THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS JOURNALS

"The Culture of Redemption": Marcel Proust and Melanie Klein

Author(s): Leo Bersani

Source: *Critical Inquiry*, Winter, 1986, Vol. 12, No. 2 (Winter, 1986), pp. 399-421

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343481

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at https://about.jstor.org/terms

The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Critical Inquiry*

JSTOR

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

"The Culture of Redemption": Marcel Proust and Melanie Klein

Leo Bersani

What is the redemptive power of art? More fundamentally, what are the assumptions which make it seem natural to think of art as having such powers? In attempting to answer these questions, I will first be turning to Proust, who embodies perhaps more clearly—in a sense, even more crudely—than any other major artist a certain tendency to think of cultural symbolizations in general as essentially reparative. This tendency, which had already been sanctified as a more or less explicit dogma of modern high culture by Proust's time, persists, I believe, in our own time as the enabling morality of a humanistic criticism. I will argue that the notion of art as salvaging somehow damaged experience has, furthermore, been served by psychoanalysis—more specifically, by a certain view of sublimation first proposed rather disconnectedly by Sigmund Freud and later developed more coherently and forcefully by Melanie Klein. The psychoanalytic theory I refer to makes normative—both for an individual and for a culture—the mortuary aesthetic of *A la recherche du temps perdu.*

As everyone knows, involuntary memories play a crucial role in the Proustian narrator's discovery of his vocation as a writer. Let's begin with a somewhat untypical example of the genre, the passage in *Sodome et Gomorrhe* describing the "resurrection" of Marcel's grandmother on the first evening of his second visit to Balbec. This passage reformulates the importance of memory for art in terms of *another* relation about which the theoretical passages that conclude *Le Temps retrouvé* will be at once prolific and evasive: the dependence of art on death.

This dependence is obliquely defined in two very different ways, and the difference is first pointed to by what the narrator describes as

Critical Inquiry 12 (Winter 1986)
© 1986 The University of Chicago. 0093-1896/86/1202-0003$01.00. All rights reserved.

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

the painful contradiction inherent in his involuntary memory. On the one hand, the possession of others is possible only when they are dead; only then is nothing opposed to our image of them. Biological death accomplishes, or literalizes, the annihilation of others which Proust tirelessly proposes as the aim of our interest in others. "The living reality (la réalité vivante)" of his grandmother at the moment of involuntary memory is exactly equivalent to her ideal penetrability.[1] At such moments, the narrator writes, nothing remains of past joy and past suffering other than "the self that lived them (le moi qui les vécut)" (2:114; 2:757). The posthumous possession of others is always an unprecedented self-possession.

And yet there is of course also a real loss. It is, however, by no means certain that it is the grandmother herself who has been lost, since her death is seen primarily as having deprived Marcel of himself. When the narrator speaks of "the strange contradiction of survival and obliteration intersecting within me (cette contradiction si étrange de la survivance et du néant entre-croisés en moi)" (2:116; 2:759), he means, first of all, that his grandmother has suddenly been resurrected in him, and, second, that death has erased his image from her tenderness ("un néant qui avait effacé mon image de cette tendresse") (2:115; 2:758).[2] In a sense, then—and quite bizarrely—it is Marcel's grandmother who has survived her death, and Marcel himself who has disappeared as a result of that death. Nothingness, as the narrator strikingly puts it, had made of his grandmother "at the very moment when I found her again as in a mirror, a mere stranger whom chance had allowed to spend a few years by my side . . . but for whom, before and after, I was nothing, I would be nothing (au moment où je la retrouvais comme dans un miroir, une simple étrangère qu'un hasard a fait passer quelques années auprès de moi . . . mais pour qui, avant et après, je n'étais rien, je ne serais rien)"(2:115; 2:758). In these boxes of survival and nothingness placed one within the other, the living grandson sees an image of his grandmother contained within his own image; but her image—although it can now be nowhere but in him—no longer contains him. Hidden within this strangely specular relation to his grandmother's renewed presence is Marcel's own absence. The unprecedented self-possession I referred to a moment ago is identical to an irremediable loss of self.

Who, finally, is that "mere stranger" now seen for the first time? More significant, I think, than the posthumous porousness of the other is the fact that the grandmother is only now authentically *other*. It could

---

Leo Bersani is professor of French at the University of California, Berkeley. *The Forms of Violence/Narrative in Ancient Assyria and Modern Culture,* written in collaboration with Ulysse Dutoit, is his most recent publication. Professor Bersani's *The Freudian Body/Psychoanalysis and Art* will be published this winter.

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

perhaps be said that the only way we ever experience death (as distinct from dying) is in a change in the mode of a relation. Marcel's involuntary memory returns his grandmother to him as the *outside of thought:* that is, not as someone who can be desired, or appropriated, or dialectically related to, but simply as someone who existed alongside of him, a mere other presence in the world. A relation of desire has, it would seem, been replaced by a juxtaposition. This change is of course noted with despair, and yet it could also be said that Marcel now experiences his grandmother's death as a retroactive—and spectral—rediversification of the world. Desire in Proust works—however unsuccessfully—to reduce the world to a reflection of the desiring subject; death, however, would seem to be the condition for an escape from the self-repetitions initiated by desire and a restoring to the world of those differences which had promoted anxious desire in the first place. From this perspective, death re-creates (in, so to speak, reverse affectivity: pain is substituted for excitement) Marcel's exhilarated shock, frequently recorded in the early volumes, at discovering his own absence from the world.

Death experienced within an involuntary memory thus helps to define involuntary memory as a kind of death. For if such memories revive the past as nothing more than the self which lived it ("le moi qui le vécut"), they also effect, belatedly and retroactively, a radical separation of the self from the world. If, for example, the *madeleine* resurrects a wholly internalized Combray, it also projects or throws forth from within that internalization a Combray of pure appearance, a Combray which persists phenomenally, from which all Marcel's past interests—from which Marcel himself—have been evacuated, and to which a new relation must be invented. I want to approach the consequences for art of this contradiction by way of a long detour. Perhaps the most curious aspect of the passage from *Sodome et Gomorrhe* which I have been discussing is the narrator's undecidable relation to it. There are two temporal perspectives in the passage (the moment of the memory at Balbec and the moments of writing) and three central terms (the painful *impression* itself, the *truth* to be extracted from that impression, and the role of *intelligence* in the extracting process). At the end of an extremely dense analysis of "cette contradiction si étrange de la survivance et du néant entre-croisés en moi," the narrator writes: "That powerful and, at the moment, incomprehensible impression, I knew—not, to be sure, whether I would one day distill some truth from it—but that if I ever should extract that grain of truth, it could only be from *it*"—that is, from an impression not "traced by [his] intelligence" but carved within him by death itself (2:116; 2:759).

