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## Seeing Double: A Hermeneutics of the Window and the Written Oeuvre in Proust's In Search of Lost Time

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Bard

Seeing Double

A Hermeneutics of the Window and the Written *Oeuvre* in Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*

Senior Project submitted to  
The Division of Languages and Literature  
of Bard College

by

Julian Dime

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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# INTRODUCTION

## WAKING, SEEING

*For a long time I would go to bed early. Sometimes, the candle barely out, my eyes closed so quickly that I did not have time to tell myself: "I'm falling asleep." And half an hour later the thought that it was time to look for sleep would awaken me; I would make as if to put away the book which I imagined was still in my hands, and to blow out the light; I had gone on thinking, while I was asleep, about what I had just been reading, but these thoughts had taken a rather peculiar turn; it seemed to me that I myself was the immediate subject of my book: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between Francois I and Charles V. This impression would persist for some moments after I awoke; it did not offend my reason, but lay like scales upon my eyes and prevented them from registering the fact that the candle was no longer burning. Then it would begin to seem unintelligible, as the thoughts of a previous existence must be after reincarnation; the subject of my book would separate itself from me, leaving me free to apply myself to it or not; and at the same time my sight would return and I would be astonished to find myself in a state of darkness, pleasant and restful enough for my eyes, but even more, perhaps for my mind, to which it appeared incomprehensible, without a cause, something dark indeed.<sup>1</sup>*

The Search begins as such, in a moment of darkness, of incomprehensibility, of a return to sight from something else—a dream, perhaps, or an otherwise imagined reality. The book is still, Marcel imagines, in his hands, the light still needing to be blown out; this reality is

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<sup>1</sup> Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, trans. Charles Kenneth Scott-Moncrieff, Terence Kilmartin, and Dennis Joseph Enright, Modern Library pbk. ed, In Search of Lost Time, v. 1 (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 1.



convincing enough that, even though it is one that exists in a liminal space between the world and the imaginary, it is well-lit and epistemologically sustained by aspects of his perception. What most upsets a conception of the real in this moment is not that it is a moment that is perceptually inviable, but that the act of perception is not grounded in a normalcy of perception, of things within the perceptual world-space.

An alterity of perception, of seeing, a stumbling through the imaginary, places our narrator within a uniquely literary space, as if he were the “immediate subject of [his] book.” Waking up in his childhood home in Combray, Marcel experiences what is not exactly an act of unseeing, not quite a closing of the eyes. We cannot doubt that this is an episode that describes an act of seeing: the light, the book are still regarded in their proximity to the narrator. And still, there are seeings which appear to be less comprehensible: “a church, a quartet, the rivalry between Francois I and Charles V” are as present, further into the passage, as the ephemera of the room in the imaginary that directly surrounds him. These are the constituent parts of a perceptual whole that then supplants the seeing eye, of a perceptible imaginary that supplants the real: the church later becomes an image analogous both with the perception of duration, of time itself,<sup>2</sup> and with the process of literary creation;<sup>3</sup> the quartet alludes to the sense of hearing as well as toward a lived experience in relation with art and art-making; the rivalry between Francois I and Charles V harkens to a historical past (become present).

All of these parts make up a presentation of a perceptible space that is both imaginary and literary, which accounts for and constitutes elements of the sensory—that is the seeing of the church, the hearing of the quartet—with elements of a post-sensory; the latter category

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<sup>2</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 80.

<sup>3</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 254.

relies heavily on the imaginary, on taking the detachability of the image it most directly presents, and, in doing so, envisioning also a perceptual experience which is heavily durational, that is attuned to the perception of time itself. It is the durational aspects of seeing, perhaps, which point most directly to the alterity of seeing represented in this passage, into the darkness supplanted by the imaginary.

In the moment of liminality between sleep and waking, in which the coherence of the objects which surround Marcel in his room assume the character not entirely of themselves but, insofar as they range themselves by way of an active interpretation, of a reading, the self becomes the active maker of the space that surrounds him. In this moment, as it were, Marcel literalizes an imaginative refiguration of the world; he engages a nuanced reading of the world as if “[h]e [him]self were the subject of [his] book.” And by this particularity of seeing, in which the seeing bears with it a quality of the imagination, and therefore of the self projected into the world—and which may be a seeing directed either towards the perception of truth or toward a falsification either of the seeing self or the captive object—he is left in a “state of darkness” that is both “pleasant and restful.” He is left to reconfigure around him the space which he has, in this moment that is fundamentally between, been made incapable of adequately deciphering. In darkness, he is released from the habitual modes of seeing, left, as it were, to grope and stumble through, to read and interpret at the window the darkened world and, in its reflection, an “inner book of unknown symbols,” by which his own self is enacted upon the seen world—within a double-seeing.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Marcel Proust, *Time Regained*, trans. Andreas Mayor, Terence Kilmartin, and D. J. Enright, Modern Library pbk. ed, vol. 6, The Modern Library Classics, (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 274.

The composite parts which make up this dualistic seeing, insofar as they are represented even in the incipit of the text—within the layerings of seeings which present themselves therein to the imagination of Marcel—shall become the object toward which this project is directed. The seeing double, the seeing itself, especially in the moment in which it is apprehended, is made intelligible, in becoming the object of Proust’s gaze, shall become also our own; and the moment which precedes it, that ephemeral moment before the seeing is phenomenalized, in which our eyes have yet to distinguish between these objects of our seeing, becomes the fugitive moment which can never be seen again, which bears with it the prospect of truth itself, of an image of the world whose construction is made apparent to itself.

This seeing will become also the mechanism by which the creative act is made possible: it is the genesis for the creative seeing, in which the interrelation of objects within the space of the world is made entirely apparent but also in which the essential relation of the self to the world is most adeptly epitomized; and, likewise, it is written into the ambition underlying the creative act, that is, to excavate the essential seeing and, with it, the essential truth which is entombed therein, to regain the moment of seeing in which the actual depths of our seeings might be plumbed, to traverse these “depths[...] in order to reach them,” such that they may be “re-created.”<sup>5</sup> For, as Julia Kristeva notes, the artistic “genius is nothing but the ‘instinct’ that delves beneath the surface distractions of a plot in order to reach the unconscious, passing through the intellect and ‘logical truth’ in order to attain a state of ‘pure joy’ where life is indistinguishable from an impression of truth.”<sup>6</sup> Insofar as this may be true, this project shall

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<sup>5</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 303.

<sup>6</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Time & Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature*, European Perspectives (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 202.

become also, inasmuch as it is a series of ruminations upon the nature of seeing as it appears within *In Search of Lost Time*, one which focuses on the ‘re-creation’ of life such that is “indistinguishable from an impression of truth,” and upon the moment of seeing as being the essential vehicle by which such an impression is made.

And though the incipit of the text presents the germinations of what will become a text largely driven by seeing itself, and by the capacity in seeing to gain access to other alterior seeings, it is also a foreseeing of the text’s end. It is not simply that the moment of sleeping, in “the fact that the candle was no longer burning,” might be a prefiguring of the narrator’s dying.<sup>7</sup> For the moment of death in the text is never entirely rendered as a total death, but is conveyed, rather, with the implication of a potential for recreation—not of the body, but within the eye, disembodied as it is both in sleep and in the nearing of death. This seeing, in the darkness between sleep and waking, might then also be a seeing towards the text’s final narrator, who rests in a darkness between life and death, who “f[alls] back exhausted and close[s] [his] eyes, not to emerge from a purely vegetal existence before a week had elapsed,” and who, only slightly later, will “complete the periphery of [his] walls and close ‘the funeral gate.’”<sup>8</sup> It is not that he is dead so much as that he is beyond living, as Marcel at one point notes, in moving through the text, that he is the “I, who was not yet detached from life[...].”<sup>9</sup> As the body withers, it is the eyes which become most active, which approximate the movement of which the body had been previously capable; in the closing of ‘the funeral gate’

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<sup>7</sup> Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 1.

<sup>8</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 520.

<sup>9</sup> Marcel Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, trans. Charles Kenneth Scott-Moncrieff, Terence Kilmartin, and Dennis Joseph Enright, Modern Library pbk. ed, vol. 3, *In Search of Lost Time*, (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 428.

and in the completing of the walled periphery around his own self, the final narrator engages a seeing that pushes the limits of any optical logic, that is able to actualize a seeing even as the body is effectively dead.

The incipit of the text in relation to its closing moments is, thus, implicitly a looking forward; the final narrator, likewise, is the narrator in retrospection. In the narrative movement of the text—that is, in the compounding of the narrative voice, of two distinct voices that approximate and attempt to see one another—it is these forces, of these distinct narrators, which enact the most significant instances of a seeing double that occurs, centrally, in time. Their interplay engenders the manner in which the text might make manifest an interpretive seeing not toward “what we are—but wondering, instead, what we will have been.”<sup>10</sup> It is the seeing which “would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (post) anterior (modo).”<sup>11</sup>

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in writing *Phenomenology of Perception*, notes, “As I have two eyes, I ought to see the object double, and if I see only one of it, that is because I construct by means of two images the idea of one object a distance away.”<sup>12</sup> The Proustian double-seeing enacts itself by a similar manner, becoming the seeing by which the image is falsified, by which it enshrouds that which perhaps might otherwise reveal an essential truth; and yet, the seeing double becomes also the potentially recuperative act by which the seeing may be recovered. For, insofar as “to seek the essence of perception is to declare that perception

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<sup>10</sup> Joshua Landy, *Philosophy As Fiction: Self, Deception, and Knowledge in Proust* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 125.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, “*Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?*,” in *Philosophers on Art From Kant to the Postmodernists: A Critical Reader*, ed. Christopher Want (Columbia University Press, 2010), 81.

<sup>12</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1986), 33.

is, not presumed true, but defined as access to truth,” then the seeing double—the seeing, as it were, of one’s self in the act of seeing—might be the regenerative seeing by which the truth is made clear, by which it presents itself, as it were, in the process of seeing and writing oneself.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, xvi.

## FIGURATION AND DISFIGURATION

### IN THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH

*Perhaps the immobility of the things that surround us is forced upon them by our conviction that they are themselves and not anything else, by the immobility of our conception of them. For it always happened that when I awoke like this, and my mind struggled in an unsuccessful attempt to discover where I was, everything revolved around me through the darkness: things, places, years.*<sup>14</sup>

“The Search for lost time is in fact the search for truth,”<sup>15</sup> writes Gilles Deleuze in *Proust and Signs*. Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, as much as it is a treatise on time itself, is also a text of vision and seeing, which dwells with its narrator in time and which, in maneuvering through time, asks its reader to see along with its narrator things “situated at a great distance”<sup>16</sup> in space as well as in time. It is the truth-seeking, or “the Search,” as it is termed by Deleuze, which necessitates a seeing and careful observation of these signs—that is, the elementary perceptions which gesture toward an essential truth—and, also, which brings into relief the perceptual inadequacies of the human body, whose limits cast their shadow upon the world.

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<sup>14</sup> Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs: The Complete Text*, Theory out of Bounds, v. 17 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 15.

<sup>16</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 520.

Though seeing is in itself perhaps the guiding Proustian method of truth-seeking, it is often in the supplemented perceptions made by way of the other senses that these truths may be fulfilled. The acknowledgement of signs and the seeking of truths within the Proustian world are fulfilled often in the failings inherent to seeing, in those instances in which the limits of seeing cast shadows upon the world, which must be fully investigated in order to arrive at a complex truth. The Search, in its meandering inquiry into time and space, as an elegy of the experience of life lived in and sometimes outside of time, is also necessarily an investigation of the means through which we enact ourselves in time, of the experience of the life whose price is time itself—and what is the experience of time if not a bodily and sensory experience, to feel time as one feels themselves move through a world.

Proust exhibits, in his writing, a keen understanding of vision as being both the sense of reason and, conversely, the sense by which one might lead themselves to be deceived, obscured by the banality of seeing itself and by the habits which accompany it: Swann mistakes Odette's window for another and, after recognizing two shadows within the room, is alarmed to find the room occupied by two older gentlemen;<sup>17</sup> Aunt Léonie's voyeurism, through her bedroom window, assumes a total knowledge over her neighbours' activities that is

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<sup>17</sup> "Amid the glimmering blackness of the row of windows in which the lights had long since been put out, he saw one, and only one, from which percolated[...] the light that filled the room within[...]. Certainly he suffered as he watched that light, [...] as he listened to that murmur which revealed the presence of the man who had crept in after his own departure" (Proust, *Swann's Way*, 387). After Swann knocks upon the window and it is finally opened to him, "He looked up. Two old gentlemen stood facing him at the window, one of them with a lamp in his hand; and beyond them he could see into the room, a room that he had never seen before" (390).



eventually proven faulty;<sup>18</sup> Marcel, in watching the ‘little band’, of which Albertine is a part, at Balbec, becomes incapable of being able to distinguish her from them as a group, nor is he able to remember where on her face sits the beauty spot he thinks he has noticed in her countenance;<sup>19</sup> and, perhaps most importantly within the text, the occurrence of involuntary memory presents itself through a litany of senses, but never through the seeing eye.<sup>20</sup> The eye in Proust is the sense of voluntary memory, of habit and assumption, of superficiality (within a field of images as opposed to within a depth of things) and projection, of horizontality; it is the sense of non-truth.

In neglecting to account for the limitations of our own seeing, as is evinced by many of the characters that appear throughout *In Search of Lost time*, one fails also to underscore the structures by which their perceptions of the world are made intelligible. Our sense-perception is governed by its own causality, a series of logical cues which render that which is perceived, in

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<sup>18</sup> Marcel describes the gossip in which his aunt would engage with the maid, Françoise: “Thus Françoise and my aunt between them made a critical evaluation, in the course of these morning sessions, of the earliest events of the day. But sometimes these events assumed so mysterious or so alarming a character that my aunt felt she could not wait until it was time for Françoise to come upstairs, and then a formidable and quadruple peal would resound through the house” (Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 75). Aunt Léonie’s totalizing gaze from the window, in the cases in which the events fail to uphold the logic by which they normally make themselves apparent; these sessions spent gossiping between Françoise and Aunt Léonie bear testament to a certain faultiness by which the logic of seeing, even in the totalizing gaze herein presented by Léonie at her window, might be circumvented in the act of seeing.

<sup>19</sup> Marcel notes, “to conclude this account of my first introduction to Albertine, when trying to recapture that little beauty spot on her cheek, just under the eye, I remembered that, looking from Elstir’s window when Albertine had gone by, I had seen it on her chin. In fact, when I saw her I noticed that she had a beauty spot, but my errant memory made it wander about her face, fixing it now in one place, now in another” (Marcel Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, trans. Charles Kenneth Scott-Moncrieff, Terence Kilmartin, and Dennis Joseph Enright, Modern Library pbk. ed, vol. 2, *In Search of Lost Time*, (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 622). “Shortly after this, one morning when it had been raining and was almost cold, I was accosted on the front by a girl wearing a little toque and carrying a muff, so different from the girl whom I had met at Elstir’s party that to recognise in her the same person seemed an operation beyond the power of the human mind” (622-623).

