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"La fourme du pié toute escripte:" Tracking Mélusine through A la recherche du temps perdu.

by

Sarah Wernick Foy

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in French in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2002

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Approval

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in French in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

"La fourme du pié toute escripte:" Tracking Mélusine through A la recherche du temps perdu.

by

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Advisor: Professor Bettina L. Knapp

This dissertation examines the ways in which Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu incorporates the legend of Mélusine, primarily seen through Jean d'Arras's 14th century work, into its vast panorama. As a fairy who assumed a human form Mélusine had to hide the division marking her as a supernatural being. Half woman and half serpent Mélusine signaled the destabilization of the boundaries between genders and even species driven by a process of metamorphosis. Mélusine's image, the division inscribed on her body, and the uncertainty surrounding her identity are refracted in the characters, episodes and structure of the Recherche.

The crucial role and the schemata that structure first encounters in medieval narratives where fairy meets mortal is adopted and

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espoused in the narrator's first meetings with his love objects, and with Gilberte in particular.

The points of contact between both works are moreover subtended by the themes of profanation and voyeurism that are central to d'Arras's The Roman de Mélusine. These themes covertly inform all of the narrator's major relationships and mediate his apprehension of the world.

Furthermore, Mélusine's multiplicity and the concomitant impossibility of determining the veracity of her nature or of anything she says, is replicated to some extent in all the characters of the Recherche, but particularly in Albertine. Albertine, like Mélusine, resists decipherment. Both are hybrid figures, ambiguous *êtres de fuite* who are impossible to domesticate and to bring within the confines of human understanding. Their shifting identities consistently undermine notions of a definitive truth.

Thus, this study in pointing out the numerous connections between both works, establishes the Mélusinian narrative as a covert intertext for the Recherche and reveals it as one of its most important *livres modèles.*

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Acknowledgments

This dissertation has been long in the making and Professor Bettina Knapp has been there since the beginning, encouraging, keeping after me and insisting that I stay the course when my courage flagged. I can never thank her enough for always being there, for her tenacity in not letting me let go and, for the gift of her time while reading several versions of the manuscript.

Professor Jeanine Plottel has also been with me since the inception of this project and I thank her for her interest, her careful reading of the manuscript and for helping me to narrow down my subject.

Indeed, without the unstinting support of Professors Knapp and Plottel this dissertation would never have seen the light of day.

I would like to thank Professor Francesca Sautman for her understanding and for giving me the time to accomplish this work.

My thanks also go to my children, Natasha and Ted, for their encouragement and support. I thank Natasha for her patience and help with formatting. My son Ted's pride in the on-

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going work was a source of inspiration and a factor in my determination to get to the finish.

My gratitude goes to Deirdre Bergson to whose standards of writing and integrity I will always aspire, and to both Deirdre and Allen for more than I can say here and whom I can never thank enough.

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of Professor Hanna K. Charney who read and approved all my pages, but whose sudden and premature death leaves such a painful vacuum. Her scrupulous, critical and passionate reading of the manuscript and the long discussions about Proust helped make this work far better than its beginnings.

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Introduction

The legend of Mélusine occupies a privileged if hidden place in Proust's A la recherche du temps perdu. Mélusine was a medieval *fée* who, because of a curse imposed by her mother, had to become a serpent from the waist down on Saturdays. Eventually betrayed by her mortal husband, Raymondin, she loses her human form entirely and is transmogrified into a flying serpent or dragon. Once alerted to Mélusine's story the reader becomes aware of its constant though fragmented presence disseminated throughout the novel. The Recherche is a world unto itself and it is sustained and nourished by many intertexts great and small. Terence Cave observes that "modern critical theory stresses the extent to which all writing is rewriting: the existence of any text depends primarily on the pre-existence of other texts rather than on phenomena external to writing."[1] This study will show that the legend of Mélusine, is deeply embedded in the Recherche and that Mélusine is one of its most important central images.

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In examining the incorporation of the legend into the Recherche we shall refer primarily to Roman de Mélusine written by Jehan d'Arras in the 14th century and less frequently to Coudrette's version composed ten years after d'Arras's. Until recently the Mélusinian tradition has not caught the attention of many modern readers. But as Donald and Sara Sturm-Maddox observe: "Its wide readership and international dissemination is evident in the manuscript tradition and the numerous printed editions and translations from the mid-fifteenth century to the nineteenth century."[2] In the nineteenth century many artists, writers, musicians, and poets drew their inspiration from works of the Middle Ages. These works constituted some of the literary and cultural background out of which Proust came. His fascination with medieval art and literature was legendary among his friends. For instance, in one well known anecdote, Robert de Billy lent him Emile Mâle's L'Art religieux du XIIIe siècle en France and got it back four years later in very bad shape because it had been studied and read extensively during that period by Proust.[3] Proust's erudition in medieval art has often been commented on by scholars and it is known that even before reading Mâle, he was inspired by Ruskin to make "pilgrimages" to cathedrals and churches. Proust was interested in the

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Middle Ages even as a child. Included in Proust's use of medieval material is a book he read as a child, Augustin Thierry's Récits des temps mérovingiens.[4] Thierry Laget, one of the editors of the second Pléiade edition of the Recherche, writes that in a letter to Antoine Bibesco Proust included Lusignan in a list of names he was considering for his novel.[5]

We do not know which edition of Mélusine was available to Proust but he certainly knew about the legend and would have seen representations of her sculpted in the churches that he visited and scrutinized with such intensity and love. In musing upon intertexuality Richard Goodkin says that a literary text belongs to a "broadly defined cultural tradition that creates – indeed that is largely composed of – a potentially infinite number of relations between different artistic and intellectual works spanning many centuries." Independently of being familiar with these works the author may speak in a similar or dissenting voice or interact with them in other ways. And Goodkin continues:

> On the other hand, even when authors are familiar with other works, and even when they are aware of alluding to them in some way, they are certainly no more conscious of all the different ways in which their text might be said to interact with

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> those other works then they are of all the possible interpretations of their own work.[6]

Goodkin's point is well taken, but regardless of conscious or unconscious intertexuality, the important affinities connecting Mélusine to Proust's great work are too strongly marked to be dismissed. Mélusine is a deeply divided creature. She is a beautiful woman and the mother of ten sons, but she is also a monster. The most evident sign of this is the tail that marks her corporeal hybridity. Le Goff calls her the "fée de l'essor économique médieval" because she confers power on the chivalric class in the form of castles and cities which spring up in the blink of an eye, as well as the land and lineages that accrue to those she favors. Yet, for all this beneficence she also has a malevolent aspect. She happens to be the niece of the often sinister Morgana and, as we shall see, is guilty of parricide and regicide. In d'Arras's and Coudrette's narratives the supernatural and at times malevolent Mélusine is juxtaposed to a Christian Mélusine, whose good nature is exemplified by a behavior and discourse that is a model of Christian piety. She is a Mother Goddess, yet the murder of one of her sons also places her in the realm of the sinister mother figure.[7] Her progeny does consist of ten strapping young men, all of whom are

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mortal and consistently described as handsome. However, eight of them have grotesque deformities, such as Renaud whose one eye is in the middle of his forehead. Daughters of *fées* inherit their mother's supernatural nature, but sons remain fully human and only inherit a mark that is physical or moral. The sons' blemishes or deformities were known as mother-marks.[8] Douglas Kelly believes that the lack of mother-marks on Remonnet and Thierry, the two youngest sons, is an indication of Mélusine's progressive humanization.[9] However, because of Raymondin's betrayal, Mélusine never achieves full humanity.

Mélusine's dividedness also makes her sexuality problematic. As Brownlee says: "Mélusine is a phallic mother in that she entombs her father in a womb-like cavern (rather than the accustomed imprisonment of a daughter by a king/father in a phallic tower)."[10] To kill one's father, even if it is just symbolically, to be a clearer of forests and a builder of castles and cities, does not accord with the usual perception of normative female behavior but is associated with male abilities. Gabielle Spiegel observes:

> Not only is she a clearly androgenous figure, both maternelle . . . and phallic, but she functions socially in highly ambiguous – and androgenous – ways. It is she who is responsible for the construction of the Lusignan domains, who builds

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> castles, clears lands, provisions households, endows churches and, most important gives her name to the agnatic lignage, which, since the twelfth century at least, had been the principal and exclusive genealogical task of males.[11]

Aside from such activities, concrete evidence of Mélusine's power to usurp male authority is concentrated in her anxiety producing and ultimately terrifying tail. Notwithstanding her reproductive and nurturing abilities, Mélusine's tail, when she changes into a half-woman, half-snake, and eventually, completely into the body of a snake, brings her femininity into question. As for the Recherche, it is a truism of Proust scholarship that the novel abounds in phallic women and neutralized or weak men, including almost nonexistent fathers.

Mélusine gambles that she has chosen the right man - one who will not seek to discover exactly who or what she is. Or if he does that, he will keep quiet about it. His silence will guarantee that she can pass for human for an undetermined number of years, thereby giving her a chance to become fully human. The attempt to pass for something that one is not, often at the mercy of the silence of others, is the lot of many of the characters of the Recherche. The cloak of secrecy hangs heavily on the shoulders of those whose ambition it is

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to cross the boundaries of class or gender differences. Mélusine's attempt to cross boundaries serves as a narrative model for the Recherche where most of the characters are engaged, sometimes very single-mindedly and very secretly, in such crossings along paths with surprising twists and turns.

Sara Sturm-Maddox writes that Jean d'Arras's account boasts a "singular narrative design, one in which the intersection of mortal and supernatural spheres is rendered by the convergence and conjoining of two narrative programs, one with the mortal, one with the fairy as protagonist."[12] This number is doubled in A la recherche du temps perdu which contains four principal narrative programs, the Jew's, the aristocracy's, the homosexual's and the narrator's. Two of them are emblematized by the two ways, les deux côtés": Swann's way, which may be linked to the Judaic, since Swann is Jewish and the Guermantes's way which is linked to the French aristocracy. The conjoining of a Jew with an aristocrat may seem as impossible as a fairy marrying a mortal, but that is exactly what happens when Gilberte who is Jewish, marries a Guermantes, the aristocratic Robert de Saint-Loup. Swann's daughter Gilberte, described as both a mélusine and Jewish, moves from one "way" to the other, bridging

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both worlds. This is also true of homosexuals who, usually obliged to hide their true inclinations, are to be found among Jews and aristocrats and across all levels of society. And, toutes proportions gardeés, it is perhaps the intersection of spheres, their convergence and divergence, their rencontres manquées as well as their near misses, the failures and losses along the way to redemption or oblivion that account for the similarity in the tone of the medieval texts and the Recherche. These works are connected by and resonate with a tone of lamentation, of reserve, and of grandeur. According to Edmund Wilson the tone of lamentation and complaint that resounds throughout the Recherche is rarely dropped except for the animated humor of the social scenes so bitter in their implications.[13] Much the same could be said about Mélusine. Even in those scenes that depict joyful events, such as the ceremonies surrounding Raimomdin and Mélusine's wedding, there is a sense that something could go terribly wrong. At the wedding, no one has ever heard of Mélusine or knows where she comes from. Raymondin has to dodge and lie, as the comte de Poitiers and Raymondin's brother, the comte de Forez, voice everyone's suspicions by repeatedly asking about Mélusine's lineage. That lineage which brings much honor and approval to Mélusine for a

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while, is the Achilles heel of this otherwise powerful woman. Grief is present in almost every episode from Elinas's betrayal of Mélusine and Raymondin's accidental killing of his uncle to Mélusine's leave-taking and Raymondin's long penance.

Even though the medieval text concludes with the fundamental incompatibility of fairy and mortal while on the other hand, the Recherche ends in the reunion of opposites especially in the figure of Gilberte and her daughter, both works may be said to highlight a preoccupation with origin as one of their main features, and at times, as an obsession. Various characters in the Recherche consistently boast about or hide their ancestors, or try to ferret out the ancestry of their friends, neighbors and acquaintances. In both narratives the shape of one's life, its success or failure, can be determined by the ability to hide or display one's origins. Charlus constantly trumpets the prestige of his lineage which, in his eyes, confers a superiority over most other mortals. We may recall that, mindful of the class difference, Charlus refers to Marcel as less than a microscopic piece of dust: "Il [Marcel] n'a aucunement la notion du prodigieux personnage que je suis et du microscopique vibrion qu'il figure" (III,14). Moreover, Charlus and the Guermantes are descendants of Mélusine, as we shall

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see. Bloch and the adult Gilberte are examples of characters who expend much energy on concealing their true origins. Crimes or transgressions against genealogical lines enacted in both works are closely linked to the question of origin and lead back to the mother.

In early twentieth century works Colleen Lamos notes that the issue of erotic desire and gender definition are typically concentrated in the figure of the mother in male modernist texts: "One of their distinguishing yet disturbing features is the representation of maternal identification and matricidal fury as collaborative impulses."[14] These impulses are incorporated into the Recherche and Mélusine. While both works contest maternal authority they also challenge boundaries that separate and differentiate. The destabilization of the boundaries between genders and even between species is blurred, often driven by a process of metamorphosis.

The multiplicity of crossings in both narratives is intimately linked to the idea of redemption. Indeed, crossing into the world of men is the very condition for any chance that Mélusine has for salvation. A gradual humanization of her fairy nature would have allowed her to acquire a soul and die a Christian death with full benefits of the sacraments. The quest for redemption is the whole point of her

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attempt to pass for human while living in the world of those who are not her kind. Some of the characters of the Recherche, such as the narrator, Elstir and Mlle Vinteuil, must leave behind the world of superficial society diversions or of deviant sexual behavior to attain the redemption afforded by art. However, in a reversal of the Mélusinian scheme the protagonists of the Recherche must make a return trip retracing their steps back to their original starting point. The narrator must go in sens inverse through temps retrouvé to temps perdu, through the steps of his ascent in high society back to his position at the margins of this society. Mlle Vinteuil will have to drop the persona of the debauched and sadistic young girl to become once again the loving daughter who honors her father above all else. Elstir's path diverges less from Mélusine's in that in his progression from something potentially base he aspires to a new and more valued state. The ridiculous M. Biche, initially a devotee of the petit clan, becomes Elstir one of the most serious and talented painters of his time. There was no apparent animality in Mélusine to begin with nor is there any in her mother Présine, but having lost all humanity she returns to the fairy nature from whence she came and in this sense she too makes a journey in sens inverse. Unlike the narrator's and Elstir's, Mélusine's

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journey results in a greater degradation relative to her original nature. Mélusine's tragedy is that her desire for redemption is always inscribed in a trajectory that is doomed to failure.

The Mélusine that figures in the 14th century texts of Jean d'Arras and Coudrette haunts the pages of the Recherche. Her image and the division that marks her is inscribed within many of Proust's characters and episodes, and within the structure of the Recherche. There is a division between temps perdu and temps retrouvé. Time itself, like the medieval fairy, is flawed when it is so deeply divided. Only at the end of the work does time seem to be cured of its division. Healing or erasing the line of division is what Mélusine aspires to and fails to achieve as do many of the Recherche's characters with varying degrees of success or failure.

Chapter 1 addresses the crucial role of first encounters between fairy and mortal in Mélusine and between the narrator and his love objects in the Recherche. The focus will be on Gilberte who was, aside from his mother, the first great love of the adolescent Marcel's life. The narrator's initial glimpse of Gilberte, later described as a mélusine, espouses to a remarkable degree the schemata that structure

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the initial meeting of a supernatural being and a mortal in medieval tales. The narrative thread that connects the two works is also explored in close readings of some passages of the Recherche that explicitly evoke episodes and themes that link it with Mélusine.

Just as with Gilberte, the narrator's first encounter with the Vinteuils compels comparisons to Mélusine's tale. Mlle Vinteuil and her father are not the main characters of the Recherche, but they are certainly among its most important. Even if the Vinteuil episodes are briefly featured only in the first volume, M. Vinteuil and his daughter are far more important than the frequency of their appearance in the work would seem to indicate. M. Vinteuil's music, the "petite phrase" of his sonata, and his great work, the septet, appear at various points throughout the Recherche, helping to keep the Vinteuil name in mind. Mlle Vinteuil and her father's work play a pivotal role in initiating and developing the narrator's understanding of sexuality and art. Thus, chapter 2 of our study insists on a careful examination of an episode that may seem at first glance only marginal. It also highlights more emphatically the pivotally important themes of both works, namely ambiguity, metamorphosis, voyeurism and profanation that were

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introduced in the previous chapter and that will be the main focus of subsequent chapters.

Our first two chapters show that the dazzling first encounters resonate with the Mélusinian narrative and that their setting against a backdrop of hawthorns is important for establishing links with that narrative. Flowers in general and hawthorns in particular encode dichotomous oppositions, such as virtue and vice, thereby foreshadowing Mlle Vinteuil's and Gilberte's defilement of their parents.

In Chapter 3 we will briefly pause to glance backward at some of Proust's pre-Recherche writings. These early texts consisting of essays, short stories, articles, letters and fragments in the unfinished novel, Jean Santeuil, illustrate the tenacity of voyeurism and profanation that covertly inform and drive most of the episodes of the Recherche.

To understand profanation in the Recherche and in the Roman de Mélusine it is useful to review the mechanisms of incorporation, reversal and projection at work in the various scenes of voyeurism. Thus chapter 4 which is organized into two parts begins with an overview of the concept of voyeurism. In the first section, "From

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Genviève de Brabant's castle to Monjouvain" the voyeur's need to look will be examined in two triptychs of pivotal episodes. The panels of the triptychs are interconnected by the narrator's insatiable desire to look and the sadistic undertone that accompanies it. In Part Two, "Raymondin's 'meffaiz' at Mervent," we turn to Raymondin's momentous "meffaiz" when he spies on his wife and loses her forever. We will illustrate the destabilization of gender and the power relations based on sexual difference entailed in voyeuristic experiences.

In chapter 5 the focus shifts to profanation to show that it subtends to some degree all relationships in the Recherche, but especially the son's relationship with his mother. Proust expressed a desire to devote an entire chapter to profanation, but this became unnecessary because it is so widely dispersed throughout the novel, and undesirable because it is one of the narrator's most deeply hidden and guilt-ridden compulsions. The most unlikely objects, such as the Letters of Madame de Sévigné, mediate the desecration of the parent. Mélusine is also a mother profaned, as we shall demonstrate, but she is a wife, daughter and mother whereas the wifely and daughterly roles of maternal figures in the Recherche are almost completely elided. The final section of this chapter considers the redemptive possibilities of

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art. Mlle Vinteuil and her nameless friend do atone for their profanatory activities in their selfless devotion to rescuing M. Vinteuil's great septet from oblivion.

Our final chapter turns to Albertine who is presented as a proliferation of shapes and possibilities. Her multiplicity as well as her qualities as "un être de fuite" suggest her connection to Mélusine. Both the Recherche and the Roman de Mélusine purport to be a search for the truth or a truthful report of events, yet each narrative reveals a duplicity in its claims for veracity. Our purpose in this study is to bring to light the process by which The Roman de Mélusine is absorbed into Proust's novel and to keep track of its various themes, tropes and episodes dispersed throughout the Recherche.

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Notes

[1] Terence Cave, The Cornucopian Text: Problems of writing in the French Renaissance (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979) 324.

[2] Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox, "Introduction: Mélusine at 600." Melusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France. Eds. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox. (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996): 3.

[3] Robert D. Frye, "The role of Medieval Art and Allegory in the Genesis of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu.*" Symposium 39.4 (1985-1986): 254.

[4] Mary Ellen Clark Becker, "Medieval Themes and Forms in *A la recherche du temps perdu,*" Abstract., Proust Research Association Newsletter 12 Fall (1974): 30.

[5] Thierry Laget, A la recherche du temps perdu II, 311 n.1.

[6] Richard Goodkin, Around Proust (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1991) 8.

[7] Marina S. Brownlee, "Interference in *Mélusine*." Mélusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France. Eds. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox. (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996) 226-240. Mélusine's dividedness is addressed in a variety of scholarly essays that shed light on a plurality of critical issues ignored until recently, but raised by Jean d'Arras's text.

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[8] Douglas Kelly, "The Domestication of the Marvelous in the Mélusine Romances." Mélusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France. Eds. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox. (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996): 39.

[9] Douglas Kelly, "The Domestication of the Marvelous in the Mélusine Romances," Mélusine of Lusignan 44.

[10] Marina S. Brownlee, "Interference in *Mélusine*." Mélusine of Lusignan 227.

[11] Gabrielle M. Spiegel, "Maternity and Monstrosity: Reproductive Biology in the *Roman de Mélusine*." Mélusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France. Eds. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox. (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996): 103.

[12] Sara Sturm-Maddox, "Crossed Destinies: Narrative Programs in the *Roman de Mélusine*." Roman de Mélusine: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France. Eds. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox. (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996): 12.

[13] Edmund Wilson, Axel's Castle (New York and London: Norton, 1931) 144.

[14] Colleen Lamos, Deviant Modernism: Sexual and Textual Errancy in T.S.Eliot, James Joyce, and Marcel Proust (Cambridge, England: Cambridge UP, 1998) 11.

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Chapter 1

Gilberte's rendez-vous with Mélusine

> Je dis une fleur! et, hors l'oubli
> où ma voix relègue aucun
> contour, en tant que quelque
> chose d'autre que les calices
> sus, musicalement se lève, idée
> rieuse ou altière, l'absente de
> tous bouquets.
>
> Mallarmé[1]

A la recherche du temps perdu is filled with flowers, but it is particularly in Du côté de Swann that they proliferate. As a young boy, Proust developed what became a life-long interest in botany. He was awarded first prize in natural science at the age of twelve and used to write to horticulturists and correspond with knowledgeable friends about flowers.[2] Because of their frequent occurrence, orchids and hawthorns are of particular interest to anyone who wishes to

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understand the Recherche. Raymonde Debray-Genette finds hawthorns of such importance that she confidently states: "les aubépines sont une pièce indispensable à la construction et à la comprehension de toute la Recherche."[3] As Claudette Sartiliot says, flowers have a secret meaning and they are a common literary device used to express human qualities.[4] It is widely known that Swann and Odette ascribe meaning to orchids since "faire cattlyea" was their code word for having sex, but at least one other character of the Recherche believes in the "language of flowers." During a late-night visit to Charlus, the young narrator's ignorance of the language provokes the baron's fury:

> Comment? S'écriait-il avec colère (et en effet son visage convulsé et blanc différait autant de son visage ordinaire que la mer quand, un matin de tempête, on aperçoit, au lieu de la souriante surface habituelle, mille serpents d'écume et de bave), vous prétendez que vous n'avez pas reçu mon message – presque une déclaration – d'avoir à vous souvenir de moi? Qu'y avait-il comme décoration autour du livre que je vous fis parvenir? De très jolis entrelacs historiés, lui dis-je. . . . Un de ces jours vous prendrez les genoux de Mme de Villeparisis pour le lavabo, et on ne sait pas ce que vous y ferez. Pareillement, vous n'avez même pas reconnu dans la reliure du livre de Bergotte le linteau de myosotis de l'église de Balbec. Y avait-il une manière plus limpide de vous dire: 'Ne m'oubliez pas'? (II,843)[5]

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Hence, it is always of interest to ask what motivates the appearance of flowers and what lies behind their appearance in a text, but, in any case, the wealth of floral images in the Recherche should alert us to the fact that they play more than an accessory role, and that they are, in fact, essential, if problematic, markers of signification.

No attempt will be made to determine what flowers symbolize. Indeed, such an enterprise is specious, as Claudette Sartiliot has shown in her article "Herbarium Verbarium." She finds it surprising that someone of Georges Bataille's stature should even have attempted it. However, when Bataille tried to find a rational explanation linking flowers and love, he did come to the important realization: "that the relationship between flowers and their symbolic meaning, rather than being motivated or rational, is akin to the kinds of substitutions one encounters in dreams."[6] Bataille writes: "C'est presque toujours un rapprochement accidentel qui rend compte de l'origine des substitutions dans les rêves. On connaît suffisammant, entre autres, le sens donné à des objets selon qu'ils sont pointus ou creux."[7] Sartiliot reviews some common associations to flowers such as beauty, and perhaps, indifference and passivity. Traditionally, they

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are also supposed to express innocence and virginity. Sartiliot questions the propriety of this kind of a "language of flowers." She summarizes a passage in Derrida's Glas, which confirms Jean Genet's statement that flowers signify nothing:

> ... flowers cannot signify anything because of the process of metamorphosis in which they are involved. Thus, like gloves and shoes (fetishes), flowers can always be turned inside out into their opposite: 'For castration to overlap virginity, for the phallus to be reversed into the vagina, for alleged opposites to be equivalent to each other and reflect each other, the flower has to be turned inside out like a glove and its style like a sheath'. Like the fetish, the flower is detachable, cuttable, coupable in French, as in Derrida's text, therefore both cuttable and culpable, and as such part of an economy which reconciles contraries. Like the fetish, the flower allows an oscillation between contraries, between feminine and masculine.[8]

It is in respect to the oscillation between contraries that the flower "can serve as a disseminative model for Derrida's deconstruction of hermeneutic interpretation." As Sartiliot writes, the herbarium changes into a verbarium. In order to elucidate this transformation she bases her formulation of it on Freud and Derrida, among others. Jean Marie Pelt used a metaphor which appealed to Derrida when he compared pollination and fecundation to the postal

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service. For Derrida it is the *destinataire* who eventually gives meaning to the writing process. Sartillot writes: "... in this comparison between the game of reproduction and the postal system, Jean Marie Pelt wants to establish the alliance in botanical reproduction between rule and chance."[9] Upon sending a letter we must trust the carrier and chance, but it is the *destinataire*, who, like the stigma of the flower, is in control of the production of meaning. The analogy of the "botanical discourse" to the postal system enables Sartiliot to articulate the transformation, in texts, of the flower into the letter, the herbarium into the verbarium:

> The reader, as stigma of the flower, is the one who ensures the signature and the life of the writer, as flower. The writer is the one at risk, the seducer of intermediaries who has to rely on wind and chance so that his message reaches its destination ...[10]

In an explosive vitality, the seemingly fragile stalks of flowers will carry and disseminate an often unconscious production of meaning and multiple images of Mélusine, Judaism, homosexuality, the androgyne, guilt and betrayal, and many other Proustian obsessions deeply structured by contraries. Of all the flowers encountered in Combray it is hawthorns, in particular, that will give us entry into the

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myth of Mélusine. A brief summary of the history of the fourteenth century text will provide some background for the ways in which Proust used it as one of his intertexts.

*

Toward the end of the fourteenth century, two works were composed on Mélusine: one in prose, the other in verse. The first, written by Jean d'Arras, was commissioned by his powerful patron to write the legend of Mélusine. Jean, the Duke of Berry, wanted it known that he was related to the House of Lusignan through his mother's line. In 1374 John of Berry had taken the most important fortification in Poitou, the fortress of Lusignan, from the English. In 1392 he was afraid the English would recapture Lusignan. Should the fortress fall into their hands all of Poitou might also be lost. Lusignan was the name that Mélusine chose for the lineage she founded therefore, tracing one's bloodline back to her would legitimize the appropriation of the fortress in 1374, and also confer prestige and authority to her descendants.[11] Ten years after Jean d'Arras, in 1405, a second work on Mélusine was composed, this time in verse, by a Parisian book-seller Coudrette.[12] For the most part the story line in

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both works is quite similar and such differences as there are do not usually affect the tenets of this study.

Jean d'Arras tells us that Mélusine had many children, all of them boys, and that some of her sons became rulers in such places as Armenia and Cyprus. Charlus brags to the narrator that the Knights of Rhodes were "de fort petits garçons à côté des Lusignan, rois de Chypre, dont nous descendons en ligne directe" (II,862). Jacques Le Goff informs us that Mélusine's sixth son, Geoffroy la grande dent, is probably the only historical personage in the legend. According to Le Goff, Geoffroy seems to have been identified with Geoffroy of Lusignan, Viscount of Châtelleraut.[13] In Châtelleraut we recognize the name of one of Proust's homosexual aristocrats. Names such as Lusignan and Châtelleraut lead to onomastic affinities between Proust's and Jean d'Arras's narratives.

The myth of Mélusine is partially submerged, but its traces are released and disseminated throughout the <u>Recherche</u>. The hawthorns as perhaps the most important flowers in the <u>Recherche</u> will provide the transport for this dissemination.

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It is during the narrator's childhood that we first learn of the his love of hawthorns: "C'est au mois de Marie que je me souviens d'avoir commencé à aimer les aubépines". Here, in church, he dares not look at them openly but rather:

> ... à la dérobée, je sentais que ces apprêts pompeux étaient vivants et que c'était la nature elle-même qui, en creusant ses découpures dans les feuilles, en ajoutant l'ornement suprême de ces blancs boutons, avait rendu cette décoration digne de ce qui était à la fois une réjouissance populaire et une solennité mystique. (I,111)

A more extended reverie and depiction of the hawthorns will occur during an afternoon stroll. Going for walks with members of his family is a habitual pleasure in Combray in fine weather, but on this particular day Marcel's mother is not present. On this day, which happens to be a Saturday, the narrator's father and grandfather venture near Swann's forbidden parc (it is said that he has gone to Paris and that there is no danger of meeting him or anyone of his family). But Saturdays are days which are different from any other day in both the medieval legend as well as in the Combray section of the Recherche. We will speak more about that later. To return now to our episode, during the rare promenade du_côté de Méséglise, which is

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Swann's way, we may notice that it is framed by two events that happen "tout d'un coup" (I, 135) and "tout à coup" (I, 139). The narrator begins thinking about Gilberte, hoping that he will meet her. All of a sudden (tout d'un coup) he sees an abandoned fishing line in the grass by the edge of the little river. He takes this object as a sign of Gilberte's presence. Immediately after catching sight of the fishing line, he hears the prolonged cry of an invisible bird and time seems to stop:

> ... un invisible oiseau s'ingéniant à faire trouver la journée courte, explorait d'une note prolongée, la solitude environnante, mais il recevait d'elle une réplique si unanime, un choc en retour si redoublé de silence et d'immobilité qu'on aurait dit qu'il venait d'arrêter pour toujours l'instant qu'il avait cherché à faire passer plus vite. La lumière tombait si implacable du ciel devenu fixe que l'on aurait voulu se soustraire à son attention, et l'eau dormante elle-même, dont des insectes irritaient perpétuellement le sommeil, rêvant sans doute de quelque Maelstrom .... (I, 135-136)

An extraordinary event tinged with a hint of danger is obviously about to occur. The passage includes the guilty feeling on the part of the narrator that he should warn Mlle Swann "que le poisson mordait." His reverie is broken when he is called by his father to the little path "throbbing with the scent of hawthorn-blossom." At this point in the

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narrative the hawthorns are white and the narrator stares at them intently for some time. His grandfather then makes a discovery and points to some pink hawthorns inserted high up in the hedge of white hawthorns: "Toi qui aimes les aubépines, regarde un peu cette épine rose; est-elle jolie!" For the narrator the rose hawthorns are even more beautiful than the white ones and he associates them with something edible, like costly biscuits, which are more expensive when their sugar is pink. He is entranced by the pink blossoms:

> Au haut des branches, comme autant de ces petits rosiers aux pots cachés dans des papiers en dentelles, dont aux grandes fêtes on faisait rayonner sur l'autel les minces fusées, pullulaient mille petits boutons d'une teinte plus pâle qui, en s'entrouvant, laissaient voir comme au fond d'une coupe de marbre rose, de rouges sanguines et trahissaient plus encore que les fleurs, l'essence particulière, irrésistible, de l'épine, qui, partout où elle allait fleurir, ne le pouvait qu'en rose. Intercalé dans la haie, mais aussi différent d'elle qu'une jeune fille en robe de fête au milieu de personnes en négligé qui resteront à la maison, tout prêt pour le mois de Marie, dont il semblait faire partie déjà, tel brillait en souriant dans sa fraîche toilette rose, l'arbuste catholique et délicieux. (I,138; emphasis added)

It is during this moment of intense contemplation, this time of the pink hawthorns, that Gilberte appears. As we shall see, it is not

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just the bowl of pink marble and its blood-red stain, but several components of the episode under consideration that call up the image of Mélusine. Parenthetically, for now, we will point out that Mlle Vinteuil appears immediately after Marcel has secretly been ogling the hawthorn flowers on the altar of the village church. We shall want to investigate a possible connection between hawthorn flowers, Gilberte and Mlle Vinteuil in chapter 2 of this work.

A clue to this connection lies in the images and themes embedded in the myth of Mélusine, and covertly inscribed in Proust's text long before the explicit mention of her name. It is in A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur, when the narrator begins to know Gilberte, that he will see the figure of a mélusine undulating in her body as she assumes, alternately, attributes of both her mother and father. The following parental traits, among others, have been transmitted and imprinted on the daughter's body: "Dans la figure de Gilberte, au coin du nez d'Odette parfaitement reproduit, la peau se soulevait pour garder intacts les deux grains de beauté de M. Swann" (I,554). She may, at one moment, have "le bon regard franc de son père," or, on the other hand, the dissimulation and sadness of her mother's gaze when Odette was lying to Swann about one of her infidelities to him.

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The consequence of such a pronounced confluence of parental traits is the creation of a divided creature: "Telles on voyait ces deux natures de M. et de Mme Swann onduler, refluer, empiéter tour à tour l'une sur l'autre, dans le corps de cette Mélusine" (I, 555). This extended depiction of Gilberte that has as its finishing touches "le corps de cette mélusine," shows Proust indulging in a personal fantasy of the two merged into one.[14]

The mélusines of legend were a kind of succubus. The creatures that were succubi and incubi represent what Jean Libdis has called "un dédoublement hermaphrodique."[15] Mélusine, in the French legend, was a fairy who, for a time, became a woman bestowing power and wealth on her husband. Her story begins when Raymondin accidentally kills his uncle Aimery who is a father figure and also his liege lord. The young man's spear thrown at a wild boar killed the animal but also killed Aimery. In spite of Aimery's love for the young man it is altogether likely that Raymondin will be put to death for this misdeed. Raymondin wanders about disconsolately at a loss for what to do. He comes upon a mysterious and beautiful lady and two other companions at a forest spring. Without having to be told, Mélusine knows Raymondin's name and the reason for his consternation. She

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promises to save Raymondin from the dire straits he is in if he marries her, and also, to make him "le plus noble, le plus grand seigneur qui fût jamais en ton lignage et le plus puissant terrien". In the light of her preternatural knowledge and the circumstances surrounding their meeting in the forest, Raymondin might have some suspicions concerning just who or what she is. Mélusine preempts such questions with assurances that she is not demonic, but rather, "de par Dieu." In any case, Raymondin seems little inclined towards an investigation of Mélusine's origins nor does he give any sign of curiosity. The *fée*'s assurances are followed by a request for two promises in exchange for all that she will do for him as his wife. One is that he must never seek to know what she is doing on Saturdays, nor must he see her on that day:

> ... jamais vous ne tenterez de me voir le samedi ni de savoir ce que je fais ni où je suis. Et je vous jure, par le peril de mon âme, que ce jour là je ne ferai quoi que ce soit qui puisse atteindre votre honneur et qu'au contraire je ne ferai que réfléchir par quelle voie je peux mieux accoître en bien votre valeur et votre état.[16]

The second part of Raymondin's promise is that he will never reveal her secret. Mélusine tells him that if he does not keep faith

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with her, he and his descendants will experience a gradual decline and loss of property, and that the consequences for her will be even more grievous. Other than the pain of separation from Raymondin, she does not provide any details as to the precise form her suffering will take. What she does not tell him is that she has been severely punished for an act of aggression towards her father. Her mother, Présine, has cursed Mélusine and her sisters:

> La vertu de la germe (semence) de ton père vous aurait amenées, toi et les autres [her sisters], à sa nature humaine et vous eussiez, grâce à lui, été brièvement hors des mains des nymphes et fées sans y retourner jamais. Mais désormais je te donne le don que tu seras tous les samedis serpente au-dessous du nombril. Mais si tu trouves un homme qui te veuille prendre pour épouse, que tu conviennes avec lui que jamais il ne te verra le samedi et, s'il ne te découvre pas, ni qu'il <u>le dise à personne</u>, tu vivras le cours naturel de ta vie comme toute femme naturelle et tu mourras naturellement. Et de toute façon une longue lignée sortira de toi, et tes descendants feront de grandes prouesses. Et si tu es trahie de ton mari, sache que tu retourneras au tourmant d'avant, sans fin .... (emphasis added)[17]

Mélusine does not ever tell Raymondin about the crime against her father, nor does she reveal that her mother is a *fée*.

