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Review Essays

Abstract

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The Modernist Novel in Spain. *Transparent Simulacra: Spanish Fiction 1902-1906*, by Robert Spires. Roberta Johnson

Staging the End of Individualism: Sloterdijk's Postmetaphysical Dramaturgy. *Thinker on Stage: Nietzsche's Materialism*, by Peter Sloterdijk. Alan D. Schrift

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Review Essays

Awareness and Amnesia: Malcolm Bowie's *Freud, Proust and Lacan*

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Bowie, Malcolm. *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1987. Pp. 225.

This interesting, extremely well-written and gratifyingly literate book is divided into five chapters (framed by an introduction and an epilogue) as follows: 1. Freud's dreams of knowledge; 2. Proust, jealousy, knowledge; 3. Freud and Proust; 4. Lacan; and 5. Lacan and literature. The elements making up the pattern of Bowie's mosaic emerge clearly enough from this list: dreams, knowledge, jealousy and literature—as they relate to Freud, Proust and Lacan—not to mention, I would add (since as its author, he is not and cannot be mentioned in the series, *except by another*) Malcolm Bowie himself, implicitly. The word “mosaic” is appropriate not only because the book consists of a series of related essays, but also because beginning with Freud's phrase: “*Saxa loquuntur*”! (“Stones talk”!) quoted on page 19, a certain “stony” motif may be seen at work throughout, manifest thematically, for example, in the stones of Venice of the Proust chapter and culminating materially, as it were, in the “bedrock” evoked in the book's final sentence.

Bowie takes as his point of departure the observation that “[h]ypotheses were . . . both frowned upon and assiduously cultivated by Freud” (16) as he pursued his dream of the *science* of psychoanalysis—his desire that its discoveries have the validity and be accorded the status of scientific truth. Acknowledging that Freud's ambivalence towards theory is there for all to read “on the invitingly intelligible surface that Freud imparted to his ‘public’ essays” (16–17), Bowie proposes to review Freud's “anti-theoretical and philo-theoretical tendencies” in their “less official and less responsible

guises," to explore "the wishful substratum of Freud's scientific writings" (17). He will do so by tracing the fantasmatic presence of the archaeologist and the *conquistador* ("both are enthusiasts for hardness" [37]) as favored self-images in Freud's text.

What is at once noteworthy and predictable about Bowie's declared intention, given the psychoanalytic perspective he adopts, is that it is both facilitated by and repetitive of Freud's own theory of the unconscious. The situation is the familiar one whereby (to paraphrase T. S. Eliot) it is inevitably Freud that we know, whenever as active readers of his text, we claim to know more than him. It is a matter, in other words, of reading Freud with the aid of techniques he first made available in his elaboration of psychoanalysis, notably the *gleichschwebende Aufmerksamkeit* or "evenly suspended attention," and its accessory, displacement; the former permitting the analyst to resist the patient's (and his own) well-nigh irresistible urge to make sense, the latter allowing the dreamer to evade censorship by shifting the emphasis and focus of the dream-thoughts onto the apparently irrelevant or trivial. To read psychoanalytically is (in a sense!) to "stop making sense." The paradox is that the reading can only be recognized as successful (i.e. convincing) by eventually making sense, albeit *otherwise*. Hence the assumption that non-sense, however long and tolerantly indulged, must eventually be revealed as merely apparent if understanding is to result. Non-sense, in other words (or so at least received opinion would have it) must eventually yield to sense.

Freud, seeing himself alternately, in Bowie's account, as archaeologist and conquering hero, wants at the same time to reach the bedrock underlying the stratified archaeological site he sometimes took the unconscious to be and to discover and annex new territory (the unconscious as radically unknowable) for his mental science. In the first instance the need for theory could be dispensed with when "the hard, indestructible, 'original' psychical material" was reached; in the second the fact of repression (the necessary condition, according to Freud, for the existence of an unconscious) must preclude any but a theoretical, i.e. hypothetical, knowledge of the latter. For if repression is admitted, then not only the content of the unconscious, but its very existence (like that of America for Columbus) can only be deduced—predicated, as Freud was the first to perceive, on its manifestation in dreams and in the great variety of slips and errors to which it gives rise. Pointing to the simultaneous plasticity (*Plastizität*) and adhesiveness (*Haftfähigkeit*) of the libido