<sup>20</sup> A brief summary of the primary instances of involuntary memory within *In Search of Lost Time* reveals that the sense of vision plays no role in involuntary memory. The first such instance, the *madeleine* episode, in which Marcel dips a madeleine into a cup of tea and, in tasting it, is confronted with the involuntary memory of his childhood at Combray, occurs in Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 60. An incomplete list of incidences of involuntary memory within the text appears also in Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove Press, 1970), 23.

its rawness, into intelligible figures; and, therefore, such a perception cannot in itself be the arbiter of reason in one's appraisal of the world. The occurrence of a causality of seeing can be traced between the symbolic use of language and the visually perceptible. For in the case of the intelligibility of sense-perception, that is the clarification of a distinct act of seeing in the moments immediately following it, the moment in question is subjected then to a certain disfiguration of its own form in time; such a clarification of visual phenomena is linguistic, or descriptive, and requires itself to be qualified within an indefinite future, that is, described such that it can be remembered. For it is not the seminal moment of sense-perception which lingers, but the residual effect of the moment, as it is overseen by the correlative and interdependent nature of language and seeing. The nature of seeing, then, is such that it must always exist essentially within an anticipated past—detached, as a memory—and therefore “would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*).”<sup>21</sup>

Marcel, in the unintelligible moment in which he wakes up one morning, in which, also, it becomes less determinate as to whether he is entirely asleep or awake, finds himself in the liminal space between dreaming and waking, between figurations of different sorts. “My sight would return,” he notes, “and I would be astonished to find myself in a state of darkness.”<sup>22</sup> Moments later, as he begins to become more firmly fixed within the world, as the process of waking allows the objects in the room which ought to surround him to range themselves anew, he notes, “[...]now well awake; my body had veered round for the last time and the good angel of certainty had made all the surrounding objects stand still, had set me

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<sup>21</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, “Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?” in *Philosophers on Art From Kant to the Postmodernists: A Critical Reader*, ed. Christopher Want (Columbia University Press, 2010), 81.

<sup>22</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 1.

down under my bedclothes, in my bedroom, and had fixed, approximately in their right places in the uncertain light[...] both the doors.”<sup>23</sup>

In the process of waking, the gradual enclosing of sight phenomena into easily defined figures, fixed in their right places, beckons toward a process of refiguration by which the imaginary dreamscape is supplanted by the refiguring of phenomena within the visual field. In the uncertain light, though, in which the forms fail to connect themselves so adequately with the idea with which they are habitually associated, being only, as it were, “fixe[d] approximately in their right places,” such forms for a moment resist phenomenalization. Markedly, Marcel expresses relief at the objects within the room having been made to stand still; habit has steadied and reasserted itself. For a moment, though, it appears as if the object themselves had resisted their own refiguration.

The refiguration of objects in the moment of waking, which constitutes a re-phenomenalization of the object, a becoming fixed in its form, mirrors also the rendering of such phenomena into recognizable forms by way of language; the act of making intelligible that which is most immediately and presently felt in the act of seeing is to make discernible these phenomena, to reason with them and to sever them irremediably from the direct moment of their apprehension. It is actually by this process that a perceived entity becomes a phenomenon, “mean[ing] in Greek: what looks like something what ‘seems,’ ‘semblance.”<sup>24</sup> The object of a seeing has no semblance, is not “a good that looks like,”<sup>25</sup> until it has become a

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<sup>23</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings: From Being and Time (1927) to The Task of Thinking (1964)*, ed. David Farrell Krell, Rev. and expanded ed (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Thought, 2008), 74.

<sup>25</sup> Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 74.

phenomenon, which is to say that it has been made intelligible, until it has been reasoned to have happened and to have been experienced by way of a visual sense-perception.

The phenomenalization of an entity perceived, which follows from a linguistic mediation of the perceiving eye, simultaneously connotes a sense-object that is disfigured as it is made sensible, it obscures the formal intricacies of that which is seen; that what has become of our primary vision of the world is itself phenomenal creates an equivalence between the act of seeing and the act of disfiguring, of hiding the form or figure of what is beheld. Yet, it is also, perhaps, by way of language that we might efface the disfiguration of our own seeing. For, as Marcel notices in the afterglow of what is a fairly immediate act of retrospection upon seeing the steeples of Martinville, “that what lay hidden behind the[m...] must be analogous to a pretty phrase, since it was in the form of words which gave me pleasure that it had appeared to me.”<sup>26</sup> He notices, first, that it is by way of language that his immediate seeing has been taken away, hidden from him, but that it was also by way of his own language that the steeples might be returned to him.

Since the apprehension of a phenomenon, the possibility of obtaining access to the form itself of the phenomenalized object, must take place in a retrospective effort, then one’s own ability to assume an active role in the moment of one’s own seeing, to engage with forms directly, without having one’s immediate seeing complicated by nascent and forming reasonings which dress the phenomenon and make it presentable, is suitably problematized. Since the actual seeing is seemingly only made possible in retrospect, then there is an essential separation in the image itself from the moment at which the perception is made; one,

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<sup>26</sup> Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 255.

necessarily, looks back at, and therefore observes a seeing displaced from the moment at which it was made as a fragment in time, in stasis, unmoving.

To see and to succumb blindly to the habit of association between seeing and reason is to separate one's self from the world by way of distance. It is to put one's trust fully in the truths presented by a world of order grounded in the solidity and impenetrability of objects at a distance, to take the world as it is or, more likely, as one expects it to be, without acknowledgement of the self in relation to the world or of the dynamism of the world itself and of those things which inhabit it. In the sense that seeing might be an act of ignoring the dynamic movement of things within the world, then it is also a disavowal of time itself; the seeing presented, as we will return to later, is one in which the detachability of the image presents also the image of a world in timeless stasis.

The distance inherent to seeing, which follows necessarily from the displacement of seeing in time and, similarly, from the disfiguration of the seen by way of habit and language, is paralleled in the mere physical act of seeing; in contrasting the act of seeing with the other faculties of sense-perception, we might perhaps better understand the physical structures which underlie the epistemological problems by which the act of seeing is transformed before our own eyes. Hans Jonas' essay, *The Nobility of Sight* describes a phenomenology of seeing as a component of a larger phenomenological endeavour into the epistemologies of the senses. He distinguishes sight and the creation of the image, termed the "image-performance," as implicating of three particular characteristics: "simultaneity in the presentation of a manifold, neutralization of the causality of sense-affection, distance in the spatial and mental senses."<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 136

The first of these, a “simultaneity in the presentation of a manifold,” implies the privileging of static objects in a spatial field and, thus, that in seeing a manifold of objects, one comprehends a static image of a world that is presently, that is “as a lasting of the same... [an] unmoved, continued present—so long as no change occurs in the objects themselves.”<sup>28</sup> The first characteristic denotes the seeing of a static world of being as opposed to a dynamic world of becoming, such that seeing becomes the sense of detachability under the guise of uniformity, failing then to describe in any way the interrelationships present within a moving world.

The second, a “neutralization of the causality of sense-affection,” implies the detachment of the subject from the object, who otherwise would require themselves to be in intercourse with the world—that is, either affecting themselves either upon an object (as in the case of touch) or allowing an object to impress itself upon themselves (as in the case of hearing). “The gain,” writes Jonas,

*is the concept of objectivity, of the thing as it is in itself as distinct from the thing as it affects me, and from this distinction arises the whole idea of theoria and theoretical truth. Furthermore, the image is handed over to the imagination, which can deal with it in complete detachment from the actual presence of the original object: the detachability of the image, i.e., of ‘form’ from its ‘matter,’ of ‘essence’ from ‘existence,’ is at the bottom of abstraction and therefore of all free thought.<sup>29</sup>*

This detachment evinces the means by which sight, through the ease of its own perceptive abilities, precedes the idea of theory as separate from practice, of form as separate from matter—as, at once, the means through which one is able to access the indefinite and the impossible

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<sup>28</sup> Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 144.

<sup>29</sup> Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 147.

or, at least, that which is not yet definite or possible, and also the means through which one assumes the stagnancy of a world of manifold objects. It is the sense of immateriality under the guise of the sense of objectivity, beneath the speciousness of what we take to be an empirical mode of perception.

The third characteristic, a “distance in the spatial and mental senses,” describes the distance inherent in the act of seeing and the unique ability for sight to assume the role of “the ideal distance-sense.”<sup>30</sup> It is this characteristic which gives shape to sight as being the perceptual mode which presupposes, by way of an “indefinite “and so on” ... the birthplace of the idea of *infinity*.”<sup>31</sup> It seems, also, given that the acuity of vision decreases little, especially relative to the other senses, as distance between the observer and the observed increases, that this characteristic points to a “disinterested beholding,”<sup>32</sup> and thus leads to vision as a sense of habit and disengagement in its own right, which places one through habitual interactions at a distance from the world through which they move and describe. If seeing is the sense of habit, given that it is the most readily available and, seemingly, the most encompassing of a manifold of objects in a visual field, then it should also be the sense which we are most unwilling to focalize our own attention toward, by which we are made negligent to call into question the habits which make up our most fundamental epistemological inquiries into such things as space and time, and through which we have formed the buttresses upon which rests our relationship with the world at large (and, also, at a microscopic level).

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<sup>30</sup> Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 149.

<sup>31</sup> Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 150.

<sup>32</sup> Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 153.

Jonas points, then, toward that which one stands to gain in the act of seeing: the conception of distance itself; the conception of totality, both in the perception of a manifold of objects within a visual field and in the ability to see through distances otherwise imperceptible, therefore leading to “the birthplace of the idea of *infinity*,” but leading also to the assumption of mastery. What is implicit, though, in his understanding of the apparatus of vision, which effects itself best in a distancing of the viewer from the viewed, is that the ideal function of vision, whose “gain is the concept of objectivity, of the thing in itself as different from the thing as it affects me,” presupposes an objectivity not founded upon the object in its object-ness, but, crucially, in its figuration. For it is not in the matter or materiality of the object that it qualifies its own object-ness to the seeing eye, but rather in its formal qualities.

What then, to the seeing eye, is the difference between the image of a rock in situ and the image of a rock as projection? The act of projection is one of replacing the relationality, by which we might otherwise, and by way of other senses, actively interrelate with objects and subjects within the world, with the perceptual speciousness inherent to a voyeurism, whose claim is one of objectivity, but whose reality, as we will come to see, is in the projections of the self onto the other. The voyeur fills that which falls within their visual field as best as they are capable, by their own habits, memories, and projections.



## VOYEURISM AND PROJECTION: READING AND WRITING THROUGH THE WINDOW

*I gazed at her, at first with that gaze which is not merely the messenger of the eyes, but at whose window all the senses assemble and lean out, petrified and anxious, a gaze eager to reach, touch, capture, bear off in triumph the body at which it is aimed, and the soul with the body[...].<sup>33</sup>*

What becomes abundantly clear, in the reading of *In Search of Lost Time*, is the pleasure which its hero takes in the act of watching, in seeing and not being seen. This voyeuristic dualism, as it enacts a dissociation between the self and the world, and thereby places the narrator at an irreconcilable distance from that which he is immediately observing, becomes also a means through which the projection of the self, whose desires muddy themselves in representations of the real, may come to exist in the world. Most often, the voyeuristic sightings within the text, the self effectively seeing the world without their own active participation in it, literalize the opposition of the voyeur with that which is being seen in the symbolic use of space.

The window, above all, stands out as being a particularly adept symbolization of this distance; in the compounding instances of voyeurism within the text, the window becomes the medium and the image most inextricable from the voyeur: it becomes the most consequential

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<sup>33</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 198.

symbol of a distance existing in seeings directed by Marcel both inward and outward, both in the seeing of one's self and in the seeing of an other. For it is the function of the window to place in opposition the seeing eye and the object of their gaze, since the voyeur's seeing passes necessarily through the window; and yet, it is also the window whose materiality is misinterpreted, which stands singularly as a transparent and therefore effectively neutral medium by which judgement is passed in the act of seeing.

The window, in the act of perception, seems, in its physical imperceptibility, ineffectual in the act of seeing; yet, the window is also the reflective surface of desire and, likewise, the impenetrable barrier which enacts a separation and presupposes, then, an irreconcilability of the voyeur with the image of desire. The window of Proust, even as it allows Marcel to remain imperceptible in an act of direct and seemingly clear-eyed seeing, enacts its own effect of distancing and disfiguration. Insofar as it is both the vehicle and the downfall of the voyeuristic perspective, it becomes also the legitimization of both the pleasure and pain to be taken in the voyeuristic experience. Such a "pain-pleasure" duality is found primarily in the text, as Howard Moss notes, in "helplessness—the watching of the performance of others, either childishly,[...] sexually and literally;[...] or figuratively."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Howard Moss, *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), 69. In an entire chapter devoted to the imagery of windows within *In Search of Lost Time*, Moss frames the voyeurism by way of the window primarily as a seeing of the unimaginable, of "horrifying vision[s] of sexual love" (75). Though the relationship between the seeing self and the other through the window is of vital importance to this chapter and, likewise, the projection of one's own phantasies through the window is necessary to this project, Moss explicitly tracks the imagery of the window as it pertains to sadistic behaviour and homosexuality within the text, which is not within the scope of this project. See also Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (University of California Press, 2008) and, specifically, the chapter, *Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet*, for a reading of Proust which treads between positivist and anti-positivist readings of homosexuality in the prefatory section of *Sodom and Gomorrah* and investigates this developing spectacle as it appears to the narrator.

At Montjouvain, Marcel arrives, in somewhat dubious circumstances, before the window of the Vinteuil home and sees, through the window, Mlle Vinteuil:<sup>35</sup> “The window was partly open; the lamp was lighted; I could watch her every movement without her being able to see me; but if I had moved away I would have made a rustling sound among the bushes, she would have heard me, and she might have thought that I had been hiding there in order to spy upon her.”<sup>36</sup> Marcel here describes the helplessness of the voyeur: the seeing is coupled with the inability to move and preempts, then, a disembodied seeing: the body, immobile, in stasis, gives way to the disembodied eye.

The window becomes also, in its reflectivity, the symbol of this disembodiment, since it affords to the one seeing the ability to look through but also to look reflectively, to look back at oneself. It allows oneself to see oneself—as a vision, and so as a distinct other. This particular scene, in describing the relationship of the voyeur to that which they are seeing, exemplifies the characteristics of seeing through the window: the ability, that is granted by its apparatus, to remain inconspicuous in the act of seeing (both the other and the seeing self), which requires one to forfeit their bodily function, to remain in stasis, helpless.

The motif of the window, as a symbol of voyeurism in the text, becomes not only a symbol of Marcel’s helplessness before the other; it also stands as the synthesized image of an implicit ‘double-seeing’ which comes to pervade the text. “As I have two eyes,” writes Merleau-Ponty, “I ought to see the object double, and if I see only one of it, that is because I construct

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<sup>35</sup> It is worth noting here, since we have yet to fully touch upon the exact impact of M. Vinteuil upon Marcel’s seeings, nor of his musical genius upon Marcel’s written oeuvre, that Mlle Vinteuil is the daughter of M. Vinteuil, whose ‘petite phrase’ becomes the “national anthem” of Swann and Odette’s love and whose “glowing” septet will later play a similar role in Marcel’s love for Albertine.

<sup>36</sup> Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 224-225.

by means of two images the idea of one object a distance away.”<sup>37</sup> And, similarly, as our narrator, following Swann, indulges serially his own phantasies in the moments of voyeurism, and thereby recognizes them in the other, then we must also acknowledge a double-seeing wherein the two properties of the window synthesize an image of two distinct seeings: the first, simply, is a seeing directly of an object, which passes through the transparency of the window; the second, which becomes of the reflectivity of the window, denotes the impression of the self into the act of seeing. The synthesis of the double-seeing which passes through the window, then, is the synthesis of the seeing of one’s self with the seeing of the other.

“In Proust,” writes Moss, “the window is, psychologically, the *voyeur’s* picture.[...] Contributing a power within himself to what he sees, Marcel is the victim of what is to be seen.”<sup>38</sup> Moss’ reading centres on the window as the symbol of the self-victimization of the voyeur by their own sexual and projected phantasies, “a ‘peep-hole’ behind which a once unimagined, and now desired and detested action takes place.”<sup>39</sup> And yet the window becomes also a symbol of seeing itself, explicated in the formation of Marcel’s seeings through the window over time and throughout the text. In becoming the victim of his own self in the act of seeing, and in failing to acknowledge the reflexivity of the voyeuristic apparatus, he becomes neglectful of the habits which constitute his own seeings, of his own self and his growing delusion.

The window becomes synonymous with a double-seeing, not of two images of similitude synthesized for the benefit of perspective—not implicitly as a means toward

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<sup>37</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 33.

<sup>38</sup> Moss, *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust*, 55.

