

The spaces of truth and cathedral window light

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Abstract

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Major writers and painters of the Romantic period interpreted the church or cathedral in its organic and spiritual dimensions as a complex expression of a matured Christian civilization. Artists of the mid-nineteenth century continued to produce both secular and religious variations upon this established referentiality. Although divergent uses reciprocally reinforced the fascination for the central imagery of the church and its multiple contexts, they also came to suggest a deeper tension in Western development between what the church had meant in an earlier Europe and what it might mean for late modernity. The threat of a permanent loss of cultural values was an issue haunting Realist approaches. A crucial revision occurred when key Symbolist poets openly revived the first Romantic themes but treated them as contents available to a decidedly post-Romantic historical consciousness. There was an analogous revival of interest in the church as a culturally charged symbol in painting around the turn of the century. Although they might apply this poetic and pictorial heritage in strikingly different ways, writers of high Modernism such as Rilke, Proust, and Kafka understood its richness and importance.

1. The Romantic prelude

The metaphor of being “at the window” serves as the final chapter title of Roger Cardinal’s *Figures of Reality* (1981) to characterize the core of European poetic consciousness during the larger period that stretches roughly from Romanticism through the twentieth century.¹ Appreciation of the Modernist experience or sense of being in the presence of such light is indeed enhanced if we examine its Romantic roots.

1 Here I propose to revisit from a new perspective the “spaces of sacral epiphany” noted in an earlier paper (Gillespie, 1990) and to consider the nature of the luminosity which the “window” admits and engenders in a larger historical framework

Among its many themes, the opening monologue of the scene “Night” in *Faust I* (1808) suggests the drive of Renaissance aspirations to break through the encumbrance of a decaying medieval tradition. Goethe has Faust, the discontented savant, think of his Gothic study with its books and research apparatus as a prison that separates him from vital nature (lines 398 ff.):

*Weh! steck ich in dem Kerker noch?
Verfluchtes dumpfes Mauerloch,
Wo selbst das liebe Himmelslicht
Trüb durch gemalte Scheiben bricht!*

[Woe, am I stuck in this dungeon still?
Cursed dank hole in the wall;
here even the gentle light of heaven passes
murkily through stained glass.]

These lines, originally composed around the mid-1770s and preserving the Storm-and-Stress flavour of the *Urfaust*, bring together two images that were an abundant source of metaphor throughout the Romantic era.

- **The medieval castle or church as container of dark forces**

One image, the here only figurative “dungeon,” invokes the medieval castle or church as the container of dark forces, motives, or secrets, as the focus of a curse, an association popularized by eighteenth-century Gothicism. Romantic authors were attracted to the ambivalence inherent in the church and castle as repositories of a special illumination, as we see, for example, in Byron’s “Elegy on Newstead Abbey” (1807). Having explored both negative and positive memory entombed in this “dark pile” (line 17), Byron ends by jibing at modern pomp and at the shallow fad of artificial ruins and “romantic” landscapes (an outgrowth of the very fascination exhibited in his own poem), yet strikes a final pose of secret atunement with the ruins as a fatal man.

Readers of the age widely understood Goethe’s wayward experimenter, who yearns for the moonlight outside, yet abandons his beloved in an actual dungeon, as this type.

- **The symbol of the window marking an existence of otherness**

The other image, the window, is a favourite Romantic symbol of the transactional membrane between self and world. The window marks the existence of otherness and a beyond to which the self is attracted. In John Keats’ poem “The Eve of St. Agnes” (1820), the balladic narrative moves from the wintry church – where the “sweet Virgin’s picture” and “Music’s golden tongue” posit hope for “the sculptur’d dead [...], Emprisoned in black, purgatorial rails” (strophes 1-3) – into Madeline’s bedchamber as into a most precious chapel within the medieval

castle. There Porphyro, at first concealed, witnesses her prayer as she is bathed in the magic light transmitted through the stained glass window which unites the organic and supernatural realms (str. 24 and 25).

A casement high and triple-arch'd there was,
All garlanded with carven imag'ries
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot-grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damasked wings;
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
A shielded scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings.

Full on this casement shone the wintry moon,
And threw warm gules on Madeline's fair breast,
As down she knelt for heaven's grace and boon;
Rose-bloom fell on her hands, together prest,
And on her silver cross soft amethyst,
And on her hair a glory, like a saint:
She seem'd a splendid angel, newly drest,
Save wings, for heaven: – Porphyro grew faint:
She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint.

This illumination of the beloved as an embodied paradise not only sanctifies the ensuing bridal night, but empowers the couple to escape from the castle as from a potential hell, fleeing forever into the “elfin-storm from faery land” (str. 39). Natural and poetic truth have redemptively penetrated the depths of Gothic night through the window.

The elder Goethe expatiated on the idea of the work of art as a simultaneous mediation and reception of divine light in an untitled poem of the year 1826:

*Gedichte sind gemalte Fensterscheiben!
Sieht man vom Markt in die Kirche hinein,
Da ist alles dunkel and düster;
Und so sieht's auch der Herr Philister.
Der mag denn wohl verdrießlich sein
Und lebenslang verdrießlich bleiben.*

*Kommt aber nur einmal herein!
Begrüß die heilige Kapelle;
Da ist's auf einmal farbig helle,
Geschicht' und Zierat glänzt in Schnelle,
Bedeutend wirkt ein edler Schein.*

*Dies wird euch Kindern Gottes taugen,
Erbaut euch und ergetzt die Augen.*

[Poems are stained glass windows! If one looks into the church from the marketplace, everything there is dark and gloomy; and this is just how it looks to Mr. Philistine. He may well be irritated and remain irritated his life long.

But do just once come inside! Greet the holy chapel, and everything suddenly is colourfully bright, history and adornment radiate in a trice, a noble illumination has its significant effect. This will be of value to you children of God. Be edified and rejoice your eyes.]

The term “stained glass windows” that states the primary thing which poems are has the transparency about which the poet is speaking. The poem interposes itself as both means and end; the light of the work of art, its aesthetic illusion (“Schein”), constitutes a realm in itself. While it would be rewarding to dwell here on Goethe’s concept of the symbol, more pertinent to my argument is the complex spatialization of the experience. Not only are we invited into a larger structure (“church”); once inside, we discover an enclosed smaller structure (“chapel”). This makes explicit our initial awareness that the church is a dedicated space – in effect, a chapel in the metaphoric temple of the world.

- **Religious images embodying meanings**

Within the chapel as within the church, religious images are resplendent in their supratemporal sense and tell of a past that reaches into the present. The structure (church, chapel) contains artifacts that in their turn embody meanings. Edification flows out of the delight to which we open our eyes, once our eyes function in sympathetic attunement to the holy light of the cosmos by being transmitters of the light of art. The eyes as instruments of the mind become, once again, the traditional windows in the emblematic temple of our own being. That lingering sense descends from older meditative poetry, a familiar example in the English tradition being George Herbert’s poem, “The Windows” (published 1633 in *The Temple*), which opens:

Lord, how can man preach Thy eternal word?
He is a brittle crazie glasse;
Yet in Thy temple Thou dost him afford
This glorious and transcendent place,
To be a window through Thy grace.

