

TWO STUDIES IN PROUST:

THE MAGIC LANTERN

and

ROMANTIC ANALOGUES

OF THE

DEATH OF LOVE

by

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## ABSTRACT

Part I - The image of the magic lantern in A la recherche du temps perdu is explored: its stylistic use to relate different incidents, and its symbolic significance in introducing a major theme.

Part II- The transition from the ideas of romantic passion to those of Proustian love are explored through a study of Marcel's falling out of love with Gilberte Swann.

For most people, childhood is a nostalgic era of dimly recollected activities and imperfectly perceived impressions. For this reason, it is difficult for any importance to be assigned to this time, even in biography. In the early volumes of A la recherche du temps perdu, Proust the author designed his nostalgia: he used images of childhood such as toys and games to tie together incidents which he wished delicately related; he carefully presented the childhood of Marcel, the narrator, to introduce and illustrate the largest themes of his art. The foremost example of this device is the magic lantern:

On a bien inventé, pour me distraire les soirs où me trouvait l'air trop malheureux, de me donner une lanterne magique dont, . . . on coiffait ma lampe; et, à l'instar de premières architectes et maîtres verriers de l'âge gothique, elle substituait à l'opacité des murs d'impalpables irisations, de supernaturelles apparitions multicolores, où des légendes étaient déviantes comme dans un vitrail vacillant et momentané. (Swann-p. 12)

The lantern is a symbol of continual change, for not only does the lantern change the walls to church windows, but the very scenes on the windows are in flux!

The change of opaque wall into window prefigures the first impressions of the narrator, Marcel, about society. The seemingly impenetrable barriers between him and the Faubourg Saint-Germain are near-magically removed, but he remains an observer, seeing them as if through a window:

the inhabitants are "supernaturelles apparitions" - above the observer (or, considering that it is a "vitrail", above the mortal worshipper). Consider, for example, Marcel's musings upon receiving his first invitation to dine with the duchesse de Guermantes:

. . . De sorte que, pendant que dans le silence de la solitude, pareil à celui d'une belle nuit, nous nous imaginons les différentes reines de la société, poursuivant leur route dans le ciel à une distance infinie, . . . (II-p. 377)

The drawing-room of the Guermantes is to him as lofty and remote as the pictures portrayed on the church windows:

entre moi et lui y avait la barrière où finit le réel (II-p. 375)

The Faubourg Saint-Germain is like the figure of Golo, in that it remains the Faubourg Saint-Germain although its basic components, i.e. its members, may change as drastically as those of Golo:

Golo qui continuait à s'avancer sur les rideaux de la fenêtre, se bombant de leurs plis, descendant dans leurs fentes. Le cors de Golo lui-même, d'une essence aussi supernaturelle que celui de sa monture, s'arrangeait de tout obstacle matériel, de tout objet gênant qu'il recontrait et le prenant comme ossature et en se le rendait intérieur, fût-ce le bouton de la porte sur lequel s'adaptait aussitôt et surnageait invincible sa robe rouge ou sa figure pâle toujours aussi et aussi mélancolique, mais qui ne laissait paraître aucun trouble de cette transvertébration. (Swann-p. 13)

These changes in Golo are effected by moving the magic lantern. Similarly, the light of Proust's analysis

presents the people of the Faubourg, first one aspect and then another of the personality of a given individual (as shown in different situations) is revealed as Proust passes over his surfaces and penetrates his depths.

The impassivity of Golos's expression is shared by characters who go through changes without recognizing themselves as changes; as long as they are maintaining the same superficial attributes, they assume that no one will notice violent and unnatural changes in their internal makeup. An example of this is Robert de Saint-Loup's womanising after he had discovered his homosexual tendencies, i.e. the "cloak" of womanising over the "doorknob" of homosexuality.

