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# THE METEMPSYCHOTIC ROOM: PROUST, HIS SIBLINGS, AND HIS AVATARS

When the moment came to write *À la recherche du temps perdu*, Marcel Proust retreated to a room. His life had changed in 1905: following the death of his widowed mother, he vacated the family home in the rue de Courcelles and moved in 1906 to 102, boulevard Haussmann. Proust's apartment, on the first floor, was large, consisting of five rooms, with a kitchen, a pantry, and a bathroom. Initially, he intended to make the smaller salon his principal room. Between the very end of 1907 and the autumn of 1908, he began to work on the several projects that would lead ultimately to the *Recherche*. Each year from 1908 to 1914, he made an annual visit to the coast at Cabourg. In August 1914, as France entered war, he took with him all of his manuscripts, and had difficult outward and return journeys. He was never to leave Paris or its environs again, although he was compelled quite unexpectedly to quit the boulevard Haussmann in 1919, when the building was sold from under his feet. In October of that year, he moved to 44, rue Hamelin, where he resided until his death in November 1922.[1]

From 1906, then, Proust led a fully independent life in rooms he adapted to his needs. Over time, his state of health meant that it was to his bedroom that he kept more and more. Its consecration as a refuge, a place of confinement and self-medication, a shrine to the memory of his parents, a setting for improvised recitals of chamber music, and above all as the site of long hours of work, meant that it came to embody a highly productive, if singular, way of life. In 1910, he had it lined with cork, a further act of self-enclosure and self-protection from the noise of the city and the block in which he lived, disturbances that were for Proust magnified by his long-ingrained habit of sleeping by day and working by night. His social life was likewise nocturnal. During the war, he experienced a return of youth, assiduously frequented the Ritz Hotel, and became close to a generation of younger writers.[2] In the afternoon of 10 December 1919, he was sound asleep when Gaston Gallimard called to announce that he had won the Prix Goncourt; this welcome news was relayed by Céleste Albaret, his housekeeper, scribe, and nurse, with the publisher then having to insist on being admitted for a consultation with his author that was to be brief.[3]

The novel itself opens in what we take to be the room of the mysterious 'je' whom we encounter in its first sentence, the one, that is, where in his sleepy state he will seem to flit between several others that he has inhabited or frequented. In the now proverbial opening line, the Narrator recalls that period of his life when he kept to conventional hours: 'Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure' ['For a long time I would go to bed early'].[4] There were nights when sleep was instantaneous. But then a little later he would make as if to put away the book he had been reading, only to find that he had already done so. In the meantime, his thoughts had merged with its contents. Such a 'croyance', or belief, though not at the outset absolutely irreconcilable with reason, soon does become unintelligible. As he is somehow united with the substance of whichever volume it happens to be, the

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[1] Jean-Yves Tadié, *Marcel Proust: biographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), 560–70; 648–50; 663; 680; 697; 826–27; 734, 809–16. For a plan of Proust's apartment in the boulevard Haussmann, see Marcel Proust, *Lettres à sa voisine*, ed. Estelle Gaudry and Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Gallimard, 2013), 76.

[2] Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, 754; 650; 764–65. On neighbours and noise, see also Proust, *Lettres à sa voisine*.

[3] Thierry Laget, *Proust, prix Goncourt: une émeute littéraire* (Paris: Gallimard, 2019), 119–21.

[4] *RTP*, 1: 3; *SLT*, 1: 1.

Narrator reports that what has come about is a 'métempsycose' [metempsychosis], or a transmigration of souls: these moments are as if tokens of a prior existence.[5]

So the novel begins on first publication in 1913, with the unearthly apparition of what will prove to be a Celtic cross-current of some moment. Forty pages further on, at the point of broaching the scene of the *madeleine*, Proust will again evoke the process of transmigration: drawing possibly on Jules Michelet's *Histoire de France* (*History of France*), where the term 'métempsycose' is applied to notions of the eternal survival and transmutation of the soul, he alludes to it as a 'croyance celtique' ['Celtic belief'].[6] This beguiling motif loomed large among Proust's earliest folio sketches for the future novel in 1907 or 1908. In the first known rehearsal of the resurgence of involuntary memory, such a connection is made explicit, as this pivotal experience is equated with transmigration: just as in the 'légende bretonne' ['Breton legend'] to which he refers there, a present moment is transfigured, in this case by the restoration of a flavour of the past.[7] By late 1908 or early 1909, Proust began to write in bound notebooks, rather than on loose leaves as before, and so adapted his practice to his environment: these were easier to handle when writing in bed. In one of them, he has his Narrator, once more, recall that he had read somewhere of 'une légende bretonne' (possibly derived, as Max McGuinness argues earlier in this volume, from a book of Breton folklore by Anatole Le Braz). It is on this source that he draws, as he develops an account of the sensations unleashed by the taste — in this version — of some continental toast dipped in tea.[8]

