrely on the wall of Voynitsky's bedroom/office. Clearly out of place—as indicated by the stage notes—this image of a land far away from the Russian provinces perhaps symbolizes what Voynitsky's yearns for, that which might have been, but has been irretrievably, lost in his wasting his life.



Thomas Mann (1875-1955)

VIII  
*Buddenbrooks*  
(1901)



Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks*, book cover popular edition (1930)

*Buddenbrooks* (1901), by Thomas Mann, chronicles the decline of a wealthy north German merchant family over the course of four generations, incidentally portraying the manner of life and mores of the Hanseatic bourgeoisie in the years from 1835 to 1877. Mann drew deeply from the history of his own family, the Mann family of Lübeck, and their milieu. The exploration of decadence in the novel reflects the influence of Arthur Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation* on the young Thomas Mann. The *Buddenbrooks* of successive generations experience a gradual decline of their finances and family ideals, finding happiness increasingly elusive. The characters who subordinate their personal happiness to the welfare of the family firm encounter reverses, as do those who do not. The city where the *Buddenbrooks* live shares so many street names and other details with Mann's native town of Lübeck that the identification is unmistakable, although the novel makes no mention of the name. The young author was condemned for writing a scandalous, defamatory roman à clef about (supposedly) recognizable personages. Mann defended the right of a writer to use material from his own experience. The years covered in the novel were marked by major political and military developments that reshaped Germany, such as the Revolutions of 1848, the Austro-Prussian War, and the establishment of the German Empire. Historic events nevertheless generally remain in the background, having no direct bearing on the lives of the characters.



Yousuf Karsh, *The Hands Of Thomas Mann* (1946)

## BUDDENBROOKS

### PART ONE

#### CHAPTER VIII

THEY were rising from table.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, gesegnete Mahlzeit! Cigars and coffee in the next room, and a liqueur if Madame feels generous.... Billiards for whoever chooses. Jean, you will show them the way back to the billiard-room? Madame Koppen, may I have the honour?"

Full of well-being, laughing and chattering, the company trooped back through the folding doors into the landscape-room. The Consul remained behind, and collected about him the gentlemen who wanted to play billiards.

"You won't try a game, Father?"

No, Lebrecht Kröger would stop with the ladies, but Justus might go if he liked.... Senator Langhals, Koppen, Grätjens, and Doctor Grabow went with the Consul, and Jean Jacques Hoffstede said he would join them later. "Johann Buddenbrook is going to play the flute," he said. "I must stop for that. Au revoir, messieurs."

As the gentlemen passed through the hall, they could hear from the landscape-room the first notes of the flute, accompanied by the Frau Consul on the harmonium: an airy, charming little melody that floated sweetly through the lofty rooms. The Consul listened as long as he could. He would have liked to stop behind in an easy-chair in the landscape-room and indulge the reveries that the music conjured up; but his duties as host...

"Bring some coffee and cigars into the billiard-room," he said to the maid whom he met in the entry.

"Yes, Line, coffee!" Herr Koppen echoed, in a rich, well-fed voice, trying to pinch the girl's red arm. The c came from far back in his throat, as if he were already swallowing the coffee.

"I'm sure Madame Koppen saw you through the glass," Consul Kröger remarked.

"So you live up there, Buddenbrook?" asked Senator Langhals. To the right a broad white staircase with a carved baluster led up to the sleeping-chambers of the Consul's family in the second storey; to the left came another row of rooms. The party descended the stairs, smoking, and the Consul halted at the landing.

"The entresol has three rooms," he explained "the breakfast-room, my parents' sleeping-chamber, and a third room which is seldom used. A corridor runs along all three.... This way, please. The wagons drive through the entry; they can go all the way out to Bakers' Alley at the back."

The broad echoing passage-way below was paved with great square flagstones. At either end of it were several offices. The odour of the onion sauce still floated out from the kitchen, which, with the entrance to the cellars, lay on the left of the steps. On the right, at the height of a storey above the passageway, a scaffolding of ungainly but neatly varnished rafters thrust out from the wall, supporting the servants' quarters above. A sort of ladder which led up to them from the passage was their only means of ingress or egress. Below the scaffolding were some enormous old cupboards and a carved chest.

Two low, worn steps led through a glass door out to the courtyard and the small wash-house. From here you could look into the pretty little garden, which was well laid out, though just now brown and sodden with the autumn rains, its beds protected with straw mats against the cold. At the other end of the garden rose the "portal," the rococo facade of the summer house. From the courtyard, however, the party took the path to the left, leading between two walls through another courtyard to the annex.

They entered by slippery steps into a cellar-like vault with an earthen floor, which was used as a granary and provided with a rope for hauling up the sacks. A pair of stairs led up to the first storey, where the Consul opened a white door and admitted his guests to the billiard-room.



It was a bare, severe-looking room, with stiff chairs ranged round the sides. Herr Koppen flung himself exhausted into one of them. "I'll look on for a while," said he, brushing the wet from his coat. "It's the devil of a Sabbath day's journey through your house, Buddenbrook!"

Here too the stove was burning merrily, behind a brass lattice. Through the three high, narrow windows one looked out over red roofs gleaming with the wet, grey gables and court-yards.

The Consul took the cues out of the rack. "Shall we play a carambolage, Senator?" he asked. He went around and closed the pockets on both tables. "Who is playing with us? Grätjens? The Doctor? All right. Then will you take the other table, Grätjens and Justus? Koppen, you'll have to play." - The wine-merchant stood up and listened, with his mouth full of smoke. A violent gust of wind whistled between the houses, lashed the window-panes with rain, and howled down the chimney.

"Good Lord!" he said, blowing out the smoke. "Do you think the Willenwewer will get into port, Buddenbrook? What abominable weather!"

Yes, and the news from Travemünde was not of the best, Consul Kröger agreed, chalking his cue. Storms everywhere on the coast. Nearly as bad as in 1824, the year of the great flood in St. Petersburg. Well, here was the coffee.

They poured it out and drank a little and began their game. The talk turned upon the Customs Union, and Consul Buddenbrook waxed enthusiastic.

"An inspiration, gentlemen," he said. He finished a shot and turned to the other table, where the topic had begun.

"We ought to join at the earliest opportunity."

Herr Koppen disagreed. He fairly snorted in opposition. "How about our independence?" he asked incensed, supporting himself belligerently on his CUB. "How about our self-determination? Would Hamburg consent to be a party to this Prussian scheme? We might as well be annexed at once! Heaven save us, what do we want of a customs union? Aren't we well enough as we are?"

"Yes, you and your red wine, Koppen. And the Russian products are all right. But there is little or nothing else imported. As for exports, well, we send a little corn to Holland and England, it is true. But I think we are far from being well enough as we are. In days gone by a very different business went on. Now, with the Customs Union, the Mecklenburgs and Schleswig-Holstein would be opened up - and private business would increase beyond all reckoning..."

"But look here, Buddenbrook," Cratjens broke in, leaning far over the table and shifting his cue in his bony hand as he took careful aim. "I don't get the idea. Certainly our own system is perfectly simple and practical. Clearing on the security of a civic oath..."

"A fine old institution," the Consul admitted.

"Do you call it fine, Herr Consul?" Senator Langhals spoke with some heat. "I am not a merchant; but to speak frankly - well, I think this civic oath business has become little short of a farce: everybody makes light of it, and the State pockets the loss. One hears things that are simply scandalous. I am convinced that our entry into the Customs Union, so far as the Senate is concerned..."

Herr Koppen flung down his cue. "Then there will be a conflick," he said heatedly, forgetting to be careful with his pronunciation. "I know what I'm sayin'--God help you, but you don't know what you're talkin' about, beggin' your par-don."

Well, thank goodness! thought the rest of the company, as Jean Jacques entered at this point. He and Pastor Wunderlich came together, arm in arm, two cheerful, unaffected old men from another and less troubled age.

"Here, my friends," he began. "I have something for you: a little rhymed epigram from the French."

He sat down comfortably opposite the billiard-players, who leaned upon their cues across the tables. Drawing a paper from his pocket and laying his long finger with the signet ring to the side of his pointed nose, he read aloud, with a mock-heroic intonation: "When the Marechal Saxe and the proud Pompadour Were driving out gaily in gilt coach and four, Frelon



spied the pair: 'Oh, see them,' he cried: 'The sword of our king - and his sheath, side by side.'

Herr Koppen looked disconcerted for a minute. Then he dropped the "conflick" where it was and joined in the hearty laughter that echoed to the ceiling of the billiard-room. Pastor Wunderlich withdrew to the window, but the movement of his shoulders betrayed that he was chuckling to himself.

Herr Hoffstede had more ammunition of the same sort in his pocket, and the gentlemen remained for some time in the billiard-room. Herr Koppen unbuttoned his waistcoat all the way down, and felt much more at ease here than in the dining-room. He gave vent to droll low-German expressions at every turn, and at frequent intervals began reciting to himself with enormous relish: "When the Marchal Saxe..."

It sounded quite different in his harsh bass.

## CHAPTER IX

IT was rather late, nearly eleven, when the party began to break up. They had reassembled in the landscape-room, and they all made their adieux at the same time. The Frau Consul, as soon as her hand had been kissed in farewell, went upstairs to see how Christian was doing. To Mamsell Jung-mann was left the supervision of the maids as they set things to rights and put away the silver. Madame Antoinette retired to the entresol. But the Consul accompanied his guests downstairs, across the entry, and outside the house.

A high wind was driving the rain slantwise through the streets as the old Krögers, wrapped in heavy fur mantles, slipped as fast as they could into their carriage. It had been waiting for hours before the door. The street was lighted by the flickering yellow rays from oil lamps hanging on posts before the houses or suspended on heavy chains across the streets. The projecting fronts of some of the houses jutted out into the roadway; others had porticos or raised benches added on. The street ran steeply down to the River Trave; it was badly paved, and sodden grass sprang up between the cracks. The church of St. Mary'a was entirely shrouded in rain and darkness.

"Merci" said Lebrecht Kröger, shaking the Consul's hand as he stood by the carriage door. "Merci, Jean; it was too charming!" The door slammed, and the carriage drove off. Pastor Wunderlich and Broker Grätjens expressed their thanks and went their way. Herr Koppen, in a mantle with a five-fold cape and a broad grey hat, took his plump wife on his arm and said in his gruff bass: "G'night, Buddenbrook. Go in, go in; don't catch cold. Best thanks for everything... I don't know when I've fed so well! So you like my red wine at four marks? Well, g'night, again."

The Koppens went in the same direction as the Krögers, down toward the river; Senator Langhals, Doctor Grabow, and Jean Jacques Hoffstede turned the other way. Consul Buddenbrook stood with his hands in his trousers pockets and listened to their footsteps as they died away down the empty, damp, dimly-lighted street. He shivered a little in his light clothes as he stood there a few paces from his own house, and turned to look up at its grey gabled facade. His eyes lingered upon the motto carved in the stone over the entrance, in antique lettering: *Dorninus providebit--*"The Lord will provide." He bowed his head a little and went in, bolting the door carefully behind him. Then he locked the vestibule door and walked slowly across the echoing floor of the great entry. The cook was coming down the stairs with a tray of glasses in her hands, and he asked her, "Where's the master, Trina?"

"In the dining-room, Herr Consul," said she, and her face went as red as her arms, for she came from the country and was very bashful.

As he passed through the dark hall, he felt in his pocket for the letter. Then he went quickly into the dining-room, where a few small candle-ends in one of the candelabra cast a dim light over the empty table. The sour smell of the onion sauce still hung on the air.

Over by the windows Johann Buddenbrook was pacing comfortably up and down, with his hands behind his back.

Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks* (1901)



*Hanseatic City of Lübeck (2006)*

## MANN AND HISTORY

by T. J. Reed

It is paradoxical that a body of work which begins by being so narrowly preoccupied with problems of the writer's self, and which to the end centres on characters expressing his intimate and unchanged concerns, should also contain so much history. Partly it is a matter of natural growth, the widening range of experience in increasingly turbulent times, which a novelist of all people could hardly ignore; but it also sprang from a remarkable congruence between Thomas Mann's themes and the patterns of twentieth-century German history. His work, with all the traditions, ambitions and temptations that lay behind it, was representative of fundamental German situations and responses before he set out consciously to represent them in fiction. When awareness dawned and representation became deliberate analysis, he was able to represent those phenomena with such depth of insight because he had been so deeply part of them and they of him. We can read him for pleasure, but also for understanding. *Crede experto*: believe the man who has gone through it himself. He can offer, in a word that is central to both Mann's art and his ethics, *Erkenntnis* (a complex concept which embraces knowledge, insight, analysis, understanding). Two of Mann's novels in particular are impressive reports – they are a great deal more than that, but they are that too – on crises of modern history: *The Magic Mountain* of 1924 on pre-1914 Europe and on the conflicts, especially acute in Germany, which were left unresolved by the First World War; and *Doctor Faustus* of 1947 on the long roots of Nazism in German culture and society.

There is already history of a kind in Mann's precocious first masterpiece, the family saga *Buddenbrooks* (1901). The novel preserves in amber the commercial and private lives and attitudes of a German nineteenth-century city state (plainly Lübeck, though only its streets and landmarks are ever mentioned, not its name) and displays them in their full dignity, idiosyncrasy and sometimes tragedy. From the grand scenic opening where the city's merchant class and their professional friends gather for a lavish Buddenbrook house-warming, down through four generations of the family and all their vicissitudes to a final bleak scene where only spinsters, divorcees and a widow are left, everything Mann narrates and describes is

concretely characteristic of its time and place: the place he knew as the scene of his early years, and the times he had heard tell of or could be informed about by his older relatives.

Recording history was not, however, Mann's aim. He drew on the rich materials to hand for quite different purposes. *Buddenbrooks* is a history of decline and rise: the decline of the family's old vitality and outward standing (the 'Verfall' of the subtitle), and the rise (nowhere so precisely labelled) of inward qualities – intellect, artistic sensibility, creative potential. These new and subtler strengths did not necessarily follow from the waning of vitality, but it seemed in some mysterious way to be their cause when they did arise. That, at any rate, was a common perception of the period; in the wake of Darwin and Nietzsche and their popularisers, heredity and decadence were common coin in the cultural debates of the 1890s. Nietzsche gave the terms a deeply ambivalent sense, decrying mankind's loss of healthy primitive instincts, yet at the same time recognising that the human animal only became 'interesting' when 'sick', that is to say, when instinct had been tamed and transformed into spiritual systems, however perverse. So the thesis of decline and its problematic compensation is itself a piece of history that Mann's first novel enshrines. If the idea was not original, it certainly seemed to fit his own case as an artist sprung from an old merchant line. In *Buddenbrooks*, under the narrative's social surface, he was writing the history of his own talent. The novel grew indeed from the idea for a novella wholly devoted to a sensitive latecomer, a last-generation figure. This would not have been very different from other early stories of Mann's about suffering outsiders. They are all set in the present, with no space for more than a gesture towards causal explanation – accident, illness, mixed parentage. The novel form, in contrast, gave Mann room to show how this human type gradually came about. But the family's genetic history inheres in and interacts with social history. Tracing that inner history down through time by subtle hints and touches, the novel also registers external changes as it goes along, not least the hardening of an older commercial tradition into more hard-nosed business practice. These things compose a varied historical reality which is part of the novel's triumph and a large part of its readers' pleasure. This was not, for Thomas Mann, its point. It is symptomatic that as significant an event as Europe's 1848 revolutions is treated in an



House of Elisabeth Mann, *Buddenbrooks House*, Mengstraße 4, Lübeck (1682)

offhand, in a beguilingly humorous way (i, 181–94; Part 4, Chapter 3).

*Buddenbrooks* remains Mann's one large social canvas. Though his interest in society and the political forces that shape it later became intense, he never again treated social reality head-on on such a scale. That approach belonged to a nineteenth-century realist tradition he had left behind, having just this once used its means for his own ends. It is ironic that his fullest portrayal of society was achieved, and in masterly fashion, when he was least concerned with it for its own sake.

Elsewhere in Mann's early work up to 1914, society is presented unambiguously as the outsider's antithesis and sometimes his antagonist. Society and its members have something he lacks: an unthinking normality and order, what in *Tonio Kröger* (1903) is called a 'seductive banality' (viii, 302). For the excluded or self-excluding outsider, the 'joys of ordinariness' (ibid.) become an object of yearning. Mann, like *Kröger*, idealises its fair-haired, blue-eyed representatives. In another mood he pillories its less ideal embodiments, like Herr Klöterjahn and his alarmingly robust baby son in 'Tristan' (also 1903). Yet whether it is soft-focus idealisation or the sharp outlines of satire, these emblematic figures are ultimately biological rather than social types, animals living out their unimpaired vitality, as the figure of the infant Klöterjahn makes clear. Behind ideal and satire is a single reality; they are the contrasting faces of the life-force. As Mann later half-ruefully said, the leitmotif of blondness in his ideal figures was a harmless remnant of the 'blond beast', the vitality-symbol Nietzsche had set against modern decadence (xi, 110). Nietzschean vitalism is constantly present behind the young Thomas Mann's judgements and self-judgements.

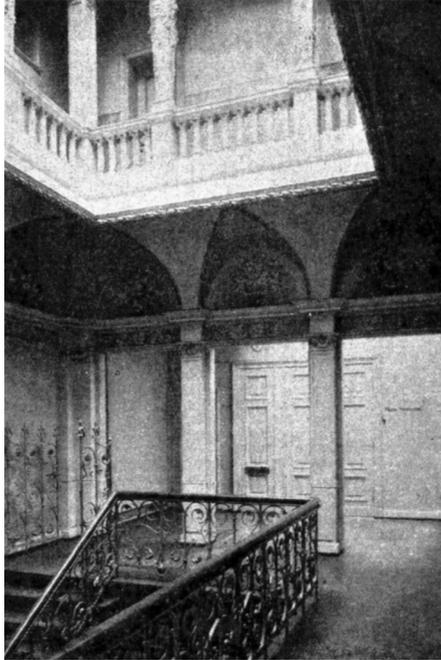
Both the finished works and the unfinished projects of the years between *Buddenbrooks* and the First World War show the same inward-looking focus that scarcely engages the outside world. On the face of it, Mann's second novel, *Royal Highness* (1909), is a romantic comedy in which the prince of a small Ruritanian state saves its fortunes by marrying one. Mann had just consolidated his own fortunes by a good marriage. Private reference does not stop there. The tale's point is the allegorical equation of prince and artist: both are purely 'formal' existences, with no real function in society. Ruritania likewise has no real history. This slight idea is worked out

over some 350 pages, a mass that did not prevent critics finding it too light from the author of *Buddenbrooks*. Mann did soon afterwards plan a novel about a prince of quite another calibre, Frederick the Great, which would have offered real historical substance and demanded a quite different treatment, but it came to nothing. The writer's points of contact with the subject were too limited and self-referential: the King's ascetic self-discipline and heroic 'ethos of achievement' (i.e. yet more of the prince-writer parallel), and perhaps the homosexuality common to them both.

A second project that seemed to promise and demand substance was the novel 'Maya', conceived as a tapestry of Munich society, a kind of Bavarian *Buddenbrooks*, though with a more calculated philosophical theme: social 'reality' as a veil of illusion, for which 'maya' is the Buddhist and Schopenhauerian term. Moreover, the central interest, as the surviving worknotes show, is the fictional projection of Mann's intense relationship with his painter friend Paul Ehrenberg, to which society functions as an episodic background. This plan too came to nothing, though four decades later Mann set some of its episodes, with their now historical patina, in the narrative of *Doctor Faustus*.

One aspect of Munich did achieve brief but brilliant realisation in a finished work. The short story 'Gladius Dei' (1902) satirises the Bavarian capital as a reproduction Renaissance Florence: it too is devoted to a cult of visual art that refuses to look into the depths of suffering beneath life's beautiful surface. To complete the parallel, a monkishly costumed outsider rails against the city's wicked sensuality like some grotesque latter-day Savonarola. These echoes from the past serve the very specific protest of a displaced person from Lübeck whose own more probing and compassionate literary art is neglected by Munich in favour of the fashionable visual genre. Mann also treated the theme in its original period in a costume-drama, *Fiorenza* (1905). Despite the added historical distance, the message sounds more vehement, the identification with Savonarola's vengeful will to power is more patent, when narrative detachment is replaced by direct dialogue. The bite of the short story is lost in wordiness; what is left, as the theatre critic Alfred Kerr cuttingly wrote, is so much dutifully read-up Renaissance.

The satire on modern Munich is linked



House of Thomas Mann's parents, Beckergrube 52, Lübeck (1881)

with Mann's other main uncompleted project of these doldrum years, the essay 'Intellect and Art'. As the extensive work-notes show, this was to be a major treatise taking issue with the state of German culture around 1910 : literature, theatre, music, art, crafts; trends and attitudes, fads, fashions and influences; major figures of the present (Max Reinhardt, Stefan George, Richard Strauss) and of the recent past (Nietzsche, Wagner); and some ancestral voices (Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, the Romantics) prophesying modernity. The tone is critical, at times polemical, for in all the observed phenomena Mann made out something deeply inimical to his own art: a new wave of taste for the unproblematic beauty of modern (but not too modern!) visual art and music, and a rejection of analysis, social criticism, pathology and decadence – in short, of everything the writers of his generation had concentrated on. The anti-literary trend he had first spotted in Munich now seemed to him an anti-intellectualism pervading German culture. As he was very much an intellectual writer, the new spirit was a threat to his values, hence to his popularity and so in the most practical sense to his career. Personal concerns again, then – but through the lens of the private he was at least starting to perceive external change. If he had completed the essay, it would have been a historical document (even the work-notes, in their rough form, are that) and perhaps a compelling historical diagnosis of society and culture around 1910.

The trouble was, where did he really stand? Was he committed to being only ever the cool analytic mind, the intellectual writer? Other kinds of literature were possible, and rising – writing that aimed to be fresh and unproblematic, healthy and poetic, 'Plastik' rather than 'Kritik', celebrating life in the way visual art was currently assumed to do. New writers were coming along to challenge the old. Some of his own generation – Gerhart Hauptmann, Hugo von Hofmannsthal – seemed to be adapting so as not to miss the bus. Should he polemicise against all this, and thereby publicly set himself against his times? Or should he follow suit and emphasise anything in his own work that was healthy? It was a classic case of beat them or join them. Mann was torn. The self-concern that was too narrow to base substantial novels on was also too uncertain of its direction to allow a clear public statement. The essay too was duly aborted.

Working on this project had involved

looking in breadth at current social phenomena, and looking back in time at their historical roots. This was of course only literary and cultural history. Only? There is no clear dividing line between the merely cultural and the allegedly more real forces that make history. It was to be a key element of Mann's later *Erkenntnis* that every cultural or intellectual attitude is latently political: 'in jeder geistigen Haltung ist das Politische latent' (x, 267). Certainly in Germany, so he would write after the German catastrophe, 'das Seelische' – spiritual, cultural, emotional impulse – was the prime moving force, and political action only came after, as its expression and instrument (vi, 408). These were truths derived from his own past, as well as from wider experience.

*Death in Venice* (1912) has a place in history in two distinct ways. In social terms, as a classic of homosexual passion which yet makes enough show of moral judgement not to seem a direct plea or cause a public scandal, and which has been made into a film and an opera with a prestige of their own, it has probably done more to edge homosexuality into the common culture than any other single work of art. The remark of Mann's old enemy Alfred Kerr, that the story 'made pederasty acceptable to the cultivated middle classes', was meant to be sarcastic but has proved prophetic.

The novella has, secondly, something to say about political history, even though the sole mention of the public sphere is the threat of war in its opening sentence – the truncated date '19.' could refer to any one of several pre-1914 crises. Otherwise the themes are internal, first artistic, then emotional, and the hidden depths are moral and psychological. With his artistic discipline collapsing, Aschenbach travels to refresh his creative system, but instinctively is seeking a deeper release (as witness the alarming jungle vision of Chapter 1 ). In Nietzschean terms, Dionysus is reasserting his power against too harsh a rule of Apollo; in Freudian terms, it is a revolt against repression. Mann was consciously using Nietzsche, but probably did not yet know Freud; on this his own accounts vary. The Polish boy's beauty does, briefly, inspire new writing, but then becomes an obsession overcoming all rational self-control (as witness Aschenbach's dream-vision of a Dionysian orgy in Chapter 5).

The issues become political only if the collapse of a disciplined individual life is read as a symbol of forces waiting to be unleashed



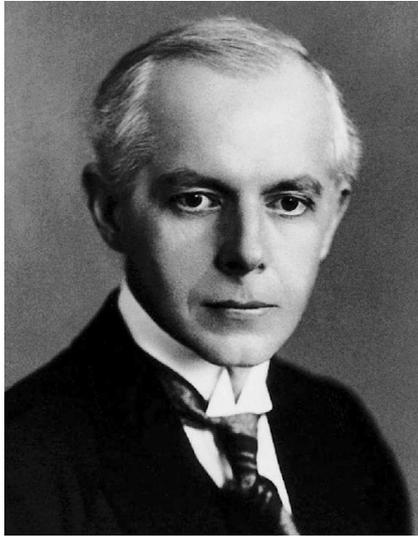
Alfred Weidenmann, *Buddenbrooks*, movie scene (1959)

in society. Georg Lukács was the first to see this angle, albeit by trial and error, first stressing Aschenbach's Prussian discipline. 'Prussianism' is an old bogeyman for historians of Germany, not because of any breakdown, however, but because of its ruthless persistence: Wilhelm II's provocation of crises until one of them led to war; the increasing Prussian military control of policy during 1914–18; Hindenburg's selling out of the fragile Weimar democracy to Hitler in 1933; the Wehrmacht general staff holding the candle to the devil of Nazism through the thirties and forties, until the belated conspiracy of a group of officers which nearly killed Hitler. What really matters, as Lukács eventually sees, is not the old Prussian discipline, but the emotional and social forces whose tool it increasingly became, the 'barbaric underworld' which the Venice novella suggests is lurking under the surface of an ordered life or, by implication, of an ordered society. Even that stops short of Mann's own later insight. The solutions to his artistic difficulties that Aschenbach casts around for – rejecting the psychological analysis and understanding he practised in his early work, simplifying morality, abandoning himself to the dark emotions he no longer even wants to control – these things would later strike Thomas Mann, in exile from Nazi Germany, as a clear proto-fascist syndrome. The emotional nexus had taken on political form in the Nazis' violent attacks on reason and intellect, the whipping up of atavistic mass feeling, the collective unreason of enthusiasm for Hitler. Insofar as Aschenbach's problems and temptations had been Mann's own – 'I had these things in me as much as anyone', he wrote to his American patroness Agnes E. Meyer on 30 May 1938 – he shuddered to think he had embodied the coming politics of the age.

The 'socially responsible Apolline narrative' that eventually takes over *Death in Venice* and consigns Aschenbach to a tragic death had not disposed of the potential for atavistic feeling in Mann himself. Within two years, the war that looms in that opening sentence had broken out and Mann was carried away, like most intellectuals in the combatant nations, by the nationalistic emotions of August 1914.