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Raymondin agrees to the marriage and after the wedding Mélusine's workers appear out of nowhere to build several fortresses on land she has acquired for her husband. Mysterious workers appear and castles and cities spring up with astonishing rapidity and, as a result Mélusine came to be known as Mélusine la *bâtisseuse*, and la *défricheuse*.

Mélusine can retain her human form and reside among mortals only as long as her husband respects the interdiction against never seeking to know where she was or what she was doing on Saturdays. On that day, depending on the version, she became either a fish or a serpent from the waist down as she splashed in her bath hidden away from the prying eyes of men. In the Quart Livre, chapter 38, Rabelais gives a comical description of Mélusine connecting her to *andouilles* (chitterlings):

> ... visitez Lusignan, Partenay, Vovant,Mervant et Ponzauges en Poictou. Là trouverrez tesmoings vieulx de renom et de bonne forge, lesquelz vous jueront sus le braz sainct Rigomé que Mellusine, leur première fondatrice, avoit corps foeminin jusques aux boursavitz, et que les reste en bas estoit andouille serpentine ou bien serpent andouillique.[18]

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Kevin Brownlee finds the comparison of Mélusine's tail to a vat packed with herrings (une tonne où on met harenc) comical: ". . . this metaphor . . . transposes Mélusine's composite body . . . abruptly and comically out of the courtly register. She is portrayed not only as a monster, but as a somewhat comical monster."[19] If indeed this is a moment of comedy it is short-lived and, for the most part, the tone of d'Arras's text is sober and conveys a sense of foreboding.

Nevertheless, Mélusine's life in the world of men begins auspiciously. She does substantiate her claim that she will make Raymondin powerful and prosperous. Cities spring up at Mélusine's bidding, the couple's marriage is happy, and Mélusine gives birth to ten sons. All but two of the boys are born with strange physical abnormalities, such as a huge hairy facial mole shaped like a lion's paw complete with sharp claws.[20] These deformities, known as "mother-marks", were considered a sign of Mélusine's nonhuman nature.[21] After several years, when the two youngest children are still infants, Raymondin's brother, the comte de Forez, tells him the local gossip about Mélusine: that she is an "esprit enchanté" and that she is engaging in adultery during her secret Saturday activities. Aroused to fury, Raymondin, in a jealous rage, pierces a hole through the wall and

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spies on Mélusine, thereby transgressing the interdiction: "Alors il regarde et voit Mélusine qui était dans une grande cuve de marbre où il y avait des degrés jusqu'au fond. La grandeur de la cuve faisait bien quinze pieds de large et là se baignait Mélusine..."[22] The similarity of the images of "une cuve de marbre" and the "coupe de marbre rouge" in the passage from the Recherche (I, 139) quoted above, lends itself to comparisons which will be examined later in this study. Raymondin is not upset by what he sees. On the contrary, Mélusine's hybridity exculpates her from the charge of infidelity and this is the only part of the accusation that Raymondin pays attention to at this point in the narrative. He is furious with his brother for inciting him to break the pact with Mélusine and even though part of the accusation is true, he curses his brother for the false information, and returns quietly to his room to await Mélusine's return from her bath.

Because Raymondin does not tell anyone of Mélusine's metamorphosis, she pretends not to be aware of his spying, but when one of their sons, Geoffroy à la grande dent, commits a terrible crime, Raymondin reacts in anger and despair. He has just cause, because Geoffroy, enraged that his brother Fromont has joined a monastery, burns his brother and the Maillezais monks alive. Raymondin,

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believing that Mélusine's "infamy," has been passed on to the children, publicly reveals that she is "serpente en-dessous du nombril,"[23] and calls her "très infame serpente." To understand these inherited differences between sons and daughters, Douglas Kelly argues that we must look to medieval notions of medicine:

> Two medieval factors seem to me important: seed and blood. Traditionally, the family passes to the offspring through the father's semen. The sons preserve that seed and transmit it in turn to their own sons and daughters. . . . Daughters are also the product of the father's seed, but they do not transmit that seed. They transmit blood. Blood carries the order to which one belongs. It is more or less blue – or fairy – blood. It determines therefore whether the child will be ducal or royal, burgher or peasant, fay or human. In the cases of Mélusine and Présine [Mélusine's mother], the daughters transmit their mother's nature, the sons transmit the father's family. Yet each acquires, but does not transmit, the effect of the opposite sex parent. In daughters, the paternal seed effects a slow humanization if no supernatural force intervenes.[24]

Raymondin's public denunciation constitutes the most serious transgression of his oath. Upon learning of her husband's betrayal Mélusine throws herself into the air like a great bird, in the shape of a dragon or flying serpent, and disappears after uttering a loud and mournful cry. Mélusine will emit that sound many times over in her

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serpentine form. This will always happen three days before the fall of a Lusignan castle or three days before the death of a family member. More details of the story will be filled in later, but for now, this brief summary will suffice to ferret out some of the links that justify a comparison between the legend of Mélusine and Gilberte's sudden and brief appearance on the other side of the hawthorn bush.

Mélusine is quite remarkably foreshadowed, here, in the Combray section under consideration. Both narratives contain the motifs of the fish, the bird and the bird's cry. Specialists such as Miguet Olagnier have linked Mélusine to birds as well as to serpents and fish, as we shall see when we discuss the Guermantes connection to the legend. The sign that does indeed turn out to presage Gilberte's presence is a fish pole on whose line a fish has bitten. The sudden appearance of Mélusine at the fountain or spring where she is seen by Raymondin is evoked in the Recherche by the sudden appearance of the fishing line. Mélusine is half fish, half woman, the piscatorial or ophidian part marking her as a divided and, in fact, defective creature, one who has something to hide. The division, pointing to animality is ontological as well as sexual. Gilberte, already associated with a fish, makes an obscene gesture which she hides from all but Marcel's eyes.

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The mysteriousness of that gesture is so profound that he will not understand its significance until the end of the novel. That the middle aged, worldly man of Le temps retrouvé can still not decipher the gesture without having it explained to him speaks volumes about the inscrutability of women for the narrator. The gesture, being obscene, points to precocious sexual knowledge and even, as we learn at the end of the book, precocious sexual activity on the part of the little girl. Gilberte's obscene gesture has established her as a desiring subject, on a par with the narrator in the same role. Because of the narrator's misinterpretation, however, it is as though Gilberte's message does not reach its *destinataire*. The narrator's ignorance and lack of understanding causes the little girl's desire to fall fruitlessly, rather like wasted seeds falling on barren ground or ending up in the wrong place. Moreover, the misunderstanding is reciprocal in that Gilberte also misconstrues the narrator's gaze. At the end of Albertine disparue IV the following conversation between the adult Marcel and Gilberte takes place:

> Epanchant brusquement sur elle la tendresse dont j'étais rempli par l'air délicieux, la bise qu'on respirait, je lui dis: 'Vous parliez l'autre jour du raidillon. Comme je vous aimais alors!' Elle me répondit: 'Pourquoi ne me le disiez-vous pas? Je

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> ne m'en étais pas doutée.' . . . Comme on me laissait sortir seule, dès que je pouvais m'échapper j'y (the ruins of Roussainville, where the youngsters, led by the choir boy Théodore, engaged in sexual play) courais. Je ne peux pas vous dire comme j'auraus voulu vous y voir venir. (IV, 269)

She explains that her gesture was in fact an invitation for him to join them in the ruins. She thought he understood and rejected the offer: "Mais vous m'avez regardée d'une façon si méchante que j'ai compris que vous ne vouliez pas" (IV, 269).

The narrator, in turn, has not understood Gilberte. In reminiscing she tells Marcel that she was in love with him when they first met on the hawthorn path:

> Moi je vous aimais. Et même une fois je me suis jetée à votre tête. - Quand donc? - La première fois à Tansonville, vous vous promeniez avec votre famille, je rentrais, je n'avais jamais connu un aussi joli petit garçon. J'avais l'habitude, ajouta-t-elle d'un air vague et pudique, d'aller jouer avec de petits amis, dans les ruines du donjon de Roussainville. Et vous me direz que j'étais bien mal élevée, car il y avait là-dedans des filles et des garçons de tout genre qui profitaient de l'obscurité. (IV, 269)

Just before seeing the so very mysterious girl who, initially, had only been *une image incertaine*, through the hedge of hawthorn

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bushes, the narrator notices a serpentine water hose, pierced at intervals, throwing droplets of water in the air. The water hose is again mentioned immediately when Gilberte's name is peremptorily called by "une dame en blanc," who, as it turns out, is really "la dame en rose" whom Marcel met at his grand-uncle's. The name, Gilberte, wafting across the flowers, is compared to the drops of water thrown up in the air:

> Ainsi passa près de moi ce nom de Gilberte, donné comme un talisman qui me permettrait peut-être de retrouver un jour celle dont il venait de faire une personne et qui, l'instant d'avant, n'était qu'une image incertaine. Ainsi passa-t-il, proféré au-dessus des jasmins et des giroflées, aigre et frais comme les gouttes de l'arrosoir vert; imprégnant, irisant la Zone d'air pur qu'il avait traversée - et qu'il isolait - du mystère de la vie de celle qu'il désignait ... (I, 140)

The lush descriptions of the flowers, the narrator's desire to see Gilberte, the onanism suggested by the image of the droplets of water spurting from a hose, all conspire to locate Gilberte in an highly eroticized context. Her name wafts across flowers among which are the heads of stocks, which, we have been told "held open their plump purses," Gilberte's potent name is associated with the drops of water, impregnating and filling the air it traverses with colors and the mystery

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of life, somewhat like God's rainbow streaking its prism of colors across the sky after the deluge. Let us not forget that before the young girl's arrival the placid water was dreaming of some maelstrom. Here, the more obvious allusion is to Genesis. It reinforces the aura of sin, loss and punishment that surrounds the hawthorns, evoking humankind's betrayal of God's purpose, his subsequent wrath: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis, 6,5). The Maelstrom evokes God's promise, his covenant, to refrain, after the deluge, from destroying the earth and its inhabitants. Less obviously, however, the Maelstrom[25] connects the passage to the promises which feature in the medieval tale and on which so much hinges. As we have seen, Raymondin's pact with Mélusine is the condition of his marriage, prosperity and happiness. Betrayal brings about suffering and a long slow decline of his name and lineage, but the broken promise brings much more suffering to Mélusine who loses her chance to be whole. Mélusine's mother has cursed her daughter for reasons that will now be delineated in greater detail.

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Because Mélusine's father is human she had a chance to lose her fairy nature and become fully human, but that happy outcome is not to occur because of Présine's displeasure at the revenge that Mélusine enacted upon her father. Sometime after the death of his wife, king Elinas, Mélusine's future father, seeks to slake his thirst during a hunting expedition. While searching for water he is drawn towards an enchanting voice coming from the vicinity of a forest spring. The voice belongs to a beautiful young woman, but it is her voice as much as her beauty that mesmerizes him: "Alors il s'arrêta ébloui par la beauté de cette femme qui continuait de chanter plus mélodieusement qu'une sirène, aucune fée, aucune nymphe ne chanta jamais."[26] He is so taken with the lady that, forgetting his thirst and the hunt, he hides himself to observe her through some bushes, much as Marcel observes Gilberte through the hawthorn bush. When he asks that she marry him, Présine replies:

> Si vous me voulez prendre pour femme ... il faut me jurer que, si nous avons des enfants, vous n'essaierez jamais de me voir pendant mes couches, et ni ne ferez par voie quelconque rien dans cette intention.[27]

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In French, les *couches* of a woman has to do with giving birth or with menstruation. Elinas swears that he will never transgress this interdiction and the couple have a happy marriage until Présine gives birth to three daughters, the eldest of whom is Mélusine. Mataquas, Elinas's son by his first wife, hates his step-mother and tells Elinas to come and look at the beautiful little girls he has just sired. Elinas forgets his promise and walks in on Présine while she is bathing the children. Before vanishing into thin air with her daughters, she screams swearing vengeance:

> Faux roi, tu as manqué à ta promesse, ce dont il t'adviendra malheur et tu m'as perdue pour toujours. Et je sais bien que c'est à cause de ton fils Mataquas, il me faut partir soudainement, mais encore serai-je vengée de ton fils ou de ses descendants.... [28]

She will raise her daughters, in the company of her sister, "la Dame de l'Ile Perdue", on the isle of Avalon, the site of her perpetual exile. Her sister is none other than Morgana, who can be a sinister figure at times, even though she knows the secret of plants and can apply their curative properties to heal the sick. Moreover, Morgana uses feathers to fly though the air. This ability underlines the family rememblance between the three fairies:

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> Presine est . . . l'une des soeurs de Morgane, laquelle est un des aspects de la Déesse-Mère, maîtresse des fruits, des plantes et des changements d'aspects. Le fait qu'elle soit capable de se muer en oiseau ... n'est pas sans intérêt si l'on pense que, plus tard, sa nièce Mélusine, une fois son secret découvert, s'envolera sous forme de serpent ailé.[29]

The intratextual similarities that ricochet between Présine's narrative and Mélusine's, and the intertextual affinities linking their stories to the Recherche are sustained in the narrator's contemplation of the hawthorns and in his scrutiny of Gilberte. The little girl whom he sees has blondish-red hair and her face is strewn with freckles, "semé de taches roses." Gilberte's red hair and pink freckles link her again with the hawthorns. The same intensity that was invested in the hawthorns is now directed towards Gilberte. The narrator specifies exactly when he began to love hawthorns. It was in the mois de Marie and the flowers, or rather the buds, are associated to the fête de la Vierge: "elle [the pink hawthorn] aussi avait une parure de fête - de ces seules vraies fêtes que sont les fêtes religieuses" (I,137). The buds, however, are blood-red and the opposition between the white and pink or blood-red hawthorns evokes those folkloric tales in which fairies who metamorphosed into human women imposed a taboo that no one

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could see them while they were giving birth or during their menstruation. Gaignebet writes that fairies who wanted to become human had to submit to the feminine condition of menstruation and that Mélusine is the personification of the cleansing bath: "Mélusine, dont l'image archétypale est celle d'une femme nue jusqu'à mi-corps qui se baigne dans un baquet hors de la vue de son mari, est la personification du bain de purification menstruel."[30] In the passage from Du côté de Swann (I, 138) quoted above, the *coupe de marbre rose* suggests the *cuve de marbre* that Mélusine bathes in. The buds *rouges sanguines* of the same passage suggest menstruation. Gaignebet gives some precise information regarding fairies aspiring to the human condition. Like their mortal counterparts, unclean once a month, they had to purify themselves in a bath. Before going into the bath: "elles doivent enlever leurs 'petites chemises' de plumes qui leur permettent de voler au ciel. C'est à ce moment que les héros peuvent les capturer."[31] Gaignebet says that fairies are most vulnerable to capture when they are bathing and that capturing them occurs at specific times of the year. One of the most propitious times is the month of May which is a month the narrator takes care to mention several times in the episode under discussion:

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> ... pas plus la capture que la rupture n'interviennent n'importe quand dans l'année ... c'est surtout pendant la nuit de mai, lors de la lune dont la rousseur connote les 'fleurs' (roses) de la fée, que la scène est habituellement localisée. Cette lune qui suit l'équinoxe de printemps (21 mars) trouve des équivalents en quatre points lunaires de l'année qui suivent les solstices et les équinoxes. Les deux 'lunes rousses' de purification solsticiales sont situées au 1er février et au 1er août; les deux lunes rousses équinoxales au 1er mai et au 1er novembre.[32]

The activity of bathing often occurs in a cuve which is usually a vat, tun, or tub of some sort. The homophony and synonymy between the coupe de marbre rose that the hawthorns open to the narrator's gaze, and the *cuve de marbre* in which Mélusine is bathing when Raymondin spied on her has already been mentioned. The link between *cuve* and *coupe*, between Mélusine and Gilberte, is again hinted at in A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur, while the teen-age narrator is waiting for Gilberte in the flower-filled petit salon of her parent's home:

> ... je restais seul en compagnie d'orchidées, de roses et de violettes qui - pareilles à des personnes qui attendent à côté de vous, mais ne vous connaissent pas - gardaient un silence que leur individualité de choses vivantes rendaient plus impressionnant et recevaient frileusement la chaleur d'un feu incandescent de charbon, précisément posé derrière une vitrine de cristal, dans une cuve de marbre blanc où il faisait

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écrouler de temps à autre ses dangereux rubis.
(I,517)

He remarks upon a *cuve de marbre blanc* (I,517) into which are falling dangerous red-hot embers from the fire. This little scene contains some of the same features present when human and fairy worlds collide, as well as features that link it to Marcel's initial encounter with Gilberte. Upon entering the house his expectation is that he will experience "de surnaturels plaisirs." The hero is alone, he is waiting or lying in wait. The heat, orchids and roses, suggest an eroticized atmosphere, while the violets and "dangerous rubies" indicate some sort of peril. The white marble bassin, which we now associate with Gilberte's presence, is in an aquatic context since the petit salon is bathed in blue light: "l'après-midi bleu de ses fenêtres." All of these elements bring us back to the path, throbbing with the scent of hawthorn blossoms, on which Gilberte is about to appear.

The look that conveys the narrator's desire to ravish, "le regard qui voudrait toucher, capturer, emmener le corps qu'il regarde et l'âme avec lui" (I,139) resembles the desire of medieval heroes when they come upon a beautiful maiden bathing in a forest. For example, the *Lai du Graelent*, which has been compared to Mélusine's

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tale and described by Harf-Lancner as a variation of it, has a scene where the hero, Graelent takes the feathery clothing of the *fée* while she is bathing in the forest. She is now in his power as she can no longer assume her animal form and fly away. Graelent, most unchivalrously, takes full advantage of this situation: "On assiste dans Graelent à une veritable scène de viol."[33] In the story this is stated very simply: "Au plus profond de la forêt, il la plia à sa volonté."[34] Here, unlike in the conte mélusinien of which it is nevertheless a type, a supernatural being is subdued by force. The narrator's gaze that wishes to "bear off in triumph the body at which it is aimed, and the soul with the body,"[35] desires such subjugation of the object of that gaze.

The preceding remarks point to some of the similarities found in the legend, between the mother's and the daughter's stories which are linked by various parallels and doublings. These sorts of connections which also occur between the medieval text and Proust's are not limited to the number of recurrent motifs and obsessions already alluded to that criss-cross both texts. With remarkable frequency Proust duplicates many of the following schemata of precise and constant conditions structuring the initial meeting between fairy

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and mortal, delineated in Harf-Lancner's fascinating and useful book Les Fées au Moyen Age:

> 1. Elle a souvent pour cadre la forêt.
> 2. Le héros va au devant de la fée en partant pour la chasse. L'éloignement place le héros dans une situation de vulnérabilité, donc de disponibilité à l'initiation.
> 3. Les contes insistent sur la solitude du héros: la fée ne se montre qu'à un seul homme, qui fait figure d'élu.
> 4. Au plus profond de la forêt, une radieuse apparition se laisse contempler par le héros ébloui.
> 5. La mystérieuse inconnue ne sera jamais nommée.[36]

Let us look at the first item on the list. Harf-Lancner says that the forest is an uncertain boundary between two worlds and serves as a setting for supernatural adventures:

> La fée qui se hasarde loin de son empyrée, le mortel intrépide qui franchit les limites protectrices de son domaine pour s'enfoncer au coeur du monde sauvage, ne peuvent se joindre que sous les arbres tutélaires.... La mer, une rivière ou une source président souvent aux accordailles des deux héros. [37]

Among its many attributes the medieval forest was often considered either a dangerous place where it was wise not to venture, or a refuge for those marginalized by society. With reference to the

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forest setting for the encounter between fairy and human, Harf-Lancner writes: "Frontière incertaine de deux mondes ... la forêt devait tout naturellement offrir son décor à une aventure placée aussi nettement sous le signe du surnaturel."[38] As previously noted, Tansonville and the parc surrounding it are embedded with forbidden and forbidding qualities. Moreover, Swann's way marks one of the limits of Marcel's Combraysian childhood world. As we shall see the family stroll will reveal Swann's way as a mysterious world of illicit activities, of *infamie*, and of flowers that one dare not pick.

Upon returning to Aunt Léonie's, the narrator's grandfather tells the old woman that he would have liked to, but did not dare, bring her a branch of pink hawthorns: "Si j'avais osé, je t'aurais coupé une branche de ces épines roses que tu aimes tant." (I,141) And it is the grandfather who says: "Ce pauvre Swann, quel rôle ils lui font jouer: on le fait partir pour qu'elle reste seule avec son Charlus, car c'est lui, je l'ai reconnu! Et cette petite, mêlée à toute cette infamie!" (I,140). In pronouncing the word "infamie" and associating Gilberte with it, the grandfather echoes Raymondin's invective, calling his wife "très infâme serpente." Thus, it is not during Swann's nocturnal visits, but in the park adjoining Swann's estate that Marcel's world meets

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Swann's world. Swann's visits to Marcel's family take place on their ground, Aunt Léonie's garden, but out here, the parc, like the medieval forest, places the hero on different ground, a liminal, unfamiliar place where different worlds collide. It may be pertinent to draw attention to a small detail, the bêche de jardinage, that the author mentions twice during Gilberte's brief appearance. The discrete accumulation of details such as the little trowel or shovel in Gilberte's hand, disseminated throughout the novel, repeatedly underscores her association to Mélusine, who, we may remember, was often characterized as la *défricheuse*, la *bâtisseuse*. An additional link between Mélusine and Gilberte is underscored by Miguet-Ollagnier when she juxtaposes Mélusine's prowess as a builder and Gilberte's "gâteau architectural" at a tea party to which the narrator has been invited.[37] La *bâtisseuse*, however, can also be a destroyer. One needs only to recall Jean d'Arras's description of Mélusine's last moments in human form to see that her destructive powers are suggested when Gilberte devours the cake and demolishes its "ramparts." After her serpentine transformation, Mélusine circles the fortress, causing its stone's to rattle:

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> ... puis, après avoir fait trois fois le tour de la forteresse, elle vint s'abattre si violemment sur la tour Poitevine, dans une telle tempête, un tel vacarme, qu'il sembla à tous ceux qui y habitaient que toute la forteresse s'effondrait dans un abîme et que toutes les pierres de la construction bougeaient l'une après l'autre.[39]

This emphatic connection between Gilberte and Mélusine is further reinforced by Proust's choice of words when he says that the cake placed in Gilberte's little sitting-room has been provided for her in case she might be seized with the "fantaisie ... de le découronner de ses créneaux en chocolat et d'abattre ses ramparts . . . (I, 497; emphasis added). Miguet-Ollagnier says that some of the details of Gilberte's life, such as the inclusion of an afternoon's consumption of the architectural cake, can only be understood against the backdrop of Mélusine's legend.[40]

At this juncture, let us return to the young narrator whose stroll in Swann's park invites a comparison with medieval heroes in the midst of an adventure - heroes such as Graelent,[41] who, hunting deep in the forest, suddenly comes upon the unknown in the form of a beautiful woman bathing in some sort of tub, and is then met at a river by two beautiful maidens whose mission is to bring him back to their

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mistress. In the same vein, Marcel's outing in Swann's parc with his male relatives is an adventure highlighted by several factors. As we have seen, it is marked by proleptic signs like the fishing pole and the bird's strange song. This fragment of the passage bears being quoted again because it refers to a song that attempts to alter one of the most important constructs of the Recherche, namely, time:

> un invisible oiseau s'ingéniait à faire trouver la journée courte, explorait d'une note prolongée, la solitude environnante, mais il recevait d'elle une réplique si unanime, un choc en retour si redoublé de silence et d'immobilité qu'on aurait dit qu'il venait d'arrêter pour toujours l'instant qu'il avait cherché à faire passer plus vite. (I,135-136)

Immediately thereafter, time seems to stop and the Maelstrom is mentioned. The accumulation of these details gives the reader the sense that strangeness and mystery are present at every turn in that day's adventure. For example, that the bird is invisible is not surprising in itself, but the bird is itself dividing "la hauteur d'un arbre uncertain." Thus the divided nature of Mélusine is introduced with the word "divisant," and strangeness is hinted at by the tree which is characterized as "incertain." The entire episode takes place on a Saturday, which we have been told is "asmymétrique," and which, of

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course, is connected with Mélusine's strange and hidden activities when the division, inscribed in her double corporeality, must secretly manifest itself. It is on Saturdays that Mélusine retreats to her bath, splashing droplets of water on the ceiling with her heavy fish or serpent's tail. Raymondin, spying on his wife through a hole he has gouged out with his sword, sees Mélusine in her fairy shape: "à partir du nombril, elle avait une énorme queue de serpent, grosse comme un tonneau pour mettre des harengs, terriblement longue, avec laquelle elle battait l'eau qu'elle faisait gicler jusqu'à la voûte de la salle."[42] On the day of Marcel's promenade the mystery is prolonged by his perplexity at signs that he cannot read, such as the hawthorns that do not yield their secret "comme ces mélodies qu'on rejoue cent fois de suite sans descendre plus avant dans leur secret" (I, 136) or Gilberte's gesture.

The bird connected with division, and the prolonged song, which is after all a form of art, may serve as a metaphor for the entire project of A la recherche du temps perdu, a prolonged song that seeks to alter time, to make it stop, thereby granting immortality and reversing the erasure caused by death. John McCole notes Benjamin's observation that "the culmination of the work of A la recherche du

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temps perdu comes with the narrator's decision to compose the novel; only art can hope to capture and stabilize the fleeting epiphanies of involuntary memory," and McCole further states that "Proust did not so much capture time as annilihate it, attempting to flee from the consequences of transience."[43]

Harf-Lacner's second condition by which the hero is engaged in a hunt may not seem to relate to Proust's protagonist. She explains the importance of the hunt as the raison d'être for the hero's presence in the forest and his eventual sighting of a woman of surpassing beauty with whom he will immediately fall in love. The animal is often the lure to get the young man into the *fée*'s presence. "Le thème de la chasse répond à toutes les exigences du conte: il mène le héros dans la forêt et justifie sa solitude par la poursuite acharnée d'un gibier insaisissable" (88). And she adds that the figure profiled in that setting is the "chasseur passionné." The narrator is not hunting for birds, but Gilberte is a Swann, after all, and the bird and the hunt are a topos of numerous folkloric tales. Harf-Lancner writes:

> Ainsi de nombreux contes de tous les pays commencent-ils avec le départ du héros pour la chasse. Mais l'éloignement du héros peut aussi être justifiée par son métier de pêcheur, qui lui permettra d'accéder à un monde subaquatique ou

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> tout simplement par <u>une promenade</u> dans la forêt
> ou la montagne." (emphasis added)[44]

Harf-Lancner states that the hunted animal can be a bird and, as an example, cites a fragment of an Auvergnat legend in which the enchanted animal leading the hero to the *fée* is a bird whose song is even more beautiful than its plumage: "...le père Anselme, qui médite dans la forêt, aperçut un oiseau dont le plumage était de la plus éclatante beauté, dont le chant était plus ravissant encore, qui voltigeait devant lui de branche en branche."[45]

A stroll may therefore represent the hunt, but there is always some sort of encounter with a marvelous animal and that animal is suggested by the bird in Proust's text. As we shall see later on, the Guermantes, who trace their lineage to Mélusine and the house of Lusignan, are insistently associated with birds. Gilberte was already associated with birds by virtue of her father's name. Through her marriage to Saint-Loup, she will become a Guermantes, thereby intensifying this ornithological attribution.

It is easier to connect the narrator to the subset of the second condition which refers to the hero's vulnerability. When Marcel embarks on Méséglise-la-Vineuse or Swann's way, he is not as

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devastated as Raymondin was after killing his uncle. However, the supposed impossibility of meeting Gilberte does depress him, so much so that the prospect of a stroll along Swann's forbidden "way" leaves him indifferent to participating in what is normally a pleasurable outing. When he hopes for a miracle, (the unexpected appearance of Gilberte), and when he is supremely alert to any trace that might signal her presence he is like a "chasseur passionné" tracking a most desired prey. His desire and discouragement place him in a "situation de disponibilité."

The third condition, that according to Harf-Lancner, structures the initial meeting between fairy and mortal, refers to the solitude of the hero. She writes that the supernatural being reveals herself to only one man, "qui fait figure d'élu." Even though the father and grandfather are close by, they are out of sight. Marcel is not technically alone, but nonetheless, a profound solitude envelopes the children the first time Gilberte comes into view. No one sees the look she gives the young narrator, nor the gesture that she makes. Moreover, Marcel is not supposed to look at her or pay any attention to her because his parents disapprove of Odette. Looking at Gilberte is

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a forbidden activity in which he was able to indulge only when he was momentarily alone and before the adults noticed.

Proust's text parallels the fourth condition so closely as to be its double: "Tout à coup, je m'arrêtai, je ne pus plus bouger, comme il arrive quand une vision ne s'adresse pas seulement à nos regards, mais requiert des perceptions plus profondes et dispose de notre être tout entier" (I, 139). Here, the *héros ébloui* is figured in a scene of love at first sight.

As to the fifth condition pertaining to the overall structure of these kinds of tales, Harf-Lancner says that the mysterious lady's name is never revealed, but that Mélusine is one of the exceptions to the rule, so even here, the narrative of the Recherche mirrors its folkloric source.

Other schemata that structure these tales and legends appear to some degree in other Gilberte episodes, but not as strikingly as in this initial encounter which shows deep folkloric strata particularly, but not exclusively, relating to the *conte mélusinien*. Further points of contact between Gilberte and Mélusine especially concerning the question of profanation will be established later in this study. Before doing so, however, we shall examine how the narrative of Mlle

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Vinteuil's first appearance in Combray intersects with the Mélusinian tradition.

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Notes

[1] Stéphane Mallarmé, Oeuvres Complètes (Paris: Gallimard, 1945) 368.

[2] Rina Viers, "Evolution et sexualité des plantes dans 'Sodome et Gomorrhe'. Revue Littéraire d'histoire de la France 5-6 (1971): 102.

[3] Raymonde Debray-Genette, "Thème, figure, épisode: Genèse des aubépines." Poétique 25 (1976): 46.

[4] Claudette Sartiliot, "Herbarium Verbarium: The Discourse of Flowers." Diacritics ns 18.4 (1988): 68.

[5] All references to or quotations from A la recherche du temps perdu are from the 1987-1989 Pléiade edition. Volume and page numbers will be given in parentheses in each case.

[6] Sartiliot 68.

[7] Georges Bataille, "Le langage des fleurs." Oeuvres Complètes, ed. Michel Foucault (Paris: Gallimard, 1970) 174.

[8] Sartillot 77.

[9] Sartillot 77.

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[10] Sartillot 79.

[11] Kevin Brownlee, "Mélusine's Hybrid Body and the Poetics of Metamorphosis'" Yale French Studies 86 (1994) 18; for more details on the Lusignan and for Jean d'Arras's talent for reconciling history and folklore, see Laurence Harf-Lancner, Les fées au moyen âge, Morgane et Mélusine: la naissance des fées (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1996) 170, 176-177.

[12] Jacques Le Goff, Pour un autre moyen age: temps, travail et culture en Occident (Paris: Gallimard, 1977) 311.

[13] Le Goff, Pour un autre moyen âge 311.

[14] Marie Miguet-Ollagnier, La mythologie de Marcel Proust, (Paris: Les belles lettres, 1982)262.

[15] Jean Libdis, Le mythe de l'androgyne (Paris: Berg International Editeurs, 1980)

[16] Claude Gaignebet and Jean-Dominique Lajoux, Art Profane et religion populaire au moyen âge (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1985) 316.

[17] Gaignebet, Art Profane 314.

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[18] François Rabelais. Oeuvres complètes (Paris: Seuil, 1973) 687-688.

[19] Kevin Brownlee, "Mélusine's hybrid body" Mélusine of Lusignan, 82.

[20] Jean d'Arras, Le Roman de Mélusine ou L'Histoire des Lusignan, (Paris: Editions Stock,1997,1991)106.

[21] Douglas Kelly, "The Domestication of the Marvelous in the Melusine Romances," Melusine of Lusignan, eds. Donald Maddox and Sara-Sturm-Maddox (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996): 40.

[22] Gaignebet, Art Profane 320.

[23] Gaignebet, Art Profane 321.

[24] Douglas Kelly, "The Domestication of the Marvelous in the Mélusine Romances." 42.

[25] Capitalized in the Pléiade edition.

[26] d'Arras, 18.

[27] Gaignebet, Art Profane 316.

[28] Gaignebet, Art Profane, 313.

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[29] Jean Markale, Mélusine ou l'androgyne (Paris: Editions Retz, 1983) 24.

[30] Gaignebet, Art Profane 90.

[31] Gaignebet, Art profane 137.

[32] Gaignebet, Art Profane 137.

[33] Laurence Harf-Lancner, Les fées au moyen âge: Morgane et Mélusine, la naissance des fées (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1984) 255.

[34] Danielle Régnier-Bohler, ed. and trans., Le Coeur Mangé: Récits érotiques et courtois des XIIe et XIIIe siècles (Stock + Moyen Age, 1979) 33.

[35] C. K. Scott Montcrieff, and Terence Kilmartin, Remembrance of Things Past (New York: Vintage Books, 1982) 154.

[36] Harf-Lancner, Les fées au moyen âge, 87.

[37] Harf-Lancner, Les fées au moyen âge, 87.

[38] Harf-Lancner, Les fées au moyen âge, 87.

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[37] Miguet-Ollagnier, La mythologie de Marcel Proust, 93.

[39] d'Arras 260.

[40] Miguet-Ollagnier 93.

[41] Harf-Lancner characterizes the lai du Graelent as a type of "conte mélusinien" and it is one in which the Melusinian tabou figures prominently. See Harf-Lancner, Les fées au moyen âge 254-258.

[42] Jean d'Arras, Mélusine 230.

[43] Qtd. in Louis Simon, "Narrative and Simultaneity: Benjamin and the Image of Proust." Studies in Twentieth Century Literature, 2 (1997) 362.

[44] Harf-Lancner, Les fées au moyen âge 104.

[45] Harf-Lancner, Les fées au moyen âge 105.

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Chapter 2

Mélusine and the Vinteuils in the church of Saint Hilaire

Mlle Vinteuil is a minor, but very important character who figures in the Combray section of the novel and in one of the Recherche's most notable scenes of voyeurism and scenarios of redemption. What the narrator sees through the open window is carefully anticipated by Proust in his preliminary portrayal of the Vinteuils. We will focus on this portrayal and defer the discussion of the scene of voyeurism until chapter 4.

