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READING, DREAMING, WRITING IN PROUST AND CIXOUS

"Et pourtant tous les événements de cette vie suraiguë ont l'air d'être taillés dans l'hyperrêve [And yet all the events of this hyped-up life seem to be cut from the hyperdream]."[1]

Hélène Cixous's writing, creative and critical alike, focuses on the question, itself, of writing. In her quasi-fictional or semi-autobiographical writing in particular, she often refers to writing (and reading) in a very literal sense, including scores of references, both by name and through deep intertext, to literary, philosophical, and psychoanalytic writers. But most striking is perhaps her attention to the *experience* of reading and writing, which goes far beyond turning pages or putting pen to paper. A key convergence of these concerns is Marcel Proust, in whose work reading and writing has a similarly complex place.

Throughout Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*, books are very often the site of aesthetic education, whether they are the character Bergotte's books, classics of literature like the *Thousand and One Nights*, or the more surprising *François le champi*, whose inclusion is striking because it highlights the importance of the particular *scene* of reading in the formation of what we might call a personal canon, regardless of, or even counter to, a more objective assessment of the book's content or value. Alongside these many discrete books, however, is what we might call the Book: a hidden, obscure, and essentially virtual set of discrete signs that each one of us is tasked with reading, a reading that takes place across the course of a life. In *Le Temps retrouvé*, Proust writes: "Quant au livre intérieur de signes inconnus (de signes en relief, semblait-il, que mon attention, explorant mon inconscient, allait chercher, heurtait, contournait, comme un plongeur qui sonde), pour la lecture desquels personne ne pouvait m'aider d'aucune règle, cette lecture consistait en un acte de création où nul ne peut nous suppléer ni même collaborer avec nous [As for the inner book of unknown symbols (symbols carved in relief they might have been, which my attention, as it explored my unconscious, groped for and stumbled against and followed the contours of, like a diver exploring the ocean-bed), if I tried

to read them no one could help me with any rules, for to read them was an act of creation in which no one can do our work for us or even collaborate with us]."[2] As it is evoked here, the Book can only be read by being written, and can only be written by first being unlocked through an indirect, mysterious process of discovery in which the intellect, as it often is in Proust, is powerless to help us. This paradoxical form of reading—a reading disconnected from the intellect, a reading that is also a writing—entails also that the process of reading is at least as important as what is being read.

Cixous begins *Philippines* by writing: "Chacun de nous a un livre secret. C'est un livre chéri. Il n'est pas beau. Pas grand. Pas si bien écrit. On s'en fiche [Every one of us has a secret book. It is a cherished book. It is not beautiful. Not great. Not so well written. We don't care]".[3] The point, which resonates between Proust and Cixous, is that such a book—distinct from, but also related to the Book—does not necessarily respect our usual standards for what is worthy of appreciation; this is why, and how, "we don't care." Instead, they speak to us in a more direct, personal way, and yet remain secret due, at least in part, to the fact that their value for us is not immediately legible to others. But perhaps—and this is where these secret books relate back to the Book—something about these books is illegible even to ourselves.

Proust's characterization of his hero's conscious attention as a diver navigating the dark depths activates certain key echoes of the psychoanalytic discourse around the unconscious. It is not possible, in encountering the inner book, to exercise our normal readerly work of interpretation on it—but what this even means to begin with, and how we may be unable to straightforwardly read such a Book, is what interests me here. In this sense, the book gives way—theoretically, but also literally—to dreaming. In a recent essay on the book and the library vis-à-vis Proust, Virginie Greene writes that "Falling asleep is like falling into the book you were reading as a preparation to sleep."[4] It is not only a question of the place of books in our lives as reading material, but also as our nighttime dreaming material. At times, it is difficult to navigate between reading and dreaming. Michael Silverblatt, in an email conversation shared with me by Chris Via, wrote: "If I fall asleep while reading I will dream I'm still reading the book. Therefore when I wake up I have to go back around 20 pages to be sure I know what's on the page and am not intermeshing the book with my dreams."

The Book, for Cixous, if it is to be written and read, must first be *dreamed*. And indeed, she writes that "Proust aurait pu lire le livre qui me fait pleurer. Moi-même je ne le lis jamais : je le rêve. Je le revis [Proust might have read the book which makes me weep. I myself never read it: I dream it. I live it again]."[5] François-Nicolas Vozel, in an article dealing with Cixous, Proust, and Freud, makes the connection that dreaming, writing, and reading all "[allow] one to retreat into the depths of the self."[6] *Philippines* is mainly concerned with the idea of dreaming as a kind of writing and reading, and to dream here is first and foremost to delve into a fundamentally creative dimension of experience that disallows us any mastery or foresight, and even any ability to orient ourselves. It is to renew, repeat, or even continue

accessing an experience of the book. But it is not only that, and does not only look like that. Dreaming goes beyond representation, and so must literature, to a certain extent. Nor is it concerned with a raw improvisatory state that we might normally associate with dreaming; this is not, in other words, automatic writing or surrealism. It may be fair to say that, with its close connections to dreaming, this book engages the experience of dreaming *intransitively*, rather than as a process leading to a final product, not unlike the way that Roland Barthes concerned himself with writing as a *state* in his late lecture courses.[7] Just as Barthes' aim was not necessarily to actually write a novel—in the sense that the novel remained a desideratum, and his final lectures explored the *state* of desiring to write rather than novelistic techniques—the dreaming of the book is a process that resists decoding and reduction to corresponding nodes, whether this means biographical details, "dream-like" etymological wordplay, or some other process of unfolding that depends on an analogous relationship to external facts or events. On the side of the reader, the dreamed book will therefore not necessarily appear dream-like in any predetermined way, but only through each separate reader's (and reading) engagement with it. The "signes inconnus" referred to by Proust will retain something of their opacity.

