Skepsi

On The Logic of Secrecy in *À la recherche du temps perdu*

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Abstract

In this article, the author links what he terms 'logic of secrecy' to Proust's best known and celebrated work, *À la recherche du temps perdu*. The article explores the way in which the '*holder*' and the '*addressee*' of a secret can relate one to the other despite a fundamental state of separation and finds that the *Recherche* contains a great variety of examples in which different kinds of secrets are kept or exhibited. The article argues that, in the logic sustaining the relationships between *holders* and *addressees*, secrets are always taken as dynamic principles moving the narrative gears of Proust's construction. Referring to Gilles Deleuze's notion of 'temporal apprenticeship', as opposed to 'abstract knowledge', the article investigates what is, in effect, a search for a secret in Proust's novel. While the article highlights two main kinds of secrets, deliberate and involuntary, it also considers Proust's notion of '*livre intérieur aux signes inconnus*' as a key point in the novel's architecture. Finally, the article discusses the potentialities of the logic of secrecy in the alternation between the states of being closed or open in what the author, following the terminology of physiology and András Zempléni's reflection on secret in communication, calls 'secretion'.

Keywords: separation, communication, inversion, closed spaces, inner being, outward experience, signs, acts of reading, desire to know, experience of time, deliberate and involuntary secrets, secretion

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At first sight, Marcel Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–1927) is concerned with two *côtés* or sides, those of Swann and Guermantes, whose 'Ways' feature in the titles of two of the seven volumes comprised in the novel.[1] However, and more importantly, Swann and Guermantes also represent a radical separation and their 'Ways', two alternative directions for the walks in the countryside taken by Marcel, the hero, during his childhood, can be seen as a metaphor for the hero's itineraries in his *recherche*, or search, for art, love and knowledge of the world. If Swann represents the way to a knowledge of the arts through

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[1]   *Du côté de chez Swann* (Swann's Way) and *Le côté de Guermantes* (Guermantes' Way).

literature, music, paintings, and architecture, Guermantes is principally the route to the hero's initiation into Faubourg Saint-Germain high society. We can say, therefore, that a great part of the novel is based on this visible opposition between art and high society, a separation that the hero, throughout the narrative, perceives as a real incompatibility.

This is an unusual kind of separation in that, although both Swann's Way and Guermantes' Way diverge from the same point, the house of the hero's great-aunt in Combray, there ia another connection between them, the significance of which is only discovered in the novel's last volume, when, during a conversation between Marcel and his friend Gilberte, the latter mentions a curious link between the two different walks, curious because previously unknown to the hero:[2]

> "Si vous voulez, nous pourrons tout de même sortir un après-midi et nous pourrons aller à Guermantes, en prenant par Méséglise, c'est la plus jolie façon," — phrase qui, en bouleversant toutes les idées de mon enfance, m'apprit que les deux côtés n'étaient pas aussi inconciliables que j'avais cru (Proust 1987–89: IV, 268).[3]
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> [*'If you like, we could still go out one afternoon to walk towards Guermantes, but we could walk past Méséglise, it's the prettiest route,' a sentence which overturned all the ideas of my childhood by revealing that the two ways were not as irreconcilable as I had thought* (Proust 2002: V, 1633).]

What had been experienced as radically separated is actually unseparated. This is very close to what Roland Barthes called 'the law of inversion', or play between opposites, in the architecture of Proust's fiction (Barthes 1994: 1218–21). But we can go a step further than Barthes' 'law' as we explore this ambiguous relationship between two sides, starting from what Louis Marin calls the 'logic of secrecy', by which he means the effect of secrecy on a particular relationship (Marin 1984), that shapes Proust's entire novel.

A state of separation informs all the secrets to be found in the *Recherche*, secrecy being at the very heart of the work.[4] This is no great wonder, when we consider, as Arnaud Lévy does, the etymology of the term 'secret'.[5] However, the term has also inherited the spatial connotations to be found in the Medieval Latin *secretarium* [shelter], in that a consistent characteristic of the secret is that it is conceived as being contained, enclosed. The 'logic of

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[2]   Both the French and English versions of Proust's novel from which quotations are taken are published in several volumes, as listed in the Bibliography. References will therefore include the volume number, as well as the page number(s). Individual books are referred to in the text by their titles in the French edition.

[3]   The route called 'Swann's Way' by the hero-narrator is known locally as 'Méséglise'.

[4]   In this article, I shall, following convention, refer to the novel as 'the *Recherche*', with upper case first letter, and to the hero's personal search as his '*recherche*'.

[5]   The origin of the term 'secret' is the Latin *secretus*, the past participle of the composite verb *secernere* (*se*+*cernere*), which means 'to separate' in the sense of 'to distinguish between'. The root verb *cernere* means to separate in the sense of to sift or sieve, as, for exampling, sifting wheat from chaff.

secrecy' is, in fact, a spatial disposition which necessarily requires a border between 'Inside' and 'Outside' (Lévy 1976: 117–29).

