THE ROOM OF MEMORY: ON THE PRACTICE OF WRITING OF VIRGINIA WOOLF AND MARCEL PROUST

by

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Abstract

The present thesis, The Room of Memory: On the Practice of Writing of Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust, is an attempt to approach the process of writing in the works of these authors from the perspective of space. Woolf's theoretical essay, A Room of One's Own, allows for a starting point in the definition of the private space: one's room is necessary for writing. Furthermore, different characters from Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu, and Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway and short story "The New Dress," through their effort to construct their own space—a concrete and a spiritual space, at the same time—offer possible keys of interpreting art. This process, of creating art, proves to be complex; it cannot be achieved without pain, struggle, and effort, which must converge to develop, eventually, one's individuality as an artist.

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1. Suffering and Taking One's Time in One's Room

The thesis entitled The Room of Memory: On the Practice of Writing of Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust will elaborate on the process of writing through the concept of the private space as it is presented in some of the works of Woolf and Proust. The theoretical approach to the room is presented in chapter 2 which deals with their critical essays, A Room of One's Own, and, respectively, Contre Sainte-Beuve. The following chapters, from 3 to 6, analyze the concept of the artistic space in several passages from fictional works; from A la recherche du temps perdu, I have selected the scenes: the bedtime in Combray, and Swann's frustration (Du Côté de chez Swann), the foreign room in Balbec, Berma's first performance, and, Madame Swann's salon (A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur); from Woolf's texts, I have chosen Clarissa's preparation of the party (Mrs Dalloway), and the short story "The New Dress".

The main questions I shall try to answer are: what is it **to write**?; is it possible for one **to learn** to write and how?; what is the private **space**?; is there any connection between **space and writing**?

Being Ill

The main idea to be developed in the first chapters of the thesis (2, "Transferring Experience"; 4.1., "Mother and George Sand in the Bedroom"; 4.2, "Grandmother in the Foreign Room") will be that learning cannot be achieved without pain. "A great achievement is the fruit of toil, misery, and, disappointment" (Benjamin 204). The "event" happening in one's life has to inflict sufferance under all the forms I mentioned —frustration, anguish, sadness, desperation—if this "event" is to be "retained" and

transformed into art.

De Botton wrote a whole chapter entitled "How To Suffer Successfully" (see 49-84), where he concludes with the same idea: all Proust's psychological and health problems–starting with the problem of the Jewish mother, the failure of a theatrical career, to asthma, sensitivity and visions of death; all these may be "fructified" in that kind of "experience" which leads to writing. Thus, the comparison between one's life and one's work is not a simple contrast any more. "However brilliant, however wise the work, it seems that the lives of artists can be relied upon to exhibit an extraordinary, incongruous range of turmoil, misery, and, stupidity "(De Botton 50). Sainte-Beuve's thesis, that it is important to be informed about the writer's real life if you want to understand him completely, is discarded by Proust. "Balzac may have been ill-mannered, Stendhal conversationally dull, and Baudelaire obsessive, but why should this color our approach to their works, which suffer from none of the faults of their creators?"(50) asks De Botton. A relationship between one's life and one's work **does** certainly exist. The problem is that this relationship is far more complicated than one may suspect. It is not a question of drawing schematical parallelisms: was the author poor/rich? What was his religion? What kinds of theatre did he frequent?–these are not questions whose answers would speak about the writer's creation. "Whereas his [Proust's] writing was logical, well constructed, often serene, even sagelike, he led a life of appalling physical and psychological suffering" (50). The contradiction between his tormented life and his "well constructed" book is apparent.

The process of suffering may become a work of art. It so happens that both

writers I focus on have "psychological problems" (I cannot generalize without the risk of finding a counter-example , but I think it is at least not unusual to notice that numerous artists may have health problems). In Marcel Proust's case, one may enumerate first of all asthma and insomnia, then problems with his skin and with his stomach. He is sensitive to cold:

> Even in the midsummer, he wears an overcoat and four jumpers if forced to leave the house. At dinner parties, he usually keeps a fur coat on. Nevertheless, people who greet him are surprised to find how cold his hands are. Fearing the effects of smoke, he doesn't allow his room to be properly heated, and keeps himself warm mostly through hot-water bottles and pullovers. (De Botton 58-9)

He also has a manic sensitivity to noise. When some neighbors in his Parisian block of flats redecorate the apartment next to his, he complains that he hears them as *if they were in his bedroom* and concludes that these workers are probably erecting something as "majestic **as the Pyramid of Cheops** which passers-by must be astonished to see between the Printemps and Saint-Augustin" (De Botton 61). [1]

Virginia Woolf "does not give up" either. One of her biographers, Stephen Trombley, gathers information concerning Woolf's maladies and symptoms in an attempt to establish her degree of sanity. She believes that people are laughing at her in and she has a terrible fear of being run down in the street; periodically, she refuses to eat

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[1] The bold letters in quotations are always mine, except when indicated otherwise.

(4-5). Like Marcel Proust, who spent most of the last part of his life in bed, Woolf also spends is bedridden quite often because she suffers incessantly from influenza, she has pneumonia, and, maybe as a result of the two, she has a weak heart (9). The room of *imprisonment*, as a consequence of illnesses, is common to both writers: Woolf experiences life in a private asylum in Twickenham, where she is sent on four occasions (11). Better known are her breakdowns, combined with hallucinations, after her father's death, and, also her attempts to commit suicide, of which the last one ends her life in 1941. Benjamin compares Proust's work to Michelangelo's:

> . . .this malady was destined to have its place in the great work process assigned to it by a furor devoid of desires or regrets. . . . There rose a scaffold like Michelangelo's on which the artist, his head thrown back, painted the Creation on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel: the sickbed on which Marcel Proust consecrates the countless pages which he covered with his handwriting, holding them up in the air, to the creation of his microcosm. (Benjamin 215)

Michelangelo might have gotten ill because of the paint which dropped in his eyes; Proust might have suffered from asthma; Virginia Woolf might have suffered breakdowns: yet, suffering does not open, unconditionally, the way to art. There are countless people who may suffer from atrocious maladies without ever creating a work of art. Why is that?

The malady may make one sensitive; that is, it may make one acknowledge what, in other circumstances, would remain hidden: "a sprain in the ankle quickly teaches us

about the body's weight distribution; hiccups force us to notice and adjust to hitherto unknown aspects of the respiratory system; being jilted by a lover is a perfect introduction to the mechanisms of emotional dependency" (De Botton 65-6).

According to Proust, one has the **chance** to learn something when a difficulty occurs. It may be pain under various manifestations—physical, as a sprained ankle, or psychological, as anguish—but:

> Infirmity alone makes us take more notice and learn, and enables us to analyze processes which we would otherwise know nothing about. A man who falls straight into bed every night, and ceases to live until the moment when he wakes and rises, will surely never dream of making, not necessarily great discoveries, but even minor observations about sleep. He scarcely knows that he is asleep. **A little insomnia is not without its value** in making us appreciate sleep, in throwing a ray of light upon that darkness. (Proust qtd. in De Botton 66)

The suffering is not meaningless. It does have a meaning to be discovered and to be reflected upon.

Going Slowly

Max Unold, one of the Proustian critics, insists on the boredom emanating from A la recherche; Proust succeeds in making a **pointless** story **interesting**:

> "He [Proust] says: 'Imagine dear reader, yesterday I was dunking a cookie in my tea when it occurred to me that as a child I spent some time in the country.' For this he uses eighty pages, and it is so fascinating that you

> think you are no longer the listener but the daydreamer himself." In such stories, "all ordinary dreams turn into pointless stories as soon as one tells them to someone." (Unold qtd. in Benjamin 204)

Is not the transformation of the "boring" and "banal" into the "fascinating" the essence of the process of art creation?

The dunking of the *madeleine* in the tea takes eighty pages. Sleeping and awakening take nine in the very beginning of A la recherche. Virginia Woolf needs a whole book—296 pages—to tell us that Clarissa Dalloway prepares a party. "N'allez pas trop vite" may be a Proustian slogan (De Botton 46). Speed is the quality of newspapers. If one were to transform Mrs. Dalloway into a newspaper article, one would need no more than a paragraph. For example: "This evening, Richard and Clarissa Dalloway have celebrated Mrs. Dalloway's birthday at their house. All the top class were present: Lord X, Sir Y, Lady Z, etc. The party proved to be, as usual, a success." As I shall mention in the chapter "Transferring Experience," the taste for "ceremoniousness" and for "slowing down" is part of the writer's art.

A young diplomat named Harold Nicolson met Marcel Proust at the Ritz on the occasion of the peace conference of 1919. This is what he mentions in his diary:

> A swell affair. Proust is white, unshaven, grubby, slip-faced. He asks me questions. Will I please tell him how the Committees work. I say, "Well, we generally meet at 10.00, there are secretaries behind..." "Mais non, mais non, **vous allez trop vite**. Recommencez. Vous prenez la voiture de la Délégation. Vous descendez au Quai d'Orsay. Vous montez l'escalier.

> Vous entrez dans la salle. Et alors? Précisez, mon cher, précisez." So, I tell him everything. The sham cordiality of it all: the handshakes; the maps; the rustle of papers; the tea in the next room; the macaroons. He listens enthralled, interrupting from time to time—"Mais précisez, mon cher, n'allez pas trop vite." (Nicolson qtd. in De Botton 46)

This taking one's time is not, as it may seem, wasting one's time. It is, on the contrary, regaining one's time. When Virginia Woolf describes for us in 13 pages how Clarissa is interrupted by Peter Walsh while she is mending her dress (see chapter 6.2.1), she does not waste her and the readers' time. She puts the story in the context. The larger, the more detailed, the more complex the context, the more numerous are one's chances to understand and to remember. What is there to remember?

Remembering

Each of the two writers has a room of one's own where one recollects. Proust retires almost completely to his room on boulevard Haussmann, surrounds himself with books, and isolates this space in all the ways possible. Virginia Woolf's room is full of books untidily arranged (Russel 19). Proust writes lying on the bed; Woolf writes at a high table standing. The windows on this floor are double since she is, like Proust, very sensitive to noise from the street. She writes in the morning for two and a half hours very regularly. In these rooms, the two writers recollect their memories. The analogy between one's room and one's ***mental office*** (which I shall present in chapter 3), is evident: the *office* is the condition *sine qua non* of writing; getting the memories stored in this *spiritual* room, and re-considering them in writing, are the two phases which the artistic

process undergoes. The distinction made by Proust, between *mémoire volontaire* and *mémoire involontaire*, becomes, in Benjamin's terms, the distinction *memory-remembrance* (162). The "memory" would be the one connected to the conscious, to the rational. The consciousness' role is to cushion the shock received by the organism. "The function of remembrance, Reik writes, is the protection of **impressions**; memory aims at their disintegration" (Benjamin 160).

The impressions are more powerful and long lasting when events which provoked them do not enter consciousness. "Only that has not been experienced explicitly and consciously, what has not happened to the subject as an experience, can become a component of the *mémoire involontaire"* (160-61). Experience here is used in the sense of what someone lived consciously. The ***mental office*** should contain, in a total disorder, these impressions which were not filtered by consciousness. I say "disorder," because the *mémoire involontaire* manifests itself accidentally; so then, there is no way of putting order into what this memory provides.

Rendering the events of one's life in a conscious manner cannot create art. Proust, in his book, did not render his life "as it actually was", but his **life as it was remembered** by him (202); Virginia Woolf did not reproduce her life as it was in Mrs. Dalloway, but as she remembered it. The life which one lives is limited. It is finite. The life as one remembers it is infinite, boundless, unlimited, because the recaptured moment "is only a key to everything that has happened before it and after it" (Benjamin 202):

> For here the day unravels what the night was woven . When we awake each morning, we hold in our hands, usually weakly and loosely, but a

> few fringes of the tapestry of lived life, as loomed for us by forgetting. However, with our purposeful activity and, even more, our purposive remembering, each day unravels the web and the ornaments of forgetting. This is why Proust finally turned his days into nights, devoting all his hours to undisturbed work in his darkened room with artificial lumination, so that none of those intricate arabesques might escape him. (Benjamin 202)

The writer needs to "evaporate" the day and to transform the day into night. The writer's task is to fight against the rational kind of memory, to save the remembrance–"the Penelope work of recollection" (Benjamin 202). The suffering may give one a chance to perceive life differently. Turning usual things into interesting things is what the writer must do. Suffering and slowing down are possible in the mental office—one's space in a house and one's space in one's mind.

2. Transferring Experience: Learning in the Proustian Text

One of Marcel Proust's main ideas is that becoming a writer means learning; the theme of learning through experience is present everywhere in A la recherche du temps perdu. I shall select two scenes from Du côté de chez Swann, which reveal the trauma involved in learning. The first scene is part of Combray and is often referred to as *la scène du coucher*: the mother cannot (and may not) kiss good night the narrator-child. The second scene belongs to Un amour de Swann: Swann cannot find Odette at the Verdurins' *soirée.* I will focus on the theme of learning, as it encounters desire, *angoisse,* and jealousy.

The resemblance of the two scenes is striking; not only do both situations arise because of the characters' frustration, but there is also the figure of Swann uniting them. Although the presence of Swann is not central in the first scene, he is the one who, by his **unexpected** visit, disrupts the child's ritual of the good night kiss (Kristeva 36). We encounter here a process of learning, as it concerns the narrator, and a process of teaching, as it concerns Swann. In the scene from Combray, Swann *induces* an experience in the child's life. In the second scene, by Swann's own experience with Odette, he serves as a *model* (if I could call it so) for the narrator. What is remarkable in this teaching is the fact that, this time, the object is not a clear discussion where both speakers are aware of what they are debating, as for example Swann and the narrator's talk about Bergotte's works, or about the church of Balbec. Swann teaches involuntarily, without realizing it:

> Some people who are fond of secrets flatter themselves that objects retain

> something of the gaze that has rested on them . . . They believe that monuments and pictures present themselves only beneath the delicate veil which centuries of love and reverence on the part of so many admirers have woven about them. This chimera . . . would change into truth if they related it to the **only reality that is valid for the individuals, namely, the world of his emotions.** (Proust qtd. in Benjamin 188)

Because it is non-intentional teaching, the truth learned by the narrator on this occasion I have chosen to evoke refers to a deeper reality: the reality of emotions. Whether he represents the outsider, the unwilling initiator of the process of learning in the first case; whether he remains a spectator of the child's trauma (or even a false spectator since he does not acknowledge it); or, later he becomes the *actor* in Un amour de Swann,where he *performs* this time his own trauma, Swann does not cease to be the teacher:

> Swann a le rôle d'un initiateur, dans un destin qu'il ne sut pas réaliser pour son compte . . . Swann n'est ici que l'occasion, mais sans cette occasion la série eût été une autre. Et à certains égards, Swann est beaucoup plus. C'est lui qui, dès le début, possède la loi de la série ou le secret de la progression, et en fait confidence au héros dans un "avertissement prophétique." (Deleuze, Proust et les signes 86)

I am going to elaborate in this chapter the idea of Swann as an *initiator*. Swann's love story represents in a *nutshell* the long story of Marcel and Albertine (see Albertine disparue and La Prisonnière). This confession of Swann's on love designates him as an important and analogous character to that of the narrator. The analogy, Swann-narrator,

is quite evident and has been often invoked.[1] The former, and he is not the only one[2], acts as a kind of *double* of the narrator:

> If Swann contains the seeds of the narrator and an image of the narrator's tribulation on the path to Time Regained, the narrator must have been Swann. Swann was always present. Like a desirable father, Swann is the one who always claimed the attention of the mother and the universe; the "guests" were always limited to him. (Kristeva 33)

The particular analogies between these two characters extend to almost all levels – understanding art, loving a woman, being jealous; the difference is the fact that the narrator goes over the stage, where Swann is frozen in his relationship with Odette; in the end, the narrator can become a writer. I will talk about one particular similarity between the two characters, disclosed by the drama which unfolds the two key-scenes: the particular value of experience produced by chance. "According to Proust, it is a matter of chance whether an individual forms an image of himself. Whether he can take hold of his experience. It is by no means inevitable to be dependent on chance in this matter"

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1 As for example in Lettura critica di *Un amore di Swann*, Swann walking around in a night gown (in Swann's dream) would refer exactly to *la scène du coucher*: "Swann, che gira in camicia da notte, fa riferimento alle ossessioni infantili del bacio della buonanotte a Combray, in cui la madre non solo si sottrae al desiderio del figlio, ma esige che rinuncia a desiderarla, al tempo stesso il rituale quasi ossessivo del bacio, rivela l'importanza che esso ha per l'inconscio." (Swann, who wanders in a night gown, makes reference to the child's obsessions with the goodnight kiss at Combray, where the mother withdraws from her son's desire, but demands that he give up desiring her, to the very time of the quasi-obsessive ritual of the kiss, reveals the importance which this has for the unconscious. [Trice 99; my translation].)

2 I think of Bloch, Saint-Loup, Legrandin, tante Léonie who may very well be read as figures representing the narrator.

(Benjamin 158).

In both scenes we deal with chance. Chance, or *exterior accident,* plays, in Proust's psychology, the role of the agent of renewal; it is the occasion for intermittences and for all kinds of interior alterations (Bonnet 235). Planning and foretelling are not possible when the process of experiencing unfolds. It just happens that one evening, Swann pays his **usual** visit to the Verdurins, and does not meet Odette there. It just happens that, one evening, Swann, by his **unexpected** visit to the narrator's parents, affects the child's **habit**. Habit, as laziness, *reduces* our being " to minimum," and it is with this being-at-minimum that we usually live (Bonnet 235): "la plupart de nos facultés restent endormies parce qu'elles se réposent sur l'habitude qui sait ce qu'il y a à faire et n'a pas besoin d'elles" (Proust qtd. in Bonnet 235). *L'habitude* is useful to adaptation and to our everyday life. Proust shows that an accident has to break it so that novelty, i.e., a transformation, appear:

> Mais le seul d'entre nous pour qui la venue de Swann devint l'objet d'une préoccupation **douloureuse,** ce fut **moi.** C'est que les soirs où des étrangers, ou seulement M. Swann , étaient là, maman ne montait pas dans ma chambre. Je dînais avant tout le monde et je venais ensuite m'asseoir à table, jusqu'à huit heures où il était convenu que je devais monter; ce baiser précieux et fragile que maman me confiait **d'habitude** dans mon lit au moment de m'endormir il me fallait le transporter de la salle à manger

dans ma chambre. (A la recherche 1. 23[3])

The only one who is sensitive to Swann's presence in the house, the only one who feels a *painful preoccupation*, is the narrator. And he is the one who is meant to learn on this occasion. Learning proves to be painful. One cannot find out something profound about oneself without suffering, and Proust designates this feeling several times as *angoisse*. Every disruption in the stream of habits[4] brings about a crisis in character's inner life. The introduction to our second scene –let us call it *searching for Odette*–expresses the same type of feeling, namely sufferance:

> Mais une fois qu'ayant songé avec maussaderie à cet inévitable retour ensemble, il [Swann] avait emmené jusq'au Bois sa jeune ouvrière pour retarder le moment d'aller chez les Verdurins, il arriva chez eux si tard qu'Odette, croyant qu'il ne viendrait plus, était partie. En voyant qu'elle n'était plus dans le salon, Swann ressentit **une souffrance au coeur**; il tremblait d'être **privé** d'un plaisir qu'il mesurait pour la première fois, ayant eu jusque-là cette certitude de le trouver quand il le voulait qui pour tous les plaisirs nous diminue ou même nous empêche d'apercevoir aucunement leur grandeur. (1. 223)

Absence and privation produce anguish. This state seems to be the only one capable of

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3 All the quotations from Proust which mention the number of the volume before the number of the page are from A la recherche.

