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Milton Hindus

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*Milton Hindus*

## THE PATTERN OF PROUSTIAN LOVE

**I**T WAS through the relationship of sexual love that Proust achieved his most penetrating insights into the powers and limitations of the mind. To systematize these insights, however, is a little like trying to marshal a series of lightning strokes in order to achieve a steady illumination over the area they are intended to reveal.

The primary step in Proust's reasoning seems to be that love is essentially a subjective phenomenon. It is created by something within a man rather than by something outside him. The Proustian affair usually takes place between a rich man (and an idle one, professionally speaking, because, as Balzac indicated, leisure is the necessary ground for allowing the pure strain of this feeling to unfold properly) and some poor opportunist. Not counting minor affairs, five major ones occupy Proust's attention—the ones between Swann and Odette, between the narrator and Gilberte, between Saint-Loup and Rachel, between Charlus and Morel, and between the narrator and Albertine. Only one of these affairs (the one between the narrator and Gilberte) involves those

who are almost social equals, and yet even here the woman must be lower in social esteem since the parents of the narrator will not receive Gilberte's mother. All the other affairs are concerned with men who are rich enough to keep women, or (in the case of Charlus and Morel) with a man who keeps another man. In every case it is the woman (or the man playing the feminine role) who makes her lover suffer terribly, and in every case the cause of this suffering is the same, jealousy. If we put these facts together it is probable that in Proust suffering is what a man seeks in love, what he pays for, and why he originally falls in love. It may be useful to examine the hypothesis that such jealous love is created by the need of self-punishment in a rich, spoiled child.

The theme of the subjective nature of love, the very foundation of its psychology, is present—in disguised form, it is true—in the very opening pages of the book, in which, describing his troubled sleep, the narrator tells us: "Sometimes, too, just as Eve was created from a rib of Adam, so a woman would come into existence while I was sleeping, conceived from some strain in the position of my limbs. Formed by the appetite that I was on the point of gratifying, she it was, I imagined, who offered me that gratification." It might be said that Odette, Albertine, Gilberte, Rachel, and Morel are creations, in the sense that they are loved, of the minds of their lovers, just as this dream woman was a creation of the mind of the sleeper. They are all eventually proved as accidental and as subjective as she is.

Perhaps this oblique and veiled way of stating the theme is even more satisfactory to the imagination of the reader than a more explicit statement of it: "I had guessed long ago in the Champs-Elysees, and had since established to my own satisfaction, that when we are in love with a woman we simply project into her a state of our own soul, that the important thing is, therefore, not the worth of the woman, but the depth of the state; and the emotions which a young girl of no kind of distinction arouses in us

can enable us to bring to the surface of our consciousness some of the most intimate parts of our being."

Proust has an ambiguous attitude toward this power of transformation possessed by the mind—admiration of the enchanter and contempt for the objects, and the progress in Proust, if there is any, is the same as the one we find in *Don Quixote*, from enchantment to disenchantment. That is why Proust's pages are so filled with unhappiness, for happiness, as Swift informs us, is "a perpetual possession of being well deceived," and none of Proust's people are so permanently possessed. Sooner or later, like Cervantes' hero, they awaken from their dreams to the accompaniment of shame and torment. Proust does take a certain pride in the lover's poetic ability, which might be compared to Rimbaud's voluntary derangement of his senses so that he should be able to see a romantic mosque in place of an ordinary prosaic brick factory. This pride is present, for example, in Proust's pointed comment on the look of disillusion so plainly printed on Saint-Loup's face when the narrator shows him the photograph of his mistress: "Let us leave pretty women to men devoid of imagination."

It is the subjective nature of love, its growth in the soil of mind alone rather than in any external, material realities, that makes its bodily realization the least important of its phases. When Albertine leaves the narrator, it is not as a woman that he regrets her. She would not have been very dangerous to his tranquility if he had been able to think of her physically, because he knows intellectually that she is not at all remarkable in that way. She brings anguish with her because she is an image of frustration.

