

‘Sand’s Way’: The Voices of George Sand’s *François the Waif* in Marcel Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past*.

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Proust’s critics have acknowledged that the volumes of *A la Recherche du temps perdu* (*Remembrance of Things Past*) are about the narrator finding his voice as a writer and taking the conscious decision to investigate his own past in order to draw general laws about life, love and art (Descombes 1987; Fraisse 1992; Marchaisse 2009). His book is a construction oriented toward the demonstration of a truth—his calling as a writer—that can be uttered only at the end. We also know that the final episode that makes the truth burst forth, during the *matinée* at the house of the Prince de Guermantes, was one of the first written by Proust. *Time Regained* comes to this renewed faith in literature and in his own talents only after a very long detour.

My article wants to revisit two appearances of George Sand’s *François le Champi*/*François the Waif* at both ends of *A la Recherche du temps perdu* and look at the origins of Proust’s calling. His early involvement with literature and the retelling at the end of the novel of the moment when the narrator, now an old man, discovers the book in the Guermantes’s library will be the focus of this essay. More specifically, I would like to interrogate the place of Sand’s novel within Proust’s opus and the part it plays in the definition of literary vocation for Proust. The two encounters with the novel stand at the two poles of the narrator’s life: the book first appears in the ‘Combray’

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section in *Swann's Way* and it reappears at the moment of apparent illumination regarding his future as a writer in *Time Regained*, when he finds renewed faith in literature and in his own literary talents. The narrator connects intimately with the voices at play in Sand's novel, which is delivered to him through the voice of his mother. The discovery, incarnation and integration of voices will ultimately constitute a fertile ground on which the narrator will build his own creation. They will also form part of a larger search for the personal within the collective.

The narrator first hears the story of *François le Champi* during the famous 'good-night kiss scene.' The narrator, then about 10 years old, wants a good-night kiss from his mother and becomes so agitated that she decides to spend the night with him to calm him down, and reads him a story. The protagonist, despite having committed 'une faute telle que je m'attendais à être obligé de quitter la maison'¹ (Proust 1954: I, 49), is paradoxically awarded with possession of his mother for one night. The book she reads tells a simple story, the awakening of love between the young miller's wife Madeleine Blanchet and her adoptive son, François, who was abandoned in the fields (hence his name Champi, literally 'field-boy') and whom she has brought up as her son.

One can see the parallel between the intense and passionate love felt by the narrator for his mother and the (incestuous) love between the characters in the story. Several critics, from Didier (1981) to Kristeva (1994), have commented on the symbolic connexions between the two love stories, but few have discussed the oral tradition at play in similar ways in both novels. *François le Champi* is a story taken from the oral tradition of Berry, Sand's native region. Both stories involve a storyteller and an audience. In the context of literary vocation, this seems important. Vocation (*vocare*: the act of calling) involves a voice (from above) that ultimately will give the order to write, when the narrator is ready to hear 'the calling.'

George Sand wrote several rural novels drawing from her childhood experiences of the Berry. The story of *François le Champi*, written in 1850, is part of a series of three stories, compiled under the title of *Veillées du chanvreur*.² The story is told by two alternating voices. One is feminine, the old woman/grand-mother/parish priest's servant

¹ 'a sin so deadly that I expected to be banished from the household' (Proust 2003: 40–41).

² *The Hemp-twiner's Tales* is one of Sand's three pastoral novels, the other two being *La Mare au diable* (The Devil's Pool) and *La petite Fadette* (Fadette), all published between 1847 and 1848. What unites these three texts is the semi-mythical character of the hemp twiner telling his stories at night.

whose function is to tell the story of the childhood and adolescence of François. The other is masculine, the hemp-twiner who narrates the actual love story between the two protagonists. These two voices are depicted as inspired and gifted: they know how to convey a story and to bring it to life. One can also note that the masculine voice will be more daring in that it will tell the part of the story which is, after all, in the traditional 19th-century rural society of Berry, an immoral and incestuous tale, that of a mother who ends up marrying her adoptive son.

