

PROUSTIAN BODIES

Proustian Bodies

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ABSTRACT

What role does the body play in Marcel Proust's A La Recherche Du Temps Perdu? Concentrating particularly on Combray and Un Amour de Swann, the following study traces Proust's transformation of the physical body by metaphor. Because the presentation of the body is a barometer indicating both a character's conscious and subconscious thought, critical interpretation of the body is a vital part of understanding Proustian desire. In "chapter one" on the metaphors of bodily processes, the narrator's desire is discussed. Swann's love for Odette is the focus of "chapter two" on the body of desire. Finally, "chapter three" which deals with the body as "sign" in the social world, describes the problems which accompany the interpretation of the body in the text.

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INTRODUCTION

Although A La Recherche Du Temps Perdu is governed by a transcendental aesthetic, the physical - that is the body - plays an important and necessary part in the text. In fact, the duality "spirit-body" figures prominently in many crucial scenes in the novel. The mystery generated by the relationship between these two categorically different sides of consciousness is well depicted in the madeleine scene where, there is a direct connection between a physical stimulus, the bodily sensations it produces, and the act of creation it catalyzes. In Le Temps Retrouvé, the narrator reaffirms what is metaphorically stated in the madeleine scene by defining the writer's task as the expression of insights in the work of art by the writer's transformation of physical sensation into literary form:

Ces impressions, "matérielles parce qu'elles sont entrées en nous par nos sens", nous pouvons et nous devons en "dégager l'esprit", les "convertir en un équivalent spirituel", ce qui n'est pas "autre chose que faire une oeuvre d'art".¹

The procedure described here is two-fold; it begins with a sensual - that is - bodily experience followed by the intellect's conversion of this feeling into a work of art. A moment of epiphany precedes the actual creation of the work of art. During this experience of heightened awareness the narrator transcends the reality of his current situation and glimpses the essence of something eternal. Paradoxically, this would be mystical experience is achieved through the physical material of the body. In the madeleine scene the narrator establishes the importance of the role the body plays in the act of creation by emphasizing bodily sensation and by decreeing its interpretation morally imperative (nous pouvons et nous devons).

The body also occupies a privileged place in Proust's A La Recherche as the focus of the epistemological process involved in understanding the world; in other words, in the act of reading. Reading, in A La Recherche, applies not only to books but to people in society. People act as signifiers in the social arena. They are like the printed words on the page. But beyond the physical body which must be interpreted as a sign, there is also the metaphorical body. The narrator's conception of reality is of a world where inanimate objects are described as having metaphorical bodies. His approach to discovery is not by scientific method but by creating a personal interpretation of things which satisfies his curiosity. As behind every human body there lies a spirit, so the narrator views the physical

world as hiding other, more interesting realities behind its metaphorical "bodies".

The body is not a "theme" explicitly addressed in the narrator's discourse. Yet the body is an instrument through which the author develops his major ideas. For example, love, music, art, and society are themes that include the body. Contrary to popular misconceptions A La Recherche contains a great deal more action than its sparse storyline would suggest. Jean-Yves Tadié observes, for example, that "L'acte sexuel nous est peint sous toutes ses formes..."² Action, of course, implies the presence of the body. In fact, Proust's observation begins first with the body:

...le regard s'attache au geste en attendant l'acte, et de l'acte remonte à l'univers intérieur du héros. Car le héros tel que Proust le conçoit est à la fois ce qu'il fait et ce qu'il cache.³

It is only through the body that one can arrive at a knowledge of one's inner thought because indicators of what one thinks, whether voluntary or not, are to be found in one's actions.

This thesis is made up of three chapters, each of which discusses a different "body" in the text. The first chapter concerns metaphors of bodily processes. The second focuses on the body of desire. The third deals with the social body. The chapters are organized thus to show a general movement from the body of an individual (je), to the erotic body of an interpersonal relationship (je-tu), and

finally to the gathering of many bodies in society. This ordering reflects the progression of the text itself. In Combray, the narrator begins to understand his own body in relation to the world around him. Then, in Un Amour de Swann, the body in is Odette's. Swann's love for her leads him into the milieu of the social party scenes.

Chapter one deals mainly with the metaphor of the bodily process of digestion. Rather than describing the narrator's interpretation of the external world as an intellectual activity, Proust presents it in the metaphor of bodily consumption. Eating is the prerequisite, not only for a satisfied body, but for creative productivity. Indeed, the metaphorically fed body provides the actual substance for the text.

The analysis of the erotic body and the nature of desire in the love affair between Charles Swann and Odette de Crécy (a love relationship that most critics agree is typical of Proustian love) is the topic of the second chapter. Swann's love for Odette is motivated by an underlying desire that he himself is unaware of and tries to explain by associating her with a painting by Botticelli which he admires. One expects the physical body to be at the centre of a discussion which focuses on sexual possession but, instead, the body is here constantly substituted by metaphor into other material.

Finally, in chapter three the Verdurin salon and Mme de Sainte Euverte's soirée provide the social setting for

the study of bodily signs. In Proust's text, one must be able to read the body in order to understand the true nature of the characters for they themselves will not directly or verbally communicate this information. V

CHAPTER I

Metaphors of Bodily Process

An author's oeuvre is sometimes referred to as a "body" of work. One can even describe the act of writing through the metaphor of the author's giving birth to his text. Considered in this light, the ordered functioning of the text's parts, and the creative process itself, take on explicit biological overtones. What is implied by such imagery is that we no longer have the mere printed product of the author's imagination but an actual living organism.

Such biological metaphors seem especially apt for characterizing the aesthetics of A La Recherche Du Temps Perdu - especially since they relate to the notion of "process" which is paramount to an understanding of the text. The body performs many processes each day; for example, digestion and blood circulation. As a result, it never ceases to change. By doing so, it lives. Proust himself never ceased to correct and to add to his manuscripts, and was thus always in the process of writing. More importantly,

this notion of change or of transformation and evolution is at work within A La Recherche itself.

The notion of process exists on different levels throughout the novel. For example, the search for a vocation causes the narrator considerable anxiety right up until the end of the novel. In fact, the novel is the narrative of a search that concludes with the realization that the novel must be written. This cyclical structure suggests that there is no real end to the text, but that once completed, the process must begin again. The analogy can be drawn to the body whose processes repeat themselves on a daily cycle.

Time is another process at work in A La Recherche which chronicles not only the psychic or spiritual development of the narrator but his bodily development as well. Time is a metaphysical notion which manifests itself through the body; the evidence of bodily deterioration marks the lapse of time.

Generally, the relationship between the physical and the metaphysical is metaphorical in nature. As a body, a work of literature possesses its own metaphorical biology, witnessed in the very act of writing. The work's creation can be viewed on quasi-biological terms. The pen for example, can be seen as a phallic symbol.¹ Following Serge Doubrovsky's analogy: "jouir = (jet de sperme ou d'encre)".² The receptacle of this orgasmic creative process is the ("virgin") page; its product, writing. In this way, the author con-

ceives his work. Moreover, the use of bodily metaphors will become an important tool for describing the act of creation.

One of the most important scenes in A La Recherche to illustrate the essential role of the body in its relation to the mind is the madeleine scene.³ In particular, this scene highlights the bodily function of digestion as a metaphor for interpretation. What happens on a purely physical level here is that the narrator consumes some tea and biscuits. Food can be nourishment for the body but, as this scene bears out, it can also activate the imagination, and act as food for the mind as in the metaphor: "food for thought".

Often referred to as a metaphorical communion, the madeleine scene proves sacramental in the change it brings to the narrator. In the Catholic ceremony of the Mass the body and blood of Christ are consumed (in the tradition of the Last Supper). This act serves to renew and to replenish the recipient; on a physical level because he eats bread and drinks wine, and on a spiritual level because his faith is strengthened. What happens in the madeleine scene is analogous to communion. The narrator is given tea and a madeleine which, once consumed, transform his life. Not only does Combray emerge, as it were, from his cup of tea but he is given the opportunity to relive his past. This event saves the narrator much in the same way as receiving the Eucharist is, for the believer, a means of finding salvation through Christ.

