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Author(s): Juliette De Soto

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The Poetics of Domestic Space in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*

Juliette De Soto
George Fox University

Readings of In Search of Lost Time *have primarily focused on the function of time rather than space. But the opening section of* Swann's Way, *the Overture, is one of the most powerful in Proust's corpus. The narrator Marcel's relation to his domestic space is not merely a circumstance of the plot, but the condition of the plot's possibility. The interior space of Marcel's childhood at Combray creates his most formative memories. His bedroom shapes his fixation with the passage of time and anxious disorientation with his world, while the upstairs-downstairs configuration establishes the structure of obsession with his mother and the mediated desire for her, a pattern he constantly revisits in his later sexual experiences. Proust writes thousands of pages, but they are a reworking of the fundamental themes introduced in the Overture, in which Marcel's interaction with domestic space frames the major concerns of his life.*

Keywords: Marcel Proust / Gaston Bachelard / *The Poetics of Space* / spatial theory / modernism

BACHELARD AND PROUST

French philosopher Gaston Bachelard's contribution to spatial theory, *The Poetics of Space* (1958), meditates on the interiority of the house and regards the childhood home as "our corner of the world … our first universe, a cosmos in every sense of the word" (4). For Bachelard, our first spatial arrangement determines how we experience the world and normalizes social relationships and concepts of self. "Inhabited space transcends geometrical space," he writes (47). The archetype of home is especially powerful, and our contact with our first homes lingers deep

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Juliette De Soto's (jdesoto@georgefox.edu) teaching and research interests include twentieth-century literature, feminist studies, and spatial theory. She earned a PhD in English from Claremont Graduate University in 2016 and is currently a visiting assistant professor of English at George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon. She lives in Portland.

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within the psyche. According to Bachelard, through our early interactions with our domestic space, we learn to inhabit the wider world: "In short, the house we were born in has engraved within us the hierarchy of the various functions of inhabiting. We are the diagram of the functions of inhabiting that particular house, and all the other houses are but variations on a fundamental theme" (15). The childhood home is in essence the blueprint for life. As architects of modernity, we may shape space, but space shapes us in return.

There has been much discussion of the function of public space in Marcel Proust's work and the work of the modernists in general. In *Moving Through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism*, Andrew Thacker discusses the "movement, speed and the furious restructuring of spaces" (47) associated with modernity, which are reflected in the new, dynamic uses of public space within modernist texts, such as Woolf's London and Joyce's Dublin. But what of domestic space in literary modernism? Victoria Rosner's *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (2005) is one of the first focused studies on the influence of architectural and interior design on the psychic life within British modernist texts. She argues "that the spaces of private life are a generative site for literary modernism" because they reflect the "post-Victorian reorganization of private life to accord with changing social customs" and "the fundamental role of the built environment in creating the categories we use to organize and understand who we are" (2).

Only recently have scholars begun to turn more of their attention to the central role of domestic space within literary texts, as in Sharon Marcus's *Apartment Stories* (1999), Diana Fuss's *The Sense of an Interior* (2004), and Michelle Perrot's *Histoire de Chambres* (2009). In *The Sense of an Interior*, Fuss analyzes the writing spaces of several authors to offer a more comprehensive context for their work since these spaces are "infused . . . with the lived experiences of sensation, memory, illness, and intellect" (66). Fuss reads Proust's own site of creativity—his famous cork-lined bedroom in which he withdrew to write for the last three years of his life—as distinctly feminine. Furthermore, she argues that male critics have ignored this aspect of Proust's writing life in favor of that of "the rugged urbanity of the male modernist writer" (66). Georges Poulet's 1977 book *Proustian Space* was an early exploration of spatial questions in relation to *In Search of Lost Time*, though, as Fuss points out, his project was "more interested in plumbing the depths of metaphorical space than in taking the measure of its more literal manifestations" (66).

When it comes to Proust studies, readings of *In Search of Lost Time* have primarily focused on the function of time rather than space. But the opening section of *Swann's Way*, the Overture, is one of the most powerful sections in Proust's corpus, and I would argue the narrator Marcel's relation to his domestic space is not merely a circumstance of the plot, but the condition of the plot's possibility. The Overture is the locus of Marcel's first memories, and we never truly leave it. Proust writes thousands of pages, but they are a reworking of Marcel's first interactions with his domestic space. It is through investigating these early

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interactions that we can get to the heart of Marcel's compulsions and neuroses, and these, in turn, correspond to the wider social disorientation of modernity and the decentering of masculinity (and sexuality more broadly) that characterized the modern era.

