

Le Romantisme
et après en France

Romanticism
and after in France
Volume 15

Nigel Harkness and
Marion Schmid (eds)

Au seuil de la modernité:
Proust, Literature and the Arts

Essays in Memory of Richard Bales

Peter Lang

Le Romantisme et après en France

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This volume of essays, which is dedicated to the late Richard Bales, one of the doyens of Proust studies, considers Proust's pivotal role at the threshold of modernity, between nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of writing and thinking, between the Belle Epoque and the First World War, between tradition and innovation. More than just a temporal concept, this threshold is theorized in the volume as a liminal space where borders (geographical, artistic, personal) dissolve, where greater possibilities for artistic dialogue emerge, and where unexpected encounters (between artists, genres and disciplines) take place.

Working both backwards and forwards from the publication dates of *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–27), the seventeen essays written specially for this volume take as their focus Proust's manifold engagements with the world of modernity, as well as intermedial relations among the generations of artists before and immediately after him. Looking back to the nineteenth century, the undisputed starting point for nascent forms of modernity in Western art and literature, and a period that was uniquely formative for the young Proust, they also offer insights into inter-artistic dialogue in Surrealist and post-Surrealist painting and poetry.

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Au seuil de la modernité: Proust, Literature and the Arts

Le Romantisme et après en France
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Volume 15

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and edited by Patrick McGuinness

Peter Lang

Oxford · Bern · Berlin · Bruxelles · Frankfurt am Main · New York · Wien

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Richard Bales (1946–2007)

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— NIGEL HARKNESS AND MARION SCHMID

Abbreviations

To simplify referencing, the following abbreviations are used throughout the volume:

- CSB* *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, précédé de *Pastiches et mélanges* et suivi de *Essais et articles*, ed. by Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971)
- CSB(F)* *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, suivi de *Nouveaux Mélanges*, ed. by Bernard de Fallois (Paris: Gallimard, 1954)
- Corr.* *Correspondance de Marcel Proust*, ed. by Philip Kolb, 21 vols (Paris: Plon, 1970–1993)
- EA* *Essais et articles*, in *CSB*, ed. by Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971)
- JS* *Jean Santeuil*, précédé de *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, ed. by Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971)
- PJ* *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, in *JS*, ed. by Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971)
- PM* *Pastiches et mélanges*, in *CSB*, ed. by Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971)
- RTP* *À la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. by Jean-Yves Tadié, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1987–1989)

References will take the form of the abbreviation, followed, where relevant, by the volume number in roman numerals, and the page number in arabic numerals.

Introduction

The publication of the last volume of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, *Le Temps retrouvé*, in 1927 marks a watershed in the history of French literature. With Proust's seven-volume novel, the project of modernity, announced from the second-half of the nineteenth century in such groundbreaking works as Baudelaire's *Fleurs du mal* and Flaubert's *L'Éducation sentimentale*, finds both its natural achievement and its greatest accomplishment. The French literary tradition is offered its first modernist masterpiece, a work soon to be cited in the same breath as Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, Thomas Mann, Hermann Broch or Robert Musil. Proust's epic novel of remembrance, whose genesis extends over some fourteen years from the *Contre Sainte-Beuve* of 1908/1909 to the author's premature death in 1922, but whose intellectual and artistic roots extend into the previous century and beyond, crystallizes the fundamental changes French art and literature underwent between the last decades of the nineteenth century – the period of Proust's literary formation – and the first decades of the twentieth century. The rapid technical and social change that occurs during the *fin de siècle*, not only in France, but throughout the Western hemisphere, is reflected in the changed sensibilities and preoccupations of the modern novel, which, as Virginia Woolf wrote, becomes permeable to 'the myriad of impressions – trivial, fantastic, evanescent' that shower modern man at any given moment.¹ Not only do concepts of the self and the other, no longer bound up in a transcendental, rational universe, undergo radical change in the more opaque and fragmented world of modernity, perceptions of time and space, the understanding of History as well as notions of personal and collective identity also are subject to redefinition and rethinking.

1 Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction', in *Collected Essays*, 4 vols (London: The Hogarth Press, 1966), II, 103–10 (p. 106).

Proust, though a passionate admirer of the literature and art of earlier centuries – references to which are omnipresent in *A la recherche du temps perdu* –, is above all, we must not forget, a contemporary of Freud, Einstein, Picasso and Schoenberg, to name only these four pioneers of the twentieth-century modern revolution. Having made his début in literature and criticism under the auspices of Decadence and Symbolism, the two dominant movements of the fin de siècle, Proust writes the early drafts for what will become *A la recherche* during the beginnings of Cubism and Futurism; the genesis of the last volumes, on the other hand, coincides with the advent of Dada and Surrealism. The contact points that link him to the avant-garde and to emerging Modernism were manifold and go beyond the purely social and anecdotal: André Breton, employed by the *NRF* to correct the proofs for *Le Côté de Guermantes* (a responsibility of which he apparently acquitted himself with considerable negligence), gave Proust *Les Champs magnétiques*, one of the key works of the radical avant-garde co-written with Soupault, and solicited his contribution to *Littérature*, one of the main organs of Dadaism;² Cocteau, already a well known poet when Proust met him in 1910, initiated him to Cubism and kept him up to date with the latest developments in modern art; his one-time lover Reynaldo Hahn, who had composed the music for *Le Dieu bleu*, one of the legendary ballets danced by Nijinski, provided a personal link to the *Ballets russes*. Like his contemporaries Thomas Mann and Robert Graves, as Serge Fauchereau explains, Proust did not belong to the avant-gardes of the first half of the twentieth century,³ but he nonetheless keenly followed their artistic experiments and, in a different key and register, sought to give voice to the individual's experience in the dazzling world of modernity.

'On or about December 1910, human character changed', Virginia Woolf famously wrote in her 1924 essay 'Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown'.⁴

2 See Frank Schuerewegen, 'Proust est-il dadaïste? (à propos d'un mystère encore non élucidé de l'histoire littéraire)', *Marcel Proust aujourd'hui*, 5 (2007), 137–60.

3 *Avant-gardes du XX^e siècle: arts et littérature 1905–1930* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), p. 536.

4 In *Collected Essays*, III, 422–3.

Whilst, in the course of the 1920s, the great English writer was to explore new forms of consciousness in such groundbreaking works as *Mrs Dalloway* and *To The Lighthouse*, Proust, preceding her by some ten years, began to sound out the most remote recesses of human perception and emotion, offering his readers a beguiling and richly detailed account of life from the Belle Époque to the aftermath of the Great War. Theodor W. Adorno who, together with Ernst Robert Curtius and Walter Benjamin, was one of Proust's first and most astute promoters in Germany, pays homage to the author's liminal role between nineteenth- and twentieth century sensibilities when he calls *A la recherche* 'das Ende des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts, das letzte Panorama' [the end of the nineteenth-century, its last panoramic vision] while also evoking its capacity to represent, in a new novelistic idiom, 'eine neue Form der Erfahrung' [a new form of experience].⁵ With Proust, the last manifestations of documentary realism and of a Cartesian and transcendental vision of the self and the other, challenged by several generations of prose writers and poets before him from Flaubert to Mallarmé, come to an end. The causality-driven narrative of the realist novel gives way to the contingencies of modernist writing, itself a potent echo of the fragmented and alienated forms of existence to which the self is subjected in an increasingly anonymous and senseless world: Rimbaud's prophetic 'je est un autre' finds its logical conclusion in Proust's multiplication of narrative perspectives and agencies. What is more, the belief in temporal duration and teleology, indispensable for the development of a unified self and for the processes of formation encoded by the *Bildungsroman*, one of the most popular genres of the nineteenth century, is abandoned in favour of a more atomized, splintered understanding of human time and existence. Diachronic narrative time, and with it the dogma of linearity and teleology, is eschewed in favour of new experiments in narrative form based on simultaneity and synchronicity. *Erlebnis* (a non-cognitive, superficial form of experience), as Walter Benjamin argues, comes to supersede

5 Theodor W. Adorno, *Noten zur Literatur*, 2 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 100.

Erfahrung (genuine, deep-seated experience)⁶ and History as a category of collective experience and a privileged model for explaining and making sense of human development is questioned and abandoned in favour of the individual's intimately personal and subjective engagement with the everyday.

Proust, following in the footsteps of Baudelaire, is the first of the great Modernists to have redrafted human experience in the modern metropolis, the first to dedicate himself in-depth to the phenomena of time and perception and to introduce a radical perspectivism into the representation of the self and the other that matches the new vision of subjectivity as essentially ungraspable, riddled with contradictions and in constant flux that emerged in the early decades of the twentieth century. Taking time not only as its main subject but also its central structuring principle, the *Recherche* can justly be considered as the founding piece of what Hans Robert Jauss has termed the *Zeitroman* [novel of time],⁷ a genre that is concomitant with (though not directly indebted to) the reflections on the nature of time pursued by thinkers as diverse as Henri Bergson and Albert Einstein. Harking back to the nineteenth century in which it is rooted, the novel acts as a bridge between the nascent forms of Modernism in the generations of writers and artists before Proust, and the high Modernism that was to shake Western writing between the two world wars centred around figures such as Joyce and Thomas Mann. Characteristically 'in-between', Proust is both alpha and omega of French modernity, the finest materialization of the nascent modern project and a springboard towards more radical forms of modernity and post-modernity in the generations after him.⁸

6 'Über einige Motive bei Baudelaire', in Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire. Ein Lyriker im Zeitalter des Hochkapitalismus* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1969), pp. 111–64.

7 *Zeit und Erinnerung in Marcel Prousts 'À la recherche du temps perdu'. Ein Beitrag zur Theorie des Romans* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1955).

8 For a discussion of the inherently postmodern aspects of Proust, see Margaret E. Gray, *Postmodern Proust* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

This volume of essays dedicated to the late Richard Bales, one of the doyens of Proust studies, considers Proust's pivotal role at the threshold of modernity, between nineteenth- and twentieth-century forms of writing and thinking, Belle Époque and First World War, tradition and innovation. More than just a temporal concept, the threshold here is theorized as a liminal space where borders (geographical, artistic, personal) dissolve, where greater possibilities for artistic dialogue emerge, and where unexpected encounters (between artists, genres, disciplines) are allowed to take place. Working both backwards and forwards from the publication date of the *Recherche* (1913–27), the collected essays take as their focus Proust's manifold engagements with the world of modernity, as well as artistic relations in the generations before and immediately after him. Looking back above all to the nineteenth century, the undisputed starting point for nascent forms of modernity in Western art and literature, and a period that was uniquely formative for the young Proust, they also offer insights into interartistic dialogue in Surrealist and post-Surrealist painting and poetry.

The first section entitled 'Mediations' considers the intertextual relations that link Proust to his predecessors and contemporaries, highlighting both the complex hypo-textual processes at work in Proust's writing and the 'anxiety of influence' that, despite his overt engagement with fellow writers, seems to have haunted Proust throughout his career. Catherine O'Beirne opens the section with an article on the presence of Dantean motifs in Proust which, in turn, enters into a close intertextual dialogue with the work that inspired it: Richard Bales's *Proust and the Middle Ages*. Proust may have owed his knowledge of the Italian poet, she argues, to Carlyle, who offers a detailed reading of *La Divina Commedia* in *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, translated into French in 1887. Carlyle's exposition of *Purgatorio*, in particular, is likely to have mediated to Proust Dante's meditations on virtue and vice, his interrogation of what it means to be an artist, and his evocation of the cathedral as a philosophical and literary model, themes and motifs which resonate strongly in *A la recherche*. The palimpsestic presence of a literary other is examined further by Annick Bouillaguet who charts the gradual effacement of Balzacian intertextual

references in the *avant-textes* for *A la recherche du temps perdu*. Still heavily present in the preparatory drafts, echoes of Balzac are gradually written out of the text as it approaches publication, but remain nonetheless tangible in the form of non-avowed pastiches, discernable to the informed reader by a number of hyper-textual indices. Proust the literary critic and aesthetic mediator is the focus of Timothy Unwin's article, 'Proust, Flaubert, et Flaubert avant Flaubert', which revisits Proust's celebrated article 'Autour du "style" de Flaubert' of 1920. Does the modern aesthetics which Proust discerns in Flaubert's idiosyncratic use of the definite and the indefinite past and in his 'marked' usage of past participles, pronouns, adverbs and propositions, Unwin asks, already exist before Flaubert's mature works which constituted the corpus for Proust's analysis? In other words, can stylistic traces of the 'modern' Flaubert canonized by Proust be found in his much lesser-known juvenilia: *Mémoires d'un fou*, *Novembre*, and the 1845 version of *L'Éducation sentimentale*? Returning to the question of Proust's ambivalent attitude towards the fin de siècle movement known as Decadence, finally, Marion Schmid examines his attempted rehabilitation of Robert de Montesquiou, one of the movement's most prominent figures and an important mentor to the young Proust, in a series of articles from the late 1890s and early 1900s. The author's persistent attempts to free Montesquiou from his reputation as 'prince de la décadence' and to assimilate him into the more venerable tradition of the *Grand Siècle* and its classical aesthetics, whilst evincing his unease towards Decadence, also offer a first glimpse of his reflection on the classicism of modern art, an art he considers to be defined above all by the incomprehension it provokes amongst contemporary audiences.

The second section, 'Cultures of Modernity', focuses on Proust's pivotal role as both an agent of, and a commentator on French national and cultural life from the Belle Époque to the aftermath of World War I. Drawing on recent Proust scholarship, which foregrounds political and social aspects of *A la recherche*, Alison Finch pays tribute to Proust the cultural historian, an author keenly observant of the technological and social developments of his time and singularly sensitive to the richness of the everyday. Be it in his mythologizing descriptions of telephones and airplanes, his ironic remarks on France's colonial expansion or his comments on the urban transformations

of Paris post-Haussmann, Proust offers a rich panorama of France's journey into modernity. His reflections on influence and cultural capital, moreover, Finch argues, anticipate seminal concepts of modern cultural history formulated some fifty years later by theoreticians such as Roland Barthes and Pierre Bourdieu. Proust's attentiveness to the quotidian is explored further by Adam Watt who, engaging with Richard Bales's appreciation of Proust as a 'poet of the ordinary', revisits the role of transitory, banal objects in *À la recherche*. On the surface, Proust's depiction of everyday objects seems to converge with the portrait of modern life found in the nineteenth-century painter Constantin Guys, who, in the words of Baudelaire, 'tire l'éternel du transitoire', yet the intrusion of the ordinary into Proust's fictional worlds, Watt contends, goes beyond the mere revelation of beauty in contingent moments: the objects of the everyday described in the *Recherche* serve as powerful reminders of humankind's propensity towards self-delusion and its fragility in the face of personal tragedy and mortality. Cultural practice is examined more directly by Cynthia Gamble who provides a detailed account of Proust's exposure to the workshop of Siegfried Bing, one of the most prominent promoters of Art Nouveau in fin de siècle Paris. Tracing the various points of contact between Proust's social entourage and the refined world of *chez Bing*, Gamble evokes the lasting influence that the concept of art as craft favoured by Art Nouveau had on Proust's aesthetics. The workshop, here, becomes a genuine place of exchange, both commercial and cultural, which finds its way into a novel which the Narrator himself famously compares to a dress and a cathedral, that is, to cultural artefacts crafted by a specialist *artisan* (revealingly, in French, the word for craftsman contains the word 'art'). Edward Hughes, in a more ideologically oriented piece, finally, takes us back to the notion of Proust as social and political commentator outlined by Finch. Drawing on Proust's correspondence with Daniel Halevy and Maurice Barrès, he considers the author's engagement with a range of cultural and political issues from the separation between Church and State of 1905 to the debate about national regeneration in the aftermath of the Great War. Hughes shows how Proust, in his engagement with Barrès in particular, was already grappling with questions concerning literature and national identity, and the role of the intellectual, which are brought to a resolution in the pages of *Le Temps retrouvé*.

The early twentieth century, as a time of radical technical and social change, brought with it new conditions of living which profoundly transformed modern consciousness. Section III, 'Ontologies of the Modern', explores the ontological experience of the twentieth-century subject as it is described in Proust's modernist novel: the new conceptions of time and space that emerge; the changed notion of the subject as a layered and unstable entity; the vicissitudes of love. Jack Jordan, examining the themes of travel and motion in Proust, maps out the radical paradigm shift from a Newtonian to an Einsteinian world-view that occurred during the author's lifetime and its implications for the experiencing subject in *A la recherche*. Technologies of travel and the experience of speed, he shows, are inseparably linked to creation and to the workings of memory in the novel, which help overcome the principle of discontinuity and, in Jordan's words, break 'the chains of the contingencies of a world fixed in a mechanistic universe' (p. 162). Diane Leonard further explores Proust's engagement with the scientific ideas of his time in an article on Proust's affinity with concepts of four-dimensional space which she traces back not only to Ruskin's texts on cathedrals, but also to H. G. Wells's popular science fiction novels which she identifies as potential intertexts for the novel. Proust draws on non-Euclidean theories of space in his descriptions of the Combray church, she argues, and more radically fashions the narrative of *A la recherche* according to principles of simultaneity and spatialized time, thus turning it into a type of literary 'time machine'. Shifting the horizon of enquiry to the ontological condition of the subject in crisis, Patrick O'Donovan analyses the representation of affect in *A la recherche* and the philosophical and spiritual insights to be gained from pain and suffering. Situating Proust's work in the aesthetic and ethical trajectory of the nineteenth-century confessional novel, a genre studied by Richard Bales in his *Persuasion in the French Personal Novel*, O'Donovan argues that 'le chagrin' in Proust can become a productive force which, in stimulating creative processes, allows us to transcend contingency. Another form of affective experience, that of the lover, forms the focus of Jean Milly's article which concludes this section. Through a close examination of the various staging devices and recurrent theatrical metaphors in the novel's great love scenes, Milly shows

that the spectacle of love, especially in the later volumes where homosexuality emerges as one of the dominant themes, is part of a complex process of veiling and unveiling: the careful non-implication of the Narrator in homosexual scenes and his positioning as both heterosexual and spectator, rather than concealing homosexuality, as Mario Lavagetto has argued from a psychoanalytical perspective,⁹ on the contrary draw attention to its taboo and to the Narrator's revealing fascination with it.

The book's final section, entitled 'Artistic Correspondences' extends the focus from Proust to, on the one hand, his nineteenth-century predecessors, and, on the other, his twentieth-century contemporaries and successors, engaging closely with topics that were at the heart of Richard Bales's research interests: the dialogue between different art forms, its repercussions on nineteenth- and twentieth-century aesthetic discourses, and Belgian Symbolism. Nigel Harkness opens this rich field of enquiry with an article which examines the intersection of literature and sculpture in Proust's novel by way of a nineteenth-century heritage focusing particularly on Balzac. Harkness demonstrates the crucial importance that sculpture had on nineteenth-century discussions about mimesis, creation and questions of representation more widely. Tracing this forward to Proust, and taking as his starting point the writing out of sculpture in successive drafts of the first page of the *Recherche*, Harkness shows how this deletion has the effect of embedding the sculptural in a dense network of artistic correspondences which inform the Narrator's artistic vocation, and articulate an awareness of the spatialization and simultaneity of time. Another case of interartistic dialogue is examined by Clare Moran who considers the influence of the theatre and of theatrical *mise en scène* on the compositional methods of the two great Belgian symbolists Fernand Khnopff and James Ensor. Khnopff's assimilation of Symbolist drama

9 Mario Lavagetto, *Chambre 43, un lapsus de Marcel Proust* (Paris: Belin, 1996). See also Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick's celebrated reading of the spectacle of homosexuality in *A la recherche du temps perdu* in *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), chapter 5, 'Proust and the Spectacle of the Closet'.

and Ensor's incorporation of the grotesque style of popular puppet theatre hint at the close symbiosis between the world of the theatre and the visual arts during the fin de siècle, and at a wider aesthetic preoccupation with the relationship between artifice, art and reality that is reflected in the recurrent motif of masks and masking used by the two painters. A poetic diptych brings this section to a conclusion: in two complementary studies, Patrick McGuinness and Peter Broome explore dialogues between poetry and politics and poetry and the visual arts. McGuinness examines a range of Decadent and Symbolist journals from the 1880s and 1890s to show how avant-garde literature and politics are not distinct in this period. Focussing particularly on the writings of Anatole Baju in *Le Décadent*, and on Jean Moréas's reactionary 'école romane' (characterized, amongst other things, by its anti-Belgian discourses), McGuinness elucidates the tangled cultural politics of this period, and demonstrates how differences between the two groups are expressed as much in political as in aesthetic terms. Broome's focus, by contrast, is on interactions between painting and poetry, which he explores through the Belgian poet and painter Michaux's affinities with his compatriot, the surrealist painter Magritte. Fascinated by the void and the incomplete, the everyday's potential for strangeness and the mysterious world of dreams, Michaux and Magritte are both 'orchestrators of the unconscious' and artists of uprooting and displacement. A close reading of one of the poems from *En rêvant à partir de peintures énigmatiques* (1972), 'Ne verra-t-on jamais dans un beau visage silencieux',¹⁰ which enters into a close dialogue with Magritte's *La Mémoire* (1948), brings to light the multiple resonances between the pictorial and verbal worlds of the two artists which communicate in Michaux's poetic echo chamber.

The articles collected in this volume closely reflect the research interests of Richard Bales who like the authors and artists he studied was an incessant traveller between the worlds of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and who, in addition to Proust, who remained the centre of his work, harboured a keen interest in the non-literary art forms – most importantly music and painting – and in the rich exchanges between them.

10 The poem is untitled. For ease of reference, we cite its first line here.

Richard was born in London on 21 June 1946. He completed his secondary education at Reigate Grammar School before going to the University of Exeter to read for a degree in French and German. In 1969–70 he undertook an MA at the University of Kansas, where a dissertation on Proust and the composer Reynaldo Hahn, completed under the supervision of Theodore Johnson, Jr. was an early indicator of a critical preoccupation with artistic interactions which was to remain a constant of his work. He subsequently published a summary of this work in a number of *Adam International Review* (1971) entitled *Return to Proust*. Richard's doctoral studies took him back to the UK, this time to King's College London, where he completed a doctoral thesis under the supervision of John Cocking which would subsequently be published as *Proust and the Middle Ages* (Droz, 1975). Here architecture was to provide a dominant motif for thinking about Proust's monumental work, its construction and the *ars poetica* which underpinned it. At the same time as he was completing this first book, Richard was also at work on what would become his second major contribution to Proust studies: the critical edition '*Briquebec*': prototype d'*A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur*' (Clarendon, 1989). Work on this edition would bring Richard into contact with the group of Proust scholars based at the Institut des Textes et Manuscrits (ITEM). This would mark the beginning of a career-long collaboration and place Richard at the centre of debates and discussions from which new genetic approaches to Proust's work would emerge. It was natural then, when the ITEM was putting together an international team to produce critical editions of the 75 Proust *cabiers*, that Richard be asked to participate. At the time of his death, he had completed work on *Cahier 27*, for which he was awarded a Leverhulme Research Fellowship in 2005–6, and which will now be published posthumously.

Critically nuanced, without being theoretically narrow, Richard's sensitive readings are recognized as seminal contributions which have shaped modern approaches to Proust's work. His standing in the field is reflected in his selection as editor for the *Cambridge Companion to Proust* (CUP, 2001) and in the fact that on the day following his death he was to have delivered the opening keynote lecture to a Proust conference in London.

The title he had chosen – ‘*Le Temps retrouvé*; or, Wagner in and out’ – bears witness to the enduring nature of his critical interest in the interaction between literature and music. But if Richard’s criticism was characterized by erudition, his scholarly work also bore the mark of the unaffected manner that characterized his interactions with colleagues and students. He sought always to make the complex accessible, and did not hold with obfuscation; nowhere is this more evident than in his Grant and Cutler guide to *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1995) whose lucid analyses have facilitated and shaped many students’ understanding of Proust’s novel.

Someone with such a wide range of cultural interests could scarcely have confined themselves to the work of one author, even one as critically demanding and rich as Proust. This indeed proved to be the case for Richard, who published a study of the nineteenth-century personal novel, *Persuasion in the French Novel: Studies of Chateaubriand, Constant, Balzac, Nerval, and Fromentin* (Summa, 1997), and editions of works by the Belgian Symbolists Georges Rodenbach and Grégoire Le Roy (Exeter, 1999 and 2005). A more recent literary passion was the work of W. G. Sebald, to whom he dedicated a number of conference papers and articles, including what was to be his final conference paper given at a Sebald conference in Sydney in July 2006.¹¹

Upon completion of his doctorate, Richard took up a lecturing post at Queen’s University Belfast, where he was to remain for the rest of his career (becoming Reader in 1990, and Professor of Modern French Literature in 1996). Here he was an enthusiastic tutor and a supportive colleague who delighted in the intellectual interactions that the university environment offered, as well as a passionate defender of the place of the Humanities within the modern university driven by skills and employability agendas. For many generations of students, Richard and French at Queen’s were synonymous.

11 It appeared, posthumously, as ‘Homeland and Displacement: The Status of the Text in Sebald and Proust’, in *W. G. Sebald: Schreiben ex patria/Expatriate Writing*, ed. by Gerhard Fischer (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 461–74.

If Belfast was to become Richard's home, Paris too would occupy an important place in his scholarly, social and cultural life. In Paris he indulged his interest in classical music at the Opéra Bastille and the Salle Pleyel; took in the major exhibitions which the city's museums offered; explored lesser-known areas of Paris on walking tours selected from the *Officiel des spectacles*; put his encyclopaedic knowledge of the bus, metro and tram network to regular use; planned and executed complex rail journeys criss-crossing France; and took great pleasure in the everyday activities of the 3rd *arrondissement* which he made his 'home from home' for almost ten years. Who better than Richard, then, to write the entry on 'Paris' for the *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*? Here his comments on the centrality of the Opéra in Proust's novel – where it has a double role as 'théâtre culturel et [...] théâtre social, réunissant ainsi les deux grandes préoccupations du Narrateur en herbe'¹² – seem to sum up perfectly what Paris was also to represent for him: a cultural and social space, a place where the professional and the personal, the cerebral and the convivial, the aesthetic and the gastronomic intertwined.

This volume is brought to a fitting conclusion with a postface by Bernard Brun who traces his own interactions with Richard Bales in the course of over thirty years, from their first meeting in the Salle des Manuscrits of the Bibliothèque Nationale to their last encounter in the Hôpital Saint-Antoine. Paying homage to a career in which Richard was constantly at the forefront of Proust studies, Brun also continues the engagement with Richard's work in an examination of *Cahiers* 6 and 7 of the *Contre Sainte-Beuve* to demonstrate how medieval motifs are integral to the genesis of *A la recherche*, and present in the earliest drafts, in a way which affirms the continued currency and validity of Richard's first monograph, *Proust and the Middle Ages*. Brun's essay thus brings to a conclusion a dialogue with Richard – *l'homme et l'œuvre* – that runs throughout this volume, and reminds us that his premature death in 2007 deprived the academic community of a fine critic and scholar, a devoted teacher and peerless colleague, and also, perhaps most importantly, a friend.

12 'Paris', in *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*, ed. by Annick Bouillaguet and Brian G. Rogers (Paris: Champion, 2004), pp. 722–4 (p. 723).

I Mediations

Proust and the Carlylean Mediation of Dante

In *Proust and the Middle Ages*, Richard Bales concludes his examination of the presence of Dantean imagery in *A la recherche du temps perdu* by saying that while images 'based on Dante' found 'in passing' are 'not numerous', nevertheless their contextual significance points to the 'quasi-certainty that Dante acted, to some extent, as a structural model for *A la recherche du temps perdu*'.¹ In his following chapter entitled 'The structure and scope of *A la recherche du temps perdu*', Bales supports this hypothesis by outlining and summarizing the general correspondences between the *Commedia* and the *Recherche* as noted in Samuel Borton's 'invaluable' article, 'A Tentative Essay on Dante and Proust'.² Among the correspondences observed by Borton is the fact that both works are *Commedias*, that is, both 'progress on an uphill slope towards a final illumination' (p. 38), which for Dante is 'Christian initiation', whereas for Proust it is 'self-revelation through self-inspection' (p. 37). While acknowledging that 'such chiliastic codas are few and far between in literature', Bales points out, however, that 'the parallel holds good if one ignores the childhood paradise of Combray'.³ Another proposed parallel is the guide motif with its concomitant idea of mentor-relay, since Beatrice's replacement of Virgil as guide to Dante-pilgrim prefigures Albertine's assumption of Saint-Loup's role vis-à-vis the Narrator of the *Recherche*. Taking issue with Borton's observation that 'trinary and septenary structural divisions are common to the *Divine Comedy* and

1 Richard Bales, *Proust and the Middle Ages* (Geneva: Droz, 1975), p. 114.

2 Samuel Borton, 'A Tentative Essay on Dante and Proust', *Delaware Notes*, 31 (1958), 33–42.

3 Bales, p. 123, n. 12.

A la recherche du temps perdu, Bales paraphrases Borton's final argument thus: 'both works lay great stress on music and on the "sacramental quality of poetry"'.⁴

After focusing on the 'possibility of an architectural comparison' between the respective masterpieces, probably through the 'linking element' of Balzac as Georges Cataui suggests,⁵ Bales goes on to propose among 'further analogies which seem to have escaped [Borton]' (p. 124), the necessarily 'didactic' (in the Christian sense) aspect of both works (p. 125), 'theocentric' in Dante, 'egocentric' in Proust (p. 134). This 'didactic' function is behind the second major analogy which Bales proposes, the 'rather exalted conception of the book [...] which Proust harboured' (p. 138) and which Dante shared (as Ernst Curtius points out in his treatment of the book as symbol in Dante).⁶ These common traits lead Bales to ask the 'hazardous' question: 'Could *A la recherche* not be considered as performing a didactic rôle analogous to that of medieval cathedrals?' (p. 131).

While attempting to remain heedful of Bales's repeated warnings of the 'hazardous' business of tracing Dantean influence which he approaches with some 'trepidation', I nevertheless propose in homage to the enthusiasm and sensitivity with which Bales opens out the inevitable question, to venture onto yet more speculative ground by suggesting a probable origin of what appears to me to be the indubitable Dantean influence not only on, but perhaps even tethering, the *Recherche*. It is very likely that Dante's importance was powerfully mediated to Proust through his reading in 1895 at Beg-Meil of Carlyle's *Les Héros, le culte des héros et l'héroïque dans l'histoire* translated by Jean Izoulet.⁷ Since the influence neither of Dante,

4 Bales, pp. 123–4.

5 Georges Cataui, 'L'Œuvre de Proust et son architecture symbolique,' *Art et pensée*, 1 (May 1956), [3–8] (unpaginated), p. [7].

6 Bales refers to Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (New York and Evanston: Harper and Row, 1963), pp. 302–47.

7 In his biography of Marcel Proust, Jean-Yves Tadié identifies the absolute importance of Carlyle: 'Il n'est pas jusqu'au mot "adoration", annonçant "l'adoration perpétuelle"

nor indeed of Carlyle, on Proust has as yet been the object of a major critical work, I shall limit myself to a commanding passage in 'Le Héros comme poète' in which Carlyle encapsulates the essence of *Purgatorio*. In fact, this pithy paragraph has a double impact on the reader of *Les Héros*, since Izoulet also cites it in full in his famous introduction, 'Le Crépuscule des Dieux'. In this short but condensed exposition of Dante's middle cantica, Carlyle firstly counters contemporaneous critical consensus by suggesting that *Purgatorio* is quite possibly the foremost book of the *Divine Comedy*, and that the general preference for the *Inferno* is due to the Byronism which has regrettably shaped literary taste.⁸ Sprinkling his summary with remembered quotations from the much-loved work, Carlyle evokes in a few memorable brush strokes the penitent souls' gradual ascent of the 'Mountain of Purification' towards Heaven's Gate:

Je ne m'accorde pas avec une grande partie de la critique moderne, pour préférer grandement *l'Inferno* aux deux autres parties de la *Divine Commedia*. Une telle préférence provient, j'imagine, de notre général Byronisme de goût, et paraît devoir être un sentiment transitoire. Le *Purgatorio* et le *Paradiso*, spécialement le premier, dirait-on presque, lui sont même supérieurs. C'est une noble chose que ce *Purgatorio*, 'Montagne de Purification'; emblème de la plus noble conception de cet âge. Si le Pêché est si fatal, et que l'Enfer soit et doive être si rigoureux, si redoutable, pourtant, dans le Repentir aussi l'homme se purifie; le Repentir est le grand acte chrétien. Il est beau de voir comment Dante le traite. Le *tremolar dell'onde*,⁹ ce 'tremblement' des

du *Temps retrouvé*, et la comparaison avec l'Église que l'on ne retrouve chez Carlyle' (*Marcel Proust. Biographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 415). Tadié also mischievously observes that both Carlyle and Ruskin have long been consigned to the confederacy of 'radoteurs'. While Ruskin seems to be escaping this ignominious fate, Carlyle along with his huge contribution to nineteenth-century English thought through his mediation of world literature and philosophy, has largely been erased from literary history. Because of this, the impression made over almost a century by his pages on Dante has been largely forgotten.

8 Carlyle makes the same point in the lecture on 'Dante and the *Divina Commedia*' in his *Lectures on the History of Literature* (London: Ellis and Elvey, 1892), pp. 79–96.

9 Critics frequently take Carlyle to task for misremembering quotations. In Dante's text, the expression is *tremolar dell'marina*.

vagues de l'océan, sous le premier pur rayon du matin, dont l'aube point au loin sur les Deux errants, est comme le type d'une humeur changée. L'aube de l'Espérance vient de poindre maintenant; de l'espérance qui jamais ne meurt, si elle est encore accompagnée de lourds chagrins. L'obscur séjour des démons et des réprouvés est sous les pieds; une douce haleine de pénitence monte plus haut et plus haut, jusqu'au Trône de Merci lui-même. 'Priez pour moi', lui disent tous les habitants de ce Mont de Douleur. 'Dites à ma Giovanna de prier pour moi', ma fille Giovanna; 'je pense que sa mère ne m'aime plus!' Ils montent péniblement et douloureusement par cet escarpement en spirale, 'ployés comme des encorbellements d'édifice', quelques-uns d'entre eux, – écrasés ensemble ainsi 'pour le péché d'orgueil'; et néanmoins dans des années, dans des âges et des éons, ils doivent atteindre le sommet, qui est la porte du Ciel [Heaven's Gate], et par Merci doivent y être admis. La joie aussi de tous, quand un a prévalu, toute la Montagne tremble de joie, et un psaume de louange s'élève, quand une âme a parfait son repentir et est parvenue à laisser son péché et sa misère derrière elle! J'appelle tout ceci une noble incarnation d'une vraie et noble pensée.¹⁰

'C'est une noble chose que ce *Purgatorio*'

Carlyle seems to prefer *Purgatorio* because the cantica encapsulates the doctrine of repentance (and subsequent redemption) which was in the Scottish historian's eyes the supreme ethic, 'le grand acte chrétien', of the 'Sublime Catholicisme' of the Middle Ages (ibid.). In fact, Dante has always been regarded as responsible for 'fully imagining this intermediate kingdom' which, before the *Commedia*, had been 'little more than a theologian's abstraction'.¹¹ Proust would meet this hypothesis when trans-

10 Carlyle, *Les Héros, le culte des héros et l'héroïque dans l'histoire*, ed. and trans. by J.-B.-J. Izoulet-Loubatières (Paris: Armand Colin, 1887), pp. 151–2 (future references are to this edition and are indicated by the abbreviation *H*).

11 Jeffrey T. Schnapp, 'Introduction to *Purgatorio*', *The Cambridge Companion to Dante*, ed. by Rachel Jacoff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 192–207 (p. 193).

lating *The Bible of Amiens* in which Ruskin makes a similar comment,¹² and would have immediately compared Ruskin's wariness on the subject with Carlyle's surprising attachment for the essentially Roman Catholic concept of Purgatory.

It is perhaps interesting to note that *The Divine Comedy* had always been an important touchstone in the Carlyle family as the various and life-long references, both playful and serious, to Dante and his work, in Thomas's correspondence with his wife, Jane Welsh Carlyle, attest. Carlyle's interest in Dante came to have yet another familial aspect, when his brother John, a medical doctor who had spent many years in Rome, published the first English prose translation of the *Inferno* in 1849.

References to Purgatory are to be found in many of Carlyle's writings. In his 'creative autobiography' and masterpiece, *Sartor Resartus*, written in 1831, some four years before his intensive reading of Dante in 1835, Teufelsdröckh's spiritual journey is characterized by the 'Purgatory pain' of unbelief which accompanies his metaphorical ascent of a 'Mountain which has no summit – or whose summit is in Heaven only'.¹³ More generally, the motif of personal expiation often figures in Carlyle's 'portraits' of admired writers, as in for example, his 1832 essay on 'Boswell's *Life of Johnson*', where he reflects at length on Boswell's anecdote concerning Samuel Johnson's act of public repentance on Uttoxeter marketplace for a prideful act of filial disobedience committed half a century before. However, this ethic of atonement took on an even more intimate quality and became the formative element of the last movement of Carlyle's life, when he contributed to the beginning of the unfortunate and almost irrevocable decline in his reputation by making the letters of his late wife Jane available to his biographer as an act of honest expiation for his neglect of her while she nurtured his genius to the detriment of her own.¹⁴

12 See John Ruskin, *La Bible d'Amiens*, trans. by Marcel Proust (Paris: Mercure de France, 1904), pp. 334–5.

13 Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, ed. by Mark Engel and Rodger L. Tarr (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 88 and 138.

14 See James A. Froude, *Carlyle's Life in London*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, 1882), II, pp. 438ff.

Ascent: 'rayons de soleil'

Before returning to Carlyle's résumé of *Purgatorio*, let us briefly trace the general Purgatorial paradigm in Dante. As opposed to his conception of a concave Hell, Dante's Purgatory is a conical mountain made up of seven concentric terraces. Each terrace represents one of the seven capital sins (the gravity of the sins decreasing as one ascends): pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, gluttony, and lust. The 'Mountain of Sorrow' rises upwards into the Heavens and in order for the pilgrims to reach Heaven's Gate, it is constantly stressed that as much climbing as possible be effected during daylight, so that time is 'well spent' and not 'wasted' as in Hell.¹⁵ Sunlight is the indispensable guide to the ascent as Virgil's apostrophe to the 'cherished light in whom I place my trust' in Canto XIII illustrates:

You warm the world; you shed your light on it;
Unless there be some reason that opposes,
Your radiant light should always show the way.¹⁶

The Dantean emphasis on work accomplished with the help of 'rays' of sunlight ('*esser dien sempre li tuoi raggi duci*') adds a further layer of symbolic significance to Proust's fondness for Ruskin's references to St John's invocation to work while there is light.¹⁷ Proust's fascination with this call to work is most apparent in the important creative period of 1908 when the shape of his future novel is at last becoming clear.¹⁸ The presence of Carlyle can be sensed behind this renewed interest in Ruskin's attachment

15 See Schnapp, 'Introduction to *Purgatorio*', pp. 193–5.

16 Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, vol. 2: *Purgatory*, trans. by Mark Musa (New York: Penguin, 1985), p. 139 (future references are to this edition and are indicated by the abbreviation *P*).

17 John 9. 4: 'I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.'

18 Letter to Georges Lauris, 8 November 1908 (*Corr.*, VIII, 285–6). See also *CSB*, 219.

to St John's call to work, since it is most probable that the memory of it was reactivated by Proust's reading, in January 1908, of Carlyle's profoundly touching letters to his Mother in which the Scottish writer twice quotes the urgent reminder.¹⁹ References to this injunction in *Sartor Resartus*²⁰ and *Heroes*²¹ suggest that Carlyle may even have been the initial pointer to this evangelical counsel.

Proust's work will of course renew these themes in its focus on art's recuperation of 'wasted time'. The most convincing indication of continuous dialogue with one of his greatest influences could be the very antithetical aspect of some Proustian motifs: the emphasis on his Narrator's plan to work at night, as did Proust as far as we know; and the innocently decadent transposition of guiding sunrays into the 'rayons de soleil sur un balcon' which promise distraction with Gilberte on the *Champs Élysées* (RTP, I, 388–90).

Ascent: 'Élévation'

Dante's conception of the pilgrim souls' painful ascent of the 'Mountain of Sorrow' towards an exalted state of redemption, in addition to its theological didacticism, also allegorizes the artist's secular pilgrimage towards artistic salvation. Similarly, Carlyle and Proust also play on the

19 *Carlyle intime. Lettres de Thomas Carlyle à sa mère, dont plusieurs inédites revues sur les originaux par M. Alexandre Carlyle*, trans. by Émile Masson (Paris: Mercure de France, 1907), pp. 153, 172.

20 At the end of Chapter IX, 'The Everlasting Yea', p. 146: 'Up, up! Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy whole might. Work while it is called Today, for the Night cometh wherein no man can work.'

21 Carlyle refers very allusively to Boswell's anecdote about Sam Johnson's watch which had 'for the night cometh' engraved on it: 'Une noble inconscience est en lui. Il ne va pas graver *Vérité* sur son cachet de montre' (H, p. 285).

many significations – spiritual, artistic, philosophical – of the concept of 'elevation' in their respective writings on the progression of the artist. As does Dante, both use the common biblical trope of the mountain-top as a place of spiritual salvation to express the motif of the 'summit' or hard-won 'point of view' on the world which is the mature artist's stance. Just as Carlyle has Teufelsdröckh view life 'in miniature' from his 'mountain seat' since he now sees the general propositions and subsequent conclusions behind the details of his life,²² so too as Luc Fraisse points out, the Proustian Narrator's 'lente ascension au clocher' of the *œuvre cathédrale* is the allegory of artistic creation upon which the *Recherche* is based.²³ Proust would also have been very familiar with Ruskin's analysis of 'Mountain Glory', where he traces the influence of mountains not only on medieval religious temperament but also on its artistic power, and subsequently on the building of Gothic cathedrals.²⁴

Carlyle and Proust both display similar inclinations for treating such profundity irreverently. Proust ironizes on the idea of artistic elevation in Tante Léonie's surveillance of the 'chronique quotidienne mais immémoriale de Combray' (*RTP*, I, 51), as does Carlyle in his strangely similar satirical depiction of Teufelsdröckh's 'speculum' or 'watch-tower' overlooking 'Illusion Lane'.²⁵ Of course, both Carlyle and Proust are not only dialoguing with Dante's motif of spiritual and artistic ascension, but also more generally with the Romantic and Symbolist conception of art as 'high argument', an aesthetic philosophy famously articulated by Wordsworth in his verse-manifesto, the *Prospectus*, in which he outlines 'the design and

22 *Sartor Resartus*, p. 140. *Sartor Resartus, vie et opinions de Herr Teufelsdröckh*, trans. by Edmond Barthélemy (Paris: Mercure de France, 1904), p. 207. Barthélemy's first translation of *Sartor* had been published in 1899.

23 Luc Fraisse, *L'Œuvre cathédrale: Proust et l'architecture médiévale* (Paris: José Corti, 1990), pp. 187–8.

24 *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: G. Allen, 1903–1912), VI, Chapter XX, 'The Mountain Glory'.

25 *Sartor Resartus*, p. 16 ['Ce logis était en fait l'observatoire, la tour du guet de Teufelsdröckh', situated in the 'rue de l'Illusion', *Sartor Resartus*, French translation, p. 34].

scope' of his planned but ultimately unfinished epic work, *The Recluse*.²⁶ There, the 'elevation' called for by Wordsworth is to a 'marriage' between the poet's mind (which now replaces both Divine protagonists and their respective kingdoms of Heaven and Hell) and the universe, thus showing the transformational potential of the everyday into an earthly paradise. Carlyle, who inherited the same 'common theological prototype' of the spiritual autobiography as exemplified by Augustine's *Confessions*, envelops such 'high argument' in ambiguity in *Sartor Resartus* which, as Abrams puts it, 'plays with and undercuts the conventions it nonetheless accepts'.²⁷ As we know, Proust continuously reworks thematics of spiritual and aesthetic elevation as in, for example, the continuous emphasis on the bell-tower, the play on Tante Léonie's obsession with Mme Goupil's missing the 'élévation' of the Eucharist (*RTP*, I, 54 and 107), the many stairs to be climbed and descended,²⁸ not forgetting the motif of the mechanical 'lift'. Through their irreverent reverence towards this weighty theme, both Carlyle's and Proust's masterpieces point the way forward to modernist and indeed post-modernist literature.

'Écrasés ensemble pour le péché d'orgueil'

In Carlyle's resonant summary of *Purgatorio*, it is noteworthy that the author limits his commentary to the most grievous capital sin of pride. Dante's simile describing the penitent prideful souls as 'ployés comme

26 See M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism: Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature* (New York: Norton, 1971), Chapter One, 'This is our high argument'.

27 Abrams, p. 133.

28 Of course, here Dante's complaint about the artist's subservience to aristocratic patronage comes to mind: 'e come è duro calle | lo scendere e l salir per l'altrui scale' [how hard the path to descend and mount by another man's stairs] (*Paradiso*, XVII, 58–60). Carlyle refers to this in *H*, p. 140.

des encorbellements d'édifice', stays in the memory of this stone-mason's son who in homage to his father's life-long manual work frequently uses many such architectural comparisons in his writings. Among the 'corbel-like' souls oppressed by the weight of the stones which they must carry as penitence for their stiff-necked and haughty deportment on Earth are various exponents of prideful demeanour. Umberto Aldobrandesco from a noble Tuscan family represents aristocratic pride. Political pride is represented by the crawling soul of Provenzano Salvani, former Ghibelline dictator of Siena. It is, however artistic pride, as exemplified by the soul of the manuscript illuminator Oderisi of Gubbio, which is most explored in *Purgatorio*, the cantica which meditates most on art and its executors.

Before recounting the distress of individual souls and in particular Oderisi, Dante follows biblical teaching in reminding the 'haughty Christians' that humans are merely 'worms | each born to form the angelic butterfly, that flies defenseless to the Final Judge'.²⁹ Amazed that humans can let their 'souls' pretensions rise so high, he admonishes them that they are but 'defective insects still, | worms as yet imperfectly evolved' (ibid.).

The evocation of the prideful as potential butterflies arrested at grub stage could perhaps be etymologically responsible for the coining of the name 'Verdurin' as the designation of the 'cercle' whose pride as evinced in their assumed superiority to the *Faubourg Saint-Germain* is accompanied by stunted spiritual growth. Swann's denigration of their name ('quel nom!'), along with his depiction of their 'base' life in Dantean terms, seems to echo *Purgatorio*'s specific admonition to ludicrously prideful 'worms' behind its more obvious and rather clichéd *Inferno* reference.³⁰ A similarly dramatic but more overt entomological perspective is of course that of the Narrator's gaze upon the assembly at the last *matinée*, where, for example, he beholds the 'molle chrysalide' aspect of M. d'Argencourt (*RTP*, IV, 501).

29 Cf. Job 25. 4–6; Augustine, *In Ioannem*, 1. 13: 'All men born of the flesh, what are they but worms? And of them he makes angels'; and Psalm 22. 6: 'But I am a worm, and no man'. These references are derived from the notes in *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Purgatorio*, ed. and trans. by Robert M. Durling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 171.

30 *RTP*, I, 283. Bales comments on this passage on p. 114.

On the other hand, the frequent presence of the butterfly motif in the *Recherche* can be interpreted as affirmation of the vital conviction of self-worth for every artist. The recurrent image is also evidently a subtle pointer to Whistler (whom Ruskin accused of displaying ‘candid conceit’³¹) as the model for the artist who must fly in the face of Dante-pilgrim’s moral admonition and share the ‘proud silent ways’ of Dante himself.³² In yet a further reticular thread of this great intertextual fabric, it is interesting to note that Whistler’s butterfly signature is very prominent in *Arrangement in grey and black, no. 2: Thomas Carlyle*, which, for a time, was according to Proust the sole decoration in his writing-room.

The first soul Dante recognizes among the weighed-down pilgrims is that of the manuscript illuminator Oderisi of Gubbio whom he greets enthusiastically:

‘Oh!’ I said, ‘*you* must be that Oderisi,
Honour of Gubbio, honour of the art
Which men in Paris call “Illuminating”.’ (P, p. 120)

Showing that his pride has almost been eradicated, Oderisi now confesses that his proud ambition has been tempered by his recognition of a greater artist in his former pupil Franco Bolognese:

‘The pages Franco Bolognese paints,’
he said, ‘my brother, smile more radiantly;
his is the honor now – mine is far less.

Less courteous would I have been to him,
I must admit, while I was still alive
and my desire was only to excel.’ (Ibid.)

31 *The Works of John Ruskin*, XXIX, 586. Ruskin ends the piece by invoking ‘the ancient decision of the artist’s pride, that his fame should be founded on what he had given, not on what he had received’.

32 Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History*, ed. by Michael K. Goldberg, Joel J. Brattin and Mark Engel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 76 [‘ses façons orgueilleuses et silencieuses’, *H*, p. 140].

Oderisi continues to evoke the 'empty glory of all human power!', for fame which he compares to fragile verdant growth, a recurrent Dantean comparison inspired most probably by the biblical metaphor of 'withered grass',³³ is transitory:

Oh, empty glory of all human power!
How soon the green fades from the topmost bough,
unless the following season shows no growth! (Ibid.)

Some verses later, Oderisi returns to the faded green motif when he points out the penitent soul of Provenzan Salvani, former dictator of Sienna:

Your earthly fame is like the green in grass:
it comes and goes, and He who makes it grow
green from the earth will make it fade again. (*P*, p. 121)³⁴

The realization by Oderisi of the fragility of his fame and the possible transience of his art raises haunting questions for every artist. A similar meditation on artistic pride is perhaps flagged in the *Recherche* with the occasional references to the 'morceau de lustrine verte', which usually func-

33 In for example James 1. 9–11: 'Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted: But the rich, in that he is made low: because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass'; and also, Isaiah 40. 7–8: 'the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the Lord bloweth upon it: surely the people *is* grass. The grass withereth the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever'.

34 The emphasis on the primary colour of Nature in the *Commedia* as a token of earthly glory recurs in yet another interesting image in Canto XV of the *Inferno* where the speedy figure of Dante's former schoolmaster and mentor Brunetto Latini is compared to someone running so fast that he could obtain the 'green cloth' or *pallio* bestowed to the winner of the annual footrace in Verona (*Inferno*, Canto XV, v. 121–4). Once again, Dante is comparing the perishability of an earthly prize to the eternal winning of Heaven.

tions as a window-blind.³⁵ This apparently slight but symbolically important motif figures more prominently as a privileged reminiscence in the 1908 *Carnet* and in *Cahier* 58.³⁶ It is but one example of Proust's humble-in-aspect but profoundly hermeneutic objects. Since its apparently prosaic function of blocking out the light can be read symbolically as an obstacle to artistic inspiration, its very humility represents not only the spiritually positive antithesis of pride, but its unfortunate and negative corollary: artistic sterility.³⁷

Once again, a Carlylean intertext seems to emerge in what at first sight appears to be a uniquely Dantean influence. In *Sartor Resartus*, the foundling Teufelsdröckh who will become the eccentric man of genius is discovered in a 'Basket, overhung with green Persian silk'.³⁸ Teufelsdröckh keeps his birth-cloth as a puzzling indicator of his mysterious origins, occasionally wonders about its significance, but concludes that 'from the veil can nothing be inferred: a piece of now quite faded Persian silk, like thousands of others'.

The second part of Oderisi's commentary on pride addresses the idea of displacement of one artist by another, raising therefore the concomitant and inevitable question of the possibility of artistic progress, another aesthetic preoccupation in the *Recherche*. Just as Bolognese surpassed his mentor Oderisi, so too does Giotto now outshine his teacher, Cimabue, who had previously 'held the field'. Similarly, the rivalry between the poets Guido Cavalcanti and Guido Guinizelli may prove futile since another poet (Dante himself?) may yet surpass both of them:

35 For example, *RTP*, III, 335: 'Mon éloge du morceau de lustrine verte bouchant un carreau cassé n'eut pas plus de succès'; p. 339: 'J'avais été seul, pensant à ma lustrine verte'; *RTP*, IV, 814, esquisse xxiv: 'un morceau d'étoffe verte'; and *CSB*, 214.

36 *Carnets*, ed. by Florence Callu and Antoine Compagnon (Paris: Gallimard, 2002), p. 52.

37 See *RTP*, III, 1533 for a comprehensive note on the motif.

38 *Sartor Resartus*, p. 65; ['une corbeille recouverte de perse verte', *Sartor Resartus*, French translation, p. 101].

Once Cimabue thought to hold the field
as painter; Giotto now is all the rage,
dimming the lustre of the other's fame.

So, one Guido takes from the other one
poetic glory; and, already born,
perhaps, is he who'll drive both from fame's nest. (*P*, p. 121)

Besides the homage to Giotto who continues to 'hold the field' in the *Recherche*, the theme of artistic displacement is more overtly represented by the 'nouvel écrivain' who seems to unseat Bergotte, a fact which causes the Narrator to speculate on the characteristics of novelty and perishability which mark all artistic creation. For 'l'univers nouveau et périssable qui vient d'être créé' will only last until 'la prochaine catastrophe géologique que déchaîneront un nouveau peintre ou un nouvel écrivain originaux'.³⁹ Meditations on the supplanting of one artist by another lead the Narrator to the tentative yet unavoidable admission that art could perhaps show, as does science, a certain progression. This eternally relevant aesthetic question raised by Dante also features in Proust's dialogue with Ruskin.⁴⁰

'L'orgueilleuse pensée'

In 'Le Héros comme poète', Carlyle stresses the importance of pride for Dante as a rampart to his earthly suffering. Dante's consolatory vice results from his continuous focus on his eternal soul, and his secret and constant brooding upon his work:

39 *RTP*, II, 623. See also the discussion of the 'nouvel écrivain' in *EA*, 615.

40 *RTP*, II, 624. See Jean Autret, *L'Influence de Ruskin sur la vie, les idées et l'œuvre de Marcel Proust* (Geneva: Droz, 1955), p. 107.

La grande âme de Dante, sans foyer sur terre, fit son foyer de plus en plus dans ce redoutable autre monde. Naturellement ses pensées *couvaient* cela, comme le seul fait important pour lui. Incarné ou non incarné, c'est le seul fait important pour tous les hommes: mais pour Dante, dans cet âge, il était incarné dans une fixe certitude de forme scientifique. [...] Le cœur de Dante, longtemps rempli de ceci, le *couvant* dans sa pensée et sa terreur sans paroles, éclate à la fin en un 'mystique et insondable chant'; et cette *Divine Comédie*, le plus remarquable de tous les Livres modernes, est le résultat. (*H*, pp. 141–2; emphasis added)

Poultry-yard metaphors are very frequent in Carlyle's writings since his symbolic arsenal is always rooted in the farm-life he knew as a boy in Scotland. Hence, the artist who meditates on his work as a feature of his 'eternal home' is as a hen 'brooding' on her eggs. Poultry-inspired metaphors are equally common in the *Recherche*, as in for example the image of the laying-hen to which the young hero is compared because of his delight at having written a 'petit morceau' on the 'clochers de Martinville': 'Je me trouvais si heureux [...] comme si j'avais été moi-même une poule et si je venais de pondre un œuf, je me mis à chanter à tue-tête' (*RTP*, I, 180). Similarly grounded images recur in the evocation of the 'mystique chant du coq' (*RTP*, III, 754) to which the Narrator likens Vinteuil's new work, and in the metaphor of nutritive 'albumen' at the base of all organic development to which the Narrator compares the 'réserve' of impressions he has built up over his life.⁴¹

For Carlyle, Dante's 'pensée orgueilleuse' which fortified him against the sufferings occasioned by exile and patronage was based not only on his conviction that he should 'follow his star' as his former mentor Bruno Latini tells Dante-pilgrim in *Inferno*, but on his conviction of the greatness of his future work:

⁴¹ *RTP*, IV, 478. See *Sartor Resartus*, French translation, p. 107: 'Former une jeune Âme, n'est-ce point comme couvrir un (céleste) Œuf nouveau; où tout est encore informe, sans pouvoir; mais où, par degrés, les éléments et les fibres organiques se développent à travers l'albumine aqueuse; jusqu'à ce que de la Sensation vague pousse la Pensée, poussent l'Imaginative et la Force, et que nous ayons les Philosophies, les Dynasties, et jusqu'aux Poésies et aux Religions!'.

Ce doit être l'orgueilleuse pensée pour lui parfois, que lui, ici en exil, pût faire cette œuvre; que nulle Florence, nul homme ou nuls hommes non plus, ne pussent l'empêcher de la faire, ou même l'aider beaucoup à la faire. Il savait aussi, en partie, qu'elle était grande; la plus grande qu'un homme pût faire. 'Si tu suis ton étoile, *Se tu segui tua stella.*' (H, p. 142)

Latini's complete advice is '*se tu segui tua stella, non puoi fallire a glorioso porto*', which Carlyle translates in his essay 'The Hero as Poet' as: 'Follow thou thy star, thou shalt not fail of a glorious haven!'.⁴² One is tempted to wonder if Proust's depiction of Bergotte's tragically late epiphany could be a novelistic rewriting of this advice, since the writer's poignant realization as he beholds Vermeer's *Vue de Delft* is in essence that he has failed artistically to reach such a 'glorious port'.

Examples abound of Proust's embedded meditation upon the artist's pride. Proust's Narrator, for example, plays on the language of the proud artist *à la* Oderisi as he conjures up his interior library of impressions comparable to exquisite 'illuminations' which he will translate into his work:

La bibliothèque que je me composerais ainsi serait même d'une valeur plus grande encore; car les livres que je lus jadis à Combray, à Venise, enrichis maintenant par ma mémoire de *vastes enluminures* représentant l'église Saint-Hilaire, la gondola amarrée au pied de Saint Georges-le-Majeur sur le Grand Canal incrusté de scintillants saphirs, seraient devenus dignes de ces 'livres à images', bibles historiées, livres d'heures [...]. (RTP, IV, 466; emphasis added)

Moreover, Proust's Narrator could perhaps be participating in the exiled Dante's famous retort given, according to Carlyle, 'avec un fixe et farouche orgueil' to the Florentine magistrates' proposition of an amnesty: 'Si je ne puis rentrer sans m'appeler moi-même coupable, jamais je ne rentrerai, *nunquam revertar*'.⁴³ Could the mystery surrounding the fact that Proust's

42 *Inferno*, XV, 55–6; *Heroes*, p. 77 ['Si tu suis ton étoile, tu ne manqueras pas un glorieux port!'; H, p. 142].

43 H, p. 140. Dante's actual words were: 'Quod si per nullam talem Florentia introitur, nunquam Florentiam introibo' ['But if Florence may be entered by no other path, then I will never enter Florence']. The letter was written not to Florentine magistrates but to a Florentine friend.

Narrator never goes to the 'Cité surnaturelle' of Florence which has such a hold on his imagination and to which Alberto Beretta Anguissola refers in *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*,⁴⁴ be perhaps explained by the presence not only of a Dantean subtext, but by Dantean elements in the Narrator's very make-up? The wording of a relevant *avant-texte* from *Cahier 57* with its repeated equivalence of Florence and paradise as in the resonant sentence, 'je n'y pénétrerais pas, je ne l'aurais pas connu, je mourrais sans avoir connu le paradis' (*RTP*, IV, 869), seems to support this hypothesis.

Perhaps Carlyle's most important statement on the strange combination of pride and humility which characterizes the artist is expressed in *Sartor Resartus* when the long-suffering Editor in his analysis of the 'diluted madness' of Teufelsdröckh's genius sees therein: 'a certain indomitable Defiance and yet a boundless Reverence [...] as two mountain summits, on whose rock-strata all the rest were based and built'.⁴⁵ The Proustian description of Elstir in his *atelier* rivalling the Creator (*RTP*, II, 191) similarly juxtaposes human pride and defiance in the artist who most exemplifies and indeed almost personifies the conception of art as praise.

Adoration, Praise, Love

Carlyle concludes his paragraph on *Purgatorio* with the evocation of the 'psaume de louange' with which the redeemed soul expresses its joy.⁴⁶ In the combination of 'spiritual autobiography with generic allegory' that

44 See 'Florence', in *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*, ed. by Annick Bouillaguet and Brian G. Rogers (Paris: Champion, 2004), p. 388.

45 *Sartor Resartus*, p. 152 ['un indomptable défi et pourtant comme une Vénération sans bornes, pareils à deux sommets de montagne, sur les strates rocheuses de qui tout le reste serait basé ou bâti', *Sartor Resartus*, French translation, p. 225].

46 Carlyle is probably remembering Canto XXI where Statius, the major poet of the Silver Age of Latin literature and author of the *Thebaid*, describes the soul's release from Purgatory.

is the *Commedia*,⁴⁷ the song of praise is also that of the soul of the artist saved by his art.

The conception of art as praise was for Dante, as it is for every artist, a key realization in his literary and spiritual apprenticeship. It is this realization that causes *Purgatorio* to transcend its allegory of an individual spiritual and aesthetic journey and become a wide-ranging examination of poetry's own pilgrimage.⁴⁸ In this cantica, art itself becomes an instrument of salvation as Dante explores the 'new style' which he explained in his *Vita nuova* was to change the status of poetry from a 'dead' art form (self-regarding poetry) to a 'new style' (the 'dolce stil nuovo' of praise).⁴⁹

The personal epiphany which led to this realization is referred to in Canto XXIV of *Purgatorio*, when the shade of the poet Bonagiunta da Lucca asks if Dante-pilgrim is the poet who 'brought the new rhymes forth, beginning: "*Ladies who have intelligence of love*". 'Donne ch'avete intelletto d'amore' is the first line of a poem, written by Dante in the mid 1280s, which forms the centrepiece of the *Vita nuova* as it articulates the change from the thematic of self-indulgent love to the elevated doctrine of virtuous love. Dante's self-affirming reply to Bonagiunta's question defines the essential feature of this 'new style' as fidelity to the inner dictates of love. Love is now the true poet, and Dante is merely his scribe:

I said to him, 'I am one who, when Love
inspires me, takes careful note and then,
gives form to what he dictates in my heart.'⁵⁰

The selfless, non-erotic love which inspires the artist is desire of the 'supreme good', as Virgil explains at length in Cantos XVII and XVIII, where, in a transmission of Christian Neoplatonic teaching, he pronounces on the central importance of love as the motivator of every human action. Love

47 Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism*, p. 167.

48 See Schnapp, 'Introduction to *Purgatorio*', p. 198.

49 Cf. *H*, p. 144: 'Je donne à Dante ma plus haute louange quand je dis de sa *Divine Comédie* qu'elle est, en tout sens, essentiellement un Chant [...] un *canto fermo* [...]. On lit tout du long naturellement avec une sorte de *psalmodie*'.

50 *Purgatory*, Canto XXIV, v. 52–4, p. 259.

is therefore, according to Virgil, the source not only of virtue but of vice; consequently all the sins purged in Purgatory spring from perversions of love.⁵¹

For Carlyle also, the prime motivating trait of the poet was his ability to see the 'loveliness of things': 'Celui qui peut discerner l'amabilité des choses, nous l'appelons Poète, Peintre, Homme de Génie, doué, aimable' (*H*, pp. 16–17). Proust's reflection on this definition is evident when the trait surfaces in Elstir whose 'amabilité' is for the Narrator one of his most pertinent qualities:

Il prodigua pour moi une amabilité qui était aussi supérieure à celle de Saint-Loup que celle-ci à l'affabilité d'un petit bourgeois. A côté de celle d'un grand artiste, l'amabilité d'un grand seigneur, si charmante soit-elle, a l'air d'un jeu d'acteur, d'une simulation.⁵²

In his definition of art in the *Laws of Fiesole*, Ruskin, whose sensibilities were largely shaped by Dante and Carlyle, famously stated that 'All Great Art Is Praise'. The stimulus to praise is grounded in love of God's creation, with the resulting 'love song' transmuting into art through the artist's 'reason and discipline'. In Robert de la Sizeranne's *Pages choisies* of Ruskin's writings, where the translator emphasizes the essential nature of the teaching '*tout art vrai est adoration*' by his choice of title, 'Qu'est-ce que l'art?', the central conception of art shared by both British writers and Dante is clear:

Fixer ceci dans votre esprit comme le principe directeur de tout bon labeur pratique et la source de toute saine énergie vitale: – *votre œuvre d'art doit être faite à la gloire de quelque chose que vous aimez*. Ce peut être seulement à la gloire d'un coquillage ou d'une pierre; ce peut être à la gloire d'un héros, ce peut être à la gloire de Dieu.⁵³

Proust's decision to entitle the section of his novel which contains his artistic program 'adoration perpétuelle' (a thesis which was already being worked out in his meditations on the links between reverence, praise and love in his Ruskinian articles) shares this conception of art as praise grounded

51 *Purgatory*, Canto XVII, v. 82–139, pp. 183–5; Canto XVIII, v. 1–75, pp. 191–3.

52 *RTP*, II, 184; see also 'Dangers de l'amabilité' (*JS*, 667–8).

53 Robert de la Sizeranne, *Ruskin: pages choisies* (Paris: Hachette, 1909), pp. 115–16.

in love. However, Proust will show this driving force of nature in all its complexity, through his vision which eventually transcends Ruskin's teaching and harks back to the sincerity of Carlyle and the intensity of Dante. Perhaps the reason why, as Bernard Brun observes, 'l'amour n'est pas un sentiment véritablement proustien',⁵⁴ is that the author had long interiorized the Dantean and Virgilian lesson of love as a complex force which drives helpless humanity not only towards virtue and instinctive praise of the 'supreme good', but also towards vice.

Conclusion

Richard Bales wonders if Dante's work could have been a model for the 'didactic' function, analogous to that of medieval cathedrals, of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. As we have seen, the profound meditation in Proust's work on virtue and vice, combined with the constant self-reflexive interrogation on what it means to be an artist, have their equivalences in Dante. The link between this didactic function and that of a gothic cathedral is specifically made by Carlyle who saw the *Commedia* as 'a great supernatural world-cathedral' containing a 'World of Souls':

Les trois royaumes, *Inferno*, *Purgatorio*, *Paradiso*, ont vue l'un dans l'autre comme des compartiments⁵⁵ d'un grand édifice; une grande et surnaturelle cathédrale du monde, édifiée là, sévère, solennelle, redoutable; le Monde des Âmes d'après Dante! (*H*, p. 145)

In fact, Carlyle makes his contribution to the Proustian model of the cathedral not only in this particularly powerful comparison, but also in his use of the cathedral motif as a philosophical and literary model. In his lecture, 'Le

54 'Amour', in *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*, pp. 59–62 (p. 59).

55 An important term in Proust and one which is much repeated by Carlyle in his evocation of Dante as hero-poet.

Héros comme homme de lettres', Carlyle points out that men of letters and their writings have become the new church in emerging secular times:

Des fragments d'une réelle 'Liturgie d'Église' et d'un réel 'Corps d'Homélies', étrangement déguisés et méconnaissables à l'œil ordinaire, peuvent être trouvés flottant dans cet immense océan d'écume de Parole Imprimée que nous appelons négligemment Littérature. Les Livres sont notre Église aussi. (*H*, p. 257)

Words slowly build cathedrals of civilization which are the result of collaboration, stone upon stone, by artists and thinkers over centuries. Books are now new ways to preach and to adore. The prime importance of the Carlylean book-cathedral image as a literary model lies however in its being an analogy of the heroic and constant wish of all artists to reconcile beauty and truth in their 'adoration':

Celui qui, de quelque façon, nous montre, mieux que nous ne le savions auparavant, qu'un lis des champs est beau, ne nous le montre-t-il pas comme une effusion de la Fontaine de toute Beauté, comme l'écriture, faite visible là, de la main même du grand Créateur de l'Univers? Il a chanté pour nous, nous a fait chanter avec lui un petit verset d'un Psaume sacré. Il en est essentiellement ainsi. Combien plus celui qui chante, qui dit, ou de quelque façon rapporte à notre cœur les nobles faits et gestes, sentiments, audaces et endurances d'un homme notre frère! Il a véritablement touché nos cœurs comme avec un vivant charbon *pris à l'autel*. Peut-être n'y a-t-il nulle adoration plus authentique. (*H*, p. 256)

Carlyle's profound meditations on art and on its executors as heroes and modern-day prophet-priests, along with his powerful mediation and vulgarization skills due to his impressively wide reading, mean that he was a portal for Proust not only to Dante but perhaps also to an enormous reticulation of literary and philosophical writing ranging from Goethe and the German idealistic philosophers to the Ancients. His compelling mediation of *Purgatorio* must have led Proust to explore the challenge facing every artist since the cantica's examination of pride encapsulates the dilemma of the artist in attempting to reconcile impulses both to praise and to be insubordinate. In addition, Dante's meditation on the complex nature of love as instigator both of virtue and vice, leads us ultimately to appreciate just how complex Proust's concept of 'adoration' was.

Cryptage et décryptage de la présence de Balzac dans l'écriture d'*A la recherche du temps perdu*

Les prédécesseurs de Proust occupent une place plutôt discrète dans son roman et, paradoxalement semble-t-il, moins ils y sont nommés, plus grande est leur influence. C'est au moins le cas de Flaubert, auquel on reviendra. Beaucoup plus fréquemment invoqués dans les manuscrits les plus anciens, ils voient progressivement leur identité s'y effacer, pour disparaître bien souvent dans le texte imprimé. Et pourtant, et ce sera la thèse que l'on défendra ici,¹ ils y restent présents, mais de manière sous-jacente, sous forme de pastiches inavoués de Balzac pour l'essentiel, c'est-à-dire dépourvus de la double signature, celle de l'écrivain pasticheur et celle de l'écrivain pastiché. A l'encontre des pastiches qu'on peut dire 'déclarés', soit parce qu'ils ont été publiés sous ce nom dans *Le Figaro* ou *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, soit parce qu'ils sont insérés dans la correspondance, on pourra les dire 'intégrés' au texte d'*A la recherche du temps perdu*, de manière apparemment subreptice, sans que leur existence soit ouvertement revendiquée. Leur présence est ainsi cryptée, involontairement ou non. Je me propose d'étudier le fonctionnement et les valeurs de cette imitation cryptée.

Ces récritures inavouées (ou qui du moins ne se déclarent pas) sont pourtant rendues lisibles par un certain nombre d'indices. On peut y voir des noyaux qui ont donné son impulsion à l'imitation d'un style, ou d'un corpus considéré comme un style. Ils semblent s'appliquer à tous les auteurs (Balzac est loin d'être le seul) qui donnent lieu au pastiche crypté dans *A la recherche du temps perdu*. J'en proposerai cinq à l'œuvre dans les exemples

1 Nous lui avons consacré un ouvrage intitulé *Proust lecteur de Balzac et de Flaubert. L'imitation cryptée* (Paris: Champion, 2000).

retenus, et qui permettent chaque fois le décryptage de l'imitation. L'indice le plus fréquent et le plus évident est le nom (quand il subsiste, mais sans jamais être explicitement désigné comme l'élément d'une influence) de l'écrivain subrepticement pastiché ou de l'un de ses personnages. Ces noms suscitent alors l'émergence de fragments imitatifs dans leur environnement (les lignes qui les entourent).

Il arrive que ces noms forment une liste. Cela revient à dire qu'ils sont pris dans une énumération, ou qu'ils engendrent cette énumération. On a alors affaire à des passages descriptifs le plus souvent, qui se trouvent être l'un des lieux privilégiés de l'imitation. Le troisième indice consiste dans le fait que le fragment imitatif se laisse assez facilement délimiter par des éléments marquant une rupture. Ils nous renseignent sur les rapports du pastiche avec le texte-source. Ce rapport exprime souvent le refus de masquer l'intégration d'un style dans *A la recherche du temps perdu*; mais laisse parfois entrevoir la volonté de le dévoiler au lecteur perspicace, c'est-à-dire au lecteur idéal. Le quatrième type de noyaux du pastiche intégré se manifeste dans la brusque apparition, dans *A la recherche du temps perdu*, de personnages échappés d'un roman, du XIX^e siècle le plus souvent. La cinquième et dernière impulsion donnée au pastiche est fournie par l'allusion aux pratiques sociales d'une autre époque, découvertes chez le prédécesseur. On les verra tous à l'œuvre dans les exemples proposés, avec plus ou moins d'intensité.

Pour étudier les caractéristiques du fragment imitatif, il n'est pas sans intérêt de les envisager dans les formes qu'il peut prendre, et qui peuvent être celles du pastiche d'auteur, la plus classique, mais aussi du pastiche de genre, du pastiche disséminé (qu'on pourrait aussi appeler 'filé') voire le pastiche-fiction. Le pastiche de Balzac relève bien entendu du premier genre, mais peut en combiner d'autres, ainsi que des formes d'emprunt comme celle du plagiat, on le verra. Son indice le plus frappant dans l'œuvre est le mot caractéristique qui révèle la présence du pastiche sans désigner pour autant le procédé. On le voit sur un exemple dans lequel coexistent dissimulation et exhibition de la source, cryptage et indice permettant le décryptage, celui-ci prenant la forme d'un nom désignant une personne. Il peut alors suffire, en interrompant la narration par un effet de rupture,

à évoquer en même temps une époque révolue, des personnages venus d'ailleurs, l'univers d'un romancier auquel Proust reconnaît une dette. Et cela au moment où il esquisse son monde propre, avec ses moyens à lui, qu'il met au service de son projet. C'est le cas du mot *tigre*, dans l'épisode de la soirée chez Mme de Saint-Euverte dans 'Un amour de Swann', qui marque une rupture dans la trame narrative.

