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Popular modernism: representations of modernist literature in popular culture

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Chapter 1

Beginning: Marcel Proust and Charlie Kaufman

A first sentence must be good. It determines the tone and character of the text. Struggling to find the perfect first line can drive writers to despair. How does one find the right beginning, a beginning that is original, that says something about one's perspective on literature, and is yet smooth and catchy? Overthinking, every beginning starts to look contrived or banal. In this chapter, I analyze two writers that suffer from the fear of beginning to write. The first is Charlie Kaufman in the film *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze, 2002), for which the real-life Charlie Kaufman wrote the screenplay; the second is the narrator, Marcel, of Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* (first published in 1913 – 1927). Although almost ninety years passed between these two works, I see remarkable similarities in their joint anxiety and their choice to turn this anxiety into the subject of the work. I bring these two works in dialogue with one another to study not only the question of beginning, but also the protagonists' self-reflexive thoughts on what it means to write.

In *Adaptation*, the protagonist Charlie (played by Nicolas Cage) is a screenwriter who struggles with a severe writer's block.¹⁹ To be a screenwriter is, of course, different from being an author of literary fiction. Yet, Charlie's ideas about what it entails to write resemble the narrator's ideas about writing in Proust's novel. While *Adaptation* is instantly recognizable as a postmodern work, self-reflexive in countless ways and knowingly commenting on the art of film-making as well as Hollywood clichés, the monologues of Charlie conform to early modernist self-conscious monologues. The screenwriting teacher Robert McKee, who wrote a critical commentary for *Adaptation: The Shooting Script* (2002), observes the same:

¹⁹ There are numerous other films in which writers are portrayed with writer's blocks, for instance *Barton Fink* (Coen brother, 1991), *Shakespeare in Love* (John Madden, 1998), *Ask the Dust* (Robert Towne, 2006), or Federico Fellini's classic *8 ½* (1963), and Rob Marshall's film *Nine* (2010), a musical which is based on Fellini's *8 ½*. However, *Adaptation* is the most relevant for my analysis as the protagonist repeatedly reflects on the act of writing, the difficulty of finding a right beginning and what it means to be a writer.

[Kaufman] may use the disorienting techniques of Postmodernism, he draws upon an older, deeper creed. Charlie Kaufman is an old-fashioned Modernist. He writes in the palaeo-avant-garde tradition that runs from the dream plays of Strindberg and inner monologues of Proust through the tortured identities in Pirandello and the paranoia of Kafka to the rush of subjectivities in Wolfe, Joyce, Faulkner, Beckett, and Bergman – that grand twentieth-century preoccupation with the Self (131).

McKee mentions nine modernists in the same breath—all literary authors, except for Bergman, suggesting that Kaufman’s perspective on writing, as represented in the film, does not merely apply to screenwriting but to writing in general. McKee states that all of these authors share what he defines as a “preoccupation with the Self.” Although self-reflexivity not necessarily implies reflection on the self, McKee is right that the two are inextricably bound up with one another in *Adaptation*. Moreover, in *Adaptation* and *La Recherche*, the protagonists repeatedly comment on their selves and the indistinct frontier between their selves and the selves of the authors, thus making the works explicitly self-referential; a self-referentiality that becomes self-reflexive as they obsessively reflect on the process of writing.²⁰

Self-reflexive writing is often defined as the most important feature of modernist literature. For instance, in “Early Modernism” (2007), Peter Brooker claims that modernism is “understood as a self-referential mode, alert to its own formal composition and the constructedness of the ‘real’” (33). Critics frequently distinguish between early modernist works, in which highly self-conscious minds are presented, and late modernist works, which leave behind the individual mind to foreground the structure of the text or the particular use of language.²¹ In

²⁰ I encountered one other text in which *Adaptation* and Proust’s work are discussed together. However, this text concerns not Proust’s novel, but Raoul Ruiz’s film adaptation *Le Temps Retrouvé* (1999). In “Once Upon an Adaptation” (2005), Karen Diehl compares the two films because they both bring in the author of the book that is adapted. I refer to Ruiz’s film as well; yet, my main interest is not that of film adaptation, but of literary writing: how it is represented in Proust’s work and how it relates to contemporary representations.

²¹ In *The Struggle of the Modern* (1963), Stephen Spender also observes that in modernist literature and visual art “the mode of perceiving itself becomes an object of perception and is

other words, late modernist works tend to break free from the perspective of a protagonist, revealing the text itself as a meaning system. As Eysteinnsson writes, “the whole notion of the self-consciousness of literary artifacts, complex as it is, would seem to be one of the chief links between the two ‘modernisms’” (109). Considering the distinction between early and late modernism, Proust’s work belongs to the early part and, although *Adaptation* historically belongs to the postmodernist era, Charlie’s interior monologues also conform to the early modernist self-conscious writings.²²

While self-reflexive writing expresses an uncertainty about the self, modernist authors favored descriptions of subjective experience over an assumed objective reality. The writer should concentrate on the spirit, as Virginia Woolf argues, and interpret the book that hides in oneself, as Proust’s narrator believes. In this chapter, I also study another kind of preoccupation with the self, namely that of self-help culture, with which Charlie is confronted when he visits a writing seminar. Self-help literature developed in the same period as modernism. Both modernist writing and the genre of self-help literature can be interpreted as resulting from the general distrust of the idea that reality can be represented objectively. Elisabeth Herion-Sarafidis argues that even science, which used to represent objective knowledge, started to teach that “*man* was the measure of things” (1992: 220). After the horrors of the First World War, old Protestant morality did not seem credible any longer, and neither did it seem to fit the materialistic ambitions that started to flourish. Moreover, Herion-Sarafidis argues, psychology gained in popularity, having a decisive influence on the growth of self-help books, which started off as success manuals. Some of the self-help writing books published today still read as success manuals, for instance Judith Appelbaum’s *How to Get Happily Published* (1998). Written in 1978, the book sold over five hundred thousand copies.²³

included as part of the thing perceived” (134-35). Not all critics are charmed by such self-reflexivity; Peter Keating, for example, concludes from Henry James’s astonishment about the absence of “life” in certain novels that “in the saddest possible way ... the modernist novel was ruthlessly determined to be about nothing but itself” (1991: 358).

²² One could say that self-reflexivity is the chief link between modernist and postmodernist literature as well. Charles Russel, for instance, argues that postmodernist literature above all is “a construct that explicitly says something about the process of creating meaning” (1980: 183).

²³ “The Freudian theories became well-known to the American general public in the 1920s; as was the case in Great Britain, the publication of *The Interpretation of Dreams* had an enormous

With regard to Charlie's resorting to the self-help course, I look at how his modernist ideas about writing and originality relate to the psychological principles in self-help literature.²⁴ One of the returning topics is writer's block. Charlie is often depicted at moments when he feels he is not able to write anything. Similarly, Marcel feels unable to start writing. I analyze the contemporary idea of the writer's block and the way it relates to the impasse that the narrator describes in *La Recherche*. In course, Proust demonstrates that the writer has often already begun when he believes that he will never be able to write anything of value. Thus, the representation of the writing process proves that "to identify a point as a beginning is to classify it after the fact," as Edward Said formulates it in *Beginnings* (1985: 29).

This is partially due to our temporal understanding of cause and effect. As Friedrich Nietzsche famously argues, a cause without an effect cannot legitimately be identified as a cause. An effect has to be distinguished as an effect before a cause can be distinguished, which makes him conclude that effects precede their cause (1995: 34).²⁵ Correspondingly, the beginning of a story only becomes recognizable when a story has been identified. Even if one does not succeed in writing more than a first sentence, it can only be recognized as the first sentence of a larger story if it at least *suggests* a continuation. Hence, a definite beginning can only be determined in retrospect, just as a source text only becomes a source text after the creation of an adaptation.²⁶

impact in the United States, as had psychoanalysis, "the miracle cure," Herion-Sarafidis writes (220). The combination of psychological theories and religion resulted in the most famous self-help book; *The Power of Positive Thinking* that was published in 1952. This book has been a bestseller for decennia, and has influenced all other self-help books; Ralph Keyes for instance entitles one section in his book "The Power of Positive Anxiety" (1995: 14).

²⁴ In "Consciousness as a Stream" (2007), Ann Fernihough argues that novels like May Sinclair's *Mary Olivier* (1919), D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow* or James Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* follow a "trajectory towards the *unfettered ego*," an expression that is frequently used in the genre of self-help literature as well (76).

²⁵ Concerning cause and effect, see Nietzsche's *Human, All Too Human* (1995 [1878]) and *The Gay Science* (1975 [1887]).

²⁶ By placing *La Recherche* and *Adaptation* in a shared context, I do not intend to claim that these works both essentially are about this one question regarding the beginning moment of writing. I am aware of the fact that, as Fredric Jameson writes, "the constructional problem posed by any totality is not that of inclusion but that of the inevitable and necessary leaving out of content, and thereby that of the masking of those omissions" (2007: 172). The nature of a book or film, in that case, is not very different from the character of a protagonist in Proust's work, in which each person has multiple faces, each of which also could be reduced to projections of the narrator. Jameson discusses the problem of interpretations that reveal a totality of a "deeper meaning" of a work in view of Proust's description of the mechanisms by which the various aristocratic figures

Proust's multivolume novel *A la recherche du temps perdu* arose from numerous attempts to write a long essay that would have been called *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869), one of the most authoritative literary critics of the nineteenth century, believed that one could not understand a literary work without knowing the background, habits and character of the author. Proust never finished his essay proving Sainte-Beuve wrong. Yet, each of the various sketches of this essay forms a possible beginning for a thesis about the relation of the author to his or her work.²⁷ One can trace several scenes and dialogues in these attempts that have found a place in the different volumes of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Consequently, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* is often called the polymorphous source from which *La Recherche* arose.

Following Mieke Bal, I approach Proust's novel and Jonze's film predominantly as textual objects that "theorize" a particular part of cultural history.²⁸ The act of bringing these two works into a shared context can be defined as what Bal calls "preposterous history" (1999: 6-7). It is not the relation between the film and the novel in itself that is an example of preposterous history, but rather my act of combining these works that might be called preposterous. In other words, I complicate *pre-* and *post-* by reading Proust through the framework of Charlie's ideas about writing, and thus hope to produce what Bal calls "productive uncertainties" (7).²⁹

By bringing these two works into dialogue with one another, contemporary-modernist perspectives on beginning, originality, authenticity, as well as adaptation are brought to the fore. In *Adaptation*, the question of originality is inextricably bound up with reflections on what it means to write an

and salons later are misperceived and misinterpreted. Especially because omissions, the absence of the true aristocratic figures in a certain salon, are not remembered, they leave no gap in history; while less aristocratic persons that were present gain in importance, only because they are registered as having been present. Jameson argues captivately that similar mechanisms can be observed in interpretations that explain a work from one particular angle and thus necessarily leave out certain aspects of the work.

²⁷ These sketches are published in the collection *Contre Sainte-Beuve* (1971).

²⁸ In *The Mottled Screen: Reading Proust Visually* (1997), Mieke Bal in a captivating way reads Proust's images.

²⁹ With regard to contemporary art works that quote Baroque art, Bal writes: "They do, however, demonstrate a possible way of dealing with 'the past today.' This reversal, which puts what came chronologically first ('pre-') as an aftereffect behind ('post-') its later recycling, is what I would like to call a *preposterous history*. In other words, it is a way of 'doing history' that carries productive uncertainties and illuminating highlights" (1999: 6-7).

adaptation. One irony lies in the fact that the topic of the book Charlie wants to adapt is orchids, which, according to its author Susan Orlean, “are the most cleverly adaptable living things on earth,” as she writes in her foreword to *Adaptation: The Shooting Script* (vii). The fact that the book is about those cleverly adaptable things makes Charlie’s fate of not being able to make a clever adaptation of the book more poignant, forcing him to reflect on writing as a process of adaptation. I confront Charlie’s ideas about originality and adaptation with T.S. Eliot’s exposé on individual talent as well as with theories about originality in contemporary adaptation studies.

