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Proust's Interior Venice

Although other novels have architects as heroes, Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* may be the only one whose principal character conducts research in architectural history and criticism. In the sixth published volume of Proust's work, known as *Albertine disparue*, the narrator makes his journey to Venice, where he carries notebooks "où je prendrais des notes relatives à un travail que je faisais sur Ruskin" (in which I would take notes for a work I was doing on Ruskin) (*A la recherche* 4:224). This project takes him to the baptistery of Saint Mark's Cathedral, which has a central place in Ruskin's writings on Venice. The chapter of the *Recherche* devoted to Venice represents a long-awaited moment, for the narrator's dream of visiting that city, like his passion for Gothic architecture, has been a recurring motif throughout several volumes of the novel. In *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* (vol. 2), as "le voyageur ravi dont parle Ruskin" (2:9), the enchanted traveler of whom Ruskin speaks, he makes an excursion to the renowned church of Balbec, which disappoints his high expectations, as its Gothic front faces a tramway intersection and its famous statue of the Virgin shares the sunlight with the local branch of a commercial credit bank (2:20).

When we speak of Proust's narrator in such cases, we are of course also speaking of Proust, for whom Ruskin, Venice, and Gothic architecture were always intimately related. Proust was precisely one of those enchanted travelers who carried Ruskin's works to the Gothic cathedrals of the Middle Ages. Luc Fraisse has shown how the fictional visit to the church of Bal-

bec was based on Proust's own visit to the Cathedral of Amiens after reading Ruskin's book on that monument (87). Proust first read Ruskin in 1899, and the following year made two visits to Venice, taking a copy of *St. Mark's Rest* to the baptistery of the cathedral (Tadié 1:623–39; Proust, *Lettres* 187).¹ Figure 9 shows him on the terrace of the Albergo Europa overlooking the Grand Canal.² Like his narrator, Proust also wrote on Ruskin, publishing four articles on the English writer in 1900. These are collected as the preface to Proust's translation (1904) of *The Bible of Amiens*. Like the narrator's journey to Venice in the *Recherche*, the chapter of *Albertine disparue* known as the "séjour à Venise" was long in gestation and has never been established in definitive form. Parts of it appeared in Proust's notebook entries beginning in 1908, and in 1919 an abbreviated version was published in the review *Feuillets d'art* (no. 4). The canonical version was published four years after the author's death in Gaston Gallimard's 1925 edition of *Albertine disparue* as volume 7 of the *Recherche*. However, the discovery of Proust's manuscript of *Albertine disparue* in 1986 gave rise to a number of new versions of the volume, notably those by Nathalie Mauriac Dyer and Etienne Wolf (1987), Jean-Yves Tadié (1989), Anne Chevalier (1990), and Jean Milly (1992), with the result that the Venice episode in particular has been reworked and even completely transformed so many times as to endanger its coherence. This dense and multilayered textual history, then, has its counterpart in the form and even the thematic register of the Venice chapter, which begins under the sign of what Proust calls "transposition." The fragmentary and elusive nature of Proust's text will have bearing on my architectural reading of this chapter.

Although I have begun by evoking Proust's Ruskinism, there is a fundamental difference between Ruskin's conception of architecture and that of Proust. For Ruskin, as we have seen, architecture is profoundly ethical and even political, in the sense of being the concrete practice of an ideal of justice; it expresses the "large principles of right" with which God has endowed the human spirit (*Library Edition* 8:20). When Ruskin writes on Venice, he finds in that part of it that survives from the Middle Ages an architecture erected in opposition to the sensuality and idolatry of the Roman Empire. The two great influences on Venetian architecture have been the Lombard or northern, giving "hardihood and system" to the enervated body of Roman Christianity, and the Arab, whose work was to "punish idolatry, and to proclaim the spirituality of worship" (9:38). Venice was historically the point of contact between these two opposing movements, and before the Renaissance its vigor and purity derived from



Fig. 9. Proust in Venice. (From Cattai, *Proust: Documents iconographiques*, plate 53.)

the manner in which these two forms of spiritual energy were held in perfect suspension. The declared purpose of *The Stones of Venice* is to recover that vanished spirit, to which the finest Venetian architecture nonetheless bears mute testimony.

Architecture comes to have a different meaning for Proust. In contrast to the ethical and social preoccupations of Ruskin's Victorianism, architecture for Proust figures as a metaphor for his own subjectivity; his devotion to the study of architecture runs parallel to and indeed intersects with what he calls the search for lost time, which is in effect the search for the ground of his own being. The architecture of Venice, like the music of Vinteuil and the paintings of Elstir, functions as what Gilles Deleuze calls, in *Proust et les signes*, the artistic sign of a concealed essence. Proust's nar-

rator is dedicated to the reading of such signs because they give the promise of unveiling the hidden essence of his own life. My own purpose, however, is less ambitious than to follow the process of that unveiling. In a previous chapter I made the point that in Proust the structures of desire are rendered in terms of architectural space. Here I wish to extend that argument in order to show that the various architectural forms that constitute the city of Venice serve as metaphorical projections of the narrator's successive states of mind, and that the discontinuity of those forms, however splendid, matches the fragmented subjectivity that it is the object of the *Recherche* to unify.

Proust's predilection for architecture is related to the fact that he is above all a writer of interior spaces, from the little garden shed that, in *Du côté de chez Swann*, the narrator uses as a reading room, to the library of the hotel de Guermantes where, in *Le temps retrouvé*, he experiences his final revelation. Among all the arts, what is specific about architecture is that it alone combines outward form with literal interiority: the architectural work can be entered and inhabited, and as such it provides the perfect metaphor for the interiority of the subject. This is what happens in the Venice chapter of *Albertine disparue*: the narrator's subjectivity is given the architectural form inspired by various scenes of the city itself. In reading the architectural signs of Venice he is in effect reading the signs of his own "interior Venice."

Parfois au crépuscule en rentrant à l'hôtel je sentais que l'Albertine d'autrefois, invisible à moi-même, était pourtant fermée au fond de moi comme aux "plombs" d'une Venise intérieure, dont parfois un incident faisait glisser le couvercle durci jusqu'à me donner une ouverture sur ce passé. (4:219)³

Sometimes, returning to the hotel, I felt that the Albertine of old, invisible to myself, was nonetheless locked up deep inside me as if in the piombi of an interior Venice,⁴ where sometimes an incident shifted the lid enough to give me an opening onto that past.

