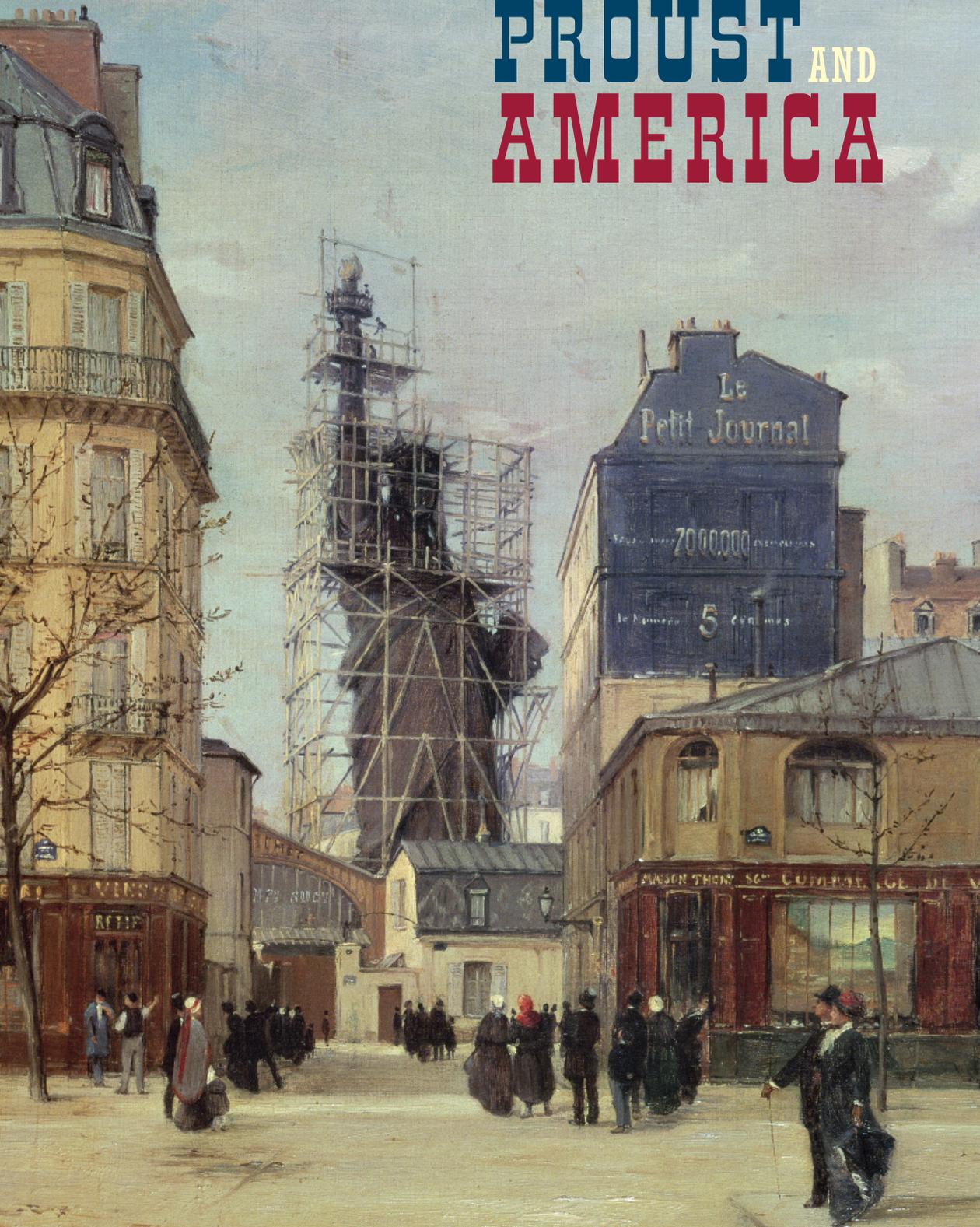


PROUST AND AMERICA



MICHAEL MURPHY

PROUST AND AMERICA

Proust and America

Michael Murphy

Liverpool University Press

First published 2007 by
Liverpool University Press
4 Cambridge Street
Liverpool L69 7ZU

Copyright © 2007 Michael Murphy

The right of Michael Murphy to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication data

A British Library CIP record is available

ISBN 978-1-84631-114-7 cased



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

Typeset by Carnegie Book Production Ltd, Lancaster
Printed and bound in the European Union by Bell and Bain Ltd, Glasgow

Contents

List of Plates	vi
Acknowledgments	vii
Notes on References and Abbreviations	ix
Introduction: The Spirit of Liberty	i
1 <i>Le Côté de New York</i> , or Marcel in America	16
2 The Impossible Possible Philosophers' Man	64
3 <i>A Bout de Souffle</i>	112
4 Exquisite Corpses/Buried Texts	148
5 Proust's Butterfly	195
Bibliography	242
Index	250

List of Plates

The plates are reproduced between pages 212 and 213

- 1 James McNeill Whistler, *Blue and Silver: Trouville* (ca. 1865), 59.3 × 72.8 cm., oil on canvas, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C., Gift of Charles Lang Freer (F1902.137a-b).
- 2 James McNeill Whistler, *Design for wall decoration at Aubrey House* (ca. 1873–74), 13.6 × 10.2 cm., charcoal and gouache on brown paper, photo © Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, Birnie Philip Bequest.
- 3 James McNeill Whistler, *Pink Note: The Novelette* (early 1880s), 25.3 × 15.5 cm., watercolor on paper, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C., Gift of Charles Lang Freer (F1902.137a-c).
- 4 Marcel Proust, *Ressemblance de Karlich et d'Anatole Le Roy Beaulieu* (1908), *Lettres à Reynaldo Hahn* (Paris: Gallimard, 1956), p. 163 © Éditions Gallimard.
- 5 James McNeill Whistler, *Note in Green and Brown: Orlando at Coombe* (1884), 14.8 × 9 cm., photo © Hunterian Museum and Art Gallery, University of Glasgow, Birnie Philip Bequest.
- 6 James McNeill Whistler, *Design for a dress for Miss Cicely H. Alexander* (1873), pen and brown ink on off-white laid paper, letter in album, 18.8 × 22.9cm., The British Museum, London (M.503).
- 7 James McNeill Whistler, *Blanchissage à Cologne* (1858), 15.1 × 9.8 cm., pencil on white paper, Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C., Gift of Charles Lang Freer (F1898.201).

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for its generous award of a period of research leave that made the writing of this book possible. I am particularly grateful to the two anonymous AHRC assessors and Patrick McGuinness for supporting my application.

My thanks, too, to Professor Kenneth Newport, Dr. Terry Phillips, and Ms. Lucy Kay at Liverpool Hope University for the award of several shorter periods of teaching relief. I would also like to acknowledge Dr. Mike Glenday, whose advice at an early stage in the development of this book pointed me in the right direction. More recently, I am grateful to my new colleagues at Nottingham Trent University, in particular Dr. Lynne Hapgood, Professor Claire Jowitt, Professor Tim Youngs, Dr. Catherine Byron, and Mahendra Solanki for helping me to find my feet.

Thanks are due to the editors of *Women: a cultural review*, *European Journal of American Culture*, and *Comparative American Studies* for permission to reprint material that appears in Chapters 2, 3 and 5.

Last but not least, my gratitude to Anthony Cond, commissioning editor at Liverpool University Press, for his tireless enthusiasm and support.

I first read Proust when I was nineteen, ostensibly employed as a Claims and Insurance clerk by a Merseyside bus company. The origins of *Proust and America* date back to 2000 and a conference paper I gave at the Mona Bismarck Foundation in Paris. Over the past two decades, then, Proust has become an integral part of my reading and writing life. He is one of the family, and like all family members he has tested the goodwill and patience of many. For their generosity of spirit, sense of humor, offerings of food and wine, beds for the night, holiday homes-from-home, intellectual vigor, sound counsel, *le grand crack*, sagacity, and general willingness to listen, my heartfelt thanks are due to: Miriam Allott, Nick Benefield, Brenda

Breen, Simon and Jenny Craske, Bob Hornby, Hester Jones, Paul Leahy, John and Pauline Lucas, Alison Mark, Terry and Gladys Murphy, Judith Palmer, Ralph Pite, David and Angela Rees-Jones, Maurice Riordan, Matt and Monika Simpson, Merylyn Smith, Alan Wilson, and Pam Windsor. Above all, my thanks go to Deryn and Eira for their infinite kindness and *joie de vivre*.

Notes on References and Abbreviations

I have opted for the Gallimard one-volume edition of *A la recherche du temps perdu* (Paris: Gallimard Quarto, 2004), edited under the direction of Jean Yves-Tadié. My reason for doing so is that I anticipate readers will find this edition more accessible than Tadié's admittedly exhaustive but extremely expensive four-volume Bibliothèque de la Pléiade edition. References in my text are therefore to page number, followed by volume and page number from *In Search of Lost Time*, 6 vols. (London: Penguin, 2002), translated under the general editorship of Christopher Prendergast. This is the first completely new translation of *A la recherche* since the 1920s, and therefore the only English-language edition to be able to take advantage of the 1954 and 1987 Pléiade editions.

List of abbreviations

- ASB* *Against Sainte-Beuve and Other Essays*, trans. with an introduction and notes by John Sturrock (London: Penguin Books, 1988)
- C 1908* *Le Carnet de 1908*. Établi et présenté par Philip Kolb. Cahiers Marcel Proust nouvelle série 8 (Paris: Gallimard, 1976)
- Corr.* *Correspondance de Marcel Proust (1880–1922)*, ed. Philip Kolb, 21 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1970–1993)
- CSB* *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, preceded by *Pastiches et mélanges*, and followed by *Essais et articles*, ed. Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971)
- FSP* “Filial Sentiments of a Parricide”, trans. Barbara Anderson, in *Great Short Stories of the Masters*, ed. Charles Neider (New York: Cooper Square Press, 2002)

- JS* *Jean Santeuil*, preceded by *Les Plaisirs et les Jours*, ed. Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre (Paris: Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, 1971)
- JS English* *Jean Santeuil*, trans. Gerard Hopkins, with a preface by André Maurois (London: Penguin Books, 1985)
- PJ* *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, included in *Jean Santeuil*, 3–178.
- PR* *Pleasures and Regrets*, trans. Louise Varese, preface D.J. Enright (London: Peter Owen, 1986)
- OR* *On Reading* (“Sur la lecture”), preface to *Sésame et les Lys*, trans and ed. Jean Autret and William Burford, intro. William Burford (London: Souvenir Press, 1971)
- ORR* *On Reading Ruskin*, prefaces to *La Bible d’Amiens* and *Sésame et les Lys* with selections from the notes to the translated texts, trans. and ed. Jean Autret, William Burford, and Phillip J. Wolfe, intro. Richard Macksey (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987)
- SL* *Selected Letters*, ed. Philip Kolb, trans. Joanna Kilmartin, Terence Kilmartin, and Ralph Manheim, 4 vols. (London: Harper Collins, 1983–2000).

In addition, the following abbreviations are used for those works by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Edgar Allan Poe cited in the text:

Ralph Waldo Emerson

- EL* *Essays and Lectures*, ed. Joel Porte (New York: Library of America, 1983)
- PE* *The Portable Emerson*, ed. Carl Bode in collaboration with Malcolm Cowley (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977)
- SPP* *Selected Poetry and Prose* (2nd ed.), ed. and intro. Reginald L. Cook (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969)

Edgar Allan Poe

- CS* *The Complete Stories*, intro. John Seelye (London: Everyman, 1992)

- FHU* *The Fall of the House of Usher and Other Writings*. ed. and intro. David Galloway (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 2003)
- MRM* *The Murders in the Rue Morgue: The Dupin Tales*, ed. and intro. Matthew Pearl (London: Vintage, 2006)
- ST* *Selected Tales*, ed., intro., and notes David Van Leer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998)
- TMI* *Tales of Mystery and Imagination*, ed. Graham Clarke (London and Vermont: Everyman, 1993)

For my son, Felix

*Darling, when love fails to speak
the magic words I'm yours,
think this: Out in the restless dark,
Mars and Venus, Orion and the Pleiades
look on, breaking their hearts
among leaf-shadow, between worlds.*

Introduction: *The Spirit of Liberty*

In a little hotel where we stayed some time they spoke of us as English, no we said no we are Americans, at last one of them a little annoyed at our persistence said but it is all the same.

— Gertrude Stein, *Paris France*

It may appear willful not to say eccentric to regard Proust's writing as having been in any way influenced by America. Proust never visited the United States nor showed any known inclination to do so. Even had he been offered passage to New York, as is Odette de Crécy by one of her young lovers, we can imagine him doing precisely as she does: handing the ticket to someone waiting at the dock side and returning straight to the comforts of Paris. Does this mean Proust was uninterested in the States? We might usefully approach the question from the perspective of his relationship with Britain. Despite plans to cross *La Manche*, Proust was never to set foot in England. His grasp of the language was by his own admission shaky. "[J]e lis l'anglais très difficilement" [I read English with great difficulty], he wrote Violet Schiff in 1919 (*Corr.* XVIII:475; my translation). His inability to speak English fluently he put down to his learning it while suffering with asthma: "et ne pouvais parler, que je l'ai appris des yeux et ne sais ni prononcer les mots, ni les reconnaître quand on les prononce" [and I couldn't talk, I learned with my eyes and am unable to pronounce the words or to recognize them when pronounced by others] (*Corr.* III:221; *SL* I:290).

Proust grew up at the height of Anglophilia in Paris, and his interest in British art and culture is a reflection of the times. What knowledge he had

of Britain came either from his reading (the periodical *La Revue des deux mondes* advertised itself as “Anglophile”) or from friends such as Robert d’Humières, author of *L’île et l’empire de Grande-Bretagne: Angleterre, Egypt, Inde* and the translator of Rudyard Kipling; Robert de Billy, who worked for three years at the French Embassy in London, from where he kept Proust abreast of the Wilde scandal; the painter Jacques Emile-Blanche, who, a resident among the Anglo-French artists’ colony at Dieppe, was the source of much news and gossip about literary London; and Marie Nordlinger, the English cousin of the composer Reynaldo Hahn, with whom Proust worked on his translations of Ruskin.

The aim of this study is to extend the influence of the Anglophone world to embrace America. That Proust has influenced aspects of American literature is both incontrovertible and uncontroversial. In his influential chapter on Proust in *Axel’s Castle* (1931), Edmund Wilson sees Proust alongside James Joyce as marking the final “evolutionary” stage in the development of European fiction. After them, the baton would be handed over to those writers whom Wilson mentions at the close of the chapter: Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Wilder, and Parker. Wilson is, of course, looking forward to developments in American literature, where Proust’s influence has indeed proved significant. We might think of Edith Wharton, Edmund White, Harold Brodkey, James Baldwin, Richard Wright (who spoke of being “crushed” by the hopelessness of ever himself depicting the lives of black Americans with equal thoroughness), the sinuous poetry of C.K. Williams, or the plays of August Wilson (“Black America’s Proust”). Even Philip Roth’s fictional Zuckerman is touted as “The Marcel Proust of New Jersey.” While such future developments stand to one side of those with which this study is concerned, they nevertheless indicate that part of the attraction of Wilson’s argument lies in his having charted not only a clear line of development in Proust’s writings, one that moves from romanticism to modernism, but that he opens the door to the great emerging power of the twentieth century: the United States.

A defining feature of discussions and analyses of modernism is the difficulty of accounting for its origins. What consistently emerges from all such attempts is an agreement that modernism was an international movement that came to prominence in different places at different times. Overall, however, there has tended to be an emphasis on the Anglo-French axis in early developments of modernism. Thus the Founding Fathers of the movement include Flaubert, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, and Huysmans, after whom come Debussy, Valéry, and Proust himself. Only then do we find

the geographical and linguistic borders being pushed back to take stock of the wider English-speaking nations: Pound, Eliot, Joyce, Stein, Moore, and Woolf. Yet if behind the modernism of Proust we acknowledge the presence of Baudelaire and Huysmans, then we must learn to accommodate the influence of Edgar Allan Poe; if we recognize in Proust aspects of symbolism, then a key presence will be Ralph Waldo Emerson; and if we read Proust's experiments in fiction alongside a near-contemporary, such as the composer Claude Debussy, then the provocative figure of James McNeill Whistler heaves into view. Certainly Proust himself went some way to acknowledging the fact. As he wrote to Robert de Billy in March 1910: "C'est curieux que dans tout les genres les plus différents, de George Eliot à Hardy, de Stevenson à Emerson, il n'y a pas de littérature qui ait sur moi un pouvoir comparable à la littérature anglaise et américaine" [It's odd how in every genre, however different, from George Eliot to Hardy, from Stevenson to Emerson, there's no literature that has a power over me comparable to English and American] (*Corr.* X:55; *SL* III:4). Elsewhere Proust described Poe as "dans la désolation de ma vie, une des bénédictions du souvenir" [in the desolation of my life, one of the blessings of memory] (*Corr.* XX:92; my translation); while Whistler remained for him throughout his life an artist of the first rank.

Leslie A. Fiedler's *Love and Death in the American Novel* identifies longstanding ties between developments in literature and the conjoined histories of France and the United States prior to the lineage discussed by Edmund Wilson. The series of events which culminated in the American and French revolutions, Fiedler argues, gave birth to "a new literary form and a new kind of democratic society, their beginnings coincid[ing] with the beginnings of the modern era and, indeed, help[ing] to define it" (1967, 23). Fiedler goes on to discuss the situation of American authors who struggled to find a way to write prose fiction "in a land where there are no conventions of conversation, no special class idioms and no dialogue between classes, no continuing literary language" (1967, 24). This would appear an entirely alien situation to that which Proust found himself in. And in many ways the two are irreconcilable. Yet while Proust could rely on and exploit precisely the features which Fiedler's American novelist found lacking, he also lived during a period of enormous domestic and international upheaval. *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913–1927) is, then, a response to rapid and wholesale changes in conventions, idioms, language, and class within French society, as well as being a work of art the composition and structure of which was first

interrupted and then reconfigured in light of a global conflagration, the First World War, that only ended when it did because of the decisive entry of the United States.¹

While Proust may have been less forthcoming about the wider impact of Americanization than he was about his literary and artistic influences, this is not to say that he was ignorant of its benefits. He knew enough to secure shares in the United States Steel Corporation, and he owned New York City bonds; the proceeds from the sale of his infamous cork-lined apartment at 102 Boulevard Haussmann were reinvested in American securities; and he enjoyed close contacts with influential members of the Stock Exchange, including Walter Berry, “the most well-known American in Paris” (see Lee 2007, 286), dedicatee of *Pastiches et mélanges* (1919), and from 1917 to 1922 president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Paris.

It would be astonishing had Proust *not* been affected by the growing cultural, economic, and political presence of America in France during the period between his birth in 1871 and his death in 1922. In 1867, of the approximately 119,000 foreigners living in the city, some 4,400 (including Confederate political refugees fleeing the States after the Unionist victory in 1865) were American. By the late twenties, the estimate rises to over three times that number (Higonnet 2002, 328). The painter William Merritt Chase no doubt spoke for many when he declared in 1912: “My God, I would rather go to Europe than go to Heaven.” Chase, who studied in Munich but exhibited in Paris, was acutely aware of the importance of Europe to American artists and of how cultural exchanges between the two were producing “a new type ... the offspring, as we know, of European stock, but which no longer resembles it” (cited in Adler, Hirshler, and Weiberg 2006, 14). As such he typifies the view that the flow of influence between the Old and New Worlds tended to run predominantly in one direction: westwards. Increasingly, however, Parisians were themselves becoming enamored of their American visitors and what the country had to offer.

¹ The first volume of *A la recherche, Du côté de chez Swann*, was published in 1913 with a note on the flyleaf announcing that the second and final volume, *Le Côté de Guermantes*, would appear the following year. As it was, the outbreak of war meant that the second and greatly augmented section, *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, had to wait until 1919 for publication. In the intervening years, Proust's original conception of the novel had undergone massive development and change. For a detailed summary of these developments, see Tadié 2000, 600–608, 664–667.

Only a short stroll from the family home at 9 Boulevard Malesherbes, the young Proust was taken often to the Parc de Monceau. There survives an undated photograph of him playing there with Antoinette Fauré and an unknown male friend. With its small lake known as the *Naumachie*, a semi-circular Corinthian colonnade, Greco-Roman “ruins,” and a child-sized pyramid, the entrance to which is guarded by two stone sphinxes, the Parc remains today much the same as it was when described in a contemporary Baedeker as “a pleasant and refreshing oasis in the midst of a well-peopled quarter of the city.” Modernity, then, is hardly the first word that comes to mind when strolling there. If, however, one clear day in December 1881, the ten-year-old Proust should have halted in his game of *partie de barres* and looked into the cold blue sky above the tree-lined Boulevard de Courcelles to the north of the Parc, he would have seen an unfamiliar addition to the Paris skyline – a statue that was just commencing to reach above the houses, and before the end of the following spring would overlook the entire city.

Designed by Frédérick-Auguste Bartholdi, plans for the erection of *La liberté éclairant le monde* (Liberty Enlightening the World) dated back to the mid-1860s and growing dissatisfaction with Napoleon III’s failure to move decisively toward a more democratic form of government. What republicans aspired to was a constitution on the American model. Not even tacit U.S. support for Prussia in 1870–71 (a tit-for-tat response by the U.S. government to French sympathy and aid for the Confederate South during the American Civil War) dampened their enthusiasm for the “American school.” So the idea arose of presenting the statue to the United States as a gift to mark the centenary in 1876 of the American War of Independence. Republicans thus hoped to arouse domestic support for political change by appealing to France’s revolutionary, antimonarchical past and the decisive part the country had played in securing American freedom from British rule.

Though the shattering military defeat of 1871 and the subsequent war of attrition between left and right conspired against the statue’s immediate construction, the idea was not shelved. In November 1875 an appeal for funds was launched at the Grand Hôtel de Louvre, followed by a gala benefit performance of Gounod’s newly composed motet, named after Bartholdi’s proposed statue, at the Paris Opéra. As it was, insufficient funds were raised, hardly surprising given the ongoing war indemnity imposed by Prussia and the heavy cost of rebuilding work made necessary by the firestorm of the Commune. Not until October 1881 (the same year,

incidentally, as a square in the 16th arrondissement between the Palais du Trocadéro and the Étoile was renamed the place des États-Unis) did work on the statue begin in the foundry of Monduit and Béchet at 25 Rue de Chazelles. By December, as noted earlier, Bartholdi was able to boast that the statue already overlooked the surrounding area.

The erection of the statue marked, literally, a high point in Franco-American relations. It symbolized a history of shared revolutionary ideals: the light the statue was to shed on the world being that of reason, democracy, industry, and a sustained confidence in the future. This was vitally important to France following the *annus terribilis* of 1871. Yet it is also important to recognize that there existed a strong antagonism toward the United States. As I will return to in my first chapter, the unease felt by many when faced with the reality of Haussmann's revamped Paris increasingly took the form of anti-Americanism. The Goncourt brothers, for example, registered their disillusion with "the Americanized modern world and hidebound Paris"; yet others feared that Paris was becoming a kind of "American Babylon." Why, though, should Haussmannization and the United States have become synonymous? Haussmann's project, the building of a unified and rational city, Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson writes, opened up a fracture between the Paris of the past with "its layers of settlement; its dirty, crowded central section; its crooked, winding streets; and its multiple-dwelling, and often multistory, housing stock" and the city of the future. The latter was clearly associated with the emerging cities of the New World, and the governance of centralized urban planning. The difference lay between Washington D.C., the city of the republic, and Paris, the city of revolution (1994, 31). Haussmann's designs, then, became a battleground for possession of the city's past as well as its future. What was at stake was Paris's claim to being the presiding genius of precisely those revolutionary attributes given symbolic form by Bartholdi's statue. In short, would future generations call the revolution by the name of *Liberté* or *Liberty*.

The *Statue of Liberty* was completed in June 1884. It remained in the yard behind the Rue de Courcelles until the following spring, when it was finally dismantled in preparation for its voyage to New York. By then thousands of French visitors including ministers of state, ambassadors, President Jules Grevy, and Victor Hugo, the noted advocate of all things American, had visited the yard to goggle at the statue as it took shape. Among them was the American painter Edmund Charles Tarbull. "I expected to see a large statue," he wrote in 1884, "but when I ... saw this huge black thing rising

up against the sky above the tops of the houses I was startled.”² Having seen the statue as it towered over the Parc de Monceau, it is difficult to imagine that the young Proust did not persuade a member of his family or one of the family servants to accompany him on a pilgrimage to take a closer look at *Liberté*. Whether such a hypothesis is true or not, there remains a neat symmetry in the fact that Proust’s childhood games took place in the shadow of Bartholdi’s statue while his final months at 44 Rue Hamelin were to be overlooked by the Eiffel Tower, erected to mark the 1889 Exposition Universelle. For it was Eiffel who designed the steel supporting structure for the *Statue of Liberty*, a structure that anticipated that other defining image of the American skyline: the skyscraper.

If Proust grew up at the height of French Anglophilia, so too must he have been aware of an often strident anti-Americanism. “Everyone knows,” Phillipe Roger writes, “how the Statue of Liberty was finished before its pedestal. The statue of the American Enemy raised by the French, however, is a work in progress: each successive generation tinkers at it, tightening its bolts. But its pedestal is well established” (2005, xi). Roger looks to understand the historical phenomenon of anti-Americanism with reference to a narrative the rhetoric of which had been “broken in as early as the 1890s.” A by-product of this “narrative” has been the almost total silence surrounding Proust’s American influences, and the representation of America and Americans in *A la recherche*. While no single study of Proust’s debt to the Anglo-Saxon world has been as extensive as Pierre-Edmond Robert’s *Marcel Proust lecteur des anglo-saxons* (1976), the emphasis is placed firmly on Proust’s debt to Britain rather than the States. Such, too, is the situation with more recent studies: Emily Eells’s *Proust’s Cup of Tea* (2002) and Daniel Karlin’s *Proust’s English* (2005). Eells’s great contribution to Proustian studies is to have coined the term “Anglosexuality,” by which she signifies the uses to which Proust put his reading of nineteenth-century British and Irish writers, and his appreciation of such artists as Turner and the pre-Raphaelites, in his complex and ambiguous portrayal of gender and sexuality. Karlin, meanwhile, is interested less in Eells’s “third sex” than the “second language” of *A la recherche*. Through a study of the French phenomenon of *Anglomanie* – the craze for all things English – he aims to

² Cited in Hirshler 2006, 105. Tarbull’s response puts us in mind of Marcel’s experience in *Du côté de chez Swann* of seeing the steeples of Martinville peeping above or through the surrounding trees as he approaches the town by road (148–149; I:180–181).

uncover a world-within-a-world in the novel, one determined by Proust's usage of English words and phrases.

