“... une apparition surnaturelle”: Window-motif and framing strategies in Mörike and Proust

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Introduction

1 The window-motif has been very popular in art and literature for centuries. It dates back to the 15th century, for example in Northern Renaissance paintings of interiors, and can be seen in the depiction of the woman at the window in Vermeer in the 16th century. It is striking, however, that the window in literature emerges in particular during the first half of the 19th century and that it has another revival at the turn of the 20th century, e. g. in Forster’s A Room with a View.

2 The window-motif seems particularly significant for authors between two time periods. The aforementioned transition periods favour this pattern of imagination, which reacts to the various challenges posed by the cultural context. This article focuses on the window-motif in the works of two authors who are writing on the threshold: Mörike, between the Napoleonic era and the Restauration in Germany, and Proust between 1900 and the First World War in France. In their writings, the window-motif can be illustrated as a functional device that tries to compensate for the loss of transcendental areas. Windows become essential to trying and exploring the transition to another sphere by creating this sphere within a frame. This can be read either as a nostalgic gesture to save the past in an area of idealization or as an attempt to grasp the diversity of a new life – to imagine the hereafter despite its actual concealment.

3 Drawing on the social context of their time periods, this article will illustrate the literal and figurative construction of windows in two of Mörike’s object-poems and in Proust’s Du côté de chez Swann. The question is, in particular, how objects are attributed with a
quality of transcendence and are allowed to open up window-like visions to mysterious spheres of regained paradise.

**The Loss of the Object – The Matted Mirror**

As a result of grave political and social changes in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars (1803-1815), traditional metaphysical patterns that underlay the romantic mind were affected. The romantics had depicted nature as a mirror of their souls. In romantic symbols, landscapes figured as the counterpart of the feeling subject and, by this, provided a spiritual refuge in contrast to the city. The corresponding landscape is based on an *analogia entis* between subject and object, which is a key concept in Hegel’s and Schelling’s philosophies. Man and nature are supposed to be of identical “substance” because the very ground of all being is the spirit. It reaches its highest objectivation in human reason. Thus, contemplative perception of nature is self-awareness of nature.

Caspar David Friedrich depicted this type of quasi-religious perception in his famous paintings, e.g. in *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (1818) (The Wanderer Above the Sea Fog).

Ongoing industrialization, however, invades the temple of nature and kills its reputation. Darwin depicts it, far from being a cosmic harmony, as a ruthless battlefield where the races fight to survive. The fact that nature degenerates into dead material is expressed in the German term *Entseelung* or *Entzauberung* (Disenchantment), which refers to the deep crisis of the romantic metaphysical system on the threshold of modernity.

The central aspect of this crisis is, in fact, the loss of the object. The universal spirit, sensualized in its objectivation (nature), has withdrawn. As a result, the object becomes opaque and is a stranger to the subject. The mirror of self-cognition becomes matte; the interrelation fails. Thus, the loss of the object is at the same time the loss of self-consciousness. The synoptic view of the wide space has turned out to be the “empty vision,” which searches obsessively but in vain for the object and its comforting response.

**Modern Times: Liminality As an End in Itself**

The loss of the object and its resulting opacity, due to the reinterpretation of nature, is only one aspect of the great semantic shift within the threshold between romanticism and modernity. This semantic shift can be viewed using the term *liminality* by Victor Turner. He develops the concept using symbolic anthropology, on the backs of van Gennep’s *Rites de passage*. In order to describe the process of social initiation, Turner distinguishes the preliminal phase (A), the phase of liminality (B) and the postliminal phase (C). While A and C are characterized by fixed semantic structures, B represents the semantic crisis or transition, the stripping off of preliminal and postliminal attributes. In B, the social sign receives a new meaning. Thus liminality is ambiguity, and serves as a grave and a fold at the same time. Turner’s model can be described in the teleological scheme of thesis, antithesis and synthesis: $A \leftrightarrow B \rightarrow C$. C represents the final stage to which B will inevitably be led.

However, the periods between the end of the 18th century up to the 19th century, and from the turn of the 20th century up to the First World War, can be considered as a time
of permanent cultural shock. None of Turner’s structural conditions could be fulfilled anymore, as the world seemed an ill-assorted bunch of social phenomena rather than a structured social body. The transition to the postliminal status (C) was blocked permanently. In our scheme, \( A \leftrightarrow B \rightarrow C \), we can take note of the failure of the ritual system with a frontier between B and C: \( A \leftrightarrow B | C \) with the result \( A \leftrightarrow | B | (C) \). The contemporaries experienced the end of the former world but could not reach the world to come as a stabilized structure. They were “enclosed” in the space between two time periods. Warning refers to the loss of the object as an experience within the thresholded mind. He points out that the unattainable otherness of the changing reality can be considered as a breaking off of the notion of the outer reality. In the metaphysical discourse, this breaking off corresponds to the loss of the spiritualized nature as an object of cognition.

