Comparing Powell and Proust

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The obvious parallels between *A Dance to the Music of Time* and *In Search of Lost Time* have led some to call Powell ‘the English Proust.’ Equally often the resemblance between the two authors is dubbed ‘superficial’. Thus Neil McEwan wrote, "Marcel Proust is the Modernist with whom Powell invites the most obvious, although superficial, comparison" [McEwan, p. 121). And James Tucker wrote, "I do not think very much can be learned from putting *A Dance to the Music of Time* alongside Proust’s *A la recherche du temps perdu*" [Tucker, p. 4].

Let’s begin, therefore, by comparing Powell with Proust as superficially as possible, listing as many casual similarities between *A Dance to the Music of Time* and *In Search of Lost Time* as we can find.

REFERENCES. Page numbers for *A Dance to the Music of Time* (henceforth DMOT) are from the Little, Brown editions: [QU 12] means page 12 of *A Question of Upbringing*. Page numbers for *In Search of Lost Time* (ISLT) are from the Modern Library edition (Scott Moncrieff's translation, twice revised, first by Terence Kilmartin, then by D. J. Enright): [III 819] refers to the third volume of ISLT, aka *The Guermantes Way*, specifically to page 819 (its last page!). Citations, in the form [XXX, p. 25] refer to one of the items listed at the end.

A MAXIMALLY SUPERFICIAL COMPARISON

LENGTH. DMOT and ISLT are both very long, but ISLT is longer. DMOT is only about two-thirds its length. DMOT contains about a million words and deploys four to five hundred characters. These are Powell's estimates from the introduction to Spurling's *Handbook* [Spurling, p. vii]. Corresponding estimates for ISLT are one and half million words and six hundred characters.

OVERALL STRUCTURE. According to the entry 'Novel Sequences' in Wikipedia, a *roman fleuve* is "an extended sequence of novels of which the whole acts as a commentary for a society or an epoch, and which continually deals with a central character, community, or a saga within a family. The river metaphor implies a steady, broad dynamic lending itself to a perspective. Each volume makes up a complete novel by itself, but the entire cycle exhibits unifying characteristics."

This is roughly accurate as a description of DMOT and ISLT.

Many readers will protest that the individual volumes of DMOT aren't complete novels, that they make far too many references to characters and events of previous volumes to be read independently. The same objection holds for ISLT. Both authors clearly attempted however, with varying success, to give each volume its own unity.
Events in both DMOT and ISLT are mostly told in chronological order and the novels cover substantial time-spans, similar in length. DMOT covers 50 years (1921-1971) with a lengthy digression back to 1914; ISLT covers about 46 years (1880-1926) with a lengthy digression back to the 1870s for 'Swann in Love'. Each time span includes a world war.

THE NARRATOR. Both novels have a first person narrator who is the writer's alter ego, that is, the events in the novel roughly correspond to those in the author's own life and the opinions expressed by the narrator often seem to be those of the author's. In particular, Nick Jenkins and the un-named narrator of ISLT (whom we call M) share the ambition to become a writer and each fulfills that ambition over the course of the novel. Michael Barber, comparing Proust with Powell, wrote, "both wrote largely about what they had either seen, heard or experienced" [Barber B, p. 212].

The narrators in DMOT and ISLT appear in two forms: as an older person looking back over their life and as a younger person narrating events as they happen. The narration glides back and forth between them.

CHARACTERS. Many characters in DMOT and ISLT are, or appear to be, based on persons whom the author knew, some being an amalgam of several acquaintances. Both novels feature characters who are artists: writers, painters, actors, musicians. Both authors invent an entire upper-class family, numerous members of which are characters: the Tollands in DMOT; the Guermantes in ISLT. Both novels include a monstrous character who is the focus of a substantial portion of the novel and whose life becomes increasingly shocking: Widmerpool in DMOT; Charlus in ISLT.

PLOT. Both novels begin with an 'overture', a section of a meditative cast that sets the stage for the whole work and that is carefully separated from the remainder—even if only by a single blank line. (Neither author ever used the word 'overture'. The term was coined by Proust's translator.)

Both novels have a circular construction: the last pages refer to the time and place of the beginning of the novel, and the reader is implicitly invited to begin reading the novel anew. Both novels purport to be the narrator's effort to understand the past. Neither DMOT nor ISLT is plot-driven; one does not turn the pages solely out of the desire to find out what happens next. The authors’ prose style, the narrators’ musings, the nature of the characters assembled and their conversation offer important rewards, among others, to readers of both books.

Both authors employ happenstance as a plot device. Coincidental events not only supply information and bring characters together, but also enliven the narrative with humorous surprises. Proust's narrator is an inadvertent voyeur, finding himself on significant occasions over-seeing or over-hearing other characters intimate moments. Powell's use of coincidence, perhaps more thorough-going than Proust's, is too well-known to say more about here.

NARRATIVE STYLE. Both writers use an ornate prose style. Proust is famous for extremely long sentences with convoluted syntax; Powell's sentences are not nearly as long, but he chooses more recondite words than Proust ('recondite' being one of them). Michael Barber
writes, "Powell's prose, though never as convoluted as Proust's, is sufficiently labyrinthine to deserve the adjective 'Proustian' [Barber-B, p. 212].

Both writers are considered naturalistic. For example, both are praised for finding modes of speech suited to each individual character. Both use outlandish yet telling metaphors. These often offer a humorous contrast with otherwise concrete description. (See the example at the end of this section.)

Both authors reference specific paintings, sculpture, and literary classics to help describe characters and situations and to comment on events in the novel. Both authors occasionally use pastiche.

COMMON THEMES. Here are a few among many. Both DMOT and ISLT are concerned with the flow of time. Both are comic novels. Both novels depict the upper classes as made up of quite ordinary, if not boring, individuals. Both claim to expound general 'laws of life'. Both works suggest that art can illuminate one's life. Both focus on the sex lives of its characters—no surprise here, few contemporary novels don't. Both deliberately feature a variety of sexual preferences.

CONCLUSION. We save for later the significant differences between DMOT and ISLT. Likewise, any subtle similarities. The list of superficial similarities alone is striking.

Some of these authorial choices entail others. Given a first-person narrator some kind of more-or-less artificial means is needed to bring characters together. Coincidence is a natural device. Some choices Powell made appear to be deliberately in homage to Proust. The long pastiche [MP 119-120] is one.

But many items in this list are not linked to others. If one decides to write a long novel, does it mean covering a substantial time span? No: think Ulysses. Does a long novel imply a multitude of characters? No: think Robinson Crusoe. Does a long novel require naturalistic dialog? Extravagant metaphor? An obsession with time? A fascination with the aristocracy? Not at all. These are all separate issues upon which these two authors happen to be in accord.

PARTING SHOT. Reading Proust after reading Powell is a strange experience. One regularly encounters passages in ISLT reminiscent of passages from DMOT although of course they were written in the opposite order. Here's an example which shows Proust's style at it's most amusing and how his sense of humor resembles Powell's.

[The narrator M is in a theater watching the aristocrats in the boxes above him. The Marquis de Palancy is an insignificant character in ISLT, referred to on only three of its 4,347 pages.] The Marquis de Palancy, his face bent downwards at the end of his long neck, his round bulging eye glued to the glass of his monocle, moved slowly around in the transparent shade [of the box] and appeared no more to see the public in the stalls than a fish that drifts past, unconscious of the press of curious gazers, behind the glass wall of an aquarium. Now and again he paused, venerable, wheezing, moss-grown, and the audience [in the theater] could not have told whether he was in pain, asleep, swimming, about to spawn, or merely taking breath. [III 48]

Compare this with a passage from DMOT also describing a character who wears glasses and is likened to a fish:
The fiancé was Widmerpool. Scarlet in the face, grinning agitatedly through the thick lenses of his spectacles, he advanced into the room, his hand on Mrs. Haycock's arm. He was wearing a new dark suit. Like a huge fish swimming into a hitherto unexplored, unexpectedly exciting aquarium, he sailed resolutely forward: yet not a real fish, fish made of rubber or some artificial substance. [LM 43]

THE NARRATORS

Nick Jenkins (Powell's narrator) and Proust's M both come from somewhere in the middle class. Both have an interest in the upper classes, at least to the extent that they end up knowing a lot of what Uncle Giles calls "people with handles to their names." Otherwise, the alter-egos that Proust and Powell have invented for these ‘creative autobiographies’ are as different from each other as the authors themselves.

Crucially, as Neil McEwan says [McEwan, p. 122], "Proust's Marcel is far more introspective than Jenkins, always exploring the inner world of self while Jenkins guards much of his private experience, even his childhood memories being mostly of other people." Philip Thody [Thody-A, p. 228] puts it more strongly, "... the essential quality of Nicholas Jenkins is that he does not dwell on his feelings, and he is so different in this as in other respects from the Marcel of A la recherche du temps perdu that it is again hard to read A Dance to the Music of Time without feeling that the contrast is a deliberate one. It is almost as though Powell is telling us that he is indeed a kind of Proust, but a Proust of a very different kind from the anguished, neurotic, half-gentile, guilt-ridden, mother-fixated Marcel—a Proust so English, in fact, that he is almost the opposite of the author whom in other respects he so much admires."

That M and Nick are opposites on some theoretical, inward-looking/outward-looking scale (the introversion/extroversion scale of the Myers-Briggs Personality Inventory is a real-life example) affects many aspects of ISLT and DMOT. An important example is the relative weight given to telling versus showing. The balance struck between these drastically affects the experience of reading.

You might like to reflect for a moment on the relative weight ISLT and DMOT give to description vs. dramatization. Knowing that M is more introspective than Nick, you might predict ahead of time that ISLT will have less dramatization than DMOT. What, however, is the precise proportion of each novel devoted to showing events, rather than didactic description, reflection, and/or speculation?

My initial guess was that the percentage of text devoted to dramatization would be 25% for ISLT and 50% for DMOT. To test this hypothesis, I roughly calculated the proportion of space in ISLT and DMOT devoted to dialog. The idea was that in social novels, such as these, dramatization is nearly synonymous with dialog. Dialog in turn is easy to identify visually. My methods are not very accurate. If you are interested, the details are below. However I believe that indeed dialog occupies about 25% of ISLT while the corresponding figure for DMOT is 47%, quite close to what I anticipated.

If this is accurate, then DMOT is nearly twice as committed to dialog as ISLT—a huge difference and one that matters profoundly to the reader. After all, as Alice asks, "what is the use of a book without pictures and conversations in it?" There is what you might call a 'dialog gap'
between DMOT and ISLT which reflects the difference in the narrator's personalities. Both narrators are interested in the world around them but M is also determined to record his interior life. For some, this is the most original aspect of ISLT. It is almost completely absent in DMOT.

Other differences arise from the same source. Proust's M is fascinated by his childhood; Nick Jenkins much less so. Proust, like Freud, thought the influence of those early years crucial. And so they are—but it requires someone of an introspective bent to discover this. Nick Jenkins' childhood, from the little we know of it, is not dissimilar to M's. Both had well-off, doting parents; both were raised in urban as well as rural environments. But Nick Jenkins begins his story with adolescence, at school and the university where he makes friends and acquaintances who will dance in and out of the rest of his life, an appropriate beginning for a narrator whose focus is outward. M is an omniscient narrator, in the sense of appearing to know his characters’ thoughts and feelings; Nick almost never so.

HOW MUCH DIALOG: THE DETAILS. I took a random sample of 60 pages of ISLT and 60 pages of DMOT. For Proust, this was straight-forward. I used the original Moncrieff translation for simplicity because in the Modern Library edition it comes in two equal-sized volumes each of about 1100 pages. EXCEL choose a random sample of 30 pages from each of these volumes. Powell was not as easy to sample since the different novels are individually paginated in all editions. I took independent samples of 20 pages from three of the 12 volumes: an early novel (AW), a middle one (VB), and a late one (TK).

On each sampled page, I estimated by eye alone the percentage of dialog, rather a subjective process. I ignored casual quotation. Both authors, for different reasons, are fond of single, detached quotes, e.g., the comments of Uncle Giles and Barnby that appear at odd moments in DMOT. Proust does something similar.

ARE THE NARRATORS RELIABLE? This question must be asked about any narrator. Are there aspects of Nick’s or M’s narration that seem doubtful?

Nick appears quite trustworthy but I find him unreliable on a few subjects, primarily related to women. For example, Nick writes, "A woman who loves you likes to torment you from time to time; if not actually hurt you.” [AW 104]. Is this really a general law? Nick speaks specifically of Jean about whom, in particular, he seems unreliable. Many of Nick’s ideas about women come from Barnby. Consider this passage:

‘I once asked Barnby if he did not find most women extraordinarily unsensual,’ he [Moreland] said.
‘Do you know what he answered?’
‘What?’
‘He said, “I’ve never noticed.”’ [KO 248]

A strange gap in the knowledge of a supposed expert on women.

M, however, is much more unreliable. His apparent success with women is mysterious and unconvincing, as AP himself thought. M may actually deliberately be lying here. His judgmental attitude towards homosexuality and Jews are problematical. They are, perhaps, explainable in terms of the times he lives in, but even in this context they ring false. He is obsessed with homosexual and Jewish characters, suggesting a more intimate connection with
both groups.

ARE THE NARRATOR'S LIKABLE? Nick has many friends. He seems to get along with people. In contrast, Proust's narrator, despite being something of a social butterfly and possessing many acquaintances, has almost no close friends.

M is, in fact, not very nice. He is hugely ego-centric, obsessively judgmental, a social climber, a hypochondriac and a voyeur—plus inconstant, controlling, manipulative, and a compulsive liar.

M can be positively creepy. For example, at the beginning of his climb towards acceptance at the highest level of Parisian society, he becomes preoccupied with the Duchess of Guermantes, In the throes of this obsession he makes sure he sees her every day—and that she sees that he sees her.

Now, every morning, long before the hour at which she left her house, I went by a devious route to post myself at the corner of the street along which she generally came, and, when the moment of her arrival seemed imminent, I strolled back with an air being absorbed in something else, looking the other way, and raised my eyes to her face as I drew level with her, but as though I had not in the least expected to see her. [III 69]

In other words, M stalks Mme de Guermantes. Later he adds:

I was genuinely in love with Mme de Guermantes. The greatest happiness that I could have asked of God would have been that he should send down on her every imaginable calamity, and that ruined, despised, stripped of all the privileges that separated her from me, having no longer any home of her own or people who would condescend to speak to her, she should come to me for asylum. [III 82]

Such is true love.

Most characters in ISLT don't see M in a negative light, however. By his own report (!), others like M and many seek his company. Superficially, he could be as likable as he says he is, but to someone privy to M's thoughts his unattractive side is plain.

THE NARRATORS REPRESENT EVERYMAN. Despite their differences, both narrators represent ordinary people though in different ways. Nick, relatively bland, a calm observer of life, is in many ways an average person—except for his interest in the arts. He is an everyman viewed from the outside. M is an everyman viewed from the inside. His mock-heroic daydreams (like the above paragraph about Mme de Guermantes) are much the same as anyone's.

