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Detours and Syncopations: in Search of Lost Time Through the Lens of "Les Intermittences du Coeur"

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DETOURS AND SYNCOPATIONS:

IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME
THROUGH THE LENS
OF "LES INTERMITTENCES DU COEUR"

by
Martha Graham Wiseman

Final Project submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

Skidmore College
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What is our innocence,
what is our guilt? All are
naked, none is safe. And whence
is courage: the unanswered question,
the resolute doubt—
dumbly calling, deafly listening—that
in misfortune, even death,
encourages others
and in its defeat, stirs

the soul to be strong? He
sees deep and is glad, who
accedes to mortality
and in his imprisonment rises
upon himself as
the sea in a chasm, struggling to be
free and unable to be,
in its surrendering
finds its continuing.

So he who strongly feels,
behaves. The very bird,
grown taller as he sings, steels
his form straight up. Though he is a captive,
his mighty singing
says, satisfaction is a lowly
thing, how pure a thing is joy.
This is mortality,
this is eternity.

— Marianne Moore, "What Are Years?"

When I began to read an author I very soon caught the tune
of the song beneath the words, which in each author is distinct from
that of every other; and while I was reading, and without knowing what
I was doing, I hummed it over, hurrying the words, or slowing them
down, or suspending them, in order to keep time with the rhythm of
the notes, as one does in singing, where in compliance with the shape
of the tune one often delays for a long time before coming to the last
syllable of a word.

— Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve*

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Abstract

“Les Intermittences du coeur,” a section of *Sodom and Gomorrah* in Marcel Proust’s *In Search of Lost Time*, exposes the raw work of mourning that the *Search* spirals in on again and again. The section, in which the Narrator through the workings of involuntary memory confronts the stark reality of the loss of his grandmother, recapitulates in both substance and rhythm the counterpoint of many of the central forces of the *Search*: those of absence and presence, death and survival, isolation and contextualization, unification and fragmentation, dispersal and concentration, the boundaried self and the hazily boundaried consciousness.

“Les Intermittences” sets a clearly expressed contrapuntal precedent for the rest of the novel, in the Narrator’s intense experience of two contradictory states at once and in its tracing of emotional and intellectual lapses, inconstancies, alternations, and mutations. “Les Intermittences” becomes a focal point of motif and energy for the Narrator and his creator, offering us a possibly privileged, though not necessarily cleanly paradigmatic, glimpse at Proust’s double-helix thematics.

A Note on Texts and Translations

For quotations in English from Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, I have relied on the most recent translation, released in Britain in late 2002 by Allen Lane, an imprint of Penguin. This translation in six volumes under the general editorship of Christopher Prendergast was produced with a different translator for each of the seven books that make up the *Recherche* and is based primarily on the 1987 Pléiade edition by Jean-Yves Tadié. For quotations from the French, I have used a one-volume version of the 1987 Pléiade.

General readers in English have known Proust's work as *Remembrance of Things Past*, as translated by C. K. Scott Moncrieff (the last volume translated by Stephen Hudson, picking up where Scott Moncrieff left off when he died). This title, melodiously but inaccurately, was drawn from the famous Shakespeare sonnet ("When to the sessions of sweet silent thought / I summon up remembrance of things past [. . .]"). As Prendergast notes in his "General Editor's Preface" to the Penguin edition, Proust himself did not approve of Scott Moncrieff's choice of title.

Scott Moncrieff worked from the original Gallimard edition of Proust's novel, which was riddled with errors and misjudgments. In 1981 Terence Kilmartin produced what he called a reworking of Scott Moncrieff's translation of the first six books of the *Recherche*, which was published along with the seventh book in a translation by Andreas Mayor. This edition, published by Random House, was based on the 1954 Pléiade edition, considered definitive until Tadié's 1987 version. A later revision of the Moncrieff-Kilmartin version by D. J. Enright was released from 1992–1993 by Modern Library.

Where pertinent, I have compared the translation of key phrases and passages in Penguin edition with that in the Moncrieff-Kilmartin version, which while stilted and

sometimes dated can in some instances be more musical than the later translation. My citations for quotations in English, unless otherwise indicated, use the Penguin edition titles. I refer to the overall work, after the initial reference, by the shorthand title the *Search*, from the Penguin's *In Search of Lost Time*, which is in fact the accurate one. I have also referred to the section on which this paper concentrates, perhaps somewhat inconsistently, by its French name, "Les Intermittences," largely because, as I will attempt to explain, there is no adequate English equivalent. Please note that I have retained British spellings and punctuation as they appear in both the Moncrieff-Kilmartin and Penguin editions.

For ease of reference, here are the French titles, the Scott Moncrieff-Kilmartin titles, and the Penguin titles:

<i>À la recherche du temps perdu</i>	<i>Remembrance of Things Past</i>	<i>In Search of Lost Time</i>
<i>Du côté de chez Swann</i>	<i>Swann's Way</i>	<i>The Way by Swann's</i>
<i>À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs</i>	<i>Within a Budding Grove</i>	<i>In the Shadow of Young Girls in Flower*</i>
<i>Le Côté de Guermantes</i>	<i>The Guermantes Way</i>	<i>The Guermantes Way</i>
<i>Sodome et Gomorrhe</i>	<i>Cities of the Plain</i>	<i>Sodom and Gomorrah</i>
<i>La Prisonnière</i>	<i>The Captive</i>	<i>The Prisoner</i>
<i>Albertine disparue</i> (also: <i>La Fugitive</i>) **	<i>The Fugitive</i>	<i>The Fugitive</i>
<i>Le Temps retrouvé</i>	<i>Time Regained</i>	<i>Finding Time Again</i>

*Prendergast notes that the volume's translator, James Grieve, preferred *A Rosebud Garden of Girls* or *A Rose-Garden of Girls*.

**Proust's original title was *La Fugitive*, but the first Gallimard edition used *Albertine disparue* because Rabindranath Tagore published his own *La Fugitive* in France in 1922. Scott Moncrieff's title for this volume was *The Sweet Cheat Gone*, rejected by Kilmartin and never seen since.

Introduction

The section called “Les Intermittences du coeur” occurs about halfway through the huge opus of *In Search of Lost Time* and about 150 pages into the 500-some pages of *Sodom and Gomorrah*. That volume opens with the Narrator’s observation of the sexual encounter between Charlus and Jupien, introducing the theme of homosexuality, or, as the subtitle for Part I of the volume has it, of “the men-women, descendants of those inhabitants of Sodom who were spared by the fire from heaven.” In “Les Intermittences,” the Narrator confronts through the workings of involuntary memory the stark reality of the loss of his grandmother, a year after her actual death, and thus undergoes a sort of rite of passage. It is a clearly demarcated set-piece, the complement to the section of *The Guermantes Way* that recounts the illness and death of the grandmother some 400 pages earlier. Roger Shattuck refers to both sections as a “double incident” that grounds the narrative (39). Samuel Beckett, in his marvelously concise book on Proust from 1931, considers “Les Intermittences” “perhaps the greatest passage that Proust ever wrote” (*Proust* 25).

In Search of Lost Time glides in, out, and through perspectives. It gazes at internal as well as external states, from deep within the consciousness and from deep within the entanglements of the salons and the aristocracy, and it embraces great spans of society and of time from a point seemingly high up in the cosmic ether. It also manages to evade attempts to align its vision along any strict internal-external lines or dualities, though it also makes these attempts almost irresistible and renders its admirers and scholars nearly unable to discuss it except in these terms.

“Les Intermittences” generates numerous essential questions that the *Search* as an entirety entertains, engages, develops—indeed, cannot resist. In its delineation of the

Narrator's intense experience of two contradictory states at once, it sets a contrapuntal precedent for the rest of the novel, becoming a focal point of motif and energy. It offers us a possibly privileged, though not necessarily cleanly paradigmatic, glimpse at Proust's double-helix thematics. The questions we ask about "Les Intermittences" and its relation to the whole are questions that apply to the relation of any and all parts with the whole as well as the whole's relation with itself. The movements of the section from aridity to repossession to loss to provisional possibility, from absence to presence to a sense of the one embedded in the other, both echo and encapsulate the larger movements of the *Search*. "Les Intermittences" thus offers us a way into a work that so often threatens to overwhelm and mesmerize—which, perhaps, is exactly what its author wanted it to do.

Definitions and Translations

Roger Shattuck has called the idea of "intermittences" the "guiding principle" of the *Search* (97). "Les Intermittences du coeur" was in fact the title Proust gave to an early version of the novel, a projected work in two volumes, *Le Temps perdu* and *Le Temps retrouvé*.¹ His own reading of his provisional title is telling. In an October 1912 letter, he noted that the phrase "alludes to a physical malady in the moral world" (qtd. in Compagnon 1226). Physical and moral dimensions, the literal and the figurative, are seen as inseparable.

Intermittence, like *intermission*, derives from the Latin verb to interrupt (*intermittere*) and is generally defined in both French and English as a descriptive noun: the nature of that which is intermittent, which ceases and begins again, or which alternates between functioning and not functioning, whose action is discontinuous or irregular. This is only a beginning. Proust uses the term in the plural, making a "nature of that which" definition too

vague and too passive. The plural implies, almost paradoxically, successive interruptions, repeated discontinuities. *Intermittences* define the behavior of the human heart—and also of this particular human’s heart. The term is literal and medical, describing what seem to be symptoms of arrhythmia in the Narrator, as well as figurative and psychological. The density of bodily experience, though erased eventually by the passage of time, is not to be denied. What we hold within our bodies and what our seemingly fleeting sensations grasp constitute a form of knowledge that, for large chunks of our lives, we do not know we know. If something cannot be articulated, do we know it? This is one of Proust’s persistent questions.

While working on *Sodom and Gomorrah*, Proust consulted Maeterlinck’s *The Intelligence of Flowers*. In an essay called “Immortality” included in this collection, Maeterlinck writes of the heart, “On would say that the functions of this organ, by which we taste life and bring it into ourselves, are intermittent, and that the presence of our self, except when we suffer, is only a perpetual series of departures and returns” (qtd. in Compagnon, 1432; my translation). Certainly, Proust understood and used the notion of intermittence in a similar way, extending it to refer to memory, the heart of our psychological and moral functioning, and, more specifically, in the case of the section titled with the term, to the work of mourning. The notion of intermittences seems to have predated involuntary memory as a central thematic concept (Compagnon 1226), that is, if we concede that involuntary memory *is* a central concept, which critics such as Gilles Deleuze have found debatable.

Proust’s use of *intermittence* gives us a sense of memory, selves, grief, and love as discontinuous; of sensations, perceptions, and recognitions as emerging, then sinking, as rising, fading, and rising again. It points to lapses and resurrections. The philosopher Martha Nussbaum has defined “the heart’s intermittences” as “the alternations between love and its

denial, suffering and denial of suffering, that constitute the most essential and ubiquitous structural feature of the human heart” (498). Walter Benjamin speaks of both remembering and forgetting as processes of weaving, remembering as the woof and forgetting the warf; in the next breath, he also slyly reverses the terms in which we usually think of these actions, by considering that forgetting, which Benjamin places in close conceptual proximity to involuntary memory, weaves a web that remembering unravels: “[T]he day unravels what the night has woven” (“The Image of Proust” 202). He sees cyclical alternation as a kind of intermittence, although we must bear in mind that he is discussing the relation of Proust to his own work at least as much as he is analyzing the text itself. In *Time and Sense*, her study of Proust, Julia Kristeva uses *intermittent* to describe the deeply contradictory sensations leading to the Narrator’s discovery of an intact past self in “Les Intermittences,” sensations that are “at once sufficiently violent and nothing at all, a source of tenderness and effacement, a joy combined with grief and guilt” (181) and can thus touch several points of our existence at once. It is, she writes, an “alternation between love and death that punctuates the narrator’s experience” throughout the *Search* (173). Intermittence might be seen as a pattern of alternation; but in “Les Intermittences,” the Narrator confronts both sides of the pattern at once, in Benjamin’s terms, he finds himself weaving and unraveling reality at the same time. This is a simultaneity that can only be discovered intermittently. The human mind cannot function from day to day with full consciousness of this duality. Because this consciousness is too painful and paralyzing, we are caught up in cycles and spirals of reiterations.

Intermittence thus dictates two major structural elements. The first involves alternation or vacillation: between love and cruelty, or as Julia Kristeva puts it, between

affection and anger (79); between heterosexuality and homosexuality; between desire and emptiness; between knowing and not knowing; between the particular and the universal; between absence and presence. The second element embraces time lags and delays, gaps, even abysses of blankness, misapprehension, indifference, social indulgence, or sexual pursuit.

It is perhaps in a rhythmic sense that the notion of intermittence is most persuasive and pervasive, both within the specific section and throughout the novel as a whole. Gilles Deleuze suggests that it is disappointment and understanding which are intermittent, which alternate with each other throughout to form an overall pattern: “The Search is given a rhythm not simply by the contributions or sediments of memory, but by series of discontinuous disappointments and also by the means employed to overcome them within each series” (26). Roger Shattuck speaks of a “rhythm of delayed revelation” (211). He implies an analogy between the rhythm of intermittences and the rhythms of weather, seasons, tides, currents—those we pass through and those that pass through us, or that we *are* at any given moment—as well a link between intermittence and the body’s pulse, which Proust himself underscores. Intermittence defines perhaps our strongest relation to the time and flux.

Intermittence describes a sequence of variations without prescribing their course or regularity. Correspondingly, since we cannot assume all parts of our character at a particular moment or grasp the full significance of our experience as it occurs, it is wise to recognize and tolerate this temporal aspect of our humanity. To oppose it is folly. As a basic insight into the pulse of life, intermittence means that Marcel gradually learns to bear and reflect upon fluctuations of self and experience through periods of long duration. He speaks occasionally and misleadingly of general laws, but he lives with, and through, vividly alternating particulars. (Shattuck 97)

Underlying the fluctuations of *les intermittences* and forming the prototype for the patterns these fluctuations cumulatively create is the clash and interplay of a steady beat with

cyclically repetitive motifs and with unpredictable shifts and accidents. It is this clash and interplay that keep both the surface and the depths of the *Search* in constant motion and provide one of the work's most vivid sources of amazement, frustration, and critical nourishment.

Does the word *intermittence* work in English? Both translations of the *Search* as well as Proustian commentators and scholars use the English cognate for the French *intermittence* (some use *intermittencies*). It is unwieldy and unresonant. It also appears to be somewhat unavoidable.

Possible alternates include *disruption*, *inconsistency*, *inconstancy*, and, yes, *alternation*. There is Shattuck's implied synonym, *fluctuation*; Malcolm Bowie uses the term *syncopation*. While he does not propose the word as a translation for *intermittence*, it may be one of the more useful options. I have not yet found an English word that does complete justice to Proust's "*les intermittences*."

“Les Intermittences” Under the Microscope

Nothing extraordinary happens immediately.

The Narrator recounts his second arrival at Balbec, reproducing the prattlings of the malapropish hotel manager, who has met him at the station, and going over his own “practical” and not necessarily mutually consistent reasons, beyond health, for returning to Balbec: to be near Mme. Putbus’s maid, whom he wants desperately to meet; to encounter as many women as possible, which his knowledge of the place and his aristocratic connections and invitations promise to make easy; and to rekindle the “illusion” that a new life is beginning—and that the maid really has “inflamed” him (156)—in a landscape that takes him out of his habitual existence. He tells us, too, that none of these goals will be fulfilled.

The hotel manager courteously dismisses the Narrator’s thanks for meeting his train and escorting him to the hotel with, “Oh, don’t mention it! It made me waste only an infinite (for “infinitesimal”) amount of time” (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 157-58). Then the Narrator tells us simply, “We had in any event arrived” (158). The contrast of *infinite* and *infinitesimal*—even more, the substitution of one for the other, making them almost synonymous, virtually contradicting the contrast—gives us in highly condensed form one of the central themes of the novel. The infinite/infinitesimal juxtaposition melds the perspectives of microcosmic and macroscopic, microscopic and telescopic, specific and general, bounded and unbounded, just as the *Search* as a whole does, producing what Walter Benjamin called a sense of “convoluted time” (“Image” 211). It is linked to the final words of *Finding Time Again*: “[I]f enough time was left to me to complete my work, my first concern would be to describe the people in it, even at the risk of making them seem colossal and unnatural creatures, as occupying a place far larger than the very limited one reserved for

them in space, a place in fact almost infinitely extended..." (*Finding Time Again* 358). These people are hugely, preternaturally significant; they are insignificant. Both statements are true.

