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The Strange M. Proust. Ed. André Benhaïm. London: Legenda, Modern Humanities Research Association and Manley Publishing, 2009. ISBN 9781905981977. Pp. 142. £45 (\$89.50).

The ten essays of this volume are taken from a conference of the same name held at Princeton University in 2006, the aim of which was to explore the strangeness of Marcel Proust's work. According to the editor of the book and organizer of the conference, André Benhaïm, "this strangeness has been forgotten or occulted by public and institutional recognition." (1) Proust has become such a sacred cow, for high and low culture alike, that the newness of In Search of Lost Time, its ability to provoke thought as well as unease in its readers, has been almost completely effaced. The eminent Proust scholars contributing to this volume all propose readings of the Search that tease out paradoxes, the uncanny, and the subversive hidden in Proust's text through a variety of critical perspectives. Although the theme of "strangeness" is broad, the chapters cohere remarkably well and are of a uniformly high caliber.

The first chapter, by David Ellison, defines a Proustian uncanny, in its similarities and differences with Freud's notion of Unheimlichkeit. For Ellison, finding the strange in Proust means moving backwards in time to a point before the Search was familiar territory, a move he likens to the reversing of the "anaesthetizing force of Habit" (15) described by Proust's narrator.

Yet the “disquieting strangeness” found in Proust is not simply an effect of time or narrative, but, as Ellison suggests, the strange inhabits the familiar: narrative does not overcome the uncanny but seeks to forget or displace the experience.

Christie McDonald’s essay, “Da Capo: Accumulations and Explosions,” approaches the Proustian subject’s recognition of the familiar from a different perspective, that of repetition, linearity, and temporal breaks. Analyzing two key events, the narrator’s inability to recognize his own article in Le Figaro and the sudden recognition of Vinteuil’s “petite phrase” in his sonata, McDonald shows how memory accumulates slowly, in fits and starts, and “explodes into meaning,” (86) for a narrative subject whose models of creative destruction are music and art.

Michael Wood argues that, like Barthes, Proust claims to prefer photography to cinema, but that the use of the two media in the Search makes it impossible to separate them. Ultimately, what Proust prefers in photography, the freezing of the moment, and what he deplores in cinema, the unstoppable movement of time, are two sides of the same coin: “the ongoing life of the dead, and the oncoming death of the living.” (110)

The concluding chapter by the late Malcolm Bowie, “Reading Proust between the Lines,” is the finest piece in the book and is Bowie’s final published essay. He argues for a reading of Proust that is attentive to “the ordinary strangeness of Proust at the textual level” (126). What follows is a brilliant demonstration where he reads the instances in the novel of the verb “superposer” to uncover new ambiguities of Proust’s spatial images, which, in Bowie’s reading, both affirm and undermine the possibility of an objective observer, the “foundations of an observational science.” (133)

Regrettably, the quality of the translations from French to English does not match the quality of the essays. Some of the chapters originally written in French are barely readable and rely on word for word translations that produce blatant errors: “s’ignoraient” as “mutually ignored” (71) or the French “physicien” translated as “physician” (113). Editorial slip or perhaps error of translation, Antoine Compagnon asserts, in chapter nine, that “Unlike so many bourgeois writers of the nineteenth century, Proust did not study law” (114); yet in 1890 Proust began taking classes at the Faculté de Droit and in 1893 received a Licence de droit. (Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, vol. 1, 1987, CXVI-II). It may be in the details hidden in plain view, like the basic facts of Proust’s education, that the Strange M. Proust can still surprise even the greatest of scholars...