Quand Swann descend de voiture, il aperçoit le petit peuple des grooms et oublie un instant son chagrin en les contemplant:

Swann prit plaisir à voir les héritiers des 'tigres' de Balzac, les grooms, suivants ordinaires de la promenade qui, chapeautés et bottés, restaient dehors devant l'hôtel sur le sol de l'avenue, ou devant les écuries comme des jardiniers auraient été rangés à l'entrée de leurs parterres. (RTP, I, 317)

Ces tigres sont effectivement présents chez Balzac, dans *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan*, auquel renvoyait déjà le pastiche déclaré intitulé 'Dans un roman de Balzac', appartenant à la série des pastiches Lemoine que Proust rédige entre 1908 et 1909. Ils s'y trouvent réduits à une seule personne, puisque la princesse ne possède qu'un tigre, Toby, 'l'ancien tigre de feu Beaudenord', lequel remplit plusieurs offices (comme d'ailleurs ceux de Mme de Saint-Euverte). Proust semble poser une équivalence entre *tigre* et *groom*, dans l'extrait cité plus haut. Ce n'est pas ce que fait Balzac, qui les distingue au contraire soigneusement dans *La Maison Nucingen*: il y précise que Beaudenord 'avait un tigre, non un groom, comme l'écrivent des gens qui ne savent rien du monde'.² Cette sévérité de jugement n'a pourtant pas empêché Balzac de confondre les deux termes dans sa correspondance.

Or Littré pose bien une distinction au XIX^e siècle entre les deux mots: il définit *tigre* comme un groom élégant, ce qui dote le mot d'un signifié supplémentaire, celui-là même dont le pourvoit Balzac. Donc, lorsque Proust rapproche les deux termes, loin de les confondre, il montre son souci de prendre à son compte le mot spécifiquement balzacien et recourt

2 Balzac, *La Maison Nucingen*, in *La Comédie humaine* (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1977), VI, 344.

à *groom* comme à une traduction de *tigre* en langage ordinaire et contemporain, faisant ainsi acte d'historicité littéraire. Il introduit de fait dans son roman un personnage-type qu'il adapte à l'époque où la scène prend place – vraisemblablement vers 1880, date intermédiaire entre la mort de Balzac et l'écriture d'«Un amour de Swann». Ce n'est pas en effet le mot *tigre* que le texte donne comme hérité de Balzac, ce sont les *grooms* eux-mêmes; ils sont les héritiers des tigres dans leur personne et dans leur fonction. On peut donc voir là une présence discrète du style de Balzac (par l'intrusion du mot appartenant à un vocabulaire passé de mode) dans le texte de Proust.

Mais si nous sommes ainsi renvoyés à Balzac dans «Un amour de Swann», ce n'est pas d'une manière directe, celle dont Proust évoquerait la domesticité florissante de Mme de Saint-Euverte, à partir de celle, indigente, de Mme de Cadignan. Nous sommes en fait invités à relire derrière ces lignes celles de «Dans un roman de Balzac», ce pastiche déclaré évoqué plus haut, et qui a paru le 22 février 1908 dans le «Supplément littéraire» du *Figaro*. Ce texte n'est antérieur que de deux ans à la rédaction d'«Un amour de Swann». En voici un extrait:

Imaginez-vous, s'écria d'Arthez avant même d'avoir remis son manteau à Paddy, le célèbre tigre de feu Beaudenord (voir *Les Secrets de la princesse de Cadignan*), qui se tenait devant lui avec l'immobilité spéciale à la domesticité du Faubourg Saint-Germain. (*PM*, 9)

Que *tigre* soit un mot typiquement balzacien n'a donc pas suffi à motiver le pastiche intégré dans le roman, à lui donner son impulsion. Le véritable noyau en est sans doute plutôt ce minuscule plagiat du pastiche déclaré. Il ne s'agit pas pour autant d'un simple auto-plagiat: Paddy, ce célèbre tigre de feu Beaudenord du pastiche démarque en fait, et presque à l'identique, une expression de Balzac qui figure dans *La princesse de Cadignan*.

La seconde distorsion est plus intéressante, puisque l'ancien tigre des *Secrets* est devenu le célèbre tigre du pastiche de 1908, un «à la manière de Balzac» sur un fait divers d'actualité, l'affaire Lemoine. Chez Proust, sa célébrité ne s'explique pas seulement par la notoriété du petit Irlandais, «nommé Paddy, Joby, Toby à volonté» chez Balzac, auprès des amis du dandy. Il la doit surtout au fait que pour lui, qui pastiche Balzac, Toby tient de

cet écrivain une existence antérieure et déjà littéraire: Toby existe pour un public, les lecteurs de Balzac et il aura, pour ceux d'«Un amour de Swann», des héritiers. D'un point de vue textuel, on peut donc dire que le plagiat s'est effacé dans le roman, auquel le pastiche déclaré avait servi d'avant-texte pour ce minuscule fragment de pastiche intégré. Ce qui persiste, c'est la connotation d'élégance, devenue un critère d'excellence professionnelle: l'immobilité que Paddy affiche dans le pastiche de 1908 se retrouve dans la comparaison des grooms avec les jardiniers 'rangés à l'entrée de leurs parterres'. Cette immobilité, qui résume celle dont la domesticité du Faubourg Saint-Germain est seule capable, perdure d'une époque à une autre, d'un roman à un autre.

Proust a donc tardivement enrichi la personnalité du groupe anonyme en lui donnant un modèle littéraire, qui est un personnage balzacien. Celui-ci fait figure de clé romanesque dans la perception que Swann a de la scène. Il y a chez ce critique d'art bien connu du lecteur un lettré jusque-là ignoré. Le nom commun (le tigre) qui forme à lui tout seul un noyau possible pour la cristallisation d'un fragment imitatif, en appelle un autre, déterminant pour le décryptage, celui-là même de Balzac. Les moyens auxquels Proust recourt pour l'évoquer sont ceux de l'association et de la métonymie. Mais le nom prépondérant, celui qui donne la clé du pastiche et en est le pivot, lui, reste tu dans le texte second: c'est celui de Beaudenord, ce dandy qui est le frère littéraire de Swann, dans l'esprit duquel se produit la complexe interprétation de la scène. Le héros de Proust pénètre ainsi furtivement et furtivement dans un roman de Balzac.

Le nom affirme ainsi sa puissance, dans le pastiche intégré comme dans d'autres domaines. Il est un facteur essentiel dans la motivation du fragment imitatif, mais fécond aussi d'autres noyaux; c'est ce qui renforce sa valeur de déclenchement, d'impulsion à un pastiche. Il peut en outre être mis en série et rencontrer alors le procédé typiquement balzacien de l'énumération. On en trouve un exemple dans *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, dans un passage où le Narrateur peint la piété du baron de Charlus, autre personnage de Proust autour duquel nous allons voir se développer une fois encore un pastiche intégré à la *Recherche du temps perdu*. Cet extrait regroupe un certain nombre de traits communs à l'énumération et à la description:

Le baron était non seulement chrétien comme on le sait, mais pieux à la façon du Moyen Âge. Pour lui, comme pour les sculpteurs du XVII^e siècle, l'Église chrétienne était, au sens vivant du mot, peuplée d'une foule d'êtres, crus parfaitement réels: prophètes, apôtres, anges, saints personnages de toute sorte entourant le Verbe incarné, sa mère et son époux, le Père éternel, tous les martyrs et docteurs, tels que leur peuple en plein relief se presse au porche ou remplit le vaisseau des cathédrales. Entre tous M. de Charlus avait choisi comme patrons intercesseurs les archanges, Michel, Gabriel, et Raphaël. (*RTP*, III, 427)

L'énumération, ici, est inclusive: elle en intègre une première, qui détaille les êtres crus réels (prophètes, apôtres, anges, saints personnages de toutes sortes etc.). Elle en inclut une autre, qui la développe à un second niveau: 'Entre tous, M. de Charlus avait choisi comme patrons intercesseurs les archanges, Michel, Gabriel et Raphaël'. Il apparaît au premier coup d'œil que l'énumération, avec ses termes englobants, prend exactement la forme de la description réaliste canonique qui se développe à partir d'un thème-titre (c'est-à-dire susceptible de se décomposer en ses éléments), 'le baron'.

Mais la différence tient au fait que ce qui est décrit est moins son personnage que l'une des entités qui le constituent: sa piété. C'est ainsi que s'explique la reprise d'un thème comme nouveau thème-titre: 'des êtres crus réels'. Celui-ci aboutit lui-même, au terme d'une accumulation arborescente, au thème des 'intercesseurs', lequel devient thème-titre à son tour, quand sont énumérés les archanges, selon le principe de la description chez Balzac. La piété de Charlus est hors du commun, et le procédé cher à Balzac de l'accumulation descriptive est ici poussé à l'extrême: la concentration des éléments crée l'effet d'une démesure étrange, accordée à la personnalité hors-norme du baron. La manière de Balzac se profile derrière la phrase de Proust; mais la monstruosité ténébreuse des héros de Balzac se fait ici céleste.

Ce retournement ressortit à la pratique propre à la parodie et au pastiche, qui consiste à reprendre certaines valeurs des personnages pour mieux les transformer; or ce procédé est constamment à l'œuvre dans *A la recherche du temps perdu*, à la fois quand l'imitation se cache (le style ne s'avoue pas directement comme balzacien) et se montre (car la similitude des procédés est suffisamment identifiable). Il se trouve en outre que l'imitation cryptée de Balzac est massivement présente dans *Sodome et Gomorrhe* où elle est particulièrement adaptée au sujet: l'homosexualité, même si celle-ci n'est pas en cause ici.

Le pastiche envoie loin ses racines, et l'on voit là se dessiner une autre de ses constantes, déjà présente dans la construction du personnage littéraire de Swann, évoqué plus haut. Ici, l'accumulation descriptive comporte l'aspect explicatif que Proust a relevé dans les juxtapositions chez Balzac. Proust est depuis longtemps sensible à cet aspect, et l'a signalé dans l'un des fragments du *Contre Sainte-Beuve* consacrés à Balzac. La transthématisation qui s'opère ici par les moyens de la juxtaposition fournit au moins deux clés de lecture. La première concerne le personnage: cette piété que nous lui connaissions par ailleurs lui donne une complexité peu balzacienne, mais à la hauteur de sa démesure. La seconde touche à l'interprétation du roman: Charlus relève d'une loi de la psycho-sociologie, chez Proust, aux fortes potentialités poétiques: elle consiste dans l'équivalence qui s'établit dans l'œuvre entre l'aristocratie et la paysannerie. Ce qui les identifie fortement l'une à l'autre, c'est essentiellement leur lien avec le monde féodal. La 'foule des êtres' qui est l'objet de la dévotion de Charlus a ainsi autant de réalité dans son âme chrétienne que sur les porches ou dans les nefs des cathédrales, où elle apparaît 'en plein relief'. Nous sommes alors renvoyés au monde de Combray, où les sculptures naïves de l'église Saint-André-des-Champs sont à l'image de la religion de Françoise: elles nourrissent ses représentations tout comme elles alimentent celles de Charlus.

Balzac n'est pas le seul écrivain à avoir apporté une contribution à la description telle que Proust la conçoit: celle de Flaubert, moins voyante, encore plus profonde, fait ressortir par contraste la manière occasionnellement balzacienne du style de Proust. Sa présence intertextuelle, par la référence et la citation, est bien moindre que celle de Balzac; mais il en va différemment dans le pastiche. C'est à sa syntaxe, davantage encore qu'à celle de Balzac, qu'il se montre sensible avant tout. Et c'est aussi dans la description que la syntaxe de Flaubert révèle son originalité, mais cette fois par la répartition du sujet et de l'objet, sans rapport aucun avec l'accumulation. Dans 'A ajouter à Flaubert', probablement rédigé en 1910 et contemporain de la première rédaction d'"Un amour de Swann", Proust note ceci: 'Dans [ses] grandes phrases les choses existent non pas comme l'accessoire d'une histoire, mais dans la réalité de leur apparition; elles sont généralement le sujet de la phrase, car le personnage n'intervient pas et subit la vision' (CSB, 299). Il en donne un exemple: 'Un village parut, les peupliers s'alignèrent'.

Le pastiche 'L'Affaire Lemoine par Gustave Flaubert' avait reproduit deux ans plus tôt et de manière fidèle, ce procédé dans chacun des éléments descriptifs qu'il comporte. Ils sont nombreux, et on retiendra comme exemple la description de la salle d'audience où se tient Lemoine, jugé pour escroquerie:

Pour finir [l'avocat de Werner] attesta les portraits des présidents Grévy et Carnot, placés au-dessus du tribunal; et chacun, ayant levé la tête, constata que la moisissure les avait gagnés dans cette salle officielle et malpropre, qui exhibait nos gloires et sentait le renfermé. *Une large baie la divisait par le milieu; des bancs s'y alignaient jusqu'au pied du tribunal.* (PM, 13-14; nous soulignons)

Rien de tel chez Balzac et ses pastiches par Proust, qu'ils soient déclarés ou intégrés. Dans sa souplesse, le style de Proust s'approprie les procédés empruntés qui conviennent à son sujet, n'hésitant pas à faire appel à sa mémoire de la littérature, et sans se limiter à un modèle unique.

Ces remarques inciteront peut-être à ne pas minorer plus qu'il ne convient l'appoint que les techniques réputées propres au pastiche apportent à l'élaboration du roman. Il a fallu les isoler par nécessité de l'analyse. Mais elles se fondent en réalité dans le large creuset de l'inter- et de l'hypertextualité. Ces procédés sont inséparables des modes les plus originaux de l'écriture de Proust, qui consistent dans l'élaboration d'une syntaxe. À ce titre, ils conditionnent toute lecture en profondeur. Proust autorise cette manière de voir quand il commente l'attitude du héros après le dîner chez la duchesse dans *Guermites II* (RTP, II, 836-7).

Il affirme qu'il faut choisir entre deux grandes forces: celle qui émane de nous-mêmes (les impressions profondes) et celle qui nous vient du dehors (les paroles des autres). Il condamne provisoirement ce dernier choix au moment où nous voyons le héros, enivré par la conversation qu'il vient d'entendre, se montrer incapable de résister à la tentation d'en faire la répétition, qui ne peut être que purement mécanique: son stéréoscope intérieur est incapable d'assimiler ce langage d'autrui à celui qui lui est propre. Dans *Le Temps retrouvé*, Proust va plus loin; il redéfinit l'imitation en faisant d'elle la matrice de l'écriture originale: 's'il est un moyen pour nous d'apprendre à comprendre ces mots oubliés, ce moyen, ne devons-nous pas l'employer?'

(*RTP*, IV, 482). Il ne refuse donc plus désormais de recourir à la force qui nous vient du dehors. Les mots d'autrui sont devenus utilisables, mais à condition d'avoir été préalablement traduits 'en un langage universel [...], qui ferait de ceux qui ne sont plus, en leur essence la plus vraie, une acquisition perpétuelle pour toutes les âmes' (*ibid.*).

Proust, Flaubert, et Flaubert avant Flaubert

Dans un roman de David Lodge intitulé *Small World* (1984), le jeune professeur irlandais Persse McGarrigle a fait une étude de l'influence de Shakespeare sur T. S. Eliot. Mais, dans un colloque à l'université (fictive) de Rummidge, il annonce que son sujet est l'influence de T. S. Eliot sur Shakespeare. Loin de choquer ou de provoquer le ridicule, cette apparente absurdité fait la joie de certains participants qui y voient non une impossibilité chronologique ou un travail à l'envers, mais une approche aventureuse et novatrice, voire le dernier cri du poststructuralisme.¹ En effet, dit-on, comment 'lire' Shakespeare aujourd'hui sans passer par Eliot? L'impact de ce dernier sur la façon dont on lit ayant totalement transformé notre compréhension de la chose littéraire, déterminer la nature et les enjeux de cette transformation devient urgent et nécessaire. Du coup, la caricature semble presque prête à céder la place à l'analyse d'un problème légitime, celui de 'l'évolution' des anciens (ou de la lecture que nous en pratiquons) à la lumière des approches modernes. Il y a, après tout, comme Proust lui-même le disait dans son célèbre article sur Flaubert, des auteurs qui peuvent renouveler 'presque autant notre vision des choses que Kant avec ses Catégories'.²

1 David Lodge, *Small World* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1984), traduit en français par Maurice et Yvonne Couturier sous le titre *Un tout petit monde* (Paris: Rivages Poche, 1984). Ajoutons qu'à son heure ce livre faisait les délices de notre ami Richard Bales, qui en parlait avec ce sourire espiègle et ces yeux pétillants qu'on lui connaissait.

2 Marcel Proust, 'À propos du style de Flaubert', *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 1 janvier 1920, pp. 72–90. L'article de Proust a été réimprimé dans *Flaubert savait-il écrire? Une querelle grammaticale (1919–1921)*, textes réunis par Gilles Philippe (Grenoble: Ellug, 2005), pp. 81–97. Nous citons d'après cette réédition, avec l'abréviation APSF pour le titre de l'article de Proust.

Pour dépasser l'aspect caricatural de cette notion barbare d'«influence à rebours», précisons d'abord qu'il s'agit réellement d'un problème de réception. Substituons ensuite, pour la valeur exemplaire du cas, les noms de Flaubert et de Proust à ceux de Shakespeare et d'Eliot. On sait, après tout, que l'impact rétrospectif de Proust sur Flaubert (ou plutôt sur notre lecture de Flaubert) a été énorme et que l'intervention de Proust dans le débat sur le style de son prédécesseur a constitué un des tournants majeurs de la critique dans la première moitié du vingtième siècle. Selon Genette, Proust a approfondi notre sens du style flaubertien en mettant «un doigt d'une précision toute chirurgicale sur ce que Flaubert a de plus spécifique».³ En construisant en grande partie sa propre approche de romancier à travers sa lecture de Flaubert, Proust fait ressortir les qualités essentielles et particulières de la vision flaubertienne et de la syntaxe qui la fonde (ou qui en découle, si on envisage un peu différemment le problème).⁴ La lecture de Flaubert reste une référence constante et fondamentale dans l'œuvre de Proust, comme plusieurs études récentes l'ont signalé,⁵ et bien sûr, l'intervention de Proust dans la critique flaubertienne est encore aujourd'hui un

- 3 Gérard Genette, *Palimpsestes: la littérature au second degré* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), p. 128.
- 4 Dans la polémique sur le style de Flaubert qui oppose Thibaudet à Proust, une des questions qui se posent est celle de savoir si le style de Flaubert résulte d'une «vision» du monde qu'il traduit, ou si le style lui-même est générateur de cette vision. Gérard Genette affirme que la position de Proust sur Flaubert serait plutôt la première, et qu'elle s'affirme progressivement: «Il me semble qu'avec le temps, Proust tend à appuyer de plus en plus (lourdement) son esthétique sur une «métaphysique», et que sa position finale est la plus expressionniste: la syntaxe de Flaubert ne serait donc pas «déformante», mais bien *déformée* par une vision singulière, qui se serait peu à peu accentuée chez lui, imprimant de plus en plus sa marque à son discours» (Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 129).
- 5 Voir notamment Annick Bouillaguet, *Proust lecteur de Balzac et de Flaubert. L'imitation cryptée* (Paris: Champion, 2000), et plus récemment encore Mireille Naturel, *Proust et Flaubert: un secret d'écriture* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007). Le très beau livre de Marion Schmid, *Processes of Literary Creation: Flaubert and Proust* (Oxford: Legenda, 1998) montre aussi à quel point une étude génétique parallèle des deux auteurs peut être révélatrice, même si cela révèle des approches essentiellement différentes (composition «programmétique» chez Flaubert, «immanente» chez Proust).

point de repère indispensable. Comme Mireille Naturel nous le rappelle, Flaubert est présent d'une façon ou d'une autre tout au long de la carrière littéraire de Proust, non seulement dans les fameux pastiches ('Mondanité et mélomanie dans *Bouvard et Pécuchet*', ou 'L'Affaire Lemoine par Gustave Flaubert'), mais aussi par l'emploi de certaines particularités stylistiques et, bien sûr, par ses thèmes majeurs: le souvenir et le passage du temps. Bien avant son article de 1920, Proust connaissait l'essentiel des écrits publiés de Flaubert, y compris les écrits de jeunesse et *Par les champs et par les grèves*.⁶ Son article sur le style de Flaubert avait été précédé de bon nombre de morceaux préparatoires, et les notes écrites avant la guerre sont ensuite reprises en 1920.⁷ Flaubert est d'ailleurs souvent présent aussi dans les manuscrits de Proust, et il ne serait pas exagéré d'affirmer, avec Mireille Naturel, que l'auteur de la *Recherche* se définit et se trouve à travers sa lecture (ou sa contre-lecture) de Flaubert.⁸

Le retentissement de 'A propos du style de Flaubert', autant à l'époque de sa publication que par la suite, reste presque sans égal, et grâce à une nouvelle édition des textes principaux de la polémique de 1919–21 sur le style de Flaubert,⁹ nous sommes aujourd'hui mieux que jamais en mesure de comprendre l'importance de l'intervention de Proust. La question de l'incorrection grammaticale de Flaubert était elle-même loin d'être neuve à l'époque, et comme Thibaudet le rappelle dans son article 'Sur le style de Flaubert' paru dans la *Nouvelle Revue française* en novembre 1919, Émile

6 Dans *Proust et Flaubert*, Mireille Naturel affirme que Proust a été inspiré par les premiers écrits de Flaubert (voir par exemple sa discussion de *Par les champs et par les grèves*, pp. 42–62, et des *Mémoires d'un fou*, pp. 112–16). Même s'il est méthodologiquement douteux de vouloir chercher des preuves concrètes et détaillées d'une quelconque 'influence', la critique a longtemps souligné la parenté stylistique et thématique entre les deux écrivains, et ceci à partir des œuvres de jeunesse de Flaubert. Ainsi Geneviève Bollème pouvait affirmer que 'le jeune Flaubert est parfois proustien avant la lettre' (*La Leçon de Flaubert* (Paris: Julliard, 1963), p. 43).

7 Voir Mireille Naturel, 'Proust lecteur et critique de Flaubert', dans *Proust et Flaubert*, pp. 19–108.

8 *Proust et Flaubert*, pp. 9–15.

9 *Flaubert savait-il écrire? Une querelle grammaticale (1919–1921)*: voir la note 2.

Faguet s'en était déjà occupé en 1899.¹⁰ Le débat se concentre donc surtout sur l'importance ou sur l'admissibilité de ces fautes: un écrivain a-t-il le droit de faire des entorses grammaticales dans un but stylistique supérieur? La réponse de Proust à cette question sera sans équivoque. Bien sûr, affirme-t-il, Flaubert s'écarte de la norme grammaticale, mais il le fait pour arriver à un style particulier qui traduit une vision personnelle et originale des choses. Alors que Proust ne semble pas avoir eu connaissance de la plupart des textes de ce débat,¹¹ et qu'il exprime des idées qu'il méditait depuis une dizaine d'années, c'est l'article d'Albert Thibaudet qui le pique et qui le pousse à l'action. Dans la querelle qui oppose les deux hommes, Proust s'en prend surtout à la déclaration de Thibaudet que Flaubert n'était pas 'un grand écrivain de race et que la pleine maîtrise verbale ne lui était pas donnée dans sa nature même' (SF, p. 56). L'essentiel de leurs différences est là. Pour Proust, les pages 'sans précédent dans la littérature' de Flaubert prouvent non que celui-ci était étranger à l'incorrection grammaticale, mais qu'il la tournait à son profit. Il y a, dit Proust, 'une beauté grammaticale, (comme il y a une beauté morale, dramatique, etc.) qui n'a rien à voir avec la correction' (APSF, pp. 83 et 84). Point de vue qui est d'ailleurs bien proche de certaines affirmations de Flaubert lui-même, par exemple lorsque celui-ci explique la différence entre les deux héros de la première *Éducation sentimentale* en 1845. Henry, écrit-il, 'ne remarquera pas la correction profonde d'une phrase incorrecte ni l'harmonie d'un rythme brisé'.¹²

- 10 Albert Thibaudet, 'Sur le style de Flaubert', *La Nouvelle Revue française*, XIII, 74 (1 novembre 1919), 942-53, réimprimé dans *Flaubert savait-il écrire?*, pp. 53-63 (p. 56). Nous citons d'après cette réédition, avec l'abréviation SF pour le titre de l'article de Thibaudet.
- 11 Gilles Philippe fait très justement remarquer: 'Qu'il prenne principalement appui sur *L'Éducation sentimentale* et non sur *Madame Bovary* qui était au cœur des débats depuis l'article de Louis de Robert, suffirait à prouver que le texte de janvier 1920 n'est pas directement connecté à la polémique qui se déploie depuis août' (*Flaubert savait-il écrire?*, p. 81).
- 12 Gustave Flaubert, *L'Éducation sentimentale (1845)*, in *Œuvres de jeunesse* (désormais *OJ*), éd. Claudine Gothot-Mersch et Guy Sagnes (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 2001), p. 1060.

Si l'écart entre Proust et Thibaudet est évident (le premier insistant sur le fait que le grand 'trottoir roulant' du texte flaubertien résulte d'un travail long et précis, le deuxième affirmant que la langue est maîtrisée du dehors et que le génie verbal lui manque), on pourrait aussi rappeler les points de convergence entre leurs approches: d'abord l'attention qu'ils portent tous les deux au rythme distinctif de la phrase de Flaubert, avec ses conjonctions, ses participes présents, ses adverbes, ses usages particuliers du passé défini et du passé indéfini. Pour Proust, ce style entièrement original exprime une nouvelle façon d'appréhender la réalité, voire une métaphysique, alors que pour Thibaudet, qui reste bien plus sceptique vis-à-vis de l'originalité du style de Flaubert, il y a néanmoins une 'solidité substantielle de cette forme flaubertienne qui tant qu'il y aura une langue française ne vieillira jamais' (SF, p. 62). Mais Thibaudet rejoint également Proust dans la mesure où il considère le projet littéraire de Flaubert comme une évolution venue à son heure, et ce qui réunit plus spécifiquement les deux hommes, c'est le jugement qu'ils portent sur les écrits qui précèdent *Madame Bovary*. Pour Thibaudet, tout ce que Flaubert a écrit avant *Madame Bovary* est sans intérêt, le style des écrits de jeunesse étant d'une 'insignifiance absolue' (SF, p. 56),¹³ et pour Proust également, le vrai Flaubert est tardif et ne sort que très lentement de son apprentissage littéraire. Sur ce point, il va d'ailleurs plus loin que Thibaudet. Même dans *Madame Bovary*, dit-il, Flaubert n'est pas encore tout à fait Flaubert et ce n'est qu'avec *L'Éducation sentimentale* de 1869 que 'la révolution est accomplie' (APSF, p. 85). Comme Gérard Genette l'affirme – presque sans exagérer – les textes qui constituent pour Proust le vrai Flaubert se réduisent donc à 'un corpus de quelques pages privilégiées, début de *l'Éducation*, bribes de *Salammbô*, des *Trois contes*, de *Bouvard* bien sûr, [...] et un peu toujours les mêmes. On dirait volontiers qu'il s'est constitué son Flaubert sur deux ou trois phrases caractéristiques, retenues

13 Dans sa réponse à l'article de Proust, 'Lettre à M. Marcel Proust' (*Nouvelle Revue française*, VII, 78, 1 mars 1920, pp. 426–41, réimprimée dans *Flaubert savait-il écrire?*, pp. 105–22), Thibaudet reprend et renforce ce jugement en parlant de 'cet écart si singulier qui existe entre les *Œuvres de jeunesse* et *Madame Bovary*' (p. 108).

par cœur.¹⁴ On est frappé, en effet, de voir les écrits de jeunesse marginalisés à ce point chez Proust, et ceci malgré le fait qu'il les connaissait très bien. Ce Flaubert avant Flaubert, Proust le laisse volontiers dans l'ombre.

Le peu de cas que font Proust et Thibaudet des écrits de jeunesse de Flaubert dans la polémique qui les oppose est bien sûr loin d'être exceptionnel. Ce phénomène revient très souvent dans la critique flaubertienne. Pour peu qu'on insiste sur le long et difficile apprentissage du romancier, on souligne naturellement la distance parcourue et l'écart entre la jeunesse et la maturité, et cela au détriment du caractère continu ou homogène de son évolution. Pour de nombreux critiques, Flaubert fait entièrement peau neuve à un moment ou un autre, vision que le romancier a d'ailleurs lui-même encouragée en parlant, par exemple, de *Novembre* comme 'la clôture de [sa] jeunesse',¹⁵ ou en mettant en scène le personnage de Jules qui se réinvente radicalement vers la fin de *L'Éducation sentimentale* de 1845. Pourtant, comme Jules lui-même le reconnaît, les états différents de son évolution contiennent un fil secret et caché qu'il importe de trouver: 'De tout cela [...] résultait son état présent qui était la somme de tous ces antécédents et qui lui permettait de les revoir. [...] Il y avait [...] une conséquence et une suite dans cette série de perceptions diverses' (*OJ*, p. 1023). Le grand romancier Flaubert est bel et bien sorti de ces pages tourmentées et souvent spontanées qui constituent son œuvre de jeunesse, et il ne faudrait pas les désavouer entièrement. Il y aurait même tout un travail à faire sur ces écrits en tant que brouillons préparatoires aux romans de maturité, et la critique génétique pourrait profiter d'une extension dans ce sens. S'il nous arrive dans ces pages de préciser le statut de 'brouillon' de deux ou trois passages des écrits de jeunesse, notre intention principale est pourtant davantage d'affirmer la pertinence de l'approche de Proust pour le corpus de jeunesse de Flaubert, et d'esquisser la possibilité d'une

14 Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 128.

15 Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance*, 5 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1973-2007), I, 410. On se rappelle également le commentaire sur *Novembre*: 'Quel nez fin j'ai eu de ne pas le publier! Comme j'en rougirais maintenant!' (*Correspondance*, II, 460).

relecture de certains passages typiques à la lumière de l'analyse proposée dans 'A propos du style de Flaubert'. En attendant une étude exhaustive de ce sujet, nous donnerons ici quelques exemples seulement, en soulignant avant tout le rôle de *Novembre* et de la première *Éducation sentimentale* dans l'évolution du style de Flaubert vers l'état décrit par Proust. L'usage des participes présents, des pronoms, des adverbes et des prépositions y est déjà très marqué, ainsi que le passage fréquent et inattendu entre le passé défini et le passé indéfini.

Tout au long du corpus de textes écrits entre 1835 et 1845, on peut discerner des tentatives de manier le rythme de la langue et la coupe de la phrase selon les critères identifiés par Proust. Si la ponctuation de Flaubert est très approximative dans ces textes souvent hâtifs, et que l'usage de la virgule y est d'une irrégularité notoire, les hésitations et les arrêts s'impriment néanmoins sur la phrase ou sur un paragraphe entier, pour lui donner ce rythme si reconnaissable. Lorsque Flaubert, à l'âge de quinze ans, évoque 'une folle nuit d'Italie, au mois d'août, à Florence' dans *La Peste à Florence* (*OJ*, p. 149), nous trouvons déjà la division ternaire qui sera la marque de son style. Mais ce rythme particulier se développe largement au cours de ses premiers écrits, et nous le trouvons surtout dans les passages racontés à la troisième personne. Ainsi, dans *Les Mémoires d'un fou*, nous tombons sur ce passage dans le chapitre qui décrit les sœurs anglaises: 'Elle avait un livre à la main; c'était des vers, je crois; elle le laissa tomber. Notre promenade continua' (*OJ*, p. 496). Dans son analyse de Flaubert, Proust indique qu'en 'permettant de faire jaillir du cœur d'une proposition l'arceau qui ne retombera qu'en plein milieu de la proposition suivante, [de telles phrases] assuraient l'étroite, l'hermétique continuité du style' (APSF, p. 84). Ainsi, dans cet exemple précis, le pronom 'le' ('elle le laissa tomber') est séparé du 'livre' auquel il se réfère par une proposition intercalée. Mais ce qui est encore plus 'flaubertien' dans ce passage précis, c'est la chute qui constitue la suite ('Notre promenade continua'). Cette courte phrase d'une simplicité extrême, telle que nous en trouvons souvent dans les grands romans de Flaubert, marque un moment de clôture et de passage abrupt vers une nouvelle étape de la narration, avec le changement de temps de l'imparfait au passé simple. Dans d'autres cas, le rythme ternaire peut se dédoubler et

s'accompagner d'un usage particulier d'un adverbe, dont la position marque tout le rythme de la phrase (c'est bien pour cela que Proust admirait le 'alternativement' sur lequel se termine *Hérodias*). Ainsi, dans *Novembre*, au moment où le narrateur va chez la prostituée Marie pour la première fois, une série de propositions ternaires se termine ainsi: 'je m'avançai; je sens encore le contact de la porte que je poussai de mon épaule, elle céda; j'avais eu peur qu'elle ne fût scellée dans la muraille, mais non, elle tourna sur un gond, doucement, sans faire de bruit' (*OJ*, p. 786). Ce 'doucement' apporte un changement nouveau au rythme établi dans l'organisation par groupes de trois, ralentissant la narration et fixant cet instant dans une espèce de continuité d'impressions. Comme Proust le verra si bien dans son analyse, tout est dans la valeur rythmique.

C'est surtout dans la première *Éducation sentimentale* que le rythme ternaire, avec ses variations et ses modulations, commence à s'imposer. Sous sa forme la plus simple, on le trouve très souvent. Ainsi, à propos du fils de M. et Mme Lenoir – avec la ponctuation singulière du jeune Flaubert qui a été restituée dans la nouvelle édition de la *Pléiade* – nous lisons ces phrases d'une inconséquence délicieusement ironique et tout à fait 'flaubertienne': 'il mangeait prodigieusement, surtout de la crème. – Ses parents lui trouvaient beaucoup de moyens – on l'avait habillé en artilleur' (*OJ*, p. 855); ou bien, à propos du père Renaud le soir du bal: 'il se mit au piano et tapa sur le clavier avec ses coudes. Cela fit beaucoup rire. Il fut content' (*OJ*, p. 897). Mais très souvent, l'organisation tripartite de la phrase ou du paragraphe se complique avec l'ajout de connecteurs et de propositions supplémentaires, ou bien par une série d'éléments ternaires qui s'enchaînent et s'imbriquent. Ajoutons à cela les changements de temps et l'usage de participes présents, et dès lors la complexité du style particulier de Flaubert, tel que Proust l'identifie, commence à se faire sentir.

Dans l'extrait suivant, où Flaubert décrit la réaction d'Émilie aux avances d'Henry, une série d'éléments se combinent pour donner un rythme bien flaubertien à la narration: 'Et elle se pencha sur lui, passa lentement ses deux mains moelleuses dans ses cheveux et le baisa au front, sans bruit, les lèvres collées, le serrant sur sa bouche. Henry, la tenant embrassée dans ses bras, la tête sur ses seins, humait le parfum de sa peau et sentait son cœur

se fondre' (*OJ*, p. 878). D'abord, dans la première phrase, trois verbes au passé simple ('pencha', 'passa', 'baisa') suivis de trois propositions apposées, celles-ci séparées par des virgules. La troisième proposition introduit le participe présent ('serrant'), autre élément qui selon Proust constitue avec les adverbes une particularité importante du style de Flaubert, et qui modifie de nouveau le rythme de la phrase. A cela, il faut ajouter l'usage de la conjonction 'et' deux fois au cours de ce passage. Selon Proust, 'la conjonction "et" n'a nullement dans Flaubert l'objet que la grammaire lui assigne. Elle marque une pause dans une mesure rythmique et divise un tableau. En effet partout où on mettrait "et", Flaubert le supprime. [...] En revanche là où personne n'aurait l'idée d'en user, Flaubert l'emploie' (APSF, p. 87). La formule exagère peut-être la symétrie de l'usage flaubertien, mais on voit bien que la conjonction 'et' est investie dans le passage cité d'une valeur particulière et qu'il ne s'agit pas d'usage normal. Loin de 'conjoindre' deux propositions séparées et de leur imposer un ordre binaire ou consécutif, elle sert plutôt à relancer la narration ('Et elle se pencha sur lui').¹⁶ Certes, sa présence n'est pas grammaticalement ou logiquement nécessaire, car elle marque surtout une transition et une modulation du rythme. Ensuite, son usage vers la fin de la deuxième phrase ('et sentait son cœur se fondre') signale un deuxième changement de vitesse qui sera cette fois-ci renforcé par un changement de temps. La narration passe à l'imparfait avec les deux verbes de la deuxième phrase ('humait', 'sentait'), là où on aurait pu attendre le passé simple. 'L'éternel imparfait' de Flaubert, cet imparfait 'si nouveau dans la littérature' selon Proust (APSF, p. 86), commence dès maintenant à se faire sentir et se faire entendre, jetant sa lumière très particulière et sur la narration et sur la vision de la réalité qui en découle. En même temps, cet imparfait estompe la différence entre l'action et l'impression, voire entre le temps et la durée.

16 A son tour, Thibaudet sera fasciné par l'usage tout à fait particulier que fait Flaubert de la conjonction 'et'. Pour lui, le 'et' de mouvement chez Flaubert, celui qui relance une proposition, vient directement de l'art oratoire (SE, p. 115). On pourra trouver un exemple frappant de cet usage de 'et' dans *Les Mémoires d'un fou*, où le huitième chapitre débute ainsi: 'Et il y a des jours où j'ai une lassitude immense, et un sombre ennui m'enveloppe comme un linceul partout où je vais' (*OJ*, p. 480).

La présence d'un imparfait apparemment itératif, souvent entremêlé de l'usage du participe présent, devient également un des éléments marquants du style du jeune Flaubert, et cela surtout à partir de *Novembre*. Dans ce texte où il y a très peu d'événements réels à part la rencontre avec Marie et le suicide du héros raconté par un deuxième narrateur à la fin de l'histoire, les impressions subjectives constituent la vie et l'histoire du premier narrateur, et l'imparfait s'impose presque dès le départ, même quand il est question d'événements précis où l'usage du passé simple serait tout à fait justifié: 'Le soleil jetait un dernier adieu derrière les collines confondues, les lumières des maisons s'allumaient dans la vallée, et la lune, l'astre de la rosée, commençait à se découvrir d'entre les nuages et à montrer sa pâle figure' (*OJ*, p. 760). Certes, si on décide qu'il s'agit d'une série d'événements semblables racontés une seule fois, on pourrait considérer que Flaubert fait ici un emploi tout à fait conventionnel de l'itératif. Mais l'intérêt de ce cas, c'est que l'itératif semble vouloir glisser vers le singulatif, sans que l'imparfait soit abandonné. La technique est relativement répandue dans *Novembre*, et on la retrouve quelques pages plus loin, lorsque le narrateur raconte sa (ou ses) visite(s) au théâtre et la vision de l'actrice qui attire les applaudissements de la foule: 'sa poitrine, d'où sortaient des notes précipitées, se baissait et montait en palpitant, le rythme poussait sa voix au galop et l'emportait dans un tourbillon mélodieux, les roulades faisaient onduler son cou gonflé comme celui d'un cygne, sous le poids de baisers aériens [...]. On l'applaudissait, on lui jetait des fleurs' (*OJ*, p. 763). Faut-il croire que ce passage raconte une scène qui s'est produite plusieurs fois, ou régulièrement, comme l'usage de l'imparfait voudrait l'indiquer? L'auteur ne traduit-il pas plutôt un seul événement, tout en nous donnant l'illusion qu'il s'est souvent répété? Impossible de trancher, bien sûr, puisque l'événement 'réel' n'existe pas au-delà de l'écriture, mais dans ce cas comme dans l'autre, le style de Flaubert donne l'impression de flotter entre l'itératif et le singulatif. Le sens précis ne se laisse pas déterminer, et c'est une des grandes trouvailles stylistiques que fait l'auteur de *Novembre*. D'ailleurs ce passage frappant, qui maintient uniformément l'usage de l'imparfait sur deux longs paragraphes remplis de verbes d'action, a certainement constitué un premier brouillon – un quart de siècle à l'avance – d'un passage de

L'Éducation sentimentale de 1869 où, un soir, Madame Arnoux chante dans son salon, accompagnée d'un pianiste: 'sa belle tête, aux grands sourcils, s'inclinait sur son épaule; sa poitrine se gonflait, ses bras s'écartaient, son cou d'où s'échappaient des roulades se renversait mollement comme sous des baisers aériens'.¹⁷ Même effet, avec plusieurs récurrences des mêmes mots ('roulades', 'gonflé', 'baisers aériens'), mais pour confirmer peut-être que Flaubert maîtrise mieux son art dans les années 1860 qu'au début des années 1840, on remarquera l'absence, dans *L'Éducation sentimentale*, de la comparaison explicite mais redondante avec le cygne, et l'on verra que l'auteur est plus précis en écrivant que c'est la poitrine et non le cou qui se gonfle. D'ailleurs, dans le deuxième texte, l'usage de l'imparfait est plus savamment alterné avec le passé simple lorsque, vers la fin de sa chanson, Madame Arnoux 'lança trois notes aiguës, redescendit, en jeta une plus haute encore, et, après un silence, termina par un point d'orgue'. En effet, Flaubert a mis longtemps à devenir Flaubert, et l'on peut dire avec Proust que dans *L'Éducation sentimentale* de 1869 il maîtrise pleinement ses effets. Mais si, dans *Novembre*, il n'en est qu'à ses débuts, si les effets y sont quelque peu exagérés ou bien maintenus un peu trop longtemps, le jeune Flaubert fait des essais qui mèneront ultérieurement au style de ses grands romans, et capte par moments le rythme et la sonorité qui seront par la suite les siens. C'est donc bien le même Flaubert que celui de Proust. L'usage singulier de l'imparfait montre qu'il est sur la bonne piste, et qu'il pousse déjà la syntaxe jusqu'à la limite des conventions jusque-là acceptées. On pourrait dire que l'éternel imparfait de Flaubert commence dès 1842 à 'change[r] entièrement l'aspect des choses et des êtres' (APSF, p. 86).

Selon Proust, ce qu'il y a de plus beau dans *L'Éducation sentimentale* de 1869, c'est le blanc, cette ellipse que le romancier établit entre deux moments de la narration. Proust cite (sans aucun doute de mémoire, comme l'affirme Genette)¹⁸ le début de l'avant-dernier chapitre où, après le meurtre

17 Gustave Flaubert, *L'Éducation sentimentale* (désormais *ES*), in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. II (Paris: Seuil, 1964), p. 26.

18 Voir la note 14 ci-dessus.

de Dussardier par Sénecal, le narrateur raconte en quelques lignes les voyages de Frédéric, son retour, ses fréquentations mondaines, d'autres amours, et la visite de Madame Arnoux un soir de 1867. Or, Flaubert a déjà fait des expériences importantes avec l'ellipse narrative dans ses premiers textes, produisant quelquefois des effets comparables à ceux de ses écrits de maturité. L'exemple type du blanc narratif se trouve à la fin de l'épisode où Jules rencontre un chien galeux qui le poursuit au cours du chapitre XXVI de la première *Éducation sentimentale*. Rentré chez lui, et se demandant encore si cette rencontre curieuse peut avoir un sens, Jules ouvre la porte, et le chapitre se termine par la phrase, isolée en un seul paragraphe: 'Le chien était couché sur le seuil' (*OJ*, p. 1031). L'auteur ne nous dit pas ce qui se passe ensuite. Dans le chapitre suivant, après avoir tiré un trait avec 'Ce fut son dernier jour de pathétique', il relance la narration en passant à l'évolution des idées de Jules. La clôture du chapitre précédent semble en conséquence encore plus abrupte, plus définitive. Le blanc s'accompagne d'ailleurs par définition de ces phrases de clôture qui deviendront une des marques du style du Flaubert, et qui sont souvent chargées de signification potentielle dans leur simplicité même. On pense, par exemple, à la danse d'Emma avec le vicomte et à son rêve momentané qui se termine soudain lorsqu'en ouvrant les yeux elle voit que son cavalier est parti danser avec une autre dame: 'Elle choisit le vicomte, et le violon recommença'. Il s'agit, dans ce cas précis, d'un blanc en miniature, qui renforce le mouvement irréversible du temps et la perte de l'illusion. Dans *Novembre*, comme dans *L'Éducation sentimentale* de 1845, Flaubert commence déjà à utiliser de telles phrases, qui signalent la rupture définitive d'un rêve ou d'un état psychologique, et le passage inexorable à une nouvelle étape de l'existence d'un personnage. L'épisode panthéiste de *Novembre* se termine, par exemple, par une toute petite phrase – 'Puis ce fut tout' (*OJ*, p. 781) – où le narrateur semble indiquer qu'il n'y aura aucune tentative de s'interroger sur la nature de son expérience ou de revenir en arrière. Tout est fini. Comme pour Emma Bovary, une petite phrase simple et fruste résonne de sens possibles mais non réalisés, et la formule brève et sobre semble particulièrement apte à exprimer ce non-lieu de rêves et de sensations sublimes. C'est aussi un moment de transition dans la narration, un blanc pur, point limite où en quelques

mots nous passons d'un état à l'autre. En guise de note supplémentaire à notre réflexion sur ce passage de *Novembre*, ajoutons que dans *L'Éducation sentimentale* de 1869 nous retrouverons presque la même formule vers la fin du roman lorsque, après la dernière rencontre de Frédéric avec Madame Arnoux, nous lisons: 'Et ce fut tout' (*ES*, p 161). Même effet de clôture et d'hiatus, même effet de blanc (quoique les circonstances narratives soient très différentes) avec ce passage silencieux d'un état de rêves et d'espoir à un état de désillusion. Que Flaubert se soit souvenu de *Novembre* en rédigeant la fin de *L'Éducation sentimentale*, ou qu'il ait tout au moins préparé dès *Novembre* le genre d'effet qu'il allait créer dans les pages finales de son grand roman, on ne peut aucunement en douter. Comme pour confirmer le statut de brouillon de *Novembre*, on trouve vers la fin de *L'Éducation* une autre phrase parue dans sa première version dans le roman de 1842. Juste avant le départ de Madame Arnoux, Flaubert écrit: 'Il y a un moment, dans les séparations, où la personne aimée n'est déjà plus avec nous' (*ES*, p. 161). Dans *Novembre*, avant la séparation du narrateur et de Marie, il avait écrit: 'Il y a un instant, dans le départ, où, par anticipation de tristesse, la personne aimée n'est déjà plus avec vous' (*OJ*, p. 815). La phrase est reprise et remodelée (en mieux? – qui pourrait en juger?) mais sa présence dans le roman de 1869 confirme l'importance et la présence continue de *Novembre* dans l'écriture de Flaubert, ainsi que son statut d'avant-texte.

Les blancs de Flaubert, marqués par ces belles phrases de clôture, sont souvent accompagnés aussi par des passages où la durée est télescopée et réduite à quelques traits saillants. C'est le cas par excellence, nous l'avons vu, à la fin de *L'Éducation* de 1869 où la narration passe très rapidement sur une période de dix-sept ans, et c'est bien ce que Proust admirait chez Flaubert. Mais le télescopage narratif est utilisé aussi dans les écrits de jeunesse, et notamment à la fin de *L'Éducation sentimentale* de 1845 où le narrateur fait rapidement revivre tous ses personnages et nous résume en quelques lignes la vie de chacun par la suite. Ainsi, par exemple, le capitaine Nicole qui, tant qu'il faisait des voyages transatlantiques, rêvait d'acheter une petite maison en Normandie, a fini par réaliser cette ambition mais 'il s'ennuie; il regrette la mer' (*OJ*, p. 1078). La technique n'est pas sans rapport avec la fin de *L'Éducation sentimentale* de 1869, où dans le dernier chapitre

Frédéric et Deslauriers se racontent l'histoire ultérieure des personnages qu'ils ont connus. Mais il y a un passage entre tous dans la première *Éducation sentimentale* qu'il faudrait évoquer, et ceci (bizarrement) parce qu'on en parle très peu souvent. C'est le moment où Flaubert évoque la vie d'un personnage tout à fait secondaire à bord du vaisseau du capitaine Nicole, l'ancien esclave Itatoë ('Statoë' dans les éditions précédentes du roman):

Son père l'avait vendu pour un paquet de clous; il était venu en France comme domestique. Il avait volé un foulard pour une femme de chambre qu'il aimait – on l'avait mis cinq ans aux galères. – Il était revenu de Toulon au Havre à pied pour revoir sa maîtresse; il ne l'avait pas retrouvée. – Il s'en retournait maintenant au pays des Noirs.

Celui-là aussi avait fait son éducation sentimentale. (*OJ*, p. 978)

Pour Proust, ce 'titre si beau par sa solidité' (APSF, p. 85) de *L'Éducation sentimentale* ne fut pas la moindre des trouvailles de Flaubert. Or, comme le passage du roman de 1845 le montre, son origine est très précise, indice supplémentaire des rapports qui unissent les deux versions du texte. Mais contrairement à l'éducation sentimentale de Frédéric dans le roman de 1869, l'éducation sentimentale d'Itatoë dans le roman de 1845 est racontée dans les termes les plus brefs, les plus frustes, et pourtant, dans cette petite histoire qui se termine aussi par un blanc, que d'émotions, que d'événements, que d'espoirs le jeune Flaubert laisse entrevoir. En effet, l'épisode d'Itatoë est inversement proportionnel à la grandeur et l'étendue de son épopée personnelle. Dans ce style compact et dense, Flaubert trouve le rythme, la discipline et la retenue qui seront plus tard les siens, et commence dès maintenant à maîtriser et à appliquer la règle classique: exprimer le plus en disant le moins. On remarquera aussi l'absence de conjonctions dans ce passage. Son style sec, un peu heurté, passe sans fléchir d'un événement à l'autre, et c'est dans le non-dit que le pathétique ressort de plus belle. On peut dire ici, comme Proust le disait des romans de maturité de Flaubert, que la syntaxe et le style traduisent une vision du monde. C'est dans de tels passages que Flaubert commence à devenir Flaubert, et notamment à devenir le Flaubert que Proust a si bien compris et si bien expliqué.

Dans cette étude nous avons voulu indiquer la valeur possible d'une approche proustienne des œuvres de jeunesse de Flaubert, et nous espérons avoir montré la voie à d'autres études stylistiques de ce corpus si riche et abondant. Malgré les magnifiques études menées par Jean Bruneau et d'autres, les textes du jeune Flaubert ont encore bien des secrets à nous révéler. Si l'intérêt de Proust pour tout ce qui était écrit avant *Madame Bovary* et même *Salammbô* était manifestement faible, son étude de Flaubert donne néanmoins des clés précieuses pour l'analyse stylistique et syntaxique des écrits produits entre 1835 et 1845. Un travail plus vaste reste à accomplir, à savoir l'analyse systématique et parallèle du style des écrits de jeunesse et des écrits de maturité de Flaubert. Le Flaubert de Proust, c'est un Flaubert qui travaille très attentivement la coupe et le rythme de ses phrases, et ce travail est nettement visible à partir de ses écrits de jeunesse. Persse McGarrigle serait-il satisfait de notre lecture de Flaubert par le biais de Proust ? Ce que nous pouvons tout au moins affirmer, c'est que la méthode de lecture rétrospective sur laquelle ce personnage achoppe est largement justifiée, et que cela n'a nullement besoin de se solder par des absurdités à la Bouvard et Pécuchet. Proust éclaire Flaubert, et Flaubert est devenu, avec l'intervention de Proust, l'auteur que nous connaissons aujourd'hui. Mais Flaubert avant Flaubert, ce Flaubert si souvent marginalisé, est lui aussi dans une large mesure le Flaubert de Proust.

MARION SCHMID

Proust et Robert de Montesquiou: décadence, classicisme, originalité

Je ne suis pas *décadent*. Dans ce siècle, j'aime surtout Musset, le père Hugo, Michelet, Renan, Sully-Prudhomme, Leconte de Lisle, Halévy, Taine, Becque, France. Je me plais beaucoup à Banville, à Hérédia et à une certaine anthologie idéale, composée de morceaux exquis de poètes que je n'adopte pas en entier: 'La Création des Fleurs' de Mallarmé, des *Chansons* de Paul Verlaine etc. etc. Mais j'ai horreur des critiques qui ont une attitude ironique vis-à-vis des décadents. Je crois qu'il entre dans leur cas beaucoup d'insincérité, mais inconsciente ou au moins sans clairvoyance. Les causes de cette insincérité sont, si tu veux, la religion des belles formes de langage, une perversion des sens, une sensibilité malade qui trouve des jouissances très rares dans de lointaines accordances, dans des musiques plutôt suggérées que réellement existantes.¹

Mieux peut-être que toute réflexion théorique, cet extrait d'une lettre à Daniel Halévy de juin 1888 illustre la position ambiguë de Proust vis-à-vis de la décadence, mouvement dont les thèmes et l'esthétique marquent ses écrits de jeunesse, mais à l'égard duquel il prendra vite ses distances et qu'il pastichera et parodiera dans *A la recherche du temps perdu*.² Critique littéraire et écrivain apprenti, le jeune Proust s'empresse de se démarquer de la

1 Marcel Proust, *Écrits de jeunesse, 1887-1897*, édition d'Anne Borel (Illiers-Combray: Institut Marcel Proust International, 1991), p. 56.

2 Pour une étude détaillée du dialogue critique qu'entretient Proust avec la décadence voir mon *Proust dans la décadence* (Paris: Champion, 2008), qui traite aussi en plus de détail du rapport entre Proust et Montesquiou esquissé ici.

décadence devant son ami ('Je ne suis pas *décadent*'), pour presque aussitôt s'engager dans une critique de ses détracteurs ('Mais j'ai horreur des critiques qui ont une attitude ironique vis-à-vis des décadents'). La dialectique ici présente entre distanciation et dialogue, rejet et assimilation, caractérisera sa réception critique avec la décadence dans les deux décennies à venir et trouvera son écho dans ses écrits critiques ainsi que sa fiction, des *Écrits de jeunesse* jusqu'*A la recherche du temps perdu*.

Cette dialectique se cristallise dans une série d'études sur Robert de Montesquiou, mentor du jeune Proust dans les années 1890 et future inspiration pour Charlus dans la *Recherche*, qui ont pour but de dissocier le poète de l'école décadente qui se l'est approprié comme son chef de file et de l'assimiler à la tradition classique. Exemple intéressant du déplacement idiosyncrasique des classifications littéraires par un écrivain, ces études constituent aussi une première articulation de la pensée proustienne sur le classicisme des modernes, ainsi qu'une réflexion soutenue sur la question de l'originalité en littérature. C'est en ces qualités qu'elles nous intéresseront ici.

La soi-disant simplicité de Robert de Montesquiou

En 1893, quand Proust fait la connaissance de Montesquiou dans le salon de Madeleine Lemaire, celui-ci, quoiqu'ayant publié un recueil de poèmes, *Les Chauves-souris* (1892), est connu avant tout comme esthète, collectionneur d'art et aristocratique arbitre des élégances. Le fait que Huysmans se soit inspiré de lui pour le personnage de des Esseintes dans *A rebours*, rattache son nom à la décadence tout autant que son dandysme, sa quête du rare et du raffiné et sa célébration des arts, notamment du style Art Nouveau qu'il contribue à faire connaître en France. Proust devient vite un des plus fervents admirateurs et partisans de Montesquiou qui, en retour, lui ouvre les portes des plus illustres salons du Faubourg Saint-Germain.

Outre une riche correspondance et des critiques mondaines, Proust voue une série d'études littéraires au comte, dont le but principal est de libérer son œuvre et sa personne des attributs décadents et de l'assimiler à la tradition classique.

En octobre 1893, Proust informe le comte d'un projet d'article qu'il a l'intention de lui consacrer intitulé provisoirement 'De la simplicité de Robert de Montesquiou'.³ L'article fut rédigé de toute vraisemblance en juillet 1893, mais il reste inédit jusqu'en 1954, quand il est intégré dans le *Contre Sainte-Beuve* sous le titre 'Robert de Montesquiou. Le souverain des choses transitoires'. Montesquiou, affirme Proust, a du succès auprès de deux types de lecteurs: d'une part les gens du monde qui, pas assez avant-gardistes pour apprécier Leconte de Lisle ou Mallarmé, se pâment devant ses vers plus accessibles mais néanmoins précurseurs; et, d'autre part, 'de plus libres esprits' qui aiment Montesquiou 'comme une sorte de Prince de la Décadence régnant en despote capricieux sur toutes les corruptions de l'esprit et tous les raffinements de l'Imagination' (*EA*, 406). Ces derniers, regroupant les jeunes poètes décadents, ne le comprennent guère mieux que les premiers. Pire, en l'élisant comme chef de file de leur école, ils voient la véritable nature de sa poésie. Pour montrer les dangers inhérents à une telle appropriation, Proust s'attaque à la célèbre préface aux *Fleurs du mal* de Gautier, texte quasi constitutif du mouvement décadent. Ce texte fondateur, affirme-t-il, a entraîné deux graves conséquences: en premier lieu, il a terni le génie de Baudelaire avec une 'obscurcissante légende' qui le déclare décadent et satanique (et Proust ajoute que Montesquiou est en train de devenir victime d'une légende identique); en second lieu, avec sa valorisation d'un style faisandé et sa célébration de la vie factice et même de la dépravation, Gautier a enfanté une génération d'écrivains médiocres qui se ressemblent et se copient les uns les autres, tout en adoptant les mêmes poses affectées:

3 Lettre à Robert de Montesquiou, octobre 1893 (*Corr.*, I, 238-9).

Vous les connaissez tous, ces jeunes gens, si vous en connaissez un. Ils sont tous pareils. D'abord ils ont tous une 'maladie de la volonté'. Ils ne peuvent pas vouloir, d'où ils ne savent agir et ne veulent pas penser. La plupart s'en glorifient, d'autres affectent de s'en plaindre, comme d'une faiblesse infiniment distinguée. Quelques-uns sentent la profondeur du mal, ses ravages dans l'esprit et dans l'action, mais ne peuvent changer, justement parce que pour cela il faudrait vouloir. Si ce n'était la plus pitoyable des misères, ce serait la plus écœurante des banalités. (EA, 407)

Proust s'efforce de distinguer Montesquiou de cette jeune école qui, de surcroît, pèche par son ignorance de tout ce qui n'est pas littérature de la décadence et par son manque de réflexion et de pensée. Non seulement, affirme-t-il, le comte est avant tout un intellectuel, mais c'est un écrivain imprégné d'une très grande culture, notamment des siècles antérieurs. En effet, son style, comme Proust cherche à le démontrer grâce à quelques citations, loin de la langue marbrée des décadents, s'insère au contraire dans la plus belle tradition classique. Si les vers de Baudelaire sont souvent raciniens, ceux de Montesquiou sont souvent cornéliens.

On comprend aisément pourquoi Proust cherche à distinguer le comte, dont il est devenu un des protégés, d'un groupe d'écrivains qu'il considère de seconde ordre et dont il cherche ardemment à se distancier lui-même (il ne mentionne pas de noms, mais on devine facilement qu'il vise les jeunes poètes publiant dans la revue *Le Décadent* d'Anatole Baju ainsi que dans d'autres petites revues pour la plupart éphémères qui servaient d'organes de diffusion aux nouvelles avant-gardes comme *Le Symboliste*, *Lutèce* et *La Wallonie*). Ce qui peut surprendre, en revanche, surtout de la part du critique déjà avisé qu'est le jeune Proust, c'est son obstination à inscrire l'écriture de Montesquiou dans la tradition classique du XVII^e siècle. La poésie du comte répond certes à une certaine veine classique, comme déjà celle de Leconte de Lisle et maints autres poètes français du XIX^e siècle avant lui, mais elle se caractérise avant tout par un style alambiqué et précieux, une recherche de termes rares et raffinés et une prédilection pour le savant artifice, bien à l'encontre de l'idéal classique qui réclame au contraire l'équilibre, la clarté, l'harmonie et, avant tout, la simplicité. Une des raisons pour laquelle la critique reçoit si sévèrement les premiers recueils de Montesquiou est justement qu'elle trouve non seulement son style pédant

par moments, mais que ses vers sont truffés de curiosités de vocabulaire, de termes rares et d'archaïsmes, traits constitutifs, parmi d'autres, du style décadent.⁴ Proust propose son article à la *Revue blanche* et à *La Revue de Paris*, mais, chose peut-être prévisible, toutes les deux se gardent bien d'échanger l'image convenue d'un Montesquiou 'Prince de la Décadence' contre celle d'un poète classique dans la tradition de Corneille.

'Contre l'obscurité'

Il faut lire 'La Simplicité de Robert de Montesquiou' en conjonction avec quatre autres articles écrits entre 1896 et 1905 qui développent la critique de la décadence ainsi que la reconfiguration classique de Montesquiou: 'Contre l'obscurité' (1896), 'Robert de Montesquiou à Versailles' (1899), 'M. de Montesquiou, historien et poète' (1899) et 'Un professeur de beauté' (1905). Contrairement aux trois autres, 'Contre l'obscurité' ne porte pas directement sur Montesquiou, mais s'attaque de manière plus générale aux tendances obscurantistes à l'intérieur du symbolisme et de la décadence. Proust a une fois de plus maille à partir avec la jeune école de poètes et de prosateurs qui constituent l'avant-garde de la fin de siècle. Réfutant la perception courante d'une extraordinaire efflorescence dans les arts, le jeune romancier âgé de vingt-cinq ans qui vient tout juste de publier son premier recueil, *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, lui-même fortement influencé par la décadence et le symbolisme, déclare de manière polémique: 'Quant au talent qui n'a jamais été très commun, il semble qu'il y en eut rarement moins qu'aujourd'hui' (*EA*, 390). Ce qu'il reproche à la littérature contemporaine c'est avant tout son manque d'originalité et son copiage de formules toutes faites, assemblées des vestiges de la grande poésie du dix-neuvième siècle:

4 Pour une définition du style décadent voir Henri Mitterand, 'De l'écriture artiste au style décadent', in *Histoire de la langue française 1880-1914*, sous la direction de Gérard Antoine et Robert Martin (Paris: Éditions du CNRS, 1999), pp. 467-77.

Certes si le talent consiste dans une certaine rhétorique ambiante qui apprend à faire des ‘vers libres’ comme une autre apprenait à faire des vers latins, dont les ‘princesses’, les ‘mélancolies’, ‘accoudées’ ou ‘souriantes’, les ‘béryls’ sont à tout le monde, on peut dire que aujourd’hui tout le monde a du talent. Mais ce ne sont là que vains coquillages, sonores et vides, morceaux de bois pourris ou ferrailles rouillées que le flux a jetés sur le rivage et que le premier venu peut prendre, s’il lui plaît, tant qu’en s’en retirant la génération ne les a pas emportés. Mais que faire avec du bois pourri, souvent débris d’une belle flotte ancienne – image méconnaissable de Chateaubriand ou d’Hugo?... (EA, 390)

L’incapacité des jeunes poètes à soumettre leur tempérament ‘aux lois générales de l’art, au génie permanent de la langue’ aboutit à une double obscurité: ‘obscurité des idées et des images d’une part, obscurité grammaticale de l’autre’ (EA, 391). Ayant diagnostiqué le malaise dont est atteinte la jeune école, Proust réfute de manière proleptique quatre objections de principe qu’elle pourrait avancer contre sa critique. Premièrement, affirme-t-il, bien que les jeunes poètes prétendent que toute nouvelle pratique littéraire suscite de l’étonnement et qu’on leur reproche une obscurité jadis attribuée déjà à Victor Hugo et à Racine, l’obscurité délibérée qu’ils pratiquent est ‘au contraire bien récente dans l’histoire des lettres’ (ibid.). Obscurité n’équivaut pas à modernité: le choc de la nouveauté que provoquèrent les premières tragédies de Racine et les premières odes de Victor Hugo diffère radicalement de la quasi-inintelligibilité de certains ouvrages fin de siècle.

Le deuxième argument que s’efforce de réfuter Proust porte sur l’idée que la littérature, aspirant à être un système philosophique, nécessite des explications à la manière d’un Kant, d’un Spinoza ou d’un Hegel, ‘qui aussi obscurs qu’ils sont profonds, ne se laissent pas pénétrer sans des difficultés bien grandes’ (EA, 392). Proust soutient au contraire que la littérature et la philosophie, bien qu’égaies dans leur capacité à scruter la réalité des choses, doivent s’engager dans des voies différentes: ‘Ne s’adressant pas à nos facultés logiques, le poète ne peut bénéficier du droit qu’a tout philosophe profond de paraître d’abord obscur. [...] Sans arriver à faire de la métaphysique qui veut une langue autrement rigoureuse et définie, il cesse de faire de la poésie’ (ibid.). Esquissant une poétique du sensible qu’il développera dans la *Recherche*, Proust distingue entre la langue de la

philosophie où les termes ont une valeur quasi scientifique et la poésie qui procède par évocation. Le langage poétique, dépassant la simple dénotation, doit s'engager dans la voie de la connotation, faisant résonner en nous '[l]es affinités anciennes et mystérieuses entre notre langage maternel et notre sensibilité' (*EA*, 393). Si les forces évocatrices des mots, le 'charme natal' d'un parler sont parfaitement illustrés par un écrivain comme Anatole France, la nouvelle génération, par contre, à force d'obscurantisme, risque de rompre le lien ombilical entre langue et mémoire sur lequel est fondé toute transmission de la poésie:

Le poète renonce à ce pouvoir irrésistible de réveiller tant de Belles au bois dormant en nous, s'il parle une langue que nous ne connaissons pas, où des adjectifs, sinon incompréhensibles, au moins trop récents pour ne pas être muets pour nous, succèdent dans des propositions qui semblent traduites à des adverbes intraduisibles. A l'aide de vos gloses, j'arriverai peut-être à comprendre votre poème comme un théorème ou comme un rébus. Mais la poésie demande un peu plus de mystère et l'impression poétique, qui est tout instinctive et spontanée, ne sera pas produite. (*Ibid.*)

Proust passe rapidement sur la troisième raison que pourraient alléguer les jeunes poètes, à savoir l'intérêt accru que présentent les idées ou les sensations obscures par rapport à des sensations claires ou plus courantes. Les sensations obscures sont plus intéressantes, avance-t-il, seulement 'à condition de les rendre claires' (*ibid.*). Finalement, la dernière objection – la nécessité de protéger la poésie contre les atteintes du vulgaire –, selon Proust, repose comme les autres sur une fausse prémisse. Celui qui pense qu'un poème peut être 'atteint autrement que par la pensée et le sentiment' se fait de la poésie 'l'idée enfantine et grossière qu'on pourrait précisément reprocher au vulgaire' (*EA*, 393-4). La précaution contre l'atteinte du vulgaire étant inutile aux œuvres, le désir de plaire ou de déplaire à la foule ne produit, hélas, que des œuvres médiocres destinées à des lecteurs de second ordre.

A cette analyse des fausses bases théoriques sur lesquelles est fondée la jeune école de poésie, Proust ajoute une dernière remarque qui annonce, de nouveau, l'esthétique développée dans *Le Temps retrouvé*, à savoir que pour atteindre l'universel et l'éternel, les œuvres doivent tout d'abord être individuelles, les lois générales se dégageant de l'expérience vécue de chacun.

Toute œuvre qui se perd dans une trop grande abstraction et obscurité risque ‘de manquer de vie et par là de profondeur’. Si, de plus, au lieu de toucher l’esprit, les poètes se contentent de reproduire des clichés, les poèmes, qui ‘devraient être de vivants symboles, ne sont plus que de froides allégories’ (EA, 394). Au lieu de se perdre dans une abstraction stérile et mystificatrice, les poètes de la jeune école devraient s’inspirer de la nature, ‘où, si le fond de tout est un et obscur, la forme de tout est individuelle et claire’ (ibid.).

La critique dans ‘Contre l’obscurité’, comme Proust le précise dans un des derniers paragraphes de l’article, s’applique surtout au symbolisme. Toutefois, le mouvement décadent, bien que n’étant pas mentionné explicitement, semble également visé, surtout dans les passages qui fustigent la préciosité du langage et le copiage pratiquée par les écrivains de la jeune école qui réitérent des arguments déjà avancés dans ‘De la simplicité de Robert de Montesquiou’. Rappelons que, pendant la fin de siècle, les classifications en écoles sont fluides: non seulement les attributs ‘décadents’ et ‘symbolistes’ sont-ils souvent utilisés comme synonymes, mais les poètes sont groupés de manière peu différenciée dans l’un ou l’autre camp, Verlaine et Mallarmé étant classifiés en tête des ‘symbolistes et décadents’ par Jules Huret dans son ‘Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire’,⁵ et Montesquiou étant considéré comme porte-flambeau du symbolisme par une partie de la critique.

Les idées de Proust dans cet article fondamental, Jean-Yves Tadié le remarque, ne sont pas entièrement originales. Dans ‘Contre l’obscurité’, le jeune Proust se fait, et ce pour la dernière fois, le porte-parole d’Anatole France, son deuxième mentor, après Robert de Montesquiou, dans les années 1890. En effet, dans une série d’articles donnés tout d’abord dans *Le Temps* et réunis par la suite dans *La Vie littéraire*, France s’était prononcé avec véhémence contre la jeune école littéraire française qui exprimait ‘des pensées difficiles dans une langue obscure’.⁶ Dans la préface au tome II de

5 Jules Huret, *Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire* (Vanves: Thot, 1984).

6 Anatole France, *La Vie littéraire* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1890), in *Œuvres complètes*, VI, 525.

La Vie littéraire il accuse le symbolisme de s'adonner au mysticisme et à l'extase et conclut cyniquement: 'L'avenir est au symbolisme si la névrose qui l'a produit se généralise'.⁷ L'article polémique de Proust provoqua un débat soutenu dans *La Revue blanche*: Lucien Mühlfeld, ancien rédacteur de la revue, rétorque dans un article intitulé 'Sur la clarté', et Mallarmé, qui se sent visé personnellement par Proust, réagit avec un essai, 'Le mystère dans les lettres', qui prend la défense de la rhétorique symboliste.⁸

Un professeur de beauté

Proust poursuit ses réflexions critiques sur Montesquiou dans deux brefs articles rédigés à l'occasion de la publication, en 1899, du recueil de poésie du comte, *Les Perles rouges*, ainsi que dans une étude plus développée, 'Un professeur de beauté', rédigée en 1905. Dans le premier article, intitulé 'Robert de Montesquiou à Versailles', Proust imagine une promenade à travers le parc de Versailles, source d'inspiration des '93 sonnets historiques' de Montesquiou et lieu de mainte fête littéraire donnée par le comte lors de sa résidence dans la ville royale entre 1894 et 1899.⁹ Une première partie, parsemée de vers du recueil, décrit les lieux, une seconde rend hommage au poète. Ce dernier ainsi que son œuvre sont rattachés à l'histoire de Versailles, plus précisément à son âge d'or sous Louis XIV, le poète étant décrit comme une 'noble figure jeune et de race antique', ses vers comme ayant 'd'indestructibles fondements, de racines mystérieuses et profondes dans ce sol sacré, dans sa nature et son histoire' (*EA*, 411). Dans le deuxième article

7 Ibid., p. 323.

8 Pour une étude détaillée du débat, voir Anne Henry, *Marcel Proust: théories pour une esthétique* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1983), pp. 55–65.

9 Proust décrit une de ces fêtes dans une chronique mondaine signée 'Tout-Paris' parue dans *Le Gaulois* du 31 mai (voir 'Une fête littéraire à Versailles', in *EA*, 360–5).

‘M. de Montesquiou, historien et poète’, compte rendu plus fourni des *Perles rouges*, le comte est de nouveau assimilé au cadre de Versailles et, à travers lui, à une riche tradition littéraire s’étendant du XVII^e au XIX^e siècles. Il est présenté comme un digne successeur de Chateaubriand, Lamartine et Goethe, mais reste avant tout associé à l’âge classique :

Dédaigneux de la littérature facile et des historiettes vulgaires, vivant dans la compagnie austère et fraternelle des grands morts dont j’évoquais, parce qu’il l’évoque, le souvenir, ce penseur, ce poète à la fois si grandiosement vaste d’envol et si artistement minutieux d’exécution, ajoute chaque année, plus souvent même, à un monument déjà consacré une dalle nouvelle, large, impossible à mesurer et à soupeser aux esprits faibles, et hiéroglyphiée de signes charmants au sens mystérieux et profond qui reproduisent dans leur variété les mille formes de la nature. Cette fois-ci le poète s’est fait historien, mais l’historien est resté poète. C’est une poésie étrangement forte, nourrie de faits, désaltérée de vie, ne reculant pas devant le comique, devant l’horreur, devant l’érudition, poésie singulière et singulièrement belle dont, continuateur d’un romantisme et par-delà d’un XVII^e siècle oublié, M. de Montesquiou est peut-être aujourd’hui le seul représentant. (*EA*, 412)

Enfin en 1905, à l’occasion de la parution d’un recueil d’articles du comte, *Professionnelles beautés*, Proust consacre son seul texte un peu développé à Montesquiou, ‘Un professeur de beauté’ (*EA*, 506–20). L’article, tout en rendant hommage au critique d’art, poursuit l’assimilation du poète à l’esthétique classique. Contrairement à Ruskin, qui s’est trompé sur quasiment tous ses contemporains (promouvant par exemple les préraphaélites et Meissonier aux dépens de Whistler), affirme Proust, Montesquiou, devançant le goût de son époque, est parmi les seuls critiques à avoir initié le public à des beautés nouvelles. En tant que critique d’art, il fait preuve d’un remarquable don d’observation et d’un désir de précision reflétés dans un ‘vocabulaire infiniment varié, fournissant à toute minute le mot technique, le terme juste qui est souvent le terme rare’ (*EA*, 517). Et Proust de s’acharner que la préciosité du style du comte et son étalage souvent excessif d’érudition, traits communément associés à l’esthétique décadente, le rattachent au contraire à la plus belle tradition des lettres françaises, à savoir, au XVI^e, XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles :

On est emporté dans ce tourbillon où parfois l'on n'aurait voulu s'aventurer qu'avec son dictionnaire. Mais, je le répète, on est souvent plus déconcerté encore par les mots qu'emploie Théophile Gautier. Chez M. de Montesquiou, d'ailleurs, comme chez lui, le terme rare est toujours un terme excellent, choisi dans les meilleurs 'milieux' littéraires du XVI^e, du XVII^e ou du XVIII^e siècle et dans ce livre de *Professionnelles Beautés* où il y a pourtant tant de choses difficiles à désigner et à différencier, je ne crois pas qu'il y ait moitié autant de mots rares que dans le premier volume du *Capitaine Fracasse*. (EA, 517–18)

Troisième étape de l'assimilation de Montesquiou à la tradition classique, ce texte est également un tour de force dans l'art du pastiche proustien. Aussi bien par son contenu que par son style, l'article reproduit les manies du 'Prince de la décadence': son goût pour l'énumération, son étalage érudit et prétentieux de noms, de citations et de références culturelles, ainsi que sa prédilection pour les termes rares et recherchés. Proust s'imagine avec 'quelle incomparable et majestueuse légèreté, quelle alerte et noble et cruelle désinvolture, [...] quelle piaffante, trépidante, trépignante et caracolante allure' (EA, 509), Montesquiou, élu à l'Académie française, accueillerait de nouveaux littérateurs, peintres et musiciens. Il rappelle avec quelle 'maestria et [...] furia' (EA, 510), le comte corrigea les œuvres d'un peintre dans un article récent des *Arts de la vie*. La critique proustienne de la décadence en même temps fait office d'exercice de style décadent, bel exemple de la double valeur du pastiche chez Proust comme, d'un côté, 'critique d'art en action',¹⁰ et, de l'autre, exorcisme des influences littéraires et instrument crucial dans la quête d'originalité. L'ayant appliqué de manière non déclarée dans *Les Plaisirs et les jours* et, de manière déclarée, dans la série des pastiches Lemoine publiée entre 1908 et 1909, Proust continuera cette double pratique du pastiche dans la *Recherche*, notamment dans sa célèbre réécriture du journal des Goncourt, sa critique en action la plus fournie du style décadent.¹¹

10 Cf. sa lettre à Robert Dreyfus, 17 mars 1908 à propos des pastiches Lemoine: 'C'était par paresse de faire de la critique littéraire, amusement de faire de la critique littéraire "en action"' (Corr., VIII, 61).