What can this mean? We might reasonably have thought that the few pages we have just read *are* the expression of any "truth" which may have been contained within that past impression. The narrator has been moving easily—as he does throughout the novel—from certain interpretations of his experience (or, as he would say, certain "truths") which

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

appear to date from the time of the involuntary memory to reflections on the incident as he now writes about it. He had apparently already understood (and suffered from) the contradictory nature of his grandmother's "resurrection," while certain other thoughts presented as general laws are perhaps disengaged at the moment of writing. Thus the narrator's remark that "the living reality" of the past "does not exist for us until it has been re-created by our thought" (2:113; 2:756), and the sentences in which, again using the present, he traces the relation between the "troubles of memory (troubles de la mémoire)" and "the heart's intermissions (les intermittences du coeur)" bring a kind of interpretive closure *now* to Marcel's memory at Balbec (2:114; 2:756–57). But the status of these confidently formulated laws—obviously made with the aid of intelligence—is suddenly thrown into doubt by the claim that if he were one day to disengage some truth from his involuntary memory, it could only be from the "particular" and "spontaneous" impression itself, which had not, he adds, been "traced by [his] intelligence." Furthermore, since it was in the past that he realized these preconditions of truth, this insight into that peculiar intersection of survival and nothingness—an insight also belonging to the past—cannot really be part of the desirable truth apparently still to come.

Will it ever come? And what is the relation to that truth of the text which we have been reading? It is as if the narrator were making explicit here the ambiguous status of the entire Proustian text. I speak of an ambiguity which has led some of Proust's readers to raise the extremely peculiar question of whether or not the text we have is the one which the narrator tells us, at the end of *Le Temps retrouvé,* that he finally set out to write. It is the Proustian narrator himself who sows the seeds of that doubt by promoting, throughout the work, precisely the kind of undecidability which we have located in the passage from *Sodome et Gomorrhe.* I wish to suggest that the narrator's hesitation about whether or not the work he is writing is the work he has chosen to write can be traced to the effects, on the process of writing, of a conception of art as a kind of remedial completion of life.

If the narrator encourages the reader's doubt about whether this is the work he speaks of writing at the end of *Le Temps retrouvé,* he leaves us in even greater doubt about the relation of this work to his life. On the one hand, "the duty and the task of a writer," as the narrator will conclude in *Le Temps retrouvé,* "are those of a translator" (2:1009; 3:890). Art would be "our real life, reality as we have felt or experienced it (notre vraie vie, la réalité telle que nous l'avons sentie)" (2:1002; 3:881). Moved by what would appear to be the extreme purity of this referential aesthetic, the narrator even distrusts the element of *work* in art. In *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur* he recalls wondering "if the differences between works of art are perhaps not the result of work"—and if art would not thereby

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

be mere artifice, or even deception ("s'il n'y a pas dans tout cela un peu de feinte")—"rather than the expression of a radical difference of essence between different personalities" (1:418; 1:549). And during the period of his love for Albertine in Paris, Marcel is "troubled" by Wagner's "habileté vulcanienne": "if art is only that"—that is, superior craftsmanship, "a product of industrious labor," then "it is not more real than life," and there is no reason to regret his lack of literary talent (2:491; 3:161–62). Art, then, is "real" to the degree that it discovers and expresses a preexistent truth; it is "factitious" (the "réel-factice" opposition is Proust's) to the extent that it produces a "truth" of its own, a truth derived from the conditions and constraints of literary performance.

But how are we to understand a translation more real than its original? Marcel's literary education culminates in the discovery that the only life worth living is life "realized in a book (réalisée dans un livre)" (2:1112; 3:1032). Outside of a book, that same life is worthless: hence the narrator's astonishing and relentless condemnation of his nonetheless meticulously recorded experience. If Marcel continuously reproaches himself for having friendships, for going into society, even for falling in love, it is, he suggests, because he should have been at home trying to get to the bottom of his impressions of friendship, of society, and of love. In the work of art, a certain type of representation of experience will operate both as an escape from the objects of representation and as a justification (retroactive, we might even say posthumous) for having had any experiences at all. In Proust, art simultaneously erases, repeats, and redeems life. Literary repetition is an annihilating salvation.

It would be a simplification of this project to say of it, as Sartre has said of Flaubert, that for Proust art is a strategy of de-realization. In *La Recherche* the imaginary is considered as the mode in which life is most authentically realized: art is a kind of ontological and moral sur-reality, the interpretation of sensations, as the narrator writes in *Le Temps retrouvé,* as signs of laws and ideas. If the Proustian novel's relation to the Proustian narrator's experience is, however, necessarily and irremediably ambiguous, this is because Proust is continuously having to decide how to place phenomena within an essentializing version of them. The subject of the Proustian novel is the relation between truth and existence, and the ontological undecidability of all the events recorded in the novel reflects the problematic nature of that relation. In what mode do phenomena persist in the record of their essence? In a sense, *La Recherche* moves toward a relatively simple answer to that question: in the later volumes, the phenomenal is more and more absorbed in the universally valid formula, the general law. The adequate formulation of a truth would make the representation of phenomena superfluous. But Proust is clearly reluctant to divorce truth entirely from the experience which it ultimately invalidates. His narrator therefore seeks to "repeat" his experience in a

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

way that will deprive it of any existential authority. The transcendence of phenomena depends on a certain discrediting of phenomena at the very moment of their representation.

As the major step in this maneuver, experience is divorced from a securely locatable subject of experience. Whose life is the narrative recording? The autobiographical "I" of *La Recherche* is not named until we are more than two thousand pages into the novel. Even then, only a first name is given in a dizzyingly hypothetical manner. The narrator is speaking of Albertine waking up in the bedroom of his Paris apartment: "As soon as she was able to speak, she would say: 'My' or 'My darling' followed by my Christian name, which, if we give the narrator the same first name as the author of this book, would have given (eût fait) 'My Marcel' or 'My darling Marcel'" (2:429; 3:75). This extraordinary violation of the convention according to which a fictional narrator cannot possibly "know" the author of the novel in which he himself figures is nonetheless consistent with the ontological destabilization initiated by the act of writing. *A la recherche du temps perdu* is a nonattributable autobiographical novel. The experience it records may, it is suggested, belong to Marcel Proust, or it may belong to a fictional character named Marcel, or it may belong to a fictional character not named Marcel. Or, finally, it may belong to no one at all. In *Le Temps retrouvé* the narrator praises the modest heroism of the rich Larivière couple during World War I who, after their nephew's death at the front, came out of retirement to work fifteen hours a day, without wages, in his young widow's Parisian café. Theirs, we are told, is the only real name and the only real story in the entire work; everything else is fictive, everything else has been invented "to meet the needs of my story (selon les besoins de ma démonstration)" (2:976; 3:846). If this is the case, and if we are to take the narrator's literary program seriously, we would have a book of nearly unimaginable originality: a wholly invented translation. The translation of particular experience into general laws is conceivable, and is not, properly speaking, an invention; much more difficult to conceive is an entirely fictive life which would nonetheless be the "real life," life as he felt or experienced it, of—whom? Is the narrator himself to be included among the "invented" elements of his work? If the narrator is *not* to be thought of as, so to speak, his own invention, how do we locate, and what is the ontological status of, a figure whose real life is "remembered" entirely in fictive terms? How can the reality of the subject be distinguished from the wholly invented experience by which, after all, we know that subject?