In this article, I will argue that Cixous takes up Proust's idea of the Book and, through her engagement with dreams, develops it in a new direction. Vozel succinctly glosses *Philippines*, writing that it "pursues Proust's vision of reading as an initiation into 'la vie de l'esprit,' as the beginning of an inner journey of self-discovery and self-creation, which is, in fact, a journey toward foreignness that departs from the conscious self and ventures into a wider realm of experience."[8] If reading (and even not-reading, as in Cixous's statement above) is implicated in a self-discovery that leads us far away from what we think we know, then writing, as an activity related both to reading and to dreams, is doubly complex insofar as it mobilizes a creative impulse that might lead us away from sense itself, into nonsense or at least toward a difficult reading experience.

Exploring this paradox will require exploring the related moments of reading, not-reading, non-sense, and dreaming without view of a second moment, keeping any possible resolution or decoding in abeyance. Relative to psychoanalysis, as Freud suggested in more than one place, artists in general and literary writers in particular are ahead of ordinary people and psychoanalytic researchers alike because they grapple with psychological questions that have not yet been researched.[9] Proust and Cixous are interested in examining the phenomenon of dreaming in a way that does not necessarily seek to stop meaning where it would be traced to origins, thereby retaining and communicating something of its force *as a dream*. I will begin by turning to one of the best-known sections of the *Recherche*, "Les Intermittences du coeur", which includes a strange and compelling dream passage. My aim here will not exactly be to interpret this dream, but rather to examine the narrator's exploration of the dream logic upon waking and consider how it may speak more broadly to how we, literally, *read* dreams in literature. Following this, I will

turn to a passage from Cixous's *Revirements: dans l'antarctique du coeur* to argue that Cixous responds, by her very prose and through her complex interweaving of dreams and narrative, to Proust's engagement with dreams, and to the relationship between dreams and literature more broadly.

Writing the Dream in Proust

The famous "Les Intermittences du coeur" section of the *Recherche* is considered by many to be Proust's finest moment as a writer, with Samuel Beckett suggesting that it "is perhaps the greatest passage that Proust ever wrote."[10] It is also well known that Proust at one time was considering this section's title as a title for his entire novel. In general, interpreters of the *Recherche* have pointed time and again to this passage and its astute evocation and theorization of mourning, by way of a peculiar kind of involuntary memory. The dream contained within this section, however, bears further exploration. According to Angela Moorjani, this section "links writing to the reading of a cryptic text inscribed within", and she proposes a "cryptanalysis" of the passage.[11] She substantiates a reading of the strangest portion of the dream sequence, tracing connections between Proust's text and certain oblique semi-biographical details from his life. However, as I will argue here, a different kind of attention can be paid to the dream, especially the hero's bizarre speech within it and his attention to that speech upon waking, allowing certain questions regarding the relationship between reading, writing, and dreaming to resonate more fully.

The key event contained in this passage begins in earnest with the following fragment: "Bouleversement de toute ma personne [A convulsion of my entire being]."[12] The hero bends down to remove his boots, and is suddenly, inexplicably in the presence of his dead grandmother once again, in the very same moment as he is taken by the bodily, involuntary realization of her death, as if for the first time. This "bouleversement", particularly in the context of what is to follow, brings to mind Deleuze's explication of thought in the Proustian context. Deleuze writes that "truth is never the product of a prior disposition but the result of a violence in thought. The explicit and conventional significations are never profound; the only profound meaning is the one that is enveloped, implicated in an external sign."[13] Keeping in mind the chance nature of the hero's access to truth, what I want to develop here is the latter idea, that profound meaning (as well as experience) occurs in an encounter with a complex sign that can only be apprehended and read in its own particular context, perhaps even only in the moment out of which it emerges.

As is often the case for Proust's hero, a realization about the external world, and about interpersonal relationships, is mediated before all else through the self and inner experience. As this is a case of involuntary memory, multiple selves are in question, united once more through time. Speaking of the convergence of these past and present selves, the text reads: "il était moi et plus que moi (le contenant qui est plus que le contenu et me l'apportait) [it was both me and more than me

(the container which is more than the content, and had brought it to me)]."[14] Involuntary memory participates in a structural process not unlike what is at work in dreams insofar as these processes entail a rearrangement that—directly, yet at the same time indirectly—forcefully imparts a kind of meaning to the subject. Directly, due to its force, as Deleuze notes; but indirectly due to the potentially illogical or contradictory nature of the path toward this insight, both chronologically (involuntary memory allows direct access in the present to the essence of the thing as it was never experienced in the past) and in a readerly way (what in dreams is the most significant thing can only definitively be experienced as significant by the dreamer, and a later narration of it will tend to fall flat). A concern for form over thematic or symptomatic criticism will become salient in what follows.

