

MELANCHOLY IN MARCEL PROUST

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OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH TIME

When we talk about time, we cannot help mentioning Chronos, the melancholic myth par excellence. As Chronos used to swallow his children as soon as he generates them¹, the past devours the present uninterruptedly. Time is therefore linked to the idea that everything that is behind is over, time is related with the end and thus, time is connected with the death of something and also with death itself. Chronos, after being defeated by his son Zeus², was also condemned to live in the world of the dead, to live in death, using Benjamin's words, to live in the "place of eternal mournfulness."³

It is our relationship with time that determines our time, being melancholy a way of relationship with time. In other words, melancholy is present in the manner how we face the passage of time. As the course of time is associated with something that has ended, it is also related with something that has been lost, with something inaccessible, with something that the melancholic is not willing to give up. To the melancholic it is urgent to find again what has been lost and its absence leads him/her to a state of absolute discouragement, boredom (*taedium vitae*), and alienation.

After a certain time, the paternity of melancholics was attributed to Saturn, the Roman mythological god equivalent to Chronos.⁴ Melancholics are even called Children of Saturn. As Saturn is also a planet, we can infer, in the cosmological and astrological contexts, that

¹ Hesiod, *Theogony Works and Days Testimonia*, trans. G.W. Most (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 41.

² Ibidem, p. 61.

³ W. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. J. Osborne (New York: Verso, 2003), p. 144.

⁴ R. Klibansky, E. Panofsky, F. Saxl, *Saturn and Melancholy* (Liechtenstein: Kraus Reprint, 1979), p. 133.

there is a certain relationship between its movement and the performance of the melancholic personality. Thus, because Saturn is a planet with a long and slow orbit and also because of the great distance that separates it from planet Earth, it is considered a slow planet, a cold and dark planet, and a distant and lonely planet influencing the disposition for indolence, inertia, apathy, discouragement, and isolation, typical of melancholics.⁵ This disposition is reflected in a move away from worldly activities and sets the melancholic in a deeply contemplative state that can, in opposite, offer him/her another face of the Saturnine experience. It can give him/her the face of extreme intelligence, of genius, or even the gift of prophecy. This ambivalence⁶ can thus bring to melancholics, both obscurity or lucidity, sterility or fertility, and desolation or happiness.

The melancholic ambiguity can also be related to the Myth of Chronos in which we also find a duality due to his different destinies that reflect the issue of temporality. On the one hand, the legend tells us that Chronos was relegated to the depths of Tartarus⁷ to live in the most infinite sadness, but on the other hand, his figure appears associated with the God of the Golden Age Myth reigning on the Islands of the Blessed⁸ where time was experienced as an instant that does not change, temporality was simultaneous instead of successive, the moments were spatialized, and time was eternalized. The melancholic is someone who lives obsessed with the idea of this non-chronological time. The melancholic cannot accept earthly life as it is: ephemeral. Melancholics are permanently looking for a kind of non-existent paradise, as if they were looking for a fullness and for an eternal happiness. The melancholic lives an endless seek, so his/her disturbed soul's state and his/her permanent anguish and suffering that can lead him/her to madness or even to suicide.⁹ The saturnine lives a kind of "death in life," in the style of the mythological heroes of Aristotle's *Problem XXX*, Ajax, Hercules, and Bellerophon¹⁰, the saturnine is a wanderer, the saturnine is always on the way.

In a passage from the chapter "Combray" of Proust's first book of *In Search of Lost Time*, we can infer that he lived this experience of melancholy when he extends to himself the feeling of anguish lived by Swan, but making it appear preceding the object of loss:

... to him that anguish came through love, to which it is in a sense predestined, by which it will be seized upon and exploited; but when, as had befallen me, it possesses one's soul before love has yet entered into one's life, then it must drift, awaiting love's coming, vague and free, without precise attachment, at the disposal of one sentiment today, of another tomorrow, of filial piety or affection for a friend.¹¹

This gives us the sign that his anguish was part of a natural state as the sensation of loss had dominated him since always and it is consistent with Giorgio Agamben's idea, transposed to Ilit Ferber's words:

⁵ W. Benjamin, op. cit, p. 150.