<sup>39</sup> Moss, *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust*, 75.

quantifying the distance at which one stands from that which they are seeing—but rather with a seeing of the self mapped onto the seeing of the world. The window stands as the medium through which judgement is passed upon the world in the search for truth; the double-image is taken to be a synthesizing and totalizing whole, the becoming of a totality that problematizes the distinction between the self and the world. Such judgement passed, as it were, without its being interpreted by the viewer, “instead of being a transcendental activity, [...] becomes simply a logical activity of drawing a conclusion.”<sup>40</sup>

The problem of double-seeing, of projecting the self in the voyeuristic act of seeing, is analogized within the opening pages of the text:

*Nearly midnight. The hour when an invalid, who has been obliged to set out on a journey and to sleep in a strange hotel, awakened by a sudden spasm, sees with glad relief a streak of daylight showing under his door. Thank God, it is morning! The servants will be about in a minute: he can ring, and someone will come to look after him. The thought of being assuaged gives him strength to endure his pain. He is certain he heard footsteps: they come nearer, and then die away. The ray of the light beneath his door is extinguished. It is midnight; someone has just turned down the gas; the last servant has gone to bed, and he must lie all night suffering without remedy.*<sup>41</sup>

The pleasure in helplessness is herein immediately followed by the pain of a phantasy unrealized; the desire of the invalid to have someone come to look after him, overtly expressed in the description of the seeing, and hearing, of the servants beyond the door, mars the impression of the perception at its most fundamental level. The perception of the footsteps beyond the door, the seeing of light through what may be seen as an analogy to the window, becomes a mirror of the desire that the invalid expresses. His wants are realized only in the

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<sup>40</sup> Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 33.

<sup>41</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 2.

pain of having then to go without; the perception is faulty and the truth misleading, blinded as he is in the act of seeing double. The interpretation being not one in the realization of truth, but rather in the judgement of phenomena toward the conclusion already having been previously expressed as phantasy, the window in this moment becomes, then, a reflective medium but also the barrier by which the image allows itself to be detached: it becomes, then, the object of the imagination, of willful deceit. We see here, in this passage, the imagination wielded against the search for truth. The window, in affording the distance of the seeing self and the object of their gaze, in precluding the detachability of such an image, allows for an introspective and retrospective viewing even as it entangles such an experience in the phenomena of the double-image.

The narrator, reading in Combray, begins to form the incipient image of the window. He begins to understand the means by which the empiricist function of the window is wrought in the voyeuristic seeing. He notes,

*And then my thoughts, too, formed a similar sort of recess [as in the dim coolness of my room], in the depths of which I felt that I could bury myself and remain invisible even while I looked at what went on outside. When I saw an external object, my consciousness that I was seeing it would remain between me and it, surrounding it with a thin spiritual border that prevented me from ever touching its substance directly; for it would somehow evaporate before I could make contact with it, just as an incandescent body that is brought into proximity with something wet never actually touches its moisture, since it is always preceded by a zone of evaporation.<sup>42</sup>*

In the acknowledgement of his own consciousness in interplay with the phenomena of the world, Marcel becomes complicit in the creation of meaning as enabled by the act of voyeurism. The spiritual border, which also prevented him from being able to directly touch

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<sup>42</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 115.

the substance of the external object, becomes also that which invests the world with the qualities of phantasy. In effect, Marcel begins to form an awareness in these moments of the relationship cultivated between the self and the world, such that the world assumes its materiality in voyeurism not by way of its actual substance, but rather in the projection of the imagining and desiring self into the world.

It is this interplay, of the imaginative seeing with the seeing of the physical world, that also precludes the writerly approach to being-in-the-world, the autofictional, the fictionalization of the real, which at once engenders the phenomenal disfiguration of objects in the world, whilst investing them with a new substance emanating from the consciousness of the viewer. In its incipience, the habits associated with voyeurism and the window are analogous with the misappraisal of truths of the self and truths of the world within a faulty double-image; in their interplay, though, and in the act of distinguishing one from the other, Marcel perhaps also evinces what will become an alterior mode of seeing, one that is, or will come to be, quintessentially literary—that is, to see one’s own selves.

We should not treat the window, then, as merely the image of an anti-empiricist seeing, nor even as the image of an epistemological impossibility, but, in Proust’s terms, as “the shadow is to the sunbeam, that is to say equally luminous, and presented to my imagination [that] which my senses[...] could have tasted and enjoyed only piecemeal.”<sup>43</sup> And though such seeings arise truly only later in the text, as the apprenticeship in the mastery of signs joins the narrating Marcel with the Marcel having narrated, it is more worthwhile, it seems to me, to examine closely the moments in which they originate, in which they are described fully and

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<sup>43</sup> Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 114.

are neither enclosed within the habitude of our narrator nor entirely dehabituized. For it is, in fact, in the slow and spiralling journey to reconstitute his habits, and consequently in the unseeing as a means to see again, that Marcel is finally enabled in the writing of his *oeuvre*, is finally allowed by Proust to assume an altogether totalizing point of seeing.

The vantage point from which the final narrator recounts becomes only presently available to the reader in the final moments of *Time Regained*, in the closing of “the funeral gate,”<sup>44</sup> and, until then, appears only intermittently as gestures from a distant self ‘beyond the grave’, from an “I, who was not yet detached from life[...].”<sup>45</sup> The closing of the funeral gate, the anticipation of death itself and the disembodiment by which it is accompanied, a disembodiment perhaps able to prompt another seeing, is paralleled to some degree in the concluding moments of the Montjouvain episode.

“I heard no more,” Marcel notes, “for Mlle Vinteuil[...] came to the window and drew the shutters close.”<sup>46</sup> He, however, continues: “And yet I have since reflected that if M. Vinteuil had been able to be present at this scene, he might still, in spite of everything, have continued to believe in his daughter’s goodness of heart, and perhaps in so doing would not have been altogether wrong.”<sup>47</sup> The window as a symbol becomes also the literary vehicle which enables the reflection. To have invested himself in this moment with the perspective of

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<sup>44</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 520.

<sup>45</sup> Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, 428.

<sup>46</sup> Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 230.

<sup>47</sup> Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 230. Marcel, watching through the window at Montjouvain, witnesses Mlle Vinteuil and her lesbian lover in what is the first explicit appearance of the themes of homosexuality and sadism in the text, themes which becomes more and more present within the text. Marcel’s reflection on behalf of Vinteuil follows a moment in which Mlle Vinteuil’s lover threatens to spit on a photograph of the deceased father after mocking him. It is, therefore, in the context of such “cruel offences as those of Mlle Vinteuil against the memory and wishes of her dead father” (231) that Marcel continues to ruminate on the sadistic events of which he has borne witness.



the recently deceased Vinteuil is not only a disembodiment of his own self but a becoming directed toward his final, literary self. He is drawn out of himself and simultaneously into the perspective of the deceased, and thereby disembodied, Vinteuil; he is drawn again, thereby, into the room to which he has just played voyeur.

The window closing, it seems, is only the prelude to another seeing, to a reflection from the perspective of an other; the scene places the window at the threshold of an absolute othering, of complete separation and disembodiment, but also of an unlikely empathy. That which begins initially as a distinct and voyeuristic seeing, becomes, in the invocation of the presumed will of the deceased Vinteuil, a uniquely literary seeing, a projection in which Marcel is reembodyed as the missing and deceased father in the room he has just been made unable to see. The closing of the shutters, of the half-open window, does not manifest a change in the voyeuristic seeing and the disembodiment of the self in such an act of seeing; it only obstructs the most direct means of access.

Insofar as the window represents a voyeuristic seeing that, in its essence, disembodies the viewer, and leaves them closer to death than to the life which they are helpless to affect—as Marcel seeing through the window at Montjouvain provides what he imagines would be the seeing of the deceased Vinteuil, even after the window has closed—then the window's recurrence as a symbol can be perhaps also indicative of a narrative of seeing as it pertains to Marcel, as a trajectory, as it were, from the succumbing to the epistemological problem presented by the window, to another seeing entirely.

Published in *Le Spleen de Paris* over a half-decade before *In Search of Lost Time*, Baudelaire's poem, *Les Fenêtres*, or in English, *Windows*, conceives of a seeing through the window which, in many ways, may have guided the Proustian effort:

*He who looks from outside through an open window never sees as he who looks through a window closed. There is no more profound object: none more mysterious, more fruitful, more somber, nor more dazzling than the window lit by a candle. That which one might see in the sun's light is always less desirable than that which passes behind the window's panes.*

*In this hole, black or luminous, lives life, dreams life, suffers life.*

*Beyond waves of roof, I espy an older woman, wrinkled already, poor, always bent against some thing, and who never leaves. With her face, with her dress, with her movement, with so little for me to know, I rebuilt the story of this woman, or more so, I rebuilt her legend, and sometimes I recount it to myself through tears.*

*If this had been a poor old man, I would have remade him just as easily.*

*And I fall asleep, proud to have lived and suffered in another, in a life other than my own.*

*Perhaps you will say to me: "Are you sure that this legend is the truth?" What does it matter what reality may be when placed outside my self, if it has helped me to live, to feel that I am and to feel that which I am?<sup>48</sup>*

In similar fashion to Proust, Baudelaire accesses here a particular duality of the window: that the window is the image of absolute distance and separation. As Georges Poulet notes in *Proustian Space*:

*Things are, but they are at a distance. A distance which is impossible for them to suppress or reduce. In the Proustian universe, it is never allowed to draw near, to touch, to establish ones with others, in the intimacy of neighbourhood. All that is living in it is living in solitude. And the feeling of distance, which, under one form or another, never ceases to manifest itself, confounds itself with the anguished feeling of existence. At the bottom of all desires there is an impotency, inherent in the very nature of beings, that forbids their attaining*

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<sup>48</sup> Charles Baudelaire, *Le Spleen de Paris: Petits Poèmes en Prose*, ed. Jean-Luc Steinmetz, Le Livre de Poche Classiques 16120 (Paris: Librairie Generale Francaise, 2010), 173. My own translation.

*the object of their desires. To desire is to render apparent a distance apart. To love is to see escape in the distance the being one loves.*<sup>49</sup>

It is this absolute distance which renders itself apparent most clearly through the window; and yet, 'with so little for [one] to know,' it affords one also the opportunity to mythologize the personage of the other. The other becomes a character, fictionalized, and yet more real than they might ever otherwise have been to the narrator. Baudelaire's speaker understands this complication: that the intimacy in which he finds himself with the older woman is not a shared one, and that such an intimacy is not founded upon a 'truth' so much as it becomes a 'legend,' becomes something which, having never existed, touches still upon the seminal feeling of an encounter and seeks to bring it to its highest relief. The encounter is not shared; it is transcendental, if it is at all, only to the voyeur, and so the function of the window is one which occurs seemingly only in the service of the narrator.

The fictionalization of the other, the rendering of an intersection of the object-ness of the other and the phantasy of the viewer, is striking in its devotion to a radical subjectivity, in its eye which has no interest in factoring into it an approximation of the eye of the other; and yet, there is a quality of this interaction which touches on the transcendental. For as much as the window is a separation from the other, it is also the means by which the other is mythologized; it is a projected, and thereby imaginary, reconciliation of the self and the other. The imaginary, here, does not necessarily point to the creative act. The disfiguration of the other through the window may just as well be an operation performed by the imaginative subconscious, a destruction and reconstitution of one's own phantasy in an other, but such invocation of the imaginary prefigures the creative act which rests at the heart of *In Search of*

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<sup>49</sup> Georges Poulet, *Proustian Space*, trans. Elliott Coleman (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 42.

*Lost Time* and which is alluded to in this particular poem. In the “rebuil[ding of] the history of this woman,” and in the “rebuil[ding of] her legend,” the workings of the imagination seek to revivify that which is observed in darkness. It is in the attempt to bring outward that which is seen in the window, that which Baudelaire sees in the “hole, black or luminous,” that a certain creative act, an art-making, might originate.

Marcel, while in his room reading, begins to form the image of the essential relationship between seeing through the window and a creative imaginary, a forming creative seeing paralleled in both its outward and inward movement. He notes, “This dim coolness of my room was to the broad daylight of the street what the shadow is to the sunbeam, that is to say equally luminous, and presented to my imagination [that] which my senses[...] could have tasted and enjoyed only piecemeal.”<sup>50</sup> And slightly later, after his grandmother has pushed him to venture outside, where he continues reading, “And then my thoughts, too, formed a similar sort of recess[...],”<sup>51</sup> he notes. Such a comparison, of a relationship in space rooted in an essential difference between that which is inside and that which is outside the house, here becomes a relationship which maps itself onto the internality and externality of our narrator himself.

That such an awareness comes to him in the act of reading is important. “[This] is,” after all, “the story of how a little boy became a writer,”<sup>52</sup> and, says Deleuze, in the Proustian world “we learn nothing except by deciphering and interpreting,”<sup>53</sup> that is to say, by reading.

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<sup>50</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 114.

<sup>51</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 115

<sup>52</sup> Moss, *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust*, 13.

<sup>53</sup> Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 3.

In mapping the dichotomy of his own reading self beside the window in the “dim coolness of his room” with that which is outside the window, in noting their equal luminosity, the activity of reading is extended beyond the confines of the immediately accessible text and thrust into an interaction between the self and the world. Such an interrelationship is mirrored later when such a duality, of legibility of a different sort within both an interiority and an exteriority, are mapped more intricately upon Marcel’s own self. The activity of reading, Proust would lead us to believe, is as much in the world of things as it is in the text; it is as much in the darkness as it is in the light; and it is as much in one’s own self as it is outside oneself.

Marcel, ruminating later on the nature of truths, the deciphering of signs, and on his own memory, writes:

*As for the inner book of unknown symbols (symbols carved in relief they might have been, which my attention, as it explored my unconscious, groped for and stumbled against and followed the contours of, like a diver exploring the ocean-bed), if I tried to read them no one could help me with any rules, for to read them was an act of creation in which no one can do our work for us or even collaborate with us.<sup>54</sup>*

The window exists, then, not only as the medium through which is mediated an encounter with the other, but also as the medium through which one might access the seeing of one’s own self. For in both there in an inherence of symbols, of signs which exist within them, which one must attend to in one’s own interpretive mode, in one’s own reading; the window assumes a phenomenal encounter with the world as with one’s own self, a process of deciphering, an intentionality to exploring the shadows, in their own luminosity, to excavate, as it were, the phenomenal aspect of the window, or to unconsciously preserve it, to have its

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<sup>54</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 274.

interaction with the world tinge it, though its proximity would affect, and would at times drastically colour one's interaction with the world.

The failure to see through the window, evinced in the instances in which the window provides the basis for the necessary delusion, refers back to the window as a sign itself, as the nascent image of an optical tool by which the narrator, as reader-writer, makes sense of the world. When, as at Montjouvain, the window is closed, that which has become of seeing through the window, that which has guided the narrator through these seeings since the earliest moments of the text,<sup>55</sup> become the instruments of the writing: they act as catalysts to an ability to see through the medium of the window; to grasp the distance inherent in this seeing and, thereby, the question of accessibility and inaccessibility; to see oneself in the window alongside that which is immediately present within the field of vision, that is to understand one's own projected presence in the act of seeing. The window, even after it has become closed, remains, under the guise of reading and writing the world, a central image within the text.

As Beckett notes, "The creation of the [Proustian] world did not take place once and for all time but takes place every day,"<sup>56</sup> which is to say that it is a world that resists stagnation, that it is in constant flux, a state of defiguration and recreation. It is a world that is conscious of its own creation and recreation, that engages with an ongoing refigurative process qualified by the essential creative act. The seeing of the world, and the being-in-the-world, is the process

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<sup>55</sup> I am speaking, here, of the analogy of the invalid and also of the magic lantern episode, which both appear within the opening pages of *Swann's Way*.

<sup>56</sup> Beckett, *Proust*, 8.

of art-making itself, it is interpretive, to be “groped for and stumbled against.”<sup>57</sup> In reading, we are figuring the written world, “a book of unknown symbols” whose reading is “an act of creation in which no one can do our work for us.”<sup>58</sup> In being-in-the-world, the self draws similarly from the chasm of symbols, of signs in the world, and refigures them around their self.

