

THE TOPOLOGY OF THE ATTIC IN THE DRAMATURGY OF H. IBSEN, F. WEDEKIND, AND M. SEBASTIAN¹

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Abstract

An important topos of the imaginary and, implicitly, of literature, the attic of the house is a symbol within the major coordinate of space which, through its functional meanings, consciously or unconsciously guides the actions of characters. In order to approach the attic as a domestic space, we have drawn on the theoretical insights concerning interior space developed by Abraham Moles and Élisabeth A. Rohmer (1972), and especially on those offered by Gaston Bachelard in *The Poetics of Space* (1957/1963). Comparing the functions of the house built on the ground with those of the dwelling in an apartment block, Bachelard (1963, p. 26) proposes, for the drama of the “superimposed boxes,” the solution of reverie, more precisely “the metaphors of the ocean” (p. 28), a resolution that proves valid in a considerable number of literary works. It appears in Frank Wedekind’s *Pandora’s Box* (1904/1918), where the action of the final act takes place in the attic of an unconverted apartment building; through the two large windows, through which the sky should have been visible, the incessant drumming of rain penetrates, covering the city’s din and isolating the heroes who, each within his or her own interior space, are free to dream. In Henrik Ibsen’s *The Wild Duck* (1884/1900), the attic acquires a particular significance: it is an attic-forest that points toward the Bachelardian hut-house, where one feels removed from urban concerns and the bustle of the city, and where, within the realm of absolute imagination, human beings can remain young for a long time. Similarly, Mihail Sebastian’s *Insula* [The Island] (1947/1956) perfectly illustrates this type of reverie; a representative episode is the aspirin-induced intoxication of the three protagonists who live in a garret, on which occasion they imagine the ocean and an island, accompanied by a series of auditory elements that frame their reverie.

In the plays under analysis, the attic or garret represents rationality; it is the space in which the characters become aware of the true reality in which they live and, moreover, accept it while seeking solutions to overcome the impasses they face. It is the place where time is abolished and escapism becomes, for all of them, a therapy of the soul.

Keywords: the attic of the house; the garret; reverie; M. Sebastian; F. Wedekind; H. Ibsen.

The attic of the house, an important topos of the imaginary and, implicitly, of literature, is a symbol within the major coordinate of space which, through its functional meanings, consciously or unconsciously guides the actions of characters. In our study we employ the term topology as the study of a place, derived from the Greek words *topos* and *logos*.

In *The Poetics of Space*, a foundational work for our research, Gaston Bachelard (1963) draws a distinction between the house built on the ground—that imagined vertical being whose verticality is defined by the cellar–attic polarity—and the urban apartment building, the

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container of “superimposed boxes” (Bachelard, 1963, p. 26), or “wardrobes within a wardrobe” (Claudel in Bachelard, 1963, p. 27), furnished with all manner of objects. The apartment, a dwelling situated in multi-storey buildings, is “a conventional hole” (Claudel, in Bachelard, 1963, p. 27) and lacks verticality, since within such an ensemble of dwellings the rooms are stacked from pavement to roof, and the fact of living somewhere close to the sky in such a box is of no particular importance. The absence of surrounding space around the apartment block, the equivalent of the yard of a house built on the ground, leads to the dispersal of intimate life and to the disappearance of the values of intimacy.

For the typology of interior space, Abraham Moles and Élisabeth A. Rohmer define a phenomenological bubble (Moles & Rohmer, 1972, p. 45), regarded as a constant of the human soul. The individual constructs around himself a shell (Moles & Rohmer, 1972, p. 42) composed of several layers or concentric walls. The first wall erected between the Self and the world is the skin, considered the boundary of the human body; then clothing, seen as an extension of the skin, functions as a second skin beneath which the Self hides. Since each individual has a personal sphere of activity in which he or she moves and acts—a sphere in which an extension of the autonomous gesture takes place, giving rise to a theory of functional furniture—the next layer enclosing the Self is the dwelling. The dwelling is composed of secret shells, the room being an optically closed territory with a unified form; and likewise, from small to large, the subsequent walls are considered to be the building, the neighborhood, the city, the county, the country, and the examples may continue.

For the drama of the “superimposed boxes” (1963, p. 26), Gaston Bachelard offers the solution of reverie, and not just any reverie, but “the metaphors of the ocean” (Bachelard, 1963, p. 28). Initially, such a resolution surprised us, but we found that it is validated in a considerable number of literary works.

