

FINISHING PROUST

Jean Cocteau once wondered whether “Proustians’ read line by line or skip.” André Gide, of course, was one such Proustian when he skimmed the first few pages of *À la recherche du temps perdu* and decided not to publish it. But he was another kind of Proustian after his change of heart: the kind that can’t finish the novel. So was Virginia Woolf, and it’s instructive to compare the two. Their analogous failures suggest the extent to which we should look beyond literary misreadings toward *nonreadings*—supplementing Harold Bloom’s notion of the anxiety of influence with a Barthesian concept of the *fantasy* of influence. (I’m referring here to Roland Barthes’s somewhat spurious admission: “And if I hadn’t read Hegel, or *La Princesse de Clèves*. . . ?—The book which I haven’t read and which is frequently *told to me* even before I have time to read it (which is perhaps the reason I don’t read it): this book exists to the same degree as the other: it has its intelligibility, its memorability, its mode of action.”) The failures suggest, in other words, that Proustian writers—if not Proustian readers—who, to a certain extent, merely *imagine* Proust, feel both constrained and liberated. (I will not be so bold—so Proustian—as to delineate the limits of that liberation.) And they suggest ways in which any writer, to continue quoting Barthes, can afford to be “indifferent to [his or her] own stupidity.” (Barthes adds: “Not to have read Hegel would be an exorbitant defect for a philosophy teacher, for a Marxist intellectual, for a Bataille specialist. But for me? Where do my reading duties begin? [The writer] agrees cheerfully enough to diminish or to divert the acuity, the responsibility of his ideas: in writing there would be the pleasure of a certain inertia, a certain mental *facility*: as if I were more indifferent to my own stupidity when I write than when I speak.”) Or if not indifferent to her stupidity, to her ignorance.

By “comparing” Gide and Woolf, I mean of course to deconstruct any difference between their—presumably “analogous”—failures. (It’s my basic critical move.) Gide was annoyed—and impeded—by grammatical and syntactical errors in Proust; Woolf wasn’t. He was impeded by a conceptual disagreement concerning homosexuality, thinking Proust should have written about pederasty instead of “inversion;” Woolf wasn’t. He found Proust insin-

cere, “camouflaging” his own homosexuality with the narrator’s heterosexuality; Woolf didn’t. Yet Gide loved the novel—as did Woolf, hesitating and eventually failing to finish it in order to sustain the enjoyment it affords. The subordination of component parts to the whole, he wrote in “Apropos of Marcel Proust,” is so deeply hidden that each page seems to find its perfect end in itself: “hence this extreme slowness, this reluctance to quicken the pace, this continuous satisfaction.”

Gide’s remark in “Apropos of Marcel Proust” is a public affirmation. He was censorious in private, writing in his journal that the component parts are *insubordinate*, the attention to detail overwhelming:

Finished also *Les jeunes filles en fleurs* (which I notice that I had never read completely) with an uncertain mixture of admiration and irritation. Though a few sentences (and, in spots, very numerous ones) are insufferably badly written, Proust always says precisely what he wants to say. And it is because he succeeds so well in doing so that he delights in it. So much subtlety is, at times, utterly useless; he merely yields to a finicky need of analysis. But often that analysis leads him to extraordinary discoveries. Then I read him with rapture. I even like the fact that the point of his scalpel attacks everything that offers itself to his mind, to his memory; to everything and to anything whatever. If there is waste here, it’s just too bad! What matters is not so much the result of the analysis as the method. Often one follows attentively, not so much the matter on which he is operating, as the minute work of the instrument and the slow patience of his operation. But it constantly appears to me that if the true work of art cannot do without that preliminary operation, it really begins only with that accomplished. The work of art presupposes it, to be sure, but rises up only after that original operation has ended. The architecture in Proust is very beautiful; but it often happens, since he removes none of the scaffolding, that the latter assumes more importance than the monument itself, in which one’s glance, constantly distracted by the detail, does not succeed in grasping the whole. Proust knew this, and this is what made him, in his letters and in his conversation, insist so much on the general composition of his work: he was well aware that it would not be obvious.

Woolf, on the other hand, was censorious in public, affirmative in private. Her essay “Phases of Fiction” complains about the attention to detail. Much of the difficulty of reading Proust, she writes, comes from this “content obliq-

uity." In Proust, that is, the accumulation of objects which surround any central point is so vast and they are often so remote, so difficult of approach and of apprehension that this drawing-together process is "gradual, tortuous, and the final relation difficult in the extreme." There is so much more to think about than one had supposed, because "one's relations are not only with another person but with the weather, food, clothes, smells, with art and religion and science and history and a thousand other influences." An early draft of the essay, however, justifies the attention: the long digressions, the disregard of time, and the enormous elaboration of analysis, Woolf writes, represent "the natural and right way of telling this particular story." Should I even bother to interrogate this public-versus-private opposition? Perhaps, if only to trouble a somewhat spurious distinction to which many of us, myself included, are all too attracted: the distinction between Gide the closet classicist, or formalist, and Woolf the closet Romantic.

At any rate, all such distinctions between the French author and the British collapse under the sign of incapacity. Both Gide and Woolf resisted reading—and finishing—Proust because he made it hard for them to write. (He may make it hard for everyone to write. "Proust's style had permeated my mind and changed my literary taste," writes Phyllis Rose in *The Year of Reading Proust*. "A mixed blessing: everything I'd written before, whose chief virtues were clarity and brevity, now seemed pinched and parsimonious.") Woolf's letters and journals reiterated this:

May 6, 1922; to Roger Fry:

Proust so titillates my own desire for expression that I can hardly set out the sentence. Oh if I could write like that! I cry. And at the moment such is the astonishing vibration and saturation and intensification that he procures—there's something sexual in it—that I feel I *can* write like that, and seize my pen and then I *can't* write like that.

November 18, 1924:

No doubt Proust could say what I mean—that great writer whom I cannot read when I'm correcting, so persuasive is he.

April 8, 1925:

I wonder if this time [with *Mrs. Dalloway*] I have achieved something? Well, nothing anyhow compared with Proust, in whom I am embedded now. The thing about Proust is his combination of the utmost sensibility with the utmost tenacity. He searches out these butterfly shades to the last

grain. He is as tough as catgut & as evanescent as a butterfly's bloom. And he will I suppose both influence me & make me out of temper with every sentence of my own.

