

Memory

For Marcel Proust, in *A la recherche du temps perdu*, memory is more than the past but is the past personal and tapestry woven, co-equal and co present to the mind. For this true aesthete memory is the frame for an extensive setting within which the dramatic colors of life are depicted. Through Proust's own memory pass the many elegant and eccentric personages who make up the Saint Germain upper structure of late nineteenth century society, the eccentrics, aristocratic geniuses of the night with whom Marcel Proust constructed his world.

This is very different memory work from that of authors who place themselves inside a dry fraught pastscape, like Albert Camus in *The Stranger*, another classic of the modern effort to characterize and be the elusive self. Camus' self-portrait is configured against a bare Algerian landscape across which moves the author, traveling by train to the funeral of his mother. The sensory landscape of this fiction is pared down to the minimum of characters and colors. Life itself is a minimalist condition, and the bearer of nothing more than a shadow of value.

Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* transposes its rethinking of the modern condition into a chilly Alpine wonderland sanatorium, in which characters as idiosyncratic as Proust's but drawn from the contemporary bourgeois world dispute, argue, fall in love, and severely characterize their time, which is the same post-fideist, starkly sensuous, dark future world gradually assuming its position as 'modern literature.'

Our true present is made up of memories like these.