Focusing on several plays, in F. Wedekind’s *Pandora’s Box* (1918) the action of the final act takes place in the attic of an unconverted apartment building. Through the two large windows, through which the sky should have been visible, only the drumming of rain seems to penetrate—rain that appears never to end, yet which covers the entire din of the city and isolates the characters, thus allowing them to dream freely. The male characters retreat into their own selves, into their personal shells, and allow reverie to invade them, making their existence easier to endure.

In H. Ibsen’s play *The Wild Duck* (1900), the attic has a particular significance: it is an attic-forest that points toward the Bachelardian hut-house, in which one feels isolated, far from urban worries and the bustle of the city; it is a center of solitude where, within the realm of absolute imagination, human beings can remain young for a long time. In this symbolically charged space the old Ekdal lives out his drama, while Hjalmar, his son, nourishes his dream of saving his father’s honor and rehabilitating him. In the attic, the Ekdal family has stored, among other objects, books: “...there are all the other pictures of churches and palaces, and streets, and great ships sailing on the sea.” (Ibsen, 1900, p. 67) (emphasis in the original), books brought there by an old sea captain whom people called “The Flying Dutchman” (p. 67). Moreover, because the attic door was heavy, that part of the attic is concealed by “...a curtain falls from within, the lower part of which consists of an old sail, and the rest, the upper part of an outspread finishing net.” (Ibsen, 1900, p. 61).

The old Ekdal—“a poor castaway,” as his son considers him—raises various animals and a wild duck in the attic. The duck was wounded during a hunting party, dived into the sea where it caught hold of seaweed with its beak, and was pulled out by a hunting dog. Hedvig, the daughter of Hjalmar and Gina, confesses that whenever she remembers the attic of the house and all that it contains, she has the impression that it is truly the bottom of the sea (Ibsen, 1900, p. 52).

Mihail Sebastian's *Insula* [The Island] (1956), by contrast, perfectly illustrates the type of reverie mentioned, if we consider the aspirin-induced intoxication of the three inhabitants of the garret, the ocean and the island they imagine, together with all the auditory elements that accompany their dream.

The loss of social identity is doubled by the destruction of personal identity, in which case the characters come to identify with the mask they wear while living in the garret; they end up playing a role assumed under constraint, since "between the masked being and the mask there is flux and reflux, two movements that alternately reverberate upon consciousness"² (Bachelard, in Danciu, 2015, p. 115). In the desire to be different from what they are, or more precisely to be exactly what they have now become, among the three main characters in *Insula* [The Island], Bob is drawn with great difficulty into the "intoxication" that more readily envelops Nadia and Manuel. After finding the tube of aspirin, he begins to eat slowly, searching for the taste of each tablet and making comments³, this occupation prompts Nadia to invent a game through which she challenges the two men to dream. After they eat all the tablets, dividing the last one into three, the characters are seized by warmth, as in a state of intoxication; they close their eyes and escape into a wondrous landscape: "...oh, how good it is! How good!"⁴ (Sebastian, 1956, p. 251), says Nadia. "It's marvelous"⁵ (Sebastian, 1956, p. 251), Manuel replies, and the dialogue continues:

NADIA: I feel as if I'm floating.
MANUEL: I feel as if I'm flying.
NADIA: It's as if we're no longer here. As if we were far away.
MANUEL: Far away from this infamous garret.
NADIA: Somewhere on a ship, at sea, on an island.
MANUEL: Yes, on an island.
NADIA: With a lot of light, a lot of blue, a lot of sky. I see plants and flowers and colors, and a wide horizon, I see...
BOB: I don't see anything.
NADIA: Don't you see anything either, Manuel?
MANUEL: Yes, I do. I see everything.
BOB: He's lying. He's pretending. He doesn't see anything.
MANUEL: Yes, Nadia, I swear. I see everything. Very clearly. Very simply: as through a smoky telescope... as in a dream. [...]
NADIA: Shh! I hear the rustling of leaves.
MANUEL: And the flight of seagulls out at sea.
NADIA: And I feel... I feel the evening breeze...
MANUEL: And the night wind blowing gently toward the shore... [...]
MANUEL (in a dream): It's not a big island.
NADIA (idem): No. It's small and round.
MANUEL: Like a silver ring.
NADIA: Like a coral bracelet.
MANUEL: Like a smoky telescope⁶. (Sebastian, 1956, p. 251-252)

² „între ființa mascată și mască există flux și reflux, două mișcări care repercutază alternativ asupra conștiinței” (Bachelard, in Danciu, 2015, p. 115). The English translations are our own.