4 I may mention here another important fragment, from A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs, when the narrator confronts a new space, the hotel room in Balbec, to which he is not accustomed (see chapter 4.2.)

attaching an individual, almost without failure, to another individual; it seems to be the principle of great passions (Bonnet 108). Certainty belongs to habit as uncertainty belongs to surprise, to novelty. Until that evening, Swann had the certainty of a certain pleasure given by a certain presence. As soon as this presence is replaced by an absence–the absence of the mother for the narrator, the absence of Odette for Swann, respectively–the character perceives the dimension of the pleasure. This allows for the narrator and Swann to be exposed to chance, to uncertainty, which, evidently, they cannot control. Desire is created by absence: "pour Marcel Proust, le désir est presque toujours déclenché par la crainte de ne pas posséder quelque chose. **On ne désire que ce que l'on n'a pas**"(Bonnet 104).

In the searching for the mother's kiss scene, it is about a son's love for the mother. The searching for Odette scene is about a man falling in love with a woman:

> Il est toujours permis de trouver l'origine de la série amoureuse dans l'amour du héros pour sa mère; mais là encore, nous rencontrons Swann qui, venant dîner à Combray, prive l'enfant de la présence maternelle. Et le chagrin du héros, son angoisse à l'égard de sa mère, c'est déjà l'angoisse et le chagrin que Swann lui-même éprouvait pour Odette. (Deleuze, Proust et les signes 86)

According to Proust, the two kinds of love–the maternal and the erotic– find a common basis: they are built on **sufferance**. The resemblance between Swann and the narrator is even more striking if one looks attentively at *la scène du coucher,* where the writer inserts (from the very beginning of the novel) an allusion to the common anguish of the two

main characters:

> L'angoisse que je venais d'éprouver, je pensai que Swann s'en serait bien moqué s'il avait lu ma lettre et en avait deviné le but; or, au contraire, comme je l'ai appris plus tard, une **angoisse semblable** fut le tourment de longues années de sa vie et personne, aussi bien que lui peut-être, n'aurait pu me comprendre; lui, cette angoisse qu'il y a à sentir l'être qu'on aime dans un lieu de plaisir où l'on n'est pas, où l'on ne peut pas le rejoindre, c'est l'amour qui la lui a fait connaître, l'amour, auquel elle est en quelque sorte prédestinée, par lequel elle sera acaparée, spécialisée . . . Et la joie avec laquelle je fis mon premier apprentissage quand Françoise revint me dire que ma lettre serait remise, **Swann l'avait bien connue** aussi cette joie trompeuse. (1. 30)

The communication between the two characters,virtual for the moment, is already established; they both experience the *angoisse* of a frustrated desire. Love and suffering are two sides of the same reality: their collision is described both as the most banal and the most universal fact (Grimaldi 13). Once the pain is acknowledged, the lover understands he is in love. The more inaccessible the person one loves is, the more improbable, uncertain, threatened one's possession-- the more vivid, constant, and obsessive is the feeling (Grimaldi 31). The desire of the child to receive the mother's goodnight kiss and the desire of Swann to see Odette's face, become obsessions on those particular evenings. What makes these obsessions evident, is the extreme stubbornness latent inside the two male characters, which finds now a way to express itself:

> . . . j'eus un moment de révolte, je voulus essayer une ruse de condamné. J'écrivis à ma mère en la suppliant de monter pour une chose grave que je ne pouvais lui dire dans ma lettre. Mon effroi était que Françoise, la cuisinière de ma tante, qui était chargée de s'occuper de moi quand j'étais à Combray, refusât de porter mon mot. Je me doutais que pour elle, faire une commission à ma mère quand il y avait du monde lui paraîtrait aussi impossible que pour le portier d'un théâtre de remettre une lettre à un acteur pendant qu'il est en scène. . . . Mais pour mettre une chance de mon côté, je n'hésitai pas à mentir et à lui dire que ce n'était pas du tout moi qui avais voulu écrire à maman, mais que c'était maman qui, en me quittant, m'avait recommandé de ne pas oublier de lui envoyer une réponse relativement à un objet qu'elle m'avait prié de chercher; et elle serait certainement très fâchée si on ne lui remettait pas ce mot. (1. 28-9)

As one notices, the child becomes very inventive instantly: he wants to try a trick and a lie to escape his desperation. He would try anything to get what he wants. The letter trick does not work with his mother–she sends the *cruel* and dry answer: "Il n'y a pas de réponse."(1. 30) The narrator chooses the last possibility: to stay awake (which is not very difficult, since he is extremely agitated), to lie in wait for his mother and to tell her good night in the corridor when she goes to bed. The insistence on his own desire and the stubbornness with which he thinks of all possibilities to reach the desired object characterize Swann as well when he is looking for Odette. Both characters would try anything rather than give up. Swann starts his search at Prévost's restaurant:

> Elle n'était pas chez Prévost; il voulut chercher dans tous les restaurants des boulevards. Pour gagner du temps, pendant qu'il visitait les uns, il envoya dans les autres son cocher Rémi (le doge Loredan de Rizzo) qu'il alla attendre ensuite -n'ayant rien trouvé lui-même- à l'endroit qu'il lui avait désigné. (1. 226)

Rémi, the driver, finds his correspondent in Françoise, the cook in charge of handing the letter to the mother. They act as intermediaries between the suffering characters and the objects of their desires, and they are the perfect outsiders because they are not involved, so that they do not understand the drama of the situation. Even the lie conceived carefully by the narrator–i.e., the pretext that **his mother, not him**, would need an answer concerning a certain object, and that would be the reason of his needing to contact her–is reflected in the searching for Odette episode: it is **the lady, not Swann himself**, who would be terribly annoyed if they did not see each other:

> "Je crois que Monsieur n'a plus qu'à rentrer." [says Rémi] . . .
>
> "Mais pas du tout, s'écria-t-il [Swann], il faut que nous trouvions cette dame; c'est de la plus haute importance. Elle serait extrêmement ennuyée, pour une affaire, et froissée, si elle ne m'avait pas vu." (1. 226-27)

That is how the narrator and Swann try to *disguise* themselves as best they can in the *non-understanding* eyes of their intermediaries: by shifting the emphasis of their torment, by displacing the cause of the torment, and by pretending it affects their objects rather than themselves.

In Proust's text, whenever it is a question of love, it is a question of desire; and

whenever it is a question of desire, it is a question of jealousy. The jealous person wants what it is inaccessible to him: to possess entirely the other. As it often happens in life, the extremes are closer than we imagine; jealousy would be as related to hatred as it is to love: " Jealousy is a hate-induce reorientation of desire. Yet it does not present itself as such, for it preserves the envious side of desire and the depressive side of hatred. As depressed envy and envious depression, jealousy is a spastic humor that breeds anger and tears." (Kristeva 42) Depression and envy, spasmodic humor: we are recognizing the fine description of the two *searching for* episodes.

Jealousy is, obviously, the essence of erotic love in the whole A la recherche. In Time and Sense, Kristeva comments extensively on jealousy as it concerns Swann's falling in love with Odette; but I want to look at the other relationship, between mother and son, still from the same perspective. One might expect jealousy not to be manifested in the searching for mother's kiss scene, but, surprisingly enough (or maybe not so surprisingly), although it is about the child-mother relationship, the feeling of jealousy is part of the *angoisse*, just as it is in the second episode. The narrator is jealous of every person present in the living room, of all those allowed to see his mother and to talk to her. The letter that he sends through Françoise is a way of drawing his mother's attention to himself in a situation where she is supposed to be totally preoccupied with the guest. His message would open a way for him to penetrate the space where she sits now: "mon petit mot allait . . . me faire du moins entrer invisible et ravi dans la même pièce qu'elle, allait lui parler **de moi** à l'oreille" (1. 29-30). It is the same principle of love as in Swann's passion for Odette; it is an **egotistical** love which proves to be vulnerable to the feeling of

jealousy (Kristeva 42).

The two events provoke in the male characters something similar to **sickness.** The narrator is a very sensitive and nervous child. An apparently small event may affect profoundly both his mind and his body. When his father tells him in an authoritarian manner that he should go up to his bedroom, the child has no choice but to climb the *appalling* stairs, with their varnish smell:

> Et il me fallut partir sans viatique; il me fallut monter chaque marche de l'escalier, comme dit l'expression populaire, à *contre-coeur*, montant **contre mon coeur** qui voulait retourner près de ma mère parce qu'elle ne lui avait pas, en m'embrassant, donné licence de me suivre. Cet escalier **détesté** où je m'engageais si tristement, exhalait une odeur de vernis qui avait en quelque sorte absorbé, fixé, cette sorte particulière de chagrin que je ressentais chaque soir et la rendait peut-être plus cruelle encore pour ma sensibilité parce que sous cette forme olfactive mon intelligence n'en pouvait plus prendre sa part . . . mon chagrin de monter dans ma chambre entrait en moi d'une façon **infiniment plus rapide**, presque instantanée, à la fois insidieuse et brusque, par l'inhalation –**beaucoup plus toxique que la pénétration morale**- de l'odeur de vernis particulière à cet escalier. (1. 27-8)

In the description of this movement, he talks about the disagreement between his *heart*, which wants him to go back to the living room, and his legs, which continue to climb toward his bedroom. In the same context, he mentions the *odour* of the stairs, which is

irritating and *toxic*. So, he is talking about his **physical** and his **psychological** reaction simultaneously. Is the former producing the latter, or is it the other way around? Usually, we tend to see the emotional reactions as the major ones and all the physical *complementary* responses as secondary and derived from the former ones. The child is so deeply sad that at that moment, even the odour of the stairs is unbearable. But one could also say that the sense of smell [*la sensation olfactive*] is one cause of the pain. Bonnet suggests that the anguish may be so profoundly a cause of desire that there are cases where anguish of **physiological origin** might provoke love (109). Is it not the unpleasant smell challenging the child's sharp frustration, since we are told that *the inhalation* of the scent *is much more toxic than the moral penetration*? The odour of the polish makes the *angoisse* invade him faster and, especially, more *insidiously*. The sickness, that is the extreme sensitivity and nervousness of the narrator as a child, are part of his suffering–i.e., his *angoisse*, and *angoisse* is a certain manifestation of desire and love. According to Proust, malady is always part of one's feelings. Benjamin goes farther in asserting that Proust's disease, namely asthma, "became part of his art -if indeed his art did not create it" (214). The interconnection between body and spirit appears to be too complicated as to be disclosed clearly: which is the source of which in our context?

Swann is plunged in his neurosis [*névrose*], too (Béhar 93). He falls in love with Odette as if he were catching a virus:

> . . .après une incubation . . ., c'est la période d'état de la maladie. Cet amour désorganise la vie intérieure de Swann, comme un virus cholérique altère les cellules du corps humain. Dès lors les désordres se multiplient.

> Les symptômes de cet amour-maladie? L'apparition, chez un être tranquille, d'une agitation, d'une angoisse peu communes. (Béhar 92)

His response to Odette's absence from the Verdurins' salon is that of a sick person:

> Swann partit chez Prévost, mais à chaque pas sa voiture était arrêtée par d'autres ou par des gens qui traversaient, **odieux** obstacles qu'il eût été **heureux de renverser** si le procès-verbal de l'agent ne l'eût retardé plus encore que le passage du piéton. Il comptait le temps qu'il mettait, ajoutait quelques secondes à toutes les minutes pour être sûr de ne pas les avoir faites trop courtes, ce qui lui eût laissé croire plus grande qu'elle n'était en réalité sa chance d'arriver assez tôt et de trouver encore Odette. Et à un moment, comme un **fiévreux** qui vient de dormir et qui prend conscience de l'absurdité des rêvasseries qu'il ruminait sans se distinguer nettement d'elles, Swann tout d'un coup aperçut en lui l'étrangeté des pensées qu'il roulait depuis le moment où on lui avait dit chez les Verdurins qu'Odette était déjà partie, la **nouveauté** de la **douleur au coeur** dont il souffrait, mais qu'il constata seulement comme s'il venait de s'éveiller. (1. 224-25)

The anguish of the narrator in the first scene may be compared to Swann's anguish. He is tremendously agitated, so completely plunged into his own grief, that he would like to smash the walkers who delay his getting to see Odette. He suffers from fever and serious pain, and looks for the only remedy he thinks would help him: finding the lady. Nevertheless, as if waking up from his feverish state, Swann has a moment of lucidity: he realizes the absurdity of his feelings and of his rush. But he is not able to master what is

happening to him. This moment of awareness is another lesson for the narrator: he finds out that **realizing** is the first step toward learning. For what do the characters feel after having gotten what they anxiously desire?

According to Proust, no one is ever satisfied once one has obtained the desired object. The human being turns around two basic states of mind: the tranquillity associated with habit, and the anguish provoked by the desire for something that, evidently, one does not possess. When the narrator *wins*, that is, when he succeeds in having his mother spend the night in his bedroom, he does not become happier:

> J'aurai dû être heureux: je ne l'étais pas. Il me semblait que ma mère venait de me faire une première concession qui devait lui être douloureuse, que c'était une première abdication de sa part devant l'idéal qu'elle avait conçu pour moi, et que pour la première fois, elle, si courageuse, s'avouait vaincue. Il me semblait que si je venais de remporter une victoire c'était contre elle, que j'avais réussi comme auraient pu faire la maladie, des chagrins, ou l'âge, à détendre sa volonté, à faire fléchir sa raison et que cette soirée commençait une ère, resterait comme une triste date. (1. 38)

The narrator's victory is a bitter one. For the first time he *understands* his mother's reasoning: she wanted to teach him discipline and stability. His crisis is a manifestation of his being **un**reasonable, and, while plunged into this state of mind, obviously he cannot form any reasonable idea of his mother's intentions nor of the pointless character of his desire. The mother's intention becomes clear to him only when he himself becomes reasonable, this means after the *malady*. One may see now that the waking up (*réveil*) is

common to both the searching for the mother's kiss and searching for Odette scenes. Furthermore, after realizing the strangeness[5] and absurdity of their behaviour and thoughts, the two main characters do not give up their desired object, their source of anguish. Neither is able to distance himself from the situation brought up by his *feverish* stubbornness. Disappointment arises as a final step in the process of learning; fulfilling one's desire, no matter how powerful and devastating it may be, does not imply satisfaction.

The two scenes on which I focussed here show how, according to Proust, the evolution of learning (or apprehending) functions. The *novelty* involves suffering: the character is totally *immersed* in his subjectivity and his *disease*, after which he has his moment of objectivity, of lucidity, when he seems cured. I will name this kind of experience the *shock-malady experience*. A shock (which is accidental, otherwise it would not be a shock) provokes the malady-like crisis; this chain, shock-malady-awareness, is the structure of the Proustian experience in this case.

Speaking about Proust's sense of complication, which he connects to the French spirit, *par excellence*, Walter Benjamin gives an example of ceremoniousness. Once, while paying a visit to Princess Clermont-Tonnerre, the writer sent a valet to bring him a certain medicine from his house. With this purpose in mind, Proust gave him a detailed description of the house including everything but the house number (Benjamin 207). The valet was supposed to learn through his own experience where the house was situated. The house number, if told, would represent a piece of information, not *formation*.

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5 Strangeness as *étrangeté* in both senses.

Information would help him instantly, but on a short term. "Is it not the **quintessence of experience** to find out how very difficult it is to learn many things which apparently could be told in very few things?" (Benjamin 207). What would have happened if Swann had chosen to tell the narrator in just a few words the essence of the lesson? Something like: "Dear boy, let me tell you two things: 1) we are alike, and 2) love involves desire, which involves frustration, which involves anguish, but, trust me, you will recover one day and realize how ill you were." This would sound like news, and news means information rather than formation. Even if Swann told him, the narrator needs to have the experience on his own in order to learn. Swann's merit, in the searching for mother's kiss scene, is simply to **provoke** the child's frustration, *angoisse* and, thus, an awareness that he could not have acquired otherwise. The narrator does not need a piece of **information**, but a *story* (see Benjamin 159); that is, a contextualized story, as opposed to isolated information. The story embeds what happened in the life of the storyteller in order to pass it on as experience to those listening. As I mentioned, listening to the discourse of another person, no matter how wise this person is, cannot lead us to truth:

> . . . c'est un résultat essentiel de l'apprentissage de nous réveler à la fin qu'il y a des vérités de ce temps qu'on perd. Un travail entrepris par l'effort de la volonté n'est rien; en littérature, il ne peut nous méner qu'à ces verités de l'intellligence auxquelles manque la griffe de la nécessité, et dont on a toujours l'impression qu'elles "auraient pu" être autres, et autrement dites. De même que, ce que dit un homme profond et intelligent vaut en soi par son contenu manifeste, par sa signification explicite,

> objective et élaborée; nous en tirerons peu de choses, rien que des possiblités abstraites, si nous n'avons pas su parvenir à d'autres vérités par d'autres voies. (Deleuze 28)

The "abstraction" of ideas can be replaced by something concrete, and this should be the role of the teacher-storyteller. I could say that Swann acts like a storyteller in the *searching for Odette* scene, to the extent to which an event in his own life is transferred to the younger character[6]. More than a storyteller, in our first episode, he embodies a kind of *causa prima* of a comparable story. Thus, the *student* does not get information in isolation, but he gets formation[7] through a story in context. The two scenes are in a tight relationship; the child's longing for his mother is placed at the beginning of the book, as a key to Swann's obsession. At the stage where the narrator is a child, he does not know Swann's story. The searching for mother's kiss scene gets meaning after Marcel **compares** what happened to Swann to what happened to himself. The narrator becomes aware of his feelings when he acknowledges the analogies with Swann's anguish and pain. Therefore, the story in context is meaningful for a student who can *re-find* himself in the story.

The two scenes analysed in the present chapter show that learning is a long painful process and it is possible only through experience. Not only the narrator's character learns by means of a story; the reader, as well, is in the position of the student. A positive

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6 In a realist novel, it would be important to know how the narrator finds out this whole story of Swann and Odette. In A la recherche, although this is not clear, it is not important.

7 Perhaps that is why the novel was often called a *Bildungsroman*.

reception of literature may take place if a connection may be established between the piece of literature and the experience of the readers (Benjamin 156). The story offered by the storyteller Proust makes sense if the reader can see the similarities between the character's experience and her own experience.

3. The Woolfian Room and the Proustian Memory

Following Virginia Woolf's theoretical essay, A Room of One's Own, I shall focus on the process of writing. What does one need in order to write? The answer will deal with both space (room), and time (history), as well as the link between them as they intermingle with the writing process.

