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Indelible Marks and Impossible Tasks:
The Solitary Pursuit of the Past in Proust, Nabokov and Sebald

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Languages and Literature
of Bard College

by

Kate Ehrenberg

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York
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For Jennifer Day

With all my gratitude to my incredible adviser, Marina van Zuylen, for her unbelievable faith and patience, infinite wisdom and understanding, cookies, and *petit café*

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k.e.

All works by my three primary authors—Marcel Proust, Vladimir Nabokov, and W.G. Sebald—are cited in text with the following abbreviations:

A – *Austerlitz*
CS – *Campo Santo*
RLSK – *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*
LRL – *Lectures on Russian Literature*
CSB – *By Way of Sainte-Beuve (Contre Sainte-Beuve)*

The individual volumes of *In Search of Lost Time* are cited by volume number in Roman numeral.

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Introduction

At the very heart of it this project is about a relationship between memory and solitude. On the side of solitude what I am exploring are different qualities of being alone, whether that means a detachment from a larger social world, an emphasis on one's inability to bridge distances and achieve intimacy, or a tangible block between the interior self and the world around that self. My aims are to explore the many implications of the relationship between a solitary lifestyle and the act remembering. One central question hinges on whether, how, and why these qualities enable a character's capacity to remember. Within the larger theoretical discourse on memory, there is a strong emphasis on the implications of cultural or collective memory, that is, how communities of different sizes and formations construct a memory of an event. The term "collective memory" was popularized by Maurice Halbwachs who argued that in fact all memory is collective since it is "in society that people normally acquire their memories" and it is only "in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (Halbwachs 38). Halbwachs uses the dream state as his counter example; because dreams merely "evoke images that have the appearance of memories" and that occur in a "fragmented state" we are "incapable of reliving our past while we dream" (Halbwachs 41). From this he draws that the isolated self cannot truly remember as it does within a larger society because the dream state is the time in which "the mind is most removed from society" (Halbwachs 42).

My investigation is based on a rejection of what I feel is the overstated emphasis on the collective in the discourse on memory. The desired or needed capacity to remember or reconstruct the past in the texts I explore is neither collective nor cultural but deeply personal, even in cases when one seeks the personal history of an ultimately unattainable other. While some of the protagonists I discuss do mine other people's memories or seek out external, tangible proofs in their investigation of the past, these sources are often false gods, invested with the expectation that they will illuminate mysteries and confirm internal hunches. In reality, the contributions of a larger society to these pursuits never live up to their promise and often further estrange our heroes from the past they believe to be alive within them. It is very much this internal mechanism of memory that stirs our narrators, that drives them to pursue the past either in the external world or by maintaining that enclosed world of self and recollection. Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time,* Vladimir Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*, and W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* are all narratives of desire, a desire for one's past or forgotten events taken to its limit. These books chronicle attempts to discover the potentially undiscoverable personal history and even revive the past.

There is a sense of extremes in the definitions I have thus far put forth in the two basic terms of solitude and memory. The types of solitude I explore are innate and often frustratingly heightened, a constant looming presence in the worlds of the three characters whose narratives form the basis of my investigation. The goals of memory are idealized and often reflect a craving for the hallucinatory reliving of the past. This ambition frequently necessitates the occurrence, as each narrative progresses, of radical transformations of one's understanding of time. The time here dealt with is first

understood in a linear sense, the acknowledgement of the past as behind one and the future ahead. However, in all three texts this linearity must be violated in order for each protagonist to achieve his extreme goals. The reviving the past within the present, no matter to what degree this is enacted, necessitates some kind of investment in the past's not truly being past and a rejection of linear time. As measurable time is on par with any other social construct, the removal of oneself from its constraints is a retreat from the social world. He who seeks to maintain his own past must be, like our three protagonists, separated from the world that proclaims it as past.

While this sense of detachment and solitude enables memory in these texts, it is also the drive behind their common sense of pursuit. These books are not merely about remembering, one's relationship to the past, or how memories occur but rather how one follows, traces, reconstructs, and ultimately seeks the past. In a sense, and to varying to degrees, they are all detective stories, ranging from Nabokov's more explicit structure of a man's investigation and piecing together his brother's life to Proust's narrator's search for truth at both macrocosmic and microcosmic levels of life. While these solitary narrators are in a better position to re-experience past events and engage in their memories, they must also struggle with their inherent separation from the world around them. Thus pursuit in this project is not exclusively about pursuing the past within oneself, but a striving to make something that either is or appears to be external a part of one's internal world. Memory is the internal process by which we feel we can make something in the tangible world part of our interior self forever and so the presence of other forms of this obsessive pursuit in memory narratives seems natural.

In my first chapter I aim to first understand the space of solitude as it exists in relation to this sense of desire for a romantic other. Emmanuel Lévinas describes the structures of distance in *In Search of Lost Time* as "situating the real in a relation with what for ever remains other—with the other as absence and mystery" (Lévinas 105). I will be investigating the nature of these distances in *The Captive* and *The Fugitive* and how they are enacted and resisted by the narrator. They are in fact often enacted through resistance. The narrator demonstrates in earlier volumes that his attempts to break down barriers between himself and an object of desire often results in a more painful sense of separation between them. The only experience he has of the other, then, is in solitude. The closest he comes to possessing his beloved Albertine is when she is asleep and unable to interact with him. He can then project the whole of himself onto her and inversely absorb this image of her into his being.

While the narrator is rarely explicitly aware that he only truly enjoys Albertine when she is consumed into himself and mentally absent in her unconsciousness, he recognizes the necessity of solitude to engage in his memories. In a striking scene towards the beginning of *The Captive* he enjoys an extended reverie of the past while isolated in his room. Throughout this scene he constructs a self-reflexive world, similar to the isolated space of his room that Proust himself constructed to write his work. At the end of the narrator's journey through several brief, voluntary memories, he remarks on the crucial role of solitude in this kind of activity. He then briefly considers the possibility of not marrying Albertine at all so that he might be able to continue to enjoy the pleasures of this solitary engagement with his past. At the beginning of *The Fugitive* he is tragically granted this wish in the form of Albertine's flight and subsequent death.

Albertine is now permanently and unbridgably separated from him. His only mode of experiencing her now is in his vivid memories. She has no physical counterpart now to frustrate and make evident his innate separation from her even when she is alive. The narrator's internalized images of her, as the only existing trace accessible to him, make her appear more real and more alive after her death.

The events of Vladimir Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* start from this point of death's eternal separation of the pursued other from his pursuer. After the death of his half-brother, the famed writer Sebastian Knight, our narrator V. attempts to write his biography. By engaging in both his own memories and seeking those who knew Sebastian better than he did, V. hopes to find some image of the "real" Sebastian beyond what is conveyed in his novels. In my chapter on this text, I will look at a more direct relationship between pursuing the past and pursuing an increasingly abstracted other. V.'s story, the most overtly like a detective story of the three, is based on seeking the life of the now ghostly figure of another. We are not as intimately acquainted with the structuring behind V.'s own distance from the world around him as he resists revealing himself, even to his reader. This gives the reader spectral sense from this our narrator, or least the sense of one who has lived a life slightly outside larger societal experience and disconnected from most people**.** V. speaks early in the text of one biography of his brother where he is "bound to appear non-existent" to the reader (Nabokov 4). He appears to have lived something of a ghost's life in his own family, in the shadow of his brother, who, though famous, appears to be a shadow himself. In the wake of his brother's death, V.'s own self takes on a new direction and a new clarity, yet we still have the impression of one ghost pursuing another. This impression comes from a doubling

feature, present in all three novels I explore, through which we get the sense that V.'s pursuit distances and distorts the image of his brother while simultaneously merging the two men into one figure.

V.'s journey to write his brother's biography posits that he can know and understand Sebastian's life and past now that he is dead better than he could in life. The fact that he makes this journey explicitly to write a story—one that, from the title, plays with our idea of what is real—directly brings the issue of narrative into the larger study of the pursuit of memory and the past. In addition, he weaves Sebastian's fictional writings and previously written biographies of his brother into the account**.** The question of writing and the real is central to V.'s story. He attempts to find the real Sebastian through creating what becomes a new and ultimately fictional narrative. He often struggles to discern Sebastian's real life from the self he conveyed in his novels. Through these relationships that overlap the fictional and the real there is a suggestion that one might overcome death through literature. Other critics have written in support of this suggestion in both *Sebastian Knight* and other works by Nabokov. While this implication is certainly there, I feel that it exists more as an ideal that V. himself holds in his pursuit of Sebastian, yet one that does not completely hold up in the end. V.'s text does not stand as the hereafter in which Sebastian is resurrected, yet it also does not reflect Sebastian's "real life." It is rather a creation unto itself, occupying a more liminal, ghostly space that echoes the real but cannot concretely link to or reflect the life of the man it claims to be about.

In the final chapter I will explore the eponymous hero of Sebald's *Austerlitz.* He differs from the previous two protagonists in that he is the only one who suffers from

repression. In fact he is the only one who has experienced trauma in its conventional understanding. Trauma and repression, at their core, challenge ideas of why and how things are remembered. A repressed trauma is an indelible mark which, because it is so forceful, must be forgotten in order for one to continue to exist. It necessitates a radical severance from a section of one's experience, and in Austerlitz's case, an entire period of his personal history. What Austerlitz is in fact repressing and separating from is itself an act of separation, that is, his removal from his homeland. He thus suffers a loss and an unknown longing for the German idea of *Heimat*, that idealized place of home, origins and centeredness. Both the initial traumatic separation and Austerlitz's self-imposed, repressive distance have a ripple effect on Austerlitz as a character. Both before and after the revelation of his past, he leads the life of a wanderer, physically drifting and completely, necessarily detached from the world around him. In this sense, he seems to resemble the flâneur, the figure of modernity, willfully separated from the conventions and restrictions of society, in order have the distance necessary to observe and aestheticize the urban landscape. Austerlitz's detachment, however, is not by choice and he does not have the same gaze that the flâneur does. He wanders because he cannot stop as stopping might mean the return of the repressed past. Thus for Austerlitz, his disconnect from the world and the motion that he uses to maintain that disconnect is an attempt to exaggerate, lengthen and slow linear time in order to prevent its subversion in the ultimate revival of the past in the present.

As a story based around uncovering a repressed past centered on a historical trauma, *Austerlitz* plays with many of what we can see as the tropes of the discourse on collective memory. The exploration and looming presence of the archive in the text and

the parade of frequently unexplained photographs stand not as monuments to a cultural memory or shared past but as spectral presences and often ambiguously positioned clues. The archive is both an oppressive and tomb-like space yet also the homely, sequestered location of his investigation and motions towards his true home. The photographs are simultaneously clues and ghosts, seeming to contain a tangible truth of the past yet standing in for that which has been permanently lost. In addition, they implicate the reader as detective, throwing us into an irresolvable state of uncertainty as to the text's relationship with reality. Thus, tangibility and object reality in the text are both clues and obstacles, leading one in but often blocking one or promising too much. This dual relationship is exemplified in the text by Austerlitz's fetish-like obsession with architecture and railway stations, which he only by chance discovers as the key to uncovering his past after pushing their significance away through academic study.

My exploration thus both hinges on the larger links of these texts' understanding of memory and revival of the past and the varying solitary natures of their protagonists. However, what these connections lead to is a larger notion of pursuit in the texts. How one attempts to find a desired object or restrict oneself from that object and the external world impacts one's perception of time and the barriers between the real, external world and the interior and fictionalized one. Through remembering we incorporate aspects of the outside world into ourselves, and yet that incorporation is largely illusion as we remember what is often already lost.

Chapter I:

Alone Together: The Solipsistic Experience of the Other in *The Captive* and *The Fugitive*

Georges Poulet characterizes desire in *In Search of Lost Time* as a sentiment inherently tied up with what he sees as the Proustian notion of space. This space is defined by its insurmountable quality, by the existence of unbridgeable and unchanging distances. In Proust

> [t]hings are, but they are *at a distance*. A distance which it is impossible for them to suppress or reduce. In the Proustian universe, at this stage, it is never allowed to draw near, to touch, to establish ones with others, in the intimacy of neighborhood. All that is living in it is living in solitude. And the feelings of distance, which, under one form or another never ceases to manifest itself, confounds itself with the anguished feeling of existence. At the bottom of all desires there is an impotency, inherent in the very nature of beings, that forbids their attaining the object of their desires. To desire is to render apparent a distance apart (Poulet 42).

In this assessment of the relationships between what he simply refers to as "things"—referring to all living beings—Poulet searches for a way to give a physical shape to the tragedy of desire throughout the text. In this description desire exists on one end of a fixed space, whose length and shape can never be changed. The "impotency" that he speaks of results from the efforts and longings, innate to desire, to transform and overcome this space, that is, that which by definition cannot be moved or crossed. The act of "render[ing] apparent" is the most central quality of desire; one's longing for something or someone does not then increase its distance from oneself but rather reveals that distance. It is the simplicity of this act of revelation that makes desiring so painful.

In this chapter I will attempt to further clarify the nature and shape of these distances in the specific context of the narrator's relationship to Albertine in *The Captive* and after her death in *The Fugitive*. Yet the process of the revelation of this tragic space

caused by desire is evident throughout the text. It would certainly be an oversimplification to point to one moment in the text as the prototype for these distances, a representation of the initial severance and abolition of true intimacy that the narrator is forever attempting to overcome in different forms. And in fact, seeking this first separation would yield no results, if we put our faith in Poulet, as there is no act or moment in which distance is created; it simply exists. The only motion we can make in relation to it is to become aware of it. The episode in *Swann's Way* of the "bedtime drama" could then be seen as the narrator's first awareness of space between himself and Maman, with whom he takes a natural intimacy for granted. Throughout the episode he insists on a precarious logic by which he claims he can bring his mother closer to him. In sending her a note to remind him to come give him a kiss before bed he firmly believes that he can bring the "barriers" between them down, establish "an exquisite thread" to unite them (*I*, 39). The mere idea of her reading his note makes him feel that his "intoxicated heart" can be filled with "the sweetness of Maman's attention." Yet even basing this connection on his note implicitly recognizes the distance. In order to connect with Maman the narrator must put multiple steps between them: the medium of writing, the conveyance of this writing from Françoise to the butler and from the butler finally to his mother. Each step further emphasizes that the narrator cannot physically be in his mother's presence while ironically making him feel that he is coming closer to her.

It is only in the fulfillment of what the narrator believes he desires, that is, the arrival of Maman in his bedroom, that he recognizes his true incapacity to have his longing satisfied. He describes a "sudden puberty of sorrow" that occurs at her ceding to his wishes. He cannot be happy as her presence means her making "a first concession

that must have been painful to her," that "[undermined] her judgment" and in fact pushes her further away, closer to her death, because in forcing her concession he "had with an impious and secret finger traced a first wrinkle upon her soul and brought out a first white hair on her head" (*I*, 51, 52). Even in acknowledging the continued separation between them does he inherently, and narcissistically, believe in an indelible connection between his actions and her life. He does not point directly to the constant, unshifting abyss between them but rather senses, "makes apparent" that there is no true satisfaction of his desire as this wish only shows him that she will one day be completely separated from him. In having her physically close to him, he sees her severed from him by time. Thus the space and distance in his desire shows a converse relationship between physical space and temporality. Even if physical distance is overcome, the feeling of space runs deeper and will always keep the desired object out of reach.

The narrator's awareness of the distance between himself and the object of his desire is more acutely felt later on in his early encounters with Gilberte. He feels unsatisfied with their interactions at the Champs-Elysées and proclaims that he is unable to appreciate "the small favours she had granted me […] in themselves and as if they were self-sufficient" (*I*, 574). Instead he views these moments with her as "fresh rungs of the ladder on which I might set my feet, which would enable me to advance one step further towards the final attainment of that happiness which I had not yet encountered." Here he does not truly experience these moments but rather places them within a sequence of events, as a narrative. However, the progression of this sequence is an illusion. The idea that each encounter is an "advance" towards something more real and satisfying than the encounter itself is, like the note to Maman, a false promise of

connection and intimacy that rather provides a measurement of the distance between them. Yet unlike the bedtime drama, where this space exists through the threat of the future, the narrator here plainly describes both his and Gilberte's incapacity to be present in these moments. These "pleasures […] were given not by the little girl whom I loved to the 'me' who loved her, but by the other, the one with whom I used to play, to that other 'me.'" The separation between them occurs not just in the naming of these separate selves—made manifest in the textual sequestering of this self in quotation marks—but in the allusion to an absent self that can somehow more fully appreciate the moment as it occurs. This self, however, is only named in negation, abstracted and idealized in contrast to the other "me," here spoken of and defined as one "who possessed neither the memory of the true Gilberte, nor the inalienably committed heart which alone could have known the value of a happiness which it alone had desired." Thus the separation occurs both between the two children and between the narrator and his desiring self. It is not only that the object of desire is at a distance from the one who desires it, but that the true nature of this desire cannot even be strong or present enough at what should be the moment of attainment.

Central to these missed experiences is one of the key paradoxes around which the text functions, that is, that the present can never be experienced as present, that those experiences are only savored once the present's tangible form has disappeared or somehow been minimized. We see this both in the experience of involuntary memory and in the narrator's insistence on reading as a better means to experience the external world than the physical, first-hand experience itself. While the distances that inhibit intimacy and the obtaining of the desired object are tragic in the self-effacing way in

which they are only fully shown in the narrator's attempt to destroy them, this understanding of experience implies a value on the inability to bridge this distance. If we look within Poulet's own definition of this space, we find it is not just a definition of those spaces between subject and object, lover and beloved. Embedded within this description we get a clearer view of those "things" that are suspended in these structures of distance. In the simple declaration that "[a]ll that is living is living in solitude" Poulet, for one sentence, speaks almost neutrally of the space one inhabits while becoming aware of the separation between oneself and the external world, the "thin spiritual border" that keeps the narrator from "touching [an object's] substance directly" (*I*, 115). Throughout the text solitude is placed at a variety of points on a spectrum of judgment. It prevents one from connecting with the external object, with the lover one craves. Yet this solitary state is central facet of existence and experience. It must be celebrated completely in order for that experience to be fulfilled and, ultimately, for a text to be created in response to that experience.

In this chapter I will look at three facets of the narrator's solitary experience of Albertine. In the first part I examine his complete celebration of a solipsistic lifestyle that rejects physical proximity and the constant, official domesticity of marriage so that he might better engage with his interior self and the past that lies within him. In one particular passage that attempts to justify and celebrate this choice, he creates an intricate and reflexive world that invites the reader into the joys of solitude while reflecting on the self-enclosed space of writing and the creation of condensed, aestheticized worlds. In the second part I examine the realization of that physical separation that he had presently longed for in light of Albertine's flight and death. The bulk of *The Fugitive* attempts to

maintain a constant state of mourning for Albertine and thus a constant state of remembering. If the external and the other are best experienced through the internal mechanism of memory, then it is in this phase of memory that Albertine must truly be most alive. In her eternal separation from the narrator, she becomes part of that vivid, solitary world that he felt he could only create and enjoy by pushing her away. In the final section, I examine the episode of the narrator's "encounter" with Albertine as she sleeps. Here we see the physical proximity of the other and the celebration of the internal world existing in the same space. The episode both prefigures her death and demonstrates the futility of the narrator's efforts to bring her into his subjective world while she is physically present. In looking at these three episodes together, I hope to shed some light on Poulet's space of desire with respect to the narrator's own desire and enjoyment of solitude. The solitary life and a life of intimacy with another would seem to be inherently at odds with each other. The latter would require that physical proximity that Poulet calls "neighborhood." Yet Proust's narrator attempts to reconcile this paradox through an object-effacing consumption. Intimacy takes the shape of internalization of the external object into the narrator's solitary experience.

I. "The Too Arduous Task of Devoting Myself To Another Person"

The tale told in *The Captive* is marked by the narrator's obsessive desire to know the hidden Albertine, to possess her while restraining her movements and longings. These attempts at restriction are the narrator's primary mode of engagement with his love object. He speaks at the very beginning of the volume of his diminishing love for Albertine since "[l]ove is no more perhaps than the diffusion of those eddies which, in the

wake of an emotion, stir the soul" (*V*, 16). The narrator has himself experienced these "eddies […] through and through when Albertine spoke to me at Balbec about Mlle Vinteuil, but these were now stilled […] I no longer loved Albertine" (*V*, 17). The connection between the narrator's jealousy and his feelings of love is so inherent that we do not see any logical breakdown of the relationship between these two feelings. It is as if they are one and the same. Jealousy *is* love, for the narrator, and more importantly, it is the cause of a physical reaction within himself, as the image of the eddy implies, caused by Albertine. However destructively this feeling is manifested, it is this concrete connection caused by jealous desire that the narrator seeks.