Following a series of reflections on the phenomenon by which the narrator begins to work through the mourning of his grandmother, he eventually falls asleep and begins to dream. Even the very moment of falling asleep is theorized, with a focus on the strangeness of the sleeper's dormancy and the inverted or subverted logic that will play a large role in dreaming itself:

> Mais dès que je fus arrivé à m'endormir, à cette heure, plus véridique, où mes yeux se fermèrent aux choses du dehors, le monde du sommeil (sur le seuil duquel l'intelligence et la volonté momentanément paralysées ne pouvaient plus me disputer à la cruauté de mes impressions véritables) refléta, réfracta la douloureuse synthèse de la survivance et du néant, dans la profondeur organique et devenue translucide des viscères mystérieusement éclairés.[15]
>
> But as soon as I came to fall asleep, at that more truthful hour when my eyes were closed to the things without, the world of sleep (on the threshold of which my intellect and my will, momentarily paralyzed, could no longer contend with the cruelty of my genuine impressions) reflected, refracted the painful synthesis of survival and nothingness, in the organic depths, now become translucid, of the mysteriously illuminated viscera.[16]

Recalling for a moment the above comments about Deleuze and the violence that incites thought, the paralysis of intelligence and will here seems to suggest that something else in the subject is at work in responding to this event—furthermore, something that is activated once the subject falls asleep and can no longer exercise its waking faculties. During sleep, when "l'instinct de conservation [the instinct for self-preservation]"[17] is arrested, the unconscious can be allowed to speak. With the reference to depths, which recalls any number of psychoanalytic references to the unconscious, we are introduced to the hero's particular state of dreaming, with its heightened relationship to truth, despite its blindness to the external world.

It is in what follows that this passage becomes truly fascinating, as it raises several questions about dreaming, writing, and representation, all stemming from the initial concern with mourning. James Dutton argues, following Derrida, that "the aporia of mourning … is also the aporia of writing",[18] and with reference to this particular moment in Proust I would argue that the aporia of mourning the

dead grandmother also becomes an aporia of writing *dreams*. How can a dream, which bears a logic and a force all its own (as even Proust's hero notes in what will follow), be written in a work of literature? How can the experience of mourning, a personal, unspeakable experience, be understood by others? How, in other words, can a "Léthé intérieur [internal Lethe]"[19] be made exterior and communicable? Cixous evokes "Letherature" as a literary capacity of association that stops us in our tracks, awakening us to the world around us.[20] Picking up also on *Philippines*' fascination with the idea of dreaming together, telepathically, as well as the way that Cixous troubles the notion of attempting to trace dreams (or literature) directly back to life by way of legible, objective facts or events, Vozel writes: "Tele-Lethepathy operates in literature as in dreams, blurring the boundary between both realms."[21]

Proust's hero begins to experience a narrative dream, which concerns his foiled attempts to find his grandmother. At first, the situation is straightforward enough: he experiences the simultaneous presence and absence of his grandmother—"la douloureuse synthèse de la survivance et du néant"—and subsequently has a quest-like dream about locating her. In the dream, he comes across his father, and their brief exchange ends with his father promising to give him directions to where his grandmother is staying, though he notes that the nurse may not admit him to see her. (I will pause here to note that even this very brief paraphrase of the hero's dream so far sounds typically dreamlike: a quest revolving around a significant meeting and including a specific detail that sticks in our mind.) Matthew Spellberg, examining several dreams from the *Recherche* (though, interestingly, not this one) draws from Ludwig Binswanger's suggestion that in dreams "each individual experience immediately provides its own framework, its own structure of justification; the dream rearranges itself around each new stimulus."[22] This accounts for the somewhat abrupt manner in which the narrator's conversation with his father proceeds, and the immanent logic and force that it seems to possess, as well as his confusion upon waking up from the dream. But Spellberg's statement becomes especially helpful and compelling when considering the hero's outpouring in response to his father, which is as follows: "Tu sais bien pourtant que je vivrai toujours près d'elle, cerfs, cerfs, Francis Jammes, fourchette [You know very well, though that I should always live near her, stags, stags, Francis Jammes, fork]."[23] It is at this point that he wakes up, immediately reflecting on the strange turn of phrase in the lines above:

> Mais déjà j'avais retraversé le fleuve aux ténébreux méandres, j'étais remonté à la surface où s'ouvre le monde des vivants ; aussi si je répétais encore : « Francis Jammes, cerfs, cerfs » , la suite de ces mots ne m'offrait plus le sens limpide et la logique qu'ils exprimaient si naturellement pour moi il y a un instant encore et que je ne pouvais plus me rappeler. Je ne comprenais plus même pourquoi le mot *Aias*, que m'avait dit tout à l'heure mon père, avait immédiatement signifié : « Prends garde d'avoir froid » , sans aucun doute possible.[24]

> But already I had recrossed the river with its gloomy meanders, I had come back to the surface, where the world of the living opens out; so, if I was still repeating "Francis Jammes, stags, stags", this sequence of words no longer held the limpid, logical meaning they had expressed so naturally for me only a moment before and which I could no longer recall. I could no longer understand even why the word Aias, spoken to me just now by my father, had at once signified "Take care not to catch cold", beyond any possible doubt.[25]

