

PROUST AND BENJAMIN: THE INVISIBLE IMAGE

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At the conclusion of the Proustian itinerary, the closing sentence of *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, the reader circles back to the "petite phrase" at the beginning: "Longtemps je me suis couché de bonne heure." Although it has become a critical commonplace to link the narrator's conclusive vocation with the writing of Proust's novel, the gesture of circularity is encoded within Proust's fiction: it is an effect. Unlike the narrator, Proust himself is the author of the *Recherche*. At the very moment of circling back, the reader is confronted by the impossibility of his own gesture and the incommensurable gap separating the announcement of the narrator's scriptural vocation from the first sentence and its nightfall. Just as the arc cannot be closed and made into a circle, it is impossible to collapse narrator and author into a single identity. In this sense, the effect of the Proustian voyage toward the narrator's vocation is the revelation of vocation as mystery—as a mystical event. The "end" of Proust's novel opens the question of vocation rather than closing it. Beyond rational experience, the ecstasy that takes the narrator as its field reveals truth to him in the form of an inner book awaiting creation.

It is not by chance that at the end of Walter Benjamin's essay, "Zum Bilde Prousts" ("Toward the Image of Proust"),¹ the reader turns back to its first paragraph in search of a beginning—something that might have led to the final Proustian image of Proust himself, creating the Creation, suspended on a scaffold like Michelangelo. But Proust's scaffold is the sickbed, and death. In Benjamin's text as in Proust's final scene of the *matinee chez la princesse de Guermantes*, the image of creation is predicated on one of disappearance. The central *Bild*—figure, representation, photograph, and so on—is as much

an open question, in Benjamin's interpretation, as the "ungezählten Blätter" of the Proustian creation.

One might even say that Benjamin's exposition, starting with the Proustian night and moving through the dream world, memory, social patterns, and the solitude of ecstasy toward the finale of death and writing, so closely parallels aspects of the Proustian trajectory as to be *its* image. If this is the case, Benjamin's image faces in both directions; its reflection of *A la Recherche du temps perdu* is also a reflection of his own writings. Through an unfolding of Proust's relationship to images, Benjamin inscribes his own constellation of allegory, ecstasy (or mystical conversion), and autobiography.

In the subtly filtered light of Benjamin's preoccupations, writing itself is posed as an open question. Benjamin's *oeuvre* defies classification. His critical writings displace the center and margins of traditional forms of criticism through a subversion of categories; the poetic and the analytical stand side by side, the comfortable distinction between "primary" and "secondary" literature is dissolved. The overflow of symbolic layers, Benjamin's own Nile of language ("Nil der Sprache" [132]), is characteristic of the violence of allegory (according to Benjamin's theory of allegory, elaborated in the *Ursprung des deutschen Trauerspiels* and in the writings on Baudelaire). Here too Benjamin's text bears an image of Proust's text—a multi-layered, immeasurably allegorical combination of poetic language, autobiography, and critical interpretation—as Benjamin enters Proust's subversive strategy of reading and writing. Indeed, the Proustian images of creation indicate the impossibility of separating reading from writing. According to the narrator of the *Recherche*, writing is an act of translation rather than creation: "ce livre essentiel, le seul livre vrai, un grand écrivain n'a pas, dans le sens courant, à l'inventer, puisqu'il existe déjà en chacun de nous, mais à le traduire" ("This essential book, the only true book, a great writer does not have to invent it, in the usual sense, since it already exists in each of us, but rather he must translate it" [III, 890]). Proust's figures of translation were familiar to Benjamin, and the interlaced arabesques of the essay offer a provocative image of Proustian "Vergegenwärtigung" ("presentification" [143]). Rather than closing the book on Benjamin's evocation of Proust-Michelangelo's countless pages, I would like to circle back to the written images that emerge in the first paragraph of "Zum Bilde Prousts."