Reading through the window leads to a writing through the window; the window, first an epistemological barrier, a conflation of self against the other, becomes an instrument, a technological variegation of seeing, toward the writing of the world. To learn to see through the window is to write, and to write through the window is to understand the distance at which one stands from the other, a distance of absolute impossibility bridged only in a distinctive writing and seeing: in writing, as the return of the signs of reading to one’s self; in seeing, as the return of the signs of reading the world to one’s self, thus the observation therein of one’s own self in the window alongside an inaccessible other.

Marcel, before the window in his room at the hotel in Balbec, invokes Elstir as being the foremost practitioner of transcending the distancing inherent to the window in the process of art-making:

*Sometimes, at my window in the hotel at Balbec, in the morning when Françoise undid the blankets that shut out the light, or in the evening when I was waiting until it was time to go out with Saint-Loup, I had been led by some effect of sunlight to mistake what was only a darker stretch of sea for a distant coastline, or to gaze delightedly at a belt of liquid azure without knowing whether it belonged to sea or sky. But presently my reason would reestablish between the elements the distinction which my first impression had*

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<sup>57</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 274.

<sup>58</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 274.

*abolished.[...] But the rare moments in which we see nature as it is, poetically, were those from which Elstir's work was created.*<sup>59</sup>

And, slightly later, Marcel, in maneuvering through Elstir's studio, describes in ekphrasis, itself the unique application of a creative writing in the description of another work of art, the exact manner in which the visual phenomena, presented in encounters through the window but also in the writing of the Proustian world at large, might be written; presented, then, is the manner in which such an interaction between the self and the world, and, thus, an interaction between the voyeur and the world through the window, might be reconciled in the practice of art-making:

*Now the effort made by Elstir to reproduce things not as he knew them to be but according to the optical illusions of which our first sight of them is composed, had led him precisely to bring out certain of these laws of perspective, which were thus all the more striking, since art had been the first to disclose them. A river, because of the windings of its course, a bay because of the apparent proximity to one another of the cliffs on either side of it, would seem to have hollowed out in the heart of the plain or of the mountains a lake absolutely landlocked on every side. In a picture of a view from Balbec painted upon a scorching day in summer an inlet of the sea, enclosed between walls of pink granite, appeared not to be the sea, which began further out. The continuity of the ocean was suggested only by the gulls which, wheeling over what seemed to be solid rock, were as a matter of fact sniffing the moist vapour of the shifting tide.*<sup>60</sup>

The double-seeing, as it were, of the sea and land indistinguishable from one another, a conception of the world which describes a relationship of diametrical opposition as one of continuity, acts as a nullification of the distance between them in the act of art-making.

Marcel, in his ekphrastic description of the Elstir canvasses, in painting in his own writing the

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<sup>59</sup> Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, 566-567.

<sup>60</sup> Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, 570-571.



reading which he has made of Elstir's own work, has offered, albeit unwittingly, a description, in his own creative language, of that which will become the greatest success of a seeing through the window; it becomes the vehicle by which a double-seeing, and thus a double-reading, of the world might render itself apparent, an externalizing of the narrator's internality coupled with an internalizing of the narrator's externality—it is the foundational seeing upon which fixes the buttresses of Marcel's ability to write.

## A LANGUAGE OF SEEING

*It is the same in life; the heart changes, and it is our worst sorrow; but we know it only through reading, through our imagination: in reality its alteration, like that of certain natural phenomena, is so gradual that, even if we are able to distinguish, successively, each of its different states, we are still spared the actual sensation of change.<sup>61</sup>*

We've observed, in the previous discussion of voyeurism, the means by which the window enacts a disfiguring in the act of seeing which precedes and later becomes the vehicle for an alterity of seeing synonymous with the creative and imaginative act of art-making. Still, though, we might encounter a difficulty in attempting to separate the imaginative and creative double-seeing from the disfigurement immediately implied by the seeing through the window, the line between them being, as it is, thinly drawn.

Marcel captures Elstir's creative process as one of ongoing neologisms: "If God the Father had created things by naming them," he notes, "it was by taking away their names or giving them other names that Elstir created them anew. The names which designate things correspond invariably to an intellectual notion, alien to our true impressions, and compelling us to eliminate from them everything that is not in keeping that notion."<sup>62</sup> Elstir's neologisms are not mere un-naming as unseeing; his painting, we understand, is not mere abstraction, but

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<sup>61</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 117.

<sup>62</sup> Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, 566.

the painstaking effort of disfiguration and reconstitution.<sup>63</sup> “By his impressionism,” Beckett notes of Elstir, “I mean his non-logical statement of phenomena in the order and exactitude of their perception, before they have been distorted into intelligibility in order to be forced into a chain of cause and effect. The painter Elstir is the type of the impressionist, stating what he sees and not what he knows he ought to see.”<sup>64</sup> His impressionism is not one which denies a foundational truth that is held in the objects of which he has painted, but one whose function displaces such an object and articulates the subject, the viewer, as the arbiter of meaning; and yet it is the artist who is finally able to transcend their own subjectivity in seeing, to reconcile their own projection with the world.

In the Proustian universe, the manner in which the object of one’s seeing is muddled inevitably in the act of seeing is foundational. It is in the will of the creative act which originates a transcendental subject-ness that reconstitutes, that is, refigures, an object-ness within the world; and it is this precisely which differentiates the seeings of Elstir and, later, of Marcel from those of Charles Swann, whose interest in art is peripheral and superficial, and whose seeings are of a quality which imposes itself in the disfiguration of objects toward their falsification. As Leo Bersani notes, “Marcel comes to consider artistic genius as the ability to

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<sup>63</sup> Elstir, as we have shown previously in quotation of Marcel’s ekphrasis in Elstir’s studio, is not an abstract painter but a figurative painter; though it is never explicitly stated within the text, many have argued, sometimes crudely, as Parker Tyler, that Elstir “is obviously an impressionist,” in “*The Impressionism of Marcel Proust*,” *The Kenyon Review* 8, no. 1 (1946), 49. Other prominent and likely comparisons for Elstir include Monet, Cézanne, Manet, and Whistler, whose name might perhaps be an anagram for that of Elstir. Raymond T. Riva notes that “one can see clearly the influences of Ruskin and Emile Mâle,” in “*A Probable Model for Proust’s Elstir*,” *MLN* 78, no. 3 (May 1963): 309. Later, he notes that Elstir is demonstrably “a composite of several painters” which have been mentioned herein (310); and, later still, he remits to certain documents which point toward another “very important model for Elstir[...] [being] the American painter Thomas Alexander Harrison” (310). Finally, he concludes, noting, “ultimately, is not Proust himself the most important model for Elstir” (313), which seems, given the sheer quantity of painters reasoned to have been of some influence upon the enigmatic character of Elstir, to be the most logical, were Elstir not the Frankenstein’s creation of all available impressionistic painters contemporaneous to Proust’s writing. Nonetheless, it is important to note that Elstir “is obviously an impressionist.”

<sup>64</sup> Beckett, *Proust*, 66.

transcribe the ‘residuum’ of individuality that we are ordinarily forced to leave unexpressed when we use a language designed to emphasize what men share.”<sup>65</sup> Swann’s seeing seeks to enact a reconciliation of art with the world, as we will come to see, not in a transcendental subject-ness, but rather in a conflation of one with the other, in a misplaced double-seeing.

Swann, on his way to meet Odette at her house,

*Formed a picture of her in his mind[...] He had always found a peculiar fascination in tracing in the paintings of the old masters not merely the general characteristics of the people whom he encountered in his daily life, but rather what seems least susceptible of generalisation, the individual features of men and women whom he knew.*<sup>66</sup>

Such a generalization, constructed of the comparison of art to the semblance, that is, to the phenomena, of objects and subjects in the world, leads to a misappraisal of them both; it is to say that the object of one’s seeing is phenomenalized, that it ‘seems like’, and, therefore, such a seeing is never an adjudication of, essentially, *what is*.

*[Swann] no longer based his estimate of the merit of Odette’s face on the doubtful quality of her cheeks and the purely fleshy softness which he supposed would greet his lips should he ever hazard a kiss, but regarded it rather as a skein of beautiful, delicate lines which his eyes unravelled, following their curves and convolutions, relating the rhythm of the neck to the effusion of the hair and the droop of the eyelids, as though in a portrait of her in which her type was made clearly intelligible.*<sup>67</sup>

Swann’s logic of seeing qualifies a reification of otherness, an essential object-ness of things in stasis, to be hollowed out and projected upon; and yet, insofar as Swann’s particular seeing

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<sup>65</sup> Leo Bersani, *Marcel Proust; the Fictions of Life and of Art* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1965, 1965), 210.

<sup>66</sup> Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 314-315. The passage continues: “as, for instance, in a bust of the Doge Loredan by Antonio Rizzo, the prominent cheekbones, the slanting eyebrows, in short, a speaking likeness to his own coachman Rémi; in the colouring of a Ghirlandaio, the nose of M. de Palancy; in a portrait by Tintoretto, the invasion of the cheek by an outcrop of whisker, the broken nose, the penetrating stare, the swollen eyelids of Dr du Boulbon” (315).

<sup>67</sup> Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 316.

“enabled him[...] to introduce the image of Odette into a world of dreams and fancies[...] where she assumed a new and nobler form,”<sup>68</sup> the seeing feels still eerily similar to that which we have hitherto described, that seeing which has been evinced by Elstir. It perhaps serves us well to further excavate their essential differences, to trace carefully the line which separates the disfigurative seeing from the refigurative, neologicistic seeing. For to simply identify Swann’s delusion as an instance of snobbery, though it surely is, or of bad seeing, which it certainly is as well, would be to ignore the essential differences in the formations of these distinct visions.<sup>69</sup>

Swann’s peculiar insistence as to the malleability of Odette seems in itself to resist the stagnancy which we have hitherto posited as being inextricable from the faultiness of his seeing; his noting, as it were, of the “delicate lines which his eyes unravelled” and of a “rhythm” and “effusion” nascent in the relating of her neck and her hair, gestures towards a motility gathered in the movement of his eyes unravelling her image. Her ability to, under his gaze, assume a “new and nobler form” echoes the writing of Baudelaire on the apparatus of the window in the conception of the written work of art: therein, he notes, “What does it matter

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<sup>68</sup> Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 317.

<sup>69</sup> Though it is largely true that Swann’s seeings might be characterized as being ‘bad seeing’, it is also worth noting that there are redemptive moments within the larger narrative of Swann’s seeing. One such example, which occurs in a moment in which Swann, at the Marquise de Saint-Euverte’s, is placed at a distance from the social world, distracted by the phantasy in the image of Odette. The narrator observes the lucidity of Swann’s vision, as “the spectacle of the servants gave place to that of the guests[...] And in these men[...] there was nothing, down to the monocles which many of them wore[...] that, no longer restricted to the general connotation of a habit, the same in all of them, did not now strike him with a sense of individuality in each” (Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 463-464). The monocle, a symbol of seeing itself, presents the means toward an access to the essential “individuality in each” person present, such that the habitualized totalization of the general concept of society becomes an actual totalization of its individual parts. Marcel notes, of Swann in this moment, that “it was society as a whole, now that he was detached from it, which presented itself to him as a series of pictures” (459). Swann is again reminded of his phantasy for Odette by the playing of Vinteuil’s sonata, which presents a moment in which “he now recovered everything that had fixed unalterably the specific, volatile essence of that lost happiness; he could see it all” (491); he sees, even, in the music “ideas veiled in shadow, unknown, impenetrable to the human mind,” whose “form[...] could not be resolved into rational discourse” (496); and yet the stroke of lucidity in his seeing seems to be punctured later when he notes “an underlying sense[...] in the words” used by the Comtesse de Monteriender to describe the sonata, that she has “never seen anything to beat it[...]” before adding, “anything to beat it... since the table turning!” (501). Swann consigns this experience of seeing, as such, to the realm of the supernatural, treated as inexistent and to be kept within himself.

what reality may be when placed outside my self, if it has helped me to live, to feel that I am and to feel *that which* I am?”<sup>70</sup> Implicit, then, in the malleability of the object, and in the invention of her ‘story’, is that, in its artistic function, it reconciles the image of the voyeur with the image of that which they are seeing. Swann’s gesturing is directed not toward the apprehension of the self in the image of the other; it is directed, as it were, only toward the deluding of his self in the desire of phantasy (or in the phantasy of desire), founded and fictionalized in the implicit double-seeing of the world of objects with the world of art.

This transposition, still, mirrors to some degree the indeterminate fluidity with which Elstir, as we have noted, is able to confuse the delineations between the oppositional forces of sea and land; art being, however, not necessarily an opposition to a being-in-the-world and the signs held therein, but an appraisal of an essence which underlies a more spiritual conception of that which is essentially true and real, such a comparison doesn’t quite hold traction. “It is inconceivable that a piece of [art],” Marcel notes, “which gives us an emotion that we feel to be more exalted, more pure, more true, does not correspond to some definite spiritual reality, or life would be meaningless.”<sup>71</sup> Art is not, in Proust’s terms, to be taken on par with the objects of the world, with what Deleuze refers to as “the world of[...] worldliness,” but art is to be taken rather as being of a higher order.<sup>72</sup> As Deleuze later notes, “[the essence] is a difference, the absolute and ultimate Difference. Difference is what constitutes being, what makes us conceive being. This is why art, insofar as it manifests essences, is alone capable of giving us

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<sup>70</sup> Baudelaire, *Le Spleen de Paris*, 173.

<sup>71</sup> Marcel Proust, *The Captive & The Fugitive*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff, Terence Kilmartin, and D.J. Enright, vol. 5, In *Search of Lost Time* (New York; London: Modern Library; Kuperard, 1999), 504.

<sup>72</sup> Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 5.

what we sought in vain from life.”<sup>73</sup> The connection between art and life is thus somewhat contradictory, art being in direct correspondence with the world itself, of an essence “not existing on the surface of the Earth,” nor “with all the more reason in what we call *the world*,” and yet, it is necessarily the purveyor of an essential truth. Marcel asks, of such a difference, of such an elusive essence, “Does it exist[...] anywhere? Vinteuil’s septet had seemed to tell me so.”<sup>74</sup>

Marcel’s own understanding of the concept of essence, or of an essential truth, places such a notion in some sort of existence that is, by its nature, oppositional to “the surface of the earth” or to “what we call *the world*.” Nevertheless, even in its contradictory nature, the notion of the essential truth belongs to a spiritual reality, which is to say that it exists; it is merely that its existence is not superficial, not on the surface of the world and, therefore, not in the objects of the world—that is, neither in their form nor their materiality. It is, rather, perhaps to be found as that which these functions of the object must necessarily convey; it is that which underlies the phenomenal qualities of the object of seeing, not the least of which is the name. For, as Marcel notices evinced in Elstir’s painting, that “it was by taking away their names or giving them other names that Elstir created them anew,” then the neologicistic function might serve as vehicle toward a refigurative seeing in the context of art-making.

Marcel’s own concern with the nature of names features prominently throughout the text; in *Place-Names—The Name*, the portion of the text which immediately follows *Swann in Love*, Marcel ruminates on the nature of the name as it might describe an object, but also,

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<sup>73</sup> Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 41.

<sup>74</sup> Proust, *The Captive and The Fugitive*, 368. I am, however, using Deleuze’s translation of the passage, which can be found in, Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, 41.

consequently, upon the name as it might describe the place or person for which it stands. He notes,

*But if these names thus permanently absorbed the image I had formed of these towns, it was only by transforming that image, by subordinating its reappearance in me to their own special laws; and in consequence of this they made it more beautiful, but at the same time more different from anything that the towns of Normandy or Tuscany could in reality be, and, by increasing the arbitrary delights of my imagination, aggravated the disenchantment that was in store for me when I set out upon my travels. They magnified the idea that I had formed of certain places on the surface of the globe, making them more special and in consequence more real. I did not then represent to myself cities, landscapes, historical monuments, as more or less attractive pictures, cut out here and there of a substance that was common to them all, but looked on each of them as an unknown thing, different in essence from all the rest, a thing for which my soul thirsted and which it would profit from knowing.<sup>75</sup>*

The name, thus, seems possibly to possess the means by which is revealed to the imagination that which is essential, that which is imagined to be “different in essence from all the rest.”