The nocturnal room is likewise the subject of a series of drafts and redrafts, in one of which the Narrator-To-Be, as he lapses into sleepy confusion, struggles to identify the setting in which he finds himself. Anticipating what would become the title of the work as a whole, he declares himself to be 'à la recherche d'un gîte et d'un temps' [in search of a shelter and a moment in time].[9] A little later in the same series of drafts, the process of regaining one's habitual bearings is said to be akin to that of reconstructing the present bedroom from all of the others that exist in memory: once the uncertainty is dissipated, a dividing line between the space in which one has just awoken and the residual traces of all of the earlier, now — so to speak — dormant, alternatives at last becomes tangible.[10] And again, at a still later stage of composition, it is nothing less than 'le plan de ma chambre' [the plan of my room], its orientation, design and contents, that dissolve in the moment of falling asleep. At once quite literally and quite fantastically, 'la métempsycose s'opérait' [metempsychosis was at work]. So Proust writes in 1909 in an independent clause notable for its lapidary concision. It forms part of an addition to a working typescript that was not to be incorporated into the final text.[11] But in the end, this piece of lore, having figured as something of a resource for Proust in his workings on the several components of his narrative, is given pride of place in the opening paragraph of the novel itself.

If, then, this notion assumes some prominence from the beginning of the novel, it is because Proust drew on it repeatedly and quite decisively in his early drafts: in quick succession it transmigrates, sustaining his work on the separate narrative threads of the mobile bedchamber and the intense if volatile onset of involuntary memory. In the context of 'Combray', it also assumes a structural function: two references, one simply to metempsychosis, a term derived from the Greek, and the other to the 'croyance celtique'

[5] Proust, *RTP*, 1: 3 (my translation); cf. *SLT*, 1: 1.

[6] Proust, *RTP*, 1: 43–44 and 1122; SLT, 1: 50. See Jules Michelet, *Histoire de France*, 1 (Paris: Hachette, 1833), 42–43.

[7] Marcel Proust, *Les Soixante-Quinze Feuillets et autres manuscrits inédits*, ed. Nathalie Mauriac Dyer (Paris: Gallimard, 2021), 128–29; *The Seventy-Five Folios and Other Unpublished Manuscripts*, ed. Nathalie Mauriac Dyer and trans. Sam Taylor (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023) 81–82.

[8] *RTP*, 1: 695 (Cahier 8).

[9] Marcel Proust, *Essais*, ed. Antoine Compagnon, Christophe Pradeau, and Matthieu Vernet (Paris: Gallimard, 2022), 718 (Cahier 3).

[10] Proust, *Essais*, 737 (Cahier 1).

[11] Proust, *RTP*, 1: 637 (Cahier 3); 1086 (typescript).

that underpins it, frame the first chapter. At the end of this span of fifty or so pages in the original edition, the wider environment of the little town is retrieved from a cup of tea: this outcome is heralded by the latter invocation on the reflective Narrator's part of the Celtic belief system.[12] He can then turn in the second of two chapters to its external aspect, the lives of its inhabitants, its architecture, and the two ways. It is indeed striking to note that it is to an architectural lexicon that Proust's appeals almost instinctively in characterizing such settings, irrespective of the state of consciousness in which they are accessed. The word 'plan', for instance, recurs both in these segments and later more widely, and with a range of senses, including, architecturally speaking, that of a projection or drawing on a horizontal surface displaying a view from above, or, perspectivally speaking, that of a series of items receding in linear sequence. In the novel's opening, he records that 'il suffisait que [...] mon sommeil fût profond et détendît entièrement mon esprit; alors celui-ci lâchait le plan du lieu où je m'étais endormi' ['it was enough if [...] my sleep was so heavy as completely to relax my consciousness; for then I could no longer retain the plan of the place where I had fallen asleep'].[13] What is dissolved here is the room's design, the distribution of its doors and windows, and also its contents, disposed as all of these would be in a floor plan.[14] Proust's emergent Narrator thinks of space in abstract terms, then, and repeatedly throws into relief the three-dimensional potentialities of the rooms he inhabits. Being himself, he says, both an 'architecte' and a 'tapissier' [interior decorator], he is finally able to delineate their actual configurations as dawn breaks, and so his reveries on past habitats come to a close. This self-characterization, and a series of new references to spatial variations among remembered rooms, again have a framing effect, for these are the conceits on which Proust draws in the very final paragraph of 'Combray'.[15]