As is often the case, the story is told during a *veillée*, at night. The *veillée* is a genre in itself: it is a signal to sit comfortably and pay attention to a real-life narrator. The audience is composed of young people, young girls in particular, which means that some precautions in the telling of the story are necessary: 'je sais que je parle devant des jeunesses, et je ne dirai parole de trop'³ (Sand 1960: 279). As is often the case with the oral tradition, there are no definite or 'true' versions of the story: variations are included in the material and the listeners shape the emerging story for themselves. By nature, oral tales are 'promiscuous and omnivorous ... Motifs and plotlines are nomadic' says Marina Warner (1994: xvii); 'L'écriture fait du conte un texte définitif alors que raconté oralement, il n'est jamais le même puisqu'il ne peut être mémorisé mot à mot,'⁴ comments Belmont (Belmont 2005: 24). Thus George Sand is only faithful to the story to the extent that she is faithful to its fundamental oral mode of expression, to the regional Berrichon expressions and to the beliefs and representations of a traditional rural world. The characters, for example, are not talkative and are often ignorant of the origin of their feelings. Love between the two characters, François and Madeleine, is not declared openly but evolves secretly and silently under the surface, goes through many twists and turns until an inner voice speaks the truth of the revelation.

Et Madeleine ... comprit mieux que par des paroles que ce n'était plus son enfant le champi, mais son amoureux François qui se promenait à son côté. Et quand ils eurent marché un peu de temps sans se parler, mais en se tenant par le bras, aussi serrés que la vigne à la vigne, François lui dit :

- Allons à la fontaine, peut-être y trouverai-je ma langue. (Sand 1960: 402)⁵

³ 'I know that I am speaking before young people, and I shall not say a word too much' (Sand 1930: 187).

⁴ 'Writing makes a story a definitive text though told orally, it is never the same because it cannot be memorised word for word.' All translations are my own with the exception of published translations of Proust's and Sand's works.

⁵ 'she understood, better than if he had spoken, that it was no longer her child, the waif, but her lover François, that walked by her side. And after they had gone a little distance, silent, but linked arm in arm, as vine is interlaced with vine, François said: "Let's go to the fountain, perhaps I may find my tongue there"' (Sand 1930: 280).

Silence and pauses seem to be called upon so that feelings can blossom and grow. This evokes a rural world in which, as it is with the land, it is better to let things grow naturally, with as little human intervention as possible: 'On dirait qu'à l'approche du lourd sommeil de l'hiver chaque être et chaque chose s'arrangent furtivement pour jouir d'un reste de vie et d'animation avant l'engourdissement fatal de la gelée ...'⁶ (Sand 1960: 204). This laconicism is included in the rhythm of the story itself as Sand wants to emphasise the instinctive poetry of the rural region and its people: 'Les chansons, les récits, les contes rustiques, peignent en peu de mots ce que notre littérature ne sait qu'amplifier et déguiser'⁷ (Sand 1960: 211). Sand's ultimate aim is to give a voice, through her stories, to this provincial world in which no one is tormented by the desire to give an account of their inner life to others, in which feelings do not emerge fully but remain on the verge of consciousness and are stronger for it.

The narration itself is highly staged: it is a recounted story and the objections from the storytellers themselves and/or the author regularly intrude upon the narration, 'providing a double thickness of heteroglossic context' (Gray-McDonald 1992: 342). Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia challenges the idea of a fixed monolingual discourse in a text and encourages the recognition of 'a diversity of social speech types ... and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organised' (Bakhtin 1981: 262). In the novel's preface (in the form of a dialogue between two artists), Sand mentions that she is aiming at hybridity: a story told by and for simple people, using dialect and peasant idiom, but connecting with more educated/Parisian readers: 'raconte-moi l'histoire du Champi ... mais raconte-la moi comme si tu avais à ta droite un Parisien parlant la langue moderne, et à ta gauche un paysan devant lequel tu ne voudrais pas dire une phrase, un mot où il ne pourrait pas pénétrer' (Sand 1960: 217).⁸ In a sense, the voices of the hemp-twiner and the priest's servant, one 'paysan inculte, mais heureusement doué et fort éloquent à sa manière,' the other 'paysanne un peu cultivée'⁹ (Sand 1960: 217) provide a successful compromise between familiarity and intelligibility.

