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Closeted Metaphors, or Reading Identity in *A la recherche du temps perdu*

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The young narrator in *Du côté de chez Swann* follows the course of the Vivonne with its *nymphéas* and crystal waters in his idealistic pursuit of the myth of the Guermantes only to discover many years later a "Vivonne mince et laide au bord du chemin de halage," whose source is not the romantic fount he had imagined but "une espèce de lavoir carré où montaient des bulles" (4: 267-68). Readers of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, Marcel Proust's *roman-fleuve*, encounter the same problems of perception, identity and time as we navigate a current that holds countless surprises for even its most seasoned travelers and that teems with enough flora and fauna to satisfy the most exacting naturalist. While the stream remains difficult to chart, certain creative mapping attempts such as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's "Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet," from her larger work, *Epistemology of the Closet*, not only explore essential problematics within the novel, but reveal fundamental problems at the root (to switch metaphors briefly) of Proust criticism.

The focus of Sedgwick's analysis is the dramatic first episode of male homosexual encounter between Charlus and Jupien, which is described initially in terms of the organic metaphor of the fertilization of orchids only to give way to an amplified discussion of sexual "inversion." The segment can be and has been read quite negatively, and Sedgwick openly tackles the scene "from the relatively decentered perspective of modern gay and antihomophobic theory" (Sedgwick 1). The metaphor of the homosexual closet both structures her deftly wrought rhetorical strategy and serves as an investigative tool which she intends to use to interrogate power relations between the observed Charlus and Jupien ("the spectacle of the closet" [Sedgwick 222]) and the observing, narrating *je* ("the viewpoint of the closet" [223]) and to explore the critical ground between what she calls J.E. Rivers's "minoritizing" view and Leo Bersani's "universalizing" view of the revelatory scene. However, while Sedgwick's innovative, timely, and powerful epistemological figure of the closet focuses our attention on

hitherto diffuse dynamics interanimating homophobia, epistemology, and the performative aspect of the text, her articulation of this figure, too heavily freighted with the connotative baggage of an "engaged" reading, ultimately encloses identity within fixed ontological boundaries and shuts the door on the much more complex epistemological considerations suggested by the architecture of the entirety of Proust's construction.

Sedgwick chooses to isolate the text of "Sodom I" from the rest of the novel in a reenactment of what she terms to be "the dramas of dismemberment" of the novel performed by Rivers and Bersani (215). Moving quickly through her interpretation of their criticisms of this passage, Sedgwick arrives at a characterization of this scene as full of "negative stereotypes" (Rivers), "banal," and "sentimental and reductive" (Bersani). She adds to the mix her suggestion that this episode is at the same time "the—catalytic node" for the rest of the novel (216-17), and with the better part of the textual body thus amputated, she focuses on this episode as the privileged locus of "sheer representational anxiety" (217) and of homo/heterosexual power negotiations. She then perceptively demonstrates the difficulty of resolving the lengthy central orchid-bee metaphor, inspired by the presence of orchids in the courtyard, which is used to describe the encounter of the two men as the "autofécondation" of two orchids by the third-party "bourdon," for, in spite of the fact that Charlus and Jupien are at times both figured as women, Sedgwick notes, "one orchid is still just plain male, the other just plain female" (220).

Despite her claim that the subject of her reading will be the "performative" aspect of the text, or how the reader is "constituted by and through the text" (223), and her axiomatic definition of the Narrator as homophobic (a non-homophobic narrating *je* is not "even... optional" [223]), her desire to define *A la recherche* as the "coming out story that doesn't come out" (248) leads her to go to some pains to discover the "nature" of this voyeur-Narrator within the constraints of the orchid-bee paradigm while the reader-relation remains comparatively untheorized.