The similarities between the madeleine scene and communion go further than the mere parallels between their ceremonial aspects; the symbolic significance of the foods eaten in each case is similar. What is eaten in both cases is a body; in communion it is the body of Christ and in the madeleine scene, as Serge Doubrovsky argues, it is the body of the mother. One need but look closely at the manner in which the madeleine is described in order to discover that Proust has anthropomorphised it:

Elle envoya chercher un de ces gâteaux courts et dodus appelés Petites Madeleines qui semblent avoir été moulés dans la valve rainurée d'une coquille de Saint-Jacques.⁴

J.-Francis Reille comments, "Dodue évoque un corps avant d'évoquer un gâteau, dans le contexte où le gâteau porte un nom de femme..."⁵ The symbolic representation of the madeleine as a woman is clearer further on in the scene where the narrator, describing it more sensuously, says, "...si grassement sensuel sous son plissage sévère et dévot..."⁶ The last two adjectives used here perhaps connote the moral qualities of the mother. At the same time, "grassement sensuel" suggests the erotic appeal of the madeleine. The description remains as equivocal as the biblical allusion its name makes - Madeleine - saint or sinner? In either case, the attraction that exists for the madeleine is promoted by its appearance much as a man is first attracted to a woman by her body. Moreover, it would appear that the narrator is drawn to a certain type of beauty as one notes

throughout A La Recherche. Often the women he fancies are plump. The use of "grassement" would imply that this particular taste projects itself onto the madeleine. Thus, rather than expressing his desire for a woman, the narrator directs his sexual desire towards food; metaphorically, a transposed act of intercourse is achieved orally when the food is ingested. "Intercourse" which results in physical pleasure, and "communion" which results in spiritual joy, are in fact synonyms which describe a union. The ambiguity of the madeleine is due to the similarity in the language used to describe these two acts of union.

The parallel between the Christian sacrament of communion and the madeleine scene evokes the basic relationship between the spirit and the body. Serge Doubrovsky's psychoanalytic interpretation of the madeleine scene extends the reader's sense of importance of the body's influence on the mind. In his book, La Place De La Madeleine, Doubrovsky looks upon the madeleine scene as some sort of screen memory for some original state of bliss where mother and child were united. As a result of the narrator's latent desire to recapture this state, one can interpret the tea and madeleine, which are an offering from the mother to her son, as some sort of love offering. The body, which is cold, needs some nourishment to revitalize itself; the madeleine and tea satisfy this need. At the same time, the narrator also needs to be nourished with love. Doubrovsky makes the following comment:

On s'étonnera sans doute moins que le
 "plaisir délicieux", dont sa dégustation
 s'accompagne, se manifeste "de la même
 façon qu'opère l'amour".⁷

Love and hunger are similar because both begin from a desire which must be fulfilled. Be it love or hunger, it is through the body that these needs are nourished and satisfied.

Since the madeleine scene marks the beginning of an association between the erotic and orality which one encounters quite often in A La Recherche, the narrator's fascination for women's cheeks represents a further case of the relationship between eating and love. Plump cheeks suggest the illusion of plenitude. The act of nourishment is so vital to the narrator's own experience that anything which might be associated with it will hold some unconscious attraction for him. In fact, those things which remind him of nourishment (besides cheeks, Doubrovsky also notes the narrator's fascination for breasts which are more obviously associated as a means of nourishment) become objects of sexual desire as well since, as has already been established in the madeleine scene, the pleasure derived from eating works in the same way as love ("...de la même façon qu'opère l'amour").

In A L'Ombre Des Jeunes Filles En Fleurs, the scene in which the narrator spends his first night in a Balbec hotel room with his grandmother demonstrates the close relation that exists between love and nourishment. Looking at

the incident in retrospect he realizes that he found his grandmother's body alone a source of strength which he could feed upon. In the scene, their bodies become as one, as in the original state of union between mother and child:

...trompé par l'apparence du corps comme
on l'est dans ce monde où nous ne per-
cevons pas directement les âmes, je me
jetai dans les bras de ma grand'mère et
je suspendis mes lèvres à sa figure comme
si j'accédais ainsi à ce coeur immense
qu'elle m'ouvrait. Quand j'avais ainsi ma
bouche collée à ses joues, à son front,
j'y puisais quelque chose de si bien-
faisant, de si nourricier, que je gardais
l'immobilité, le sérieux, la tranquillité
avidité d'un enfant qui tète.⁸

The narrator is comforted by his grandmother at a time when he feels threatened by the unfamiliar, outside world. His mouth is firmly attached to her cheeks which again, are a symbol of nourishment. He benefits from this nourishment by acquiring a feeling of security. He also has the sensation of being loved for he has "access to (her) immense heart". The relation between love and nourishment here serves to demonstrate that the narrator, at this early stage of his life, understands the world in terms of the physical. He in fact confuses the soul and the body as being the same thing; physical contact means having access to the soul. As he says, in this world one cannot perceive the soul but through the body. Thus the narrator believes he can unite with external bodies or objects through the act of touch. In such a perception of the world spiritual love cannot be described

unless it too is reduced to a physical state. Again, hunger and love seem to work on the same level.

Many times, in Combray, the narrator attributes the capabilities of the mind to the body. It is never in his mind (voluntary memory) that he remembers something but with his body (involuntary memory). During the description of his bedroom and awaking scenes he says:

Et avant même que ma pensée, qui hésitait
au seuil des temps et des formes, eût
identifié le logis en, rapprochant les
circonstances, lui - mon corps - se rap-
pelait pour chacun le genre du lit, la
place des portes...⁸

Again a few lines later:

...et mon corps, le côté sur lequel je
reposais, gardiens fidèles d'un passé que
mon esprit n'aurait jamais dû oublier, me
rappelaient la flamme de la veilleuse
de verre de Bohême...⁹

To speak of the body in these terms seems quite out of the ordinary and so these passages indicate that it is the body, not the mind, which is central to the narrator's understanding of the world around him. There are certain things that the mind forgets but that the body does not. For example, the body is a "gardien fidèle" of a past that the conscious mind has perhaps repressed, for he says, "que mon esprit n'aurait jamais dû oublier" but that for some reason has forgotten. The importance of the body therefore does not mean the importance of the physical; rather, the body is considered by the narrator in psychosomatic terms.

Essentially however, the body's tendencies are different from those of the spirit. Doubrovsky states that "...la loi spirituelle est d'involution, là où la loi biologique est d'évolution. Le corps progresse, quand l'esprit veut régresser."¹⁰ That is, the body necessarily undergoes a series of changes in the process of aging which is forward moving - one grows old, not young. Contrarily, the mind seems to be governed by repressed memories of past events and subconsciously tries to relive them, thereby going backwards. This observation casts some light on the madeleine scene where, while the body is being nourished and grows, the mind regresses to the past and to all of the forgotten details of Combray. This remembrance of early childhood years in Combray which evoke the closeness between the narrator and his mother is triggered by the madeleine, which is symbolic of the mother. From this perspective the eating of the madeleine can be interpreted as an erotic gesture which indicates the narrator's repressed need for his mother.

Eroticism is a theme which is found in the madeleine scene in the form of incest. The fact that the madeleine is offered to the narrator by his mother and that it evokes certain female physical attributes, bear out this interpretation. Of course, while the incestuous act is disguised in the form of a metaphor, it is concealed to the narrator by repression. What is being repressed is his desire to rediscover a state of union with his mother. Since he cannot achieve the object of his desire within reality, he un-

knowingly seeks it through the imagination; "L'échec réel va devenir la réussite imaginaire".¹¹ The narrator's need for his mother is only fulfilled symbolically but even at this level his instinctual response to her offering is ambivalent. He accepts the tea but says, "Je refusai d'abord et, je ne sais pourquoi, me ravisai".¹² His incomprehension of his initial refusal points to a mechanism which is at work at an unconscious level. It must be that he senses the incestuous nature of the act, but realizing the harmlessness of acting out, if only symbolically, that which his unconscious desires, he accepts.

The narrator's acceptance of the madeleine indicates his need for some help regarding his future, which at this point he describes as "un triste lendemain".¹³ The madeleine scene can be looked upon as a sort of identity crisis where the narrator finally receives the first bit of stimulus he needs to realize his vocation as a writer. Doubrovsky situates the scene at a crucial point in both the novel and the narrator's life:

Métonymiquement, dans la chaîne narrative, elle la produit au lieu où on pourrait dire que le récit cesse, faute de substance...¹⁴

One of the functions of this scene is that it produces the material about which the narrator will write; the subject of the novel will be his past life. Many critics feel that without the madeleine scene, it is quite probable that A La Recherche could not have existed. It represents not only a

topic on which to write but the very method by which this novel will be written.

The uncertainty which precedes this scene, followed by a sense of direction on the narrator's part, is paralleled by the state of hunger or emptiness which is followed by a state of plenitude. In Doubrovsky's words:

La problématique de la plénitude mentale renvoie au modèle primitif de la réplétion physique: nourriture + mère..."¹⁵

The narrator's bodily hunger is fed by the madeleine, which in turn acts as the necessary condition for the appeasement of his spiritual hunger. In so far as he is given some hope concerning his future as a writer, the process of realizing his identity has advanced one step further. He is now aware of a meaning to his life which he created himself through a process which he will apply to the writing of his novel. Creativity thus finds itself to be contingent upon the image of the satisfied body.