⁶ 'At the approach of the long winter sleep, it seems as if every creature and thing stealthily agreed to enjoy what is left of life and animation before the deadly torpor of the frost' (Sand 1930: 131).

⁷ 'Songs, ballads and rustic tales say in a few words what our literature can only amplify and disguise' (Sand 1930: 135–136).

⁸ 'Come, begin, tell me the story of the 'Waif,' but not in the way you and I heard it last night ... Tell it to me as if you had on your right hand a Parisian speaking the modern tongue, and on your left a peasant before whom you were unwilling to utter a word or phrase which he could not understand' (Sand 1930: 139–140).

⁹ 'he was uneducated, but happily gifted by nature and endowed with a certain rude eloquence,' 'she was a peasant-woman of some slight education' (Sand 1930: 139).

Nous avons assisté hier à une veillée rustique à la ferme. Le chanvreur a conté des histoires jusqu'à deux heures du matin. La servante du curé l'aidait ou le reprenait ; c'était une paysanne un peu cultivée ; lui, un paysan inculte, mais heureusement doué et fort éloquent à sa manière. A eux deux, ils nous ont raconté une histoire vraie, assez longue, et qui avait l'air d'un roman intime. L'as-tu retenue ?

- Parfaitement, et je pourrais la redire mot à mot dans leur langage. (Sand 1960: 216–217)¹⁰

This juxtaposition expresses a conception of art at the opposite pole from the perfection of the artwork: it is an attempt to render authenticity (with an accent on 'attempt'). Sand's decision to find a new language and emphasise orality, spontaneity and the interaction that comes from communal storytelling is a risky one but she fully accepts and understands the possibility of trial and error. To write oral tales during the mid-nineteenth century was to challenge authority and the unquestionable cultural hegemony of Parisian literary life with a populist form, to promote the values of the French regions, and to reject the conventional generic structure of the novel. The so-called 'province' was considered a foreign land by the Parisians, and the different provinces were perceived as 'petites républiques, dont chacune a ses lois, ses usages, ses jargons, ses Héros, ses opinions politiques' (Janin 2003: 15). Behind this challenge lies a struggle for cultural dominance, expressed by a debate about what authentic expression is; whether it is written or oral, whether it comes from the provinces or from Paris.

The story thus appears at the frontier of two worlds (regional/Parisian), two representations (nature/culture), two languages (dialect/French), two voices (feminine/masculine), two generations (young/old), two ways of expressing emotions (by telling/by silence), two ways of telling a story (orally/in writing) and, finally, two approaches (instinctive, as produced by the land/nature itself, and intellectual, as retold by an artist). Beyond this bipolar artistic model, one should not overlook the polyphonic nature of the story. The novel is staging a process of narration as collective, communal, heteroglossic, in an attempt to find one's voice through the childhood land and the original patois.

¹⁰ 'we were present last evening at a rustic gathering at the farm, and the hemp-dresser told a story until two o'clock in the morning. The priest's servant helped him with his tale, and resumed it when he stopped; she was a peasant-woman of some slight education; he was uneducated, but happily gifted by nature and endowed with a certain rude eloquence. Between them they related a true story, which was rather long, and like a simple kind of novel. Can you remember it?—Perfectly, and I could repeat it word for word in their language' (Sand 1930: 139).