In order to take into account both "negative" and "sentimental" elements of the scene together with the metaphor's inconsistencies, which she characterizes as a "red herring" (220), "creative mislabelings" and "'bad faith'" (242), she manipulates Proust's metaphor and frames her double closet as a more impenetrable

substitute. Unable to "solve" the metaphorical puzzle by definitively assigning stable referents to the female and male orchids as well as the bee component of the metaphor, she artfully removes the bothersome bee by assigning its role to her Narrator. With her Narrator thus rhetorically mapped onto the metaphor, she can, with the aid of present-day socio-political exempla and (her own autobiographical) empowerment through reading, interpret the undecidability of the image as revelatory of "homosexual panic" (20), deliberate and deflected unknowing on the part of a unified, single Narrator, and thus closeted (homo)sexual identity in Proust.

Artful though Sedgwick's strategy may be, it nonetheless does not demonstrate the necessity of an exclusively homophobic Narrator to a reading of the metaphor-enigmas that not only infiltrate but compose the text. By merely linking her justification of a homophobic Narrator to metaphorical representation that opens up "conceptual abysses" (220) of undecidability in the representation of "inversion," Sedgwick risks running aground on a logical reversal of her scheme. If undecidability or an excess of content amounts to pathological homophobia, then decidability or successful taxonomizing would constitute "normalcy," a notion strictly at odds with an antihomophobic reading. By insisting on restricting her own analysis to a spatial metaphor confined to two states-of-being—the closeted and the outed—she effectively confines her reading to "ontologies" of pre-existing closeted categories to the detriment of the relationships among the multiple perspectives subtly articulated Proust's work. Such a two-dimensional approach overlooks the inherent problematics of the text's temporal aspect, which is so blatantly obvious in Proust that it perhaps tends to be forgotten.

Paradoxically, the rhetorical device of the double closet reinforces Sedgwick's text while it weakens her reading. Its very structuring gesture causes her to sweep bothersome questions of metaphorical representation's relationship to identity and epistemology in the Proustian text itself under the rug. The axiomatic qualification of the *je* as homosexual/phobic serves as a powerful strategic move that coerces rather than persuades readers that they must adopt Sedgwick's privileged reading of the otherwise undecipherable text or remain trapped in the "homosexual panic" of homophobia. While postmodernism and "weak thought" have lead us to despair of finding an objective position with respect to

literary texts, Sedgwick's own deliberately marginalized position is suspect for two reasons: it fails to recognize its own "closet" metaphor as productive of a highly determined and deterministic reading, and it tends to evacuate specific significance from Proust's text in the service of exterior political motivations. The particular problem in our discussion is to evaluate Sedgwick's depiction of the relationship between the narrating voice(s) and metaphorical labelling both within the scene of "Sodom I" and in the larger context of the novel's three thousand pages.

Sedgwick's critical text serves as a curious rhetorical double to the Proustian master text such that effective disabling of metaphorical mesmerism in one implies the demythologization of the other. If the "Narrator" is "lying" in a system of metaphorical labelling, the project of definitive "naming" can never be more than utopian. The obsession with naming, or empowerment through knowing, is clearly thematized in the first part of the novel, "Nom du pays: le nom." We follow the young *je*'s obsession with names and the fanciful associations he creates around them for lack of better information only to discover that these associations are in fact limited or erroneous. In "Métonymie chez Proust," Gérard Genette demonstrates the role of metonymy in creating metaphors in *A la recherche*: the young *je* assumes that chance-contiguous relationships constitute identities that he later discovers to have been constructions. The imagery surrounding the names, however erroneous or disparate, tends to cohere into overarching metaphorical representations that will transmute and travel to the end of the novel; hence the Guermantes, for example, acquire a fluvial cast because of their association with their riverside property. Names are evocative metonymies for people and places and can become entire categories in the Proustian scheme of society and mapping, especially when the threads of earlier metaphorical texts are picked up again. However, these relationships are not confined to the thematic representations in the mind of the *je*, for relationships of place can give way to purely textual relationships.