CHARACTERS

LINKED CHARACTERS. Certain characters in DMOT are functionally linked with characters from ISLT. Here are some examples.

Both novels include a significant number of artists. There are painters (Proust: Elstir, Powell: Barnby), writers (Proust: Bergotte, Powell: X. Trapnel), actresses (Proust: Berma, Powell: Matilda), and composers (Proust: Vinteuil, Powell: Moreland). Both authors invent a

The most important pair of functionally linked characters are the Baron Charlus (ISLT) and Widmerpool (DMOT): major characters who fascinate their respective narrators and appear in every single volume. Both are monsters: their life style becomes increasingly lurid over the course of the novels.

Why did Powell include characters with such clear Proustian parallels? Thody writes, "If, like Powell, you move between Bohemia, Bloomsbury, and the English equivalent of the Faubourg Saint-Germain, you are bound to come across very much the same things that Proust did in the Paris of the belle époque." [Thody-A, p. 331]. There is something to this, but there are also important thematic and structural reasons. Proust and Powell are interested in the relevance of art to life, so it is natural that each include characters who are artists. Both authors are interested in genealogy and aristocratic families, hence the Guermantes and the Tolland families. It is thematically important in both novels that aristocrats turn out to be ordinary human beings. For Proust this is part of a general program of deconstruction of the narrator's expectations; for Powell it is an expression of his narrator's tolerance.

Widmerpool is a special case. Clearly it is useful in DMOT to have a single character who recurs with greater frequency than others, who connects with several of the novel's themes, and whose very existence helps tie the series together. It's not the only reason to read DMOT but it adds a lot. Widmerpool's recurrences are eagerly anticipated, the reader constantly wonders: what he will be up to next. Giving him an increasingly lurid sex life grabs readers' attention and makes him similar to Proust's Charlus. Charlus, for example, as is Widmerpool, is mentioned near the beginning [I 45] and near the end [VI 445] of the novel in which he is featured. Like Widmerpool, he takes up more space in the index of characters [VI 563-566] than any other character (except Albertine [VI 546-550]).

MORE CHARACTERS. Something else going on, however. Consider these examples.

Albert vs Françoise. In DMOT, Albert is Nick's parents' cook and general factotum. He is a pessimist; also an excellent cook and proud of it:

“General and Mrs. Conyers are coming next week, ’ I said.
‘It was me told you that,’ said Albert.
‘Will you cook something special for them?’
‘You bet.’
‘Something very special?’
‘A mousse, I ’ speck.’
‘Will they like it?’
‘Course they will.” [KO 9-10]

In ISLT, Françoise serves M's parents' family, performing miscellaneous duties much as Albert does for Nick's parents. Like Albert, Françoise looks askance at most things and is an exceptional cook:
Before leaving the house he [M's father] said to my mother: ‘Try and have a good dinner for us tonight; you remember I'm bringing de Norpois back with me.’ My mother had not forgotten. And ever since the day before, Françoise, rejoicing in the opportunity to devote herself to that art of cooking at which she was so gifted, stimulated, moreover, by the prospect of a new guest, and knowing that she would have to compose, by methods known to her alone, a dish of boeuf à la gelée, had been living in the effervescence of creation; since she attached the utmost importance to the intrinsic quality of the materials which were to enter into the fabric of her work, she had gone herself to the Halles to procure the best cuts of rump steak, shin of beef, calves’-feet, just as Michelangelo spent eight months in the mountains of Carrara choosing the most perfect blocks of marble for the monument of Julius II. [II 21]

Françoise is far more important to ISLT than Albert is to DMOT. She is a major presence in M's life. Despite this difference, these passages suggest that some aspects of Françoise have entered into the make-up of Albert.

Theodoric vs. Theodosius. Sir Gavin Walpole-Wilson vs. the Marquis de Norpois. Proust and Powell both make use of a fictitious, Balkan, royal personage. The characters have similar names, Prince Theodoric (Powell) and King Theodosius (Proust). In his pastiche of Proust [MP 119-120] Powell makes the supposedly Proustian character, Prince Odoacer, be related to Powell's own Prince Theodoric, linking the two novels.

There is more. In ISLT, the Marquis de Norpois, a rather stuffy functionary and the head of the government department at which M's father works, knows King Theodosius:

"We saw in the papers that you had a long talk with King Theodosius," my father ventured. "Why, yes, the King, who has a wonderful memory for faces, was kind enough to remember, when he noticed me in the stalls, that I had had the honour to meet him on several occasions at the court of Bavaria, at a time when he had never dreamed of his oriental throne—to which, as you know, he was summoned by a European Congress, and indeed had grave doubts about accepting, regarding that particular sovereignty as unworthy of his race, the noblest, heraldically speaking, in the whole of Europe. [II 41]

In DMOT, Sir Gavin Walpole-Wilson knows Prince Theodoric:

“I’m rather glad we don’t have to attend those big official crushes any more as a duty,’ said Lady Walpole-Wilson, with a sigh. ‘We had to turn out in honour of Prince Theodoric the other night, and, really, it was too exhausting. Now that one is rather out of touch with that world one does so much prefer just to see one’s own friends.”

…

“Theodoric, on the other hand, is a serious young man,’ he [Sir Gavin] said. ‘A pity, really, that he is not King. The party given for him at their Legation was certainly dull enough—though personally I enjoy such jollifications as, for example, the court ball when our own King and Queen visited Berlin in 1913.” [BM 47-48]

Something of the friendship of M. de Norpois with King Theodosius and the personality of the Marquis seem to have entered into the make up of Sir Gavin, who has a parallel relationship with Prince Theodoric and shares some of the stuffiness of the Marquis. Later on both use the same phrase:

"In the words of a fine Arab proverb, 'The dogs bark, but the caravan moves on!' “ [II 44]
“Eleanor’s father, Sir Gavin Walpole-Wilson, after many years of retirement, had made a public reappearance by writing a ‘turnover’ article for The Times on German influence in the smaller South American countries. This piece had ended with the words: ‘The dogs bark: the caravan moves on.’ [KO 206]

Jean vs Odette. In ISLT, Odette is a woman who is kept by a series of men including Charles Swann, a second alter-ego for Proust. Odette eventually marries Swann and is continually deprecated for her lies and deceptions. At the same time, she appears to be a warm and welcoming hostess, fond mother and spouse. There is a tension between her actions and M’s attitude towards her. Philip Thody, who wrote on both Proust and Powell, suggests [Thody-B, pp. 31-33] that contemporary readers will find Odette a more sympathetic character than Proust does—admirable even. In her mysterious beauty, numerous conquests, popularity as a hostess, fond attention to her daughter and only child, resourcefulness, and determination to rise in a society in which women have little or no rights, she almost seems deliberately designed to appeal to our current admiration for such figures. Other writers make the same point. This is one of those places where M is not reliable.

Many of the characteristics of Odette listed above belong also to Jean, Nick's early love and, like Odette, an object of fascination for the narrator and a topic upon which he is not to be trusted. Jean is not Odette in many ways. She is not a kept woman and when last seen is on good terms with her first husband, who certainly was as unfaithful to her as she was to him. Jean is also something of an intellectual while Odette is not. Nevertheless, some aspects of Odette seem to have made their way into Jean as a character in DMOT.

Albertine, Andrée, Gisele, et. al. vs. Baby Wentworth and Bijou Ardglass. Albertine, Andrée and others form the little band of girls' in the second volume of ISLT with all of whom M falls simultaneously in love and all of whom he wishes would simultaneously fall in love with him:

And yet the supposition that I might some day be the friend of one or other of those girls, that these eyes, whose incomprehensible gaze struck me from time to time and played unwittingly upon me like an effect of sunlight on a wall, might ever, by some miraculous alchemy, allow the idea of my existence, some affection for my person, to interpenetrate their ineffable particles, that I myself might some day take my place among them in the evolution of their course by the sea's edge—that supposition appeared to me to contain within it a contradiction as insoluble as if, standing before some Attic frieze or a fresco representing a procession, I had believed it possible for me, the spectator, to take my place, beloved of them, among the divine participants. [II 512-513]

For an instant, Nick Jenkins has a parallel experience in DMOT:

The taller of the two girls was largely built, with china-blue eyes and yellow hair, holding herself in a somewhat conventionally languor style: the other, dark, with small, pointed breasts and a neat, supple figure. The combined effect of their beauty was irresistible, causing a kind of involuntary pang, as if for a split-second I loved both of them passionately; though a further survey convinced me that nothing so disturbing had taken place. [BM 112]

Mme de Villeparisis vs. Lady Molly. Mme de Villeparisis is a elderly lady whom M...
meets at the seashore in Balbec and also at her salon in Paris. On account of youthful indiscretions and a rackety life style (later revealed to be a long-term liaison with M. Norpois), she has come down in the world and is only visited by 'third rate society.' Her salon is called a 'sham salon' by M. Nonetheless her nephew Robert St. Loup, encourages M to visit her and, in general, "when asked by a friend to introduce him into society would say, 'I'll take you to my aunt Villeparisis's, or to my aunt X's— you meet interesting people in there.' " [III 262].

This parallels the situation of Lady Molly, who like Mme de Villeparisis, has seen 'better days' and whose salon in DMOT is looked down upon by some (e.g., Mark Members). Powell's narrator, like Proust's, is introduced into this milieu by a nephew (Chips Lovell) who coaxes Nick to visit his aunt by saying, "There are always people there" and "You may find anything at Aunt Molly's . . .," in terms similar to St. Loup's description of his aunt. [LM 15]

CONCLUSION. More linked pairs of characters could be added to this list. Still more presumably remain to be discovered. What is going on?

According to Cormac McCarthy (as quoted in [Bell]), "Books are made out of books. The novel depends for its life on the novels that have been written." Bell himself writes, "Novels have two primary sources: writers' life experiences or their art experiences . . . While it's popular in publicity to focus on the life experience that informs a book, a writer's art experiences are just as responsible for how a story emerges from the imagination and eventually appears on the page."

How do characters emerge 'from the imagination'? Both Proust and Powell have long been accused of basing particular characters on real-life models and their fans have long played the game spot-the-model. Both authors insist that they only blended the traits of several people in order to create a new character: something quite different and then only upon occasion.

So far so good (as Widmerpool might say). However, as McCarthy and Bell point out, novel writers look for inspiration in what they have read as much as in what they have experienced. Based on these examples, a significant number of characters from DMOT may owe a part of themselves to a literary source instead of a real-life one. At least one character in DMOT owes something to someone from another book. That would be Nick Jenkins himself, who even is named after his literary antecedent, Nick Carraway.

PARTING SHOT. Here is M's description of Jupien, an important character in ISLT:

I am bound to say that my first impression of Jupien had been far from favorable. From a few feet away, entirely destroying the effect that his plump cheeks and florid complexion would otherwise have produced, his eyes, brimming with a compassionate, mournful, dreamy gaze, gave one to suppose that he was seriously ill or had just suffered a great bereavement.

Indeed, corresponding perhaps to that inundation of the face by the eyes (which one ceased to notice when one came to know him), I soon discerned in him a rare intelligence, one of the most spontaneously literary . . . [III 18]

Here is a passage from DMOT that also describes a character with unusual eyes:
He had a thin face and light blue eyes that gave out a perpetual and quite mechanical sparkle: at first engaging: then irritating: and finally a normal and inevitable aspect of his features that one no longer noticed. [QU 29].

TECHNIQUE

STRUCTURE. ISLT and DMOT have radically different internal structure.

Proust's struggle with publication (described in detail in [Cano]) prevented ISLT from appearing in the form he wanted. Pressure from publishers, anticipation of his own death, unrestrained growth of the middle sections of his work: all these forced division of his manuscript into separate volumes. Paul Souday's reaction, in an early review of *Swann's Way* (as quoted in [Cano]), gives what is probably the initial response of a reader even today, "It seems to me that Monsieur Marcel Proust's thick volume has no structure and that it's as excessive as it is chaotic . . ."

In the teeth of this criticism, Proust strenuously maintained that ISLT was a whole and not to be subdivided at all. He hated the multiple volume format and died with the material from two of the six volumes in the current Modern Library edition, about a third of the whole, unpublished.

In truth, ISLT is very carefully organized. Proust wrote first the first and last chapters before the rest. This approach allowed him to fill the initial volume with explicit references to later events and characters. Throughout ISLT, Proust unifies his sprawling novel in various ways, for example by making more systematic use of foreshadowing than Powell. And the narrator's consciousness keeps the main themes of the novel constantly before the reader.

DMOT was written in a different spirit. Powell clearly wanted to avoid Proust's problems. He explicitly rejected the idea of writing the end first. He began writing DMOT with no idea how long the work would be or to how many volumes it might extend. He was fortunate to have the time to see the whole series published and satisfactorily concluded but this method of composition meant he could plant only the vaguest hints of what later volumes might contain.

On the other hand, Powell, unlike Proust, gave each individual volume its own unity. New characters are introduced at the beginning of each volume, characters who inevitably play a major role in that volume, and each volume has its own narrative arc. Some volumes, for example, revolve around the sad fate, or tragic end of a particular character: Maclintick (CCR), Gwatkin (VB), X. Trapnel (BDFR). Other volumes deliberately play Nick off against Widmerpool. For example, in BM, both begin in love with Barbara, become disillusioned with her simultaneously, then pursue Gypsy. Still other volumes are unified by spanning a particular period in the narrator's life: his friendship with Stringham for example (QU) or the life of a magazine (BDFR).

PLOT. Viewed from a distance, ISLT and DMOT might both be said to have no plot at all. Neither has a convincing story line upon which the novel as a whole focuses.

Superficially, ISLT tells how the narrator came to become a writer. But M only makes progress towards this goal in the last volume. In principle, DMOT is a series of observations Nick makes in response to the news of Widmerpool's death. But this is not made clear until the
final pages. These overall plot strands, if such they are, do not successfully command the reader's attention the way a traditional plot does. Yet things do happen in DMOT and ISLT.

What happens? DMOT and ISLT are novels of social life. Things happen at luncheons, dinners and other social events. Both authors create 'set-pieces' around these: elaborate, self-contained passages involving a substantial cast of characters and arranged for climactic effect. At a Powellian or Proustian set-piece either the narrator might make a significant discovery (e.g., M's of his vocation as a writer, or Nick's that he is no longer in love with Barbara Goring). Alternatively some character or set of characters acts out (e.g., the Maclintick's have a row, Pamela creates a scene, or Mme Verdurin throws Charlus out).

Each volume of DMOT between three and seven set-pieces as I count them. There are perhaps 48 in all, taking up 1080 pages. In ISLT there are only nine. Roger Shattuck enumerates them [Shattuck]. They occupy 1160 pages, so Proust's set-pieces are much longer, on average, than Powell's. The longest (the Guermantes-Verdurin matinée in VI) is as long as a whole volume of DMOT. Overall, however, DMOT devotes more space (proportionally) to set-pieces, consistent with Powell's greater interest in dramatization.

When do things happen? Precise dates are elusive. Proust and Powell instead refer to a few historical events (Proust: the Dreyfus Affair, Powell: the abdication crisis and the Katyn massacre) and let readers figure out as best they can when particular events occur.