Novalis dramatically internalized this space of discovery or revelation in *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*. Left as a fragment in 1800, this novel is ostensibly set in the Middle Ages before humanity’s secondary fall in history, a fall marked by the Reformation and Enlightenment, which supposedly dimmed the power of faith

and poetry. In chapter V, the quester knight, Heinrich, learns the ethos of mining by which Novalis transcribes the noble task of high Romanticism. Heinrich personally descends by labyrinthine ways into the underground where his dream-like movement in a mysterious cathedral-like immensity (“erhabenen Münster”) is both exploration and synthesis. He encounters secrets touching the world and the self: a multiplicity of geological, evolutionary, historical, and psychological factors and potentialities. Just before Heinrich meets the hermit in the cave, Novalis repeats the equation between the interior realm of the psyche and the natural magic of the nocturnal realm, that night which haunts Faust in Part I of Goethe’s play. Novalis fervently believes in the rightness of the inner illumination. A unifying synaesthesia supports not only the analogies between the night and organic psychic spaces, but also the perception of the developmental process as if it is both underway and completed. The entry into the space of the experiencing self – here through a tapestry door – is also the discovery of a complex structure for which Novalis’ image, too, is a cathedral. In short, Novalis conjoins the thematics of anamnesis and of the self as the medium and the space of recollection in a manner that anticipates the Proustian method.

- **Dedicated space – symbolic interior realm**

Otilie’s solitary church visit depicted in Part II, chapters 2 and 3, of Goethe’s *Die Wahlverwandtschaften* (*Elective Affinities* [1809]) is an unsurpassable earlier example of the imagery of dedicated space that conveys simultaneously a character’s personal inner illumination and the suprapersonal truth of art. Otilie is already virtually enshrined in the restored side-chapel and looking down as if from heaven because the young artist has intuitively painted variations of her face in his murals (JA 21.159); she is an authentic Germanic type “nach einem verschwundenen goldenen Zeitalter, nach einem verlorenen Paradiese” (“after a disappeared golden age, after a paradise lost” [154]) toward which the medievalizing present aspires. Overwhelmed by the restored, reconsecrated space, which is both strange and familiar to her, Otilie soon connects her own rediscovery of this sacred environment on the eve of Eduard’s birthday with the realization of the necessity of loss. She inwardly accepts death, turning like the sun-flower depicted in the chapel toward heaven (162). Goethe’s description emphasizes her stepping through the chapel door into an unexpected radiance that is the objective correlative of her personal epiphany:

Durch das einzige hohe Fenster fiel ein ernstes buntes Licht herein: denn es war von farbigen Gläsern anmutig zusammengesetzt. Das Ganze erhielt dadurch einen fremden Ton and bereitete zu einer eigenen Stimmung. Die Schönheit des Gewölbes und der Wände ward durch die Zierde des Fußbodens erhöht, der aus besonders geformten, nach einem schönen Muster gelegten, durch eine gegossene Gipsfläche verbundenen Ziegelsteinen bestand. Diese sowohl als die farbigen Scheiben hatte der Architekt

heimlich bereiten lassen, und konnte nun in kurzer Zeit alles zusammenfügen (161).

[A solemn many-coloured light fell through the gracefully composed panes of the single, high stained-glass window. The whole space acquired an unfamiliar quality and induced a peculiar mood. The beauty of the vaulting and the walls was heightened by the decorative design of the floor, paved with specially shaped bricks which were joined by mortar to form a beautiful pattern. The Architect had had these bricks as well as the stained glass prepared in secret and was able to assemble everything in a short time.]

Afterwards, in analogy to her own alienation upon crossing into another realm, she records in her journal her thoughts about the strange destiny of the modern artist who must be exiled from his own gifts to mankind, his own constructs or acts of mediation:

[...] Seine Werke verlassen ihn [...]. Wie oft wendet er seinen ganzen Geist, seine ganze Neigung auf, um Räume hervorzubringen, von denen er sich selbst ausschließen muß. [...] In den Tempeln zieht er eine Grenze zwischen sich und dem Allerheiligsten; er darf die Stufen nicht mehr betreten, die er zur herzerhebenden Feierlichkeit gründete, so wie der Goldschmied die Monstranz nur von fern anbetet, deren Schmelz und Edelsteine er zusammengeordnet hat [...] (162 f.).

[His works abandon him [...]. How often he devotes his whole mind and inclination to bring forth spaces from which he by necessity is excluded. [...] In places of worship he draws a line between himself and the holy of holies; he is no longer allowed to ascend the steps whose foundation he has laid for the heart-lifting celebration, just as the goldsmith reveres only from a distance the monstrance whose enamel and precious stones he has duly set together.]

Ottlie's mind is filled with the imagery of death and rebirth; she yearns for the emergence of "das innere Licht" ("the inner light") and, though still on earth, in her spirit actually already waits in heaven to greet her friends (163 f.).

- **The metaphor of internalized space seen negatively**

The negative interpretation of this symbolic interior realm in high Romanticism, in direct contradiction to Novalis, already appears at the opening of the fourth vigil in the anonymous *Nachwachen von Bonaventura (Night Watches of Bonaventura [1804])*. There the church, borrowed whole from horrific Gothicism, is enshrouded in the paralyzing enchantment of night; its windows are occluded, inoperative, ignored. When the strange narrator Kreuzgang takes up his perch "in dem alten gotischen Dome" ("in the old Gothic cathedral"), in order

to witness such matters as the Oedipal ragings of Don Juan, he situates himself in the church as if within the subjective, ironic, theatrical space of an imagination divorcing itself from the world and being self-destructing in the process. Whenever some residual value appears as a last glimmering – for instance, the death of a free-thinker surrounded by his adoring family in vigil one – the watchman peers into the interior space of the scene as into a chapel-like subspace. In this novel the metaphor of internalized space embraces all aspects of mankind’s divorce from nature and the inexorable retreat into and captivity in the self and mind. Art does not escape the curse, as we repeatedly learn. Bonaventura elevates to an aesthetic anti-principle the discovery that the internally illuminated drama of the human mind is spectral and phantasmagoric. The opening words of the final vigil stress the colourlessness of the condemning and condemned entropic mind as it plunges into nothingness.

When Stendhal allows us, with Julien Sorel, to intrude behind the scenes during the church celebration honouring the King in *Le Rouge et le Noir* (*The Red and the Black* [1831]), the inner spaces of ecclesiastical power exhibit only such a deceptive, base, theatrical light. The dandyish, unctuous young bishop practises hieratical poses before a mirror in a chamber whose Gothic windows ominously are walled up (Stendhal, 1957:103). A surviving, remote innersanctum, the magnificent old Gothic chapel ablaze with candlelight, is reserved by church authorities only for show, for a *coup de théâtre* to dazzle the susceptible ladies of rich families (108). Julien senses that, in effect, there are no windows, only occlusion and entrapment.

