I

THE WRITINGS of Proust and Freud invite comparison at so many points that the avoidance of comparison by those critics who have been willing to link their names must be accounted a thing of wonder. For Proust and Freud culture informs and is informed by sexuality, and both write urgently and at length about the manifold forms of sexual desire that meet and compete in the moral, artistic and intellectual spheres. For both of them language is the hugely unstable medium in which desire is socialised and in which constant failures of that socialisation occur: language is at once a retreat from, and a surreptitious return route to, the libidinal substratum. Add to this a willingness on the part of each to disclose the desiring impulses and gambits that underlie his own productions and the two writers begin to seem irresistibly, perhaps even cloyingly, comparable.

But until now most joint discussion of Proust and Freud has been content to pursue lesser quarries. First, it has addressed the questions: how much, if anything, of Freud's work did Proust know? if he had read nothing or little, what sort of hearsay acquaintance with Freud's ideas could he be expected to have derived from his casual reading, from salon conversation, from his many medical acquaintances? Secondly, it has taken a few bare and sometimes incompletely understood concepts from primers of psychoanalysis, named or nicknamed them 'Freudian theory', and applied them to Proust's imaginary narrator in the context of his imaginary family. What both these approaches have for the most part overlooked is that Proust and Freud have many psychological, sociological and linguistic interests in common, that their works, whatever knowledge the one author may have had of the other, are reciprocally illuminating to a remarkable degree, and that the two sets of texts mesh together and interact, and at the same time contest and diffract each other, in numerous ways.[1]

In order to give some idea of the scale of the terrain to be explored I shall simply list ten sample areas of common interest (there are many others), of which I have chosen two for discussion here:

(i) infantile sexuality and the Oedipus complex
(ii) sadism, masochism and their various hybridisations

(iii) pathological jealousy
(iv) bisexuality and homosexuality
(v) dream analysis and the rules of interpretation
(vi) the theory of the unconscious
(vii) the 'accidental' emergence of the unconscious in errors, slips, symptoms, mannerisms and jokes
(viii) the theory of consciousness
(ix) the role of free association in the investigation of mental process
(x) theories of writing

A joint exploration of the two writers will of course proceed differently in different areas. In certain cases Proust's narrator's fluctuating theoretical pronouncements can be measured against one or other of Freud's theories. For example, one of the narrator's accounts of conscious thought in *La Fugitive* – 'la pensée ayant un pouvoir de renouvellement ou plutôt une impuissance de conservation' (III, 644) – is directly comparable to Freud's account of consciousness, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and elsewhere, as a system through which stimuli pass without leaving any permanent trace (XVIII, 25) or as a magically self-erasing writing-pad (XIX, 227–32).[2] In certain other cases, Freud provides versatile exploratory tools for the analysis of Proust's text: Freud's discussion in *The Interpretation of Dreams* of condensation and displacement as primary modes of mental functioning (IV, 279–309), for example, illuminates Proust's convoluted and mobile metaphorical textures. In still other cases broader kinds of comparison are available: between Proust and Freud as artists in interpretation, or as sufferers from that hypertrophy of the interpretative function of mind that Deleuze and Guattari have called *interpretosis*.[3] Most instructively of all, perhaps, Proust may be called upon to provide a complex phenomenology for mental processes – those associated with bisexuality, jealousy and sado-masochism, for instance – upon which Freud performed certain of his most adventurous pieces of theoretical modelling.

This high degree of comparability and commutability between the Freudian and Proustian corpuses should not lead us to understate the wide gaps between them. Apart from the generic discontinuity, which is far from trivial, between the novel and the scientific treatise, the most notable of these gaps involves the kind of psychology, or rather of psychologising, that Proust's narrator

himself chiefly does. Let us remember a tone and an analytic diction used throughout *A la recherche du temps perdu* in the narrator's discussion of mental process. The passage below is part of the extended Venetian episode which occurs towards the end of *La Fugitive* (and from which most of my later quotations will also be taken). Like much of that episode, it is concerned with the death of Albertine and with the disruption, provoked by that death, of the narrator's own sense of coherence and continuity as a person:

> on ne s'afflige pas plus d'être devenu un autre, les années ayant passé et dans l'ordre de la succession des 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 déplorer, l'autre l'autre qui est à ce moment-là, ou désormais, tout vous; le mufle sourit de sa muflerie car on est le mufle, et l'oublieux ne s'attriste pas de son manque de mémoire, précisément parce qu'on a oublié.[4] (III,642)

This is a subtle language, abstract yet untechnical, for the introspective analysis of mind in action, and has of course deep roots in the French intellectual tradition: in the work of Montaigne, Descartes, Pascal, La Rochefoucauld and La Bruyère; in the psychologising philosophies of Maine de Biran or Bergson and in the *romans personnels* of Constant, Nerval, Fromentin and others. Into this commodious ready-made language certain kinds of Proustian speculation could insert themselves smoothly: it enabled the narrator to seize upon and discuss such dangerous topics as the multiplicity of the self, forgetfulness, psychical numbness, depersonalisation, and the inconstancy or contradictoriness of desire, yet at the same time to suggest that this teeming world of dispersed and discontinuous personal life was indefinitely, and at will, retrievable to consciousness and subject to the control of the single, imperturbable self that resided there. Later on the same page we read: 'ma pensée était déjà habituée à son nouveau maître – mon nouveau moi';[5] in one gesture the fragmentation of the self is espoused and superseded. At these moments Proust's narrator is an associationist psychologist of an entirely traditional stamp. All experience is the writing of complicated and superimposed messages on the mental *tabula rasa*; given proper knowledge of the modes of association between idea and idea, and given lucidity, patience and dedication in the required measure, what experience

has ravelled the mind can of itself, acting freely upon itself, unravel.

Such introspective analytic performances are of course not only unassimilable to psychoanalysis, they are based on theoretical suppositions to which it was and remains hostile. For psychoanalysis *repression* is an unavoidably central fact about the mental life: Freud's theory concerns itself precisely with the limitations under which the retrieval capacities of the conscious mind labour, and with the indirect, devious and unmasterable routes by which the repressed contents of the unconscious may become available to conscious reflection. Psychoanalysis may have been born by agonising parthenogenesis within Freud's introspective mind – this is the view of Ernest Jones, who celebrates at length in his biography the solitary acts of heroism by which Freud discovered within himself the Oedipus complex – but in its theoretical elaboration, and in the practical work that it does as a therapeutic method, psychoanalysis is relentlessly dialogical and dialectical. (A marked introspective capacity in the analysand may assist but may also impede analytic treatment.) The dynamic relationship between the unconscious and the preconscious–conscious systems is such that resistance may be overcome, repression lifted and previously unconscious material made available to reflection only by way of the mediations and displacements of the analytic dialogue. Over and against the introspective model, in which the mind is transparent from level to level and permeable part by part, Freud offers us models of the mind in which part is radically extrinsic to part and in which barriers and opacities may occasionally be attenuated but never definitively removed.

Clearly, if the encounter between *A la recherche du temps perdu* and psychoanalytic theory is to be close and informative, we shall be obliged to look beyond the smooth psychological speculations of Proust's narrator, to distrust his masterful voice and to ask whether an alternative psychology – more unstable, more dialectical and more discontinuous – may not also be ingrained in Proust's text. The psychological topics of common interest to Proust and Freud that I have chosen from my original list for more detailed discussion are: (i) errors and slips and (ii) bisexuality.