Not only does the hero examine his dream-speech, but, upon waking, he repeats part of it (albeit in reversed order) in an attempt to unlock its meaning in waking life. Besides remarking upon the failure of this attempt, the lines cited above give a vivid sense of the inscrutable way in which phrases, words, and images can become cathected within a dream, often in ways that the dreamer is unable to unravel. My purpose in citing this passage, and in particular this dream, is to suggest that the inability to reconcile the force of dream logic with waking life is not a failure—far from it. Instead, the one-way transformation or translation highlights a problem of writing, and of the creative act more generally. The experience described here, that of repeating a series of words while no longer possessing their logic, is in many ways the driving force behind the desire to write, and as such deserves to be preserved and commented upon, rather than decoded. If the hero no longer possesses the dream logic, he can still marvel at the intensity of the dream and of that logic, and it is perhaps this experience—whether or not dreams are in question at all, in any explicit way—that Cixous pursues in her texts.

In *Hyperrêve*, Cixous writes that "le narrateur de *Sodome et Gomorrhe* serre sur son coeur une fourchette dont il n'a plus la formule et qui pourtant à bord du rêve qui le débarque avait la toute-puissance alchimique" [the narrator of Sodom and Gomorrah holds to his heart a fork whose formula he has lost and which however aboard the dream that is now disembarking him had alchemical omnipotence].[26] In addition to suggesting her recurring characterization of dreams as a journey or environment, Cixous pinpoints that the hero, on remarking about the dream logic upon waking, is doing something quite different from trying to uncover his dream's "hidden meaning", the way we might be tempted to when reading dreams in a therapeutic sense, or even in interpreting literature. But this is a natural endeavor—after all, if the unconscious is an obscure, profound, deep realm, what is our task if not to navigate it by making it conscious? Lucie Cantin has noted that Freud describes the navel of the dream as "a dark spot that reaches down into the unknown, amidst a tangle of dream-thoughts which cannot be unraveled", meaning that "the dream's navel is therefore what, in the motive force, can in no way be structured by a representation. It is the point where the unrepresentable real emerges through, despite the signifiers elaborated by the dream."[27] It is precisely with the question of representation that dreams and literature can be drawn more closely together. Both must navigate the process of representation, even if this means rejecting it to a large degree, as in non-representational painting. But just as

a shot-for-shot remake of a film will not necessarily have the same spirit or force as the original, representation does not guarantee its own effects from moment to moment. Something else is at play in dreams and literature that resists our attempts of capture, especially when we rely on normal interpretive means.

Here, I want to make a connection with surface reading, a recent trend in literary criticism that takes issue with the sort of symptomatic reading that purports to "plumb [the] depths" of texts, instead seeking to "attend to the surfaces."[28] As the editors of a special issue on surface reading write: "A surface is what insists on being looked *at* rather than what we must train ourselves to see *through*."[29] The editors advocate for "just reading", which "sees ghosts as presences, not absences, and lets ghosts be ghosts, instead of saying what they are ghosts *of*", that is, instead of presupposing that the navel of the dream carries a meaning that would be legible to us if only we could bring it to the surface.[30] Writing about the dream in the "Intermittences", Moorjani highlights some possible resonances of the strange series of words uttered by the hero, arguing that "[t]he Proustian narrator sets out to decipher the unconscious without flinching, delineating in all its ferocity the other side of idealistic flights. It is a path readers are challenged to double by working through the narrative's maskings, scatterings, displacements, and reiterations."[31] I will end this section by suggesting that it is precisely by keeping these scatterings and displacements, as well as the unconscious more generally, in suspension—meaning also preserving them—that the Proustian text touches on what makes dreams so potent in the first place, and why they continue to be imbricated with the endeavor of writing.

Reading the Dream in Cixous

In "La Venue à l'écriture" Cixous refers to the passage from being "touchée, caressée, blessée [touched caressed, wounded]" to the attempt to "découvrir le secret de ce toucher pour l'étendre, le célébrer et le transformer en une autre caresse [discover the secret of this touch to extend it, celebrate it, and transform it into another caress]."[32] In addition to describing the activity of writing, this movement suggested by Cixous can be said to respond to the questions posed in the previous section regarding how to write dreams. If transforming the caress of literature into another work of literature is something other than decoding or deciphering the text—for, indeed, Cixous seems in her prose to be invested in preserving the crypted nature of writing—what exactly is the relationship between dreams and writing in Cixous? What roles do writing and dreaming play in our reshaping of the world through our creative engagement with it? How is this reshaping implicated in a proliferation of the desire to write, to dream? In what way might dreams themselves be considered our "secret book"?

As I noted at the beginning, Cixous is concerned with writing and reading, and with books in general, often in a sense proximate to the autobiographical, whether through references to her own life, writing, reading, or research. However, she

writes in *Ciguë: Vieilles femmes en fleurs* that "Ce livre m'empêche de produire ici la trace *exacte* de l'événement [The book is keeping my from reproducing the *exact* trace of the event]", only to write later of "l'influx des émotions dans mon livre intérieur [the flood of my inner book's emotions]."[33] Books do not always have the same value, and themselves take up properties that must be considered according to context. I highlight this because even when Cixous's writing feels most autobiographical, this is by no means a hermeneutic key to understanding the value or meaning of the writing, reading, or above all dreaming that is in question.