⁶ R. Klibansky, E. Panofsky, F. Saxl, op. cit., pp. 134–135.

⁷ Hesiod, op. cit., pp. 61–62.

⁸ Ibidem, p. 101.

⁹ Aristotle, *Problems II, books XXII–XXXVIII*, trans. W.S. Hett (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1957), p. 165.

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 155.

¹¹ M. Proust, *Swann's Way, In Search of Lost Time*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff, T. Kilmartin (New York: The Modern Library, 1992), p. 40.

Agamben pushes this further to claim that the melancholic actually lost what was never hers to have.¹²

Let us see next how Proust faces temporality and how we can draw a parallel between his moods and the melancholic disposition.

MELANCHOLY IN MARCEL PROUST

Although Proust has written *In Search of Lost Time* as a work of fiction, there are several aspects that can lead us to take it as an autobiographical work. In this sense, the feeling of loss intuited in the different trips to the past cannot be separated from the melancholic experience lived by himself. The permanent duel between the present and the past proposed by Proust through involuntary memory denotes an uneasiness in relation to life as life is, they manifest a continuous sadness as if there is a misadjustment of the author in relation to himself and in relation to the world, a misadjustment that seems to come back to his childhood and that increased with the death of his mother. It was this state of mind and the pain that led him to isolation and to be distant as suggested by several passages in his work from which I highlight the following ones:

At Combray ... my bedroom became the fixed point on which my melancholy and anxious thoughts were centred. ... But my sorrows were only increased thereby.¹³

The anaesthetic effect of habit being destroyed, I would begin to think – and to feel – such melancholy things.¹⁴

... this room, from which, in the daytime, I could see as far as the keep of Roussainville-le-Pin, was for a long time my place of refuge, doubtless because it was the only room whose door I was allowed to lock, whenever my occupation was such as required an inviolable solitude: reading or day-dreaming, tears or sensual pleasure.¹⁵

Walter Benjamin in his essay “The Image of Proust” mentioned that Proust was created in extremely unhealthy conditions like “an unusual malady” and an “abnormal disposition.”¹⁶ This situation is reinforced by Proust’s quote of his grandmother Bathilde:

... especially this little man, who needs all the strength and will-power that he can get.¹⁷

The “abnormal disposition” and the lack of “strength and will-power” complement the idea that Proust lived the saturnine experience. We must not forget that the melancholic phenomenon can present either soul or organic manifestations:

¹² I. Ferber, “Melancholy Philosophy: Freud and Benjamin,” *E-rea* (4.1/2006), <http://journals.openedition.org/erea/413> [access: 01.03.2019], paragraph 4, note 2.

¹³ M. Proust, op. cit., pp. 9–10.

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 11.

¹⁵ Ibidem, p. 14.

¹⁶ W. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. H. Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), p. 201.

¹⁷ M. Proust, op. cit., p. 12.

... they incline towards melancholic diseases, different people in different parts of the body; with some the symptoms are epileptic, with others apoplectic, others again are given to deep despondency or to fear, others are over-confident, as was the case with Archelaus, king of Macedonia.¹⁸

Marcel Proust died of the same inexperience which permitted him to write his works. He died of ignorance of the world and because he did not know how to change the conditions of his life which had begun to crush him. He died because he did not know how to make a fire or open a window.¹⁹

And, to be sure, of his psychogenic asthma.²⁰

If we establish a dual relationship between the referred misadjustment (fragility and discouragement) and the exceptionality (genius) that makes his work unique, we find again elements that allow us to connect him to melancholy. As already mentioned, melancholy has an ambiguous nature, like a double-edged sword so, if we find in Proust a painful experience of suffering with existence and of alienation from the world, on the other hand, we find also in him a particular fertility that brought him the poetic creation.