One could say that the narrator momentarily steps outside of the fictive relations he has invented for himself in order to pay tribute to the Larivière couple; one is, of course, even more tempted to appeal to biography in order to say that the tribute represents an unassimilated intrusion into the narrative of Proust himself. The passage is, however, less interesting as a strictly local puzzle or anomaly than as a crystallization

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

of a more pervasive doubt in the novel. In *La Recherche,* translation into art means de-particularization, and this is the case even when particular people and events are being represented. It is as if the narrator—or Proust—had first of all abstracted his experience into general laws and then deduced another version of the particular from those laws—a kind of second-degree particularity of experience disengaged from existence. The narrator suggests something very much like this when he writes in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur:* "Thus it is useless to observe customs, since one can deduce them from psychological laws" (1:392; 1:513). In *La Recherche* the situation is of course somewhat more complicated, since it is the already fictive narrator—and not Proust the author—who speaks of having entirely invented a past for the purposes of his "demonstration." Thus a fictive narrator's invented past would ultimately derive from that narrator's "real" life—which of course means from an equally fictive life. The latter would, however, be a fiction which has not been invented; having been, as it were, bypassed in the move from the more or less verifiable real life of the author Marcel Proust to the narrator's invention of *his* life, it would have the remarkable referential status of a necessary origin which, however, has never been realized, either biographically or novelistically.

Gilles Deleuze has compared Proustian essences to Leibnizian "monads," each of which expresses the world from a distinctive point of view. The world thus expressed, Deleuze writes, "does not exist outside the subject expressing it, but it is expressed as the essence not of the subject but of Being, or of the region of Being which is revealed to the subject."[3] Thus the "morceau idéal" of Bergotte is at once the most individual and the least particular aspect of Bergotte. It is an individuality somehow detached from the point of view of experience, a repetition or translation of Bergotte that is simultaneously wholly different from Bergotte. In art, the particular is resurrected as the individual; or, to put this in another way, art in Proust is, at least ideally (and we shall see the importance of this qualification), *truth liberated from phenomena.*

What is, however, most striking about this program in *La Recherche* is that it is indissociable from the kinds of questions I have been raising—questions about the narrator's identity, about the invented or remembered nature of his recorded past, about whether or not this is the book the theory of which is given at the end of *Le Temps retrouvé,* and—to return to the question raised by the "intermittences du coeur" passage from *Sodome et Gomorrhe*—about the degree to which the work we are reading is actually expressing those truths or essences which literature presumably disengages from experience. That is, Proust problematizes the very signs by which we might recognize the success of his narrator's literary enterprise. And in each case the problematizing takes the form of an uncertainty, traced within the text itself, about whether experience has been sufficiently de-particularized to qualify as truth. It is, moreover, as if this uncertainty

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

were being expressed in relation to the particular itself—which would mean that the move into truth or essences would not be necessarily, or even primarily, a generalizing move, but would, rather, require a *displaced repetition* of the particular.

Now we are meant to see the narrator in two quite different relations to each of the people and events he records: first, as Marcel knowing these people and living these events (in *La Recherche,* this essentially means in relations of desire to them), and, second, as the narrator now writing about the first relation. The second relation is, as I have been suggesting, the only justification for the first one. Furthermore, it is a justification which, strictly speaking, requires no content: it is the narrator's present *position* which principally operates the reversal of value. And that position can be defined as the ontological and moral superiority of death. "All those people who had revealed truths to me and who were no longer alive, struck me as having lived lives from which only I had profited, and as if they had died for me" (2:1018; 3:902). The narrator continues: "A book is a large cemetery where, on most of the tombs, one can no longer read the erased names" (2:1018–19; 3:902). The perspective of death permits the resurrection of others as redemptive truths. But, unlike the involuntary memory which resurrects Marcel's grandmother as a wholly other presence in the world—a presence which no longer contains Marcel and which he can no longer appropriate, the death evoked as a condition of art in *Le Temps retrouvé* is the retrospective absorption of others into the narrator's "monadic" point of view. *A la recherche du temps perdu* proposes death as a metaphor for the artist's relation to the world in two contrasting ways. On the one hand, the death of others definitively ejects or expels Marcel from their being and thereby re-creates the world as difference. On the other hand, their death both ends all resistance to Marcel's voracious desire to appropriate them *and* allows him to reconstruct the objects of his desires as invulnerable truths. Experience destroys; art restores.

In what way is experience—or, more precisely, desire—destructive? Rather than answer my questions, I will reformulate them in other contexts—thereby evoking, I would hope, the concentric circles of *La Recherche* itself, in which each section is a (mistaken yet illuminating) replication and *approfondissement* of the preceding section. Proust's novel offers us the model for a circular, or nonnarrative, criticism. Although *La Recherche* proceeds narratively toward a conclusive vindication of Marcel's vocation as an artist in *Le Temps retrouvé,* this classical movement toward a climactic resolution and revelation is undermined as it takes place. Because the entire work is written after its own climax, the reader is implicitly invited to find the theoretical formulations of the final pages superfluous: he should, ideally, be able to infer them from the work which they inform from beginning to end. Suspense is promoted as a primary value of reading at the same time that the reader is encouraged *to read without suspense*—or, in other terms, to invent a motive for reading unsustained

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

by a promise of epistemological gain. Everything is present from the start, and this is rendered thematically visible by the schematic (yet already somewhat definitive) treatment of all the major topics of *La Recherche* (memory, nature, love, social life, and art) in *Combray*. The subsequent sections of the novel, instead of adding anything radically new to what the early pages have already given us, provide a kind of mnemonic hermeneutics on the themes of the first volume. *La Recherche* continues to repeat its own beginning with an increasingly bloated intelligibility. The rather simple chronological linearity of the novel is thus complicated by a movement of circular repetition—or, more exactly, by the simultaneously amplifying and replicative movement of concentric circles.

We may see in the tension between these two movements a structural analogue of Proust's conflicting views of the relation between phenomena and truth, or between experience and art. Is life always somehow prior to the essences which art alone disengages? Or is art a certain type of repetition of the phenomenal itself, a repetition which, far from substituting "truth" for appearances, continuously re-presents appearances in order to test modes of interpretation freed from the constraints of anxious desire? If I now turn away from Proust in order, as it were, to repeat him psychoanalytically, this move can be taken as the procedural expression of my own commitment to the latter possibility of a circular hermeneutics—that is, to the possibility of repetition as the occasion for revising the terms of our interest in the objects of our interpretations.