The magic lantern is recalled in the scene in the church at Combray where, for the first time, Marcel sees the descendent of Genevieve de Brabant, the duchesse de Guermandes. The lantern had changed the wall to a pageant "de supernaturelles apparitions multicolores" . . . comme dans un vitrail" (Swann-p. 12); Marcel had made the mistake of imagining the duchesse "avec les couleurs d'une tapisserie ou d'un vitrail . . . d'une autre manière que le reste des personnes vivants." (Swann-p. 209)

Also reminiscent of the lantern projection is the apparition of the duchesse:

. . . nous étions incertains si nous n'avons

pas devant les yeux une simple projection  
lumineuse (Swann-p. 210)

There is also a subtle color identification between Oriane de Guermantes and the tableau of Geneviève de Brabant. Geneviève wears a blue girdle, stands before a yellow castle and is menaced by a Golo in a flowing red cloak:

. . . Geneviève, qui portait une ceinture  
bleue. Le château et la lande était  
jaunes. . .  
(about Golo). . . surnageait invinciblement sa robe rouge (Swann-p. 13)

The duchesse is "une dame blonde avec. . . des yeux bleus . . . la surface de son visage rouge" (Swann-p. 209).

Fer glance is "bleu comme un rayon de soliel qui aurait traversé le vitrail de Gilbert le Mauvais" (Swann-p. 213).

And she views the ceremony from a chapel reserved to the Guermantes, the floor of which is described as "dorées et distendues comme des alvéoles de miel" (Swann-p. 209).

Particularly striking is the last sight of the duchesse:

Ses yeux bleuissant comme une pervenche  
. . . le soliel. . . donnait un carnation  
de géranium aux tapis rouge qu'on y avait  
étendus par terre pour la solennité et  
sur lesquels s'avancait Mme. de Guermantes,  
et ajoutait à leur lainage un velouté rose,  
un épiderme de lumière. . . (Swann-p. 213)

The association of the yellow, blue and red brings out the historical and phantasmagorical aspect of Mme. de Guermantes, a very important factor in Marcel's falling in love with her.

the role of light is to be noted in both events. At Combray the sun appears with rays made blue, then red. The magic lantern similarly transmutes the light of Marcel's lamp into the colors of the Geneviève-Golo tableau. Light is responsible for a similar transformation at Doncierres:

Dans un petit magasin de bric-à-brac, une bougie à demi consumée, en projetant sa lueur rouge sur une gravure, le transformait en sanguine, pendant que, luttant contre l'ombre, la clarté de la grosse lampe basait un morceau de cuir, neillait un poignard de paillettes étincelantes, sur des tableaux qui n'étaient que de mauvaises copies déposait une dorure précieuse comme la patine du passe ou le vernis d'un maître, et faisait enfin de ce taudis où il n'y avait que du toc et des croutes un inestimable Rembrandt. (II-p. 97)

Here it is a candle which projects a strangely red light upon an engraving to change its hue, similar to the sunlight at Combray which changes the red carpet to a geranium hue, a deepening and enriching glow in both cases, for the poor copies seem to acquire the patina of a masterpiece, just as the wool carpet at Combray acquires the lustre of velvet. At Doncierres, light spread a film of gold which changed the shop into a Rembrandt and at Combray the changes wrought by the light conjure up a painting by Carpaccio. The reference to the masters of the past recalls how the magic lantern conjured up the work of the "maîtres verriers".

The situation at Doncieres may be viewed as slightly analogous to that of the magic lantern tableau. Marcel is at Doncieres for the purpose of gaining contact with the duchesse de Guermantes, but, like the Golo of the magic lantern\* who advances perpetually but never reaches Geneviève, Marcel will never reach Oriane (while he is still in love with her).

Throughout the three scenes, the color red, in a state of flux, predominates: with the lantern, the red cloak of Golo which adapts itself to anything over which it floats; at Combray, the red carpet, which seemingly changes to velvet; the red glow of the candle which transforms the shop. The first case concerned a Guermantes ancestor, the second case - the duchesse de Guermantes, and the third was encountered through Marcel's visiting one Guermantes (Saint-Loup) for the purpose of reaching another. It cannot be coincidence that the color of the Guermantes monogram is red, as revealed at the funeral of Saint-Loup:

. . . . . son enterrement dans l'église Saint-Hilaire de Combray toute tendue de tentures noires où se détachait en rouge, . . . le G du Guermantes. . . (III-p. 851)

The magic lantern projected its figures not only

\* In this analogy, it must be Golo of the lamp, not the ahistorical Golo, who did reach Genevieve's husband with his scurrilous charges of Genevieve's adultery.



on the walls of the room but upon Marcel's mind. The figures of Geneviève, the castle and Golo were the first inspiration of the Guermantes mystique with which Marcel invests the inhabitants of the Faubourg Saint-Germain and, in particular, Mme. de Guermantes. It is the colored rays of the magic lantern that shine down upon the duchesse at Combray, investing her with the historical, almost mythological presence of her ancestor Geneviève de Brabant. Marcel cannot at first accord to the real duchesse that veneration which he holds for his ideal:

. . . sur cette image toute récente, inchangeable, j'essayais d'appliquer l'idée: "C'est Mme. de Guermantes", sans parvenir qu'à la faire manoeuvrer en face de l'image, comme deux disques séparés par un intervalle.

