

chapter one

The Kiss of Death:
Desire in the Garden of Good and Evil

I ought to have been happy; I was not. It struck me that my mother had just made a concession which must have been painful to her, that it was a first step down from the *ideal* that she had formed of me, and that for the first time she, with all her courage, had to confess herself beaten. It struck me that if I had just scored a victory it was over her; that I had succeeded, as sickness or sorrow or age might have succeeded, in relaxing her will, in altering her judgment; that this evening opened a new era, must remain a *black date in the calendar*.

—SW 29, my emphasis

A BLACK DATE IN THE CALENDAR

IN *A LA RECHERCHE DU TEMPS PERDU* (1922–27) Proust provides two case studies that usefully illustrate the theories of Otto Rank regarding the neurotic origins of the creative impulse. The first involves Marcel's long apprenticeship to art; the second foregrounds the career of the "old music master of Combray," Vinteuil. This Rankian reading of *A la Recherche* is driven by (and therefore must commence with) a series of questions: does Marcel's suffering constitute a "neurosis"? If neurosis is rooted in pathological fear, what is the fear from which Marcel suffers? Is there evidence in the narrative of a cause/effect relationship between neurosis and creativity?

As the aforementioned passage evinces, the reader need search no further in *The Search* than its inciting "action," than this "black date in the calendar" to discover evidence of the protean symbiosis between neurotic

conflict and the symbolic realm of invention—which either affords an escape from conflict, a means of objectifying it, or a means of escaping it by objectifying it.

The final six words of the aforementioned passage inform the origin of Marcel's conflict, even as they generate shock waves of meaning that resonate throughout *A la Recherche*. On the level of imagery, "date" and "calendar" metonymically reinforce the master trope of time, while "black" tropes on the darkness that lies at the very heart of Combray, and of the novel itself—concretized in the blackened bedroom, spiritualized in Marcel's neurotic fears. Further, "black" resonates with connotations of death: in this case, the death of innocence and joy, the death of the "ideal" self ("a first step down from the ideal she had formed of me"). This death of the ideal self in the "drame coucher" (good night kiss crisis) enervates the need to recuperate this self, prompting a search for its material counterparts in art, nature, nobility, love, and friendship. This outward search is, moreover, a surrogate for the real search: a quest for the means to liberate from within the self an ideal self, concretized under the sign of the "artist." The Search is nothing if not a struggle to recover an ideal self lost in this originary "black date in the calendar." This passage is not only an obituary for the death of Marcel's ideal self, but masks matricidal impulses that prefigure the death of the mother ("beaten," "a victory over her," "sickness or sorrow or age").

If "black date in the calendar" is an emblem of death, it is also signifies the darkness of birth. If on the one hand it conjures the tomb (and the tomb of the ideal), then on the other it evokes the womb: that mysterious neurotic darkness in which art is born. This "black date" connotes not only the death of an ideal self, but its rebirth through art as a direct consequence of the torment it spawns. It is altogether fitting, therefore, that a work that is nothing if not a bildungsroman of the artist commence with that "black date" on which the narrator's creative impulse is born, amidst the separation anxieties associated with the "good night kiss," which is for Marcel a "kiss of death," as well as a kiss of eternal life insofar as it signifies the death of an ideal self to profane desire and its redemptive rebirth to art.

The kiss, conferred in the darkness of night, is an ambivalent emblem of Marcel's "separation anxiety" and "merger hungry" personality. Consequently, it is invested at once with the savor of the profane and the sacred, of original sin and eternal salvation, of damnation and redemption, of oblivion and immortality. This ambivalent conflation of the profane and the sacred in the drama of the "good night kiss" inaugurates the pattern that conjoins vice and genius in works of art: *Francois le champi* (an allegory of incest), the magic lantern (an allegory of adultery), Vinteuil's sonata and septet (musical allegories of same-sex desire), Elstir's portrait of Odette (a courtesan), and Swann's association of a Botticelli with Odette. Throughout *Recherche*, genius is inseparable from vice: it is vice that humanizes genius, and genius

that redeems vice—in what comprises a dialectical exchange between higher and lower selves, in which the baseness of vice is superimposed with the redemptive virtue of genius, even as materiality is superimposed with spirituality throughout *Recherche*. An intent of this study is to identify and track these narrative patterns or progressions: in this case, the superimposition of vice with genius, of the material with the spiritual.

One cannot understand the fundamental meaning of *Recherche* without first understanding the manifold psychological implications of the “drame coucher.” The entire search arises from this inciting trauma, is rooted in its ambivalent material, is an effect of this protean crisis. The profane desire to “merge” with the maternal sublime that is thwarted here enervates the “merger hunger” that is futilely displaced onto the opposite sex (Gilberte, Albertine), and then onto same-sex relationships (Saint Loup, Charlus). The a priori desire that governs the self of The Search is a desire to surmount its own sexual differentiation: a desire repeatedly thwarted in reality until fulfilled on the illusory plane in art. The narrator’s deepest neurotic fears are associated with the “drame coucher”: a fear grounded in Absence, an anxiety associated with separation from the beloved, and which establishes the pattern of separation anxiety for every love affair in the novel.

THE GARDEN OF ORIGINAL SIN:
THE GUEST WHO CAME TO DINNER

If the Guermentes way is associated with the suffering of Marcel’s separation anxiety (insofar as it keeps him afield too late to be kissed good night), then the Méséglise way is similarly a topos of sorrow by virtue of its association with Swann, whose presence at the dinner table compounds Marcel’s separation anxiety. As Gilles Deleuze observes in *Proust and Signs* (1972), “[I]t is [Swann] who, from the start, possesses the law of the series or the secret of the progression, and confides it to the hero in a ‘prophetic admonition’: the beloved as Captive”:

We may locate the origins of this series in the hero’s love for his mother; but here too we encounter Swann, who by coming to Combray to dine deprives the child of the maternal presence. And the anguish the hero suffers over his mother is already the anguish Odette caused Swann himself. (69–70)

Marcel blames Swann for diminishing his pleasure by having to “snatch” his kiss in front of others (18). As Harold Moss observes in *The Magic Lantern of Marcel Proust* (1962), “Swann’s ringing of the garden gate bell . . . carries the sound of doom to Marcel” (21).

Swann’s penetration of this Edenic childhood garden resonates with multiple meanings. It prefigures a type of romantic suffering that pervades the entire work, establishing the primacy of the beloved’s absence over her

presence in arousing desire. As Moss avers, “[I]t is the enigmatic nature of woman, it is the torture of her absence rather than the pleasure of her presence, that constitutes the clue to passion” (52). Whereas other writers spill volumes of ink upon the beloved’s presence, it is his or her absence (and the psychological effects of it) that concerns Proust. The most deterministic of these effects is the enervation of desire. No absence, no desire. Absence is the deterministic, if ironic, precondition for the presence of desire. Indeed, the beloved’s habitual presence is an impediment to desire insofar as it inhibits the imagination’s production of fear and jealousy, upon which desire feeds.

Proustian desire is neurotic in nature insofar as it foregrounds the sorrows of separation anxiety. More significantly, this neurotic anguish stimulates the creative impulse indirectly by enervating the jealous imagination, whose hyperactivity stimulates the growth of the creative imagination. Further, the need to cope with the romantic wounds of the material world prompts Marcel’s turn away from the material to the immaterial, as a means of satisfying his idealizing desire. This leads directly to the first works of his idealizing imagination: a Norman gothic Balbec church, a Turneresque Normandy coastline, Berma’s reinscription of the classic Greek ideal in *Phedre*, Ruskin’s Venice, or the feudal sublime embodied in the names of Geneviève de Brabant and Guermantes. The real is supplanted by the ideal, which in turn seeks to superimpose itself upon the real—in vain, until the ideal and the real are reunited in the end through involuntary memory, their merger eternalized in a work of art whose principal aim and most salutary effect is to gratify the “merger hunger” of a disordered self. Pain in the material world induces Marcel to search for pleasure in the realm of the symbolic, prompts the inward turn into the self, which evolves into an epic struggle to liberate from within itself that creative self which alone can eternalize the mother, can justify the sacrifice of the mother to art, can unite both mother and son in an immortal embrace that gratifies forever the “merger hunger” of the soul. All prisoners in *Recherche* are surrogates for the ideal self imprisoned within itself: Geneviève imprisoned in her tower, the female imprisoned within Charlus, the lost selves of Marcel imprisoned in the petites madeleines, the steeples of Martinville, and the trees of Hudimesnil, etc.

Every date in the calendar of *The Search* reinscribes this first “black date in the calendar” of Marcel’s soul—bears the dark imprint, the neurotic fingerprint of this original sin. The “drame coucher” casts a spiritual shadow over the narrative landscape of *Recherche*, which not even the luminosity of St. Hilaire’s stained glass windows or the pastoral brilliance of the hawthorns can entirely efface. That distinction is reserved for the final transfiguration, into whose redemptive light this spiritual darkness is finally absorbed.