In this work, Proust did not write a temporal narrative, but rather the articulation of real time with the past, awakened from the unconscious through intuitions. Let us see how he described the moment when a softened piece of madeleine came into contact with his palate and made him to be taken by an unexpected joy that rescued him, as if by magic, from the lethargy that accompanied him and overcome all his sorrows:

No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shiver ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory – this new sensation having had the effect, which love has, of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it *was* me. I had ceased now to feel mediocre, contingent, mortal.²¹

The description of this sensation is one of the passages in the chapter that gives us the visualization of his constant search for something able of quieting his disquiet to the point of making him stop “feeling mortal.” The joy that invaded him was so powerful that we can imagine that for an instant Proust felt in Paradise, that he was a Chronos in the Golden Age. It was the search for these perceptions that drove him, and it was his ability to capture emotions in objects, with which he came across one day, that Benjamin called the “experience of the aura”²² and that enabled him to endlessly repeat the illusory state of happiness that sounds as a Proust’s shout. Quoting Benjamin, it is the “elegiac idea of happiness.”²³ Proust, dominated by the obsessive longing for happiness, resorted exhaustively to remembrance in order to mitigate the sadness and grief, caused by the arduous understanding of an end feeling which regulated his inner life. He proceeded thus a frenetic search for images that he held in

¹⁸ Aristotle, op. cit., p. 165.

¹⁹ W. Benjamin, *Illuminations...*, op. cit. p. 213.

²⁰ Ibidem.

²¹ M. Proust, op. cit., pp. 60–61.

²² W. Benjamin, *Illuminations...*, op. cit., p. 188.

²³ Ibidem, p. 204.

his heart and that were images he kept from lost times. This search denotes his inability to accept and to recognize their absence and to be conformed with his loss and bears witness to his melancholic mood. It is as if Proust, by interweaving his time with the memories that come to him through his involuntary memory, was looking for an antidote to ageing.

Following this madeleine's experience, he made several efforts repeating the act to make that sensation reappear attempting to understand its cause:

I want to try to make it reappear. I retrace my thoughts to the moment at which I drank the first spoonful of tea. I rediscover the same state, illuminated by no fresh light. I ask my mind to make one further effort, to bring back once more the fleeting sensation.²⁴

But these efforts were done under the domain of intelligence and the sensation did not reappear. Only after disconnecting from this conscious struggle for understanding it and after returning to his daily restlessness, does his unconscious, suddenly, brought it again to his memory and he realized that the taste was that of the little piece of madeleine which his aunt used on Sunday mornings at Combray to give him dipping it first in her own cup of tea or tisane.

In this kind of experiences, of being surprised by unexpected sensations, associated with brief moments from the present that stimulate involuntary memory which immediately responds triggering intuitions, one can be taken, in a pleasant way, to situations lived in distant times. The feeling of loss can then be deceived momentarily, while we are led, as if in delirium, to the past. Every instant that arises from the unconscious as a memory is an ended moment, so its invocation is an attempt to achieve a mourning not fully realized and even that may never be completed. According to the following Benjamin's description the brief joy that the memory brings, masks the suffering caused by deprivation:

Mourning is the state of mind in which feeling revives the empty world in the form of a mask, and derives an enigmatic satisfaction in contemplating it.²⁵

The opposite can also happen in the case the conscience deceives us masking the loss putting in its place an apparent "happiness." That allows us to endure the loss by deluding us in such a way that we can live this way for a long period of time and if the chance is not given, may even last a lifetime. When chance happens, the apparent joy, the "keep smiling" imposed by the conscience, is drastically disturbed by the unconscious, bringing us the memory of the lost object and making us revive the perception of impossibility. It is how we relate to these sensations that we find our response to the events that were the sources of our sorrows and of our perennial pains. It is in this relationship that we find our greater or lesser degree of melancholy.

Proust's melancholic disposition, connected to the lost object, expands the feeling of impossibility with which he cannot live. In his next words, the projection of this incapacity is evident in the word "never":

²⁴ M. Proust, op. cit., pp. 61–62.

²⁵ W. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama...*, op. cit., p. 139.