Sedgwick rightly observes that textual eruptions or moments of "representational anxiety" are key to understanding the reader's relationship (mediated through the narrating *je*) to the text, but her flat definition of this anxiety as the essential characteristic of the Narrator obscures the more subtle representational and epistemo-

logical considerations of this key scene. Sedgwick defines "closetedness" as "a performance initiated as such by the speech act of a silence—not a particular silence, but a silence...in relation to the discourse that surrounds and differentially constitutes it" (3). While it is a risky move to define silence even relationally, Sedgwick's recognition of context nonetheless points to the need to reconstruct the anatomy of the dismembered textual body and to consider the performances enacted in the relationships among various and even competing discourses and figures that produce ironic and telling textual disruptions.

The revelatory first portion of "Sodom I" is not merely a battleground of defensive homophobic "ballistics" (222) but rather the dramatization of naming and knowing carefully prepared by the orchid discussion at the end of *Du côté de Guermantes*. The work of "classifying," which in Sedgwick's terms is an identification with the "the medical expert" granting access to the "ironclad epistemological receivership" (225) of the "authority" to describe, begins here with the young *je* cast in the role of principal observer in this theater of discovery. However, the comic depiction of the young *je*, whose botanical project is repeatedly ridiculed through hyperbolic representation, skews the "sight lines" (213) defining the paranoid viewing closet and the spectacular closet and troubles the mapping of the "highly invested" (221) bumble bee. We must ask not only what he thinks, but how he is represented in order to determine his real function and to evaluate the quality of his understanding of the scene.

The narrating *je* himself describes the hero-*je* as a "botaniste" (3:3), but this classification is implicitly only positional, for moments before, this generalist "expert" held the position of a "géologue." If the authoritative gaze implies a vertical hierarchy of knowing and naming in Sedgwick's logic, the relative positioning of the young *je* in the staging of this scene does not inspire confidence in his ability to define and understand what he sees, for we know from the outset that the hero-*je* has descended from his "séjour d'altitude" (3:3) before the action and his observation begin. The hero-*je*, a foolish boy who bolsters his courage in the face of the revelation of Sodom by asserting directly (and improbably) that he "'vien[t] d'avoir plusieurs duels sans aucune crainte, à cause de l'affaire Dreyfus'" (3:10), admittedly displays emotion and lack of caution scarcely suitable for biologist or geologist.

It is possible to say that the hero-*je* falls victim to defensive description on the part of the narrating *je*, who is the real authority, as an alibi for his own exemption from the scene. However, if the narrating *je* subjects the role of classifier to ridicule and is himself in the process of classifying, he implicitly undermines the authority of the "taxonomic gaze" (227) as locus of efficacious power. The limits of knowledge reveal themselves in the long-term effects of the discovery of Sodom on the young *je*, who is later unable to use his new knowledge to better conduct his relations with Albertine while the text itself points to figurative language as a key to understanding the role of naming.

A conjunction of botany (or ontological classification), and writing (or epistemology) emerges from the syllepsis of the word "styles," highlighted by quotation marks (3:5), toward the beginning of the scene, for here the "styles" of the orchid are linked to the style of the text. We are not only alerted to the question of textuality but also to the fact that the writing *je* may have a different attitude toward his subject matter than the hero-*je*. The multiple valences at work in this scene serve to confront the notion of aesthetic representation with that of reporting. Thus, while the observations internalized by the hero-*je* help to constitute the raw material of the text, the depiction and function of this *je* and his attitudes as well as the obvious instances of comic distance from him help to reveal not only the limitations of his understanding, but of epistemological projects and products in general. Throughout the scene the spectre of textuality breaks through the surface of the narration to make us aware of what metaphors are being used and when and even of how we should read the text. The substitution of the metaphor for reality in the description, for example, becomes complete at the moment at which "la porte de la boutique se referma sur eux et je ne pus plus rien entendre. J'avais perdu de vue le bourdon..." only to be immediately distanced from it once again by the narrating *je*'s observation that this was a "simple comparaison...sans la moindre prétention scientifique de rapprocher certaines lois de la botanique et ce qu'on appelle parfois fort mal l'homosexualité..." (3:9).