Gide said so both publicly and privately. "Each time I plunge anew into this lake of delights," he wrote in "Apropos of Marcel Proust," "I sit for days without daring to take up my own pen again, unable to admit—as is customary during the time that we remain under the spell of a masterpiece—that there are other ways of writing well, and seeing in what is called the 'purity' of my style nothing but poverty." The journals, however, are less self-aggrandizing and even manage to hit the nail on the head—or to hit the right note. Having heard a Mlle X. "dash off with extraordinary assurance and charm, to perfection," a number of pieces by Chabrier, Debussy, and Chopin, Gide confessed that he didn't dare "to open my piano for twelve days."

Small wonder after that that I don't like pianists! All the pleasure they give me is nothing compared to the pleasure I give myself when I play; but when I hear them I become ashamed of my playing—and certainly quite wrongly. But it is just the same when I read Proust; I hate virtuosity, but it always impresses me, and in order to scorn it I should first like to be capable of it; I should like to be sure of not being the fox of the fable. I *know* and *feel* for instance that Chopin's *Barcarolle* is to be played much more slowly than Mlle X. does, than they all do—but in order to dare to play it in the presence of others as *leisurely* as I like it, I should have to know that I could just as well play it much more rapidly and especially feel that whoever hears me is convinced of this. Played at that speed, Chopin's music becomes *brilliant*, loses its own value, its virtue.

Sour grapes. Or "pianist envy," to cite myself in *Beethoven's Kiss*. (One reason why I don't like Gide very much, and prefer amateur-pianists / professional-writers like Barthes, is that he claimed—publicly—to be a better musician than he was, an altogether spurious claim mystified by his refusal to play for anyone.)

Woolf alone may have resisted finishing Proust because she felt engulfed by him—an eerie anticipation, as elsewhere in her *oeuvre*, of her own death by drowning. (Sink or swim. Gide, plunging into "this lake of delights," swam.) There'd come a point in time (in 1934) when she felt time was running out. "So I came back and read Proust," she wrote to Ethel Smyth, "which is of course so magnificent that I can't write myself within its arc; that's true; for

years I've put off finishing it; but now, thinking I may, and indeed so they say must die one of these years, I've returned, and let my own scribble do what it likes. Lord what a hopeless bad book [*The Years*] will be!" Yet the water imagery, and the tenor thereof (whatever it may be), kept holding her back: *eros* versus *thanatos* ("there's something sexual in it"), or maybe the other way around.

January 21, 1922; to E.M. Forster:

Everyone is reading Proust. I sit silent and hear their reports. It seems to be a tremendous experience, but I'm shivering on the brink, and waiting to be submerged with a horrid sort of notion that I shall go down and down and down and perhaps never come up again.

June 20, 1928:

Take up Proust after dinner & put him down. This is the worst time of all. It makes me suicidal.

March 7, 1937; to Smyth:

And everyone seems chirping at me to read their damned works for them. And I want to sink into Proust.

Interestingly—or oddly—enough, it never seems to have occurred to Gide and Woolf that they may have been too *bored* to finish, whatever boredom (or ennui) is. It certainly isn't an emotion in and of itself. Freud saw it as a form of anxiety. Barthes, in his autobiography, wonders whether boredom is a form of hysteria. Patricia Meyer Spacks, in her literary history of boredom, describes ways in which it can mask rage, despair, irritation, alienation, frustration, emotional inadequacy, and either intellectual inferiority or intellectual superiority. She also distinguishes it from ennui: whereas ennui implies a judgment of the universe, boredom implies a response to the immediate. Gide was too in touch with his irritation to be bored by Proust; Woolf too in touch with her sense of inferiority. The one who may have been bored is Barthes, who in *The Pleasure of the Text* both wonders whether anyone's ever read Proust word for word ("Proust's good fortune: from one reading to the next, we never skip the same passages.") and includes a related passage with "Proust" written all over it:

If I read this sentence, this story, or this word with pleasure, it is because they were written in pleasure (such pleasure does not contradict the writer's complaints). [Recall Gide's claim that Proust "delights" in saying what he wants to say.] But the opposite? Does writing in pleasure guarantee—guar-

antee me, the writer—my reader's pleasure? Not at all. I must seek out this reader (must "cruise" him) *without knowing where he is*. A site of bliss is then created. It is not the reader's "person" that is necessary to me, it is this site: the possibility of a dialectics of desire, of an *unpredictability* of bliss: the bets are not placed, there can still be a game.

I am offered a text. This text bores me. It might be said to *prattle*. The prattle of the text is merely that foam of language which forms by the effect of a simple need of writing. Here we are not dealing with perversion but with demand. The writer of this text employs an unweaned language: imperative, automatic, unaffectionate, a minor disaster of static (those milky phonemes which the remarkable Jesuit, van Ginnekin, posited between writing and language): these are the motions of ungratified sucking, of an undifferentiated orality, intersecting the orality which produces the pleasures of gastrosophy and of language. You address yourself to me so that I may read you, but I am nothing to you except this address; in your eyes, I am the substitute for nothing, for no figure (hardly that of the mother); for you I am neither a body nor even an object (and I couldn't care less: I am not the one whose soul demands recognition), but merely a field, a vessel for expansion. It can be said that after all you have written this text quite apart from bliss; and this prattling text is then a frigid text, as any demand is frigid until desire, until neurosis forms in it.

To continue that Cocteau quotation: "I wonder if the 'Proustians' read line by line or skip. One is alarmed, physically speaking, for his apparently remarkable translators. The very idea of their task overwhelms us with fatigue." (No Proust translator has ever finished the entire novel. Of the English ones: C.K. Scott Moncrieff died after translating the first six parts—the seventh part was translated by Stephen Hudson in England and Frederick Blossom in the United States; Andreas Mayor re-translated the seventh part and then died after beginning the remainder; Terence Kilmartin revised the Scott-Moncrieff translation and then died after undertaking a second revision eventually done by D.J. Enright; James Grieve abandoned his translation—or so I'm told—after the Enright appeared.) Richard Howard, in fact, does seem to have abandoned his complete translation for reasons related to fatigue. Walter Benjamin, however, who undertook the first German version in collaboration with a friend, does not. Then again, he'd only had to do half the novel.