Au Temps Perdu

Each of the first eight sentences of Benjamin's essay proclaims the unclassifiable nature of Proust's *oeuvre* in terms that tacitly announce the commentator's distance from the traditional markers of literary criticism. Proust's work is "das Ergebnis einer unkonstruierbaren Synthesis" ("the product of an unconstructible synthesis") of elements formed into "einem autobiographischen Werke"—not quite novel, not quite autobiography, but an autobiographical work. The place of critical interpretation locates itself in the break between life and work; Benjamin evokes the work of a life in quotation marks ("Lebenswerk"). All prior assumptions—about autobiography, about the image of the writer in the writer's own work, about continuity between life and work, character and author—are suspended. Both Proust and Benjamin take the reader into a genre-defying representation that combines "Dichtung, Memoirenwerk, Kommentar" ("poetry, memoir, commentary") at the heart of impossibility ("im Herzen der Unmöglichkeit"). The terms I quote here are used by Benjamin to describe and situate Proust's work. At the same time, however, they reflect the locus of the reader/translator/writer, Walter Benjamin. With his diagnosis of the ever increasing discrepancy between poetry and life ("die unaufhaltsam wachsende Diskrepanz von Poesie und Leben"), Benjamin himself enters the heart of impossibility: the image of Proust.

Benjamin's essay is entitled "Toward the Image of Proust." The notion of the image, like the "Lebenswerk," is deprived of its usual imaginary consistency, (so eloquently analyzed by Lacan). It can no longer be considered the representation of an organic, visible whole, insofar as the "Lebenswerk" can no longer be read as a faithful replica of the author's life. The *Bild*, both visual and scriptural, enters the terrain of Proustian invisibilia: it reveals not a life, but the impossibility of revealing that life. In this sense, it is analogous to the Proustian trope that reveals the invisible essence of things. The Proustian dialectic of the evanescence of time and the resurrection of the instant is crystallized in the image. Through metaphor, according to the narrator, the writer will save two sensations from the ravages of time by uniting them: "il degagera leur essence commune en les réunissant l'un et l'autre pour les soustraire aux contingences du temps, dans une métaphore" (III, 889). The sensations to be saved or resuscitated are themselves retrieved from the flow of time into the

abyss. They are recovered through the reflection of the image through memory ("miroiter une sensation . . . à la fois dans le passé . . . et dans le présent" [III, 872]) and isolated as fragments of time, as momentary flashes: "la durée d'un éclair— . . . un peu de temps à l'état pur." The course of time is described as a trajectory through the abyss ("son trajet dans l'abîme où il est lancé" [III, 926]). Proust's description of time as the invisible form ("la forme . . . qui nous reste habituellement invisible, celle du Temps" [III, 1045]) qualifies that invisibility as the most paradoxical image of all. It is the object of the narrator's vocation, marked with the capital letter of baroque allegory.

At heart, the Proustian "*Lebenswerk*" and, within it, the sowing and reaping of the narrator's time within the framework of his absent and finally revealed vocation, are the product of an allegorical vision. They emerge from the abyss, the vertiginous realm of time: "J'avais le vertige de voir au-dessous de moi, en moi pourtant, . . . tant d'années" (III, 1047). In the first paragraph of Benjamin's essay, the incomensurable distance between art and life marks the image with an allegorical resonance.

Between the traditional signposts of "art" and "life," "Zum Bilde Prousts" locates the Proustian "recherche." It overflows the margins of both art and life as Benjamin dispels some of the clichés of Proustian mythology. Memory is no abstract concept, no subject for Bergsonian study: it is the sacred and mysterious forest that absorbs existence ("einen Bannwald der Erinnerung" [135]), a Baudelairean "forêt des symboles." Proust sacrifices everything, in both "life" and "art," on the altar of memory's hieroglyphics. This sacrifice, however, cannot be assimilated to the usual comfortable perspective of renunciation, heroism, and askesis ("der altbewährten, bequemen Perspektive der Entsagung, des Heroismus, der Askese" [134]): Proust sacrifices everything to the lost paradise of happiness, its elegiac idea ("diese elegische Glücksidee" [135]).