The famous sentence fragment of the section introduces and summarizes the experience of regaining and losing his grandmother as well as parts of himself. The Moncrieff-Kilmartin translation: "Disruption of my entire being" (*Cities of the Plain* 783). The Penguin version, translated by John Sturrock: "A convulsion of my entire being" (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 158). My translation: "Upheaval of my entire being—" The abruptness and brevity of the fragment combine to express the action of convulsion. A passage that will emphasize the multiplicity of selves and their inability to interact or communicate begins with a reference to the "entire being." This idea of wholeness is one that Proust is about to shatter—another sort of convulsion.

Making a general statement about all the epiphanic moments in the *Search*, Gilles Deleuze uses the term "violence" (15) to describe the way what he calls sensuous signs, or sense-impressions, act upon the Narrator to produce sudden, overwhelming, intense emotion. According to Deleuze, it is this violence that impels the Narrator to search for understanding and truth, to attempt to explain his experience to himself, which is something he, like any other human being, would not be likely to do otherwise. The image of violence seems particularly appropriate to the Narrator's experience in "Les Intermittences." Julia Kristeva, positing from a psychoanalytic perspective that the grandmother here is a stand-in for the mother, discusses "the sensory violence of the mother-child relationship" (240).

The Narrator, feeling ill, leans over carefully to undo his boots. This small, simple action, because it recapitulates an action from the past that occurred in the same spot, unleashes deep emotion and fills him "with an unknown, divine presence" (*Sodom and*

Gomorra 158): that of his grandmother, who has been dead for a year. On the night of his first arrival at Balbec years before, when he'd also felt ill, his grandmother had leaned over him, stayed his hand, and undone his boots and the rest of his clothing herself. Now he recovers her "living reality" in a sweep of "a complete and involuntary memory" (158). Instantaneously, overwhelmed with a desire for his grandmother's love, protection, and reassurance, he understands fully that she is dead. Thus, the living reality and the reality of death coincide. They may indeed be the same phenomenon. This bitter contradiction is itself a source of pain, and in analyzing it, in feeling it, the Narrator sees on the one hand a love, his grandmother's for him, that made him and that love the center of the universe and, on the other, a void where she and her love had been, a nothingness that renders all of it—his grandmother, her love, their relation—meaningless, partly because so easily wiped out, and partly because from the perspective of that nothingness, he and his grandmother are dwarfed, each interchangeable with any other human, strangers who for a brief moment have crossed paths. This contradiction, which Proust states in a series of closely related phrases within the "Intermittences" section ("that contradiction between survival and oblivion" [161]; "the painful synthesis of survival and nothingness" [162]; "that incomprehensible contradiction between memory and nothingness" [170];² in Beckett's paraphrase, "this contradiction between presence and irremediable obliteration" (Beckett 28)), is absolutely central to the *Search* overall.

What is the exact nature of the Narrator's feeling of illness as he leans over to undo his boots, and is it important? He makes only a passing reference to what he feels physically before recounting the overwhelmingly intense and much more significant experience that marks the core of "Les Intermittences." It is worth lingering over for a moment, however. In

the Moncrieff-Kilmartin translation, the Narrator is suffering from “cardiac fatigue” (vol. 2, 783); in the Penguin translation by John Sturrock, he suffers from “an attack of cardiac fatigue” (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 158), the literal rendering of the French “*une crise de fatigue cardiaque*” (*Recherche* 1526). For the next phrase, “*tâchant de dompter ma souffrance*,” the Moncrieff-Kilmartin has “trying to master my pain” and Sturrock has “trying to overcome the pain.” The French phrases point to the physical analogue—probably some arrhythmia, possibly palpitations, or skipped or irregular heartbeats—of the figurative heart’s lapses in love and perception that the section focuses on so relentlessly. They illustrate that overlap of the physical and moral with which Proust first explained the phrase “*les intermittences du coeur*.” They hint too at a quickening of the heart, both in the sense of a hastening toward death and of a stirring of love. In any case, the literal English sounds rather leaden. Although it entails taking more liberty than many translators and scholars would be willing to take, a translation that more clearly indicates the literal-figurative connection and gives a more idiomatically English (perhaps American) spin to “cardiac fatigue” could be in order, something like, “feeling ill from my weak, tired heart’s irregular beating.” The central point is, of course, that the physical heart’s irregularities and the care which the Narrator takes in attempting to calm them multiply and send him reeling.

Proust uses a financial metaphor as the Narrator initially attempts to explain to the emotional experience he has just undergone:

At whatever moment we might happen to examine it, our soul’s sum total has a value that is really only fictional, despite the riches that fill up its balance sheet. Now some assets, now others, are unavailable, and the wealth of the imagination as well as actual wealth must be considered; for me, for example, the ancient name of Guermantes counted for as much as other assets no matter how much more serious—as much as the true memory of my grandmother. (*Recherche* 1527; my translation)

We can never have access to all of ourselves at once; the notion of completeness is again shattered. Expressing our soul's riches in terms of material wealth reinforces, by a kind of reverse metaphorical reasoning, the impossibility of trying to add up or keep track of the immaterial.

Here, death is both material and immaterial. The grandmother's material body is gone. Until this moment, so has a material—that is, a tangible, sensory, physically oriented—sense of both her aliveness and the Narrator's memory of that aliveness, which overlap but are not quite the same thing. The Narrator feels his grandmother's presence on an immaterial, spiritual level, yet the spiritual has been transmuted in this scene to the physical, or, rather, they are temporarily inseparable. The fact of the grandmother's death is momentarily immaterial, for she returns to her grandson, but within almost the same moment, the Narrator recognizes that fact on a deep, physical level, as if he had just received material evidence establishing it, as if that evidence were a kind of physical symptom. The action taking place in the physical world, as well as initially in memory, is one of undressing: a shedding of the outer, worldly, material self. And the Narrator is indeed stripped of that outer reality, of the trappings of the present.

Death presents us with double and sometimes contradictory aspects throughout the novel. Overall, as Malcolm Bowie points out, death exists and does its work both externally and internally, both macrocosmically and microcosmically. It exerts its power over the individual, but it also grows within the individual, as the seed of his own demise and as the potential for cruelty:

Death in Proust's novel, then, has two faces which are monumental, elaborate and inseparable from each other. On the one hand death is a transcendent power, part of an overarching natural design in which the lives of human individuals count for very little; it is visited from without upon the human body and upon consciousness.

But on the other hand, death is immanent in human minds, a power that individuals seek to exercise upon others and, more selectively, upon themselves. (*Proust Among the Stars* 303)

In “Les Intermittences,” the Narrator stares into both these faces of death.

The Narrator experiences a death of the present, including a disappearance, or temporary inaccessibility, of his present self, and recovers not only his grandmother but, in Samuel Beckett’s words, “the lost reality of himself, the reality of his lost self” (27):

Now, just as he who I had suddenly once again become had not existed since that distant evening when I’d arrived at Balbec and my grandmother had undressed me, it was completely natural—as if time ran in separate but parallel sequences, as if the present followed immediately and without interruption upon the distant past—that it was the moment of that first evening long ago to which I now clung, the moment when my grandmother had bent over me, rather than any moment of the actual present day, of which this older self could not in any case be aware. The self who I had been then and who had disappeared so long ago was once more so much a part of me that I seemed to hear again the words spoken just before that moment, though these were no more than an illusion, much like the sounds of a fleeting dream that a rudely-awakened man believes he still hears. (*Recherche* 1527-28; my translation)

Beckett extends the notion of time running in “separate but parallel sequences” into a wonderfully appropriate metaphor of train lines: “his life is switched over to another line” (27). Two “lines” mentioned in this section are calendar time and emotional time, though these are not the only ones Proust considers. Within the moment of recovering a former self—a moment that is stretched and stretched by Proust, as happens so often, so that the momentary approaches, if not the infinite, then an extended, extensive existence—the Narrator cannot effectively “remember” or understand who his present self might be, even as this moment of the present expands.

His suffering over the “contradiction of survival and annihilation” is exacerbated by the memory of his cruelties to his grandmother and by the realization that he can never console her for those cruelties. In particular, he is pained by his reaction to her having had

her photograph taken while they were at Balbec. At the time, he'd thought her childish and coquettish, in wanting to be photographed and in her behavior as she posed, and he had not concealed his impatience from her. The photograph has until now been a painful reminder of these unlikely, disturbing qualities he saw in her, qualities so inconsistent with his sense of who she was. Now, the photograph serves as a reminder of his own unkindness. As Beckett puts it, "[H]e suffers with her whom he had not seen suffer, as though....pain could only be focussed at a distance" (30). A little later, when he discovers the truth behind the taking of the photograph, his sense of his own cruelty and therefore his guilt will be even more profound.

He welcomes the suffering he feels because it provides evidence of his grandmother's existence, once in actual time, now within him, both in his memory, and, as has just happened, in a reawakened, recreated memory that does not feel like memory but like present experience. The suffering counteracts, though it cannot negate, the nothingness that has absorbed her. It keeps the contradiction palpable, but it does not console. It may, however, assuage an element of guilt, allowing the Narrator to take on some of the pain he believes he inflicted on his grandmother. More significantly, it may offer to the Narrator proof that he is alive, and that he too will die. He is beginning to read what death has inscribed within him:

[. . .] I wanted to continue to endure [my suffering], in accordance with its own laws, each time this strange contradiction between survival and oblivion, intersecting within me, returned. I knew, not, certainly, whether I might one day isolate some element of truth in this painful and at present incomprehensible impression, but that, if I were ever able to extract that element of truth, it could only be from this same impression, so particular, so spontaneous, which had been neither traced by my intellect, nor inflected or attenuated by my pusillanimity, but which death itself, the abrupt revelation of death, had hollowed out in me, like a thunderbolt, in accordance with some inhuman, supernatural diagram, like a double and mysterious furrow.
(*Sodom and Gomorrah* 161-62)

The Narrator is fully aware of the overlap of his grandmother's with his own identity; he states clearly that "the dead exist only in us" (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 161). Beckett glosses this, drawing out further complexities, as "the dead are only dead in so far as they continue to exist in the heart of the survivor" (29). Throughout the *Search*, the Narrator learns and learns again that loss and death are always present, always written, within us.

The living reality of his grandmother and the reality of her death have been locked away within the Narrator, inaccessible "in an unknown domain" (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 159), now released by the repetition of the sensory framework in which they were once experienced. It is as if those realities are dipped again in that sensory framework, just as the madeleine was dipped in linden-flower tisane. Deep within his consciousness (or, from a psychoanalytic perspective, within his unconscious), his grandmother has, in a sense, been buried alive. She has endured a living death. Habit and forgetting have helped to close off her burial site. Now her death has been reborn and lives in a different way. She has been released from her crypt and could now be said to be haunting her grandson.³

He has already compared his sense of his grandmother's presence to the fleeting images a dreamer still clings to as he wakes (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 159). The image of this woman enclosed, buried, locked away, inaccessible, lodged in his unconscious, becomes literal in the first of two dreams, which occurs on that first night in the hotel after the intense experience of recovery and loss. The descent into the world of sleep is very clearly described as a descent both into an innermost world and into the land of the dead:

[. . .] as soon as, in order to travel along the arteries of the subterranean city, we have embarked on the dark waves of our own blood, as if on the sixfold meanders of some internal Lethe, tall, solemn forms appear to us, accost us and then go from us, leaving us in tears. (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 162)

Our own bloodstream is a river of forgetfulness; it conducts us to the dead, who are lodged within us. In this case, traveling on the river and reaching the land of the dead cause the Narrator to remember his forgetfulness, so that a second forgetting seems to cancel out the first. The dream also enacts the forgetfulness the Narrator has until now dwelt in, heralding a new phase of inevitable forgetting, which his dream self tries futilely to resist. The use of the verbs *forget* and *remember* (*se rappeler, oublier*) drives the point home, at the same time imparting the confusion and slipperiness of the dream world. As he searches for his grandmother, as he waits for his father to take him to her, he is overcome, in a smaller-scale recapitulation of the initial “upheaval,” by the memory that he has forgotten to write to her. He worries she’ll think he has forgotten her completely. He knows she is confined to a tiny room and no longer even wishes to get out of bed. His father appears, resembling, as Angela Moorjani notes (883), a Virgil-like guide through the underworld. The father does not fulfill this role, though he is vaguely consoling. He will not at first reveal the grandmother’s address, assuring his son that she is taken care of but that it would be too upsetting to see her; then the father promises to leave directions but thinks his son would go in vain, as the nurse would not allow him in. The dream ends with the Narrator insisting that he’ll always live near her, trailing off into a nonsense string of words: “stags, stags, Francis Jammes, fork” (“*cerfs, cerfs, Francis Jammes, fourchette*”).

The nonsense, of course, may be full of sense. *Stags* is thought to refer to a medieval legend of a possibly mythical saint, used by Flaubert in his story *La Légende de saint Julien l’hospitalier* (Compagnon 1434; Moorjani 883).⁴ According to the original legend, a stag prophesies that Julien will kill his parents, which he does unwittingly (Moorjani 883-84; Sturrock, note 123, 535). By atoning for his parricide by aiding strangers, Julien became the

patron saint of travelers (Brewer's 644). Because the dream is believed to have been drawn from several of Proust's own dreams dealing with his dead parents, recorded in a 1908 notebook (Moorjani 883), and because biographers and critics have accepted the Narrator's grandmother as a stand-in for Proust's mother, the elliptical reference to a legend and a story involving parricide is thought to play out both the writer's and his protagonist's guilt. Angela Moorjani, who refers both to Freud and to Melanie Klein's conception of art as reactivation of early loss, guilt, and mourning, suggests that the stags and Francis Jammes—a poet whose work was associated with themes of innocence and who had wanted Proust to cut the Montjouvain episode in *The Way by Swann's*, an episode mixing homosexuality and profanation of a dead parent—"are astonishing instances of both condensation and displacement from the seemingly peripheral to the major themes of parricide and sadism in relation to the mother" (884) and "screen the sadism underlying idealization, and the idealization underlying sadism" (887).⁵ As for *forks*: In an early draft of the *Search*, the sound of a fork hitting a plate set off memory and an aesthetic disquisition, much as in *Finding Time Again* the sound of a spoon against a saucer does (Moorjani 886; Sturrock, note 123, 535). (In that last volume, in which many inconsistencies appear, there remains a trace of these older drafts, where Proust slipped from "spoon" back to "fork." A few pages after hearing the spoon against the plate and realizing that it has brought back the sound of a hammer against a train wheel, the Narrator asks, "Was it no more than a moment of the past?" and, trying to discover the links between sensations of present and past, mentions "the sound of a fork and a hammer" (*Finding Time Again* 180).)

As the Narrator wakes, he has in his mind as well his father's last word from the dream, "Aias," the Greek form of Ajax: "I could no longer understand even why the word

Aias, spoken to me by my father, had at once signified ‘Take care not to catch cold,’ beyond any possible doubt” (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 164). In terms of Proust’s own life, Ajax carries a particular resonance of sadomasochism and parricide, reinforcing psychoanalytical interpretations of the dream. At the urging of *Le Figaro*’s editor Gaston Calmette, Proust wrote a sympathetic article, “Filial Sentiments of a Parricide” (“*Sentiments filiaux d’un parricide*”), about one Henri van Blarenberghe who had killed his mother and then himself. The article, which, as Brassai delicately puts it, “betrays the ambiguity of Proust’s own filial sentiments” (72), appeared in the paper’s 1 February, 1907, edition and was later collected in *Pastiches et mélanges*.⁶ Proust, referring to Sophocles’ *Ajax*, compares van Blarenberghe’s crime to that of the tragic hero, who, enraged that Achilles’ armor is to go to Odysseus, plans to kill the Greek leaders but instead, afflicted by Athena with madness, massacres Greek herds, believing them to be his enemies; he commits suicide when he understands his terrible error. Proust’s original ending for the piece, cut by the editor, referred as well to those other famous parricides, Oedipus and Orestes, noting that these were venerated figures among the ancients (Brassai 73; Compagnon 1434-35).