³ „Începe să mănânce încet, căutând gustul fiecărei pastile, făcând aprecieri...” (Chiciudean, in Cubleşan (coord.), 2007, p. 49) The English translations from the play *The Island*, from Mihail Sebastian, *Teatru. Dicționar de personaje* [Mihail Sebastian, Theater. Dictionary of Characters]. Hasefer, by Constantin Cubleşan (2007) (coord.), are our own.

⁴ „...o, ce bine e! Ce bine!” (p. 251). The English translations from the play *The Island*, from *Selected Works*, Vol. I: *Theatre*, by Mihail Sebastian (1956), are our own.

⁵ „E grozav” (Sebastian, 1956, p. 251).

⁶ „NADIA: Parcă plutesc./ MANUEL: Parcă zbor./ NADIA: Parcă nu mai simțem aici. Parc-am fi departe./ MANUEL: Departe de mansarda asta infamă./ NADIA: Undeva pe o navă, pe mare, pe o insulă./ MANUEL: Da, pe o insulă./ NADIA: Cu multă lumină, cu mult albastru, cu mult cer. Văd plante și flori și culori, și un orizont larg, văd.../ BOB: Eu nu văd nimic./ NADIA: Nici tu, Manuel?/ MANUEL: Ba da. Văd totul./ BOB: Minte. Se prefacă. Nu vede nimic./ MANUEL: Ba da, Nadia. Îți jur. Văd

The three main characters in *Insula* [The Island] are unable to accept the situation in which they have found themselves, the gap between what they once were and what they have become in the garret in which they are forced to live being too great, and they themselves turn into islands. Their selves can no longer find their place either in the new world that does not accept them or within their own inner being, and they come to wear different masks, in the Jungian sense, in order to survive. Reveries do not torment the soul in the same way as the nightmares of the night do. The nocturnal dream is not ours; we cannot control it. Reverie belongs to memory, it presupposes an abolition of duration, and one reaches it through a “long sojourn,” writes Bachelard (1963, p. 9). And in order to be able to psychoanalyze the unconscious, it is necessary

to desocialize our important memoires, and attain to the plane of the daydreams that we used to have in the places identified with our solitude. For investigations of the kind, daydreams are more useful than dreams. They show moreover that daydreams can be very different from dreams (Bachelard, 1963, p. 9).

Solitude can bring suffering, but it can also bring joy; it can be desired, producing moments to which the being becomes attached and does not wish to forget, since it knows that the spaces of solitude are constitutive parts of the self. Even if those spaces no longer exist physically, if we no longer have the attic or the garret that once gave us pleasure, we can return there at any time through reverie. These places have the value of a shell, says Bachelard (1963, p. 10),

We return to them in our night dreams. These retreats have the value of a shell. [...] In the past, the attic may have seemed too small, it may have seemed cold in winter and hot in summer. Now, however, in memory recaptured through daydreams, it is hard to say through what syncretism the attic is once small and large, warm and cool, always comforting (Bachelard, 1963, p. 10).

Reverie is an oneiric activity in which a trace of consciousness is still preserved and which occurs when tensions of any kind disappear. It is linked to a pleasure-producing image, more precisely to an image that has been created without constraints or responsibilities.

The attic and the roof of the house represent rationality, while the cellar represents irrationality. In the attic one can experience long hours of solitude; here thoughts are clear, and the roof represents the dreamer’s head and its conscious functions. The cellar represents “...the dark entity of the house” (Bachelard, 1963, p. 18) and belongs to the irrationality of depths. In the spaces in which they lead their wretched existence, the heroes of the plays under discussion dream either of times past, of lost glory, or of future times filled with happiness. Alwa Schön in *Pandora’s Box* (1918), having reached “the last stage” (Wedekind, 1918, p. 59), together with Lulu and Schigolch, dreams of a dinner at the Olympia in the room beneath the London roof. Schigolch has one final wish, that of eating a Christmas pudding once more, while Lulu obsessively arranges her hair in order to revive old memories: “SCHIGOLGH: Ya, ya. And I was dreaming of a Christmas pudding. [...] Where have you been? Curling your hair first? / ALVA: She only does that to revive old memories.” (Wedekind, 1918, p. 58). After the display of culinary desires, Alwa turns his thoughts back to the time when he first met Lulu and when he filled his nights with amusements: “At the time, tho she was a fully developed woman, she