* * *

What is the "place" of sexuality in culture? Or, to put this question in more specifically Freudian terms, how are cultural activities "invested" with sexual interests? In one of her first papers—the 1923 essay entitled "Early Analysis"—Melanie Klein proposes what her later work compels us to recognize as some very non-Kleinian answers to these questions. The essay I refer to—based on three unpublished papers—is difficult and diffuse. The first half is an extremely dense theoretical discussion; the second half is a considerably more relaxed, and intellectually less interesting, case history. Klein begins with a therapeutically oriented discussion of the role of anxiety in the "neurotic inhibitions of talent."[4] The basis of such inhibitions is, as we might expect, "a strong primary pleasure which had been repressed on account of its sexual character" ("EA," p. 77). The analyst reverses the inhibiting mechanism by helping the patient to release, recognize, and work through the anxiety which the mechanism has "bound" and thus to return to the original, anxiety-provoking pleasure. But now the pleasure can be enjoyed: "By successful removal of the inhibition, I do not simply mean that the inhibitions as such should be diminished or removed, but that the analysis should succeed in reinstating the primary pleasure of the activity" ("EA," p. 78). This local conclusion on the paper's second page is extremely important,

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

for it raises questions which will lead to the most original moments in the discussion. There is, apparently, a nonproblematic, a nonneurotic, sexualizing of ego interests—of those "talents" referred to in the essay's first sentence. The patient's analysis ends not with a separation of libidinal tendencies from ego activities, but rather with a recognition of their compatibility. In other words, the nonsexual can be sexualized in an analytically irreducible way: therapy ends here, and there is, apparently, nothing more to be interpreted.

How has this happened? After a couple of pages of following Freud on the question of the repression of affects and their transformation into anxiety, Klein comes back to the mechanism of inhibition as a potentially healthy mode of binding and discharging anxiety. Such apparently non-neurotic inhibitions "would imply," Klein writes, "that a certain quantity of anxiety had been taken up by an ego-tendency which already had a previous libidinal cathexis" ("EA," p. 81). Thus the argument returns—in different terms—to that original investment of ego activities with sexual pleasure to which the phenomenon of inhibition is merely ancillary. The so-called nonneurotic inhibition leans on an already established sexualizing of ego interest. Klein asserts that priority when, several pages later, she writes: "We may suppose that for a sublimation to be inhibited it must have actually come into existence as a sublimation" ("EA," p. 90). The crucial notion of sublimation had entered the argument almost immediately after the sentence about anxiety having been taken up by ego tendencies with "previous libidinal cathexis," and in that first appearance of the concept Klein equates "the capacity to sublimate" with "the capacity to employ superfluous libido [*before,* it is implied, either fixation or repression] in a cathexis of ego-tendencies" ("EA," p. 81).[5]

A few pages later, in a paragraph of great originality which somewhat perversely manages to present itself as a summary of the theories of four other analysts (Sperber, Sándor Ferenczi, Ernest Jones, and Freud), Klein discusses the origin of those libidinally invested ego tendencies which, by "taking up" the anxiety connected to sexual pleasures, help to produce inhibitions of "normal" rather than "neurotic" intensity. What she describes is a movement from identification to symbolism, and the description is particularly interesting in view of the very different ways in which identification will be defined in her later work. Here identification would *appear* to be the very opposite of object-relationships; it is the activity of what might be called an appetitive narcissism. The first identifications in this process take place on the child's own body; referring to speculations made by Freud and Ferenczi, Klein speaks of equivalences which the child sees "in the upper part of its body for each affectively important detail of the lower part" ("EA," p. 85). Identification thus works here as an extension of regions of pleasure: both the child's own body and the world of objects are, so to speak, tested for their capacity to repeat certain sensations, to generalize originally local sensations. Furthermore, in both

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

identification and the displacement of libido to new objects and ego activities (a displacement which constitutes symbol-formation), it is, for Klein, the identification itself which produces pleasure and not, as Jones argued, a prior or given "similitude of pleasurable tone or interest" which would be the precondition for comparisons and identifications ("EA," p. 85). "Objects and activities," she writes, "not in themselves sources of pleasure, become so through this identification, a sexual pleasure being displaced onto them" ("EA," p. 85).

Now when Klein gives examples of symbol-formation, she actually seems to be describing symbolic *symptom*-formation: that is, the choice of certain objects and ego activities because of their resemblance to the repressed memories and fantasies. In this view, the symbolizing process would be nothing more than a (compulsive) substitute for the frightening and/or forbidden original pleasures. I emphasize this because it is precisely at this point that the originality of Klein's argument risks being dissipated as sublimation begins once again to look like a more or less specialized branch of symptomatology. This blurring of definitions has of course occurred frequently in the history of psychoanalytic theory. Freud himself left us no sustained analysis of sublimation, and his own discussions of literature and the visual arts tend to stress either the compensatory or the symptomatic nature of art. Not only do the mechanisms of sublimation often seem indistinguishable from those of repression and symptom-formation in much psychoanalytic writing; the work of art is often "treated"—interpreted and, one might almost say, cured—as if it were little more than a socialized symptom.[6] It is therefore all the more interesting to see Klein's attempt in "Early Analysis" to locate the specificity of a sublimating mechanism. Perhaps the most crucial factor in this effort is her assumption of a certain quantity of "superfluous" or "suspended" libido. She speaks, for example, of "the ability to hold libido in a state of suspension" as a "contributing factor" to the capacity to sublimate ("EA," p. 87). It is as if the history of an individual's sexuality included a "moment" of significant uncertainty about the fate of sexual energy. Or, in other terms, it is as if sexual excitement exceeded the representations attached to it and therefore became, as it were, greedily, even promiscuously, available to *other* scenes and *other* activities. And the displacement of libido onto other objects and ego activities can be called symbol-formation only if we specify that these objects and activities *act symbolically without, however, symbolizing anything external to them.*

Only if we think of her argument moving in this direction can we understand Klein's surprising remark that when "pleasurable situations, actually experienced or phantasied" are "given play in an ego-tendency, . . . the fixations are divested of their sexual character" ("EA," pp. 87–88). What can this mean except that the ego-tendencies in question can no longer be considered as "symbolic" in the sense in which Klein—like most analysts—usually understands that word? We would have a non-

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

allusive or nonreferential symbol. In sublimation, ego-activities become "symbols" in the sense that the most diverse cultural activities "symbolize" the libidinal energy with which they are invested. We would not have a symbol that merely participates in the nature of an extrinsic symbolized object or activity (as, to use one of Klein's own examples, "athletic movements of all kinds stand for penetrating into the mother" ["EA," p. 86]). Rather, forms of culture would symbolize nothing more than that which is already contained within them: the sexual energy which, as Klein writes, thereby "acts as the stimulus and driving force of talent" ("EA," p. 88). Thus the most varied ego interests would represent symbolically not specific sexual fantasies but rather the very process by which human interests and behavior are *sexually moved.* From this perspective, sublimation could no longer be described (as it usually has been) in terms of a drive whose aim has been changed or displaced, for the drive in question would be, precisely, an aimless one, a kind of floating signifier of sexual energy. Sublimation would describe the fate of sexual energies detached from sexual desires.[7]