Where do things happen? Proust and Powell both endow certain locations with extra meaning. In Proust, the narrator's childhood home in Combray, the seaside resort of Balbec, and the Faubourg Saint-Germain have particular resonance. In DMOT, prep school, the university, Lady Molly's, and Stourwater are significant—along with a series of pubs and restaurants. Place matters less to Nick than it does to Proust's narrator.

LANGUAGE. Proust is famous for the length and elaborate structure of his sentences and paragraphs. Some idea of what a long Proustian sentence is like can be obtained from this one, extracted from a paragraph three pages long:

He [Swann] knew that the very memory of the piano falsified still further the perspective in which he saw the elements of music, that the field open to the musician is not a miserable stave of seven notes, but an immeasurable keyboard (still almost entirely unknown) on which, here and there only, separated by the thick darkness of its unexplored tracts, some few among the millions of keys of tenderness, of passion, of courage, of serenity, which compose it, each one different from all the rest as one universe differs from another, have been discovered by a few great artists who do us the service, when they awaken in us the emotion corresponding to the theme they have discovered, of showing us what richness, what variety lies hidden, unknown to us, in that vast, unfathomed and forbidding night of our soul which we take to be an impenetrable void. [I 496-7]

On display here are some typical features of Proust's prose: the metaphors (a keyboard stands for the space of musical ideas, the difference between such ideas is likened to the difference between universes), a lengthy list ('of tenderness, . . . of serenity'), and a dramatic ending.

Powell's sentences and paragraphs aren't of Proustian length, but they can be syntactically complicated, and, like Proust, Powell usually saves an important element of the sentence for the end. Powell's prose in DMOT is certainly Proustian in spirit without making the reader's task overly difficult.
Here is a pair of examples, chosen to display Proust and Powell's skill with lists.

[Nick talks with Gypsy Jones at Milly Andriadis party.] She clung on to me desperately, whether as an affectionate gesture, a means of encouraging sympathy, or merely to maintain her balance, I wasn't certain. [BM 127]

[M tries to strike up a conversation with the elevator operator at the Balbec hotel.] But he vouchsafed no answer, whether from astonishment at my words, preoccupation with his work, regard for etiquette, hardness of hearing, respect for holy ground, fear of danger, slowness of understanding, or the manager's orders. [II 331-332]

A CASE STUDY

A systematic comparison of two events, one from each book, will illuminate their differences and similarities. In some areas Powell made choices diametrically the opposite of Proust's; on the other hand, he also adopted a fair number of Proust's ideas, toning down or ameliorating them for his own purposes.

WHAT HAPPENS? Midway through the second volume of ISLT and of DMOT, the narrator meets a new character. The two don't immediately hit it off until suddenly something shifts and they instantly become friends. In ISLT, the new character is Robert Saint-Loup; in DMOT, it is Ralph Barnby.

BEFORE THEY MEET. Narrator and reader are prepared for the new character. Nick learns about Barnby from Mr. Deacon in the second chapter of A Buyer's Market. Already in the first chapter, Barnby is quoted as an authority on women. In Within A Budding Grove, M and his grandmother, with whom he is staying in Balbec, are warned by Mme Villeparisis that her nephew will soon arrive and she won't be able to spare much time for them. M is impressed:

In the course of our drives together she had spoken highly of his intelligence and above all his kindheartedness, and already I imagined that he would take a liking to me, and that I should be his best friend . . . . [II 420]

INITIAL DESCRIPTION. Nick describes Barnby:

I had to ring the bell of the side door twice before anyone answered the summons. Then, after a long pause, the door was half opened by a young man in shirt-sleeves, carrying a dustpan and brush. ‘Yes?’ he asked abruptly. My first estimate of Barnby, whom I immediately guessed this to be, the raisonneur so often quoted at the party by Mr. Deacon as inhabiting the top floor of the house, was not wholly favourable; nor, as I learnt later, was his own assessment of myself. He looked about twenty-six or twenty-seven, dark, thick-set, and rather puffed under the eyes. There was the impression of someone who knew how to look after his own interests, though in a balanced and leisurely manner. [BM 164]

Barnby is 'about twenty-six or twenty-seven' making him at most a couple of years older than Nick. In ISLT, Saint-Loup, similarly, is slightly older than Proust's narrator M, who at this point is in his late teens.
Descriptions inevitably involve lists. From the second sentence above we learn two things: Barnby is in shirt-sleeves and he carries a dustpan and brush. In the second sentence of the last paragraph, we learn three things: that he is 'dark, thick-set, and rather puffed under his eyes'. The sentences laying out these facts are short; and the lists are confined to two or three items.

Nick's first impression of Barnby is 'not wholly favorable'. Barnby's impression of Nick is also 'not wholly favorable'. Both are ironic understatements. As Nick says, in the next volume, "Intricacies of social life make English habits unyielding to simplification, while understatement and irony—in which all classes of this island converse—upset the normal emphasis of reported speech." [AW 32]

M describes Saint-Loup:

...along the central gangway leading from the beach to the road I saw approaching, tall, slim, bare-necked, his head held proudly erect, a young man with penetrating eyes who skin was as fair and his hair as golden as if they had absorbed all the rays of the sun. Dressed in a suit of soft, whitish material such as I could never have believed that any man would have the audacity to wear, the thinness of which suggested no less visibly than the coolness of the dining room the heat and brightness of the glorious day outside, he was walking fast. His eyes, from one of which a monocle kept dropping, were the color of the sea. Everyone looked at him with interest as he passed, knowing that this young Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray was famed for his elegance. All the newspapers had described the suit in which he had recently acted as second to the Young Duc d'Uzès in a duel. One felt that the distinctive quality of his hair, his eyes, his skin, his bearing, which would have marked him out in a crowd like a precious vein of opal, azure-shot and luminous, embedded in a mass of coarser substance, must correspond to a life different from that led by other men. [II 420-421]

The outstanding stylistic feature of this description is overstatement. It is full of exaggerated metaphors: Saint-Loup's suit is of a color that no 'man would have the audacity to wear,' Saint-Loup himself is 'like a precious vein of opal . . . embedded in a mass of coarser substance,' and he must lead 'a life different from that led by other men'.

Proust's approach to description is the opposite of Powell's. Both authors intent, presumably, is to amuse: Proust by over-statement, Powell by under-statement. Unlike Powell's lists, Proust's often contain more than two or three items. In this example, there are two lists with four items: 'tall, slim, bare-necked, his head held proudly erect' and 'his hair, his eyes, his skin, his bearing'.

WILL THEY BE FRIENDS? Nick has no preconception of what his relationship with Barnby will be. M has the brightest of hopes:

...This was the nephew about whom Mme de Villeparisis had spoken to us. I was delighted at the thought that I was going to enjoy his company for some weeks, and confident that he would bestow on me all his affection. He strolled rapidly across the full width of the hotel, seeming to be in pursuit of his monocle, which kept darting away in front of him like a butterfly. He was coming from the beach, and the sea which filled the lower half of the glass front of the hall made a background against which he stood out full-length, as in certain portraits whose painters attempt, without in any way falsifying the most accurate observation of contemporary life, but by choosing for their sitter an appropriate setting—a polo ground, golf links, racecourse, the bridge of the yacht—to furnish a modern equivalent of those canvases on which the old Masters used to present the human figure in the foreground of a landscape. [II 421-422]
Note the elaborate butterfly metaphor for Saint-Loup's monocle and the four-item list: 'a polo ground, golf links, racecourse, the bridge of the yacht'. Powell is capable of metaphors just as elaborate as Proust's, but uses them less frequently. Note also that Saint-Loup's progress through the hotel lobby is compared with a style of portraiture. Powell also references art in description, though not in the case of Barnby.

THE MEETING. Powell describes it this way:

. . . I explained that I had come to see Mr. Deacon.
‘Have you an appointment?’
‘No.’
‘Business?’
‘No.’
‘Mr. Deacon is not here.’
‘Where is he?’
‘Cornwall.’
‘For long?’
‘No idea.’
This allegedly absolute ignorance of the duration of a landlord’s retirement to the country seemed scarcely credible in a tenant whose life, at least as presented in Mr. Deacon’s anecdotes, was lived at such close range to the other members of the household. However, the question, put in a somewhat different form, achieved no greater success. Barnby stared hard, and without much friendliness. [BM 164-165]

Barnby seems not to care for Nick. His studied indifference is dramatized by a dialog in which no sentence is longer than five words. Then, in a long and elaborate (in fact Proustian) sentence, Nick more-or-less accuses Barnby of lying.

Compare the brevity of the preceding quotation with Proust's handling of the analogous meeting in ISLT. It extends over three pages. First Proust prolongs the period before they meet:

How disappointed I was on the days that followed, when each time that I met him outside or in the hotel—his head erect, perpetually balancing the movements of his limbs round the fugitive and dancing monocle which seemed to be their center of gravity—I was forced to knowledge that he had evidently no desire to make our acquaintance and saw that he did not bow to us although he must've known that we were friends of his aunt. [II 422]

For an additional one and a half pages before they meet, M meditates on Saint-Loup's coldness. Then their meeting is approached in such a way that the reader barely realizes that the formal introduction which M has been eagerly anticipating for so long is actually occurring. Watch how Proust slips into this scene—for scene it is although there is no dialog:

When Mme De Villeparisis, doubtless in an attempt to counteract the bad impression that had been made on us by an exterior indicative of an arrogant and unfriendly nature, spoke to us again of the inexhaustible kindness of her great nephew (he was the son of one of her nieces, and a little older than myself), I marveled at how the gentry, with an utter disregard of truth, ascribe tenderness of heart to people whose hearts are in reality so hard and dry, provided only that they behave with common courtesy to the brilliant members of their own set. Mme De Villeparisis herself confirmed, though indirectly, my diagnosis, which was already a conviction, of the essential points of her
nephew's character one day, when I met them both coming along a path so narrow that she could
not do otherwise than introduce me to him. He seemed not to hear that a person's name was being
announced to him; not a muscle of his face moved; his eyes, in which there shown not the faintest
gleam of human sympathy, showed merely, in the insensibility, in the inanity of their gaze an
exaggeration failing which they would have been nothing to distinguish them from lifeless mirrors.
Then, fastening on me those hard eyes as though he wished to examine me before returning my
salute, with an abrupt gesture which seemed to be due rather to a reflex action of his muscles than
to an exercise of will, keeping between himself and me the greatest possible interval, he stretched
his arm out to its full extension and, at the end of it, offered me his hand. I supposed it must mean,
at the very least, a duel when, next day, he sent me his card. [II 424]

Proust's sentences here are, as usual, filled with humorous exaggerations—'not a muscle
of his face moved,' 'not the faintest gleam of human sympathy,' 'nothing to distinguish [his eyes]
from lifeless mirrors'. M even facetiously suggests that Saint-Loup is so unwelcoming that by
sending to M his card the next day he must mean the possibility of a duel. All this is in Proust's
customary, over-stated style. What is remarkable is that the meeting between M and Saint-Loup
is placed in the middle of a long paragraph (over two pages) whose purpose seems at first only to
allow M to comment at length about Saint-Loup's supposed coldness. Suddenly M is meeting
Saint-Loup; they shake hands; and, by the end of the next sentence, a day has passed and M has
received Saint-Loup's card.

This sneaky way of feeding information to the reader is a device of importance to Proust
but foreign to Powell, who also slips information in casually all the time, but not so slyly, and
usually with some assessment of its importance, or lack thereof.

THE THAW. Almost immediately after they meet, there is a change in the atmosphere
between the narrator and new acquaintance. In Powell's version:

I saw that I should get no further with him at this rate, and requested that he would inform Mr.
Deacon, on his return, of my call.
'What name?'
'Jenkins.'
At this, Barnby became on the spot more accommodating. He opened the door wider and came out
on to the step.
'Didn't you take Edgar to Milly Andriadis' party?' he asked, in a different tone. [BM 165]

Again Powell's treatment is dramatic. Barnby 'opened the door wider' and takes 'a different tone,'
simple statements that involve action. Their import is confirmed by the intimate question Barnby
immediately puts to Nick and his thereafter inviting Nick in. Within a few pages, they set out
together for a drink. In all of this, neither calls the other 'friend,' but their actions and the tone of
their conversation make their instant friendship obvious.

Although not dramatized by dialog, Saint-Loup in ISLT also changes his tone:

But he spoke to me when we met only of literature, and declared after a long talk that he would like
immensely to spend several hours with me every day. He had not only, in this encounter, given proof
of an ardent zest for the things of the mind; he had shown a regard for me which was little in keeping
with his greeting of the day before.
The first rights of exorcism once performed, as a cantankerous fairy discards her preliminary guise and assumes all the most enchanting graces, I saw this disdainful creature become the most friendly, the most considerate young man I had ever met. [II 425]

There follow five full pages in which M details, among other things, how Saint-Loup won over his grandmother. Then comes this passage:

It was promptly settled between us that he and I were to be great friends forever, and he would say "our friendship" as though he was speaking of some important and delightful thing which had an existence independent of ourselves, and which he soon called apart from his love for his mistress the great joy of his life. These words filled me with a sort of melancholy and I was at a loss for an answer, for I felt when I was with him, when I was talking to him and no doubt it would've been the same with anyone else none of that happiness which it was possible for me to experience but I was by myself. [II 430]

Almost instantly, Saint-Loup, becomes M's best friend—and remains so until his death at the front in WWI. The speed with which this happens is remarkable but then Barnby and Nick become friends just as quickly, if not so effusively. M's melancholy at the cementing of this friendship is more revealing. He is unable to respond in kind to Saint-Loup, instead baldly states the essential difference between himself and Nick, namely, that he is happier, as a confirmed introvert, when alone rather than with a friend, no matter who that friend is.

SUMMARY. The way Powell and Proust handle these separate encounters reveals many differences. Powell is the more economical writer; Proust vastly more prolix. Powell is dramatic; Proust is reflective. Powell routinely writes in a straight-forward manner; Proust favors over-statement.

It is also significant, however, that somehow at the same point in each novel, the narrator forms a close friendship, suddenly and quickly. The details vary but, in outline, what happens is broadly analogous. Both new friends, as it happens, also die in action in the ensuing world war.

Is it fair to compare these two authors using such short passages—less than a whole page of Powell, fragments from about ten pages of Proust? Just as complete information on how to reconstruct an entire living organism is available from a single cell in the form of its DNA, so the essence of these two particular authors is revealed by quite short extracts. It may not be true of all novelists, let alone writers in general, but in the case of Proust and Powell, both seem on every page to proclaim loudly who they are as writers.

COMEDY?

LOW HUMOR. Slapstick; pratfalls; unexpected meetings; abrupt humiliations; surprising reactions. Billson's appearance stark naked [KO 57] is an example. So is the sugar incident, the thrown banana incident(s), the uninvited speech incident(s), and so on. And don't forget the stink bomb in HSH. Humor doesn't get much lower than a stink bomb. Yet these are some of the funniest and most memorable scenes in DMOT.