Like all of Cixous's quasi-fictional texts, *Revirements* is worthy of a book-length exposition. This text explicitly highlights the connection between literature and life in an almost overdetermined way: "Dans la fusion entre la littérature et la vie, j'avais écrit une pièce pour le Grand Théâtre" [In the fusion between literature and life, I'd written a play for the Great Theater]."[34] Some lines down, after describing a fight between the narrator-character H. and her brother O., the text remarks upon the deep resonances between the violent real-life scene occurring in the narrative present and the violence depicted in the play. In parallel to these concerns are the interrelated themes of navigation, uncharted territory, and the threat of shipwreck, which touch back on the threat of violence and even the possibility of suicide. One passage in particular from *Revirements* evokes dreams, but does not exactly describe them in a straightforward narrational sense—nor, arguably, is it framed explicitly as a dream, as in *Rêve je te dis*, for example, since to do so would require an orienting preamble or framing device. The passage in question serves as a meeting point between Cixous's general dream-like writing style and her preoccupation with dreams, suggesting that preserving the experience of dreams requires a combined approach of style and emphasis. What I want to suggest is that Cixous, by incorporating the above themes in a subtle way, achieves something akin to a dream state with this passage, as well as telling us something about dreams and their importance for writing.

This passage comes at the beginning of a section entitled "L'autre froid." Given the already complex and narratively uncertain nature of the preceding text, it is somewhat difficult to tell how this passage narratively should be read, and therefore it already thrusts us into the ambiguously weighted experience of dreaming. This passage begins as follows:

> Je peux l'affirmer sans embarras, j'ai bien passé ces quinze derniers mois dans l'Antarctique, avec la même surpuissante sensation de réalité que si j'y avais été en rêve, la différence avec la surforce du rêve tenant à la ténacité régulière, au prolongement sur des mois de cette sensation de rêve en réalité. Pendant les premiers mois surtout, j'ai eu des troubles cardiaques, des vertiges, ces brusques défaillances des jambes qui me causent les pires craintes d'entre les craintes, et mes yeux sont encore ahuris par la contemplation des énormes volumes de couleurs épaisses laiteuses de laiteurs bleuâtres nacrées surnaturelles, je dis laiteurs car laitances ne convient pas, il s'agit de sortes d'épaisseurs presque animales de bleuissures, comme si l'on voyait

> des cubes géants de lait congelé qui eussent jailli de mamelles de monstres marins disparus, on pense aux laits de Léviathan, c'est d'une effrayante beauté, les blocs de glaciers qui se lèvent sur notre passage sont polis comme des sorcelleries optiques, parfois un paysage s'arrête de se tordre en jets de douleurs dont les lames d'eau de fer volent par-dessus les embarcations, et tombe subitement dans un calme sidéré aussi violent que le déchaînement que ce coup de calme vient de saisir.[35]

> I can, without embarrassment, say this: I really did spend the past fifteen months in the Antarctic, with the same overwhelming feeling of reality as if I had been there in a dream, the superior force of the dream having to do with the tenacity, the month-after-monthness of this sensation of dreaming in reality. During the first months especially, I had cardiac problems, vertigo, a sudden wobbliness in the legs that triggers the worst of my worst fears, and my eyes are still dazzled by the contemplation of the huge clotted milky slabs of bluish supernaturally opalescent milkinesses, I say milkinesses because milt isn't right, I have in mind blubbery thicknesses of a bruising-blue, as if one saw huge cubes of frozen milk spewed from the udders of vanished sea monsters, one thinks of the milk of leviathans, it's so fearsomely beautiful, the glacier chunks that heave themselves up in front of us glitter like optic witchcraft, sometimes a landscape ceases to writhe in spurts of pains whose steely blades of water fly over the boats, and subsides into a flabbergasted calm itself as violent as the turmoil that this outbreak of calm has just stunned.[36]

Though she goes on to specify that there was "Ni aller ni retour [Neither voyage nor return]"[37] there is movement happening here, if only in a compromized or unusual sense. The vertigo experienced is a function of this imaginary voyage, which, importantly, seems neither real *nor* a dream. However, the commonplace relationship between dreams and reality is upended: dreams are not unreal, but are in fact overwhelmingly real. If Cixous then goes on to write of the tenacity of this sensation, it is because dreaming is a state for which one must get one's sea legs, so to speak. The digressions that follow continue to play on the established theme of navigation at sea, as well as mirroring the oftentimes undue or bewildering attention to detail found in dreams. Echoing Socrates' discussion of wonder in *Theaetetus*, the passage moves from vertigo to bedazzlement, and becomes reflexive, stumbling over the homonymy of milk/milt [lait/laite]. At once, this wonder opens onto a magnitude rivaling that encountered in the Kantian sublime, and yet does so in a markedly strange, dream-like way, describing the glaciers with vivid and almost mythological detail.