The secret that drives the *Recherche* is represented by the concept of 'Lost Time', which is the radical separation from Time by the person who has 'lost' it. The degree of separation is such that the loss is forgotten, unless something suddenly occurs to remind the loser of this separation; an example of this is the *madeleine* which Marcel suddenly remembers from his childhood: until that moment, he had forgotten not only his experiences in Combray but also their very loss.

This is a construction peculiar to Proust: losses and secrets are often paired in a reflexive process involving the hero's capability to recognise them. Proust represents the hero as the a*ddressee*, or person from whom certain information is to be withheld, of several secrets;[6] some are *deliberate*, that is, intentionally created by the *holder*, the person who initiates a secret, to deceive his *addressee*; others are *involuntary*, that is, created as the result of an unconscious separation within the self. From the hero's point of view, this distance created by separation generates a desire to know and finally write about something absent. While Lost Time represents the main object of this desire; we can easily find signs of this pursuit in the hero's experiences of love or in his social life.

In this article, I shall identify some of the possibilities for there to be a secret in general terms by using examples from Proust's work. Such a reading implies that not only are secrets logically possible but also that there is a logic of secrecy which informs Proust's fiction. My purpose is, therefore, to describe how this logic works in the novel, why *À la recherche du temps perdu* is actually a search for secrets and, finally, why we can read this novel as a huge work of what Zempléni terms 'secretion' accomplished by its author.

1.   Reading Proust through the lens of secrecy

The *Recherche*, insists Deleuze in the first chapter of his *Proust and Signs*, has little to do with 'recollection, memory, even involuntary memory' (2000: 3). It is, he continues, 'not an exposition of involuntary memory but the narrative of an apprenticeship: more precisely, the apprenticeship of a man of letters' (2000: 3), the 'apprentice' being Marcel, the hero-narrator, who, in the course of his *apprentissage* learns how to read, interpret, and finally translate many different kind of signs, acts of discovery that are as vital to the progress of Proust's eponymous

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[6]   In his discussion of the secret, Zempléni uses the terms '*contenu'* to denote the information which is to kept secret, '*détenteur'* to denote the person who initiates the secret and '*déstinataire'* to denote the person from whom the *contenu* is to be hidden (1976: passim); these are rendered as '*content*', '*holder*' and '*addressee*' respectively in this article.

search as are the recollections conjured by involuntary memory. From start to finish, the *Recherche* is a work of reading, interpreting and translating the signs that betray secrets, a multitude of secrets. Every such sign implies a sense, which the hero can understand only as 'the content of a temporal apprenticeship, not of an 'abstract knowledge' (Deleuze 2000: 4).

In the Introduction we saw how the link between Swann's Way and Guermantes' Way, of which Marcel had been unaware throughout his childhood and which was revealed by Gilberte Swann in *Le temps retrouvé*, illustrates how two things that the hero had experienced as radically separated, are, he discovers much later, connected. This separation and connection is both physical, the two Ways and the link between exist geographically, and symbolical, they can be read as a metaphor for the hero's itineraries in his *recherche* and the opposition between art and high society, the link between which is Gilberte herself. This episode also serves to illustrate the effect of his *apprentissage*: time and again, the infinite work of interpretation carried out in *Recherche* reveals a link between a *holder* and an *addressee* of a secret. Marcel's *apprentissage* plays on his fascination with unknown *contents* by forcing him into a relationship with them.

A powerful example of this fascination with an unknown *content* is the way Marcel is captivated by the Guermantes' aristocratic charm. This has not so much to do with their material wealth but something less tangible — the family's history and style; Guermantes becomes a sort of password for an exclusive dimension from which Marcel is excluded, and the more the hero appreciates this exclusive quality, the more he feels that, by virtue of his being excluded, he is an *addressee* of a secret of which the family is the *holder*:

> J'avais entendu parler des célèbres tapisseries de Guermantes et je les voyais, médiévales et bleues, un peu grosses, se détacher comme un nuage sur le nom amarante et légendaire, au pied de l'antique forêt où chassa si souvent Childebert et ce fin fond mystérieux des terres, ce lointain des siècles, il me semblait qu'aussi bien que par un voyage je pénétrerais dans leurs secrets, rien qu'en approchant un instant à Paris Mme de Guermantes, suzeraine du lieu et dame du lac, comme si son visage et ses paroles eussent dû posséder le charme local des futaies et des rives et les mêmes particularités séculaires que le vieux coutumier de ses archives (Proust 1987–89: II, 314).

> [*I had heard of the famous Guermantes tapestries and could see them, medieval and blue, somewhat coarse, standing out like a cloud against the amaranth, legendary name beneath the ancient forest where Childebert so often went hunting, and it seemed to me that, without making a journey to see them, I might just as easily penetrate the secrets of the mysterious corners of these lands, this remoteness of the centuries, simply by coming into contact for a moment, in Paris, with Mme de Guermantes, the suzerain of the place and lady of the lake, as if her face and her words must possess the local charm of forests and streams and the same age-old characteristics as those recorded in the book of ancient customs in her archives* (Proust 2002: III, 37.)]*

In his *rêveries* about the Middle Ages, Marcel adumbrates the distance between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy; he imagines the members of this family to be hiding something legendary

and mysterious behind their name, secrets of 'mysterious corners of [those] lands' and 'remoteness of centuries' that he might penetrate by coming into contact with Mme de Guermantes 'for a moment'. The endless work of interpretation carried out in the *Recherche* repeatedly reveals links between a *holder* and an *addressee* of a secret.