Mlle Vinteuil and her friend belong to the long line of filles "de mauvais genre" that populate the novel. In French, genre, in addition to allure (bearing), manières, tenue (behavior, manners, bearing or way of dressing), also means espèces (kind, sort, species), sorte, type. Usually the term de mauvais genre applied to a woman indicates heterosexual promiscuity, but in the Recherche it takes on a different coloration always pointing towards lesbianism. The narrator himself says as much when he puzzles over the exact meaning of the term:

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> Il [Aimé] m'avait dit qu'il l'avait rencontrée [Albertine], qu'il lui avait trouvé mauvais genre. Qu'avait-il voulu dire par mauvais genre? J'avais compris genre vulgaire, parce que pour le contredire d'avance j'avais déclaré qu'elle avait de la distinction. Mais non, peut-être avait-il voulu dire genre gomorrhéen. Elle était avec une amie, peut-être qu'elles se tenaient par la taille, qu'elles regardaient d'autres femmes, qu'elles avaient en effet un "genre" que je n'avais jamais vu ã Albertine en ma présence. (III,592)

Hence, "mauvais genre" is used in the novel to denote a specific type of what Proust saw as female perversion. Mlle Vinteuil and her friend, as well as many of the narrator's female friends and acquaintances, are inscribed explicitly or implicitly in the category of *filles de mauvais genre*. Bloch's sisters, for example, are often described as such. In the Casino at Balbec on a night out with Albertine and Andrée, the narrator sees a sister and a cousin of Bloch's, both of whom have become very pretty, but whom he does not greet because the cousin is living with an actress:

> Andrée, sur une allusion qu'on fit à mi-voix à cela, me dit: 'Oh! La-dessus je suis comme Albertine, il n'y a rien qui nous fasse horreur à toutes les deux comme cela.' Quant à Albertine, se mettant à causer avec moi sur le canapé où nous étions assis, elle avait tourné le dos aux deux jeunes filles de mauvais genre. (III, 197)

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In an earlier volume, but still in Balbec, after declaring that she is not allowed to play with "issraélite"[1] girls Albertine caps her antisemitic utterances with: "Du reste, elles ont un sale genre, vos amies" (II, 257). When the narrator finally obtains a formal introduction to Albertine in Elstir's studio, she refers to all the friends that he mentions as "elle a un mauvais genre, elle a un drôle de genre" (III,228). A few pages later she puts herself in the same category: "Ah! Vous connaissez les petites d'Ambresac? Hé bien, vous connaissez des gens très chics... Elles sont très gentilles mais tellement bien élevées qu'on ne les laisse pas aller au Casino, surtout à cause de nous parce que nous avons trop mauvais genre" (II, 238).

M. Vinteuil has an acutely developed sense of what constitutes le mauvais genre in others, to the extent that this is underlined almost every time the composer appears or is mentioned. The first time that the young narrator reports running into M. Vinteuil is in Combray just outside the church: "Comme nous y rencontrions parfois M. Vinteuil, très sévère pour le 'genre déplorable des jeunes gens négligés, dans les idées de l'époque actuelle', ma mère prenait garde que rien ne clochât dans ma tenue . . . "(I, 110).

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Mélusine is also a woman of the wrong sort. She can qualify as the ur-fille de mauvais genre by virtue not only of a fairy nature, but also the hybridity which was one the conditions of her mother's curse. Her alterity constituted by the embodiment of a fairy other and a monstrous other assigns her to the world of a different species. Mélusine's attempt to pass for human failed, as we know, because that alterity was revealed to the world of mortals into which she was trying so hard to integrate. In effect Mélusine was "outed" by her husband. Had she been able to remain in the closet, so to speak, the gambit to acquire a soul would have paid off and she could have escaped her fairy state and integrated fully.

In the world of Combray as in the Roman de Mélusine to have *mauvais* or *deplorable* genre constitutes a departure or displacement from the normative bon genre which leads to suspicion and gossip. A close reading of the episodes in which the Vinteuil name appears reveals the remarkable profusion of terms referring to or alluding to displacement. When it becomes known in Combray that Mlle Vinteuil has an older friend of bad reputation living in the house the gossip mongers come out in full force: "On disait: 'Faut-il que ce pauvre M. Vinteuil soit aveuglé par la tendresse pour ne pas s'apercevoir ce qu'on

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raconte, et permettre à sa fille, lui qui se scandalise pour une parole déplacée, de faire vivre sous son toit une femme pareille" (I, 145). His priggishness is such that he foregoes the pleasure of visiting the narrator's parents for fear that in their little garden, he might meet Swann who has made an unsuitable marriage, "un mariage déplacé" (I,111). *Déplacé* can be translated in various ways, but it literally means displaced, and displacement is at the heart of the Vinteuil episodes.

Seemingly innocuous terms such as *déplacé, se placer, placer,* and *place* are in fact never far from the Vinteuil name. Their juxtaposition to his name and lexical reoccurrence are no more innocent or accidental than in a poem. These terms placed here and there in the Vinteuil episodes smuggle a major and potentially subversive theme into the text, into the narrator's childhood, into the little paradise that Combray appears to be. Aside from questions of intentionality, they provide another disguised connection between Mélusine and vitally important passages and characters in the Recherche. In addition to the ones cited above, two more examples will demonstrate their abundance in the text. In church, "M. Vinteuil était venu avec sa fille se placer à côté de nous" (I,111). And during a

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visit of the narrator's parents at his house in Montjouvain, he removes his musical compositions from the piano to a corner of the room. When the narrator's mother repeatedly requests that he play for them, Vinteuil says "Mais je ne sais qui a mis cela sur le piano, ce n'est pas sa place" (I, 112). Later on at Montjouvain when Mlle Vinteuil and her friend are engaged in profanatory activities, it is M. Vinteuil's picture that will be circulated from its customary place on the mantelpiece to a little table and back and forth since the two young women are engaged in a ritual of profanation and rituals involve very precise repetition of the same words and gestures.

Mlle Vinteuil is introduced for the first time on a Saturday (a day that is suspect in the medieval tale and "asymétrique" in the Recherche) during the mois de Marie: "Le Samedi avait encore ceci de particulier que ce jour-là, pendant le mois de mai, nous sortions après le diner pour aller au 'mois de Marie'"(I, 110). These temporal specifications are particularly noticeable because they occupy a separate paragraph consisting of a mere two and a half lines of text. Such short paragraphs are extremely rare especially when they do not highlight dialogue and one may wonder if Proust intended to draw our attention to these precisely marked moments in time. We have seen

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the importance of Saturdays to the Mélusine legend, since it is the day on which a part of her must revert to a serpentine form. Denyse Delcourt points out that in the prologue of his Mélusine d'Arras relates two instances of men walking in on their wives while they are bathing only to see them change into serpents. Delcourt suggests that what women must hide from men are the vestiges of their reptilian origins:

> Avant de nous raconter l'histoire de Mélusine qui elle aussi sera affligée de cette difformité [her tail], le texte de Jean d'Arras nous laisse donc entendre que ce qui [sic] les femmes cachent si soigneusement aux hommes n'est peut-être, au fond, que leur nature primitive de serpentes. Il faut se demander alors si Présine elle-même, dont la voix remarquable la rapproche en effet des sirènes, ne s'est pas révélée à son mari dans la chambre sous cette forme même.[2]

Thus, the Saturday during the mois de Marie when Mlle Vinteuil first appears in the Recherche sends us glancing back to the medieval legend and we may also recall that the month of May was the most propitious moment for capturing a *fée* who was at that time of the year particularly vulnerable because she had to remove her petite chemise of feathers to bathe and cleanse away the menstrual blood.

Immediately after the short paragraph described above, which sets the next episode against a background of medieval legend,

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Vinteuil's name appears in the text. The young narrator, in the village church of Saint Hilaire on Saturday in honor of the mois de Marie, is engrossed in an intense contemplation of the hawthorns. Saint Hilaire happens to figure in Jean d'Arras's Mélusine. It is the church in which, following Mélusine's advice, Raymondin asks the assembled barons to recompense him for his service to their lord, his uncle, whom he has accidentally killed. Again following the *fée*'s counsel, he lies and says that Aymeri was killed by a wild boar. The barons gladly give him what he asks, since it appears to be so little. For instance, one request is for land that could be enclosed within the circumference of one stag's hide. With Mélusine's magic knowledge that skin is cut in such fine strips that, upon being deployed, it encloses a very large tract of land. Hence, the Saint Hilaire of the medieval tale is the locus of a less than honest or holy assembly, and the duplicity enacted on that sacred site will be mirrored in Combray's village church. Enid Maranz makes an important point when she observes that Saint Hilaire becomes a desecrated church. She shows, following Jean-Pierre Richard's lead, that Saint Hilaire commemorates a crime and a miracle:

The tomb of Sigebert's murdered grand-daughter in which the fossilized remains of a crystal lamp are embedded makes the church

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which rises above it an ambiguous dual monument designed to perpetuate the confusion of good and evil.[3]

Moreover, the fact that religious services are clearly unimportant constitutes clear evidence of the moral ambiguity of Saint Hilaire: "Religious services have become mere pretexts for personal, social and esthetic pleasures."[4] This is true throughout the Recherche. In the episode we will be looking at next, the Mass or services that the narrator and his family have presumably gone to attend, are not described or even alluded to.

Instead, it is the hawthorns adorning much of the church of Saint Hilaire that merit the total focus of the narrator's intense attention. They first appear to his admiring gaze in a dazzling white purity: "des petits bouquets de boutons d'une blancheur éclatante" (I,111). However, the dazzling pure whiteness of the flowers cannot blind the young narrator to his awareness of their inherent ambiguity and eroticism. These aspects are made all the more noticeable by the narrator's fear of looking at them openly. At this stage of their appearance in the text, the hawthorns already manifest distinct dichotomous oppositions. At their opposite poles they are both worthy of solemn mystery (solennité mystique) and public rejoicing

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(réjouissance populaire). It is the latter aspect that seems to exert its fascination on the narrator as an erotically charged description of the flowers ensues:

> Plus haut s'ouvraient leurs corolles ça et là avec une grâce insouciante , retenant si négligemment comme un dernier et vaporeux atour le bouguet d'étamines, fines comme les fils de la Vierge, qui les embrumaient toutes entières, qu'en suivant, qu'en essayant de mimer au fond de moi le geste de leur efflorescence, je l'imaginais comme si ç'avait été le mouvement de tête étourdi et rapide, au regard coquet, aux pupilles diminuées, d'une blanche jeune fille, distraite et vive. M. Vinteuil était venu avec sa fille se placer à côté de nous. (I,111)

In her initial appearance in the text it is a little coup de théâtre to unexpectedly see a young girl rise up out of the flowers as if she were herself one of the hawthorns. A few lines later, on the following page, Mlle Vinteuil is described as one in whom masculine and feminine components do not exclude each other. Elisabeth Ladenson states: "Neither aspect of Mlle Vinteuil, it seems, is exactly a sham; her boyish and girlish traits coexist as if they were a pair of fraternal twins sharing a single body."[5] Her androgyny is emphasized in the first description of her and it will be further emphasized whenever she

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appears. This description lingers on the ambiguous nature of the young woman:

> Sa seule passion [M.Vinteuil's] était pour sa fille et celle-ci qui avait l'air d'un garçon paraissait si robuste qu'on ne pouvait s'empêcher de sourire en voyant les précautions que son père prenait pour elle, ayant toujours des châles supplémentaires à lui jeter sur les épaules. Ma grand-mère faisait remarquer quelle expression douce, délicate, presque timide passait souvent dans les regards de cette enfant si rude dont le visage était semé de taches de son. Quand elle venait de prononcer une parole elle l'entendait avec l'esprit de ceux à qui elle l'avait dite, s'alarmait des malendendus possibles et on voyait s'éclairer se découper comme par transparence, sous la figure hommasse du 'bon diable', les traits d'une jeune fille éplorée. (I,112)

But even before this explicit revelation of the warring genders which appear simultaneously[6] in Mlle Vinteuil, her duality has already been displayed for those who have eyes to see. One page earlier, in spite of the sacredness of the setting, in spite of the virginal whiteness of the hawthorns, the narrator perceives an erotic dance of the flowers ("s'ouvraient . . . retenant . . . le geste de leur efflorescence . . . le mouvement de tête étourdi et rapide") and Mlle Vinteuil placed in such close contiguity with them that she seems to be one of those flowers herself. The hawthorns are here a metonymical sign of purity and

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vice. Virginal and libidinal, masculine and feminine, they mirror the double nature of Mlle Vinteuil. What is not so apparent is that there may be a revelation of a secret of the narrator's, a secret he never tells (or tells repeatedly by not telling). In this scene of voyeurism, the narrator is spying "à la dérobée" (stealthily, secretly, on the sly) on the flowers whose stamens are completely veiling each corolla. He, as well as Mlle Vinteuil, is emphatically associated with the hawthorns, not only because he too is placed in contiguity with them, but also because he tries to mimic in the very depths of his being, "au fond de moi-même" the action of the efflorescence of the stamens which he then imagines as the rapid head movement of a young girl with flirtatious eyes. In other words, the corolla, a feminine aspect of the flower, is veiled or covered by the phallic stamens or their spermic effusions which are then compared to the young girl's head.

This astonishing comparison may be leading to something too painful to contemplate, such as the narrator's own gender ambiguity, which may be why, without benefit of a new paragraph, the narrator's train of thought suddenly veers away from the hawthorns and leads him to remember M. Vinteuil's excessive prudishness and a voyeuristic episode in which that prudishness was much in evidence. The

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narrator's parents, on a visit to the musician's house had asked M. Vinteuil to play one of his compositions. Hiding on a bushy hill right up against the upstairs window, he sees a display of M. Vinteuil's false modesty when the old gentleman insists on hiding something that is in plain sight of everyone and that he, in fact, wants everyone to see: "Et chaque fois que ma mère était revenue à la charge au cours de la visite, il avait répété plusieurs fois: 'Mais je ne sais qui a mis cela sur le piano, ce n'est pas sa place', et avait détourné la conversation sur d'autres sujets, justement parce que ceux-là l'intéressaient moins (I,112).

His maneuvers only call more attention to the music, since he does not hide it before the narrator's parents enter the room, but does so by design, after they have come in and have seen the music on the piano. M.Vinteuil seems to be a very proper, even an irreproachable aging gentleman, but in fact he is duplicitous and, moreover, there is village gossip to the effect that he is sexually involved with his daughter's friend, that there are unsavory goings-on in the household: "ils font trop de musique ces gens" (I,146). While such misconduct may be hard to believe, there is, nevertheless, a suggestion of impropriety or even of sordidness hovering over the old musician.

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Raymonde Debray-Genette is undoubtedly correct when she writes that Mlle Vinteuil and her father begin the narrator's initiation into new areas of knowledge: "Avec eux, on entre dans deux mondes d'apprentissage: celui de l'art, bien que Vinteuil ne soit encore pour le héros qu'un professeur de piano, et celui de l'amour hermaphrodite (on ne sait pas bien quel est le sexe dominant chez Mlle Vinteuil)."[7]

The narrative having described Mlle Vinteuil and the circumstances surrounding her father in Combray, then returns to the hawthorn flowers whose now alarming libidinous nature will be all the more in evidence in the following paragraph. The narrator is about to leave when he experiences the hawthorns in quite a different manner from the way he did when he entered the church:

> . . . je sentis tout d'un coup, en me relevant, s'échapper des aubépines une odeur amère et douce d'amandes, et je remarquai alors sur les fleurs de petites places plus blondes, sous lesquelles je me figurai que devait être cachée cette odeur comme sous les parties gratinées le goût d'une frangipane ou sous leurs taches de rousseur celui des joues de Mlle Vinteuil. Malgré la silencieuse immobilité des aubépines, cette intermittante odeur était comme le murmure de leur vie intense dont l'autel vibrait ainsi qu'une haie agreste visitée par de vivantes antennes, auxquelles on pensait en voyant certaines étamines presque rousses qui semblaient avoir gardé la virulence printanière, le pouvoir irritant,

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> d'insectes aujourd'hui métamorphosés en fleurs (I, 112).

One of the first things one notices in this second sequence of the description of the hawthorns is the change of tone brought about by the color red, which is now the color that predominates. In "virulence" and "the irritant power of stinging insects" there is a suggestion of hostility and violence. The hawthorns, here, seem less benign as their redness, which was not immediately discernible, comes into the narrator's field of vision. Red and white, as we have seen in the episode where the narrator is spying on Gilberte through the hawthorn bush, imply a preoccupation with sex and virginity. In a passage that bears repetition, red is a color associated to violence and betrayal: "Au haut des branches. . . pullulaient mille petits boutons d'une teinte plus pâle qui, en s'entrouvant, laissaient voir, comme au fond d'une coupe de marbre rose, de <u>rouges sanguines</u> et <u>trahissaient</u> plus encore que les fleurs, l'essence particulière, irrésistible, de l'épine." (I,138; emphasis added)

In the interest of clarity we shall, for the moment, differentiate between what will be called Mlle Vinteuil's hawthorns and those of Gilberte. The erotic dance which we discerned among the hawthorns

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on the altar (I, 111) is maintained in the second sequence (I, 112), in spite of the flowers' "motionless silence." Instead of immobility their "intense organic life" makes the altar quiver "like a hedgerow." The hedgerow, and indeed the entirety of both passages concerning Mlle Vinteuil's hawthorns, foreshadows the narrator's momentous first meeting with Gilberte in the path lined with hawthorns. In fact, as we shall see, striking similarities may be drawn between these episodes where the young girls first appear in the text.

The red stamens, that have kept their springtime virulence and the irritating power of stinging insects in the second sequence, which is a continuation of the interrupted initial passage on Mlle Vinteuil's hawthorns, lead to the blood-red stain of the buds bursting open on their hedgerow when Gilberte first comes into view. The narrator's fixation on flower parts and on the interplay and markings left by the red and white colors speaks to what these colors might signify for him. In both passages these colors are inextricably linked to virginity and sex. Blood-red stains may result from a wound or from the loss of virginity, as well as from the menstruation of a maturing young woman.[8] Even the color white, according to Rina Viers, when it belongs to flowers connotes sexuality:

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> Il semble que Gilberte apparaît non-seulement derrière un écran d'aubépines (symbole de virginité qui n'en est pas; le Narrateur découvrira plus tard que le premier geste de Gilberte à son égard était un geste obscène. . . Cette symbolique est une symbolique inversée, où le blanc n'est plus virginal mais au contraire la marque de l'absence de virginité.[9]

In the appearances of Mlle Vinteuil and Gilberte, much is made of the freckles ("taches de rousseur")on the cheeks of both young girls. Taches de rousseur means, literally, reddish stains which as we have seen, could indicate the end of virginity or of the innocence of sexual immaturity. The girls are stained in a color that disturbs our narrator, but because the blood-red stains of the flowers are displaced upwards[10] onto the cheeks of the young girls, they may be safely gazed at and even serve as markers of desire.

All of the episodes in which hawthorns appear reveal and re-veil ambiguity and deceptiveness, and are tightly linked by an identical structure, by identical themes and motifs. These include the church (even though Gilberte is seen outside in a natural setting, the hedge is compared to series of chapels), the opposition between pagan and religious feasts, the mouvement from white to red, the sudden appearance of a young girl, and the presence of fathers. In Raymonde

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Debray-Genette's comments on some of these similarities she espouses a dominance of the paternal at all levels of signification. Instead, we would argue that the passages we have been examining are strongly placed under the sign of the mother which supercedes all others.

The narrator began to love the hawthorns in the mois de Marie and this temporal appendage to the hawthorns is repeated several times in the narrative. Debray-Genette overstates her case when she claims that these passages are dominated by the paternal:

> Comme pour les épisodes narrativement encadrés par M. Vinteuil et sa fille, celui-ci [the first appearance of Gilberte] s'ouvre sur le père de Gilberte et se ferme sur la fille de Swann. Il y a identité de structure narrative. Ainsi la figure paternelle, tant pour le héros que pour Gilberte domine-t-elle l'ensemble de l'aventure érotique, esthéthique et intellectuelle.[11]

These episodes are both framed, as Debray-Genette says, by a father and his daughter, but these men, M. Vinteuil and Swann who have sired a child (a rare occurrence for the characters of this novel) are weak fathers. Mlle Vinteuil's behavior flies in the face of her father's proprieties and causes him great shame and misery. Swann's presence in the hawthorn path does not prevent Gilberte from making

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an obscene gesture and he is unable to get her accepted into high aristocratic society during his lifetime. M. Vinteuil is represented more as a maternal figure than as a paternal one. He is forever throwing unneeded shawls around the shoulders of his robust and sturdy daughter and, when M. Vinteuil dies, the narrator's mother remembers his motherliness: "Ma mère se rappelait la triste fin de vie de M. Vinteuil, tout absorbée d'abord par les soins de mère de M. Vinteuil et de bonne d'enfant qu'il donnait à sa fille; puis par les souffrances que celle-ci lui avait causées" (I,157). Compagnon says that readers are probably right to see a transposition of Proust's overprotective and overbearing mother in M. Vinteuil.[12] Moreover, Proust may also have been thinking of the worry and sorrow he felt responsible for causing his mother.[13] If anything, without minimizing their importance, the presence of the fathers in the hawthorn episodes speaks to paternal weakness rather than to dominance. As for the hawthorns one could say of them what Raymonde Coudert says of Proustian women: "pas un des personnages féminins de la Recherche qui ne soit traversée par le plan religieux et sexuel de virginité, pas un qui ne soit l'évocation ou l'incarnation de la Vierge du porche." [14] Any reference or allusion to

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the Virgin of course evokes the mother and, as Viti says, Mary is the most famous mother of all.[15]

There is another passage which Proust entitled "adieu aux aubépines", in which the hawthorns are quite clearly associated with the mother. The narrator's anger is perhaps much more muted in this episode than it was in the real event on which it is based. His mother's slightly premature departure from Combray back to Paris causes the narrator to tear and dirty his clothes while declaiming a tearful good-bye to the hawthorns: "O mes pauvres petites aubépines, disais-je en pleurant, ce n'est pas vous qui voudriez me faire du chagrin, me forcer à partir. Vous, vous ne m'avez jamais fait de peine! Aussi, je vous aimerai toujours" (I,141) These words are obviously addressed to his mother, and the association with the mother is further emphasized in the description of his disarray when his mother finds him in the hawthorn path:

> . . . ma mère me trouva en larmes dans le petit raidillon, contigu à Tansonville, en train de dire adieu aux aubépines, entourant de mes bras les branches piquantes, et, comme une princesse de tragédie à qui pèseraient ces vains ornements, ingrat envers l'importune main qui en formant tous ces noeuds avait pris soin sur mon front d'assembler mes cheveux foulant aux pieds mes papillotes arrachées et mon chapeau neuf. (I, 143)

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As any French school child knows, the "princesse de tragédie à qui pèseraient ces vains ornements" is a direct reference to Racine's play Phèdre, which is about the trangressive incestuous love of a mother for her stepson. Phèdre first appears on the scène tormented by the guilty secret of her illicit love. The narrator's description of himself is in large part a prose replication of the famous words of Phèdre's despair:

> Que ces vains ornements, que ces voiles me pèsent!
> Quelle importune main, en formant tous ces noeuds,
> A pris sur mon front d'assembler mes cheveux
> Tout m'afflige et me nuit, et conspire à me nuire.

The narrator is thus comparing himself to a woman and, moreover, to a woman with incestuous desires. The pastiche-like quality of the narrator's comical depiction of himself also evokes Proust's mother who frequently quoted Racine.

Before returning to Mlle Vinteuil we may again note, this time with the help of a digression which we might call du côté de Montserrat, that Proust's novel is studded with covert allusions to Mélusine. Parenthetically, this digression will establish that hawthorns

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are not absent from the cultural legacy bestowed by Mélusine's legend. After Mélusine's metamorphosis and departure, Raymondin makes a pilgrimage to Montserrat where he becomes a hermit to live out his penance for betraying Mélusine. We may recall that one of the irreversible conditions of Présine's curse was that Mélusine would appear in the serpentine form to which she was condemned three days before the death of any family member or descendant and that is exactly what Mélusine does three days before Raymondin dies. One would expect Raymondin to be buried in Poitou, the seat of the Lusignan family, but instead as Gaignebet points out, he is buried in Montserrat in what is described as "la chapelle aux lampes." Much is made of Montserrat by Jean d'Arras at the time of Raymondin's pilgrimage there and also in the aftermath of his death. It is there that two of Raymondin's sons come to bury him and that a very big funeral takes place. The burial and funeral rites, attended by the royalty of Aragona and ordinary people as well as the feast which follows, are described in some detail. Gaignebet in his endlessly fascinating book, Art profane et religion populaire au Moyen Age, explains the importance of Montserrat as a site of a famous Marial pilgrimage:

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> L'image miraculeuse de Notre-Dame de Montserrat . . . a été découverte un 27 avril et c'est dans le cycle de mai que le principal pèlerinage avait lieu autrefois. La coutume d'orner la voiture de pèlerins de rameaux feuillus perpétue le souvenir des pratiques du 1er mai, bien que le principal "voyage" ait été translaté de nos jours au 8 septembre. Parmi les miracles les plus souvent représentés figure celui des serpents.[16]

The miracle in question concerns an old woman and her daughter who give birth on the same day. The daughter's child is still-born, but the old woman's is healthy. The old woman has no milk, but her daughter refuses to breast feed her little brother. That night, attracted by the milk, two snakes appear and sink their fangs into the young woman's breasts. They do not let go until her husband invokes the aid of the Virgin Mary. According to Gaignebet, engravings of this miracle are extremely explicit. While the old woman consoles the infant who is deprived of milk, the young woman leaps from her bed with the firmly attached snakes hanging from her breasts. Gaignebet follows the image of the woman suckling two snakes as it appears in the art of different ages. In Carolingian art her image is allegorical and she represents Mother Earth:

> Dans l'art romain et gothique, cette Terre prendra place dans la série allégorique des péchés capitaux

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> et deviendra la Luxure, avec certaines variations iconographiques: crapauds sur le sexe, etc. . . Dans le cas de Montserrat, et en accord avec les connotations calendraires de la femme aux serpents et de Mélusine, cette image prend un tout autre sens. Les enfants engendrés par les sirènes au 1er août naissent au 1er mai, sont abandonnés et nourris par leur mère. . . [17]

Mélusine was often represented as a dragon or as a serpent and, as Gaignebet adds, it was a wide-spread custom in all of France to plant on the morning of the first of May, a hawthorn branch in full bloom in order to keep toads and serpents from suckling the milk of livestock.[18]

The young woman who refused to feed her baby brother and who is punished by having to suckle serpents ultimately becomes identified as a symbol of lust.[19] She was deemed a bad mother, but why not also see her as a model of the bad child who behaves in cruel fashion towards a parent. The denial of her milk could be interpreted as furious jealousy of her mother's successful pregnancy. Mélusine haunts the tale of this young woman in which are highlighted the month of May, serpents, the mother's body as a source of nourishment and the cruelty of one of its protagonists. These features enhance its allusive connection to Mlle Vinteuil's and Gilberte's

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appearance among the hawthorns in the month of May and their cruel behavior towards their fathers. Geography (Montserrat) and the time frame (May)[20] are not the only indications of this connection. Mélusine is the cause of her parents' misery, albeit inadvertent in the case of her mother. Hence, like the young woman of Montserrat, she is not a model of filial piety but, unlike the young woman, she makes sure the children are nourished at her breast. Her mother's milk will flow even as she assumes a serpentine form. However, as we have seen, her qualities as an exemplary mother are off-set by her insistence that one of her sons should be put to death. Serpents, the month of May, hawthorns, maternity or the lack thereof, cruel behavior toward a parent whether dead or alive, all constitute points of connection in what is difficult to deny as a kind of triple intertextuality operating between the story of the miracle at Montserrat, the legend of Mélusine and the episodes concerning "les demoiselles Vinteuil." Even the miracle of Saint Hilaire, in which it is said that a crystal lamp detached itself of its own accord from golden chains to fall on the tomb of Siegebert's murdered grand-daughter, where it became embedded, unbroken and unquenched, in stones that had softened to receive

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it(I,61), is strangely reminiscent of the "autel des Lampes" in Montserrat. This altar figures in d'Arras's text when Raymondin dies:

> Ils [Geoffroy and Thierry] virent aussi que le prieur avait bien fait ce qu'il devait: il avait fait ouvrir et embaumer le corps de leur père, avait fait préparer son coeur et enseveli ses entrailles dans la chapelle aux lampes, devant l'autel principal.[21]

The convergence between Mélusine's tale and the narrator's first encounter with Mlle Vinteuil in the Recherche is anchored by the many specific episodes, temporal references, sites and even objects such as hawthorns and serpents that they have in common. In the next chapters we shall look at the theme of profanation in Proust's early works and as a link between Mélusine's tale and the Vinteuil episodes.

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Notes

[1] Albertine's mispronunciation of "israélite" reveals her antisemitism.

[2] Denyse Delcourt, "Métamorphose, mystère et féminité: Lecture du *Roman de Mélusine* par Jean d'Arras." Le Moyen Français (1993): 87.

[3] Enid, G. Marantz, "The topography of Combray or the Inversion of the Sacred and the Profane." Proust et le texte Producteur. Eds. John D. Erikson and Irène Pagès. Guelph Ontario: University of Guelph, 1980. 38.

[4] Marantz 39.

[5] Elisabeth Ladenson, Proust's Lesbianism (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1999) 94.

[6] Ladenson, Proust's Lesbianism 93.

[7] Debray-Genette 62.

[8] Randolph Splitter, Proust's Recherche: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation (Boston, London and Henley: Routledge, 1981)64.

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[9] Rina Viers, "La signification des fleurs dans l'oeuvre de Marcel Proust." Bulletin des amis de Marcel Proust. 25, 1975:152.

[10] Sigmund Freud, Collected Papers, trans. Alix and James Strachey, vol 3 (New York: Basic Books,1959) 38.

[11] Debray-Genette, 65.

[12] Antoine Compagnon, Proust: Between Two Centuries, trans. Richard E. Goodkin (New York: Columbia University Press,1992):152.

[13] William C. Carter, Marcel Proust: A Life (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000) 400.

[14] Raymonde Coudert, Proust au féminin (Grasset et Fasquelle, 1998) 37.

[15] Elizabeth Richardson Viti. Mothers, Madams, and "Lady-Like" Men: Proust and the Maternal (Birmingham: Summa Publications, 1994): 103.

[16] Gaignebet, 138.

[17] Gaignebet 139.

[18] Gaignebet,139.

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[19] Gaignebet 139.

[20] See chapter 1.

[21] d'Arras 283.

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Chapter 3

Profanation in the works before the Recherche

Profanation particularly in relation to the mother was an important issue for Proust. In fact, the theme of les mères profanées was of such importance to Proust that he declared his intention to devote an entire chapter to it. This project is announced in Sodome et Gomorrhe at the end of a passage where Charlus is described as not only a woman in a man's body (so much so that the aging aristocrat deserves the epithet "lady-like"), but also as a mother's son. The narrator observes that Charlus waddles into the Verdurin's salon very much like a woman dressed in skirts, and that one could mistake him for his mother, Madame de Marsantes.

> On aurait cru voir s'avancer Mme de Marsantes, tant ressortait à ce moment la femme qu'une erreur de la nature avait mise dans le corps de M. de Charlus. Certes cette erreur, le baron avait durement peiné pour la dissimuler et prendre une apparence masculine. Mais à peine y était-il parvenu que, ayant pendant le même temps gardé les mêmes goûts, cette habitude de sentir en femme lui donnait une nouvelle apparence féminine, née celle là non de l'hérédité mais de la vie individuelle. Et comme il arrivait peu à peu à penser, même les choses sociales, au féminin, et cela sans s'en apercevoir, car ce n'est pas qu'à force de mentir aux autres, mais aussi de se mentir

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> à soi-même, qu'on cesse de s'apercevoir qu'on ment, bien qu'il eût demandé à son corps de rendre manifeste (au moment où il entrait chez les Verdurin) toute la courtoisie d'un grand seigneur, ce corps qui avait bien compris ce que M. de Charlus avait cessé d'entendre, déploya, au point que le baron eût mérité l'épithète de lady-like, toutes les séductions d'une grande dame. Au reste peut-on séparer entièrement l'aspect de M. de Charlus du fait que, les fils n'ayant pas toujours la ressemblance paternelle, <u>même sans être invertis et en recherchant des femmes, ils consomment dans leur visage la profanation de leur mère? Mais laissons ici ce qui mériteraient un chapitre à part: les mères profanées</u> . (III, 300, emphasis added)

Here, as Rivers observes, the influence of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, a German sexologist who formulated his theories of sexuality in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, is evident. In <u>Memnon</u> (1868) Ulrichs defined the homosexual man in the latin formula anima muliebris virili corpora inclusa (the soul of a woman enclosed in the body of a man). When Proust writes of the error of nature that places a woman in the body of Charlus he shows his familiarity with Ulrichs's ideas.[1]

Even if Charlus were not homosexual he would still profane his mother Madame de Marsantes for it seems that any sexual attraction, even heterosexual, is a desecration of the mother. Indeed, it is the

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exhibition of maternal rather than paternal traits on a son's face that constitutes the profanation.

A different version of these sacrileges may be found in a passage of Contre Sainte-Beuve, a book published posthumously that is part criticism, part fiction, and which Terence Kilmartin views as a sort of therapeutic exercise to help Proust "clarify his own artistic purposes and develop an aesthetic that would give shape to his as yet inchoate novel."[2] Forgetting the beloved parent is added to the sins of sexual activity and resemblance committed by the sons who "consummate upon their faces the profanation of their mothers," in this passage from Contre Sainte-Beuve:

> Le visage d'un fils qui vit, ostensoir où mettait toute sa foi une sublime mère morte, est comme une profanation de ce souvenir sacré. Car il est ce visage à qui ces yeux suppliants ont adressé un adieu qu'il ne devrait pas pouvoir oublier une seconde. Car c'est avec la ligne si belle du nez de sa mère que son nez est fait, car c'est avec le sourire de sa mère qu'il excite les filles à la débauche, car c'est avec le mouvement de sourcil de sa mère pour le plus tendrement regarder qu'il ment, car cette expression calme que sa mère avait pour parler de tout ce qui lui était indifférent, c'est à dire de tout ce qui n'était pas lui, il l'a, lui, maintenant pour parler d'elle, pour dire indifféremment "'ma pauvre mère.'"[3]

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As we shall see this second passage leads directly to the Vinteuil episodes, particularly to the scene of voyeurism at Mountjouvain which stages the most explicit enactment of the profanation of a parent in the Recherche.

Proust never wrote the chapter on profanation. Instead, this pervasive theme is dispersed and concealed throughout not only the Recherche but also in some of the early writings. "Violante ou la mondanité" first appeared in 1893 in Le Banquet, a monthly literary magazine created by a group of Proust's school friends[4] and it was subsequently published in Les Plaisirs et les jours. It was the most effective sustained narration he had written to date and it contained some of the important themes that were to be developed later in the Recherche. Violante, the heroine of the story, is a pure young girl whose only fault is a lack of will (manque de volonté). Her mother is aware of this flaw, but she dies a tragic death before she can help her daughter: "This lack of will power inspired in Violante's mother fears that might with time have borne fruit if the Viscountess with her husband had not, while out hunting one day, met with a violent end." [5] Initiated into sensuality by a sixteen year old boy, she falls in love only to be disappointed by the young man's departure: ". . . it was not long

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before love made her suffer, which is the only way one ever comes to know it."[6]

As a result of her loss of innocence Violante acquires a taste for "worldly vanities" from which she never recovers. In spite of her old tutor's entreaties she does not return to the childhood home and country where she might have regained the imagination, creativity and generosity that she had as a child:

> She never returned. Young, she stayed in the world to rule over the kingdom of fashion that, hardly more than a child, she had conquered. Grown old, she stayed on to defend it. All in vain. She lost it. When she died she was still engaged in trying to re-conquer it. Augustin [her tutor] had counted on disgust. But he had counted without a force which, if nourished from the first by vanity, will overcome disgust, contempt, and even boredom: and this is habit.[7]

Readers of the Recherche will recognize the initial stages of some of its key themes in this story. Among them are a mother's anxiety about her child's lack of will and the pernicious effect of that lack; the seduction of one adolescent by another who is more worldly; and the malignancy of the forces of habit. There is also an episode of an attempted lesbian seduction in the story. The woman who tries to

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seduce Violante is literally associated with the mother in that her excuse for her caresses is based on the claim that she once held Violante on her lap and was a friend of her mother's. Ladenson points to the theme of matricide and profanation disseminated in the text that intimates that the mother's death can be attributed to the child's sexuality. She sees this theme inscribed in the name of the heroine, which is, as she points out, peculiar. After citing the words which tell of the mother's meeting "a violent end" (péri violemment) Ladenson concludes:

"Thus we find, in the form of a strategically placed adverb the first occurrence of matricide in Proust's writing: Violante's lack of will is itself her violence, which causes her mother's death. The latter dies "violently," which is to say at the grammatical hands of her daughter.[8]

Other scholars, such as Alain Roger and Antoine Compagnon have called attention to the incipient themes of profanation and matricide in the early works usually taking "La confession d'une jeune fille," which was also published in Les plaisirs et les jours, as their starting point.[9] Most commentators see it as a clear anticipation of the Montjouvain episode and Edmund Wilson even sees it containing, in embryonic form, all of the Recherche.[10] "La confession" is a first-

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person narrative told by a dying protagonist. While waiting to expire from her self-inflicted gunshot wound, the young girl whose story this is, confesses that on the eve of her marriage, while her fiancé was out of town, she gave in to the seductions of a "perverse and wicked" man who had corrupted her at the age of sixteen. This act of infidelity is witnessed by the mother who happens to look through an open window. To see her daughter succumbing to lust is more than she can bear and she falls dead on the spot:

> . . .je vis, je le dis comme cela était, écoutez-moi puisque je peux vous le dire, sur le balcon, devant la fenêtre, je vis ma mère qui me regardai hébétée. Je ne sais si elle a crié, je n'ai rien entendu, mais elle est tombée en arrière et est restée la tête prise entre les deux barreaux du balcon . . . "[11]

The young woman shoots herself out of guilt at having caused her mother's death. However, more than the act of infidelity, what really kills the mother, is the look of bestial sensuality that she sees on her daughter's face. The daughter's final words that close the story are:

> "J'aimerais mieux que ma mère m'ait vue commettre d'autres crimes encore et celui-là même, mais qu'elle n'ait pas vu cette expression joyeuse qu'avait ma figure dans la glace. Non, elle n'a pas pu la voir. . . C'est une coïncidence . . .elle

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> a été frappée d'apoplexie une minute avant de me voir . . . Elle ne l'a pas vue . . . Cela ne se peut pas! Dieu qui savait tout ne l'aurait pas voulu.[12]

The spectacle of the daughter's desire is more transgressive than those "other crimes" of promiscuity committed before her engagement or even the infidelity committed after it. It is necessary to be seen in order to consummate the desecration of the mother in "La Confession", and this aspect of profanation will be more elaborated and more important in the scene of voyeurism at Montjouvain.