First of all, Benjamin became bored—bored insofar as he felt intellectually

superior. After years of what he considered obscure prevarications by publishers, according to one biographer, Benjamin was no longer inclined to return to the drudgery of the translation, particularly because his interests had shifted to other fields of literary production. (Proust himself, having spent years translating Ruskin in collaboration with Marie Nordlinger, might have sympathized. Although the *achevé d'imprimer* of *La Bible d'Amiens* was February 15, 1904, according to the biographer George Painter, it wasn't too late for Proust to add last-minute corrections. "In the small hours of that very day he sent two questionnaires to Mlle Nordlinger on passages which still perplexed him, ending with the ominous words: 'This old man'—meaning Ruskin—'is beginning to bore me.'") Before the shift of interests, however, Benjamin had found the coincidence of various interests disabling. When he read his lover Asja Lacis the lesbian scene from Proust, he noted in his *Moscow Diary*, she grasped its savage nihilism. She grasped, that is, how Proust ventures into the private chamber marked "sadism" and then smashes everything to pieces, "so that nothing remains of the untarnished, clear-cut conception of wickedness, but instead within every fracture evil explicitly shows its true substance—'humanity,' or even 'kindness.'" And when he explained this to her, it became clear to Benjamin how closely this coincided with the thrust of his book on the baroque: "Proust was here developing a conception that corresponds at every point to what I myself have tried to subsume under the concept of allegory." Tried to subsume—and probably failed. He'd also found the entire undertaking somewhat ridiculous. The critics may like his translation of *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, he wrote Hugo von Hofmannsthal, but so what? Any such translation "has something absurd about it."

Second of all, Benjamin may have felt aesthetically inferior. Not only would he have written poetry if he could, he suspected that translators should be poets as well—something Howard, of course, is. Don't we usually regard that which lies beyond communication in a literary work as the unfathomable, the mysterious, or the poetic, Benjamin asks in "The Task of the Translator." "And is this not something that a translator can reproduce only if he is also—a poet?" Nonetheless Benjamin did finalize his Baudelaire translation. Or maybe he didn't. Benjamin's estate contains numerous subsequent versions of poems from *Les fleurs du mal*, only four of which were published in his lifetime.

Benjamin never finished his own masterpiece either—a project inspired by the skylit shopping arcades of Paris—in part because it kept him from killing himself. It was, he felt, the actual, if not the only reason not to lose courage

in the struggle for existence. The Parisian arcades inspired “The Task of the Translator” as well. A real translation is transparent, Benjamin writes. It doesn’t cover the original, nor block its light. This can be achieved, above all, by a literal rendering of the syntax which proves words rather than sentences to be the primary element of the translator: “For if the sentence is the wall before the language of the original, literalness is the arcade.” (An unpoetic point of view, given that poetic translations aren’t literal.)

A third reason for Benjamin’s failure may stem from Proust’s attention to detail, even more overwhelming for a translator than for a reader. One reviewer described the collaborators’ division of labor as follows. Each contributes elements from his individual personality and scholarly background: whereas Benjamin represents the subtle, exact, unremittingly probing, critically transcending side which is never satisfied with a single solution, and that corresponds to Proust’s compulsion not to leave anything untouched and to retain in the depths of memory and knowledge all that has been experienced, Benjamin’s friend (Franz Hessel) represents Proust’s engaging, affectionate, and intuitively acquisitive side. The reviewer deconstructed himself, however. Just as Proust can’t be dissected into parts (“almost every sentence of this gigantic work is a miracle of modulation and nuance”), nor are the two translators rigid and inflexible: “Hessel is sufficiently thoughtful, and Benjamin has shown not only here, but also in his Baudelaire translations, just what strong emotions and powers of expression he can summon to convey poetic virtues and resonances.” (A poetic point of view.)

A more likely reason for the failure stems, not from Proustian detail, but from the linguistic dislocation most translators experience, even ones who also write poetry. Benjamin, in “The Task of the Translator,” invokes nature to describe this alienation: “Unlike a work of literature, translation finds itself not in the center of the language forest but on the outside facing the wooded ridge; it calls into it without entering, aiming at that single spot where the echo is able to give, in its own language, the reverberation of the work in the alien one.” Banana Yoshimoto invokes it as well. “What would be an appropriate metaphor to explain my feelings when I was doing a translation?” asks the narrator of *N.P.*, her novel about suicidal translators.

An endless meadow of golden pampas grass swaying in the wind, or a coral reef beneath a deep brilliant blue ocean. That utter stillness you feel when you’re seeing a whole bunch of tropical fish swimming by, all in bright colors, and they don’t even look like living creatures.

"You're not going to live long with that kind of world in your head," she adds. But it is the unpoetic translator—the Benjamin, according to Benjamin—who is more likely to experience the dislocation. To quote another one of his metaphors: the enormous danger inherent in all translation is that "the gates of a language thus expanded and modified may slam shut and enclose the author in silence."

A final reason for the failure is that Benjamin identified with Proust, notwithstanding any intellectual superiority or aesthetic inferiority. And as with both Gide and Woolf, it was an identification that made it hard for him to write. The mother of Yoshimoto's narrator describes the problem—as well as the intense literary mediation of translation—in general terms. She feels that you become so involved with the writer's style it starts to feel like your own; that when you spend hours every day with that style, you end up thinking you alone created it in the first place; and that you get so far into the author's thought processes you sense no resistance at all. "Sometimes I find myself thinking the way she would," the mother admits, "not just about the book, but about my own life, even when I'm not translating." Benjamin himself describes the problem in specific terms, admitting that his Proust translation necessitated "the renunciation of any dalliance with related possibilities." Related possibilities, he wonders, do they really exist? They certainly permit no dalliance, because having begun to open the fan of memory Proust never comes to the end of its segments. No one image ever satisfies him, for it too can be unfolded, and only in its folds does truth reside: that image, that taste, that touch for whose sake everything has been unfurled and dissected. "Such is the deadly game that Proust began so dilettantishly, in which he will hardly find more successors than he needed companions." Benjamin also describes it in terms that anticipated—or that *predicted*—his own death, which he achieved by having overdosed on morphine, just as Woolf describes it in terms that anticipated hers. The actual work, he wrote to his friend Gershom Scholem, "makes me sick." Unproductive involvement with a writer who so splendidly pursues goals that are similar to his own, at least former, goals "occasionally induces something like symptoms of internal poisoning in me."