total. Foarte clar. Foarte simplu: ca printr-un ocean de fum... ca prin vis. [...] NADIA: Ssst! Aud foşnetul frunzelor./ MANUEL: Şi zborul pescăruşilor în larg./ NADIA: Şi simt... simt briza de seară.../ MANUEL: Şi vîntul de noapte cum bate uşor spre ţărm.../ [...]MANUEL (în vis): Nu e o insulă mare./ NADIA (idem): Nu. E mică şi rotundă./ MANUEL: Ca un inel de argint./ NADIA: Ca o brăţară de coral./ MANUEL: Ca un ocean de fum” (Sebastian, 1956, p. 251-252).

had the expression of a five-year-old, joyous utterly healthy child. And she was only three years younger than me – but how long ago it is now!” (Wedekind, 1918, p. 62). Lulu represents, in this scene, the link with reality. Her returns to that room, whether accompanied or unaccompanied, interrupt the dreams of the two men, who thus become aware of the misery in which they find themselves.

Bob, in Mihail Sebastian’s *Insula* [The Island], misses football deeply. He knows that in Europe the autumn championship has already begun and dreams of playing in a great match. This character belongs among those who deny the reality in which they live but are incapable of replacing it with another (Georgescu, 1964, pp. 158–163). Bob longs for his days of glory and is able to visualize all the lights of the arena, the voices of the people who acclaim him and of his admirers; he even sees Nadia there. Of all the characters, Bob opposes reverie the most. When he enters Nadia’s game, he is frightened and irritated and stops the other two, telling them that they have gotten drunk and that they need to wake up⁷. Nevertheless, we observe that the instinct for dreaming, for escapism, is just as important as that of hunger,

and, gradually guided by the other two, he begins to behave like a drunk man. He hiccups—“He’s drunk,” says Manuel. “He’s done for,” Nadia adds—and little by little, it seems that Bob too begins to see the island. At first he does not see it very clearly: “Because there’s too much light. Too much sun”⁸ (Sebastian, 1956, p. 253), Nadia tells him; but in the end, the hero closes his eyes and begins to laugh, drawing the others into the same hilarity (Chiciudean, in Cubleşan coord., 2007, p. 49).

The other male character in the same drama, Manuel B. Manuel, behaves like a somnambulist, since he too finds it difficult to accept reality. Now that he has nothing to eat, he, the great banker, vaguely remembers that he must have heard of poor people; he read about them in novels or perhaps even saw them on the street while getting in or out of his car, and he confesses that they seemed to him to be unreal beings, living far away, on another planet⁹ (Sebastian, 1956, p. 241). He finds it hard to acknowledge that he works in the port for food, and when he is asked where the potatoes come from, he replies distantly that he must have found them in the places where he wandered. Only later does he admit to Nadia that, for those potatoes, he unloaded a cart of stones, but he was ashamed to say so¹⁰ (Sebastian, 1956, p. 241).

Like Lulu in F. Wedekind’s *Pandora’s Box* (1918), the female character in *Insula* [The Island] is the one who brings about the awareness and acceptance of reality, but this time with much greater brutality. After several weeks lived in deprivation and misery, in the unsanitary garret where she washes clothes and cooks whatever she can, little remains of Nadia’s beauty and elegance. Even so, she is a dynamic character in relation to whom the other characters are defined or manifest themselves¹¹ (Anghelescu, 1978, p. 255). Through a shattering plea for life, Nadia instills hope and confidence in Bob and Manuel and is indignant when the two, overwhelmed by helplessness, wish to give up. She activates the rhythm of the action, awakens the male characters from their lethargy, stirs memories, gestures, and feelings, and above all stimulates their dream, their reverie. Bob, as we have seen, dreams himself in the stadium, while Manuel regrets not having known Nadia in his moments of glory, which he recalls.

In Sebastian’s work, conscious dreaming is a necessary therapy of the soul and is placed alongside the instinct of hunger. When Bob reproaches Nadia for not loving him, she attributes

⁷ „Destul! Treziți-vă! Hai, treziți-vă! Deschideți ochii! (Nadia și Manuel deschid ochii.) V-ați îmbătat” (Sebastian, 1963, p. 251)

⁸ „De prea multă lumină. De prea mult soare” (Sebastian, 1963, p. 253).