What also becomes clear, though, in Marcel’s discourse on the name, is a point at which the imagination begins to complete a process of which the naming is merely a seminal, yet beginning, stage. There is, then too, a largely interpretive process by which the name is made resonant to Marcel. For “much more individual still was the character they assumed from being designated by names, names that were for themselves alone, proper names such as people have!”<sup>76</sup> Their character, then, being one predicated primarily upon the proper name, allows for the imaginative neologism that is the reconfiguration of the place around the name.

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<sup>75</sup> Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 550-551.

<sup>76</sup> Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 551.



The name in this case is suggestive rather than descriptive or ‘symbolical’<sup>77</sup>: it allows one to fictionalize, to some degree, the image of the place.

Still, it is also impossible to overlook the process by which the imagination becomes capable of falsifying the image to the point of ‘disenchantment’ with the real; and yet, though the name, coupled with the image it provokes, fails often to describe the reality of the place itself, such that these images “aggravated the disenchantment that was in store for [Marcel] when [he] set out upon [his] travels,” they are also images which magnify the forming idea of an essential truth, which possibly is itself “in consequence more real” than that which is superficially gleaned in the visiting of the place.<sup>78</sup>

In the case, though, in which the symbolic and descriptive aspects of writing, of the names, then, which are given to describe the objects which exist in the world, whose essential truth might rest much deeper within the construction of language itself, Marcel raises a

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<sup>77</sup> I’m referring here to the theory that language might be ‘symbolical’, reflexive in itself of sighted description. For, as Georgina Kleege notes in her essays on blindness caused by macular degeneration, “the more one knows about language, the harder it is to find the vocabulary which does not have some root in sighted[...] experience” (Georgina Kleege, “Blindness and Visual Culture: An Eyewitness Account,” *Journal of Visual Culture* 4, no. 2 (August 1, 2005), 185.). See also, for more on the notion of language as being reflexive of sighted experience, the opening chapter of Martin Jay’s *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

<sup>78</sup> Marcel experiences a similar disappointment to the one “in store for him in his travels,” inasmuch as the projected image of the place in the imagination leads only to a disenchantment or misperception in the event in which it becomes actually perceptible, when, in first seeing the Duchesse de Guermantes, he is entirely incapable of recognizing her. He notes, “I said to myself: ‘This lady is like the Duchesse de Guermantes.’ Now the chapel from which she was following the service was that of Gilbert the Bad, beneath the flat tombstones of which, yellowed and bulging like cells of honey in a comb, rested the bones of the old Counts of Brabant; and I remembered having heard it said that this chapel was reserved for the Guermantes family, whenever any of its members came to attend a ceremony at Combray; hence there was only one woman resembling the portrait of Mme de Guermantes who on that day, the very day on which she was expected to come there, could conceivably be sitting in that chapel: it was she! My disappointment was immense. It arose from my not having borne in mind, when I thought of Mme de Guermantes, that I was picturing her to myself in the colours of a tapestry or a stained-glass window” (Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 246). As we will come to see later, the disfigurement of the imagination in tandem with the name is often paralleled with the image of the window, whose disfigurative quality we’ve already accredited.

separate concern, a direct attack upon the ability for literature to evoke an essential truth underlying such worldly superficialities:

*[Vinteuil's] music seemed to me something truer than all known books. At moments I thought this was due to the fact that, what we feel about life not being felt in the form of ideas, its literary, that is to say, intellectual expression describes it, explains it, analyses it, but does not recompose it as does music, in which the sounds seem to follow the very movement of our being, to reproduce that extreme inner point of our sensations which is the part that gives us that peculiar exhilaration which we experience from time to time and which, when we say, 'What a fine day! What glorious sunshine!' we do not in the least communicate to others, in whom the same sun and weather evoke quite different vibrations. In Vinteuil's music, there were thus some of those visions which it is impossible to express and almost forbidden to contemplate, since, when at the moment of falling asleep we receive the caress of their unreal enchantment, at that very moment in which reason has already deserted us, our eyes seal up and before we have had time to know not only the ineffable but the invisible, we are asleep.<sup>79</sup>*

This passage, as it is relayed by Marcel, presents what is a devastating blow to the ability for writing, for the literary function, to fulfill that sacrosanct truth of which is imparted in the music of Vinteuil. For the communication of ideas, in the sense in which they may be both a “literary” or “intellectual expression,” is incapable of assuming the form by which this truth is actualized in its reception. The pre-intellectualized perception of the truth, as it were, is also presented in the painting of Elstir, Marcel notes, which seeks “to reproduce things not as he knew them to be but according to the optical illusions of which our first sight of them is composed.”<sup>80</sup> Writing, it seems to Marcel, is incapable, in the way that music and painting may be, of conveying in their actual form the resonance of the essential truth as it is revealed to him in this particular moment.

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<sup>79</sup> Proust, *The Captive and The Fugitive*, 504.

<sup>80</sup> Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, 570.

The revelation to the self of such a moment of lucidity, in the ongoing search for what might be an essential truth, occurs at “the moment of falling asleep,” that is, in “that very moment in which reason has already deserted us” and is incomprehensible in its brevity, since “before we have had time to know not only the ineffable,” that being the written truth underlying the name, nor “the invisible,” which corresponds to the visual truth behind the window, “we are asleep.” Such a moment, in the interim lasting between the closing of the eyes and the moment at which the eyes rest dormant and free to dream, allows for the revelatory moment toward essential truth.

This discovery thus takes place at the threshold between figurative and disfigurative seeings; notwithstanding that either the waking vision of the world or the visual landscape of the dream might offer interchangeably, depending on one’s own interpretive viewing of these distinct seeings, either the disfigurative or figurative seeing of which we have spoken, it is in the liminality which distinguishes them in which the sort of clarity of seeing necessitated by the nature of the essential truth might come to be. This threshold, actualized in the liminality between waking life and sleep, which mirrors in large part the novel’s opening pages, exists also then at the threshold between seeing and not seeing, between, as it were, the actual moment of seeing and the disfiguration caused in making it intelligible—in intellectualizing the image by way of conflating the perception with a corresponding idea.

Viktor Shklovsky’s *Theory of Prose* offers, in its proposition of the theory of ‘estrangement’, what seems to be an alternative path by which the literary might excavate the essential truth buried either in the disfigurative seeing of the object through the window or in the disfigurative literary imagining of the object vis-à-vis the name. He notes,

*After being perceived several times, objects acquire the status of “recognition.” An object appears before us. We know it’s there but we do not see it, and, for that reason, we can say nothing about it. The removal of this object from the sphere of automatized perception is accomplished in art by a variety of means.<sup>81</sup>*

Crucial to Shklovsky’s argument is the separating of the visual object from the literary object; and yet, the process of de-familiarization or of estrangement is, primarily, a circumvention of the functions by which habit assimilates the image or name to its corresponding idea, intellectualizes it so that it might appropriate the semblance of the familiar. In positing that the literary object does not due just service to the visual object it represents, Shklovsky places the essential truth of the object entirely in the empirical relationship of the subject-viewer to the object, such that meaning resides foremost within the object itself.

The nature of seeing through the window, of the subject to the image as it is presented in the context of the voyeuristic seeing, is one, as we have shown, not entirely of falsification but also which retains a possible reconciliation of the subject with the pre-intellectualized perception of the object of their seeing, as is evinced in the painting of Elstir. For insofar as the literary object is subject to the habitualized process of perception and recognition, then this may be said also of the visual object, whose figuration and disfiguration and, similarly, whose intellectualization and defamiliarization might operate along similar lines; it is not only true, then, that the epistemological problematic of the window is a problem of the sensory and of the perceptive, but that such a discussion might be mapped as easily upon the literary world as it already has been upon the world as it is visualized. It is not, then, such that the literary

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<sup>81</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, trans. Benjamin Sher, 1. ed., 2., corr. pr (Elmwood Park, Ill: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991), 6.

object fails to describe the visual object, but that neither is capable of describing the essential truth which presents itself in our own being in the world.

Already, we have noted that the process of disfiguration in the act of seeing is conjoined with the intermingling of the linguistic, of the literary as represented by the name, in the exact moment of visual perception. *In Search of Lost Time*, in its paralleling imagery of the window alongside its discourse on the notion of names as they relate to objects in the world, similarly places such a discussion of seeing and knowing, of comprehending an essential truth of—but not in—the world, equally within the faculties of seeing and of literary sense-making, as well as in the space between them.

Shklovsky later articulates what such a “variety of means” might entail, as he gestures toward a method by which art might circumvent the automatization of perception and access perhaps some semblance of the essential. Preeminent within such means is the notion of ‘estrangement’, which in other translations is also termed as a ‘defamiliarization’. Using Tolstoy as an example of the mastery of the theory of ‘estrangement’, Shklovsky argues,

*The devices by which Tolsto[y] estranges his material may be boiled down to the following: he does not call a thing by its name, that is, he describes it as if it were perceived for the first time, while an incident is described as if it were happening for the first time. In addition, he foregoes the conventional names of the various parts of a thing, replacing them instead with the names of the various parts in other thing.<sup>82</sup>*

In the severing of the linguistic object from the habitualized idea to which it correlates, Shklovsky represents a return to materiality, to perception in the literary sphere from the pretence of a literary modality which fails to capture things as they are. It is also framed as a

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<sup>82</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, 6.

return to the seeing of the object in its actual material formation, a return, if not to the image, then to the image which predates the image, that which comes before its incipient connection to the idea associated with the name; in doing so, it seeks to present a literary capsule for the experience of vision itself, that is, a visual experience which predates also our own experience of the visual. The name, then, might perhaps become the nullification of the power of the image and, likewise, a straying into a science of literature, into the basic communication of meaning, rather than into a poetical refiguration of the object in writing.

The essay begins with an unattributed quotation: “Art is thinking in images”<sup>83</sup> Under the Proustian model, in which the parallel drawn between the disfiguration of the image in the window and the disfiguration of the name, the literary impossibility by which it fails adequately to describe things as they are, is reconciled not in the image (nor, it seems, is the image reconciled in the literary) but in the recuperation of the essence which underlies them both, in the convalescence, as it were, from the disfigurative seeings which they seem most often to impart. For, Marcel notes, as “images, unreal, fixed, always alike, filling all my nights and days, differentiated this period of my life from those which had gone before it (and might easily have been confused with it by an observer who saw things only from without, that is to say who saw nothing),” then the image, without form or figuration, outside the context of the literary, might liken itself to the observation of ‘nothing’.<sup>84</sup> This is the unfortunate experience of the voyeur, but it is also the experience of one whose reliance on names, and whose experience of the literary, might fall too far on either side of a spectrum of figuration—upon one for whom names mean, altogether, everything or, conversely, mean nothing at all.

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<sup>83</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, *Theory of Prose*, 1.

<sup>84</sup> Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 555.

It follows, in the developing narrative of the Search, that art cannot merely be ‘thinking in images’. For the image in itself is the phenomena under which is held captive an inkling of the essential. It is perhaps, on the other hand, in the practice of distinguishing within and between images, within one’s own seeing and within one’s artistic vocation, in peeling back the forming layers of the image to reveal its essence, that art is originated. In dealings both in names and in images it is, as Beckett notes, in a reorganization of habit, “an operation described by Proust as ‘longer and more difficult than the turning inside out of the eyelid, and which consists in the imposition of our own familiar soul on the terrifying soul of our surroundings,” that the essential is derived from the ephemeral.<sup>85</sup>

It is, likewise, in a refigurative process by which one accounts for their own habit that the habits of seeing themselves might be circumvented—in, as it were, an ability to look back at oneself, as “according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*).”<sup>86</sup> And so the creative act, as in the interpretation of one’s own seeing, is conducted in reverse, ever a ‘looking back at’, “as Elstir painted the sea, by reversing the real and the apparent, starting from illusions and beliefs which one then slowly brings into line with the truth, which is the manner in which Dostoevsky tells the story of a life.”<sup>87</sup> And yet, this particular act of seeing is not a glamorization of the past, nor is it necessarily the admission that one is capable only of understanding and knowing in the past tense; it is, rather, the seeing by which we are able to see ourselves, the same seeing by which we are able to account for our own reflection in seeing through the window.

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<sup>85</sup> Beckett, *Proust*, 26.

<sup>86</sup> Lyotard, *Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?*, 81.

<sup>87</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 431.

The linearity of the figurations which have so consumed Swann in his imaginings of Odette, his ‘artistry’ being one which manifests “the image of Odette,” is essentially a gesture toward a phenomenal ‘seems-like’. Her likeness becomes only the means toward a comparison with another work of art. The linearity of her contour, of her face likewise, become similarly the phenomenal *mise-en-scène* for an ephemeral interaction, one which relates to art only in its interest in form. Her ‘type’, also, which Swann desires to have made “clearly intelligible,” echoes such an interest in image over an essential truth; the *tupos*<sup>88</sup> being, as it were, the conformist undertaking by which the impression of the image is formed, then it is the image less of a neologism of Odette’s essential truth than of a sublimation of her image into another—not, then, the separation of the phenomenal double-seeing so much as the conflation of one seeing with another seeing of a different order. Her *tupos* signals the extrication of her essence into another prison altogether, to be held captive deep within her own image now itself held captive within the domain of art, within the image of Botticelli’s Zipporah.<sup>89</sup>

The disfigurative process by which Odette’s image is captured, enabled in the comparison Swann engenders between her and Zipporah, is a capturing instituted by the self; the process of such a disfiguration is one that relies entirely on the creator of the image, thus the image is held at a distance from the realms of which it was taken, that is, from the realm of

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<sup>88</sup> The etymology of ‘type’, stemming from the Ancient Greek *tupos*, connotes a writerly quality, as in a textual content; it suggests as well an ‘image’ in the form of a ‘mark’ or ‘impression’; lastly, it suggests a pattern of conformity, a habitualized generalization of sorts. The use of the word, ‘type’, if not a deliberate implication toward a correlation existing between seeing, writing, and the formation of habit, is still altogether an evocation of the habitualized writing and seeing of the other; the impression by which they are made intelligible or even present is heralded in the etymology of *tupos*. In the use of the term *tupos*, then, we are forced to acknowledge to some degree the means by which Odette is assimilated into Swann’s own phantasy—that she is seen, written, and impressed into a habitualized image.

<sup>89</sup> For “it was with an unusual intensity of pleasure, a pleasure destined to have a lasting effect on him, that Swann remarked Odette’s resemblance to the Zipporah of that Alessandro de Mariano to whom people more willingly give his popular surname, Botticelli, now that it suggests not so much the actual work of the Master as that false and banal conception of it which has of late obtained common currency” (Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 316).



art and from the realm of the world. The image, now in captive stasis, proceeds in another realm entirely—that of the projected. Such a vision remains at the centre of Swann's relationship with Odette, but becomes merely a placeholder for a way of seeing predicated not upon an interrelationship with the world but, rather, within an infinitesimal means to project within himself. The imaginary in this case becomes the totalizing gaze which captures and imprisons the phantasy of Odette, whose captive image then resides within Swann under the guise of Zipporah.