**Imaginative Recompensation: The Frame to Regain the Object**

9 As a consequence of being enclosed in transition, an overflowing mental energy arises that cannot be consumed by action or by “using reality,” but which turns into reflection and imagination. Highly subjective inner worlds are created – esthetic substitutes of the unpredictable world “outside” that lies beyond comprehension.

10 Imagination reacts with essential motifs, which are borders, passages and windows. These motifs are all different types of frames. The frame constitutes an artificial exit to another sphere (C). Imaginary thresholds are passed through and repassed through, constituting a circular model that intends to (re)create wholeness as dysphoric or euphoric eternity. This concept of circulation can also be considered as a frame. Framing is an attempt to objectivate the unpredictable otherness and to regain the lost object by (re)creating it in a well-defined area – a kind of epistemological reflex. Such framing can be read as a nostalgic gesture to regain an idealized past or as an explorative attempt to grasp the diversity of a new life.

11 There are different ways in which a quasi-transcendental frame can be constructed. The object can be coded as transcendental. Then, it is often ritualized or animated as the auratic counterpart (or mirror) of the subject and is treated as an idol that opens up a view into another sphere. On the other hand, the transcendental frame can be constructed as a textual strategy. The authors experienced an epistemological situation similar to a threshold. A new time period was imminent, but there were not yet adequate categories in which to articulate this “glimpse of eternity.” Turner’s liminality is thus used as a rhetorical milieu where reality is stripped of its literal meaning in order to open up a view of new areas of figurative meaning. In Mörike and Proust, we will analyze these different types of transcendental framing.

**Mörike and the Window in Nature**

12 Eduard Mörike (1804-1875) was a contemporary of the great process of modernization on the threshold between the Napoleonic era and the Restauration. The unpredictable, changing times and the fragility of the political situation left a deep impression on him. But his poetry articulates first and foremost the danger of ideologizing nature as a temple in the late Romantic age. He himself lived on the threshold: between his reclusive life as a pastor and his far-reaching real profession, which he considered to be that of a writer.
Two of his object-poems shall be analyzed with regard to the construction of transcendental frames, which are intended to open up a view into a sphere of otherness.

“An einem Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang”¹⁶

In the poem An einem Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang, written in 1825 and printed in 1834 in the Deutsche Musenalmanach, Mörike chooses the threshold between night and day – the dawn – to create a window of otherness. The speaker stays in touch with this tender, untrodden zone between night and day, addressing it as his counterpart by means of an apostrophe. The zone opens suddenly into an area of otherness; an experience that is different to everyday life: “Welche neue Welt bewegest du in mir? / Was ists, daß ich auf einmal nun in dir / Von sanfter Wollust meines Daseins glühe?”¹⁷ It is the space of a new world of unknown origin in the subject, which provides a euphoric feeling of intensity, or even gloom. Thus, the time zone of dawn can be considered as an ontological field of its own, which is of some higher degree than the empirical world – a quasi-transcendental field opened window-like to a subjectively-legitimized hereafter.

The second strophe intensifies the auratic field between dawn and the speaker’s mind, which appears metaphorically as a crystal. This crystal-like inner world is opened by a magic, God-like word and is illustrated by a vision in the third stanza. The subject closes his eyes because the light makes him reel: “Bei hellen Augen glaub ich doch zu schwanken; / Ich schließe sie, daß nicht der Traum entweiche.”¹⁸ The dizziness indicates the loss of the empirical world, which used to be reassuring to the romantic mind. In permanent liminality, the modern subject has lost its balance and moves in circles.¹⁹ The mentioned reaction to the vertiginous semantic instability is paradigmatic for modern writing in general: the closing of the eyes to see another world, so far undiscovered but now approaching vaguely like a dream: “Seh ich hinab in lichte Feenreiche?” S²⁰ Sight is led downward toward some fairy kingdom. This topographical detail indicates the rhetorical restitution of the ground where all beings lie (which seems lost in the outer world) as an indestructible inner area. It figures as an artificially-created hereafter without real substance or reference, but is made of mere beauty. Thus, the vision appears as a celebrative self-reflection, which replaces the mirror of nature and shows the inner condition in all its fluctuation and multi-coloured oscillation of thought and image: the “bunten Schwarm von Bildern und Gedanken.”²¹

The fourth stanza indicates the pool of one’s own heart as a pool of semantic otherness, where different religious concepts merge: The panpipe and vinous youth evoke the divine cosmos of antiquity and Dionysian rites – the cradle is a reminder of the Christian arrival of the saviour.²² The bourgeois, gilded pool is coded as the very window of regained wholeness or transcendental unity, rediscovered by the subject within himself: unity of past and present, of Christianity and antiquity, of motion and quietness, of sensuality and moral integrity. The dream during slumber turns out to be a window, which opens up the view to a quasi-religious sphere where the subject experiences being part of the unity. In himself, he reactivates the broken bond of the romantic analogia entis in order to re-participate in the “Urgrund.” The water from the pool figures as the universe’s integral force. The vision’s window-like character is accentuated by the sudden contrast with “meine traurigen Wände.”²³ They limit ex negativo, the transcendental field of self-reflection, indicating the outer world with its rigid semantic structures instead of
quiet motion, the opaqueness of strange objects instead of the transparent soul-crystal, which allows a look into the sphere of dynamic life and beauty.