The interior space of Marcel's childhood at Combray creates his most formative memories. His bedroom shapes his fixation with the passage of time and his anxious disorientation with his world, while the upstairs-downstairs configuration establishes the structure of his obsession with his mother and the mediated desire for her, a pattern he constantly revisits in his later sexual experiences. Young Marcel's inability to control his mother—and her actions within their shared space—is a natural catalyst for his later compulsion to control the women in his life. As a grown man, he finally can command his space, and fashions a domestic arrangement in which Albertine, his maternal surrogate, is under lock and key. The domestic spaces, as central sites of anxiety for Marcel, provide the necessary setting through which his moral and social identities are developed and challenged.

Finally, the domestic interiority of *In Search of Lost Time* opens up possibilities for the psychological exploration of Marcel and of the modernist novel more broadly. Literary modernism was Proust's radical project, and Marcel's intense interiority was enabled by his interactions with domestic space. The novel is a continuous wandering through memory, as if wandering through the rooms of a house.

Though their work is divergent in many ways, both Bachelard and Proust were obsessed with the formative and haunting influence of domestic space as well as the function of memory. In *The Poetics of Space*, Bachelard's project is one he calls topoanalysis, which explores the idea that the psyche itself is spatial and that the home of our origin plays a major part in forming it. Through topoanalysis, we come to discover the topography of our intimate selves. Sigmund Freud himself described the unconscious as "a large entrance hall" connected to a smaller room "in which consciousness too, resides" (365–6). But a spatial psychology goes beyond descriptions of the psyche in spatial terms; it investigates the primal relationship we have with space as such, since it molds our ways of inhabiting (4). Bachelard identifies fundamental questions in exploring the significant rooms of our young lives: "Was the room a large one? Was the garret cluttered up? Was the nook warm? How was it lighted? How, too, in these fragments of space, did the human being achieve silence? How did he relish the very special silence of the various retreats of solitary daydreaming?" (9). These spatial questions are essential in discovering who one will become—how habits are developed, how the psyche is formed.

MEMORY AS SPATIAL

One of the primary concerns of Bachelard's text—and of Proust's—is to reveal the intricate relationship between domestic space and memory. The house, as our

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first reality, figures into our later dreams and imagination. The impression the childhood home has made upon us is more significant than its reality, especially once we have moved away. Bachelard writes,

> the house is not experienced from day to day only, on the thread of a narrative, or in the telling of our own story. Through dreams, the various dwelling-places in our lives co-penetrate and retain the treasures of former days. And after we are in the new house, when memories of other places we have lived in come back to us, we travel to the land of Motionless Childhood, motionless the way all Immemorial things are.... Memories of the outside world will never have the same tonality as those of home and, by recalling these memories, we add to our store of dreams; we are never real historians, but always near poets, and our emotion is perhaps nothing but an expression of a poetry that was lost. (5–6)

Though we may eventually leave them, our childhood homes become immortalized, and to a certain degree, haunted. We cannot help but bring our old house to every new house. Anthropologist Mary Douglas discusses this "tyranny of the home" (287), writing, "This is how the home works. Even its most altruistic and successful versions exert a tyrannous control over mind and body" (303).

Whereas Bachelard is rapturous about domestic space, Proust's text contains darker tones, suggesting that the childhood house is indeed haunted. Further, the haunted house provides the context in which all kinds of uncanny manifestations and dark memories can come to the surface. Marcel's neuroses cannot remain repressed; rather, they emerge in his adult life in often ugly ways.

Throughout his text, Bachelard quotes the work of poets on domestic space, following a psychoanalytic tradition that considers writers and their myths as credible evidence, and concludes that "both room and house are psychological diagrams that guide writers and poets in their analysis of intimacy" (38). Proust is doing similar work. *In Search of Lost Time* is primarily a meditation on time and memory, but for Proust, as for Bachelard, memory is closely tied to spatial configurations. Many of the volumes either begin or end with a meditation on rooms and interior space, and throughout the work, Marcel is suddenly visited by specific memories of place: "but then the memory—not yet of the place in which I was, but of various other places where I had lived and might now very possibly be—would come like a rope let down from heaven to draw me up ..." (*Swann's Way* 5–6). So many of Marcel's memories involve living inside houses. So much of his time in his home, in the long hours in his bedroom drifting off to sleep, is spent dreaming of the past. The activity of dreaming that forms the child Marcel is for Bachelard the most important contribution of the house, for it "shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace" (6). For Bachelard, early daydreaming allows our childhoods to remain "poetically useful within us" (16). Marcel continually returns to the formative images and patterns—often traumatic memories—within his childhood home that haunt his adult life.