(Swann-p. 210-211)

It is only through the agency of her magic glance:

. . . ce regard qu'elle avait laissé s'arrêter sur moi, . . . bleu comme un rayon de soleil qui aurait traversé le vitrail de Gilbert le Mauvais. . .

(Swann-p. 213)

(or like the "vitrail"-like projections of the magic lantern, set over the lamp) that Marcel can make the identification of his dream with reality. The process is similar to that of the red rays of the candle at Doncières which transforms the reality of a dingy bric-a-brac shop into a masterpiece.

The same transformation which so enhances the duchesse de Guermantes and the shop at Doncières has the opposite effect on Marcel's room at Combray. In the former cases, the lantern rays adjust reality to a state appealing and familiar to Marcel, but the initial effect of the lantern itself was to destroy the shield, constructed by "l'habitude", between Marcel and reality:

. . . rien que le changement d'éclairage détruisant l'habitude que j'avais de ma chambre et grâce à quoi, sauf le supplice de coucher, elle m'était devenue supportable. (Swann-p. 12)

Marcel had built up, with the aid of "l'habitude", a certain idea of his surroundings, and had assimilated the reality of the room to this idea. The magic lantern projections gave, to parts of the room which Marcel had considered to be stable and secure, the possibility of change, for example:

le bouton de la porte de ma chambre, qui différait pour moi de tous les autres boutons de porte du monde. . . le maniement n'en était devenu inconscient. le voilà qui servait maintenant **antidécors astral** à Golo (Swann-p. 12)

In contradistinction to the conventional function of illusion as protection from reality, here illusion causes the young Marcel to be confronted with reality in existential flux. This is not a temporal change, i.e. one in which a certain base object is gradually altered by the natural passage of time, but a change in the

essential nature of the object, which is occurring independently or outside of real time. The magic lantern's effect of enabling things to change is similar to, or is perhaps a special case of the phenomenon directly preceding it - the kaleidoscopic change of surroundings which takes place before totally awakening:

souvent ma brève incertitude de lieu  
où je me trouvais ne distinguait pas  
mieux les unes des autres les diverses  
suppositions dont elle était faite, que  
nous isolons. . . les positions  
successives que nous montre le  
kinétoscope. (Swann-p. 10)

The magic lantern superimposed, upon the draperies or doorknobs of Marcel's time, scenes from the past, which assimilate these objects into themselves:

Le corps de Golo lui-même. . . s'arran-  
geait de tout obstacle matériel, . . .  
en le prenant comme opacité et en se  
le rendant intérieur (Swann-p. 13)

Awakening from a deep sleep, surroundings of the present seem to take successive forms from rooms of the past, even to exciting the same sensations:

tout tournait autour de moi dans  
l'obscurité, les choses, les pays,  
les années. Mon corps. . . la  
mémoire de ses côtes, de ses genoux,  
de ses épaules, lui présentait  
successivement plusieurs des chambres  
où il avait dormi, tandis qu'autour  
de lui les murs invisibles, changeant  
de place selon la forme de la place  
imaginée, tourbillonnaient dans les  
ténèbres (Swann-p. 8)

Mais j'avais revu tantôt l'une,  
tantôt l'autre des chambres que  
j'avais habitées dans ma vie, . . .  
(Swann-p. 10)

The psychological sensations which result from these experiences are similar. The child Marcel feels estranged from his room:

Maintenant je ne la reconnaissais plus et j'y étais inquiet, comme dans une chambre d'hôtel ou de "chalet" où je fusse arrivé pour la première fois en descendant de chemin de fer.  
(Swann-p. 12)

This feeling is elaborated in the scene of Marcel's first night at Balbec. Here the defenses of "l'habitude" have been destroyed by the actual unfamiliarity of the furnishings:

les objets inconnus qui l'encerclaient, en le forçant à mettre ses perceptions sur le pied permanent d'une défensive vigilante  
(Fleurs-p. 252)