Woolf, in A Room of One's Own, tries to diagnose the present state of literature written by women and also to find the reasons for its (under)development. According to Woolf, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (6). This, at first sight, would imply that a woman needs to be financially independent. The implications of the *room* prove to be multiple if one looks at how she characterizes the room later in her essay:

> One goes into **the** room - but the resources of the English language would be much put to the stretch, and whole flights of words would need to wing their way illegitimately into existence before **a woman** could say what happens when she goes into **a** room. The rooms differ so completely; they are calm or thunderous; **open** to the sea, or, on the contrary, give on to a **prison** yard; are hung with washing or soft as feathers - one has only to go into any room in any street for the whole of that extremely complex force of feminity to fly in one's face. How should it be otherwise? For women have sat **indoors** all these millions of **years,** so that by this time the very walls are permeated by their creative force. (83)[1]

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[1] In this chapter, all the quotations from Woolf, are from A Room of One's Own.

"One"–and I suppose *one* is a woman in this case–"goes into the room." I notice here that *room* follows the definite article and not a possessive adjective, so this does not allow me to think of it as *hers*. The following sentence from the quotation above tries to underline how difficult it is for a woman to say what happens when she goes into the room. Why is it difficult? Because the language **lacks** the right tools to express what she wants to say. Woolf may refer to the (lack of) tradition in women's fiction. The field is rather new, it traces its first books to the previous century (names such as Brontë, G. Eliot, Austen easily come to mind). As long as one does not **know** the thing, i.e., what happens in the room when a woman goes into it, one does not know the words to name the thing. So, what is missing is the **remembrance** of this room which is not **her** room but just the room where she stays.

I distinguish two kinds of rooms in Woolf's text. The first room of which the author talks is the one that a woman needs in order to write; it is **her** room and it stands for the creating space. The second room is **the** room where the woman has been insulated " for all these millions of years"; it is a space where the woman has lived, but it is space which has never belonged to her.

The rooms differ substantially. The first type of room may be "open to the sea," it is opened from inside and cannot be opened from outside since it has a lock and the person indoors has the key. Its walls are permeable: although it is a closed space (it must be closed if a person is to write in there), it is at the same time open. The door may open in order to let the text that she writes spread into the world toward **recognition**.

The second room may "give on to a prison yard." Its door shuts down. This room

cannot be locked; even if it can, it is always locked from the outside. The person indoors has **no control** over this space. The walls are impenetrable, they do not allow any connection to the outside world. Evidently, in this case, writing and recognition cannot exist. It is the confining space where women have been kept away from knowledge and from writing. This is why there is no remembrance of this empty room. But there is no univocal description of what this room "giving on to a prison yard" may mean. If one cannot write in this room, it is perhaps because it does not belong to the person spending her time in it. Fortunately enough, there have been some exceptions; women have written, otherwise the nineteenth-century women writers would not have been known. If the room is not **hers,** it might be the living-room; " if a woman wrote, she would have to write in the common sitting-room." (Woolf 64). As Smith says:

> In Woolf's novels, the rooms as a physical enclosure ostensibly establish an alternative space in which an essential feminine self is dominant, a private space in which a woman can engage, without interruptions from domestic and social duties, in intellectual and creative pursuits. The essential feminine self embodied in the rooms supposedly transcends social situation because it is imagined, in terms of the discourse of individualism, as autonomous and self-realizing. (216)

Only in her own room can a woman be free from domestic duties and can concentrate on other things beside her social tasks existing inside the family. There are some women who did write in the living-room. And it is in this aspect that Woolf finds a possible explanation for the preference of female authors for writing novels rather than in other

genres. The room with a view to the prison yard is the non-stimulating type of room. It is the room in such a way constructed that it does not allow, or at least does not encourage, anyone to **write.**

The rooms may also be "hung with washing or soft as feathers". Considering the modality of structuring this complex sentence, one may observe that there is a repetitive symmetry around the conjunction *or* which separates contrasting characteristics of the room: they are calm *or* thunderous, they give to the sea *or* give to a prison yard, they are hung with laundry *or* soft as feathers. Should one feel a certain opposition between these two last sets of attributes? Is perhaps the former room tough and heavy because there is someone working there, and the latter room light and soft because it is a space meant for relaxation? I choose not to look for a straight answer now. The laundry hung to dry brings about a touch of **femininity** to the room; or, better, it makes one think of a woman's work. How did a woman usually work? Let us say washing clothes, hanging them to dry, ironing maybe? Cooking diners, washing plates, sending children to school? (Woolf 85). All these domestic activities fill up all of a woman's time. The time is spent in this manner and nothing remains of it. Why? Because these jobs are all *silent.* After these activities are accomplished, nothing is left behind. No biography, no history preserves a trace of what women do (Woolf 85). Whether it is the room with the laundry displayed or it may be the soft room, "the force of femininity" strikes one upon entering it. It is not the force of a writer hidden in the space where women are "locked" and *forgotten*; women do not write here, although they live here. Not only do **they** not write, but others do not **write about** them either. Nevertheless, one may not deny that there are

female characters in novels. But,

> . . . almost without exception they [women] are shown [in literature] in relation to men. It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen's day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex. And how **small a part of a woman's life** is that; and how little can a man know even of that . . . This is not so true of the nineteenth century novelists, of course. Women become more various and complicated there. (79)

The memory of women's occupations is almost totally absent; what one wrote about them in the past centuries was usually limited to their relations with men. So, what we may find out about women' s ways of spending time and making conversation can be but partial. Woolf talks mainly about fiction here, and fiction changes in the nineteenth century when names of female novelists start to appear on the scene of literary history. Even if the view on this topic becomes of higher interest and it diversifies, the male writer is "terribly hampered and partial in his knowledge of women, as a woman in the knowledge of men" (79). No memories of the room with laundry hung to dry are available. Even if portraits of women are present in novels, they are either false or, in the best case, incomplete.

Virginia Woolf's idea about feminine writing is what could be called a historical perspective. She analyses the present state of women's fiction as it is related to the previous one, genealogically. "Without forerunners, Jane Austen and the Brontës and George Eliot could no more have written than Shakespeare could have written without

Marlowe, or Marlowe without Chaucer, or Chaucer without those forerunners who paved the ways and tamed the natural savagery of the tongue. For masterpieces are not single and solitary births" (63). Freedom of action and of expression were not part of tradition in the writing of women; the tools and the terrain were not prepared for them in any way (Woolf 73). A text is built on the other thousands of texts born before it: "Books continue each other, in spite of our habit of judging them separately" (Woolf 77). The same idea, at least partially, is to be found in T.S. Eliot's essay, "Tradition and the Individual Talent": a work of art, in particular a book, cannot be born alone, independently of the poets who lived before; the meaning of the work is fulfilled by linking it to what has been already created; one appreciates and evaluates a piece of art by bringing the *new* to the tradition, by contrasting it with the dead artists' creation (Eliot 15). The new poet should possess a particular historical sense, which involves both a sense of the past as a past and a sense of the past as a presence (Eliot14). The influence does not act just in one direction, however; namely, it is not only the past poet who affects the new one. The **past** stage of an art form is also **reorganized** by the appearance of the new work because, again, comparing and contrasting prove to be principles of aesthetic criticism. So, Woolf's point of view on books continuing each other is justified, but one should see that the *direction* of influence is double: the present is influenced by the past as much as a newly created text affects all texts previously created (Eliot 15). By appearing on the stage of the existing literature, the new book brings about an alteration to the old order. Virginia Woolf seems to focus more on the first aspect of a literary work, i.e., a book needs a *history* of books before it is born.

In his critical essay, Contre Sainte-Beuve, Marcel Proust writes:

> . . . en art il n'y a pas (au moins dans le sens scientifique) d' initiateur, de précurseur. Tout [est] dans l'individu, chaque individu recommence, pour son compte, la tentative artistique ou littéraire; les oeuvres de ses prédécesseurs ne constituent pas, comme dans la science, une vérité acquise dont on profite celui qui suit. Un écrivain de génie aujourd'hui a tout à faire. Il n'est pas beaucoup plus avancé que Homère. (220)

Woolf's and Proust's opinions seem to be divergent, but actually each of them emphasizes one of the two sides of a literary work. According to T.S. Eliot, in any work there is **repetition** and **difference** (14). The former is related to what one has in **common** with the old works, and how the new one can be **integrated** in the order of already existing *monuments*. The latter represents the poet's difference from his predecessors; he is seen in **isolation** from these. While Virginia Woolf is interested more in the socio-historical background; Marcel Proust deals more with individuality. There is no exclusion, but complementarity between the two points of view. Her view is not at all one-sided since her fiction demonstrates a high interest for originality. Similarly, Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu represents a revolutionary re-evaluation of the literary tradition. In order to be revolutionary, one needs something to fight against.

Proust talks about the *originality* of the author. *Original* is always a relative adjective. *Original* implies *difference* from others, so, in using this adjective, one may not escape the comparison. When wishing his/her work to be original a writer has to be aware of what *non-original* means. (S)he has to keep in her/his *mental office,* in fact

everything s/he has been reading, that is the history built by her predecessors. Being original involves "possessing" their memory. What Proust specifies in Contre Sainte-Beuve is that there is no predecessor, at least in the scientific sense; an author cannot just spread the whole amount of his readings on the table and then try, based only on these ideas belonging to others, to build up something new. In science, if one solves an equation in a linear space (R), the following researcher, based on that, can solve an equation in a double linear space (R_2), and then in R_3 and in R_n eventually. This is not necessarily a case of originality in the case of such a sequence of progression, perhaps only about an extension of the data presented. This manner of progressing in science does not work in defining the originality of a writer. Proust tries to demonstrate this by applying it to Sainte-Beuve, who is not an original author–he is not creative, he is just repetitive.

But Proust's statement on originality is in a way softened by the affirmation that the other writers nevertheless have their importance:

> Les écrivains que nous admirons **ne peuvent pas** nous servir de guides, puisque nous possédons en nous, comme l'aiguille aimantée ou le pigeon voyageur, le sens de notre orientation. Mais tandis que guidés par cet instinct intérieur nous volons de l'avant et suivons notre voie, par moments, quand nous jetons les yeux de droite et de gauche sur l'oeuvre nouvelle de Francis Jammes ou de Maeterlinck, . . . les réminiscences anticipées que nous trouvons de la **même** idée, de la même sensation, du même effort d'art que nous exprimons en ce moment, nous font plaisir

> comme d'aimables poteaux indicateurs qui nous montrent que nous ne nous sommes pas trompés. . . . Superflus si l'on veut. **Pas tout à fait inutiles** cependant. (Contre Sainte-Beuve 311)

Thus Proust is not totally against the usefulness of referring to other writers' works; even if the author is talented and original, he possesses the tools, the energy and sense of the orientation in himself, he relies on what the others wrote as well. One has to re-discover ideas which have fermented in her/his mind somewhere else, too, so that she/he can be assured that she/he is going on the right direction. Proust uses the criterion of relativity, when it comes to evaluating someone's work, i.e., the fact that it has **to be related** to other points of reference. Nevertheless, he does emphasize the **individuality** of a work of art.

How should one explain the difference of opinions between Woolf and Proust? These opinions are relevant for the authors' preoccupations and for the period when they were formulated. In this way, I encounter again the gender problem. Marcel Proust writes within the major and solid tradition of men's writing. So, his concern is to talk about originality and individual talent; the ancestors in art are right there, his question is how to **isolate** talent and what makes it unique. When Virginia Woolf gives her lecture, the *for-centuries* - female writing is absent: because tradition is not there (or, if there, its history is very young), it is natural for her to look at history and repetition, first of all.

Perhaps it is a question of hierarchy more or less. One notices: women's writing is quite undeveloped. In order to have the **basic** conditions for writing, a woman needs a room of her own, and this means control over her space, it means her capability of

expressing herself freely; it means a memory of the literature written before her. After having obtained these, a woman would possess a *starting point* similar to a man's. After this *integration*, there is room for originality. Woolf starts with an initial problem –how to find an equivalent of the background of the male writer for a woman writer–while Proust departs at a stage where the background is assumed. Sainte-Beuve, of whom he talks in his essay, is an example a person who happens to have all the material and status[1] necessary to write, but he cannot be a "real" writer. To be a man and to have money represent the basic conditions but not the sufficient ones. The same with Proust; he did not lack any of the *material* conditions in order to be a writer, he did not lack money, and he did not even need to write for a living. In his case, the financial independence is doubled by the stability afforded by his belonging to the dominant sex.[2]

Woolf's memory room is necessary for women in order to write, a figure of the writer's individuality which Proust would not connect to the memory of literature. Two apparently opposite attempts to define writing thus joinedt together by the concept of the room.

The room may be *open to the sea*; one may feel that only the presence of the word *sea* suggests *openness* and *lack of limitation*. The sea has numerous connotations in literature, but I would like to find a new one: the sea as an image of writing. The concrete

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1

I mean he is a man of means.

2

As it is well known, Proust's situation was not ideal; but for the moment, I refer only to the positive conditions of his writing.

picture would show a room which has at least a window giving on to the sea. Maybe the link between room and sea is more tight than it looks. *The sea as life's experience*; I mean not the sea as the image of the whole world, but the sea as what the world has *produced* in an author's life.

A woman or a man who writes needs *a room open to the sea.* The second type of room mentioned in my classification in the beginning of the chapter, *gives on to a prison yard.* The window of this room is fake; it does not open to the sea, but to a prison yard, another claustrophobic place. By opening, it shuts down. The *obscure chamber* is, in many cases, as Virginia Woolf points out, the room/house where a woman lives, a room/house belonging to the father, the husband or the master. The paragraph where Woolf speaks about chapter twelve of Charlotte Brontë's book, Jane Eyre, deals with this obscure chamber:

> And I read how Jane Eyre used to go up to the roof when Mrs Fairfax was making jellies and looked over the fields at the distant view. And then she longed–and it was for this that they blamed her–'then I longed for a power of vision which might reach the **busy world**, towns, regions full of life I had heard of but never seen; then I desired more of practical experience than I possessed; more of intercourse with my kind, of acquaintance with **variety of character** than was here within my reach. I valued what was good in Mrs Fairfax, and what was good in Adèle; but I believed in the existence of other and more vivid kinds of goodness, of what I believed in I wished to behold.' (65-6)

The main female character from Jane Eyre is always in an *obscure chamber*. In the quotation above, she goes up to the attic of the house which belongs to her master and employer, and looks to the landscape. Woolf significantly selects this passage to tell to the audience that Jane Eyre is confined to Rochester's house and she is not allowed to reach *the busy world, towns, regions full of life* which would open for her the *sea of experience*. Knowing Adèle and Mrs Fairfax is good, but the number of characters existing in a house is of course limited. Brontë's *personnage* feels that this knowledge is not enough for her and that she wants more: "If Jane Austen suffered in any way from her circumstance it was in the narrowness of life that was imposed upon her" (Woolf 65). The realm of jobs for women was very restrained. Jane Eyre has a typical job for a woman, as she is Adèle's governess. Many years after the Brontës wrote their novels, at the very beginning of the twentieth century, the realm was not much wider; an honourable woman could earn money, as Woolf confesses from her own experience, by teaching young children, reading to old ladies, or addressing envelopes (37). In the nineteenth century, no woman could travel, study, or walk alone in town: "she never drove through London in an omnibus or had luncheon in a shop by herself" (65). People whom she could meet were basically family or acquaintances of the family whose conversations she was allowed to share. One cannot deny that, when a writer writes, she writes about her life. This does not mean that every book of hers is an autobiography[3]. It means that a person cannot write about something that she does not know, about

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3

It is true that Woolf's and Proust's major works have been seen as partly biographical; I shall not insist on this aspect.

something that she has never encountered. Even if she tells a simple story that happened to some stranger, whom she heard while buying a pie at the baker's, she has been in contact with that story for ten minutes. For that, a woman in the nineteenth century should have had the possibility to go to the baker's to buy a pie. This was not at all usual for a woman in that century. Jane Eyre represents the female writer: she longs for practical experience and for encountering a variety of characters. She longs for what is constantly refused to her. An author needs access to the sea of experience. A male author would not notice this need because no access is denied to him.

Suppose that the future woman writer goes beyond the first stage–the access to the sea of experience–claimed by Woolf. What does she need afterwards? She needs again a *room*. This time one should leave the approach of the room as the writer's *territory* in the most concrete sense, i.e., a room in a house with a lock on the door, probably a table on which sheets of paper are spread, and a chair. And one should also not reflect on history, for the moment. One may look at the room as a figurative space in one's mind, that space which Proust has called *l'atelier de la mémoire*, and which I shall call, in a more general sense, the "mental office". The images which make an impression are picked up because one feels that there is another meaning, another kind of reality hidden behind them[4]. If one wants to penetrate to this secondary sense, collecting images is not enough:

> C'est quelque image qui était *a priori* sans valeur intelectuelle, quelque clocher filant dans une perspective, quelque fleur de sauge, quelque tête de

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4

There are some well–known fragments in A la recherche du temps perdu which have become reference-scenes in this sense–seeing something which seems to tell more than the immediate reality–e.g. *le thé et la madelaine, les trois clochers de Martinville, les arbres de Husdimenil.*

> jeune fille, quelque forme qui s'imposait à moi. J'ai su pour quelques-unes decouvrir la beauté ou la pensée qu'elles contenaient et qui m'avait fait à leur passage dresser l'oreille intérieure. Pour d'autres, dans ma paresse je me disais: "Il suffit de me rappeler l'image un jour <je> la prendrai, j'essaierai de **l'ouvrir**"; et c'est ainsi que **les ateliers de mon passé** se sont encombrés de clochers, de têtes de jeunes filles, de fleurs fanées, de mille autres formes en qui toute vie est morte et qui ne signifieront rien pour moi, d'où j'eus peut-être tiré, si j'avais eu cette volonté que voulait me donner ma grande-mère, des pensées qui eussent servi aux **arts** d'aliment. (Esquisse XV; 1. 839)[5]

The narrator is sensitive to the exterior things. What he does is to collect them by dropping them into a kind of *storage room*. He cannot reflect on the images of the flower, of the young girl, of the bell, on the spot. But depositing them is just the first step. Without reconsidering them with a lot of effort, **at the right time**, all these images die–after the manner in which the flowers are fading–because one forgets what they said at first encounter; and thus, they do not **signify** anything any more. The storage room is called by Proust l'*atelier de son passé*. At this point one can notice the analogy between this atelier of the past, which is inevitably that of memory, representing the space in one's mind filled up with images that the brain records and saves, and the room where an artist works, surrounded by his tools and objects. It is not enough to possess the room where

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5

All Esquisses are from A la recherche; however I specify "Esquisse..." so that it may be a distinction between Proust's sketches and final version of A la recherche.

one builds up his pile of flowers and heads. One has to work on these impressions before it is too late. In time, the flowers and the heads fade and become mute. To remember is not enough. To believe that "il suffit de me rappeler l'image . . . un jour j'essaierai de l'**ouvrir**," is wrong. For the moment arrives when one is not able to open any longer the image; the *atelier* remains **locked**. Like the room in Woolf's essay, one cannot lock and unlock the door of the room as one pleases. Proust's Contre Sainte-Beuve offers another and yet similar type of answer regarding the importance of the **room of memory**:

> Les belles choses que nous écrirons si nous avons du talent, sont en nous, indistinctes, comme le souvenir d'un air qui nous charme sans que nous puissions en retrouver le contour, le fredonner, ni même en donner un dessin quantitatif ; dire s'il y a des pauses, des suites de notes rapides. . . Le talent est comme une sorte de **mémoire** qui leur permettra de finir par rapprocher d'eux cette musique confuse, d'entendre clairement, de la noter, de la reproduire, de la chanter. (312)

One who writes needs to remember; one has to work on the impressions he has been keeping inside. The faculty of intelligence comes **after** : "L'impression est pour l'écrivain ce que l'expérimentation est pour le savant, avec cette différence que chez le savant le travail de l'intelligence précède et chez l'écrivain vient après" (Proust, Contre Sainte-Beuve 311). After experiencing and collecting the impressions in the mental office, the work of the writer begins. In order to manage the impressions, one needs memory. Memory distinguishes a potential author from the other people in general, but memory is not enough. The insufficiency of memory is brought into light by Alain de

Botton, who mentions an episode told by Lucien Daudet, Proust's friend. One day after having listened to Beethoven's Ninth Symphony no. 9 together, Daudet and Proust were walking home while the former was humming some *vague notes, while saying* what a wonderful tune that was. Proust's first response was to laugh and, then, to reply: "But my dear Lucien, it's not your poum, poum, poum that is going to convey this wonderfulness! It would be better to try and explain it" (De Botton 87).