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Before looking at the function of domestic space in *Swann's Way*, it is important to recognize that each space has its own rules, its own metaphysics. Inhabiting interior space is different from walking through public space, and, further, each type of space determines the characteristics of the other. Inside is the space of comfort, security, and shelter, all of which forms an interface with the outside. Thus, when the weather is cold and blustery, we feel the warmth inside even more forcefully, as Bachelard writes, "we feel warm *because* it is cold out-of-doors" (39). Our senses are heightened in either space precisely because of its difference from the other, and this binary is crucial in forming our relationship with each. Thus, as Marcel recalls the rooms of his life, he remembers them first in the season of winter:

> But I had seen first one and then another of the rooms in which I had slept during my life, and in the end I would revisit them all in the long course of my waking dream: rooms in winter, where on going to bed I would at once bury my head in a nest woven out of the most diverse materials—the corner of my pillow, the top of my blankets, a piece of a shawl, the edge of my bed, and a copy of a children's paper—which I had contrived to cement together, bird-fashion, by dint of continuous pressure; rooms where, in freezing weather, I would enjoy the satisfaction of being shut in from the outer world (like the sea-swallow which builds at the end of a dark tunnel and is kept warm by the surrounding earth), and where, the fire keeping in all night, I would sleep wrapped up, as it were, in a great cloak of snug and smoky air.… (*Swann's Way* 8)

Marcel's memories of winter are powerful, structuring his sense of home and warmth against the outdoor chill. In this memory, Marcel emphasizes his need to build a nest, which, for Bachelard, is a primal image, indicating our need for refuge (91).

For Marcel, this attempt to build a nest, a place of psychological comfort, is tied to his nervous condition and, as we will see later, to his continual attempts to seek comfort by constructing an orderly, rational world. Marcel's bed is a central image, representative of his nest-building, and becomes the focus of later scenes of his domestic arrangement with Albertine. In addition, his tendency to stay indoors is important to the development of his psyche and gender identity, issues about which his grandmother worries. Marcel recounts her exclaiming, "It's a pity to shut oneself indoors in the country" (*Swann's Way* 11). She argues with his father that allowing him to stay indoors with a book on stormy days "is not the way to make him strong and active … especially this little man, who needs all the strength and will-power that he can get" (*Swann's Way* 11). In his grandmother's view, Marcel's proclivity for interior comforts on wild, wintery days only perpetuates his feminine weakness and fragility. His tendency to stay indoors also contributes to his tendency to remain inward-focused, through which his childish obsessions and neurotic habits can continue to grow, as evidenced later on, when he cloisters himself and Albertine within his four walls.

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DOMESTIC OBJECTS: THE BEDROOM

Of the various rooms within *Swann's Way* that profoundly influence Marcel, the bedroom is of paramount importance. It is the childhood bedroom that is the site of Marcel's angst about time passing, the anxieties of modernity, and his lack of control over his circumstances. Marcel daydreams about all the rooms in which he has ever slept. He is particularly fixated on his bedroom at Combray, which functions as the center of his emotional life, "the fixed point on which [his] melancholy and anxious thoughts were centred" (*Swann's Way* 9). While Bachelard argues that the home is one's first universe, the bedroom is even more primal and structurally important. Thus, the way Marcel relates to his bedroom will be recapitulated in his adult years.

Marcel is so attuned to the objects that surround him in his bedroom that he even wonders about the possibility that certain objects house souls of people. He reflects that these objects also house our past: "It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture [the past]: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) of which we have no inkling" (*Swann's Way* 47–8). For Proust, our true past is not conjured up through voluntary memory, but through involuntary memory, initiated by certain childhood objects. These objects—Bachelard calls them "house images"—bring past worlds to us that our intellect cannot readily reach on its own.

As Marcel falls asleep, he recounts trying to position his body with respect to "the direction of the wall, the location of the furniture, to piece together and give a name to the house in which it lay … my body—would recall from each room in succession the style of bed, the position of the doors, the angle at which the daylight came through the windows …" (*Swann's Way* 6). Here, the domestic space, rather than a backdrop to Marcel's life, is integral to his precise movements and worries. Of particular disturbance to Marcel is the perception that when he is in between sleeping and waking, the placement of the furniture grows distorted. He has sought comfort in the idea that the objects in his bedroom are fixed, stable entities that will never change. He reflects:

> Perhaps the immobility of the things that surround us is forced upon them by our conviction that they are themselves, and not anything else, by the immobility of our conception of them. For it always happened that when I awoke like this, and my mind struggled in an unsuccessful attempt to discover where I was, everything revolved around me through the darkness: things, places, years. (*Swann's Way* 6)

The state of in-between consciousness gives him a distorted perspective, contrary to the assurances of his waking life: "the good angel of certainty had made all the surrounding objects stand still, had set me down under my bedclothes, in my bedroom, and had fixed, approximately in their right places in the uncertain light, my chest of drawers, my writing-table, my fireplace, the window overlooking the street, and both the doors" (*Swann's Way* 9).