After the speaker has satisfied himself by re-participating in the “Urgrund,” stanzas five and six describe an enthusiastic motion. The soul is flying to heaven, a typical romantic gesture of embracing the wide open space. Mörike’s post-romantic gesture, however, is articulated as a completely internal scenario. The illusional character’s sudden idea of the vision ends the enthusiastic motion from one moment to the next: “[...] Doch sage, / Warum wird jetzt der Blick von Wehmut feucht? / Ist es ein verloren Glück, was mich erweicht?”

Melancholy announces the closure of the figurative window. Slumber reclaims its literal meaning: The vision was just a dream, floating between past and present, without real being or truth. The euphoric and quasi-timeless motion is turned into the dysphoric fugacity of linear temporality: “Es ist ein Augenblick, und Alles wird verwehn!” The capitalization of “Alles” denotes the whole vision as the object of the imagination.

The final stanza turns the regard towards the outer world: “Dort, sieh, am Horizont lüft sich der Vorhang schon!” The horizontal line seems to end the vision definitively. Day is jumping around God-like. This literal message, however, is superimposed by an implicit, figurative meaning. The notion of the rising curtain codes the day as a spectacle and the described vision as an unofficial intermezzo. Thus, the ontological values of dream and reality maintained up until then by the text are rearranged, as well as in verse 35: “Es träumt der Tag, nun sei die Nacht entflohn.” Perhaps the end of the night was simply a dream? The figurative code attributes imagination as actual reality, and reality as mere imagination, and thus indicates the difficult epistemological situation that the thresholded mind faces. The outer world, which can no more be coped with by rational forces, seems dream-like, yet broken away, whereas the well-bordered inner world claims to be a serious reality in which the subject itself is the sovereign master.

“The poem Mein Fluß, published in 1828 in the Morgenblatt für gebildete Stände, is an attempt to establish the auratic romantic correspondence between subject and nature. The colloquial tone portrays a scenario of successful reconciliation. But the text’s implied semantics superimpose themselves onto the literal meaning and indicate the intended union’ deficiency.

The imploring demand for erotic (or even homoerotic) union seems at first promising in its result: “Er fühlt mir schon herauf die Brust / Er küßt mit Liebesschauerlust / Und jauchzendem Gesange // Es schlüpft der goldne Sonnenschein / In Tropfen an mir nieder.” The demand’s result, however, is given as a reflexive statement by the subject, and not by means of the apostrophe that started the poem. The change in perspective – which implies a turning away from the real nature-object – destabilizes the certainty of the union, which the literal message accentuates by suggestive expressions of love, joy, singing and golden sunshine. Thus, the rhetorical device discreetly opens a window into the poem’s figurative meaning, constituting a dimension that is “between the words,” which seems much less euphoric: Perhaps the river’s feigned responses are mere imagination? Uncertainty overshadows the rest of the second stanza, where further semantic ambiguities are brought in: the gesture of devotional love described as “hingegeben” implies a religious context – the savior’s suffering and surrender. Thus,
the image of a coffin or grave are superimposed on the concept of the “cradle,” a rather disturbing evocation that is even accentuated by verse 12: “Die Arme hab ich ausgespannt” – like another Jesus on the cross. Complete union with nature can be reversed to its dysphoric side – the act of painful self-sacrifice due to the perverted nature of all beings, undergoing the waves of temptation.

The third stanza continues the feigned union’s dysphoric aspect, as the murmuring of the river turns out to be a noise lacking in any significance. Stanza four likens heaven’s praise to the soul of the river. The subject seems to have regained the romantic ideology of nature as a temple. But the dysphoric dimension has to be read again in its implied semantics: as a hidden window, in the literal meaning, opening up towards the figurative meaning. The text asserts that when you look into the river, you can look directly into heaven. Thus, the river takes on the very function of the window to eternity, as nature is often represented during contemplative moments within the romantic mind. But this heaven is a mere reflection on water without any real substance. By establishing the romantic metaphysical construction – by classifying heaven as the soul of the river – the text must, at the same time, deny heaven’s ontological verity. So the figurative message becomes clear: The feigned soul of nature has to be considered as an optical illusion, not of original innocence as the neologism “kinderrein” would suggest, but of a very secondary nature. As such, the subject cannot grasp it: “Ich [...] kann sie [= die Bläue] nicht erschwingen.” The deepness of the blue, which lends itself literally to the romantic depth of the comforting “Urgrund”, turns out to be the bottomless abyss that denies meaning a stable ground. Here lies an essential moment of Mörike’s liminal writing. As verses 26-29 implies, the physical encounter with nature (see the arms widespread to grasp heaven) cannot bring any satisfaction. In liminality, the changing outer world can no longer be fixed as real and it loses its status as a reliable reference of meaning.