II

Both writers are hyper-acute observers of error; for both the erroneous, the erratic and the errant are powerful sources of

meaning; and for both the ready flow of such material within everyday human exchange creates problems of organisation and makes their own claims to error-freeness difficult to sustain with confidence. Precisely the everydayness of the perceptual and verbal events anthologised in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, and the gaiety of Freud's anecdotal manner, have made this his most popular and least menacing work. And many a 'popular' dilution of psychoanalytic thinking has taken its cue from this volume and from its companion study of jokes: errors, slips and jokes have allowed the unconscious to be portrayed as desultory – only momentarily audible and hence, seemingly, a thing of the moment – and likely to make itself felt in the world of purposeful speech and behaviour as no more than an occasional benign purveyor of witticisms or as an ineffectual subversive whose attacks leave their target institutions intact. But although Freud's serried catalogues of lapses, gaffes and embarrassments may seem to give support to this view, the most disconsolate themes of *The Interpretation of Dreams* are also amply present in the *Psychopathology*. In both books unconscious desire, however briefly glimpsed, is in fact obdurate and unstoppable and exerts a continuous pressure upon all human activity. And words, which when spoken may indeed acquire certain of their accidental-seeming inflections in direct response to that pressure, are also a facilitating medium for all unspoken mental productions. This 'compliance of the linguistic material', as Freud called it in the *Psychopathology* (VI, 222), allowed unconscious motives and wishes to find local expression in slips but, more gravely, made the elimination of error, whether from the language of neurosis or from the language in which the theory of psychoanalysis itself was articulated, into an exacting and unfinishable task.[6]

Proust too is a pathologist of speech-habits, and his inexhaustible fund of comic case-material, which extends from the malapropisms of Françoise to the proliferating banalities of Norpois and the clannish affectations of the Guermantes, may suddenly give way to linguistic aberrations that are ominously charged with emotion. 'Failed performances' – if I may hazard an alternative translation for the German term (*Fehlleistung*) that is usually obscurely rendered as 'parapraxis'[7] – of the exact kind that Freud discusses are relatively rare in *A la recherche*. But certain of these provide the narrator with a direct route to the realm of unconscious motivation, absorb several pages of text and are

placed at major points of transition within the narrative. In the case of Albertine's 'me faire casser [le pot]' (III, 337),[8] for example, a slip of the tongue reveals in her an unsuspected mode of 'perverse' sexual desire (for anal intercourse) and launches the narrator upon a protracted analysis that characteristically blends puzzlement, indignation and envy (III, 337–41). This desire, once revealed and analysed, allows the narrator to contemplate dispassionately, and thereafter to provoke, Albertine's flight from captivity.

During the Venetian episode this eloquent 'failed performance' of Albertine's is answered by another, a mis-transcription or a misreading by which Albertine, now dead, seems to have been resurrected. By telegram the narrator had summoned the fugitive Albertine back to him; by an almost simultaneous telegram he had been told of her death (III, 476); and a telegram now revives her (Proust dramatises his account of self-enclosed subjectivity in *La Fugitive* – its distance from others, its resistance to penetration – by having all these portentous messages travel at the speed of light):

> ... le portier me remit une dépêche que l'employé du télégraphe était déjà venu trois fois pour m'apporter, car à cause de l'inexactitude du nom du destinataire (que je compris pourtant à travers les déformations des employés italiens être le mien), on demandait un accusé de réception certifiant que le télégramme était bien pour moi. Je l'ouvris dès que je fus dans ma chambre, et jetant un coup d'œil sur un libellé rempli de mots mal transmis, je pus lire néanmoins: 'Mon ami, vous me croyez morte, pardonnez-moi, je suis très vivante, je voudrais vous voir, vous parler mariage, quand revenez-vous? Tendrement. Albertine.'[9] (III, 641)

By this stage in the novel Venice is a place where memory and forgetfulness are inseparably woven together; it offers release from the traumatic residues of passion yet at the same time provides countless associative paths by which that passion may by accident be revived. In this telegram, Albertine's precarious afterlife within the narrator's *oublieuse mémoire*[10] finds its most laconic form: in a wrong name. But what kind of error has been made? The name 'Gilberte' has been confused with its near-miss anagram 'Albertine'. But by whom?

> La dépêche que j'avais reçue dernièrement et que j'avais crue d'Albertine, cette dépêche était de Gilberte. Comme l'originalité assez factice de l'écriture de Gilberte consistait principalement, quand elle écrivait une ligne, à faire figurer dans la ligne supérieure les barres de *t* qui avaient l'air de souligner les mots ou les points sur les *i* qui avaient l'air d'interrompre les phrases de la ligne d'au-dessus, et en revanche à intercaler dans la ligne d'au-dessous les queues et arabesques des mots qui leur étaient superposés, il était tout naturel que l'employé du télégraphe eût lu les boucles d'*s* ou d'*y* de la ligne supérieure comme un 'ine' finissant le mot

de Gilberte. Le point sur l'*i* de Gilberte était monté au-dessus faire point de suspension. Quant à son *G*, il avait l'air d'un *A* gothique. Qu'en dehors de cela deux ou trois mots eussent été mal lus, pris les uns dans les autres (certains, d'ailleurs, m'avaient paru incompréhensibles), cela était suffisant pour expliquer les détails de mon erreur, et n'était même pas nécessaire. Combien de lettres lit dans un mot une personne distraite et surtout prévenue, qui part de l'idée que la lettre est d'une certaine personne? combien de mots dans la phrase? On devine en lisant, on crée; tout part d'une erreur initiale; celles qui suivent (et ce n'est pas seulement dans la lecture des lettres et des télégrammes, pas seulement dans toute lecture), si extraordinaires qu'elles puissent paraître à celui qui n'a pas le même point de départ, sont toutes naturelles. Une bonne partie de ce que nous croyons, et jusque dans les conclusions dernières c'est ainsi, avec un entêtement et une bonne foi égales, vient d'une première méprise sur les prémisses.[11] (III, 656)

The erratic anagrammatising of Gilberte's name has had at least three possible phases: Gilberte's ornate handwriting could have provided cues for misreading (her flourishes have an irresponsible semantic power); the telegraph clerk, responding to one or other of these cues, could have made a mistake (Freud, analysing his own example of error in telegrams, singled out these clerks as artists in 'secondary revision', VI, 129–30); the wishful narrator himself could have read 'correctly' the incorrect name or distorted further an already distorted message or introduced the whole distortion himself. The narrator does not adjudicate between the alternative prehistories of 'his' error, for in the face of his powerful unconscious wish – that Albertine should be alive – each of them is equally credible. In withholding judgment on the merely precipitating causes involved, the narrator is continuing in miniature a procedure already familiar to readers of *La Prisonnière* and *La Fugitive* – that procedure whereby a number of successive or imbricated hypotheses are left permanently unresolved. In the passage that separates the error from its explanation, two clear examples of this occur. The 'real' death of Albertine – the only one that matters to the narrator – is her death as a structure of his own thought; the creation, flowering and extinction of that structure are subject to their own causal laws and these are not reducible, or even coherently relatable, to the laws which govern the life and death of Albertine's body (641–2). But within two pages an interference between the two causal orders is allowed: news of Albertine's apparent return to life accelerates the onset of forgetfulness and indifference (643), despite the narrator's earlier claim that this process had run its full course before the arrival of the telegram. A similar equivocation takes place on the nature of

the self: can the self be subject to definitive mutation, severed from its own past states, or, on the contrary, can it be defined only by its improbable power to endure? In one view the self is endlessly in eclipse (642) and thought incapable of conserving anything (644). In another the self anxiously returns in thought to the scene of its losses and, without seeking continuity, endlessly finds it: 'Notre amour de la vie n'est qu'une vieille liaison dont nous ne savons pas nous débarrasser. Sa force est dans sa permanence' (645).[12]

One thing seems to the narrator certain despite these conceptual and emotional indecisions: there had been an initial mistake from which all subsequent mistakes flowed. The misreader of a letter is one who begins from an erroneous idea – 'l'idée que la lettre est d'une certaine personne'. The point is repeated and reinforced: 'tout part d'une erreur initiale'; '[une] bonne partie de ce que nous croyons . . . vient d'une première méprise sur les prémisses'.[13] But these anxious repetitions suggest that there is something singularly unstable about the narrator's claim. A passage that discusses one near-miss anagram (*Gilberte* → *Albertine*) as the revealer of a hidden wish ends with another, emphatic and still more complex: *première* → *méprise* → *prémisses*. In this culminating piece of word-play, notions of temporal or logical priority threaten to dissolve into the centrally placed notion of misapprehension or mistake. And the narrator's most distinctively 'Freudian' account of misreading earlier in the passage has already allowed that error may have no origin or beginning: 'ce n'est pas seulement dans la lecture des lettres et des télégrammes, pas seulement dans toute lecture'.[14] Error may simply be an inescapable condition of mental performances.