It is difficult to detach the idea of love from that of physical beauty; the connection of the two is a prejudice very early ingrained into our minds. It is as painful to part with this prejudice as to part with our pride. In Proust, certainly, good looks have no causal connection with the feeling of love. Instead, it is

*anxiety* that is central. Perhaps that is why famous lovers of history (like Cleopatra whose beauty Plutarch specifically denies, emphasizing instead the charm of her voice!) have been not necessarily the beauties but the *fugitives*. That is, those who exploit our anxieties and terrors by seeming to threaten constantly to take flight from us. If personality in general, according to Proust, is unstable, it is the most unstable personalities that seem to inspire the most fervent attachments. Why this should be so, I shall try presently to deduce from Proust's analysis, but that it is indeed so, he leaves little room for doubt: "Generally speaking, love has not as its object a human body, except when an emotion, the fear of losing it, the uncertainty of finding it again have been infused into it. This sort of anxiety has a great affinity for bodies. It adds to them a quality which surpasses beauty even; which is one of the reasons why we see men who are indifferent to the most beautiful women fall passionately in love with others who appear to us to be ugly."

It is this hallucinatory quality of love which makes us see things as no one in his right senses would see them, that makes Proust refer to love continually as a disease, a compulsion, a poison. Whether a given person who has caught it ever recovers from it depends on his reserves or resistance, the strength of his mental constitution, and the seriousness of the original infection. There is no way of saying in advance whether the thing is going to be fatal or not. Once the recovery is complete, however, the sufferer (which is to say, etymologically, the *passionate* man) can see the world once again in the same light as everybody else, and then it must be clear to him that it was something in himself which he called his love and not something outside. So after Swann expends his time, his fortune, and very nearly his life itself in his vain (and necessarily vain, for love cannot be compelled—the effort to compel it only alienates it still further) pursuit of Odette, he, who had compared her to a Botticellian masterpiece, who would have said in the manner of the elders of Troy when they beheld Helen: "All

misfortunes are worth a single glance of her eyes," who had desired death as a relief from the intolerable pain of his unrequited love, suddenly, luckily, unexpectedly, reaches the opposite shore of sanity and is able to look back in wonder at the illusion which had nearly undone him. Then there follows the famous coda of the chapter called "Swann in Love," which recounts his reawakening to reality, accomplished ironically through the agency of a dream! "... he saw once again as he had felt them close beside him Odette's pallid complexion, her too thin cheeks, her drawn features, her tired eyes, all the things which—in the course of those successive bursts of affection which had made of his enduring love for Odette a long oblivion of the first impression he had formed of her—he had ceased to observe after the first few days of intimacy . . . and he cried out in his heart: 'To think that I have wasted years of my life, that I have longed for death, that the greatest love that I have ever known has been for a woman who did not please me, who was not in my style!'"

If we turn now to the other half of the team of love, the part represented by Odette, Rachel, Gilberte, Albertine and Morel, we find that they are the ones who let themselves be loved. They are the carriers of the disease but are not themselves affected by it. They see the world only too clearly to mistake their dreams for reality. They are hardheaded Sanchos, who look for their rewards in the governorship of some island promised them by their crazy masters, except that, being shrewder than Sancho was, they choose to follow men who already possess islands instead of one who is only planning to conquer them. The connections which Proust traces between love and the opportunity to enter society, to acquire money, to advance one's career, and in general to gain material advantage, would appear to be extremely cynical, were it not for the fact that the circumstantial details which he supplies show very clearly that he knows what he is talking about.

To Proust, there seems no real possibility for the development of all the potentialities of love which shall illustrate his laws,

where there is an absence of money, position, or other advantages. In the latter case, the affair is doomed even before its growth. Where there is no leisure, there may be a simulacrum of romantic love, or simple sex, but not love in the involved, fully developed Proustian sense. Love is a luxury, and only sex a necessity, consequently while every one can enjoy the latter, only a few can afford the former. Quite seriously, Proust quotes the aphorism of La Bruyère: "It is a mistake to fall in love without an ample fortune." That is a mistake which Proust's characters never make.