- **The window as boundary between selfhood and otherness**

The great Romantic painter Casper David Friedrich is one of the most insistent thematizers of the window as boundary between selfhood and otherness. He is also one of the most important artists who links modern consciousness in the individual subject, facing windows, doors, and gates, with collective cultural experience. The painting “Frauengestalt im Atelierfenster des Künstlers” (“Female Figure in the Window of the Artist’s Studio” [ca. 1818]), by allowing us viewers like the implied artist to gaze over her shoulder from the inside toward the partly intimated outside realm, exhibits Friedrich’s characteristic mode of Romantic irony. This internally replicated, self-conscious framing of the act of observing the world attains a new degree of complication in “Die Kreidefelsen auf Rügen” (“The Chalk Cliffs at Rügen”) where the viewer of the painting gazes through a bony aperture in nature at the sea, as into the infinite, while internal figures on the chalk cliffs in the work engage in three different modes of seeing. Pictures of fenestrated or gated walls through which we look, like the implicit artist, constitute another large category of Friedrich’s works.

- **Self-aware vision**

The import of self-aware vision is spelled out more fully in “Klosterhof im Schnee” (“Cloister Courtyard in the Snow” [1819]) which depicts a procession of tiny robed figures passing through a Gothic gate and entering into the empty space of a ruined church, as if for some commemoration. All that remains of the church are the high glassless windows of the apse, and we gaze through them at the same muted rose tone (promise of rebirth) in the winter clouds visible also through the blasted trees which internally frame the remnant. The surrounding snowy cemetery brings home powerfully the truth of the ruling winter trope. But since, in sympathy, we are invited to pass through the gate and stare out of the empty windows, we quickly arrive at the realization that the physical tokens of the death of religion have been transmuted in our mediating spirits into a new kind of truth. The outer structures of faith from an earlier age are now internalized in the mind that must face the reality of the historical situation and look through it. The humble clerics in this painting or in the similar “Abtei im Eichwald” (“Abbey in the Oak Wood” [1809]) suggest the collective heroism of those persisting in their belief. This complex understanding is present, though veiled, in “Winterlandschaft mit Ruine des Klosters Eldena” (“Winter Landscape with Ruin of the Eldena Cloister” [1808]) where a bent solitary figure passes in a wintry landscape before the shards of fenestrated church walls – a figure as noble in isolation as is the tiny internal viewer of the infinite in “Mönch am Meer” (“Monk on the Seashore” [1810-11]). There can be no mistaking the moral rightness of Romantic consciousness in such late Friedrich works as “Eule in gotischem Fenster” (“Owl in Gothic Window” [1836]), where the emblematic bird of wisdom and the Night stares at us in challenge from a ruined church window, or the mellower “Der Träumer” (“The Dreamer” [1835]), depicting a solitary man reading in the frame of a ruined church window beyond which nature emits a roseate and golden glow, sunset or sunrise.

2. Toward the *fin-de-siècle*

Hawthorne’s artist novel, *The Marble Faun* (1860), establishes in fulsome detail the kind of late Romantic consciousness which will nourish Symbolism and Modernism. The New England author uses to full advantage the well-established literary fascination for Rome and Italy. The interaction of the sculptor Kenyon and the painter Hilda, the American protagonists, with Donatello, the young Italian nobleman of ancient lineage, and the mysterious Miriam, constitutes, among other things, an exploration of cultural development. As they discuss or enact, and the narrator interposes his own insights into, aspects of the Judaic, Catholic, Protestant, and Humanist heritages, the plotline acquires connections that reach back through Romanticism and the Renaissance over the Middle Ages to our ancient classical and Oriental roots. In the Gothic depths of the catacombs

and ruins of Rome, as in the regions, cityscapes, buildings, and art works of Italy everywhere, reside forces that are historical, psychological, and archetypal: these the novel evokes and examines, continuing a heritage ingrained since the Renaissance and modified and enriched in Romanticism.

- **The literary fascination for Rome and Italy**

In Canto IV of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* (1818), for example, Byron exercises the license to contemplate Rome as a grand key to the story of European man. In so doing Byron dwells on two of the most important Roman temples which later figure in *The Marble Faun*. One, the Pantheon, stands as the monument that still conveys to the modern pilgrim the great inspiration of ancient civilization, whose *pietas*, *decorum*, and *virtus* are apprehended as the light entering its eye-like aperture. Despite the extra allure the surviving pagan holy place might be expected to possess for Byron, he goes on in *Childe Harold* to devote seven full stanzas instead to praise of “the vast and wondrous dome” (st. 153) of St. Peter’s, a grandeur which causes the mind to grow “colossal” (st. 155), to rise through the cathedral’s “gigantic elegance” toward a harmony “all musical in its immensities” (st. 156). Initially the “Outshining and o’erwhelming edifice/ Fools our fond gaze”; but gradually “growing with its growth, we thus dilate/ Our spirits to the size of that they contemplate” (st. 158). The achievement of the daring Renaissance mind embodied in St. Peter’s overshadows for Byron any lesser, negative association the cathedral has as the supreme basilica of Catholicism.

Although couched in a more strictly Protestant framework, Hawthorne’s treatment of St. Peter’s, elaborated in chapters 36 to 39 of *The Marble Faun*, is just as complex as Byron’s. Plunged into sorrow through knowledge of her friends’ desperate crime, Hilda unbeknownst inspires a painter who secretly captures her “forlorn gaze”, similar, so the Roman connoisseurs judge, to that in “the portrait of Beatrice Cenci” (1127). Of course, this identification is suffused for the reader by the sombre light of Shelley’s tragedy (1819). Though the daughter of New England Puritans, Hilda instinctively begins praying to the Virgin Mary, the “humanized” archetype of “Divine Womanhood” (1128). Restlessly wandering the galleries and churches of Rome, she now has the capacity to perceive the conflict between the sensual and the spiritual in the great masters, ambiguities in the works making up the long European heritage; yet also to feel poignantly the rare “hallowed work of genius” (1134) amid the plethora of commonplace, deconsecrated art. It is during this travail that Hilda experiences the awesome spaces of St. Peter’s and in chapter 39, entitled “The World’s Cathedral”, trembling on the brink of conversion, has recourse to the confessional (1148 ff.). In the preceding chapter entitled “Altars and Incense”, Hawthorne pays an ambivalent Romantic tribute to Catholicism’s all-encompassing aesthetics that appeals to the whole range of sensibility, including our weaknesses. The

introductory image for the mediational role of the Catholic system is that of cathedral window light:

[It supplies a multitude of external forms, in which the spiritual may be clothed and manifested; it has many painted windows, as it were, through which the celestial sunshine, else disregarded, may make itself gloriously perceptible in visions of beauty and splendour (1138).]

In this chapter's prelude the narrator takes us into the glowing sacral interior, under the lofty arches, within the space of apotheosis that the churches of Rome collectively constitute; and Hilda makes the familiar progression through these, by way of the "Pantheon, under the round opening in the Dome", to the unsurpassable "grandeur of this mighty Cathedral" (1141). At first St. Peter's "stands in its own way"; and Hilda clings to her own "childish vision", until by repeated visits she discovers – in the words of the narrator – "that the Cathedral has gradually extended itself over the whole compass of your idea; it covers all the site of your visionary temple, and has room for its cloudy pinnacles beneath the Dome" (1142 f.). Before recreating Hilda's breakthrough experience of the "comprehensive, majestic symbol" (1143), the narrator prepares us with a statement that pertains equally to our own experience of Hawthorne's entire book: "it is only by this fragmentary process that you get an idea of the Cathedral" (1142).