Never again will such moments be possible for me. But of late I have been increasingly able to catch, if I listen attentively, the sound of the sobs which I had the strength to control in my father's presence, and which broke out only when I found myself alone with Mamma. In reality their echo has never ceased.²⁶

The permanent feeling of impossibility, to satisfy his desire to go back in time, was the generator of the anguish and melancholic sorrow that accompanied him since ever. The aforementioned projection that the word "never" suggests, together with the final part of the last sentence of the quote, may induce us to read a new projection, as if the words "never ceased" indicate "they will never cease" making room for melancholic hopelessness and suggesting, once again, a time articulation. This kind of allusions to the infeasibility of a return are several throughout the entire chapter and show Proust's obsession with images from the past:

I knew that such a night could not be repeated Tomorrow night my anguish would return and Mamma would not stay by my side.²⁷

According to Benjamin:

The eternity which Proust opens to view is convoluted time, not boundless time.²⁸

REMEMBRANCE AND FORGETFULNESS

During the night, as in a daydream, just as the spider skillfully builds its web, Proust, no less skillfully, wove a web of memories from his past life that flooded him involuntarily. These memories acted as his weapon in the fight against the eternal sorrow and malaise that dominated his existence. On the one hand, there was the plot of memories of what was unconsciously desired and that filled him with a certain happiness and on the other hand, there was the undoing of the network brought by the daybreak that faded the memories awakening again the discouragement, the suffering, and the dismay. As Benjamin questioned, would not Proust be closer to forgetfulness than to reminiscence, opposite to Penelope?

For here the day unravels what the night was woven.²⁹

Through everyday life and conscious remembrance, we are led to dissipate the past realities that are turned into weak vestiges of what has been experienced leading us to oblivion. According to Freud's student Theodor Reik, remembrance (*Gedächtnis*) is as Proust's involuntary memory and keeps the memories, while memory (*Erinnerung*), the voluntary memory in Proust, is destructive. This thought is based on Freud's hypotheses:

... becoming conscious and leaving behind a memory-trace are processes incompatible with each other within one and the same system.³⁰

On the basis of impressions derived from our psycho-analytic experience, we assume that all excitatory processes that occur in the other systems leave permanent

²⁶ M. Proust, op. cit., p. 49.

²⁷ M. Proust, op. cit., p. 58.

²⁸ Benjamin, *Illuminations...*, op. cit., p. 211.

²⁹ Ibidem, p. 202.

³⁰ S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. J. Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1990), p. 19.

traces behind in them which form the foundation of memory. Such memory-traces, then, have nothing to do with the fact of becoming conscious; indeed they are often most powerful and most enduring when the process which left them behind was one which never entered consciousness.³¹

That is also consistent with Proust's idea that only what does not have the character of "isolated experience" (*Erlebnis*) but of "experience" (*Erfahrung*) can be a component of involuntary memory. For Freud, the conscience serves also as protection against stimuli in the reception of shocks assimilating them as "isolated experiences" and making them sterile for creative exercise. The shock only becomes part of the "experience" from the moment it enters the domain of the unconscious as it is the case of the fright, then becoming null the resistance to it. So, in his psychoanalytic theory, Freud launches outside the conscious domain attempting to get to the heart of the traumatic shock.

Proust was an absolute reader of Baudelaire's *The Flowers of Evil*, having incorporated various aspects of the experience contained in this work into his own experience. According to Benjamin, Baudelaire included the duel in his poetry as an image of shock experience, this acting as his shout.³² In *The Flowers of Evil*, fencing was Baudelaire's image with which he parried the blows (shocks):

I practise my quaint swordsmanship alone,
Stumbling on words as over paving stones,
Sniffing in corners all the risks of rhyme,
To find a verse I'd dreamt of a long time.³³

It was through the aforementioned weaving of memories that Proust's pen trimmed them, constituting this weave his own creative process. The combat between the present and the past that unfolded between the wakefulness state and the moments between sleep and awakening or between falling asleep and sleep was Proust's "fencing":

When a man is asleep, he has in a circle round him the chain of the hours, the sequence of the years, the order of the heavenly bodies. Instinctively he consults them when he awakes, and in an instant reads off his own position on the earth's surface and the time that has elapsed during his slumbers; but this ordered procession is apt to grow confused, and to break its ranks.³⁴

To the already referred idea that reflection offers us a shock absorber, we can associate the idea that intention mitigates sadness and mourning, as mentioned by Ferber³⁵ through the following Benjamin's quote about Goethe's considerations on intention and its relation to sadness:

... a sadness that would be boundless, were it not for the presence of that intentionality which Goethe deems an essential component of every work of art, and which manifests itself with an assertiveness that fends off mourning. A mourning-game [*Trauer-Spiel*], in short.³⁶

³¹ Ibidem, pp. 18–19.