All the lovers in Proust are conscious of the advantage which is gained for them by their titles or their wealth. And they are continually uneasy about the sufficiency or continuation of these advantages. We find Saint-Loup looking forward to a rich though loveless marriage in order that he might be able to afford keeping his mistress Rachel. For though he drugs his pain occasionally with the optimistic self-assurance that it is really himself and not his money she loves, he is really aware that his little friend suffers him "only on account of his money, and that on the day when she had nothing more to expect from him, she would make haste to leave him." Nor does the narrator show any more confidence about his relations with Albertine when he says: "Pecuniary interest alone could attach a woman to me."

It is to be noted, however, that Proustian love is never inspired by outright prostitutes. Even when the woman has sold herself in the past for a definite low sum (as is the case with Rachel), that fact is not known to her great lover, though it may be known to all his friends. Saint-Loup never finds out about Rachel, nor does Swann about Odette (until it is too late for them to be interested), because as Proust shows us (and it is one of his most excellent observations), around every lover there is woven necessarily a conspiracy of silence, either by the considerateness of people towards him or their cruelty. If it is obvious to the reader that Swann, Saint-Loup and the rest are the purchasers of the favors

they receive, they have nevertheless been convinced by a very artful process that they are quite exceptional and that their virtuous mistresses have been seduced and corrupted by them. If this sounds funny, it is because it actually is funny, though the dupe is not expected to appreciate the joke. Proust thinks that the failure of prostitutes to inspire love is due to the fact that there must always be "a risk of impossibility" standing between ourselves and our object to lend its possession savor. Therefore, he concludes, difficult women alone are interesting, and love is always born of uncertainty. Difficult women but not impossible ones. Completely virtuous women are without power to inspire love either. When the narrator is repelled by Albertine at Balbec and draws the erroneous conclusion that she is impossible to seduce, his interests in her cools immediately. It is only those women who are doubtful in their morals who are capable of exercising a fatal attraction upon men. Women who seem to be wavering in their allegiance to virtue without being yet committed to vice; women who *this time alone* seem capable of succumbing to the lure of money or position but are not known to have yielded to this weakness before.

The connections between love and guilt are both subtle and manifold. Essentially it is a nameless guilt of which the sufferings caused by jealousy are the expiation. Swann's grief over his love and his need continually to speak of it to anybody who will listen is compared by Proust to the murderer's need to confess. This "figure of speech" is far from accidental. It is not *we* who seek love, but the albatrosses that hang round our necks. The proof of the morality of Proust's vision of the world, if any were needed (and at least some of his critics like Mauriac and Fernandez have felt that it was), is that pain seems to him a retribution—ultimately, his language may suggest, of original sin. The merit of love is that when its tortures become unbearably excruciating, they may lead us to a re-examination of our festering consciences. A man unfortunate enough to fall into the net of a woman like



Odette must ask himself at some point—what did I ever do to deserve this? The answer that Proust gives to this question is "Plenty!" In that tremendous scene which closes the volume *Cities of the Plains*, in which Albertine finally secures her death grip on the heart of the narrator, by the perfectly silly accident of her lying claim to intimacy with Vinteuil's daughter (whose perversion the narrator is aware of but Albertine is not), he reveals under the shock of his despair the burden of guilt which he had carried in his heart but concealed from himself for so long. His torments then appear to him ". . . as a punishment, as a retribution (who can tell?) for my having allowed my grandmother to die, perhaps, rising up suddenly from the black night in which it seemed forever buried, and striking, like an Avenger, in order to inaugurate for me a novel, terrible, and merited existence, perhaps also to make dazzlingly clear to my eyes the fatal consequences which evil actions indefinitely engender, not only for those who have committed them, but for those who have done no more, have thought that they were doing no more than look on at a curious and entertaining spectacle, like myself, alas, on that afternoon long ago at Montjouvain, concealed behind a bush where (as when I complacently listened to an account of Swann's love affair), I had perilously allowed to expand within myself the fatal road, destined to cause me suffering, of knowledge."

So here, many volumes later, we have the logical conclusion of that Biblical image in the opening pages in which a woman was created by the strain in a sleeper's limbs "just as Eve was created from a rib of Adam." Woman the cause of man's transgression originally is also the instrument with which he is punished.