The young woman expresses her wish to die in a place filled with the presence of her mother: "Je voudrais aller mourir aux Oublis . . . Nul lieu n'est plus plein de ma mère, tant sa présence et son absence plus encore, l'imprégnèrent de sa personne."[13] While she seems at first to be expressing a desire to forget, what she is in fact articulating is the wish never to forget her mother and never to be separated from her. Forgetting, experienced as a transgression, is not fully worked out in this story, but it is implicit in the protagonist's reaction to the death of her mother. The theme of forgetting and its relation to separation will be fleshed out in the Recherche and developed in a far more sophisticated manner.

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As in "Violante" much is made of the young woman's lack of will which leads to a drying up of the imagination and the inability to take pleasure in art and solitary contemplation. However, the crux of the story is the way in which the child's sexuality causes the death of a parent.

In relation to profaned mothers, another text that has attracted the attention of scholars is the article called "Sentiments filiaux d'un parricide" that Proust wrote for the Figaro in 1907. An acquaintance of Proust's, Henri van Blarenberghe, murdered his mother and then killed himself.[14] The servants report that the dying woman's last words were: What have you done to me! What have you done to me!" When the police arrive they came upon a gruesome scene. After stabbing himself, the young man had gone into his bed room and put a bullet through his head. He was found with one of his eyes drooped on the pillow. Proust was especially shocked because he had just received a "most sensitive" letter from Van Blarenberghe. He expresses his disbelief to a friend: "Can you imagine that I received ten days ago the most sensitive, the saddest, the most touching letter from that unfortunate Van Blarenberghe which would make him more to be pitied than Oedipus. What a shocking story!"[15]

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"Sentiments filiaux d'un parricide" is Proust's confession of guilt towards his own mother. In the article he compares Van Blarenberghe to a Greek hero whom the gods have driven to madness and to committing terrible crimes.

The conviction that he too was responsible for his mother's death is clearly expressed:

> "Qu'as-tu fait de moi! Qu'as-tu fait de moi! Si nous voulons bien y penser il n'y a peut-être pas une mère vraiment aimante qui ne pourrait, à son dernier jour, souvent bien avant, adresser ce reproche à son fils. Au fond, nous vieillissons, nous tuons tout ce qui nous aime par les soucis que nous lui donnons, par l'inquiète tendresse elle-même que nous inspirons et mettons sans cesse en alarme. (emphasis added)[16]

In 1906 barely a year after the death of his mother Proust proposed that he and his friend René Peter collaborate on a play which Proust outlined briefly in a letter to Reynaldo Hahn. The main protagonists in this play are a couple who adore each other. A religious vocabulary is used to describe their love: "un ménage s'adore, affection immense, sainte, pure . . ." However, the husband has a sadistic side which his wife eventually witnesses and the marriage is doomed:

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> Mais cet homme est sadique et en dehors de l'amour pour sa femme a des liaisons avec des putains où il trouve plaisir à salir ses propres bons sentiments. Et finalement le sadique ayant toujours besoin de plus fort il en arrive à salir sa femme en parlant à ces putains, à s'en faire dire du mal et à en dire (il est écoeuré cinq minutes après). Pendant qu'il parle ainsi une fois, sa femme entre dans la pièce sans qu'il l'entende, elle ne peut en croire ses oreilles et ses yeux, tombe. Puis elle quitte son mari. Il la supplie, rien n'y fait. Les putains veulent revenir mais le sadisme lui serait trop douloureux maintenant et après une dernière tentative pour reconquérir sa femme qui ne lui répond même pas, il se tue.[17]

Here, as Baudry notes, the wife, much as the mother in "La confession d'une jeune fille", witnesses a horrifying sexual act, but unlike the mother in the short story the wife is also drawn into the scenario of sadism. The love and adoration that this man feels for his wife are essential when staging her profanation. Without this love there would be no sadism: "Le héros ne commet pas seulement le mal malgré ses bons sentiments, mais à cause d'eux. C'est parce qu'il éprouve une affection immense pour sa femme qu'il a du plaisir à la salir."[18]

Finally we shall look at an episode in Jean Santeuil, the fragmentary novel that Proust began writing sometime in 1895.[19]

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Although Proust abandonned the novel it is widely recognized as a prototype for the Recherche. In the episode in question entitled "La querelle de Jean avec ses parents," Jean's parents are angry and upset about his friendship with young men whose bad influence and bad example make him neglect his studies and engage in debauchery. Jean has decided to change his behavior and to stop associating with those particular friends, but before he can tell his parents of his respectful and willing acquiesence to their wishes, they explode at him, forbidding any further visits to his friends and humiliatingly dressing him down in front of the servant. With Madame Santeuil's full support, Jean's father threatens to throw him out of the house. Jean storms about in his room, his heart filled with fury and a desire for revenge:

> . . . se souvenir d'une heure où il eût pensé tendrement à ses parents lui était intolérable. La haine a besoin de rendre la haine. Et il se les imaginait riant sous cape de leur exécution, ayant concerté froidement ce plan. Il les voyait se disant: 'Ca ne fait rien, je crois que maintenant il ne recommencera plus.' Et ses suppositions devenaient une manière générale de sentir qui excusait sa violence, nourrissait sa haine et excitait sa vengence.[20]

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In his rage he breaks the glass on the door of his room as well as an expensive antique vase (le verre de Venise) given to him by his mother. The scene ends with Jean confessing to breaking the vase and a reconciliation with his parents. Notwithstanding the happy ending, hatred and even sadism are inherent in the episode and these feelings are carried over into the Recherche where they underlie relationships with mother figures in a way that is often pervasive if muted.

Compagnon notes that the feeling of hatred for the mother mitigates the image of the all-loving mother of the Recherche. "The mater dolorosa is also the resentful Madonna of 'Bénédiction,' a harpy: the mother too contributes to the son's wounds."[21] In the chapter where Compagnon reads Proustian "evil" as reminiscent of and, indeed, owing something to Baudelaire who was often considered alternately as a monster or as a martyr he observes: "and yet it [Proustian evil] is something else again; it cannot be reduced either to the sadism of Sade or to the clinical definition of sadism given by nineteenth century medicine." He concludes that characters hurt one another in the Recherche, but that faire mal (hurt someone) is not the same as faire le mal (to do evil).[22] Sadism in Proust is always

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associated with love and some degree of goodness. For example, as he is watching Mlle Vinteuil's scandalous behavior, the narrator observes:

> Les sadiques de l'espèce de Mlle Vinteuil sont des êtres si purement sentimentaux, si naturellement vertueux que même le plaisir sensuel leur paraît quelquechose de mauvais, le privilège des méchants. Et quand ils se concèdent à eux-mêmes de s'y livrer un moment, c'est dans la peau des méchants qu'ils tâchent d'entrer et de faire entrer leur complice de façon à avoir eu un moment l'illusion de s'être évadés de leur âme scrupuleuse et tendre, dans le monde inhumain du plaisir (I, 162).

Even the despicable Verdurins have their moments of magnanimity, as in M. Verdurin's suggestion to his wife that they might secretly contribute a steady income to Saniette, the destitute archivist, so that he will not become too aware of his poverty and be able to keep a roof over his head.

But to return to the early works, part of what emerges from the juxtaposition of these texts is a sense of the multiple meanings of the "profanation des mères." Profanation may consist of anger, murderous rage or sadism in thought or deed. It may be a defect in the child, such as a lack of will or even, for sons, the sin of looking like

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their mothers rather than their fathers. It may be the child's sexuality which always seems associated with debauchery. In the continuum from the early writings through to the Recherche profanation is associated with sexual pleasure and it is the perversion of feelings of love. Finally, it may be the worries that a child causes the parent, thereby hastening the aging process and the approach of death. Even death provides no protection, for the worst profanation of all is to be forgotten.

That all of these profanations, often articulated in a tone of lamentation, appear in texts from the earliest writings to the more mature works like Contre Sainte Beuve and Jean Santeuil speaks to Proust's life-long preoccupation with this theme, which seems, at first glance, to occupy only the margins of the Recherche. However, desecration is concealed in almost every relationship in the novel and even encompasses, if one takes into account recent feminist criticism, the relationship between the narrator and his grandmother. Many factors contribute it its central importance. Among them is the provocative trampling of our underlying expectations that profanation enacted upon such beloved characters, such as the grandmother, will be punished. The narrator is eventually punished for this transgression

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however, Proust exploits the ambiguity inherent in profanation in such a way that the reader may at times feel that the profaner's target deserves his or her treatment. At the very least, what Bowie terms a "colluding criticism" accompanies criticism of the desecrator. For example, the demoiselles Vinteuil treat a loving father scandalously badly, yet, as we have already noted it is hinted that M. Vinteuil may be guilty of rather sordid behavior himself. Such a suggestion disrupts the full force of our sympathy directed at the father so ill-repayed for his care and devotion of an unappreciative daughter.

In our next chapter we shall examine the the role of voyeurism in the profanation of maternal figures in the Recherche and in the Roman de Mélusine.

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Notes

[1] Rivers 184.

[2] Marcel Proust, Marcel Proust: On Art and Literature, trans, Sylvia Townsend Warner, introduction, Terence Kilmartin, (New York, Carroll and Graf Publishers, 1997)12.

[3] Proust, Marcel. Contre Sainte-Beuve (Paris: Gallimard, 1954) 276.

[4] Carter 126.

[5] Proust, Marcel. Pleasures and Regrets. Trans. Louise Varese. New York: Ecco Press, 1949, 88.

[6] Proust, Pleasures and Regrets 92.

[7] Proust, Pleasures and Regrets 99.

[8] Ladenson, Proust's Lesbianism 84.

[9] See Roger's chapter on "Les mères profanées" in Alain Roger. Proust: les plaisirs et les noms (Paris: Denoel, 1985)31-65. Also see Compagnon's chapter on "This shuddering of a heart being hurt" in Proust between two Centuries 131-163.

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[10] Edmund Wilson, 176.

[11] Proust, Marcel. Jean Santeuil (Paris: Gallimard, 1971) 95.

[12] Proust, Jean Santeuil 95-96.

[13] Proust, Jean Santeuil 85.

[14] See Painter for an account of the Van Blarenberghe affair and Proust's article in the Figaro. George Painter. Marcel Proust: A Biography (New York: Vintage Books, 1978) 67-71. For the affair in more recent biographies see Carter, Marcel Proust: A Life 418-421. Also see Jean-Yves Tadié. Marcel Proust: A Life. Trans. Euan Cameron. New York: Viking Press, 2000. 418-420.

[15] Qtd in Carter 419.

[16] Marcel Proust, Pastiches et Mélanges (Paris: Gallimard, 1919 renouvelé 1947):234.

[17] Marcel Proust, "To Reynaldo Hahn," [Sept.18 or 19, 1906], Correspondance de Marcel Proust VI: 216.

[18] Jean-Louis Baudry, Proust, Freud et l'autre. Paris: Les Editions de Minuit, 1984. 29-30.

[19] Carter, 209.

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[20] Marcel Proust, Jean Santeuil (Paris: Gallimard, 1971)416.

[21] Compagnon, 141.

[22] Compagnon, 132.

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Chapter 4

Voyeurism: Combray and Mervent

From Geneviève de Brabant's castle to Montjouvain:

In this chapter we shall now turn to Mlle Vinteuil and the scene of voyeurism at Montjouvain. Let us examine how it specifically informs the theme of the profanation of mothers which was alluded to in the preliminary portrayal of Mlle Vinteuil and her father when they make their first appearance in the church of Saint Hilaire in Combray. The desecration that Mlle Vinteuil's engages in defines her scandalous behavior. It brings shame to her father and makes him suffer. Mlle Vinteuil's behavior encompasses the profanatory ritual which she stages with her nameless friend. We will begin with a brief overview of some of the key psychoanalytic concepts of voyeurism before examining the Montjouvain scene's connection to episodes leading up to it. Not usually associated with voyeurism in Proustian criticism, episodes such as the magic lantern and the grandmother's torture at the hands of her family can be understood as enactments of the desire to see, to know and to destroy.

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Fenichel addresses the issue of the insatiability of voyeurs when he observes that no sight can actually result in the reassurance that a voyeur seeks. They have to keep staring with ever increasing intensity or displace their interest to scenes that reassure them more than actual genital observation would. The insatiability of their desire to look characterizes the voyeur and because of this a sadistic significance may become attached to their voyeurism.[1]

The most basic definition of voyeurism, or scopophilia as it is sometimes called, is "the act of looking at the intimate, mostly sexual activities of other people. It has a compulsive, but pleasurable quality."[2] For Freud voyeurism is driven by the scopophilic component instinct.[3] Component instincts (also called partial instincts) are fundamental infantile elements that contribute to the sexual instinct. In addition to scopophilia, other component instincts are exhibitionism and cruelty. These instincts "emerge for the most part as pairs of opposites, both of which are active and introduce new sexual aims: for example the scopophilic instinct pairs with exhibitionism, and there are active and passive forms for the instinct of cruelty."[4]

Scopophilia is considered active, and exhibitionism, the wish to be looked at, passive. Voyeurism and exhibitionism are to some

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degree independent of erogenous zones, but in voyeurism the eye corresponds to such a zone.[5] Moreover, Fenichel emphasizes that the voyeur wishes to share in the experience of the object he is watching. In fact, pleasurable looking is accompanied and conditioned by this wish to share in the experience.[6] With regard to the eye, Fenichel, following Freud's lead, says that the object relations of the pregenital instinctual impulses are primitive and the primitive object relation is incorporation. He formulates the voyeur's wish to incorporate what he sees: "I wish what I see to enter into me." The voyeur's desire to incorporate is also very often accompanied by a sadistic impulse to destroy: ". . . one wishes to destroy something by means of looking at it, or else the act of looking itself has already acquired the significance of a modified form of destruction (emphasis in the original)."[7] Moreover scopophilia is often connected to what Freud called the instinct for knowledge or epistemophilia which can include a desire to hurt. According to Freud the instinct to know is not one of the component instincts nor can it be classed as exclusively belonging to sexuality:

> Its activity corresponds on the one hand to a sublimated manner of obtaining mastery, while on the other hand it makes use of the energy of

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> scopophilia. Its relations to sexual life, however, are of particular importance, since we have learnt from psycho-analysis that the instinct for knowledge in children is attracted unexpectedly early and intensively to sexual problems and is in fact possibly first aroused by them.[8]

Sadistic impulses, an insatiable desire to see, to know and to master, sometimes by means of incorporation, are often, if not always, attached to the instinct of voyeurism, and it is these aspects of this compulsive need[9] that we shall use to analyze the episodes under discussion in this chapter.

The scene at Montjouvain described in the section called Du côté de Swann: Combray II appears at the end of a continuum of scenes structured around sadism and voyeurism that has its origins in the first pages of Combray I. We shall quote extensively from the magic lantern episode because it mirrors to a remarkable degree the whole of the Recherche.[10] A mother profaned, a dialectic of persecution and guilt, the projection of the narrator's desire and much else in this brief episode are refracted throughout the novel. The Recherche opens with a short overture in which the narrator muses about sleep and wakefulness and the "images tournoyantes et confuses" between the two states as well as the different rooms he

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has occupied. This is followed by the narrative of Marcel's childhood in which the first clearly remembered memory is the perturbations of conscience brought about by the images that a magic lantern projects on the bedroom curtains. The projections of the magic lantern destabilize the comfort and familiarity that Marcel had finally wrested from this bedroom:

> A Combray . . . ma chambre à coucher redevenait le point fixe et douloureux de mes préoccupations. On avait bien inventé pour me distraire les soirs où on me trouvait l'air trop malheureux, de me donner une lanterne magique, dont, en attendant l'heure du dîner, on coiffait ma lampe. . . Mais ma tristesse n'en était qu'accrue, parce que rien que le changement d'éclairage détruisait l'habitude que j'avais de ma chambre et grâce à quoi, sauf le supplice du coucher, elle m'était devenue supportable (I, 9).

The magic lantern projects the protagonists of a popular medieval legend on the walls of Marcel's room. In the legend Geneviève is the wife of Count Siegfried. During his long absence Siegfried's bailiff, Golo, tries to seduce Geneviève, but his advances are rebuffed. When the Count returns, Golo, in an act of vengeance, accuses Geneviève of adultery. Siegfried condemns his wife to death but she is saved by her merciful servants who, unwilling to kill mother

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and child, abandon them in the forest. Years later Golo's treachery is discovered and he is put to death.

This violent tale might be considered an odd choice for a nervous and hypersensitive child, but the narrator does say that he enjoyed the magic lantern's projections even though he felt uneasy about their "intrusion" into his room: "Mais je ne peux dire quel malaise me causaient pourtant cette intrusion du mystère et de la beauté dans une chambre que j'avais fini par remplir de mon moi . . . (I,10).[11]

The *malaise* that is presented as emanating only from the child's fear of anything unfamiliar can be ascribed to other causes as well. This will become more apparent as we examine the magic lantern's images in greater detail. A text read by Marcel's great-aunt accompanies the sequence of images as they appear on the curtains. Filled with evil intentions Golo emerges from a small triangular forest and advances towards "poor" Geneviève de Brabant's castle. The dark green of the forest gives a velvety softness to a near-by hill:

> Au pas saccadé de son cheval, Golo, plein d'un affreux dessein, sortait de la petite forêt triangulaire qui veloutait d'un vert sombre la pente d'une colline, et s'avançait en tressautant vers le

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château de la pauvre Geneviève de Brabant.
(emphasis added; I, 9)[12]

For Johnnie Gratton, the little triangular forest and the velvety softness that it confers on the curvature of the hill suggests the *mons veneris*. Golo's jerky (saccadé) and jolting (tressautant) advance suggests a phallic attack on Geneviève's castle which Gratton sees as a symbolic site of femininity and maternity because of its specification in terms of "une ligne courbe" and "des ovales de verre."[13] The passage of the magic lantern ends with Marcel fleeing to the dining room which is bathed with the reassuring light of an "ignorant" lamp, one that knows nothing of the desire to rape and kill. But as Freud and Fenichel among others point out no sight can bring the reassurance that the voyeur is seeking and no flight is possible from the insatiable need to look:

> . . . they (voyeurs) have to look again and again . . . with ever increasing intensity – or they displace their interest . . . to scenes that may better serve as reassurances than does actual genital observation. . . . Because of the insatiability, the desire to look may acquire a more and more sadistic significance . . . voyeurs displace their interest from destroying (castrating) on to looking, in order to avoid feelings of responsibility and guilt.[14]

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The last sentence of the magic lantern passage shows Marcel guiltily associating himself with Golo and his mother with Geneviève and seeking reassurance in the arms of his mother in the dining room where all eyes are turned to the mundane pot roast.

> Et dès qu'on sonnait le dîner, j'avais hâte de courir à la salle à manger où la grosse lampe de la suspension, ignorante de Golo et de Barbe-Bleue, et qui connaissait mes parents et le boeuf à la casserole, donnait sa lumière de tous les soirs, et de tomber dans les bras de maman que les malheurs de Geneviève de Brabant me rendaient plus chère, tandis que les crimes de Golo me faisait examiner ma propre conscience avec plus de scrupules. (I,10)

This closing sentence helps Gratton to substantiate the following parallel which she draws between Marcel and the protagonists of the legend: "Marcel is to Golo as Maman is to Geneviève or, in order to register the main polarization expressed in the passage: Marcel/Golo/Criminal vs. Maman/Geneviève/Victim."[15]

The narrative of Golo's pursuit of Geneviève is divided into two parts with the great-aunt's "boniment" (patter) serving as the line of division. Golo stops to listen to the great-aunt's reading of the text: "Golo s'arrêtait un instant pour écouter avec tristesse le boniment lu à haute voix par ma grand-tante et qu'il avait l'air de comprendre

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parfaitement, conformant son attitude avec une docilité qui n'excluait pas une certaine majesté, aux indications du texte; puis il s'éloignait du même pas sacccadé (I, 10).

However, the "boniment" only effects a momentary pause in Golo's pursuit of his quarry. Gratton asserts that the patter read by the great-aunt "subsumes a speech of interdiction that Golo takes very seriously . . . it furnishes an obstacle prohibiting possession of the object of desire: in Golo's case his absent master's wife, in the child's case his own mother." In stopping Golo's advance, the great-aunt is the law-giver who intervenes to prohibit incest: " . . . the act of censure so curiously assigned to the child's great-aunt, has all the qualities of a Law." Having imposed an Oedipal configuration on the Golo episode, Gratton finds it curious that, instead of the father to whom the role of lawmaker (in this case the law of incest-prohibition) is usually assigned, it is now the great-aunt who is responsible for the Law and, thanks to her symbolic status as lawmaker, who is God, father, author, and other. Because Golo instantly and unquestioningly obeys the Law, he shifts from criminal to victim, although ultimately he is a triumphant victim.[16] Gratton's emphasis on Golo's victimhood and on the great-aunt's power as lawmaker warrants a second look.

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Her assertion of Golo's status as victim is based on the "stature" he acquires because of his sadness, docility and majesty and on her reading of s'éloigner ("puis il s'éloignait du même pas saccadé") as retreat or withdrawal, which it what it usually, but not necessarily, means. It can also mean to leave, to move off. S'éloigner could then be read as Golo's movement away from the child who is looking at the image. However, the bailiff is all the while moving towards his prey. The text then explicitly states that Golo continues his inexorable advance towards Geneviève: ". . . puis il s'éloignait du même pas saccadé. Et rien ne pouvait arrêter sa lente chevauchée. Si on bougeait la lanterne magique, je distinguais le cheval de Golo qui continuait à s'avancer sur les rideaux de la fenêtre, se bombant de leurs plis, descendant dans leurs fentes (I, 10).

In spite of Golo's docility, it is excessive to declare him a victim at this point given that his supposed "retreat" is reversed into an advance. Instead, after a brief pause Golo's relentless advance and incorporation of all the obstacles in his path qualify his movements as an unstoppable advance moving in one continuous direction and they cast him as the all-conquering, even if sad and majestic, villain.

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> Le corps de Golo lui-même d'une essence aussi surnaturelle que celui de sa monture, s'arrangeait de tout obstacle matériel, de tout object gênant qu'il rencontrait en le prenant comme ossature et en se le rendant intérieur, fût-ce le bouton de la porte sur lequel s'adaptait aussitôt et surnageait invinciblement sa robe rouge ou sa figure pâle toujours aussi noble et aussi mélancolique, mais qui ne laissait paraître aucun trouble de cette transvertébration. (I,10)

Golo's implacable pursuit of Geneviève puts the great-aunt's status as lawmaker into question. If hers is the voice of God or of the Father, as Gratton says, it is an ineffectual voice, powerless to stop the crime about to be committed. In fact, the great-aunt is merely giving voice to someone else's words, in this case the text of the medieval legend from which she is reading. That the text should be denigrated as a boniment and that Golo escapes from the great-aunt's control is a demonstration of his power, and a point to which we shall return in the last chapter of this study. With God or the father's voice rendered so impotent as to be, for all intents and purposes non-existent, the episode of the magic lantern has a preoedipal configuration constituted by Marcel/Golo and Maman/Geneviève.

Like the voyeur who projects his own desire onto the scene he is viewing, Marcel/Golo will pursue Maman/Geneviève until he gets

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what he wants, and then, in an act of great cruelty, will try to punish the love object for having resisted his advances. It is clear that at this point Marcel identifies with the persecutor, since Golo's crimes make him examine his own conscience more carefully.

However, the picture becomes more complicated because, for all his power and cruelty, Golo cannot be eliminated from the ranks of victims. Gratton is much more convincing with respect to this question when she demonstrates how Golo is mirrored in Bathilde, Marcel's grandmother, who figures prominently in the second "panel" of our triptych. In this scene the grandmother is walking round and round in the garden ("la révolution de sa promenade"), and pausing at the end of each circuit in front of the window, only to be tormented by the great-aunt who is pouring a forbidden drink for Mme Amedée's husband. "Bathilde! viens donc empêcher ton mari de boire du cognac!" The narrator insists on the voyeuristic quality of this scene and on the persecutory aspect of the family's complicity in the teasing of his grandmother:

> Ce supplice que lui infligeait ma grand-tante, le <u>spectacle</u> des vaines prières de ma grandmère et de sa faiblesse, vaincue d'avance . . . c'était de ces choses à la vue desquelles on s'habitue plus tard jusqu'à les considérer en riant et à prendre la

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> part du persécuteur assez résolument et gaiment pour se persuader à soi-même qu'il ne s'agit pas de persécution. (emphasis added; I, 12)

Although horrified by his great-aunt's cruelty, the narrator proclaims himself already a man through his cowardice ("déjà homme par la lâcheté") in seeming to take the persecutor's side and remaining silent. His complicity and guilt are very clearly delineated here as well as a few lines later when the narrator comes to understand that, at the time of this childhood scene, he did not realize that he was the real cause of his grandmother's torment. More than her husband's disregard of medical advice not to drink, it was "mon manque de volonté, ma santé délicate, l'incertitude qu'ils projetaient sur mon avenir" that brought tears to Bathilde's eyes as she walked in the garden.

Gratton observes that Proust chose the name Bathilde for its Merovinginian echoes. Contre Sainte-Beuve contains the prefiguration of a Merovinginian forest (as opposed to a less wild contemporary forest) out of which Golo will emerge:

> C'est l'antique forêt de Guermantes où chassait Childebert, et vraiment comme dans ma lanterne magique, comme dans Shakespeare ou dans Materlinck, 'à gauche, il y a une forêt.' Elle est

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> peinte sur la colline qui domine Guermantes, elle a velouté de vert tragique le côté ouest, comme dans l'illustration enluminée d'une chronique mérovingienne.

Just beyond this description of the forest he mentions "le fleuve où furent déposés les énervés de Jumièges." [17] The "énervés de Jumièges" were the sons of Clovis II who were tortured for having rebelled against their mother, Bathilde. The grandmother's name therefore evokes, on the one hand a mother who was persecuted by her own sons and, on the other, sons who were tortured in retribution for the persecution of their mother. Gratton establishes further links between Mme Amadée (Bathilde) and Golo when she points out that the grandmother's "petit pas saccadé" duplicates the gait of Golo and his horse. Moreover Bathilde and Golo are both "restless outsiders" circling enclosures.[18] Because the grandmother is an idealized mother figure, she occupies a place alongside Geneviève de Brabant and the real mother in a "paradigm of victimized females pursued by an importunate lover-son."[19]

This scene showcases the spectacle of the grandmother's suffering and victimization by her family and even by her grandson. According to Freud, instincts such as voyeurism and sadism are

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structured by a reversibility which may be resolved by a change from active to passive.[20] An instance of this reversibility is illustrated by the two episodes we are examining. Initially Marcel is identified with the aggressive Golo, but because Golo is also associated with Bathilde Marcel assumes the role of victim as well as persecutor. Moreover, in the second scene Marcel suffers because of what is done to his grandmother. Her suffering is even more explicit in one of the versions of this episode where the great aunt's cruelty towards her sister-in-law stands in stark contrast to the grandmother's meek goodness. The narrator compares her suffering to that of the Savior's and her perambulations in the garden to the stations of the cross, "station de douleur."[21] Bathilde's pain and the tears which she tries to conceal as she walks in the garden are duplicated by her grandson, who, unable to continue watching the spectacle of her misery, weeps in the only truly private space available to him. This important place to which he has fled is described as a little room filled with the scent of an orris root plant and a flowering wild blackberry branch. It is here that Marcel masturbates after witnessing the ritual cruelty to which his grandmother is subjected: "Je montais sangloter . . . dans une petite piece sentant l'iris, et que parfumait aussi un cassis sauvage poussé

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au-dehors entre les pierres de la muraille et qui passait une branche de fleurs par la fenêtre entrouverte" (I, 12).

In this last scene of our first triptych which opened with Golo's attack on Geneviève's castle and was followed by the grandmother's victimization Marcel takes refuge in the second floor lavatory looking out towards Roussainville, a place later described as "terre maudite." Roussainville, the village that is "chastised" by lashing rain and within whose walls he has never penetrated, is associated with illicit sexual activities and with the biblical cities of the plain. The lavatory "déstinée à un usage plus spécial et plus vulgaire" is also used by Marcel to read, to day-dream, to cry and to masturbate. Geneviève de Brabant day-dreams looking out over the moor, Marcel listens to his great-aunt reading and, like his grandmother, he hides his tears. This episode thus gathers into itself all the elements and themes of the previous two scenes. Because it is a window on Roussainville and the place where Marcel explores his own body the "petite pièce sentant l'iris" becomes an eroticized space investing all the activities engaged in there with a transgressive and sexual coloration. An argument can be made that cruelty and suffering are prerequisites for Marcel's experience of this kind of volupté, since the two masturbatory

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incidences in the novel come right after sadistic events either alluded to, as we shall see in the second lavatory scene, or explicitly described, as in the present episode. It is not surprising that reading is included in autoerotic activities since most of the books that are explicitly featured in the Recherche involve transgressive desires. These texts include the medieval tale about Golo, Georges Sand's François le Champi about an orphan boy who marries his adoptive mother and Racine's Phèdre, which is about Theseus's wife who falls in love with her step-son.

In the early twentieth century masturbation was considered sinful by the Catholic church and it was condemned as mentally and physically harmful by medical and popular opinion. It was thought to weaken the will, destroy virility and to contribute to the development of homosexuality in its practitioners. In Proust's day masturbation was viewed with horror and considered as something abnormal.[22] These views explain Proust's difficulty in writing even as discreetly as he does about autoeroticism. Even though it is explicit enough, the act described by the single word "volupté" can easily be missed by readers. More fully elaborated upon some 150 pages later, this auto-erotic experience, while it remains discrete, takes place in the same

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lavatory in which Marcel is again looking out towards Roussainville. We shall return to this latter scene of masturbation which takes its place at mid-point in a second series of episodes consisting of three scenes that in several ways duplicate those of the first triplex established above.

The first of these is not really a scene at all. Instead, it is a passage that can best be understood as an allusion to Jean's quarrel with his parents in Jean Santeuil.[23] Marcel, exhilarated by a walk in the woods near Roussainville and exclaiming "Zut, zut, zut, zut," muses on the discrepancy between our emotions and our power to express them and the discrepancy between the mood or emotions of two people at the same point in time. In his exuberance he nearly pokes a grumpy peasant in the eye while jabbing an umbrella towards the sky:

> Si je venais de penser à mes parents avec tendresse et de prendre les décisions les plus sages et les plus propres à leur faire plaisir, ils avaient employé le même temps à apprendre une péccadille que j'avais oubliée et qu'ils me reprochaient sévèrement au moment où je m'élançais vers eux pour les embrasser. (I, 154)

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This passage refracts the one in Jean Santeuil which opens the famous scene of Jean's quarrel with his parents:

> Hélas! Les heures n'apportent pas à tous les mêmes pensées. Et la reconnaissance pour une bonne action est en train de mûrir pour vous au moment où vous en commettez une mauvaise, tandis que la colère excitée par une faute se produit au moment où, vous sentant devenir meilleurs, vous l'avez tout à fait oubliée (et vous voudriez bien que les autres l'aient oubliée) avec cette absolu de l'âme pour qui tous les bonheurs palpitant dans le vaste monde ne sont plus rien que des bruissements intolérables si elle est triste, et [qui] si elle est gaie, voit s'allumer partout des feux de la joie là où il n'y a que les torches de la vengeance ou de la mort.[24]

The melodrama of this passage is not replicated in the Recherche passage quoted above, but it does echo Jean's indignation and fury when his parents punish him just after he has taken a decision (décisions les plus sages et les propres à leur faire plaisir) to forsake associating with shady young men and to return to his studious ways. Reminiscent as it is of Jean Santeuil and Jean's quarrel with his parents, the passage in the Recherche points to undercurrents of tension between Marcel and his parents that rarely ruffle the surface of a seemingly harmonious relationship.

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In the quarrel episode Jean feels guilt and anger after shattering the vase his mother gave him, and he even holds his parents responsible for the breakage. Jean claims that he did not mean to break the verre de Venise, but this is hard to believe since he runs towards the vase on the mantelpiece while searching for something on which to vent his anger: "Mais ces paroles qu'il ne pouvait pas dire restaient en lui et, comme un poison qu'on ne peut expulser gagne tous les membres, ses pieds, ses mains tremblaient, se convulsaient dans le vide, cherchaient une proie."[25] The prey that he is looking for is of course his mother who is closely associated with the vase, not simply because she loved it and gave it to him, but also because, with the benefit of hindsight afforded to the reader who has finished reading the Recherche, we know that Venice is a city closely linked with the mother. Moreover, when he confesses to the deed, his mother compares it to the glass broken during a Jewish wedding ceremony: "Ce sera comme au temple le symbole de l'indestructible union."[26]

Joan Rosasco observes that the scene of Jean's hatred manifested in his attack on the vase is staged as a theatrical representation where the broken glass is offered as a spectacle that

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requires a witness in order to be effective.[27] To substantiate this, Rosasco quotes the following excerpt from Jean Santeuil which highlights a wealth of verbs for seeing and the word verre which denotes glass in general, but also the lenses used in glasses or optical instruments. Verre also evokes the future of voir:

> Et il y répondait sans cesse: ils verront, ils verront!
> . . . .
> Mais la pensée que sa mère serait fâchée et verrait qu'il fallait un peu plus y regarder avant de tourmenter Jean . . . ne le calma pas car il s'en voulait d'avoir détruit ce verre qu'il trouvait si beau . . .[28]

Feeling cold and still angry Jean tearfully searches in the armoire for something to throw on his shoulders. But his hand "déréglée et folle" crosses into the section of the closet that holds clothes no longer worn by his mother because she has aged and become too heavy to fit into them. Jean pulls out one of his mother's coats and flings it into the room as though it were a young girl whom a warrior had captured and dragged by the hair: "C'était un manteau de velours noir bordé d'aiguillettes, doublé de satin cerise et d'hermine, qui, meurtri par la violence du coup, entra dans la chambre au poing de Jean comme comme une jeune fille saisie aux cheveux par un

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guerrier."[29] Violence and eroticism infuse this extraordinary description of a (forsaken and) conventional bourgeois matron's coat represented as a girl about to be raped. As Rosasco points out the coat functions in a perfect metonymical relationship with the mother. The outside is black suggesting an absence of sensuality and the unchanging color of the mother's clothes since the death of her father. Inside, the coat's lining is pink, a color which always connotes sensuality in Proust.[30] The scent of the velvet suddenly reminds Jean of his mother as she was ten years earlier:

> . . . il sentit l'odeur indéfinissable de ce velous qu'il senatit quand, il y a dix ans, il allait embrasser sa mère, alors jeune, brillante, heureuse, prête à sortir, et que passant ses bras autour de sa taille, il sentait le velours écrasé sous sa main, et que les aiguillettes lui caressaient la joue pendant que sa bouche respirait sur le front de sa mère tout le bonheur dont elle resplendissait et qu'elle semblait lui promettre.[31]

The scent of the coat and the way the velour feels under the caresses of his hand give Jean the impression that he is kissing the mother who was "valide, jeune et belle." The realization that this young, healthy and happy mother no longer exists leads to intolerable sadness and thoughts of his mother's death. Jean again alternates

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between feelings of anger and sadness before going down to apologize to his parents with his mother's coat draped about his shoulders.