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The stable objects Marcel mentions in this passage are symbols of intimacy. At his writing table, he is able to reveal his most private thoughts. His fireplace brings warmth contrasted to the cold outside. According to Bachelard, furniture like chests, drawers, and wardrobes are "veritable organs of the secret psychological life" as well as furniture that bring order to a space. The wardrobe is not only orderly in its appearance and in its geometrical construction, but its primary function is to organize disparate objects, "protect[ing] the entire house against uncurbed disorder" (Bachelard 78–9). Marcel desperately seeks this kind of structure in his bedroom and in the world beyond, and when such orderly furniture becomes disordered, he panics.

THE LANTERN

Marcel specifies another source of disorder in his bedroom: the "magic lantern," given to him to distract him from disquieting thoughts always centered in his bedroom. But instead of calming Marcel, the lantern adds to his anxiety: "my sorrows were only increased thereby, because this mere change of lighting was enough to destroy the familiar impression I had of my room, thanks to which, save for the torture of going to bed, it had become quite endurable. Now I no longer recognised it, and felt uneasy in it, as in a room in some hotel or chalet" (*Swann's Way* 9–10). The lantern casts different lighting and shading onto the room, rendering it unrecognizable and ushering in a sense of the uncanny, a blending of the familiar with the foreign. Objects over which he had psychological ownership transform into unfamiliar things under the lantern's light.

Adding to Marcel's horror is the way the lantern reconstructs his doorknob, an object of special significance to him, into the body of the character Golo. The doorknob is an important symbol of children's ownership over their space. In analyzing childhood drawings, Bachelard sees the inclusion of the doorknob as an indication that the child perceives his or her house to be "lived-in" (73). Likewise, to Marcel, the distorted doorknob is an invasion of a space he has made his own: "I cannot express the discomfort I felt at this intrusion of mystery and beauty into a room which I had succeeded in filling with my own personality until I thought no more of it than of myself" (*Swann's Way* 11). Marcel regards his bedroom as an extension of himself—and, even further, as a microcosm of the world. What terrifies Marcel is the feeling that his room, his objects, the inscrutable world beyond, escapes his grasp.

One of Bachelard's key questions concerns the illumination of the child's bedroom ("How was it lighted?"). For Marcel, darkness is mostly feared because it alienates him from the world and makes uncanny his beloved objects. Nighttime is composed of "sad hours of darkness" (*Swann's Way* 46). Light, on the other hand, can be soothing or menacing, as with the magic lantern, where the unnatural change of lighting terrifies the child. Marcel calls the lamplight he sees through his bedroom window when he is outside "a solitary beacon in the night," as his bedroom acts as a sanctuary (*Swann's Way* 7). At the same time,

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his bedroom is equal parts haven and hazard because, in it, he will either feel the elation of his mother's arrival or the disaster of her exit. Just outside his bedroom, in the stairwell, the light from his mother's candle signals comfort and coming intimacy, while the light from his father's candle signals a threat to this maternal visitation.

The opening pages of *Swann's Way* highlight Marcel's fear of waking in the middle of the night. Time becomes incomprehensible in these moments, which causes Marcel to question his identity:

> When a man is asleep, he has in a circle round him the chain of the hours, the sequence of the years, the order of the heavenly host. Instinctively, when he awakes, he looks to these, and in an instant reads off his own position on the earth's surface and the time that has elapsed during his slumbers; but this ordered procession is apt to grow confused, and to break its ranks … suppose that he dozes off in some even more abnormal and divergent position, sitting in an armchair, for instance, after dinner: then the world will go hurtling out of orbit, the magic chair will carry him at full speed through time and space, and when he opens his eyes again he will imagine that he went to sleep months earlier in another place. But for me it was enough if, in my own bed, my sleep was so heavy as completely to relax my consciousness; for then I lost all sense of the place in which I had gone to sleep, and when I awoke in the middle of the night, not knowing where I was, I could not even be sure at first who I was.… (*Swann's Way* 5)

Poulet discusses this crisis of identity when Marcel is hypnagogic: "Who is he? He no longer knows, and he no longer knows because he has lost the means of relating the place and the moment in which he now lives to all the other places and moments of his former existence. His thought stumbles between times and between places" (8). Space plays a role here since what often terrifies him is the thought that he is in a no-place—a hotel room—"grimmest of all, because, lacking all habitual sympathy with the being who occupies them, they are not real places, they hold nothing personal; they are, so to speak, anywhere in space …" (Poulet 8–9).