The feeling of satisfaction that accompanies the creative act is described by the narrator in terms of physical sensation. In the closing episodes of Combray, he demonstrates his ability to write, and then comments on the pleasure that it brings him. The contemplation of the written page on the subject of the bell-towers of Martinville evokes the following remark:

...je sentais qu'elle m'avait si parfaitement débarrassé de ces clochers et de ce qu'ils cachaient derrière eux, que comme si j'avais été moi-même une poule et si je venais de pondre un oeuf..."¹⁶

One can only assume that the laying of an egg is an event followed by both a sense of relief and satisfaction. The simile employed by the narrator is comic in its treatment of a serious, metaphysical event, by comparing it to the banality of a hen laying its egg. He consequently becomes a "mother" by symbolically performing the female function of giving birth. The narrator has discovered that writing is an effective way to deal with his feelings. Moreover, Proust emphasizes the discovery of the act of creation through the biological analogy of reproduction.

Contrary to the madeleine scene, the narrator does not endeavor to search for, let alone create, the meaning of the bell-tower experience. The process in the madeleine scene requires two stages; "Chercher? pas seulement: créer"¹⁷ In the bell-tower scene, however, the narrator has not yet discovered the meaning behind the towers; he only succeeds in freeing his mind of their effect. Writing, for him, proves a cathartic experience which releases the tension of repressed material. Just as though he had laid an egg, he feels relieved of a burden. What occurs is a transfer from one body to another; from the narrator's body to the body of work. The egg is laid but has not been hatched - we do not know what is inside; in other words, no interpretation of the bell-towers takes place.

Within the madeleine scene, interpretation is an act of creation itself. Metaphorically, interpretation recalls the process of digestion where the material to be inter-

puted passes through the body in various stages. Doubrovsky gives a concise formula for this process:

1. je mange maman
2. je digère maman
3. je fais Combray = je chie maman

He arrives at this observation by first equating the madeleine to the mother for which it is a symbol. Given that the material substance which stimulates the memory of Combray is the madeleine, and that the psychic act of memory is described on a physical level ("...Combray et ses environs, tout cela qui prend forme et solidité, est sorti, ville et jardins, de ma tasse de thé."¹⁹), he consequently makes the analogy: (le narrateur) "chie maman". Indeed, defecation is the natural conclusion to the process of digestion. The madeleine has undergone a transformation through the body and has been broken down into its essential components; the good has been incorporated while the bad has been expelled. Doubrovsky says:

Une défécation réussie offre, en effet, le modèle archaïque d'une constitution idéale du "moi": 1) conversion de l'Autre en ma propre substance 2) expulsion de la "mauvaise nourriture, après absorption de la "bonne".²⁰

The body is naturally critical of that which passes through it; able to discern between good and bad.

Doubrovsky's analogy of the creative process is an idea comically but explicitly expressed in the text itself. In the Verdurin salon, the painter comments on a work of art he has recently seen by saying:

...on ne pourrait pas dire si c'est fait
 avec de la colle, avec du rubis, avec du
 savon, avec du bronze, avec du soleil,
 avec du caca! ...et pas mèche de savoir
 avec quoi c'est fait, c'en est sorcier,
 c'est de la rouerie, c'est du miracle...²¹

The discongruity of the term "caca" with a painting that seems miraculous evokes the madeleine scene and Doubrovsky's equation: "je fais Combray"(product of creation) = "je chie maman". Proust calls attention to the painter's choice of terms twice afterwards: "...qui avait fait jeter à Forcheville un coup d'oeil circulaire sur la table pour voir si le mot passait..."²² and "Quoiqu'il ait, chemin faisant, quelques mots un peu réalistes, mais c'est le goût du jour..."²³ Having been acceptable at the Verdurin's, Doubrovsky's analogy is preceded and therefore appropriate.

The comparison of the digestive process to the act of interpretation extends further: as well as sorting out the good from the bad, the body must deal with each. Before the narrator eats the madeleine, he is unaware of the meaning which it contains. Afterwards, it supplies the substance for Combray or, as the narrator defines it, "...tout cela qui prend forme et solidité..."²⁴ The end product of this digestion or that which is "formed" is necessarily subjective as is any interpretation. The narrator, having desired communion with his mother, has achieved this goal via the imagination by making her part of something which is his own.

According to Freudian theory, the drama of possession is first experienced by the child in the anal stage. In the words of Norman O. Brown:

This infantile stage of anal erotism takes the essential form of attaching symbolic meaning to the anal product. As a result of these symbolic equations the anal product acquires for the child the significance of being his own child or creation...²⁵

The fact that the narrator produces Combray, which is tantamount to "je chie maman" gives him a certain sense of power over his past for it has become his own creation. This symbolic possession gives him joy because he has thus acquired the object of his subconscious desire. Moreover, this repressed desire has provided the substance for the narrator's creation and so the creative act becomes a means of releasing tension.

The process of taking possession and the resulting sense of power which it brings seems to work dialectically. At first the narrator refuses his independence and regresses back to the original state of union with the mother. Ironically, the feeling which results from this action is a sense of freedom or independence. This change sees the narrator go from a cold and hungry boy, to one who, in his own words says, "J'avais cessé de me sentir médiocre, contingent, mortel. D'où avait pu me venir cette puissante joie?"²⁶ Through the Other, he gets a stronger sense of Self. Norman O. Brown explains the working of this process:

Repression transforms the timeless instinctual compulsion to repeat into a forward-moving dialectic of neurosis which is history; history is a forward-moving recherche du temps perdu...²⁷

The child creates his own identity by the dialectical process of regressing back to the state of union between mother and child, by seeking those things associated with this state, the madeleine for example. Then, he transforms them metaphorically, through the body, into something which is his own. The narrator progresses by repeating a repressed event in the future. Thus his desire will always be mediated by the initial desire for the mother.

The extreme influence which the child's first object-choice (the mother's breast) has on the rest of his life indicates the essential bond between the body and mind.

Freud says:

I cannot convey to you any adequate idea of the importance of his first object-choice in determining every later object adopted, of the profound influence it exerts through transformation and substitution, upon the most distant fields of mental life.²⁸

In fact, the child continues to seek objects which resemble this first object-choice. Consequently, the mother's influence upon his life extends far past her initial physical offering; it manifests itself later on psychologically in the objects he desires. Thus the initial physical satisfaction will continue to be played out symbolically as in the madeleine scene where the madeleine is a substitute for the moth-

er. Metaphor becomes the only means by which the narrator can satisfy his desire.

The narrator's experience with the world becomes an attempt to attain a state of continuity with it, since, those things which attract him are subconsciously associated with the original state of union between mother and child. He tries to unite with the world by assimilating the objects that he comes into contact with. The assimilation is achieved through metaphor. Leo Bersani notes that the many eating and digestion metaphors in A La Recherche "...suggests this changing of a world of resistant matter into something more easily taken in and assimilated".²⁹ The internalisation of that which is external illustrates the method that the narrator uses in developing his sense of identity; he becomes the world, so to speak, by making it a part of himself.

It is at Françoise's dinner table where the narrator delights at the sight of asparagus, that we find the process of assimilation at work. As with the madeleine, these asparagus are anthropomorphised by the narrator and given magical qualities. He says:

Il me semblait que ces nuances célestes
trahissaient les délicieuses créatures
qui s'étaient amusées à se métamorphoser
en légumes et qui, à travers le déguise-
ment de leur chair comestible et
ferme...³⁰

These are not merely vegetables but rather some kind of celestial substance. They are described in physical form as

having "(un) chair comestible" which gives them the attributes needed for their assimilation by the narrator. As in the madeleine scene there is a transformation of physical matter into spiritual food. In both cases, a special essence is transferred to the narrator by means of a physical form.

What happens once the essences are inside his body remains a mystery to the narrator. He likens the process to a Shakespearean comedy:

...elles (les essences) jouaient dans
leurs farces poétiques et grossières
comme une féerie de Shakespeare, à
changer mon pot de chambre en un vase de
parfum.³¹

This fanciful description of the asparagus is an example of the narrator's novel-like approach to phenomena he cannot explain. The allusion to fairies indicates the supernatural element in his description of the world.

Such supernatural properties are ascribed to Golo in the magic lantern scene in Combray. The narrator, by moving the lantern, can project Golo's image onto various parts of the room. In this way, whatever his image projects onto, would in a sense be incorporated or assimilated by the image. The narrator describes the scene:

Le corps de Golo lui-même, d'une essence
aussi surnaturelle que celui de sa mon-
ture, s'arrangeait de tout obstacle
matériel, de tout objet gênant qu'il ren-
contrait en le prenant comme ossature et
en se le rendant intérieur... mais qui ne
laissait paraître aucun trouble de cette
transvertébration.³²

Golo deals with the world external to himself by internalizing it. The narrator ascribes to Golo's body "une essence (aussi) surnaturelle" in its ability to assimilate anything in its path. With any change of position, his skeletal structure changes as well; he is perfectly adaptable to any obstacle. The use of the term "transvertébration" evokes the idea of metempsychosis and, in effect, aptly describes what Golo can do; while his essence remains the same, his form can constantly change.