Furthermore, such a chain of secrets attracts not only the hero: if we follow some of the main male characters of the novel (Swann, Charlus, Saint-Loup), we recognise the recurring features of reading, deciphering, and translating secrets. On the other hand, if the male characters are often associated with the role of the *addressee* of a secret, female characters (Odette, Rachel, Albertine) correspond just as often to the role of the *holder*. However, Proust's genius also consists in constructing characters such as Charlus and Saint-Loup, who are at the same time *addressees* and *holders* of different sexual secrets; we cannot invariably apply a simple gender rule to the *holder/addressee* opposition.

This is because the logic of secrecy itself cannot easily accommodate such a rule; rather it allows the possibility of an exchange of roles between *holder* and *addressee*. This can have a significant effect on the fictional action, as we find in the *Recherche*: secrets are not present as static substances but rather as dynamic principles leading a game of *mimesis*. In this sense, the final discovery of the non-incompatibility of the two Ways (that of Guermantes and that of Méséglise) becomes the symbol of the radical impossibility to separate a pair of 'sides' in social statuses (aristocracy and bourgeoisie), in genders (male and female) and in sexual orientations (Sodom and Gomorrah).

The principle behind this role-play goes by the name of 'transitivity' and produces the same inversions that Barthes noticed as the keys of the novel's development.[7] In other words, the *Recherche*'s surprises are very often the result of a macro-movement governed by a superior force that Proust calls 'Time', in which contingency finally coincides with necessity. All this temporal dynamism takes place in 'potential spaces' constituted by secrets, in which separation is not a permanent state, but the very condition of Marcel's 'temporal apprenticeship'[8]. Moreover, the combination between time effects and the hero's learning produces several overturning effects in the *Recherche*. We have but to consider Mme Verdurin, the 'Mistress' of the enlightened bourgeoisie, who becomes, at the end of *Le Temps retrouvé*, the Princess of

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[7] The term 'transitivity' in this context can be defined, following Barthes' concept of a 'law of inversion' as the principal play of opposites in Proust's work. The expression also embraces a reference to Donald Winnicott's 'transitional object', the term by which he defines the passage from 'me' to 'not me' in a child's *apprentissage*; see also his concept of 'potential space' (Winnicott 2005: 141–48).

[8] 'Potential space' is a psychoanalytic notion indicating an intermediate area of experiencing that lies between the inner world and the external reality; see Donald Winnicott (2005: 144–48).

Guermantes. This kind of inversion belongs to the secrets of 'Time', which the hero will only understand at the end of the novel. This is more a rule than an exception in the Proustian logic of secrecy: what has been experienced in one way (Mme Verdurin as a proud bourgeois) will be at last revealed in another way (Mme Verdurin as the princess of Guermantes).

> Certes, s'il s'agit uniquement de nos cœurs, le poète a eu raison de parler des fils mystérieux que la vie brise. Mais il est encore plus vrai qu'elle en tisse sans cesse entre les êtres, entre les événements, qu'elle entrecroise ces fils, qu'elle les redouble pour épaissir la trame, si bien qu'entre le moindre point de notre passé et tous les autres, un riche réseau de souvenirs ne laisse que le choix des communications (Proust 1987–89: IV, 607).[9]

> [*If it were only a matter of our hearts, the poet would have been right to speak of the 'mysterious threads' that are broken by life. But it is even more true to say that life is ceaselessly weaving these threads between individuals and between events, that it interweaves them, doubles them, to make the weave thicker, to such an extent finally that between the least significant point in our past and all the others a rich network of memories gives us in fact a choice about which connection to make* (Proust 2002: VI, 770).]

The search for secrets in which the hero is engaged is a search for 'truth'; however, as Deleuze demonstrates, there is not one great Secret hidden at the culmination of the apprenticeship; at the heart of all signs/secrets there is a truth that resists all attempts to read translate and interpret it. This truth is Time or the temporal relationship between the *addressee* of the secret and that which is unknown to him.

> To seek the truth is to interpret, decipher, explicate. But this "explication" is identified with the development of the sign in itself. This is why the Search is always temporal, and the truth always a truth of time. The final systematization reminds us that time itself (*le Temps*) is plural. (Deleuze 2000: 17)

This essential truth, which Deleuze defines as a 'truth of time', is a force, hidden behind the secrets, that drives the *Recherche* by challenging the hero to discover it. The eventual revelation, which concludes *Le temps retrouvé* and the entire novel, is only achieved through the hero-narrator's previous, and apparently, worthless efforts *during his apprentissage*.