Given the uncertainty of its counterpart, the subject appeals again to the river: “Schwill an, mein Fluß, und hebe dich! / Mit Grausen übergieße mich! / Mein Leben um das deine!” This desperate last appeal can be read as a quasi-romantic gesture to be unified in death with the beloved. But the appeal also has a figurative meaning on an epistemological level, which indicates quite the contrary of a love-encounter. The river shall swell or rise up. It shall form a threatening threshold that cannot be passed over. The monumental wave codes the power of the semantic alternation – the thresholded time of lost reference rising up against man. The subject, taking part in the struggle against the loss of semantics, challenges the fleeing object to present itself as a quasi-positive entity; to an existential degree, the subject is swept up in this “irresistible motion that forces any text beyond its limits and projects it towards an exterior referent. The movement coincides with the need for a meaning,” as Paul de Man notes in Allegories of Reading.

The subject’s appeal, however, fails: “Du weisest schmeichelnd mich zurück / Zu deiner Blumenschwelle.” The struggle does not take place and a meaning cannot be reconquered. The subject couldn’t pass the threshold of the wave. Rather, he drops back to the flowered borders of the river. They seem to frame the abyss, which alone remains to be trodden on, and grant a stable ground, whereas the river itself denies its (self-)presence. The metaphor “Blumenschwelle” articulates on a rhetorical level the epistemological situation of the thresholded mind in liminality: As the outer world denies a fixed meaning and cannot be surmounted by rational forces, the mind is rejected.
to already known categories. Thus, the objectivation of otherness can solely be attained by drawing a beautiful (flowered), but necessarily empty frame. The frame of cognitive objectivation turns out to be an art frame.\textsuperscript{43} Truth cannot be fixed anymore, so any objectivation seems artificial or rhetorical.

**Proust and the Window in Time**

The turn of the 20th century was characterized by an amalgam of cultural changes, which cleared the way for the age of imperialism. From about 1880 on, the second phase of the industrial revolution favored such concepts as progress and global communication. The main vein of thought during that time was characterized by monumentalism and pragmatism, which focused on the here and now. The world was supposed to be conquered by man and reason.\textsuperscript{44}

The concept of liminality arose among contemporaries within this context. It effectuated an intellectual rebellion against Hegel’s authoritative system of teleological progress in history and science. Critical movements, at the forefront of various modernist patterns in art and literature, had the intention of reconquering quasi-transcendental areas that couldn’t be identified by rational or scientific access. A world of otherness was meant to be validated in order to reconstruct spiritual sense “on a small scale” after reality seemed to have completely lost its mysterious aspects. Art tried to disarrange established semantic systems to deny teleology, by creating and exploring marginal zones and thresholds. The construction of these imaginary windows represents a kind of transcendental framing, which operates on a given empirical object and creates its auralic force in the process of perception.

**Proust’s Mémoire Involontaire: Fulfilled Past and Treasured Object**

Among the writers who identify liminality as an anti-programme to the previously-described established discourses, Marcel Proust (1871-1922) claims a central position. His efforts to cultivate a quasi-transcendental sphere of otherness can be found in the essay *La Méthode de Sainte-Beuve*, in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*.\textsuperscript{45} In this essay, Proust deals with the attitudes implied in Sainte-Beuve’s conception of a writer. Sainte-Beuve defines art in a positivist manner: as a strict consequence of biography and social status.\textsuperscript{46} Proust, however, considers these attributes only as the outside of an artist’s personality, the *moi extérieur*, whereas his actual interest is focused on the inner universe of the writer, the *moi profond*, where the “son vrai de [...] [son] coeur”\textsuperscript{47} can be heard. The *moi profond* operates in the depths of the personality and can only be found in single moments of highly intimate encounters.\textsuperscript{48} For Proust, art’s greatest task is to reveal this inner cosmos. Literature is the only place to open up the view to the *vie pure*, which exceeds habit and intelligence.\textsuperscript{49} After the loss of the spirit in actual reality, it is assumed that art will restore the notion of essential value or *vérité*, as Proust writes in the last volume of *À la recherche du temps perdu*: “La vraie vie [...] c’est dans la littérature”.\textsuperscript{50} In Proust, furthermore, this restitution of a spiritual sphere is always combined with the motif of time. The writer’s central aim is to regain his own past in its highly individual form.