Howard was older than Benjamin when he undertook his own translation. Benjamin had been thirty-four at the time; Howard was fifty-eight and therefore mature enough to come to believe that he might not live to complete it. At the beginning, he thought the work would take about a decade. He soon realized that it would take twenty years and that he'd do nothing else. He also

appears to have been overwhelmed by the physical fatigue Cocteau mentions. "If I continued it would kill me," Howard told a newspaper reporter in 1996. And so he's limited himself to a novel within the novel, to be titled *Charlus*. Howard has indicated one reason for that maneuver: a suggestion by F.R. Leavis that *Daniel Deronda* contains a shorter, better novel (*Gwendolen Harleth*) about its heroine, not to mention a more British (and thus more "realistic"), less Jewish (or Romantic) one. (Of course, Edith Wharton already extracted such a novel by writing *The House of Mirth*.) One could credit Howard, I suppose. One could even attribute his decision to a preference for comedy. Charlus is, in fact, Proust's funniest character, although Mme Verdurin gives him a run for his money. I myself, however, tend to credit—and will indicate—a motivation of which Howard appears to be unaware.

But before I indicate it, I should touch upon several other possible reasons. First of all, Howard wasn't bored. The complete translation, he told another reporter in 1988, involved "pleasure very close to terror"—a feeling that never abated because he was always within the clutches of something beyond his ability. That something, he explained, is the poetic attention to linguistic detail no novelist prior to Proust had paid, attention which conveys an impression of verbal immediacy, compensates for the formal incoherence of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, and accounts for the ten year delay Howard anticipated. Yet another Proustian "incapacity." Yet another sense of aesthetic inferiority—even though Howard, unlike Benjamin, was a poet, which makes the sense somewhat false. Howard's brilliant translation of Proust's first sentence ("Time and again, I have gone to bed early.") shows him having risen to the challenge. (The novel both begins and ends on "Time," which no other English translator has recognized.) He continued doing so. For example, whereas Proust's second sentence, in which the narrator remembers lying in the dark and drifting in between wakefulness and sleep, uses the phrase "*ma bougie éteinte*" (literally, "my candle extinguished"), both Kilmartin and Grieve drop the passive tone, the former saying "when I had put out my candle" and the latter "as soon as I snuffed out my candle." Howard translated the phrase "my candle just out," which captures the vagueness of the original—the narrator's sense of not knowing whether he put out the candle himself or whether it flickered out of its own accord.

Howard experienced linguistic dislocation as well, that feeling of finding himself outside Benjamin's language forest. "Every word has to be weighed in relation to what might be called the strangeness, the obliquity, the 'off' quality of Proust," he told another 1988 reporter. (Woolf's "content obliquity"

concerned detail, not dislocation.) Howard's own example, a passage in which Proust uses the peculiar expression "*cabinet de verdure*" to describe a room in a house, echoed the sylvan image. "I couldn't find an easy reference for it," he told the reporter.

"I thought it might mean a conservatory or a winter garden, but it doesn't. The existing translation translates it 'arbor,' and I wasn't sure about arbor. I called up friends in France and gradually it became clear that it was a place in the garden, what we might call a green nook, a secluded spot where the hedges were clipped in such a way as to make a kind of outdoor room. I don't think I was able to do much with this, but I wanted to know what it meant because I thought it would influence the tone. I think I translated it as a bower."

Whereas Benjamin may have abandoned his translation because he identified with Proust, Howard may have done so because he disidentified. This I infer from "For James Boatwright, 1937–88," a poem containing the lines:

You went with a sigh of relief—to me a sign
that any past we might hope to reclaim
spreads like an oil slick, wide behind us,
and the oncoming

years of retrieval diminish even now
until our name becomes, to memory,
a synonym for weaknesses endured,
or worse still, adored.

Howard had planned to call *Le temps retrouvé*, Proust's final volume, *Time Reclaimed*. Yet the poem implies that time can't be reclaimed, that our true past is irretrievable—even through involuntary memory, even through art. And so the poet himself may have disavowed the novelist's profound truth. He may feel that Proust's final point isn't one he need reach.

And yet Howard began his aborted translation at that point. (Remembering Scott Moncreiff, who died before completing his translation, Howard, in a fit of superstition, initially began with the last book, before deciding to work from beginning to end.) And yet the motivation I'm aware of—or which I imagine to be true—rests upon Howard's identification with the "Marcel" who'd known Charlus, the Proust who hadn't yet discovered that truth. For I do believe (I *need* to believe) that Howard, by pulling *Charlus* out of *À la recherche du temps perdu*, has chosen, if only unconsciously, to translate the

sections that concern, if not the one character who doesn't bore him, the one character with whom he associates Robert Phelps, a would-be older brother who also happened to have been gay, and to have been from Ohio.

The Times reports six years in Elyria,
browbeaten suburb of your childhood
before my own had begun in Shaker Heights,
the brighter side of Cleveland's tracks . . .

begins "For Robert Phelps, Dead at 66," a poem included along with "For James Boatwright" in the volume *Like Most Revelations*. But unlike J.D. Salinger, an only son who imagined Seymour Glass as the superior sibling he never had, Howard is an only child who imagines Phelps as the *inferior* one. For Phelps is Charlus, for Howard. He's someone who should have been Proust, or Howard himself. (Julia Kristeva hits this particular nail on the head. If Charlus had been less of a dilettante, she writes, he would have been Proust.) To continue the poem:

Granted: you would not write. Then your hand
began to shake so, you could not write. It was
Parkinson's, as we would discover,
but was it not at first a failure of your will?
Those years you passed off as "successes,"
triumphant manipulations of decor;
I recall seasons when you devised
"literaries"—a noun, *voyons*—for our latest
Mme. Verdurin. Besides the fun,
she paid far better than mere authorship, since
the rich, my dear, are always with us.

Phelps was, moreover, "the man I should be / if I had not been the child I was; / not son, not father either, but—I know it now—/ The lost brother found. Vale frater."

Vale frater. Vale *scriptor*, if you'll forgive the less than florid Latin. I wonder whether either Benjamin or Howard would have had a different experience were Proust alive when they were working on him. To translate a living author is to fall in love with him; it's an insinuation of self into otherness, according to George Steiner. And so to abandon that translation is to break

things off too soon. But Proust was dead, and according to Nabokov posthumous translation is disrespectful—a “profanation of the dead.” I disagree. I’d call any such translation mournful. The “hermeneutic motion” Steiner recommended to translators—(1) trust (an assumption that the original can be translated), (2) penetration (an interpretative attack), (3) embodiment (a dialectic in which the translation can be crippled) and (4) restitution (an equilibrium between translation and original)—recalls the mourning process both Freud and Proust anatomize. And so to abandon that translation is to fail to fully mourn. It is, in a sense, to remain melancholy.