Fenichel's observations about the voyeur's need to look in order to reassure himself that the object that he wants to hurt is not really destroyed[32] may be used to understand the spectacle of the broken verre de Venise, Jean's refusal to take responsibility for wanting to smash it or even for having broken it and his anger directed at the mother's coat. After Jean breaks the vase, his anger is then transferred on an object which is subjected to vengeful hatred to be sure, but which nevertheless remains intact in spite of being bruised and crushed in his hands. Draped on his shoulders the coat that once enveloped his mother now envelops her son, signifying a union that the mother understands perfectly well, as demonstrated in her comment about what the broken glass symbolizes. Thus, the brief passage in the Recherche quoted above about the difficulty of putting our emotions into words is, to use the language of psychoanalysis, heavily overdetermined on the one hand by its position opening the sequence of scenes that culminates with Marcel spying on the demoiselles Vinteuil and, on the other hand by its evocation of the episode in Jean Santeuil that is so rich in detail and imagery. There

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the broken glass of the door panel, the broken vase and the bruised (meurtri) and caressed coat, are invested respectively with the desire to hurt the beloved and Jean's aggressive, libidinal, incestuous and guilty feelings. These images and their attendant significations serve as incompletely erased traces on a palimpsest conferring a covert meaning to a passage that might otherwise seem insignificant and somewhat out of place in its context.

The next panel in our triptych depicts the second auto-erotic experience which, as we noted earlier, takes place in the same lavatory looking towards the sinful Roussainville. While the description of this experience remains discrete, it is more fully elaborated upon than the initial instance of masturbation. It is preceded by Marcel's fantasies about meeting a luscious young peasant girl who will caress him in the woods of Roussainville. In the petit cabinet sentant l'iris while vainly imploring the Roussainville castle-keep to send the young girl his way he explores his own body:

> . . . quand du haut de notre maison de Combray, dans le petit cabinet sentant l'iris, je ne voyais que sa tour au milieu du carreau de la fenêtre entrouverte, pendant qu'avec les hésitations héroïques du voyageur qui entreprend une exploration ou du désespéré qui se suicide, défaillant, je me frayais en moi-même une route

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> inconnue et que je croyais mortelle, jusqu'au moment où une trace naturelle comme celle d'un colimaçon s'ajoutait aux feuilles du cassis sauvage qui se penchaient jusqu'a moi. (emphasis added)[33]

This passage elaborates on the volupté of the first masturbatory experience reported in the Recherche. It also indicates that Proust, who was the son and brother of doctors, was aware of the supposed harmful effects of masturbation: homosexuality on the one hand and/or ill health and weakness of will on the other (je me frayais en moi-même une route . . . que je croyais mortelle). As J. E. Rivers points out, in the space of two pages we learn that Marcel is often ill, that he has little energy and a weak will and that he is in the habit of masturbating in the lavatory. Moreover, Roussainville while not explicitly linked to Sodom is compared to the biblical city punished by God and thus prefigures the imagery that will be developed in the later volume, Sodome et Gomorrhe I.[34]

Marcel's imploring gaze through the partially opened window connects to his voyeuristic gaze through another partially opened window which allows him to view the amorous foreplay of les demoiselles Vinteuil at Montjouvain situated du côté de Roussainville. In one of the early sketches for this scene the narrator's desire to see

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is disavowed and transferred onto a cousin whose curiosity is piqued by the gossip surrounding the young women. The cousin hides beneath the open window and reports on what he has seen.[35] In the final published text the voyeuristic intent is still disavowed, since Marcel only accidentally happens to be in a position to see. After a walk through the countryside Marcel falls asleep on the slope of a bushy hill (un monticule buissonneux) which, like the velvety curvature of the hill from which Golo emerges, also evokes an image of the mons veneris. When he awakens, this vantage point gives Marcel a clear view of what is happening inside the house. What he sees "à quelques centimètres de moi" is a ritual desecration of Mlle Vinteuil's father staged by Mlle Vinteuil and her friend. The ritual begins with Mlle Vinteuil taking the musician's portrait from the mantelpiece and placing it on a table next to the couch on which she throws herself just as her friend comes into the room. During their amorous activities the two young women appear transformed into birds:

> Dans l'échancrure de son corsage de crêpe Mlle Vinteuil sentit que son amie piquait un baiser, elle poussa un petit cri, s'échappa, et elles se poursuivirent en sautant, faisant voleter leurs larges manches comme des ailes et gloussant et piaillant comme des oiseaux amoureux. (I, 160)

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Parenthetically we might note here that the scene of the friends flapping about like birds evokes the episode in the Mélusinian legend where Raymondin spies on his wife now transformed into a partially non-human form, as she vigorously splashes her fish tail on the water while she bathes. In both instances there is some sort of metamorphosis, alluded to or accomplished, and women are portrayed as able to provide their own pleasure without the assistance of a man.

The father's picture is an essential and necessary element in the ritual of profanation at Montjouvain, and circulates along an axis linking voyeurism and exhibitionism. Let us recall that in a previous scene Marcel, positioned on the same hill during a family visit to M. Vinteuil, sees the old gentleman move his sheet-music to the piano while the narrator's parents are coming upstairs, and then claims that he can't imagine who placed it there. Mlle Vinteuil enacts a similar scenario as she exclaims to her friend; "Oh! Ce portrait de mon père qui nous regarde, je ne sais pas qui a pu le mettre là, j'ai pourtant dit vingt fois que ce n'était pas sa place" (I, 160). Unlike Edgar Allen Poe's purloined letter which is subjected to a series of displacements from one highly visible locus to another in the hopes of making it invisible, Vinteuil's musical score and picture are, on the contrary,

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moved around in order to make them as noticeable as possible. The queen in The Purloined Letter feigns *insouciance* as she leaves in full view something that she really wishes to conceal, whereas M. Vinteuil pretends to want to hide something that he really wishes to exhibit. As Ladenson observes M. Vinteuil's "artistic exhibitionism" is reproduced in sexualized form when his beloved daughter uses his picture as an essential prop for his degradation and her sexual play.[36] The musical score and its substitute function as markers of the exhibitionism of father and daughter.

The demoiselles Vinteuil's ritual of "debauchery" has to be witnessed to be effective. The old musician is obliged to see his own degradation that ritually concludes with the nameless friend spitting on his picture. However, this shocking behavior is not staged for M. Vinteuil's eyes alone. According to Ladenson, the young women leave the shutters open to ensure that it is possible for someone from the outside to watch. In fact, the discussion centered on the question of closing or not closing them is a scripted part of their ritual. It ends with the friend proclaiming "quand on nous verrait ce n'en est que meillleur" (I, 159).[37] This power to control the spectacle of their love-making calls into question what Dorothy Kelly calls the genderization of

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activity and passivity.[38] As we have seen, active looking tends to be considered a masculine mode and passive gazing a feminine one, Can such a clear-cut division be maintained in the scene at Montjouvain? To what extent can we accept that *the demoiselles* Vinteuil are passive objects if they are staging their scenario for the voyeur? Freud himself addresses the blurring of boundaries between activity and passivity and concludes by espousing their ambiguity:

> The only correct statement to make about the scopophilic impulse would be that all the stages of its development, its auto-erotic, preliminary stage as well as its final active or passive form, co-exist alongside one another . . . The fact that, at that later period of its development, the instinct in its primary form may be observed side by side with its (passive) opposite deserves to be distinguished by the highly appropriate name introduced by Bleuler: ambivalence.[39]

This destabilization of the distinction between activity and passivity and structures of reversal are imbedded in every phase of the voyeuristic episode at Montjouvain. The young women are the focal point of the narrator's gaze as well as M. Vinteuil's, but in a dynamic of reversal they are not merely the passive receptors, so to speak, of the male gaze, because they play an active role in staging the scenario

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of what will be seen and because they can close the viewing area at any point they wish, which is indeed what happens before the full consummation of their sexual activities. M. Vinteuil is the object of the women's gaze, but he too is looking. During his lifetime it is probable but not entirely certain that he understood exactly what was going on under his roof. In the months before M. Vinteuil's death the narrator comments: "Il eût été difficile de ne pas comprendre qu'il était en train de mourir de chagrin, et de supposer qu'il ne se rendait pas compte des propos qui couraient." Now, obliged by his daughter and her friend to see, his eyes are opened. Before, "on disait" that he was blind: "On disait: 'Faut que ce pauvre M Vinteuil soit aveuglé par la tendresse pour ne pas s'apercevoir de ce qu'on raconte, et permettre à sa fille, lui qui se scandalise d'une parole déplacée, de faire vivre sous son toit une femme pareille' (I, 145). The "on" sounds very much like the voice of that comically degraded avatar of Oedipus, Dr. Percepied, whose epistemological prowess consists in telling everyone what is already known: "Ah! sapristi on en fait une musique dans c'te boîte là."

The narrator, like M. Vinteuil, is struck by a partial blindness eventually lifted, but in his case this will only happen several volumes

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later when Albertine reveals that she knows Mlle Vinteuil very well, almost as well as Mlle Vinteuil's friend who was like a mother and a sister to her in the years that they spent together in Trieste. The narrator's painful reaction to this revelation stands in stark contrast to his apparent clinical detachment in the initial scene:

> A ces mots prononcés . . . si loin de Combray et de Montjouvain, si longtemps après la mort de Vinteuil, une image s'agitait dans mon coeur, une image tenue en réserve pendant tant d'années . . . conservée vivante au fond de moi . . . surgissant tout à coup du fond de la nuit où elle semblait à jamais ensevelie et frappant comme un Vengeur, afin d'inaugurer pour moi une vie terrible, méritée et nouvelle, peut-être aussi pour faire éclater à mes yeux les funestes conséquences que les actes mauvais engendrent indéfiniment, non pas seulement pour ceux qui les ont commis, mais pour ceux qui n'ont fait, qui n'ont cru, que contempler un spectacle curieux et divertissant, comme moi, hélas! en cette fin de journée lointaine à Montjouvain, caché derrière un buisson . . . j'avais dangereusement laissé s'élargir en moi la voie funeste et destinée à être douloureuse du Savoir. (III, 499-500)

Margaret Gray uses the narrator's passivity in the Monjouvain episode and the narrator's memory of the event to contest the traditional view that the ubiquitous narrating voice in the Recherche expresses the rich experience of a deeply interiorized subjectivity. But

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it may be useful to preface her reading of that voyeuristic scene with a brief account of her understanding of the postmodern self.[40] The modernist critical tradition parses out the "je" to a hero who acts and then to what the hero becomes: a narrator who recounts those acts. Calling on the work of numerous critics such as Deleuze, Bersani, and Barthes among others, Gray argues that this neat division resists the ambiguity of the "je" in the Recherche. From a non-postmodern perspective the difference between hero and narrator is a function of time, because the hero cannot overlap with the narrator since he precedes him temporally.[41] This theory of a temporally segregated hero and narrator implies that "the events alone of the narrative suffice for the passive, mystified hero to achieve the degree of control, mastery, and knowledge critics have claimed for the narrator."[42] But according to Gray the "miracle" of the narrator's final revelations during the Guermantes' matinée invites suspicion. It is simply too theatrical and too convenient. She also delineates other problems inherent in the tidy "hero/narrator stratification." Some of these problems arise from considerations of voice. Postmodernism understands voice as disconnected from subjectivity rather than as an expression of identity. Gray points to what she discerns as the

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"displacement of character by voice" in Beckett's trilogy where, as Matei Calinescu observes, it is impossible to say whether there is "one broken voice or several."[43] In the trilogy "such a shift from voice as an emanation of the singularity of character to an implicit reversal, voice or voices in conflict with singular consciousness, seems to bespeak a postmodern character: a self evacuated and replaced by a profusion of voices."[44] Gray gives specific examples of instances, such as the summer afternoon reading scene, where the Recherche's self is emptied of itself and replaced by voice. This results when the self's interiority is articulated as an image projected on a screen: "Dans l'espèce d'écran diapré d'états différents qui, tandis que je lisais, déployait simultanément ma conscience . . ." (I,83). The narrator's observation that the outer horizon and his inner aspirations are simultaneously juxtaposed on the screen of awareness leads Gray to propose a flattened and depthless postmodern self in lieu of the deep and rich interiorized subjectivity previously discerned as emerging from the narrating voice: "Awareness becomes a screen of simultaneously juxtaposed images, collapsed . . . and flattened to the immanence of a screen. Voice, . . . becomes the textual equivalent of a screen, the expulsion and flattening of interiority to immanence."

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If the narrating voice is understood as an absent self the scenes of voyeurism, according to Gray, must be reread in the light of Jean Baudrillard's notion of fascination: "l'homme est fasciné par ce qui l'exclut

. . . Son absence le fascine, comme de voir sans être vu."[45] This revised understanding focuses on the voyeur's absence from the world beheld as fascinating spectacle. Thus, in all but a few of the Recherche's voyeuristic scenes, Gray espouses a reading that no longer suggests Freud's subject/object reversals, but rather a fascination with the failure to engage selfhood.

In order to bolster her argument for an empty and flattened self she points to the narrator's detached and dispassionate observation in different scenes of voyeurism. To see the narrator as unengaged and affectless in such episodes as Charlus and Jupien's sexual encounter or the flagellation of Charlus is certainly warranted by Marcel's emotionless description of these scenes. However, in her zeal to promote the argument for an empty and flattened self Gray also includes the scene at Montjouvain claiming that:

Both at the moment of its occurrence when Montjouvain is 'spectacle,' and later, when it is retrospectively recognized as the

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initiation to a certain sexual knowledge, the scene is beheld by a surprisingly contemplative, spectating hero.[46]

This claim, however, is contested within the text of the Recherche when Albertine tells of her friendship with Mlle Vinteuil and her friend. Upon hearing this completely unexpected news Marcel is far from contemplative and indifferent to what he has just been told.[47] On the contrary, the pain he feels is not only intense, but also implicitly present from the beginning in the initial scene where he did not recognize it for what is was. Let us recall that Albertine's words stir up the image of Montjouvain, an image which he had kept in reserve, an image whose noxious power has been kept alive in the depths of his being (III, 499). Now, no longer dormant, evoking Oedipus's painful passage from ignorance to insight, the import (les funestes conséquences) of what he saw so long ago in Combray explodes before his eyes (éclater à mes yeux). Even though it is obvious that the Recherche rejects the illusion of fixed identity, the depth of Marcel's suffering resists the notion of a flattened self in the Montjouvain episode.

Even if momentary, the stable integrated self, appearing in various passages of the Recherche and in the closing pages at the end

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of Le temps retrouvé, and this subjectivity exist side by side with the postmodern self described by Gray and others.[48] Addressing the question of a single self versus plural unstable selves, Malcolm Bowie observes that we lose a great deal if the "ontological telos" of the novel remains unquestioned. The cohesive self of the last volume has made "premonitory appearances" throughout the book, but so has a scattered, fragmented self dispersed into a plurality of voices. The "centralised and resolved self on which the novel ends may be seen . . . but as one momentary geometry among others."[49] We would argue that in one of those momentary geometries the self that observes the goings-on at Montjouvain cannot be used to illustrate the emptied-out absent self espoused by Margaret Gray. We refute the idea of an absent self in this scene on the grounds that absence means something far more radical than exclusion. Since absence encompasses "non-existent" the narrator may be said to be excluded but, by virtue of his fantasies and intense emotional reaction, he is engaged and not absent. The observing subjectivity in that episode points to the juxtaposition of paradoxical possibilities: a relatively coherent single self alternating with elusive plural selves, somewhat

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like the alternating different natures that ripple and flow through the Mélusinian Gilberte.

Like the narrator's delayed reaction to Montjouvain, Marcel's anxious and guilty flight from the magic lantern's images contests the notion of an exclusively dispassionate, flattened and fragmented self throughout the Recherche. In fact, the episodes comprising our first triptych may be seen as an emotive chain reaction to those disturbing images: two voyeuristic episodes laced with sadistic undertones lead to autoerotic pleasures. The second triptych combines the same elements but in a different order, and culminates with one of the major voyeuristic scenes of the novel.

Both three-part sequences are linked by emanations of the body which in turn add to the guilty narrator's pervasive sense of his own sin and transgression. Both sequences include the narrator's masturbatory activities that culminate with "une trace naturelle comme celle d'un colimaçon" on the leaves of the flowering currant plant coming in through the half-opened window. This trace implicit in the first passage and explicit in the second is described as a "fil de la vierge" in the esquisses:

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> Enfin s'éleva un jet d'opal, par élans successifs . . A ce moment je sentis comme une tendresse qui m'entourait, c'était l'odeur du lilas que dans mon exaltation j'avais cessé de percevoir. Mais une odeur âcre de sève s'y mêlait comme si j'eusse cassé la branche; j'avais seulement laissé sur la feuille une trace argentée et naturelle, comme fait le fil de la vierge ou le colimaçon. Mais sur cette branche il m'apparaissait comme le fruit défendu sur l'arbre du mal. Et comme les peuples qui donnent à leurs divinités des formes inorganisées, ce fut sous l'apparence de ce fil d'argent qu'on pouvait tendre presque indéfiniment sans le faire finir, et que je venais de tirer de moi même, en allant tout au rebours de ma vie naturelle, que je me représentai dès lors et pour quelque temps le diable. (emphasis added)[51]

In this auto-erotic exploration of his body the silvery threads pulled from deep within himself are compared to water spurting out of a fountain and to the gossamer threads spilling out of a spider's body. These threads are evocatively called fils de la Vierge in French. Fils of course translates as threads, but it is also the word for son, and fils de la Vierge is precisely the term used by the narrator to describe the hawthorns' stamens (fines comme les fils de la Vierge) releasing their pollen and the movement of those spermic effusions that Marcel tries to imitate at the time of his encounter with the Vinteuils in the church of Saint Hilaire.[52] Given that the mother is the object of Marcel's love

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and given the passionate, exclusive, jealous nature of that love, it is hard to imagine that the narrator would shun the notion of being the son of a virgin. What better way to exclude the father and to have sole possession of the mother?

The emanations of the body arch from one masturbatory scene to the other, passing through the church of Saint Hilaire where the effusions of the hawthorns' stamens are compared to the silky diaphanous substance that spiders expel from their bodies. The web of metaphors and comparisons woven around semen is extended to yet another extrusion of the body in the final scene when the shutters are closed in Marcel's face just as Mlle Vinteuil's friend is about to expectorate on M. Vinteuil's picture. Whether from an insect, plant or human body, these effusions (semen, gossamer, pollen and spittle) expelled pleasurably or violently or both are an essential part of the voyeuristic moment in the episodes we have been studying.

As we have seen, sadism and voyeurism with their mechanisms of reversal, projection and incorporation are at work in various scenes of both triptychs. The mostly fluid bodily emanations that are so insistently featured in these scenes underscore the excitement and pleasure that accompanies the profanation of the parent enacted in the

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episodes. We may recall that in his overview of the voyeuristic impulse Fenichel speaks of the voyeur's desire to incorporate what he sees. But what is it Marcel wants to incorporate? At Montjouvain, far more than the sex which does not go very far in any case, it is the wish to share in the profanation of the parent that fascinates the adolescent voyeur. He has already participated, albeit with reluctance, in this kind of desecration when he believes himself complicitous with his great-aunt's persecution of his grandmother because he remains silent. However, spitting on the picture of a beloved parent who is forced to watch his or her child engaged in sexual activities raises profanation to new heights. Our hero's fascinated gaze brings to mind Fenichel's observation that "the longing to substitute looking for acting makes persons who are in conflict about whether or not to follow some impulse long for someone else to perform the act."[53]

The intensity of the disavowed longing to look and also the longing to share the experience helps to explain the intense and painful vividness of the memory. When the narrator hears of Albertine's relationship with the demoiselles Vinteuil he remembers Montjouvain but in a sexual fantasy substitutes Albertine for Mlle Vinteuil: "A Mlle Vinteuil maintenant, tandis que son amie la chatouillait avant de

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s'abattre sur elle, je donnais le visage enflammé d'Albertine" (III, 504). This substitution is a clear illustration of how the voyeur can project his own fantasies, but even before Albertine's appearance in his life Marcel's projections on the scene at Montjouvain can not be attributed solely to a curiosity about what women do together. A major component of the entire episode is the profanation of the parent once again insisted upon by the inclusion of the threat of spitting on M. Vinteuil's picture, a threat uttered this time in Marcel's fantasy by Albertine and accompanied by her voluptuous laughter in the following passage:

> La chambre de Montjouvain où Albertine rose, pelotonnée comme une grosse chatte, le nez mutin, avait pris la place de l'amie de Mlle Vinteuil et disait avec des éclats de son rire voluptueux: 'Hé bien! Si on nous voit, ce n'en sera que meilleur. Moi! Je n'oserais pas cracher sur ce vieux singe'? (III, 514)

The eroticism of the Monjouvain episode and especially its memory tend to veil the importance of the theme of profanation. But in a return of the repressed the detail of spitting on the father's picture reappears submitted to the alterations of fantasy, since it is now Albertine who does the spitting. This fantasy opens up dizzying

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possibilities of profanation. Because M. Vinteuil is a maternal figure, spitting on his picture is a profanation of both parents. But Mlle Vinteuil's friend and Albertine are also maternal figures. Seen in this way the "sadistic" act of spitting on the father's picture would represent a degradation of the father by the mother, a "spitting out"[54] or at the very least a debasement of the son's main obstacle in maintaining an exclusive relationship with his mother. Spitting epitomizes the desire to destroy the beloved object. The absolute necessity of including a picture in this sexual ritual speaks to the love that the profaned object commands. The actions of the demoiselles Vinteuil are proof of the child's intense need of the parent. Their use of M. Vinteuil's picture constitutes a degradation of M. Vinteuil's memory, to be sure, but it also ensures that he will never be forgotten. Inscribed forever within the circuit of desire, the picture and how it is used enables Mlle Vinteuil and her friend to cature the old gentleman for the rest of their days. And this is exactly what happens even when the "flame of a pure and lofty friendship" replaces the "smoldering conflagration" of their passion.[55] We have seen the link between the picture and M. Vinteuil's music as both are incorporated in the interaction between voyeurism and exhibitionism. It is because

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Mlle Vinteuil's adoration and sacrilege of her father are adopted by her nameless friend that the great septet is deciphered by the friend who devotes her life to this painstaking and difficult task. Whether their relationship is predicated on passion or sisterly affection, M. Vinteuil never becomes displaced as a center of the couple's lives. Ironically, the old musician who had a horror of all that was déplacé, but was himself drawn into the category of things déplacées, is redeemed by the very ones who caused his marginalization, and in death finds his rightful place among the greatest musicians of the time and perhaps even of all time.

When Albertine's revelation of her friendship with the demoiselles Vinteuil brings back the memory of Monjouvain, Marcel realizes the danger of voyeurism: ". . . j'avais laissé s'élargir en moi la voie funeste et destinée à être douloureuse du Savoir" (III,500). Scott Moncrieff translates s'élargir as "to open up," but less ambiguously it means to extend, to widen out, to broaden.[56] The scene at Montjouvain is often understood as an initiation into a new sexual knowledge. But exactly what knowledge is acquired in this episode? The adolescent narrator already knew from village gossip that women could engage in same-sex love and, as Ladenson points out, in so far

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as the sexual activities of women with other women are concerned Marcel's efforts to understand are always thwarted. The curtain is always prematurely closed in Marcel's face.[57]

The painful road of Knowledge on which he was already launched as a voyeuristic child in Combray was not visible to him at the time, yet some of its pitfalls were. The narrator has an intuition of them even as far back as his childhood identification with Golo's crimes enacted upon the virtuous Bathilde: "les crimes de Golo me faisaient examiner ma propre conscience avec plus de scrupules"(I, 10). His first steps along the path of knowledge point to an increasing access to and understanding of the dire consequences of parental profanation. For the narrator in Sodome and Gomorrhe the image of Montjouvain which bursts into Marcel's awareness evokes Orestes who has returned home to kill his mother: "comme Oreste dont les dieux avaient empêché la mort pour qu'au jour désigné il revînt dans son pays punir le meurtre d'Agamemnon – pour mon supplice, pour mon châtiment . . ." (III,499). The reference to Orestes brings to mind the mother in La confession d'une jeune fille[58] who dies of a fatal heart attack when she is the unwitting voyeur of her daughter's debauchery. Evocations of murdered mothers are not out of place, since les

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demoiselles Vinteuil are deemed responsible for having killed a loving and maternal parent. The voyeuristic pleasure is normally enjoyed in safety, since it involves looking without the look being returned. Yet Montjouvain's aftershock shows us that it is dangerous, even though there is no returned gaze. In two other famous scenes of voyeurism, when Marcel spies on Charlus and Jupien's lovemaking and, later, on Charlus's whipping in Jupien's brothel, there is no painful suffering, no piper to pay. The absence of a returned look and unpleasant consequences of the episodes involving Charlus show that something else is at work in Montjouvain. Inded, does not the text state unequivocally that the narrator will pay dearly for his peeping? We would suggest that in Marcel's flashback to Montjouvain it is not only the revelation of Albertine's possible lesbianism, but also the deliberate profanation of the parent that ultimately makes voyeurism a dangerous activity.

The reverberations of the Montjouvain episode in the later volumes substantiate Proust's claim that this seemingly displaced and unnecessary scene is in fact of central thematic and narrative importance to the work as a whole. It serves as a vehicle for the concealment and dispersal of the theme of profanation; it alerts the

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reader to just how crucial voyeurism is in the economy of the novel; and it advances the narrative in the volumes after A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs. Had the narrator not observed Mlle Vinteuil and her friend through the window at Monjouvain, he would in all likelihood not have become jealous of Albertine's female relationships. In a letter to Paul Souday Proust responds to objections voiced by Francis Jammes about the Montjouvain episode. He agrees that the scene is "useless" in the Combray section, but without it much of the later volumes would be unintelligible:

> Its remembrance is the foundation of volumes IV and V (through the jealousy it inspires, etc.). In suppressing this scene, I would not have changed very much in the first volume; I would have, in return, because of the interdependence of the parts, caused two entire volumes, of which this scene is the cornerstone, to fall down around the reader's ears.[59]

When Albertine becomes completely available to Marcel and a docile prisoner he loses interest in her. As Samuel Beckett observes: "He becomes indifferent to this new creature who opposes no further resistance."[60] At this juncture Marcel would probably have broken off the relationship with Albertine[61] and consequently would not have

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embarked on the fateful and painful journey on the road of Knowledge which, as it turns out, ultimately leads to redemption through art.

*

Raymondin's "meffaiz" at Mervent

We have already noted that the scenes of voyeurism are essential at Montjouvain in the Recherche and also at Mervent in the Mélusinian romances. We will now turn our attention from the Recherche to focus on the key narrative moment constituted by Raymondin's spying on Mélusine during her Saturday bath. Just as in the Recherche, voyeurism is fraught with danger in the Roman de Mélusine. As we have seen, Elinas and Raymondin's voyeuristic impulse leads to a loss that parallels Marcel's. However, even though both protagonists achieve redemption, one through art and the other through penance, in some sense Raymondin suffers far unhappier consequences, than the Recherche's narrator. For whereas, in losing Albertine Marcel is finally able to forget her, to slough off worldly preoccupations and to be ready to finally begin writing, Raymondin also leaves the world behind him, but he never forgets Mélusine and, after her departure, spends the rest of his life atoning for his betrayal.

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In both narratives the full implications and consequences of the scene are deferred. However, in the Recherche Marcel has no immediate overt reaction, whereas in the Roman de Mélusine Raymondin's response to what he has just seen is swift and overt. Raymondin's brother, the comte de Forez has made a two-pronged accusation against Mélusine, claiming that she disappears on Saturdays because she is either unfaithful to her husband "en se livrant à la débauche" or a supernatural being "un esprit enchanté." Unexpectedly, Raymondin completely suppresses the accurate part of the accusation that is so powerfully in evidence in order to focus instead on Mélusine's innocence regarding her marital fidelity. Aware that he has broken his oath, Raymondin's anger towards his brother who has falsely suggested Mélusine's "debauchery" is such that the comte de Forez flees, knowing that the relationship with Raymondin is irreparably damaged: "Il se rendait bien compte qu'il avait perdu à tout jamais l'affection de Raymond, qui refuserait toujours de le revoir."[62]

Harf-Lancner attributes Raymondin's lack of a "mouvement d'horreur et de recul" or even of surprise at Mélusine's partial metamorphosis to his awareness of his spouse's real nature. She points out that the prestige bestowed on the family that claims a fairy

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ancestor overrides concerns about the worrisome aspect of the "merveilleux païen."[63] Instead of horror or anger at the revelation of Mélusine's hybridity, Raymondin is overcome with a sense of loss. Hoping that Mélusine will not know what he has done, Raymondin fills the spy hole he has pierced. This, however, does not calm his fear of losing Mélusine forever. In fact, convinced that he has lost her, he engages in a long lament about her virtues and his treachery:

> Ah! Mélusine . . . je viens de vous perdre à tout jamais. Je viens de perdre le bonheur à tout jamais. Je viens de perdre la beauté, la bonté, la douceur, l'affection, la sagesse . . . toute mon espérance, tout mon bonheur, ma prospérité, ma gloire, ma vaillance, car ce peu d'honneur que Dieu m'avait donné me venait de vous . . . J'ai manqué de clairvoyance, j'ai fait le borgne . . .[64]

In this first stage of the violation of the pact with Mélusine Raymondin turns his anger against himself. Like the narrator in the Recherche Raymondin believes that he will suffer because of a crime committed long ago. The lamentation continues as Raymondin apostrophizes fortune: "Fortune aveugle, dure, amère et aigre . . . Maudite sois-tu de Dieu! A cause de toi, j'ai commis un crime épouvantable sur la personne de mon seigneur et oncle. Maintenant tu veux me faire payer."[65] Like Marcel, who believes that he will be

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punished for allowing his grandmother to die, Raymondin is convinced that he will be punished for his uncle Aymeri's death. His entire complaint is uttered from the bed to which he has retired to meekly await Mélusine's return.

Still in bed, beating his chest and tearing at his face, Raymondin launches into a diatribe against himself likening his betrayal to the poisonous serpents:

> Hélas! ma très douce amie, je suis l'ignoble et cruel aspic, et vous la précieuse licorne. Je vous ai trahie, avec mon sale venin. Hélas! vous m'aviez pourtant purgé de mon premier venin, si terrible, et voici que je vous récompense cruellement: je vous trahis, et je manque à mes engagements envers vous![66]

From this perspective Raymondin sees himself as a betrayer many times over. Not only is Mélusine beautiful, wise and good, a woman from whom all his happiness and success enamate, but she is also the precious unicorn, the very image of nobility and purity, whose capture suggests betrayal. The only way to seize a unicorn was to produce a virgin, for then the animal would lay its head in her lap and allow itself to be captured.

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Maryse Delcourt calls our attention to the prologue of the Roman de Mélusine where Gervais de Tilbury, invoked as an authority to buttress d'Arras's claim to the veracity of his tale, is said to have believed that the metamorphosis of women into serpents can be explained by a secret offense or transgression "meffaiz secrez" which is displeasing to God and for which He punishes them.[67] Gloria Fiero and Wendy Pfeffer point out respectively that in medieval times the Virgin Mary provided a positive image of women. The Virgin as a model of what is best in women was often not associated with real flesh-and blood women, and a misogynistic tradition was widespread in secular and religious literature.[68] The Church justified its negative view of women by turning to the story of Adam and Eve where the serpent was identified with Satan and Eve was held more responsible for the Fall than Adam.[69] According to Fiero, in the Middle Ages woman and serpent were often "reciprocal images – one a metaphor for the other, and both symbolic of Satan." She cites a popular work of the Middle Ages, the Blasme des Fames, in which this parallel is emphasized. The author of the Blasme insists that women are as venomous as snakes.[70] Denyse Delcourt points out that medieval romances abounded in explicit or implicit comparisons of women and

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serpents, and, as we have seen, that d'Arras's text is giving us to understand that what women really want to hide from men is their original nature: "leur nature primitive de serpentes."[71]

The scope of the theme of gender ambiguity which seemed concentrated on Mélusine's activities and hybrid body is expanded when Raymondin identifies himself with the negative aspects of the serpent, while watching Mélusine partially transformed into one. Because of this identification ("je suis l'ignoble et cruel aspic") a secure gender identity, if it ever belonged to Raymondin, is called into question. On a symbolic level at least a gender exchange comes into play in this scene. As Delcourt points out, Raymondin's fascinated gaze is fixed not only on Mélusine's tail, but also on its size ("grosse comme un tonneau pour mettre des harengs, terriblement longue"), and, we may add, on its power. The tail is powerful enough to send water splashing up to the ceiling of the chamber. This powerfully phallic representation of his wife is amplified when he also sees her as a unicorn and it attests to Raymondin's implicit feeling that he is in some way unmanned. And even more radically the doubly phallic representation of Mélusine as serpent and as unicorn suggests a dismantling of Raymondin's masculinity. He denigrates himself as the

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false and cruel serpent and disparages his "venom" when he testifies to its impurity: "Je vous ai trahie, avec mon sale venin."[72] Raymondin's self-disparagement is intensified by his depiction of Mélusine as a "licorne précieuse." The contrast between Mélusine who has become associated in Raymondin's mind with that symbol of purity, the unicorn, and himself as the false serpent filled with a polluted poison which he carries within his body could not be more self-deprecating. Here, Raymondin is not identifying with the powerful serpent that Mélusine has partially become, but rather with the serpent who belongs to what Bruno Roy denotes as le bestiaire du mépris.[73] Raymondin's weakness is highlighted as he lies down in bed, lamenting the night through, while Mélusine continues to splash in her bath chamber. The iconography of this scene always shows Mélusine sitting upright in the cuve rather than lying down. Mélusine's vertical stance contrasted to Raymondin's horizontal position is one more indication of the way this scene illustrates the fairy's superiority, at the very least in terms of the power structure between the couple, and proleptically it points to the same relationship between Présine and Elinas as it is represented in the position of the statues in the chamber where Geoffroy discovers them. The power structure emblematized

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along vertical and horizontal axes is redeployed in the second stage of Raymondin's betrayal. After he publicly denounces Mélusine as a très fausse serpente and she explains in a long lament that his words have lost her forever (she loses her chance for a human soul and he will never see her again), they both fall into a dead faint on the ground. Mélusine regains consciousness first, stands up by herself with no help, and it is she, rather than all their "gens" who are around them attending this scene, who lifts up Raymondin and sets him standing: "Mélusine revint alors à elle, entendit ses gens se désoler de son départ, et se mit à pleurer d'attendrissement. Puis elle alla à Raymond qui gisait encore evanoui, le souleva et le remit debout (emphasis added)."[74]

But, to return to the first phase of the betrayal, Raymondin's exclusion from the scene is a further illustration of Mélusine's power. Like the demoiselles Vinteuil, she controls the details in providing for her own pleasure. Even though Mélusine desires to be fully human she clearly enjoys the Saturday baths as the vigorous splashing indicates, and the intimate detail of combing her hair adds to a sense of an exclusive and solitary pleasure. Mélusine's challenge to Raymondin's identity has, in fact,

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begun much earlier than in the scene of voyeurism. Raymondin's and Elinas's first encounters with their future spouses have in all likelihood
been engineered by their fairy partners, but Elinas takes a much more active approach than Raymondin. Elinas spies on Présine and dashes through the forest to declare his love. Raymondin does not see Mélusine at first. It is she who initiates every move, until he comes out of his trancelike despair. First she talks to him, then she takes his horse's bridle, but it is only when she grabs his hand and shakes it energetically that Raymondin becomes aware of her presence. She then proposes to protect and enrich him if he will marry her. The triplex of assertive gestures and Mélusine's proposal stand in sharp contrast to Raymondin's complete helplessness. Raymondin is only an adolescent at the time he accidentally killed his uncle and is in danger of being put to death for the crime. What sixteen year old would not be at his wits' end faced with such a predicament? Mélusine is about the same age when she takes vengence upon her father. But here again, Mélusine is much more forceful than Raymondin. Her parricide is no accident or semi-accident. She initiated it and she led her sisters to help her do it. The full responsibility falls squarely on her shoulders,

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whereas Raymondin can always claim that he only meant to kill the wild boar and not his uncle. However, in this scene he does assume full blame: "J'ai commis un crime épouvantable sur la personne de mon seigneur et oncle."