11 Voir Annick Bouillaguet, 'Proust lecteur des Goncourt: du pastiche satirique à l'imitation sérieuse', in *Les Frères Goncourt: art et écriture*, sous la direction de J.-L.

Le Classicisme des modernes: Racine et Baudelaire

La critique s'est interrogée sur les motifs de la réhabilitation classique de Montesquiou sous la plume de Proust: est-ce avant tout pour flatter le comte narcissique et rendre hommage à une classe sociale, l'aristocratie, envers laquelle il considérait que la France avait une dette de reconnaissance, comme le soutient Frank Rosengarten?¹² Pour faire rupture 'avec une partie de la jeunesse et de l'avant-garde contemporaine', comme le propose Tadié? Car, comme l'affirme le critique, 'c'est frapper au cœur de l'ennemi que de montrer que Montesquiou n'est pas décadent'.¹³ Pour comprendre les enjeux théoriques de cette reclassification, il est utile d'examiner trois autres textes, tous parus en 1921, qui formulent, en des termes plus clairs et de façon plus développée, l'argument sur le classicisme des modernes qui était esquissé pour la première fois dans le contexte de la décadence. Il s'agit de l'essai intitulé 'Classicisme et romantisme', de la préface au livre de Paul Morand, *Tendres Stocks*, et du célèbre article 'À propos de Baudelaire'.

L'essai 'Classicisme et romantisme', réponse à une enquête d'Émile Henriot sous forme de lettre publique, s'annonce dès la première phrase comme un véritable credo esthétique de l'auteur de la *Recherche*: 'Je crois que tout art véritable est classique, mais les lois de l'esprit permettent rarement qu'il soit, à son apparition, reconnu pour tel' (*EA*, 617). Selon Proust, ce n'est qu'une question de temps avant que la critique et le public décèlent en leurs contemporains les plus innovateurs le classicisme passé jusque-là inaperçu. Il cite en exemple *Olympia* de Manet, peinture qui fit scandale au Salon de 1865, mais qui, en 1921, est regardée avec la même approbation que les chefs-d'œuvre plus anciens qui l'entourent, ainsi que Baudelaire, poète

Cabanès (Bordeaux: Presses universitaires de Bordeaux, 1997); Jean Milly, *Les Pastiches de Proust* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970); et mon *Proust dans la décadence*, pp. 213–22.

12 Frank Rosengarten, *The Writings of the Young Marcel Proust (1885–1900): An Ideological Critique* (New York: Peter Lang, 2001), p. 81.

13 Jean-Yves Tadié, *Marcel Proust. Biographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p. 216.

incompris par excellence de son vivant, mais qui, lors de la rédaction de l'article, jouit d'une reconnaissance aussi grande que Racine. Si le public ne reconnaît pas tout de suite le caractère classique des artistes novateurs, c'est que l'architecture de leurs œuvres, fort prononcée pourtant, est trop nouvelle pour être saisie d'emblée. Souvent méconnus par leurs propres contemporains, les innovateurs s'avèrent en revanche excellents juges de leurs prédécesseurs, puisqu'ils sont capables de discerner les beautés que ceux-ci ont engendrées.

Proust s'engage ici dans une double dialectique, prêtant aux modernes des qualités classiques non identifiées par leurs contemporains et aux classiques des qualités modernes passées inaperçues de leur vivant. 'Classicisme' pour lui, comme le souligne Antoine Compagnon, ne signifie pas, ainsi qu'on pourrait l'imaginer, 'intemporalité d'une œuvre, mais peut-être discordance dans tout présent, le sien et le nôtre, par opposition à l'œuvre qui passe de mode'.¹⁴ Selon cette définition hautement iconoclaste et peut-être paradoxale, sont donc classiques, comme l'affirme Proust en conclusion de son article, 'les grands artistes qui furent appelés romantiques, réalistes, décadents, etc., tant qu'ils ne furent pas compris' (*EA*, 618; nous soulignons).

Des réflexions similaires sont développées dans la préface au livre de Paul Morand, *Tendres Stocks*, rédigée en 1920, et dans l'article 'À propos de Baudelaire', paru dans la *NRF* en juin 1921. Dans sa préface, Proust déclare de façon polémique que 'Baudelaire est un grand poète classique' et que, 'chose curieuse, ce classicisme de la forme s'accroît en proportion de la licence des peintures'.¹⁵ Ses propos font écho à une lettre à Madame Fortoul de 1905 dans laquelle il défend Baudelaire contre la critique 'injuste' dont il devient victime dans le livre de Jules Lemaitre, *Les Contemporains: études et portraits* (1893). Proust insiste sur le classicisme du poète qui, selon lui, a été faussement associé à la décadence et au satanisme: 'A-t-on dit que c'était un décadent? Rien n'est plus faux. Baudelaire n'est pas même un romantique. Il écrit comme Racine' (*Corr.*, V, 127). Dans l'article de

14 Antoine Compagnon, *Proust entre deux siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), p. 29.

15 *Tendres Stocks* (Paris: Gallimard, 1921), p. 16.

la *NRF*, Proust établit un même rapprochement entre les deux écrivains, véritable leitmotiv dans les dernières années de sa vie. Racine est une fois de plus évoqué pour établir le classicisme de Baudelaire, poète des passions tout comme son grand prédécesseur: 'en tenant compte de la différence des temps, rien n'est si baudelairien que *Phèdre*, rien n'est si digne de Racine, voire de Malherbe, que *Les Fleurs du mal*' (*EA*, 627). Et Proust de citer, en guise de démonstration, des vers des 'Phares', d'«Un Voyage à Cythère» et des 'Femmes damnées'.

Inversant, soutient Antoine Compagnon,¹⁶ les termes de l'idée exprimée par Stendhal dans *Racine et Shakespeare* (1823) selon laquelle toute œuvre classique fut romantique en son temps, et réitérant l'argument prononcé déjà dans 'Classicisme et romantisme', Proust postule ici le classicisme des romantiques. Notions interchangeables, romantisme et classicisme ne sont pas antithétiques. Comme l'affirme Compagnon: 'Racine est toujours un romantique et Baudelaire a toujours été un classique; Racine et Baudelaire sont frères' (p. 92). La seule différence entre les deux écrivains réside dans leur positionnement face au public: tandis que, dans ses préfaces, Racine cherche à se défendre des accusations d'immoralité proférées à son égard et va jusqu'à invoquer l'univers antique comme garant de sa bonne foi, Baudelaire, au contraire, dans son avis 'Au Lecteur' crée une complicité avec ses lecteurs, anges déchus aux prises de Satan tout comme le poète: 'Hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frère'.

Pour conclure, donc, si les classiques et les romantiques se ressemblent dans leur peinture du vice, des fautes et des faiblesses de l'amour, les derniers en particulier font scandale à cause non seulement du contenu controversé et de la forme novatrice de leurs œuvres, mais aussi de leur refus de reconnaître le rôle exemplaire qui incombe habituellement à l'artiste. C'est grâce à cette triple rupture avec le modèle traditionnel que, selon la logique proustienne, ils acquièrent leur statut de classiques. Cette réinterprétation classique des romantiques permet également de mieux comprendre l'argumentation dans les articles sur Montesquiou dont nous

16 Compagnon, *Proust entre deux siècles*, p. 91.

avons traité ici. Montesquiou est un classique non seulement parce que son écriture s'inscrit dans la tradition du XVII^e siècle, mais peut-être avant tout parce qu'il reste incompris par le public contemporain qui, confondant l'homme et l'œuvre, l'assimile à la mouvance décadente. Baudelaire est un poète racinien, Montesquiou est un poète cornélien.

La poésie de Montesquiou, contrairement à celle de Baudelaire à laquelle le jeune Proust le compare dans 'La Simplicité de Robert de Montesquiou', passa vite de mode. Moins d'un siècle après la mort du poète, elle est tombée dans l'oubli même si le nom de l'excentrique comte survit grâce, entre autres, à ses relations avec Proust et à sa réputation inchangée de 'Prince de la décadence'. Si Proust semble s'être trompé sur l'intemporalité de ses écrits (ou, plutôt, s'il semble avoir compromis son jugement critique dans un exercice de flatterie mondaine), sa réévaluation classique de Montesquiou a été une étape importante dans la formation esthétique du jeune écrivain: non seulement lui permit-elle de formuler une critique de la décadence qui le situe à contre-courant des goûts de son temps,¹⁷ mais elle l'aide à préparer les conditions de réception de sa propre œuvre en germe dont il prévoit déjà, à son tour, l'incompréhension publique.

17 Voir Tadié, *Marcel Proust*, p. 217.

II Cultures of Modernity

Marcel Proust: Cultural Historian?

In *The Proustian Fabric*, Christie McDonald identifies three successive waves in Proust criticism: broadly, up to the mid-1960s one preoccupied with the phenomenology of mind; in the 1960s and 1970s, a structural approach, focusing on semiological aspects of the text; from the 1980s, genetic criticism.¹ McDonald's book was written twenty years ago, and to her categories we can now, it is clear, add a fourth: the historical and political. This is, obviously, attributable to changing emphases in literary criticism; it can also be dated roughly to the publication of the 1987–89 Pléiade edition of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, with its meticulous notes elucidating, *inter alia*, the novel's historical references. There had been precursors: as early as 1971, Barthes was referring to a 'sociological' Proust.² But, strikingly, it is in the last two decades that study after study has appeared with such titles as *Proust sociologue*, or *Proust et le sens du social*;³ the major landmark here has been Michael Sprinker's work of 1994, *History and Ideology in Proust: 'A la*

1 Christie McDonald, *The Proustian Fabric: Associations of Memory* (Lincoln, NE, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991), p. 11.

2 'L'œuvre de Proust est beaucoup plus sociologique qu'on ne le dit': Roland Barthes, 'Une idée de recherche', in *Recherche de Proust*, ed. by Gérard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov (Paris: Seuil, 1980), pp. 34–9 (p. 37); the essay originally appeared in 1971 in *Paragone*. Going still further back, Jean-François Revel and René Girard were drawing attention in the early 1960s to Proust's social critique and quasi-anthropological insights. See, respectively, *Sur Proust: remarques sur 'A la recherche du temps perdu'* (Paris: Julliard, 1960) and *Mensonge romantique et vérité romanesque* (Paris: Grasset, 1961).

3 Catherine Bidou-Zachariasen, *Proust sociologue: de la maison aristocratique au salon bourgeois* (Paris: Descartes & Cie, 1997); Jacques Dubois, *Pour Albertine: Proust et le sens du social* (Paris: Seuil, 1997).

recherche du temps perdu and the Third Republic.⁴ It would be difficult to write a book on Proust in the twenty-first century without some attempt to place him in the political history of his time.

A further aspect of the 'social Proust', the 'historical Proust', into which critics are starting to move is what might be called 'Proust, the cultural historian'. Dividing-lines here are inevitably blurred. But these recent critics are inclining to tease out the political power-relations that, Proust insinuates, govern representations of many kinds: representations of artefacts, from the élite to the humble; representations of science, of technology. Such representations become slippery in his hands without, for all that, losing their bite. Not that analyses of the slippery politics of *A la recherche* have been lacking: critics have for decades pointed to the contrast between the Dreyfus Affair of *Jean Santeuil* and that of the mature novel. Whereas in *Jean Santeuil* it was presented almost as 'raw' history, in *A la recherche* it is depicted in such a way as to bring out the mobility and relativism of characters' tangled perceptions. But the commentaries of those critics, and much of Sprinker's book, focused on 'high history'.⁵ Now the work of,

4 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). See also especially the chapter 'Politics' in Malcolm Bowie, *Proust Among the Stars* (London: HarperCollins, 1998), pp. 126–74, and, for example, Edward Hughes, *Writing Marginality in Modern French Literature from Loti to Genet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). Internationally comparative works are also inclining to this approach. See, among others: Jessica Berman, *Modernist Fiction, Cosmopolitanism, and the Politics of Community* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), which brings together Henry James, Proust, Virginia Woolf and Gertrude Stein; and Cyraia Johnson-Roullier, *Reading on the Edge: Exiles, Modernities, and Cultural Transformation in Proust, Joyce, and Baldwin* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000). One of the subtlest recent attempts to locate Proust's Narrator within a community is Ingrid Wassenaar's *Proustian Passions: The Uses of Self-Justification for 'A la recherche du temps perdu'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

5 'High history' here might include the Third Republic's pro-feminist reforms; Proust's suggestion that revolution is possible (in his quasi-Baudelairean picture of the Balbec poor looking through the restaurant window at affluent diners: see Baudelaire's 'Les yeux des pauvres', and *RTP*, II, 41–2); and the most general irony of the novel: the fact that the Narrator is a Third Republic boy ('born', internal evidence suggests, in the early 1880s), yet still snobbishly admires the aristocracy. For discussion of 'old

for example, André Benhaïm is opening up new areas. Benhaïm explores the role of the monocle in Proust, or of the exhibitions held in the Jardin d'Acclimatation between 1877 and 1912, in such a way as to demonstrate that ordinary, or seemingly odd and off-key, objects and encounters speak tellingly about France's complex political discourses.⁶ Such readings can relocate Proust as an author who, amongst other things, creates a picture of the nation France.⁷ Far from exclusively: cosmopolitanism is at the heart of his novel, as Jessica Berman, for instance, has convincingly demonstrated;⁸ art, in *A la recherche*, may be that of Japan or ancient Persia as well as that of the great French cathedrals. But the cosmopolitanism involves returning to a broad view of one's own nation – a view that can be socially inclusive, even affectionate, while retaining a sense of aesthetic and moral distinctions. It is the perspective of the wry *moraliste* rather than of the preaching *moralisateur*.

This essay is an attempt to illustrate further the 'cultural historian' in Proust. Let us start with lowly objects and with technology. There is, say, that umbrella which the young Bloch refuses to carry because it is 'platement bourgeois'.⁹ But this very awareness marks him out in ways other than

rank' in the Third Republic, see Michael Lucey, *Never Say I: Sexuality and the First Person in Colette, Gide, and Proust* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2006).

6 See André Benhaïm, chapter 1, 'Musée de l'œil. (Les Contes du Monocle)', in *Panim: Visages de Proust* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2006), pp. 25–76; 'Proust's Singhalese Song (A Strange Little Story)', in *The Strange M. Proust*, ed. by A. Benhaïm (London: Legenda, 2009), pp. 57–70. Recent approaches to science in Proust are also yielding new cultural insights: see, for example, sections on Proust in Mark Jackson's *Allergy: The History of a Modern Malady* (London: Reaktion, 2006); and Allen Thiher, *Fiction Refracts Science: Modernist Writers from Proust to Borges* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2005).

7 This is, of course, one contribution made by Richard Bales in his outstanding and pioneering *Proust and the Middle Ages* (Geneva: Droz, 1975): see, for example, his comment that French novels staging medieval history were 'basing themselves on a truly national past' (p. 10).

8 See n. 4 above.

9 *RTP*, I, 91. Succeeding references are to this edition. All italics in quotations are mine.

those he might desire. He is uncomfortable with the appurtenances of a growing stratum of society, that of the 'petits fonctionnaires' who figured, for example, in Maupassant's short story *Le Parapluie* of 1884. The umbrella had been the symbol of the 'bourgeois king' Louis-Philippe, but in Proust's lifetime it has become a subtler indicator, one of post-1870 white-collar life. Office-workers cannot afford carriages to shelter them from the rain but must arrive at work looking respectable. So the lower middle-class Bloch's disdain for the essential umbrella not only proclaims his Romantic and Symbolist loyalties but also, ineluctably and through his need to reject it, indicates that he is already an 'arriviste'.

More recently invented appliances create sometimes unease, sometimes exhilaration or hilarity – frequently responses, again, to shifting status. The Narrator stages the struggles provoked in the psyche by the major technological developments of his time: these struggles are often recreated through images of power, whether grave or comical. An obvious and carnivalesque case is the Narrator's commentary on the 'Demoiselles du téléphone', who – he explains with whimsical but nervous condescension – can, goddess-like, cut one off or put one in touch with the invisible (II, 432; III, 607–9, 866). It is not a real social reversal but it feels like one. More disturbing is the Narrator's presentation of the airplane, similarly wondrous, similarly ready to be loaded with cultural connotations, but now urgent ones. The fighter planes of *Le Temps retrouvé* must be read through the lenses of the earlier comparison between the plane and the 'habileté technique' of Wagner's music. The Narrator is playing *Tristan*:

j'entendais redoubler le rire immortellement jeune et les coups de marteau de Siegfried, en qui du reste, plus merveilleusement frappées étaient ces phrases, l'habileté technique de l'ouvrier ne servait qu'à leur faire plus librement quitter la terre, oiseaux pareils non au cygne de Lohengrin mais à cet aéroplane que j'avais vu à Balbec [...]. Peut-être [...] fallait-il de ces appareils vraiment matériels pour explorer l'infini, de ces cent vingt chevaux marque Mystère, où pourtant, si haut qu'on plane, on est un peu empêché de goûter le silence des espaces par le puissant ronflement du moteur! (III, 667–8)

The rapturous reception of Wagner had been viewed with unease in many quarters, particularly since the Franco-Prussian war. (Mallarmé, for example,

had in 1885 opposed Wagner's music to 'l'esprit français'.¹⁰) In the wake of its disastrous defeat, France had reformed aspects of its educational system, believing that Germany had triumphed because of its superior technical expertise. So we can scarcely regard Proust's Siegfried/airplane comparison as apolitical; it has national as well as aesthetic meanings.

A political context can be restored to numerous other 'objects' in *À la recherche*; this is a rich seam to mine. Let us now explore a somewhat broader interpretation of the 'national' in Proust. *À la recherche* sometimes as it were brings together the schisms of Third Republic consciousness, as when Proust creates an analogy between sexual experimentation, illiberal ideologies and Cubism. Charlus bemoans the spread of bisexuality 'du ton d'un vieux gallican parlant de certaines formes d'ultramontanisme, d'un royaliste libéral parlant de l'Action française, ou d'un disciple de Claude Monet des cubistes' (III, 811). This France is, internally, a multifarious nation, divided but also fluid.

As we might expect, this multifariousness especially marks the treatment of style and of the French language itself. At many points in its history French literature had mingled elite and 'low' language, but arguably after 1789 no such blend could even pretend to be culturally innocent – particularly not once Stendhal and Hugo had overtly theorized it in social terms.¹¹ When Proust compares the street-cries of vendors to medieval liturgical music, he is seeing the marvellous in the everyday, yet makes a subtle political statement too, reinstating the voice of humble traders and reminding us that these are all 'French' (III, 623–6).¹² The sisters Céleste Albaret and Marie Gineste are also as 'French' as the region from which they come; and significantly, the narrator here abolishes educational distinctions with his remark that:

10 'Si l'esprit français, strictement imagitatif et abstrait, donc poétique, jette un éclat, ce ne sera pas ainsi': Stéphane Mallarmé, 'Richard Wagner: rêverie d'un poète français', in *Œuvres complètes*, II (Paris: Gallimard, 2003), pp. 153–9 (p. 157).

11 See respectively *Racine et Shakespeare*, 1823–25, and the 'Préface' of *Cromwell*, 1827.

12 Alongside some tongue-in-cheek remarks are other more serious ones: '[...] divers petits métiers [...] passaient devant le noble hôtel de Guermantes, et faisaient penser par moments à la France ecclésiastique d'autrefois' (III, 623).

Je n'ai jamais connu de personnes aussi volontairement *ignorantes*, qui n'avaient absolument rien appris à l'école, et dont le langage eût pourtant quelque chose de si *littéraire* que sans le naturel presque sauvage de leur ton, on aurait cru leurs paroles affectées. (III, 240)

The once-purist Narrator also comes to accept Françoise's pronunciation mistakes as part of the French language: his comment is a side-swipe at chauvinistic and centralizing efforts to promote one version of French: 'Et [mon] reproche était particulièrement stupide, [...] notre langue n'étant que la prononciation défectueuse de quelques autres' (III, 134).

Proust's own style is *sui generis*, yet it too has a role in French culture that could be interpreted in quasi-political terms. The nineteenth century had inherited a sense that verse and prose were in social opposition to each other, verse being the nobler; but the development of a lush and 'poetic' prose style (starting with Rousseau but given its real birth with Chateaubriand's *René*) was one way of undermining this opposition, of endowing a 'humble' form with the prestige of verse. Baudelaire would famously suggest that prose poetry is a suitable medium for a modern consciousness of the urban.¹³ The 'libre' of *vers libre*, now going in the converse direction and pushing verse closer to prose, carried a political charge in the country of '*liberté, égalité, fraternité*'. Proust's extraordinary style goes further than any previous French writer's in melding prose and verse, almost as if it has the function of healing a rift. This is not to say that it cannot be enlisted for socially partisan purposes also: in earlier parts of the novel (those deploying the magnificent waffle of the diplomat Norpois), Proust was already implicitly contrasting empty political rhetoric with the sharper language of the good writer, and does so later with Parliamentary vacuity or journalese.¹⁴ His Narrator waxes particularly cold on the theme of war-writing. But a more accommodating, kindly patriotic, view is attributed to Saint-Loup, who says he is moved even by the clichés of the working-class soldiers at the front: they may fall back on hackneyed phrases, but

13 'A Arsène Houssaye', prefatory letter to *Le Spleen de Paris* (*Œuvres complètes*, I (Paris: Gallimard, 1975), pp. 275–6).

14 Especially in *Le Temps retrouvé*: see, for example, IV, 346–7, 362–4, 367–8.

their bravery 'donne une belle idée des Français' (IV, 332–3). There is room for both exclusive and all-embracing attitudes to the use of French in this novel that depicts 'France'.

France's external image is equally teasing and complex in Proust. He was doubtless aware of French 'exceptionalism', and aware that, since the early modern period, France had sought to attain international prestige as much by cultural as by military means. Like Baudelaire, he celebrates two French 'crafts' that had made their mark on Europe: cookery and dress. These are artisanal yet can represent the work of the great artists, as Proust makes clear in *Le Temps retrouvé* and earlier (IV, 610–12; I, 410, 437); but, as well as this, cuisine and couture contribute to France's image, and have, as Proust and his readers knew, a special place in French culture. They contribute to a relatively harmless form of national pride. Proust is, however, more ironic about the colonial expansionism of his native land. By the time he was writing *A la recherche*, France had already established the huge empire that at its height – between the World Wars – would be second in size only to Britain's. (France had lost one empire in the early nineteenth century, in the wake of Napoleon's defeats, but the Third Republic assiduously built up another, establishing protectorates and annexing territory in Africa, Indo-China and elsewhere.) Proust subtly condescends to French colonialism: a fellow holiday-maker of the Narrator's at Balbec has had himself declared king of a tiny isle of Oceania; he looks both absurd and pretentious as a result (II, 37, 43). In other words, Proust is alert to France's imperialist exploits past and present, and to its concomitant strutting.¹⁵

The Third Republic's 'gloire' was amplified not only by imperialism but also by the international status of Paris. This in turn derived from centuries of attempted, and often achieved, centralization, leading to a peculiarly 'French' tension between capital and provinces. As is well known, France's governing authorities have at key moments made determined, even ferocious, efforts to bring the whole country under the sway of unified

15 The term 'Oceania' was coined by the French explorer Dumont d'Urville in 1831, mainly to designate Pacific Ocean islands. See also here Benhaïm, 'Proust's Singhalese Song'.

programmes. But a newly self-conscious regionalism asserted itself in the nineteenth century, and two works important (in different ways) to the structure of *A la recherche*, Sand's *François le Champi* (1848) and Nerval's *Sylvie* (1853), were, in significant respects, 'regional' tales. Proust himself weaves countryside and capital together: images of each are present in the other, and even in mid-Faubourg Saint-Germain the Narrator is transported to Combray or more distant French regions by memories or by reminders of local speech. Differences are respected but the tension starts to melt away. Proust also plays with and to some degree undercuts the cultural image of Paris in the episode at the end of *Du côté de chez Swann* in which the Narrator – now once more the weary middle-aged man of the *madeleine* episode – is wandering through the Bois de Boulogne. He describes it with a piercing nostalgia that may recall that of Baudelaire's 'Le Cygne'. And indeed, the ghost of Haussmann is here, just as Haussmann is present in 'Le Cygne'. The Bois de Boulogne was not a long-standing Parisian beauty spot but a site of Haussmannization; the Narrator opens his meditation with the comment that it is a 'lieu factice' (I, 414). (Proust is also nodding to Baudelaire's poem by locating this episode at the end of a volume whose title refers to a 'swan'.) Thus, as in Baudelaire, the focuses of the Narrator's yearnings shift not just because his mental world is shifting and time is passing, but also because they are part of a material Paris subject – we are reminded – to the dictates of planners effecting a social as well as an aesthetic agenda. The Bois de Boulogne is scarcely the stuff of an immemorial politics-free setting.

More widely, Proust sets subtle agendas for later cultural theorists (as we can increasingly now see). One concept without which modern cultural studies would perish is that of 'influence'. Yet the value of even this idea is starting to be questioned; or, at the least, commentators are recognizing that it must be used with caution.¹⁶ Proust himself gives the concept an exceptional breadth and diversity. His complex explorations sketch out an approach that will not emerge visibly for decades.

16 See, for example, Chris Rojek's careful approach in *Cultural Studies* (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), e.g. pp. 1–6, 82, 113–14, 133.

The Narrator of *A la recherche* does cite the 'influence' of this or that artist or person quite straightforwardly at times, speaking of the 'influence si profonde' the painter Elstir has had on his own vision, or the influence of Charlus on his musical protégé Morel (II, 14; III 420, 475). And he makes a few attempts to indicate what 'influence' is or might be. Thus, at a purely personal level, the Narrator states that certain 'influences' from an earlier love impact on following loves 'par souvenir, suggestion, habitude' (II, 188), isolating three elements that may play a role in the process. But the more ambiguous or ironic uses are by a long way preponderant, as when, for example, Proust stages other characters' belief in influence. The Narrator's grandmother attaches importance to 'influences' of various kinds, views that are (as many Proustians have noted) a little too earnest: she believes in the influence of certain books on children, or in the beneficent influence of nature when this has not been tampered with by mankind (I, 39, 41, 63). Charlus, lording it over Mme Verdurin, informs her that she did right not to invite the comtesse Molé to her gathering, for this woman would have quasi-magically spoiled it all: the lights would have failed, the petits-fours would have arrived late, the musicians would have played badly. 'Moi', he loftily asserts, 'qui crois beaucoup à l'*influence* des personnes, j'ai très bien senti [...] que l'absence de la Molé inspirait les musiciens'. (III, 780). Is he or is he not presumptuous enough really to believe this? The humour lies in the uncertainty. In less comical contexts, too, the credence lent to 'influence' can be obviously misguided or inconsistent. Swann begs first Uncle Adolphe, then Charlus, to use their *influence* on Odette; we can be sure this will have no effect, or at least will not conduce to the outcome Swann currently desires (I, 306, 317). Swann and Odette first attribute to the Narrator a bad *influence* over their daughter Gilberte, then a good or even 'excellent' one, all with equally little substance (I, 482, 500, 572, 629). Norpois claims that the writer Bergotte exerts a 'bad' influence (I, 465); while Bloch, as ever self-promotional, assures the Narrator he has influence with Albertine's uncle M. Bontemps – an influence the reader can again assume is non-existent, even if the idea of it infuriates the Narrator (IV, 26). Proust also demotes the belief in influence by putting the verb 'influencer' in quotation marks when attributing it to the mother: she

cannot bring herself to speak directly with the Narrator about Albertine's residence with him, 'de peur de m'"influencer" dans un mauvais sens et de gâter ce qu'elle croyait mon bonheur' (III, 524).¹⁷ And finally he attacks a popular view with the assertion in *Le Temps retrouvé* that '[les] grands événements n'*influent* pas du dehors sur nos puissances d'esprit, et [...] un écrivain médiocre vivant dans une époque épique restera un tout aussi médiocre écrivain' (IV, 497). This is to deny any infiltration of high history into 'innate' artistic capability. Examples of these varying *aperçus*, not always consistent, could be multiplied. But let us now take the two most striking and overt considerations of 'influence' in *A la recherche*; these reinforce some of the others, but in a more extended and still more multilayered manner.

The first is the well-known passage in *La Prisonnière* in which Albertine launches into a highly wrought description of ice-cream, one which the Narrator characterizes as 'un peu trop bien dit' and as displaying a 'grâce assez facile' (III, 635–8). But Albertine herself attributes her elaborate spoken style to the Narrator: 'ces paroles du genre de celles qu'elle prétendait dues uniquement à mon *influence*'; and he privately agrees: 'je pensai: "Certes je ne parlerais pas comme elle, mais tout de même, sans moi elle ne parlerait pas ainsi, elle a subi profondément mon *influence*, elle ne peut donc pas ne pas m'aimer, elle est mon œuvre"'. Certainly, there is 'influence' here. But it does not come out quite 'right'; and it is less powerful than the Narrator supposes – for Albertine, as events will prove, is not his 'œuvre'.

My second example comes from the Narrator's visit to Saint-Loup at the garrison of Doncières. The young men are all discussing the Dreyfus Affair, remarking on the fact that there are only two Dreyfusards at Doncières – Saint-Loup and one other – and commenting that it is possible to adopt a political position very different from that of one's family. Thus Saint-Loup himself: a Dreyfusard despite his birth into an aristocracy in which anti-Semitism was not only rife but was, as historians have argued, part of the glue that held the Faubourg St-Germain together. The Narrator tells the group:

17 The verb is not, as might be thought, in *guillemets* because it is an 'ugly' usage: Proust uses it elsewhere without them (e.g. III, 230, 761).

Voyez-vous [...], c'est que l'*influence* qu'on prête au milieu est surtout vraie du milieu intellectuel. On est l'homme de son idée; il y a beaucoup moins d'idées que d'hommes, ainsi tous les hommes d'une même idée sont pareils. Comme une idée n'a rien de matériel, les hommes qui ne sont que matériellement autour de l'homme d'une idée ne la modifient en rien. [...] Et comme une idée [...] est quelque chose qui ne peut participer aux intérêts humains et ne pourrait jouir de leurs avantages, les hommes d'une idée ne sont pas *influencés* par l'intérêt. (II, 404–5)

Here, then, is an apparently direct effort on the part of the Narrator to define influence – albeit a rather clumsy effort. First of all, he claims, it is the intellectual milieu that is important rather than the groups of people with whom one, so to speak, physically associates. And the intellectual milieu is important chiefly because there are relatively few ideas: they are bound to attract more than one adherent, and this is how they can spread. In addition, an idea cannot itself participate in self-interested activity; thus, those who share an idea cannot be influenced by self-interest. Clearly, this argument is far from watertight, and even more significant is the follow-up. For a few days later the Narrator, citing Saint-Loup's 'gentle admiration' for him, relates that Saint-Loup forcibly relays these same notions back to him – almost verbatim. Here is Saint-Loup in full flow:

Et avec la même force que s'il avait eu peur que je l'interrompisse ou ne le comprisse pas:

'La vraie *influence*, c'est celle du milieu intellectuel! On est l'homme de son idée!' [...]

[Et] posant son regard comme une vrille sur moi:

'Tous les hommes d'une même idée sont pareils', me dit-il, d'un air de défi. Il n'avait sans doute aucun souvenir que je lui avais dit peu de jours auparavant ce qu'il s'était en revanche si bien rappelé. (II, 417–18)

We have here a deflating *mise en abyme*. The Narrator's comments on influence themselves so influence Saint-Loup that he believes they emanate from his own intellect. Whether the Narrator's argument is actually correct matters less than its prompt and unconscious absorption by another. The fact that the analysis of influence is itself influential, and this in a knee-jerk mode, renders the episode especially piquant. No doubt Proust gave the Narrator an easily assailable argument in order to make its parroting all the more conspicuous.

Thus Proust directs two obvious ironies at the concept of influence. In the case of Albertine's style, it is a dramatic irony that will fully unfold only when Albertine leaves the Narrator. In the second, Saint-Loup's repetition, Proust suggests that definitions of 'influence' can be simple-minded and that its procedures, when observable at all, can be crudely mechanical: the more sweeping the idea, the more readily it is transmitted. Proust does not, then, dispense with the notion of influence, but he makes it an uncomfortable one.

Another key concept in modern cultural studies is Bourdieu's famous 'cultural capital'. Arguably, this took its cue from those French authors who had already laid bare, entertainingly and mordantly, the ways in which aesthetic judgments may be helpfully enlisted to club opponents on the metaphorical head. Sarraute was one such; so was Proust. Catherine Bidou-Zachariasen, in her *Proust sociologue* of 1997, proposes that, as *A la recherche* unfolds, status is able to move decisively from the nobility to the bourgeoisie because of the 'cultural capital' acquired by Mme Verdurin.¹⁸ Earlier commentators had, to be sure, drawn out the implications of struggles between, say, Mme de Cambremer and her daughter-in-law on the subject of Chopin, and had noted that Mme Verdurin's espousal of the avant-garde makes her salon attractive, while at the same time the aristocracy for the most part displays an ignorance of the arts that will eventually leave it floundering in a new society. But Bidou-Zachariasen's analysis is definitive: those highly comic conflicts in the cultural arena of *A la recherche* betoken a real power-shift. Proust's keen eye picks out not only aesthetic developments but also the 'profit' derived from them, cultural capital being earnestly wished for even by those who have plenty of the other kind of capital.

In all this, the social and even the financial positioning of the Narrator himself, though not trumpeted, is central. John Lough, in his *Writer and Public in France*, whilst not denying the obvious – that some modern writers can still gain vast sums from their works – asserts that 'the golden age of the professional writer' (for instance Dumas *père* and later Zola) was

18 See n. 3 above; Dubois's *Pour Albertine* is also pertinent here.

coming to an end by 1914.¹⁹ Where does Proust sit? Personally wealthy, he was able to devote himself to the arts and to writing in part because he did not have to earn a living. His private correspondence, while at times focusing on the ups and downs of the stock market and on his own financial circumstances, provides no evidence that he was ever seriously in danger of impoverishment. On the other hand, the Narrator of *A la recherche* may (possibly) need an income from his writing. He refers often to money, either actual or metaphorical: its use in the consolidation of relationships; the ways in which the possession or lack of it shapes class interaction; the fluctuation of investments as a symbol of other kinds of instability. When Bergotte dies, the presence of his works in booksellers' windows is explicitly cited (and rather sentimentally allegorized).²⁰ And at the end of the novel, when the Narrator declares he will now write his great work, commerce puts in an appearance. He makes the famous statement that his readers would be, 'selon moi', 'les propres lecteurs d'eux-mêmes, mon livre n'étant qu'une sorte de ces verres grossissants comme ceux que tendait à un *acheteur* l'opticien de Combray' (IV, 610). The optician relies on his customers for a living. Yet the tone is low-key: 'selon moi', 'n'étant que': this is no sales-pitch – the optician simply 'offers' his wares for trial. Perhaps the bourgeois Narrator can dispense with a publisher's contract, perhaps he hopes for it: we do not know. But he rapidly goes on to present his future achievement as one that will become part of the image-making, the story-telling and the internal checks of a community. Whether it will be a financial success is so unimportant that, the matter having been vestigially broached, it simply fades out.

De sorte que je ne leur demanderais pas de me louer ou de me dénigrer, mais seulement de me dire si c'est bien cela, si les mots qu'ils lisent en eux-mêmes sont bien ceux que j'ai écrits [...] (IV, 610)

19 John Lough, *Writer and Public in France: From the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978), p. 370.

20 '[...] toute la nuit funèbre, aux vitrines éclairées, ses livres [...] veillaient comme des anges aux ailes déployées [...] (III, 693).

Yes, with this the Narrator is claiming a right to cultural capital, but modestly so; there is something much more generous here than we have witnessed in other characters' culture-wars, and gentler than we shall find in Bourdieu – something, also, that goes beyond the division between 'élite' and 'popular' writing. The future novel is presented as a conduit to self-knowledge for a culture, as an offering that respects its diversity and may begin to close up its schisms.

ADAM WATT

Proust: Poet of the Ordinary

Proust is supremely the poet of the ordinary

— RICHARD BALES¹

This line set me thinking. The ordinary, that which is mundane, everyday or run-of-the-mill, is everywhere in Proust's book. But nowhere is his writing, or his thinking, plain *ordinary*. As is well known, Proust's Narrator's greatest revelations stem from very ordinary things or events – small cakes part-dissolved in tea, paving stones that are not flush with one another, cutlery that strikes upon crockery, water groaning through pipes – which act as catalysts, serving as hitherto hidden access points to that which lies beyond their surface, beyond their very ordinariness. Tom Baldwin's recent book *The Material Object in the Work of Marcel Proust* delineates and demonstrates the philosophical weight and importance of the phenomenological matter of Proust's world.² I do not want to rework his ground; nor do I wish to rehash the important work done before him by Naomi Segal in her book on the 'banal object'.³ Segal was among the first to draw attention to the very ordinariness, the banality, of the objects that so often are of central significance to Proust's Narrator, and she explores the manner in which their very banality becomes part of their disturbing

¹ Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* (London: Grant & Cutler, 1995), p. 82.

² Thomas Baldwin, *The Material Object in the Work of Marcel Proust* (Oxford and Bern: Peter Lang, 2005).

³ Naomi Segal, *The Banal Object: Theme and Thematics in Proust, Rilke, Hofmannsthal, and Sartre* (London: IGRS/Maney, 1981).

transformative power. Jean-Pierre Richard's psychoanalytically informed semiological approach, too, has greatly enriched our understanding of the interpenetrating sensory codes at work in the world of Proust's novel, but I do not wish to retread his steps.⁴

There is much in Proust's novel that could be swept up under the heading of 'the ordinary': 'small-to-medium-sized dry-goods,'⁵ feature in many of the best-known passages of the book. *François le Champi* during the Narrator's 'drame du coucher', the 'carafes dans la Vivonne', the *madeleine*, of course, and many others one might mention. The revelatory nature of the objects in these scenes transforms their ordinariness and makes them extraordinary, catalytic, revelatory. The ordinary could justifiably include asparagus or monocles. Both, however, have received due levels of critical scrutiny: they are not innocent indices of ordinariness inlaid in the narrative by Proust to create a Barthesian 'effet de réel': they undoubtedly have this function but they also do a good deal more.⁶ They lead the Narrator or other characters to reflect on and thus penetrate beneath the surface of some aspect of human business, sometimes immediately, sometimes a good deal later in the narrative. Monocles, these 'verres grossissants', stimulate thought on the question of class and snobbery as well as on perspective, vision, magnification and distortion; they offer easily manipulable analogues of the novel we hold in our hands.⁷ The asparagus leads in various directions, towards the contemporary painting of Manet and others, and, of course,

4 Jean-Pierre Richard, *Proust et le monde sensible* (Paris: Seuil, 1974). See also Richard's engaging exploration of Proustian mundanity at its richest, 'Proust météo', in *Essais de critique buissonnière* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), pp. 107–19.

5 See Baldwin, p. 9.

6 Roland Barthes, 'L'effet de réel', in Roland Barthes, Leo Bersani et al, *Littérature et réalité* (Paris: Seuil, 1982), pp. 81–90. On monocles, see David Mendelson, *Le Verre et les objets de verre dans l'univers imaginaire de Marcel Proust* (Paris: José Corti, 1968), particularly pp. 161–5; and André Benhaïm, *Panim: Visages de Proust* (Villeneuve d'Ascq: Presses universitaires du Septentrion, 2006) in particular Chapter One, 'Musée de l'œil. (Les contes du monocle)', pp. 25–76.

7 For the glittering Proustian set-piece on monocle-wearers and -wearing, see *RTP*, I, 321–32, and for an informative and insightful survey of Proust's monocles, see Anne

towards the famous disquisition on Françoise's character and how cruelly she makes the kitchen maid suffer (*RTP*, I, 122). Asparagus, in fact, has an entry all of its own in the recent *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*, so I shan't dwell any further on it here.⁸ Rather, what interests me are a number of moments in the novel where we find intrusions of the ordinary, moments when we are faced with banal objects, to use Segal's term, that *do not* in themselves prompt lengthy philosophical reflections from the Narrator, or licit from him chains of metaphors or metonymies. My focus, to put it another way, is ordinariness that features in the *Recherche* in a discreet, subtle way, rather like internal rhyme or sound patterning in poetry.

To do this, my starting point is Baudelaire, for Proust arguably the most important poet of the nineteenth century. There is something like an echo of the title of Baudelaire's 1863 essay 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne' in Richard Bales's notion of Proust as 'poet of the ordinary'.⁹ In that essay, according to Baudelaire, in Constantin Guys's art 'il s'agit [...] de tirer l'éternel du transitoire' (PVM, 694). This goal sounds similar, does it not, to that of the Narrator in *A la recherche*? The notion of that which is transitory or fleeting is central to Baudelaire's conception of modernity. And when we think of Proust's novel, the best-known moment, rendered clichetic by almost a century's critical – and not so critical – allusion, is the most fleeting of our ordinary day-to-day business: the consumption of a mouthful of tea and cake. The transcendent and the transitory meet in what Beckett called 'the shallow well of a cup's inscrutable banality'.¹⁰ This is all well known. What has received less attention are the transitory, ordinary things that we encounter in the novel but which do not let us 'en

Simon's entry 'Monocle', in *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*, ed. by Annick Bouillaguet and Brian G. Rogers (Paris: Champion, 2004), pp. 641–2.

8 Kazuyoshi Yoshikawa, 'Asperges', in *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*, pp. 89–90.

9 Charles Baudelaire, 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne' (1863), in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard 1975–76), II, 683–724 (all subsequent references will be to this edition and indicated by the abbreviation PVM).

10 Samuel Beckett, *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1965; 1987), p. 35.

tirer l'éternel'. I will look to Baudelaire's ideas of how the fleeting, ordinary details of everyday life are incorporated into Guys's painting in order to illustrate Proust's proximity, on some counts, to his nineteenth-century predecessor, and then subsequently to show how his practice – his poetry of the ordinary – in fact distances him from Baudelaire's view of Guys.¹¹ Time and again in *A la recherche*, now in veiled ways, now explicitly, Baudelaire is a key point of reference. Antoine Compagnon has offered some highly persuasive readings of these intertextual relations in *Proust entre deux siècles*, which was one of the earliest books to profit from the full range of manuscripts and draft material upon which the four-volume Pléiade is based.¹² Walter Benjamin is also an important figure in the critical field here: he wrote brilliantly on both Proust and Baudelaire, and makes some of his finest critical observations about Proust, I think, when he is ostensibly writing about Baudelaire. If one looks, for instance, at the endnotes to the essay 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', one finds there some characteristically incisive comments pertaining to Proust.¹³ There is an intriguing affinity between the writers, then, which has been long recognized but which still merits further exploration.

'Le plaisir que nous retirons de la représentation du présent', writes Baudelaire, 'tient non seulement à la beauté dont il peut être revêtu, mais aussi à sa qualité essentielle de présent' (PVM, 684). Baudelaire celebrates the very presentness of the present moment in the preamble to his essay

- 11 The painters whose depiction of the ordinary or everyday most intrigued Proust were Rembrandt and Chardin. Proust's essay on these two painters, written around 1895, is awash with the lexis of the ordinary: 'quotidienne', 'banalité', 'médiocrité' and 'insipide' all crop up within just three pages. See 'Chardin et Rembrandt', in *EA*, 372–82. For a detailed and engaging assessment of Proust's relation to these painters, and his incorporation of their work into *A la recherche*, see Mieke Bal, *Images littéraires, ou, Comment lire visuellement Proust* (Québec/Toulouse: XYZ Éditeur/Presses universitaires du Mirail, 1997), pp. 29–62.
- 12 See Antoine Compagnon, *Proust entre deux siècles* (Paris: Seuil, 1989), "Le soleil rayonnant sur la mer", ou l'épithète inégale' (pp. 187–228).
- 13 'On Some Motifs in Baudelaire', in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn, ed. by Hannah Arendt (London: Jonathan Cape, 1973), pp. 157–202.

on Guys. Beauty, he goes on to say, in a well known formulation, has a dual character: 'Le beau est fait d'un élément éternel, invariable, dont la quantité est excessivement difficile à déterminer, et d'un élément relatif, circonstanciel, qui sera, si l'on veut, tour à tour ou tout ensemble, l'époque, la mode, la morale, la passion' (PVM, 685). A little later he goes on to say that this latter part of beauty is what constitutes modernity: 'Il s'agit, pour lui [Guys], [...] de tirer l'éternel du transitoire. [...] La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable' (PVM, 694–5). Guys, Baudelaire argues, has precisely the temperament, the vision and the approach never to let this quality – the relative, circumstantial element of beauty – escape his works of art; and this, in summary, is what makes him, for Baudelaire, 'le peintre de la vie moderne'. His attention to modern dress and poise, to the mores and manoeuvres of the military, to the design and movement of carriages, and his incorporation of these into his works capture, for Baudelaire, the fugitive and thus infinitely modern character of their times in a way other painters have failed to do. Now, profitable comparisons could be drawn between Baudelaire's assessment of Guys's depiction of fashion and modern dress and the Narrator's comments made in the Bois du Boulogne at the end of *Du côté de chez Swann* (RTP, I, 414–20) on similar matters (as well as other germane topics such as the decline of carriages, the rise of the motorcar, the death of elegance). Similarly there are things to be learnt from a comparison of what Baudelaire has to say about the attention Guys pays to 'un régiment [qui] passe' and the passage in 'Combray' when the troops pass through the village (RTP, I, 87–8). Proust mentions Guys once in the *Recherche*, in relation to the appearance of carriages, and a letter of 1901 attests to his familiarity with Baudelaire's essay.¹⁴ It may be, then, that in the detailed socio-historical considerations of dress and the interest in the military in Combray that becomes a fascination later at Doncières, Proust – author of the 1921 essay 'A propos de Baudelaire' – was responding, consciously or otherwise, to Baudelaire's 1863 eulogy of Guys.

14 See RTP, I, 411; and *Corr.*, II, 461.

These would be interesting considerations to pursue, but in the space available to me here I want to begin by focusing on Baudelaire's characterization of Guys's sensibility, his way of being in the world that somehow affords access to the great beauty in the ordinary or banal components of daily life. Here we will find an apparent affinity and some uncanny parallels between the subject of Baudelaire's essay and Proust and his Narrator. The key section of the essay for us is the third part entitled 'L'Artiste, homme du monde, homme des foules et enfant'. Guys, Baudelaire argues, has all of these characteristics to varying degrees and this plurality of character permits him fully to access the world around him and to communicate its beauty to his public. As an artist, Guys has the gift of being able to transpose what he has seen on to his chosen surface whilst keeping the fleeting, fugitive element of the present alive in his brushstrokes. He is also a man of the world, not in the sense of being a 'mondain' like so many in Proust's cast of characters, but rather being what Baudelaire terms 'un citoyen spirituel de l'univers': '*Homme du monde, c'est-à-dire homme du monde entier, homme qui comprend le monde et les raisons mystérieuses et légitimes de tous ses usages*' (PVM, 689; Baudelaire's emphasis). Besides this, he is a man at home in a crowd, a sort of amphibious creature able at once to partake in and objectively observe the social spectacles of his time. Finally, above all, Guys has that quality so prized by Baudelaire, the untainted, untrammelled vision of a child who sees what is before him without the intervention of socially imposed restraints, preconceptions or prejudice.

Baudelaire portrays Guys as a man of many qualities, a polymorphous perceiver of the world, open to its multiplicity, its varying speeds, and capable of their capture and communication. Proust shares these qualities; Guys and the author of the *Recherche* seem to have them all at once, whereas the Narrator of the novel, we might say, develops his capacities gradually, in phases, as the novel proceeds. The more familiar we become with the novel, of course, the more we realize that these different levels of the Narrator's character – the childlike, the worldly, the artistic – are in fact artfully interwoven by Proust from start to finish, individually enjoying varying levels of ascendancy at different periods in the Narrator's life but never being wholly separable one from the other.

Baudelaire continues: 'Supposez un artiste qui serait toujours, spirituellement, à l'état du convalescent, et vous aurez la clef du caractère de M. G.' (PVM, 690). With this we get yet another indication of the rather uncanny 'fit' between the painter of modern life and the poet of the ordinary. Proust's perennial ill health is well documented and his Narrator's later life is punctuated by ineffectual stays in 'maisons de santé'. Baudelaire writes that 'Le convalescent jouit au plus haut degré, comme l'enfant, de la faculté de s'intéresser vivement aux choses, même les plus triviales en apparence' (PVM, 690), a comment that surely would have struck a chord with Proust. Here is how Baudelaire depicts Guys working:

A l'heure où les autres dorment, celui-ci est penché sur sa table, dardant sur une feuille de papier le même regard qu'il attachait tout à l'heure sur les choses, s'escrimant avec son crayon, sa plume, son pinceau, faisant jaillir l'eau du verre au plafond, essuyant sa plume sur sa chemise, pressé, violent, actif, comme s'il craignait que les images ne lui échappent, querelleur quoique seul, et se bousculant lui-même. (PVM, 693)

This image of the lucubration of the nocturnal artist figure has a powerful impact for a reader familiar with Proust's biography. And that wonderful phrase, 'querelleur quoique seul' is a magnificent shorthand for the sort of reasoning and writing we find so much of in *A la recherche*.

We have seen the affinities, then, between Baudelaire's painter and Proust himself as well as his Narrator within the novel. But do these shared characteristics mean that there is necessarily some sort of similarity in their work? Do the similar sensibilities and dispositions of Guys and Proust mean that the effects of their artistic output are equivalent? Baudelaire's vision of Guys's practice of painting is encapsulated in that phrase 'tirer l'éternel du transitoire'. With this in mind I would now like to turn to some of Proust's Narrator's statements regarding the role of ordinary, transitory things in art before considering a few examples of the contingent and ordinary in *A la recherche* that show us Proust exploiting the mundanity of the present in a way quite different to that suggested by Baudelaire.

The aesthetic Baudelaire constructs in 'Le Peintre de la vie moderne' has the revelation of Beauty at its core. Proust too is concerned with the discovery and apprehension of beauty, the unveiling of truth and revelation of

hidden meanings. Early on in 'Combray', in fact, in a passage about reading, he mentions 'le secret de la vérité et de la beauté à demi pressenties, à demi incompréhensibles, dont la connaissance était le but vague mais permanent de ma pensée' (*RTP*, I, 83). The Narrator retains this goal throughout the *Recherche*, and in *Le Temps retrouvé*, when he arrives in Venice with his mother, we read the following: '[Il] peut y avoir de la beauté, aussi bien que dans les choses les plus humbles, dans les plus précieuses' (*RTP*, IV, 202). In these words the Narrator strikes a Baudelairean note. If we examine and record the minutiae of ordinary life, beneath the surface of these things and in the relations between them we will discover beauty and hitherto unrecognized connections. This, largely, remains the Narrator's perspective, but it is importantly nuanced in his pronouncements made in the Guermantes' library before the 'Bal de têtes'. Prior to this, upon reading the Goncourts' journal, he expresses the suspicions and discontent provoked in him by their brand of 'écriture artiste'. Then in the library scene the Narrator equally trenchantly holds forth against realist literature:

Les choses [...], sitôt qu'elles sont perçues par nous, deviennent en nous quelque chose d'immatériel, de même nature que toutes nos préoccupations ou nos sentiments de ce temps-là, et se mêlent indissolublement à elles. [...] De sorte que la littérature qui se contente de 'décrire les choses', d'en donner seulement un misérable relevé de lignes et de surfaces, est celle qui tout en s'appelant réaliste, est la plus éloignée de la réalité, celle qui nous appauvrit et nous attriste le plus. (*RTP*, IV, 463)

If the ordinary objects in Proust's novel that I am about to turn to neither reveal beauty (which would mean they fulfilled the role that Baudelaire ascribes to that which is fleeting in modern life), nor provide a material connection between a past and present self, nor fulfil the same role as the crockery, cutlery and other paraphernalia of the Verdurin table that needs to be identified, docketed and accounted for in the Goncourts' rather hollow 'littérature de notation', then what *do* they do?

In 'Un amour de Swann', we hear that Swann often gives Odette money. She admires and indeed loves his generosity. One day, remembering rumours he had heard about Odette once having been 'une femme entretenue', Swann suddenly realizes the situation he is in: he fears that if

he reduces, for whatever reason, the monthly sum he gives her, she should think his love for her diminished.

Alors tout d'un coup, il se demandait si cela, ce n'était pas précisément l' 'entretenir' (comme si, en effet, cette notion d'entretenir pouvait être extraite d'éléments non pas mystérieux ni pervers, mais appartenant au fond quotidien et privé de sa vie, tels que ce billet de mille francs, domestique et familial, déchiré et recollé, que son valet de chambre, après lui avoir payé les comptes du mois et le terme, avait serré dans le tiroir du vieux bureau où Swann l'avait repris pour l'envoyer avec quatre autres à Odette) et si on ne pouvait pas appliquer à Odette, depuis qu'il la connaissait [...], ce mot qu'il avait cru si inconciliable avec elle, de 'femme entretenue'. (*RTP*, I, 264)

Swann's pathos-riven realization that keeping a woman need not be something exotic, perverse or out of the ordinary, something that happens only away from the hum-drum daily life of respectable people, is emblemized in the wrinkles of a used banknote, 'domestique et familial, déchiré et recollé'.¹⁵ This wholly ordinary object, integral to transactions that are intended to bring happiness, does not reveal beauty, nor is it revelatory of some previously unrecognized past self. It brings home momentarily to Swann the reality of his situation. But only momentarily, however; the passage continues:

Il ne put approfondir cette idée, car un accès d'une paresse d'esprit qui était chez lui congénitale, intermittente et providentielle, vint à ce moment éteindre toute lumière dans son intelligence, aussi brusquement que, plus tard, quand on eut installé partout l'éclairage électrique, on put couper l'électricité dans une maison. Sa pensée tâtonna un instant dans l'obscurité, il retira ses lunettes, en essuya les verres, se passa la main sur les yeux, et ne revit la lumière que quand il se retrouva en présence d'une idée toute différente, à savoir qu'il faudrait tâcher d'envoyer le mois prochain six ou sept mille francs à Odette au lieu de cinq à cause de la surprise et de la joie que cela lui causerait. (*RTP*, I, 264)

15 Note the 'poetic' scansion of this phrase, splitting neatly into two vocally balanced heptasyllables.

The materiality of the dirty money in his hands is not enough to make him change his ways. The depiction of Swann here illustrates the astonishing capacity the human subject has for self-delusion; the effects of this bank-note on Swann are almost perfectly antithetical to those of the Narrator's encounter with the tea-soaked *madeleine*. For Swann this ordinary object prompts a closing down of mental activity, a looking away into darkness rather than a striving towards the light of understanding.¹⁶ Swann tries to think about something else here, not to allow an involuntary return to what has been partially revealed to him, but to forget it. This stubborn refusal to face up to the reality of the situation, belied by even the most ordinary of objects, is a trait that Swann shares, of course, with the mature Narrator in *La Prisonnière*.

Near the beginning of *La Prisonnière*, when he returns home unannounced with a bunch of seringas, the Narrator very nearly catches Albertine and Andrée *in flagrante*. Readers of the novel here can quite straightforwardly piece together the likely picture of what was happening before the Narrator returned, but although his suspicions are aroused, like Swann before him, the Narrator chooses not to let his mind cast further light on the situation. The following quotation gives us another moment where the ordinary intrudes into the narrative in a telling fashion:

Sauf cet incident unique, tout se passait normalement quand je remontais de chez la duchesse. Albertine ignorant si je ne désirerais pas sortir avec elle avant le dîner, je trouvais d'habitude dans l'antichambre son chapeau, son manteau, son ombrelle qu'elle y avait laissés à tout hasard. Dès qu'en entrant je les apercevais, l'atmosphère de la maison devenait respirable. Je sentais qu'au lieu d'un air raréfié, le bonheur la remplissait. J'étais sauvé de ma tristesse, la vue de ces riens me faisait posséder Albertine, je courais vers elle. (*RTP*, III, 564)

Albertine's things have a special role in the novel: they are indices of her character that require reading and interpretation and they are duly described, dissected, codified. The processes of scrutiny carried out by the Narrator in

16 Proust's chosen analogy here – that of the coming of electricity, and the power cut – might be considered as a descendant of one of Baudelaire's favoured emblems of modernity, the gas-light or 'réverbère'.

relation to these items in some ways parallels the attention paid by Guys to what is fleeting and contingent in everyday life. Think about Albertine's bicycle; her 'polo', the little hat she wears; her kimono;¹⁷ the Fortuny gowns the Narrator buys her; the rings that Françoise comes across in a drawer after she has run away.¹⁸ The items of clothing mentioned here, though, are of a different sort. They are generic items, unremarkable, ordinary. The Narrator reads them too, of course, but in a way that suggests not the inquisitive thirst for knowledge we might expect, but a rather blinkered search for security and comfort. Albertine's bicycle, the eagles engraved on her rings, and the letters concealed in her kimono all bespeak her status as 'être de fuite' and as always incompletely known. Her hat, coat and parasol in the anteroom, at this stage in the novel, cry out to be read as indicators of her readiness to depart, or at least to slip momentarily away from the Narrator's observation. Instead of reading this more obvious meaning in these ordinary objects, the Narrator fancifully deems them to be merely 'laissés à tout hasard'. His naivety here is striking. Simply setting eyes on these trifles, he says, makes the air breathable, fills him with happiness, and not only this – his delusion goes so far as for him to suggest that the sight of these ordinary objects grants him possession of Albertine. Retrospectively we can appreciate the absurdity of this moment, absurdity amplified by the proximity of the description of the near-discovery of the two girls in a compromising position. Like Swann's banknotes, Albertine's personal effects here are not revelatory for the person who ought to be most capable of interpreting them as such and thus they too illuminate once again the blinkeredness of the lover, the wilful blindness of even those who pride themselves on being most clear-sighted.

17 On the Narrator's refusal to give in to the lure of the unknown represented by Albertine's kimono and its contents, see Joshua Landy, 'The Unpurloined Letter', in *Philosophy as Fiction: Self, Deception and Knowledge in Proust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 85–91.

18 On the gowns, see Peter Collier's analysis in *Proust and Venice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), chapters 6 and 7, and Christie McDonald, *The Proustian Fabric: Associations of Memory* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1991); on the role of Albertine's rings, see Collier, pp. 87–9, and my *Reading in Proust's 'À la recherche': 'le délire de la lecture'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), chapter four.

My final example of a telling intrusion of the ordinary is slightly different in tone, although it shares something of the pathos of the two scenes I've just examined. Bergotte's death is a crucial moment in *La Prisonnière*, where considerations of aesthetics and mortality are brought to a sublime crescendo. But Proust is not content with these achievements. He uses the scene to highlight human fragility and he does so by means of what is perhaps an underexploited weapon in the writer's armoury. The potato.

Bergotte's health deteriorates, he ceases to leave his house, and is described as follows: 'Il allait ainsi se refroidissant progressivement, petite planète qui offrait une image anticipée des derniers jours de la grande quand, peu à peu, la chaleur se retirera de la Terre, puis la vie' (*RTP*, III, 689). This planetary image can be read as an indication of Bergotte's stature in the Narrator's mind; it also anticipates the later comments regarding the artist's vision, the universe he sees and to which his art offers us access; it also announces, on a vast scale, the theme of decline and death that becomes increasingly prominent in the closing stages of the *Recherche*. Finally, this image is also subtly connected to Bergotte's potatoes which I shall come to in a moment. Reading a critique of an exhibition of Dutch painting, and in particular some comments on Vermeer's *View of Delft*, lures him from his sickbed. Despite his failing health he decides to go and see the painting for himself. After the grandeur of the interplanetary imagery, this is how the scene is set: 'Bergotte mangea quelques pommes de terre, sortit et entra à l'exposition' (*RTP*, III, 692). As he moves through the exhibition, his dizziness and discomfort get progressively worse, until he stands before the Vermeer where, in a fleeting, glorious instant of plenitude, he seems to arrive at an understanding of the conflict of life and art, recognizing, through the analogy offered by the 'petit pan de mur jaune', just how he should have written. He has a vision: 'dans une céleste balance lui apparaissait, chargeant l'un des plateaux, sa propre vie, tandis que l'autre contenait le petit pan de mur si bien peint en jaune' (*RTP*, III, 692). Bergotte feels he has forfeited the latter for the former; we are given little time to reflect on this profound and touching moment, however. Instead we are made privy to Bergotte's thoughts: he does not wish to die here and enter the

annals of the quotidian as a 'fait divers' in the next day's newspaper. Trying to rationalize the turmoil wracking in his frail body, Bergotte sits down and optimistically tells himself: 'C'est une simple indigestion que m'ont donnée ces pommes de *terre* pas assez cuites, ce n'est rien' (*RTP*, III, 692; my emphasis). And these are the last reported words we have from him.

Un nouveau coup l'abattit, il roula du canapé par *terre* où accoururent tous les visiteurs et gardiens. Il était mort. Mort à jamais? Qui peut le dire. [...] Ce qu'on peut dire, c'est que tout se passe dans notre vie comme si nous y entrions avec le faix d'obligations contractées dans une vie antérieure; il n'y a aucune raison dans nos conditions de vie sur cette *terre* pour que nous nous croyions obligés à faire le bien. [...] Toutes ces obligations qui n'ont pas leur sanction dans la vie présente semblent appartenir à un monde différent, fondé sur la bonté, le scrupule, le sacrifice, un monde entièrement différent de celui-ci, et dont nous sortons pour naître à cette *terre*, avant peut-être d'y retourner [...].

On l'*enterra*, mais toute la nuit funèbre, aux vitrines éclairées, ses livres, disposés trois par trois, veillaient comme des anges aux ailes éployées et semblaient pour celui qui n'était plus, le symbole de sa résurrection. (*RTP*, III, 692–3; my emphasis)

What interests me here is the network of references to 'terre'. The initial one comes in the earlier image of Bergotte as planet, whose decline is a model and reminder of the way our planet – 'la Terre' – will go. Next, from the celestial to the earthy, we get the potatoes, Bergotte's exceedingly ordinary last supper, the meal which, in his delusion, he holds responsible for his malaise. This man, producer of literary art, sensitive appreciator of the art of others, is brought out of his orbit and down to earth with an undignified, public thump ('il roula par terre'). 'Terre' crops up twice more in the passage I've just quoted at length, where Proust uses it to denote everyday reality, the realm of the ordinary in which we must live and, ultimately, die. There is a final trace of this 'terre' at the start of that short paragraph that closes the scene: 'On l'*enterra*', we read, and Bergotte is returned to the earth, the source of all life and the source of the potatoes that are directly – albeit deceptively – associated with his death.

This scene of delirious discovery and despair, which has us shuttling back and forth between the sublime and the comic, serves to foreground the indiscriminate nature of death, which spares no one. Bergotte, it seems,

is struck down by the sheer beauty of the detail in Vermeer, and by the perceived perils of undercooked potatoes, the modern antithesis, perhaps, of the eternal life-giving apples of the Hesperides. For Baudelaire, Constantin Guys's painting illuminates the beauty of the contingent and the fugitive in modern life. Proust here takes the contingency of the most ordinary of things and weaves around it a portrait of both staggering human potential and pitiful human limitation and fragility. The ordinary 'pommes de terre' here do not open a door into the past for Bergotte but they do provide an object lesson for Narrator and reader alike. The writer's earthly end, although associated with the sublime perfection of great art, is also unforgivably associated with the absurd ordinariness of ill-cooked potatoes, objects diametrically opposed to Bergotte's 'proses lyriques', which, as we are told in 'Combray', enchant the Narrator as much by their 'philosophie idéaliste' as by their 'effusion musicale' (*RTP*, I, 93). Proust's peculiar poetry of the ordinary here reminds us that ignoble death can come at any moment; as Beckett put it, 'Death has not required us to keep a day free'.¹⁹ However we use the hours we have on this earth, we will without doubt – and sometimes without warning – return to the earth from whence we came; for the Narrator at this point, the message is acutely felt: his own body is far from robust and time is running out in his search for his vocation.

As is so often the case when we turn to the detail of Proust's prose, to the nuance of word-choice and the careful weighting of the syntactical relations, we discover riches we might have suspected but never actually lighted on. When we attend to Proust's poetry of the ordinary, his insistence on the low as well as the high, we discover a real and raw sense of human fragility and weakness. Proust's attention to the ordinary provides a valuable illustration of the developments in aesthetic sensibilities in the years between the 1863 publication of 'Le peintre de la vie moderne' and the appearance of *A la recherche* between 1913 and 1927. Guys's modernity puts contingency and fleetingness in the service of beauty. Proust's novel has its familiar share of this sort of modernity, but as I hope to have shown, what

19 Samuel Beckett, p. 17.

I have called his 'poetry of the ordinary' performs a more sobering task than the revelation of beauty in ephemeral moments, or the celebration of an unmistakably historically determined present. Instead it unflinchingly shows the human subject as a self-deceiver, weak and delusive; it also makes plain the fact of human mortality and limitation. Proust's novel is about much more than the triumph over time, or the experience of 'un peu de temps à l'état pur'. The acknowledgement of the painful finiteness of human capacities and human life is a difficult thing to accomplish; it goes against our nature as over-reachers, seekers after the ideal. Simon Critchley has written persuasively and movingly about this; Malcolm Bowie points in this direction towards the end of *Proust Among the Stars*; and recently Julian Barnes has reflected at length on related matters in *Nothing to be frightened of*.²⁰ The unmediated, unmetaphorized ordinary in Proust gives a glimpse of an aesthetic not uniquely with beauty at its core, but with something else in view, something perhaps more valuable. We are taught, implicitly, in scenes such as those I have been examining, how deluded we can be, how fragile is the thread that attaches us to the world. If we can recognize this and adapt our worldly interactions accordingly, Proust's novel will have achieved something remarkable, something quite beyond the mere 'painting' of modern life. It will have instilled in us a rare humility which, when our day comes and the 'étourdissements' that shook Bergotte begin for us, might give us strength to accept them gracefully and without a struggle.

20 Simon Critchley, *Very Little... Almost Nothing: Death, Philosophy, Literature* (London: Routledge, 1997; second revised edition 2004); Malcolm Bowie, *Proust Among the Stars* (London: HarperCollins, 1998); Julian Barnes, *Nothing to be Frightened of* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008).

22 rue de Provence: Siegfried Bing's Hub of Art Nouveau Creativity and its 'Rayonnement' in the World of Marcel Proust

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, 22 rue de Provence, in the ninth *arrondissement* of Paris, is still a hub of activity: a post office. But in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries this address was one of the most coveted and sought after in Paris: it was the gallery of famous Art Nouveau manufacturer and collector Siegfried Bing whose work was much prized by Marcel Proust.

Siegfried Bing was born in Hamburg in 1838, the third child of Jacob Bing, a prosperous businessman, co-owner of Gebrüder Bing, a firm trading in porcelain and glass. The family later moved to France and set up a business near Châteauroux in the Indre, specializing in the import-export of luxury goods. Siegfried Bing was only twenty-five when, on his father's retirement, he took over much of the family firm and expanded his own business into fashionable districts of Paris. Jacob Bing died in 1868, leaving a considerable fortune to his children. Bing's wealth increased even more on his marriage, a few months later, to Johanna Baer, his wealthy third cousin. Faced with the impending Franco-Prussian war, the newlyweds took refuge in Brussels and did not return to France until May 1871. Bing's German nationality might well have put him at a disadvantage, but he emerged singularly untouched. When, in 1876, he applied for naturalization as a French citizen, he was highly praised as a person who 'ne s'intéresse pas à la politique, se consacre entièrement à ses affaires et à sa famille, et ne conserve aucun intérêt dans son pays d'origine, car il réside en France sans discontinuer depuis vingt-deux ans'.¹

1 Gabriel P. Weisberg, 'Une affaire de famille: de Hambourg à Paris et au-delà', in *Les Origines de l'Art Nouveau. La Maison Bing*, ed. by Gabriel P. Weisberg, Edwin Becker

Bing was through and through an entrepreneur, keenly aware of opportunities and trends. He was also a discriminating collector of Oriental treasures. The strength of his collecting power came to public attention when in March 1876 he sold one of his collections at an auction at the Hôtel Drouot in Paris.² That same year, the term *le japonisme* was coined.³ Bing was not alone in his passion for the Far East. Other serious collectors included the writers Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, the Italian-born politician and economist Henri Cernuschi, and the industrialist Émile Guimet. A less well-known collector was the diplomat Robert de Billy, a friend of the Proust family. Proust bought a Japanese sword-hilt inlaid with precious metal as a present for Robert de Billy *chez* Bing, elegantly described by the recipient in his book of reminiscences:

[La garde de sabre japonaise] représente une fleur dont le bord des pétales est mosaïqué d'un alliage à base d'argent appelé Shibuitsui. Son choix témoigne d'une fine compréhension d'un art pour lequel Marcel connaissait ma tendresse.⁴

Bing's shop specializing in Japanese and Chinese arts and crafts opened at 19 rue Chauchat in 1878. Bing visited the Far East in 1880 on a year-long journey through China and to Japan where he bought a huge amount of treasure. He described himself as being like 'a wild man [who] had come ashore to buy up everything.'⁵ This 'grand French merchant and also a connoisseur of art', as he was described in the *Tokyo Daily News*,⁶ eventually returned home 'loaded down with a tremendous bounty'.⁷ His brother-in-law Michael Martin Baer, German Consul in Tokyo, facilitated the process.

and Évelyne Possémé (Amsterdam: Van Gogh Museum; Antwerp: Fonds Mercator; Paris: Musée des Arts décoratifs, 2004), p. 16.

2 Gabriel P. Weisberg, *Art Nouveau Bing: Paris Style 1900* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, in association with The Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service, 1986), p. 14.

3 Alain Rey, ed., *Dictionnaire culturel en langue française* (Paris: Le Robert, 2005), II, p. 2150.

4 Robert de Billy, *Marcel Proust. Lettres et conversations* (Paris: Éditions des Portiques, 1930), p. 70.

5 *Art Nouveau Bing: Paris Style 1900*, p. 18.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

An astute move was Bing's creation in May 1888 of a monthly, high quality and fairly expensive, glossy magazine devoted to Japanese art. Its publication was planned to coincide with an exhibition of Japanese engravings and prints at his new gallery at 22 rue de Provence, adjoining 19 rue Chauchat. Although Bing initiated this magazine and remained the driving force, its success was also due to the involvement of an international team of contributors. It was produced in France as *Le Japon artistique*, subtitled *Documents d'art et d'industrie*, and in England as *Artistic Japan*, subtitled *A Monthly Illustrated Journal of Arts and Industries*. In the first issue, Bing explained a basic principle, that for the Japanese artist:

le guide constant dont il suit les indications s'appelle *la nature*; c'est elle son seul maître; un maître vénéré, dont les préceptes constituent la source intarissable où il puise ses inspirations. Il se livre à elle avec une ferveur naïve qui se reflète dans tous ses ouvrages et leur imprime un caractère d'absolue sincérité qui touche profondément. [...] En un mot, il est persuadé que la nature renferme les éléments primordiaux de toutes choses et, suivant lui, il n'existe rien dans la création, fût-ce un infime brin d'herbe, qui ne soit digne de trouver sa place dans les conceptions élevées de l'art.⁸

Bing's intentions in creating this new magazine were also clearly formulated in the first issue: 'entreprendre encore l'initiation de la grande masse du public aux beautés intimes d'un art qui l'a surtout frappé jusqu'à ce jour par ses qualités superficielles. – Et de fait, comment saurait-il en être autrement?'⁹ Japanese art, Bing maintained, had been relegated to a low level status by the State and had been neglected: 'Nos grands musées d'État, où se trouvent accumulées les merveilles de tous les styles, de toutes les époques et de chaque pays – à l'exclusion d'un seul – ont dédaigneusement refusé d'ouvrir leurs portes à ce dernier venu. C'est dans la vitrine des bazars que l'objet du Japon trouve un refuge, sous la forme la moins

8 *Le Japon artistique*, May 1888, p. 7. The emphasis is Bing's. This was at the heart of the art teaching of John Ruskin who, in *Modern Painters*, advised that the artist 'should go to Nature in all singleness of heart [...], having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning, and remember her instruction; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing' (E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds, *The Works of John Ruskin*, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903–1912), III, 624.