Where Mann-Aschenbach's Venetian 'visitation' ('Heimsuchung') by homoerotic passion had been kept in moral check, this new and larger one could be welcomed and embraced. Mann uses the word 'visitation' again prominently in 'Thoughts in War', the article with which in 1914 he leaped to defend his country against the accusations of Entente propaganda: that Germany had provoked and begun hostilities, had flouted morality and broken international law by invading France via neutral Belgium, and was now committing atrocities. Such charges made much of the contrast between the true Germany of culture (Beethoven, Kant, Goethe) and the new Germany of ruthless *Realpolitik* (Nietzsche, Treitschke, the politicians and generals round Kaiser Wilhelm). Mann denied this distinction: true culture was compatible with and in touch with the terrible realities of life; all else was shallow or feigned, mere Western 'civilisation'. In *Frederick and the Grand Coalition* (1915) he drew a parallel with Prussian history: however 'enlightened' the philosopher-prince had been before acceding, the soldier-king was right to be ruthless once he was on the throne. Prussia's destiny was at stake, the outcome justified him. The same applied to Germany now – or, come to think of it (and he clearly did), to Thomas Mann's own transformation.

With these two pieces early in the war, Mann might have shot his political bolt, if his brother Heinrich – an increasingly radical left-wing writer, and now an outspoken critic of German actions – had not countered with his own historical parallel. Heinrich's essay 'Zola' celebrates the French novelist's political commitment, especially to the anti-militarist cause in the notorious Dreyfus affair. More generally, it is about the moral demands on writers in a sabre-rattling society like the French Third Republic and then, back to specifics, it uses personal allusions nobody else would recognise to condemn Thomas's own moral failure and corruption as a writer who has gone along with the sabre-rattlers of the Wilhelmine Second Empire. Along-smouldering conflict between the brothers was now flaring openly.



Béla Bartók (1881-1945)

IX  
*Bluebeard's Castle*  
(1911)



Pierre Boulezl, *Béla Bartók: Bluebeard's Castle*, BBC Symphony Orchestra (1967)

Young Judith leaves her family and her betrothed and flees with Bluebeard to his castle. When they enter the castle, Judith plans to make improvements on the dark and generally dreary home the lovers will share. Bluebeard instructs her not to open any of the seven doors in the castle, but she is insistent. The first door reveals Bluebeard's torture chamber, where the walls drip with fresh blood. This doesn't deter Judith: she is both inquisitive and, perhaps, a bit insecure, ultimately prodding Bluebeard into handing over the keys to all seven doors so that she might know him better. Against Bluebeard's wishes she continues to open doors, ultimately revealing various aspects of Bluebeard's past. At the seventh door, Bluebeard's three former wives step out into the hall. They are the Duke's morning, noon, and evening wives, and Judith is now his midnight wife. He weighs her down with jewels, a crown, and a cloak, and she follows a moonbeam into the seventh chamber, the door closing behind her. Bluebeard is left alone in darkness.



Gustave Doré, *Perrault's Fairy Tale: Bluebeard*, engraving (1862)

## BLUEBEARD'S CASTLE

### LIBRETTO

*A vast, circular, Gothic hall. Steep stairs at Left lead up to a small iron door. To the Right of the stairs seven enormous doors, four of them directly facing the audience, the last two at one side. No windows, no ornamentation. The hall is empty, dark, and forbidding like a cave hewn in the heart of solid rock. When the curtain rises the stage is in total darkness. The minstrel steps back and is swallowed up in the gloom. Suddenly the small iron door at the head of the stairs is flung wide, and in the dazzling white opening appear the black, silhouetted figures of Bluebeard and Judith.*

BLUEBEARD

Here we are now. Now at last you see  
Before you Bluebeard's castle.  
Not a happy place like your father's.  
Judith, answer. Are you coming?

JUDITH

Coming, coming, dearest Bluebeard.

BLUEBEARD (*coming slowly down the steps*)

Do you hear the bells a-jangling?  
Child, thy mother sits in sorrow;  
Sword and shield your father seizeth;  
Swift thy brother leaps to saddle.  
Judith, answer. Art thou coming?

JUDITH

Coming, coming, dearest Bluebeard.

*Bluebeard is at the bottom of the stairs. He turns to look at Judith who has stopped half way down. The ray of light from the open door shines directly on them both.*

BLUEBEARD

Dearest Judith, are you frightened?

JUDITH (*with hands pressed to her breast*)

No, my flowing skirt was tangled,  
something caught the silken flounces.

BLUEBEARD

See, the doorway standeth open.

JUDITH

Dearest Bluebeard!

*She comes a few steps down.*

Mother and father beloved,  
Brother and sister devoted ...

*She comes all the way down.*



All of them, I left them weeping,  
All my kindred, to come hither.

*She snuggles up to him.*

Darling Bluebeard! If you reject me  
And drive me out, I'll never leave you.  
I'll perish on your icy threshold.

*Bluebeard embraces her.*

BLUEBEARD  
Let the door be shut and bolted.

*The small iron door swings to. The hall is only bright enough for the two figures and the seven huge black doors to be just visible. Judith fumbles her way along the left wall, keeping hold of Bluebeard's hand.*

JUDITH  
Is this really Bluebeard's castle?  
Why no windows?  
No sweet daylight?

BLUEBEARD  
Never.

JUDITH  
Can the sun never glimmer here?

BLUEBEARD  
Nevermore.

JUDITH  
Always icy, dark and gloomy?

BLUEBEARD  
Always, always.

JUDITH (*she comes forward*)  
All who come here cease their gossip.  
All the rumours hushed in silence.

BLUEBEARD  
Do you know them?

JUDITH  
Ev'rything lies deep in shadow.

*She feels her way forward. She shudders.*

[...]



FIRST DOOR  
Bluebeard's Torture Chamber

Woe!

BLUEBEARD  
What seest thou? What seest thou?

JUDITH (*pressing her hands to her breast*)  
Shackles, daggers, racks and pincers,  
Branding irons!

BLUEBEARD  
Judith, 'tis my torture chamber.

JUDITH  
Fearful is thy room of torture,  
Dearest Bluebeard!  
Dreadful, horrible!

BLUEBEARD  
Art thou afraid?

JUDITH (*starts in horror*)  
Look, your castle walls are blood-stained!  
Look, the walls are bleeding ...  
Bleeding ... bleeding ...

BLUEBEARD  
Art thou afraid?

*Judith turns back to Bluebeard.  
She is silhouetted against the red light.*

JUDITH (*with pale, calm resolution*)  
No! I'm not afraid. See, morning breaks!  
Crimson sunrise! Behold the light.

*She goes back to him, walking cautiously along  
the beam of light.*

Look there, lovely radiance!

*She kneels down and stretches out her arms as  
though cupping the light in her hands.*

BLUEBEARD  
Crimson river, blood-stained waters!

[...]



Gustave Doré, *Perrault's Fairy Tale: Bluebeard*, engraving (1862)

DYING FOR ART:  
THE FILMIC ART-WORK OF THE FUTURE  
by Ian Christie

Behold, the song sounds.  
You all gaze (*at me*), I gaze at you.  
Our eyelash-curtain is up:  
Where's the stage: is it outside or in,  
Lords, Ladies?

Béla Balázs, Prologue to *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*

So much of the history of theorizing cinema has been devoted to defining its specificity, or difference from other arts and media, that the question of how cinema inherited and developed the nineteenth-century arts of spectacle, which was a important focus of early thinking about its significance, now requires a conscious effort to re-frame. Nowhere is this more apparent than in considering the role of film (or the electronic image) as a way of presenting, or perhaps reinventing, opera. Arnold Schoenberg could contemplate using abstract or animated film in his opera *Die glückliche Hand*, as early as 1913, and even while deploring the effects of popular cinema on mass taste, he could still envisage the synchronized 'talkie' in 1927 making possible 'a completely new and independent instrument for innovative artistic expression'. This was the period when Schoenberg was starting work on his opera, *Moses und Aron*, which would remain unfinished but did not incorporate any novel form of staging or presentation. Schoenberg's pupil, Alban Berg, however, incorporated a film episode into his final (also unfinished) opera, *Lulu*.

Perhaps surprisingly, the most substantial early experiment in fusing opera and film came, not from the Modernist avant-garde, but from what might be considered the leaders of the earlier Symbolist avant-garde, the composer Richard Strauss and his librettist Hugo von Hofmannstahl. Working with the film director Robert Wiene, already famous for *The Cabinet of Dr Caligari* (*Das Kabinett des Dr Caligari*) (1919), they reworked their greatest popular success of the pre-Great War period, *Der Rosenkavalier* (1911), as a silent film to be shown with live orchestral accompaniment. No doubt because this remained little seen for nearly seventy years, it has acquired the reputation of being a perverse failure—a commercial attempt to exploit an established hit and to revive the flagging

reputations of both Strauss and Hofmannstahl. Yet as Leon Botstein has argued, having examined both reconstructed film and music, both librettist and composer took the opportunity to rethink their most successful work and make considerable changes. They wanted to improve the dramaturgy of the original and to take advantage of the new medium—as well as, presumably, seeking to overcome the central issue of absence of singers in this new combination of silent image and orchestral accompaniment.

The Strauss–Hofmannstahl–Wiene experiment seems to have left little lasting impression, no doubt because it was rarely performed, and appeared at the precise moment when recorded sound with film had finally reached a viable commercial form. Nor did the fact that both Strauss and Hofmannstahl were seen as conservatives by the interwar avant-garde encourage archaeology or citation in later cultural history. In a symmetrical fashion, histories of cinema paid little or no attention to other ambitious film–music hybrids, such as Cecil B. DeMille's *Carmen* (1915), accompanied by an adaptation of Bizet's score, or Abel Gance's *Napoleon*, with its original music by Arthur Honegger.<sup>8</sup> Instead, various currents of avant-garde aspiration for film in the 1920s stressed the autonomy of the moving image, by implication intrinsically silent, or the potential of using the new synchronous sound to experiment with audiovisual 'counterpoint', or synesthetic abstraction in the 'optical music' of Len Lye and Oskar Fischinger. Yet there was also a current of thought that found expression in Terry Ramsaye's populist history of cinema, *A Million and One Nights*, which claimed the movies as the culmination of 'all of the art processes of all the ages'. And in this it is possible to detect a distant echo of Richard Wagner's manifesto *The Art-Work of the Future*, first published in 1849, in which he called for an 'all-embracing' art of drama which would combine all the individual arts in order to make 'a direct appeal to a common public'. Wagner would eventually realize this aim when his series of music dramas, *The Ring of the Nibelungen* (*Der Ring des Nibelungen*), was produced as an integral cycle in the festival theatre specially created in Bayreuth in 1876, with its revolutionary amphitheatre form, concealed orchestra pit and darkened auditorium. In the same year that Ramsaye's book appeared, the Bayreuth Festspielhaus was invoked as



Georges Méliès, *Barbe-bleue*, Filmstills from different *tableaux* (1901)

anticipating the immersive cocoon of large-scale cinema presentation.

Wagner's conception of music drama as total art work (*Gesamtkunstwerk*) was to cast a long shadow across subsequent opera and theatre, ranging from its influence on Symbolist artists in France and Germany to the radical theatre design of Adolphe Appia and the popular spectacle of Max Reinhardt. Within this broad current of the early twentieth century, we can locate Béla Balázs's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* (*A kékszállú herceg vára*) (1910), his third play, which he hoped would be adopted as a libretto by one of the emerging young Hungarian composers, his friend Zoltán Kodály, or Béla Bartók. Like these musicians, Balázs was strongly influenced by traditional culture, finding in Transylvanian folk ballads a 'dramatic fluidity' that would allow him to 'depict a modern soul in the primary colours of folk song'. Another model, however, was the recent libretto by the Symbolist Maurice Maeterlinck for Paul Dukas's opera, *Ariane and Bluebeard* (*Ariane et Barbe-bleue*), in 1907. If we see Symbolism as a bridge between Romanticism and Modernism, marked by a particular fascination with psychological alienation and private worlds, then Balázs's questioning of whether the stage is 'outside or in' in his Prologue assumes considerable significance. The fact that he would go on to become a pioneer film theorist and screenwriter further encourages a view of the work as proto-filmic in the sense that Eisenstein identified in his essay on Dickens. However, the Bartók–Balázs opera had to wait until the 1960s before a filmmaker would realize its potential, and bring to it an 'all-embracing' conception of cinema. The result is a little-known work which still has the potential to illuminate the trajectories of both Wagner's aspiration and Michael Powell's pursuit of the 'composed film', as well as offering a significant modern addition to the evolving 'Bluebeard text'.

The English director Michael Powell made three opera-based films in the 1950s and 1960s, two of these with his long-term, and Hungarian-born, partner Emeric Pressburger: *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951) and a version of Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus*, entitled *Oh Rosalinda!!* [sic] (1955). In 1964, he directed Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* at the invitation of another old colleague, the stage and film designer, Hein Heckroth. In addition to these completed works, he also planned at least three other opera-based projects, ranging from a proposed collaboration

with Stravinsky around 1952, to a biographical fantasia about Richard Strauss, *The Golden Years*, and finally a collaboration with Philip Glass to film the latter's Poe opera, *The Fall of the House of Usher*, in 1987. Nor does this tally include the 'quotation' of Manuel de Falla's *El Amor Brujo* in his Spanish production *Honeymoon* (*Luna de Miel*) (1959), or his short dance film *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* in 1955, and somewhat fraught involvement with the biographical *Anna Pavlova* in 1983. In spite of this substantial record, opera has rarely been seen as central to an understanding of Powell's achievement, although *The Tales of Hoffmann* has been recognized as a cornerstone of his 'anti-realism'. Instead, it has more often been regarded as symptomatic of a loss of creative independence—as if 'merely' to film an opera was to abdicate responsibility in favour of becoming a purveyor of others' vision. Yet Powell came increasingly to regard opera, or more precisely the fusion of opera and dance that cinema made possible, as an ideal to which he aspired. In the second volume of his memoirs, published posthumously, he wrote of *The Tales of Hoffmann* as 'a delight. It dares everything and never falters'; and described *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* as 'a jewel of a piece'. This last music-based work to be completed under his control can now be seen as crucial in resolving the search for artistic unity that had preoccupied Powell since the mid-1940s.

The fact that Powell, initially with Pressburger and later independently, was drawn towards musical forms to realize this goal has both a semiotic and an economic dimension. In semiotic terms, the presence of song and dance, together with dramatic and filmic codes, produced a richness of expressive discourse, and also a means of fracturing the implicit realism of cinema which Powell found increasingly irksome. But immediately after the war British filmmakers also found themselves facing hard commercial choices. Losing ground to Hollywood in the struggle for a mass audience, both internationally and domestically, there was an imperative to produce culturally distinctive work. The Archers' first post-war film, *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), cast as a fantasy contest between Britain and America for post-war moral supremacy, revived the allegorical machinery of the Jacobean masque in an elaborate display of filmic virtuosity. In *Black Narcissus* (1947) this semiotic complexity was replaced by a synaesthetic fusion of painterly design, choreographed movement



Harry Clarke, *Perrault's Fairy Tale- Bluebeard*, illustration (1920)

and music, echoing a contemporary interest in the integration of music and image that was shared by such apparently diverse figures as Disney and Eisenstein.

The path that lay before Powell and Pressburger after the notable success of *Black Narcissus* pointed towards a continued exploitation of female-centred melodrama, which would prove a dependable formula for at least one British studio, Gainsborough, and was also the underlying genre already being practised by Alfred Hitchcock in Hollywood, where it would soon be developed in different ways by Vincente Minnelli and Douglas Sirk. Powell and Pressburger's approach, however, was oblique and precipitated their first major involvement with musical theatre. Reviving a pre-war project, originally commissioned from Pressburger by the producer Alexander Korda as a vehicle for his wife, the former dancer Merle Oberon, they began to develop *The Red Shoes* as a film that would have at its centre a full-scale ballet conceived in cinematic terms. For Powell, this would be a continuation of two earlier discoveries: the dual approach to extreme psychological states used in *A Matter of Life and Death*, where the pilot's crisis is seen in both medical and allegorical terms; and the integration of scenography, music and movement in the final sequence of *Black Narcissus*, which Powell would later term 'composed film'.

In its new form, *The Red Shoes* ostensibly satisfied the demands of post-war melodrama, as a wish-fulfilment story about a young woman escaping the mundane reality of England to plunge into an exotic international life devoted to art—although the life of the Russian ballet company that Vicky Page enters turns out to be one demanding all or nothing, that will eventually destroy her. Instead of dying for one's country, which had been the theme of so many wartime films, including Powell and Pressburger's own, *The Red Shoes*—as Powell put it sardonically—'told us to go and die for art'. In melodramatic terms, Vicky is forced to choose between two lives, represented by two men, her composer husband Julian and the impresario Lermontov. Unable to choose, she runs from the theatre and throws herself onto a railway line, so living, and dying, the tragic role that she has been performing on stage in *The Red Shoes* ballet.

As in *A Matter of Life and Death*, Powell's concern with a level of 'professional realism' creates a credible framework for the backstage

story of the ballet company, loosely based on Diaghilev's Ballets Russes. Likewise, his demand to 'know what she is feeling while she is dancing' would lead to the creation of a phantasmagoric space that is the equivalent of the allegorical space of the earlier film's Heaven. But the central device that links these lives and spaces is the doubling of the heroine as ingénue dancer and as the protagonist of a ballet based on Hans Christian Andersen's story. As in Strauss and Hoffmannstahl's opera *Ariadne auf Naxos* (1916), we see first the preparations for a performance and then the performance itself, which 'leaves' the stage to become an exploration of the heroine's dilemma. However the ballet scenario does not follow this striking example of what Dinah Birch has aptly termed Andersen's 'perverse fantasies of abjection', except in retaining the girl who is punished for desiring the shoes by being 'danced' by them and rejected by the members of her community. Instead, *The Red Shoes* ballet becomes a frame for an intense psychodramatic sequence in which motifs from the ballet are mixed with the key figures from Vicky's own life and a range of nightmare characters. As she passes from the ballet's fairground into a De Chirico-like realm of deserted streets and ruins, she encounters a will-o'-the-wisp who transforms briefly into her stage lover (Helpmann), before entering a Dead City of Failure, with grotesque statues of Envy and Malice. The lover reappears in a vast ballroom, where she is borne aloft in triumph. Then, in a striking and complex visual metaphor, the audience's applause becomes waves breaking, with Lermontov and Julian standing as rocks against this turbulence, before merging into a composite support, as she returns to the ballet's story and to her rejection on the steps of the church.

Vicky interprets the ballet as a text woven around her own desires and conflicts, rather like the fantasy narrative of Maya Deren's film *Meshes of the Afternoon* (1943), or the dreams supposedly told to her psychoanalyst by the successful heroine of Moss Hart's Freudian musical *Lady in the Dark* (1941). As Andrew Moor observes, Vicky displays 'a dangerous over-identification with the image of the dancing Girl' which she sees reflected in the shop window. Moor suggests that the ballet serves to bring together different senses of commodity, with the girls who cluster round the Shoemaker's shop evoking a typical equation between femininity and consumerism, while Vicky herself is in the process of becoming a commodity,



Fritz Lang, *Secret Beyond the Door*, cinema advertising (1948)

albeit cultural, and will ultimately be destroyed by the pressures of such commodification. On a psychosexual level, Lermontov insists on total submission as a condition of Vicky returning to satisfy her narcissistic desire to dance *The Red Shoes*, and when she resists—unable to split into two versions of herself, as she had in the ballet—the conflict between her 'natural' and 'unnatural' desires drives her, in effect, to recapitulate the masochistic gesture of Andersen's heroine, who submits to castration by having her feet cut off.

Just as *A Matter of Life and Death* had imbricated elements of the myths of Orpheus and Eurydice and Alcestis, as well as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and other cultural motifs, to create a distinctively modern myth, so *The Red Shoes* drew on Andersen's story, pitting it against the myth of Cupid and Psyche, which is the subject of Julian's opera, and combining in Lermontov aspects of the impresarios Diaghilev and Korda, the former relevant to the ballet world and the latter to cinema, as well as echoes of Mephistopheles's and Svengali's powers of persuasion. But more than all these cultural references, perhaps the central discovery, which would propel Powell forward to his future opera films, was the realization of 'the empty stage as the most magical and suggestive area in the world [...] [where] everything is fantasy and invention'. The allegorical and mythic themes of *A Matter of Life and Death* had led Powell and Pressburger to create a series of spatial structures for the afterworld which awaits the pilot, and for its threshold, which is figured as a vast escalator stretching between earth and heaven, an ironically modernized version of Jacob's Ladder with its inexorable motion symbolizing mortality. In *Black Narcissus*, the Himalayan setting centred on a former harem-palace now being used as a convent allowed for considerable visual stylization in an essentially realistic design. Suggestive wall paintings, the constant eddying of wind and vivid contrasts in colour all contribute to creating a disturbingly erotic setting for the conflicts which will destroy this precarious community, ostensibly dedicated to chastity but riven by unrepressed desires. Twenty years later, the dark studio of *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, full of statuary and symbolic forms, will become a more abstract space equally riven by contradictory desires.

All of Powell and Pressburger's films from 1943 to 1947 were de - signed by Alfred Junge, a German-born designer who became a mainstay of the architectural school of production design in British cinema during the 1930s and 1940s. But Powell had chafed at Junge's realist approach to the fantastic and ethereal aspects of both *A Matter of Life and Death* and *Black Narcissus*. Now, faced with designs for 'a real stage in a real theatre', Powell turned to another German designer, hitherto responsible only for costumes, and invited him to assume responsibility for the whole of *The Red Shoes*. Hein Heckroth had come to England in the 1930s as designer for Kurt Joo's dance company, famous for its boldly stylized political allegory *The Green Table*, and had stayed, teaching at Dartington Hall, before entering the cinema as a costume designer. In place of the predominantly architectural approach to design practised by Junge, Heckroth introduced a plastic, painterly approach that was ideally suited to realizing the imagery now demanded by Powell. While much of *The Red Shoes* relied on detailed studio-built interiors linked by location exteriors, the extended ballet sequence was based on a series of paintings by Heckroth that combined Expressionist, Surrealist and Neo-classical motifs, and realized these through a wide range of techniques, including drapery, innovative lighting, and variable camera speed. Heckroth had created a new design idiom that owed more to contemporary Neo-Romantic visual art than to the conventional realism of the period's narrative cinema or indeed its theatre and opera production. Faced with British cinema's limited horizons at the beginning of the 1950s, Powell began to prepare a speculative portfolio of 'tales', which would be films of varying lengths involving the collaboration of previous colleagues and distinguished artists from different media. All of these would remain unrealized, despite Powell's recognition that television would become a future sponsor of such cultural programmes, but the most ambitious of them—an episode from the *Odyssey*, *Nausicaa*, with music by Stravinsky, libretto by Dylan Thomas, and design by Heckroth—was a pointer towards the freedom with which Powell and Heckroth would approach *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*. [...]



Franz Kafka (1883-1924)

X

*The Metamorphosis*  
(1915)



Franz Kafka, *Die Verwandlung/The Metamorphosis*, First Edition Cover (1916)

In 1911, Kafka's father pressured him into helping a relative open an asbestos factory. This venture took a severe toll on both Kafka's time and his already weak constitution, leading him to contemplate suicide. But in 1912, Kafka met Felice Bauer, a relation of Brod's through marriage. These events broke a creative logjam for Kafka. In September 1912, he wrote the short story "The Judgment" in a single sitting, dedicating it to his new love. And over the course of three weeks that autumn, he wrote *The Metamorphosis*.

In *The Metamorphosis*, Gregor Samsa, a traveling salesman, wakes up in his bed to find himself transformed into a large insect. He looks around his room, which appears normal, and decides to go back to sleep to forget about what has happened. He attempts to roll over, only to discover that he cannot due to his new body—he is stuck on his hard, convex back. He tries to scratch an itch on his stomach, but when he touches himself with one of his many new legs, he is disgusted. He reflects on how dreary life as a traveling salesman is and how he would quit if his parents and sister did not depend so much on his income. He turns to the clock and sees that he has overslept and missed his train to work.

Gregor's mother knocks on the door, and when he answers her, Gregor finds that his voice has changed. His family suspects that he may be ill, so they ask him to open the door, which he keeps locked out of habit. He tries to get out of bed, but he cannot maneuver his transformed body. While struggling to move, he hears his office manager come into the family's apartment to find out why Gregor has not shown up to work. He eventually rocks himself to the floor and calls out that he will open the door momentarily.

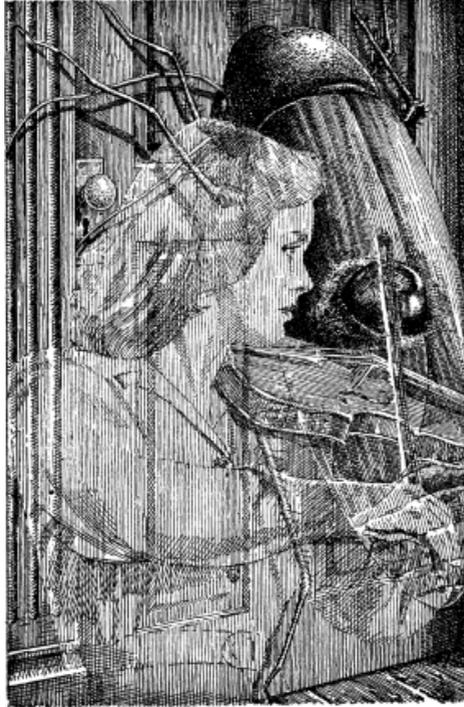
Through the door, the office manager warns Gregor of the consequences of missing work and hints that Gregor's recent work has not been satisfactory. Gregor protests and tells the office manager that he will be there shortly. Neither his family nor the office manager can understand what Gregor says, and they suspect that something may be seriously wrong with him. Gregor manages to unlock and open the door with his mouth, since he has no hands. He begs the office manager's forgiveness for his late start. Horrified by Gregor's appearance, the office manager bolts from the apartment. Gregor tries to catch up with the fleeing office manager, but his father drives him back into the bedroom with a cane and a rolled newspaper.

Gregor grows more comfortable with his changed body. He begins climbing the walls and ceiling for amusement. Discovering Gregor's new pastime, Grete decides to remove some of the furniture to give Gregor more space. She and her mother begin taking furniture away, but Gregor finds their actions deeply distressing. He tries to save a picture on the wall of a woman wearing a fur hat, fur scarf, and a fur muff.

Gregor's family begins leaving the bedroom door open for a few hours each evening so he can watch them. He sees his family wearing down as a result of his transformation and their new poverty.

One evening, the cleaning lady leaves Gregor's door open while the boarders lounge about the living room. Grete has been asked to play the violin for them, and Gregor creeps out of his bedroom to listen. The boarders, who initially seemed interested in Grete, grow bored with her performance, but Gregor is transfixed by it. One of the boarders spots Gregor and they become alarmed. Gregor's father tries to shove the boarders back into their rooms, but the three men protest and announce that they will move out immediately without paying rent because of the disgusting conditions in the apartment.

Grete tells her parents that they must get rid of Gregor or they will all be ruined. Her father agrees, wishing Gregor could understand them and would leave of his own accord. Gregor does in fact understand and slowly moves back to the bedroom. There, determined to rid his family of his presence, Gregor dies.



Kafka's Metemorphosis, Famous Fantastic Mysteries, Illustration Lawrence-Sterne Stevens (1953)

## THE METAMORPHOSIS

### CHAPTER I

One morning, when Gregor Samsa woke from troubled dreams, he found himself transformed in his bed into a horrible vermin. He lay on his armour-like back, and if he lifted his head a little he could see his brown belly, slightly domed and divided by arches into stiff sections. The bedding was hardly able to cover it and seemed ready to slide off any moment. His many legs, pitifully thin compared with the size of the rest of him, waved about helplessly as he looked.