The “drame coucher” initiates another narrative progression. The primacy of the absent mother prefigures Swann’s fixation with an absent Odette and Marcel’s own obsession with an absent Albertine—as well as his fixations

with an absent Balbec and an absent Venice. His preoccupation with the absent is both an effect and a cause of Marcel's diseased imagination, of the "disease of the ideal" (Moss 49). Doubrovsky underscores the deterministic influence of the mother's "presence/absence [which] gives rhythm to the fullness/emptiness of the vital flux, determines the sequence of ecstasy/anguish, repletion/depression pinpointed in Combray I and infinitely repeated in the narrator's life. There is no mode of existence other than this legacy of early childhood" (19). The absent/present binary produces the bind and inflicts the wound that incites *The Search*, which culminates seven volumes later in *The Word*. Again, Doubrovsky's comments are instructive: "By a rigorous law, if the Other's continual presence determines absence to yourself, presence to yourself demands the Other's eternal absence—without whom, however, it is impossible to be yourself" (23). The solution to this double bind is to "become your own mother" by mothering a child in the form of art: "[W]hat is not possible in the real is executed in the imaginary, through art" (30). The anguish of a maternal absence agitates the imagination, which converts the absence into a presence on the plane of illusion. The neurotic effect of separation anxiety is the true mother of Marcel's invention.

The "merger hunger" that is thwarted by the mother is not only displaced onto heterosexual loves and same-sex friendships, but onto people, places, and things as well. This is evidenced by Marcel's need to merge the ideal and the real in Berma and the Guermantes, in Balbec church and in an erotic-artistic Venice. As Moss observes, this ideal self is "half a metaphor constantly searching for its relevant image" (54). The desire to have the ideal self mirrored in the mother, when thwarted, engenders a search for Others that mirror the ideal self (Saint Loup, Bergotte, Vinteuil) or for objects that personify this self (the petite madeleines, the Martinville steeples, the Hudimesnil trees). The desire for these privileged Others betrays yet another aspect of Marcel's diseased self: the "mirror-hungry personality" (Kohut 378). In *The Search for the Self*, Kohut defines this manifestation of the disordered self as follows: "[T]he mirror-hungry personalities thirst for selfobjects whose confirming and admiring responses will nourish their famished self" (378). Marcel's personality bears resemblance to yet another type of the disordered self: the "ideal-hungry personality" which "is forever in search of others whom [it] can admire for their prestige, power, beauty, intelligence, or moral stature" (378). As Marcel's career evidences, his disordered self seems to be a compendium of three disparate, yet overlapping personality types: the "merger-hungry," the "mirror-hungry," and the "ideal-hungry," which are in play throughout *The Search*, but which are particularly asserted during the "privileged moments."

Swann's penetration of Aunt Leonie's garden is the worm of sorrow that penetrates the apple of innocence, the serpent that corrupts the lovers in the Edenic garden with the promise of knowledge, in which Swann's rhetorical seduction of the mother through art replicates the serpent's seduction of Eve.

Aunt Leonie's garden is not merely a trope for the Edenic childhood garden of "perpetual springtime" (Moss 20); it is as well an emblem for the Edenic garden of "original sin": of the eternal corruption of love and happiness by the penetration of sin and sorrow. Leonie's garden is a topos of corrupted innocence, of exile into damnation and mortality.

The dining room is the first topos of forbidden desire and the possessive jealousy it breeds. It is a precursor of Montjouvain, the bathhouses of Sapphic love, and the sensuous streets of Venice: all as "desirable and hostile as the dining room that prevented the narrator's mother from kissing her son in Combray. There are sons who love their mothers (and mothers who love their sons) like the Gormorrheans" (Kristeva 76). It is alas that "garden from which a child is expelled" (Moss 21) that is invested with the melancholy enchantment of a paradise lost, for which the exiled sinner vainly seeks surrogates in the real world and which he finally repossesses through art.

Marcel's obsessive surveillance of the beloved, as well as the nature of the suffering he endures, foreshadows the sorrows of Swann during his love for Odette—establishing a correspondence between Marcel and his older double, here given an ironic twist by Swann's sorrow-inducing presence in the garden of the maternal sublime. As Moss writes,

[H]e becomes a spy, the watcher whose beloved object is kept under surveillance until what he must irrationally possess becomes his . . . here we have all the precipitating emotions that will determine Marcel's emotional life. Since there is no security in a possession based on anxiety, the act must be repeated over and over again. Love is not a choice but a desperate reassurance, and the greatest power such a love has is the cessation of anxiety. The repetition of this ritual is the psychological key to the character of Marcel, in which suffering and love are inextricably bound. (22)

Swann's sorrow over Odette is a metonym for Marcel's agonies over the mother and Albertine, in what constitutes a tripartite development of the neurotic suffering associated with separation anxiety that spans seven volumes. Marcel's desire for the mother is replicated in his desire for the Other, which repeats the separation anxiety of the good night kiss tableau. As Moss avers, maternal "love itself is a disease psychic in origin . . . the pervasive maternal fog through which he sees all sexual relations" (48). The profane desire of the mother-son dyad, and the pathology of the self associated with it, produces acute symptoms, not the least of which is the "disease of the ideal" rooted in Marcel's imagination (49), which in turn incites his errant, Quixote-like quest for a paradise of the ideal to replace that from which he is exiled in childhood by his sense of maternal abandonment: the one fact of life he can neither alter nor accept.

Moss develops the implications of "the garden," observing that it is not only an image of paradise lost, but of paradise regained, not only of dispos-

session but of repossession, not only of exile but of salvation, not only of that which is fugitive but of that which is enduring. It is a trope for the garden of the maternal sublime, for the garden of youth and beauty, for the garden of profane desire, for the garden of a flowering intellect, for the garden of the aristocratic sublime, and finally for the Edenic garden of art that subsumes them all, and beside which the gardens of friendship, love, and society devolve into counterfeit gardens.

The garden of Aunt Leonie, as with the Garden of Eden, is a terrain of innocent felicity corrupted by desire into a topos of suffering. As with Eden, knowledge is invested with the power to damn: in this case, it is the knowledge Marcel gains of Swann's sorrows that seemingly induces his own. Later, he will attribute his suffering for Albertine to the knowledge he acquired of Sapphic desire at Montjouvain—as if Marcel's original sin was not the practice of profane desire, but the mere knowledge of it. He plucks the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge that is the tale of Swann's profane desire for a courtesan: a tale that deeply informs his profane desire for the mother insofar as it too recounts the sorrows associated with separation from the beloved: knowledge that comes to him in his own garden. The apple that is pastoral Combray, that is Marcel's family, that is youthful innocence is corrupted by the two-headed worm of profane desire or the knowledge of it. As Moss affirms, "[T]he relationship of Swann and Odette is the nourishing soil from which the emblematic tree of Marcel's life is to spring" (23). If Marcel's profane desire is the "original sin" of *Recherche*, then knowledge of profane desire is the "mortal sin," as evidenced by the near mortal effects it has upon Swann and Marcel respectively. Yet, the narrator's confession of incestuous desire in the novel is merely a transposition of the novelist's need to confess not only his knowledge, but his practice of homoerotic desires (a point I will develop at greater length in the next chapter).

Swann's amorous sufferings, more than his artistic sensibilities, are what he bequeaths to Marcel—and comprise (along with the maternal curse of the good night kiss) the source of the novel's determinism. In her penetrating work of Proustian criticism, *Time and Sense* (1996), Julia Kristeva observes that "out of Swann's excessive presence and his intrusive being (rather than through the photographs of Giotto paintings he generously gives the narrator . . .), an imagination, and therefore a narrator, is created" (23). The incestuous jealousy Swann incites in the narrator, by actuating his imagination, does far more to launch the careers of Marcel-the-lover and Marcel-the-artist than the narrator's mere perusal of masterpieces. For it is Swann "who ruins your evenings and leaves you all alone in your bedroom, torn between your desire to see your mother and the shame you would feel," as if the essence of that desire was discovered by he who has thwarted it. Kristeva continues: the narrator "could not have created his art without the sort of primordial suffering induced by Swann's actions," for "once the incisive imaginary is awakened, love becomes lethal, and jealousy becomes fiction" (22, 26).

This “black date in the calendar” signifies the conception of Marcel’s creative soul, birthed in the psychic blood of separation anxiety. It connotes as well the birthday of his creative imagination, even if it is usurped by jealousy. No matter: the Icarian flight to the realm of the ideal (a realm of pure imagination) has been triggered. Psychic wings are flapping in the nest, animated by an epic migratory impulse.

The object of Marcel’s desire is inherently fugitive, even when being kissed, which affords no “clearer idea of the taste of the rose of his desire” (979). Every attempt to possess the Other not only reinforces the Other’s independence, but intensifies the self’s dependence upon the Other. Possessive desire commences by seeking to increase the dependence of the Other upon the self, but ends by achieving the precise opposite: the increased dependence of the self upon the Other. Possessive desire defeats its own purpose—perhaps because its hidden agenda is not possession of the Other, but of the self; its real objective is not communion with the Other, but to either convert the Other into a function of the self, or to use the Other’s rejection of the self as a further impetus to self-assertion through a deeper engagement of the self with the self. In either case (the fulfillment or the frustration of possessive desire), the effect is the same: the narcissistic assertion of the self.