Far from being incidental, an architectonic sense of space is, like the motif of metempsychosis with which it is closely associated, central to Proust's earliest inklings of his project. This sense proves in turn to be intrinsic to his emergent conception of novelistic practice and design. As Anthony Vidler observes of Proust's famous opening to his novel, what is in play is a subtle, expressive, and kinetic '*re*-formulation in modern terms' of Vitruvian bodily projection.[16] For his own part, Proust chooses to invoke an architectural precedent at a very early point in his labours, though one whose provenance is literary. In *Carnet 1*, one of four notebooks in which he began in 1908 to record elements of the plot and plans for the configuration of the work, he extols a certain architect-novelist as a model artisan of geometric construction in fiction. The novels of Thomas Hardy, he notes, 'sont construits [...] superposablement' [are constructed by means of superimposition]: the recurrence from one work to the next of certain elements, indeed, certains avatars, like tombs, boats, train carriages, a piece of sculpture, blocks of stone, and even houses mean that the series of which they form part is served and shaped by an unmistakably architectural scheme, an 'admirable parallélisme géométrique' [admirable geometric parallelism].[17] In a reflexive twist, this reference will be incorporated into the novel, when the Narrator imparts exactly the same lesson to Albertine.[18]

[12] Proust, *RTP*, 1: 4; 43–47; *SLT*, 1: 50–55.

[13] Proust, *RTP*, 1: 5; *SLT*, 1: 4 (translation modified). For an instance of the perspectival sense, which corresponds to the English word 'plane' and where reference is made to an oblique view of the church of Saint-Augustin in Paris, see *RTP*, 1: 65; *SLT*, 1: 77.

[14] For just such a plan to scale of Proust's own room, based on the Rue Hamelin, see Dogma, *The Room of One's Own: The Architecture of the (Private) Room* (Milan: Black Square, 2017), 113; for a perspectival drawing in *ligne claire* of the same space, see *ibid*., 75.

[15] Proust, *RTP*, 1: 184; *SLT*, 1: 223–24. The role of a 'tapissier-décorateur' in Haussmannian Paris was to facilitate the occupier of an unfurnished apartment in arranging and equipping it according to taste; see Roy Johnston, *Parisian Architecture of the Belle Epoque* (Chichester: Wiley, 2007), 49.

[16] Anthony Vidler, 'The Building in Pain: The Body and Architecture in Post-Modern Culture', *AA Files* no. 19 (1990): 3–10 (6) (italics mine).

[17] Marcel Proust, *Carnets*, ed. Florence Callu and Antoine Compagnon (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), 116–17.

[18] Proust, *RTP*, 3: 878–79; *SLT*, 5: 430.

When it comes to his own novel, Proust avails of the potential of the room as a spatial and narrative figure. His account in the novel's opening paragraphs of a moment of apparent self-decomposition in the metempsychotic room is, as Vidler carefully notes, succeeded by a recomposition no less consequential, that of 'les traits originaux de mon moi' [my self's original traits].[19] The 'moi' resurfaces in an actual room and finally knows where it is he finds himself and when, even if not all of this information is disclosed to the reader. It is apparently from a metropolitan home that he speaks, no doubt on the Right Bank of the river.[20] At all events, in the wake of the episode of the *madeleine*, the narrative shifts into a three-dimensional realm over which it will range even more widely than in this opening scene, a domain made up of entities that are 'consistants' ['solid'] and 'reconnaissables' ['recognisable'].[21] Emblematic references to spatial transmigration come to co-exist with an architectural programme that gives a sustained, though fluid, place to the room as a spatial quantity, a unit of design with form, purpose, and adjacencies. The Narrator's spatial awareness equips him to assimilate the arrangement of this and in turn the other rooms, apartments, hotels, palaces, and so on, that he will frequent in the course of his narrative. Its substance will unfold accordingly, along with its architecture in the widest sense, as these spaces come to be characterized not only according to their location, their volume, orientation, and fixtures, their visual appearance, their role in their environment, their antiquity or their novelty, but also the relationships that come to exist between them in the plot, and above all in the design and the telling of the story. So, Venice, for the Narrator at least, is an avatar of Combray. It is in this way that a distinctively Proustian architectural mode functions precisely as a blueprint, and sustains the novelist's own ambitious, complex, and proliferating literary experiment.