Everything seems hostile in its strangeness, and, what is worse, indifferent to Marcel:

la chambre. . . était pleine de choses qui ne me connaissaient pas. me rendirent le coup d'oeil méfiant que je leur jetai et, sans tenir aucun compte de mon existence, témoignèrent que je dérangeais le train-train de la leur.  
(Fleurs-p. 252-253)

Marcel is stripped of the rapport with the exterior world given him by being surrounded by things so familiar that their existence seems but an extension of his own; he is losing his assumed control over his environment:

Mais je ne peux dire quel malaise me  
causait pourtant cette intrusion du  
mystère et de la beauté dans une  
chambre que j'avais fini par remplir  
de mon moi au point de ne pas faire  
plus attention à elle qu'à lui-même  
(Swann-p. 13)

The magic lantern projections have given him a frightening  
glimpse of the fluidity which is part of the essential  
nature of things, which causes him to reflect:

Peut-être l'immobilité des choses autour  
de nous leur est-elle imposée par notre  
certitude que sont elles et non pas les  
autres, par l'immobilité de notre pensée  
en face d'elles. (Swann-p. 8)

It is this immobility of mind that makes the first night  
at Balbec so enghuishing. This immobility is fostered  
by habit, so Marcel came to Balbec with a conditioned  
mind, accustomed to being reinforced by the familiar  
state of things in Paris. However, in Balbec the fur-  
nishings do not match the conditioning, which serves  
to reinforce their strangeness. Marcel felt alienated  
from his surroundings:

ma pensée restait ailleurs et à sa  
place envoyait seulement l'habitude.  
Mais je ne pouvais chasser cette  
servante moins sensible de s'occuper  
de mes affaires dans un pays nouveau  
(II-p. 82)

Without this aid, Marcel loses even his sense of  
occupying space in the world:

De la place, il n'y en avait pas  
pour moi dans ma chambre de  
Balbec (Fleurs-p. 252)

The sense of location in space is vital to Marcel's identity and his very existence:

comme j'ignorais où je me trouvais,  
je ne savais même pas au premier  
instant qui j'étais: j'avais  
seulement dans la simplicité  
première le sentiment de l'existence.  
(Swann-p. 8)

His first solution to this existential dilemma is retreat - into the comfortingly unchanging reality of another person: in the case of the magic lantern, his mother:

. . . tomber dans les bras de maman que  
les malheurs de Geneviève de Brabant me  
rendaient plus chère. . . (Swann-p. 14)

and at Balbec, his Grandmother:

Alors ma grand'mère entra: et a  
l'expansion de mon coeur refoule  
s'ouvrirent aussitôt des espaces  
infinis. (Fleurs-p. 253)

The secret seemed to be to avoid being alone, for under these circumstances, in solitude there was death:

N'ayant plus d'univers, plus de  
chambre, plus de corps que menacé par  
les ennemis qui m'entouraient,  
qu'on vahi jusque dans les os par la  
fièvre, j'étais seul, j'avais envie  
de mourir. (Fleurs-p. 253)

But the reality of another person Marcel later found to be equally a creation of the person who believed in that reality. He discovered how much his personal attitudes and preconceptions influenced his idea of his Grandmother:

Nous ne voyons jamais les êtres chers  
que dans le system animé, le mouvement  
perpétuel de votre incessante tendresse,  
laquelle, avant de laisser les images que  
nous présente leur visage arriver jusqu'à  
nous, les prend dans son tourbillon, les  
rejetta sur l'idée que nous faisons d'eux  
depuis toujours. les fait adherer à elle,  
coïncider avec elle, (II-p. 140)

Once again, "l'habitude" was sparing him from Change.

On another occasion, at the hotel in Doncierres,  
Marcel found himself miraculously able to feel at home  
from the first night:

Je reçus cette dispense d'effort que  
nous accordent seules les choses dont  
nous avons un long usage, quand je  
posai mes pieds pour la première fois  
sur ces marches familières avant  
d'être connues. . . (II-p. 83)

Je n'eus pas le temps d'être triste,  
car je ne fus pas un instant seul.  
(II-p. 82)