An author needs **remembrance,** which could help her/him to render clear the vague notes (*poum, poum, poum*) played in low tone in the background of her/his mind. This tune is to be transferred from this dark area to what I would call the *memory room* of the mind. So, music must be expressed; if it remains at the stage of impression only, the abstract air cannot be converted into the material of a book. This is how remembrance transforms itself.

If one thinks of the **room** as the space in one's mind reserved for the working of remembrance, then bringing together the image of the room in Woolf's essay, and the *atelier de la mémoire* of Proust begins to make sense. A writer needs access to the room of other writers' memory, i.e., the room of *history*–and literary history in this case, as Virginia Woolf argues. Also, according to Marcel Proust, a writer needs the *atelier* of **her/his** own memory: She/he should be able to *reproduce* and to *sing* the indistinct music, transforming it into something clear, palpable, **written.**

4. The Writer in The Private Space

In A Room of One's Own Virginia Woolf talks about the room which should be possessed by a person if this person is to write. This room, a typical image of the private space, may be either extended to a *house* or reduced to something smaller as for example a *corner*. Regarding this latter possibility, Gaston Bachelard states that a poetical space (*l'espace poétique*) may be limited to an analogical "personal"space: the nest and the shell: "Avec le nid, avec la coquille surtout, nous trouverons tout un lot d'images que nous allons essayer de caractériser comme images premières, comme images qui sollicitent en nous une primitivité." (93) The comparison with the *home* of birds and of snails, makes one discover the primitivity of the private space, primitivity in the sense of *origin* or *interiority* which are to be revealed only in the limits of this space.

Referring to a book written by the scientist Fernand Lequenne, Bachelard continues in the same chapter dedicated to the nest:

> Fernand Lequenne, l'ami des plantes, se promenant avec sa femme Mathilde, voit un nid de fauvette dans un buisson d'épine noir: "Mathilde s'agenouille, avec un doigt, effleure la fine mousse, laisse le doigt en suspens... Tout d'un coup je suis secoué d'un frisson. La signification féminine du nid perché à la fourche de deux rameaux, je viens de la découvrir. Le buisson prend une valeur si humaine que je cris:
>
> - Ne touche pas, surtout, n'y touche pas." (97)

The surprise and fear of the narrator mark a discovery: the nest of the bird appears now as hiding an interiority. Touching the nest means violating the intimacy built inside

and aggressing the secret of the nest space. Every intimacy hides away ("Je suis ma cachette" says J. Bousquet [Bachelard 91]). Violating someone's space equals violating the person.

At the other extreme, I mentioned that the Woolfian room may grow to a house. The house is designated to protect the human against natural phenomena and possible enemies (Levinas 162). Inside the home, the human is *chez soi* and may retire at any moment. Even if it seems that the home exists as the ultimate purpose of human activities, it constitutes actually the condition, namely the commencement. When one gets out in the world, she *comes from* this private space where she can recollect herself. The fact that there is a house where the human may retire, does not automatically imply the possibility of recollecting and of creating one's subjectivity (164). It is the opposite that should be noticed; this **separation** "built" by the home, this re-collection, is concretized in a home. The "I" may exist through recollecting, so that subjectivity may be constructed in the home.

Be the room a whole house or just a nest (or a shell), it has the same fundamental function: to separate the being who can re-find her/his own interiority. The fragments from Proust's work which I shall focus on, reveal the significance of home as a space meant for shaping the "I". One needs her private space if she is to be an artist. The room in A la recherche has and is a privileged place in the narrator's life; it may be the familiar bedroom at Combray–where he goes every evening as a child waiting with all his heart and soul for mother to come and kiss him goodnight--it may be the alien hotel room in Balbec, which harasses him; or it may be the room of the theatre, a public and private

space at the same time.

The separation involved in dwelling has the role of diminishing the usual reactions one has in contact with the outside world (Levinas 164). The human lends her ears to herself, she reflects and recollects. The interiority supports the passage to action –energy– and leads to work. In all these rooms Marcel confronts himself with his own self, constructs his writer's "I"; the experience collected inside these rooms constitutes the basis of his later vocation.

4.1. Mother and George Sand in The Bedroom

The rooms can be *thunderous or soft as feathers.*

I shall try to find an answer to the question: **"What did women do indoors?"** by studying the female figure in two excerpts from A la recherche du temps perdu. As it is known, there is a strong connection between Proust's real life and the narrator's life in the book. The real relationship with his mother is similar to the one developed in the book.

In searching for the mother's kiss scene ("le drame du coucher") in Du côté de chez Swann the child is forced by the authority of the father to go to his bedroom early, without being allowed to kiss his mother goodnight. Later he is allowed to have his mother in his room for the whole night, also as a consequence of the father's spontaneous decision. Although it is Marcel's bedroom, every evening is a nightmare to him; the perspective of confronting the long night in solitude, produces in him terror, sufferance and anguish (see chapter 2).

What is the significance of this particular scene which, is placed right at the beginning of A la recherche. There are two parts to this long scene; his child's anguish before mother comes, and, then, the reading of George Sand's book, after mother's arrival. I shall start with the latter. Not only does the mother enter the child's bedroom, but, spiritually his grandmother does it, too. Since Marcel's birthday is coming, grandmother wants to buy him a present, not an usual present but something useful and beautiful, that only she can think of. She buys initially a volume of poems by Musset, a book by Rousseau and G. Sand's Indiana. In this original choice of books, the grandmother wants to *expose* the child to some important writers. These books should

edify him, they are not *unhealthy*, according to her, but, on the contrary, she says that they are energy giving.

Nevertheless, the head of the family does not agree with grandmother's *crazy* choice of books; it seems that he judges this literature too difficult and to pretentious for the taste and comprehension of a young child. Indirectly, therefore, father has an influence on Marcel's readings, too. Be this at it may, it is grandmother who chooses the novels, and, finally, she buys "les romans champêtres" by George Sand.

At the beginning of the scene, Marcel's bedroom is invested with all his feelings of anxiety: "Une fois dans ma chambre, il fallut boucher toutes les issues, fermer les volets, creuser mon propre tombeau, en défaisant mes couvertures." (28) The room becomes an impenetrable room because he has to close all its exits and blinds. It is a room of solitude, and, of death eventually. Making his bed is digging his grave. What would change this macabre vision of the room is his mother's arrival.

On this occasion, the boy encounters "the novel", as a genre. Sand's books are very much appreciated by grandmother: "Ma fille, disait-elle à maman, je ne pourrais me décider à donner à cet enfant quelque chose de mal écrit." (1. 39) This means that George Sand's books are well written. As compared to Musset and Rousseau,-- the first selection-- which are ranged among the rather "important" contributors to French literature, George Sand might seem of less importance. There have been commentaries on the choice of <u>François le champi</u> pointing to the unusual attachment between mother and son (see Kristeva, <u>Time and Sense</u>, 3-10) François is an abandoned little boy who is falls in love with Madeleine, his adoptive mother. But in <u>Esquisses</u>, the mother reads <u>La</u>

Mare au diable (see 1. 676). This hesitation on Proust's part, between the titles of books to be chosen, shows that the scene of reading does not have to do so much with on a particular book (François le champi or La Mare au diable), but rather with the mother's reading of Sand.

One may say that the little boy could have read the novel himself in the absence of the mother, that he would have learned just the same from his reading. The two feminine characters not only produce this event; mother puts **her** print on François le champi by reading it:

> Et aux lacunes que cette distraction [la rêverie] laissait dans le récit s'ajoutait, quand c'était maman qui me lisait à haute voix, qu'elle passait toutes les scènes d'amour . . . Si ma mère était une lectrice infidèle, c'était aussi, pour les ouvrages où elle trouvait l'accent d'un sentiment vrai, une lectrice **admirable** par le respect et la simplicité de l'interprétation, par **la beauté et la douceur du son,** quand elle lisait la prose de George Sand, qui respire cette bonté, cette distinction morale que maman avait appris de ma grand-mère à tenir pour supérieures à tout dans la vie, et que je ne devais lui apprendre que bien plus tard à ne pas tenir également pour supérieures à tout dans les livres, attentive à bannir de sa voix toute petitesse, toute affectation qui eût pu empêcher le flot puissant d'y être reçu, elle fournissait toute la tendresse **naturelle,** toute l'ample douceur qu'elles réclamaient à ces phrases qui semblaient écrites pour sa voix et qui pour ainsi dire tenaient tout entières dans le registre de sa sensibilité.

(1. 41-2)

The mother does not read the entire text to her child. She omits the love scenes probably because she believes that they would not be understood, namely, they could not constitute "teachable" material.

Besides selecting the text, she has a beautiful and tender voice. Reading for oneself is different from listening to some one else's reading in the same way in which a letter is different from oral speech. Mother does not transmit to the child the content of the novel neutrally. She interprets the text. She transforms it through intonation, through her own rhythm, through the selection she operates:

> Je ne sais pas ce que Maman n'aurait pas bien lu, tant sa belle voix savait mettre à chaque mot son sens st sa grâce. Mais s'il y a quelque chose au monde qu'elle lisait bien c'était George Sand parce qu'elle l'aimait. Le style de George Sand a justement ce qu'avait Maman quand elle parlait, et ce qui pour un style je crois est un défaut, une belle voix, un accent de distinction, de générosité, de noblesse d'âme, tout ce qui fait qu'une grande âme comme Maman lisant les lettres de George Sand et de Flaubert verra toute la différence d'âme qu'il y a entre les deux et supportera à peine les lettres vulgaires et plates de Flaubert, mais qui empêchent une vue vraiment objective, vraiment artistique, qui empêchent de sortir de soi. Maman aimait cela chez George Sand, chez Fromentin, elle sentait dans le tour de la phrase la vraie distinction, l'accent toujours sincère, d'une sincérité humaine, d'une douceur de femme, qui n'est peut-être pas la

sincérité artistique. (Esquisse X; 1. 676-7)

The characteristics of her style–beauty, nobility, distinction–are, actually, shortcomings. Mother's style of reading and talking, and Sand's manner of writing are of a feminine nature for Proust. Even if it is true that the two women–the mother and the grandmother–did not do art, the future writer, who is very young in the scene from Combray, needs to be introduced to literature. Grandmother' s choice of books and mother's reading create a medium where the child develops his taste and imagination. The novels read, like the walls of the room, are permeated by their feminine force.

This "reading evening" is not important for the reading itself only, but also for the **anguish** that mother produces in the child. After analyzing the meaning of the reading which happens after the mother's arrival in the bedroom, I shall deal now with the beginning of the same scene, where the narrator talks about his crisis provoked by Swann's visit.

Livio Bélloi finds numerous examples in A la recherche which illustrate Goffman's sociology of co-presence. The idea is that as soon as an individual is perceived by another individual, she will change her "*personal façade*" in order to offer to the "intruder" a convenient appearance (77). Thus, each character, in the presence of another—a public in general—will act a part, i.e., she will become an "actor." The switch between the behaviour in solitude and the behaviour in public is presented very often as a kind of general feature of humans. Bélloi selects a scene where one surprises Marcel in the middle of this "switch": "Marcel exerce correlativement à la presence de l'Autre, la même surveillance de sa façade personnelle que celle à laquelle se livrent les autres

personnages de la Recherche. Ainsi de son extase, qu'il croit solitaire, devant les marbrures de la mare Montjouvain." (79)

> Et voyant sur l'eau et à la face du mur un pâle sourire répondre au sourire du ciel, je m'écrirai dans mon enthousiaste en brandissant mon parapluie, refermé: "Zut, zut, zut, zut!"... Et c'est à ce moment-là encore—grâce à un paysan qui passait, l'air déjà d'être d'assez mauvaise humeur, qui le fut davantage quand il faillit recevoir mon parapluie dans la figure, et qui répondit sans chaleur à mes "beau temps, n'est-ce pas, il fait bon marcher"—que j'appris que les mêmes emotions ne se produisent pas simultanément, dans un ordre préetabli chez tous les hommes. (Proust 1.153-4)

The scene reveals a modification (this time comical) of Marcel's behaviour due to the fact that another person shows up; he switches from onomatopoeic exclamations to a verbal exchange supposed to become small talk.

The searching for mother's kiss scene is the drama of the child forced to behave "properly" in the eyes of a public, namely Swann. The space where his relatives (parents included) have dinner with the guest is a public space. In general, the mother tries to be strict; within the rules, she consents that usually she will go and kiss the child goodnight in his bedroom. She would be angry if he insisted on gettimg more than one kiss. In the public room the rule is even more strict: there is is no question that she even admit a repeated kiss: "maman ne me laissait pas l'embrasser à plusieurs reprises **devant le monde**, comme si ç'avait été dans ma chambre." (1.27) There is a clear demarcation cut

between the two spheres of the social space (Bélloi 22). In the public space, the *exhibition* of caresses among individuals is not acceptable. The bedroom, on the contrary, allows for this kind of manifestations where they are no longer embarrassing or unacceptable.

Mother definitely represents the familiar. She is the one who enters Marcel's bedroom "naturally" ("naturally," not in the sense that she should be there, but in the sense that the child desires her there); he feels *at home* in her presence. The "zut, zut" exclaimed from the "umbrella scene" (see the quotation above) and the tears shed when mother comes in the room are, if I may so call them, "instinctual" signs; in these circumstances he does not have to watch his words any longer since he is alone or he is within the "familiar. His crying may be seen as a free expression of grief which he would not allow himself in public but, which is permissible in his room.

The private sphere implies solitude: one is with oneself. Walking with an umbrella and screaming are in a way "free" acts because they are not watched or studied. The intrusion of the "foreign"another is disturbing because it imposes certain rules of behaviour on the individual. The child wants to build his familiar "corner" by attracting the mother into what it is supposed to be **his** space. He hates the public space where his mother entertains a social relationship with the guest because, on the one hand, he has limited access to it (the father sends him early to bed in a very authoritarian manner); on the other hand, in the presence of the Other (here Swann), the child is not free to manifest his desire as he wishes.

Julia Kristeva' s analysis points to the erotic connotation of the narrator's desire

for the mother, mirrored by Madeleine's and François' story. The scene is about forbidden desire. But it would be maybe too easy to dwell on something generally recognized as the forbidden in the moral sense, namely the incest. The meaning of the searching for mother's kiss scene yields rather a different lesson for the future artist. The child **wants** comfort, and comfort represents, on that particular evening, something definitely unacceptable for the one who makes the rules, namely the mother. What exactly does he obtain by his stubbornness by waiting until the guest is gone, by his effort to put an end to his anguish and frustration by getting the good night kiss? Trying to "kidnap" the mother from her public duties is an apparent success: he gets what he wants and, later in the evening, he enjoys his time with the mother who reads him François le champi. But his crying is a sign of something he does not recognize at that stage, something he will understand only later. Both events, the crying first, and mother's reading second will embody "lessons" in a way or another.

One wishes for what one cannot have (see the chapter "Transferring Experience"). Once one gets what one wished for, one is disappointed. This would represent the "hidden" layer of his tears. On the other hand, George Sand's book intermingled with mother's voice are that feminine and gentle flow which surrounds him as in a dream. But this does not mean that that evening, penetrated by Sand's literature, actually, teaches him nothing. That evening is an unforgettable evening. "We thus have, says Kristeva, good reason to believe that the incest theme—the theme of the mother sinner—is precisely what caught and sustained Proust' interest in François le champi and enabled him to set aside his reservations about Sand's style." (9) I think that Proust **had** his reservations about

Sand's style, and, his interest in Sand is related to her similarity to his mother or/and to the subject of the book. The lesson of the evening would be: you should not have your mother in your bedroom. Nevertheless, if you broke the rule (or her rule), you will experience something worth remembering. You should not write as Sand writes and as mother reads. You should not be François who did not leave his mother. The real life of Marcel Proust stands for a quite clear demonstration: he becomes a writer when he gains his independence. What he received that evening was a biased reading, a text "edited" by the mother. What is acceptable and fruitful for him as a child will have to change later when he needs a "direct" reading. Proust did cut off from his Sandian mother. The crying may be the sign of this later realization: in order to be a writer one has to be *free*. Having a "room of one's own" means both to afford it—which was not a problem for Proust—and to possess a space which really belongs to one in the spiritual sense.

4.2. Grandmother in The Foreign Room

On the list of Proust's health problems–where asthma, incomprehension of friends, cold, sensitivity to altitude, and coughing are just a few–there is also **disturbance** caused by travel:

> Sensitive to any disruption of routine, Proust suffers from homesickness and fears that every journey will kill him. He explains that in the first few days in a new place, he is as unhappy as certain animals when night comes (it is not clear which animals he has in mind). He formulates a wish to live on a yacht and thereby move around **without having to get out of bed.** (De Botton 59; bold letters mine)

His very original view on the home, the yacht, is a compromise between habit and novelty. How could someone have both? The yacht would be the vehicle which would allow him to sleep in the **same** bed, while opening every day **to another** landscape: "we shall watch all the most beautiful cities in the universe parade past us on the sea-shore without our leaving our bed (our beds)," says Proust in this invitation to Madame Straus (De Botton 60). It is known that the writer *had a crush* on his own bed; in the last years of his life, his bed turned into his desk and office. "When one is sad, it is lovely to lie in the warmth of one's bed, and there, with all effort and struggle at an end, even perhaps with one's head under the blankets, surrender completely to wailing, like branches in the autumn wind" (Proust qtd. in De Botton 60). A boat would offer this wonderful warm bed and would travel, thus encompassing both tendencies existing in one: the openness toward the new and the closeness in himself.