• **Hilda-Kenyon: modern man walking through time and interpreting the human story**

Before we witness Hilda's arrival at an epiphanic turning-point, Hawthorne conducts us on a larger journey through the cultural topography of Italy under the guidance of the sculptor Kenyon who, starting in the "grand frame-work of the Apennines" (1029), combines an actual tour of art appreciation with his mission to aid the guilt-stricken Donatello and Miriam, and thereby Hilda, too. The wanderer Kenyon is our representative expert in this celebration of the romance of art; he interprets the evidence of the human story throughout the ages in Italy and even savours wine in accordance with the Romantic thesis of recollection. In probing the archaic origins of Monte Beni, he senses the local "wine of the Golden Age" unmistakably pertains to a whole range of human acts which underly the emergence into civilization:

There was a deliciousness in it that eluded analysis, and – like whatever else is superlatively good – was perhaps better appreciated in the memory than by present consciousness (1037).

Unlike Donatello who is still struggling to comprehend his fall from natural grace, Kenyon can see the glorious Italian landscape unfolding to the horizon, studded

with cities, “the seats and nurseries of early Art” (1065). He draws strength reading “a page of heaven and a page of earth spread wide open before us”, something “only expressible by such grand hieroglyphics as these around us” (1066). Kenyon’s experience of the sublime of the greater world at sunset, a sublime understood to embrace all the time layers in the mind of its beholder, recapitulates with narrative amplitude the Romantic meditation such as practised by Shelley in “Lines Written among the Euganean Hills” (1818).

The interpenetration of all things and of “the mind which feeds this verse/ Peopling the lone universe” (lines 318-19) – to use Shelley’s words – actually has already occurred in Kenyon, and thus his understanding preconditions the step-by-step exploration of that immense canvas in the company of Donatello, his pupil and patient. The narrator, suspecting the life of a people “becomes fascinating either in the poet’s imagination or the painter’s eye” when they “are waning to decay and ruin” (1098), is implicated in his character’s ongoing act of recollection. The narrator’s authoritative discussion of the complexities embodied in the particular places and monuments blends into Kenyon’s. Chapter 33, entitled “Pictured Windows”, then fully internalizes the exploration. In the “forgotten edifices” of ancient towns we see the ghostly centuries piled up. But within the Gothic cathedrals and churches, the spirit of history is emitted as a glow of art (1104) for those still wanting to see. Especially in the stained-glass windows of Gothic churches, the mind experiences its own act of recognition, because

the light, which falls merely on the outside of other pictures, is here interfused throughout the work; it illuminates the design, and invests it with living radiance; and, in requital, the unfading colours transmute the common daylight into a miracle of richness and glory, in its passage through the heavenly substance of the blessed and angelic shapes, which through the arch window.

Kenyon, agreeing with the awakening Donatello on the horror of spiritual opacity, speculates that the punishment of unresolved sin may be

[that it shall insulate the sinner from all sweet society by rendering him impermeable to light, and therefore unrecognizable in the abode of heavenly simplicity and truth (1105)].

Just as Goethe says in his poem “Gedichte sind gemalte Fensterscheiben” (“Poems are stained glass windows”), Kenyon and Donatello find the windows dreary outside:

That miracle of radiant art, thus viewed, was nothing better than an incomprehensible obscurity, without a gleam of beauty to induce the beholder to attempt unravelling it (1107).

These lessons prepare the reversal when, in chapter 34, Hawthorne makes the entire market square of Perugia, under real daylight, into the sacral space of restored community. The cathedral suddenly recurs as the world and history through whose chapels we journey. Kenyon has been changed inwardly by his own charitable mission and new experiences, as we learn in chapter 43 where he wanders through “vast ranges of apartments” past centuries of the “treasures and marvels of antique art” in the Vatican. He is modern man walking through time represented in frozen images. Significant is his progress beyond the merit of the Apollo Belvedere to the “terrible magnificence” and “sad moral” of the Laokoon group (1178 f.). The metaphor of the church window appears in the narrator’s paraphrase of Kenyon’s thoughts about the nobler forms:

Being of so cold and pure a substance, and most deriving their vitality more from thought than passion, they require to be seen through a perfectly transparent medium (1178).

Kenyon seeks further through the obelisks, pyramids, monuments, and other markers of the Roman Campagna which seem to reveal the universal sickness and depravity of the present as against eternity; this landscape of tombs and dishonoured graves pictures the modern spiritual struggle against death. But eventually he happens upon and unearths the “long-buried hands” and soon more parts of a statue which rivals the Venus de’ Medici, the feminine analogy to the Apollo Belvedere; and instantly he makes the connection: “I seek for Hilda and find a marble woman!” (1206) “It is,” the narrator confirms, “one of the few works of antique sculpture in which we recognize Womanhood, and that, moreover, without prejudice to its divinity” (1207). With the bridal token, a bracelet that is like the eye of the Pantheon, Hawthorne invites us in the novel’s closing page to look through his book’s intertwined double plot, at the immemorial relationship Miriam-Donatello and that of the modern American artist couple Hilda-Kenyon, as through a magic glass. We gaze through the multiple facets of the symbol as through the transparency of the church window.

• **The “feminization” of the cathedral**

Hawthorne (1860 [1982]) brings us for brief previews into the forgotten cultural realm which a fellow New Englander, Henry Adams, revisits in his book *Mont-Saint-Michel and Chartres* in 1904, celebrating the glorious reemergence of the feminine in the interior sanctuary of the great medieval churches (“Astarte, Isis, Demeter, Aphrodite, and the last and greatest deity of all, the Virgin”, – p. 198). 1904 is, of course the year in which, in his novel *Ulysses* (1922), Joyce places the visit of the father and son questers, Bloom and Dedalus, to the queenly precinct. The time of Hawthorne’s novel is that of the passionate work of restoration of great French cathedrals undertaken by the architect and author Eugène-Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc (1814-79). If the trajectory from Hawthorne to Adams and Proust

represents one line of revaluation, a second line emphasizes the displacement of the church at the heart of the city. Edward Engelberg has argued convincingly that, from the mid-nineteenth century into Modernism, major novelists often “feminized” the cathedral. Concomitant with their recognition that a collapse of faith had voided churches of their once enormous symbolic powers, writers ironically used cathedral scenes as sites of erotic encounter or suggestion, as well as to imply “a counterpoint between bourgeois reality” and an “outworn creed” (Engelberg, 1986:246). He examines how Flaubert’s cathedral at Rouen in *Madame Bovary*, James’ Notre Dame in *The Ambassadors*, Lawrence’s Lincoln cathedral in *The Rainbow*, and Kafka’s Prague cathedral in *Der Prozeß* serve to link the lofty and the banal, to contrast an older communal bonding and moral imperative with the tawdry individual rebellion and sexuality of the present, although in the case of Kafka the church retains its authority against the all-too-human protagonist.

3. The Symbolist heritage

Major Symbolist and post-Symbolist poets recognized the importance of this same disjuncture which had conditioned the status of modern consciousness. José-Maria de Hérédia’s *Les Trophées* exemplifies the historical dimension.