“What’s happened to me?” he thought. It wasn’t a dream. His room, a proper human room although a little too small, lay peacefully between its four familiar walls. A collection of textile samples lay spread out on the table - Samsa was a travelling salesman - and above it there hung a picture that he had recently cut out of an illustrated magazine and housed in a nice, gilded frame. It showed a lady fitted out with a fur hat and fur boa who sat upright, raising a heavy fur muff that covered the whole of her lower arm towards the viewer.

Gregor then turned to look out the window at the dull weather. Drops of rain could be heard hitting the pane, which made him feel quite sad. “How about if I sleep a little bit longer and forget all this nonsense”, he thought, but that was something he was unable to do because he was used to sleeping on his right, and in his present state couldn’t get into that position. However hard he threw himself onto his right, he always rolled back to where he was. He must have tried it a hundred times, shut his eyes so that he wouldn’t have to look at the floundering legs, and only stopped when he began to feel a mild, dull pain there that he had never felt before.

“Oh, God”, he thought, “what a strenuous career it is that I’ve chosen! Travelling day in and day out. Doing business like this takes much more effort than doing your own business at home, and on top of that there’s the curse of travelling, worries about making train connections, bad and irregular food, contact with different people all the time so that you can never get to know anyone or become friendly with them. It can all go to Hell!” He felt a slight itch up on his belly; pushed himself slowly up on his back towards the headboard so that he could lift his head better; found where the itch was, and saw that it was covered with lots of little white spots which he didn’t know what to make of; and when he tried to feel the place with one of his legs he drew it quickly back because as soon as he touched it he was overcome by a cold shudder.

He slid back into his former position. “Getting up early all the time”, he thought, “it makes you stupid. You’ve got to get enough sleep. Other travelling salesmen live a life of luxury. For instance, whenever I go back to the guest house during the morning to copy out the contract, these gentlemen are always still sitting there eating their breakfasts. I ought to just try that with my boss; I’d get kicked out on the spot. But who knows, maybe that would be the best thing for me. If I didn’t have my parents to think about I’d have given in my notice a long time ago, I’d have gone up to the boss and told him just what I think, tell him everything I would, let him know just what I feel. He’d fall right off his desk! And it’s a funny sort of business to be sitting up there at your desk, talking down at your subordinates from up there, especially when you have to go right up close because the boss is hard of hearing. Well, there’s still some hope; once I’ve got the money together to pay off my parents’ debt to him - another five or six years I suppose - that’s definitely what I’ll do. That’s when I’ll make the big change. First of all though, I’ve got to get up, my train leaves at five.”

And he looked over at the alarm clock, ticking on the chest of drawers. “God in Heaven!” he thought. It was half past six and the hands were quietly moving forwards, it was even later than half past, more like quarter to seven. Had the alarm clock not rung? He could see from the bed that it had been set for four o’clock as it should have been; it certainly must have rung. Yes, but was it possible to quietly sleep through that furniture-



rattling noise? True, he had not slept peacefully, but probably all the more deeply because of that. What should he do now? The next train went at seven; if he were to catch that he would have to rush like mad and the collection of samples was still not packed, and he did not at all feel particularly fresh and lively. And even if he did catch the train he would not avoid his boss's anger as the office assistant would have been there to see the five o'clock train go, he would have put in his report about Gregor's not being there a long time ago. The office assistant was the boss's man, spineless, and with no understanding. What about if he reported sick? But that would be extremely strained and suspicious as in fifteen years of service Gregor had never once yet been ill. His boss would certainly come round with the doctor from the medical insurance company, accuse his parents of having a lazy son, and accept the doctor's recommendation not to make any claim as the doctor believed that no-one was ever ill but that many were workshy. And what's more, would he have been entirely wrong in this case? Gregor did in fact, apart from excessive sleepiness after sleeping for so long, feel completely well and even felt much hungrier than usual.

He was still hurriedly thinking all this through, unable to decide to get out of the bed, when the clock struck quarter to seven. There was a cautious knock at the door near his head. "Gregor", somebody called - it was his mother - "it's quarter to seven. Didn't you want to go somewhere?" That gentle voice! Gregor was shocked when he heard his own voice answering, it could hardly be recognised as the voice he had had before. As if from deep inside him, there was a painful and uncontrollable squeaking mixed in with it, the words could be made out at first but then there was a sort of echo which made them unclear, leaving the hearer unsure whether he had heard properly or not. Gregor had wanted to give a full answer and explain everything, but in the circumstances contented himself with saying: "Yes, mother, yes, thank-you, I'm getting up now." The change in Gregor's voice probably could not be noticed outside through the wooden door, as his mother was satisfied with this explanation and shuffled away. But this short conversation made the other members of the family aware that Gregor, against their expectations was still at home, and soon his father came knocking at one of the side doors, gently, but with his fist. "Gregor, Gregor", he called, "what's wrong?" And after a short while he called again with a warning deepness in his voice: "Gregor! Gregor!" At the other side door his sister came plaintively: "Gregor? Aren't you well? Do you need anything?" Gregor answered to both sides: "I'm ready, now", making an effort to remove all the strangeness from his voice by enunciating very carefully and putting long pauses between each, individual word. His father went back to his breakfast, but his sister whispered: "Gregor, open the door, I beg of you." Gregor, however, had no thought of opening the door, and instead congratulated himself for his cautious habit, acquired from his travelling, of locking all doors at night even when he was at home.

The first thing he wanted to do was to get up in peace without being disturbed, to get dressed, and most of all to have his breakfast. Only then would he consider what to do next, as he was well aware that he would not bring his thoughts to any sensible conclusions by lying in bed. He remembered that he had often felt a slight pain in bed, perhaps caused by lying awkwardly, but that had always turned out to be pure imagination and he wondered how his imaginings would slowly resolve themselves today. He did not have the slightest doubt that the change in his voice was nothing more than the first sign of a serious cold, which was an occupational hazard for travelling salesmen.

It was a simple matter to throw off the covers; he only had to blow himself up a little and they fell off by themselves. But it became difficult after that, especially as he was so exceptionally broad. He would have used his arms and his hands to push himself up; but instead of them he only had all those little legs continuously moving in different directions, and which he was moreover unable to control. If he wanted to bend one of them, then that was the first one that would stretch itself out; and if he finally managed to do what he wanted with that leg, all the others seemed to be set free and would move about painfully. "This is something that can't be done in bed", Gregor said to himself, "so don't keep trying to do it".



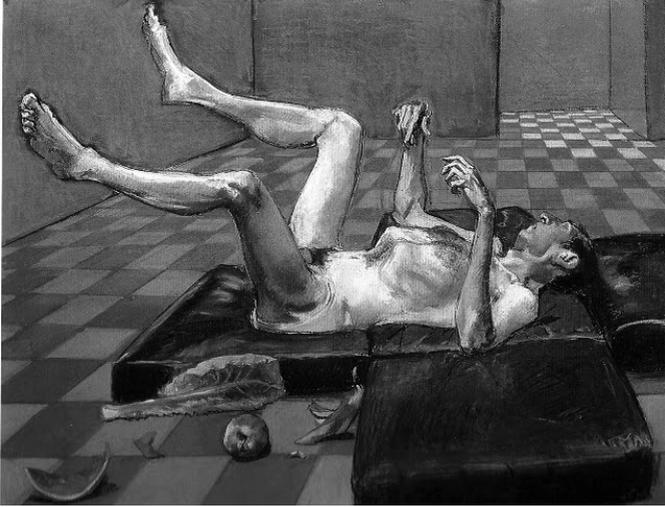
The first thing he wanted to do was get the lower part of his body out of the bed, but he had never seen this lower part, and could not imagine what it looked like; it turned out to be too hard to move; it went so slowly; and finally, almost in a frenzy, when he carelessly shoved himself forwards with all the force he could gather, he chose the wrong direction, hit hard against the lower bedpost, and learned from the burning pain he felt that the lower part of his body might well, at present, be the most sensitive.

So then he tried to get the top part of his body out of the bed first, carefully turning his head to the side. This he managed quite easily, and despite its breadth and its weight, the bulk of his body eventually followed slowly in the direction of the head. But when he had at last got his head out of the bed and into the fresh air it occurred to him that if he let himself fall it would be a miracle if his head were not injured, so he became afraid to carry on pushing himself forward the same way. And he could not knock himself out now at any price; better to stay in bed than lose consciousness.

It took just as much effort to get back to where he had been earlier, but when he lay there sighing, and was once more watching his legs as they struggled against each other even harder than before, if that was possible, he could think of no way of bringing peace and order to this chaos. He told himself once more that it was not possible for him to stay in bed and that the most sensible thing to do would be to get free of it in whatever way he could at whatever sacrifice. At the same time, though, he did not forget to remind himself that calm consideration was much better than rushing to desperate conclusions. At times like this he would direct his eyes to the window and look out as clearly as he could, but unfortunately, even the other side of the narrow street was enveloped in morning fog and the view had little confidence or cheer to offer him. "Seven o'clock, already," he said to himself when the clock struck again, "seven o'clock, and there's still a fog like this." And he lay there quietly a while longer, breathing lightly as if he perhaps expected the total stillness to bring things back to their real and natural state.

But then he said to himself: "Before it strikes quarter past seven I'll definitely have to have got properly out of bed. And by then somebody will have come round from work to ask what's happened to me as well, as they open up at work before seven o'clock." And so he set himself to the task of swinging the entire length of his body out of the bed all at the same time. If he succeeded in falling out of bed in this way and kept his head raised as he did so he could probably avoid injuring it. His back seemed to be quite hard, and probably nothing would happen to it falling onto the carpet. His main concern was for the loud noise he was bound to make, and which even through all the doors would probably raise concern if not alarm. But it was something that had to be risked.

When Gregor was already sticking half way out of the bed - the new method was more of a game than an effort, all he had to do was rock back and forth - it occurred to him how simple everything would be if somebody came to help him. Two strong people - he had his father and the maid in mind - would have been more than enough; they would only have to push their arms under the dome of his back, peel him away from the bed, bend down with the load and then be patient and careful as he swang over onto the floor, where, hopefully, the little legs would find a use. Should he really call for help though, even apart from the fact that all the doors were locked? Despite all the difficulty he was in, he could not suppress a smile at this thought.



Paula Rego, *Metamorphosing After Kafka* (2002)

## THE METAMORPHOSIS

by Johannes Pfeiffer

Kafka's *Story The Metamorphosis* is a parabolic story in the sense that what is narrated affords glimpses of a background of meaning which gives immeasurable depth to all that takes place. But since we are concerned here with a work of creative literature, this does not imply that the point of departure is some abstract thought which is subsequently illustrated by a manifest event and could be extracted from that event; rather, the significance is encountered from the outset in the medium of a pictorial reality which flashes on our brooding imagination with the force of something seen in a vision.

To begin with the composition: the story is arranged in three sections of roughly equal length. Between the first and the second section there is an interval of a day, between the second and the third a longer and indefinite period. Each of these three sections culminate in a catastrophe which increases in intensity each time. The first, brought about by the arrival of the chief clerk, ends with the father using his stick and newspaper to drive the monster his son has become back into his room; the second, set in motion by the clearing out of the furniture, ends with the brutal bombardment of the son with apples; the third, occasioned by the sister's violin-playing, ends with the voluntary withdrawal. The first catastrophe leads to a "heavy, swooning sleep"; the second, to a swoon and a dangerous injury; the third, to death.

This balanced composition has a certain correspondence in the exactness with which the room is imagined and in a kind of "magic realism," whereby objects are presented with such a compact wealth of detail and such sober pithiness that they are constantly turned into something unreal or more than real. The metamorphosis is accomplished with relentless consistency in the mode of presentation itself, the bodily nature of the monster being grasped from within, while the outside world is built up entirely from that embodiment. Slowly Gregor's room emerges into view: the table with the textile samples laid out on it, and the picture above; the window looking on to the narrow street, at first enveloped in the morning mist in such a way that later, when it has become

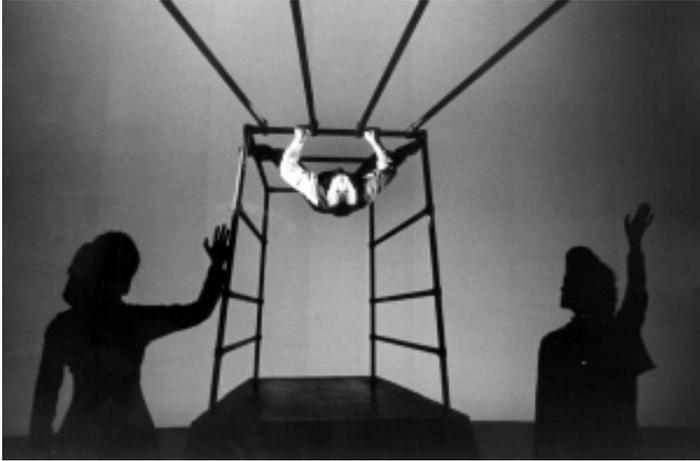
brighter, the street is seen to be terminated by "a section of the endlessly long, dark gray building opposite - it was a hospital-abruptly punctuated by its row of regular windows: the alarm-clock on the chest-drawers, the door near the head of the bed, the two side-doors to left and right. Later, when there is a ring at the door of the flat, and the maid goes "with a firm tread" to open it, a first vague picture of the rooms adjoining is given. Then the carpet lying in Gregor's room; the heard presence of the neighboring rooms; the arm-chair with which Gregor shuffles himself to the door. After the door is opened, a glimpse of the next room: a table laid for breakfast, Gregor's photograph on the wall opposite; a glimpse, through the door leading to the outside room, of the open door to the flat, and beyond this the landing "and the beginning of the stairs going down." Later, the banisters which the chief clerk clasps, and the indirectly presented staircase, when the chief clerk jumps several stairs at once and his yell resounds up and down every flight; the window thrust open on the other side by the mother, the draught between the street and the staircase, the curtains flying up, the newspapers flapping on the table; finally the door which is too narrow to crawl back through, and whose other leaf the father does not think to open. All this has an oppressively suggestive spatial reality, never being portrayed once and for all as a finished picture, but emerging piece by piece as the events proceed - and moreover, emerging only as it is seen from the point of view of the man in his metamorphosed shape.

"As Gregor Samsa awoke one morning from uneasy dreams, he found himself in his bed." With this sentence the story begins as though it were a matter of a normal awakening; and when in the development of the same sentence the decisive turn follows, this also is given with sober matter-of-factness: "transformed into a gigantic insect." The unassumingness with which the weird fact is mentioned is later emphasized, in the words:

*Gregor tried to suppose to himself that something like what had happened to him today might someday happen to the chief clerk; one really could not deny that it was possible.*

At the beginning of the second paragraph, however, a dear definition preserves the characteristics of completely everyday reality. "What has happened to me?" he thought. It was no dream."

Johannes Pfeiffer, *The Metamorphosis. Kafka: A collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Ronald Gray. A Spectrum Book, Prentice-Hall, Inc. Series editor Maynard Mack, Yale University (1962)



Theater Mikhail Baryshnikov & René Auberjonois, Barrymore Theatre NYC

## A STUDY OF FRANZ KAFKA'S THE METAMORPHOSIS

By Hamedreza Kohzadi, Fatemeh  
Azizmohammadi, Mahboubeh Nouri

### THE PROCESS OF ALIENATION IN KAFKA'S METAMORPHOSIS

The first sign of alienation which happens to him is his reaction to his physical change. Gregor Samsa feels that he has been treated as a lowly insect and comes to feel that he is one: the story makes the leap from "I feel like an insect" to "I am an insect." Whatever the causes, Gregor's feeling is rooted in the collapse of his nature between impersonal self (outside) and I (inner self). This collapse can be accepted in the realm of dream. For Gregor Samsa does not at all desire such a transformation into an animal. On the contrary it happens to him suddenly - a frighteningly incomprehensible and strange occurrence. He is far from identifying his ego with a beetle. It is true that he too, precisely, is in a state of unresolved conflict between work and ego. Gregor vacillates between two spheres. On the one hand, he is ruled by the rational, plan-making considerations related to his work: he wants to get up and carry on his business trip. "Just don't stay in bed being useless," Gregor said to himself. On the other hand, however, he curses his work, "the upset of doing business," the 'torture of traveling,' and he ponders, "How about going back to sleep for a few minutes and forgetting all this nonsense." This "nonsense" refers to his metamorphosis into the beetle that inwardly he in no way accepts, but actually wants "to forget" in his sleep. Gregor can look upon the dream metamorphosis only as a negative phenomenon that disturbs his daily work routine. The beetle acquires frightful characteristics; it becomes a "monstrous vermin" that is of no help to him but merely hampers him. When Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning from unsettling dream, he finds himself changed in his bed into a monstrous vermin ... "what happened to me?" he thinks it was no dream. Gregor, thus, is in a waking state. The transformation that had taken place in his dream — characteristically in "unsettling" dream — suddenly overtakes Gregor upon his waking, as an incomprehensible occurrence that has "happened to him," something that he accordingly, did not want, let alone, long to happen. He shakes it off as "nonsense" and

reflects for a long time and in detail upon his strenuous career, upon his relationship to the head of his firm and he considers whether "he can now still catch the seven o'clock train. It does not enter his mind at all that he could perhaps be hindered in his business trip by his transformation. At the outset this consideration is beyond the scope of his imagination. For him the metamorphosis is non-existent. He remains rooted in the realm of the impersonal 'one'. The "self" is a burdensome verminous bug, a monstrous creature of a nightmare that cannot be real. In conflict with his job, he feels the estrangement, the missing "intimate" associations with people. What is more, he ponders on the idea that he would like most of all to "have quit long ago." Only his concern for his parents, who have to pay back a large debt they owe the head of his firm, has prevented him until now from having marched up to the boss and in Gregor's own words, spoken my piece from the bottom of my heart! He would have fallen off the desk!... Well, I haven't given up hope completely; once I've got the money together to pay off my parent's debt to him- that will, probably take another five or six years - I'm going to do it without fail. Then I'm going to make the big break. But for the time being I'd better get up, since my train leaves at five. There can be no doubt that this conflict, between his occupation and his desire to make the final break and become self-reliant and independent, was the cause of his "unsettling dreams." Since the pressure of the moral obligation of his occupation prevails in this conflict, and since the fulfillment of his desire to become a self of his own is put off for five to six years, this desire must of necessity be felt as disturbing and as running counter to his work. The possibilities that offer themselves in the "dream" are simply to have the "self" remain in bed and freely and independently direct all the goings-on outside in the world, without being pounded to bits in the hustle and bustle of business which Gregor cannot accept. And the meaning of this terrible "metamorphosis" rests in the very fact that this "irremovable" self, the self that is "not to be got rid of," this reality of the ego that struggles against the impersonal "one", suddenly invades Gregor's concrete daily reality, too, in a shocking manner. The seemingly fantastic unreality of this "vermin" is actually the supreme reality from which no one can escape. What is new in Kafka's creative writing and view of the problem is his realization that the 'Law' of man's alienation remains hidden from modern man.



Fura Dels Baus, Xxxxxxx (2009)

Man has become the slave of the unknown law of the impersonal 'one' to such an extent that he does not know about his own self or his inner life any longer at all, he represses it and cloaks it again and again by means of calculations. Gregor, it is true, feels extremely uncomfortable in his business life, he senses the conflict through and through, but he believes, in turn, that he can get the better of it by means of mere calculations of a business nature. He calculates that when he has saved the amount of money he needs for his parents, he can then at last make the 'final break' and take the leap, and get away from his business firm. But he has no idea at all of where he will actually leap, of what potential forms of existence he would like to actualize. His own inner being remains alien to him. It is for this reason, therefore, that Kafka gives it a form that is quite alien to him, the form of a verminous creature that threatens his rational existence in an incomprehensible manner. The most gruesome aspect of Gregor's fate is not his metamorphosis. But the blindness with which everybody treats this transformation. Gregor will not admit it. "I'll get dressed right away; pack up my samples, and go." His parents and his sister do not understand it. The self is what is absolutely alien, void and non-existent, not only in the world of business but also in the world of the family. To be sure, his mother and sister love him dearly. In a touching manner they try at first to improve his condition, to surmount their feelings at the sight of this vermin, to take care of him, to protect him, to see to the comforts of life for him, to preserve or once again evoke what for them was human and lovable in him. But the terrible truth of this short story is the realization that even the "most beautiful", most tender relations among people are founded on illusions. No one knows or suspects what he himself "is" and what the other person "is". Gregor Samsa's parents, for instance, never had any inkling of this conflict, of the 'sacrifice' that he was making for their sake; "His parents did not understand this too well; in the course of the years they had formed the conviction that Gregor was set for life in this firm." They had never dreamt that there was trouble brewing within Gregor, that something had been 'out of order' long before the eruption of this inner sickness in the form of the metamorphosis. They did not know that the essential in man can actually be concealed, distorted and destroyed if he is provided with no more than the 'necessaries of life.' Now that the distortion assumes visible features, they are at a loss and feel their son to be a

'foreign body.' By the same token, however, Gregor had also been mistaken in his relations with his family. "What a quiet life the family had been leading;" Gregor said to himself. He believed he had to provide his family with a pleasant, contented, secure life by sacrificing himself, by selling himself to his business. Through his 'sacrifice' Gregor had distorted his own self. But his sacrifice was meaningless. In reality Gregor's parents did not need the sacrifice at all. His father possessed more money than Gregor knew about. According to this interpretation, despite the negative meaning of sacrifice, it has a positive meaning too. When the beetle Gregor hears his sister playing the violin, there is this decisive statement. "Was he an animal, that music could move him so? He felt as if the way to the unknown nourishment he longed for were coming to light." Here the meaning of this transformation into an animal first becomes clear. The matter at issue is the "unknown nourishment" that does not exist on earth. As an animal he is at the same time more than an animal. His alienation had the purpose of awakening in him the 'longing' for this 'nourishment.' The final intent of Gregor's metamorphosis into a beetle is the escape into freedom, that longing for man's 'unknown nourishment.' However, as his longing for music and for the unknown nourishment has already shown, Gregor finally does nevertheless free himself from his enslavement to the empirical world. His death is not merely a meaningless annihilation, but a liberation or realization. Gregor says, 'yes,' to his own death. He dies reconciled with himself and with the world. He thought back on his family with deep emotion and love. His conviction that he would have to disappear was, if possible, even firmer than his sister's. He remained in this state of empty and peaceful reflection until the tower clock struck three in the morning. He still saw that outside the window everything was beginning to grow light. It is no longer possible to understand this 'self' psychologically, as a determinable psychic state that can be explained in terms of the realm of feelings, wishes, hopes, dreams, striving, etc. Somewhat in the sense, perhaps, that in conflict with his business occupation there arises a series of 'inner' emotions, ideals, and goals which now represent, as it were, Gregor's actual self which until now had been suppressed. Since Gregor has nothing but revulsion for the beetle such a sympathetic view of the metamorphosis is out of question. Besides, in that case, it would be



altogether impossible to understand how such an inner life could assume, of all forms, the form of disgusting verminous insect. Even in the view developed by us, it is a matter of perversion of the self, since this self is suppressed or opposed by Gregor and must assume negative characteristics; therefore such a positive/sympathetic psychological interpretation is not possible. But the story makes neither a positive nor a negative statement about the transformation. The metamorphosis is not of spirit, mind, or character. And this is precisely Kafka's contribution to the literature dealing with the dichotomy of man's heart and mind. Psychological interpretations of the story have to take this into account. The beetle remains something "alien" that cannot be made to fit into the human world. It is "The Other"; "The Incomprehensible", pure and simple, beyond the reach of any feeling or imagining. That is why Kafka instructed his publisher to ensure that the illustrator did not draw any specific insect on the cover page for the vermin of Gregor is something that cannot be drawn. It is not only from the view point of the pictorial art that the insect cannot be drawn but also from the view point of imitative art. It is only then that the beetle image contains truth. In this sense truth and the self are identical. The "self" is inexplicable, pure and simple. The beetle embodies the world beyond our conscious as well as our unconscious imagination. The animal, although it is nothing but man 'himself', is the absolute disaffirmation of the so-called 'human world.' The cleavage between the world in which Samsa lives and Samsa's beetlehood is the cleavage between 'imagining' and 'being.' Since for Kafka the world beyond 'imagining' is in man himself, since there is no 'beyond' exterior to man, the 'image' the 'parable' of this beyond is necessarily an earthly image that is unearthly and that at the same time cannot be 'drawn.' The paradox of these circumstances is the reason why Kafka represents such beyond in the form of things or animals that incomprehensibly break into everyday existence, causing bewilderment and fright. It is interesting to note the difference in the use of the beetle image with reference to Raban and Samsa. If the self is represented as the beetle, Raban saw the world from the vantage point of a tranquil self. To him the world naturally appears intolerable and

disgusting. Samsa on the other hand wishes to remain in the world. For him therefore the tranquil self must appear as a terrible monster. That is why what for Raban is a beetle is for Samsa a monstrous vermin. Both the views can be defended as long as one remembers that for Kafka both together constitute human life. Kafka criticizes and affirms both. It would be wrong to interpret Kafka only through Raban's or Samsa's viewpoints. Both cross one another just as the names of both Raban and Samsa are cover names for Kafka himself. Only when both the images of the beetle are taken into account will the full import of Kafka's meaning become apparent.

The *Metamorphosis* is a good example for portraying the riskiest moment (awakening). Kafka said that man is confronted by a world of impossible dimensions and he cannot but despair of comprehending its overwhelming and mysterious forces in the best form of surrealism. All he can do is to test his own capacity for understanding the real self (unconscious). Each fateful confrontation of the antagonist, self (unconscious being) and world (ontology = the world of beings), brings with it hosts of mutually exclusive, indeed, paradoxical relations, riddles which seem to clarify but which eventually confound even further man's impossible task of penetrating the puzzling relations of his world. These "riddles" are philosophical and theological, psychological and social; they extend to all spheres of human existence involved in man's search.