The full range of architectural reference in the novel proves to be broad. For one thing, Proust declares early on his intention of writing 'un roman parisien' [a novel of Paris].[22] The work's architectural plot as such is tripartite. It encompasses, as well as this projected component, the Balbec and Venice segments, each of these constituents having its own signatures and amenities, and involving some buildings as revolutionary as those in imperial and post-imperial Paris. So, the novel juxtaposes a spectrum of main homes in the capital with extra-domestic environments in Balbec and Venice, all three of these cardinal locales being linked by the trains on which the Narrator travels to and fro: mobility and architectural as well as spatial effects go hand-in-hand in the novel, at all locations, scales, and velocities. There are two urban settings out of three, then, Paris and Venice, the first of these being presented as prototypically modern as well as much larger in effective scale and density, with its apartments, lifts, department stores, public gardens, restaurants, its theatres, opera houses, and concert halls. Both Paris and Venice are real-world sites, by contrast with the fictive Balbec, which presents a different face of modernization, and where the room again figures conspicuously, but not as part of a private setting. In other words, the room straddles the work's several plots, functioning itself as an avatar, a locus both of correspondence and transfiguration, within the novel's massively extended course. The Paris plot is markedly Haussmannian in its focus on the urban environment brought about by 'the first total conceptualization of what we understand by "the modern city" ', in which, to a greater degree than at any earlier point in its history, new, vaster, and more luxurious, apartment blocks were to be integrated into the 'rationalized circulatory network' of new thoroughfares, above all in the city's north-western quadrant where Proust lived his whole life.[23] Both Balbec, with its treatment of the great railway hotel, its emergence and

[19] Vidler, 'The Building in Pain', 6; Proust, *RTP*, 1: 6 (my translation); cf. *SLT*, 1: 4.

[20] Proust, *RTP*, 1: 184; *SLT*, 1: 223. A typescript variant makes it explicit that the Narrator is in his bedroom in Paris; see *RTP*, 1: 1179.

[21] Proust, *RTP*, 1: 47; *SLT*, 1: 55

[22] Proust, *Corr.*, 8: 112–13.

[23] Spiro Kostof, 'His Majesty the Pick: The Aesthetics of Demolition', *Design Quarterly* 118/119 (1982): 32–41 (34).

ascendancy, and the poetic city of Venice, with its magnificent buildings reimagined as the 'the protagonists of Ruskin's novels',[24] can be said to be complete and self-contained architectural ensembles. Indeed, the same is true of Paris, but it is a much more complex, fluid, discontinuous, and disruptive case.

It is in the Balbec plot that the room as site of sleep is taken up again, in the course of each of the Narrator's two main visits to the Grand-Hôtel, the first in *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (*Within a Budding Grove*), and the second in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* (*Sodom and Gomorrah*). On the first occasion, in a state of extreme fatigue, he has some pleasure in returning to a room that he found alienating to begin with. Here, it is sleep, rather than the happy chance of a *madeleine* dipped in tea, that secures 'la reprise des années passées [...] la transmigration des âmes' ['the recapture of past years [...] the transmigration of souls'].[25] The second such episode occurs, again late at night, on the Narrator's return from dining with the Verdurins at La Raspelière. Again, tellingly, he is tired in the extreme. This segment initially formed the threshold of a new chapter, reminiscent of the opening of the novel itself; in a late addition, Proust brings about a shift in emphasis by inserting a new opening paragraph that contains 'a burlesque account of working-class aspiration' on the part of the page who happens to be operating the hotel lift at this late hour.[26] It is by means of an architectural trope that the mystifying experience of metempsychosis is broached: the Narrator enters the world of sleep and dreams, 'lequel est comme un second appartement que nous aurions et où, délaissant le nôtre, nous serions allé dormir' [which is like a second apartment into which we move for the purpose of sleeping].[27] This 'second' domain has its characteristic sources of noise, its servants and visitors, or so it seems. Its inhabitants are androgynous: from one moment to the next, a man can assume the appearance of a woman. But then, in an abrupt further switch to the moment of narration, the 'je' intervenes from some quite different quarters to vouch for the account he has given of these strange moments. Indeed, he does so speaking from a space that uncannily resembles the narratorial — if not the authorial — room, in his actual, or, so to speak, his 'first' apartment, located in Paris. Here indeed is a different 'je', who oscillates between the first and third person: 'moi l'étrange humain qui, en attendant que la mort le délivre, vit les volets clos, ne sait rien du monde, reste immobile comme un hibou et comme celui-ci, ne voit un peu clair que dans les ténèbres' ['I, the strange human, who, while he waits for death to release him, lives behind closed shutters, knows nothing of the world, sits motionless as an owl, and like that bird can only see things at all clearly in the darkness']. This is a retained addition from as late as 1922, weeks before the publication of this volume in the year of Proust's death.[28] What it marks is the intrusion into the novel of an occasional though distinct figure, that other 'je' who resides — still — on the boulevard Haussmann, and whose household is managed by none other than that celebrated witness to Proust's life, Céleste Albaret, in other words, its signatory, to recall Max Nicolas Muller's term for him.[29] It is as if the author, having grappled between 1907 and 1909 with the meaning and function of the metempsychotic room, now turns to confide in his prospective reader, who is poised, much like Gaston Gallimard in 1919, on