One notices here a double interiority: first there is a Venice "interior" to the narrator, and then there is an interior to that: the prison of the *piombi* concealed within this inner city, as in a set of Chinese boxes. This spatial system suggesting successively deeper levels of interiority is presented within a temporal order of successively rarer incidents of unveiling: "sometimes" returning to the hotel the narrator senses an invisible Albertine en-

closed within him, and of those times, only “sometimes” does he catch a glimpse of the past that she represents. In this way Venice figures as a metaphor not just for the narrator’s subjectivity but also for his notion of involuntary memory, in which an occasional incident allows him access to an otherwise forgotten past. However, the objective form given to the narrator’s subjectivity can be deceptive, because the interior Venice of the narrator’s mind is no more unified than the city itself. Just as the waterways of the city fragment it into dozens of little islands, so the mind of the narrator is fragmented into a series of disjointed, alternating movements of enchantment and disillusion, grief and forgetfulness, desire and boredom.

The “séjour à Venise” occurs as the last in a series of episodes devoted to what the narrator calls the progressive stages of his indifference to the death of his lover, Albertine—what a more conventional writer would call the gradual subsidence of his grief. Plans of earlier visits to Venice had been put off, first by the narrator’s fear that his lover would come between him and the pleasures of the city and then, after her death, by the disappointment that she wouldn’t. When he finally arrives, it is as if he had come through his grief to the other side, and to Venice as the world transformed, or rather “transposed.”

[J]’y goûtais des impressions analogues à celles que j’avais si souvent ressenties autrefois à Combray, mais transposées selon un mode entièrement différent et plus riche. (4:202)

My impressions were analogous to those I had so often felt at Combray, but transposed in a way that made them entirely different and more rich.

The effect on the narrator’s sensibility is to superimpose the structure of Venice onto the humble village of his childhood in a systematic substitution of natural and architectural forms. From his hotel room, the first thing he sees through his open shutters in the morning is, instead of the slate roof of the familiar village church, the golden angel atop the bell tower of Saint Mark’s. Descending to what should be the street, he finds it transformed into water the color of sapphire. In place of the village houses lining the main street of Combray, here palaces of porphyry and jasper line the splendid blue of the water. On the Piazza San Marco, the shadow that in Combray would be cast on the pavement by a shop awning is here cast by the sculpted relief of a Renaissance facade on sun-drenched tiles, in shadows shaped like little blue flowers. At Venice, just as at Combray, window shades are drawn against the sun. But here they hang among the qua-

trefoils and foliations of Gothic windows. In Combray, the narrator's Aunt Léonie would look out from her room through a window asymmetrically positioned, mounted on a wooden support disproportionately high. Such things, with their "humble particularity," the narrator says, become objects of affection by allowing us to recognize where we live from afar, and they are later remembered as proof that for a time we dwelled in that house. Such things have their equivalents in Venice, but here the function of marking this individuality is performed not by simple things but by, for example, the half-Arab ogive window of a facade that happens to be reproduced everywhere in museums and books as one of the masterpieces of medieval domestic architecture (4:203–4). In Combray, the narrator would enter the house on a warm summer's day to find the cool air of a little staircase with narrow wooden steps, but in Venice the air is cooled by the sea and the hotel staircase is formed of marble surfaces splashed with sea-green sunlight.

This series of comparisons is presented as if the forms of Combray were being transformed into the splendor of Venice, but what actually takes place in the narrator's mind is that the forms of Venice recover the memory of Combray, so that the two places are combined in a single vision joining past and present: Combray transformed into the splendor of Venice, Venice made familiar as Combray, and thus already an intimate part of the narrator's being. This double vision is the condition for what the narrator calls the promise of joy. When he sees the angel of Saint Mark's shining in the morning sun, it bears "une promesse de joie plus certaine que celle qu'il put être jadis chargé d'annoncer aux hommes de bonne volonté" (a promise of joy more certain than that which he could once have been given to announce to men of goodwill) (4:202).⁵ In other words, the angel, who in the Gospel of Luke (2:14) announced the birth of Christ held out a promise of joy less certain than the one of secular, aesthetic joy now given to the narrator who awakens to the splendors of Venice. The promise made by Luke's angel is of a coming reconciliation of heaven and earth as foreseen in the final book of the Bible. The opening section of Proust's chapter thus implicitly includes, in addition to the remembered Combray and the present Venice, a third city: the New Jerusalem to come. In the narrator's mind, to the cities of memory and immediate perception is thus added the archetypal city of visionary imagination: the stones of Proust's Venice are those of the holy city in Revelation 21 and 22. Venice's sapphire-colored canals are a watery version of the foundations of the New Jerusalem where "the first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire"

(Rev. 21:19, King James version). The porphyry and jasper palaces lining the Grand Canal appear to have been designed by the architect of the holy city, for “the wall of it was pure jasper, and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass” (Rev. 21:18). The central avenue of Venice is a glassy canal, that of the New Jerusalem, “a pure river of the water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb” (Rev. 22.1). Just as Combray has been transposed from the past, so the holy city is transposed from the future, anticipated and rendered superfluous, as it were, by a Venice that not only promises but delivers joy in the present. The opening vision of Venice is therefore a kind of dream of spiritual plenitude embodied in architectural form: the heavenly city made into the earth and water of this world, joining past and future in the present and reconciling the narrator’s interior Venice with the real one at hand.

It is characteristic of Proust that this moment of consummation does not last, and that the perfect equilibrium of the narrator’s aesthetic stance suddenly gives way to the less exalted pursuit of sexual pleasure. When the narrator goes out on afternoons alone, that is, without his mother, he explores the remote and obscure parts of the city in the pursuit of working-class girls from the factories where they make matches, beads, glass, and lace. The account of and setting for this ritual exploration are constructed in terms of what we might call, in contrast to the architecture of consummate splendor that opens the chapter, the architecture of desire. Where the narrator’s position, in the opening passage, was mainly a static appreciation of the splendor arrayed before him, here he is always in motion, actively penetrating the back streets of a city whose hidden pleasures are more erotic than aesthetic, and where the *recherche du temps perdu* is reduced to the simpler but nonetheless exciting “recherche des Vénitiennes” (4:206). In terms of narrative form, the episode imitates the oriental tale, with its secret passageways, its mysterious genie or “magical guide,” its sudden materializations of exotic scenes, and its erotic overtones. As the narrator’s gondola advances ever farther into the *quartiers populaires*, the little canals seem, as if guided by the hand of a genie, to open a path between the houses with their Moorish windows. He comes by “surprise” on boys dangling their legs over the walls of the canal; a little Greek temple appears suddenly “like a surprise in a box we have just opened” (4:206).