Marriage then, would not fulfill this urge. A marriage is connection only in name and engenders merely a legal domestication of the love object. As a result the narrator considers abandoning his plan to marry Albertine at this early moment in *The Captive*. He asks himself whether this marriage "might not spoil my life, not only by making me assume the too arduous task of devoting myself to another person, but by forcing me to live apart from myself because of her continual presence and depriving me forever of the joys of solitude" (*V*, 26). The strength of this statement rests in its explicit declaration of a preference for solitude. He poses the struggle of his relationship with Albertine—and the expectation of exhaustion should he put this struggle into legal and domestic terms—against the pure *joies de la solitude*, the supposed comfort of never-ending reflexivity, in which the whole of the text itself is produced. After this proclamation, he meditates for a few pages on what he sees as his growing distaste for Albertine. While these meditations further justify his ability to even consider a "rupture", it is what precedes his initial consideration of not marrying her that explains this desire. What first occurs in this

passage is a specific kind of engagement with the past, one that evokes qualities of both involuntary and voluntary memory and yet does not fully fit the definitions of either. It is this curious mixing of tropes from both types of recollection that form for the narrator, at a surface level, a solitary contentment that is ultimately preferable to the unsettling presence and pursuit of Albertine.

What the narrator pinpoints in this moment is the pleasure of a carefully constructed, solitary space. On this particular day he has decided to stay inside and not go out with Albertine. In not leaving his room, he notes that he has "refused to savour with my senses this particular morning" and so could enjoy "in imagination all the similar mornings, past or possible, or more precisely a certain type of morning of which all those of the same kind were but the intermittent apparition which I had at once recognized" (*V*, 24). The realm of solitude is at first that which is beyond the senses, yet its effects on the narrator's temperament are almost physical; he regards these pleasures as "an activity with which I was overflowing and which I kept constantly charged" that makes "me pulsate internally." The enjoyment of the internal world is vivid and pervades his whole being. This inner, imagined space might be more preferable to the outside world of the senses.

The space of solitude is characterized by its reflexivity, formed through the creation of a barrier between the self and the exterior world, yet the narrator initially draws this characteristic from the inanimate qualities of the room. The passage starts with the narrator in the sequestered space of his room. Françoise quietly and momentarily breaks through that enclosure to light the fire. It is this entrance into his physical world that triggers the transformations of the narrator's perceptions of time.

When lighting the fire, Françoise throws "upon it a handful of twigs, the scent of which, forgotten for a year past, traced round the fireplace a magic circle" (*V*, 24). The action and the narrator's response to it is a misleading allusion to the madeleine. In conjunction with the experience of the "scent" of the fire that had been "forgotten for a year past" comes an impression common to two periods of time that could possibly wholly revive the past. Yet in this construction, the thing which is "forgotten," brought back by the scent is, in fact, the scent itself. The odor's limited capacity to evoke only a memory of another scent sets up a reflexivity of experience, whereby the sense impression does not necessarily open the door to endless other memories, but only reiterates the persistence of its own presence.

This reflexivity is expanded upon in the idea of the "magic circle" created by the scent. It is within this circle that the illusion of being able to re-experience this past at this time is enacted. The narrator describes how in the circle he was able to "[glimpse] myself poring over a book, now at Combray, now at Doncières" and "was joyful, while remaining in my bedroom in Paris" (*V*, 24). He purports to transcend time and space through this scent. Yet these transformations are varied, fleeting, and only loosely described. In seeing himself as "on the point of setting out for a walk along the Méséglise way, or of going to join Saint-Loup and his friends on manoeuvres" there is a fleeting impression of recaptured time, yet these memories lack involuntary memory's vividness. The manner in which he jumps between different places and times suggests not the fluidity of time and space but the lack of specificity that produces an interchangeable quality of the moments recalled. These recollections create an image of a past that is consistent and comforting in its continuing familiarity through repetition.

These are not memories that suddenly, in all their details arise and consume the narrator by force and chance, but rather those softly evoked, willingly engaged in, almost selected. He is building his solitary world based on these principles of the reflexive and repetitive. There is a safety in this form of solitude in that it creates a universe that never expands towards the future or the external, that is enclosed and predictable in the realm of his being.

These briefly described recollections reiterate the narrator's desire for the insular world of the self. He observes himself reading, not yet but "on the point of" engaging with the people and world around him. This *sur le point* speaks to the pleasure and comfort taken in the space of the threshold. From this threshold position he can see everything at once without choosing, without neglecting other moments by fully engaging in one or the other. By seeing himself reading, he alludes to an early passage in *Swann's Way*, where he lauds reading as a better means to experience the world than first hand experience itself. His elevation of reading above first hand experience comes from its ability to condense that experience so that one can more fully perceive it. For the narrator, reading brackets the world in such a way that it can be experienced more clearly yet this is done at the expense of certain central and defining qualities. One example of this capacity is the case of sympathy. In life, a "real person" is "in a great measure perceptible only through our senses, that is to say, remains opaque, presents a dead weight which our sensibilities have not the strength to lift" (*I*, 116). In a novel, on the other hand, "those opaque sections impenetrable to the human soul" are substituted with "their equivalent in immaterial sections, things, that is, which one's soul can assimilate" (*I*, 117). In order to sympathize, we must first be able to process and understand the

whole self of the other person. The narrator here equates this understanding with an assimilation that must take place between what the other person presents us with and our own selves. Throughout the text, the sensory experience is invested with great power, it is the only thing that can be common to the past and the present and thus bridge the seemingly unbridgeable distances created by lost time. Yet in this theory of reading the strength of the sensory defeats itself. He presents that self-defeating quality by evoking the unbearably massive and tangible quality of the "dead weight" that cannot be lifted as causing the opacity of the other. The power of the sensory then overwhelms us to the point of desensitization rather than bringing complete understanding. The novelist's achievement is recognized in its capability to make the experience of another person into "our own, since it is in ourselves that they are happening" (*I*, 117). In reading the external becomes the internal, and so the qualities that make it obscure are minimized. Yet it is just these obscure qualities that define it. Reading is then not just a condensing and subsuming of the external world into the internal space of the self, but a kind of destruction of that world and the challenges that its inherent nature poses. It is this necessary destruction external object's reality in order to experience it that pervades the rest of the text both in the narrator's relationship to time and to Albertine.

In experiencing memories of himself reading "while remaining in my bedroom in Paris" the narrator adds another layer of reflexivity to this moment (*V*, 24). If reading reduces the opacity of the external world by stripping it of those qualities that make it external, then the fact that the narrator sees himself reading further distances him from that initial external experience. In this solitary moment of remembrance he recollects his own preference for that solitude. He recalls different places by name yet not in any full

detail, placing them at a further distance and relegating them to the realm of passive recollection rather than living, involuntary memory. The narrator alludes to this passive quality when he speaks of the "pleasure which everyone takes in turning over the keepsakes that his memory has collected" (*V*, 25). There is a strange logic to this image. The narrator appears to hold up the "keepsake" as a metaphor for his recollections. However, the keepsake is itself a memory technology and thus already a tangible stand-in for the internal function of memory. Thus that which in the physical world aids and relieves the mental process of memory—to the point of inhibiting it—is made to represent that memory itself. A keepsake is thus what Jacques Derrida would call a form of hypomnesis, a "monumental apparatus" that is not "memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience" and so "takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of said memory" (Derrida 11). In addition, it is the voluntary memory that "has collected" these keepsakes and not an act of the one who remembers. Voluntary memory is directly equated with its external expression in the keepsake. This keepsake is on par with Henri Bergson's assessment of the "learned recollection" which, unlike "spontaneous recollection"—the equivalent of involuntary memory—has no real relationship to time, the more recognized this type of recollection is the "more and more impersonal" it becomes, "more and more foreign to our past life" (Bergson 84). Like the learned recollection, the keepsake as an object can enable memory, yet it is ultimately about a present action or existence and not a relationship to past time. Thus the narrator's transference of agency from person to memory as an abstract subject fully enacts the distance created in transforming the recollections into "keepsakes." The whole phrase, upon first glance, suggests a closeness to one's past and memory as an internal

mechanism. Yet in its break down we see the hollow and unending reflexivity that draws the narrator further into an internal world with no external reference, minimizing the experience of the past into objects and further separating himself from the original recollection.

On the other side of this act of drawing away into his reflexive world, the narrator begins to suggest an opposing motion of desire for a tangible manifestation of his memories. He continues his meditation on the qualities of "turning over" these keepsakes, stating that this pleasure is strongest "in those whom the tyranny of physical illness and the daily hope of its cure prevent […] from going out to seek in nature scenes that resemble those memories" (*V*, 25). It seems strange that after fully detaching his memories from any external experience, he expresses his need to find them somewhere in the natural world, to have these moments in time be somehow more than recollections. Yet his creation of this need is constantly subverted by his description of it. The imagined invalids he poses here—with whom he is somewhat aligned even though he has previously admitted to the reader that, in spite of what he has told Albertine, he has not been ordered by a doctor to continue to stay in bed—desire to find "in nature" something that "resemble[s]" their memories. The natural is thus transformed into a mere representation of something that once was and is now only preserved in memory. The people the narrator describes are "so convinced" that they will be able to find their memories depicted in the natural world that "they can remain gazing at them in a state of desire and appetite and not regard them merely as memories or pictures." Yet there is a disjuncture between the form these memories take and the form that those who long for them seek to find. The desire to find these memories in nature is a desire to find "scenes

that resemble those memories," *des tableaux qui ressemblent à ces souvenirs*. As *tableaux* these memories are not just frozen in time as pictures, but transformed into art. The obsessive search for such representative art prefigures the episode later in the volume in which Bergotte dies upon gazing of the "little patch of yellow wall" in a Vermeer painting, so overwhelmed by the simplicity and presence of the color (*V*, 244-245). Yet according to the narrator those who search for these images as art want to see them as more than art. Thus one can also gaze at these scenes and see them not *seulement comme des souvenirs, comme des tableaux.* What they desire is in fact more than what the narrator claims they seek. Yet as objects of a gaze they are continually reduced to images with limited power to fulfill this desire.

In these futile actions to seek the past in the world, the narrator establishes a distance from the present. He claims to be able to transcend this distance and bring his past and present selves together. He notes that even if his memories

> could never have been more than this for me, even if, in recalling them, I could see them as pictures only, they none the less suddenly re-created out of my present self, the whole of that self, by virtue of an identical sensation, the child or the youth who had first seen them (*V*, 25)

The narrator here acknowledges and attempts to reject the voluntary memory's inherent doomed quality and inability to fulfill its promise, of the pictures and keepsakes he has been thus far taking pleasure in. He goes against Proust's own proclamation in the prologue to *Contre Sainte-Beuve* that the "objects which you have consciously tried to connect with certain hours of your life, these they can never take shelter" (*CSB* 19). Voluntary memory is so doomed in that any effort to use it to remember will forcibly reject pure memory. The narrator, on the contrary, implicitly claims that even in a situation that was obviously not a full experience of involuntary memory, he can still,

Comment [KE1]: Bergson or Nabokov, (speak memory) or csb

through the sensation of the smell of the fire, unify his past self and his present self. Yet time is not bridged through the sensation, this experience is entirely dependant on the present as the past is "re-created out of my present self." It is that present self, and not simply sensory perception, that makes the revival he asserts possible. The language he uses to describe what should be a unification of the past and present is that of the artificial. He describes the action that occurs as "an alteration in age, the substitution of another person" that occurs within himself. Yet this substitution is his own creation, it is a function of his internal world that he as made. While it neither takes a written form nor is enabled by writing, it is on par with an act of writing. The artificiality of this supposed transcendence of time points to the inability of these two times to exist at once. There is more a power struggle between the past self and the present self in which the past self ultimately dominates. In order to experience the past, one must sacrifice one's present being and allow the self of the past to temporarily replace it.

This inherent incompatibility of the past and the present continues to pervade the narrator's sensual experience of the smell of the fire that initially triggered this experience. After he describes the feeling of "substitution" of his past self for his present self, he comes back to the smell itself, saying that it "was like a fragment of the past, an invisible ice-floe, detached from some bygone winter advancing into my room" (*V*, 25). The sensations of the past appear to invade the present space. Yet the scent has become separated from its context, it is "detached" from an era that is now "bygone." It is a reminder of the past with no real link to it, further enhancing the distance between that time and the present moment, pushing that time into a space that cannot even be seen or experienced. The past is transformed into small objects and pieces that can be called

up and rearranged into a new experience. While he is no longer using the language of keepsakes, memory objects, and voluntary memory he continues to places his memories into this framework. Fragments of past time taken out of their context are like souvenirs, intended to serve the metonymic function of wholly evoking that very context they have been robbed of. Susan Stewarts speaks of the need for souvenirs of "events that […] exist only through the invention of narrative" (Stewart 135). Even fragmenting the past internally, as the narrator does here, frees him to invent his own narratives of it, regardless of whether or not they speak to the original experience itself. This capacity to rearrange an experience at will is another facet of the solitary bliss of the moment. As a mere "fragment" this sensation of the past is elusive by being both tangible and limited, like the narrator's darting and brief remembrances that begin the passage. This description is the key to seeing that this episode does not fulfill the potential for involuntary memory. In the case of the madeleine, the sensory experience is strong yet must also be aided by the narrator's intellect. Here, the link of a common sensation between the past and the present is a concrete yet floating remnant of past time that cannot be manipulated to completely represent what the narrator hopes to remember. There is a struggle, then, between what the narrator hopes to experience in this moment and the means in which he attempts to achieve that experience.

The strength of this vain longing is the central energy of this episode. He speaks of the "different years in which I found myself once more submerged, overwhelmed" and yet acknowledges his inability to specify these years by saying that he feels this submersion "even before I had identified them" (*V*, 25). It is the act of desire itself that causes an "exhilaration of hopes long since abandoned." There is a noticeable physical

impact in the unintentional elimination of the object of desire that shifts all of the narrator's energy onto the act of longing for itself. Even if this happens unintentionally, it is still an act that further encloses him into the comforting solitary space. He observes how the "sun's rays fell upon my bed and passed through the transparent shell of my attenuated body [*corps aminci*]," a striking image that makes tangible the narrator's fruitless physical sacrifice of his present self in order to may way for such a limited and false revival of the past. The separation of selves—and more importantly, the loss of those separate selves—diminishes his body, as if the ceding of the present to the past actually removed the weight of that person. There is a distinct toll that is taken in the effort to connect with a past moment. The taxing nature of this effort is aligned with and sets up the final postulation about the "too arduous task" of devoting oneself to another person. The thinning body of the narrator is the physical proof of the difference in these two strenuous efforts and demonstrates which one he prefers. He has allowed the struggle to revive the past to have this drastic impact on his body through its slow metabolization, yet the prospect of living with another person, one who cannot possibly be consumed and metabolized in the same way, is written off as impossible. Even the mere mention of Albertine strikes the reader as "arduous" as it invades a long string of descriptions that focus exclusively on the narrator, the sun that "fell upon my bed" and "my attenuated body," that "warmed me, made me glow like crystal." We are so lulled and comforted by the rhythmic train of *mon* and *me* in these phrases that when he "wonder[s] whether marriage with Albertine might not spoil my life" (*me demandais si me marier avec Albertine ne gâcherait pas ma vie*) her mere presence in the sentence very visibly disrupts and spoils his reflexive paradise. This sudden reflection shifts the

tension from that between the past and the present to one between the present and the future, but moreover, between the self and the other. The resignation of self and solitude that the narrator anticipates in a marriage to Albertine also reflects the resignation of present self that we have seen to be necessary in the activities of this valued solitude. Thus this reflection seems derived both from his enjoyment of the preceding activity and his insistence on maintaining it, as well as the parallel struggles involved in both recollection and devoting oneself to another. The narrator sees that selves within a single individual cannot coexist anymore than two separate individuals can ever hope to know each other.

II. Albertine's Flight and Death: Intimacy and Mourning

Even the enthusiasm with which the narrator embraces both his own solitude and the prospect of blissfully continuing in that state is not safe from the events of the external world. Albertine's departure at the beginning of *The Fugitive* shatters both his desire to isolate himself and his faith in the promise and pleasure of that isolation. At the announcement that Albertine has left, the realization that he does not, in fact, want to be separated from her is almost secondary to the revelation of his incapacity to have realized this before her departure. He does not consider Albertine's flight as changing his former opinions and emotions towards her, but rather relegates those feelings to the realm of faulty, naïve beliefs that have suddenly been refuted. When he speaks of his now outdated feelings that he "no longer loved Albertine," "was leaving nothing out of account," and "knew the state of my own heart" he prefaces each with the completed and definitively past pluperfect, "I had believed," *j'avais cru* (*V*, 564). He places his former

desire for solitude so far behind his present emotional state that he detaches from it completely. In spite of this insistence on detachment through the use of the pluperfect, the proximity of the moment when he held these beliefs persists in his language and subverts his claim that these beliefs are far in the past. It was merely "a moment ago," *tout à l'heure*, that he had believed all these things about himself which he now desperately tries to extract.

This disjuncture of knowledge over time echoes the narrator's childhood attempts in *Swann's Way* to reassure himself that his mother will come to give him his bedtime kiss. Upon sending a note to her via Françoise—who now at Albertine's departure revives her role conveying messages of absence and separation to the narrator—he allows his anxiety to be assuaged by the knowledge that "it was now no longer (as it had been a moment ago) until tomorrow that I had lost my mother" (*I*, 39). What the narrator is in fact celebrating here is the vast contrast he feels between two periods in time that are distinguishable only in his naming of them, that is, "now" (*maintenant*) and "a moment ago" (*tout à l'heure*). The use of the pluperfect in describing the loss of the mother (*j'avais quitté ma mère*) implies both the classification of this event as a permanent action so complete in its passage as well as the negation of its validity in light of present information. Albertine's flight is similarly a transformation in circumstances that nullifies past emotions, or rather, detaches those emotions from present context and places them in the past. The pluperfect then acts as part of this force while pointing to its own deliberateness. In both passages there is an overwhelming sense of the need to convince himself of the present and make it distinct from the past. Underlying this creation of a distinction is a need to create the past itself, to make what is out of line with

present needs truly outdated. There is a comfort in the past's status as behind one that the narrator here actively tries to engage in and control to suit his needs.

Out of this desire to assert control over time, to make emotions somehow more relevant and up to date, is the disturbing supposition that one is unknown to oneself. As previously shown, the narrator, until the announcement of Albertine's flight was engaging in a world of pure self, one that basked in the joys of continuous discovery of the inner world. What the narrator now claims to be mistaken in is his capacity to be "a rigorous analyst" of himself and "thinking that I could see clearly into my own heart" (*V*, 564). Such statements and the force behind them assert that there are parts of the self that are unknown to one. More importantly, they beg the question of what these unknown parts are. Complementing this question is the one that asks what then exactly can one know of oneself, if anything. There is a discomfort in the fact that he does not address these questions, potentially suggesting faults in his own logic. The tension he supposes from his previous inability to realize his alleged attachment to Albertine is one between part and whole. He asserts that "our intelligence, however lucid, cannot perceive the elements that compose it." He implicitly poses a self that can be understood by the mind in contrast with a deeper, more essential self whose surface cannot even be scratched. The mystery, then, is in the individual components of the self that must be isolated by "a phenomenon" that can "[subject] them to the first stages of solidification" in order to be seen. His language here is scientific, yet also completely nonspecific; he speaks abstractly of "elements" and "phenomenon" yet gives us no hint as to what these things are, save for his own concrete example which already stands on shaky logic. He demonstrates these reactions by stating that the knowledge of Albertine leaving him

"which the shrewdest perceptions of the mind would not have given me, had now been brought to me, hard, glittering, strange, like a crystallized salt, by the abrupt reaction of pain." In this statement he divides completely his capacity to think and reason from his capacity to feel, both physically and emotionally. By privileging the emotional and sensory over the intellect he breaks apart the delicate fusion of the two that at the beginning of the text helped reveal the madeleine's secret. Once his efforts to revive the initial sensation that the cake first evoked failed he then "examine[s] [his] own mind" claiming that "[i]t alone can discover the truth" (*I*, 61). This exclusive examination of the mind reveals no more than pursuing the sensory alone; he describes the "abyss of uncertainty" felt "whenever the mind feels overtaken by itself" not unlike the opacity of his own mind that he now firmly believes at the revelation of his desire for Albertine. Yet in the instance of the madeleine he recognizes that investigating one's own mind goes beyond pursuit, it is rather an act of creation " face to face with something which does not yet exist, which it alone can make actual, which it alone can bring into the light of day." This sentiment is ignored in light of Albertine's flight, though it illuminates what the narrator himself fails to perceive, that is, that the solitary space of creation he so craved to enjoy apart from Albertine is now enabling his desire to bring her back.