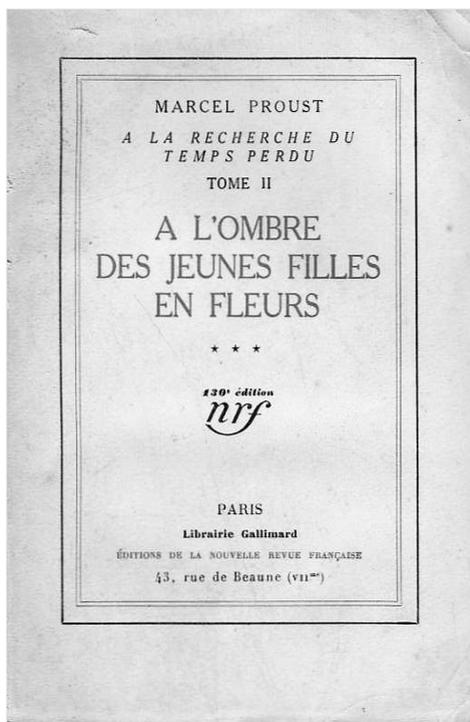
Johannes Pfeiffer, *The Metamorphosis. Kafka: A collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Ronald Gray. A Spectrum Book, Prentice-Hall, Inc. Series editor Maynard Mack, Yale University (1962)



Marcel Proust (1871-1922)

XI

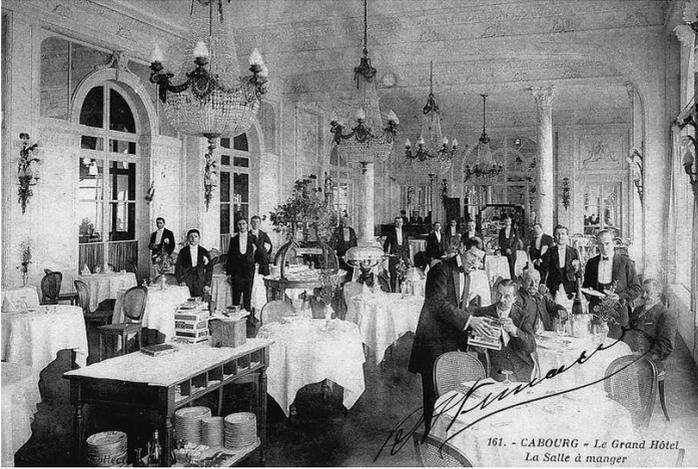
*In The Shadows of Young Girls in Flower*  
(1919)



Marcel Proust, *A l'Ombre des Jeunes Filles en Fleurs*, Ed. Gallimard (1919)

In the *Shadow of Young Girls in Flower* (1919) tells a story of separation and emergence. The first half enacts the shifting perspectives of social initiation. The narrator, resuming his portrayal of his younger self at a point several years past the conclusion of the previous volume, dissects the cold sociability and blinkered pieties of his family's upper-middle-class household. Where the previous volume looked over his family from the dreamy and inward perspective of childhood, now his family members stand more often in the different light of their social existence, like an orange extruded so that the peel turns inside out: even his mother, whom the narrator has been referring to as "Maman," now enters the action, in the volume's first sentence, as "my mother." The same reversals of the familiar and the strange, the cooling of one's family into any family and the opening of a world where any stranger might become a new intimate, animate his inquiry into the life of the Swanns, a distant and, for him, exotic household that initially denies him entry, but eventually embraces him.

The second half of the novel opens out the broader horizons that Proust needs for his ambition to write a human comedy, describing the narrator's stay with his grandmother at the resort town of Balbec. Amid the niche species and petty hierarchies whose conflicts animate this ecosystem, the narrator finds friends who can actually pull him into higher circles and help guide his social education, including the nobleman Robert de Saint-Loup and his aunt, Mme de Villeparisis. What he will later recognize as more important is the education of another kind that he acquires through his acquaintance with an avant-garde painter, Elstir, and with the world of young women and their charms and gestures that seems suddenly to blossom all around the adolescent narrator, including one particular little clique that adopts him at Balbec. Initiating himself into modern art and the elusive poetry of women, Marcel discovers new ways to see.



*Grand Hotel Cabourg - Dining Room (1909)*

## IN THE SHADOWS OF YOUNG GIRLS IN FLOWER

(...) we had finally landed in the hall of the Grand Hotel at Balbec, and I stood there in front of the monumental staircase that looked like marble, while my grandmother, regardless of the growing hostility of the strangers among whom we should have to live, discussed 'terms' with the manager, a sort of nodding mandarin whose face and voice were alike covered with scars (left by the excision of countless pustules from one and from the other of the divers accents acquired from an alien ancestry and in a cosmopolitan upbringing) who stood there in a smart dinner-jacket, with the air of an expert psychologist, classifying, whenever the 'omnibus' discharged a fresh load, the 'nobility and gentry' as 'geesers' and the 'hotel crooks' as nobility and gentry. Forgetting, probably, that he himself was not drawing five hundred francs a month, he had a profound contempt for people to whom five hundred francs--or, as he preferred to put it, 'twenty-five louis' was 'a lot of money,' and regarded them as belonging to a race of pariahs for whom the Grand Hotel was certainly not intended. It is true that even within its walls there were people who did not pay very much and yet had not forfeited the manager's esteem, provided that he was assured that they were watching their expenditure not from poverty so much as from avarice. For this could in no way lower their standing since it is a vice and may consequently be found at every grade of social position. Social position was the one thing by which the manager was impressed, social position, or rather the signs which seemed to him to imply that it was exalted, such as not taking one's hat off when one came into the hall, wearing knickerbockers, or an overcoat with a waist, and taking a cigar with a band of purple and gold out of a crushed morocco case--to none of which advantages could I, alas, lay claim. He would also adorn his business conversation with choice expressions, to which, as a rule, he gave a wrong meaning.

While I heard my grandmother, who shewed no sign of annoyance at his listening to her with his hat on his head and whistling through his teeth at her, ask him in an artificial voice, "And what are... your charges?... Oh! far too high for my little budget," waiting upon a bench, I sought refuge in the innermost depths of my own consciousness, strove to migrate to a plane of eternal thoughts--to leave nothing of myself, nothing that lived and felt on the surface of my body, anaesthetised as are those of animals which by inhibition feign death when they are attacked--so as not to suffer too keenly in this place, with which my total unfamiliarity was made all the more evident to me when I saw the familiarity that seemed at the same moment to be enjoyed by a smartly dressed lady for whom the manager shewed his respect by taking liberties with the little dog that followed her across the hall, the young 'blood' with a feather in his hat who asked, as he came in, 'Any letters?'--all these people to whom it was an act of home-coming to mount those stairs of imitation marble. And at the same time the triple frown of Minos, Eacus and Rhadamanthus (beneath which I plunged my naked soul as into an unknown element where there was nothing now to protect it) was bent sternly upon me by a group of gentlemen who, though little versed perhaps in the art of receiving, yet bore the title 'Reception Clerks,' while beyond them again, through a closed wall of glass, were people sitting in a reading-room for the description of which I should have had to borrow from Dante alternately the colours in which he paints Paradise and Hell, according as I was thinking of the happiness of the elect who had the right to sit and read there undisturbed, or of the terror which my grandmother would have inspired in me if, in her insensibility to this sort of impression, she had asked me to go in there and wait for her by myself.

My sense of loneliness was further increased a moment later: when I had confessed to my grandmother that I did not feel well, that I thought that we should be obliged to return to Paris, she had offered no protest, saying merely that she was going out to buy a few things which would be equally useful whether we left or stayed (and which, I afterwards learned, were all for my benefit, Françoise having gone off with certain articles which I might need); while I waited for her I had taken a turn through the streets, packed with a crowd of people who imparted to them a sort of indoor warmth, streets in which



were still open the hairdresser's shop and the pastry-cook's, the latter filled with customers eating ices, opposite the statue of Duguay-Trouin. This crowd gave me just about as much pleasure as a photograph of it in one of the 'illustrateds' might give a patient who was turning its pages in the surgeon's waiting-room. I was astonished to find that there were people so different from myself that this stroll through the town had actually been recommended to me by the manager as a distraction, and also that the torture chamber which a new place of residence is could appear to some people a 'continuous amusement,' to quote the hotel prospectus, which might, it was true, exaggerate, but was, for all that, addressed to a whole army of clients to whose tastes it must appeal. True, it invoked, to make them come to the Grand Hotel, Balbec, not only the 'exquisite fare' and the 'fairy-like view across the Casino gardens,' but also the 'ordinances of her Majesty Queen Fashion, which no one may break with impunity, or without being taken for a Boeotian, a charge that no well-bred man would willingly incur.' The need that I now had of my grandmother was enhanced by my fear that I had shattered another of her illusions. She must be feeling discouraged, feeling that if I could not stand the fatigue of this journey there was no hope that any change of air could ever do me good. I decided to return to the hotel and to wait for her there: the manager himself came forward and pressed a button, and a person whose acquaintance I had not yet made, labelled 'LIFT' (who at that highest point in the building, which corresponded to the lantern in a Norman church, was installed like a photographer in his darkroom or an organist in his loft) came rushing down towards me with the agility of a squirrel, tamed, active, caged. Then, sliding upwards again along a steel pillar, he bore me aloft in his train towards the dome of this temple of Mammon. On each floor, on either side of a narrow communicating stair, opened out fanwise a range of shadowy galleries, along one of which, carrying a bolster, a chambermaid came past. I lent to her face, which the gathering dusk made featureless, the mask of my most impassioned dreams of beauty, but read in her eyes as they turned towards me the horror of my own nonentity. Meanwhile, to dissipate, in the course of this interminable ascent, the mortal anguish which I felt in penetrating thus in silence the mystery of this chiaroscuro so devoid of poetry, lighted by a single vertical line of little windows which were those of the solitary water-closet on each landing, I addressed a few words to the young organist, artificer of my journey and my partner in captivity, who continued to manipulate the registers of his instrument and to finger the stops. I apologised for taking up so much room, for giving him so much trouble, and asked whether I was not obstructing him in the practice of an art to which, so as to flatter the performer, I did more than display curiosity, I confessed my strong attachment. But he vouchsafed no answer, whether from astonishment at my words, preoccupation with what he was doing, regard for convention, hardness of hearing, respect for holy ground, fear of danger, slowness of understanding, or by the manager's orders.

There is perhaps nothing that gives us so strong an impression of the reality of the external world as the difference in the positions, relative to ourselves, of even a quite unimportant person before we have met him and after. I was the same man who had taken, that afternoon, the little train from Balbec to the coast, I carried in my body the same consciousness. But on that consciousness, in the place where, at six o'clock, there had been, with the impossibility of forming any idea of the manager, the Grand Hotel or its occupants, a vague and timorous impatience for the moment at which I should reach my destination, were to be found now the pustules excised from the face of the cosmopolitan manager (he was, as a matter of fact, a naturalised Monégasque, although--as he himself put it, for he was always using expressions which he thought distinguished without noticing that they were incorrect--of Rumanian originality'), his action in ringing for the lift, the lift-boy himself, a whole frieze of puppet-show characters issuing from that Pandora's box which was the Grand Hotel, undeniable, irremovable, and, like everything that is realised, sterilising. But at least this change, which I had done nothing to bring about, proved to me that something had happened which was external to myself--however devoid of interest that thing might be--and I was like a traveller who, having had



the sun in his face when he started, concludes that he has been for so many hours on the road when he finds the sun behind him. I was half dead with exhaustion, I was burning with fever; I would gladly have gone to bed, but I had no night-things. I should have liked at least to lie down for a little while on the bed, but what good would that have done me, seeing that I should not have been able to find any rest there forthat mass of sensations which is for each of us his sentient if not his material body, and that the unfamiliar objects which encircled that body, forcing it to set its perceptions on the permanent footing of a vigilant and defensive guard, would have kept my sight, my hearing, all my senses in a position as cramped and comfortless (even if I had stretched out my legs) as that of Cardinal La Balue in the cage in which he could neither stand nor sit. It is our noticing them that puts things in a room, our growing used to them that takes them away again and clears a space for us. Space there was none for me in my bedroom (mine in name only) at Balbec; it was full of things which did not know me, which flung back at me the distrustful look that I had cast at them, and, without taking any heed of my existence, shewed that I was interrupting the course of theirs. The clock--whereas at home I heard my clock tick only a few seconds in a week, when I was coming out of some profound meditation--continued without a moment's interruption to utter, in an unknown tongue, a series of observations which must have been most uncomplimentary to myself, for the violet curtains listened to them without replying, but in an attitude such as people adopt who shrug their shoulders to indicate that the sight of a third person irritates them. They gave to this room with its lofty ceiling a semi-historical character which might have made it asuitable place for the assassination of the Duc de Guise, and afterwards for parties of tourists personally conducted by one of Messrs. Thomas Cook and Son's guides, but for me to sleep in--no. I was tormented by the presence of some little bookcases with glass fronts which ran along the walls, but especially by a large mirror with feet which stood across one corner, for I felt that until it had left the room there would be no possibility of rest for me there. I kept raising my eyes--which the things in my room in Paris disturbed no more than did my eyelids themselves, for they were merely extensions of my organs, an enlargement of myself--towards the fantastically high ceiling of this belvedere planted upon the summit of the hotel which my grandmother had chosen for me; and in that region more intimate than those in which we see and hear, that region in which we test the quality of odours, almost in the very heart of my inmost self, the smell of flowering grasses next launched its offensive against my last feeble line of trenches, where I stood up to it, not without tiring myself still further, with the futile incessant defence of an anxious sniffing. Having no world, no room, no body now that was not menaced by the enemies thronging round me, invaded to the very bones by fever, I was utterly alone; I longed to die. Then my grandmother came in, and to the expansion of my ebbing heart there opened at once an infinity of space. (...)



Living room at Proust's family house in Illiers-Combray

SUMMARY OF "A LA RECHERCHE DU  
TEMPS PERDU"

1. Swann's Way: The first part of this volume describes 'Marcel's family vacation at Combray, their country walks along the two 'ways'; their relationship with various neighbors, including Charles Swann, and 'Marcel's fascination with the aristocratic Guermantes. The second part tells the story of Swann's unhappy love affair with the courtesan Odette de Crecy at the salon of Mme. Verdurin. The volume's final section describes the friendship between Marcel and Gilberte, the daughter of Swann and Odette – now Madame Swann.

2. Within a Budding Grove [published separately as: *In The Shadows of Young Girls in Flower*]: The first half describes 'Marcel's adolescence in Paris in two upper middle-class households; that of his parents and that of the Swanns. The second half takes place in Balbec on the Normandy coast where he stays in the Grand Hotel with his grandmother. The Paris section describes hilarious haute-bourgeois pretensions while the Balbec section contains equally hysterical descriptions of provincial bourgeois pretensions. Recovered from his infatuation with Gilberte, Marcel now falls in love with every girl he sees, of which there are many. He makes friends with Robert de Saint-Loup, and his uncle Baron de Charlus.

3. The Guermantes Way: 'Marcel's family move next door to the Paris residence of the Duke and Duchess of Guermantes and Marcel becomes obsessed with getting acquainted. He spends weeks at a military academy with their cousin, Robert Saint-Loup whom he had met at Balbec. Eventually Marcel is accepted into the magic circle of the Guermantes and the Faubourg St. Germain.

4. Cities of the Plain: Continuing his social success in the Faubourg St. Germain, Marcel also discovers the hidden homosexual world of the Guermantes' Baron Charlus. On his second visit to Balbec he becomes part of the 'little clan' of the

Verdurins, rekindles his love affair with Albertine and discovers the world of lesbianism.

5. The Captive: Marcel brings Albertine to live with him in Paris where he treats her more like a captive. Obsessively jealous, he discards his social circle and alternately tries to please her or to leave her. Above all he tortures himself thinking about, asking about and neurotically thwarting any possible indulgence in her lesbian tastes. Meantime, Charlus' public behavior becomes increasingly outrageous until he is publicly disgraced by the now influential Verdurins. Albertine leaves without warning and disappears.

6. The Fugitive: Marcel gradually recovers from the departure and subsequent death of Albertine. He rediscovers Gilberte who, with her mother Odette, is now accepted by smart Society while the memory of her father Swann is repressed and destroyed. Marcel visits Venice with his mother and learns by letter of Saint-Loup's marriage to Gilberte. After his marriage, Saint-Loup becomes an active and promiscuous homosexual.

7. Time Regained: Visiting Gilberte at her home in Combray Marcel learns that Swann's Way and the Guermantes' Way are not irreconcilable. The war affects everyone: Robert dies a hero at the front, Charlus haunts the male brothels of wartime Paris. M, still an unsuccessful writer, returns to Paris after the war and is invited to an afternoon party at the Princess de Guermantes. All the novel's characters, or those still living, are at the party but everyone has changed. Time has destroyed everything. Even the new Princess de Guermantes turns out to be the widowed Mme. Verdurin. Marcel realizes that memory can only be recaptured and Time defeated through great art. With a sense of great joy, in the middle of the party, he realizes that his vocation is to write a great novel and thus to bring the past back to life.



Johannes Vermeer, *A view of Delft* (1661)  
*Proust's favourite painting.*

## THE REPRODUCTION AND METAPHOR

Among Pascal's *Pensees* are two separate but complementary reflections: first, 'Un portrait porte absence et presence, plaisir et deplaisir'. La realite exclut absence et deplaisir' ['A portrait conveys absence and presence, pleasure and displeasure. Reality excludes absence and displeasure']; second, 'Figure porte absence et resence, plaisir et deplaisir' ['Figure conveys absence and presence, pleasure and displeasure,]. In his view portraits and figures (in the sense of representations or symbols, hence, arguably, figures of speech) thus have in common the quality of implying presence and absence. I have already argued that reproductions, particularly photographs, possess the same quality; here I shall examine the ways in which they also function like metaphors and, in this respect, are similarly integral to the structure of the novel.

In the pages of *Le Temps retrouvé* in which the Narrator delivers his manifesto of art, the celebrated passage on style and metaphor makes it abundantly clear that Proust regards 'un beau style' not as an added-on refinement nor metaphor as mere decoration: both are quite fundamental to the artist's vision and hence expression. He makes the same assertion in his essay 'A propos du "style" de Flaubert': 'I believe that only metaphor can confer a sort of eternity on style'. Because, as he suggests evocatively, 'An hour is not just an hour, it is a vase full of perfumes, sounds, plans and climates', our perception of reality is a complex, multi-layered experience involving the fleeting interaction of memories and sensations. To describe adequately the nature of this experience, which is no less a task, after all, than rendering one's awareness of consciousness, the writer cannot resort to a 'simple cinematic vision'. 'Stream of consciousness' is thus not an appropriate term to describe Proust's method, because his concern is not merely to record impressionistically mental phenomena and passing thoughts. Rather, his declared conviction is that art can aspire to truth, can achieve eternal relevance, only by making connections between disparate objects, thereby identifying some kind of essential quality, common to the two and yet separate - which is not quite the same as a thesis-anti thesis-synthesis process of combination. It

is through the creation of a metaphor that this essence is born and can survive. In the famous passage previously quoted:

*On peut faire se succeder indetinement dans une description les objets qui figureraient dans le lieu decrit, la verite ne commencera qu'au moment ou l'ecrivain prendra deux objets differents, posera leur rapport, analogue dans le monde de l'art a celui qu'est le rapport unique de la loi causale dans le monde de la science, et les enfermera dans les anneaux necessaires d'un beau style. Meme, ainsi que la vie, quand en rapprochant une qualite commune a deux sensations, il degagera leur essence commune en les reunissant l'une et l'autre pour les soustraire aux contingences du temps, dans une metaphore. (RTP IV; 468)*

The writer's task is, then, to discover the hidden link that allows the formation of a metaphor, a task that, expressed in this way, might seem as much forensic as creative. In the same spirit, the Narrator claims that ce livre essentiel,

*the task of a great writer is not to invent, in the normal sense, this essential book - the only true book, since it already exists within each of us - but to translate it. The duty and task of a writer are those of a translator.*

But even though the raw material of literature preexists in the writer's life experience, creating a work of art is not a task of simple transcription: the writer must employ 'un beau style', in which metaphor is pre-eminent. Metaphor has a structural function in the process of creation, so the artist's role is of course creative - that of architect, engineer and poet rather than mere interpreter. And style is essentially individual. Philippe Hamon writes that Style is thus the presence in a work of an individual, the trace or signature disseminated throughout the work of his or her presence, of the presence of one who is absent, the distant or dead author, a sort of reverse image of the author. It is style, therefore, that ensures the immortality of the author just as, according to Proust, it removes ephemeral sensations from the contingencies of time. The author, he says, is embarked on a quest: starting from individual and transitory experiences, he aims to discover the general and eternal truth behind them. There are two parallel movements: from specific to representative, from temporally enclosed to eternal.

Gabrielle Townsend, *Proust Imaginary Museum: Reproductions and Reproduction in "A la Recherche du Temps Perdu"*, (2008)



*Grand Hotel Cabourg* (around 1909)

PROUSTS WAY  
PLACES:

The first setting is the village of COMBRAY, presumably near Chartres. (Proust later shifts it eastward into the World War I combat zone.) Marcel and his parents spend vacations there. Aunt Leonie's house and the village church are described as if one would never seek to appeal from their simple reality to a higher realm. Combray embodies the solidarity of family origins as well as the roots of French civilization—Church, people, royalty. The two “ways” along which Marcel and his family take their walks divide the countryside, and the universe, into two irreconcilable and seemingly inaccessible worlds. Marcel will eventually penetrate into both: the Guermantes way, or the aristocracy with all its remote mysteries; and Swann's way, a worldly, artistic domain tinged with evil and scandal. After the opening two hundred pages, Combray does not again become the setting of the story except for a brief section in the last volume. Yet it is never out of mind.

PARIS, where most of the novel takes place, is reduced to a few elements. At first everything revolves around the Champs-Elysees gardens where Marcel meets Gilberte Swann as a playmate. Later Marcel and his family move to a new apartment attached to the town house of the Duc and Duchesse de Guermantes. Around this complex of rooms, courtyards, and shops, the streets lead away to two further regions: the

various salons to which Marcel is invited, and the houses of ill repute he later stumbles into or visits.

BALBEC is an imaginary seaside resort town in Normandy or Brittany, closely modeled on Cabourg, whose beaches attracted great numbers of French and English summer visitors at the turn of the century. (The Grand Hotel still stands next to the beach in Cabourg, a massive building with long corridors and a slow-moving, open-cage elevator.) Marcel drives occasionally to Rivebelle, where there is a good restaurant. Elstir's studio is near the beach at Balbec. It is out of this very seascape that “the young girls in bloom” seem to materialize; they arouse Marcel's most enduring desires. A short train ride along the coast brings one to La Raspelière, the estate rented during the summer by the Verdurins.

Inland from Balbec lies the military town of DONCIÈRES, where Saint-Loup is doing his service in the cavalry. Marcel here makes his first long stay away from his family. On returning to Paris he suddenly perceives his grandmother as a complete stranger, an old lady approaching death.

Early in the novel Marcel's father decides that the family will make a trip to VENICE. Marcel becomes so overwrought with anticipation that the trip has to be canceled. The image of Venice haunts him all his life until he finally makes the journey with his mother long after the desire to do so has passed.

<i>Combray</i>	<i>Paris</i>	<i>Balbec</i>	<i>Doncières</i>	<i>Venice</i>
Church of Saint-Hilaire	Champs-Elysées Gardens	Grand Hôtel	Cavalry Barracks	(Trip planned and canceled)
Aunt Léonie's House	Guermantes' Town House	Elstir's Studio	Pension	Visit with Mother
Swann's Way (Méséglise Tansonville)	Marcel's Family's Apartment	Rivebelle		
The Guermantes Way	Salons	La Raspelière		
Martinville Steeples	Houses of Prostitution			

Roger Shattuck, *Proust's Way* (2000)



77 ROUTE DE TROUVILLE A HONFLEUR. -- L'Église de Criquebeuf. -- LL.

*Criquebeuf Church covered with ivy (around 1910)*

CHURCH ARCHITECTURE:  
The Structure of *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*

When, in 1919, Marcel Proust wrote to the Comte Jean de Gaignron, he commended, with almost excessive ingenuousness, the Comte's insight into his novel *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Proust also confided to the Comte what now seems but a gratuitous revelation, that the structure of *A la recherche* is like a cathedral

*When you speak to me of Cathedrals, I cannot but feel touched at the evidence of an intuition which has led you to guess {deviner} what I had never mentioned to anyone, and here set down in writing for the first time - that I once planned to give to each part of my book a succession of titles, such as "Porch", "Windows in the Apse", etc. ... so as to defend myself in advance against the sort of stupid criticism which has been made to the effect that my books lack construction, whereas I hope to prove to you that their sole merit lies in the solidity of their tiniest parts. I gave up the idea of using these architectural titles because I found them too pretentious, but I am touched at finding that you have dug them up by a sort of intelligent divination. (...)*

Marcel's architectural simile clearly achieves more than strategical defense: not only does the image endow the book with "teachfulness" ("true believers" might "learn" there) and symbolic monumentality, legendary and mysterious (a "druid monument"); it also enables the narrator to describe "making" (is this like Hopkins's "process"?) and so release discussions of literary structure from the confines of descriptive formalism into vistas of interpretative possibility. The formal distinction between outer structure and inner detail, between exterior and interior, might, for instance, suggest those perceptual and conceptual antinomies between a generalized harmony (inaccuracy?) and a particularized truthfulness (accuracy?), between distance and size (the confusions of relative measurement, telescope versus microscope), between continuous and contiguous worlds ("each of them a world in itself"). Likewise, the evocation of literary artist as Gothic craftsman who carves images (or "truths"!) suggests something about the materials and functions of language, its permanence, solidity, and spatial potential.

These matters Marcel, for the moment, only suggests. Regarding the other riches bestowed by the architectural image, Proust's narrator is explicit. By evoking comparison with a Gothic cathedral, Marcel reserves for the literary artist the right to an incomplete work:

*And in those great books there are certain portions which there has been time only to sketch in and which no doubt will never be completed because of the very magnitude of the architect's plan. How many great cathedrals remain unfinished!*

But perhaps most important to the narrator, the image of the cathedral secures the book as an edifice constructed in "Time." Marcel, fearing his own waning strength, comments:

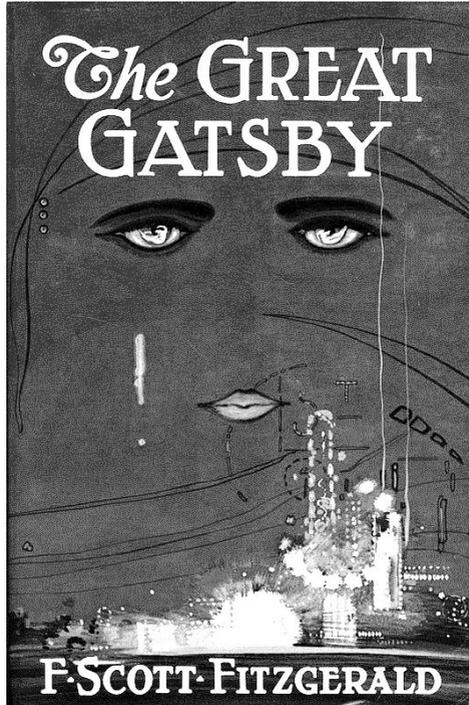
*In any event, if I still had the strength to accomplish my work, I realized that the nature of the circumstances which today ... had given me at one and the same time the idea of my work and the fear of not being able to carry it out would assuredly before all else imprint upon it the form I had once dimly sensed in the church at Combray, during certain days which had deeply influenced me, a form which usually remains invisible to us, the form of Time. This dimension of Time which I had once vaguely felt in the church at Combray I would try to make continually perceptible in a manuscript of humbly life necessarily very different from that conveyed to us by our deceptive senses.*

While the young Marcel might have only "dimly sensed" the significance of the church at Combray, the mature narrator had, even in the early pages of the book, enlarged the naive view to something more. Although nature herself was indifferent to the singularity of [the church (Madame Loiseau's fuchsias leave her flower-pots to cool "their purple cheeks against the dark front of the church") (I, 47), the narrator's mind defied this Visual evidence and exploded between church and town an abyss. Saint-Hilaire stood apart precisely because it occupied "four dimensions of space-the name of the fourth being Time" (I, 46). The special "geometry" of the church is likewise the geometry-and the innovativeness - of the novel: the varieties of temporal extension, with the capacity for contradictory, because instantaneous, contraction, are not only essential and necessary to both architecture and literature; they also reveal and constitute both the material and the "dematerialized" essence of both art forms and of literary architecture.