To travel means to lose the fixed point of reference: habit. Habit is a favourite theme of Proust. Chapter 2 tried to show the manner in which the breaking of habit may affect the narrator. It is very significant that in this scene, searching for mother's kiss *(le drame du coucher)*, the child longs for habit–that is, the ritual of the goodnight kiss–and dreads any element which may intervene and spoil such reassuring repetitiveness.

Habit is a compromise between the individual and his environment (Beckett 18-9). Once habit is set, no adaptation is necessary. While adaptation "represents the perilous zones in the life of the individual, dangerous, precarious, painful," habit is dullness and security. (19) The new is frightening since it is unknown, unfamiliar and unsafe:

> The narrator [in A la recherche] cannot sleep in a strange room, is tortured by a high ceiling, being used to a low ceiling. What is taking place? The old pact is out of date. It contained no clause treating of high ceilings. The habit of friendship for the low ceiling is ineffectual, must die in order that a habit of friendship for the high ceiling may be born. Between this death and that birth, reality, intolerable, absorbed feverishly by his consciousness at the extreme limit of its intensity, by his total consciousness organizes to avert the disaster, to create the new habit that will empty the mystery of its threat—and also of its beauty. "If Habit" writes Proust, "is a second nature, it keeps us in ignorance of the first and it is free of its cruelties and its enchantments." (Beckett 22)

To be in a "transition" period, to be between the death of one habit and the birth of

another habit, is painful and at the same time *enchanting*. Does the word *enchanting* appear here "by mistake"? It would apparently be the last adjective to describe the anguishing and cruel moment of facing the *unusual*.

Setting out to explore the realm of what may be named "l'inquiétante étrangeté," Freud poses that the meaning of the word *heimlich*, "familiar", may coincide with the meaning of its antonym, *unheimlich*, "unfamiliar" (221). "Heimlich" would be linked to "familiar," "known," "serene," but also to "intimate," which opens the semantic field of "hidden," "interior," "secret" (217-20). Within the series of the last adjectives, "heimlich" meets the characteristics of the "unheimlich": "On qualifie de *un-heimlich* tout ce qui devrait rester . . . dans le secret, dans l'ombre, et qui en est sorti" (Schelling qtd in Freud 221). The semantic fields of the two opposites is so wide that they interfere: "heimlich" coincides with "unheimlich." "Cela nous rappelle plus généralement que ce terme de *heimlich* n'est pas univoque, mais qu'il appartient à deux ensembles de représentation qui, sans être opposés, n'en sont pas moins fortement étrangers, celui du familier, du confortable, et celui du caché, du dissimulé" (221). The unfamiliar is secretive; so is the familiar. Thus, the unfamiliar implies mystery and surprise, and these may be "enchanting," as Proust says. I return to Beckett's-quoted in full this time-comment on the unusual: it is "dangerous, precarious, **mysterious and fertile**" (19). There is, therefore no contradiction among the affirmations of Proust, Freud, and Beckett. "Mysterious" associated with "fertile" is not a surprise any longer. "Fertile," especially, suggests the idea of creation: to be fertile is to create. The *unheimlich*—cruel, threatening, and painful as it is—lies at the roots of creating. The painful experience of adaptation

embodies the material on which a writer works.

The repugnance for changing places and beds characterizes very explicitly the narrator in A la recherche. In A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur, his holiday is planned to be spent in the resort of Balbec. The **travel** to Balbec means separation from habit and repetition, and, implicitly, from the mother whose presence represents the safest space for Marcel. The fact that he leaves without his mother is again decided by the father who prefers renting a summer house close to Paris (see 2. 6). Mother cannot find words to console the gloomy child at the time of his departure, but she promises him a letter everyday while grandmother invokes (and not just this time) Mme de Sévigné: "Ma fille, dit ma grand-mère, je te vois comme Mme de Sévigné, une carte devant les yeux et ne nous quittant pas un instant." (2. 9). It is known that the mother and the grandmother are "ardent admirers of Mme de Sévigné" (Kristeva 126); Mme de Sévigné and Mme de Grignan had to part, the latter followed her husband to the opposite side of France, and the only way for the two women to stay close was through letter-writing. There is a kind of symmetry in the triangle mother-grandmother-narrator: the grandmother is like a Mme de Sévigné for the mother, while the mother is a Mme de Sévigné for Marcel ("même loin je serai encore avec mon petit loup. Tu auras demain une lettre de ta maman," she tells the child [2: 9]). The grief of the separation from Sévigné-mother is "softened" by the fact that Sévigné-grandmother accompanies him, and I shall show how the latter is the mother's "replacement" during the holiday.

At Balbec, Marcel receives the key to "his" room in the Grand Hôtel; he is exhausted after his journey, but there is no question of being able to sleep. As soon as he

enters the room, anguish invades him:

> C'est notre attention qui met les objets dans une chambre et **l'habitude** qui les en retire et nous y fait de la place. De la place, il n'y en avait pas pour moi dans ma chambre de Balbec (mienne de nom seulement), elle était pleine de choses qui ne me connaissaient pas, me rendirent le coup d'oeil méfiant que je leur jetai et, sans tenir aucun compte de mon existence, témoignèrent que je dérangeais le train-train de la leur. La pendule- alors qu'à la maison je n'entendais la mienne que quelques secondes par semaine, seulement quand je sortais d'une profonde méditation- continua sans s'interrompre un instant à tenir dans une langue inconnue des propos qui devaient être désobligeants pour moi, car les grands rideaux violets l'écoutaient sans répondre, mais dans une attitude analogue à celle des gens qui haussent les épaules pour montrer que la vue d'un tiers les irrite. Ils donnaient à cette chambre si haute un caractère quasi historique qui eût pu la rendre appropriée à l'assassinat du duc de Guise, et plus tard à une visite de touristes conduits par un guide de l'agence Cook,--mais nullement à mon sommeil. J'étais tourmenté par la présence de petites bibliothèques à vitrines, qui couraient le long des murs, mais surtout par une grande glace à pieds, arrêtée en travers de la pièce et avant le départ de laquelle, je sentais qu'il n'y aurait pour moi de détente possible. Je levais à tout moment mes regards--que les objets de ma chambre de Paris ne gênaient pas de plus que ne faisaient mes propres

> prunelles, car ils étaient plus que des annexes de mes organes, un agrandissement de moi-même–vers le plafond surélevé de ce belvédère situé au sommet de l'hôtel et que ma grand-mère avait choisi pour moi; et, jusque dans cette région plus intime que celle où nous voyons et où nous entendons, dans cette région où nous éprouvons la qualité des odeurs, c'était presque à l'intérieur de moi que celle du vétiver venait pousser dans mes derniers retranchements son offensive, à laquelle j'opposais non sans fatigue la riposte inutile et incessante d'un reniflement alarmé. N'ayant plus d'univers, plus de chambre, plus de corps que menacé par les ennemis qui m'entouraient, qu'envahi jusque dans les os par la fièvre, j'étais seul, j'avais envie de mourir. **Alors ma grand'mère entra; et à l'expansion de mon coeur refoulé s'ouvrirent aussitôt des espaces infinis.** (2. 27-8)

The room and the universe are synonymous. One's universe is one's room. One who does not possess a room has no universe, namely one cannot recollect oneself. Marcel undergoes a hysterical crisis because he feels that **this** room is not **his** room. The objects of the room are animated in the sense in which 'anima' belongs to another than himself. The enemy, the other, is hidden in the little bookcases, in the big mirror, in the clock. The shelves *travel*, the clock *speaks* a foreign language, and the mirror *cuts* his way off. "All his faculties are on the alert, on the defensive, vigilant and taut, and as painfully incapable of relaxation as the tortured body of La Balue in his cage, where he could neither stand upright nor sit down" (Beckett 24). While the familiar space welcomes, the unfamiliar space threatens; his body cannot find its place because the space is invaded by all these

foreign objects, so there is *no room* for *his* space any more.

The objects in a room partake to intimacy as well. Bachelard names the drawers and the chests "les cachettes où l'homme . . . enferme ou dissimule ses secrets" (80). The fascination for a box which can be properly closed is shared by Rilke, too: "Le couvercle d'une boîte saine dont le bord ne serait pas bosselé, un tel couvercle ne devrait pas avoir d'autre désir que de se trouver dans sa boîte" (Rilke qtd in Bachelard 86). It is not only that humans lock up their secrets in a drawer or a box with a lid or a key; even the objects which do not close or lock, like a table or a mirror, are marked by the secretness of someone' s personality, someone who made, chose, arranged them in a certain place.

The narrator is suddenly in contact with objects that are not his but somebody else's. The otherness acts, speaks; it is restless and it is violent. Experiencing the otherness is threatening and destabilizing. Aggressed from all the corners of the room, the narrator is vulnerable, he feels on the edge of death. If in the room of Combray he makes his bed as if digging a *grave,* the room of Balbec is suited for the scene of a *murder*. The same motive of death reunites the two descriptions of rooms.[1] Although the room in Combray is his, the mood with which he approaches it is already the *angoisse.* From this point of view, both rooms are *angoissantes*, until someone else (a motherly presence) comes. As in Combray, the narrator longs for a feminine presence to appear.

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[1] In both rooms, the solitude is scary and "worrysome" (inquiétante), but one may say that the feelings provoked by the room in Combray are a kind of "primitive" experience which gets perpetuated years later: "Quant à la solitude, au silence et à l'obscurité, nous ne pouvons rien en dire, sinon que ce sont là effectivement les circonstances auxquelles s'attache chez la plupart des humains une angoisse infantile qui ne s'éteint jamais tout à fait" (Freud 263).

Familiarity and intimacy present themselves like a tenderness which spreads over the face of things (Levinas 165; 155 for English). The objects which do **not** belong to Marcel and which cannot be **used** by him, are rendered soft by his grandmother. Tenderness comes from friendship, the *intimité* implied by familiarity is *intimité* with somebody else. Grandmother and mother belong to Marcel's *familiar* universe already. The familiarity with the grandmother that the teenager experiences "spreads" over the aggressive objects of the room.

"Autrui qui accueille dans l'intimité n'est pas le *vous* du visage qui se révèle dans une dimension, de hauteur–mais précisement le *tu* de la familiarité: langage sans enseignement, langage silencieux, entente sans mots, expression dans le secret." (Levinas 166).[2] Closeness may exist where language does not need words; the connection to the motherly figure is enacted in silence: "je me jetai dans les bras de ma grand-mère et je suspendis mes lèvres à sa figure comme si j'accédais ainsi à son coeur immense qu'elle m'ouvrait." (Proust 2. 28) Mother and grandmother, again, represent the *familiar*. In their presence, Marcel may express himself "freely"; the embrace of grandmother is like communication beyond words, it is their shared secret since *intimité* supposes secretness. Also, according to Bélloi, the grandmother is the character who represents "le cercle familial ou l'ère naturelle," meaning that there is nothing interposing between the communication between her and her grandson, that she is *transparent* and *natural* for him

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2 "The Other who welcomes in intimacy is not the *you* [*vous*] of the face that reveals itself in a dimension of height, but precisely the *thou* [*tu*] of familiarity; a language without teaching, a silent language, an understanding without words, an expression in secret" (Levinas 155)

(107). Her face is already her heart. He can open his heart completely to this woman who opens also completely to him. He reads her face as he reads a book,[3] and her facial expressions are in a language meant only for him.

The isolation he experiences in the hotel room may be broken, or at least he may *imagine* it broken; it is clear that he "fights" these material objects with *psychological* weapons. The objects cannot be aggressive since they are simply objects, yet they can be invested with human characteristics by the adolescent's excessive sensitivity. What dominates the psychological life of neurotic people is "l'accentuation excessive de la réalité psychique par rapport à la réalité matérielle, trait qui se rattache à la toute-puissance des pensées" (Freud 251). Marcel "tames" the room with the help of a psychological fact: that grandmother's room is exactly next to his, and, above all, that he can communicate at **any** time with her through the wall:

> ". . . Et surtout ne manque pas de frapper au mur si tu as besoin de quelque chose cette nuit, mon lit est adossé au tien, le cloison est très mince. D'ici un moment quand tu seras couché, fais-le, pour voir si nous nous comprenons bien."
>
> . . . je risquai trois petits coups . . . Et à peine j'avais frappé mes coups que j'entendais trois autres, d'une intonation différente ceux-là, empreints d'une calme autorité, répétés à deux reprises pour plus de clarté et qui

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[3] ". . . chaque fois que ma grand-mère avait causé avec moi, ce qu'elle me disait, je l'avais toujours suivi sur la partition ouverte de son visage où les yeux tenaient beaucoup de place." (2. 433) "Les expressions de son visage semblaient écrites dans une langue qui n'était que pour moi." (3. 172)

> disaient: "Ne t'agite pas, j'ai entendu; dans quelques instants je serai là"; et bientôt après ma grand-mère arrivait. (29)

This is his manner of *appropriating* the chamber: he extends it to a larger one which does encompass, at an almost figural level, the familiar. It is evidently a mental "extension" of his space and this is what he needs to find appeasement. The one whose tender presence confers comfort in her absence—the female, as Levinas says—is the grandmother.

4.3. The Two Rooms of the Narrator

Adaptation to a space presupposes that in this space one can enjoy the world and nourish one's self (Levinas 165; for English154-155). The feminine and maternal figure in Marcel's rooms–the mother in Combray, the grandmother in Balbec–gives him joy and nourishes him.

Julia Kristeva's vision of the narrator's incestuous love for mother, explained at length through the image of the madeleine (see Time and Sense, chapter 1, "In Search of Madeleine"), may be interpreted differently. Searching for the time lost may be searching for the "mother" lost; in the Balbec episode, the narrator himself expresses this idea of the "mother" when he embraces his grandmother: "Quand j'avais ainsi ma bouche collée à ses joues, à son front, j'y puisais quelque chose de si bienfaisant, de si **nourricier**, que je gardais l'immobilité, le sérieux, la tranquille avidité d'un enfant qui tête" (2. 28).

To be nourished means to get something from someone else; yet the feminine tenderness that he receives is not exactly what one needs to become a writer. Above all, one must **learn,** and to learn implies to meet the *new* . The two tendencies toward, on the one hand, the known and the comfortable, and, on the other hand, the unknown and the violent, meet in the narrator's character through two groups of characters. It seems that women are the ones who correspond to the former inclination: they welcome the child, console him, and try to put order in his life by a strict set of rules; they want to train him, to fortify him since he is such a frail and nervous child. Rules must refer to a necessary repetition, to a pattern established in his everyday life. The familiar is embodied, according to Levinas, in habits (165; 155 for English) and in tenderness, which are

provided by the "mothers." But these women, in trying to protect him against accidents, do not allow him to take part in new events; his going to the theatre and his travelling to Balbec are not easily permitted, and his goodnight kiss, under unusual conditions, is absolutely refused by the mother.

Nevertheless, disruption in Marcel's life must appear. It is always a male character who causes, in an indirect (or even unintended) way, the accidents. Monsieur de Norpois convinces the family that Berma playing Phèdre is really worth seeing. In Combray, M.Swann pays a visit to the narrator's family and this brings about the father's arbitrary decision to let the mother sleep in the child's bedroom that night. The doctor recommends the Balbec resort for the child's health.

The two inclinations which meet in Marcel's character are those of the artist. He needs a "balance" assured by the female element and an "unbalance" coming generally from the male side. In answer to the question what would unhappiness be for him, Marcel Proust answers "to be separated from *Maman*" (De Botton 52). When he could not sleep he would write letters that he would drop in front of the mother's bedroom: "My dear little *Maman*, I am writing you a note while I am finding it impossible to sleep, to tell you that I am thinking of you"(Proust qtd. in De Botton 52). Proust will be working on this novel after his mother's death:

> When I lost Mamma, I thought about doing away with myself. I did not want to kill myself, because I would not have liked to die like a hero of a newspaper account. Instead, I would allow myself to die by not eating or sleeping. But then I realized that if I die, I would take the **memory** I had

> of her with me, the memory of her unique zeal, and I would be committing a sort of parricide. (Duplay in Mon ami Marcel Proust qtd. in Kristeva 176)

Proust would declare here that no matter how deep his grief, he wants to preserve the memory of the mother. His mother has nourished him enough and he has to live alone now. The room of **memory** will be his hermetic and sheltered apartment on boulevard Haussmann (Kristeva 182), where he will write. This space, rendered feminine by the mother for years, will be transformed into an isolated space which should be rendered feminine by the work of memory.

5.Theatre and Painting: Berma's performance in A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur

A picture's beauty does not depend on the things portrayed in it.

In an essay, Marcel Proust tries to help a very sad young man (see De Botton 133 ff.). The reasons for this man's sadness and disillusion are his inability to afford visiting the cultural centres of Europe. His life is average, ordinary, and, consequently, uninteresting. Proust leads the gloomy man to an exhibition of Jean-Baptiste Chardin.

Chardin depicts the ordinary. No special objects, but objects that we encounter every day without paying attention to them (e.g.bowls, glasses, apples); no noblemen, but ordinary people doing something banal. What is Proust's goal in showing to the young man the exhibition of Chardin's paintings? There is an analogy between the sad man's real life and the life displayed on the canvas:

> Chardin had shown him that the kind of environment in which he lived could, for a fraction of the cost, have many of the charms he had previously associated only with palaces and the princely life. No longer would he feel **painfully excluded from the aesthetic realm**, no longer would he be so envious of smart bankers with gold-plated coal tongs and diamond-studded door handles. (De Botton 136)

Chardin shows the "simple," the "ordinary," the "non-pompous". The sad man should be capable of distinguishing a certain opposition between appearance/essence if he is to change the manner in which he defines it, connected to an aristocratic type of painting. To decrypt the secret of the bowls and apples, the man has to evolve to a point where he

can love and admire Chardin's style.

The simplicity of Chardin's subjects may appear as poverty; this so called "objective" way of painting denotes a certain attitude of the painter toward his models. Rilke says about Van Gogh that he depicts objects that are "sans trace de compassion ou de reproche" (27)–"and it is not pitiful and not at all reproachful (18). It is a "democracy" of the models; all objects are equally important and are worth depicting. Going on with his commentary, on Cézanne this time, Rilke says that all Cézanne's objects are poor: "les pommes sont toutes des pommes à cuire, les bouteilles auraient leur place dans de vieilles poches de veste evasées par l'usage" (35)–"the apples are all cooking apples, and the wine belong in the roundly bulging pockets of an old coat" (29). Both Van Gogh and Cézanne create richness underneath poverty. In Van Gogh's "L'Arbre fleuri," a great splendour radiates from inside (29; 20 for English). Cézanne takes apples and places them on the bed cover, and among them a bottle or something handy. As for Van Gogh, he makes these ordinary objects become his "saints" and forces them to be **beautiful**, to symbolize all the universe and all the joy. It is this beauty that Proust's sad man should discover in the paintings which at first sight do not seem to tell him very much.

In A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur, the young narrator goes to the theatre for the first time. He is going to see Berma, the famous actress, performing Phèdre in a matinée show. Phèdre is already known very well to him; it is certain, therefore, that his attention will focus on the actors' performance and not on the text. This text may be one of the most representative classic pieces of literature, but, as in *le drame du coucher*, where the mother reads to him, the object presented (G. Sand's book, and, here, Racine's

play) is not the main issue. In both cases, the narrator deals with some particular manifestation of art for the first time.