By unsettling Marcel at the start, Proust also unsettles the reader in situating the time and space of this modernist novel. The sense of displacement Marcel experiences in his own bedroom is an introduction to the destabilized world he inhabits. Every time Marcel awakens in some abnormal position or at some odd hour, he experiences a loss of self and a loss of faith in objective reality. Jack Jordan writes, "In the same few opening pages, with the loss of an internal, subjective reality founded on a solid notion of self, the Narrator also loses the external reality of an objective world anchored in fixed notions of time and space" (100).

This disorientation with time and space continues through his life. In *Cities of the Plain*, Marcel muses about his ever-present sleep anxiety: "It is no easy task; sleep, which does not know whether we have slept for two hours or two days, cannot provide us with any point of reference" (1016). This dislocation in

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the night hours—the disordering of furniture, the magic lantern's distortion of his bedroom—follows Marcel into adulthood. In addition, the magic lantern symbolizes the dismantling of others' fixed identities. It appears later in *The Fugitive*, when Marcel compares Albertine's multivalent identity to "the curve of the coloured slides" of the lantern. He reflects "that none of us is single, that each of us contains many persons who do not all have the same moral value" (540). It is as if the unnerving objects within Marcel's childhood bedroom have shapeshifted into the new people and objects of his adult life, keeping his childhood anxiety alive.

THE DOOR

While Fuss reads the symbol of the door in the novel as Marcel's entry into gradually higher social statuses (73–4), I would argue that the door also typifies Marcel's intense psychological privacy. Throughout this long novel, Marcel continually shuts himself up in rooms. When the door closes, he is given a space he can finally control and in which he can indulge in feelings he cannot reveal outside the walls. While doorknobs suggest space as "lived-in," locks connote secrecy and solitude, the subjects of two of Bachelard's fundamental questions.[1] Marcel achieves solitude in a room at the top of the house in Combray to which he flees when he needs privacy: "this room . . . was for a long time my place of refuge, doubtless because it was the only room whose door I was allowed to lock, whenever my occupation was such as required an inviolable solitude: reading or day-dreaming, secret tears or sensual gratification" (*Swann's Way* 13). First, this room sits just below the roof, which for Bachelard, signifies a place of shelter and rationality, of order and reason, a place to clear one's head (18). Second, Marcel acknowledges that being able to lock the door of the top room is crucial. According to Bachelard, locks and keys "are very evident witnesses of the need for secrecy, of an intuitive sense of hiding places. . . . A lock is a psychological threshold" (81). Though locks are not always difficult to break, their power lies in the strong psychological message they communicate: keep out. The significance of the door in Marcel's life also corresponds with modern readings of his possible closetedness. As critics have paid more attention to the coded nature of the novel and Marcel's sexuality, the door has even wider resonance as a means for sexual secrecy and forbidden intimacy.

In a fascinating turn, Marcel's intense desire to circumscribe an area through lock and key translates later in his life into an acute desire to spatially control others. Locks and keys figure in a crucial way in Marcel's later relationship with his lover, Albertine. In *Cities of the Plain*, he reflects on his desire to regulate Albertine, keeping her "under lock and key" (1158), and in *The Captive*, he will see this vision through, with Albertine "effectively caged" and "shut up in my house" (62). In *The Fugitive*, he says, "I used to leave her for days on end without letting her come to my room" (481). She, in turn, will

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shut him out of her space, giving way to a crying fit. Marcel exclaims, "'she's turning the handle; she's opening the door, it's too late, she has shut it behind her!' … I returned to my station outside her door, but the crack beneath it no longer showed any light.… I remained there motionless, hoping for some lucky accident which did not occur; and long afterwards, frozen, I returned to bestow myself between my own sheets and cried for the rest of the night" (*The Captive* 108). And while Albertine is his captive, he also remains a captive to himself. He locks himself away at this time of his life, seeking the solitude he pursued as a child in Combray: "It was, in fact, principally from my bedroom that I took in the life of the outer world during this period.… I had always refused to go out of doors" (*The Captive* 1). Marcel's desire for solitude as a child transforms into a darker impulse later on, when he shuts himself and Albertine away in order to keep her under his jurisdiction.