Francis Scott Fitzgerald (1896-1940)

XII  
*The Great Gatsby*  
(1922)



F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, book cover first edition (1925)

*The Great Gatsby* is Fitzgerald's finest novel, it was published in 1925, and Eliot considered it "to be the first step that America has taken since Henry James". It is a sensitive and symbolic treatment of themes of contemporary life related with irony and pathos to the legendry of "American dream". Nick Carraway, a young Midwesterner who sells bonds in New York, lives at West Egg, Long Islands, which is separated from the city by an ash-dump, whose distinctive feature is an oculist's faded billboard with a pair of great staring eyes behind yellow spectacles, symbolic of an obscenely futile world. Nick's neighbor is mysterious Jay Gatsby, whose mansion and fabulous entertainments are financed by bootlegging and other criminal activities. As a poor army lieutenant, Gatsby had fallen in love with Nick's cousin Daisy, who later married Tom Buchanan, an unintelligent, brutal man of wealth. Through Nick, he manages to meet Daisy again, impresses her by his extravagant devotion, and makes her his mistress. Her husband takes as his mistress Myrtle Wilson, sensual wife of a garageman. When her husband becomes jealous and imprisons her in her room, Myrtle escapes, runs out on the highway, and is accidentally hit by Daisy, who drives on. Gatsby tries to protect Daisy, and Tom, to whom she has become reconciled, brings his hatred of her lover to a climax by telling Myrtle's husband that it was Gatsby who killed her. Wilson shoots Gatsby and then himself.



Jack Clayton, *The Great Gatsby*, movie scene (1974)

## THE GREAT GATSBY

### CHAPTER III

There was music from my neighbor's house through the summer nights. In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne and the stars. At high tide in the afternoon I watched his guests diving from the tower of his raft, or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his two motor-boats slit the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. On week-ends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city between nine in the morning and long past midnight, while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains. And on Mondays eight servants, including an extra gardener, toiled all day with mops and scrubbing-brushes and hammers and garden-shears, repairing the ravages of the night before.

Every Friday five crates of oranges and lemons arrived from a fruiterer in New York — every Monday these same oranges, and lemons left his back door in a pyramid of pulpless halves. There was a machine in the kitchen which could extract the juice of two hundred oranges in half an hour if a little button was pressed two hundred times by a butler's thumb.

At least once a fortnight a crop of caterers came down with several hundred feet of canvas and enough colored lights to make a Christmas tree of Gatsby's enormous garden. On buffet tables, garnished with glistening hors-d'oeuvre, spiced baked hams crowded against salads of harlequin designs and pastry pigs and turkeys bewitched to a dark gold. In the main hall a bar with a real brass rail was set up, and stocked with gins and liquors and with cordials so long forgotten that most of his female guests were too young to know one from another.

By seven o'clock the orchestra has arrived, no thin five-piece affair, but a whole pitiful of oboes and trombones and saxophones and viols and cornets and piccolos, and low and high drums. The last swimmers have come in from the beach now and are dressing up-stairs; the cars from New York are parked five deep in the drive, and already the halls and salons and verandas are gaudy with primary colors, and hair shorn in strange new ways, and shawls beyond the dreams of Castile. The bar is in full swing, and floating rounds of cocktails permeate the garden outside, until the air is alive with chatter and laughter, and casual innuendo and introductions forgotten on the spot, and enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other's names.

The lights grow brighter as the earth lurches away from the sun, and now the orchestra is playing yellow cocktail music, and the opera of voices pitches a key higher. Laughter is easier minute by minute, spilled with prodigality, tipped out at a cheerful word. The groups change more swiftly, swell with new arrivals, dissolve and form in the same breath; already there are wanderers, confident girls who weave here and there among the stouter and more stable, become for a sharp, joyous moment the center of a group, and then, excited with triumph, glide on through the sea-change of faces and voices and color under the constantly changing light.

Suddenly one of these gypsies, in trembling opal, seizes a cocktail out of the air, dumps it down for courage and, moving her hands like Frisco, dances out alone on the canvas platform. A momentary hush; the orchestra leader varies his rhythm obligingly for her, and there is a burst of chatter as the erroneous news goes around that she is Gilda Gray's understudy from the Follies. The party has begun.

I believe that on the first night I went to Gatsby's house I was one of the few guests who had actually been invited. People were not invited — they went there. They got into automobiles which bore them out to Long Island, and somehow they ended up at Gatsby's door. Once there they were introduced by somebody who knew Gatsby, and after that they conducted themselves according to the rules of behavior associated with an amusement park. Sometimes they came and went without having met Gatsby at all, came for the party with a simplicity of heart that was its own ticket of admission.



I had been actually invited. A chauffeur in a uniform of robin's-egg blue crossed my lawn early that Saturday morning with a surprisingly formal note from his employer: the honor would be entirely Gatsby's, it said, if I would attend his "little party" that night. He had seen me several times, and had intended to call on me long before, but a peculiar combination of circumstances had prevented it — signed Jay Gatsby, in a majestic hand.

Dressed up in white flannels I went over to his lawn a little after seven, and wandered around rather ill at ease among swirls and eddies of people I didn't know — though here and there was a face I had noticed on the commuting train. I was immediately struck by the number of young Englishmen dotted about; all well dressed, all looking a little hungry, and all talking in low, earnest voices to solid and prosperous Americans. I was sure that they were selling something: bonds or insurance or automobiles. They were at least agonizingly aware of the easy money in the vicinity and convinced that it was theirs for a few words in the right key.

As soon as I arrived I made an attempt to find my host, but the two or three people of whom I asked his whereabouts stared at me in such an amazed way, and denied so vehemently any knowledge of his movements, that I slunk off in the direction of the cocktail table — the only place in the garden where a single man could linger without looking purposeless and alone.

I was on my way to get roaring drunk from sheer embarrassment when Jordan Baker came out of the house and stood at the head of the marble steps, leaning a little backward and looking with contemptuous interest down into the garden.

Welcome or not, I found it necessary to attach myself to some one before I should begin to address cordial remarks to the passers-by.

"Hello!" I roared, advancing toward her. My voice seemed unnaturally loud across the garden.

"I thought you might be here," she responded absently as I came up. "I remembered you lived next door to —"

She held my hand impersonally, as a promise that she'd take care of me in a minute, and gave ear to two girls in twin yellow dresses, who stopped at the foot of the steps.

"Hello!" they cried together. "Sorry you didn't win."

That was for the golf tournament. She had lost in the finals the week before.

"You don't know who we are," said one of the girls in yellow, "but we met you here about a month ago."

"You've dyed your hair since then," remarked Jordan, and I started, but the girls had moved casually on and her remark was addressed to the premature moon, produced like the supper, no doubt, out of a caterer's basket. With Jordan's slender golden arm resting in mine, we descended the steps and sauntered about the garden. A tray of cocktails floated at us through the twilight, and we sat down at a table with the two girls in yellow and three men, each one introduced to us as Mr. Mumble.

"Do you come to these parties often?" inquired Jordan of the girl beside her.

"The last one was the one I met you at," answered the girl, in an alert confident voice. She turned to her companion: "Wasn't it for you, Lucille?"

It was for Lucille, too.

"I like to come," Lucille said. "I never care what I do, so I always have a good time. When I was here last I tore my gown on a chair, and he asked me my name and address — inside of a week I got a package from Croirier's with a new evening gown in it."

"Did you keep it?" asked Jordan.

"Sure I did. I was going to wear it tonight, but it was too big in the bust and had to be altered. It was gas blue with lavender beads. Two hundred and sixty-five dollars."

"There's something funny about a fellow that'll do a thing like that," said the other girl eagerly. "He doesn't want any trouble with ant/body."

"Who doesn't?" I inquired. "Gatsby. Somebody told me —" The two girls and Jordan leaned together confidentially. "Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once."

A thrill passed over all of us. The three Mr. Mumbles bent forward and listened eagerly.



"I don't think it's so much that," argued Lucille sceptically; "it's more that he was a German spy during the war."

One of the men nodded in confirmation.

"I heard that from a man who knew all about him, grew up with him in Germany," he assured us positively.

"Oh, no," said the first girl. "it couldn't be that, because he was in the American army during the war." As our credulity switched back to her she leaned forward with enthusiasm. "You look at him sometimes when he thinks nobody's looking at him. I'll bet he killed a man."

She narrowed her eyes and shivered. Lucille shivered. We all turned and looked around for Gatsby. It was testimony to the romantic speculation he inspired that there were whispers about him from those who had found little that it was necessary to whisper about in this world.

The first supper — there would be another one after midnight — was now being served, and Jordan invited me to join her own party, who were spread around a table on the other side of the garden. There were three married couples and Jordan's escort, a persistent undergraduate given to violent innuendo, and obviously under the impression that sooner or later Jordan was going to yield him up her person to a greater or lesser degree. Instead of rambling, this party had preserved a dignified homogeneity, and assumed to itself the function of representing the staid nobility of the countryside — East Egg condescending to West Egg, and carefully on guard against its spectroscopic gayety.

"Let's get out," whispered Jordan, after a somehow wasteful and inappropriate half-hour; "this is much too polite for me."

We got up, and she explained that we were going to find the host: I had never met him, she said, and it was making me uneasy. The undergraduate nodded in a cynical, melancholy way.

The bar, where we glanced first, was crowded, but Gatsby was not there. She couldn't find him from the top of the steps, and he wasn't on the veranda. On a chance we tried an important-looking door, and walked into a high Gothic library, panelled with carved English oak, and probably transported complete from some ruin overseas.

A stout, middle-aged man, with enormous owl-eyed spectacles, was sitting somewhat drunk on the edge of a great table, staring with unsteady concentration at the shelves of books. As we entered he wheeled excitedly around and examined Jordan from head to foot.

"What do you think?" he demanded impetuously.

"About what?"

He waved his hand toward the book-shelves.

"About that. As a matter of fact you needn't bother to ascertain. I ascertained. They're real."

"The books?"

He nodded.

"Absolutely real — have pages and everything. I thought they'd be a nice durable cardboard. Matter of fact, they're absolutely real. Pages and — Here! Lemme show you."

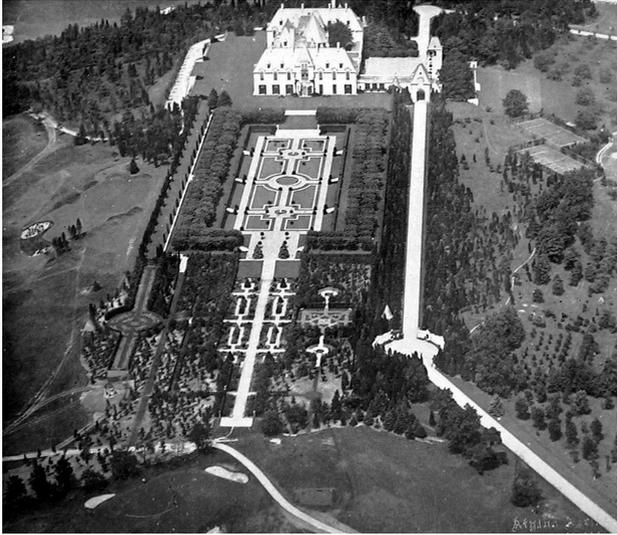
Taking our scepticism for granted, he rushed to the bookcases and returned with Volume One of the "Stoddard Lectures."

"See!" he cried triumphantly. "It's a bona-fide piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fellow's a regular Belasco. It's a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop, too — didn't cut the pages. But what do you want? What do you expect?"

He snatched the book from me and replaced it hastily on its shelf, muttering that if one brick was removed the whole library was liable to collapse.

"Who brought you?" he demanded. "Or did you just come? I was brought. Most people were brought."

[...]



*Oheka Castle a.k.a. Otto Kahn Estate, Gold Coast of Long Island, New York (1919)*

## AMERICAN ARCHITECTURAL STYLES IN THE GREAT GATSBY

by Curtis Dahl

Though many critics of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* have commented on the crucial importance of the buildings in the novel, none has given full and specific attention to those buildings' particular architectural styles. This is surprising, since, following a tradition in American fiction that reaches as far back as Irving, Poe and Hawthorne, Fitzgerald in his masterpiece makes architectural style a highly effective tool. On one level the styles of his buildings form part of the vivid, impressionistic "local color" rendering of American life of the twenties which gives the novel so much of its illusion of reality. He displays an extraordinarily keen eye for the niceties of the architectural modes of 1922 and indeed ranks with Howells, the early James, Wharton and Cather as a recorder in fiction of American architectural history. But, like theirs, his often satiric architectural description functions on other levels too. The specific styles of his buildings, both individually and in their carefully developed counterpoint, embody basic aspects of his characters, reinforce his social analysis and help express the characteristically American Europe-East-West tensions that are central to the novel. Architectural style rises from mere local color to become a highly effective connotative language through which Fitzgerald can not only set his scene but also tell his story and represent his themes.

Central in the novel looms Gatsby's "colossal" mansion at West Egg. The significance of all the other buildings in the story is defined by their relationship to it. We see it, of course, only through the satiric yet slightly ambivalent eyes of Nick, for whom it is both an impressive though absurdly anachronistic "palace on Long Island Sound" and "an elaborate road-house". Imagined to have been built about 1912, "early in the 'period' craze", it is a highly accurate caricature of the elaborate Châteauesque Style developed in the late nineteenth century by Richard Morris Hunt and Stanford White for the Vanderbilts and other enormously rich families of New York City, Newport and Long Island. Its large central bay, its high tower set asymmetrically on one side of its facade, its big postern, great arched doors, square towers and ranges of French windows give it the

eclectic, partly late Gothic, partly Renaissance, European flavor characteristic of the genre. Nick, whose comments accurately represent the sophisticated taste of the middle twenties, is amused by what he considers its showy and vulgar anachronism but yet, especially at night, cannot help being moved by its shadowy grandeur. Disparagingly, he calls it a "factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy", "factual" in his remark probably implying accuracy in detail but not in whole impression. Seen at night, its silhouette against the sky is "feudal"—a word with mixed connotations, savoring of foolish but generally harmless Sir Walter Scott romance yet hinting also of a European class system. In the daytime, however, he wryly notes that one can see that its masonry is "spanking new under a thin beard of ivy". Certainly its lavish marble swimming pool clashes with its pretense of antiquity.

Nick's amusing account of the interior could well be read as a satiric (though, of course, unfair) guidebook description of the Vanderbilts' "enormous" Newport cottages "The Breakers" and "Marble House." From the high and splendid great hall, where Gatsby has indecorously set up his "road-house" bar, open the public rooms, each in its own pastiche of a "period" style: "Marie Antoinette music-rooms and Restoration salons", a Versailles-like "long, many-windowed room which overhung the terrace", and, most spectacular of all, the Merton College Library—"a high Gothic library, panelled with carved English oak, and probably transported complete from some ruin overseas". The last is, of course, a close parallel to the real Gothic Room in "Marble House." Upstairs—here the parallel with "The Breakers" is almost exact—there are "period bedrooms swathed in rose and lavender silk," "dressing-rooms and poolrooms, and bathrooms with sunken baths. Here, too, (as in several Newport mansions) are the owner's contrastingly simple bedroom and chaste Adam study.

The great chateau, however, also has rich symbolic significance. In its vast size, its costliness and its ostentation, it is a commentary on what Nick regards as the essential vulgarity and tasteless extravagance of the new wealth of the period. Even more significantly, what Nick considers the aesthetic failure of its derivative and anachronistic architecture—late in the novel he calls it a "huge incoherent failure of a house"—symbolizes to him the impossibility of effectively recapturing



Richard Morris Hunt, *The Breakers Mansion*, Newport (1895)

the past. In his view, there is something false in building a great Norman Hôtel de Ville in West Egg. The chateau is not genuine; the stone behind its raw fringe of ivy is too new, its period interiors too “factually” studied. The falseness of the design, however, is not merely aesthetic or historical. It is a function of the equally inappropriate and doomed desire of the rich brewer who built it to Found in America a Family—a “house” in the European sense. Like the brewer’s preposterous attempt to get the cottage-owners of West Egg to roof their cottages with thatch, it represents a lack of understanding of American reality and failure to sympathize with American ideals.

In addition to suggesting the inappropriateness of trying to import an alien concept of aristocracy into the United States, the mansion makes a comment on the spuriousness of an American “nobility” whose “nobleness” rests on money alone. The rich brewer by building his pretentious eclectic house had attempted to buy gentility. But true nobility is not to be bought, even when the money spent for it has been earned honestly. It is certainly not to be bought with corrupt money. The “house” of Gatsby—both his actual mansion and his dream of an aristocratic life with Daisy—rests in the end on Wolfsheim’s rackets. Like its architecture (as Nick judges the architecture) it is a false simulacrum and fated to fall. Architectural decadence, as Ruskin would remind us, grows out of moral decadence; architectural style has connotations beyond itself.

In such use of symbolic architectural style *The Great Gatsby*, though it seems so much a novel of the twenties, is clearly heir to an older American fictional tradition. The “feudal” style of the central mansion is “Gothic” not only in the architectural sense but also in the literary sense of Poe and Hawthorne and Melville and James. The great halls and Marie Antoinette music rooms and long galleries overlooking terraces are shadowed by a brooding sense of mysterious evil. Like the House of Usher, the House of the Seven Gables, and to a lesser degree Saddle Meadows, Bly and the Bellegarde chateau at Fleurières, the house hides a secret crime or a halfmad obsessive passion. Its relationship to the House of the Seven Gables is especially close. That mansion too was built by a man—Colonel Pyncheon—who sought to Found a Family in America. He too failed, partly because inherited social status is repugnant to American ideals and partly because he laid the foundations of his house on mercenary

crime—on the judicial murder of Mathew Maule in order to appropriate his land.

The fact that Gatsby’s mansion functions in part as a symbolic representation of its owner is an even more important parallel to the American Gothic tradition. In Hawthorne’s novel the author-narrator, looking at the House of the Seven Gables, sees in its facade the expression of Judge Pyncheon. The House of Usher in Poe’s tale, in an occult way, images Roderick and Madeline; the crack in its wall is the fissure in Roderick’s breaking mind, the relationship between it and its image in the tarn figures that between brother and sister, its fall is their fall and that of their ancient “house.” So here, the architecture of Gatsby’s mansion represents Gatsby. Superficially, it is rich, handsome, aristocratic, magnificent. It pretends to be a building of heroic romance. It embodies his vision of himself as a bold baron, perhaps a robber baron, wooing the fairytale “king’s daughter, the golden girl” from her high “white palace” to his noble castle. He desperately wants Daisy to visit his house, and with infinite pride he shows her through it, wishing her to see him in it and it in him. And, at least for a time, she does. Alternatively, he sees himself as a gallant young Lochinvar, faithful in love and dauntless in war, riding out of the West to sweep up his beloved and in defiance of her bridegroom carry her away (in a long gleaming yellow automobile) to his feudal keep. With only slight irony the usually cynical Nick compares him momentarily to a Knight of the Round Table following the gleam of the green light in quest of an impossible Grail.

But, as Nick more often sees them, the house and Gatsby are both fakes. The mansion is no more a feudal keep or an old Norman Hôtel de Ville than Gatsby is an Oxford graduate. True, its architecture does embody “factual” elements of old styles and indeed the whole of an authentic Gothic library which, to Owl-Eyes’ amazement, even contains real books. But Gatsby too has authentic details: he did study at Oxford, he did receive a medal from Montenegro, he does have a card from the Police Commissioner. “Factually,” in details, he too is genuine. But, like the brewer’s, his “nobility” is based only on money, money from the rackets. He has assumed a facade of British culture and language, but in the daylight one can see through the ivy to the raw, new stone beneath. Though he has given himself a new name, basically he is still vulgar James Gatz, the man who sets up a speak-easy bar in his baronial



Elliott Nugent, *The Great Gatsby*, film poster (1949)

hall. Furthermore, just as to many architectural critics of the twenties there always seemed a hint of false, impossible nostalgia in even the greatest and most beautiful buildings of the Châteauesque Style, so too Gatsby tries in vain to recapture those golden, romantic, almost mythic days with Daisy in Louisville during the War. He really thought that one could bring back the past, and for a few weeks the illusion seemed true. But as Nick sees it, neither in architectural style nor in life is the past really recoverable; any attempt to relive it is necessarily false: "You can't repeat the past".

Furthermore, the mansion also images the ambivalence of Gatsby as traditional Gothic hero. Like his enormous house, he is in some lights great—"The Great Gatsby" of the title. He is a man of great force, great determination, great possibilities for good or evil. He stands alone; his singleness of purpose sets him apart. "There was," Nick says, "something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life . . . an extraordinary gift for hope. He is worth, Nick calls out to him in the darkness, "the whole damn bunch put together". There is also a tragic loneliness about him, a loneliness like that of the magnificent house after all the gay parties are over and it is shut up. He has an ideal by which he lives, whereas the others around him have none. Effectively symbolized by the simplicity of the decor of his bedroom—"the simplest room of all"—and private study, he has in his private recesses an almost innocent simplicity, a refreshingly idealistic Western faith. Even his adulterous liaison with Daisy in his eyes seems pure and good. Superior to the morals of ordinary men, he feels married to her. When the inevitable denouement comes, it is on one level tragic. In Gothic terms the novel might justifiably be renamed the Fall of the House of Gatsby.

But despite its magnificence and grandeur, Gatsby's great mansion inherits many of the sinister connotations of mystery and evil that characterize its many forebears in Gothic romance. As it is ambivalent (old yet new, European yet American, aristocratic yet vulgar), so from the very first pages of the novel, Gatsby too as Gothic hero shares its sinister as well as its heroic characteristics. There is a shadow, a mystery about him. Gossip has it that he is a cousin of the Kaiser or a nephew of Von Hindenburg, that he was a German spy during the War, that he has killed a man. "I'm scared of him," says Catherine; "I'd hate to have him get anything on me".

He is a second cousin to the devil. He may be a bootlegger or a racketeer. He receives mysterious telephone calls. Though wealthy, generous and dressed by the best English tailors, he is associated with Meyer Wolfsheim, the man who fixed the World Series. Like so many other Gothic heroes, he hides a secret and almost mad adulterous passion. His lonely, perhaps blasphemous ritual of adoration, lifting from his night-darkened lawn his hands in idolatrous supplication to the green light across the bay, has in it much of the Gothic strangeness that imbues Poe. Though "hugely" impressive in its way, the "Gothic" architecture of Gatsby's personality is no more "coherent" than that of his vast "ancestral" mansion. Nick, who at times catches glimpses of his lonely, mythic grandeur, in summary remarks that he lacked the "fundamental decencies" and represented "everything for which I have an unaffected scorn.

Once the significance of the architecture of Gatsby's mansion is established, the symbolic meanings of the styles of the other important buildings readily fall into place. Prime among them is the Buchanans' far less ostentatious, cheerful red-and-white mansion symbolically facing Gatsby's in fashionable East Egg across the bay. In its architecture Fitzgerald gives a remarkably accurate and vivid impressionistic picture of the Georgian Colonial Revival style—what Mary Mix Foley calls "Millionaire's Colonial"—that in the early 1900s and even more in the twenties contested with Châteauesque for supremacy in the wealthy enclaves of Newport and Long Island. Built of red brick with white stone or wood trim, set on a "lawn [that] started at the beach and ran toward the front door for a quarter of a mile, jumping over sun-dials and brick walks and burning gardens," covered with bright vines, its French windows "wide open to the warm windy afternoon," it is an ideal example of a seaside mansion of the era, designed both to fit into its natural setting and to recall American tradition. Its living spaces are blended into the outdoors. In front is the sunny porch overlooking the Sound where on Nick's first visit Tom stands to welcome him. Around other parts are "a chain of interconnecting verandahs" with wicker settees. Through a high hallway Tom leads Nick to a salon where he finds Daisy and Jordan—"a bright rosy-colored space [recalling the rose garden outside], fragily bound into the house by French windows at either end."



Elliott Nugent, *The Great Gatsby*, movie scene (1949)

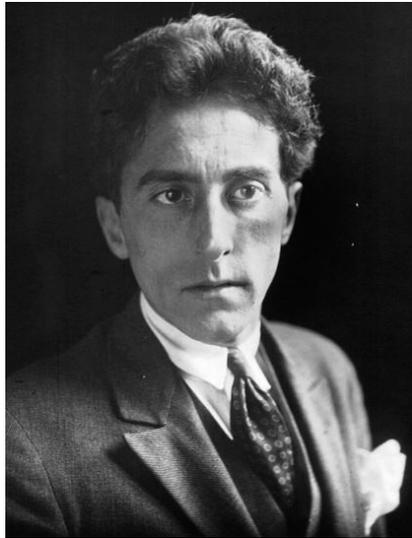
*The windows were ajar and gleaming white against the fresh grass outside that seemed to grow a little way into the house. A breeze blew through the room, blew curtains in at one end and out the other like pale flags, twisting them up toward the frosted weddingcake of the ceiling, and then rippled over the wine-colored rug. . . .*

The room, darkened by awnings, has a brick (Georgian) fireplace; Daisy and Jordan lie somnolently on one of the great couches popular at the time. Dining room, library, pantry and bedrooms are not particularized, but we can be sure that they are open and, if not shaded by awnings, sunny and bright. Even the grounds—the former garage a quarter of a mile down the road now made into stables for Tom's polo ponies, the gate, the long gravel drive from the road—are brought sharply to life.

How different this house from Gatsby's! Though it is, as Nick remarks, surprisingly elaborate, and perhaps as costly as Gatsby's, this is not a flamboyant, imported, Gothic-Renaissance Beaux-Arts chateau. It is built of simple brick, not of marble. It is long and low (probably two-story or two stories and a half), clinging to the American soil. It does not pretend or blatantly aspire like Gatsby's vulgar castle. Instead of Gatsby's formal terraces with their great marble steps, here there are restrained brick Georgian walks and (for a slight touch of European culture) an understated, sunken Italian garden, "a half acre of deep, pungent roses". Inside, the high front hall has nothing of the public "road-house" or "Hôtel de Ville" atmosphere of Gatsby's pretentious (Nick might say sham) baronial hall. There is no bar here. Instead of looking down distantly on a marble terrace, the French windows of the front room open directly on the lawn and the sea. For this house, with its connotations of a dignified old American aristocratic tradition, though lavish and large and not wholly authentic, represents old money, restrained good taste, a genuine, native quality. It is East Egg, not West Egg. It speaks a selfconfident social status that does not need to shout architecturally yet likes to express its wealth. Though, like Gatsby, Tom Buchanan

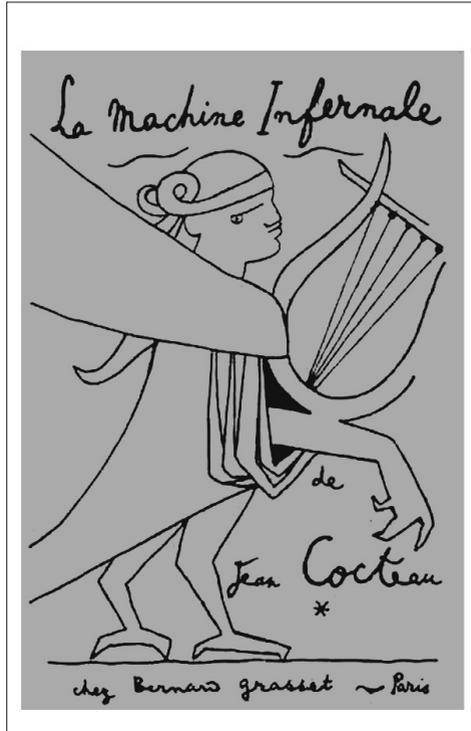
comes from the West, with his older money and Eastern education he has been able to buy into what Nick regards as a far more genuine tradition. Even his pride in being the first man to turn a garage into a stable may suggest his clinging to an older, more natural social ideal. Indeed, throughout the novel Tom is regularly associated with animals, Gatsby with motor cars. Nick sees Tom and Daisy as more genuine, though in their way they are equally as hollow as, or more hollow than, Gatsby (certainly they are harder and more uncaring). Like the architecture of their house, they belong. They are not mere pastiche.