[24] Proust, *Les Soixante-Quinze Feuillets*, 106; *The Seventy-Five Folios*, 64. On architectural innovation at the seaside, see Herbert Lachmayer, Christian Gargerie, and Géza Hajós, 'The Grand Hotel', *AA Files* no. 22 (1991): 33–41.

[25] Proust, *RTP*, 2: 176; *SLT*, 2: 461.

[26] Edward J. Hughes, *Proust, Class, and Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 189.

[27] Proust, *RTP*, 3: 370 (my translation); cf. *SLT*, 4: 439

[28] Proust, *RTP*, 3: 371 and 1557, n. 4; *SLT*, 4: 440–41.

[29] For the boulevard Haussmann, see Proust, *RTP*, 4: 314; *SLT*, 6: 55. On Céleste Albaret, see *RTP*, 3: 527; *SLT*, 5: 11. On the 'je' as ambiguous 'Signataire', at once *of* and *in* the novel, see Max Nicolas Muller, *Les Voix narratives dans la 'Recherche du temps perdu'* (Geneva: Droz, 2019), 214. On the place of explicit authorial self-reference, some of it in 'jest' and with the invocation in particular of Albaret, see Christopher Prendergast, *Mirages and Mad Beliefs: Proust the Skeptic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 41–42.

the threshold of perhaps the self-same domicile, and to whom yet another transmutation of a nocturnal environment is in the process of being disclosed.

James Joyce once almost had occasion to visit Proust's by then notorious apartment. At the end of the evening they both spent in May 1922 in the company of Picasso, Diaghilev, and Stravinsky, he accompanied Proust to his front door in the rue Hamelin and seemed curious to see the writer's fifth-floor lair. Proust, however, 'was resolute in being shot of him'.[30] Their extramural encounter in the Hôtel Majestic can be deemed a missed opportunity: there were points of deep common interest on which they could, in another life, have aired and shared their views. Paris, to which Joyce had quite recently returned, was an overwhelming stimulus for both. What was it, indeed, to experience and to contend with so powerful a modern urban environment, one that Joyce had first inhabited twenty years earlier? Such was a question with which they both grappled.[31] And what use might ever be made of the ancient myth of transmigration in self-consciously modern urban fictions? In Proust's case, metempsychosis is a term that has a symbolic charge in the Narrator's own lexicon. In Joyce's *Ulysses*, it has its place in the world of his characters, while exerting also an unmistakable influence on the novel's 'schemata' and in turn its design.[32] In the 'Calypso' episode, Molly asks Bloom to explain to her the meaning of a word on which she has stumbled. 'It's Greek: from the Greek', he replies. 'That means the transmigration of souls', he says, before setting out for her 'in plain words' what it entails.[33] The notion that through metempsychosis, as Bloom reflects, 'you could be changed into an animal or a tree' has, Margot Norris observes, 'a particularly poignant implication' here, given the salience of death and disappearance throughout this day.[34] If it ever happened that Dublin itself disappeared 'from the Earth', Joyce saw himself as the architect of its future reconstruction, 'out of my book' — a revolutionary outcome, for a city would in that case emerge by metempsychosis from a novel.[35] In any event, transfiguration shapes *Ulysses*. Catherine Flynn has shown that the novel draws pervasively on the metamorphosis of Paris brought about by Haussmann and his designers, and on the intensification of capitalist consumption that resulted. Such is the 'matter' that comes to be projected onto Dublin: the 'reenvisioned' French capital, and Joyce's remobilization of his first encounter with it in 1902–03, lead him to transmute Nighttown into 'a city unto itself' in the 'Circe' episode, defying in the process 'the limits of art'.[36]

After Paris, Balbec and Dublin, the migrant Celtic legend resurfaces in London, indeed in Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*. Clarissa begins her momentous day — 'what a morning' — with an errand that takes her out and about in the city.[37] What she loves more than anything, we read, 'was this, here, now, in front of her'. And yet, even the knowledge that in death 'she must inevitably cease completely' does not induce despair: 'here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home'. The momentary identification with Peter Walsh will not necessarily outlive the

[30] Richard Davenport-Hines, *A Night at the Majestic: Proust and the Great Modernist Dinner Party of 1922* (London: Faber, 2007), 44. On the early fame of Proust's murky room, see interviews with him in *Le Temps* and *Le Miroir* following the appearance in 1913 of *Du côté de chez Swann* (*Swann's Way*), in Proust, *Essais*, 1169; 1173–74.