While Eells's emphasis on Englishness is clearly defined, Karlin's avoidance of any discussion of America is harder to explain. There is no doubt that Karlin contributes much to our understanding of Proust's extraordinary attentiveness to aspects of Englishness; what he does not address is the fact that English was spoken beyond the narrow provinces of the British isles. The repercussions of this are felt as early as Karlin's introduction, where he announces that his interest in the subject was sparked by a reference to Marcel owning a pair of "snow boots" (1164; III:546). The word, Karlin informs us, "was very recent in French ... and belongs to a large group of English words which the French language borrowed from new products, technologies, and social practices of the nineteenth century. Many more of these occur in *A la recherche*: from *les films* to *les cocktails*, from *le revolver* to *le golf*" (2005, 2). What Karlin doesn't register is that snow boots were not of English origin. Also known in French as *caoutchoucs américains*, they were of American design and manufacture. Proust may have been using a word taken from the English language; the origins of that word, as with defining aspects of successive waves of modernism, lay across the Atlantic.

The point may reasonably be raised as to whether it is up to Karlin to make a distinction or recognize the elements of American rather than English word origin if Proust does not himself do so. If Proust means the word to refer to the fashion for all things English, we should honor his intention – whether or not he is mistaken. The situation, however, is more interesting than this economy allows. Karlin's comments on the importation of English words and phrases into French are similar to Malcolm Bowie's discussion of the passage in *A la recherche* where Proust refers to Giotto's angels in the Arena Chapel as "exécuter des loopings" (2093; V:612). "Looping," Bowie says, "in the sense of 'looping the loop' is recorded by Paul Robert's dictionary as making its first appearance in French in 1911, and both examples given are from Proust's novel"; "No sooner had English adopted a vigorous expression from a fairground attraction of the day, than French had borrowed it in an abbreviated form" (Bowie 1998, 89). Karlin, too, cites Proust's use of the word, describing it as one of those "rare, privileged moments for English in the novel" (2005, 56). The problem for Karlin's thesis is that this "privileging" of English turns out to be a privileging not of *Anglomanie* but an example of Proust's sensitivity to the Americanization of the French language and culture: the

aeronautical stunt called “looping the loop” (although the first pilot credited with accomplishing the feat was the Frenchman, Adolphe Pégoud) took its name from a rollercoaster ride called “loop-the-loop” built by Edwin Precott at Coney Island in 1901. As a result, though there may be times when the second language of *A la recherche* is English, on many such occasions it is a form of the language that hailed from the States and it is spoken with a distinct American twang.

It is not just America’s contribution to linguistic developments in the English language that we need to consider with relation to *A la recherche*. In not acknowledging the origins of words that are American-English we overlook the significant impact of U.S. technology, enterprise, sexual mores, art, literature, fashion, and economics on the novel. Karlin’s curious sensitivity to the translation of *caoutchoucs américains* as “American rubbers” (he objects to the modern slang sense of “rubber” as condom) in both the Vintage and Penguin editions of *In Search of Lost Time*, preferring instead “galoshes,” is entirely to miss the point. The word galoshes is derived from the French *galoches*. To use it would be to remove from the passage the textual evidence of Marcel’s awkwardness. Why should he feel he has committed a faux-pas wearing French footwear? The reason Proust has *caoutchoucs américains* is that America, for the Parisian upper echelons, was associated with the mass-production of clothing rather than *haute couture*. We can only imagine Mme de Parme’s comment “Oh! Quelle bonne idée ... comme c’est pratique!” [Oh! What a good idea! ... It’s so practical!] being said in a tone similar to that which would have greeted Marcel announcing, say, that he had taken to wearing a ready-made bow tie. The Faubourg is hardly the place to display a keen interest in the effects of democratization on high fashion. And the incident has repercussions later in the novel. Witness, as discussed below in Chapter 3, Marcel’s desire to dress Albertine in exclusive designs by the *couturier* Fortuny rather than a figure-hugging mackintosh (“la tunique guerrière de caoutchouc”) made of the same *caoutchouc américains* as his shoes. What is at stake in the scene (and in the language) is not only Marcel having committed a *faux pas* but the difficulties that aspects of French society were experiencing in adapting to the growing American presence. The United States may have been eminently *pratique* but what would be the effects of the wider application of such practicality?

Some aspects of this become clearer if we look more closely at another of Karlin’s examples: Proust’s reference to *le revolver* as in “revolving-door.” Looking to invent a French equivalent for the word, Proust, Karlin

says, finds “not one but two native terms for a revolving door” before he comes up with “the bastardized form *porte revolver*, which carries ludicrous associations with le revolver, the firearm, a word used on several occasions in *A la recherche*” (2005, 51). The passage appears in *Le Côté de Guermantes* when Marcel is invited to dine at an exclusive Parisian restaurant by Robert de Saint-Loup. The two arrive in thick fog and, while Robert gives instructions to the cabdriver on when to collect them, Marcel attempts to enter the building. In a scene straight from a Charlie Chaplin or Buster Keaton movie, things go from bad to worse:

pour commencer, une fois engagé dans la porte tournante dont je n'avais pas l'habitude, je crus que je ne pourrais pas arriver à en sortir. (Disons en passant, pour les amateurs d'un vocabulaire plus précis, que cette porte tambour, malgré ses apparences pacifiques, s'appelle porte revolver, de l'anglais *revolving door*.)

[to begin with, once I had engaged with the unfamiliar workings of the turning door, I became alarmed that I should never get out of it. (Let me add, for the lovers of precise vocabulary, that the drum-shaped entrance in question, despite its harmless appearance, is known as a “revolver,” from the English term “revolving door.”)]

Marcel's ignorance of how to operate the door earns the attention of the restaurant's owner:

la riieuse cordialité de son accueil fut dissipée par la vue d'un inconnu qui ne savait pas se dégager des volants de verre. Cette marque flagrante d'ignorance lui fit froncer le sourcil comme à un examinateur qui a bonne envie de ne pas prononcer le *dignus est intrare*. Pour comble de malchance j'allai m'asseoir dans la salle réservée à l'aristocratie d'où il vint rudement me tirer en m'indiquant, avec une grossièreté à laquelle se conformèrent immédiatement tous les garçons, une place dans l'autre salle.

[the smiling cordiality of his welcome vanished at the sight of a stranger trying to disengage himself from the revolving glass panels of the door. This flagrant sign of ignorance made him frown like an examiner who is totally disinclined to utter the words: *Dignus est intrare*. To cap it all, I went and sat down in the room reserved for the young aristocrats, from which he made no bones about coming

to oust me, pointing me, with a rudeness from which all the other waiters immediately took their cue, to a place in the other room.] (1056; III:399–400)

Neither is this the end of Marcel's humiliation or discomfort, as he finds himself sitting on an already crowded wall seat staring straight at the door reserved for "Hebrews" and "which did not revolve, but opened and closed continuously, exposing me to a horrible draught" ["qui, non tournante celle-là, s'ouvrant et se fermant à chaque instant, m'envoyait un froid horrible"].

The passage marks a moment in the novel when Marcel is made aware of how vulnerable is his place within Parisian society. Where exactly does he belong? Let down by his ignorance of modern technology, he is humiliated in terms of class and race. He may begin the evening confident of his status; he soon finds himself overlooked and ignored – sitting on benches reserved for a race of exiles. Some kind of revolution has taken place. Paris has turned inhospitable; Marcel is an alien. In moving through the revolving door, it is as though Marcel, like the Clark Kent of the comic-strips and movies, has swapped identity. Only in Marcel's case he goes from the privileged status of a "Superman," a friend of the aristocracy, to a nobody.

Marcel's ignorance of revolving doors can be forgiven. The scene at the restaurant is set in the late 1890s, when few would have been the buildings in Paris fitted with a door which its inventor, Theophilus Van Kannell of Philadelphia (who had only received a patent for his "storm-door structure" as recently as 1888), guaranteed would not, unlike the door set aside for the hotel's Jewish customers, blow open in a gale. Relatively quickly, James Buzzard has written, Van Kannell's invention became recognized across the globe as "a symbol, even a synecdoche, of modern American life" associated with "the fast-paced, skyscrapered American city" (2001, 560). Far, then, from pointing the reader in the direction of Proust's Englishness, the text acknowledges the presence of a powerful and disorientating American presence in Proust's novel. Furthermore, if we take Proust's "bastardized" *le porte revolver* as a more deliberate and ambiguous coinage than Karlin allows, the image of Marcel in the revolving door doubles as a disconcerting vision of him locked in the spinning chamber of one of Samuel Colt's revolvers, recognized across the world as a defining image and product of America. Such references disrupt or do violence to the text, forcing Proust to adopt a kind of "bastardized" or creolized French. Disruptions of another kind are often implicit in his choice of these words. If *le revolver* entails

Marcel getting caught up in a kind of Russian roulette, with himself the single bullet being spun round in the chamber of the gun, *loopings* contains the haunting presence of Alfred Agostinelli, Proust's chauffeur and possibly lover, whose death in a flying accident in 1914 scarred Proust's final years and contributed to his depiction of the doomed affair between Marcel and Albertine. We can only imagine Proust's emotions when, in a passage from the same scene in *Le Côté de Guermantes* where Marcel and Robert dine out, he imagines himself "en compagnie d'un aviateur qui ne vole pas en ce moment" and watching "les évolutions d'un pilote exécutant des *loopings*" (in the company of an airman who is not flying that day [watching] the moves of a pilot looping the loop) (1055; III:398). At these moments, the importation of American English seems to register some deeper mode of personal or cultural anxiety on Proust's part.

Even if we want to argue that examples such as *loopings*, *revolving door* and *snow boots* were not intended by Proust specifically to signify America, we nevertheless have to contend with the fact that many times in the novel he is a good deal more explicit about the importance of the United States. There is for example the moment in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* when Marcel sees one of Elstir's paintings and declares: "Ah! que j'aimerais aller à Carquethuit!" [How I would love to go to Carquethuit]. The significance of this is easy to overlook, referring as it does to one of Elstir's landscapes, *Porte de Carquethuit* [Harbor at Carquethuit], which would appear to depict a quintessentially French coastal scene. However, not only is Carquethuit a place wholly untypical of resorts on the Brittany coast, Elstir tells the wondering Marcel, it is unlike anywhere else in France: "Carquethuit, c'est tout autre chose avec ses roches sur une plage basse. Je ne connais rien en France d'analogue, cela me rappelle plutôt certains aspects de la Floride. C'est très curieux, et du reste extrêmement sauvage aussi" [Carquethuit is completely different, with its rocks and its low sandy beach. I've never seen anywhere else like it in France – it looks more like somewhere in Florida. A most curious place, and very wild country too.] (671; II:433).

America here serves as a touchstone for Proust's imagined topography and as an example of why Elstir's art matters. The painting moves Marcel: literally, in that he wants to visit the town; metaphorically, in that concealed within the desire to see the place for himself is the overwhelming desire to become an artist. Carquethuit thus represents all that Marcel feels to be just out of reach. It is a province less of France than of the Imagination. Of all his various mentors, it is arguably Elstir who contributes most to Marcel's aesthetic. And it is only he (or so this passage seems to suggest)

who has visited the States and brought back with him an influence that allows him to re-imagine France as both elsewhere and “Other.” The scene is a vital moment in the novel. It tells us that Elstir has discovered some new capacity for picturing the everyday world in a way that is exotic, profound, and unsettling, and that it is inextricably linked to the *idea* as much as the reality of America.

Though as I highlight at the opening of Chapter 5 James McNeill Whistler is a significant and acknowledged presence in *A la recherche*, a reader suspicious or doubtful of the wider claims I am making in this book for the influence of the United States on Proust’s writings will no doubt feel justified by the fact that Proust makes just one reference apiece to Poe and Emerson in the novel, and no mention at all in any of his fiction, essays, or correspondence of George Beard, the “discoverer” of American Nervousness. My hypothetical reader might, borrowing a phrase from John Donne, say that such a thesis relies on material that is “extreme and scattering bright.” There are two ways of approaching this diffuseness: either to see it as nothing more than coincidental, as being imported into the novel by sheer force of the enormous centripetal force of Proust’s imagination; or, as I prefer, seeing all such fragments, hints, and allusions as containing matter that gives off a radiance and energy of its own. While the former model turns the novel into the equivalent of a black hole, with nothing being allowed to escape the gravitational pull of Proust’s sentences, the latter returns the novel to us as something that radiates rather than absorbs light.

My aim throughout is to take what might otherwise be overlooked and, with attention to *A la recherche* and Proust’s other writings, to tease out a whole new world of influence which, on close scrutiny, becomes compelling in its assertion that not only did Proust weave through the novel textual echoes of Emerson, Poe, and Whistler, but that important aspects of his aesthetic draw their energy from his lifelong engagement with what they individually had achieved. Because this approach means shuttling back and forth across the many thousands of pages of Proust’s *oeuvre*, my approach has been to avoid making any sweeping generalizations but rather gradually to work outward from what Proust himself wrote and to unravel a fascinating and intriguing system of correspondences. These are often elusive and tantalizing, and as a result there is a necessary element of the speculative in my approach. Speculative, though, in the truest sense of

the word: that what we do as readers is to “watch over” the literary text, to engage with it, explore it and give it our fullest imaginative regard. Such a process must always be speculative in that we take the risk that it will not repay our investment of that most Proustian and finite of resources: time. My feeling here is that the particular approach of this book brings to light aspects of the novel that otherwise remain in the shadows.

A la recherche demands that we read it not as a hermetically sealed text but as a work of art that re-admits us to, and re-acquaints us with, the world and our own lives. Such ultimately is the conclusion of Marcel’s own search. It is a novel uniquely open to the worlds of language (among them American English) as well as the more specialized arenas of art, science, social studies, linguistics, and philosophy. As such it would, as I said earlier, be remarkable had Proust not been influenced by American culture. In Chapter 1, therefore, I look at the impact of US technology, enterprise, sexual mores, art, literature, fashion, and economics on the progress of *modernité* in order to examine how those same American influences that contributed to the building of Bartholdi’s statue came to affect Proust in the writing of arguably the twentieth century’s greatest work of prose fiction. As we might guess, these influences are widespread and important. What is more surprising is the attention afforded by Proust to the seemingly mundane aspects of American material influence. The chapter goes on to examine these in some detail, describing how they contribute to a number of the novel’s key themes and motifs. A case in point, as I examine in Chapter 3, is the discourse of neurasthenia as it evolved under the American physician and neurologist George Beard. Beard it was who in *Neurasthenia, or nervous exhaustion* (1869) defined the *fin de siècle* malady *par excellence* as a condition determined by a whole complex of symptoms including fatigue, anxiety, impotence, and depression. What began, however, as an illness the causes of which were subjective evolved to become a defining symptom of western civilization, American Nervousness.

My hypothetical reader, disposed to incredulity, will counter that there is no hard evidence that Proust had read Beard. This is true. What we do know, however, is that Proust’s father most certainly had read Beard in translation, probably as soon as his *Sexual Neurasthenia (Nervous Exhaustion, its Hygiene, Causes, Symptoms and Treatment)* first appeared in French in 1895. Prior to this, M. Proust was introduced to Beard’s ideas when he attended Charcot’s lectures in the late 1880s, as well as in his reading of Charcot’s preface to Fernand Villain’s *La Neurasthénie* (1891). We also know that Proust’s father, himself the co-author with

Gilbert Ballet of *L'Hygiène du neurasthénique* (1897), was enough aware of “American Nervousness” to insist on a distinction between neurasthenia as it manifested itself in America and in Europe. Proust, then, even before he was himself diagnosed as neurasthenic, was well and truly submersed in the language of Beard. Little wonder, then, as Michael R. Finn says, that Proust and any number of his characters are “paralysed by ... neuroses, half-way between Beard’s neurasthenic and Charcot’s hysteric” (1999, 45). Short of our discovering a memorandum from Proust to his twenty-first-century critics stating that on such and such a date he went into his father’s study and took down from the shelves a copy of Beard’s work, it is difficult to imagine what further evidence is required to show that Proust, in his life and his writing, was inescapably and inextricably influenced by American Nervousness.

Where Dr. Adrien Proust wanted to keep America and France distinct and separate, his son was minded to see confluence. Rarely does the United States figure in the novel as an unmediated presence. As with the American flora described by M. de Guermantes entered France by being caught in the wool of a traveling rug and was dispersed across the county via the railways, or like the liminal Florida of Elstir’s *Porte de Carquethuit*, America functions as both actuality and metaphor. Just as the way by Swann and the Guermantes way are finally revealed as having the same source, so the United States appears in the novel less as an unmediated presence than as an amalgam. What Proust shows us is a culture in transition. In doing so he gives us a road map to what was already in the process of becoming, with all its continuing implications and reverberations, the American Way.

CHAPTER I

*Le Côté de New-York,
or Marcel in America*

J'entends déjà le son aigre de cette voix à venir
Du camarade qui se promènera avec toi en Europe
Tout en restant en Amérique
[Already I hear that shrill sound of the future voice
Of the friend who will walk with you in Europe
While he remains in America]

—Apollinaire, “Arbre”

With the exception of Elstir, Proust's fictional painter, none of Proust's characters is an Amerophile as Odette and others are Anglophiles. Yet there are no British characters in *A la recherche*. The nearest we get is the Prince of Wales, who appears “off-stage” as a friend of Swann. When it comes to Proust's depiction of *Anglomanie*, therefore, the term remains strangely disembodied. This omission is all the more notable given Proust's obvious sympathies with, and interest in, England and Englishness: he was a noted translator of Ruskin; he maintained close friendships with English-speakers, such as Willie Heath (to whom he dedicated *Les Plaisirs et les jours*), Marie Nordlinger (with whom, alongside his English-speaking mother, he collaborated on his translations of Ruskin), and Sydney Schiff (who was to translate into English *Le Temps retrouvé*). Conversely (we might say perversely) there are a number of walk-on parts for American characters in the novel. They are all anonymous and in each case female: the American lady with her daughters staying at Balbec (743; II:528); the American girl with her chaperone going down for dinner (1333; IV:165); and the American woman who mistakes Marcel's hotel room for her own, interrupting him

while he is trying to persuade “le lift” to act as a go-between for him with Albertine (1354; IV:194).

In one sense what Proust is referring to with such “characters” is the stereotype of the American woman who visited Europe only in order to stay at luxurious hotels, go shopping, or as Paul Morand recollected “[queue] to have their bust sculpted [by Rodin] at a cost of forty thousand gold francs” (2002, 26). The life of energetic indolence and shallow indulgence is exemplified by Undine Spragg in Edith Wharton’s *The Customs of the Country* (1913), her satire on Americans in Paris:

Every moment of her days was packed with excitement and exhilaration. Everything amused her: the long hours of bargaining and debate with dress-makers and jewellers, the crowded lunches at fashionable restaurants, the perfunctory dash through a picture-show or the lingering visit to the last new milliner; the afternoon motor-rush to some leafy suburb, where tea and music and sunset were hastily absorbed on a crowded terrace above the Seine; the whirl home through the Bois to dress for dinner and start again on the round of evening diversions; the dinner at the Nouveaux Luxe or the Café de Paris, and the little play at the Capucines or the Variétés, followed, because the night was “too lovely,” and it was a shame to waste it, by a breathless flight back to the Bois, with supper in one of its lamp-hung restaurants, or, if the weather forbade, a tumultuous progress through the midnight haunts where “ladies” were not supposed to show themselves, and might consequently taste the thrill of being occasionally taken for their opposites. (2000, 177)

Hermione Lee draws our attention to the “commercial imperialism” of this “self-engrossed American tribe exploiting, but not participating in” Parisian culture (2007, 264). An echo of this can be found in *A la recherche* when, in addition to the characters mentioned above, American women appear by reputation or hearsay as representatives of the “dollar princess.” Particularly in the sections written after the outbreak of war in 1914, such women become a focus for the changing contours of French society: the rich American lady who because of her marriage to a Frenchman is able to greet Mme de Guermites on familial terms (1156; III:535); the American-Jewish women “serrant sur leurs sein décatis le collier de perles qui leur permettra d’épouser un duc décave” [clutching to their withered bosoms the pearl necklaces that would enable them to marry a penniless

duke] (2180; VI:67); an American lady who has taken ownership of the old hotel belonging to the Prince de Guermantes (2255; VI:166); and “la dernière des Américaines” [the latest American hostess] who, by casually greeting Charlus, signals the depths of his humiliation at the hands of the rapacious Verdurins (2257; VI:2257). These are women who, in Wharton’s words, “created about them a kind of phantom America” (1970, 182).

While Wharton’s characters are not wholly insulated against being changed by their encounters with France, as Lee says she “hardly ever shifts the vantage-point to look at how the French characters have their lives altered by the influx of Americans” (2007, 265). Such a vantage, however obliquely, is provided by Proust. One example is the incident in *Sodom et Gomorrhe* when an American woman steps by mistake into Marcel’s hotel room. Why does Proust have this take place, and why exactly is it an American woman who interrupts Marcel in his negotiations with “le lift”? The woman’s appearance – brief as it is – leaves Marcel flustered and confused. The effect is comic, yet it is a moment strikingly similar to an incident described by Georges Duhamel in his provocative prose memoir of a visit to the United States, *Scenes de la Vie Future* (1930). Nearing the end of his trip, Duhamel is staying in a hotel. He is relieved to have escaped the all-pervading noise and crush of American urban life:

... Solitude, solitude!

Then suddenly the door, which by chance I had forgotten to lock, came open. A lady appeared in it – shingle, short skirt, rouge, powder, pearls and diamonds.

She contemplated with interest the person thus surprised in his privacy, and observed with the completest calm, “My mistake. Beg pardon.”

Would I not be thoroughly justified, I thought, in dragging that lady into court and demanding heavy damages? Oh if only I had witnesses! (1931, 177–178)

Duhamel’s response to the “invasion” seems excessive to say the least. Published almost a decade after *Sodom et Gomorrhe*, however, it alerts us to an aspect of the corresponding scene in *A la recherche* which would otherwise pass us by: that Marcel, if only for a moment, finds himself in a Balbec where all the social protocols that assert his superiority no longer apply. The effect, as with the encounter with a revolving door discussed in my introduction, is that Marcel is made less secure, less assured of his

place in the world. Modernity in the guise of an unaccompanied American woman stepping into his room challenges his sense of who and what he is. Whispered negotiations give way to his slamming the door with all his strength – the noise of which brings a further interruption in the form of a *chasseur* to make sure no windows have been left open.

Later in the novel Marcel has another “encounter” with an American woman. This time it takes the form of a letter addressed to someone who lives in the same building as Marcel. The letter is written “en style convenu et qui disait” [in a coded format] and Marcel, ever on the lookout for evidence of Albertine’s duplicity, is convinced it is for her. He is mistaken: “La lettre n’était pas en signes convenus mais en mauvais français parce qu’elle était d’une Américaine ... Et la façon étrange dont cette Américaine formait certaines lettres avait donné l’aspect d’un surnom à un nom parfaitement réel mais étranger” [The letter was written not in a coded format but in poor French, because it had been written by an American lady ... And the strange way in which this American lady formed some of her letters had given the appearance of a nickname to a perfectly authentic but foreign surname] (1924; V:394).

That a letter from an American woman should cause such confusion was not untypical of exchanges between the sexes of the two nations. As Clair Hughes writes with regard to the often simplistic link made between consumer capitalism and female entrapment: “American women [were] not ... simply passive in their consumption or display of wealth. Their role was complex and, in European eyes, often extremely confusing.”¹ Proust was obviously aware of such stereotypes, as he must also have been of the

¹ Hughes 2001, 15. Ulrich Lehmann, meanwhile, argues that the feminine article in “la mode” meant that “women’s fashion – that is, the objectification of the female – would flourish within the establishment of an unqualified form of capitalist and patriarchal society, out to dominate the female sex. The emphasis is on equating *la mode* within the ephemeral and the futile ... as the woman does not really dominate anything but the consumption of an artificial reality of luxuries and vagaries” (Lehmann 2000, 19). What is interesting here with regard to *A la recherche* is that it is Marcel who insists on purchasing such bonbons: “Les brimborions de la parure causaient à Albertine de grands plaisirs. Je ne savais pas me refuser de lui en faire chaque jour un nouveau” [The “little touches” of dress gave Albertine enormous pleasure, and I could not resist making her a small present of this kind every day] (1626; V:24). While there certainly are strong elements of patriarchal dominance at play here, the keen interest Marcel and Elstir show in *la mode* complicate Lehmann’s rather too insistent gendering.

confusion alluded to by Hughes. Indeed there are times in *A la recherche* when America is all but synonymous with mistaken identities and what-might-have-been: Mme de Cambremer is made to change gender and nationality by virtue of sporting an “American” moustache (1377; IV:223); a well-turned-out footman is mistaken for “un Américain très chic” [an ultra-smart American] (1499; IV:383); his receiving regular supplies of fruit from a young telegraphist and former “protégé” for whom he has secured “une place aux Colonies” [an opening in the colonies] leads Mme Verdurin to innocently conclude “Vous avez donc un oncle ou un neveu d’Amérique, M. de Charlus, pour recevoir des ananas pareils!” [“You must have an uncle in America, or a nephew, M. de Charlus, to get pineapples like these!”] (1851; V:304); while Odette tells Marcel of her affair with a young man with whom she agreed to travel to America, only at the last minute (and after a final night of passion) to give away her ticket to “un voyageur que je ne connaissais pas” [a traveler I didn’t know] (2380; VI:330).

Proust first introduced the motif of wealthy American heiresses who, like Daisy in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, lured on their French lovers with “voices ... full of money” in *Jean Santeuil*. As in a number of Wharton’s novels, we find Proust touching on the experience of women who, like Undine Spragg, marry into the “brilliant,” “inaccessible,” “tantalizing” Faubourg and who “led, in the high-walled houses beyond the Seine which she had once thought so dull and dingy, a life that made her own seem as undistinguished as the social existence of the Mealey House.”² As did Wharton, Proust uses the material for satirical purpose. In *Jean Santeuil*, then, we have “une Américaine ravissante, richissime, qui adorait le monde” [a ravishing and enormously rich American woman who adored Society] who marries the Marquis de Réveillon. From being a “simple cadet de sa maison” [a member of the younger branch of the family], the Marquis, bankrolled by his wife’s greenbacks, buys back the ancient family seat and begins throwing lavish parties. The effect of such an experiment in cultural amalgamation proves unsettling to the older, impoverished branch of the family:

Même quand il n’y avait pas de fête à Soubise, le malheureux duc de Réveillon ne pouvait ouvrir *Le Gaulois* ou *Le Figaro* sans y lire

² Wharton 2000, 179. With its “comparative gentility” and centrally heated rooms, Mealey House represents everything about the United States that Undine Spragg flees to Paris to escape.

que le nouveau cheval de son cousin venait de gagner aux courses, et la description, de la longueur d'un article, de la toilette que la marquise de Réveillon portait à telle comédie de château, à telle réunion hippique ...

Peu à peu les vrais Réveillon étaient devenus pour les fournisseurs ceux à qui ils vendaient tant de voitures, tant de chapeaux, tant de bijoux, pour le public ceux dont ils lisaient sans cesse le nom dans les journaux.