- The window as intersecting planes of time, viewpoints and viewers

The poem “Vitrail” (“Church Window”) that just precedes “Épiphanie” (“Epiphany”) in this collection (1893) presents the “window” of its title as an intersection of planes of time, viewpoints, and viewers who are implicated in the mysterious image and its light. The word “Aujourd’hui” (“Today”) with which the sestina opens reinforces the temporal framing which the first quatrain establishes with the verb tense of line one:

*Cette verrière a vu dames et hauts barons
Étincelants d’azur, d’or, de flamme et de nacre,
Incliner, sous la dextre auguste qui consacre,
L’orgueil de leurs cimiers et de leurs chaperons: [...]*

[This window has seen dames and lords of might,
Sparkling with gold, with azure, flame and nacre,
Bow down before the altar of their Maker
The pride of crest and hood to sacred right, [...]]

The reader, too, is paradoxically captured. The unnamed poetic mind has implicitly already involved the reader in the permanent stare of the entombed nobility who repose in the church in the roseate glow, themselves having meanwhile become part of the image of the Middle Ages that remains to us, as the closing tercet states:

*Il gisent là sans voix, sans geste et sans ouïe,
Et de leurs yeux de pierre ils regardent sans voir
La rose du vitrail toujours épanouie.*

[All voiceless, deaf and motionless are they,
Whose eyes of stone look on the window nigh,
Yet cannot see its rose that blooms alway]

(Hérédia, 1913:93; translator E.R. Taylor).

Building upon Romantic recollection and anticipating Proust, Hérédia savours the insight that, in a certain sense, the participants of the lived Middle Ages could not truly know their own essence in the immediacy of experience to the degree that they embody it for us in a monumental permanence of their images and that we are privileged to bear witness to their beauty, once it is mediated.

• **An “epic” understanding of our past as transmitted**

The title of the collection *Les Trophées* (1893 [1979]) should be taken literally, because Hérédia is displaying the rich exotic booty, the glimpses which poetic recollection saves from oblivion. As viewings from a multitude of perspectives, together the sonnets gradually suggest an ultimate, ungraspable Symbol: the deeper mystery of the unfolding of Western consciousness. Hérédia divides his “trophies” into sub-cycles that follow, and reconstitute, the developmental outline already familiar as the deep structure of civilization in Hawthorne’s *The Marble Faun* and many another nineteenth-century work that aspires to an “epic” understanding of our past. The poem “Vitrail” opens the sub-cycle of the “Le Moyen Age et la Renaissance”, which closes in an exotic evocation of the decadence of the dream empire of the early modern period. Other poets will make other specific choices of materials in the twentieth century in reapproaching this kind of grand recapitulation. But in essence Ezra Pound’s *Cantos* reinstate more fulsomely the nineteenth-century universalizing survey of the human pathway such as Hérédia attempted in fewer, finer slices.

The sub-cycles “Romancero” (“Book of Romance”) and “Les Conquistadors de l’Or” (“Conquistadors”) explore the drama of the expansion of the European system to the New World, the extraordinary surge of energies that, in the final analysis, faces the same inexorable limits of death and decay as all other human enterprise. Hérédia celebrates the coming into existence of the matrix to which he owes his own being as a son of the Caribbean. Long before such cultural exiles as Alejo Carpentier, Hérédia here sketches the foundational romance that will be such an important genre in the Latin American novel of the second half of the twentieth century. Traveling back and forth between Old and New Worlds and back and forth perspectively in history implies movement around the elusive symbol – also movement through the mediating “window” that finally proves to

be invisible, or only knowable in the emptied frame or art. That is all we are promised in the poem “L’Oubli” (“Oblivion”) opening *Les Trophées*, as the first quatrain states:

*Le temple est en ruine au haut du promontoire.
Et la Mort a mêlé, dans ce fauve terrain,
Les Déeses de marbre et les Héros d’airain
Dont l’herbe solitaire ensevelit la gloire.*

[The Temple’s ruins all the headland strew,
Upon whose tawny height brass heroes wane,
With marble goddesses, whose glory vain
The lonely grass shrouds tenderly from view]
(Hérédia, 1913:5; translator E.R. Taylor, 5).

- **The evidence of eternity; the threat of the void**

Hérédia’s formal substitution of the ruined temple for the church – a pictorial example of the latter as emptied form would be Friedrich’s painting of a ruined abbey amidst oaks (“Die Abtei im Eichwald”) – is far from a neo-classical gesture after Romanticism; it draws upon a fundamental sensibility enunciated in Stéphane Mallarmé’s early poems gathered in 1866 under the title *Parnasse Contemporain* (*Contemporary Parnassus*). Mallarmé’s poet is faced with his own decrepitude, the evidence of eternity, the threat of the void, “L’insensibilité de l’azur et des pierres” (“The insensibility of the blue [sky] and the stones”) (“Tristesse de’Été” [“Sadness of Summer”]); he seeks a direction out of the sterility of his own awareness and the limits of exhausted nature, but the question remains, “Où fuir dans la révolte inutile et perverse?” (“Whither to flee in this futile and perverse revolt?”) (“L’Azur” [“Azure”]); nonetheless, the heart cannot forswear its yearning for the Baudelairean voyage of discovery “pour une exotique nature” (“seeking an exotic nature”) (“Brise Marine” [“Sea Breeze”]). In this well-known context, Mallarmé’s “window” is the emptied framing that haunts us; however, the negative force of space defined by the framing reveals a positive space acquired.

- **Mallarmé’s paradoxical image of the “window”**

This paradox has a special poignancy in Mallarmé’s “Les Fenêtres” (“The Windows,” [1863]) since the poem’s protagonist is a sick old man who, through the hospital windows, fastens upon the virginal luminosity outside. Robert Cohn (1991) has argued persuasively that the “drunken” viewer rediscovers the “mother” as the primal chanel and attachment. The first-person voice that despite his alienation associates with this childlike thirst as of strophe seven is torn by the questions which recognition of the yearning raises. The window of birth and nourishment becomes a surface, the mirror, simultaneously, the spectral moment

of self-recognition, of transformation, of restoration, of recollection – the glass of “art” or “mysticity”:

*Dans leurs verre, lavé d'éternelles rosées,
Que dore le matin chaste de l'Infini*

*Je me mire et me vois ange! et je meurs, et j'aime
– Que la vitre soit l'art, soit la mysticité –
A renaître portant mon rêve en diademe,
Au ciel antérieur où fleurit la Beauté!*
(lines 28-32)

[In their glass, bathed by eternal dews, which the chaste morning of the Infinite gilds, I look and see myself an angel! and I die, and I love – whether that window-pane be art or be mysticity – to be reborn bearing my dream in diadem, to an anterior heaven where Beauty blossoms.]

• **Mirror, window and (inner) space**

But caught below in the impure, the Self (“Moi”) is the swan that agonizes over whether to break the crystalline surface and take flight, fearful of an eternal Icarian fall. In the death-conditioned vision of this Symbolist swan we can hear resonating the death-song of the Romantic swan. For example, in Clemens Brentano’s “Schwanenlied” (“Swan Song”), so admired by Hölderlin, the poetic bird recognizes and blesses life “between dawn and dusk,” as the seasons rush past and while its head is plunging into the waters of baptism and death as into a mirror. At the moment of passionate understanding, it realizes it is frozen into the winter ice and its own plumage betokens the deathly purity of snow and stars.