³² W. Benjamin, *Illuminations...*, op. cit., p. 164.

³³ C. Baudelaire, *The Flowers of Evil*, trans. J. McGowan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 169.

³⁴ M. Proust, op. cit., pp. 3–4.

³⁵ I. Ferber, op. cit., paragraph 8.

³⁶ W. Benjamin, *Selected Writings, 1: 1913–1926*, eds. M. Bullock, M.W. Jennings (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Belknap Press, 2002), p. 373.

In Proust, shock can be found when he aestheticizes his mother's absence through her presence which foreshadows it:

But this good night lasted for so short a time, she went down again so soon, that the moment in which I heard her climb the stairs, and then caught the sound of her garden dress of blue muslin, from which hung little tassels of plaited straw, rustling along the double-doored corridor, was for me a moment of the utmost pain; for it heralded the moment which was to follow it, when she would have left me and gone downstairs again.³⁷

The shock lies in the painful anticipation of the fatality that will follow. It is as if it multiplies the nostalgia for what will happen. The ecstasy of the moment is contained in the last sentence of the quote and is reinforced by the following sentence in which Proust shows the desire to delay the inevitable evil:

I reached the point of hoping that this good night which I loved so much would come as late as possible.³⁸

Proust's premature nostalgia, due to being emotionally invaded by shock of absence feeling, related with the presence that has not yet occurred, resembles to the nostalgic feeling contained in the melancholic disposition which the Portuguese poet Fernando Pessoa, through his heteronym Bernardo Soares, has rightly revealed in *The Book of Disquiet*:

Ah, there is no more painful longing than the longing for things that never were!³⁹

This is the way the melancholic lives longing, making present the absence of what he most desires and which for him, being unattainable, will definitely be absent, although he embraces its reach as his task. Proust had an urgent need to immortalize the longing with which he permanently lived, and he did it through writing.

Bergson's idea "the actualization of the *Durée*" mentioned by Benjamin⁴⁰ was the instrument to which Proust resorted in his obsessive way of relating to time. Proust's aim was to recover the duration of time and it is mostly, through the use of sensory impressions that the images reach him through "correspondences," partly assimilated from the aforementioned readings of *The Flowers of Evil*. Time was retained in flavours, aromas, and touches and it was through synesthesias that the experience took place. Let us see how the scent transcribed in the following lines retained his soul pains giving them primacy and how Proust sustained the idea that there was no possibility of the intelligence be able to counteract it:

That hateful staircase, up which I always went so sadly, gave out a smell of varnish which had, as it were, absorbed and crystallized the special quality of sorrow that I felt each evening, and made it perhaps even crueller to my sensibility because, when it assumed this olfactory guise, my intellect was powerless to resist it.⁴¹

Proust exercised the remembrance throughout his life, through the encounter with images retained in his unconscious that appeared to him in a casual way, not being subordi-

³⁷ M. Proust, op. cit., p.15.

³⁸ Ibidem.

³⁹ F. Pessoa, *The Book of Disquiet*, trans. M.J. Costa (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 2017), p. 83.

⁴⁰ W. Benjamin, *Illuminations...*, op. cit., p. 180.

⁴¹ M. Proust, op. cit., p. 36.

nated to the “isolated experience.” In his attempts to recall the past voluntarily, Proust made it very clear that any effort in this direction was fruitless. Results would only be achieved in the eventuality of an encounter with some material object to bring the necessary sensation for that purpose:

And so it is with our own past. It is a labour in vain to attempt to recapture it: all the efforts of our intellect must prove futile. The past is hidden somewhere outside the realm, beyond the reach of intellect, in some material object (in the sensation which that material object will give us) of which we have no inkling. And it depends on chance whether or not we come upon this object before we ourselves must die.⁴²

While in the case of voluntary memory, remembrance is under the domain of the intelligible depending on our conscience, in the case of involuntary memory, it is the remembrance itself that dictates the rules and not us being, in that case, under the umbrella of the sensitive world.

FREUD VERSUS BENJAMIN AND THE PHENOMENON OF MELANCHOLY

We have been referring to melancholy as a phenomenon in relation to which there is a natural predisposition of certain subjects, or even of all subjects, although with a degree variation from some to others approaching to Aristotle’s view exposed in *Problem XXX*.⁴³ Let us now make an approach from Freud’s perspective.