The fall into the abyss of profane and possessive desire is, however, a fortunate fall for Marcel insofar as it awakens his creative imagination. And to the extent Marcel is Proust, perhaps those sufferings were willed, whether consciously or unconsciously, in an instinctive effort to awaken the ideal (artistic) self from its inward slumber. Perhaps here we discover as well the reason Marcel/Proust begins his narrative hovering in a realm of twilight psychology between wakefulness and sleep: an allegory, perhaps, of the artist who until this moment has slept (albeit fitfully) deep within the self. It is Absence that converts the absence of this ideal (creative) self into a presence: the absence of the beloved. This awakening of Marcel’s imagination by desire is evidenced when he describes the “inconceivable, infernal scene of gaiety in the thick of which we had been imagining swarms of enemies, perverse and seductive, beguiling away from us, even making laugh at us, the woman whom we love” (SW 24). Marcel’s yearning for the good night kiss is encoded with incestuous desire, as is the madeleine-flavored tea, which is “capable of awakening insatiable desires when placed on the tongue. And then the narrator discovers the forbidden pleasure of the mother’s kiss” (Kristeva 11). When coupled to the allegory of incest in *Francois le champi* that his mother reads to him, Marcel’s profane pleasure is redoubled—as is his subsequent guilt for thus profaning the maternal sublime. As Kristeva observes, a direct line can be traced from the madeleine to the “drame coucher”: “[T]he ‘madeleine episode’ . . . openly invites us to restore the oral bond that attaches the narrator to a loved woman, who must nevertheless remain indifferent to him [and to his desire]” (13). The episodes of the

madeleine, the “drame coucher,” and *Francois le champi* are all metafictionalizations of profane desire—as is Montjouvain.

Does the episode of the madeleine connote an erotic, incestuous desire to restore the “oral bond” with the mother? Is the illicit desire embedded in the tea-dipped madeleine brought to the lips merely a precursor of the illicit desires that underlie the good night kiss: to taste with the lips a forbidden maternal sexuality? The terrain of Combray is pervaded by the “oral disturbance around Mamma awakening desire and marked by readings performed and kisses sometimes withheld” (Kristeva 21). The symbiotic coupling of vice and genius is established early in the good night kiss tableau. There are undeniable oedipal overtones of incest in the narrator’s love (and physical desire) for his mother, but to assert that a sublimated incestuous impulse is the sole source of his creative urge is to egregiously oversimplify the origins of creativity. It is not merely the repressed incestuous impulse, but the neurosis of separation anxiety associated with it that here informs the origins of the creative urge—and this it does in conjunction with a host of other factors. The will to form, the desire to eternalize the soul, to replace what has been lost, to free oneself from the oppressive effects of the creative urge itself are equally responsible for artistic production in general, and for the evolution of this work of art in particular.

Indeed, *Recherche* is not merely the developmental paradigm of an artist’s initiation to art, but of a lover’s initiation to those “cruel mysteries” whose unbearable pain becomes not only the object of his art, but the primary cause of it—providing not only the material but the necessity for it. This too is immanent in the good night kiss, for the sweetness of that kiss has about it the savor of death: by virtue of the sorrows it incites, the separation it interrupts, and the innocence it ends.

THE AGONY OF THE ECSTASY: THE SORROWS OF SEPARATION ANXIETY

In order to determine the relevance of a Rankian reading of *Recherche* it is first necessary to answer a fundamental question: does Marcel’s suffering rise to the level of neurosis? The drama of the good night kiss suggests that it does. Further, it establishes the symbiosis between neurosis and creativity, as evidenced by the enervation of Marcel’s “novelizing imagination” (Shattuck 77): a significant symptom of his pathology of the self. His own words repeatedly and poignantly evidence the morbid nature of his suffering and the root cause of it. He confides that the dining room that keeps his mother from him is the cause of his “mortal sadness” (SW 23) because of the pleasures she is experiencing, and from which he is “far away”: a phrase that captures his sense of exile from the maternal sublime, and which contributes to his keen sense of maternal abandonment. The agony induced by his longing for the

kiss is heightened by his fear that this “contrivance would make me ridiculous in Swann’s eyes,” and is surpassed only by the guilt that follows it.

Marcel’s own words betray the violence of his torment, which he describes as “the agony through which I had just passed.” Moreover, this “agony” is posited as the inevitable byproduct of all possessive love, not just the maternal, as evidenced by the fact the narrator equates it with “a similar anguish (that) had been the bane of [Swann’s] life for many years.” He continues:

[A]nd noone perhaps could have understood my feelings at that moment so well as himself; to him, that anguish which lies in knowing that the creature one adores is in some place of enjoyment where oneself is not and cannot follow—to him that anguish came through Love, to which it is in a sense predestined. (SW 23)

He speaks, for example, of the “hours of anguish which I should have to spend, that evening, alone in my room, without the possibility of going to sleep,” and of the “terrifying abyss that yawned at my feet” (SW 19). He writes of the “hateful staircase” he must climb, unknissed, as if to a dungeon or to a tower cell (21), and which reeks of a “special quality of sorrow,” rendering it even “more cruel to my sensibility” (22). He speaks of an “anguish” that is “insidious and brutal . . . poisonous” (22): as toxic as the fresh varnish that invades his nostrils and lungs. Proust’s imagery, filtered through Marcel’s self-reflexive discourse, reinforces the morbid nature of his suffering. He turns down the covers of his bed, as if digging “my own grave,” and compares his nightshirt to a “shroud”: images of death that reinforce the association of the kiss with death, which indeed make it a kiss of death. He speaks of “burying” himself in his “iron bed” and resorts to the stratagem of a “condemned prisoner.” These images of morbidity underscore the neurotic nature of Marcel’s conflict, even as they reinforce associations with the image of Geneviève de Brabant imprisoned in her feudal tower.

The solace of the magic lantern projections prefigures the psychic turn from the material to the immaterial realm, from the fleshly sorrows of the good night kiss to the idealizing adjustments of the imagination, which will invest the world of *Recherche* with its own fanciful projections from Paris to Normandy to Venice. Marcel’s bedroom, awash in the fanciful projections of the magic lantern, becomes a surrogate topos for the creative self, as yet imprisoned within the self. This and “the little room at the top of the house” become his places of refuge, reserved for “reading or dreaming, secret tears or paroxysms of desire” (SW 10). Marcel’s words evidence the fact that neurosis is the first master to which the creative imagination apprentices itself.

His imagination is fixated by those “inaccessible and torturing hours into which she has gone to taste of unknown pleasures” (24), a form of initiation into those “cruel mysteries,” as a consequence of which his “heart began to beat more and more painfully as I increased my agitation, as I

ordered myself to remain calm and to acquiesce in my misfortune" (25). Fears of maternal abandonment are as central to the birth of Marcel's creative imagination as fears of eternal damnation are in the birth of Stephen Dedalus's imagination. Both protagonists are plunged into a psychic hell of suffering that destabilizes the self in the act of fixating it, enervating the need to escape from the self into the illusory realms of the imagination. By objectifying a part of the self, art enables the remainder to cope with its neurotic imprisonment, which is no longer absolute inasmuch as it no longer totalizes the self. Art reduces neurosis from a totalizing to a partializing phenomenon with respect to the self—leaves a portion of the self to itself, and this difference makes all the difference in the world to the self: is the difference between madness and sanity, disease and health, mortality and immortality, self-destruction and self-regeneration. A touch of madness is beneficial to genius, which is enervated by it.

The good night kiss meta-drama also establishes the remedial effects of writing for Marcel, and by implication for the neurotic artist in general. Writing (the note he pens to his mother, and delivers through Françoise) converts her absence into a presence. Further, writing objectifies the sublimated desire to be the fixated object of the maternal gaze. It satisfies the "mirror-hungry" needs of the disordered self. If his physical being is denied the narcissistic pleasure of being the object of his mother's attention, then writing will, if only for a moment, bring the idea of him before the maternal gaze. The note Françoise delivers to his mother also reinscribes those urgent messages a lover sends via a servant to his beloved sequestered in a salon to which he has not been invited. It anticipates the desperate dispatches Marcel sends via Saint Loup to Albertine after her escape. The word is not passive, but protean: capable of projecting the self outside itself, of extending its domain beyond the boundaries of its own imprisoning flesh, of imposing its will upon the material world, of converting sorrow into joy and anxiety into repose. The word temporarily bridges the abyss between self and Other, as it will affect the eternal conjunction of mother and son in art. As an objectification of the self, the written word enacts the profane will of the self, insofar as each word will "pour into my intoxicated heart the gushing sweetness of mamma's attention while she was reading what I had written" (SW 23). This boyhood moment anticipates those dreamed of moments in adulthood when Marcel hopes she will be able to read "what I had written": a hope that will remain unfulfilled as long as the mother lives, insofar as she thwarts the impulse toward independence without which no artistic work can be achieved.