The relationship between “mirror” and “window” interests poets throughout the longer period marked by the succession of Romantic, Symbolist, and Modern sensibilities. Rilke, an inheritor through both the German and French traditions, is especially attracted to the possibilities for combining or bridging motivic materials. The abandoned sacral or private space as a simile for the poetic self and as the medium for recollection is frequent in his early lyrics, e.g., in the opening line of the pieces gathered in 1896 under the title *Traumgekrönt* (*Dream-crowned*): “Mein Herz gleicht der vergessenen Kapelle” (“My heart is like the forgotten chapel”). The typical Romantic room and window of the experiencing-poetizing subject appear in such poems as “Am Rande der Nacht” (“On the Edge of Night” [1900]), while “Letzter Abend” (“Final Evening” [1906]) adds the motif of the internal mirror and enlarges the room into an androgynic, intersubjective space, the boundary between inner world and outer nature still being the traditional window. In “Casabianca” (*Advent* [1897]) the poet recognizes that communion still occurs even though to the forgetful world the church windows are “hollow” (second strophe):

*Vergessene Heilige wohnen
dort einsam im Altarschrein:
der Abend reicht ihnen Kronen
durch hohle Fenster hinein.*

[Forgotten saints dwell there lonely in the altar's sanctuary: Evening hands
in crowns to them through hollow windows.]

As they will be for Proust, in *Vom mönchischen Leben (Of Monastic Life* [1899]) churches are a species of fading music, "in ihrem Steigen und Erstehen/ als Harfen, tönende Verröster" [p. 289]). In *Von der Armut und vom Tode (Of Poverty and Death* [1903]), the humblest space can be in correspondence to that authentic embodiment: "Des Armen Haus ist wie ein Altarschrein" ("The poorman's house is like an altar shrine" [p. 362]). In "Die Kathedrale" (*Neue Gedichte* [1907]), Rilke suddenly feels confronted by the mysterious life-story of the churches that, as sacramental embodiment, seem so out of place in the quotidian town, almost out of time despite their surviving material features (lines 23-27):

*Da war Geburt in diesen Unterlagen,
Und Kraft und Andrang war in diesem Ragen
und Liebe überall wie Wein und Brot,
und die Portale voller Liebesklagen (p. 498).*

[Birth was there in these underpinnings, and power and impetus was in this rearing, and love everywhere as wine and bread, and the portal full of complaints of love.]

The paired poems "Adam" and "Eva" of *Der neuen Gedichte anderer Teil (New Poems, Part Two* [1908]) return to the examination of the gentler aspect of the Middle Ages. Our First Parents (as archetypes) occupy a surprising position "above" us (as beholders) despite the Fall. Yet they appear respectively startled and proud (Adam), and uprooted, yearning, recollective (Eve). They are in an awkward relation to the great rose window, estranged but close to that very symbol they embody – on our behalf, and like us. The unidentified voice of the poem speaks with authority and analytic externality that adds to the irony of discovering the latent glory of the window. In effect, we have happened upon the protagonists of an educational wandering after the fortunate Fall. It is an arrival at a steep place, where pausing we, as our First Parents, are discomfited by our exile and yet determined to see it through. The avatars Adam and Eve, being "roses" in conformity with Christ and Mary, dizzily ascend into the Rose of the window.

Several poems following "Die Kathedrale" in *Neue Gedichte* (1906) – "Das Portal" ("The Portal"), "Die Fensterrose" ("The Rose Window"), "Das Kapital"

(“The Capital”), “Gott im Mittelalter” (“God in the Middle Ages”) – examine aspects of the structure bearing on the nature of the too demanding deity revealed thereby. The sonnet “Die Fensterrose” (“The Rose Window”) glimpses the terrifying mystery of the symbol:

*Da drin: das träge Treten ihrer Tatzen
eine Stille, die dich fast verwirrt;
und wie dann plötzlich eine von den Katzen
den Blick an ihr, der hin und wieder irrt,*

*gewaltsam in ihr großes Auge nimmt –
den Blick, der, wie von eines Wirbels Kreis
ergriffen, eine kleine Weile schwimmt
und dann versinkt und nichts mehr von sich weiß,*

*wenn dieses Auge, welches scheinbar ruht,
sich auftut und zusammenschlägt mit Tosen
und ihn hineinreißt bis ins rote Blut – :*

*So griffen einstmals aus dem Dunkelsein
der Kathedralen große Fensterrosen
ein Herz und rissen es in Gott hinein (p. 501).*

[In there: The languid tread of their paws a stillness which almost disconcerts you; and then, suddenly, how one of the cats takes the look of it wandering back and forth violently into its great eye; – that look which, as if seized in a vortex’s gyre, swims a little while and then submerges and shows no further sign, when this eye, apparently at rest, opens and slams itself shut with tumult and rips the gaze right into the red blood: Thus once upon a time out of dark being the cathedrals’ rose windows plucked a heart and ripped it into God.]

The human glance is drawn into an abyss on high when the window as a cat-like eye suddenly tears and devours the beholder. Our selfhood is annihilated in the sudden sacrificial moment. This is, on the one hand, a savage rendering as in mystical poetry; the final tercet interprets medieval total dedication to God as being engulfed in the Redeemer-Victim’s blood at the heart of the rose. The moment bears resemblance, on the other hand, to the realization of the dangerous attraction toward the divine which results in the poet’s being blasted by his presumption. In Hölderlin’s poetry, the chastened hubristic “priest” plummets to earth. Here the narrating voice moves within a Symbolist perspectival network of associations. It returns suddenly from the rose as the frightening eye, the power of which has been evoked, to the real ground of the street, to the normal terrain of history from which, nowadays, we look at cathedral rose windows.

• Architectonic window and organic window

Rilke's late French poems, gathered in the cycles *Les Roses* and *Les Fenêtres*, delicately fuse the architectonic window and the organic window of Symbolism in order to allow the transmuted spaces of self and art to flow in and out of each other and of the natural estate. The taproots nourishing these cycles go deep into the soil of Romantic literature. The rose reclaims its universality, standing both for the organic realm as "l'odorante labyrinthe" ("A fragrant labyrinth" [Rilke, 1986:6-7; translated by Poulin]) and for the psychological realm as "cet espace d'amour" ("this love-space" [Rilke, 1986:4-5]) – which flow together as one. The rose incarnates the mystery of our pilgrimage as children of Adam and Eve; it is the "rose qui infiniment possède la perte" ("rose infinitely holding the fall" [Rilke, 1986:8-9]). Even God, appearing as Self, looks out of the window at the roses in the garden: "Dieu, en regardant par la fenêtre,/ fait la maison" ("God, while looking out the window,/ keeps house" [Rilke, 1986:163]). Like the flesh, ours or the rose's, the poem envelops and determines the space of the mystery with a Symbolist theatrical gesture as "rideau,/ robe du vide!" ("curtain,/ vestment of the void!" [Rilke, 1986:36-37]).