To conclude, I take into consideration the possibility that Marcel is perhaps more of a postmodernist than Charlie. He ultimately decides that all writing is a process of “interpreting.” His claim for authenticity is intrinsically connected to this view and his ideas about the divided self. I discuss Samuel Beckett’s, as well as Fredric Jameson’s and Frank Kermode’s readings of Proust, whom in different ways connect the scattered selves with Proust’s representation of time. To round off this chapter, I look at how Marcel’s conclusions about writing relate to advice offered in contemporary self-help literature. From this preposterous reading, it becomes clear that the characteristics that we have defined as modernist today appear to function as standards for general expectations of what writing should be. To begin, however, I look at the beginning of *Adaptation*, in which the modern anti-hero Charlie struggles with the question of how to begin.

Do I Have An Original Thought in my Head?

Although one might argue that a book or a film finds its origin in the cultural and discursive milieu in which it is created, a book or film reel can only have one material beginning, which consists of the first shot of film or the first words in a book. The first shot of *Adaptation* does not show an image, but a black screen. One hears a gloomy yet humorous monologue in voice-over as the opening credits appear in typewriting-style letters at the bottom of the screen. *This* is the actual beginning of the film. However, in the process of writing, the film shows, the actualized moment is only one of many possible beginnings. By beginning the

film without a “real” shot, except for a screen with typewriting, the film emphasizes the importance of *writing* for film.³⁰

Charlie’s monologue begins with the question I chose as a title for this section: “Do I have an original thought in my head?” These words set the tone. Charlie is desperate to find an original beginning for his screenplay. It becomes clear that originality is of existential importance:

Do I have an original thought in my head? My bald head? Maybe if I were happier, my hair wouldn’t be falling out. Life is short. I need to make the most of it. Today is the first day of the rest of my life... I’m a walking cliché. I really need to go to the doctor and have my leg checked. There’s something wrong. A bump. The dentist called again. I’m way overdue. If I stop putting things off, I would be happier. ... (2002: 1).³¹

For Charlie, originality is important for his personal wellbeing; being a “walking cliché” is the worst. Originality not only guarantees a good screenplay, but also happiness and health. At least, that is what he wants to believe. The film seems to ridicule this belief by the portrayal of his twin brother, Donald, who, to Charlie’s horror, has decided to become a screenwriter as well. Donald does not care for artistic originality. It appears that precisely the lack of that aspiration makes him a happy person: Donald nonchalantly finds success in his career as well as his love life. Thus, the wish to be original appears counterproductive for success.³²

Charlie, however, believes that a writer should write something unexpected, that he should strive for absolute newness; must be *absolutely modern*, to use Rimbaud’s famous line (1966: 209).³³ The opinion that literary writing should be reinvented with each text and that the writer should strive for “something new,” as Charlie formulates it, is particularly cultivated by modernist

³⁰ In *Film Fables* (2006), Jacques Rancière, following Gilles Deleuze, complicates the idea of the moving image, arguing that breaks or ruptures, for instance between subsequent shots, also should be understood as images. Thus, the black screen, if not a “shot,” is an image that is crucial to the narrative in the film.

³¹ When quoting from the film, I refer to pages from the screenplay *Adaptation: The Shooting Script* (2002).

³² Donald, also played by Nicolas Cage, looks identical to Charlie. Yet, his opinions are mostly opposite to Charlie’s, as we will also see later in this chapter.

³³ “Il faut être absolument moderne” (1984: 208).

authors (12).³⁴ The term “modernism” refers to change and the wish to produce something new, signifying the “dividing line between a henceforth classical culture and a present whose historic task lies in reinventing that culture,” as Fredric Jameson writes (2002: 17).³⁵

While Charlie confirms the modernist wish to write something original, now a cliché of artistic writing, T.S. Eliot already criticized this inclination. In his seminal essay “Tradition and Individual Talent” (1934 [1920]), Eliot writes, “our tendency [is] to insist, when we praise a poet, upon aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else. In these aspects or parts of his work we pretend to find what is individual, what is the peculiar essence of the man” (48). Eliot, however, discovers a paradox in this tendency:

We dwell with satisfaction upon the poet’s difference from his predecessors, especially his immediate predecessors; we endeavor to find something that can be isolated in order to be enjoyed. Whereas if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously (48).

With his emphasis on tradition, Eliot underlines continuation rather than the radical break with history that other modernists prefer. Yet, as Nancy K. Gish has pointed out, “Eliot’s ‘tradition’ was European, white, and male,” whereas the really new art was women’s; a point of view that Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar have expressed as well (1990: 140). That does not, however, deny Eliot’s argument that newness is related to literary history.³⁶

On the one hand, Charlie is an example of the tendency that Eliot presents as naive. On the other hand, however, he is also aware of what has been written before. That awareness adds to the inability of finding a right beginning, as he

³⁴ For instance, in one of Virginia Woolf’s most anthologized essays “Modern Fiction” (2003 [1919]), Woolf argues that novelists should no longer attempt to describe the world as we know it. Instead, the novelist should be concerned with the individual mind and the myriad impressions on the spirit.

³⁵ In *A Singular Modernity* (2002), Jameson discusses the complexity of historicity concerning modernity.

³⁶ Gish writes that Eliot in general experienced woman writers as a threat; however, he supported, published and praised Djuna Barnes and Marianne Moore.

feels incapable to contend with a history of brilliant literature and screenplays. Charlie also worships the originality of Susan Orlean's style of writing, which moves between the genres of historical fiction, journalism and autobiography. Thus, one could say, even today Charlie confirms Gish's argument that the new writing is women's. Charlie not only worships her writing, he also desperately admires Orlean as a person, an admiration that mutates into a fear of disappointing her, adding to his impasse.³⁷

One might wonder why Charlie is worrying so much about the beginning, since he is adapting an already written text, *The Orchid Thief* (2000). Why does Charlie not simply follow that book's opening? Apart from his wish to write an adaptation that offers an original perspective on the book, the problem is that the book consists of Orlean's reports on her expeditions with the orchid hunter John Laroche, mixed with myths and histories about orchid hunters from a century ago. In other words, the book does not offer a narrative with one beginning, but several beginnings, none of which easily accomodating a plot.



As Charlie becomes increasingly desperate, he is shown perspiring above his typewriter. One overhears his voice-over trying out several first sentences. Nothing is good enough. Suddenly, in a bewildering epiphany, he is convinced he should begin at the very, very beginning: the beginning of life on planet Earth. He

³⁷ I agree with Gish that Eliot's emphasis on tradition appears conservative, yet, the point he raises about the reciprocal relationship between heritage and newness remains relevant. Moreover, Eliot emphatically argues that he does not mean that a writer should simply "conform" to tradition; that would deny the work to be a work of art.

remembers Darwin, who argued that we all stem from single cell organisms. Yet, here we are, here *he* is, having to write a script, trapped in his body in a moment of history. The solution is to tie all history together. He grabs his tape recorder and yells:

Start right before life begins on the planet. All is... lifeless. And then, like, life begins. Um... with organisms. Those little single cell ones. Oh, and it's before sex, 'cause, like, everything was asexual. Uh, from there we go to bigger things. Jellyfish. And then that fish that got legs on it and crawled out on the land. And then we see, you know, like uh, uh, dinosaurs. And then they are around for a long, long time. And then, and then an asteroid comes and, and "Phwark!". The insects, the simple mammals, the primates, monkeys – The simple monkeys, the old-fashioned monkeys giving way to the new monkeys. Whatever. And then apes. Whatever. And, and men. And then we see the whole history of human civilization: Hunting and gathering, farming, uh, Bronze Age, war, love, religion, heartache, disease, loneliness, technology (41).

Instead of recreating the book, as adapting it for the screen, Charlie now wants to recreate evolution. In this way, the fragment calls attention to another meaning of the word adaptation: adaptation as evolution, the ability to adapt and attune transgenerationally, leading to the evolution of a species. It also suggests another meaning of the word beginning: not beginning as an active (writing) process, but beginning as "origin."³⁸

Said distinguishes beginning from origin in the following way: "*beginning* as having the more active meaning, and *origin* the more passive one: thus 'X is the origin of Y,' while 'The beginning A leads to B'" (6). In other words, origin has a sense of necessity to it: it carries the essence of what follows; just as a seed carries the essence of a tree. In contrast, a beginning is a matter of selection, hence, contingent. Whereas Charlie wants to write something new, he finds it hard to accept that the beginning of his story will always be marked by his

³⁸ For a detailed analysis of the homology between biological and cultural adaptation see "On the Origin of Adaptations: Rethinking Fidelity Discourse and 'Success' – Biologically" (2007) by Gary R. Bortolotti and Linda Hutcheon.

fallible choice. Opening with the origin of the world seems ideal: the origin of the world is the summit of newness, as it precedes any possible tradition as well as any arbitrary beginning. Charlie dissimulates the contingency of his story's beginning by associating it with the absolute beginning, the origin of everything.

However, evolution in fact denies originality, since it is dependent on attunement and adaptation rather than originality. Moreover, even the representation of the origin of life is bound to become arbitrary. To represent the beginning and evolution of life, Charlie is forced to make choices about what to show and what to leave out. The hopelessness of this task is well represented by the randomness of what follows the absolute beginning: "The simple monkeys, the old-fashioned monkeys [...] Whatever. And then apes. Whatever [...] Bronze Age [...] love, religion, loneliness," and so on. The arbitrariness of what Charlie mentions is best symbolized by his repetition of the word "whatever". He could specify whatever, any-thing. Yet, this anything must represent everything.

On the one hand, a beginning that shows how infinitesimal the intentions of a writer are in the scope of the evolution makes the writer feel redundant; on the other hand, however, such a beginning forms an escape from writing; an escape from language, hence relief for the tortured writer. Seen in this way, *Adaptation* shows the struggle with "the limits of language as communicative system, limits of the subjective and naturally the sexual identity, limits of sociality," as Kristeva writes with regard to postmodernist literature (1980: 137). Charlie's remark that his script should start "before sex, 'cause, like, everything was asexual," also refers to a starting point that would relieve his sexual frustrations. Apart from being an incompetent writer, Charlie sees himself as a loser in love. He uses the act of writing to evade the advances his girlfriend makes. Writing is responsible for the breakdown of his relationship—just as writing is hindered by his sexual desires, which repeatedly distract and disappoint him. Even his erotic dreams and imaginations are interrupted, mostly by his brother. Hence, an asexual beginning would level the playing field: there would be nothing that would refer to either writing or sexual desire.³⁹

³⁹ Like Charlie, Marcel is also often kept from writing by his preoccupation with women and his sexual desire.

Although origin and originality are related etymologically, Charlie's desperate attempt to conflate the beginning of his script with the origin of life shows that origin is not a relevant concept for writing. A *beginning* can be called original, but it cannot be the origin. Furthermore, one has to take into consideration that originality is never purely original, but, as Eliot argues, always part of a certain discourse and tradition. However, Charlie's choice can also be explained as a way to divert from the frustrating task of having to adapt someone else's work. Many critics, among whom Timothy Corrigan and Thomas M. Leitch, have argued that one of the classical prejudices about film adaptations is that the source text should serve as the touchstone of value for its adaptation. That point of view would deny Charlie's task of an original writer, since it would make originality into a quality that is attributed only to the source text.