as Freud would eventually conceive it, Bowie concludes that “as a theorist Freud was, in his own terms, both an adhesive and a mobile libidinal type” (44), and the book’s transition from Freud’s “unruly dreams of knowledge” (44) to Proust’s jealous lover’s “call to know” hinges on the implication that science, “like all works of the mind [is a work] of passion too” (65). So is literary criticism, I might add, however equivocal its status as art or science. Indeed Bowie obliquely acknowledges as much when he attributes to Freud’s commentators archaeological ambitions and dreams of conquest similar to Freud’s own, wryly remarking that “even commentators are seekers after buried meaning and aspirants to heroic status” (30).

In “Proust, jealousy, knowledge” Bowie directs his attention to what he regards as the largely unread (repressed?) volumes of *La Recherche: Sodome et Gomorrhe*, *La Prisonnière* and *La Fugitive*. Concentrating on *La Prisonnière* in particular, he represents the jealous narrator’s interminable speculation as to Albertine’s putative mendacity (and hence her sexual orientation) as “a dynamics of knowing, a portrait of the mind in process” (58). Furthermore, by showing how Proust’s brilliant hypothesis-maker simultaneously wishes to make hypothesizing redundant (he entertains the fantasy of a “total intelligence”—the result of an impossible omnipresence in Albertine’s life—that “would require of him no more than a small final inductive jump for the abiding truths of Albertine’s character to emerge”), Bowie can argue that

What we have here . . . in this competition between two modes of jealous inquiry is the rough sketch of a debate between the inductive and hypothetico-deductive methods. Methods that philosophers of science have striven to formulate clearly, and that have been defended in their arguments with formidable mathematical and logical weapons, are rediscovered by Proust’s narrator as the spontaneous impulses of a mind under conditions of torment. (55)

It is not simply then that science is a passion, but that passion too (or at least jealousy) is a kind of science. Indeed Bowie will characterize jealousy as it is represented in *La Recherche* as

the quest for knowledge in a terrifyingly pure form: a quest for knowledge untrammelled and unsupported by things actually

known. It is a continuous journey towards a receding goal, an itinerary with no stopping-places and no land-marks; it is an appetite for knowledge, but knows nothing: 'La jalousie, qui a un bandeau sur les yeux, n'est pas seulement impuissante à rien découvrir dans les ténèbres qui l'enveloppent, elle est encore un de ces supplices où la tâche est à recommencer sans cesse, comme celle des Danaïdes, comme celle d'Ixion' " [Jealousy, which is blindfolded, is not merely powerless to discover anything in the darkness that enshrouds it; it is also one of those tortures where the task must be incessantly repeated, like that of the Danaïdes, or of Ixion]. (58)

Or, dare I suggest, like psychoanalysis—that other impossible task from whose rigors even Freud sought relief? Hence his intermittent efforts to arrest the interminable theorizing that psychoanalysis (his own discovery) seemed to demand; when goaded by enthusiasm for a new theory or alternatively by intellectual and moral exhaustion, he would draw a premature conclusion or lapse momentarily into biologism. That is Bowie's interesting thesis, in extension of which I would argue that a major element in Lacan's celebrated return to Freud is the tenacity with which he continually foregrounds the dimension of what Bowie calls "jealous inquiry" in Freud's mental science. I mean that even as he continues to assert its scientific status, Lacan insists on viewing psychoanalysis as nothing less than "an appetite for knowledge [that] knows nothing," "a continuous journey towards a receding goal," to adopt the terms Bowie applies to Proust's narrator's investigations. It is just this "unknowing" of psychoanalysis as elaborated by Lacan that Shoshana Felman explicates in her remarkable essay "La Méprise et sa chance" (*L'Arc* 58, 1974) but before passing to the third member of Bowie's trinity, I want to discuss "Freud and Proust," the chapter to which, as it happens, the notion of *la méprise*, or error, is central.