Writing consummates Marcel's profane desire for the mother. Writing is not only conscripted by desire, but consummates and consecrates it. The ideal self is corrupted by the profane self. Writing is a surrogate for possession insofar as it fixates the maternal gaze upon the abstracted self. Eventually, writing will liberate the ideal self from the profane self, by which it is profaned here,

atoning for the sins of the profane self. The sadism of the profane self is purged by the figurations of an ideal self, as the sins of the son are expunged by the redemptive deeds of the artist. Each written word has for Marcel the redemptive power of a bead on a rosary. And *Recherche* is nothing if not a vast rosary that loops upon itself, a seventeen-year penance for sins committed against the maternal sublime, for the original sin of profanation which becomes for mother and artist alike a mortal sin, that contributes not only to the death, but to the immortality of each. *Recherche* is the eternal garden that the banished lovers (in this case, Marcel and his mother) regain through the redemptive power of the written word.

The written word produces the desired results: “[N]ow I was no longer separated from her” (23). Writing solves, if only temporarily, the central problem of his existence insofar as it effaces his separation from the mother. It replicates the ephemeral joining of the two-in-one enacted in the good-night kiss. The word is a silken rope dipped in enchanted ink, lowered from the prison tower of his bedroom to the enchanted garden of the maternal sublime. Mother and son are temporarily united in a chain of signification—or, as Marcel states, “an exquisite thread was binding us” (SW 23): an emotional and psychic surrogate for the severed umbilical cord. He fashions an umbilical cord of ink. Ink, for Marcel is the “mother’s milk” that restores the pre-*oedipal*, two-in-one symbiosis.

Significantly, writing becomes the vehicle not only for the resolution of neurotic conflict, but the means by which the maternal is first profaned, initiating the conjunction of vice and genius that recurs throughout *Recherche*. The longed-for kiss alas confers no pleasure because it “lasted too short a time,” producing instead “the keenest sorrow” (SW 10). The tyranny of the transient haunts Marcel, even as the mother’s presence is overshadowed by the awareness that some day she must die, is subsumed by the specter of maternal abandonment. Marcel speaks of his “wretchedness and agitation” (10). Instead of relieving his anxiety, the mother’s kiss inaugurates a new round of suffering, induced by his acute sense of guilt. Marcel speaks of the “grave consequences” that “could follow only some really shameful fault” (SW 25). He speaks of the “anguish of mind” (25), of his “transgressions,” the “rigor of punishment,” comparing his behavior to “the same category as certain other sins for which I had been severely chastised, though infinitely more serious than they”; “I should not be allowed to stay in the house a day longer . . . so much was certain.” As evidenced by his pangs of conscience, Marcel’s crime is his punishment, the morbid cruelty of which anticipates the wounds inflicted by the sorrows of Sapphic desire: “Had I been obliged . . . to hurl myself out the window, I should still have preferred such a fate” (26):

My heart was beating so violently that I could hardly move, but at least it was throbbing no longer with anxiety, but with terror and joy. . . . I threw

myself upon her . . . then her face assumed an expression of anger. She said not a single word to me; and for that matter, I used to go for days on end not being spoken to, for far less offense than this . . . a sin so deadly that I was waiting to be banished from the household . . . [h]ow wretched I was every evening. (27)

Marcel's guilt activates sado-masochistic impulses whose cruelties are directed outward toward the mother and inward at the self. As Deleuze asserts, "Freud assigned two fundamental anxieties in relation to the law [of love]: aggression against the beloved involves . . . a threat of the loss of love, and . . . a guilt caused by turning that aggression against the self. . . . Now, in Proust the theme of guilt remains superficial, social rather than moral, projected upon others rather than internalized in the narrator . . ." (126). I would argue that Marcel's guilt is both internalized and socialized. A sadistic impulse that commences with the personal and familial becomes social, finds its resonance in a social cruelty that is pervasive, which is institutionalized in the salons of the Faubourg St. Germaine, and in the salon of Mme Verdurin in particular. The sadistic impulse that is displaced across a spectrum of characters, from Françoise to Charlus, that pervades every social class in *Recherche*, is but the flip side of a cruelty directed at the self. This dream of social sadism mirrors the narrator's personal nightmare of sado-masochistic impulses inscribed in the rural "salon" of Combray: in the snobbery of Legrandin, in the middle-class snobbery of the narrator's family toward Swann, in the social banishment of Vinteuil, and in Françoise's overt sadism toward the chickens she strangles and the maid she persecutes (Giotto's Charity). If Marcel's willingness to profane the mother betrays a sadistic impulse, the even greater willingness to inflict pain upon himself underscores a masochistic impulse. The introduction of sado-masochistic tendencies in the "drame coucher" anticipates Proust's novel development of these impulses in other characters (Mlle Vinteuil and Charlus), which culminates in the meta-drama of Merovingian masochism mounted in Jupien's brothel.

As the one thing "upon which all his security and well-being depend" (Moss 21), the good night kiss exercises a disproportionate and deterministic influence over Marcel. His own words underscore the fugitive nature of felicity: "I ought to have been happy; I was not." The good night kiss simultaneously signifies the consummation and the frustration of Marcel's desire. The knowledge that he has profaned the object of his desire in order to obtain it, ruins his pleasure. To satisfy the desires of a profane self he has forever tarnished his ideal self: in his eyes, and worse, in his mother's. Hence, the narrator's accurate identification of himself with Golo, the cruel husband of Geneviève de Brabant, who plays the beloved false, and who rides fantastic circles about Marcel's tormented head, like an astral projection of his own sadistic impulse. Marcel's soul vacillates between Geneviève and

Golo, identifying now with the falsely imprisoned personification of the feudal ideal, now with the sequestering sadism of her mobile lover. As Moss notes, even these seemingly benign childhood memories (the magic lantern, *Francois le champi*) “contain a sexual secret” (Moss 54–55).

They comment on Proust’s genius as well, adding an allegorical meaning that enriches the literal content of the “drame coucher.” To the extent this medieval marriage is blighted by the specter of adultery it prefigures the real marriage of the Duc and Duchess de Guermantes (the feudal descendants of Golo and Geneviève). What is less apparent, but perhaps more significant, is that this feudal couple comments as well on the love of Marcel and his mother. A direct correspondence is established between his mother and Geneviève when he writes that the amorous “misfortunes of Geneviève de Brabant had made [his mother] all the dearer to me, just as the crimes of Golo had driven me to a more than ordinarily scrupulous examination of my own conscience” (SW 9). Why? Because of the manner in which he profanes his mother’s love: by using his asthma to arouse her pity, by lying to secure a kiss, and perhaps by committing in adulthood, not the sin of adultery, but the even greater sin of homosexuality. As Marcel reveals in *Cities of the Plain*, he suffers the same pangs of conscience as that “race upon which a curse weighs and which must live amid falsehood and perjury . . . sons without a mother, to whom they are obliged to lie all her life long and even in the hour when they close her dying eyes” (CP 13).

The mother’s kiss is not only fulfillment of a profane wish, but the product of a son’s manipulation. Consequently, it leaves a bitter taste on the lips of his memory. As Moss observes “this ‘involuntary’ kiss seals Marcel’s fate” by redoubling his sorrows: “[I]n ridding himself of one anxiety, he inherits others.” Marcel’s victory in this contest of wills comes with a terrible price insofar as it renews the cycle of sorrow. As Kristeva avers, “[F]rom the outset, this love was marked by confrontation and by a combination of violence and passivity and of desire and compunction. Indeed, as soon as the mother gives in and lets her son have the kiss he so desires, our budding narrator’s victory turns into bitter regret, and pain begins to taint his pleasure” (175). The effect of his guilt is salutary, however, insofar as it becomes a further boon to creativity: if “the iridescent sensibility of childhood” is tainted “with violence,” it is the violence of The Big Bang (Kristeva 180).

In *Recherche*, Proust shifts the locus of violence from the physical to the psychological realm. The pathological violence of an aggressive self is manifested in matricidal, suicidal, sadistic, masochistic, and possessive impulses that proliferate over the course of the narrative—an effect, perhaps, of his debilitating asthma which prevented the self from working off violent impulses in habitually masculine avenues: physical exercise, sports, warfare. These violent impulses are not only internalized, but enervated by their repression—surfacing in the form of matricidal and suicidal, in sadistic and

masochistic tendencies, in the violent aggressions of a self: transposed to the realm of the personal and the social, in a pathological effort to re-masculinize the self. The violent impulses of the self are displaced from their normal arenas (the soccer field and the battlefield) to the privileged battlefields of a pathological self: the bedroom, the salon, and the garden. The violence that is everywhere turned on the Other (mother, Vinteuil, Albertine, Swann, Saniette, Giotto's Charity, Charlus) returns with a vengeance upon the self.