For the narrator, the process of experiencing the shock of this separation—a violent, external experience—takes place within that carefully constructed internal system celebrated at the beginning of the *The Captive*. His attempts to understand Albertine's flight start, surprisingly, with a physical gesture, when he decides that he "could not remain sitting there, and stood up again" (*V*, 579). The pulse of this action is taken to correspond to the internal motion, where "at every moment, there was one more

of those innumerable and humble 'selves' that compose our personality which was still unaware of Albertine's departure and must be informed of it." While the fragmentation of the self into these separate "selves" is an image that recurs throughout the text, it here directly corresponds with the fragmentation in the external world that he has just experienced, the breaking apart of that world through the removal of the object of desire. However, a fragmented experience is not a minimized experience. Rather the fragment takes on a metonymic function, enhancing the power of the minimal details of emotion and experience. The experience and recognition of this loss both requires the acknowledgement of these fragmented, individual selves within the narrator and enables their reunification into one whole. He tacks back and forth between acknowledging them as a group, in the act of announcing "to all these beings […] who did not yet know of it, the calamity that had just occurred," and seeing them as distinct in insisting that "each of them in turn must hear for the first time the words 'Albertine has asked for her boxes.'" This constant fragmenting and regrouping, both of which are caused by the announcement that Albertine has left, creates a cycling breath within the text at this moment. While it is a painful process, it is regarded, like breathing, as natural and automatic. The narrator describes grief not as a "pessimistic conclusion" but rather "the intermittent and involuntary reviviscence of a specific impression that has come to us from without and was not chosen by us." In this meditation on grief, in addition to referring to Albertine's boxes as "coffin-shaped," he prefigures her death and his reaction to it. The mourning of a loss does not mark the conclusion of that which has been lost but rather has a life and breath unto itself characterized by the interior self's heightened activity.

It is only when that loss is truly unbridgeable that the narrator is able to transform Albertine in order to fit this fragmented structure of himself. Once her death infinitely heightens her distance and inaccessibility, the more vivid and intense the narrator's perception of her becomes. At one point, he encounters her spectral presence in the form of a posthumously delivered letter and notes that the only way her death would be able to "eliminate my suffering, the shock of the fall would have had to kill her not only in Touraine but in myself" (*V*, 645). The knowledge of her death creates a split between the internal and the external, in which the tragedy of her death is secondary to her continued existence in his interior world. He does not skirt around his preference for her as part of that inner, solitary space where she had "never been more alive," suggesting that she becomes more real in his memory as she ceases to exist in the physical world. Her subsumption into his self and the vividness there evoked is enabled by a posited fragmentation of her that corresponds to his infinite selves. He describes how in "order to enter into us, another person must first have assumed the form, have adapted himself to the framework for time; appearing to us only in a succession of momentary flashes" and so "[i]n order to be consoled I would have to forget, not one, but innumerable Albertines." This process is strikingly similar to the previously discussed process of feeling sympathy for fictional characters. Implied is an incompatibility between the other as it is experienced first-hand in the world and one's internal world. There is no space in the self for a complete other. The narrator equates the ability of another person to be only "a collection of moments" with her being only "a product of memory." Thus understanding another is on par with remembering them. It is only through this

remembering that the narrator can feel she has entered into him, occupying the same space without being present.

The majority of the text of *The Fugitive* attempts to sustain the narrator's overwhelming grief over Albertine's flight and his subsequent mourning over her death. In *The Dialectics of Isolation*, Richard Terdiman insists that the volume is the pinnacle of the break between the internal world and the external one, where "[r]eality finally becomes totally mental, as Proust has been insisting all along" (Terdiman 202). While the internal certainly becomes heightened and all consuming, the emphasis on this process gives it a forced quality and ignores its inherent artificiality. In the narrator's earlier celebration of the solitary and internal, there was an implicit recognition of that world as the space of creation. After that solitude is granted to him, and after Albertine's death makes it irreversible, the fact of his longing for her is taken as a previously unrecognized truth and her existence within his memory is, by extension, held to a similar status of credibility as the only remaining trace of her. What is ignored is how these representations of and thoughts about Albertine are obviously molded to his internal landscape and made manifest through language. She is not, as he claims, made up of a series of "single photograph[s]" of herself that she was able to show him throughout her life. Rather she is formed by his freedom to write her however he sees fit once she is separated from him, just as he is free to write his own world in the glow of the magic circle of the fireplace. Yet part of writing this intimacy is his unfaltering belief that it exists in the world, that it is nature merely represented inside himself and not art.

III. Albertine Sleeping: Intimacy, Subjectivity and Physical Presence.

This internalized presence of Albertine through the process of mourning certainly evokes the ghostly, yet this spectral feature exists prior to the events of *The Fugitive*. It is created in the narrator's epistemological pursuit of Albertine, an act not unlike the search for origins that Derrida describes in *Archive Fever*. Derrida sees the archive as being "spectral *a priori*" (Derrida 84, emphasis his). This assessment is drawn from an inversion of what he sees to be the archive's predominant capacity to be both public and private. The meaning of the word "archive," he reminds us at the beginning of the text, "comes to it from the Greek *arkheion*: initially a house, a domicile, an address, the residence of the superior magistrates" (Derrida 2). Thus the archive's own origins suggest an inherent and uncomfortable intertwining of the private domestic space and the public space of law. In combing these two opposite qualities, the public and the private, the archive eliminates their power to a certain extent. The archive can then appear as a ghost to us because, like a ghost, it is "neither present nor absent, 'in the flesh,' neither visible nor invisible" (Derrida 84). These ephemeral states of visibility, presence and tangibility are noticeable directly because we have invested in the archive an expectation of these qualities. We look to the archive for physical proof of something's existence, for an indisputable truth, yet even these tangible objects in their full presence elude us. "A trace" is "always referring to another whose eyes can never be met, no more than those of Hamlet's father" (Derrida 84).

What is striking here is Derrida's choice to speak of the "eyes" of the trace that can "never be met" as proof of the archive's ghostliness. If the trace is taken as a metonymy for the archive and the physicality it suggests, then what is asserted here is an inability to ever look the archive itself in the eyes and to see the origins that it promises.

The interconnectedness of the physical proofs that the archive offers us create a structure of elusiveness, whereby we believe that we have found what we are looking for but are in fact not looking at it at all. Just as the language of elusive gaze infects the discourse on the archive, so the language of origins and foundations occurs in discussion of the gaze. In an explanation of the phenomenon of love at first sight in literature, Mladen Dolar describes that moment of first looking upon a love object which is "reduced to and epitomized by the gaze, that elusive object, which in the foundational scene of the encounter appear as anything but elusive," it is "the firm rock of positivity on which to build one's existence, the authoritative and commanding presence by which to rule one's life" (Dolar 135). The gaze on the love object suggests the same space where law and origins intersect that Derrida sees in the archive. Yet just as the archive's promise of a tangible proof and knowledge of one's origins is deceptive and thus misleads and disappoints our gaze, so the gaze of the lover gives only false discoveries and ephemeral moments of intimacy. It is this frustration and falsity of gaze that marks the interaction between Proust's narrator's subjectivity in the physical presence of Albertine.

The false promise of knowledge and possession through gaze is directly pointed to from the beginning of *The Captive* when we see our narrator's fascination with Albertine's closed eyes. In the first few pages of the volume he attempts to demonstrate for the reader how Albertine had recently "developed to an astonishing degree" (V, 12). He tells us of her physical changes, most notably how her eyes

> had altered in appearance; they were indeed of the same colour, but seemed to have passed into a liquid state. So much so that, when she closed them, it was as though a pair of curtains had been drawn to shut out a view of the sea. It was no doubt this aspect of her person that I remembered most vividly each night on leaving her (V, 14).

What the narrator describes at first here is a transformation, a physical, observable change in Albertine's face. Yet the ability to quantify what he first suggests through the word "altered" as a tangible metamorphosis slips away in his immediate description of this change. In saying that they were "indeed of the same color," he subverts his original supposition through the visual evidence that her face gives. The change that he sees as a passing into a "liquid state" suggests an appearance that is in constant flux and motion and can never be contained. The inability to fully measure, describe, and therefore have some sense of possession over this motion is magnified when mere liquid expands into "the sea." Yet this expansion is ultimately the loss of descriptive control over the image. Our narrator has been deceived by the promise of her eyes and lead to a more elusive image. Furthermore this image is not truly seen as it comes when Albertine closes her eyes and "shut[s] out" this view. It is the image of a gaze thwarted that the narrator seems to hold particularly close as he remembers it "most vividly each night on leaving her." By keeping the image of being blocked from the new, more transient form of Albertine in his memory, there is a forced reconciliation of the struggle for empirical knowledge of her. The narrator attempts to show us that he can possess and know without actually looking at what is there, at what eludes him in the first place. He would rather have control over and look at that which tells him it cannot return his gaze than have his gaze evaded.

By taking control over and possessing internally the image of an Albertine whose self is hidden behind her eyelids, the narrator is able to manipulate and ultimately invert that image into one that seems to reveal. A prolonged episode in which the narrator describes Albertine as she sleeps is thus an expansion on the evocations of her closed

eyes with the added barrier of her complete loss of consciousness. The expansion and addition of the initial blockage created by a denial of gaze allows for the narrator to attempt a full inversion of this barrier. He speaks directly to both her lack of gaze and her lack of conscious presence when he describes her "shutting her eyes" and "losing consciousness" which, in the narrator's view, enables her to strip off "the different human personalities with which she had deceived me ever since the day I had first made her acquaintance" (V, 84). In these phrases the narrator establishes the central supposition in this episode that Albertine can be fully possessed in her sleep because she sheds her deceit and elusiveness. Asleep, "[h]er personality was not constantly escaping, as when we talked, by the outlets of her unacknowledged thoughts and of her eyes." What is lost during sleep that enables the narrator to see Albertine in this light is a liminal space that comes with her returned, conscious gaze. It is this gaze which reveals that there is something that is not revealed. This is the same space as Derrida's archive, in which we look at something present and tangible that does not, no matter how we look at it, show us what we want. While the narrator does not explicitly find a ghost here, the prolonged image of sleep functions as a premonition of Albertine's death. There also remains the discomfort of the liminal object that begs possession and containment.

Through the supposed elimination in sleep of this uncomfortable liminality that stands to block his knowledge of her, the narrator is able to heighten Albertine's status as an object. In shedding deception and elusiveness, as we have already seen, Albertine sheds her humanity in those "human personalities" that create falsity and are lost in sleep. What these human qualities are then replaced by is the "unconscious life of plants, of trees, a life more different from my own, more alien, and yet one that belonged more to

me" (V, 84). She is reduced, in these phrases, not even to the animal but to the vegetable which enhances her status as other. While this otherness and separation from the narrator is heightened, it further enables the narrator to feel a stronger possession over her. Grammatically, this state strips her of her agency. The passage begins with her having actively "stripped off" her "different human personalities" and ends with her being passively "animated" by "the life of plants." The narrator is somewhat justified in seeing her as "[belonging] more to me" as it is his description that gives her her otherness, robs her of her agency and ultimately transforms her.

Emmanuel Lévinas describes these qualities as inherent to the larger relationship of self to other in the text. This relationship "contains a hidden ambiguity, for it is a question not of expressing but of creating the object" (Lévinas 100). Here we see encapsulated the relationship between writing and desire, the space in which one both "[creates] the object" while at the same time attempting to create, or rather posses, something within the self that is inherently and eternally other. The empirical quest in both the writing of the text and in the desires described is contained in this tense space. Gilles Deleuze notes that in the larger empirical search in the text the process of learning is "first of all to consider a substance, an object, a being as if they emitted signs to be deciphered, interpreted" (Deleuze 4). We see the tension of this space in his use of the word "object." The word insists on a thing separate from the self that is pursued and yet it is created through the act of increased understanding and knowledge about it. The narrator's observation, and more importantly his description, of Albertine asleep points to the enhancing of separation in the act of attempted consumption.

Even though he has control over describing her, and thus over the reader's understanding of what she is, this scene makes it painfully clear that the narrator cannot simply reduce the Albertine he feels he can possess to an object. In spite of her sleeping state, Albertine has complete control over her unbridgeable distance from the narrator. In one sentence he returns her agency by saying that she "had called back into herself everything of her that lay outside, had withdrawn, enclosed, reabsorbed herself into her body" (V, 84). Not only is Albertine active in this sentence, but she acts reflexively, "*elle s'était réfugiée, enclose, résumée*." The almost redundant emphasis on the fact that she takes all these actions "into herself" and brings "herself into her body" creates a stronger enclosure. Every part of the sentence is necessarily imbued with Albertine's being, there is no other subject and no other object. This all-encompassing presence of Albertine is, through these actions, opaque to both the narrator and the reader. These actions make her "enclosed" and "withdrawn" into—literally "having taken refuge" within the house of her self. She is everywhere grammatically yet her being cannot be found.

The narrator's reaction to this omnipresence in absence is the "impression of possessing her entirely which I never had when she was awake" which he attributes to the act of "keeping her in front of my eyes, in my hands" (V, 85). He describes his act of possession as an "impression" and so acknowledges it as an abstraction rather than a physical action. He points to the fact that the capacity to posses her that he feels in this scene is an illusion. This projection is at odds with the physical acts that enable it, "keeping her in front of my eyes, in my hands" (V, 84). This description minimizes the power of sensory experience. This is a radical suggestion for a text whose central moments of revelation hinge on the perception of the senses and the capacity of a

sensation to transcend time, to be "common to […] two moments, the present and the past" (Deleuze 58). Yet it is Deleuze's own explanation of the process of involuntary memory as evoked through the senses that reveals to us the commonalities between that experience of the past and the narrator's experience of Albertine in this moment. The madeleine, at the beginning of the novel, so thoroughly evokes Combray to the narrator through taste because its flavor has "in its volume, imprisoned and enveloped Combray" (Deleuze 58). Before the experience of involuntary memory, Combray is locked behind that sensory experience. Deleuze uses the same language to describe the lover's attempt to access those hidden worlds "which remain enveloped within the beloved" (Deleuze 7). The narrator's "impression" of being able to access the inaccessible part of Albertine through his senses is in keeping with this logic. Yet the admission that it is mere impression puts Albertine beyond the reach of empirical knowledge. One may be able to transcend, through taste and touch, past time that is locked within an object, but the beloved one seeks cannot be accessed in the same way. Albertine is physically present to the senses, yet to the mind she is frustratingly and forever absent.

As Albertine's sleep becomes deeper "she ceased to be merely the plant that she had been; her sleep, on the margin of which I remained musing, with a fresh delight of which I never tired, which I could have gone on enjoying indefinitely, was to me a whole landscape." Even in sleep, Albertine takes on the capacity to transcend her form, into something larger and potentially more mystifying. While the image of landscape could transform Albertine into something more elusive, it is the narrator's second attempt to understand her through the language of plants. In the first instance of comparison he describes her presence as plant life as "a life more different from my own, more alien,

and yet one that belonged more to me" (V, 84). This single phrase highlights the plant's role in supporting the central dialectic of this scene, in which the intense foreignness and separation of Albertine in sleep further enables the narrator's illusion of knowing and possessing her. It is a tenet supported by Schopenhauer's understanding of the plant and the ways in which he distinguishes it from other forms of life. In order "to know an animal according to its Idea, we must observe its action and behaviour and to know man, we must fully investigate and test him, for his faculty of reason makes him capable of a high degree of dissimulation" (Schopenhauer 156). What he posits here is the thorough empirical investigation of humans and animals in order to understand their beings. It is particularly notable that he here distinguishes humans' place above animals through their opacity and capacity to conceal their being and only bring their "true nature […] to light almost by chance and in isolated cases." Man is thus characterized by his ability to remain unknown to other men. The "alien" quality, then, that the narrator sees in Albertine when she is in her plant form is a complicated characterization. By Schopenhauer's assessment of how and when we can know other human beings, she is equally, if not more, separate when seen as human as she is when she takes the form of another species.

The plant's being is in fact more comprehensible precisely because it is so alien, so different than other forms of life. The plant, in Schopenhauer's view, by total contrast to both animals and men, "lays open its whole character through its mere form and reveals its whole being […] at the first glance and with complete innocence" (Schopenhauer 156). What is central in these descriptions of the plant is the relationship between sight and understanding. According to his distinctions between different forms

of life, the plant is the only one whose whole self is understood purely through gaze. There is a vast difference between the need to "observe" the animal's actions to understand it and the mere "glance" that sizes up every facet of the plant. In this glance there is no engagement, no development of understanding or increased knowledge over time. The revelation of the plant's self is instantaneous. Thus the assumed totality of knowledge and possession of Albertine that the narrator feels in her plant state is dependent on the instant gratification of the gaze. The force of this "interaction" with Albertine as she sleeps, his total consumption of her through the gaze by transforming her into a plant stands against Lévinas' insistence that while "the relation with the face [of the Other] can surely be dominated by perception, […] what is specifically the face is what cannot be reduced to that" (Lévinas 86). The narrator here, through this invocation of Schopenhauer's image of the plant, in fact does "reduce" his relationship to Albertine to perception. From this perspective, perception may be the dominating force of the interaction, but it is not a reductive one. The plant's power is in its ability to show all "at the first glance." This passage then lays emphasis on that capability both of the instant gaze and the perceptible vast regions of Albertine.

The power of the instant gaze breaks down the original supposition of Albertine as an enclosed being as she sleeps. She is now able to be broken open, or rather, instantly shows herself under a brief glance. Yet the passage consists of not merely the "first glance" of Schopenhauer's plant, but an extended gaze. This extended gaze then has the capability to paradoxically go beyond the whole self that should have been revealed under that first look. The narrator, as one who "was acquainted with many Albertines in one person, seemed now to see many more again reposing by my side" (*V*, 87). There is

a tension in this phrase between the contained and that which seems to multiply endlessly. She is physically present "by my side," enclosed in a single physical being, yet he can see at once in this single being those "many more" Albertines. He notices how "[h]er eyebrows, arched as I had never noticed them, encircled the globes of her eyelids like a halcyon's downy nest […,] [r]aces, atavisms, vices reposed on her face." In claiming to see all of Albertine while she sleeps, the language of the unknown creeps in. He has to describe everything that he purports her sleep can show him, yet this means admitting the facets of her that he has never seen before. He describes how "[w]henever she moved her head, she created a different woman, often one whose existence I had never suspected" and that he "seemed to possess not one but countless girls." If the narrator's main concern in *The Captive* is the possibility of Albertine's infidelity and duplicity, then the revelation of a woman he has never seen before should be utterly disturbing. Yet it somehow leads him back to the notion of possessing her. It does not cause him unrest that there are infinite Albertines which he can never truly know but rather increases the bounty of his possession.

In his incapacity to realize that it is impossible to "possess" the "countless" we are struck by the image of the narrator, obsessively grasping at the elusive which cannot be contained. These countless girls prefigure the fragmented nature of Albertine that must be painfully reconciled after her death. Just as he tries to sustain his grief through internalizing this endless series of Albertines, he here attempts to create, or rather, insists on, a world where Albertine's evasive characteristics can be conquered. While he resists Lévinas' assessment of the face, he falls into his description of desire as something "that cannot be satisfied," that "in some way nourishes itself on its own hungers and is

augmented by its satisfaction" (Lévinas 92). Yet he also goes beyond the image of the desiring self who's desire is only increased when it achieves its intended object. He structures his perception of Albertine to mean more than it does, more than what the reader can actually see. He guides us through the world of her sleep yet this world remains a fantasyland. His desire rather exists around her and, as he says himself, remains "on the margin" of her sleep, "musing" (*V*, 85). But being on the margin, for the narrator, does not imply a liminal space but rather a space where that which is blocked can still reveal all. He cannot get inside Albertine but instead describes a kind of perception that eliminates the need to do so. He desires without recognizing his own desire, by taking its creative force as real.