Here Bowie offers many valuable insights into the ways in which Freud and *La Recherche* are mutually illuminating, concentrating his attention on two of the psychological topics that Freud and Proust share, namely errors and slips and bi-sexuality. But the relationship between the two writers as Bowie perceives it goes beyond the mere fact of such indisputably common interests. Hence an awareness of Freud's theory of the unconscious ought to shift the focus of our reading, he argues, making us on the one hand properly suspicious of

the conclusions Proust's narrator draws from his prolific and ingenious theorizing, and on the other, causing us to suspect the presence of symptomatic error elsewhere than in those places where Proust and/or his narrator are eager to point it out.

Thus according to Bowie: "Freud helps us to see how many kinds and levels of interlocation Proust has inserted into his narrator's tireless soliloquy, and to distrust his psychologizing even when this is of a seemingly clairvoyant psychoanalytic kind" (76). *Particularly* when it is "of a seemingly clairvoyant psychoanalytic kind," Bowie will in fact claim, because "repression operates against introspective analytic performance such as Proust seems to favor." As long therefore as the psychoanalytically informed reader continues to keep the fact of repression in mind (though as Bowie and others have suggested, even Freud found this difficult if not impossible to do consistently), he or she will find it necessary

to look beyond the smooth psychological speculations of Proust's narrator, to distrust his masterful voice and to ask whether an alternative psychology—more unstable, more dialectical and more discontinuous—may not also be ingrained in Proust's text. (68)

But this attitude can not be limited to Proust's text exclusively, I suggest, and hence a book such as *Freud, Proust and Lacan* in which "smooth speculations" (if not precisely "psychological" ones) uttered by a "masterful voice" abound, must invite the same kind of scrutiny to which it would subject Proust's *recherche*. "For every new access of awareness that the impassioned theorist achieves, a new amnesia is exacted," Bowie writes (65), prompting speculation as to the cost in amnesia of the insights achieved in his own book. That Bowie would resist identification with "the impassioned theorist" may be respectfully bracketed, I believe. Despite his reluctance to claim the status of a "work of theory" for *Freud, Proust and Lacan* (he describes it as "merely a work of theory-tinged criticism" [11]), there is more than enough passion and theory (and passion *about* theory) in it to warrant the description. But before attempting to pursue this point further, I want first of all to take up the discussion of errors and slips in *La Recherche*.

The most dramatic example of error in Proust's error-ridden novel (and it is all the more dramatic for being *textual*) is the famous

telegram, ostensibly signed "Albertine," that Proust's narrator receives in Venice. Albertine has in fact been dead for some time. The signature turns out somewhat improbably to be a distortion of "Gilberte," the name of the actual sender, and Bowie's discussion of this episode is the occasion for one of several inspired close readings of Proust and Lacan that distinguish his book.

Passing over the succession of elaborate theories that the narrator advances to account for his misreading of the signature, Bowie focuses on the following pronouncement: "Une bonne partie de ce que nous croyons, et jusque dans les conclusions dernières c'est ainsi, avec un entêtement et une bonne foi égales, vient d'une première méprise sur les prémisses" (74). (In Terence Kilmartin's translation: "A large part of what we believe to be true [and this applies even to our final conclusions] with an obstinacy equalled only by our good faith springs from an original mistake in our premises.")

Allowing his attention to drift (as Freud recommended) and shifting his focus (in the manner developed by Lacan) from the signified to the signifier, in other words *looking at* this sentence as opposed to reading it, Bowie arrives at the brilliant insight (or in more Lacanian terms, "it occurs to him,") that "A passage that discusses one near-miss anagram (*Gilberte - Albertine*) as the revealer of a hidden wish ends with another, emphatic and still more complex: *première - méprise - prémisses*" (Regrettably the English, "*original-mistake-premises*" cannot capture the variation on the letters *p r e m* in Proust's phrase, while the anagram *méprise - prémisses* is entirely lost.) "In this culminating piece of word-play," Bowie observes (with the elegant economy that marks his style), "notions of temporal and logical priority threaten to dissolve into the centrally placed notion of misapprehension or mistake" (74).