* * *

But the view of sublimation as coextensive with sexuality occupies only a marginal place in the development of Kleinian theory. "From the beginning of my psycho-analytic work," Klein wrote in 1948, "my interest was focused on anxiety and its causation, and this brought me nearer to the understanding of the relation between aggression and anxiety."[8] In effect, during more than forty years of analytic practice and speculation, Klein elaborated the most radical—at once the most compelling and the most implausible—theory regarding infantile anxiety and aggression in the history of psychoanalysis. I will assume a certain familiarity with the broad outlines of this theory. Klein divides the first year of human life into two periods, or "positions," the first dominated by anxiety over external and internal threats to the preservation of the ego (the "paranoid-schizoid position") and the second characterized principally by anxiety about dangers felt to threaten the loved parent as a result of the infant's fantasy-aggressions (the "depressive position"). Also crucial are the notion of a defensive mechanism preceding repression, a mechanism which would involve the splitting of the introjected object into a good partial or whole object and a bad partial or whole object; the contention that oedipal conflicts and the development of a superego take place much earlier than Freud thought; and finally, the fundamental argument—on which everything else depends—about the importance of fantasy from almost the very beginning of life. If we accept the argument about fantasy, then we should also recognize that Klein's scenarios of infantile violence, for all their apparent extravagance, rigorously and brilliantly spell out the consequences for our object-relations of those destructive desires which Freud had already associated with anal and oral infantile sexuality. Klein traces the history

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

of the infant's attempts to deal with the anxieties engendered by a sexuality which is *born as aggression*. That history begins, according to Klein, at birth. A complex nonverbal syntax of fantasmatic introjections and projections constitutes the infantile ego's defenses against internal and external bad objects, against, perhaps most profoundly, its own impulses to destroy both itself and the objects it loves.

Sublimation becomes, in this view, the infant's most sophisticated defense against its own aggressions. The awesome nature of this defensive enterprise can be understood from the following description in the essay "The Early Development of Conscience in the Child":

> In attacking its mother's inside, . . . the child is attacking a great number of objects, and is embarking on a course which is fraught with consequences. The womb first stands for the world; and the child originally approaches this world with desires to attack and destroy it, and is therefore prepared from the outset to view the real, external world as more or less hostile to itself, and peopled with objects ready to make attacks upon it. Its belief that in thus attacking its mother's body it has also attacked its father and its brothers and sisters, and, in a wider sense the whole world, is, in my experience, one of the underlying causes of its sense of guilt, and of the development of its social and moral feelings in general. For when the excessive severity of the super-ego has become somewhat lessened, its visitations upon the ego on account of those imaginary attacks induce feelings of guilt which arouse strong tendencies in the child to make good the imaginary damage it has done to its objects. And now the individual content and details of its destructive phantasies help to determine the development of its sublimations, which indirectly subserve its restitutive tendencies, or to produce even more direct desires to help other people.[9]

Sublimations have now become symbolic reparations, and in the light of this new concept, Klein has begun to modify the entire process outlined in "Early Analysis" (1923). In a 1930 reference to that essay Klein, speaking once again of Ferenczi's and Jones' notions of identification and symbol-formation, writes: "I can now add to what I said then . . . and state that, side by side with the libidinal interest, it is the anxiety arising in the phase that I have described [of "excessive sadism" toward the mother] which sets going the mechanism of identification."[10] From this point on, the emphasis is on identification not as an attempted repetition of pleasure but rather as an attempted flight from anxiety. The child conceives a dread of the organs it wishes to destroy (Klein mentions "penis, vagina, breasts"), and "this anxiety contributes to make him equate the organs in question with other things; owing to this equation these in their turn become objects of anxiety, and so he is impelled constantly to make other and new equations, which form the basis of his interest in the new objects

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

and of symbolism" ("ISF," p. 220). In this way, Klein concludes, "not only does symbolism come to be the foundation of all phantasy and sublimation, but, more than that, it is the basis of the subject's relation to the outside world and to reality in general" ("ISF," p. 221). Generalized anxiety has more or less replaced generalized libidinal interest. More precisely, symbolism deflects anxiety by bringing "into phantasy the sadistic relation to the mother's body" ("ISF," p. 224). This process will be described in somewhat more positive terms in subsequent formulations (Klein will assert that *love* for the first objects must be maintained in successful sublimations), but even then symbols remain what Klein calls "substitute objects." That is, whatever the distribution of anxiety and love may be in the move from the mother's body and the child's fantasized contacts with her body, to other objects and other activities, the latter have now become, in Kleinian theory, *restored versions of the former.*

In what sense can these new relations properly be called object-relations? In the sublimating process outlined in "Early Analysis," libidinalized ego-interests are not substitutive formations for some original (but now repressed) pleasure-situation. In that version of sublimation, sexuality provides the energy of sublimating interests without defining their terms. We would have, as I have suggested, a nonallusive or nonreferential version of sexualized mental activities; as a result, the sexualization of those activities could be thought of as a heightening rather than as a blurring of their specificity. But from the perspective of Klein's later and dominant theory of sublimation, the ego's "new" object-relations are, by definition, new relations to old fantasy objects. Originally, the ego is involved in a relation to a real other body (the mother's), but, curiously enough, as the ego develops, its relations become more spectral or fantasmatic. The objects and interests which symbolically represent the subject's early relation to the world of objects are restitutive repetitions of those early relations, which means that they fantasmatically re-create what was already a fantasmatic remodeling of the world. Ontologically, these new sublimations are, as it were, at two removes from any real objects; they are fantasy-reparations of fantasy-destructions.

We can see the basis for a return to Proust in this psychoanalytic echo of the Proustian notion of art as a redemptive replication of damaged or worthless experience: in both cases, sublimations integrate, unify and restore. But this restorative activity would make no sense if it were not being performed on earlier or original experience. The very function of art in Proust would be threatened if it introduced us to a world of authentic difference: in an aesthetic of reparation, the artist's life—a life at once "translated" and made "more real"—is, as Proust suggests, the only legitimate subject of art. Klein herself points to the solipsistic nature of this operation when, in "A Contribution to the Psycho-Genesis of Manic-Depressive States," she traces "the desire for perfection" to "the depressive anxiety of disintegration, which is thus of great importance in all sublimations."[11] She speaks of patients who have "a beautiful picture of the

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

mother, but one which was felt to be a *picture* of her only, not her real self. The real object was felt to be unattractive—really an injured, incurable and therefore dreaded person."[12] What is restored therefore never existed; the "perfect" object is nothing more than a function of the attacked object. And this is by no means true only of disturbed or neurotic patients. Insofar as the process of idealization "is derived from the need to be protected from persecuting objects, it is a method of defense against anxiety."[13] "Excessive idealization denotes that persecution is the main driving force,"[14] but the logic of Kleinian theory would, I think, allow us to rephrase this as: "Some degree of persecution is always the motivating force of any degree of idealization." If the sublimated object is by definition an idealized object—both a mental construct and a "better" (repaired and made whole) version of an originally dangerous, injured, and fragmented object—we could also say that sublimation is a regression disguised as a transcendence.[15] Intellectually valuable pursuits and aesthetically pleasing objects are, in this view, disguised repetitions of an infantile defense against infantile aggressions.