The difficult-to-situate power relations between narrating and acting *je*'s are not only a complication of the *je*'s "identity." They dramatize the problem of the power (or lack thereof) of classification itself. A condition of classificatory confusion also contami-

nates Charlus who, availing himself of the vocabulary of medicine, says that in pursuing a young man he jumps,

comme un petit professeur, comme un jeune et beau médecin, dans le même tramway que la petite personne, dont nous ne parlons au féminin que pour suivre la règle (comme on dit en parlant d'un prince: Est-ce que Son Altesse est bien portante?). Si elle change de tramway, je prends, avec peut-être les microbes de la peste, la chose incroyable appelée "correspondance".... (3:12)

Here, Charlus doubly classifies himself through comparison as a "professeur" and a "médecin," thus assuming the position of authority held by the "botaniste." He may "saute," but his ability, like that of the *hero-je*, is not vertically superior, for he is enclosed within the space of a tramway, which he changes three or four times without ever reaching the object of his quest (3:12). Just as he was depicted as an orchid because of the presence of a nearby flower, he implicitly classifies others by metonymy as "les microbes de la peste," and he refers to a "petit bourgeois" (perhaps a veiled reference to our "hero") as both a "microscopique vibrion" and a "petit âne" (3:14). He is not, however, altogether unaware of the linguistic implications of his classifications, for he understands the contrary and conventional "règle" of grammar and signification that governs the designation of gender. If we accept Sedgwick's view that he represents a double for her homophobic Narrator, we see the enactment here of the reader-relation that perhaps reveals the potential pitfalls for our own readings when he remarks to Jupien, "Je vois que les métaphores vous laissent sourd et l'histoire de la France indifférent" (3:14).

The "essay" on inverts which follows the dramatization of the scene of conjunction between Charlus and Jupien lacks the comic tone of the scene partially because the dwindling of the drama constitutes a move away from scenicity itself and (hence the removal of the convenient exterior objects, which constitute the narration's motivation for representation), and the discussion relies on earlier metaphors to generate further interest in observations that, according to Rivers, do not stand up to the test of scientific knowledge or even rigorous logic. Rather, the discussion of inverts and Jews can be seen as the aftermath of epistemological revelation that continues to demand explanations inherently linked

with language. The young *je* sees the moment as one of clear definition of identity, whereas the writing *je* thematizes the effects of the metaphorical cliché in perception and the representation of identity in terms of the happy example (zoology having been introduced into the botanical paradigm with the bourdon) of the figure of speech, "'Quel chameau!'" (3:15). The example is offered as an illustration of the change of perspective occasioned, not by a move down the stairs, but by the simple invocation of a figural expression:

Rien, sur le visage privé de caractères de tel ou tel homme, ne pouvait...faire supposer qu'il était précisément le frère, ou le fiancé, ou l'amant d'une femme dont elles [quelques personnes] allaient dire: "Quel chameau!" Mais alors, par bonheur, un mot que leur chuchote un voisin arrête sur leurs lèvres le terme fatal. Aussitôt apparaissent, comme un Mané, Thécél, Pharès, ces mots: il est le fiancé, ou il est le frère, ou il est l'amant de la femme qu'il ne convient pas d'appeler devant lui: "chameau". Et cette seule notion entraînera tout un regroupement, le retrait ou l'avance de la fraction des notions, désormais complétées, qu'on possédait sur le reste de la famille. (3:15-16)

The sudden revelation of the "identity" of the men in terms of their relationship (at one remove) to a metaphorical expression mimics that of the revelation of the homosexual in terms of the perception of the observer. The contingent figure of speech or "psychologie de convention" (3:17) that introduces the category of "chameau" does not reveal an essential nature but rather retrospectively reorganizes impressions to construct a new "understanding" of identity. The "races" of homosexual and Jew, which both bear an uncomfortable resemblance in their constitution to the category of "chameau," do not, however, coexist comfortably as principles of identity in the text's dramatization of metaphorical classification. The invert Charlus's violently antisemitic diatribe against "l'afflux de messieurs et de dames du Chameau, de la Chamellerie, de la Chamellerie..." (2:586) effectively puts the two "races maudites" at cross-purposes. In the light of the example of the figurative use of the word "chameau," identities emerge as perceived categories, and naming is often name-calling, as we can clearly see in Odette's anecdote about one Mme Blatin's unfortunate greeting of "Bonjour,

négro!" to a Cinghalais at the Jardin d'Acclimatation who retorts: "Moi négro...mais toi, chameau!" (1:526).