⁹ „Mi se părea că sînt ființe de pe altă planetă...” (Sebastian, 1956, p. 241).

¹⁰ „Nu-mi vine a crede. Mi se pare că nu-i adevărat. Mă uit la mîinile astea două, care o viață întreagă au răsfoit cărți și au mîngîiat femei... mă uit la ele și nu le recunosc./ NADIA: Ești un snob./ MANUEL: Un snob care acum jumatate de oră căra pietre în port. Un snob care s-a învățat să culeagă mucuri de țigară de pe jos. Un snob care curăță cartofi” (Sebastian, 1956, p. 241).

¹¹ „...elementul dinamic în funcție de care se definesc sau se manifestă celelalte personaje” (Anghelescu, 1978, p. 255).

everything to hunger. She reminds him that he is hungry and therefore sad. In a chain of causality, sadness makes Bob sentimental, and hunger becomes for Nadia a most curious thing, one that resembles a dream. She feels caught between reality and dream, slightly dizzy as when one drinks alcohol, and then exclaims that hunger is intoxicating, that it is like wine and love; in those moments, wine and love are for the heroine the finest things in the world¹² (Sebastian, 1956, p. 232).

The police officer intervenes and shatters the oceanic reverie of the three tenants; this is the moment when disillusionment takes hold of everything and the problem of finding the sum of money necessary to pay the outstanding debts once again comes to the fore. Nadia offers her locket to be sold, realizing with stark realism that, in the given situation, objects no longer have any significance; they are merely obstacles, ballast that drags one back and makes movement more difficult. The men, too proud, cannot accept living off the sale of Nadia's belongings and refuse. Consequently, they receive an unforgiving response: "We are hungry. And we want to live. The rest falls away. [...] There is no tomorrow. There is only this day. This hour. Beyond that I do not know. Beyond that I do not see."¹³ (Sebastian, 1956, p. 263).

Hjalmar Ekdal in *The Wild Duck* has a purpose in life that he pursues day and night: to make a staggering discovery through which he might restore his father's honor, whom he sees as a castaway caught in a storm and whom he wishes to save: "I will save the shipwrecked man" (Ibsen, 1900, p. 74). He confides to the young Werle: "I can invoke his self-respect from the dead, by raising up the name of Ekdal to honor and respect again" (Ibsen, 1900, p. 74).

Ekdal's dream becomes a form of spiritual nourishment, and even though he does absolutely nothing toward his invention, the hero feeds on the illusion that he is already a discoverer and a support for his family, which helps him rise above his humble condition. He dreams of the day when he receives his inventor's patent as an end—both of his mission and of his existence—while his wife will become the wealthy and happy widow of the great inventor. After the long walk he takes with Gregers, who speaks to him about the old Ekdal's innocence, Hjalmar becomes aware of the illusion in which he lives and struggles to accept reality. Ultimately, it proves that Hjalmar is not a special man, as those around him believe, but merely a patient of Doctor Relling, who keeps his life-lie awake: "I take care to keep up his life-lie" (Ibsen, 1900, p. 121). The doctor feeds his dream and constantly urges him to make the great discovery, precisely in order to give him an occupation that will sustain him and keep him alive.

In the attic, among his animals—domestic rabbits, hens, and pigeons—the old Ekdal feels as if he were in the forests on the mountain where he used to go hunting. In contrast to his son, who needs Doctor Relling's fabrication, Lieutenant Ekdal has found his own remedy, building his own forest.

The appearance of Gregers Werle in the attic-dwelling of the Ekdal family triggers a rupture in the existing balance. He speaks to the old Ekdal about events that took place fifteen years earlier in the mountains, in the town of Høydal, even though all the latter remembers is related only to the hunting parties in which he took part. Gregers is considered a sick man, "suffering from an acute attack of virtue-fever" (Ibsen, 1900, p. 87) and of rectitude, and is suspected of always carrying with him an ideal claim, "claims of the ideal" (p. 99). His new goal is to help his childhood friend, Hjalmar, achieve a perfect marriage, based on mutual trust. Gregers reveals to him secrets concerning his wife, Gina, and her connection with the old Werle, hoping that the clarification between Hjalmar and Gina will have a purifying influence and that the two will be able to begin a new life, "the living together in truth and without all deceit" (p. 97), founded on complete trust and sincerity. At a certain point, he realizes that Hjalmar,

¹² „Ce curios lucru e foamea. Seamănă puțin cu visul. Parcă nu ești cu totul treaz. Parcă ai băut puțin. Uite... uite, eu sînt puțin amețită. [...] Ce amețitoare e foamea! Ca cele mai bune lucruri din lumea asta. Ca vinul. Ca iubirea” (Sebastian, 1956, p. 232).