Chapter II

Inventing the Real in *Sebastian Knight*

In the three narratives of pursuit and memory treated in this project repetition and doubling form a common and prominent thread, from Proust's endless series of Albertines as a means of possessing and preserving her forever, to Sebald's presentation of Austerlitz's haunting doppelgangers in the form of photographs and the hallucinatory vision of himself as a child that evokes his past. Repetition is inherently tied to voluntary memory as a feature of memorization and thus serves as a technique intended to preserve the past in a motion towards the future. Yet on the side of pursuit, the double can give the false impression of having achieved one's goal and bonding with the other while it in fact destroys either the pursuer, the pursued, or both. Only in the final scene of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is this doppelganger effect between the pursuer, our narrator V., and the pursued, his eponymous dead brother, fully realized. While this doubling is hinted at throughout the text, Sebastian is not V.'s only doppelganger. In his role as author of the text, investigator of the life of a dead man, and biographer of his brother, V. has several false doubles in other characters who seek to understand who Sebastian was, collect information on him, and spin a narrative out of his life. The shining counterexample of V.'s quest is Mr. Goodman, Sebastian's buffoonish former secretary who writes *The Tragedy of Sebastian Knight*. Mr. Goodman proclaims in his text an interdependent relationship between Sebastian's life and his authorial self. While V. is not so audacious in these claims, it remains an underlying tenet of his search for Sebastian. Even the title of Mr. Goodman's book suggests both its echoes and distortions

of V.'s work. It claims, like our text's title, to fully encapsulate its enigmatic subject. Yet its claim of a "tragedy" is both laughable in its hyperbole and proposes a forced explanation of Sebastian and a misguided attempt to reduce him to classical structures of narrative.

In berating Mr. Goodman's efforts, V. harps on his numerous inaccuracies. The most glaring of these is of course his complete unawareness of their father's second marriage and thus of V. himself "so that to readers of Goodman's book I am bound to appear non-existent—a bogus relative, a garrulous imposter" (*RLSK* 4). V.'s exaggerated notion that the results of such an error can nullify his existence reflect the inverse of what he actually detests about Goodman's work, that is, its overgrown sense of the relationship between an author's milieu and his work. V. describes the "sole object" of Goodman's work as being "to show 'poor Knight' as a product and victim of what he calls 'our time'" (*RLSK* 60). He then continues to mock Goodman's emphasis on "those special aspects of postwar life which met a young man at 'the troubled dawn of his career'" which the latter attempts to show as fundamental to shaping Sebastian as a person and a writer. Our narrator is attempting to show us the trap of meaning, of having a life and a text mean something beyond themselves when looked at in conjunction with one another. It is this trap which Proust warns against in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* when he declares that looking at the life of a writer in order to understand his work "ignores what a very slight degree of self-acquaintance teaches us: that a book is the product of a different *self* from the self we manifest in our habits, in our social life, in our vices" (*CSB* 76). This self that creates, according to Proust, is only understood

> by searching our own bosoms, and trying to reconstruct it there […] [I]t is taking things too easily to suppose that one fine morning the truth will arrive by post in

> the form of an unpublished letter submitted to us by a friend's librarian, or that we shall gather it from the lips of someone who saw a great deal of the author.

In looking to Proust to understand V.'s case against Mr. Goodman, we see instead V.'s own errors. Proust describes almost exactly V.'s hopes and efforts when researching his brother's "real life." The bulk of the text is consumed with V.'s desire and attempts to find someone, be it schoolmate, secretary, or lover, who knew Sebastian even more intimately than the last, who can reveal to him something of his brother that no one else can.

V. then falls closer to his literary enemy than he would like his reader to think. What distinguishes him from Goodman, and from Proust's complaints, is that he does not seek information in order to form a better understanding of Sebastian's books. Sebastian's own words are woven throughout the text yet they are only rarely examples of his life's impact on their creation. Rather the reader is left with the sense that his novels are the only extant proof of the life V. is so desperate to piece together. The passages are both an unfulfilling effort to bridge certain gaps in V.'s research and the only semblance of our title character's presence in the text. Sebastian's art is thus transformed into his ghost, an undefined yet powerful suggestion of some part of himself. However, this use of text is not the only ground on which V. distinguishes himself from and critiques Goodman. According to our narrator, Goodman's emphasis on the historical period in which Sebastian wrote makes him guilty of trying to "make others share in [his] chronometric concepts" (*RLSK* 60). Goodman's mistake, then, centers on his use of time. According to V.

> [t]ime for Sebastian was never 1914 or 1920 or 1936—it was always year 1 […] [t]ime and space were to him measures of the same eternity, so that the very idea

> of his reacting in any special 'modern' way to what Mr. Goodman calls 'the atmosphere of postwar Europe' is utterly preposterous (*RLSK* 63-64).

For V., then, the error of assigning Sebastian to a literary era has less to do with Proust's assertion of a creative self that exists outside of a historical milieu and more to do with a faulty perception of time. If Sebastian perceived the world according his emotional reactions that transcend time, then trying to put his life and work into a linear, historical structure is a fallacy. Yet even in arguing against this summation of Sebastian, and trying to enact a different model of his work, V. falls into similar traps. He presents his findings in the text not in the order in which they occurred in Sebastian's life, but in the order in which he finds them and feels that they go together. In rejecting Mr. Goodman's model of the historical, he in essence claims a better understanding and a better representation of Sebastian. The motivation behind this structure is the belief that Sebastian can be represented in the first place. While V. does not proclaim as overtly and presumptuously as his counterpart that there is some meaning in his subject's life, or a meaning to be found by putting life and work in dialogue with one another, his text still hinges around his investment in the capacity to find Sebastian, to recapture his life and represent it permanently in a written form. We find out only at the end of the novel that V.'s quest was inspired by a failed attempt to see Sebastian on his death bed, to "catch the words he would say" in a belief that "some extraordinary revelation would come from his lips" (*RLSK* 192). He finds out after his visit that the breathing he listened to so intently was the wrong patient, that Sebastian was in fact already dead, that he did not capture his last breath. Just as the breathless, elongated sentences of *In Search of Lost Time* speak to Proust's desperate attempt to push every last possible word out on his deathbed, so V.'s

text represents the hope of finding—but rather, of creating—his brother's last, elusive, illusory breath.

Mr. Goodman's erroneous claim of a meaning in Sebastian's work in the context of his life and time-period and V.'s equally fruitless quest to capture some secret truth or representation of who Sebastian was speaks to Nabokov's larger joke in the novel. By using the structure and tropes of detective novel and his characteristic suggestions of patterns and mysteries to be solved, he presents us with the notion that we can find some sort of definite interpretation of the text. Yet just as V.'s search for Sebastian's "real life" yields only a beautiful collection of moments and his final realization of the synthesis and interchangeability of their two selves, the quest for interpretation reveals patterns made for patterns' sake, mysteries that lead only to punch lines, and myriad of intertextual references. Just as Sebastian cannot be situated within his historical period, the text itself cannot be connected to some reference in our own world. Its jokes are internal and its paths lead deeper into its own space and the world of literature and writing. This self-reflexive world of the text, and its connection to other texts, that Nabokov so artfully and slyly spins is often characterized as an "otherworld." Vladimir Alexandrov argues, basing his position heavily on remarks by Véra Nabokov, that this "otherworld"—translated from the Russian *potustoronnost*—is the "central theme" of Nabokov's works (Alexandrov 3). While Alexandrov acknowledges the fact that Nabokov "celebrated unique details and condemned generalizations that obscured or ignored them" he still claims that emphasizing a belief in a transcendent realm will "outline the laws that show how [his books] are put together" (Alexandrov 8). This is not to say that I reject outright the presence of this theme in Nabokov's works, whose existence forms the terrifying,

anonymous country of *Invitation to a Beheading* and Earth's uncanny doppelganger, Antiterra, in *Ada*. Rather I am resistant to critics who claim that a belief in this world drives Nabokov's understanding of the function of text. In the case of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight,* Julia Bader pushes this understanding to the extreme in her interpretation of the final scene. Before explicitly revealing that he and Sebastian are one, V. claims that "the soul is but a manner of being—not a constant state—that any soul may be yours, if you find and follow its undulations […] [t]he hereafter may be the full ability of consciously living in any chosen soul, in any number of souls" (*RLSK* 202). Bader suggests that "[i]f we read 'art' for 'the hereafter' […] we have gained an essential insight into the technique of the novel" (Bader 14). As *potustoronnost* can also be translated as "hereafter," Bader poses the tempting interpretation of the text itself as the world beyond death, a world that overcomes death. In this reading, the text does not represent our world or even a fictionalized or imaginary world, but one beyond our known life and death. As V.'s own goal throughout the book is to search for the essential thing that he missed in not hearing Sebastian's dying breath, Bader essentially suggests that he has succeeded, that literature and writing, as the otherworld itself, can transcend death.

This notion of the text's ability to overcome death is complicated by the idea of "real life" suggested in the title. The idea of a book that represents, encapsulates, and essentially is Sebastian's real life certainly implies that literature exists beyond death and can resist its destructive power. Yet throughout the text the relationship between writing and the real is often non-existent or ironic. The title itself becomes an ironic suggestion of the text's own reality and qualities of the real, both in the larger sense of how real life

is represented in writing and how Sebastian's real life is linked to his own writing and V.'s text. Writing is often characterized as dead in its inability to satisfy V.'s need for some living semblance of Sebastian. In these ironic allusions to "real life" the question of where art stands with respect to the living and the dead is further complicated. It is not, as Bader claims, the hereafter, and though it is also not the real, it is hungrily sought after and presented under the pretense that it could be. Writing, as we see in Proust's assessment of where in the self art comes from, is necessarily beyond real life but, as V.'s text proves, cannot transcend death. It occupies a more ghostly space, one in which V. constantly feels Sebastian is looming as he writes his work. Like a ghost, the written world holds and reveals its relationship to the living world while permanently existing beyond, unable to exist in this world. This is not the "hereafter" or a transcendent realm, it is very much part of our reality. However, like Sebastian is to V., it can only be seen in unstable, yet vivid, glimpses.

I. Writing as Life, Writing as Death

While writing cannot completely overcome death and present the world of the hereafter, in order for V.'s search to have any purpose, there must first be this belief that writing offers something more than life. From the beginning of his tale, V. interweaves the story of Sebastian's writing with the story of their childhood and parents. This technique is particularly prominent in his descriptions of their father, who is the only link between them as half-brothers. He describes him as a "fine soldier, a warm-hearted, humorous, high-spirited man, he had in him that rich strain of adventurous restlessness which Sebastian inherited as a writer" (*RLSK* 5). V. does not, as Goodman might

suggest, imply that Sebastian's characteristics as an author come to him from his familial surroundings. Rather the connection between their father and Sebastian's writing goes deeper, to the level of the hereditary. It is a disjointed notion of atavism, whereby Sebastian does not inherit his father's wandering spirit in his real self but in the self behind his writing. His father's life and his own writing are innately linked, implying that the features of one's life can be given a textual form. Yet this common ground also makes the two men distinct from one another, as the qualities they share manifest respectively in two different worlds, that of the real and that of art.

V. enhances this distinction when he compares Sebastian's own life to the life of his writing. He notes that his brother's life "though far from being dull, lacked the terrific vigour of his literary style" (*RLSK* 5). He sees in his brother's style his impression of their father from his childhood perspective of "suddenly soaring up from the floor […] the crystal pendants of the chandelier dangerously near my head" followed by being bumped down "as suddenly as he had snatched me up, as suddenly as Sebastian's prose sweeps the reader off his feet, to let him drop with a shock into the gleeful bathos of the next wild paragraph." This passage skillfully knits together the vividness and excitement of childhood experience with Sebastian's writing while leaving Sebastian entirely out of that original moment. The intersection of the power of writing and the power of experience—itself conveyed in textual form—causes a rift between the real and the written. V. can write of his childhood perception of his father and write of how Sebastian's writing shares these qualities but he cannot write in that style. Conversely, Sebastian's life is unable to share in the "vigour" of his prose. Writing can be described in terms of life's vividness but the writer cannot both experience and create

these feelings at once, implying an essential tension between "real life" and the real encounter with text.

As V.'s pursuit of Sebastian's past life builds a separate, present experience that forms its own text, the real and the literary have more frequent overlaps. When our narrator goes to the house of Clare Bishop, his brother's great love, he refers to her maid as "that ruddy and rather raw young female" (*RLSK* 75). This description is immediately followed by the parenthetical comment that "Sebastian mentions somewhere that English novelists never depart from a certain fixed tone when describing housemaids." As a text whose primary topic is its own writing and the life of a writer, this comment is one of many jokes about literary tropes and conventions. Yet the moment this side note is made, we are taken away from the V.'s present circumstances. He essentially reminds us, through Sebastian, that what we are reading is text and that we can only experience it as text. This textual experience by default includes the clichés of his literary predecessors, and so by both using this almost stock-description of an English maid and acknowledging it as such necessarily puts the reader at a double distance from V.'s experience. Later, when V. is interrogating Mme Lecerf, he uses a similar technique to describe how "[h]er small hard bosom heaved," then, parenthetically echoing his earlier comments about the maid, notes that "Sebastian once wrote that it happened only in books but here was proof that he was mistaken" (*RLSK* 166). Both these asides take the same form—use of parentheses, the vague reference to some unnamed piece of writing by Sebastian in which he describes these phenomena—which seems designed to draw the reader out of the world of the text by making him aware of its artifice. However, this later instance of Mme Lecerf's bosom calls into question which world is real and which world is textual.

Sebastian's assertion that this action only happens in books cannot be "mistaken" if it here happens in a book. His explicit rejection of Sebastian's theory in fact accepts it. The bond to literary history forged by his description of the Bishop's maid is loosened. By describing the maid in a convention of "English novelists" V. overtly creates his experience of something fictional within the space of the real. Here, the implication is that this echo of the textual simply happens in real life. It is no longer exclusively bound to the world of novels. In writing this real experience down, his journey is now textual, yet not bound to literary history and convention. His search for Sebastian has led him to liminal space between the written word and writing as an institution.

When he looks directly at Sebastian's writing to enhance his understanding of his life—that is, taking the opposite technique of Mr. Goodman and Sainte-Beuve—V. is perplexed by the manner in which the two overlap. In Sebastian's book *Lost Property* we see the full text of a love letter lost in a plane crash. His brother poses that "[i]f we abstract from this fictitious letter everything that is personal to its supposed author, I believe that there is much in it that may have been felt by Sebastian, or even written by him, to Clare" (*RLSK* 112). V. starts by calling the letter "fictitious," and yet this label does not give him full reign to regard the letter as unreal or non-existent. Rather it places the letter in a space between the real and the unreal. It is fictitious, but rather than being written by an author who is equally fictitious, it is instead attributed to a "supposed author." This "supposed" does not allow the letter to rest comfortably in the space of either fiction or reality as we do not know what this author is "supposed" to be. In the context of the events of *Lost Property* the letter is already completely detached from its sender and intended recipient. It is merely signed "L" and it will never reach its

destination. Even in its fictional creation, it is a text without attribution, significance or a point of reference in its own world. If it is not definitely Sebastian speaking and has no concrete fictional life, then the letter seems to barely exist. As V.'s reading of it progresses, it becomes equally detached from the reality of Sebastian it might reflect. V. shies away from claiming with certainty that it reflects Sebastian's feelings towards Clare, but states only that he has the belief that it shows that which "may have been felt by Sebastian." The noncommittal tone of this belief becomes more prominent when V. claims again that Sebastian's "hero's letter may possibly have been a kind of code in which he expressed a few truths about his relations with Clare." The more unsure the letter's reflection of reality becomes, the more readily V. attaches the letter to the fictional world in calling it the "hero's letter," no longer vaguely written by a "supposed author." If Sebastian's message in it even exists, it is in the form of code, a code created by him and meant exclusively for Clare. The letter may be part of a fictional world, but on another level it is part of a world that contains only the two people for whom it acts as a mode of communication. The world of their intimate correspondence becomes bound up the terms of fiction, inaccessible to the world that V. occupies.

V. perceives this inaccessibility when he calls Sebastian's technique of intersecting the real and personal into his fiction "baffling to me who might desire to see the real man behind the author" (*RLSK* 112). If Sebastian is in fact using his text in the way V. hesitantly imagines here, then this "real man" is right in front of him. Rather than being "behind" the author, Sebastian has merged his real self not with his authorial self but with a fictional character who has only the smallest semblance of a presence in his text. V. attributes his incapacity to see Sebastian to the fact that the "light of personal

truth is hard to perceive in the shimmer of an imaginary nature." Yet there is some irony here in this wording, that a full "light" would be impossible to see behind a "shimmer," almost as if V. is making fun of his inability to see the real behind the soft yet dazzling world of fiction. In spite of his claim to the obscurity of this truth, it is V.'s own beliefs that posit the existence of it in the text in the first place. We have no sense of whether or not Sebastian's real feelings for Clare were intentionally placed in his text. Our experiences of *Lost Property* and Sebastian are mediated by V. What is so strange here is the way in which V. reads this emotional content into the text, or at least its existence, and then claims that it is too obscured by the text itself. He desires both the force of real life behind the written word while at once having that force be buried and implicit. He marvels at his projection of Sebastian, both in the text itself and his image of him writing the novel, describing it as an "amazing fact that a man writing of things which he really felt at the time of writing, could have had the power to create simultaneously—and out of the very things which distressed his mind—a fictitious and faintly absurd character." V. here seems to speak of the very essence of writing, the ideal of fiction, yet frames it as a magical, nearly impossible, feat. The implication here is that real feeling and writing are distinct, that the process of emotional assimilation is so all consuming that it cannot happen in conjunction with the creation of a fictional world. V. emphasizes the fact that the character that results from this process was "fictitious and faintly absurd" highlighting the letter-writer's lack of grounding in reality in contrast to the vividness of Sebastian's real, interior life that made him. As a pursuer of the real Sebastian, V. is not even satisfied with what he believes are the thinly veiled literary manifestations of his brother. He must constantly present to the reader the unsatisfying, unreality of fiction.

In sensing Sebastian's interior, emotional life in the anonymous character's letter, V. feels that following the trace of these sentiments will lead him to the very man who felt and created them. What he here fails to understand is that while Sebastian may have concretely had these feelings for Clare and written her this letter, the transposing of these emotions into fiction creates something beyond his real, internal life. In describing how writing happens, Maurice Blanchot compares it to any other process of creation in that the object that is created "is the affirmation of a reality different from the elements which constitute it" (Blanchot 313). In creating a fictional world from his own reality—even if he did indeed, as V. suspects, use phrases he had originally intended expressly for Clare—transforms those elements of that reality into something entirely different from their original form. In changing the context, he does not merely disguise his feelings, but alters their meaning; they maintain their emotional resonance while becoming detached from their reality.