The primitive level at which Golo is able to transvertebrate recalls the Celtic belief which the narrator mentions at the introduction to the madeleine scene. The essence of this belief is that the soul, after death, is imprisoned in another recipient, inferior to the body and must wait to be released:

Je trouve très raisonnable la croyance celtique que les âmes de ceux que nous avons perdus sont captives dans quelque être inférieur, perdues en effet pour nous jusqu'au jour... où nous trouvons passer près de l'arbre, entre en possession de l'objet qui est leur prison. Alors elles tressaillent, nous appellent, et sitôt que nous les avons reconnues, l'enchantement est brisé.³³

This passage is very mystical in the way that it describes a sort of reincarnation of the soul. But the possession of such an object is not enough to free the soul from it; possession is a necessary condition but not sufficient in itself. By the end of the madeleine scene, the narrator has developed a comparable theory:

Mais, quand d'un passé ancien rien ne subsiste, après la mort des êtres, après la destruction des choses, seules, plus frêles mais plus vivaces, plus immatérielles, plus persistantes, plus fidèles, l'odeur et la saveur restent encore longtemps, comme des âmes, à se rappeler à attendre, à espérer, sur la ruine de tout le reste, à porter sans fléchir, sur leur gouttelette presque impalpable, l'édifice immense du souvenir.³⁴

The narrator is essentially saying that once the material thing has died and disappeared, its essence can live on. But, in order for it to be recalled to memory, the essence, like a soul, must wait and hope to find its "gouttelette presque impalpable", its asparagus, or its madeleine. That is, it must find a new body to occupy since one can only grasp the soul through the body. Thus, what remains of that forgotten past in Combray is transferred or transformed into a "gouttelette" which in turned is changed, in the end, into a novel.

The importance of bodily metaphors in A La Recherche is related to the nature of the narrator's desire. Food, therefore, occupies an important place in his life because, often, it resembles the body and is eaten. Both of these characteristics are associated with the mother's breast, which is part of the body and which represents a form of nourishment. The narrator's repressed desire for the mother is satisfied through possession of food described using bodily metaphors.

Since the object of his desire is associated with the body, the world in general is defined in terms of the

body. That is, the vocabulary used to describe the body finds its way into the description of psychic events and other objects. The madeleine and the asparagus, for example, are foods which contain certain essences and which are described as bodies. Both, the narrator suggests, have a reality beyond the obvious physical reality; the existence of "another world" fascinates him. This other reality is unknown to him much as the inner body is unknown to him. Thus, if his description or explanation of things is novel-like, it is because he must create one for himself. The attempt to do so results in the novel.

CHAPTER II

The Body and Desire

In the words of Ortega y Gasset: "Un Amour de Swann shows us every kind of feeling except love".¹ Love, rather, is the desire to possess the object. Furthermore, this object is nothing other than a mediating factor through which the subject can get to an essence of some other world. "Proust pensait que l'amoureux, à travers la personne aimée, cherche obscurément à entrer en communication avec quelque déité inconnue."² Initially, the loved object, the physical body, must possess some charm. Afterwards, the love which develops for it is subjectively nurtured. Swann, for example, distorts his vision of reality as a result of his love for Odette causing himself anguish. Indeed, this self-induced suffering, secretly sought after by the lover, is the result of an inability to sexually and emotionally possess the loved one. The anxiety which this desire produces is the proustian form of "love". As Leo Bersani states: "Love is an anxiety which a fortuitous group of circumstances attaches at different moments of our lives to to different people".³

Un Amour de Swann is a text which focuses on this kind of love. It depicts an attempt, albeit perhaps unconscious, by Swann to understand the relation between the desiring mind and the body of desire. More precisely, he tries to sort out the reasons for loving a woman that, not only is not his "type" but whom he does not even like.

In the first few pages of Un Amour the narrator describes Swann's taste for women as being opposite to his aesthetic taste. Baring this point in mind, one notes that the relationship he has with Odette is like no other he has had before. Paradoxically, Odette does not appeal to Swann's taste in women but to his taste in art. The description of the women he has had relations with in the past marks a contrast to Odette's physical features:

...les qualités physiques qu'il recherchait sans s'en rendre compte étaient en complète opposition avec celles qui lui rendaient admirables les femmes sculptées ou peintes par les maîtres qu'il préférait. La profondeur, la mélancolie de l'expression glaçaient ses sens, que suffisait au contraire à éveiller une chair saine, plantureuse et rose.⁴

The opposition which exists here between Swann's criteria for discerning beauty in women rendered in art and actual physical women illustrates that perhaps love for Swann must exclude lust. He ostensibly loves Odette but rarely do her physical features arouse passion in him. Facial expressions which evoke emotional or intellectual states, such as the kind he attributes to Odette, do nothing to stimulate Swann. On the other hand, the flesh of a rosy buxom girl easily

succeeds in awakening his senses. This is the type of woman that can satisfy his sexual desire. The qualities he enjoys as an art critic cannot give him physical satisfaction. Because of this discrepancy, Swann's pursuit of Odette is problematic from the start. He makes the ontological error of confusing flesh with canvas and must journey the length of Un Amour trying to make sense of this mistake.

The desire Swann has for Odette is symptomatic of a state of transition which is constantly at work in A La Recherche. As René Girard points out, the characters are always undergoing a "conversion" of what they think.⁵ Swann too fluctuates between desiring Odette and questioning this desire as a function of seeing her as either a woman or a work of art. His anxiety is a direct result of this fluctuation. Sexual desire is primarily an unmediated response to the physical features of the body; it can occur quite inadvertently, without reflection. In contrast, art criticism requires a conscious effort to judge and interpret that which is under scrutiny. Swann is constantly putting his desire into question, unaware himself of the error he is making in applying the criterion of art to the body.

The correspondence between art and reality in Swann's life is central to an understanding of his relations with women. Swann is a very social character; his life is spent frequenting various salons. However, another side of his personality reveals the aesthete, the art collector, and the author of an unfinished work on Vermeer. These two dif-

ferent aspects though are not independent of each other. In fact, when a woman is involved, they act so as to create tension. For example, in Swann's view, denying himself the object of his desire would seem a cowardly act. He says:

Si en voyage il rencontrait une famille
...dans laquelle une femme se présentait
à ses yeux... rester dans son "quant à
soi" et tromper le désir qu'elle avait
fait naître, substituer un plaisir dif-
férent... lui eût semblé une aussi lâche
abdication devant la vie, un aussi stu-
pide renoncement à un bonheur nouveau que
si, au lieu de visiter le pays, il s'était
s'était confiné dans sa chambre en regard-
ant des vues de Paris.⁶

From this statement, it is clear that Proust has injected his character with a spirit which regards life with a certain zeal; he wants to directly embrace and experience what is real. The alternative would be to shun life altogether by limiting its experience to a second-hand account of it in literature or art. These contrary propensities towards life are two forces which, when focused on Odette, create tension for Swann.

The problem is that Swann's love for Odette is mediated. He would rather pursue the object of desire rather than satisfy this desire by substituting another object for it. He says

...substituer un plaisir différent au
plaisir qu'il eût pu connaître avec elle,
écrivant à une ancienne maîtresse de
venir le rejoindre, lui eût semblé une
aussi lâche abdication devant la vie...⁷

This example clarifies the confusion that exists in Swann's love for Odette. Art, for Swann, is a means of getting to

essences as Georges Cattaui has pointed out. Thus art is a mediating agent. In real life though, it would be "une lâche abdication" according to Swann to attempt anything other than to possess the desired object directly. Indeed, Odette as object of desire, is but a substitution for Botticelli's "Jethro's daughter". Unknowingly, Swann contradicts his earlier statement by pursuing the desired object Odette, through the mediation of art.

When Swann does make love to Odette or rather as he calls it "faire catleyas" it is an act which is described by metaphor. A flower arrangement, which can certainly be considered a work of art, is used to mediate the act of possession.⁸ Odette herself becomes a flower, dressed in layers of clothing resembling petals:

Elle était habillée, sous sa mantille,
d'une flot de velours noir qui, par un
rattrapé oblique, découvrait en un large
triangle le bas d'une jupe de faille
blanche et laissait voir un empiècement,
également de faille blanche, à l'ouverture
du corsage décolleté...⁹

Catleyas, appropriately, are one of Odette's favourite flowers by virtue of "...ne pas ressembler à des fleurs, mais d'être en soie, en satin".¹⁰ As Odette is described as a flower, the language used to describe the arranging of the catleyas becomes full of sexual imagery:

...je pense que c'est du pollen qui s'est
répandu sur vous... Je ne vais pas trop
fort, je ne suis pas trop brutal... et
comme ça en les enfonçant un peu moi-
même...¹¹

Proust need not describe the sexual act to which this scene is a prelude since he has already done so within the scene by way of metaphor.