The definition of a "source text" is inherently problematic, since it assumes a model of comparison between the source text and its adaptation. In the article, "Literature vs. Literacy: Two Futures of Adaptation Studies" (2007), Leitch argues that the criterion of fidelity is based on a marketplace of competing models; a competition of course always won by the original book. This makes Leitch conclude that one should approach the book as a text that *should* be rewritten, since "every text offers itself as an invitation to be rewritten" (9). One can also shift focus and argue that the work of the later writer is "an active intervention in the material handed down to him or her," as Bal summarizes Michael Baxandall's argument. Bal continues: "This reversal, which also affects the relation between cause and effect, complicates the idea of precedent as origin, and thereby makes the claim of historical reconstruction problematic" (1999: 9).⁴⁰

Moreover, intertextual references to other films and books have become an inherent part of the way a film brings across meaning, humor and context.

⁴⁰ The difference between original and adapted screenplays is also a source of discussion for prizes that are based on this distinction. Sergio Rizzo recounts a controversy among Academy Award voters in 2002: "They found that year's nominees, including *Adaptation*, unsettled the Academy's traditional distinction between "original screenplay" and "adapted screenplay," debating whether a nominee for best original screenplay, such as *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* (Joel Zwick, 2002), was more like an adaptation, while *Adaptation*, a nominee for best adapted screenplay, was more like an original screenplay" (2007: 1). *Adaptation* shows a similar argument, as Donald in fact is the one who eventually writes a screenplay that is usually called an "original screenplay," while it is also clear that his script is full of clichés.

Taking into account the filmmaker's and the spectator's awareness of intertextuality, the word "adaptation" becomes almost anachronistic, in the way Jameson calls the word "remake" anachronistic⁴¹:

to the degree to which our awareness of the pre-existence of other versions, previous films of the novel as well as the novel itself, is now a constitutive part of the film's structure: we are now, in other words in "intertextuality" as a deliberate, built-in feature of the aesthetic effect (2004: 204).

While *Adaptation* is full of intertextual references to other movies, for instance *Being John Malkovich* (Spike Jonze, 1999) and various film genres, Charlie takes his task of adapting Orlean's novel seriously. The film challenges the criterion of fidelity precisely through Charlie's wish to be faithful. Paradoxically, in view of his wish to write something new, Charlie is simultaneously determined to remain faithful to the book and its topic: flowers. This wish is so overwhelming that it forces him to write a screenplay with no compelling narrative. "I'd want to let the movie exist rather than be artificially plot driven," Charlie confides, just like the orchids "exist" (5). In that scenario, fidelity would be applied to something other than narrative: to an intention, an atmosphere, or a specific perspective on life. Those outcomes would be difficult to judge as either faithful or unfaithful representations. However, perhaps it is a mistake to think that storylines are easier to compare than the atmospheres or worldviews presented by different works. Leitch asks:

Given the myriad differences, not only between literary and cinematic texts, but between successive cinematic adaptations of a given literary text, or for that matter between different versions of a given story in the

⁴¹ The Soviet philosopher of language Mikhail Bakhtin introduced the term "intertextuality." Other thinkers, like Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida have written extensively on the intertextual character of cultural phenomena and communication in general, arguing in different ways that the meaning of a text is not transferred directly from writer to reader but is mediated through other texts and discourses. Each text is dependent on a larger web of other texts, which excludes the existence of a first or purely original text.

same medium, what exactly is it that film adaptations adapt, or are supposed to adapt? (2003: 150)

This is the question with which Charlie struggles. Which part of the book, or which aspect of Orlean's style of writing, which part of her approach to orchids, should he adapt? Moreover, how can Charlie be faithful to the book while transforming it into a screenplay, which relies on such different forms of narration and visualization?⁴²

Eventually Charlie's screenplay becomes a double adaptation, not only of the book, but of the entire writing process, including all his doubts and perspectives on adaptation. I would like to suggest that every possible beginning considered in the film represents a potential adaptation. All ideas for opening sequels that Charlie dismisses demonstrate in how many directions the story could have gone off. If he had pursued any of the other beginnings, the film would have become a different adaptation of Orlean's book, as well as of his own experiences. In that sense, eventually Charlie is successful at indicating *everything*, gesturing towards the endless possibilities he envisioned—the very possibilities that made him feel he had nothing original to say.⁴³

Adaptation probes the question whether the process of adaptation is different from writing a new story. On the one hand, it shows that any story, even an adaptation, can be approached as a new one. On the other hand, however, the film shows that also new stories are themselves adaptations: even the origin of the world is an adaptation of what we consider to be the origin of the world and presents an arbitrary choice. In a certain way, source texts should be approached as adaptations as well, since they inevitably respond to other texts, offering contingent interpretations of historical periods and cultures. Consequently,

⁴² Because film and literature are “regarded as narrative acts,” Karen Diehl argues, “narrativity was established as the definitive shared feature,” and thus became a focal point in the study of adaptation (2005: 90).

⁴³ Although Charlie dismisses his earlier idea of beginning the script before life exists on the planet, the film not only shows Charlie as being inspired by this idea, it also depicts a sequence representing evolution long before Charlie is shown as inspired by the idea. This cinematic depiction involves an unexpected montage of shots: bubbling lava, underwater organisms, jellyfish, a fish with legs crawling out on the land, oceans drying up, plants growing, dinosaurs grazing, the ice-age, a fox, and a child being born. Likewise, the orchid hunter Laroche is introduced early on in the film in a situation that Charlie later in the film thinks through as a possible scene. Thus, the film undoes clear chronology of the narrative and the writing process.

originality is not opposed to adaptation; on the contrary, adaptation forms the condition of originality. Hence, it does not surprise that Charlie is struggling with similar anxieties that a writer faces who does not have to adapt a book: Marcel in *La Recherche*.

Marcel's Beginnings

The first chapter of *La Recherche*, titled *Ouverture*, denies its own status as *ouverture*, since the subsequent chapter could be interpreted as the real opening. As Murat Aydemir writes, “the book starts twice over, which suggests that its origin is suspended between two places, two chapters, or that the book cannot be said to originate properly at all” (2006: 249). The defiance of a clear opening also takes place on the level of its sentences, as we will see below. Moreover, the narrator defines numerous other moments as beginning moments of writerly thought. In *Swann's Way* (1992), Proust portrays the narrator, Marcel, as a young boy who wishes to become a writer:

[S]ince I wished, some day, to become a writer, it was high time to decide what sort of books I was going to write. But as soon as I asked myself the question, and tried to discover some subject to which I could impart a philosophical significance of infinite value, my mind would stop like a clock, I would see before me a vacuity, nothing, would feel either that I was wholly devoid of talent, or that perhaps, a malady of the brain was hindering its development (203).

Marcel is caught in a trap that is similar to Charlie's. While Charlie thinks his screenplay should embrace the entirety of evolution, Marcel wishes to locate a subject of infinite philosophical value. In light of infinity, every detail or moment turns into an insignificant dot, just as any detail seems arbitrary in the face of evolution. Marcel blinds himself with his wishes; the wishes Fredric Jameson defines as desires that are “crystallized” into obsessions (2007: 189). While desire knows a sense of continuity, Jameson argues, the wish replaces another wish. Jameson writes that the wish is “no longer some omnipresent fluid or element but rather the childish fetishization of some impossible whim, on which

the whole of existence henceforth depends” (emphasis added, 189). Jameson’s description seems particularly appropriate, offering a link between Marcel’s wish to find a subject of infinite philosophical value and Charlie’s wish to embrace “the whole of existence.” Precisely the enormity of the wish causes him to see before him a vacuity.⁴⁴

Apart from this moment, the narrator frequently describes that Marcel flees from his writing and postpones the beginning, while promising his mother, grandmother and his girlfriend Albertine that he will soon start.⁴⁵ When Marcel eventually does begin, he does not begin with an introduction to a thesis of “infinite philosophical value”; instead, he starts his life story with a narration of falling asleep. As is well known, *A la recherche du temps perdu* begins with the remark: “For a long time I used to go to bed early” (9). In the sequence that follows, Proust describes how young Marcel, after reading a book in bed, dozes off, but does not enter complete unconsciousness: “half an hour later the thought that it was time to go to sleep” would awaken him (9). When Marcel tries to sleep, he is half awake and half asleep. Accordingly, the sentences murmur, mirroring a logic of daydreams rather than rational thought.⁴⁶

The reader is immediately welcomed to Proust’s unique style of writing; a quality that Julia Kristeva has meticulously analyzed in *Time and Sense* (1996),

⁴⁴ According to Maurice Blanchot, the writer in fact has no choice; every writer faces the potential of embracing everything. In his collection of essays on literature and writing, *The Work of Fire* (1995), Blanchot suggests that “the realm of the imaginary is not a strange region situated beyond the world, it is the world itself, but the world as entire, manifold, the world as a whole” (316). Paradoxically, this everything, or the “world as a whole,” cannot be described: it continuously escapes when attempting to capture it in words. “Everything” can only remain everything as long as it is not represented in language.

⁴⁵ See, for instance: “When I still did not know the Swanns I thought that I was prevented from working by the state of agitation into which I was thrown by the impossibility of seeing Gilberte when I chose. But, now that their door stood open to me, scarcely had I sat down at my desk than I would rise and run to them. ... Had I been less firmly resolved upon setting myself definitely to work, I should perhaps have made an effort to begin at once” (*Within a Budding Grove*, Part One: 215-216). Or: “She remembered all the years in which my grandmother and she had refrained from speaking to me of my work, and of a more wholesome rule of life, which, I said, the agitation into which their exhortations threw me alone prevented me from beginning” (*Cities of the Plain*, Part Two: 227). Or: “I had promised Albertine that, if I did not go out with her, I would settle down to work, but ...” (*The Captive*, Part One: 102).

⁴⁶ In *Poetics of Reverie* (1969), Gaston Bachelard makes a distinction between dreams and reveries. He claims that dreams can be recounted, whereas a reverie, or a daydream, cannot. “To be communicated,” Bachelard argues, “it must be *written*, written with emotion and taste, being relived all the more strongly because it is being written down” (7). Moreover, Bachelard argues that the reverie, in contrast to the dream, is specifically poetic. Reveries connect associations of different character, without turning into a narrative as real dreams tend to do. Following Bachelard, Marcel’s dreams should be defined as reveries.

particularly in the case of one of the first meandering sentences. According to Kristeva, the Proustian sentence “delays closure of the logical and syntactical totality” (291). This description of Proust’s style corresponds well with the topic of *La Recherche*’s first sentences: the dreams in which a logic of beginning and end, waking up and falling asleep, seems lost.⁴⁷

Like Marcel, Charlie also is repeatedly depicted lying in bed. Mostly, he cannot sleep; sometimes his dreams are portrayed. On occasion dreams function as a metaphor for inspiration, yet mostly sleep is a form of torture to Marcel as well as Charlie. Marcel suffers from insomnia, bad dreams, and compulsory sleeping schedules to benefit his weak physical constitution, and of course from the painful waiting for his mother’s bedtime kiss; the first obsession in a pattern of unfulfilled desires. In *La Recherche*, sleep has little to do with rest or physical relaxation. The description of Marcel’s falling asleep resembles the twilight zone between thought and unconscious dreams; a zone of involuntary memory, which the narrator ultimately defines as the instigation of writerly thought. While the *Madeleine* episode is the most famous example of the surfacing of involuntary memories, there are numerous other moments that set in motion a string of unexpected memories and associations. Beckett mentions five other objects that incite involuntary memories: “The last five visitations – cobbles, spoon and plate, napkin, water in the pipes, and François le Champi – may be considered as forming a single annunciation and as providing the key to his life and work” (1965: 38).