V.'s frustration with the detachment that occurs through writing's transformative power in Sebastian's own work bleeds into his feelings about his quest and the text that it creates. While the novel itself reflects the larger textual effort of V.'s search for his brother, writing is central to his process of collecting information to further his endeavor, both in its creation through transcription and gathering it as evidence. V. speaks with Miss Pratt, an old friend of Clare and Sebastian's and an employee of Mr. Goodman's in an attempt to gather information about his brother's life with Clare and possibly trace Clare herself in order to question her. When Miss Pratt departs after providing him with what he calls a "dismal tale" of the early years of his brother's heart-condition, V. "wrote it all down—but it was dead, dead" (*RLSK* 74). He here names the detachment between

events and their written manifestation as death, but what he in fact speaks to is the emptiness of Miss Pratt's tale that brings him no closer to the past or the truth of Sebastian. Yet there is a tension surrounding what causes this death. Blanchot cites this death, this act of killing through writing, as stemming from the fact that if one says, for example, "this woman" one's "language means that this person [that one speaks of] who is here right now, can be detached from herself, removed from her existence and her presence, and suddenly plunged into a nothingness in which there is no existence or presence" (Blanchot 323). If we follow this supposition, then it is not only V.'s writing down this information—both as a piece of evidence for himself and as part of the novel we are reading—but Miss Pratt's mere conveyance of it to him that strips it of any meaning or power. This is also evident in the lack of an explicit logical link between his writing "it all down" and the fact that it "was dead," leaving the question open as to whether it was dead because he wrote it down, or whether it was dead already in its telling. The death inherent in his creation of this narrative results in a stronger sense of urgency to find the concrete thing it represents. The only action, according to V., that can bring his writing to life would be to see Clare, "[o]ne glance, one word, the mere sound of her voice would be sufficient (and necessary, absolutely necessary) to animate the past." He tacks back and forth between the necessity of perceiving Clare through his senses, in the present, and continuing to rely on language—the "one word" that can reveal and revive all—to feel that he has found something closer to Sebastian than his own second and third hand narrative. Yet his word choice admits that what he seeks is inherently dead. He craves a meeting with Clare in order to "animate," not the perhaps more logical "reanimate," the past. What he searches for has no inherent life of its own,

it is the past and therefore dead. While his search for and telling of his brother's story flattens and kills what it is supposed to represent, he still believes that connecting it to a living trace will give it its own life. His intention is to revive in the knowledge that the medium by which he conveys this revival is killing it.

In this self-defeating mission to revive the past, V. delves into his own memory, if only to set his experience against the vividness of his brother's novels. He similarly prefaces his discussion of Clare with Miss Pratt with an extended memory of his first and only meeting with her. He recalls running into her and Sebastian in a café in Paris in 1924. From the outset of this memory, V.'s tone and subjectivity are everywhere, constantly alerting us to the fact that this is not a mere representation of the scene but a representation of a remembered and highly subjective event. He describes how "[t]hey were drinking coffee […,] Clare Bishop, her lashes beating, rummaged in her bag, found her handkerchief, and dabbed first one pink nostril and then the other" (*RLSK* 70). The small, factual actions at first suggest a kind of realism. The mentioning of Clare's full name would then play into this impression of V. as an almost omniscient narrator. However, remarks that Sebastian's comments are made "not very truthfully I am afraid" remind us that V. is speaking subjectively in a way that aims to subtly manipulate. His knowledge of Clare's full name without a picture of their introduction does not quite fit. It is as if in the process of reflecting on this moment in the present—a moment selected because of Clare—his past self was able to instantly recognize her. Thus the qualities of omniscience in fact heighten our awareness of the fact that V.—and, by extension, the reader—is not experiencing the moment in the present. Once this separation through time and through V.'s mediation is established, all semblance of the real starts to melt

away. V. relates that Sebastian said "'Oh splendidly,' […] in reply to an obvious question" and that later he himself "probably asked" Clare "[w]hen was that" in reference to their first meeting based on the fact that he "now remember[s] her answer" (*RLSK* 70, 72). These small gaps in the information that V. provides convey a more accurate space of recollection while loosening the reader's inclination to rely on these memories for a true picture of the moment.

The empty spaces in V.'s description also hint at the ghostliness of recollection. The alternating patches of the vivid world of the recalled and the empty spaces of the forgotten show a scene whose presence points to its numerous absences. At the end of the memory, V. describes a group of pigeons that "settled among the pearl-gray and black frieze of the Arc de Triomphe and when some of them fluttered off again it seemed as if bits of the carved entablature were turned into flaky life" (*RLSK* 72). This description is immediately followed by the remark that he later " found that picture, 'that stone melting into wing,' in Sebastian's third book." The image itself is one of life transforming into representation transforming back into life again. He implies the possibility that the image from Sebastian's book has already merged with his own memory. Yet this very implication manages to keep them distinct. These are the first hints of the doppelganger effect between the two brothers. Yet while Sebastian is overtly devoted to the world of fiction, V. stands on the borders of appearing to accurately convey his memories while letting them slowly slip into the world of literature. Early in the novel he ventures to distinguish himself from Sebastian by describing his own efforts to become a writer through a correspondence course. V. imagines that if Sebastian had done the same course he would have been an "incalculably more hopeless pupil" than he was (*RLSK* 33).

Sebastian's writing, he goes on to detail "was a dazzling succession of gaps; and you cannot ape a gap because you are bound to fill it in somehow or other—and blot it out in the process." This brief definition of the style of Sebastian's prose creates a myriad of images from both inside and outside the world of the novel. We see the angle of a knight's movement on a chessboard as well as V's prefiguring of what later becomes his style when he attempts to weave his own recollections into the narrative. V. also warns his reader against his own unreliability as a narrator and investigator of the past. Any hole in his story will be instantly filled upon looking at it. The absence of our title character will give way to a ghostly presence created by disparate information of those who once knew him and sporadic passages from his prose.

The liminal ghost-world that V. appears to occupy in his search and writing is reflected back to him in the haunting suggestions of his brother's presence. His visit to Sebastian's house in London is a rare moment in the novel when he is confronted with tangible evidence of his brother's domestic life. He notes seeing "[h]alf a dozen suits, mostly old, […] hanging in the wardrobe, and for a second I had an odd impression of Sebastian's body being stiffly multiplied in a succession of square-shouldered forms" (*RLSK* 34). V.'s striking image of Sebastian detracts from itself through this surreal multiplication. The fact that he sees as many Sebastians as there are suits points to the element of projection here. In addition, he notes shortly before this vision that "[d]uring the last years of his life he had not lived there very much, nor had he died there." The house then does not hold any strong connection to Sebastian's real life. It is a tangible, physical trace of his life, now situated in the real world of the present, that in fact held no significance for him and thus makes an unlikely haunting ground. When V. touches one

of the coats that he had seen Sebastian wear once, it is "limp and irresponsive to that faint call of memory." V. points to the desperateness and forced quality of his search. He transforms the notion of a ghost into his projection of the past onto the empty spaces—those gaps that he saw in Sebastian's writing and thought process, here represented by the empty suits in his closet—of the real world. The moment V. observes what could be a ghostly phenomenon, he almost simultaneously pulls the curtain aside, as when he notes that in the empty house "[t]here was, it is true, a cigarette end in a glass ashtray, but it had been left there by a certain Mr. McMath, house-agent" (*RLSK* 35). He focuses our attention on his own attraction to ordinary objects that, through their functions suggest the people who are supposed to interact with them. When no one is there to use these objects, they open themselves up to another world. They could potentially be used by anyone, but with no living, present person to perform this action, these tangible presences become part of a spectral realm. By at once hoping for and denying this potential for the supernatural, V. allows for the limited existence of this ghost world; it can be a part of his text but only as his creation.

This ghost realm is projected and created through V.'s present experience. We in turn experience it in the form of his final novel, the book in our hands. If V. is seeking the dead in his search for the truth of his brother, then the text of *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* is the medium of the mediator. Its completed form represents an attempt to straddle the world of the dead and the world of the living, and, within that, another effort to create a bridge between the fictional and the real. The book is a ghost of a ghost. V.'s assertion at the beginning of the novel that, if one were to judge Sebastian's life entirely on Mr. Goodman's book, V. himself would be "bound to appear non-

existent" takes on a new dimension considering how his own text makes Sebastian's image thinner and more elusive by striving to find him. Imbuing his final product with this spectral quality is another means of setting V.'s technique as a writer apart from his brother's. When searching Sebastian's effects for the writing he was instructed to destroy after his death, V finds that his brother has already taken care of most of this process

> for he belonged to that rare type of writer who knows that nothing ought to remain except the perfect achievement: the printed book; that its actual existence is inconsistent with that of its spectre, the uncouth manuscript flaunting its imperfections like a vengeful ghost carrying its own head under its arm; and that for this reason the litter of the workshop, no matter its sentimental or commercial value, must never subsist (*RLSK* 34).

Sebastian is momentarily present here in the absence of these drafts which bring to life his desire to have only the finished product of this work. But this desire also eliminates the real Sebastian of his creative process, the physical traces of his real self, his thinking behind the self that is only expressed in art. What V. here identifies as Sebastian's desire to eliminate any ghost forms of his final drafts that might haunt the perfection of his novels in fact uses the language of the doppelganger. Freud describes the history of the doppelganger's significance, originally "an insurance against the destruction of the ego […] a preservation against extinction" (Freud 210). However, when the "primary narcissism which dominates the mind of the child and of primitive men" is overcome, a persistent doppelganger can become uncanny, taking on an opposite role as a "harbinger of death" (Freud 211). The missing doppelgangers of Sebastian's drafts could have preserved his self in the process of writing. In their absence they become, like Freud's doubles, ghostly reminders of that which must be destroyed. Their "imperfections", equated with the ghost who carries the mark of his own demise, deprive those novels of their complete, autonomous, and perfected state, their potential to be alive and unique as

whole worlds. The rough drafts serve as reminders of writing's attachment to the human hand and effort that created them. If ghosts are the dead who have not fully transcended their human life and maintain some connection to the earthly and alive, then the drafts—even though V. describes them as ghosts—threaten to hold back the perfect and complete novel from transcending the real by marking it with its mortality and humanity. The written word is constantly teetering between the transcendent and the earthly. Because V.'s novel is committed to finding that real semblance behind the fictional, it will constantly be haunted by its doppelgangers and threatened with being itself a doppelganger of what is found in life.

II. Ghost Writers, Detectives, and Solitary Doppelgangers

Early on his journey, V. confesses to his lack of knowledge about the narrative he seeks to extract from Sebastian's life. Beyond the "couple of chapters" that he can write about "the little I remembered of his childhood and youth" he has little else to draw upon (*RLSK* 31). He speaks first of the quest for the real and how it necessitates, the "immense amount of research" that will bring "up his life bit by bit." In conjunction with this search within the tangible, V. acknowledges that he will meld these fragments with an "inner knowledge" of Sebastian:

> Inner knowledge? Yes, this was a thing I possessed, I felt it in every nerve. And the more I pondered on it, the more I perceived that I had yet another tool in my hand: when I imagined actions of his which I heard of only after his death, I knew for certain that in such or such a case I should have acted just as he had (*RLSK* 31-32).

Here V. speaks again to the gaps that he has previously perceived in both Sebastian's prose style and his life, the gaps upon which he projected Sebastian's ghost. He now

goes beyond merely forming his brother's ghost where he knows there is none. He claims an intuitive sense of Sebastian while admitting that he knows very little of his brother that is concrete. It this instinctual faculty that in fact estranges him from actual pursuit and replaces tangible evidence, making the reader uncertain of whether this capacity truly exists. Just as Sebastian's ghost in his house is clearly V.'s creation, we sense here a link between this magical intuition and the creative process. This intuition, however, is founded on a growing notion of the two brothers as one. The creation of an "inner knowledge" that unites, to a certain degree, their two distinct beings and this process' parallels to V.'s perception of his brother's ghost begins to instill him with a similar spectral quality. As V. becomes the author of his text, he necessarily enters into an awareness of a ghost world and his hand in creating it, slowly infecting himself with these spectral qualities. Yet becoming this ghost figure of an author necessitates mirroring the ideal image of an author in the text, that is, Sebastian. For V. then, the process of creating the text is by default confused with the sense of becoming Sebastian himself and losing his own living identity.

Through these early hints of doubling between himself and his brother, what V. experiences as a writer is a breakdown in the barrier between self and subject. Yet V. is not merely the author of this text, the conveyor of Sebastian's life, and the mediator between the dead and the living. His style of authorial investigation—literally traveling through the different regions of Sebastian's life, spying on Clare and considering the possibility of pretending he has Sebastian's letters in order to coerce her into talking to him—suggest a private detective rather than a writer. He even enlists the help a former private detective, Silbermann, in order to get the names and addresses of the women who

might have been Sebastian's last lover. When the two men first meet on the train two Strasbourg, V. tells him that he travels "in the past" to which Silbermann nods "as if he had understood" (*RLSK* 125). W. G Sebald, in his essay on Nabokov in *Campo Santo*, attributes the "instant understanding" in this moment to the fact that he posits that Silbermann is a ghost and "[g]hosts and writers meet in their concern for the past" (*CS* 144). Yet this "understanding" between the two men happens again in this scene, when Silbermann tells V. "I was in de police—no, no, not once, not quite…Plain-clothes […] [u]nderstand me?" to which V. looks at him "with sudden interest." The two men's interest in the past may come to them through their mutual spectral qualities—Silbermann is now a traveling salesman and so shares V's wandering and detached lifestyle that is necessarily bound to the earthly—but they also share a common method for searching for that past. In asking for Silbermann's help, V. acknowledges his role as a detective searching for his brother's life.

However, as the book's existence proves, V. is first and foremost a writer. Correspondingly, his position as a detective impacts this role as writer of our text. By acknowledging himself as detective, V. recognizes his tactics for collecting information on his brother's life as empirical. This would call into question the previously discussed intuitive sense of Sebastian that he claimed was helping him. At certain moments, V. fully subscribes to the method of empirical pursuit. In his discussion of Sebastian and Clare's time together, he points out that it would be impossible for him to "touch upon the intimate side of their relationship, firstly, because it would be ridiculous to discuss what no one can definitely assert" (*RLSK* 103). He further points out that the word "sex" "with its hissing vulgarity and the 'ks, ks' catcall at the end" makes him doubt "whether

there *is* any real idea behind the word." His first claim that he cannot discuss what is not "definite" almost too fervently subscribes to the notion that his work must deal exclusively with the real and the observed. He has long since given evidence that he is a creative force and not just a conveyor of information. He picks and chooses where he searches and how he presents his findings and subjectively guides us through a world that is ultimately his creation. His assessment of the word "sex" as having no "real idea" behind it echoes his larger frustration in his attempt to find the real Sebastian in his novels. In other moments, however, the previously explained "inner knowledge" of Sebastian quietly takes over and complicates the notion of what can be spoken of and "definitely" asserted. In describing the difficulties Sebastian faced in writing his first novel—a central moment in his time with Clare, perhaps more intimate than their sex life—V. claims "I know, I know as definitely as I know we had the same father, I know Sebastian's Russian was better and more natural to him than his English" (*RLSK* 82). V. "definitely asserts" here something equally as unknowable as what passed between Sebastian and Clare in bed. It is the work of his intuitive sense as a writer that goes against his empirical investigation as a detective.

Yet just as V. and Silbermann connect by being both ghosts and detectives, the role of writer and of investigator can enhance and enable each other. When V. speculates that Sebastian and Clare "must have had a glorious time together" he says that it is "hard to believe that the warmth, the tenderness, the beauty of it has not been gathered, and is not treasured somewhere, somehow, by some immortal witness of mortal life" (*RLSK* 85). He then continues to describe them "wandering in Kew Gardens, or Richmond Park (personally I have never been their but the names attract me), or eating ham and eggs at

some pretty in." These images of their life together are all we have as evidence yet we know it has no tangible basis. V. poses that this information has been collected by a ghost observer, equating the ghost world with the role of the voyeur. V. transmits this information to us yet it is not clearly defined as either fact or invention. His transmission of it places him in the position of that ghostly voyeur on par with that of the writer. The empirical can be achieved through the world of the supernatural. The writer, at least in V.'s case, becomes a synthesis of the ghost and the detective. His uncertain evidence comes to him through impossible means and so creates a narrative that resembles the real without having a definite link to it. The world V. creates must look like something we can believe while existing beyond the realm of the real.

In the beginnings of the novel, V. overtly struggles to synthesize his quest for the real beyond the tangible with creating a clear narrative. He assesses his efforts to describe their childhood, the only extended period of time during which he had consistent proximity to Sebastian, as an attempt "to form a coherent picture of what I saw of my half-brother in those childhood days of mine […] [b]ut the task eludes me" (*RLSK* 15). He imagines that this attempt will only yield "sundry bits of cinema-film cut away by scissors and having nothing in common with the essential drama" (*RLSK* 16). V.'s goals here are those of a writer, striving to have the essence of what he seeks to represent shine through. He compares his process to other art forms in his desire to "make a coherent picture" and not end up with scraps from the editing process. However, he already recognizes this smooth and complete narrative arc as impossible. The search for the past's real and essential quality is somehow incompatible with the use of tangible proof

and the creation of a perfect story. He works through the cause of this unattainable quality in the language of memory, saying that

> Sebastian's image does not appear as part of my boyhood […] nor as a succession of familiar visions, but it comes to me in a few bright patches, as if he were not a constant member of our family, but some erratic visitor passing across a lighted room and then for a long interval fading into the night. I explain this […] by Sebastian's constant aloofness, which, although I loved him dearly, never allowed my affection either recognition or food (*RLSK* 16).

The image of Sebastian as V. remembers him already has what will later become those characteristic marks of the ghostly discussed above. Sebastian's presence seems to hinge on the special presence or absence of lighting in a given situation. Like a photograph his entire existence depends on how he is illuminated. Yet while Sebastian may later be justifiably compared to a ghost, V. relates their childhood to tangible, embodied moments of illumination, moments when his brother was in fact physically present. This impression of Sebastian as a flash of a light is derived from his emotional distance from V. Sebastian's inability to return the intimacy that V. craves is transformed into a spectral presence. The ghostly and the solitary are equated, making this osmosis part of the greater process of literary creation.

Like all of our other impressions of Sebastian, we must remember that this picture of him as solitary comes to us mediated through V. and his writing. Even though he gathers his information about Sebastian's years at Cambridge from his former schoolmates, the sense of detachment that V. felt from his brother as a child continues to resonate in his representation of the years when they had no contact. While V. does convey the conversation he had with an anonymous fellow student of his brother's—referred to only as "my informer" and "my interlocutor"—he begins his section on Cambridge with the tone of an omniscient, third-person narrator, referring to Sebastian by

his full name in declarative statements such as "Sebastian Knight's college years were not particularly happy" (*RLSK* 41). This tone and the intimate yet factual knowledge it proclaims are of course a jab at conventional biography of the Mr. Goodman school of writing. In the opening pages of the chapter, V. makes no references to any sources for this information while charging forward into Sebastian's psyche. With regard to Sebastian's discomfort in England, he states that

> no matter how wisely and sweetly his new surroundings played up to his old dreams, he himself, or rather still the most precious part of himself, would remain as hopelessly alone as it had always been. The keynote of Sebastian's life was solitude and the kindlier fate tried to make him feel at home by counterfeiting admirably the things he thought he wanted, the more he was aware of his inability to fit into the picture,--into any kind of picture (*RLSK* 42).

The passage could be interpreted as either V.'s foray into what he himself would view as bad biography or an example of the "inner knowledge" he claims to have of Sebastian. Or possibly it is the latter in the guise of the former. Either way, its claims are extreme in the way that it touches on "the most precious part of [Sebastian]" echoing somewhat the self "of our own bosoms" that Proust cites as the origin of the writer's art. V.'s overarching point and intuitive claim about Sebastian is that his essential self is innately alone. This is a solitude that permeates through Sebastian's exterior self and interactions and, according to his brother, defines him. Yet this quality is necessarily demonstrated through the world around him. V. posits that Sebastian perceives the world as a sham, one that merely "[counterfeits] admirably the things he thought he wanted." The assessment that Sebastian does not "fit into […] any kind of picture" is almost an oversimplification. For a man who searches to reconstruct the "real life" of one who now only exists through art, the revelation that he had no place in the real world has devastating implications. If Sebastian's solitude becomes evident through the real

world's counterfeit nature, then the question of where V. can, in physical space and measurable time, find Sebastian is potentially unanswerable.

When Sebastian is allowed to speak of his solitude, through passages of his novels, he puts it under the more benign heading of "shyness" (*RLSK* 65). Yet his explanation of how this quality manifested itself in his life quickly shows that the innocence this word implies is a deception. Behind this quality is what Sebastian calls a "morbid secret" in which his brain was never allowed the "happy state of somnolence" that he feels most others let "part of their mind" exist in throughout the day. This state of "constant wakefulness" gives "[e]very ordinary act […] a multitude of associative ideas" which are "so tricky and obscure, so utterly useless for practical application" that it makes everyday actions and interactions nearly impossible. Sebastian's own assessment of his solitude echoes V.'s in his posing of a dependant relationship between this feeling of "shyness" and the world around him. Yet while V.'s description hinged on setting Sebastian further apart from the external and real world, further into the realm of the unreal, Sebastian speaks very concretely of the discreet world of his self and its attempts to interact with the real. When Sebastian speaks of his mind having all of its "shutters and lids and doors […] open at once at all times of the day" he suggests a space of the hyper real that is incompatible with the real. Even though Sebastian is solitary in that he is incapable of interacting with others, it seems more logical that it is their sleeping minds that are locked to the world around them if Sebastian's is as open as he posits. It is thus his state of constant and all consuming engagement with his world that makes it impossible for him to engage on an everyday level. He describes how this "quality or defect which tormented me so, when confronted with what is called the practical side of

life […] became an instrument of exquisite pleasure whenever I yielded to my loneliness" (*RLSK* 66). Unlike Proust's narrator, his pleasure is not the space of solitude for the joys—and potential for creation—that separation from the external world engenders. Rather, it is the inverse, in that it is the cause of his solitude that he most wants to enjoy without the stress of external interactions. Paradoxically, this cause is that intensification of the present and the real that relegates Sebastian to the world of the unreal in order to engage with it.