This is an episode, then, in which analytic and interpretative mastery is ostensibly being sought, but in which, detail by detail, mastery is being undermined. As explanation vies indecisively with explanation and as the copious narrative self reinvents its characteristics, factual *erreur* turns into textual *errance*; in the discussion of lapses further lapses occur; and the attempted correction of symptomatic misreadings becomes symptomatic in its turn. If we were looking for straightforward conclusions on 'Freud and Proust' at this premature stage, if conclusions were to be allowed at all on such a narrow range of evidence, we could say that both are searchers for the latent beneath the manifest and in particular for that which is insistently and informingly desired beneath all that is casual and contingent in human conduct; both

are attentive to the derivatives of the unconscious and regard 'failed performances' as accurate pointers to unconscious motivation; and for both the discovery of this instructive material is a disquieting one, an invitation to disorder. The couplet from the second part of Goethe's *Faust* that appears on the title-page of *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* could also serve as an epigraph to *La Fugitive*:

> Nun ist die Luft von solchem Spuk so voll,
> Daß niemand weiß, wie er ihn meiden soll.
>
> Now fills the air so many a haunting shape,
> That no one knows how best he may escape.[15]

But comparative conclusions like this are far too simple. For while indicating a certain degree of congruence between the two writers, or prominent moments of conceptual overlap between their works, they omit the complex middle-distance. The major lesson of Freud's theory for observers of Proust's text is that symptomatic slips are likely to be visible elsewhere than in the narrator's theoretical discussion of such slips, and indeed that his fluent discussion and his propensity for theory may themselves become suspect once a fuller range of unconscious motives has been revealed. Freud alerts us to the ways in which Proust's text means on the margins of its oratorical declarations and in the interstices of its famously penetrating analyses. In the passage I have discussed, for example, the alternative order of slips and of motives would have to do with the killing of Albertine rather than with her involuntary resuscitation. For her death – whether real or imaginary, bodily or mental, telegrammatically confuted or anagrammatically confirmed – is relentlessly reiterated as the ingenious analytic texture spreads, and the unconscious that revives her is providing itself with the opportunity to despatch her again. Freud helps us to see how many kinds and levels of interlocution Proust has inserted into his narrator's tireless soliloquy, and to distrust his psychologising even when this is of a seemingly clairvoyant psychoanalytic kind.

III

Freud and Proust were both consummate dialecticians of human sexuality, and the scale and complexity of their enquiries are still astonishing today. Only very rarely in the later twentieth century –

but unmistakably in, say, Foucault's *Histoire de la sexualité* – has analytic subtlety comparable to theirs been devoted to the procedures by which sexual attitudes and identities are fabricated within culture. Both conferred unusual epistemic privileges upon 'aberrant' configurations of sexual desire; both were impassioned relativists in their surveys of sexual behaviour yet had recourse to the strong-minded normative categories of their age in their moments of moral or intellectual exhaustion. And both made the unsettling discovery that in order to present a coherent account of what sexual creatures did the phenomenon of bisexuality had to be entirely rethought: it had to be retrieved from the wild and distant shores to which the cumulative *psychopathia sexualis* of modern Europe had consigned it and given a central role in the new literature of sex.

'Without taking bisexuality into account', Freud wrote in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), 'I think it would scarcely be possible to arrive at an understanding of the sexual manifestations that are actually to be observed in men and women' (VII, 220). The bisexual constitution of human beings at large made the description 'homosexual' unreliable and imprecise and, in conjunction with other factors, prompted Freud to speak of the 'manifold permutations' to which homosexual desire was subject (XVIII, 170). In *The Ego and the Id* (1923) that same constitution was presented as a permanent obstacle to the intelligible description of the child's early development (XIX, 33): the young child cannot be other than uncertain in his or her choice of sexual object and uncertainty preys too upon any theorist who seeks to trace the developmental routes by which this or that variety of adult sexual preference is reached. For Proust's narrator in *La Prisonnière* and *La Fugitive*, bisexuality similarly figures as an epistemological outrage and moment by moment frustrates the search for intelligibility in his personal relationships. Albertine's mobile desires are the object of interminable speculation and analysis – of *albertinage*, as these irremediably anxious textual performances have been called. To answer the question that her sexuality poses would be to reach the blissful outcome of a tormented philosophical quest.

'Male and female created He them.' But in Paris and Vienna by the early years of the present century, the Creator's original distribution of sexual kinds had gone seriously awry. Teasing sexual indeterminacy of a kind that had long been familiar in works

of art – in Leonardo's Saint John the Baptist or Caravaggio's angels and urchins, in Shakespeare's comedies or Balzac's *Séraphîta* and *Sarrasine* – was now being raised to the level of theory. An obscure middle zone seemed to be drawing into itself the once clearly counterposed notions 'male' and 'female' and to be hastening an immemorially ancient classificatory tradition to its close. Proust and Freud each responded to this crisis with a vein of historico-biological whimsy that was characteristic of their time. If 'male' and 'female' were no longer available to the observer of human sexuality as an efficient system of classes then the reason for their shortcomings was to be sought not in the recent history of European culture, not in the changing pressures which that culture placed upon the sexual instinct, but in the early history of biological species. The journey back through biological time led not to an Eden of bipolar sexual difference but to a primordial hermaphroditism:

> Enfin, l'inversion elle-même, venant de ce que l'inverti se rapproche trop de la femme pour pouvoir avoir des rapports utiles avec elle, se rattache par là à une loi plus haute qui fait que tant de fleurs hermaphrodites restent inféconds, c'est-à-dire à la stérilité de l'autofécondation. Il est vrai que les invertis à la recherche d'un mâle se contentent souvent d'un inverti aussi efféminé qu'eux. Mais il suffit qu'ils n'appartiennent pas au sexe féminin, dont ils ont en eux un embryon dont ils ne peuvent se servir, ce qui arrive à tant de fleurs hermaphrodites et même à certains animaux hermaphrodites, comme l'escargot, qui ne peuvent être fécondés par eux-mêmes, mais peuvent l'être par d'autres hermaphrodites. Par là les invertis, qui se rattachent volontiers à l'antique Orient ou à l'âge d'or de la Grèce, remonteraient plus haut encore, à ces époques d'essai où n'existaient ni les fleurs dioïques ni les animaux unisexués, à cet hermaphroditisme initial dont quelques rudiments d'organes mâles dans l'anatomie de la femme et d'organes femelles dans l'anatomie de l'homme semblent conserver la trace.[16] (II, 629)

In this passage from the incomparably passionate and witty exordium to *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, Proust's narrator has naturalised homosexual desire by moving its main field of action from the cultural to the biological sphere and its golden age from Greek antiquity to the remote first stirrings of terrestrial life: homosexuality, far from being a psychological predisposition of certain individuals within human society, is part of man's archaic biological inheritance. Freud, in his account of bisexuality or 'psychical hermaphroditism' in the *Three Essays*, entertained the same biological analogy in his search for an explanation of what were indisputably mental and social facts:

> . . . it appears that a certain degree of anatomical hermaphroditism occurs normally. In every normal male or female individual, traces are found of the apparatus of the opposite sex. These either persist without function as rudimentary organs or become modified and take on other functions.
>
> These long-familiar facts of anatomy lead us to suppose that an originally bisexual physical disposition has, in the course of evolution, become modified into a unisexual one, leaving behind only a few traces of the sex that has become atrophied. (VII, 141)

The analogical explanation that biology seemed about to provide was promptly but with some regret rejected by Freud: 'The truth must therefore be recognized that inversion and somatic hermaphroditism are on the whole independent of each other' (142) – although explanations of this sort continued to fascinate him throughout his career. If the development of minds could not in the end be thought of as imitating that of bodies, and if ontogenesis did not in exact and determinate ways recapitulate phylogenesis, nature could not, strictly, be blamed. But by refusing such replications of structure nature had certainly, in Freud's view, missed an opportunity for beauty and elegance in its organisation of itself.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud, like Proust's narrator, uses the Greek golden age as a staging post on his way to a possible biological explanation and chooses from that age the text that has always marked, for theorists of sex, its most resplendent moment: Plato's *Symposium*.[17] Science has little to tell us, Freud says, about either of the two sets of forces – the instincts of 'life' and 'death' – that *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* sets against each other. Yet Plato's fabulous hermaphrodites (*Symp.*, 189) may perhaps suggest one way in which science, destitute of illuminating hypotheses about the origin of sexuality, could proceed:

> In quite a different region, it is true, we *do* meet with such a hypothesis; but it is of so fantastic a kind – a myth rather than a scientific explanation – that I should not venture to produce it here, were it not that it fulfils precisely the one condition whose fulfilment we desire. For it traces the origin of an instinct to *a need to restore an earlier state of things*.
>
> What I have in mind is, of course, the theory which Plato put into the mouth of Aristophanes in the *Symposium*, and which deals not only with the *origin* of the sexual instinct but also with the most important of its variations in relation to its object. 'The original human nature was not like the present, but different. In the first place, the sexes were originally three in number, not two as they are now; there was man, woman, and the union of the two. . . .' Everything about these primaeval men was double: they had four hands and four feet, two faces, two privy parts, and so on. Eventually Zeus decided to cut these men in two, 'like a sorb-apple which is halved for pickling'. After the division had been made, 'the two parts of man, each desiring his other half, came together, and threw their arms about one another eager to grow into one'.