Swann, in this case, also models a behaviour that is, essentially, creative, in which the imaginary supplants the supposed reality. Odette's own features have been transposed entirely, their form lost to the image. The act of love itself, as it is presented within their relationship, becomes also the image of habitude, as the over-worked symbolism of the 'cattleya': the interpretation of its symbol, being that it is so distinctly separated from the act it engenders, involves then the ritualization of habit itself.<sup>90</sup> That the invocation of the flower is the pretence for their intercourse displaces their relationship into an image; the metaphoric quality of the interaction is habitualized to the point at which it carries no real significance, no real memory of the essence by which it came originally to be. We might say the same thing about their

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<sup>90</sup> When Swann, one evening at the Verdurins, arrives to find Odette has already departed, he "ransack[s] the streets of Paris" in searching for her. Eventually, when he finds her and joins her in her carriage, the cattleyas, part of Odette's flowery garb, become the pretence for their flirtation: "[Odette] was holding in her hand a bunch of cattleyas, and Swann could see, beneath the film of lace that covered her head, more of the same flowers fastened to a swansdown plume. She was dressed beneath her cloak, in a flowing gown of black velvet, caught up on one side to reveal a large triangle of white silk skirt, and with a yoke, also of white silk, in the cleft of the low-necked bodice, in which were fastened a few more cattleyas" (Proust, *Swann's Way*, 328-329). After the horse starts abruptly to one side, and Odette is left "quivering and breathless," Swann begins to refasten the cattleyas upon the different articles of clothing on which they had been placed (329). Later, this will become "the ritual pretence of [Swann's] rearrangement" of Odette's cattleyas, such that "the metaphor 'Do a cattleya,' transmuted into a simple verb which they would employ without thinking when they wished to refer to the act of physical possession[...], survived to commemorate in their vocabulary the long-forgotten custom from which it sprang" (331).

invocation of the Vinteuil Sonata, whose meaning is displaced into the image of Odette;<sup>91</sup> and we might also say this about Swann's voyeuristic seeing of what he imagines to be Odette at the window, by which the shadows of two older men are displaced into the image of Odette and a probable lover.<sup>92</sup> The essentially creative, and yet ultimately problematic, insistence upon projection is analogous to a particular misuse of the metaphoric function within literature. The issue of Swann's seeing, most importantly, lies in the habits of seeing by which he is never able to see the process of his own disfigurative seeing, nor, then, is he able to account for it in his appraisals of the world.

The section entitled *Swann in Love* ends, as it were, with Swann exclaiming to himself: "To think that I've wasted years of my life, that I've longed to die, that I've experienced my greatest love, for a woman who didn't appeal to me, who wasn't even my type!"<sup>93</sup> Swann, misguided as he is, now places the locus of his love in Odette's person, he charges her with being of a *typos*, ignoring the process by which it has been him, in his falsifying gaze, that has typified her character, that has appropriated her into a stagnant image even as he elevates her image into the realm of art; even as he disfigures the image of Odette, he is negligent to the effects of his own seeing, to his own complicity in such a typification.

Such issues of seeing predominate not only the seeings of Swann within the text, but also those of Marcel, whose making captive the image of Albertine mirrors largely Swann's

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<sup>91</sup> In becoming "the national anthem of [Swann and Odette's] love," Vinteuil's little phrase displaces, likewise, their love into a realm of which it knows nothing, that is, the realm of art; and, consequently, it disfigures the sonata (Proust, *Swann's Way*, 308). That which is described foremost as being a totalizing and altogether staggering work of art, is truncated, fragmented to the point at which it retains none of its essence save the 'little phrase'. Odette at one points asks Swann, "Why do you want the rest? Our little bit; that's all we need" (309).

<sup>92</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 387.

<sup>93</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 543.

capturing of the image of Odette; that she will become later the fugitive figures largely into Marcel's reappraisal of seeing, but also imparts an important duality embodied by the image—by which it may be both static and fleeting. In insisting towards an analogy between the image through the window and the function of naming, we might insist also essentially upon an analogy in their reconciliation, an achievement of literature, a renaming which mirrors Elstir's model of a refiguration of the disfigured percept in the window.

Marcel, in speaking of a quality of untenability within the name of Albertine but also in her silhouetted image, suggests,

*I ought to give a different name to each of the selves who subsequently thought of Albertine; I ought still more to give a different name to each of the Albertines who appeared before me, never the same, like those seas—called by me simply and for the sake of convenience 'the sea'—that succeeded one another and, against which, a nymph likewise, she was silhouetted.<sup>94</sup>*

Unwittingly, he suggests also the means by which the literary modality might effect its own refiguration toward the essential—not, as it were, within the estrangement or displacement of the image or name along spacial terms, but in the effecting of such a neologicistic function in time, in extending the gaze beyond the disfigured layering of images in space and toward a succession of images, of names. “Like those seas” of Elstir, whose ongoing neologisms convalesce the essential truths of that which they define in time, painted, as they are, ‘in reverse’, and which depict the interrelation, even the interchangeability, of these seas with the land—the seas swallow the edges of the land such that they are in continuous exchange, such that their indistinctness from one another is a seeing of their relationship in movement, that is, over time—Marcel's imperative is to create images in writing “that succee[d] one another and,

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<sup>94</sup> Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, 720.

against which, a nymph likewise, [is] silhouetted” that whose material formation, as it were, becomes of a layering of distinct seeings in time.

## A SEEING OF TIME

*Suddenly I stood still, unable to move, as happens when we are faced with a vision that appeals not to our eyes only but requires a deeper kind of perception and takes possession of the whole of our being.*<sup>95</sup>

A seeing, in time, through the window is the becoming of Marcel's art-making process. It is in the window, and in its analogy with a literary modality—with, in particular, the name—that Marcel's *poiesis* is enabled. It is, likewise, the window and the name which become both the vehicles of disfiguration and the reconstitutive instruments by which Marcel learns to see and to write anew; accordingly, it is by way of this particular creative act, by way of a *poiesis*, as it were, that Marcel might excavate the essential from the superficial, that he might find the essential truth which eludes him until the final moments of the texts, when he proclaims his ambition, “to describe men as occupying so considerable a place[...] in Time,” and assumes a totalizing gaze in time;<sup>96</sup> and yet, we have still not given any means toward a reconciliation of such a totalizing gaze, nor the final writing of the *oeuvre*, with the character which we have thus far been describing, whose seeings at the window and whose neologisms offer promise of a *poiesis* but are still uncertain of themselves, have still yet to become the refigurative vehicles which we have thus far predicted them to have been.

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<sup>95</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 197.

<sup>96</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 532.

Marcel still doubts the ability for the literary to offer the vantage point by which the issue of the window is remedied, by which the phenomena is refigured to reveal the buried essential. He echoes his earlier doubt for the literary to embody the essence, for his writing to be worthy of his own isolation from the world, even as he has yet to begin writing his *oeuvre* toward the end of the text. He asks, “what point is there in foregoing the pleasures of social life if, as seems to be the case, the famous “work” which for so long I have been hoping every day to start the next day, is something I am not, or am no longer, made for and perhaps does not even correspond to any reality.”<sup>97</sup>

Neither does the essence correspond to any reality; it is, essentially, untenable. For it is impossible to find, nor to describe, as it rests buried within the ephemera of the world; it is the paradise lost, which can never be returned to, gestured toward but always out of reach, “since the true paradises are the paradises we have lost.”<sup>98</sup> We may run in circles around it and never quite reach it, though it exists: Marcel has heard it in Vinteuil’s septet; he has seen it in Elstir’s painting. Still, there remains the question as to whether the literary might justify an expression of this essence and by what means might it express a layering of distinct seeings in time, given that the locus of the seeing, its essence, is irremediably lost, hinted towards necessarily in retrospection.

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<sup>97</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 240.

<sup>98</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 261.

## METAPHORIC SEEING AND INVOLUNTARY MEMORY

To reflect and, then, to refigure is an essential function of Marcel's art-making. For it is only in the examination of one's own seeing *a posteriori* in which the primeval seeing, the "non-logical statement of phenomena in the order and exactitude of their perception," might be recovered. The convalescence of seeing, the return to the point of seeing and thus the interposing of one moment of vision upon another, that is, the layering of a succession of images, is yet analogous to the transcendental feat that is involuntary memory, which revivifies an image from the distant past alongside the immediate present; it is "a reduplication," as Beckett notes, "at once imaginative and empirical, real without merely being actual, ideal without being merely abstract, the ideal real, the essential, the extratemporal."<sup>99</sup>

It is the bridging of the distance at which one sees through the window, from which one must see, and by which one is kept always at a distance from the essence of their own seeing. For the seeing, as we have noted, may be investigated retrospectively, and one may likewise attempt to refigure the phenomenalization which occurs in the moment which directly follows the seeing—and, in doing so, to dispel the disfigurations which one might have been complicit in creating within the image—and yet there is ever the looming impossibility that one might never again be able to inhabit the seeing at the exact moment at which it was made—that is, prior to its being made intelligible, prior to its being

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<sup>99</sup> Beckett, *Proust*, 56.

phenomenalized. It is only by way of the involuntary memory that one is allowed to inhabit such a space of seeing.

G rard Genette’s analysis of the *Search*, as evidenced within his essay, *Metonymy in Proust*, responds to the importance of the metaphor within the text, being, as it were, the vehicle of involuntary memory, in discussing the essentiality of metonymy alongside (and inside) the metaphor within the Proustian model. The image favoured by Proust, he notes, in quoting Proust’s *Correspondance*, is one “of transparent unity, where all things, as they lose their initial appearance as things, fall into place alongside each other in a type of order, imbued by the same light, seen within each other, without a single word remaining aloof, resistant to assimilation.”<sup>100</sup> Even in his suggestion that the metonymic image is, in fact, the favoured image of Proust (as opposed to the metaphoric image), he positions the relationship between metaphor and metonymy as one made between two essential parties, but also as a distinction between two distinct means of seeing; they are, essentially, two contiguous and corollary seeings, which stem necessarily from one another, such that both enact an essential contiguity in which “all contrasts are wiped away, all oppositions disappear, all barriers vanish in the euphoria of a continuous space.”<sup>101</sup>

The use of metonymy within Proust, is thus explained by Genette as an extension of the metaphor, in which a “metaphoric relationship is established between two terms already linked by a relationship of spatiotemporal contiguity.”<sup>102</sup> In this sense, then, the relationship

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<sup>100</sup> Marcel Proust, *Correspondance*, ed. Philip Kolb, vol. 2 (Paris: Plon, 1976), 86. The quoted section appears also, as we have noted, in, G rard Genette. “*Metonymy in Proust*” In *Swann’s Way: The Moncrieff Translation* ed. Susanna Lee, 433-453, A Norton Critical Edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 451. The translation is Genette’s.

<sup>101</sup> Genette, *Metonymy in Proust*, 442.

<sup>102</sup> Genette, *Metonymy in Proust*, 451.



between these two modes of analogy, between metaphor and metonymy, should be seen not as a binary, but as a succession of seeings made manifest within the *Search* itself, made apparent only in the actual progression made by the author-narrator from metonymy toward metaphor (as well as between them and within them), from the microscopic toward the telescopic—a manifestation of an “apprenticeship in signs” of an ever-increasing scope, signs which require of a truth-seeker always a new vantage point, a new perspective, and thus desire a certain narratorial motility. The metonymic function is a subset of the metaphoric function;<sup>103</sup> it is simply that it enacts the metaphoric function within a localized geography, within, as it were, a substitution in proximity, such that the “role of metonymy [is] within metaphor.”<sup>104</sup> Landy, though claiming that “Genette and De Man are a little overzealous when they tar all of Marcel’s metaphors with the metonymic brush,” still terms Proust’s particular usage of their functions entwined as being that of the ‘metonyphor’.<sup>105</sup>

A narratorial motility, which is at once the most adequate response to the limits of seeing,<sup>106</sup> might also be well served by the use of metaphor and metonymy within a literary work: metonymy, first, as a localized asset, as a comparison made based on the proximity of things, serves the function of moving through a defined and immediate space and simulates the motion of a narratorial voice and eye through said space; metaphor, as a radical

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<sup>103</sup> Genette, though, would argue that they are, in different instances, subsidiary to one another, but that, more often, it is the metaphoric seeing which becomes a subset of the metonymic seeing. It is sufficient, in this case, to note merely the interrelatedness of their functions which, as Genette and Landy both claim, operate similarly and often in a capacity in which they pick up upon one another, in which they both invoke and evoke the other.

<sup>104</sup> Genette, *Metonymy in Proust*, 434.

<sup>105</sup> Landy, *Philosophy As Fiction*, 73.

<sup>106</sup> Since, in changing perspective and in shifting the visual plane, the simultaneity of objects with a visual field and the detachability of the object from the world are inevitably compromised. The nobility of seeing, as it is proposed by Hans Jonas, is somewhat inverted, becomes atrophied, and permits perhaps for a new seeing.

displacement by way of substitution, evokes in this way an interchangeability of things and, thus, the abandonment of the seeing eye altogether (at least insofar as we may conceive of 'the seeing eye'). The metaphor, as a displacement—a radical substitution made possible by the imaginative and creative act—is derived from the notion of the detachability of the image inherent to seeing, which is “at the bottom of abstraction and therefore of all free thought.”<sup>107</sup> The final metaphor, then, emanates from within the closing moments of the text, in the nearing of death and of a final freeing of the eye.

If we imagine sight as primarily being the sense of logic, structure, and reality, then the metaphor is itself never an act of seeing in that sense but, rather, becomes an uninhibited act of seeing imaginatively. It is an intensely interpretive vision made possible by the literary, by the neologicistic undertaking of the writing of Marcel's life; likewise, it is the substantiation of the theory that there exists a certain freedom in seeing through the window, in seeing double. The metaphor becomes, as it were, the instinctive literary corollary to involuntary memory. For it is “thanks to the metaphoric operation of memory,” writes Poulet, that “the mind has escaped the tyranny of time as well as of space.”<sup>108</sup>

It is in the metonymic seeings, geographically localized as they are and which, often to the disappointment of the narrator, begin to contaminate the characteristics of the object of one seeing in another proximate vessel, that the narrator traverses the narrative (which, ultimately, it is he himself who has constructed); it is within these seeings, chiefly, that he spends the majority of his time. The metonym becomes, in evincing an interrelationship

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<sup>107</sup> Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, 147.

<sup>108</sup> Georges Poulet, “Proust and Human Time” In, *Proust: A Collection of Critical Essays, Twentieth Century Views*, René Girard, ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962), 172.

between objects of seeing in proximity, the function of the eye as projection, the fallibility of the window as well as its potential reconstitution. For though it muddies what one may perceive in *the real*, it is also the genesis of the seeing of Elstir, that primeval seeing which comes before the seeing.

The metonymic movement of the narrator through the text is a bipartite suggestion: that, primarily, the function of vision is one that is essentially a subjective “impression” which, “however trivial its material may seem to be, however faint its traces, is a criterion of truth[...]” since it forms of the necessary intercourse of our selves with the world;<sup>109</sup> and, consequently, that there is a second seeing which must come after, which must revisit the metonymic seeing, and in doing so must transcend the subjectivity of the seeing. It is this seeing by which “the observable manifestations” of the first “need to be translated and[...] to be read backwards and laboriously deciphered.”<sup>110</sup> It is in this way that the seeing may become universal, “as art exactly reconstitutes life, around the truths to which we have attained inside ourselves.”<sup>111</sup>

This second seeing is the poetic seeing; it is the imaginative seeing, the seeing uniquely enabled in the process of art-making, by which the artist engages with the essential in time. A writer, Marcel notes,

*Can describe a scene by describing one after another the innumerable objects which at a given moment were present at a particular place, but truth will be attained by him only when he takes two different objects, states the connexion between them[...] and encloses them in the necessary links of a well-wrought style; truth—and life too—can be attained by us only when, by comparing a*

<sup>109</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 275.

<sup>110</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 300.

<sup>111</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 302.

*quality common to two sensations, we succeed in extracting their common essence and in reuniting them with each other, liberated from the contingencies of time, within a metaphor.*<sup>112</sup>

And so the function of the metaphoric seeing, being the corollary of the metonymic seeing within the text, is one not only directed toward the tracing of memory—and, likewise, is not merely the literary analogue for involuntary memory—but is one that is directed ultimately toward the poetic gesture, toward a *poiesis*. It is also, insofar as it draws the connection between two different objects, the prefiguration of a double-seeing, of a seeing through the window, which, in relaying the commonalities of two distinct objects, might relay also the commonalities of two distinct selves, that is, of the self that sees through the window and of the self that is reflected and projected.

