

# Literary Architecture

Essays Toward a Tradition

WALTER PATER
GERARD MANLEY HOPKINS
MARCEL PROUST
HENRY JAMES

Ellen Eve Frank

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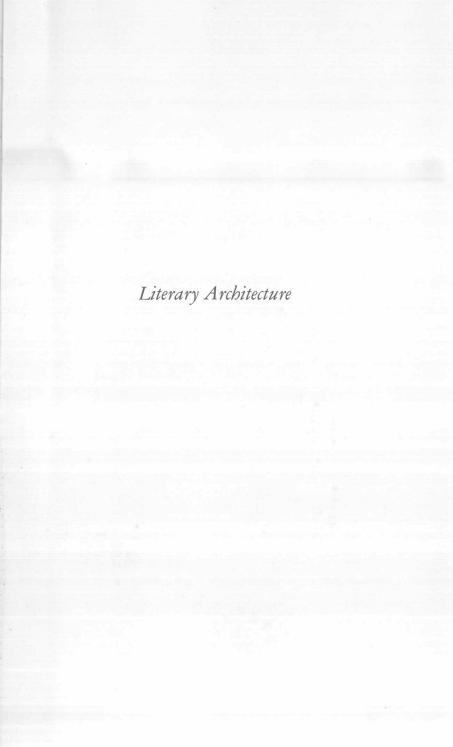
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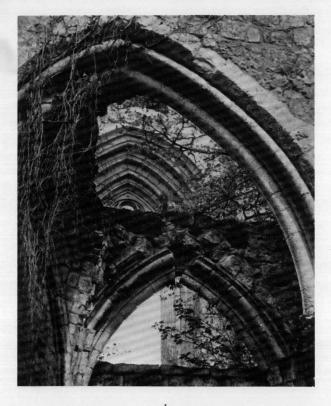


To my family

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The very place one is in, its stone-work, its empty spaces, invade you; invade all who belong to them . . . seem to question you masterfully as to your purpose in being here at all.

WALTER PATER



The "Achieve and Mastery": Literary Architecture Rent. (Abbey Ruins, Jumièges)

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

I began thinking about architecture as a possible analogue for literature in 1971. The core essays exploring this possibility were written in the years following, from 1972 to 1974. The enlargement upon the idea, the context into which I have placed these essays, came from my experiences after these essays were completed and was integrated into the manuscript in 1976.

Special care has been taken in the selection and arrangment of the photographs and in the printing of this book. I trust literary architecture can weather the time these processes have rightly taken.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# INTRODUCTION

Sit in a child's wagon. Someone pulls you through this house. You have entered white walls thick, prepared for the frescoing of your thoughts. Brown ground of earth is your floor, sky your ceiling. In the first room are Greek temples. You are pulled around them. In one corner you pass Roman ruins; in another, a plain English house with a flight of stairs to its roof. Then the second room. You do not know how you got there. Perhaps you were outside in passage, with Pegasus. In this room are cathedral façades, arches and spires, erect like sentries to Weather. Winged flight: the third room. You begin to smile. Here is a church entire, grey, light. But when you go inside you wish to be outside. So your guide pulls you faster until you no longer know whether you look up outside or are arched over inside. Winged flight: the fourth room. You walk, you have no guide. Here you find smaller rooms crowded with furniture or

cleared in deference to window-views of churches, palaces, or people. Winged flight: the fifth is not a room at all but a hall. Every few feet issues a cord stretching out from under the wall. Windows mark the space above each cord. When you look through the windows, you see trails of houses and cathedrals, this cord stretching straight to Greece, that one shorter going to nineteenth-century France, another marked with speechmakers, still another with men writing on stone tablets. And then you are spun around, you cannot tell this way from that. You are outside. The white walls are gone. It is the world you are in. But ah, over there is the Parthenon, here a Gothic church, to the right your own house with a stairway to the attic and its own view. The world inside was no different, it was just bounded by white walls.

The house I have described is the book before you, the open-air architecture of *Literary Architecture*. The five rooms are its five chapters, each filled with the furniture of its subject matter, each very specifically located, separated by halls of space. The tour is what I hope will be the experience of reading: a transitive activity connecting these separate rooms of vision and concluding in reflection on these connections. That we sit in a child's wagon to begin this tour is a gentle admonition that our activity of perceiving be undertaken with curiosity, the seeing and taking note of entrances and exits, peripheries and contents. For these are the tissue of this book: the architecture of literature as external configuration, as form and embodiment, of consciousness.

Literary Architecture is a building of connection. The particular subject, what may be thought of as the occasion, is the relationships between architecture and literature as announced in the writings of Walter Pater, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Marcel Proust, and Henry James; for each of these writers declares in one way or another that literature is like architecture. The larger subject is a proposition. There exists as a convention in literature the habit of comparison between architecture and literature extending from Plato to Samuel Beckett and discovering particular expression late in the nine-

#### LITERARY ARCHITECTURE

teenth century and on into the twentieth. I propose that this convention constitutes a tradition which I should like to call literary architecture. I present the tradition of literary architecture by noting its occurrence and by asking this question: what may be accomplished when writers select architecture as art analogue for literature? The question is new to literary studies. It constitutes the motive for this book.

And yet this book as a building of connection is more than a structure with contents. For a building is not an object (product) only; it is, importantly, an activity. And it is the activity of building that constitutes my largest subject, that is, the nature of experience. Experience may be particularized in literary study to mean critical inquiry, methodology, reading; for our purposes, I should like it to be taken to mean our way of noticing or perceiving, our activity of being in the world. There is precedent for understanding experience and being as building: if we follow the word building to its etymological origins, we find it comes from an Indo-European word meaning "to be, to exist, to grow." It is no surprise, then, that both building-as-object (product) and building-as-activity require and turn upon space constructs, the art of architecture. We may use the brief dream I have recorded as a literary example, for both building-as-object (product) of perception and building-as-activity of perceiving are present. The architectural structure (house) that we enter encloses its own kind of structure (architecture) as its contents (or, in literary language, its content): the Greek temples of Pater, the cathedral remains of Hopkins, the church of Proust, the writing-rooms of James. Our experience as an activity of being-entering and moving through interior space, see-