À la recherche du temps perdu is itself a translation. It’s a translation, or mistranslation, of Proust’s precursors: Corneille, Molière, Racine . . . Scheherazade. (Bloom’s idea.) It’s a translation of the prelinguistic thoughts these writers enabled Proust to have. (Benjamin’s idea.) And it’s a translation of various writers Proust imitates. Proust, of course, was brilliant at pastiche. Here, for example, is how he begins imitating Edmond and Jules Goncourt:

“The day before yesterday Verdurin drops in here to carry me off to dine with him—Verdurin, former critic of the *Revue*, author of that book on Whistler in which the workmanship, the painterly colouration of the American eccentric is interpreted sometimes with great delicacy by the lover of all the refinements, all the *prettinesses* of the painted canvas that Verdurin is. And while I am getting dressed to accompany him, he treats me to a long narrative, almost at moments a timidly stammered confession, about his renunciation of writing immediately after his marriage to Fromentin’s ‘Madeleine,’ a renunciation brought about, he says, by his addiction to morphine and which had the result, according to Verdurin, that most of the frequenters of his wife’s drawing-room did not even know that her husband had ever been a writer and spoke to him of Charles Blanc, of Saint-Victor, of Sainte-Beuve, of Burty, as individuals to whom they considered him, Verdurin, altogether inferior. ‘Now, you Goncourts, you know—and Gautier knew too—that my *Salons* were on a different plane to those pitiful *Maîtres d’Autrefois* which are deemed a masterpiece in my wife’s family.’ Then, through a dusk in which, as we pass the towers of the Trocadéro, the last glimmer of a gleam of daylight makes them positively resemble those towers of red-currant jelly that pastry-cooks used to make, the conversation continues in the carriage on its way to the Quai Conti,

where is their mansion, which its owner claims was once the mansion of the Venetian Ambassadors, and in which there is a room used as a smoking-room which Verdurin tells me was transported lock, stock and barrel, as in a tale of the *Thousand and One Nights*, from a celebrated *palazzo* whose name I forget, a *palazzo* boasting a well-head decorated with a Coronation of the Virgin which Verdurin maintains is positively one of Sansovino's finest things and which now, he says, their guests find useful as a receptacle for cigar-ash. And upon my word, when we arrive, in the watery shimmer of a moonlight really just like that in which the paintings of the great age enwraps Venice, against which the silhouetted dome of the Institute makes one think of the Salute in Guardi's pictures, I have almost the illusion of looking out over the Grand Canal. And the illusion is preserved by the way in which the house is built so that from the first floor one cannot see the quay, and by the evocative remark of its owner, who affirms that the name of the Rue du Bac—the devil if ever I'd thought of it—comes from the ferry which once upon a time used to take an order of nuns, the Miramiones, across to attend services in Notre-Dame. A whole quarter which my childhood used idly to explore when my aunt de Courmont lived there, and which I am inspired to *re-love* by rediscovering, almost next door to the Verdurin mansion, the sign of 'Little Dunkirk,' one of the rare shops surviving elsewhere than in the crayon and wash vignettes of Gabriel de Saint-Subin, to which the eighteenth-century connoisseur would come to pass a few leisure moments in cheapening trinkets French and foreign and 'all the newest products of the arts,' as an invoice of this Little Dunkirk puts it, an invoice of which we two, Verdurin and myself, are, I believe, alone in possessing copies, one of those flimsy masterpieces of engraved paper upon which the reign of Louis XV made out its accounts, with a headpiece representing a billowy sea laden with vessels, a sea of billows which might be an illustration, in the *Fermiers Généraux La Fontaine*, to 'The Oyster and the Litigants.' The mistress of the house, who has placed me next to her at dinner, graciously tells me before we go in that she has flowered her table with nothing but Japanese chrysanthemums—but chrysanthemums displayed in vases which are the rarest masterpieces, one in particular of bronze on which petals of red-gold copper seem to have been shed by the living flower."

Despite the prattle, more naive than Proust's, one gets a good impression of the "literaries" Howard's friend Phelps reproduced. (Note the morphine addiction to which Verdurin attributes his renunciation of writing—another anticipation of Benjamin's death.)

And because the original is a translation as well, you may be wondering whether Proust, like Howard, was too fatigued to finish. He wasn't. In fact, he was indefatigable. (According to Kristeva, Proust—even though terminally ill—"never tires of his continuous expansions." According to Benjamin, finished works weigh lighter than those fragments on which great writers work throughout their lives. Whereas the more feeble and distracted take an inimitable pleasure in closure, feeling that their lives have thereby been given back to them, "For the genius each caesura, and the heavy blows of fate, fall like gentle sleep itself into his workshop labor.") I myself, notwithstanding my sustained interest in the novel and knowledge of his work habits, have wondered whether Proust was too bored to finish. But he couldn't have been. One writes to avoid boredom. One writes, in part, to *amuse* oneself. (Proust claims that the joy of both involuntary memory and art guarantees the truthfulness of the past they do reclaim. Barthes suggests that *À la recherche du temps perdu* was "written in pleasure." Joseph Litvak, in *Strange Gourmets*, a study of sophistication, calls the novel an "immense and intricate technology for the avoidance of boredom.") But if writing is a pleasure, it's a *painful* one that justifies—or compensates for—the asocial extremes to which it can lead, and to which it certainly lead Proust. To quote Benjamin: Proust's radical attempt at self-absorption has as its center a loneliness which pulls the world down into its vortex with the force of a maelstrom. "And the overloud and inconceivably hollow chatter which comes roaring out of Proust's novels is the sound of society plunging down into the abyss of this loneliness." This, Benjamin believed, is the site of Proust's invectives against friendship. (So much for his affectionate side.)

It was a matter of perceiving the silence at the bottom of this crater, whose eyes are the quietest and most absorbing. Something that is manifested irritatingly and capriciously in so many anecdotes is the combination of an unparalleled intensity of conversation with an unsurpassable aloofness from his partner. There has never been anyone else with Proust's ability to show us things; Proust's pointing finger is unequalled. But there is another gesture in amicable togetherness, in conversation: physical contact. To no one is this gesture more alien than to Proust.