The suggestion is then that, like other defining characteristics conveyed to us by V. and Sebastian's own writing, this characteristic solitude, its cause, and its shape, is what enables him to be the legendary writer that V. hopes to depict. We continue to be set back by the fact that we are unable to see any semblance of the real man, and see only the vague traces of the self that V. can find and the separate self of his work that comes to us in passages from his novels. However, as this passage about "shyness" comes to us from *Lost Property*, supposedly Sebastian's most "autobiographical work," it calls into question where the literary self ends and the real self begins, if the two connect at all (*RLSK* 4). In the case of V. as author of and character in his own text, this question is briefly addressed. As our narrator, he is capable of proclaiming, before he begins his search for the woman who might have been Sebastian's last lover, that "[a]s the reader may have noticed, I have tried to put into this book as little of my own self as possible" (*RLSK* 139). Yet this statement alone and V.'s further attempts to prove it point to its own falsity. While it may be true that V has "tried not to allude […] to the circumstances of my own life," this mere explanation points to how noticeable his presence is, and has always been, in the text. While V. may be as solitary a figure as Sebastian supposedly

was, this solitude is undercut by the reader's constant sense of proximity to him. Conversely, Sebastian's solitary nature is enhanced and more believable as we realize that as close as we are to V., the object of his pursuit remains locked in the past, behind his texts, and obscured by the story of V.'s journey. Even before explicitly pointing to his supposed absence in his own text, V. makes it known that he is in fact the hero of his own story. In imagining the ways in which he might approach Clare Bishop in order to extract information on Sebastian from her, he claims that he "would have said: 'Let us not talk of Sebastian. Let us talk of Paris. Do you know it well? Do you remember those pigeons? […] Do you still lose your gloves, parcels?'" (*RLSK* 76). While this diversion from his true subject is jokingly presented as a strategy of interrogation—he has already been told by Clare's husband that she will not see him—it reveals V. as the creator and manipulator of the events of his text. His line of questioning, supposedly focused on Clare herself, stems entirely from his previously described memory of his one encounter with her. We do not know what V. looks like, his full first name, his last name, or his occupation, yet such facts are the concerns of people like Mr. Goodman. Without knowing any of the facts of V. we are fully entrenched and enclosed in his world. Sebastian is then hidden not only behind his own writing but also behind the world that V. so desperately tries to write him into.

This forced presence of Sebastian's ghost in all facets of V.'s search is most apparent as the events of the novel race towards its haunting conclusion. After he realizes that he will not find what he was searching for in Sebastian's last lover, Nina, V. begins the penultimate chapter of what has ultimately become his owns story by stating

> I have managed to reconstruct more or less the last year of Sebastian's life: 1935. He died in the very beginning of 1936, and as I look at this figure I cannot help

> thinking that there is an occult resemblance between a man and the date of his death. Sebastian Knight d. 1936…This date to me seems the reflection of that name in a pool of rippling water […] I am trying, as I have often tried in the course of this book, to express an idea that might have appealed to him…If here and there I have not captured at least the shadow of his thought, or if now and then unconscious cerebration has not led me to take the right turn in his private labyrinth, then my book is a clumsy failure (*RLSK* 181).

This passage itself creates a downward spiral. V. begins with a lofty claim that speaks to the goals of a more conventional biography. He has reconstructed a portion of time, brought back the past. And yet in that word "reconstruct" we see the acknowledgement of the patchwork and chaotic nature of his text. He has very much reconstructed, rather than resurrected, Sebastian's life. He has taken pieces, names, retraced his brother's steps and looked through his books, creating an entirely separate universe based on small, elusive traces of his brother. There is a wavering force in the striking claim that Sebastian's name is reflected in the date of his death. On first glance, we are ready to believe it, we see the reflected curl of "Se…" in the 36. Yet V.'s naming it an "occult resemblance" makes us unsure as to whether he is playing a joke on us. By further calling it a reflection "in a pool of rippling water" he opens up the possibilities. It does not have to be an exact resemblance, even a distorted one strikes us as significant. He admits that the shape of his book is not one of biography, or even a detective novel. It cannot recreate whole years out of vague patches. The ripple reflection of Sebastian in the text could be moved ever so slightly, forever changing its shape and losing that image of its elusive, eponymous subject. As V. meditates more on his book, Sebastian, becomes lost entirely in this ripple. V's "I" emerges with full force. It overwhelms its increasingly abstract and ambiguous object, which is now not Sebastian but "an idea that might have appealed to him" with no form or definite connection to the once coveted

figure of his real life. V.'s final definition of his book here saves it from being what he views as a "clumsy failure," yet only because his object has changed. There is no life of Sebastian to be caught or transcended, only the shadow of his ghost form, solitary, vague, and fleetingly reflective of either brother.

Chapter III:

"We Who are Still Alive are Unreal in the Eyes of the Dead": Traumatized Flânerie and Alienating Tangibility in *Austerlitz*

The title character of W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* plays out the stages of a person who has, in our general understanding of the word, experienced trauma. He exists in the first half of the novel in a state of ignorance, achieved through repression, of his past life as a Jew in Prague and his arrival in London on the Kindertransport at the start of World War II. The repressed memory of this past makes a violent re-emergence in his psyche through a chance encounter at Liverpool Station where he arrived as a child. He spends the rest of the novel attempting to reconcile this trauma by pursuing the knowledge of his parents' fate after his departure. Yet there is something in the way Austerlitz enacts this cycle that does not quite fit with our general notions of a life traumatized during World War II. What distinguishes and complicates Austerlitz's particular trauma is the traumatic event itself; Austerlitz has repressed not a singular event, but his entire life just until shortly after his arrival in England. Traumatic events are repressed because of our inability to experience them at the time they happened and our continued inability to exist with the knowledge that they happened. It would be easy to think of Austerlitz's trauma as a microcosm of the larger, collective trauma of Europe and the Jewish people of that time. In fact, the event that Austerlitz has undergone, while traumatic in its connection with these events, must in fact be repressed for another set of reasons. Repression creates a rift in experience, yet what Austerlitz has repressed is this rift in itself. Recognizing his past means recognizing two distinct selves with two separate histories which, according

to the protective mechanisms of his psyche, cannot coexist. Trauma splits, layers, and ultimately alters time. Austerlitz's own traumatic experience makes him an embodiment of these violent actions against time.

In this chapter I will explore primarily the nature of Austerlitz's fragmented character during his period of continued repression shortly before his discovery of his past. *Austerlitz*, as a novel, presents us with many of the tropes of the discourse on collective memory by positioning its subject around the events of the Holocaust while also using photographs and archival research as deceptive clues to the past. Austerlitz's tale, however, is not one of the collective. Austerlitz is distinctly alone both before and after his first uncovering of his origins. His fractured existence and his lack of knowledge of what is behind the kind of life he is living causes him to wander in a frantic and unconnected way. By comparing him to the figure of the flâneur, the wandering figure of the modern city, we can see how his walking and decisive disconnection from the structured world better suits and helps transform his altered perception of time. While this walking seems to prevent and resist the revival of the past, it ultimately and randomly leads him to that discovery. In this sense, Austerlitz's wandering and its relationship to the revelation of his trauma evokes the same relationship of time and narrative that occurs in psychoanalytic treatment as Freud dictates it. It is a form of time that must be freed from its temporality and experienced as, and in conjunction with. the spatial. At the end of the chapter I touch briefly on what constitutes that spatial and physical reality of the past that Austerlitz struggles to reclaim through photographs and archives that ultimately fail to bring back the past they imagine and promise.

I. Austerlitz's Wandering, the Flâneur, and Heimat

In his exploration of modernity in relation to the larger body of Sebald's work, J.J. Long brings up the idea of *Heimat*, a German word that he translates as meaning "home," but more specifically "the place in which one is born and grows up and to which one feels a particular affinity" (Long 6). He sees the definition of *Heimat* as inextricably "dependent on its opposite […] 'die Fremde'", that is, "the strange, foreign, geographically removed." Thus we can see how crucially this word plays into to the narrative arc of *Austerlitz*. Yet in spite of Long's insistence on physical place and real location inherent in these words, their presence and weight in the text often comes in a ghostly and liminal form. The idea of a home and one's location of origin is rarely made tangible—Austerlitz's own pursuit of this goal does not even begin until halfway through the novel. This frequently indefinable quality of the home as object extends to its opposite, making the foreign land not merely the area outside of and away from the place of one's origins but defined by its strangeness and permanent unfamiliarity.

It would seem inherently contradictory that the *Heimat* and the *Fremde* would have common ground based on qualities that would more adequately define the sense in the foreign of the unknown and the uncertain in order to distinguish it from the idea of homeland. Yet this is precisely the space that Freud describes in his definition of the uncanny, where the *heimlich*—the homely and familiar—can have a meaning "which is identical with its opposite," the *unheimlich* (Freud 199). The mutual definition to which Freud here refers is that of the secret and hidden which can then be revealed; that which is "[c]onceald" and "withheld from others" in the case of the *heimlich* and, in the case of the *unheimlich*, what Schelling defined as "*everything that ought to have*

remained…secret and hidden but has come to light" (Freud 198, 199, emphasis his). Thus it is not just liminality that Austerlitz experiences in the space between his *Heimat*[1] and its discovery but also the strangeness and uncertainty in moving towards its revelation. There is a sense of danger posed by revealing what the home, that original space of familiarity and comfort, is. The *Heimat*, for Austerlitz, might never fulfill its meaning of the comforting location of one's origins and centeredness. In this sense, Austerlitz embodies one of the means by which Freud distinguishes melancholia from mourning, he "cannot see clearly what it is that has been lost" and there is a sense of "an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness" (Freud 245). The notions of a home and a foreign land are both strange to him and the sense of what this foreignness connotes within his internal landscape is equally clouded. The physical foreign lands which he inhabits for most of the novel are then an inconstant and shifting landscape. This landscape reflects not just his status as a liminal figure, most tangibly reflected in the novel in the form a waiting room at a train-station where we first meet our protagonist, but his constant position as a stranger even to the reader.

It is this feeling of strangeness, inherent within Austerlitz and impacting his surroundings that then seems to necessitate a structure of movement and response similar to the flâneur. While the "penchant for walking" that Long notes as a common and prominent thread between Sebaldian narrators is most certainly present in Austerlitz, it is not the exclusive factor, as Long suggests in passing, that "links [him] with the flâneur" (Long 6). The elements of flânerie in both in Austerlitz as a character and in his narrative journey are inextricably linked to the uncertain landscape of the text, where the meaning

[1] I use *Heimat* here to refer to both the physical place of his origins and the reality of his past that becomes uncovered in the course of the novel.

and image of the *Heimat* has been subverted. Celia Applegate notes within the idea of *Heimat* a sense of "restricted and secure society of a childhood memory" *(*Applegate 8). She thus touches on a notion in *Heimat* that one depends on and feels shielded by not only the place of one's origins, but also the original space itself which has already passed into memory. We again see the presence of the uncanny, where the idea of centeredness and origins within the *Heimat* also drive the ephemeral and transient into it, causing one to depend on and seek that which cannot be found in tangible reality. The undefined space of the *Fremde* and the intangible one of the *Heimat* then necessitate for Austerlitz a constant incarnation of the flâneur's basic "activity," as initially defined by Keith Tester in his collection of essays on the subject, that "strolling and looking which is carried out by the flâneur" (Tester 1). Even if Austerlitz refutes or eludes conventional understandings of the flâneur, investigating him through the lens of flânerie broadens our perception of the mechanisms of time in Austerlitz's at once focused and unfocused wanderings into the past.

These flâneur-like wanderings ultimately shape the larger narrative arc of the novel through their impact on the various threads within the text. The focus of the first half of the book is both the story of our eponymous hero's early life according to his own memories and the simultaneous steady build-up to and looming presence of the revelation in Liverpool station. In the brief period at the very beginning of the novel where the events are related by the original narrator, he remarks that he was initially

> astonished by the way Austerlitz put his ideas together as he talked, forming perfectly balanced sentences out of whatever occurred to him, so to speak, and the way in which, in his mind, the passing on of his knowledge seemed to become a gradual approach to a kind of historical metaphysic, bringing remembered events back to life *(A* 12).

This observation on the part of the narrator is a deceptive form of foreshadowing. The idea that Austerlitz can, through his manner of speech, bring "remembered events back to life" projects a power onto him that only truly occurs later through physical and sensory exploration instead of verbal exposition. The idea that he forms these structures out of "whatever occurred to him" suggests an illusion of the capability of a purely mental flânerie that, as we later discover in Liverpool station, must function in tandem with the bodily flânerie of the physical sensation and motion in order to transcend time. The narrator further suggests that this power occurs not just through speech but through a particularly controlled form of speech made of "perfectly balanced sentences" and the steady pace of "a gradual approach to a kind of historical metaphysic." Austerlitz's narration[2], that is, the voice that guides us through the majority of the text, is what in fact controls the concept of time and inhibits its free flow. This control over time in Austerlitz's narration distinguishes his agency in his larger act of repressing his past. It suggests what Walter Benjamin sees as "the special achievement of shock defense," that is, "its function of assigning to an incident a precise point in time in consciousness at the cost of the integrity of its contents" (Benjamin 163). This structuring of experience within time is protecting Austerlitz from his past and thus opposes the idea that it can imbue "remembered events" with life. It is thus the existence of Austerlitz's narration, his story's structure as a controlled path that keeps him from truly reliving the past.

It would appear that this form of storytelling on Austerlitz's part would then actively prevent the novel from progressing, from ever allowing the past to completely

[2] In this chapter I will use the word "narration" to refer to the act by individual characters, either our primary narrator or Austerlitz's voice as relayed by this primary narrator, which implies their subjective voices and impact on the narrative of the text as a whole. I will use "narrative" to refer to the larger arcs and flow of the text.

return. By arranging the remembered events of his life as he does, he places them not just within time, but within the past, turning each "incident into a moment that has been lived" (Benjamin 163). However, it is precisely the erosion of this intellectual control that makes up the action of the first half of the novel. The original narrator relates to us in this scene how the pages of Austerlitz's research on architecture "had long outstripped their original purpose as a project for a dissertation, proliferating in his hands into endless preliminary sketches for a study, based entirely on his own views, of the family likeness between all these buildings" *(A* 33). What begins as the formation of a structured, written argument quickly turns into something without end or form. The image of his initial research "proliferating in his hands" into something "endless" gives Austerlitz a kind of limitless power while simultaneously stripping him of all agency over his academic investigations. This fluctuating power dynamic suggested here between Austerlitz and his intellectual pursuit is comparable to the relationship between the flâneur and his urban surroundings. Benjamin declares that "[t]he street conducts the flâneur into a vanished time" and thus there is a necessary passivity to the idea of wandering that is flânerie as well as a relationship between this passivity and a subversion of temporality (Benjamin 416). In this transforming relationship between Austerlitz and his research, it is critical that he transfer power from his intellect to his instinct. Yet in his essential role as observer the flâneur is in a constant position of power over his surroundings whom he makes the object of his gaze. He has "the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off a miscreant […] [h]e catches things in flight" (Benjamin 72). Austerlitz too derives his agency as a character from observation.

In the act of research, his gaze is the semblance of control that he has; he observes connections but does not create anything new or tangible.

The fact that this intellectual wandering takes the form of perpetual "preliminary sketches" suggests a constant re-starting, an eternal newness that transforms and chips away at conventional ideas of temporality and narrative progress. The image of Austerlitz's pages of research growing without taking form appears to be a reflection of the loss of control through the overwhelming presence that the tangible objects and paper that one's intellectual investigations can become. Yet the subversion of narrative that it engenders is also a safety net. Zygmunt Bauman writes of a similar feeling of comfort in the transformation of conventional temporality that is encountered in the urban landscape. In the city, according to Bauman,

> there is just the present, untied by the past, the present that may be lived as the beginning, and a secure beginning, a beginning that does not threaten to solidify into a consequence, a beginning which can be only followed by other beginnings, and thus may be lived with the benign feeling of impunity (Bauman 140).

The "consequence" that Bauman here speaks of is the terror of stopping in Austerlitz's research, which also later manifests itself in his physical wandering. The only point of stopping in intellectual wandering is the point of discovery. As Austerlitz seems to refuse to make this discovery, he fits Freud's definition as being in a state of melancholia as opposed to being in mourning. To be in mourning he would have to fully recognize his lost love-object and see himself as homeless. Apart from the capacity to recognize the lost love-object, mourning differs from melancholia in that in the former "it is the world which has become poor and empty" and in the latter "it is the ego itself" (Freud 246). Thus by concluding, stopping, and recognizing himself as homeless, Austerlitz

would transform the world around him into something unrecognizable, devoid of life, imbued with the *unheimlich*, and potentially terrifying.

However, the initial recognition of the lost *Heimat,* and thus the first true pause in Austerlitz's wandering existence, comes entirely by chance. Because it is this seemingly unfocused wandering through London that leads him to resurrect his repressed past, Austerlitz's similarities to the flâneur peak in the time immediately preceding this incident. He talks of his isolation at this time as something of an innate, visceral response to his surroundings. The original narrator relates to us Austerlitz's feeling that the "mere idea of listening to anyone brought on a wave of revulsion, while the thought of talking myself, said Austerlitz, was perhaps worse still" *(A* 125). The state that Austerlitz refers to is necessarily past because he can now not only speak of it but, more importantly, speak to another person about it. He takes this moment in his past and places it outside the realm of the hidden, the *heimlich*, and into a space of discourse and storytelling. At the same time, the ability to narrate one's past is central to *Heimat*, which Applegate describes as representing "the modern imagining and, consequently, remaking of the hometown, not the hometown's own deeply rooted historical reality" (Applegate 8). Thus working towards the image of the *Heimat* through narrative is a working away from the true nature of one's origins. By contrast, Austerlitz's period of intense isolation is a time characterized by the withdrawn and closed *heimlich*; it is hidden yet, with the simultaneous meaning of home-like, makes him more capable of the motion necessary to accessing his origins.

The structures of everyday life, in comparison to the lost home that Austerlitz unknowingly longs for, seem to offer a pale imitation of the centeredness and comfort of

Heimat. Further description of the isolated period in Austerlitz's life situates his innate rejection of and revulsion at daily interaction within these terms of larger, codified society. Austerlitz's rejection of interpersonal relationships and interactions leads him to realize "how isolated I was and always have been, among the Welsh as much as among the English and French" *(A* 125). What occurs in this statement is a rejection of nationality that is in fact a realization of a lack of nationality. He identifies a feeling of isolation in all places and thus shows how his homelessness is inherent; it is not that he simply does not identify with the national identity of the places he goes, but rather feels innately unsettled, essentially lost in any country. We once again see the symptoms of Freud's melancholia, in that Austerlitz sees the unfamiliarity and unwelcoming qualities of those places as coming from within by describing his isolation in those countries rather than finding those countries isolating or unfamiliar.