In the sentence from *La Recherche* that Kristeva dissects, Marcel describes the various rooms he slept in during his life. The bedrooms illustrate his confusion about waking up and feeling uncertain where he is. Kristeva points out that the sentence “is structured around two clauses: ‘I had seen the rooms’ and ‘in the end I would revisit them all’” (283). With this last remark, Marcel connects the rooms with the periods in his life he will try to remember, that he “would revisit.” Yet, the process of remembering his impressions and experiences from the chosen periods cannot be a conscious or intentional project, as, according to

⁴⁷ Benjamin, in *The Arcades Project*, ignores Proust’s description of going to bed and falling asleep, he states that “Just as Proust begins the story of his life with an awakening, so must every presentation of history begin with awakening; in fact it should treat nothing else” (N4: 3).

the narrator, only involuntary memory discloses the moments that inspire literary writing.

Marcel describes how his falling asleep while reading a book affects his dreams to the extent that the book continues to unfold in his dream. In his semi-unconscious state, Marcel sees himself as the subject of the book he had been reading⁴⁸:

I had been thinking all the time, while I was asleep, of what I had just been reading, but my thoughts had run into a channel of their own, until I myself seemed actually to have become the 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 was awake; it did not disturb my mind, but it 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 former existence must be to a reincarnate spirit; the subject of my book would separate itself from me, leaving me free to choose whether I would form part of it or no; 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 for the eyes, and even more, perhaps, for my mind, to which it appeared incomprehensible, without a cause, a matter dark indeed (9).

Marcel's experience is not uncommon. Yet, one might read this passage as a *mise en abyme* of Proust's method of writing: his dreams bring up memories that mingle with associations in the present time as well as the other way around. The sudden impression that his thoughts are intelligible, as though they are "thoughts of a former existence," sounds like the theory that he will later develop in *Time Regained*. There, he argues that the reminiscences that are "communicated to us unconsciously" are the memories that will transform into material for his writing (1960: 225). In short, seemingly incomprehensible

⁴⁸ Beckett writes, "there is no great difference, says Proust, between the memory of a dream and the memory of reality" (33).

associations, like the situation in which he finds himself, “a matter dark indeed,” will prove more fruitful to a writer than conscious thought and memory.

In the last sentence of the passage, the impression of being “part of the book” alternates with the feeling of being separated from it: “leaving me free to choose whether I would form part of it or no” (9). This ability to choose also resonates with his reflections on the relation between the writer and the narrator, which I discuss below. Simultaneously, it applies to the writing process, in which the writer/narrator is writing from and about his unconscious memories, while the narrative develops a route as though it is about someone else, an unknown self: a self that is part of the writing as it separates from him.

Numerous moments could be defined as the beginning of Marcel’s writing. Aydemir, for instance, analyzes Marcel’s wet dream, which is described in the opening chapter of *La Recherche*. In Marcel’s dream, a woman seems to be born from one of his limbs. Aydemir suggests that perhaps this “giving birth concerns the book as a product, whereas ejaculation involves the process of writing” (254). Moreover, he argues:

Indeed, the wet dream that forms the starting place of *Lost Time* concatenates masculine reproduction, punctual and virtual, with feminine reproduction, durative and material, into an iterative series of nocturnal emissions that entangle ejaculation and gestation, high creation and low evolution (256).

Following Aydemir, one can read Charlie’s digression to evolution as a desire for low evolution, which would relieve him from his own demand for high artistic creation. Malcolm Bowie also interprets Proust’s description of the wet dream as a nocturnal reverie on which the novel opens. In *Proust Among the Stars* (1998), Bowie writes that “the narrator encounters in a rapid associative sequence many of the desirable objects and activities upon which his attention is later to dwell: travel, reading, social advancement, personal and historical remembrance, the countryside and artistic life” (210). Bowie concludes, “sexual energy, which was on the point of producing a nocturnal emission, produces instead a long-drawn-out chain of reaction” (211).

Both Serge Doubrovski and Mieke Bal consider the description of the ejaculation scene in *Combray* and its earlier counterpart in *Against Sainte-Beuve*, in which the fragment is titled “Solitary Pleasure,” as a scene in which ejaculation is compared to the act of writing.⁴⁹ With regard to the scene in *Contre Sainte-Beuve* and in *Combray*, in which Proust describes the trace of sperm respectively “like the thread of gossamer or the trail of a snail” and “a natural trail like that left by a snail,” Bal writes:

the power of the trace remains: it is the power to leave a trace on a leaf in defiance of mortality. The snail’s trail, with all it evokes of the volute form of the animal and of the mother-of-pearl, mottled color of its trail, having previously been identified with the devil, it now simply “natural.” The diabolical opalescent liquid – which is black in a figurative sense – has become natural, a source of life: ink (1997: 153).

By defining ink as a source of life, Bal not only reads the ejaculation scene as a metaphor for writing, but also identifies writing as the origin of life for Marcel. Of course, Marcel is a fictional figure and literally owes his life to ink; however, Bal confirms Proust’s theory that through writing, as through involuntary reminiscence, experiences appear as new, as though experienced for the first time, and thus become worth living.

Ejaculation, like falling asleep, is a form of loss of control rather than the enhanced control that Marcel otherwise seems to pursue. As we will see, Marcel is obsessed with controlling his life, his reputation, as well as the women he loves, and writing his life story could also be seen as a form of taking control. However, the multiple beginnings, Marcel’s falling asleep, his wet dream, the

⁴⁹ While masturbating, Marcel looks at the round clouds and breastlike hills, in which, as Aydemir writes, “Doubrovsky recognizes the shape of the maternal Madeleine that haunts the narrator of *Combray*. Masturbating, the subject seeks to break away from motherly influence, only to see it return in the rounded clouds and hills” (169). Bal also calls the swelling forms “clearly maternal” (101). Aydemir, however, emphasizes that the “masturbation it recounts is primary in the sense that it does not center on an absent woman, maternal or not” (270). One is inclined to read the absence of a woman as an absent presence, since Marcel will show to be prone to a pattern of feeling desire only when he fears losing the woman he loves. However, with regard to this fragment, Aydemir argues rightly that “the object to which the original knowledge brought about by primary masturbation pertains is the male body itself, its desire, and its pleasure” (270). It is in this sense truly primary, as this pleasure will later disperse in the complex mixture of love, desire, jealousy, despise and anxiety.

moment of ejaculation, or later moments of involuntary memory, are all instances in which control is lost and images turn up unexpectedly. Although a lack of restraint appears to scare Marcel, these instigating moments also arouse an unexpected feeling of pleasure. Moreover, the loss of control is the condition for *authentic* writing, as the narrator eventually argues in *Time Regained*. The descriptions of the narrator's reflections on the process of writing create a double perspective, simultaneously from within and outside the narrative. This often happens without having to leave the framework of the fictional narrative; however, in *Adaptation* as well as *La Recherche*, at certain moments the protagonists also refer to their real-life authors, stepping outside of the fictional framework. Below I analyze several of such moments in *Adaptation* and *La Recherche*.

Ourobouros

At a certain point, Charlie recognizes that he has included himself and his writing into the screenplay. This circular narrative, in which the protagonist is portrayed as the writer writing about the protagonist, can be compared to a snake swallowing its tail. Charlie comments on this image after his twin brother Donald has described his girlfriend's tattoo of a snake:

Charlie: Ourobouros.
Donald: I don't know what that means.
Charlie: The snake. It's called Ourobouros.
Donald: I don't think so. But anyway,
Charlie: I am insane. I'm Ourobouros.
Donald: I don't know what that word means.
Charlie: I've written myself into my screenplay.
Donald: Oh. That's kinda weird, huh?
Charlie: It's self-indulgent. It's narcissistic. It's solipsistic. It's pathetic. I'm pathetic. I'm fat and pathetic.

Donald: I am sure you had good reasons, Charles. You're an artist.
(2002: 60).⁵⁰

The protagonist Charlie Kaufman has written himself into the fictional screenplay. Simultaneously, his comments hint at the real-life author, who also has written himself into his script, if only by naming the protagonist after him.⁵¹ Kaufman not only includes himself as a character in the screenplay, but also other people, such as the author Susan Orlean (Meryl Streep) and the screenwriting teacher Robert McKee (Brian Cox). In addition, Kaufman has conflated fiction and reality in the opposite way, creating the fictional twin brother, who is also credited as co-writer of the film and *Adaptation: The Shooting Script*.⁵²

In the discussions between the two brothers varying views are worked out. When Charlie calls his writings self-indulgent, narcissistic and pathetic, Donald assures him: "I am sure you had good reasons, Charles. You're an artist." Donald reminds us of the modernist idea of the artist that Charlie otherwise seems to defend, which embraces self-referential writing and portrays the author as a genius full of unfathomable motives. Thus the inclusion of the twin brother allows the protagonist/author to create a dialogue, as if between two alter-egos, and to ostentatiously reflect on self-referentiality.

This double perspective, from inside as well as outside the story, can be found at a couple of instances in *La Recherche* as well. In *Cities of the Plain* for instance, the narrator unexpectedly addresses the reader as well as the author of the book:

⁵⁰ In *The Shooting Script*, Charlie's character is referred to as "Kaufman," whereas his twin brother is called by his first name. However, in order to distinguish between the protagonist and the real-life author, I continue calling the protagonist "Charlie" and the real-life author "Kaufman," hence I write "Charlie" where *The Shooting Script* prints "Kaufman."

⁵¹ Needless to say that the book or screenplay in which the protagonist goes by the same name as the author, is not necessarily autobiographical; a matter to which I will return in my third chapter in which I elaborate on the question of the author.

⁵² In an interview, included in *The Shooting Script*, Kaufman confides: "Even though you're watching the movie as a story that plays as a story, there's this constant nagging thing that's, 'Is this real, is this not real?' I really like that" (128). However, Kaufman is known for evading questions about his motives, his writing as well as his personal life. Rob Feld, who interviewed Kaufman and Jonze, wrote that before the interview he "was nursing a nagging fear that [he] would be returning to New York with a tape full of deflected questions, outright lies, and long silences broken only by the occasional *Pffttthhh!* of a whoopee cushion" (116).

“All this,” the reader will remark, “tells us nothing as to the lady’s failure to oblige; but since you have made so long a digression, allow me, gentle author, to waste another moment of your time in telling you that it is a pity that, young as you were (or as the hero was, if he be not yourself), you had already so feeble a memory that you could not recall the name of a lady whom you knew quite well” (1961: 72).

This fragment interrupts a string of memories recounted by the narrator, who admits that he cannot remember the name of a lady. Suddenly, the narrator speaks not as the narrator in the book, but as the reader addressing the author of the book. More precisely, the narrator imagines that the reader perceives his memory of trying to remember a name as a “digression,” which allows the reader to “waste another moment” of the writer’s time by pointing out to him that he had “so feeble a memory.” In other words, the narrator first speaks as the author, then he speaks as the reader addressing the author. Instead of a twin brother, here the snake eating its own tail includes a reader, allowing for dialogue.

If the narrator were still speaking, he would be aware of the fact that he is a character in a novel. Instead of emphasizing the fictive character of the story, however, this fragment hints at the opposite. It seems to suggest that, at least in this fragment, there is no distinction between the author and the narrator. The author takes over for a moment and integrates himself into a monologue of the narrator, while simultaneously anticipating this conclusion by having the reader remark: “young as you were (or as the hero was, if he be not yourself).”⁵³

⁵³ Such remarks, as well as the overlapping of certain events in Proust’s biography and his fiction, apparently motivated the filmmaker Raoul Ruiz to present the writer of the scattered memories in *Le temps retrouvé* (1999) as Proust himself. Karen Diehl observes that in Ruiz’s film: “The biographical dimension is most obviously ascertained in the casting of Marcello Mazzarella as the adult Marcel. Not only was he picked for his physiognomic resemblance to Proust, he also imitates gestures of Proust’s taken from photos of the author” (96). Ruiz conflates fiction and biography. Furthermore, he mixes facts from Proust’s biography with elements from the fictional narrative, for instance, as Karen Diehl also observes, by using the name of Proust’s real servant, Celeste, instead of the fictionalized servant, whom is called Françoise. In other words, Ruiz emphasizes the autobiographical aspect of Proust’s novel. Correspondingly, Paul de Man writes in his article “Autobiography as De-Facement”: “in the case of Proust, ... each example taken from the *Recherche* can produce, on this level, an endless discussion between a reading of the novel as fiction and a reading of the same novel as autobiography” (1984: 69). This discussion about the relation between text and author, and the question of defining both, is the topic of the second chapter of my dissertation.