Benjamin himself couldn't avoid that abyss, which may be the idiosyncratic reason why he positioned Proust's loneliness as central.

"The inconceivably hollow chatter which comes roaring out of Proust." Wayne Koestenbaum, in "Logorrhea," has written about people (like my mother) who "chatter" and writers who prattle—"graphomaniacs" like the Goncourts, and like Proust himself. Unlike the Goncourts, however, "Proust staves off the malodorous aura of logorrhea through his elegant symphonic paragraphing: each paragraph, a sculpted boundaried organism, develops a theme, a scene, a figure, and thus, though it is fueled by logorrhea, and is buoyed by an informing logorrheic tide, avoids the appearance of lost control, lost will." But Proust can't stave off Benjamin's sense, *our* sense of his loneliness. Although Barthes correctly described logorrhea as the "piling up of words for mere verbal pleasure," the condition is always "a matter of solitary binge, of isolation." Nor can he stave off other negative aspects: logorrhea as a failure to be masculine; as an anti-Semitic slur; as an upper-class affliction. Then again, Proust couldn't have been epigrammatic, because logorrhea—"writing *against* the aphorism"—is an essential trait of memory writing. We need logorrhea, Koestenbaum writes, to retrieve the past. In a novel like Proust's, nostalgia takes the form of linguistic excess and spill, imitating the loop of memory, "and the distance of voice from the beloved objects it strives to recapture."

Do prattlers address anyone? Does Proust—lonely Proust—*converse*? That depends upon the reader. Koestenbaum thinks not: "The malaise is never interpersonal, never dialogic." Barthes thinks not, or pretended not to for the sake of argument: "I am the substitute for nothing, for no figure (hardly that of the mother)." Even Proust thought not. The essential difference between a book and a friend is not their degree of wisdom, he wrote in a preface to one of the Ruskin translations, "but the manner in which we communicate with them—reading, contrary to conversation, consisting for each of us in receiving the communication of another thought, while we remain alone, that is to say, while continuing to enjoy the intellectual power we have in solitude, which conversation dissipates immediately." Gerard Genette, however, thinks he does: every reader "knows himself to be the implied—and anxiously awaited—narratee of this swirling narrative that, in order to exist in its own truth, undoubtedly needs, more than any other narrative does, to escape the closure of 'final message' and narrative completion." I think so too, one of

the things that keeps me interested. But unlike Barthes (or a certain fantasy of Barthes) I also think that every reader—including Gide and Woolf, despite their analogous failures to finish—knows him- or herself to be positioned as Proust's mother in her entirety, as opposed to her body or body parts alone. Just as translators want paternal authors to love them back, demanding what Barthes in a pseudo-Lacanian section of *A Lover's Discourse: Fragments* calls "the impossible reply" ("I love you, too" said simultaneously), novelists want maternal readers to do so. If gay, if men who've "failed to be masculine," they also want these readers to accept them. Isn't it the mother, Eve Sedgwick asks in *Epistemology of the Closet*, to whom both the coming-out testament and its continued refusal to come out are addressed? And isn't some scene like that behind the force of Proust's profanation of the mother? "That that woman who lovingly and fearfully scrutinizes narrator and narrative *can't know* is both an analytic inference (she never acts as if she knows, and anyway how could she know?) and a blank imperative: she *mustn't* know." Lacan, however, suggests that what any novelist, like any child, really wants, on an unconscious level, is for the maternal reader *not* to love him back, not to accept him, not to read him. He must want her to help him realize that she can't meet all his demands. He wants to desire someone else.

"I am the substitute for nothing, for no figure (hardly that of the mother)." For some reason, Barthes never felt that way when he played the piano, an activity he analogized to reading. What does the body do, he once asked, when it enunciates musically? It speaks, it declaims, "it doubles its voice." But the Barthesian body doesn't really double *its* voice in an attempt to express itself. It doubles the voice of the mother. The Barthesian body signifies its senseless, sensuous, and dismembered self by impersonating the one woman who ever sees it whole, the one woman who ever lets it see itself whole. Maybe reading—or reading prattlers like Proust—remained, for Barthes, far more passive, far more disengaged than he'd have had it be. (Barthes does indicate a secret fondness for readerly texts. Then again, according to Proust in that Ruskin preface, every writer shares that fondness: "Even those writers who to their contemporaries appeared to be the most 'romantic' read scarcely anything but the classics." So much for any distinction between Gide the closet classicist and Woolf the closet Romantic.) And maybe, just maybe, it would have been less passive—less consumptive, more productive—if, like Gide and Woolf, Barthes never bothered to finish.

I can't quite describe the incompletion of *À la recherche du temps perdu*. Is the

novel too short, Proust having failed to say everything he had to say? Or is it too long, Proust having failed to prune it properly? Once again, that depends upon the reader. Readers who need logorrhea—bookish readers bored by life, lonely readers with time on their hands—may find it too short. Readers running out of time may find it too long. Or not. “For years I’ve put off finishing it,” wrote Woolf, “but now, thinking I may, and indeed so they say must die one of these years, I’ve returned.” In *Getting Into Death*, however, a story by Thomas Disch, terminally ill Cassandra Millar resolves to finish Proust before she dies, but never does—partly because she finds herself both “bored and ravished by this dulllest and best of all books,” partly because she doesn’t want to die, and partly because reading it enables her to approximate an understanding of death she knows she’ll never really attain. Midway through she thinks that death will be like Proust, that death is what people talk about when you leave the room: “not oneself, not the vanished, pitiable Albertine, but *their* business and appetites.” More than midway through she thinks what might have to be her final, affectionate word on the subject: that “death is a social experience; an exchange; not a relationship in itself, but the medium in which relationships may exist; not a friend nor a lover, but the room in which all friends and lovers meet.”

Proust himself, a sickly Scheherazade who according to Benjamin was constantly aware of death, most of all when he was writing, and who according to Painter resolved to die when it was done, failed to finish *À la recherche du temps perdu* because he didn’t want to die. And yet he did want to die. *Eros* versus *thanatos*. (Or the other way around.) To quote Painter, Proust’s desire to complete the novel counterbalanced longing for the moment when “his sins would be instantaneously atoned and his mother’s love eternally regained.” He longed not to suffer as well, both emotionally and physically. Cocteau alone, according to Benjamin, recognized what really should have been the major concern of all Proust readers: “He recognized Proust’s blind, senseless, frenzied quest for happiness.” And Benjamin alone recognized that his terrible asthma was part of his art. Proust’s syntax, he felt, rhythmically reproduces his fear of suffocating. His ironic, philosophical, and didactic reflections are the deep breath with which he shakes off the weight of memories. “On a larger scale, however, the threatening, suffocating crisis was death.”