This, he found, was due to the fact that the old hotel  
has such a strong and vivid past that it seemed like  
a familiar person itself. Most important of all was the  
strength of the "habitude" which was associated with it.  
This offered the sensitive Marcel a crutch even stronger  
than that which "l'habitude" of Paris had given him:

la douceur anticipée d'habitude que  
je n'avais pas contractées encore et  
qui même ne pourraient que s'affaiblir  
quand elles seraient devenues miennes.  
(II-p. 83)

This, of course, was a further case of an illusion of  
stability, created this time by the enormous past of

the hotel. The many things which gave testimony to the years of tradition of the hotel served to reassure Marcel that this was something which had existed in this way almost all throughout the past, and would remain unchanged about as long. Such a state was precisely what Marcel wished. The heavy emphasis on the Past and the intense awareness of the Present combine to avoid prolonged dwelling on the Future. In the Future, Marcel knows, lies death, the ultimate change. There is nothing "l'habitude" can do to affect that.

That time moves irreversibly forward is continual threat. Each day finds a new Self which has replaced the one of the day before. Marcel spent years trying to recapture some one of these former selves through the use of his memory, but he found that "l'habitude" had blurred the experience of the event to such an extent that the memory-picture was disappointingly two-dimensional. He discovered at last the "involuntary memory", an event triggered by the recreation of some small detail of some past state by an event of the present. The reaction is a duplication of the past event complete to the most minute sensation, effectively, existence in that past time. The person Marcel becomes then, who is existing in two times simultaneously, is perforce immune to death by virtue of his existence outside the



real time of the world:

. . . l'être qui alors goûtait en moi  
cette impression le goûtait en ce  
qu'elle avait de commun dans un jour  
ancien et maintenant, dans ce qu'elle  
avait d'extra-temporel, un être qui  
n'apparaissait que quand, par une de  
ces identités entre le présent et le  
passé, il pouvait se trouver dans le  
seul milieu où il pût vivre, jouir de  
l'essence des choses c'est-à-dire en  
dehors du temps. (III-p. 871)

With no contact with (and therefore no threat from) the future, this "master self" sits outside time and can become any one of the past selves which, with all their sensations included, are lined up like successive frames of film in a movie camera. This degree of philosophical sophistication is, of course, as far in advance of the uneasy sensations of the child Marcel watching the projections of the magic lantern as the movie camera is to its ancestor the magic lantern. But the magic lantern scene was vital to Marcel's development in that it was his first experience of how things thought to be basic and immutable can alter themselves into entirely different things, and the lasting impression from this discovery enabled him to formulate and to accept his final theory of successive and different selves. This theory refutes the idea that there can be a clearly identifiable, identical thing which changes as it develops but remains basically the same, e.g. one person with his changing

attitudes of love and hate. It states rather that at every instant a different individual exists, complete with his own particular emotional pattern and responses. For this reason, happiness is impossible for the person who succeeds in achieving something is not the person who conceived it as an aim.

So it may be seen how a simple child's toy, a magic lantern, can have many functions, many interpretations, and significance far more than nostalgia could ever give it, in the hands of Marcel Proust.

PART II

Proustian love, in particular as seen between Marcel and Albertine, is a new genre, but the phenomenon of love in the work of Proust has many romantic antecedents and analogues. The affair with Gilberte, as the earliest in maturity of those in A la recherche de temps perdu, has the most characteristics of romantic love. Also, in the break-up of this affair may be discerned the beginnings of Proust's original developments. In particular, the part in which Proust portrays the successful death of romantic passion leads to his discovery of why such an end of feeling is possible, i.e. the passion dies because the lover dies with it, yet the person whose name the lover bore lives on.

The conventional romantic beginnings go back far. When Marcel was a child, he was under the impression that Mlle. Swann (Gilberte) was as far above him as the lady of a leige lord to a beginning knight. This was due first, to his overestimation of the social position of her family:

Comme je n'avais aucune notion sur la hiérarchie sociale, depuis longtemps l'impossibilité que mon pere trouvait à ce que nous frequentions Mme. et Mlle. Swann avait plutôt pour effet, en me faisant imaginer entre elles et nous de grandes distances, leur donner à mes yeux du prestige. (I-p. 99)

and second, to the privileged position which she enjoyed in having as a friend and companion Bergotte, Marcel's literary idol:

[Swann, speaking of Bergotte] il n'y a pas  
de semaine dans l'année où il ne dîne à la  
maison. C'est le grand ami de ma fille.  
Ils vont ensemble visiter les vieilles  
villes, les cathédrales, les châteaux.  
(I -p. 99)