In the trajectory of the melancholy ego, the "threatened libidinal cathexis at length [abandons] the object, only, however, to draw back to the place in the ego from which it had proceeded" in order to "[escape] extinction" (Freud 257). Austerlitz manifests this process by allowing the dissociation from locality and nationality to have a domino effect on all other social signifiers. The lack of nationality, which causes him to realize that it "never occurred to me to wonder about my true origins," is linked to the feeling that he never "belonged to a certain social class, professional group, or religious confession" *(A* 125). Thus Austerlitz seems to aptly define the ghostly quality that looms about him in the early pages of the novel. In her assessment of proto-typical images of the flâneur from the early nineteenth century, Priscilla Parkhust Ferguson notes one of the "primary traits of the *flâneur*" as "detachment from the ordinary social world," and a "[suspension]

from social obligation" (Ferguson 26). It is exactly this quality of suspension that Austerlitz here notes in himself. Yet while the flâneur chooses to exist outside the realm of ordinary interactions, professions, and other social bounds in order to be free from conventional "social obligation" Austerlitz physically and internally cannot exist within these terms and boundaries. By describing himself as being intrinsically unable to occupy any conventional social space, or rather, as occupying a space outside of those conventions and definitions, Austerlitz places himself somewhere between the real and the unreal. He cannot connect to other people or to a country by any standard means or terminology, yet this inability is driven by a deep-rooted, almost instinctual fear.

This liminality present in Austerlitz's response to various social definitions is exemplified in his supplementing friendship with etiquette. His inability to form personal bonds, much like his instinctual outsider status, is based on a strong emotional reaction, that is, fear and anxiety. He notes how "no sooner did I become acquainted with someone than I feared I had come too close" *(A* 125). Instead, he describes how he became

> linked to other people only by certain forms of courtesy which I took to extremes and which I know today […] I observed not so much for the sake of their recipients as because they allowed me to ignore the fact that my life has always, for as far back as I can remember, been clouded by an unrelieved despair *(A* 126).

Courtesy can be seen as the most microcosmic of social structures in that it is a binding, implicit agreement of a society to behave a certain way. By taking courtesy "to extremes" in a time when he acknowledges his intense awareness of his lack of bonds with any other social definition appears then to be not just a substitute for friendship but for a social identity as well. The fact that he does not specify what these "certain forms of courtesy" were at the time further suggests a desire for some sort of blanket definition

of his existence within society. This desire is reminiscent of what Nabokov, in his assessment of philistinism in *Lectures on Russian Literature*, calls the philistine's "passionate urge to conform, to belong" which is "torn between two longings: to act as everybody does" and to "belong to an exclusive set, to an organization" (*LRL* 310). Austerlitz here struggles with his innate inability to do what the philistine seeks, that is, attach to a social group that will make him easy to identify. He then attempts to compensate for this inability by exaggerating "the cliché side," expressed through common courtesy and token phrases, that Nabokov acknowledges as a form of philistinism of which we are all to some degree guilty. These "platitudes are used […] as a kind of disguise or as the shortest cut for avoiding conversation with fools" or in order to avoid being seen as a "pedant or a bore" if you gave detailed, personal answers to courteous questions (*LRL* 310). Austerlitz, by amplifying these shortcuts, makes a lifestyle and a semblance of an identity out of not saying and not truly interacting. He acknowledges, with the mention of "an unrelieved despair," that these actions served a function of repression, yet he does not go so far as to unpack what that function is. He rather suggests briefly that these actions, which play so crucially in keeping him on the borders between complete isolation and functioning society, were enabling him to ignore the ghostly presences in his own life.

It is thus through recognizing his position in a space outside of the everyday social realm that leads Austerlitz to his own variant on the flâneur's walking cure. He describes how he became partial to "nocturnal wanderings through London, to escape the insomnia which increasingly tormented me" *(A* 126). The image of "nocturnal wanderings" brings us back to the opening scene of the novel, in which the original

narrator explores the Antwerp Nocturama shortly before his first encounter with Austerlitz. There he sees a raccoon "washing the same piece of apple over and over again, as if it hoped that all this washing […] would help it to escape the unreal world in which it had arrived" *(A* 4). Austerlitz thus becomes linked, through his nocturnal nature, to the raccoon and so his actions take on a feverish, instinctual tone. Austerlitz and the animal are aligned in their desire to escape their current states of insomnia and the "unreal world," respectively, and through the common futility of their actions. Tester describes flânerie as "a way of going on precisely because it is ultimately so utterly futile"; the flâneur, in his wandering, "hopes and believes he will be able to find the truth of his *being*" through engaging in an activity that is "the way of avoiding arrival at the funeral pyre of *being*" (Tester 7, emphasis his). It is a structure of experience that is attributed to the flâneur but can also be applied to schizophrenics. Thus this detachment takes on takes on a dangerously dream-like quality[3]. The "being" that Austerlitz compulsively and unknowingly longs for in this state is the reality of his past. "Nocturnal wandering" then keeps him suspended in a place outside of time, away from the present reality and its social conventions and restrictions, and moving towards but not yet reaching, almost avoiding the revival of the past.

The landscape that Austerlitz covers in his late-night walks appears unique to himself and the time and nature of his walks. Austerlitz first recounts his walks not

[3] Louis A. Sass notes some of these qualities of schizophrenia as a loss of the "appetitive soul" and the "physical and emotional aspects of one's being" which "results in detachment from the natural rhythms of the body and entrapment in a sort of morbid wakefulness or hyperawareness […] [s]chizophrenic individuals often describe themselves as feeling dead yet hyperalert—a sort of corpse with insomnia" (*Madness and Modernism,* p. 7-8)

through the city's topography or any other physical image of what he encounters but rather as a long list of neighborhood and street names. He tells how he walked

> down the Mile End Road and Bow Road to Stratford, then to Chigwell and Romford, right across Bethnal Green and Canonbury, through Holloway and Kentish Town and thus to Hampstead Heath, or else south over the river to Peckham and Dulwhich or westward to Richmond Park *(A* 126).

Listing only names for this long disorients the reader. The names are both highly specific yet completely disassociated from any tangible image of the city. We recognize the names as belonging to London, and while one familiar with the city might have their own image of these streets, what we never get is a London as Austerlitz sees it to attach them to. Thus the unguided quality of the wandering as well as the darkness in which it takes place seems to eliminate the city from the picture. The immensity of this list, while often lyrical, also takes on the shape of the uncontrollable, the compulsive, verging on the insane. He seems to have no control over this process of list-making, and it is this powerlessness that in fact relates the uncontrollable need to wander and his inability to control the course of that wandering. While this wandering does, as Rob Shields describes in the walking of the flâneur, de-familiarize the urban environment, he loses, in this particular moment, the control of the flâneur's gaze and his act of "visually [consuming the city] as an 'exotic' spectacle" (Shields 74). In emphasizing the "fact that you can traverse this vast city almost from end to end on foot in a single night" Austerlitz's flânerie strikes us in this moment as disproportionately and obsessively concerned with the act of walking situated within space and time rather than with sight and observation *(A* 126).

The physical act of walking seems to be so emphasized because it is just this action that allows Austerlitz to continue to occupy the borderlands of existence. He tells

the narrator how getting "used to walking alone" means also getting used to "meeting only a few nocturnal specters on your way" *(A* 126). As Austerlitz is out walking at night, it would seem that he implicitly aligns himself here with the ghost world of those "nocturnal specters" that he encounters as they must view him as such. However, he does not explicitly call himself a "nocturnal specter," and so those figures could easily be strictly others to him.[4] Austerlitz is positioned as ambiguously amongst the dead as he is amongst the living, further obscuring his positioning between day and night, present and past. His ability to observe spectral presences both distinguishes him from them and simultaneously makes himself one of them. The gaze that this relationship implies is present as this passage of wandering comes the close. However, it is still not completely directed at the city, which itself remains a hovering presence. The act of looking is present as he tells of his walks leading to "outlying parts of the metropolis which I would never have otherwise seen" *(A* 126). The object of his gaze, what those areas actually look like, is still conspicuously absent. We know through the verb "seen" that he has, in fact, looked upon these regions, yet describing the act with the negative conditional of "would never have" puts an immediate distance between his gaze and its object. This mode of conveying the act of looking combined with the noticeable lack of any tangible description of these areas feigns revealing these otherwise unseen, literally off-the-map

[4] While just a moment ago in this passage it appeared that Austerlitz did not have the gaze of the flâneur, his ability to recognize specters and his ambiguous status amongst them engages him in what Benjamin calls the "[d]ialectic of flânerie," itself based on the fluctuation of gaze for the flâneur. Within this dialectic, the flâneur is "on one side, the man who feels himself viewed by all and sundry as a true suspect and, on the other side, the man who is utterly undiscoverable" (*The Arcades Project,* p. 420). This idea of a dialectic is taken from Baudelaire who describes an artist as able "to be at the very centre of the world, and yet to be unseen of the world" (*The Painter of Modern Life*, p. 400).

locations when it in fact continues to repress them. There is the action of a gaze but there is no true recipient of this action.

This seeing without a true object extends to Austerlitz's description of his experience of the crowd. He speaks of "all the poor souls who flow from the suburbs towards the center at that time of day," that is, the beginning of the day when he returns home from his walk *(A* 126). The crowd is present and yet it is here is less the "enormous reservoir of electricity" that is the "domain" of the artist that Baudelaire describes and more like the shades of Dante's *Inferno*, stripped of their true identities, seen and felt only as a unified mass of motion (Baudelaire 399-400). Austerlitz creates through his gaze a swimming, unspecified dream-world. The ghostliness of the crowd is exemplified in the moments where it wavers into the space of the living, present, and familiar. Austerlitz often imagines that he sees among them "a face known to me from some much earlier part of my life, but I could never say whose it was" and that these images "always had something different from the rest of them, something I might almost call indistinct, and on occasion they would haunt and disturb me for days on end" *(A* 127). The impending return of Austerlitz's past is not just haunting but uncanny. What attracts him and begins to stir recollections of his home are those faces that are the most ghostly. Austerlitz aligns within himself feelings towards the *Heimat* and the ghost-world, thus creating an *unheimlich* presence of the indefinably familiar. The fact that he is struck by qualities and people that are the most vague can be seen to explain why his gaze as a flâneur appears to have no tangible, definite object, a reflection of his present inability to identify both his home and the loss of his home. It is as if he is drawn to the repressed and clouded nature of his past, what he calls "images from a faded world," a

notion that not only transforms his observations and memories into photographs but also transfers the quality of his perception to the object itself.

Austerlitz's attraction and specific selection of the most anonymous and unpronounced qualities of the crowd keeps him delicately balanced in the liminal ghost world that he inhabits. However, this dynamic, as ambiguous as it is, is not exactly parallel to the flâneur's relationship to the crowd. Benjamin summarizes this relationship through Edgar Allen Poe's story, "The Man of the Crowd." He describes how Poe "purposely blurs the difference between the asocial person and the flâneur" by positioning the figure of the "unknown man" as "someone who does not feel comfortable in his own company" and thus he "seeks out the crowd" and "hides in it" in order to remedy this discomfort (Benjamin 79). This too suggests a dependence on the crowd in order to be able to blend in with them, a capability that hinges on the flâneur being separate from the masses in the first place. While this is similar to Austerlitz's own experience, and while his detachment from social definition and obligation certainly puts him into the category of "asocial person," what ultimately distinguishes him from the flâneur is that act of "seeking out." Austerlitz comes upon and uses the crowd in his wandering but it is not a space that he intentionally seeks.

Even after recognizing and pursuing his repressed past, he describes how, when encountering a crowd on the streets of Nuremburg, he "avoided looking closely at the faces coming towards me, and thought it odd that few of these people raised their voices as they moved quietly through the city" *(A* 223). He describes how he was "swept along by a huge crowd of people who were streaming down the entire breadth of the street." He is rendered passive, even ignored, by the presence of a large group of people. While,

prior to his recognition of the past, the crowd may impact Austerlitz's perception of time and understanding of himself, and while there may be faces in it that attract him, there will always be a space between him and the masses. It is a space that goes beyond his inherent separation from the conventional social world of class, nationality, or religion. In these moments, the separation is created by an active disengagement between Austerlitz and the masses of the world around him; they both exist in the same place, and thus their existence seems mutually undeniable, yet there is a lack of recognition and, paradoxically, on the part of our narrator, an acknowledgement of this refusal to recognize. The space resulting from this active non-interaction creates an alternating sense of the spectral between Austerlitz and the crowd, with our narrator on one end ignoring the crowd, and thus ignoring the present, and the other side his tension and anguish over their hushed tones and ultimately unified presence. The reader fluctuates between feeling like Austerlitz is present in a world of ghosts or that the outside world ignores him because he himself is the ghost.

The presence of ghostly figures and the reader's disconcerting uncertainty as to whether Austerlitz is one of these figures has an innate link to the structure and relationship of time and space in the novel. The intentionality of the spectral and its ambiguous assignment is more explicitly evident in Sebald's own readings of Nabokov in his essay on the author in *Campo Santo*, whom he saw as being most preoccupied with "the study of spirits" (*CS* 142). For Sebald the

> most brilliant passages in [Nabokov's] prose often give the impression that our worldly doings are being observed by some other species […] whose emissaries sometimes assume a guest role in the plays performed by the living. Just as they appear to us […] so we appear to them.

Sebald himself senses and posits a blurred definition of what he here calls "spirits." This blurring centers around the action of appearing, a word applied to the dead as subject and the living as indirect object and vice versa. The fact that the dead and the living can both equally appear to each other enables them both to be apparitions and thus one's status as alive or dead has no bearing on one's ability to be a ghost.

This ability to occupy the spirit world is based, according to Austerlitz, on one's relationship to time. He declares, in one particularly extended meditation on the measurement of time and space, that the "dead are outside time, the dying and all the sick at home or in hospitals, and they are not the only ones, for a certain degree of personal misfortune is enough to cut us off from the past and the future" *(A* 101). This statement is preceded by the idea that, in spite of constant reminders and arbitrary measurements, "it is still possible to be outside time, a state of affairs which until recently was almost as common in backward and forgotten areas of our own country as it used to be in the undiscovered continents overseas." Austerlitz's suggestion that existing in and being aware of time is an oppressive state and a crisis of modernity elevates a ghost's existence outside of time to a kind of liberation. Yet it is a liberation available only to those who are inherently restricted in some way, either by being literally dead or for having suffered "a certain degree of personal misfortune." Austerlitz, by saying that those who have suffered trauma are outside time because they are cut "off from the past and the future," admits that this liberation is forced and, in fact, a form of restriction that necessitates repressing both time past and time to come. Austerlitz here skims the surface of his relationship to time. While he has not uncovered his own status as one who has also had

"a certain degree of personal misfortune," he implies his preference for being outside of time and existing in this idealized, ghostly state of repression.

While being a ghost at this moment, for Austerlitz, is dependent on his lack of relationship with the past, this position is contrary to Sebald's own stated interest in spirits. In discussing the scene from *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* in which V. tells Silbermann that he "travels in the past" he cites the understanding between the two men as a result of the fact that "[g]hosts and writers meet in their concern for the past—their own and that of those who were once dear to them" (*CS* 144). A ghost, then, is not necessarily one who is severed from time, as Austerlitz suggests. Austerlitz appears to view measured time as a structure similar to the social classifications with which he feels incapable of allying himself. The kind of ghost that Sebald refers to in his essay on Nabokov has a distinctive attachment to measuring time in the broader sense of recognizing the existence and position of the past. It is through this attachment that the type of ghost that Sebald here speaks of can be seen as an embodiment of the desire for *Heimat*. If ghosts have a distinctive "concern for the past," particularly for the past of "those who were once dear to them," then their existence is in part defined by something which inherently no longer exists. They do not seek to haunt the living or intervene in their lives but rather, as seen in Sebald's definition of the ghost's society as being made up of those "who were once" close to them, are concerned with a past that appears deceptively attainable.[5] At the beginning of his diatribe on time, Austerlitz entertains

[5] Derrida suggests a further link between ghosts and the space of the home. In his assessment of Freud's response to Jensen's *Gradiva*, he notes that ghosts are "sensitive to [the] idiom of those they appear to" and thus puts them in the space of "familial domesticity." He draws from this a connection between ghosts and the notion of home

Newton's image of time as a river, an image that prompts him to ask "where is its source and into what sea does it finally flow?" (*A* 100). In asking this question, Austerlitz is in effect challenging this image of time by posing a non-existent "source," a beginning which, like *Heimat*, only provides an image of physical space of commencement. Austerlitz then proves himself to have both the ghost's concern for a vanished, possibly imagined, past and that distance from the measured time of the present.

The coexistence of the desire for the intensely temporal *Heimat* and the vehement resistance of everyday time creates a need within Austerlitz for a transformation of his overarching understanding of time. He describes how his self-imposed separation from "so-called current events" was caused by

> the hope […] that time will not pass away, has not passed away, that I can turn back and go behind it, and there I shall find everything as it once was, or more precisely I shall find that all moments of time have co-existed simultaneously, in which case none of what history tells us would be true, past events have not yet occurred but are waiting to do so at the moment when we think of them (*A* 101).

The longing expressed here seems stronger than a longing for *Heimat*, a homeland that ultimately exists as an idealized and imaginary world. The expressed desire to "turn back and go behind it" applies a distinctly physical act to this apparent freezing of time. Yet the idea that time "has not passed" turns out not to be a freezing but a natural stasis, as seen in the idea that all time exists at once, in a distinctly non-linear structure. This conception itself seems to be modeled on memory in the notion that events can occur "at the moment we think of them." He essentially eliminates the idea of the past, an act which should eliminate the basis of *Heimat*. However, this creation of a time without past, present, or future still bears the marks of the melancholy we have come to associate

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since "haunting implies places, a habitation, and always a haunted house" (*Archive Fever* p. 86).

with nostalgia and a longing for the past. This rejection of time is an enacting of the "countless separate struggles" that are "carried on over the [lost] object, in which hate and love contend with each other; the one seeks to detach the libido against the assault" (Freud 256). In having repressed and essentially lost his past, this new form of time is Austerlitz's assault on that loss. He seeks to reconcile and understand time without recognizing its progression in his everyday life.

This form of reconciliation is another facet of a quality in Austerlitz that goes beyond conventional understandings of repression. Austerlitz ultimately resists both the exterior world, the social and the temporal, and his interior world. In this way, we see Austerlitz's most drastic departure from the standard image of the flâneur. By aggressively resisting it he takes no real pleasure in the world around him. The flâneur, by contrast, uses the distance gained by consciously separating himself from the ties of the everyday social world in order to appreciate it on an aesthetic level. Benjamin describes an "authentically intoxicated phase" that occurs as a result of flânerie where "the blood is pounding in the veins of the happy flâneur […] and inwardly as well as outwardly things go on as we would imagine them to do in one of those 'mechanical pictures' [of] the nineteenth century" (Benjamin 419). This is a physical and sensory pleasure enjoyed through simultaneous connection with the interior self and a certain detachment from exterior world, ultimately enjoyed as art. Austerlitz, as we have previously seen, cannot even describe the landscape in which he wanders, let alone aesthetically appreciate it. Austerlitz's wandering is his most physical expression of any part of himself. Austerlitz's truly aimless wandering can also be understood within the context of a narrative and thus with respect to our position as readers. While the story is

told retrospectively by the original narrator, this narrator does not impart the entirety of his present knowledge to us at the beginning of the book. We have no knowledge of the events at Liverpool Station until the narrator describes Austerlitz's divulgence of them to him. Thus while recounting the experience of knowing Austerlitz, the narrator is anticipating the moment or revelation and the reader cannot share this anticipation. By allowing us to experience this wandering so directly, with as little premonition of the unintended goal as Austerlitz has, the narrator disorients us. Through this disorientation and intentional withholding of information, we are given more direct access and alignment with Austerlitz as a character. Both reader and protagonist need to go through this seemingly pointless, singularly focused, almost schizophrenic wandering in order to experience the shock of the underlying and impending revelation.

In the intentional repression of the goal by the primary storyteller and the unconscious repression of the goal by Austerlitz himself, our hero—at least in the first half of the novel—seems to also eliminate the flâneur's quality as a detective. While Benjamin notes that the flâneur is often an "unwilling detective" this status "legitimates his idleness" which gives him the appearance of indolence behind which "there is the watchfulness of an observer who does not take his eyes off a miscreant" (Benjamin 72). While he is not a detective in this first part of the text, his story is a detective story and thus the wandering with no apparent goal has a larger goal within the novel. Austerlitz's academic fetishization of train stations, and his insistence on wandering, almost automatically, to the station to which he arrived on the Kindertrasport, shows an attraction both Freudian in its draw to that which symbolizes and protects him from his trauma and detective-like in its natural draw to the most essential clue. Even though

Austerlitz spends the bulk of his life resisting these clues, his previous academic investigation of that which holds the key to his past connects him to the flâneur, for whom "[n]o matter what traces [he] may follow, every one of them will lead him to a crime" (Benjamin 72). Even though his wandering resists linear narrative and a structured intake and categorization of information, it automatically places him in the position of a detective and leads him to a space where he will be forced to make sense of the experience before him. Thus wandering as he does impacts our perception of the narrative and our perception of time. A goal is discovered and reached, yet only through resistance. If narrative progression is resisted, then time, or at least the reader's perception of time, is ultimately slowed. In addition, that resistance is based in repression and the pushing out of the past, and so linear time is simultaneously slowed and denied. Austerlitz, therefore, through wandering and allowing the reader to experience his journey almost at the same time that he does, participates in and enables while at the same time subverting narrative and temporal progress.