*We instinctively love what will make us suffer.* "We are wrong in speaking of a bad choice in love," says Proust, "since whenever there is a choice it can only be bad." In another place he says: "It is human to seek out what hurts us." And when we consider all the positive *good* that accrues to us through the medium of our sufferings, we conclude by being grateful for it and we see that

we have chosen right after all. "... A woman is of greater service to our life if she is in it, instead of being an element of happiness, an instrument of sorrow, and there is not a woman in the world the possession of whom is as precious as that of the truths she reveals to us by making us suffer."

Suffering is so valuable to Proust because, without it, he thinks we must always remain strangers to ourselves. "How much further," he exclaims at one point, "does anguish penetrate in psychology itself!" By the second term, we are to understand cold intellectual self-analysis. The innermost nature of life for Proust as for Schopenhauer is something much more akin to feeling than it is to reason—consequently thought can work best when aroused by the keenest of all feelings which is pain. Schopenhauer says of death that it is the muse of all philosophy, and Proust makes of frustrated love the inspiration of all art. From his most youthful works to his latest ones, an idea which recurs in Proust is that suffering is what inspires us (that is to say the best of us, for the others are hardened and made more callous in proportion to their sufferings) with feelings of sympathy for other men; without such sympathy there can be no understanding or communication between men and therefore no art either.

The need of suffering which it fulfills is the reason why love has a basic affinity for attaching itself to cruel people. The lover in Proust always has "an excess of good nature," and the loved one "an excess of malice." Therefore we have a very wide latitude of choice, for Proust thinks that people in general tend to be cruel—and cowardly at the same time. One of his most striking aphorisms about human nature is that while we all enjoy tormenting others, we hesitate to put ourselves clearly in the wrong by killing them outright. Morel, Rachel, Gilberte, and Odette are displayed to us in a great variety of postures denoting willful torture, sometimes of their unfortunate lovers, sometimes of other innocents. The Rachel who arranges with her coterie to hiss a rival actress off the stage is the same Rachel who taunts Saint-

Loup. Morel is exhibited in perhaps the greatest variety of such actions, possibly because homosexuality, being itself the quintessential perversity, naturally attaches itself to creatures more morally obtuse than any that can be found among the more normal lovers. Morel's public rebuff of his patron Charlus, after the concert which the latter has arranged to introduce him to fashionable society, is one of the most painful scenes in literature. As for Gilberte, she is cruel not only to Marcel but to her own father as well. And in this respect, she shows herself worthy of her mother Odette, the depths of whose inconceivable depravity are sounded by Swann when he suspects her of being capable of hiding a lover in their room in order to inflame the senses of the latter or simply to torture him by allowing him to witness her lovemaking with Swann. Albertine seems to the narrator the heaven-sent instrument of his castigation—he speaks of “the contrary, inflexible will of Albertine, upon which no pressure had had any effect.” Such are the ideal objects of love because sensitive men, according to Proust, “need to suffer.”

In one passage, which is about no character in the book in particular but rather deals in the abstract with those qualities of woman which are most attractive, Proust sums up his impressions in phrases which show unmistakably, by the isolation of certain traits of physiognomy and posture, that it is the external features which seem best to denote an inward coldness and cruelty or at least lack of sympathy which prove most compelling—I mean such expressions as “haughty calm,” “indifferent,” “the proud girl,” “the beauty of stern eyes.”

Proustian love is a passion in which the consent of the sufferer is necessary—at least at first; after that, it acts like the spring of a trap which has been released. *If the femme fatale did not exist, the romantic would have to invent her, for she corresponds to his need of suffering, and necessity is the mother of invention.* In the respect that consent is necessary at the beginning, love is like hypnosis, because no one can be hypnotized against his will, nor