4. Modernist narrative

Beyond episodic nuclei around which chapters may cohere, the first complex order of epiphany in narrative fiction is that associated with an esthete or artist as in *A Rebours*, "Tonio Kröger", *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, or *A la Recherche du Temps perdu*. There are innumerable instances when as privileged listeners we hear Proust's (as yet unnamed) narrator in *Du côté de chez Swann* (*Swann's Way*), the first book of *A la Recherche du Temps perdu*, recount specific moments of aesthetic breakthrough based on his own experiences. Among the analogies proffered on page one for the "work" we are entering is the famous equation: "une église, un quatuor, la rivalité de François Ier et de Charles Quint" ("a church, a quartet, the rivalry of Francis I and Charles V"). In a striking reversion to an older model, Proust reinvoles the positive imagery of cathedral window light. Even though he uses the danger-laden Romantic motif of the magic lantern or internal projection, he combines the Romantic room as the interior space of the subject with the window as metaphor of mediation. This promise of meaningful correspondences offsets the evident malaise of the experiencing subject. In the overture passages of the Combray section of *Du côté de chez Swann*, the narrating voice recollects early moments in the development of his own imagination during childhood. The stories projected by magic lantern to amuse him both alleviate and aggravate his awareness of separation within, and alienation from, his own mental space:

À Combray, tous les jours dès la fin de l'après-midi, longtemps avant le moment où il faudrait me mettre au lit et rester, sans dormir, loin de ma

mère et de ma grand-mère, ma chambre à coucher redevenait le point fixe et douloureux de mes préoccupations. On avait bien inventé, pour me distraire les soirs où on me trouvait l'air trop malheureux, de me donner une lanterne magique dont, en attendant l'heure du diner, on coiffait ma lampe; et, à l'instar des premiers architectes et maîtres verriers de l'âge gothique, elle substituait à l'opacité des murs d'impalpables irisations, de surnaturelles apparitions multicolores, ou des légendes étaient dépeintes comme dans un vitrail vacillant et momentané. Mais ma tristesse n'en était qu'accrue, parce que rien que le changement d'éclairage détruisait l'habitude que j'avais de ma chambre et grâce à quoi, sauf le supplice du coucher, elle m'était devenue supportable. Maintenant je ne la reconnaissais plus et j'y étais inquiet, comme dans une chambre d'hôtel ou de chalet où je fusse arrivé pour la première fois en descendant de chemin de fer (Proust, 1987:9).

[At Combray, as every afternoon ended, long before the time when I should have to go to bed and lie there, unsleeping, far from my mother and grandmother, my bedroom became the fixed point on which my melancholy and anxious thoughts were centered. Someone had indeed had the happy idea of giving me, to distract me on evenings when I seemed abnormally wretched, a magic lantern, which used to be set on top of my lamp while we waited for dinner-time to come; and, after the fashion of the master-builders and glass painters of gothic days, it substituted for the opaqueness of my walls an impalpable, iridescence, supernatural phenomena of many colours, in which legends were depicted as on a shifting and transitory window. But 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, in a place where I had just arrived by train for the first time] (Proust, 1981:9-10; translation by Moncrieff & Kilmartin).

- **The master image of the church and church window**

The master-image of the church and the church window is a guarantor once again of the inherent correspondence between the revelations of form in the organic realm, in the psyche, and in art. This is abundantly clear in the famous episode in the Combray section when, as a boy, the narrator glimpses Gilberte amid the hawthorns. The progression over synesthetic-musical bridges builds to several epiphanic peaks that are resolved and muted in the irony of the aged narrator's recollection of how the power of his imagination converted the colour of Gilberte's eyes from black to his childhood ideal, blue. Here Proust also picks up and carries forward the Romantic and Symbolist theme in blue, as part of the elaborate chromatics of his novel. At one point the divine light of the Easter season – the ruling trope of Combray section – is experienced as being

transmitted through the blossoms as if pouring in through the windows of a church:

La haie formait comme une suite de chapelles qui disparaissaient sous la jonchée de leurs fleurs amoncellées en reposoir; au-dessus d'elles, le soleil posait à terre un quadrillage de clarté, comme s'il venait de traverser une verrière; leur parfum s'étendait aussi onctueux, aussi délimité en sa forme que si j'eusse été devant l'autel de la Vierge, et les fleurs, aussi parées, tenaient chacune d'une air distrait son étincelant bouquet d'étamines, fines et rayonnantes nervures de style flamboyant comme celles qui à l'église ajouraient la rampe du jube ou les meneaux du vitrail et qui s'épanouissaient en blanche chair de fleur de fraisier (Proust, 1987:138).

[The hedge resembled a series of chapels, whose walls were no longer visible under the mountains of flowers that were heaped upon their altars; while beneath them the sun cast a checkered light upon the ground, as though it had just passed through a stained-glass window; and their scent swept over me, as unctuous, as circumscribed in its range, as though I had been standing before the Lady-altar, and the flowers, themselves adorned also, held out each its little bunch of glittering stamens with an absent-minded air, delicate radiating veins in the flamboyant style like those which, in the church, framed the stairway to the rood-loft or the mullions of windows and blossomed out into the fleshy whiteness of strawberry-flowers] (Proust, 1981:150; translation by Moncrieff & Kilmartin).

- **Correspondences and synesthetical bridging of realms**

Onto the correspondences inhering in the structures of organic nature, art, and the mind, gradually we superimpose the patterns discovered in history. Toward the end of the Combray section, for example, the narrator (Marcel) recalls, through the virtually time-liberated optic of an indefinite later moment, the overwhelming vision of Mme de Guermantes in the church, her aristocratic eyes emitting a “flot de lumière bleue” (“a flood of blue light”) like cathedral windows. We are privy not just to a recollection of the complex process by which Marcel integrated all his prior knowledge and imaginings about her with the human actuality of the person and the occasion, but to a recollection of an epiphany occurring in a context that is effectively unlocked by that epiphany. Through Marcel we submit to the spell and totality of a ritual that marks and qualifies biological and social time: the wedding mass. We are further initiated into a living and dying structure, the church at Combray that houses the meaning of his vision in many forms, including entire works of art therein, which is a point of “lyrical” precipitation in the recollected experience when Marcel recognizes his attraction to the duchess. His youthful interpretation of her gesture of tenderness, first associated synesthetically with the light, cloth, and flowers that produce “un épiderme de lumière” (“an epidermis of light”) flows over into an overt critical insight, a

mature reference to instances where the arts as complex structures (“certaines pages de *Lohengrin*, certaines peintures de Carpaccio, [...] Baudelaire”, p. 176 [certain pages of *Lohengrin*, certain paintings by Carpaccio, (...) Baudelaire (Moncrieff & Kilmartin, p. 194)]) have synesthetically bridged the realms.