My aim is neither to deny nor to defend the empirical validity of this theory of sublimation. It may in fact be the case, as Jean Laplanche has suggested, that sublimation has two quite different modes of operation: one corresponding to what Klein described in "Early Analysis" as the investment of ego interests with a kind of floating or suspended sexual energy, and the other corresponding to the appropriation of the entire cultural field either as "substitute objects" for the desired and feared objects of repressed infantile fantasies or as a repository of more or less socially useful activities in which the aims of sexuality can be symbolically deflected.[16] Significantly, a theoretical shift or hesitation analogous to the one we have found in Klein can also be located in Freud. It could be shown, for example, that while proposing in the first chapter of his essay on Leonardo da Vinci a view of sublimation very much like the one outlined in "Early Analysis," Freud nonetheless goes on to treat Leonardo's work as psychologically compensatory and symptomatic. Indeed, far from pursuing a concept of sublimation as an appropriation and elaboration of sexual impulses, Freud will come to consider sublimation as one of the desexualizing activities of the ego—an activity which, furthermore, makes the ego particulary vulnerable to the death instinct.[17] This shift, I think, must be understood in connection with the development of a theory of the ego as itself constituted by a partially desexualizing process of identification with lost or abandoned love objects. From the point of view of the tripartite systemic view of the mind elaborated in *The Ego and the Id* (1923), sublimation would be a relation to objects which is structurally determined by the already established relations among those internalized and lost objects which make up an ego and a superego.

In Freud, and particularly in Klein, the kinds of spectral repetitions on which art in Proust seems to depend are presented as a goal of normative development. What I have wished to suggest is that such

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

theories of the restitutive or redemptive power of cultural forms and activities are themselves symptomatic versions of the very process they purport to explain. Both this process and its theoretical legitimations give us extraordinarily diminished views of both our sexuality and our cultural imagination. On the one hand, the forms of culture become transparent and—at least from an interpretive point of view—dismissible: they are, ultimately, regressive attempts to make up for failed experience. On the other hand, the fragmenting and destructive aspects of sexuality gain the ambiguous dignity of occupying—of haunting—the invisible yet determinant depths of all human activity. Sexuality is consecrated as violence by virtue of the very definition of culture as an unceasing effort to make life whole, to repair a world attacked by desire. A fundamentally meaningless culture thus ennobles gravely damaged experience. Or, to put this in other terms, art, in this view, redeems the catastrophe of history. To play this role, art must preserve what might be called a moral monumentality—a requirement which explains, I believe, much of the mistrust in the modern period of precisely those modern works which have more or less violently rejected any such edifying and petrifying functions. Claims for the high morality of art may conceal a deep horror of life. And yet nothing, perhaps, is more frivolous than that horror, since it carries within it the conviction that because of the achievements of culture, the disasters of history somehow do not matter. Everything can be made up, can be made over again, and the absolute singularity of human experience—the source, undoubtedly, of both its tragedy and its beauty—is thus dissipated in the trivializing nobility of a redemption through art.

* * *

What *are*—to initiate a final interpretive circle—the dangers of desire in Proust? Let us first of all acknowledge the outlines of a novel of *happy* desire in *La Recherche,* of a desire which, as it were, exuberantly dismembers its objects. There is a Baudelairean mobility of desire in Proust, an extravagant excess of desiring fantasy over a presumed original object of desire. Like Baudelaire, the Proustian narrator shows desire putting persons into bits and pieces, happily transforming them into partial objects. Perhaps no volume is more abundant than *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur* in what might be called the appetitive metonymies of desire, the simultaneous reduction and enrichment of Albertine and her friends through those extrahuman associations by which, for example, they are metamorphosed into stems of roses profiled against the sea. If Marcel's desires here are, as he claims, never for persons ("The most exclusive love for a person is always the love of something else" [1:627; 1:833]), it is because those desires are too impatient for any such psychologically constitutive and reflective activity. Indeed, the constitution of persons is linked to the emergence of a novel of *un*happy desire, a novel which depends, we

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

might say, on Marcel's misreading of the otherness inherent in desire. Desire becomes identical to anxiety as soon as Marcel begins to understand the disappearance of the object not as a function of the energy of his desire but rather as the consequence of an evil intention on the part of the other. Thus desire's mobility is interpreted paranoiacally: the other has a secret, and that secret is itself a desire which excludes Marcel. Curiously and, I think, significantly, it is now that the other is reconstituted as a personality—that is, as a psychological individual who can make Marcel suffer. Thus what would appear to be a humanizing of the other—the transformation of Albertine from a "moment" or unit in the metonymic chain of desires into a young girl with a particular history and particular desires—is actually a tactic of intended mastery over the other. Only as a person can Albertine perhaps be penetrated and made to suffer; the desexualization of desire and the invention of character are, in Proust, the preconditions for a ruthless if futile effort to absorb or appropriate the other.

The most radical manifestation of that effort is of course Marcel's imprisonment of Albertine in his Paris apartment. The motive for that imprisonment, recorded in the remarkable final pages of *Sodome et Gomorrhe,* is the discovery that Albertine is a friend of Mlle Vinteuil and of her female lover. In conclusion, we return once again to an involuntary memory—this time to the most painful one of all: Albertine's revelation catapults Marcel back to the lesbian scene between those two young women which he had witnessed years before through the window of Vinteuil's home at Montjouvain. Once he feels convinced of Albertine's lesbianism, the only truthful way to portray her relation to him would be "to place Albertine . . . not at some distance from me, but within me"(2:327; 2:1116). What is this internalized yet impenetrable otherness?

Let's return to the psychological law I referred to a moment ago: "The most exclusive love for a person is always the love of something else." If the narrator occasionally encourages us to understand this as a formulation of desire's mobility (to desire Albertine is to desire a certain type of seascape), it could also be taken to summarize the novel's more frequent demonstrations of desire's fixity. A certain resemblance among the women we love, the narrator writes, can be traced to "the fixity of our temperament"; the different loved ones are nothing more than a "product" of that temperament, "an image inversely projected, a 'negative' of our sensibility" (1:671; 1:894). Is it possible, then, to see one's own "temperament" or "sensibility" apart from these alien images of desire? The narrator's discovery of repetition in desire (of similarities among the women he pursues) leads him to a question about himself analogous to the one we have seen him ask about others. Jealousy of the other is the paranoid interpretation of desire's mobility. But, at the end of *La Prisonnière,* the narrator writes: "Just as we can know only ourselves, it could almost be said that we can only be jealous of ourselves" (2:650;

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

3:386), which suggests that the withheld secret Marcel anxiously pursues in others may be the projected secret, the fantasy formula, of his own desires.

The most accurate sexual metaphor for a hopeless pursuit of one's own desire is undoubtedly the heterosexual's jealousy of homosexuality *in the other sex.* I spoke a moment ago of Albertine's sudden displacement from outside Marcel to inside Marcel as the internalization of an impenetrable otherness. We should now refine this formula by noting, first of all, that it is her inwardness which Marcel has internalized. The Albertine now making him suffer from within himself is not the body which made an excited Marcel move from her to the sea but, rather, the desiring Albertine, the girl who could give Marcel the key to her desires by letting him hear "the unknown sound (le son inconnu) of her *jouissance*" (2:368; 2:1117). I wish to suggest that *this internalized interiority of otherness is, for Marcel, the experienced otherness of his own interiority.* Albertine's lesbianism represents a nearly inconceivable yet inescapable identity of sameness and otherness in Marcel's desires; lesbianism is a relation of sameness which Marcel is condemned to see as an irreducibly unknowable otherness. He shares Albertine's love for women, but not her point of view: from what perspective of anticipated pleasures does she seek out bodies in which she will find reminders of her own body? Thus in the final pages of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* the banal thematization of homosexuality in the essay which opens the volume—a thematization at once sentimental and reductive—is implicitly brushed aside (as is the secondary, and, in a sense, merely anecdotal question of "sexual preference") by an extraordinary reflection on what might be called the ontological necessity of homosexuality in a kind of universal *hetero*sexual relation of all human subjects to their own desires.