The thematization of writing and the introduction of a new ontological category of homosexuality has been analyzed by Marcel Muller ("La naturalisation de Charlus"), and the role of homosexuality in conjunction with Jewishness as a structuring discourse in the novel has been discussed by Jeanne Bem. However, while the new category of the homosexual dramatically furthers the narrative and even gives it new life, and in some ways new clarity, it merely complicates the epistemological problem signaled by Sedgwick's "mislabellings." The bastion of authority on which the reader and Sedgwick's Narrator stand is poorly fortified. If the work becomes more coherent in terms of its representation and mythological consistency, it loses credibility in terms of "real," objective knowledge, because once the categories are sorted out, they prove to have moveable boundaries that allow the intersection with other categories.

Even if Charlus's authority to describe others is suspect because he cannot describe himself (224), the text offers us expert witnesses with the proper credentials by which we can judge the classificatory discourses established in the novel. Sedgwick contends that "the narrator's presentations of Charlus persist in reaching out toward an appeal to, and identification with, the medical expert" (224). The expert voice that echoes in our ears is that of Cottard, a "prince de la science" (3:304). The foolish Every Scientist, the ubiquitous Cottard reifies the unreliable mutations wrought by figurative language and pathology. The high visibility accorded to the new rubric of the invert implies a motivation for a greater role for the medical expert whose increasing interactions with Charlus are both comic and telling. A category unto himself, he is classified in the space of two pages as, "Tel homme," "d'innombrables Cottard," "Un Cottard," and "De nombreux Cottard" (3: 273-75), a species which nonetheless intersects that of the "invert." His own nephew by marriage is effeminate (3:299), he constitutes a bizarre "double" for Charlus as the Baron's second in the fictive duel with Morel, and as the object of Charlus's *weillades*, he is mistakenly classified as an invert (by "one" who should "know one," according to Sedgwick [222]).

However, he is also a classifier who shows himself to be spectacularly unable to control social language and to diagnose

metaphorical pathologies. Naming might be said to be Cottard's principal concern, for "il ne laissait jamais passer soit une locution ou un nom propre qui lui étaient inconnus, sans tâcher de se faire documenter" (1:197). However, despite his ineptitude, his comically omnipotent scientific expertise spreads uncontrolled like a cancer into the linguistic, for Brichot asks him,

Dites donc, Cottard, vous semble-t-il que la neurasthénie puisse avoir une fâcheuse influence sur la philologie, la philologie une influence calmante sur la neurasthénie, et la guérison de la neurasthénie conduire au rhumatisme?—Parfaitement, le rhumatisme et la neurasthénie sont deux formes vicariantes du neuro-arthritisme. On peut passer de l'une à l'autre par métastase (3:284)

In this case, while Cottard should be associated with a hierarchically privileged position of control, his authority to understand and diagnose is staged instead as chronic ineptitude whose presence is so entrenched that it cannot be localized, diagnosed, or excised. Thanks to his allusive and imprecise language, Mme Cottard erroneously concludes that "M. de Charlus devait être un Israélite bavard" (3:426). Because of her own misunderstanding of Charlus' language, she thinks "'C'est un fanatique'" (3:427). The contagion spreads even to the *hero-je*, for an incident as serious as the narrator's first suspicion about Albertine's "genre" ironically "naquit d'une remarque de Cottard" (3:190), a fool who frames the scene at the casino at Incarville.