The crisis of the good night kiss underscores the impossibility of possession. As such, it sets the tone (and the course) for the entire novel. As Deleuze observes, "[T]he loss of love truly defines destiny or the law . . . and to stop loving, since the emptying of the worlds, the explication of the beloved, leads the self which loves to its death" (126). Desire is doomed to never obtain its object, or to perish in the act of possession. Consummation of desire, the thing wished throughout *Recherche*, comprises the death of desire. Desire cannot survive its fulfillment. And this tragic law casts a shadow over *Recherche* as deterministic as the law that sets the two apart. The two-in-one can never overcome the hyphen of differentiation. The dream of possessive desire dies the moment it ceases to be a dream—cannot withstand the dawn of reality. Fulfillment of desire is a contradiction in terms. The moment desire is fulfilled it converts to indifference. The moment of its consummation is the moment of its death. It exhausts its life in a consuming struggle toward its end, only to perish in the moment of gratification. Its resilient, questing flesh decays in the milk of its own sperm. The death of desire is executed by the gratification of desire—and this law is given in *Recherche* with the terrible grandeur of a New Testament of the heart, by one who has mounted a summit of introspection.

The self's aggressive explications of the Other not only does violence to the Other but to itself. The violence of *Recherche*, which is a self-violence as much as it is a violence upon the Other, derives from the efforts of the idealizing imagination to construct or deconstruct the Other. This volitional violence rebounds violently upon the self, in an endless sado-masochistic feedback loop. Deleuze is succinct in his analysis: each of these voluntary faculties "explicates a type of sign which does it particular violence" (165). The species of violence extant in *Recherche* is distinctly postmodern inasmuch as it shifts the locus of violence from the material to the immaterial world, from the violence of deeds to the violence of desire, from the collective violence of humankind's inhumanity to itself to the individual violence of the self on the Other, whose weapons of choice are an idealizing or jealousizing imagination and an interpreting intellect. The signs by which the self imposes itself upon the Other return upon itself, in a feedback loop of violence whose pathological circuitry is a sado-masochistic impulse. This is the sardonic irony of the sign's eternal return in *Recherche*: a sign with a double edge, which does violence in two directions, toward the Other and to the self, in

the service of a sado-masochism whose inward violence turns outward and whose violence to the Other returns upon the self. As Marcel confides, "I felt that I had with an impious finger traced a first wrinkle upon her soul and made the first white hair show upon her head. This thought redoubled my sobs" (SW 30).

IS A KISS JUST A KISS? PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE "DRAME COUCHER"

What are the deeper psychological implications of this "black date in the calendar"? What implications does it possess for the novel as a whole? What myths does it reinscribe? The crisis of the good night kiss deeply informs neurotic as well as creative impulses. From a Rankian perspective, the "drame coucher" enjoys a contest of wills between mother and son and is significant insofar as it establishes the primacy of Marcel's will over his mother's, even as it evidences at an early age the presence of a strong inventive will, despite the narrator's assertion that a "weak will" is his Achilles heel. It is only through the persistent application of an "iron will" that Marcel is finally able to liberate the creative self from its captivity within the self. The heroic struggle of this will is metonymically inscribed in the labors of the "privileged moments." Sans the epic liberatory struggles of this will, the creative self would perish within the closed circle of the neurotic bind.

This "kiss of death" leaves Marcel an emotional orphan, even as it creates an emotional dependency upon the mother. The agony of the good night kiss plunges Marcel into a paradoxical limbo of unsatisfied dependency and emotional estrangement. The agony of the good night kiss is a symptom of a deeper disease—of a separation anxiety that produces a sense of maternal abandonment. Marcel's torment arises from two terrible sources: from the realization that his desire to possess his mother can never be realized, and that in contradistinction to their placental symbiosis, his being and hers are forever disjoined. His free-standing existence outside the womb is an unsatisfactory surrogate for the mother-son symbiosis within the womb—as if he never fully recovered from the shock of the severed umbilical cord. The narrator's trauma is in part the trauma induced at birth, as Rank asserts, by the severing of the umbilical cord: a severing the narrator has never been able to reproduce psychically or emotionally. Hence, the irreconcilable conflict of his existence in which psychic and emotional umbilical cords remain intact after the severing of the anatomical umbilical cord at the moment of birth. The fundamental dualism that generates the narrator's neurotic conflict stems from the irreconcilable fact of his physical separation from the mother and his psychic/emotional dependence upon her. This maternal dependence will bring him into direct and morbid conflict with a creative self, whose liberating autonomy is threatened by psychic dependence upon the mother.

Marcel's heart is still attached to his mother by an emotional umbilical cord he will not be able to sever until her death severs it for him, liberating him into the mothering embrace of art.

The self here and throughout *Recherche* is insufficiently differentiated from the maternal sublime to enable artistic production. Hence, the cruel duality of the narrator's condition, which is characterized by a yearning to create (to "mother" his own invention) and by an attachment to the mother which impedes creation. This is the deterministic bind at the heart of *Recherche*. As Doubrovsky observes, "[I]mpossible identification with the mother determines the long itinerary of the Narrator of *Recherche*"(72):

[not only] the impossibility of rejoining being in the mother, but the reciprocal impossibility of finding any being in the self . . . the desire to have the self and the Other coincide, the obsession with the fusion of differences will establish at the narrative level the symbiosis of the two-in-one. (73–74)

Doubrovsky's interpretation reinforces the relevance of Kohut's theories regarding the personalities of the pathological self, and of the "merger-hungry" personality in particular. As Kohut observes, with this type of personality, "it is the need for merger that dominates the picture":

Because the self of these individuals is seriously defective or enfeebled, they need selfobjects in lieu of self structure. . . . [T]he fluidity of the boundaries between them and others interferes with their ability to discriminate their own thoughts, wishes, and intentions from those of the selfobject. Because they experience the other as their own self, they feel intolerant of his independence: they are very sensitive to separations from him and they demand—indeed they expect without question—the selfobject's continuous presence. (380)

Kohut's analysis of the "merger-hungry" personality deeply informs the "separation anxiety" of Marcel, which comprises a fictional representation of it, as evidenced not only in the "drame coucher," but in the violent rupture with the mother that occurs when he first boards the train for Balbec. As Kohut asserts, the blurring of boundaries between self and other seriously impedes the project of self-differentiation. This passage informs Marcel's sensitivity to the mother's absence, the demands he makes on her to ensure her "continuous presence," which is thwarted in reality, but fulfilled on the plane of illusion: in art, wherein their mutual reading of *Francois le champi* prefigures the writing of *Recherche* insofar as it satisfies the wish for the two-in-one. The implications of Marcel's "merger-hungry" personality will be developed further in chapter 3, particularly as they relate to the "ideal-hungry" and "mirror-hungry" aspects of the pathological self.

Marcel's incestuous desire not only to be with the mother, but to be the mother, evidences an atavistic regression, is the manifestation of a desire to

“return to the womb, already clearly glimpsed in the form of the ‘quite thin partition’ separating the narrator from his grandmother, upon which he has only to give ‘three knocks’ to have her come to ‘give him milk’” (77). Writing becomes in the end a surrogate for the maternal sublime: “Ink is the resurrection of milk. In the fantasy’s logic, the dying writer writes in a fetal position” (77). Doubrovsky continues:

[T]he obsession with the two-in-one, with the $1 + 1 = 1$, which the Narrator projects in all his relationships with others . . . is already nostalgia for an original fusion, for a lost age, where all difference is abolished . . . and where Proust’s deepest desire to write originates . . . below the rivalries and the ambivalence that occur after birth . . . the serenity of the visceral enclosure is affirmed, the joy of the primitive circuit. (78)

Ink is his mother’s milk.

This desire for an undifferentiated being is also the place where the desire for same-sex love originates. In all Proustian love, the Other is an ideal extension of the self. Hence, the ideal lover comes not from the opposite, but from the same sex. Doubrovsky even takes his analysis one step farther, linking “the original fantasy of fusion with the mother, the desire for non-difference” (81) to the original and recurring trope of the madeleine-flavored tea: “happiness of the embryo floating in its lime-flower-urine” (79).

The turn from the material to the immaterial, from the kiss withheld to the kiss imagined, the “gradual withdrawal from the world” that sets aunt Leonie’s “model in place” and that culminates in the cork-lined sanitarium of the bedroom in Boulevard Haussmann, begins in this critical moment of a childhood trauma, arises from the conflicted material of a “dual relationship with the mother,”

which you can never manage to leave behind or to go back to; from which you can neither free yourself nor separate yourself: insoluble conflict, producing contradictory behavior (adoration and profanation in sacrilegious gestures . . . and leading into a progressive inertia (bedroom-bed-paralysis). (Doubrovsky 77)

A double bind that paralyzes the will, that prompts a long delay to writing, which can only occur with the “murder” of the mother—which becomes, in essence, the vehicle of a matricidal impulse.

The desire for the mother is complicated by the desire to kill the mother, incestuous urges opposed by matricidal impulses. Marcel is torn in two by powerful opposing tendencies: the tendency toward maternal attachment and the tendency toward artistic independence. Though the two tendencies are incompatible, the conflict generated is essential not only to the conception but to the ultimate liberation of the artistic impulse. This first “black date in the calendar” signifies paradoxically the death and the birth of the ideal self.