Allow me to quote another example from *La Recherche* that is quite famous, for it is the only time the narrator's proper name is mentioned. In *The Captive* (1960), Proust writes:

As soon as she was able to speak she said: "My ---" or "My dearest ---" followed by my Christian name, which, if we give the narrator the same name as the author of this book, would be "My Marcel," or "My dearest Marcel" (Part 1: 91).

The narrator is once more aware of the existence of the author of the book, while he makes a clear distinction between the two by saying that "if we give the narrator the same name as the author of this book." Also, the narrator uses the plural "we," which can refer to the author and the narrator, also including the assumed reader. This creates the impression that the narrator and author step outside of the story for a moment, while yet remaining part of it, and consider the option of naming the narrator after the author as partners.

In *The Struggle of the Modern* (1963), Stephen Spender sketches a history of the use of the personal pronoun in fiction, arguing that "I," "we," "thou" or "he" traditionally are "the sign for a fusion of experienceable values shared by writer and reader in a situation in which the writer's consciousness 'stands in' for the reader and enacts experience created in the work" (135). For the modernist writer, however, "I" no longer represents certain values of a particular community. According to Spender, "I" undergoes a transformation. "What is eliminated," he writes, "is the subjective self-consciousness that comes between receptive sensibility and events acting upon it" (141). Thus the "I" simultaneously represents the different aspects of receptive sensibility as well as outer events acting upon it. This might be the case in streams of consciousness in the work of, for instance James Joyce, whom Spender takes as his main example. Proust's narrator, however, does not eliminate subjective self-consciousness; rather, his narrator hyper-consciously observes the process of events acting upon his receptive sensibility. In this sense, Proust is more traditional than modernists like Joyce or Djuna Barnes, who can be understood to be part of late modernism.

With regard to this distinction, the early-modernist “I” is still quite coherent, while the later is scattered, tending towards the postmodern “I” of experimental literature. In *Continuities* (1968), Frank Kermode makes a similar distinction between what he calls paleo- and neo-modernism (8). For Kermode, the main difference lies in the distinctive attitudes to the past: “to the older it is a source of order; to the newer it is that which ought to be ignored” (1967: 115). In other words, later modernism is a-historical, resulting in a scattered “I,” while early modernism finds its material in the past. Kermode illustrates his argument with the help of Beckett’s and Proust’s writing. While Beckett only presents order with “a sign of cancellation,” in Proust, “the order, the forms of passion, all derive from the last book; they are positive” (115).

Bowie, however, finds such a reading of Proust limited. He argues that the “opulent affirmative ending” of the novel has been wrongly interpreted as a dialectical counterweight, which would imply that the last volume is “mysteriously truer than the rest of the book” (1990: 47). For my part, I tend to agree with Kermode, as Proust’s novel does find an order in his past, however associative and dreamlike, implying a certain consistency of the “I.” From this perspective, Charlie is also more of an *early* modernist: instead of emphasizing the fragmentation of the self, he argues that people do not really change. “They struggle and are frustrated, and nothing is resolved” (68).

In both cases, the traditional “we” or “I,” which Spender understands as representing shared values, is left behind. Descriptions of the outer world and community are continuously accompanied or substituted by an investigation of the inner world: the narrator’s emotions, reveries, desires, anxieties and doubts. Yet, this singular and partial portrait still mirrors a certain milieu, as well as a specific idea about what a writer should be. The narrator of *La Recherche* imagines how the reader is disappointed by his feeble memory and inability to keep to the point. Thus, the narrator excuses himself for his digressions. However, he does not excuse himself for including his own experiences and thoughts, something that Charlie does when he calls his inclusion into his own writing narcissistic and self-indulgent.

Many critics today are convinced that one should never read a work biographically or assume that a text reveals a truth about the author’s

experiences, emotions and beliefs. This point of view finds its roots in the idea that high literature, particularly modernist literature, is predominantly preoccupied with form. As Spender writes: “The quality which is called modern shows in the realized sensibility of style and form more than in the subject matter” (71). Charlie reflects that opinion when he condemns his inclusion of himself in his writing. However, that conviction denies the multiple layers of the self-referentiality we find in *Adaptation* as well as *La Recherche*, which present the struggle of the writer, referring to the narrator as well as the author of the work.

In a sense, we all remain New Critics, as Jonathan Culler writes in *The Pursuit of Signs* (1981). Proust also argues against biographic interpretation in *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. Nonetheless, the narrator of *La Recherche* claims that the true book a writer must produce hides in him or herself, in his or her own memories. While writing might tell us something about the author, Proust makes clear that one should not try to explain literature the other way around, using facts and anecdotes from the author’s life to explain the work. The facts of the author’s life do not disclose anything essential, Proust argues, since the author is drawing from a different “self,” of a deeper and more intimate nature. This deeper self is the seat of authenticity, harboring the memories brought to live by unconscious associations, which the writer must interpret.

The Writer as Interpreter

After thousands of pages, during which the narrator apparently feels unsure as to what he should write about, he decides to turn his memories, especially his unconscious memories, into a novel. In the last volume of *La Recherche*, the narrator declares that the true book a writer must produce does not have to be invented:

to write that essential book, which is the only true one, a great writer does not, in the current meaning of the word, invent it, but, since it exists already in each of us, interprets it. The duty and the task of a writer are those of an interpreter (1960: 240).

It strikes me that Marcel describes the tasks of the writer as “those of an interpreter,” whereas Charlie, who in fact has to interpret someone else’s book, describes writing as “a journey into the unknown” (12). If the writer is an interpreter, as Marcel claims, originality should not be understood as newness, uniqueness or novelty; rather, it incorporates a binding relation to something else that precedes the work.

The matter that has to be interpreted, however, does not consist of a literary tradition, as Eliot would like to see it, and neither does it consist of other facts that can deliberately be studied. On the contrary, unconscious memories provoked by unexpected sensations or perceptions create a link with past moments, as, for instance, described in the famous episode of the *madeleine* steeped in tea. Those memories do “not contain an earlier experience but a new truth,” Marcel argues (224). Consequently, these memories are not autobiographic in a strict sense. Rather, they represent a new insight in a situation that one did not perceive as such when living it. The reminiscence has come to mean something different and thus offers a new truth.

The narrator continues to dwell on unexpected memories: “their first characteristic was that I was not free to choose them, that they had been given to me as they were. And I felt that must be the seal of their authenticity” (226). For Marcel, authenticity cannot be the product of artistic choice, but is the result of images that are “given” to him. If we bring Charlie’s frustration about his fallible choice back to mind, Marcel seems to have an answer. Still, even if involuntary memories are authentic, the emergence of those memories is not necessarily less arbitrary than a conscious thought.

Following Marcel, the spontaneity of involuntary memories is crucial for the authenticity of the work. Paradoxically, however, *Contre Sainte-Beuve* shows that this conclusion is part of one of the first texts that Proust worked on. One can conclude that the process of writing, ignited by involuntary memories, is less involuntary and more controlled than Marcel’s conclusion suggests.⁵⁴ Thus, the

⁵⁴ Still, the volumes of *La Recherche* are not a result of a plan that was entirely structured before hand. Jameson recounts that “Proust’s first volume – *Du côté de chez Swann* – is published in 1913 and a modest two volume sequel (*Le côté de Guermantes* and *Le temps retrouvé*) stands ready and waiting as its completion. The immediate war crisis then brings an acute shortage of paper, which will last for the duration. Publication is accordingly postponed indefinitely: yet Proust does not use this time to start new projects, but rather to add new details and even new

ending of the book, which contains the discovery of the entrance to his oeuvre, embraces the other volumes in a circular structure claiming an inherent authenticity incited by spontaneous memories on the one hand, while on the other hand it confirms the structuring thread that keeps the volumes together. Correspondingly, Marcel's point of view about authentic writing contradicts his point of view about writing as interpreting: "interpretation" and "deciphering" oppose authenticity, while precisely the process of interpreting should lead to the true book a writer should write.⁵⁵

Marcel's view of the writer as an interpreter resembles postmodernist theories about intertextuality. In "Signature Event Context" (1995), Jacques Derrida discusses a quote by Étienne Bonnot de Condillac, in which Condillac connects memories with language: "Memory ... consists in nothing but the power of recalling signs of our ideas, or the circumstances that accompanied them; and this power only takes place by virtue of the *analogy of the signs*" (Derrida's emphasis, 6). The analogy of signs is intrinsically connected to memory. As Condillac argues, memories already consist of signs we can interpret because of their interdependent analogy. Hence, following Derrida, authenticity as well as personal memory are caught in the web of analogies, representations and interpretations. Such citationality, or iterability as he calls it, belongs to the structure of language.⁵⁶ Although Marcel does not claim to give an explanation of language in general, his argument that his writing is an act of interpreting, especially that through the act of interpreting a reminiscence is re-created, differently, yet authentically, makes Marcel more of a postmodernist than a classical modernist.

For Marcel, authenticity above all belongs to what occurs without plan, to coincidence. Eliot also makes a distinction between what can be controlled in writing and what cannot. He wittily summarizes the complexity of this

episodes to the proof of the existing volumes, at the same time that he fills in the temporal gap between them with wholly new and unexpected material Thus, when paper again becomes available an immense new novel has taken the place of the two-volume original ..." (2007:195).

⁵⁵ The narrator also speaks of deciphering the inner book: "That book which is the most arduous to decipher is the only one which reality has dictated, the only one printed within us by reality itself" (227).

⁵⁶ In "Signature Event Context," Derrida expands on the assumed difference between writing and speech, and argues that even a personal signature, the symbol of unique individuality, can only function if it can be repeated, although always in a slightly different form.

distinction: “The bad poet is usually unconscious where he ought to be conscious, and conscious where he ought to be unconscious” (58). This remark could well be applied to Donald’s screenwriting, at least from Charlie’s perspective. Eliot argues that the author’s relation to his memory and experiences requires a special concentration, “which does not happen consciously or of deliberation,” resembling Proust’s description of the appearance of unconscious memories. Thus Eliot and Proust agree that the literary value and authenticity of a text is never the product of a fully deliberate act of writing. However, they also differ: in the vein of Proust to the effect that concentration is found in the appearance of involuntary but personal memories; in the vein of Eliot to the effect that art is at its core impersonal and finds its source in tradition.

Charlie confirms the idea that writing cannot be a controlled act. When Donald tries to convince him of the use of McKee’s screenwriting seminars, Charlie answers: “Look, my point is that those teachers are dangerous if your goal is to try to do something new. And a writer should always have that goal. Writing is a journey into the unknown. It is not... building one of your model airplanes!” (12). True writing, Charlie believes, cannot be taught: it should be a confrontation with something other, something unknown.⁵⁷ Although he has to write an adaptation, Charlie finds it hard to give up his ideas about originality. Marcel, on the other hand, does not strive for originality in the sense of newness; he stresses the importance of authenticity. While *originality* for Charlie is connected to the unknown, Marcel’s *authenticity* comes from his inner self.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ The idea that artistic creation asks for an encounter with something new or radically other, is an opinion that various philosophers have expressed as well. Martin Heidegger dedicated many lectures to the need of openness (*Entschlossenheit*) to the unknown and the foreign in relation to poetry and literature. In the lecture series collected in the book *Hölderlins Hymne Andenken* (1982), Heidegger describes for instance the importance of a moment of openness that breaks the force of our habits of thinking and living, and makes something other appear that places all with which we are familiar in a different light. Derek Attridge, in an article on innovation in literature, also argues that “[the] coming into being of the wholly new requires some relinquishment of intellectual control, and *the other* is a possible name for that to which control is ceded” (1999: 21).