Architectural style is used, though less elaborately, to express the other characters too. The modesty of Nick's weatherbeaten little wooden house squeezed between two great mansions in West Egg says a great deal about Nick's own modest self-depreciation. He has a "shed" for his car, not a garage like Gatsby's nor a stable like Tom's. His drive is rocky, his lawn, until Gatsby's men mow it, unkempt. His proud parvenu neighbors regard his small house—so small that there is a distinct feeling of cramped space the day that Daisy and Gatsby come to tea—an "eyesore," as some of the rich owners of palatial Newport "cottages" must have considered the occasional modest 1870s frame houses that still remain on Ocean Drive or Bellevue Avenue. But though small, though in comparison to the great stone chateau only "cardboard," his weatherbeaten house is only fifty yards from the ocean—much closer than the Buchanans', for instance. And, even more significant, it is a bungalow, built in the bungalow style that flourished first on the West coast but later swept across the country, finding its greatest acceptance early in the twentieth century in the Midwest. Unassuming, middle-class, comfortable, democratic, completely naturalized to the United States though of Asian origin, it carries with it in the novel strong connotations of that homelike Middle West (Fitzgerald is doubtless thinking of St. Paul) which Nick so vividly remembers from his Christmas vacations and to which at the end of the story he returns. With great precision, it also represents Nick himself. [...]



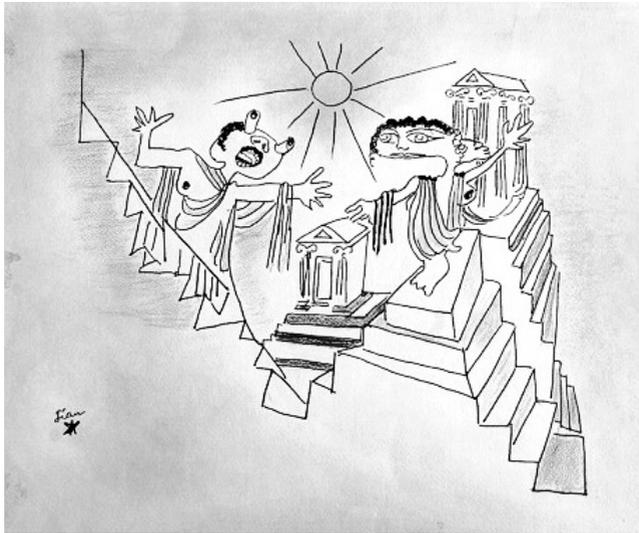
Jean Cocteau (1889-1963)

XIII  
*The Infernal Machine*  
(1934)



Jean Cocteau, *The Infernal Machine*, book cover

*The Informal Machine* by Jean Cocteau was first presented by the great French actor/producer, Louis Jouvet, at his theatre in Paris, April 10, 1934. Jean-Pierre Aumont created the role of Oedipus, and Marthe Regnier was Jocasta. Jouvet played the Shepherd and Cocteau himself was the Voice. In *The Informal Machine* Cocteau gives his own treatment of the Oedipus legend, one of the most ancient, powerful and tragic stories of all time. Many important writers, both ancient and modern, have given versions of the story, the greatest, of course, being that of Sophocles. Cocteau certainly does not try to copy Sophocles in his play. Rather he gives us a very modern treatment in modern terms of an ancient myth. Cocteau's Oedipus could be any young man out to make his place in the world. His Thebes could be any modern city with its age old problems. In the play Cocteau tries to rid the audience of its "sweaty excitement" over what happens next." He wants his audience to sit back and observe "with almost the detachment of the gods" how it happened, rather than what happened. In *The Informal Machine* Cocteau "has succeeded in building a drama of great depth and beauty, a masterpiece of the modern theatre. It is only when one thinks of it in relation to the landmarks- to Sophoclean tragedy, for instance- that it may appear merely ingenious." *The Informal Machine* has been produced in the United States by Harvard , Northwestern, Princeton, Kansas, Buffalo and Wayne Universities and by Vassar College and Middle Tennessee College. It has been produced three times Off-Broadway. The play has been produced in Ireland, West Germany and English, including a production at Oxford. The Millsaps Players first staged *The Informal Machine* in the fall of 1935 with Hardy Nall as Oedipus and Karen Gilfoy as Queen Jocasta.



Jean Cocteau, *Le Complexe d'Edipe*, illustration for *The Infernal Machine* (1924)

## THE INFERNAL MACHINE

### CHARACTERS

OEDIPUS, son of Laius  
JOCASTA, the queen, widow of Laius  
TIRESIAS, a soothsayer, nearly blind  
THE SPHINX  
ANUBIS, Egyptian God of the Dead  
THE PHANTOM OF LAIUS, the dead king  
CREON, brother of Jocasta  
ANTIGONE, daughter of Oedipus  
THE MESSENGER FROM CORINTH  
THE SHEPHERD of Laius  
THE SOLDIER and THE YOUNG SOLDIER  
THE CHIEF, their captain  
THE THEBAN MATRON

### ACT III

#### The Wedding Night

THE VOICE . The coronation and nuptial celebrations have been going on since dawn. The crowd has just acclaimed the queen and the conqueror of the Sphinx for the last time.

Every one goes home. In the little square of the royal palace now rises only the slight murmur of a fountain. Oedipus and Jocasta find privacy at last in the nuptial chamber. They are very tired and heavy with sleep. In spite of a few hints and civilities on the part of destiny, sleep will prevent them from seeing the trap which is closing on them for ever.

*The platform represents JOCASTA'S bedroom, which is as red as a little butcher's shop amid the town buildings. A broad bed covered with white furs. At the foot of the bed, an animal's skin. On the right of the bed, a cradle. On the right fore-stage, a latticed bay window, looking on to the square of Thebes. On the left fore-stage, a movable mirror of human size. OEDIPUS and JOCASTA are wearing their coronation costumes. From the moment the curtain rises, they move about in the slow motion induced by extreme fatigue.*

JOCASTA . Phew! I'm done! You are so active, dear! I am afraid, for you, this room will become a cage, a prison.

OEDIPUS . My dear love! A scented bedroom, a woman's room, yours! After this killing day, those processions, that ceremonial, that crowd which still clamored for us under our very windows...

JOCASTA . Not clamored for us... for you, dear.

OEDIPUS . Same thing.

JOCASTA . You must be truthful, my young conqueror. They hate me. My dress annoys them, my accent annoys them, they are annoyed by my blackened eyelashes, my rouge, and my liveliness!

OEDIPUS . It's Creon who annoys them! The cold, hard, inhuman Creon! I shall make your star rise again. Ah! Jocasta! What a magnificent programme!

JOCASTA . It was high time you came. I can't stand it any more.

OEDIPUS . Your room a prison! Your room, dear... and our bed.

JOCASTA . Do you want me to remove the cradle? After the death of the child, I



had to have it near me, I couldn't sleep... I was too lonely... But now...

OEDIPUS . (*in an indistinct voice*). But now...

JOCASTA . What?

OEDIPUS . I said... I said... that it's he... he... the dog... I mean... the dog who won't... the dog... the fountain dog... (*His head droops.*)

JOCASTA . Oedipus! Oedipus!

OEDIPUS (*awakens, startled*). What?

JOCASTA . You were falling asleep, dear!

OEDIPUS . Me? Never.

JOCASTA . Oh, yes, you were, dear. You were telling me about a dog who won't... a fountain-dog. And I was listening.

*She laughs and herself seems to be becoming vague.*

OEDIPUS . Nonsense!

JOCASTA . I was asking you if you wanted me to remove the cradle, if it worries you.

OEDIPUS . Am I such a kid as to fear this pretty muslin ghost? On the contrary, it will be the cradle of my luck. My luck will grow in it beside our love until it can be used for our first son. So you see!...

JOCASTA . My poor love... You're dropping with fatigue and here we stand... (*Same business as with OEDIPUS*)... stand on this wall...

OEDIPUS . What wall?

JOCASTA . This rampart wall. (*She starts.*) A wall... What? I... I... (*Haggard*) What's happening?

OEDIPUS (*laughing*). Well, this time it's you dreaming. We're tired out, my poor sweet.

JOCASTA . I was asleep? Did I talk?

OEDIPUS . We are a pretty pair! Here I go telling you about fountain-dogs, and you tell me about rampart walls: and this is our wedding night! Listen, Jocasta, if I happen to fall asleep again (*are you listening?*), do please awaken me, shake me, and if you fall asleep, I'll do the same for you. This one night of all must not founder in sleep. That would be too sad.

JOCASTA . You crazy darling you, why? We have all our life before us.

OEDIPUS . Maybe, but I don't want sleep to spoil the miracle of passing this joyous night alone, unutterably alone with you. I suggest we remove these heavy clothes, and as we're not expecting any one...

JOCASTA . Listen, my darling boy, you'll be cross...

OEDIPUS . Jocasta, don't tell me there's still some official duty on the program!

JOCASTA . While my women are doing my hair, etiquette demands that you receive a visit.

OEDIPUS . A visit? At this hour?

JOCASTA . A visit... a visit... a purely formal visit.

OEDIPUS . In this room?

JOCASTA . In this room.

OEDIPUS . From whom?

JOCASTA . Now don't get cross. From Tiresias.

OEDIPUS . Tiresias? I refuse!

JOCASTA . Listen, dear...

OEDIPUS . That's the limit! Tiresias playing the part of the family pouring out their farewell advice. How comic! I shall refuse his visit.

JOCASTA . You crazy dear, I am asking you to. It's an old custom in Thebes that the high priest must in some way bless the royal marriage bonds. And besides, Tiresias is our old uncle, our watchdog. I am very fond of him, Oedipus, and Laius adored him.



He is nearly blind. It would be unfortunate if you hurt his feelings and set him against our love.

OEDIPUS . That's all very well... in the middle of the night...

JOCASTA . Do! Please, for our sake and the sake of the future. It's essential. See him for five minutes, but see him and listen to him. I ask you to.

*She kisses him.*

OEDIPUS . I warn you I shan't let him sit down.

JOCASTA . I love you, dear. (*Long kiss*) I shall not be long. (*At the right-hand exit*) I am going to let him know he can come. Be patient. Do it for my sake. Think of me.

*She goes out. OEDIPUS , alone, looks at himself in the mirror and tries attitudes. TIRESIAS comes in left, unheard. OEDIPUS sees him in the middle of the room and turns about face.*

OEDIPUS . I am listening.

TIRESIAS . Steady, My Lord. Who told you I had saved up a sermon for your especial benefit?

OEDIPUS . No one, Tiresias, no one. But I don't suppose you find it pleasant acting as kill-joy. I suggest you are waiting for me to pretend I have received your advice. I shall bow, and you will give me the accolade. That would be enough for us in our tired state and at the same time custom would be satisfied. Have I guessed right?

TIRESIAS . It is perhaps correct that there is at the bottom of this procedure a sort of custom, but for that, it would be necessary to have a royal marriage with all the dynastic, mechanical, and, I admit, even irksome business which that entails. No, My Lord. Unforeseen events bring us face to face with new problems and duties. And you will agree, I think, that your coronation, and your marriage, appear in a form which is difficult to classify, and does not fit into any code.

OEDIPUS . No one could say more graciously that I have crashed on Thebes like a tile from a roof.

TIRESIAS . My Lord!

OEDIPUS . You must know, then, that classifiable things reek of death. You must strike out in other spheres, Tiresias, quit the ranks. That's the sign of masterpieces and heroes. An original, that's the person to astonish and to rule.

TIRESIAS . Right! Then you will admit that, as I have taken on a job outside the ceremonial sphere, I am striking out on a new line for myself.

OEDIPUS . To the point, Tiresias, to the point.

TIRESIAS . Good. Then I'll go straight to the point and speak in all frankness. My Lord, your auguries look black, very black. I must put you on your guard.

OEDIPUS . Well, if I didn't expect that! Anything else would have surprised me. This is not the first time the oracles have set about me and my audacity has thwarted them.

TIRESIAS . Do you believe they can be thwarted?

OEDIPUS . I am the living proof of it. And even if my marriage upsets the gods, what about your promises, your freeing of the town, and the death of the Sphinx? And why should the gods have pushed me on as far as this room, if this marriage displeases them?

[...]



Louis Jouvet, *The Infernal Machine*, Comédie des Champs Elysées (1934)

COCTEAU'S SURREALIST PLAY:  
FANTASY AND DREAM  
by Kyung Mee Joo

*The Infernal Machine*, "first produced by Louis Jouvet in 1934, is considered the most extraordinary work of all Cocteau's improvisations". As notes, "the call for 'artistic autonomy' in the theatre instead of imitation of life is one that echoes through much French theatre theory of this period," and Cocteau is one of the most representative artists who fully enjoys this "artistic autonomy." This "rejection of conventional reality" is already imprinted in his preface to *The Wedding Party on the Tour Eiffel*, written by Cocteau in 1922. As said, borrowing the words of Apollinaire, Cocteau's "surrealistic" work translated reality into "a coherent ensemble of painting, dance, mime, and plastic art- a total theatre peace". Thus, contrasted with Racine's 17th century tragedy as is seen on the previous pages, the unities of time, place and action are no more respected in this avant-garde 31 work and purposely destroyed in order to make the play not real, but "surrealistic" with its various theatrical devices:

*"Cocteau's art up to this point has operated by a skill full process of selection, revealing subsidiary aspects of the story while leaving the great tragic truth in shadow. It lies there in the shadows, just beyond the reach of our skeptical modern minds, while we see the characters in roles that we can comprehend in our terms -the terms of ambition of flirtation or fantasy or anger."*

Thus, in *The Infernal Machine*, where Cocteau selects some essential parts of "the great tragic truth," the play is more flexible for the time, place, and actions than in Racine's tragedy. Especially, the time is even elastic, and it can be transformed as long as the artist wants to manipulate it for his surrealist purpose.

For instance, from Act I to Act III, there is a huge time difference between two acts, i.e., 17 years, while in the Act II, which is "a pure invention of Cocteau," time has no boundaries as well as the place which can be set anywhere. Here, the time and the place, where Oedipus meets Sphinx, has even an imaginary aspect in which "the drama dissolves into fantasy".

Concerning the place, the scenery is not limited to "a room of palace," as is seen in *The*

*Theban Brothers*. The setting ranges from the rampart of the palace to outside the palace where Oedipus meets the Sphinx; to a nuptial chamber for this conqueror and Jocasta; to a platform with a fountain. In addition, stairs connect the high platform to the city in which the Theban people dwell. The different settings, arranged by Cocteau, give an impression that they are made in "miniature," so that all the places are adjusted to be appropriate to his "sensitive and imaginative" strategy.

As Francis Fergusson remarked, "the entire play, with the exception of the last act, shows us a diminished world, a world of light, boulevard comedy replete with suggestive plays on words and double-entendre". These three acts in Thebes can be seen as "any demoralized Balkan or Mediterranean commercial city of our time or anytime". Being no more "the mythical scapegoat of the gods," Oedipus is described as "the winner of a bicycle marathon or an ambitious politician" who can be seen anywhere in our days. Cocteau's characters seem to be minimized as an archetypal form of human beings struggling for their destiny in a surrealist dimension of a "diminished world":

*"We have a modern and antique hero, a bedroom farce and a Greek myth. And myth, seen through this screen of petty intrigue, assumes something like its old dimension. It extends beyond the narrow limits of the platform with its cardboard palace to strike reverberations in that racial conscience which poetry helps preserve."*

Using "the spoken word," Cocteau wants to introduce "poetry of the theatre," instead of searching poetry in the theatre as it is seen in traditional verse drama such as Racine's tragedy. This poetry of the theatre will be achieved by all the means available to the staged performance. Cocteau wants to "accentuate" the absurdity of life, "emphasize" it, and paint it "more truly than the truth".

Thus, this play of Cocteau is balanced between the modern and antique background, as well as between fantasy and dramatic reality. In *The Infernal Machine*, the plot doesn't depend on the action, unlike *The Oedipus Rex* of Sophocles where the plot is "a search for a culprit, the search, that is, for the human responsibility which brought on the plague." In Racine's *The Theban Brothers*, all the characters struggle to 33 accomplish the ultimate end of killing herself



Igor Stravinsky, *Oedipus Rex*, opera-oratorio after Sophocles (1927)

or himself and of killing one another. Instead of focusing on Oedipus' quest for "his true nature and destiny," the play is rather propelled by a pursuit of "feeling and expression" of the characters.

*"The high point of the play, Act III, The Wedding Night of Oedipus and Jocaste, is developed with the versatility of a Moliere comedy. But again, as in Orpheus, the predominant tone is neither comic nor tragic. It is something else, some special genre of Cocteau's own creation, with a continuity of feeling and expression which is not easily accounted for."*

This play is "something else, some special genre," in that Cocteau introduces the variety of special devices throughout as the introduction of voice for each act, the apparition of ghost, and the intrigue of dream. These theatrical devices, as well as the theme, contribute a strong surrealist aspect in the play and they make the play more liberal and avant-garde in the level of directing. Thus, the play seems to put more emphasis on these devices rather than the characters' actions themselves.

The play starts with the Voice which "rehearses the story of the myth and enjoins the audience to look for the real story behind the entertainment they are about to witness." Since Cocteau doesn't treat the whole history of *King Oedipus* the same way as Sophocles, this Voice is very helpful for audiences who do not have basic knowledge about the myth of Oedipus. The explication of Voice gives Cocteau more freedom to develop his play using the flexibility of his imagination. Furthermore, this device of Voice introduced at the beginning of each act instills a feeling of "alienation" in the spectators:

THE VOICE: *"Spectators, let us imagine that we can wind back the last few minutes and relive them elsewhere. While the ghost of Laius tries to warn Jocasta on the ramparts of Thebes, Oedipus encounters the Sphinx on a hill that overlooks the city. The same trumpet-calls, the same cock-crows, the same moon, the same stars."*

With this Voice, the spectators might feel more engaged with the play and, at the same time, recognize that the play is not real and that it produces a theatrical reality. Consequently, the Voice strongly contributes surrealist features

to the play, allowing the spectators to get more involved and see the play as both "modern and antique" as well as real and imaginary.

These surrealist features are strengthened by another theatrical device: the apparition of a ghost. Just like the opening of *Hamlet*, *The Infernal Machine* introduces the ghost of a father, in this case Laius, at the beginning of the play. The conversations between two soldiers inform the audience about the death of Laius, the existence of the Sphinx, and the apparition of the ghost of Laius, their dead king:

*"He doesn't frighten us. Not our old ghost, Laius. He doesn't still make your guts quiver, does he? Perhaps the first time... But not afterward. He's not a bad ghost, he's a friend. Ah, the trouble is we're all jumpy in Thebes: you, me, the rich people, and the poor people; everybody except the few who always out on top. We're tired of fighting an enemy we don't know, and we're tired of oracles and heroic victims and brave mothers."*

The apparition of this friendly ghost permits Cocteau, who is "tired of oracles and heroic victims and brave mothers," to skip all the "heroic" and "majestic" aspects of the myth of Oedipus. The Ghost of Laius appears "fixed," "frozen," and "stuck," instead of being scary or horrible, and even has trouble disappearing:

*"He tried – God how he tried! But he just couldn't. We thought he'd go mad. Then he asked us to swear at him, because he said that the way to make a ghost disappear. But we couldn't – he's our friend. And the more he begged us, the more stupid we looked."*

This ghost's inability to disappear on its own makes its supernatural power look ridiculous. Described as a "stupid" beggar, this ghost lacks both horror and power, becoming a subject for sympathy. The soldiers see him and say, "A dead king isn't a king." Furthermore, Cocteau enhances his surrealist play with the apparition of the ghost of Jocasta, who is a part of the fantasy in this play with her "extravagant" and "largely comic" character. It is with the apparition of the ghost that Cocteau insinuates the death of Jocasta, without introducing the messenger. This device not only economizes the play, but also makes the play dreamlike. Since it is carefully calculated from the beginning, the play is "not vitiated by



Jean-Antoine-Théodore Giroust, *Oedipus at Colonus*, oil on canvas (1788)

the presence of Jocasta, for the supernatural has established its rights early in the play”.

In addition, the playwright introduces Jocasta’s dream, a device which seems more significant and prophetic than the oracles predicted by Tiresias, the great prophet:

*“I dream I am somewhere rather like this ledge. It’s night, and I am holding a baby. Suddenly the baby becomes a sticky pulp which runs through my fingers. I scream and try to rid myself of it, but it clings to me. Then, when I think I’m free of it, it flies back and hurls itself against my face. And this thins... this pulp... is alive! With a kind of mouth that fixes on mine. And it creeps about me, feeling for my belly and my thighs... Oh!”*

First, this dream plays a great role in reminding the readers or the audiences of Laius and Jocasta’s crime: abandoning their infant Oedipus as prophesied by the oracle. Their crime is still imprinted in Jocasta’s subconscious, repeatedly appearing in her dreams. Cocteau successfully implicates Jocasta’s infanticide only through these lines. The memory of this past crime manifests itself in Jocasta’s subconscious as a “pulp” which is so “alive” that she cannot rid herself of it.

The dream also predicts that the consequence of the infanticide committed by the parents will be substituted for another crime: incest between a mother and her own son, which is another fundamental taboo. Here, the feminine senses are juxtaposed with a predictable dream. When Jocasta meets the soldier, who reports seeing the ghost of Laius, she is instantly reminded of her son that she abandoned nineteen years ago and might be the same age as this young guardian: “The same age. He’d be exactly the same age. How good-looking he is!”

In Act Three, *The Wedding Night*, Cocteau presents very surrealist scenic images which suggest that the maternal source is like a primitive power of life: a platform which “represents Jocasta’s bedroom, red as a butcher’s shop set down among Municipal building.” The audience sees “a wide bed covered with white furs.” At the foot of the bed lies an animal skin; to the left of

the bed, a cradle. These scenic images explain the double aspect of Oedipus who might be a husband in the bed and a baby in the cradle.

Here, dream and supernatural are introduced again in this act as a tool to shake the inside of this couple, who is sleeping “side by side, hand in hand.”

*“Murmuring of the fountain. Distant, intermittent thunder. A flash of very bright dream lightning. The animal skin is pushed up by the head of Anubis. On the end of his arm is Oedipus’ belt. Oedipus tosses uneasily.”*

The apparition of Anubis, another supernatural character, whom Oedipus meets in Act II, makes the play strongly surrealistic in that now the audiences share not only the stage reality but also the realm of Oedipus’ dream. Thus, Cocteau demonstrates two different dimensions on the stage: the natural and supernatural, through which the characters constantly travel from one dimension to another, from their sleep to their wake, from unconsciousness to consciousness:

Jocasta: mumbling in her sleep. No, no, not that pulp, not that sticky pulp...

Oedipus: in a heavy, distant voice. I’ll count up to fifty: One, two, three, four, eight, ten, eleven, fourteen, fifteen, fifteen, fifteen, three, four...

Anubis: “And Anubis would spring and open his wolf jaws! (*He disappears through the trap door, replacing the animal skin above him.*)

Oedipus: Help! Help! Come here! Anybody! Help me!

Jocasta: What is it, my darling? Oedipus, I was fast sleep. (*She shakes him.*) Wake up!

Oedipus: No! Oh! no! Please! Mercy!

Jocasta: It’s all right, my darling. It was a dream.

Oedipus: No, no! (*He wakes*) Oh! Where was I? Jocasta? It’s you. What a terrible nightmare!

Jocasta: There! It’s all over. You’re in our room... in my arms.

[...]



Alain Robbe-Grillet (1922 -2008)

XIV  
*La Jalousie*  
(1957)

ALAIN ROBBE - GRILLET

LA  
JALOUSIE

ROMAN



LES ÉDITIONS DE MINUIT

Alain Robbe-Grillet, *La Jalousie* (1957)

La *Jalousie* presents a jealous husband, the narrator, attempting to come to terms with his wife's behavior, which he sees as being ambivalent. On the one hand, this ambivalence is disturbing for him because it allows him to make a circumstantial interpretation of her behavior as marital infidelity—behavior which for him is intolerable.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, this same ambivalence permits him to exercise the constant hope that her behavior is not what he fears it to be. And, because the anguish of facing his wife's infidelity would be more intolerable for him than the anxiety of living with his doubts, he avoids confronting his dilemma squarely by seeking out the truth at any cost. He tries, rather, to deal with her suspicious and threatening behavior either by ignoring, justifying, or denying it, or by making it appear incoherent or otherwise unrecognizable. The use of obscure pun is in keeping with the narrator's efforts to confront and obliterate the source of his anguish by disguising it. It permits him to refer implicitly to the general character or to a comparable aspect of the intolerable situation which A . . . 's behavior and its setting have come to represent for him and to avoid affirming the reality of his impression by referring to it explicitly.

A special use of language contributes to this meaning of the novel, to the narrator's intense preoccupation with suppressing possibilities that he finds to be troubling. The narrator's suppressed jealousy is the constant subject, the tenor; while his explicit and apparently neutral descriptions are in fact the vehicle, the figurative language through which his jealousy is expressed. Whereas this tenor is concealed in the case of homophony, it appears to be revealed in sound figures or vehicles such as paranomasia, adnomination, rime, assonance, and alliteration, which are not orally identical to the tenor. The tenor, in these types of pun, however, retains its obscurity by virtue of having a denotative value which appears more prominent than its connotative allusion to the jealousy-producing situation. For example, the vehicle "trajet" refers through assonance to "tache" whose less conspicuous connotative meaning alludes to the narrator's concern with A . . . 's moral purity. Some of the homophonous vehicles of hidden tenors which refer to the nature of the situation which the narrator fears or to a parallel aspect of it are "jalousie," "maîtresse," "affaire," "compagnie," "margouillat," and "vapeur."<sup>6</sup> The "jalousie" referred to explicitly by the narrator, the vehicle of the pun, is a series of movable slats, in the bottom or top half of a window casement, which often obstruct his view as he looks both into and out of A . . . 's room and as he looks out of the southwest window of his office when the casements are closed. The explicit and implicit use of the plural, "les jalousies," in the descriptions of these windows alludes to the character of the narrator's behavior, to his "jalousie"—his observing and interrogating of A . . . 's behavior and its setting in such a way that he appears to be unconcerned and that he seems to be unable to fully discern scenes or activity which he finds suspicious.<sup>8</sup> This usage also alludes to what the narrator believes to be the plurality of occasions on which A . . . is unfaithful and which cause him to be jealous of her. (A . . . 's health, and perhaps her behavior, was the same in Africa as it is in her present situation, and the narrator believes that not only does A . . . have no reason for not sleeping with Franck but also that she has no objection to sleeping with the natives, p. 194). The use of the plural thus represents the narrator's attempt to disguise his specific concern about Franck. This implication that A . . . is often unfaithful, however, has the ultimate effect of validating this concern.