All this for a single classical reference. Certainly, however, it reveals something about Proust’s preoccupations. In the context of the Narrator’s dream and awakening in “Les Intermittences,” the father’s “Aias” may simply be a warning against self-destructiveness, madness, or guilt. It may be an instance of the dreaming mind’s incredible conciseness, or a slip into a Freudianism of which Proust was apparently not aware; it seems he never read the Viennese doctor (Brassai 73). But if the heart has reasons that the mind does not recognize, perhaps, as Freud noted, a writer’s unconscious knows truths—and tricks—that cannot yet be consciously expressed.

Proust in *Contre Saint-Beuve* famously warned against using biography as a basis for literary criticism. Perhaps, as a writer who created a form that melds, among other genres, autobiography and fiction, he might also recognize that referring the art to the life would be to some degree irresistible. It is interesting that his Narrator, who never shies away from explication and analysis, doesn't bother much with his dream-words in "Les Intermittences." There is always the possibility that Proust was subtly poking fun at his own ideas and methods, or teasing his readers a little.

The dream's central significance lies in its opening up the very problem of the interpretation of signs and symbols. In *Finding Time Again*, the Narrator understands that his task is to translate his "inner book of unknown signs" (187), an image the whole novel has prepared us for. The book begins near the edge of sleep, and throughout, it employs dreams and sleep as a means of entry into truths that the waking intellect can never grasp. Indeed, it is possible to see the entire *Search* as dream, as Edmund Wilson suggests (Wilson 179). Deleuze argues that the Narrator's central activity—or only activity—is learning to read signs and decipher secrets. Here in the dream of the grandmother, we have unknown signs that might be nonsense or might be dense symbols. The Narrator himself does not know how or even whether to read them. The task he will eventually set for himself seems at this point nonsensical, or simply too difficult. He is not yet capable of reading and deciphering the inner book. The odd string of words partakes of the in-between world bordering sleep and waking, becoming his ferry back across Lethe; it is what he finds himself repeating as he comes to the surface of consciousness. It is exactly that half-world the Narrator hopes to expand and illuminate, for he wants to apprehend buried inner truths without overly distorting them with the rational mind of daytime life. He has not yet found a way to

accomplish this. The signs' meaningfulness does not survive the voyage into wakefulness; the ferry turns traitor and fades away. One could also say that Lethe accomplishes its task at least partially on the return trip, by wiping out some of the dream meaning. Or to put it another way: The words hover in the contradiction between survival and annihilation, and illustrate that contradiction. The Narrator describes his descent into sleep this way:

[A]s soon as I came to fall asleep, at that more truthful hour when my eyes were closed to the things without, the world of sleep (on the threshold of which, my intellect and my will, momentarily paralysed, could no longer contend with the cruelty of my genuine impressions) reflected, refracted the painful synthesis of survival and nothingness, in the organic depths, now become translucent, of the mysteriously illuminated viscera. (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 162)

Note, again, the physical/spiritual, material/immaterial synthesis: "organic depths,"

"illuminated viscera."

The role of writing is an element of the dream that should not be overlooked. The dreamer's first regret is that he has not *written* to his grandmother; the dream-father tells him how pleased she was when she heard her grandson was to write a book. Images of what he hasn't done, what he hasn't yet accomplished, and most particularly what he has not yet written haunt the Narrator in various forms throughout the *Search* until he prepares to take on the challenge of writing at the end. In the dream, his failure to write compounds his pain, because of the pain it causes his grandmother. The absence of his written words compounds the absence of the loved one and provides a further spur to his guilt. What he has actually lost reflects another sort of loss, an imaginary loss: the writing that has not yet come into existence. And he has lost his way, both literally in the dream (he cannot find his grandmother, cannot determine her address) and figuratively (he cannot find a path to making art or meaning, which is his situation for most of the *Search*). His dream of becoming a writer is both an intermittent daily presence and an overarching, sustained one.

Fully awake, he shuns the beautiful daylight view of the sea and beach from his hotel window. Not only will his grandmother never again look upon the scene, not only will the scene no longer contain her; the scene is indifferent to his suffering over these facts. He finds himself boxed in, faintly echoing his grandmother's eternal enclosure in death, in her coffin, in the little room of the dream. He turns away from the window to the wall. But the wall also taunts him with his grandmother's absence and her inability to console him ever again. This is the same wall that, on his visit here with his grandmother, they used as a means of communication between their two rooms; he would knock three times when he awakened in the morning, and she would answer to assure him she would be with him soon. Her responding taps meant, You are not alone. Now he is enclosed in his aloneness and in a kind of silence. Proust compares the wall to a musical instrument, first a violin, then a piano, which, aside from reinforcing the literal absence of the grandmother's sounds and the absence of her figurative music of companionship and love, serves as an echo of the Vinteuil sonata for violin and piano, a piece that plays a central role in the book, particularly for Swann and Odette, for whom the "little phrase" has already become a mnemonic for their courtship. The wall is a door that will never be answered, no matter how many times one knocks. The loved one will never be at home again.

The comic element is never far, however. The Narrator relates his wish that God "if there is a Paradise...should let me remain with [my grandmother] for all eternity, which would not be too long for the two of us" (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 165), but the next paragraph wrenches him and us out of eternity and back into the daily round, with, "The manager came to ask me whether I did not want to go down"—that is, to breakfast in the dining room. The manager also brings a note from Albertine, who will very soon replace the grandmother as

the center of the Narrator's emotional attention. The grandmother and the pain her grandson has just endured are on their way to being forgotten, although he will attempt to resist the process.

With his mother's arrival two days later, the Narrator must confront the face of a truer, more penetrating grief than his own. His experience of suffering now allows him to begin to understand that his mother's suffering over *her* mother's loss must necessarily be deeper than his; that his own, by contrast, is "ephemeral."

It seemed to me that I was less unworthy of living beside [my mother], that I would understand her better, now that a whole alien and degrading existence had made way for the resurgence of heart-rending memories that had garlanded and ennobled my soul, like hers, with their crown of thorns. Or so I believed; in reality there is every difference between genuine grief like that of Mama—which literally takes away your life for long periods, sometimes for ever, the moment you have lost the person that you love—and that other grief, ephemeral in spite of everything, as mine was to be, which goes away quickly just as it is late in coming, which we experience only long after the event because in order to feel it we needed to 'understand' that event [. . .].
(*Sodom and Gomorrah* 170)

He is at one remove from this "genuine grief," but that distance also enables him to describe it, as through a screen or filter.

He realizes that in effect his mother has become his grandmother: "[I]t was no longer my mother I saw in front of me, but my grandmother" (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 171). The younger woman has begun to look like her parent, appropriating her mother's treasured belongings and reading and rereading her mother's favorite authors. A metamorphosis has taken place, and it is described in zoological terms, with the larval mother breaking out of a chrysalis to assume her own mother's form, the mature form whose genetic pattern is predetermined. Death gives birth to a new version of the dead, providing a continuity that counterbalances the disjunction it has caused:

[T]he dead man seizes hold of the living one, who becomes his successor in his own likeness, the perpetuator of his interrupted life. Perhaps all that the great grief does which, in a daughter such as Mama was, ensues on the death of her mother, is to break open the chrysalid a little sooner, to hasten the metamorphosis and the appearance of a being that we bear within us and which, but for this crisis, which misses out the intermediate stages and covers long periods at a single bound, would only have supervened more slowly. (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 171)

Interruptions and continuity: two rhythms that are at once contradictory and complementary; intermittence on the large scale. The Narrator's mother has become other, but "other" forms a continuity with the past by replacing it. She has evolved into a self she has always borne within.

Transformation is indeed under way. The Narrator attempts to preserve both his own mourning and his sense of his mother's mourning, staying in his hotel room until his mother persuades him to go out. As he returns from the enforced outing and attempts to hold on to his images of his grandmother, he nevertheless notices the goings-on of the hotel staff on the grounds and in the lobby and describes them as a performance:

I understood very well the attraction this grand hotel might have for certain people. It was arranged like a theatre, and a numerous cast of extras gave life to it all the way up into the flies. Although the guest was only a sort of spectator, he was constantly involved in the spectacle, not even as in those theatres where the actors perform one scene in the auditorium, but as if the spectator's own life were unfolding amidst the sumptuousness of a stage-set. (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 175)

The Narrator even imagines lines from Racine's *Athalie* coming out of the mouths of those he watches and wonders if he is in Balbec's Grand Hotel or the Temple of Solomon.

The theater is the realm of at least temporary transformations. Its energies and its offerings are already diverting the Narrator, drawing him in to the spectacle of society, transforming him into both spectator and actor. The use of third person reinforces a spectator's removal, while hinting at an attempt to resist inevitable involvement and self-observation. The theatrical metaphor is one that Proust employs with enormous flexibility

and deftness throughout the *Search*, particularly in his presentation of aristocratic and upper-middle-class society and the Narrator's relation to it.

The overlapping worlds of the theater and religion are juxtaposed with a behind-the-scenes revelation. As the Narrator contemplates the photograph of his grandmother taken by Saint-Loup and alternately perceives a stranger and a woman to whom he has a clear-cut relation, he hears Françoise's account of the photograph's history. At the time, as we've seen, the Narrator saw his grandmother playing the role of a coquette. Now that theatrical mask is stripped away as he learns how ill his grandmother was, how she wanted to keep all knowledge of her poor health and, as she then believed, her imminent death from her grandson. She managed to assume for the photograph quite a different mask from the one he'd projected on to her; she disguised the evidence of her illness. He learns additionally from the hotel manager that his grandmother had fainting spells there at Balbec, knowledge of which, in a comic twist on social masking, the manager desperately hoped to keep from the other guests. He suggests that he was on the verge of asking her to leave. These revelations from Françoise and the manager make clear that in fact the Narrator has, just as he'd imagined, been staring at a stranger in the photograph of his grandmother, because he did not know the truth behind it.

The next day, once again prompted by his mother, he ventures out onto the beach. He lies in a sheltered area and has another dream of his grandmother, in which she is both dead and not dead, a condition the Narrator tries desperately to puzzle out within the dream, attempting once more to ferret answers out of his father. The Narrator wants to arouse some sign of affection from the dead/living woman. She is both present and absent at once: "Absent from herself, she appeared not to love me, not to know me, perhaps not to see me."

He tells his father, “‘It’s a complete illusion of life. If only we could get your cousin to come who claims that the dead aren’t alive! It’s more than year now since she died yet all in all she’s still alive.’” He wants to know if his father thinks “‘she could die any more?’” (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 180). In the first dream, he has forgotten to write or visit her. Here, it is the other way around; it is the grandmother who does not respond to him.

This dream presents us with degrees of death. It is precisely by degrees that the Narrator has been experiencing his grandmother’s absence since—even before—her actual death. Memory, forgetting, and habit have conspired to produce this effect. The Narrator is now becoming accustomed to the deep fact, as opposed to the superficial fact, which was all he could take in before, of his grandmother’s death. He is growing used to the truth that, as his father tells him at the end of the dream, “‘the dead are the dead’” (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 181). He finds that a few days after the dream, he can contemplate Saint-Loup’s photograph with less pain, seeing in effect two photographs at once: one in which his grandmother looks healthy and happy, and one in which she wears a death mask. The second is that which his mother has seen all along: “[T]his photograph [. . .] seemed to her a photograph not so much of her mother as of the latter’s illness [. . .]” (181). Death is continuous, in the sense that the grandmother continues to die, that she does so in stages. Yet it is also being constantly interrupted, by the habit of daily life, by the forgetting which that entails, by our inability to comprehend death when it actually occurs, by our willingness to coast, as the Narrator has done, on the surface of pleasures and desires until pulled down into the depths. Almost as quickly as it has overtaken him, his mourning is interrupted—by his mother’s urgings, the passage of time, the theater of social life, by Albertine, the temptations of love and the flesh, a craving for beauty and life. Once again, “‘the painful synthesis of survival and nothingness.’”

The final two pages of “Les Intermittences” find the Narrator responding to the sensuous signs of seaside life and dreaming of Albertine and the little band, for *les jeunes filles en fleur* are his sustaining symbols, “the characteristic flora,” of Balbec (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 181). He is drawn back into the world of the living, into its sounds, its music. In imagery blending sight and sound, the Narrator hears the beachfront symphony concert blended with the concert and the vision of the waves.

Albertine’s brief re-appearance close to the end of the section follows, in a subtly flat-footed way, an intensely poetic passage blending manmade and angelic music, the movement of the sea, cathedrals, and gems. Albertine brings bad weather, both external (rain, chill) and internal (her own bad mood). Yet the Narrator is hardly affected. Their meeting is dealt with summarily, though Albertine will insinuate herself more and more, in the next chapter and in the next book. He takes a walk alone. In the intensity and beauty of what he sees—apple trees in full spring flower, the sea and now-vibrant sky as backdrop—he finds a kind of consolation. It is the combined consolation of nature and of art. What he sees partakes of the flux of nature, yet also appears to him as a Japanese print that offers the “effects of a refined artifice” (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 182): “[I]t moved one almost to tears because, however excessive these effects of a refined artifice, you felt that it was natural, that these apple trees were there, in the heart of the countryside, like peasants, on one of the highways of France” (182). The sunlight gives way once more to rain, but the rain only serves to reinforce the beauty of the scene, its role in the natural time-embedded cycle, and thus its fleetingness, permanence, and preciousness. The chapter ends with a starkly simple clause: “it was a day in spring” (183).

In its effulgence and brilliance, the scene offers a potent contrast to the grief the Narrator has just experienced and to the nothingness he has glimpsed. It does not just represent, it *is* the very stuff of survival, in the paradoxical survival-and-nothingness synthesis. A purity and an innocence emanate from the sight of the apple blossoms, even from the suddenness with which the Narrator comes upon that sight, and these counterbalance not just the crude facts of aging and death but also the somewhat sordid sexual adventures of Charlus, with which *Sodom and Gomorrah* began, and the problematic innocence of Albertine, which will plague the Narrator through the rest of *Sodom and Gomorrah* and throughout *The Prisoner*. The apple blossoms are not purely innocent, however. We must remember that central image of the “young girls in flower” and keep in mind the imagery of the pollinating insect and waiting flower with which Proust set up the Jupien-Charlus encounter. The springtime apple trees in bloom, whose flowers await pollination, implicitly pick up these threads. The Narrator’s own desire for happiness and for sexual fulfillment is awakening and will begin to bloom again. He will take up just this theme in the first pages of the next chapter.

As “Les Intermittences” closes (if one dares use such a verb with the *Search* or any part of it; perhaps *fades* would be preferable), the Narrator has already moved away from that older self who reappeared on the first evening of the section. He steps back from the self steeped in grief to become an observer with a broader view, a painter with a broader brush. He is a little more here in this last scene than the spectator he was at the hotel performance of several pages back (though he was hovering on the brink of action even then). He is at once more porous and less present, both more immersed and more removed. There is a sense of an opening of the hand, both in the Narrator’s description of the scene and in the action of the

blossoming trees, the birds, the sun, the rain, the wind. This scene, this “bedazzlement” (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 182), is not willed. The Narrator happens upon it just as he happens to taste the tea-soaked madeleine or to glimpse the steeples of Martinville.

Hinge, Midpoint, Way Station: "Les Intermittences" on the Path to Vocation

In her essay "Death as Editor," Christine Caro discusses, among other issues of completeness and fragmentation, the solution Proust envisioned to the problem that the somewhat arbitrary division of his opus into separate "books" presented (presented, at least, to him):

Resigned to the necessity of fragmenting his 'indivisible' work for publication in 1913, [Proust] counted on the reader to reestablish its unity: 'Si je dois ne pas être lu,' he wrote, 'évidemment j'aime encore mieux que cela paraisse en loques et se recouse ensuite dans l'esprit du lecteur' ('If I am not to be read otherwise, obviously I would rather that it come out in scraps and be sewn back together later on in the mind of the reader'). [. . .] [T]he role of the reader has become what Proust had always imagined it to be: to reconstruct the whole from published fragments, to reestablish what he called *la composition véritable* or *l'oeuvre réelle*, in face of the inevitable inadequacies of the arrested form. (Caro 56; my translation of quotation)

By singling out a section like "Les Intermittences" from the *l'oeuvre réelle* (insofar as we can approach that reality), do we distort that work? Do we risk generalizing the particular instance? Possibly; perhaps inevitably. But it is a distortion that may pay some dividends, and one that in itself reveals the very dilemmas the work confronts.