Marcel's imagination, which near-deified Bergotte:

il cheminait à côté d'elle, inconnu et  
glorieux, comme les dieux qui descendait  
au milieu des mortels (I -p.100)

naturally extended to Gilberte, making her infinitely  
desireable:

c'était être tout prêt à l'aimer  
(I -p.100)

From such circumstances it would be natural to expect  
courtly romantic love to develop. But a Proustian per-  
spective is introduced even at this early point in the  
romance:

Que nous croyions qu'un être participe  
à une vie inconnue où son amour nous  
ferait pénétrer, c'est, de tout ce qu'  
exige l'amour pour naître, ce à quoi  
il tient le plus, et qui fait faire bon  
marché du reste. (I -p.100)

This may seem a radically cynical way for Proustian love  
to interpret romantic love as expressed in previous  
literature. That most clinical of French love theorists,  
Stendahl, considered necessary for love the process of  
"crystallization" - in which the beloved, who may not be  
much in herself, acquires qualities desireable to the  
lover, a process of accretion which occurs within his  
mind, independent of whether she in fact possesses such

qualities:

I call crystallization that process of the mind which discovers fresh perfections in its beloved at every turn of events. (Stendahl-On Love, p. 7)

In Proustian love, it is not the beloved herself who is developed. By virtue of a sort of crystallization of this unknown life, the beloved becomes desireable; the beloved is reduced to little more than a medium for gaining access to this unknown life. In direct opposition to Stendahl's love, in which the beloved's true self may be concealed by the addition of these new and perhaps false qualities, Proustian love seeks to penetrate the beloved, to strip off assumed characteristics and "external selves", as illustrated in the thoughts of Marcel while watching the sleeping Albertine:

En fermant les yeux, en perdant la conscience, Albertine avait dépouillé, l'un après l'autre, ces différents caractères d'humanité qui m'avaient decu depuis le jour où j'avais fait la connaissance.  
(III -p. 70)

The eventual aim of Proustian love is such complete access to the "vie inconnue" that it no longer possesses the mystery which had been the cause of love:

L'image que je cherchais, où je me reposais, contre laquelle j'aurais voulu mourir, ce n'était plus l'Albertine ayant une vie inconnue, c'était une Albertine aussi connue de moi qu'il était possible (et c'est pour cela que

cet amour ne pouvait être durable à moins de rester malheureux, car par définition il ne contenait pas le besoin de mystère), c'était une Albertine ne reflétant pas un monde lointain, mais ne désirant rien d'autre ...qu'être avec moi, toute pareille à moi, une Albertine image de ce qui précisément était mien et non de l'inconnu.  
(III -p. 74)

This idea may seem overly egotistical in that Marcel seems now to wish to love a sort of carbon copy of himself, but this is not that strange in romantic love either. The romantic lover who has "crystallized" his beloved is largely captivated by attributes of his own invention, and perhaps retains just as little of the reality of the person loved.

A real insight into the dilemma of the Proustian lover may be obtained through a study of the process of 'falling out of love'. The young Marcel first goes through this experience at the end of his "affair" with Gilberte Swann. No matter what the original motivation, crystallization-by-association did occur and their relationship was apparently one of mutual romantic love, in the courtly tradition. Except for the sensual contact of the wrestling scene in the Champs-Elysees, Marcel conducted himself according to the chivalric code of donnai. ("Of donnai he knows truly nothing who wants fully to possess his lady" - quote in DeRougemont's Love in the Western World, p. 34) In the manner of romantic love, Marcel had to struggle, during most of the affair, against

real obstacles of society, the disapproval of his parents of the Swanns and at first, Swann's mistrust of him.

Thanks to this, love flourished:

Unless the course of love be hindered there is no 'romance'. (De Rougemont, Love in the Western World, p. 52)

The romantic lover cannot exist in the situation of a satisfied, static love. The words of De Rougemont:

Hence, whether our desire is for the most self-conscious or simply for the most intense love, secretly we desire obstruction. And this obstruction we are ready if needs be to invent or imagine. (Ibid., p.52)

are similar to Marcel's statement:

Il ne peut pas y en avoir dans l'amour; puisque ce qu'on a obtenu n'est jamais qu'un nouveau point de départ pour désirer davantage. (I - p. 581)