Shall we follow the hint given us by the poet-philosopher, and venture upon the hypothesis that living substance at the time of its coming to life was torn apart into small particles, which have ever since endeavoured to reunite through the sexual instincts? that these instincts, in which the chemical affinity of inanimate matter persisted, gradually succeeded, as they developed through the kingdom of the protista, in overcoming the difficulties put in the way of that endeavour by an environment charged with dangerous stimuli – stimuli which compelled them to form a protective cortical layer? that these splintered fragments of living substance in this way attained a multicellular condition and finally transferred the instinct for reuniting, in the most highly concentrated form, to the germ-cells? – But here, I think, the moment has come for breaking off. (XVIII, 57–8)

In the years when Freud found it necessary to rebut repeatedly the charge that psychoanalysis was a lubricious 'pan-sexualism', the 'divine Plato' (VII, 134) was the most notable of the character witnesses he called in his own defence (XVIII, 91, XIX, 218, XXII, 209).[18] It was as absurd to accuse psychoanalysis of explaining 'everything' by sex as it would be to make the same charge against Plato's symposiasts in their celebrations of Eros. But the *Symposium* has in this passage a much less diplomatic and public-spirited role. It is called upon to initiate, and confer respectability upon, a characteristic Freudian departure into theoretical reverie. His eventual return to strict and responsible science is announced by an equally characteristic gesture of seeming recantation: 'But here, I think, the moment has come for breaking off.'[19] The pleasures of the speculative intelligence that Freud abandons with this gesture are complex ones. For the intuition about the instinctual life that he introduces by way of Plato – that instincts have their origin in '*a need to restore an earlier state of things*' – is tested by methods that are themselves speculative, if not plainly science-fictional. Freud's search for the origin of the instincts leads him to surmise that the desired origin might be found precisely in the predisposition of animate matter to desire a return to its original state. The theorist's desire for origins is thus written into the book of Nature as the prototype of all desire.[20] His own text returns upon the anterior textual world of Plato just as Plato's returned upon the fabled 'initial hermaphroditism' of the human species, and the 'scientific' hypothesis that the Platonic myth allegedly facilitates in fact does no more than provide for that myth a protective cortical layer of erudite terminology.

In the immediate vicinity of the passages I have quoted from *Sodome et Gomorrhe* and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, both authors make as it were ceremonial reference to Darwin[21] as an emblem of

irreproachably strict biological science. But both writers in their fantasticated accounts of the yearnings felt by unisexual human creatures for their bisexual pre-existence are closer to the scientific world of Erasmus Darwin's *The Loves of the Plants* than to his grandson's *Origin of Species*. The quest for mental or instinctual 'origins' was at once an austere moral responsibility and a pretext for phantasy and play. For Proust's narrator this quest was the boldest element in an elaborate *deffence et illustration* of the homosexual condition; for Freud it was the psychological scientist's supreme calling. But once anchorage of this kind had been found and praiseworthy intentions declared, the way was opened up to multifarious textual invention. The hermaphrodite who guarded the instinctual origins was also the patron deity of the polymorphous, pleasure-seeking writer at work upon his page.[22]

Elsewhere than in the opening pages of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* there is little evidence to suggest the presence in *A la recherche du temps perdu* of a *theory* of bisexuality. Indeed bisexuality – whether as a term, or as a concept, or even as a phenomenon complex enough to be theorised upon – is almost completely absent from the remainder of Proust's novel.[23] Although the book as a whole is a vast fresco of imperious sexual energy, changes in sexual orientation almost all follow the same pattern: an apparently heterosexual man or woman emerges as homosexual in fact. Such conversions or comings-out accumulate so fast towards the end of the novel that a decidedly comic air of millennial upheaval is created. Most of the narrator's discussion of Albertine's obdurately ambiguous sexuality has to do with the question 'which does she *really* desire, men or women?' Proust prided himself on the creation late in the novel of Morel – who desired both, and with apparently equal intensity – but seems to have had or to have affected doubts about whether any significant number of individuals thus constituted actually existed. 'Ce sont du reste les brutes à qui ce rôle est d'habitude départi', he said in his essay on Baudelaire, while congratulating himself in an aside upon the singularity of Morel's character.[24]

Not possessing the term 'bisexuality', and in a book where homosexuality as distinct from bisexuality provided a major element of teleological structure, Proust nevertheless endowed his narrator with an indefinite capacity for bisexual phantasy and repeatedly allowed a volatile sense of sexual indeterminacy into the fine textures of his writing. Among the many cues for phantasy of

this kind that the narrator encounters in everyday experience, works of art – quoted, alluded to or described – have a particularly prominent role. And they offer the novelist handling what was still a shameful theme an opportunity for obliqueness and discretion: in the absence of a full-scale theory of sexual origins, works of art suggest that the modes of desire proscribed by modern Europe have a long, dignified and thoroughly European prehistory.

In my first example, again taken from the episode of the telegram in *La Fugitive*, the work of art involved is a literary one – Racine's *Phèdre*. 'How strange it is that I should be so completely cured of my love for Albertine', the narrator has just suggested:

> Est-ce pour cette fille que je revoyais en ce moment si bouffie et qui avait certainement vieilli comme avaient vieilli les filles qu'elle avait aimées, est-ce pour elle qu'il fallait renoncer à l'éclatante fille qui était mon souvenir d'hier, mon espoir de demain, à qui je ne pourrais plus donner un sou, non plus qu'à aucune autre, si j'épousais Albertine, renoncer à cette "Albertine nouvelle", "non point telle que l'ont vue les Enfers" "mais fidèle, mais fière et même un peu farouche"? C'était elle qui était maintenant ce qu'Albertine avait été autrefois: mon amour pour Albertine n'avait été qu'une forme passagère de ma dévotion à la jeunesse.[25] (III, 644)

As the narrator's dream-like retrospection espouses Phèdre's in her celebrated speech of avowal –

> Je l'aime, non point tel que l'ont vu les enfers,
> Volage adorateur de mille objets divers,
> Qui va du Dieu des morts déshonorer la couche;
> Mais fidèle, mais fier, et même un peu farouche,
> Charmant, jeune, traînant tous les cœurs après soi,
> Tel qu'on dépeint nos Dieux, ou tel que je vous voi.[26] (II. v)

– echoes are sounded back through the intricate Racinian sub-text of the novel. As a child at Combray, the narrator had seen himself as a new Phèdre at the moment of saying farewell to his beloved hawthorns: 'comme une princesse de tragédie à qui pèseraient ces vains ornements, ingrat envers l'importune main qui en formant tous ces nœuds avait pris soin sur mon front d'assembler mes cheveux' (I, 145 quoting *Phèdre*, I.iii).[27] (The narrative voice injects grotesque comedy into the scene by assimilating Phèdre to a self-willed child combed and curled for the photographer and by transforming the Racinian alexandrine into lurching semi-metrical prose.) In *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* the narrator, preparing himself to hear La Berma perform (I, 440–3), had schooled himself in an earlier speech of Phèdre's ('On dit qu'un prompt départ vous éloigne de nous . . .') from the scene he quotes in *La Fugitive*.

These and other self-identifications with Racine's heroine are now recapitulated in a symmetrical exchange of sexual roles: the narrator becomes Phèdre to Albertine's Hippolyte. 'I am accustoming myself', Freud wrote to Fliess, 'to regarding every sexual act as a process in which four individuals are involved' (Freud/Fliess, 364; *Origins*, 289).[28] How eloquently Proust has enshrined this fourness in the passage above; and with what economy and wit does he remind us of the book's earlier Oedipal drama: in a turbulent phantasy provoked and abetted by literary art, the narrator becomes an incestuously desiring mother – a mother of the very kind that, as a child, he had most wished to have.