⁵⁸ In *De Romantische Orde* (2004), Maarten Doorman gives a wonderful account of the rise of the authentic self in romanticism; the pursuit to know one’s authentic self and the impossibility of reaching it; how the idea of the unique individual arose in the late eighteenth century, and how it is connected to contemporary discussions about personal identity.

Each Day another Self

Samuel Beckett stresses that we should not overlook the importance of the distinction that Proust makes between habit and involuntary memory. This distinction, according to Beckett, implies that the self as a permanent self can only be “apprehended as a retrospective hypothesis,” since the individual is

the seat of decantation, decantation from the vessel containing the fluid of future time, sluggish, pale and monochrome, to the vessel containing the fluid of past time, agitated and multicoloured by the phenomena of its hours (1965: 15).

Whereas habit suggests continuity, the self is changing from day to day: “The aspirations of yesterday were valid for yesterday’s ego, not for today’s” (13). Beckett denies the order of the past and understands each present moment as a multicolored instant that scatters previous ones.⁵⁹

Jameson finds a comparable focus on the present in Proust’s work. He emphasizes that involuntary memory does not open up the past, but makes it present “for the first time” (2007: 185). Consequently, there is no experience outside of writing. Jameson writes, “we must therefore insist on the presence in his work ..., namely that there is no immediacy, that we never experience anything for the first time, but that it is in the present of writing and only then that we come to experience it” (185-6). For Proust, however, the present is not a tiny interval, on the contrary, it stretches itself into the past and the future. Early in his essay, Beckett quotes the last sentence of Proust’s novel:

But were I granted time to accomplish my work, I would not fail to stamp it with the seal of that Time, now so forcibly present to my mind, and in it I would describe men, even at risk of giving them the appearance of monstrous beings, as occupying in Time a much greater place than that so sparingly conceded to them in Space, a place indeed extended beyond measure, because like giants plunged in the years, they touch at once

⁵⁹ Eliot, in contrast, argues that the writer “is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living” (59).

those periods of their lives – separated by so many days – so far apart in Time (quoted by Beckett 12).

It is space, rather than time, that seems limited to Proust. Beckett emphasizes that habit is connected to space, whereas involuntary memory is connected to time. He does not mention Henry Bergson. Yet, one cannot fail to recognize the resemblance to Bergson's theory in Proust's last sentence. In the collection of lectures and articles *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics* (2004), Bergson argues that time is not exterior to us as physical objects are, not measurable like spatial things. Time is an essential part of our subjective relation to the world and is experienced differently by each person. In Bergson's subjective sense of time, *durée* (duration), the past is prolonged into the present, which means not only that memory intermingles with perception and mind with bodily experiences, but also that it is difficult to determine chronology.

Novels by other modernist writers, like William Faulkner or Woolf, have been connected to Bergson's theory of time. Jeff Wallace observes: "the opening pages of Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* ([1925]), with their subtle manipulation of tense and careful ambiguity surrounding the question of 'now', vividly suggest a sense in which Clarissa Dalloway is simultaneously a menopausal and a teenage woman" (2007: 26). The simultaneity that Wallace observes assumes continuity, which contrasts with Beckett's argument that each day we transform into another self. Beckett emphasizes the false construction of the unitary and continuous self that is only sustained by habit.

Beckett discusses the different persons of which Albertine consists in Marcel's perception, and quotes the narrator's remark after her death: "I would have to forget, not one, but innumerable Albertines" (60). Furthermore, Beckett argues "for any given Albertine there exists a correlative narrator and no anachronism can put apart what Time has coupled" (60). He emphasizes that each self is scattered over time. Wallace comments that Beckett's theory of "constant, creative unfolding of new selves ... resonates through Beckett's own oeuvre and on into deconstructive philosophy" (27).⁶⁰

⁶⁰ In *Postmodernist Fiction* (1987), Brian McHale argues that "Beckett makes the transition from modernist to postmodernist poetics in the course of this trilogy of novels of the early 1950s,

In *The Mottled Screen* (1997), Mieke Bal argues that Albertine's character is inseparable from the "I," since Albertine "is a projection of the narrator." However, Bal continues: "like [Swann, Saint-Loup and Charlus] she remains nonetheless unknowable to him. For although the other is 'I,' I remains irreducibly other" (6). I concur with Bal that Albertine is a projection and nonetheless unknowable, since Marcel is unknowable to himself. The singularity of an individual cannot be completely fathomed and thus always remains other, just as the other remains singular: both terms refer to that which is untranslatable. This seems to confirm Beckett's theory. However, in my point of view there is also a constant that remains unbroken through time, and this constant connects all different selves. Instead of emphasizing the scattered and fragmented self, as Beckett does, I prefer to look at the self as alienated from itself, constantly other to itself, as Bal writes, yet in various and changing ways identical to itself.⁶¹

According to Bowie, the cohesion between multiple selves is "the cult of scientific precision that [the narrator] adheres to even as he records his losses and confusions" (1998: 11). Bowie stresses that Proust's "countless sudden excursions into natural science, ..., do not exert an integrative and centralizing force upon his phenomenology of selfhood" (13). He resists the improbable construction of a coherent selfhood. Still, a constant is represented by the style of writing and reflecting, which develops gradually and not as sudden as Beckett suggests. In Marcel's elaboration on involuntary memory, he finds a constant factor in his emotions, which brings him satisfaction, "because it proved that I was the same then and that it represented a fundamental quality of my nature," as well as sadness, "in the thought that since then I had made no progress" (224-225). These remarks suggest continuity rather than change. Yet, this self need not be single. It is a self that is confirmed repetitively, differently, the product of the process of remembering while writing, experienced as if for the first time

Molloy (1950), *Malone Dies* (1951), *The Unnamable* (1952)," distinguishing a shift in preoccupation with epistemological to ontological questions (12).

⁶¹ In "Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism" (2004), Jameson writes with regard to the modernism and postmodernism: "This shift in the dynamics of cultural pathology can be characterized as one in which the alienation of the subject is displaced by the fragmentation of the subject" (199). Following Jameson's distinction, Beckett would also be more of a postmodernist than a modernist.

each time. Thus, the narrator connects the different phases the self goes through in his writing.

I would like to suggest that the narrator offers a possible beginning to the story for each self. The focus on the self, its impressions and various aspects reflects the idea that a plot is not essential. The notion that literature should represent minute impressions on subjective minds rather than a story consisting of a string of exciting events, concluding in an enlightening or staggering denouement, is one of the principles that are connected to modernism. Charlie shares this opinion with the modernists, as he believes that a story in which “nothing much happens” more truthfully reflects the real world than most films do in which people are overrun by a vertiginous succession of events. However, when he eventually betrays his artistic principles by visiting a writing-seminar, he is resolutely freed from that ideal.

Writing Seminar

After weeks of depression, feeling incapable of writing anything decent, Charlie resorts to attending a writing seminar by Robert McKee. Listening to McKee, one overhears Charlie thinking:

I'm pathetic, I'm a loser. ... I have failed. I am panicked. I have sold out. ...I am worthless. I... ..Eh, what the fuck am I doing here? ...What the fuck am I doing here?! Fuck! ... It is my weakness.....my ultimate lack of conviction that brings me here... (66-7)

In the meantime, McKee argues precisely against the use of voice-over, which demonstrates that the real-life screenwriter Kaufman disagrees with McKee's principles despite Charlie's eventual conversion. Attending the writing seminar first makes Charlie feel worse than ever, suffering a betrayal of his artistic, modernist principles. His aversion to the seminar strengthens the portrayal of Charlie as the highbrow writer, in contrast to his twin brother Donald, who represents lowbrow self-help culture. Charlie feels ashamed for having resorted to the self-help seminar, which his brother recommended him. His shame adds to his shame for not being able to adapt a book about adaptation. His resolve to

write a screenplay without cramming in “sex or guns or car chases” or “characters learning profound life lessons, or growing, or coming to like each other, or overcoming obstacles to succeed in the end” makes him ask, timidly (6):

Sir, what if a writer is attempting to create a story where nothing much happens? Where people don't change, they don't have epiphanies. They struggle and are frustrated, and nothing is resolved. More of a reflection of the real world (68).

McKee replies that, first of all, “you'll bore your audience to tears.” Secondly, McKee notes, his voice rising in anger:

[N]othing happens in the world?... Are you out of your fucking mind? People are murdered every day. There's genocide, war, corruption. Every fucking day somewhere in the world, somebody sacrifices his life to save somebody else. Every fucking day someone somewhere makes a decision to destroy someone else! People find love! People lose it! For Christ's sake, a child watches a mother beaten to death on the steps of a church! Someone goes hungry! Somebody else betrays his best friend for a woman! If you can't find that stuff in life, then you, my friend, don't know crap about life! ... (69).

Charlie realizes McKee is right. The lives of people are perhaps different from those of flowers. Considering the two sides that the orchid symbolizes, stillness and the ability to change, perhaps he should focus on people's ability to evolve instead of dwelling on their apparent stillness. After all, orchids are the most dramatic of flowers, inasmuch as they can change their way of living: their “identity,” if one can use this word in relation to flowers.⁶² After Charlie has listened to McKee's impassioned monologue, the film changes in style.

The idea that nothing really happens in the world suddenly seems a decadent point of view. While Charlie first stresses the importance of originality,

⁶² Proust also repeatedly compares human behavior and humanity to vegetal organisms. Beckett writes in this regard: “Flowers and plants have no conscious will. They are shameless, exposing their genitals” (89).

suddenly *Adaptation* shows a different perspective: McKee's and Donald's. Showing McKee's point of view, the film offers the opinion that critics have formulated with regard to the supposed incompatibility between elite literary minds and the masses. Paul de Man argues that continental criticism at the time when his book appeared can be summarized as representing a

methodologically motivated attack on the notion that a literary or poetic consciousness is in any way a privileged consciousness, whose use of language can pretend to escape, to some degree, from the duplicity, the confusion, the untruth that we take for granted in the everyday use of language (1983: 9).

De Man addresses the inherent problem of such a critique, since the critique of privileged language is often still part of a privileged discourse. By disconnecting the text from the subject, as the New Critics proposed, one seems to get around the problem of the privileged *mind*; however, one does not get around the problem of privileged *discourse*.⁶³ The film is liable to the same problem, as it presents the distinction between the assumed superior ideals of the literary mind and the ideals of the masses and Hollywood. However, the film deploys different norms of narration belonging to different genres, thus also commenting on the discourses it traverses.

Parts of the film present McKee and Donald as though they are right, confirming McKee's opinion that those arrogant, yet naïve writers miss insight in how the world functions: "Then you, my friend, don't know crap about life!" From this perspective, Charlie's ideas about writing are old-fashioned and have become cliché and romantic, represented by Charlie's old typewriter, while Donald produces his new writings on a laptop. The parts of the film that favor Donald's and McKee's perspective argue that success asks for the ability to adapt, and that being able to adapt to one's habitat necessitates strategies that achieve

⁶³ De Man discusses Edmund Husserl's lecture "The Crisis of European Philosophy and Humanity" in which Husserl describes philosophy as a "universal critique of all life and all the goals of life" (15). Yet, de Man argues: "The privileged viewpoint of the post-Hellenic, European consciousness is never for a moment put into question; the crucial, determining examination of which depends Husserl's right to call himself, by his own terms, a philosopher, is in fact never undertaken" (16).

desired outcomes. For a filmmaker, this means one must write a narrative with standard Hollywood elements, a compelling plot, attractive actors, sex and violence. It also means that the portrayal of characters should be consistent and that the characters should not be too complex or outlandish. Being able to adapt means being able to follow what one shares with others, in opposition to the idea that each individual is singular.