The story is, above all, a reflection on voice as theme and enunciation, mixing old songs, different accents, inner voices (the voice of God, of the fairies¹¹ and the supernatural are an integral part of the story, for instance François's inner voice tells him whom to court and love). There are also the voice of the manual labourer (the hemp-twiner is working on the hemp while he is telling the story) and the voice of the artist trying to recapture all these voices. We should add here the presence of another voice: that of Sand the mother, who, before or during the writing of her stories, tested them on her own children and grandchildren, before bedtime.¹² So the story retains something of its viva voce origins. Anne Berger rightly points out that the *Contes champêtres* inscribe or represent orality in the written text (Berger 1987).

Finding one's voice, a voice that would render all voices in their authenticity, is thus at the centre of the story of *François le Champi*. A crucial element for Sand is to find the right balance between emotions and the intellect, to make these voices agree and negotiate, to diffuse tensions and potential conflict in order to create harmony between the voices; each voice pulling gently in its direction so that none is neglected but none is dominant. It is a celebration of the oral in the literary, a celebration of freedom, authenticity and lack of constraint. It is, in the words of Tim Farrant: 'word-spinning, freewheeling, vibrant' (Farrant 2010: 87).

The result is a story that is pure telling without the showing, in which many voices can cohabit so harmoniously that no one, young or old, conservative or educated, can ultimately be shocked by what the story is telling. The artful way in which Sand disguises the crux of the matter means that someone like Marcel's mother, to go back to *Remembrance*, will read this story to her young son, at a time when he is claiming her as his possession. It is indeed ironic that Sand's style, which is most revered by Marcel's mother and grandmother, can allow this mythic story of forbidden love, under the guise of a bucolic and provincial world, to be read to a child who is obsessed by the love of his mother. But I deliberately want to avoid the oedipal implications of the

¹¹ One can note that the etymology of 'fée' comes from 'fatum' (destiny) and the verb 'fari' (to speak). Words and destiny are intertwined to describe what fairies represent in fairy-tales (a form of oracle).

¹² Implying a constant toing-and-froing between oral and written versions within a family circle. Sand also assimilates, in her work and in her life, the act of caring for a child with writing (at night). The 'veillée' is also singular: it is when she chose to write, while looking after her sleeping children. Just like the Proustian narrator's mother, she is actively creating (performing a story) while looking after a child. Both missions appear equally important.

nocturnal bedroom scene between mother and son and go back to the voice, and, ultimately, vocation.

Marcel's mother reads the story to him at night (the night session recalls the 'veillée'/fireside story in the farm or a barn of the original story), providing another voice and another layer in the heteroglossia, cunningly coupling the masculine and the feminine (the young Marcel believes that Sand is a masculine author because of her masculine pen name), taking on multiple roles, playing each character. The book also comes to him with a certain prestige attached to it, having been carefully selected by his grandmother for his birthday, for its moral quality and impeccable style. Like the oral stories told communally, it is also aimed at a young audience.

Orality is not reduced to vocal action. According to Paul Zumthor (1983), it integrates facial and body gestures. By staging a performance, the mother brings the voices to life and participates actively in the discovery of his literary vocation: the narrator mentions that the 'phrases ... semblaient écrites pour sa voix' (Proust 1954: I, 55).¹³ The voice of the mother unites with Sand's story and mission, just as if she had found instinctively, underneath the surface, what binds the text together: Sand's vision and feelings, her goodness,¹⁴ her doctrines of love, progress and reconciliation, and her connection to the rural world, trying to embrace a whole community: 'c'est la continuité de cette voix des grands-mères que nous fait entendre George Sand, cette permanence de la tradition orale grâce aux femmes. Par cette continuité peuvent se faire entendre des voix beaucoup plus anciennes' (Didier 1990: 296).¹⁵ This is a scene of transmission of knowledge through the mother's tongue.

Not only does Marcel's mother convey the multiplicity and hybridity that so characterise the book (writing, reading, translating at the same time), she also changes the original text. Faithful, in that respect, to the idea of oral variations, she does not read love scenes, deemed too frank for a young reader, thus adding another layer of silence to the original text.¹⁶ By slightly altering the text, she reinforces the mysterious power of

¹³ 'sentences ... seemed written for her voice' (Proust 2003: 45).