The vicissitudes of sexual desire in Proust's account of Carpaccio, which is my second example, are less quadrilateral and more complex. One effect of the unfortunate publishing history of Proust's novel, both in French and in English, has been to confine Carpaccio to the threshold of the small pantheon of 'Proustian painters'.[29] Asked to name a painter having a kinetic function in the text of *A la recherche*, most readers are still likely to mention Vermeer, or Botticelli, or Giotto, or various of the Impressionists, or Whistler. But not Carpaccio. Carpaccio was in fact inserted into the narrative with great precision and was the subject of one of those minute long-term calculations in which the novel abounds. He appears in the company of Racine in *A l'ombre*: 'Un Carpaccio à Venise, la Berma dans *Phèdre*, chefs-d'œuvre d'art pictural ou dramatique que le prestige qui s'attachait à eux rendait en moi si vivants . . .' (I, 441).[30] Some 2,250 pages later the promise made in these lines is kept: painter and dramatist reappear in close proximity and the narrator demonstrates their continued living presence within him by turning himself first into Phèdre (III, 644) and then into Carpaccio's Saint Ursula (III, 646). I shall quote the main Carpaccio episode in its entirety and then discuss in turn the two works referred to and reinvented by the narrator:

> Nous entrions, ma mère et moi, dans le baptistère, foulant tous deux les mosaïques de marbre et de verre du pavage, ayant devant nous les larges arcades dont le temps a légèrement infléchi les surfaces évasées et roses, ce qui donne à l'église, là où il a respecté la fraîcheur de ce coloris, l'air d'être construite dans une matière douce et malléable comme la cire de géantes alvéoles; là au contraire où il a racorni la matière et où les artistes l'ont ajourée et rehaussée d'or, d'être la précieuse reliure, en quelque cuir de Cordoue, du colossal Évangile de Venise. Voyant que j'avais à rester longtemps devant les mosaïques qui représentent le baptême du Christ, ma mère, sentant la fraîcheur glacée qui tombait dans le

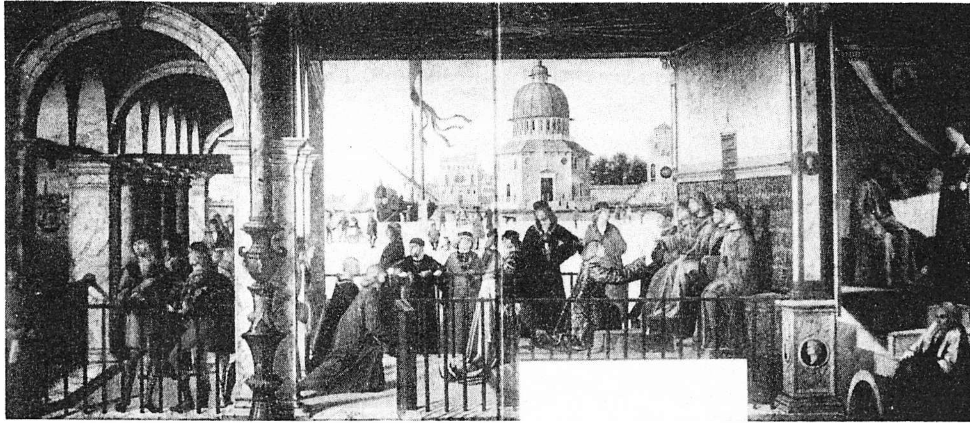
baptistère, me jetait un châle sur les épaules. Quand j'étais avec Albertine à Balbec, je croyais qu'elle révélait une de ces illusions inconsistantes qui remplissent l'esprit de tant de gens qui ne pensent pas clairement, quand elle me parlait du plaisir – selon moi ne reposant sur rien – qu'elle aurait à voir telle peinture avec moi. Aujourd'hui, je suis au moins sûr que le plaisir existe sinon de voir, du moins d'avoir vu une belle chose avec une certaine personne. Une heure est venue pour moi où, quand je me rappelle le baptistère, devant les flots du Jourdain où saint Jean immerge le Christ, tandis que la gondole nous attendait devant la Piazzetta, il ne m'est pas indifférent que dans cette fraîche pénombre, à côté de moi, il y eût une femme drapée dans son deuil avec la ferveur respectueuse et enthousiaste de la femme âgée qu'on voit à Venise dans la *Sainte Ursule* de Carpaccio, et que cette femme aux joues rouges, aux yeux tristes, dans ses voiles noirs, et que rien ne pourra plus jamais faire sortir pour moi de ce sanctuaire doucement éclairé de Saint-Marc où je suis sûr de la retrouver parce qu'elle y a sa place réservée et immuable comme une mosaïque, ce soit ma mère.

Carpaccio, que je viens de nommer et qui était le peintre auquel, quand je ne travaillais pas à Saint-Marc, nous rendions le plus volontiers visite, faillit un jour ranimer mon amour pour Albertine. Je voyais pour la première fois *Le Patriarche di Grando* [sic] *exorcisant un possédé*. Je regardais l'admirable ciel incarnat et violet sur lequel se détachent ces hautes cheminées incrustées, dont la forme évasée et le rouge épanouissement de tulipes fait penser à tant de Venises de Whistler. Puis mes yeux allaient du vieux Rialto en bois à ce Ponte Vecchio du XVe siècle aux palais de marbre ornés de chapiteaux dorés, revenaient au Canal où les barques sont menées par des adolescents en vestes roses, en toques surmontées d'aigrettes, semblables à s'y méprendre à tel qui évoquait vraiment Carpaccio dans cette éblouissante *Légende de Joseph* de Sert, Strauss et Kessler. Enfin, avant de quitter le tableau mes yeux revinrent à la rive où fourmillent les scènes de la vie vénitienne de l'époque. Je regardais le barbier essuyer son rasoir, le nègre portant son tonneau, les conversations des musulmans, des nobles seigneurs vénitiens en larges brocarts, en damas, en toque de velours cerise, quand tout à coup je sentis au cœur comme une légère morsure. Sur le dos d'un des *Compagnons de la Calza*, reconnaissable aux broderies d'or et de perles qui inscrivent sur leur manche ou leur collet l'emblème de la joyeuse confrérie à laquelle ils étaient affiliés, je venais de reconnaître le manteau qu'Albertine avait pris pour venir avec moi en voiture découverte à Versailles, le soir où j'étais loin de me douter qu'une quinzaine d'heures me séparaient à peine du moment où elle partirait de chez moi. Toujours prête à tout, quand je lui avais demandé de partir, ce triste jour qu'elle devait appeler dans la dernière lettre "deux fois crépusculaire puisque la nuit tombait et que nous allions nous quitter", elle avait jeté sur ses épaules un manteau de Fortuny qu'elle avait emporté avec elle le lendemain et que je n'avais jamais revu depuis dans mes souvenirs. Or c'était dans ce tableau de Carpaccio que le fils génial de Venise l'avait pris, c'est des épaules de ce *compagnon de la Calza* qu'il l'avait détaché pour le jeter sur celles de tant de Parisiennes, qui certes ignoraient, comme je l'avais fait jusqu'ici, que le modèle en existait dans un groupe de seigneurs, au premier plan du *Patriarche di Grado*, dans une salle de l'Académie de Venise. J'avais tout reconnu, et, le manteau oublié m'ayant rendu pour le regarder les yeux et le cœur de celui qui allait ce soir-là partir à Versailles avec Albertine, je fus envahi pendant quelques instants par un sentiment trouble et bientôt dissipé de désir et de mélancolie.[31] (III, 646–7)

Venice, as we have already been reminded by this stage in the novel, is a place where different styles and structures meet and interweave. The acquisitive and assimilative Venetian republic had made heterogeneity into a local rule, and artefacts, ideas and feelings are alike subject to it. The dominant gothic motif in the civic and domestic architecture of the city is 'encore à demi arabe' (625)[32] and, just as orient and occident flow together in the intricate façades of the buildings, so the narrator's possessive sexual passion is directed at once towards his mother, who has accompanied him, and towards the young working women of the town. The town-scape is so completely sexualised that his mother, desiring and desired, is described as having left a permanent imprint on his memory of the Venetian gothic style (625), and the network of lesser canals that he explores by gondola as offering an inex-haustible array of erotic itineraries (626–7). Before the re-entry of Carpaccio, that is to say, Venice has already established itself as a privileged site for phantasy and as an ingenious mechanism for the transformation of desire.

The drama of the first paragraph resides in the narrator's improbable rediscovery of maternal power. Having travelled by water to San Marco, he finds the basilica to be not a merely monumental edifice but one that is mobile and fluent, a continu-ation of the sea. The work of time upon the building has been to replace straight lines by curves and that work is going on now, for the whole place seems to have been 'construite dans une matière douce et malléable comme la cire de géantes alvéoles'.[33] His mother's solicitude in placing a shawl over his shoulders persuades him that a special pleasure exists in seeing, or in having seen, a thing of beauty in the company of this person rather than that. But his commemoration of his mother's tenderness takes a provocative form: in a world where everything else is exuberantly in process, he turns her to stone. While the pavement mosaics themselves become wax, the memory of her becomes 'immuable comme une mosaïque'.[34]