The authoritative gaze of the linguistically stumbling and satirically represented Cottard does not coincide with that of the novelist-*je*, who demonstrates a deft touch with irony that highlights the rhetorical nature of understanding. Sedgwick indicates that "M. de Charlus is the novel's most ravishingly consumable product" (223)—perhaps an unconscious invocation on her part of Jupien's reply to Charlus that he has "un cœur d'artichaut" (3:11)—and this consumability recalls the parodic representation of M. Nissim Bernard, a notoriously Jewish and homosexual figure in the novel, and his confused encounters with twin brothers, one an "invert" and the other straight, who remarkably resemble two tomatoes:

Non loin de nous était M. Nissim Bernard, lequel avait un œil poché. Il trompait depuis peu l'enfant des chœurs d'Athalie avec le garçon d'une ferme assez achalandée du voisinage, *Aux Cerisiers*. Ce garçon rouge, aux traits abrupts, avait absolument l'air d'avoir comme tête une tomate. Une tomate exactement semblable servait de tête à son frère jumeau. Pour le contemplateur désintéressé, il y a cela d'assez beau dans ces ressemblances parfaites de deux jumeaux que la nature, comme si elle s'était momentanément industrialisée, semble débiter des produits pareils. Malheureusement, le point de vue de M. Nissim Bernard était autre et cette ressemblance n'était qu'extérieure. La tomate n° 2 se plaisait avec frénésie à faire exclusivement les délices des dames, la tomate n° 1 ne détestait pas condescendre aux goûts de certains messieurs. Or chaque fois que secoué ainsi que par un réflexe, par le souvenir des bonnes heures passées avec la tomate n° 1, M. Bernard se présentait *Aux Cerisiers*,...le vieil Israélite jouant sans le savoir Amphytrion s'adressait au frère jumeau et lui disait: "Veux-tu me donner rendez-vous pour ce soir?" Il recevait aussitôt une solide "tournée." Elle vint même à se renouveler au cours d'un même repas, où il continuait avec l'autre, les propos commencés avec le premier. A la longue elle le dégouta tellement, par association d'idées, des tomates, même de celles comestibles, que chaque fois qu'il entendait un voyageur en commander à côté de lui au Grand-Hôtel, il lui chuchotait: "Excusez-moi, Monsieur, de m'adresser à vous, sans vous connaître. Mais j'ai entendu que vous commandiez des tomates. Elles sont pourries aujourd'hui. Je vous le dis dans votre intérêt car pour moi cela m'est égal, je n'en prends jamais." (3:249)

Here we have the response to the Charlus-Jupien-orchid metaphor or, perhaps more appropriately, its fraternal twin. The fruit of the rare orchid pollination is a garden-variety tomato, mass-produced to the power of two, and cousin to the cherries of its locus of origin, *Aux Cerisiers*. The botanical extends to the category of the alimentary ("celles comestibles") which subdivides into simple vegetarian ("tomates") and ovo-lacto ("œil poché" inspires "œuf poché"). The garden trope, although a guarantor of meaning on the textual level, is "true" only on the linguistic level, because even if Charlus and Jupien are able to read each others's signs, the "inversion" of one tomato and the "normalcy" of the other are not legible on their surfaces. Nor do their gestures apparently reveal them. Thus, if one were to take the Charlus-Jupien metaphor as evidence of a totalizing essentialist characterization of homosexuality, be it nega-

tive or positive, one would fly in the face of this rather pointed *dédoublement*. M. Bernard's Jewish identity further complicates the image, for instead of recognizing his marginal cousin the invert, which we would suppose possible from the analogy drawn between Jew and homosexual, a presumably recognizable composite category, he gets punched in the eye for his trouble. And finally, even though we readers would be so much more suave than the unhappy M. Nissim Bernard, we learn that "*la myopie n'était pas nécessaire pour les confondre*" (3:248) and that we probably would not have fared much better in distinguishing them.