¹⁴ The goodness and generosity of the mother and grandmother of Marcel are often commented upon in Proust's novel.

¹⁵ 'it is the continuity of the voices of the grandmothers that George Sand lets us hear, the permanence of the oral tradition thanks to women. Through this continuity, ancient voices can be heard.'

¹⁶ In a similar way, Madeleine will bond with François when she reads him Biblical stories (she will also rearrange some passages of the Gospels and the lives of the saints).

the novel: the incomprehensibility of the patois words, the incoherences due to the omissions or the daydreamings of the boy cultivate the belief of the young narrator that the book is unique and that the story, despite or because of its strangeness, is written solely for him: 'c'est cet enfant que le livre avait appelé tout de suite, ne voulant être regardé que par ses yeux, aimé que par son cœur, et ne parler qu'à lui'¹⁷ (Proust 1954: VIII, 243–244). It clearly exerts a strong magnetic or quasi-mystical pull on the boy.

It is then no accident that all these elements (an intimate audience of one, a voice deployed in a circumscribed space, a unique story recounted in real time), converge toward the child, here and now, to create a circular and sacred space, a stage of a sort, cut from the continuum of social and family life, related to the sacral, so that a kind of prophecy can take place. Reading out loud 'définit ainsi un espace d'intimité non seulement physique, mais aussi spirituel, qui favorise le rapprochement'¹⁸ (Ender 2002: 85) between mother and child, joining sacred space and earthly room.

The fact that the story is told by someone invested with special powers/authority—one must note here the force of breath, prevalent in the doctrine of inspiration: 'elle insufflait à cette prose si commune une sorte de vie sentimentale et continue' (Proust 1954: I, 56)¹⁹; similarly, Sand's prose that 'respire toujours cette bonté, cette distinction morale' (Proust 1, 1954: I, 55)²⁰—tends to heighten its power over the boy. What we are shown here is an Annunciation—traditionally a woman's scene—which acts as 'mise-en-abyme' of another scene from *François le Champi*, where Madeleine reads to François and teaches him how to read: 'la dimension de la parole s'y trouve maintenue et fonde dans l'union des bouches et des oreilles le plaisir de la consommation du livre'²¹ comments Anne Berger (Berger 1987: 81). The Annunciation intertext suggests a correlation between God's intercessor and the Verb, bringing together the power of words and notions of agency, intimating that something miraculous has happened: he has been chosen by God. As the archangel Gabriel tells Mary that she is to conceive a

¹⁷ '[the child] brought to me only by the book, this child has instantly summoned him to its presence, wanting to be seen only by his eyes, to be loved only by his heart, to speak only to him' (Proust 1992: 240).

¹⁸ 'thus defines an intimate space, not only physical, but also spiritual, which encourages bonding'

¹⁹ 'she [the mother] breathed into this very common prose a sort of continuous emotional life' (Proust 2003: 45).

²⁰ 'always breathes that goodness, that moral distinction which Mama had learned from my grandmother to consider superior to all else in life ...' (Proust 2003: 45).

²¹ 'the dimension of speech is maintained and founds the pleasure of consuming the book in the union of mouth and ears.'

son, the mother, recognising the sensitive nature of her son, singularises the future writer and imbues him with a sense of mission: 'l'Annonciation s'avère être dans la *Recherche* une structure riche en implications, structure souple (adaptable à la transgression des catégories sexuelles) en même temps persistante'²² writes Brigitte Mahuzier (1992: 91).

The narrator will never describe at length what the book is about but will emphasise these three elements: the haunting motif of the mother's voice; the enigma of the book (in particular the patois word *champi*); the singularity of that night and that book, which appear to the young boy to be made just for him. Like the dreams that form part of the narrator's inner world, the story is entirely formed of disconnected images that will stay imprinted at a profound level in his memory.