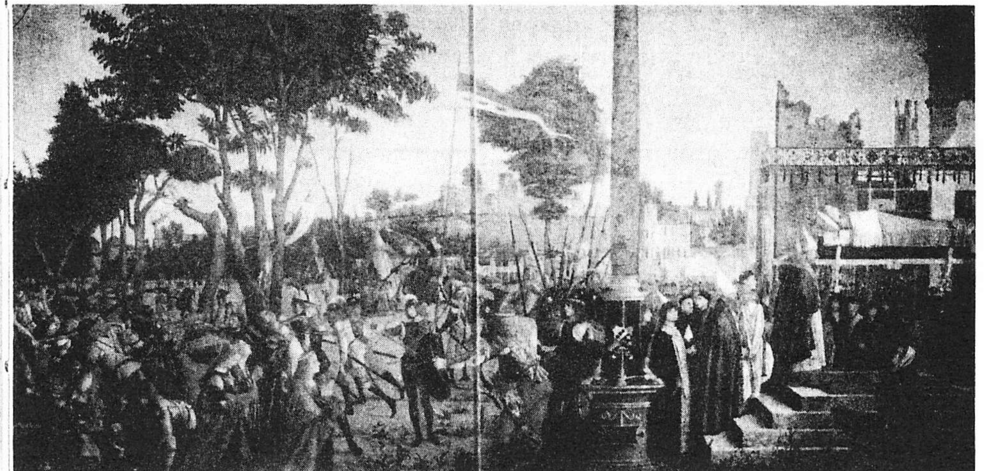
The narrator's mother attends upon his emotion before Ven-etian art, just as an anonymous old woman attends upon Saint Ursula in two of the eight panels, now in the Accademia, in which Carpaccio depicts her spectacular career (Plates 1 and 2). Ursula, according to Carpaccio's version of the legend,[35] was a Breton princess, who agreed to marry the son of the pagan King of England only on condition that she be allowed to undertake an



1 Carpaccio, *The Arrival of the English Ambassadors* (*St Ursula Cycle*); Venice, Accademia

arduous pilgrimage with a multitudinous following of virgins. It was on this pilgrimage that Ursula was martyred at the hands of the Huns. It is not clear whether Proust had one only of these panels in mind, although the phrase 'ferveur respectueuse et enthousiaste'[36] perhaps suggests the second woman, at prayer, rather than the first, who is depicted in passive contemplation. The question 'which panel did he mean?' is in any case not a particularly sensible one in that the *vecchia* – who was to become a familiar motif in Venetian narrative painting of the *cinquecento*[37] – is one of several elements from the first painting that the second self-consciously recombines.[38] Each of the panels is in the form of an episodic narrative designed to be read from left to right. In the first the arrival of the English ambassadors in an enchanted, Venetianised Brittany, and their homage to the Breton King, are followed by the discussion between father and daughter of the marriage settlement. In the second the slaughter of Ursula and her companions is followed by her funeral ceremony. In both the old woman occupies the bottom right of the painting, is present during the latest narrative stage, and is active within the pictorial design while having no role in the story. In the first work, she is half-turned out of the picture plane and into the space occupied by the spectator; she contradicts the flat rightwards movement of the tale, not simply by turning outwards, but by mirroring the leaning, askew posture of the King in a composition where almost all other figures are seen frontally or in profile. She occupies a point of tension

between depth visibly receding into the picture, into the King's private chamber, and depth invisibly projecting from the picture into 'our' world. In the second work her kneeling figure in the funeral scene mirrors Ursula's kneeling figure in the scene of murder. Both praying women are in full profile. Yet despite their mirroring of each other the figure of the old woman still has a contradictory energy: she kneels against the direction of the corpse and the funeral cortège and looks backwards into a now superseded phase of the narrative. Her hands posed diagonally upwards join forces with the episcopal mitres to counteract the diagonally downwards movement of the lethal Hunnish shaft. Both old women are active without doing anything, active by being there; both are placed at the foot of a staircase that neither of them, it is clear, is eligible to ascend. For on the podium to which each staircase leads a sacrament is being prepared or enacted. It is this 'being there', this mute attending upon the suffering, travail or death of another woman, that provides the bridge between Carpaccio's *repoussoir* figure and the figure of the narrator's mother, and this that allows the narrator momentarily to become, in his Venetian rapture, a virgin bride, pious and resolute as she faces martyrdom. But what passion is it that the narrator, having thus become feminine and Ursuline, undergoes? And what entitles him to annex to himself his mother's mourning for her own mother?



2 Carpaccio, *The Martyrdom of Ursula* (*St Ursula Cycle*); Venice, Accademia

In this paragraph, as in earlier ones, the narrator's mother has acquired an extraordinary cadential weight. For the second time in this Venetian episode the word 'mère' has closed a long and elaborate paragraph; for the second time it has both acted as the long-deferred resolution of an intricate syntactic pattern and been associated with Venetian stone.[39] In a world where the stones themselves are labile and capricious, the psychical life of the individual is held to be organised and governed by weighty internal fixtures. Love of this mother and for this mother is the only enduring thing in a mutable world, and is undergone as a passion and a martyrdom.

How close we are in this portrait of petrified human desire to an entire dimension of Freud's thought – not simply to its general drift but to the animated metaphorical substratum of his texts. Freud too was fascinated by the eloquence of worked stone, although Rome rather than Venice was his Italian *lieu d'élection* and archaeology rather than architecture his favourite reservoir of images.[40] Archaeology and psychoanalysis resembled each other in that both were concerned with the excavation and restoration of a previously lost past. But the excavator of mental objects had one central advantage over his archaeological counterpart. For the primitive sexual impulse, the traumatic event, the earliest configurations of libido, belonged to a superior order of durability.[41] Where the material relics of human civilisation were friable and destructible, primitive psychical relics were solid enough to prevail against the innumerable adventitious pressures to which minds are exposed. Proust and Freud, who have a similar gift for dramatic portraiture of mental process, take a similar pleasure in the idea that the mere desires of mere minds should provide firm bedrock in an otherwise dispersive and entropic material world.[42] And both write with particular force about the ways in which libidinal structures first produced in the context of the mother–child relationship persist through adult life. In his last book, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, Freud restated his lifelong maternal theme in perhaps its gravest and simplest form:

> A child's first erotic object is the mother's breast that nourishes it; love has its origin in attachment to the satisfied need for nourishment . . . This first object is later completed into the person of the child's mother, who not only nourishes it but also looks after it and thus arouses in it a number of other physical sensations, pleasurable and unpleasurable. By her care of the child's body she becomes its first seducer. In these two relations lies the root of a mother's importance, unique,

> without parallel, established unalterably for a whole lifetime as the first and strongest love-object and as the prototype of all later love-relations – for both sexes. (XXIII, 188)

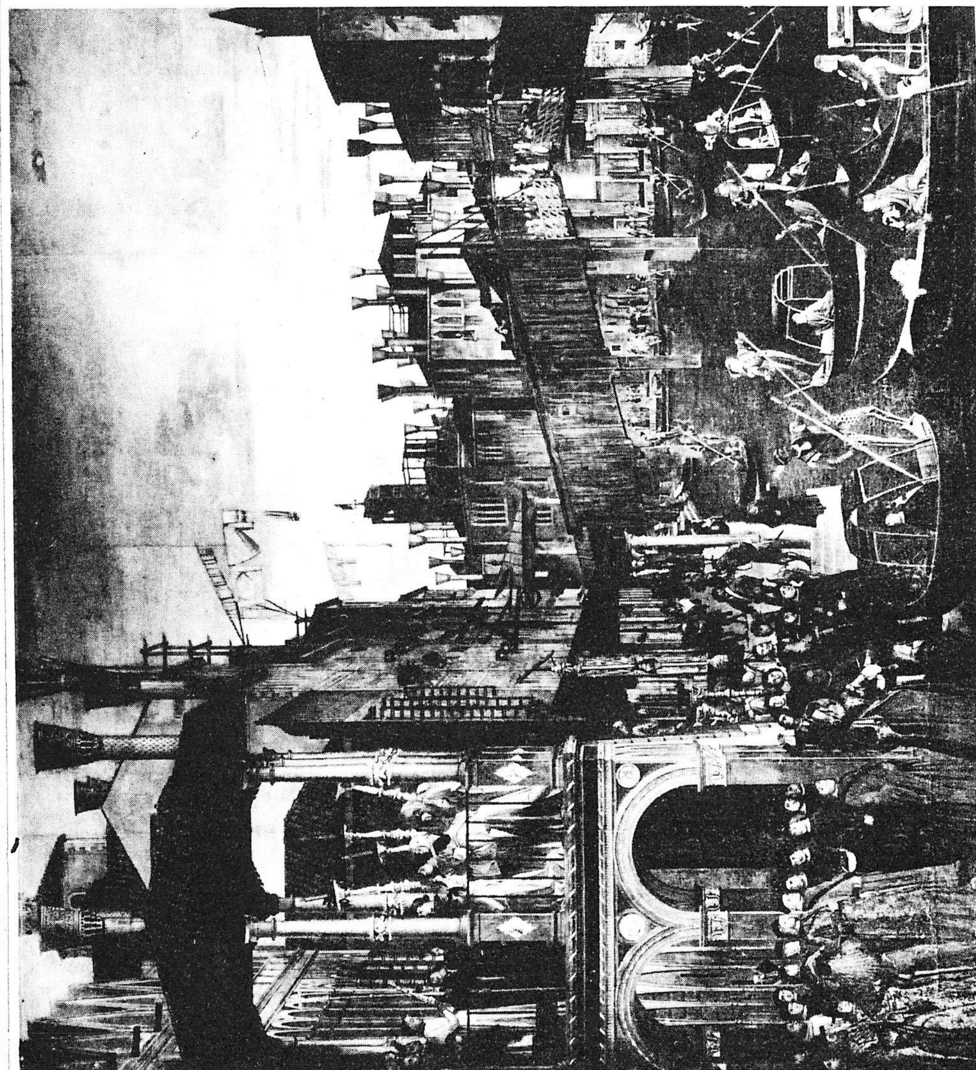
By way of the milky flow from breast to mouth, a rigid pattern is being created; in the playful caresses that pass between the child and its first seducer an implacable fatality is at work. The infant human mind is already forming for itself the restrictions under which its later pursuit of pleasure and happiness will be conducted: even as the child sucks, sacrifice and martyrdom are its lot.[43]