Marcel's leaving Gilberte is a sort of self-imposed obstacle; he hoped that his absence would lead Gilberte to appreciate him more and that she would write to him strong affirmations of her love. When this did not come about, he actually created an incident to which he referred in his letters and to which he attributed the barrier which he claimed now existed between himself and Gilberte:

La raison que je donnais maintenant dans mes lettres à Gilberte, de mon refus de la voir, c'était une allusion à quelque mystérieux malentendu, parfaitement fictif, qu'il y aurait eu entre elle et moi et sur lequel j'avais espéré d'abord que Gilberte me demanderait des explications. (I - p.632)



Gilberte's refusal to react to this and her eventual acceptance of this mythical offense led Marcel to believe it himself:

...je vivais avec l'idée que la vie avait changé en effet, que nous garderions le souvenir du sentiment qui n'était plus, comme certains nerveux, pour avoir simulé une maladie finissent par rester toujours malades.

(I - p. 633)

It was this impediment, fabricated by Marcel's mind, which existed at first only on paper and at last in the minds of both Marcel and Gilberte, that made an end of the affair. The actual event of seeing Gilberte in what seemed to be amorous conversation with a young man, to which Marcel never makes reference, was predated by the invention of this ruse and the importance of this real "betrayal" was far less than that of the written and mental word. This is an important variation from the Romantic love affair, where actual difficulties and physical distances may successfully part lovers, but not mere words. Even throughout misunderstandings between romantic lovers, love still smoulders, and certainly no serious thought is entertained of loving another. Marcel, however, could glimpse, through the romantic haze, the future of other loves to come:

je savais non plus seulement que dans un certain temps je n'aimerais plus Gilberte, ;. . et que les tentatives qu'elle ferait alors pour me voir seraient aussi vaines que celles d'aujourd'hui, non plus parce

que je l'aimerais trop, mais parce que j'aimerais certainement une autre femme que je resterais à désirer, à attendre, pendant des heures dont je n'oserais pas distraire une parcelle pour Gilberte qui ne me serait plus rien. (I-p. 611)

(This startlingly unromantic attribute will be further discussed later.)

Another characteristic of Romantic love is the love potion. In the case of Tristan and Iseult, the prototype romantic lovers, the love potion was a drug which was responsible for their illicit passion. Symbolically, the "magic" nature of the love-potion relieved the lovers of the responsibility which they incurred by their love, which was contrary to the laws of chivalry and therefore in opposition to society:

The love notion is thus an alibi for passion. It enables each of the two unhappy lovers to say: 'You see, I am not in the least to blame; you see, it's more than I can help.' Yet, thanks to this deceptive necessity, everything they do is directed toward the fatal fulfillment they are in love with, and they can approach this fulfillment with a kind of crafty determination and a cunning the more unerring for not being open to moral judgment.

(DeRougemont, Love in the Western World, p.48)

In Proust, drugs also figure in the development of love:

A cause de la violence de mes battements de coeur on me fit diminuer la caféine, ils cessèrent. Alors je me demandai si ce n'était pas un peu à elle qu'était due cette angoisse que j'avais éprouvée quand je m'étais à peu près brouillé avec Gilberte... Mais, si ce médicament avait été à l'origine des souffrances que mon imagination eût

alors faussement interprétées..., c'était  
à la façon du philtre que, longtemps  
après avoir été absorbé, continue à lier  
Tristan à Yseult. (I - p. 610)

Proust, however, could not introduce magic as an outside agency but, significantly, he used images of sickness; equally involuntary, sickness is an outside force which causes suffering and is hard to resist or cure. For example;

je souffrais comme un malade qui a vidé  
sa fiole de morphine sans avoir sous la  
main une seconde. (I - p. 609)

and also:

D'ailleurs, il est à remarquer que l'image  
d'une personne qui nous fait souffrir  
tient peu de place dans ces complications  
qui aggravent un chagrin d'amour, le  
prolongent et l'empêchent de guérir,  
comme dans certaines maladies la cause  
est hors de proportions avec la fièvre  
consécutive et la lenteur à entrer en  
convalescence. (I- p. 627)

DeRougemont contends that the aim of romantic or passionate love is death, "for passion is 'what is suffered' - and its limit is death" (Love in the Western World, p.44)  
The obstructions, real or deliberate, the trials and dangers, are a sort of ordeal of purification, at the end of which is

...a death that means transfiguration  
...In dying for love they redeem their  
destiny and are avenged for the love-  
potion. (DeRougemont, Love in the  
Western World, p. 45)

Marcel, too, foresaw death as the result of his love for

Gilberte, but with a very different type of attitude:

. . . cette résistance me coûtait de moins en moins, parce qu'on a beau aimer le poison qui vous fait du mal, quand on en est privé par quelque nécessité depuis déjà un certain temps, on ne peut pas ne pas attacher quelque prix au repos qu'on ne connaissait plus, à l'absence d'émotions et de souffrances.