[Even when there was no party at Soubise, the unhappy Duke could not open the *Gaulois* or the *Figaro* without seeing that his cousin's horse had won several races, or coming on a description – as long as an article – of what the Marquise de Réveillon had worn at the Horse Show, or when attending private theatricals at a neighboring Great House ...

Gradually the shopkeepers had come to regard as the “real Réveillons” those of the family to whom they sold such quantities of carriages, hats and jewels, while the general public seeing their names figure so prominently in the news made the same mistake.] (*JS*, 503; *JS English*, 413)

This passage anticipates the role of the dollar in the later volumes of *A la recherche*. One difference, though, is that while the rich American woman goes unnamed, her new-found circle of friends and relations is carefully delineated, allowing Proust to exercise his considerable comic skills:

Miss Footit, la pimpante Clara Timour, Tekita inconsolable du lâchage de G., côté des femmes du monde, Mme Cuyper, la femme du richissime banquier ès Israël [et] Mme Bering-Granval, la vaillante créatrice de *Vers de honte*[.]

[Miss Footit, the delicious Clara Timour, Tekita, who has never got over G-'s defection, Madame Guypper, wife of Israel, the enormously rich banker ... and Madame Bering-Granval, author of *Vers de honte*.]³ (*JS*, 504; *JS English*, 414)

This delightful concoction blends fact, fiction, and literary allusions: “Miss

³ The English translation omits the irony of Proust describing Madame Bering-Granval as “la vaillante créatrice” [the worthy/first-rate author].

Footit” owes her name to the character played by the English Whiteface clown, George Footit; “Clara Timour” is a reference to the eponymous hero of Monk Lewis’s Gothic melodrama; “Tekita” (te kita) may refer to the Japanese verb “to become”; Sir Rufus Israel is based on Hugo Finlay, a wealthy banker and the father of one of Proust’s classmates; while Mme Bering-Granval’s *Verses of Shame* mark her out as a minor Decadent poet. Such names not only tell us something about the range of references at Proust’s command, and a great deal about his sense of humor, they also personify the world the Marquis de Réveillon’s American wife inhabits. It is a dynamic, cosmopolitan universe on a collision course with the old.

The passage also functions in ways analogous to what Rhonda K. Garrelík says about how the dandy blurs distinctions between the natural and the unnatural, the fictional and the everyday. “Dandyism,” Garrelík writes, “dismantles social distinctions by creating an aristocracy of the self that does not require nobility of birth. The dandy exists in a parallel hierarchy based on personal attributes rather than genealogy or property” (2001, 35–36). The dandy would appear to be Americanization personified. And for many, as we will see in Chapter 5, he went by the name of James McNeill Whistler. Certainly Proust’s own “dandified” text displays an interest in the coming together not only of France and America, but fact and fiction when he has Yvette Guilbert, the real-life star of the Montmartre café-concert scene, speak on behalf of her fictional American friend:

“Ce que je pense de *Mme* de Réveillon, ami ? nous a dit la toute gracieuse divette. D’abord c’est qu’elle est avant tout, passez-moi l’expression, bon zig, et pas duchesse pour deux sous.”

[“You ask for my views on Madame de Réveillon,” said the gracious luminary of our theatrical firmament, “well, the chief thing about her is that she’s – if you’ll pardon the expression – a dam’ good pal. There’s nothing of the duchess about her.”] (*JS*, 504; *JS English*, 415)

The American duchess, or “Mme” as Guilbert pointedly and democratically refers to her, “speaks” in the colloquial voice of a performer who, in her own words, wanted to “assemble an exhibition of humorous sketches in song, depicting all the indecencies, all the excesses, all the vices

of my contemporaries, and to enable them to laugh at themselves.”⁴ It is to be wondered how the duchess’s planned rendition of Guilbert’s “Ah! laissez mois me tordre” would go down before those who assemble to hear her at Réveillon, “ce château gothique où vécut Louis XIV et est enterré saint François de Sales” [the Gothic Château where Louis XIV lived and Saint Francis de Sales lies buried].

It is a shame Proust didn’t see fit to include a version of this material from *Jean Santeuil* in *A la recherche*. With its portrait of the cosmopolitan and bohemian world that gravitated around American money and influence, it would have offered a fascinating alternative to the insular worlds of the Verdurin and Guermantes circles. Proust didn’t, however, altogether do away with the idea that American influences were turning Parisian society into a kind of Gilbert and Sullivan-esque world of Topsy-Turvy. In *Le Temps retrouvé* there is a long section in which Proust describes how the seemingly fixed and determined roles of French aristocratic families intersect with those of the novel’s characters, creating a landscape in which age-old certainties are in the process of being reinscribed. And as in *Jean Santeuil*, his doing so allows him to draw attention to the art in artifice: “C’est tout un roman” [It’s just like a novel] (2336; VI:271).

The “author” of this *nouveau roman* is a young female acquaintance of Marcel’s old friend, Bloch. Unsure as to why Gilberte de Saint-Loup is on such friendly terms with “la plus brillante société,” she asks an American woman who, the Narrator informs us, “était mariée au comte de Farcy, parent obscur des Forcheville et pour lequel ils représentaient ce qu’il y a de plus grand au monde” [was married to the Comte de Farcy, an obscure relation of the Forchevilles, for whom they represented all that was grandest in the world] (2334; VI:269). The American’s ill-informed reply – “Quand ce ne serait que parce qu’elle est née Forcheville. C’est ce qu’il y a de plus grand.” [“Wouldn’t it be because she is a Forcheville by birth? There’s nothing grander than that.”] – betrays her ignorance of Gilberte’s family history, and further contributes to the ongoing process by which Swann is erased from the collective memory of Parisian society. Her words are taken as gospel by Bloch’s friend, who inadvertently passes the information on to a gentleman who “adopta l’erreur et ne tarda pas à la propager” [adopted the erroneous idea and lost no time in propagating it]. Thus the comedy of the corresponding scene in *Jean Santeuil* takes on a

⁴ www.nga.gov/exhibitions/2005/toulouse/guilbert.shtm (accessed Sept. 20, 2006).

darker and more philosophical hue in *A la recherche*. The bonhomie of the café-concert is replaced by an elegy for the effects of time and *traduction*:

Les dîners, les fêtes mondaines, étaient pour l'Américaine une sorte d'école Berlitz. Elle entendait les noms et les répétait sans avoir connu préalablement leur valeur, leur portée exacte ...

Du reste, il faut bien dire que cette ignorance des situations réelles qui tous les dix ans fait surgir les élus dans leur apparence actuelle et comme si le passé n'existait pas, qui empêche pour une Américaine fraîchement débarquée, de voir que M. Charlus avait eu la plus grande situation de Paris à une époque où Bloch n'en avait aucune, et que Swann, qui faisait tant de frais pour M. Bontemps, avait été traité avec la plus grande amitié, cette ignorance n'existe pas seulement chez les nouveaux venus, mais chez ceux qui ont fréquenté toujours des sociétés voisines, et cette ignorance, chez ces derniers comme chez les autres, est aussi un effet ... du Temps.

[Dinner parties and fashionable gatherings were a sort of Berlitz school for the American woman. She heard the names and repeated them without having first understood their value, and their precise significance ...

Moreover, it must be said that this ignorance of the true situation which every ten years makes individuals suddenly emerge in their current guise, as if the past never existed, which prevents a newly disembarked American woman from seeing that M. de Charlus had held the highest social position in Paris at a time when Bloch had had none, and that Swann, who put himself to such trouble for M. Bontemps, had been treated with the greatest friendship by the Prince of Wales,⁵ this ignorance does not exist only among the newcomers, but among those who have always frequented adjacent sections of society, and this ignorance, in the latter as in others, is also an effect ... of Time.] (2335, 2338; VI:269, 273)

For the first and only time in his writings, Proust has allowed one of his American characters to speak. The result is that the fabric of that novel, and of society, is rent. Does this make Proust anti-American?

⁵ In a note to his translation Ian Patterson writes: "Proust does not actually say 'by the Prince of Wales' ... but this is generally thought to be an omission" (VI:366 n. 104).

Certainly the question is not so easily answered as when we are talking, say, of the Baudelaire of *Journal Intime* (“we shall perish by that which we have believed to be our means of existence. So far will machinery have Americanized us”), or the Baudelaire whose defense of Poe took the form of an attack on all things American (“that rabble of buyers and sellers, that nameless thing, that headless monster, that convict deported beyond the sea”).⁶ If there is any antipathy to the United States in *A la recherche*, it is joined to Proust’s wider concerns with the “democratization” of the French language. This affects characters as widely divergent as Françoise, Albertine, “le lift” at Balbec, or, as here, M. de Guermantes:

que de temps en temps, comme font leur apparition et s'éloignent certaines maladies dont on n'entend plus parler ensuite, il naît on ne sait trop comment, soit spontanément, soit par un hasard comparable à celui qui fit germer en France une mauvaise herbe d'Amérique dont la graine prise après la peluche d'une couverture de voyage était tombée sur un talus de chemin de fer, des modes d'expressions qu'on entend dans la même décade dites par des gens qui ne se sont pas concertés pour cela.

[from time to time, just as certain diseases appear, vanish and are never heard of again, there somehow arise (either spontaneously or by some accident like the one that brought into France that American weed the seeds of which, caught in the wool of a travelling rug, fell on a railway embankment) modes of expression which one hears in the same decade on the lips of people who have in no way concerted their efforts to use them.] (926; III:233)

Elsewhere, M. de Guermantes’ younger brother, the Baron de Charlus, extends a double-edged welcome for America’s delayed entry into the war:

« Je ne veux pas dire de mal des Américains, monsieur, continua-t-il,

⁶ Baudelaire thought better of the indigenous Americans. In 1846 he praised a portrait by the American artist George Caitlin of a Native American shown at the previous year’s exhibition of “Indian” art at the Louvre (Higonnet 2002, 328). He also recognized in the Native American a fellow dandy: “Dandyism is a mysterious institution ... Chateaubriand having found it in the forests and by the lakes of the New World” (1964c, 26).

il paraît qu'ils sont inépuisablement généreux et comme il n'y a pas eu de chef d'orchestre dans cette guerre, que chacun est entré dans la danse longtemps après l'autre, et que les Américains ont commencé quand nous étions quasiment finis, ils peuvent avoir une ardeur que quatre ans de guerre ont pu calmer chez nous. Même avant la guerre, ils aimaient notre pays, notre art, ils payaient fort cher nos chefs-d'œuvre. Beaucoup sont chez eux maintenant. [»]

["I do not wish to speak ill of the Americans, Monsieur, he continued, it seems that they are inexhaustibly generous and, as there has not been a conductor in this war, and each performer has joined in long after the last, and the Americans have come in when we are almost finished, they may have an enthusiasm which four years of war have somewhat dulled in us. Even before the war they exhibited a love for our country and our art, and paid high prices for our masterpieces. Many of them are now in their country"] (2207; VI:103)

Charlus speaks, however, with the benefit of his author's experience. For though the scene is set in 1918, Proust wrote it in the early 1920s after the disappointment felt by many in France with the outcome of the treaty talks held in Paris between January and July 1919. Proust's earlier enthusiasm for America joining the war is testified by his dedicating *Pastiches et mélanges* to Walter Berry:

A Monsieur Walter Berry, avocat et lettré, qui, depuis le premier jour de la guerre, devant l'Amérique encore indécise, a plaidé, avec une énergie et un talent incomparables, la cause de la France, et l'a gagnée.

[To M. Walter Berry, lawyer and man of letters, who from the first day of the war, confronting an indecisive America, argued France's case with an incomparable energy and talent, and won.]

After the war the American President, Woodrow Wilson, arrived at the peace talks as the first serving president to travel to Europe.⁷ Wilson's

⁷ Thomas Jefferson had lived in Paris during the late eighteenth century and had been an habitué of the Paris salons. John Adams was a diplomat in Paris in 1783. Benjamin Franklin, meanwhile, went on the record as saying that every man had two homelands: his own and France.

hard-line approach toward the defeated German and Austro-Hungarian empires struck an obvious sympathetic chord with the French public. For a while the attraction was mutual. Wilson, quipped a British diplomat, was drawn to Paris “as a debutante is entranced by the prospect of her first ball” (MacMillan 2001, 3); while the newspaper *L’Humanité* brought out a special issue in which the leading lights of the French left lined up to praise Wilson. Neither was Proust himself immune to the fervor that gripped the city. When Harold Nicolson, one of over 400 British officials alone present at the talks, met Proust – “white, unshaven, grubby, slip-faced” – Proust pumped him for information about how the Peace Conference was proceeding. Typically for Proust, Nicolson’s replies were too generalized: “Be specific, my friend, be specific,” he demanded (MacMillan 2001, 149–150). The phrase is significant, and perhaps tells us that what Proust feared about America was that it was in danger of generalizing the specific. The effect, as with the American woman who is mistaken about Gilberte, is that such generalities would serve to erase the Paris Proust knew and loved as effectively as Swann becomes first overlooked and then forgotten.

This is certainly reflected in Joseph Roth’s report in the *Frankfurter Zeitung*, written less than three years after Proust’s death in 1922:

This summer Paris is neither hot nor cold nor rainy; it is American. Everywhere you go, you hear the twang of American English, everywhere you encounter lanky figures in flat shoes, with big horn-rimmed glasses ... extrawide suits, red Baedeker guides in their hands ... Along all the avenues there are tour buses, each crammed with fifty or sixty Americans sitting obediently and with folded hands, almost as if they were at school ... The elegant and subtle line of French designers and couturiers in summer becomes lavish and ostentatious: American, in a word. (2005, 30–31)

André Maurois’ *Le Côté de Chelsea* (1929) provided a gentler if no less pointed satire on a Paris caught up in the throes of the Jazz Age. A pastiche of *A la recherche*, we find Marcel and M. de Norpois dining at the Pré Catalan in the Bois de Boulogne where the entertainment is initially provided by a violinist who “looked like Morel,” and who performs for an audience of “golden-haired American girls whose vivid dresses encircled the dais of varnished wood in their herbaceous border of animated flowers” (1966, 19). The girls are obviously direct descendants of both “le petite

bande” from *A l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* and the stereotype of “The American Girl Abroad.” Further allusions, however, alert us to the fact that the *Belle Epoque* has undergone more violent change. For while the violinist performs melodies from operas by Saint-Saëns and Leoncavallo that summon up the familiar ghosts of the nineteenth century, France’s more recent dead are evoked in Maurois’ description of his Morel look-alike as a “sonorous outpost ... mobile scout” who “couched his bowpoint like a guardsman saluting with drawn sword.” In turn, the musicians accompanying him “launch a new harmonious offensive” (1966, 13, 14). Soloist and orchestra alike are represented as relics of a culture torn apart by the mechanized carnage of the First World War. And it is to the legacy of the war that Maurois next turns. For while the violinist has been performing “the most antiquated of pre-war refrains,” endowing them with “a tone of authentic and even beautiful despair” (1966, 15), all that is changed when he comes under “friendly fire” from a jazz band:

But as ten o’clock drew near a group of tall negroes in dinner-jackets made their appearance ... deposit[ing] a saxophone near the ‘cellist and a drum by the viola-player ... At the precise moment when the first stroke of ten o’clock was heard to sound, one of the negroes ... grasped his drumsticks, bent downward, and announced with a loud and prolonged tattoo that the time had passed for a life of indolent ease, with its ingenuously voluptuous cadences, and the motley, barbaric and mechanical hour of swift rhythms, skyscrapers and racing cars had at last arrived. (1966, 15)

The music that suddenly shatters the “indolent ease” of Marcel and M. de Norpois was largely fuelled by black GIs who chose to delay their return home after the Armistice, or by touring musicians who traveled to France because they were unable to find acceptance in the States. That *le jazz nègre* (or *le jazz hot* as it was later called when more and more white musicians started performing the new music) met with such an enthusiastic response in France was in no small part influenced by the fact that it was seen as fusing two of the most powerful impulses behind modernism: the “primitive,” and the mechanical or technological. With its syncopated rhythms hailing from Africa via the country of Henry Ford’s mechanized production lines, jazz was acclaimed the epitome of modernity.

Rod Kedward has described French enthusiasm for *le jazz nègre* as evidence of the process of cultural assimilation working in a direction

contrary to that usually seen:

Assimilation ... was understood as bringing foreigners into the orbit of French institutions, language and culture. Much of modernism and the enthusiastic adoption of jazz were forms of assimilation in reverse. They involved the adaptation of French musical and artistic ideas to forms, colors, expressions, rhythms and dance which were the culture of others, notably racial others, and celebrated as such. (2005, 132–133)

While *A la recherche* depicts an earlier period of cultural assimilation, with the relative “invisibility” of black men and women in the France of pre-1914 reflected in the fact that Proust’s references to blacks occur at the rate of once every twelve hundred or so pages, we need to bear in mind that the greater part of the novel was written if not set in the period during and after the outbreak of hostilities in 1914. As a result Proust, too, was seduced by the elision of black and primitive that came to be encapsulated in the phrase *le nègre primitif*. Though Proust’s Marcel never encounters an African-American, the Narrator’s discussion of the blacks he does see is tinged by the racial discourse of modernity. In *A l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, Mme de Villeparisis is accompanied by “le petit nègre habillé en satin rouge qui la suivait partout et qui faisait l’émerveillement de la plage” [the little black boy in a red satin suit who always walked behind her, to the amazement of the whole sea-front] (555; II:279). It seems reasonable to assume that the boy is from one of the French colonies, Algeria, Tunisia, or the Upper Nile rather than the United States. As such he is a singularly ostentatious display of French colonial power as much as bourgeois wealth. In *La Prisonnière*, meanwhile, the presence of Africa while more generalized does touch on the profound effect “primitive” art had on aspects of modernism, represented by the Ballets Russes production of *Shéhérazade*, which, Proust reports, was influenced by “l’art nègre” (1781; V:217). Elsewhere, Proust again associates blacks with the primitive: “noirs que l’existence confortable des blancs désespère et qui préfèrent les risques de la vie sauvage et ses incompréhensibles joies” [blacks, who are driven to despair by the comfortable existence of whites and prefer the risks of the uncivilized life and its incomprehensible joys] (1226–1227; IV:28). What is interesting here is that Proust uses the example of blacks alongside Jews as a way of discussing the social alienation of the invert. In these terms, homosexuality, too, is presented as a form of “la vie sauvage.”

This is important when it comes to reading *Le Côté de Chelsea*. Not only is Maurois' emphasis on the visible and aural "otherness" of the jazz musicians evidence of a barely concealed racism, it also signals what Philippe Roger calls "an *aesthetic* anti-Americanism" (2005, 36). We discover something similar in Duhamel's *Scenes de la Vie Future*, published the year after *Le Côté de Chelsea*, in which black music, jazz in particular, is the defining sound of the New World. The equation of African-Americans with modernity is everywhere apparent in Duhamel's book: it is black workers who are described manning the production-line of a Chicago abattoir, with the sounds of the terrified animals likened to the "pretty tunes" of a jazz band. What is more, jazz is the "triumph of barbaric folly" on a par with cubism and the fad for novelists to "introduce into all their stories a 'pair' of homosexuals" (1931, 104, 121). Thus *le nègre primitif* fuses with a fear of American effeminacy (Roger 2005, 19–21) and the kind of art that challenged old assumptions.

Voices full of money

The deeply entrenched conservatism espoused by Maurois and Duhamel had not always prevailed. In the 1830s Alexis de Tocqueville was generally positive in his assessment of America, believing that it offered a political model for what France might one day become. Similarly Edgar Degas, visiting New Orleans in the early 1870s, had felt the stirrings of new possibilities and subject matter for art. Writing to James Jacques-Joseph Tissot, Degas was enthusiastic in praising a series of Whistler's latest seascapes, while adding (perhaps with reference to the painting on which he was himself engaged, *The Cotton Office, New Orleans*) "But bless me, there are quite different things to be done!"⁸ Back in France, Edouard Manet was in no doubt that the United States "produces men who have not only all the qualities of our old French society, but also an instinct for modernity. They understand it. They have a real feeling for it ... I won't go on about it, but in years to come they're going to amaze the Old World" (Wilson-Bareau 1991, 303).

Prescient as such admiration for the United States was, it can hardly

⁸ Kendall 1987, 98. The interesting thing here is that Degas seems to have equated Whistler's landscapes with a French rather than American tradition. In doing so, he may well have been signaling his disapproval of Courbet and his influence on Whistler.

be thought of as typical. Tocqueville himself came to hold contradictory opinions about the States. In volume 2 of *Democracy in America* (1840), he commented on the lack of scientific and artistic progress made in the country. One reason for this, he thought, was that in America alone among the civilized nations “the whole community of men is simultaneously engaged in production and commerce” (Tocqueville 2003, 525). This led him to be critical of an American model of democracy which brought about a culture devoid of intellectual and artistic enterprise. Contemporary with Poe’s first published poems and stories, it is fascinating to read Tocqueville’s deeply felt response to the stifling conformity of American society while bearing in mind those passages in Poe that describe live burials:

When I imagine a democratic society of this kind, I fancy myself in one of those dark, low, close places where light is brought in from outside soon to grow dim and die. A sudden heaviness appears to overwhelm me and I stumble about in the surrounding darkness looking for an escape route into air and daylight. (2003, 527)

Almost three decades later in 1867, the Goncourt brothers attended a dinner held at the French Embassy. Among those present was the wife of the U.S. minister in Brussels. “Studying the free and confident grace of this spirited example of a young race,” the brothers wrote, “[we] said to [ourselves] that these men and women were destined to be the future conquerors of the world. They will be the Barbarians of civilization, who will devour the Latin world as the Barbarians of barbarism devoured it in the past” (Goncourt and Goncourt 1980, 145). The Goncourts were not alone in their apocalyptic outlook. “America,” the essayist Émile Barbier wrote in 1893, “is invading old Europe; it is flooding it and will soon submerge it”; while the economist Paul de Rousiers thought “America has ceased to be an object of curiosity in becoming an object of dread.” Warming to his theme, Rousiers added that the United States “has grown to be a formidable rival to the Old World” (Roger 2005, 137, 138). Even in jest French concerns bubbled to the surface, as evidenced by comments made in the society journal *L’Illustration* in 1881 when an American horse won the Grand Prix at Longchamps for the first time:

I know, since the victory of Foxhall, one determined [French] patriot who can no longer, without a lot of grumbling, say the name America. He finds the Yankees a bit unbecoming ... They have

painters who carry off our medals, like Mr Sargent, beautiful women who eclipse ours, like Mme Gauthereau, and horses that beat our steeds ... It is a peaceful war, but they come to hoist their victory colors over our land.⁹

This was a hard pill to swallow for Parisians who, in Colin Jones's resonant phrase, prided themselves on being "the template of modernity which other cities strove to achieve" (2004, xvii).

One of the ways Paris set about realizing this ideal was literally to demolish the past and refashion itself under the modernizing aegis of Napoleon III and Baron Georges Eugène Haussmann. It was a process not without its counselors of doom, and those who raised their voices against Haussmann often did so because they saw the changed cityscape as threatening to resemble "some future American Babylon" (Jones 2004, 414). Again we find the Goncourt brothers registering their disillusion. Visiting Rome in the spring of 1867, they discovered a city that reminded them of the Paris that had been torn down in the name of modernity. With its "twisting streets, narrow alleys and filthy markets ... stained, gimcrack buildings ... full of exotic charm and showing no sign of municipal activity," Rome allowed them to escape "the Americanized modern world and hidebound Paris."¹⁰ Neither was such a view limited to Parisians. Ralph Waldo Emerson decried those changes he believed would turn the city into "a loud modern New York of a place" (cited in Porte 1982, 109); and Henry James, recalling the Paris of previous visits, bemoaned "the deadly monotony that M. Haussmann called into being." James also noted how the air "smells of the modern asphalt ... and over the hardened bitumen the young Parisian of our day will constantly circulate, looking rather pallid" (2001, 74, 75). Such imagery is one part Dante's *Inferno* with its lost souls circling for eternity, and one part modern America with its asphalt sidewalks (patented in 1875 by Henry R. Bellamy of Indianapolis). In the air as well as on the ground, Paris was changing. The designs for the Eiffel Tower were condemned in terms that implicated the United

⁹ Cited in Hirshler 2006, 80. "Mme Gauthereau" is a misspelling of Mme Virginie Avegno Gautreau, the American-born sitter for Sargent's notorious society portrait, *Madame X* (1883–84).

¹⁰ Goncourt and Goncourt 1980, 142. Three years later Edmond de Goncourt asked Victor Hugo if, on his return from exile in Jersey, he didn't find that "the Parisian of the past felt lost here, that the city had been Americanized" (1980, 198).

States – a public petition from 1887 stating: “The Eiffel Tower, which even money-grubbing America, we can be certain, would not want, is the dishonor of Paris” (Jones 2004, 391). Little wonder, then, that legislation was put in place to block any further moves to create high-rise buildings.¹¹ With hindsight, we can see that what was being delayed was a shift in the balance of cultural hegemony: from Paris, capital of the nineteenth century, to New York, the soon-to-be capital of the twentieth.

Given the outpouring of anti-Americanism prompted by Haussmann’s reconstruction of Paris, it is ironic that his ability to follow through his plans relied in part on the gold that came pouring into French coffers from the new mines in California. Further finance was obtained from private American donors, given in recognition of the longstanding alliance between the two nations. For the French, then, to rail against America is rather like Huysmans’s arch-decadent, Des Esseintes, complaining about the “American century” while taking full advantage of what it had to offer in terms of consumption. Patrick McGuinness has written that in his passion for private ownership Des Esseintes is uncannily like an early twentieth-century American millionaire, “buying, transporting, transplanting” (2003, xxix). In reality, then, decadence ran parallel with, rather than counter to, burgeoning commercialization. And while consumerism was hardly the preserve of America (Flaubert, for example, is scathing about French consumerism in *Madame Bovary*), increasingly it came to be associated with the United States. Even a writer as seemingly untainted by the material world as Edgar Allan Poe was not exempt from such cultural stereotyping. Jules Barbey d’Aurevilly, venomously anti-American, writing in 1858, singled out Poe as “a characteristic product of the materialistic society that has abandoned any shared spiritual commitment for the anarchic principle of pure individuality” (Seigel 1986, 113). Central, then, to the emergence of the decadent movement, but as Jennifer Birkett has commented, not always acknowledged as such, was the influence of American capital, democracy and commerce. Thus “the Yankee businessman join[ed] the Jewish banker, Medusa and the mob” in the iconography of writers such as Huysmans (1986, 19). To this we should add Poe, the author who inspires Des

¹¹ Again, such views were not restricted to France. David Boyd, president of the Philadelphia branch of the American Institute of Architects, called skyscrapers “architectural protuberances” and “an offence that must be stopped”; and Henry James on his return to the States in 1904 saw the skyscraper as a “bristling” symbol of greed and the market (1994, xii).

Esseintes' ideal that "the only thing that mattered to him was the writer's personality" and that to earn a place in his library "a book had to have that quality of strangeness that Edgar Allan Poe called for" (Huysmans 2003, 165).

