

Pre-workshop comment

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My own angle on the field

A few points on my own interest in memory, which is somewhat at the edges of my research focus (on gender, psychoanalysis & the body in literature and other cultural objects/figures). In the French confessional *récit*, there is the question of how narrative both captures and creates what is remembered and, more centrally for my focus, how the act of reading (intended or unintended) intervenes on and partakes in the manipulation of fictional remembrance: the authorial choice between framed retrospection or the diary form is the difference, for the reader, between catching the narrator out in the long or short term, in local lies or reconstructive self-formation. In Gide, systems of hydraulic desire (modelled as is Freud's 'economic theory' on the fluid dynamics of the fantasised male body) appear across a range of texts as three coexistent versions of imagined genealogy: pederasty, pedagogy and narrative. My most recent book, *Consensuality* (2009) begins from the sense of touch and the work of Didier Anzieu – psychoanalyst author of *Le Moi-peau* [*The Skin-ego*] – and covers a whole range of textual and cultural objects. Most relevant for this workshop is probably the last chapter, on 'Loss' (following one on 'Love'), in which I argue that, contrary to the metaphor of digestion that is used in most writing about mourning, we may discover more if we use the images of the imaginary friend, the phantom limb, Capgras or Cotard's syndromes or the replacement child. Anzieu wrote: 'I became a psychoanalyst to care for my mother [...] in myself and other people. To care, in other people, for this threatening and threatened mother'. The key word here is 'in': the mother as both container and contained, in both the self and others, and carrying both threat and pity, encapsulates the way memory and loss is not so much an object to be digested as a second skin to be worn.

In addition to the material described above, I have been involved in teaching for the IGRS MA on Cultural Memory on the question of hysterics as carriers of memory. This brings together my theoretical interests in psychoanalysis, the body and feminism. It is argued nowadays that hysteria has been replaced by other symptomatologies and named conditions but, curiously, this was already being argued by Sándor Ferenczi in 1931; and Elaine Showalter's millennial assertion (*Hystories*, 1997) that hysteria has moved sideways into ME, gulf-war syndrome, alien abduction etc is also nothing new. I believe that the bad memories of societies are still (for example) carried on the bodies of their daughters and, increasingly but not more importantly, their sons. My comments below refer to the perspectives of both these paragraphs.

a) Truth of memory: fact and fiction

Ways in which we either tell lies or enjoy catching other people out in lies are supremely available in fictions – not only textual ones, of course. They work a bit differently in non-fiction: Philippe Lejeune has shown that the reader's pleasure in a text that claims to be autobiography is to catch out the parts that are fictitious, while the pleasure in reading a text that purports to be fiction (witness broadcasts on books and reading that we hear every day: 'is the narrator based on you?', asks the interviewer) is to find the bits that are 'taken from real life'. Similarly, psychoanalysis is all about the principle that everything is an utterance and no utterance is innocent: words, symptoms or gestures give away what are then audible and visible secrets. A slip is a joke whose hearer refuses to accept it as authored. But a text cannot be uncanny and a fictional world cannot be an atheistic regime: authorship is a project of controlling worlds which finally has to be relinquished to readers no less encumbered by desire. Within all this, hysterics 'suffer mainly from reminiscences' (Freud & Breuer, *Studies on Hysteria*, 1893), which means that they can neither forget nor remember. The question is

whether hysteria is in control of its lies about remembering. Can a hysteric also be an author? (Can we ever tell a joke in a foreign language?)

b) Regimes of memory: spaces, texts, objects, bodies

c) Trauma and memory

On space, I follow Anzieu in saying that we have talked too long about contents and the time has come to talk about containers. The other three items here (texts, objects and bodies) are also containers with double-facing skins like the *moi-peau* and Freud's 'mystic writing-pad'. A text is often a place where the lost beloved is interred – sometimes, as in the *Manon Lescaut* (Prévost, 1731), *Carmen* (Mérimée, 1845) or some of Hugo's poems in *Les Contemplations* (1856), for motives of revenge and resumed control – and that is another kind of skin. I would suggest, combining questions b) and c), that the body remembers what it has lost in the form (viewed from one side) of the phantom limb, which still hurts you even though or precisely because it is gone, and (viewed from the other) of Capgras syndrome, in which the bereaved or betrayed person finds themselves unrecognised and thus unrecognisable. A last example from literature: Rilke's Eurydice, told by Hermes 'He has turned round', says 'Who?'. The next lines read:

Fern aber, dunkel vor dem klaren Ausgang
stand irgend jemand, dessen Angesicht
nicht zu erkennen war.