Here's a low key example from ISLT.
[M has induced the painter Elstir to take a walk with him. His secret goal is to meet the band of girls to whom he is attracted and whom Elstir says he knows, and so be introduced to them.] Dusk was falling; it was time to be turning homewards. I was accompanying Elstir back to his villa when suddenly there appeared at the end of the avenue . . . [the] band of girls, who looked as though they had not seen me but were unquestionably engaged is passing a sarcastic judgment on me. Feeling that a meeting between them and us was now inevitable, and that Elstir would be certain to call me, I turned my back like a bather preparing to meet the shock of a wave; I stopped dead and, leaving my illustrious companion to pursue his way, remained where I was, stooping, as if I had suddenly become engrossed in it, towards the window of the antique shop which we happened to be passing at that moment. I was not sorry to give the appearance of being able to think of something other than those girls, and I was already dimly aware that when Elstir did call me up to introduce me to them I should wear that sort of inquiring expression which betrays not surprise but the wish to look surprised—such bad actors are we all, or such good mind-readers our fellow-men—that I should even go so far as to point a finger to my breast, as we should ask "Are you calling me?" And then run to join them, my head lowered in compliance and docility in my face coldly masking my annoyance at being torn from the study of old pottery in order to be introduced to people whom I had no wish to know. Meanwhile I contemplated the window and waited for the moment when my name shouted by Elstir would come to strike me like an unexpected and innocuous bullet . . . [I was sure] Elstir was about to call me. This was not all the way in which I had so often, on the beach, in my bedroom, imagined myself making the acquaintance of these girls. What was about to happen was a different event, for which I was not prepared. I recognized in it neither my desire nor my object; I regretted almost that I had come out with Elstir . . . [then] having decided to turn my head, I saw Elstir, standing a few feet away with the girls, bidding them good-bye. The face of the girl who stood nearest to him, round and plump and glittering with the light in her eyes, reminded me of a cake on the top of which a place has been kept for a morsel of blue sky. . . . For a moment her eyes met mine, like those traveling skies on stormy days which approach a slower cloud, touch it, overtake it, pass it . . . But already Elstir had left the girls without having summoned me. They disappeared down a side street; he came towards me. My whole plan was wrecked. [II 593-595]

The joke is on M. By playing cool, he misses the opportunity to meet the 'band of girls.' Yet only he knows what has happened; the scene plays out entirely in his mind. In this way, M is the butt of much of the humor in ISLT. In DMOT, this honor goes to Widmerpool. In his case the humor usually takes physical form.

Proust is perfectly capable of writing physical comedy:

"You know, I'm not in the least ticklish; you could go on tickling me for a whole hour and I wouldn't even feel it." [This is M.]
"Really?" [This is Albertine.]
"I assure you."

. . .
"Would you like me to try?" she inquired, with womanly meekness.
"Just as you like, but you would be more comfortable if you lay down properly on the bed."
"Like that?"
"No; further in."
"You're sure I'm not too heavy?"
As she uttered these words the door opened and Françoise walked in carrying a lamp. Albertine just had time to scramble back on to her chair. [III 489]

COMEDY OF MANNERS. Classic social comedy: people playing incompatible roles and talking at cross-purposes. This is what Powell describes when he writes:

. . . in everyday life, the participants act their parts without consideration either for suitability of scene or for the words spoken by the rest of the cast: the result is a general tendency for things to be
brought to the level of farce even when the theme is serious enough. This disregard for the unities is something that cannot be circumvented in human life; though there are times when close observation reveals, one way or another, that matters may not have been so irreconcilable at the close of the performance as they may have appeared in the Second Act. [QU 52]

A good example from DMOT is the session with planchette at Peter and Mona Templer's:

'This is too exciting,' said Mona.
She clasped her hands together. We tried again.
'Wives in common.'
This was an uncomfortable remark. It was impossible to guess what the instrument might write next. However, everyone was far too engrossed to notice whether the comment had brought embarrassment to any individual present.

'Look here—' began Quiggin.
Before he could complete the sentence, the board began once more to race beneath our fingers.
'Force is the midwife.'
'I hope he isn't going to get too obstetric,' said Templer.
Quiggin turned once more towards me. He was definitely in a rage.

'You must know where these phrases come from,' he said. 'You can't be as ignorant as that.'
'Search me.'

'You are trying to be funny.'
'Never less.'
'Marx, of course, Marx,' said Quiggin testily, but perhaps wavering in his belief that I was responsible for faking the writing. 'Das Kapital….The Communist Manifesto.'

'So it's Karl Marx, is it?' asked Mona.

...'I believe Karl Marx has been 'through' before;' said Stripling, slowly and with great solemnity.
'Wasn't he a revolutionary writer?'

'He was,' said Quiggin, with heavy irony, 'He was a revolutionary writer.' [AW 96-97]

No two characters react in the same way to planchette: Mona is excited; Peter, amused; Stripling, solemn; Nick embarrassed; Quiggin angry.
Here's a similar example from ISLT:

Early in the course of the dinner, when M. de Forcheville, seated on the right of Mme. Verdurin, who, in the 'newcomer's' honour, had taken great pains with her toilet, observed to her: "Quite original, that white dress," the doctor, who had never taken his eyes off him [de Forcheville], so curious was he to learn the nature and attributes of what he called a "de," and was on the look-out for an opportunity of attracting his attention, so as to come into closer contact with him, caught in its flight the adjective 'blanche' and, his eyes still glued to his plate, snapped out, "Blanche? Blanche of Castile?" then, without moving his head, shot a furtive glance to right and left of him, smiling uncertainly. While Swann, by the painful and futile effort which he made to smile, showed that he thought the pun absurd, Forcheville had shewn at one and the same time that he could appreciate its subtlety, and that he was a man of the world, by keeping within its proper limits a mirth the spontaneity of which had charmed Mme. Verdurin.

"What do you make of a scientist like that?" she asked Forcheville. "You can't talk seriously to him for two minutes on end. Is that the sort of thing you tell them at your hospital?" she went on, turning to the doctor. "They must have some pretty lively times there, if that's the case. I can see that I shall have to get taken in as a patient!"

"I think I heard the Doctor speak of that old termagant, Blanche of Castile, if I may so express myself. Am I not right, Madame?" Brichot appealed to Mme. Verdurin, who, swooning with merriment, her eyes tightly closed, had buried her face in her two hands, from behind which muffled screams could be heard.
"Good gracious, Madame, I would not dream of shocking the reverent-minded, if there are any such around this table, sub rosa . . . I recognise, moreover, that our ineffable and Athenian—oh, how infinitely Athenian—republic is capable of honouring, in the person of that obscurantist old she-Capet, the first of our strong-arm chiefs of police. . . . [I 356-358]

An explanation may help. There is a rough correspondence between this passage and the Templer luncheon. Mme. Verdurin, the hostess, is a kind of super-Mona, excited by everything that happens at her dinner party, determined to be in control, swift to make known her displeasure if crossed. She is more successful as a hostess than Mona and more consumed by social status. Two of her guests: Swann and de Forcheville, supply a sexual subtext as they are sometime rivals for Odette's attention and favors—not unlike Nick and Stripling at the Templer's, who both are or have been Jean's lover.

The 'doctor' is a kind of living planchette, a farcical character, literal-minded and obsessed with minutiae of speech. As is his wont, he shouts out whatever comes into his head. In this passage he zeroes in on two scraps of verbiage. One is the use of 'de' (= 'of') as a 'nobility marker' in a person's name, i.e., 'de Forcheville.' The other 'blanche' (= 'white') is the color of Mme Verdurin's dress. In the doctor's mind they combine in the historical figure 'Blanche of Castile'.

Last but not least: Brichot, a Sorbonne professor and pedant, is given to Widmerpudlian lecturing.

Here is a collection of odds and sods such as Powell might assemble for a meal, each acting their individual part “without consideration either for suitability of scene or for the words spoken by the rest of the cast”. If you don't find much humor in this passage and/or think it difficult to puzzle out, I agree completely. Yet Proust has nicely captured how social conversations bounce around without direction or purpose. On display also are some of the difficulties to be met translating Proust—multiple characters with individual peculiarities of speech, word play across languages, obscure historical references.

DIALOG. Proust and Powell are praised for creating individual speech patterns for their characters. In this example from DMOT, Siegfried attempts to serve Pamela.

'More of tea, Miss, please?'
'No.'
'Not good?'
'Not particularly.'
'Why not so?'
'God knows.'
'There is enough. China tea for the ration more easy.'
'I said I don't want any more.'
'No?'
She did not answer this time, merely closed her eyes. Siegfried, not in the least put out, showed no sign of going away. He and Alfred Tolland stood side by side staring at Pamela, expressing in their individual and contrasted ways boundless silent admiration. [BDFR 70-71]

Siegfried's struggle with English and his immense self-confidence are suggested by his language; Pamela's cosmic irritation by hers. The contrast is comic.

Here is an example from Proust. Albertine, one of the band of teenage girls M is smitten
with, chats up the narrator in Balbec:

"What weather," she began. "Really the perpetual summer of Balbec is all stuff and nonsense. Don't you do anything here? We never see you playing golf, or dancing at the Casino. You don't ride either. You must be bored stiff. You don't find it too deadly, idling about on the beach all day? Ah, so you like basking in the sun like a lizard? You must have plenty of time on your hands. I can see you are not like me; I simply adore all sports." [II 623]

She sounds a bit like Barbara Goring:

"Do be quick, if you're going to ask me for a dance," she had said, when her cousin, Eleanor Walpole-Wilson, had first introduced us. "I can't wait all night while you make up your mind." [BM 16]

Or Lydia Bennett:

"How nicely we are crammed in!" cried Lydia. "I am glad I bought my bonnet, if it is only for the fun of having another bandbox! Well, now let us be quite comfortable and snug, and talk and laugh all the way home. And in the first place, let us hear what has happened to you all, since you went away. Have you seen any pleasant men? Have you had any flirting? I was in great hopes that one of you would have got a husband before you came back. . . ." [Pride and Prejudice, Chapter 39]

Proust has perfectly captured bubbly teen-speak. It must be the same in all eras. Apart from its naturalness, Albertine's speech comedically makes clear how very unsuited to each other she and M are. Without intending to, she exposes the poverty of his life at Balbec. Here's another example of how M is the victim of Proust's humor.

HUMOR IN LANGUAGE. ISLT and DMOT are also filled with linguistic humor of all kinds: extravagant metaphor, ironic understatement, comic exuberance. All the passages quoted previously reflect, in some way, such comedy-on-the-fly. Here are two more:

Meanwhile, turning towards the indiscreet musician with a single movement and as though he were carved out of a solid block, the Duc de Guermantes, drawing himself up, monumental, mute, wrathful, like Jupiter Tonans, remained thus motionless for some seconds, his eyes ablaze with anger and astonishment, his crinkly hair seeming to emerge from a crater. Then, as though carried away by an impulse which alone enabled him to perform the act of politeness that was demanded of him, and after appearing by his aggressive demeanor to be calling the entire company to witness that he did not know the Bavarian musician, clasping his white-gloved hands behind his back, he jerked his body forward and bestowed upon the musician a bow so profound, instinct with such stupefaction and rage, so abrupt, so violent, that the trembling artist recoiled, bowing as he went, so as not to receive a formidable butt in the stomach. [IV 112]

From the rubber valve formed by pressure together of upper and lower lip, he unexpectedly ejected a small morsel of fat, discharging this particle with notable accuracy of aim on to the extreme margin of his plate, just beyond the potatoes left uneaten. It was a first-rate shot of its kind. [SA 70]

TOLERANCE. Just how open-minded are Proust and Powell? Do they succeed, as many believe, in avoiding satire? Are they funny without being cruel?

Nick seems to dislike only a few characters: Widmerpool (at times), Bob Duport (for a while), Biggs. His treatment of these can be waspish. Otherwise, Nick seems to believe what he
writes, namely, “All human beings, driven as they are at different speeds by the same Furies, are at close range equally extraordinary.” [AW 85] Tolerance is a major theme of DMOT and an attractive feature.

Proust's humor, in contrast, is often sour, verging on satire. Nearly every description fastens on an unpleasant feature of a character's appearance or manner, and then highlights it. It's almost automatic, a Proustian tic. For example:

In speaking, Albertine kept her head motionless and her nostrils pinched, and scarcely moved her lips. The result of this was a drawling, nasal sound, into the composition of which there entered perhaps a provincial heredity, a juvenile affectation of British phlegm, the teaching of a foreign governess and a congestive hypertrophy of the mucus of the nose. [II 624]

The words 'provincial' and 'juvenile' are digs, but the kicker is the phrase 'congestive hypertrophy of the mucus.' It makes a disagreeable impression—even if the deluded narrator a few sentences later says that he finds it 'peculiarly delightful.' Note how by being set last, 'hypertrophy' becomes the most important element in the description.

M anticipates being criticized for 'ill-nature.' Here is his defense, given towards the end of ISLT:

The stupidest people, in their gestures, their remarks, the sentiments which they involuntarily express, manifest laws which they do not themselves perceive but which the artist surprises in them. Because he makes observations of this kind the writer is popularly believed to be ill-natured. But this belief is false: in an instance of ridiculous behavior the artist sees a beautiful generality, and he no more condemns on this account the individual in whom he observes it than a surgeon would despise the patient for suffering from some quite common disorder of the circulation; the writer, in fact, is the least inclined of all men to scoff at folly. [VI 307]

M comically commits the very sin for which he seeks absolution: calling his victims 'stupid,' comparing their 'ridiculous behavior' to a 'common disorder of the circulation,' and boasting that 'the writer ... is the least inclined of all men to scoff at folly.'

Is M tolerant? Not likely. ISLT and DMOT are both comic novels, but their narrators have very different sensibilities: Nick, tolerant; M, misogynistic and misanthropic.

PARTING SHOT. Whose sense of humor?

The humor in ISLT and DMOT above all is the authors. Proust and Powell have proven that they, at least, have lively senses of humor. But what of the narrators? Do they share in the humor present in the books they narrate?

Neither of the younger narrators laughs much, or tells jokes, or seems to be very amusing company. You don’t see them comment along the lines “It was funny that ...” The young Nick is empathic and engaging, yet it is impossible to say specifically if he has a good sense of humor or not. It seems unlikely that he has the distant, amused stance of the older Nick, who can look back calmly on the events of DMOT. The young M—neurotic and self-absorbed—is even less likely to have a well-developed sense of humor. He definitely doesn't seem capable of seeing anything funny about his own life.

The older narrators are different. Supposedly they are the authors of these books. To the extent we find the novels funny, it is natural to assume their authors understand and appreciate
the humor. This is only so, however, if the humor is intentional. Is it possible that the narrators are funny unintentionally? It's not out of the question. One train of thought suggests this may be so.

Towards the end of ISLT and DMOT, the two narrators come together; the younger one catches up to the older. The older narrator is the only one left. To the extent that the older narrator shows appreciation of the comedic aspects of life, the humor should continue. However, humor becomes scarcer toward the end of both books; both become noticeably darker. To the extent that DMOT maintains a sense of humor towards the end (think: stink bomb), this line of reasoning applies only to ISLT.