In his rage to consume, Des Esseintes is a child of his time. Writing in 1855 about the Exposition Universelle, the historian Ernest Renan commented on how "Europe has gone off to view the merchandise" (Jones 2004, 385). What the crowds who attended this and subsequent Expositions witnessed was a display of American entrepreneurial ingenuity, including the sewing machine, the refrigerator, the phonograph, the elevator, and a panoply of other domestic appliances. Parisians flocked to the city's newly established department stores in order to buy the latest American gadget, leading to warnings that France was becoming Americanized by "things."

A la recherche provides a fascinating glimpse of this process and of the wide-ranging nature of American influence. From dentistry to celluloid, dry-cleaning to the revolving door, the Mormons¹² to running water, Buffalo Bill to the pianola, the Boston Dip to publicity,¹³ cocktails¹⁴ to

¹² Proust's M. de Bréauté, one of Odette's lovers, writes an essay on the Mormons that appears in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* (1132; III:503)

¹³ "American" publicity was associated with the rise of mass circulation newspapers and the increasing importance attached to popular opinion. As Eugene Weber says, there arose a genuine tension in France between press and parliament as to which was "the chief site and instrument of public debate" (1986, 240). The publicity stunt was born in the States, and James McNeill Whistler for one was adept at using it to draw attention to his work – not always to his advantage. So notorious was he for attracting publicity, particularly after the Ruskin court case, that he found it difficult to gain new patrons. Proust was not exempt from similar charges: "His weakness for newspaper opinions, and his respect for the power of journalists to make reputations, showed in his ruthless use of contacts and shameless persistence in trying to ensure good publicity for his novel" (Davenport-Hines 2006, 220).

¹⁴ *Les cocktails* originate from New Orleans where they were invented by Antoine Amedee Peychaud, a French-Haitian exile. The English name is thought to derive from the fact that the drink may have been served in a *coquetier* (an egg cup). While Daniel Karlin sees the word as evidence of Proust's "Englishness," it rather speaks, as H. L. Mencken said, of the "conviviality [and] imaginativeness of Americans ... both in the invention and in the naming of new and often highly complex beverages. So vast was the production of novelties during the Nineteenth Century that England borrowed many of them and their names with them. And

vulcanized rubber, patent leather to “sweaters.”¹⁵ lobster à l’américaine to the Singer sewing machines – all of which receive a mention in Proust’s novel – every stratum of Parisian society was becoming familiar with what the United States had to offer.

It is not simply a case of Proust referring to these things in passing. More often than not they become a way of focussing the reader on key themes and motifs. Take hot running water, for example. Known as the “American comfort,” because frequent washing was still not something to which the general populace subscribed (this was left to prostitutes, though more as a form of birth control than for personal hygiene), it was a utility which many remained suspicious of. Such associations are present in *A la recherche*: Marcel overhears Charlus and Jupien washing themselves after having had sex (1215; IV:13); and Marcel and Albertine, living together in his parents’ apartment, carry on a conversation while they bathe because the wall between their bathrooms is thin (1610; V:5).¹⁶

Time and again the influence of America on French society is synonymous with Marcel’s “sentimental education.” Visting Gilberte, the adolescent Marcel wears patent-leather ankle boots, “bottines vernies,” when invited to the Swanns’ for “lunch” (419; II:101). He later associates such visits with eating “homard à l’américaine” – lobster cooked with tomatoes, cognac and white wine (428; II:113). Their relationship eventually becomes strained, and the last time Marcel visits Gilberte at her parents’ house she becomes annoyed with him because she would rather be at a dancing-class where she will dance “le Boston” (462; II:159).¹⁷ America

not only England: one buys *cocktails* and *gin-fizzes* to this day in American bars that stretch from Paris to Yokohama” (Mencken 1936, 148–149).

¹⁵ The “sweater” originated in America in the 1890s and was originally worn by men to induce sweating (believed to be healthy). It probably entered women’s fashion through the craze for cycling, and it is because of this that the bicycling dairy-maid Marcel asks to run a message for him is wearing “une golf” (1710; V:128). Carol Clark, in the Penguin edition (2002), translates “C’est mon golf” as “That’s my cardigan.” It seems to me, however, that the previous English translations are right in plumping for “sweater.”

¹⁶ The implicit eroticism of the scene is made explicit in Chantal Akerman’s film adaptation of *La Prisonnière*, *La Captive* (2000) when Marcel watches Arianne/Albertine bathing through a frosted-glass partition.

¹⁷ The American Waltz was introduced by an Italian dancing master in Boston in 1834. Slower than the Viennese waltz, it evolved into the Boston dip, the French Boston, and finally the Valse l’Américain (composed in 1866 by the Société Académique des Professional danse de Paris). Several mentions occur in the novel.

and music feature elsewhere in the novel. In *La Prisonnière* Albertine plays the pianola – the pneumatic system found in most player pianos, later marketed as the pianola, was patented by Edwin Votey in Detroit in 1895 – for Marcel. Among the pieces he selects are arrangements of Vinteuil’s compositions. These he chooses so as to test whether, because of the connection between Albertine and Mlle Vinteuil, she remains capable of making him suffer jealousy. Proust also refers to a more sophisticated form of pianola introduced in France in 1904 that could reproduce “le son et le style des différents artistes qui en jouèrent” [the sound and the style of the various artists who played them] (755; III:9).

More allusive and wider ranging is the confluence of ideas that cluster round Proust’s seemingly innocuous mention of the Singer sewing machine. Proust knew Winaretta Singer, the American heiress to the Singer fortune, who in 1893 had married the elderly Prince Edmond de Polignac. The marriage was one of convenience: the Prince enjoyed the benefit of his wife’s substantial fortune, while the now Princesse Edmond de Polignac was able to live an openly gay life. Proust was a friend of the couple, and wanted to dedicate *A l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* to the Prince, but his wife refused. A lover and commissioner of new music, it was the Princesse for whom Ravel wrote “Pavane pour une Infante défunte” (1899), which was played, at Proust’s specific request, at his own funeral.¹⁸

Once noticed, such allusions to American culture and French sexual mores provide fascinating insights into Proust’s imagination. His reference

Octave wins prizes in all the dancing competitions, including the Boston dip (689; II:456); and the Princesse de Guermantes, in greeting Marcel, performs “un tournoiement plein de grâce, dans le tourbillon duquel je me sentais emporté” [a very graceful pirouette, in whose vortex I felt swept away] and which the Narrator likens to watching her dance the Boston dip. This latter reference leads to an acknowledgment of the shared revolutionary history of France and the States. Having completed her “dance,” the Princesse reminds Marcel of the “grandes dames qui montèrent si fièrement à l’échafaud” [great ladies who ... mounted the scaffold with such pride] (1238–1239; IV:44).

¹⁸ A description of one of her concert parties incidentally shows the standing of other “dollar princesses” in contemporary Parisian society: “Automatically the different groups went to their places: the first three rows for the American multi-millionaires, with white hair and diamonds, and English duchesses, the next three rows for important Frenchwomen with their hair dyed, the heavenly young were grouped at the back whispering and jostling, while standing about, decorating the doorways, were always some old aesthetes, boon companions of the princess’s youth” (Davenport-Hines 2006, 229).

to “les apaches,” for example, alludes not only to the enormous popularity of Buffalo Bill’s Wild West show when it appeared for seven months at the 1889 Exposition Universelle, but to the fact that Paris street gangs became known as “apaches” in homage to the show and to their use of knuckle-dusters, known as “American punches.” The association of Paris’s criminal underclass with indigenous Americans goes back at least as far as the 1840s. In *Les Mystères de Paris* (1842–43), Eugène Sue wrote:

Everyone has read those admirable pages in which Fenimore Cooper, the American Walter Scott, has brought to life the fierce ways of the savages ... It is our intent to bring before the eyes of the reader some episodes in the lives of various other barbarians, no less removed from the civilized world than the tribes so well portrayed by Cooper.

Balzac, meanwhile, was criticized for offering his readers “an excess of Mohicans in spencer jackets and of Iroquois in frock coats” (cited in Benjamin 1999a, 441). Thus Charlus shows some familiarity with “du monde apache” (1575; IV:484), and his brother expresses a delight in *Les Mohicans de Paris*, a novel written not by Balzac, as he tells Marcel, but by Alexandre Dumas père (1123; III:490). “Les Apaches” was also the name given to a circle of French musicians, writers, and artists at the turn of the twentieth century. Several members of the circle, including Ravel, developed an interest in jazz, the influence of which can be felt in a number of Ravel’s compositions, including his Sonata for Violin and Piano. Perhaps, too, as with Charlus, Ravel may have felt that the associations between Les Apaches and gritty American urban life offered a smokescreen for the rumors surrounding his secretive and ambiguous sexuality.

As a result of the States no longer denoting “a territory or a people, but rather a certain ‘being-in-the-world’ that has become planetary” (Roger 2005, 451–452), it is hardly surprising that American influences were discerned where none existed. Marcel, for example, attributes the invention of the telephone to Edison rather than Bell (1307; IV:133);¹⁹ while Françoise refers to a baked ham as “jambon de Nev’York.” The significance of Françoise’s error is that while she has heard of New York she is ignorant of (ye olde) York:

¹⁹ Proust’s confusion as to the “discoverer” of the telephone may have come about because Edison’s invention of the “carbon-button” telephone dramatically improved the quality of sound, and remains at the heart of the modern telephone.

Croyant la langue moins riche qu'elle n'est et ses propres oreilles peu sûres, sans doute la première fois quelle avait entendu parler de jambon d'York avait-elle cru – trouvant d'une prodigalité invraisemblable dans le vocabulaire qu'il pût exister à la fois York et New York – qu'elle avait mal entendu et qu'on avait voulu dire le nom qu'elle connaissait déjà.

[In the belief that the language was poorer than it is, and her own ears less reliable than they were, the first time Françoise had heard of "York ham," she must have deduced that the lexicon could not possibly be so abundant as to allow for both York and New York, that she had misheard and that the right name was the one she already knew.] (358; II:19)

One thing is clear: the United States is a powerful presence within *A la recherche* – one that exceeds the relatively few references to "Américains" (four) or "Amérique" (eleven) listed by Tadié in the *Index des noms de lieux*.²⁰ What necessarily gets excluded from Tadié's index are those objects and influences that constitute the material world of the novel, and that play so important a role in the inner lives of Proust's characters, not least Marcel and his struggle to accommodate himself to a rapidly changing world. In the rest of this chapter I want to establish just how fundamental a part this plays in key aspects of Marcel's development as both an interpreter and a writer of *modernité*.

A painted yacht, on a painted ocean

America has long represented to European eyes the boundless imagination, the challenge of unknown worlds. Chateaubriand, for example, in the early 1790s recognized the dual attraction of adventure – he hoped to discover the fabled North-West Passage – and the opportunity to consolidate France's colonial presence in the continent. Control of North America's trade-routes was, he saw, key to continued French power and privilege back home in Europe. America also held the prospect of a renewed sense of direction for French art, one inspired by "an unknown Muse": "I listened to the accents of her voice and marked them down in my book, by the light

²⁰ The eleven references to "Amérique" should be seen as referring to the United States. There is one additional reference apiece to "Amérique centrale" and "Amérique du sud."

of the stars, as an ordinary musician might write down the notes dictated to him by some great master of harmony” (Chateaubriand 1961, 171).

Proust read *Mémoires d'outre tombe* avidly throughout his life. We might wonder, then, whether Chateaubriand’s “unknown muse” is the same as later inspires Elstir to paint *Porte de Carquethuit*, or whether the rapt description of an Edenic America contributes to Marcel’s sensuous rediscovery of Combray in the mingled tastes of a *madeleine* and a cup of tea:

After dinner [the Governor] showed me what he called his garden. A sweet, delicate smell of heliotrope came from a small patch of flowering bean; it was not wafted towards us by a gentle breeze from home, but by a wild Newfoundland wind which had no connection with the exiled plant, no attractive element of reminiscence or delight. In this perfume which was no longer breathed in by beauty, purified in its breast, or diffused in its wake, in this perfume of a changed dawn, a different culture, another world, there lingered all the melancholy of nostalgia, absence, and youth. (1961, 151)

Certainly the various forms of corruption that Proust brought together in the figure of Morel, a gifted musician, are prefigured in Chateaubriand’s description of a French violinist, “his hair all curled and powdered,” who leads the native Americans in their demi-paradise a merry dance (Chateaubriand 1961, 165). Considered in this context, we might count the treatment of Maurois’ Morel lookalike in *Le Côté de Chelsea* as marking the repayment of a longstanding debt.

The Stars and Stripes was the first and arguably the most potent American-made symbol of the kind of aspirations evoked by Chateaubriand. Proust seems to have recognized this. For among the works by Elstir that Marcel sees in the artist’s studio at Balbec we have not only *Porte de Carquethuit*, with its depiction of a French landscape that reminds the painter of Florida, but a painting of a yacht sporting the red, white, and blue not of the *tricolore* but “le drapeau américain.” As with the painting of Carquethuit, the image of the yacht affects Marcel deeply and has wide-ranging implications for the subsequent direction his life takes. It is a passage worth quoting at some length.

De sorte qui si avant ces visites chez Elstir, avant d’avoir vu une marine de lui où une jeune femme, en robe de barège ou de linon, dans un yacht arborant le drapeau américain, mit le « double » spirituel

d'une robe de linon blanc et d'un drapeau dans mon imagination qui aussitôt couva un désir insatiable de voir sur-le-champ des robes de linon blanc et des drapeaux près de la mer, comme si cela ne m'était jamais arrivé jusque-là, je m'étais toujours efforcé, devant la mer, d'expulser du champ de ma vision, aussi bien que les baigneurs du premier plan, les yachts aux voiles trop blanches comme un costume de plage, tout ce qui m'empêchait de me persuader que je contemplais le flot immémorial qui déroulait déjà sa même vie mystérieuse avant l'apparition de l'espèce humaine et jusqu'aux jours radieux qui me semblaient revêtir de l'aspect banal de l'universel été cette côte de brumes et de tempêtes, y marquer un simple temps d'arrêt, l'équivalent de ce qu'on appelle en musique une mesure pour rien, or maintenant c'était le mauvais temps qui me paraissait devenir quelque accident funeste, ne pouvant plus trouver de place dans le monde de la beauté: je désirais vivement aller retrouver dans la réalité ce qui m'exaltait si fort et j'espérais que le temps serait assez favorable pour voir du haut de la falaise les mêmes ombres bleues que dans le tableau d'Elstir.

[Whereas before my visits to Elstir's studio (before I had seen in one of his seascapes a young woman wearing a dress of barège or lawn, on the deck of a yacht flying the American flag, who imprinted the spiritual replica of a dress of white lawn and a flag in my imagination, giving it an instantaneous and insatiable desire to set my eyes on dresses of white lawn and flags by the sea, as though I had never seen such a sight before) I had always striven, when looking at the sea, to exclude from my field of vision not only the bathers in the foreground but the yachts with their sails as excessively white as beach-clothes, indeed anything which prevented me from having the feeling that I was gazing upon the timeless deep, whose mysterious existence had been rolling on unchanged since long before the first appearance of mankind, even the glorious weather which seemed to veil that foggy gale-lashed coastline behind summer's trite and changeless aspect, filling it with an empty pause, the equivalent of what is called in music a rest, now, however, it was bad weather which seemed to have become the unfortunate accident and to have no place in the world of beauty; and so, burning with the desire to go and seek out from reality what had so stirred me, I hoped the day

would be fine enough for me to see from the cliff-top the same blue shadows as I had admired in Elstir's picture ...] (706; II:479)

Elstir's unnamed painting offers Marcel his first lesson in modernity. Where previously he has attempted to erase from his imagination anything that distracts him from "the timeless deep," the image of a girl on board a yacht refocusses his attention on the material presence of surface detail, predominantly cloth, whether her clothes or the flag. It is a painting the effects of which are "instantaneous and insatiable." It creates a space within him which corresponds to that opened up by his mother's long-delayed goodnight kiss at Combray. Like the withheld kiss, Elstir's painting provokes and excites, challenging the belief that an artwork, like the individual, is a wholly self-sustaining and unique presence in the world.

While Marcel has previously sought the decadent ideal of losing sight of the contemporary world through the timelessness of art, the lesson of Elstir's painting, with its depiction of a fashionable young woman at ease in a world of sophistication, wealth and glamor, is that the material world can be an alternative source of insight. One of the origins of this artistic credo can be found in Emerson's "The American Scholar":

I embrace the common, I explore and sit at the feet of the familiar, the low. Give me insight into to-day, and you may have the antique and future worlds. What would we really know the meaning of? The meal in the Firkin; the milk in the pan; the ballad in the street; the news of the boat; the glance of the eyes; the form and gait of the body ... there is no trifle; there is no puzzle; but one design unites and animates the farthest pinnacle and the lowest trench. (*EL*, 68–69).²¹

Another source is Baudelaire, in particular his writings on fashion, which, as Ulrich Lehmann says, provide "the supreme example of that contemporary spirit [which] changes constantly and remains necessarily incomplete; it is transitory, mobile, and fragmentary" (2000, xii). Baudelaire's influence at this point in the novel should not be underestimated. Not only because his essay "Le peintre de la vie moderne" established the terms and conditions under which we continue to assess modernity, but also because it was

²¹ See "Notes on References and Abbreviations" for details of those editions of Emerson's writings cited in this book.

Baudelaire, in a review critical of the 1855 Exposition, who coined the term “Americanization.” *Modernité* and *américanisé*, the former positive and the latter negative, thus became the twin poles of the modern world. As a result, we might justifiably call what Marcel responds to in Elstir’s painting the “American way.”

An aficionado of women’s fashion, Elstir’s ideal is for the clothes women wear on board yachts: “ce qui est gracieux, ce sont ces toilettes légères, blanches et unies, en toile, en linon, en pékin, en coutil, qui au soleil et sur le bleu de la mer font un blanc aussi éclatant qu’une voile blanche” [the really graceful ones wear things that are light and white and plain, linen, duck, twill, which when you see them in the sunlight and against the blue of the sea are as white as the white of a sail] (704; II:476–477). Given Marcel’s later obsession with dressing Albertine in designs by the Venetian couturier Fortuny, it is ironic that Elstir’s preference for such Whistlerian “Symphonies in White” indicates a rejection of the contemporary fashion for “period costume.” Ironic, and yet it prepares us for the jealousy Marcel is to suffer when he learns that Albertine is on friendly terms with the notorious lesbian actress, Léa. The antithesis of the Fortuny-clad woman, the actress, Elstir comments, is one of the very few women who really know how to dress. Elstir’s description of Léa excites in Marcel a desire to understand not only the mysteries of *haute couture* but what it is that women like Albertine really want: “J’aurais tant voulu savoir en quoi cette petite ombrelle différait des autres, et pour d’autres raisons, de coquetterie féminine, Albertine l’aurait voulu plus encore.” [I would have given a lot to understand what it was that made this little sunshade different from other sunshades; and for different reasons, related to feminine pleasure in appearance, Albertine would have given even more.] (704; II:477). In a neat reversal of Marx’s famous epigram, we encounter here as comedy what in the *roman d’Albertine* will reappear as tragedy.²²

There are other ways in which Elstir’s painting can be seen as representing, or having been inscribed with, evidence of the single theme

²² The *roman d’Albertine* is the name commonly given to the “novel-within-a-novel” that constitutes *La Prisonnière* (1923) and *Albertine disparue* (1925). Unpublished at the time of Proust’s death, the story of Marcel’s obsession with Albertine, her flight from Paris, her death in a horse-riding accident, and Marcel’s subsequent trip to Venice with his mother did not form part of Proust’s original plan for the novel. It was only during the First World War, one effect of which was that publishing in France ground to a halt, that Proust decided to expand his novel and to place greater emphasis on the figure of Albertine.

that from *Sodome et Gomorrhe* onward dominates the novel: homosexuality. For in Joséphin Péladan's arch-decadent novel *La Gynandre* (1891), we find a lesbian American heiress, Countess Limerick, who is captain of a yacht (the *Sappho*, what else) manned by a crew of all-male sailors. If the girl on board Elstir's yacht is a version of Countess Limerick, the painting thus takes on the ambiguous and provocative nature of other works by Elstir, notably his portrait of Odette as the cross-dressing "Miss Sacripant."

The Stars and Stripes dates back to 1777, and the resolution by Congress that the flag should consist of thirteen alternately red and white stripes representing the individual colonies, and that the Union be represented by thirteen white stars on a blue background. However, the addition of further states to the Union meant that there was a need for periodic revision. As a result, there remained little conformity in the flag's design until after the Civil War and the advent of mass production in the late nineteenth century. We can assume that it is one of these mass-produced flags that Elstir paints, and that Marcel in turn wants to see further replicated. This very reproducibility of the Stars and Stripes is itself significant. In popular legend at least, the original flag was the handiwork of Betsy Ross, a flagmaker for the Pennsylvania Navy, who designed and sewed it together from separate bits of cloth. This tradition of hand-made flags continues today. As Fred Orton has commented, little or no distinction is made between

the Stars and Stripes as it is made to be flown from a flag-pole, draped against a wall, hung above a street or as it might be painted or printed or otherwise put on any surface ... [W]hen it is made of fabric for public display, especially outside or in public buildings, it is rarely printed. The convention ... is to sew it together.²³

If not exactly a work of art, the American flag retains the aura of an artifact the production of which alludes to the fabrication of a unique object by a named individual at a particular time and place. This means that the mass production of the Stars and Stripes can be regarded as being a part of the technological diminishment of the artwork discussed by Walter Benjamin:

²³ Orton 1994, 90. As I discuss in Chapter 5, at the close of *A la recherche* Proust likens the task of the novelist to that of a seamstress stitching together separate pieces of fabric.

In even the most perfect reproduction, *one* thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art – its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence – and nothing else – that bears the mark of the history to which the work has been subject. This history includes changes to the physical structure of the work over time, together with any changes in ownership ... *The whole sphere of authenticity eludes technological – and, of course, not only technological – reproducibility.* But whereas the authentic work retains its full authority in the face of a reproduction made by hand, which it generally brands a forgery, this is not the case with technological reproductions. (2003b, 253–254)

The flag carries with it, then, tensions that remain a part of Marcel's response to Elstir's painting. "By replicating the work many times over," Benjamin continues, "it substitutes a mass existence for a unique existence." Up until this point in the novel, it has been the latter that Marcel has aspired to. Now, however, he wants not only to see the flag but the girl on the yacht reproduced *ad infinitum*. Or, more accurately, he wants not *her* but her *clothes*. The painting arouses in Marcel a desire for surfaces, for the immediacy of the visible and tangible as opposed to the mysterious and unchanging depths of the sea (*le flot immémorial*). Ironically it is the painting's very "aura," its existence as a work of art, which leads Marcel to want to challenge this uniqueness. In this he comes close to a state described by the art critic Max Kozloff in relation to Jasper Johns's *White Flag* (1955), a painting he refers to as "a reverie on surface and illusion" (1970, 16).

Elstir's painting alerts us to the controversy raised by Johns's earlier *Flag* (1954–55). "Is it a flag, or is it a painting?" Alan R. Solomon asked, almost a decade after the work was first exhibited (cited in Orton 1994, 131). In one sense the question is easily answered. The United States Statutes at Large declares:

The words "flag, standard, colors, or ensign," as used herein, shall include any flag, standard, colors, ensign or any picture or representation of either ... made of any substance or represented on any substance, of any size evidently purporting to be either of said flag, standard, colors, or ensign of the United States of America ... by which the average person seeing the same without deliberation may believe the same to represent the flag, colors, standard, or ensign of the United States of America.

Elstir's flag, too, does not represent but *is*. It makes the painted canvas subject to US law, history, and ideology. There is in this a fascinating correlative to the situation in France during the decades straddling the turn of the twentieth century when there was a marked increase in the influence on the French art market of American collectors. By 1910, the London-based *Burlington Magazine* was advising anyone who wished to make "a serious study of French painting" that they "must cross the Atlantic" (Dumas and Brenneman 2000, 13). Neither was American influence limited to private wealth. Threatened by what seemed the imminent capture of Paris by German troops in 1914, the American ambassador, Myron Herrick, promised the French government that as a neutral country the United States would protect the city's museums by flying the American flag over them. The safety of Paris's treasures would be guaranteed because, rather than belonging solely to the nation, they would be held "in the custody of humanity at large" (Horne 2002, 353).

How consciously is Marcel responding to those ideals propounded here by Herrick? The question returns us to how deliberate was Proust in "importing" references to the United States into his novel. On the one hand we can simply say that Proust, like Elstir, is recording what he saw. Elstir, we imagine, catches sight of a yacht and paints it for its purely pictorial interest. Yet there is no Balbec. There was no Elstir. No such painting of a yacht exists. Proust imagined them all. They are themselves, then, examples of Marcel's desire for "le « double » spirituel." Moreover, that Proust's readers continue to be fascinated by the real-life personalities behind his characters suggests that the claims of biography rather than artifice continue to show through the surface of his fiction. To paraphrase what Walter Benjamin wrote in his preparatory notes to his great essay "On the Image of Proust," the "text" becomes a "textum" (fabric) in which, as Ulrich Lehmann says, what is hidden in the folds is remembrance (2000, 210). There are, then, fascinating parallels between Proust's layering of fact and fiction and the technique employed by Johns in making *Flag*. What Johns did, collage-like, was to take scraps and strips of newspaper, dip them in wax mixed with white paint, and then fix them to his canvas. Having left some newsprint visible in places through the additional layers of paint, the result, as Orton comments, is that texture *and* textuality both demand recognition. What we find, then, in *Flag* is a similar blurring of the distinctions between "surface" and "depth" that Elstir's painting forces Marcel to reconsider: "*Flag's* texts are trivial and superficial: beneath the red, white and blue we can

make out comic strips, adverts for pile remedies and douches, Hollywood gossip, a medical textbook with the title 'The Nervous System,' a Rodgers and Hammerstein musical (*Pipe Dreams*) and real-estate ads" (Orton 1994, 127).