9 *Le Japon artistique*, May 1888, p. 2.

relevée. C'est là qu'il sollicite, dans un fouillis pittoresque, les regards peu expérimentés du passant.¹⁰

In that same issue, Bing referred to this art in general terms as 'art nouveau' and identified its low status as being due to a lack of direction: 'À défaut d'une orientation suffisante dans l'art nouveau, on en utilisa toutes les bribes éparses, bonnes ou mauvaises.'¹¹ His aim of elevating the status of this new art, formalizing it and giving it much-needed direction, would come to fruition in the name of his shop and gallery, 'L'Art Nouveau', and in all the associated activities. 'Art Nouveau' became a brand name skilfully and successfully marketed by Bing. His furniture became so closely identified with him that in Louis de Robert's collection of short stories *Fragiles* (1895), Madame d'Èrèse's salon is described as 'art nouveau au point que les meubles en font Bing! quand on les touche'.¹²

Although both the French and English versions of the magazine were relatively short lived (the publication ceased in April 1891 after 36 issues), they served Bing's purpose of promoting Japanese art among connoisseurs and reinforcing his position as central, if not indispensable. He became the unsurpassed expert and authority in identifying, authenticating and valuing oriental works at the important sales.

In 1895 Bing made extensive alterations and radical changes to his large adjoining, corner properties comprising 19 rue Chauchat (mainly his Galeries d'art japonais) and 22 rue de Provence (his original townhouse with a circular turret and interior courtyard). L'Art Nouveau was the name engraved in block letters on the lintel above the main entrance, flanked by plaster sunflowers, at 22 rue de Provence. Inside, the most important rooms around the central hall were reserved for the works of particular creators. There was a room for Maurice Denis, and a smoking room and dining room for the Belgian painter, architect and interior designer Henry van de Velde. Édouard Vuillard showed several masterpieces of decorative

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid., p. 5.

12 Quoted in Émilien Carassus, *Le Snobisme et les lettres françaises de Paul Bourget à Marcel Proust 1884–1914* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1966), p. 520.

art. The walls and ceiling of a small circular salon were painted by Albert Besnard with an evocative fresco of a group of young girls dancing in a ring against a background of stars.¹³ Proust's English friend Marie Nordlinger qualified it as an 'œuvre ravissante', and Proust also admired Besnard's technique, describing him in a letter to Daniel Halévy as 'un peintre adroit et sage [...] un excellent peintre' (*Corr.*, XXI, 632). This society painter was chosen by the flamboyant Count Robert de Montesquiou to illustrate *Les Perles rouges* (1899), a collection of poems that Proust sycophantically praised (*EA*, 411–12). One special room, designed by Henry Van de Velde, was designated a 'cabinet d'amateur', for the promotion of new artists. Hanging on the walls were paintings by Henri-Edmond Cross, Théo van Rysselberghe and Paul Signac.

Among six works on show by society artist Antonio de La Gandara was his lithograph, *Portrait de la princesse de P[olignac]*, née Winnaretta Singer whose salon Proust frequented and about which he published an article entitled 'Le Salon de la Princesse Edmond de Polignac' in *Le Figaro* on 6 September 1903 (*EA*, 464–9). There were several seascapes by Charles Cottet, brother of Jules, Proust's doctor. Other rooms were richly furnished with carpets, tapestries, Liberty silks, screens, rugs and William Morris wallpaper designs. Auguste Rodin contributed a marble statuette *Minotaure* and a bronze head of John the Baptist. There were bronzes by the Belgian sculptor Constantin Meunier, glassware by Émile Gallé, imaginative, decorated jewellery and creations by René Lalique: in brief, everything to adorn the home. Approximately seven hundred items were listed in the catalogue.¹⁴

This vast, diverse, cosmopolitan emporium of pure and applied arts and crafts, opened on 26 December 1895 with much fanfare and publicity. Émilien Carassus, writing in 1966, described it as a sanctuary 'nécessaire pour centraliser ces tentatives à la fois diverses et convergentes'.¹⁵

13 Marie Nordlinger-Riefstahl, 'Fragments de Journal', *Bulletin de la Société des Amis de Marcel Proust et des Amis de Combray*, 8 (1958), p. 522.

14 *Salon de l'art nouveau: premier catalogue* (Paris: Chamerot & Renouard, 1896).

15 Carassus, p. 255.

For Jacques-Émile Blanche, it was ‘une ruche artistique’.¹⁶ Arsène Alexandre, the influential art critic for *Le Figaro*, made a vitriolic attack on Bing’s show. In a lead article, he went to the heart of the matter by questioning and challenging the validity of the name of the Gallery and the concept of Art Nouveau: ‘Il n’y a pas d’art nouveau; il y a de l’art ou il n’y en a pas. [...] Le peintre, ou le sculpteur, ou le céramiste, qui ose dire ou laisse dire de lui qu’il fait de l’art nouveau, se promène avec une plume de paon au derrière.’¹⁷ The crude image of ‘une plume de paon au derrière’ may be regarded as a pejorative reference to Robert de Montesquiou’s ostentatious style and in particular to his ‘trademark’ use and glorification of the peacock feather (and the hydrangea) as a symbol of Art Nouveau. Only a few months before the grand opening, Alexandre had written an ironic review – Proust called it ‘une attaque vulgaire’ (*Corr.*, I, 406) –, also in *Le Figaro*, of the Count’s new collection of poems entitled *Le Parcours du rêve au souvenir*, to which Montesquiou quickly and wittily responded with an even sharper pen.

Alexandre used popular, indeed offensive, language to denigrate Bing’s Salon and the mixture of styles, materials and strident colours: being there gave him a migraine. It was, he wrote, ‘confus, incohérent, presque malsain’. He concluded mockingly, authoritatively and with a great deal of xenophobia: ‘L’art nouveau consiste donc à nous révéler que les Anglais sont de bons ébénistes et que les Belges n’ont plus le sens des lignes? Nous le savions. [...] Tout cela sent l’Anglais vicieux, la Juive morphinomane ou le Belge roublard, ou une agréable salade de ces trois poisons. Ah! que l’on me ramène aux puerils pastiches de Riesener et de Jacob, divertissements inoffensifs de M. de Montesquiou!’¹⁸ Thadée Natanson joined in the debate and came to the defence of Bing’s creativity and his thirst for new forms of art in an article entitled ‘Art Nouveau’ published in his own

16 Jacques-Émile Blanche, *Les Arts plastiques* (Paris: Les Éditions de France, 1931), p. 452.

17 *Le Figaro*, 28 December 1895, p. 1.

18 *Ibid.*

journal *La Revue blanche*. Natanson asked searching questions: 'Vaut-il mieux attendre patiemment que les moules anciens très lentement se transforment? [...] Applaudira-t-on aux efforts des industriels et des commerçants qui s'adressent aux artistes pour obtenir des modèles dont les artisans pourront s'inspirer?'.¹⁹

Rather than deter visitors, Alexandre's sensational and controversial comments aroused interest and curiosity, for Bing continued to promote these new forms of art and craft with an almost endless stream of exhibitions over the next few years and developed a strong and loyal following and customer base. As well as private individuals – Robert de Montesquiou, Marcel Proust – his purchasers included public authorities: Paris and Brussels bought items to enrich their municipal museums and collections, for example, for the Palais (future Musée) Galliera, and the Musées royaux d'Art et d'Histoire respectively.

In order to maintain the momentum of Art Nouveau, in itself a constant search for the 'new', and to enhance his business and artistic profile, Bing organized with great energy, enthusiasm and skill a series of exhibitions. He gave opportunities to individual artists, some not well known at the time: solo exhibitions of works by Edvard Munch (in May 1896) and Paul Signac (in June 1902); two one-woman shows by artist Marie Bermond (in March 1902) and African-American sculptor Meta Warrick (in June 1902); and, among Proust's acquaintances, Eugène Carrière (in April–May 1896), Charles Cottet (in November 1896), the Spanish-born engraver Daniel Vierge (April 1898), and Jean-François Raffaëlli (November–December 1898).²⁰

Proust had already shown an interest in Raffaëlli²¹ as early as 1891 in a review in *Le Mensuel* of a series of talks given by Hugues Le Roux about

19 *La Revue blanche*, 10 (1896), p. 115, quoted in *Les Origines de l'Art Nouveau. La Maison Bing*, p. 148.

20 For a complete list, see *Les Origines de l'Art Nouveau. La Maison Bing*, p. 262.

21 I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Richard Bales for awakening my interest in Raffaëlli. Only a few weeks before his death, Richard phoned me and asked

the musical hall artiste Yvette Guilbert.²² The realism she displayed on stage was, Proust argued, far removed from the fantasy depictions of her by artists such as Jules Chéret and Adolphe-Léon Willette, as Le Roux had suggested. For Proust, she resembled most of all one of Raffaëlli's works: 'Vêtue d'une simple robe blanche qui fait ressortir encore ses longs gants noirs, elle ressemble plutôt, avec sa figure blêmie de poudre, au milieu de laquelle la bouche trop rouge saigne comme une coupure, aux créatures d'un dessin brutal et d'une vie intense dont l'œuvre d'un Raffaëlli est semée.'²³ We do not know which of Raffaëlli's paintings Proust had in mind but fine examples of his realism can be found in *Le Vendeur d'ail* (c. 1880), *La Famille de Jean-le-Boîteux, paysans de Plougasnou* (1876) and in the strong features of *Les Deux Sœurs* (c. 1889).

Partly to celebrate the publication of Proust's collection of short stories *Les Plaisirs et les jours* (1896), Montesquiou invited the 25-year-old author, along with his cousin la Marquise d'Eyragues and others, to lunch at the famous restaurant La Maison Dorée, Boulevard des Italiens. He then suggested some afternoon entertainment: 'Après, nous irons un instant, revoir l'Exposition livresque, et le manuscrit de *Les Plaisirs et les jours*' (*Corr.*, II, 74). The 'Exposition livresque' that Montesquiou and Proust visited again was the *Exposition Internationale du Livre Moderne*, which had opened on 25 May at Bing's Art Nouveau gallery. 1132 exhibits of different types of books, bookbindings, fonts and manuscripts were listed in the exhibition catalogue compiled by the Swiss painter and engraver Félix Vallotton. Of particular interest to Proust would have been the two contrasting editions, published by George Allen in 1893, of Ruskin's *The Poetry of Architecture*: no. 221 in the section 'Les livres imprimés illustrés par des gravures en taille-douce'; and no. 280, described as 'avec dessins en couleurs de Ruskin', in the section 'Les livres imprimés illustrés par des procédés mécaniques'. This

me an intriguing and fairly obscure question about Raffaëlli to which I was unable to give an answer in time.

22 Marcel Proust, *Écrits de jeunesse 1887–1895*, ed. by Anne Borrel (Illiers-Combray: Institut Marcel Proust International, 1991), pp. 174–7.

23 *Écrits de jeunesse*, p. 177.

was the work that Proust discussed with Marie Nordlinger at the beginning of his intense period of writing about and translating Ruskin in 1900.²⁴ There was also the manuscript of Ruskin's *Deucalion*, belonging to W. G. Collingwood, Ruskin's first biographer, neighbour, secretary and friend. Also on display were richly illustrated books by two leading members of the Arts and Crafts movement, much influenced by Ruskin: Walter Crane and William Morris. Exhibit no. 418, Augustin Thierry's *Récits des temps mérovingiens* with illustrations by J.-P. Laurens, would have been a catalyst for memories of Proust's childhood reading and of his total immersion in that historian, particularly in 1886, a period he called 'l'année d'Augustin Thierry'.²⁵

There were numerous works by members of Proust's circle, including the manuscripts of: Léon Daudet's novel *Les Morticoles* (1894); Anatole France's *Le Crime de Silvestre Bonnard*; Ludovic Halévy's *Virginie Cardinal*; Georges de Porto-Riche's *Amoureuse*; and most surprisingly Jean Izoulet's *La Cité moderne et la métaphysique de la sociologie*. Izoulet was a philosophy teacher at the Lycée Condorcet until 1897. Proust had a high regard for this teacher and translator of Carlyle and attended the public viva for his doctoral thesis (on display *chez Bing*) at the Sorbonne in January 1895. Works by Montesquiou included the manuscript of his recently published poems *Les Hortensias bleus*, as well as two de luxe, lavishly bound editions of *Les Chauves-Souris*.

Proust's first book of short stories and vignettes, or 'tableaux très variés' according to the critic Paul Perret,²⁶ *Les Plaisirs et les jours* had a preface by Anatole France, watercolours by Madeleine Lemaire, and musical scores by Reynaldo Hahn; it was an expensive publication on sale at 13 francs 50.

24 See Cynthia J. Gamble, *Proust as Interpreter of Ruskin: The Seven Lamps of Translation* (Birmingham, AL: Summa, 2002), p. 84.

25 RTP, III, 1470, note 5. See also *Corr.*, I, 110 and 112, note 6. In *À la recherche du temps perdu*, the Narrator recalls his childhood reading at Combray: 'je lisais Augustin Thierry' (RTP, III, 230).

26 Paul Perret, 'À travers champs', in Marcel Proust, *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, suivi de *L'Indifférent*, ed. by Thierry Laget (Paris: Gallimard, 1993), p. 289.

Its official publication date was 12 June. Although Montesquiou, in his invitation to Proust, seems to suggest that the manuscript of this work was on display *chez* Bing, no trace of it can be found in the official catalogue of the exhibition or in reviews. Philip Kolb points out that *Le Figaro* critic P.-P. Plan, in his review published on 9 June 1896, omitted to mention *Les Plaisirs et les jours* (*Corr.*, II, 74, note 3). Was it added to the exhibits after the printing of the catalogue? That is a possibility, for exhibitions are notoriously volatile and organizers have to cope with lenders who change their minds and exhibits being added or removed. Final decisions are often not made until the very last moment, well after the printing of a catalogue. The presentation and the content of this de luxe volume described by Perret as 'nouveau, d'une originalité vraie'²⁷ would have fitted in well with the ethos of Bing's book exhibition. Moreover, Montesquiou, a friend and client of Bing, would have supported the inclusion of Proust's first publication.

Reading, books and book covers have a central role in *A la recherche du temps perdu* and in Proust's other writings. In the apotheosis of 'Sur la lecture', it is Ruskin's *St Mark's Rest* that has generated the creative process. Likewise, in *Le Temps retrouvé*, when the mature Narrator is waiting in the library of the Prince de Guermantes, among the first editions and precious books so highly praised by the Goncourt brothers, it is the red cover and title of a book, *François le Champi*, that release floods of childhood memories, the starting point for his novel. This discovery also incites the Narrator to consider what criteria he would have used if he had been tempted to become a bibliophile like the Prince de Guermantes. For the Narrator, the most valuable first edition is the first reading of a book when the unique impact and impressions created will remain a precious resource enabling the reader, on rediscovering a copy of that book, to find again and relive with intensity and freshness the essence of the original experience (*RTP*, IV, 465–6).

27 Perret, 'A travers champs', p. 291.

Inspired initially by some of the teaching of Ruskin and Morris, Bing, assisted by his son Marcel, decided to construct his own workshops behind and above his existing premises and employ and direct his own experts for the creation of Arts and Crafts products. By July 1900, he already had a team of *bijoutiers* making not only fine pieces of jewellery, but luxury items to embellish the home – furniture handles, metal boxes and decorative locks. He energized his enterprise by engaging teams of designers, furniture makers and modellers. In the sculptors' *atelier* on the second floor, the *animalier* Pierre-Paul Jouve prepared models and motifs for firing or casting, Léon Jallot carved furniture and the Dutch-born painter and craftsman Georges de Feure worked quite independently on Limoges porcelain and series of ivories, often without discernment and, in the words of Marie Nordlinger, 'd'une bouffonnerie irrésistible'.²⁸ Bing gave opportunities to talented young designers who would, he hoped, ensure the continuation of his philosophy and also take it in new directions.

Nordlinger had attended an Anglo-German high school prior to enrolling in 1894 at the School of Art in Cavendish Street, Manchester. There, she studied 'drawing, design, painting, historic ornament, anatomy and modelling, with the concurrent lectures and examinations'.²⁹ She was encouraged and inspired by Walter Crane, Director of the Manchester School of Art between 1893 and 1896, and one of the most influential members of the Arts and Crafts Movement. He worked closely with William Morris and shared his political and aesthetic beliefs. Some of Crane's works were exhibited at Bing's first 'Salon de l'Art Nouveau'.

During a stay in Paris in 1902, Nordlinger approached Lalique, whom she already knew, for work, but without success.³⁰ Her cousin, Reynaldo Hahn, suggested that she approach Bing about the possibility of a job. Bing examined samples of her work, asked a few questions and added: 'We have

28 Nordlinger-Riefstahl, 'Fragments de Journal', p. 523.

29 P. F. Prestwich, *The Translation of Memories. Recollections of the Young Proust* (London: Peter Owen, 1999), pp. 55–6.

30 Marie Nordlinger-Riefstahl, 'Proust and Ruskin', in *Marcel Proust. 1871–1922* (Manchester: Whitworth Art Gallery, 1956), p. 9.

a metal workshop upstairs, my son manages it, he is not an executant but does quite a lot of designing... If you care to leave your things with me he might be interested.³¹

Nordlinger's request was successful and she started work as a silversmith in the metal-shop, making jewellery, buttons (some of which she made for Suzette Lemaire),³² buckles, enamel boxes, inkpots, trays, dishes, brooches and other items for sale. One of her masterpieces, a bronze funeral urn, appealed particularly to Proust. He was deeply touched by its emotional appeal, its Art Nouveau curves and its symbolism:

L'urne est merveilleuse! Les quatre têtes harpocratiques (le sommeil identique et quadruple) exquises, le serpent symbolique ferme admirablement l'urne et les pétales des fleurs, les feuilles du feuillage et les nœuds des serpents sont admirables. Mais plus que tout, j'aime la douleur, si intimement unie à la cendre chérie à laquelle elle adhère, son manteau comme dans *Middlemarch*, sa rêverie absorbée et amère.³³

From her present to him of a hawthorn blossom brooch in translucent pink enamel Proust extracted all its beneficent balm and was inspired to compose a twenty-nine-line verse about her enamelling work (*Corr.*, IV, 60–1). It was for him a 'sésame', an epiphanic moment like the one before the real hawthorn at Combray. In *Lettres à une amie*, Nordlinger first drew attention to Proust's footnote in *Sésame et les lys* in which he makes the process of enamelling into a symbol of the art of writing:

Parfois le grand écrivain sent qu'au lieu de ces phrases au fond desquelles tremble une lueur incertaine que tant de regards n'apercevront pas, il pourrait (rien qu'en juxtaposant et en exhibant les métaux charmants qu'il fait fondre sans pitié et disparaître pour composer ce sombre émail), se faire reconnaître grand homme par la foule, et ce qui est une tentation plus diabolique, par tels de ses amis qui nient son génie.³⁴

31 Prestwich, p. 120.

32 Ibid., p. 256, chapter 12, note 6.

33 Marcel Proust, *Lettres à une amie* (Manchester: Éditions du Calame, 1942), p. 50.

34 Ibid., p. 118.

Other creations emanating from her links with Bing that inspired Proust were a pair of 'exquisitely wrought Japanese cloisonné earrings, hanging on a long chain'. It was not only a visual experience but a physical one that Proust needed. He asked: 'May I touch them? No, don't remove them, tell me about them.'³⁵ In *Du côté de chez Swann*, the Narrator, walking around Combray, describes the water after a storm as 'd'un bleu clair et cru, tirant sur le violet, d'apparence cloisonnée et de goût japonais' (*RTP*, I, 167). At Doncières, the blue-eyed prince de Borodino encloses 'sous un émail bleu de roi aussi, des images glorieuses, la relique mystérieuse, éclairée et survivante du regard' (*RTP*, II, 430).

Nordlinger kept a diary in French in which she recorded with much verve and imagination the atmosphere behind the fashionable Art Nouveau façade. On the production lines, Bing's staff took a cynical and disrespectful view of the enterprise. With much hilarity, ribaldry and derision, they mocked the very notion of Art Nouveau, arguing that such a thing could not exist: "Art Nouveau", nomenclature qui provoque d'interminables débats: "Pourquoi diable 'nouveau'? Il n'y a rien de *nouveau* sur terre, l'art se renouvelle, preuve qu'on nous accuse de chiper des motifs Louis XV"³⁶

Proust acquired first-hand knowledge of the process of production not only through Nordlinger, who assisted him from time to time with his translations of Ruskin, but also through his friendship with René Haas, the Germanophobe 'commis-voyageur boiteux'.³⁷ Proust was attracted to Haas, describing him as 'un charmant monsieur blond de chez Bing (qui a un cousin interne) [qui] a été fort bon pour moi chez Durand-Ruel' (*Corr.*, IV, 57). He had met Haas at the preview of the sale of Charles Gillot's collection of *Objets d'art et peintures d'Extrême-Orient*, for which Bing was the expert in charge. A few days later, Proust mentioned Haas again in a letter to Nordlinger: 'J'ai reçu de chez Bing je ne sais quoi qui doit m'être adressé par ce délicieux homme blond' (*Corr.*, IV, 60). In *A la*

35 Prestwich, p. 125.

36 Nordlinger-Riefstahl, 'Fragments de Journal', pp. 524–5.

37 Ibid., p. 523.

recherche, the Narrator is attracted by similar features in Robert de Saint-Loup when he first sees him, one afternoon at the Grand Hôtel in Balbec: 'un jeune homme [...] dont la peau était aussi blonde et les cheveux aussi dorés que s'ils avaient absorbé tous les rayons du soleil' (*RTP*, II, 88). It is the fictional Saint-Loup who replaces his valuable antiques (furniture, paintings, manuscripts) with paintings by Carrière (whom Bing promoted) and Art Nouveau furniture ('des meubles modern style') bought direct from Bing: furniture that Saint-Loup delights in describing flamboyantly and hyperbolically in terms such as 'vatique', 'cosmique', 'pythique' and 'suréminent' (*RTP*, II, 839–40).³⁸

Bing continued until at least the year before his death to have the responsibility for ensuring the authenticity and value of oriental artefacts with the renowned auction houses and dealers. Charles Gillot, the talented etcher and avid collector of Oriental art and artefacts who had cooperated closely with Bing in the preparation of illustrations for *Le Japon artistique* and *Artistic Japan*, died in January 1903 at the age of 50. So vast was his holding that two sales were organized in Paris in different locations. Bing was the expert in charge. The first sale of *Objets d'art et peintures d'Extrême-Orient* took place at the Galeries Durand-Ruel, from 8–13 February 1904. Viewing was at Bing's Gallery, 25–31 January, and at Durand-Ruel's, 5–7 February. The second sale of *Estampes japonaises et livres illustrés* (1331 lots) was held at the Hôtel Drouot on 15, 16, 18 and 19 April 1904. This collection could be viewed by private individuals at Bing's Gallery, 28 March to 9 April, and at the Hôtel Drouot, 12 and 13 April. It was open to the public on 14 April only.

Proust was hoping to accompany Nordlinger to view the lots on display *chez* Bing on Sunday 31 January (the last day of viewing at his gallery) but his state of health was too uncertain to make a firm arrangement (*Corr.*, IV, 50).

38 René Haas – also spelt Haase – remained a devoted, trusted employee and became an associate of Marcel Bing. After the latter's death in 1920, he took charge of the shop and continued the business. Little is known about him, though Weisberg has suggested that Haas perished in a German concentration camp (*Les Origines de l'Art Nouveau. La Maison Bing*, p. 31).

The visit was postponed until the following week. Meanwhile, Proust had received the magnificently illustrated catalogue, containing 2122 lots, most probably *Objets d'art et peintures d'Extrême-Orient*. He was delighted to receive this gift, apparently from, or at least via, Nordlinger to whom he wrote: 'J'ai idée que ce Japon est prodigieux[,] des "sinologues" voulaient m'y mener. Et je vous remercie de m'en avoir montré par anticipation de fidèles images' (*Corr.*, IV, 50–1).

Proust eventually managed to get to Durand-Ruel's, on Saturday 6 February, but with only five minutes to spare before the gallery closed at 6 pm. His motive in wishing to go there may also have been linked to his attraction to René Haas, the 'charmant monsieur blond' who was so helpful to him (*Corr.*, IV, 57). Proust acquired several copies of Bing's expensive and erudite catalogues, indispensable for him as reference works. He wrote to Nordlinger in late May 1904: 'Votre Bing m'inonde des catalogues les plus magnifiques. *Il n'y a pas à le remercier n'est-ce pas?* Je crois que je dois ces largesses toujours à "l'homme blond" qui a pris mon nom quand j'ai acheté le grand catalogue Gillot' (*Corr.*, IV, 133).

Nordlinger's art of surprising Proust with unusual gifts, charged with meaning understood by them alone, contributed to his creativity. The little packet of balsam seeds she offered him represented mystical food, understood as a symbol of sympathy to Proust during a period of much ill health.³⁹ The gesture fired Proust's imagination: he found analogies and made connections, and the act kindled a desire for Japan and Bing's bonsai of which there had been a major exhibition in 1902. He explained to Nordlinger:

Merci pour ces non balsamiques balsamines. Baume pour moi, d'autant plus qu'il n'embaume point. Graines, spirituel présent [...] pour quelqu'un qui aime les fleurs et craint les parfums. Graines, fleurs pour l'imagination comme les arbres nains de Bing sont des arbres pour l'imagination, les unes avenir des fleurs, les autres passé des arbres, dans un petit présent. (*Corr.*, IV, 53)

39 Prestwich, p. 137. See also *Lettres à une amie*, p. ix: 'Un simple petit paquet à deux sous de graines de balsamine dut une fois lui servir de mystique aliment'.

Similarly, Nordlinger's simple gift of compressed Japanese flowers, little unscented pellets, made of coloured pith, not paper,⁴⁰ that open to reveal their hidden beauty when soaked in water, was warmly appreciated by the asthmatic Proust: 'Merci des fleurs merveilleuses et cachées qui m'ont permis ce soir de "faire un printemps" comme dit Madame de Sévigné, printemps fluvial et inoffensif. Grâce à vous ma chambre noire électrique a eu son printemps d'Extrême-Orient.'⁴¹ This image of resurrection by immersion in water, with its strong religious overtones, is explored in one of his drafts for *Contre Sainte-Beuve*:

Mais aussitôt [que] j'eus goûté à la biscotte, ce fut tout un jardin, jusque-là vague et terne à mes yeux avec ses allées oubliées, qui se peignit, corbeille par corbeille, avec toutes ses fleurs, dans la petite tasse de thé, comme ces petites fleurs japonaises qui ne reprennent que dans l'eau. (*CSB*, 212)

In *À la recherche*, after a series of indistinct and unsatisfactory reveries, as the Narrator dips a piece of his *madeleine* into his herbal drink, it is the recollection of this fascinating Oriental trinket that releases his vibrant memories of the village of Combray:

Et comme dans ce jeu où les Japonais s'amuse à tremper dans un bol de porcelaine rempli d'eau, de petits morceaux de papier jusque-là indistincts qui, à peine y sont-ils plongés s'étirent, se contournent, se colorent, se différencient, deviennent des fleurs, des maisons, des personnages consistants et reconnaissables, de même maintenant toutes les fleurs de notre jardin et celles du parc de M. Swann, et les nymphéas de la Vivonne, et les bonnes gens du village et leurs petits logis et l'église et tout Combray et ses environs, tout cela qui prend forme et solidité, est sorti, ville et jardins, de ma tasse de thé. (*RTP*, I, 47)

The analogy of memory, and with it, Proust's great novel, emerging and taking shape 'like those little Japanese flowers that open in water' may be a direct echo of Bing's taste and influence.

40 Prestwich, p. 140.

41 *Lettres à une amie*, p. 45 (cf. *Corr.*, IV, 111).

On the Nation and its Culture: Proust, Barrès and Daniel Halévy

‘Aucun esprit juste ne contestera qu’on fait perdre sa valeur universelle à une œuvre en la dénationalisant, et que c’est à la cime même du particulier qu’éclôt le général. Mais n’est-ce pas une vérité de même ordre, qu’on ôte sa valeur générale et même nationale à une œuvre en cherchant à la nationaliser?’ (*Corr.*, XVIII, 34). Writing to Daniel Halévy against a backdrop of post-war nationalist fervour in July 1919, Proust urgently asserts that literature generates universal appeal when it is trained on the particular and reflects a national specificity. By the same token, he cautions against narrow prescriptiveness, warning that the institutionalization of literature as an arm of the nation robs writing of its capacity to reflect not just the general but also national particularity.

The context for these comments was Proust’s forthright opposition to the right-wing views of the self-styled ‘Parti de l’Intelligence’, whose manifesto had just been published in the weekly literary supplement of *Le Figaro*.¹ The group sought to rescue France from what it saw as a Bolchevik threat to the nation and to its key pillars, ‘[la] société, [...] [la] famille’. It presented itself as guiding and protecting ‘l’opinion publique, troublée par ces folies’ and as equipped to deliver ‘la reconstitution nationale et le relèvement du genre humain’. The notion of civilizing values defining, and also radiating out from, a national context holds echoes of that other, would-be edifying, project, the *mission civilisatrice* that sought to give moral stature to French colonial ambitions. Indeed one of the signatories of ‘Pour un Parti

1 ‘Pour un Parti de l’Intelligence’, *Le Figaro Littéraire*, 19 July 1919, p. 1.

de l'Intelligence', Louis Bertrand, was to become an aggressive exponent of French Algerianist supremacy in colonial Algeria in the 1920s.²

Although not addressing specifically colonial issues, Proust's letter explores the cognate issue of cultural domination. In particular he conveys an extreme reticence about any form of triumphalism:

Que la France doive veiller sur les littératures du monde entier, c'est un mandat qu'on pleurerait de joie d'apprendre qu'on nous a confié, mais qu'il est un peu choquant de nous voir assumer de nous-même. Cette 'hégémonie', née de la 'Victoire' fait involontairement penser à 'Deutschland über alles' et à cause de cela est légèrement désagréable. Le caractère de notre 'race' (est-il d'un bien bon français, de parler de 'race' 'française'?) était de savoir allier à autant de fierté plus de modestie. (*Corr.*, XVIII, 335)

While Proust views as wishful thinking an ever-expanding French literary prestige, the string of metalinguistic asides about 'victory', 'hegemony' and 'race' woven into the letter show the author's fundamental dissent from an ostensibly racialized superiority. Alongside his call for a curb on temporal power, Proust rejects the group's assertion that the Catholic Church – working through both its believers and 'des catholiques "incroyants"' – was the exclusive embodiment of civilizing values. He reflects bitterly on the earlier failure of figures such as Charles Maurras (a high-profile signatory of the *Le Figaro* manifesto and leader of the monarchist *Action française*) to support the cause of justice in the Dreyfus Affair and dismisses as far-fetched the claims made for the church: 'Personne n'admire plus que moi l'Église, mais prendre le contrepied d'Homais jusqu'à dire qu'elle a été la tutelle des progrès de l'esprit humain, en tout temps, est un peu fort' (*Corr.*, XVIII, 335). Proust simultaneously targets what he presents as two sectarian positions: the morally discredited republican secularism of Flaubert's Homais and the narrow Catholic conformism of the 'Parti de l'Intelligence'. While his belief in the centrality of a Christian legacy to France's cultural

2 For an authoritative account of Bertrand's influential role in propagating the myth of French imperial grandeur in North Africa, see Peter Dunwoodie, *Writing French Algeria* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

self-definition was clear from his active opposition to the separation of the churches and the state in 1905 (and I shall be considering that later), the liberal pluralist outlook that he adopts accounts for his uneasiness with the cultural triumphalism of the 'Parti de l'Intelligence'.

His correspondent, Daniel Halévy, was himself one of the signatories of the manifesto. Having been contemporaries and friends at the Lycée Condorcet in the 1880s, he and Proust were already embarked on influential careers as writers by the time of the First World War. As a literary biographer and wartime journalist, Halévy was the author of works that were well known to Proust.³ His ideological position had evolved substantially from that adopted in his early career, when he published his *Essais sur le mouvement ouvrier en France* (1901) and was involved in the 'Université populaire' movement.

Proust begins his letter by pleading serious ill health ('il a fallu un état voisin de la mort...' (*Corr.*, XVIII, 334; Proust's italics)) for not having written earlier to congratulate Halévy on his book, *Charles Péguy et les 'Cahiers de la Quinzaine'*, which appeared in October 1918. He thanks Halévy too for providing him with a bound copy of Proust's 'Sentiments filiaux d'un parricide', an article which had originally appeared in *Le Figaro* in 1907 and a copy of which Proust needed for inclusion in a forthcoming collection, *Pastiches et mélanges*.

Signing off as 'ton admirateur et ami', Proust persists with his theme by insisting that it is indeed Halévy's *works* that best honour France rather than the bombastic nationalism contained in the *Le Figaro* manifesto. The detail in the July 1919 letter to Halévy provides us with a platform from which to pursue Proust's engagement with national cultural debate in the first two decades of the century. His correspondence with Halévy and Maurice Barrès in particular provides access to antagonistic discourses around issues of class, nation, aesthetics and religion. The points of consensus and disagreement that emerge in these on-off dialogues centre importantly around some very precise socio-political confrontations.

3 Daniel Halévy, *La Vie de Frédéric Nietzsche* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1909); *Charles Péguy et les 'Cahiers de la Quinzaine'* (Paris: Payot, 1918).

The prescriptive directness of the 'Parti de l'Intelligence' was clear. It called for a counter to '[le] désordre libéral et anarchique, [le] soulèvement de l'instinct' and advocated 'une méthode intellectuelle qui hiérarchise et qui classe'. Proust's gripe was as much stylistic as political. He recoiled from the highly rhetorical posturing inherent in the very genre of the manifesto and can have only been vexed by sanctimonious nationalist posturing, of which the following claim is typical: 'C'est à un apostolat intellectuel que nous voulons nous consacrer, en tant que Français d'abord, mais aussi en tant qu'hommes, en tant que gardiens de la civilisation'. Aggressively anti-modern in its prescriptiveness, the manifesto was vociferous in its opposition to socio-economic change in the wake of the war. Its authors saw as dangerous the stress on materialism and shunned the marks of urban modernity, 'les tendances matérialistes de ces théoriciens qui ne voient la rénovation de la France qu'industrielle ou commerciale'.

In a brief trailer to the text proper of 'Pour un Parti de l'Intelligence', *Le Figaro* carried a context and a justification: the authors of the manifesto felt compelled, the paper argues, to react to what they saw as the provocative slur contained in an earlier, internationalist manifesto directed against the patriotic discourse of the First World War. The textual snippet they cite (in which they stand accused of having 'avili, abaissé, dégradé la pensée') is drawn from Romain Rolland's 'Un Appel: Fièvre Déclaration d'Intellectuels', which appeared in *L'Humanité* on 26 June 1919 with numerous French signatories, among them Georges Duhamel and Henri Barbusse, as well as many others from across Europe, including Bertrand Russell, Albert Einstein, Stefan Zweig, Hermann Hesse and Benedetto Croce.

In his call to action, Rolland, echoing the language of the *Communist Manifesto*, urges intellectuals to unite: 'Travailleurs de l'esprit, compagnons dispersés à travers le monde, séparés depuis cinq ans par les armées, la censure et la haine des nations en guerre, nous vous adressons [...] un appel pour reformer notre union fraternelle'.⁴ In his letter to Halévy, Proust concedes that, were he to have seen what he terms the 'manifeste "bolcheviste"' that had triggered the 'Parti de l'Intelligence' declaration, he would have found it 'mille fois pire que le vôtre' (*Corr.*, XVIII, 335).

4 'Un Appel: Fièvre Déclaration d'Intellectuels', *L'Humanité*, 26 June 1919.

Proust's outspoken rejection of these calls to collectivist identity, whether nationalist or, as with Rolland's appeal in *L'Humanité*, internationalist, suggests a writer working to clear a space that would be unrestricted by ideological narrowness. In the pages of *A la recherche du temps perdu* that depict the war, he develops this: the detachment from xenophobia in *Le Temps retrouvé*, Charlus's expressions of Germanophilia and the author's conversion of night-time Paris threatened by aerial bombardment into a site of apocalyptic mystery reminiscent of Sodom and Gomorrah all help steer Proust's coverage of the conflict away from any narrow endorsement of nationalist partisanship. The authors of the *Le Figaro* manifesto, by contrast, denounce what for them is a cultural war waged against tradition: 'Dans cette grande réforme sociale, c'est un attentat contre une culture qui s'apprête. Et l'on voit des intellectuels qui ont découvert l'ozone et la houille blanche désertir soudain leur devoir d'état'. Significantly Proust moves to redefine the discourse of duty to the nation: as formulated in *Le Temps retrouvé*, artists fundamentally heed their 'devoir d'état' by being artists. Thus, for the Narrator, the cultural legacy of the eighteenth century shows Watteau and de la Tour honouring the nation far more enduringly than all of France's Revolutionary artists of the period (*RTP*, IV, 467).

Reflecting elsewhere in *Le Temps retrouvé* that it is the spontaneity of private memory rather than the recording of any revolutionary dates that makes the greatness of Chateaubriand's *Mémoires d'outre-tombe*, the Narrator anticipates the anger of those immersed in the prejudice of the war at the suggestion that the label *boche* would end up having mere curiosity value like the terms *sans-culotte* and *chouan* before it (*RTP*, IV, 306).

Maurras's opposite number in the 1919 war of manifestos was Romain Rolland, who also attracts Proust's censure. In *Le Temps retrouvé*, the Narrator tires of 'tant de conversations humanitaires, patriotiques, internationalistes, et métaphysiques. "Plus de style, avais-je entendu dire alors, plus de littérature, de la vie"' (*RTP*, IV, 461). The cross-reference is to *La Foire sur la place* (1908), in which Rolland promotes what he terms *life* in place of artistic refinement.⁵

5 See the editorial note, *RTP*, IV, 1261, note 2 to p. 461.

We find an earlier critique of Rolland in a piece entitled 'Romain Rolland' in *Cahier XXIX* and included in the *Contre Sainte-Beuve* volume. Proust's rallying cry – 'qu'il y ait profondeur' (*CSB*, 307) – articulates the frustration that he experiences as a reader of *Jean Christophe*, branded by Proust as superficial and simplistic. Uneasy about what he views as Rolland's false distinction between 'l'art élevé' and 'l'art immoral', he writes impatiently: 'Les buts élevés sont eux aussi de l'apparence' (*CSB*, 863, note 3). Dismissing Rolland's moralizing, Proust cuts across superficial differences between, on the one hand, the 'savant' and the 'saint' and, on the other, '[l']homme du monde': 'dans tout ce qui est du caractère et des passions, des réflexes, il n'y a pas de différence; le caractère est le même pour les deux, comme les poumons et les os, et le physiologiste, pour démontrer les grandes lois de la circulation du sang, ne se soucie pas que les viscères aient été extraits du corps d'un artiste ou d'un boutiquier' (*CSB*, 307). Medicine provides Proust with an image of levelling that undoes hierarchy, both social and moral; moreover, in surgical penetration, he finds a variant on the depth metaphor that he will go on to privilege in *Le Temps retrouvé*.

If, as he complains, superficiality and banality are dominant in *Jean Christophe*, a literature of depth will transcend social categories: 'il n'y a qu'une manière d'écrire pour tous, c'est d'écrire sans penser à personne' (*CSB*, 308), writes Proust in a vein that anticipates the rejection in 1919 that we have seen, both of right-wing Catholic authoritarianism and Communist internationalism. In a concluding note to the piece on Rolland, Proust works to free up attitudes to assumed categories of literary taste and readership:

En outre, il est aussi vain d'écrire spécialement pour le peuple que pour les enfants. Ce qui féconde un enfant, ce n'est pas un livre d'enfantalles. Pourquoi croit-on qu'un ouvrier électricien a besoin que vous écriviez mal et parliez de la Révolution française pour vous comprendre? D'abord c'est juste le contraire. Comme les Parisiens aiment à lire des voyages d'Océanie et les riches des récits de la vie des mineurs russes, le peuple aime autant lire des choses qui ne se rapportent pas à sa vie. (*CSB*, 310)

In a similar scenario in *A la recherche*, the Narrator sees popular art as more likely to engage the interest of members of the Jockey-Club than of the 'Confédération générale du travail' (RTP, IV, 467).

Detaching the consumer of literature from restrictive social-class categories, Proust energetically writes of the power of literature to liberate the imagination. Indeed he proudly promotes his groups of readers as they abandon the familiar in the quest for exotic difference. In a utopian view of the act of reading and without reference to questions to do with access to literature and the leisure needed for its consumption, he celebrates the effortlessly mobile reader effecting imaginative migrations. Tellingly, he displays a restlessness with the all-too-easy, caricatural connection linking French workers, bad French and the discourse of revolutionary tradition. The typecasting of revolution, we might note in passing, recalls the opening lines of *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* where Barthes scrutinizes the procedures of the eighteenth-century revolutionary writer Jacques Hébert, who liberally laces his pamphlets with words like 'bougre' and 'foutre' to signal proletarian coarseness. Crucially, Hébert provides Barthes with an example of 'une écriture dont la fonction n'est plus seulement de communiquer ou d'exprimer, mais d'imposer un au-delà du langage qui est à la fois l'Histoire et le parti qu'on y prend'.⁶

If Barthes's preface drives at the idea of the interconnectedness of 'l'histoire des Signes de la Littérature' and 'l'Histoire profonde' (ibid.), Proust's aspirations for the consumers of literature rest both on a confirmation of social-class boundaries and the transcendence of these in the realm of the imagination. Uneasy with the socially determinist matching of working-class reader and revolutionary subject-matter, Proust speculates anarchically in the conclusion to his piece 'Romain Rolland': 'De plus, pourquoi faire cette barrière? Un ouvrier (voir Halévy) peut être baudelairien' (CSB, 310).

The allusion here is to Halévy's short story of 1907, *Un épisode*, in which Proust's old Condorcet classmate champions the cause of the 'Université

6 Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), p. 7.

populaire'.⁷ Set in the twentieth *arrondissement*, Halévy's tale explores the plight of a young, male, working-class protagonist who embraces literature, undergoes a disabling crisis of class identity and kills himself. Yet as the correspondence with Halévy in December 1907 reveals, Proust, who had clearly read 'Un épisode', was much less accommodating than the image of the freely migrating reader in his piece on Rolland suggests. Halévy was active in the 'Université populaire' and dedicated *Un épisode* to the workers' education group of the eighteenth *arrondissement*, 'l'Enseignement mutuel'. Proust, by contrast, positioning himself conservatively on the 'rivage bourgeois', as he terms it, declares himself ill-equipped to comprehend the proletarian culture reflected in Halévy's social realism (*Corr.*, XXI, 620).⁸ Proust's territorial metaphor of the shoreline of social class distinction signals a distance from the political engagement with working-class learning that characterized the 'Université populaire'.

Having championed the 'Université populaire' in the early years of the century (even if his involvement assumed highly theatrical proportions),⁹ Halévy had clearly moved some way to the right by 1919 and the time of the 'Manifeste du Parti de l'Intelligence'. The 'Université populaire' attracted support from a wide range of writers, including Henri Bergson, Anatole France, Lucien Febvre and Paul Léautaud. Growing out of the Dreyfus Affair, the movement aimed to provide a place of encounter that would be mutually educative for workers and intellectuals.¹⁰ But as Lucien Mercier points out, two ideological trends were discernible: in the one, the strand

7 Daniel Halévy, *Un épisode* (Paris, Cahiers de la Quinzaine, 1907).

8 For a fuller treatment of 'Un épisode', see my forthcoming article, 'Perspectives sur la culture populaire' in a collected volume, *Morales de Proust*, ed. by Antoine Compagnon.

9 Referring to the 'totale ignorance de la sensibilité ouvrière' afflicting many intellectuals involved in the 'Université populaire' movement, Lucien Mercier cites the case of Daniel Halévy wearing coarse clogs 'pour faire peuple' (Mercier, 'Universités populaires' in *Dictionnaire des intellectuels français*, ed. by Jacques Julliard and Michel Winock (Paris: Seuil, 1996), pp. 1132–5 (p. 1134)). I am indebted to Mercier for the material on the 'Université populaire' used in this article.

10 Mercier, p. 1113.

of class struggle dominated, hence the strongly socialist profile of 'l'Union Mouffetard', for example, in the fifth *arrondissement*; in the other, 'Université populaire' activists sought to integrate the working class with the rest of the nation. Among them were nationalists like Maurice Barrès.

As with his correspondence with Halévy, Proust's letters to Barrès allow us to explore the fraught connection, in Proust's mind, between literature and the nation. In *Le Temps retrouvé*, Barrès's call for a patriotic art is dismissed as misguided: 'Dès le début de la guerre M. Barrès avait dit que l'artiste (en l'espèce Titien) doit avant tout servir la gloire de sa patrie. Mais il ne peut la servir qu'en étant artiste' (*RTP*, IV, 467). The Narrator's reference to Barrès's contribution confuses two distinct interventions, as the Pléiade editors point out: the one published by Barrès in *L'Echo de Paris* of 14 June 1916, after a trip to the Italian front (in which Barrès in fact praises Titian's work as preparing the way for national independence); and the other being Barrès's speech at Metz on 15 August 1911 (*RTP*, IV, 1263–4, note 3). This earlier piece is grounded in populist rhetoric and Proust's very diplomatic response to it in the ensuing correspondence with Barrès suggests an accommodation with nationalist fervour that contrasts markedly with his post-War response to the 'Parti de l'Intelligence'.

In his address to the delegates of 'Le Souvenir français' in Metz reported in *Le Temps* on the following day, 16 August 1911, Barrès underscores the collectivist identity of the gathering: 'Une fois encore, tous ensemble, d'un seul cœur, nous venons d'aller sur les champs de bataille honorer ceux qui sont tombés pour la défense du sol'.¹¹ Delighting in the presence of 'le cadre de cette immense armée du souvenir [...] qui maintenez cette religion des morts', Barrès casts himself as the obedient 'serviteur de votre volonté', as the conduit of France's message to Alsace and Lorraine, and as a participant in the 'beau dialogue français-alsacien-lorrain'. Evoking the memory of Lorraine's Jeanne d'Arc, Barrès also draws on Jaurès's metaphor for the lost provinces, that of trees superficially separated by a wall and yet with deep links to the 'racines de la forêt primitive'. Barrès imagines the spirit

11 *Le Temps*, 16 August 1911, p. 4.

of Ancient Rome and Gaul, of Caesar and Vercingetorix, presiding over Alsace-Lorraine. And in an attempt to avoid any charge of Germanophobia, he claims to be saying no more than he would wish to say to 'un digne Allemand'. Quoting from Goethe, he urges his audience to take as its watchword the line: 'Allons! par-dessus les tombeaux, en avant!'

Barrès's address connects strongly with the militarism at the heart of France's colonial expansion. Lamenting the death of a captain Petitjean in the recent campaign in Morocco, he reminds his listeners that the dead of 1870 had previously served France in Crimea and Italy and in the conquest of Algeria. His call, moreover, for stoic acceptance of France's loss relies on a caricatural depiction of Oriental culture, replete with racial and gender stereotyping: 'Mais ne laissons pas se diminuer la vertu de notre piété funèbre. Nous n'allons pas nous asseoir sur les tombes, comme des femmes d'Orient, pour gémir. Les morts de 1870 n'ont jamais pleuré.'

Other pieces on the same page of *Le Temps* reinforce the mood of zealous patriotism. Under the headline 'Un discours patriotique', a report on an international gymnastics event quotes from the address of a General Verrier from Saint-Cyr who sees military life generally as defending the greatness of the nation and delivers a harangue against military indiscipline and desertion.

In contrast with the Narrator's subsequent dismissal of Barrès in *Le Temps retrouvé*, Proust's response in two letters (one of August 1911, the other dated 1 October of the same year) shows him dealing with Barrès in a much more circumspect fashion. Writing from the Grand Hôtel in Cabourg in August, a flattering Proust – then a much less well known writer than his correspondent, who was a member of the Académie Française – congratulates Barrès on the rare ability that he demonstrates to combine artistic greatness and political leadership:

Vous êtes devenu [...] un grand écrivain qui est en même temps reconnu et obéi comme le chef le plus haut, par sa patrie, par l'unanimité du peuple. Cela n'est pas né d'un désir d'imiter telle ancienne théocratie ou autre pouvoir et qui eût été stérile. Cela a été produit par un précipité merveilleux, *inconnu* jusqu'à ce jour (car Lamartine ce ne fut qu'une heure) par deux tendances entièrement désintéressées, ne cherchant que leur satisfaction intime de votre âme. (*Corr.*, X, 341; Proust's italics)

Artistic achievement and the exercise of socio-political influence which elsewhere in the letter Proust sees as incompatible (the combination is 'chose contradictoire, impossible, maintenant du moins et périmée' (*Corr.*, X, 340)) miraculously coalesce in the person of Barrès. And in a choice of vegetal metaphor that suggests almost a pastiche of Barrès's discourse of cultural 'enracinement', Proust writes of 'une symétrie – involontaire, la seule parfaite, celle de la vie d'une croissance végétale – entre les fruits que vous portez sur les branches de l'action et ceux que vous portez sur les branches de l'art' (*Corr.*, X, 341). Proust ends his letter by asserting the sincerity of his tribute, designed to mirror, he says, that of the admiring crowd who, as reported in the newspapers, remove their headwear as a mark of respect to their leader. In its sentimentalism and deference, the letter, then, flatters Barrès, even if Proust insists that he writes 'sans coquetterie' (*Corr.*, X, 342).

Yet with hindsight and on closer reading, we can see Proust wrestling with the restrictions that come with the twinning of literature and nationalism. While he pleads gaucheness, caused by illness, in the formulation of his ideas, the letter contains in embryo the terms of a debate about mass culture and the figure of the intellectual that is to be resumed in *Le Temps retrouvé*. In a following letter to Barrès of October 1911, he draws together the ideological strands of national life manifesting themselves with particular salience at that juncture:

Depuis que je vous ai écrit, combien toutes les préoccupations de la France, question des églises, question allemande, question du sentiment patriotique et de la littérature, viennent comme une figure 'semblable', je crois que c'est ainsi qu'on dit en géométrie, faire coïncider chaque angle, chaque limite même avec tous les points de la vôtre. (*Corr.*, X, 351)

Proust's interest in the questions he itemizes was very real. But while magnifying Barrès's role (commending him as the necessary intermediary who will channel the voice of the nation into a parliamentary language for ministries as varied as Foreign Affairs and Culture: 'on n'aurait pas moins besoin de vous aux Beaux-Arts que pour les questions extérieures' (*ibid.*)), he implicitly distances himself from the national-political route. Rather

he situates his own project, 'une espèce d'immense roman' (*Corr.*, X, 353) which he refers to in the last quarter of the letter, within a literary field. Stendhal, Mme de Lafayette, Constant and Francis Jammes all feature in the closing paragraph, Proust complaining that a recent critic in the *Nouvelle Revue française* had indiscriminately thrown together the writers of *nouvelles* and *romans*. His complaint notwithstanding, the impression given is that reflection on the literary canon shifts attention away from the populist demagoguery of Barrès's 'Discours de Metz'. Aesthetics rather than political action, then, is the choice glancingly signalled by Proust.

In the same letter, he expresses frustration with 'une enquête stupide relative au sentiment politique' (*Corr.*, X, 351–2) that had been running in recent numbers of *Le Figaro*. In the 'Petite Chronique des lettres' section of the paper, the question put to writers concerned the extent to which literature had contributed positively to the mood of the nation, specifically in the forty-year period since the defeat of 1870: 'Nous connaissons tous', the questionnaire read, 'l'histoire du mouvement patriotique créée par la littérature dans les années qui ont suivi Iéna; la littérature française née après Sedan et notamment dans ces dernières années, a-t-elle rempli la même mission?'.¹² A number of the respondents including Émile Faguet and Paul Margueritte single out Barrès's positive contribution, Proust using these mentions to deliver a further compliment to his correspondent (*Corr.*, X, 352). But he cannot have been seduced by what he read: Margueritte writes of Barrès's works as having 'affermi chez nous la conscience de la race et le sentiment de ses vertus héréditaires'; another respondent, Alfred Mézières, argues that no writer of worth would dare go against the French people's resolute union 'en face de l'étranger'; and another minor writer decries the string of poisons released by political power and infecting 'l'âme française' – antipatriotism, anarchy, atheism and antimilitarism.

The judgemental certainties that Barrès plies in his 'Discours de Metz' and the claim to his audience to be 'le serviteur de votre volonté' contrast markedly with the will in Proust's Narrator to cultivate moral relativism

12 *Le Figaro*, 22 September 1911, p. 3.

and a socially isolating introspection. Proust also signals the risks inherent in seeking to influence a nation. He points out to Barrès that the enthusiastic prescriptions contained in the 'Discours de Metz' are being harshly misappropriated. The example he offers is of how Barrès's point about the stoic victims of 1870 ends up being misapplied to the situation involving the explosion on board the *Liberté* in Toulon of September 1911 that caused mass casualties: 'Mais on prend si à la lettre ce que vous dites, que parce que vous avez parlé de la gaîté et de ces vieux braves qui ne pleuraient pas, il y a déjà dans la presse un peu littéraire une certaine dureté (crue "à la Barrès") en parlant des victimes de la Liberté' (*Corr.*, X, 352–3).

Intriguingly, a counterpoint to the claustrophobic inwardness of the enquiry into literature and 'le sentiment national' that so irritated Proust is provided in the particular issue of *Le Figaro* that Proust quotes from (1 October 1911). Under the very un-Barresian caption 'L'Art n'a pas de patrie', an unnamed fashion columnist – promoting a brand named 'High Life Tailor' – speaks of the ability of its autumn collection to transcend national boundaries. Beyond the world of politics, the piece begins, 'l'internationalisme intellectuel' beckons. The exuberance with which the escapist topos is articulated ('L'Art n'a pas de patrie' is resoundingly touted as 'cette grande vérité [qui] n'a jamais cessé de planer au-dessus des intérêts de la politique et des ambitions') throws into relief the political obsession with the German question and national boundaries evident in the pre-war national press.

Seen against the ideological backdrop of the day, the outlook of Proust's Narrator would seem to be largely free from the nationalist aggression and paranoia that even this cursory glance at the pages of *Le Figaro* reveals. The summer and autumn of 1911 when the letters to Barrès were written was a period when Proust was working intensively on 'Combray' and *Un amour de Swann*.¹³ The opposition between the issues addressed in his

13 See chapters 10 and 11 of Anthony Pugh, *The Growth of 'À la recherche du temps perdu': A Chronological Examination of Proust's Manuscripts from 1909 to 1914*, 2 vols (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), II, 379–464.

novel and those triggered by the 'Discours de Metz' is stark. It would be too easy, too tidy to contrast Barrès's championing of the collective memory nurtured by delegates of 'Le Souvenir français' with the private workings of spontaneous individual memory that Proust promoted as a convenient byword for the first volume of the novel.¹⁴ More to the point, reading the celebration of the *petite patrie* in Combray against a Barresian backdrop is instructive in ideological terms.

Admittedly the cult of medievalism, the quintessential Frenchness of the church of Saint-André-des-Champs and the conservative social routine sustained by Combray's 'caste' system (*RTP*, I, 16) could all be seen as markers of a traditionalist social cohesion of the kind prized by Barrès. Yet the *campanilismo* of Combray appears uncontaminated by the unrelenting territorial and collectivist claims at the heart of Barrès's Metz address. Until, that is, we take into account the publication history of the pages on the church of Combray in *Du côté de chez Swann*. Substantial pre-publication of the material, under the title 'L'Église de village', was carried on the front page of *Le Figaro* on 3 September 1912. While that piece is offered as the evocation of a real-life 'simple chef-lieu de canton', the newspaper and 'Combray' versions of the pages are very substantially the same. There is some difference in the ordering of material and the named fictional characters feature, understandably, in the novel version only. Yet a luxuriant celebration of traditionalism is common to both texts. Moreover, the forum for the pre-publication, *Le Figaro*, already signals a very precise political context. Throughout the summer of 1912, the paper had been carrying lists, by department, of 'Les Églises artistiques de France' and this work of classification of France's specifically ecclesiastical heritage was, among other things, an expression of the cultural anxiety about heritage following on from the separation of the Churches and the State in 1905.¹⁵ But the strong political inflection in the *Le Figaro*

14 See Proust's *Du côté de chez Swann* interview with Elie-Joseph Bois published in *Le Temps*, 13 November 1913 and reproduced in *Textes retrouvés*, ed. by P. Kolb, *Cahiers Marcel Proust* 3 (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), pp. 285–91.

15 Barrès cites the work of Joséphin Péladan, who was preparing a volume entitled *L'Inventaire de nos dix mille églises artistiques et historiques à classer par listes*

version of Proust's village-church piece – a year before the appearance of the Grasset edition of *Du côté de chez Swann* – comes at the beginning of the text, where Proust expressly signals the fact that he is following in the footsteps of 'l'admirable auteur du vrai "Génie du Christianisme" – je veux dire Maurice Barrès'.¹⁶ The effect of the affiliation is to reveal a very precise contemporaneous context for Proust's evocation of the medieval provincial church. Encompassed, squarely if temporarily, within Barrès's conservative nationalism, Proust's 'Église de village' vignette cannot fail to give weight to Barrès's high-profile defence of the churches of France. But there is a double recuperation. For not only is the provincial church offered as a literary tribute to the Barresian campaign. So too, as it were proleptically, is Chateaubriand's aesthetic defence of Catholicism in the *Génie du Christianisme ou Beautés de la religion chrétienne*.

Proust's overt designation of Barrès as defender of the built heritage of Catholic France has thus become submerged in the accretion of later readings of the Combray-church pages of the *Recherche*. What in early twentieth-century France was an intensely contested political and cultural site has mutated into a would-be apolitical celebration of the charms of small-town, French life refracted through a narrator's memory. The fierce partisanship of a national debate between clericalists and radicals becomes elided as the literary text migrates and is read in new social contexts. Yet were we to imagine the Narrator's claim for the church of Combray – 'Combray [...] ce n'était qu'une église résumant la ville, la représentant, parlant d'elle et pour elle aux lointains' (*RTP*, I, 47) – being relayed to the Chamber of Deputies (as were Barrès's views, as recorded in parliamentary transcripts reproduced in *La Grande Pitié des églises de France*), the howls of anticlericalist disapproval would have been no less vociferous.

Significant detail in the Proust/Barrès *rapprochement* emerges from a parallel reading of 'L'Église de village' and Barrès's *La Grande Pitié des églises*

départementales et alphabétiques. See Barrès, *La Grande Pitié des églises de France* (Paris: Émile-Paul, 1914), p. 368 (henceforth abbreviated to *GPEF*).

16 *Le Figaro*, 3 September 1912, p. 1.

de France, published in 1914 but containing texts that had been substantially published in the preceding years, in newspapers and parliamentary records, texts therefore with which Proust was familiar. The exclamatory tone in the Barrès, 'Nos pauvres églises!' (*GPEF*, 11), is echoed in the Narrator's 'Que je l'aimais, que je la revois bien, notre Église!' (*RTP*, I, 58). Proust's church emerges victorious from across the centuries (*RTP*, I, 60) and is grounded in the soil, entering it being likened by the Narrator to a peasant walking through a magic valley. Just as Barrès insists that the village church in its very ordinairiness (as opposed to the grandeur of cathedrals) has to be preserved, likewise in the evocation of the Combray church the emphasis is on quirkiness: hence the asymmetry of the abbreviations in its Latin inscriptions; the grandmother's 'il n'est peut-être pas beau dans les règles, mais sa vieille figure bizarre me plaît' (*RTP*, I, 63); and, very strikingly, the apse of the building: 'Elle était si grossière, si dénuée de beauté artistique et même d'élan religieux' (*RTP*, I, 61). Proust is here working the same vein that we find in Barrès, who argues that the village church is a symbol of lived cultural history, a central plank of French provincial life, as much the property of the nation as of any faith community and thus qualifying for upkeep by the State (*GPEF*, 131). Both Barrès, a self-proclaimed 'catholique-athée', and Proust are less concerned with Christian apologetics than with the cultural Catholicism that France's churches symbolize.¹⁷ Or as Barrès puts it even more proprietorially, 'des sectaires [...] veulent détruire notre religion, c'est-à-dire le langage de notre sensibilité' (*GPEF*, 8).

In an open letter to Aristide Briand, Minister of the Interior, Barrès protests: 'la plus modeste [église] n'est-elle pas infiniment précieuse sur place? Que m'importe que vous conserviez une église plus belle à Toulouse, si vous jetez bas l'église de mon village?' (*GPEF*, 369). Proust makes similar play of the juxtaposition of cathedral and village church, for in

17 Maurice Barrès, *Mes Cahiers*, in *L'Œuvre de Maurice Barrès*, ed. by Philippe Barrès, 20 vols (Paris: Au Club de l'Honnête Homme, 1965–1968), XIV, 294; quoted in Philip Ouston, *The Imagination of Maurice Barrès* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), p. 74.

its asymmetry, Saint-Hilaire cannot compare with ‘toutes les glorieuses absides que j’ai vues’. But the sight of another provincial church, similarly misshapen, reinforces the sense of a keenly recognized and vital cultural artefact: ‘Alors je ne me suis pas demandé comme à Chartres ou à Reims avec quelle puissance y était exprimé le sentiment religieux, mais je me suis involontairement écrié: “L’Église!”’ (*RTP*, I, 61).

The seemingly depoliticized spontaneity of the Narrator’s tribute squares with the ideological case being pressed by Barrès. Even the provocative designation of the Saint-Hilaire church as a ‘simple citoyenne de Combray’ (*RTP*, I, 62) provides a Proustian twist, resonating ironically in a republican France where the church has acquired its egalitarian status like the shops and houses it is attached to. Yet elsewhere in these pages, it is as though, in an anticlerical age, the centrality of the church is being affirmed in an image of striking cultural hegemony: ‘C’était le clocher de Saint-Hilaire qui donnait à toutes les occupations, à toutes les heures, à tous les points de vue de la ville, leur figure, leur couronnement, leur consécration’ (*RTP*, I, 64).

Like Barrès, Proust stresses the socially inclusive role of the church. For Barrès, ‘le plus pauvre homme s’élève au rang des intellectuels, des poètes’ (*GPEF*, 89), while in the Combray church, all social ranks assemble, albeit hierarchically. In the culture war engulfing Church and State in France in the decade before the First World War, then, Barrès was in the pro-clericalist vanguard. Although assuming a less high profile, Proust too wrote publicly of his support for the continued alliance between church and state. The overtly political sub-heading to his ‘La Mort des cathédrales’ article published in *Le Figaro* on 16 August 1904 reads: ‘Une conséquence du projet Briand sur la séparation.’¹⁸ There is a proleptic dimension to Proust’s piece, which envisages a scenario centuries later in which Catholicism as a living tradition has died away, the only surviving traces being France’s cathedrals. Artists and experts, the young Proust writes, would devote all their creative endeavour to attempting the cultural reconstruction of lost

18 *Le Figaro*, 16 August 1904, p. 3.

religious practices; and the government of the day would finance 'avec raison [...] cette résurrection des ceremonies catholiques, d'un tel intérêt historique, social, plastique, musical et de la beauté desquelles seul Wagner s'est approché, en l'imitant, dans *Parsifal*' (CSB, 142).

Against this backdrop of future 'museumification', 'des caravanes de snobs' (CSB, 142), as Proust sneeringly refers to them, would make their annual trips to the cathedral cities. But if this merely cultural reenactment of worship satisfies the curiosity of 'lettrés', Proust, like Barrès, voices a strong nostalgia for the faith-based practice of a community represented as a tightly organicist whole: 'tout un peuple répondait à la voix du prêtre, se courbait à genoux quand tintait la sonnette de l'élévation, non pas comme dans ces représentations rétrospectives, en froids figurants stylés, mais parce qu'eux aussi, comme le prêtre, comme le sculpteur, croyaient' (CSB, 143). Observing that faith, not aesthetics, is what motivated the believers of old, Proust affirms his distaste for a legislative programme that will set in train the decline of France's cathedrals, 'qui sont la plus haute et la plus originale expression du génie de la France' (CSB, 142). The engagement with a cause could scarcely be less equivocal.

If a lack of filial piety operating within the confines of the family intermittently exercises the protagonist in *A la recherche*, the failure to respect the memory of antecedents assumes a more diffuse, societal form in 'La Mort des cathédrales'. Proust extrapolates from the figures depicted in the stained glass of France's cathedrals a busy and socially cohesive medieval community condemned to oblivion by a present population indifferent to its heritage:

De leurs vitraux de Chartres, de Tours, de Sens, de Bourges, d'Auxerre, de Clermont, de Toulouse, de Troyes, les tonneliers, pelletiers, épiciers, pèlerins, laboureurs, armuriers, tisserands, tailleurs de pierre, bouchers, vanniers, cordonniers, changeurs, *grande démocratie silencieuse*, fidèles obstinés à entendre l'office, n'entendront plus la messe qu'ils s'étaient assurée en donnant pour l'édification de l'église le plus clair de leurs deniers. Les morts ne gouvernent plus les vivants. Et les vivants, oublieux, cessent de remplir les vœux des morts. (CSB, 149; my emphasis)

Proust's roll-call of cathedrals and the expansive listing of occupations signal simultaneously a tribute to medieval iconography and the intense celebration of a teeming mass of producers, makers and tradesmen. Within the historically very precise context of 1904, his lusty tribute in the pages of *Le Figaro* to a 'grande démocratie silencieuse' that has been discarded becomes an intensely political statement directed against an anticlericalist lobby. The substance of Proust's objection is that anticlericalists risk instituting a cultural amnesia with implicitly anti-democratic connotations.

With hindsight, Proust views his 1904 piece on 'La Mort des cathédrales' as providing proof of semantic as well as cultural change: 'combien, à quelques années de distance, les mots changent de sens et combien sur le chemin tournant du temps, nous ne pouvons pas apercevoir l'avenir d'une nation plus que d'une personne' (*CSB*, 142), he remarks in an extended note added to 'La Mort des cathédrales' in preparation for its re-publication in *Pastiches et mélanges* (1919). Political and national histories are no more predictable, he observes, than private ones. The preoccupation surrounding 'la Séparation' has been superseded by the concerns of a new decade: 'Quand je parlai de la mort des Cathédrales, je craignis que la France fût transformée en une grève où de géantes conquies ciselées sembleraient échouées, vidées de la vie qui les habita et n'apportant même plus à l'oreille qui se pencherait sur elles la vague rumeur d'autrefois, simples pièces de musée, glacées elles-mêmes' (*CSB*, 142). While the initial fears expressed by Proust in *Le Figaro* echo those articulated by Barrès in *La Grande Pitié des églises de France*, a decade later, Proust observes that it is the German army that threatens the material fabric of France's churches, while the once hostile anticlerical deputies find common cause in wartime with patriotic bishops.

Proust's campaigning journalism and his correspondence with such figures as Daniel Halévy and Maurice Barrès show him engaging with his contemporaries on a range of cultural and political issues: the emergence of the 'Université populaire' at the turn of the century, the 'Séparation' of 1905, the role of the writer in relation to national politics, the debate about national regeneration and the claims of the 'Parti de l'Intelligence' in the aftermath

of the First World War. But there is a complex dynamic in play. Just as he does not conceal his Narrator's susceptibility to Germanophobia (*RTP*, IV, 491), Proust does not forego partisan engagement himself. Yet he also identifies the paradigm whereby cultural wars run their course; in doing so, he points up what is ephemeral and subjective in the espousal of causes. In *Le Temps retrouvé* the Narrator describes how once despised, high-profile Dreyfusards like the deputy Joseph Reinach come to be embraced, a decade later, by strident nationalist xenophobes in wartime France (*RTP*, IV, 492). The Narrator builds this into a more general theory about the subjective basis for so many of our evaluations. He signals a skewing of perspective as relevant to the conduct of international affairs as to the course of private lives.

The 'amours successives' (*RTP*, IV, 491) of Marcel's life are thus made to mirror the 'haines successives' that condition national affairs, both passions leading to a chain of aggressively held, erroneous positions. Thus to the love-distorted evaluations of Rachel and Albertine held respectively by Saint-Loup and Marcel, the Narrator adds other subjectivist positions: 'enseignement contre nature des congréganistes selon les radicaux, impossibilité de la race juive à se nationaliser, haine perpétuelle de la race allemande contre la race latine, la race jaune étant momentanément réhabilitée' (*RTP*, IV, 492). Compressed into Proust's tight parenthesis, the assertions of anticlericals, anti-Semites and racists all generate prejudice and groundless certainty. He identifies the connectedness of private and public misperception and exposes the negative workings of partisanship, his own included: 'après tant d'années écoulées et de temps perdu, je sentais cette influence capitale de l'acte interne jusque dans les relations internationales' (*ibid.*). It is with a sense of discovery, therefore, that the Narrator weighs the vexatious burden and pervasiveness of subjectivist opinion. Indeed he argues that every hour of his life has served to reinforce the view that 'seule la perception plutôt grossière et erronée place tout dans l'objet quand tout au contraire est dans l'esprit' (*RTP*, IV, 493). In his own case, he provides evidence of both partisan stances on the big issues of his day and a countervailing plea to 'comprendre et [...] écouter' (*RTP*, IV, 492). But if the conviction that culture wars are ultimately ephemeral feeds the transience-generated pathos of *Le Temps retrouvé*, Proust's dialogues with Barrès and Halévy lay bare the intense ideological debate of their day.

III Ontologies of the Modern

JACK JORDAN

Proust's Narrator: Travels in the Space-Time Continuum

Like Proust, the Narrator of *A la recherche du temps perdu* is known for his sedentary existence, confined to his room or moving in the closed world of Paris's salons. He does get up and around, however, at times picking up enough speed – first in a carriage, then a car, then a train – to experience the unsettling feeling of a world in motion. No longer is one anchored in a stable universe based on rational, causal principles. The Cartesian and Newtonian mechanical universe, open to rational, conscious observation, is left behind for an Einsteinian and Freudian one, in which space is confounded with time, causality is replaced by statistical probability, and conscious, rational observation is replaced by an inverted quest in the unconscious. The Narrator can be said to have travelled down Heraclitus' river into Einsteinian eddies in the space-time continuum.