¹³ „Nouă ne e foame. Și vrem să trăim. Restul cade. [...] Nu există mîine. Există doar ziua asta. Ceasul acesta. Mai departe nu știu. Mai departe nu văd” (Sebastian, 1956, p. 263).

symbolically, like the hunted duck, has dived down and has remained too long at the bottom of the marsh, among poisonous weeds, acquiring a hidden disease. For this reason, he wishes to be “a real uncommonly clever dog; such a one as can dive under after wild ducks, when they go to the bottom, and get fast in all the tangle and sea-weeds down in the mud below.” (Ibsen, 1900, p. 55).

Familiar objects, more precisely regression in their presence, establish the dreamer’s communication with his world. For Jean Baudrillard (1996b), coexistence among objects is the only truly possible one, because the differences between them do not generate rivalries, as in the case of human beings. In relation to the individual, the object is a perfect mirror that reflects desired images rather than real ones; it is like “a dog of which nothing remains but faithfulness.” (p. 90).

As it is only natural, any dwelling is populated with objects, and the house’s maternal and defining function can be deciphered in its furniture, since furnishings have their own substances and forms, are invested with a soul, and possess a symbolic presence. Functional objects have the primordial function of a containing vessel and are linked to the imaginative function. They are fixed containers of a substance; each contains the image of an entire vision of the world (Baudrillard, 1996a, p. 18).

Every object has two functions: to be used and to be possessed. The practical object acquires a social status, whereas the object separated from its function takes on a subjective status and becomes a collector’s item. Nonfunctional objects “appear to run counter to the requirements of functional calculation, and answer to other kinds of demands such as witness, memory, nostalgia or escapism” (Baudrillard, 1996b, p. 73). Old things, whether gathered into a collection or not, signify the abolition of time and represent an attraction for the civilized individual.

In an ordinary house, possession naturally intertwines with use; this is not a collection in the true sense of the word, but an accumulation. Accumulation, an inferior stage of the collection, is a piling up of objects. When old and deteriorated objects are simply thrown somewhere, into a cellar or an attic, they are severed from almost any normal functionality. Totalization through objects bears the marks of solitude and signifies a lack of communication.

The garrets or attics in which the heroes of the dramas live are rather poor and, as it is only natural, old objects are stored there, though not collectible ones. In the miserable room of the play *Insula* [The Island] there is a heap of mismatched things that the landlady no longer uses: an old piano missing a leg, scratched, with rusted strings and broken keys; beside it stands a wash tub, and further on a cooking stove; three beds separated by large sackcloth curtains and a washbasin.

The unconverted room beneath the roof of the London building in which Lulu and her companions come to live, after having lived in a fitted-out cellar in Germany and in a well-furnished house in Paris, has two large roof windows, a rickety little flower table, an oil lamp, an old chaise longue, a damaged wicker armchair, and a tattered gray mattress.

Only Hjalmar’s dwelling, in *The Wild Duck* (1900), has a cared-for appearance; it is arranged and ensures a minimum of comfort. It is divided into two large parts: an attic section in which the Ekdal family lives, and another part, on the same level, called the loft. In the loft, as we have seen, there are some cupboards with books, most of them illustrated, a shabby desk, “with drawers and flaps, and a big clock with figures that can come out. But the clock doesn’t go now. [...] And then there’s an old paint-box and so forth; and then all the books.” (Ibsen, 1900, p. 66).

In that same area, among all the odds and ends, the lieutenant has built the forest in which he hunts. The attic has large windows; a blue curtain covers half of the roof on the right; it has a common room with an iron stove, a modest but neatly arranged workshop, with a sofa, a table, and a few chairs, and a shelving unit with utensils used in the photographic art.