*French colonial architecture, Conakry, Guinea (c. 1905)*

## JEALOUSY

Now the shadow of the column—the column which supports the southwest corner of the roof—divides the corresponding corner of the veranda into two equal parts. This veranda is a wide, covered gallery surrounding the house on three sides. Since its width is the same for the central portion as for the sides, the line of shadow cast by the column extends precisely to the corner of the house; but it stops there, for only the veranda flagstones are reached by the sun, which is still too high in the sky. The wooden walls of the house—that is, its front and west gable-end—are still protected from the sun by the roof (common to the house proper and the terrace). So at this moment the shadow of the outer edge of the roof coincides exactly with the right angle formed by the terrace and the two vertical surfaces of the corner of the house.

Now A . . . has come into the bedroom by the inside door opening onto the central hallway. She does not look at the wide open window through which—from the door—she would see this corner of the terrace. Now she has turned back toward the door to close it behind her. She still has on the light-colored, close-fitting dress with the high collar that she was wearing at lunch when Christiane reminded her again that loosefitting clothes make the heat easier to bear. But A . . . merely smiled: she never suffered from the heat, she had known much worse climates than this — in Africa, for instance — and had always felt fine there. Besides, she doesn't feel the cold either. Wherever she is, she keeps quite comfortable. The black curls of her hair shift with a supple movement and brush her shoulders as she turns her head.

The heavy hand-rail of the balustrade has almost no paint left on top. The gray of the wood shows through, streaked with tiny longitudinal cracks. On the other side of this rail, a good six feet below the level of the veranda, the garden begins.

But from the far side of the bedroom the eye carries over the balustrade and touches ground only much further away, on the opposite slope of the little valley, among the banana trees of the plantation. The sun cannot be seen between their thick clusters of wide green leaves. However, since this sector has been under cultivation only recently, the regular criss-crossing of the rows of trees can still be clearly followed. The same is true of almost all the property visible from here, for the older sectors — where confusion has gained the ascendancy — are located higher up on this side of the valley, that is, on the other side of the house.

It is on the other side, too, that the highway passes, just below the edge of the plateau. This highway, the only road that gives access to the property, marks its northern border. A dirt road leads from the highway to the sheds and, lower still, to the house, in front of which a large cleared area with a very slight slope permits cars to be turned around.

The house is built on a level with this courtyard, from which it is separated by no veranda or gallery. On the three other sides, however, it is enclosed by the veranda.

The slope of the terrain, more pronounced starting from the courtyard, causes the central portion of the veranda (which runs along the front of the house on the south) to stand at least six feet above the garden.

On all sides of the garden, as far as the borders of the plantation, stretches the green mass of the banana trees.

On the right and the left, their proximity is too great, combined with the veranda's relative lack of elevation, to permit an observer stationed there to distinguish the arrangement of the trees; while further down the valley, the quincunx can be made out at first glance. In certain very recently replanted sectors—those where the reddish earth is just beginning to yield supremacy to foliage—it is easy enough to follow the regular perspective of the four intersecting lanes along which the young trunks are aligned.

This exercise is not much more difficult, despite their more advanced growth, for those sectors of the plantation on the opposite hillside: this, in fact, is the place which offers itself most readily to inspection, the place over which surveillance can be



maintained with the least difficulty (although the path to reach it is a long one), the place which the eye falls on quite naturally, of its own accord, when looking out of one or the other of the two open windows of the bedroom.

Her back to the hall door she has just closed, A . . . absently stares at the paint-flaked wood of the balustrade, nearer her the paintflaked window frame, then, nearer still, the scrubbed wood of the floor. She takes a few steps into the room, goes over to the heavy chest and opens its top drawer. She shifts the papers in the right-hand side of the drawer, leans over and, in order to see the rear of the drawer better, pulls it a little further out of the chest. After looking a little longer, she straightens up and remains motionless, elbows close to her body, forearms bent and hidden by the upper part of her body — probably holding a sheet of paper between her hands.

She turns toward the light now in order to continue reading without straining her eyes. Her inclined profile does not move any more. The paper is pale blue, the size of ordinary letter paper, and shows the creases where it has been folded into quarters.

Then, holding the letter in one hand, A . . . closes the drawer, moves toward the little work table (near the second window, against the partition separating the bedroom from the hallway) and sits down in front of the writing-case from which she removes a sheet of pale blue papersimilar to the first, but blank. She unscrews the cap of her pen, then, after a glance to the right (which does not include even the middle of the window-frame behind her), bends her head toward the writing-case in order to begin writing.

The lustrous black hair falls in motionless curls along the line of her back which the narrow metal fastening of her dress indicates a little lower down.

Now the shadow of the column—the column which supports the southwest corner of the roof—lengthens across the flagstones of this central part of the veranda, in front of the house where the chairs have been set out for the evening. Already the tip of the line of shadow almost touches the doorway which marks the center of the façade. Against the west gable-end of the house, the sun falls on the wood about a yard and a half above the flagstone. Through the third window, which looks out on this side, it would reach far into the bedroom if the blinds had not been lowered.

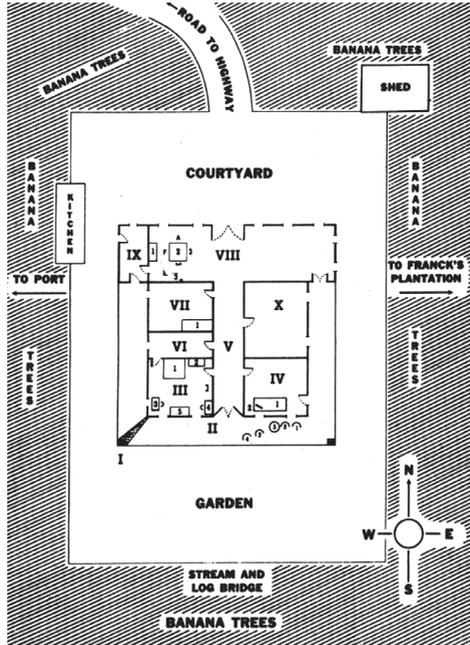
The pantry is at the other end of this west wing of the veranda. Through its half-open door can be heard A . . .'s voice, then that of the black cook, voluble and singsong, then again the clear, moderate voice, giving orders for the evening meal.

The sun has disappeared behind the rocky spur that ends the main section of the plateau. Sitting facing the valley, in one of the armchairs of local manufacture, A . . . is reading the novel borrowed the day before; they have already spoken about it at noon. She continues reading, without raising her eyes, until the daylight becomes too faint. Then she raises her head, closes the book—which she puts within arm's reach on the low table—and remains staring straight in front of her, toward the openwork balustrade and the banana trees on the opposite slope, soon invisible in the darkness. She seems to be listening to the noise that rises on all sides from the thousands of crickets inhabiting the low ground. But it is a continuous, ear-splitting sound without variations, in which nothing can be distinguished.

Franck is here again for dinner, smiling, talkative, affable. Christiane has not come with him this time; she has stayed home with the child, who is running a slight fever. It is not unusual, these days, for her husband to come without her like this: because of the child, because of Christiane's own ailments—for her health has difficulty adapting itself to this hot, humid climate—and also because of her domestic problems, her difficulties managing her too numerous and poorly organized servants.

Tonight, though, A . . . seemed to expect her. At least she had had four places set. She gives orders to have the one that will not be used taken away at once.

(...)



- I. South-west pillar and its shadow at the beginning of the novel
- II. Veranda: 1) Franck's chair; 2) A...s chair; 3) Empty chair; 4) Husband's chair; 5) Coffee table
- III. A...s room: 1) Bed; 2) Chest; 3) Dressing table; 4) Writing table; 5) Wardrobe
- IV. Office: 1) Desk; 2) Photo of A...
- V. Hallway
- VI. Bathroom
- VII. Small bedroom: 1) Bed
- VIII. Living room / dining room: 1) Buffet; 2) Table; 3) Centipede mark on wall
- IX. Pantry
- X. Storage room or other (not described)

## THE GEOMETRY OF THE PRESSANT

(...) ‘The Dressmaker’s Dummy’ (which opens the collection *Snapshots*), we are shown a coffee pot, a four-legged table, a waxed tablecloth, a mannequin and, crucially, a large rectangular mirror that reflects the room’s objects – which include a mirror-fronted wardrobe that in turn redoubles everything. Thus we are made to navigate a set of duplications, modifications and distortions that are at once almost impossibly complex and utterly accurate: this is how rooms actually look to an observer, how their angles, surfaces and sight lines impose themselves on his or her perception. No other action takes place in the piece, which nonetheless ends with a quite stunning “twist” as we are told that the coffee pot’s base bears a picture of an owl “with two large, somewhat frightening eyes” but, due to the coffee pot’s presence, this image cannot be seen. What waits for us at the story’s climax, its gaze directed back towards our own, is a blind spot.

(...)

The novel is saturated with a sense of geometry. The house’s surfaces reveal themselves to us in a series of straight lines and chevrons, horizontals, verticals and diagonals, discs and trapezoids. The banana trees, as green as jealousy itself, are laid out in quincunxes, as are the workers who replace the bridge’s rectangular beams. Geometric order is pitted against formlessness and entropy: on the far side of the valley, towards Franck’s house, is a patch in which the narrator tells us, using language reminiscent of Othello’s, that “confusion has gained the ascendancy”. As A... combs her hair, the struggle between geometry and chaos is replayed: with a “mechanical gesture” the oval of the brush and straight lines of its teeth pass through the “black mass” on her head, imposing order on it, just as the “mechanical cries” of nocturnal animals shape the darkness beyond the veranda by indicating each one’s “trajectory through the night”. Geometry usually wins: even the “tangled skein” of insects buzzing round the lamp reveal themselves, when observed at length by the husband, to be “describing more or less flattened ellipses in horizontal planes or at slight angles”. But an ellipse is not merely a type of orbit; it also designates a syntactical omission,

a typographic gap. What’s missing from this geometry is A..., the character whose very name contains an ellipse: during this particular scene she is off in town with Franck. As the narrator waits for her to come home, the lamp hisses, like a green-eyed monster.

Enmeshed with the book’s spatial logic is a temporal one. The second time we see the shadow of the column fall on the veranda it has lengthened in a clockwise direction, the geometry of the house effectively forming a sundial. In a filmed interview with curator Hans Ulrich Obrist (Robbe-Grillet’s influence on contemporary visual art is enormous), Robbe-Grillet ponders Hegel’s paradox that to say “Now it is day” cannot be wholly true if, a few hours later, one can equally truthfully declare “Now it is night”, and notes that, for Hegel, the only true part of both statements is the word “now”. Why? Because it persists. The same word punctuates *Jealousy* like the regular chime of a clock: “Now the shadow of the column...”; “Now the house is empty...”; “... until the day breaks, now”. This is not to say that time moves forwards in a straight line. Like Benjy in William Faulkner’s *The Sound and the Fury*, *Jealousy*’s narrator experiences time – or times – simultaneously.

For Robbe-Grillet, who also made films, writing is like splicing strips of celluloid together to create a continual present. There are prolepses, analepses, loops and repetitions (a process slyly alain robbe-grillet mirrored in the staggering of the plantation cycle through the whole year such that all its phases “occur at the same time every day, and the periodical trivial incidents also repeat themselves simultaneously”), but the time is always “now”. A delightful exchange between the husband and the serving boy, in which the latter answers a question as to when he was instructed to retrieve ice cubes from the pantry with an imprecise “now” (discerning in the question “a request to hurry”), carries this point home: all the book’s actions and exchanges swelter in a stultifying, oppressive and persistent present tense – what Joyce, in *Finnegans Wake*, calls “the pressant”.



*Last Year at Marienbad* film, screenplay by Alain Robbe-Grillet (1961)

## ROBBE-GRILLET'S DIALECTICAL TOPOLOGY

Topology is a branch of geometry which studies the qualitative rather than the quantitative properties of space. Topology investigates the kind of spatial continuity and reversibility that we find in a Möbius strip or a Klein bottle, recording the interchangeability of one surface with another. Bruce Morrisette, in applying topology to Robbe-Grillet's works, defines it as one of the "primary intellectual operations capable of revealing the modalities of surfaces, volumes, boundaries, contiguities, holes, and above all of the notions of inside and outside." Vicki Mistacco gives topology an additional metaphorical dimension in which the "production" of contemporary texts depends on the continuity and contiguity of both reader and writer. Topology, therefore, may refer to the spaces within a text as well as to the implied spatial relationship between the intrinsic text and the extrinsic reader—relationships which have ontological and perceptual implications.

Within the text, topology can signify the topography of a room, a house, a city, or a place. It elucidates structural relationships and configurations which may be stretched, twisted, and distorted. "In topology [says Robbe-Grillet] there are volumes whose inside is outside. There are surfaces where one side is on the other . . . in *Project pour une révolution* . . . the house, the street, and the keyhole . . . function as topological spaces. At times one has the impression that the whole house empties itself and that it passes entirely through the keyhole, that the whole inside of the house becomes the outside.

Topology is therefore more than a branch of geometry, or geography, or medicine. It deals with art, language, and perception. It is a dialectical space in which ontology and

topography meet. Following Derrida's dictum that "We have to unite or reconcile the two presentations (Darstellung) of the inside and the outside," *Dans le labyrinthe* (1959), *La Jalousie* (1957), *L'Immortelle* (1963), *Projet pour une révolution à New York* (1970), and *Topologie d'une cité fantôme* (1975), synthesize the inside and the outside. These works, and others like them, structure a reversible and interchangeable continuity between the inside and the outside, i.e., between the subjective and the objective, the reader and the text.  
(...)

Robbe-Grillet's fiction, like Magritte's painting, communicates the duality and simultaneity of creative perception. My eyes are the mediating surface between the outside and the inside, while consciousness itself records the phenomenon in all its complexity (early Robbe-Grillet criticism was not wrong to label his novels as belonging to "l'école du regard"). Art, as a mediating agent, can be viewed as an extension of our sensory organs. And the distortions of our senses, though we may not be aware of them, as Magritte's painting of an eye entitled "The False Mirror" implies, are perhaps as acute as those of Robbe-Grillet's fiction. His rooms empty themselves through keyholes, while the insides of houses become the outside. His topology, his human condition, like Magritte's, is indeed the dialectical space where ontology and topography meet. Doors, windows, and blinds, like the human eye, are the mediating agents between two seemingly opposed and irreconcilable spaces. Robbe-Grillet's art unites them both in one transcendental leap.



René Magritte, *The Human Condition* (1933)

The New Novel or Nouveau Roman refers to a movement in French literature that flourished in the mid-fifties and early sixties which called into question the traditional modes of literary realism. It is seen by some commentators as standing mid-way between modernism and postmodernism. Associated with the works of Marguerite Duras, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Michel Butor, Claude Simon, Phillippe Sollers, and Nathalie Sarraute, the new novel is characterized by an austere narrative tone which often eschews metaphor and simile in favour of precise physical descriptions, a heightened sense of ambiguity with regards to point of view, radical disjunctions of time and space, and self-reflexive commentary on the processes of literary composition.

In *Pour un nouveau roman* (1963), Robbe-Grillet argues that the traditional novel, with its dependence on an omniscient narrator, and adherence to the unities of time and place, creates an illusion of order and significance which is inconsistent with the radically discontinuous and aleatory nature of modern experience. The task of the new novel, as he presents it, is to foster change by dispensing with any technique which imposes a particular interpretation on events, or which organizes events in such a way as to endow them with a determinate meaning. The ambiguities of the New Novel situate the reader as the site of meaning and, as a model of what Barthes calls the writerly text, invite re-reading and re-interpretation



*La Jalousie*, coreography D. Hay-Gordon, H.r Essakow, J. Cousins and M. Runacre-Temple (2012)

*CASTLES AND ANTI-CASTLES,  
OR KAFKA AND ROBBE-GRILLET*

(...)

Robbe-Grillet has been accused of boring his readers by his lengthy spatial descriptions quite as effectively as Balzac. But the hypertrophy of locale in his novels is used for entirely un-Balzacian reasons: not to underline the continuity of his created world with the world as we know it, but rather the discontinuity. And this discontinuity offers a ... striking analogy with Kafka. Though their fictional spaces are by no means other-worldly, in the sense of the fantastic or the surreal, they border on no geographic spaces known to man; for even when their hermetic sites are linked to neighboring regions by bridges, roads, or traversable oceans, on the other side of the crossings lie further no-man's-lands....

What seems certain is that Robbe-Grillet can obtain spatial effects so similar to Kafka's only because his settings, like Kafka's, are filtered through the obsessions of the protagonists, if not entirely determined by them. After his first novel (*The Erasers*)—which plays parodistic games with omniscience—Robbe-Grillet altogether dismissed omniscient narrators from his fictional world, allowing only for subjectivized and often pathologically flawed narrative perspectives. Three of the later novels (*Jealousy*, *In the Labyrinth*, and *La Maison de Rendez-Vous*) work bold and entirely original variations on this restriction of viewpoint....

The process of discontinuing the flow of time is ... carried much further by Robbe-Grillet than by Kafka. Where Kafka still progresses from event to event with a semblance of chronology, Robbe-Grillet deliberately fractures time sequences. In this realm he undoubtedly learned far more from Faulkner than from Kafka, though even Faulkner's games with time seem tame when compared to

Robbe-Grillet's. The chronology of events in *The Sound and the Fury*, for example, can be studiously reconstructed from its dismantled presentation, whereas the scrambled episodes of some Robbe-Grillet novels refuse to yield to even the most stubborn assault....

Robbe-Grillet's protagonists, resigned to the "pure and simple observation" that no one is there to give an answer, ask no questions about ultimate meaning, but at most punctuate the text with their resigned "je ne sais pas." And while Kafka's novels are so contrived that the silent interlocutor remains shrouded in mystery, Robbe-Grillet's novels starkly block out the possibility of his existence. Where Kafka throws up a veil, Robbe-Grillet builds a wall: a wall of words, compulsively repetitive, hermetically concrete, deliberately built to block off all semblance of transcendence.



*Lady in the Lake*, Film dir. Robert Montgomery (1947)

## THE CASE OF ROBBE-GRILLET

With the appearance of Robbe-Grillet's *La jalousie*, in which the narrative is presented to us in the form of a withheld first person narration (what I have termed the *je-neant*), the critics were quick to make comparisons between the "point of view" of the narrator in that novel and that of the protagonist in Robert Montgomery's famous film *The Lady in the Lake*. Already in *L'âge du roman américain* (Paris, 1948), Claude-Edmonde Magny had praised this film: "The most remarkable, the [film] that really uses first-person narration in hyperbolic fashion ... in which the camera is constantly in the hero's position and shows us things as they appear to him, without ever allowing us to see him, unless he is looking at himself in a mirror". In reading *La jalousie*, critics were reminded of that film. Jacques Howlen, well aware of the nuances of the phenomenological novel, immediately made this distinction: "in *The Lady in the lake*, the camera took the hero's place, but in *La jalousie* there is no hero. "The gaze of the narrator is one that is unaware of itself".

Colette Audry takes up Howlett's idea, to draw an even sharper contrast: "Whereas Robert Montgomery makes a character of his camera, Robbe-Grillet makes his character a camera. The former humanizes the lens or objective; the latter objectifies the human personage." This view, despite the various difficulties of logic it may raise, at least has the merit of emphasizing the endless chatter of the narrator in *The Lady in the Lake*. That narrator (a facet Claude-Edmonde Magny ignores), far from being absorbed in what he sees or does (as behaviorism would have it), never stops commenting upon his actions, his thoughts, or giving us analyses and monologues (in a very banal verbal style), reminding us each instant that he is the one who "sees" what we see. He spends an exaggerated portion of his time conversing with others in front of the many mirrors (in which we see him even too "normally"); he constantly shows us his cigarette, held in his excessively visible fingers. He even appears before us conventionally seated at his desk, to explain to us that we are about "to live what he has lived." In other words, the entire mechanism of this first-person camera seems poorly conceived, if not simply awkward in execution. There is more. We quickly realize

that, technically, the differences that separate the wide-angle optics ( of the human eye) from the very limited visual field of the camera render the substitution-even if illusory-of a camera for a person almost impossible. This difficulty, of a visual nature, does not touch very closely upon the fundamental question of the cinema with respect to the novel, but it nevertheless warrants a scrutiny, since the failure of this film in the sphere of psychological transfers provides a general lesson in the analysis of points of view. *The Lady in the Lake*, far from establishing the prescribed identification between the human eye and the camera lens, has demonstrated the near impossibility of such an identification.

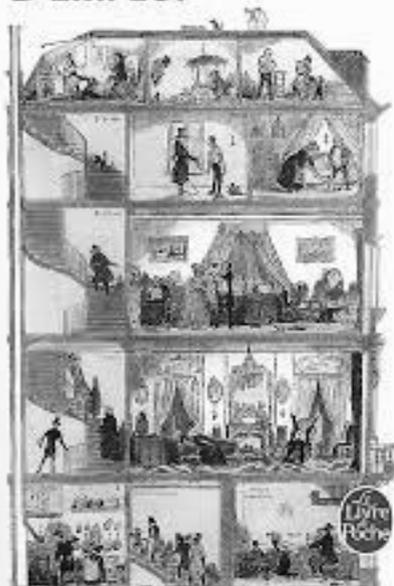
The experience of *The Lady in the Lake* leads us mainly to conclude that the "conventional" points of view-detached from characters and variable in position-of regular cinema (including over-the-shoulder shots, traveling shots, and all the rest) are more adept in producing an identification effect of spectator/character than are the views of an "objective" camera moving in the guise of the narrator's eye. Moreover, the cinematographic critics who most admire *The Lady in the Lake* admit that the film was a failure, and that what might have, or ought to have, passed for the very essence of filmic development in "point of view" simply did not do so. Would the situation have been different had Montgomery deleted his narrator's endless commentary that reaches us from behind the screen had he made it more "objective," limiting his hero's verbal-mental aspect to dialogues with other characters, for example? In such a case, at any rate, the film would have been far more comparable to Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie*. In its present form, *The Lady in the Lake* has almost nothing to do with that novel. Further worth noting is the total absence, between the film and the novel, of parallels in the use of time or of chronology. There is nothing in the film but a linear or literal chronology, with no effort to have the chronological interior of the hero's psychological universe felt, or to penetrate the spatiotemporal dimensions of a narrator situated at the heart of the narrative.



Georges Perec(1936-1982)

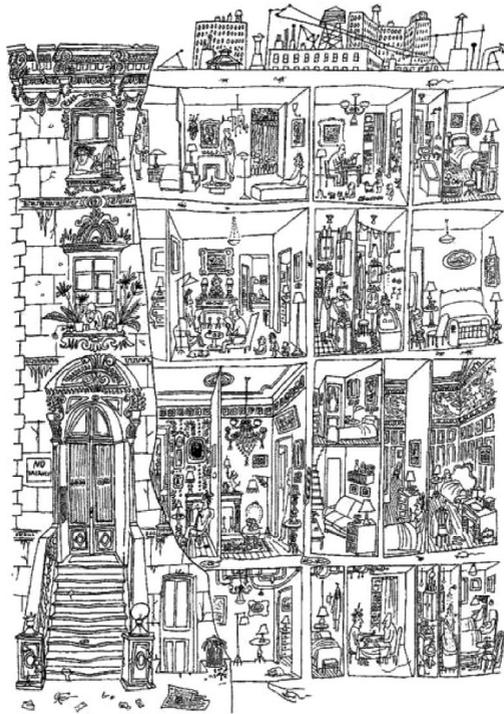
XV  
*Life a User's Maannual*  
(1978)

**LA VIE** Georges  
**MODE** Perec  
**D'EMPLOI**



Georges Perec, *La Vie Mode d'Emploi* (1978)

George Perec's novel, *Life A Users Manual* (1978) focuses particular attention upon domestic artefacts that shape and influence our experience of the interior. Chapter by chapter, room by room, the novel describes a Parisian apartment building, whose façade has been peeled away to expose a cross section of the interior, leaving rooms and residents (both past and present) simultaneously visible. Perec regulates the elements to be described in each chapter: they include inventories of objects, characters, actions, and allusions to other texts. The author employs elaborate organisational principles that are analogous to a structural armature, containing his luxuriant forays into documenting the minutiae of everyday life.



Saul Steinberg, *The Art of Living*

## PREAMBLE

The eye follows the paths that have been laid down for it in the work (Paul Klee, *Pädagogisches Skizzenbuch*) To begin with, the art of jigsaw puzzles seems of little substance, easily exhausted, wholly dealt with by a basic introduction to Gestalt: the perceived object – we may be dealing with a perceptual act, the acquisition of a skill, a physiological system, or, as in the present case, a wooden jigsaw puzzle – is not a sum of elements to be distinguished from each other and analysed discretely, but a pattern, that is to say a form, a structure: the element's existence does not precede the existence of the whole, it comes neither before nor after it, for the parts do not determine the pattern, but the pattern determines the parts: knowledge of the pattern and of its laws, of the set and its structure, could not possibly be derived from discrete knowledge of the elements that compose it. That means that you can look at a piece of a puzzle for three whole days, you can believe that you know all there is to know about its colouring and shape, and be no further on than when you started. The only thing that counts is the ability to link this piece to other pieces, and in that sense the art of the jigsaw puzzle has something in common with the art of go. The pieces are readable, take on a sense, widely and firmly held belief, it does not really matter whether the initial image is easy (or something taken to be easy – a genre scene in the style of Vermeer, for example, or a colour photograph of an Austrian castle) or difficult (a Jackson Pollock, a Pissarro, or the poor paradox of a blank puzzle). It's not the subject of the picture, or the painter's technique, which makes a puzzle more or less difficult, but the greater or lesser subtlety of the way it has been cut; and an arbitrary cutting pattern will necessarily produce an arbitrary degree of difficulty, ranging from the extreme of easiness – for edge pieces, patches of light, well-defined objects, lines, transitions – to the tiresome awkwardness of all the other pieces (cloudless skies, sand, meadow, ploughed land, shaded areas, etc.) and once the edges have been put together, the detail pieces put in place – the very light, almost whitish yellow fringe on the carpet on the table holding a lectern with an open book, the rich edging of the mirror, the lute, the woman's red dress – and the bulk of the background pieces parcelled out according to their shade of grey, brown, white, or sky blue, then solving the puzzle consists simply of trying all the plausible combinations one by one. Pieces in puzzles of this kind come in classes of which the best-known are

## PUZZLE PIECES

The art of jigsaw puzzling begins with wooden puzzles cut by hand, whose maker undertakes to ask himself all the questions the player will have to solve, and, instead of allowing chance to cover his tracks, aims to replace it with cunning, trickery, and subterfuge. All the elements occurring in the image to be reassembled – this armchair covered in gold brocade, that three-pointed black hat with its rather ruined black plume, or that silver-braided bright yellow livery – serve by design as points of departure for trails that lead to false information. The organised, coherent, structured signifying space of the picture is cut up not only into inert, formless elements containing little information or signifying power, but also into falsified elements, carrying false information; two fragments of cornice made to fit each other perfectly when they belong in fact to two quite separate sections of the ceiling, the belt buckle of a uniform which turns out in extremis to be a metal clasp holding the chandelier, several almost identically cut pieces belonging, for one part, to a dwarf orange tree placed on a mantelpiece and, for the other part, to its scarcely attenuated reflection in a mirror, are classic examples of the types of traps puzzle-lovers come across. From this, one can make a deduction which is quite certainly the ultimate truth of jigsaw puzzles: despite appearances, puzzling is not a solitary game: every move the puzzler makes, the puzzle-maker has made before; every piece the puzzler picks up, and picks up again, and studies and strokes, every combination he tries, and tries a second time, every blunder and every insight, each hope and each discouragement have all been designed, calculated, and decided by the other.