Actually, McKee does not help Charlie to find a compelling beginning; he helps him to find an ending that makes the beginning irrelevant. His final advice to Charlie is: "The last act makes the film. Wow them in the end and you got a hit" (70). The film follows this advice: it wows the spectators in the end with car chases, Donald's violent death, sex, sensations enhanced by drugs extracted from orchids, and passionate love between Orlean and the orchid hunter Laroche (Chris Cooper). Charlie's decision to follow McKee's principles is made in a state of panic. He confesses: "I've got pages of false starts and wrong approaches. I'm way past my deadline" (70). Thus, even while he adapts, he is still presented as the frustrated writer of the first part of the film.

In the article "The Implicit Soul of Charlie Kaufman's *Adaptation*" (2006), David L. Smith argues: "While Charlie drowns in the sea of life, Donald swims. Thus, it becomes increasingly clear that, in evolutionary terms, Charlie is maladapted – a wanker, no less – while Donald represents the genius of nature itself, the tautological triumph of what works" (432). However, as Sergio Rizzo argues, Charles Darwin's work on natural selection shows that "nature's 'losers' vastly outnumber nature's 'winners'" (2007: 2). Both Laroche and Donald die in the end, while Charlie emerges as the only survivor. Unable to change, remaining the tormented soul, Charlie is the only real winner, if one reads survival as a token of evolutionary success. This "makes the violence at the movie's end an ironic device within Charlie's personal and artistic evolution," Rizzo concludes, "a way for him to maintain a critical distance on the Hollywood conventions he has resisted while simultaneously incorporating them into his art" (2). Charlie might adapt to McKee's advice, but his artistic ideas survive, represented by his own character, his survival, as well as by the film's satiric deployment of the Hollywood elements. Thus, one can conclude that the film actually never leaves the privileged discourse from a meta-perspective, as it continues to critique

Hollywood elements, satirizing Charlie's conversion to the self-help principles. Moreover, retrospectively, his writer's block emerges as the most fruitful condition for writing, as the film turns out to be chiefly about his frustrations regarding his inability to find a beginning.

While the portrayal of Charlie on the one hand turns him into a contemporary Marcel, conforming to a modernist image of the writer, the film on the other hand also shows that self-help gurus can offer a solution when being stuck in a writing process; after all, the film does follow McKee's advice. By including McKee's seminar in the film, Charlie's modernist ideas about writing are opposed by present-day self-help ideology. To round off this chapter, I look at how Marcel's perspective on writing relates to self-help literature that offers advice on how to deal with the inability to find a suitable beginning. Although Proust's writing is one of the most canonic examples of high literature and self-help books are part of contemporary popular culture, I find that certain principles in self-help literature resemble Marcel's opinions.

Writer's Block

The role of anxiety in *La Recherche* has been studied by many critics and philosophers, among whom Blanchot, Bowie and Kristeva. Writing and anguish, or language and anxiety, are often connected, not only by philosophers but by self-help literature as well.⁶⁴ In this section, I discuss how these dissimilar genres and their divergent approaches relate to Marcel's and Charlie's anxieties. Marcel's feelings of anxiety are, however, not only connected to his writing, they concern almost everything he cannot fully control.⁶⁵

In "The Experience of Proust" (2001), Blanchot argues that few books assign so large a role to anguish as *La Recherche*. Often Marcel's fear of loosing

⁶⁴ See for instance Judith Appelbaum *How to Get Happily Published* (1998), John Gardner *On Becoming a Novelist* (1999), Ralph Keyes *The Writer's Book of Hope* (2003), Caroline Sharp *A Writer's Workbook* (2000).

⁶⁵ The fact that his beloved cannot be completely fathomed is, for instance, the cause for his desire for her and simultaneously for his extreme distrust, which turns into mental self-torture. A self-torture that, as Kristeva points out, turns into a "torture of the other in which the self and the other both remain inaccessible" (26). Kristeva also emphasizes that Swann's love for Odette is imaginary, that he does not love the real woman but his imagination. However, Marcel continually distrusts even his own imagination and never stops his epistemological investigation into the "truth" about Albertine, which of course always escapes him, compelling him to write about all his hypotheses.

control blinds him to everything but the predicament he fears most, for example, his beloved Albertine caressing girls. Since Marcel suffers from a persistent lack of trust her presence cannot bring any form of reassuring information: even in her presence she is absent. Consequently, Blanchot argues that Marcel is forced to know things in absence. For Blanchot anxiety and absence, as well as writing, absence and death, are all related. Thus, he connects Proust's writing with metaphysical questions concerning anxiety and language with, alluding to Heidegger's theories on anxiety, vacuity and language.⁶⁶

In the lecture "What Is Metaphysics?" (1993 [1929]), Heidegger argues that a sudden anxiety is a condition in which we feel as if everything slips away into nothingness. He describes that condition as an existential crisis in which one loses hold of everything one thought was familiar. In a sense, this might be compared to Marcel's feeling of vacuity as he looks for a topic of "infinite philosophical value," or, for that matter, with Charlie's desperation when he wants to account for the entirety of evolution: in these moments the subject matter grows to such proportions that it becomes ungraspable. Its totality comes close to nothingness, leaving no specific thing that represents anything sensible. Precisely because one senses the disappearance of everything, Heidegger argues, one realizes that there "is" something, and that we "are."⁶⁷

Heidegger distinguishes between fear and anxiety: *Furcht* and *Angst* (1993: 32). Fear is fear of something, whereas "angst" has no specific cause or object. In Blanchot's reading of Proust, Blanchot clearly deals with anxiety. However, when looking into the genre of self-help literature, anxiety is rather

⁶⁶ In the essay "From Anguish to Language" (2001 [1943]), Blanchot argues: "The writer sometimes seems strangely as if anguish were part of his occupation, even more, as if the fact of writing so deepens anguish that it attaches itself to him rather than to any other sort of person" (4). On the one hand, Blanchot argues, language can never completely capture the object it wishes to describe. On the other hand, the unfathomable that causes such anxiety can only be made present by being described in words. Consequently, writing forms the ultimate way of controlling what the writer fears, whereas it simultaneously causes anxiety and confirms the inability of catching reality in language.

⁶⁷ In other words, in transcendence, we find ourselves *opposed* to everything that *is*, and therefore also opposed to ourselves. Heidegger holds that, only because we can transcend ourselves, we can relate to ourselves and to the world. He argues that we can only understand what it means "to be," because we can experience what "nothing" means. Through the nothingness we experience in our anguish, in which everything slips away, we are able to relate to that which "is". This relation is necessary for reflection on language, since our understanding of what the verb "to be" means, is, according to Heidegger, necessary for all understanding of language and writing (35).

approached as various forms of fear, which easily result in writer's blocks. This distinction is crucial for the difference between the philosophical approach of anxiety and notions of anxiety as present in self-help literature. In the self-help book *The Courage to Write: How Writers Transcend Fear* (1995), Ralph Keyes quotes various literary authors who all comment on their anxieties. These comments mostly embody different forms of fear of failure: for example, fear of being revealed "as an impostor: someone who said he could write a book but couldn't" (7). While Keyes's descriptions do not address any metaphysical questions, they resonate with Marcel's and Charlie's insecurities.⁶⁸

In *Writing Down the Bones* (1986), Natalie Goldberg defines anxiety as insecurity, which is the result of our habit to live in "the realm of second and third thoughts, thoughts on thought" (9). According to Goldberg, these thoughts are led by politeness, fear, embarrassment and other internal censors that arrest the mind and cause a writer's block. She gives a set of rules to fight these censors of the mind: "1. Keep your hand moving. 2 Don't cross out. 3. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, grammar. 4. Lose Control. 5. Don't think. Don't get logical. 6. Go for the jugular" (8). Most important are the fourth and the fifth rule. According to Goldberg, the mind is not to be trusted in the creative process. When you get your hand to write without minding second or third thoughts, you can write what *your* mind "actually sees and feels, not what it *thinks* it should see or feel" (8). Goldberg claims that at that moment the unencumbered self is able to express its inner feelings without shame.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Heidegger does not refer to psychoanalysis and presents his theory as a metaphysical concern. However, one can compare his argument with that of Sigmund Freud, who makes a similar distinction in his *Vorlesungen über die Psychoanalyse* (1918). Freud argues that people can experience fear of, for example, spiders, heights or open spaces; these are all phobias that have clear causes. The experience of pure anxiety, however, according to Freud, leads back to the experience of being born. The word *angst* stems from the Latin "angustiae," which means "narrowness" or "tightness." Angst manifests itself in a tight feeling in one's chest and in being short of breath, just when one was born and separated from one's mother, Freud claims (388). Heidegger does not refer to Freud. Yet, both connect angst with the absence of an object that incites fear and with the experience of a primal initiation: Freud with birth, and Heidegger with the understanding that precedes all other understanding; the realization that there "is" something rather than nothing (1993: 110).

⁶⁹ Self-help literature offers advice not only as how to overcome one's anxiety concerning writing; writing is promoted as a good medicine for other psychological problems as well as for physical illness. On the CFIDS website, Lisa Norden writes that "recent research shows that the simple act of writing down thoughts and feelings can help people with chronic illness improve their health". See: www.cfdselfhelp.org. Also, the April 14, 1999 issue of the *Journal of the American Medical*

Similarly, Keyes argues that honest writing is the most authentic and, consequently, the best writing: “The more honest and alive our writing, the more we show ourselves. The more we show ourselves, the greater danger we’re in, the more scared we are. Hence fear is a marker on the path to good writing” (122). Keyes’s discussion of the writer’s fears also hints at a philosophical perspective on language. A destructive, negative force of language is highlighted, since each word, due to the generalizing force of language, appears to deny the existence of the particular object it names. In a paragraph on page fright, Keyes quotes the author Anthony Burgess, who said that he “thought every book was a failure from the moment its first sentence was written, because this sentence destroyed forever the dream of what that book might be” (25). This notion can be compared to Charlie’s and Marcel’s feelings of incompetence. As long as one cherishes an idea for a book, without actually having started writing, the book *might* be the ideal book. Yet, the sentences that eventually begin the book close off that potentiality.⁷⁰

Did Marcel’s anxieties cause a writer’s block? In *A Writer’s Workbook* (2000), Caroline Sharp argues that a writer’s block can be caused by a large variety of sources, ranging from a lack of ideas to a burn-out. From looking at *Adaptation* and reading various self-help texts the impression rises that a writer’s block has become a symbol of the true intellectual writer. It is tempting

Association reported that patients with asthma or rheumatoid arthritis who wrote about stressful experiences in their lives experienced reduced symptoms.