II. Psychoanalysis, Repressed Trauma and the Experience of Time

Thus far in this exploration we have looked to Freud almost exclusively to aid our understanding of *Heimat*. We have looked at the *Heimat*'s *unheimlich* characteristics as well as its relationship to Freud's melancholia in order to understand the nature of Austerlitz's loss. However, at this juncture, Austerlitz's unique brand of flânerie seems to slow time while functioning as central component to the progression of the narrative and thus to the revelation of trauma. If wandering can, in some potentially unintentional and certainly roundabout process, transform time and break through trauma, I must then

consider the possibility of a relationship between this kind of walking cure and the talking cure of psychoanalysis.

Freud's writings on methodology pose specific connections between psychoanalytic treatment and time and attempt to explain the treatment's relationship to time. He takes into special consideration the question that those who practice this form of treatment will, so he posits, invariably be asked by their patients at the beginning of their treatment of how long the process will take. He first describes this question as "unanswerable" and then, in a somewhat comic effort to be more specific, describes psychoanalysis as "always a matter of long periods of time, of half a year or whole years—of longer periods than the patient expects" (Freud 128, 129). Freud's intentionally elusive answers here speak to a conflict between patient and practice, one that centers on an understanding of time and its flow. Duration assumes a capacity to measure time and so heightens its linear quality. If duration is an unanswerable question that can at best be addressed with vague references to "long periods of time" and "half a year or whole years," which ultimately strike one as meaningless, then time within treatment either does not exist—at least not in any linear fashion—or can reasonably extend forever. Much like Austerlitz's walking without a goal, a trajectory without end slows time down. However, an eternal motion of linear time also focuses not on the present or past but on the future. If the goal of psychoanalysis to uncover repressed traumas and memories is being done within the space of an unending future, then the past and the future must meet in the realm of the unknowably long treatment. Time in treatment, it would then appear, is both slowed and overlapped.

Just as the alteration of time produced by Austerlitz's wandering must be situated in, and thus impacts, his narrative, so the effects of Freud's own coyness around the issue of time shape ideas of structure within the process of treatment. In that psychoanalysis centers on a form of narrative, an unpredictable and immeasurable time designated for that narrative intentionally frees any limits on its arc or shape. Freud puts an emphasis on this freedom, and while he does not refer specifically to a narrative, his language could easily be applied to storytelling. He warns physicians who want to practice psychoanalysis against working

> on a case scientifically while treatment is still proceeding—to piece together its structure, to try to foretell its further progress […] Cases which are devoted from the first to scientific purposes and are treated accordingly suffer in their outcome; while the most successful cases are those in which one proceeds, as it were, without any purpose in view, allows oneself to be taken by surprise by any new turn in them, and always meets them with an open mind, free from any presuppositions (Freud 114).

In his emphasis on the element of surprise, the inability to predict an outcome, and the injunction towards an open mind for events, one might even see this as advice for readers of thrillers and detective stories. He also in essence condones Austerlitz's unconscious method of responding to his trauma. It is exactly Austerlitz's detachment from purpose, as well as his perusal of false purposes in academic endeavors, that ultimately allows him to discover and experience the necessary shock of his traumatic past. A more structured lifestyle and an existence within the patterned, social world might have prevented Austerlitz from ever uncovering his trauma. In this sense, it seems that both sufferers of repressed trauma and the doctors who aid them in this uncovering must exist in the same spatial and temporal world.

Both psychoanalysis and Austerlitz's wandering existence, then, reject all forms of quantification. If we accept Heidegger's understanding of these quantifications as a means to make time pass, then they are also an effort of "the shortening of time" in the face of a time that "seeks to become long" (Heidegger 96). These processes of Austerlitz and the analytic treatment would then ultimately allow for a certain length in time which is most natural and enable its natural flow. However, in both Austerlitz's case and in psychoanalytic practice, enabling this flow brings back painful, repressed experiences of the past. The past comes back to the present when spatial and temporal experience is free from quantifying structures. We can assume then that free time, that is, time in some sort of natural state, is non-linear. It further appears that the cycle of traumatic repression and revelation is the most present and effective means of accessing this truer structure of time. Cathy Caruth summarizes the larger understanding of trauma in the Freudian sense as the experience of events which "assume their force precisely in their temporal delay" (Caruth 8). Trauma is thus based in an inability to experience events at the moment they happen and so it is a pathology not based directly on time but on "the *structure of its experience* or its reception" (Caruth 4, emphasis hers). Trauma is the domination of experience over time.

Because it is characterized by an "insistent return," that is, the inevitable uncovering of repression, trauma does not, in fact, erase time, but rather radically transforms its perception (Caruth 5). It is no surprise then that Austerlitz's meditations on time move closer and closer to an erasure of the concept once he has re-experienced his traumatic event and attempts to journey further into the past. In describing the moment in which he is shown the image of himself as a child dressed for a masked ball,

taken a few months before his departure on the Kindertransport when the rupture of the linear time of his life occurred, he considers the notion that we do not "understand the laws governing the return of the past" and that he feels "more and more as if time did not exist at all, only various spaces interlocking according to the rules of a higher form of stereometry, between which the living and the dead can move back and forth as they like" (*A* 185). What he poses here is a transformation of the temporal into the spatial, or rather, a replacement of the former with the latter. If repression of trauma were merely a willing ignorance of past events, it would be an experience better suited to linear temporality; if events are repressed to the point of complete and unalterable forgetting, then they are distinctly relegated to the past, as something behind us which, once experienced, has no presence or bearing on our lives. However, the events of trauma are in fact felt to be "all too accessible in their horrible truth," as seen demonstrated in Austerlitz's obsessive pursuit of this truth once those initial events return to the present (Caruth 6). Trauma creates a movement of time in free space.[6]

In the moment of traumatic revelation for Austerlitz in Liverpool Station, the spatial and temporal structures merge through his gradual awareness of the tearing down and reconstruction of the station. However, it is his exploration of the space of the ladies' waiting room that serves as the final catalyst that pushes Austerlitz into the recollection

[6] However, this fluid and uninhibited motion of time as if it were in space is not exclusive to, nor exclusively evoked by, trauma. For Austerlitz, his repressed trauma led to an instinctual severance of himself from the world around him which, as we have seen, progressively led him back to the original experience. Yet this structure of the revival of time can as well be experienced in actively and consciously chosen, and ultimately less restrictive solitude. Trauma's hallucinatory resurrections of the shocking event mirror in their structure the dreams that pleasurable reverie evoke. Gaston Bachelard speaks of a "dreaming solitude" in which "memories arrange themselves in tableaux [and] [d]écor takes precedence over drama" (*The Poetics of Reverie* p. 14)

of meeting his foster parents. In the last few sentences that lead up to the vision, he repeats the phrase and the image of the "waiting room" three times. After describing more recent memories that recur while standing in the station, he remarks that those memories

> came back to me in the disused Ladies' Waiting Room of Liverpool Street station, memories behind and within which many things much further back in the past seemed to lie, all interlocking like the labyrinthine vaults I saw in the dusty gray light, and which seemed to go on and on forever (136).

In keeping with the more spatial structure of time in trauma, we see here the gradual positioning that comes with the onset of the recollection. Memories contain more of the past "behind and within" them. Yet while the past becomes positioned in space and transformed into objects, this process also stretches out Austerlitz's perception of time. He physically sees these time-objects "interlocking like labyrinthine vaults […] which seemed to go on and on forever." There is a futility associated with the recollection that the waiting room evokes. It is a concrete space that realizes memory as objects and yet it morphs into a path towards the intangibility of infinite space and time. The repetitions of "the waiting room" in this episode set up the fluctuating nature of time between tangibility and intangibility, between something that can be measured and something immense, infinite and beyond quantification. For Austerlitz the struggle inherent in a waiting room, as a controlled space of indefinite time—or in Heidegger's terms, a space designated for this act of shortening an ever-lengthening time—will ultimately bridge the gap between present and past. The waiting room becomes a meeting point of these two notions of time within space, one that can be measured in the present and one that lengthens infinitely into the past. The third repetition of "the waiting room" then, fully enacts the complete fusion of these two notions of time in the full revival of the past in

the present. These previous experiences of the waiting room are described as possibly being "why, in the gloomy light of the waiting room, I also saw two middle-aged people dressed in the style of the thirties" (*A* 136-137). There is no acknowledgement that what he is witnessing is vision. He is not seeing something that happened from the thirties but rather two people dressed from that era, existing—for both Austerlitz and the reader—completely in the present.

Yet while there is no temporal distance between Austerlitz and what he sees in the train station, a physical distance is felt when he sees "the boy [the couple] had come to meet" (*A* 137). While he soon realizes that this boy is himself, the fact that he first goes unrecognized and is seen in the third person at all adds another dimension to the memory and its relation to the train station. Austerlitz is so distanced from his past and the self of his past that he remembers as a third person narrator might describe. He is physically distanced from himself and this memory and is able to watch it play out in front of him. Thus remembering the past is equated with observing people in the train station—an activity Austerlitz had partaken in frequently during the time before his revelation. Just as one can, like the flâneur, passively engage with one's present surroundings by simply observing, Austerlitz passively engages with his past by seeing it outside of and separate from himself. When Austerlitz does finally unify his present self with the child in his vision, it is through an object, that is, his rucksack. The text performs Austerlitz's process of self recognition through this object. He tells us that if not "for the small rucksack he was holding on his lap I don't think I would have known him." He then goes from only recognizing the rucksack to saying that he "recognized him by that rucksack of his." Through the phrase "of his," this supposed recognition is at first negated as

Austerlitz is still maintaining distance between the boy and himself. Then finally he declares "I recollected myself as a small child." Through this reflexive statement, Austerlitz can finally possess the memory as his own, finally see the child as himself and finally remember by letting the past connect with and take its place in the present instead of just watching it play out separately in front of him.

III. The Presence of Tangible Reality and Memory Technologies

In the breakdown of Austerlitz's revelatory moment, what occurs is not just a merging of one's perceptions of time and space, but an imbuement of the physical and spatial with temporal significance. While experiencing the space in this way renders time able to move more freely through it, Austerlitz's memories are also triggered through his contact with other forms of tangible reality. While the moment at Liverpool Station is one of few in which the physical aids in a successful revival of the past, the bulk of *Austerlitz* is littered with a more ambiguous and tense relationship between memory and the tangible trace. The tension that Austerlitz finds between a truth of the past and the supposedly believable world of the tangible—particularly in the case of photographs and archives—is a distinctly modern one. While memory is an internal process, modern conceptions of memory have become more based on exteriority, these are, according to Pierre Nora, the "materiality of the trace, the immediacy of the recording, the visibility of the image" which thus diminish memory's innate interiority (Nora 13). Yet Susan Stewart notes that this obsession with exterior manifestations of memory as reflective of a structure of experience that is "increasingly mediated and abstracted" (Stewart 133). This mediation and abstraction is itself based on a "nostalgic myth of contact and

presence." Stewart here emphasizes a connection between the tangible trace and nostalgia, in the "narrative of origins," of a longing for one's home, a *Heimat*, essentially (Stewart 136). Yet while the *Heimat*—or perhaps, because the *Heimat* must necessarily exist almost exclusively in the nostalgic mind, it is crucial to have this tangible trace that collapses "distance into proximity to, or approximation with, the self" (Stewart xii). However, this proximity, as all proximity sought with respect to origins and *Heimat*, will always be innately false and exaggerate the distance it seeks to bridge.

The most prolific presence of objects in the text comes in the form of photographs. Their presence in the text carries particular weight in that they do not only exist in the fictional world of the narrative but as physical objects that the reader can actually look at, touch, and have their own tangible relationship with them. Yet our relationship with the photographs is mediated through their direct or lack of direct connection to the text they are embedded in. Our understanding and feelings towards them hinge on Austerlitz's own ability to address and relate to each photo. These reactions are often based around a de-familiarization of what should evoke and render the familiar. In looking at photos of his family with Vera, his childhood nanny in Prague, he quotes her as saying that it was as if "the pictures had a memory of their own and remembered the roles that we, the survivors, and those no longer among us had played in our former lives" (*A* 182). This observation hits on two separate problems of photography. The first is a general problem of the memory aid—that *hypomnesis* addressed briefly in my first chapter—the idea that the object which has been entrusted with the power to help us remember in fact relieves us of the capacity to remember naturally and internally. Her statement goes beyond this issue, seeing the photos not just

as memory aids but as objects themselves capable of remembering things separate from what we could ever remember on our own.

In the idea that in this memory they distinguish between "survivors, and those no longer among us" and acknowledge a former life is the suggestion of the spectral in photography. This is the "return of the dead" that Roland Barthes recognizes as existing in "every photograph" (Barthes 9). In being photographed, according to Barthes, one is neither "subject nor object" but rather "a subject who feels he is becoming an object" and thus experiences "a micro-version of death" (Barthes 13). Austerlitz has himself already experienced vivid hallucinations and visions of the past returning in the present. In this moment, the photograph is a pale imitation of these hallucinations, suggesting that the past can exist in the present, be held and touched, yet through photographs the past loses its original form and is drained of its life. Austerlitz describes the sense when, looking at the photo of himself as a child dressed as "the Rose Queen's page" of having the impression, more strongly than ever before of having "no place in reality, as if I were not there at all" (*A* 185). While Barthes speaks of the process of being made into a ghost while having one's picture taken, Austerlitz experiences his own spectrality in looking at this image long after its taking. The disconnect between himself and the boy depicted does not render the subject of the photo a ghost but rather himself, as if the presence of another version of himself—touted to be true by the existence of a photograph—could, like a haunting double, rob him of his own reality.

This experience of his own spectral status that evokes an inability to reconcile the reality of what the photograph depicts with his sense of his own reality reflects certain aspects of the reader's overarching connection to the photographs as part of the text. We

take photographs to be something real and yet we read *Austerlitz* knowing that what it depicts is fictional. In addition, the text implies Austerlitz, through his carrying of a camera, as the creator of most of these images. J.J. Long cites John Zilcosky's argument that this reference to Austerlitz as photographer "neatly [integrates]" the pictures into the text (Long 149). This technique separates the device of using photos in the novel from Sebald's use of many of his own photos in other works where it serves as a device to "confuse fiction and memoir." Long opposes this argument by noting that the idea of Austerlitz as photographer is a more "profoundly disorienting technique" because the "photographs must have been taken by somebody in the 'real world'" yet are attributed to someone fictional and thus contribute to a "profound ontological confusion" in the text (Long 149-150). The photographs, according to this theory, place the reader in a liminal space on par with Austerlitz. We now are complicit in a world which bears both the marks of the real and the imagined, which goes even further in that it attempts to attribute the real to the imagined. We are uncertain, and, in this uncertainty, occupy a space outside of both real-time and narrative time.[7]

Many of these photographs which seem to correspond to the events of the text with which they are juxtaposed—and thus which we can assume are "taken" by Austerlitz himself—are of the spaces of Austerlitz's research into his own past, that is, of archives and libraries. It is not surprising that Austerlitz, having based his whole life up to the revelation of his childhood on gathering information in a structured and archival fashion would continue this method when seeking his own personal history and

[7] My use of "uncertainty" here is an intentional allusion to Tzvetan Todorov's definition of the fantastic, that is, "the duration of the uncertainty […] in relation to those of the real and the imaginary" that the reader experiences in text which simultaneously bears the marks of "reality or dream […] truth or illusion" (*The Fantastic* p. 25)

memories. Once again, we must consider Derrida's warning against the archive as *hypomnesis*, that it can "never be either memory or anamnesis as spontaneous, alive and internal experience"; the archive "takes place at the place of originary and structural breakdown of said memory" (Derrida 3). And yet, just as in photos, it is exactly this "exteriority" and "consignation", this semblance of truth in the tangible sequence of signs that Austerlitz seeks (Derrida 3). Long notes that in this fashion Austerlitz makes a movement to "replace memory with archival knowledge" thus further repressing what he seeks to uncover (Long 154). Austerlitz himself experiences the frustration and surreal quality that comes with seeking the truth in an object representation on paper. He describes a day spent in the Biblothèque Nationale in Paris where he found that he was "losing myself in the small print of the footnotes to the works I was reading, in the books I found mentioned in those notes, then in the footnotes to those books in their turn" (*A* 260). He finds in this moment a "continual regression expressed in the form of my own marginal remarks and glosses […] it struck me that the scholars, together with the whole apparatus of the library, formed an immensely complex and constantly evolving creature" (*A* 260-261). Austerlitz here seems to sense that archives and libraries, while providing tangible proofs, exist in a realm of their own, with a life of their own, and a memory of their own. They take the traces of our own stories and weave them into a separate story, just as Austerlitz attempts to weave his own story through his travels and photographs. If we accept Stewart's view that souvenirs embody nostalgia in their representation of a "story's lost point of identity with the mother and its perpetual desire for reunion" then the archive is the ultimate place of nostalgia (Stewart xii). It represents the myth and the promise of origins through a full incorporation of these souvenirs while perpetually

eluding this resolution in creating a separate narrative. It is in a way well-suited to Austerlitz's wandering nostalgia that seeks to re-create time while evading it.

The trajectory of *Austerlitz* is one that, on the surface, hinges on this moment of revelation. In the first part, we wander with Austerlitz in the ghost world he inhabits, listening to the story of his life in Wales with a combination of detachment from any significance of the events and a vague curiosity about the mysteries they pose. The revelatory moment at Liverpool Station, however, does not answer all our questions in one blow nor does it immediately trigger a whirlwind adventure story of Austerlitz's quest for his past. While the events of the novel do change drastically after Austerlitz's revelation, the tone stays remarkably consistent. In his search for traces of his family, Austerlitz continues to be a wanderer. This wandering has the image of a goal and so is not exactly on par with the seemingly completely unguided flânerie of the first half of the novel. Yet all signs of coming closer to this goal are vague and ephemeral and we see no end in sight. The traces of Austerlitz's past give the hope of connection while in fact only further disassociate him from it. The train-travel and archive lust in which he engages in the second half of the novel is rather a distorted reflection of his earlier repressive flânerie. Austerlitz suffers from a permanent disassociation from his past that is only briefly overcome in the first moments of his recognition of it. In searching for that which is already gone in the physical traces of the real, Austerlitz only continues to lengthen his separation from the past that was once locked behind his psyche.

Conclusion

In the course of my project, the unexpected yet vital connecting image between the three texts I address turned out to be the ghost. From the narrator's attempts to sustain his grief for Albertine after her death by engaging in his memories of her, to Sebastian's imagined looming presence over V.'s writing, to the haunting photographs that reflect back to Austerlitz his own spectral status, it seems that I have unintentionally arranged a series of ghost stories. Perhaps the importance of the spectral would strike one as obvious in a project attempting to deal with narratives of memory. The ghost is easily abstracted as a symbol of a past that persists. The ghost also fits into this project's corresponding topic of solitude in that it represents one who, by the force of death, has been detached from all their social and intimate bonds with no hope of forming new ones. The ghost's embodiment of these two topics in this way then refutes Proust's narrator's assertion about the relationship between memory and solitude, that is, that the presence of other people will violate the enclosed, self-reflexive space necessary to engaging with one's own memory. Rather the ghost links memory to solitude through the suggestion of a necessary alienation that occurs to one who is obsessed with seeking, retaining, or reconciling past events. In this way I have often looked at the ghost in this project as a symbol of the liminal space between the past and the present. A ghost is a figure of the past who is perceived in the present, yet cannot rest totally in either realm. Through this liminality the spectral presence evokes the self-effacing longing for the other and the past. The ghostly figure is both the tempting semblance of the past one seeks to revive and engage with while bearing the marks that prove this goal impossible to attain.

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