[But far off, dark before the bright exit
stood someone or other, whose countenance
could not be recognised].

The politics and ethics of memory

Though they are much more on the 'digestive' side of the psychoanalytic theory of mourning than the images I have proposed above, Abraham and Torok (*L'Écorce et le noyau* [*The Shell and the Kernel*], 1978) provide a useful theory of how things-forgotten/unspoken as well as things remembered/uttered are carried between generations as 'family crypts'. I'd like, again, to move the imagery back to the outside and suggest that each generation *bears* the thoughts of the last and next, both in the sense of carrying them to birth and in the sense of wearing them on their bodies. Again the maternal role is both inside and outside and both threatened and threatening; the ethics of care in the sense of either Anzieu's cautious or Levinas's biblical injunction to be responsible for the other is that garment of remembrance.

In the 'private sphere', the ways in which [not] forgetting and [not] forgiving relate to each other are fascinating. Whatever metaphors we favour, the mourning process must be one of clearing away the excessive remembrance of what is lost, and there are specific spatial ways in which the only way to do this is to 'leave the place where the other is', simply refusing to be in touch (literally) or haunted (less so). Is there any parallel to this in the case of groups or nations?

Position paper

How fictions remember, how readers forget

I decided to take an angle that goes, for the topic of this Workshop, 'back to basics': to look at three texts, by (alphabetically) Proust, Rilke and Woolf, and all published in the first quarter of the 20c, at the time when psychoanalysis – with which all of them strikingly intersect – was in its richest period. These texts are (chronologically): Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge* (1910) [The notebooks of MLB], Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* (1912) [Swann's Way] and Woolf's *To the Lighthouse* (1927). I'll take them in turn and pick out from each some key quotations [my own translations] to comment on. I'm going to take these texts in reverse chronological order.

Woolf

'No, she thought, putting together some of the pictures he had cut out – a refrigerator, a mowing machine, a gentleman in evening dress – children never forget. For this reason, it was so important what one said and what one did, and it was a relief when they went to bed. For now, she need not think about anybody. She could be herself, by herself. And that was what now she felt the need of – to think; well, not even to think. To be silent; to be alone' (60). The idea that children are (to take Borges' term for the burden of total memory) both 'memorious' and unforgiving is what makes the mother relieved to be able to switch off her beam of light and find a darkness where no attention – even to herself – is required. Memory, then, is the burden not only of those (all of us) who set up stores in infancy of largely angry memories but also of those who take responsibility for nursing them in others. Being the lighthouse, or maternal centre, of the fiction, Mrs Ramsay has no need, it seems, of a focused beam on her since she surrounds herself, instead, with the cares of a group who will depend on her: children, guests, the formation of islands supported by inner quiet & darkness.

This text is of course, a work of mourning; it focuses for the reader the scandal of loss in a quite remarkable way. The most shocking moment, in the middle section of the book, represents Mrs Ramsay's death by a syntactically jagged paragraph set in square brackets: '[Mr Ramsay stumbling along a passage stretched his arms out one dark morning, but, Mrs Ramsay having died rather suddenly the night before, he stretched his arms out. They remained empty.]' (120). What this does is to require the reader to share the act of mourning – that is, to learn, by remembering something that was never their memory, how [eventually] to forget it.

Proust

Most people in memory studies have come across the famous scene of the *madeleine* dipped in *tisane* (based on a 'real-life' event with tea & a slice of toast). So I won't repeat it here. The unjustified pleasure provoked by this taste must be explored (very patiently) until it (very suddenly) yields up its metaphorical counterpart: a *madeleine* eaten habitually in childhood and mysteriously bringing with it a fully-coloured memory in the form of narrative. This is involuntary memory, the only kind free of the strains of intelligence & closer to the body and the arbitrariness of the banal object: 'notre passé [...] est caché [...] en quelque objet matériel (en la sensation que nous donnerait cet objet matériel) que nous ne soupçonnons pas. Cet objet, il dépend du hasard que nous le rencontrions avant de mourir, ou que nous ne le rencontrions pas' (44). [our past is hidden in a material object (in the sensation that object would give us) that we have no idea of. It is pure chance whether we will encounter that object before we die or not].