Allowing my own attention to drift from the word-play he so expertly seizes on in Proust's text, and resisting the appeal of the masterly conclusion he draws from it, I find myself speculating about the formulation, "near-miss anagram," and its status in Bowie's text. The first thing to be observed is that what Bowie describes as a "near-miss" involves the confusion of two women's names. Both "Gilberte" and "Albertine" are of course feminized versions of masculine names, and as we have seen, the mobility or plasticity (*Plastizität*) of Albertine's libido (hence her sexual orientation, clearly irreducible to biological gender) is the cause of the narrator's torment. Might one not risk the suggestion therefore, that if we take "miss" to be a comple-

ment of femininity, then a “near-miss” is exactly what Albertine is in Proust’s text, and that moreover, Bowie’s sentence appears to know this, if unknowingly?

It is not my purpose here to suggest that “Albertine” may be a front for some “Albert” (Agostinelli or other). The futility of such speculation, in which Proust’s own sexuality is inevitably and coarsely implicated, has been rightly pointed out by Michel Butor, for example. What I *am* saying, rather, is that the object of Albertine’s desire remains undecidable, so that for all his theorizing the narrator never does find out what or whom she really “wants.”

With the enigma of Albertine’s sexuality still in mind, I want to return now to an earlier moment in Bowie’s book where he cites the final paragraph of Freud’s 1937 essay “Analysis Terminable and Interminable,” as an example of how “biology is reintroduced with a familiar and terminal force” (39). Here is Bowie, quoting Freud:

The female’s supposed wish for a penis teases the speculative psychologist out of thought; it gives him ‘the impression that . . . we have penetrated through all the psychological strata and have reached bedrock, and that thus our activities are at an end. This is probably true, since, for the psychical field, the biological field does in fact play the part of the underlying bedrock [*des unterliegenden gewachsenen Felsens*]. (39)

The association here between bedrock and so-called *Penisneid* or penis-envy (an association reinforced by the context Bowie provides for Freud’s statement) is curious to say the least. It appears to be an instance in Freud’s thought where a premature conclusion and a lapse into biology combined are marshalled to call a halt to his incessant hypothesizing about femininity. In the present context, however, the association of penis-envy with bedrock suggests a further connection between Freud and Proust that Bowie leaves implicit: namely that the *Wißbegierde* or drive to knowledge common to Proust’s narrator and the founder of psychoanalysis is indissolubly linked with the enigma of female sexuality. On this view Freud’s bafflement before what he called “the riddle of femininity” would parallel the narrator’s incapacity to fix the object of Albertine’s desire. But more than this, it is the suspicion that the object of her desire may precisely *not* be a penis, I would argue, that prompts the narrator’s “jealous inquiry”: an intuition that one of the most

celebrated set-pieces in *La Recherche*—Albertine's ice fantasy—serves to confirm.

It will be recalled that this fantasy is properly Albertine's (the official "summary" refers to it as "son morceau sur les glaces"), and not the narrator's creation. It is a highly polished text, at once precious and *risqué*, which the narrator is bound to admire, despite the fact that parts of it seem to him too well turned ("trop bien dit"), because he attributes Albertine's new-found eloquence to his influence upon her. The girl is describing with considerable sensual detail, how she would consume a variety of ices shaped like historical monuments (the Vendôme column etc.) which take on such an exaggeratedly and hence hilariously phallic dimension on her tongue that the whole passage (punctuated, as the narrator repeatedly remarks, by her "cruel" laughter) suggests a high degree of irony on the part of its creator. The episode, which might be regarded as exemplary of Freud's concept in that fantasies of swallowing the penis are characteristic of *Penisneid*, might just as easily be read as a spirited parody of the very notion of penis-envy. This becomes especially plausible when one notices that it is the deliquescence of the monumental *pièces montées* rather than their hardness, hence their mobility rather than their viscosity (to adopt Freud's terms for the libido) that is emphasized. So much for Freud's bedrock, one is tempted to remark, but in any event this would seem to be an instance where, as Freud himself suggested, inquiry into the nature of feminine desire is better served by recourse to the poets than to the *explicanda* of science.