There is a change from the scene in Combray and this scene in A l'ombre. In the former scene, he "meets" the novel. He is too young and too tired to catch all that is happening in the book, but, nevertheless, he learns what a "classical" novel is about. In the latter scene, he moves from a read **text** to a performed play, and this time he is extremely attentive to the actors' acting. Although it may sound odd, the mother and Berma have something in common; in their enterprise to initiate the narrator, they both act as teachers:

> . . . une actrice entra par le fond, qui avait la figure et la voix qu'on m'avait dit être celles de la Berma. On avait dû changer la distribution, tout le soin que j'avais mis à étudier le rôle de la femme de Thésée devenait inutile. Mais une autre actrice donna la réplique à la première. J'avais dû me tromper en prenant celle-là pour la Berma, car la seconde lui ressemblait davantage encore et, plus que l'autre, avait sa diction. Toutes les deux d'ailleurs **ajoutaient à leur rôle de nobles gestes** - que je distinguais **clairement** et dont **je comprenais la relation avec le texte**, tandis qu'elles soulevaient leurs beaux péplums - et aussi des intonations ingénieuses, tantôt passionées, tantôt ironiques, qui me faisaient comprendre la signification d'un vers que j'avais lu chez moi sans apporter assez d'attention à ce qu'il voulait dire. Mais tout d'un coup, dans l'écartement du rideau rouge du sanctuaire, comme dans un cadre, une

> femme parut et aussitôt, à la peur que j'eus, bien plus anxieuse que pouvait être celle de la Berma . . .; - à ma façon, plus absolue encore que celle de la Berma, de ne considérer, dès cet instant, salle, plublic, acteurs, pièce, et mon propre corps que comme un milieu acoustique n'ayant d'importance que dans la mesure où il était favorable aux inflexions de cette voix, je compris que les deux actrices que j'admirais depuis quelques minutes **n'avaient aucune ressemblance avec celle** que j'étais venu entendre. (1. 440)

In describing the first moments of the performance, the narrator tries to lead us to reflect on the quality of art: what is a good actress, what is a bad actress, what would be the difference between them? Trying to express what exactly is the difference between the *real* art and the *non-real* art in painting, Alain de Botton writes:

> It is remarkable to what extent bad paintings of spring resemble, though are still distinct from, good ones. Bad painters may be excellent draftsmen, good on clouds, clever on budding leaves, dutiful in roots, and yet still lack a command of those **elusive elements** in which the particular charms of spring are lodged. They cannot, for instance, depict, and hence make us notice, the pinkish border on the edge of the blossom of a tree, the contrast between storm and sunshine in the light across the field, the gnarled quality of bark or the vulnerable tentative appearance of flowers on the side of a country track--small details no doubt, but in the end, the only things on which our sense of, and enthusiasm for, springtime can be

based. (144)

The main idea would be that in bad paintings there is obviousness and description of an exterior object; the good paintings have "elusive elements," they can surprise the "pinkish border" and the "tentative appearance," which is *l'insaisisable*. Since the bad painters are "excellent draftsmen"–they go straight to the visible elements, to a "fidelity"related strictly to what the picture represents–bad paintings are similar.

I am returning to the quotation from A l'ombre. The first two actresses try to "enrich" the speech, to do *noble* gestures, and to add brilliance to their reciting. The child-spectator understands clearly the significance of their acting and also the relationship to the text. Like the bad paintings described by De Botton, which are linked to the object represented by a fidelity easy to grasp, the actresses, through their intonations either "passionate" or "ironic," make the viewer *see* the text. These two actresses have nothing in common with Berma. Berma seems to offer a *plain* and simple discourse; she would follow Racine's text but nothing more: "Je l'écoutais comme j'aurais lu Phèdre, ou comme si Phèdre elle-même avait dit en ce moment les choses que j'entendais sans que le talent de la Berma semblât leur avoir rien ajouté" (1. 440). The tone of Berma's voice is *monotonous*. She seems to be in a rush. She seems simple. The narrator listens to her speech as if he read Phèdre himself.

> Le héros souhaite de toutes ses forces entendre la Berma, à cerner son talent, à l'isoler pour pouvoir enfin le désigner. C'est la Berma, "j'entends enfin la Berma". Il perçoit une intonation particulièrement intelligente, d'une justesse admirable. D'un coup, c'est Phèdre, c'est

> Phèdre en personne. Pourtant, rien ne peut empêcher la deception. Car cette intonation n'a de valeur qu'intelligible, elle a un sens parfaitement défini, elle est seulement le fruit de l'intelligence et du travail. Peut-être fallait -il entendre autrement la Berma. (Deleuze, Proust et les signes 45)

Berma becomes a transparent *medium* for Racine's Phèdre. She is Phèdre. The teenager does not understand that actually her simplicity is part of her talent. So, he is disappointed. He cannot bridge the distance between the spectator and the actress.

In the final version of A la recherche, the narrator goes to the theatre to see only Phèdre. In one of his sketches, Proust has in mind to comment on two different pieces of literature--a classic one and a modern one:

> Même elle-même [the actress] me paraissait donner â sa vie théâtrale un caractère en jouant de ses anciens rôles. C'était montrer que les pièces avaient un interêt qui survivait au moment où **même modernes** elles étaient venues sur la scène et en autorisait la reprise, que c'était des sortes de morceaux de musée qu'il était intéressant de ressortir quelquefois; l'imprévu même de celles qu'elle ressortait, une fois Le Demi-Monde, une fois Mademoiselle de la Seiglière, une fois Les Enfants d'Edouard, la montrant comme ayant en effet dans la tête tout un musée où elle conférait l'interêt plus grand et les choses qu'elle avait jouées et que son jeu était aussi quelque chose qui avait de l'interêt qui était **indépendant de ce qu'elle jouait** et pouvait exciter l'interêt des amateurs. (Esquisse V; 1. 1006)

In the beginning, the narrator believes that the talent of Berma may be displayed **because** she acts in an ancient play. Phèdre's part interests him because it is more "beautiful," Berma's talent looks "more true," it is founded on something "more real"; briefly, to see Berma in Racine's play is a great feast. She seems to have a "more artistic" theatre life by playing the ancients. The modern parts show him that Berma's talent does not depend on **what** she plays; like Chardin's and Cézanne's paintings which depict banal objects, Berma's repertoire demonstrates that art does not consist in the object depicted:

> Berma se sert de sa voix, de ses bras. Mais ses gestes, au lieu de témoigner de "connexités musculaires", forment un corps transparent qui refracte une essence, une Idée. Les actrices médiocres ont besoin de pleurer pour faire signe que leur rôle comporte la douleur: "excèdent de larmes qu'on voyait couler, parce qu'elles n'avaient pu s'y imbiber, sur la voix de marbre d' Aricie ou d'Ismène." Mais toutes les expressions de la Berma, comme chez un grand violoniste, sont devenues des qualités de timbre. Dans sa voix, "ne subsistait pas un seul déchet de matière inerte et réfractaire à l'esprit." (Deleuze, Proust et les signes 50)

Berma and Cézanne are not opaque objects, objects in themselves, but they are transparent. They reflect ideas; namely, they open the path to these ideas. Theatre for the young narrator, as paintings for the sad man from Proust's essay, is *supposed to* be shining, glamourous, and noble in the sense of an *obvious* nobility. The teenager believes that Berma's acting should do something "more" with Racine's text. The paintings worth seeing are Veronese's, because they represent aristocratic figures and

these objects would be "naturally" beautiful because luxurious. According to this man and to Marcel, art appears to be what they should discover it is not.

The art which the sad man and the narrator are exposed to does not deal with that kind of easily recognizable beauty. It seems that there is no transition between the object and the representation of the object. It seems that the ordinary existence of humans and of objects is taken from everyday life and put on a canvas: Racine's text is taken and recited *as it is*. The easiness of this process is of course only apparent. The painter's and the actress' work is not evident at first sight:

> By saying that great painters were the ones by whom our eyes were opened, Proust was at the same time implying that our sense of beauty was not immobile, and could be sensitized by painters, who would, through their canvases, inculcate in us an appreciation of **once neglected aesthetic qualities**. (De Botton 139)

The simplicity of what Chardin paints, and of the manner of Berma's acting, must make the viewer stop and reflect. It is exactly because these two seem to do *easy* and maybe *usual* things, that they should open the spectator's eyes by suggesting another sense of beauty.

The discovery of art takes place in a particular space. The space of the theatre that the narrator enters for the first time appears as a public space *par excellence*. It is a space opened to the people, it is a space where people gather to sit in the same room, to watch and to talk. The theatre is at the same time private. All the seats are disposed in such a away that each spectator feels that s/he is the only viewer and that s/he has the best

possible seat: "Je pensais qu'on devait être empêché de bien voir par les autres spectateurs comme on l'est au milieu d'une foule; or je me rendis compte qu'au contraire . . . chacun se sent le centre du théâtre" (1. 438).

The relationship established between the spectator and the art of performing is of a private nature. The space of the theatre is thus both private and public. This dual nature means that the private space has "*pignon sur la rue,*" but that it also has its secret; the home separates the human from the world, but this separation does not isolate her/him as it makes work possible (Levinas, 167; 156 for English). The actress on the stage is presenting something on which she has been working for a long time, and, at the same time, she is working at the moment of the performance. The stage space is opened to the public, but still possesses its secret.

The distance between the spectators and the performers should be "shortened," but it is not the "material" distance from the seats to the stage. "Je dis à ma grand-mère que je ne voyais pas bien, elle me passa sa lorgnette" (1. 441): Marcel believes that with the help of his grandmother's binoculars he would be able to bring Berma "closer". But getting closer to La Berma means approaching the dramatic art from her perspective. And this takes time: in Le Côté de Guermantes (see 2. 346-52), the narrator makes an analysis post-performance which reveals his understanding of Art a few years after the matinée. Marcel is desperately trying to be attentive: "J'aurais voulu -pour pouvoir l'approfondir, pour tâcher d'y découvrir ce qu'elle avait de beau- arrêter, immobiliser longtemps devant moi chaque intonation de l'artiste, chaque expression de sa physionomie" (1. 440-41) He wants to possess the secret of Berma's acting. The secret, which must be of a private

nature, is at least partially disclosed to Marcel: on the one hand, *enough*, so that he become curious and interested, and, on the other hand, insufficiently, so that he be frustrated and disappointed.

The dual nature of the space is felt by the narrator as soon he enters the theatre. The curtains once pulled up would reveal a world supposed to be different:

> Ce rideau une fois levé–quand sur la scène une table à écrire et une cheminée, assez ordinaires d'ailleurs, signifièrent que les personnages qui allaient entrer seraient, non pas des acteurs venus pour réciter comme j'en avais vu une fois en soirée, mais des hommes en train de vivre chez eux un jour de leur vie dans laquelle je pénétrais par effraction sans qu'ils puissent me voir." (1. 439)

The stage space seems private and the spectator feels he penetrates a universe meant not to be seen by any kind of public. Marcel feels like a voyeur[1] who enters another's private life in which he would not be allowed to participate. But this time it is a false kind voyeurism since the conversations of actors are meant to be opened, seen, displayed.

The artist–the actor in this case–has to traverse from the private space to a public one. The room which belongs to the actor has to be like the room of the writer, according to Virginia Woolf: it has to be under the control of the person who lives there. The actor can unlock the door and make his art travel towards the public.

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[1] The narrator as a voyeur is a recurrent theme in A la recherche; at least two instances deal exactly with what is most intimate, namely sexual life: the dialogue between Mlle de Vinteuil and her girlfriend in Du Côté de chez Swann, and, respectively, the encounter of Jupien with baron Charlus in Sodome and Gomorrhe.

6. The Artist's Feminine Space

6.1. Madame Swann's Flowers

Virginia Woolf states that, in the nineteenth century, an *honourable* woman could earn money by teaching young children, reading to old ladies or addressing envelopes; no woman could travel, study, or walk alone in town (see chapter 3). A woman cannot have much choice if she wants to have her own money, yet she can still find a way to freedom by dropping the adjective "honourable" from her description and by becoming a *courtisane* (a courtesan wanton). Proust has a particular idea about courtesans:

> The prostitute is an unfortunate position in the Proustian theory of desire, because she both wishes to entice a man and yet is commercially prevented from doing what is most likely to encourage love–namely, tell him that she is not free tonight. She may be clever and attractive, and yet the one thing she cannot do is foster **doubts** as to whether he will ever possess her physically. The outcome is clear, and therefore real, lasting desire unlikely. "If prostitutes . . . attract us so little, it is not because they are less beautiful than other women, but because they are ready and waiting; because they already offer precisely what we seek to attain." (De Botton 168)

If De Botton is right, the counterpart of this comment would be that a man may yet be attracted by a prostitute if she reserves the right to *choose* her date. Odette de Crécy, later Mme Swann, although a kept woman, is, paradoxically enough, an independent woman: 1) she can make a living; 2) she can choose what man she would receive. She belongs to

the group of those whom society reject, but, nevertheless, with whom men fall in love with. A la recherche reveals that a man would fall in love with a woman, no matter that she is a duchess or a *courtisane*, as long as she can formulate a potential refusal. It is the freedom to refuse a man, to be busy with other things and/or men, that attracts Swann.[1] In the chapter "Transferring Experience," I showed that the simple and hazardous absence of Odette at one of the Verdurins' soirées provokes Swann's frustration and anguish which would lead to his *sickness*-love. Swann starts to love this woman because she is **not always available**. The present chapter is dedicated to the long process by which Swann falls in love. Because he cannot confess to himself that this is the reason of his passion, what he actually does is transform a woman who "is not his type"[2] into a piece of art. According to Deleuze, Odette, as all the other characters in A la recherche, contains signs, and these signs are richer for the man who is in love with her than for anyone else:

> Devenir amoureux, c'est individualiser quelqu'un par les signes qu'il porte ou qu'il émet. C'est devenir sensible à ces signes, en faire l'apprentissage (ainsi la lente individualisation d'Albertine dans le groupe des jeunes filles). Il se peut que l'amitié se nourisse d'observation et de conversation,

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1

This type of relationship between a gentleman and a prostitute is not unique in A la recherche. Besides the couple Swann-Odette, there is another couple which surprises the public opinion: Saint-Loup and Rachel, an actress who used to work in a brothel (see A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur).

2

". . .elle était apparue à Swann non pas certes sans beauté, mais d'un genre de beauté qui lui était indifférent, qui ne lui inspirait aucun désir, lui causait même une sorte de répulsion physique, de ces femmes comme tout le monde a les siennes, différentes pour chacun, et qui sont l'opposé du type que nos sens réclament" (1.193).

> mais l'amour naît et se nourrit d'interprétation silencieuse. L'être aimé apparaît comme un signe, une "âme": il exprime un monde possible inconnu de nous. (Proust et les signes 12)

The loved person is unknown, she keeps a secret inside her. Swann tries to understand these signs possessed by Odette. Odette's **beauty** is something to *discover.* Like Chardin's and Cézanne's paintings, and like Berma's acting (see the chapter "Theatre and Painting"), which do not reveal beauty on the spot, Odette appears *common* at first sight:

> Swann may know as a general truth that life is full of contrasts, but in the case of each person he knows, he trusts that those parts of a life which he is not familiar must be identical with the parts with which he is. He understands what is hidden from him in the light of what is revealed, and therefore understands nothing of Odette, difficult as it is to accept that a woman who seems so respectable when she is with him could be the same person who once frequented brothels. (De Botton 82)

Van Gogh, says Rilke, makes the ordinary objects he depicts his "saints" and forces them to be beautiful (29, 20 for English). Swann acts as a creator as well; he forces Odette to be **beautiful**, as if she were a painting or an object of art. He tries to find the similarity between her and a painting by Botticelli–and he succeeds; the *sign* of Odette will be this painting. I shall deal first with the way in which Swann approaches Odette, and, afterward, with the way in which Odette approaches herself.

Odette's metamorphosis is impressive. She changes herself and she changes in the eyes of the others as well. In Combray, she is "la dame en rose" ("the lady in pink")

whom the child-narrator meets at his uncle's house. In Un amour de Swann, she frequents the Verdurins' *salon*, and her clothing is perceived as something inappropriate:

> . . . le corsage . . . donnait à la femme l'air d'être composée de pièces différentes mal enmanchées les unes dans les autres: . . . tant les ruchés, les volants, le gilet suivaient en toute indépendance, selon la fantaisie de leur dessin ou la consistance de leur étoffe, la ligne qui les conduisait aux noeuds, aux bouillons de dentelle . . . mais ne s'attachaient nullement à l'être vivant. (1. 194)

This description is not necessarily about bad taste. The vest, the flounces, the "honeycombs" possess a certain "autonomy." They are not attached to the person wearing these clothes. The pieces of the costume are different and there is no unity in this difference. Swann "accepts Odette provided that he can raise her stature, compromise between elegance and artistic expression" (Kristeva 13); that is how Swann, in the first phase of his falling in love, finds a compromise: he unifies two concepts from different realms by imposing an association. The image of Odette as a painting starts as a comparison:

> Debout à côté de lui, laissant le long de ses joues ses cheveux qu'elle avait dénoués, fléchissant une jambe dans une attitude légèrement dansante pour pouvoir pencher sans fatigue vers la gravure qu'elle regardait, en inclinant la tête, de ses grands yeux, si fatigués et maussades quand elle ne s'animait pas, elle frappa Swann par sa ressemblance avec cette figure de Zéphora, la fille de Jéthro, qu'on voit dans une fresque de la chapelle

Sixtine.[3] (1. 219)

Gradually, the comparison transforms into a metaphor-metonymy; every metaphor implies a metamorphosis, and this will determine an exchange between Zéphora's face and Odette's face: "Il plaça sur sa table de travail, comme une photographie d'Odette, une réproduction de la fille de Jéthro" (1. 221).

In the initial phase, the "inappropriateness" of Odette's outfit comes from a "rupture" between her and her clothes. This "rupture" may be the result of Odette's taste, but it is for sure the result of what one may call Swann's "objectiveness." In order to fall in love with this woman, Swann has to become "subjective." He is subjective and original because the analogy he establishes in his mind is really a *particular* idea belonging only to him:[4]

> Il arrive qu'une qualité sensible nous donne une joie étrange, en même temps qu'elle nous transmet une sorte d'impératif. Ainsi éprouvée, la qualité n'apparaît plus comme une propriété de l'objet qui la possède actuellement, mais comme le signe d'un *tout autre* objet, que nous devons tenter de déchiffrer, au prix d'un effort qui risque toujours d'échouer.

3

"Proust aussi avait ce goût [de Swann]. Dans une lettre à Robert Dreyfus (10 sept. 1888) il évoque comme un exemple de la "fleur esthétique parisienne de 1880" une grande courtisane, "dont l'évasure de la nuque a precisément la rondeur charmante de ces amphores où les Etrusques patients mirent tout leur idéal, tout leur rêve consolant de grâce, dont le coin de la lèvre est la même que dans ces vierges naïves de Luini (Bernardino) ou de Botticelli . . ." (Correspondance quoted in Notes et variantes 1. 1206).