And compare this line, the last word Swann has on his painful and lengthy love affair with Odette: 'Dire que j'ai gâché des années de ma vie, que j'ai voulu mourir, que j'ai eu mon plus grand amour, pour une femme qui ne me plaisait pas, qui n'était pas mon genre!' (375) [To think that I wasted years of my life, that I wanted to die, that I had my greatest love, for a woman I didn't even fancy, who was not my type!].

There are two important points here. First that the only way in to memory (and thus creative writing) is through the bodily encounter with an object that must be, in order to conserve memory, a thing you never seek out, that you don't 'fancy'. This is not simply the refusal of intellect, it is the refusal of everything we accumulate consciously which, necessarily, hides the memorious material of the unconscious (throned in & accessible through the body). In many ways, for all that this is an aesthetic theory – the point is not to remember but to write – it works directly counter to the aesthetic impulse towards beauty, pleasure and coherence.

And secondly: what the reader has to do (again) is accept that the particular cake that does it for Proust's protagonist will not do it for me; that I have to go on with both the fictional involuntary memories – which to some extent will become mine by being spaced out across the experience of reading this enormous book – and whatever might possibly turn up of my own. A novel is only (Proust says) an 'optical instrument' for discovering [or not discovering] yourself.

Rilke

Rilke's protagonist is having something akin to a nervous breakdown, alone in Paris with very little money. People keep coming up to him in the street as if they recognised in him another piece of human detritus ('Fortgeworfener'). He takes refuge in remembering, in parallel to a phantom-like house-wall standing exposed in Paris, houses recalled from his childhood in Denmark or, in the face of a horror of death intuited here and now, a recollection of his grandfather's monumental & drawn-out death long ago. These appear in the ever more coherent shape of narratives. 'Ich habe etwas getan gegen die Furcht. Ich habe die ganze Nacht gesessen und geschrieben, und jetzt bin ich so gut müde wie nach einem weiten Weg über die Felder von Ulsgaard [...] Hätte man doch wenigstens seine Erinnerungen. Aber wer hat die? Wäre die Kindheit da, sie ist wie vergraben' (19) [I have done something against my fear. I've sat up all night and written, and now I feel as healthily tired as after a long walk through the fields at Ulsgaard [...] If only one had one's memories, at least; but who has? If only one's childhood were there; it seems buried.]

A few pages later, he gets the idea of how to unearth it: accept the forgetting, start writing and that will be recollection; again, the process relies on the body. 'Denn die Erinnerungen selbst *sind* es noch nicht. Erst wenn sie Blut werden in uns, Blick und Gebärde, namenlos und nicht mehr zu unterscheiden von uns selbst, erst dann kann es geschehen, daß in einer sehr seltenen Stunde das erste Wort eines Verses aufsteht in ihrer Mitte und aus ihnen ausgeht' (22) [For memories themselves are not the point. It is only when they have turned into blood inside us, into glance and gesture, nameless and no longer distinguishable from ourselves, that it can suddenly happen, in a very rare hour, that the first word of a poem arises in their midst and walks forth from among them].

For the writer-protagonist, once again, memories can't be evoked at will but are accessible through suffering, creativity – and the ability to forget (a sort of digestive process). For the reader: for all the complexity of Proust's vast work, this book is much more intricate; like Orpheus, Malte falls into pieces (recollections, things seen, sensations, motifs) that are scattered across the pages like a constellation which the reading process has to gather back – and by the end, he has disappeared entirely behind the inverted narrative of the not-yet-loved prodigal son. Again, then, reading is the acquisition of someone else's ['false'] memories that can only function through letting them go.

To conclude: The reading process in these three texts consists of the acquisition of a set of new attachments and identifications in the form of the lost and hazardous memory of a fictional other – in each case a writer-protagonist whom we know to be 'shadowed' by the author. The encounter with the memory of another – historical or fictional – works by a provocation of vicarious desires that places us both inside and adjacent to that other figure.

How is reading prosthetic to writing? What is that adjacent position, in relation to memory?

- Do we stand in the place of the dead mother (there is one in each of these texts) whose failure to be good enough in a number of ways – often by simple absence – is the instigation in most confessional fiction of the creative act of reburying her and releasing him?
- Or do we stand for the psychoanalyst (parthenogenetic only in the case of Freud, or maybe in Proust where the cake and *tisane* are brought by a servant), who 'brings it forth' by sitting in silence?
- Or is our need as readers to supply the links by remembering Marcel's napkins in Venice or remembering the *disjecta membra* of Malte's part-objects the only memory act that takes place in fiction?