Marcel notices, also, a similar seeing within the paintings of Elstir, within whose work he discovers “a sort of metamorphosis of the objects represented, analogous to what in poetry we call metaphor.”<sup>113</sup> Accordingly, “the trope which seems most exactly to characterize Elstir’s method in his paintings of reversing marine and contiguous terrestrial details would, in fact, be metonymy.”<sup>114</sup> In the language of Proust, as Landy insinuates in his usage of the term, ‘metonyphor’, there is not a real qualitative difference in the manner in which these seeings are conducted; both are being directed uniquely toward the essential truth.<sup>115</sup> It is only that the metonymic seeing is primarily a seeing in space—and a manifestation of an immediate

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<sup>112</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 289-290.

<sup>113</sup> Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, 566.

<sup>114</sup> Gerald Kamber and Richard Macksey, “‘Negative Metaphor’ and Proust’s Rhetoric of Absence,” *MLN* 85, no. 6 (1970): 858–83, 859.

<sup>115</sup> Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction*, 73.

perceptual world therein—whereas the metaphoric seeing is one held primarily, as it were, in time.

The metonymic seeing bears along with it the capability for disfiguration—as in the window, in which the proclivity toward projection leads to a configuration of space that deludes the seeing self, in a localized and spatialized geography—and is, as such, overcome in a convalescence of seeing; the metaphor, on the other hand, is enacted as a disfiguration of time—or, on the other hand, as a disfiguration of the self towards an alterior occupying of time—and thus is slightly less accessible. For it presents itself not in the disfiguration of the metonymic seeing but, rather, in the seeing of the metonymic seeing, in the impossibility, then, of inhabiting that particular seeing in time after it has passed.

The metonymic seeing is, as it were, the metaphoric seeing of Elstir, since painting is an art which renders, broadly speaking, the figurations of the seen along spatial terms; and yet, in his painting, in the “metamorphosis of the objects represented” therein, which blur into each other, which are in a process of becoming and are, therefore, essentially in time, therein resides also the quality of the metaphor. The writing of the *oeuvre* becomes of such a metaphoric seeing and must, necessarily, in order to evoke the essential truth which is held in the primeval seeing. For it is in the “metaphoric operation of memory,” that one might, in writing, capture the seeing that Elstir has modelled, that one might excavate the essential truth that is beheld only as a buried fragment in the given moment, but which becomes accessible in time.

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AN *OEUVRE*:  
ON LYOTARD'S 'AESTHETIC OF THE SUBLIME'

Jean-François Lyotard, writing in *Discourse, Figure*, posits a model for the art-maker that resembles, in large part, the model presented by Elstir. His definition of the artist, however, is limiting and exclusive; the writer, notably, is not included. He writes,

*The position of art indicates a function of the figure, which is not signified—a function around or even in the figure, that is, a spatial manifestation that linguistic space cannot incorporate without being shaken, an exteriority it cannot interiorize as signification. Art stands in alterity as plasticity and desire, a curved expanse against invariability and reason, diacritical space.*<sup>116</sup>

In positioning art, “in alterity as plasticity and desire,[...] against invariability and reason, diacritical space,” Lyotard suggests a model for the artist which, similarly to Elstir (and later, to Marcel), places itself firmly against the intellect, which forms in the “plasticity and desire” of the most primeval seeing. In the vein of the metonymic seeing, the position of art derives itself of a “spatial manifestation” and becomes therefore a space that the literary “cannot incorporate without being shaken,” that is illegible and impossible to write; and yet, its function, in becoming within a “diacritical space,” hints inevitably toward a literary function—it is only that its literariness is not superficial, that this quality of the work derives not from a signification but from a function “which is not signified.”

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<sup>116</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, trans. Antony Hudek and Mary Lydon, Cultural Critique Books (Minneapolis [Minn.]: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 7.

The essential truth becomes in this case of a plasticity, of the formal disfiguration (and the neologistic refiguration) of the percept to access the primeval seeing, within a “diacritical space.” Richard Kearney notes, on the nature of such a ‘diacritical space’, “that diacritical perception witnesses the birth of expression, against an unformed background, as a meaning which begins and re-begins, an awakening which takes the form of a figure that is prefigured and refigured again and again, now fore, now aft, now here, now there.”<sup>117</sup> That is, the diacritical space suggests an essence which underlies the figuration, that is rendered beneath the figurative seeing, awakened to in constant refiguration, which is the “birth of expression, against an unformed background.” It is, thence, a pre-perceptual mode of seeing, unique to the Elstirian moment which precedes the intellectualization of the seeing, a “non-logical statement of phenomena in the order and exactitude of their perception.”<sup>118</sup> It is the genesis of seeing itself, the ‘true paradise’ of seeing.

The literary perspective in the seeing of such a space is necessarily distinct; it positions itself, contrarily to the metonymic seeing in space as it is posited by Lyotard and Elstir, in the form of time. Lyotard, in writing of the position of the artist in excavating, in the plasticity of their practice, what we have referred to herein as the essential truth, echoes many of Marcel’s concerns about the capabilities for the literary to achieve such an excavation of truth and of essence in what is deemed to be a process largely of spatial figuration (and refiguration). Marcel finds also such a rendering of the excavation of the essential truth, along spatial terms and, likewise, emanating from a visual perspective, in the genius of Vinteuil’s music. For, “in

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<sup>117</sup> Richard Kearney, “*What Is Diacritical Hermeneutics?*,” *Journal of Applied Hermeneutics*, December 10, 2011, 7.

<sup>118</sup> Beckett, *Proust*, 66.

Vinteuil's music, there were thus some of those visions which it is impossible to express and almost forbidden to contemplate."<sup>119</sup>

The paralleling seeings of space that are rendered in the works of Elstir and Vinteuil are analogous in the function of the seeing, in that which that seeing seeks essentially to uncover; though there are discrepancies by which one might separate their seeings, they both excavate, by way of their formal—and distinctly spatial—figurations, that which is deemed essential.

For, as Marcel notes,

*Just as there was a certain world, perceptible to us in those fragments scattered here and there, in private houses, in public galleries, which was Elstir's world, the world he saw, the world in which he lived, so too the music of Vinteuil extended, note by note, stroke by stroke, the unknown, incalculable colourings of an unsuspected world, fragmented by the gaps between the different occasions of hearing his work performed[.]*<sup>120</sup>

Marcel renders, within the competing artistic practices of Elstir and Vinteuil, a similitude of sighted expressiveness. For though these seeings exist, as it were, within different modalities of art-making, they both enact to Marcel that which is quintessentially of the eyes. Elstir's perceptual world, insofar as it is already a figuration in visualized space (since it is, after all, a figurative painting), is still emphasized as being "the world he saw." Likewise, Vinteuil's music is presented within a diction replete with terms reflexive of a visual experience, of an experience in space: his music is maintains a function by which it 'extends' 'colourings' of a 'world'.

Marcel notes, "[Vinteuil's] music seemed to me something truer than all known books. At moments I thought this was due to the fact that, what we feel about life not being felt in

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<sup>119</sup> Proust, *The Captive and The Fugitive*, 504.

<sup>120</sup> Proust, *The Captive and The Fugitive*, 339-340.



the form of ideas, its literary, that is to say, intellectual expression describes it, explains it, analyses it, but does not recombine it as does music.”<sup>121</sup> At any rate, he describes, only moments later, the process by which the literary might enact its own proper excavation of the truth, “in memory,” only to discredit it once again, noting that “the vague sensations given by Vinteuil com[e] not from a memory but from an impression (like that of the steeples of Martinville).”<sup>122</sup> When Albertine wonders whether this might be not be replicated in literature, Marcel responds “that the great men of letters have never create more than a single [type of] work, or rather have never done more than refract through various media an identical beauty which they bring into the world.”<sup>123</sup>

Lyotard, writing again in an essay entitled *Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism?*, explicates and reforms his conception of how the literary might represent the essential truth. He accomplishes this, as it were, within the dichotomy represented by modernist and postmodernist artistic practice, although, in doing so, he invariably redefines

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<sup>121</sup> Proust, *The Captive and The Fugitive*, 504.

<sup>122</sup> Proust, *The Captive and The Fugitive*, 505.

<sup>123</sup> Proust, *The Captive and The Fugitive*, 505-506. The addition of ‘type of’ is my own, intended to gesture towards the context in which he is explaining this to Albertine, that is, in “thinking again of the sameness of Vinteuil’s works” (505). For he is not simply saying that the great writers only produce one singular work, but that they all “refract[...] an identical beauty” (505-506). The “sameness of Vinteuil’s works” thus refers to a common direction within a similitude of pieces, such that they become an *oeuvre*, which gestures altogether toward an essential truth. The common similitude present within the “great men of letters,” is a similitude, rather, in which they are all directed not toward the essential truth but toward the superficialities and figurations by which the truth is entombed.

the nature of these movements and strips them largely of their historical relevance.<sup>124</sup> “Modern aesthetics,” he notes,

*is an aesthetic of the sublime[...]. It allows the unrepresentable to be put forward only as the missing contents; but the form because of its recognizable consistency, continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace and pleasure. Yet these sentiments do not constitute the real sublime sentiment[...]. The postmodern would be that which, in the modern, puts forward the unrepresentable in presentation itself[.]*<sup>125</sup>

He uses this same dichotomy, between the capacity for these newly reframed modernisms and postmodernisms to present an ‘unrepresentable’—respectively, either in encircling it, in gesturing towards it in the negative, or in presenting the ‘unrepresentable’ within the actual form of the work, which necessitates a neologicist reformulation of the rules by which the art is made—to frame an opposition between the formation of the writings of Proust and of Joyce:

*The work of Proust and that of Joyce both allude to something which does not allow itself to be made present.[...] Proust calls for the unrepresentable by means of a language unaltered in its syntax and vocabulary and of a writing which in many of its operators still belongs to the genre of novelistic narration.[...] Joyce allows the unrepresentable to become perceptible in his writing itself, in the signifier. The whole range of available narrative and even stylistic operators is put into play without concern for the unity of the whole, and new operators are tried. The grammar and vocabulary of literary language are no longer accepted*

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<sup>124</sup> This essay, in actuality, is much more broad in its scope than we shall be able here to convey. It traces, as it were, a newly defined distinction between modernism and postmodernism through what Lyotard terms an ‘aesthetic of the sublime’, and thus creates a dichotomy between modernist and postmodernist writing and art-making not in the period or movement (as tied to history) in which they are created, but based upon their ability to represent, formally, that which is ‘unrepresentable’, that which constitutes an ‘aesthetic of the sublime’. The relation of modernism to postmodernism, in this case, is one in which the modern becomes the corollary of the postmodern, since postmodern works are “not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of what *will have been done*” (Lyotard, *Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?*, 81). It is modernist art which much accord to these newly formulated rules, which must gesture toward the unrepresentable only as it has been already evoked within the postmodern. Accordingly, in his re-presentation of the sublime as an aesthetic, he also recovers the germ of the Romantic cause as an undertaking within the modernist and postmodernist movements, at least insofar as he has reframed them.

<sup>125</sup> Lyotard, *Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?*, 81.

*as a given; rather, they appear as academic forms, as rituals originating in piety[...] which prevent the unrepresentable from being put forward.*<sup>126</sup>

In championing the writing of Joyce, insofar as it reveals an aesthetic of the sublime that is actualized in its formation, Lyotard has retracted the claim that the “position of art indicates[...] a spatial manifestation that linguistic space cannot incorporate.”<sup>127</sup> He has confounded his own definition of what might be accomplished within the “diacritical space” of art, and upon what grounds such a space might permit itself to be accessed.

Joyce’s writing, he argues, conveys the ‘unrepresentable’ within that which is presented, within a neologistic usage of language itself in which “the grammar and vocabulary of literary language are no longer accepted as given.” The unrepresentable is unearthed therein, that is, it becomes of the formal quality of the work; this is, of course, the same literary modality which he has also suggested might not be capable of enacting such an evocation, such a rendering of space. By this token, Lyotard suggests that Joyce’s work is uniquely non-literary, that its genius is one in effecting within the literary mode what is a spatialized structure, that Joyce, to some degree, effects the mirroring of the metonymic seeing of Elstir. To Marcel (and, likewise, to Proust), whose literary ambitions are rendered along spatial terms, which gesture, as it were, toward an extrication of an essence *beneath* the figuration and toward a perspective in space, but whose interests are in effecting such a seeing—a seeing of an ‘aesthetic of the sublime’, a ‘postmodern’ vision—within an essentially literary modality, Lyotard suggests that their course

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<sup>126</sup> Lyotard, *Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?*, 80-81.

<sup>127</sup> Lyotard, *Discourse, Figure*, 7.

is one necessarily in the gesturing towards, in the allusion to, in his own language, a 'modernist' seeing.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Lyotard does, however, note that Proust's "hero is no longer a character but the inner consciousness of time, and in that the diegetic diachrony[...] is here [in the text] put in question because of the narrative voice" (Lyotard, *Answering the Question: What Is Postmodernism?*, 80), and, in doing so, admits that Proust upsets a "literary institution" in this particular subversion. His argument, more precisely, is that Proust's writing still upholds such an institutional understanding of the literary in its actual use of language, that it does not, as Joyce perhaps does, subvert such expectations in its every formal intricacy, but that it does so perhaps only in aspects of its form—only, as it were, in the narrative voice. This inquiry will attempt to prove, subsequently, that such a subversion of expectations such as they might pertain to the narrative voice is inherently not only an issue of form, but a stylistic mechanism by which the text evokes, with a constancy that is distinct from the constant philosophizing within the text, the 'unpresentable' essential.

## AGAINST CIRCULARITY

Marcel, in the early portions of the text, describes “in the environs of Combray, two ‘ways’ which we used to take for our walks, and they were so diametrically opposed that we would actually have to leave the house by a different door according to the way we had chosen.”<sup>129</sup> These ways are the Méséglise way—which is also referred to as ‘Swann’s way’, being that it passes Swann’s estate—and the ‘Guermantes way’; they are, as Marcel notes, completely irreconcilable, such that “to ‘take the Guermantes way’ in order to get to Méséglise, or vice versa, would have seemed[...] as nonsensical a proceeding as to turn east in order to reach the west.”<sup>130</sup> Much later, Marcel is surprised to learn from Gilberte that the two ways are not as diametrically opposed as he’d previously thought. He notes, “Gilberte said to me: ‘If you like, we might after all go out one afternoon and then we can go to Guermantes, taking the road by Méséglise, which is the nicest way,” a sentence which upset all the ideas of my childhood by informing me that the two ‘ways’ were not as irreconcilable as I had supposed.”<sup>131</sup>

Harry Slochower, in noting the opposition by which the two paths are initially framed in relation to their ultimate reconciliation, suggests additionally that “The Verdurin and Guermantes [social] circles are Proust’s projections of [the] two alternative ways.”<sup>132</sup> He is not

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<sup>129</sup> Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 188.

<sup>130</sup> Proust, *Swann’s Way*, 189.

<sup>131</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 3-4.

<sup>132</sup> Harry Slochower, “*Marcel Proust: Revolt against the Tyranny of Time*,” *The Sewanee Review* 51, no. 3 (1943): 370–81, 373.

altogether wrong in noting that these two routes, viewed as irreconcilable until their reconciliation, prefigure perhaps to the two preeminent social circles which appear within the text. For in these circles too, as Slochower notes, there is a deliberately placed opposition: the Guermantes circle sits at the uppermost echelon of the French aristocracy, typified by a vague sense of cultural superiority; the Verdurin circle, rather, is of the haute bourgeoisie, whose membership is built of the newly and exorbitantly wealthy upper-middle class in Paris. They represent an opposition, at once, of the old world and the new world, of a cultural significance and a monetary means. There is little to no intersection between them; just as one may not have been able to pass easily from the Méséglise to the Guermantes way, or vice versa, neither can one pass easily between these social milieus.