[31] On the long-term bearing of Joyce's stay in Paris in 1902–03 on his conception and practice of art, see Catherine Flynn, *James Joyce and the Matter of Paris* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 19–21. On shifts in the social environment of Proust's world as they materialize in a range of settings and the pronounced inflections in the narrative that they cause, see Hughes, *Proust, Class, and Nation*.

[32] On intertextual incarnations in *Ulysses* and 'the transmigration of characters from ancient to modern texts', see James Ramey, 'Intertextual Metempsychosis in *Ulysses*: Murphy, Sinbad, and the "U.P.: up" Postcard', *James Joyce Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (2007): 97–114.

[33] James Joyce, *The Cambridge Centenary Ulysses: The 1922 Text with Essays and Notes*, ed. Catherine Flynn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 124.

[34] Margot Norris, 'Calypso', in Joyce, *The Cambridge Centenary Ulysses*, 125; 110.

[35] Frank Bugden, *James Joyce and the Making of 'Ulysses'* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 69.

[36] Flynn, *James Joyce and the Matter of Paris*, 128–68 (129).

[37] Virginia Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, ed. Stella McNichol (London: Penguin, 1992), 3.

events of the day, but it is on an urban street rich in diversions that this reverie will for now take its intermittent course. Here, Woolf takes us outdoors, away for now from interiors of the sort occupied by Proust's Narrator, or by Bloom and Molly. But there is a decisive connection with Proust, whom Woolf read closely, in that the metempsychotic reference, which is here implicit, is liminal, placed, that is, near the novel's opening. As well as to the character's shifting, half-conscious, patterns of attention, it is linked not to a mere room, but to the built environment of the teeming city, a setting where Clarissa proves even to be 'part' of a house she passes by, 'ugly rambling all to bits and pieces as it was'.[38]

Woolf, like Proust once again, availed of the ways of thinking and the procedures of the architect: witness the first formulation, accompanied by a sketch in the form of a plan, of the novel that would become *To the Lighthouse*, set on a remote island on the Celtic fringe. At the head of a new manuscript page, she writes: 'Two blocks connected by a corridor', and then inserts her schematic drawing.[39] When the novel was published, she wrote to Roger Fry, stating that she 'meant nothing' by the figure of the lighthouse itself. Its true function is architectonic: it serves, Woolf says, as 'a central line', the means of holding the book, in its three separate parts, together.[40] Over and above her novels' stories, it is, as Woolf herself hints, through such mechanisms that their schemes are devised, that their cryptic architectures can be inferred. But in the case of *Mrs Dalloway*, the opposite risk is run of valuing 'design' above Dostoevsky's imperative to write 'from deep feeling'. Fearful of 'insubstantis[ing]', such is the question she puts to herself at a moment where the outcome is still in play: 'do I fabricate with words, loving them as I do? [...] The design is so queer & so masterful. I'm always having to wrench my substance to fit it'.[41]

And yet, David Leatherbarrow argues, 'architectural works [...] are *made-up* much the way stories are [...] the two, stories and spaces are sibling *fictions*'.[42] Proust, Joyce, and Woolf, makers-up born within a decade or so of each other, can be thought of as modernist siblings, however ill-matched, and dedicated practitioners of literature and architecture as sister and brother arts. Already some points of convergence in their novelistic designs have come to the surface. To take only one further instance, all three write novels — or, in Proust's case, discrete parts of a multi-volume work spanning all of the seasons — set in the summer. The plots that result have a marked tendency towards unity of place. All three take a turn in the direction of the seaside, the strand, or the beach, 'a surprisingly generative site for the modernist novel',[43] with all of its out-of-the-ordinary affordances: the chance to spend time outdoors as well as in; a degree of social mixity less characteristic of other settings and in turn enhanced scope for otherwise not so likely meetings, indeed for assignations, for social display; the lures of leisure, and the suspension of ordinary work, for some at least; exposure to the lives and conditions of those whose fate it is to have to labour, by day and by night; access, by way of contrast, to artists, poets, and thinkers, and to items of coastal infrastructure, like great railway hotels, disaffected watchtowers, remote holiday homes, and lighthouses; the railway and its 'fine, generous [...] train',[44] with the prospect of return another year. In brief, here fiction proves to be, in Leatherbarrow's formulation, 'a *constructive* art', in which 'patterns of life' find their timely and protean, though sometimes transient, outlets.[45]

[38] Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway*, 9–10. On the metempsychotic dimension, see Vicki Tromanhauser, 'Virginia Woolf's London and the Archaeology of Character', in *The Swarming Streets: Twentieth-Century Literary Representations of London*, ed. Lawrence Phillips (Amsterdam–New York: Rodopi, 2004), 33–43 (40).