The last pages of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* depict several agitated displacements. Marcel is thrown back to the scene at Montjouvain and to the anguish of the *drame du coucher* at Combray; Albertine moves from somewhere outside Marcel to somewhere within him; and, in an echo of the passage which we began by considering, Marcel's mother, as she enters his hotel room at dawn, resembles *her* mother so strongly that Marcel momentarily wonders if his grandmother has been "resurrected." These displacements and metamorphoses bring us back to what has always been a central question in *La Recherche:* how does one thing evoke another? or, more fundamentally, what are the modes of mobility in consciousness? On the one hand, the Proustian protagonist is always asking questions about what lies *behind* phenomena. There is a more or less happy version of this movement at Combray, in Marcel's excited anticipation that the spectacles of nature will "open up" and reveal "the secret of truth and of beauty" behind them. But the final pages of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* introduce us to the anguish of transcendence: "Behind Albertine," the narrator writes, "I no longer saw the blue mountains of the sea, but the room at

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Montjouvain where she was falling into the arms of Mlle Vinteuil with that laugh with which she gave utterance to the unknown sound of her *jouissance*" (2:368; 2:1117).

The narrator conceives of both the happy and the unhappy examples of this movement as leading to a kind of truth: to the essences behind natural phenomena, to the presumed reality of Albertine's desires. But *Sodome et Gomorrhe* interestingly suggests that the truth behind appearances may be nothing more than a degraded version of appearances, a kind of shadowy simulacrum. The spectralizing effect on reality of this movement into truth—of this essentializing or antiphenomenal movement—is obliquely indicated by the narrator's description, on the last page of *Sodome et Gomorrhe,* of the dawn as a kind of abstract, or unreal, sunset. Looking out of his window at the end of the sleepless night following Albertine's "revelation," Marcel finds, in the new day, reminders of evening: both in the sight of the woods which he and Albertine, after a late afternoon nap, would often leave at sunset, and in the spectacle of boats which Marcel had frequently seen bathed in the oblique light of sunset as they returned to harbor in the evening, and which are now illuminated by the slanting rays of the rising sun. Thus dawn evokes dusk, but dusk perceived as "a scene imaginary, chilling and deserted, a pure evocation of a sunset which was not based, as it is in the evening, on the sequence of the day's hours which I was used to seeing precede it, but which was now set free, interpolated, more insubstantial even than the horrible image of Montjouvain which it did not succeed in canceling, covering, concealing—a poetical, vain image of memory and dreams" (2:377; 2:1130). In the sickening inconsistency of this false sameness, we are far indeed from the presumed Proustian ecstasy of metaphorical equivalents. Here that trembling of surfaces—often the sign of a revelatory intrusion of temporal and ontological depths into the world of perceived phenomena—is repeated as a kind of contamination of nature itself by Marcel's willful and anguished pursuit of the truth of desire, of desire reduced to its essential formula. The perception of a certain type of light common to dawn and dusk is experienced as the nausea of inhabiting the desert of metaphorical essences and provokes in Marcel a nostalgia for the "impurities" of temporal sequences and contexts.

I propose that we consider this scene as an unintended emblem of an aesthetic of art as truth divorced from phenomena, truth as merely an evocative sameness, an exact yet alien repetition of phenomena—or, in psychoanalytic terms, of art as consecrating a paranoid relation of desire to others, as well as to one's own desires hidden in others. The myth of art as both a "translation of life" and as more "real" or more "essential" than life could itself be thought of as a simulacrum of a realistic aesthetic: in this myth, the imaginary adheres to the real not in order to impart an existential authority or legitimacy to art, but rather in order to reproduce the real without any such authority, to demonstrate the

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

superiority of the image to the model. And yet, precisely because of this adherence, the "substitute objects" of art continuously remind us of the objects they are meant to annihilate or transcend; what purports to be an essentializing repetition turns out to be the symbolic reminder, the symbolic symptom, of phenomena at once erased and indelible.

And yet, as in Klein, we have seen hints in Proust of a quite different view of the sublimating activity of art. I have spoken of the involuntary memory which "resurrects" Marcel's grandmother as possibly, and paradoxically, inaugurating a presence at last freed from Marcel's appropriation of that presence, and I have referred to the appetitive metonymies of desire in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur*. If consciousness in Proust seeks most frequently to go *behind* objects, there is also a move—wholly different in its consequences—*to the side of objects*. In the passage we have been considering from *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, the encouragement to make the latter move comes from an unexpected source. In order to distract Marcel from his suffering, and to keep him from losing "the benefit of a spectacle which [his] grandmother used to regret that [he] never watched," his mother points to the window (2:376–77; 2:1129). But while she thus encourages a kind of lateral mobility away from her and from the hotel room and toward the sea, the beach, the sunrise, Marcel monotonously sees *behind* the sea, the beach, and the sunrise the fantasmatic spectacle of Albertine at Montjouvain with Mlle Vinteuil. However little Marcel appears to attend to it, we may nonetheless consider the mother's gesture as an instructive reminder of the power of appearances to defeat what may be imagined to lie "behind" them. Or, to put this in terms which I have already used, we could say that Marcel's mother seeks to distract him from his hallucinated transcendence of phenomena, and thereby to point, ultimately, to *the possibility of pursuing not an art of truth divorced from experience, but rather of phenomena liberated from the obsession with truth.*

But the substance of the very passage in which this possibility is raised appears to preclude it. Not only does Marcel see Montjouvain behind the spectacle of sea and sun which his mother invites him to contemplate; more fundamentally, the rising sun becomes a lurid metaphor for Marcel's future inability *not* to see behind such spectacles, for the reduction of the world to a monotonous and ineluctable reflection of his suffering:

> And thinking of all the nondescript scenes that were about to be lighted up, scenes which, only yesterday, would have filled me simply with the desire to visit them, I could not repress a sob when, with a gesture of oblation mechanically performed which appeared to me to symbolise the bloody sacrifice which I should have to make of all joy, every morning, until the end of my life, a solemn renewal, celebrated as each day dawned, of my daily grief and of the blood from my wound, the golden egg of the sun, as though propelled

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

> by the breach of equilibrium brought about at the moment of coagulation by a change of density, barbed with tongues of flame as in a painting, came leaping through the curtain behind which one had felt that it was quivering with impatience, ready to appear on the scene and to spring aloft, the mysterious ingrained purple of which it erased with waves of light (creva d'un bond le rideau derrière lequel on le sentait depuis un moment frémissant et prêt à entrer en scène et à s'élancer, et dont il effaça sous des flots de lumière la pourpre mystérieuse et figée). [2:376; 2:1128]

"The bloody sacrifice of all joy" which Marcel sees symbolized in the spectacle of the sunlight bursting into his room is the sacrifice of the spectacle itself. In other terms, it is the sacrifice of the pleasure he had earlier known of anticipating scenes from which he is absent, landscapes beneficently resistant to his need to find himself in them. These waves of light symbolize their own pathetic availability to the symbolic imagination.