be made to do anything while in that state which runs counter to his basic character formation. So, no one who is not at least potentially a criminal to begin with can be made to commit a crime by suggestion. But though the consent of the patient is necessary at first in order to induce the state (of either love or hypnosis) once the state is fully established and confirmed, one may be influenced to do many painful things, and the process of awakening, unless managed very skillfully by a physician (but in love the cause is not a physician—it is a disease), may be very difficult and disturbing. This matter of consent and foreknowledge of the passion of love before it becomes fixed is very important. It indicates that love is something which, in spite of all its troubles, is sought as an expiation of some anterior guilt, which would be even more serious to face—just as some types of mental illness can apparently be arrested only by the artificial stimulation of such high fevers as are themselves eventually dangerous to life. We are constantly forced, like Ulysses, to choose between evils, and if we choose love, it must be because unconsciously we regard it as the lesser one in comparison with some other dread, the very name of which we suppress from our minds, though it may perhaps occasionally be brought to the surface by a skillful analyst. Charlus makes the brilliant observation at one point that homosexuality is probably a disease which prevents a man from suffering an even more dangerous one.

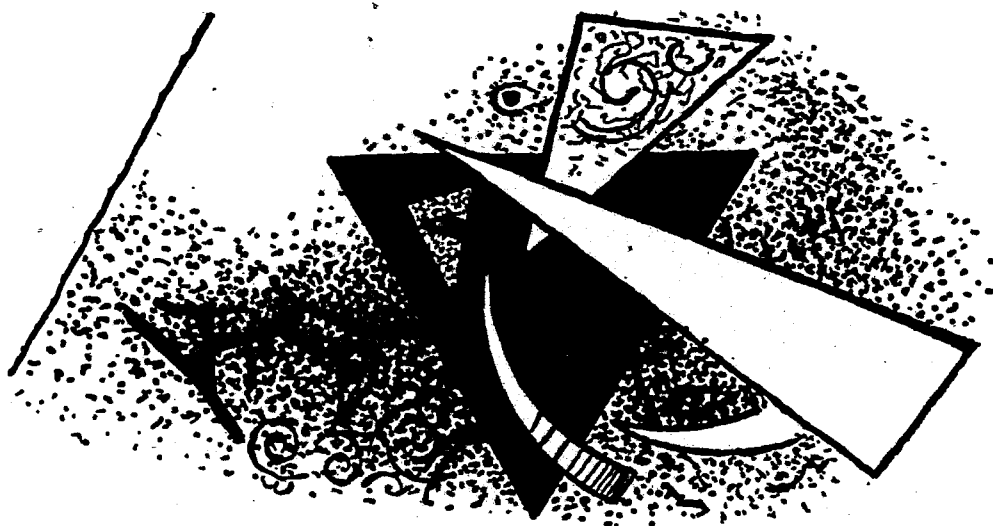
Swann had been cautious with his heart before he met Odette. He had stayed within easy reach of shore. He had never given himself deeply to any of his numerous female friends, and he had never lost that mastery of himself which, so long as it is retained, keeps him from being a lover in the Proustian sense—that is to say helplessly, compulsively, perhaps even convulsively. In general, Swann is a man whose awakenings to the fundamental realities about himself come very late—that is true not only of his great love for Odette but of his discovery of the importance of his Jewish identity under the impact of the Dreyfus Case. The motiva-

tions which make him *consent* to become involved with Odette as he had successfully avoided becoming involved with anyone before that are multiple—curiosity about the life which lovers lead of which he had read and heard and dreamt so much though he had not the courage to try it (in which caution he was well-advised, it seems, for it very nearly costs him his life when he does experience it), respect for the nobility of self-sacrifice in love, and finally his own lack of fulfillment as an artist which he associated with his lack of the inspiration of love. Swann<sup>9</sup> proves that love is the most literary of emotions. Love, which is the subject of so much of the world's art, is itself stimulated by works of art. La Rochefoucauld observes that many a man would never have fallen in love had he not read about it first.

But this is not to say, as I have tried to indicate, that love does not fulfill a subjectively compelling necessity. Proust speaks of "our need of a great love," by which he means, as I understand him, a love not lightly taken or trivial, but profound and spiritually exhausting. Only when love, like an enraged bull, comes within an ace of killing you (sometimes, of course, it does actually gore its victim to death) can you be sure that it is the real thing, the salutary terror which allays the memory of all your nameless guilt. "Slight" love affairs in Proust's pages serve as relaxations between more serious ones. The source of much tragedy in the world and almost all in Proust is that the nature of things makes it seem inevitable that there should be very few beings who correspond to "our need of a great love" and only too many to take advantage of it. Proust makes it clear in reference to the narrator, by the use which he makes of the Mme. de Stermaria episode, that at a given moment of his life, a man is simply ready for his great love affair. The object of his feeling is certainly of secondary importance if not entirely accidental. He is determined by his whole past to let himself fall into the death lock of love.