Benjamin's dialectic of happiness ("eine Dialektik des Glücks") focuses on the mystery of unknown happiness and the original paradise, consecrated by its loss. The dialectic of paradise unknown and paradise lost introduces two allegorical elements of Benjamin's image of Proust. One is a boundless, insatiable desire that swallows everything into its abyss; the other is a hopeless melancholy ("die hoffnungslose Trauer" [134]) that tears its bearer apart with nostalgia or *Heimweh* for the ineffable joy of paradise. This dialectical image

leaves its traces in several accounts of the narrator's vocation. The invisibilia of Proustian paradise indicate that the happiness in question is related to the revelation of truth; the two are intertwined in a textual arabesque.

It is therefore impossible to oppose the asceticism of vocation to the world of desire. In one account of the narrator's vocation, the call ("le mystérieux appel") of Vinteuil's Septuor, the herald of art, is described in the terms of a feminine seduction: "cette créature invisible dont je ne connaissais pas le langage et que je comprenais si bien—la seule Inconnue qu'il m'ait jamais été donné de rencontrer" ("this invisible creature whose language I did not know and whom I understood so well—the only Unknown woman I was ever enabled to meet" [III, 260]). The musical motif inscribes this event with the ineffable joy emanating from paradise: "Enfin le motif joyeux resta triomphant; . . . c'était une joie ineffable qui semblait venir du paradis" (III, 260). Proust links the narrator's impressions of Vinteuil's music with the moments of revelation telescoping the images of the spires of Martinville, the trees near Balbec, and eventually the cobblestones of Venice. These impressions are cut off from the rest of life and from the visible world. The deciphered hieroglyphics of Vinteuil's Septuor offer "cette joie inconnue, l'esperance mystique de l'Ange écarlate du Matin" ("this unknown joy, the mystical hope of the Scarlet Angel of Morning" [III, 263]). At the end of *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, the narrator returns to the description of his moments of "felicity." He links it to the words of artistic transmission spoken to him by the writer Bergotte ("vous avez les joies de l'esprit"), the role played by Vinteuil's representation of artistic jubilation, and the original vision opening his "recherche" out of the banal silence of the forgotten (III, 866).

To nostalgia, *Heimweh*, a yearning for paradise, belongs "was bei Proust geschieht"—the Proustian event. It bears the image. Benjamin describes it: "Es löst sich aus dem Gefüge der Proustschen Sätze wie unter Françoisens Händen in Balbec der Sommertag, alt, unvordenklich, mumienhaft aus den Tüllgardinen" ("It emerges from the juncture of Proustian sentences like the summer day in Balbec, emerging old, immemorial, mummified, from the tulle curtains under the hands of Françoise" [136]). Shining with a mysterious light, Proust's image enters the artful night of his creation.

Benjamin's image moves out of the ruins of history toward the present. It shines with the violence of the indecipherable; it wears

masks and speaks in code. It breathes the breath of illness and death into its sentences. It bears the weight of time, the blackness of the abyss, the rapturous flash-fire of the instant. It is the image of allegory.

Selbstversenkung

Among the elements combined in Proust's "autobiographischen Werke," the first is described by Benjamin as "die Versenkung des Mystikers" (132). The descent of the mystic is Benjamin's image of Proustian ecstasy. Within the fiction of Proust's novel, the narrator's moments of ecstasy are the key to a descent into his past "life"—the countless pages of *A la Recherche du temps perdu*—and, at the final scene of the matinee, the key to his renewed vocation.

Benjamin hastens to underline the allegorical dimensions of the "Versenkung." Line by line, he explodes the imaginary organic unity of the "Lifework"; he evokes the Proustian descent through the spiral of negativity. It is not life itself that Proust describes, but rather a life as it is remembered ("ein Leben, so wie der, der's erlebt hat, dieses Leben erinnert" [132]). Remembered life is of little importance compared to "das Weben seiner Erinnerung," the weave of memory.