These elements (the voice, the mystery and the singularity) capture the mythical elements necessary to set a scene of revelation. The emphasis is not on the love story between Madeleine and François (in which it is accepted that a young son can marry his mother) but on the setting of a calling. The voice of the mother summons a child in order for him to hear his destiny. And what is vocation after all if not the careful and long selection, between the myriad voices, of that unique voice that will take the writer to the discovery of what he is made for? This is exactly what happens in the final volume, when the narrator arrives at the realisation of what he is and what he wants to do.

The calling is fully heard in the final volume, a delay that might be read, as in *François le Champi*, as an expression of nature taking its time. *François le Champi* does reappear in the final scenes of *Time Regained*, in the Prince de Guermantes's bookcase, when the narrator finally grasps his calling and can free himself of years of procrastination (but, as we have seen, procrastination plays its part, it is the time one needs to bring the calling to maturity: 'Les vrais livres doivent être les enfants non du grand jour et de la causerie mais de l'obscurité et du silence'²³ (Proust 1954: VIII, 260).

²² 'the Annunciation proves to be within la *Recherche* a structure rich with implications, supple (adaptable to the transgression of sexual categories) and at the same time, persistent.'

²³ 'real books should be the offspring not of daylight and casual talk but of darkness and silence' (Proust 1992: 257). Silence plays also an important part in the structure of the book, as Proust is very deliberately hiding elements that could, first, make his discovery about time too literal and obvious, or second, appear too dogmatic or philosophical to the readers. Keeping the reader a little behind, a little deaf and blind, is

His meditation on the place the book occupies occurs in a moment of apparent illumination, after a series of signs that all seem to point towards the rediscovery of literature. Again, the narrator does not describe at length what the book is about but this time he emphasises different elements, moving away from the theatrical elements and the process of narration as collective and dialogised. As we have noted, the original story read to him gave a communal point of view and emphasised meaningful connections to the voices of others, through the unifying voice of the mother. In many ways, the book was a product of her voice and also of her taste in novels (and that of her own mother).

The rediscovery of the book brings back to the forefront its title, *François le Champi*, that becomes an insistent leitmotif throughout the passage, with, at its centre, the name of the boy. Now, the character, his name, and his forceful efforts to push the plot forward are given preeminence: it is the quest/the tribulations of the hero that are important, his vicissitudes, his resilience, his power of invention, his creative forces, his ultimate success. The story has moved from the communal to the agentic. François comes from nothing and wins everything. Once he knows what he wants and can identify his allies, he pursues his aim with determination.²⁴

The fascination of the narrator does not thus reside in the book itself but in the title which carries his memories (it belongs undoubtedly to the family of poetic names such as Guermites, Balbec, and Parme. whose sounds and colours fill the narrator with awe) and provides the solidity of a foundation: *François le Champi* is, at the same time, a name, a situation ('champi,' a child without a father), a place (a regional dialect, the countryside of Sand) and a journey. All these elements will lead the narrator to discover that his own book, the book he has been longing to write, will also be about a boy and a quest. He is, ultimately, as François is, the subject of this book: 'Et je compris que tous ces matériaux de l'œuvre littéraire, c'était ma vie passée'²⁵ (Proust 1954: VIII, 262). By quoting repeatedly the title of the original book, the narrator adopts an identity and a singularity in order to start writing. It is an impulse to write, a call to act. The name

also a deliberate technique on Proust's part in order to control the distribution of information. The reader is just as the narrator was as a child, victim of the same ecstatic dazzlement.

²⁴ In the classification of traditional oral stories, *François le Champi* belongs to the 'conte-nouvelle,' in which an autonomous young boy or girl journeys from the family home until he or she finds fortune or makes a good marriage, without any supernatural interventions. (Belmont 2005: 19).

²⁵ 'And I understood that all these materials for a work of literature were simply my past life' (Proust 1992: 258).

François also forms a strange echo with the name of his maid Françoise, whom he likens to his writing double. Both are domestics involved with manual labour, and the narrator will identify his writing techniques to the activities of Françoise the 'mender,' establishing a link between her creativity and his. This is also evocative of the manual labour of the hemp-twiner, artist of a sort, talking and singing while he works.