The catleyas scene is important because of its transformation of the body by metaphor. Odette's body is not described with a sense of lust, or for that matter, as something which is desired. Swann approaches Odette with a measure of safety by transforming her into a flower. He is very nervous and ill at ease as he performs the task of arranging the catleyas: his anxiety contrasts with Odette's passivity during the scene. As the flower metaphor indicates, there has been a substitution made of a living body by lifeless material; Odette has thereby been devitalized.

Throughout Un Amour Odette's body is of secondary importance with very little said about it. Although her facial features are aptly described, her body is left a mystery. Forcheville begins to discuss this subject with the other men who make up the "fidèles" of the Verdurins, but his sentence is left unfinished: "Je me figure que comme corps de femme..."¹² It is unsure whether Swann ever considers Odette's body in relation to other women's bodies in this same way. He is, however, aware of what the other men think about Odette:

...mais depuis qu'il s'était aperçu qu'à beaucoup d'hommes Odette semblait une femme ravissante et désirable, le charme qu'avait éveillé en lui un besoin douloureux de la maîtriser entièrement dans les moindres parties de son coeur.¹³

Her initial undesirability is transformed for Swann by mediation. As Girard says, "Le médiateur se rapproche et le désir se métamorphose".¹⁴ Swann does not desire Odette because he finds her attractive but because others do.

The mediator can not only transform the desire of the subject, but as Botticelli's painting proves, it can also alter the image of the desired object. When looking at Odette Swann sees Zéphora:

...maintenant qu'il connaissait l'original charnel de la fille de Jéthro, elle devenait un désir qui suppléa désormais à celui que le corps d'Odette ne lui avait pas d'abord inspiré.¹⁵

On its own, Odette's body fails to inspire him. But when seen as the possible model from which Botticelli took his inspiration she indeed becomes desirable. At one point, Odette ironically says to Swann,

Vous allez vous moquer de moi, ce peintre qui vous empêche de me voir (elle voulait parler de Ver Meer), je n'avais jamais entendu parler de lui, vit-il encore?¹⁶

Proust specifies Ver Meer in parentheses perhaps because another painter, Botticelli, also prevents Swann from seeing Odette; that is, in so far as he influences Swann's perception, he prevents him from realistically seeing her. Swann puts his trust in the artist's taste and not in his own; he desires through the painting and not according to his own criteria.

That Swann searches for some kind of justification for his love for Odette in external sources, indicates an

uneasiness on his part to fully accept his feelings for her. Here, it is important to note that Swann in fact believes he loves Odette before he enters the Verdurin circle and before he makes the association between her and Botticelli's painting.¹⁷ What Swann tries to do is establish a stable criterion to justify a feeling for which he has no explanation. The narrator writes:

Et, tandis que la vue purement charnelle qu'il avait eue de cette femme en renouvelant perpétuellement ses doutes sur la qualité de son visage, de son corps, de toute sa beauté, affaiblissait son amour, ces doutes furent détruits, cet amour assuré quand il eut à la place pour les données d'une esthétique certaine; sans compter que le baiser et la possession qui semblaient naturels et médiocres s'ils lui étaient accordés par une chair abîmée, venant couronner l'adoration d'une pièce de musée, lui parurent devoir être surnaturels et délicieux.¹⁸ (my emphasis)

Given the context of the art gallery, Odette can become the object of Swann's desire despite her looks; that which hangs in a museum has proven worth and is deserving of adoration. Even more importantly, this context can serve to transform the mere physical body or flesh into something which is supernatural. The association of Odette to a work of art can permit Swann access to another reality or to essences which are embodied in the art itself. As a result, he transforms his doubt into a certainty which qualifies his sexual possession of Odette as "délicieux".

Swann's attempt to justify his love for Odette represents a refusal to come to terms with what really causes

him to desire her. Instead of loving Odette through a mediating agent, she herself mediates a more deeper, repressed desire for the mother. Doubrovsky establishes that for Swann Odette is a mother figure:

Swann, qui se croit maître du jeu, se laisse de prime abord séduire au blanches d'un maternage systématique.¹⁹

Odette's attitude and the way she speaks to Swann are indeed motherly. But the most important indicator of her symbolic representation of the mother evokes the madeleine scene:

Deux fois seulement, dans l'après-midi, il était allé participer à cette opération capitale pour elle: "prendre le thé".²⁰

One cannot ignore this allusion to an event which itself manifests the repressed desire for the mother. Swann's attempt to metaphorically disguise the incestuous nature of his relationship with Odette is the sole factor responsible for the representation of the body of desire in Un Amour. Odette's body cannot be directly described or else his subconscious desire is revealed. For example, in the catleyas scene Odette's corsage is unbuttoned but there is no reference made to her breast - object of sexual desire and symbol of motherly nourishment. Instead, flesh becomes flower and Swann avoids a potentially incriminating action.

Georges Poulet has argued that space in A La Recherche is as important as temporality. Of course the body is a spatial thing and, is as well, an object of desire. When examining the kinds of spaces in which Odette's

character is described to occupy in Un Amour, often Swann perceives them as other worlds. This impression can be attributed to her association with art. Let us begin from the presumption that art and death have something in common, or to quote Doubrovsky, "...l'amour de la mort est l'amour de l'art".²¹ Art, afterall, is the negation of life; it does not live and thus does not change and evolve; instead, it is a static form. Thus, to love art is in a way to love the qualities that pertain to death - something eternal. This analogy is strengthened by Odette's resemblance to a corpse. Consequently, the other world is a leitmotif in Un Amour.

Having established this point, Swann's love for Odette can be seen as a symbolic necrophelia. Given her physical appearance, Doubrovsky concludes:

...ce qu'il désire en Odette, c'est l'image de sa mortalité, sa vocation au cadavre. Le teint fané, les yeux fatigués, la mauvaise mine, la pâleur font une belle morte. La perversion sexuelle de Swann, à laquelle il ne peut céder sans lutter n'est rien d'autre que la nécrophelie.²²

Swann's love for Odette is indeed a perversion because of his ontological error; he loves art which means that he loves death, but this equation renders a negative image of love once it is applied to a living person.

Swann is at least subconsciously aware of the nature of his desire. The very images he uses to describe the places associated with Odette indicate this awareness. For

example, the very place where Swann is able to meet Odette on a regular basis is described as Dante's inferno:

C'est vraiment, ce disait-il, ce qu'il y a de plus bas dans l'échelle sociale, le dernier cercle de Dante. Nul doute que le texte auguste ne se réfère aux Verdurin.²³

On another occasion, he employs the myth of Orpheus to describe his search for Odette when he arrives at the Verdurin's too late and she has already gone:

Il frôlait anxieusement tous ces corps obscurs comme si, parmi les fantômes des morts, dans le royaume sombre, il eût cherché Eurydice.²⁴

The image of hell is evoked in both these examples by alluding to classical literature. Swann's novel-like vision of the world gives a description of his real-life situation which figures in the realm of fiction. If his choice of imagery is random, it at least reveals a subconscious longing for another reality. His desire for Odette, which, although not consciously is necrophelia, can be interpreted as a metaphor of communion with another world which is unknown to him.

The metaphor of necrophelia represents Odette as an object. As feminist literature points out, "Woman through male eyes is sex object, that by which man knows himself at once as man and subject".²⁵ Likewise, necrophelia describes woman as a lifeless object - passive and manipulated by man. Odette, in fact, does not play a large role in Swann's love affair with her; the real Odette little resem-

bles the Odette that he represents in his imagination. In fact, when he is able to distinguish between the two he grammatically reduces her to an object:

Il se disait presque avec étonnement: "C'est elle, comme si tout d'un coup on nous montrait extériorisée devant nous une de nos maladies que nous ne la trouvions pas ressemblante à ce que nous souffrons. "Elle", il essayait de se demander ce que c'était; car c'est une ressemblance de l'amour et de la mort... le mystère de la personnalité.²⁶

Swann's relationship to Odette does not depend on her as a person. He refers to her as a sickness and as an object (he says, "ce que c'était" instead of "qui c'était"). The real Odette remains a mystery to Swann and thus she becomes what he makes her.

The pessimistic image of love in Un Amour is based on the impossibility of attaining the goal towards which love aspires: "L'on est ici. L'être aimé est là. Entre ces deux endroits il n'y a pas de pont, pas de communication..."²⁷ Swann illustrates this eternal dilemma in his pursuit of Odette; he even exaggerates it by imagining her as pertaining to a different world than him.