(I-p. 621)

He ~~saw~~ love as a poison, but he ~~did~~ not particularly wish to prolong his agony. He ~~avoided~~ encountering Gilberte because seeing her would cause a relapse not of love but of pain of falling out of love. Marcel's "death" was drastically different from that of the romantic lover:

C'était a un long et cruel suicide du moi qui en moi-même aimait Gilberte, que je m'acharnais avec continuité, avec la clairvoyance non seulement de ce que je faisais dans le présent, mais de ce qui en résultait pour l'avenir

(I-p. 610-611)

This destruction of the Marcel that loved Gilberte is not accomplished through the dark offices of a love-potion nor by excesses of passion, but merely by Marcel's submission to Time. As mentioned previously, Marcel was unblinded by the romantic belief in a consuming passion that would unite the lovers eternally; his love had another kind of timelessness. one not bound forever to one beloved:

quand on aime. on sent que cet amour ne porte pas leur nom, pourra dans l'avenir renaître. aurait même pu, dans le passé, naître, pour une autre et non pour celle-là

(I-p. 611)

Actually, as Marcel later learned, neither was his love

bound to one lover, that is, the Marcel that presently felt a love for Gilberte was not the Marcel who would feel love for the duchesse de Guermantes nor the Marcel who later loved Albertine. His remark at the time of the affair with Gilberte:

si l'on prend philosophiquement son parti de ce qu'il y a de contradictoire dans l'amour, c'est que cet amour dont on parle à son aise, on ne l'éprouve pas alors, donc on ne le connaît pas, la connaissance en ces matières étant intermittente et survivant pas à la présence effective du sentiment. (I-p. 611)

was but a hint of the later revelation that the speaker was a completely different person from the one who loved! Marcel realized this many years later when, in Venice after Albertine's death he received a telegram seemingly from Albertine and realized that he felt no love for her at that time:

Et en m'anergissant que je n'avais pas de joie qu'elle fût vivante, que je ne l'aimais plus. . . n'est-ce pas un changement aussi profond, une mort aussi totale du moi qu'on était, la substitution aussi complète de ce moi nouveau, que de voir un visage ridé surmonté d'une perruque blanche qui a remplacé l'ancien? (III-p. 642)

Marcel's experience with love, no matter how much he might try to maintain a romantic love, pushed him towards his realization of himself as a multiplicity of different selves:

Mais on ne s'afflige pas plus d'être devenu

un autre, les années ayant passée et dans l'ordre de la succession de temps, qu'on ne s'afflige, à une même époque, d'être tour à tour les êtres contradictoires, le méchant, le sensible, le délicat, le mufle, le désintéressé, l'ambitieux qu'on est tour à tour chaque journée. Et la raison pour laquelle on ne s'en afflige pas est la même, c'est que le moi éclipsé --momentanément dans le dernier cas et quand il s'agit du caractère, pour toujours dans le premier cas et quand il s'agit des passions--n'est pas là pour deplorer l'autre, l'autre qui est à ce moment-là, ou désormais, tout vous; (III-p. 642)

This discovery led, it is true, to disenchantment with romantic love, but was worth far more in the value of its intellectual break-through, the concept of multiple "selves" or states of being. The times in his affairs during which Marcel realized himself as a lover of the past and a lover in the future gave him a glimpse of the revelation on the nature of Being in Time he received at the Guermantes' last party, of each man with all his selves extending from his present self behind him to the past and ahead of him to the future:

les hommes. . . occupant une place si considérable, à côté de celle si restreinte qui leur est réservée dans l'espace, un place au contraire prolongée sans mesure --puis qu'ils touchent simultanément, comme des géants plongés dans les années, à des époques si distantes, entre lesquelles tant de jours sont venus se placer--dans le Temps. (III-p. 1048)

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