J’avais l’impression, qu’augmentait encore mon désir, de ne pas être dehors, mais d’entrer de plus en plus au fond de quelque chose de secret, car à chaque fois je trouvais quelque chose de nouveau qui venait se

placer de l'un ou de l'autre coté de moi, petit monument ou *campo* imprévu, gardant l'air étonné des belles choses qu'on voit pour la première fois et dont on ne comprend pas encore bien la destination et l'utilité. (4:207)

I had the impression, increased by my desire, of not being outdoors but of entering farther and farther into something secret, because at every turn something new appeared on one hand or the other, an unexpected little building or open square, with the surprised look of beautiful things one sees for the first time and of which one doesn't yet know their purpose or use.

What I am calling the architecture of desire applies both to the narrative based on this dynamic of unveiling and to the design of the architectural space—"petit monument ou *campo* imprévu" that is, its mise-en-scène. The libertine tales of Casanova and Vivant Denon take place in just such settings of narrow passages, secret gardens, and hidden pavilions. In Proust the movement into and through this kind of space, moreover, is rendered in a language ripe with images of natural abundance and abandon, as if the object of desire were not so much the Venetian working girls as the space that they inhabit. Garden trellises directly overhang the water, as in a flooded city, and a little farther, again, as if to overdetermine the image of abundance itself, gardens divided by the canal let their leaves and their "astounded" fruit overflow into the water. The peristyle of the little Greek temple is so covered with fallen leaves and fruit that it resembles a loading dock for market produce. In this landscape, the interpenetration of natural and architectural elements sometimes extends to the material of architectural construction itself. The garden that negligently drags its leaves into the water adjoins a house with an edge of sandstone so rough that it seems freshly cut. The rough stone, neglected gardens, and leaf-littered squares have a sensual appeal for the narrator, which corresponds to his taste for the working girls who live in this part of the city. He knows, however, that the *recherche des Vénitiennes* cannot assist him in the more ambitious *recherche* that gives his book its title, because of what he calls the "individuality of desire" (4:207): the girls he desires now cannot be the ones he desired years ago, because the latter by now have aged to the point where they no longer would attract him. Just as, in space, he is drawn into the city by the pleasure of constantly new surprises, in time his sexual desire can only be satisfied by a never-ending succession of girls, because "what I loved was youth," and "the youth of those I used to know no longer existed but in my burning memory" (4:207–8). In these erotic excursions into the interior of

Venice, the narrator does not return by the way he came, as if knowing that no new pleasures are to be found by simply retracing the same path. Instead, he disembarks from the gondola and returns to his hotel on foot. If, as I claim they do, these excursions provide a spatial and architectural metaphor for the narrator's desire, what this itinerary suggests is that his desire cannot return to its former object simply by retracing its ground; rather, desire is pursued as if through a city in which the streets are all one way, and the way back is never the way one came, nor is it easily to be found.

In another of these excursions, this time by night, the narrator compares himself to a character in the *Thousand and One Nights*, so much has he the impression of finding himself transported as if by magic into an enchanted city. In this case, however, the analogy between lost space and lost time is made into a kind of fable. Wandering through the maze of little *calli*, the narrator suddenly comes upon a vast and sumptuous *campo* surrounded by charming palaces and illuminated by the pale moonlight. It is the kind of place that, in another city, would be placed at the convergence of several streets. But here it seems deliberately concealed by the lack of any direct approach to it.

Ici, [cet ensemble architectural] semblait exprès caché dans un entrecroisement de ruelles, comme ces palais des contes orientaux où on mène la nuit un personnage qui ramené chez lui avant le jour, ne doit pas pouvoir retrouver la demeure magique où il finit par croire qu'il n'est allé qu'en rêve. (4:229–30)

Here [this architectural ensemble] seemed deliberately hidden in a network of little streets, like those palaces in oriental tales where a person is led by night and then taken home before morning, so that he won't remember how to return to the magical place, which he finally believes he visited only in a dream.

This is exactly what happens to the narrator. On the following day he goes out again in search of the beautiful square, only to get hopelessly lost in the labyrinth of little *calli*, then finds himself, against his will, back where he started at the Grand Canal. He never again finds the beautiful square, which remains forever exiled from him in its solitude and concealment. Like the person in the oriental tale, he begins to ask himself whether he saw it only in a dream. Indeed the very geography of Venice contributes to the city's dreamlike quality: its islands are themselves crisscrossed by innu-

merable little *calli*, like grooves in a piece of crystal. According to this metaphor, the open square in the midst of the little streets appears as a “distension” of the crystal, an anomalous interior space within the otherwise solid geometrical design. Later, after the narrator has given up trying to retrace his steps to the square, he wonders if in his sleep there has not perhaps occurred in his mind a similar crystallization in which a strange inner distension “presented to the moonlight’s prolonged meditation a vast square bounded by romantic palaces” (4:230). This impressionistic conceit should not obscure either the elegance or lucidity of Proust’s fable, which presents the urban space of Venice as a metaphor for memory. The search for the lost square is an allegory of voluntary memory—the conscious attempt to retrieve a privileged moment of the past. It cannot succeed, however systematically one searches through the labyrinth, because one is invariably sent back to the present—the Grand Canal of consciousness—before one can really recapture the past as an object of subjective experience. It is this failure that leads the narrator to doubt the objective reality of those privileged moments and spaces, and this doubt extends to the continuity of his subjective selfhood; it produces the tension, expressed in the very form of the text, between the fragmentation of experience and the constant effort to recuperate those fragments into an architectural ensemble of crystallized meaning.

Proust’s search for the lost Venetian square as an allegory of an irretrievable past belongs to an ancient tradition of using architectural loci in the art of memory. In *De Oratore* (II), Cicero tells the story of the poet Simonides who, on the day of a feast, happened to leave the banquet hall just before the roof collapsed, killing all who had remained inside and maiming their bodies beyond recognition. But Simonides was able to identify the dead by recalling the order in which the guests had been seated at the table. Cicero tells this gruesome story in order to teach the lesson that memory is aided when its objects can be organized in architectural space (Carruthers 22). In Proust’s story the object of memory is itself an architectural space—*la belle place exilée* (4:230)—contained within the larger architectural space of the city. When the narrator is unable to find it again he confirms Cicero’s principle, albeit in a negative way, since the irretrievability of his object is the direct consequence of his failure to organize in his mind the urban space surrounding it. Proust’s metaphor of the mind, however, is not simply of a faculty more or less well adapted to concrete reality; rather it is of a space of more or less solid parts. In the opening pages of *Albertine disparue* the narrator discovers that, although he had thought

that he no longer loved Albertine, as soon as she leaves he discovers that he does still love her. Our intelligence, he concludes, no matter how great, cannot perceive the elements of its own composition until “de l'état volatil où ils subsistent la plupart du temps, un phénomène capable de les isoler . . . leur a fait subir un commencement de solidification” (from the volatile state in which they exist most of the time, a phenomenon capable of isolating them has made them begin to solidify) (4:4). The mind, then, can only know that part of itself that has become solid and concrete, like the built environment. The rest, as volatile and formless as the abyssal origin of space in what Plato calls *chora*,⁶ is that part of ourselves that remains beyond our reach: “Je m'étais trompé en croyant voir clair dans mon coeur” (I had been mistaken in believing that I knew my own heart) (4:4).