THE STAIRCASE

One way to examine the spatial dynamics of the novel is through binaries of in and out (indoors and outdoors) and up and down (the motion of the staircase). While the inside-outside dialectic highlights Marcel's psychological inwardness and neurotic tendencies, the upward-downward binary represents hierarchy—one in which his parents' authority reigns over him. Outside Marcel's childhood bedroom is the staircase, the passageway and boundary between two domestic spaces. At this boundary, Marcel enacts his childhood dramas, always in relation to the attention from his mother. When his family hosts evening visitors in the dining room, the staircase becomes a barrier between him and his desired union with her. Because he is barred from it, Marcel characterizes the dining room as "forbidden and unfriendly" (*Swann's Way* 32). When the family dismisses Marcel at dinner, he has to "climb each step of the staircase 'against my heart,' as the saying is, climbing in opposition to my heart's desire, which was to return to my mother …" (*Swann's Way* 29–30). Marcel reflects on the smell of varnish on the staircase that reiterates his sorrow. The staircase and its varnish smell solidify Marcel's distance from his mother and intensify his thwarted desire for her.

While the staircase is a symbol of separation between Marcel and his mother, it also engenders joy and anticipation when he sees or hears her climb the stairs and traverse the boundary to come to him. At first, the moment he hears her climb the staircase in the beginning of the evening is "a moment of the utmost pain" (*Swann's Way* 13) since she will only leave again. Yet the significance of the staircase changes at the close of the evening when she ascends once and for all: "My mother opened the latticed door which led from the hall to the staircase. Presently I heard her coming upstairs to close her window. I went quietly into the passage; my heart was beating so violently that I could hardly move, but at least it was throbbing no longer with anxiety, but with terror and with joy" (*Swann's*

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Way 37–8). Once his mother joins him in his bedroom, he repeats twice on the same page: "Mamma spent that night in my room" (*Swann's Way* 40). In this final scene, Marcel has succeeded in drawing his mother into his own borders. There, in his bedroom—his microcosm—everyone and everything else are excluded, so he alone can possess her attention.

The span between upstairs and downstairs frames Marcel's relation to love, desire, and jealousy. The obsession with his mother that dominates the Overture echoes throughout the rest of the novel. Two thousand pages into *In Search of Lost Time*, Marcel continues to be fixated on his mother. When he sees Albertine in *Cities of the Plain* he thinks, "I could barely restrain myself from kissing—with almost the same kind of pleasure that I should have had in kissing my mother—this new face" (860). A few pages later Marcel says, "Calmed by my confrontation with Albertine, I began once again to live in closer intimacy with my mother" (*Cities of the Plain* 864). In *The Captive*, Marcel describes Albertine's goodnight kiss as "almost as precious as when my mother in the evening at Combray used to lay her lips upon my forehead" (72). This adult love with Albertine acts as an inferior copy of the original desire for the maternal object. According to critic Elizabeth Viti, "Proust's novel illustrates superbly [Dorothy] Dinnerstein's theories which expose adult sexual arrangements for what they are: women and men alike all want to return to Mother" (6). Every romantic pursuit in his adulthood traces back to his maternal obsession, and Albertine, more than anyone else, takes the place of the lost mother.

Marcel's desperate, torturous relationship with Albertine is a mere imitation of his first love, and space plays a crucial role in this structure of desire. Poulet discusses the function of spatial distance in desire:

> Distance for Proust, then, can only be tragic. It is like the visible demonstration inscribed on infinite vastness, of the great principle of separation that affects and afflicts men. One is here. The loved one is there … the theme of distance, or negative space, attains the maximum of sorrowful intensity. It appears under the form of a goodnight kiss, desired by the child and refused by the mother, of a union between her and the child, which would abolish all distance.… Space is what sees to it that beings are obliged to live far away from each other. (42–3)

Women generally occupy an absence in the novel, while men yearn for their presence. This spatial arrangement resounds throughout the long work with respect to the child Marcel and his mother, Swann and Odette, and the adult Marcel and Albertine.