Where the Carpaccio cadence of Proust's first paragraph establishes the maternal prototype, the paragraph that follows describes an attempt to be free of its determining force. The painting to which the narrator now turns is known by a variety of names in addition to the one that he provides, including *Miracolo della reliquia della Croce* and *The Healing of the Madman* (Plate 3). One can understand readily enough why the author of *A la recherche du temps perdu* should have found this panel singularly absorbing. For here, among numerous shared motifs, are: madness; madness miraculously cured; madness and its cure both placed upon the margins of a populous and variegated social world. Here too are the populace in its variety, and, caught up within that variety, a number of exclusive societies – those of the priesthood, monastic orders, trade guilds and that elegant coterie of young noblemen-about-town known as the *compagnia della Calza*. The miracle-working patriarch himself may well remind us of the curative paternal power so singularly absent from the novel. But despite the wealth of associations between painting and novel, Carpaccio's work is incorporated smoothly into Proust's narrative structure. The relationship between this paragraph and the preceding one, and between this painting and the Ursula cycle that it follows in Proust's narrative is, at its simplest, one of chiasmus: the multifarious Venetian world of the first paragraph comes to rest upon a figure from Carpaccio, and Carpaccio then offers, in the second paragraph, a return route to Venice in its multifariousness; two accounts of mobile desire pivot upon an image of desire fixated. Within the ever-changing topography to which this second painting returns the narrator's attention, a sexual metamorphosis, of man into woman, again occupies a central position. Fortuny, like so many brilliant couturiers, is a plagiarist. He has plundered Carpaccio for his designs, and in removing a cape from fashionable fifteenth-century Venetian men has made it available

to fashionable modern Parisian women. Contemplating these sumptuously attired men, the narrator is brought back, in a sudden moment of pained recognition, to Albertine and to those features of her that had been most threatening and most alluring: her seeming duplicity and the indeterminacy of her sexual appetites. This male figure in female-seeming garb in the painting is wearing the cape of one who was 'toujours prête à tout'.[44]

This momentary reawakening of desire for Albertine is announced at the start of the paragraph and explained at some length in the second half. But throughout this remarkable page, an unstoppable transformational machinery is in operation. There are no identities, only trajectories; no original, only derived forms. Carpaccio's work reproduces that of nameless contemporary costume-makers and is itself reproduced in the work of later artists: in Whistler, José-Maria Sert and Fortuny. Carpaccio's paintings become stage designs in the hands of Sert (whom Diaghilev brought together with Richard Strauss as composer and Harry Kessler as choreographer for the *ballets russes* production of the *Legend of Joseph*) and dress designs in the hands of Fortuny – who was a migrant from Spain to Venice to Paris.[45] Thanks to Carpaccio's record of Venice, clothing from across the centuries is reborn as clothing, and paint as paint. Features of San Marco as described in the preceding paragraph are transported to the neighbourhood of the Rialto: material that decorative artists had 'ajourée et rehaussée d'or' in the baptistery is now echoed in the 'cheminées incrustées' of Carpaccio's skyline, just as the 'surfaces évasées et roses' of the arcades are rediscovered in the 'forme évasée et le rouge épanouissement de tulipes' of these same chimneys, the full description of which in *Le Côté de Guermantes* (II, 572) is about to be repeated verbatim (III, 650).[46]

Above all Proust is interested in the many alternative trajectories for the eye that Carpaccio has inserted into his painting. (One has only to see the work in the Accademia in the company of contemporary works also celebrating Venetian scenes and ceremonies – by Gentile Bellini, Mansueti and Bastiani – to become aware of how complex Carpaccio's handling of depth and multiple perspective is.) The narrator traces in some detail one of the routes taken by his eye within the painting: from the chimneys, to the old Rialto, to the palaces on the canal-side, to the water traffic, and back along the teeming canal-bank. The portrait of Venice that emerges as he describes this receding avenue of human types and



3 Carpaccio, *The Healing of the Madman*; Venice, Accademia

trades is of course familiar from generations of earlier writers and artists: Venice as the point of intersection between otherwise remote societies, manners and artistic styles had been celebrated before Carpaccio and by Proust's time had become an essential commonplace of the guide-books and of belletrist travel impressions such as Gautier's *Italia* (1852) and Taine's *Voyage en Italie* (1866).[47] Proust not only re-orchestrates the familiar theme, but distorts the painting in his retelling to improve upon Carpaccio's presentation of this inveterately heterogeneous city. In the painting only one black appears – in the fluent form of the moorish gondolier who occupies the centre foreground. Proust has taken this figure, removed him from the foreground, placed him firmly in the dimension of depth and given him someone else's barrel to carry: 'le nègre portant son tonneau'.[48] Let the rich seam of humankind that plunges into the painting be one of ethnic as well as professional diversity, he seems to be saying: let the eye on its journey into Venetian space move from Europe to Africa to the Levant, and from Christianity to Islam. In Venice such journeys are a chief delight.

This point is repeated a hundred or so pages later in the novel, at the start of *Le Temps retrouvé*, in Proust's last reference to Carpaccio. During the war the presence of allied troops from the outposts of Empire has made Paris resemble Carpaccio's Venice:

> . . . c'était le défilé le plus disparate des uniformes des troupes alliées; et parmi elles, des Africains en jupe-culotte rouge, des Hindous enturbannés de blanc suffisaient pour que de ce Paris où je me promenais je fisse toute une imaginaire cité exotique, dans un Orient à la fois minutieusement exact en ce qui concernait les costumes et la couleur des visages, arbitrairement chimérique en ce qui concernait le décor, comme de la ville où il vivait Carpaccio fit une Jérusalem ou une Constantinople en y assemblant une foule dont la merveilleuse bigarrure n'était pas plus colorée que celle-ci.[49] (III, 763)

The minimal index of cultural diversity is here the same as it had been in Proust's fictional recreation of *The Healing of the Madman*: a cosmopolitan scene must possess at least one person from Africa and several from the East. The black and Muslims are replaced by Africans and Hindus. Whereas in the Carpaccio painting the black wore red on the top half of his body, his counterparts now wear it on the bottom half; white turbans, which had formerly been Islamic emblems, are now emblems of Hinduism. In this final appeal to Carpaccio, then, Proust is re-transforming his earlier revised version of the painting. Carpaccio, under whose patronage

the narrator's sexual identities and aims are diversified, is himself transformed by Proust's all-consuming text.[50]

Freud is well known as the tragedian of libidinal fixation. But he also wrote eloquently about that quality of libido – 'plasticity' or 'free mobility' – that made its sublimation and socialisation possible:

> . . . we must bear in mind that the sexual instinctual impulses in particular are extraordinarily *plastic*, if I may so express it. One of them can take the place of another, one of them can take over another's intensity; if the satisfaction of one of them is frustrated by reality, the satisfaction of another can afford complete compensation. They are related to one another like a network of intercommunicating channels filled with a liquid . . . Further, the component instincts of sexuality, as well as the sexual current which is compounded from them, exhibit a large capacity for changing their object, for taking another in its place – and one, therefore, that is more easily attainable.
>
> (*Introductory Lectures* (1916–17), XVI, 345)[51]

Venice – was there ever a more glorious 'network of intercommunicating channels filled with a liquid'? – provides Proust with a model not only of desire in perpetual displacement but of the sublimating and desublimating exchanges that occur between the sexual and the cultural realms. Architecture and painting divert and absorb the narrator's sexual impulses, but precariously. At any moment the gothic trefoil may drive him back upon his Oedipal longing, or a Carpaccio panel reawaken his passion for Albertine. The 'free' mobility of his desire as it plays upon the works of culture constantly stumbles into unfreedom.