4

He will "transmit" something of this analogy to the narrator as well–and I shall talk about that later–but the relationship between the two characters, as I mentioned before, is special.

> Tout se passe comme si la qualité enveloppait, retenait captive l'âme d'un autre objet que celui qu'elle désigne maintenant. (Deleuze, Proust et les signes 16)

Deleuze comments on the same aspect of the association in terms of signs. One object becomes the sign of another object. The joy that the image of Odette gives to Swann is not provoked by her qualities purely and simply, but by what he actually achieves in this bringing together of two different realities. The reproduction of Botticelli's painting placed on his desk seems to capture the soul, the uniqueness of the woman:

> Proust a su faire résonner visage, paysage, peinture, musique, etc. . . . D'abord, tout un dispositif signifiant s'établit. Visage d'Odette aux larges joues blanches et jaunes et yeux comme trous noirs. Mais ce visage lui-même ne cesse de renvoyer à d'autres choses, également disposées sur le mur. C'est cela, l'esthétisme, l'amateurisme de Swann: il faut toujours que quelque chose lui rappelle autre chose, dans un réseau d'interprétations sous le signe du signifiant. Un visage renvoie à un paysage. Un visage doit lui "rappeler" un tableau, un fragment de tableau. . . . Tout ce dispositif de significance, dans un renvoi d'intreprétations, prépare le second moment, subjectif passionnel, où la jalousie, la querulance, l'érotomanie de Swann vont se développer. Voilà maintenant que le visage d'Odette file sur une ligne qui se précipite vers un seul trou noir, celui de la Passion de Swann. Les autres lignes aussi, de paysagité, de picturalité, de musicalité, se hâtent vers ce trou catatonique, et s'enroulent autour,

pour le border plusieurs fois.[5] (Deleuze et Guattari 227-28)

Feelings and art are not separable. It is through the bias of art—music and painting—that Swann is attracted to Odette. When he first sees her, he realizes that she is not his type; he tries to isolate a certain spot on her cheek because that is the only thing he likes about her. Isolation is not the key of getting joy from that particular object. Later in the book, in A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur, Marcel does the same thing with Berma's art: trying to isolate Berma's acting does not make him admire her (see chapter 5).

According to Proust, love is born on the basis of an "accidental association." "Nous substituons aux valeurs intelligibles objectives un jeu subjectif d'associations d'idées. L'insuffisance de cette compensation apparaît d'autant mieux qu'on s'élève dans l'échelle de signes. Un geste de Berma serait beau parce qu'il évoquerait celui d'une statuette . . . Tout est permis dans l'exercice de l'association" (Deleuze, Proust et e les signes 46). For the narrator, Albertine remains associated with the seaside and with the girls' cheerful group from Balbec; for Swann, Odette is Zéphora. It is not the absolute value of someone's qualities which charm one, but the *relative* "value" of that person,

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5

"Proust was able to make the face, landscape, painting, music, etc., resonate together. . . First, a whole signifying mechanism is set up. The face of Odette with her broad white or yellow cheeks, and her eyes as black holes. But this face continually refers back to other things, also arrayed on the wall. That is Swann's aestheticism, his amateurism: a thing must always recall something else, in a network of interpretations under the sign of the signifier. A face refers to a landscape. A face must "recall" a painting, or a fragment of painting. . . The entire mechanism of significance, with its referral of interpretations, prepares the way for the second, passional subjective moment, during which Swann's jealousy, querulous delusion, and erotomania develop. Now Odette's face races down a line hurtling toward a single black hole, that of Swann's passion. The other lines, of landscapity, picturality, and musicality, also rush toward this catatonic hole and coil around it, bordering it several times" (Deleuze and Guattari 185-186).

"relative" meaning *in relation to* certain circumstances. Swann starts loving Odette when he starts to see her **in connection** to art forms. He succeeds, like Proust, in making the face, the landscape, the painting, the music "resonate together".

The admiration exercised by Swann falling in love with Odette is extended to the adolescent-narrator who pays her visits: "Quelquefois Mme Swann s'asseyait devant le piano près de la fenêtre. Sa robe de chambre en crêpe de Chine, d'une seule couleur vive, rappelait certaines blouses qu'on voit dans les tableaux florentins" (Esquisse XVII; 1.1021). The same approach of connecting Odette to art is exercised by Marcel. Her house-robe "recalls" a blouse from Italian paintings. It is not her face this time but her blouse; it is not Botticelli but the Florence school. Nevertheless, the essence of the manner in which the two male characters come to like this woman is the same. In another draft, Proust associates Mme Swann with the historical figure of Mary Stuart:

> . . elle ballayait l'allée tandis que sous les acacias je voyais s'avancer lentement la femme qui était représentée là, levant de la même façon son délicieux visage; le bras à demi tendu pour tenir son ombrelle devant elle; seule, **sous les acacias**, formant pour moi un **tableau où le paysage était complété** par cette figure des plus charmantes historiques pour moi plus fine, plus mystérieusement séduisante qu'aucune figure de l'histoire ou de la poésie, aussi **particulière** et aussi **noble que si ç'avait été Marie Stuart**, Mme Swann s'avançait. (Esquisse LXXXV; 1. 987)

Her nobility is **connected** not only to a historical background but also to the scenery where she appears. The natural landscape creates a scene for her appearance to the same

extent in which her appearance affects the landscape: "le paysage était complété par cette figure." One may perceive how, at this stage, the initial *inappropriateness* in the image of Odette (see the beginning of Un amour de Swann, where Swann starts to frequent the Verdurins' salon) changes into *appropriateness.*[6] The rupture (break, disruption) in Odette's *toilette* is blurred and gradually replaced by *smoothness*; the acacias under which she walks **match** with her parasol and with her delightful face. So, she "appropriates" her clothes, her objects, and *her* landscape.

Beauty demands effort in order to be discovered:

> The incident emphasizes once more that **beauty is something to be found**, rather than passively encountered, that it requires us to pick up on certain details, to identify the whiteness of a cotton dress, the reflection of the sea on the hull of the yacht, or the contrast between the colour of a jockey's coat and his face. (De Botton 149)

To find something beautiful implies a doubly-folded effort. It comes from both the object of beauty and from the "subjectifier" (the one who turns the object into a subject). Swann tries to transform Odette into a piece of art. As if his subjectivity affected her, the object of his love, she starts doing art. As the wife of Monsieur Swann, she transforms herself and her space:

> Il y avait une autre raison que celles données plus haut et pour laquelle les

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6

Appropriateness: see *approprié* (French), which contains *propre*--"personal," "possessed," "belonging to one."

> fleurs n'avaient pas qu'un caractère d'ornement dans le salon de Mme Swann et cette raison-là ne tenait pas à l'époque, mais en partie à l'existence qu'avait menée jadis Odette. Une grande cocotte, comme elle avait été, vit beaucoup pour ses amants, c'est-à-dire **chez elle**, ce qui peut la conduire à vivre **pour elle**. Les choses que chez une honnête femme on voit et qui certes peuvent lui paraître, à elle aussi, avoir de l'importance, sont celles, en tout cas, qui pour la cocotte en ont plus. Le point culminant de sa journée est celui non pas où **elle s'habille pour le monde**, mais où elle se déshabille pour un homme. Il lui faut être aussi élégante en robe de chambre, en chemise de nuit, qu'en toillette de ville. D'autres femmes montrent leurs bijoux, elle, elle vit dans l'intimité de ses perles. Ce genre d'existence impose l'obligation, et finit par donner le goût, d'un luxe secret, c'est-à-dire bien près d'être désinteressé. Mme Swann l'étendait aux fleurs. Il y avait toujours près de son fauteuil une immense coupe de cristal remplie entièrement de violettes de Parme ou de marguerites effeuillées dans l'eau, et qui semblait témoigner aux yeux de l'arrivant de quelque occupation préferée et interrompue, comme eût été la tasse de thé que Mme Swann eût bue seule, pour son plaisir; d'une occupation plus intime même et plus mystérieuse. (1. 583-84)

There is a combination of factors acting on the development of Mme Swann's taste. The influence of Swann is not isolated. It seems paradoxical that her past—she was a courtesan—acts in conjunction with Swann's idea of art. The fact that she always wears

exquisite clothes is to be traced back to the epoch where she practiced her profession. The routine of the job becomes part of an aesthetic order. Having to spend a lot of time indoors did not make her neglect her look. On the contrary, since she was receiving men in her house all the time, she had to pay great attention to the way she dressed. Living *chez elle* leads to living *pour elle*. Her private space gets invested with aesthetic qualities. The beauty of her dress and of her jewels is "extended" to flowers. In one of Proust' drafts, the flowers—violets—embody the expression of Odette's eye: "Elle souriait et pendant un moment ses yeux souriants prenaient l'air léger, capricieux, rêveur, flexible et **frivole** des fleurs de cyclamen, de rose et de **violette** qu'elle avait au-dessus de sa mèche grise" (Esquisse LXXXIV; 1. 985). Here, the connection between Mme Swann and flowers—cyclamens, roses and violets—is made very clear. Her gaze is "contaminated" by the qualities of the flowers: it is light, capricious, dreamy, flexible, frivolous. She lives with her pearls, as well as with her flowers, in intimacy.

> Et le corps de Mme Swann, fouettant la soie comme le corps d'une **sirène** fait l'onde, donnant au drap une expression humaine, avait trouvé lui aussi un type autant qu'avait fait son visage et semblait une forme organisée et divine qui **s'était dégagée du long chaos,** de l'enveloppement nébuleux des modes précédentes, maintenant démodées. Mme Swann me semblait choisir la toilette différente qu'elle portait chaque jour d'aprés les rites dans la liturgie desquels elle était plus versée qu'aucune, mais auxquels, comme à une sorte de sagesse divine dont elle était la grande prêtresse, elle était forcée d'obéïr. (Esquisse XXIV; 1.1036)

The difference is notable between Odette's image during her first meetings with Swann and the image offered now by Madame Swann. The vest she wore was "independent" of her person. The assemblage of different pieces of clothing seemed taken *at random*, disorganized and not reflected upon, having no *intimacy* with her body. In the latest quotation, it is her body which gives expression to the wrapping silk; as in the case of Berma's acting, the movement proceeds from inside toward outside. Her taste "moulds" the clothes from her own interiority. It is not disorganised any more; on the contrary, her body seems an "organized" and "divine" form. The attention she pays to her "toilettes" is more and more evident. Nothing is at random; she always wears different clothes, as if following the rites of the liturgy. There is no doubt that Madame Swann is seen as an artist: the phrase "une forme dégagée du long chaos" ("chaos" being in her case the "inappropriateness" of her outfit) appears in the description of the writer Bergotte, whom the narrator deeply admires:

> Et quand on lisait Bergotte ensuite, comme quand j'avais causé avec lui, il paraissait moins bergottique qu'on avait cru, avec un foisennement d'autres choses sur lesquelles tout d'un coup, mais individuellement, **mais tiré du chaos,** mais nouveau, comme un visage qu'on voit pour la première fois ... [*interrompu*]. (Esquisse XXII; 1. 1033)

Odette got out from chaos, that is, she gained her individuality, her originality, **her own space.** The house where she expects guests, her flowers spread in a *disinterested* manner, the exquisite dresses, the hats, the parasols she wears every time differently: all these are signs of her individuality. Just like a writer, she has found her private space.

6.2. Virginia Woolf's Dresses

I am insane on the subject of clothes.
Virginia Woolf

6.2.1. Mrs Dalloway in Green

In order for the "intimité" of dwelling to be created, the home needs a presence (Levinas 165). It must be a *presence* revealed in *absence*; this apparent contradiction of presence and absence is the very definition of discretion (166; 155 for English). The Other whose presence is discrete is the *feminine*.

In Mrs Dalloway, the main character, Clarissa Dalloway, prepares her house for a party. The preparations focus on two aspects: one is the house, the other is herself. She knows her house *as her own pocket*, which means that there is an intimate relationship between her and her space:

> Strange, she thought, pausing on the landing, and assembling that diamond shape, that single person, strange how a mistress knows the very moment, **the very temper of the house!** Faint sounds rose in spirals up the well of the stairs; the swish of a mop; tapping; knocking; a loudness when the front door opened; a voice repeating a message in the basement; the chink of silver on a tray; clean silver for the party. **All was for the party.** (55-6)[1]

She **knows** "the very temper of the house." She distinguishes all imperceptible sounds of the house. The house is thus almost "interior" to her. This familiar space of hers is prepared for a party. In a quite similar manner to Berma, the actress in A l'ombre des

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[1] In this chapter, all the references in Woolf are from Mrs. Dalloway, except when indicated otherwise.

jeunes filles en fleur, Clarissa's movement is from private to public. A party means lots of people, means public, means display of the house in the eyes of this public. Her space must turn into a *welcoming* space for the guests whom she expects that evening[2]. As a host, she takes care of the way in which the house will *look* to the others. She gives specific orders to her maids: they clean the house and the silver cutlery which is to be displayed for dinner. Her maid, Lucy, sets up the smallest details for rendering the space *beautiful*:

> Lucy came running full tilt, having just nipped in to the drawing-room to smooth a cover, to straighten a chair, to pause a moment and feel—whoever came in must think how clean, how bright, how beautifully cared for, when they saw the beautiful silver, the brass fir-irons, the new chair-covers, and the curtains of yellow chintz. (250)

All the objects of the house have to be arranged in a **particular** manner. Nothing should be there by accident; all details are planned and taken care of. The *beautiful* of the silver, the *new* of the chair-covers, the *brass* of the fir-irons, the *yellow* of the curtains, are signs of welcoming and also signs of Clarissa's own taste.

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[2]Sally, a female friend of Clarissa's, is another example of "discrete presence": "Sally's power was amazing, her gift, her personality. There was her way with flowers, for instance. At Bourton they always had stiff little vases all the way down the table. Sally went out, picked hollyhocks, dahlias -all sorts of flowers that had never been seen together -cut their heads off, and made them swim on the top of water bowls. The effect was extraordinary- coming in to dinner in the sunset" (50). Sally discovers how to use the bowls put on the table. The action of gathering and disposing the heads of hollyhocks, dahlias, and other flowers on water does not have a practical purpose. The flowers on the bowls change the atmosphere of the room. Sally's personality spreads over the objects of the room. Her presence is felt through this arrangement which welcomes the others.

Some critics see in Clarissa Dalloway a failed destiny: "No wonder Clarissa's eyes fill with tears, when she sees her old friend Peter Walsh. They both have given up their freedoms, the passions, the connections with nature which they once felt, even if only fleetingly, their youthful summer at Bourton" (Searle 114-15).

This statement needs some more elaboration. In spite of the appearances, the freedoms of Peter and of Clarissa are not that similar. Clarissa's marriage appears to be the only path on which she can walk in order to have an honourable place in society, while Peter's free will is manifested in his going to India. Clarissa's bursting into tears may be the typical nostalgia that humans feel when thinking of their youth: then, all possibilities were still contained within; now, most of life has been consumed along a particular path and is exhausted.

Clarissa's tears **do not mean** that she is an unaccomplished woman. It is true that Clarissa does not practice a profession, nor has she money of her own. In her diary, Virginia Woolf writes about Flora Woolf, the youngest of Leonard Woolf's three sisters: "She can typewrite, do shorthand, sing, play chess, write stories which are sometimes accepted, and she earns 30/ a week as the secretary of the Principal of the Scottish Church in London. And in doing these various arts she will keep lively till a great old age, like a man playing with five billiard balls" (The Diary of Virginia Woolf 1.6). Clarissa Dalloway does not practice "these various arts": she cannot typewrite, she does not write short stories, and does not earn any money as a secretary. But she finds her own way of keeping "lively" and of doing art. When she was young she wrote poetry, was interested in socialist ideas, and read William Morris. After she marries Richard, she "channels her

wit, desires, and artistic instincts: into orchestrating beautiful parties for her husband" (Searles 114). She did not end as a poet eventually, but she directs her artistic abilities toward a **hostess'** talents. Even married to Richard, without having a job, she is able to create a space of her own: the home.

The image of the nest-house makes us dream of intimacy, says Bachelard (100). The nest forms itself from its interior, like a shell; it is the inside of the nest which imposes its form. Similar to the nest of a bird, the shape of the home is given by its interior; the *intimité* of the home is the one which makes it what it is. The house is as "personal" as a garment, namely, it is adjusted for one's body. In Mrs Dalloway, the room which "fits" Clarissa is the attic. It is a very simple room, reminiscent of Woolf's own room; it has a bed, a mirror, a dressing-table, and a cupboard where Clarissa keeps her dresses and garments (Smith 219):

> Her evening dresses hung in the cupboard. Clarissa, plunging her hand into the softness, gently, detached her green dress and carried it to window. She had torn it. Some one had trod on the skirt. She had felt it give at the Embassy party at the top among the folds. By artificial light the green shone, but lost its colour now in the sun. She would mend it. Her maids had too much to do. She would wear it to-night. She would take her silks, her scissors, her -what was it?- her thimble, of course, down into the drawing room, for she must also write, and see that things generally were more or less in order. (55-6)

In the "garment-room," she keeps her clothes. Clarissa chooses one particular dress for the birthday party. Why is she mending her green dress? Surely she has many dresses; it cannot be a question of not having the money to acquire new dresses; she has worn that dress repeatedly. Has maybe the dress fused so intimately with Clarissa's personality that she cannot abandon it? Some may think that clothes were created for practical reasons; Thomas Carlyle, in Sartor Resartus, insists that "the first purpose of Clothes . . . was not warmth or decency, but ornament" (30). Like the flowers arranged in bowls, clothes do not represent "usefulness" but are rather an encapsulation of one's personality.

On the morning of the party, Peter Walsh enters the scene and interrupts suddenly her domestic activities:

> "Who can- what can," asked Mrs Dalloway (thinking it was outrageous to be interrupted at eleven o'clock, on the morning of the day she was giving a party), hearing a step on the stairs. She heard a hand upon the door. She made to hide her dress, like a virgin protecting chastity, respecting privacy. (59)

According to Bachelard, there is no lock which could resist total violence (see Lequenne quoted in Bachelard in the chapter "The Writer in the Private Space"). As a flashing torrent, Peter Walsh invades Clarissa's space. The fact that he shows up at that hour is "outrageous" for Clarissa. She is working; she is preparing for a party, and has many things to do. Peter does not care a bit for the hour of his arrival; evidently, for him the interruption is in no way "outrageous'. He disregards in fact everything linked to

Clarissa's feminine tasks. The comparison with the virgin when she attempts to hide her dress–that has often been interpreted, in a psychoanalytical manner, as ravishment–shows that both Clarissa's room and her dress represent her *intimité*. The green dress will be a party dress that evening when she wears it; but until then, the dress is as intimate as underclothes. At the same time, "Clarissa Dalloway's green dress is a covering . . Presumably, she sits with it on her lap, mending, when Peter Walsh interrupts her. . . . Clarissa' s gown, fetishistically reviled by Peter for what it does/not cover, is presented as an elemental part of her and not just a temporary costume" (Edson 122). Seeing the green dress, Peter sees a hidden part of Clarissa. While mending her dress, she is surprised by Peter at a moment not only of domestic activity but of private activity:

> "And what's all this?" he said, sitting his pen-knife towards her green dress.
>
> He's very well dressed, thought Clarissa; yet he always criticises *me*.
>
> Here she is mending her dress; mending her dress as usual; here she's been **sitting** all the time I've been in India; mending her dress; playing about; going to parties; running to the House and back and all that, he thought, growing more and more irritated, more and more agitated, for there's nothing in the world so bad for some women as marriage. (60-1)

Peter's contempt is visible in his words, gestures, and, especially, in his spontaneous thoughts. "And what's all this?" is a question which places him in a rather superior position as compared to Clarissa's. He does not point with his eyes or with his hand to the

dress–as one may expect–but with his pen-knife. Is this his *subtle* way of criticizing her? It cannot be a generally critical opinion on clothes, since he is well dressed himself. Why, then, does Clarissa's green dress represent a rather frivolous preoccupation, when he is preoccupied by clothing, too?