It is ironic that Odette's body does not play a very central role in Un Amour. Swann is not attracted by the body; indeed his desire is mediated by a third party. Eroticism is described on much more of an intellectual level than physical; metaphor conceals the carnal act when it occurs and replaces the body. This substitution occurs because love, in a proustian sense, is based on the desire for

the mother. The kind of love that sees a woman's body itself as the object of desire does not exist between Swann and Odette. The body of desire, in Un Amour is a creation of the imagination; Odette's body need not be physically pleasing to Swann since the satisfaction he gets from being with her takes place in his mind.

CHAPTER III

The Social Body

A La Recherche Du Temps Perdu is known for its depiction of turn-of-the-century Parisian bourgeois and aristocratic society. In fact, the importance of the social (party) scenes to the novel's meaning can be measured by the sheer number of pages devoted to such scenes: approximately one third of the novel.¹ During these party scenes the body is of primary importance, both on a metaphorical and physical level, in the interaction between the guests. Appearances are of first priority in a world ordered by snobbery and jealousy. The body becomes the instrument which manifests these emotions as it produces signs to be read. Body language is the means of communication in a society where the spoken word is often misleading or ambiguous. In the context of "la mondanité" the message of words spoken often differs from their literal meaning. The same can be said about signs which often do not convey any real information.

The salons in Paris during the Third Republic were a breeding ground for artists, politicians, bourgeois, and aristocrats. The qualities pertaining to the hostess of a salon were embodied in Madame Dorian, an actual example of the period:

Madame Dorian was a charming woman, who had received an excellent education, and who, coming as she did from old bourgeois stock, never pretended to be aught else than what she was by birth. She was extremely intelligent, very broad in her opinions, and with many advanced ideas in regard to religion and politics; above everything else, she was a lady in her manners, her general behaviour and her tastes.²

Such positive qualities could also be attributed to the guests typical of the salons; usually intelligent people with a keen interest in literature and politics. Personalities such as Anatole France and Emile Zola frequented salons of this nature where one could keep up to date with current events, for example, the Dreyfus affair.

The Verdurin salon, described by the narrator in Un Amour de Swann is more of a parody of the true Parisian salon than an accurate example thereof. In her salon, a small nucleus of people, invited by Mme Verdurin, gather, not so much to share ideas as to experience a sense of prestige for belonging to this group. Indeed, the guests share a group consciousness as emphasized by the various ways in which they refer to themselves:

Pour faire partie du petit "noyau", du "petit groupe", du "petit clan" des Verdurins...³

They represent a segment of bourgeois society inferior to that which made up the best Parisian salons; the members of Mme Verdurin's salon lack talent and intelligence. Consequently, Mme Verdurin's salon is perhaps more intensely deceitful than the society it emulates because it can only imitate it in form and not in content.

In "chapter one" of this thesis I established the metaphor of the novel as a body of work. The body lends itself, by analogy, to the social world too, because what the narrator of A La Recherche does in the novel is to proceed from reading books to a life where he must read events occurring in the social world. It is evident that a society consists of people or bodies. Thus, for the narrator, coping in the "beau monde" becomes a further act of translation and deciphering; in short, of interpretation.

The role the imagination plays in the act of reading is all-important in society because it is due to society's conventions that one translates the gestures performed by the body. The narrator's quest for truth, pursued in the treacherous world of the "beau monde's" duplicitous signs, is necessarily a challenge to the reader. He must overcome his own subjectivity in order to arrive at it. Interpretation then becomes an attempt to bridge the gap between the imagination and the body. Between the creation of a sign and its transformation by the imagination of the perceiver there is a separation. To interpret well thus means to

bridge this separation so that the imagination more closely corresponds to the sign produced by the body.

Body movement can complement, modify or contradict spoken words. Indeed, it can even replace the spoken word, as is the case in the first encounter between the narrator and Gilberte:

Un fillette d'un blond roux, qui avait l'air de rentrer de promenade et tenait à la main une bêche de jardinage, nous regardait, levant son visage semé de taches roses... et sa main esquissait en même temps un geste indécent, auquel, quand il était adressé en public à une personne qu'on ne connaissait pas, le petit dictionnaire de civilité que je portais en moi ne donnait qu'un seul sens, celui d'une intention insolente.⁴

This first meeting goes on without so much as a word. Yet, there is a communication between these two children which depends upon their ability to make and interpret signs. The gesture Gilberte makes with her hand is considered indecent in that particular situation. The narrator carries with him a dictionary with which he can decipher signs. That is, even at this young age, he has learned a certain number of signs and their corresponding meanings that he carries as a sort of lexicon in his mind - a social code.

Often in A La Recherche a hasty reading of a sign will determine superficial meaning only and result in error. Swann, for example, demonstrates a perspicacious ability in interpretation, especially where it concerns Odette. Proust writes:

Elle secoua la tête en fonçant la bouche, signe fréquemment employé par les gens pour répondre qu'ils n'iront pas, que cela les ennuie, à quelqu'un qui leur a demandé: "Viendrez-vous passer la cavalcade, assisterez-vous à la Revue?" Mais ce hochement de tête affecté ainsi d'habitude à un événement à venir, mêlé à cause de cela de quelque incertitude la dénégation d'un événement passé... En voyant Odette lui faire ainsi le signe que c'était faux, Swann comprit que c'était peut-être vrai.⁵

The sign that Odette gives does not perhaps convey the meaning she would like. Quite involuntarily, Odette produces a sign which Swann can easily read and so she is unsuccessful in her lie. Swann's social experience permits him to find a relatively complex meaning in a simple head shake. As a result he is finally able to make Odette admit she had previous relations with women. It would seem then, that a keen ability to interpret the nuances of a sign will assure some measure of success in society.

The key to understanding the exchanges which transpire between the guests of Mme Verdurin's salon, is an ability to insightfully read the signs they emit. Although a sign is supposed to convey information, this function is only ostensibly carried out in this setting. Gilles Deleuze observes this phenomenon when he states:

On ne pense pas et on n'agit pas, mais on fait signe. Rien de drôle n'est dit chez Mme Verdurin, et Mme Verdurin ne rit pas; mais Cottard fait signe qu'il dit quelque chose de drôle, Mme Verdurin fait signe qu'elle rit, et son signe est émis si parfaitement que M. Verdurin, pour n'est pas être inférieur, cherche à son tour une mimique appropriée.⁶

In short, "le signe mondain ne renvoie pas à quelque chose, il en tient lieu, il prétend valoir pour son sens."⁷ The social sign as it is employed in the party setting is void of any true substance; it is a signifier which points to nothing else but itself. Thus, any passages in the novel which describe evenings at the Verdurins' have an air of falsity to them. Laughter, for example, does not necessarily indicate amusement. Rather, such behaviour is no more than an attempt to remain on equal footing with those taking part in the conversation.

The use of one's body as an instrument of sign-making is depicted in the Verdurin salon as the manifestation of a lie. A character's physical disposition is often in contradiction with what he truly believes. In other words, the atmosphere is one of hypocrisy in that, within each guest, there exists a tension between the mind and the body. Consequently, there is no real communication between these people because they do not say or act what they think. The events that transpire at the Verdurins' occur on the level of ceremony. As Deleuze says, one does not think or act, one makes signs. Thus everything that takes place in the salons is based on illusion.

The illusory nature of the Verdurin salon is actually part of the theatricality which is characteristic of these social gatherings. In fact, that which occurs at the Verdurins' is similar to what actors do on a stage; they make signs to create an illusion of reality. The acting

skills of M. and Mme Verdurin illustrate this analogy as they react to a joke made by Cottard:

Ainsi lui et Mme Verdurin qui, en face,
écoutant le peintre qui racontait une
histoire, fermait les yeux avant de
précipiter son visage dans ses mains,
l'air de deux masques de théâtre qui fig-
uraient différemment la gaité.⁸

When they are seen together in this situation, the theatric-
al or staged element of these characters is obvious to the
narrator; their faces look as if they are masks to him.
Both characters are indeed fabricating their "look" so as to
say the same thing. On the part of M. Verdurin, there is a
concerted effort to find distinction from his wife:

... il ne marchanda pas sa gaité, car il
avait trouvé depuis peu pour la signifier
un symbole autre que celui dont usait sa
femme, mais aussi simple et aussi
clair...⁹

M. Verdurin's choice not to display his emotion in this
situation, illustrates the calculated nature of the product-
ion of signs. His laughter cannot be spontaneous as it
should; instead he must worry about appearance. Specifical-
ly, he cannot copy his wife's sign since it would mean in-
fringing upon her character, much like stealing another act-
or's lines.