Like memory, travel is fundamental to an understanding of Proust's novel. As with memory, inertia is broken. Traditional laws of time and space are destroyed, and a new law, a new order, a new certainty are created. According to Georges Poulet:

On ne saurait donc assez insister sur le caractère surprenant, et même véritablement inouï, du voyage, dans l'œuvre proustienne. Car il rompt une loi; il enfreint une règle qui, chez Proust, a une sphère d'application littéralement universelle; et, de ce fait, il change l'aspect de l'univers. Le voyage bouleverse l'apparence des choses.¹

1 Georges Poulet, *L'Espace proustien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), p. 93.

Travelling takes the Narrator out of his confinement, his isolation. Novelty replaces habit. Things and places – heretofore separated into little ‘closed worlds’ – are united. Space itself undergoes a sort of metamorphosis. Both the metamorphosis and the new unity are reflected in the Narrator’s experience of the road. As memory brings together events isolated in time, so travel brings together places and people isolated in space. In both cases – in the internal, subjective travel of memory in time, and in physical travel in space – he is able to escape the paralyzing inertia and uncertainty in which he would otherwise be imprisoned. The Narrator’s life is in opposition to that of his aunt Léonie who ‘n’avait plus voulu quitter, d’abord Combray, puis à Combray sa maison, puis son lit [...] [et qui], dans l’inertie absolue où elle vivait [...] prêtait à ses moindres impressions une importance extraordinaire’ (*RTP*, I, 48–50). His ‘least sensations’ are not experienced in isolation. He finds them instead in the outside world, endowing them with a more objective validity. Paradoxically, the unsettling experience of travelling provides him with a new certainty, a new order, a new sort of grace. The walls of his ‘diverse and enclosed worlds’ magically – or even supernaturally – fall:

L’expérience du voyage est aussi inexplicable chez Proust que l’expérience du souvenir. Inespérée, impréparée et explicitement contraire à toute expérience antécédente, elle surgit tout à coup, comme une grâce céleste, pour sauver l’être qui l’éprouve, sinon du désespoir, au moins de la paralysie. Tout voyage, même sans tapis volant, est pour Proust une action magique. Magique, ou, si l’on veut, surnaturelle.²

Proust’s use and enjoyment of automobiles is well known. Throughout his later life his automobile and driver served as nearly the only means of escape from the seclusion of his bedroom. In an automobile he could go anywhere he wanted, when he wanted and, if necessary, remain insulated from whatever it was he had gone to see (for instance from flowers, to which he was allergic). The automobile was his little enclosed world. According to George Painter, Proust was feeling relatively healthy at Cabourg in

2 Poulet, pp. 93–4.

August of 1912. Even his sleeping habits had improved. His friends were there and he was adapting to the external world fairly well. Despite his friends' misfortunes behind the wheel, he was enjoying riding around the countryside in Normandy and would not let a few rather depressing incidents stop him:

But his ardor was chilled by a series of disasters: on the 11th Nahmias ran over a poor little girl, who died two days later, on the road to Caen; on the 25th Bardac killed another outright; and a few days later two local taxis were wrecked in a collision. In the end he prudently hired the hotel omnibus – 'it's enormous and far from elegant,' he told Mme Strauss, 'but it's safe and the driver is very careful and clever'.³

The change from the use of carriages to the ever more common use of automobiles in Proust's lifetime is reflected in a passage at the end of *Du côté de chez Swann*, riding along a road at the Bois de Boulogne. The Narrator is forced to face not only the reality of the passing of time, but also of place. The road itself has changed. Both time and space are thin, unconnected, juxtaposed and irretrievable slices. First he is horrified and unaccepting, then defeated and suffering. The whole experience is dramatically punctuated by a series of 'Hélas' and 'Quelle horreur':

Quelle horreur! Me disais-je: peut-on trouver ces automobiles élégantes comme étaient les anciens attelages? [...] La réalité que j'avais connue n'existait plus. Il suffisait que Mme Swann n'arrivât pas toute pareille au même moment, pour que l'Avenue fût autre. Les lieux que nous avons connus n'appartiennent pas qu'au monde de l'espace où nous les situons pour plus de facilité. Ils n'étaient qu'une mince tranche au milieu d'impressions contiguës qui formaient notre vie d'alors; le souvenir d'une certaine image n'est que le regret d'un certain instant; et les maisons, les routes, les avenues, sont fugitives, hélas, comme les années. (*RTP*, I, 418–20)

For the Narrator, however, the automobile has another significance. Having one becomes an essential factor in his relationship with Albertine. Now they are able to visit more places in one day than they could have before

3 George Painter, *Marcel Proust: A Biography*, 2 vols (New York: Random House, 1959), II, p. 180.

in two. Time and space have changed for them. As the Narrator notes, 'les distances ne sont que le rapport de l'espace au temps et varient avec lui'. He goes on in a somewhat more amusing way, describing his friend's reaction to this Einsteinien notion:

En tous cas, apprendre qu'il existe peut-être un univers où 2 et 2 font 5 et où la ligne droite n'est pas le chemin le plus court d'un point à un autre, eût beaucoup moins étonné Albertine que d'entendre le mécanicien lui dire qu'il était facile d'aller dans une même après-midi à Saint-Jean et à La Raspelière. Douville et Quetteholme [...], prisonniers aussi hermétiquement enfermés jusque-là dans la cellule de jours distincts que jadis Méséglise et Guermantes, et sur lesquels les mêmes yeux ne pouvaient se passer d'un seul après-midi, délivrés maintenant par le géant aux bottes de sept lieues, vinrent assembler autour de l'heure de notre goûter leurs clochers et leurs tours, leurs vieux jardins que le bois avoisinant s'empressait de découvrir. (*RTP*, III, 385–6)

In 1907, Proust wrote an article, 'Impressions de route en automobile', for *Le Figaro* in which he described the changing relationship between man and road that resulted from the increased speed experienced when riding in an automobile. This article was the model for the watershed passage in *Du côté de chez Swann* when, experiencing the effects of speeding along the road, the Narrator writes for the first time. The passage in the novel differs from the article in one very important way. Since automobiles had not yet been invented within the chronology of the novel, he had to omit the automobile while keeping its speed. He did this by putting the Narrator into Dr. Percepied's horse-drawn carriage that must travel at an unusually high speed in order to get to a patient. As Claude Pichois shows in his *Vitesse et vision du monde*, speed was an essential element of the artistic process: 'Le dépaysement, l'effet d'étrangeté dû à la vitesse permettent de modifier les conditions de la perception, les catégories du temps et de la sensation. Vitesse, dans ce cas c'est poésie.'⁴ In both the article and the novel one finds the 'little piece of writing' where the Narrator sees the world in transformation: 'Les minutes passaient, nous allions vite et pourtant les trois

4 Claude Pichois, *Vitesse et vision du monde* (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1973), p. 93.

clochers étaient toujours au loin devant nous, comme trois oiseaux posés sur la plaine' (*RTP*, I, 179). Thanks to the speed of the vehicle, the change in lighting due to the setting sun and the curves in the road, and having passed the personified steeples/birds that result in a changing perspective, the Narrator writes for the first time. The road and the objects and animals along it seem like they are moving, alive, personified in part by the sense that it was the world around the speeding vehicle and not the vehicle and its passengers that are in motion. Speed, the automobile, the road – all are essential to Proust's very modern vision of the world, memory, the artistic process and the Narrator's vocation.

The Narrator also spends a lot of time travelling on trains. Unlike the newly introduced automobile, trains were a common means of transportation in Proust's time. The experience of riding in a train had been used in literature in a positive, dynamic and even magical way since the middle of the nineteenth century, as can be seen in an excerpt from a work by Paul de Kock, from 1842:

Voyager en chemin de fer ne fatigue pas; c'est un plaisir, un agrément... on se sent rouler avec une douceur inconcevable, ou plutôt on ne se sent pas rouler. On voit fuir devant soi les arbres, les maisons, les villages... tout cela passe! passe... bien plus vite que dans une lanterne magique... et tout cela est véritable, vous n'êtes point le jouet de l'optique!... Le chemin de fer est la véritable lanterne magique de la nature.⁵

The question of perspective, the introduction of the notion of magic (in particular, the image of the magic lantern, and the optical uncertainty involved in this subject-object relationship), the consciousness of a fixed reality slipping away and the joy at experiencing it all remind one of Proust. Earlier in the century, Gérard de Nerval had already used as many means of transportation in his writings as his epoch offered. In 1832 Nerval endowed the external world with mobility, and the passenger with immobility, an

5 Paul de Kock, *La Grande Ville. Nouveau tableau de Paris comique, critique et philosophique* (Paris: Bureau central des publications nouvelles, 1842–3), p. 188 (quoted in Pichois, p. 18).

inversion which, as we have seen, pervades Proust's description of the steeples in both his article for *Le Figaro* and in *Du côté de chez Swann*. (This aspect also distinguishes these two works from anything Proust wrote in his earlier work, *Jean Santeuil*.)

In the experience of riding in a train, man's most elementary notions of time and space are shaken. Space is irrelevant. According to Heinrich Heine, only time is important: 'Quelles transformations doivent maintenant s'effectuer dans nos manières de voir et de penser! Même les idées élémentaires du temps et de l'espace sont devenues chancelantes. Par les chemins de fer, l'espace est anéanti, et il ne nous reste plus que le temps'.⁶ Space is, according to Benjamin Gastineau, a rational construct, a shadowy metaphysic: 'La distance n'est plus qu'un être de raison, l'espace qu'une entité métaphysique dépourvue de toute réalité'.⁷ While we have not, of course, reached Einstein's time, these writers reflect a sense of the limits of the Cartesian, Newtonian, classical world-view that prepared the literary terrain for Proust's own writing.

The first popular edition of Einstein's theory came out in 1916 and, as his correspondence with Camille Vettard shows, Proust was familiar with the physicist's views. It is evident that both the scientist and the writer saw in the railroad train a vehicle universal enough to serve as the expression of their relative world views. In his work, *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory*, Einstein uses the train as a basis for his 'clear explanation that anyone can understand'. In the chapter entitled 'Space and Time in Classical Mechanics', he first defines 'the purpose of mechanics [which] is to describe how bodies change their position in space with "time"'.⁸ Not wishing to 'sin against the sacred spirit of lucidity', he proceeds to explain his theory by questioning the notions of 'positions' and 'space'. If a stone

6 Heinrich Heine, *Lutèce* (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1855), p. 327 (quoted in Pichois, p. 36).

7 Gastineau, *Histoire des chemins de fer* (Paris: Chez tous les libraires, 1863), quoted in Pichois, p. 35.

8 Albert Einstein, *Relativity: The Special and the General Theory* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1916), p. 9.

is dropped from a moving train, 'do the "positions" traversed by the stone lie "in reality" on a straight line or on a parabola? Moreover, what is meant here by motion "in space"? His definitions of position and space, which he founded on classical, Euclidean geometry have been eroded, the 'rigid body' they depended on having become fluid, unfixed, the classical, mechanical world, unhinged:

Every description of events in space involves the use of a rigid body to which such events have to be referred. The resulting relationship takes for granted that the laws of Euclidean geometry hold for 'distances', the 'distance' being represented physically by means of the convention of two marks on a rigid body. [...] [Now, with regard to the train,] we entirely shun the vague word 'space', of which, we must honestly acknowledge, we cannot form the slightest conception, and we replace it by 'motion relative to a practically rigid body of reference'.⁹

There is no causal connecting principle in Proust's world. A stereoscopic vision is evident in both time and space, and is of such a fundamental and universal nature as to be called by Poulet, paradoxically, 'un principe général de discontinuité':

La discontinuité temporelle est elle-même précédée, voire même commandée par une discontinuité plus radicale encore, celle de l'espace. Toutes deux s'entremêlent et s'aggravent mutuellement de façon si inextricable qu'il serait peut-être utile de faire ici quelques réflexions sur ce qui se trouve impliqué chez Proust par ce qu'on ne peut appeler autrement qu'un principe général de discontinuité.¹⁰

This principle is not limited to time and space, it applies also to the human condition and carries no certainty, no solid, unifying 'help from above' in its universal manifestation. For Proust, distance is only a visible and tragic demonstration of the universal and inescapable impossibility of a happiness found in love. The subject in love is in one place, the object of love in another. The 'little enclosed worlds' referred to earlier apply to people, moments and places alike. The principle of discontinuity, of separation,

9 Einstein, p. 8.

10 Poulet, pp. 55–6.

with its inherent lack of any causal connecting principle is universal. Yet, is there no connecting principle, no order, no certainty? Perhaps coincidence, or synchronicity, an a-causal connecting principle (as Wolfgang Pauli and Carl Jung describe it)¹¹ may suggest such a reordering of the world.¹² It is just such a chance occurrence that brings about the Narrator's experience of the 'special pleasure', as when he tastes the *madeleine* and tea or sees the steeples of Martinville and Vieuxvicq.

Einstein pursues the analogy of the train, adding conceptual problems in the form of varying points of reference, such as a flying raven and two events on the train viewed by someone on the embankment – are they simultaneous with reference to everyone? We have already seen difficulties in the simpler example, with one event and two perspectives, one of which is immobile. Now, the problem of a firm 'truth,' universal to all, with fixed references in space and time, is compounded by this problem of simultaneity.

For Proust, love is a 'lesson in relativity'. In such a case, one does not even have the fixed referent of an embankment, as the 'other' is in an equally mobile state. Both the subject, with its own multiplicity of selves, and the object of love, with its inherently uncertain and ever-changing nature lead the Narrator to experience the anguish of jealousy instead of the security of love. The development of his relationship with Albertine is, in essence, a description of this fundamental Proustian reality. The Narrator is painfully aware that he can never truly know the 'real' Albertine. Not only can he never find out exactly what she is doing, and with whom she is doing it, he cannot even escape the confines of his own temporal context. As Einstein explains, events which are simultaneous with reference to one coordinate system (such as on a train) are not simultaneous with regard to another (such as on the embankment): 'Every reference-body (co-ordinate system) has its own particular time; unless we are told the reference-body

11 *Synchronicity: An A-Causal Connecting Principle* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1955).

12 For more on this topic see my *Marcel Proust's 'A la recherche du temps perdu': A Search for Certainty* (Birmingham, AL: Summa, 1993).

to which the statement of time refers, there is no meaning in a statement of the time of an event' (p. 26). The Narrator will try to imprison Albertine on the train, in the compartment, in his arms, and even there cannot do it because of what is going on outside the train, in the compartment, inside Albertine, and inside his own self. There are far too many 'coordinate systems' to arrive at any solid, fixed certainty. In the same passage one can see an artistic embodiment of Einstein's theory of relativity as explained in his *Relativity: The Special and General Theory*.

In chapter three of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, the Narrator recalls a particular train trip along the coast of Normandy. The journey offers Proust a chance to use another 'little enclosed world' in the form of a train and, inside the train, a compartment, with occasional interruptions by local stations which seem more like images in a magic-lantern show, offering topics of conversation, rather than solid entities in a real world. The passengers are no longer bound by the contingencies of an external reality. The spatial and temporal chain with the world outside the train and then the carriages that have come to meet them has been broken. It is a change in the road that re-orientates them:

Une fois dans les voitures qui nous attendaient, on ne savait plus du tout où on se trouvait; les routes n'étaient pas éclairées; on reconnaissait au bruit plus fort des roues qu'on traversait un village, on se croyait arrivé, on se retrouvait en pleins champs, on entendait des cloches lointaines, on oubliait qu'on était en smoking, et on s'était presque assoupi quand au bout de cette longue marge d'obscurité qui à cause de la distance parcourue et des incidents caractéristiques de tout trajet en chemin de fer, semblait nous avoir portés jusqu'à une heure avancée de la nuit et presque à moitié chemin de retour vers Paris, tout à coup, après que le glissement de la voiture sur un sable plus fin avait décelé qu'on venait d'entrer dans le parc, explosaient, nous réintroduisant dans la vie mondaine, les éclatantes lumières du salon, puis de la salle à manger où nous éprouvions un vif mouvement de recul en entendant sonner ces huit heures que nous croyions passées depuis longtemps, tandis que les services nombreux et les vins fins allaient se succéder autour des hommes en frac et des femmes à demi décolletées, en un dîner rutilant de clarté comme un véritable dîner en ville et qu'entourait seulement, changeant par là son caractère, la double écharpe sombre et singulière qu'avaient tissée, détournées par cette utilisation mondaine de leur solennité première, les heures nocturnes, champêtres et marines de l'aller et du retour. (*RTP*, III, 481-2)

Time, space, land, sea, darkness, light: all are evoked in one typically Proustian sentence – long, sinuous, unbroken except for minor punctuation – a fitting style to describe the experience of riding in a train.

The Narrator first encounters an airplane when he is on an uncharacteristic horse-back ride to see the Verdurins at Rivebelle. He encounters more novelty and surprise than he expected in this already unaccustomed act when he hears what will be his first airplane. He is moved to tears as he feels a sense of novelty, freedom and liberation (while he, on the other hand, is earthbound, imprisoned by habit): 'Je fus aussi ému que pouvait l'être un Grec qui voyait pour la première fois un demi-dieu. Je pleurais aussi, car j'étais prêt à pleurer du moment que j'avais reconnu que le bruit venait d'au-dessus de ma tête – les avions étaient encore rares à cette époque – à la pensée que ce que j'allais voir pour la première fois c'était un avion' (*RTP*, III, 417). The road now leads upwards, outwards, even to 'life itself', seemingly breaking that most fundamental of the mechanistic laws that govern what was, until now, the largest of our little enclosed world, earth:

Cependant l'aviateur sembla hésiter sur sa voie; je sentais ouvertes devant lui – devant moi si l'habitude ne m'avait pas fait prisonnier – toutes les routes de l'espace, de la vie; il poussa plus loin, plana quelques instants au-dessus de la mer, puis prenant brusquement son parti, semblant céder à quelque attraction inverse de celle de la pesanteur, comme retournant dans sa patrie, d'un léger mouvement de ses ailes d'or il piqua droit vers le ciel. (*RTP*, III, 417)

The introduction of airplanes occurs on a large scale in the last volume of Proust's novel, *Le Temps retrouvé*. The advent of World War I has precipitated the use of the airplane. The Narrator is conscious of its intrusion into the one area of apparent stability and unchanging order to which man has looked since the times of the Babylonians, the stars: 'Je reconnais que c'est très beau le moment où ils montent, où ils vont *faire constellation*, et obéissent en cela à des lois tout aussi précises que celles qui régissent les constellations, car ce qui te semble un spectacle est le ralliement des escadrilles, les commandements qu'on leur donne, leur départ en chasse, etc.' (*RTP*, IV, 337). The Narrator's interest in the beauty of the airplanes' ascent and

inclusion in the celestial clockwork is only surmounted by their breaking of these laws, by their moving and, hence, the destruction of the immutable, unchanging order of the cosmos: 'Mais est-ce que tu n'aimes pas mieux le moment où, définitivement assimilés aux étoiles, ils s'en détachent pour partir en chasse ou rentrer après la berloque, le moment où ils *font apocalypse*, même les étoiles ne gardant plus leur place?' (*RTP*, III, 425-6).

It is no longer only the immediate physical world that is in movement; now the stars, the sky are also. The personification has reached outward to the limits of the visible universe. The stars are like insects or 'human shooting stars'. Instead of drawing order, meaning and certainty down from the heavens, man's ordering reason is projected upward in the form of spotlights and planes. The familiarity of an old and unchanging sky is also replaced by the beauty seen in the novelty of the planes. The feeling of security that was previously found in a stable, unchanging universe is replaced by confidence in man's intelligence, his will, and their manifestations on the macrocosmic level in the form of the government and the military. These wilful, intellectual intrusions into the sky, while bringing a certain sense of security, are still unsettling, making the Narrator feel he is not even in the same world. It is as if the earth has moved under his feet, as if he were in a different part of the world, under 'new stars'. The sky is in more motion than the earth: 'Des avions montaient encore comme des fusées rejoindre les étoiles, et des projecteurs promenaient lentement, dans le ciel sectionné, comme une pâle poussière d'étoiles, d'errantes voies lactées. Cependant les avions venaient s'insérer au milieu des constellations et on aurait pu se croire dans un autre hémisphère en effet, en voyant ces "étoiles nouvelles"' (*RTP*, IV, 380).

Later, driving in the streets of Paris, faced with the destruction of the world he used to know and all the novelty, all the change, the unfamiliar surroundings that had earlier brought on so much anguish, the Narrator experiences another of those sudden, magical feelings that transform the world. Change, motion, novelty: all the things that previously brought on uncertainty and fear are now accepted. He can now adapt to the unfamiliarity of the external world. His separation and confinement from the external world, itself divided into little enclosed worlds, little slices in

time and space divided by what Poulet refers to as the 'principe général de discontinuité', is transcended. He uses the experience of driving in an automobile to explain the sensation. It is the experience of a fundamental change of the world he is moving in. The ground on which his automobile is rolling changes from paving stones (divided, as are time and space in the world view just described) into a finer, smoother ride on sand, or dead leaves. Time and space are no longer divided into little parcels. The self is no longer contained and isolated. It is one continuous ride, the 'principe général de discontinuité' has been transcended and the chains of the contingencies of a world fixed in a mechanistic universe are broken. In an inverted image of flight, Proust moves from the automobile to the airplane and uses the latter not to suggest death, but rather the resurrecting flight of memory. Riding down streets he used to take with Françoise on his way to the Champs-Élysées, but had forgotten: 'Le sol de lui-même savait où il devait aller; sa résistance était vaincue. Et, comme un aviateur qui a jusque-là péniblement roulé à terre, "décollant" brusquement, je m'élevais lentement vers les hauteurs silencieuses du souvenir' (*RTP*, IV, 818). The different modes of travel used to move about in the external, physical world are also used to describe the Narrator's journey into the unconscious. In this internal world of the self, the traveller must find a new methodology, a new set of tools and standards in his search for certainty in this world where observer and observed have become one. The Narrator's experiences of cars, trains and planes provide the means by which he achieves this quest.¹³

Contrary to what one might expect, then, on encountering the sedentary Narrator of the first pages of *Du côté de chez Swann*, motion is a fundamental aspect of Proust's novel. The Narrator must travel. As technology develops, so does the individual's relationship to the world. Time and space take on new meaning as one moves from carriage to train to automobile to airplane. As the Narrator reaches the speed of the train

13 For more on this topic see my chapter 'The Unconscious', in *The Cambridge Companion to Proust*, ed. by Richard Bales (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 100–16.

and automobile, he finds the world to be as unfamiliar and in motion as in the first pages of the novel, waking up in the night with no clear sense of time or space. Not only does the Narrator not find certainty, but he ends up in the Einsteinian world view of relativity. In the outward search for certainty, for life, science and technology lead to uncertainty and, as seen in the apocalyptic passage with the airplanes in war-time Paris, to death. Paradoxically, at each experience of speed, of novelty, another brick is made for his 'édifice immense du souvenir' (*RTP*, I, 46), the foundation for the Narrator's new certainty. He begins to write when he sees the steeples of Martinville and Vieuxvicq while riding with Dr. Percepied. His experiences in the world arouse the 'special pleasure', transporting him into the world of the self, outside the contingencies of time and space, where he finds the essence of a new world view, a new certainty. The previously apocalyptic airplane represents the magical, resurrecting flight of memory and, in the final analysis, the artist himself.

Proust in the Fourth Dimension

One of the most well-known passages in Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* is his description of the church of Combray as 'un édifice occupant, si l'on peut dire, un espace à quatre dimensions – la quatrième étant celle du Temps' (*RTP*, I, 60). This reference to the fourth dimension is neither explained nor repeated elsewhere in the text, yet it indicates a central structural principle of the whole seven-volume narrative.

That such a reference, seemingly torn out of a futuristic sci-fi context, should occur in this setting at all seems surprising in light of the fact that the text on the Combray church is woven of a tissue of medievalisms drawn largely from the writings of John Ruskin, the celebrated English writer on the visual arts.¹ Proust had probably begun reading Ruskin as early as 1893; after Ruskin's death in 1900, he brought out a series of essays oriented toward persuading the French public to honour the Englishman's memory by making 'pilgrimages' to the places he had loved. In the next few years, he completed translations of two of Ruskin's books, *The Bible of Amiens* and *Sesame and Lilies*, and wrote several more articles and reviews about him, along with an unfinished pastiche.

Proust was especially interested in Ruskin's texts on cathedrals, as he wrote in a letter of 1900 to his friend, Marie Nordlinger (*Corr.*, II, 387). There he declares that what he most wants to read are Ruskin's writings

1 Even though, as Richard Bales has shown, a number of medieval details were also drawn from the writings of Émile Mâle (*Proust and the Middle Ages* (Geneva: Droz, 1975)). Yet it appears to have been Proust's translation of Ruskin's large volume on the cathedral of Amiens that initially sparked his interest in and writings on medieval architecture.

about French cathedrals other than Amiens – apart from *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, *The Bible of Amiens*, *Val d'Arno*, *Lectures on Architecture and Painting*, and *Praeterita*, because he knows those books ‘par cœur’. It seems quite likely that Proust was in particular attracted by the temporal aspect of Ruskin’s cathedral descriptions, for one of the primary qualities Ruskin emphasized in his discussions of churches and cathedrals was their agedness and their persistence through time. For example, in *Modern Painters IV* he gives a celebrated description of the old tower of Calais church:

The record of its years written so visibly, yet without sign of weakness or decay; its stern wasteness and gloom, eaten away by the Channel winds, and overgrown with the bitter sea grasses; its slates and tiles all shaken and rent, and yet not falling; its desert of brickwork full of bolts, and holes, and ugly fissures, and yet strong, like a bare brown rock.²

In a well-known passage from *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, one of the books Proust claimed to know by heart, Ruskin discusses the importance of age to the beauty of a building:

The greatest glory of a building is not in its stones, nor in its gold. Its glory is in its Age, and in that deep sense of voicefulness, of stern watching, of mysterious sympathy, nay, even of approval or condemnation, which we feel in walls that have long been washed by the passing waves of humanity. It is in their lasting witness against men, in their quiet contrast with the transitional character of all things, in the strength which [...] connects forgotten and following ages with each other, and half constitutes the identity, as it concentrates the sympathy, of nations: it is in that golden stain of time, that we are to look for the real light, and colour, and preciousness of architecture. (*JR*, VIII, 233–4)

When Proust came to write his own text on the church of Combray in the opening section of the *Recherche*, he wove into it images of ‘the golden stain of time’ like those Ruskin had elaborated. Thus his Narrator describes the

2 John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. by E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903–12), VI, p. 11 (hereafter *JR*). This is the edition that Proust himself owned, given to him as a present by his mother.

church porch as being ‘grêlé comme une écumoire’, worn out of shape and deeply furrowed at the sides; the memorial stones softened by time and made to flow like honey, their Latin inscriptions contracted and distended; the stained glass windows so old that their silvery antiquity could be seen sparkling with the dust of centuries (*RTP*, I, 58–9).

The particular aspect of the church that makes it ‘four-dimensional’ in the Narrator’s eyes is the layering of diverse times in its architecture. He gives a complex description of its structure built up through time by accretions of different epochs:

Dérobant le rude et farouche XI^e siècle dans l’épaisseur de ses murs, [...] élevant dans le ciel au-dessus de la Place, sa tour qui avait contemplé saint Louis et semblait le voir encore; et s’enfonçant avec sa crypte dans une nuit mérovingienne. (*RTP*, I, 60–1)

This text on the layers of times in the church is evocative of Ruskin’s description of the coexistence of different centuries in St Mark’s church in Venice.³ In the second volume of *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin notes that ‘the earliest parts of the building belong to the eleventh, twelfth, and first part of the thirteenth century; the Gothic portions to the fourteenth; some of the altars and embellishments to the fifteenth and sixteenth; and the modern portion of the mosaics to the seventeenth’ (*JR*, X, 77–8). Proust appears to have transposed these elements of Ruskin’s description of St Mark’s into his own text on the church of Combray, making it a figure for the simultaneous coexistence of all epochs in the fourth dimension.

Linda Dalrymple Henderson has traced the evolution of this concept of four-dimensional space in her 1983 book, *The Fourth Dimension and Non-Euclidean Geometry in Modern Art*. She shows that it was in Paris from 1900 to 1912 – precisely the time when Proust began to compose his

3 Though there are other texts which might have contributed to this description, the fact that Proust was so passionately interested in *The Stones of Venice* that he offered to annotate his cousin’s translation of it at a time when he himself was in poor health seems to make Ruskin’s text a likely candidate for having inspired it. See Proust’s 1904 letter to Auguste Marguillier in which he calls *The Stones of Venice* ‘un des plus beaux ouvrages de Ruskin’ (*Corr.*, IV, 364–5).

Recherche – that popular concepts of the fourth dimension reached their apogee. These concepts were rooted in early systems of non-Euclidean geometry formulated by Gauss, Lobatchevsky and Bolyai in the 1820s, as well as in the basic principles of n -dimensional geometry set forth by Cayley in the 1870s. Henderson discusses various writers who spread ideas of the fourth dimension in popular culture, such as E. A. Abbott, Charles Howard Hinton, H. G. Wells and P. D. Ouspensky. Among these popularizers of non-Euclidean geometry, H. G. Wells was the most well-known by far.

A number of Wells's science fiction pieces deal in one way or another with aspects of the fourth dimension, but it was *The Time Machine* of 1895 that made the concept internationally famous. In its opening pages, the main character, called simply 'the Time Traveller', explains his concept of time as the fourth dimension of space: '*There is no difference*', he maintains, '*between Time and any of the three dimensions of Space except that our consciousness moves along it*'.⁴ 'Scientific people know very well', he declares, 'that Time is only a kind of Space' (*TM*, p. 5). He even asserts that we have a natural power to travel about in time as we do in space through the capacity of our memory:

You are wrong to say that we cannot move about in Time. For instance, if I am recalling an incident very vividly I go back to the instant of its occurrence. [...] Of course we have no means of staying back for any length of Time [...]. [W]hy should [a civilized man] not hope that ultimately he may be able to stop or accelerate his drift along the Time-Dimension, or even turn about and travel the other way? (*TM*, p. 6)

The Time Traveller implies that moments in time actually coexist, rather than occurring in succession as we perceive them. It is because of this simultaneity of all 'time' in the fourth dimension that his Time Machine is able to move about freely among 'past, present and future', which are shown to be but illusory constructs of our consciousness.

4 H. G. Wells, *The Time Machine* (New York: Dover, 1995), p. 4 (hereafter *TM*).

When the French translation of Wells's novel, *La Machine à explorer le temps*, appeared in Paris in early 1899, it was an instant success.⁵ Proust clearly knew Wells's text,⁶ as he made various references to it in his letters. Thus it seems likely that his description of the church of Combray draws upon Wells's concept of time as a fourth dimension of space.⁷ Though he doesn't mention Wells by name, Proust does suggest the source of his reference by describing the Combray church as a kind of time machine, travelling across the years: 'déployant à travers les siècles son vaisseau qui, de travée en travée, de chapelle en chapelle, semblait vaincre et franchir, non pas seulement quelques mètres, mais des époques successives d'où il sortait victorieux' (*RTP*, I, 61). He also hints at the provenance of this concept by consistently capitalizing the word 'Temps', as Wells does with the word 'Time' in his narrative.

One of the early versions of Proust's passage on the four-dimensional space of the church is found in a manuscript draft for the church of Combray. Though identified by a different name – the Guermantes' abbey – the description is clearly an early version of the text on the church as it appears in 'Combray':

Ce qui est beau à Guermantes, c'est que les siècles qui ne sont plus y essayent d'être encore; le temps y a pris la forme de l'espace [...]. C'est le XI^e siècle [...] qui regarde étonné le XIII^e siècle et le XV^e, qui se mettent devant lui [...]. On sent bien qu'on traverse du temps, comme quand un souvenir ancien nous revient à l'esprit. Ce n'est plus dans la mémoire de notre vie, mais dans celle des siècles. (*CSB(F)*, p. 279)

This draft echoes the Time Traveller's statement that, 'Time is only a kind of space'. It resembles Wells's narrative also in that it makes an explicit link between time travel and memory. The published text on the church of

5 *The Time Machine* was translated in 1899, *The War of the Worlds* in 1900, *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *The Invisible Man* in 1901.

6 He first mentions Wells's writings in a letter of 1902 to Mme Léon Yeatman, in which he writes that he would like to entertain her with some 'assez mauvais mais très amusants livres d'une sorte de Jules Verne anglais qui s'appelle Wells' (*Corr.*, III, 37).

7 However, he only refers to Wells once in his narrative, in an allusion to *The Invisible Man* in *Le Côté de Guermantes* (*RTP*, II, 193).

Combray does not overtly make this link; however it does *suggest* such an association by the fact that the *madeleine* scene, the famous scene of remembering in 'Combray' I, is preceded by a series of references to time travel: the magic chair that carries the Narrator 'à toute vitesse dans le temps et dans l'espace' if he happens to fall asleep in it (*RTP*, I, 5); memory that draws him out of the abyss of non-being by making him traverse 'des siècles de civilisation' upon waking (I, 6); the magic lantern, whose bright projections seem to 'émaner d'un passé mérovingien' (I, 10); Golo, a time traveller who appears from out of the Middle Ages to trot across the walls of the Narrator's room, taking his doorknob as a 'corps astral' (I, 10). All these allusions to time travel build to a crescendo when the Narrator's involuntary memory is awakened by dipping a *madeleine* into a cup of lime tea, sending him travelling back in time to his childhood days with aunt Léonie in Combray.

Memory helps Proust's reader travel in time also: whenever we encounter one of the mnemonic devices with which the narrative is strewn (as, for instance, a recurrent visual image), we are thrown back in time in our memory to its previous occurrences in the text – or thrown forward in time on re-reading. We are never in one time, but in all times simultaneously – or rather, there is no 'time', for time has become space, spread out before us like a map as is the landscape seen from the top of the steeple of Combray. Indeed, for Proust there was no need to physically construct a time machine, as Wells's narrator had done: he took Wells's ideas one step further, creating a literary text that would itself serve as a time machine by orchestrating its reader's memory. The Narrator hints at such a possibility when he mentions in 'Combray' I that his grandmother had given him the novels of George Sand because their archaic language creates in the mind 'la nostalgie d'impossibles voyages dans le temps' (*RTP*, I, 41).

Proust had already associated memory with the reading of texts in his essays on Ruskin. In his 1903 preface to his translation of *The Bible of Amiens*, he characterizes his footnotes as 'une mémoire improvisée, où j'ai disposé des souvenirs des autres livres de Ruskin – sorte de caisse de résonance, où des paroles de *la Bible d'Amiens* pourront prendre plus de

retentissement en y éveillant des échos fraternels.⁸ In the 1905 preface to his translation of Ruskin's *Sesame and Lilies*, Proust takes this concept even further, presenting literary texts as vehicles for time travel through memory. When we read a text by Racine or Saint-Simon, he writes, we experience the same happiness we feel in walking through an old city like Beaune, where various ages of architecture remain intact: 'Car ils contiennent toutes les belles formes de langage abolies qui gardent le souvenir d'usages, ou de façons de sentir qui n'existent plus, traces persistantes du passé à quoi rien du présent ne ressemble et dont le temps, en passant sur elles, a pu seul embellir encore la couleur.'⁹ He then amplifies this 'golden stain of time' by evoking the four-dimensional space of the Piazzetta columns in Venice, which he compares to reading a text by Shakespeare or Dante:

Que de fois, dans la *Divine Comédie*, dans Shakespeare, j'ai eu cette impression d'avoir devant moi, inséré dans l'heure présente, actuelle un peu du passé, cette impression de rêve qu'on ressent à Venise sur la Piazzetta, devant ses deux colonnes de granit gris et rose qui [...]. Continuent à attarder au milieu de nous leurs jours du XII^e siècle [...]. Au milieu d'aujourd'hui dont il interrompt à cet endroit l'empire, un peu du XII^e siècle, du XII^e siècle depuis si longtemps enfui, se dresse en un double élan léger de granit rose. Tout autour, les jours actuels, les jours que nous vivons circulent, se pressent en bourdonnant autour des colonnes, mais là brusquement s'arrêtent, fuient comme des abeilles repoussées; car elles ne sont pas dans le présent, ces hautes et fines enclaves du passé, mais dans un autre temps où il est interdit au présent de pénétrer. (*SL*, 57)

These columns on the Piazzetta in front of St Mark's church were strongly associated with Ruskin, who had described them at some length in his late work, *St Mark's Rest*. Here Proust appears to re-write Ruskin's description of the columns in order to translate them into a figure for the four-dimensional interpenetration of different planes of time in literary texts, offering the reader the same possibility of time travel as the coexistence of different centuries in a cathedral.

8 John Ruskin, *La Bible d'Amiens*, trans. by Marcel Proust (Paris: Mercure de France, 1904), p. 10.

9 John Ruskin, *Sésame et les lys*, trans. by Marcel Proust (Paris: Mercure de France, 1906), p. 53 (hereafter *SL*).

We know from Proust's correspondence that he planned to structure his *Recherche* as a cathedral.¹⁰ This was another aspect of his writing inspired by Ruskin, who wrote several volumes – including *The Bible of Amiens* – on cathedrals as books to be read. It seems likely that Proust's church of Combray is meant to serve as a model for this cathedral-novel, since it is placed at the beginning of the text just as there was often placed at the entrance to a Gothic cathedral a miniature of the cathedral itself. Moreover, the Narrator says at the end of the *Recherche* that his entire narrative would be stamped with the form 'que j'avais pressentie autrefois dans l'église de Combray, [...] celle du Temps' (*RTP*, IV, 622). Like the church, the text is four-dimensional, which is to say that its events exist all at once, simultaneously, although they appear to us to be linear and successive in three-dimensional 'time' as we read the narrative. In order to coexist in our consciousness, they must become layered or stratified, a process that takes place in our memory. As we read, we encounter various repetitions of images or other mnemonic devices that cause us to recall previous sections of the text, thereby 'folding' the text back upon itself in layers – a process that works against the forward or horizontal thrust of the narrative, creating a 'vertical' axis that is augmented with every new folding. This process continues until we reach the end of the seventh volume, at which point the Narrator is 'taller than a church steeple' in the dimension of time – as is the layered narrative in our memory.

- 10 He declared as much in a letter of August 1919 to Jean de Gaigneron: 'Et quand vous me parlez de cathédrales, je ne peux pas ne pas être ému d'une intuition qui vous permet de deviner ce que je n'ai jamais dit à personne et que j'écris ici pour la première fois: c'est que j'avais voulu donner à chaque partie de mon livre le titre: *Porche I Vitraux de l'abside etc.* pour répondre d'avance à la critique stupide qu'on me fait du manque de construction dans des livres où je vous montrerai que le seul mérite est dans la solidité des moindres parties. J'ai renoncé tout de suite à ces titres d'architecture parce que je les trouvais trop prétentieux mais je suis touché que vous les retrouviez par une sorte de divination de l'intelligence' (*Corr.*, XVIII, 359). For detailed discussions of Proust's construction of his 'roman-cathédrale', see Luc Fraisse, *L'Œuvre cathédrale: Proust et l'architecture médiévale* (Paris: José Corti, 1990), and J. Theodore Johnson Jr., 'Marcel Proust et l'architecture: Considérations sur le problème du roman-cathédrale', *Bulletin de la Société des amis de Marcel Proust et des amis de Combray*, 24 (1974), 37–40; and 25 (1975), 16–34.

The priest's description of the view from the church steeple in 'Combray' serves as a directive of how to read Proust's text: 'Du clocher de Saint-Hilaire c'est autre chose, c'est tout un réseau où la localité est prise. Seulement on ne distingue pas d'eau. [...] Il faudrait pour bien faire être à la fois dans le clocher de Saint-Hilaire et à Jouy-le-Vicomte' (*RTP*, I, 105). In the same way, once we have reached the top of the narrative's steeple at the end of its seventh volume, we must go back to view it from the bottom – that is, re-read the *Recherche* from the beginning – to experience the four-dimensional space of the text. Then the knowledge of the architecture of the whole will be fused with the process of coming to construct it, moving through the texture of individual sentences. Time will become reversible in this four-dimensional continuum – the future will be the past and vice versa – and therefore will be effectively 'spatialized'.

Indeed, the end of the *Recherche* is linked to its beginning by a sequence of involuntary memories in *Le Temps retrouvé* that echoes the Narrator's experience of the *madeleine* and creates a flurry of time travel. His first memory occurs when the sensation of teetering on the uneven paving stones in the Guermantes' courtyard in Paris carries him back to his pilgrimage to Venice, as well as to the church of Combray. This vision of Venice, which implicitly resurrects Ruskin for both the reader and the Narrator (who is said to be translating Ruskin there),¹¹ initiates a series of involuntary memories that surge into the Narrator's consciousness after he enters the hôtel de Guermantes. As he waits in the Guermantes' library, he begins to travel freely in time and space as each new sensation evokes another moment, and therefore another place, of his past:

La sensation commune avait cherché à recréer autour d'elle le lieu ancien, cependant que le lieu actuel qui en tenait la place s'opposait de toute la résistance de sa masse à cette immigration dans un hôtel de Paris d'une plage normande ou d'un talus d'une voie de chemin de fer. La salle à manger marine de Balbec [...] avait cherché à ébranler la solidité de l'hôtel de Guermantes, à en forcer les portes et avait fait vaciller un instant les canapés autour de moi. (*RTP*, IV, 453)

11 In the Venetian episode of *La Prisonnière* (*RTP*, IV, 224).

Such experiences echo the opening pages of 'Combray', where the Narrator remains immobile as he travels in time and space, while around him 'les murs invisibles, changeant de place selon la forme de la pièce imaginée, tourbillonnaient dans les ténèbres' (*RTP*, I, 6). In fact, all these involuntary memories serve as mnemonic devices that tie the final section of the narrative to its opening pages in the reader's memory – thus reinforcing the circular structure of the whole text, making it a kind of Moebius loop.

This bending of the end of the text back to its beginning in 'Combray' may be modelled on another H. G. Wells text, a well-known short story of 1895, 'The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes'. Here Davidson, a scientist, is struck by lightning in his lab and thereafter is unable to see anything around him, while at the same time he has a constant vision of a ship on an island where penguins are playing. During several weeks he gradually recovers his eyesight: 'Over patches of his field of vision the phantom world grew fainter, grew transparent, as it were, and through these translucent gaps he began to see dimly the real world about him. [...] At first it was very confusing to him to have these two pictures overlapping each other like the changing views of a lantern.'¹² Two years after he regains his vision, Davidson is shown a picture of a ship on the South Seas, eight thousand miles away, that he recognizes as the one he had seen for weeks after his accident: 'In some unaccountable way, while he moved hither and thither in London, his sight moved hither and thither in a manner that corresponded, about this distant island' (DE, 61). The ending of the story suggests a 'fourth-dimensional' explanation for this phenomenon:

Explanation there is none forthcoming, except what Professor Wade has thrown out. But his explanation invokes the Fourth Dimension, and a dissertation on theoretical kinds of space. To talk of there being a 'kink in space' seems mere nonsense to me. [...] When I said that nothing would alter the fact that the place is eight thousand miles away, he answered that two points might be a yard away on a sheet of paper and yet be brought together by bending the paper round. (DE, 61)

12 H. G. Wells, 'The Remarkable Case of Davidson's Eyes', in *The Country of the Blind and Other Science-Fiction Stories*, ed. by Martin Gardner (Mineola, NY: Dover, 1997), p. 60 (hereafter DE).

In the same way, Proust appears to have 'bent' the end of his text around to its beginning to form a continuum; in his Narrator's eyes, too, visions of the distant Combray, Balbec and Venice struggle for supremacy with his 'real' surroundings in Paris, until the distant places of the past are ultimately vanquished. The fact that Wells's text compares Davidson's alternating vision of near and far to 'two pictures overlapping each other like the changing views of a [magic] lantern' seems further suggestive of the possibility of a link between this story of a 'kink in space' and Proust's text on his Narrator's involuntary memories in *Le Temps retrouvé*.

Curiously, despite his indebtedness to Wells, Proust seems to have originally developed the idea of travelling in time through his writings on Ruskin. His first text about a 'time traveller' appears to be his description of the 'petite figure' on the portal of the Cathedral of Rouen in his 1900 essay, 'John Ruskin'. Ruskin had singled out this figure and made a drawing of it in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* in order to illustrate the vitality of art in the Middle Ages. In his essay, Proust presents the figure as a 'time machine' that has transported the soul of its 14th-century sculptor into the present, along with Ruskin's soul. At the essay's end, he makes of Ruskin a time traveller also: 'Mort, il continue à nous éclairer, comme ces étoiles éteintes dont la lumière nous arrive encore' (*CSB*, 129). Proust would later treat this four-dimensional aspect of Ruskin in a comic vein in his 1909 pastiche, 'La Bénédiction du sanglier'. Here he presents a tourist travelling by airplane to Paris, where Ruskin offers to explain to him some twentieth-century frescoes by the medieval artist, Giotto (*CSB*, 201–5). The use of the airplane (called 'l'oiseau de Wilbur'), which functions here almost like a time machine, allows Proust to play wildly with four-dimensional interminglings of different vectors of space and time, as does his humorous attribution of frescoes about the Lemoine Affair of 1907–9 to an Italian painter of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.¹³

13 This text prefigures one of the later sections of *Sodome et Gomorrhe* in the *Recherche*, in which the Narrator sees an airplane flying for the first time (*RTP*, III, 417). By presenting his Narrator's first view of an airplane as occurring while he is on horseback, Proust creates an interpenetration of different historical times.

Such fusions of medieval and ultra-modern are characteristic of many of Proust's writings on Ruskin. In his 1907 essay, 'Impressions de route en automobile', where he describes his trips by car to see the cathedrals of Normandy, Proust presents his chauffeur, Agostinelli, as a similar kind of fusion:

Mon mécanicien avait revêtu une vaste mante de caoutchouc et coiffé une sorte de capuche qui, enserrant la plénitude de son jeune visage imberbe, le faisait ressembler, tandis que nous nous enfoncions de plus en plus vite dans la nuit, à quelque pèlerin ou plutôt à quelque nonne de la vitesse. [...] Mais la plupart du temps il tenait seulement dans sa main sa roue [...] assez semblable aux croix de consécration que tiennent les apôtres adossés aux colonnes du chœur dans la Sainte-Chapelle de Paris, à la croix de Saint-Benoît, et en général à toute stylisation de la roue dans l'art du moyen âge. (*CSB*, 66–7)¹⁴

This essay presents the last of Proust's Ruskinian pilgrimages, as indicated by his desire to see at Lisieux 'à la façade de la cathédrale quelques-uns des feuillages dont parle Ruskin' (*CSB*, 66).¹⁵ At the same time, its opening section is an *avant-texte* for Proust's text on the steeples of Martinville in the *Recherche*, which in its original form here is a description of the steeples of Caen as he had seen them while travelling rapidly across the landscape in his motorcar. It is also an *avant-texte* for the Narrator's 'promenades en automobile avec Albertine' in *Sodome et Gomorrhe II*, where Proust presents descriptions of towns that formerly had been 'imprisoned' in one place, but which now are 'delivered' by the automobile from their captivity so that they may move around freely in four-dimensional space/time.

Thus we might say that the church of Combray serves as a model for Proust's *Recherche* in yet another way: just as it is at once a medieval village church and a space-age time machine, so Proust's narrative reveals a consistent layering of the modern over the medieval.¹⁶ This fusion of two

14 This version of the essay is from the 1919 *Pastiches et mélanges*, in which the original 1907 essay is given the simple title of 'Journées en automobile'.

15 Ruskin had described the foliation on the southwestern entrance of the cathedral of Lisieux in *The Seven Lamps of Architecture* (*JR*, VIII, 128–9).

16 Richard Bales has shown how extensive a role the Middle Ages play in *A la recherche* in his *Proust and the Middle Ages*, to which Luc Fraisse has added much useful

such distant ages into a simultaneous coexistence is itself part of the four-dimensionality of the text. A description in 'Combray' of the landscape on the Guermantes' way seems to be a figure for this four-dimensional composition of the narrative:

Ils étaient semés des restes, à demi enfouis dans l'herbe, du château des anciens comtes de Combray qui au Moyen Âge avait de ce côté le cours de la Vivonne comme défense contre les attaques des sires de Guermantes et les abbés de Martinville. Ce n'étaient plus que quelques fragments de tours bossuant la prairie, à peine apparents [...] – passé presque descendu dans la terre [...] mais me donnant fort à songer, me faisant ajouter dans le nom de Combray à la petite ville d'aujourd'hui une cité très différente, retenant mes pensées par son visage incompréhensible et d'autrefois qu'il cachait à demi sous les boutons d'or. (*RTP*, I, 165)

Just as the present-day landscape of Combray is dotted with medieval outcroppings, so Proust's narrative is punctuated by medieval elements, like the upsurging of the past into our present consciousness through involuntary memories.

Thus Proust combined his interest in Ruskin's medievalism with theories of the fourth dimension fashionable among the Parisian avant-garde of his day. The 'cathedral-novel' he created in his *Recherche* synthesizes both these models in a unique form that gives to the reader the role of mentally constructing the four-dimensional cathedral that was to emerge from the linear text. The seven volumes of his narrative are encoded with mnemonic devices that orchestrate the reader's memory to convert horizontality into verticality, succession into superimposition, time into space.

A striking image of Proust's cathedral-novel has been left us by Jean Cocteau, who described the experience of seeing his friend Marcel on his deathbed, the unpublished manuscripts of the *Recherche* piled on a table at his side:

information on the medieval elements related to its churches and cathedrals in his *L'Œuvre cathédrale* (see footnotes 1 and 10).

Peu à peu, la chambre s'évanouissait, la pile émouvante des feuilles, seule, grandissait, grandissait; ses cornes dentelées, ses angles, devenaient une dentelle innombrable de murailles, d'arches, de rosaces, de voûtes, de niches, de flèches, de toitures.

Une cathédrale de papier [...] d'où la recherche du temps perdu s'élevait et bâtissait en l'air une nef dont Albertine serait l'ange au sourire détruit, et les autres, les saints, les damnés et les gargouilles.¹⁷

Cocteau must have had a vision at that moment of the four-dimensional architecture Proust's completed narrative would assume: the church of Combray having travelled through the ages of the text to become the cathedral-novel of the *Recherche* itself, transporting its reader into a four-dimensional space where all of 'le temps perdu' would be 'retrouvé' – and bearing among the figures carved on its portals the souls of Ruskin and H. G. Wells, propelled across the ages in this most splendid time machine.

17 Jean Cocteau, 'Nous deux Marcel', in *Poésie critique I* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959), p. 132.

Proust's 'grands chagrins utiles': Beyond Contingency?

At a certain point in *Le Temps retrouvé*, the Narrator appears to take a clear and insistent line when it comes to the issue of 'le chagrin'. The impact of 'le chagrin', he says, is in the end biological: the pain it causes simply brings us closer to death; before the body comes to be destroyed, all we can do, for the sake of 'la connaissance spirituelle', is to extract whatever parcel of understanding we can from the experience (*RTP*, IV, 484–5). What seems to prompt the conviction that 'la connaissance spirituelle' is something of value is the new urgency which attaches to the Narrator's projected work, in the light of the discoveries which he has just recorded. As the Narrator begins, then, to envisage his book as a realizable project, it seems possible to impose closure on certain of the threads which constitute the quest that has led him to this point, to aspire to the attainment of wisdom in the face of suffering. This gesture represents one view of what it might be to be beyond contingency.

This intriguing line of thought is eminently Proustian in that it forms part of the novel's ceaseless plotting of the dynamics of loss and recovery. At the same time, it can be connected to a line of writing in fiction and indeed in thought which is centred on feeling that is no less singular, on which Proust himself draws. These two issues – the significance we might assign to the insights which shape the Narrator's resolutions at the end of the novel, on the one hand, and the representation of affect in modern fictional narrative, on the other – are connected in the work of Richard Bales.¹ What I shall comment on here is how, in Proust's work, these two

1 See in particular Proust: *'À la recherche du temps perdu'* (London: Grant and Cutler, 1995), ch. 6, and *Persuasion in the French Personal Novel: Studies of Chateaubriand, Constant, Balzac, Nerval, and Fromentin* (Birmingham, AL: Summa, 1997).

strands, though they appear to diverge, in fact provide a perspective within which we can engage with his representation of subjectivity. To elucidate this claim, I shall combine my discussion of the *Recherche* with some comments on Goethe's *Elective Affinities* and Constant's *Adolphe*, where the issue that dominates each narrative is, by contrast, the apparent futility of certain experiences of passion.

It is indeed the case that Proust's response to the suffering of sorrow can be situated with reference to the emergence within modern European culture of a discourse of affectivity centred ultimately on the issue of representation. What is significant about this discourse is that it parallels and indeed could be said to supplant a countervailing ethical theory essentially derived from Stoic and other ancient sources. Adam Smith trenchantly calls into question the Stoic insistence on the need to eliminate the passions and proceeds to present the imagination as a source of moral judgements. He takes a special case: the sometimes acute feelings of concern and care which a parent may feel for a child. However excessive such a feeling may appear, it is difficult to regard it as hateful. It is rather, Smith argues, the Stoic position – that any such feeling should be repressed – which is repellent. Smith generalizes this argument, saying that what is true of parental affection, or more generally of love and friendship, applies in fact also to the entire range of 'private and domestic affections'. He concludes his rebuttal of Stoicism with a provocative appeal to imaginary passions:

The stoical apathy is, in such cases, never agreeable [...]. The poets and romance writers, who best paint the refinements and delicacies of love and friendship, and of all other private and domestic affections, Racine and Voltaire; Richardson, Maurivaux, and Riccoboni; are, in such cases, much better instructors than Zeno, Chrysippus, or Epictetus.²

2 *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. by Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 164–5.

For Smith, the choice of modern authors consolidates the break with ancient philosophy. Indeed, there is something of a precautionary move here. Stoic philosophy illustrates what may be a vice of philosophy more generally: in its construction of a theory of human nature and human conduct, it can pre-empt any effort to understand how some feeling – even an extreme feeling – may in fact be reconciled with a sense of virtue and self-approbation, as Smith himself goes on to argue. Thus, sorrow at the misfortune of others or grief for the dead may seem perfectly justified and justifiable feelings. Two points are to be noted: first, drama and fiction are enduring sources of a scepticism towards the claims of philosophical systems which is salutary; and, second, these forms of writing further provide access to an emotionally conditioned perspective on the emotions. By excluding Stoic apathy, Smith seeks to define the proper place and character of feeling – in the very process of how we understand and deal with feeling.³

Now, at first glance the Narrator's attempted transmutation of '*le chagrin*' into '*la connaissance spirituelle*' seems to diverge from such a stance. Behind the question of wisdom, there seems to lurk something of an impasse: the attempt to confront painful feelings appears to be deflected into a project with a different, more cerebral, focus. The question to which I now turn is this: to what extent does extreme feeling equate with a certain exposure to contingency? It is possible that the Narrator's gesture amounts to an attempted displacement, not just of the problem of feeling, but also that of contingency. Viewed in this light, the concern which the Narrator articulates may be a cryptic way of connecting the problem of affectivity with other problems: this is a possibility which I shall explore further. A claim we can derive from Smith is that representation is intimately connected to the resources on which we can draw as we grapple with the problems we experience with affect. The problem of affectivity is indeed

3 For a comparable contemporary intervention, see Richard Wollheim, who argues that when we fall under the sway of philosophy we are 'seduced into abandoning the natural, which is the psychological, understanding of mental dispositions' (*On the Emotions* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 6, 33, 223).

that of its unmasterable dynamism and, within this component of mental life, it is the infant's loss of a sense of her own or her parent's omnipotence that signals the advent of contingency. So Adam Phillips argues, drawing on D. W. Winnicott. Painful experiences of emotional states confirm, all too tangibly, the outcome of the attainment of the Depressive Position, namely the loss of this sense of omnipotence and the 'immense shock' (to quote Winnicott) which it causes. In the face of 'le chagrin', then, all we can ever hope for is the most momentary equipoise. Even knowledge of contingency is 'paradoxical'. Each parcel of understanding is precarious, as Phillips concludes, because 'emotional experience is new at every moment'.⁴ Every insight, as a result, is contingent, because provisional, because vulnerable to the uncertainties, internal or external, subjective and social alike, which in turn it provokes. Desire, like knowledge, is shadowed by the contingencies that drive it on and in turn impinge on each and every one of its outcomes. The incompleteness of each is radical in that these outcomes re-enact a position where the subject is compelled – often painfully – to adopt an attitude of complete and uncertain openness to new emotional experiences.

We can offer a provisional conclusion by saying that the narrative impact of Proust's novel derives from a contingency that has many outcomes – affective, social, aesthetic – but whose significance could ultimately be said to lie in its perennial unforeseeable potential to precipitate shifts in how we think about the world and our place in it. The Narrator's own position is ambiguous: from the outset, from the moment of the *madeleine* episode, he acknowledges and seeks to espouse a positive contingency.⁵

- 4 'Contingency for Beginners', in *On Flirtation* (London: Faber, 1994), pp. 3–21 (pp. 19–21). The Depressive Position entails the recognition of the mother as a whole object, triggering anxieties connected with the possibility of loss. On the impact of the loss of the feeling of omnipotence, see D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 71.
- 5 The experience of tasting the *madeleine* leads the Narrator to give a special promise to a contingency which is at least half-benign: 'Il y a beaucoup de hasard en tout ceci, et un second hasard, celui de notre mort, souvent ne nous permet pas d'attendre longtemps les faveurs du premier' (*RTP*, I, 43).

But this pursuit co-exists with experiences of contingency which are – potentially – more ominous and which call the self and its projects into question. Yet at the end of the novel, the past recurs in a present laden with its own contingencies and it is here that the threat of death, which becomes more acute in the light of the revelations of the *matinée* of the Princesse de Guermantes, reveals the vicissitudes of temporality in a new light, such that one of its outcomes is to generate a whole series of new subjective pressures.⁶

It is perhaps in this light that we should consider the Narrator's attempts at containment when it comes to 'le chagrin'. The Narrator elaborates the view that even pain can be a source of a certain joy, if we find some way of drawing on intelligence as a means of generalizing from our own experience: 'Là où la vie emmure, l'intelligence perce une issue, [...] on sort de la constatation d'une souffrance, ne fût-ce qu'en en tirant les conséquences qu'elle comporte' (*RTP*, IV, 484). On this basis, it is possible to embark on a taxonomy of the stages of suffering: what might have been only the beginnings of a moment of torment comes in fact to be fully actualized by the experience of some new desire and the suffering to which, in turn, it gives rise. And these sorrows then become the focus of an inverted loving gesture, almost a *carpe diem*:

Pour ces grands chagrins utiles on ne peut pas trop se plaindre, car ils ne manquent pas, ils ne se font pas attendre bien longtemps. Tout de même il faut se dépêcher de profiter d'eux, car ils ne durent pas très longtemps: c'est qu'on se console, ou bien, quand ils sont trop forts, si le cœur n'est plus très solide, on meurt. (*RTP*, IV, 484)

To avail of the utility of suffering, we must mobilize capacities which are above all intellectual. This attitude of mind finds its confirmation in what the Narrator presents as a negative psychological law: our capacity to

6 I explore further Phillips's model of contingency as applied to the *Recherche* and some of the ways in which it could be challenged, in 'A Contradictory Look at the Look: Resisting *Le Temps retrouvé*', in *Le Temps retrouvé Eighty Years After / 80 ans après: Critical Essays / Essais critiques*, ed. by Adam Watt (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2009), pp. 167–80.

benefit from pain (something which we must be prepared to do, because 'c'est le chagrin qui développe les forces de l'esprit') is constantly at risk from subjective factors: thus, 'le chagrin' is indispensable, because it is the means by which we can 'nous remettre chaque fois dans la vérité', and evade lapsing into the bad habits of passivity, of scepticism, of indifference. But this intellectual outcome has a precarious yield at best. Fully to embrace the harsh truths which suffering uncovers is fraught with mortal risks: 'Il est vrai que cette vérité, qui n'est pas compatible avec le bonheur, avec la santé, ne l'est pas toujours avec la vie. Le chagrin finit par tuer'. If we must accept 'le chagrin', it is, as we saw at the outset, for the sake of 'la connaissance spirituelle qu'il nous apporte' (*RTP*, IV, 484–5). Because the body is mortal, it is the work that must become the repository of knowledge.

So, in effect, the Narrator harnesses something of the sheer force of the novel's redemptive outcome, itself the result of a series of contingencies with a special productive power, so as to bring some closure to what is a seminal thread in the novel. Perhaps to a greater degree than with any other affective state in the novel, 'le chagrin' is a salient issue from the outset and a slippery one: it is a state of feeling in which we are most powerfully exposed to the future and to all of the uncertainties with which it is freighted. This is the problem to which the Narrator finds he must respond. So he appears to conclude from the 'drame du coucher', in which the affective interactions of child and parent are in fact equally opaque and unpredictable to all. The Narrator's father intervenes unexpectedly to urge his wife to sleep in the same room as her son, he justifies doing so by referring to the pain he sees in the Narrator's face: 'tu vois bien que ce petit a du chagrin, il a l'air désolé, cet enfant' (*RTP*, I, 36). But this intensely desired but altogether contingent outcome triggers new and unexpected feelings: his relationship with his mother is altered, in ways which themselves have the potential to cause future pain.⁷

7 The Narrator himself, drawing explicitly on experiences which date back to this period, concludes in an aside that intersubjectivity is inescapably subject to contingencies of this sort: 'il y a entre nous et les êtres un liseré de contingences, comme j'avais compris dans mes lectures de Combray qu'il y en a un de perception et qui empêche la mise en contact absolue de la réalité et de l'esprit' (*RTP*, IV, 553).

Ultimately, then, what emerges from the Narrator's attempts to produce an account of 'le chagrin' which will contain it is its intractability, in that any such effort is liable to be affected, precisely, by all of its own contingent outcomes and those of any number of other facets of mental life. In a sense, the attempt to resolve 'le chagrin' simply perpetuates it. The space and the prominence which the Narrator gives to the issue hints as much. There is an element of pessimism in the treatment of 'le chagrin' which points perhaps to unresolved subjective conflicts, exacerbated at the novel's end by the looming contingencies of the present moment.

The Narrator himself acknowledges explicitly that this is a way of thinking which presents him with some problems. Near the opening of *La Prisonnière*, as he ponders his reasons to be suspicious of Albertine, he notes half-ironically that the ways of thinking that come naturally to him are ill-adapted to contingency. He claims that how he thinks is a fact of nature: 'le monde des possibles m'a toujours été plus ouvert que celui de la contingence réelle'. This passing acknowledgement of contingency quickly transforms into a statement of its forbidding scope, the catastrophes to which it exposes the subject: 'Cela aide à connaître l'âme, mais on se laisse tromper par les individus' (*RTP*, III, 533–4). So the concession to contingency is in its way decisive: such knowledge as may be derived from a scrutiny of any and all possible worlds remains wholly at risk from contingencies which are all too pressing.

There seems, then, to be no way of minimizing the question of contingency and so of 'le chagrin'. In order to appraise this outcome, we need to return to the discourse of affect to which I referred at the outset. The discourse in question can certainly be said to be a feature of what Richard Bales terms the personal novel. Bales's initial reference-point is the confessional novel of the early nineteenth century, whose essentially persuasive orientation extends, as he shows, into a range of later texts. There would be further scope to link this corpus to other contemporary works, including ones, like *Elective Affinities*, with a different narrative voice, or much later ones, like *Anna Karenina*, where the conflicts of personal life are represented within the vastly expanded framework characteristic of canonical realism. Here again, an adverse contingency is at issue: in the works analysed by Bales, chance, mishap, misadventure and malice all figure

prominently and generate their own surplus of pain. Bales's analysis also shows just how problematic the narrative telos can be under these conditions – not only subjectively, but also rhetorically (vis-à-vis the implied or actual addressee), and in turn socially. The representational yield of the personal novel considered generically is both distinctive and problematic: what Bales characterizes as 'subjectivity with a vengeance'.⁸ This orientation is directly linked to its persuasive intent: the *raison d'être* of a personal narration directed at an audience at once stated and implicit is self-justification – its primary motivation being psychological, in that the act of telling proceeds on the basis of repeated appeals to human psychology. Built into the typically highly architectonic narrative frameworks which these texts mobilize is, then, the intimation of the wider significance of contingency as an issue which connects subjective crisis to a host of problems through which modernity defines itself: in the case of *Adolphe*, the salient problem is one which is central also to Constant's political theory, namely freedom; in the case of *Elective Affinities*, it is that of social calm. Because in these earlier narratives and in Proust's novel alike its impact derives from the powerful sense it gives that everything is at stake, 'le chagrin', the states it provokes and the actions it prompts, are ways of dealing with contingency, both for the subject and in inter-subjective relations which prove to be pervasively governed by it.

But the paradox of the persuasive intent is that, in narrative terms, it is characteristically rooted in the failure of the protagonists' quests: hence, as Bales shows, the suspicion that attaches to it. The 'chagrins' which these personal narratives purport to document are embedded in a complex set of frameworks where evaluation is implicitly or explicitly at issue. So, the persuasive urge is played out against several distinct horizons: that of subjectivity, of course, in the first instance, in that the logic of persuasion presupposes a psychological and ethical framework just as it seeks to modify it; that of the social regulation of the kinds of action which precipitate or

cause 'le chagrin',⁹ and symbolic, in that the contingencies of subjectivity come in turn to assume a special prominence within a framework that is essentially realist in orientation.¹⁰

At the same time, there is, in the personal novel, an important element of virtuality in the representation of the passions as a system of causes and effects, something that surfaces at a pivotal moment in Goethe's *Elective Affinities*:

So all in their different fashions pursued their daily lives, thoughtfully or not; everything seemed to be following its usual course, as is the way in monstrously strange circumstances when everything is at stake: we go on with our lives as though nothing were the matter.¹¹

There is more than a hint here of what is unrepresentable. If we think of Proust's Narrator, and his characterization of the recuperation of 'le chagrin' in 'la connaissance spirituelle', perhaps we might see it as a covert concession of the impenetrability of affectivity. The passions can make the improbable seem probable. They motivate the monstrous: this is in part what the progression of the story, stage by stage, will show. It is as if the workings of the passions operate as a parallel plot through which the monstrous can be apprehended. Daily life appears in the Narrator's comment almost as something to be taken for granted, but here too the issue is more complex. During the writing of *Elective Affinities*, Goethe mentions in a letter the sense of satisfaction to be derived from taking refuge from the political and military turbulence of the times in the depths of calm passions.¹² The irony of this

9 See Constant's preface to the second edition of *Adolphe*, where he comments that certain choices expose us only to 'le choix des maux' (*Adolphe*, ed. by Daniel Leuwers (Paris: Garnier-Flammariion, 1989), p. 39).

10 In the case of *Adolphe*, the wholly secular framework of the action can be said to align it with an emergent discourse of realism, by contrast with the belief systems invoked in Chateaubriand's *René*.

11 *Elective Affinities: A Novel*, trans. by David Constantine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 89.

12 See 'Die Wahlverwandtschaften'. *Eine Dokumentation der Wirkung von Goethes Roman: 1808–1832*, ed. by Heinz Härtl (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1983), p. 43.

claim is very palpable: the calm passions of private life possess a turbulence of their own and Goethe himself acknowledged the 'deep passionate wound' which the fiction enveloped for him.¹³ If this is a tale of passion, what is at issue are its baleful effects. But the characters' choices are also somehow implicated in a wider evaluative framework, even if only negatively, in the absence, for instance, of an effective compensatory frame, so that this story of the calmer passions ultimately jeopardizes the idea of social calm.

The contingency of subjectivity and the wider problems of evaluation which in turn it poses are issues of distinct import in Constant's writing. In Constant's politics as in his fiction, there is a relationship between choice and consciousness which is not always a benign one. Our choices about choices are the key to a dynamic process in which affectivity is an essential component.¹⁴

If Adolphe's feelings, like those of Goethe's protagonists, are unfathomable, it is in part because of an unresolved tension between the demands of the world, in all their variety and their tenacity, and those of Ellénore. The story of the seduction of Ellénore and the affair is framed by his protracted and ultimately unsuccessful attempts to complete his social and his sentimental education and these focus increasingly on the desire for freedom.

The ultimate subjective crisis comes about when Ellénore dies, where a lethal form of contingency is unleashed. Adolphe has resolved to leave her, but has not declared his intention. But it is revealed to her when she is sent Adolphe's letter to another character in which he confirms this decision, at which point she becomes fatally ill. Death is experienced as

13 *Goethes Werke*, X, *Autobiographische Schriften II*, ed. by Erich Trunz (Hamburg: Wegner, 1959), p. 505; see also T. J. Reed, *The Classical Centre: Goethe and Weimar, 1775-1832* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p. 251, n. 18.

14 This is the conclusion reached by Albert O. Hirschman in his phenomenological analysis of oscillations between the private and the public today, an analysis that explicitly takes Constant as its starting point; see *Shifting Involvements: Private Interest and Public Action* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 7-8, 96-9. But experiences like that of 'chagrin' are not purely phenomenological; on this point, see André Green, who connects affect to unconscious process by virtue of its 'produits de transformation' (*La Folie privée: psychanalyse des cas-limites* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), pp. 220-2).

an absolute separation; what he feels is not regret at lost love, but the shattering pain and horror of an irrevocable farewell, in the face of which the value of freedom is thrown into doubt.¹⁵ What the power of his feelings serves to confirm is the reality of freedom of choice, even though it also shows that this reality has been imperfectly understood. The revaluation of freedom stems from the belatedness of Adolphe's discovery of its reality. The absolute loss of Ellénore confirms the reality of a choice that cannot be recuperated. At the same time, the sense that death represents an absolute horizon confirms the significance of freedom as the source of human meaning. Further, this emergence of an equivocal relation to freedom is at the centre of the text's means of representation, in that the narration of consciousness tends to play on a certain temporal indeterminacy precisely where the conflict between love and freedom is in play. What I have in mind here is that form of free indirect discourse which Sylvia Adamson has linked to the use of the 'was-now' construction, or the use of predicates in the imperfect combined with deictics which normally refer to the moment of speaking:

Combien elle me pesait, cette liberté que j'avais tant regrettée! [...] Naguère toutes mes actions avaient un but [...] Personne maintenant ne les observait [...] J'étais libre, en effet, je n'étais plus aimé.¹⁶

- 15 Here I take issue with Tzvetan Todorov, who argues that in *Adolphe* affective independence does not map on to political autonomy (*Benjamin Constant: la passion démocratique* (Paris: Hachette, 1997), pp. 124–5). But given that, for Constant, the freedom of the moderns is freedom of choice, it follows that bad choices, whether privately or publicly directed, can generate a sense of loss that deprives freedom of its meaning. Cf. also Stephen Holmes who argues that the pessimism of Constant's private works, including *Adolphe*, is sublimated in the political writings (*Benjamin Constant and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), pp. 13–14). I query this dissociation of literary and philosophical perspectives on the basis that political dimensions of experience, as they impinge on subjectivity, could be said to amount to a distinctively continental version of modernity, in 'Poetry and the Discourse of Happiness in Nineteenth-Century France: The Case of Vigny', in *Joie de vivre in French Literature and Culture: Essays in Honour of Michael Freeman*, ed. by Susan Harrow and Timothy Unwin (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2009), pp. 193–210.

16 *Adolphe*, pp. 163–4.

Here, the occurrence of *maintenant* relates not, of course, to the moment of narration, which is in any case indeterminate, but to the state of consciousness that prevailed at the time of the events narrated; in other words, a number of distinct states of consciousness are merged.¹⁷ At the beginning of the chapter in question, at the point where Adolphe has resolved to break with Ellénore, love is valued because soon all that will remain is the memory of love. The perspective is reversed at the end of the chapter: the pain of lost love annihilates what was to have been the fulfilment of freedom. The full discovery of the significance of freedom, from the agent's point of view, comes at a colossal cost: it is impossible to be free and happy. What the text relates is the suffering caused by the discovery of the co-existence of the desire for freedom with other desires and needs.

The reality of freedom as choice makes for states of consciousness which are deeply equivocal. This problem is cast in a wider, no less troubling, perspective at the end of the text. The two framing letters at the end stage a debate about the moral and social significance of the *anecdote*: the publisher castigates Adolphe for his lack of principles, his correspondent argues from the inescapable force of social values and pressures. It remains altogether unclear whether these letters can be said to be compensatory or ironic. The letters could be taken to be compensatory in the sense that they rectify any residual dependence we may have on Adolphe's telling of the story. But they are ironic – they are many-voiced – in that the first letter pre-empts the second and is in turn pre-empted by Adolphe's own telling of the story. There is no last word. Each judgement projects us back into the story. The conflict of values which the text exposes is inescapable and the reality of freedom, in all its ambivalence, is sustained until the end.

For Bales, there is a sharp division between this mode of writing and that of Proust. The personal novel is, as we have seen, rooted in failures which the process of narration is intended, in some way, to redeem. The

17 See Sylvia Adamson, who argues that in the Bildungsroman the 'was' form becomes a marker of fictionality and the 'was-now' combination a marker of 'sympathetic imagination' ('The Rise and Fall of Empathetic Narrative: A Historical Perspective on Perspective', in *New Perspectives on Narrative Perspective*, ed. by Willie van Peer and Seymour Chatman (New York: SUNY Press, 2001), pp. 83–99 (p. 95)).

characteristic failure of the Narrator's quest becomes the condition of a psychologically centred self-exploration in which the reader is implicated, though in conflictual ways. Again, the comparison with Proust is potentially telling, in that one way in which the juxtaposition of 'le chagrin' and 'la connaissance spirituelle' can itself be seen is as a compensatory move, though in the case of the *Recherche* directed at the subject who finds himself freshly confronted with painful contingencies. In the case of Proust, for Bales, the subjective outcome of a vastly extended quest, subject to the most extraordinary vicissitudes, is ultimately determined by a kind of complicity which the text sustains with the reader.¹⁸ The turn which these issues take in the *Recherche* is, if we follow Bales, distinctive. Contingency contributes to defining a dominant element of the book on which the Narrator is, finally, about to embark – the redemptive telos and perhaps also its potential as a source of creativity – but it also carries with it the very high likelihood that this project opens precariously onto a future in which it will come to be reoriented, redefined, deflected, and further that negative contingencies (paralysis, death) may in the end have the upper hand.

What all of these relationships, discursive and social, as well as textual, reveal is this: contingency is an issue with two notable interpretative dimensions. On the one hand, exposure to contingency confronts us with the sense that meanings which matter lie in the future. On the other hand, the extent to which the evaluation of contingency can be social as well as subjective connects it to the ways in which categories like that of modernity are constituted as explanatory frameworks. To close, I shall argue that central to the treatment of the former, in the *Recherche*, is a model of representation which the Narrator's theorization of 'le chagrin' and its transmutation into 'la connaissance spirituelle' tends to occlude. I shall also argue that a central aspect of Proust's great aesthetic gamble is the means by which he broaches the problems which this latter dimension poses, namely the sense that what we term modernity is a space of interpretations, sometimes enabling, sometimes conflictual, of contingencies whose impact is pervasive.

18 For comments on the sense of complicity which results from the reader's access to the creative act in its full immediacy, see Proust: *À la recherche du temps perdu*, p. 82.

First, representation. The recovery of the past finally vindicates the Narrator's project, but leaves it exposed to a duality without apparent resolution. What's at issue is the Narrator's relation to the materials of the projected work. On the one hand, it is with 'la vraie vie' that art is equated (*RTP*, IV, 459). On the other hand, the 'chagrins' of life are something which, for the sake of the art work, we must somehow overcome. 'La connaissance spirituelle', because it imposes the impossible perspective of one who is beyond death, who exists only in his works, discounts loss. In this way, it is a bulwark against contingency. But it is self-impoverishing: if the subjective perspective is disallowed, then any and all contingencies, happy or not, are marginalized. Only death delivers us from contingency and the threat of death exacerbates the anxieties which it occasions. The redemptive outcome amounts to a space of painful contradictions and there is some intimation also that 'la connaissance spirituelle' lies in a future from which the subject is ultimately divorced. What's required to bring these two perspectives, if not into alignment, then at least into contact, is a theory of representation, one in which we can point to how contingency and its affective impacts can in some way be engaged with.