The spiral continues: no sooner has the reader relinquished lived life for remembered life, and remembered life for the knotted interiority of memory's weave, than Benjamin adds: "die Penelopearbeit des Eingedenkens" ("the Penelope-work of remembering/thinking inward" [133]). Penelope's weaving is also an act of unweaving. Benjamin descends from "Eingedenken" to "Vergessen" ("forgetting") to turn Penelope's knotting of time and desire inside out. As Proust's "Gegenstück" (counterpart), she undoes the day's work during the night. Proust's "Penelopewerk" descends into the dark night of the mystic and the dreamer. His artful and artificial light substitutes night for day, in a web of memory and forgetting. Within its density, life and author disappear: only the text remains, the interlaced arabesques ("verschlungenen Arabesken")—the allegorical pattern in the carpet.

Benjamin locates Proust's image at the end point of a path through the allegorical stations of memory, the dreamworld, and resemblance: "Das ist Prousts frenetisches Studium, sein passionierter Kultus der Ähnlichkeit" ("This is Proust's frenetic study, his passionate cult of resemblance" [135]). The happiness of the retrieved instant is guaranteed by forgetting (III, 870) since it has become an isolated fragment, untouched by the course of time that

followed it. The instant is found anew in a moment of resurrection (III, 872).

The Proustian image is the conclusion of *Ähnlichkeit*. The writer must bring out the common essence uniting two evanescent sensations in order to subtract them from the contingencies of time: "il dégagera leur essence commune en les réunissant l'un et l'autre pour les soustraire aux contingences du temps, dans une métaphore" (III, 889). Resemblance allows the observer (the narrator) to escape from the ravages of time: the "miracle d'une analogie" (III, 871) emerges from the backdrop of the flight of time to become written style in the form of metaphor.

Subtracted from the ruins of time, Proust's privileged instants or moments of sensation are "caractères hiéroglyphiques" (III, 878). They are the letters of a mystical script, kernels of metaphor demanding "déchiffrement" (deciphering) or interpretation. The narrator's impressions unfold before him as the object of "recherche": "ces vérités écrites à l'aide de figures dont j'essayais de chercher le sens dans ma tête" (III, 879). The images or figures bear truths and must be interpreted. Their spirals and arabesques are explicitly rendered through and in the terms of esthetic form. Proust's instances of "vision ineffable" (III, 875) are represented as singular textual creations that solicit an ongoing spiral of singular textual creations. They inscribe the narrator's ecstatic vision with their presence, mysteriously emanating from somewhere else. Unlike the traditional models of vocation, however, the visionary moments of Proust's text are cumulative rather than punctual. They form a series, and the initial "open sesame" of the *Petite Madeleine* posits an opening without which the narrator's vocation or conversion would be impossible.

Under the sign "Au Temps Perdu," Benjamin invites the reader to consider the cumulative series of instants as temporal images. Visible and invisible, exterior and interior, these Proustian events take on the form of aging and memory. Benjamin describes their serial formation as a counterpoint, "das Widerspiel von Altern und Erinnern" (145). This is the world of Proustian resemblance and presentification. The final moment, described in "Zum Bilde Prousts" as the shock of rejuvenation ("ein schmerzlicher Chok der Verjüngung" [143]) appears to lead back toward the beginning.

In order for the final closure to be accomplished, Proust's opening moment must be followed by a series of moments of

revelation. The gesture of closing the circle was essential from the beginning of Proust's conception of *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, and it was extended through the "paperoles" overflowing the borders of the novel even as Proust himself had imagined them. The closure of the text consecrates the opening of the vocation to be consummated. But the circle is a fictional one: it is a figure of a circle, since there is no common measure between the authorial scripture as written by Marcel Proust and named "A la Recherche du temps perdu," and the inscribed vocation attributed to the narrator. The circle is a fictional image for still another reason. The temporal symmetry it adumbrates cannot disguise the anachronistic dimensions of the experience of ecstatic vocation as written in the *Recherche*.