The *mémoire involontaire*, a sudden euphoric remembrance resulting from the sensual impression of a given object, e. g. the madeleine\textsuperscript{51} or the folded napkin\textsuperscript{52}, can be considered as the construction of a quasi-transcendental sphere of otherness that...
operates in immanence. A quasi-transcendental aspect is attributed to the object, as it seems to treasure the fulfilled past – the “vraie vie” of the subject. When Marcel writes in the poetological passages of the last volume of Recherche that “objects are in one half extending in ourselves”\textsuperscript{54}, he alludes metaphorically to this subjectively legitimated meaning of the object, which is to be regained by the writer in drudgery-like work.\textsuperscript{55} In the intimate union of the mémoire involontaire, the object accidently grants its subjective semantics (which it received long ago from the subject himself) back to the subject. Thus, the object provides the subject with a window-like vision into the past, which can be read as an act of self-(re)construction and disempowers even death. Proust’s poetics can be considered as an attempt to affect the subject’s resurrection under conditions of immanence. The thresholded mind cannot proceed teleologically and it attempts to reach redemption by constructing an artificial hereafter. Similar to Mörike’s writing, Proust’s poetics privilege the sensitive subject as a sort of priest who is able to look into a divine sphere. Writing is designated a substitutive religious act that endeavours to find the spiritual equivalent of Time regained.\textsuperscript{56}

In his essay Le rayon de soleil sur le balcon in Contre Sainte-Beuve, Proust preconceptualizes the experience of the mémoire involontaire by exposing the significant attributes of the quasi-transcendental sphere, which is opened window-like by imagination.\textsuperscript{57} At first, the narrator looks through the real window of his room out onto the balcony, where the sunshine is playing on the railing and is creating shadows of the plants on the balcony in various patterns. These patterns work as the empirical impulse for remembrance. This impulse generates the transcendental field of Marcel’s childhood in Paris, which arises from the common ground provided by the identity of the former and present impression:

“Comme dans ces représentations extraordinaires, où une multitude de choristes invisibles vient de soutenir la voix d’une chanteuse célèbre [...] venue chanter une mélodie, des innombrables souvenirs indistincts les uns derrière les autres jusqu’au fond de mon passé ressentaient l’impression de ce rayon de soleil en même temps que mes yeux d’aujourd’hui, et donnaient à cette impression une sorte de volume, mettaient en moi une sorte de profondeur, de plénitude, de réalité faite de toute cette réalité de ces journées aimées [...] senties dans leur vérité [...] dans une minute de réalité [...] Et de cette impression [...] quelque chose qui leur est commun se dégage, quelque chose dont nous ne saurions pas expliquer la superiority sur les réalités de notre vie, celles même de l’intelligence, de la passion et du sentiment. [...] Au moment où cette chose, essence commune de nos impressions, est perçue par nous, nous éprouvons un plaisir que rien n’égale, pendant lequel nous savons que la mort n’a aucune espèce d’importance.”\textsuperscript{58}

Through the experience of the mémoire involontaire, the real window that the narrator is looking through is designated as a textual window, which opens to the past as well as to a transcendental sphere. The transcendental field revealing the fulfilled past can be compared to a birth-place where the past in its true nature arises (as does the subject himself): in its truth (vérité), abundance (plénitude) and superiority (superiorité), furnish a deep pleasure (plaisir), which disempowers even death.

**Temps and Atmosphere**

Proust reflects on the nature of the fulfilled past, the Temps, using a range of different notions. The rather objective concepts of volume, essence or chose are complemented by
notions that favor Temps as a dynamic entity – similar to a melody – or as purified life (vie pure). As Rainer Warning illustrated, Proust’s poetics of remembrance are marked by the fundamental tension between fulfilment and failure. This tension can be read as an indicator of writing in liminality, as well as of a thresholded mind that is trying to objectivate semantic otherness but often is deceived because these objectivations do not fit. Time in its essence cannot be objectivated except in quasi-dead ritual eternity, which merely reproduces the past but is unable to effect its vital resurrection, as Proust illustrates, e.g. in the petrified gestures of the Guermantes-saloon. Even the notions of language seem unable to express the undeniable otherness of time, which is experienced in the diversity of the “new” life. Like Mörike, Proust was the contemporary of an imminent new age. But there were not yet adequate categories to articulate a “glimpse of eternity”. Liminality is to be regarded as a rhetorical milieu where reality is stripped of its literal meaning in order to open up a view of new areas of figurative meaning.

Proust clearly articulates the failure of mere words to express Temps in his essay on Gérard de Nerval in Contre Sainte-Beuve. The essay discusses Nerval’s construction of Sylvie, in particular the effect on the reader of being troubled by different levels of time, which are artfully interwoven and imitate dream-like memory. Proust was deeply impressed by Nerval’s art, as well as his writings: “[il] y a quelque chose d’indéfinissable, qui se communique, [...]. C’est quelque chose de vague et d’obsédant comme le souvenir. C’est une atmosphère. L’atmosphère bleuâtre et pourprée de Sylvie [...]. Seulement ce n’est pas dans les mots, ce n’est pas exprimé, c’est tout entre les mots, comme la brume d’un matin de Chantilly.”

The inexprimable, which arises “between the words” in Nerval’s narration, is created by a sophisticated construction of the plot. It ambiguates at least two concepts of time. Thus, a tension is created that cannot be dissolved by reason. The effect is the arising of a semantic drive between the two concepts, which activates the zone between as a third entity. This zone exceeds the literal meaning and represents something additional (“quelque chose de plus”), which can be grasped neither by the first nor the second notion. The additional entity on the semantic threshold between the two concepts represents the quasi-transcendental sphere of otherness that is atmosphere. The technique of creating atmosphere is a rhetorical device used to regain a spiritual dimension apart from reality; a device of figural meaning. Proust describes this dimension as the indéfinissable and au-delà, e.g. the concept of Île-de-France.