In 'Analysis Terminable and Interminable' (1937) Freud drew a brief combined picture of the 'fixated' and 'mobile' libidinal types (XXIII, 241–2). What Proust has done in this passage from *La Fugitive* – and in numerous other sections of the novel – is draw an extended picture of the same kind, but making both types internal to his narrator and enacting each of these desiring styles within the movement of his own text. The narrator, who is capable elsewhere of irate or complacent or defensive statements of sexual preference, achieves by way of works of art, and in the texture of his own discourse, a condition of extreme libidinal mobility. Differences of sexual orientation become, within the texture of Proust's writing, handleable, shimmering *stuff*, a variegated fabric like the costumes of the *compagnia della Calza*. Writing offers a precious escape from a punitive sexual typology.

Yet desire plainly does not run unhindered from one delight to the next, in writing or anywhere else. The interconnected channels

of Venice, like those explored by the writer when engaged upon the higher tourism that is textual production, are haunted by emblems of immobilised desire, and the journey that promises displacement and diversification without end may abruptly return the traveller to his point of departure. Proust writes with great scruple and precision about the almost-freedom of desire, and about the helplessness induced by the discovery that the severest limitations placed upon that freedom are internal to the mind, unwilled and indissoluble. At the centre of the Venetian chiasmus, the narrator's mother stands (or sits, or kneels) as an intractable stone guest, calling him back from his erotic adventures and re-infantilising his once-defiant adult emotion. And the mother's power runs across the chiasmus too: her gesture of solicitude ('ma mère . . . me jetait un châle sur les épaules') is repeated by Albertine as a gesture of *sauve-qui-peut* self-interest ('elle avait jeté sur ses épaules un manteau de Fortuny'), and by Fortuny as one of insolent acquisitiveness ('c'est des épaules de ce *compagnon de la Calza* qu'il l'avait détaché pour le jeter sur celles de tant de Parisiennes').[52] Even as the mother's action is travestied and desecrated its prototypical status is reinforced. Quite apart from the internal constraints of forgetfulness and distorted remembrance that organise these paragraphs, the 'merveilleuse bigarrure'[53] of the Carpaccio episode in its entirety and of its brief reprise in *Le Temps retrouvé* is hemmed in by the spectacle of other people's sexuality, which may add little to the variegation of the world and a great deal to the individual's sense of forlornness in his own desires. The 'sentiment trouble . . . de désir et de mélancolie'[54] that a detail of Carpaccio's painting precipitates is to reappear and achieve elegiac intensity in the remaining pages of *La Fugitive*, which are concerned with the narrator's discovery of Saint-Loup's homosexuality.[55] And the reappearance of Carpaccio's Venice acts as a prelude to further sexual researches and to scenes of sado-masochistic excitement and abjection that the narrator observes from a distance, through a peephole. The narrator is formed by others in his capacity to desire, yet perpetually discovers that the desires of others are not, or not yet, his.

IV

The two sample areas in which I have chosen to compare Freud and Proust clearly have much in common. For the student of

'failed performances' who perceives desire errant in discourse is confronting, case by case, segments of the psycho-libidinal motor that propels all performances. That motor may be hypothetically reconstructed from these punctual emergences of the unconscious into the behavioural domain, but may also be modelled by scanning behaviour over time and by sounding its subterranean contours. The momentary *Fehlleistungen* of sexual creatures will have no semantic power and will not be interpretable until they have been exposed to a theory – or inserted into a story – about human sexuality at large. Yet 'sexuality at large' will be a vapid and unwieldy topic of concern for theorist or novelist unless individual events are called upon to exert a continual particularising pressure upon it. Proust and Freud are memorably alike in their capacity to adopt both these approaches – now concurrently, now consecutively – to their overflowing dossiers of observational material, and to sustain relentless dialogue between the freedom and the fixation of desire. For both of them observation confirms unerringly that desire errs. Yet what would their books have been like if they had had no other message? What enchanted verbal confections would we now possess, what extravaganzas of omnivorous appetite and polymorphous passion? The books they in fact wrote are permeated by the knowledge that desire – agile, Protean, acquisitive and experimental as it may be – has in each local instance its inescapable prehistory, its determining pattern of choices already made and its moorings within a sensate organism. Pleasure-seeking *errance* may have been inaugurated long ago by simple *erreur*, and may still bear its traumatic mark. For Proust's narrator, mapping ontogenesis on to phylogenesis as boldly as Freud ever did, the peculiar anxieties of the homosexual disposition may be traced back to an 'erreur initiale de la société' (II, 622),[56] an unfortunate fall from the 'hermaphroditisme initial' (II, 629) of the species.[57] Homosexual desire is founded upon one memory of prelapsarian bliss, heterosexual desire upon another. But both are products of limitation and constraint. Bisexuality remembers the protozoic Eden more completely, and rediscovers its many pleasures more readily, but is preyed upon, as all sexual dispositions are, by that other prehistory – of training and coercion, seduction and counter-seduction – which is the life of the human infant within the family. For both writers the narrative about desire that sets the pre- and postlapsarian states against each other may be duplicated, enlarged or miniaturised at will: it may be

told of the species or the individual, of organisms or minds, of legendary monsters or modern nurslings. There was once a paradise in which multiform desires were unfailingly satiated (in the primal oceans, at the mother's breast) and there is now (among unisexual mammals, in the social group) a fallen world of severance, dissatisfaction, envy and pursuit. The two phases of that narrative are connected by an unhappy power of remembrance that visits upon the individual a knowledge of what has been lost.

Most of my discussion has been taken up with fairly obvious similarities between Freud and Proust and I shall end with another. But before ending, I shall speak briefly of a dissimilarity that cannot not be mentioned if a comparative portrait along the lines sketched here is to make sense. Proust and Freud, while remarkably similar in their models of human desire and in their postulation of an unconscious upon which the coherence of those models depends, are dissimilar in their accounts of the main access routes to the unconscious and of the benefits that having access to it may be expected to provide. Where Proust's narrator, in *Le Temps retrouvé*, speaks of joy and ecstasy, Freud speaks of work. Intense moments of contact with the unconscious are, for Proust, a gratuitous grace – spontaneous, uncovenanted, ungoverned by rule; they are the culmination of an unplanned individual journey into the psychical underworld; they are the introspective's best reward, the last leap into apperceptive knowledge of a mind accustomed to solitary exertion. For Freud such moments occur by way of the indirections and mediations of interpersonal dialogue and may be attested by the subject's resistance to their onset, or by the pain they cause; although they too cannot be planned for, the working conditions and conventions in which they are pursued must be rigorously controlled; they may bring further pain, further work and further dialogue in their wake. Even here, points of comparison exist. The narrator, returning to the social world at the end of his introspective trances in *Le Temps retrouvé*, in some respects resembles an analysand emerging from a particularly fruitful analytic session: he is less anguished, less censorious, more versatile in his sympathies and more self-accepting. And Freud would surely not have dissented from Proust's valedictory maxim 'tous les altruismes féconds de la nature se développent selon un mode égoïste' (III, 1036), nor failed to perceive its applications to psychoanalysis. Yet the gulf between Freud and the Proust of *Le Temps retrouvé* is still very wide on the matter of how liberating and

enabling discoveries about the mind can best be made. I spoke, at the start, of the tension in *A la recherche du temps perdu* between a narrator who psychologised, who 'did' psychology of a kind that the tradition of the *moralistes* had made familiar, and a narrator who was the instrument of an alternative psychology, resembling psychoanalysis, that the Proustian text itself enacted in its discontinuities, contradictions and reversals. Proust chose at the end of the novel to give one of these narrators a special reward. He provided his psychologising narrator, that is to say, with the apotheosis that his extraordinary introspective gifts most deserved, and so removed him from the anxious interlocutory world in which vast tracts of the preceding narrative had been situated. Freud chose not only to inhabit that world but to create within it a new style of clinical practice and a new scientific profession.

My last resemblance is largely a matter of ambition and scale. The persistence, the limitless emotional investment, the fecundating egotism with which Proust and Freud both pursued their early insights, together with their indefinite capacity to re-organise, re-energise and re-dialecticise their representations of mental process, make them heroes of the speculative mind, upholders of an exacting code of theoretical prowess. Even as they discuss the limitations under which the creative writer labours, their desire-laden writing presses beyond them. Even as they trace the boundaries beyond which their texts have nothing to say, their assimilative and expressive powers are calling those boundaries into dispute. And both of them expend huge energies in the recapitulation, correction and reinforcement of their own ideas – on sexuality as on everything else – as if the supreme test of an existing theory were its capacity to generate alternative versions of itself.