Proust's edifice of the fictions of temporality depends on a vertiginous twist. Time is taken out of the traditional framework of human and divine, of lost and found. Proust refuses the rhetorical bravado of this confessional model. From the chronologically ex-tatic "open sesame" of the Madeleine, waiting at a grave for the emergence of the Word, the series of deferrals that constitute Proust's writing of the raptures of vocation points the reader toward the asymmetrical *passage* through hell. In Proustian allegory, this passage makes the narrator a witness of evil and death: hell is the abyss of desire, condemned to the losses inseparable from human time. Time's shape seems to indicate the impossibility of paradise (III, 870). The moments of ecstasy are punctual indications of an anticipated vocation that does not leave the wasteland of idolatry until the final weave of the loom. Only at the end of the novel can vocation take its literal stand in an invocation—the effect of the fictional conversion, the crystallization of the book and the invisible dimension of time (III, 1043–45). Benjamin's reading of Proustian temporality reveals the emergence of the arabesques of invisibilia from the allegorized ruins of time. These ruins form the background for the ecstatic connections linking "Erinnern" and "Altern."

Die verschränkte Zeit

The verb *verschränken* is used to describe the crossing or clasping of one's own arms, the teeth of a saw, the steps of a deer. "Verschränkte Zeit" appears to be Benjamin's own invention: "Die Ewigkeit, in welche Proust Aspekte eröffnet, ist die verschränkte, nicht die grenzenlose Zeit" ("The eternity into which Proust opens windows is clasped time, not limitless time" [143]). Benjamin's

formulation of eternity seems rather enigmatic: how is it possible to distinguish "éternité" from "temps" (as both Ramón Fernández and Benjamin do) and yet maintain that eternity is not infinite? As if to compound the paradoxical formulation, Benjamin immediately shifts from time to space with the "raumverschränkten Gestalt" (143), the form that clasps the interiority of memory to the exteriority of aging.

The site of this clasped form is not named. It is not the author, but rather the created object, the countless pages of his fiction. One might call it the interior world of the narrator, but only on the condition that the narrator be considered the telescopic heart of the Proustian world, the arena of its day and night. In Benjamin's terms, the narrator is hardly mentioned: in the theater of Proustian representation, lived life appears through the hieroglyphics and significations of the dreamworld, far from the fantasmatic projections of psychology. There is only the spun web of the text, and the interlace of aging and memory: "Das Widerspiel von Altern und Erinnern verfolgen heisst in das Herz der Proustchen Welt, ins Universum der Verschränkung dringen" ("To follow the counterpoint of aging and memory in the heart of the Proustian world means to penetrate into the universe of clasping" [143]).

This is the world of resemblance (*Ähnlichkeit*), ruled by *correspondances*. Under the sign of Proustian rapture, Benjamin moves from the similarities that rule the dream world to Baudelairean allegory. "Korrespondenzen," the network of displaced mystical significations, plummet the subject into a universe of hieroglyphics. Benjamin posits "Verschränkung" as the appearance of correspondence in the image of lived life ("in unserem gelebten Leben" [143]).

In "Zum Bilde Prousts," "Verschränkung" occurs in several formulations. Benjamin conceptualizes Proustian "Ewigkeit" as the clasping of time. Temporality becomes operative within the context of spatial forms of "Verschränkung." Benjamin evokes the bearer of lived life, the subject of autobiography, as a point of intersection, the spatial clasping of interiority and exteriority. The reassuring image of lived life (the autobiographical persona) in terms of spatial dimensions is reduced to a point, the nearly invisible image of the autobiographical tapestry. On its stage, Proustian temporality is played out in the clasping of memory and aging. The spatial aspect of "Verschränkung" shifts from the autobiographical life to the geography of Proust's remembered world, "wie die Richtung von

Guermantes mit der Richtung von Swann für Proust sich verschränkte, da er (im dreizehnten Bande) ein letztes Mal die Gegend von Combray durchstreift und die Verschlingung der Wege entdeckt" ("as Guermantes' Way clasps/crosses Swann's Way, when [in the thirteenth volume] he evokes the region of Combray for the last time and discovers the interlacing of the Ways" [143]).