- **The window as metaphoric capacity**

We can see in painting, too, at the turn of the century just how thoroughly the church window and its light have pervaded French art by offering an attractive metaphoric capacity. The work of Odilon Redon illustrates this. In his “Le Jour” (“The Day” [1891]), we gaze out of a mournful dark interior through a barred window at the trunk section of the tree of life outside. His “Le Liseur” (“The Reader” [1892]) thematizes how a high window admits illumination into the inner space where it shines upon and is radiating forth from a book which his own teacher reads – in a setting probably influenced by Albrecht Dürer’s picture of Saint Jerome in his study. In “La Fenêtre” (ca. 1894) a figure, hands clasped on face in wonder, kneels in interior darkness by a barred window in the shape of a church window through which radiates an indefinite luminous vision. In “Vitrail-Beatrice” (“Beatrice-Stained Glass Window” [1895]) the organic and spiritual fold together in Dante’s beloved caught like a saint’s effigy in a stained glass window. The many idealized heads and figures in magical colour by Redon from the 1890s onward – e.g., “Sita” (1892), “Orphée” (1903), “Buddha” (1905) and “Hommage à Gauguin” (1906) – could readily also be integrated into a window as is the head with profuse flowers in “La Fenêtre” (1907).

The many pastels and oils by Redon carrying the label “window” in the first decade of the new century cover the gamut from direct representation of a historical church window from within the church, to figures in holy scenes in his own manner, to virtually abstract floriation framed within architecturally distinct Gothic church windows. Robert Delaunay’s “Fenêtre” (ca. 1912-13) demonstrates the possibility of summing up this great Romantic-Symbolist tradition in a modernist vein. Delaunay’s Cubist window is simultaneously the abstractly reconceived total image of an entire cathedral which, as if liberated from its own structural materials, seems to soar in the direction given by, and within, a Gothic arch as if it is window transcendent.

- **Clusters of inner space associations – even in anti-Romantic writing**

It is indicative of its status that even the avowedly anti-Romantic writer William Dean Howells is able to exploit the space illuminated by cathedral window light for swift characterization of a complex set of cultural and psychological understandings. In part I, chapter 8 of his novel *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890), the American couple, the Marches, momentarily step out of the morning rush of New York City into Grace Cathedral, whose architecture, though

imitative, they nonetheless admit to be “beautiful.” As a narrated moment, their immersion is brief, and it can be kept to a few pen strokes because the cluster of associations is so well-established:

Rapt far from New York, if not from earth, in the dim richness of the painted light, the hallowed music took them with a solemn ecstasy; the aerial, aspiring Gothic forms seemed to lift them heavenward. They came out reluctant into the dazzle and bustle of the street, with a feeling that they were too good for it, which they confessed to each other with whimsical consciousness.

Reader escapism, too, is held in check by the virtual shorthand citation of the basics. The pause to acknowledge the spell of the place is also a chance to recognize being situated beyond Romanticism:

“But no matter how consecrated we feel now,” he said, “we mustn’t forget that we went into the church for precisely the same reason that we went into the Vienna Cafe for breakfast – to gratify an aesthetic sense, to renew the faded pleasure of travel for a moment, to get back to the Europe of our youth. It was a purely pagan impulse, Isabel, and we’d better own it” (Howells, 1965:47).

In drawing the geocultural coordinates, Howells not only confirms that the wholesome realism of the Marches is the successor to the religious sentiment embodied in the church; he also indicates that contemporary America, though schooled by older Europe, has subsumed, critiqued, and incorporated the various lessons in a modern form; America is now the scene of the vital action.

One generation later, back in old Europe in chapter 9 of Franz Kafka’s novel *Der Prozeß* (*The Trial* [1925]), Josef K. is exploring the at first apparently empty, dank cathedral while waiting to show it to a never-to-arrive Italian business client as a tourist attraction. He strains to see pictures and emblems by the faint light of lamps including his pocket torch, when mysteriously a vester motions him toward a pulpit from which a priest, who turns out to be the prison chaplan, preaches an accusatory sermon at him. The episode is replete with glimpses of traditional imagery which Modernist readers, unlike obdurate K., can scarcely resist acknowledging. Indeed ominous is the invisible narrator’s observation:

Was für ein Unwetter mochte draußen sein? Das war kein trüber Tag, das war schon tiefe Nacht. Keine Glasmalerei der großen Fenster war in-stande, die dunkle Wand auch nur mit einem Schimmer zu unterbrechen. Und gerade jetzt begann der Kirchendiener, die Kerzen auf dem Hauptaltar, eine nach der anderen, auszulöschen. ‘Bist du mir böse?’ fragte K. den Geistlichen (Kafka, 1953:253 f.).

[What fearful weather there must be outside! There was no longer even a murky daylight; black night had set in. All the stained glass in the great window could not illumine the darkness of the wall with one solitary glimmer of light. And at this very moment the verger began to put out the candles on the high altar, one after another. 'Are you angry with me?' asked K. of the priest] (translated by Muir in Kafka, 1984:211).

I do not want to pursue an interpretation of Kafka's chapter "Im Dome" ("In the Cathedral"). My limited point here in citing this passage is that the German writer, too, like Howells, for his own purposes re-uses the elaborate interior space of the cathedral as a familiar quotation – in this instance, of course, starting from an invocation of the negative Gothic variation. As I have treated at greater length in an essay entitled "The Haunted Narrator before the Gate" (Gillespie, 1996), Kafka's cathedral gradually reveals itself to contain the lost complexity that the protagonist has representatively forgotten. That complexity permeates, but is also subsumed by, the mind of the outer narrator who probes the metamorphosed condition of K.'s mind. Internalized in the cathedral chapter, as are many dimly perceived representations on chapel walls, is the great midrashic exchange between the prison chaplain who expounds the parable of the "gate of the Law" and K. as maladroit and resistant interlocutor. In the parable, the radiance of God shines forth through the "gate" into an interior darkness which bears remarkable resemblance to the darkness in which the human subject is caught. If the entire cathedral chapter functions like a stained glass window (paradoxically, in spite, or because, of the express theme that the cathedral's windows are occulted), the reader, with his or her nature, remains as the challenged perceiver who must relate to the light.

5. Conclusion

Several general conclusions can be drawn from the Modernist paintings and narratives examined above. Each tends to thematize some aspect of the Symbolist response to a threatening loss of cultural and sacral values. The artist's sense of being "haunted" by hidden or receding meaning tends to reinstantiate what has been lost, at least in a preliminary gesture. Rilke establishes a new secular position as an ontological existentialist in respectfully acknowledging (like Hérédia) the cultural forms that once flourished as expressions of life's genuine mystery and of the human spirit; he moves from keen observation of these to reverential acceptance of supreme symbols taken from "ordinary" life in extraordinary condensation, thereby providing us with reconstituted sacraments. In contrast, Kafka elevates "forgetting", the experience of separation from the sacred, on one level, seemingly, its collapse, to a central place in his art; the reader remains "haunted", even "paranoiac", but unendingly driven to interpretation. The great question becomes whether, by negation, too,

the sacred persists. Proust carries us beyond this existential and spiritual wounding (Mallarmé's "glaive sûr" in "L'Azur") to the completion of the Symbolist goal of "recollection" (Baudelaire's "receuillement"). He accepts the historical evidence – already noted by the Romantics – for the time-process in which the complex expressions of the human desire for the sacred are inexorably involved; he depicts that need as a permanent attribute of human existence; and he recuperates the sacramental correspondence between the laws of life and human striving. In Proust, nature's light and that of cathedral windows ultimately merge in same space of truth.

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