The older and more critical narrator comments on the style of Sand to note that he has adopted a more critical stance. He refers here to Sand's idealism and 'feminine' generosity and goodness, for which she was praised by his mother and grandmother. However, he has managed to reverse his mother's tastes and teach her literary appreciation: 'Certes, la 'plume' de George Sand ... ne me semblait pas du tout, comme elle avait paru si longtemps à ma mère avant qu'elle modelât ses goûts littéraires sur les miens, une plume magique'²⁶ (Proust 1954: VIII, 244). In matters of literary taste, the son has become the master and declares that Sand is not a supreme novelist.

This distancing principle does not prevent some kind of magic from taking place however: it in no way precludes a profound empathy with the book. The enchantment is still present after all these years: 'une chose que nous avons regardée autrefois, si nous la revoyons, nous rapporte avec le regard que nous y avons posé, toutes les images qui le remplissaient alors'²⁷ (Proust 1954: VIII, 244) because he has, as a child, 'magnetised' the 'quill'—'plume que sans le vouloir j'avais électrisée'²⁸ (Proust 1954: VIII, 244). He is able to conjure up recollections of his past, imagination taking over, fuelled by a firm consciousness of his own creative forces. If *François le Champi* is not such a remarkable book ('n'était pas un livre bien extraordinaire' (Proust 1954: VIII, 243), who has ordered the chain of memories and resurrected the past if not himself? Only he can magnify the book and grant himself power of epiphany.

The rediscovery of the book inaugurates the narrator's real writing career: communal collaboration has become one singular voice assuming control with a greater emotional distance, away from sentimentality and idealism, recognising and embracing his own creative desire. By emphasising the name of the hero, discarding Sand's style and

²⁶ 'Admittedly the 'pen' of George Sand ... no longer seemed to me, as for so long it had seemed to my mother before she had gradually come to model her literary tastes upon mine, in the least a magic pen' (Proust 1992: 240).

²⁷ 'a thing which we have looked at in the past brings back to us, if we see it again, not only the eyes with which we looked at it but all the images with which at the time those eyes were filled' (Proust 1992: 241).

²⁸ 'a pen which unintentionally ... I had charged with electricity' (Proust 1992: 241).

asserting his taste, the narrator reappropriates the book as his own, analyses its magical properties and asserts his own creation by playing a more active role. Where he had to listen to a voice, he knows now how to summon it and give it shape. It is, as Doubrovsky puts it, 'le seul moyen d'accoucher de soi': 'être soi-même, c'est trouver sa voix (voie)'²⁹ (Doubrovsky 1974: 60). In that respect, the only negotiation and reconciliation is with himself. The fusion is now with the name and not with the mother's voice.

One source of the image of the magnetised pen seems to be Plato's *Ion*, in which Socrates offers the metaphor of a magnet to explain how the rhapsode transmits the poet's original inspiration from the Muse to the audience. Socrates likens this magnetic attraction to the power of the Muse, who inspires poets and, through them, a 'chain' of other men. The magnetic stone of Herakles, like the magnetic pen of Sand, is analogous to the possession and inspiration of a poet by the Muse, creating a 'chain of inspired beings' travelling from place to place to tell their story/recite their poems and communicate the message from the gods.

Indeed, if the narrator places his efforts under the aegis of predecessors to bask in the reflected light of a cohort of models, instinctive artists and myths from the past (the nomadic background of the hemp-twiner is also acknowledged), there remains the possibility of a community necessary to establish the seriousness of his creative ambitions. In yet another sense, the mother's voice and the storytellers of the past could be seen as two sides of the same coin, as the former proved an incentive to interrogate the latter. Such an identification does not exclude affirmation of his own perspective and the construction of a personal locus³⁰ but the all-important notion of filiation must not be overlooked. Knowing oneself as a writer is crucially linked to knowing one's place within a literary genealogy.