Diverging from Benjamin’s vision about melancholy, Freud made a distinction between melancholy and mourning. In both cases we face a reaction regarding loss, although Freud treats melancholy as a pathology as he explains in his essay “Mourning and Melancholia.” In the inability to accept the loss of the loved object or the loss of the abstraction that filled its place, melancholy and mourning go hand in hand. However, they diverge in how the loss is recognized and assimilated. According to Freud, in melancholy, the subject loses self-regard and experiences a feeling of immense guilt that takes him to permanent dysphoria not being a temporary state as in the case of mourning. While in mourning the loss is located in the *Cs.* (conscious) domain, with a clear notion of the lost object, in the case of melancholy, the loss is completely removed from consciousness becoming part of the *Ucs.* (unconscious) acquiring a more chimeric nature. In this case, the object is, most of the time, undefined and inexplicable, even for the melancholic himself/herself. When part of the work of mourning (*Trauerarbeit*), over the course of a slow and progressive process, the ego manages to free the libido of the loved object until the subject feels free to love another object. In the melancholic, the libidinal energy is moved from the loved object to the ego, thus keeping the love for the beloved object alive, not allowing its extinction, as it is referred by Freud in the following sentence:

So by taking flight into the ego love escapes extinction.⁴⁴

Thus, it can be explained that the profound discouragement, the lack of interest in

⁴² Ibidem, p. 60.

⁴³ Aristotle, op. cit., pp. 154–181.

⁴⁴ S. Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia,” in: *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud: 1914–1916*, trans. J. Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1957), p. 257.

the world, the inability to love and the inertia, when part of the work of mourning, end up disappearing. On the contrary, in the case of melancholy, one come across a “destructive loyalty”⁴⁵ from the subject in relation to the lost object being it internalized into his/her ego⁴⁶ not allowing him/her to be able to distinguish between the lost object in his/her ego and the ego itself. The ego identifies itself with the lost object.

In mourning it is the world which has become poor and empty; in melancholia it is the ego itself.⁴⁷

This situation is, however, ambiguous, since it is through the destruction of the loved object that the melancholic will ensure its presence creating for this purpose, images, illusions, dreams, and ghosts of the loved object, seeking in them his/her way of relating to it and thus maintaining a fidelity to it. Philosophy diverges from Freudian perspective of considering the melancholic disposition as a disease. To philosophy, the capacity of the melancholic to assimilate the loved object through the creation of diverse images of it is a way to the artistic creation. As in the case of Chronos, it is the destruction that guarantees the creation. In this way, the melancholic not only ensures the survival of the loved object, but also guarantees its own survival.

Returning to the way how the conscious and the unconscious behave concerning the stimuli, we can find in Proust’s words something that fits into the Freudian melancholic framework, since they denote the existence of an involuntary evil installed in his unconscious and over which he had no power of action:

... my unhappiness was regarded no longer as a punishable offence but as an involuntary ailment which had been officially recognized, a nervous condition for which I was in no way responsible.⁴⁸

To calm his uneasy spirit, Proust obstinately searched for the images that his unconscious stored resembling that, in Freudian context, to a kind of self-therapy, to a kind of self-psychoanalysis with which he tried to fight against the nostalgia in which he was submerged. However, outside of this context, what this state brought him was creation.

Walter Benjamin did not make a distinction between mourning and melancholy. According to Ferber, Benjamin sometimes used the terms “mourning” and “melancholy” without distinguishing them⁴⁹ ending up referring to something that lies between both Freudian distinctions with “loss” as the common denominator. In Benjamin’s book *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, he sustained the idea that loss is the condition for the possibility of tragedy and that mourning game (*Trauerspiel*) is contained in the very essence of mourning and melancholy. For him, mourning game is the result of modernity. With Lutheranism and the Protestant Reformation, salvation through “good works” loses relevance in relation to salvation through faith⁵⁰ and without “good works” any chance of redemption is excluded. Life becomes then meaningless and modern man remains immersed in an endless mourning.

The melancholic falls into a state of deep meditation plunging into the bodies of the

⁴⁵ I. Ferber, op. cit., paragraph 11.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, paragraph 1.