The occasions on which the United States is so explicit and demanding a presence as in Elstir's painting are few. Unlike the other great Anglo-Saxon nation, there are no references to America's political system or its history; and while Britain appears in the novel in terms of its institutions (the jockey club, the Prince of Wales, the military), the United States is more usually referred to in the guise of famous inventors like Edison (1307; IV:133), or representatives of commerce and industry, such as Andrew Carnegie, the "Steel King" [le Roi de l'Acier] (1178; III:564). Further references share something of the inconsequentiality of the texts that show through the *textum* of Johns's *Flag*. There are the Siamese twins, Rosita and Doodica, from Barnum's circus, which wintered in Paris from November 1901 to March 1902 (1656; V:62),²⁴ or the craze for the Boston dip. More often than not, American citizens appear in the novel as anonymous, barely sketched "characters," such as the unnamed Americans with whom Swann goes to the opera rather than attending the Verdurin salon (162; I:198). When, however, a glimpse of *le drapeau américain* threatens the integrity of the *tricolore*, Proust's characters take refuge in isolationism and snobbery. Thus we find M. de Norpois giving vent to anti-American prejudices when pontificating on Berma's acting to

²⁴ Barnum's Circus left a lasting impression on the French. The Goncourt brothers nicknamed Edgar Allan Poe "Hoffmann-Barnum" (Goncourt and Goncourt 1980, 119), while Whistler was referred to as an "artistic Barnum" (Curry Park 2004, 26). In Huysmans' *À Rebours*, moreover, we find Des Esseintes sexually excited by watching an American circus acrobat called Miss Urania. He fantasizes about her changing first from a woman to an androgynous creature before settling on the identity of a man ("uranist" being a contemporary medical term for a male homosexual), while he changes from a man to a woman (Huysmans 2003, 97). Proust, meanwhile, refers to the Siamese twins Rosita and Doodica in terms of Albertine's duplicity about her lesbian relationships: "Mais combien il est plus étrange qu'une femme soit accolée, comme Rosita à Doodica, à une autre femme dont la beauté différente fait induire un autre caractère, et que pour voir l'une il faille se placer de profil, pour l'autre de face" [But how much stranger it is that a woman should be attached, like Rosita and Doodica, to another woman whose different beauty makes us deduce the existence of another personality, and that to see the one we should have to look at her in profile, the other full face] (1656; v:62).

Marcel and his family: “Bien qu'elle ait fait de fréquentes et fructueuses tournées en Angleterre et en Amérique, la vulgarité je ne dirai pas de John Bull, ce qui serait injuste, au moins pour l'Angleterre de l'ère victorienne, mais de l'oncle Sam n'a pas déteint sur elle” [Even though she has made frequent and profitable tours to England and to America, the vulgarity – I won't say of the England of this Victorian era of ours – but the vulgarity of Uncle Sam seems not to have affected her] (367; II:31).

Such sentiments could not outlive the experience of Verdun or the Somme, never mind the decisive entry into the war of the United States in 1917. In a moment of sardonic genius, Proust refers to the sinking of the *Lusitania*, a turning point in making America reassess its own policy of isolationism,²⁵ in such a way as to capture something of the shallowness of the Verdurin circle:

Mme Verdurin, souffrant pour ses migraines de ne plus avoir de croissant à tremper dans son café au lait, avait fini par obtenir de Cottard une ordonnance qui lui permit de s'en faire faire dans certain restaurant ... Elle reprit son premier croissant le matin où les journaux narraient le naufrage du *Lusitania*. Tout en trempant le croissant dans le café au lait, et donnant des pichenettes à son journal pour qu'il pût se tenir grand ouvert sans qu'elle eût besoin de détourner son autre main des trempettes, elle disait: « Quelle horreur ! Cela dépasse en horreur les plus affreuses tragédies. » Mais la mort de tous ces noyés ne devait lui apparaître que réduite au milliardième, car tout en faisant, la bouche pleine, ces réflexions désolées, l'air qui surnageait sur sa figure, amené là probablement par la saveur du croissant, si précieux contre la migraine, était plutôt celui d'une douce satisfaction.

[Mme Verdurin, suffering from migraines again now that there were no more croissants to dip in her coffee, had finally obtained an order from Cottard allowing her to have them made for her at a certain restaurant ... She received the first of these croissants on the morning when the newspapers reported the wreck of the *Lusitania*. As she dipped it in the coffee, and flicked her newspaper with one

²⁵ The first American troops did not land in France until May 1917. Though the sinking of the *Lusitania* had provoked outrage, it was the torpedoing of five American ships in March 1917 that finally compelled Congress to sanction America joining the war.

hand so that it would stay open without her having to remove her other hand from the croissant she was soaking, she said: "How awful! It's worse than the most horrific tragedy." But the loss of all those people at sea must have been a thousand million times reduced before it struck her, because even while she uttered, through a mouthful of croissant, these distressing thoughts, the look which lingered on her face, probably induced by the taste of the croissant, so valuable in preventing migraine, was more like one of quiet satisfaction.] (2190; VI:80-81)

There is more at stake here, though, than simply delineating and satirizing Mme Verdurin's self-centeredness. Only a handful of historical events by which we can with any certainty reconstruct the chronology of the novel are mentioned in *A la recherche*. The torpedoing of the *Lusitania* in May 1915 provides one of them. It therefore marks a point at which Proust anchors his fiction to history and to the linear, rather than the bewildering labyrinth that is Marcel's experience of Time.

Ghosts in the machine

As we have seen, the United States was a source of considerable mistrust and anxiety. It is the very irrationality of the fears expressed in, say, Gustave Le Rouge's serialized novel *La Conspiration des milliardaires* [*The Billionaire's Conspiracy*] (1899-1900), that makes its hysterical narrative about the efforts of a secret committee of American magnates, led by the billionaire William Boltyn, to take over Europe using an army of automatons and the power of mediums so compelling. In a reversal of the usual myths, Le Rouge's United States is a land not of opportunity but of exodus, its population traversing a blighted landscape ("a standardized desert" that anticipates Baudrillard's *America* in the 1980s) with "weapons in hand, pillaging and burning everything." At once fearful and excited by the perceived threat of American industry, science, and Capital ("the odious Yankee type, the scientist with no high-minded ideas, the industrialist with no humanity"), Le Rouge was not the last French writer to be made nervous when confronted with America.

When he visited the States in 1944 as a member of a party of French journalists invited to observe the United States' war effort, Jean-Paul Sartre described a New York that could have come straight from the pages of *La Conspiration des milliardaires*. Its inhabitants were vulnerable to "all

the hostility and all the cruelty of Nature,” while Sartre confessed that even in “the furthest depths of my apartment, I suffer the assaults of this hostile, indifferent, mysterious Nature.” He continued: “I feel as though I am camping in the midst of a jungle swarming with insects. There is a great moaning of the wind; there are the static electricity shocks I get every time I touch a door handle or shake hands with a friend” (Roger 2000, 364). As well as drawing on centuries-old rhetoric that portrayed America as a “boundless swamp of a continent,” an “unending backwater” (Roger 2000, 7), Sartre is clearly projecting his anxieties onto seemingly innocent objects. What is it he really fears: static electricity, or shaking hands with American hosts whom he is reluctant to consider friends and allies? The result is that Sartre attaches to an object – here a door handle – a significance – a charge or shock – in excess of its daily use. Similarly in *A la recherche*, where such objects are equally conspicuous in having originated from the States.

While it is implausible to credit any individual with the “invention” of electricity, nevertheless there is a history that unites the harnessing of its powers to the emergence of American industrial and economic might. From Benjamin Franklin’s kite experiments to Robert Andrews Millikan accurately measuring the charge of the electron in 1909, scientific exploration paved the way for the widespread use of electricity in the work of pioneering engineers and inventors, including Edison, George Westinghouse, Nikola Tesla, and Charles Proteus Steinmetz. Indeed Raul Dufy’s *La Fée Electricité*, commissioned for the 1937 Exposition Universelle where it decorated the Pavillon de l’Electricité, depicted the United States as the culmination of thousands of years of experimentation. Now housed in the Musée d’Art Moderne de la ville de Paris (situated, appropriately, on the avenue du Président Wilson), Dufy’s colossal painting contains some 110 figures of scientists, inventors, and artists, beginning with Archimedes and ending with Edison, the inventor of the light-bulb and the dreaded “world-renowned electrician” of Le Rouge’s fevered imaginings.

The benefits of such prodigious invention became increasingly apparent, nowhere more so than in Paris. The first experiments with electric street-lighting in the city took place in 1878. Staying there that year, Henry James repeatedly referred to the “brilliance,” “brightness,” “radiance,” and “glittering newness, like a palace in a fairy-tale” of Paris (2001, 73–74). For others the effect was less fairy-tale than nightmare. Edmond de Goncourt, being driven home in an open cab in May 1884, saw electric lights in the Place de la Concorde as “mortuary tapers”: “I thought for a

second that I was no longer alive but traveling along a Road of Souls of which I had read a description in Poe" (Goncourt and Goncourt 1980, 314). There were other reasons to fear electricity. In the same year as the 1889 Exposition Universelle was powered by electricity, New York State introduced the electric chair. Little wonder, then, that electrical companies in France protested that this would make electricity appear too dangerous for domestic use (Weber 1986, 74). As late as 1900, electricity was still being referred to in the official guide to that year's Exposition as a "magic fluid." It was a modern "magic" that found a resonance with the contemporary interest in the paranormal, turning tables, and telepathy. Such influences were integral to modernity, a point confirmed by Arthur Symons, who, writing in 1906 about the recently deceased Whistler, declared, "It is the aim of Whistler, as of so much modern art, to be taken at a hint, divined at a gesture, or by telepathy."²⁶

Proust was clearly sympathetic to such beliefs, as evidenced by what he says in *A la recherche* about the spirits of the dead inhabiting the most commonplace objects. Similarly, when Marcel wanders through Paris at the height of the air raids during the First World War (having "returned from the dead" after a long stay at a sanatorium), the Narrator comments that "soit de ces aéroplanes, soit de projecteurs de la tour Eiffel, on savait dirigés par une volonté intelligente, par une vigilance amie" [whether they came from aeroplanes or from the searchlights on the Eiffel Tower, one knew to be directed by an intelligent will, by a friendly vigilance] (2212; VI:110). Elsewhere in the novel, electricity is associated with less beneficial agencies. In its "raw" state it is frequently returned to as a way of communicating the violent immediacy of sexual attraction. To be "turned on," Marcel reminds us, is both enlivening and terrifying. It is to become possessed by an invisible power:

On aurait dit qu'une vertu n'ayant aucun rapport avec elles leur

²⁶ Spencer 1991, 350. In 1889, Huysmans had noted an "unearthly touch" to Whistler's art. "There is also a supernatural side in this mysterious, slightly ghostly painter, which to some degree justifies the word 'spiritualist' ... One cannot indeed read the more or less truthful revelations of Dr Crookes concerning Katie, her female shadow embodying both tangible and fluid forms at the same time, without thinking of Whistler's [*sic*] portraits of women, those ghost-portraits which seem to want to retreat, to sink into the wall, with their enigmatic eyes and glazed, ghoulish red mouths" (Spencer 1991, 267). Huysmans's eccentric spelling of Whistler's name was taken up by Proust as discussed below in Chapter 5.

avait été accessoirement adjointe par la nature, et que cette vertu, ce pouvoir simili-électrique avait pour effet sur moi d'exciter mon amour, c'est-à-dire de diriger toutes mes actions et de causer toutes mes souffrances ... Comme par un courant électrique qui vous meut, j'ai été secoué par mes amours, je les ai vécus, je les ai sentis: jamais je n'ai pu arriver à les voir ou à les penser.

[It was as if a virtue having no connection with them had been adjoined to them incidentally by nature, and that this virtue, this electricity-like power, had the effect on me of exciting my love, that is to say of directing all my actions and causing all my sufferings ... As though by an electric current that moves you, I have been shaken by my love affairs, I have lived them, I have felt them; never have I succeeded in seeing them or thinking them.] (1601-1602; IV:518-519)

References such as this appear most often in the context of Marcel's love for Albertine. Electrolysis, for example, becomes a metaphor for Marcel "extracting" from Albertine's words, as though they were otherwise impure chemical compounds, some essential truth: "jailli dans une conflagration par le rapprochement involontaire, parfois périlleux, de deux idées que l'interlocuteur n'exprimait pas ... précieux amalgames que je me hâtais de « traiter » pour les transformer en idées claires" [flaring up, sparked by the unintended, sometimes dangerous proximity of two ideas unexpressed by the speaker ... precious compounds which I hastened to "process" so as to turn them into clear ideas] (1668; V:77).

After her disappearance, electricity is allied with the immediacy of physical pain brought on by jealousy in such a way as to make us wonder whether Proust's description doesn't draw on those contemporary anxieties prompted by New York's adoption of the electric chair: "mon cœur fut bouleversé avec plus de rapidité que n'eût mis un courant électrique" [my heart was wracked by spasms even more immediately than if it had been connected to an electric current] (1959; V:439). Jealousy not only threatens to extinguish Marcel and condemn him to hell, it also revives the dead Albertine, returning her to the bliss of a lesbian embrace:

cent fois par heure le courant interrompu était rétabli et mon cœur était brûlé sans pitié par un feu d'enfer, tandis que je voyais Albertine ressuscitée par ma jalousie, vraiment vivante, se raidir sous les

caresses de la petite blanchisseuse à qui elle disait: « Tu me mets aux anges ».²⁷

[a hundred times an hour the current was restored and my heart was scorched by a hellish and pitiless fire as I saw Albertine brought truly back to life by my jealousy, stretching out beneath the caresses of the young laundry-maid, telling her, "I'm in heaven."] (2001-2002; V:494)

The increasing objectification of Albertine as the novel progresses is compounded by her being commodified. It is a process of reification in which it is possible to trace elements familiar from what I earlier said about the American woman being represented as consumerism gone mad. For Henry James, an ambivalent observer of the American scene at the best of times, American women had become "a new human convenience, not unlike fifty of the others, of a slightly different order, the ingenious mechanical appliances, stoves, refrigerators, sewing-machines, type-writers, cash-registers" (1994, 256). Albertine, then, puts Marcel in mind of "le photo-téléphone de l'avenir," which he imagines as possessing her voice: "et sa voix était comme celle que réalisera, dit-on, le photo-téléphone de l'avenir: dans le son se découpait nettement l'image visuel" [her voice was like the one which is said will be part of the photo-telephone of the future: the sound of it gave a vivid picture of her] (727; II:507).²⁸ Later still, in *La Prisonnière*, we find Marcel imagining that while sitting at a pianola, Albertine is actually riding a bicycle. In doing so he becomes incapable of distinguishing what is flesh from what is steel or wood:

Ses belles jambes, que le premier jour j'avais imaginées avec raison avoir manœuvré pendant toute son adolescence les pédales d'une

²⁷ Literally, "You put me among the angels." The masculine article, however, throws a typically Proustian ambiguity on whether even in the arms of a lesbian lover Albertine is with a man or a woman. Such ambiguities become all the more pronounced when we consider that *ange* was a common term for "homosexual." Language too, then, is part of the conspiracy against Marcel ever discovering the truth about Albertine's sexuality.

²⁸ Proust is almost certainly drawing on Albert Robida's *La vie électrique* (1892), a remarkably prescient science-fiction novel set in the technological future of 1954. Among a host of inventions, Robida anticipated the TV age with the "Téléphonoscope," a flat screen that shows, à la CNN, 24-hour news.

bicyclette, montaient et descendaient tour à tour sur celles du pianola ... Ses doigts jadis familiers du guidon se posaient maintenant sur les *touches*[.]

[Her fine legs, which I had marked down on the first day, rightly, as having spent their whole adolescence turning the pedals of a bicycle, rose and fell on those of the pianola ... The fingers which once knew the handlebars now rested on the stops.] (1890–1891; V:353)

What should strike us here is how similar is Proust's description of mechanized femininity to Sadie Plant's argument that the association between women, modernity, and technology dates from the early twentieth century, when the first typists and telephonists were women. As Caroline Evans has commented, however, Plant's "utopian vision of women as instruments and images of progress and a better future is shadowed by a darker image of women as commodities in the age of mass production" (2003, 166). Again, Proust was obviously attuned to such currents. Thus Marcel's imagining Albertine as a "ghost in the machine," the voice of the photo-telephone, should be read alongside Evans's discussion of the manufacture of speaking dolls in a factory run by Thomas Edison:

Thus in the most up-to-date modern factory we witness the young woman robotically speaking each individual utterance, five hundred times a day, onto the wax cylinders in order to produce the living or, at least, talking simulacrum of the human female. The animated doll acquires some of the lifelike qualities of the living girl, while the girl trades semblances with the doll in her mechanical and repetitive utterances ... As people and things trade semblances the commodity assumes an uncanny vitality of its own ... All is done in the name of progress, "the American way." (2003, 171)

Lisa Tickner comments that for the nineteenth and early twentieth century, "Technology held both a phantasmic promise and a phantasmic threat: men might become 'prosthetic gods' or mere cogs in the machinery of modernity."²⁹ Read in this context, Albertine not only becomes

²⁹ Tickner 2000, 191. The anxiety provoked by mechanization worked both ways. While some commentators complained that France was becoming overly mechanized, others, including the Goncourt brothers, saw France's failure to withstand the German assault in 1870/71 as due to the fact that "precision weapons are contrary to the French temperament ... The mechanization of the individual

secondary to technology but her presence becomes justified by it rather than vice versa. This is made all the clearer given Proust's description of the Ovidian metamorphosis (Ovidian because the transformation is brought on by a desire in excess of what the human body can withstand) of Albertine's thigh into first the neck of a swan, and then into a telephone receiver (2001–2002; V:493–494).

Albertine represents all in modernity that provokes, threatens, tantalizes, and ultimately eludes Marcel. As I will return to in Chapter 3, she calls into question the established hierarchy between subject and object, defined by Baudrillard as the object's passivity, its being no more than the "alienated, accursed part of the subject" (1990, 111). This blurring of the distinction between subject and object strikes to the heart of Marcel's relationship with Albertine, as it does that between the human and the technological. And so, whether it be electric lights (1306; IV:131–132), the telephone (1307; IV:133), or the phonograph (2327; VI:253) Proust is acutely sensitive to the fact that inanimate objects are lent a seemingly autonomous life by electricity. In part we should read this alongside the spiritualist craze that swept parts of North America, New England in particular, and spread to France and Britain in the 1850s, where it contributed to the emerging Symbolist movement and persisted as a distinct and influential strain of modernism. Thus the equation of modern technology with, say, table-turning is not as eccentric as it might seem. Even today we can discern parallels between the shorthand of the text message and the disembodied discourse of the Ouija board.³⁰

Possession and technological innovation were inextricably linked. Nowhere was this equation between science and superstition more apparent than in contemporary debates about the camera. As Walter Benjamin wrote, the camera was an invention of "the greatest consequence" just because "a touch of the finger sufficed to fix an event for an unlimited period of time. The camera gave the moment a posthumous shock" (2003b, 328). In *A la recherche*, Marcel's grandmother asks Saint-Loup to take her photograph with the Kodak he owns. She does so because, as Françoise later tells Marcel, having already been ill she realizes that her death is imminent: "Si jamais il m'arrivait quelque chose, il faudrait qu'il ait un

is not for him. And that is where the Prussian soldier is superior at present" (Goncourt and Goncourt 1980, 189).

³⁰ I am grateful to Professor Greg Woods at Nottingham Trent University for suggesting the comparison.

portrait de moi. Je n'en ai jamais fait faire un seul" ["If anything were ever to happen to me, he'd need to have a portrait of me. I've never had one done"] (1342; IV:178). The grandmother's photograph is therefore intended as a communiqué from beyond the grave.³¹

The first Kodak camera was manufactured in the States by George Eastman in 1888. A dozen years later he had sold over a hundred thousand. With the introduction of the pocket Kodak, sales in Europe alone were two thousand a month, and in 1897 Eastman established a subsidiary company in France, expanding a branch office that had been open since 1891. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that as the section of *A la recherche* where Saint-Loup takes the grandmother's photograph is set in 1898, he uses one of the first French-produced pocket Kodaks. It is a snapshot that will continue to administer Marcel a series of "posthumous shocks." For not only will the photograph later be recognized as containing evidence of his grandmother's imminent death, but Marcel also learns from Aimé, the maître d'hôtel at the Grand hôtel de Balbec, that under cover of developing the photograph in his room, Saint-Loup had shut himself away with an elevator boy whom he "seduces."

As Brassäi puts it, photographs are "doubles," "simulacra" which "exert a power as if they were actual living persons" (2001, 69). While it is now a cliché to say that photographs turn the human subject into an object, both in terms of the person being photographed and, in as much as the human eye is replaced by a mechanical lens and shutter, the photographer, there can be no doubt that this contributed to early criticism of the camera. The Kodak also came in for particular criticism because of the way in which it democratized the business of image making. While Eastman in his 1888 *Kodak Manual* emphasized that "where the practice of the art was formerly confined to those who could give it study and time and room, it is now feasible for *everybody*," Henry James was more equivocal about a world where "every desire is fulfilled instanter ... we hardly need to do more than the wishing."³²

³¹ In "Experience" Emerson laments the death of his son, Waldo, in terms of the "evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest." In a profoundly moving essay, Julie Ellison has discussed this resonant phrase alongside early developments in the photographic image, and recounts how a daguerreotype of Waldo was "removed [from] its glass and wiped ... with a soft cloth [so that] no trace of [Waldo] was left, only a bare silver plate" (1999, 140-141).

³² Cited in Rawlings 1996, 3. James's antipathy to the Kodak did not extend to

We know that Proust himself owned a large number of photographs of his many friends and acquaintances: “He collected, compared, collated, cherished, examined their photographs, stored them away in a drawer, year after year, and every once in a while would show them to his intimates; more often he would look at the portraits of the creatures he thus ‘possessed’ by himself, poring over them” (Bernard 2002, 14). Such an obsession may have contributed to Proust’s refusal to disparage the camera in the way, for example, that James did. And while some saw the Kodak as “a talisman of vulgarity, of an age interested only in the rapid production of what could be quickly consumed and easily forgotten” (Rawlings 1996, 3), Proust documents the extent to which modernity is haunted by its own past.

The language of hauntings was everywhere applied to the products of mechanization. The Kodak as with other appliances was criticized – we might say feared – because of the “soulless perfection” of its products (Rawlings 1996, 4). Proust captures something of the suspicion of, and superstitions surrounding, the modern through deliberately anachronistic descriptions of the telephone. Thus he figures the system whereby connections between individual telephones needed to be made manually by operators, predominantly female, working at switchboards located in central switching offices, in terms reminiscent of the Homeric epics: “les Vierges Vigilantes,” “les Toutes-Puissantes,” “les Danaïdes de l’invisible,” “les ironiques Furies,” and “les servantes toujours irritées du Mystère, les ombrageuses prêtresses de l’Invisible” [the vigilant virgins ... the All-Powerful Ones ... the Danaids of the unseen ... the ironic Furies ... the forever fractious servants of the Mysteries, the shadowy priestesses of the Invisible, so quick to take offense] (848; III:130). The uncanny nature of the phone is further emphasized by references to the receiver as a kind of Pulcinella, a dead piece of wood that will suddenly begin to speak [ce morceau de bois se mit à parler comme Polichinelle] (848; III:131).

The elision of the human and non-human, organic and inorganic, is further developed by Proust in a scene where, incredible as it may seem,

fine art photography. In June 1906 he sat for the American photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn (1882–1966), who, in the early twentieth century, had studied in Paris before setting up in New York and England. Coburn’s early photographs appeared in *Camera Work*, an influential quarterly journal which first appeared in 1903 in the wake of the Photo-Secession movement. The antithesis of the Kodak print, *Camera Work* was beautifully produced, with many pictures printed on fine Japanese tissue and pasted in by hand.

Marcel goes horse-riding. While so doing, he follows an unmarked path through some woods that hug a cliff-top. The landscape puts him in mind of two mythological studies by Elstir, "Poète rencontrant une Muse" [Poet Meeting with a Muse] and "Jeune homme rencontrant un Centaure" [Young Man Meeting with a Centaur], and the passage goes on to further blur the distinctions between the modern and mythical, fact and fiction:

Leur souvenir remplaçait les lieux où je me trouvais tellement en dehors du monde actuel que je n'aurais pas été étonné si, comme le jeune homme de l'âge anté-historique que peint Elstir, j'avais au cours de ma promenade croisé un personnage mythologique. Tout à coup mon cheval se cabra; il avait entendu un bruit singulier, j'eus peine à le maîtriser et à ne pas être jeté à terre, puis je levai vers le point d'où semblait venir ce bruit mes yeux pleins de larmes, et je vis à une cinquantaine de mètres au-dessus de moi, dans le soleil, entre deux grandes ailes d'acier étincelant qui l'emportaient, un être dont la figure peu distincte me parut ressembler à celle d'un homme. Je fus aussi ému que pouvait l'être un Grec qui voyait pour la première fois un demi-dieu.

[The memory of them relocated the place in which I found myself so far outside the present-day world that I would not have been surprised if, like the young man of ante-historic times painted by Elstir, I had in the course of my ride come upon some mythological personage. All of a sudden my horse reared; he had heard a strange noise, I had difficulty in controlling him and not being thrown to the ground, then I raised my tear-filled eyes to the spot from where the noise appeared to be coming, and I saw, fifty metres or so above me, in the sunlight, between two great wings of glittering steel that were bearing him away, a being whose distinct face I fancied resembled that of a man. I was moved as might a Greek have been setting eyes for the first time on a demigod.] (1529; IV:423)

As with Elstir's painting of a yacht, art transposes other realities onto Marcel's experience of the world. In the earlier painting what is suggested is that we are all subject to the defining symbol of the United States; here, the sudden juxtaposition between the fictions of Elstir's mythological scenes and the appearance of the aeroplane tells us that our lives are

governed by the caprices of technology rather than the certainties of teleology. In temporal and spatial terms, the near and the distant become relative, easily confused. As Stephen Kern has written, this was a direct result of technological innovation and its application in a variety of fields, the effect of which was to “atomize” our experience of the world:

Man cannot know the world “as it really is,” if he cannot know what time it really is. If there are as many private times as there are individuals, then every person is responsible for creating their own world from one moment to the next, and creating it alone ... The present was no longer limited to one event in one place, sandwiched tightly between past and future and limited to local surroundings. (1983, 314)

This is precisely Marcel’s experience while out horse riding. It is similarly ours as readers, catapulted simultaneously out of history into an imaginary Hellenic “past” by the shock administered by Marcel seeing an early aeroplane, and at the same time forward into the as-yet undisclosed events of *A la recherche* (the factual air raids over Paris; the fictional death of Albertine thrown from a horse while riding). What is more, Marcel and the unknown aviator are both hybrids: Marcel is a centaur; the pilot, half man/half bird. Thus the mythical world of Nestor and Daedalus rubs shoulders with our own. Moreover, it is the centaur, the ancient symbol of the marriage between human reason and animal energy, that is awed by the comparison between his own physical limitations and the limitless horizons that open up before technology: “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” [I felt there to lie open before him – before me, had habit not made me its prisoner – every course through space, or through life] (1529; IV:423). It is also a passage that takes on an unbearable personal resonance when we remember that Alfred Agostinelli disappeared when the plane he was learning to fly (at Proust’s expense) crashed into the sea. So Daedalus is transformed into Icarus.

Atomized

The effect of Proust's elision of the mythical and technological is reminiscent of Laura Marcus's commentary on the way Walter Benjamin, perhaps influenced by his reading of Proust, himself described the modern in deliberately anachronistic terms. In so doing, Marcus writes, he "leaves open, or opens up, the space of anxiety; a subliminal anxiety, which he terms 'mythic'" (Marcus 1983, 218–219). Like Benjamin, though admittedly for widely differing reasons and in very different circumstances, Proust, too, was concerned with the anxieties and desires fostered by the modern world.

