

Space and the Self: Representations of the Bedroom in Nineteenth-Century French Literature

A Dissertation Defense by Jill Owen

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Committee:

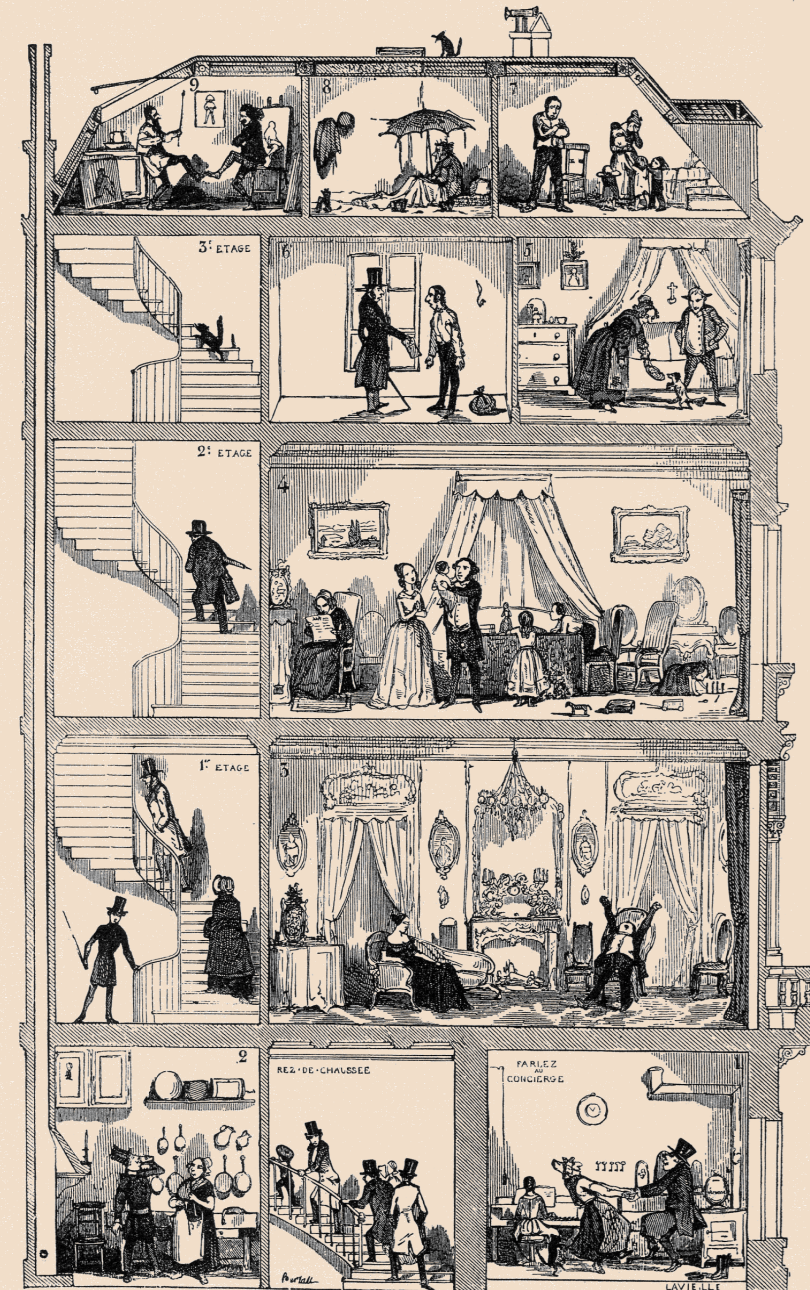
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As a domestic, personal, and quotidian space, the bedroom might at first seem like an incidental or tangential element of description within a text. If texts about identifiable characters include views of their private spaces, it is only in relation to the character's believability as a person, or a way to connect the reader to the character's experience. Prior to the nineteenth century in France, this domestic space conveyed privacy and intimacy; and the distinction of within and without seemed quite clear. Yet, written, viewed, or read within the literary and socio-historical context of the nineteenth century, the bedroom plays a much more active role than its otherwise passive description would lead the reader to believe. The bedroom becomes a literary device, a trope, a topos, an example of "esthétique du quotidien" that presents itself as a metonymy of interiority. During the nineteenth century's rise of material culture, the bedroom and its decorations become yet another way for authors and characters to put themselves on display within both historical and literary works. The space enabled authors to explore questions of identity as well as public versus private life. A study of literary bedrooms, then, is an important undertaking as it allows for the intersection of various theoretical questions surrounding space theory, narratology, ekphrasis, and intimacy within different kinds of texts – the novel, poetry, essays, and travelogues. The authors included in this project, both canonical and less well-known, represent an evolutionary timeline of spatial representation across the long nineteenth century. What this project explores, then, is how depictions of the French literary bedroom contribute to a broader understanding of identity for authors, characters, and readers in this period of history.



3. Cross section of a Parisian house about 1850 showing the economic status of tenants varying by floors. (Edmund Texier, *Tableau de Paris*, Paris, 1852, 1, 65.)