"'La vérité que poursuit la science,' écrit Georges Bataille, n'est vraie qu' à la condition d'être dépourvue de sens, et rien n'a de sens qu'à la condition d'être fiction.'" ("The truth pursued by science," writes Georges Bataille, 'is true only on condition that it is deprived of sense, and nothing makes sense except on condition that it is fiction.') This is the opening sentence of Shoshana Felman's essay "La Méprise et sa chance," a remarkable discussion of Lacan's theory and of the status of theory in Lacan's text. The resonance, of this sentence in particular and equally of the text it introduces, for the book under review (which is subtitled *Theory as Fiction*) seems to me startlingly clear. It is curious then that neither the essay (which appeared, as I noted above, in 1974) nor its author's name (though she has written extensively on Lacan) appears anywhere in Bowie's book—a book whose bibliographical apparatus is otherwise comprehensive, and is

annotated, in addition, with exceptional generosity. Thus a majority of the works cited are described as “admirable” and among these many are held to be “brilliant” or “indispensable.”

What is one to make of the omission of an essay entitled “La Méprise et sa chance” from a book in which a singularly insightful discussion of *la méprise* in the Proustian context plays such an important role? Is “centrally placed” one might even say, echoing Bowie’s description of Proust’s word-play, where “notions of temporal and logical priority threaten to dissolve into the *centrally placed* notion of misapprehension or mistake”: *la méprise* not only as a concept, but materially, as a signifier, in the manner advocated precisely by Lacan. “Si l’écriture lacanienne s’arrête avec tant d’insistance sur l’opacité de la lettre, sur la matérialité du signifiant et de ses sur-prises anagrammatiques,” Felman writes, “c’est pour tâcher de ‘rejoindre la méprise en son lieu,’ en ce lieu de langage où précisément se situe l’écriture: *là ou nous sommes joués*.” [If Lacan’s writing dwells with such insistence on the opacity of the letter, on the materiality of the signifier and of its anagrammatic sur-prises . . . it is in an effort to “meet *la méprise* on its own ground” in that place of language where writing is, the place *where we are duped*.] (45) The “anagrammatic sur-prises” of this statement (to single out just one of the phrases relevant to the present discussion) will come as no surprise to readers of Bowie’s book or of this review, and may be taken (since space is limited) as emblematic of the coincidence uniting “La Méprise et sa chance” with Bowie’s masterful reading of *la méprise* in Proust. The coincidence is of course not perfect. *Freud, Proust, and Lacan* goes far beyond Felman’s short article. However, re-posing the question I raised earlier in a more restricted form, namely, “what is the cost in amnesia of Bowie’s insight regarding Proust’s *méprise*?” I would now venture the response that what is forgotten is Felman’s essay: *la méprise* which Bowie was bound to forget in order to arrive at his own moment of illumination—about *la méprise*. To state the matter in the anagrammatic Proustian terms he highlights: the “original” (*première*) discussion of *la méprise* in Felman’s essay becomes, I suggest, one of the unconscious premises (*prémisses*) for Bowie’s reading of Proust. Unconscious yet visible on “the invitingly intelligible surface” of Bowie’s text in the expression “near-miss,” which may then be read as a veiled reference not only to “Gilberte” and “Albertine,” sources of the narrator’s *méprise*, but also to the repressed *Felman* (the name is surely significant) as well.

In speculating (theorizing?) thus, I have no aspirations to be “the source-hunter, the genealogist of ideas [or] the forensic scientist of originality” that the otherwise harmless “literary scholar” may harbor, (the terms and the quotation marks surrounding “literary scholar” are Bowie’s and one notes the uncharacteristically hostile tone [144]). Rather, the theory I have developed in order to make sense of Felman’s absence from Bowie’s text is pure fiction, in the terms made current by both writers, terms that are crystallized in the distinction Bataille draws between truth and sense. It is this distinction, difficult to grasp and well-nigh impossible to sustain, that is the kernel (to adopt a favorite Bowie image) of Lacanian psychoanalysis. Thus Felman writes: “La psychanalyse aspire-t-elle dès lors à la vérité-ou au sens? Quel est le sens de la psychanalyse? Cette question est une contradiction dans les termes puisque le sens est toujours une fiction et que c’est précisément la psychanalyse qui nous l’a appris” (40). [Does psychoanalysis consequently aspire to truth or to sense? What is the sense of psychoanalysis? This question is a contradiction in terms because sense is always a fiction and it is precisely psychoanalysis that has taught us so.] “Le sens se sait,” [sense knows itself], is present to itself, in the form of knowledge—self-knowledge—of consciousness. If on the other hand the Freudian unconscious makes any sense (I continue to paraphrase Felman) it is because it gives utterance to “a knowledge that will not tolerate one’s knowing that one knows” (“*un savoir qui ne supporte pas que l’on sache qu’on sait*” p. 41) “hence the subject can only get a ‘take’ (*prise*) on this unconscious knowledge through the *mistake* (*la méprise*): the non-sense effects recorded in his speech: dreams, slips, witticisms” (41). Witticisms such as Bowie’s “near-miss,” for example.