Further, female interiority is locked out from the men who try to access it. The relationships women have with other women—friendly or romantic—poses the highest sexual threat to men. Both Swann and Marcel are tortured by the prospect of their lovers' affairs with other women because it is the female bond to which they will never be given admittance. In the second volume, *In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*, Marcel becomes obsessed with the "little band" of girls

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in Balbec. This lively and strange coterie disturbs him because they speak in a language and hold a miniature society all their own:

> within their little band … they had decided that the surrounding crowd was composed of beings of another race not even whose sufferings could awaken in them any sense of fellowship, they appeared not to see them … and if some terrified or furious old gentleman whose existence they did not even acknowledge and whose contact they spurned took precipitate and ludicrous flight, they merely looked at one another and laughed. (*Shadow* 849)

The girls are oblivious, even resistant, to male attention. Their laughter, incomprehensible to Marcel, is a secret communication that shuts everyone else out. He watches them, "and then a giggle, which seemed the sole manifestation of their personal life, convulsed them all together" (*Shadow* 882). Within feminist theory, female laughter can serve as subversion of reason and a rejection of patriarchal order. The girls' exclusive circle baffles the narrator, and it is precisely because he is outside of the cluster that he so badly wants to penetrate it, like a room in a house from which he is barred. Though the novel has been critiqued for its female objectification, this can be read in part as retailiatory: the male protagonist feels like a social outcast in a society of laughing women.

Among its many themes, *In Search of Lost Time* is about a man who becomes a petty tyrant toward the lovers in his life, a tyranny first engendered as a result of the spatial separation he originally felt from his mother. Because Marcel is tormented by the impossibility of completely possessing his lover, he tries to wield complete control over her. In *The Captive*, Marcel compares his having Albertine "installed in a bedroom within twenty paces of my own" to "the night on which my father sent Mamma to sleep in the little bed beside mine" (2). Marcel has fashioned his space with Albertine as a mirror of his childhood space. With Albertine's goodnight kiss each night, he is able to revisit the nightly ritual with Mamma. Their routine also gives him the same anguish he felt as a child, one of spatial separation: "It was no longer the peace of my mother's kiss at Combray that I felt when I was with Albertine on these evenings, but, on the contrary, the anguish of those on which my mother scarcely bade me good-night, or even did not come up to my room at all, either because she was cross with me or was kept downstairs by guests" (*The Captive* 107).

But unlike in his childhood, when Marcel was powerless to control his mother, in his adulthood he is able to exert control over his space, designing it so that Albertine is only a few paces away, under his strict supervision. He begins to discipline Albertine as his parents disciplined him: "in reproaching her I used the same arguments that had been so often advanced against me by my parents when I was small, and that had appeared so unintelligent and cruel to my misunderstood childhood … so many obscure unconscious currents caused everything in me even down to the tiniest movements of my fingers to be drawn into the same cycles as my parents …" (*The Captive* 102–3). Marcel's repetition of his childhood traumas and his manipulation of Albertine, and to a lesser extent,

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Gilberte and Andrée, are exercises in regaining the authority he lacked over his space in his early years. He can inhabit the same power structure with Albertine as with his mother; this time, however, he is the parent. While the home would traditionally belong to the female sphere, Marcel reverses this relationship in the goodnight ritual, this time with himself as powerful Mother and Albertine as powerless Child.

THE WINDOW

While the door represents Albertine's confinement, a solid wall to the person without the key to open it, the window is the domestic constituent that represents her freedom. Albertine will later escape from Marcel's dominion through the opening of a window. At first, her window figures profoundly in Marcel's sense of domination over her. After an evening out, he stands on the pavement, gazing at it:

> that window, formerly quite black at night when she had not been staying in the house … tracing before my tranquil mind precise images, near at hand, of which I should presently be taking possession, was invisible to Brichot who had remained in the carriage and was almost blind, and would in any case have been incomprehensible to him.… It was true that I endowed those luminous streaks which I could see from below, and which to anyone else would have seemed quite superficial, with the utmost plenitude, solidity and volume, because of all the significance that I placed behind them.… But now what I had to do when the time came for love-making was not to set out on a journey, was not even to leave my own house, but to return there. (*The Captive* 336)

Albertine's window does not hold significance to anyone else but Marcel, who is satisfied that he will find the object of his desire kept in his home, that he is able "to return there," to his childhood desire. As with his mother's candle, Albertine's window light beckons Marcel and indicates a coming consummation of this desire. In addition to the light that shines out of it and beckons him, the window makes it possible for Marcel to see through the house at Albertine, his object of possession.