In everyday experience, 'secret' means a lack of open communication, but in the *Recherche* this lack represents the very condition of a deep and sudden ommunication between past and present. It is the same for all hidden contents enclosed in a container, that is the classical

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[9]   By 'fils mystérieux [*mysterious threads*]', the author is referring to Victor Hugo's poem 'Tristesse d'Olympio' from his collection *Les Rayons et les Ombres*, first published in 1840:

> Que peu de temps suffit pour changer toutes choses!
> Nature au front serein, comme vous oubliez!
> Et comme vous brisez dans vos métamorphoses
> Les fils mystérieux où nos cœurs sont liés (Hugo 1957: 76).

> [*How little time is needed for everything to change!*
> *Serene-browed Nature, how you forget!*
> *And how, in your transformations, you break*
> *The mysterious threads in which our hearts are bound* (author's translation).]

situation of a secret, as discussed by Deleuze & Guattari (2004: 316–30): the contents could always become a container for other contents, while the container could reveal itself as an empty space. Despite the infinite variability of contents and actors, we can recognise the effects of a strict logic working between separated sides and places. In these terms, the dynamic of the secret can produce, by way of its recurrent movements, a complex narrative plot that contains not only an entire world but also infinite worlds contained in potential containers (just like the *madeleine* from Marcel's forgotten and so hidden childhood). For Proust, a secret is never a static substance but rather a medium whereby some fundamental hidden parts of the self can be discovered, just like the 'mysterious threads' that life weaves between beings and events and breaks.

The influence of this logic can be analysed in the novel only at the price of a sacrifice. We must abandon the notion that the *content* of the secret behind the novel can be discovered. In the *Recherche*, the only real secret is, in fact, a paradoxical one: there is no secret. In other words, in Proust's writing there are multiple effects of secrecy, but it looks as though there is not, prevailing over the others, a single secret prevailing over the others, what we might call the Prime Secret, the Secret of Secrets, the Secret, or as Derrida puts it the secret having 'the clarity of divine lucidity [that] penetrates everything yet keeps within itself the most secret of secrets' (Derrida 1995: 108). On the contrary, the novel's secrets compose a chain that rolls in the narrative gear, increasing the dynamic effects of overturn between one side and its opposite. In order to find an image drawing the role of the logic of secrecy in Proust's novel, we can think about a transparent lift that carries the reader to different levels of the book and shows its inner workings while it is moving from one floor to another. The lift is actually a good representation of the secret because it is a closed and protected space (a *claustrum* in Latin), in which the inside does not communicate with the outside. But sometimes doors open and let the passenger out. The relationship between these two dimensions, Inside and Outside (identity and otherness, inner being and outward appearance), is the most powerful example of the secret's productivity in the *Recherche*: a shifting combination between protection and exposition leads the role-play of the hero's 'temporal apprenticeship'.[10]

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[10] See Louis Marin's article 'Logiques du secret', in which he says: 'Le secret — répétons-le — n'est pas une chose ou un être mis à part, mais l'effet — négatif — d'un jeu de relations et d'interactions [*The secret, I repeat, is not some thing or some being set apart, but the effect, the negative effect, of a play between relationships and interactions*]' (1984: 64; editor's translation).

2. Deliberate secrets

Innumerable *contents* can pass through the secret, provided that they are placed in a closed space that makes the *content* invisible or unknown to its *addressee*. The separation instituting the secret must satisfy a fundamental condition: keeping its *content* safe, that is, maintaining the secret in a state of being unknown, by excluding the sharing of it or at least regulating such sharing according to some restrictive principles. The closed space of a secret is instituted by the *holder*, who consequently holds its knowledge. Scenes in which the presence of his *addressee* requires the *holder* to act in such a way that the secret is kept from the *addressee* abound in Proust's novel, as in the following example, one of the most important, concerning Marcel's relationship with Albertine:

> Parfois l'écriture où je déchiffrais les mensonges d'Albertine, sans être idéographique, avait simplement besoin d'être lue à rebours; c'est ainsi que ce soir elle m'avait lancé d'un air négligent ce message destiné à passer presque inaperçu: "Il serait possible que j'aille demain chez les Verdurin, je ne sais pas du tout si j'irai, je n'en ai guère envie." Anagramme enfantin de cet aveu: "J'irai demain chez les Verdurin, c'est absolument certain, car j'y attache une extrême importance." Cette hésitation apparente signifiait une volonté arrêtée et avait pour but de diminuer l'importance de la visite tout en me l'annonçant. Albertine employait toujours le ton dubitatif pour les résolutions irrévocables (Proust 1987–89: III, 598).

> [*Sometimes the script in which I deciphered Albertine's lies was not ideographic, but simply had to be read backwards; thus, on this particular evening she had thrown out in my direction the message, designed to pass almost unnoticed: 'I might perhaps go to the Verdurins' tomorrow, I don't really know, I don't much feel like going.' A childish anagram of the admission, 'I'm going to the Verdurins tomorrow, I simply must go, it's really important.' This apparent hesitation was the sign of a firm resolve and was designed to reduce the importance of the visit in the very moment of telling me about it. Albertine always used a tentative tone for irrevocable decisions* (Proust 2002: V, 237–38).]