If the original sin he commits slays the ideal self, then the psychological pathology this engenders eventually resurrects the ideal-self-as-artist. The mortal ideal of the self-as-good-son is replaced by a super-ideal (self-as-artist). An ideal self destabilized by profane desire is recuperated and sedimented as a super-ideal self by art. The origins of this impulse are dark indeed, belying the seeming Edenic, nostalgic terrain of Combray. Roger Shattuck, in his analysis of optical imagery in *Recherche* (Proust's *Binoculars* 1963), endorses this view: Like *Arabian Nights*, *Recherche* begins "by presenting a secure and happy life soon shattered by a revelation of infidelity and depravity. . . . Marcel's innocent vision of Combray collapses beneath the weight of vice and duplicity that reveal themselves in every character outside the immediate family" (137)—and within it as well, if we understand the mother's behavior in the context of the son's reaction: as an infidelity—which, moreover, extends from the material and maternal realms to the symbolic, as evidenced by Golo's accusations against Geneviève and by the incestuous theme of Sand's novel. Marcel's illicit desires and profanations reinforce the decadence and vice that inform the broader social landscape of Combray: as evidenced in the orgies of Uncle Adolphe, in the Sapphic trysts of Montjouvain, in Charlus's tête-à-tête with the courtesan Odette (the lady-in-pink). Hardly the landscape of Edenic innocence or orthodox piety suggested by the Hawthorns and the spiritualized edifice of St. Hilaire, with its stained-glass windows, its biblical sculptures, and its heaven-reaching steeples. Like the microcosm of the bedroom/garden, the macrocosm of Combray reflects the superimposition of vice and virtue.

Marcel's mind and heart still dwell in a placental fluid outside the mother: as if the soul of a fetus is trapped within the body of a boy. Marcel's Otherness begins early, begins indeed at the moment of birth, which is nothing if not the birth of his otherness from mother: He never adequately adjusts to his sexual differentiation from the mother at birth. Moreover, Marcel's otherness is compounded in the author by his homosexuality and Jewishness. Consequently, the search may be posited as a quest to discover some means of adjusting to this a priori fact of life: Marcel's sexual differentiation from the mother—to which art is the ultimate adjustment. As Kristeva affirms, it is "the mother on whom the narrator must revenge himself in order to be separated from her so that sexual pleasure and writing may occur" (20).

The two-in-one communion of the womb engenders a need to surmount sexual differentiation in post-placental reality. Life after birth is a quest to enfold the self in the mother, which it finally does by immersing itself in the afterbirth of art. The self surmounts its differentiation from the mother by replicating the moment of pregnancy: by impregnating itself, by begetting a creative self: which then further replicates the birthing process by begetting itself in words. Writing is the self's means of rewriting the trauma of the birth experience—of closing the psychic wounds of sexual differentiation by

objectifying them in ink, by differentiating the ideal self from its differentiated self. The self copes with its differentiation by displacing it onto art, which simultaneously fulfills its wish for communion with the mother, to eternalize the two-in-one. As Deleuze observes, “[T]he truth of love is first of all the isolation of the sexes. We live under Samson’s prophesy: ‘The two sexes shall die, each in a place apart’” (77)—symbolically inscribed by the separation of the “two ways,” whose conjunction in the end reinscribes the narrator’s primal wish for the “two-in-one.” For Marcel, the knowledge that the two sexes must die apart is aggravated by the realization they must also live apart. Deleuze’s observations are echoed by Samuel Beckett (*Proust* 1957), who argues that the narrator’s separation anxiety is due not only to a fear of death (his own and his mother’s), but to a fear of emotional death with respect to the mother—to a fear of indifference:

[T]his reluctance to die . . . explains also the horror at the idea of ever living without Gilberte Swann, of ever losing his parents, at the idea of his own death. But this terror at the thought of separation—from Gilberte, from his parents, from himself—is dissipated in a greater terror, when he thinks that to the pain of separation will succeed indifference . . . when not only the objects of his affection have vanished, but that affection itself. (qtd. in Bloom 25–26)

The fear of death inherent in Marcel’s separation anxiety is a precursor to an even greater fear, his fear of indifference—which in the Proustian universe is the locus of actual death, the final destination toward which everything in *Recherche* gestures, and whose governing determinism would be absolute were it not for art, for the possibility of eternalizing the objects of our affection in the abstract realm of signs.

Harold Bloom notes the Freudian implications of maternal separation anxiety, including its tendency to produce patricidal, masochistic, and homosexual impulses. As Bloom observes in *Modern Critical Interpretations* (1987), competitive jealousy “is compounded of grief, due to the loss of the loved object, and of the reactivation of the narcissistic scar, the tragic first loss, by the infant, of the parent. . . . Freud genially throws into the compound such delights as enmity against the successful rival, some self-blaming, self-criticism, and a generous portion of bisexuality” (Intro 1). Marcel’s vice is the inevitable byproduct of his separation anxiety. Frustration of the desire to possess the mother prompts a desire to possess the self—and its idealized image, as embodied in the same sex (Saint Loup, Albertine/Alfred Agostinelli), even as it prompts the turn away from the material to the immaterial world. Separation anxiety leads to homoerotica and art. Unable to merge with the mother, the artist becomes a mother himself (impregnates himself, as it were), fulfilling the desire to be eternally enfolded in a maternal embrace by enfolding within himself the child of his own creation. The

separation of the sexes is thus internalized in a hermaphroditic solution that characterizes the careers of the homosexual and the artist, and particularly of the homosexual-as-artist. Deleuze's observations are instructive:

But matters are complicated because the separated, partitioned sexes coexist in the same individual: "initial Hermaphroditism," as in a plant or a snail, which cannot be fertilized "except by other hermaphrodites." Then it happens that the intermediary, instead of effecting the communication of male and female, doubles each sex with itself: symbol of self-fertilization all the more moving in that it is homosexual, sterile, indirect. And more than an episode, this is the essence of love. (77–78)

The self-fertilizing hermaphroditic flower is a central trope for apprehending the deep psychological grammar of *Recherche*, and of the relation between sexual differentiation, homoeroticity, and creativity in particular. Deleuze underscores the connection between this separation of the sexes and "initial Hermaphroditism, [which] is the continuous law of the divergent series; from one series to the other, we see love constantly engendering signs which are those of Sodom and Gomorrah" (78). Deleuze's reading is endorsed by Kristeva: "At the same time, the mother is absorbed by the homosexual, transmuted into a vice that is at once pleasure and eccentric discourse, and swept up by this detour into the accursed race. She vanishes inside 'the disease that devours' the 'smooth polish of a woman's belly'" (221).

This law of sexual desire has profound implications, for it establishes the parameters of the series of love. As Deleuze asserts, "[T]he true generality of love is serial, our loves are experienced profoundly only according to the series in which they are organized" (79). The narrator's love for his mother establishes the pattern to be repeated in Swann's love for Odette, in Marcel's for Gilberte and Albertine, in Saint Loup's for Rachel, and in Charlus's for Morel. This initial separation of the sexes proliferates in these ensuing affairs, whose preponderance of homosexual, bisexual, or lesbian lovers would seem to dramatize the governing determinism between separation of the sexes and hermaphroditism. Marcel's two-in-one hermaphroditism is the internalized effect of thwarted desire, which objectifies itself in two principal signs: the homoerotic and the artistic. The ideal self seeks its object in the same sex and in writing, in flesh and blood and in ink.

Marcel intolerance of his mother's absence is but a symptom of his fear of her death, of her eternal absence. Her nightly abandonment prefigures her eternal abandonment in death. As Moss observes, "[T]he separation of the moment must, in the future, be permanent. . . . Painfully, her existence within him tells him that they are eternally separated" (103). Whatever joy Marcel finds in life is compromised by the realization that his mother must die. As Kristeva notes, "[H]e paints death casting a shadow over love. . . . Proust then quotes a line of Hugo: ['The grass must grow and children have

to die']" (173). Present and future alike inscribe his separation anxiety; it inheres in the abstract as well as in the concrete—casts its shadow over the ephemeral as well as the eternal. *Recherche* owes its existence to the desire to alter this reality. It depicts the multiple strategies by which the self adjusts to its own sexual differentiation.