What I referred to at the outset as a discourse of affectivity has its own bearing on these issues, in that it may provide the means by which feeling can be understood in itself and also as the essential medium of the self-world relation. In his essay on *Elective Affinities*, Walter Benjamin brilliantly encapsulates this feature of nineteenth-century fiction: "The lament full of tears: that is emotion. [...] The more deeply emotion understands itself, the more it is transition; for the true poet, it never signifies an end".¹⁹ In part, no doubt, what Benjamin refers to can be viewed conventionally as the mutability of feeling; but here he also hints at the problem which is intrinsically that of representation, which is its inaccessibility.²⁰ For the

19 'Goethe's *Elective Affinities*', in *Selected Writings*, I, 1913–1926, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 297–360 (p. 349).

20 See Adam Phillips, who comments that, while representation can make instinct 'tolerable', 'there is an intensity of affect which representation cannot bind'

relationship between affect and representation is not stable, so much so that what we may say about feeling does indeed have almost a fictional component. It is for this reason that Nietzsche characterizes as universal the difference between having an experience, on the one hand, and describing it, on the other:

Achilles and Homer. — It is always as between Achilles and Homer: the one *has* the experience, the sensation, the other *describes* it. A true writer bestows words on the emotions and experiences of others, he is an artist so as to divine much from the little he himself has felt.²¹

In other words, representation is understood with reference to a contingency of bestowing, as Nietzsche puts it, which is nonetheless productive.

It is on the point where representation and contingency converge in Proust that it is possible to draw some conclusions regarding the wider scope of the latter. Roland Barthes, like Bales, highlights the identificatory movement which so marks the *Recherche*, insisting that what matters is not the canonical monumentality of the work and its author, but rather the scope to identify with 'l'ouvrier, tantôt tourmenté, tantôt exalté [...] qui a voulu entreprendre une tâche à laquelle [...] il a conféré un caractère absolu.'²² This desire for the absolute is the decisive shift in focus which characterizes the closing part of *Le Temps retrouvé*. Yet at the same time the novel's aesthetic dimension consists in a search along the lines envisaged by Nietzsche; it can be said, not to perpetuate, but rather to elicit, as we have just seen, affect and in turn to reactualize the subjective processes which are its 'contentants', not its 'contenus': the 'contentants' of representation originate in processes of affect which are themselves 'contentants'.²³

(*Promises, Promises: Essays on Literature and Psychoanalysis* (London: Faber, 2000), pp. 305–6).

21 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. by R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 97.

22 "Longtemps, je me suis couché de bonne heure", in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Éric Marty, 5 vols (Paris: Seuil, 2002), V, 459–70 (p. 459).

23 Green, *La Folie privée*, pp. 68–70.

Art is a space of *rediscovery*, a *reappropriation* of materials from which, because of death, the subject will ultimately be divorced. Contingency is the counterpart of that search which expresses itself as the recovery of lost time: it represents all of its deflections and reversals, and the pleasure and pain they may cause. It signifies that a search can continue beyond the apparent point of resolution, where it transmutes into something altogether limitless. The aesthetic matters because it represents this limitless search, at least as far as it can be connected with affectivity. It can also be seen as a gesture towards a space of possibilities that remains open, a pure reaffirmation, seemingly unaffected by the madness from which it may stem, of the future as the space of human and aesthetic projects that matter. Its future-ness matters more perhaps than anything else. This is the sense of the work's aesthetic gamble: it consists in assuming the contingencies of the redemptive outcome and seeing to what extent and how the artwork can become the bearer of 'a future trajectory'.²⁴ The novel's extravagant commitment to and realization of the aesthetic is a magnificent façade. It connects with but also conceals all of the novel's inner articulations. It contains, but, of course, is different from, the whole host of problems which beset the narrative, those of representation, affect, madness, loss and more. Because distinct from affect, it allows us somehow to become open to its contingencies; because it is connected to affect, we can engage with our passions, irrespective of phenomenology, independently of social factors which have a bearing on evaluation. The novel's impact, which is aesthetic more than it is spiritual, brings us to a point where it is possible to believe, because in being confronted with it in new and unexpected ways we somehow go beyond it, that we are perhaps not absolutely ruled by contingency.²⁵

24 It is on this basis that Luciano Berio advocates a concern for artistic behaviour that 'revises or suspends our relation with the past' (*Remembering the Future* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 2).

25 On the recognition of contingency as a way of mastering it, see Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Solidarity, and Irony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 103.

Levers de rideau amoureux chez Proust

Qu'*A la recherche du temps perdu* soit un roman d'amour, c'est ce qu'annoncent plusieurs de ses sous-titres, 'Un Amour de Swann', *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, *La Prisonnière*, *Albertine disparue* (ou *La Fugitive*), et encore bien plus le premier titre général auquel Proust a renoncé: *Les Intermittences du cœur*. On pourrait même parler de roman d'amours, tant ceux-ci sont nombreux et divers: amour maternel, amour d'enfance, amour conjugal, amour passion, amour vénal, amour vieillissant, amours entre hommes ou entre femmes. Ce qu'ils ont tous en commun, c'est d'être représentés, dans leurs premiers moments ou lorsqu'ils se découvrent, comme des spectacles, avec scène, acteurs, répliques, sans oublier le spectateur unique qu'est le Narrateur. Les principales de ces scènes d'exposition ou de révélation témoignent de ce que *révéler*, c'est *lever le voile* et, plus précisément, *lever le rideau*.

Le premier amour apparaissant dans le roman est celui qui unit le Narrateur enfant à sa mère et à sa grand-mère, deux figures d'une même relation. Il apparaît d'abord (*RTP*, I, 10–12) à travers les tours de jardin spectaculairement réglés de la grand-mère – comme le sont les plaisanteries rituelles de la part des autres membres de la famille –, puis immédiatement après, lors du 'drame' du coucher de l'enfant, dont sont évoqués les lieux, restreints et fonctionnels (chambre, lit, fenêtre, escalier, vestibule), les personnages, parfois avec leur costume spécial (le père en Abraham), leurs déplacements, leurs paroles souvent directement reproduites, leur voix et jusqu'au 'ton qu'il faut' de la lecture de la mère. Et ce que fait renaître sans fin chez l'adulte le souvenir de cette scène, c'est le *cadre* où elle se *joue*, dont le Narrateur fait le *décor* nécessaire – comme celui qu'on voit 'en tête des vieilles *pièces* pour les *représentations* en province' (*RTP*, I, 43; nous soulignons) – au *drame* de son déshabillage. Ainsi, la manifestation de l'amour

est inséparable de ses repères matériels, parfois simplifiés et stylisés ('cette sorte de pan lumineux, découpé au milieu d'indistinctes ténèbres'), et de la mise en place, en mouvement, en attitudes et en gestes des personnages, de leur regard et de leur voix. A ces éléments communs avec le théâtre s'ajoute cependant le commentaire permanent du Narrateur, qui les fait échapper à l'imitation pure.

La naissance de l'amour sexuel est toujours traitée avec un soin particulier, et l'écrivain souligne fortement en quoi il rompt avec l'ordinaire de la vie et manifeste par là des profondeurs psychologiques. Il organise chaque fois une mise en scène spéciale, qui n'est pas sans rappeler celle de l'amour filial. La première rencontre du héros enfant avec Gilberte à Combray (*RTP*, I, 138-40), préparée par la description de la haie vivante et blanche d'aubépines, se produit dans un décor floral multicolore, cadré par l'ouverture de la haie devant laquelle le garçon est placé en spectateur. La fillette apparaît seule en scène. Un jeu de physionomies se déroule entre eux deux: le garçon devient lui aussi acteur, mais passif, fasciné, le regard exorbité et suppliant, troublé au point de tomber amoureux d'yeux bleus qui sont noirs en réalité. La fillette joue l'indifférence, le mépris, mais ébauche une invite 'indécente'. La féerie du décor se prolonge dans les sons, le seul audible étant le nom de Gilberte appelée par sa mère (qui apparaît dans le lointain accompagnée d'un homme à l'allure étrange), proféré 'comme un talisman qui me permettrait peut-être de retrouver un jour celle dont il venait de faire une personne' (I, 140). Presque deux cent cinquante pages plus loin, dans un décor parisien de jardins moins familier que de coutume ('dans ces régions voisines mais étrangères où les visages sont inconnus' (I, 387)), le même nom retentit et passe au-dessus de lui comme il l'avait fait à Combray, mais porteur d'une promesse de connaissance et chargé d'une référence à la fois picturale et théâtrale: 'formant [...] un petit nuage d'une couleur précieuse, pareil à celui qui, bombé au-dessus d'un beau jardin du Poussin, reflète minutieusement, comme un nuage d'opéra, plein de chevaux et de chars, quelque apparition de la vie des dieux' (I, 387). La phrase qui évoque ce nom se déroule sur une page entière, témoin de ce que l'écrivain déploie tous ses talents pour donner un équivalent littéraire de cette féerie.

Toujours à Combray, l'enfant découvre, mais en pur spectateur, une autre forme d'amour, que le texte ne nomme pas (raison de plus pour le mimer), entre Mlle Vinteuil et son amie (I, 157-63). Cette fois la rencontre est préparée de loin dans le récit, par l'évocation physique de cette jeune fille 'hommasse', par une rêverie à l'église sur 'le goût [...] des joues de Mlle Vinteuil' et par une visite familiale antérieure à M. Vinteuil où l'enfant avait vu, par la fenêtre, le vieux musicien dissimuler ses compositions aux regards. Juste avant la scène nouvelle et comme pour en préparer l'atmosphère, le garçon parcourt la campagne en pleine exaltation, frappant les buissons à coups de parapluie et se rappelant le petit cabinet à l'odeur d'iris. Il est sous le coup d'un interdit familial: on s'est abstenu par 'pudeur' de rendre visite à Mlle Vinteuil après la mort de son père. La révélation survient par surprise et dans l'obscurité, car il s'est endormi en plein jour et se réveille à 'quelques centimètres' (ce qui est d'une invraisemblance totale) de la fenêtre ouverte de Mlle Vinteuil. Il est en situation de spectateur et même de voyeur. La fenêtre fournit un cadre de vision, la mise en scène est assurée par Mlle Vinteuil elle-même, qui dispose les objets comme pour une représentation. Sa gestuelle, puis celle de son amie, sont très éloquentes. Leur dialogue est très 'joué', anti-naturel, d'abord dans le 'ton guindé', puis de plus en plus chaud, jusqu'au moment où les fenêtres se ferment, comme un rideau qui tombe, sur ce qui n'est plus montrable selon les conventions théâtrales. C'est le Narrateur adulte qui commente ensuite ce qu'il a vu et devant quoi il est resté comme paralysé, parlant à ce propos de 'théâtres du boulevard', d'esthétique du mélodrame, et de 'sadisme' (I, 161) (plutôt que d'homosexualité, comme pour détourner l'expression d'une réalité encore indicible).

À l'opposé de ce 'côté de Méséglise' qui est symboliquement celui des amours coupables se produit la première rencontre avec la duchesse de Guermantes (I, 172-6). Elle est elle aussi préparée par des rêveries de promenades champêtres et de conversations littéraires en sa compagnie. Puis un jour, lors d'une messe de mariage, dans le cadre de l'église de Combray illuminée de tous ses vitraux et remplie de l'assistance des grandes fêtes (suisses, nobles dans leurs chapelles réservées), c'est l'apparition soudaine ('tout d'un coup'), d'abord indigne du décor, d'une 'dame blonde avec un

grand nez, des yeux bleus et perçants, une cravate en soie mauve, lisse, neuve et brillante, et un petit bouton au coin du nez'. Mais à cette vision prosaïque l'enfant superpose celle de son imagination, fondée sur l'énumération des titres de gloire anciens de la famille Guermantes. A la fin de la cérémonie, la duchesse sourit à la ronde, et le jeune spectateur perdu dans la foule se sent l'objet d'une véritable révélation personnelle, qui le frappe d'amour, et transforme le décor ensoleillé en une féerie non pas religieuse, mais artistique:

Ses yeux bleuissaient comme une pervenche impossible à cueillir et que pourtant elle m'eût dédiée; et le soleil menacé par un nuage, mais dardant encore de toute sa force sur la Place et dans la sacristie, donnait une carnation de géranium aux tapis rouges qu'on y avait étendus par terre pour la solennité et sur lesquels s'avancait en souriant Mme de Guermantes, et ajoutait à leur lainage un velouté rose, un épiderme de lumière, cette sorte de tendresse, de sérieuse douceur dans la pompe et dans la joie qui caractérisent certaines pages de *Lohengrin*, certaines peintures de Carpaccio, et qui font comprendre que Baudelaire ait pu appliquer au son de la trompette l'épithète de délicieux. (I, 175-6)

La mise en scène solennelle, complétée par des effets d'éclairage, est cette fois élargie jusqu'à devenir une *mise en scène culturelle*.

Swann est déjà un homme mûr et un séducteur avéré lorsqu'il s'prend d'Odette de Crécy. C'est au théâtre, notons-le, qu'il lui est présenté (I, 192-3). Elle a mauvaise mine, les traits tirés, l'air d'être de mauvaise humeur. Sa toilette a quelque chose de bouffon et la fait apparaître comme 'engoncée ou perdue' dans ses vêtements. Ce n'est que plus tard, chez elle, dans son intérieur décoré de bibelots chinois et de chrysanthèmes, alors qu'elle porte 'un peignoir de crêpe de Chine mauve', sorte de costume de scène, et adopte une attitude étudiée ('laissant couler le long de ses joues ses cheveux qu'elle avait dénoués, fléchissant une jambe dans une attitude légèrement dansante' (I, 219)), qu'il associe sa vision à celle de la Zéphora de Botticelli dans une fresque célèbre. Après cette double contemplation du tableau vivant et, dans le souvenir, de l'œuvre peinte, Swann est prêt pour une nouvelle scène, franchement amoureuse cette fois, celle de l'arrangement des catleyas sur la poitrine d'Odette, dans une voiture (I, 228-30).

Elle débute par une surprise, celle de 'heurter' Odette sur le trottoir alors qu'il l'a vainement cherchée partout dans la nuit. Le cadre clos de la voiture est lui-même en mouvement, et ce qui se passe à l'intérieur est une scène de vaudeville au second degré, avec le costume d'Odette décrit en détail, sa parure de fleurs, variante, ici, des jardins de Combray et des Champs-Élysées, l'accessoire déterminant des catleyas, les gestes plus étudiés que naturels des deux personnages, la conversation détournée de Swann et la perche tendue par Odette ('Non, pas du tout, ça ne me gêne pas'). La nuit et la rencontre inattendue situent l'événement dans un demi-rêve, de même que la réaction de Swann à l'instant décisif (il 'avait voulu laisser à sa pensée le temps d'accourir, de reconnaître le rêve qu'elle avait si longtemps caressé' (I, 230)). Il en va de même, bientôt, du caractère répétitif et rituel des mêmes gestes. Le Narrateur du roman n'est pas cette fois en position de spectateur, mais en situation omnisciente.

Il redevient acteur lors de sa première rencontre de la troupe des jeunes filles au bord de la mer (II, 145-56). Le nouveau cadre, particulièrement mis en valeur, est celui de la plage et de la digue de Balbec. Le moment est encore exceptionnel, favorisé par une absence inhabituelle de Saint-Loup, le nouvel ami, obligé de se rendre dans sa garnison. Le héros est seul et l'esprit disponible: 'J'étais dans une de ces périodes de la jeunesse, dépourvues d'un amour particulier, vacantes, où partout [...] on désire, on cherche, on voit la Beauté' (II, 145). Survient alors une entrée en scène collective:

[...] presque encore à l'extrémité de la digue où elles faisaient mouvoir une tache singulière, je vis s'avancer cinq ou six fillettes, aussi différentes par l'aspect et par les façons, de toutes les personnes auxquelles on était accoutumé à Balbec, qu'aurait pu l'être, débarquée on ne sait d'où, une bande de mouettes qui exécute à pas comptés sur la plage – les retardataires rattrapant les autres en voletant – une promenade dont le but était aussi obscur aux promeneurs qu'elles paraissaient ne pas voir, que clairement déterminé pour leur esprit d'oiseaux. (II, 146)

L'accent est mis sur le mouvement, bientôt transformé en ballet, et sur l'étrangeté de ces jeunes filles à l'appartenance sociale mal déterminée et aux manières insolentes, porteuses cependant d'une 'beauté fluide, collective et mobile' (II, 148), transformées tantôt en oiseaux, tantôt en 'nobles

et calmes modèles de beauté humaine [...] comme des statues exposées au soleil sur un rivage de la Grèce' (II, 149). C'est précisément 'cette fugacité des êtres qui ne sont pas connus de nous' qui procure un plaisir particulier au héros et le 'met dans cet état de poursuite où rien n'arrête plus l'imagination' (II, 154). De cette troupe d'étranges danseuses se détache bientôt, non comme la duchesse-diva et presque mariale apparue dans l'église de Combray, mais comme une émanation de 'cette petite tribu', une 'brune aux grosses joues' dont il croise les 'regards obliques et rieurs' (II, 151), Albertine, signalée par son polo noir et par la bicyclette qu'elle pousse. L'adolescent va tomber bientôt amoureux d'elle et passer au statut d'acteur, et même d'acteur hypertrophié en vertu de ce principe général qu' 'en étant amoureux d'une femme nous projetons simplement en elle un état de notre âme; que par conséquent l'important n'est pas la valeur de la femme mais la profondeur de l'état' (II, 189).

Les deux scènes de baiser à Albertine le montrent bien. Dans la première (II, 285-6), c'est lui qui agit et même s'agit (il se précipite, bouscule Françoise, se penche, puis se jette sur la jeune fille), tandis qu'elle est dans son lit, immobile et dépouillée de ses vêtements (à l'inverse de la duchesse et d'Odette), réduite à l'état de proie ou de fruit offert aux sens. Lui bouillonne intérieurement ('la vie n'était pas hors de moi, elle était en moi'), il projette ses fantasmes sur le paysage au clair de lune et les 'seins bombés' des collines; même dans ce décor nocturne il voit partout du rose, couleur érotique, (alors que le bleu pervenche dominait pour la duchesse, et le mauve catleya pour Odette); le visage d'Albertine lui paraît 'éclairé par un feu intérieur comme par une veilleuse' et évoque pour lui des figures de Michel-Ange, nouvelle intervention de l'art dans une scène amoureuse. Mais, hélas, la tentative s'achève par un coup de théâtre digne d'une comédie de boulevard et un brusque retour à la réalité: Albertine sonne de toutes ses forces.

La seconde scène (II, 656-62) survient également dans une circonstance exceptionnelle: la visite impromptue d'Albertine au héros, à qui elle apparaît transformée jusque dans son langage. Pourtant celui-ci est d'abord tenté de restituer par l'imagination le décor de l'année précédente, et d'insinuer [en Albertine] tous les souvenirs de notre vie à Balbec, le bruit du

flot déferlant sous ma fenêtre, les cris des enfants' (II, 659). Il se replace en situation d'acteur en répétition, prépare d'abord son action mentalement pour 'savoir le goût de la rose inconnue que sont les joues d'Albertine' (ibid.), doit lutter contre son incapacité à agir opportunément (le trac) et même contre un dégoût assez symptomatique, si l'on en lit bien les termes, venant de ce que l'homme est à peine mieux loti pour embrasser 'que s'il était réduit à caresser la bien-aimée avec une défense de corne' (ibid.). Il est stimulé par le souvenir d'effets scéniques que la photographie tire des alignements architecturaux à Venise, et voit se succéder, en s'approchant, une série d'images comme dans un *zoom* cinématographique: 'dans ce court trajet de mes lèvres vers sa joue, c'est dix Albertine que je vis; cette seule jeune fille étant comme une déesse à plusieurs têtes, celle que j'avais vue en dernier, si je tentais de m'approcher d'elle, faisait place à une autre' (II, 660). L'aboutissement de ce geste si longuement mûri et si savamment exécuté est encore un coup de théâtre, mais de nature tactile et psychologique: 'tout d'un coup, mes yeux cessèrent de voir, à son tour mon nez s'écrasant ne perçut plus aucune odeur, et sans connaître pour cela davantage le goût du rose désiré, j'appris, à ces détestables signes, qu'enfin j'étais en train d'embrasser la joue d'Albertine' (II, 660-1). Le comportement, extérieur et intérieur à la fois, du Narrateur-acteur, face à une Albertine purement passive, l'allusion au monde animal et même à des créatures monstrueuses, situe cette scène, pourtant présentée dans sa gestuelle concrète, dans un univers parfaitement subjectif et presque onirique.

La révélation de la véritable nature du baron de Charlus se fait longtemps attendre. Ses préparations, nombreuses, figurent dans des scènes toutes remarquables par leur lieu ou leur portée symbolique (point central de la digue de Balbec, chambre du Narrateur, salon de Mme de Villeparisis, domicile de Charlus), par un comportement bizarre du personnage (fou ou espion, s'en allant avec un cocher ivre, montrant une amabilité démesurée à la grand-mère, faisant des propositions de soutien au héros suivies d'insultes et d'une promenade au clair de lune), par sa voix, par ses gestes (toucher le menton des jeunes gens). Mais c'est surtout le début de *Sodome et Gomorrhe I* qui mérite l'attention par ses ressemblances et ses différences avec les autres scènes de révélation amoureuse. En fait, plusieurs séquences

se déroulent dans des lieux contigus, si bien qu'on pourrait parler plutôt d'un acte de théâtre. Il débute par un bref prologue adressé par le Narrateur au lecteur, annonçant une 'découverte' qui nécessitera de l''étendue, qui a été retirée de son contexte Guermantes et différée. Dans la première scène (III, 4-8) le Narrateur se représente lui-même à la fois en guetteur installé dans l'espace dramatique (où sont, dit-il, évités des *décors* 'à l'italienne', remplacés par l'apparat sommaire d'un escalier, d'une cour et d'une plante, proche de celui du théâtre réaliste), c'est-à-dire en situation de personnage et de spectateur. L'intention avouée du guetteur est d'attendre l'arrivée incertaine du bourdon qui viendra féconder l'orchidée de la duchesse exposée dans la cour: ce projet est donné pour aussi innocent que celui de l'enfant s'endormant jadis devant la fenêtre de Mlle Vinteuil. L'attention est ainsi détournée de la suite véritable pour ménager l'effet de surprise, et préparer discrètement un parallèle avec l'épisode de Montjouvain. 'Brusquement' survient M. de Charlus, en visite inopinée chez sa tante Mme de Villeparisis. La scène est silencieuse. Elle se concentre sur la physionomie du baron, dont éclate le côté féminin. Elle se poursuit par l'apparition de Jupien, également silencieuse et faite uniquement de gestes et de mimiques. Le vocabulaire descriptif est bien celui du théâtre: le giletier était 'capable de tenir à l'improviste sa partie dans cette sorte de *scène des deux muets* qui [...] semblait avoir été longtemps *répétée*' (III, 6-7; nous soulignons). Cette scène, qui évoque la *commedia dell'arte*, est dite par le Narrateur 'pas positivement comique', mais de plus en plus belle par son étrangeté, qui évoque à la fois le monde des insectes fécondateurs, des fêtes rituelles de mariage et les manèges nuptiaux des oiseaux. Les deux hommes sortent enfin de la cour, au moment où entre un bourdon, premier prétexte, vite abandonné, à l'observation du Narrateur-guetteur.

Une très brève deuxième scène ('au bout de quelques minutes') voit revenir les deux hommes qui échangent quelques propos anodins et entrent dans la boutique du giletier. Le héros monologue en silence sur le hasard et la prédestination que de telles rencontres présupposent. Puis il reste entièrement seul sur le plateau dans la scène suivante. Il se déplace, au risque d'être vu, et se rappelle alors le même risque encouru à Montjouvain: 'De fait, les choses de ce genre auxquelles j'assistai eurent toujours, dans la *mise*

en scène, le caractère le plus imprudent et le moins *vraisemblable*, comme si de telles révélations ne devaient être la récompense que d'un acte plein de risques, quoique en partie clandestin' (III, 10). L'in vraisemblance fait donc 'toujours' partie de la dramaturgie des découvertes du héros. C'est d'ailleurs une des lois du genre dramatique tel qu'il est souvent pratiqué, dans le passé comme à l'époque de Proust: celui-ci le souligne avec humour dans son pastiche de 1908 d'Émile Faguet commentant une pièce de Henry Bernstein.¹ La description des gestes et de l'itinéraire compliqué du personnage-narrateur, et de la disposition des lieux abonde en détails scéniques d'une grande précision. Outre l'action principale, une action de rechange (monter à l'échelle) est même envisagée.

Jusqu'ici, les scènes ont été ponctuées, avec une sorte de précision professionnelle, par l'expression 'quelques minutes'. Dans la quatrième, on passe à une autre échelle, celle de la demi-heure, en même temps qu'au déroulement de l'action la plus importante aux yeux (ou plutôt aux oreilles) du Narrateur: la conjonction physique entre Charlus et Jupien, qui constitue l'essentiel de sa découverte. Paradoxalement, elle n'occupe qu'une demi-page de texte et ne consiste qu'en sons inarticulés et bruits provenant de la pièce voisine. Proust respecte la convention théâtrale de ne pas représenter directement les actions paroxystiques, mais il insiste sur le caractère mélodramatique de celle-ci en évoquant des plaintes et un égorgement. Parallèlement à l'élévation de la tension dramatique, le Narrateur-acteur s'élève en grimpant sur son échelle et parvient à l'acmé de la curiosité et de la jouissance du voyeur.

La longue cinquième et dernière scène (III, 11-18) est un retour à la visibilité et à la parole des protagonistes, tandis que le Narrateur se replie sur sa position de spectateur-auditeur extérieur à l'action. Le dialogue est d'abord faussement anodin, désignant des réalités sexuelles sous la banalité

1 'La pièce de M. Bernstein fourmille d'in vraisemblances, mais sur un fond de vérité, [contrairement aux] comédies d'Euripide, lesquelles fourmillent de vérités, mais sur un fond d'in vraisemblance' (Marcel Proust, *L'Affaire Lemoine* (Genève: Slatkine Reprints, 1994), pp. 183-95).

des allusions, comme c'était déjà le cas entre les jeunes filles de Montjouvain. Jupien reste dans un registre vulgaire et à peine dissimulateur. La parole de Charlus passe rapidement du niveau purement allusif à l'amplification littéraire (les *Mille et une Nuits*) et historique (Diane de Poitiers) et presque au récit épique. C'est une parole *sui generis*, aussi particulière que celle de Bergotte, et dans laquelle se mêlent son orientation sexuelle, l'esprit de sa caste et sa culture: 'M. de Charlus se servait avec le giletier du même langage qu'il eût fait avec des gens du monde de sa coterie, exagérant même ses tics' (III, 12). Il constate de lui-même que l'obstacle social, culturel et linguistique empêche toute communication autre que physique avec Jupien: 'Je vois que les métaphores vous laissent sourd et l'histoire de France indifférent' (III, 14), nous suggérant, à nous lecteurs, que l'usage privilégié de la métaphore et la vaste culture historique et nobiliaire proustiennes pourraient bien avoir, entre autres, la même fonction de révélation voilée. L'allusion transparente à l'«étrange petit bonhomme, un intelligent petit bourgeois, qui montre à mon égard une incivilité prodigieuse» et dont le baron a «la tête tournée» (III, 13-14) implique le Narrateur, qui feint de ne pas se reconnaître, et rend moins fiable à nos yeux sa position de témoin prétendument non concerné.

C'est pourtant sur sa naïveté, soudain éclairée comme par un coup de baguette magique, qu'insiste d'abord le vaste commentaire (III, 16-33) qui suit et qui est en réalité parfaitement retors puisqu'il manifeste en réalité une connaissance approfondie et propose une interprétation justificatrice de l'homosexualité. Ce que nous pouvons en tout cas retenir pour notre propos, dans ce discours, est l'affirmation que celle-ci exige de ses adeptes les mêmes qualités que celles des acteurs de théâtre: l'artifice, la dissimulation, la connivence secrète avec leurs semblables, le travestissement; une allusion est d'ailleurs faite aux comédies de Shakespeare où «une jeune fille déguisée [...] se fait passer pour un adolescent» (III, 23).

Tous ces *leviers de rideau* proustiens sur les rencontres amoureuses nous incitent à nous demander ce qui a conduit l'écrivain à les dramatiser de cette façon insistante. Cela tient en partie au thème, qui dans notre tradition littéraire attire tout spécialement les dramaturges, car il introduit une situation nouvelle et ouvre une intrigue, entre deux êtres sous la forme d'une

conquête ou d'une attirance mutuelle, et avec des personnages adjuvants ou opposants, des circonstances et des péripéties favorables ou contraires. La rencontre, pour éveiller l'intérêt du spectateur et rendre compte d'une réalité psychologique, est généralement inattendue, présentée comme un fruit du hasard (les surprises de l'amour). Les romanciers s'emparent eux aussi de ce thème. On connaît l'admiration de Proust pour *L'Éducation sentimentale*. Il n'a certainement pas oublié la première rencontre de Frédéric Moreau avec Mme Arnoux, qui transforme pour un moment le bateau où elle a lieu en un théâtre flottant: 'Ce fut comme une apparition. Elle était assise, au milieu du banc, toute seule'. La rencontre est souvent une source d'exaltation, si ce n'est d'illusion, pour le personnage amoureux: ainsi le Narrateur enfant ou adolescent devant Gilberte ou la duchesse de Guermantes; mais cette saillie hors de soi peut conduire à des ridicules (les yeux de Gilberte faussement bleus, la timidité de Swann arrangeant les catleyas), à des échecs (Albertine sonnait au lieu d'accepter le baiser), à des va-et-vient comiques (le baron et Jupien dans la cour de l'hôtel), à des méprises (le première attitude de Gilberte crue insultante, le sourire de la duchesse dans l'église perçu comme destiné à l'enfant), à des rapprochements biaisés (Swann redécouvrant Odette, qui n'est pas son genre, à travers Zéphora), à des déceptions (le goût du baiser tant désiré à Albertine). La rencontre a traditionnellement ses lieux, intimes (chambre, ou même voiture, encore à la manière de Flaubert) ou publics (l'église, la plage de Balbec), ou socialement marqués (le jardin des Swann, la maison bourgeoise de Combray, la cour de l'hôtel de Guermantes). Elle a ses dispositifs stratégiques (particulièrement évidents à Montjouvain et dans *Sodome et Gomorrhe I*), ses gestes conventionnels (les regards vers Gilberte, les caresses de Swann, les approches physiques du héros vers Albertine), ses distances et ses obstacles (la haie de Combray, les cloisons du logis de Jupien), ses personnages secondaires témoins; mais c'est plutôt l'absence de ces derniers qui frappe chez Proust, laissant les protagonistes bien en évidence et réservant toute la vision et l'interprétation au Narrateur: les parents marchent loin devant lors de la rencontre avec Gilberte, les lesbiennes de Montjouvain n'ont auprès d'elles que la photo du père mort, Swann et Odette sont enfermés dans la voiture, le héros et Albertine seuls dans une chambre, le baron et Jupien

n'aperçoivent personne dans la cour; ou bien la rencontre a lieu devant une foule anonyme et indifférente (la duchesse à l'église, les jeunes filles sur la digue). Tout ce mode de représentation est historiquement assez daté: c'est celui du théâtre de boulevard que Proust a pu connaître de son temps, et parfois du mélodrame.

La théâtralisation attire encore l'écrivain des rencontres amoureuses parce qu'elle rend les personnages et les objets plus présents, les grandit, les particularise physiquement par leur tenue, leur voix, leurs propos; parce qu'elle permet de jouer sur les effets de lumière et leur symbolisme (le plein jour à Combray et à Balbec, la lumière des vitraux dans l'église; et au contraire la pénombre ou l'obscurité à Montjouvain, dans le fiacre, dans la chambre d'hôtel à Balbec, dans les sous-sols de Jupien); parce qu'elle donne une place particulière aux lieux et objets de passage, donc d'ouverture à la nouveauté, peut-être à l'étrange, si présents chez Proust, comme portes et fenêtres, vestibules, volets, escaliers, cour, souterrains, échelle. Et les conventions du théâtre n'empêchent nullement l'ouverture sur l'imaginaire, que ce soit celui de la féerie, celui de l'invraisemblance des intrigues ou celui des distorsions de la temporalité: ces dernières permettent en particulier la mise en parallèle de plusieurs scènes éloignées dans le temps (les deux appels du nom de Gilberte, les deux baisers à Albertine, et plus encore Montjouvain et la cour des Guermantes).

Mais Proust va plus loin qu'une simple imitation. Poussant au-delà de l'expérience banale, il donne à plusieurs de ces scènes un caractère semi-onirique: aux scènes nocturnes, bien sûr, mais aussi à toutes celles qui laissent le héros médusé par ce qu'il voit ou entend. Il faut bien voir dès lors que le Narrateur prend une autre consistance que celle de simple spectateur. Son rôle n'est jamais purement objectif, car il est en même temps acteur des scènes qu'il relate: acteur muet mais déjà conquis devant Gilberte ou la duchesse, conquérant plus ou moins chanceux devant Albertine, détective faisant sa propre éducation devant les scènes d'homosexualité. Même en tant que rapporteur tardif d'un amour de Swann, il souligne trop les rapports avec son propre cas pour qu'on ne puisse pas l'identifier largement à lui. En fait ce narrateur-acteur-témoin est en même temps le démiurge des histoires qu'il raconte, le représentant des intentions non explicitement

déclarées de l'auteur. Celui-ci, voulant traiter le thème de l'homosexualité qui le touche de près mais fait l'objet d'un tabou, délègue à son narrateur la découverte, la description et le commentaire de cette orientation sexuelle. Mais il évite de l'y impliquer trop directement, d'où sa position de spectateur hétérosexuel et ignorant; mais celle-ci est impure, car il est trop fasciné par ce qu'il perçoit, trop attiré quoiqu'il s'en défende par les spectacles scabreux, et parfois mis en cause incidemment comme sous la forme du 'petit bonhomme' qui tourne la tête de Charlus. Il se joue donc en même temps que la représentation explicite des débuts de l'amour un autre théâtre, entre auteur et Narrateur, un jeu de masques et de miroirs.

La théâtralisation conduit Proust à faire dans les parties concernées de son roman le choix d'un discours particulier, qui se situe à un niveau intermédiaire. Une partie non négligeable des descriptions est consacrée à des indications scéniques sur le décor, la disposition des objets ou l'interprétation de gestes, des mouvements, des paroles. C'est un péri-texte théâtral, du même ordre que les didascalies. Lorsqu'il fait parler ses personnages, il leur prête un discours direct généralement bref et condensé, mais très typé (Mlle Vinteuil, Jupien, Charlus). Il leur fait intensément pratiquer le langage détourné, soit apparemment banal par prudence et pour voiler le désir, soit au contraire hyperbolique chez Charlus adaptant en une longue tirade le langage des homosexuels à celui de sa caste sociale. D'autres fois, un changement de langage peut révéler de nouvelles dispositions d'un des membres du couple, comme chez Albertine revoyant le héros à Paris. Mais surtout, Proust intègre le scénique dans le narratif: parce qu'il est romancier, et parce que son narrateur si ambigu commente en permanence les scènes auxquelles il assiste ou prend part. Le lecteur se retrouve à la fois en spectateur de la représentation et en destinataire d'un propos didactique qui lui explique le spectacle et la réalité cachée qu'il recouvre, qui valorise son expérience et sa sagacité en lui montrant les naïvetés du Narrateur-acteur, et qui le rend complice de l'ironie de l'auteur. Connaissance, intelligence et complicité sont ce à quoi veulent le conduire les longs commentaires, qui peu à peu s'orientent, dans *Sodome et Gomorrhe I*, vers la démonstration que l'homosexualité est acceptable et justifiable, qu'elle est voulue par la nature, qu'elle est universellement répandue, qu'elle peut inciter à la bonté

(Charlus recommandant Jupien et sa nièce ‘à toute une brillante clientèle’ (III, 31)), qu’elle ouvre à l’amour de l’art, qu’elle exige de l’habileté, et que les souffrances qu’on subit à cause d’elle sont injustes.

Plus qu’une imitation pittoresque des représentations de l’époque et qu’une utilisation d’un des lieux communs de la littérature, les levers de rideau amoureux proustiens sont et deviennent, de plus en plus à mesure qu’on avance dans le roman, des levers de rideau sur l’auteur lui-même, sur sa scène intérieure, sur sa volonté de démontrer que l’amour est entièrement subjectif, repose sur des malentendus, n’est jamais réciproque – sauf dans le cas de la mère et de la grand-mère –, qu’il est globalement identique dans l’hétéro- et dans l’homosexualité, avec pour cette dernière des avantages dans l’ordre de l’habileté et de l’approche de la beauté. Ces expériences initiales de l’amour n’ouvrent nullement pour les personnages qui sont censés les vivre des perspectives de bonheur, mais plutôt de duperie et de souffrance; du moins seront-elles réhabilitées dans la suite du roman comme des erreurs heureuses qui auront enrichi la connaissance et les capacités du Narrateur et lui auront permis de se hisser jusqu’à l’entreprise d’une œuvre d’art.

IV Artistic Correspondences

NIGEL HARKNESS

Ut sculptura poesis: Literary-Sculptural Intersections in Balzac and Proust

In *Proust and the Middle Ages*, Richard Bales draws attention to the protracted process of rewriting which shaped the first pages of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. In the opening episode, the young Narrator wakes suddenly and identifies profoundly with the content of his dream which is itself shaped by the book he had been reading before falling asleep: 'il me semblait que j'étais moi-même ce dont parlait l'ouvrage: une église, un quatuor, la rivalité de François Ier et Charles-Quint' (*RTP*, I, 3). Earlier versions of this episode identify the book as 'un Traité d'archéologie monumentale', and reveal important hesitations on Proust's part as to the object of identification: it is first 'la date de ces sculptures', then 'l'école régionale d'architecture', corrected to 'les sculptures dont il était question dans l'ouvrage' (*RTP*, I, 1086), before the author settles on a final formulation in which the self is situated in relation to architectural, musical and historical modes of expression.¹ In these revisions to an episode in which questions of self, time, reading and perception are central, the sculptural reference appears, disappears and reappears in a way which suggests that its place within the poetic and thematic structure of the *Recherche* from its

1 Bales discusses this variant in the context of the medieval atmosphere which is generated in the 'Combray' section of the *Recherche* in advance of the description of the Combray church. He draws the following conclusion: 'Proust doubtless toned down the reference in order to retain the vagueness necessary at this point; too precise a reference would have appeared pedantic' (*Proust and the Middle Ages* (Geneva: Droz, 1975), p. 34). My own reading takes the oscillation between the writing-in and writing-out of the sculptural reference as an indication that something more fundamental to a Proustian poetics is being negotiated here.

inception is both significant and problematic. By situating Proust's hesitations within a nineteenth-century literary cultural heritage – one that emphatically shapes the *Recherche* in other ways² – I want to reflect on the play of presence and absence which characterizes the sculptural poetics of this 'œuvre cathédrale'.

When, in 'La Beauté', Baudelaire equates the ideal of beauty with 'un rêve de pierre', and establishes the sculptural form as a source of poetic inspiration, he captures something culturally significant about the nineteenth century.³ Throughout the 1800s, French novels and poetry deployed a series of sculptural images and analogies, turned female characters into statues in a reversal of the Pygmalion myth, and drew heavily on the metaphorical and thematic potential of the figures of the statue and the sculptor. Nonetheless, sculpture has been relegated to the sidelines of contemporary examinations of the nineteenth-century's metaliterary reflections.⁴

- 2 Bales, for instance, comments that the nineteenth century was the 'field of literature [...] with which [...] Proust was most familiar, and whose atmosphere formed the background to his development' (p. 125), and that 'the compendious nature of Proust allies him closely to [...] nineteenth-century tendencies' for works of art to aim for all-embracing syntheses (p. 128). Perhaps more significantly for my purposes here, and given the way painting and music inform both the narrator's literary development and the poetics of his novel, the nineteenth century also provided a rich mine of literary raw material in which artistic interactions are probed, problematized and idealized.
- 3 Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*, in *Œuvres complètes*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1975), I, 21. While Baudelaire's inaccessible female statue casts an ironic gaze on the poets who idealize her marmoreal beauty, with the expression 'rêve de pierre' the poet also draws attention to a more widespread cultural phenomenon.
- 4 Only recently has this imbalance begun to be corrected in two complementary publications: *From Rodin to Giacometti: Sculpture and Literature in France 1880–1950*, ed. by Aspley, Cowling & Sharratt (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000), and the special issue *Sculpture et Poétique: Sculpture and Literature in France, 1789–1859*, ed. by Cassandra Hamrick and Suzanne Nash, *Nineteenth-Century French Studies*, 35.1 (2006). But even here, the focus is not on the *comings and goings* between literature and sculpture: examination of the place of the sculptural within the literary sphere is, for instance, the central concern of only three of the twelve essays in the *NCFS* special number (see the articles by David Scott, Rosemary Lloyd and Stamos Metzidakis).

In many respects, our comparative critical neglect of the sculptural as compared to the pictorial was already a feature of early nineteenth-century artistic discourse. Tony Johannot's frontispiece for the first number of the periodical *L'Artiste* (1831) is a case in point (Figure 1). This 'Journal de la littérature et des arts', advocated both in its sub-title and its regular content (art criticism, poetry, engravings, literary pieces) a somewhat catholic, all-inclusive conception of the 'artist'. Thus David Scott has read the image as one uniting the figures of the painter, sculptor, poet and musician under the all-inclusive title of 'artiste', in a way which underlines the journal's aesthetic position that 'writers and painters were imaginative and creative individuals who aimed at comparable goals in their different media and who could learn much from each other on a technical and practical as well as on an intellectual level'.⁵ But Scott, while acknowledging the dominant position of the painter and the sketchy background presence of the sculptor, downplays the clear hierarchy which is established here between the different arts, insisting instead on the dynamic of artistic cross-fertilization which the image superficially represents.

Alex Wettlaufer points up the discord which subtends the fraternity of the arts represented here, and draws attention to the centrality and dominance of both the engraver's signature and figure of the painter relative to the writer and musician who 'occupy subordinated positions in the visual and implicitly in the power hierarchy, and are reduced to roles as inspiration and scribe respectively'.⁶ But one figure is absent from Wettlaufer's perceptive analysis of the undercurrents of rivalry and competition in this image: the shadowy sculptor who almost merges with the background in the upper left hand corner of the scene. The contrasts between this figure and his 'brothers in the arts' are striking: he faces away from the others, is

5 David Scott, 'Writing the Arts: Aesthetics, Art Criticism and Literary Practice' in *Artistic Relations: Literature and the Visual Arts in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. by Peter Collier and Robert Lethbridge (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 61–75 (p. 66).

6 Alexandra Wettlaufer, 'Balzac and Sand: Sibling Rivalry and the Sisterhood of the Arts in *Le Chef-d'œuvre inconnu* and *Les Maîtres mosaïstes*', *George Sand Studies*, 18 (1999), 65–85 (p. 65).

dressed more simply, and whereas the others sport moustaches and beards, the sculptor's lack of facial hair seems to signal youth and perhaps also immaturity. David Hall adds that this figure 'myopically prods a clay *modello* of St George and the Dragon. He pokes; George stabs. It is meant to be crude, cold and antediluvian, and it is. Here, sculpture is a trade for silent, ghostly slaves'.⁷ Sculpture is relegated to the shadows, occupying not only a different space but a different artistic time, and excluded from the networks and interactions which the image foregrounds.

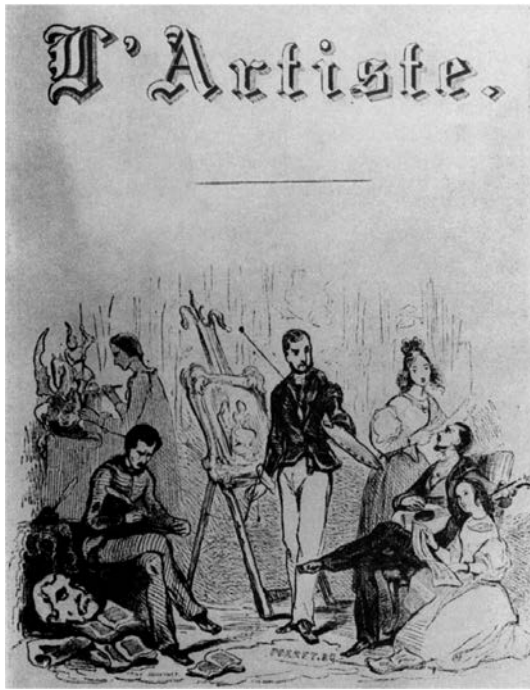


Fig. 1 Tony Johannot, Frontispiece of *L'Artiste* (1831)

7 James Hall, *The World as Sculpture* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1999), p. 28.

One aspect of the sculptor's difference vis-à-vis the representatives of painting, music and literature appears to have some empirical grounding: that is, his social class, signalled here by the fact that he is represented wearing an artisan's smock redolent of the *atelier* while the others are dressed in more elegant attire befitting the *salon*. Sculptors in nineteenth-century France were indeed often of low social status, and more frequently than painters came from a working class or artisanal background (Rude's father, for instance, was a stove-maker; Etex, who also worked on the sculptures of the Arc de Triomphe, came from a family of ornamental sculptors; Préault's father was a metal worker; while Carpeaux's was a stone mason). Consequently, when writers depicted sculptors, they often drew attention to their coarseness and to their lack of social skills, as in the Goncourts' description of the arrival of three sculptors at a party given by their painter friend Philippe Burty:

Ils avaient des voix d'ouvriers dans le monde [...]. Tout en eux respirait le manque d'éducation: ils puaient le voyou prétentieux, corrompu par je ne sais quel orgueil d'idéal. Ils disaient des phrases d'art comme des sentences d'argot, des choses apprises, des dogmes sifflés. Sur leur figure, pâlie et creusée de misère, salie de la barbe du peuple et de poils durs, on lisait je ne sais quoi d'hostile, de rétracté, ce passé de la bohème qui fait amer. Un surtout avait une vilaine tête taillée à la serpe, grossière et rude, de carrier [...]. Celui-là était Carpeaux, un sculpteur de grand talent.⁸

Everything signals the social difference of this group of sculptors: their lack of education – in the sense of both instruction and manners, – their scruffy, uncouth appearance, their poverty, their inarticulacy, and especially their inability to talk about art, their 'phrases d'art' being more like 'sentences d'argot', all of which associate them with the working class, and mark them as out of place in the *beau monde* of the *salons*.

Whatever the empirical basis for the representation of the sculptor as an outsider to the salon scene in the Johannot engraving, however, this is an image which calls out to be read not for its mimetic accuracy but for its

8 Edmond et Jules de Goncourt, *Journal*, 3 vols (Paris: Robert Laffont, 1989), I, 1145–6.

ideological underpinnings. From an aesthetic perspective, the marginality of the sculptor cannot simply be attributed to the commonly held view that sculpture was more imbued with classical aesthetics than the other arts, and therefore less open to the expression of passion, vitality and spontaneity that would characterize the Romantic conception of the visual arts.⁹ Rather, just as the ideal of 'fraternité' of the Revolution operated its own exclusions (notably of women), so too here the construction of a 'fraternité des arts' generates its own others. Jules Janin's editorial essay in the first number of *L'Artiste* makes explicit, the artist is he who creates ('l'homme qui compose et qui crée'); what is then expelled from the category of the 'artiste' is the 'artisan'. Sculptors were frequently subsumed within the category of the 'craftsman', of those who dealt not in creation and originality, but in execution and imitation. The shadowy peripherality of the sculptor in Joghannot's image can thus be read as indicating his uncertain status between *artiste* and *artisan*, and drawing attention to a binary opposing the manual nature of the sculptural art on the one hand and the cerebral nature of painting, literature and music on the other.

But uncertainty characterizes the figure of the sculptor in other ways, for in the gender politics of this image, the sculptor stands outside the network established by the interactions of the three men in the foreground. In terms of the composition of the image, this is reinforced by the triangle which they form – the painter's palette and mahlstick almost bisect the image diagonally from top left to bottom right, the line of the musical instrument intersects horizontally with this, and the parallel lines established between the quill in its inkpot on the far left of the image, the angle of the writer's body and the rear leg of the tripod supporting the painter's canvas close the third side of this triangle, and close out the sculptor. The three other figures – the sculptor and the two women whose functions appear to be those of model and singer – are excluded from this space of homosocial and artistic exchange. Thus, while the sculptor's smock and lack of beard may denote social class and youth, they also connote

9 The Goncourts again exemplify this position: 'Le dogme académique que le passé inspire l'avenir, est contraire à tous les faits. Les arts qui ont les plus parfaits modèles sont en pleine décadence: je ne citerai que la sculpture' (*Journal*, II, 1).

femininity. This gendering – or rather this apparently deliberate refusal to mark the sculptor as masculine – reinforces the ideological implications of the image. In a context where gender functions to articulate and reinforce artistic dynamics and relationships of power, the shadowy, indeterminate figure of the sculptor is situated on the negative side of the binaries which underpin this image – artist/artisan, creator/executor, originator/imitator, masculine/feminine. He/she is written out of the network of artistic power which binds together the male painter, writer and musician, and is relegated to the space of the barely seen. The paradox that it is arguably the most masculine of nineteenth-century arts – both in terms of the gender of its practitioners and the sexual symbolism of mythical tales such as that of Pygmalion – which is marginalised in this way only serves to render the gender politics of this image all the more striking.

The Sculpted Text: Balzac and Barthes

An analogous process of consigning the sculptor and the sculptural to the critical shadows underpins our reading of even the most sculptural of nineteenth-century texts. While concerns with form and plasticity evinced by poets such as Gautier and Banville have made the sculptural an integral part of explorations of the Parnassian aesthetic, sculpture functions as painting's troubling other when it comes to the novel. Balzac's twinned artist tales *Sarrasine* (1830) and *Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu* (1831 and 1837) are a particularly good case in point.

Balzac first published *Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu* in *L'Artiste* in July and August 1831. He subsequently made minor modifications to the text for publication as a single volume later that year. In 1837 he undertook more significant revisions, amplifying Frenhofer's extemporizations on art and reworking the ending to render death the inevitable outcome of artistic disillusionment. The thematic ties and similarities of plot binding the 1837 *Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu* and *Sarrasine* are such that writing on one often

entails writing about the other – Alex Wettlaufer and Diana Knight have explored the way the Pygmalion tale operates in both stories;¹⁰ Sandy Petrey considers both in an analysis of ‘performative mimesis’;¹¹ and Barthes memorably couples Frenhofer’s canvas with Sarrasine’s statue in *S/Z*. But what criticism has been more blind to, it seems to me, is the rich sculptural seam which unites these two texts, and which suggests that Balzac was consciously accentuating the presence of *Sarrasine* as a privileged intertext when he revised *Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu* in 1837.¹²

Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu is usually read as a novel about painting, not least since it was admired by Cézanne and Picasso, and the sources of Frenhofer’s artistic theory and practice have been traced to both Diderot and Gautier. However, Frenhofer’s artistic theorizing, as articulated in the 1837 text, is profoundly marked by the sculptural. Thus when he comments on the deficiencies of Porbus’s painting of *Marie égyptienne*, his critique suggests that the painting has not achieved the perfect sculptural balance.

[Ta sainte] est collée au fond de la toile et [...] on ne pourrait pas faire le tour de son corps; c’est une silhouette qui n’a qu’une seule face, c’est une apparence découplée qui ne saurait se retourner, ni changer de position. [...] je ne saurais croire que ce beau corps soit animé par le tiède souffle de la vie. Il me semble que si je portais la main sur cette gorge d’une si ferme rondeur, je la trouverais froide comme du marbre. [...] ici c’est une femme, là une statue, plus loin un cadavre. [...] Le flambeau de Prométhée s’est éteint plus d’une fois dans tes mains [...].¹³

- 10 See Wettlaufer, *Pen vs. Paintbrush: Girodet, Balzac, and the Myth of Pygmalion in Postrevolutionary France* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), and Knight, *Balzac and the Model of Painting* (Oxford: Legenda, 2007).
- 11 Sandy Petrey, ‘Catherine Lescault and Louis-Philippe: Performative Representation in and around Balzac’, *The French Review*, 65 (1992), 733–45.
- 12 While Petrey notes that, ‘in many ways, *Sarrasine* is a model for the final *Chef-d’œuvre inconnu*’, his unpacking of this statement focuses primarily on the ending in which disillusionment is now a precursor to death in both novels rather than the intertextual dialogue which *Le Chef-d’œuvre inconnu* pursues with the earlier text.
- 13 Balzac, *La Comédie humaine*, ed. by P.-G. Castex, 11 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade), X, 417 (hereafter *CH*).

There is an revealing aesthetic progression in this passage: first Porbus's painting of Marie is judged not to be sufficiently sculptural because it lacks three-dimensionality (she is flat, stuck to the canvas; one cannot walk round her; hers is not a body which has the spatial qualities of sculpture);¹⁴ questions of perspective are then introduced only after a sculptural discourse has been developed at length, for even though 'tout est bien en perspective', the painted image remains flat and lifeless; at this point the sculptural qualities of the female subject are acknowledged, but in the negative – 'Il me semble que si je portais la main sur cette gorge d'une si ferme rondeur, je la trouverais froide comme du marbre' – such that although Porbus has been successful in conveying the three-dimensionality of aspects of this female body, it remains inert; for Frenhofer, it is sculpture which will be the mediating term between inertia and animation (the progression 'ici c'est une femme, là une statue, plus loin un cadavre' points strongly in this direction), for sculpture is not just about volume, it also renders 'le mouvement et la vie'. In the rewritten *Chef d'œuvre inconnu*, as in *Sarrasine*, it is sculpture which fuels the referential illusion in which statue and model, real woman and artistic creation are imagined to merge.¹⁵

Sarrasine emerges, then, not just as a potential model for the 1837 ending of *Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu*, but as a sculptural intertext for Frenhofer's artistic theory and practice. As such, it provides a fresh context for thinking about two of the most critically over-determined moments in *Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu*, both of which can be traced back to the earlier text.

¹⁴ In Porbus's speech, Balzac echoes the views of Herder, as articulated in his 1778 essay, *Sculpture. Some Observations on Form and Shape from Pygmalion's Creative Dream*. According to Alex Potts, Herder, while drawing distinctions between painting and sculpture based on the difference between the way the viewer perceives them through the senses of touch (sculpture) and sight (painting), also 'envisaged painting as having to embrace a sculptural, tactile apprehension of form [...] and 'legitimately, if inadequately, to draw on the resources of the sculptural' (Alex Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), p. 34).

¹⁵ Herder's influence may again be at work here, since for Herder, sculpture was 'the art of deeply felt naked truth, painting the art of semblance and appearance' (Potts, *The Sculptural Imagination*, p. 29).

The first of these is the reworking of Frenhofer's description of his painting – where in 1831 we read, 'Cette femme n'est pas une création, c'est une créature', this is reversed in 1837 to give, 'Cette femme n'est pas une créature, c'est une création'. The term 'création' also occurs in *Sarrasine* where La Zambinella is described as 'cette création' inespérée' (*CH*, VI, 1061), and in this text, 'création' is freighted with the sculptural – the reference to La Zambinella as a 'création' occurs just before she is compared to 'la statue de Pygmalion descendue [...] de son piédestal', and classical sculpture is designated by the formulation, 'les riches et suaves créations de la Grèce antique' (*CH*, VI, 1060). The second point where *Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu* resonates in potentially significant ways with *Sarrasine* comes with the perfectly formed foot which emerges from Frenhofer's painting, and which is compared to 'le torse de quelque Vénus en marbre de Paros' (*CH*, X, 436): this was of course a feature of the 1831 text, but in the 1837 version it is no longer an isolated sculptural fragment, but part of a more extensive discursive network, linking not only to the sculpture-painting dialectic of Frenhofer's artistic theory, but also to the Vien painting in *Sarrasine*, in which the Adonis figure is modelled on Sarrasine's statue of La Zambinella.

Sculpture in these novels is intimately bound up with the mimetic illusion, the dangers of believing that the art object and the real object of desire merge. However, both painting and writing also draw on the sculptural to create the illusion of referential plenitude, the sense of something behind the canvas, beneath the page. Note the contrast in vocabulary in the description of Frenhofer's painting: the 'marbre de Paros' of the foot is contrasted with the 'brouillard', 'lignes' and 'chaos de couleurs' surrounding it (*CH*, X, 436); this perfect sculptural form emerges, solid and intact, from the chaos and formlessness of the painting. In this passage, representational stability, unity, truth and transparency are linked to the trope of the sculptural. Against the danger of semantic saturation and the attendant crisis of representation which the plurality and formlessness of Frenhofer's painting evoke, sculpture seems to stand for representational solidity, definition and clarity. And, as Barthes argues in *S/Z*, sculpture in *Sarrasine* is the exemplary representational art form: 'la statue parfaite,

selon Sarrasine, eût été une enveloppe sous laquelle se fût tenue une femme réelle [...] dont l'essence de réalité aurait vérifié et garanti la peau de marbre qui lui aurait été appliquée'.¹⁶ It is the phenomenological dimensions of the viewer's (and of course the sculptor's) engagement with the work of sculpture which constitute the danger, for sculpture occupies the same space as the viewer. This is the trap into which both Frenhofer and Sarrasine fall, for they confuse the illusion and the real; in writing about this, however, Balzac distances himself from the deluded sculptor.

And so too does Barthes. In *S/Z*, the critic has relatively little to say on the specifics of sculpture in relation to *Sarrasine*, and his comments are restricted to the analysis of individual lexia rather than forming the subject of one of his longer critical set pieces. What links these isolated comments is the association of the sculptural with the erotic, such that the techniques of 'pétrissage' and 'déchiquetage' are compared to the process of undressing the female body and the creation of the fetish object (p. 131); and this equation of the sculptural and the erotic is then underwritten by the invocation of Pygmalion. Furthermore, Barthes establishes a clear hierarchy between sculpture and painting, in which he valorizes the painter's work as concerned with 'l'âme, l'expression, c'est-à-dire l'intériorité venant se peindre en surface', whereas the sculptor is simply 'propriétaire du volume' and concerned with 'le corps, la matière, la sensualité' (p. 119). He thus affirms that, 'la sculpture est réputée lutter avec la matière, non avec la représentation comme le fait la peinture' (p. 105). This effectively seals sculpture's fate in *S/Z* and rules it out as a significant player in Barthes's influential exegesis of the Balzac story.

And so indeed it proves to be, for in *S/Z*, the theorization of realism as a literary mode is pursued predominantly in relation to painting, occasionally in relation to sculpture mediated through painting, but never in relation to sculpture in its own right. Thus, in the following example, the progression is from sculpture to painting and then to literature:

16 Barthes, *S/Z* (Paris: Seuil, 1970), p. 213.

L'artiste sarrasinien veut déshabiller l'apparence, aller toujours *plus loin, derrière*, en vertu du principe idéaliste qui identifie le secret à la vérité: il faut donc passer *dans* le modèle, *sous* la statue, *derrière* la toile (c'est ce qu'un autre artiste balzacien, Frenhofer, demande à la toile idéale dont il rêve). Même règle pour l'écrivain réaliste (et sa postérité critique): il faut aller *derrière* le papier [...]. (p. 128)

This process whereby the critical move from sculpture to realist writing is always mediated by painting (and frequently by explicit reference to Frenhofer) can be traced back to Barthes's reflections on the portrayal of the 'vieillard' in the opening frame. In Balzac's description, painterly, sculptural and theatrical elements coalesce, though the sculptural arguably dominates: in addition to terms such as 'anguleux', 'creusé', 'creux', 'cavités', the 'vieillard' is described as 'immobile autant qu'une statue' (*CH*, VI, 1052), and, confirming Barthes's contention elsewhere in *S/Z* that 'la statue appelle la visite, l'exploration' (p. 213), Mme de Rochefide cannot resist the desire to touch. But Barthes's analysis focuses only on the pictorial in order to posit painting as underpinning realist representation: 'il faut que l'écrivain [...] transforme d'abord le "reel" en objet peint (encadré) [...]. Ainsi le réalisme [...] consiste, non à copier le réel, mais à copier une copie (peinte) du réel' (p. 61). This formulation will guide his exegesis of the Balzacian text, and will reach a logical conclusion in one of the final set pieces of the volume entitled 'De la sculpture à la peinture' (pp. 213–14), where the argument again progresses from the statue to the canvas by way of Frenhofer, and only then to the literary page, thus completing a process which has subtended the whole of *S/Z*, that is the subordination of sculpture to painting as a model for thinking representation.

Indeed, the mediating presence of painting linked to Frenhofer is so strong in *S/Z* that it leads Barthes to a confusion of the two stories. So set is he on making *Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu* an essential supplement for reading *Sarrasine*, that he rewrites the ending of *Sarrasine* such that Frenhofer's destruction of his canvases is mirrored in what Barthes imagines to be Sarrasine's destruction of the statue of Zambinella (whereas of course in the text, Sarrasine's hammer is thrown with such force that it misses the statue). Barthes will refer to Sarrasine 'brisant pour finir la statue creuse' (p. 119), and go on to claim that Sarrasine has 'détruit dans la statue illusoire le témoin de son échec' (p. 129). On three further occasions he will evoke

'la statue détruite' (p. 174), 'l'art se brise (la statue est détruite)' (p. 206) and 'une statue se brise' (p. 213), thereby transferring to the Balzacian story the destruction of sculpture which his own critical exegesis has wrought.¹⁷

Thus while Balzac writes sculpture *into* the final edition of *Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu*, his sculptural additions have gone largely unseen, such that sculpture is subjected to the same process of gradual effacement from critical readings as the statue of Zambinella in *Sarrasine* which is copied by Vien in a painting which then serves as a model for Girodet: it is painted over and painted out, to the point where it is no longer seen. Just as Frenhofer is blind to what Porbus, Poussin and we as readers take to be obvious, so too we are similarly blind in our readings, for while we can make out the formless blobs of paint on Frenhofer's canvas, we fail to see the large blocks of marble, the sculptural fragments which litter Balzac's story, and which, as much as painting, inform the reflections which both *Le Chef d'œuvre inconnu* and *Sarrasine* pursue in relation to realist representation. To paraphrase Frenhofer, 'Où est la sculpture? perdue, disparue...'

Proust and the Poetics of Sculptural Dispersal

The continuities, as much as the discontinuities, between Balzac and Proust are striking. Proust's articulations of the sculptural in the *Recherche* are rooted in a nineteenth-century cultural context, and are elucidated when examined from the three perspectives which the preceding analysis has highlighted: the relative position of the sculptor compared to other artists; issues of mimesis; and the potential for sculptural metaphors to act as metaliterary vehicles for reflections on the author's craft.

17 Diana Knight first noted this misreading by Barthes and she lists the first four of my examples (see *Balzac and Model of Painting*, p. 28); I offer a different interpretation of their significance within *S/Z*.

In one very obvious respect, Proust appears to perpetuate a nineteenth-century trend in which the sculptor and sculpture progressively disappear as cultural referents or vehicles for metaliterary reflection, so strikingly represented in the Johannot engraving: whereas the *Recherche* includes major characters from the worlds of literature (Bergotte), music (Vinteuil) and painting (Elstir), there is no equivalent when it comes to sculpture. Moreover, the secondary character Ski, a sculptor who has produced nothing, remains an object of some ridicule throughout for his dilettantism; described as 'pas plus modifié qu'une fleur ou un fruit qui a séché' and as an 'essai informe' (*RTP*, IV, 514) at the end of the novel, expressions which capture his lack of capacity for artistic development, he acts as something of a foil for the Narrator's own increasing artistic maturity.

Continuities with the nineteenth century can also be seen in the meanings which attach to sculpture, for Proust's novel is not devoid of passages in which the sculptural is anchored to concepts such as beauty and formal perfection. Albertine is 'ciselée et fine', like 'une petite statue sur laquelle les minutes heureuses de Balbec avaient passé leur patine' (*RTP*, II, 684), while the sight of a group of young girls in Balbec prompts the following reflection: 'n'était-ce pas de nobles et calmes modèles de beauté humaine que je voyais là, devant la mer, comme des statues exposées au soleil sur un rivage de la Grèce' (*RTP*, II, 149). In this metaphorical network, it is logical that the ideal woman will be crafted by the male sculptor. Thus the Narrator declares: 'Nous sommes des sculpteurs: nous voulons obtenir d'une femme une statue entièrement différente de celle qu'elle nous a présentée' (*RTP*, III, 648). But it is not just the female body which assumes this sculptural form in Proust's work. In the description of a lunch with Albertine, the waiter's constant comings and goings prompt the following comparison: 'à cause de son activité naturelle, [...] on l'apercevait tantôt ici, tantôt là, comme des statues successives d'un jeune dieu courant' (*RTP*, III, 404). Charlus will draw a similar comparison between classical sculpture and male physical perfection when he refers to British and American soldiers as 'des statues vivantes de Phidias' (*RTP*, IV, 356).

As this last example demonstrates, the sculptural is also linked to desire in the *Recherche*. Hence, when the desired woman is proposed as a source of artistic inspiration, it is to a sculptural analogy that the Narrator immediately has recourse:

Comme Elstir aimait à voir incarnée devant lui, dans sa femme, la beauté vénitienne, qu'il avait souvent peinte dans ses œuvres, je me donnais l'excuse d'être attiré par un certain égoïsme esthétique vers les belles femmes qui pouvaient me causer de la souffrance, et j'avais un certain sentiment d'idolâtrie pour les futures Gilberte, les futures duchesses de Guermantes, les futures Albertine [...] qui [...] pourraient m'inspirer, comme un sculpteur qui se promène au milieu de beaux marbres antiques. (*RTP*, IV, 566)

In this passage, the Narrator comes closest to the Sarrasinian model of sculptural practice in which a correspondence is established between the statue and the ideal woman, and in which both desire for the woman and the suffering provoked by her unattainability are integral parts of the creative process. But it is here that the similarities with Proust's nineteenth-century predecessors end. Whereas it is the three-dimensionality of the artwork that constitutes both sculpture's attraction and danger for Balzac's artist figures, Proust's Narrator will be most fascinated by the four-dimensionality of sculpture, the way in which it encodes both historical continuity and the passing of time.

In this last quotation from *Le Temps retrouvé*, for instance, the Narrator's sculptural reflections evoke the role of time and memory as much as desire. Hence the idealized woman is presented as double, and a contrast is established between the ideal figure fixed by desire in an imagined landscape outside time, and 'celle née non du désir, mais du souvenir' whose plurality is stressed: 'Cette seconde personne [...] n'était pas pour chacune de ces femmes, unique. Car chacune, je l'avais connue à diverses reprises, en des temps différents, où elle était un autre pour moi, où moi-même j'étais autre' (*RTP*, IV, 567). Two different sculptural traditions underpin this description and inform the whole of the *Recherche*: the first, Classical statuary embodying an ideal of beauty and carrying an erotic charge, illustrated in the examples above and exemplified by Balzac's artists; the

second, Gothic sculpture in an architectural context (that of the cathedral) which constitutes the novel's primary sculptural reference, and in which sculpture is conceptually bound up with both time and memory.¹⁸

Unlike ideal sculpture with its timeless qualities, gothic sculpture is inseparable from the contingencies of the viewing experience, and is rooted in both time and space. Hence the statue of the Virgin at Balbec which the Narrator had constructed in his imagination as 'idéale, ayant une valeur universelle' occupies 'une place où elle avait pour rivales une affiche électorale et la pointe de ma canne, [...] inséparable du débouché de la grand-rue, ne pouvant fuir les regards du café et du bureau d'omnibus' (*RTP*, II, 20). The Narrator's disappointment is intense when he sees 'la Vierge illustre que [...] j'avais douée d'une existence générale et d'une intangible beauté', 'réduite [...] à sa propre apparence de pierre' and 'métamorphosée [...] en une petite vieille de pierre dont je pouvais mesurer la hauteur et compter les rides' (*RTP*, II, 20–1). Elstir will subsequently enable the Narrator to correct this first mis-reading of the sculptures; his mistake has been to focus on the one figure rather than the totality of the sculptures decorating the façade which constitute 'la plus belle Bible historiée que le peuple ait jamais pu lire' (*RTP*, II, 196). Moreover, Elstir's praise for the medieval sculptor places him alongside contemporary artists: 'Le type qui a sculpté cette façade-là, croyez bien qu'il était aussi fort, qu'il avait des idées aussi profondes que les gens de maintenant que vous admirez le plus' (*RTP*, II, 196–7).

This will be an important moment in the Narrator's sculptural 'apprentissage', and its effects – the collapsing of time between the medieval and the contemporary, sculpture's expression of historical and artistic continuity, the sculptural embodiment of the passage of time – will reverberate throughout the *Recherche*. Indeed, Proust's novel is replete with moments

18 Time is not, however, entirely absent from the examples given of references to Classical sculpture: Albertine's statuesque beauty is enhanced by the patina which ageing and exposure have produced (even if this is only the result of 'les minutes heureuses de Balbec' (*RTP*, II, 684)), and in the description of the waiter, sculpture is invoked to capture transitory appearances.

in which characters are compared to gothic sculptures. Françoise's immobility and rigid posture are captured not just by reference to a statue, but more specifically to 'une statue de sainte dans sa niche' (*RTP*, I, 52), whereas it is social status which the comparison of Mme de Guermantes' dinner guests to 'les statues d'or des apôtres de la Sainte-Chapelle' (*RTP*, II, 331) emphasizes. The comparisons can also be based on metonym rather than metaphor: in the Narrator's most vivid fantasy of her, Gilberte is 'devant le porche d'une cathédrale, m'expliquant la signification des statues' (*RTP*, I, 99); and Odette is also linked to this motif when the decorative features of her jacket which are habitually hidden from view are compared to 'ces sculptures gothiques d'une cathédrale dissimulées au revers d'une balustrade [...], aussi parfaites que les bas-reliefs du grand porche' (*RTP*, I, 627).

While the Narrator's desire to fashion his novel like a cathedral (to which I shall return later) sheds light on the thematic significance of these references, it does not fully account for them or recognize their metaliterary resonance. Thus neither Diane Leonard's contention that, 'Proust voulait présenter au lecteur un roman dans lequel les caractères fonctionnent comme les sculptures qui animent le porche d'un vaste édifice',¹⁹ nor Luc Fraisse's suggestion that, 'dans l'œuvre cathédrale, les personnages ne peuvent avoir qu'une beauté sculpturale' captures the full significance of these sculptural comparisons.²⁰ Here too, time is at work, for Proust's sculptural analogies are not just about physical similarities between the character and the statue, but about continuities across time, the merging of different historical periods. We see this in miniature in the description of the Narrator's grandmother on her deathbed where 'la mort, comme le sculpteur du Moyen Âge, l'avait couchée sous l'apparence d'une jeune fille' (*RTP*, II, 641), with sculpture thereby effecting a coalescence of the old woman and the young girl, bringing forth a past form from within the

19 Diane Leonard, 'La Cathédrale', in *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*, ed. by Annick Bouillaguet and Brian G. Rogers (Paris: Champion, 2004), pp. 193–4 (p. 193).

20 Luc Fraisse, *L'Œuvre cathédrale: Proust et l'architecture médiévale* (Paris: José Corti, 1990), p. 396.

body ravaged by age and illness. Continuity of a different sort is highlighted when the Duchesse de Guermantes is identified with 'tous les châteaux des terres dont elle était duchesse, princesse, vicomtesse' by way of a sculptural metaphor which roots the character in both a geographical and genealogical context: '[elle] semblait les porter avec elle, comme les personnages sculptés au linteau d'un portail tiennent dans leur main la cathédrale qu'ils ont construite, ou la cité qu'ils ont défendue' (*RTP*, III, 540). The sense of historical continuity is again strongly marked, with the sculptural acting as a tangible reminder of the passage of time and also the continuities which transcend the centuries.

The most famous example of this, however, is the episode of the Church of Saint-André-des-Champs, which Richard Bales analyses extensively in his *Proust and the Middle Ages* (pp. 87–90). Here the sculpted figures appear not only to be an external manifestation of Françoise's soul, but are also presented as 'un ensommeillement, [...] une réserve, prête à refleurir dans la vie en innombrables visages populaires' (*RTP*, I, 149). Sculpture preserves a series of physical forms in a virtual state, which will subsequently be embodied first of all in Theodore and then in a local peasant girl:

Détachée du porche, d'une stature plus qu'humaine, debout sur un socle [...] une sainte avait les joues pleines, le sein ferme [...], le front étroit, le nez court et mutin, les prunelles enfoncées, l'air valide, insensible et courageux des paysannes de la contrée. Cette ressemblance [...] était souvent certifiée par quelque fille des champs, venue comme nous se mettre à couvert et dont la présence [...] semblait destinée à permettre, par une confrontation avec la nature, de juger de la vérité de l'œuvre d'art. (*RTP*, I, 149–50)

While the Narrator seems, as Bales argues, to be 'intent on justifying the work of art as a faithful representation of reality', at the same time, 'the stress on the continuity, unchanged, of the peasant stock is strong'.²¹ But if the resemblance between the real peasant girl and the statue has the effect of mutually enhancing the qualities of each, and of validating the truth of

21 Bales, p. 88.

the artwork, there is no sense here of the person and the statue occupying either the same space or the same time; nor indeed is there a hint that the statue has come to life. Resemblance here, rather than being constructed on contiguity *and* simultaneity such that statue and woman might merge in one perfect figure, instead emphasizes continuity and correspondence within spatial and temporal difference.²²

This temporal quality of sculpture – which, as we have seen, is a constant feature of Proust's sculptural references – also emerges in the motif of erosion, most memorably in the 'bal des têtes' episode of *Le Temps retrouvé*. Here the sculptural emphasizes not solidity, formal perfection or continuity, but rather disintegration and erosion: 'les femmes trop belles [...] sculptées comme un marbre aux lignes définitives duquel on ne peut plus rien changer, s'effritaient comme une statue' (*RTP*, IV, 521). The ravages of time on their sculptural faces is emphasized a few pages later: 'On était effrayé, en pensant aux périodes qui avaient dû s'écrouler avant que s'accomplît une pareille révolution dans la géologie d'un visage, de voir quelles érosions s'étaient faites le long du nez, quelles énormes alluvions au bord des joues entouraient toute la figure de leurs masses opaques et réfractaires' (*RTP*, IV, 524). It is arguably the predisposition of sculpture to disintegration, crumbling and weathering, to the tangible representation of the fourth dimension of time, which gives it its distinctive quality or patina within the metaphorical and metaliterary texture of the *Recherche*. As if to reinforce this association, right at the end of *Le Temps retrouvé*, time will be revealed not just as something which acts upon sculpture, and of which sculpture bodies forth the traces, but also as a sculptor itself. For when the Narrator sees Mlle de Saint-Loup again, he notes that 'le temps [...] l'avait pétrie comme un chef-d'œuvre', and adds:

22 This is not an isolated episode, for the Narrator will return to this analogy in *Le Côté de Guermantes* when Albertine is described as 'une des incarnations de la petite paysanne française dont le modèle est en pierre à Saint-André-des-Champs' (*RTP*, II, 662), and 'la jeune Picarde, qu'aurait pu sculpter à son porche l'imagier de Saint-André-des-Champs' (*RTP*, II, 665).