Raymondin is the passive partner; as long as he does what he is told, he prospers. It is only when he acts without Mélusine's wise counsel that he gets into trouble as is evident in our scene where he listens to his brother, and, in the second stage of his betrayal, when on his own initiative he denounces Mélusine publicly.

Ironically, it is when Raymondin looks through the spy hole to see what was never seen before that he accuses himself of a kind of blindness. The peephole has made him blind in one eye, a one-eyed man,: "J'ai manqué de clairvoyance, j'ai fait le borgne." Raymondin is immediately and painfully aware of his lack of clairvoyance, whereas it is only in retrospect, a long time after Montjouvain, that Marcel recognizes this lack in himself.

By the twelfth century *borgne* had the meaning of *louche* which can denote a shifty, shady, suspicious person. Thus, Raymondin, while not going as far as Oedipus, who, upon confronting the truth, puts out both his eyes for having been blind up to that point, does

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symbolically partially blind himself upon confronting the truth of Mélusine, her alterity. He closed one eye to a truth that he may have been aware of all along and opened one eye to the possibilty of Mélusine's infidelity, a transgression that he seems much less inclined to have believed in. If this is the case, then in some sense, the eye that is opened is as blind as the eye that is closed, for the open eye sees nothing. In an important way the voyeur is always le borgne, a one-eyed man whose monocular vision limits how much he sees or understands about what he is seeing. This is why the voyeur can never be satisfied, can never pierce the mystery of woman.

The Recherche and the Roman de Mélusine both encapsulate profanation of the parent, particularly the mother, in their scenarios of voyeurism. However, as we shall see in the next chapter voyeurism is not the only vehicle for profanatory desires.

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Notes

[1] Otto Fenichel, The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis (New York: Norton,1945) 348.

[2] Voyeurs are understood to fixate on scenes that give them reassurance. An example of this is described in Freud's case of a foot fetishism. However, more often voyeurs fixate on experiences that gave rise to castration anxiety. These experiences are considered to be primal scenes or the sight of adult genitalia. The voyeur then repeats the frightening experience by viewing scenes that resemble the original, but are different enough to reassure the voyeur that there is no real danger. The desire to repeat a traumatic scene may serve the purpose of helping to achieve mastery over the original frightening event. See Fenichel, The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis 347-348.

[3] Burness E. Moore and Bernard D. Fine, eds. Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts (New Haven and London: The American Psychoanalytic Association and Yale University Press, 1990) 203.

[4] Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts 42-43. Also see Sigmund Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, trans. James Strachey (New York: Basic Books, 2000) 32.

[5] Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts 42-43. Also see Freud, Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality 35.

[6] Otto Fenichel, The Collected Papers: First Series (New York: Norton,1953) 377-378.

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[7] Fenichel, Collected Papers 377.

[8] Freud, Three Essays 60.

[9] Freud writes that an instinct always acts as a constant force: "As it makes its attack not from without but from within the organism, it follows that no flight can avail against it. A better term for a stimulus of instinctual origin is a need." Sigmund Freud, Collected Papers, vol. IV. (New York: Basic Books, 1959)62.

[10] See Michael Riffaterre, "Marcel Proust's Magic Lantern: on Narrative Subtexts," in Reading Proust Now eds. Mary Ann Caws and Eugene Nicole (New York: Peter Lang, 1990):55-78.

[11] We will return to the question of Golo's text as *inappropriate* in Chapter 5 of this study.

[12] We have added emphasis here because the *pente d'une colline* reappears in the scene at Montjouvain.

[13] "Ce château était coupé selon une ligne courbe qui n'était autre que la limite d'un des ovales de verre ménagés dans le châssis qu'on glissait entre les coulisses de la lanterne." See Johnnie Gratton, "Textual Interaction in *Combray:* The example of Golo," Dalhousie French Studies (1980): 69. This is an interesting and useful article even though we do not agree with all of its claims.

[14] Fenichel, The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis 348.

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[15] Gratton 70.

[16] Gratton 72-73.

[17] Proust, Contre Sainte-Beuve 280.

[18] Gratton 78-81.

[19] Gratton 81.

[20] Freud, "Instincts and their Vicissitudes." Collected Papers, vol.IV 69.

[21] See *notes et variantes* in Marcel Proust, A la recherche du temps perdu I: 1094-1096.

[22] See J. E. Rivers, Proust and the Art of Love (New York: Columbia UP, 1980) 210-211 for the views held in the early twentieth century about masturbation, reader responses to the two scenes where it figures and its relationship to homosexuality.

[23] We began outlining this scene in chapter 3.

[24] Proust, Jean Santeuil 412.

[25] Proust, Jean Santeuil 418.

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[26] Proust, Jean Santeuil 423.

[27] Joan Térésa Rosasco, Voies de l'imagination proustienne (Paris: Nizet, 1980): 124.

[28] Qtd in Rosasco 124.

[29] Proust, Jean Santeuil 419.

[30] Rosasco 137-138.

[31] Proust, Jean Santeuil 419.

[32] Fenichel, The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis 71.

[33] Proust, A la recherche du temps perdu 156.

[34] Rivers 211.

[35] See A la recherche du temps perdu, *Esquisse LI*: I, 798.

[36] Ladenson 65.

[37] Ladenson also makes this point, 65-66.

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[38] Dorothy Kelly, Telling Glances: Voyeurism in the French Novel (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992) 36.

[39] Sigmund Freud, Collected Papers (volume 4) 73-74.

[40] For the following see "Postmodern Selfhood and the 'Monsieur qui dit je'" in Margaret E. Gray, Postmodern Proust (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992)38-66.

[41] Gray 39.

[42] Gray 40.

[43] Qtd in Gray 46.

[44] Gray 46.

[45] Qtd in Gray 51.

[46] Gray 52.

[47] See the passage quoted on page 143 .

[48] See Malcolm Bowie, Proust among the Stars (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998) and Emma Wilson, Sexuality and the Reading Encounter: Identity and Desire in Proust, Duras, Tournier, and Cixous (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

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[49] See Malcolm Bowie, Proust among the Stars (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998)5 and 29.

[51] See A la recherche du temps perdu, *Esquisse III*: I, 646-647.

[52] See the passage quoted on page 76.

[53] Fenichel, The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis 348.

[54] Fenichel explains that one of the roots of sadism is "the negative instinctual aim of getting rid ('spitting away') of painful stimuli." See The Psychoanalytical Theory of Neurosis 73.

[55] Moncrieff III, 263.

[56] Moncrieff II, 1152.

[57] Ladenson 67.

[58] See page 99 .

[59] Qtd in J. E. Rivers, Proust and the Art of Love (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980) 24.

[60] Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove Press, 1957):36.

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[61] Bored with Albertine Marcel has taken the "irrevocable" decision to drop her, believing himself to be more interested in her friend Andrée. He reverses himself immediately upon hearing that she knows Mlle Vinteuil. (III, 496)

[62] d'Arras 231.

[63] Harf-Lancner 172.

[64] d'Arras 232.

[65] d'Arras 232.

[66] d'Arras 232-233.

[67] Delcourt 93.

[68] Gloria K. Fiero, Wendy Pfeffer, and Mathé Allain eds. Three Medieval View of Women (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989)68 and 24.

[69] Gloria K. Fiero, "The *Dits*: The historical Context," in Three Medieval Views of Women, eds. Gloria K. Fiero, Wendy Pfeffer, and Mathé Allain (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989) 60-61.

[70] Fiero 63.

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[71] See page 71.

[72] Delcourt 98.

[73] Bruno Roy, "La Belle e(s)t la bête." Etudes Françaises (Août 1974): 321-327. For what follows see pages 321-322 where Roy observes that in Le secret des secrets, one of the most influential books of the Middle Ages, every trait of man (as in mankind) is incarnated in animals. Thus man is "hardi comme le lion, timide comme le lièvre, généreux comme le coq" etc. But, whereas the animal metaphor covers the whole human race to which women after all belong. However: "dans les faits cette métaphore est métonymique. La partie s'érige en totalité; l'homme, c'est l'homme mâle, car au sens de la philosophie médiévale, seul le mâle remplit la notion d'homme en sa partie la plus noble. La femme, sans être exclue de l'espèce, en est toutefois la partie la moins digne. Sémantiquement, l'homme est affecté d'un signe positif: c'est lui qui incarne la science, la sagesse, l'esprit, alors que la femme ne s'élève pas au-dessus du corporel. Son existence même comme celle des monstres resulte d'un accident de la nature." In the distribution of traits from the list referred to above men have as many qualities as faults, but as Roy asserts, when women are compared to animals the scenery becomes more somber: " le paysage devient tout à coup parfaitement sombre: on pénètre dans une jungle obscure où ne règne que la griffe, la dent et la perversité." In the Blasme des Fames where only women, as opposed to mankind are compared to animals there are no positive traits associated with women. Woman is made a lion to devour and she is a sly fox made for deception. She is also "dragon de grande brûlure." In the *bestiaire* des femmes there are only bad, noxious, harmful (*malfaisant)* animals.

[74] d'Arras 252.

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Chapter 5

Crime, Punishment and Redemption

Mothers and Sons

Beloved children, as we have seen in Proust's writings before the Recherche and in the Vinteuil episodes, are often the most efficient tormentors of their parents and, they may even be in one form or another their executioners. This is especially, but not exclusively true of mothers and sons in the Recherche where the mise à mort, unlike Henri Van Blarenberghe's literal slaying of his mother, takes the form of rejection, exile or forgetting. The theme of maternal profanation in the Mélusine legend presents striking parallels with the Recherche. We shall now examine how that profanation manifests itself particularly in the relationship between mothers and sons in both works.

Nothing could seem farther from Mlle Vinteuil's desecration of her father during his lifetime and after his death than Marcel's loving relationship with his mother and grandmother. Marcel's culte of his grandmother particularly, who assumes until her death the maternal role after the Combray section, is characterized by an adoring, exclusive, and fierce intensity. The grandmother is the idealized

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mother figure for she, unlike her daughter, is completely focused on the narrator. Viviane Forrester says that the grandmother is the innocent mother whose status as a married woman is not troublesome because there is no man around: "la mère innocente – déjà épousée mais sans mâle."[1] This is certainly true when Madame Amédée accompanies Marcel to Balbec in order to take care of him. Her husband must be around, but there is not one single mention of him in Balbec. Marcel's mother, on the other hand, is at times more concerned with her husband's sensibilities and needs than with her son's. This is evident, for example, when she does not go to Balbec with her son because of a change in her husband's travel plans. This decision leads to a painful realization:

> Pour la première fois je sentais qu'il était possible que ma mère vécût sans moi, autrement que pour moi, d'une autre vie. Elle allait habiter de son côté avec mon père à qui peut-être elle trouvait que ma mauvaise santé, ma nervosité, rendait l'existence un peu compliquée et triste. (II,9)

In Balbec, feeling ill and disconsolate in new surroundings, Marcel transfers his desire for a preoedipal fusion with the mother onto her double, his grandmother. Believing himself besieged on all sides ("N'ayant plus d'univers, plus de chambre, plus de corps que menacé

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par les ennemis qui m'entouraient"), feeling totally alone and wanting to die, he recovers as soon as she comes into his room wearing the "blouse de servante et de garde, son habit de religieuse", which she dons as soon as anyone in the family needs nursing. Throwing himself into her arms he becomes like a small baby soothed at its mother's breast:

> . . . je suspendis mes lèvres à sa figure comme si j'accédais ainsi à ce coeur immense qu'elle m'ouvrait. 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. (II, 28)

The intensity of the narrator's bond with the mother is certainly not hidden in the Recherche and it is even quite explicitly expressed on a number of occasions. But what of the Roman de Mélusine? It would seem that nothing could be more remote from Marcel's relationship with his mother than Geoffroy's with Mélusine, yet the medieval fairy does have a very special relationship with her sixth son and it is one that sets him apart from his siblings. He is the son who is set over his brothers in the narrative: "Geoffroy la Grand'Dent, le plus sauvage, le plus courageux, le plus audacieux de tous."[2]

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The historical Geoffroy was a terrible personage known for his brutality and ferocity. Much of this reputation carries over into the fictional Geoffroy of the romance, for, as we have seen, Geoffroy burns his brother and one hundred monks alive in what appears to be an anticlerical rage. Harf-Lancner observes, "en Geoffroy se réincarne la férocité du sanglier qui a tué le comte Aymeri."[3] However, unlike his brother Horrible, Geoffroy cannot be reduced to a solely negative status. He also figures as a savior slaying evil giants and, after Mélusine's final departure, repenting for his sins, he reconquers his father's lands and recuperates his mother's past.

There is no doubt that Geoffroy's relationship to his mother is different from that of the other sons. Sylvie Roblin argues that the "armorial complicity" depicted on a Lusignan coat of arms featuring Mélusine in her semi-serpentine form on one side and Geoffroy Big Tooth on the other represents the privileged bond that Geoffroy, above all his brothers, enjoys with Mélusine.[4] She observes that the facial animal marks are only noted at the time of the children's births. The sole exception is Geoffroy whose big tooth is frequently mentioned and constantly brought to mind by virtue of its inscription in his name.[5] Some commentators have noted that Geoffroy's big tooth is as much a

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sign of Raymondin's transgression as of Mélusine's. Be that as it may, it is interesting that Geoffroy's defect like those of his brothers reveals a demonic origin.[6] But, as we shall see, Geoffroy's defect also mirrors a specific flaw transmitted from the parents. In spite of betraying Mélusine's animal nature, the marks on the other sons, the various extra eyes, big ears, the mark of the lion or of the mole, could suggest positive attributes. They could signify extra insight, or, as Roblin observes, nobility (the lion's paw on Antoine's face) or religious contemplation (the mark of the mole on Fromont's nose).[7] This is, of course, not true either of Horrible (who before the age of seven has killed two of his nursemaids by biting off their breasts and two of his father's squires) or of Geoffroy. However, Horrible's savagery cannot compare to Geoffroy's, although, according to Mélusine, it would have surpassed Geoffroy's, had the child been allowed to live:

> Messeigneurs, si vous désirez maintenir votre honneur et votre prospérité, arrangez-vous pour qu'Horrible, celui de nos fils qui a trois yeux, dont un au milieu du front, soit tué secrètement, car sachez, en vérité, qu'il ferait tant de mal que la perte de vingt mille hommes ne serait rien à côté des dommages qu'on aurait à déplorer à cause de lui. Soyez certains qu'il détruirait tout ce que j'ai édifié, et que jamais la guerre ne cesserait au pays de Poitou et de Guyenne. Tâchez de suivre mon

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conseil; ce serait une grande folie que de ne pas le faire.[8]

Laurence's de Looze's observation that Geoffroy's extreme nature concentrates and repeats Raymondin's tale in a mise-en-abyme suggests that Geoffroy's facial defect is in some sense a mark of the father rather than of the mother: "If the boar of the work's beginning can be read as a signifier of uncontrolled and uncontrollable violence, violence that becomes displaced to Raymondin in an oedipal murder, Geoffroy Big-Tooth can in turn be read as a return of the boar."[9] We shall argue however that the boar's tooth links Geoffroy more closely to his mother than to his father precisely because of the connotations of ferocity conveyed by the tooth. While Raymondin is capable of towering rages, there is little evidence of ferocity in him. Mélusine, on the other hand, enacts a terrible revenge on her father for his betrayal of Présine, and she instigates the infanticide of her seven year-old son Horrible.

With one notable exception when he denounces Mélusine as très infâme serpente, Raymondin never flies into <u>uncontrollable</u> rages. On the contrary, unlike his son, Raymondin always exercises restraint in situations where a more ferocious man would not hold back. He

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does not kill his brother, the comte de Forez, even though he is sorely tempted when he has spied on Mélusine at the instigation of his brother: "La loi naturelle me l'interdit, puisque vous êtes mon frère." And, in what is perhaps a surprising demonstration of a merciful nature, he pleads the cause of the man who betrayed his father, Hervey de Leon, resulting in Hervey's exile and loss of his lands. The betrayer, Josselin de Pont de Leon, now old and feeble has a son, who was not yet born at the time of his father's misdeed. The truth of Raymondin's claim is proven to the king of the Bretons when young Olivier loses against his father's adversary in single-handed combat. Raymondin pleads for the life of the young man who was not even born at the time of the treachery and, surprisingly, he begs the king not to hang the father.

> Je vous prie par pitié et miséricorde de bien vouloir m'accorder la grâce d'Olivier, car, vu sa vaillance, et étant donné qu'il n'a pas participé à la trahison, ce serait grand domage qu'il meure, car il est encore possible que dans l'avenir il se comporte fort bien. Quant au père, je le vois fragile et vieux, et s'il vous plaisait seigneur roi, de lui faire grâce, je vous prierais pour ma part, de l'épargner . . . [10]

Mercy would thus seem to be a genuine and integral part of Raymondin's nature, all the more so because he asked for the lives of

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the old man and his son to be spared without any prompting from Mélusine. Nevertheless father and son are hung on the spot, perhaps because seeking forgiveness for the miscreant and his son never came to Mélusine's mind.[11] Yet, as we shall see, she does not hesitate to ask for forgiveness when necessary for her own son.

Roblin points out in another one of her insights that Geoffroy is a solitary figure. Not only does he not marry, but he accomplishes his exploits alone. The other brothers, who go off to fight the Saracens or conquer new lands, do so in pairs. Geoffroy may help his brothers in times of need, but he is never paired with them. And, unlike his brothers none of whose exploits have anything to do with the supernatural world, Geoffroy engages in combat with three otherworldly beings: two giants, Gardon and Grimaud, and one knight, the strongest he has ever fought, the mysterious chevalier de la tour de Lusignan.[12] This last combat is strangely reminiscent of another favorite son's struggle with a mysterious being. Jacob, Rebekah's favorite, fights all night through at the edge of a small river with a mysterious being who will not tell him his name but whom Jacob takes to be a representation of God: "I have seen God face to face."

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In a struggle that is somewhat analogous to Jacob's, Geoffroy fights on the banks of a river a mysterious, possibly heaven-sent being, who refuses to give his name. This is a knight to whom a yearly tribute of ten sous is paid to prevent the destruction that an enormous hand, reaching down from heaven, causes to the top of the tower of Lusignan castle. At the first day's end no one has gained the upper hand in the fierce combat. The knight asks for a return engagement the next day at the river's edge. Their protracted struggle is again inconclusive, and the mysterious figure disappears after refusing to tell his name. He does assure Geoffroy that he is God's messenger:

> Geoffroy, écoute-moi. Je t'ai assez mis à l'épreuve . . . Maintenant, voici: si tu veux bien faire construire un hôpital et concéder une chapellenie, pour le salut de l'âme de ton père, ta tour restera en paix . . . Sois donc sûr, répondit Geoffroy, que je le ferai, mais dis-moi qui tu es. . . . Geoffroy, ne m'en demande pas d'avantage . . . car tu ne peux savoir qu'une chose: je suis un envoyé de Dieu.[13]

Mélusine's special bond with her sixth son is perhaps nowhere so evident as when she tries to defend him against Raymondin's rage after Geoffroy has committed fratricide and immolated the monks at Maillezais. She admonishes Raymondin for his inconsolability,

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declaring that God forgives all sinners no matter what they have done if they are truly repentant. At the same time she justifies Geoffroy's crime claiming that he was accomplishing God's will to punish the monks for their debauchery. Finally she avers that God's ways are beyond human understanding:

> Voulez-vous donc faire procès à la volonté du Créateur, qui a tout fait et qui défera tout à son gré, quand il lui plaira. Sachez qu'il n'est pas de pécheur, aussi grand soit-il, à qui Dieu ne témoigne encore plus de miséricorde, dans sa bonté, lorsque le pécheur se repent et lui demande pardon avec bonne volonté, d'un coeur sincère. Si votre fils Geoffroy a commis cette offense, emporté par l'extraordinaire violence de ses sentiments, soyez sûr que c'est à cause des péchés des moines, qui menaient une vie de débauche et de désordre. Notre-Seigneur a voulu les punir, et cette chose ne peut être connue par la créature humaine, car les jugements de Dieu sont si mystérieux que nul homme en ce monde ne peut les comprendre avec son entendement limité.[14]

Even though this speech does not achieve its desired goal of defusing Raymondin's anger, the care with which it is crafted and articulated reflects Mélusine's desire not only to console her husband but also to exculpate her son.

Thus, Geoffroy does figure as a solitary figure and as a special favorite of his mother. In this way the mighty and ferocious warrior

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that Geoffroy is and the pampered mama's boy of the Recherche have more in common than is immediately apparent. Of course, Marcel, unlike Geoffroy, ceaselessly questions the past and finally recovers it. Geoffroy, on the other hand, is singularly uninterested in the past and at one point even says: "Je ne sais rien des choses passées, et je ne tiens pas à m'en enquérir."[15] Yet, after chasing the giant Grimaud into a mountain chamber, it is Geoffroy who rediscovers the past written on his grandmother's tablets, and he delights in this discovery.[16] In this way he is not unlike the narrator of the Recherche. Moreover, as we shall see, both of these favorite sons often ill repay the devotion lavished upon them by their mothers. We will begin with some examples of maternal profanation in the Roman de Mélusine.

There are several major instances of the desecration of the mother in Mélusine's story, three of which were briefly outlined in chapter one of this study. We shall now examine them in greater detail.

The most obvious instance of maternal profanation in the Mélusine legend occurs in Présine's part of the story. We may recall that Mélusine's father, Elinas, had to swear never to see his wife during the birth of a child. Mataquas, Elinas's son by a previous

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marriage, evidently knows of the interdiction and uses his knowledge to get rid of his hated step-mother. Banking on his father's joy at the news of the birth of three healthy children (Présine gives birth to triplets), he tells Elinas: "Madame la reine Présine, votre femme, vous a donné les trois plus jolies petites filles qu'on ait jamais vues. Sire, venez les voir." On impulse and in a mood for congratulations, Elinas walks in on his wife as she is bathing the children. Unlike Mélusine's dolorous and drawn out leave-taking, Présine's is instantaneous. Her response to Elinas's joyous "Dieu bénisse la mère et les filles," is immediate and terrible as we may recall: "Fourbe, tu as manqué à ta promesse, et cela te portera malheur: tu m'as perdue à tout jamais. Je sais bien que c'est à cause de ton fils Mataquas . . ." She snatches up her little girls and vanishes: "Sur ce, elle prit ses trois filles avec elle, et s'évanouit dans les airs. On ne la revit plus jamais en ce pays."[17] Innocent or not of a willful betrayal Elinas is clearly responsible, since he betrays the oath he had sworn to uphold. It is also clear that the son used his father as the agent of betrayal and that Présine's banishment is permanent. Thus Mataquas is the (indirect) cause of his step-mother's unhappiness and her eternal banishment back into the

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world of fairies. Upon her expulsion, Mataquas becomes ruler of his father's kingdom.

Thus, in condensed form, Présine's story foreshadows Mélusine's life in the world of mortals. However, there is an important difference in the second instance of profanation in that Raymondin's treachery is not, at first glance, initiated by a son. Unlike Elinas, Raymondin seems to be the sole agent of his wife's betrayal. A brother, the comte de Forez is blamed for having aroused Raymondin's suspicions which leads to Raymondin's spying on his wife during her Saturday activities, which in turn leads to the public denunciation of Mélusine by her husband and her forced departure from the world of mortals. The comte de Forez is held accountable, and his nephew, Geoffroy, kills him to avenge his mother: "Ignoble traître, cria-t-il, tes fourberies m'ont fait perdre ma mère. Tu as maintenant ta récompense!"[18] In all of this it seems that a brother rather than a son is to blame.

However, if we look at the story more closely we see that had Geoffroy not committed the crime of burning alive his brother and the monks of Maillezais, the treachery instigated by the brother would not have led to the tragic events at the close of Mélusine's story.

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Parenthetically, we may notice that Geoffroy leaves from one of his favorite residences, the tower of Montjouet, to commit the greatest sin of his life, and it is to this tower that he will later return filled with remorse for what he has just done.[19] The tower is therefore implicitly associated not only with sin, but also with redemption since a Christian who is sincerely repentant has taken the first step towards redemption. It would be hard to forget the tower, as it is mentioned several times in d'Arras's text.[20] Is it merely a coincidence that the name of Geoffroy's tower so closely resembles the sinful Montjouvain of the Recherche? Perhaps, but it is noteworthy that only the dissimilarity of their last syllable separates the two names. Be that as it may, Geoffroy's horrible crime causes his father to transgress the most important part of his promise to Mélusine: never to speak of his wife's hybridity. If Raymondin's only infringement of the interdiction had been to spy on his wife, the matter would have rested there. Geoffroy, like Mataquas, is the indirect cause of his mother's forced departure, but, unlike Mataquas, he does not intentionally undertake to get rid of his mother.

In the Recherche and Mélusine's story blame, literal in the former narrative and figurative in the latter, falls on the sons' shoulders for the

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death of the mother. It is literal in Proust's novel in the sense that the narrator thinks he has killed his grandmother. This guilt is explicit when the narrator says after learning of Albertine's death: "rapprochant la mort de ma grand-mère et celle d'Albertine, il me semblait que ma vie était souillée d'un double assassinat que seule la lâcheté du monde pouvait me pardonner" (IV,78). Thus far, the sons' responsibility for the desecration of the mother that resonates in both the Recherche and d'Arras's Roman de Mélusine operates on a fairly obvious level. But Proust's novel insists on another emphatic correspondence between the two works.

It is surely no accident that in yet another instance of profanation it is the mother-markedness of the son that leads to the mother's expulsion. In the Roman de Mélusine, Raymondin, after having learned of Geoffroy's violence against the monks at Maillezais, curses Mélusine as he gallops towards his castle at Mervent. In the litany of grievances he includes those aspects of Mélusine towards which he had previously turned a willing blind eye: "Sur la foi que je dois à mon Dieu, je crois que cette femme n'est qu'un esprit malfaisant, je ne crois pas que le fruit de ses entrailles puisse être

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parfaitement bon; elle n'a mis au monde que <u>des enfants marqués d'un signe étrange</u>" (emphasis added).[21]

Until this point in the narrative neither Raymondin nor anyone else has ever said anything negative about the strange markings that appear on eight of the couple's children, even though there may be an implied awareness and criticism that these marks are defects in the insistence that the young men are very handsome. To buttress his accusations against Mélusine, Raymondin evokes what he saw when she was bathing and, for the first time, the fact that she knew, before he had said a word, everything that had befallen him during the hunt with his uncle for the wild boar. For all these reasons he accuses her of being an evil spirit: "C'est quelque esprit malin, ou une apparition, une illusion qui m'a ainsi abusé . . ." [22] We know that all the strange signs that mark the children of this "evil spirit" appear on their faces. Consequently, the facial defects that link the sons to their mother account, in part, for Raymondin's subsequent betrayal of his wife when he publicly exposes her as "très infâme serpente."

And finally, there is a curious incident in d'Arras's narrative when Geoffroy seems to have forgotten who his mother is. Not long after Geoffroy's fratricide and Mélusine's metamorphosis, our hero

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arrives in Northumberland where he undertakes to slay a giant who has been devastating the land. The giant, knowing that the only man who can kill him is Geoffroy, tries to escape by sliding down through a crevasse in the mountain. In hot pursuit, Geoffroy discovers an enormous chamber in the bowels of the mountain. The chamber is fully illuminated by candelabra which shed light on a sumptuous tomb. According to Coudrette, the light reveals a statue of king Elinas lying on the tomb and at his feet stands a statue of his wife, Présine, holding tablets on which her story is written.[23] The relative position of the statues represents the superiority of the *fée*. She is the one standing and she, whose voice was her first distinguishing feature, is the one who controls the narrative of her story and the way it will be remembered in the world of mortals. She has inscribed these events and the curse that punishes her daughters on the tablets:

> "Ci-gît mon mari, le noble roi Elinas d'Ecosse," et elles racontaient comment il avait été enfermé là, pour quelle raison. <u>Elles disaient aussi comment les trois filles de cette reine, Mélusine, Mélior et Palestine</u>, avaient étés punies pour avoir emprisonné leur père, comment le géant avait été placé là pour garder les lieux, jusqu'au jour où il en serait expulsé par l'héritier de l'une des filles, enfin comment nul ne pourrait entrer là s'il n'était de leur lignage. Les tablettes racontaient tout cela en détail . . . <u>Geoffroy passa longtemps à lire les</u>

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> tablettes et à contempler la beauté du lieu, mais il ne savait pas encore qu'il était un descendant du roi Elinas et de Présine (emphasis added).[24]

It is curious that in spite of Geoffroy's lengthy perusal of the tablets, which clearly state that Mélusine is the daughter of Présine, he still does not know that he is her grandson. It is true that Mélusine's fairy ancestry was not revealed until her departure. At the time, Geoffroy was on his way to Northumberland, so he could not have known about it until his descent into the cave, but he does spend a great deal of time reading the tablets on which this ancestry is explained. Donald Maddox accounts for Geoffroy's failure to recognize his lineage in the subterranean chamber on the grounds that Raymondin did not know anything about his own father's life until Mélusine gave him a detailed account of it. Maddox also observes that "as Raymondin grew up in ignorance of the patrilineal order, so will his sons live in long ignorance of the marvelous matrilineal order."[25] However, Geoffroy's ignorance of the marvelous matrilineal order does not explain his inability to recognize his mother's name clearly inscribed on the tablets. Nowhere in d'Arras's account or in Coudrette's is there any mention of Mélusine using an alias or

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concealing her real name. In fact, just before her wedding one of her squires announces it to the comte de Poitiers and his entourage.[26] We also know that Mélusine was a very attentive and nurturing mother. Therefore, it seems highly unlikely that her sons would not have known her name. Instead, it seems possible that a temporary amnesia is operating here and that Geoffroy has forgotten the name of his mother. If this is true we may ask ourselves what symbolic status attaches itself to the cave and if it has anything to do with Geoffroy's inability to remember.

That the pursuit of the giant into the cave is a symbolic return to the womb is very clear in both Coudrette's and d'Arras's accounts. Geoffroy slides into the narrow crevasse feet first to find himself in a wondrous cave that has only one passage of entry and exit. In the face to face encounter with his origins Geoffroy gives no sign of anxiety. On the contrary, he marvels at its trappings and even seems to take an esthetic pleasure in them. However, a disavowed anxiety may be at the root of his forgetfulness and his deferred pursuit the giant into the mountain. After his adversary disappears down the crevasse Geoffroy calmly waits until the next day to continue his

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pursuit: "Je sais bien dans quel trou il s'est enfoncé; je le trouverais demain." [27]

Even if we can ascribe any anxiety to Geoffroy the anxiety is short-lived. As soon as Geoffroy has killed the giant and returned to Montjouet in his own country, his brother, Raymonnet, tells him of Raymondin's betrayal and their mother's departure. It is only at this point that Geoffroy remembers the writings on the tablets: "En entendant cela, Geoffroy repensa aux tablettes qu'il avait retrouvées sur la tombe du roi Elinas, et il se rendit compte qu'ils étaient, lui et ses frères de son lignage . . ." and Geoffroy is filled with pride.[28]

We may now recall Proust's words in Contre Sainte-Beuve: "Le visage d'un fils qui vit, ostensoir où mettait toute sa foi une sublime mère morte, est comme une profanation de ce souvenir sacré,"[29] and especially the following sentence in the Recherche: ". . . même sans être invertis et en recherchant des femmes, ils consomment dans leur visage la profanation de leur mère" (III, 300). In Proust's work the resemblance to his mother that the son bears on his face is an essential component of maternal profanation, and that profanation extends to forgetting the mother after her death. Geoffroy, Mélusine's most illustrious son, is guilty of the same forgetfulness. However, our

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analogy breaks down here because Geoffroy's forgetfulness is guiltless and of short duration. The narrator, on the other hand, experiences his forgetting as having lasted a long time and as a crime against his grandmother.

As for Geoffroy, his crime at Maillezais sets in motion a chain of events leading to catastrophic loss for Mélusine: she loses her husband, her human form, her chance to turn hybridity into wholeness, and possibly her chance at redemption. But even before Maillezais, Geoffroy, by the nature of his exploits was already unwittingly pointing to that which Mélusine most wanted and indeed needed to keep secret. As we have already noted, Geoffroy is the only son of Mélusine who engages in adventures where he fights against supernatural beings. As Spiegel points out, even when Mélusine's fairy nature is revealed by Raymondin's public dislosure, she continues to insist on the "natural" character of her maternity[30] and thus on her own humanity. Roblin draws attention to Mélusine's constant attemps to rid herself of any association with the supernatural. With the exception of Geoffroy the exploits of the other sons are "natural:"

> . . . les fils de Mélusine réalisent le voeu de leur mère: ils vont combattre des païens naturels, des seigneurs félons naturels, épouser des femmes

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> naturelles qui sont à la tête de royaumes bien orthodoxes, même s'ils sont orientaux. . . . les frères de Geoffroy, leurs malformations mises à part . . . installent leur mère sinon dans une vie sans histoire puisqu'il s'agit de conquête et de sang, du moins dans une vie qui ne sent point trop le souffre (emphasis in the original).[31]

The "natural" exploits of these other sons thus argue for Mélusine as a good Catholic wife and may help to explain why so much of d'Arras's romance is devoted to recounting these events: "Le récit, grâce à eux [Geoffroy's brothers], pénètre sereinement dans le domaine hiératique de l'épopée, délaissant les voies troubles et troublantes du conte."[32] Geoffroy ruins this for Mélusine by effectuating a "retour au merveilleux," thanks to his frequent forays into the supernatural: "Seul parmi les fils de Mélusine, il est à même de renouer avec le merveilleux qui avait été totalement éclipsé par les aventures épiques des aînés de Lusignan."[33] Even if Geoffroy's exploits benefit the communities in which they take place, they constitute a hidden repudiation of Mélusine's claim that she is human. In this way Geoffroy is once again an unwitting profaner of his mother.

Yet, Mélusine's ultimate exile and misery cannot be blamed solely on Geoffroy and Raymondin, for behind them stands a far more

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powerful figure, Présine. Présine's curse on her daughter is perhaps not quite infanticide, but it comes close.