Even with the difficulty of situating the passage as a whole in mind, trying to chart out what exactly is happening within it is particularly difficult—are the glaciers vibrating? Is their violent turmoil simply an extension of the wonder being described? In turn, beyond its content, the form of the passage its most striking aspect. After introducing other figures—"mes parents-d'Antarctique [my Antarctic

parents]"—the text moves on to pose further questions, including the highly relevant question of communication, stating that

> dans ces climats—si ce mot a un sens dans ce monde totalement gouverné par l'imprévisible —, il est convenu naturellement qu'on ne se parle pas en profondeur mais seulement en réseaux, en surface, en télécommunications, les distances entre nous étant multipliées à l'infini, même à trois mètres d'écart apparent.[38]

> in these climates—if this word has any meaning in a world wholly governed by the unpredictable—it goes without saying that one doesn't talk to one another in depth but only in networks, on the surface, via telecommunications, the distances between us being multiplied to infinity, even at a distance of what would appear to be only three meters.[39]

Calling into question the very fact of climates on the basis of chance and unpredictability as governing principles highlights something fundamental about the division of form and content in communication. In the context of this passage, communication occurs specifically on the surface, nonverbally. With dreams in particular, the content—as anyone who has heard a dream described will likely know—utterly fails to give a sense of the dream's force or impact on the dreamer. It is more specifically the formal aspects of the dream, as with literature, that are effective in creating a certain experience.

The passage continues on, shifting from communication to deal with the issue of identity, by way of variations of the first and third person: "Tout cela sans discours. On n'est ni nous ni eux, on est *on*. Il y a *qui* aussi [All this without speeches. One is neither us nor them, one is *one*. There is *who* too]."[40] After a poetic digression discussing "que, sur les continents développés, on appelle *l'humanité*, sans savoir ni comment écrire ce mot ni le sentir vivre [what on the developed continents one calls *humanity*, without knowing either how to write this word nor how to take its pulse]",[41] the text becomes personal, even ostensibly autobiographical:

> On ne sait rien des uns et des autres, et aucun ne savait rien de « moi ». Personne n'a jamais manifesté auprès de moi disposer d'une information relevant de mon curriculum vitae, que j'aie une histoire, que j'aie publié des histoires. Rien n'est caché ni montré. On est lié par les vents et les glaces comme par les liens de sang surgelé. La plupart du temps je n'ai même pas su leur nom.[42]

> One knows nothing about one another, and no one knew anything about "me." Nobody showed any sign of having any information about my curriculum vitae, that I might have a story, that I might have published stories. Nothing is hidden or shown. One is tied by the winds and the icepack as if by threads of frozen blood. Most of the time I didn't even know their names.[43]

The self becomes essentially anonymous and unmarked here, while the narrative voice delves even deeper into its particular attributes. The dream landscape is such that facts are sensed and noted in a passive manner, with an immanent value that resists the kind of interpretation we normally like to undertake. As Nicholas Royle writes, dreams "wait for us, they are up ahead. There is no bus or taxi, passport or other document enabling entry. And then the dream country lovingly releases you, without your ever having had a proper chance to get your bearings."[44] Just as we fall into a dream without any foresight, our time in "the dream country" is aporetic; we must make our own way each and every time anew.

One might say that in this passage as a whole—as well as in dreams and in literature—"nothing is hidden or shown." Or perhaps everything is hidden and shown at once. Either way, nothing in particular is definitively narrated here, with what would be referents, characters, or events taking on a highly abstract quality, a distance that is also extreme proximity. And yet, something emerges and becomes palpable through the very rhythm of the prose itself, its repetitions and thematic maneuvering. We return again to a description of this imaginary Antarctic, cold, vast, alienating, but also familiar:

> Mais de tout ce blanc ce froid ces étendues coupées, ce rassemblement, a perlé pendant quinze mois une sensation intarissable de peuple, de familiarité engourdie et cependant extrêmement animée, semblable à celle que nous goûtons en rêve, ou lorsque, lisant certains livres dont les toiles ont été sécrétées par les organes d'individus ultradoués de compétences vitales, des explorateurs inlassables, des génies de la curiosité, je pense aux bienheureux Goethe ou Montaigne, Kafka, Stendhal, à tous ces inconnus dont le charme nous envoûte fortunément si bien que nous oublions que nous ne les avons jamais rencontrés car ils ont l'espace psychique si hospitalier qu'on se sent reconnus, attendus, bienvenus, et sis, sans façon, sans condition, sans contradiction, sans commentaire, sans demande de justification, sans aucune remarque, ni contrat, ni pacte, ni déliverance d'un visa ou d'un signe de consentement. Un indicible indice de parenté. Entrée libre entrée sortie séjour nuits transports douleurs découvertes surpassements vertigineux, longs désespoirs aux couloirs mal éclairés, autoroutes aux eaux parcourues d'effrayants véhicules zoologiques, scènes de tortures inouïes comme il n'y en a que dans la famille et, d'un autre côté, scènes de voluptés à toute heure, fêtes d'impertinence et averses d'éternité comme il n'y en a que chez chez-soi, l'inconnu.[45]
>
> But all this white this cold these jagged wastes, this gathering, had strung together over fifteen months a bottomless sensation of people, of familiarity numbing and yet extremely animated, similar to what we savor in dreams or when reading certain books whose webs have been secreted by the organs of individuals super-gifted with vital capabilities, untiring explorers, geniuses of curiosity, I think of the blessedness of Goethe or Montaigne, Kafka, Stendhal, of all those strangers whose charms bewitch us luckily so