Another reason for the incompletion is that Proust was obsessive. Obsessive neurotics fail to finish anything because they’re frustrated by incompatible desires. Proust’s incompatible desires relate to his mother, whom he both loved and hated. Or so suggests Kristeva, who sees Albertine as both Proust

and his mother, and who situates her, Albertine's, sapphic profanation of the mother within the context of an earlier profanation of the father. The narrator, taking responsibility for the sins of Mlle Vinteuil and of the unnamed friend who profaned her father, links these women to both Albertine and Vinteuil, whose death is transformed into a "murder" of the mother. And so "when Albertine, the narrator's alter ego, loves other women, is she taking revenge on her mother?" (Kristeva's rhetorical question is, of course, homophobic, but I'd rather not read her symptomatically, except to say that she also indicates a questionable interest in Proust's sadomasochism. Maybe Proust can't stop writing because he can't stop torturing himself—and us. Maybe Kristeva can't. Writing, after all, is a *painful* pleasure.)

If Albertine is the narrator's alter ego, she's not the only one. But she's the only one who isn't a failed writer. The Goncourts who prattle without taking paragraph breaks are two such failures. The drug-addicted Verdurin who renounced writing is another. The sickly Bergotte, who did nothing for almost twenty years and then died thinking that his novels pale in comparison with a painting by Vermeer, is another. ("I ought to have gone over them with a few layers of colour, made my language precious in itself, like this little patch of yellow wall.") So is Charlus, who according to Kristeva would have been Proust if he'd been less of a dilettante. So is Swann, who never finishes his essay on Vermeer. To continue quoting Kristeva: whereas Proust surrounds Swann with irony as well as with a despondent, admiring affection, which we see in his visits to Combray, in his gardens, his Giotto prints, his Jewish mother, his licentious wife, and his pitiful death, Swann "reminds Proust of what might happen if he should ever stop writing." But I wonder whether Proust was aware of these identifications, including the one with Swann. Or so I'm led to believe by *The End of the Story*, a novel by Lydia Davis. Davis—yet another Proust translator (she did *Du côté de chez Swann*)—has her narrator, a translator writing about a failed love affair, admit:

Then again, maybe there is nothing that does not belong in, and this novel is like a puzzle with a difficult solution. If I were clever and patient enough, I could find it. When I do a difficult crossword, I never quite finish it, but I usually don't remember to look at the solution when it appears. I have been working on this puzzle so long by now that I catch myself thinking it is time to look at the solution, as though I will only have to dig through a pile of papers to find it. I have the same sort of frustration, at times, with a problem in a translation. I ask, Now, what is the answer?—as though it

existed somewhere. Maybe the answer is what will occur to me later, when I look back.

Because of the kind of puzzle this is, though, no one else will ever know that a few more things belonged in the novel and were left out because I did not know where to put them.

This is not the only thing I'm afraid of. I'm afraid I may realize after the novel is finished that what actually made me want to write it was something different, and that it should have taken a different direction. But by then I will not be able to go back and change it, so the novel will remain what it is and the other novel, the one that should have been written, will never be written.

Proust, that is, would have realized these identifications had he not died writing the novel, had he been able to "look back" and discover such a solution. In fact, the only failed writer with whom Proust did realize he identified is a character in another novel by George Eliot: not Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda*, but Casaubon in *Middlemarch*. But that was in 1899, according to Painter, long before he began *À la recherche du temps perdu*.

I also wonder, for personal—idiosyncratic—reasons, whether Proust was aware of having left his brother Robert out. Maybe this omission (repression) was inadvertent (unconscious), and Proust could have finished the novel had he corrected it—or simply "known where to put him." Genette calls this kind of omission *paralipsis* (the absence of one of the constituent elements of a situation in a period the narrative generally covers) and cited as an example: "the fact of recounting his childhood while systematically concealing the existence of one of the members of his family (which Proust would be doing vis-à-vis his brother Robert if we took the *Recherche* for a genuine autobiography)." After all, the narrator of *Jean Santeuil*, Proust's first novel, hasn't got a brother either, even though, according to Genette, the abandoned book is even closer to autobiography than *À la recherche du temps perdu* is. But the narrator of *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, his second novel, does: a brother named Robert, and an inclusion, moreover, that didn't prevent the author from abandoning that book as well. And so the out-casting of the character in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, which synthesizes—or subsumes—the two previous books, was quite deliberate.

What about the brothers Proust does include? How should we construe Basin de Guermantes and Palamède de Charlus, both uncles of Saint-Loup (the narrator's only friend—and the only one who ever *touches* him); Edmond

and Jules Goncourt; Arnulphe and Victurnien de Surgis. I've nothing to say about the beautiful but idiotic—not to mention affectless—Surgis, with whom, through Charlus, Proust must have disidentified. Nor have I anything to say about the Goncourts, whom Proust presents as both naïve and indistinguishable. Basin and Palamède (“Mémé”), however, feel an intermittent affection for one another they find hard to express, a nostalgic affection compromised by maternal knowledge the senior, straighter sibling, to cite Sedgwick, mustn't possess. To quote, at length, the scene that occurs shortly after Charlus cruises the Surgis:

To return to this first evening at the Princesse de Guermantes's, I went to bid her good-night, for her cousins, who had promised to take me home, were in a hurry to be gone. M. de Guermantes wished, however, to say good-bye to his brother, Mme de Surgis having found time to mention to the Duke as she left that M. de Charlus had been charming to her and to her sons. This great kindness on his brother's part, the first moreover that he had ever shown in that line, touched Basin deeply and aroused in him old family feelings which were never entirely dormant. As we were saying good-bye to the Princess he insisted, without actually thanking M. de Charlus, on expressing his fondness for him, either because he genuinely had difficulty in containing it or in order that the Baron might remember that actions of the sort he had performed that evening did not escape the eyes of a brother, just as, with the object of creating salutary associations of memory for the future, we give a lump of sugar to a dog that has done its trick. “Well, little brother!” said the Duke, stopping M. de Charlus and taking him tenderly by the arm, “so we walk past our elders without so much as a word. I never see you now, Mémé, and you can't think how I miss you. I was turning over some old letters the other day and came upon some from poor Mamma, which are all so full of tenderness for you.”