In Proust's representation of the writer's vocation, Benjamin singles out rapture ("Rausch"). It characterizes Proustian eternity: "diese Ewigkeit . . . ist rauschhaft" (142). The experience of rapture appears to be the mystical, temporal counterpart of the geographical "Verschränkung." At the same time, rapture is the effect of "Verschränkung," "Wo das Gewesene im taufrischen 'Nu' sich spiegelt" (143). The image of the past is mirrored in the dew-fresh "Nu" or instant. This mirroring constitutes the "Verjüngung" (rejuvenation), the object of Proustian presentification. The clasping of the world with a single human life gives rise to the invisible Nu and its geographical image: "Im Nu springt die Landschaft um wie ein Kind" ("In the Nu, the landscape springs around like a child" [143]). Benjamin's concept of "Verschränkung" gives an account of the specifically Proustian image of *correspondance*: the interlace of invisibilia and the emergence of rapturous eternity within the framework of a lived life. The image of the writer's vocation steps out of the flow of time and the flight of images into the light. Clasped and rendered eternal, the images of rapture enter Benjamin's text from Proust's formulation of vocation operating in and through *A la Recherche du temps perdu*. According to the terms of Proust's text, this formulation represents rapture as style.

Schriftsteller werden

Proust illustrates the inscription of rapture through style in the characterization of Bergotte, the writer of fiction admired by the narrator. Like Dante's Vergil, Proust's Bergotte disappears before the narrator takes up his own vocation. His paternal role anchors him in the narrator's past, where he glows like the Golden Angel, a harbinger of the extatic present tense of vocation. His death is marked by a moment of rapture that is itself a figure of the turn toward writing. The narrator counterpoints this figure during the matinee, when he alludes to the instants of "une vision ineffable" in terms of a fall or loss of consciousness (III, 875). Bergotte's vision of Vermeer's "View of Delft" is a knot of fiction and autobiography, sifted through the

paternity of literary apprenticeship and the *correspondance* of creation. The "View of Delft," considered by Proust to be the most beautiful painting in the world, links Bergotte to Swann's role in the narrator's apprenticeship of love and art while, at the same time, it recalls Proust's own formative relationship to Ruskin.² Bergotte's moment of rapture focuses on the style of a single panel of yellow wall framed by spires and chimneys, midway between sky and sea: "C'est ainsi que j'aurais dû écrire, disait-il. Mes derniers livres sont trop secs, il aurait fallu passer plusieurs couches de couleur, rendre ma phrase en elle-même précieuse, comme ce petit pan de mur jaune" ("This is the way I should have written, he said. My last books are too dry, it would have been necessary to paint several layers of color, to make my sentence in itself precious, like this little panel of yellow wall" [III, 187]).

Bergotte's rapture of style is reminiscent of the "effusion de la flèche," the spire of Saint-Hilaire that voices the passionate sensibility of the narrator's grandmother: "C'était lui qui parlait pour elle." The narrator quotes her rather Baudelairean remark that if the spire could play the piano, "il ne jouerait pas sec" ("it would not play in a dry manner" [I, 64]). This "open sesame" of vocation uncovers the arabesque of *correspondance* linking art, fiction, and love. As light shining in darkness, it is prefigured in the paragraphs introducing the narrator's vision of the Petite Madeleine. The Proustian wafer bears the proper name of a sinner whose love for the Word led her to a vision withheld from the less effusive Apostles: "C'est ainsi que, pendant longtemps, quand, réveillée la nuit, je me ressouvenais de Combray, je n'en revis jamais que cette sorte de pan lumineux, decoupe au milieu d'indistinctes ténèbres" ("It was thus that, for a long time when, awakened at night, I remembered Combray, I never saw more of it than this kind of luminous panel, cut out in the middle of vague shadows" [I, 44]). The narrator's ecstasy of the Madeleine marks the passage through the illuminated panel, the "petit pan de mur jaune," into the fictional revelation of invisibilia.