Michael Riffaterre treats this hyperbolic representation at length in his discussion of humor as an index of fictionality (38-40). He characterizes the tomatoes as "the terminal and highest point of a paradigm" of metaphorical representations (38). It is with respect to this metaphor that the orchid-bee metaphor creatively metamorphosed into the closet metaphor by Sedgwick can be effectively judged. As each of the categories of identity and classification in the tomato metaphor itself proves to be ineffective both thematically and representationally as means to the end of understanding, the notion of categories altogether becomes an issue of representation as opposed to essence. An ironic extrapolation of the orchid metaphor and the subsequent discussion of inverts and Jews in "Sodom I," the tomatoes undermine the "legitimate" categories of fin-de-siècle science's classifications of Jews and homosexuals, and they reveal the suspicious nature of taxonomic projects like the orchid-bee metaphor. Not only is the emblematic Nissim Bernard's system of knowing thematically put into question, but the stability of the reader's understanding is also destabilized by textual self-referentiality.

Although the metaphor of the two tomatoes is undeniably comic and ironically satirizes the reading of signs and categories, perhaps an equally great significance lies in its illustration of the implicit relationship between both the "dramatic" and "non-referential" notions of performance which Sedgwick's stance with respect to reader-relations suggests but fails to explore and fully articulate. Judith Butler's notion of identity as "an enacted fantasy or incorporation" (136) that is performed as "an effect of a corporeal signification" (136) coupled with that of subversive repetition of parody (136-37), renders the metaphor particularly meaningful

for the discussion of identity on a general epistemological level and suggests that epistemology itself is a matter of signs. The tomato metaphor pushes classificatory systems to their logical limits by clothing sexual preference in a form of overt botanical drag that extends beyond the limits of the human species. The both dramatic and non-referential nature of the categories in the metaphor reveals the constructed nature of the understanding of identity in contrast to a fixed understanding of essential ontological categories.

For the reader, whose reaction or impression is the real "business of literary art" according to Riffaterre's reading of Proust (39), this construction becomes noticeable at this locus, which qualifies as one of Sedgwick's performative "sites of definitional creation, violence and rupture in relation to particular readers" (3). Even if readers do experience an identification with the relatively powerful position of the comic narrating voice, the intrusion of textual fictionality requires us to reexamine the status of the seemingly objective, diagnostic description that it ironizes and destabilizes our faith in our modes of "understanding." Just as silence itself cannot be readily characterized and identified, the non-representational as such resists definite characterization. Silences on the part of the narrator with respect to his own sexuality or involvement in the myriad events in the novel do not necessarily (or necessarily fail to) signify homosexual panic. Rather, we do not recognize homosexual panic on the part of a Narrator so much as the inadequacy of our own ability to know, despite the drama of the revelations. Just as the young hero's ability to cope with "inversion" as a category is not enhanced but rather confused (particularly in the case of Albertine), more information does not necessarily result in greater understanding. The defective nature of knowledge and understanding is made evident by the element of Time during our experience with the text and would not be as obvious in a reading confined to the first metaphorical representation, that of the orchids and the bee.

The most powerful readerly identification with the text is the desire to know, a desire which is thematized and foiled from the opening paragraphs of the novel. The epistemology of the text, which we can see as one intimately linked with representation, lies squarely in the crux of the difference between "meaning" and "performance" that Sedgwick invokes, for the narrating *je* repre-

sents all manner of knowledge to us, and yet the particulars of this knowledge continue to remain mobile, contingent, and even contradictory. We know that homosexuality is increasingly present in the text, and yet the impossible-to-locate definition of homosexuality that slides between object choice and inner gender manifested by the Charlus-Albertine pairing does not allow us a fixed privileged position from which to spot, much less predict, the next occurrence of "coming out." We are rather relegated to the increasingly paranoid position of the hero-*je* who desires to know and who cannot find out. At the same time, the omissions of the narrator-*je* who does not label himself suggest an identification with the reader who has no resort but to define him or herself in terms of the equally unstable and suspect "adjectival communities" (Sedgwick 229) constituted by the novel. The danger posed by the text, however, is that the absence of stable categories and the free circulation of "adjectives" renders the reader susceptible to all of the possible categories represented. The spectacle of the closet is in fact emblematic of the specular nature of the text which effectively puts everyone into a closet that will always mark the limits of our ability to know.