The Venetian story is an exotic retelling of another episode concerning architectural memory in the first volume of Proust's work. There, a long passage is devoted to a description of the church of Combray, which is important not for any architectural distinction but for the integral role it plays in the narrator's remembered childhood: for its homely familiarity, its uniqueness, its intimate association with the life and objects of the village. The narrator's relation to it is not one of aesthetic appreciation but rather one of profound and permanent attachment. He has indeed engraved in his memory the sight of other churches seen in later life and other places. But no matter how artfully his memory made these “engravings” (1:65), they could not restore what he lost long ago, the feeling of believing in a thing as being without any equivalent:

aucune d'elles ne tient sous sa dépendance toute une partie profonde de ma vie, comme fait le souvenir de ces aspects du clocher de Combray dans les rues qui sont derrière l'église. (1:65)

none of them holds such sway over a profound part of my life as does the memory of those views of the bell tower of Combray from the streets behind the church.

The narrator has lost the capacity to believe in the immanence of things and their intimate relation to his own being. Nonetheless, the church of Combray would be an exception to the rule except that it remains removed from him in time and space. So it is that even now, while walking in some strange city, he will sometimes be stopped by the sight of some belfry or steeple in which his memory struggles to find some point of resemblance to “la figure chère et disparue” (the cherished, lost figure) (4:66) of the

church of Combray. On such occasions a passerby might be struck by the figure of the narrator himself standing there motionless, trying to remember, “sentant au fond de moi des terres reconquises sur l’oubli qui s’assèchent et se rebâtissent” (feeling deep within me the lands recaptured from forgetfulness, drained, and rebuilt) (4:66), until, recalled to the present, he once again seeks his way through the streets. The architectural figures here are layered one within the other—*mises en abyme*, as Peter Collier puts it in another context. In this passage from the section known as “Combray,” the most immediate architectural context for the structure of layering is the provincial city or the unfamiliar quarter of Paris where the narrator, having stopped to ask the way, is given directions according to some bell tower as a landmark. Within that setting there is the work of memory, here figured as an *aménagement de territoire* in which the ground must be reclaimed from the swamps of forgetfulness and reconstructed with solid habitations. Only within this figure does there stand the elusive church of Combray, just beyond the reach of conscious memory but still felt to be there deep within the heart, “c’est dans mon coeur.” (1:66) What distinguishes the “belle place exilée” of Venice from the “chère et disparue” church of Combray is the newness and strangeness of the former, as well as its literally eccentric situation with respect to the narrator’s being. If the church of Combray remains somewhere deep within the narrator, the lost square of Venice stands beyond the outer limits of his existence; neither is to be wholly retrieved.

In comparing the two episodes of the *recherche des Vénitienes* and the search for the *belle place exilée*, I have considered together two parts of the *séjour à Venise* that are in fact separated by other episodes written in different registers: there is a dinner conversation between M de Norpois and Mme de Villeparisis, two satirically drawn characters who, now superannuated, married to each other, and visiting Venice, have survived from the first volume of the *Recherche*; there is an episode in which the narrator receives a telegram the text of which has been garbled in transmission but which he reads as from the mourned Albertine, with the startling news that she still lives and wants to marry him. He finds, however, that having grown indifferent to Albertine dead, he is no longer interested in Albertine alive. I will return to this scene later. The one I wish to turn to now is that in which the narrator visits the baptistery of Saint Mark’s Cathedral with his mother. It is a scene we should expect to be given special importance in the narrative: the visit to Venice has been anticipated for more than a thousand pages, given the narrator’s obsession with Ruskin, and for Ruskin the

baptistry of Saint Mark's figures as the geographical, architectural, and spiritual center of Venice, and thus of the world.

Ruskin writes on the baptistry most notably on two occasions. The first is book II, chapter 4, of *The Stones of Venice*, where the contrast between the original splendor of the baptistry and its decayed condition in 1853 drives home the recurring motif of Venice's progressive degradation after the fourteenth century, when the baptistry was built. Ruskin's initial attention is directed not at the font itself, nor at the celebrated mosaics depicting the life of John the Baptist, but at a tomb within the baptistry chamber, a tomb so easily overlooked that one could mistake it for a narrow stone couch set beside the window. It is the Gothic tomb of Andrea Dandolo (1306–54), the last doge to be buried in Saint Mark's and a figure who serves as a frame for Ruskin's treatment of the baptistry. On Dandolo's tomb sits a figure of the Virgin bordered by "flowers and soft leaves, growing rich and deep, as if in a field in summer" (10:86). Ruskin's evocation of Dandolo's death at the age of forty-six sets the mood for his contemplation of the walls of the baptistry, "worn and shattered, and darkly stained with age," but beautiful in their ruin (10:86). Their translucent masses are "darkened into fields of rich brown, like the colour of seaweed when the sun strikes it through deep sea" (10:86). Ruskin perceives only dimly, in the gloom, the mosaic of the baptism of Christ, but raising his eyes to the roof vaulting, he sees two circles of heavenly angels and, in an architectural metaphor for poetic language, is reminded of Milton's "single massy line": "Thrones, Dominations, Princedom, Virtues, Powers" (Ruskin 10:86; Milton, *Paradise Lost* V:601). Returning to the wall mosaics and their scenes from the life of John the Baptist, Ruskin sees "the streams of the Jordan running down between their cloven rocks" and interprets the story put before him in terms of the choice set before all men "to be baptized with fire or to be cast therein" (10:87). "Venice has made her choice," Ruskin writes sententiously, meaning that the city has chosen perdition (10:88). He adds that Dandolo would have taught the city another choice but that "he and his counsels have long been forgotten by her, and the dust lies upon his lips" (10:88). However, the moral lesson Ruskin draws from the story of John the Baptist is more cultural and aesthetic in nature than it is religious. The Gothic sepulcher of the last doge to be buried there, with its carved stone border of soft leaves and summer flowers, marks for Ruskin a final expression of medieval purity and natural plenitude, after which the decline of Venice can be read in the corrupted architecture of the Renaissance.