“Thank you, Basin,” M. de Charlus replied in a broken voice, for he could never speak of their mother without emotion.

“You must let me fix up a cottage for you at Guermantes,” the Duke went on.

“It's nice to see the two brothers being so affectionate towards each other,” the Princess said to Oriane.

“Yes, indeed! I don't suppose you could find many brothers like them. I shall invite you with him,” the Duchess promised me. “You've not quarrelled with him? . . . But what can they be talking about?” she added in an

anxious tone, for she could catch only an occasional word of what they were saying. She had always felt a certain jealousy of the pleasure that M. de Guermantes found in talking to his brother of a past from which he was inclined to keep his wife shut out. She felt that, when they were happily together like this and she, unable to restrain her impatient curiosity, came and joined them, her arrival was not well received. But this evening, this habitual jealousy was reinforced by another. For if Mme de Surgis had told M. de Guermantes how kind his brother had been to her so that the Duke might thank his brother, at the same time certain devoted female friends had felt it their duty to warn the Duchess that her husband's mistress had been seen in close conversation with his brother. And Mme de Guermantes was tormented by this.

"Think of the fun we used to have at Guermantes long ago," the Duke went on. "If you came down sometimes in summer we could take up our old life again. Do you remember old Father Courveau; 'Why is Pascal disturbing? Because he is dis. . . dis. . .'" "Turbed," put in M. de Charlus as though he were still answering his tutor's question. "'And why is Pascal disturbed?; because he is dis. . . because he is dis. . .'" "Turbing." "'Very good, you'll pass, you're certain to get a distinction, and Madame la Duchesse will give you a Chinese dictionary.' How it all comes back to me, Mémé, and the old Chinese vase Hervey de Saint-Denys brought back for you, I can see it now. You used to threaten us that you would go and spend your life in China, you were so enamoured of the country; even then you used to love going for long rambles. Ah, you were always an odd one, for I can honestly say that you never had the same tastes as other people in anything. . . ." But no sooner had he uttered these words than the Duke blushed scarlet, for he was aware of his brother's reputation, if not of his actual habits. As he never spoke to him about it, he was all the more embarrassed at having said something which might be taken to refer to it, and still more at having shown his embarrassment. After a moment's silence: "Who knows," he said, to cancel the effect of his previous words, "you were perhaps in love with a Chinese girl before loving so many white ones, and finding favour with them, if I am to judge by a certain lady to whom you have given great pleasure this evening by talking to her. She was delighted with you." The Duke had vowed to himself that he would not mention Mme de Surgis, but, in the confusion that the gaffe he had just made had wrought in his ideas, he had pounced on the one that was uppermost in his

mind, which happened to be precisely the one that ought not to have appeared in the conversation, although it had started it. But M. de Charlus had observed his brother's blush. And, like guilty persons who do not wish to appear embarrassed that you should talk in their presence of the crime which they are supposed not to have committed, and feel obliged to prolong a dangerous conversation: "I am charmed to hear it," he replied, "but I should like to go back to what you were saying before, which struck me as being profoundly true. You were saying that I never had the same ideas as other people—how right you are!—and you said that I had unorthodox tastes." "No, I didn't," protested M. de Guermantes, who, as a matter of fact, had not used those words, and may not have believed that their meaning was applicable to his brother. Besides, what right had he to bully him about idiosyncrasies which in any case were vague enough or secret enough to have in no way impaired the Baron's tremendous position in society? What was more, feeling that the resources of his brother's position were about to be placed at the service of his mistresses, the Duke told himself that this was well worth a little tolerance in exchange; had he at that moment known of some "unorthodox" relationship of his brother's M. de Guermantes would, in the hope of the support that the other might give him, have passed it over, shutting his eyes to it, and if need be lending a hand. "Come along, Basin; good-night, Palamède," said the Duchess, who, devoured by rage and curiosity, could endure no more, "if you have made up your minds to spend the night here, we might just as well stay to supper. You've been keeping Marie and me standing for the last half-hour." The Duke parted from his brother after a meaningful embrace, and the three of us began to descend the immense staircase of the Princess's house.

Writers, according to Kristeva, aren't supposed to kill themselves, even though many do: Woolf, Benjamin, even Barthes, in a way. (Kafka could explain all such deaths. Despair, he wrote, is an enemy of both life and writing, because writing is merely a moratorium, as it is for someone who writes his will just before hanging himself.) When Albertine commits suicide, she wrote in another homophobic spasm, we see "the tyranny of remorse" in lesbians and the "criminal lunacy" of the character's obsession—a lunacy that enables the narrator to distance himself from the temptation of suicide and that clears a path toward art, that wonderful "substitute" for grief and remorse. "Succumbing neither to melancholy nor to flagellation but playing every possible role at the same time," he buries both Albertine and his illusions about love—maintain-

ing thereby that the creator is inherently solitary. On the other hand, Kristeva acknowledged, writers do succumb to melancholy, especially ones who never stop. Death, she felt, is not a final destination but an indispensable part of life, its “constitutive intermittence.” In this sense, sadomasochism is the inevitable counterpart to the imaginary, hidden, and necessary face of delicacy. In this sense, Sade, too, was one of Proust’s precursors. Think of Charlus, who is elegant because he is mad. Or think of the narrator, whose subtlety stems from having allowed—or caused—both Albertine and his grandmother to die. “Interminable remorse is a formula for putting off indifference, a way of delaying it in the name of style.”

Time and again, I have tried to write an entire book—to be titled *Finishing Proust* as well—about all this. If I ever succeed, I wonder what kind of book it will have been. Will it have been an elegy—either Proustian or Barthesian—for my own older brother, who killed himself twenty years ago: one the completion of which has enabled me not to do so too? (Terminable remorse.) Will it have been a pseudo-elegy at the end of which I’ll do it anyway: a poor substitute for true remorse? (*Terminal* remorse.) On the other hand, who’s to say I haven’t finished *Finishing Proust*? And who’s to say—who am *I* to say Proust didn’t finish *À la recherche du temps perdu*? Or that Benjamin and Howard didn’t finish their translations, Gide and Woolf their readings. According to Maurice Blanchot—notwithstanding his competing notion of *désœuvrement* (or “unworkable” idleness), which I’d attribute to the man’s having been a Cocteau Proustian—a work of art is neither complete nor incomplete. It simply *is*.