Love is the ultimate test of life in Proust. The analogy which he makes of it with war has been used many times before, but it

is given new force by him. Like war, it is a situation in which the control of our destiny is committed into the hands of another. Like war, love is a test from which we may not return alive (though our friends do not always notice that they are really conversing with our ghosts!). Like war, too, it terrifies and thrills us simultaneously with a feeling of our own insignificance and helplessness. There seems to be a carnal attraction to danger. That all of the greatest love affairs of literature and history—Anthony and Cleopatra, Paolo and Francesca, Eloise and Abelard, Tristan and Isolde, Romeo and Juliet, Launcelot and Guinevere, Hero



and Leander, Dido and Aeneas—seem to have been in some way illicit or at least surrounded by dangers and pitfalls is not just a coincidence.

It is characteristic of Proust's lovers that they know *in advance* the path that their love is bound to follow *or think they do*. Thus, from the moment that he is inextricably taken in the toils of Albertine, the narrator compares his own situation with that of Swann which he had once heard about. Yet this intellectual knowledge is without visible effect upon his actions. The pattern which all the different affairs follow is their nonreciprocity: "I felt even then that in a love which is not reciprocated—I might

as well say in love, for there are people for whom there is no such thing as reciprocated love. . . ." We may add here that the people for whom there is no such thing as reciprocated love are all the people in Proust, because, if there are any others, he either did not observe them or describe them, though his careful phrasing occasionally leaves room for the possibility that somewhere they may actually exist.

The initial condition of love, then, is the expectant, perhaps even eager condition of the organism that awaits it (if I use such scientific verbiage, it is because Proust's clinical treatment of the subject suggests it). The immediate cause of love, in the presence of this weakened and assenting state, is, as I have said, less than nothing in comparison with the vast uproar and turmoil which follows. Proust compares the immediate cause of love to "an insignificant bacillus" which is capable of making the proudest men die. Charlus says very well that it is not whom or what one loves that matters, but the fact of loving itself.

I have spoken of the cruelty of those who cause the most lasting passions in Proust. This is not always intentional cruelty, though it can be, but merely thoughtlessness, carelessness, or stupidity. The thoughtlessness of Odette is invaluable to her in bringing about some of Swann's most violent paroxysms. He clearly realizes her lack of intelligence. In fact, we might put the Proustian thought in this way, exaggerating his pessimism a bit perhaps but not being basically unfair to him—*the more moral worth a person is possessed of, the more sensitive he is, the more intelligent and considerate, the less are his chances of inspiring that great love which we all need as an expiation.* The more worthless the object of love the better, for in that case we are bound to suffer more excruciatingly, and that suffering is what we really seek to find, without clearly knowing it from the beginning, or admitting it to ourselves eventually perhaps. A sensitive, moral, intelligent being would hesitate, after all, to involve us in so tormenting and hopeless a situation, and, if we became involved in spite of such

care, once he realized what was happening, he would do his best to extricate us and to assuage the pain he had unwittingly caused. A good, strong, wise person is therefore constitutionally unfitted for the work which is left for those insignificant bacilli, Odette, Rachel, Gilberte, Albertine, and Morel.

Jealousy is the inseparable shadow of love. And just as a man or any material body which casts no shadow would be impalpable or unreal, so Proust doubts the existence of any love which finds no counterpart in jealousy. There seems to be an absolutely necessary place for jealousy in the pattern of love, and it seems very often that we are jealous *not* because we are in love, but that we are in love in order that we might be jealous.