Ruskin's other piece on the baptistery is a twenty-page section of *St. Mark's Rest* (1884), the history of Venice he wrote late in life. The title of this section, "Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus," reflects both the author's return to Christian faith and the place of the baptistery at the very center of his own spiritual and aesthetic universe. However, in place of the moralizing tone of *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin adopts a humbler approach to his subject; he gives a simple descriptive account of the mosaics, as if trusting to their own eloquence. Two moments in this account are of particular relevance to Proust's work. The first is Ruskin's description of the mosaic in the lunette over the altarpiece, which is devoted to the Crucifixion. Saint Mark himself is shown with a book (not his Gospel) open to the words "In illo tempore Maria mater" (in that hour Mary his mother), whereas Saint John the Evangelist is shown receiving the charge to take care of the mother of Christ: "When Jesus, therefore, saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour the disciple took her unto his own home" (John 19:26–27; Ruskin 24:311). In terms of the story told by the mosaics ranged along the walls of the baptistery, the most significant is that depicting the baptism of Christ. Ruskin tells us how Christ stands in the midst of the River Jordan, with John's hand on his head. Christ blesses the fishes, while angels watch from the riverbank. The mosaic is inscribed with the words of Matthew, who relates that when Jesus was baptized he went up out of the water into heaven, where the Spirit of God lighted upon him like a dove (Matt. 3:16–17). This scene is followed by Ruskin's descriptions of the remaining mosaics, in a chapter that ends with the citation, in Latin, of Revelation 4:8: "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come" (24:334).

This brief account of Ruskin's writing on the baptistery of Saint Mark's provides a context for the manner in which Proust commemorates the same architectural space in the *séjour à Venise*. Having announced that he is taking notes for some work he is doing on Ruskin, the narrator, accompanied by his mother, goes to the baptistery to contemplate the same mosaics that his master has described in so much detail. Although much of Ruskin's language and imagery survives in Proust's account of the same space, in Proust's hands the meaning of the baptistery is transformed into something very different from what it is in Ruskin. The single concrete incident of the scene in Proust is related as follows.

Voyant que j'avais à rester *longtemps* devant les mosaïques qui représentent le baptême du Christ, ma mère, sentant la fraîcheur glacée qui tombait dans le baptistère, me jetait un châle sur les épaules. (4:225, my emphasis)

Seeing that I would have to remain for a long time before the mosaics representing the baptism of Christ, my mother, feeling the icy fresh air of the baptistery, threw a shawl over my shoulders.

In the context of Proust's own work, this takes us back to the very beginning of the *Recherche*, where the narrator tells how *longtemps* (for a long time) as a child he would go to bed early, and that starting in the late afternoon, *longtemps* before going to bed, his bedroom became the fixed object of his anxiety because it was there that he had to separate from his mother for the night (1:3, 9).

While resonant of the entire history of the narrator's anxious relation with his mother, the language of the baptistery scene is also constructed on two other textual layers: that of the mosaics themselves, which tell a story in images; and that of Ruskin's writing on these same images. Proust's narrator sees the mosaics through the mediation of Ruskin's text; he is in a sense baptized in their reading, but like Jesus his understanding of the ritual will be of another order than that of his baptizer. Following Ruskin's evocation of Christ's mother at the Crucifixion, Proust draws the theme of the mother in mourning. Having recently lost her own mother, the narrator's mother stands beside him "drapée dans son deuil avec [une] ferveur respectueuse et enthousiaste" (draped in her mourning with respectful and fervent devotion) (4:225). Like Ruskin, Proust's narrator is drawn to the aquamarine mosaics of the River Jordan, but unlike his English guide, he juxtaposes them in his imagination, as they are in fact juxtaposed in space, with the sapphire waters of Venice where a gondola waits for him just at the edge of the piazza. Proust shares with Ruskin not only the sense that the baptistery stands at the center of things as a sacred space; he also shares, both with Ruskin and with the inscription on the baptistery wall, the notion of a single, significant moment in time. To the Latin words in the mosaic translated by Ruskin as "in that hour," Proust's narrator responds:

Une heure est venue pour moi où quand je me rappelle ce baptistère, devant les flots du Jourdain où saint Jean immerge le Christ tandis que la gondole nous attendait devant la Piazzetta il ne m'est pas indifférent que dans cette fraîche pénombre, à côté de moi il y avait une femme

drapée dans son deuil . . . et que cette femme aux joues rouges, aux yeux tristes, dans ses voiles noires, et que rien ne pourra jamais faire sortir pour moi de ce sanctuaire doucement éclairé de Saint-Marc où je suis sûr de la trouver parce qu'elle y a sa place réservée et immuable comme une mosaïque, ce soit ma mère. (4:225)

An hour has come for me when, remembering this baptistery before the waves of the Jordan River where Saint John submerges the Christ while the gondola waited for us by the Piazza, it is not indifferent to me that in those cool shadows, there stood beside me a woman draped in mourning . . . and that this woman with her red cheeks, her sad eyes, in her black veils, whom for me nothing could ever remove from that softly lighted sanctuary of Saint Mark's, where I am certain to find her because her place is reserved for her there, immovable like a mosaic—this woman is my mother.

This is an exceptional moment within the history of the dynamics of memory to which the entire *Recherche* is devoted, as it seems to escape the limitations of both the voluntary and involuntary forms of memory. For Proust, the limits of voluntary memory in general are those of the intellect: the idea that it conveys of the past contains no material trace of the past itself. By contrast, the limits of involuntary memory are those of time, place, and circumstance: the past, in all its presence, is returned to us only fleetingly in the chance encounter with some material object at moments we cannot predict. However, the kind of memory enshrined in the baptistery of Saint Mark's seems to belong to another order: the narrator claims to be able to return at will to the remembered figure of his mother in that sanctuary, where she remains fully present to him, immovable in that place forever reserved for her in the sacred architecture of his own mind. He can still feel her throw the shawl over his shoulders in the chilly air of the baptistery. In this manner the *Évangile* of Saint Mark's acquires a very different meaning in Proust from what it means in Ruskin. Whereas Ruskin draws an ironic contrast between the holiness of the baptistery and the historical decline of Venice, for Proust the importance of the baptistery lies wholly in its function of permanently consecrating his mother's love in his memory, creating a place of inner pilgrimage to which he can always return. With respect to the architecture of the narrator's memory, the space of the baptistery is both metaphorical, as a figure for the inner sanctuary within memory, and metonymic, as the actual setting to which memory returns, "where I am certain to find her."⁷