⁴⁷ S. Freud, “Mourning and Melancholia” ..., op. cit, p. 246.

⁴⁸ M. Proust, op. cit., p. 51.

⁴⁹ I. Ferber, op. cit., paragraph 3.

⁵⁰ W. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*..., op. cit., p. 138

objects in order to save them⁵¹ as foreshadowed in Albert Dürer's engraving *Melencolia I* from 1514. For Benjamin, the work of mourning does not promote the object's absence to reach its extinction as proposed by Freud, but it promotes its actualization by placing it only in a resting state. In this context, the time in mourning game is a non-diegetic time coming as a single instant. Time is spatialized becoming non-teleological.

In Proust's work, we witness a fidelity to the ruins of his lost object being the loss at the heart of his mourning. It was not his intent to build a narrative offering us neither figurative literature nor abstract literature. Proust, through articulated temporality, made his past continuously present. He saved himself from nostalgia by saving his beloved object.

CONCLUSION

In Search of Lost Time is a figural work whose pages are full of sensations obtained with the use of involuntary memory and reveal a plot of memories as Proust recorded them and not how he lived them.⁵² This is how he tirelessly combated his melancholic hopelessness by making the sensation of the present and the sensation of the past rhythmically embrace each other, making the image (figure) appear which, if it was not enough to satisfy his hunger for happiness, was at least enough to ensure his survival.

Melancholy made Proust an eternal Bellerophon, and his writing was like the wandering of the mythological hero of *The Iliad*:

But then Bellerophon angered all the Gods.
He wandered out alone on the Aleian plain –
depressed in spirit, roaming there and shunning all.⁵³

Not belonging to the world of the gods (past), he also did not adjust to the earthly world (present) and so he lived in permanent solitude. His obsession was so intense that, in the last years of his life, so as not to let any memory escape, he reserved the night for the writing of the sensations that he sought more and more frantically and obstinately.⁵⁴ Let us end with two quotes from George Girard's interview with Proust's editor Gallimard, published in *Bulletin de la Maison du Livre* and found in a note by the translator of Portuguese edition of Benjamin's work, João Barrento. They attest to Proust's endless search:

Proust's proofs? But he never corrected them! Proust never amended a typographical error. For him, the proofs served not to correct the text, but to add text. As long as there were proofs, he added new sentences.⁵⁵

He once told me that, if it was possible, he would have liked to see his entire work published in a single volume in two columns and without a single paragraph.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Ibidem, p. 157.

⁵² W. Benjamin, *Illuminations...*, op. cit., p. 202.

⁵³ Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. I. Johnston (Virginia: Richer Resources Publications, 2007), p. 130.

⁵⁴ W. Benjamin, *Illuminations...*, op. cit., p. 202.

⁵⁵ W. Benjamin, *Ensaio sobre Literatura*, trans. J. Barrento (Porto: Porto Editora, 2016), p. 313. [My translation.]

⁵⁶ Ibidem, p. 314. [My translation.]

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SUMMARY

The purpose of this article is to show how Marcel Proust faces temporality and how we can establish a parallel between his moods and the melancholic state of mind. A brief reflection is made on our relationship with time and about melancholy as consequence of our awareness of the passage of time. Focusing on the study of the first chapter of *Swann's Way*, the first volume of Proust's work *In Search of Lost Time*, it is presented as part of Proust's melancholic experience, the fact that he articulated different times with the recourse of involuntary memory, one of the main means used by him in the writing of this work. The question of intuitions as thrusters of this same involuntary memory is addressed and as Proust, neither offering us a figurative literature, nor an abstract literature, used this formula in the struggle against his melancholic hopelessness. It is specified how Proust made the image (figure) to appear alternating the sensation of present with the sensation of past. Some considerations are made about mourning from two different standpoints, firstly from Walter Benjamin's point of view and his philosophical perspective on the phenomenon of melancholy, then from the approach of Sigmund Freud, to whom melancholy is a pathology within the scope of psychiatry, opposed to mourning. The "loss" prevails throughout this reflection as a condition for the melancholic disposition.

KEYWORDS

melancholy, time, unconscious, involuntary memory, loss, mourning