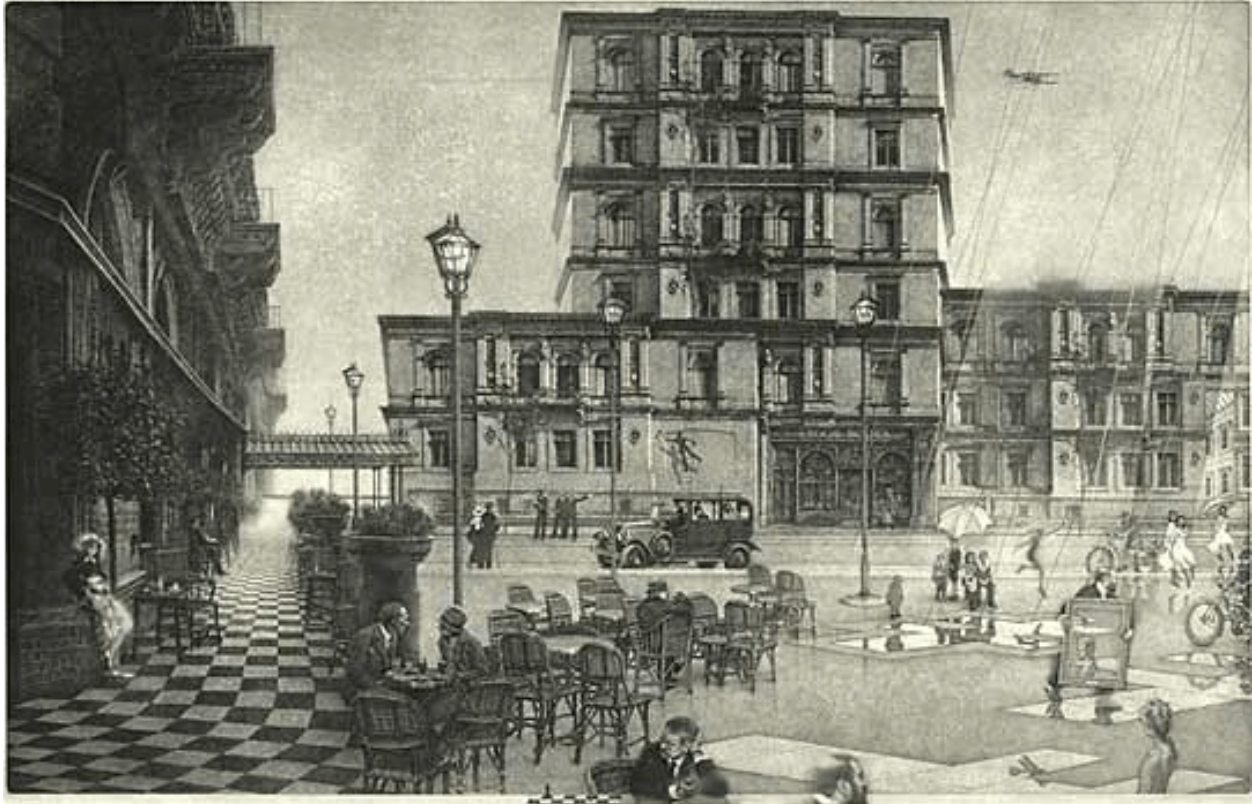


# PETER MILTON



*Hidden Cities I: The Ministry*

## Notes on: *Hidden Cities I: The Ministry*

Paris, 1922. The year Marcel Proust died. The year Sylvia Beach published James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The year also of their only meeting—at a soiree to celebrate a Ballet Russe performance of an Igor Stravinsky ballet.

Proust and Joyce shared a taxi home. Their friends had expected an encounter of the gods. What the gods talked about was their health: Joyce was half-blind and Proust couldn't breathe. When Joyce flung down the window to smoke Proust was convinced Joyce was trying to kill him. Joyce thought Proust was a snob. Reporting on this great literary event, Joyce claimed that Proust was only interested in duchesses while he (Joyce) was more interested in the chambermaids. No account of the meeting by Proust has survived—but nor did Proust. He died a few months later.

Joyce, surprised at his death, said Proust had looked just fine that evening. A comment which would not have surprised Proust, who was said by observers to be less than thrilled by Joyce's state of insobriety and to be just trying to get away from him as quickly as possible.