In the labyrinth of Proust's interior Venice, the abiding presence of the

mother in the baptistery has a different function from the imagined imprisonment of Albertine in his own unconscious, which he has compared to the *piombi* of the Ducal Palace. The two spaces of the baptistery and the *piombi*, though separated by only a few meters' distance, represent symbolic antitheses in the architecture of Venice: the city's most sacred place versus its most abject. In the narrator's mind, the figure of Albertine locked up deep inside him functions as a special case of involuntary memory, just as the figure of his mother in the baptistery constitutes an exceptional case of voluntary memory. For him the image of Albertine has been repressed in the "prison" of his unconscious as a defense against the suffering caused by the flight of the real Albertine. When incidents occur that happen to open the doors of that prison, the involuntary memory of Albertine functions not as the momentary recovery of a longed-for past but as a return of the repressed, like the terrifying emergence of Madeline Usher, in Poe's story, from her tomb deep within the walls of her ancestral home. In this way, when a phrase used in a letter from the narrator's stockbroker recalls one used by Albertine, it unlocks the door of the inner dungeon of the narrator's self in which Albertine's image is still imprisoned. But the prison door closes again after a moment, because the narrator's suffering has now been supplanted by indifference. This newfound indifference is again tested when the narrator receives a garbled telegram that he mistakenly reads as from Albertine, not dead after all, and now proposing marriage. When he feels no joy in this "discovery" that she is still alive, his indifference is indeed confirmed, but only with the realization of another loss, that of his former self, the young man who had loved Albertine: "J'aurais été incapable de ressusciter Albertine parce que je l'étais de me ressusciter moi-même, de ressusciter mon moi d'alors" (I would not have been able to revive Albertine because I was incapable of reviving myself, of reviving my past self) (4:221). This past self is not mourned, precisely because "je suis un autre" (4:221), the narrator has become someone else, but the consciousness that the passing of time creates a succession of distinct selves makes all the more significant a memory that seems to transcend this condition of existential fragmentation in time.

When the narrator remembers the figure of his mother in the baptistery, he does so in language that recovers a significant moment of the past in a fulfilled moment of the present, "une heure est venue pour moi," language that recalls the sacred text inscribed on the baptistery wall: *in illo tempore*, a familiar biblical phrase. This joining of the past and present, sacred and profane, is figured in Proust's text by the location of the remem-

bered moment in architectural space: “devant les flots du Jourdan . . . tandis que la gondole nous attendait devant la Piazzetta” (before the waves of the Jordan . . . while the gondola waited for us by the Piazza) (4:225). The sacred space of the baptistery, “ce sanctuaire doucement éclairé” (this softly lighted sanctuary) (4:225), has been reconsecrated in the inner architecture of the narrator’s memory, where the image of his mother will always be found, just as those of Christ and his mother are always to be found in the real baptistery. What at first seems an understatement on the narrator’s part, when he says that the ability to remember his mother in this way “is not indifferent to me,” acquires greater rhetorical definition when we consider the importance that the word *indifference* has acquired by this point in *Albertine disparue*. For a writer who allows no nuance of feeling to escape his attention, *indifferent* is not an indifferent word. It is first used by Albertine herself in the letter she leaves on her escape, predicting, in order to ease the pain of his loss, that the narrator will become by degrees indifferent to her. It is then used, in the ways already shown, to define the narrator’s response to the various incidents in Venice that remind him of Albertine, where his indifference to her loss is attributed to the fact that he is no longer the same person he once was. When, therefore, in the present moment of narration an hour has come for him when to remember the moment of his mother’s solicitude in the baptistery is *not* indifferent, the negation carries all the force of the difference between a sanctuary and a prison cell.

What we have reviewed so far in this chapter can be summed up as a series of alternating moments in the relation between Venice and the narrator’s mind, in which the status of the city as a concrete metaphor for subjective interiority moves in and out of focus, just as, according to Proust, the elements of the mind itself alternate between volatile and more solid states. On one hand, Venice crystallizes in the form of a holy city or an inner sanctuary, producing a corresponding clarity in the narrator’s mind. On the other hand, and just as often, the space of the city dissolves like an oriental palace seen in a dream, just as the objects of memory are themselves subject to dissolution in the oblivion of forgetfulness. For Proust’s narrator even the moment in the baptistery, which seemed to fix in the architecture of Venice an enduring sign of his mother’s love, must give way to the law of this rhythm of alternating unity and fragmentation, both in his mind’s relation to Venice and within the elements of his mind itself. If the opening of the *séjour à Venise* presented the city in terms of visionary promise, its conclusion is one of catastrophic disillusionment. On learning

that the Baronne Putbus is due to arrive with her servants in Venice, the narrator's carnal desire is reawakened, and he suddenly wishes to extend his stay. His mother refuses this change in plans and sets off for the train station alone, while the narrator, vexed but determined to stay on, orders a drink on the terrace of the hotel facing the Grand Canal to watch the sun set. However, with his mother's departure the narrator is faced with the prospect of an "irrevocable solitude" so near that it seems already upon him. His intense loneliness causes the familiar things around him suddenly to become strange: "[T]he city before me had ceased to be Venice" (4:231). This sensation of defamiliarization extends to the very architecture of the city, which now appears stripped of meaning and beauty and reduced to a mass of inert matter.

Les palais m'apparaissaient réduits à leurs simples parties et quantités de marbre pareil à tout autre, et l'eau comme une combinaison d'hydrogène et d'azote,⁸ éternelle, aveugle, antérieure et extérieure à Venise, ignorante des doges et de Turner. (4:231)

The palaces appeared reduced to simple parts and quantities of marble like any other, and the water a combination of hydrogen and nitrogen, never ending, blind, anterior and exterior to Venice, ignorant of the doges and of Turner.

Even the Rialto now appears mediocre, not just as an architecturally inferior bridge but as false as the kind of bad actor who in spite of his blond wig and black attire fails to convince the audience that he is Hamlet. Like the palaces and the canal, the Rialto, too, has been stripped of the idea that created its particularity and has dissolved into crude materiality. As the built environment is uncannily emptied of everything that "Venice" has come to mean, the narrator feels a like estrangement from himself, a self now reduced to a mere beating heart and a set of nerves fixed stupidly by the sound of "O sole mio," the banal Neapolitan song being sung by a musician stationed in a boat just in front of the hotel. It goes without saying that the narrator's interior Venice has likewise dissolved, for in this state of hebetude he is now as devoid of interiority as Venice is devoid of charm. Finally, aware that his mother must already be boarding the train, he is seized by an instinctive impulse to run after her and arrives to join her at the last possible moment before the train pulls out of the station.