The *Search* entails a profoundly complex interrelation of the particular and the overarching, of fragment and continuity, of, in Malcolm Bowie's apt phrase, compounds and essences ("Miracle of Miracles"). Proust's narrator seeks the essence of people, places, time, emotions, and sense-experience, or, more exactly, the essence that emanates from the interpenetration of these elements. But his story involves individual people, emotions, and experiences and concocts compounds out of these particularities. Indeed, as Bowie points out, each individual character is himself a compound, a unique alchemical combination of many essences. "Les Intermittences" can reveal certain essences of the entire *Search* while at the same time remaining a very specific, particular event that functions in combination with

other events to create an eventual cumulative effect or set of effects. It is its own compound of various essences and an essence that becomes an ingredient in larger compounds.

An essence or a distillation is not the same as a symbol. It would be a mistake to see “Les Intermittences” as straightforwardly symbolic of the *Search*’s themes, as a representative or synecdochal section that one might in effect substitute for the whole. That would grate against Proust’s efforts. We cannot say that Charlus is representative of male homosexuals or Swann of jealous lovers, even though both of these characters reveal significant aspects exhibited by homosexuals and lovers respectively and even though the Narrator is ever anxious to derive universal laws from the accumulation of what he observes, to infer the general from the specific. The Narrator, however, never stays with the general; he returns again and again to the particular. It is a constant dance, a constant partner switch, or perhaps a continual modulation, constant key changes and shifts in time signature, between the general and the specific, the universal and the particular, the essence and the compound, the broad and the deep, the isolated and the embedded.

Just as in analyzing a musical score we look at the development and resolution of motives or melodies, so in analyzing the *Search* we can examine how Proust prepares us for “Les Intermittences,” how the section prepares us for what follows, and how it points toward resolution and coda, even if, as we shall see, some readers regard these as potentially suspect or unconvincing.

Bedtime Drama

If we return to the beginning of the *Search*, to what the Narrator calls “the theater and drama of my bedtime” (*The Way by Swann’s* 47) (“*le théâtre et le drame de mon coucher*”

[*Recherche* 44)]—and much of the novel can be said to reflect back upon that drama—we find a complex system revolving around issues of loss, including its relation to time. The Narrator as a child is already anticipating two types, or perhaps two gradations, of loss: his mother’s leaving him alone in his bedroom after her normal goodnight kiss, and his mother’s not giving him a goodnight kiss at all on those evenings when company (usually Swann) is in the house. Already, time is folding back on itself, for the Narrator is remembering an anticipation, that is, an image of the future, from the past, and the reader can anticipate at this early point in the novel that loss, its anticipation, and its memory will play a significant role in all the pages that lie ahead.

The child mourns the loss of his mother’s consoling presence in advance. Further, he does whatever he can to postpone the moment of loss: “So that I came to wish this goodnight I loved so much would take place as late as possible, so as to prolong the time of respite in which Mama had not yet come” (*Swann’s* 17). He would like to prolong the moment of the embrace as well but dares not ask for another kiss, since it would annoy his mother and destroy the effect of the first one. He is already attempting to stretch and to contract time in relation to loss and mourning.

As the Narrator recounts it, one version of the bedtime drama takes place each evening, and its developed form—that of the mother not coming, the message through Françoise, the boy’s intercepting his parents, and so on—seems also to occur on at least a semiregular basis, for it is introduced in this way: “[T]hose evenings, when Mama stayed so short a time altogether in my room, were still sweet compared to the ones when there were people for dinner and when, because of that, she did not come up to say goodnight to me. These people were usually limited to M. Swann [. . .]” (*Swann’s* 17). But the story of the

company evenings continues as if only one particular evening were the focus, until, with his mother near him, his wishes granted, the Narrator tells us, “I knew that such a night could not be repeated; that the greatest desire I had in the world, to keep my mother in my room during those sad hours of darkness, was too contrary to the necessities of life and the wishes of others for its fulfillment, granted this night, to be anything other than artificial and exceptional” (*Swann's* 45-46).

The story is the one “luminous panel” (*Swann's* 46) that at this point shines out for the adult Narrator from the murk of the past, and as such resembles so many of our memories, which are cut off from context, from the rest of the past's lived life. We often cannot distinguish between a remembered event that happened more than once, or that may even have happened fairly often, and one that was singular and unique. This haziness not only mimics the action of memory but also sets in motion the interplay of the particular and the general, the unpredictable and the regular, the unrepeatable and the repetitive. The boy treats the event as something both expected and unexpected; he does not seem to know whether or not what has just happened will or can occur again, partly because once his needs are met, he no longer understands, feels, or remembers them. His relation to the future is changed. The future, which comes with relentless regularity, is infinitely far off, and the assuaged self is separate from the anguished self.

[W]hen my anguish was quieted, I no longer understood it; and then tomorrow night was still far away; I told myself I would have time to think what to do, even though that time could not bring me any access of power, since these things did not depend on my will and seemed more avoidable to me only because of the interval that still separated them from me. (*Swann's* 46)

The bedtime drama also sets up the central tension between passivity and agency. The child struggles against his experience of passivity. He knows he should not go to his mother,

he must await her coming to him, or not coming; he knows he must not ask for more of what he wants. The drama might be said to consist of his struggle against the passivity he feels condemned to, the passivity of the child—in this case, a hypersensitive child—in an adult world. Every action that attempts to alter the code, to shake up the routine (the role of habit in our lives is never far off: “it isn’t a question of habit,” his father says), puts him, he believes, at risk, whether it is sending a note to his mother through Françoise on a “company” night or throwing himself at his mother when she comes upstairs to bed. That his mother does come to him, even stays the night with him, is just as much a result of an adult whim—his father’s saying, essentially, Why not?—as a response to the child’s behavior. In “Les Intermittences,” the grandmother comes to the Narrator unbidden, as does the simultaneous knowledge that her going—death as the ultimate leaving—is complete and unalterable. The later scene echoes the boy’s lack of control in the earlier scene and repeats the unlooked-for arrival of the mother figure.

Just as “Les Intermittences” does, the Combray scene deals in imagery of rooms, enclosure, confinement, and entombment, and these images resonate with the child’s and the young man’s sense of passivity and powerlessness. The child, focused on having to stay in his bedroom, away from his mother and grandmother, sees himself exiled and even entombed there, removed from the normal goings-on of life: “Once in my room, I had to stop up all the exits, close the shutters, dig my own grave by undoing my covers, put on the shroud of my nightshirt”; he speaks of “burying” himself in his iron bed and sees himself as a “condemned man” (*Swann’s* 31). In “Les Intermittences,” it is the grandmother who is confined in the “little room” of the Narrator’s dream; she is also confined within his dream or within his unconscious (which may not after all be completely confining, as we shall see

when we look at the other side of the problem of powerlessness). And of course he is confined within the walls of the hotel room, another bedroom that is a setting for a sense of intense loss.

The early scene, in contrast to “Les Intermittences,” reveals an undercurrent of comic exaggeration. (This will be more pronounced in the grandmother’s death, where the comic notes do not detract from, and actually reinforce, the poignancy and suffering.) The child’s extreme image of himself as condemned, buried, enshrouded, has an edge of humor, and he seizes on such drama and imagery with relish, producing in himself, in a phrase of Kristeva’s, “some delightful forms of suffering” (180).

That the boy is at least a part-creator of the drama subtly counteracts his sense of powerlessness. Passivity and powerlessness are balanced in both the Combray goodnight scene and “Les Intermittences” by, in Malcolm Bowie’s phrase, “an unsubduable sense of personal responsibility and intellectual anguish” (*Proust Among the Stars* 289). Even in the early goodnight kiss episode, the child’s guilt, whether anticipated or experienced in the moment, mitigates our sense of his passivity. In “Les Intermittences,” the Narrator’s guilt approaches that of someone who has desired a loved one dead, indicating at least a wish for power over the other person. The question then becomes, Can this “power” work in reverse? Can his consciousness bring her back from the dead? The answer is clearly yes and clearly no.

Yes, his consciousness can resurrect from its own depths a palpable image of this loved person. No, it cannot hold onto her but finds a vast emptiness where she once was. Bowie describes the Narrator’s painful dilemma in these terms:

How can it be that the spontaneous movements of my remembering and forgetting mind have such power over another life? That in dreams or daydreams I can summon

up, in its phenomenal fullness, the sensation of having a living person close at hand, and then wake to find her not simply gone but deserted and allowed to die? (*Proust Among the Stars* 289).

Has his consciousness also created the nothingness? Has it brought that up too from deep within itself? He has resurrected his grandmother *and* her absence. He has some power, not just over her reappearance, but over her disappearance, which may involve psychological guilt but reaches beyond it, to include the constant presence of death within every human consciousness. We travel down, like Orpheus, to recover our dead, but we are already and always looking back, sensing our Eurydice and at the same time sending her back to the land of death. She is there; she is not there and will never be again. As Bowie suggests, death may be simply the most extreme case in which we confront the power of our minds in relation to others, the furthest point of our intense subjectivity (*Proust Among the Stars* 290).

Blanchot, in his chapter on “The Gaze of Orpheus” in *The Space of Literature* and in his own convoluted way, relates this paradoxical double gaze of Orpheus, this double movement of leading the loved one upward without looking upon her and of sending her back into irremediable absence by looking, to the very act of creation. Orpheus’s turning back to look at Eurydice constitutes an essential failure that, combined with the attempt to draw her back into the light, allows for the creation of his song. It is the singer’s choice to look back, that is, to fail at the attempt to keep her, which is the significant act, and the act that binds his song to absence. In this sense, Blanchot’s analysis of Orpheus’s gaze elucidates not just the Narrator’s confronting his grandmother’s presence and absence in “Les Intermittences” and his role in creating her absence and the presence but also the entire *Search*’s insistence on plenitude in the midst of death and absence, on an emptiness that

masks plenitude. Indeed, Blanchot writes of Orpheus's desire for "the plenitude of death" to *live* within his Eurydice (171).⁷

Seeing and Hearing Distance: The Phone Call and the Return Home from Doncières

In Part One of *The Guermantes Way*, two events—and though they are what are normally considered "small" occurrences, they are events in the Proustian scheme—foreshadow and contextualize both the grandmother's death later in the same volume and the Narrator's relation to her as explored in "Les Intermittences." These are, first, the telephone call between the Narrator in Doncières and the grandmother in Paris and, second, his glimpse of her on his return to Paris, precipitated by the phone call, when she is not yet expecting him and does not know he is observing her. Both instances engage the interplay of presence and absence, the working of the senses, the imagery of technology, and the amorphousness of identity.

Distance in space and time, the means to bridge it, the impossibility of bridging it: these issues are the first that strike us in these linked scenes, and they serve to connect these scenes to "Les Intermittences." In Doncières, where he is visiting Saint-Loup, where he has confronted the stereotyped image of manhood that the military affords, and where he has observed the convolutions of Saint-Loup's relation with his mistress, the Narrator is physically distant from his grandmother in Paris. He regards the telephone as the potentially miraculous instrument for bridging that physical distance. His reflections have a comic tone, yet also manage to maintain a very serious edge. Approaching the great theme of loss by focusing on the complications of placing a call and on the wonder-working of this new-fangled technology creates a subtle irony, to which the mythical allusions contribute. The

operators have become Vigilant Virgins, heard but never seen, with the telephone their temple; goddesses who can make people appear out of thin air; guardians of a Hades-like darkness; Danaids condemned to fill never-full vessels of sound;⁸ furies who cut off conversations; “the forever fractious servants of the Mysteries, the shadowy priestesses of the Invisible, so quick to take offence, the Young Ladies of the Telephone!” (*The Guermantes Way* 130).

The list is wonderfully silly, yet there is a sense in which the Narrator and the reader are about to be initiated into a true mystery, that of separation and loss. The prophecy spoken by the oracle of the telephone is that physical, emotional, and cognitive intimacy with another is an illusion. Proust frames the mystery in terms of a contrast between sound and sight. The Narrator anticipates that when he speaks to his grandmother on the phone, her voice will seem to close by but will not be connected to a visible body. Presence and absence are very clearly juxtaposed here. The juxtaposition is itself narratively prophetic, foretelling as it does the interweaving of ultimate separation and resurrection that occurs in “Les Intermittences”:

A real presence, the voice that seems so close—but is in fact miles away! But it is also a foreglimpse of an eternal separation! Many times, as I have listened in this way without seeing the woman who spoke to me from so far, I have felt that the voice was crying out to me from depths from which it would never emerge again, and I have experienced the anxiety which was one day to take hold of me when a voice would return like this (alone and no longer part of a body which I was never to see again) to murmur in my ear words I would dearly like to have kissed as they passed from lips forever turned to dust. (*Guermantes* 131)

The image of kissing words from dead lips is in fact a remarkable metaphor for the work that Proust is undertaking and we as readers are carrying out.

Here, as is true at many points in the *Search*, the world of shades, death, and darkness overlaps and bleeds into paradise, the place of fulfilled dreams and desires, the locus of

unhindered intimacy, perhaps the imagined past, a place both reachable—simply put through a phone call!—and unreachable. The Narrator imagines, before he hears it, his grandmother's voice emerging from the shades, from the world to which she already belongs but has not yet reached: a kind of double projection in time. The voice's very emergence condemns it: Its "presence" on one end of the telephone is a sign of its present and its future absence. The overlap of absence and presence prevents either from being or becoming absolute. This is one of the deeper sources of the mystery into which the Narrator is to be initiated.

After the buildup—the reflections on telephone technology, the Narrator's anticipations—Proust briefly postpones the actual call, with the Narrator noting that the "the miracle did not take place" (*Guermantes* 131) because of all the usual early-telephone difficulties. The use of the term *miracle* reinforces the magical and the quasireligious aspects of the anticipated communication and subtly sets up the reader, while withholding them, for the revelations to come.

Finally reaching his grandmother, the Narrator believes that he is suddenly hearing "her actual voice" (*Guermantes* 131) for the first time, in the same way that when he comes upon her unawares a few pages later, he believes he is seeing the truth of who she is in that moment—an old woman—and in the same way that in "Les Intermittences" he sees the face of his "true grandmother." In each case, it is as if some masking layer, once assumed to be reflective of the truth, is peeled away. Beckett calls this layer Habit, which he defines as "the compromise effected between the individual and his environment (7), and he sees the phone call and the coming upon the grandmother nodding over her book as exemplifying "the pact waived in the interests of the narrator's *via dolorosa*" (13). Beckett notes that what the Narrator hears over the phone "is a grievous voice, its fragility unmitigated and undisguised

by the carefully arranged mask of her features, and this strange real voice is the measure of its owner's suffering" (14-15). It is this suffering, and the depth of the love entwined with it, that the Narrator has not allowed himself to see or hear. Habit, urging him to cling to images frozen in time and memory, has hidden it from him. Habit has also kept his grandmother from full expression of her love. When he hears her voice isolated from every other aspect of her, the masking layers are stripped away, and the frozen images melt and fade.