Unlike a door, the window is an aperture through which the gaze can traverse its threshold (and, here, can quarantine its object). Later, Proust will use this window as a symbol of Albertine's escape from Marcel's possession. In the middle of the night, he hears the most distressing noise he can imagine—the noise of Albertine's window being flung open: "the noise had been violent, almost rude, as though she had flung the window open, crimson with rage, saying to herself: 'this life is stifling me. I don't care, I must have air!'" (*The Captive* 409). Though Albertine does not leave on this night, the scene foreshadows her escape soon after, when she transforms the significance of the window from Marcel's cage to her means of freedom. Albertine subverts the window's prior function (one of male domination—Marcel's possession of her body through the gaze) and frees

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herself by traversing the aperture of surveillance and control, thereby becoming invisible to Marcel, and reimagining the meanings that Marcel had bestowed on the window.

CONCLUSION

Just as the configuration of space molds who we are, the demolition of space can erase pieces of ourselves. In a moment of recollection, Marcel realizes that certain joys and sorrows have disappeared with the destruction of the spaces that shaped them:

> The wall of the staircase up which I had watched the light of his candle gradually climb was long ago demolished. And in myself, too, many things have perished which I imagined would last for ever, and new ones have arisen, giving birth to new sorrows and new joys which in those days I could not have foreseen, just as now the old are hard to understand. It is a long time, too, since my father has been able to say to Mamma: "Go along with the child." Never again will such moments be possible for me. But of late I have been increasingly able to catch, if I listen attentively, the sound of the sobs which I had the strength to control in my father's presence, and which broke out only when I found myself alone with Mamma. In reality their echo has never ceased; and it is only because life is now growing more and more quiet round about me that I hear them anew. . . . (*Swann's Way* 39–40)

Underneath all the activity of the novel is the narrator's profound grief that began in his youth and continues in his adulthood. The sorrows have changed, along with the space, but they come from the same deep feeling of separation, even abandonment, from the love object.

The intense sadness the narrator associates with the staircase, the candles, and the hallway, we are told, marks the rest of his life. At the end of the Overture, Marcel concludes his thoughts on his memories of Combray:

> when I lay awake at night and revived old memories of Combray, I saw no more of it than this sort of luminous panel . . . the little parlour, the dining-room, the opening of the dark path from which M. Swann, the unwitting author of my sufferings, would emerge, the hall through which I would journey to the first step of that staircase, so painful to climb, which constituted, all by itself, the slender cone of this irregular pyramid; and, at the summit, my bedroom, with the little passage through whose glazed door Mamma would enter . . . as though all Combray had consisted of but two floors joined by a slender staircase. . . . (*Swann's Way* 46–7)

In this passage, we see the primacy of the domestic over public space. For Marcel, his home—just those two floors—is representative of all of Combray. Later he acknowledges that there were other scenes in Combray, but they are "all dead" (*Swann's Way* 47). The domestic scenes are alive, given to him by involuntary memory, the memory closest to his emotional center.

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Finally, a few pages before the end of the last volume, *Time Regained*, the narrator continues to fixate on the details and sounds of the childhood home he contemplates at length in the Overture: "the noise of my parents' footsteps as they accompanied M. Swann to the door and the peal … of the bell on the garden gate which informed me that at last he had gone and that Mamma would presently come upstairs, these sounds rang again in my ears, yes, unmistakably I heard these very sounds, situated though they were in a remote past" (1105). Though he objectively is situated at the Guermantes party, he does not occupy that space subjectively; instead, he chooses to inhabit the space of a now deconstructed house from his memory. Perhaps this is how Marcel recovers lost time. Though his body lives in the present, his mind dwells in past places and scenes.

Proust ends his 3,500-page novel with this reflection: "if strength were granted me for long enough to accomplish my work, I should not fail … to describe men first and foremost as occupying a place, a very considerable place compared with the restricted one which is allotted to them in space, a place on the contrary prolonged past measure … in the dimension of Time" (1107). This is how time and space are united in Proust's work. Although in each moment Marcel is physically restricted to a fixed space and time, he is free to travel psychically to many, many other places—and Proust suggests that the places of our past are the ones to which we are most beholden. As Douglas writes, "Home is located in space, but it is not necessarily a fixed space. It does not need bricks and mortar" (289). The home is in the mind.

"For a long time I used to go to bed early" (*Swann's Way* 3) is a fitting beginning for Proust's seven-volume novel. Proust famously spent the last years of his life confined to his cork-lined bedroom laboring over his great work. Most activities, including writing, he did from bed. In Bachelard's language, Proust knew how to "inhabit with intensity" (xxxiv). The large world that Proust depicts in *In Search of Lost Time* was written from the smallest of interior places, and with this great work, Proust proved himself to be one of the best poets of domestic space.

Note

1. "How, too, in these fragments of space, did the human being achieve silence? How did he relish the very special silence of the various retreats of solitary daydreaming?" (Bachelard 9).

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