The women in Proust who are the most successful in arousing love are those who recognize instinctively its connection with the personal insecurity and anxiety of the lover. Albertine knows how to exploit the narrator's jealousy, just as Odette had exploited Swann's. In their own persons, these women bore their lovers; what gives them their power is the desire which they arouse in others. Women enchain us in proportion to the suffering they cause. The initial shock of anxiety is sudden in its onset and knocks down the surprised lover before he really knows what is happening. He had not known himself so weak till that moment. Swann had never even kissed Odette before the evening of his fall, when he missed her from her accustomed place at the Verdurins'. Without knowing why he is rendered frantic and "ransacks" the streets of Paris for the missing Odette until by some ill chance (or "retribution," as Proust might put it) he finds her again. He is led to his fate as blindly as Oedipus once travelled the road from Corinth to Thebes. It is at this point of the story that Proust writes one of his most amazingly suggestive paragraphs on the origin and mystery of love: "Among all the methods by which love is brought into being, among all the agents which disseminate that blessed bane, there are few so efficacious as the great gust of agitation which, now and then, sweeps over the human spirit.



For then the creature in whose company we are seeking amusement at the moment, her lot is cast, her fate and ours decided, that is the creature whom we shall henceforward love. It is not necessary that she should have pleased us up till then, any more, or even as much as others. All that is necessary is that our taste for her should become exclusive. And that condition is fulfilled as soon as—for the pleasure which we were on the point of enjoying in her charming company is abruptly substituted an anxious, torturing desire, which the laws of civilized society make it impossible to satisfy and difficult to assuage—the insensate, agonizing desire to possess her.”

If the power of women over men, as Proust illustrates this truth in a hundred variations (so that his demonstration gradually assumes the rigor of mathematics), grows with each pang of suffering they cause, that is because, like Baudelaire and Poe, Proust thinks that in human nature itself there lurks some “demon of perversity.” It is this demon of perversity which explains why the most senseless and harmful habits in human life are also the hardest ones to shake off. The human condition for Proust is one of futility. The least unkind thing he has to say about sexual love is that it is “a sedative.” It drugs momentarily the saddest and silliest element in human nature, our vanity, and it temporarily appeases our insatiable egos by supplying us with an illusory, imaginative triumph “over countless rivals.”

We can see how this psychological structure is related to his conception of the human personality with its discontinuities, its innumerable fissures, its general instability and changeableness, its lightning shifts of mood and key. Whoever puts his reliance upon human beings composed of such fragmentary elements steps upon a spiritual quicksand. Since the relationship of sexual love implies the heaviest reliance upon the personality and will of other people, it is liable to sink deepest into the quagmire. The safest course for a human being sentenced to this world (unless he is lucky or blessed enough to enjoy divine love which seems to

mitigate the punishment somewhat) is to steer alone. Proust at the end rejects friendship and society along with love. Only art survives his bitter criticism, and art, as we remember from the well-known passage on the death of the novelist Bergotte, is a reminder of the possible, not the necessary existence of another and better world than the one we are aware of through our senses.

If, as Proust reiterates, we must remain in perpetual ignorance even of ourselves and our feelings, just as the kaleidoscope is ignorant of the pattern which will turn up after the next shake, we are condemned to an even darker and more abysmal ignorance of our mysteriously moving neighbors in life. One reason that love is so torturing is that the more we are interested in other people the less, it seems, we can know about them. It is when we no longer care that the truth, so carefully concealed when we would have given our lives for it, suddenly floats like scum to the surface. It is only years after the end of his affair with Gilberte that her double life at the time Marcel loved her becomes known to him. It is not Swann who learns from Charlus that she is a troublesome gay lady whom he had once gotten rid of. And it is only after Marcel is hopelessly enmeshed with Albertine that he learns from her that his first and fatal step was taken because she had lied to him about her acquaintanceship with Mlle. Vinteuil.

Nor does thinking things through seem to help any. There are an infinite number of hypotheses about the intentions of other people. I once heard the greatest chess player in the world define life as the game at which we are all duffers. The sources of all the greatest events in life like the sources of great rivers, says Proust, remain hidden from us and are sought in vain. We can trace them step by step, but one more step always remains possible after the latest discovery we have made. It is an inflexible law that, as one of the subdivisions of that vast ignorance of things which Socrates, Ecclesiastes, and the wisest men of all times and nations have recognized as the ultimate destiny of humanity, we must also remain ignorant of those whom we love best.