[. . .] I was aware for the first time how affectionate that voice was; and perhaps it had never been so affectionate, because my grandmother, sensing me to be far away and unhappy, felt that she could allow herself unrestrained expression of the affection which, in accordance with her 'principles' of upbringing, she normally contained and kept hidden. Her voice was sweet, but how sad it was, primarily because of its sweetness, and it was, more than all but a few human voices can ever have been, almost drained clear of every element of harshness, of resistance to others, of selfishness; frail by reason of its delicacy, it seemed constantly likely to become choked, to expire into an unbroken flood of tears, and with it alone beside me, experienced without the mask of her face, I noticed for the first time the way that pain had cracked it in the course of a lifetime. (*Guermantes* 131-32)

Although the Narrator perceives the voice freed of all context, Proust superimposes a few layers of associations and references on that isolation. He contextualizes the isolation, something of a contradiction:

But was it solely the voice, heard in isolation, that created the new impression which tore at my heart? Not at all; it was rather that the isolation of the voice was like a symbol, an evocation, a direct consequence of another isolation, that of my grandmother, separated from me for the first time. (*Guermantes* 132)

And again: "[W]hat the little bell I held to my ear contained was our mutual affection, unencumbered by the conflicting pressures that had daily counteracted it" (132). It's as if Proust were playing chemist, isolating a single molecule from an element, or a single element from solid matter. When the phone line is cut and he and his grandmother can no longer hear each other, Proust brings in the reference to Orpheus:

I felt as though it was already a beloved ghost that I had just allowed to disappear into the world of shadows, and standing there alone in front of the telephone I went on vainly calling: 'Grandmother! Grandmother!' like the abandoned Orpheus repeating the name of his dead wife. (*Guermantes* 133)

When the Narrator surprises his grandmother in Paris, his sense of sight is affected just as his hearing has been in the telephone call. He sees someone who appears to be a stranger, "a crushed old woman whom I did not know" (*Guermantes* 138). It is his grandmother in her true state of aging. She is stripped of the habitual mask his consciousness has placed on her, which is actually a replica of part of himself. As Beckett puts it, "he realises [. . .] that the cherished familiar of his mind, mercifully composed all along the years by the solicitude of habitual memory, exists no longer [. . .]" (15). At the same time, it is as if a semiopaque mask or blindfold falls from his own face. The mask has worked in two directions.

He sees the present truth, momentarily. He is also seeing the future, in which his grandmother dies, leaves him, haunts him, becomes an utter stranger, becomes that nothingness that will pierce him in "Les Intermittences." And he is sensorily and viscerally experiencing the intermittent, start-stop-start nature of his relation to this woman, of her being, and of his own. He glimpses not only the end of his grandmother but the end of their connection (the cutting off of the telephone communication has served a similar purpose) and the death of the self who knew that "cherished familiar of his mind." He too is a stranger in his own house. The familiar self will be resurrected almost immediately, if temporarily and perhaps not quite the same as before. Another pattern of intermittence is revealed in the way in which protective habitual memory functions, then ceases to function, then starts up again.

In this scene Proust employs the metaphor of the photograph and the photographer, that of "the virgin, neutral, disinterested, indifferent vision of photography," "the absolute,

unimpeachable witness,” according to Brassai in his *Proust in the Power of Photography* (121). Indeed, the Narrator asks us to suppose that it is not his eyes but a photographic lens that “sees” the old woman dozing in the chair. He asks us to imagine that he is free for a brief moment from the usual awareness of his own perception, that his eyes function without the normal blinders, like photographic film: “What my eyes did, automatically, in the moment I caught sight of my grandmother, was to take a photograph” (*Guermites* 137). The Narrator’s vision becomes at this moment more deeply human, in that he “sees” beyond reflections and projections and into the heart of nothingness. But it also becomes nonhuman and mechanistic, or, as Brassai calls it, “a-human” (120), which in turn might be thought of as either omnisciently godlike and radiographic or cold, removed, and devoid of human feeling. This doubleness is echoed in the “incomprehensible contradiction between memory and nothingness” in “Les Intermittences.”

We think of a photograph as “freezing” time, but again Proust is playing a double game. What the Narrator “photographs” is not just the effects of time upon his grandmother but the actual rush of time. We might think not of a portrait but a photograph of blurred moving bodies. Yet this body is absolutely, if briefly, in focus. It is the past, not the present, that seems at this moment frozen. He sees his grandmother as a figure within Time:

[. . .] I who had only ever seen her with my soul, always at the same point of the past, through the transparency of contiguous and overlapping memories, suddenly, in our drawing-room which had now become part of a new world, the world of Time, inhabited by the strangers we describe as ‘ageing well’, for the first time and for a mere second, since she vanished almost immediately, I saw, sitting there on the sofa beneath the lamp, red-faced, heavy and vulgar, a crushed old woman whom I did not know. (*Guermites* 138).

I have said that the Narrator, when he comes upon his grandmother in Paris, experiences a death of the self who knew her as unaging. What happens, more precisely, is that at that moment, the moment of taking the photograph, he has no real self at all:

The only part of myself that was present—in that privileged moment which does not last and in which, during the brief space of a return, we suddenly find ourselves able to perceive our own absence—was the witness, the observer, in travelling-coat and hat, the stranger to the house, the photographer who has called to take a photograph of places that will never be seen again. (*Guermantes* 137)

As Beckett glosses it: “[The Narrator] is not there because she does not know that he is there. He is present at his own absence” (15). It is not just a question of seeing into the void, of seeing both the death of the grandmother he thought he knew and her actual death, of seeing her coming absence, their absence to each other, and his eventual indifference to her, which is perhaps the truest death. It is also a question of a bizarre balance—bizarre because its music is discordant, atonal, not tempered and harmonious—between presence and absence, between seeing something and seeing nothing, being something and being nothing. That contradiction between survival and annihilation. This balance-contradiction points to one of the truths of our intermittent lives, a reality dictated by the inconstancies of our hearts and minds: we can only at rare moments be present in the face of absence. We can rarely register absence as such, and even when we do, it is rarely in the present in which that absence transpires, in which, for instance, a loved one dies. As “Les Intermittences” theorizes, we register absence in a profound, complete way only *after* the fact. Loss or absence does seem to lay the groundwork, however, for a distillation or resurrection of what we have lost, though because of the very nature of loss, the resurrection is only partial. Death and absence may in fact provide the spur for artistic creation, but this will not be fully understood until the afternoon party in *Finding Time Again*. The two small scenes of the telephone call and the

return to Paris underscore the role of distance, played out in greater detail in “Les Intermittences.” On some level, these scenes intimate, we are always operating at a distance.

The Narrator’s perception of his own absence in “that privileged moment [. . .] during the brief span of a return,” his stance as “the witness, the observer,” captures something of the essence of the Narrator’s position in relation to his own story. In that perception, we glimpse the Narrator’s retrospective, future-situated, past-oriented self, the self already turned writer. We glimpse, too, Proust’s own position in relation to the material of his own life, which, with the aid of a distance both slight and profound, he could begin to see as story, or as a series of potential photographs. This is not quite the same thing as actual photographs; this is, rather, what the photographer imagines within the frame before taking the actual picture.⁹

Death Scene, The Guermantes Way

The sections recounting the illness and death of the Narrator’s grandmother form a remarkable fabric woven of high social comedy, clear-eyed, even coldly objective scientific observation, and searingly straightforward evocations of the stations on the way to the end of physical life. Malcolm Bowie has noted, in these scenes and throughout the *Search*, “the uneasy co-presence of Proust’s generalising death-haunted textual music and what could be called the social comedy of dying” (*Proust Among the Stars* 309). Walter Benjamin calls Proust’s attitude in the face of death “so spasmodic and harsh an alternation of sarcasm and tenderness” (“Image” 212). He also quotes Jacques Rivière: “Proust approaches experience [. . .] without the slightest tendency to console” (qtd. in Benjamin, “Image” 213).¹⁰

Theatrical metaphors abound in these scenes of the grandmother’s dying. Tragedy and comedy cannot escape each other, and cannot escape the Narrator’s notice. In its bounty

of tragedy and comedy, death reveals some of its generative force. Indeed, death is described as an artist, a sculptor who has altered the dying woman's face beyond recognition (*Guermantes* 322) and who, his work finished, lays her out in the guise of herself as a young girl on a medieval tomb (*Guermantes* 343).

The grandmother's death becomes the reference point for all the other deaths in the rest of the *Search*, and for the very idea of death and its generative powers. Malcolm Bowie notes in his review of Jean-Yves Tadié's recent biography of Proust that "when mother-figures die, the same dense fictional texture associates their going not just with other deaths ancient and modern but with the dark side of the creative imagination and with the deathly practice that literature is in one of its Proustian embodiments" ("Miracle of Miracles"). Bowie, in his study of Proust, calls the grandmother's death an "exemplary one," adding that "the narrator is often to rediscover in himself the strange syncopations that this first disastrous loss had provoked" (*Proust Among the Stars* 279).

The notion of syncopations, already mentioned in terms of defining *intermittences*, is an extremely useful one, especially for understanding the way comedy and tragedy play off each other in the grandmother's death. The pretensions of the "Marquise" of the lavatory in the Champs-Élysées, where the grandmother has a stroke; the visit to Professor E, who pronounces the grandmother fatally ill in almost the same breath in which he complains about the state of his tailcoat for his social call; Françoise's attachment to the social rituals of death; the interlude of comic relief afforded by the visit of the duc de Guermantes: All of this comedy is syncopated against the steady, metronomic progress of the grandmother's descent through pain, weakness, and disorientation and of the Narrator's and his mother's grief. Syncopation applies as well to the description of death in these sections. It is both an

unpredictable event, vaguely situated somewhere in the future, and an almost mechanical force with a regulated, regular schedule (albeit one we can be aware of only retrospectively).¹¹ Death is at one moment a stranger who takes up residence within the self and rapidly becomes an intimate;¹² at another moment it might be some sort of external force—a sculptor, a ravaging beast, an invading army (*Guermantes* 320). The grandmother eventually becomes the beast, or the stranger, herself: “Bent in a semi-circle on the bed, a creature other than my grandmother, a sort of beast who had donned the same hair and nestled among the same bedclothes, lay panting, whimpering, making the blankets heave with its convulsions” (*Guermantes* 334). The double or syncopated nature of the grandmother’s death is a version of the interplay throughout the *Search* of accident and contingency with universal law, as well as an expression of the conflicts and confusions that exist between inner and outer worlds, whose boundaries are hazy and rigid at once.

In death, the grandmother is transformed again, into her younger self, wrinkles and shadows gone. Time runs backward, and she becomes other. “Other,” however, also means, as we have seen, that she becomes her daughter and the daughter becomes the mother. “Other” in this sense denies its own definition; it is a state of being that has always resided within. Her grandson can barely recognize his dead grandmother as the woman he knew, or thought he knew. The phone call from Doncières, the glimpse of the grandmother on the Narrator’s arrival home, and her protracted death might be considered, in terms of 19th-century melodrama, scenes of non-recognition. Recognition, which functions as a means of stilling or ignoring both time and the transformations it effects, assumes a major role in the novel as a whole and in its relation to death and identity moves center stage in *Finding Time Again*.¹³ The Narrator enters the drawing room of the Prince de Guermantes after the series

of revelations in the courtyard and library. He has just recognized, after long years of detours and delays, what he now takes to be his true self and his vocation, but after the lapse of time during which he has been absent from Paris, he initially fails to recognize most of the people in the room:

To 'recognize' somebody, after all, even more, to identify somebody after not being able to recognize them, is to think two contradictory things under a single heading, to admit that what was here, the individual one remembers, no longer exists, and that what is here is a being one did not formerly know; it is to have to think about a mystery almost as disturbing as that of death, of which it is effectively the preface and the herald. (*Finding Time Again* 248)

Before the Narrator becomes entangled in the passion, jealousy, suspicion, indifference, and cruelty that mark his relation with Albertine, in "Les Intermittences" he has a glimpse of the link between love and cruelty, a hint that they may be inseparable. He undergoes an experience that recapitulates both love and indifference. The experience sends the Narrator and the reader back to the grandmother's death and so to the physical and mental cruelties inflicted on her as she died. As Malcolm Bowie points out, "in the episode of the grandmother's death and in that of the narrator's delayed mourning for her, the human organism in its death-throes is presented as undergoing an atrocity" (*Proust Among the Stars* 277). There is the further cruelty of the helplessness of the living and of the arbitrariness of death and its timing; as Bowie writes, "Love and loss are accidents, and no intrusive machinery of cause and effect must be allowed to suggest otherwise. The grandmother was alive, and is now dead. She was close, and is now far away" (*Stars* 277). In "Les Intermittences," she is back again, then she is gone again. The second loss has even greater potency than the first.

Innocence and Profanation

The grandmother and the mother are figures in whom the Narrator sees true innocence and goodness—practically the only such figures in the *Search*. The grandmother, more than the mother, provides the reference point for these virtues, for both Narrator and reader, despite the transformations she undergoes as she dies. Edmund Wilson, who compares the constant shifting of consciousness and values in the *Search* to Einstein's vision of relativity, has suggested that the grandmother might be the "single constant value" in the Proustian system, analogous to the speed of light in Einstein's theory (163). In the grandmother's death, the Narrator experiences the death of some of his own innocence, a rite of passage that for many commentators might justify seeing the *Search* as a form of *bildungsroman*.

The Narrator himself is implicated in the end of innocence, through his own sexual attractions and escapades and through his voyeurism, which is intimately tied to homosexuality. Again, he is both active and passive; he is guilty, he is innocent. His implication, imagined or real, in the loss of his mother's kiss, the loss of his own innocence, and the loss of his grandmother and her love partakes in turn of both agency and powerlessness. This is particularly clear if we regard his "active" role in these losses as at least partially unconscious, and if we look closely at the role of voyeurism. The workings of the unconscious and the effects of his voyeurism are intimately connected to the way art may be constructed (is it created or discovered?) and to the *Search's* reliance on detours and delays.

Based on evidence from Proust's notebooks and letters and on his 1907 article on van Blarenberghe's parricide/suicide, "Les Intermittences" has been seen, as already noted in discussion of the section's two dreams, as a working out of murderous impulses, guilt, and

desire for the mother. The mother figure has become the grandmother. Indeed, in her discussion of this “pivotal episode,” Julia Kristeva refers to the central memory as one of the “(grand)mother’s death” (see 178-181). Many accept the section, based on the same persuasive evidence, as directly related to the death of Proust’s mother in December 1905 and the writer’s own guilt, remorse, and deep mourning (Kristeva 177, 178-181; Compagnon 11226-1233, 1434-35). In light of the whole of *Sodom and Gomorrah* and of the *Search* overall, the Narrator’s joy and despair in relation to his dead grandmother in “Les Intermittences” may stem from guilt not only over his involvement in society-life frivolities and the “forgetting” that the social scene entails—a forgetting akin, as the dreams suggest, to murder—but also from his fascination with inversion, or homosexuality.¹⁴ At the beginning of *Sodom and Gomorrah*, the Narrator watches Charlus and Jupien, the decidedly uninnocent, “court” each other and overhears their sexual encounter; in “Les Intermittences,” he confronts the purity of his grandmother, whom in a sense his interests and his observations have profaned. He might also be said to have profaned his grandmother by his assumptions about her reasons for having her photograph taken by Saint-Loup; he assumed a certain level of sexual vanity and overreaching in the old woman’s decision. Kristeva regards the very embedding of “Les Intermittences” in *Sodom and Gomorrah* as a profanation of the (grand)mother. She sees the Narrator’s focus on the grandmother’s illness and death in *The Guermantes Way* as atonement for the pleasures of the social scene in which he has been indulging, with the “note of deep regret” (179) sounding more and more intensely as the *Search* continues in *Sodom and Gomorrah*.¹⁵ The feminine manner of Charlus himself, when he is introduced to Mme. Verdurin later in the book, is described as a “profanation,” and Proust suggests the possibility that all sons somehow bear a profanation of their mother

within them: “Can we in any case entirely separate M. de Charlus’s appearance from the fact that, sons not always taking after their fathers, even if they are not invertés and go in pursuit of women, they may consummate the profanation of their mothers in their faces?” (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 306).

Profanation in “Les Intermittences” is often linked to the scene in *Swann’s Way* in which the young Narrator observes Mlle. Vinteuil and her lesbian lover profane Mlle. Vinteuil’s dead father (Kristeva 180; Bataille 56-59; Brassai 69-70). As the Narrator spies on the daughter in mourning (and he gives himself every rationale for remaining rooted to the spot; if he left, she would hear the rustling of the bushes, and so on), he remembers his mother speaking of the remorse the daughter must now feel over having sent her father to his grave. He witnesses the daughter moving her father’s portrait to a table near the couch, the arrival of her friend, their amorous by-play, Mlle. Vinteuil’s attempts at hesitation and restraint, their kisses, chases, tumbings onto the couch. The daughter points out the portrait as if she did not know why it was there, clearly wanting her friend to notice it, prompting that woman to condemn him as bothersome, whiny, an “ugly old monkey” (*The Way by Swann’s* 163). The father is thus present at his own absence. Mlle. Vinteuil offers her forehead to her friend to kiss—“as a daughter might have done, [. . .] robbing M. Vinteuil, even in his grave, of his fatherhood” (163). Finally, the friend whispers something she’d like to do to the father’s picture; it comes out that she wants to spit on it. Here the curtain almost literally falls; Mlle. Vinteuil closes the shutters and the window, and the Narrator makes his escape.