Rod Kedward has written about how in the twentieth century France has seen a "constantly shifting amalgam of old and new, the process of keeping an old France while creating modernity" (2005, 5). Kedward's comments serve as an excellent introduction to an important aspect of *mémoire involontaire*, Proust's own unique response to contemporary fears about the atomization of human experience. The episode with the *madeleine* at Combray speaks for the (relatively) pre-industrial, pre-technological idyll of Marcel's childhood. In all that follows in the novel it remains a fixed point of reference amid the fluidity and dissolution of character, space, and time. If we focus on this aspect of the involuntary, *A la recherche* becomes an elegy for a world lost to time and a celebration of the transcendentalism of the subject. However, in a novel that sets out to provide a rational inquiry into the nature of time, as signaled by the very word *recherche*, it is equally important that we recognize the role played by technology in making available to Marcel the recovery of wasted time.

Marcel's discovery of how the involuntary will enable him to write his novel occurs during a visit to the Guermantes *hôtel*, shortly after his arrival back in Paris following a prolonged stay at a sanatorium. As he enters the courtyard, he stumbles on an uneven paving stone. He is suddenly conscious of a flood of images from the time he spent in Venice with his mother after the death of Albertine. The experience of being present both in the moment and elsewhere in time and space reminds him of a similar sensation as a child when tasting a biscuit dipped in tea. There then follow a succession of other "moments bienheureux," caused respectively by the sound of a spoon being tapped against a plate, the sensation of wiping his lips with a linen napkin, and the "piercing" sound [le bruit strident] of a water pipe. These sensations restore to him the memories of a train journey, his first day at the hotel in Balbec, and the pleasure of watching

steam boats sailing off the Brittany coast. Taken with the return of his memories from earliest childhood at Combray and the “purgatory” that was his visit to Venice, what Marcel discovers is the thus far hidden narrative of his life.

While the evocation of Combray is the most famous instance of *mémoire involontaire*, it would distort Proust’s novel to give it too much precedence. To do so would be to confine the novel to being a reconstruction of a nineteenth-century childhood idyll out of step with the rapid advances of the twentieth century. Similarly, to stress only the memories of Venice would be to overestimate the role of suffering in art. As I examine in my second chapter, the role of Emerson in Proust’s development of involuntary memory ties the involuntary to the “timeless” world of Nature and opens the narrative to the wider consolations of the landscapes of Combray, Tansonville, Balbec, and Venice. Yet other examples, as discussed in Chapter 4 with regard to the influence of Edgar Allan Poe, plunge us into a Proustian inferno. For while the episode of the *madeleine* and the cup of lime-blossom tea grants Marcel a moment of integration, *mémoire involontaire* can also be experienced as a kind of delirium and fragmentation. In short, a Benjaminian “shock.” In giving three further examples in close succession, Proust widens the frames of reference and the areas of experience the novel must learn to take into consideration. Only then will Marcel be given the key to unlocking the work of art he has felt himself capable of writing but unable to begin. The unconscious resurrection of memories thus provide “les signes d’autant de lois et d’idées” [the signs of so many laws and ideas] (2271; VI:187). These laws, however, do not exist apart from life as it is lived: Marcel stumbles in the courtyard because “dans ma distraction je n’avais pas vu une voiture qui s’avançait; au cri du wattman je n’eus que le temps de me ranger vivement de côté” [in my distraction [I] had failed to see an approaching car; at the chauffeur’s shout I had time only to step smartly aside] (2262; VI:174). The motor car, a symbol of modernity, brings him back to himself. Similarly with the sound of hot water – the “American comfort” – building up in the water pipes. It is in the heart of the modern city that Marcel becomes aware of the power of what Apollinaire called *simultaneity*: “the impression of a full and instant awareness within one moment of space-time” (2004, 3).

A defining aspect of the Americanized life, speed, like *mémoire involontaire*, dissolves distance and evacuates space. It is the triumph, Baudrillard has argued, “of effect over cause ... instantaneity over time as depth ... surface and pure objectality over the profundity of desire ...

its only rule is to leave no trace behind ... an uncultivated, amnesiac intoxication' (1988, 6–7). Proust's is a different tack. For consciousness and history he reads unconscious memory; for the obliteration of desire he turns instead to the trace elements of those desires as they adhere in the nonhuman, material present. Far from erasing the past, *mémoire involontaire* revives it from the blandishments of habit. Rather than abolishing time, it serves to make us acutely conscious of it. The same might be said for the impact from the nineteenth century onward of those rapid technological advances that impacted on the daily lives of increasing numbers of people in almost every sphere of human activity.

As early as *Jean Santeuil*, Proust made a connection between memory and the growing "omnipresence" of technological innovation:

Le génie de la mémoire qui, plus rapidement que l'électricité, fait le tour de la terre, et qui fait aussi rapidement le tour du temps, l'y avait déposé sans qu'il pût s'apercevoir même si une seconde avait passé. L'électricité ne met pas moins de temps à conduire à notre oreille penchée sur un cornet téléphonique une voix pourtant bien éloignée, que la mémoire, cet autre élément puissant de la nature qui, comme la lumière ou l'électricité, dans un mouvement si vertigineux qu'il nous semble un repos immense, une sorte d'omniprésence[.]

[The presiding genius of memory which, more quickly than any electric flash can make the circuit of a globe and, no less quickly, that of Time, had set [Jean] back in the past without his noticing that so much as a second had elapsed. Electricity does not take less time to bring to the ear pressed to the telephone receiver the sound of a voice which, in fact, is many miles distant, than does memory, that other powerful element in nature which, like light or electricity, moving at a speed so vertiginous that it seems almost to be its opposite, an absence of all speed, a sort of omnipresence.] (*JS*, 243; *JS English*, 40)

America, precisely as Proust says here about memory and electricity, was itself becoming a kind of "omnipresence" that figured paradoxically as a form of absence.

Proust's novel is often cited as a work that is an elegy for a vanished age. Up to a point this is true. It may be more instructive to compare Proust with the photographer Jacques-Henri Lartigue who, born twenty-two years

after Proust, lived to see the United States become a global superpower. Lartigue's work developed from documenting the antics of his bourgeois family at the turn of the twentieth century (particularly their excitement at the arrival of the motorcar and airplane) to recording the flirtations of the soon-to-be president, John F. Kennedy, or the Indianapolis Auto Races. What unites Proust and Lartigue is their elegizing not so much the past but the present in all its ephemerality. That this "present" was, for a significant part of the twentieth century, lived – or believed to be – more fully in the United States than elsewhere affected them both. For Lartigue it meant actually visiting and photographing America; for Proust, it resulted in his weaving into the fabric of *A la recherche* material that could not have existed without the presence of the United States. Marcel, we might say, had no need to visit the States as it was becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish what was American from what was simply modern.

A la recherche is intrinsically about the challenges facing Marcel if he is to become an artist capable of representing the sweeping changes in technology and culture that dominated those decades, roughly 1880 to 1920, when the events of the novel take place. Like all the great works of the period, *A la recherche* came to existence "amidst the tools of modern relativism, scepticism and hope for secular change"; like those other works it balanced, sometimes precariously, "on the sensibility of transition, often holding in suspension the forces that persist from the past and those that grow from the novel present" (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991, 49). That Proust appears to us today as a writer secure in the reputation of having expanded the possibilities of the novel is because *A la recherche* created a place for itself among other developments in modernity and modernism: cubism, stream-of-consciousness, atonality, psychoanalysis, and the theory of relativity. Each, in having altered the frames of reference we have for understanding our experience of the world, shifts in turn our perception of the dimensions in which we live. This is not to say that Proust was wholly at ease with, or capable of "naturalizing," all the changes he lived through. More typical is the kind of difficulty Marcel experiences when trying to negotiate, for example, a revolving door for the first time. Indeed, part of the novel's power, as Edward Said says about Visconti's adaptation of *The Leopard*, resides in that it "offers numerous insights into the past, but each of them leaves an impression of something unsayable or ungraspable" (2006, 109). What Proust and others recognized and took advantage of in the early decades of the twentieth century was, in John Berger's words, "a liberation from the immediate, from the rigid distinction between absence

and presence ... For the first time the world, as totality, ceased to be an abstraction and became *realizable*" (2001, 74). And it was America which, as Phillippe Roger says, in denoting less a place on the map than "a certain 'being-in-the-world,'" epitomized this. That this "being" proved both liberating and disorienting could neither be ignored nor avoided:

I am everywhere or rather I start to be everywhere

It is I who am starting this thing of the centuries to come

Commenting on these lines from Apollinaire, Berger says, "As soon as more than one man says this, or feels it, or aspires towards feeling it ... the unity of the world has been proposed" (2001, 76). Such a "dangerously utopian aura" was no more likely to seduce Proust than the dangers inherent in memorializing a fugitive past. If Proust is the historian of an historical moment, his novel, as one of its greatest works of art, transforms that moment into the future. He is, as John Middleton Murry commented in 1922, "the culmination of the 19th Century ... but the culmination of the 19th is also the beginning of the 20th" (cited in Davenport-Hines 2006, 45). Only in hindsight is such a progression seen as effortless. To move from the known, secure world of yesterday and embrace the unknown continent of tomorrow meant Proust taking a kind of leap of faith. Or to quote Emerson: "Power ... resides in the moment of transition from a past to a new state, in the shooting of the gulf, in the darting to an aim."

CHAPTER 2

*The Impossible Possible
Philosophers' Man*

The impossible possible philosophers' man,
The man who has had the time to think enough,
The central man, the human globe, responsive
As a mirror with a voice, the man of glass
Who in a million diamonds sums us up.

—Wallace Stevens, “Asides on the Oboe”

Hypocrite lecteur, – mon semblable, – mon frère

—Charles Baudelaire, “Au Lecteur”

To be “modern,” Hugo von Hofmannsthal wrote in 1893, meant discovering a balance between seemingly oppositional energies: analysis and fantasy. “Modern,” he explained, “is the dissection of a mood, a sigh, a scruple; and the modern is the instinctive, almost somnambulistic surrender to every revelation of beauty, to a harmony of colours, to a glittering melody, to a wondrous analogy” (Bradbury and McFarlane 1991, 71). If this sounds like as clear a summary of *A la recherche* as we could wish, its origins need to be traced back to New England and to Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Emerson is an elusive presence in Proust’s writing. We might express surprise that he appears there at all. For if Emerson was a clarion call declaring America’s literary independence from the Old World, an iconoclast who would smash “the sepulchres of the fathers,” and a voice in the Concord wilderness rousing his fellow countrymen and women to demand, “Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not tradition” (*EL*, 7), what earthly use could a neurotic young man

growing up in the hothouse atmosphere of Paris, the seeming antithesis of everything for which Emerson's robust New England pragmatism stood, make of such a manifesto?

The differences between the two men seem overwhelming: "optimism versus disenchantment, moralism versus art for art's sake, transcendentalism versus impressionism" (Virtanen 1977, 123). If such binaries suggest the advantages lay all on Emerson's side, it did not necessarily appear so at the time. Henry James for one commented on Emerson's life lacking "color," that it gave the reader an "impression of paleness." More damning in comparison with a work as singularly teeming as *A la recherche* (not to mention James's own fictions), it was a life "curiously devoid of complexity ... passions, alternations, affairs, adventures." In place of amazement, it offered a "terrible paucity of alternatives ... the bribes and lures, the beguilements and prizes were few." And while Marcel's world is almost fatally divided between the ways by Swann and the Guermantes, Emerson's New England proved nothing more than "a clue without a labyrinth."¹

While critics have for some time acknowledged Proust's debt to Emerson, this has not always been the case. And even when acknowledged, the full extent of the influence has yet to be clearly appraised. At one extreme we have André Maurois' *The World of Marcel Proust* (1960). Little more than a coffee-table book that celebrates the lives of Proust's aristocratic friends, Maurois had clearly read Proust's letter to his friend Robert de Billy in which he emphasized the importance to him of a number of British and American writers, and yet no mention is made of Proust listing Emerson among them. Maurois' anti-Americanism is hardly unique among French writers and critics. Even so, J.M. Cocking's assessment that this is tantamount to an "anglophobe" conspiracy among such writers as Maurice Bardèche who "pour scorn on critics who attach

¹ James 1987, 209, 210, 216, 214. Despite all that he says about Emerson, James himself persisted in depicting Americans, women in particular, as fundamentally innocent and naïve in comparison to the arch seductresses that were her European cousins. As Leslie A. Fiedler comments: "No Nice American Girl could in James be guilty of adultery, which remained for him the European ... sin [and he] assumes a fundamental and ineradicable distinction between females born not to know evil and those born to endure the effects" (Fiedler 1967, 287, 288). Given Fiedler's comments, it is fascinating to discover in *La Prisonnière* Proust drawing an analogy between pre-Columbian America and the survival within us of "Une bonté partielle" [a partial goodness] (1849; V:302).

importance to Emerson and Ruskin" (1982, xvii–xix) is hardly confined to the Francophile world. If we read Walter A. Strauss, for example, though he too cites Proust's letter to de Billy he also limits his discussion to Eliot, Hardy, and Stevenson (1957, 171–172). Similarly, American-based academics, such as Germaine Brée and George Stambolian, while convinced that there is a connection between Proust and Emerson, remain less confident that it outlasted the artistic growing pains that characterized *Jean Santeuil*. Both admit the importance of Emerson's *Representative Men* (1850), particularly with regard to the central role Proust's fiction affords the artist (Stambolian 1972, 137; Brée 1967, 49). "Proust," Brée writes, "like Emerson, seems to have thought of humanity as one man slowly coming into being through millions of individuals, a man whose essential and distinct being is non-material, a being that he designates as 'esprit' and that Emerson spoke of as the 'oversoul.'" The significance of this, she adds, is that it opened up "new paths in French literature, very Emersonian ones" (Brée 1967, 69–70). Pierre-Edmond Roberts, meanwhile, while giving Emerson sustained credit for influencing Proust, contrasts Emerson's purely philosophical contribution to *A la recherche* with the more dynamic impact of his reading Ruskin (1976, 7). This is a false distinction to make. As we will see with regard to Proust's appreciation of the Gothic – an aspect of his art that has traditionally been ascribed to the tutelage of Ruskin – Emerson's influence makes itself felt in any number of key ways.

Cocking's assessment must now be further tempered by the acknowledgment given Emerson by Jean-Yves Tadié, Proust's inspired biographer and the editor of the four-volume Pléiade edition of *A la recherche*. It is to Tadié that we owe the most telling proof of Emerson's life-long hold over Proust's imagination: that on the night he died, Proust jotted down from memory a misquotation of Emerson's "There's nothing so frivolous as dying" (2000, 777). Despite this, Tadié's necessarily brief but probing analysis of Proust's reading of Emerson comes to the conclusion that his infatuation with Emerson was strongest while still a young man. By 1902, Tadié informs us, Proust was confident enough to criticize Emerson and his mentor Carlyle for failing to "differentiate sufficiently deeply the various forms of translating reality" (2000, 345). Much the same, however, might be said for Proust's "apprenticeship" to Ruskin, the importance of whom could only be fully absorbed, as Richard Macksey points out, when, like so many of his characters, Proust had gone through "all the successive stages of infatuation, discipleship, and disillusion" (*ORR*, xvii). More important, Macksey continues, are those subtle references to Ruskin which "constitute

an important pattern in the fabric of [*A la recherche*].” Precisely the same can be said for Emerson.

Where I find myself departing from Tadié, not to mention Stambolian and Brée, is in arguing that Emerson remained an influence on Proust’s writing long past the years of his literary apprenticeship. I should begin by acknowledging that this conviction is hardly helped by Proust’s own failure to signpost any such debt. Emerson is mentioned only once in *A la recherche*, and then in such terms as to constitute more a red herring than a point of any obvious significance. But with a similar attention to the woof and weave of Proust’s novel as Macksey affords Ruskin, we are better able to discern the full extent of Emerson’s textual presence.

Proust’s early reading of Emerson marks him out as a product of the literary tastes and fashions of his time. Emerson’s writings had a profound effect on the work of the Symbolists, not least through the advocacy of Maurice Maeterlinck, who wrote an influential preface to a collection of seven of Emerson’s essays published in French in 1894. Maeterlinck called Emerson “the good, early morning shepherd of the pale green fields of a new optimism,” and in turn he became known as “a Belgian Emerson.”² Whether Emerson imagined his advocacy of self-reliance and individualism appealing to a writer such as J. K. Huysmans, however, is another matter entirely. But as Havelock Ellis wrote in 1931, Emerson was regarded as a decadent precisely because an age of individualism “is usually an age of artistic decadence” (Ellis 1969, xv). It was in France, Ellis says, beginning with Baudelaire, that such a message was heard and responded to most immediately. As early as 1863 and his defense of Delacroix as the first great artist of *modernité*, we find Baudelaire turning to Emerson as a recognized authority:

“The hero is he who is immovably centered,” says the transatlantic moralist, Emerson, who, in spite of reputation as the leader of the wearisome Bostonian school, has nevertheless a certain flavor of Seneca about him, which effectively stimulates meditation ... But this maxim, which the leader of American *Transcendentalism* applies to the conduct of life and the sphere of business, can equally well be applied to the sphere of poetry and art. (1964d, 53)

² Cited in Halls 1966, 42. Proust’s early admiration for Maeterlinck is well known. Maeterlinck was the subject of one of his dazzling pastiches, and it is Debussy’s operatic version of *Pelléas et Mélisande* that Marcel, ill in bed, listens to repeatedly on the theaterphone.

We know that the teenage Proust was familiar with Emerson in Émile Montégut's translation of *Essais de philosophie américaine* (1851). Later, as I discuss below, he would read and make notes on *Sept essais d'Emerson* (1894) translated by I. Will with its preface by Maeterlinck.³ What is more, Proust was keen that others share his passion. Writing to Daniel Halévy in 1888, Proust set his schoolfriend a precocious and forbidding reading list that included some twenty-four authors ancient and modern, among them Emerson.⁴ *Les Plaisirs et les jours* (1896), meanwhile, made accessible to a wider audience this enthusiasm. Among the epigraphs that Proust scattered liberally throughout his first published book, no author appears more regularly than Emerson. The collection is framed by quotations from both books of *Essays*: the first story, "La Mort de Baldassare Silvande, Vicomte de Sylvanie," is headed by a quotation from *Nature*; while the third and final sections of "La Fin de la Jalousie" begin, appropriately enough given Proust's lifelong elision of the two emotions, with a passage from "Love." In between come quotations taken from "History" ("Fragments de comédie itallienne") and "The Poet" ("Les Regrets, rêveries couleur du temps").

In a letter to Reynaldo Hahn from 1895, Proust refers to his having spent a day in bed reading Emerson's *Essays* "avec ivresse" [with intoxication] (*Corr.* I:363–364; *SL* I:87–88). A similar state informs his depiction in the unfinished *Jean Santeuil* of the eponymous hero's adolescent love affair with books. "Déjà du reste quand nous étions petits," Proust writes about the young Jean (and by inference all budding writers), "il y avait un certain livre que nous prenions sous notre bras quand on allait au parc et que nous lisions avec amour, qu'aucun autre n'aurait remplacé" [When we were young there was always one especial which we carried with us to the Park, and read with a passion which no other book could ever quite supplant] (*JS*, 367–368; *JS English*, 377). It is an experience which Proust goes on to describe in strikingly sensuous terms:

Son charme de corps ne faisait qu'un avec l'histoire que nous aimions et le plaisir qu'il nous donnait, quand par une chaude après-midi, dans la charmille du parc, nous cachant aux regards pour ne pas être interrompus, ou par une matinée pluvieuse, en attendant le déjeuner

³ The collection was comprised of "Confiance en soi-même," "Compensation," "Lois de l'esprit," "le Poète," "Caractère," "L'Âme Suprême," and "Fatalité."

⁴ See the online Proust-Kolb Archive for Research at www.library.uiuc.edu/kolbp (accessed July 19, 2006).

près du feu de la salle à manger, gêné par la cuisinière qui sous prétexte de nous mieux installer nous dérangeait, nous étions assis le tenant à la main, et, regardant ses pages, nous ne le séparions pas de la douceur de ses minces feuillets, de leur fine odeur[.]

[Its physical enchantment was one with the story that we loved, with the pleasure it gave us when in the shady arbors of the Park, hidden away so as not to be interrupted, or on rainy days waiting for lunch beside the fire in the dining-room, bothered by the cook who, with the excuse of making us more comfortable, kept on constantly disturbing us, holding it in our hands and looking at its pages, we never, in our mind, separated its contents from the softness of its thin pages, from its lovely smell.] (*JS*, 368; *JS English*, 377)

Exacting and excluding, reading occupies a mental and emotional space that will reappear in *A la recherche* as the obsessive and secretive love affairs of Swann, Marcel, Charlus, Albertine, and any number of other characters. Books are more trustworthy than friendship, the pleasures of the text more accessible than those of the sexual, the word more physically present than the body. As with Marcel's retreat at Combray to a little room that smelled of orris-root and was perfumed by a wild blackcurrant bush, a room in which take place "à toutes celles de mes occupations qui réclamaient une inviolable solitude: la lecture, la rêverie, les larmes et la volupté" [all those occupations of mine that demanded an inviolable solitude: reading, reverie, tears and sensuous pleasure] (20; I:16), there is something onanistic about Proust's evocation of reading. Indeed, this rudimentary "self-reliance" shares a good deal with what Genet says about masturbation being the "gesture of solitude that makes you sufficient unto yourself," allowing us to possess "intimately others who serve your pleasure without their suspecting it" (1964, 105). With Genet our guide, we cannot fail to be reminded of Marcel's fatal need to identify with Albertine – both in the mutual masturbation that comprises their love life and, as I discuss in the following chapter, his overwhelming need to penetrate the secrets of her body and see through to those memories which he longs to transcribe and incorporate into his own long-deliberated but much-postponed novel.

If such intensity and isolation are to last, much else must be sacrificed. As Eve Sedgwick comments: "The reading practice founded on such basic demands and intuitions [must necessarily] run against the grain of the most patent available formulae for young people's reading and life – against the

grain, often, of the most accessible voices even in the texts themselves" (1994, 3). What must replace the "sanctity" of the one prized book of childhood is a kind of promiscuity (Sedgwick talks about "becoming a perverse reader") which allows the adult reader to pursue textual pleasure like the *flâneur* hoping to come across the unexpected in previously unremarked places. Thus it is that Proust imagines Jean's widening sense of himself in terms of his accidentally discovering some hitherto unread pages of Emerson in manuscript or published in a newspaper (*JS*, 368; *JS English*, 377).

Emerson is referred to a second time in *Jean Santeuil*, again in the context of a species of pleasure that is involuntary and intimate but which also establishes a tension between estrangement and communion:

Si vous trouviez dans la chambre de votre aubergiste, dans une province éloignée, les poésies d'Alfred de Vigny, les *Essais* d'Emerson et *Le Rouge et le Noir*, ne vous sentiriez-vous pas comme en présence d'un ami plein de vous-même, avec qui vous auriez envie de converser?

[If you found in your inn-keeper's room, in a remote part of the country, the poems of Alfred de Vigny, Emerson's *Essays*, and *Le Rouge et le Noir* [*sic*], would you not feel that you were in the presence of a kindred spirit with whom it would be delightful to have a talk?] (*JS*, 556; *JS English*, 447)

We can already see delineating themselves a number of associations which were to remain a significant part of Proust's interest in Emerson: the need for a sustaining friendship, allied to the fear that any such intimacy might overwhelm him and leave him vulnerable.

From *Jean Santeuil* onward the Emersonian trail appears to go cold. Perhaps Proust felt that readers would associate Emerson too closely with *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, a book which enjoyed at best a lukewarm reception and at worst contributed to Proust's reputation as a dilettante. By the time we come to *A la recherche*, Emerson seems all but absent as an influence. The single reference to him occurs while Marcel is talking with the Baron de Charlus about a luncheon that he, Marcel, has had with Robert de Saint-Loup, Charlus's nephew, and with Rachel, an actress and Saint-Loup's mistress. The luncheon exposes Marcel to Saint-Loup's sexual jealousy at the attention Rachel attracts from other men. While

begging her to stop making an exhibition of herself, Robert receives a note saying that he is wanted by a man who would like to speak with him at his carriage door. He refuses, believing the message to be a ploy to remove him from the room while Rachel arranges an assignation. The man, however, is Charlus, and Saint-Loup has to make excuses in order to avoid meeting his uncle (875; III:165). Having sent Marcel off to warn the restaurant owner that he is not to be further disturbed, Saint-Loup and Rachel retire to a private room, where Marcel later joins them. From believing himself to have wasted the first afternoon of spring sitting in a restaurant, Marcel, as the effects of the champagne kick in, becomes more amenable to the pleasures to be had from “choses gracieuses et qu'on ne peut payer trop cher, une rose, une cigarette parfumée, une coupe de champagne” [gracious things which cannot be bought too dear – a rose, a scented cigarette, a glass of champagne]. It is these, he believes, that will redeem “ces heures d'ennui” [these hours of boredom] (876; III:167).

Drunk, Marcel experiences a rare moment of companionship and camaraderie, only for it to be subsumed in a more disquieting vision:

Le cabinet où se trouvait Saint-Loup était petit, mais la glace unique qui le décorait était de telle sorte qu'elle semblait en réfléchir une trentaine d'autres, le long d'une perspective infinie; et l'ampoule électrique placée au sommet du cadre devait le soir, quand elle était allumée, suivie de la procession d'une trentaine de reflets pareils à elle-même, donner au buveur, même solitaire, l'idée que l'espace autour de lui se multipliait en même temps que ses sensations exaltées par l'ivresse et qu'enfermé seul dans ce petit réduit, il régnait pourtant sur quelque chose de bien plus étendu en sa courbe indéfinie et lumineuse, qu'un allée du « Jardin de Paris ». Or, étant alors à ce moment-là ce buveur, tout d'un coup, le cherchant dans la glace, je l'aperçus, hideux, inconnu, qui me regardait. La joie de l'ivresse était plus forte que le dégoût; par gaieté ou bravade, je lui souris et en même temps il me souriait. Et je me sentais tellement sous l'empire éphémère et puissant de la minute où les sensations sont si fortes que je ne sais si ma seule tristesse ne fut pas de penser que le moi affreux que je venais d'apercevoir était peut-être à son dernier jour et que je ne rencontrerais plus jamais cet étranger dans le cours de ma vie.