So Time as it has been experienced by the subject in its highly individual perception of the world cannot be possessed as a positive entity but reveals itself as a kind of semantic oscillation between different concepts. This oscillation is identical to the resurrection or esthetic revitalisation of Temps, which returns “[dans] une sorte de vitalité, d’irradiation” as an “apparition surnaturelle, [qui] était aussi familière” as Proust writes in his essay Retour à Guermantes.

A Window that Lights the Past – The Frame of Irony

In order to illustrate the atmospheric effects that Proust creates in À la Recherche du Temps perdu, we look to a particular sentence in Du côté de chez Swann, the description of the window of St. Hilaire. The text constitutes the reality of remembrance, which works
associatively and not logically. Thus, different times and events are interwoven in dense syntactic structures. As is evident in this sentence, the atmospheric figuration of Time during the process of reading can also include an agonal rhetoric of irony:

“l’un était rempli dans toute sa grandeur par un seul personnage pareil à un Roi de jeu de cartes, qui vivait là-haut, sous un dais architectural, entre ciel et terre (et dans le reflet oblique et bleu duquel, parfois les jours de semaïne, à midi, quand il n’y a pas d’office – à l’un de ces rares moments où l’église aérée, vacante, plus humaine, luxueuse, avec du soleil sur son riche mobilier, avait l’air presque habitable comme le hall, de pierre sculptée et de verre peint, d’un hôtel de style Moyen Âge – on voyait s’agenouiller un instant Mme Sazerat, posant sur le prie-Dieu voisin un paquet tout ficelé de petits fours qu’elle venait de prendre chez le pâtissier d’en face et qu’elle allait rapporter pour le déjeuner)”;\(^{34}\)

This remarkable sentence structure exposes an ironic deformation in several ways. On the one hand, there is an obvious disproportion between the fractional empirical datum on the level of \textit{histoire}, the real window that young Marcel looks at in the church, and its enormous imaginative counterpart built up on the level of \textit{discours} in the parentheses, as an “édifice immense du souvenir”\(^{35}\) – a window that lights the past. This disproportion creates a deep discrepancy in terms of the traditional mimetic balance between narrated time and narrative time. The stylistic device can be read as a kind of narrative self-mockery on the paradigmatic folds of remembrance in liminal epistemology, which obsessively seek to regain the original object in its subjective semantic value throughout the different phases of Marcel’s lifetime.

On the other hand, the strategy of creating the atmospheric figure of Time, in the main section of the sentence between parentheses, correlates to the ironic defiguration of the depicted person, Madame Sazerat, and its social status in \textit{bourgeois} Combray. The ironic code is closely interlocked with the emerging of the Time-atmosphere that is elicited by the syntactical structure of the sentence. The complex syntax works on an epistemological level for the reader. After introducing four different time-levels by syntactical complication\(^{36}\), the main clause is continued abruptly with “on voyait s’agenouiller un instant Mme Sazerat”. It remains unclear to the reader when this happens. By using suspension and syntactical complication strategies, Proust manages to negate the evoked literal time-concept with another one. As a result, the capacity of the reader to remember the given information is blocked and he starts forgetting. The different concepts of time work together to create the impression of a blurred chronological background. At the forefront, the clearly described scenario, Madame Sazerat’s kneeling down, seems in an unexpressable way “unnatural” in spite of its obvious banality. To the trivial literal meaning of the gesture is added a spiritual “more-meaning”, a Time-aura that is not expressed by words but emerges as an atmosphere between the words – as the window that opens to the past. Madame Sazerat seems to be located in a dream-like transcendental sphere, which inevitably heightens her significance. She is styled as the incarnation of her own time period in Combray. The effect of irony, however, arises in the very moment of the letter’s confrontation with its spirit: The insignificant person is forced into co-existence with its high narrative destiny, which is to appear as a figure of Time.

The preparation of the scene, with the long-winded associative descriptions of the inner church, is part of this ironic disproportion. The exact drawing of the temporal
circumstances suggests that an extraordinary object is to be revealed at the finale. The reader is made curious as to what the window of Time will finally expose, as the narrator has so carefully constructed the frame. The great expectation, however, is also the great deception. The final closure is quite the contrary of grandeur: the narrow-minded woman representing the bigotry of the contemporary bourgeoisie in Combray. It seems that the prepared background is in fact a target, the centre of which is tiny, but nevertheless great enough to be fit by the cruauté proustienne. One might ask how the ironic code, which is interlaced in the atmospheric creation of the Time-figure, could challenge the poetics of remembrance at work in the passage. Is the creation of the atmospheric Time-figure (Madame Sazerat) affected by its ironic de-figuration?