In particular, M's apology (quoted immediately above) occurs late in ISLT, when he is describing the book he is to write. Nothing in his apology or the meditation surrounding it suggests that his book, presumably the book the reader is currently reading, will be humorous.

All this is speculation. I claim only that neither Nick nor M—particularly M—displays much consciousness of their own humor. The books remain comic; their humor can be enjoyed whether the narrators share it or not. If the narrators don't get it, it adds spice to the story and speaks to the skill of Proust and Powell, both of whom claimed their narrators were not exactly like themselves.

**PSYCHOLOGY**

Proust was an undoubted psychological pioneer. In ISLT, he recorded, perhaps for the first time, a single person's thought processes in detail and so discovered, or at least formulated, a number of significant psychological ideas of which there is space here to discuss only a few.

Although DMOT was not intended as a psychological novel—the opposite, in fact—Proust's ideas still find reflection there.

**TO DISCOVER THE FEELINGS OR THOUGHTS OF ANOTHER PERSON IS IMPOSSIBLE.** Powell and Proust expound on this theme in different ways.

In ISLT the impossibility of completely knowing another person is a major theme, a source of great frustration for Proust's narrator who spends a whole volume (V) struggling to understand his captive lover, Albertine. Here is one of this principle's earliest articulations:

At any rate I realized the impossibility of obtaining any direct and certain knowledge whether Françoise loved or hated me. And thus it was she who first gave me the idea that a person does not, as I had imagined, stand motionless and clear before our eyes with his merits, his defects, his plans, his intentions with regard to ourselves (like a garden at which we gaze through a railing with all its borders spread out before us), but is a shadow which we can never penetrate, of which there can be no such thing as direct knowledge, with respect to which we form countless beliefs, based upon words and sometimes actions, neither of which can give us anything but inadequate and as it proves contradictory information—a shadow behind which we can alternately imagine with equal justification, that there burns the flame of hatred and of love. [III 81-82]

In DMOT, the impossibility of completely understanding another person is implicit in Powell's decision not to allow his narrator direct access to any other character's thoughts or
feelings. Nick’s point-of-view is never omniscient and he routinely experiences trouble reading others. Here, for example, he observes the waitress Norma.

She still did not speak. Her expression changed in a very slight degree, registering what might have been embarrassment or cunning. [CCR 37]

Embarrassment and cunning are inconsistent yet still can be confused. Later, Nick discusses the difficulty of describing a marriage, one of the relatively few places where he lectures the reader on the difficulty of reporting what is normally hidden in human behavior.

A future marriage, or a past one, may be investigated and explained in terms of writing by one of its parties, but it is doubtful whether an existing marriage can ever be described directly in the first person and convey a sense of reality. Even those writers who suggest some of the substance of married life best, stylize heavily, losing the subtlety of the relationship at the price of a few accurately recorded, but isolated, aspects. To think at all objectively about one’s own marriage is impossible, while a balanced view of other people’s marriage is almost equally hard to achieve with so much information available, so little to be believed. [CCR 97]

Despite these caveats, several marriages are laid out 'in the first person' (in [CCR]) through the speech of characters who either don't care what they say and where they say it (the Maclinticks) or are drunk (Stringham, Moreland, and Matilda) [CCR 150-179].

PERSONALITY IS NOT FIXED. But rather composed of separate personas that constantly change places and compete for attention. Some of these personas are tailored to particular social situations; others incorporate parts of others (e.g., our parents). Proust's view of this becomes more nuanced over the course of ISLT. Here is an early formulation:

But then, even in the most insignificant details of our daily life, none of us can be said to constitute a material whole, which is identical for everyone, and need only be turned up like a page in an account-book or the record of a will; our social personality is created by the thoughts of other people. [I 23]

In other words, behavior changes with social context.

If none of us is a 'material whole', then what are the parts of which we consist? Proust calls them 'selves'. Consider this example:

[M has kept Albertine a virtual prisoner in his Paris apartment. He has just learned that she has left him. While coping with this news, he sits down on one of several chairs in his bedroom] Alas, I had never sat in one of them until this minute except when Albertine was still with me. And so I could not remain sitting there, and stood up again; and thus, at every moment, there was one more of those innumerable and humble "selves" that compose our personality which was still unaware of Albertine's departure and must be informed of it; I was obliged—and this was more cruel than if they had been strangers and did not share my susceptibility to suffering—to announce to all these beings, to all these "selves" who did not yet know of it, the calamity that had just occurred; each of them in turn must hear for the first time the words: "... Albertine has gone." ... There were some of these "selves" which I had not encountered for a long time past. For instance (I had not remembered that it was the day in which the barber called) the "self" that I was when I was having my hair cut. I had forgotten this "self," and his arrival made me burst into tears, as, at a funeral, does the appearance of an old retired servant who has not forgotten the deceased. [V 578-579]
The different personas making up an individual are not like the personas found in the condition known as dissociative identity disorder, of which the public became aware during Proust's lifetime—his father wrote about a case. By definition, a person with dissociative identity disorder experiences a loss of memory in one or more personas. Proust understood the key role of memory in personality formation:

In so many people, there are different strata which are not alike: the character of the father, then of the mother; one traverses first one, then the other. But, next day, the order of their superimposition is reversed. And finally one does not know who will decide between the contestants, to whom one is to appeal for the verdict. Gilberte was like one of those countries with which one dare not form an alliance because of its too frequent changes of government. But in reality this is a mistake. The memory of the most multiple person establishes a sort of identity in him and makes him reluctant to go back on promises which he remembers, even if he has not countersigned them. [VI 2-3]

Turning to DMOT, characters there also express, at times, different and inconsistent personas (or 'selves' in Proust's terminology). As in Proust, these personas have a common identity consisting of "an insouciant but systematic inconsistency," in Neil Brennan's phrase [Brennan, p. 70]. In other words, chameleon-like, people act and speak capriciously, unaware or indifferent to inconsistency. It is almost laughable the way each of Powell's characters remains his or her own unique self, tending, no matter what the situation and how differently they may behave, that is, regardless of the persona they are inhabiting, to expose an underlying ground personality.

Unlike Proust, Powell is seldom specific about the multiple personas that make up a character. Multiple personas are dramatized, often by pointing out a change in mood, for example when Barnby realizes that it was Nick who took Mr. Deacon to Milly Andriadis' party [BM 165] and suddenly becomes a friendly persona. Another such moment occurs when Stringham shifts from drunken flirtation with Audrey Maclintick to sober submission to Tuffy Weeden [CCR 180-185] just as earlier he gave up wrestling Widmerpool and resigned himself to being put to bed [AW 208].

Such sudden shifts often occur at or create a climactic moment. Consider this quotation.

I was conscious of Gypsy changing her individuality, though at the same time retaining her familiar form; this illusion almost conveying the extraordinary impression that there were really three of us—perhaps even four, because I was aware that alteration had taken place within myself too—of whom the pair of active participants had been, as it were, projected from out of our normally unrelated selves. [BM 256-257]

X. Trapnel, in particular, has many selves—some unconscious no doubt, others deliberate. At one point Nick lists over twenty [BDFR 144-145]. This passage is one of Powell's few direct discussions of the question of personas, here called 'acts.' Another term in use is 'personal myth,' which seems to be an 'act' or 'self' played with tenacity because the individual thinks of it as an essential part of themselves. Roland Gwatkin has such a 'personal myth.' As for Widmerpool, his personal myth might be summarized, "I plan; I work hard; I succeed." He is, however, prey to selves not under his conscious control.

In a remarkable passage at the end of At Lady Molly's, four of Widmerpool's personas
show up in quick succession [LM 225-239] when General Conyers takes Nick aside to describe his recent visit to Dogdene. According to the General, Widmerpool at Dogdene at first alternated between two of them:

‘... Widmerpool seemed to me rather a trying fellow. Half the time he was being obsequious, behaving as if he was applying for the job as footman, the other half, he was telling Geoffrey Sleaford and myself how to run our own affairs. It was then I began to mark down his psychological type. I had brought the book with me.’ [LM 229]

Next morning, Widmerpool displays a third persona:

'What do you think I found? Widmerpool in the hall, making preparations to leave the house. Some story about a telephone call, and being summoned back to London. Fellow looked like death. Shaking like a jelly and the colour of wax. [LM 230]

A moment later, Widmerpool shows up at Lady Molly's in the grip of a fourth:

After so recently hearing an account of his departure from Dogdene, I almost expected Widmerpool to display, morally, if not physically, the disheveled state described by the General. On the contrary, as he pushed his way through the people in the room, I thought I had never seen him look more pleased with himself. His spectacles glistened. Wearing a short black coat and striped trousers, his manner suggested that he was unaware that such a thing as failure could exist: certainly not for himself. [LM 237]

Nick and General Conyers have personas too, of course. Towards the end of their tête-à-tête, they shift personas together:

‘Well, I mustn’t keep you up here away from the others any longer,’ he said. ‘Lots of people you ought to be meeting. You are going to be a very lucky young man, I am sure. What do you want for a wedding present?’
The change in his voice announced that our fantasy life together was over. We had returned to the world of everyday things. Perhaps it would be truer to say that our real life together was over, and we returned to the world of fantasy. [LM 236]

INDIVIDUAL EGOISM. Proust and Powell are sensitive to egoism. Both describe characters with a range 'ego-fixation' ('self-centeredness' or 'self-esteem') upon which they comment directly. Here are two examples.

The illusion that egoists will be pleased, or flattered, by interest taken in their habits persists throughout life; whereas, in fact, persons like Widmerpool, in complete subjection to the ego, are, by the nature of that infirmity, prevented from supposing that the minds of others could possibly be occupied by any subject far distant from the egoist’s own affairs. [BM 32]

Self-centeredness, thus enabling every human being to see the universe spread out in descending tiers beneath himself who is its Lord, M. Bloch afforded himself the luxury of being a pitiless one when in the morning, as he drank his chocolate, seeing Bergotte's signature at the foot of the article in the newspaper which he had scarcely opened, he disdainfully granted him a hearing which was soon cut short, pronounced sentence upon him, and gave himself the comforting pleasure of repeating after every mouthful of the scalding brew: 'That fellow Bergotte has become unreadable.
My word, what a bore the brute can be. I really must stop my subscription. It’s such a rigmarole—stodgy stuff!” And he helped himself to another slice of bread. [II 479]

PARTING SHOT. If it is impossible to understand another person's thoughts or feelings, why does Proust's narrator enjoy an omniscient point-of-view, able, for example, to read so thoroughly the mind of M. Bloch in the previous quotation. Such omniscience contradicts a fundamental tenet of Proustian psychology.

One explanation is that ISLT was written to be read twice. (That's right: twice.) Some even claim that to be properly understood it is necessary to read ISLT twice. (They may be right.) One way to understand M’s omniscience is to unpack this idea a certain way.

At the end of ISLT, Proust's narrator, in order to redeem what seems to him to be a life hitherto wasted, resolves to write a book: a re-creation of his life. It is implied that the book the reader is just finishing is the book M will write. This suggests a second reading. If the reader, responds and re-reads ISLT, its ontological status shifts, almost as if, like a character in a novel, it changed persona. It may be helpful to compare the situation with what happens if one re-reads DMOT.

Powell's novel is purely naturalistic—or at least let us say so for the sake of argument. In DMOT, the events described are supposed actually to take place. In the world of DMOT, no one perfectly understands another person; no one is omniscient. In re-reading, this doesn't change; a second reading may bring enhanced enjoyment and understanding, but one reads the same book. Upon re-reading ISLT, however, the events described there no longer are supposed to have happened exactly as described within the world of the book. What the reader now reads is a creative re-telling of the narrator's life.

The first time through ISLT, one doesn't realize this—or isn't supposed to. At that time, the intelligent reader may well complain (I certainly have) that the narrator cannot know the things he says he knows about everyone else in the book. On second reading, however, the reader no longer supposes the narrative to be an exact account of the narrator’s life. They understand that they are reading an artistic statement and that the narrator, because he is writing a novel, has corresponding freedom and power.

Remember the words of X. Trapnel:

People think because a novel's invented, it isn't true. Exactly the reverse is the case. Because a novel's invented, it is true. Biography and memoirs can never be wholly true, since they can't include every conceivable circumstance of what happened. The novel can do that. The novelist himself lays it down. His decision is binding. [HSH 84]

The first time through ISLT, the reader, imagining M to be real, considers his pretense of omniscience nonsense. The second time, however, M no longer is remembering his life, but creating it, and, therefore, may write anything he chooses. He decides to be omniscient, for example, but that's the least of it. He can, in addition, become a success at anything he puts his hand to. He can enhance his consequence in the eyes of others at will. He can, if he wants, have Albertine grow bat wings. He’s a god. This being understood, some problems with ISLT are resolved, if we so choose.

For example, why is M so successful with women, when nothing about his behavior
makes this plausible? If ISLT is a fictionalized vision of M’s life, this problem disappears. What is more natural that that the narrator exaggerate his success in this area—or any other realm he chooses.

In another direction, every critic struggles either to ignore the similarity between Proust’s life and that of his narrator—or take it into account. If ISLT is fiction within the novel itself, then we, as critics, may without compunction conclude that M is both homosexual and Jewish. There is plenty of internal evidence for this conclusion and it resolves some difficulties. If some of the relationships in ISLT seem to be transposed from homosexual relationships to heterosexual ones, that is no longer problematical: M is gay. If, as ISLT rolls along, more and more characters are revealed as closeted gays, that now makes sense: M is gay. As a result, many of his acquaintances naturally are also. He has simply incorporated this in his novel.

**DISILLUSIONMENT**

THE UPPER CLASS. For the first half of ISLT (volumes I-III and part of IV), Proust's narrator is obsessed with upper class life: far more important as a theme in ISLT than in DMOT. Anyone who thinks Powell's characters are drawn from a narrow segment of society should be forced to read Proust.

In those initial volumes, Proust's narrator spends endless time and energy seeking acceptance at higher and higher levels of Parisian society. In this he is mysteriously successful, rising through successive social strata as if swimming slowly upwards through a giant wedding cake. Jack Murray [Murray] calls this Marcel's progress. While absorbed in his 'progress', M endlessly reflects on who is who in society—who is welcome where and who is not. Meanwhile, ISLT acquires its large cast of characters, many of whom appear on only a few pages.

Marcel's progress is thematically important because it illustrates a piece of Proustian psychology, namely, the importance of early childhood experience. Each step of M's progress echoes a particular scenario from his childhood: the 'drama of the goodnight kiss' set out in detail at the very beginning of ISLT [I 35-58].

As a child of perhaps seven, M schemes to receive his mother's goodnight kiss on an evening his parents entertain. Exiled to his room, M writes his mother a mendacious note, has Françoise deliver it at the dinner table, then, in defiance of parental edict, sits on the stairs where he knows his mother must pass. The success of this gambit causes M unconsciously to re-play it, with variations, in future attempts to gain attention all the rest of his life.

Each re-enactment begins with M feeling excluded: by his mother, by Gilberte Swann, by the 'band of girls' at Balbec, by the Duchess de Guermantes, and by others. M's strategy typically involves subterfuge: the stalking of individuals or groups, the sending of slyly worded letters, and so forth—quasi-criminal activities Murray calls them. They yield nothing at first except enhanced feelings of worthlessness. Eventually M gives up and decides he doesn't care. Then miraculously doors fly open: his mother stays in his room overnight, Gilberte invites him to play, he meets Albertine, he becomes a favored guest of this or that society hostess.