Maternal separation anxiety lies at the heart of the narrator's neurosis. It is the bitter root of his creative urge as well. "Writing is," as Kristeva asserts, "memory regained from signs to flesh and from flesh to signs through an intense identification (and a dramatic separation from) an other who is loved, desired, hated, and rendered indifferent" (245):

The "vigorous and luxuriant" growth of a literary work requires death. Is it the death of a child? Which one? Albertine? Or is it perhaps the death of the narrator himself, who believes himself to have died many times over since his childhood, following each disruption, each separation, each bed-time drama that has taken him away from his parents, and especially his mother? And what if they were children only as long as a mother was present? In that case, the mother would have to die so that the child could separate himself from his childhood, turning it into a memory as well as the regained time of his past. Like the well-known Manet painting, the book will transform a graveyard of dead children into an outing and a snack of madeleines by relying on the ambiguous, loving, and vengeful memory of a mother who always loved too much though not enough and who thus made you into a child who never stops dying but who will come back to life and mature within the grassy growth of the book. (Kristeva 174)

Kristeva's interpretation reinscribes Rank's theories on the origins of the creative impulse insofar as it underscores the influence of an "ideology of sacrifice," the relevance of which for *Recherche I* will develop at greater length in the final chapter. Separation from the mother engenders a deeply ambivalent psychological terrain: it incites the neurosis that gives rise to the "merger-hungry" and "ideal-hungry" personalities, even as it produces the initial differentiation without which no artistic work can ever occur. *Recherche* narrates Marcel's love-hate relation to his own sexual differentiation, which is loathed by the son but loved by the writer, who succeeds in extricating the self from the neurotic bind by writing his way out of it. "What can be done about it?" Kristeva asks. "The narrator first detaches himself in the same way he detached himself from his parents to protect himself from the sexual difficulties they caused him" (253). This ability to detach the self from neurotic conflict distinguishes the artist from the neurotic. As Rank asserts, the artist is able "to detach the whole creative process from his own person and transfer it to an ideological abstraction" (41):

This explains why hardly any productive work gets through with morbid crises of a "neurotic" nature; it also explains why the relation between pro-

ductivity and illness has so far been unrecognized or misinterpreted. . . . [A]s I have said elsewhere, the fundamental problem is individual difference, which the ego can interpret as inferiority unless it can be proved by achievement to be superiority. (41,42. My emphasis)

Unlike the neurotic (who being unable to objectify these conflicts is consumed by them), the artist is able to “detach the whole creative process from his own person and transfer it to an ideological abstraction” (41). For this type of artist, neurosis is not only a stimulus to creativity, but often becomes the theme of it—is not only a cause, but an effect of the creative urge. In contradistinction to the artist, the neurotic remains imprisoned in neurotic conflict: for which Mallarmé’s swan frozen in ice is an apt emblem. An embryonic self whose maturation is arrested within the shell of its neurosis.

Rank’s interpretation is significant because it not only informs the neurotic origins of the creative impulse, but informs Marcel’s/Proust’s conviction of Otherness, rooted in an uncomfortable consciousness of sexual differentiation, homoerotic desires, Jewishness, and artistic impulses. The artist’s consciousness of difference relative to the putative “norms” of society incites a conflict that is yet another impetus to creativity. Conflicts of a neurotic order, insofar as they further individualize the artist, intensify this conflict with the collective ideology of society. Neurosis has a de-collectivizing effect on the would-be artist: as do Jewishness and homoerotic tendencies. In contradistinction to the neurotic, who is fatally fixated by the trauma, “the artistic reaction is thus distinguished . . . by an overcoming of the trauma. . . . This overcoming is only possible through will” (64).

Art, for Rank, is defined in terms of neurosis: “[P]roduction is the creative development of neurosis in objective form” (43)—is “forcible liberation from inward pressure” (51). Speaking of this modern, “individual-type” of artist, Rank concludes: “[W]e can thus understand the experience-problem of the individual type of artist also only by studying the nature of neurosis,” which has to do essentially with the “problem of fear”(47)—and in Marcel’s case, with fear of separation from the mother.

Marcel’s ambiguity toward his sexual differentiation is projected onto the mother—one of the most ambiguous figures in *Recherche*. Kristeva’s interpretation merits consideration: “Does the maternal breast save us from sin, or does its participation in sin make it even worse? What we do know is that purity no longer exists. The haven of infantile consolations that allowed us to imagine the budding girls . . . is itself contaminated by vice, betrayal, and jealousy” (76). The milk of vice and genius will flow from the maternal breast, feeding off one another, nurturing a bastard progeny tainted with vices deeply embedded in a cult of genius: the Vinteuil family; the Charlus-Morel-Jupien triad; Uncle Adolphe, Swann and Odette; Lea and Albertine, Saint-Loup and the Prince de Guermantes. Marcel’s death to purity in the “drame

coucher” coincides with his birth to impurity: as evidenced by the juxtaposition of the profane and the pastoral in Montjouvain and the Méséglise way—an allegorical reinscription of Eve’s original sin in which vice corrupts virtue. If Aunt Leonie’s garden is breached by the vice of incestuous desire, then the Garden of Combray is similarly penetrated by this variation on “the original sin of Woman.” The metafictional contents of the magic lantern, of *Francois le champi*, of Montjouvain, and Marcel’s “education” at his uncle Adolphe’s are, as Paul de Man observes in “Reading (Proust),” “the first explicit example of his ritualistic initiation to the ambivalences of good and evil” (119). In the final analysis, it is the pure that redeems the impure in *Recherche*—the vices of character are redeemed by its virtues, as evidenced by Proust’s novel interpretation of the sadistic impulse. In “Proust and Evil,” Georges Bataille draws a significant distinction between the sadism of Proust and Sade:

Impurity is only known by contrast by those who thought they could not do without its opposite, purity. The absolute desire for impurity, artificially conceived by Sade, led him to that sated state in which every blunted sensation, even the possibility of pleasure, ultimately escaped him. . . . He never knew the particular delight of that moral feeling that gives our sins that criminal flavour without which they seem natural, without which they are natural. Proust was more able than Sade. . . . [I]f he was virtuous, it was not in order to obtain pleasure, and if he obtained pleasure it was because he had first wanted to obtain virtue. The wicked only know the material benefits of Evil. If they seek other people’s misfortune, this misfortune is ultimately their selfish fortune. We only escape the imbroglia where Evil lies concealed by perceiving the interdependence of opposites . . . happiness alone is not desirable in itself and would result in boredom if the experience of misfortune, or of Evil, did not make us long for it. The opposite is also true: had we not, like Proust . . . longed for Good, Evil would provide us with a succession of indifferent sensations. (qtd. in Bloom 59)

Evil in *Recherche* is not absolute, is everywhere mitigated by virtue: in Mlle Vinteuil, in Charlus, in Mme Verdurin, and in the narrator—a striking contrast to the portrait of absolute evil depicted by Sade. Proust’s discovery of virtue in vice permits him to compose such a compelling portrait of vice. His moral judgments are tempered by the realization that vice and virtue are commingled, exist in a state of “perpetual alliteration.” Everything in *Recherche* is permissible due to the good that exists in evil. There is no corner of the soul too evil to be objectified in art, for the simple reason that no soul in the Proustian universe is absolutely evil, is unmitigated by virtue. The result is a universe in which even the profane is poetic—in which every garden is a garden of good and evil.

Experience for Marcel is a landscape of exile, framed on either end by the Edenic gardens of pre-oedipal communion with the mother and of artistic

creation. His exile is figured as the inevitable result of his “sin” against the mother, of his profanation of the pure. The sorrow and madness that ensue are figured as atonement for his original sin. His transformation into an artist is figured as the lasting redemption of a soul that has suffered for its sins. The narrative of *Recherche* inscribes the arc of a career that is quintessentially Catholic, if not at times, pagan—that is informed by the biblical allegories of Adam and Eve, Sodom and Gomorrah, *Paradise Lost*, Mary Magdalene, and *Faust*. Its central theme is the damnation of differentiation, and of the profane desires that arise from it: in which the sorrows of Swann for Odette are framed by the sorrows of Marcel for the mother and Albertine. *Recherche* is largely a landscape of damnation, exile, and redemption, whose external topoi are totalized by a psychological pathology rooted in the debilitating and liberatory effects of sexual differentiation. *Recherche* is Marcel’s penance and atonement, in which he resurrects an ideal self sacrificed in the moment of profane desire, in which he objectifies and expiates his guilt in the confessional of art, in which he eternalizes the mother he has helped kill, and in which he eternalizes the maternal embrace sundered at birth.

THE RAVENS OF ST. HILAIRE:
THE MYTH OF THE PASTORAL SIGN

The locus of this pathology of the self extends far beyond the garden and the bedroom. Indeed, it corrupts the innocent pleasures extant in the broader gardens of Combray, casts its shadow over the pastoral pleasures of the Méséglise and Guermantes ways, totalizing the physical as well as the psychological landscapes of *Recherche* with the shadow of original sin. The pastoral is absorbed into the neurotic. No ground in Combray (nor in the novel at large) is free of its deterministic reach. What first appears as a free-standing signifier of the pastoral (the Combray countryside), and its beneficent effects upon the creative imagination, devolves into a sign of the neurotic which totalizes the landscape of Combray, if not the entire novel. All the pleasures of Combray, indeed of life itself (nature walks, dreams of knowing the Guermantes, fishing, drifting down the Vivonne), are pleasurable only insofar as they afford escape from the central traumatizing reality of Marcel’s existence: the knowledge that when he returns to Aunt Leonie’s he will have to go to bed alone, will be parted for the duration of the night from his mother—and if there was to be a visitor, without the consoling benediction of a good night kiss. The neurotic effects of Marcel’s separation anxiety are evidenced not only by the symptoms produced in the bedroom, but by their ability to fixate his mind when far afield, when he has seemingly “escaped” into the pastoral, romantic, and social topoi of the “two ways.” The psychic walls of his neurotic fixation with a mother’s absence extend his prison from the bedroom to the encompassing countryside, totalizing the narrative terrain

of Combray, as the circle of separation anxiety closes around the pastoral pleasures of the “two ways,” in the process leaving Marcel no way out.