> well that we forget that we've never met them for they have such a hospitable mental space that one feels recognized, expected, welcomed, and given a place, without more ado, without conditions, without contradictions, without commentary, without need for justification, without any remark, or contract, or pact, or issuance of a visa or sign of consent. An indescribable indication of kinship. Free entry exit stay nights transportation pains discoveries dizzying experiences of surpassing oneself, long moments of despair in ill-lit corridors, watery high-ways with fearful zoological vehicles, unbelievable scenes of torture such as exist only within the family and, on the other hand, scenes of voluptuousness at all hours, festivals of impertinence and downpours of eternity such as happen at home with oneself, that stranger.[46]

Here we have the dream environment as the animating principle of the dream, just as, in literature, the fact of writing itself (rather than any particular story being told) is what constitutes the literary dimension. This makes good on the earlier skepticism of the term "climate" if we take the unpredictability that calls it into question as, strictly speaking, an impossibility of determining beforehand what the content (of dreams, of literature) will be. The multi-valent aspect of dreams—involving movement, despair, fear, torture, but also voluptuousness—is side by side with a list of classic literary figures. What both share is the ability to draw us in unconditionally, "without any remark, or contract, or pact, or issuance of a visa or sign of consent."

Finally, it appears that this dream, this dream country, is oddly a place without writing, but this does not exactly mean that it is a place without literature:

> Pendant ces quinze mois j'ai été hors de moi sauf le dimanche—je devrais dire treize mois car les derniers mois j'ai commencé à me détacher de la famille antarctique, j'ai fait banquise à part, j'étais fatiguée et j'avais presque épuisé mes provisions de distraction intérieure, d'abandon au sort, d'extrême passivité, mon Stylo était énervé, il commence par aller et venir dans mon lit à quatre heures du matin, une mimique d'impatience encore patiente, un avertissement, encore un peu et c'est le harcèlement que rien ne peut raisonner, les petits cris qui se plantent dans mes oreilles, dans mes joues, et comme l'apparition d'une cruauté d'oiseau de proie mais justifiée selon le droit de chaque être à exercer sa nature. D'ailleurs il me sauvait, sans que j'en aie eu conscience : en janvier j'avais atteint le degré de léthargie où les rêves ne parviennent plus à venir respirer à la surface. Silence, ça coule. Le cahier de rêves dérivait en apathie et je ne sentais plus l'angoisse de ne plus sentir les angoisses.[47]
>
> For fifteen months I was out of my mind except on Sundays—I should say thirteen months for in the final months I began to detach myself from the Antarctic family, I made myself a separate floe, I was tired and I had almost exhausted my supplies of inner amusement, of yielding to chance, of

> extreme passivity, my Pen was annoyed, it starts stalking my bed at four o'clock in the morning, mimicking still patient impatience, a warning, soon the harassment nothing can reason with, the little shrieks that plant themselves in my ears, in my cheeks, like the manifestation of a bird of prey's cruelty, but justified according to the right of each to act according to its nature. Besides this saved me, without my being aware of it: by January I had reached a degree of lethargy dreams can no longer breathe at the surface of. Silence, the ship is sinking. The dream book was adrift in apathy and no longer did I feel anguish at not feeling anguish any more.[48]

"Yielding to chance" and "extreme passivity" provoke the ire of the Pen, and we cannot help but hear a Blanchotian echo in this "still patient impatience" in the face of writing, the "impatience [that] must be the core of profound patience" for Orpheus.[49] This exhaustion, lethargy (and also lethe-argy, forgetfulness) is a fundamental requirement for writing, as is the unproductive "lost time"—time wasted, but also time spent lost, adrift, disoriented. This "dream book" could be any book, but to be written the inner book must first be accessed. Paradoxically, this requires a patient impatience, which means above all an attunement to how exactly dreams are experienced, and how exactly we can make them communicable. Royle, glossing Cixous's point that the dreams in *Interpretation of Dreams* are *written* by Freud and therefore no longer possess the vital dimension of dreams, writes: "*How to treat the dream as a dream*: is it possible? Probably not. But this is the driving desire. To treat a dream as dream, to allow ourselves to be *treated* by the dream."[50] Cixous, then, allows herself (and us) to be treated by the dream by allowing it to breathe through her writing.

Notes

1. Hélène Cixous, *Hyperrêve* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2006), p. 178; *Hyperdream*, trans. by Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2009), p. 135.

2. Marcel Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), vol. IV, p. 458; *Time Regained*, trans. by Andreas Mayor and Terence Kilmartin, rev. by D. J. Enright (New York: Modern Library, 1999) p. 274.

3. Cixous, *Philippines: Prédelles* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 2009), p. i; *Philippines*, trans. by Laurent Milesi (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), p. ix.

4. Virginie Greene, "Contemplating a Proustian Library", in *The Proustian Mind*, ed. by Anna Elsner and Thomas Stern (London: Routledge, 2023), p. 212.