As we have seen, the old object is a marginal one, belonging to the collection, which in turn is a marginal system. It is a nonfunctional object that surpasses the purpose for which it was created; it addresses the consciousness with which it enters into relation and signifies something else, responding to nostalgias, recollection, and the ego's desires for escapism. These spiritual acts are ways of relating to temporality; old objects signify time and even eliminate it, through their capacity to provoke the being (Baudrillard, 1996a, pp. 50–51).

Objects situated in a particular time belong to the anachronic regime, since, when experienced through subjectivity, they cannot be situated in space and thus old objects become atopic. The functional object is inscribed in space and time, and the sight of it does not awaken that feeling of regression toward past spaces and times; by contrast, in the case of nonfunctional objects, return and regression are facilitated by the disproportion between their inability to fulfill the function for which they were created and their immense power to generate imaginings. When organized into collections, objects bring about the annihilation of the irreversibility of time; things that bear within their being the patina of time are responsible for those dimensions of the imaginary in which the individual establishes relationships with time and death (see Baudrillard, 1996a, pp. 58–59).

Numerous functional objects, or those we accumulate around us or in the attics of houses, are responsible for analepses in chronological time. The heroes of the plays recall events from other times, sustain their dream with the help of these objects, whose mere sight transposes them into another space-time.

For Ekdal,

The four or five withered Christmas trees that he stored up there are to him the same as the whole of the great, fresh Hojdal forest; the cock and the hens are to him game peched on the top of fir trees, and the rabbits hopping about the floor of the loft, they are the bears he grapples with, he, the hardy old hunter. (Ibsen, 1900, p. 122)

The attic becomes an atemporal space. Here not even the clock measures time anymore, and the space is an almost grotesque replica of the mountain forest in which the old man used to hunt in his youth. This illusion makes him profoundly happy.

Hjalmar uses the attic as a place of retreat; for him it is a space in which he can fill his waiting time with all those objects, in order to forget the thoughts that weigh on him day after day.

Even in the hovel in which Nadia lives there is something that moves her: the piano. Although it is a wreck, with scratched wood, rusted strings, and broken keys, it once had its good days. She thinks that the piano resembles them somewhat, since it too belonged to another world before becoming a nonfunctional object, stored in an attic with mice and spiders, among broken chairs and many old clothes. Even so, Nadia notes with a certain joy that the piano can still be played; its keys sound good, as much as is possible under the given circumstances¹⁴ (Sebastian, 1856, p. 242). Likewise, the locket she wears around her neck, which she is willing to give up in order to buy food, is the symbol of another world that she no longer remembers, that she can no longer see, and that is situated far too distant in time, she says¹⁵ (Sebastian, 1856, p. 245).

Before Lulu's portrait, brought into the attic by the Marquise Geschwitz, Alwa asserts that he regains respect for his own person: "Looking on this picture I regain my self-respect. It makes my fate comprehensible to me. Everything we have endured gets clear as a day."

¹⁴ „Și el a trăit în altă lume, pînă să ajungă aici. Acum zace într-un colț de pod, cu paianjeni și șoareci, între scaune rupte și zdrențe. Dar dacă te apropii de el [...] și îl deschizi [...], dacă treci ușor cu degetul peste clapele lui sparte... sună, cîntă, așa cum poate, atît cît poate, dar încă sună...” (Sebastian, 1856, p. 242).

¹⁵ „E prea departe” (Sebastian, 1856, p. 245).

(Wedekind, 1900, p. 67), while Schigolch thinks that “Whoever looks at that’ll imagine afterwards he’s been in an Indian harem.” (p. 68).

The possession of objects is an imaginary dimension of our lives, as essential as dreams. If an object, through its function, is a mediator of a goal, it is also the exponent of a desire; and if dreams have the function of ensuring the continuity of sleep, objects ensure the continuity of life through an almost identical compromise (Baudrillard, 1996a, p. 65). Almost the entire sum of our everyday objects gathers within the field of the dwelling. Any consideration of objects, Emmanuel Lévinas tells us (1979, p. 154), takes place within a dwelling. The familiarity of the world in which we conduct our daily existence results, among other things, from acquired habits, which “...take from it its roughnesses and measure the adaptation of the living being to a world it enjoys and from which it nourishes itself” (Lévinas, 1979, pp. 154–155).

In the plays analyzed, the attic or the garret represents rationality; it is the space in which the characters become aware of the true reality in which they live and, moreover, accept it while seeking solutions to overcome the impasses they face. It is the place where time is abolished and escapism becomes, for all of them, a therapy of the soul.

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