Extraordinary as this scene is, it has not received the critical attention it deserves. Not only does it escape mention in the important works on

Proust cited elsewhere in this chapter; it does not even figure in works devoted specifically to Proust's Venice.⁹ An exception to this rule of critical indifference is the American critic J. Hillis Miller, who reads the passage as an allegory for the force of habit, observing that it is only thanks to habit that the narrator sees Venice as the great historical city celebrated in the lives of the doges, in Turner's paintings, and in Ruskin's writings. It is therefore the return of habit from some place of hidden reserve that breaks the spell, reanimates the narrator, and allows him to rejoin his mother at the station: "Our sense of self and the solidity of its circumambient world, this episode implies, are sustained by a force that comes not from within the self but from beyond it, from something that is wholly other to that self, though special to that self alone" (Miller 240). This interpretation largely conforms to what Proust's narrator himself has to say of the incident, and of the "defensive force of inveterate habit" that rescues him from his paralysis. The moment is similar to the famous one in part 1 of *Le côté de Guermantes*, where the narrator, returning unexpectedly from a journey, enters the apartment of his grandmother and, finding her reading Mme de Sévigné before she catches sight of him, sees her not with his habitual affection and tenderness but as if she were a strange face in a photograph: "[J]'aperçus sur le canapé, sous la lampe, rouge, lourde et vulgaire, malade, rêvassant, promenant au-dessus d'un livre des yeux un peu fous, une vieille femme accablée que je ne connaissais pas" (I saw on the sofa, under the lamp, red, heavy and vulgar, sick, daydreaming, poring over a book with eyes a bit mad, a helpless old woman whom I did not recognize) (2:440). "Tout regard habituel est une nécromancie" (the habitual gaze is a kind of communication with the dead) (4:439), he remarks; it beholds not what is there but what is already past. Samuel Beckett writes of this scene that when the force of habit fails, we experience a kind of suffering that can, however, ultimately prove benign; by delivering us from boredom and by opening a window onto reality, this suffering is the first condition of every artistic experience (*Proust* 39).

Beckett's comment suggests another way of reading the conclusion to the Venice episode, one that sees in it an instance of what Benjamin calls allegory. Let us recall that for Benjamin the figure of allegory, as opposed to the romantic symbol, affirms the fundamental difference between the object world and its figurative meaning in language. In allegory the former is implicitly acknowledged as dead, as a ruin onto which the allegorical figure is superimposed in such a way as to register the destruction of historical meaning (*Origin* 166). For Benjamin, allegory is the figure that rig-

rously refuses the symbolic recompense for loss, that resists the illusory reconciliation of the temporal with the eternal, and of ruin with its sublimation in language. This refusal of sublimation is essentially what takes place at the end of the *séjour à Venise*. The personality, the allure, and the name of Venice suddenly appear to Proust's narrator as obvious fictions; he no longer has the courage to transform its stones in his imagination to conform to these fictions. In Benjamin's terms, these fictions have taken the form of allegory in that they are coldly recognized as fictions, thereby allowing the inanimate objecthood of Venice to be revealed in all its reality. Proust's narrator has had the experience of the cleared-eyed observer in Stevens's poem "The Snow Man" who, "nothing himself, beholds / Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is." But unlike Stevens's observer, he has not been cold long enough to regard the landscape without being distressed by the realization of absence, so that the song "O sole mio" seems to bear witness to his own lament for the disappearance of the Venice he has known. However, by acknowledging the banality of the song and its "vulgar romance," he also acknowledges implicitly the banality of his own lament. What he describes as a sense of Venice's "unreality" (*cette Venise . . . irréelle*) is in fact the effect of his newfound if painful perception of the Real, made possible by the derealization of the historical "Venice" (4:232). For Beckett, as we have seen, the suffering caused by the failure of habitual perception may be terrifying, but it is a necessary condition for the experience of art. When, at the conclusion of Proust's passage, the narrator flies to meet his mother at the train station, he is rescued by habit only to take refuge from the reality of experience in the comforting maternal presence. Still a student of Ruskin, he is not yet ready to assume the calling of the artist. This moment will not come until *Le temps retrouvé*, where the stones of Venice are visited one last time.

Before considering the place of Venice in the final volume of Proust's work, one further remark has to be made concerning the episode in which the narrator gazes on the suddenly banal Rialto to the sentimental tune of "O sole mio." To the extent that this episode poses the question of the relation between meaning in language and the radical materiality of being, it goes to the very heart of the project of the *Recherche*. This is Proust's version of the problem posed by Joyce, for whom even the most instinctive forms of meaning, like fatherhood and religious faith, are mystical estates "founded . . . upon the void" (*Ulysses* 9:842). Indeed, Proust's narrator seems torn between two unsatisfying alternatives: either to gaze helplessly on the void or to take refuge from it in the habitual forms of received ideas.

Elsewhere in Proust, this question of the relation between meaning and being is formulated in terms of the recovery of the past in the form of memory. In such cases the moment of the past, in its radical but absent materiality, resists conscious formulation as memory in the present, just as in the *séjour à Venise* the stones of Venice, now just stones, resist assimilation to their historical and aesthetic value. In *Le temps retrouvé*, Proust's solution to this problem will take the form of an idea of art closely related to Benjamin's concept of allegory.

In one of the famous passages of Proust's final volume, the narrator goes to a *matinée* at the home of the Princesse de Guermantes. In the courtyard of her *hôtel particulier*, he happens to set his foot on a paving stone set slightly lower in the ground than the one next to it. The sensation of the uneven paving stones occasions a sudden feeling of pure joy, which he is unable to account for until he remembers that, years before, he felt precisely the same sensation while treading the uneven tiles of the baptistery of Saint Mark's, so that the present moment brings back the feelings of happiness he felt at that moment in that place.¹⁰ But the narrator is not content merely to register this sensation, because it seems to point the way toward a solution to the otherwise irretrievable difference between past and present, absence and presence, matter and memory, and even being and meaning. He wants to know how the "image" of the past, so fortuitously if only momentarily recovered, gives him a joy "pareille à une certitude" (akin to a certainty) and in itself enough to make him indifferent to death (4:446). Having entered the Hôtel de Guermantes, the narrator is shown into a small library to await the intermission of a musical performance before entering the reception room. It is in the space and time afforded by this deferral that he is able to unfold the implications of the sensory experience that has given him so much joy. The process by which he does so is crucial not just to the discovery of his vocation as an artist, but also to his understanding of the relation between art and the reality of material existence. Briefly, these reflections occur in the following order.