[39] Virginia Woolf, *To the Lighthouse*, ed. Stella McNichol (London: Penguin, 1992), xiv.

[40] Virginia Woolf, *The Letters of Virginia Woolf*, ed. Nigel Nicolson and Joanne Trautmann, 6 vols (London: Chatto & Windus, 1975–80), III, 385.

[41] Woolf, *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*, II, 248–49.

[42] David Leatherbarrow, 'Street Fiction: or, Philadelphia Stories', *Journal of Architectural Education* 75, no. 2 (2021): 224–36 (224).

[43] Hannah Freed-Thall, *Modernism at the Beach: Queer Ecologies and the Coastal Commons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023), 33.

[44] Proust, *RTP*, I: 378; *SLT*, I: 464.

[45] Leatherbarrow, 'Street Fiction: or, Philadelphia Stories', 224.

More perhaps than his siblings, Proust was to have his own avatars. Joyce's mention from Paris of 'a certain Mr Marcel Proust of here' transmutes into the 'Parish Proust' of adoptive Dubliner Flann O'Brien, or Georges Perec's unlocatable 'Parcel Mroust'.[46] The mechanism of the 'felicitous and unexpected' transmigration of persons and spaces, to which the opening of the *Recherche* gives so conspicuous a place,[47] was not only to shape Proust's own narrative but would exert often an enabling influence over novelists and theorists of later generations.[48] One of those who worked to transmute it to the context of independent Ireland was O'Brien, though in this case the rendering that resulted was motivated by an inventive, unremitting, and highly characteristic propensity to 'back-chat and funny cracks'.[49] Much less mobile than Joyce or Woolf, O'Brien echoed Proust's personal example by the end of his life: he took to the bed he had inherited from his parents, monopolizing the 'best room in the house'.[50] *The Third Policeman*, O'Brien confides, mysteriously encompasses a plot not subject to 'any known planes or dimensions'.[51] In keeping with the Celtic worldview that Proust recalls, the novel extends to a full-blown eschatology, and this in tandem with a dedicated, if confounding, architectural *parti*: at the point where the rationale, contours, and design of the post-mortem environment in which the action unfolds can finally be comprehended, the transmigration undergone by a pair of murderous protagonists is shown to be their due — and enduring — retribution. O'Brien's novel offers a reprise in miniature of Proust's 'Bal de têtes' [Ball of Faces], one that precipitates its own 'chilling shock': in the sixteen years of the narrator's absence, his 'old friend John Divney' has become truly old. But here the fright that results is greatly compounded, as Divney is carried off by death. And in tandem, the ending differs crucially in its treatment of the first-person narrator, whose second arrival at a constabulary is a recurrence that merely plunges him back into matters connected with bicycles and precludes him from embarking, as Proust's 'je' is able to do, on the reinvention of his life as his book.[52]

At the end of the *Recherche*, the 'je' begins to take his leave of the metempsychotic room: he recalls the potent dreamscape for which it stands, acknowledges the extent of his debt to the nocturnal 'second muse' of sleep, and then, in light of the revelations of the closing *matinée*, passes on to grapple with the profusion of his newly discovered materials.[53] The writing of his novel is now his brief. In embarking on her history of the bedroom, a space where we all spend almost half our lives, Michelle Perrot finds herself drawn to Proust's own habitat and the reinvention of the relation between day and night that it sustained. He, for one, spent much more than half his time there. Proust's room became 'consubstantial', no less, with his novel, a space conditioned by the writing, reflection, and 're-membering' to which it was dedicated — emblematically so, making of him a

[46] *Selected Letters of James Joyce*, ed. Richard Ellmann (London: Faber and Faber, 1975), 273; *The Collected Letters of Flann O'Brien*, ed. Maebh Long (Victoria, TX: Dalkey Archive Press, 2018), 369; Georges Perec, *Œuvres*, ed. Christelle Reggiani, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), 1, 564.

[47] Edward J. Hughes, 'Proustian Metamorphosis: The Art of Distortion in *À la recherche du temps perdu*', *Modern Language Review* 94, no. 3 (1999): 660–672 (662–63).

[48] On Perec among others, see, for example, Adam Watt, 'Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu*', in *The Cambridge History of the Novel in French*, ed. Adam Watt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 456–72 (469–71); and, on Proust, the room, and Roland Barthes, see Michael Sheringham, *Everyday Life: Theories and Practices from Surrealism to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 205–07.