5. Cixous, *Philippines: Prédelles*, p. i; *Philippines*, p. ix.

6. François-Nicolas Vozel, "Reading for the Revelation: Hélène Cixous, Marcel Proust, Sigmund Freud, and Tele-Lethe-Pathy", *MLN*, vol. 136, no. 4, Sept. 2021, p. 910.

7. Lucy O'Meara points out that the novel "is something which, by design, will *always* be ahead for Barthes, no matter how far he advances." He is oriented toward the novel in terms of a sort of experience or sensitivity, and not as set of writing tasks before him. See

O'Meara, *Roland Barthes at the Collège de France* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2012), p. 167.

8. Vozel, "Reading for the Revelation", pp. 907-908.

9. In "Delusion and Dreams in Jensen's *Gradiva*", Freud writes that "creative writers are valuable allies and their evidence is to be prized highly, for they are apt to know a whole host of things between heaven and earth of which our philosophy has not yet let us dream. In their knowledge of the mind they are far in advance of us everyday people, for they draw upon sources which we have not yet opened up for science. If only this support given by writers in favour of dreams having a meaning were less ambiguous!" Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, trans. by James Strachey, vol. 9, p. 8. Cixous cites from this passage as well; see *Philippines*, pp. 48-49.

10. Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (New York: Grove, 1931), p. 25.

11. Angela Moorjani, "A Cryptanalysis of Proust's 'Les Intermittences du coeur,'" *MLN*, vol. 105, no. 4, 1990, p. 875.

12. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. III, p. 152; *Sodom and Gomorrah*, trans. by John Sturrock (New York: Penguin, 2005) p. 152.

13. Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, trans. by Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p. 16.

14. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. III, p. 153; *Sodom and Gomorrah*, pp. 154-155.

15. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. III, p. 157.

16. Proust, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, pp. 158-159.

17. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. III, p. 157; *Sodom and Gomorrah*, p. 158.

18. James Dutton, *Proust between Deleuze and Derrida: The Remains of Literature* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), p. 174.

19. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. III, p. 157; *Sodom and Gomorrah*, p. 159.

20. Cixous, *Philippines*, p. 11.

21. Vozel, "Reading for the Revelation", p. 924.

22. Matthew Spellberg, "Proust in the Dreamtime", *The Yale Review*, vol. 104, no. 2, 2016, p. 61.

23. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. III, p. 159; *Sodom and Gomorrah*, p. 160.

24. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu*, vol. III, p. 159.

25. Proust, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, p. 158.

26. Cixous, *Hyperrêve*, p. 106; *Hyperdream*, p. 77.

27. Lucie Cantin, "From Delusion to Dream", in *After Lacan*, ed. by Robert Hughes and Kareen Ror Malone (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 89.

28. Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, "Surface Reading: an Introduction", *Representations*, vol. 108, no. 1, 2009, pp. 1-2.

29. Best and Marcus, p. 9.

30. Best and Marcus, pp. 12-13.

31. Moorjani, "A Cryptanalysis of Proust's 'Les Intermittences du coeur,'" p. 888. She points out how "Exegetes have associated the *cerfs* and the name of the poet Francis Jammes with the theme of sadism against the mother", arguing also for echoes between the "Intermittences" passage with the Montjouvain scene based on Proust's own biography. See pp. 883-884.

32. Cixous, *La Venue à l'écriture* (Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1977), p. 50; *Coming to Writing and other Essays,* ed. by Susan Rubing Suleiman, trans. by Sarah Cornell, Deborah Jenson, Ann Liddle, and Susan Sellers (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), p. 45.

33. Cixous, *Ciguë: Vieilles femmes en fleurs* (Paris: Galilée, 2008), p. 14, p. 50; *Hemlock*, trans. by Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2011), p. 5, p. 31.

34. Cixous, *Revirements : dans l'antarctique du coeur* (Paris: Galilée, 2011), p. i; *Twists and Turns in the Heart's Antarctic*, trans. by Beverley Bie Brahic (Cambridge: Polity, 2014), p. viii.

35. Cixous, *Revirements*, pp. 57-58.

36. Cixous, *Twists and Turns*, pp. 37-38.

37. Cixous, *Revirements, p. 61; Twists and Turns*, p. 40.

38. Cixous, *Revirements*, p. 58.

39. Cixous, *Twists and Turns*, p. 38.

40. Cixous, *Revirements*, p. 58; *Twists and Turns*, p. 38.

41. Cixous, *Revirements*, p. 59; *Twists and Turns*, p. 38.

42. Cixous, *Revirements*, pp. 59-60.

43. Cixous, *Twists and Turns*, p. 39.

44. Nicholas Royle, "Dream Treatment: On Sitting Down to Read a Letter from Freud", *Paragraph*, vol. 40, no. 3, 2017, p. 401.

45. Cixous, *Revirements*, p. 60.

46. Cixous, *Twists and Turns*, pp. 39-40.

47. Cixous, *Revirements*, p. 61.

48. Cixous, *Twists and Turns*, p. 40.

49. Maurice Blanchot, "Orpheus's Gaze", in *The Space of Literature*, trans. by Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), p. 176.

50. Royle, "Dream Treatment", p. 402.

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