The Narrator tells us that it is from the impression of this incident that “there emerged, well after, the idea which I formed of sadism” (*Swann’s* 160). (The “well after” is yet another indication of the time lags and delays in feeling and understanding that fall under

the rubric of “intermittence.”) This idea of sadism encompasses virtue as well as cruelty, the virtue being the soil in which the cruelty can grow, for profanation or sacrilege makes no sense if there is nothing taken as sacred in the first place. This is true not only for Mlle. Vinteuil. It turns out that it is her lover who “resurrects” Vinteuil’s last composition and prepares the score for the glorious Septet. Thus, death and loss sow the seeds of resurrection. Cruelty—which in this scene the Narrator clearly identifies as “indifference to the sufferings one causes” (*Swann’s* 166)—and love cannot be teased apart.¹⁶

Whether the intimate connection between love and cruelty is a universal law or the way that the Narrator needs to frame his own experience is a troubling question. The relation of universal laws to the individual case and the relation of the Narrator’s psychological needs to his generalizing reflections are kept purposively fluid (and have prompted seemingly endless quantities of commentary). Nevertheless, his experience in “Les Intermittences,” along with his later attempts to spy on Albertine in her suspected lesbian encounters, resonate richly with this early scene. The Narrator’s voyeurism at Montjouvain is linked not only with the scene that opens *Sodom and Gomorrah* but with “Les Intermittences”: the portrait of his grandmother is there to passively accuse him of indifference; her presence is there in the bedroom with him, watching.

Isolation and Context

Resonances, reiterations, and repercussions that operate across the *Search* argue for a kind of continuity. Yet as the pages accumulate, as the Narrator moves from one episode or phase to the next, he does not seem to accumulate knowledge or wisdom in ways he can apply.

Georges Poulet has argued that temporality and chronology do not hold much sway, that Proust's images are localized in space, lining up side by side but unconnected (see Poulet; Shattuck 208-209). The high and low points of vision and intense feeling appear and disappear, but they also assume, in relation to their supposed fleetingness, enormous spatial and mental proportions. There are the great gaps between these points; there are, on many different levels starting with the individual sentence, delays and detours. One might even say that the *Search* is one enormous detour, recalling Freud's "ever more complicated detours" and "circuitous paths" that we seem to take while pursuing the ultimate aim of death (*Beyond the Pleasure Principle* 46), or, in Adam Phillips's wonderful gloss of Freud's perspective: "The life story was, in part, the ways in which a person avoided having a life story. How we escape from our lives is our life; and how our lives tend to resist our stories about them was what interested Freud" (*Darwin's Worms* 83).¹⁷

Ultimately, the question is not whether the *Search* is a series of isolated moments or is a continuous chronology. The work must be both. What matters is how discontinuity and continuity play off each other. "Les Intermittences" reflects and elaborates on this interplay, suggesting some further subtleties of Proustian time.

"Les Intermittences" creates a kind of friction between movement and stillness, between continuous context and isolation, analogous to what the Narrator confronts on a larger scale from beginning to end of the *Search*. Interruption or intermission implies its

opposite and complement: what has been interrupted will continue, the alteration of the once-established rhythm will not last. The Narrator sees the absolute isolation that is death but at the same time sees that it is not quite absolute. Nor is his grandmother's survival within him absolute, for forgetting, habit, and the rush of daily life will begin their work, making him increasingly, if against his will, indifferent to the loved one, recreating her isolation and making them strangers again. And will *that* be absolute? Not if there is a way—and here the author, or the Narrator who has already lived through what he's narrating, steps in—to recreate the scene and the sensations. Which has just been accomplished for us. Death partakes of isolation, yes, but it has its own form of survival. It is always immanent, always oxymoronically alive within us. In this sense, it cannot be isolated from our souls or from our daily existence. It is not a separate event, but a never-ceasing process defined by lives ceasing. The end spurs the beginning, or returns us to a beginning, which may have been just as true for Proust as it is for his great work.

Spatially, there are contradictory but somehow not mutually exclusive ways of conceiving of the interruptions and isolation that mark the central experience of "Les Intermittences." The experience is a kind of peak, isolated above the rest of life, or perhaps the balance point at the crest of a wave. The wave will crash or arch down, to be reabsorbed into the ocean waters. The Narrator cannot stay at such a height of understanding, but must begin to go back out into the world, down to the beach, to the Casino, into society, into sexuality, see Albertine, notice the spring leafing out. At the same time, the experience is one of plunging below the surface of habit, down into depths, the depths of grief, nothingness, the unconscious; the inner Lethe. Again, the Narrator must return to the surface.

There are several levels of isolation to be considered. One is the separation of the various selves within the Narrator as he undergoes the experience, which he describes so painstakingly. This isolation is mitigated by the presiding consciousness of the Narrator—yet another self—who has already lived through this, is looking back on it, and can see beyond it, and by the reader's own consciousness of the many selves the Narrator has already been and will be. There is parallel existence (recall Beckett's train tracks; recall the financial account of the soul whose riches are never all accessible at once), but no simultaneous continuity, no communication between the self of that first visit to Balbec and the self who arrived in the same place years later. Or so we are told. In fact, we are reading about both selves within the same sentence, so not only the older Narrator but the author himself must have some kind of experience of both at once. The two selves, separated by years, are made physically contingent. The syntactical becomes the physical.

There is the isolation that defines death and that death entails for both the dead person and the living person left behind in mourning. There is the literal isolation of the Narrator's experience, alone in his hotel room. This is an isolation, as we have seen, that he attempts, ultimately in vain, to hold onto in order to preserve the depth and intensity of his feeling and understanding. Life sweeps him up again, given though he is to reflection and passivity.

There is also narrative isolation. This section is set apart from the surrounding text, just as the other epiphanic moments throughout the *Search* exist somehow apart from the flow of people, events, and emotions around them. "Les Intermittences" is bracketed off in a way that the others are not, giving its relative isolation added weight. And of course, at least superficially unlike the experience of the madeleine or the cobblestones and the moments of

revelation in the Guermantes library, “Les Intermittences” involves not well-being but loss instead of gain.

Isolation is a prerequisite for the epiphanic moments in which the past is suddenly in communication with present and future. Some element of the past must have been locked away in a sealed vessel, forgotten, unavailable to the conscious mind, just as Proust describes the “unknown domain” in “Les Intermittences,” in order for it to be resurrected. Only in this sort of isolation can some bit of the past remain itself. If we are aware of it, our memory works on it and inevitably alters it, integrating it into habitual thought and robbing it of vitality. It must be lost to us to offer any hope of renewal.

[I]f the memory, thanks to forgetfulness, has not been able to make a single connection, to throw up a single link between it and the present moment, if it has stayed in its place, at its date, if it has kept its distance, its isolation in the depths of a valley or at the very peak of a summit, it suddenly makes us breathe a new air, new precisely because it is an air we have breathed before, this purer air which the poets have tried in vain to make reign in paradise and which could not provide this profound feeling of renewal if it had not already been breathed, for the only true paradise is a paradise that we have lost. (*Finding Time Again* 178-79)

But what happens once that lost element of the past resurfaces and comes into contact with the rest of our lives (in all senses of the phrase), once the connection is made? Once it has left the sealed-off, unreachable domain, once it has become an element of something else, of the experience of all time, once it has participated in the momentary synthesis of survival and nothingness, mustn't it also be altered, besides causing alteration in the being who has the experience? If he experiences “the essence of things” (*Finding Time Again* 179), which are by definition unravaged, are these now altered by their exposure to the air of consciousness? It would seem that just as an idealized place, an innocently venerated name, or a lover breeds disappointment as soon as experienced or possessed in the Proustian world, so would the sought-for essence be tainted or changed. On the one hand, the Narrator seeks

to isolate the essence of things, as a chemist would in a lab. On the other, he seeks to embed essences, in his consciousness and in his art. The dead, like the grandmother, may be resurrected and may be locked away again in death. But perhaps that containment and isolation can never be as complete as before. Meaning has shifted. The only recontainment, precisely because it can embrace both isolation and context, both distance and proximity, is in a book.

The heightened isolated moments from the madeleine to the Guermites' afternoon party, moments which Roger Shattuck notes may be labeled interchangeably as involuntary memory, *moments bienheureux*, reminiscences, or resurrections (110), have usually been called extratemporal, following Proust himself in the last volume. The Narrator, after his revelations in the Guermites courtyard and library, seeks to understand the real source of the happiness they've granted him:

And I began to divine this cause as I compared these varied impressions of well-being with each other, all of which, the sound of spoon on the plate, the uneven flagstones, the taste of the madeleine, had something in common, which I was experiencing in the present moment and at the same time in a moment far away, so that the past was made to encroach upon the present and make me uncertain about which of the two I was in; the truth was that the being within who was enjoying this impression was enjoying it because of something shared between a day in the past and the present moment, something extratemporal, and this being appeared only when, through one of these moments of identity between the present and the past, it was able to find itself in the only milieu in which it could live and enjoy the essence of things, that is to say outside of time. (*Finding Time Again* 179)

One page later, the Narrator tells us that in these moments his being has been able “to obtain, to isolate, to immobilize—for the duration of a flash of lightning—the one thing it never apprehends: a little bit of time in its pure state” (*Finding Time Again* 180). This might indicate that in such moments the Narrator is actually up to his eyeballs in time, steeped in it as the madeleine is steeped in tea, just as he glimpses, in the last sentence of the work, the

human beings he will write about: “like giants immersed in the years” (*Finding Time Again* 358). He is experiencing the presence of all time at once.

Time has at least two dimensions in the novel, and it certainly has no single definition. As Deleuze notes, “Time is not a whole, for the simple reason that it is itself the instance that prevents the whole” (161). There is the dimension of flux and flow, the dimension of ceaseless motion; “extratemporal” seems to refer to this. The moments called “extratemporal” are outside the *flow* of time. There is the also dimension of depth, in which all the strata of past, present, and future can be seen at once. This would seem to argue for wholeness, but this dimension is perhaps the most fleeting of all, another sort of fragment. The two dimensions are manifested in the movements of dispersal and of concentration that themselves alternate in the Narrator’s story.

The Narrator is not trying to define time. He is trying to comprehend the experience of it. Neither he nor his author is attempting to construct a systematic philosophy, though many commentators have tried build their own and argue that it is Proust’s. The Narrator constantly adjusts and readjusts his ideas, and these shift just as his many selves shift, just as names and places shift their orientation and meaning within his consciousness and ours. Ideas (Proust frequently protested his distrust of intellectual constructs) are always being refined in the Narrator’s ongoing self-conversation. They do not stay still long enough for us or for him to pin them down and say, Yes, this is absolutely true. The point of the book the Narrator plans to write is to examine possibilities by recreating them, reliving and rethinking them. If the Narrator’s search, as Deleuze maintains, seeks essences, these may perhaps be considered fixed; but the Narrator’s experience of them, including his experience of time’s essence, as he attempts to reach and understand them is never static. “Temporality is retemporalised

endlessly [. . .],” according to Bowie (*Proust Among the Stars* 65). The *Search* is a constant act of reflective revision, not so much an effort to make things coherent as an attempt to make that effort palpable. Even at the end, when it would be easy for us to assume that the Narrator comprehends his place in time and will ride out his life on a stable set of perceptions, we find no stable notion of time or of truth. Although the Narrator recognizes the “truth” of his vocation, he is not sure it will remain true. He is not sure he can fulfill it. We could argue that we have proof of this truth before us, for the book has been written, we are reading it. But even here, are we willing to state irrefutably that the book by Proust is the book by the Narrator? It is, and it isn’t. There is not an exact match-up. If we think of the Narrator’s projected book as a semitransparent overlay on top of Proust’s achieved book, the outlines are just slightly, very slightly, off.

Malcolm Bowie has expressed this instability and flux, this slippage, beautifully.

Proust’s temporality, he writes,

ordains that past, present and future are opposites rather than simples; that recapitulations of the past are projections into the future too; that synchronicity comprises, and may be broken down into, myriad diachronic sequences; that certain time-effects are intelligible only if spatially extended; that parallel universes may be conflated into a single newly conceived space–time continuum; and that any temporally extended system of differences may collapse into an undifferentiated flux. This is the time of human desire, and the time that Proust’s book inhabits sentence by sentence. It is defiantly non-linear, and runs counter both to the plot of the book, and to much of its ‘theory’. [. . .] Against the pessimism of linear time and its losses, the book provides us—and not just in its ending, but all through and even in its darkest hours—with an optimistic view of time as connection-making and irrepressible potentiality. This time is not a concept, or a connected series of points, or a fixed scale against which geological epochs or human life-spans can be measured. It is a stuff and there for the handling. (*Proust Among the Stars* 63-64)

Bowie also finds the lens of involuntary memory too ordinary and “inert” to be of much use in making sense of the *Search* (*Proust Among the Stars* 65). We cannot understand this book by focusing on the peaks. We must immerse ourselves in the fabric, the “stuff,” of

the sentences and the sequence of sentences. Bowie insists on the sensuous aliveness of the prose itself.¹⁸ He pays careful attention to the ways in which the sentences act out the very movement of the book, in which propositions pass through a consciousness and intersect with direct sense-experience:

Past, present and future are intricately conjoined within sentences, and reconjoined still more intricately during extended narrative sequences. Sentences come to rest upon a recovered sense of propositional fullness and completion, only to have certain of their elements wrested from them and driven into new associative configurations by what follows. The temporality of a narrative which is made from unstable building blocks of this kind is one of continuous scattering and concentrations. (*Proust Among the Stars* 65)

The sentences tell of loss and recapture and loss, and enact these very processes. But they also embody fullness, incarnating a sensuous materiality even when they wield suffering and death, even as they fall away and their meanings, to borrow Bowie's term, scatter.

Perhaps self (or selves) and time (times?) are indistinguishable or at least overlapping. Julia Kristeva suggests that Proust's characters become "giant metaphors" of the sense of time, that each figure as it speaks and acts carries out the work of time, "merges with the narrator's vision, that is, with the experience Proust calls 'style.' There, time does not pass, for the character goes from being 'lost' to being 'regained' through a pure movement of time embodied" (Kristeva 135). The more the Narrator steeped himself and his characters in time by writing, the more all-encompassing his consciousness becomes, until it seems to absorb time itself. We might think of the work as a literal body that absorbs nutrients from the environment and transforms them into its body, which will itself eventually be consumed. It is possible that time is an aspect of the Narrator's consciousness, that it is his obsession; in which case, he is steeped in his own obsessions. But distinctions between inner and outer worlds are, in this book, constantly shifting. They may seem rigid and clear, blurred,

unknowable, or nonexistent at any given moment, so we can never exactly locate time as either internal or external.

Beckett preferred to see Proustian time, particularly in the revelations of the paving stones, the spoon, the napkin, and the book in the last volume, as “obliterated” rather than regained (Beckett 57). But like the Narrator’s dual experience of his dead grandmother’s survival within him and the infinite embrace of nonexistence, this is a temporary obliteration, or perhaps a temporary eternity. It is an intermittent absolute. As soon as he leaves the library and enters the Guermantes’ drawing room, his eternity, or at least one form of it, evaporates. The flow of time, as felt in the relentlessness of aging, reabsorbs him (and he enters it, it must be said, with a certain relish). Proust’s eternities are not outside of time, they are active elements of time. In those moments, it is not time that stops, nor the writer writing in time (and trying to finish in time, before he dies), but the Narrator who stops, who is stopped; who is temporarily isolated in space and time.