But the narrator's account of that past moment partially defeats its symbolic content—that is, its literary reformulation helps to *de*-symbolize it. The sentence I have quoted reinstates lost appearances. Far from being erased in the burst of sunlight, "la pourpre mystérieuse et figée" of the curtain is—verbally—highlighted. Placed at the end of this long sentence in which the skeletal structure has itself been practically buried by all the modifying and appositional phrases and clauses, the curtain negates its own disappearance and *appears*—climactically and triumphantly (if also mistakenly)—as the strongest presence of the remembered scene. Syntactic resources operating independently of (even at cross-purposes with) the impulse to symbolize "save" the purple curtain both from being erased by the sun's golden light *and* from having that luminous erasure interpreted as a mere symbol of Marcel's pain. Like the resurrections of involuntary memory, the return to the past in literature means a certain loss of Marcel as an actor *in* that past and, as a result, an unprecedented visibility of past appearances. The death of the past is also a liberation from the constraints of anxious desire, constraints which threatened to "erase" the phenomenal diversity of the world from the field of Marcel's troubled vision.

Thus the move to art in *La Recherche* is not only an annihilating and redemptive replication of experience; it also makes possible a kind of posthumous responsiveness to surfaces, a redefining reenactment of Marcel's interest in the world. From this perspective, art would be our "real life" not in the sense of an essentializing version of experience, but rather as a first or original (but originally missed) contact with phenomena. *The reappearance of the world* in Marcel's book is perhaps anticipated by his mother's pointing to a spectacle which her son will take in only when he gives it back to the world—this time as literature. In a final, Kleinian version of that maternal lesson—a version faithful to Proust's unsophis-

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

ticated and salutory insistence (already formulated by the grandmother in *Combray*) that consciousness *profit* from art (that the only just criticism is a moral criticism)—let us say that the occasions of our interest in reality far exceed the range of our symbolic use of the real as the text in which to rewrite a history of anxious desire. Furthermore, for Marcel—but perhaps not only for Marcel—to de-symbolize reality may be the precondition for re-eroticizing reality. On the basis of this too-rapid reading of Proust and of the Klein of "Early Analysis," we would now have to imagine an erotic art independent of the anxieties inherent in desire. No longer a corrective replay of anxious fantasy, such an art would reinstate a curiously *disinterested mode of desire* for objects, a mode of excitement which, far from investing objects with symbolic significance, would enhance their specificity and thereby fortify their resistance to the violence of symbolic intent.

1. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past,* trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff and (for *The Past Recaptured*) Frederick A. Blossom, 2 vols. (New York, 1934), 2:113. The original French is from Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu,* ed. Pierre Clarac and André Ferré, 3 vols. (Paris, 1954), 2:756. All further references to this work (the translation and the original in that order) will be included in the text. (Occasionally I have modified Scott Moncrieff's and Blossom's renderings in the interest of greater exactness; in a few instances I have substantially changed their renderings. In every case, however, I have included the volume and page number reference to their translation to facilitate comparison.)

2. Moncrieff translates this phrase as "an annihilation that had effaced my image of that affection." My own translation—somewhat less probable grammatically—is, as it were, solicited by my interpretation of the entire passage and more specifically by the narrator's remark, quoted next in my text, that he "was nothing" and "would be nothing" both "before and after" the death of that "mere stranger" which his grandmother had now become (2:758; 2:115).

3. Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs,* trans. Richard Howard (New York, 1972), pp. 41, 43.

4. Melanie Klein, "Early Analysis," *"Love, Guilt, and Reparation" and Other Works, 1921–1945* (New York, 1975), p. 77; all further references to this essay, abbreviated "EA," will be included in the text.

5. In the sharp distinction which Klein makes in this essay between neurotic fixations and sublimations, the crucial point appears to be what happens to suspended libido. "In hysterical fixation . . . , phantasy holds so tenaciously to the pleasure situation that, before sublimation is possible, it succumbs to repression and fixation" ("EA," p. 88). One page later Klein writes: "In my opinion we find that a fixation which leads to a symptom was already on the way to sublimation but was cut off from it by repression" ("EA," p. 89). And, in her brief account of Sigmund Freud's essay on Leonardo da Vinci, Klein concludes: "In Leonardo the pleasurable situation [gratification through fellatio] did not become fixated as such: he transferred it to ego-tendencies" ("EA," p. 87). It is true, however, that Klein sometimes speaks of this process as a transfer of an already defined, even already fixated, pleasurable situation; she will also write that the step from identifications to symbol-formation—a developmental step obviously crucial for cultural sublimations—takes place when "repression begins to operate" ("EA," p. 86). The ambiguities here may have to do with Klein's failure (or unwillingness) to recognize how radical her position in "Early

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms

Analysis" is. This suggestion seems all the more probable in the light of her later, and more "official," views of sublimation (see my discussion beginning on p. 410).

6. As a sophisticated variant of such "symptomatological" approaches, I would include analyses of the formal characteristics of primary process thinking in art—analyses in which cultural sublimations remain bound, in their very mode of operation, to repressed fantasy.

7. For an earlier version of this idea, see my "Representation and Its Discontents," *Raritan* 1 (Summer 1981): 3–17. These ideas inform my discussion of Mallarmé in my *Death of Stéphane Mallarmé* (Cambridge, 1982).

8. Klein, "On the Theory of Anxiety and Guilt," *"Envy and Gratitude" and Other Works, 1946–1963* (New York, 1975), p. 41.

9. Klein, "The Early Development of Conscience in the Child," *"Love, Guilt, and Reparation,"* p. 254.

10. Klein, "The Importance of Symbol-Formation in the Development of the Ego," *"Love, Guilt, and Reparation,"* p. 220; all further references to this essay, abbreviated "ISF," will be included in the text.

11. Klein, "A Contribution to the Psycho-Genesis of Manic-Depressive States," *"Love, Guilt, and Reparation,"* p. 270.

12. Ibid.

13. Klein, "Some Theoretical Conclusions Regarding the Emotional Life of the Infant (1952)," *"Envy and Gratitude,"* p. 64.

14. Klein, "Envy and Gratitude," *"Envy and Gratitude,"* p. 193.

15. For two quite different views of the relations between sublimation and idealization, see Guy Rosoloto, *Essais sur le symbolique,* Collections Tel (Paris, 1964), pp. 170–80, and Donald Meltzer, *Sexual States of Mind* (Perthshire, 1973), pp. 122–31.

16. See Jean Laplanche, *Problématiques III: La Sublimation* (Paris, 1980).

17. For a suggestive—and elliptical—discussion of the complex relations involved here, see Freud, *The Ego and the Id,* trans. Joan Riviere, ed. James Strachey, rev. ed. (New York, 1960), chaps. 4 and 5.

This content downloaded from
128.227.108.120 on Thu, 10 Jun 2021 16:27:09 UTC
All use subject to https://about.jstor.org/terms