[Saint-Loup's private dining-room was small, but the single mirror which hung in it was of such a kind that it seemed to reflect thirty others, in an endless progression; and, when it was lit at night and followed by the procession of thirty or more reflections of itself, the light bulb placed at the top of the mirror-frame must have given the drinker, even when alone, the impression that the surrounding space was multiplying itself along with his own sensations, heightened by drink, and that, shut up by himself in this tiny room, he was nevertheless reigning over something far more extensive in its indefinite luminous curve than a walkway in the Jardin de Paris. And, at that moment, I *was* the drinker in question: suddenly, as I looked for him in the mirror, I saw him, a hideous stranger, staring back at me. The joy of intoxication was stronger than my disgust; out of gaiety or bravado, I smiled at him and found that my smile was simultaneously returned. And I felt myself to be so much more under the ephemeral and powerful sway of this minute's intense sensation, that it is not clear to me whether the only disquieting element of the experience was not the thought that the hideous self I had just glimpsed was perhaps about to breathe his last, and that I should never meet this stranger again in my lifetime.] (877; III:168)

It is therefore with the greatest possible sense of irony that when Marcel is later challenged by Charlus over his part in the debauch-cum-luncheon, the Narrator comments, "J'aurais voulu répondre qu'au déjeuner avilissant on n'avait parlé que d'Emerson, d'Ibsen, de Tolstoi" [I should have liked to reply that this degrading lunch-party had been entirely given over to a discussion of Emerson, Ibsen, and Tolstoy] (959; III:274). Emerson functions here as a cipher for a morality so alien to the circles frequented by Marcel that it is literally unspeakable. This is made the more apparent and grotesque if we juxtapose Proust's own "intoxicated" reading of Emerson as a young man with Marcel's hall-of-mirrors-like glimpse of himself as a drunk, dying stranger. What he encounters is less "kindred spirit" than "Hypocrite lecteur." The Emerson of Proust's youth, the Emerson who seemed to offer a halfway-house between longed-for companionship and the necessity of isolation, would appear unable to exist in the world that Marcel finds himself in, which, to paraphrase Henry James, is irreducibly complex and passionate.

While this remains the only explicit reference to Emerson in *A la recherche*, with a knowledge of the passage from *Jean Santeuil* discussed

earlier we recognize Emerson's presence behind an otherwise unremarkable passage in which the Narrator reflects on the pleasures of conversing with Oriane de Guermantes:

Pour toutes ces raisons, les causeries avec la duchesse ressemblaient à ces connaissances qu'on puise dans une bibliothèque de château, surannée, incomplète, incapable de former une intelligence, dépourvue de presque tout ce que nous aimons, mais nous offrant parfois quelque renseignement curieux, voire la citation d'une belle page que nous ne connaissons pas, et dont nous sommes heureux dans la suite de nous rappeler que nous en devons la connaissance à une magnifique demeure seigneuriale. Nous sommes alors, pour avoir trouvé la préface de Balzac à *La Chartreuse* ou des lettres inédites de Joubert, tentés de nous exagérer le prix de la vie que nous y avons menée et dont nous oublions, pour cette aubaine d'un soir, la frivolité stérile.

[For all these reasons, talk with the Duchesse was like the discoveries we make in the library of a country house, outdated, incomplete, incapable of forming a mind, devoid of almost everything we value, but occasionally offering us some curious piece of information, or even a quotation from a fine passage that was unknown to us and which subsequently we are happy to remember as something we were introduced to because of a stay in a splendid stately home. And because we have discovered Balzac's preface to the *Chartreuse* or some unpublished letters of Joubert, we are then tempted to exaggerate the value of our stay there, the barren frivolity of which we forget in the light of a single evening's happy discovery.] (1167; III:550)

Read alongside Jean Santeuil's espousal of the simple but profound pleasures of reading in a newspaper an unpublished passage from Emerson, or discovering in some off-the-beaten-track hotel room a copy of the *Essays* and feeling oneself in the presence of "un ami plein de vous-même," it is impossible not to see in the transposition of authors and the transference to an aristocratic library stuffed full of rare and valuable literary relics a profound diminishment of the delights and possibilities of literature. That this happens at a stage in the novel when Marcel is becoming disillusioned with society and with his own social ambition is fitting. Far from signaling, as Tadié and others assert, Emerson's declining influence on the mature Proust, we might instead argue that he continued to be so important to

Proust that his being “sacrificed” on the altar of Marcel’s snobbery struck a deep personal chord. Furthermore, by replacing Emerson’s name with that of Joubert (who wrote little and published nothing), it may be that Proust was enacting one of his own greatest anxieties: that the writing of his novel would, like the work of George Eliot’s Casaubon, who devoted his entire life to “an insignificant and absurd study,” prove a failure. He was to hint at as much in a letter to Jacques Copeau from 1913, commenting that he feared Emerson’s letters should come to be better known and thought of than his *Essays* (*Corr.* XII: 156–159; *SL* III:171–172).

There is one further place to which we can look for evidence of Proust’s continued engagement with Emerson. In November 1908 Proust began concerted work on *Contre Sainte-Beuve*. A mixture of prose fiction, autobiography, and critical essay, it proved to be the breakthrough that allowed him to find the narrative voice and structure that was to become *A la recherche du temps perdu*. In a letter to Mme Strauss dated November 6, 1908, Proust wrote that it was necessary for the writer to evolve a style which, rather than conforming to the precepts of classical French, “porter la marque de notre choix, de notre goût, de notre incertitude, de notre desir, et de notre faiblesse” [bears the imprint of our choice, our taste, our uncertainty, our desire and our weakness]. Only then could he claim to write “beautifully.” As regards grammar and syntax, “Hélas ... il n’y a pas de certitudes, même grammaticales” [Alas ... there are no certainties, even grammatical ones]; while “Cette idée qu’il y a une langue française, existant en dehors des écrivains, et qu’on protège, est inouïe. Chaque écrivain est obligé de se faire sa langue, comme chaque violoniste est obligé de se faire son « son »” [This idea that there is a French language which exists independently of the writers who use it, and which must be protected, is preposterous. Every writer is obliged to create his own language, as every violinist is obliged to create his own “tone”] (*Corr.* VIII:276–278; *SL* II:408–409).

There are shades here of Emerson’s requirement that we overturn “the sepulchres of the fathers.” And while I am not suggesting that Proust’s style is modeled in any definite way on Emerson, still there are parallels between a manifesto that threatens to unsettle the governance of grammar and syntax and aspects of the reading he was engaged in and copying down in the notebook that has come to be known as *Le Carnet de 1908*. It is here that we find further evidence of what was fast becoming a longstanding engagement with Emerson as a reader and, increasingly, a writer growing in assurance and confidence.

Le Carnet comprises notes from 1908–09, two fragments from 1910 and one from 1912. It consists of three different sorts of notes: those concerning the work-in-progress that was to become *Contre Sainte-Beuve*; drafts of “finished” blocks of text (ranging from a sentence or two to complete paragraphs); and Proust’s reading notes. Included among the latter are a number of references to Emerson, not as in *Les Plaisirs et les jours* taken from Émile Montégut’s *Essais de philosophie américaine* but from the recently published *Ralph Waldo Emerson. Sa vie et son oeuvre* (1907) by Marie Dugard. Dugard’s is a critical biography and so the notes Proust takes are often abbreviations – amounting in most cases to rewritings – of Dugard’s translations. Drawn predominantly from the *Essays* (“Self-Reliance,” “Circles,” “Nominalist and Realist,” “Friendship,” and “Spiritual Laws”), there are also references to one of Emerson’s poems (“Give All to Love”), his correspondence with Carlyle,⁵ and to Emerson’s last original publication, *Society and Solitude* (which might itself easily serve as an alternative title to *A la recherche*).

If Proust was now reading Emerson as a “kindred spirit,” then it is one who speaks of and for isolation as a necessary part of creativity. Proust’s letter to Mme Strauss may have been bullish about the challenge of forging his own distinctive literary voice; however, there is evidence in *Le Carnet* of the sacrifices this would entail. Thus from “Friendship” we find Proust noting: “Je sens que je pleurerais mes dieux évanouis” (*C* 1908, 84), his version of Dugard’s “je sais bien qu’alors je pleurerais toujours l’évanouissement de mes dieux” (1907, 84), which is in turn a translation of Emerson’s “I know well I shall mourn always the vanishing of my mighty gods” (*EL*, 354). Similar sentiments are echoed by two lines from Emerson’s poem “Give All to Love,” “When half-gods go, / The gods arrive” (*SPP*, 444), which Proust transcribes as “Q^d les demi-dieux s’en vont les dieux arrivent” (*C* 1908, 84). A suggestion as to who these gods might be is hinted at in what Proust takes from “Self-Reliance”: “je quitte femme frère, j’espère que c’est mieux qu’une fantaisie” (*C* 1908, 84), a significantly altered version of Dugard’s “Quand mon génie m’appelle, j’évite père et mère, femme et frère. Je voudrais écrire sur le linteau du montant de ma porte:

⁵ Proust bought a French translation of Carlyle’s *Heroes and Hero-Worship* to read when he traveled to Brittany with Reynaldo Hahn in 1895. The holiday was notable for a number of reasons, not least the friendship that sprang up between Proust, Hahn, and the American painter, Thomas Harrison. The meeting, as I discuss in Chapter 5, later formed the basis of Marcel’s “hero worship” of Elstir.

Fantaisie. J'espère que, en dernière analyse, c'est quelque chose de mieux qu'une fantaisie, mais on ne peut passer sa vie en explication" (1907, 84). While Emerson declared himself willing to "shun father and mother and wife and brother, when my genius calls me. I would write on the lintels of the door post, Whim" (*EL*, 262), Proust tailors it to his own character and situation: both his parents were dead, he will not marry, and his only sibling will be excised from the pages of the novel he is preparing to write. In his imagination at least, Proust was preparing to become not only an orphan but an only child.

It is interesting to read this aspect of both Proust and Emerson in light of the kind of wish-fulfillment that Leslie A. Fiedler regards as a distinguishing aspect of American fiction, the hero of which must metaphorically be killed and reborn: "A new birth implies a new family, a wifeless and motherless one, in which the good companion is the spouse and nurse, the redeemed male the lover and child, each his own progenitor and offspring" (1967, 333). Marcel, we remember, returns to Paris in *Le Temps retrouvé* after a long spell in a sanatorium. He then settles down to begin work on his novel – the hero of which will be himself – not within the confines of a family but alone with his faithful "nurse," Françoise. Something of this is anticipated in the elliptical reference to *Society and Solitude* from which Proust notes just four words: "Le trépied de verre" (*C* 1908, 84). Read in full, we can see that Proust was responding to Emerson's description of the retreat from the world that is necessary if the word is to survive let alone flourish:

To the culture of the world an Archimedes, a Newton is indispensable; so she guards them by a certain aridity. If these had been good fellows, fond of dancing, port and clubs, we should have had no Theory of the Sphere and no Principia. They had that necessity of isolation which genius feels. Each must stand on his *glass tripod* if he would keep his electricity. (*PE*, 389; my italics)

As well as family ties, friendship is also to be doubted. This much is apparent if we return Proust's "Vendre le trône des anges. Chaque heure d'entretien nous coûte un état céleste" (*C* 1908, 84) to the context of Dugard's fuller extract from "Circles":

Comme je me promenais dans le bois et songeais à mes amis, je me

suis demandé pourquoi je jouais avec eux à cette affection idolâtre. Je sais et vois trop bien, quand je ne m'aveugle pas volontairement, les promptes limites des gens que l'on appelle élevés et estimables. Ils sont riches, nobles et grands grâce à la générosité de nos paroles, mais la réalité est triste. O Esprit béni que j'ai oublié pour eux, ils ne sont pas Toi! Toute attention accordée aux personnes nous coûte un état céleste. Nous vendons le trône des anges pour un plaisir bruyant et passager. (1907, 82)

[I thought, as I walked in the woods and mused on my friends, why should I play with them this game of idolatry? I know and see too well, when not voluntarily blind, the speedy limits of persons called high and worthy. Rich, noble, and great, they are by the liberality of our speech; but truth is sad. O blessed spirit, whom I forsake for these, they are not thee! Every personal consideration that we allow costs us heavenly state. We sell the thrones of angels for a short and turbulent pleasure.] (*EL*, 406)

Emerson's famous rejection of binding social ties in "Self-Reliance" was prompted by his reported response to being asked by "an angry bigot" to support Abolition: "Go love thy infant; love thy wood chopper: be good-natured and modest: have that grace, and never varnish your hard uncharitable ambition with this incredible tenderness for black folk a thousand miles off. Thy love afar is spite at home." "Goodness," Emerson goes on to say, "must have some edge to it, – else it is none. The doctrine of hatred must be preached as the counteraction to the doctrine of love when that pules and whines" (*EL*, 262). It is a deliberately provocative tone. Similarly the retort reported by Dugard (1907, 68), and noted in *Le Carnet*, on another occasion when Emerson's support for the anti-slavery movement was solicited: "J'ai mes propres prisonniers à délivrer" (*C* 1908, 84).

Emerson meant his essays to provide the kind of reading that challenged assumptions. That Proust was prepared to take him at his word is vouchsafed by his paraphrasing Emerson's comment on reading in "Nominalist and Realist": "I find the most pleasure in reading a book in a manner least flattering to the author. I read Proclus, and sometimes Plato, as I might read a dictionary, for a mechanical help to the fancy and the imagination" (*EL*, 579) [Je lis les écrivains Proclus etc. d'une manière qui n'est pas guère flatteuse pour eux, comme dictionnaires (*C* 1908, 84)]. Writing, however, was a different, more recalcitrant matter. As Emerson confessed in a letter

to Carlyle from February 1844:

You sometimes charge me with I know not what sky-blue, sky-void idealism. As far as it is a partiality, I fear I may be more deeply infected than you think me. I have very joyful dreams which I cannot bring to paper, much less to any approach to practice, and I blame myself not at all for my reveries, but that they have not yet got possession of my house and barn.

This too Proust notes, again in an abbreviated and as a result more gnomic form: “Si je me fais des reproches ce n’est pas de rêver c’est que mes rêves n’aient pas encore pris mes granges et ma maison” (*C 1908*, 84).

At the time when Proust was filled with a sense of both confidence and ambition, he went back to reading Emerson. That this wasn’t appreciated until Philip Kolb’s edition of *Le Carnet de 1908* was published in 1976 goes some way to explaining the lack of attention that has been given to Emerson’s influence on Proust at this stage in his life. And while it might be argued that in abandoning *Contre Sainte-Beuve* for *A la recherche* Proust left the essay form – and therefore Emerson – behind, this is to ignore the fact that the great innovation that allowed Proust to write his novel was the device of what Walter Strauss calls the novel’s “Double I” (1957, 10): a central character who as well as subjectively experiencing events the significance of which remain hidden from him is also able to maturely narrate and reflect on the meaning of the same events in a philosophical-aesthetic-moral vein recognizably drawn from Emerson.

In the rest of this chapter, then, I want to pursue these aspects of Emerson’s philosophical and aesthetic provocations, showing how they continued to play a decisive role in *A la recherche*. Most obvious from the evidence of *Le Carnet* is the influence of Emerson’s writings on friendship and self-reliance. This in turn admits to a reading of the interaction between society and the individual that forms so important a part of Marcel’s life and Proust’s theory of sexual “inversion.”⁶ The latter also shows the

⁶ Proust disliked the term *homosexualité*. And though he uses it in his correspondence, in *A la recherche* he borrowed from nineteenth-century sexology the theory of “inversion.” Put at its simplest (and Proust goes to some lengths, as I discuss below, to show how complicated is the matter), *un inverti* (always in the novel male) is a man who desires men because he is himself “really” feminine. The homosexual, Proust said, is what an invert calls himself, attempting to rationalize and normalize his self-image of masculinity (“Un homosexuel, ce serait ce que prétend être, ce que de bonne foi s’imagine être, un inverti,” *Esquisse* IV:3: 955).

influence of Emerson, particularly in Proust's analysis and classification of inversion through reference to the discipline of natural history. Less apparent, though as I aim to show none the less important, are the two references Proust noted to the vanishing of the gods, which guide us to an understanding of Proust's complex use of metaphor in the novel, a device which, appropriating Emerson, Proust likens to a god renaming the world. Finally, I will consider Emerson's contribution to Proust's formulation of *mémoire involontaire*. For if we reread those essays by Emerson that Proust refers to in *Le Carnet* and elsewhere alongside *A la recherche*, the parallels between the two writers become irresistible.

Bios(s)pheres

In October 1832, at the age of twenty-nine, Emerson resigned his ministry from the Unitarian Second Church in Boston. "I have sometimes thought," he wrote in a letter that anticipates the opening words of *Nature*, "that, in order to be a good minister, it was necessary to leave the ministry. The profession is antiquated. In an altered age, we worship in the dead forms of our forefathers" (*SPP*, 516–517). In October that year, and in search of a renewed sense of vocation, he sailed from Boston for the Old World in a ship laden with a cargo of logwood, mahogany, tobacco, sugar, coffee, beeswax, and cheese.

Emerson's journal entries for the crossing and his immediate impressions of southern Europe (the *Brig Jasper* docked first in Malta) are vivid testimony to his acute sense of alienation with regard to his changed environment, his altered relationship with religion and God and, most importantly for the future author of the *Essays*, himself. This is vividly depicted in the fact that the voice that addresses Emerson as "pale face" and to which Emerson responds can only be read as speaking in the imagined accents of an indigenous "forefather," the sepulchers of which Americans were even then building in unprecedented numbers: "What under the sun canst thou do then, pale face? Truly not much, but I can hope"; "It is doubtless a vice to turn one's eyes inward too much, but I am my own comedy and tragedy"; "All this pomp is conventional ... But to the eye of an Indian it would be ridiculous. There is no true majesty in all this millinery and imbecility" (*SPP*, 517–518). While Emerson was able to jettison aspects of his upbringing, he clearly still harbored an acute sense of residual guilt at recent American history. The result is that he comes close to articulating something of the crises in the modern

sense of human subjectivity not being identical with itself, encapsulated in Rimbaud's "*Je est un autre*" or Freud's account of visiting the Acropolis and experiencing himself as two distinct presences: the one who made the comment "*So this all really does exist, just as we learned in school!*", and the other who perceived it. "[A]nd both were amazed," Freud adds.⁷ There is, Freud implicitly states, a world of difference between knowing a thing and experiencing it. Emerson was shortly to experience the same revelation when, having arrived in Paris, he visited the "Cabinet of Natural History in the Garden of Plants."

"The universe is a more amazing puzzle than ever," the Journal records for July 13, 1833. "Not a form so grotesque, so savage, nor so beautiful but is an expression of some property inherent in man the observer ... I say continually 'I will be a naturalist'" (*SPP*, 520). The importance of this explosion of renewed feeling for the natural world and the place in it of humanity, argues Lee Rust Brown, cannot be overestimated. What Emerson saw in the Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle were "massive displays of mineral, plant, and animal specimens ... illustrat[ing] the classificatory models of individual naturalists," including Lamarck, Cuvier, and Saint-Hilaire. Faced, as Brown comments, "with this startling combination of multiplicity and 'reduction to a few laws,' Emerson found the occasion ... sacramental" (1997, 60). Here, then, was an antidote to the divorce of humanity and nature which in *Nature* was to be characterized as 'man is a god in ruins ... appl[ying] to nature but half his force. He works on the world with his understanding alone' (*EL*, 45-46).

The importance of the naturalist, Emerson was later to tell an audience at the Boston Natural History Society, is that he marries "the visible to the invisible by uniting thought to Animal Organization" (Brown 1997, 60; the quotation comes from Emerson's "The Uses of Natural History"). Natural history, then, provided a perspective from which order could be established. The naturalist's was in effect a god-like power of reading and interpreting nature. Emerson wrote:

⁷ Freud 2005a, 237. We might go further and say that there is a distinctly Emersonian strand to Freud's "A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis." For not only does he recount his own unconscious wish to destroy "the sepulchers of the father" in denying the existence of the Acropolis ("*So this all really does exist*") but his analysis of the "disturbance" leads him to the realization, "It has to do with criticism of our father in childhood ... It seems as though the essential aspect of success lies in getting further than one's father" (243).

A life in harmony with nature, the love of truth and of virtue, will purge the eyes to understand her text. By degrees we may come to know the primitive sense of the permanent objects of nature, so that the world shall be to us an open book, and every form significant of its hidden life and final cause. (*EL*, 25)

Such an elevated vantage point transformed the scientist into an artist: "There is a property in the horizon which no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts, that is, the poet" (*EL*, 9). To be able to read was not enough. For to read only would be to see the world as does "the sensual man": as "rooted and fast." The poet, though, sees through to the truth of the matter: that "the refractory world is ductile and flexible" (*EL*, 34). Once this is learned, we each become artists capable of transforming what we read of the old into the new works of the self. Above all, the poet is a fashioner of metaphors: he "unfixes the land and the sea, makes them revolve around the axis of his primary thought, and disposes them anew" (*EL*, 34). In this we can discern the presence of that most Emersonian of terms, "transition," a metaphor that points to the centrality of poetic refashioning in our ability to clothe intellectual thought in words.

A further vital distinction between passive reading and active image-making is that the latter takes place unconsciously: "That which was unconscious truth, becomes when interpreted and defined in an object, a part of the domain of knowledge – a new weapon in the magazine of power" (*EL*, 25). It would be difficult to overestimate the influence of this on Proust, while acknowledging that the evidence isn't straightforward. Certainly, Emerson's theory of the relationship between reading and writing appears to have played a decisive part in Proust's break with Ruskin. In "Sur la lecture," Proust's preface to his translation of *Sesame and Lilies* published in 1906, he takes issue with Ruskin's view that "la lecture est exactement une conversation avec des hommes beaucoup plus sages et plus intéressants que ceux que nous pouvons avoir l'occasion de connaître autour de nous" [reading is ... a conversation with men much wiser and more interesting than those around us we may have the opportunity to know]. Proust's reason for departing from Ruskin returns us to those passages from his own writings discussed earlier in which reading serves as a means of engaging in conversation a "kindred spirit":

que ce qui diffère essentiellement entre un livre et un ami, ce n'est pas leur plus ou moins grande sagesse, mais la manière dont on communique avec eux, la lecture, au rebours de la conversation, consistant pour chacun de nous à recevoir communication d'une autre pensée, mais tout en restant seul, c'est-à-dire en continuant à jouir de la puissance intellectuelle qu'on a dans la solitude et que la conversation dissipe immédiatement, en continuant à pouvoir être inspiré, à rester en plein travail fécond de l'esprit sur lui-même.

[the essential difference between a book and a friend is not their degree of greatness of wisdom, but the manner in which we communicate with them, reading, contrary to conversation, consisting for each of us in receiving the communication of another thought, but while we remain all alone, that is to say, while continuing to enjoy the intellectual power we have in solitude, and which conversation dissipates immediately, while continuing to be inspired, to maintain the mind's full, fruitful work on itself.] (*OR*, 30, 31)⁸

What reading shows us is a way to access those aspects of consciousness that remain unacknowledged or inaccessible:

In every work of genius we recognize our own rejected thoughts: they come back to us with a certain alienated majesty. Great works of art have no more affecting lesson for us than this. They teach us to abide by our spontaneous impression with good-humored inflexibility then most when the whole cry of voices is on the other side. (*EL*, 259)

As Emerson found at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, and as he knew from his reading of Coleridge, the fragment contains both singularity and multiplicity. He was to develop the point in "History," when he tells his reader to "read history actively and not passively; to esteem his own life the text, and books the commentary" (*EL*, 239). Authority, which contains the same root as "author," resides not in the "rooted and fast" but in what Lee Rust Brown summarizes as "the fresh dictates of individual life, including its entire range of idiosyncrasy, contradiction, skepticism, and annihilating revelation" (1997, 10). Permanence is only a word; what

⁸ The edition of "Sur la Lecture" used here is published as a parallel French-English text. The first page reference is therefore to Proust's original French, followed by the page number of the facing English translation.

life tells us, says Emerson in "Circles," is that its purpose is to "unsettle," to surprise us "out of our propriety" and to help us "lose our sempiternal memory" (*EL*, 414).

That Proust absorbed Emerson's lesson is apparent from "Sur la lecture." Far from being "une sorte de beau mythe platonicien" [a beautiful Platonic myth], reading is "à la fois essential et limité" [at once essential and limited]. A book, however, marks two divergent points of knowledge and experience: for the author it is all "Conclusions," while for the reader its role is one of "Incitations" [Incitements] (*OR*, 34, 35). In other words, a reader's profit begins with the "death of the author." And though Proust could not have known Emerson's *Divinity School Address*, he would surely have concurred with what Emerson had to say: "[Truth] cannot be received at second hand. Truly speaking, it is not instruction, but provocation, that I can receive from another soul. What he announces, I must find in me, or wholly reject" (*EL*, 79).

I began this chapter by asking what the nature of Emerson's influence could be on a person of Proust's neurotic disposition. That Emerson's influence had very personal associations for Proust in his struggle for self-reliance is apparent from the discussion that takes place in "Sur la lecture" regarding neurasthenia – the defining feature of which for Proust was "une sorte d'impossibilité de vouloir" [a kind of impossibility of willing]. Emerson, then, offered a theory of reading that, through its incitements, restored to the sufferer the will to act. In doing so Emerson becomes, at the end of a passage remarkable for its autobiographical content, a tutelary figure on a par with that most exemplary of literary father-figures, Virgil: "Emerson commençait rarement à écrire sans relire quelques pages de Platon. Et Dante n'est pas le seul poète que Virgile ait conduit jusqu'au seuil du paradis" [Emerson would rarely begin to write without rereading some pages of Plato. And Dante is not the only poet whom Virgil led to the threshold of paradise] (*OR*, 42, 43). Which makes Proust a modern Dante, with the figure of Emerson/Virgil rather than Beatrice providing a guiding hand to the achievement of *jouissance*.

Emerson gave Proust a mandate to take his own life as the subject matter of his fiction. For while "History" challenges us as readers to "dilate" to the dimensions of all mankind, "Self-Reliance" aims to make us more authentic by teaching us to inhabit ourselves. We can see, then, how between the twin poles of "History" and "Self-Reliance" is contained the whole expanse of *A la recherche*. The novel begins with a Marcel who has "dilated" to the extent that "il me semblait que j'étais moi-même ce

dont parlait l'ouvrage: une église, un quatuor, la rivalité de Françoise I^{er} et de Charles Quint" [it seemed to me that I myself was what the book was talking about: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between Françoise I and Charles V] (13; I:7). It ends with him vowing to show how the individual in time:

occupant une place si considérable, à côté de celle si restreinte qui leur est réservée dans l'espace, une place au contraire prolongée sans mesure puisqu'ils touchent simultanément, comme des géants plongés dans les années à des époques, vécues par eux si distantes, entre lesquelles tant de jours sont venus se placer – dans le Temp.