[49] *The Collected Letters of Flann O'Brien*, 69. When working some twenty years later on *The Dalkey Archive*, O'Brien referred to its no less sustained 'message of derision' (379).

[50] Anthony Cronin, *No Laughing Matter: The Life and Times of Flann O'Brien* (London: Grafton, 1989), 222.

[51] *The Collected Letters of Flann O'Brien*, 48.

[52] Flann O'Brien, *The Third Policeman* (Dallas: Dalkey Archive, 1999), 195–99. On punishment and redemption in Celtic eschatology, see again Michelet, *Histoire de France*, 1, 42–43.

[53] *RTP*, 4: 493; *SLT*, 6: 278. On this transition, see Alison Winton, *Proust's Additions: The Making of 'A la recherche du temps perdu'*, 2 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 1, 100–04. For a reflection that owes its impetus to Proust on how experience can 'become *something*' and so constitute the material of a writer 'embedded' in the island of Ireland, see Carlo Gébler, *A Cold Eye: Notes from a Shared Island 1989–2024* (Dublin: New Island, 2024), 280.

'grand chamberlain', like Perec, or another of his putative siblings, namely Franz Kafka.[54] This recent profile coincides with another drawn by the principals of the design practice Dogma, Pier Vittorio Aureli and Martino Tattara, where again the adaptation of Proust's bedroom to his distinctive practice as writer is thrown into relief. They see in him a post-imperial insurgent, and in his room 'a concentrated environment which simultaneously accommodated rest and work, concentration and diversion, allowing the nocturnal author to reclaim his existence as an organic whole, in opposition to the fragmentation induced by the demanding schedule of the industrial city'.[55] Proust's revolt marks the startling attenuation of the home as a regulated domus, a reinvention that is perhaps in keeping with his Narrator's own late assessment of himself as nothing less than an 'architect', though one who confesses that he is somewhat confounded by the 'very amplitude' of his plan.[56] By the end of the novel, at any rate, the metempsychotic room has transmuted into an improvised studio, in which, with the help of Françoise, he could attach additions in the form of *'paperoles'* [' "paperies" '] to his original pages, using a little paste or glue, just as historically an architect would do when incorporating corrections into a drawing.[57]

Early in *La Prisonnière* (*The Captive*), it is the work's enigmatic signatory, to recall Muller's term for him, who finds himself once more accosted in his room, indeed, in his bed, by the real-world Céleste's fictional avatar:

> 'Divinité du ciel déposée sur un lit!' Je disais: 'Mais, voyons, Céleste, pourquoi "divinité du ciel"?' 'Oh, si vous croyez que vous avez quelque chose de ceux qui voyagent sur notre vile terre, vous vous trompez bien!' 'Mais pourquoi "déposée" sur un lit? vous voyez bien que je suis couché.' 'Vous n'êtes jamais couché. A-t-on jamais vu personne couché ainsi?'
>
> 'Heavenly deity perched on a bed!' 'But why, Céleste,' I would say, 'why deity?' 'Oh, if you suppose that you have anything in common with the mortals who make their pilgrimage on our vile earth, you are greatly mistaken!' 'But why "perched" on a bed? Can't you see that I've just gone to bed?' 'You never take to your bed. Who ever saw anyone in bed like that.'[58]

The bedroom to which Proust on occasion brought musicians to perform, becomes a space open to all of the arts, and not least the 'je' 's self-styled creative practice. So at least he seems to intimate, though with a conspicuously playful emphasis on these latest shifts in his profile: he is one who is as an architect at home, and at home as an architect, in a — divinely — original posture, that of a wakeful, though recumbent, author-builder.

[54] Michelle Perrot, *Histoire de chambres* (Paris: Seuil, 2013), 308; 23.

[55] Dogma, *The Room of One's Own*, 113. They comment also on Woolf's rooms for sleep and work as separate, though intimately connected, environments (65; 95; 119).

[56] Proust, *RTP*, 4: 610; *SLT*, 6: 431.

[57] Proust, *RTP*, 4: 611; *SLT*, 6: 433. On this architectural procedure, see Paul Emmons, *Drawing Imagining Building: Embodiment in Architectural Design Practices* (London: Routledge, 2019), 188–89; 211.

[58] Proust, *RTP*, 3: 527; *SLT*, 5: 11 (translation modified). An almost identical exchange takes place a little later in the same volume, which was assembled from Proust's papers for its posthumous publication by his actual brother, Robert (*RTP*, 3: 637–38; *SLT*, 5: 141–42, in an abbreviated form).