Sadly this cycle of frustration, inadequacy and eventual triumph ends in disillusionment. The upper class friends he makes always turn out to be ordinary people with faults and
blemishes. M comes to judge the whole of the upper class, indeed all friends, as worthless.

Turning to DMOT, we find upper class and fashionable characters present, but in nowhere near the profusion of ISLT. Nor are these characters a primary focus or viewed, by the narrator or anyone else, as of great import. Nick doesn't seek social connections and there is no blanket indictment of any class. Such aristocratic friends as he has are only a part of his acquaintance and, as in Proust, ordinary, though not particularly worthless, human beings. They even earn their own living for the most part, something almost no one does in ISLT.

ART AND LIFE. This is a major theme in both novels.

In the first place, both narrators reference the arts—paintings, sculpture, architecture, and the writings of other authors—to describe characters and events. Some examples:

He was tall and dark, and looked a little like one of those stiff, sad young men in ruffs, whose long legs take up so much room in sixteenth-century portraits: or perhaps a younger—and far slighter—version of Veronese’s Alexander receiving the children of Darius after the Battle of Issus . . . [QU 8]

The words "Florentine painting" were invaluable to Swann. They enabled him, like a title, to introduce the image of Odette into a world of dreams and fantasies which, until then, she had been debarred from entering and where she assumed a new and nobler form. [I 317]

The image immediately brought to mind was one not thought of for years; the picture, reproduced in colour, that used to hang in the flat Widmerpool shared with his mother in his early London days. It had been called The Omnipresent. Three blue-robed figures respectively knelt, stood with bowed head, gazed heavenward with extended hands, all poised on the brink of a precipice. It was a long time ago. I may have remembered the scene incorrectly. Nevertheless it was these figures Widmerpool conjured up, as he advanced towards me. [HSH 212-213]

It was the period when there were constant Gotha air-raids; the air was perpetually buzzing with the vibration, vigilant and sonorous, of French airplanes. But at intervals the siren ring out like the heart rending scream of a Valkyrie—the only Germanic music to have been heard since the war—until the moment when the fire engines announced the alert was over, . . . [VI 127]

Powell uses the arts in this particular way more systematically than Proust, who draws from many areas for descriptive and metaphorical purposes. Politics, history, and even the sciences (notably optics, mechanics, biology, and medicine) play as big a role in ISLT as the arts. Specific objects of art, however—real and fictional—are examined at much greater length by Proust than by Powell. With a few exceptions—Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, Tiepolo's Candales and Gyges and Aristo's Orlando Furioso—Powell does not take space to describe what he references; reader familiarity is assumed.

Additionally, both authors introduce artists as characters—painters, actors, writers and musicians. M initially idolizes these artists; later, as with the upper class, he is disappointed to find them flawed as people. Both authors imbue particular works of art with symbolic meaning. Stringham's Modigliani and the Dogdene Veronese are examples from Powell; the 'little theme' from Vinteuil's septet is an example from Proust. Art also enters both novels via pastiche. Scattered through DMOT are five of these passages—one a tribute to Proust. ISLT contains a single pastiche [VI 27-38], a tribute of sorts to the Goncourt brothers.
Finally, art inspires both narrators with the ambition of becoming artists themselves. M is much more romantic about this than Nick, writing with quasi-religious zeal about the power of art. For example:

As the spectrum makes visible to us the composition of light, so the harmony of a Wagner, the color of an Elstir, enables us to know that essential quality of another person's sensations into which love for another person does not allow us to penetrate. [V 206]

In other words, art compensates for our inability to know real people. Nick takes a more prosaic view:

I was impressed for the ten thousandth time by the fact that literature illuminates life only for those to whom books are a necessity. Books are unconvertible assets, to be passed on only to those who possess them already. [VB 233-234]

LOVE AND SEX. What is love?

"But that was Cythera," said Isobel, "the island of love. Do you think love flourishes at Stourwater?"
"I don't know," said Moreland. ‘Love means such different things to different people." [KO 139]

Not, however, in In Search of Lost Time, where love means one thing only. Each relationship that Proust examines in detail conforms to an elaborate theory of love. In contrast, DMOT is remarkable for the variety of relationships introduced.

The two authors share some ideas about love. For example, both believe the first moments of love are the best:

Ah, in those earliest days of love how naturally the kisses spring into life! So closely, in their profusion, do they crowd together that lovers would find it as hard to count the kisses exchanged in an hour as to count the flowers in a meadow in May. [I 337]

I used to wonder afterwards whether, in the last resort, of all the time we spent together, however ecstatic, those first moments on the Great West Road were not the best. [AW 65]

Both warn us that we do not necessarily love the real person before us, but an imaginary person we construct in our minds. Proust is uncompromisingly clear about this:

It is the terrible deception of love that it begins by engaging us in a play not with a woman of the outside world but with a doll inside our brain—the only woman moreover that we have always at our disposal, the only one we shall ever possess—whom the arbitrary power of memory, almost as absolute as that of the imagination, may have made as different from the real woman as the Balbec of my dreams had been from the real Balbec; an artificial creation which by degrees, and to our own hurt, we shall force the real woman to resemble. [III 507]

Powell is more easy-going, but only a little:

There is always a real and an imaginary person you are in love with; sometimes you love one best, sometimes the other. [AW 79]
Thereafter, Powell and Proust part company.

In the first place, Proust claims that success in love comes only after an arduous process in which the pursuer eventually becomes indifferent to the chase. When the desire for conquest has finally vanished, success may be attained, but then interest in the other person fades creating an unstable system:

I felt that my life with Albertine was on the one hand, when I was not jealous, nothing but boredom, and on the other hand, when I was jealous, nothing but pain. [V 530]

The consequence of success is boredom; jealousy follows with the realization that we cannot control or even know the loved one.

Sound familiar? Love involves the same cycle of frustration, inadequacy, triumph, and disillusionment as ‘Marcel's progress’, transferred from social life to the domain of love and sex. This too goes back to the 'drama of the goodnight kiss.'

If there had been any happiness in it, it could not last. . . . I wanted to leave her, because I knew that by carrying on I should gain nothing. Only even now, I imagined that the memory that I retained of her would be like a sort of vibration, prolonged by a pedal, of the last moment of our parting. Hence I was anxious to choose a moment of sweetness, so that it might be it that continued to vibrate in me. I must not be too particular, and wait too long. I must be sensible. And yet, having waited so long, it would be madness not to wait a few days longer, until an acceptable moment should offer itself, rather than risk seeing her to part with that same sense of revolt which I felt in the past when my Mamma left my bedside without bidding me good night, or when she said goodbye to me at the station. [V 530]

Turning to DMOT, what use does Powell make of the Proustian theory of love? In one relationship at least, he seems to employ it: Nick and Jean.

At the beginning, Jean, like the women to whom M is attracted, is inaccessible and remains so for some years. Nick does not pursue her, the way M might, but still has a nagging sense that Jean means something more to him than the casualness of their sporadic encounters suggests. Then, when their affair begins, the Proustian model kicks in. Initially Nick wants to know Jean completely and when a previous lover is revealed, he is intensely jealous. When they break up, he is distraught for a while. In outline, this is very Proustian. There now follows for Nick, as for M, a long process of forgetting that includes many Proustian moments. Casual references to Jean in conversation cause Nick to remember her, sometimes with more, sometimes less, pain. Then, when he believes he has forgotten her, he is subjected to several intense conversations: first with Duport [KO 175-181], then with Brent [VB 122-134]. These add to his understanding of Jean's infidelity (if you trust those two guys) at the cost of some humiliation and the re-opening of the pain of losing her. These echo Swann's discovery of Odette's deceptions—and M's of Albertine's.

As in Proust, the process of forgetting is never complete. Only a few pages from the very end of DMOT, while looking over Duport's paintings, Nick responds powerfully to Jean's presence in Barnabas Henderson's gallery:
Even if other things had not been on my mind—that soft laugh of Jean's—Victorian seascapes would have made no great appeal.

'It's the bedroom next to yours. Give it half an hour. Don't be too long.' [HSH 257]

A few other relationships in DMOT also echo specific Proustian ideas. Widmerpool's efforts to control Pamela, for example, are reminiscent of M's attempts to control Albertine. Nick himself feels a touch of the same need for control in his early relationship with Barbara Goring:

This matter of being able to establish Barbara’s whereabouts for a specific number of hours brought at least limited relief from agonies of ignorance as to what her movements might be, with consequent inability to exercise control over her in however slight a degree; for love of that sort—the sort where the sensual element has been reduced to a minimum—must after all, largely if not entirely, resolve itself to the exercise of power: a fact of which Barbara was, of course, more aware than I. [BM 24]

Some of Proust's strictures about love, e.g., 'successful conquest requires indifference' and 'success leads to boredom,' are expounded in a hilarious conversation between Bob Duport and Dr. Trelawney:

“Cohabitation with antipathetic beings is torment,’ said Dr. Trelawney. ‘Has that never struck you, my dear friend?’

‘Time and again,’ said Duport, laughing loudly. ‘Perfect hell. I’ve done quite a bit of it in my day. Would you like to hear some of my experiences?’

‘Why should we wish to ruminate on your most secret orgies?’ said Dr. Trelawney. ‘What profit for us to muse on your nights in the lupanar, your diabolical couplings with the brides of debauch, more culpable than those phantasms of the incubi that rack the dreams of young girls, or the libidinous gymnastics of the goat-god whose ice-cold sperm fathers monsters on writhing witches in coven?’

Duport shook with laughter. I saw that one of Dr. Trelawney’s weapons was flattery, though flattery of no trite kind, in fact the best of all flattery, the sort disguised as disagreement or rebuke.’

'So you don’t want a sketch of my love life in its less successful moments?’ said Duport. Dr. Trelawney shook his head.

‘There have been some good moments too,’ said Duport. ‘Don’t get me wrong.’

‘He alone can truly possess the pleasures of love,’ said Dr. Trelawney, ‘who has gloriously vanquished the love of pleasure.’

‘Is that your technique?’

‘If you would possess, do not give.’

‘I’ve known plenty of girls who thought that, my wife among them.’

‘Continual caressing begets satiety.’ [KO 194]

Perhaps inevitably—because there is an element of truth in them—DMOT reflects Proust's ideas about love, but not in a doctrinal way. Notably on exhibit are many other kinds of relationships: happy marriages (Nick and Isobel, Nick's parents, Gen. and Mrs. Conyers, still others), stable relationships outside of marriage (Moreland and Audrey), a marriage that endures infidelity (Roddy Cutts and Susan Tolland), gay and lesbian relationships (Hugo and Sam, Barnabas Henderson and Chuck, Eleanor Walpole-Wilson and Norah Tolland), relationships unhappy, not out of boredom or jealousy but from mutual incompatibility (the Maclinticks, Stringham and Peggy Stepney) or fatigue on the part of one partner or another (Moreland and Matilda), and, finally, relationships that are intense but not sexual (Mrs. Foxe and Norman Chandler). Above all, DMOT presents many examples of ordinary friendship.
Proust's Complaint. Over the course of ISLT, as Roger Shattuck explains [Shattuck, pp. 71-98], M ventures into the three realms just discussed: the upper class, the world of art and artists, the domain of love. All prove disappointing. Disillusionment is everywhere—except in the arts themselves, which continue to inspire M even as he is disappointed in artists as people. Shattuck calls the resulting cosmic disillusionment Proust's complaint. It is perhaps the major theme of ISLT.

M is aware that something is wrong, that something interposes itself between him and the object of his desire, something makes it impossible truly to apprehend or possess any particular thing. What is this?

When I saw an external object, my consciousness that I was seeing it would remain between me and it, surrounding with a thin spiritual border that prevented me from ever touching its substance directly; for it would somehow evaporate before I could make contact with it, just as an incandescent body that is brought into proximity with something wet never actually touches its moisture, since it is always preceded by a zone of evaporation. [I 115]

In other words, M is trapped inside himself. His dilemma is existential. Escape is only through art:

A pair of wings, a different respiratory system, which enabled us to travel through space, would in no way help us. For if we visited Mars or Venus while keeping the same senses, they would clothe everything we could see in the same aspect as the things of earth. The only true voyage, the only bath in the Fountain of Youth, would be not to visit strange lands but to possess other eyes, to see the universe through the eyes of another, a hundred others, to see the hundred universes each of them sees, that each of them is; and this we can do with [artists like] an Elstir, with a Vinteuil; with men like these we do really fly from star to star. [V 343]

This is a much more romantic attitude towards art than Nick indulges in. Life's tendency to disappoint shows up in DMOT, all right, but treated more casually. Nick is content simply to point it out on occasion:

Life at Hyde Park Gardens might be ruthless but it was played out on a reasonably practical basis, in which every man was for himself and no quarter was given; while at the same time a curtain of relatively good humour was usually allowed to cloak an inexorable recognition of life's inevitable severities. [LM 208]

That odd feeling of excitement began to stir within me always provoked by news of other people's adventures in love; accompanied as ever by a sense of sadness, of regret, almost jealousy, inward emotions that express, like nothing else in life, life's irrational dissatisfactions. [CCR 155]

The message of the bell, the singer's tragic tone announcing it, underlined life's inflexible call to order, reaffirming the illusory nature of love and pleasure. [VB 7]

Perhaps the last quote approaches M's kind of world weariness.

As with the arts, Nick's approach to life is probably only useful for those already prepared to accept it. It's doubtful Gwatkin took away much from this conversation:

'It was bloody awful,' he said.
'Of course.'
‘But a lesson to me.’
‘One never takes lessons to heart. It’s just a thing people talk about—learning by experience and all that.’
‘Oh, but I do take lessons to heart,’ he said. ‘What do you think then?’
‘That one just gets these knocks from time to time.’
‘You believe that?’
‘Yes.’
‘You really believe that everyone has that sort of thing happen to them?’
‘In different ways.’ [VB 233]

Here Powell directly contradicts Proust, who stoutly defends 'learning by experience,' provided it involves suffering.

This is as good a place as any to point out, as the reader will have noted already, that in regard to the themes that Proust and Powell both address, Powell invariably takes a more easy-going viewpoint than Proust—more matter-of-fact, more straight-forward—one might almost say saner.

PARTING SHOT: Both novels become darker towards the end. What is the source of the encroaching gloom. Which novel is darker?

As DMOT winds down, there are more and more deaths. They increase in frequency during the war trilogy, let up in the immediate post-war era, then, with the last two volumes, accumulate again. The penultimate volume (TK) begins with the death of Ferrand-Seneschal. Then Trapnel's disintegration is described. Stringham's death is not described but alluded to. Moreland collapses at the Stevenses party; his death follows off-stage. Sir Magnus Donners dies sometime around then. Mrs. Erdleigh predicts her own death. Glober dies. Gwinnett and Pamela, of course, are obsessed with death. Finally, and under the most sinister circumstances, Pamela herself dies near the end of the volume. This is approximately the fourth suicide in DMOT (Maclintick, Pendry, Biggs, Pamela). These are the most difficult deaths to deal with. Death is a major source of the darkness in TK. It is the gloomiest volume.