The silent image of light emerging from darkness recalls Benjamin's construction of Proust's image. He quotes the writer of countless pages, the adorer of secret code ("Schlüsselsprache") describing his address to a servant late at night: "Sie können es nicht verfehlen. Das einzige Fenster auf dem Boulevard Haussmann in dem noch Licht brennt!" ("You cannot miss it. The only window on the Boulevard Haussmann where light is still burning!" [139]). The

little panel of illumination, the improbable hieroglyphic of Proust's *Bild*, discloses its secrets only to the reader willing to enter its heart of impossibility, beyond the threshold of "Au Temps Perdu."

Benjamin's concept of "Verschränkung" reveals Proust's deferral of vocation as evidence of the asymmetry of time. Clasped or crossed, layer to layer, time's weave is interrupted by the knot of an impossible entity—the singular repetition, or a repetition with a difference. Metaphor, too, is a repetition with a difference: "le miracle d'une analogie" (III, 871).³ It allows for an escape from time *into* the asymmetry of time. The paradoxical figure of metaphor maps out the inviolable singularity of the two entities it brings together for an a-temporal flash of *jouissance* ("jouir de l'essence des choses, c'est-à-dire en dehors du temps" ("to delight in the essence of things, i.e. outside time" [III, 871])). The Proustian strategy of deferral appears in the telescopic view of the construction of *A la Recherche* and in the microscopic display of style. Uniting these two levels of vision is the fictional blank space of *not* writing: the anticipated text requires an effect of *Nachträglichkeit* to be written. The effect is an *après-coup*, or the turn of the return. This sign brands Proust's text with the displacements of mastery—in death, love, the vicissitudes of creation. Proust shapes language into an *alliteration perpetuelle*, an ongoing poetic act, through a fiction marked by the narrator's desire to return "avec des lignes" (I, 168) and predicated on his own invisibility as Marcel Proust. In the Proustian image of vocation, the alibi or the lie can only serve to reveal the truth—somewhere else, just as the alibi of metaphor reveals the singularity of identity through a fugitive emergence and disappearance. Benjamin's instant of rapture moves the ongoing vocation of writing toward the light of the image, beyond the threshold.

NOTES

1. Quotations from "Zum Bilde Prousts" are taken from Walter Benjamin, *Schriften II* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1955), pp. 132–147, and are indicated in parentheses. I have also consulted the *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser. [Vol. II.1 *Aufsätze, Essays, Vorträge*] (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1980), pp. 310–24. An important dossier of notes to "Zum Bilde

Prousts" can be found in II.3, 1044–69. Quotations from *A la Recherche du temps perdu* are taken from the three volume edition by Pierre Clarac and Andre Ferre (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliotheque de la Pleiade, 1954), and indicated in parentheses by volume and page number. All translations into English are my own.

Benjamin's essay does not seem to have come to the attention of many Proust critics. One exception can be found in the work of Carol Jacobs, who devotes a chapter of *The Dissimulating Harmony* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978) to "Zum Bilde Prousts."

2. Letter to Jean-Louis Vaudoyer, May 2, 1921 (III, 1277). Proust admires this painting once more in 1927, in the company of Vaudoyer; afterwards, Vaudoyer marked the occasion by taking pictures of Proust—the final photographs. It is probable that Benjamin had seen a number of photographs of Proust.

Some of Proust's writings on Ruskin may be found in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, ed. Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliotheque de la Pleiade, 1971). For an interpretation of Proust's apprenticeship to Ruskin, see Richard A. Macksey's "'Conclusions' and 'Incitations': Proust a la recherche de Ruskin," *Modern Language Notes*, 96 (1981), 1113–19, and especially his "Proust on the Margins of Ruskin," in *The Ruskin Polygon*, ed. J. D. Hunt and F. M. Holland (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, 1981).

3. See Gerard Genette, *Figures I and Figures III* (Paris: Seuil, 1966 and 1972) and Stephen Ullmann, *Style in the French Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1957).