The character of Albertine is the perfect example for the role of the *holder*: in order to keep her lesbianism secret from him, she is obliged to fabricate a chain of lies addressed to the hero. But Marcel's frantic passion for this girl is actually a passion for her secrets, in so far as he is seduced only by the unknown signs that make Albertine's character an unsolvable puzzle.[11] In the hero's perspective, the experience of love is actually a desire to know the real identity of the beloved. On the other hand, if the beloved is familiar with his lover's jealousy, the logic of secrecy produces a mirror effect in which *holder* and *addressee* change their roles. In this way, if the hero's jealousy basically consists in a passion for Albertine's secrets, it is very often also a secret passion because the lover does not want the beloved to discover his jealousy. This kind

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[11] 'The need to become familiar with Albertine's desires is so intense that the activity of loving turns out to be something like a compulsive intellectual investigation' (Bersani 1969: 61). See also Malcolm Bowie in *Freud, Proust, Lacan: Theory as Fiction*: 'But over and against these emotional and moral penalties, the jealous lover hears, and heeds, an imperious call to *know*' (1987: 49; original emphasis).

of mirror game ends with the victory of the character who outdoes the other in keeping his/her secret:

> [L]es paroles elles-mêmes ne me renseignaient qu'à la condition d'être interprétées à la façon d'un afflux de sang à la figure d'une personne qui se trouble, à la façon encore d'un silence subit. Tel adverbe […] jailli dans une conflagration par le rapprochement involontaire, parfois périlleux, de deux idées que l'interlocuteur n'exprimait pas et duquel, par telles méthodes d'analyse ou d'électrolyse appropriées, je pouvais les extraire, m'en disait plus qu'un discours (Proust 1987–89: III, 596).

> [*I relied on words only when I could read them like the rush of blood to the face of a person who is unsettled, or like a sudden silence. A certain phrase [...] flaring up, sparked by the unintended, sometimes dangerous proximity of two ideas unexpressed by the speaker, from whose discourse I could, by appropriate methods of analysis or electrolysis, extract them, told me more than a whole speech. Albertine sometimes left such loose ends trailing in her speech, precious compounds which I hastened to 'process' so as to turn them into clear ideas* (Proust 2002: V, 232).]

This process entails a long phase of surveillance, during which the tools for protection, silence, lies, tricks, etc., are employed to ensure the exclusion of the *addressee*.

Clearly, for there to be a secret, there has to be a *holder*, the person who has created the secret's closed space, and there has to be an *addressee*, the person who is being excluded from knowledge of the secret; each, whether *holder* or *addressee*, only exists in relation to the other, therefore. These positions represent two sides of the logic of secrecy: they are, if you will, like two troops deployed against each other or two dancers twirling round each other in a silent ballet. The existence of a secret is a game which needs at least two actors, two roles, two sides, even though, as in the Hegelian master-slave dialectic,[12] it is possible for there to be a change in the relationship between *holder* and *addressee*, so that their roles become inverted or reversed.

However, a third person can occupy the space between the two principal participants, even if his presence is not necessary for the institution of a secret space. I refer here to the role of what Zempléni calls the '*dépositaire* [depository]': someone who is included in the secret according to the *holder*'s will. The depository is thus able to benefit from the rights of this confidential relationship but, at the same time, has to observe all the obligations it demands. The most universally known obligation is represented by the command: 'don't speak'. The principal condition for all kinds of relationships concerning the communication of a secret is silence;[13] indeed, a secret is most commonly constituted by the communication of confidential

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[12] Hegel discusses this in the chapter on Self-consciousness in his *Phänomenologie des Geistes* [The Phenomenology of Spirit (or Mind)].

[13] In his analysis from a rhetorical perspective of different types of silence, which is also concerned with the topic of the secret, Paolo Valesio distinguishes between a 'transitive silence' and an 'intransitive silence' (Valesio 1986: 356–65). See also his *Novantiqua: Rhetorics as a Contemporary Theory* (Valesio 1980).

information that has to be protected. State secrets, professional and banking confidentiality, the seal of the confessional, and the arcana of the Masonic orders all fall into this category of secrets, their common feature being that they concern information of any kind which cannot be disclosed to anyone who is not privy to the confidence and which is therefore kept hidden by any depository according to the *holder*'s will.

Every secret based on confidential information can be gathered in a great subcategory: the *deliberate secret*. In Proust's novel we find some indications of this kind of secret in the interaction between social groups (the aristocratic milieu of Guermantes and the bourgeois Verdurin family).