In the very last volume there are fewer deaths. There are even marriages, actual and planned. Remarkably some of the humor of earlier volumes comes back. The Magnus Donners Prize dinner brings with it another unexpected Widmerpool speech—and that stink bomb. The last scene, with the Duports and Barnabas Henderson, although bitter-sweet, is sustained as well by humorous touches, like Barnabas' inability to credit Nick with knowing either Mr. Deacon or Jean. But the thickening atmosphere of reminiscence throughout HSH, particularly the many rescues from the Valley of Lost Objects, inevitably remind us of those who have passed on: Moreland, Mr. Deacon, Stringham, Templer, and many more.

In ISLT, however, it isn't death that depresses. It's life; specifically, the narrator's life.

At the end of the novel, M becomes aware that his life has been an endless series of disappointments, some very painful. He comes to see all life as composed of intervals where he was numbed by habit, interrupted by spells of suffering. The word 'suffering' occurs over and over in the last two volumes of ISLT. With this realization M resolves that his own suffering will not be in vain. He creates what Ed Rivers [Rivers-A] calls an aesthetic of suffering. He will search for lost time, which turns out to mean lost suffering, and mold it into a work of art which will transform his life into something that, in part at least, will defeat death.
But I realized also that the suffering caused by the thought that our love does not belong to the [real] person who inspires it is for two reasons salutary. The first and less important is that, brief that our life may be, it is only while we are suffering that we see certain things which at other times are hidden from us—we are, as it were, posted at a window, badly placed but looking out over an expanse of sea, and only during a storm, when our thoughts are agitated by perpetually changing movements, do they elevate to a level at which we can see it. . . . But the principal reason is that . . . a portion of our mind which must, however much it hurts us (and the pain may in fact be beneficial), detach itself from individuals so that we can comprehend and restore to it its generality and give this love, the understanding of this love, to all, to the universal spirit, and not merely first to one woman and then to another with whom first one and then another of the selves that we have successively been has desired to be united. [VI 301-302]

Naturally, when some insolent fellow insults us, we would rather he had paid us a compliment, and a fortiori, when a woman whom we adore betrays us, what would we not give for this not to have happened! But then the pain of an affront, the anguish of abandonment, would have been lands which we should never know, lands whose discovery, painful though it may be for the man, is nevertheless invaluable for the artist. [VI 308]

And certainly we are obliged to relive our individual suffering, with the courage of the doctor who over and over again practices on his own person some dangerous injection. But at the same time we have to conceptualize it in a general form which will in some measure enable us to escape from its embrace, which will turn all of mankind into sharers in our pain, and which is even able to yield us a certain joy. [VI 313]

Which novel is darker?

Death will come—but, since one doesn't know when or how, an easy-going attitude towards it is almost necessary. It is not something one gets the better of. A whole life of suffering, though? That would be difficult to bear. No wonder Edmund Wilson, one of the first to write at length about Proust, concluded (as quoted in [Rivers-A]) that ISLT "in spite of all its humor and beauty, is one of the gloomiest books ever written."

THE FLOW OF TIME

From the titles alone it’s clear ISLT and DMOT are concerned with time—or Time as both authors call it when in the mood. Inevitably they tend to use similar devices to keep this theme before the reader.

Overall time mostly passes in a straight-forward manner in both novels. In detail there are many deviations, mostly small. The larger ones are the flashbacks. Powell places one at the beginning of each novel in the second trilogy. The third and longest [KO 1-74] reaches furthest into the past. Proust's chapter Swann in Love [I 265-543] reaches a corresponding distance backwards in his time. In addition to these large-scale shifts, the mélange of gossip and description in both novels connecting set-pieces floats somewhat freely in time—and is loaded with reminders of the past and, particularly in ISLT, anticipation of the future.

CALENDAR TIME. Both novelists say little about the exact time of events; dates are rare. Instead, there are occasional references to contemporary historical events. The Dreyfus
affair pulses through much of ISLT and World War I through its last volume. In DMOT, there is the abdication crisis and various milestones of World War II.

Powell's relative generosity with temporal references makes a fairly precise chronology for DMOT possible [Spurling, pp. 311-330]. A similar chronology is impossible for ISLT in part because there are inconsistencies. Thody [Thody-B, pp. 28-30] details some of these.

VISIONS OF TIME. Each novelist has a particular image or metaphor for time. Proust's narrator sees human beings as monsters, occupying Time in a manner analogous to space.

... that we occupy a place, always growing, in Time is something everybody is conscious of, and this universality could only make me rejoice, it being the truth, the truth suspected by each of us, that I had to seek to elucidate. Not only does everybody feel that we occupy a place in Time, but the simplest of us measures this place approximately, as he would measure the one we occupy in space. People with no special perspicacity, seeing two men whom they do not know, both perhaps with black mustaches or both clean-shaven, will say that of the two, one is about twenty and the other about forty years old, for the face of a young man cannot possibly be confused with that of a man of middle age, which in the eyes even of the most ignorant beholder is veiled by a sort of mist of seriousness. Of course this evaluation of age that we make is often inaccurate, but the mere fact that we think ourselves able to make it indicates that we conceive of age as an entity which is measurable. And the second of the two men with black mustaches has, in effect, had twenty years added to his stature. [VI 528-529]

I understood now why the Duc de Guermantes, who to my surprise, when I saw him sitting on a chair, had seemed to me so little aged although he had so many more years beneath him than I had, had presently, when he rose to his feet and tried to stand firm upon them, swayed backwards and forwards upon legs as tottery as those of some old archbishop with nothing solid about his person but his metal crucifix, to whose support there rushes a mob of sturdy young seminarists, and had advanced with difficulty, trembling like a leaf, upon the almost unmanageable summit of his eighty-three years, as though men spend their lives perched upon living stilts which never cease to grow until sometime they become taller than church steeples, making it in the end both difficult and perilous for them to walk and raising them to an eminence from which suddenly they fall. And I was terrified by the thought the the stilts beneath my own feet might already have reached that height; it seemed to me that quite soon now I might be too weak to maintain my hold upon a past which already went down so far. [VI 531-532]

This vision of time comes to M on the very last pages of ISLT. It will be central to his book, he says, and so it is, if that book is ISLT. But it is central only in the sense that the passage of time is broadly a theme. This specific image of people as monsters in time enters only at the end.

Powell's vision is of time as a ritual dance. This is enunciated at the beginning of DMOT:

The image of Time brought thoughts of mortality: of human beings, facing outward like the Seasons, moving hand in hand in intricate measure: stepping slowly, methodically, sometimes a trifle awkwardly, in evolutions that take recognizable shape: or breaking into seemingly meaningless gyrations, while partners disappear only to reappear again, once more giving pattern to the spectacle: unable to control the melody, unable, perhaps, to control the steps of the dance. [QU 2]

It’s referenced, as well, in the next two volumes:

... for I certainly did not expect that scattered elements of Mrs. Andriadis’s party would recur so comparatively soon in my life; least of all supposing that their new appearance would take place through the medium of the Walpole-Wilsons, who were involved, it is true, only in a somewhat

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roundabout manner. All the same, their commitment was sufficient to draw attention once again to that extraordinary process that causes certain figures to appear and reappear in the performance of one or another sequence of what I have compared with a ritual dance.” [BM 174]

Afterwards, that dinner in the Grill seemed to partake of the nature of a ritual feast, a rite from which the four of us emerged to take up new positions in the formal dance with which human life is concerned. At the time, its charm seemed to reside in a difference from the usual run of things. Certainly the chief attraction of the projected visit would be absence of all previous plan. But, in a sense, nothing in life is planned—or everything is—because in the dance every step is ultimately the corollary of the step before; the consequence of being the kind of person one chances to be. [AW 58-59]

and gently recalled in the last:

It was not quite the scene portrayed by Poussin even if elements of the Seasons' dance were suggested in a perverted form; not least by Widmerpool, perhaps naked, doing the recording. [HSH, 173]

Even the formal measure of the Seasons seemed suspended in the wintry silence. [HSH, 272]

By beginning with it, Powell gets more bang out of his image of Time, than Proust gets out of his.

MARKING TIME. Any regular or quasi-regular event suggests the passage of time. The coincidences in DMOT, for example, begin to feel familiar after a while, particularly Widmerpool's repeated appearances. Readers of DMOT are also on the alert—volume-by-volume—for the reappearance, sometimes rather suddenly, of the new characters invariably introduced at the beginning of the volume, e.g., Myra Erdleigh in AW, General and Mrs. Conyers in LM, Dr. Trelawney in KO, Russell Guinett in TK, and so on. These coincidental reappearances occur in Time as well as Space. They are part Powell’s vision of the Dance, what he refers to as “partners disappear only to reappear again.”

Proust and Powell also mark the passage of time by using iterative narrative (so-named by Gérard Genette [Genette]), a device designed to suggest movement in time. An iterative narrative describes a series of events all at once, usually by recounting a single incident in the series but using language that suggests that what is being described happened repeatedly. The first section of ISLT [I 1-264] is (largely) a long iterative narrative. It begins:

FOR a long time I would go to bed early. Sometimes, the candle barely out, my eyes closed so quickly that I did not have time to say "I'm falling asleep." And half an hour later the thought that it was time to look for sleep would awaken me; I would make as if to put away the book which I imagined was still in my hands, and to blow out the light; I had gone on thinking, while I was asleep, about what I had just been reading, but these thoughts had taken a rather peculiar turn; it seemed to me that I myself was the immediate subject of my book: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between François I and Charles V. This impression would persist for some moments after I awoke; it did not offend my reason, but lay like scales upon my eyes and prevented them from registering the fact that the candle was no longer burning. Then it would begin to seem unintelligible, as the thoughts of a previous existence must be after reincarnation; the subject of my book would separate itself from me, leaving me free to apply myself to it or not; and at the same time my sight would return and I would be astonished to find myself in a state of darkness, pleasant and restful enough for the
eyes, but even more, perhaps, for my mind, to which it appeared incomprehensible, without a cause, something dark indeed. [11]

A lifetime of various kinds of going-to-bed events are combined here. One night can’t contain them all; they are mashed together. The key word, used eight times above, is ‘would’. Replace each 'would' with the simple past tense (i.e., change 'would go to bed' to 'went to bed') and make a few other alterations (e.g., delete 'FOR a long time' and 'Sometimes' etc.) and we would have the description of a single 'going-to-bed' incident. Leaving in ‘would’ gives the impression of a series of them.

Powell employs iterative narrative also, for example, in describing tea with Uncle Giles at the Ufford:

ONCE in a way, perhaps as often as every eighteen months, an invitation to Sunday afternoon tea at the Ufford would arrive on a postcard addressed in Uncle Giles’s neat, constricted handwriting. [AW 1]

We always had tea in an apartment called ‘the lounge’, the back half of a large double drawing-room, the inner doors of which were kept permanently closed, thus detaching ‘the lounge’ from ‘the writing-room’, the half overlooking the street. [AW 3]

'I think we shall have this place to ourselves,' Uncle Giles used invariably to remark, as if we had come there by chance on a specially lucky day, 'so that we shall be able to talk over our business without disturbance. Nothing I hate more than having some damn’d fellow listening to every word I say.’ [AW 4]

Uncle Giles himself never ate tea, though he would usually remove the lid of the teapot on its arrival and comment: ‘A good sergeant-major’s brew you’ve got there,’ sometimes sending the tea back to the kitchen if something about the surface of the liquid specially displeased him. [AW 5]

He would very occasionally, and with due warning, produce an odd male acquaintance for a minute or two, never longer, usually an elderly man, probably a retired accountant, said to possess ‘a very good head for business’, but never before had I seen him in the company of a woman not a member of the family. [AW 6]

Nick is describing one tea in particular, the one where he meets Myra Erdleigh, but his language—by including such phrases as 'always,' 'usually,' 'once in a way,' 'used invariably,' and 'on most of these occasions'—plus the occasional 'would'—suggests that what happened was characteristic of a long series of teas.

Other examples of iterative narrative in DMOT include: teas at school with Stringham and Templer, Sunday afternoon teas with Sillary, debutante balls in the London season, Old Boy dinners, lunches at Hyde Park with Lady Katherine, dinners at F mess, committee meetings in Whitehall, Trapnel's handling of girl friends—and so on. Robert Selig [Selig] has carefully analyzed the use of iterative narrative in DMOT and reports that about 224 pages contain some form of this device (about a thirteenth of DMOT).

FRAGMENTS OF TIME. Both authors further evoke the flow of time by weaving references to past events and people into the stream of gossip, description, philosophical reflection and set-pieces. The final volumes of ISLT and DMOT are particularly thick with these.
Some are formalized in DMOT as ‘rescues from the Valley of Lost Objects’. In ISLT, the same function is performed by a reception held by the (new) Princesse de Guermantes which occupies the last several hundred pages of ISLT and at which many characters reappear, some aged almost beyond recognition.

Here, for illustrative purposes, is a sentence from the next-to-last volume of each novel by which time the process of inserting fragments of the past is well in play. First ISLT:

It is more likely than not that the woman who is causing the man who is in love with her to suffer has already behaved perfectly towards some one who was not interested in her, just as Odette who was so cruel to Swann had been the sedulous 'lady in pink' to my great-uncle, or indeed that the person whose every decision is calculated in advance with as much dread as that of a deity by the man who is in love with her, appears as a person of no importance, only too glad to do anything that he may require of her, in the eyes of the man who is not in love with her, as Saint-Loup's mistress appeared to me who saw in her nothing more than that 'Rachel, when from the Lord' who had so repeatedly been offered me. [V 591-592]

The characters invoked here—Odette, Swann, M's great-uncle, Saint-Loup and Rachel—are all from the past. Odette and Swann are not active characters in this volume at all, even though Odette is mentioned 21 and Swann 94 times. M's grandmother, whose death was recorded in the third volume, is mentioned 24 times. Thus Proust keeps elements of M's past in the reader's mind even as current time in the novel advances.

Turning to the next-to-last volume of DMOT, we have, for example:

The invitation had not included wives of writers asked as guests, but both the Quiggins were there, Quiggin's status as a publisher no doubt judged of sufficient eminence to be considered out of context, permitting accompaniment of his novelist consort. Alaric Kydd—to use a favourite phrase of Uncle Giles's—was behaving as if he owned the place. Other writers included L. O. Salvidge, Bernard Shernmaker, Quentin Shuckerly, a lot more, men greatly predominating in numbers over women. Mark Members was absent, known to be ill; Len Pugsley, not important enough, or considered too closely 'committed' to be asked to a purely social party. Evadne Clapham had also been overlooked, more probably barred from acceptance by a too relentless social programme of her own. Dr. Brightman, sprucely dressed in a fur cap and high fur collar, revealing a rather chilly manner to Ada Leintwardine, passed her with a smile, moving on to where L. O. Salvidge and I were chatting to one of the secretaries of embassy. [TK 213-214]

Eight of the authors/critics/reviewers who were new characters in the previous volume, BDFR, are listed here as attending (or not) a luncheon at the Soviet Embassy. None are active characters in TK. Uncle Giles, who has been deceased for at least four volumes, is worked in as well.