The narrator realizes, as a primary revelation, that when he experiences the same material sensation that he has experienced at some past moment, the past encroaches on the present in such a way as to make him hesitate between the two; neither precisely here nor there, now nor then, he is momentarily released from the limits of time. These "resurrections" (4:453) of the past, however, are quickly extinguished by the reassertion of the conscious present; the fragments of his existence abstracted from time are fugitive. The only way to rescue them from oblivion is to interpret them as

signs, that is, to convert them into ideas or thoughts capable of being rendered in language: “Or, ce moyen qui me paraissait le seul, qu’était-ce autre chose que faire une oeuvre d’art?” (The only means of bringing this about was to make a work of art) (4:457). Such a work would translate sense impressions into language, thus making them permanent as well as universal. However, where Proust departs from the symbolist tradition is in his manner of registering what is lost in this translation. The difference lies in his formulation of the relation between the work of art and the object-world of sense impressions that it seeks to revive. For a poet like Baudelaire, the work, through its symbolic form and content, brings about an ideal and lasting resurrection of impressions otherwise lost to memory. His poem “La chevelure” is itself a means of entry into the “shadowy pavilion” of his mistress’s head of blue-black hair, which in turn grants him access to the azure of an eternal heaven. The poem, its symbols, and the object-world they evoke form an ideal unity in which the past is made durably present, so that the poet drinks the wine of memory in long drafts: “Où je hume à longs traits le vin du souvenir.” Proust’s narrator remarks with a certain envy that poems such as this one represent a deliberate search for the analogies that will evoke the object of the poet’s longing, be it the azure of an immense round heaven or a port filled with masts and flaming light (4:498–99). For the symbolist, then, the conscious choice of analogies between past and present, here and there, leads to their ideal union in the form of the poem. For Proust, by contrast, past and present are unified only in a momentary sensation, the passing of which the artwork can only commemorate in a language conscious of its radical difference from the sensation itself. Even more than this, however, Proust implicitly rejects the romantic and symbolist doctrine of the spiritual immanence of the object-world, finding instead that like the stones of Venice at the end of his stay there, “la matière est indifférente et . . . tout peut y être mis par la pensée” (matter itself is indifferent, and . . . anything can be put into it by thought) (4:489). In Proust, the lifelessness of the object-world has its temporal counterpart in the lostness of the past, which can only be “regained” in an allegorical sense, that is, one that acknowledges the essential irrevocability of the past as the condition of its representation in the work of art. This is because the work of art can only come about by means of a translation or “transposition” of the past into another language. By the same logic, Combray can only be “transposed” into the ideal form of Venice when it has been definitively relegated to the past, as a time and place to which the narrator can never return.

Given the explicit and implicit connections between the *séjour à Venise* and the theories of *Le temps retrouvé*, it is remarkable how much the latter are formulated in architectural metaphors, so that the search for lost time even at this late and relatively contemplative stage is conducted through images of a constructed spatial environment. Let us recall that these meditations take place in the library of the Prince de Guermantes, which serves as the improvised waiting room for the narrator before he is to confront the death's-head figures in the famous "bal des têtes," where his old acquaintances appear as grotesque and wizened parodies of the persons he has known in the past. The library itself, of course, represents the past in another form, that of literature, so that the narrator's reflections on the book he is to write take place literally in the privileged space of the book, what some would call the intertextual field in which his own work is destined to intervene. A kind of interlude in this space is granted him before he returns to the scene of life itself, cruelly marked as suffering the ravages of time. The library, however, is not merely the space of tranquil reflection; it is also the place of mourning for the narrator's past life. When he takes down from the shelf a volume of George Sand's *François le Champi*, one of his favorite books as a child, he finds himself close to tears. He compares the feeling to that of a young man in a mortuary chamber who is about to see the remains of his late father, a man who has served his country honorably, being lowered into the grave. Within this imagined scene, a band suddenly strikes up its music outside. At first perceiving a mockery of his grief, the young man turns in outrage toward the window, only to realize that it is the music of a regiment gathered to honor his father's memory. But what does this anecdotal metaphor have to do with the narrator's sensations on finding a familiar book in the library? He explains that when he takes down the book in a spirit of tender emotion, he suddenly feels the presence of a menacing stranger, just as the solitary meditations of the young man in the mortuary are interrupted by a noise in the street. But for the narrator this stranger turns out to be his childhood self, which the book has called forth as its only rightful reader, thus estranging the aged narrator from his former self, while causing him to mourn that self as well; the childhood self, being dead, will never again respond to the book's call. Adorno remarks that for Proust there are no human beings in themselves beyond the world of images into which they are transposed, that "the individual is an abstraction, . . . [and] its being-for-itself has as little reality as its mere being-for-us" (*Notes* 2:177). The ultimate truth, however, lies precisely in those images, which (we might add to Adorno's insight) have the

same relation to the self as allegory to its object, that is, one that constitutes the mythical and absent nature of the thing signified.

In this sustained reflection on the relation between literature and life, Proust passes from the metaphor of the library as mortuary to that of the book as cemetery. The narrator acknowledges that in the book he intends to write his love for this or that person would be so disengaged from its original object that a variety of readers could apply the same terms to persons they themselves have loved, thus profaning the narrator's own memories. But the writing itself already constitutes a profanation. In the projected book, not just Albertine or the narrator's grandmother would be reduced to literary formulas; he would also appropriate a look or a word from a host of other people whom he no longer remembers as individuals: "[U]n livre est en grand cimetière où sur la plupart des tombes on ne peut plus lire les noms effacés" (A book is a great cemetery where on most of the tombstones the names can no longer be read) (4:482). The architectural metaphor of the cemetery is not chosen by chance. As sequences of monumental forms, both book and cemetery are also more or less readable texts whose elements are arranged in rows, each has its syntax and its system of manifest signifiers and buried signifieds, and both serve the essential function of commemoration: in both cases, the inscription refers to something or someone that no longer is. However, Proust reminds us that, like the cemetery, the book is a sign of consolation as well as one of suffering. Where the suffering of life walls us in (*là où la vie emmure*), the intelligence of art pierces through to the outside; it ranges free of the impasses, the no-exit situations that limit the possibilities of life itself (4:484). However, if thought and imagination exercise freedom from confinement, as the means of artistic creation they also have their own space in which to work. This space is the "atelier . . . à l'intérieur de nous-même,"¹¹ the inner studio where the models of both happiness and suffering pose for the mind of the artist, inciting it to creative action. In their essential artistic functions for Proust's work, the architectural explorations of Combray, Balbec, and Venice ultimately come down to this little workshop of the spirit, where the sittings of the models, particularly those of pain, force us to enter into closer contact with ourselves, and to discover the matter, however dispersed, of which we are made.