> Mais comme le voyageur, déçu par le premier aspect d'une ville, se dit qu'il en pénétrera peut-être le charme en visitant les musées, en liant connaissance avec le peuple, en travaillant dans les bibliothèques, je me disais que si j'avais été reçu chez Mme de Guermantes, si j'étais de ses amis, si je pénétrais dans son existence, je connaîtrais ce que sous son enveloppe orangée et brillante son nom enfermait réellement, objectivement, pour les autres, puisque enfin l'ami de mon père avait dit que le milieu des Guermantes était quelque chose d'à part dans le faubourg Saint-Germain (Proust 1987–89: II, 329–30).

> [*But like a traveller who is disappointed by his first impression of a city and who tells himself that he might perhaps penetrate its charm by visiting its museums, getting to know its inhabitants and working in its libraries, I assured myself that, had I been a regular visitor to Mme de Guermantes's house, were I one of her circle, were I to enter into her life, I should then know what was really enclosed within the brilliant orange-coloured envelope of her name, know it objectively, through the eyes of others, since, after all, my father's friend had said that the Guermantes were an exclusive set in the Faubourg Saint-Germain* (Proust 2002: III, 73–74).]

But the real kingdom of the deliberate secret in the *Recherche* is sexuality. The clearest evidence for this can be found throughout the first part of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* with its references to the frequency with which the novel's *race maudite* [accursed race], the extensive homosexual community, has to preserve its secret;[14] for example:

> Le vice (on parle ainsi pour la commodité du langage), le vice de chacun l'accompagne à la façon de ce génie qui était invisible pour les hommes tant qu'ils ignoraient sa présence. La bonté, la fourberie, le nom, les relations mondaines, ne se laissent pas découvrir, et on les porte cachés (Proust 1987–89: III, 15).

> [*Vice (I put it thus for the sake of linguistic convenience), each person's vice accompanies him in the same fashion as the genie who was invisible to men for as long as they were unaware of his presence. Kindness, double-dealing, reputation, our social relations do not let themselves be discovered, we carry them concealed* (Proust 2002: IV, 51)].

The condition of separation and coexistence with the enemy forces the member of the subgroup to adopt coded messages. Baron Charlus, who maintains a strict aristocratic code while, at the same time, concealing a 'natural' homosexual attitude behind his very manly way of talking, is

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[14] See, in particular, Proust 1987–89: III, 3–33* and Proust 2002: IV, 22–98.

an exemplar of such a person, the perfect box of secrets concerning society and sexuality (Kosofsky Sedgwick 1998: 213–51).

3. Involuntary secrets

As well as deliberate secrets that are instituted as a result of the *holder*'s *intention* to keep the *content* of the secret from the *addressee*, perhaps by disguising the information in some way, as do Albertine and Charlus, there are secrets in the *Recherche* in respect of which the separation that, as discussed in the Introduction, is an essential feature of the secret is unintentional. I call this second category of secret the 'involuntary secret'.

As I indicated in the Introduction, the separation found in the case of the involuntary secret is a separation within the space of the self. How this can occur can be explained in terms of the 'crypt', as Abraham and Torok term part of the closed space within the self in their analysis of the dialectics between introjection and incorporation within the process of mourning. Within this 'crypt' are stored experiences which only become settle and become clear over a considerable lapse of time. In the subjective space of inner experience there is, therefore, a boundary separating the knowable and the unknowable, the visible from the invisible, the speakable from the unspeakable (Abraham & Torok 1996: 252–58).

From this it will be appreciated that another feature that distinguishes the involuntary secret from the deliberate secret is the identity of the *holder* and the *addressee*: they are one and the same person. This paradox is well expressed by Masud Khan in his work on hidden selves:

> The location of a secret of this type in psychic topography is neither inside nor outside a person. A person cannot say 'I have a secret inside me'. They are the secret, yet their ongoing life does not partake of it (Masud Khan 1989: 106).

Although he does not use the term 'involuntary secret', Khan's observation that '[the person is] the secret, yet [his] ongoing life does not partake of it' exactly describes the phenomenon that is the involuntary secret: the person concerned is keeping something that he has experienced hidden from himself; he is, therefore, at one and the same time both *holder* and *addressee*.

Rather than 'do not speak', the phrase which defines the constitution of the involuntary secret is an inversion of the Socratic paradox: 'I know that I do not know' becomes 'I do not know that I know'. The inner space of the self is divided; the 'crypt' is the part in which are stored all those experiences which the subject, that is, the person who '[is] the secret', 'does not know that he knows'; the relationship between two actors, a *holder* and an *addressee* who are one and the same, is thus created and the logic of secrecy respected.

This second category of secret is elevated to a position of prime importance in the field of literature, given that it informs the entire narrative of the *Recherche*. Secrets force what Proust terms *intelligence*, that is, a character's capacity for understanding, to cross the divide between the conscious and the unconscious discussed above, and Marcel, the hero, is a perfect example of a *holder* separated from his own secret or, to put it another way, the roles of both *holder* and *addressee* are combined in the person of the hero. Furthermore, the first person pronoun — *je* (I) —, which dictates the narration and denotes both the hero and the narrator, is actually a secret space. The hero is separated from his own experience, so 'does not know that he knows', while the narrator, who appropriates his own secret and finally 'knows that he knows', can write and share the entire story with the readers.