Je fus frappé que son nez [...] s'arrêtât juste par cette ligne tout à fait horizontale sous le nez, sublime quoique pas assez courte. Un trait aussi particulier eût fait reconnaître une statue entre des milliers, n'eût-on vu que ce trait-là, et j'admira que la nature fût revenue à point nommé pour la petite-fille [...] donner, en grand et original sculpteur, ce puissant et décisif coup de ciseau. (*RTP*, IV, 609)

Like death before it in the case of the Narrator's grandmother, here it is the passage of time and the intervention of nature – crucially 'à point nommé' – which have such a decisive impact on the young girl's development. Within the metaphorical framework of the novel, it is the sculptural analogy which is most appropriate to capture this change, for the linear progression of time also expresses continuity, the reduplication of traits from one generation to the next, the simultaneity of what are chronologically distinct, and even distant, moments. This passage thus echoes the description of Gilberte (Mlle de Saint-Loup's mother) in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur*, which itself stresses, via the sculptural motif, continuity from a previous generation: 'on reconnaissait en Gilberte bien des traits – par exemple le nez arrêté avec une brusque et infaillible décision par le sculpteur invisible qui travaille de son ciseau pour plusieurs générations – l'expression, les mouvements de sa mère' (*RTP*, I, 554).

It is tempting, as others have done, to suggest, based on this network of sculptural references woven tightly into the novel and intersecting with so many of its key concerns, that the role of the sculptor, who is otherwise absent from the list of major characters, is filled by the Narrator himself. Nathalie Mauriac-Dyer, for instance, claims that, 'le premier statuaire est évidemment le Narrateur lui-même, qui se dévoile comme tel à la fin du livre'.²³ But the critic needs to tread carefully here, for the Narrator is no more a sculptor than he is a painter or a musician. The passage Mauriac-Dyer refers to is included in *Le Temps retrouvé* just after the Narrator has excoriated a certain type of 'realist' literature:

23 'Sculpture' in *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*, p. 959. Fraisse will argue that the Narrator becomes a sculpture rather than a sculptor (see below).

La littérature qui se contente de 'décrire les choses', d'en donner seulement un misérable relevé de lignes et de surfaces, est celle qui, tout en s'appelant réaliste, est la plus éloignée de la réalité, celle qui nous appauvrit et nous attriste le plus, car elle coupe brusquement toute communication de notre moi présent avec le passé, dont les choses gardaient l'essence, et l'avenir où elles nous incitent à la goûter de nouveau. (*RTP*, IV, 463-4)

The definition of realism may well be reductive in its focus on objects, lines and surfaces which are devoid of the affective content of perception and memory, but the focus on time – particularly the communication between past, present and future – sets the stage for the sculptural reference: 'ma personne d'aujourd'hui n'est qu'une carrière abandonnée, qui croit que tout ce qu'elle contient est pareil et monotone, mais d'où chaque souvenir, comme un sculpteur de génie tire des statues innombrables' (*RTP*, IV, 464). This passage thus resonates with and reworks reflections in *Le Côté de Guermantes* when the Narrator, inspired by a series of memories of Combray, Doncières and Rivebelle, had come close, he tells us, to intuiting 'la vocation invisible dont cet ouvrage est l'histoire' (*RTP*, II, 691). Here, differences in time are materialized, for between memories of these different places and periods, the Narrator perceives 'bien plus qu'une distance de temps, la distance qu'il y aurait entre des univers différents où la matière ne serait pas la même' (*RTP*, II, 692). He continues:

Si j'avais voulu dans un ouvrage imiter [la matière] dans laquelle m'apparaissent ciselés mes plus insignifiants souvenirs de Rivebelle, il m'eût fallu veiner de rose, rendre tout d'un coup translucide, compacte, fraîchissante et sonore, la substance jusque-là analogue au grès sombre et rude de Combray. (*Ibid.*)

Against the sandstone which seems appropriate for capturing memories of Combray, memories of Rivebelle, the list of adjectives suggests, must be chiselled in marble. A second intratextual echo in the passage from *Le Temps retrouvé* reinforces this network of allusions to sculptural matter and techniques which function as privileged metaliterary references elucidating the Narrator's own artistic practice. For the description of the material extracted from the abandoned quarry as 'pareil et monotone' also calls to

mind Saint-Loup's praise of the only two contemporary sculptors to be mentioned in the *Recherche*, Rodin and Maillol. The parallels are striking, for both sculptors are presented as working with similarly unpromising material – 'une matière affreuse qu'on ne reconnaîtrait pas' (*RTP*, IV, 332) – to produce great works of art. While this might be read as adding corroborating evidence to the association of Narrator and sculptor, there is an important effect of distancing in *Le Temps retrouvé*, for it is not the writer who is compared to the sculptor, but the process of memory which extracts and gives form to the work of art. The Narrator may be both subject and object of this process of remembering, but he appears careful not to claim for himself, as writer, the designation of sculptor.

The play of presence and absence which we noted in relation to the variants of the first page of the *Recherche* is very much a feature of these final pages of *Le Temps retrouvé*. For after evoking memory as the sculptor, and binding the processes of extraction and chiselling into the creative process, some pages later the Narrator refines the image of the quarry and eliminates the sculptor:

Je savais très bien que mon cerveau était un riche bassin minier, où il y avait une étendue immense et fort diverse de gisements précieux. Mais aurais-je le temps de les exploiter? J'étais la seule personne capable de le faire. Pour deux raisons: avec ma mort eût disparu non seulement le seul ouvrier mineur capable d'extraire ces minerais, mais encore le gisement lui-même. (*RTP*, IV, 614)

As memory comes to the fore in these pages as both source and tool for extracting the material which would constitute the literary work, geological metaphors replace those of sculpture, and the Narrator is transformed into both mine and miner. The sculptural resurfaces – implicitly at least – when the Narrator turns again to questions of form:

Que celui qui pouvait écrire un tel livre serait heureux, pensais-je, quel labeur devant lui! Pour en donner une idée, c'est aux arts les plus élevés et les plus différents qu'il faudrait emprunter des comparaisons; car cet écrivain, qui d'ailleurs pour chaque caractère en ferait apparaître les faces opposées pour montrer son volume, devrait préparer son livre minutieusement [...] le construire comme une église [...]. (*RTP*, IV, 609–10)

It has been the final statement in this passage, placed alongside the Narrator's assertion that, 'je bâtirais mon livre, je n'ose pas dire ambitieusement comme une cathédrale, mais tout simplement comme une robe' (*RTP*, IV, 610), which has generated most critical commentary.²⁴ Indeed, what the Narrator will term his 'travaux d'architecte' (*RTP*, IV, 617) inflect the metaphorical texture of the final pages of the novel, and sculpture, alongside the other arts, is subsumed within this structuring and structural concept: all contribute to the edification of this literary monument, and comparisons with '[les] arts les plus élevés' will illuminate the processes of its construction. But if sculpture is subsumed within the architectural, it does not, for all that, lose its specificity in the Narrator's orchestration of artistic references: articulated in terms which evoke the three-dimensional ('volume', 'faces opposées'), sculptural analogies appear now primarily to apply to descriptions of characters; but in fact, the four-dimensionality which has attached to the sculptural throughout the novel is retained, for the 'faces opposées' are not only spatial, they also reveal themselves in the unfolding and layering of time.

The hesitations which characterize the writing and re-writing of the opening paragraph of the *Recherche* prefigure the intermittent dialogue the Narrator maintains with sculpture throughout the novel. Present but also absent, and often overshadowed by an architectural context, sculpture is indeed easily overlooked in the novel. Sculptural references are less emphatic or fervent than those generated by the Narrator's reactions to Elstir's painting (*RTP*, II, 192–3) or Vinteuil's music (*RTP*, III, 756–65), both of which are expressions of a profound individuality:

24 In his letters, Proust too emphasised the importance of the structure of his work by way of architectural analogies: 'j'avais voulu donner à chaque partie de mon livre le titre: *Porche I Vitraux de l'abside, etc.*' (Letter of 1 August 1919 to Jean de Gaigneron, *Corr.*, XVIII, 359). Among the many critics who have studied the significance of the cathedral in Proust's novel, Dominique Jullien, argues that 'deux caractéristiques essentielles de la cathédrale vont déterminer Proust à l'adopter comme le modèle de son livre. D'une part, la cathédrale est un édifice porteur d'un sens qu'on doit déchiffrer dans sa structure, ses symétries, dans ses moindres détails iconographiques. La cathédrale [...] est donc [...] un bâtiment lisible. D'autre part, la cathédrale est une représentation du temps' ('La Cathédrale Romanesque', *Bulletin Marcel Proust*, 40 (1990), 43–57 (p. 44)).

N'est-ce pas que ces éléments, tout ce résidu réel que nous sommes obligés de garder pour nous-mêmes [...], cet ineffable qui différencie qualitativement ce que chacun a senti et qu'il est obligé de laisser au seuil des phrases [...], l'art, l'art d'un Vinteuil comme celui d'un Elstir, le fait apparaître, extériorisant dans les couleurs du spectre la composition de ces mondes que nous appelons les individus, et que sans l'art nous ne connaîtrions jamais? (*RTP*, III, 762)

If both music and painting are extolled for their capacity to open onto another world, and give expression to the otherwise ineffable, when this issue is next treated within the novel – again in relation to Vinteuil's music – sculpture too performs this function:

Il me semblait quand je m'abandonnais à cette hypothèse où l'art serait réel, que c'était même plus que la simple joie nerveuse d'un beau temps ou d'une nuit d'opium que la musique peut rendre, mais une ivresse plus réelle, plus féconde, du moins à ce que je pressentais. Mais il n'est pas possible qu'une sculpture, une musique qui donne une émotion qu'on sent plus élevée, plus pure, plus vraie, ne corresponde pas à une certaine réalité spirituelle, ou la vie n'aurait aucun sens. (*RTP*, III, 876)

In the experience of music, painting and sculpture, the Narrator is brought to the realization that art and life are inseparably intertwined, and that the artwork derives its greatness not from its correspondence to the external appearance of things seen, but from being hewn from the impressions, memories and experiences which constitute the artist's 'moi profond'. However, unlike the other arts, sculpture functions as a vehicle not just for the Narrator's reflection on his own literary vocation, but is also, as we have seen, mobilized as a reference for the realization of this vocation.

Luc Fraisse argues that, 'La sculpture fournit au héros, tout au long de sa vie, bien des signes de la vocation.'²⁵ Fraisse links this to the successive rewrites of the first pages of the novel and reads the Narrator's identification with the statues of his dream as rendering sculpture coextensive with the Narrator's 'moi profond' (p. 403) and with the process of introspection which will culminate in the image of the Narrator as quarry supplying the

25 Fraisse, *L'Œuvre cathédrale*, p. 404.

material from which memory will fashion the artwork. Fraisse concludes that the logic of the novel requires the emergence of a sculpture, that of the writer, at the end: 'du bloc chaotique qu'est la vie du héros dans le temps perdu, la vocation ne cesse d'extraire une lente sculpture, celle de l'écrivain qui apparaîtra entièrement formé seulement à l'instant où nous refermons *Le Temps retrouvé*' (p. 405). Rather than reading the novel as opening and concluding on the merging of the Narrator with the sculptural, and viewing the erasure of the sculptural reference in the rewriting of the first page of *Du côté de chez Swann* as a precondition for its emergence as a significant reference at the end of the novel, this article suggests that the play of presence and absence in the successive rewrites of the opening page prefigures a dispersal of the sculptural within the novel whereby it attaches to and refracts a range of aesthetic issues. Thus, while the nineteenth century furnishes a series of foundational concepts with which the *Recherche* engages – the place and distinctiveness of sculpture within an artistic hierarchy, questions of representation, form and the writer's craft – Proust's engagement with sculptural references in the *Recherche* moves him significantly beyond the concerns of his nineteenth-century predecessors. Freighted with concepts of time and memory, sculpture in the *Recherche* blurs the boundaries between artist and artisan, reflects the intersection of life and art, condenses past and present, encodes historical continuity and materializes the passing of time. It thus becomes a tangible representation of the fourth dimension of time, and an important conceptual and aesthetic touchstone within the novel.

From Maeterlinck to Masks: Theatre and *Mise en Scène* in the Art of Fernand Khnopff and James Ensor

Theatre and spectacle infiltrated every aspect of social and cultural life in nineteenth-century Belgium. Commentators on the history of Belgian theatre often cite the fact the country owes its beginnings to an opera: the performance of *La Muette de Portici* on 25 August 1830 at the Théâtre de la Monnaie. The patriotic duet of the second act fired the emotions of the audience to such an extent that a riot ensued on the streets outside, one which was in turn reproduced throughout the city, expressing the Belgian desire for political independence and culminating in the foundation of the Belgian state. The history of Belgium is, in this respect, inextricably linked to theatre. In addition, spectacle had an important social function in nineteenth-century Belgian life becoming, as Paul Aron remarks, both 'l'occasion la plus sollicitée du loisir collectif et le lieu d'un relatif brassage de la population'.¹ In particular, popular theatre and spectacle were very much in vogue in late nineteenth-century Brussels, as in Paris. Many new theatres opened, specializing in different genres such as the melodrama, the vaudeville, the *opérette* and the specifically Belgian genre of the *revue*, a mixed genre of text and music, often characterized by irony or black humour, known as *zwanze*. At the same time, the Symbolist theatre of Maurice Maeterlinck and Alfred Jarry offered a counterpoint to popular drama where the idea or symbol was emphasized over the physical aspects of the representation. This *théâtre d'art* was echoed in the experimental stage direction of Aurélien Lugné-Poe, poached by Edmond Picard from the Parisian to the Brussels stage in the 1890s.

1 Paul Aron, *La Mémoire en jeu. Une histoire du théâtre de langue française en Belgique* (Brussels: La Lettre Volée, 1995), p. 16.

It was at the end of the nineteenth century that modern *mise en scène* or stage direction developed, propelled by the theatre criticism of Emile Zola and André Antoine. In his 'Causerie sur la mise en scène', the latter offered one of the first exposés of stage direction which focused on its capacity to give meaning through organization and composition. This was made possible through two distinct elements of the director's work: 'une [partie] toute matérielle, c'est-à-dire la constitution du décor servant de milieu à l'action, le dessin et le groupement des personnages; l'autre immatérielle, c'est-à-dire l'interprétation et le mouvement du dialogue'.² Antoine's naturalist conception of *mise en scène* found a counter-mouvement in the work of Paul Fort and Lugné-Poe for whom an ideal theatre was one 'où l'idée seule domin[e] et nous n'attachons qu'une importance médiocre au côté matériel dénommé théâtre'.³ Modern *mise en scène* can be dated to the 1887 foundation of Le Théâtre Libre d'Antoine and the 1891 foundation of Paul Fort's Théâtre d'Art. The origin of *mise en scène* is thus two-fold: at once a Naturalist representation of the material world and a Symbolist emphasis on allusion and ideas. While the term has evolved in contemporary theatre and film practice, this duality remains: the conveying of the immaterial through the material, the creation of meaning through elements such as props, costume, actors, décor, space, perspective and visual effects.

Friendships and collaborations between Belgian dramatists and painters were common at the end of the century, with Camille Lemonnier, Emile Verhaeren and Maurice Maeterlinck belonging, as did Fernand Khnopff, James Ensor and Félicien Rops to the artistic movement, *Les XX* and its successor, *La Libre esthétique*. Both Khnopff and Ensor in particular displayed a strong interest in the world of theatre, with Khnopff creating costumes and set designs for the Théâtre de La Monnaie and Ensor performing speeches at banquets and festivities and writing his own ballet-pantomime,

2 André Antoine, 'Causerie sur la mise en scène', *La Revue de Paris*, mars–avril 1903, cited in *Le Théâtre français du XIX^e siècle*, ed. by Hélène Laplace-Claverie, Sylvain Ledda and Florence Naugrette (Paris: Éditions L'Avant-Scène Théâtre, 2008), p. 390.

3 Aurélien Lugné-Poe, *Acrobaties*, cited in Patrice Pavis, *La Mise en scène contemporaine* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2007), p. 22.

La Gamme d'Amour. This article focuses specifically on the place of theatre and *mise en scène* in the paintings of Khnopff and Ensor and, thus, on the relationship between art and theatre which may be understood as two-fold: the latter serving as a thematic source on the one hand, and as a creative process on the other. While allusions to theatre and performance are evident in the works of Khnopff and Ensor, both artists also display an interest in the complexities of *mise en scène*; in particular, in the relationship between the organization of visual elements and the creation of meaning. Pictorial composition in the work of both painters is inherently theatrical. This theatrical quality is not only symptomatic of the affinities Khnopff and Ensor saw between the artist and the stage director, and between the canvas and the stage; it also reveals an understanding of how the language of the theatre can be applied to painting to different ends. While both artists are inspired by theatre, their approaches to stage direction are quite different. Where Khnopff's work echoes the suggestive potentialities of Symbolist drama, Ensor's *œuvre* emulates both the realism of Antoine and the grotesque charade of popular puppet theatre. Their staging techniques thereby reiterate the double origin of stage direction in Symbolism and Naturalism.

In 1886 a dispute focusing on Khnopff's alleged plagiarism of Ensor's work divided the two artists. Khnopff's 1883 painting *En écoutant du Schumann* (Figure 1) was exhibited at the Exposition des XX and was praised by Verhaeren as 'une œuvre de modernité pure'.⁴ Ensor's outrage focused less on the idea that Khnopff had copied his idea in *La Musique russe* (1881) (Figure 2) than on the fact that *En écoutant du Schumann* was deemed more modern, designating its creator as a *chef de file* of the Belgian avant-garde. Both paintings depict a performance but in very different ways; both belong to the early career of each artist yet display characteristics of two very distinctive approaches to artistic representation which would later become implicit to the techniques of *mise en scène* practised by each painter. *La Musique russe* (also known as *Chez Miss*) belongs to a realist

4 Cited by Michel Draguet, *James Ensor* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 99.

phase in Ensor's *œuvre* which concentrated on bourgeois interiors. Painted in a sombre palette it depicts a female figure (perhaps the artist's sister, Mitche) playing the piano to a seated young man (resembling the painter Willy Finch). However, the musician has her back to the spectator and it is not her face or her hands, but the inclination of the male's head which indicates the presence of music, thus creating an atmosphere of female submission and male control. This allusive symbolism is symptomatic of what Michel Draguet terms Ensor's 'réalisme ironique' (p. 99), where appearances are deceptive and scenes of bourgeois decorum mask tensions and unease. The painting is one of a series of works by Ensor which evoke the theatrical stage through the heavy curtains, frames, sloping floor and careful arrangement of figures, furniture and ornaments.

Khnopff's *En écoutant du Schumann* is also painted in a realist style, although the tones are considerably less sombre than in Ensor's painting and the brushstrokes less visible. The setting, as in Ensor's work, is a bourgeois living room, dominated by a large mantel-piece and mirror and a piano to the left of the image. Again, a seated figure in the centre of the painting indicates the presence of music. However, this time the figure is female (perhaps the artist's mother) while the pianist is reduced to a fragmented hand playing the keys, and it is not just the face of the musician that is concealed, but also that of the listener. Unlike in Ensor, the subject is not musical distraction and bourgeois decorum, but instead the sublime effect of art and the absorption of the self. For Émile Verhaeren, Knopff's painting expressed the essence of Symbolist art:

Parce qu'elle porte au-delà de l'extérieur et qu'elle réfléchit une aile de l'âme d'aujourd'hui. [...] C'est l'attention concentrée, l'impression matérialisée, la souffrance esthétique traduite.⁵

5 Émile Verhaeren, 'Silhouettes d'artistes, Fernand Knopff', *L'Art moderne*, VI, 5 September 1886, p. 322.



Fig. 1 Fernand Khnopff, *En écoutant du Schumann* (© Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique)

It is in its ability to evoke the immaterial, in particular, the effect of music, that Khnopff's work is Symbolist. The visual elements serve less as representations of the real than as symbols of a self absorbed: the sheet of music, the mirrored reflection, the empty chairs, the fragmented hand and the hidden face.



Fig. 2 James Ensor, *La Musique russe* (© Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique)

The paintings by Ensor and Khnopff portray two musical performances through two quite different approaches. Elements of stage direction are visible in both works, betraying the painters' common interest in the world of theatre and spectacle. This example of *mise en scène* is part of a greater awareness on the part of both painters of the conveying of meaning through orchestration and arrangement of visual elements. For Khnopff, *mise en scène* emphasizes the artifice of representation; for Ensor it reveals the dramas concealed by society.

In Khnopff, it is through portraiture that the art of artifice and staging is first observed. For Michael Fried, portraiture involves an 'inherent theatricality' since 'more nakedly and as it were categorically than the conventions of any other genre, those of the portrait call for exhibiting a subject, the sitter, to the public gaze; put another way, the basic action depicted in a portrait is the sitter's presentation of himself or herself to be held'.⁶ Many of Khnopff's early portraits are of children. Among the most intriguing are the *Portrait de Jeanne Kéfer* (1885; private collection) and the *Portrait d'Yvonne Suys* (1890; private collection). The former is noteworthy primarily for the young age of the child. She is set in the centre of the painting against a door, facing the spectator. Two contrasting tones of light blue and brown divide the painting. The painter seems to have captured an instant, either the moment of returning from or anticipation of an outing. However, this is deceptive; her pose is artificial. The gesture of the left hand is unnatural, as is the framing of the figure between the sloped floorboards and vertical panels of the door, creating a closed space, similar to a theatre or a stage. Jeanne appears like an apparition, strangely absent and present. Similarly, the portrait of Yvonne attests to an artificiality of the pose. Here it is not the distance or framing that creates the artifice but the accessories. Unlike Jeanne, Yvonne is presented in close-up. Two tones of light and dark dominate; with just the child's face and hands being highlighted. The distinction between her dress and the background

6 Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), p. 109.

is difficult to determine, creating an uncanny effect. The gloves, luxurious clothes, jewellery and orchid lend her a maturity beyond her age. The orchid is artificial, its red colour symbolic perhaps of a nascent sexuality. The pose, like that of Jeanne Kéfer, is thus not innocent, but artificially staged. Artifice is at the heart of Khnopff's aesthetic. As Robert-Louis Delevoy points out, Khnopff's interest in artifice is inseparable from an anti-realist strategy, not attempting to mirror reality but *to give the appearance* of mirroring reality:

L'artifice, comme produit culturel, est substitution au réel vécu d'un réel imaginaire, à l'ordre dit 'naturel' d'arrangements tendant à susciter l'effet du neutre. L'artifice – tel qu'on le voit fonctionner, pratiquement, dans toutes les 'compositions' de Khnopff – est fiction. Détournement. Ou pseudo-événement. Il vise à déconcerter en ceci qu'il paraît ne pas trancher entre le faux et le vrai, entre 'le fabriqué', 'l'imité' et 'l'authentique', tant il joue sur l'apparence et frôle le simulacre (dès qu'il tend à abandonner toute référence, tout modèle). Il est, en fait, l'enjeu du jeu qui emporte la réalité vers la théâtralité comme drame de la représentation.⁷

While Delevoy sees artistic representation for Khnopff as a drama which is by its very nature artificial and plays with appearances, I argue that Khnopff's unnatural staging is revealing of an elaborate Symbolist *mise en scène* which seeks to emphasize the process of the construction of meaning in art. As Dorothy Kosinski points out, Khnopff's work 'is a contemplation of the ontology of image making';⁸ his visibly constructed and staged paintings draw attention to our processes of interpretation. By 'staging' reality, Khnopff questions the spectator's assumptions about perception and representation: he destabilizes the viewing experience, as he overtly manipulates our quest for meaning. His Symbolism is therefore in many respects a decoy; it guides us towards specific interpretations but reveals the entire process of representation as an enterprise in artifice, a playful *mise en scène*.

7 Robert-Louis Delevoy, *Fernand Khnopff. Catalogue de l'œuvre* (Brussels: Lebeer-Hossmann, 1979), p. 64.

8 Dorothy Kosinski, 'The Gaze of Fernand Khnopff', in *The Artist and the Camera*, ed. by Dorothy Kosinski (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999), pp. 142–56 (p. 145).

Photography was central to the development of staging and *mise en scène* in Khnopff's art. Unusual for the period, he acquired all the material necessary for taking, developing and enlarging photographs to accompany his art. He used these images as a support, document, or model for a painted image, though he was also keen to conceal the influence of photography on his art. In an article entitled 'A propos de la Photographie dite d'art', from 1916, Khnopff writes that painting and photography 'sont essentiellement différents: c'est le réalisme pour celle-ci, avec ses aspects superficiels de la vie en action; c'est l'idéalisme pour celui-là avec son interprétation personnelle des rêves les plus profonds'.⁹ He also claimed to know nothing about the technical side of photography. However, the discovery by Charles de Maeyer in 1964 of a series of 44 photographs and a Steinheil camera and equipment from the artist's studio challenged the myth Khnopff had created of his perception of photography as 'un agréable passe-temps pour un oisif'.¹⁰ Khnopff had an excellent master and friend in Arsène Alexandre, whom he knew from 1875 when the photographer moved to Brussels. The artist was fascinated by photography and the possibilities it offered for artistic creativity, in particular, its ability to 'stage reality'. Like his contemporaries, notably Edgar Degas and Édouard Vuillard, Khnopff was interested in how the photograph could give the appearance of an actual real-life scene, despite the careful orchestration of its composition. It is not just the ability of the camera to give the appearance of mirroring reality that interests the painter; it is its availability as a tool to create illusions and effects that evoke rather than state meaning. This sense of indeterminacy is best illustrated in a comparison of the photographs and portraits of his sister, Marguerite, where reality and make-believe intersect. For Delevoy, 'l'œuvre entière de Khnopff repose sur le modèle photographique, sur cet "intermédiaire" qui fait écran entre le peintre et le réel: ce "réel" qu'il n'aborde jamais que comme "imaginaire", même lorsqu'il s'agit de peindre une figure susceptible d'être située dans la catégorie du portrait'.¹¹

9 *Annexe aux Bulletins de la Classe des Beaux-Arts (1915–1918)* (Brussels: Académie Royale de Belgique, 1919), p. 97.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 96.

11 Delevoy, *Fernand Khnopff*, p. 118.

It was after the scandal concerning his portrait of the young actress Rose Caron¹² that Khnopff began to focus exclusively on his sister as muse. One of the earliest of Khnopff's portraits of his sister dates from 1887. The photograph in black and white shows Marguerite dressed in dark clothing with a hat and gloves against a pale background which resembles the gable end of a house. The distant gaze of her eyes to the left, rather than facing the photographer, lends a sense of unreality and artifice to the image. Similarly, the formality of her dress and pose contrasts with the mundane objects visible in the background, including a watering can, an outside tap and a gutter. Her pose is unnatural. The image finds an echo in the *Portrait de Marguerite Khnopff* from 1887 (Brussels, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique). Here the pose and dress are similar, as is the oblique gaze. The figure is painted in white against a pale background. As in the portrait of Jeanne Kéfer, she is set against a door, but here, rather than appearing too small, she seems too tall. Reminiscent of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, there seems to be an obvious play with mirrors and appearances. There is something incongruous in the fact that she is wearing gloves inside and her dress appears as though it's on back to front. The awkward pose of her arms and the cropping of the lower part of the image, as in a photograph, lend to the sense of unreality. Marguerite, like Jeanne, seems to float mysteriously in an ambiguous and undefined space.

- 12 Khnopff was commissioned in 1885 to paint a portrait of the young actress and singer. He had agreed to paint her in *tenue de ville* rather than in theatrical costume. However, when the actress visited the XX exhibition in February of that year, she was outraged to find her features on Khnopff's painting of the naked body of Léonora d'Este. The artist was deemed a *diffamateur* and the XX qualified as pornographers in the contemporary press.



Fig. 3 Fernand Khnopff, *Memories or Du Lawn Tennis* (© Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique)

In *Memories or Du Lawn Tennis* (1889) (Figure 3), photography also plays a central role in the *mise en scène*. The pastel, which at 127 × 200 cm remains one of the largest Symbolist works executed, depicts seven elegantly dressed women, some with tennis rackets, against an indiscriminate dark green background. Closer observation of the figures reveals striking similarities between them. This is corroborated by a series of black and white photos taken by Khnopff as a study for the pastel. It becomes clear that all of the figures are based upon various poses of the artist's sister, Marguerite, and that we are not in the presence of seven individuals, but of one, seen from different perspectives. The female figure's dress marks out these differences; serene and pure in white to the left, in summer attire in the centre and in mourning to the right. Her facial expression remains the same: absent, contemplative, dreamlike. The original photographs served as models for drawings, which the artist later used as models for the final pastel. This process of abstraction from reality is accentuated by the fact

that Khnopff chose to insert the figures with little attention to depth or perspective. The horizon and the women's eyes should be at the same level as that of the spectator but, instead, a *décalage* is created by the two lines of horizon. As a result, the figures seem like card-board cut-outs which hover in a neutral space. As in the portrait of Marguerite, the fact that the feet are for the most part invisible, gives them the appearance of floating. There is no communication between them with each one gazing beyond the confines of the image. For Delevoy, the pastel functions 'comme un rêve' (p. 124), the figures like displaced mannequins on a set, symbols without meaning extracted from reality. For Frederik Leen, they are reminiscent of Leibniz's monads which are composed 'de souvenirs immatériels, de fragments de différents moments du passé qui surgissent pour expliquer, ou mieux encore pour déterminer le présent'.¹³ Draguet also emphasizes in this respect the title of the painting, *Memories*, which for him evokes Freud's conception of the object as a 'trace mnésique' which exists in an indeterminate state, 'entre la présence affirmée et l'évocation intérieure',¹⁴ as it is transformed by memory. Khnopff's process of creation from reality to photograph to drawing to pastel, coupled with the quasi-identical multiplication of the figure of Marguerite, emphasizes this transformation of reality through memory into art. It highlights above all the processes of construction that underlie artistic representation. While on the one hand this emphasizes the artifice that is all representation, it also reveals the ambiguous and indeterminate state of each individual visual element or signified which appears to refute or defer fixed interpretation.

Khnopff's *mise en scène* of the figures is enhanced by the theatrical iconography of the image, expressed through the neutral backdrop, the costumes and the conspicuous props of hats, gloves and rackets. The painter's love of artifice is linked to his fascination with spectacle and theatre. In 1898, Khnopff collaborated with Maeterlinck to produce an illustrated

13 Frederik Leen in collaboration with Dominique Marechal and Sophie Van Vliet, *Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921)* (Brussels: MRBAB, 2004), p. 122.

14 Michel Draguet, *Khnopff ou l'ambigu poétique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), p. 227.

edition of his play, *La Mort de Tintagiles* and also created the costumes for the 1907 production of *Pelléas et Mélisande* at the Théâtre royal de la Monnaie.¹⁵ As early as 1898, critics saw parallels between the work of the painter and the playwright.¹⁶ As in Maeterlinck, the unsaid, the unknown and the mysterious are at the heart of Khnopff's aesthetic. Maeterlinck's plays set their characters in indeterminate settings, without past or future and the plot is secondary to the emotional mood created. As Draguet points out, Khnopff's paintings are similar to Maeterlinck's one-act plays: 'tout y est d'emblée donné sans que le sens ne puisse être directement assimilable'.¹⁷ Khnopff's painting echoes Maeterlinck's concept of a theatre of shadows, where action gives way to mood:

Il faut peut-être écarter entièrement l'être vivant de la scène. [...] L'être humain sera-t-il remplacé par une ombre, un reflet, une projection de formes symboliques ou un être qui aurait les allures de la vie sans avoir la vie?¹⁸

In many respects, *Memories* evokes a theatre of reflections, where each form hides another, and the representation is composed of many layers which echo each other. Where is the drama? It too is repressed, concealed, interiorized and inaccessible to the spectator who searches for meaning.

This theatre of gesture is evident in the pastel entitled *Secret* (1902; Bruges, Groeningemuseum). Like *Memories*, its origin is in a staged photograph of Khnopff's sister, Marguerite, depicting his seated muse draped in a scarf against the background of a curtain decorated with peacocks and

15 Khnopff also created the costumes for Chausson's opera, *Le Roi Arthur*. Jean Delville remarked that the artist 'savait mettre dans la conception de ses costumes et de ses accessoires le même soin, le même goût, le même sens emblématique, le même raffinement et le même métier qu'il apportait dans ses œuvres les plus parfaites' (cited in Delevoy, p. 36). In addition, the artist also created sets for the theatre including those for Rodenbach's *Le Mirage*.

16 See Draguet, *Knopff ou l'ambigu poétique*, p. 199.

17 Ibid., p. 201.

18 Maurice Maeterlinck, 'Menus propos sur le théâtre' in *Œuvres I*, ed. by Paul Gorceix (Brussels: Complexe, 1999), p. 462.

a tall candlestick. Her pose is theatrical and in her right hand she holds a mask which she contemplates. The pastel formed part of a diptych whose other half depicted a view of Bruges entitled *Reflet*. The *mise en scène* is not confined to the individual pastels but extends to their interrelation. Where *Secret* presents an interiorized and claustrophobic reality, *Reflet* offers a vision of the outside world. Yet here too it is a reflection, that of L'Hôpital Saint Jean. Hospitals in the Symbolist literature of Mallarmé and Charles Baudelaire in particular were a metaphor for the ill soul, thus its depiction echoes the sentiment of *Secret* and the diptych itself seems to stage a series of reflections of interior and exterior, dream and reality, unconscious and reason. These dichotomies are further echoed in the framing of the images – beneath glass in circular and rectangular frames set in imitation gold.

Frames were an integral part of Khnopff's aesthetic. Influenced by both the Pre-Raphaelites and the vogue of *japonisme*, the artist created highly elaborate and unusual frames for his work. He also tended to place glass over paintings which did not need it, such as the *Portrait de Marguerite*. The effect of this framing was two-fold: on the one hand it lent a sacred dimension to the image, and on the other distanced it from the spectator. Khnopff's frames therefore existed as curtains behind which a theatre of the ideal was staged. Khnopff's manipulation of the viewing experience is not confined to the canvas; the framing of the image is another form of *mise en scène*, which at once emphasizes its status as artifice and interrupts our interpretation. This is the essence of the painter's stage direction, highlighting the artifice of painting and in so doing challenging the spectator's quest for meaning.

The *mise en scène* that forms part of Ensor's trajectory from realist to Expressionist is no less complex. Unlike Khnopff, Ensor's stage direction is less concerned with the artifice of representation and the questioning of the spectator's expectations than with revealing the dramas which underlie bourgeois society. Throughout his artistic career, Ensor had an ongoing interest in the world of theatre. From play-acting and clowning with his friend Ernest Rousseau, to attending puppet shows and carnivals and his creation of a ballet pantomime, Ensor was immersed in the theatrical.

The presence of a stage is particularly evident in *Le Salon bourgeois* (1881; Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten). It depicts the artist's mother and aunt, seated at the dining-room table, engrossed in their reading and sewing. Although at first sight, the painting seems simply to portray the sleepy afternoons spent in the bourgeois home during the quiet season, the spectator's eye is drawn to the empty chair in the right-hand corner – the same chair in which the artist was to portray his father that same year. Ensor's father James Frederic Ensor was a silent presence within the female-dominated home, his failed career and financial dependence on his in-laws eventually leading to his death from alcoholism in the streets of Ostend in 1887. The light that falls upon the white cloth strewn across the chair renders this silence palpable and the absence visible, and also brings to life an array of objects, investing them with suggestion and mystery. The various ornaments cluttered upon the mantelpiece, together with the furniture and mirrors, serve as a border around the room and mark the space out as artificially theatrical. As Draguet observes, it is, however, a theatre of absence and one which, like that of Strindberg or Maeterlinck, 'montre l'isolement des choses et des êtres dans ce lieu immuable où plus rien n'advient que le lieu même'.¹⁹ This sense of an interior which is closed in upon itself is accentuated by the mirrors which reflect each other. What initially may appear as an idyllic depiction of bourgeois life becomes the site of a social critique of bourgeois hypocrisy. Lurking behind the appearance of respectability is both a failure and a refusal to communicate.

*L'Après-midi à Ostende*²⁰ (1881; Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten) takes as its setting the bourgeois dining room. The circular composition of the painting centres on the table at which the mother and daughter are seated. Once more, an atmosphere of impenetrable distance between the characters predominates, as each appears preoccupied by their own thoughts. The composition, like that of *Le Salon bourgeois*, is also characterized by artificiality. The sense of a theatrical stage is particularly evident

19 Draguet, *James Ensor*, p. 38.

20 The title is reminiscent of Courbet's *L'Après-dinée à Ornans* (1848; Lille, Palais des Beaux-Arts).

in the inclination of the table and floor and the strategically placed furniture. The depiction of the artist's mother and sister is especially artificial. One wonders, in particular, why Mitche, dressed in a bonnet and coat, is calling to see her mother in her own home. Combined with the trance-like expression upon his sister's face, this may indicate the implausibility of the situation and lead us to consider the work not so much as a realistic depiction of bourgeois life, but rather a questioning of its representation. It is evidence of a crossover between a realist and Symbolist aesthetic, where the intangible and immaterial are evoked through attention to the suggestive potential of specific visual elements. Similar to the theatre of Strindberg and Maeterlinck, Ensor's paintings capitalize on the evocative force of the absent, the unsaid and the unexplained. This dimension of Ensor's *œuvre* not only reveals his Symbolist affinities, but also highlights his intimate understanding of the capacity of *mise en scène* to convey subtle meanings and allusions.

Theatricality is particularly evident in the artist's self-portraits which promote his self-construction as artist. The desire to be recognized as an outstanding artist, in the tradition of the great Renaissance painters, finds expression for example in Ensor's celebrated *Autoportrait au chapeau fleuri* (1883 and 1888–89; Ostend, Museum voor Schone Kunsten) which alludes to Rubens's famous self-portrait (*Self-Portrait*, 1638–40; Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum). The painting remains one of Ensor's most fascinating works, as Marcel de Maeyer notes in the 1965 edition of *L'Art belge*, dedicated to the painter: 'Nulle part ailleurs on ne le voit aussi séduisant et renfermé, aussi grave et ironique, aussi conscient de lui-même et capricieux, aussi proche et lointain à la fois.'²¹ De Maeyer was the first to point out that the painting originally depicted the artist dressed in a black coat set against a brown background. Although characteristic of Ensor's early period, its reworking in 1888 marked the beginnings of a new stage in his art. Placing his bust against what appears to be a mirror, Ensor adds a strange hat, adorned with artificial, coloured flowers and an ostrich feather, and lengthens his moustache. The figure which emerges is one of an *homme-femme*, alluding perhaps to either his feminization as a result of his matriarchal home

21 Marcel de Maeyer, 'Ensor au chapeau fleuri', *L'Art belge*, 1965, pp. 41–4 (p. 41).

or equally a repressed aspect of his middle-class upbringing.²² The tone of the previous image is completely transformed. Parodying the self-portrait by his famous compatriot, Ensor offers an ironic, almost acerbic vision of himself. Having reworked his original painting, Ensor entitled this picture *Mon Portrait travesti*. This element of disguise is one which had long been attractive to Ensor: in a pencil self-portrait from 1877, he portrayed himself as an Arab, while in a series of drawings inspired by the figure of Don Quixote, he donned the mask of the Spanish 'hero'. Disguise and masking combine with theatrical compositions to further Ensor's revealing of social tensions and hypocrisies.

The first time the mask appears in the work of Ensor, without being incorporated in a reworked version of an earlier painting is in *Les Masques scandalisés* (1883) (Figure 4). In a sombre interior, lit by oil-lamp, a seated masked figure looks up towards a female figure opening the door who is also wearing a mask. The image also reflects the highly theatrical settings of the paintings of bourgeois life. There is a strong case to be made for reading *Les Masques scandalisés* as reflecting the same sentiment as *Le Salon bourgeois*. Both paintings employ theatrical techniques to reveal the disharmony in Ensor's home and specifically point to the figure of the father. The female figure of *Les Masques scandalisés* has been associated with the artist's grandmother and the male one with that of his father.²³ The masked father is seated alone with a bottle of alcohol, awaiting reprimand from his mother-in-law returning from the carnival bearing a horn which closely resembles a stick. The mask provides a particular function in the painting: its grotesque form depicts the unfortunate truth which lies beneath a seemingly respectable exterior. In this respect, Herwig Todts recognizes the similarity between Ensor and Goya: 'Ensor, too, uses the mask as an instrument to unmask what has been concealed'.²⁴

22 Ensor's sexual identity is unclear. Although he never married and often created disparaging images of women in his paintings, he maintained close friendships with Mariette Rousseau, Emma Labotte and Augusta Boogaerts.

23 See, for example, Ulrike Becks-Malorny, *James Ensor: Masks, Death and the Sea* (Cologne: Taschen, 1999), p. 38, and Draguet, *James Ensor*, p. 144.

24 Herwig Todts, 'The Grotesque in Ensor's *Ceuvre*', in *Between Street and Mirror: The Drawings of James Ensor*, ed. by Robert Hoozee and Catherine Ziegler (New York: The Drawing Centre and University of Minnesota Press, 2001), p. 212.



Fig. 4 James Ensor, *Les Masques scandalisés*
(© Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique)



Fig. 5 James Ensor, *L'Étonnement du masque Wouse*
(© Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, Antwerp)

Ensor's *mise en scène* becomes increasingly macabre in the late 1880s and 1890s, following the Expressionist evolution of his style and finds resonance with the world of puppet theatre popular in late nineteenth-century Brussels. In *Squelettes se disputant un pendu* (1891; Antwerp, Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten), a central scene of two costumed skeletons fighting over a hanged man is balanced with two groups of masks emerging from the wings. As in the other images, the artist's concentration on the action of the central figures lends a dramatic tension to the painting. Ulrike Becks-Malorny suggests that the image may have been inspired by Ensor and Ernest Rousseau's playing with bones and skeleton parts in the

dunes.²⁵ Yet, it is more likely that the painting was executed first and then staged as a tableau for the camera by the two friends. As in *Squelettes voulant se chauffer* (1889; Fort Worth, Kimbell Art Museum) which depicts skeletons acting as humans, huddling around a fire, we appear to be witnessing a drama of the social world which reveals the poverty of human relations. The theatrical aspect is highlighted by the hordes of grotesque masked characters that are squeezed into the edges of the painting. Like the manner in which the skeleton is invested with life in these later paintings, the mask, too, takes on a human dimension. Central to this grotesque animation is the use of colour and the physicality of the brushwork as the paint itself seems to come alive. Some of the masks represented in the painting recall earlier ones. In particular, the spectacled figure with the white pointed bonnet and the dark figure with the top hat call to mind the characters of *Les Masques scandalisés*. Here, however, there is no attempt to suggest a disguise or dissimulation: the masks denote the true faces. This conception of the grotesque mask as the real identity of the social individual marks a move away from an art of appearances to an art of revelation. Ensor's stage direction has evolved from conveying subtle allusions to absence and disharmony to an unambiguous expression of the grotesque reality of social interactions.

L'Étonnement du masque Wouse (1887–1888 and 1888) (Figure 5) remains one of Ensor's most well-known images, depicting the carnival mask symbolizing fear or dread dressed in an attire similar to the grandmother figure of *Les Masques scandalisés*. Here, the sense of travesty and disguise has disappeared as the masked figure appears as a real character. This figure's 'surprise' appears to stem from the fact that it finds itself abandoned on a stage-like space. Todts notes how one of the formal developments in Ensor's work in the 1880s was the transformation of space: 'space is often depicted frontally, very matter-of-factly, in the manner of a naked stage'.²⁶ The notion of the naked stage is here clearly observed. Yet it marks not

25 See Becks-Malorny, *James Ensor: Masks, Death and the Sea*, p. 32.

26 Todts, 'The Grotesque in Ensor's *Œuvre*', p. 209.

only aesthetic but also psychological concerns, since upon it lie empty and farcical masks, costumes, personal possessions, and a skull. One of these masks, wearing a white bonnet and glasses is beside a carnival horn and is easily identified as the grandmother figure from *Les Masques scandalisés*. The painting develops the theme of absence and dejection in the earlier painting to present instead a complex drama of dissolution and emptiness which seems to reflect the reality of human relations.

Ensor's trajectory in terms of theatrical techniques and *mise en scène* thus differs quite radically from that of Khnopff. Whereas for the painter of *Memories*, such techniques serve to highlight the artifice of painting, to demonstrate how meaning is created in art, and to question our processes of interpretation as spectators, for Ensor, theatrical composition and motifs draw attention to the dramas of everyday life, be they domestic bourgeois realities or social interactions where true identities hide behind masks and disguises. Theatre and specifically *mise en scène* offer a language for both painters to engage with the complex relationship between reality and representation. In the work of both artists, absence is the drama which is most pronounced; one which reiterates the paradox of art as defined by Charles Baudelaire: 'la représentation du présent' which, for the poet, is the challenge of modernity.²⁷ The modern artist attempts in vain to capture a fleeting present; one which will, by its very nature, remain absent. Ensor and Khnopff's *mise en scène*, in drawing attention to absence and to that which exists outside the frame of representation, challenges the spectator's desire for meaning and highlights the limits of pictorial art. Their *œuvre*, through an emphasis on the language of theatre, suggests the awareness of a need for modern art to push the boundaries of its discipline, to engage with literature, music, theatre, photography, performance and the nascent art of cinema in order to renew the relationship between image and reality.

27 Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Claude Pichois, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1976), II, 684.

PATRICK MCGUINNESS

The Language of Politics in Symbolist and Decadent Polemic: From *Le Décadent* to the *École romane*

Such is the image of aloof individualism and haughty dispassion projected by Symbolist poets and endorsed by their critics that we forget just how large the spectacularly unstable, corrupt and crisis-prone Third Republic loomed in the writing of the period. From Mallarmé's essays on bank collapses and the Panama Canal scandal, to Verhaeren's Socialist-inflected poems of rural depopulation and industrial squalor, by way of the overt support given by poets such as Tailhade, Quillard, Kahn and Saint-Pol-Roux to anarchist action, politics and the consequences of politics play an important part in Symbolist and Decadent artistic culture.

Symbolism, and its predecessor-cum-avatar Decadence, provide examples not just of individual and collective engagement in politics, but also of discourses about poetry and literary values that are conducted in terms that reflect the radical political ideas in the air at the time. It may be that Symbolist poetry seals itself off, more than any poetry thereto (with the possible exception of the *Parnasse*), from the world around it, but its theoretical, critical and journalistic writings reveal themselves to be both open to outside influences and capable on occasion of acting upon the world outside. But for all this, the story of the poetic avant-garde's engagement with politics is as messy, various, contradictory, strewn with red herrings and generally tangled, as any of the 'real' politics of the time. In this sense, Decadence and Symbolism, for all their rhetoric of isolation and autonomy, may be considered oddly exemplary, or at any rate symptomatic, of the very realities they claimed to rise above.

One of the first instances of a concerted – by which is not meant *coherent* – engagement with politics among the literary avant-garde is to be found

in Anatole Baju's *Le Décadent*, perhaps the most important of the Decadent and pre-Symbolist journals. Its importance lies less in its published poetic content than in its 'manifestary' tone and its cavalier sweep across areas that went well beyond the merely literary. Of Baju's closest collaborators on *Le Décadent*, we should mention Verlaine, Barrès, Laurent Tailhade (soon to become one of the most celebrated literary anarchists of the period), and two poet-critics – Ernest Raynaud and Maurice du Plessys – who in 1891 joined Charles Maurras and Raymond de la Tailhède to make up, under Jean Moréas's leadership, the *école romane*. This important but neglected breakaway group constitutes a right-wing, nationalist, monarchist and xenophobic secession from Symbolism and Decadence. The *école romane*, conceived in opposition to Symbolism's cosmopolitanism and anarcho-leftism, and to Decadence's ideological pessimism and formal subversion was, ironically enough, composed entirely of ex-Symbolist and Decadent writers. Only the young Provençal Charles Maurras, author of a short study of Moréas (published in 1891) and already making a reputation as a forceful and informed reactionary critic, came from outside the avant-garde clique. Despite being a considerable poet in his own right, it was Maurras who furnished the *école romane* with its ideological apparatus, and drew its reactionary literary values into explicit political ones.

The *école romane* had many phobias – democracy, *vers libre*, foreigners, republicanism, cosmopolitanism, Jews, socialists and anarchists – but one of its notable bugbears was Nordicity in literature. The nefarious North had not only brought forth Wagner, Strindberg and Ibsen, denaturing the French 'génie' with Teutonic barbarism, but had also allowed perhaps the most sinister of the Nordic infiltrators to dominate French literary culture: the Belgian. The Belgian, with a command of French but his secret cargo of Germanic culture, was the literary Trojan Horse which Symbolism had welcomed into the City. The duality of the Belgian writer, analysed so sympathetically by Richard Bales in his essays and editions, was precisely what made the likes of Maurras suspicious: the Belgian *was* Symbolism incarnate, because Symbolism was itself about fusions and auras, dualities and doubles, about the in-between realms of language and thought and perception, and about a constant and productive tension between

the clarities of French and the mysteries of 'La Flandre insolite'. The *école romane's* nationalism involved a return to the supposed 'chaîne gallique' (as Moréas put it in 1891), to a 'native' French tradition, to Boileau and Ronsard, to a world before German Romanticism had come to denature the French 'génie'. It involved, in short, a sort of literary and cultural protectionism, and the poetic correlative of its insistence on the straight line, on the indivisible national tradition and on top-down authority (anti-democracy, Monarchism, militarism) was an abhorrence of ambiguity, foreign forms and subject-matter, of mixed genres and *vers libre*, and much else we associate with the poetry of the 1890s. Verhaeren, Maeterlinck, Rodenbach, Le Roy, Elskamp, are all singled out by Maurras and the *roman* writers for condemnation, but also for admiration: the *roman* writers were not thuggish or stupid, they were able to recognize literary quality, and were opinionated but perceptive critics. The Belgian writers were, admitted Maurras, inventive, exotic, impressively in control of their effects – they simply had no place in French literature, and the welcome they had been given by French literary culture had been detrimental to that culture. It is a nationalist argument of course, but one that was being made both by reactionaries like Maurras and by writers, such as Anatole France, of wide sympathies and moderate politics. It was also being made by many who perceived themselves as being on the left, such as Anatole Baju.

Anti-Belgian discourse in French literary culture is hardly comparable, in its viciousness and its practical consequences, to anti-Semitism or even anti-Germanism, but it too has a great deal to tell us about the specific ways in which the avant-garde, we might say, *racialized* and *culturalized* the aesthetic, generic and formal options open to it. This racialization and culturalization was conducted not just by the reactionaries and conservatives of the Right, but by the Left, the cosmopolitans and the progressives. Maurras and Remy de Gourmont had completely opposed ideas, but they disagreed in a shared language, with Maurras condemning the foreign influences, the formal laxity, the diversions of literary tradition and the changes undergone by the French language, and Gourmont celebrating them as evidence of enrichment and expansion. French theatres had staged plays by Norwegians and Swedes, English and Russian dramatists, and even

adapted dramas from the Far East; translations from German, American, British and Russian novelists, political thinkers, poets and essayists could be found everywhere from *Le Figaro* to the short-lived, tiny-circulation avant-garde magazines. French music and painting were similarly open to foreign influence, while in the world of politics, science, trade, banking and industry, France seemed more than ever to have its fortunes tied in with those of other countries and other cultures. One of the interesting, if somewhat impressionistic, exercises a critic can indulge in today is compare, for instance, the articles and letters in, say, *Le Figaro* expressing unease about France's dependence on foreign imports and foreign loans in the 1890s with articles and letters in the literary press about French linguistic borrowings, the influence of foreign literature, or the over-dependence of publishers, theatres and opera houses on non-French work. These all constitute examples of different discourses, but not of unconnected discourses, each registering, in its own way and in its own sphere, dominant cultural concerns that are remarkably similar, and may, in fact, be transpositions of one another.

Tracing the cultural politics of Anatole Baju's *Le Décadent* magazine enables us both to trace the beginnings of the reactionary *école romane* and to see the extent to which the different strains of cultural politics that emerge more clearly in the early 1890s and especially in the wake of the Dreyfus affair are, in the mid-1880s, tangled and chaotic, but all the more interesting for the tangle and the chaos.

The Changing Cultural Politics of Decadence

For Baju's group, 'décadence' was a term coined in response to the decadence of contemporary society, to the ruling class and its bourgeois ideology, and to the corruption of the republican body politic, with its militarist posturings and sleazy authoritarianism. The 'décadent' writer was presented as an oppositional, energetic figure: a modern and progressive thinker not

just in art but in politics, and defined as much by his contempt for the static aloofness of Parnassian poetry as for the bourgeois values of the Third Republic. The 'décadent' was, in this early and formative period, very different from what he later became in France and (especially) in England: the etiolated, pessimistic, dandified aesthete casting contemptuous looks at the society beyond him.

There is a strong strain in Decadent writing, and especially in Anatole Baju and his magazine, of pseudo-apocalypticism: a vision of a society on the brink of collapse, a financial system ready to implode, a world where technology runs riot while human beings remain bounded by stupidity, greed and selfishness. This is one of the underlying discourses of literary Decadence, and it certainly matches the kind found in radical politics, of left and right, of the period: the idea of a 'Société mourante', stagnant with old ideas, choking on luxury, and sinking into corruption was as convincing to conservatives and 'anti-Decadents' such as Max Nordau as it was to the Decadents he railed against. Very specifically, and central to the Decadent idea as well as to the radical political ideas of socialists, anarchists and even the reactionary right, it is the idea of a new order arising from the decay of the old that attracts. Similarly, it is a truism that the anarchist individualism of many writers of this period was ripe for transformation into elitist anti-democracy and positions associated with the reactionary right (Boulangisme is one parallel in the world of politics proper). That sort of transformation is what we see in writers such as Camille Mauclair, Hugues Rebell, the *roman* poets, and even, later, the likes of Paul Adam and Adolphe Retté, notable self-styled leftists and anarchists in the 1880s and 90s. All of these immixed and entangled tendencies can be found in Baju's *Décadent*.

'In history as in nature, decay is the laboratory of life', wrote Marx, and what marks the Decadent writer's understanding of his place in the renewal of artistic values is exactly this sense of the crisis and decay of the old bringing forth the new. Decadent writing is full of references to putrefaction and rot – ambiguously treated because, while they provoke disgust, they are also organic life forces creating dynamic new forms. We may think of Baudelaire's 'Une Charogne' as a sort of allegory of the kind of life-giving

decomposition the Decadents would have appreciated. That propensity for seeing the very stagnation and decay of the old order as material for its renewal is something Decadent cultural politics shares with radical politics proper, especially the strain of anarchism represented by Jean Grave's important and evocatively titled *La Société mourante et l'anarchie* (1893), prefaced by Octave Mirbeau and a hugely influential book on anarchism's literary sympathizers.

For Anatole Baju, the *décadents* were an anti-decadent force in a decadent society, writers dedicated to producing what Verlaine called 'une littérature éclatant par un temps de décadence, non pas pour marcher dans le pas de son époque, mais bien tout à rebours, pour s'insurger contre'.¹ This dimension of the 'Decadent' sensibility is the most frequently forgotten, and it quickly became lost in the schism between Decadents and Symbolists represented by the 'manifeste' of Jean Moréas. Of course, 'décadent' is a particularly ill-chosen epithet for someone who considers themselves the bringer of artistic health and political progressiveness, which is why Baju attempted to replace 'Décadence' with 'Décadisme'. 'Décadisme' failed to catch on, while 'décadence' simply became an all-purpose term for all the things Baju saw himself as opposing. By the late 1880s, the Decadent was no longer held to be going 'à rebours', or against the current, of a corrupt society, but merely *going with the flow*. It was never what Baju had intended.

That moment in literary history when Symbolism became a triumphant poetic school and Decadence was relegated to a preparatory flux has mostly been analysed in terms of personal antagonisms between poets and conflicts of literary values. But there were also considerable differences in cultural politics, and one important aspect of the schism was the need on the part of some poets, represented by Jean Moréas, to remove poetry from the discursive fray, to reassert its autonomy in the face of a Decadent movement that had allowed poetry to become too entangled in 'non-literary' matters. After all, 'Décadent' and 'Décadence' gestured outside the world

1 *Le Décadent*, 1–15 January 1888.

of literature, and took in whole matrices of historical, sociological, medical and other material, and mostly in invigoratingly cavalier ways. 'Symbolisme', by comparison, already signals a move – a step back, even – towards the hermetic. An *-isme* implies a method or a system whereas an *-ance* suggests a mood, a tendency, a dissipation.

The cultural and political dimension to the Decadent/Symbolist schism may not have been the prime factor in the tensions between groups, but it becomes more significant, and certainly clearer, in the years that followed the Symbolist 'manifeste' of 1886, which, we should recall, was not in fact called a 'manifeste' when it first appeared.

Le Décadent magazine was founded in 1886 by Anatole Baju. The son of a miller from Charente, Baju exemplifies the image of the Decadent 'outsider': provincial, lower-middle class or from an artisan family, with less formal education and less cultural capital than the Symbolists. Baju, like the writers and artists of the pre-Symbolist *mêlée* such as the *Hydropathes*, the *habitués* of the *Chat noir*, and other groupings of the sort analysed by Noël Richard in books like *A l'Aube du Symbolisme* and *Le Mouvement décadent*, is from a fundamentally different social, intellectual and cultural milieu from the Symbolists, who tend to be drawn from the comfortable bourgeoisie and to have private incomes or secure jobs.

In *Les Règles de l'art*, Pierre Bourdieu describes the split between Decadents and Symbolists as a function both of social background and – correlatively – of political ideology. The Symbolists have plenty of 'capital scolaire', writes Bourdieu, while the decadents tend to come from artisan families. Bourdieu writes that 'les décadents et symbolistes divergent à mesure qu'ils accèdent à la pleine existence sociale', but also asserts that 'en politique, les symbolistes affectent l'indifférence et le pessimisme, mais sans exclure quelques éclats de radicalisme anarchiste, tandis que les décadents sont progressistes et plutôt réformistes'.² This is not a difficult conclusion to reach, but Bourdieu's analysis is too rigid: partly because he insists on emphasizing the opposition between and not the fluidity within the two

2 *Les Règles de l'art* (Paris: Seuil, 1998), pp. 440–1.

groups, and partly because he does not follow up on the political dimension of Symbolism, or take it further and explore the reactionary *engagement* represented by the *roman* school whose roots were in Decadence. The real difference between the two groups is that the Decadents, or Baju at any rate, try to inject politics into literary theory and into literature itself, whereas the Symbolists split off the two realms, re-assert their separation from each other in ways that might be perceived as conservative or even reactionary (they were so perceived by Baju). Baju's politics are vague, repetitive, contradictory and often badly expressed, but they always insist on a relationship between politics and literature, even when, as in the early *Décadent*, he sneers at politics and claims that literature is the sole province of the intellectual elite.

Baju may, in the early issues of *Le Décadent*, claim that the 'masses' deserve only to have a literature 'imposed' upon them, but his essays and articles constantly engage with the relationship between politics and literature even when they claim this relationship is an antagonistic one. It is a paradoxical situation: the writer, claims Baju, must remain aloof and disconnected, and yet almost every article, review, polemic and editorial in *Le Décadent* stresses the continuity of the literary, the political and the social. This is in part because Baju is full of contradictions, but it is also because the idea of 'decadence' is a total cultural package – that is its *raison d'être* in literary discourse: it does not recognize literature's autonomy, for the very reason that it treats literature as symptomatic and not free-standing. Indeed, Baju says this himself, when he explains the infrequency and poor quality of the poetry in his magazine by saying it is there to present evidence of the very decadence of values he exhorts the poet to rise above. It is a tortuous state of affairs, but it helps us to ascertain the fundamental difference between Decadent and Symbolist ideologies in this confused period when the two are separating of from each other: the Decadent poem is a symptom of something outside poetry; the Symbolist poem is (or wants to be) an aesthetic end in itself – or at any rate, that is the impetus behind Symbolism as Moréas envisages it in the 'manifeste'. Here, and right from the beginning, the emphasis is on the autonomy or perceived autonomy of poetry. The poem and the world of politics, culture, social organizations,

etc. are seen as discontinuous – so discontinuous indeed that they do not even need to be rejected. Here too we may see another difference between Symbolist and Decadent literary-theoretical discourse: Baju spends most of his time telling us what he is against, thus registering discursively the huge pressure exerted on his idea of literature by the non-literary forces he is trying to keep at bay. In so doing he sketches out, in looming negative, a substantial image of the ideological, social, economic and political forces exerting themselves on poetry's small and dwindling space. By contrast, Moréas's 1886 Symbolist 'manifeste' proceeds as if poetry's autonomy could simply be reclaimed by the judicious omission of any mention of the world outside. We must recall that later Symbolist writings by other poets are much more politically inflected and socially conscious, but certainly at the moment of its differentiation from Decadence, and while Moréas claimed to speak 'for' the movement, Symbolism was an obvious attempt to move poetry back into what seemed to be an autonomous realm.

Symbolist poetry, writes Moréas in his article, is 'ennemie de l'enseignement',³ which can be taken to mean, in the context of Baju's loud proclamations, not just didacticism but the production on non-literary and non-poetic opinions generally. The idea of Decadence covers everything, explains everything, makes everything fit and correspond. Symbolism by comparison is more precise and bounded, and confines itself to the literary or artistic field. To choose between Decadence and Symbolism, or so it appeared in 1886, was thus to choose between a world-view and a theory of literature. It was also, and perhaps more importantly, to choose between literature as symptom and poem as object.

The first series of *Le Décadent* ran from April to December 1886. Baju wrote many of the articles himself, not just in *propria persona* but under pseudonyms such as Louis Villate and Pierre Vareilles, as well as writing the editorials and 'manifestary' essays in the journal. After a one-year hiatus, it relaunched itself as *Le Décadent littéraire et artistique* between

3 See Michael Pakenham's edition of *Les Premières Armes du Symbolisme* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1973) for the full text of Moréas's 'Le Symbolisme'.

December 1887 and April 1889, before becoming, for three final issues, *La France littéraire* (subtitled 'Philosophie – Critique – Sociologie'). While the first series is certainly militant, anti-establishment and subversive, it has little formally to do with political parties or even established political currents, though in several of the editorials Baju acknowledges his readers' demand for more political content. It is also elitist and anti-democratic, and preaches the autonomy of art and the superiority of the artist, while, paradoxically, ceaselessly invoking all the things art must be autonomous from. The language of rejection is not necessarily the language of autonomy, though it is often taken for it, and it is important to recall this when we read poets' statements of intellectual purity and high-minded dispassion. *Rejection of* and *autonomy from* are, in Symbolist and Decadent terms, all too easily confused, and any examination of the cultural politics of avant-garde poetry and poetic theory in this period has to keep in mind that distinction from the beginning.

Baju's idea is that the artist is above the masses, but also above the bourgeois world of money, social advancement and utilitarianism. These however remain points of orientation in the artist's heroic adventure of refusal and rejection, because *Le Décadent* limits itself to polemic and attack rather than producing examples of the new literature it constantly announces. Indeed, one way of seeing the Decadent literary project is as something constantly deferred, and that sense of deferral – it is always 'à venir', 'de l'avenir', 'futur' – is part of the discourse of the period: future-orientated, but also and necessarily present-eluding, not to mention present-eliding – much like the idealist politics it rejects but so often mirrors. In politics as in literature, the future tense is the manifesto-tense.

However, the second series of *Le Décadent* and the short life of *La France littéraire* are marked by an increasing attention to topical politics, and by Baju's drift towards socialism – especially to the sort of idea of 'art social' that earlier issues of the magazine had rejected. This leftism nonetheless displays a strain of chauvinism and nationalism (for instance in Baju's attacks on Russian and German literature) and flashes of standard-issue anti-Semitism (Jews running the banks) which we may today associate with the politics of the far right, but which in the period were as

much part of the left's outlook. Thus where the first series of *Le Décadent* scorned politics and elevated an elite art, the second series called for 'art social' and became increasingly influenced by Socialism, without however abandoning its nationalism (too many foreign writers, too many Belgians, a loss of 'French' traditional 'génie') or its belief in nefarious Jewish high finance. Like many of his contemporaries, Baju liked his politics intense but changeable.

The 15 March 1889 issue of *Le Décadent* (the second series) contains an article by Baju entitled 'Appel à la jeunesse socialiste'. Such an article would never have had a place in the first series: 'C'est un préjugé de la part de nos jeunes écrivains de talent d'affecter une sorte de dédain pour la politique', writes Baju, who had spent the first series of his magazine affecting exactly this 'dédain'. The same issue promises a *plaquette* (which never appeared), also by Baju, on Boulangisme, which, perhaps unexpectedly given the attraction of Boulangisme for other intellectuals at the time, he attacked ferociously. It also contains Baju's editorial, 'Orientation', in which he rejects art for art's sake (by now seen as the province of the Symbolists) and launches a new 'isme': 'Practicisme' – a version of 'art social', in which art would be explicitly submitted to social good. *Practicisme* – for Baju, putting an *isme* at the end of a noun was tantamount to launching a movement.

What should be clear is that the 'political' nature of Decadence, or rather Baju's idea of it, grows in response to events both inside and outside the literary field. Outside the literary field, there was, in addition to the general chaos and sleaze of the Third Republic, the increasing lure of Boulangisme, which *Le Décadent* opposed energetically and with unexpected flashes of cogency. There is also the way in which several of the magazine's contributors went into politics: notably Maurice Barrès and Paul Adam as Boulangistes, and Baju himself standing for election in Bellac for the 1889 legislative elections. Inside the literary field, there was the apparent depoliticization of literature announced by the Symbolist 'manifeste', and the retreat of Symbolist poets into what Baju called 'le désert' of a purely literary realm. Isolated aesthetically by Moréas (who also steals his closest collaborators, Raynaud and du Plessys), and with René Ghil, editor of *Le*

Scapin, launching a new and rival magazine, *La Décadence* (whose first issue appeared a few weeks after Moréas's 'Le Symbolisme'), Baju's place in the avant-garde is threatened by more coherent and precise literary enterprises. As well as *La Décadence*, which threatened Baju's self-styled copyright over the terms 'décadent' and 'décadence', the new Symbolist magazines are drawing the younger generation: *Le Symboliste*, founded by Moréas and Gustave Kahn; *La Pléiade* by Quillard, Maeterlinck and Saint-Pol-Roux; *La Revue indépendante* in its new form edited by Edouard Dulardin (who also edited *La Revue wagnérienne*); Fénéon's *La Vogue*; and, in Brussels, Albert Mockel's *La Wallonie*. All of these new magazines and reviews now defined themselves as Symbolist, though they may not all have meant the same thing by the term. None of these appears to have a political agenda (yet), but instead they follow Moréas's line of sticking closely to literary and poetic questions. The second wave of Symbolist periodicals that begin after 1890, however, such as *La Revue blanche*, *L'Ermitage*, *La Plume*, *Mercur de France*, *Entretiens politiques et littéraires* and others, will become more closely involved with radical politics, and will publish a great deal of political material amid the poetry and criticism.

In response, Baju pushes his magazine in a more political direction in order to differentiate himself from the Symbolist group; but at the same time he strongly counters Boulangisme, perhaps the most attractive and obvious form of politics available to the literary and artistic avant-garde. These anti-Boulangiste articles bring him into conflict with several of his contributors to *Le Décadent*, notably Barrès, at the time involved in another important cultural-political literary magazine, *Les Taches d'Encre*.

In May 1889, *La France littéraire* died. With Baju now launched on a political campaign, and several of its contributors involved in practical politics, it died, one might say, *of* politics. It is ironic that soon after abandoning the *Décadent/France littéraire* project, Baju turns from writing literary 'textes manifestaires' to genuinely political ones. Noël Richard in his 1968 book *Le Mouvement décadent* has tracked down several items of Baju's campaign literature for the voters of Bellac, and researched his disarmingly amateurish election campaign.⁴ Even with their less literary

4 Noël Richard, *Le Mouvement décadent* (Paris: Nizet, 1968), p. 234.

content, Baju's political manifestos have his trademark aggressive vagueness and propensity for volte-facing, but they are evidence of how he took a world-view originating in essentially literary sources and tried to apply it to practical politics. It also reveals how his odd mix of Baudelaire, Bourget and other 'décadent' staples becomes crossed with genuinely progressive leftist political issues, such as universal education and social welfare, while nonetheless retaining less 'political' but certainly ideologically inflected material such as nationalism and anti-Semitism. The interest of Baju and *Le Décadent*, from a cultural-politics perspective, is that it represents a chaotic fusion of all sorts of material – literary, cultural, political, poetic – that will become separated out in the years to come. But the chaos and the fusion do not obscure the subject of poetry's relation with the cultural politics of the period; they are part of the subject, and we should beware of tidying them up too much.

Political Rewriting of Literary History

By 1891, the left and the right in literature had become more polarized, with several prominent Symbolists endorsing anarchist or socialist ideas, and, with varying degrees of radicalism, violent action.⁵ Others espoused either similar programmatic political ideas to the *roman* poets (nationalism, monarchism, militarism) or the sort of aristocratic, elitist and anti-democratic ideologies that constituted no precise 'political' programme but remained in close touch with the reactionary currents of the time. Thus if the Decadent/Symbolist split of 1885–86 was not necessarily political, it became politicized soon afterwards, especially in the minds of some of its key players. Political language, and the imputation of political stances to literary opponents, became just another way of expressing (often very minor)

5 For the best historical account of the relations between writers and anarchism in the period, see Richard D. Sonn, *Anarchism and Cultural Politics in Fin de siècle France* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989).

aesthetic differences. One text in which we see this happening is Anatole Baju's entertainingly splenetic thirty-five page essay, published in 1892, entitled *L'Anarchie littéraire*. In this understudied but extremely revealing text, he played on the two meanings of 'anarchie' – disorder and subversion on the one hand, individualism and freedom on the other – to give an account of the development of French literary schools since the mid-1880s. *L'Anarchie littéraire* was published by Léon Vanier, the 'in-house' publisher of Decadent and Symbolist poets, but also of their parodists ('Adoré Floupette', 'Jacques Plowert'), as well as their critics and opponents. Indeed, in terms of the cultural politics and even the economics of publishing, Vanier covered all his bases: left, right, pro- and anti-Symbolist, parody, originals, and even – with the *Petit Glossaire* by 'Jacques Plowert' – a parodic glossary to help understand the originals, among which there are also plenty of parodies. 'Lion Vanné', 'bibliopôle des décadents et symbolistes', as he was called in the *Petit Glossaire*, indulged the *école romane* poets by allowing them a special logo of Minerva on the front of their books to distinguish them from the 'barbare' writers with whom they shared a publisher. In terms of the publishing culture of the period, it is interesting to note that one publisher – Vanier – is responsible for circulating both sides of the political and cultural spectrum: left and right, decadent and anti-decadent, Symbolist and anti-Symbolist, the avant-garde but also, with the *roman* poets, the reactionary arrière-garde who emerge from it.

Vanier knew how to keep his poets in the news, even if it meant encouraging their enmities and keeping their controversies bubbling over. The huge success of the parodic Adoré Floupette, outscaling that of most of the poets being parodied while at the same time drawing public attention to them, showed Vanier the benefits of controversy-powered marketing, as well as showing how parody could be a surreptitiously legitimizing tool for the emerging literary movements. Despite producing some extremely risky and low-selling books, Vanier's publishing house remained surprisingly solvent at his early death in 1896. Vanier's publishing house and its back catalogue were taken over by Messein in 1903, who reprinted Baju's *L'Anarchie littéraire* in 1904, suggesting that even twelve years after its first appearance, the *plaquette* was still seen as having documentary value.

Vanier had also recently (in 1889) published Moréas's *Les Premières armes du Symbolisme*, a collection of texts pertaining to the launch of the Symbolist movement in 1886, and including the original outline of Symbolist principles, now, in Vanier's *Premières armes* – and for the first time – called a 'manifeste'. This may seem a minor detail, but it is important: Moréas's 'Le Symbolisme' published in *Le Figaro* in September 1886 was not entitled 'manifeste', and the word 'manifeste' does not occur in the text. It is only given that title in its second publication, that is to say, in the *Premières armes* brochure three years after it first came out. That every critic of Symbolism has referred to Moréas's first article as a 'manifeste du Symbolisme' is understandable – after all, that is what it has become. But it misses the crucial point that the word itself, 'manifeste', was added three years later, for a mix of reasons: the most notable of which were to generate publicity, to fall in line with increasingly militant 'tranchement' between literary schools, and to respond to the politicization both of literary polemic and of the dynamics of artistic groupings. But also, quite simply, because though Moréas never called his Symbolist statement a 'manifeste', it hardly mattered: everyone supplied the word anyway.