Structurally speaking, the system of differences established in *A la recherche* muddles the rubrics of conventional identity, for just when we seem to have discovered the "key" to one category, another possibility springs forth. Genette notes that the Proustian character is:

une figure à plusieurs plans dont l'incohérence finale n'est qu'une somme d'excessives cohérences partielles: il y a ainsi plusieurs Saint-Loup, plusieurs Rachel, plusieurs Albertine incompatibles et qui s'entredétruisent. ("Proust Palimpsest" 53-54)

People not only display conflicting impulses; they take each other's places in society: la Verdurin becomes la Princesse de Guermantes; Rachel quand du Seigneur, an artistic failure at a Guermantes salon, becomes the hit of the matinée; *la dame en rose* becomes Odette, who becomes Mme Swann, then Mme de Fourcheville; the elegant Charlus becomes ridiculous and outmoded. Everything changes except death and the transcendence of Art, and it is Charlus who takes inventory of the dead "sur un ton uniforme, légèrement bégayant et aux sourdes résonances sépulcrales:

'Hannibal de Bréauté, mort! Antoine de Mouchy, mort! Charles Swann, mort!...' (4:441). Or, in the words of la Patronne herself who comments on the first death of Cottard, the most enduring of the fidèles of the petit clan: "Hé bien oui, qu'est-ce que vous voulez, il est mort, comme tout le monde..." (3:746).

Sedgwick's deliberately paranoid position, buttressed in advance against potential attacks by the "machinery of heterosexist presumption and homophobic projection" (247) behind the voices speaking of "undecidability," would not be objectionable if it brought to light hidden operations in the text itself. However, its forceful construction is its undoing as a truly critical mechanism, for in her effort to eliminate the possibilities of other interpretations, Sedgwick defines away the problematic aspects of the text that pose perhaps the most interesting questions. The consequence of a logic whose articulation relies too heavily upon characterizing her Narrator as unproblematized and merely homophobic rather than changeable and multi-valent is that such a Narrator can no longer logically inhabit a world in which the fourth dimension is that of Time and its multiple perspectives. According to the either/or dynamic of Sedgwick's view, we must suppose him to have a "true" identity that remains hidden throughout the work, an interpretation that in itself cannot account for the thematization of increasingly complex but ongoing misunderstanding. The persistent theme of the inadequacy of objective knowledge, so often represented parodically, would be lost in Sedgwick's particular closet, as would the complex representational flow of the text. One might advance a reading of the various metaphors as comprised of signs intelligible only by other invertis. However, even the emblematic homosexual Charlus can misread signs, mistaking Cottard for a fellow invert (3:310), or a young child for an adult partner in the *Temple de l'Impudeur*: "Comment...c'était donc la première fois?" (4:442).

Sedgwick's ostensible real interest in the text, and perhaps the one with the most potential for sounding its depths—the performative aspect in its relationship to the reader—is designated as a "truth-effect" but not truly theorized or discussed in terms of epistemology or the closet. Proust himself deals with the question of the reader's desires in the preface to his translation of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies* in which he discusses his own wishful reading relationship to the author: "J'aurais voulu qu'il me dît, lui, le seul

sage détenteur de la vérité, ce que je devais penser...." ("Journées de lecture" 176). We might suggest, then, that the "truth effect" which Sedgwick pursues rather obliquely is in fact a necessary and brilliantly exploited paradox of Proustian prose: objectively taxonomized truth must be represented in order to continue to sustain desire for the aesthetic form in which it is contained even if it is ultimately refuted. As readers, we want to appropriate the text in its truth, and the representational richness of Proust's project seems to allow this. However, metaphors are mobile figures in Proust particularly because they are several and therefore recognizable as such; even the *je* of the *Recherche* poses at least two possible metaphors for his own work: "une robe" or "je n'ose pas dire ambitieusement...une cathédrale" (4:610). Just as Sedgwick's evocations of the figure of the closet rather aptly suggest that no one can ever "come out," this understanding of the epistemology in Proust does not come out in Sedgwick's reading, for her rhetorical strategy of the double-closet reveals precisely what it opted to hide, the highly ambiguous nature of metaphor and the dangers of closeted readings of Proust.

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