What is important here is not that the narrator suddenly decides to write—some scholars have underlined the fact that nothing suggests that the narrator is not, after all, going to

²⁹ 'the only way to *give birth to oneself*'; 'to be oneself is to *find one's voice (way)*'

³⁰ 'Quant au livre intérieur de signes inconnus ... cette lecture consistait en un acte de création où nul ne pourrait nous suppléer ni même collaborer avec nous' (Proust 1954: VIII, 238) ('As for the inner book of unknown symbols ... to read them was an act of creation in which no one can do our work for us or even collaborate with us' (Proust 1992: 233)).

continue his procrastination³¹—but that, upon seeing the book *François le Champi* he creates a mythology of his own by reappropriating a text populated with the intentions of his mother and grandmother, distancing himself from the lyrical and romantic style of Sand (that his mother adopts and adapts so well) and forging a path of autonomy, acknowledging his own agency: it is he (his memories) weaving together layers of the past (like the hemp-twiner), drawing connections, extracting the essence of the book. His theories (however tentative) are thus in counterpoint to Sand's text and function as his own creative act.

Finally, the narrator quotes the text as an example of what such creation might be, to exemplify and prophesise what his future book should be. He has been touched by the magnetic force of literature that binds him to a chain. So the reading scene does not so much instigate writing as forge a connection with a chain of storytellers, poets and writers whose voices come together to form his own.

This brings us back to the oral tradition in *François le Champi*. The story itself contributes to the general feeling of confusion and mystery necessary to imbue the moment with magical properties. The narrator is mesmerised by a voice telling a story about voices. And the mother's voice is simply the best vessel to convey the calling because she 're-oralises' and 're-originalises' a story that has been written down—from oral story to book and back to oral story, in a reverse trajectory, forging a bond between time and place. By choosing to record this moment in written form, the narrator not only reconnects the links but also records his act as a writer.

This transitory return to 'vocality' (Zumthor 1983) is physically and psychically effective because the text is momentarily freed from written constraints and transmitted in the present moment, through the body of the mother, in the warmth of an interpersonal moment. This quintessential embodiment, and the attunement to the quality of voice, elemental rhythms and flows of the original text provide a privileged mode of access to creation. If, in a sense, the mother expresses her creativity through reading, the narrator mirrors her dedication and transfers one craft to another, in a quest to bond the writer with the storyteller.

³¹ See Genette (1969: 234–235) and Gray-McDonald: 'The embracing of literature may not, in fact, be the successful completion of Marcel's artistic quest and the "happy ending" with which many readers have concluded' (Gray-McDonald 1989: 1021).

The vocality in the text is transmitted through a chain of artists from different backgrounds (old servant/hemp-twiner/Sand (the mother who writes)/Madame Proust (the mother who reads)) but it also creates a setting, an annunciation of a sort (voice is authority from the past). It also combines the physical (the presence of the body, even manual labour: traditionally the hemp-twiner would work while telling his story) and the intellectual and the artistic (always reworked and transformed by variations, pauses, suspenses and omissions, placed at different moments). The voice, in short, penetrates deeper, ferments and grows. It carries a message that may take years to find its object: the love of the Champi/the literary vocation of Marcel; to be in the service of Madeleine for François/to be in the service of the madeleine for the other.

The way the moment of revelation is expressed in *François le Champi* mirrors the quest of the narrator in *La Recherche*: 'il venait de se sentir brûlé pour la première fois par une grande bouffée de flamme, ayant toute sa vie chauffé doucement sous la cendre' (Sand 1960: 392).³² After years of more or less comfortable procrastination, the narrator suddenly ties all the loose ends together and understands what is at work within him. Not love, not art, but a process of composition, that is, creation.

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³² 'He shivered and gasped as if he had a fever; but it was only the fever of love, for he who had all his life warmed himself comfortably in front of the ashes, had suddenly been scorched by a great burst of flame' (Sand 1930: 272).

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