CHAPTER ONE  
On the Stairs, 1

YES, IT COULD begin this way, right here, just like that, in a rather slow and ponderous way, in this neutral place that belongs to all and to none, where people pass by almost without seeing each other, where the life of the building regularly and distantly resounds. What happens behind the flats' heavy doors can most often be perceived only through those fragmented echoes, those splinters, remnants, shadows, those first moves or incidents or accidents that happen in what are called the "common areas", soft little sounds damped by the red woollen carpet, embryos of communal life which never go further than the landing. The inhabitants of a single building live a few inches from each other, they are separated by a mere partition wall, they share the same spaces repeated along each corridor, they perform the same movements at the same times, turning on a tap, flushing the water closet, switching on a light, laying the table, a few dozen simultaneous existences repeated from storey to storey, from building to building, from street to street. They entrench themselves in their domestic dwelling space – since that is what it is called – and they would prefer nothing to emerge from it; but the little that they do let out – the dog on a lead, the child off to fetch the bread, someone brought back, someone sent away – comes out by way of the landing. For all that passes, passes by the stairs, and all that comes, comes by the stairs: letters, announcements of births, marriages, and deaths, furniture brought in or taken out by removers, the doctor called in an emergency, the traveller returning from a long voyage. It's because of that that the staircase remains an anonymous, cold, and almost hostile place. In old buildings there used to be stone steps, wrought-iron handrails, sculptures, lamp-holders, sometimes a bench to allow old folk to rest between floors. In modern buildings there are lifts with walls covered in would-be obscene graffiti, and so-called "emergency" staircases in unrendered concrete, dirty and echoing. In this block of flats, where there is an old lift almost always out of order, the staircase is an old-fashioned place of questionable cleanliness, which declines in terms of middle-class respectability as it rises from floor to floor: two thicknesses of carpet as far as the third floor, thereafter only one, and none at all for the two attic floors. Yes, it will begin here: between the third and fourth storey at 11 Rue Simon-Crubbellier. A woman of about forty is climbing the stairs; she is wearing a long imitation-leather raincoat and on her head a kind of felt hat shaped like a sugar-loaf, something like what one imagines a goblin's hat to be, divided into red and grey squares. A big dun canvas hold-all, a case of the sort commonly called overnight bags, hangs on her right shoulder. A small cambric handkerchief is knotted through one of the chromed metal rings which attach the bag to its strap. Three motifs, which look as if they had been printed with a stencil, are regularly repeated over the whole fabric of the bag: a large pendulum clock, a round loaf cut through the middle, and a kind of copper receptacle without handles.

The woman is looking at a plan held in her left hand. It's just a sheet of paper, whose still visible creases attest to its having been folded in four, fixed by a paperclip to a thick cyclostyled volume – the terms of co-ownership relating to the flat this woman is about to visit. On the sheet there are in fact not one but three sketch-plans: the first, at the top right-hand corner, shows where the building is, roughly halfway along Rue Simon-Crubbellier, which cuts at an angle across the quadrilateral formed by Rue Médéric, Rue Jadin, Rue de Chazelles, and Rue Léon Jost, in the Plaine Monceau district of the XVIIth arrondissement of Paris; the second, at the top left-hand corner, is a vertical cross-section of the building giving a diagrammatic picture of the layout of the flats and the names of some of the residents: Madame Nochère, concierge; Madame de Beaumont, second floor right; Bartlebooth, third floor left; Rémi Rorschach, television producer, fourth floor left; Dr Dinteville, sixth floor left, as well as the empty flat, sixth floor right, occupied by Gaspard Winckler, craftsman, until his death; the third plan, in the lower half of the sheet, is of Winckler's flat: three rooms facing the street, kitchen and bathroom on the courtyard side, and a boxroom without natural light.



The woman carries in her right hand a bulky set of keys, no doubt the keys of all the flats she has inspected that day; some are fixed to novelty key-rings: a miniature bottle of Marie Brizard apéritif, a golf tee and a wasp, a double-six domino, and a plastic octagonal token in which is set a tuberose flower.

It is almost two years since Gaspard Winckler died. He had no child. He was not known to have any surviving family. Bartlebooth entrusted a notary with the task of finding any heirs he might have. His only sister, Madame Anne Voltimand, died in 1942. His nephew, Grégoire Voltimand, had been killed on the Garigliano in May 1944, at the breakthrough on the Gustav line. The notary took many months to unearth a third cousin of Winckler's called Antoine Rameau, who worked for a manufacturer of knockdown divans. The taxes on the inheritance, added to the legal costs of the search for heirs, turned out to be so high that Antoine Rameau had to auction off everything. It is already a few months since the furniture was dispersed at the Sale Rooms, and a few weeks since the flat was bought by a property agency.

The woman climbing the stairs is not the director of the property agency, but his assistant; she doesn't deal with the commercial side, nor with customer relations, but only with the technical problems. From the property angle, the deal is a good one, the area is decent, the façade is of ashlar, the staircase is OK despite the agedness of the lift, and the woman is now coming to inspect in greater detail the condition of the flat itself, to draw up a more detailed plan of the accommodation with, for instance, thicker lines to distinguish structural walls from partitions and arrowheaded semicircles to show which way the doors open, and to decide on the work needed, to make a preliminary costing for complete refurbishment: the partition wall between the toilet and the boxroom to be knocked down, allowing the installation of a bathroom with a slipper-bath and WC; the kitchen tiles to be renewed; a wall-mounted gas-fired boiler (giving both central heating and hot water) to replace the old coal-fired boiler; the woodblock floor with its zigzag moulding to be lifted and replaced by a layer of cement, a felt underlay, and a fitted carpet.

Not much is left of these three small rooms in which Gaspard Winckler lived and worked for nearly forty years. His few pieces of furniture, his small workbench, his jigsaw, his minute files have gone. On the bedroom wall, opposite his bed, beside the window, that square picture he loved so much is no longer: it showed an antechamber with three men in it. Two were standing, pale and fat, dressed in frock-coats and wearing top hats which seemed screwed to their heads. The third, similarly dressed in black, was sitting by the door in the attitude of a man expecting visitors, slowly putting a pair of tight-fitting new gloves on over his fingers.

The woman is going up the stairs. Soon, the old flat will become a charming pied-à-terre, two recept. + bedr., all mod. cons., open outlook, quiet. Gaspard Winckler is dead, but the long and meticulous, patiently laid plot of his revenge is not finished yet.

(...)



SaulSteinberg, *Room Interior*

LIFE A USER'S MANUAL:  
GEORGE PEREC'S OCCUPATION OF THE  
INTERIOR

Life challenges definitions of realism in literature by utilising 'Oulipian' constraints. Perec was a member of OuLiPo (Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle, or "Workshop of Potential Literature"), a group of writers dedicated to the study of literary form based on systems of rigorous formal constraint, appropriating formal patterns and strategies from domains like mathematics, logic, and chess. Captivated by word games, Perec liberally deployed palindromes, anagrams and lipograms throughout his work.

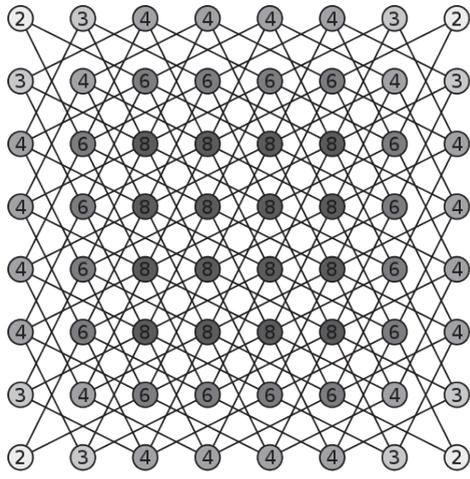
The layout of the apartments within the novel makes reference to the dimensions of a chessboard, measuring ten storeys high by ten rooms wide. The sequence of the chapters has been determined by the knight's tour of the chessboard, where the knight moves around the board landing on every square only once. This formal device serves to reinforce the disruption of narrative continuity throughout the novel. Another arcane organizational constraint Perec used involved an algorithm borrowed from higher mathematics known as the "orthogonal Latin bi-square order 10". This algorithm was used to elaborate pre-established lists of forty-two different elements, including objects, characters, situations, literary allusions and quotations, that figure in each chapter of the novel.

Throughout *Life*, Perec also enlists Situationist strategies of détournement and collage, which involve dispersing existing texts into new formal relationships. His détournement of literature has an uncanny effect, as Bellos notes, for they create "that unique and disturbing atmosphere common to dreams, in which things seem at once familiar and strange." This is emblemized by one of *Life's* central characters, Percival Bartlebooth, who was based upon two literary protagonists: Bartleby, from Herman Melville's short story, *Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street* (1853) and the central

character from Valéry Larbaud's novel, *The Diary of A.O. Barnabooth: A Novel* (c. 1913). Perec employs complex organisational principles in his novel that are analogous to some form of structural armature, which contains the author's luxuriant forays into documenting the minutiae of everyday life. As a member of the literary group Cause Commune, he was committed to the 'infra-ordinary', and was closely engaged with observing and recording everyday, banal occurrences. It is precisely these banal domestic settings that Perec illuminates throughout his novel.

Perec's characters are defined through things, by the material artefacts they surround themselves with. Prior to writing *Life*, the author produced *Things* (1965), a story which uses a young couple, and their environment, as a critique of consumer society. The narrative consists of a description of the things the couple own and the objects they desire. The couple define themselves through things, but as Emerson notes, on the other hand "it is things that define them." Identity formation is thereby contingent upon conspicuous consumption.

*Life* constructs a snapshot of the apartment and its inhabitants at one moment in time. Each chapter of the novel begins with a detailed description of a room within the apartment building. Initially, a judicious selection of objects and interiors details are described, and, through these descriptions, the reader begins to learn small, personal details about the residents occupying each room. Each object has its own itinerant history that helps the reader construct a partial biography of the resident. The psychological interiors of Perec's characters are not excavated in detail. The distancing effects of the narration are due to these indirect character descriptions. They are also a consequence of the regulatory principles Perec superimposes on the narrative.



*Knights Tower Graph, showing number of possible moves*

*CE QUI EST AMUSANT DANS LE JEU,  
C'EST LE RISQUE.*

By Georges Perec

PARABLES OF PERECQUIAN PLAY:  
A USER'S GUIDE

Unlike O'Brien and Beckett, whose Play strategies emerge only through an inductive analysis of the Play structures embedded in their texts, Georges Perec openly and actively discussed the nature of his literary project in interviews, essays, and theoretical writings. In *Life: A User's Manual* (*La Vie mode d'emploi*) the elements of Play so thoroughly set forth in *Petit traité invitant à la découverte de tart subtil du Go* - strategy, creativity, innovation, error, and dialogue - are concretized into forms of literal game-playing that, throughout the text, function as metaphors for a variety of social interactions. For Perec, the material product of the creative process - be it a painting, a performance, or a text - achieves artistic merit through its distance or proximity to the spirit of Perecquian Play. At the level of the text, the metaphor of game-playing expands to accommodate love, romance, business, painting, fraud, and fantasy, all of which serve at times as potential models for the relationships that exist between authors and readers.

Within the now significant body of secondary material that surrounds Perec's oeuvre, and particularly *Life: A User's Manual* (LAUM), few studies consider how Perec's complex structural games are related to his themes, and how these themes point readers to a larger ethical and philosophical agenda. The majority of LAUM's criticism deals with its formal aspects, and understandably so. Perec's association with the OuLiPo has generated an intense critical enterprise focusing on the highly complex literary "constraints" and mathematical formulae he uses to generate his texts. This emphasis on formal criticism has been very useful, particularly in that it has supplied a useful taxonomy of terms with which to talk about rule-guided texts, including "Glitches," "Free-fire Zones," "Clinamen," "Superconstraints," and "Metaconstraints." The necessity and massive scope of this quasi-speleological critical enterprise, however, has so occupied readers that few thematic analyses exist, as what Perec is saying is often eclipsed by the strangeness of how he is saying it.

Admittedly, it is a major critical task

merely to understand the mathematical equations and constraints that lend structure to this novel, let alone to analyze their application. The novel's genetic manuscripts, enumerating the constraints Perec imposed on himself during the writing of this novel, have been published as *Les Cahiers de charges de Lift: A User's Manual* [the CDC]. The CDC reveals the rigorous formal structures that were intended to guide the novel's construction, and substantiates the degree to which game-playing inspired and determined much of the novel's structure.

For those who are perhaps new to Perec, let me give a concrete example of some of these literary constraints he imposed on himself while writing LAUM, and how they practically impact the text. The novel is set in an apartment building at 11 rue Simon-Crubellier; some apartments in this building are studios, others have multiple rooms, and each chapter in the novel is set in one of the rooms. The one hundred rooms of the building that face the street correspond to an image of a ten-by-ten chessboard designed by Perec as a dimensional model for the building (a standard chessboard is eight by eight). In other words, with each new chapter, the reader is figuratively moving along a chessboard designed by Perec. To determine how the chapters are ordered (in which room they will be set as the chapters progress) Perec found the solution to the Knight's Tour on the ten-by-ten board (see figure 8). However, another constraint, "manque," demands that something be left out of this constraint. So, to account for this absence, he removes the Knight's sixty-sixth move and no chapter is set in the bottom left-hand corner room of the apartment building (one of the rooms of the cellars).

59	84	15	10	57	48	7	52	45	54
98	11	58	83	16	9	46	55	6	51
85	60	97	14	47	56	49	8	53	44
12	99	82	87	96	17	28	43	50	5
61	86	13	18	27	80	95	4	41	30
100	71	26	81	88	1	42	29	94	3
25	62	89	70	19	36	79	2	31	40
72	65	20	23	90	69	34	37	78	93
63	24	67	74	35	22	91	76	39	32
66	73	64	21	68	75	38	33	92	77

FIGURE 8: PEREC'S SOLUTION TO THE KNIGHT'S TOUR ON A 10 X 10 BOARD

8 <sup>th</sup> Floor	59 <i>Honoré</i>	83	15 Smauff	10 Sutton	57 Orłowska	48 Albin	7 Morellet	52 <i>Simpson</i>	45 <i>Trojan</i>	54 <i>Troquet</i>
7 <sup>th</sup> Floor	97 Hutting	11	58 Gratiolet	82 Gratiolet	16 Crespi	9 Nieto & Rogers	46 Jérôme	55 Fresnel	6 Bridel	51 Valère
6 <sup>th</sup> Floor	84 <i>Brodin-Gratiolet</i>	60 Cinoc	96 Dr. Dinteville	14 Dr. Dinteville	47 Gratiolet	56 17	49 28	8 43	53 50	44 5
5 <sup>th</sup> Floor	12 Réal	98	81 Rorschach	86 Rorschach	95 Grifalconi	79 79	94 Stairs	4 4	41 Marquiseaux	30 Echard
4 <sup>th</sup> Floor	61 Spicis Berger	85	13 80	18 80	27 87	1 1	42 42	29 29	93 93	3 3
3 <sup>rd</sup> Floor	99 Bartlebooth	70 Dauglars	26 Dauglars	80 Dauglars	87 Dauglars	1 1	42 42	29 29	93 93	3 3
2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor	25 Altamont	62 Appenzel	88 Appenzel	69 Appenzel	19 Appenzel	36 36	78 78	2 2	31 De Beaumont	40 40
1 <sup>st</sup> Floor	71 Moreau	65 Moreau	20 Moreau	23 Moreau	89 Moreau	68 68	34 34	37 37	77 Louvet	92 92
Ground Floor	63 Service Entrance	24 Marcia's Antiques	66 Marcia's Antiques	73 Marcia's Antiques	35 Claveau Nochere	22 22	90 Entrance Hall	75 75	39 Marcia	32 Massy
Basement	72 Cellar	64 Boiler Room	21 Boiler Room	67 Cellar	67 Cellar	74 74	38 Elevator Machinery	33 33	91 Cellar	76 Cellar

\* Previous occupant's name in italics

Schematic section of the 11, Rue Simon Crubellier, showing the tenants position

The ordering of the chapters follows the Knight's journey across the board until square sixty-six, which is blacked out, and subsequent numbers are adjusted to account for this missing room. Square sixty-seven becomes sixty-six, square sixty-eight becomes sixty-seven and so on, until the final chapter ninety-nine. Each chapter can be plotted out to follow his progression (see figures 8 and 9). This is the first of dozens of constraints, most of which are far more complex. Perec also used a GrecoLatin bi-square order 10 as his means of distributing certain descriptive elements across each chapter. The bi-square works by using an initial table of lists. List number fifteen determines the length of individual chapters; list number twelve determines where the action will take place; list twenty-seven determines what paintings will appear in the chapter, or at least be alluded to when the decor of the room is described. Using his unique distribution system, Perec created a veritable structure-machine, with which he was able to systematically distribute predetermined elements of his novel before it was written.

However, the actual impact of Perec's structure-machine is debatable. A closer look at the implementation of one of the elements determined by a distribution list for the bi-square, "Activite erotique," may cause readers to question just how formative this system was. Erotic activity could be expected to appear in ten chapters. Yet, in three of the chapters where it is implemented, chapters twenty-four, fifty-five, and eighty-three, it operates in such varied degrees of centrality and significance that the flexibility of this "constraint" calls into question whether it is much of a constraint at all. In chapter twenty-four, the erotic element is represented by a pornographic engraving entitled "The Servants," which is lying in the back room of Madame Marcia's antique shop. The description of the engraving constitutes one very short paragraph, buried amidst a catalogue of objects, furniture, and other pictures. It is a purely descriptive feature and is almost lost among other more detailed descriptions. Even less conspicuous are the five lines describing a man in his thirties masturbating with inflatable dolls in chapter fifty-five. This brief episode is entirely unrelated structurally or thematically to the central narrative of the chapter, and this character never appears again. However, in chapter eighty-two, the erotic element dominates the plot concerning the Danglars, as it is the motivation for their crime spree. The discrepancy

in the degree of eroticism within these respective chapters could in no way be prefigured by the distribution lists. In other words, the lists generated by the GrecoLatin bi-square order 10 provide no mechanism for creating the ideas, histories, and dispositions of the characters, and more significantly, no mechanism for determining plot or theme. At most they provide a creative "prompt"-a starting point for Perec to begin writing. Minor plot elements throughout LAUM, such as whether a character is sitting, standing, or kneeling, or whether there is a tragic or erotic charge to a situation, were shaped by the author's use of the bi-square. Certainly LAUM would have been considered a masterpiece even if its Oulipian constraints had never been revealed. These hundreds of elements alone have little or no bearing on the final product. However, these formal games do have thematic import. LAUM is a Play-Text. The elements that render it Oulipian serve as a means of metatextually scrutinizing its own construction. Perec's use of Oulipian tools facilitates a critical examination of these very tools-an examination with philosophical implications.

Although Perec's project will reveal itself as one which challenges conventions of reading and writing, his themes are revealed through the highly recognizable, even conventional, structure of the parable. The individual stories, which are sometimes brief and self-contained and other times continued across the course of several chapters, are parables of Play, and when read as an ensemble constitute the novel as a whole. To underscore this appeal to such a conventional form, Perec provides a Chaucerian-style index which catalogues and names relevant parables: "The Puzzle-maker's Tale," "The Tale of the Man who Bought the Vase of the Passion," "The Tale of the Cheated Doctor." But even without such giveaways, the structure of the parable is unmistakable. Each is potentially self-sufficient, but also functions as a constituent piece of a larger novelistic totality-a novel-puzzle. When pieced together and viewed as a whole, readers can see how Perec has clearly established the link in his mind between the strategies of two-person game playing and the strategies of reading, writing, and interpretation. Perec's conception of Play, perhaps an idealized one at times, serves as an ethical premise against which the artistic nluue of modes of creation and interaction may be evaluated. According to Perec, ethical art demands that the intercourse between creator and interpreter take



*Staircase of a Haussmann Building*

place within a dimension of uncorrupted Play. But the challenges of playing fairly while being innovative are made explicit again and again throughout his micronarratives.

The independent and often unrelated internal narratives that constitute the larger text are parables whose meaning is seized only when read in the context of one another, and whose characters metaphorically represent generic readers and writers. In each of the tales analyzed here, plot and characterization are used to represent a social interaction that is implicitly or explicitly a game. Characters themselves establish the rules of their respective games, then begin to Play-following or violating the rules of their self-defined system. The degree of integrity or corruption of the game as acted out by these characters determines the parable's denouement. Some characters are rewarded and others are punished, but unlike biblical parables, Perec's tales are never overtly didactic. Perec chooses to allow thematic patterns to emerge, which enable readers to perceive the author's own ethical biases. For Perec, it is the nature of the process of creation itself that ultimately determines the quality of what is produced.

Perec's likening of the act of reading to the art of puzzling in "The Puzzlemaker's Tale" is certainly one of the most explicit and inviting examples of autoexegesis:

*To begin with, the art of jigsaw puzzles seems of little substance, easily exhausted, wholly dealt with by a basic introduction to Gestalt: the perceived object-we may be dealing with a perceptual act, the acquisition of a skill, a physiological system, or as in the present case, a wooden jigsaw puzzle-is not a sum of the elements to be distinguished from each other and analysed discretely, but a pattern, that is to say a form, a structure ... The only thing that counts is the ability to link this piece to other pieces ... The pieces are readable, take on a sense, only when assembled; in isolation, a puzzle piece means nothing-just an impossible question, an opaque challenge.*

In spite of all the hints and the evidence left in plain sight, there is an inherent challenge embedded in the structure of LAUM. The reader must find and sort the pieces of this literary puzzle

in order to learn (or re-learn) how to play, while simultaneously engaging Perec in a literary game that he has created on his own terms. The reader of this text must learn to play the reading game according to new rules, rules that require her to decipher clues to a lesson about the meaning of Play. It is precisely the perceptive act that is at the heart of this text. Hidden in this challenge to the reader is the beginning of Perec's own game of deception and distraction that he will play throughout the text.

Inherent in these funny, quirky, banal, extravagant, and tragic tales is an overarching theme, an ethical consideration of the processes of creation and reception. When read as an ensemble, they become a powerful thematic force in the text. "Les pieces" [pieces] of the puzzletext correspond to "les pieces" [rooms] of the apartment house at 11 rue Simon-Crubellier.

Here, I have chosen tales that give a general sense of how Perec's puzzle works, and how similar themes dealing with aspects of Play unite these micronarratives. Each parable is important as it deals with a different genre of human behavior-social, academic, erotic, violent-yet the so-called 'rights' and 'wrongs' invoked should be seen as metaphorical stand-ins for Perec's central subject-the integrity of the literary project. These parables are those Perec uses to establish the rules of Play, as well as to demonstrate the aptness of the game as a metaphor for human interaction. I will at times refer to elements quite clearly intended to fulfill the obligations of one or another formal constraint set forth in CDC. However, LAUM is as creative as it is controlled. A closer look at the stories clearly indicates that philosophies, passions, ideas, and inspiration have a meaningful critical role in Perecquian scholarship. Of course, many of the parables contain a variety of social and philosophical themes external to the game-metaphor. But this is not Perec's imposition of a normative literary ethics. It would be too simplistic to argue that Perec is promoting a singular ideal of literary creation. It is precisely the complex modes and motives for Play that make it such a successful metaphor for human interaction as perceived and represented by him. The Play element in his writing is so significant that it merits categorical investigation.

Kimberly Bohman-Kalaja, *Reading Games:  
an Aesthetics of Play in Flann O'Brien, Samuel Becket & Georges Perec* (2007)



*Haussmann Façade*

While *Life a User's Manual* does give the reader certain hints as to the game it is playing (various allusions to chess are made within the text), the requirement for the reader to piece together these various oblique references in order to decipher the novel's underlying narrative structure conjures up yet another form of play. The novel's preamble is dedicated to a treatise on the "art of jigsaw puzzling", which -contrary to appearances and unlike the puzzle of the knight's tour-is "not a solitary game". Instead, the act of jigsaw puzzling constitutes a kind of dialogue between puzzle maker and puzzler; between author and reader. Thus Perec's novel calls for an active independent reader, one who must recognize, first, that there is indeed a puzzle to solve even before becoming a participant in the "game" of puzzling. The puzzle that Perec's reader must solve, however, is not of the "machine-made" variety, whose pieces are "arbitrarily" shaped (xii), thereby producing an "arbitrary degree of difficulty". Rather, it is a handmade, unique puzzle whose creator cuts up "the organised, coherent, structured signifying space of the picture [ ... ] [not only] into inert, formless elements containing little information or signifying power, but also into falsified elements, carrying false information". From this, Perec states, one can deduce "the ultimate truth of jigsaw puzzles": "every move the puzzler makes, the puzzlemaker has made before; every piece the puzzler picks up, and picks up again, and studies and strokes, every combination he tries, and tries a second time, every blunder and every insight, each hope and each discouragement have all been designed, calculated and decided by the other".

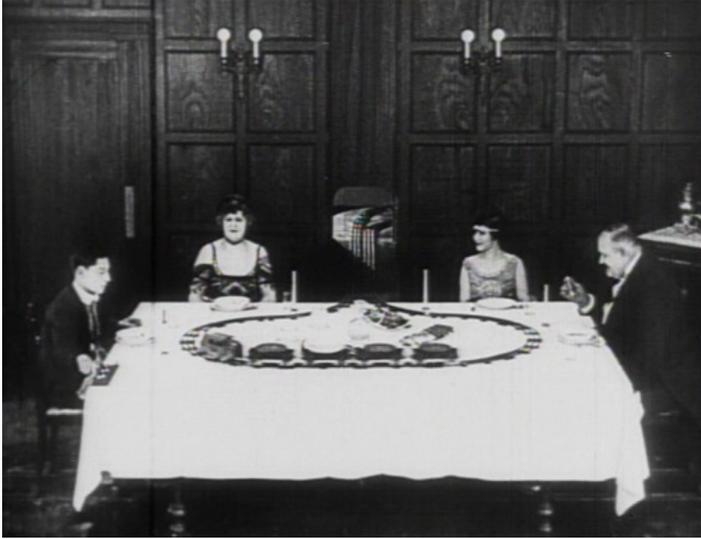
(...)

*Life a User's Manual* is thus an exemplary architext, self-reflexively articulating the impossibility of a totalizing architecture. While the novel at first seems to force a rational-modernist structure onto the lives of its inhabitants, the enclosure of meaning implied by the apartment building's classical architecture is shown to be impossible. The total structure fails, and the knight's tour is rendered incomplete. Thus the novel frees the reader from the "tyranny of the straight line" by positing the idea of architecture and literature as a game to be played between author-architect and readerinhabitant. Moreover, *Life a User's Manual* presents itself as a Yatesian "theatre of memory" -a space in which lives are played out. Above all, the novel is a celebration of the quotidian, enquiring into the way in which people-readers and dwellersexperience and negotiate the architectures of their everyday lives.



- Epistulae, The Letters of Pliny the Consul** (1st c. AD)  
Pliny the Young
- Dangerous Liaisons** (1782)  
Choderlos de Laclos
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