This complex scenario is represented allegorically by Lacan in his recourse to the myth of Diana and Actaeon, which is in turn represented pictorially, in Titian’s version, both on the cover and within the pages of Bowie’s book. (Given its high price, \$39.50—by no means exceptional for a book from Cambridge—the quality of the reproductions is, incidentally, extremely disappointing.) Lacan’s appropriation of the myth is expertly discussed in the chapter on Lacan, but more interesting from my point of view is the way it serves as the occasion for the brilliant *trouaille* of the book’s epilogue, where Bowie appropriates Lacan’s appropriation of the myth in order to discuss its appropriation by Charlus/Proust.

Actaeon, who will be turned into a stag and devoured by his own hounds as a punishment for having gazed upon the goddess, is hunting with bow and arrow when he comes upon Diana at her bath. Titian depicts him with a quiver at his back, the bow abandoned at his feet where he has dropped it, disarmed, no doubt by the goddess' unveiled beauty. This is the detail that Gabrielle Nunn (!) the designer, has chosen as an illustration for the jacket of *Freud, Proust, Lacan*, and (consciously, unconsciously?) she has placed the author's name, "Malcolm Bowie," low down, in direct line with the descending arc of the hunter's abandoned bow. "La Méprise et sa chance," it will be recalled, was published in a review called *L'Arc* or *The Bow*. It appeared in a special number devoted to Lacan in which the contributors were exclusively women.

Enough! I shall not pretend that this discussion has been exhaustive by resorting to some sententious conclusion or axiom with which to arrest my speculation. "Lacan reads Freud," Bowie writes. "That is the simplest and most important thing about him" (100). Bowie reads Freud, Proust and Lacan, often brilliantly. I read Bowie, for my pleasure and instruction and, inspired by his text, am stimulated to think again about these authors and about reading and writing: my own and others'. The horizon of my knowledge is widened by the experience, to the point where it can even accommodate, if fleetingly, a glimpse of that knowledge that will not tolerate knowing that it knows: that mysterious but infallible channel of communication that is the unconscious.

There would be a great deal more to say about the status of "theory" and "theories" in Bowie's book, about which he protests to the last that "it was not to be a work of theory" (176). The pathos of his enterprise may lie in this disclaimer and in the consciousness of a need for "a fully interactive theory of social and psychical structure" (176) that he articulates belatedly, and in my judgement somewhat unconvincingly, at the tail end of the epilogue. It is ostensibly in the service of this wish that he invokes Proust's appropriation of the Actaeon myth in which Charlus' unconsummated infatuation with a young page or *chasseur* (literally a huntsman: a reference no doubt to his livery, all that survives of his original office) is described. Proust's treatment of the myth is comic and highly irreverent—hence for me reminiscent of what I take to be the parodic treatment of penis-envy in Albertine's fantasy. Thus when the recalcitrant page (who, it turns out, had been bedded all the while with the night porter "at the hour

when Diana rose”) fails to respond to Charlus’ blandishments, the baron takes a violent dislike to the boy. This dislike persists even after he learns that the page had been unaware of his interest, leading Charlus to declare that “were they to bring me the page like a dish of venison on a silver platter, I should thrust him away with a retching stomach,” [m’apporterait-on le chasseur comme un simple gibier de chasse sur un plat d’argent, je le repousserais avec un vomissement (612–13).].