In a milieu where the body is the main instrument
for emitting signs, body movement can be the sole indicator
for distinguishing one guest from another. A simple hand-
shake, for example, can say much about a person, depending
on how it is executed. The way in which this gesture is

performed by the Verdurins differs greatly from Swann's performance. The Verdurins are described as follows:

... cette grâce des mouvements de ceux
dont les membres assouplis exécutent
exactement ce qu'ils veulent, sans part-
icipation indiscrete et maladroite du
reste du corps.¹⁰

This passage reveals the control that they exercise over their own bodies; they are able to articulate such movements with much exactitude. In fact, one might question the care with which they perform something as banal as a handshake and observe that, for the Verdurins, that which belongs to the area of ceremony is of great importance.

Swann, on the other hand, is impervious to introductions and manages to be quite graceful without too much attention:

La simple gymnastique élémentaire de
l'homme du monde tendant la main avec
bonne grâce au jeune inconnu qu'on lui
présente avait fini par passer, sans
qu'il en fût conscient...¹¹

Swann's act is described as second nature to him. What comes only with some effort for the Verdurins, is easily accomplished by him, yet without his having to consciously give attention to it. For a man of Swann's experience in aristocratic circles, his vocabulary of body movements such as the handshake comes naturally. However, for the Verdurins, who are wealthy bourgeois trying to achieve acceptance by those of higher social status, it is an obviously feigned movement. They try to be other than what they truly are; they are actors.

Understandably, one is not permitted to mention the fact that the atmosphere "chez les Verdurins" is theatrical lest the illusion be destroyed. When someone says something which betrays the forced humour and artificial nature of her parties, Mme Verdurin's entire body reacts with horror:

Mme Verdurin s'immobilisa, prit une expression inerte comme si elle était devenue une statue, fiction qui lui permit d'être censée ne pas avoir entendu ce mot insupportable de poseur qui avait l'air d'impliquer qu'on pouvait "poser" avec eux...¹²

Her response is physical. Yet, it is enough to convey the feeling of disapproval which is intended. It is, if anything, hypocritical of Mme Verdurin to accuse Swann of something which could be said of everyone in the salon in general. All of the guests are there in order to be noticed. The irony of Mme Verdurin's reaction to her husband's observation is that she becomes statue-like, or indeed, she resembles a model posing for a sculptor so that in fact, one might accuse her of being a "poseur". The truth, which would reveal the pretentiousness of the salon, is actively stifled by the Verdurin clan. It is disguised by the misuse of those outward signs which should convey the guests' true responses to their situation.

Outside of her small group, Mme Verdurin will not recognize anyone else as existing on the same level as she. Her snobbery manifests itself through her body by signs of indifference. She is described as a marble bust when the

conversation alludes to the aristocratic name of La Trémoille:

... son front bombé n'était plus qu'une étude de ronde bosse où le nom de ces La Trémoille chez qui était toujours fourré Swann, n'avait pu pénétrer... en exprimant l'imprescriptible dignité des Verdurin opposée à celle des La Trémoille et des Laumes qu'ils valent certes ainsi que tous les ennuyeux de la terre...¹³

Mme Verdurin's snobbery affects her body, making it appear lifeless. The bodily signs she emits are of feigned indifference, so that her inner thoughts are undetectable. Her envy causes her to refuse to understand a sector of society that she can never legitimately belong to but that she secretly desires.

Jean-Yves Tadié relates Proust's writing technique to the information given about characters from involuntary signs. He says:

Il s'agit donc de déceler les rapports entre un "signe révélateur" et un "secret"... A chaque instant, il y a donc au moins deux niveaux dans le geste; le personnage assume le premier, superficiel le second est pour le narrateur.¹⁴

Instead of opting for omniscience, what Proust does is, "suggérer le second niveau en se contentant de décrire le premier, sans traduction, par de légères et ironiques distortions".¹⁵ It is the reader's task, for example, to see that Mme Verdurin is envious of the aristocracy, even though the signs she emits would seem to suggest the contrary. In spite of herself, within the sign there is a subtle indication of unconscious desire.

The relationship between thought and the body is also manifested in the way physical features change depending on the character's state of mind. Mme de Gallardon, unable to mask her inner feelings, is good example of this relationship:

...elle souffrait que la conscience qu'elle avait de sa parenté avec les Guermantes ne pût se manifester extérieurement en en caractères visibles comme ceux qui, dans les mosaïques des autres, inscrivent en une colonne verticale, à côté d'un saint personnage, les mots qu'il est censé prononcer... Obligé, pour se consoler de ne pas être tout à fait l'égale des autres Guermantes... cette pensée avait fini par modeler son corps...¹⁶

Contrary to most social signs which are void of any true meaning and which are pure ostentation, the signs emitted by Mme de Gallardon betray her inner feelings. The analogy made by Proust, once again, is of reading and interpreting. In this case, he compares Mme de Gallardon to Byzantine mosaics. She is so obvious in what she thinks that her body changes to express this thought. Her thoughts and physical expressions are in harmony with each other; she cannot, therefore, disguise her jealousy of the Guermantes.

Swann's jealousy with regard to Odette causes him much the same exterior manifestation of his inner thought. As a result, his bodily signs reveal his feelings to others who find this behaviour unacceptable. Swann's possessiveness of Odette leads him to a misanthropy by viewing each man as a potential lover for her. Proust writes:

Et ainsi sa jalousie... altérerait le caractère de Swann et changeait du tout au tout, aux yeux des autres, l'aspect même des signes extérieurs par lesquels ce caractère se manifestait.¹⁷

The emotion of jealousy takes over the entire body so as to change the very way in which Swann expresses himself. In this particular instance, his dislike for others affects his outer person so that, in fact, to some extent his social attitude can be read in his bodily comportement.

Context can have a strong influence on the way a sign is read. At a party held by Mme de Sainte Euverte Swann describes five men, each of whom wears a monocle while still retaining his own individuality. Taking M. de Palancy as an example, one notices that the description is based on metonymy:

M. de Palancy qui, avec sa grosse tête de carpe aux yeux ronds... avait l'air de transporter seulement avec lui un fragment accidentel et peut-être purement symbolique, du vitrage de son aquarium, partie destinée à figurer le tout...¹⁸

In "Métonomie Chez Proust" Gérard Genette discusses the importance of this motif in A La Recherche stating that metaphor and metonymy in fact support each other in the narrative.¹⁹ Quoting Stephen Ullman, he says that metonymy is based on "...la contiguïté de deux sensations, sur leur co-existence dans le même context mental..."²⁰ The unique resemblance between M. de Palancy's face and that of a fish leads Swann to make an analogy, between an aquarium made of glass and the monocle also made of glass. The monocles of

the other men are described differently, as a function of their own particular physical features and their perception by Swann. The reading of a sign, therefore, consists of its transformation by the imagination of the perceiver through, not only metaphor, but metonymy.

The importance of context also extends to its influence on the making of signs A La Recherche. Music, for example, provides an atmosphere which both Swann and Mme de Cambremer find two different ways of expressing their appreciation. The signs that their bodies emit are influenced by the music which each character embodies differently. Mme de Cambremer internalizes the music, making her entire body become part of it:

Mme de Cambremer, en femme qui a reçu une forte éducation musicale, battant la mesure avec sa tête transformée en balancier de métronome...²¹

Her head is metaphorically transformed into a metronome as a result of the context of the music playing. Her individuality momentarily disappears as the music takes over her body.

On the contrary, Swann reacts to the music by embodying it externally. He expresses his enjoyment by metaphorically giving the music a body: "...il faisait involontairement avec ses lèvres le mouvement de baiser au passage le corps harmonieux et fuyant".²² Swann tries to kiss the music as if it had a body, thereby attempting to touch and capture it. For him, the music is a metaphor for Odette with whom he associates it. The Vinteuil sonata,

like Odette, is fleeting and cannot be possessed. In Odette's absence, Swann finds a solace in the sonata which, is familiar to him, having been a witness to their former happiness. The musical phrase, which brings to Swann the insight that his relationship with Odette will never be the same, and renders this information tolerable to him, comes in the form of a body because he regards the sonata as a liaison between this and the other world.²³ Mme de Cambremer, however, having received a musical education, accordingly, keeps time because her affinity to music is less philosophical than Swann's and is based on the technical aspects of the music's performance.

The interpretation of signs is a search for truth which Swann describes as bringing with it a certain pleasure. A scene where he is spying on what he believes to be Odette's window is an example of this kind of pleasure-seeking. Proust writes:

...il éprouvait une volupté à connaître la vérité qui le passionait dans cet exemple unique, éphémère et précieux, d'une matière translucide, si chaude et si belle.²⁴

Metaphorically, the window is compared to a volume of literature bound in gold. In both cases, knowledge lies behind the cover. That which lies on the other side of Odette's window must be read as a book. This task gives Swann a sense of voluptuousness and probably, this is the reason he qualifies the window as a living body by calling it "chaude" and "belle". Because the interpretation of

signs includes, at first, an empirical aspect, the pleasure that reading a sign brings is described as sensuous. That is, a sign is transferred to the imagination via the senses. The voluptuousness that Swann experiences in the episode is due, not only to the information that the sign can yield about the woman he loves, but to the very means of acquiring that knowledge.