The difference between the hero and the narrator is that the former does not know what the latter knows. This point corresponds to Deleuze's 'temporal apprenticeship' (Deleuze 2000: 4). Unlike the hero, the narrator has learned how to read, interpret and translate his own experience of 'Time'. All manner of processes which Proust includes in the definition of 'self-reading' are involved in this double-sided relationship within the involuntary space of the self:

> 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 (Proust 1987–89: IV, 458).

> [*As for the inner book of unknown signs (signs which seemed to stand out, as it were, in relief, and which my attention, exploring my unconscious, cast around for, stumbled over, and traced the shapes of, like a diver feeling his way underwater), for the reading of which nobody else could provide me with any rules, reading them becomes one of those acts of creation in which nobody can take our place or even collaborate with us* (Proust 202: VI, 473).]

As discussed in the first section, the *Recherche* develops the concept of reading acts in the broad sense that includes interpretation and translation. Secrets of any kind involve the *addressee* in reading in one way or another, but involuntary secrets represent the chapters of the *inner book*, that is, his own story, that the hero must learn to decipher, in order to become its narrator. This connection between reading and writing puts the logic of secrecy at the heart of the novel. Indeed, learning to read the signs of Lost Time is essential perquisite for the possibility of both regaining time and writing about this search. Further, reading — that means also knowing through interpretations — is the original act of creation, something like the secret of Proustian art.

4.   Open secrets and 'secretion'

Having discussed the two principal categories of secret, deliberate and involuntary, I now turn to a feature of the secret that has particular relevance to the *Recherche* but is one that seems to contradict the concept of the closed space. Despite being, one would suppose, 'hermetically sealed', this closed space can open at any time and let the secret escape; a phenomenon which Zempléni, borrowing a term from the vocabulary of physiology, calls 'secretion':

> Appelons *sécrétion* le processus – ou plutôt l'ensemble de processus plus ou moins involontaires – par lequel le secret *s'exhibe* devant ses destinataires sans être, pour autant, ni communiqué ni révélé (1976: 318).
>
> [*Let us call* secretion *the process, or rather all the more or less involuntary processes, whereby the secret manifests itself to those to whom it is addressed, without being, for all that, either communicated or revealed*' (editor's translation).]

Like 'secret', the term 'secretion is derived from the Latin '*secernere*', so the process of secretion has at its root the phenomenon of separation. However, in the case of secretion, the separation is accomplished by a movement that is the reverse of that by which a secret is instituted. Whilst a movement from the Outside to the Inside is necessary in the first stage of a secret's life, in its final phase the opposite obtains: what has been guarded and protected in a safe space is ejected, expelled, 'secreted'. However, although it is based on the concepts of closure and protection, the logic of secrecy accommodates this moment when the closed space opens to manifest the *content* of the secret.

Secretion proves that relationships of whatever kind based on a secret are basically transient, prone to be overturned and plunged in what Proust calls 'Time'. In short, the enclosing of a secret is rarely final: the closed space containing the secret is subjected to a pressure from the Inside to the Outside equal to force whereby the *content* was sealed up. The separation on which a secret is based embraces the possibility that the two parts of whatever has been separated may be reunited.[15] The series of tell-tale signs during Marcel's *apprentissage* —

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[15]   Even if it is not directly related to an interpretation of Proust's work, it is useful to mention Jacques Derrida's investigation about the processes of separation and reunification within the space of the secret. In a seminar from 1991 (*Répondre du secret*), Derrida considered some aporethic aspects of the secret in the inner space of the self:

> [I]l faut bien qu'il y ait là non seulement une division, mais une radicale non-identité à soi pour que le secret soit possible: le secret déterminé que je peux librement garder par-devers moi [...]. Mais aussi le secret qui, avant que je ne le partage avec tel ou tel ou avec personne, me partage radicalement, au point que ce qui ne dépend que de moi, ma liberté et ma responsabilité, ma capacité de secret, me vienne on ne sait d'où, d'un autre, d'un autre moi, d'un non-soi, me "tombe dessus" selon la formule de l'auto-hétéronomie que nous avons déjà commenté (Quoted in Michaud 2006: 29–30).
>
> [*There must be not only a split but a radical non-identity with self for the secret, the specific secret that I can freely keep to myself, to be possible.* [...] *But also the secret which, before I share it with this person or that or with no one, radically divides me, to the point that what only*

'*madeleine*, steeples, trees, cobblestones, napkin, noise of a spoon or a pipe' (Deleuze 2000: 11) — shows that involuntary secrets do not last forever. Secretion is, therefore, a process which is crucial to the Proustian logic of secrecy.

Zempléni describes secretion as a process that is 'plus ou moins involontaires' [*more or less involuntary*]; in other words, it happens despite both the *holder*'s efforts to keep and the *addressee*'s to discover the secret. And there is no uniform way in which secretion takes place: sometimes it can happen in a slow and measured flow: at others, it is gradual but intermittent; yet again, the secret kept inside for so long can suddenly burst out.