The image began with Joyce and Proust in the taxi. 1922 is also the year Marcel Duchamp, another primary icon of 20<sup>th</sup> century sensibility, left Paris for New York to finish his twelve years of work on "The Bride in Search of Her Bachelors (1923)," which is painted on glass (also called *The Large Glass*). Its transparency began to inform my thoughts about the print's structure. I wanted Duchamp's painting to be visible through the window of Shakespeare & Company (Sylvia Beach's bookshop) which would be in front of everything, and the taxi, with Proust and Joyce apparent through the cab's windows, would be seen through the painting. Like many brilliant ideas, in the execution, it was simply a mess.

But its remnants endured. And echoing Duchamp's rather perverse pleasure when his large glass was broken in shipping, I was rather taken with the resulting shards I was left to work with. Reflections replaced transparencies. For instance, Leopold Bloom, the protagonist of Joyce's *Ulysses*, is in the foreground looking at a young woman, who is seen by us in reflection in a mirror being carried across the square by a second bloom. The young woman, in turn, is startled to catch sight in the mirror of the man looking at her. This echoes the Nausicaaa chapter in *Ulysses*, the first bit to get the book banned. In a further reworking of the print, I have cracked the mirror, as happened to Duchamp's *Large Glass*. The Nausicaaa girl turns out to be lame or broken herself. A cracked looking glass appears in the beginning of *Ulysses* with the shaving Buck Mulligan. It is also a reference to Irish art, made by Stephen Dedalus, and a reference by Oscar Wilde in his remarks on the nature of Genius, a designation so thoroughly inhabited by the two Marcells and James Joyce.

There are further examples of the linear motif of fracture lines in the proliferation of lines which support the floating figures and the balloon. This is further repeated in the raindrop tracings of the shower coming in on the left. I now think of the rain as a 21<sup>st</sup> Century clearing shower for those who might find Duchamp's canonization overdue for a review.

Meanwhile, Duchamp constructing his “Bride” has morphed into Duchamp sitting with a nubile café companion. Above them is a figure of Calypso, another Ulysses reference, an image borrowed from my 1971 *Jolly Corner*. Joyce’s intricate chess-game of a novel has become an actual chess game which echoes in three games of hopscotch. Shakespeare & Company has retreated to the back and Sylvia Beach is at the print’s left side, posing as a lady of the night. After these changes I was left with Joyce and Proust in the taxi, which also began to recede—in space, in importance, and in time. Its occupants reappear now as children, spectators to the game of hopscotch which two other children, Marcel Duchamp and his sister, Adele, also watch.

I might mention that I’ve been told that hopscotch in Europe can be bipolar: the far end is “heaven,” the near end is “hell,” a concept which gave me my angels and devils in the form of dancers and motorcyclists.

I think, for me, the real purpose of the image emerged as I began to visualize these themes and references staged on a city square which I defined by two buildings. For the central building, which became the print’s dominating subject, I chose a villa in Dresden which survived the Dresden firestorm of the second World War. The small section in the middle being painted by the man on a ladder is the original villa, but in a gesture towards renewal I piled it on top of itself until the print ran out of room. Passing behind this now monumental edifice, hinting at Proust’s connection to the war, and to airplanes in general, is a World War I German Albatros DV. In the second state it tows a banner with the year 1922.

Moving in an opposite direction, the rain-shower is passing in front of the building. I put the rain in for various, compositional reasons, but, in the process I seem to have sent people scurrying. Totally mysterious as to function, the building remains a looming presence which moves beyond the intricate intimacies of Joyce and Proust, an impenetrable façade which points to modern aloofness. My thoughts turning to Kafka, I call it “The Ministry.”

In the final reworking of the print, Duchamp is floating away next to a hot air balloon carrying his female alter ego, Rose Sélavy, to finish his “Bride” in New York. Rose (*Eros c’est la vie*) 1921 was a concoction of Duchamp and Man Ray. Man Ray, with camera, is also floating. Among Man Ray’s connections to 1922 is his James Joyce 1922

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portrait and his photograph of Marcel Proust on his death bed. Man Ray is, of course, photographing the entire proceedings.

*The Ministry* is the first print of a series of three. The series title, *Hidden Cities*, is taken from a chapter of Italo Calvino's *Invisible Cities*. On Hahnemuhle paper. Print size: 24 x 37 inches, Paper size: 32 x 46 inches. Edition size: 140.