Proust’s strategy to overcode the circumstantial frame of the described action (using associative digressions) can also be seen as a strategy to create an activated frame, as defined by Derrida. In La vérité en peinture Derrida elevates the frame (parergon), traditionally considered as a mere supplement, to a work of art (ergon). Kant postulated the quasi-vanishing of the frame, the only purpose of which is to emphasize the work within. Derrida, on the contrary, points out that the frame shall be made visible as a “zone between” of its own right. With the hierarchic fixation of the signifié given up, the frame is freed of its teleological destiny to be the negligible servant of the work it contains. The activated frame seems to be a significative structure of liminal epistemology, which intends to remain on the threshold between the categories and finally has to relinquish the higher status of the aim-object, which cannot be reached by cognition.

**Conclusion**

The window-motif has been illustrated as an essential pattern of liminal writing in Mörike and Proust. The window articulates the attempt to compensate for the existential loss of spirituality in periods of transition when life, mentality and social structure are gravely involved in the changes of modernity in its different phases. The window is used as a compensative device to regain the lost object of spirituality. Reality shall be coded with a transcendental value by drawing a frame. This frame is identified mostly with the aural field of a single object, but it can also be constructed using rhetorical means and is then opened between the words on an implicit semantic level.

Mörike writes on the threshold between romanticism and modernity. He has experienced, first hand, the loss of the spirit of nature due to the ongoing process of industrialization. His object-poem An einem Wintemorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang illustrates the intimate union between the speaker and the dawn, which enables the speaker to receive an interior vision. This vision into one’s own soul and its mysterious landscapes substitute a romantic union with an empiric nature, and provide the experience of being embedded in the whole of the cosmos. The object-poem Mein Fluß, in contrast, suggests the successful correspondence between subject and object. However, this suggestive literal meaning of joy, sunshine and heaven is opened, window-like, to the figural meaning of disillusionment and existential fight for the sense of self, which can no longer be achieved.

In contrast to the positivist and pragmatic discourses of his time, Proust’s writing endeavours to regain areas of beauty and undestructible mystery, which exceed intelligence and habits. The transcendental frame that Proust draws around the object is
closely connected with the poetics of the mémoire involontaire, as various essays of Contre Sainte-Beuve have shown. The fulfilled past seems to be treasured in objects that restore their figural semantics to the subject and, by this, allow the subject a vision into its own paradise of childhood and youth. This vision effects a quasi-resurrection on the conditions of immanence. As this resurrection cannot be figured other than in literature, Time is represented as a rhetorical phenomenon that regains its vitality in the atmospheric moments of the written text, opening the text, window-like, to the sphere of Time regained. In a passage of Du côté de chez Swann, the depiction of the St.-Hilaire window could be shown to work not only as a window that lights the past, but also as an undeniably frame of irony that might affect the atmospheric creation of the Time-figure.

NOTES

2. Several passages of this article (which will be noted) are based on my study into window-motifs, which is currently an unpublished manuscript but is in the process of being published by Judicum, in 2014.
11. Turner’s method, as discussed in this section, is illustrated in more detail in my unpublished study.

13. In my unpublished manuscript, I also present the *Imaginative Recompensation*, but additionally discuss the strategy of transcendental framing in Mörike’s epic poem *Idylle vom Bodensee*.


16. “On a Winter Morning before Sunrise”


18. “My eyes are open yet I feel myself reeling; / I close them to keep my dream from fleeing.” ibd., verses 11-12.


21. “Urgund”

22. “this varied swarm of images / And thoughts” ibd., verse 14.

23. ibd., verses 18-20.


26. “This is but a moment, then all is past!” ibd., verse 33.

27. “Behold, there on the horizon the curtain rises!” ibd., verse 34.

28. “The day is taking shape, now let the night subside;” ibd., verse 35.

29. This interpretation of the poem is also part of my unpublished manuscript.

30. “My river”


32. ibd., verse 1: “O Fluß, mein Fluß im Morgenstrahl!”


34. “My arms have I spread out” ibd., verse 12.


37. “childlike pure” ibd., verse 22.


40. “– Swell on, my River, and rise! / Let the horror of thy waters wash over me! / My life for thine!” ibd., verses 33-35.


43. For epistemological framing as a practice of art, see Derrida, La vérité en peinture, p. 73: “Je ne sais pas ce qui est essentiel et accessoire dans une œuvre. […] Où le cadre a-t-il lieu. A-t-il lieu. Où commence-t-il. Où finit-il.”

44. Langewiesche, Neuere und Neueste Geschichte, pp. 401-406.


47. ibd., p. 130.


51. Proust, Marcel: Du côté de chez Swann, pp. 43-47.


54. ibd., p. 198.


56. ibd, p. 185. The introduction to Proust and the mémoire involontaire-section are also part of my unpublished manuscript.


58. ibd., p. 104.


63. ibd., p. 156.

64. ibd., p. 155.


66. In my unpublished work, I also accentuate the emergence of Temps as an atmosphere, as described in this section.


68. ibd., p. 46.