This curse carries with it the warning that, if Mélusine is betrayed by her human husband her penitence will last until Judgment day and perhaps beyond. What will happen thereafter is a decision left to God: "Si votre union [with a human] est rompue, sache que tu retourneras au tourment où tu étais auparavant, à tout jamais, jusqu'au jour où siégera le Souverain Juge."[34] It is not clear whether this tourment is an inevitable consequence of the curse of hybridity or whether it is an additional suffering imposed by the mother. Présine loves her children enough to take them with her when she flies away from Elinas, but there is also evidence that she is an unforgiving and ultimately dangerous mother. She raises her children on the île d'Avalon and takes them to a mountaintop <u>every day</u> with tears in her eyes, complaining about Elinas's treachery. Every day they look out toward Scotland, but when the girls are fifteen years old their mother tells them why they must stay on the île d'Avalon and not go to the land on which they gaze so fondly:

> le pays où vous êtes nées et où vous auriez eu votre héritage, sans la trahison de votre père qui nous a plongées, vous et moi, dans une <u>misère</u> qui

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> ne prendra fin que le jour du Jugement, quand le souverain Juge punira le mal et récompensera le bien (emphasis added).[35]

Mélusine alone among the daughters asks what their father did that was so terrible: "Madame à quelle trahision de mon père devons nous notre triste sort?" (emphasis added).[36] And later, when persuading her sisters to join her in avenging their mother, Mélusine again brings up the misery to which they have been consigned by the faithless father: "Mes chères soeurs, voyez dans quelle misère notre père nous a mises, nous et notre mère, alors que nous aurions pu vivre dans l'opulence et dans les honneurs."[37] The sisters, Mélior and Palestine, agree to avenge their mother, and Mélusine, using her magic powers, causes Elinas to be locked up for the rest of his life in the Magic Mountain, Brumborenlion. His imprisonment is as irrevocable as Mélusine's subsequent punishment for her hubris. Markale states that when Elinas is encased in the mountain he is neutralized and thereby figuratively castrated: "Elle lui a fait subir la mutilation la plus infamante et la plus débilitante pour un mâle, la castration, acte irrémédiablement définitif".[38] This act of revenge, initiated by Mélusine can be viewed as a kind of parricide, and explains why Mélusine is

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more severely punished than her sisters. One senses that the nature of the crime and the mother's anger in reaction to it dooms, from the beginning, the whole enterprise of escaping the malediction. The mother's curse is irrevocable, even though it had seemed to offer a window of opportunity for escape. Perhaps the cruelest aspect of the curse is the false hope that it holds out. Mortal husbands or lovers are notorious for transgressing the interdictions imposed by their fairy partners.

It is unclear exactly what Présine meant by the misère of their lives, since the island of Avalon is reputed to be quite pleasant. At the end of the Lai de Lanval Marie de France writes that "Le cheval les emporta [Lanval and his fairy partner], disent les Bretons, en Avallon, une île belle et merveilleuse." What is clear is that, however severe the misère, Présine loves her husband and is not inclined to take revenge on him. Présine's complaints have struck a chord with her daughters, especially with Mélusine who is the ringleader in the subsequent parental profanation for which Présine will make them pay dearly. What is striking here is the severity of the punishment and that Présine can forgive her husband but not her child - a child, moreover, who has acted on an impulse of rage on her mother's behalf.

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The loving and hateful child as well as the good mother/bad mother are also key elements in the economy of the Recherche. In one example of the narrator's responsibility for maternal suffering, we may recall that, during the drame du coucher, Marcel realizes that the victory of getting his mother into his room has traced the first signs of old age upon her face, by implication hastening the time of her permanent disappearance, her death. Here again a son is guilty of punishing or harming his mother:

> 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 ... il me semblait que je venais d'une main impie et secrète de tracer dans son âme une première ride et d'y faire apparaître un premier cheveu blanc. (I,38)

The obverse, that mothers have malefic powers and can harm their children is also true, as we have seen in the malediction that Présine calls down upon her daughter's head. But, can one really speak of the malefic powers of mothers in Proust's novel? This question will be explored later, but for now let us look at Elizabeth Richardson Viti's defense of her approach to the Recherche from the

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point of view of a feminist critic examining the male identification with the mother. This approach would reveal how "the author's preoccupation with and ambivalence toward the Mother unwittingly structures his very definition of femininity, producing everything from bad mothers to surrogate mothers to mothers among men."[39] She observes that Mme Amédée, Marcel's grandmother, is the most admirable woman, indeed the most admirable of all the characters in the novel. Content with her station in the world, completely without envy or snobbery, she never tries to be something she is not. She ascribes her own goodness to others and rarely, if ever, disapproves of anyone. Her own model for the ideal woman is Mme de Sévigné whom she is always quoting. What Madame Amédée admires is Sévigné's love of nature, her consideration for others, and especially her devotion to her daughter:

> The novelist describes the relationship between Mme de Grignan and her literary mother, though less than perfect in reality, as ideal, exemplifying for the narrator's grandmother le naturel. Thus, because Proust sets up Mme Amédée as the one woman by whom all others are judged, her model becomes the ultimate means of evaluating all the other fictional females."[40]

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Viti questions whether the narrator's mother is Mme Amédée's equal in the novel's value system which does privilege motherhood. Viti notes that "the author of the Recherche promotes motherhood as the natural role for women and depicts those who accept and respect it in a flattering light."[41] With this in mind she observes that not enough attention has been paid to the differences between the mother and grandmother. While clearly superior to all the women outside of his nuclear family, Marcel's mother has neither le naturel nor the total goodness of her own mother. For example, a snobbish preoccupation with social castes is the reason for her refusal to see Swann with his wife Odette, and this in spite of Swann's status as an old friend of the family. However, the mother's main fault lies in her inability to help Marcel separate from her.

Viti uses object-relations theory to explain the narrator's intense and exclusive attachment to his mother which will be systematically repeated in his romantic relationships. The *scène du coucher* where the little boy's fate hangs in the balance, illustrates how unwilling the mother is to encourage separation/individuation.[42] The narrator himself traces his future suffering to that unwillingness:

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> Si j'avais osé maintenant, j'aurais dit à maman: "Non, je ne veux pas, ne couche pas ici.". . . Certes, le beau visage de ma mère brillait encore de jeunesse ce soir-là où elle me tenait si doucement les mains et cherchait à arrêter mes larmes; mais justement il me semblait que <u>cela n'aurait pas dû être</u>, sa colère eût été moins triste pour moi que cette douceur nouvelle que n'avait pas connue mon enfance. (I,38; emphasis added)

The fusion of mother and child is cemented in this scene and, as Viti formulates it, mother is clearly to blame.[43]

The same dichotomy between good and bad mother that one finds in the <u>Recherche</u>, exists in Mélusine herself. By virtue of her fertility and also because of the excellent, tender care that she lavishes on her children, Mélusine is usually seen as a good maternal figure; she is the Mélusine maternelle according to Le Goff, who states that she is the medieval avatar of "une déesse-mère" appearing as "une fée de la fécondité."[44] Her fecundity plays a significant role in the prosperity that she confers on her husband and, as Le Goff attests, especially in the lineage she provides for him:

> Ce que Mélusine donne avant tout à Raymond, ce sont des enfants. Même quand ils ne sont pas dix comme chez Jean d'Arras, ils sont ce qui survit à la disparition de la fée-mère et à la ruine de l'homme-père. Edric 'laissa son héritage à son fils'. De Henno et de sa pestilentia 'une

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> nombreuse descendance en existe encore aujourd'hui'. Raymond du Château-Rousset a gardé de l'aventure et de la mésaventure une fille 'dont la descendance est parvenue jusqu'à nous'. . . Mélusine disparue, si on l'entend encore, c'est quand elle accomplit sa fonction essentielle, celle de mère et de nourricière. Ravie à la lumière, elle reste une génitrice nocturne.[45]

Edric, De Henno and Raymond du Château-Rousset referred to here were protagonists in tales of the Mélusinian type that predated Jean d'Arras and Coudrette and that provided source material for them. Henno's wife pretends to be pious, but the hero's mother spies on the young woman and sees her bathing in the form of a dragon and reverting back into human form. Henno's wife is then ambushed and sprinkled with holy water, at which point she flies away.[46] But in Mélusine's case it is not as clear that she is a diabolical spirit, since she is not driven away by Christian rites. In fact, there is ample evidence of her piety throughout the romance. Mélusine declares in the first encounter with Raymondin that she is de part Dieu and has all the beliefs of a true Catholic. She faithfully attends mass from beginning to end, unlike fairy creatures in other stories who always skip the most important parts, especially communion. Her chastoiements to her sons abound with moral and religious precepts.

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Here is some of what she says to Urian and Guyon before they leave for Cyprus:

> Mes enfants, je vous recommande, où que vous soyez, de commencer par écouter chaque jour le service divin avant tout autre chose. Implorez l'aide de votre créateur dans toutes vos entreprises, servez-le diligemment,aimez-le et craignez-le, votre Dieu et votre créateur. Soutenez notre sainte mère église, et soyez ses vrais champions contre tous ses ennemis.[47]

An even greater demonstration of Mélusine's non-diabolical nature is in evidence when, publicly betrayed by her husband and thus condemned to eternal torment, she stills forgives him. In an act of great love and Christian charity she declares:

> Hélas! mon ami, si tu ne m'avais pas trahie, j'étais sauvée de mes peines et de mes tourments, j'aurai vécu le cours naturel de la vie, comme une femme normale, je serai morte naturellement, avec tous les sacrements de l'Eglise, j'aurai été ensevelie en l'Eglise de Notre-Dame de Lusignan et on aurait célébré comme il se doit des messes de commémoration pour moi. Mais maintenant tu m'as replongée dans la sombre pénitence que j'avais longtemps connue, à cause de ma faute. Et cette pénitence, je devrai maintenant la supporter jusqu'au jour du Jugement, parce que tu m'as trahie. Je prie Dieu qu'il veuille te pardonner.[48]

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A little later when Raymondin begs for her forgiveness she gives it freely once again: ". . . que veuille vous pardonner votre faute Celui à qui appartient le véritable pardon. Celui qui est la source légitime de toute pitié et de toute miséricorde, car, quant à moi, je vous pardonne de bon coeur."[49] Marina Brownlee finds Mélusine's stance as Christian apologist surprising because of "her monstrous physical nature and the lack of such discourse in the parallel episode of her mother's betrayal."[50] However, as we pointed out, Présine does forgive Elinas and is furious when Mélusine punishes him for his betrayal. Moreover, although her curse speech is not overwhelmingly Christian, she does allude to Judgment Day, as we may recall, in specifying Mélusine's punishment: "Et si votre union est rompue, sache que tu retourneras au tourment où tu étais auparavant, à tout jamais, jusqu'au jour où siégera le Souverain Juge."[51] The Souverain Juge is also mentioned in Mélior's curse and the crusades are alluded to in Palestine's. Palestine will be locked up in a mountain to guard a treasure until "un chevalier de votre lignage y viendra, qui obtiendra le trésor, l'utilisera pour conquérir la Terre Promise, et te delivrera."[52] It seems that the duration of Palestine's punishment will be shorter than that of her sisters, perhaps because she is the youngest. As mothers go, in a

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comparison of Présine and her eldest daughter it would seem that, in spite of the order to kill Horrible, Mélusine has the upper hand.

But the fairy can also reveal her cruel side and it is in connection with Horrible that she does so. In the medieval tale, this aspect of Mélusine comes into play moments before her metamorphosis when she exhorts those assembled in the room to secretly murder one of her sons because his propensity for violence makes him extremely dangerous. By his seventh birthday, Horrible (Eudes) has already killed four people and his potential for violence and evil is so great that he could undo all that Mélusine has accomplished: "Soyez certains qu'il détruirait tout ce que j'ai édifié, et que jamais la guerre ne cesserait au pays de Poitou et de Guyenne. Tâchez de suivre mon conseil; ce serait une grande folie que de ne pas le faire."[53]

Mélusine has so convinced Raymondin that he gives the order for her wish to be carried out. The manner of Horrible's secret execution is reminiscent of Elinas's fate. He is lured treacherously into a cave: "Par des manières aimables et de bonnes paroles, ils entraînèrent donc Horrible dans une cave") whereupon Raymondin's men "l'enfermèrent, l'étouffèrent avec de la fumée de foin humide."[54] Horrible is certainly a very unpleasant fellow, but the betrayal and the

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particular way he is dispatched, death by stifling, may have caused a frisson d'horreur in our asthmatic author/protagonist who, for much of his life, was obliged, or thought he was obliged, to stay in bed. Moreover, he laid part of the blame for this, and for other woes, as we saw earlier, at his mother's door: "Si j'avais osé maintenant, j'aurais dit à Maman: 'Non je ne veux pas, ne couche pas ici" (I,38).

The narrator's mother also has an explicitly cruel side which manifests itself in the pleasure she takes in her son's suffering over the grandmother's death. His pain even makes her happy because it blocks the work of forgetting and thereby assures the survival of the grandmother's memory:

> Mais je crois que ma mère trouva surtout de la douceur dans les paroles où malgré moi je laissai passer un peu de ma souffrance. Elle ne pouvait que rendre maman heureuse (malgré toute la tendresse qu'elle avait pour moi), comme tout ce qui assurait à ma grand-mère une survivance dans les coeurs. (III, 253)

The mother's cruelty is hardly attenuated by virtue of being inscribed in scattered statements that sound like one of the laws that the Recherche is fond of formulating. Such a law would be inscribed under the rubric of the intermittences du coeur and would stress that

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remembrance is impossible without suffering and that, in fact, when suffering ceases the connection to the loved one is broken and memories of the person fade. This is why Marcel welcomes the pain felt in Balbec when the memory of his dead grandmother overwhelms him:

> Ces douleurs si cruelles qu'elles fussent, je m'y attachais de toutes mes forces, car je sentais bien qu'elles étaient l'effet du souvenir que j'avais de ma grand-mère, la preuve que ce souvenir était bien présent en moi. Je sentais que je ne me la, rappelais vraiment que par la douleur et j'aurais voulu que s'enfonçassent plus solidement encore en moi ces clous qui y rivaient sa mémoire. (III, 156)

If the mother's gratification in her son's suffering is not exactly malevolent, there is nonetheless something terribly wrong and enormously selfish in her enjoyment of her son's grief. While never explicitly stated, there is a deeply buried criticism and even condemnation of the mother who will not allow her son to separate from her. And separation is indeed at issue here, not just remembrance. In her idolatrous cult of the grandmother, Marcel's mother is doing everything in her power to turn into her own mother. She refuses to be separated from her mother's bag, clothing, and

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books, and imitates exactly everything her mother did at Balbec. When she first appears, Marcel thinks he is looking at his grandmother: "Dès que je la vis entrer dans son manteau de crêpe, je m'aperçus . . . que ce n'était plus ma mère que j'avais sous les yeux, mais ma grand-mère" (III, 166). If there were an abatement of Marcel's grief, it would entail separation from his grandmother, and thus from his mother, since the two are fusing into the one. We have seen in the *scène du coucher* that the mother is, at least on an unconscious level, reluctant to empower her son in this way.

Many commentators now agree that the grandmother is the most idealized mother figure in the novel, yet even she is profaned. In fact, the narrator remembers hurting his grandmother in some of the most explicit instances of maternal profanation in the novel. These include his insistence upon drinking on the train to Balbec[55] and his contempt for her putative frivolity in having posed for a picture of herself. Upon realizing that she was very ill after suffering two small strokes and believing that she would soon die, perhaps even in Balbec, the grandmother had wanted her grandson to have a photograph of her looking well. Swearing Françoise to secrecy, she wears a wide-brimmed hat that conceals the ravages of her attacks and, pleased

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with the results, gives Marcel the photograph which is the only one ever taken of her: "Si jamais il m'arrivait quelque chose il faudrait qu'il ait un portrait de moi" (III, 173). Marcel mutters loud enough to be overheard that the photo session is a "puérilité presque ridicule de la coquetterie" (III, 156) on her part. As the harsh, wounding words come back to him he remembers that his grandmother reacted as if she had been struck by a blow to the face. The unjust accusation of vanity hurts Madame Amédée, but there are more devastating though less direct markers of maternal desecration disseminated throughout the novel that are so sacrilegious they dare not speak themselves aloud.

It is beyond the scope of this study to catalogue all the instances of profanation that the mother and grandmother suffer, but, because of its particular connection to the point we will soon be making in this chapter about the letters of Madame de Sévigné, we shall examine one example of desecration based on an identification between the grandmother, the public toilet attendant in the Champs-Elysées and Madame de Villeparisis that Michale Riffaterre has convincingly established.

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The staging of the grandmother's first major stroke in a public toilet is in itself somewhat humiliating, but more importantly there are, as Riffaterre observes, transfers of physical features which result in the grandmother's assumption of the symbolism of the "unpalatable character" of the guardian to the door of the other world that the attendant represents.[56] Moreover, Madame de Villeparisis is also drawn into an identification with the grandmother and the attendant. Like the attendant, she is a marquise, and she asssumes some maternal functions towards the narrator, just as the attendant does in the park when she tries to protect Marcel from the cold: "Françoise assurait qu'elle était marquise et appartenait à la famille Saint-Ferréol. Cette marquise me conseilla de ne pas rester au frais et m'ouvrit même un cabinet en me disant: 'Vous ne voulez-pas entrer? En voici un tout propre, pour vous ce sera gratis'" (I, 484). Madame de Villeparisis takes Marcel on rides in her carriage for his health, gives him books, and introduces him to high society. She even tries to protect the adolescent Marcel from going home with Charlus.[57] Like the attendant, Madame de Villeparisis has lost social standing, and Charlus associates her, like the attendant, with toilets: "Un de ces jours," he fulminates at the narrator, "vous prendrez les genoux de

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Madame de Villeparisis pour le lavabo, et on ne sait pas ce que vous y ferez" (II, 483).[58] Riffaterre also points to the narrator's use of the same terms to describe the cheeks of the three ladies in question:

> And those cheeks are precisely where the oral cathexis takes place – the grandmother's cheeks are kissed by the narrator as a babe suckles the mother's breast . . . Finally, Madame de Villeparisis's face and the reason for its appearance point to the encrypted interpretation of the grandmother's sudden resemblance to the attendant – a symbol of the mother's desecration. The attendant guards the door of the toilets, but her looks make one feel as if that door opened on a netherworld that is at once death and sewer – Mallarmé's bouche sépulcrale d'égout.[59]

As profanatory as the identification of the public toilet attendant and Madame de Villeparisis is for the grandmother, a far more severe and all encompassing desecration yet resides within the Recherche. We shall argue that this desecration figures as a deeply surreptitious profanation of such sacrilegious import that it can only be given covert expression in Proust's choice of the works that figure, on one hand, as the most important and memorable texts of the narrator's childhood and, on the other, as "the maternal Bible" of the mother and grandmother.[60] The responsibility for the choice of these texts falls squarely on the shoulders of mother and grandmother, but only

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because Marcel's father is overwhelmed by the female power structure as we shall now demonstrate before returning to the question of the texts themselves.

In a kind of parricide, the father will begin to disappear after the walk along the Méséglise way, a walk which, as we have said, is all the more exciting because of its forbidden quality. Although the father will not die for several more years, silence will gradually close over him, much like Brumborenlion closed around Elinas. This silence constitutes a neutralization all the more effective because it is doubled by the disappearance of Gilberte's father, Swann.

Indeed, the voice of the narrator's father is silenced very early on in the novel. In le drame du coucher, where the adult males still have enormous power from the son's point of view, the father and grandfather transgress "la foi des traités" by banishing the little boy to his room, without his mother's good night kiss, on an evening when Swann stops by for a visit:

> Mais voici qu'avant que le dîner fût sonné mon grand-père eut la férocité inconsciente de dire: 'Le petit a l'air fatigué, il devrait monter se coucher. On dîne tard du reste ce soir'. Et mon père, qui ne gardait pas aussi scupuleusement que ma grand-mère et que ma mère la foi des traités, dit: 'Oui, allons, va te coucher.' (I,27)

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The transgression of 'la foi des traités' by the father and grandfather recalls Elinas's and Raymondin's acts of transgression, and the narrator's male relatives suffer a retribution comparable to their medieval ancestors, especially Elinas's. Except for a mention of his flair for nosing out Jews, the grandfather quickly disappears from the narrative, and even his death is only mentioned in passing. The father's potency wanes noticeably and rather early on in the novel. In the opening pages he is in a position of power in the family and plays a major role in his son's life. His power is in evidence and not only during the drame du coucher. Just before that event, he boorishly comes close to insulting the grandmother for having chosen Indiana, as well as an unnamed Rousseau book and Musset's poetry, as presents for the narrator's birthday. The insult does not merely constitute disapproval of these gifts, but also, presumably, a refusal to allow the child to read such books, which is why the old lady trots out to exchange them, on a burning hot day and returns home ill. This is our first inkling that the grandmother is not well. The grandson is also implicated because the grandmother rushes out to exchange the books so that he will not be disappointed on his birthday. Her grandson's

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unwitting complicity may constitute a first instance of the "secret and impious finger" tracing lines of mortality on the maternal figure:

> Mais mon père l'ayant presque traitée de folle en apprenant les livres qu'elle voulait me donner, elle était retournée elle-même à Jouy-le-Vicomte chez le libraire pour que je ne risquasse pas de ne pas avoir mon cadeau (c'était un jour brûlant et elle était rentrée si souffrante que le médecin avait averti ma mère de ne pas la laisser se fatiguer ainsi)... (I, 39)

Francois le champi, an incestuous tale of an orphaned child who eventually marries his surrogate mother, is one of the books the grandmother brings back. The father's silence is puzzling. The conspicuous absence of comment upon his silence is more puzzling, but a reason for it is hinted at in the drame du coucher when Marcel hypothesizes that his father's capitulation comes from a lack of courage:

> ... mais elles [mother and grandmother] m'aimaient assez pour ne pas consentir à m'épargner de la souffrance, elles voulaient m'apprendre à la dominer afin de diminuer ma sensibilité nerveuse et fortifier ma volonté. Pour mon père, dont l'affection pour moi était d'une autre sorte, je ne sais pas s'il aurait eu ce courage . . . (I,3)

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Thus, the father's gesture on the staircase legitimizing and even commanding ("Mais va donc avec lui") the incestuous joining of mother and son was already heralded by his tacit approval of the gift of Sand's books. The transgressive nature of the father's act is reinforced by his conduct in both episodes. At first, alert to the inappropriateness of certain books, he suddenly abdicates his role and abandons his son, just as he did on the staircase, allowing for the reading of a book that exactly coincides with the little boy's most passionate wishes. Just as Golo, unimpeded by a male Lawmaker, advances unopposed towards Geneviève, so the mother is now free to advance on Marcel, who, it must be said, asks for nothing better.

We have already made the point that the story of Golo (slides accompanied by a text) and François le Champi were inappropriate for the very young and hypersensitive child that Marcel was at the time these narratives were read to him. More surprising, perhaps, is the argument that the letters of Madame de Sévigné also join the ranks of improper reading for a child. What could appear more innocent than the letters of a loving mother, who constantly speaks of her love for her daughter? Some readers, like Madame de Villeparisis, find that Sévigné is boring and mawkish: "Est-ce que vous ne trouvez pas que

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c'est un peu exagéré ce souci constant de sa fille, elle en parle trop pour que ce soit bien sincère. Elle manque de naturel" (III,57). She implies that the letters are boring when she comments on Madame Amédée's habit of corresponding daily with her daughter: "Comment, votre fille vous écrit tous les jours? Mais qu'est-ce que vous pouvez trouver à vous dire?" (II, 56, emphasis in the original). Even in Sévigné's own time there were readers who were shocked by her style and the expression of maternal love in the correspondence.[61] In 1735 a certain La Rivière regrets that "les sentiments de la mère [soient] trop répétés et ressemblent tant à une passion qu'on croit que c'est un amant qui écrit à sa maîtresse."[62] And many readers since then have indeed been aware that, as Ladenson observes, the letters "fit squarely, if discomfitingly, into the tradition of erotic literature."[63] Some of the erotic tone of the letters can be explained by the constraints of a language that lacked a specialized vocabulary to express maternal love which then obliged Madame de Sévigné to use the language of sexual desire. However, according to Ladenson, these constraints cannot entirely account for the erotic aspect of the letters which she ascribes to Madame de Sévigné's wish to depict a mother-daughter relationship "based on the erotic model of exclusive lover-

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beloved dynamics rather than that of familial succession". [64] In the Recherche there is familial succession since the mother replaces the grandmother, but the model of an exclusive lover-beloved relationship between mother and child is the one that exactly describes Marcel's love for his mother. The origin of what Gilles Deleuze calls Marcel's "série amoureuse"[65] begins in some sense not with the mother or grandmother, but with Madame de Sévigné whose maternal love was the idealized model of everything a mother-child relationship ought to be. However, the child in this case is specifically a daughter. Madame de Sévigné also had a son who was obviously not her favorite and to whom she did not address love letters. The son is excluded from the inner sanctum in which there is only room for mother and daughter.

Marcel's grandmother incarnates the maternal love of her model Madame de Sévigné and, in her love for her grandson, she makes him the object of her devotion. But the narrator implies that his mother, unlike Madame Amédée, does not become the perfect mother because she only wears the outer trappings of her model, Marcel's grandmother. She dresses like her mother, reads the same books and retraces her every movement, but the main focus of her devotion is to her mother's memory and not to her son. This bond between mother

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and daughter excludes Marcel just as Charles de Sévigné was excluded from the bond between his mother and sister. Ladenson calls attention to three letters from Marcel's mother, before she joins him in Balbec, in which she quotes Sévigné "comme si ces trois lettres eussent été non pas adressées par elle à moi, mais par ma grand-mère adressées à elle" (III, 167). And Ladenson interestingly points out that this observation of Marcel's stresses a "triangulated relation among mother, grandmother, and narrator . . . " and moreover, that this triangle "of which two corners are female . . . prepares the narrator for his subsequent obsession with sexual relations between women."[66]

Neither the mother nor the grandmother ever seem to notice what is excessive in Sévigné's maternal ardor even though Sévigné herself was very aware of it. In fact, she voiced some concern upon learning that her letters were going to be read by others: "Pensez - vous que mon style qui est toujours plein d'amitié, ne se puisse mal interpéter?" she asks of her cousin Bussy after he announces that a manuscript of their correspondance will be read by Louis XIV. Charlus has surely given a clue to the less than innocent passion of Sévigné when he defends the letters in the face of Madame de Villeparisis's philistinism: "Ce que ressentait Madame de Sévigné pour sa fille peut

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prétendre beaucoup plus justement ressembler à la passion que Racine a dépeinte dans Andromaque ou dans Phèdre, que les banales relations que le jeune Sévigné avait avec ses maîtresses" (II, 122).

Examples of what Sévigné herself called excès abound in the letters including her well-known wish that she could love God as much as her daughter: "En un mot, ma fille, je ne vis que pour vous. Dieu me fasse la grâce de l'aimer un jour comme je vous aime."[67] After having read some of the letters it is noteworthy that the narrator tells his grandmother in what sounds like a sentence taken from Sévigné: "Sans toi je ne pourrai pas vivre" (II,87). The letters are thus improper reading for these particular readers who need to find the will to separate from each other. Because of the separation between them, parallel lines running closely together might be more appropriate than the triangle that Ladenson discerns. The obstacles to such separation are formidable in part because the volonté which is found so lacking in the narrator is also in short supply in the maternal figures. Madame de Sévigné's letters on the one hand enhance the unhealthy bond between these particular readers and, on the other, because of Sévigné's moral authority, validate its continuance. By virtue of their status as "maternal Bible" (to borrow Ladenson's term again,), the

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letters foreclose any real attempt on the part of the faithful to reject Sévigné's ideology.

In choosing Golo, François le champi and the Sévigné letters, the mother figures have in effect accomplished what the narrator most fears, abandonment. By not respecting one of the most sacred trusts of parenthood, the protection of a child, they ensure that it will be impossible for him to live without them.[68] Without his mother or grandmother Marcel feels deprived of a self once again as is evident during the second trip to Balbec. There Marcel re-experiences himself as an emptied interiority until his grandmother comes to his rescue:

> L'être qui venait à mon secours, qui me sauvait de la sécheresse de l'âme, c'était celui qui plusieurs années auparavant, dans un moment de détresse et de solitude identiques, dans un moment où je n'avais rien de moi, était rentré, et qui m'avait rendu à moi-même (III, 153).

As Leo Bersani observes: "His self is with his mother and he must have her to have it."[69] This deprivation could not be made clearer when, for example, Marcel makes a short-lived decision to stay on in Venice after his mother's departure: "Car je me sentais seul, les choses m'étaient devenues étrangères, je n'avais plus assez de calme pour sortir de mon coeur palpitant et introduire en elles quelque

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stabilité. La ville que j'avais devant moi avait cessé d'être Venise" (III, 231).[70] This passage is remakably similar to the one quoted above ("n'ayant plus d'uinvers, plus de chambre, plus de corps ") when Marcel is waiting for his grandmother in the room at Balbec.[71] These overlapping states of mind underscore the much older narrator's continuing difficulty in separating from his mother even for a short while. Thus, the adolescent Marcel's anguished utterance of fear: "Sans toi je ne pourrai pas vivre," is not merely what Madame de Villeparisis might dismissively call faire de la littérature but rather a prescient cri du coeur. Lodged in the substratum of the three texts in question here, in fairly obvious display, is the incestuous desire of mother and child, but perhaps more significantly, because more dissimulated is the condemnation of the parent by the child who recognizes that boundaries needed to be respected and that true mother love would have been to give him the strength not to need her. "Non," he wanted to say, but did not dare, "je ne veux pas, ne couche pas ici." This failure of will is fueled by the kinds of books chosen or allowed by his parents and most especially by mother figures.

Mélusine may also be found guilty of this kind of abandonment of a child. She has one child killed and allows another one to die a

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terrible death. She who can see into the future gives some of her sons magic rings to protect them from harm as they go out into the world. One may see a parallel between the failure of both mothers (Marcel's and Fromont's) to protect much loved children. If Sylvie Roblin is right, Fromont was certainly a beloved child, for in choosing to become a monk he represents all that is best in Mélusine: "Fromont était la part positive de Mélusine, sa part chrétienne, sa part absoute. En tuant Fromont, Geoffroy tue le seul lien absolument pur qui reliait sa mère au monde des hommes et à celui de Dieu."[72]

Parents are profaned in punishment for desecrations of their own, but more often for engaging in behaviors that whether conscious or unconscious, are harmful to their children, who, like Mélusine and the narrator, are extremely fond of their parents. The question now will be whether profaners can ever redeem the suffering that they have visited upon the beloved parent or parental figures.

Redemption

Most good fairies who cross the divide between the natural and supernatural and decide to sojourn in the world of human beings do so for love of a mortal, but Mélusine's real desire is to acquire a soul and thus to become a "normal" woman. Only in this way can she redeem

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the sin against Elinas and receive the final sacraments of the church. To be sure she does also fall in love with Raymondin in their first encounter:

> Ah! Raymond, le jour où je t'ai vu pour la première fois a été pour moi jour de malheur! Hélas! c'est pour mon malheur que j'ai vu ta grâce, ton allure, ton beau visage, c'est pour mon malheur que j'ai désiré ta beauté puisque tu m'as si ignoblement trahie! [73](251)

Mélusine also gives ample proof of a sincere love for Raymondin when she forgives his catastrophic betrayal. At the same time we know that she was on the lookout for a man who would be docile enough to honor his promise in all eventualities. Such hoped for docility must have played a part in Mélusine's choice of Raymondin as her husband to be. By betraying his wife, Raymondin sets in motion the last part of the mother's curse. Mélusine returns to "mes peines et mes tourments." It is never very clear whether these torments will ever stop, but Mélusine does envisage a distant redemption when she will at last be forgiven for her sins: "Mais maintenant tu m'as replongée dans la sombre pénitance que j'avais longtemps connue, à cause de ma faute. Et cette pénitence, je devrai maintenant la supporter jusqu'au jour du Jugement parce que tu m'as trahie.[74] (252)

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Raymondin and Geoffroy do appear to redeem themselves after Mélusine's final metamorphosis. Raymondin espouses the monastic life in penance at Montserrat where he prays for forgiveness for his sins and for Mélusine's. Geoffroy remains childless, but he becomes a good ruler and in general leads a life of virtue and piety, taking over some of his mother's attributes by endowing and building churches, including the rebuilding of Maillezais. Thus, it would seem at first glance that Raymondin and his son expiate their sins in earthly penance, yet there is a curious incident that points to an incomplete penance on the part of Raymondin. Ten years after Raymondin's death the mysterious chevalier de la tour tells Geoffroy that he has been extracting ten sous in return for not damaging the tower because Raymondin has not finished atoning for the betrayal of Mélusine:

> Apprends que ce que j'ai fait n'a été que pour le bien de ton père et de son âme; le pape lui avait donnée une pénitence pour s'être parjurié envers ta mère, et il ne l'avait pas accomplie. Maintenant voici: si tu veux bien faire construire un hôpital et concéder une chapellenie, pour le salut de l'âme de ton père, ta tour restera en paix.[75](295-296)

The mysterious knight of the tower seems to imply that Geoffroy may possibly complete Raymondin's penance or at least speed it along.

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If this is true, then Geoffroy is instrumental in effecting the realization of one of Mélusines's last wishes, that Raymondin would be forgiven; and he also honors his father by acting in ways that are beneficial for the peace of his father's soul. Thus, Geoffroy and Raymondin appear to be well on the road to redemption. As mortals who possess a soul, their penance is likely to be efficacious, whereas redemption for a creature like Mélusine, who, no matter how repentant, does not have a soul, is much more problematic.

The two most well documented instances of redemption in the Recherche are those of the demoiselles Vinteuil and of the narrator. Redemption in Proust's work is for the most part about atoning for the suffering and defilement visited on the parent. We will first briefly examine a case of parental profanation that does not follow the narrator's and the demoiselles Vinteuil's trajectory of crime, punishment and redemption in the novel.