A character that epitomises this involuntary 'coming-out' of secrets is Baron de Charlus, who, in order to keep his sexuality secret, has constructed surveillance system so paranoid that Marcel often takes what he does and says to be signs of madness (Deleuze 2000: 170–82). The Baron is an enigma, the solution to which Marcel discovers by a chance at the beginning of *Sodom et Gomorrhe*, when the Baron unwittingly betrays himself. From this moment until the end of the novel, Charlus' secret will be completely transparent, as it were a '*Segreto di Pulcinella*' or open secret, obvious to all.

Albertine, whose secret also concerns her sexuality, is another 'secretor', a character whose secret 'comes out' despite his/her intentions otherwise. In Albertine's case, this as a result of her tendency to display her lesbianism while trying to conceal it. Consequently, her discourse lets slip so many clues that Marcel's jealousy is automatically rekindled, whenever he seems to have subdued it. And to this group of 'secretors' we can also add Legrandin, the 'saint Sébastien du snobisme [*Saint Sebastian of snobbishness*]' (Proust 1987–80: I, 127; 2002: I, 342). Just like homosexual love, snobbism is regarded in the *Recherche* as being disgraceful because it concerns another unmentionable desire: an aspiration to be associated with a higher social class. Legrandin is a snob because he longs to be accepted into the aristocratic circle of the Guermantes, a desire he keeps secret by affecting to despise them. In all these cases, the dynamics of the 'coming-out' concerns uncontrolled 'secretions': a deliberate secret is revealed, perhaps through the *holder*'s discourse or mannerisms, despite his/her intentions to keep it hidden.

As regards the novel's structure, however, the most important secretion involves Marcel, the hero-narrator encapsulated in 'je [*I*]' and his experience of 'Time regained' during the final

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depends on me, my freedom and my responsibility, my capacity for secrecy, may come from who knows where, from someone else, from another me, from a non-self, may just 'happen' in the manner of auto-heteronomy that we have already discussed (editor's translation)].

See also: Jacques Derrida & Maurizio Ferraris, *A Taste for the Secret* (2001).

Guermantes matinée. Only in this moment of solitude does he understand that he has found the right lens with which to read the 'inner book of unknown signs' written by 'Time'. This episode describes the crucial moment when Marcel's metamorphosis from the novel's hero into its narrator is finally accomplished. In other words, the separation inherent in the principal involuntary secret is turned into an act of repair on a grand scale. If we look at the *Recherche* from the point of view of secrecy, the entire novel can be read as a huge work of sedimentation, as outlined in section 3, a work whose material has been assembled by the hero and then, despite his intentions, released by the only artist Proust considers as such, namely 'Time', a dual synthesis, as it were, of Life and Death.

Secretion is the definitive moment in the *Recherche's* logic of secrecy, because all the narration supposes both distances and contacts between a subject and his inner experience of Time. In fact, in the last page of the novel, the narrator asserts that:

> […] tout ce temps si long non seulement avait, sans une interruption, été vécu, pensé, sécrété par moi, qu'il était ma vie, qu'il était moi-même, mais encore que j'avais à toute minute à le maintenir attaché à moi, qu'il me supportait, moi, juché à son sommet vertigineux, que je ne pouvais me mouvoir sans le déplacer comme je le pouvais avec lui (Proust 1987–89: IV, 624).

> [[…] *all this length of time had not only uninterruptedly been lived, thought, secreted by me, that it was my life, that it was myself, but also that I had to keep it attached to me at every moment, that it supported me, that I was perched on its vertiginous summit, and that I was unable to move without its collaboration, without taking it with me* (Proust 2002: VI, 886-87).]

This final observation corroborates the importance of secrecy as a way of interpreting the work of 'Time' in the novel. The strict logic of secrecy is inherent in the relation between the hero-narrator and the great force governing his history. Both the first stage of closure and the final moment of secretion make the secret essential to the possibility of writing about lost and regained Time. The duality governing this logic is the key point in the *Recherche's* architecture. The process of secretion represents the crowning achievement for a logic founded on 'Time's' transitivity and resistance. The boundaries between the secret's container and contents are finally overtaken: past life is suddenly recovered from the domain of oblivion. But it should be recognised that the final revelation in *Le temps retrouvé* is also the moment when the hero perceives his imminent death.

The entire work of writing takes shape while the author is beset by illness and crumbling forces. The triumphal revelation also represents the last act of a life that, in the imminence of death, turns into art — thus accomplishing the 'temporal apprenticeship'. Once again, and for the last time, we are facing an irreducible ambiguity. For this same reason we can recognise in Proust's art the signs of a deep movement accomplished by 'Time' in what we call 'Life'. At the end of the novel, secretion makes clearly visible the oscillation that Proust's writing has

Skepsi

been endeavouring to translate since the novel's first pages, as it combines two dimensions (inside and outside), two states (being opened and being closed), two laws (separation and non-separation) of an uninterrupted dual movement.

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