Paraphrase cannot do justice to this delicious set-piece, in which as with Albertine’s ices, erudition and eloquence are expansively deployed in the service of a wicked fantasy from which desire itself (not to speak of its objects) does not escape unscathed. It falls so appositely into the context of Bowie’s book that one might even imagine the preceding chapters to be a mere pretext for this marvelous *trouvaille*. Its immediate function however, is to allow the comparison of Proust’s version of the myth with Lacan’s to the latter’s disadvantage. Bowie’s declared aim is “to set against the mentalizing pathos of Lacan’s vision the thoroughly socialized eroticism of Proust’s” (177). Despite my expressed suspicion that Proust’s text (wittingly or unwittingly) parodies such hallowed psychoanalytic theories as penis-envy, for example, I am not sure I agree with Bowie’s promotion of “Proust’s inglorious Actaeon” as a “far richer emblem” than “Lacan’s dismembered huntsman,” if only because he would have been unable not only to make this judgment, but to read Proust as he does, had he not read Lacan.

For my own part, I had barely finished reading about Proust’s *chasseur* when my friend N. telephoned. She had received a gift of venison and wanted to know if I had a reliable recipe for cooking it. I believe that it is in such coincidences and *trouvailles* that we encounter the unconscious as Lacan imagined it: an action-at-a-distance of which the narrator’s *telegram* and my *telephone* call are emblematic, and the Lacanian unconscious so conceived is as much a social as it is a mental phenomenon. Thus even in the unlikely event that the author of *Freud, Proust and Lacan* had remained ignorant of “La Méprise et sa chance” it was in the air, so to speak, as the notion of bisexuality (with which Bowie associates it) had been, in the early years of the century. My authority here is Freud, in a letter to Fliess dated July 27, 1904, and quoted by Bowie. Occasioned by Fliess’s apprehension that the priority of his claim for the bisexuality of all human beings had been usurped, the letter runs in part as follows:

You must admit that a resourceful mind can on its own easily take the step from the bisexual disposition of some individuals to extending it to all of them, though this step is your *novum*. For me personally, you have always (since 1901) been the author of the idea of bisexuality; I fear that in looking through the literature, you will find that many came at least close to you. (194, n. 28)

What, one might ask, can it mean to be "the author of an idea" for the theoretician of the unconscious?

In the final paragraph of this book Bowie recalls that his theme has been "theory's intermittent self-awareness as passion." For the three writers he has discussed, "a large part of that awareness," he claims "stems from the repeated discovery that theories and their authors are destructible." Thus, "all three writers cast themselves adrift upon that mental ocean where the spectacle of theory without end turns thought deathwards," leading Bowie to the conclusion that "It is in the self-declaring play of desire between certainty and extinction, between bedrock and deadlock, that their new science begins." This seems to me as good an example of a "sententious moral statement" as any made by Proust's narrator, and as such, confirms Bowie's thesis about the desire for a hiatus that theorizing (his own included) inevitably breeds. My reading gaze is drawn however to the bedrock/deadlock conceit, which falls significantly short of Bowie's customarily elegant writing and is reminiscent of the kind of (uncharacteristic) "coarse" repetition of which he finds Proust guilty on p. 57.

While Bowie is concerned to show that Proust's stylistic lapse may be justified on the grounds that "something willed and coherent" is going on, I am inclined to think that it is rather something unwilled (at least consciously), though not necessarily incoherent, that is at work in the last sentence of *Freud, Proust and Lacan*. "Bedrock" is Freud's term, cited, as we have seen, near the beginning of the book in a passage which after Bowie, I now recall at the end of this review:

The female's supposed wish for a penis teases the speculative psychologist out of thought; it gives him 'the impression that . . . we have penetrated through all the psychological strata and have reached bedrock, and that thus our activities are at an end. This is probably true, since, for the psychical field, the biological field

does in fact play the part of the underlying bedrock [*des unterliegenden gewachsenen Felsens*].

"Bedrock" in German is *Felsen*, *Felsens* being the genitive form. Dare one read in the materiality of this signifier (which underlies the innocuous "bedrock") a portmanteau word combining the name of the woman whose action-at-a-distance I have perceived at work in this book and the *sens* (sense) or fiction that is the ransom of truth? If this observation makes no sense it may be justified precisely on those grounds, if we are to heed Lacan. Thus: "il n'y a de vérité que de ce qui n'a aucun sens. "There is no truth except the truth of what makes no sense" (quoted in Felman, p. 40)), by which I presume he means the truth of the unconscious: "the knowledge that does not tolerate one's knowing that one knows." Perhaps Bowie, whose love of Keats pervades *Freud, Proust and Lacan*, might agree that this is all we know on earth.

Works Cited

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