

Wolfe on Proust

The Urth list — 1 messages, 1 voices, 05 Aug 1999

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Michael Andre-Driussi — 05 Aug 1999, 19:11

(the Proust bits from an unpublished interview conducted by myself a few years ago--the manuscript of EXODUS had just been turned in.)

Q: How many times have you read Remembrance of Things Past and what is your favorite part?

GW: To the best of my memory, I've read The Remembrance of Things Past two and a half times. I read the old translation through twice, began the new one (by Terrence Kilmartin, but quite similar to Scott Moncrieff's) and got about half through before I had to vet the galleys of something. Proust is a problem for me because when I read him I don't want to read anything else, and of course it's seven books.

I've been looking through Volume I of the Kilmartin; I finished it in 1985. My favorite part, which I've been unable to find, is the young Marcel going to mass in Combray, looking at the tombs in the church, the stained glass windows, and so on.

There is also that wonderful scene in the Bois in which he waits and waits for his grandmother to leave the public toilet. After a wait that seems almost infinite, she leaves, walking fast--very fast, for an old lady--and he hurries to catch up with her. That scene is more horrible than ninety-nine one hundredths of the avowed horror I've read.

Q: The first scene you mentioned (mass in Combray) begins on page 190 of Kilmartin Volume I, the second (grandmother's stroke) begins on 319 of Volume II. Interesting pair--the glory of the sublime and the horror of the mundane. The quiet horror of grandmother's stroke, where everyday banalities mask and hide a real crisis, where offhand remarks carry uncanny portent--this comes up again in that unforgettable scene where the dying Swann tries to introduce his daughter to the society that has shunned him (for marrying her mother, among other reasons).

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