69. The first time-specification is Combray and its everyday life. It is spread out continually from the large to the small time-unit (week, noon, single moment). But Combray remains unidentifiable because another time-area (time-level 2) is introduced by a further syntactical level. This begins with the relative "où," which has the intention of stretching out the very small time-unit of the moment by different attributes to time-level 3. The obsession of describing associatively the interior of the church brings in a fourth time-level, the time in the Grand-Hôtel, corresponding to the first stay in Balbec.

70. Duval uses the term cruauté proustienne in order to note several comments by young Marcel to his family and the domestic staff, Françoise, for example. The cruel point of these comments is revealed by the narrator afterwards so that this kind of irony affects its subject “from behind”. The term of cruauté proustienne is used for the presented passage, because it seems to fit into Proust’s pitiless strategy of delayed, but inescapable destruction of the victim of irony, Madame Sazerat. Duval, Sophie: L’ironie proustienne. La vision stéréoscopique. Paris : Éditions Champion 2004, p. 34.
This question leads to another aspect of irony in the Recherche, which refers to the possibilities of art and literature to deliver a higher truth, as it is claimed in Le Temps retrouvé. This ironic code is continued during the entire discourse of the vocation, but seems to be centered on Marcel’s doubtful reflections in La Prisonnière: “Si l’art n’est que cela [le produit d’un labeur industrieux], il n’est pas plus réel que la vie, et je n’ai pas tant de regrets à avoir”. Proust, Marcel: La Prisonnière. Édition présentée, établie et annotée par Pierre-Edmond Robert. Paris: Gallimard 1988, 1989, p. 151. Helga Thalhofer describes the oscillation of the ideology of art between its substantiation and its ironization. Thalhofer, Helga: « Sans doute ». Die Ironie Proust’s in Bezug auf die deutsche Frühromantik und Sören Kierkegaard. Heidelberg: Winter 2010, pp. 131-135. [“Sans doute”, Proust’s Irony in the Context of Early German Romanticism and Sören Kierkegaard].


Ibid., p. 93.

In my study, this last section is limited to the close-reading of the sentence and the exploring of its atmospheric structure without discussing the aspect of irony.

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ABSTRACTS

During the first half of the 19th century, the window emerged as a striking motif in art and literature. At the turn of the 20th century, framings and borders became essential once again. This article discusses the window-motif as a pattern of imagination, which seems particularly significant for authors between two ages – Mörike between the Napoleonic era and the Restauration in Germany, and Proust between 1900 and the First World War in France. Framing, or window-making, can be considered as a nostalgic gesture in periods of transition. It preserves the past in an area of idealization and constructs the hereafter despite its actual concealment – such as drawing a quasi-transcendental frame around the object. This article illustrates the evocation of real windows, but also explores their function as a textual strategy. Two of Mörike’s object poems, An einem Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang and Mein Fluß, exemplify the figural code being superimposed on the literal meaning to open up a view to a mysterious world. In Proust, the window-motif is correlated with the poetics of the mémoire involontaire. Time is treasured in objects, which grants a vision of the fulfilled past, but first and foremost seems to be regained in atmospheric moments created by syntactical structures – “between the words,” as evidenced in Du côté de chez Swann and referring to the defigurating dynamics of Proustian irony.

Dans la première moitié du XIXème siècle, la fenêtre devient un motif frappant en art et en littérature. Au tournant du XXème siècle, encadrements et frontières jouent à nouveau un rôle important. L’article analyse le motif de la fenêtre en tant que modèle de l’imagination qui semble particulièrement signifiant pour les auteurs entre deux siècles : c’est le cas de Mörike, qui a vécu entre l’époque napoléonienne et la Restauration en Allemagne, et de Proust qui écrit entre 1900 et la Première Guerre Mondiale en France. L’acte d’encadrer et de « faire des fenêtres » peut être considéré comme un geste nostalgique pratiqué dans des périodes de transition afin de sauver le passé dans une zone idéale et de (re)construire l’au-delà qui semble avoir disparu dans la réalité, par exemple dans un cadre quasi-transcendental qui borde l’objet. L’article analyse l’évocation de fenêtres réelles mais étudie aussi sa fonction en tant que stratégie textuelle. Deux des poèmes d’objet de Mörike, An einem Wintermorgen, vor Sonnenaufgang et Mein Fluß, représentent le code...
figural qui est surimposé au sens littéral afin d’ouvrir la vue du lecteur sur un monde mystérieux. Dans l’œuvre de Proust, le motif de la fenêtre correspond à la poétique de la mémoire involontaire. L’objet semble le trésor du Temps et permet de recevoir une vision du passé reconnu dans sa vérité. Mais le Temps semble avant tout être reconstitué dans des moments atmosphériques créés par des structures de syntaxe. Ces moments émergent « entre les mots » ce qui peut être exemplifié dans Du côté de chez Swann, en lien avec la dynamique défigurante de l’ironie proustienne.

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