Thus the era of manifestos has what we might call a false birth in Symbolism: the first manifesto of the modern age of manifestos was not in fact called a 'manifesto' at all. The nearest we come to the word is in the *Figaro*'s introductory paragraph presenting Moréas's essay, where the word 'manifestation' (so near to and yet so far from *manifeste*) occurs in a piece of literary *reportage* itself replete with *political* overtones: 'M. Jean Moréas, un des plus en vue parmi ces *révolutionnaires des lettres*, a formulé, sur notre demande, pour les lecteurs du Supplément, les principes fondamentaux de la nouvelle *manifestation* d'art' (emphasis added).

Where Decadent discourse had been full of references to the Commune, the revolution, social decay, political hypocrisy and cultural stagnation, early Symbolist polemics such as Moréas's article confined themselves to matters of versification, prosody, poetic history, etymology. Group consensus was only sought by Moréas around specifically *poetic* values, and not around social or ideological positions, or political viewpoints. To the more conservative readers of *Le Figaro*, the Symbolist 'manifeste' may have

appeared radical and brash, and that is how it has often been presented to modern readers. But to those used to the literary polemics of the previous few years, to their violence, their ambition, their sweeping free-ranging forays into everything from biology and sociology to politics and history, it would have represented a clear narrowing of the terms of reference.

One way of seeing the Symbolist 'manifeste' is as a temporary depoliticization of avant-garde energies, and the investment of those energies into an attempt to reassert poetry's autonomy. It also inaugurates a period of theorizing, in which, ironically enough, poetry's autonomy needs to be asserted in all the places it is supposedly autonomous *from*: the bourgeois newspapers, the radical press, magazines, *enquêtes*, critical prose, and other forums.

The vagaries of the Symbolist manifesto are instructive of the relationship between poetry and the various statements it propels about itself, as well as the relationship between the allegedly autonomous realm of 'Symbolism' and the wider culture which impinges upon it. This relationship is especially pertinent with Symbolism, which outdoes even Surrealism in the sheer quantity of theoretical, explanatory and generally para-literary discourse it generated. Symbolist 'theory', whether articulated in newspapers, letters, essays, reviews or polemics, is such an important part of the Symbolist movement that we may legitimately think of it almost as a genre by itself – in the same way as modern literary theory has become free-standing, unmoored from anything it was once designed to explicate: a discursive realm that might have owed its beginnings to some external referent or stimulus, but now becomes its own object. Symbolists rarely discuss or argue about individual poems; instead they discuss and argue about theories of poetry. The energies that might go into the explication of poems or lines of poetry are instead directed at debating the terms on which that poetry should be produced and read.

Rather than thinking of Symbolist poetic theory as an explanatory discourse in relation to the poetry, we should think of it as a parallel one: it grows up alongside the poetry, and of course it informs it, but it is just as much a record of ideas, ambitions, ways of viewing the relationship between language and form and expression, as it is a guide to the poems

themselves. It is also penetrated by political, cultural, sociological ideas in a way that the poems, often sealed up and hermetic, are not. Symbolist literary-theoretical discourse is the meeting-point between the period's most inward and closed-off poetry and the pressure building up outside, like the chamber between inner and outer doors of a submarine. Symbolist poetry and poetic theory are two realms separated – but also joined – by a space of transition and betweenness.

The 'original' Symbolist 'manifeste' sets a tone: henceforth the language of Symbolist theory will be manifesto-like in its attacking and defensive postures, its 'revendications' and demands, its outlining of new poetic realms, its doctrinal differences and debates among adherents of this or that 'line'. But all of these dramas happen to the side of the poetry itself – 'à côté', we might say. The movement that gives us 'poésie pure' is also the movement that creates a space for 'théorie pure'. Of course, the special prestige Symbolism accords to theory alongside, and on occasion *over*, practice, is not political any more than it is literary, and it is something that all artistic movements share to a greater or lesser degree. But Symbolism provides a particularly accentuated case of the creation of a semi-autonomous theoretical realm into which cultural, ideological and outrightly political material finds its way. Examples of this include political or pseudo-political justifications and rejections of *vers libre*, the racialization and nationalization of questions of literary temperament, of verbal borrowings, of archaisms and neologisms. In this context, we must note too that *pseudo-political* is only marginally less political than political. As for specific authors, we need only think of the presentation of Whitman as anti-Decadent democrat, or of Ibsen as anarchist (something Ibsen rejected vehemently), to see how Symbolist critical discourse bears the traces of the very politics its poetry appears to reject. That this poetry should be, by contrast with the prose, spectacularly unassertive, inward, in retreat, private and hermetic, is one of the ironies of the movement: the Symbolist poets of the 1890s may have been using their polemical and journalistic prose to call for the overthrow of the state and to assert kinship between anarchism and *vers libre*, but their poems were mostly about dribbling fountains, *bibelots*, abandoned gardens and luxurious interiors.

L'Anarchie littéraire

Baju's *L'Anarchie littéraire* needs to be seen as part of a general tendency among the Symbolist and Decadent poets to 'faire le bilan', to take stock, of the previous decade's literary developments. Literary stocktakes often involve a substantial re-writing of history, and Baju's book is no exception. But it is precisely that re-writing that interests us, because it acts as a prism to separate out the various ideological strands that feed into the cultural politics of the early 1890s, and shows us how those cultural politics are different from those of even five years before.

In *L'Anarchie littéraire*, Baju argues that his own group of Decadents had attempted to practise a version of *l'art social*, and that the Symbolists had diverted the Decadent movement into becoming a hermetic, reactionary and self-regarding elite. The distinction is crude – democratic and progressive Decadents versus reactionary or elitist Symbolists – but it reflects something of the way in which Baju himself had, even at the time, held out for a subversive and anti-establishment literary politics. But his was by no means an 'organized' or collective vision, and the social function of art, as we have seen, is not a pre-eminent concern in the first Decadent writings. What Baju is doing in 1892 is retrospectively allying his literary group with the dominant organized political movement of the time of writing *L'Anarchie littéraire*, namely Socialism. This is a sort of backdated politics, retrospectively imposed on a movement which by its very nature, and in the thick of its becoming (1884–87), did not have the coherent ideology Baju now attributes to it, and probably would not have accepted it anyway.

Baju contends that Symbolism marked an abandonment of 'art social', a reactionary move back towards Parnassianism, and a retreat both in time and in social relevance. He is, in the main, wrong: by the early 1890s, Symbolist journals such as *La Revue blanche*, *Entretiens politiques et littéraires*, *L'Ermitage* and others are overtly sympathetic to progressive politics, and are engaging much more than the 1886 Symbolists in political and

social matters. Writers such as Gustave Kahn, Émile Verhaeren and Francis Vielé-Griffin are vocal supporters of a non-didactic form of 'art social', while others such as Pierre Quillard, Paul Adam, and Félix Fénéon are overt anarchist sympathizers and supporters of acts of terror. There is also a crossover between radical politics and avant-garde poetics in the early 1890s: Symbolist journals and Symbolist writers have a substantial record of intellectual relations and even editorial partnerships with anarchist and leftist figures, such as Jean Grave and Elisée Reclus and contributed to papers such as *Le Père peinard* and *L'Endehors*.

But Bajou needs to disregard all this; he is settling scores. More: he is settling *literary* scores *politically*, and he knows that while the initial impetus of Moréas at least was to isolate, depoliticize and decontextualize poetry, the poets who take over the Symbolist momentum after 1890 are doing something different. What is especially revealing about Bajou's pamphlet however is its need to stake out its own version of the literary history of the various groups and movements of the period. The most salient aspect of Bajou's brochure is its strongly *political* language, a reflection certainly of Bajou's own strong leftist convictions at the time (his 1895 *Principes du Socialisme*, also published by Vanier, was dedicated to Jules Guesde, the French socialist politician), but also of his need to project as essentially political the literary differences between himself and his former comrades.

Moréas's newly founded *école romane* of 1891 is a symptom of the repoliticization, this time from the right, of the poetic terrain Moréas had himself depoliticized in 1886. This repoliticization is little more than a drawing out, into explicit *politics*, of latent ideological differences which in the previous decade had mattered little. By 1891–92, literary differences become more than ever expressed in political and pseudo-political terms: the *romans* call the Decadents chaotic communard stragglers, and accuse the Symbolists of being Germanic or Jewish armchair anarchists or culturally miscegenated Belgians; the Decadents call the *romans* reactionary, militarist and nationalistic and the Symbolists aesthetic bourgeois Parnassians. The political caricaturing of literary opponents happens on all sides of the spectrum, from far left to far right. When we recall that all of these writers are former comrades in arms from the heroic period of Symbolism

and Decadence, we begin to see that, by the beginning of the 1890s, the literary differences, scissions, splits and defections become couched as much in *political* as in literary terms. Again, what matters is not whether or not such political differences are real or imagined, but what the irruption of (pseudo-) politics into the literary field tells us about the forces and energies in flow in the literary field in the 1890s.

Baju's small book provides several insights into the growing politicization of literary and poetic debates. *L'Anarchie littéraire* is full of political terms used as markers of literary values or positions. For instance, Baju calls the early Decadent poets 'quelque chose comme un syndicat',⁶ a specifically 'socialist' term not found anywhere in Decadent writings of the mid-1880s, and describes himself as having tried to make the various disparate strands of the literary avant-garde converge towards 'un but social'.⁷ This may be true up to a point, but the earliest Decadent texts had focused more on subversion and modernism, on being anti-bourgeois and anti-establishment, than on specific ideals of collective action. Indeed the early, 'Décadent' Baju would have scorned such notions, having launched scathing attacks in *Le Décadent* not only against Victor Hugo (for inserting literature into politics) but against Louise Michel (for inserting politics into literature). Baju also makes some thoroughly amnesiac comments about the moral and temperamental differences between Decadents and Symbolists, especially when he tries to depict the Decadent as an ascetic, stoical proto-Socialist, demure and modest and hardworking:

Le Décadent est un homme de progrès. Il est soigneux, économe, laborieux et réglé dans toutes ses habitudes. Simple dans sa mise [...] il a le calme, la placidité d'un sage et la vertu d'un stoïcien. Les symbolistes, en général, ont un caractère absolument opposé.⁸

6 *L'Anarchie littéraire* (Paris: Librairie Léon Vanier, 1892), p. 7.

7 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Readers of *L'Anarchie littéraire* would have enjoyed this irony: it was Baju who, as editor of *Le Décadent*, published a piece by Pierre Vareilles (a pseudonym of Baju) glorying in the Décadent's lack of productivity, his freedom from the tenets of the work/time conjunction: 'Le poète décadent n'est pas un producteur. Il peut perpétrer un sonnet environ tous les six mois. [...] Dans chacun de ses mots il met une portion de son âme immarcescible et on s' imagine inhaler en le lisant les spires d'une vie humaine.'⁹ It is fair to say that Baju has developed, between 1886 and 1892, a class consciousness and a respect for labour that is absent from his writing of the 1880s. Baju's insistence, in 1892, on the morality and uprightness of the *décadent's* social mission is interesting also in the way it treats Zola and other Naturalist writers: *Le Décadent* had always professed disgust, but *elitist* disgust, at industrially produced literature. *L'Anarchie littéraire* retains its anti-Zola bias, despite Zola's ideological Leftism (which one would expect Baju to sympathize with), but now the objections are grounded in Zola's allegedly demeaning and disgusting literature. The 'syndicat' of Decadents sought to 'refouler à l'égout les déjections littéraires de M. Émile Zola et des Naturalistes', in favour of what Baju calls (and recalls as) 'salubrité artistique'.¹⁰

The unharnessed subversive energies of the mid-1880s, which were always rebellious but not revolutionary, ideological but not especially political, are re-cast in *L'Anarchie littéraire* in terms taken not just from established political categories, but established political categories that played little or no role in their original formation. Just as the vague elitism of one strand of Symbolism becomes drawn into the specifically monarchist, catholic, nationalist ideology of the *roman* poets and Maurras, so the vague, subversive, dissipated energies of Decadence are claimed by something harder and more ideologically stable – Socialism – on the opposite end of the spectrum. Indeed, when Baju uses the word 'syndicat' for himself and his Decadent colleagues, playing on ideas of collective action, unity, working class activism etc, he is equally quick to point out how the *roman*

9 'Le Poète décadent', *Le Décadent*, 17 April 1886.

10 *L'Anarchie littéraire*, p. 7.

writers use the word ‘caserne’ about themselves.¹¹ It is a telling observation, because it shows how alive writers like Baju were to the political undertones of each other’s supposedly ‘literary’ discourse. ‘Caserne’: the poetic school envisaged as a barracks, with its military postures, its nationalism, its discipline, its uniforms and uniformity, all that is captured in that ideologically loaded word, all the more ideologically loaded as the army is the traditional enemy of the Left and the traditional mascot of the Right. We are used to poetic ‘cénacles’, but here we have poets grouped in unions and barracks: a dramatized poetic microcosm of the face-off between the workers and the army, the Left and the Right. Soon, though with a more conspicuous blurring of left and right (there were plenty of anti-Semitic socialists), the literary field will polarize between Dreyfusards and anti-Dreyfusards. It is in these small tell-tale details that we may pick out changes, however slight-seeming, in the literary discourse of the period. Words like ‘syndicat’ and ‘caserne’ would not have featured in the poetic discourse of the mid-1880s, and though the ideological currents that produced such terms existed, they were still in the air, unformed or in mid-formation. By 1891–92, they are settling, hardening up – the language of poetic discussion is borrowing from the language of political dispute. The recent launch of the *roman* movement had taken place with the ‘Banquet Moréas’, but also with a special issue of *La Plume* (1 January 1891) in which we may perceive a new discourse taking shape, notably in the long article on Moréas by Barrès, something not at all Symbolist in its ideological underpinning: militaristic and aggressive, overtly nationalistic in its desire to ‘renouer la chaîne gallique’ that Symbolism, Romanticism and other cultural abominations had broken. The *roman* special issue of *La Plume* marks the beginning of a nationalist reaction within the avant-garde, a reaction we see prolonged in essays such as Maurras’s ‘Barbares et Romans’ also in *La Plume* later that year, and in various texts by Raynaud, du Plessys, de la Tailhède, Barrès, and others. Later, as he becomes the intellectual inspiration for *Action française* (founded in 1898), Maurras continues to evoke Moréas and the

11 Ibid., p. 18.

école romane as the earliest literary mobilization of the forces that will gain their real momentum from the Dreyfus affair, and become the dominant reactionary current of twentieth-century France. What the average reader of *Action française* in the 1920s would have thought of Maurras's eulogies for the long-dead and longer-forgotten Moréas (whom Maurras continued to promote until his own death in 1952) is hard to imagine. But for Maurras, the *école romane* of the early 1890s retains a special prestige in the prehistory of *Action française*.

In 1892, Baju is recuperating the Decadents into a much more conventionally political movement than they were, with precise ideological aims and positions, and a belief in collective action and wholesome, socially beneficial, and even morally instructive art. It is not an accurate description of the world of 1884–86, but it is an accurate reflection of the cultural-political agendas in play in the period 1891–96, a much more mobile and highly charged political time. Baju's Decadent movement, bred in the *fumisme* and parodic licence of the mid-1880s, is also the recruiting ground for the reactionaries of the *roman* school. It is therefore imperative for Baju to dissociate his own *Décadent* enterprise from the reactionary forces it nurtured, but also with which, at the time, it shared part of the nationalist ideological 'package'.

In the end, Anatole Baju's *Anarchie littéraire* tells us less about the emergence of the Symbolist and Decadent movements in the 1880s than about the politicization of poetry that takes place in the early 1890s, of which it is both a record and a symptom. Baju finishes his essay with an exultantly vague assessment of the state of literature: 'C'est le chaos, c'est la fermentation des idées, c'est l'anarchie littéraire'. He might have added that politically too it was chaos, fermentation and anarchy. Baju had contributed more than his fair share of all three to any project he touched, but that, in the end, is what makes both him and his magazine so crucial to the period's literature and cultural politics.

Michaux and Magritte

It is not difficult to see why Michaux, with the composition of *En rêvant à partir de peintures énigmatiques*,¹ should have been beckoned towards the paintings of Magritte. Affinities reverberate.

Firstly, a *dépaysement*. Not so much literal, for unlike Michaux who spurned the notion of rootedness and cultivated his exposure to the shocks and surprises, the assaults and unassimilables, of an endless 'expatriation', Magritte did not leave behind Belgium, their common place of origin. But, rather, a peculiar sense of *déracinement* and displacement that characterizes their art. 'Les pays, on ne saurait assez s'en méfier', writes Michaux at the doorway to *Ailleurs*, his half-real, half-fantastical lands whose practices subvert logic with a quirky foreignness which becomes progressively absorbed as 'natural', this being the fundamental displacement. The sign at the frontier continues:

Ces pays, on le constatera, sont en somme parfaitement naturels. On les retrouvera partout... bientôt. Naturels comme [...] la soif de transformer, de refaire, de dépasser, de canonner les atomes, de sortir de sa patrie... d'ajouter aux millions de 'possibles'..²

They occupy an intermediary space: not only 'entre centre et absence' (*OC* I, 559), to quote a pivotal Michaux title, but between glimpsed recognition and intractable otherness, interpretative temptations and the defiance of

1 (Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1972).

2 Henri Michaux, *Ceuvres complètes*, ed. by Raymond Bellour, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1998–2004), II, 3 (future references are to this edition and are indicated by the abbreviation *OC*).

gratuitous spectacle, grids of rationality and the self-confounding waywardness of the imaginary. Above all they are zones, like those opened to a new science, where one advances among unknowns and marvels at previously unseen combinations, obliged to reconfigure one's tame preconceptions.

For Michaux, as for Magritte, reality is always 'something other'. The *étranger* is defined by its *écart*: perhaps (as the last Surrealist exhibition was entitled) *l'écart absolu*. One broaches a universe of discrepancy and incongruity, where things do not tally or are divorced from customary contexts and relationships. Hence, in *Au pays de la magie*, a wave away from the ocean, with its own independent principle of mobility, advancing in a magical suspense, without one fathoming what might hold it there. Objects find themselves rerouted, switched to the service of alternative fields of force and subject to the discharges of uncharted patterns of energy. A note in Michaux's *Passages*, describing his proneness to an obliterating fatigue giving way in turn to a distinctive 'detachment', offers an insight into the role of objects in the wider context of his work and that of Magritte:

Retirement des choses hors des autres choses l'entourant. Soustraction qui revient parfois à de l'analyse, quoique à cent lieues de l'être. Le cadre part et la chose, sans solennité, même avec une rigoureuse simplicité, fait bande à part, existe. (*OC* II, 285)

It follows that their art is manipulated by a kind of absence. As early as *Ecuador* (1929), Michaux's perception of that Andean land is of things missing, and of the relative lack of reality in its incontrovertible presence. 'Une contrée ou ville étrangère est aussi remarquable par ce qui lui manque que par le spécial de ce qu'elle possède' (*OC* I, 156), he comments, adding, in the tellingly entitled 'Je suis né troué' and in a crisp self-analysis encapsulating no less a feature of the pictorial world of Magritte: 'J'ai sept ou huit sens. Un d'eux: celui du manque' (*OC* I, 189). Is it this self-contradictory 'sense' (in that it accentuates with arresting intensity the impact of what is not there) that provides the fertile ground in the *pays de la magie* for the 'cage vide', screeching with activity from the concentration of sheer absence: an image/non-image resonating across the genres to meet Magritte's *Le Thérapeute* (1936) where an open cage, prone to ins-and-outs and retaining nothing, occupies the vacated space of a missing human self, itself 'subtracted'?

The 'sense of lack' carries an awareness of the flimsiness of reality and of the abyss beyond the face of things, quick to erode the perimeters of what one is inclined to accept as familiar. It is a hypersensitivity both to those agents of disturbance which burst through partitions, mental and physical, in a text such as *La nuit remue* (1935), and to all that will always slip the noose of explanation. These are not riddles with some built-in key, but enigmas which remain enigmas (even if witnessed in the cold light of day and recorded with the most attentive lucidity): spasms of displaced perception, long or short, in which nothing satisfies the questions raised or drops finally into place. Hence Michaux's insistence on *incomplétude*, the missing element or continuing void in the picture, which is a continuing torment and a goal, a vice and a virtue: 'C'est l'incomplétude qui est désirable [...] Dans les palais d'autrefois, on laissait un bâtiment inachevé, obligatoirement' (OC II, 281).

One could aptly speak of Michaux's inner theatre. So much of what takes place in *Grande Garabagne*, for example, is a succession of spectacles laid on for the visitor, enacted in a half-and-half world between the partly related and the irreconcilable. This, too, like the energy-strewn arena of the author's mescaline experiences of twenty years later, is the domain of the sustained *écart*: of the fissure between possession and dispossession, appropriation and alienation, stark floodlighting and eclipse. In both Michaux and Magritte, one is drawn into the disconnective dynamics of a hybrid of real and illusory, external and internal, visual *evidence* (in the sense of what is indubitably there before one's eyes) and the occult magnetism of landscapes of the mind. In both, there is a potent *sollicitation de l'œil*, pulling one into the fluctuations and ambivalence of a 'space between'. In both, the creative eye – and that of the spectator in its wake – is rendered quasi-childlike, witnessing, as if for the first time, as an unprejudiced question-mark. What could be more pertinent to the painter and one's confrontation with his work, for instance, than the reference by the traveller of *Ecuador* to 'ma virginité de vue, d'observation refaite pour ainsi dire' (OC I, 150). Might one say, equally, that Magritte has restored, in his triggering of surprise and the challenge of the unlinked, those qualities of the child's eye which Michaux describes as 'regards qui ne sont pas encore liés, denses de tout ce qui leur

échappe, étoffés par l'encore indéchiffré' (*OC* II, 302). Windows, and the intensifying confines of the 'chambre de vision', play a key role in the ocular gymnastics of both artists (even if the eye in question is indistinguishably an inner and an outer one): accentuating the ambivalences of, and giving new edge and impact to, partnerships of light and shadow, the patent and the hidden, the palpable and the nebulous, the real and the artificial. One might even wonder, in view of such well-known canvases as *La Belle Captive*, *Au seuil de la liberté*, *L'Appel des cimes*, *La Fissure* or *Le Soir qui tombe*, which of the two 'painters' is voicing these words from *Ailleurs*:

Ils ont des maisons avec des fenêtres, même avec beaucoup de fenêtres, mais toutes fausses [...] cependant imitées à s'y méprendre, avec des ombres et des reflets. (*OC* II, 19)

If both artists have much in common with the spirit of Surrealism – pulses from the irrational, the exploiting of resources from a mind-bending 'other side', probes into the errancies of the subconscious and abnormal states of mind, leaps of the imagination, laconic juxtapositions from the language of dreams, and the pull towards that magical junction (or state of suspense) where, in the words of Breton, 'tout porte à croire qu'il existe un certain point de l'esprit d'où la vie et la mort, le réel et l'imaginaire, le passé et le futur, le communicable et l'incommunicable, le haut et le bas cessent d'être perçus contradictoirement'³ – neither could be thought of as a devotee of 'automatic writing' or as an artist who views himself primarily as a receptive vehicle, released from the filters of composed organization and the mesh of rationality, for the *dictée* of the subconscious. Both, one might say, are 'logiciens de l'imagination'. In phrases which, to Breton, might smack of compromise, Michaux says of one instant of vision: 'J'étais étonné, mais raisonnablement étonné' (*OC* II, 475) and, as wilful *metteur en scène* of features of his inner stage, 'Je les garde pour mon spectacle, où, avec le soin et le désintéressement voulu, (sans lequel il n'est pas d'art)[...]' (*OC* II, 160).

3 André Breton, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Marguerite Bonnet, 3 vols (Paris: Gallimard, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1988), I, 781.

Both are artists of method and ruse, with strategies of approach, an armoury of manipulative and adjustive techniques, and the command of artifice to make things loom large which do not exist. Far from being the inspired receptacle, they are poets of intervention. For, in words which Magritte would be unlikely to disown, the author of *La Vie dans les plis* says, as he suppresses and introduces selected ingredients from the *quotidien* within his private universe of odd cohabitations, 'je vois dans la vie extérieure ou dans un livre illustré, un animal qui me plaît [...] je me dis: Ça, ça ferait bien dans mes propriétés et puis ça pourrait se multiplier' (OC I, 465), adding:

Autrefois, j'avais trop de respect de la nature. Je me mettais devant les choses et les paysages et je les laissais faire.

Fini, maintenant j'interviendrai. (OC I, 488)

All of which gives force to his early statement: 'J'aime faire, créer. [...] Attaquer des objets, les modifier, les refaire, les déplacer' (OC I, 183).

Dream excerpts, or sequences of images resembling those of dream in their sibylline insistence derived from the logic of another zone, are a recurrent focus of attraction and an *agent provocateur* in the creations of both these lucid orchestrators of the unconscious. In a piece entitled *Rêve de Moore* (OC I, 570), and in a kind of *mise en abyme* or multiplication of *spectateurs*, one observes Michaux looking in, as it were, on someone else's dream, 'transcrit ici aussi fidèlement que possible': a 'translational' journey undertaken from threshold to threshold, without any final sense of belonging or concordance. Whereas in *Face aux verrous* he shuttles to-and-fro across the frail frontier between sleeping and waking, illusion and reality, loss and recovery, in a shifting balance of greater or lesser degrees of distance and detachment: 'Je rêvais que je dormais. Naturellement, je ne me laissais pas prendre, sachant que j'étais éveillé' (OC II, 484). *Façons d'endormi, façons d'éveillé* (1969) picks up the baton and is not only Michaux's most sustained account of his dealings with the metamorphic resources of this ambivalent, if not 'schizophrenic', territory, but the most revealing source of affinities with the paintings of Magritte and the 'dream experience' of which they become the mobile arena. In the first place, far from being

a state of absence, self-effacement or 'elsewhereness', it creates a curious focus, a wide-awake concentration of self at the sharp point of things: 'En rêve, simplement je suis. Je vis "actuel", un sempiternel actuel' (*OC* III, 450). Shedding clutter, it restores one to a childlike perception and an unschooled liberty of manoeuvre which is its companion. It is a form of play, and of playing truant: 'Il reste vagabond infantile. En sa langue d'images fusionnées et de rébus, il fait encore, il fait toujours l'école buissonnière' (*OC* III, 474). It trades less in exotica than with the everyday made new, 'made over' to different categories of seeing: indeed, with 'des objets, les objets ordinaires de notre vie quotidienne, de notre ordinaire le plus ordinaire' (*OC* III, 495). This is what leads Michaux to describe dream as 'cet anti-éloquent par excellence', endowed, while losing nothing of its elusiveness, with a 'poetic' gift for contraction: 'le rêve, comme la poésie, lui aussi pour la contraction, dit tout à la fois, mais traîtreusement' (*OC* III, 488). And what could better pin-point a vital feature of Magritte's art than that 'étrangeté par omission, si fréquente dans les rêves' (*OC* III, 481)? One senses a further tie, akin to 'intervention', in the notion of 'directed dreams': what Michaux calls his 'dynamiques rêves de jour', as opposed to night-time dreams with regard to which one's role is more passive, 'rêveries que *je savais rendre* fascinantes, exaltantes' (*OC* III, 460) (my italics); or his 'rêves vigiles', (*OC* III, 519), shaped and modulated by the transformative artist, characterized by the exercise of 'liberté, nonchalance, jeu' and through which, as he says, 'je me livre à la véritable vie gestuelle' (*OC* III, 523). But no amount of ordering and re-ordering in the course of that creative 'passage' brings the compositional product into the realm of keys and retentive interpretations. It remains gratuitous. It is not 'deep' in the sense of having some mysterious but significant underside. It remains explanationless. Which is why he quotes a maxim of an Arab sage which would sit appropriately alongside many a Magritte canvas: 'Un rêve non interprété ressemble à un oiseau qui plane au-dessus de la maison, sans se poser' (*OC* III, 506).

The works of both artists explore new awarenesses of space. The pull beyond window frames, or other frames of consciousness, is a sign: 'C'est ça qui nous endort à tout le reste, et toujours nous ramène, recueillis aux

fenêtres, aux fenêtres aux grands horizons' (OCI, 567). There one undergoes the disturbances and dislocation of what Michaux calls 'une autre gravitation' (OC III, 882). It is also at this expandable edge that relationships are undone and redone; proportions distorted, subject to enlargement and reduction; and the balance between component parts turned into an unresolved equation. 'Mais comment de ces précaires et insupportables passages, émigrer vers un réellement satisfaisant et définitif équilibre?' (OC II, 484–5): neither Michaux's nor Magritte's work offers convenient solutions to that 'spatial' question. Both open up for exploration an unpredictable 'space between', charged with the tensions of the interlinked and the apart, the magnetism of common purpose and the divergent. It is, among other things, a space simultaneously visible and mental, such as prompts Michaux to refer to his *lointain intérieur* or the 'campagne immense de l'être intérieur' (OCI, 620). It is space with a 'split personality', the arena of a disquieting *dédoublement*. 'La pièce, où auparavant j'étais seul, possédait dès lors une vie partagée' (OC III, 880), writes the author in *Face à ce qui se dérobe*. It is worked and undermined by the void, by that 'espace vide qui nous guette' (OC II, 199), as almost the condition of one's being there. It is a space, therefore, like the universe of *Ailleurs* hovering between spectacle and threat, *malaise* and *divertissement*, *étrangeté* and *naturel*, which does not exclude a certain anguish. To the extent that the protagonist of the spatial puzzle-chamber which is *L'espace aux ombres* exclaims to his 'looker-in': 'L'espace, mais vous ne pouvez concevoir cet horrible en dedans – en dehors qu'est le vrai espace' (OC II, 525). Perhaps, above all, it is (as well as a breathing-space) a breeding-space: multiple and metamorphic. It propagates itself anew. It does addition, multiplication and subtraction. And, in pondering Michaux's reference to his creation of 'un espace différent, un espace éparpillé, inconnu, un espace à espaces' (OC III, 642) and his salutary eye-opener on the same subject – 'Notre espace, pour qui a cessé d'y être aveugle, est plein de signaux, de points d'attrance, de zones fortes, de zones faibles, de piqûres, de messages' (OC II, 526) – one is inclined to see double and witness two artists at work inventively in such a malleable space, marked by problematic relations and *fausses profondeurs*, somewhere *entre centre et absence* (OCI, 559–72).

Nor – as one seeks to read the collapsed and faceless *Thérapeute*, the uncomfortably double-headed *L'Étrangère*, the blanketed features of *Les Amants*, the back of a head staring out impossibly from the mirror in *La Reproduction interdite*, the faces occluded by bird or apple in *L'Homme au chapeau melon* and *Le Fils de l'homme* (as if the non-unidentifiable *homme* in question were being usurped or colonized), the turned backs of the 'who-focussing-on-what' in *Sans famille*, the multi-directional figures in *Le Chef-d'œuvre ou les mystères de l'horizon* tugged apart by their sameness and difference, or the endless spawning of bowler-hatted men suspended in space in *Golconde* and their cousins twice removed clustering enigmatically at a window in the strange semi-human harvest of *Le Mois des vendanges* – can one help making connections with the impact of precarious identity in Michaux's work. For Michaux, too, is the poet/painter of eroded faces and impossible portraits. One reads in *Plume* (the home of that feather-light hero who can take off in space, no longer belonging to himself) that 'des visages émanés de son propre visage, partout le regardent' (OC I, 588). It is a look, quick to proliferate, which does not often divulge its intentions or connect with reassuring patterns of sense, being rather 'un regard qui ne dit oui ni non, un regard fixe' (OC I, 635). It is no surprise that the poet, faced with such self-projections and imponderable mirror-images, should acknowledge: 'Quel drôle de Narcisse je fais' (OC I, 195). Nor that, in a world of doubles, masks and impersonations, he should be haunted by the suspicion (or stimulated by the prospect) that, 'On veut voler mon nom' (OC I, 567). So Michaux, like Magritte, is a frequent spectator to himself (or non-self), in a receding chain of self-observation which becomes a *mise en abyme*, making of him 'un témoin, un témoin de témoin' (OC I, 450). It is then only the thinnest line holding back the personalized from the anonymous, the human from the non-human: a mere *glissement* in the expeditions of both artists into a non-categorized space of substitutions and mutations, populated more than occasionally with hybrids and strange marriages. If the unprecedented musical scales of Michaux's 'violon-giraffe' and his night of passion at close quarters with a female caterpillar count among the more colourful of his 'mixed species' depictions, it is his recounting of a therapeutic transference into an inanimate form, usually the topic of a still-life, which suggests the most precise link:

Je mets une pomme sur la table; Puis je me mets dans cette pomme. Quelle tranquillité! [...] Quand j'arrivai dans la pomme, j'étais glacé. (OCI, 559–60)

How can one fail to conjure, in that image, Magritte's *Le Fils de l'homme*, where the greenness and natural simplicity of a huge apple blot out the identifying features of a man, or more especially *La Chambre d'écoute* where a similar apple has grown and grown to occupy the entire space of a room, as a rounded universe ousting hard edges and all other competing 'properties', to offer, as it were, an anaesthetic serenity in the infinite expanse of its closed circle?

* * *

Even as early as *Ecuador*, Michaux was registering the various aptitudes of writing and painting to cope with the immediacy of contact with the *étranger*: that is to say, the comparative assets and limits of two artistic 'languages' (even though, at the time, he was referring somewhat disparagingly to 'peindre' as the mimetic artist, faithful copyist of external things). *La Nuit remue* (1935) has a section of *Dessins commentés* (OCI, 436–40): words seeking to engage with drawings in a half-and-half encounter, where *dedans* and *dehors*, the unclarified and the analytical, the inward-probing spectator and the outward-crystallizing commentator/translator, intersect as a momentary hybrid. It is there, too, that Michaux states 'un dessin ne s'ausculte pas', standing there as it does, with no laboured or circuitous self-scrutiny, as its own challenging evidence. Is it that which tempts words to make their tentative approaches as an inadequately communicative twin, brought up in a different culture with a different language?

In the far-flung fertilization of his Asian journeys, the writer catches the pollen of two artistic 'spectacles' (precursors in their own way of those, geographically disconnected, of *Ailleurs* and those conjured into being by Magritte). Firstly, Chinese theatre, with its creative exploitation of a language of absence, so distinct from the ponderous 'representationalism' of much writing and staging in its Western counterpart:

Quand on lui voit verser, avec le plus grand soin, d'un broc inexistant, de l'eau inexistante, [...] l'existence de cette eau, non apparue, et pourtant évidente, devient en quelque sorte hallucinatoire. (OCI, 379–80)

And secondly, the *wayang kaelit* or shadow-theatre of Bali, also achieving its impact, with laconic speed and a 'magical' dynamics of void and presence, through a dexterous stitching of the real and the unreal:

Une fois plaquée contre l'écran la lumière passe à travers les dentelures, les devine et les illustre à la fois avec la netteté de l'évidence ou de la dure réalité, ou plutôt d'une surréalité tranchée au couteau et retirée du ciel. (*OC I*, 406)

It is with a statement in *La vie dans les plis* (1949), however, that one registers the explicit shift in Michaux towards a fuller intercourse with his artistic duality: 'Encore une époque de ma vie de finie. Maintenant, je vais peindre...' (*OC II*, 171). It is as much a journey into an unfamiliar, uncolonized territory, with its own webs of distribution, disconcerting perspectives and tortuous paths of self-discovery, as were *Grande Garabagne* or the *Pays de la Magie*. He writes:

Le déplacement des activités créatrices est un des plus étranges voyages en soi qu'on puisse faire.
On change de gare de triage quand on se met à peindre.
On retrouve le monde par une autre fenêtre. (*OC II*, 318)

And, though an exercise in words, what are these texts which will ricochet off various paintings by Magritte if not also a 'déplacement des activités créatrices' evolving in a half-and-half world, and a re-orientation of his own resources along lines of force not entirely broken in as his own? 'Je peins pour me déconditionner' (*OC III*, 543), says Michaux, meaning, among other things, the move towards an 'expatriation', away, especially, from the strictures and conventions of a 'well set in' verbal culture, with its congealed connotations, interlocking syntax, slow-moving articulations and established canons of style: what he calls an 'immense préfabriqué qu'on se passe de génération en génération, la langue, pour condamner à suivre, à être fidèle' (*OC III*, 550). Painting brings a still-unclarified antidote to his own imbalance, to his over-reliance on a monocular mode of seeing and execution. 'L'écriture comme seul pilier, c'était le déséquilibre', he confirms. It offers a freer sphere of manœuvre for being an 'infidel': one where 'le primitif, le

primordial mieux se retrouve' and where, more particularly, 'je me dégage de ce que j'ai haï le plus, le statique, le figé, le quotidien, le 'prévu', le fatal, le satisfait' (OC III, 573). So, it is a conducive arena for the 'betrayals' of the anti-artist, which may mean, essentially, the artist wilfully dissociating himself from the confines of his own expression. 'Va suffisamment loin de toi pour que ton style ne puisse plus suivre' (OC III, 1055), is his advice.

Michaux's textual forays into the innermost dynamics of other pictorial artists, Paul Klee, Zao Wou-ki, or those 'alienated' authors of the only half-penetrable paintings of which *Les Ravagés* navigates the graphic signals, are the illustration, not simply of the necessarily reformulated equations of a 'vie partagée', but of the compulsion to dislocate and elasticate his own perception by travelling between domains in the tensions of sameness and difference, and particularly between two languages, verbal and pictorial, each feeding into the mix the 'vocabulary', grammar, technique, space, speed and modus operandi of its own medium. Michaux speaks of balancing in that mid-stream for as long as is humanly sustainable: 'Je ne cherchai pas tout de suite à rejoindre le rivage' (OC III, 855).

The Magritte encounter is located in just such a mid-stream: 'dans l'eau changeante des résonances' (OC III, 888–95), to use the title of a section in *Face à ce qui se dérobe* (with its implication of simultaneous approach and withdrawal caught in a complex exchange). It satisfies the need to 'apprendre' and 'désapprendre' (OC III, 1041) in virtually the same instant. It plays between *paroles* and *non-paroles*, between the *moi* and its energetic undoing by another *moi*. Is it a form of what he calls 'stéréovision' (OC III, 860), enabling him with the maximum fluency to 'maintenir une ouverture à double niveau, à double appréhension' (OC III, 878)? His text is the record, the 'black box' as it were, of a journey into the problematic promptings of yet another *ailleurs*, and among the enigmatic signals of what is for him a less charted, less chartable land.

* * *

It remains to take at least one step, as an inviting prelude, into the actual echo-chamber where Michaux's words and Magritte's paint adhere, however tangentially, and in however evasive a dialogue. It is, as are all the texts of

En rêvant à partir de peintures énigmatiques, untitled, and therefore without explicit pointers or 'matching' links with the originals. The *écart*, in this respect, is left as potent as ever:

Ne verra-t-on jamais dans un beau visage silencieux, ou dans un visage sans corps, ou dans une tête en plâtre ou en marbre, le front immobile prendre soudain mémoire de ceci ou de cela et la tempe se mouiller du souvenir d'un ancien événement tragique?

Si. C'est arrivé. Ici même. Une tache de sang est apparue, et s'élargit.

Sur le blanc du visage sans ombre, le souvenir 'marquant', d'abord secret s'est trahi. Le sang va sourdre de la blessure de l'âme.

Au-delà de la tempe, l'intense rouge s'étend, s'aggrave, va devenir ineffaçable.

Par la fenêtre, dans le monde du dehors, des nuages passent, qui paraissent pensés; qui paraissent ralentis, qui demeurent, telle une situation grave qui ne sera jamais réglée, sur lesquels le rideau, à la fenêtre, ne sera jamais qu'à moitié fermé.

Sortie de la main du sculpteur, entrée dans la matière, la vie continue.

D'elle-même, enfin, la pierre ressent, manifeste. A présent elle revit un drame.

Saignant visage de marbre, par ailleurs inchangé, s'exprimant en silence. (*OC* III, 698)

The details given – the blanched plaster head with no body, bearing the spreading blood-mark of a wound on the temple, with lips and eyes sealed, positioned by a window with a heavy curtain partly drawn back, opening on to the unhurried passage of clouds beyond – make it comparatively easy to identify the painting which is, so to speak, its 'twin': namely *La Mémoire* (1948). But the essential communication and affinity in space is not in mimetic detail or descriptive reproduction. It is, as always in Michaux, in movements, in shifting resonances, in pulses of the underside, in unstable patterns of circulating energy, achieved, most subtly of all, 'par la voie des rythmes'.

The text is, on first contact and before it is anything else, a complex question: not a single, but a densely laminated question, characterized by its multiplication and layering. Initially, one does not see one's way through it. One does not absorb it quickly. The reader/viewer embarks on a gradual, slowly unfurling journey into a question-mark. The text begins, then, as prolonged imminence, associated with an enigma of potential *seeing*: 'Ne

verra-t-on jamais...'. The first paragraph, the avenue of approach, is a congregation of virtualities in motion. It is a series of alternatives within alternatives – 'dans un beau visage... ou dans un visage... ou dans une tête... en plâtre ou en marbre... mémoire de ceci ou de cela' – as if one were floating between different 'takes' on the same. There is, for the moment, no hierarchy of priorities, no co-ordinating perspective. What, even, are the *composants* that one should be holding together and retaining? Not only are they somewhat unanchored or unsupported, but they are part of a provisional (in the sense of forward-looking) indeterminacy which the impersonal 'on' form, encouraging no personal belonging by either the artist or the would-be spectator, and the withdrawal of seemingly necessary accompaniments ('visage sans corps') amplify. If, then, one's first encounter is less a *prise* than a *balancement*, it is a *balancement* not just between either and or, but, more extensively from an artistic point of view, between immobility and sudden movement ('le front immobile prendre soudain mémoire'), an inert object ('en marbre') and a surge of *élan vital*, the withheld ('visage silencieux') and the emergent, between impassivity and expression ('se mouiller'), tangible and intangible ('se mouiller du souvenir'), physical and abstract. It is poised between surface and depth spatially *and* temporally (one might say visually and mentally), in that what one is urged to see beyond the *nature morte* is the non-visual 'souvenir d'un ancien événement', and that the paragraph as a whole is held, as if between poles, between the prospect of an infinitely far-reaching future ('Ne verra-t-on jamais...') and an equally distant past ('un ancien événement tragique'). Do such virtualities, in a context where things can be either 'ceci ou cela', also extend to the mirages of words, with 'la tempe' that moistens becoming simultaneously and consubstantially 'le temps', induced as if involuntarily to leak memory?

If the first paragraph in itself, as a dynamic overture, is caught in a vibration of opposites, then it will be held in turn in a wider structural pattern of alternating movements harnessed as one, so illustrating in its own way Michaux's characteristic sensitivity to the multiple intertwines of an influential 'polyrythmie': 'Mais je n'ai pas assez dit l'importance omniprésente et sous-jacente des rythmes. Par-dessous ou par-dessus ceux que j'ai dit, il s'en trouvera toujours un qui [...] dérangera, dévastera, décomposera'

(*OC* II, 872). For what follows is a more fragmented sequence of three mini-paragraphs: no longer one single sentence, tortuous and sinuous, hovering nebulously at length between possibilities, but chopped into three and with each of those thirds decisively punctuated, curt, spasmodic: 'Si. C'est arrivé. Ici même...' (a ternary rhythm within a ternary rhythm) or 's'étend, s'aggrave, va devenir...' (pumped out in brief pulses or the throbs of a close chain-reaction). It is the global giving way to the more analytical, the composite to the 'deconstructed', the broadly connected to the individually disconnected. It is expansion followed by contraction (or contractions), the more dubious and speculative by sharp signals of 'thereness' ('Si. Ici même'), the unresolved options of the hypothetical by a rivetting of the eye and the impact of *evidence*. It is also a switch of time and tempo: not now from imminent future to long-term past suddenly crystallized in the present (though each does possess its own particular *vitesse*), but from the comparatively leisured overview of a part of the mind which is, say, *la ralentie* (*OC* I, 573) to the accelerated, jolted notations of the acutely focused observer.

The sequence of three short paragraphs creates in itself a rhythm: a rhythm of rapid transition, passage and movement *between*. It takes up, in its form and as it moves through its stages from one threshold to the next, the idea which exerts its authority as a driving principle from beginning to end: 's'élargit [...] s'étend'. The repetition between parts of specific words gives them, as well as a cadence, a penetrating power, as if not confined to one compartment, and a recurrent insistence, as if they were not quite mentally filed once and for all and assimilated but, rather, a series of 'apparitions' within the same, warranting a second look. ('Visage', 'sang', 'tempe' from the denser opening paragraph all recur: but now in a more active, *realized* context, each with its own sphere of action.) Sounds also interlock in approximately ternary formations, adding to the sense of secretive affinities, transfers of influence, and an elusive (perhaps imaginary) unity: 'Si. C'est arrivé. Ici même' in the first short paragraph, 'le sang va sourdre de la blessure' in the second, and 'Au-delà de la tempe, l'intense rouge s'étend' as the amplest and most extensive, as if cumulatively motivated, in the third.

The word 'marquant', isolated in inverted commas, stands out, arresting. More importantly, one gives it a more than usual, more than single (or simple) look. It is a word but not just a word, it is *more* than its own appearance. It corresponds therefore to (and is almost the expressive offshoot of) the phrase which has closed the previous paragraph, waiting to serve as trampoline: 'est apparue, et s'élargit'. From being just a visual mark – red splodge on the brow of the bust – it *enlarges* to become a thing in time, a moment-defining testimony, commemorating an undivulged 'ancien événement'. The one word, therefore, is salient both in space and time. It contains what reaches outwards and *deepens* at the same time, in parallel to the image of a secret '[qui] s'est trahi', causing depth to leak through surface. Small wave-like movements reinforce that 'passage', registering both physical advance and the upsurge of underlying value or significance: 'est apparue, et s'élargit' being now complemented, and in a sense consummated, by its twin, 's'étend, s'aggrave'.

The three-paragraph sequence reflects again a 'world between', especially with regard to immobility and mobility in time. It is coaxed by a temporal to-and-fro. It crystallizes in the transferences between a tenacious past ('C'est arrivé [...] est apparue [...] s'est trahi') and an indubitable future ('va sourdre [...] va devenir'). And, just as one follows the red visually and physically 'au-delà de la tempe', one passes, via some invisible burning filament, 'au-delà du temps', that is, between two more deeply written 'indélissables': that of an 'ancien événement tragique' which has never been erased and that of what is about to become a stigma for all time, '[qui] va devenir ineffaçable'. One should add that, whatever the nature of the orienting current followed by Michaux, it is an alternating current, not only in that it is fed simultaneously from two artistic directions, but in that reverse movements, though harnessed as one and the same, rapidly succeed each other: from 'Ne verra-t-on jamais...' to 'ancien événement' in the first sequence, to 'C'est arrivé...' to 'va devenir' in its more fragmented successor.

As if confirming the point, the text in its second half is swept again by the same overall pattern (does one call it cohesion-dispersion or, in a Baudelairean vein, 'centralization-vaporization?'): one continuous paragraph of seven or eight lines (in the typography of the original edition),

followed by three broken paragraphs of two to three lines each. In this respect, too, one is made to look twice. And yet, rebounding off the words 'Au-delà de...', what one discovers is a further 'beyond': dimensions after dimensions. As one moves to another part of the text, so one moves to another part of Magritte's picture: to the window and what lies past it. There is no resolution, no closure. The picture is, like the text, a half-and-half world. Away from the cryptic interior, the open window looks outward 'dans le monde du dehors' on to a familiar backdrop of clouds. But it is also looking further inwards: into the depths of interpretative or non-interpretative space and time. Similarly, the clouds are paradoxically outside, as one of the few naturalistic details available, but also 'inside' in that they are seemingly mental rather than 'real' ('qui paraissent *pensés*'). And just as the drawn-back curtain at the window 'ne sera jamais qu'à moitié fermé', so this half-and-half passage of writing, alternating between two rhythms, oscillates in the one unified paragraph between transience ('passent') and permanence ('demeurent'), the continuous and the discontinuous, sameness (in the sense of recurrent structural patterns and verbal repetitions such as 'qui paraissent [...] qui paraissent' or 'ne sera jamais [...] ne sera jamais') and incessant evolution and 'otherness', between something decreed for all time ('ne sera jamais que...') and yet eternally unfinished and inconclusively poised ('jamais réglée' or merely 'à moitié fermé'). One should note finally that, in this experience of contrasting 'times', the longer paragraph, more enveloped in itself with its unhurried revolving syntax and less urgent tempo, is internally reflective (with the outside looking in and vice versa) in that it could well be described by the very words within it: 'qui paraissent ralentis'.

So, in the switches of slowness and speed, one undergoes again the changed tempo of the tripartite finale. In one sense, it furthers the interplay of polarities which holds the piece in problematical suspense and to which the reading owes its inexhaustible transferences and transitions. It derives its creative tension from the movement between 'sortie' and 'entrée', from the fact that what is inevitably 'à moitié fermé' is also uninhibitedly 'manifeste', from the apparent impossibility that what is inanimate (whether marble face or painting as a whole) becomes exuberantly animate ('pierre

ressent...’, ‘marbre s’exprimant’), and from the dynamic re-spawning and reincarnation of time (‘ressent [...] elle revit’) on the part of a figure which never wavers from its changelessness (‘par ailleurs inchangé’). In another sense, the last three paragraphs, as they break their successive waves over the piece, do coincide with a decisive recognition: that this marble head, or the complex configuration of the work of art, has left the hand of the sculptor or painter (or, indeed, now the writer) to become a material object with an existence of its own, and its own new lease of life. It ‘disengages’. One has looked at it and re-looked, visually and mentally ridden the mobile surfaces and undersides of its unfathomable ‘double life’. But, in the end, it is itself and nothing but itself (‘D’elle-même, enfin’), and all its potential times join in the present, in the inviolable ‘is-ness’ (that unbroken continuity) of the work of art itself.

Michaux’s exploratory foray towards Magritte begins with silence (‘un beau visage silencieux’) and ends with silence (‘s’exprimant en silence’). Words loom from it and return to it like an *entrée* and a *sortie*. Silence has the last word. Perhaps, with the realization that a painting, for all the nomadic currents of its inner life, is nothing but itself, there is ultimately no other recourse. Perhaps more importantly – in view of the poet’s pursuit of the virtues of silence seen in the title of a collection such as *Jours de silence* and in his statement ‘Dans ma musique il y a beaucoup de silence’ (OC II, 335) – it represents, not only a text ‘venant d’un lointain / allant vers des lointains’ (OC III, 1213) and so repledging itself to the *insaisissable*, but also a final *entre-deux* in which text and painting, verbal and non-verbal, achieve their fruitful, if provisional, communication and their unfinished play of mirrors. Is Magritte’s *La Mémoire*, then, from end to end, a stimulating form of silence in Michaux’s music?

V Postface



Richard Bales

BERNARD BRUN

Hommage à Richard Bales, pionnier des études proustiennes

La critique génétique proustienne

Pendant l'été 1974 Florence Callu, conservateur au cabinet des Manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale, donnait à la toute jeune équipe Proust du Centre d'Histoire et d'Analyse des Manuscrits modernes (CAM), devenu ensuite l'Institut des Textes et Manuscrits modernes (ITEM), l'autorisation exceptionnelle de regarder ensemble les 62 cahiers de brouillon alors connus de Marcel Proust, en vue d'une analyse matérielle scientifique. Ainsi étions-nous confinés, Claudine Quémard et moi, avec une technicienne, dans les petites salles du fond, au haut de l'escalier en colimaçon, dans le secret le plus absolu, avec tous les documents autour de nous. Privilège vite contrarié par le bruit d'une machine à écrire, un peu à l'écart. Quel était l'autre privilège ? C'était Richard, qui avait obtenu le droit exorbitant de retaper les dactylographies de Marcel Proust. En l'occurrence, les états successifs des vacances à la plage, et de l'invention des jeunes filles, à l'intérieur du premier volume du roman.

Il n'existait pas à l'époque de photocopieuse, de lecteur-reproducteur de microfilms ni de traitement de texte dignes de ce nom. La machine à écrire était manuelle. On imagine l'ampleur de son projet : sans ce passe-droit, Richard aurait dû recopier à la main des dactylographies corrigées avec des additions et des remaniements autographes extensifs. Nous sympathisâmes immédiatement sur des problèmes de fond : comment transcrire des inédits, quel code adopter et quels principes ? Et comment justifier un travail critique plus long que celui de l'écrivain sur son œuvre ?

Le problème de la transcription (et donc de l'édition) était vraiment crucial à l'époque, avant la photographie numérique et l'informatique. À l'ancienne transcription diplomatique s'opposait désormais celle que Richard et l'équipe Proust avaient choisie, sans concertation préalable: une transcription linéaire, raisonnée, obligeant à reproduire sur la ligne et dans l'ordre chronologique toutes les modifications de l'écriture (premier jet, ratures et additions), dans l'ordre où elles ont été faites. Le texte est ainsi mis en cause et déstabilisé. Il n'y a plus d'édition définitive, le texte n'est pas clos sur lui-même.

Son édition, *Bricquebec*, était publiée en 1989.¹ Richard a pu démontrer que dans son état primitif, le premier volume du roman s'arrêtait à la fin du séjour au bord de la mer et, d'autre part, plusieurs séjours (trois à un certain moment) ont coexisté, avant même la création du personnage d'Albertine. En établissant son édition, Richard se trouvait confronté à une série de problèmes: comment reproduire les modifications manuscrites, autographes ou allographes, d'une dactylographie? Et surtout, il fallait résoudre la question de savoir comment rendre compte des modifications dans les états successifs des cahiers, des manuscrits et des dactylographies. Marcel Proust en effet recopiait ses brouillons et transformait ses manuscrits à l'infini, avant d'établir des dactylographies en très grand nombre. Il fallait donc rendre compte de la macrogenèse (l'évolution des grandes parties du roman, des grands ensembles) autant que de la microgenèse (transformations de détail). Le travail syntagmatique (les modifications de la grammaire narrative) se complique de l'axe paradigmatique (selon qu'on étudie une année particulière, ou une unité de récit à travers plusieurs années de transformations). Richard avait compris le problème génétique: comment expliquer le déplacement des unités du récit? Comment faire la synthèse du paradigme et du syntagme? De la microgenèse et de la macrogenèse? Comment expliquer au lieu de visualiser? Analyser au lieu de reproduire? Richard avait compris qu'il fallait privilégier le discours de genèse (explication des processus d'écriture du roman) au détriment de la reproduction photographique, qui n'explique rien.

1 Richard Bales, '*Bricquebec*'. *Prototype d'«A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs»* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989).

La méthode de Richard Bales consistait en la conjugaison de l'étude des documents de rédaction avec les recherches documentaires et socio-historiques, complémentaires et indispensables. Le texte et ses avant-textes (les manuscrits) ne s'expliquent que par leur contexte. L'histoire littéraire est ainsi réhabilitée, contre la linguistique structurale, mais en reprenant ses méthodes. Richard l'avait compris en même temps que l'équipe Proust (d'où la surprise émerveillée de la première rencontre), et sa collaboration doit se concrétiser, prochainement, par son édition du Cahier 27. Une collaboration internationale permet en effet, depuis 2008, de commencer l'édition critique et génétique des 75 cahiers de Marcel Proust. Richard y aura collaboré, jusqu'à sa disparition dramatique et inopinée. Quatre volumes sont parus, chez Brepols à Anvers, et le cahier dont s'occupait Richard va suivre, selon ses notes récupérées dans son ordinateur.

Proust et le Moyen Âge

D'une certaine façon, Richard a commencé et terminé sa carrière par des études sur le Moyen Âge chez Proust. Sa thèse sur Proust et le Moyen Âge paraissait en 1975, et intégrait déjà tout un travail sur les cahiers qui justifiait son projet sur les dactylographies.² Enfin, la dernière réflexion de Richard sur le sujet médiéval, trente ans après, dans le *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust* en 2004 permet de délimiter clairement ses intentions et l'évolution de sa pensée.³

Marcel Proust était un écrivain de la fin du XIX^e siècle, puisque le plus important de son roman était esquissé avant 1914. Sa vision du Moyen Âge est déterminée par celle de son époque; il faut donc l'étudier d'abord, avant de voir comment l'écrivain a pu se démarquer de l'esprit 'médiéval' de son temps. Proust ignore le romantisme médiéval en peinture ou en littérature.

2 Richard Bales, *Proust and the Middle Ages* (Paris: Droz, 1975).

3 *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust*, sous la direction d'Annick Bouillaguet et Brian Rogers (Paris: Champion, 2004), entrée 'Moyen Âge'.

Victor Hugo n'est pas une de ses références. Chateaubriand ou Nerval le sont pour d'autres raisons. En architecture médiévale, Alexandre Lenoir, le fondateur du Musée des monuments français, n'est pas cité. Prosper Mérimée, qui a inventé l'idée de 'monument historique' l'est pour de tout autres raisons. Proust s'en tient à une vulgate plus récente, après le Second Empire, une trilogie qu'il a consacrée lui-même: Viollet-le-Duc, l'architecte de toutes les restaurations (après Mérimée et avant Abadie et Boeswillwald) et auteur de dictionnaires médiévaux qui font toujours autorité; Emile Mâle, l'historien d'art qui, d'une réédition à l'autre de son *Art religieux*, élimine les références à Viollet-le-Duc disgracié après la chute du second empire; John Ruskin enfin, le plus important, mais découvert trop tard, et critiqué sans cesse. Proust l'a traduit, et il serait passé à la postérité comme historien d'art et spécialiste de Ruskin si cette traduction critique ne lui avait justement permis de se forger une esthétique personnelle, à son tour, et d'écrire son roman sur des bases théoriques solides et sérieuses.

L'œuvre de Marcel Proust témoigne d'une grande effervescence critique, après son premier roman avorté: *Jean Santeuil* (1900). Jusqu'en 1910, il accumulait articles de critique et d'esthétique, traductions de Ruskin, pastiches et enfin un essai projeté sur le principal critique littéraire de l'époque. Sans avoir étudié cette problématique, Richard n'a pu l'ignorer, car elle fonde ses recherches sur le Moyen Âge.

Les études de Richard sur le Moyen Âge chez Proust – qu'il s'agisse de l'analyse de l'église de Réveillon, des personnages médiévaux, ou de l'imagerie médiévale – sont devenues classiques et ont défriché un champ qui s'est avéré particulièrement riche (comme le montrent les études qui sont venues compléter celles de Richard).⁴ Mais c'est sans doute la théma-

4 On retiendra surtout celles de Caroline Szylowicz, 'Le Miroir des images: étude de quelques dessins médiévaux de Marcel Proust', *Bulletin d'informations proustiennes*, 29 (1997), 7-29; Juliette Hassine, 'La Charité de Giotto ou l'Allégorie de l'écriture dans l'œuvre de Marcel Proust', *Bulletin d'informations proustiennes*, 26 (1995), 23-43; Alberto Beretta Anguissola, 'Les Archétypes de la Recherche: Proust ésotérique', *Marcel Proust* 2, Nouvelles Directions de la recherche proustienne 1 (Paris-Caen: Lettres Modernes Minard, 2000), pp. 79-96; et Marcel Muller, 'Création et

tique de l'architecture médiévale qui constitue l'axe central de *Proust and the Middle Ages*. Richard analyse le Moyen Âge à travers les trois églises de Combray, Balbec et Venise, dans une démonstration magistrale, qui part d'Augustin Thierry, passe par les manuscrits de rédaction de *Guermites* et aboutit à Ruskin. En effet, le problème de la modernité de Proust passe par Ruskin.

Il y a plusieurs façons d'envisager le rapport de Marcel Proust à John Ruskin. On n'est plus aujourd'hui uniquement dans la question de la critique de Ruskin par son traducteur (esthétisme social, restauration des monuments, épopée du peuple et bibliothèques populaires, etc.). La question de savoir si Proust savait l'anglais devient sans objet, quand on a accès aux cahiers de traduction de Maman et de son fils. Oui, Maman traduisait, le fils repassait dessus et ajoutait des préfaces et une annotation critique et ironique, qui démontaient les thèses ruskiniennes pour les remplacer par celle du futur romancier. Mais comme pour les pastiches trois ans plus tard, il ne s'agit pas de critiquer pour critiquer, mais de construire sa propre esthétique en la confrontant aux idées des autres. Lire, c'est mettre en œuvre son esthétique.

Les travaux plus récents d'Edward Bizub, de Diane Leonard et de Cynthia Gamble complètent les analyses de Richard. Tandis que Bizub amorçait une réflexion théorique sur la traduction en général et la poétique de la traduction en particulier,⁵ Gamble étudie de près les traductions de Proust.⁶ Savait-il l'anglais? Pourquoi Ruskin? Pourquoi le traduire, en concurrence avec Robert de La Sizeranne? Quelques éléments de réponse sont importants: l'anglomanie de la fin du siècle, des affinités de sensibilité et de pensée, en particulier le lien établi entre la religion et l'art, ou le

procréation ou allégorie et jalousie dans la *Recherche*, *Marcel Proust* 2, Nouvelles Directions de la recherche proustienne 1 (Paris-Caen: Lettres Modernes Minard, 2000), pp. 249-70.

5 Edward Bizub, *La Venise intérieure, Proust et la poétique de la traduction* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1991).

6 Cynthia Gamble, 'Proust traducteur de *La Bible d'Amiens*', *Bulletin d'informations proustiennes*, 28 (1997), 31-42.

goût des cathédrales. Diane Leonard reprend Jean Autret, qui voit dans Proust un disciple de Ruskin, et Jo Yoshida qui rejette cette influence ruskinienne.⁷ Leonard remet le char sur la route par ses analyses textuelles et sa profonde connaissance du Moyen Âge. Il s'agit de relire le langage figuratif du gothique triomphant (la bible historiée des cathédrales), pour retrouver une certaine innocence de l'œil (qui aboutit à l'impressionnisme). Il s'agit aussi d'effacer le nom de Ruskin, c'est-à-dire de cacher le sens pour le rendre difficile d'accès: 'Ce n'est qu'en effaçant John Ruskin de son texte que Marcel Proust pouvait devenir vraiment ruskinien'.⁸

Mais Richard s'intéressait aussi à l'architecture du roman: le dernier chapitre de *Proust and the Middle Ages*, sur la structure du roman, reprend l'idée de la couture et de l'église, de l'architecture à large portée, immense métaphore du roman fleuve. Il ne s'agit plus de ce que Marcel Proust a pu tirer du Moyen Âge réinterprété dans la seconde moitié du XIX^e siècle, mais de la façon dont il s'est fabriqué une certaine idée, toute personnelle. Le Narrateur déclare à la fin construire son roman comme une cathédrale avec ses parties symétriques, ses portails et ses tours, son chevet et son abside. Même s'il a fallu plusieurs siècles pour la construire, le résultat est synthétique, comme pour son roman qui est fait de morceaux ajoutés l'un à l'autre, à travers une vie d'écrivain. Dans sa correspondance, celui-ci suggère son intention de donner à chacune des parties de son roman un sous-titre tiré du plan des cathédrales, comme James Joyce voulait numéroter chacun des chapitres de *Ulysses* d'après les chants de son modèle, Homère.

Au-delà de cette architecture médiévale et scripturale, Richard avait vu la cruauté féodale de la duchesse de Guermantes, la loi vassale et tout aussi archaïque de Françoise, les Français selon Saint-André des Champs qui se retrouveront incarnés à la fin par l'aristocratique Robert de Saint-

7 Jean Autret, *L'Influence de Ruskin sur la vie, les idées et l'œuvre de Marcel Proust* (Genève: Droz, 1955) et Jo Yoshida, 'Proust contre Ruskin: la genèse de deux voyages dans la *Recherche* d'après des brouillons inédits', Paris, Sorbonne, thèse inédite, 2 vols, 1978.

8 Diane Leonard, 'La Langue du silence: inscriptions ruskiniennes dans la *Recherche*', *Marcel Proust 2*, Nouvelles Directions de la recherche proustienne 1 (Paris-Caen: Lettres Modernes Minard, 2000), pp. 115-39.

Loup et les soldats de la Grande Guerre. Mais à la fin du roman comme de la guerre, l'église de Combray est détruite, comme l'univers mondain qui se prévalait de valeurs féodales et catholiques, selon le baron de Charlus, même si plus personne n'y croit! Vision pessimiste de Marcel Proust plus que de Richard, qui ne l'était guère!

Le Moyen Âge de la duchesse de Guermantes

Pour terminer cet hommage à Richard Bales, je voudrais maintenant replacer son *Proust and the Middle Ages* au sein de la critique génétique, qu'il avait contribué à fonder avec nous, il y a trente-cinq ans maintenant. Les documents de rédaction (l'archive proustienne) sont maintenant reclassés. On peut reconstituer la biographie de l'œuvre. A partir de 1908, préparé par des articles de critique littéraire et d'esthétique, un roman inachevé, des traductions de Ruskin, des pastiches et des mondanités, c'est un projet critique qui se développe, contre Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve. Cet essai se développe en un récit qui devient progressivement un roman. Sainte-Beuve analysait le moi social de l'artiste, tandis que Marcel Proust privilégie le moi personnel. Cette personnalité intérieure développe, pour illustrer le propos de l'écrivain, une théorie du souvenir qui, d'un exemple à l'autre, assurera la suite et la structure des développements romanesques. Et le Moyen Âge apparaît dès le départ, dès les premiers brouillons de cette nuit mérovingienne: l'église et le château, même si la suite du roman vient détruire cette illusion médiévale.

Richard Bales avait étudié les quelques brouillons du 'Contre Sainte-Beuve-récit' que l'on pouvait connaître à l'époque par l'édition de Bernard de Fallois: les cahiers 6 et 7.⁹ Dans ces cahiers, Madame de Guermantes n'est pas encore 'duchesse', à peine comtesse. La conversation avec Maman s'in-

9 La nouvelle édition de la Pléiade les a republiés et les a replacés dans l'ordre du roman imprimé (*Du côté de chez Swann* et *Le Côté des Guermantes*). Mais en réalité, dans l'ordre de la genèse, c'est-à-dire dans le temps de l'écriture, le Cahier 7 précède le Cahier 6.

sère dans des fragments narratifs qui la préparent et l'introduisent. Ceux-ci en effet illustrent la théorie critique et esthétique qui aurait dû former le cœur de cette conversation et qui formera, plus tard, dans la composition du roman, la conversation de *La Prisonnière* et la théorie du *Temps retrouvé*. Quel rôle le Moyen Âge tient-il dans cette théorie?

Dans le Cahier 7, la description de l'église de Combray est négative. C'est déjà le curé qui se plaint de la vétusté et de la laideur, contre l'opinion du héros et de sa grand-mère. Cette description précède un fragment de conversation. Le héros a passé quelques jours à Guermentes et en explique à Maman la poésie. Ce n'est pas seulement un nom, ni seulement un château, mais une église abbatiale, un cloître qui conduit au château (f^{os} 10 à 141^o). On voit déjà le récit se développer en roman (Swann, les Verdurin, Charlus). Dans les deux cahiers que Richard Bales a étudiés, Marcel Proust travaille par ensembles narratifs, par fragments autour d'un objet ou d'une personne (l'église, Swann et les Verdurin, Méséglise, et Guermentes), se réservant par la suite l'articulation entre les scènes. Le héros parle avec Maman de Guermentes où il allait. C'est un passé répétitif et révolu, comme toujours. Les tours du château datent du XIII^e siècle, et ont vu construire les clochers de Chartres, de Laon, etc. La précédence de Guermentes est déjà appuyée.

C'est toutefois encore à cette époque une rêverie sur le charme poétique de l'ancienne aristocratie, qui dans le roman fera partie des erreurs du héros dénoncées par le Narrateur. D'autres fragments du Cahier 7 concernent l'église de Combray, médiévale bien sûr et la seule à ne pas avoir été restaurée. On reconnaît la dispute sur la restauration des monuments médiévaux, en même temps que la rêverie qui deviendra 'Noms de Pays' ou 'L'âge des noms'.

Le Cahier 6 est plus spectaculaire et plus dramatique. La grand-mère (double de la mère) y intervient massivement. Elle fait admirer aux enfants les clochers de Chartres. Le Narrateur évoque un séjour à Venise en sa compagnie. En se promenant lors d'un séjour à Guermentes le héros rentrera chez sa mère à la vue de ces mêmes clochers. Quand Maman doit rentrer à Paris seule ou avec le petit frère, tout le monde l'accompagne jusqu'à la gare de Chartres, et la grand-mère loue les clochers de la cathédrale comme elle

fera de celui de Combray: 'S'il était pianiste, il ne jouerait pas sec' (Cahier 6 endroit, f^{os} 71v° à 68v°). Mais ce qui domine, c'est la tristesse du départ de Maman de Combray. Le motif maternel s'oppose nettement au motif médiéval: 'Je ne voyais au contraire jamais sans tristesse ces clochers de Chartres, car souvent c'est jusqu'à Chartres que nous accompagnions Maman quand elle quittait Combray avant nous' (Cahier 6 endroit, f° 69v°).

Le fragment suivant reprend la conversation du Cahier 7: 'Mais si tu étais si bien [à Guermantes], pourquoi es-tu revenu?' (Cahier 6 endroit, f° 68v°). C'est à cause, déjà, d'une promenade dans la plaine et la vue des clochers de Chartres. L'autre partie du cahier reviendra sur cette conversation avec Maman. Cette fois ci, c'est la vue de Combray qui pousse le héros à quitter Guermantes pour rejoindre sa mère. Guermantes et Combray représentent ici deux lieux, deux personnes antinomiques.

Continuons dans l'autre sens et dans l'ordre des fragments du cahier de brouillon. Après la laide église médiévale de Combray, c'est la sinistre histoire de Golo et de Geneviève de Brabant qui est évoquée par la lanterne magique (Cahier 6 envers, f° 2r°). Le village est marqué par le clocher de l'église qui est lui-même marqué par un Moyen Âge aussi légendaire qu'architectural. Dans le même cahier envers (f^{os} 7r° à 9r°), à Guermantes le héros est invité par madame de Villeparisis et son mari (en addition) et la vue de Combray le rappelle vers sa mère, certes, mais la mère est à Paris cette fois. Comme autrefois, quand il quittait Guermantes pour Combray, il y a plusieurs couches de passé et de ressouvenir. Et dans cette conversation avec Maman, au retour éclate l'émotion de la séparation future et de la mort de Maman: 'Nous nous taisions tous les deux' (Cahier 6 envers, f° 9r°). Voici un extrait de ce magnifique brouillon où le plaisir médiéval est submergé par l'angoisse enfantine:

Cela me fait de la peine mon pauvre loup me dit Maman d'une voix troublée de penser qu'autrefois mon petit avait du chagrin comme cela quand je quittais Combray. Mais mon loup il faut nous faire un cœur un peu plus dur que cela; tu étais bien à Guermantes, et tu es revenu pour cela! Qu'est-ce que tu aurais fait si ta Maman avait été en voyage – les jours m'auraient paru longs – Mais si j'avais été partie, pour des mois, pour des années, pour... (Cahier 6 envers, f° 8r°)

Suit le bouleversant: 'Nous nous taisions tous les deux'. Il y a toujours plusieurs épaisseurs de passé, et tous ces passés sont révolus. Les fragments suivants sur la crypte de l'église de Combray (f° 42r°) renvoient à Augustin Thierry et donnent au village, et donc à l'enfance, une épaisseur archaïque, comme un passé criminel angoissant et cruel qui fonderait une culpabilité transférentielle. Tout de suite après, l'angoisse du coucher et du baiser de Maman vient recouvrir le motif médiéval (Cahier 6 envers, f°s 43r° à 52r°). Cette peur prend le pas définitivement sur la rêverie des temps anciens.

On voit Guermantes en rivalité avec Combray, tous deux pourtant se targuant d'ancienneté médiévale, avec un gros avantage pour l'église de Combray. Les clochers de Chartres rivalisent aussi avec celui de Combray, mais à armes égales. Et qui peut rivaliser avec Maman? Pas madame de Guermantes ni madame de Villeparisis. Dans d'autres brouillons, la comtesse de Guermantes se présente comme la cruelle suzeraine de ses vassaux ou la sanglante châtelaine de ses serfs. Comme madame de Villeparisis, elle se trouvera vite reléguée à Paris, locataires toutes deux du même hôtel particulier, qu'elles partagent avec des boutiquiers et des bourgeois, dont le Narrateur.

Voilà une mise à jour que Richard Bales aurait pu faire lui-même, qu'il avait faite partiellement dans le *Dictionnaire Marcel Proust* en 2004. Mais il avait tant d'autres centres d'intérêt, entre Wagner, Bruckner et Mahler, entre la Roumanie et le symbolisme belge, entre théâtre et poésie: Maeterlinck, Rodenbach et Verhaeren. Je l'avais accompagné à Cluj-Napoca, au pied des Carpates, pour un congrès proustien en l'an 2000, mais il me parlait d'autres escapades roumaines, un pays qu'il aimait bien. Oui, beaucoup d'autres centres d'intérêt, sans parler de la vie parisienne dans laquelle il s'engageait et où je commençais à l'accompagner, dans les musées, les expositions et les restaurants, sans savoir qu'il était déjà trop tard. Il m'a donné sur son lit d'hôpital le billet qu'il avait pris pour la dernière de Tannhäuser, à l'opéra de la Bastille: 'Je crois que je ne pourrai pas y aller'. C'est Parsifal qu'il aurait voulu entendre, une dernière fois, avant d'être ramené à Belfast. Trop tard, j'ai pu le voir deux fois par semaine à l'hôpital Saint-Antoine à Paris, pendant un mois trop rapide, sous prétexte d'assurer l'intendance et surtout la blanchisserie. J'ai vu l'inquiétude héroïque et discrète de Richard Bales.

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