Sense experience and psychic experience do have a strong relationship in A La Recherche where a thought can take the form of a physical entity. When Swann thinks about Odette in her absence, she becomes physically present in a metaphoric sense: "Il montait en même temps et s'installait sur ses genoux comme une bête aimée qu'on emmène partout... Il la caressait, se réchauffait à elle..."²⁵ Swann's thoughts become a companion to him even though Odette is not there. The description of her as some sort of pet, indicates his desire to master or control her which results from the insecurity that he feels when he does not know where she is. Representing her as an imaginary presence allows him to at least have the illusion of control and social interaction.

The study of the social body is a study of the interaction and communication which occurs between people through signs. Although deceptive, it is the only means by which one can know what the other thinks. Whether the sign which is emitted is voluntary or not, there is always a slight irony in the character's gesture which indicates that

the information that he intends others to have is perhaps a distortion of the truth.

The reading of sign in society closely resembles the read-ing of a book and presents many of the same problems. That is, the interpretation of each is necessarily subjective and depends on the ability of the reader. Moreover, the differ-rent stages of the process of interpretation in A La Re-cherche renders the act of communication indirect. The sign is produced through the body and is perceived by the senses; it is then transformed by the imagination of the perceiver into metaphor and becomes a means of description within the narration of the text. Reading thus starts from the outer world of the body in society and works, finally, into the inner universe of the imagination.

CONCLUSION

Three distinctive "bodies" and their place within the text have been discussed in this thesis. The biological body - analogue of the creative and interpretive process, the body of desire, and the body as "sign" all consider the body on a different level. What these bodies have in common, however, is that they are all represented metaphorically.

Naturally, this use of metaphor implies a relationship between the mind (which creates the metaphor) and the body. As in the madeleine scene, bodily sensations have a strong effect on the mind and set the process of creation in motion. Another kind of interaction occurs between the actual physical body and the imagination of the perceiver - this case applies equally to Mme Verdurin's salon as to the relationship between Swann and Odette. In both examples, the body is transformed by the imagination.

It is the nature of these transformations that indicates the desire of the subject. For example, clothes hide the body just as the metaphorical texture of the novel cloaks the body. As the narrator declares at the end:

...je bâtirais mon livre, je n'ose pas
dire ambitieusement comme une cathédrale,
mais tout simplement comme une robe.¹

By clothing the body, the author succeeds in substituting the clothes themselves for the body. Anna Favrichon, in a recent publication dealing with clothes and the image of the woman in A La Recherche says:

Dans l'ordre du regard, le vêtement "précède" le corps, surtout lorsqu'il se joue des plis et des transparences. L'apparition lointaine d'un plumeton d'une écharpe fonctionne comme un signal émotionnel, comme un avant-baiser.²

It seems that, at least in Un Amour, all that is described is the "avant-baiser" as it were (see my discussion of the catleyas scene in "chapter two"). One cannot witness the actual act of possession, for example, because it is described metaphorically in the scene which precedes it. Although the object of desire is the physical body, it can suffice that the clothes a character wears (or flowers) arouse erotic interest. Indeed, the substitution of the body, and hence, of sexual intercourse, is necessary so that the subject can (unconsciously) avoid the incestuous act sought after by the subconscious mind (for both Swann and the narrator the unconscious object of desire is the mother's body).

The subject's desire consequently determines the narrative of A La Recherche - a novel which depends on the metaphor for its creation. The narrator naively accepts the challenge of learning about the world by giving his own meaning to it. His interpretation, though, is governed sole-

ly by his desire for the mother and is a function of that desire. As stated in "chapter one", the narrator unconsciously seeks objects he associates with her.

Outside of the context of sexual intercourse, the body also plays a role in social "intercourse". The communication between the characters occurs first and foremost through the body and its gestures in A La Recherche. Interpreting the events that transpire in the Verdurin salon is a task performed by the imagination. Swann's description of the guests uses metaphor; these metaphors depend on the context of the object being described so that they are anything but arbitrary.

As stated above, the way the body is transformed tells the reader something about the desire of the subject in A La Recherche. This desire is an important consideration in the interpretation of the text. For the narrator, the metaphorical body acts as an obstacle - it avoids an explicit description of what is symbolically taboo. Initially, the obstacle presents itself to the reader. Due to the body's different manifestations through metaphor, its interpretation can be problematic. Nevertheless, the body is a key to discovering the meaning of the text.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION

1. Léon Guichard, Introduction á la lecture de Proust (Paris:1964) p.34.
2. Jean-Yves Tadié, Proust et le roman (Paris:1971) p.111
3. Ibid.

CHAPTER I

1. The question of a "masculist" conception of literary creation is discussed by Gilbert and Gubar in The madwoman in the attic.
2. Serge Doubrovsky, La place de la madeleine (Paris:1974) p.69.
3. Marcel Proust, A la recherche du temps perdu (Paris:1954) p.44.
4. Ibid p.45.
5. J-Francis Reille, Proust: le temps du désir (Paris:1979) p.84.
6. Ibid p.61.
7. Serge Doubrovsky, op. cit. p.34.
8. Marcel Proust, op. cit. p.668.
9. Ibid p.6.
10. Ibid.
11. Serge Doubrovsky, op. cit. p.109.
12. Ibid p.54.
13. Marcel Proust, op. cit. p.44.
14. Ibid p.45.

15. Serge Doubrovsky, op. cit. p.34.
16. Ibid.
17. Marcel Proust, op. cit. p. 182.
18. Ibid p.45.
19. Serge Doubrovsky, op. cit. p.48.
20. Marcel Proust, op. cit. p.48.
21. Ibid p.254.
22. Ibid p.255.
23. Ibid p.257.
24. Serge Doubrovsky, op. cit. p.48.
25. Norman O. Brown, Life against death (Middletown:1959) p.191.
26. Marcel Proust, op. cit. p. 45.
27. Norman O. Brown, op. cit. p.93.
28. Ibid p.51.
29. Leo Bersani, Marcel Proust p.35.
30. Marcel Proust, op. cit. p.121.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid p.10.
33. Ibid p.44.
31. Ibid p.47.

CHAPTER II

1. Leo Bersani, op. cit. p.98.
2. Georges Cattaut, Proust (Paris:1958) p.109.
3. Leo Bersani, op. cit..
4. Marcel Proust, op. cit. p.192.
5. René Girard, Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque (Paris:1961) p.267.

6. Marcel Proust, op. cit. p.192.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid p.232.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid p.221.
11. Ibid p.232.
12. Ibid p.262.
13. Ibid p.271.
14. René Girard, op. cit. p.264.
15. Marcel Proust, op. cit. p.225.
16. Ibid p.198.
17. Ibid p.199.
18. Ibid p.224.
19. Serge Doubrovsky, "Faire catleya" in Proust et le texte producteur (Guelph:1980) p.6.
20. Marcel Proust, op. cit. p.219.
21. Serge Doubrovsky, "Faire catleya" op. cit. p.14.
22. Ibid p.12.
23. Marcel Proust, op. cit. p.287.
24. Ibid p.230.
25. Catherine MacKinnon, "Feminism, Marxism, Method, and the State" in Signs (University of Chicago:1982) p.538.
26. Marcel Proust, op. cit. p.308.
27. Georges Poulet, L'espace proustien (Paris:1963)

CHAPTER III

1. Michel Raimond, "Scènes mondaines" in Proust et le texte producteur (Guelph:1980) p.72.
2. Count Paul Vassili, France from behind the veil (New York and London:1915) p.333.

3. Marcel Proust, op. cit. p.188.
4. Ibid p.140.
5. Ibid p.362.
6. Gilles Deleuze, Marcel Proust et les signes (Paris:1964) p.4.
7. Ibid.
8. Marcel Proust, op. cit. p.262.
9. Ibid.
10. Ibid p.202.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid p.227.
13. Ibid p.258.
14. Jean-Yves Tadié, op cit. p.105.
15. Ibid.
16. Marcel Proust, op. cit. p.329.
17. Ibid p.284.
18. Ibid p.327.
19. Gérard Genette, "Métonomie chez Proust" in Figure III (Paris:1972) p.42.
20. Ibid p.41.
21. Marcel Proust, op. cit p.328.
22. Ibid p.348.
23. Ibid p.351.
24. Ibid p.274.
25. Ibid p.269.

CONCLUSION

1. Anna Favrichon, Toilettes et silhouettes féminines
(Lyon:1987) p.133.
2. Marcel Proust, op.cit. p.1003.

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