⁷⁰ Words have a propensity to refer to general meanings, thus destroying the uniqueness of one’s imagination. This aspect of language has been described as a destructive mechanism by several thinkers, among others G.W.F. Hegel, but also by poets like Friedrich Hölderlin and Stéphane Mallarmé, and later by Blanchot and Derrida. From different perspectives, these thinkers and writers observe that when we verbalize the things we see, think or feel, those things immediately become part of general concepts and deny the singular reality of existing objects. In the essay “Literature and the Right to Death,” Blanchot quotes Hegel, who writes: “Adam’s first act, which made him master of the animals, was to give them names, that is, he annihilated them in their existence (as existing creatures)” (1995: 323) (The quote stems from a collection of essays by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel titled *System of 1803-1804* .) According to Hegel, the things we describe and call by their names in a sense vanish and die as they are to be understood as “ideas”. Blanchot argues that a word gives meaning by suppressing it: “For me to be able to say, ‘This woman,’ I must somehow take her flesh-and-blood reality away from her, cause her to be absent, annihilate her. The word gives me the being, but it gives it to me deprived of being” (322). A word is always general, never as singular as the woman herself. Stéphane Mallarmé expresses something similar when, in “Crise de vers,” he writes that the moment he says ‘a flower’, all contours of this flower are banished to oblivion, and something other than all known flowers originates, namely the idea itself, the sweet absence of all bouquets: “Je dis: une fleur! et, hors de l’oubli où ma voix relègue aucun contour, en tant que quelque chose d’autre que les calices sus, musicalement se lève, idée même et suave, l’absence de tous bouquets” (1993: 196).

to speak of Marcel as suffering from a writer's block. Yet, I doubt whether his endless procrastination, his search for diversion and his time-consuming obsessions should be defined as such.

Charlie is repeatedly shown as sitting down behind his typewriter or with a recorder in his hand hoping to get something done. If we look at other films in which writers are portrayed who suffer from writer's blocks, they are all depicted when sitting down at their desk, scribbling and angrily throwing away the piece of paper with their failed attempts, thus conforming to the present day idea of a writer's block. See, for instance, Barton in *Barton Fink* (Joel Coen, 1991), Aturo Bandini in *Ask the Dust* (Robert Towne, 2006), or Will in *Shakespeare in Love* (John Madden, 1998). While in each of these films the protagonist undergoes a state of panic when attempting to write, Marcel hardly sits down at his desk or attempts to write in another fashion. He mainly daydreams about his writing and postpones his beginning by thinking of numerous social obligations and formulating other excuses that keep him from working.

This distinction mirrors their different conditions, milieus and historical periods. Charlie has a deadline; he works under time-pressure, while Marcel does not seem to be in any hurry. This divergence also bears on the medium. A screenwriter has to reckon with a producer who is waiting, as well as with the length of shots, montage and the expected duration of the movie, while a novel allows for digressions more easily. The cause of Marcel's endless postponements is often a combination of insecurity and laziness rather than panic caused by stress. After he has described how he endlessly puts off his writing, Marcel also confides: "Even my laziness itself, beneath the novel forms that it had assumed, how was I to recognize it?" (1960 Part 1: 102). In short, while today the writer's block is associated with stress and panic, Marcel does not seem to acknowledge the sort of stress that contemporary time-pressure is likely to bring. Hence, it remains uncertain if Marcel had a writer's block as understood today. However, his inability to start writing cannot but be called a writer's block, since that has become the general term for the impasse felt by writers who cannot get themselves to work.⁷¹

⁷¹ Considering the different connotations of the writer's block, it is also revealing that Marcel starts with falling asleep, not a sleep of exhaustion, but a dreamy, early bedtime sleep.

When considering self-help literature and Proust, one cannot avoid Alain de Botton's book *How Proust Can Change Your Life* (1997). On the cover of de Botton's book a quote from *The New York Times Book Review* reads, "A self-help manual for the intelligent person ... witty, funny and tonic." De Botton claims that Proust's novel is "far from a memoir tracing the passage of a more lyrical age, it was a practical, universally applicable story about how to stop wasting time and start to appreciate life" (9). De Botton, however, makes the mistake of reading Proust as earnest writing. He highlights the moments of wisdom in Proust's writings, taking the views expressed in *La Recherche* as the author's personal views, for which de Botton uses turns of phrases like for instance: "a point [Proust] puts in the mouth of his fictional painter Elstir" (67). Thus, De Botton overlooks the self-reflexivity of Proust's writing and its countless inconsistencies, especially regarding perspectives on life, not to speak of his irony. If the character Elstir, for instance, argues that acquiring wisdom via life is superior to acquiring wisdom via a teacher, one can easily find moments in *La Recherche* that contest this point of view.

Charlie, who is portrayed as suffering from a stereotypical writer's block, looks down on people who believe in the possibility of learning to write by following self-help gurus. In general, self-help literature does not have a good reputation amongst writers, mostly due to the cliché that real writing originates in solitude and bubbles up from an authentic source of genius, as Charlie also seems to believe. Charlie's modernist ideas of what it means to be a writer clash with the self-help principles proclaimed by his brother. Yet, if we compare Keyes's and Goldberg's advice about writing as honestly as possible and trying to loose control, it resembles Marcel's conclusion.

Marcel speaks of "that book of unknown signs within me," from which he keeps running away, and from which most writers would turn away, because "no one could help me read it by any rule, for its reading consists in an act of creation in which no one can take our place and in which no one can collaborate" (226). While Marcel defies guidelines for writing, he underscores the belief that one should write from one's inner self: "Only that issues from ourselves which we ourselves extract from the darkness within ourselves and which is unknown to others" (227). The writer needs to let go of intellectual control, Marcel argues, he

needs instinct and intuition rather than experience and intelligence. Thus, it appears he would agree with Goldberg where she claims that one should write what one's mind "actually sees and feels, not what it *thinks* it should see or feel" (8).

Although Proust is one of the most canonical modernists, it does not surprise me that certain principles in self-help literature resemble certain aspects of Marcel's opinions. After all, the genre of self-help literature matured at the beginning of last the century and was part of a changing attitude that can be found in modernist literature as well: the turning away from objective reality and society, turning towards the subject. This might explain why the focus on inner, hidden thoughts and sensations of the individual, often defined as a crucial feature of modernist literature, is so essential to self-help literature. Moreover, self-help literature also presents modernist techniques, as for instance the stream of consciousness, as general literary techniques.

It strikes me, however, that self-help literature approaches anxiety as a result of honesty and openness, while philosophers like Blanchot connect it with a lack of trust, an almost opposite trait. Beckett, Bowie and Kristeva emphasize Marcel's feeling that nobody and nothing can be completely trusted. Even the present cannot be trusted, because time teaches that everything can be understood in a different light at another instant. Beckett summarizes this as follows: "The object evolves, and by the time of conclusion – if any – is reached, it is already out of date" (85). The most familiar persons and things appear mysterious, hiding their true presence behind outer coverings. Each miniscule detail has the propensity to transform into a meaningful sign, which then again cannot be trusted. With regard to Marcel's obsession with his beloved, Bowie argues "the trouble is always that the beloved has mental processes of her own; to make matters worse she has a past and, still worse, she thinks, desires and performs actions when she is not in his company" (1990: 54). Moreover:

Desire thrives upon the threat of disappointment, and can positively shrivel when the possibility of satisfaction comes too plain into view. Proust's description of things going wrong and getting in the way is hugely insistent and overdetermined (1998: 252).

The same could be said about Marcel's writing: writing is only fascinating as long as it is a struggle, it has to be difficult, or even impossible in order to be worthwhile, to promise anything good.

The emphasis on Marcel's inability to believe in the honesty of what he perceives contradicts his agreeing with the self-help principle that one should write from one's instinct, without minding the censors of the mind. This incongruity underscores the paradoxical character of Marcel's conclusion and confirms his multiple voices, which always are in transformation. While the resemblance between Marcel's perspective on writing and the advice of self-help literature might create the impression that for Marcel anxiety is a sign of honest writing, *La Recherche* actually shows that frankness is not to be trusted. Even his own opinions are not reliable; they change over time and with regard to varying companionships. Moreover, sometimes they unite almost opposite standpoints. Just as the paradoxical conclusion that authentic writing is a result from deciphering and interpreting. Honest writing, resulting from instinct instead of intellect, is always muddled by self-reflexive thoughts, comments and reviews.

The different connotations that the inability to start writing have in different genres as well as in different time periods shows the preposterous – using Bal's definition – and anachronistic character of my analysis. I have argued that the portrayal of Charlie conforms to principles associated with modernist writers. In this chapter, however, it has become clear that Charlie's ideas about writing unite and confirm even *more* modernist characteristics than the ideas expressed by Marcel himself. This shows not only that modernism is part of contemporary times, but also that it is partly a contemporary construct. The other way around, Marcel's conclusion about writing as interpretation rather makes him into a postmodernist, occasionally agreeing with certain aspects of contemporary self-help culture. Yet, it is not likely that Marcel would have been alleviated by self-help advice, or would have started writing sooner if he had a twin brother who persuaded him to visit a writing seminar. After all, if that had been the case, we would not have been able to enjoy the long novel, with all its digressions and possible opening sequences.

Conclusion

Since a proper beginning can only be pointed out when a continuation has been created, many provisional beginnings become lost. In *Adaptation*, as in *La Recherche*, superfluous beginnings are recounted as possible beginnings or entry points. *Adaptation* comments on the illusion of clear chronology in the writing process: the illusion that the beginning of a story is also its origin. The blurring of the moments of writing and the visualization of Charlie's ideas resemble the way the narrator in *La Recherche* recounts sudden reminiscences in several phases of his life before he declares he should start writing about his memories.

Yet, by studying the resemblances between the two protagonists, a growing amount of differences within these similarities has surfaced. Charlie strongly believes in principles that have become clichés of high literature, for instance, his idea of writing as a journey into the unknown. While the principles of high literature stem from modernist ideals, Marcel, who should be a genuine modernist, does not always share Charlie's opinions. Marcel does not speak of the wish to explore unknown territory, to create something entirely new or the wish to break with tradition; he rather focuses on what is authentic. While authenticity and originality are often connected, originality does not need to be authentic, nor the other way around.

Whereas for Marcel authenticity is related to one's deeper self and unconscious memories, for Charlie originality represents the discovery of something new that is inclined to change the self rather than being produced by it. At least that is what he claims; the film, however, shows that Charlie, like Marcel, turns to his own life in order to find an original entrance to his script. Marcel would probably approve, as he finds that one should not look outside of oneself, one should look inwards. Yet, the interpretation of one's unconscious memories in a sense also is a journey into the unknown, since those memories reveal a new truth, as Marcel claims. Thus, while taking different routes, eventually Charlie's and Marcel's ideas tend to meet.

Charlie's search for an original beginning comments on the relation between originality and origin, as well as on the relation between originality and newness, beginning and origin. These terms all overlap and come together in the connotations of modernism. Whereas modernism stands for a new beginning, my

two protagonists seem incapable to begin writing. In *Adaptation*, the modernist emphasis on originality, newness and innovative writing is commented on by Charlie's interior monologues, which at the same time are a result of his inability to find an original beginning. Thus, on the one hand, Charlie presents modernist principles as values of high literature, while, on the other hand, the film depicts them as impossible idealist criteria that cause a writer's block. The ending rather confirms the postmodern character of the film, as it combines different genres and satirizes the various codes of filmmaking it deploys. Meanwhile Charlie, the anti-hero, remains the cliché modernist, while Marcel proves to be more of a postmodernist, emphasizing that true writing is a form of interpretation and deciphering.

Adaptation confirms that early modernist ideas have become clichés of what the literary author and his or her writing should be. As those principles have become clichés, they also have become stronger and less complex and ambiguous in comparison to the ideas from which they stem. In Proust, all principles are ambiguous, Janus-faced and liable to change, hence always partly disagreeing with the principles proclaimed by Charlie. Thus, my analysis of the relation between Proust and *Adaptation* shows that what we consider to be modernist characteristics today often conforms to contemporary literary paradigms rather than to ideas presented in modernist texts. On the one hand, I argue that modernist paradigms have become paradigms of literary writing in general, while, on the other hand, these paradigms are the products of recent history and offer an image of modernism that has been developed after the fact. As the following chapters will show as well, the term modernism travels and is redefined in new, popular contexts, changing the idea of what modernism is and was.