Quoting characters who have died or otherwise disappeared is a device explored more thoroughly by Powell than by Proust. There is a whole chorus of them: Barnby, General Conyers, Mr. Deacon, Uncle Giles, Stringham, Templer, and Dr. Trelawney—and possibly others. All show up as disembodied voices in Temporary Kings.

Barnby: That had also been one of Barnby's themes: ‘Ladies like a man to rescue. A job that offers a challenge. They can annex the property at a cheap rate, and ruthlessly develop it.’ [TK 26-27]

General Conyers: General Conyers (had they met, which never happened) might have hazarded a favourite solution, ‘a case of exaggerated narcissism’. [TK 57]
Mr. Deacon: The Hero, one of those old-fashioned pubs in grained pitchpine with engraved looking-glass (what Mr. Deacon used to call a ‘gin palace’). . . [TK 32]

Peter Templer: “The comment that Glober was a man to whom money-making was no problem recalled Peter Templer having once made the same remark about Bob Duport. [TK 73]

Dr. Trelawney: ‘I remember Dr. Trelawney saying much the same not long before he—’
I stopped just in time, at the last minute remembering no one, least of all a mage like Dr. Trelawney, should be disparaged by the statement that Death had overtaken him. Providential suspension on my lips of that misnomer was barely accepted by Mrs. Erdleigh. She had already begun to shake her head at such a near lapse, congenital lack of insight, all but openly displayed.
‘You mean not long before he achieved the Eighth Sphere to which Trismegistus refers?’
‘Exactly.’ [TK 245-246]

Stringham is present but not named:

‘I remember, years ago, a man who kept on quoting Omar at that party of Mrs. Foxe's, after my Symphony.’ [TK 249]

And here is Moreland—a chorus member I forgot. These characters impact DMOT far more than their time on stage justifies—what Spurling calls temporal foreshortening [Spurling, p. xiii]. Dr. Trelawney is the most outstanding example. He appears in only one novel (KO) but is mentioned in all subsequent volumes (BDFR excepted).

IN Voluntary MEMORIES. These are the famous 'Proustian' moments, where M experiences great joy—while time is suspended and the past is vividly recalled in response to some stimulus. The best known is the episode of the madeleine [I 60-64]. Others are spread out rather unevenly. There are three in the last volume. Each Proustian moment follows a pattern analyzed by Roger Shattuck [Shu].

Similar kinds of events occur in DMOT. John Roe [Roe] calls them reveries. As with Proustian moments, time is suspended and Nick experiences a kind of self-realization. Examples include: the moment when Nick is serves as a dancing dummy for Lady McReith [QU 91-92] and Nick's encounter with Gypsy Jones [BM 256].

TIME SLOWED DOWN THEN ACCELERATED.

‘If Liman von Sanders—— ’ began my father.
He never finished the sentence. The name of that militarily celebrated, endlessly discussed, internationally disputed, Britannically unacceptable, German General-Inspector of the Turkish Army was caught, held, crystallised in mid-air. Just as the words left my father’s lips, the door of the drawing-room opened quietly. Billson stood on the threshold for a split second. Then she entered the room. She was naked. [KO 57]

As this climactic moment approaches, conversation between Nick's father and General Conyers begins to flag. The General drones on insistently about Turkish politics; Nick's father tries in vain to dismiss his comments; Nick's mother and Mrs. Conyers talk of knitting. Time slows to a crawl as these conversations inch forward. Luncheon was over long ago. Then Billson appears.
With Billson's entrance, time stops, while Nick reports his parents' reaction to what has happened. Later—five pages on in the novel, only seconds in elapsed fictional time—the General takes action, escorting the now discretely covered Billson to her room. At this point, time begins to advance again but only slowly at first. Nick must report what the other occupants of Stonehurst were doing and the General's own reaction. Then events begin to move more swiftly. After a paragraph, wherein the General smokes a cigarette, we leap ahead and suddenly the Conyers are leaving. Edith and Nick and Uncle Giles and Dr. Trelawney all show up in the Stonehurst drive at the same time—and events return to a normal narrative pace.

This pattern—time slowing down before a climactic event, stopping as the event occurs, then speeding up afterwards—is followed at many critical points in DMOT. A good number include Widmerpool: the sugar pouring incident, Widmerpool's uninvited speech, his first entrance at Lady Molly's, and so on. But there are others to which Widmerpool is not a party. Billson's naked entrance is one; Nick's encounter with Gypsy in fancy dress another [Roe], the moment when Nick and Jean first embrace [Roe], and Bithel's strange dance [VB 26-28].

Proust also builds up to climaxes in ISLT by retarding narrative time. He does this more flagrantly than Powell and on a larger scale—by padding the action with digressions: lengthy description of characters thoughts, essays on casual subjects, interpolated philosophical discussion.

An outstanding example is M's arrival (in IV) at a reception given by the (old) Princesse de Guermantes. The Princesse (not the Duchesse) represents the summit of Parisian society; attendance at one of her receptions is the culmination of Marcel's progress. The only difficulty is that M is not sure, for various reasons, that his invitation is the real thing. He receives it towards the end of The Guermantes Way [III 779]. His doubts about it are not resolved before the time comes to attend to the reception, even though he visits the Duchesse de Guermantes (not the Princesse) earlier in the evening [III 784-819] expressly to be assured his invitation is genuine. The visit to the Duchesse ends volume III with M still in doubt.

At the beginning of the next volume, M postpones his arrival at the reception in order to insert the now famous chapter in which he introduces the topic of homosexuality [IV 1-44]. This describes the meeting of Charlus with Jupien observed by M while waiting for the Duchesse to arrive (at the end of III). When M finally gets to the Princess's reception [IV 45], he stands nervously in line behind the Duc de Chatellerault and takes a couple of pages to outline the Duc's own difficulty with the reception line, namely that only a few days earlier he had an amorous encounter with the usher who is bawling out the names of the guests. The Duc is afraid of being recognized by this functionary and "ruined." The reader must endure the Duc's suspense until it is resolved. Then it is M's turn to be announced [IV 50-52]. So far Proust has continually held back time to maximize readers' and M's suspense, taking 80 pages from M's receipt of the doubtful invitation to his actual arrival at the party. As the climax of this adventure is attained, the timing of events accelerates. The Princess sees M and rises from her seat to greet him. She has not done this for any other guest hence M is sure he is about to be thrown out. The Princess reaches a hand out to greet him. In another half a page, the crisis is over.

A second example of Proustian time slowing and then accelerating was described earlier (in A Case Study). As M's first meeting with his soon-to-be best friend Robert St. Loup
approaches, Proust continually postpones the meeting with interpolations; when they finally meet, time accelerates and it's all over in a few sentences [II 419-426].

PARTING SHOT. Proust's narrator M and Nick awaken to their place in the flow of Time at roughly comparable spots in ISLT and DMOT. They express this realization in roughly similar ways:

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\ldots \text{But apart from that, in speaking of my inclinations as no longer liable to change, and of what was destined to make my life happy, he [my father] aroused in me two very painful suspicions. The first was that (at a time when, every day, I regarded myself as standing upon the threshold of a life which was still intact and would not enter upon its course until the following morning) my existence was already begun, and that, furthermore, what was yet to follow would not differ to any extent from what had gone before. The second suspicion, which was really no more than a variant of the first, was that I was not situated somewhere outside the realm of Time, but was subject to its laws, just like the characters in novels who, for that reason, used to plunge me in such gloom when I read of their lives, down at Combray, in the fastness of my hooded wicker chair. In theory one is aware that the earth revolves, but in practice one does not perceive it, the ground upon which one treads seems not to move, and one can rest assured. So it is with Time in one's life. And to make its flight perceptible novelists are obliged, by wildly accelerating the beat of the pendulum, to transport the reader in a couple of minutes over ten, or twenty, or even thirty years. At the top of one page we have left a lover full of hope; at the foot of the next we meet him again, a bowed old man of eighty, painfully dragging himself on his daily walk about the courtyard of a hospital, scarcely replying to what is said to him, oblivious of the past. In saying of me, "He is no longer a child," "His tastes will not change now," and so forth, my father had suddenly made me conscious of myself in Time, and caused me the same kind of depression as if I had been, not yet the enfeebled old pensioner, but one of those heroes of whom the author, in a tone of indifference which is particularly galling, says to us at the end of a book: "He very seldom comes up from the country now. He has finally decided to end his days there."
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[II 74-75]

For reasons not always at the time explicable, there are specific occasions when events begin suddenly to take on a significance previously unsuspected; so that, before we really know where we are, life seems to have begun in earnest at last, and we ourselves, scarcely aware that any change has taken place, are careering uncontrollably down the slippery avenues of eternity. [BM 274]

CONCLUSION

Anthony Powell was introduced to Proust in the nineteen twenties, reading half of *In Search of Lost Time* while at Oxford and the remainder after moving to London. He read (or re-read) Proust at least four times—roughly every twenty years, as I make it out. That first reading, was in the mid-twenties (1923-28). A second reading occurred in the mid-forties (1944-1948), I believe, while Powell pondered writing the long novel that eventually became DMOT. Yet another reading was needed in the mid-sixties (1966-69) while writing *The Military Philosophers* (published 1968) and composing the substantial essay “Proust as a Soldier” for the centennial of Proust’s birth [Quenell, pp. 149-164]). A subsequent reading is recorded in Powell’s journal:

Sunday, July 8, 1990: I reread Proust (fourth or fifth time, Kilmartin translation now) [Powell-B, p. 51].
Besides rereading, Powell reviewed books about Proust, choosing to include in his three volumes of collected reviews more books on Proust than on any other subject. One of these is a mock-interview with Bloch, a character in ISLT, written for *Punch* (1955). Another is the already-mentioned essay “Proust as a Soldier.” Proust’s name also shows up quite often in reviews of books with no particular connection to Proust.

All this simply confirms what Powell said in an interview with Michael Barber shortly after the publication of *Hearing Secret Harmonies* [Barber-A, p. 14], “I’m a great admirer of Proust and know his works very well.”

But he didn’t much like being called ‘the English Proust’. The year before the fourth rereading, he wrote:

> Wednesday, January 25, 1989: Professor P. M. W. Thody, Head of the French Department, Leeds University, sent me a piece called ‘The English Proust’. My heart sank at the title, because comparisons with Proust, if flattering, are rarely made with intelligence. Thody’s, on the contrary, was exceedingly well done, pointing out certain similarities, and a great many fundamental differences in most respects. [Powell-A, p. 165]

Thody’s piece *is* well done—and well-balanced. For every similarity, Thody finds one or more countervailing differences between DMOT and ISLT. Reading his piece [Thody-A] is like being backed up against the ropes in a boxing ring and punched alternately from the left and the right.

*In Search of Lost Time* was indeed a major influence on *A Dance to the Music of Time* but that influence was multi-sided. Every technical decision Proust made while writing *his* novel, Powell also made. Sometimes Powell’s choice echoes Proust’s. The superficial similarities listed earlier are in this category. Sometimes Powell rejects Proust’s concept outright, for example in the character of his narrator. Still other decisions are less clear cut, for Powell transformed what he read. Specifically, Powell adopted many of the themes of ISLT, but in DMOT their treatment is gentler, more refined, ameliorated.

The influence of Proust on Powell, however was not superficial but deep in the following sense. Powell reacted strongly to the choices Proust made, sometimes in agreement, sometimes in opposition, but rarely in a neutral way.

**FINAL PARTING SHOT.** The description below fits a character in *A Dance to the Music of Time* and a character in *In Search of Lost Time*. Who are they?

*Description.* He doesn't talk about his father much, but emerges from childhood with a profound attachment to his mother. He has health problems and may be a bit of a hypochondriac. He wants very much to succeed in life and has ambitions which the reader initially suspects are beyond his reach.

In his twenties, he sets himself a series of goals whose achievement he hopes will win him the acceptance he craves. He has a fixed strategy for success that he invariably employs. He works hard towards a goal, pushing himself forward aggressively yet in a carefully planned, sly, and somewhat surreptitious way. He schemes; he suffers humiliations; he faces the possibility of
failure; but repeatedly he rises to new heights the which, however, invariably disappoint him so that he soon seeks a new objective.

In middle age, he falls in love. He has been involved with women before—with mixed results. He is known, for example, to visit prostitutes. He is something of a voyeur. This particular woman mysteriously succumbs to his advances, though grave doubt is cast whether their relationship is ever consummated. Regardless, he is devoted to her, even becomes dependent on her. He is, perhaps, trying to replace his mother, all the while striving to dominate and control, as he controls his mother. He succeeds only partially. Meanwhile what he learns suggests she has committed a multitude of shocking infidelities. In the end she escapes his clutches only to die soon afterwards. He never recovers from her loss.

Who are they? Widmerpool and Proust’s narrator, M—of course.

One might object that Widmerpool marries Pamela but M doesn’t marry Albertine. Still, Albertine comes to live with M and he attempts to control her with persistence equal to Widmerpool’s efforts to control Pamela. A second objection might be that Albertine's infidelities are never proven. But it is equally unclear to what extent Widmerpool knows about Pamela's infidelities or, whatever he may suspect, whether he accepts them. Widmerpool seems to believe Pamela will always come back to him.

What about the disillusionment? Is Widmerpool as disappointed with success as M demonstrably is? Recall General Conyers’ words,

'It seems to me,’ said the General, ‘that he is a typical intuitive extrovert—classical case, almost. Cold-blooded. Keen on a thing for a moment, but never satisfied. Wants to get on to something else.’

[LM 230]

The remaining items—the mother fixation, fixed life strategy, constant striving, scheming for success, probable hypochondria, commerce with prostitutes, presumed impotence, obsession with the great love of his life who dies shortly after she absconds—all apply equally to M and to Widmerpool. Whether deliberately or by happenstance, Widmerpool has ended up with a number of M’s qualities.

Widmerpool, as it happens, is already paired with another character from ISLT, namely Charlus. Does it matter? That association is of function, not personality. Widmerpool and Charlus help unify their respective novels by their frequent reappearance and the way they fascinate their narrators. That is their function. As people they are profoundly different. Charlus has no need to climb socially; he was born at the top of the heap. Social climbing: that’s what M and Widmerpool excel at.

What does this tell us?

First of all, it supplies, in Widmerpool and Pamela, a second example in DMOT of a Proustian romantic relationship where the lover is trapped in jealousy and the need to control.

More interesting is the light is shines on the frustrating process of finding sources for Powell’s characters. Widmerpool participates, to a certain extent, in the traits of two characters
from ISLT. At the same time, he remains uniquely himself, not merely the sum of an ‘M’ plus a ‘Charlus’.

Finally, under the right circumstances, we see that Widmerpool needn’t have ended up dying ignominiously on a nude, early morning run. If only Powell had given him some of M’s artistic sensibility and a touch of his self-awareness, Widmerpool might have become a writer too, produced his own Remembrance of Things Past, and conquered Time.

REFERENCES