As we saw in the scene at Montjouvain, adoration is the sine qua non of parental profanation, which is here symbolically equivalent to parricide:

> Du vivant même du grand musicien elle avait appris de la fille le culte que celle-ci avait pour son père. C'est à cause de ce culte que . . . les deux

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> jeunes filles avaient pu trouver un plaisir dément aux profanations . . . L'adoration pour son père était la condition même du sacrilège de sa fille. (III, 765)

Gilberte and Mlle Vinteuil are two of the Recherche's figures who participate in rather blatant parricidal activities, but Gilberte more so than the composer's daughter. Unlike Mlle Vinteuil, Gilberte never atones for her cruelty towards her father. Swann had been under the illusion that after his death he would live on, thanks to his daughter: "C'est bon, ma chérie, d'avoir une fille comme toi; un jour, quand je ne serai plus là, si on parle encore de ton pauvre papa, ce sera seulement avec toi et à cause de toi" (IV,171). Little does he know that after he is gone Gilberte will finally be accepted into the Guermantes world where she will do everything in her power to repudiate and hide her Jewish origins and to silence all mention of her father's name. She is one of the richest heiresses of high society, and newspapers often write about her. When this happens, she asks to be called by her adoptive father's name, Mlle de Forcheville. In fact, her wish is to erase the name Swann from memory:

> La présence de Gilberte dans un salon au lieu d'être une occasion qu'on parlât encore quelquefois de son père était un obstacle à ce

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> qu'on saisît celles, de plus en plus rares, qu'on aurait pu avoir encore de le faire. Même à propos des mots qu'il avait dits, des objets qu'il avait donnés, on prit l'habitude de ne plus le nommer et celle qui aurait dû rajeunir sinon perpetuer sa mémoire, se trouva hâter et consommer l'oeuvre de la mort et de l'oubli. (IV,172)

Like Mélusine, who must hide the tail that reveals her true origins in the fairy world, so too must Gilberte hide the name of her progenitor. One of the ways she seeks to accomplish this is to sign her name G.S. Forcheville:

> La véritable hypocrisie dans cette signature était manifestée par la suppression bien moins des autres lettres du nom de Swann que celles du nom de Gilberte. En effet en réduisant le prénom innocent à un simple G, Mlle de Forcheville semblait insinuer à ses amis que la même amputation appliquée au nom de Swann n'était due aussi qu'à des motifs d'abréviation. Même elle donnait une importance particulière à l'S, et en faisait une sorte de <u>longue queue</u> qui venait barrer le G, mais qu'on sentait transitoire et destinée à disparaître comme celle qui, encore longue chez le singe, n'existe plus chez l'homme. (IV,167; emphasis added)

The final image suggests that Gilberte considers herself an evolved form that has long ago left behind a scorned ancestor. However, the long tail attached to the S, her father's initial, like a clue

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left by a careless criminal, links her to that ancestor. It also brings to mind Mélusine's endeavor to hide that part of herself – the tail marking her as something more than criminal – which would inevitably lead to her exclusion from the world she wishes to belong to. In fact, the "tail" that prefigures Mélusine, as well as the obfuscation concerning her name that Gilberte strives for, were inscribed long ago in the text of A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs, when the narrator, who had given up all hope of seeing Gilberte again, receives a letter from her announcing, completely unexpectedly and much like a miracle (I,491-492), that he will be allowed to visit after all. Her signature is hard to read in part because it ends with a prolonged "waving flourish." Françoise refuses to believe that the letter has come from Gilberte "parce que le G historié, appuyé sur un i sans point avait l'air d'un a, tandis que la dernière syllabe était indéfiniment prolongée à l'aide d'un paraphe dentelé" (I, 493). The future deformation of Gilberte's name is again anticipated two pages later in the description of the young woman's fancy writing paper where her initials or the letters of her name are scrambled illegibly in various shapes:

> ... [le] chiffre G.S., démesurément allongé en un rectangle qui tenait toute la hauteur de la feuille, ou encore du nom "Gilberte" tantôt tracé en

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> travers dans un coin en caractères dorés qui imitaient la signature de mon amie et finissaient par un paraphe , au-dessous d'un parapluie ouvert imprimé en noir, tantôt enfermé dans un monogramme en forme de chapeau chinois qui en contenait toutes les lettres en majuscules sans qu'il fût possible d'en distinguer une seule. (I, 495)

In a further example of the return of the repressed, the name that Gilberte has adopted, Forcheville, evokes interesting allusions. Mélusine's tail is almost always represented as bifurcated, and a *fourche*, originally written *forche*, signals bifurcation. According to the Petit Robert, the expression *la langue lui a fourché* means to say one word instead of another, a slip of the tongue. The adjective *fourchu* suggests a link to the devil who is represented with a forked foot. Proust, who knew enough English to work for years at translating Ruskin, may also have known some of the English connotations of the word 'forked.' For example, the expression 'to speak with a forked tongue', is exactly what Gilberte is engaging in, and often marks her mother's discourse. Indeed, Odette's tendency to lie, as well as her outright lies, are constantly brought to the reader's attention, and this trait which Gilberte has inherited from her mother links her to the maternal side that she is also ashamed of. This "mother-mark" is so

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strongly ingrained in Gilberte that even when telling the truth she appears to be lying:

> Souvent aux Champs-Elysées, j'avais été inquiet en voyant ce regard chez Gilberte. Mais la plupart du temps, c'était à tort. Car chez elle, survivance toute physique de sa mère, ce regard – celui-là du moins – ne correspondait plus à rien. C'est quand elle était allée à son cours, quand elle devait rentrer pour une leçon, que les pupilles de Gilberte exécutaient ce mouvement qui jadis en les yeux d'Odette était causé par la peur de révéler qu'elle avait reçu dans la journée un de ses amants ou qu'elle était pressée de se rendre à un rendez-vous. (I, 555)

After having claimed ignorance concerning her parents Gilberte says: "On a raconté beaucoup de choses très différentes sur ma naissance, moi je dois tout ignorer" (IV, 165). The narrator comments that Gilberte is ashamed of her mother even though she recognizes that Odette has been and is a good mother:

> Si honteuse que Gilberte dût être à certains instants en pensant à ses parents (car même Mme Swann représentait pour elle et était une bonne mère) d'une pareille façon d'envisager la vie, il faut malheureusement penser que les élements en étaient sans doute empruntés à ses parents, car nous ne nous faisons pas de toutes pièces nous-même. (IV, 165)

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Mlle Vinteuil, for her part, is unaware of the ways in which she resembles her parents, yet this resemblance is obvious to the voyeuristic narrator:

> Au moment où elle se voulait si différente de son père, ce qu'elle me rappelait c'était les façons de penser, de dire, du vieux professeur de piano. Bien plus que sa photographie, ce qu'elle profanait, ce qu'elle faisait servir à ses plaisirs mais qui restaient entre eux et elle et l'empêchait de les goûter directement, c'était la ressemblance de son visage, les yeux bleus de sa mère à lui qu'il lui avait transmis comme un bijou de famille, ces gestes d'amabilité qui interposaient entre le vice de Mlle Vinteuil et elle une phraséologie, une mentalité qui n'étaient pas faite pour lui et qui l'empêchait de la connaître comme quelque chose de très différent des nombreux devoirs de politesse auxquels elle se consacrait d'habitude. (I, 162)

Mlle Vinteuil and her friend do not continue their ritual of parental profanation throughout their relationship, which is one the most loving and faithful in the Recherche, second only to that of Marcel's abiding love for his mother and grandmother. The "smoldering" carnal relationship they once had is replaced by sisterly love, described thus in one of the preliminary versions: " Des jeux oubliés d'autrefois étaient née entre elles . . . une affection de deux soeurs, avec tout ce que l'abnégation, le désintéressement, la

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tendresse délicate, le respect, le dévouement au-delà de la mort peut faire fleurir . . . de plus saint" (I, 801). In this early version Mlle Vinteuil dies first, and her friend makes teary daily visits to the grave of father and daughter, thereby duplicating M. Vinteuil's painful daily visits to his wife's tomb. The final version finds the narrator in La prisonnière glancing back to the young women's conduct at Montjouvain reflecting upon how much they have now changed:

> Et sans doute la volupté de ce sacrilège, elles eussent dû se la refuser, mais celles-ci ne les exprimait pas toutes entières. Et d'ailleurs elles étaient allées se rarifiant jusqu'à disparaître tout à fait au fur et à mesure que ces relations charnelles et maladives, ce trouble et fumeux embrasement avit fait place à la flamme d'une amitié haute et pur. (III, 765-766)

What was once desecration in the "troubled, smoldering conflagration" of their love making has become a selfless devotion to one another and to the memory of M. Vinteuil. The desecration of the father is atoned for when Mlle Vinteuil's friend devotes her life to a laborious decipherment of the old musician's masterpiece, the septet, which without her efforts would have remained forever unknown:

> En passant des années à débrouiller le grimoire laissé par Vinteuil, en établissant la lecture certaine de ces hiéroglyphes inconnus, l'amie de Mlle

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> Vinteuil eut la consolation d'assurer au musicien dont elle avait assombri les dernières années, une gloire immortelle et compensatrice. (III, 766)

For the narrator the bringing to light of the septet through long years of devotion to the task marks the beginning of the revelation that redemption can be attained through art:

> C'était grâce à elle [Mlle Vinteuil's friend], par compensation, qu'avait pu venir jusqu'à moi l'étrange appel que je ne cesserais plus jamais d'entendre – comme la promesse qu'il existait autre chose, réalisable par l'art sans doute, que le néant que j'avais trouvé dans tous les plaisirs et dans l'amour même, et que si ma vie me semablait si vaine, du moins n'avait-elle pas tout accompli. (III, 767)

In the last section of the Recherche Marcel is deeply depressed and apathetic even to the beauties of nature: "Arbres . . . c'est avec froideur, avec ennui que mes yeux constatent la ligne qui sépare votre front lumineux de votre tronc d'ombre" (IV, 433). He thinks that he might as well indulge in frivolous pleasures since he does not really have it in himself to be a writer. In fact, after reading some of the Goncourt Journal he concludes that "la litérature ne révélait pas de vérité profonde" (IV, 287). All of this miraculously changes when on his way to the Guermantes he trips on some uneven paving stones.

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The uneven paving stones, the sound of a spoon clinking against a plate, and the stiffness of a napkin all constitute *moments bienheureux* which Roger Shattuck defines as moments "of pleasure caused by an involuntary memory."[76] The *moments bienheureux* during which the narrator is suffused with a sense of happiness help to convince Marcel of his literary vocation and, at the end of *Le temps retrouvé* he finally answers the étrange appel of the book that he has within him and that he resolves to write.

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Notes

[1] Viviane Forrester, "Marcel Proust: le texte de la mère," Tel Quel 78 (Winter 1980): 71.

[2] d'Arras 174.

[3] Harf-Lancner 178.

[4] Sylvie Roblin, "Le sanglier et la serpente: Geoffroy La Grant'Dent dans l'histoire des Lusignan," Métamorphose et Bestiaire Fantastique au Moyen Age, ed. Laurence Harf-Lancner (Paris, 1985)247.

[5] Roblin 253-254.

[6] See Harf-Lancner 177.

[7] Roblin observes : "La patte de lion est . . . l'emblème génétique de sa force, de sa noblesse, la marque préfigurative de sa future royauté. La tache velue 'comme le pel d'une taupe ou d'un fouiant' est l'avant signe concret de la vocation de Fromont: la taupe, l'animal de l'enfoui, du caché, des ténèbres souterraines, peut se transcrire en termes psychologiques et métaphysiques comme le symbole du goût du septième des Lusignan pour l'étude, la méditation et la contemplation religieuses. (Roblin, 252).

[8] d'Arras 254.

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[9] de Looze 128.

[10] d'Arras 99.

[11] In her prescience Mélusine at times seems able to direct or at least to influence the course of future events. Of course, there is also the possibility that she does not counsel mercy because she knows it will fail.

[12] See Roblin 258-261.

[13] d'Arras 295-296.

[14] d'Arras 249-250.

[15] d'Arras 228.

[16] See above page 197.

[17] d'Arras 23.

[18] d'Arras 270.

[19] d'Arras 245.

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[20] Coudrette does not mention the tower, but he does emphasize the sadism inherent in Geoffroy's act when he writes that Geoffroy was not only filled with rage and hate, but that he wanted to do evil, "faire le mal" as he piled wood and straw around the monastery (Coudrette, Le roman de Mélusine ou L'Histoire des Lusignan, Paris: Flammarion, 1993)97.

[21] d'Arras 247.

[22] d'Arras 247.

[23] Coudrette 117.

[24] d'Arras 266.

[25] Donald Maddox, "Configuring the Epilogue," Mélusine of Lusignan, 279.

[26] d'Arras 62.

[27] d'Arras 265.

[28] d'Arras 269.

[29] Marcel Proust, Contre Sainte-Beuve 276.

[30] Spiegel 112.

[31] Roblin 257.

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[32] Roblin 257.

[33] Roblin 260.

[34] d'Arras 26.

[35] d'Arras 24.

[36] d'Arras 24.

[37] d'Arras 25.

[38] Jean Markale, Mélusine ou l'androgyne (Paris: Editions Retz, 1983)29.

[39] Viti 5.

[40] Viti 10.

[41] Viti 10.

[42] Viti 31.

[43] Viti 7.

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[44] Le Goff 326.

[45] Le Goff 326.

[46] Claude Lecouteux, Mélusine ou le chevalier au cygne (Paris: Imago, 1997) 33.

[47] d'Arras 113-114.

[48] d'Arras 251-252.

[49] d'Arras 252.

[50] Marina Brownlee 234.

[51] d'Arras 26.

[52] d'Arras 27.

[53] d'Arras 254.

[54] d'Arras 261.

[55] We have seen in chapter 4 below Madame Amédée's distress when her husband accepts a few drops of cognac.

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[56] Michael Riffaterre, "The Intertexual Unconscious," Critical Inquiry 13.2 (1987): 376.

[57] Riffaterre, "The Intertextual Unconscious" 376-377.

[58] Qtd in Riffaterre in English.

[59] Riffaterre, "The Intertextual Unconscious" 378-379. See the entire article for the intersecting sacrilegious resemblances between the grandmother, the attendant and Madame de Villeparisis that Riffaterre uncovers.

[60] The "maternal Bible" is the term Elizabeth Ladenson uses for the letters of Madame de Sévigné in a fascinating and useful article questioning "the stability of the maternal discourse that she [Sévigné] comes to represent in the Recherche." Elizabeth Ladenson, "The Law of the Mother: Proust and Madame de Sévigné," Romanic Review 85.1 (19):94.

[61] Janet Gurkin Altman, "The Politics of Epistolary Art," A New History of French Literature, ed. Dennis Hollier (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1989) 421.

[62] Roger Duchêne, Introduction, Madame de Sévigné: Correspondance, 3 volumes. (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1972): viii.

[63] Ladenson, "The Law of the Mother" 101.

[64] Ladenson, "The Law of the Mother" 103.

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[65] Gilles Deleuze, Proust et les signes (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1970): 84.

[66] Ladenson, Proust's Lesbianism 115.

[67] Madame de Sévigné, Correspondance, (5 octobre 1673): II,594.

[68] In the novel Marcel's mother does not die.

[69] Leo Bersani, The Fictions of Life and Art (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965): 49.

[70] Qtd in Bersani 26.

[71] See page 179.

[72] Roblin 269.

[73] d'Arras 251.

[74] d'Arras 252.

[75] d'Arras 295-296.

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[76] Roger Shattuck, Proust's Binoculars (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983): 27.

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> Et sachiez que la pierre sur quoy elle passa a la fenestre y est encores, et y est la fourme du pié toute escripte.[1]

Conclusion

The image of Mélusine, so strikingly etched in key figures and episodes of the Recherche, bears ample testimony to the importance of the medieval romance as an inspiration and as a model for Proust when undertaking his novel. Let us now briefly look at some of the ways in which Mélusine is profiled in Albertine, who embodies all women,[2] and expand on other aspects of the Mélusinian narrative that resonate with Proust's own preoccupations, particularly the way in which that narrative questions the notion of truth.

We may recall the manner in which Mélusine departs from the castle of Lusignan just before her final metamorphosis. Leaping to the window in a gesture suggestive of flight, Mélusine immediately becomes a dragon but leaves the shape of her foot perfectly inscribed in the stone of the windowsill. D'Arras is careful to point out that the windowsill and the mark of Mélusine's foot are still there: "Apprenez

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que le rebord de la fenêtre par laquelle elle passa y est toujours, et que la trace de son pied s'y trouve gravée."[3] Kevin Brownlee observes that "the process of metamorphosis is contrastively linked with . . . the stasis of the footprint. The empty trace of the human body points towards the monstrous presence of the serpentine body, and vice versa".[4] Indeed, the footprint on the windowsill in d'Arras's beautiful formulation, "la fourme du pié toute escripte" functions as an image that evocatively captures Mélusine's story as a creature poised between two worlds who tries to master her ontological instability in an attempt to become fully human.

That the footprint is the last recorded mark of Melusine's desire is particularly poignant and significant, for it represents that part of her body which is most unstable, her forked tail, and most subject to negative interpretations which she attempts to erase from memory by leaving the permanent inscription of its human embodiment, her foot. This inscription is not exactly writing, but rather a recording of her story that insists on memory. One of Mélusine's greatest regrets is that masses will never be said in memory of her: "Si tu ne m'avais pas trahie. . . on aurait célébré comme il se doit des messes de commémoration pour moi."

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Eugene Vance points out that commemoration revitalizes or redeems what has become merely corporeal or deficient in the world or self. Recalling the words of Jesus as he breaks bread and exhorts his disciples: "This is my body, which is given to you; do this in remembrance of me."[5] As is true of most religions, Christianity is founded upon a theology of memory and on commemorative rituals. The piety of Mélusine's life and her wish to be remembered through the ritual of the commemorative mass, point to a Christian Mélusine, yet her tail is the sign of a demonic nature.[6] Moreover, Kevin Brownlee points out that Raymondin's characterization of Mélusine as "la meilleur et la plus loyal dame qui oncques nasquist" suggests a comparison to the Virgin Mother, thereby activating Mélusine's maternal and Christian sides: "après celle qui porta Nostre Createur."[7]

As we have seen throughout this study, d'Arras's and Coudrette's romances encode a radical undecidability of indeterminate categories. It is not possible to determine with absolute certainty Mélusine's gender identity or whether she is monstrous or human, Christian or demonic. The irresolvable contradictions of the romance that make it impossible to ever know the definitive truth of Mélusine. In the Recherche the frustrating impossibility of establishing a stable

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and definitive truth of the Other is conveyed with particular intensity in the figure of Albertine, the great love of the narrator's life.

The search for "the truth" in the Recherche is linked to Albertine's indeterminacies. Her unknowable alterity is in large part responsible for the narrator's voyeuristic and obsessive need to know everything about Albertine. Much ink has been spilled by commentators trying to pierce the mystery of the elusive young woman. In this way analysts of Proust replicate the narrator's compulsive and futile quest. Even the discovery and publication in 1987 of Grasset's new version of Albertine disparue[8] which places Albertine's death near Monjouvain, can not as some critics have argued, definitively unravel the enigma of Albertine. The old version states that: "Albertine avait été jetée par son cheval contre un arbre pendant une promenade." The Grasset edition adds: "qu'elle faisait au bord de la Vivonne." The narrator laments this new revelation:

> Ces mots: 'au bord de la Vivonne', ajoutaient quelque chose de plus atroce à mon désespoir. Car cette coïncidence qu'elle m'eût dit dans le petit trame qu'elle était l'amie de Mlle Vinteuil, et que l'endroit où elle était depuis qu'elle m'avait quitté et où elle avait trouvé la mort fût le voisinage de Montjouvain, cette coïncidence ne pouvait être fortuite, un éclair jaillissait entre ce Montjouvain raconté dans le chemin de fer et cette

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> Vivonne involontairement avouée dans le
> télégramme de Mme Bontemps.[9]

This alternative ending, as McGinnis points out, does not really prove anything: "Or, savoir la fuite d'Albertine 'du côté de Gomorrhe', ce n'est ni s'insinuer à Gomorrhe ni éclaircir la vérité sur sa vie. C'est savoir seulement que celle dont la vie est restée inconnue est morte du côté de l'inconnu."[10]

Albertine's unrelenting resistance to a decipherment of her desire lies at the crux of what Lamos calls an "epistemological failure and the deconstitution of sexual identity."[11]

In spite of or perhaps because of her opacity, Albertine also figures as a surrogate mother. In fact, she is one of the more obvious substitutes for the narrator's mother, "l'usurpatrice"[12] as Jean Milly calls her. The mother is profaned through Albertine to the extent that the young woman supplants Marcel's mother as an object of desire. Each night, when Albertine first comes to live in the narrator's house, Albertine "glissait dans ma bouche sa langue, comme un pain quotidien, comme un aliment nourrissant" (III,520). The "almost sacred" character attributed to the bread recalls the mother's goodnight kiss in Combray:

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> "Or de la voir fâchée détruisait tout le calme qu'elle m'avait apporté un instant avant, quand elle avait penché vers mon lit sa figure aimante, et me l'avait tendue comme une hôstie pour une communion de paix où mes lèvres puiseraient sa présence réelle et le pouvoir de m'endormir. (I, 13)

Moreover, the narrator explicitly says that Albertine's kiss evokes for him the night "où mon père envoya maman dans le petit lit à côté du mien" (III, 520). To have Albertine by his side every night has "un pouvoir d'apaisement tel que je n'en avais pas éprouvé de pareil depuis les soirs lointains de Combray où ma mère penché sur mon lit venait m'apporter le repos dans un baiser" (III, 585). The Recherche is rife with passages aligning the narrator's mistress with his mother. In Sodome et Gomorrhe IV he even associates the "unknown world" inhabited by Albertine with:

> . . .cette atmosphère hostile, inexplicable, comme celle qui montait jadis jusqu'à ma chambre Combray, de la salle à manger où j'entendais causer et rire avec les étrangers, dans le bruit des fourchettes, maman qui ne viendrait pas me dire bonsoir. (II, 505)

This allusive contextualization of the mother within the orbit of Albertine's putative homosexuality ("ce monde inconnu") is another way in which the mother is profaned through Albertine. Just as the

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narrator is excluded from Albertine's unknown world so is he excluded from his mother's other life when she can't make him the center of attention.

As a surrogate of the mother Albertine is an emphatically profanatory figure. She is at once a multiply divided creature, the object of the narrator's voyeuristic attempts to ferret out every last detail of her activities past and present and the lightening rod for his exorbitant jealousy

"Albertine's mobile desires" as Bowie observes "are the object of interminable speculation and analysis – of albertinage, as these irremediably anxious textual performances have been called" (emphasis in the original).[13] The narrator's obsessive quest to understand and to capture the truth of Albertine's mysterious past and her sexual inclinations is doomed to failure by the young woman's "unknowability" set against the backdrop of the unknowable Gomorrah to which she may or may not belong.[14] With Albertine confined in his apartment, Marcel undertakes an exhaustive investigation of her every move and thought in order to discover whether or not she really had a lesbian past and whether she still desires women. Albertine is spied upon, chaperoned, and questioned in minute detail, all to no avail. The

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inquisitional investigation continues even after her death, but the narrator can never be sure that any of his informants are really telling him the truth. Aimé, for example, has been dispatched to Nice whence he returns with proof of Albertine's lesbianism. He reports that a little laundress still has Albertine's teeth marks on her arm made during amorous play and that Albertine cried "Ah! Tu me mets aux anges" (IV, 106). Yet Marcel notes that Aimé might be lying in order to have something to show for the money he is being paid to investigate Albertine's past.[15]

It is impossible to locate Albertine's desires and to determine just where she belongs in the grand scheme of things. Albertine is introduced as a fragmentary part of a whole, as a seagull in a flock of gulls profiled against the sea at Balbec; and this extrahuman association of Albertine and birds is maintained throughout the Recherche. For example, Albertine's suffering caused by Marcel's imprisonment of her is described thus:

> C'est parce que je l'avais vue comme un oiseau mystérieux . . . que je l'avais trouvée merveilleuse. Une fois captif chez moi l'oiseau que j'avais vu un soir marcher à pas comptés sur la digue, entouré de la congrégation des autres jeunes filles pareilles à des mouettes venues on ne sait d'où, Albertine

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> avait perdu ses couleurs . . . . Elle avait peu à peu
> perdu sa beauté. (III, 678)

This ornithological attribution is evocative of Mélusine. If Albertine does not leave her footprint on the windowsill, she does, in spite of strict prohibitions, fling open the window on the eve of her escape from her stifling captivity: "Tout à coup, dans le silence de la nuit, je fus frappé par un bruit en apparence insignifiant mais qui me remplit de terreur, le bruit de la fenêtre d'Albertine qui s'ouvrait violemment" (III, 902). Moreover, after Albertine's flight Marcel takes care not to look at the pianola, for it is as though Albertine's foot is imprinted on its pedals, commemorating her sojourn in Marcel's apartment and her flight from it:

> Je me plaçais de façon à ne pas apercevoir . . . le pianola sur les pédales duquel elle appuyait ses mules d'or, un seul des objects dont elle avait usé et qui tous, dans le langage particulier que leur avaient enseigné mes souvenirs, semblaient vouloir me donner une traduction, une version différente, de m'annoncer une seconde fois la nouvelle, de son départ. (IV,14)

Further establishing the connection between Mélusine's and Albertine's leave-taking is Marcel's association of the noise made by Albertine opening the shutters and the funereal hoot of an owl: "Je

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continuai à penser comme à un présage plus mystérieux et plus funèbre qu'un cri de chouette, à ce bruit de la fenêtre qu'Albertine avait ouverte" (III, 903). In this instance we may recall Mélusine's "moult doulereux plaint" as she leaps to the window.

We know that like Mélusine, Albertine is an "être de fuite" and that she is deeply divided. Samuel Beckett speaks of Albertine's "pictoral multiplicity" that evolves into what he calls a plastic and moral multiplicity. These multiplicities "no longer a mere shifting superficies and an effect of the observer's angle of approach rather than the expression of an inward and active variety, but a multiplicity in depth."[16] Moreover, by virtue of belonging to "la bande zoophytique des jeunes filles" (II, 210), the flock of girl-seagulls, Albertine crosses the boundaries separating species,[17] which, of course, brings to mind Mélusine's own border crossings as a snake-woman. In an additional extrahuman capacity the Albertine zoophytique is also a girl-plant, one of the jeunes filles en fleurs. Zoophytes are those plant-animal or animal-plant organisms that dispute the strict separation of biological classes. As Bowie explains, zoophytes in Leibnitz's system were micro-organisms constituting an

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indeterminate species neither "plant nor fish; yet they also contain plants and fishes, but mostly so minute as to be imperceptible to us."[18]

Albertine and Mélusine as hybrid creatures are both êtres de fuite and as such impossible to domesticate. The narrative of the Roman de Mélusine may be said to attempt the domestication of the marvelous by bringing a supernatural being into the conventional world and by holding out the possibility that the fairy will be progressively humanized until she belongs entirely to our world. Thus, Mélusine would be bound within the confines of a narrative that purports to tell the truth of real events, regardless of how unbelievable they may seem.

From the very start of the narrative, d'Arras reveals that his sources are the "chroniques authentiques" from which his patron, Jean Duc du Berry, wants the "exacte vérité." Beginning at once to accomplish his master's bidding, d'Arras asserts in the exordium: "en vérité, j'ai composé ce récit le plus scupuleusement que je l'ai pu, en suivant les chroniques que j'estime être véridiques."[19] And while he may leave himself some room to maneuver here, he immediately adopts a slightly aggressive and subtly coercive stance towards those who might have their doubts, forcefully proclaiming his own faith in

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the truth of certain supernatural phenomena such as the penetration of our ordinary world by fairies. He then delivers to potential unbelievers a stern lecture, from which we shall quote at length because its message is pervasive throughout the tale and serves as a kind of chastoiement to the reader on the order of those that Mélusine delivers to her sons as she sends them out into the world:

> C'est pourquoi la créature ne doit pas s'efforcer, dans son outrecuidante présomption, de vouloir comprendre avec son intelligence les jugements et les actions divines. Qu'elle se contente d'y penser et de s'émerveiller, et qu'en s'émerveillant, elle apprenne à redouter et à glorifier Celui dont les décisions nous sont mystère.[20]

D'Arras invokes several authorities, such as the prophet David, Aristotle, Paul and Gervaise de Tilbury to vouch for the veracity of his "histoire,"[21] and repeatedly assures the reader in the exordium and in the epilogue that his tale tells only the truth. Moreover, he asserts that if the reader remains unconvinced of the text's truthfulness it is because the reader is ignorant. Yet, at the same time, d'Arras seems complicitous with the reader's skepticism, not simply by telling a fantastic tale, but also in his insistence that he is writing, if not a history, at least a true story, as opposed to a complete fiction.

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However, the truth of the story is consistently put into question. For example, in its least fantastical section the Roman de Mélusine lingers on the exploits of Mélusine's sons in the Near East, Armenia, Cyprus and other places, but falsifies the historical record of the conquest and governance of these lands. Emanuèle Baumgartner asserts that, since there were numerous available written accounts of these events, d'Arras must have been aware that he was not writing a true history, but rather an idealized and/or invented version of these historic episodes.[22]

D'Arras invokes God in the first and in the last sentence of his work, and often reminds us of God's mysterious ways in the course of the story. However much of a literary convention these invocations might be, the reader gets a sense of a genuine Christian faith pervading the narrative. Yet, the sincerity of the tone of the narrative is at odds with d'Arras's frequent assertions of truth-telling in instances where he is obviously not telling the truth. In defense of the veracity of his tale, d'Arras argues that it is presumptuous to question the mysterious ways of God. It is almost as though, while documenting the most implausible occurrences, d'Arras indulges in an authorial wink, confusingly and coercively accompanied by the

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assertion of God's mysterious ways, an argument that few would care to contradict. The juxtaposition of that wink and the seemingly sincere conviction that his story is true contributes to the many layers of ambiguity inherent in this text and to the suspicion that the author intends to subvert his own claims. On the other hand, what might be happening in the romance may be even more (post)modernly radical than the aporia about the author's conscious or unconscious intentions, in that it is now the work itself that has gotten away from its author in order to launch its own resistant ambiguity into a narrative that has been passed off as historical truth.

The closing words of the exordium express the author's wish to get right into his tale "parce que mon récit à pour object l'histoire de la fondation de la noble et puissante forteresse de Lusignan en Poitou, d'après la chronique précise et l'histoire authentique, sans y ajouter d'inventions ou de digressions (emphasis added).[23] Yet, as we have seen, he does invent.

The layers of ambiguity, whether conveyed by the words of protagonists or by the narrative itself evokes Proust's own extensive use of this device in the Recherche. Proust claimed in a letter to Jacques Rivière: "J'ai trouvé plus probe et plus délicat comme artiste

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de ne pas laisser voir, de ne pas annoncer que c'était justement à la recherche de la Vérité que je partais."[24] Lamos quotes Vincent Descombes answer to the question of why Proust engages in this deception: "la recherche de la vérité prend forcément la forme d'une peinture des erreurs." (emphasis in the original)[25] This assessment intersects with our own sense that the Recherche is radically opposed to the notion of Truth. Every protagonist, every relationship, every event and every interpretation may be turned on its head and reevaluated many times over. This challenge to veracity occurs in pivotal as well as in marginal episodes. In a minor scene Aimé's misreading of Charlus upon seeing the baron in a pissotière provides an example of the pervasiveness of the "peinture des erreurs". Charlus's distinctive yellow pants announce his presence in a public urinal where he is both secretly and openly performing homosexual acts. [26] Aimé believes that Charlus's prolonged stay in the urinal is due to a venereal disease contracted from women: "Voilà ce que c'est que d'être un vieux coureur de femmes" (III, 695). Misreadings such as Aimé's are intimately connected to latent and manifest processes of metamorphosis.

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For Edward J. Huges metamorphosis and related notions of misrecognition and incompetent vision are central to the Recherche.[27] Aimé's misreading of the signs entail a creative if erroneous act of transformation. Unable to "read" Charlus, Aimé transforms him from an aging gentleman cruising other men into a womanizer with a venereal disease. Let us give a few more examples of how small as well as cataclysmic mutations, all of them contingent upon "incompetent vision", crowd the pages of the Recherche. When dropped in a bowl full of water bits of paper believed to be shapeless become transformed into flowers, houses and people (I,47). Changes in society lead to a *déclassement* of the Guermantes: "Le faubourg Saint-Germain, comme une douairière gâteuse, ne répondait que par des sourires timides à des domestiques insolents qui envahissaient ses salons, buvaient son orangeade et lui présentaient leurs maîtresses (IV,535). The despised Bloch who used to make failed attempts to be accepted in high society is referred to in Le Temps retrouvé as "le Bloch Guermantes" and "le familier des Guermantes." Albertine is transformed into a hydra: "cette seule jeune fille étant comme une déesse à plusieurs têtes" (II, 660) when Marcel leans over to kiss her. Indeed, with the exception of Françoise, one would be hard pressed to

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find anything untouched by what Huges calls the "drama of metamorphosis"[28].

This drama often plays itself out in acts of misreading which are legion in the Recherche. Proust's essays on Ruskin address the issue of misreading specifically with respect to texts. Lamos observes that Proust's early writings are informed by "the commonplace ideas that reading is a mediated recollection of the author's thoughts, as the latter are transcribed in the written text. A faithful reading is true to the author's intentions and is, in effect, an act of homage that reanimates his meanings."[29] Proust admitted to idolizing Ruskin and the master's explicit instructions for reading demanded complete devotion entailing the reader's total identification and submission to the author.[30] Yet Proust finds himself doing the exact opposite of his stated goal of remembering Ruskin's work. Instead he forgets Ruskin. In the end he disavowed the master's authority and rejected his ideas on reading which had been the basis of his passion for Ruskin: "He ultimately implies that reading is as faithless and vacillating as love, and like love, inevitably betrays the object of its desire."[31] Yet repudiated ideas of Ruskin keep reappearing in Proust's works in a return of outlawed desire.

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Proust's idolatry of Ruskin and his attempts to disengage from Ruskin are reminiscent of the narrator's passionate love and profanation of his mother. We may recall that the worst kind of profanation is forgetting. But in fact, the mother is never forgotten and continues to reappear figured in her substitutes. Maternal surrogates as we have seen often serve as the repository for the narrator's hidden wish to defile the adored maman. The desecration of these representatives keeps her memory alive and ensures an indestructible union[32] between mother and son.

The inherent erotic relationship that subtends the bond between mother and son is paralleled in the Recherche's reading of Mélusine. The Mélusinian narrative is a covert intertext unlike "les livres modèles" such as Les mille et une nuits and Saint Simon's Mémoires,[33] which are often explicitly referred to in the Recherche. In the closing pages of the novel the narrator reflects on his favorite texts, such as the Mémoires and The Arabian Nights: "Sans doute, quand on est amoureux d'une oeuvre, on voudrait faire quelque chose de tout pareil, mais il faut sacrifier son amour du moment, ne pas penser à son goût, mais à une vérité qui ne vous demande pas vos préférences et vous défend d'y songer" (IV, 621). Proust's reading of

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Mélusine absorbs that narrative while adopting and transforming its tropes of ambiguity, voyeurism and profanation. The triple gestures of incorporation, reversal and projection reveal themselves through the ramifications of Mountjouvain and the pervasive voyeurism of the Recherche. The Roman de Mélusine's status as a hidden intertext as well as the ways in which Proust has adopted and adapted its plot and devices makes it one of the Recherche's most important *textes modèles.*

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Notes

[1] d'Arras 257.

[2] The narrator expresses his need for Albertine at his bedside "comme un maîtresse, comme une soeur, comme une fille, comme une mère." (III, 619).

[3] d'Arras 259.

[4] Kevin Brownlee 93.

[5] Eugene Vance, Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986): 52.

[6] Laurence de Looze is one of many commentators who stresses the connection between Mélusine's tail and the demonic: "A long tradition regards serpents necessarily as signifiers of evil, as though the bond between signifier and signified were not arbitrary and conventional but rather material." See de Looze 129.

[7] See Kevin Brownlee 85.

[8] Marcel Proust, Albertine Disparue. 1987. ed. Jean Milly (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1992).

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[9] Qtd in Reginald McGinnis, "L'inconnaissable Gomorrhe: A propos d'Albertine Disparue," Romanic Review 81.1, 1990: 100.

[10] McGinnis 101.

[11] Lamos 176.

[12] Jean Milly, Introduction, La Prisonnière, by Marcel Proust (Garnier Flammarion, 1984): 27.

[13] Malcolm Bowie, Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1987) 77.

[14] See Reginal McGinnis's article "L'inconnaissable Gomorrhe: A propos d'Albertine disparue."

[15] See Margaret Gray for a review of the unreliability of all of Marcel's informants on the question of Albertine's putative lesbianism, 98-102.

[16] Samuel Beckett, Proust (New York: Grove Press, 1957): 32.

[17] Bowie calls attention to the connection between Albertine and zoophytes in Proust Among the Stars 187.

[18] Qtd in Bowie Proust Among the Stars 187.

[19] d'Arras 13.

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[20] d'Arras 14.

[21] Parenthetically, let us not forget that L'Histoire des Lusignan is the alternative title for both Coudrette and d'Arras's work. See Michèle Perret, *postface*, Mélusine, by Jean d'Arras (Paris: Stock, 1979, 1991):320.

[22] Emmanuèle Baumgartner, "Fiction and History: The Cypriot Episode in Jean d'Arras's *Mélusine*," in Mélusine of Lusignan: Founding Fiction in Late Medieval France, eds. Donald Maddox and Sara Sturm-Maddox (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1996): 187.

[23] d'Arras 17.

[24] Lamos 170.

[25] Lamos 170, see Vincent Descombes, Proust: Philosophie du roman (Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1987) 12.

[26] Jarrod Hayes observes that when Charlus goes to public urinals for the purpose of homosexual encounters he is in effect "seen without being seen, seen performing a secret act without having that act revealed" because it is misinterpreted. To explain the length of time the baron spends in these urinals the maître d'hôtel proffers the interpretation that Charlus has an urinary infection: "Certainement M. le baron de Charlus a pris une maladie pour rester si longtemps dans une pistière" (III, 694): 992-993. See Jarrod Hayes, "Proust in the Tearoom," PMLA 110 (1995):992-1005.

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[27] Edward J. Huges, "Proustian Metamorphosis: The Art of Distortion in *À la recherche du temps perdu,*" Modern Language Review 94 (1999): 660.

[28] Huges 661.

[29] Lamos 181.

[30] Lamos 183.

[31] Lamos 181.

[32] These are Mme de Santeuil's words of reconciliation after the quarrel with her son.

[33] See Dominique Jullien, Proust et ses modèles: les Mille et Une Nuits et les Mémoires de Saint-Simon (Paris: José Corti, 1989).

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