“Les Intermittences” may be isolated from the rest of the text, and the Narrator’s experience of his grandmother’s presence and absence may share many qualities with other “peak” moments (though these, as noted tend to be associated with inexplicable and unqualified happiness). That these qualities are shared dilutes the isolation both narratively and psychologically. More significantly, in this intense experience, the Narrator, awake and asleep, is filled with the presence of others: his grandmother, both in her present state of death and in her past state of aliveness; a past self of his own; and a strong sense of otherness. His father appears in both dreams. When his mother arrives at Balbec, he inhabits her grief, realizing at the same time that he can never truly inhabit it. The experience of “Les Intermittences” is the prelude to deeper immersion in society and to involvement with

Albertine, though that relationship turns out to be built upon isolation. The end of “Les Intermittences” finds him, though without human company, very much aware of his relation to the scene around him, the blooming apple trees, the wind, the season.

Within this intense experience, past, present, and future are far from isolated from one another. Their habitual boundaries vanish. They are parallel “lines” that can be seen simultaneously, but there is also a bleeding of past into future into present. The impossible occurs: parallel lines meet. Past, present, and future almost assume selves, who can greet one another, communicate, even embrace, before being wrenched apart again: a reversal of Kristeva’s equation, in which the characters become metaphors for time. Or perhaps: *A Brief Encounter* of time’s aspects. Further: The impossible meeting point must be folded back into the larger movement of the Narrator’s consciousness and of the book’s “long-range patterns of expectation and remembrance” (Bowie, *Proust Among the Stars* 65). Even the isolated moments cannot remain isolated in this sense. The moment is drawn into the larger rhythm.

There is another, perhaps more obvious and more heavily studied type of isolation that requires acknowledgement: personal or psychological isolation. The *Search*, filled with the Narrator’s exhortations to himself to forego friendship in favor of art and with overt and indirect declarations of the ultimate impossibility of human connection, has often been regarded as a work that made “introspection and its attendant solitude the cornerstone of a new aesthetic” (Aciman 1). It also gives us a huge and striking panorama that belies the solitude so assiduously defended. The essential role of loss betrays deep need for and connection with others. The Narrator’s insistence on the artist’s need for solitude finds a counterbalance in the size and heft of the characters that fill so many of the pages. There is a

constant tension between solipsism and a reaching out. The Narrator is often situated high above the goings-on of these people, but he just as often burrows into their hearts.

Creating or discovering context, by creating or discovering connection, whether through overlap, contiguity, or metaphor, is after all one of the central activities of the *Search*. This activity never defeats or denies the isolating tendency. Detours, delays, and intermittence form an essential piece of a structure that allows for both forces to operate, by creating or allowing on the one hand for rupture, distance, and separation and on the other for friction, layering, intermingling, and convergence.

Part and Whole

The exact degree to which an overarching, architectonic plan determined the actual process of Proust's writing and the actual movement of words, the accumulation of pages; the degree to which Proust proceeded from the whole to the parts; the degree to which, to speak in now somewhat outdated electronic-cognitive terms, Proust worked from the top down or from the bottom up; the extent to which the parts of the *Search* add up to a whole: These have been a source of endless fascination for scholars. Gilles Deleuze argues persuasively against any totalizing view promoted by the work, insisting that Proust had no idea of an "antecedent unity of the Search" (116) and that "[w]hen Proust compares his work to a cathedral or to a gown, it is not to identify himself with a Logos as a splendid totality but, on the contrary, to emphasize his right to incompleteness, to seams and patches" (161). Deleuze believes that art is the only possible unifier, and any unity is not a generative principle but an aftereffect of the artwork itself. The writer discovered it, as his reader does, when the book has reached its end. If this is the case, however, and if Proust was aware of the possibility, then it is possible that he sought to produce this effect—sought to discover or produce some kind of unity. Despite the difficulty in disentangling all these threads, Deleuze's great point remains: that a sense of wholeness and unity in an artwork grows out of a given state of fragmentation, and it is a sense that is not derived from idea but from cumulative coherence of style and voice.

Adorno, justifying his own "short commentaries on individual passages" of Proust, argues in a similar vein. The reader of Proust, he writes, "is more in need of an orienting overview than of something that entangles him still more deeply in details—from which the path to the whole is in any case difficult and laborious." He continues: "In Proust, [. . .] the relationship of the whole to the detail is not that of an overall architectonic plan to the

specifics that fill it in: it is against precisely that, against the brutal untruth of a subsuming form forced on him from above, that Proust revolted” (Adorno 174).

Other critics begin from an assumption of overall coherence and antecedent unity. Many have approached the part/whole questions by scrupulously examining the path of the *Search* from conception (which perhaps began as much as words on paper as images or ideas in the mind) to the various forms of the published opus; we might even say from conception to death, if this did not once again confuse the writer and his work. Using the cathedral image to assert what Deleuze denies, Richard Macksey sees the details of the *Search* as always subservient to the higher (literal and figurative) purpose. In considering Proust a “master builder” (Macksey 89), Macksey cites André Maurois in the 1949 *A la recherche de Marcel Proust*, who in turn cites a letter of Proust’s:

And when you speak to me of cathedrals I cannot fail to be moved by the intuition which lets you guess what I have never told anyone and am writing here for the first time; that is that I had wanted to give to each part of my book the title: Porch, Stained Glass of the Apse, etc., to answer in advance the stupid criticism which claims that I lack construction in books whose only merit, as I shall show you, is in the adherence of the smallest parts. (qtd. in Macksey 90).

Given the frequent insistence by the *Search*’s Narrator that his own habits, needs, or desires determine his images of other people and the external world, it is not without foundation that many critics note, as Andrée Aciman does, that Proust applied “an internal mold to anything external” (Aciman 1). If this is the case, then the structure of the *Search* must have the coherence and wholeness of an individual consciousness. But whether consciousness can be considered coherent or whole is one of the central questions the *Search* raises. It seems just as often to come down on the side of the negative answer. Part of the wonderful problem of the *Search* is that we as readers become uncertain whether we are immersed in a book or a consciousness or several consciousnesses, or, simply, impossibly, human consciousness.

Antoine Compagnon in his “Proust Between Two Centuries” compares Proust’s own claims of a premeditated and unified overall design with the Narrator’s comments in *The Prisoner* about the retroactive unity of the work of Wagner and the great 19th-century writers, a unity that the Narrator imagines as occurring as

an afterthought, but not artificial. [. . .] Not artificial, perhaps all the more real for being an afterthought [. . .]. This new-found unity (but this time on the scale of the whole work) is like certain pieces composed independently, born of inspiration, not demanded by the artificial working-out of a plan [. . .].” (*The Prisoner* 144)

The Narrator seems to be arguing at this particular point for a kind of intuitive unity at work in the artist’s unconscious, a unity produced necessarily from a single and unique imagination, and to be pitting intellectual logic against organic growth, as he so often does.¹⁹ These comments, however, follow directly from his labeling the same works incomplete; here he reverses or at least heavily qualifies his previous judgment. Compagnon is careful to note that these pages in *The Prisoner* cannot be reduced to a clear-cut artistic assessment. Like so many of the encompassing statements about art in the *Search*, these may or may not represent what Proust ultimately hoped or planned for his book to attain (and can we say that hopes and plans are equivalent or synonymous?). Compagnon judiciously takes the contradictions and equivocations between anterior and retroactive unity, between the fragment and the whole, between completeness and incompleteness, to be essential to the fabric of the *Search*. He goes further, and attempts to resolve this “crisis.[. . .] of unity” as the inevitable tension between the art of the 19th and the 20th centuries, locating Proust as a writer astride two centuries, “drawing [. . .] energy from that imbalance” (158): “The *Recherche* stands between two centuries, which means that it is the last great organic or vital novel of the XIXth century, and the first great formal and logical novel of the XXth century” (158). Compagnon ends up by aligning himself with Paul de Man, whose ideal reader

“maintains a certain critical vigilance with regard to that promises that are being made” by the text (de Man 65; see also Josopovici in response to de Man):

[. . .] Proust applied another esthetic where detail and whole, unity and diversity are no longer the major terms, an esthetic of infinite intermittences which the law of reminiscence tries to hide in order to make the book appealing to proponents of idealism, vitalism, organicism. Any reading which tries to connect and reduce *La Recherche* to the references and theories by which Proust and the narrator legitimize it is a fallacy, because the novel's substance lies elsewhere, and the critical gap between what it claims to do and what it really does is vastly more important. (Compagnon, “Proust Between Two Centuries” 158-59)

The notion of intermittence and of alternations between, say, the aesthetics of two different time periods seems quite plausible. But how can there be intermittences and alternations and hesitations if there are no “major terms” to alternate and hesitate between? Compagnon has slid out from beneath his own argument.

The *Search* asks constantly about the relation of large to small, general to specific, whole to part, big picture to detail. It questions consistency as well as inconsistency, allowing for both on different scales and at different moments. The issues of isolation and context mirror this questioning, as do the fraught conundrums of selves and subjectivity: the *je* as blank or transparent or full, stable or shifting, as a voice or even a mouth alone like a “character” in one of Beckett's later theater works, or as one of his “unnamables,” or as some strange figure with one foot in the stuff of life and the other in the winds of the cosmos.

Extracting any passage or section from the flow of one of the volumes, and that from the flow of the entire *Search*, is rather like the task the Narrator in “Combray” tells us he has taken on in order to render the complex experience that his younger “I” had of his own consciousness as he read in the garden. The Narrator has had to isolate moments in time, yet this effort is as impossible as extracting sections from a fountain of water. He does it anyway: “[M]y dreams of travel and of love were just moments—which today I artificially

separate as if I were extracting sections of various heights from a shimmering and apparently static jet of water—moments united ineluctably in the single, unstoppable fountain in which all the forces of my life bubbled up” (*Recherche* 77; my translation). Paul de Man, in his famous essay “Reading (Proust),” examines the passage on reading from which this quotation is itself extracted and asks whether or not the passage makes “paradigmatic claims for itself” (58).

In extracting “Les Intermittences” to some degree from its context, I too am attempting to isolate sections of flowing water; I too may be making paradigmatic claims for a single section. By placing the section beneath a microscope, I may be imposing my own ideas of wholeness and of the shape of the *Search* in its entirety onto these thirty pages. I look through the lens of my own subjectivity at that of Proust’s Narrator. Subjectivity is after all one of the central psychological problems that the book confronts. The Narrator constantly finds that his image of another is drawn from within himself, a reflection or projection. He, too, routinely applies the part to the whole, deriving general laws from specific instances. He also keeps revising his conclusions, working at them, modifying, qualifying, with the modifiers and qualifiers of his syntax. There may be no clear victor in the tug of war between his laws, maxims, and universals and the particulars of any experience or observation. But this does not mean that later interpretations, which are not in any case always presented in “universal” terms, may not be more accurate than earlier ones. His branching, arching, spiraling analyses do not all reside on the same plane. Growth is possible, even if only by accumulation. At least, this is one possibility.

Gabriel Josipovici, in his chapter on Proust in his book *On Trust*, makes a similar point:

The way this novel is constructed always leaves open the possibility that today's understanding will itself be overturned by tomorrow's experience. But it is also the case that the pattern is simply binary: an initial misunderstanding leaves Marcel puzzled and confused, but that puzzlement is then resolved by a new episode. [. . .] 'Later I came to understand', in other words, should alert us in this case to the importance Proust places on what is understood. (180)

What can be learned and understood? Whatever that may be, it must be accomplished over and over, not just within the individual's life but also in relation to any understanding that other artists have proposed or gained. Proust writes in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*:

[I]n art there is no such thing as an originator, a precursor (at any rate in the scientific sense of the words): everything being comprised in the individual, every man takes up the continuous attempt of art or of literature on his own account, and for him the works of his predecessors are not, as they are for the scientists, a fund of truth which those who come after may profit by. (*Marcel Proust on Art and Literature* 97)

What does this imply about those of us who come after Proust? Is this a warning about drawing conclusions from his work? Possibly, but that doesn't stop us; it cannot. Rather than attempt, however, to make definitive, substantive statements about what the Narrator has learned by the end of the *Search*, which threaten to resemble the Narrator's own maxims, we might remind ourselves of the role of process. What the Narrator "learns" by the end of the *Search* is that he must (re)discover how and what he may have learned or may still learn. Learning, however, does seem to depend somewhat on an assumption that the Narrator himself has some level of coherence and can be treated as a character (granted, one with multiple selves) in at least some minimally traditional sense. A provisional acceptance of such an assumption may be difficult but necessary, particularly if we as readers are to reach any understanding. The *je* or the self or whatever we are to call the narrating voice(s) of the *Search* is a process, but also more than a process.

First Person(s) Subjective: A New Grammar?

Gene Moore in "The Absent Narrator of Proust's *Recherche*" discusses a *je*, named only twice as "Marcel" in the whole of the *Search*, who has no fixed character or social identity, who is more an absence than a presence:

[W]e are presented with an epic process of epistemological and sociological research. The entire *Recherche* is generated from the narrator's attempt to fill the void of his own absence by reconstructing a personal identity out of bits of memory, and the same absence, in social terms, makes possible the objectivity of the narrator's attempt to uncover and analyze the 'laws' that govern social behavior. (607)

Other critics have analyzed the Narrator in fairly straightforward binary terms. David Ellison cites the Hans-Robert Jauss distinction between the narrator, or remembering I, and Marcel, the remembered I (Ellison 148). Leo Spitzer has divided the central voice similarly into the narrating ego and the experiencing ego (Moore 609). The questions then become, as Ellison has noted, Do the various parts of the Narrator share the same essence, and is there a synthesis of the two egos at the end of the book?

The *Search* is remarkable precisely because it both absorbs and reflects the experiences of fragmentation, abstraction, concentration, transparency, opacity, movement, stasis, passivity, and agency. We as readers easily become caught up in the questions raised by the voice we're listening to as we read: What is mine, can you define me, can I define me, when does it matter, am I you, am I the writer, am I nothing or everything? The *je* may be a cry for knowledge, a core of desire, a desire to be, to understand, which grows out of an intuition that one barely is, that one soon isn't, that one is only marginally coherent.

Postmodern inquiries into the very possibility of selfhood, according to Margaret Gray in her *Postmodern Proust*, "now allow us to read Proustian interiority as the immanence of a fragmented, dispersed postmodern self, passive and voyeuristic, lacking in

depth and motivation” (38). She speaks of the Narrator’s “failure to respond to the illicit scenes he chances upon,” his “dispassionate observations,” his “vague efforts to control what resists interpretation”; she notes the “repeated failure of critical efforts to parse out and label the narrating self” (38-39). Deleuze deals with the difficulty of deciding whether or not to deal with the *je* as a character or a person by arguing that the subjective viewpoint “transcends the individual,” that the artwork itself constitutes that viewpoint and actually transcends subjectivity (110). Pinning down the narrating self is a problem that can lead us as readers astray, sending us off on our own detours. Proust might not object to that.

Proust’s drawn-out and kaleidoscopic presentation of the Narrator as consciousness shifts our assumptions about self and subjectivity. Why, Proust may be asking, should “self” look like what we think it ought to look like? Perhaps our received, habitual ideas here, as in so many other areas of our lives, are too rigid and too abstract. Perhaps we as readers are faced with the same dilemma the Narrator faces in trying to understand, in “Combray,” Giotto’s frescoes, in which Charity does not look charitable. Later in his life (“Later I came to understand”), he tells us, he realizes that Giotto may have understood that virtue rarely looks like we think it should:

When, [sic] later I had the occasion to meet, in the course of my life[. . .] truly saintly embodiments of practical charity, they generally had the cheerful, positive, indifferent and brusque air of a busy surgeon, the sort of face in which one can read no commiseration, no pity in the presence of human suffering, no fear of offending it, the sort which is the ungentle face, the antipathetic and sublime face of true goodness.
(*The Way by Swann’s* 84)

To ask the questions about who or what this consciousness or subjectivity is and attempt to answer them may be a different matter from reading the book and letting the questions play out. Bowie notes about the Narrator:

His questions about personal identity sound strict and soluble when they are formulated in philosophical or psychological terms: is the self one or many, concentrated or dispersed, continuous or fragmented, a rule-governed psycho-physical entity with its own integrative capacities or a side-effect of natural language in daily use? But for all his fluency in the handling of such concepts, the narrator's ruling passion is for images, or for abstractions that have an exposed nerve of imagery running through them. (*Proust Among the Stars* 1-2)

The wonder of images is that they are both literal and figurative, both abstract and concrete.