His contempt grows. Why does he turn more "irritated" and "agitated" when he thinks of what she has done all these years since he left for India? Going to India is completely respectable, brave, and male-like. The enumerated activities–mending her dress, going to parties, running to the House–are they unimportant, shallow, in no way brave, because they are female-like? Nevertheless, if the first part of his judgement is not and cannot be objective, his final idea concerning marriage is not *totally* wrong, although he still has a male-centred perspective. Talking about Sally, Clarissa says:

> It was her warmth, her vitality–she would paint, she would write . . . she accused Hugh Whitbread . . . of kissing her in the smoking-room to punish her for saying that women should have votes. Vulgar men did, she said. And Clarissa remembered having to persuade her not to denounce him at family prayers, which she was capable of doing with her daring, her recklessness, her melodramatic love being the centre of everything and creating scenes, and it was bound, Clarissa used to think, to end in some awful tragedy; her death; her martyrdom; instead of which she had married, quite unexpectedly, a bald man with large buttonholes, who owned, it was said, cotton mills at Manchester. And she had five boys!

(276-77)

Marriage is imprisonment, or is "another kind of" tragedy, Clarissa seems to suggest. Clarissa used to read and write poetry; Sally would paint and write. Sally's death is the marriage to the bald man who owns cotton mills at Manchester: "there is nothing in the world so bad for some women as marriage" (276). In Sally's case, marriage is a *terminus*, it is the point after which no event may arrive. Everything exciting happened before she married—this is when she arranges the flowers in the pots, when she argues that women should have votes, when she would direct her energy toward painting. It seems that after marriage there is a full stop. Nothing really happens afterwards.

In opposition to Sally's life, Clarissa' s life is accomplished, through exactly what Peter Walsh despises: mending the dress, going to parties. Clarissa possesses the **talent** of connecting people among them and connecting herself to people. Although it does not look like much, this is a talent–like any other talent–like writing poetry, for example. This ***perfect hostess*** that she embodies is composed by mending the dress, by choosing the clothing, by arranging, cleaning, and decorating the house, by talking to guests, by saying to every one: "How delightful to see you!" in a sincere and natural manner.

Odette Swann and Clarissa Dalloway are women able to apply their talent to and inside their own space, which is displayed publicly. At this point the difference of cultural background and of class, the fact that Odette entertained men for a living and Clarissa used to read William Morris, is not important any more. They both succeed in finding a manner of expressing their personalities, and the *violettes de Parme* (see the

chapter "Madame Swann's Flowers") as well as the green dress are part of it. Odette's idea is to create a salon where artists would meet and exchange opinions. Clarissa invites the Prime Minister, Lady Bruton, Sir Harry–all the so called "important people" of the city.

The role of these women *seems* valueless, but it is priceless because important things, that one takes for granted, would not exist without their work. They function as *cataliseurs* between people[3], they create the conditions, and the medium where human contacts may take place. They are directors of their own shows. Because they do not paint and do not write novels, because they are not, after the commonplace definition, recognized as "artists", they are disregarded. The secret of their talent needs to be discovered. It might not be as evident and famous as Venetian paintings, but this feminine artistry is actually closer to Cézanne's and Chardin's art, and to Berma's acting. They need to be acknowledged, and then, one could see that these women's occupations are not frivolous, unimportant, or superficial. Madame Swann and Mrs. Dalloway create art which is not assimilated by the canonical definition of art.

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3 They may be compared, to a certain extent, to the *salonières* of the previous century.

6.2.2. Mabel in Yellow

Virginia Woolf's short story, "The New Dress," is linked to her novel Mrs.Dalloway through the fact that the same character, Clarissa, and the same event, her party, appear in both writings. The "The New Dress" focuses on another female character, present at the party, Mabel.

Mabel is in the position of the object and of the subject at the same time. She sees herself from within and she perceives herself from without in a very critical way. Going to Mrs. Dalloway's party is a nightmare to her because she always thinks she knows the manner in which the public perceives her, and this is not in a favourable manner, in her opinion. She has to choose a dress for the event: " she could not be fashionable. It was absurd to pretend it even-fashion meant cut, meant style, meant thirty guineas at least—but why not be original? Why not be herself, anyhow?" (164)[1].

Why not be herself? Actually, she is herself more than she suspects. She cannot have her "own style" because she cannot "find" herself. Does she not, perhaps, have the courage to wear a dress according to her own inclinations? The manner in which she behaves, including her dressing, evidently, reveals, her intimate character. The movement has to be the same, as in Clarissa Dalloway's and Odette Swann's cases: from inside to outside. While the latter characters can display the certainty of artists mastering their own space, Mabel is unable to display anything but insecurity, uncertainty, and an inferiority complex. The new dress cannot show anything else but her "nakedness," no

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[1] In this chapter, all quotations from Woolf are from "The New Dress," except when indicated otherwise.

matter how hard she tries to prevent it:

> And at once the misery which she always tried to hide, the profound dissatisfaction—the sense she had had, ever since she was a child, of being inferior to other people—set upon her, relentlessly, remorselessly, with an intensity which she could not beat off, as she would when she woke at night at home, by reading Borrow or Scott; for oh these here, of these women, all were thinking—"What's Mabel wearing? What a fright she looks! What a hideous new dress!" (164)

Her complex of inferiority cannot be masked by any kind of clothing; on the contrary, the clothes reveal it:

> She faced herself straight in the glass; she pecked at her left shoulder; she issued out into the room, as if spears were thrown at her yellow dress from all sides. But instead of looking fierce or tragic, as Rose Shaw would have done—Rose would have looked like Boadicea[2]—she looks foolish and self-conscious, and simpered like a schoolgirl, as she were a beaten mongrel, and looked at a picture, and engraving. As if one went to a party to look at a picture! Everybody knew why she did it—it was from shame, from humiliation. (167)

The yellow dress changes its meaning, or loses its meaning once it is transferred to

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[2] "Boadicea was the fierce queen of an ancient tribe of Britons who led a revolt against the Romans, was defeated, and took her own life" (note in The Complete Shorter Fiction of Virginia Woolf 297).

another person. In chapter 2, "Transferring Experience," we have seen that the transfer taking place between Swann and the narrator is possible because of the similarities between the two characters, and, implicitly, between the two situations which arise in their lives. Mabel and Rose Shaw seem to have nothing in common. This yellow dress, in changing its mistress, transforms her individuality. Rose Shaw would look "fierce or tragic" "like Boadicea"; Mabel looks "foolish," "like a schoolgirl." The transfer fails.

"Self-conscious" is the phrase which would describe Mabel very accurately. She argues with herself that, at her age (she is forty years old), she is still so utterly dependent on other people's opinions, that she still does not have principles or convictions (166). Seeing herself all the time from an outer point of view, considering continuously what the others think and say about her, leaves her no time to consider herself from the inside.

In chapter 6.1. and 6.2.1. we have seen how the two women, Odette and Clarissa, act upon their *space*. The walls are "permeated by their femininity," says Woolf in A Room of One's Own; the woman's personality spreads over the interior of the room, over its objects, flowers and clothing, which end up being in harmony with her person. Mabel does not have the force, neither does she have a personality which would act on her interior space, including her clothes. If she did, she would find it in her to offer those around her some sympathy, if only for the sake of the party:

> But in her yellow dress tonight she could not wring out one drop; she wanted it all, all for herself. She knew (she kept on looking into the glass, dipping into that dreadfully showing-up blue pool) that she was condemned, despised, left like this in a backwater, because of her being

> like this a feeble, vacillating creature; and it seemed to be that the yellow dress was a penance which she had deserved. (168-9)

Once more, the yellow dress speaks about her fears more than she may expect. Instead of appearing as a sign of her talent, as a manifestation of her personality, the new dress is for her a penance for coming to the party and for being the way she is– "feeble" and "vacillating":

> She would go to London Library tomorrow. She would find some wonderful, helpful, astonishing book, quite by chance, a book by a clergyman, by an American no one had ever heard of; or she would walk down the Strand and drop, accidentally, into a hall where a miner was telling about the life in the pit and suddenly she would become a new person. She would be absolutely transformed. She would wear a uniform; she would be called Sister Somebody; she would never give a thought to clothes again. (170)

This passage reveals Mabel's complex; she feels she needs to change something in her life, but she does not know exactly what. Her crazy plan of going to the library, of discovering a book which would transform her, is a dream which probes once more how "school girlish" she is. She would need her yellow dress no more; she would have to wear the name of Mabel no more.

Nevertheless, there was a moment of "epiphany" when she put her dress on. It was at the tailor's:

> When Miss Milan put the glass in her hand, and she looked at herself with

> her dress on, finished, an extraordinary bliss shot through her heart. Suffused with light, she sprang into existence. Rid of cares and wrinkles, what she had dreamed of herself was there—a beautiful woman. Just for a second . . . there looked at her, framed in the scrolloping mahogany, a grew-white, mysteriously smiling, charming girl, the core of herself, the soul of herself. (166)

Miss Milan is an artist. She conceives and sows the yellow dress for Mabel. She acts on Mabel's behalf and tries to transform her. We have seen that Swann is an artist able to transform Odette from an object into a subject (see chapter 6.1., "Madame Swann's Flowers"); he succeeds not only through his effort but through Odette's effort as well. Miss Milan and Mabel represent a similar couple, but one in which only the tailor is an artist. If the two actions are not in conjunction, the result is negative. What Mabel gets when she tries the dress on is a **moment** of "bliss." She sees herself in the mirror, and she looks a different person: young, careless, beautiful. This mysterious and whitish figure is her soul. But this only lasts for a moment. Miss Milan's artistry is not enough to really transform Mabel. A "vacillating" and "feeble" character cannot recollect–therefore, she cannot allow herself to recollect, therefore she cannot come to terms with the exterior world. The party is a nightmare for her because it is a public activity. If she is not to find "herself" in privacy, she will succeed even less at the party.

The yellow dress is chosen and displayed more as a protective medium. Far from protecting her, the dress betrays her. The dress does not fit her although it is her size and it is made especially for her. It is not her dress because she is not able to appropriate the

dress. Mabel is a counter-example of Clarissa and of Odette. The yellow dress brings into focus the distance between Mabel's interior, fantasmatic world (where she longs to be exceptional, absolutely out of the ordinary), and the exterior, the public world where she has to go through the test of proving who she is. She represents the failed artist.

7. What is a Room?

What are the tasks one has to assume if she is to become an artist? Remembrance, slowness, and suffering are all three parts of the work of art, according to Proust and Woolf. If, in the chapters which analyze the Proustian space, suffering emerges as one of the main factors which may open one's eyes, in the chapters commenting on Woolf's figures of the artist stress the idea of the effort one must make if she is to appropriate her space.

The space which one must possess may be, in a concrete sense, a room or a house. Virginia Woolf, in A Room of One's Own, defends the necessity of this room of one's own and, implicitly, obtaining the means to afford it. This represents the starting point in the long process of becoming an artist (one is not born an artist, but she may become one). Evidently, having money and a room does not necessarily imply that their possessor **will** do art. But not having these means may prevent one from even attempting to write, and this is the point of view from which Virginia Woolf analyses the history of women's writing.

If Marcel Proust is not particularly interested in the material conditions of the artist, this is not because it would not be important—it is extremely important—but because it is not an issue for him. He may buy whatever house he wishes; he may go to the Ritz and order the most extravagant supper for his friends, and pay the waiter an extravagant tip. "In restaurants, and everywhere there was a chance, Marcel would give enormous tips. This was even the case in the slightest railway station buffet where he would never return." (George de Lauris qtd. in De Botton 106). "If a dinner cost him ten

francs, he would add twenty francs for the waiter." (Fernand Gregh qtd. in De Botton 106).

Having a **room of one's own** cannot be limited to the actual room in the house. Having one's space is, in the figural sense, having one's liberty, one's personality, one's ideas. If one does art, it means that one is in the process of growing up. In the scenes selected, Marcel Proust shows us that this process of growing up, of formation, is long and painful and cannot be avoided. To distinguish between appearance and essence is not easy; years of reflection are needed in order for him to realize that Berma's simplicity is in fact her talent. Swann has to find a similarity between Odette's face and Botticelli's painting in order to realize that he is in love with this woman. Finding beauty is not immediately accessible, but it is within our grasp.

The obstacle which may provoke one's struggle in the search for art may be frustration. The anxiety awakened in the narrator's soul when the mother will not come and kiss him goodnight, the anguish lived by Swann when he cannot possess Odette at this very moment, the bitter disappointment experienced by Marcel when he sees the first performance of Berma in Phèdre; all involve suffering, since one may not or cannot trespass into the space of the other. These feelings are not meaningless or useless. They may embody the first step toward learning and toward the discovery of art. This process of learning is one of formation.

Virginia Woolf's Mabel is an example of the "not-yet shaped" human being; she is not accomplished because she is a "child." Having a room of one's own means also being responsible for one's own *bravery*. Berma, Odette, and Clarissa assume in their

own way their courage and freedom in appropriating their private space.

It is not surprising that some extreme oppositions get to a point where they coincide: actually, the private space superimposes on the public space. Clarissa Dalloway starts by arranging her house and by mending her dress. She molds the room and the clothing within her inner "I," yet this is done also in order to display them later for the public. Odette Swann starts, as a courtesan, to embellish her *salon* and her *toilettes*, and she ends by becoming beautiful herself. Therefore, the movement is double: not only does their *intimité* open to the outside, but the outside—the women's status (which is in fact their profession), i.e. the fact that Odette is a courtesan, and Clarissa the wife of an important gentleman—acts on their personality as well. Odette makes herself beautiful because she has to look good for her clients. Clarissa makes herself beautiful because she is preparing a party for important people. The result is similar, although their respective driving forces seem irreconcilable.

I shall give a justification of the thesis title. The titles implies that the focus of my work would be on the "room of memory." However, the stress has proven to be rather on the figure of the **room**, as a room of isolation, a room where one writes and remembers. When I decided to write this thesis I intended to work more on the concept of memory as it is conceived in the novels of the two authors. A lot of critical texts have repeatedly dealt with the Proustian memory and with the distinction between *mémoire volontaire* and *mémoire involontaire*. As far as Virginia Woolf's work is concerned, her novel The Waves seemed very appropriate for a discussion of the process of memory (in The Waves the characters, who are friends since childhood, meet after a number of years and

re-live moments of the past, a good occasion for Woolf to ask the fundamental question, "What is to remember?"). But Du Côté de chez Swann and A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur called my attention on the writer's insistence on his rooms; it was the representation of the feeling inspired by these rooms, and of the complex process of their transformation, which started to shape my approach to the room.

In the case of Virginia Woolf, it happened that the first book I encountered was Mrs Dalloway; and Mrs Dalloway is a woman who spends a lot of time at home preparing parties. Thus, the *home* showed up again as the space of one's individuality. I mentioned quite often the importance of chance in the process of experiencing—both Walter Benjamin and Marcel Proust explain its value—so, I believe it was an *accident* in my case, as well, to read first this particular book. Had the first book been The Waves (my original intention), the thesis would have looked different, in the sense that the main theme would have probably been the weaving of memory.

The idea of the room did not occur to me all of a sudden nor simply. The connection was made actually through Virginia Woolf's theoretical essay, A Room of One's Own, which, as the title clearly states, proves to be an examination of the *private room*, in this case, of the woman's private room. Then, I discovered that bringing the works of the two writers together, through this apparently banal concept of the *room*, made sense. The private space, as Levinas argues, is the space of recollecting; recollection links to remembrance, but, at the same time, opens a wide field for the process that may take place in the room. My aim was to define the writing process which an artist has to undergo. To recollect means to build one's personality, to re-discover,

recall, re-evaluate oneself, and, eventually, to *re-write* the trajectory of one's life. *To write* should be seen not in a limited sense, but rather in a large one: to write is to *create*; whether it is to write a poem, to play a sonata, or to embellish one's room, all these activities are creating something which we perceive as *beautiful*.

Marcel Proust's and Virginia Woolf's texts also convinced me to open "the *room* of gender" problem, since the approach to art is not identical in the case of the male and the female artist. On the one hand, the main male character in A la recherche reflects on his tasks as a future writer; on the other hand, Woolf's female character, Clarissa, and Proust's, Odette Swann, are preoccupied by their tasks as hosts. To write or to act as a host are quite similar undertakings, although the general opinion attributes to the former a considerably higher status. The art of Berma stands perhaps in the middle; it is recognizable art, but commonly evaluated lower somehow than the art of producing a piece of literature or a painting. The chapter on Berma attempts to reveal exactly the equivalence between the art of performing and the art of painting.

The thesis, naturally, has its limitations. As I have already explained, I did not insist on memory; this concept marks inevitably the image of the space since one cannot talk about the process of writing without giving an account of the process of memory. The last part of the thesis title is meant to specify the particular literary areas of concentration: the writing process in Woolf's and Proust's cases. The thesis is about these authors' writing, and, about their characters' "writing" as well (the autobiographical "load" of the books is very well known); talking about Clarissa's manner of arranging the interior of the house and of choosing a dress is talking about Woolf, and vice versa;

talking about the narrator's struggle with the foreign space and with his effort of understanding what beauty is about, means talking about Proust, and vice versa.

The thesis focuses on a limited number of scenes whose analyses expose the artist's way of working. The selection is more or less arbitrary—as any selection—and certainly, there are innumerable other passages which could serve as basis for developing the commentaries further. The selections do share a common aspect, emphasized in the body of the thesis: the idea that the foreign **space** has to be "tamed." It is not by running away from *otherness*—as the narrator-child attempts in *le drame du coucher*, by insisting on having his mother in his bedroom, and as Mabel tries, by quitting the party as soon as possible—that one succeeds to learn. The foreign and the strange space may be fertile if one can appropriate and render the space familiar. Thus, this experience can be converted into art. This trajectory **unites** all the characters whom this thesis has evoked: Clarissa, the narrator, Swann, Odette–and, implicitly, their "parents," Virginia Woolf and Marcel Proust–succeed in finding what is *appropriate*. It is this *appropriateness* that makes them *artists*.

The narrator, in A la recherche, learns what the process of writing signifies; this last chapter, meant as a conclusion, represents what I have learned in the process of writing this thesis.

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