These social circles, though, are also over time reconciled: nearing the end of the text, Marcel notes, “The Princesse de Guermantes had died and the present wife of the Prince[...] was the former Mme Verdurin.”<sup>133</sup> Her passage, from the one social world to the other, suggests a closing of the circle, the imminent reconciliation of two ‘ways’ thought previously to have been incompatible; and yet, the moment of their reconciliation is registered not as the refiguration of a previously specious quality by which these paths, and these worlds, had been separated, not, then, as a fulfillment but, rather, as a profound emptiness. Marcel likens the name of the ‘Princesse de Guermantes’ to a role to which, always, “a flood of new Princesses de Guermantes” would come to play, to a succession “of different actresses playing the same part[...] then sinking from sight beneath the unvarying and immemorial placidity of the name.”<sup>134</sup> The fulfillment of this circularity is one that is essentially vacuous, that posits “one

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<sup>133</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 387.

<sup>134</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 389.

single Princesse de Guermantes, ignorant of death and indifferent to all that changes and wounds our mortal hearts.”<sup>135</sup>

Slochower, as it were, picks up on the function of circularity within the text insofar as he has discovered it within the social circles and within the two ways in which Combray might be traversed, both of which seem to be utterly irreconcilable but are, later, proven to be of a circular shape. For in the discovery that the Méséglise and Guermantes ways are actually interconnected, then one might also imagine, since they seem to depart Marcel’s house in Combray in separate directions, that they exist in a circular configuration relative to one another, that they are both part of what is a larger circle. Slochower extrapolates the circularity of these figurations in the spatial geometries of the text into an argument that, consequently, maps such a spatial circularity onto the larger formation of the text—as a circularity that exists not only within the social figurations at play within the text, but also within “Proust’s route” and, therefore, within the writing of the text.<sup>136</sup>

Lyotard, also, in discussing what he has defined as the modernist undertaking, which subsists in gesturing towards an ‘unpresentable’ that resists presentation, but which cannot actualize it within the form of the work, describes a circular function. The allusive quality of such a modernism, the tainting quality by which they must always gesture to that which they are unable fully to represent, prefigures, then, an encircling by which they present the essential truth. The ‘aesthetic of the sublime’ exists within these works but only in allusion, only insofar as these works are able to encircle that which is ‘unpresentable’ and to point toward it in the negative—to uncover, as it were, the spaces around them until they are all that is left hidden.

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<sup>135</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 389.

<sup>136</sup> Slochower, *Marcel Proust*, 380.

Their form, in this case, is merely a suggestion, a contouring, the shape that seems most likely to fit therein. As in the specious reconciliation of the two ‘ways’, of the Méséglise and the Guermantes, the circular is a gesture toward the emptiness that lies at its core. Lyotard, in categorizing Proust within such a literary modality, categorically denies the means by which Marcel might uncover an essential truth; he denounces, on those terms, the ability for the literary to evoke the ‘unpresentable’ in time rather than in space.

This circularity, though, gestures towards what is perhaps a fundamental emptiness made manifest in the wreckage of time itself, that is left, inevitably, in the wake of changes of such seismic proportions. For time enacts its own duality: in its ongoing movement, its pressing ever forward, it slowly saps the life from those still living and, from those already dead, peels the skin from their bones; and in that which is effectively its circular function, by which the Duchesse de Guermantes is enabled to succeed herself, to appear as though skirting death, time compounds only the emptiness inherent to the vacuousness of these circles. The circular function becomes, thus, the means towards actualizing these dichotomous effects of time, which, one alongside the other, wreak themselves upon the characters of the Proustian world.

If it were in such a circular pattern that the involuntary memory made itself present, by which the essential truth—at once the subject of art and its direct consequence—were represented, then these conceptions would be replete only with such an emptiness, a gesture, per Lyotard, to an aesthetic of the sublime. The circular function, insofar as it is made present within the text’s peculiar circularities, seeks only to enact the disintegrative faculties of time itself. The possibility for one to regain time, rather, is enabled in a metaphoric seeing that



becomes of, and is prefigured by, a seeing through the window, that refigures, as it were, a formal plasticity of time as its immediate art-object and thereby permits access to the primeval seeing that is otherwise spatialized.

Marcel, in first explaining the dichotomy that is presented in the arrangement of the two 'ways', notes that the Méséglise way was to him "something as inaccessible as the horizon."<sup>137</sup> The Guermantes way, "on the other hand, meant no more than the ultimate goal, ideal rather than real."<sup>138</sup> That which is presented here, which is intended to suggest the degree to which these paths are inaccessible to the other, signifies on the other hand an entirely different relationship between them: it is not so much that they are inaccessible to one another but that they are each, and together, unrealizable to the narrator, that they are essentially unrepresentable; and yet, their processes correspond to those which we have already defined in relation to metonymic and metaphoric seeings: the 'inaccessibility of the horizon' is shattered within the metonymic seeing as evinced by Elstir, such that, "beyond the sea,[...] another sea began, roseate with the light of the setting sun, which was in fact the sky," such that the horizon is rendered indistinguishable and, thus, inconsequential;<sup>139</sup> the realization of the 'ideal rather than the real' becomes of the metaphoric seeing, by which the immediate primeval seeing of space is rendered in the bridging of time.

These seeings enact simultaneous, yet distinct, functions toward the uncovering of the essential truth: the metonymic seeing manifests a spatial refiguration of time, whereas the metaphoric seeing manifests a temporal refiguration of space. It is this double-seeing, especially

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<sup>137</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 188.

<sup>138</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 189.

<sup>139</sup> Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, 571.

insofar as it is prefigured in seeing through the window, that enacts itself in the manner in which the circularity cannot; and it is, consequently, this double-seeing that is actualized in the formation of the text, that is rendered even within its form and which does not merely encircle the nature of the essential truth in the practice of art-making so as to define it in the negative, but evokes it in its very formation.

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## DOUBLE-SEEINGS

So now we recognize her. She is the “someone else” we meant when we said, death always happens to someone else. And that someone else is *here*, as, somehow, we are not. This is a truth of our present lives, not only of our future deaths. You could even say that it is *the* truth of life, the truth from which we are exiled when the storyline yanked us into the afterlife we make for ourselves with words.

If the truth of life is that we are already dead, this is not really a paradox. For death is not a departure; it is merely resuming one’s place in being. In truth we never left it. Our own bodies come into their own in death, but already enjoy in life the most intimate relations with that material world from which we are barred, relations which they maintain unbroken in death. And so we are, in a manner of speaking, already corpses, haunted by ghosts.<sup>140</sup>

The theory of the self within *In Search of Lost Time*, insofar as it is evidenced in Marcel’s own thinking about what is, at once, simultaneously an ‘intermittence’ of the self as well as a constancy around certain aspects of its composition, becomes also, to some degree, of the seeing at the window. For as the window presents the possibility by which one might envision themselves as distinctly othered from their self—that is, in the reflection in the window of the seeing self alongside the actual object of their seeing—then too might the self be enacted within such a doubled variegation.

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<sup>140</sup> Shelley Jackson, “*The Shelley Jackson Vocational School*” In, *Ways of Re-Thinking Literature*, Tom Bishop and Donatien Grau, eds. (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2018), 170.

Joshua Landy, in writing of the nature of the self and of self-creation in the text, defines such a bipartite makeup of the textual self as being between iterations of the self that are manifested in time either synchronically or diachronically: the synchronic division of the self is suggested by “a third agency [apart from the intuitive faculty and the intellect, that] always accompanies the other two, but silently, surreptitiously,” and which is represented by the will, by Marcel’s *volonté*, which remains a semblance of constancy as opposed to the fleeting nature of the diachronic self;<sup>141</sup> the diachronic division of the self is suggested by its intermittence, by a successive subdivision of the self, as “in a composite mass, the elements may one by one, without or noticing it, be replaced by others, which others again eliminate, until in the end a change has been brought about which it would be impossible to conceive if we were a single person.”<sup>142</sup>

Landy later notes, upon the existence of the synchronic division of the self as it is represented by the faculty of the will, that “there must surely be a secret site of constancy after all in the ‘mind of man’, a part of ourself which can never be seen since it is always doing the seeing, something *through* which, and never *at* which, we stare.”<sup>143</sup> In doing so, he places the

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<sup>141</sup> Landy, *Philosophy as Fiction*, 104. The existence of the will, insofar as it is the suggestion of a constancy of the self, but also insofar as it might enact itself alongside (and may often, even, subsume) the more transient functions of the self—those being the intellect and the intuition—is suggested within the text as Marcel contemplates a looming decision, and which Landy also quotes. Marcel notes, “My brain [*intellect*] assessed this pleasure at a very low value now that it was assured. But, inside, my will [*volonté*] did not for a moment share this illusion, that will which is the persevering and unalterable servant of our successive personalities; hidden away in the shadow, despised, downtrodden, untiringly faithful, toiling incessantly, and with no thought for the variability of the self, to ensure that the self may never lack what is needed.[...] It is as invariable as the intelligence and the sensibility [*intuition*] are fickle, but since it is silent, gives no account of its actions, it seems almost non-existent; it is by its dogged determination that the other constituent parts of our personality are led, but without seeing it, whereas they distinguish clearly all their own uncertainties. So my intelligence and my sensibility began a discussion as to the real value of the pleasure that were would be in knowing Albertine.[...] But my will would not let the hour pass at which I must start, and it was Elstir’s address that it called out to the driver” (Proust, *Within a Budding Grove*, 614-615).

<sup>142</sup> Proust, *The Captive and The Fugitive*, 660.

<sup>143</sup> Landy, *Philosophy of Fiction*, 113.

synchronic division of the self within a vocabulary of seeing, such that the self that wills, which exhibits in its character a constancy, is the same self that is “always doing the seeing.” It is the self “*through* which, and never *at* which, we stare.”

It is a self, then, which enacts a seeing at the window which predates even the voyeuristic seeing. For while the voyeuristic seeing, enabled through the window, enacts a disfiguration by way of the intellect and intuition, a process that is both conscious and unconscious and that is, chiefly, a product of habitualized ways of seeing—which contains also the potential for the refiguration of such a seeing—it is the seeing of the self in the act of seeing that is the final position of the narrator at the window, shuttered as he is within his own domicile—at the window, as it were, to his own self. The reflection in the window to the final narrator, the actualized expression of the will—being that he has finally and ultimately committed himself to that which is, and has always been, his singular ambition, the *oeuvre*—becomes thereby of the seeing of the diachronic self, of the seeing of the narrator in motion from a position of fixed vantage but of metaphoric possibility.

This is, naturally, the essence of the relation between the final narrator, typified at once by his totalizing gaze and his disembodied eye, the narrator, as it were, that sees, in relation to the narrator in motion, groping and stumbling through the text, for whom the search for the final narrator elicits an ongoing bettering of the apparatus of seeing—that is, in the disfigurative and refigurative process as well as in the understanding of the seeing through the window. The distinction, herein, between these dual narrators, between these dual selves, between these dual seeings, exist, in their figurations of the essential truth, as the microscope is to the telescope—that is, as the metonymic seeing is to the metaphoric seeing, in which both

are equally important. For “it was with a telescope”, as Marcel notes, “I had used to observe things which were indeed very small to the naked eye, but only because they were situated at a great distance, and which were each one of them in itself a world.”<sup>144</sup> And yet, it is only by the function of the metonymic seeing that such a metaphoric vision is made possible. It is such that, as Genette notes, “while the initial ‘drop’ of involuntary memory is indeed metaphoric in nature, the ‘edifice of memory’ is entirely metonymic.”<sup>145</sup>

Proust engages a metaphoric seeing, a substitution by way of the imagination, a disfiguration of the body in the service of occupying time. The narrator of the end of the *Search*, whose commentary, ever a reminder of De Chateaubriand’s *Memoirs from Beyond the Grave*, guides the text intermittently, alongside that of the discrete voice of the present narrator, from a space that is beyond time itself, is not governed by either of these spatial and temporal limitations; his perspective is timeless and unplaceable, his object of truth is time itself. The final narrator embraces a double-seeing in which, even as he perhaps stands looking toward his own mortality, is also a seeing directed toward his own birth, an autofictional seeing of one’s self in the chiasma of one’s own life; it is a seeing not toward death, but quintessentially a seeing from a point of perspective toward a distant terminus and, by way of an autofictional apparatus, a seeing also from the point of terminus toward the initial point of the seeing’s inception; it is, thus, a passing in both directions, as in the dichotomy of the two ‘ways’, a double-seeing.

The passing of the seeing in both directions, which, as it were, serves to reunite these two distinct narratorial forces, is literalized within a mirroring in the opening and closing

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<sup>144</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 520.

<sup>145</sup> Genette, *Metonymy in Proust*, 448.

moments of the text. Marcel, once beginning finally to construct that which will become his *oeuvre*, notes, “I fell back exhausted and closed my eyes[...] But I was resolved to devote to [the *oeuvre*] all my strength, which ebbed, as it seemed, reluctantly and as though to leave me time to complete the periphery of my walls and close ‘the funeral gate.’”<sup>146</sup> Earlier, in being denied the bedtime kiss by his mother, he similarly notes, “And so I must set forth without viaticum[...]. Once in my room I had to stop every loophole, to close the shutters, to dig my own grave as I turned down the bed-clothes, to wrap myself in the shroud of my nightshirt. But before burying myself in the iron bed,[...] I was stirred to revolt, and attempted the desperate stratagem of a condemned prisoner.”<sup>147</sup> They are juxtaposed, are interrelated, in that the final narrator, on the verge of death, passes into sleep, whereas the earlier narrator, on the verge of sleep, imagines it as if it were his own death, such that it is, distinctly, a seeing of one another across the span of the text.

The duality by which the narrative voice is presented within the text is, in this way, in a state of constant reconciliation: the two iterations of the narrator are in constant movement towards one another, are placed (both implicitly and explicitly) in relation to one another, such that the “I, who was not yet detached from life,” the eye that gropes blindly for truth and which sees metonymically, is interrelated in the formation of even this particular utterance with the final narrator, by which point the summation of the metonymic seeings has precluded that which is the metaphoric seeing.<sup>148</sup> The final *I*, which has completed around himself “the periphery of [his] walls and close[d] the ‘funeral gate,’” the *I* that has mastered the metaphoric

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<sup>146</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 520.

<sup>147</sup> Proust, *Swann's Way*, 36-37.

<sup>148</sup> Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, 428.

seeing, that is able to formalize, in the writing of his *oeuvre*, a temporal refiguration of space, is then able to inhabit the actual moment of perception as it pertains to the first narrator—to see, in the window, alongside the first narrator and to see, in their self othered, the summation of their own disfigurative seeings.<sup>149</sup>

In this way, that which Genette describes as the “initial ‘drop’ of involuntary memory” takes on a function of vital importance, a function that is present, as a temporal refiguration of space, within the actual form of the text, and which is gestured towards most clearly, perhaps, in the invocation of the “I, who was not yet detached from life.”<sup>150</sup> It is this ‘drop’, as it were, which refigures the primeval seeing that has become so quickly disfigured, which places these dual narrators in formal conjunction, together at the window, as a self seeing, and writing, their own self, that is, seeing double toward an essential truth—in a seeing directed toward the hermeneutics by which the world is read and, subsequently, toward the genesis of seeing itself. Marcel notes,

*As for the truths which the intellectual faculty—even that of the greatest minds—gathers in the open, the truths that lie in its path in full daylight, their value may be very great, but they are like drawings with a hard outline and no perspective; they have no depth because no depths have had to be traversed in order to reach them, because they have not been re-created.*<sup>151</sup>

The essential truth lies, then, not within the seeing itself, but in its recreation, within a seeing double by which the depth and complexity of the interaction between the self and the world are seen again in metaphor, and such that the window enacts itself as the symbolic image of the self seeing itself in their formal refigurations of the world—that is, in their *oeuvre*. Seeing double,

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<sup>149</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 520.

<sup>150</sup> Proust, *The Guermantes Way*, 428.

<sup>151</sup> Proust, *Time Regained*, 303.



from two points of perspective, as it were, becomes the means towards perceiving the depths at which the essential truth is buried and the mechanism by which, in the primeval seings, such a truth might be uncovered.

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