The pulse of intermittence may aid us here. This Narrator, whoever or whatever he may be or encompass, is largely absent at times. But there is always a rush of presence. It is fleeting, but it is recorded and therefore is not utterly erased. The Narrator cannot respond fully to his grandmother's death at the time it occurs (so he tells us; the prose is actually full of pain as well as macabre humor). He cannot respond at the time to what he sees at Montjouvain. In the last volume, he sees a half-lit row of trees from the train and finds himself indifferent. His paucity of reaction tells him that he will never be a writer. Should we believe him? He assumes a level of loss—loss, or really absence, of feeling, talent, motivation; a loss or absence of self. He assumes an emptiness at his center.

The Narrator, at Montjouvain, at the moment of his grandmother's dying, at the window of the train, encompasses and *is* emptiness. Temporarily. The reaction, a once-resisted, now irresistible interpretation by imagination and emotion, comes later. But it comes. In "Les Intermittences," he is literally filled with emptiness. His dispassion is dispersed, briefly. Something that he did not understand before is borne home to him, not on the level of abstraction, but on the level of the living body. Death is, if only briefly, no longer an abstract concept. It has a palpable presence, which somehow strangely becomes a foundation on which to build, a current on which to glide. "In our daily life," Josipovici writes, "we are too busy, in too much of a hurry, to respond fully to people or places. It takes

death to jolt us out of our abstractions, to make us realise what the person really was in the fullness of their being. Death or art” (*On Trust* 183).

How permanent—and perhaps we must examine our definition of permanence—such responses remain is a slightly different question. What occurs in the living body is immediately subject to erosion and dispersal. As Bowie suggests, “*A la recherche* contains innumerable moments of intense vision that have no cumulative scientific force and pay no ontological dividend” (*Proust Among the Stars* 13). Indeed, Bowie warns against accepting too readily the “ontological *telos*” (5) held out for us in the final volume, in which

the evanescent multitude of the narrator’s previous selves at last finds anchorage; in which every lost object is found; in which the conflicting dispositions of the human individual, and the endless varieties and sub-varieties of human passion, are assigned their place in an inclusive artistic design [. . .]; and in which the narrator, speaking on behalf of all men and women from the vantage-point of that design, can at last affirm as a source of certainty and clear moral vision the very self that had previously been so mobile and scattered. (*Proust Among the Stars* 4)

Not necessarily the case, for in accepting this resolution (Margaret Gray has called it a “‘deus ex machina’ intervention,” “too convenient, too timely” [40]), we deprive ourselves of some of the paradoxical, quirky, wide-ranging wonders of the *Search*. It is possible, writes Bowie, that “Proust was in need of a resonant exit-speech when he promoted involuntary memory to its crowning role, and that this narrator’s celebrated ‘quest’ in fact gives no more than a lightweight intellectual superstructure and an air of righteous striving to a mental adventure of a less than public-spirited kind” (*Proust Among the Stars* 6).

We must also bear in mind that Proust had to find a way to present a consciousness at a loss, without motivation, seeking motivation and self-recognition and denying them, reveling in both of these efforts and reveling in his own delaying tactics. He sought a means to embody delay that would be as accurate and as dramatic as possible. There is something to

be said for the dramatic and narrative necessity of intermittent revelations, for their paying no immediate visible dividends, and for some sense of finality that doesn't quite fit and threatens to be subsumed and rewritten. Proust had to grapple with the relative usefulness or futility of the self to the artistic project, and perhaps he wears this struggle on his sleeve. As Bowie suggests, selfhood in the more traditional, somewhat stable sense might actually hinder the ability to see and to translate that vision.²⁰ But without some semblance of stability at some point, how is one to get it down on the page without being sucked under?

Conclusion

Proust writes at the beginning of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*: “In reality, as soon as each hour of one’s life has died, it embodies itself in some material object, as do the souls of the dead in certain folk-stories, and hides there. There it remains captive, captive for ever, unless we should happen on the object, recognise what lies within, call it by its name, and so set it free” (*Marcel Proust on Art and Literature* 19). Hour becomes soul, and object-sensation becomes captor. The *Search* is an elaborate burial rite; the book itself, both text and set of bound pages, is the “material object” embodying the dead hours, the dead souls. The writer, his narrator, and his reader all “happen” on the object in their different ways, stumbling as over the paving stones in the Guermantes courtyard. The stumbling, the writing, and the reading are the actions that summon the dead. The captive souls and hours are set free. But they also escape us. We try to cram them back into the book, into the object, in order to possess them forever: a largely futile effort. But perhaps not entirely. “Les Intermittences” sets free and at the same time encloses and conceals the rites of burial and the rites of summoning, hinting at how they serve us, sear us, and elude us.

In its confrontation of the meaning of “end”—death and all its associations and transmutations—“Les Intermittences” looks both forward and backward. It looks backward to a beginning that explores the plenitude of loss, then reflects that beginning forward to the close of the book. It looks forward to an ending that promises to cast itself backward, an ending that has been long postponed and may never feel complete; an ending in which the text rushes into its own center in the shadow of death, submits to death and evades death, shattering on contact with its own ending and scattering its bright fragments to resow themselves.

NOTES

¹ Calling it his “primitive title,” Proust gave up “Les Intermittences du Coeur” as an overall title at least partly because of a book coming out called *Le Coeur en désordre*, by Binet-Valmer. Apparently, even as he was warning his publisher of the possible claims of indecency that would greet his own novel, Proust also did not want it compared to another work of Binet-Valmer’s, *Lucien*, which dealt with homosexuality. See Compagnon 1226.

² Compare the Moncrieff-Kilmartin translations of these phrases: “contradiction between survival and annihilation” (vol. 2, 786); “the agonising synthesis of survival and annihilation” (787); “the incomprehensible contradiction between memory and non-existence” (796).

³ Angela Moorjani, in her article “A Cryptanalysis of Proust’s ‘Les Intermittences du coeur,’” delves into all the elaborations and implications of the crypt as container for the dead and of encrypting as internal secret encoding.

⁴ For this connection, both Compagnon and Moorjani cite Liliane Fearn, “Sur un rêve de Marcel,” *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust* 17 (1967, 540-47).

⁵ Gérard Genette seems to take issue with these dream interpretations, arguing that it isn’t the strict symbolism of the dream that is significant; what matters is the “evidence of the split, upon awakening, between [the dream language] and the alert, watchful consciousness” (qtd. in Compagnon 1434, from *Figures III* 199: “*ce qui compte est le ‘témoignage de rupture au réveil, entre [le langage du rêve] et la conscience vigile.*” [my translation]). Genette might even be suggesting that the waking life’s “*conscience vigile*” is a kind of superego (though this would make him both anti-Freudian and Freudian) whose language is separate from that of the dreaming unconscious or id.

William Stewart Bell, in his *Proust's Nocturnal Muse*, is uninterested in literary allusions and psychoanalytic interpretations. He too is more concerned with the fact that the language of the dream is set apart from the language of daily life: "Thus we see, through the use of an invented language, the complete liberation of the world of sleep from the laws that govern the waking world. It is a world freed from logic, unintelligible to the conscious mind" (78). At the risk of an accusation of psychoanalyzing Mr. Bell, I would venture that he seems to be rationalizing his avoidance of interpretation.

⁶ In the *Notebook of 1908 (Carnet de 1908)*, Proust made a notation in the late fall or winter of that year to cite the Flaubert's St. Julien story in the article on van Blarenberghe and to keep the connection in mind: «Saint Julien l'hospitalier *le citer dans van Blarenberghe. S'en souvenir toujours*» (quoted in Compagnon 1434).

⁷ Ann Smock's Introduction to her translation of *The Space of Literature* suggests numerous points of contact between Blanchot and Proust: death's power and generativity; the necessity that the writer both estrange himself from and greet death (8); forgetfulness as spurring thought; the work of art's own distance from itself; and processes that never start and never end ("To see something disappear; again, this is an experience which cannot actually start. Nor, therefore, can it ever come to an end. Such, Blanchot insists, is the literary experience..." (9)). Smock also reports in a footnote Georges Poulet's remark concerning both writers: "[A]ussi, beaucoup plus radicalement encore que Proust, Maurice Blanchot apparaît-il comme l'homme du 'temps perdu'" (3). The footnote gives the straightforward translation: "Thus, much more radically even than Proust, Maurice Blanchot appears as a man of 'lost time'" (3-4), but in the body of her essay, Smock offers an enlighteningly silly

gloss, what she calls a rather free translation: “Blanchot is an even greater waste of time than Proust” (3).

⁸ The Sisyphean image of the Danaids filling sieves from a deep well in Hades seems particularly appropriate to, and perhaps could be taken as a metaphor for, the Narrator’s knowledge. He is always gathering it and attempting to accumulate it, an attempt that may never be completed and one that we may be intended to see as not entirely trustworthy.

⁹ Georges Poulet uses the image of the photograph and the photograph album to express, first, the basic relation of characters to places in the *Search* (Poulet argues that characters only appear linked to sites and landscapes) and, second, the discontinuous progression of characters from one physical setting or narrative-moral framework to another: “[T]he only images of themselves Proustian personages are permitted to offer us are similar to those photographs of the same person, of which our albums are full. Such a person in such an epoch of his life, and then in such another; such a person in the country, in the city, in evening dress, in lounging clothes” (Poulet 110). Proust was inordinately fond of collecting and looking through photos and portraits.

A recent book published in France includes a chapter on Proust and photography, which might make an interesting companion to the Brassai: *Les inventions littéraires de la photographie*, by Jérôme Thélot.

¹⁰ The context and full quote of Rivière are as follows: “After the self-satisfied inwardness of Romanticism Proust came along, determined, as Jacques Rivière puts it, not to give the least credence to the ‘*Sirènes intérieures*.’ ‘Proust approaches experience without the slightest metaphysical interest, without the slightest penchant for construction, without

the slightest tendency to console” (Benjamin, “The Image of Proust” 213). He does not give a source for the Rivière.

¹¹ The Moncrieff-Kilmartin translation for “*cet après-midi où l’emploi de toutes les heures est réglé d’avance*” [*Recherche* 990] is “this afternoon whose time-table, hour by hour, has been settled in advance” (vol. 2, 325). Mark Treharne in the Penguin edition translates the phrase as “the almost inevitable afternoon with its hourly activities prescribed in advance” (*The Guermantes Way* 312).

¹² Compare Moncrieff-Kilmartin:

But it is rare for these grave illnesses, such as that which now at last had struck her full in the face, not to take up residence in a sick person a long time before killing him, during which period they hasten, like a “sociable” neighbour or tenant, to make themselves known to him. A terrible acquaintance, not so much for the sufferings that it causes as for the strange novelty of the terminal restrictions which it imposes upon life. We see ourselves dying, in these cases, not at the actual moment of death but months, sometimes years before, when death has hideously come to dwell in us. We make the acquaintance of the Stranger whom we hear coming and going in our brain. (vol. 2, 327)

with Treharne:

But these serious illnesses, like the one that had at last just struck her full in the face, seldom take up residence in a sick person for long before they kill him, and during this time, like ‘friendly’ neighbours, they are quick to make themselves known to him. It is a terrible acquaintance, less for the suffering involved than for the novel strangeness of the terminal restrictions it imposes on life. We see ourselves dying, in this instance, when death has come to inhabit us as a hideous presence, not at the actual moment of death, but for months, or sometimes years before that. The sick woman makes her acquaintance with this stranger, whose comings and goings she hears in her brain. (*The Guermantes Way* 314)

The original:

Mais il est rare que ces grandes maladies, telles que celle qui venait enfin de la frapper en plein visage, n’élisent pas pendant longtemps domicile chez le malade avant de le tuer, et durant cette période ne se fassent pas assez vite, comme un voisin ou un locataire «liant», connaître de lui. C’est une terrible connaissance, moins par les souffrances qu’elle cause que par l’étrange nouveauté des restrictions définitives qu’elle impose à la vie. On se voit mourir, dans ce cas, non pas à l’instant même de

la mort, mais des mois, quelquefois des années auparavant, depuis qu'elle est hideusement venue habiter chez nous. La malade fait la connaissance de l'étranger qu'elle entend aller et venir dans son cerveau. (Recherche 991)

Treharne has mistranslated the sense of the doubled negative of *il est rare que ces grandes maladies...n'élisent pas* to reverse the sense of the first sentence.

¹³ Roger Shattuck has some pertinent and perceptive general remarks on recognition, misidentifications, and misapprehensions: see his *Proust's Way*, 128-30.

¹⁴ Inversion might be seen as one of the complex interlacings of contradictory impulses and paradoxical tendencies that the *Search* specializes in, a variation on the theme of doubleness. Proust is interested in the doubleness of the "race of men-women," in the presence of the feminine in Charlus and the presence of the masculine in Albertine; in the balance of blurred with clear-cut messages and attractions in sexuality; and in the elaborate role-playing involved in this doubleness. Inversion involves numerous issues of presence and absence as well: on the most obvious level, how the "invert" mixes presence (of her or his "outward" sex and of the opposite one) and absence (of the behavior expected from the apparent gender, of all the outward signs of the gender the homosexual inwardly resembles); how the presence, in Charlus, for example, of female proclivities and characteristics carves out a palpable absence within him; how the absence of Albertine, in the sense of her never being completely possessed, casts a shadow-presence of her possible lovers and of the attendant suspicions and jealousies.

It is interesting to contemplate inversion in the light of Walter Benjamin's image of the two sides of a tapestry. He describes the relation of "the intermittence of author and plot" with "the continuum of memory" this way: "One may even say that the intermittence of author and plot is only the reverse of the continuum of memory, the pattern on the back side

of the tapestry” (“Image” 203). Benjamin, as noted at the outset, also speaks of Proust’s “convoluted time” (“Image” 211); convolution could certainly be applied to inversion.

¹⁵ Kristeva writes: “The second part of *The Guermantes Way* returns incessantly to the illness, pain, and even death pangs of the narrator’s grandmother, as if seeking to undo the quasi-hallucinatory salon life that the young man found both seductive and absurd. Nevertheless, a note of deep regret can already be detected in this volume, and it becomes increasingly clear as *Sodom and Gomorrhah* progresses” (179).

¹⁶ Brassai’s excellent chapter “The Profaned Photograph of Vinteuil” in his *Proust in the Power of Photography* summarizes some of the fascinating autobiographical/fictional intersections in relation to sadomasochism and the photos of M. Vinteuil and the grandmother. See pp. 69-87.

¹⁷ In *The Arcades Project*, Benjamin writes: “I grant that Proust, in the deepest sense, ‘perhaps ranges himself on the side of death’ [source of quote not given]. His cosmos has its sun, perhaps, in death, around which orbit the lived moments, the gathered things. ‘Beyond the pleasure principle’ is probably the best commentary there is on Proust’s works. In order to understand Proust, generally speaking, it is perhaps necessary to begin with the fact that his subject is the obverse side, *le revers*, ‘not so much of the world but of life itself’” (547).

¹⁸ Kristeva, from a different perspective, is also quite responsive to sentence structure, recognizing its “halting quality” and “intermittencies” (279). Chapter 8 of her *Time and Sense* intensively analyzes two sentences from the *Search*, one from the early pages of the novel and the final sentence. See pp. 279-304.

¹⁹ Gabriel Josipovici, reviewing the Tadié biography of Proust, weighs in with this angle on unity and completeness:

I myself wish the editors [of the new Pléiade] had acknowledged that the notion of a perfect text [. . .] fully reflecting its author's intentions, [sic] is a mirage. Valéry was right: books and poems are never finished, only abandoned, and it is our unconscious clinging to a myth of organic unity that makes us think otherwise. ("Neither love nor friendship")

²⁰ According to Bowie, the *Search*, at least at certain points, and particularly in *La Prisonnière*, "presents selfhood as an impediment to creative perception. The only conception of self that can usefully remain in force is that of a discontinuous itinerary, leading towards but never reaching that moment of plenitude at which the entire range of possible world-forms would stand revealed and realised" (*Proust Among the Stars* 19). I have quoted so extensively from Bowie because I find that his insights and responses allow for great flexibility, and because he expresses them with such clarity and charm.

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