

## ENGL 310 Modern Poetry

February 23, 2007

### Discussion Section: Eliot and Proust

#### "Prufrock" and Proust

**"But as if a magic lantern threw the nerves in patterns on a screen"** (l. 105):

At Combray, as every afternoon ended, long before the time when I should have to go to bed and lie there, unsleeping, far from my mother and grandmother, my bedroom became the fixed point on which my melancholy and anxious thoughts were centred. Someone had indeed had the happy idea of giving me, to distract me on evenings when I seemed abnormally wretched, a magic lantern, which used to be set on top of my lamp while we waited for dinnertime to come; and, after the fashion of the masterbuilders and glass-painters of gothic days, it substituted for the opaqueness of my walls an impalpable iridescence, supernatural phenomena of many colours, in which legends were depicted as on a shifting and transitory window. But my sorrows were only increased thereby, because this mere change of lighting was enough to destroy the familiar impression I had of my room, thanks to which, save for the torture of going to bed, it had become quite endurable. Now I no longer recognized it, and felt uneasy in it, as in a room in some hotel or chalet, in a place where I had just arrived for the first time.

Riding at a jerky trot, Golo, filled with an infamous design, issued from the little triangular forest which dyed darkgreen the slope of a convenient hill, and advanced fitfully towards the castle of poor Genevieve de Brabant. . . And nothing could arrest his slow progress. If the lantern were moved I could still distinguish Golo's horse advancing across the windowcurtains, swelling out with their curves and diving into their folds. The body of Golo himself, being of the same supernatural substance as his steed's, overcame every material obstacle—everything that seemed to bar his way—by taking it as an ossature and embodying it in himself: even the doorhandle, for instance, over which, adapting itself at once, would float irresistibly his red cloak or his pale face, which never lost its nobility or its melancholy, never betrayed the least concern at this transvertebration.

And, indeed, I found plenty of charm in these bright projections, which seemed to emanate from a Merovingian past and shed around me the reflections of such ancient history. But I cannot express the discomfort I felt at this intrusion of mystery and beauty into a room which I had succeeded in filling with my own personality until I thought no more of it than of myself. The anaesthetic effect of habit being destroyed, I would begin to think—and to feel—such melancholy things.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Marcel Proust, *Swann's Way*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: Vintage, 1982), 10–11. This first volume of Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* was first published in French in 1912–1913. By that time, of course, Eliot had largely completed "Prufrock," though he would not publish it until 1915. Thus, despite the striking correspondences between the representation of subjectivity in the above passage and in Eliot's poem, direct influence in either direction is quite unlikely; a deeper cause must be found for the coincidence.