We gain a sense of this neurotic determinism when Marcel turns toward home after an enchanted apostasy into the realms of nature along the Méséglise or Guermantes way. His is the dread of a prisoner returning to his cell, of a Prometheus to his mythic rock, or of a Geneviève de Brabant to her prison tower:

All day long, during these walks I had been able to muse upon the pleasure that there would be in the friendship of the Duchess de Guermantes, in fishing for trout, in drifting by myself in a boat on the Vivonne; and, greedy for happiness, I asked nothing more from life, in such moments, than that it should consist always of a series of joyous afternoons. But when, on our way home, I had caught sight of a farm . . . from which, to return to Combray, we need only turn down an avenue of oaks . . . then sharply, my heart would begin to beat, I would know that in half an hour we should be at home, and that there, as was the rule on days when we had taken the “Guermantes Way” and dinner was as a consequence served later than usual I should be sent to bed as soon as I had swallowed my soup, so that my mother, kept at table, just as though there had been company to dinner, would not come upstairs to say goodnight to me in bed. The zone of melancholy which I then entered was totally distinct from that other zone, in which I had been bounding for joy a moment earlier . . . (SW 140)

This alters critical perception of the pastoral sublime in Combray, whose poetic effects belie a deeper pathology of the self, and easily seduce the reader into a “reading” that is in reality a “misreading”—in which, as Homi Bhabha asserts, “signs are taken for wonders.” The pastoral sublime of Combray is not a free-standing sign, but the other half of a metaphor that defines escape in terms of servitude, and nature in terms of neurosis. The “two ways” are satellites of the psychological black hole that is Marcel’s separation anxiety, and around which revolves all matter (and all matters) in *Recherche*. The steps he takes along the Méséglise and Guermantes ways are not part of a healthy progression, but are coursed by forces beyond his control that inscribe an orbit that always and forever returns him to the dark gravitational field at the center of his universe: the sorrows of separation anxiety.

The eternal return of this neurotic fixation is effectively captured in the image of the ravens that return to the steeple of St. Hilaire from which they have been temporarily driven out. A second image of neurotic servitude underscores the first—again of a bird in flight that disappears into the horizontal gloom of night, “just as sometimes in the sky a band of pink is separated, as though by a line invisibly ruled, from a band of green or black. You may see a bird flying across the pink; it draws near the borderline, touches it, enters and is lost upon the black” (SW 140). These images of a bird “lost

upon the black” and of ravens returning to their steeple roost at dusk trope on the self’s servitude to neurosis. What Proust is inscribing in this “black date in the calendar” is his own “emergence motif”: one that reinscribes pagan myths of origin, that evokes the Anasazi’s mythical emergence from a black hole in the desert slick-rock. This first “black date” signifies nothing more nor less than the violent birth of the creative soul in the totalizing darkness of its own most primal fear: separation from the mother. It narrates the origins of a self birthed in the darkness of its own sexual differentiation.

The violence of this “immaculate” conception produces the fictional universe that is *Recherche*. In no work since Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is the Luciferean gloom of original damnation so dramatically illumined with the shafts of redemption. In contradistinction to *Paradise Lost*, *Recherche* recounts not the collective salvation of humanity, but the personal redemption of genius—which nonetheless suffers like humanity for its sins.

THE LADY OF THE HOUSE OF SLEEP:
AN ALLEGORY OF THE MOTHER

Recherche is not only informed by biblical allegories of damnation and redemption and by fictional allegories of adultery and incest, but by allegories of the femme fatale, of which “The Lady of the House of Sleep” is perhaps the most instructive. As Joseph Campbell observes in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949), this mythic female figure is

the paragon of all paragons of beauty. The reply to all desire, the bliss-bestowing goal of every hero’s earthly and unearthly quest. She is mother, sister, mistress, bride. Whatever in the world has lured, whatever has seemed to promise joy, has been premonitory of her existence—in the deep of sleep, if not in the cities and forests of the world. For she is the incarnation of the promise of perfection; the soul’s assurance that, at the conclusion of its exile in a world of organized inadequacies, the bliss that once was known will be known again: the comforting, the nourishing, the “good” mother . . . who was known to us, and even tasted, in the remotest past. Time sealed her away, yet she is dwelling still, like one who sleeps in timelessness, at the bottom of a timeless sea. (111)

Campbell’s observations further inform the “drame coucher.” Marcel’s mother is, for example, akin to the “Lady of the House of Sleep,” whose house is reentered after a lapse of decades through the portals of sleep—even as the mother used to read him off to sleep from the pages of *Francois le champi*. The mother of the “drame coucher” is a threshold guardian to the realm of sleep, a goddess who confers the bliss of sleep (as concretized in the good night kiss) and who protects the child while he sleeps. She is, alas, the maternal siren who still beckons to him from the “deep of sleep,” whom he encounters while voyaging through the realms of sleep.

Marcel's mother is similarly figured as the ideal of ideals, as the "paragon of paragons" (not of beauty, but of love)—the "bliss bestowing" embodiment of the maternal sublime, the "reply to all desire." She too is the goal of Marcel's "earthly and unearthly quest" as evidenced by his desire to possess her in life and to eternalize her in death. It is evident that to Marcel she is the "incarnation of perfection," the embodiment of the maternal and the artistic sublime. As such, she is imbued with a nostalgic enchantment, with an innocence connoting a blissful, pre-oedipal, Edenic moment that contrasts with every subsequent moment of his existence "in a world of organized inadequacies." She signifies a moment the narrator hopes "will be known again . . . even tasted, in the remotest past," as indeed it is when he brings to his lips the cup of tea. Time has indeed "sealed her away," and it remains for him to rescue her from Oblivion. Geneviève imprisoned in her tower is also a sign for the mother imprisoned in the past. The mother is the goddess in the garden of the maternal sublime, The Lady in the House of Sleep.

There is, however, a dark side to this goddess figure. As Campbell observes, this "remembered image is not only benign," for the "bad" mother too . . . persists in the hidden land of the adult's infant recollection and is sometimes even the greater force. She is at the root of such unattainable great goddess figures as that of the chaste and terrible Diana—whose absolute ruin of the young sportsman Actaeon illustrates what a blast of fear is contained in such symbols of the mind's and the body's blocked desire. (111)

Perhaps it is this dark figure of femininity who returns to haunt Proust's vision on his deathbed, whose presence in the room he confides to Celeste Albaret. The passage is significant insofar as it posits the maternal sublime as the origin of the unattainable. Marcel's desire for the unobtainable ideal incites his vagabond quest to obtain surrogate sublimes, to incessantly scale, Sisyphus-like, the slippery slope of the ideal—only to be denied and defeated by the "organized inadequacies" of reality time and again.

Campbell's reading of this myth informs the matricidal impulses and other "aggressive fantasies" of the mother-son dyad of *Recherche*. Like the Lady in the House of Sleep, Marcel's mother is not only positively figured as the "goddess" and "the reply to all desire," but negatively figured as the "absent, unattainable mother"

against whom aggressive fantasies are directed [incest, injury, murder] . . . the hampering, forbidding, punishing mother . . . the desired, but forbidden mother (Oedipus complex) whose presence is a lure to dangerous desire"—perhaps transposed in the narrator's case to the illicit desire for courtesans, prostitutes, and bisexual girls. (111)

The frustration of Marcel's desire in the "drame coucher" deeply informs his obsessive need for the ideal, ubiquitously projected onto objects throughout *The Search*. As J. C. Flugel observes in "The Psycho-analytic Study of the

Family,” “it seems very probable that a good many of the more pronouncedly idealistic tendencies in philosophy may owe much of their attractiveness in many minds to a sublimation of this reaction against the mother” (145n, Campbell 113). The mother’s denials of the good night kiss are significant not only for inciting Marcel’s neurotic fear, but for engendering as well the idealizing constructs of his imagination which herald the birth of his art. This turn toward the realm of the ideal is Marcel’s primary response to a thwarted desire for the maternal ideal: a turn that establishes the presence of absence and the relative absence of the material.

This “black date in the calendar” establishes the antithetical correspondence between the material and the spiritual world in *Recherche*. As Campbell notes, “[T]here exists a close and obvious correspondence between the attitude of a young child toward its mother and that of the adult toward the surrounding material world” (113). Nevertheless, this “black date in the calendar” is not an “event” in the sense in which events are normally ficted in novels. Richard Terdiman, in his essay “The Depreciation of the Event,” observes that “Proustian events diffuse through the texture of his narration. They hardly ever ‘occur’”:

[T]he subjective effects of such an event are only understood over the long term, and it is fair to say that for Marcel this particular event does not “occur” until three thousand pages later, when with infinitely greater lucidity he recalls it in the Princess de Guermantes’ library on the afternoon of his revelation. Its “occurrence” in the early pages of Swann might almost be called fictitious, a pure anticipation by retrospective memory of something not realized until many years later. . . . These “pre-revelations” are one of the principal means Proust employs to diffuse the facticity of the event over time, space, and even the less measurable dimension of memory. (qtd. in Bloom 140)

This “event” enacts Proust’s conception of time. It is not simply a “black date” on the calendar; it is the calendar. This metonym of time is always and already a metaphor of time insofar as every “date” in the “calendar” of *Recherche* inheres in this “black date in the calendar.”