[occupies a place far larger than the very limited one reserved for them in space, a place in fact almost infinitely extended, since they are in simultaneous contact, like giants immersed in the years, with such distant periods of their lives, between which so many days have taken up their place – in Time] (2401; VI:358)

The "infinite extension" of Proust's "monsters of time" is the dilation of the self to a point where each, in Emerson's words, "can live all history in their own person." The key to this is provided by the "simultaneous contact" between time past and time future that defines *mémoire involontaire*. *A la recherche* thus becomes a book in which, as Emerson says, "there is properly no history; only biography. Every mind must know the whole lesson for itself, – must go over the whole ground" (*EL*, 240). What Proust took from Emerson is the lesson that we are all biographers, "bios-writers." To write is to "double-back" on our own lived experience and to translate it into language. For Emerson, the writer works primarily through metaphor. As such the self is shown not to be a stable, coherent agent but, as Jonathan Levin writes, a presence that resides in "the movement of his tropes" (Levin 1999, 28). Such fluidity and exchanges of identity mean that reading always implicates rereading. Like a pilot "looping-the-loop" we double back on ourselves, returning not through memory alone but through a "metaphorics of retrospection" to our earlier selves. However, to read *A la recherche* as a book about memory – voluntary or involuntary – is, as Deleuze says, to miss the point. Rather, as with Emerson's evocation of the representative writer, Goethe, it is a book in which we are presented with a character engaged in an apprenticeship as a man of letters. The subject of our reading is life. "All things are engaged in writing their history," Emerson wrote in "Goethe; or,

the Writer.” “The air is full of sounds, the sky of tokens, the ground is all memoranda and signatures, and every object covered over with hints, which speak to the intelligent” (*EL*, 746). If all nature is engaged in writing, then the proper study of humanity is translation, interpretation – what Deleuze defines as Marcel’s “apprenticeship to signs” (2000, 4).

Bon zig

Throughout *A la recherche* Marcel spectacularly and often comically fails to read various signs. Time and again he sees something and yet remains unsure of what exactly it is he has witnessed. He misinterprets Gilberte’s provocative gesture while out walking at Tansonville, a gesture which, if he had read it aright, the Narrator later comments, may have led him to discover some degree of future happiness. He is similarly incapable of judging whether the sight of Albertine and Andrée dancing together is, as Cottard whispers to him, evidence of their lesbianism. And following the conversation he has with Charlus during which he wishes to have been able to say that he, Saint-Loup, and Rachel had been soberly discussing Emerson rather than drinking themselves under the table, Marcel mistakes the Baron’s hat for that of his brother, the Duc de Guermantes, having forgotten that they are related:

Je m’y dirigeais assez vivement quand M. de Charlus, qui avait pu croire que j’allais vers la sortie, quitta brusquement M. de Faffenheim avec qui il causait, fit un tour rapide qui l’amena en face de moi. Je vis avec inquiétude qu’il avait pris le chapeau au fond duquel il y avait un G et une couronne ducale ...

– Vous ferez bien de faire attention, monsieur, lui dis-je. Vous avez pris par erreur le chapeau d’un des visiteurs.

– Vous voulez m’empêcher de prendre mon chapeau ? »

Je supposai, l’aventure m’étant arrivée à moi-même peu auparavant, que, quelqu’un lui ayant enlevé son chapeau, il en avait avisé un au hasard pour ne pas rentrer nu-tête et que je le mettais dans l’embarras en dévoilant sa ruse. Aussi je n’insistai pas. Je lui dis qu’il fallait d’abord que je dise quelques mots à Saint-Loup. « Il est en train de parler avec cet idiot de duc de Guermantes, ajoutai-je. – C’est charmant ce que vous dites là, je le dirai à mon frère. – Ah ! vous croyez que cela peut intéresser M. de Charlus ? » (Je me figurais que,

s'il avait un frère, ce frère devait s'appeler Charlus aussi. Saint-Loup m'avait bien donné quelques explications là-dessus à Balbec, mais je les avais oubliées.) « Qui est-ce qui vous parle de M. de Charlus? me dit le baron d'un air insolent. Allez auprès de Robert. Je sais que vous avez participé ce matin à un de ces déjeuners d'orgie qu'il a avec une femme qui le déshonore.

[As I was hurrying after him M. de Charlus, perhaps under the impression that I was leaving, brought his conversation with M. de Faffenheim to an abrupt end and wheeled round rapidly to face me. I was alarmed to see that he had taken the hat with the *G* and the ducal coronet in the lining ...

– Do take care, Monsieur,' I said. You've picked up the wrong hat by mistake.

– You want to stop me taking my own hat?

I assumed, since the same mishap had recently happened to me, that someone else had gone away with his hat and his instinctive reaction had been to pick up one at random so as not to go home bare-headed, and that my remark had embarrassed him by exposing his ruse. So I did not pursue the matter. I told him that I needed to say a few words to Saint-Loup before I left. "He's talking to that stupid Duc de Guermantes, I added. – What a charming thing to say. I shall tell my brother. – O! do you think that would interest M. de Charlus?" (I simply supposed that, if he had a brother, the brother must be called M. de Charlus too. Saint-Loup had in fact explained the family connections to me in Balbec, but I had forgotten them.) "What do you mean, M. de Charlus? Replied the Baron contemptuously. Go and speak to Robert. I know you were there this morning at one of those orgiastic lunches he has with a woman who is disgracing him." (958–959; 3:274)

This is pure farce, yet still it contains elements that contribute to Marcel's more tragic apprenticeship to signs. For example, his mistaking the *G* on the hat Charlus picks up anticipates the error he will make in misattributing a telegram from Gilberte to the dead Albertine. Similarly, the flurry of misreadings regarding Charlus's identity prefigure his discovery that the Baron is an invert. The passage also puts in question the nature of Charlus's friendship with Marcel. I would go further, and say that what Proust is dealing with here is the vexed question of how any gay man is to establish

same-sex friendships. For as the Narrator comments in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, the invert is a person condemned to having “amis sans amitiés” [friends without friendships] (1219; IV:19).

Proust's analysis (verging at times on dissection) of friendship is clearly indebted to Emerson, for whom a longing for sympathetic companionship had always to be balanced against the demands of self-reliance. Though seemingly antithetical, the two run parallel courses. This much is suggested by Emerson's including in *Essays: First Series* both “Self-Reliance” and “Friendship.” Yet so idealized is his concept of true friendship – what we might call “transcendental friendship” – that it is difficult to imagine who could possibly live up to his expectations. Emerson was at least aware of the problem, and how it could lead not to communion but introspection: “The higher the style we demand of friendship, of course, the less easy to establish it with flesh and blood. We walk alone in the world. Friends, such as we desire, are dreams and fables” (*EL*, 352). Even where it was found to exist, he discovered limitations: “Two may talk and one may hear, but three cannot take part in a conversation of the most sincere and searching sort” (*EL*, 349). What Emerson wanted from friendship is never far from what he looked for in reading: the company of “a circle of godlike men and women ... between whom subsists a lofty intelligence” (*EL*, 352). Far preferable is the intimacy and seclusion that comes with reading. Tellingly, it is to reading that Emerson likens the first kindling of friendship: “Read the language of these wandering eye-beams. The heart knoweth” (*EL*, 341).⁹

The intensity of Proust's own friendships was famous. As an adolescent he was prone to pouring out his feelings to his classmates. Among them was Daniel Halévy, to whom, in addition to the course in reading referred

⁹ This would seem to confirm the view of Emerson which appealed to the symbolists: that he was a figure remote from human society and seemingly indifferent to the logical expression and development of his ideas. But as the French scholar Maurice Gonnaud has pointed out, Emerson the man did not enjoy any such remove: “Between the cloistered life of the thinker and artist, living in the companionship of his books ... and the life of the pastor, the citizen, the ‘intellectual,’ subject to a complex and delicate play of outer pressures, there are complicities more profound and more essential than is generally admitted” (1987, xxiii). A similar situation arises with Proust, whom early critics saw as a celebrant of interiority and of a withdrawal from society. To read *A la recherche* solely in these terms, however, as Ingrid Wassenaar points out in *Proustian Passions*, is to ignore the dazzling set pieces of *Le Côté de Guermantes* and *Sodom et Gomorrhe*.

to earlier, Proust offered a “lesson” in pederasty that anticipates aspects of the “essay” on inversion in *Sodom et Gomorrhe*, the obsessive love that wracks successive characters, and the mutual masturbation that defines the sexual boundary of Marcel’s affair with Albertine:

I know ... that there are some young men ... who love other boys, who constantly long to see them ... and weep and suffer when they are apart, and wish for only one thing, to hug them and kneel before them, who love them because of their *flesh*, who covet them with their eyes, who call them darling and angel ... And yet, generally, love overwhelms them and they masturbate one another. (cited in Tadié 2000, 70)

Unlike heterosexuality, there seemed to Proust to be at least the possibility that a homosexual could remain celibate. In 1908 he commented in a letter to Abel Hermant, “It is true that homosexuality shows more delicacy, for it still displays the effect of its pure origin, which is friendship, and retains some of its virtues” (cited in Tadié 2000, 508). Marcel, of course, isn’t gay; yet *A la recherche* concerns itself with the tension between homosexual desire with all its unstable meanings and heterosexual homoeroticism. Christopher Newfield has written about a not dissimilar tension within Emerson’s discussions of male friendship. One of the examples Newfield gives, Emerson’s admission that the “cold blue eye” of a male student “induces in [him] the hypnotic and obsessional states that form an erotic captivity he finds liberating” (1996, 97), has parallels with Proust’s description of the invert as someone who covets with their eyes. This in turn returns us to the opening paragraph of “Friendship,” with its mention of “wandering eye-beams.” It also reminds us of the importance the oracular plays in Marcel’s learning to “read” sexuality.

The first time Marcel meets Gilberte,

Elle jeta en avant et de côté ses pupilles ... elle laissa ses regards filer de toute leur longueur dans ma direction ... avec une fixité et un sourire dissimulé, que je ne pouvais interpréter d’après les notions que l’on m’avait données sur la bonne éducation, que comme une preuve d’outrageant mépris.

[She cast her eyes forwards and sideways ... she allowed her glances to stream out at full length in my direction ... with a concentration

and a secret smile that I could only interpret, according to the notions of good breeding instilled in me, as a sign of insulting contempt.] (II8–II9; I:142)

Marcel is by turn captivated, puzzled, then provoked into an interpretation of why the girl addresses him in this way. His bourgeois upbringing allows him to guess, or translate, its content and meaning. Heterosexuality proves readable. Or so he thinks.

The look he is given by the man escorting the girl and her mother evades any such transcription: “un monsieur habillé de coutil et que je ne connaissais pas, fixait sur moi des yeux qui lui sortaient de la tête” [a gentleman dressed in twill whom I did not know stared at me with eyes that started from his head]. The man is Charlus, and the nature of his stare is left uncommented on. Marcel meets with it again at Balbec:

j'eus la sensation d'être regardé par quelqu'un qui n'était pas loin de moi. Je tournai la tête et j'aperçus un homme d'une quarantaine d'années, très grand et assez gros, avec des moustaches très noires, et qui, tout en frappant nerveusement son pantalon avec une badine, fixait sur moi des yeux dilatés par l'attention.

[I had a sudden feeling of being looked at by someone at quite close quarters. I glanced round and saw a very tall, rather stout man of about forty, with a jet black moustache, who stood there nervously flicking a cane against the leg of his trousers and staring at me with eyes dilated by the strain of attention.] (594; II:332)

Again, what Charlus means by looking at Marcel remains unclear. Marcel should, however, recognize it. For the way in which Charlus stares at him is strikingly similar to how he himself responds to Gilberte at Tansonville. They are a sequence of glances at once anxious to be acknowledged but afraid of being recognized. To return to Newfield, they flicker between homo- and heterosexual desire.

The situation is markedly different with Robert de Saint-Loup. The first time he and Marcel meet, their eyes do not. Saint-Loup remains aloof, his gaze “impassible” [blank] and without “la plus faible lueur de sympathie humaine” [the slightest spark of humane feeling] (578; II:310, 311). Though the two soon become close, the Narrator provides a running commentary on the friendship which tells rather of disillusion and deceit – what Emerson

called “the shades of suspicion and disbelief” that haunt “the golden hour of friendship” (*EL*, 343). While Robert declares that, apart from his love for his mistress, his friendship with Marcel provides the greatest joy of his life, Proust’s Narrator tells a different version of events:

La conversation même qui est le mode d’expression de l’amitié est une divagation superficielle ... Nous pouvons causer pendant toute une vie sans rien dire que répéter indéfiniment le vide d’une minute ... Et l’amitié n’est pas seulement dénuée de vertu comme la conversation, elle est de plus funeste.

[Conversation, which is friendship’s mode of expression, is a superficial digression ... We may converse our whole life away, without speaking anything other than the interminable repetitions that fill the vacant minute ... Moreover, friendship is not just devoid of virtue ... it is actively pernicious.] (709; II:483–484)

Proust goes even further. Friendship, in as much as it is “basé sur le mensonge qui cherche à nous faire croire que nous ne somme pas irrémédiablement seuls” [founded on a lie which tries to make us believe we are not inescapably alone] (710; II:484–485) interrupts the process of self-realization.

Self-reliance is further postponed by Robert’s desire that Marcel shine in society. This leads the Narrator to reflect on how “je m’apercevais tout d’un coup moi-même du dehors, comme quelqu’un qui lit son nom dans le journal ou qui se voit dans une glace” [I suddenly caught sight of myself from the outside, like someone who reads his name in the newspaper or sees himself in a mirror] (825; III:100). The experience may be flattering (we recall Marcel’s delight when his article appears in *Le Figaro*) but again it creates a self “incapable de me réaliser.” Robert’s friendship remains “external” [en dehors de moi sans doute] (1052; III:393), the reason being that to connect it with his true sexual self would be to acknowledge that he is living a lie. Like his uncle, Saint-Loup is an invert. This Marcel learns only after Robert’s death in the First World War. It is a death reported as being motivated by his love for his comrades (2247; VI:155), but it may rather remind us of what Eve Sedgwick writes about suicide among young gays and lesbians. Her comment that “I look at my adult friends and colleagues ... and I feel that the survival of each one is a miracle” seems as bleakly applicable to war as to the “profligate way this culture has of denying and despoiling queer energies and lives” (1994, 1).

Something of this homoerotic tension and its containment in war as “brotherly love” and “unit cohesion” is discussed by Newfield in the context of Emerson and the “antebellum panic about writers who did not distinguish sharply between their hetero- and homosexual desires” (1996, 94). Proust implicitly states that such was the case with Saint-Loup when he writes that no man, “ever felt less hatred for a nation [Germany] than he did” [“Jamais homme n’avait eu moins que lui la haine d’un peuple”] (2247; VI:155). Saint-Loup, then, sacrifices himself on the altar of the heterosexual nation. His desire for men regardless of their nationality means that self-reliance gives way to self-harm. Robert’s friendship with Marcel is premised on the suppression of his inversion. When his cover is blown, when people learn of his affair with Morel, he reverts to the same coldly impassive figure Marcel first met at Balbec: “je sentais bien, à ses nouvelles manières froides et évasives, [mon affection] ne me rendait plus, les hommes depuis qu’ils étaient devenus susceptibles de lui donner des désirs” [I felt clearly from his newly cold and evasive manner that [my affection] was no longer reciprocated, for, since he had found that men could arouse his desire, they no longer inspired his friendship] (2122; V:650).

Saint-Loup cannot act as a foil and provocation to Marcel because, ironically, he is trapped within conventional modes of behaving and thinking. He wants, in terms adopted from what Fiedler has written about a parallel impulse in American fiction, to return to the world of the epic: “a world of war, and its reigning sentimental relationship ... the loyalty of comrades in arms” (1967, 24). Such sentiments could not survive the reality of mechanized carnage. Moreover, Saint-Loup’s friendship, as Deleuze writes, is not enough for Marcel because he is “ignorant of the dark regions in which are elaborated the effective forces that act on thought, the determinations that *force* us to think; a friend is not enough for us to approach the truth. Minds communicate to each other only the conventional” (2000, 95). Ultimately, Saint-Loup’s averted gaze means that unlike Gilberte and Charlus he refuses to allow himself to be read.

La beauté convulsive

Marcel’s apprenticeship to signs reaches a further staging post with the deferred entry into the novel of an explanation of the nature of Charlus’s gaze at Tansonville and Balbec. *Sodom et Gomorrhe* begins with Proust acknowledging this delay. Indeed, so momentous a discovery is it, says the Narrator, “que j’ai jusqu’ici, jusqu’au moment de pouvoir lui donner la place

et l'étendue voulues, différe de la rapporter" [that up until now, when I am able to give it the position and dimensions it requires, I have put off reporting it] (1209; IV:5). What this initiates is a rereading of, a doubling back on, the existing narrative.¹⁰ It is the moment above all others, more so even than the discovery of *mémoire involontaire*, when Proust dramatizes the workings of the key Emersonian term, "transition."

As Richard Poirier summarizes it, transition is "a movement away from substantives or 'resting-places' or settled texts" (1987, 16). It shifts. It unsettles. It is, Poirier suggests, "like catching a glimpse of a thing before it is possible to recognize or name it, the moment just before it can be classified by language and thus become composed or reposed in a human corpus or text" (1987, 46). Charlus's gaze is one such "glimpse." Marcel does not recognize it, therefore he cannot name it. There remains a potential contradiction here: how does one put in language a dynamic which, once named, ceases? Proust's sensitivity to this is played out in the fact that what "drives" Charlus is a sexual identity that until the end of the nineteenth century had resisted precisely any such categorization. This changed with the emergence and construction of the "homosexual" as a "species." What is significant about Proust's resistance to such categorization is that he uses the discourse of the natural sciences not as a way of fixing and determining but, rather, as a metaphorical means of locating in language the dynamics of transition.

In Chapter VIII of *Nature*, Emerson writes: "In a cabinet of natural history, we become sensible of a certain occult recognition and sympathy in regard to the most unwieldy and eccentric forms of beast, fish, and insect" (*EL*, 43-44). Nowhere does Proust make more apparent his profound sympathy with the natural world than in Part One of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, where the encounter between Charlus and Jupien in the Guermantes courtyard is framed and punctuated by Marcel anticipating, commenting on, and finally admitting defeat in his attempts at observing a bee pollinate a waiting flower. It is as though, like Emerson at the Jardin des Plantes, he is declaring "I will be a naturalist": "À défaut de la contemplation du géologue," the Narrator says, "j'avais du moins celle du botaniste" [Lacking

¹⁰ Maurice Blanchot has written about Proust's *recherche* as a means of discovering a simultaneity between different temporalities: "certains épisodes ... semblent-ils vécus, à la fois, à des ages fort différents, vécus et revécus dans la simultanéité intermittente de toute une vie non comme de purs moments, mais dans la densité mouvante du temps sphérique" (Blanchot 1959, 32-33).

the perspective of the geologist, I at least had that of the botanist] (1209; IV:5). There are certainly other affinities between the scene and the layout of the *Muséum Royal d'Histoire Naturelle*: both proceed from individual examples housed in glass-fronted cabinets (for which we can substitute Charlus and Jupien "framed" by the courtyard and by Marcel's vantage point on high) to the botanical gardens where these classifications are shown on a larger scale (for which we read Proust's teeming botanical metaphors, and his tracing of inverts back through evolutionary time and space through references to Darwin).

It would appear that Marcel has exchanged his glimpses of Mlle Vinteuil and her (unnamed) lesbian lover for the literal and metaphorical perspective that Emerson saw provided by natural history. The naturalist, we remember, had a god-like power of reading and interpreting nature. Integrating and communicating what is observed requires the gifts of a poet. Proust fuses the two in having his Narrator describe Charlus and Jupien as though they were on the one hand "insecte improbable" [the improbable insect] and on the other "le pistil offert et délaisse" [the tendered and forlorn pistil]. Thus the Narrator elides his botanical commentary on "la fleur mâle, dont les étamines s'étaient spontanément tournées pour que l'insecte pût plus facilement la recevoir" [the male flower, whose stamens had spontaneously turned so that the insect might the more easily receive him] with a "reading" of Jupien's behavior that sees his metamorphosis into a plant and a woman: "de même la fleur femme qui était ici, si l'insecte venait, arquerait coquettement ses «styles»" [similarly, the flower-woman that was here would, should the insect come, arch her "styles" coquettishly] (1210; IV:6). Come the insect does, literally and metaphorically: "Au même instant où M. de Charlus avait passé la porte en sifflant comme un gros bourdon, un autre, un vrai celui-là, entra dans la cour" [At the selfsame instant that M. de Charlus passed through the gateway whistling like a fat bumblebee, another one, a real one this time, entered the courtyard] (1213; IV:10).

Just when it seems that Proust is settling on a way of portraying the "courtship" of Charlus and Jupien, he draws further distinctions between what Marcel sees, what the Narrator understands, and what language is capable of naming. In doing so he enables what it is we think we are seeing in the *Guermantes* courtyard to remain that "glimpse of a thing before it is possible to recognize or name it" discussed by Poirier.

Like Breton's "convulsive beauty," the Proustian invert shifts and unsettles our expectations. The parallel is a useful one. In Mary Ann Caws's words the convulsive provokes "an emotional state of grace ... a dynamic recognition

of the 'reciprocal relations linking the object seen in its motion and its repose,' thus, a point diametrically opposed to any static perception, and readying itself – in a constant state of expectation – for the encounter with the marvelous, that unexpected 'surprise, splendor, and dazzling outlook onto something other than what we are able to know.'"¹¹ This is strikingly similar to what the natural sciences showed Emerson: a world in which the only constant is change, and that "power ... resides in the moment of transition from a past to a new state" (*EL*, 271).

That Proust determined something analogous is evident from Sedgwick's comment that for Proust sexuality is above all a form of action, it is "still *in* performance." Sedgwick continues the theatrical metaphor when she adds that sexuality is at the same time both "definite ... in setting up positions and sight lines" and "mobile" (1990, 213). Charlus and Jupien embody this. Each attempt by the Narrator to define them results in a comparison that will not stay still: "la multiplicité de ces comparaisons est elle-même d'autant plus naturelle qu'un même homme, si on l'examine pendant quelques minutes, semble successivement un homme, un homme-oiseau ou un homme-insecte, etc." [the multiplicity of these comparisons is itself all the more natural in that, examined over the course of a few minutes, the same man seems successively to be a man, a man-bird, or a man-insect, and so on] (1212–1213; IV:11). Rather, successive comparisons are needed in order to show "des aspects différents d'une même réalité" [different aspects of the one reality] (1225; IV:25).

Emerson's "History" discusses how "there is one mind common to all individual men ... Of the works of this mind history is the record. Its genius is illustrated by the entire series of days. Man is explicable by nothing less than all his history" (*EL*, 237). Proust's invert, then, can only be characterized – illustrated – through metaphor. In so much as a metaphor defers meaning by refusing to allow it to settle, it necessitates a process whereby reading begets rereading, and where rereading becomes a form of writing. Or as Emerson says in "Circles": "Every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series. Every general law [is] only a particular fact of some more general law presently to disclose itself. There is no outside, no inclosing wall, no circumference to us" (*EL*, 405). Language cannot be relied upon to prove itself a transparent medium of representation.

¹¹ See Mary Ann Caws, "Reading Andre Breton," *Context: A Forum for Literary Arts and Culture* (no. 11) www://centerforbookculture.org/context/1011/caws.html (accessed June 7).

It obstructs as well as mobilizes, resists as well as liberates. Successive moments of apprehending the “truth” must give way to the realization that such glimpses are fluid and evanescent.

We see this in action elsewhere in the first part of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, when the Narrator recounts the story of a solitary invert in order to attempt the presentation of a more definite law. Alone on a railway station platform, the man is successively likened to Griselda dreaming in her tower, Andromeda waiting for the Argonaut who will not arrive, “a sterile jellyfish that will perish on the sand” [“une méduse stérile qui périra sur le sable”] and, returning momentarily to Charlus and Jupien, an insect and a flower. The Narrator, however, does not simply narrate; rather, he becomes the (re-) reader of his own story in the process of telling it. Like Emerson’s ideal student who is to “read history actively and not passively; to esteem his own life the text, and books the commentary” (*EL*, 239), he turns the narrative back on it and himself:

Méduse ! Orchidée ! Quand je ne suivais que mon instinct, la méduse me répugnait à Balbec; mais si je savais la regarder, comme Michelet, du point de vue de l’histoire naturelle et de l’esthétique, je voyais une délicieuse girandole d’azur. Ne sont-elles pas, avec le velours transparent de leurs pétales, comme les mauves orchidées de la mer?

[Jellyfish! Orchid! When I was following only my own instinct, the jellyfish repelled me at Balbec; but had I known how to look at it, like Michelet, from the point of view of natural history and of aesthetics, I would have seen a delectable girandole of azure. Are they not, with the transparent velvet of their petals, like the mauve orchids of the sea?] (1228; IV:30)

The significance of the jellyfish, as I will return to in Chapter 3, is that *la méduse* was a common referent for the lesbian. Thus the Narrator’s attempts at classifying male homosexuality anticipate Marcel’s later efforts to determine the exact nature of Albertine’s sexuality. Such attempts result in Marcel being likened by the Narrator to an array of specialists capable of scrutinizing Albertine’s every word and gesture: a chemist, philologist, pathologist, logician, biologist, physiologist, astronomer, historian, botanist, and meteorologist.¹² What such scrutiny lacks is precisely the metaphor-

¹² This parallels in turn the various narrative selves (Héros, Narrateur, Sujet, Intermédiaire, Protagoniste, Romancier, Écrivain, Auteur, Homme, Signataire)

inducing flexibility and fluidity called for by Emerson, and enacted in the descriptions of Charlus and Jupien. Marcel will want to transcribe Albertine's "notebook of memories" [ce bloc-notes de ses souvenirs] so as to turn her into a work of art that contains her rather than liberating himself. Their relationship thus descends into enacting all too literally that which Emerson most feared: "I should hate myself, if I then made my other friends my asylum" (*EL*, 345).

Saint-Loup's refusal to allow himself to be read parallels Marcel's own insistence on turning Albertine into a text that does not allow for, and enable, self-reflexivity. As Saint-Loup's gaze remains always at some level averted, so Albertine is always in some essential way invisible: she is an aspect of the novel and of the world that remains for reasons that remain difficult to fathom "confuse, effacée, autant dire indéchiffrable" [confused, half erased, in other words unreadable] (1667; V:75).¹³ She is, in Nietzsche's terms, associated with the mistaken Kantian belief that "Nature = world as idea, that is, as error" (Nietzsche 1984, 27). Marcel's attempts at categorizing her are doomed to failure. "Whenever we establish something scientifically," Nietzsche wrote in lines that echo his debt to Emerson,

we are always invariably reckoning with some incorrect quantities [because] numbers were invented on the basis of the initially prevailing idea that there are various identical things (but actually there is nothing identical) or at least that there are things (but there is no "thing"). The assumption of multiplicity always presumes that there is *something* which occurs repeatedly. But this is just where error rules; even here, we invent entities, unities, that do not exist. (1984, 27)

This, of course, is implicit in Proust's use of "indéchiffrable" to describe Albertine – the root of the word being found in both the noun *chiffre* and the verb *chiffrer*: respectively, a number or a figure and the act of "putting a figure on something," "costing it," "adding up."

discussed by Marcel Muller in *Les Voix narratives dans "A La recherche du temps perdu"* (1965).

¹³ For Elisabeth Ladenson this means that Proust's depiction of lesbianism fails to adequately imagine a female version of the invert, resulting in an "epistemological blindspot both in the novel and in the history of its reception" (1990, 9).

Proust's metaphoric of inversion can also be traced to Emerson's "Compensation." He refers to the essay in a letter of 1904 to Albert Sorel: "jamais malade ne fut aussi «gâté,» ne fut comblé, en vertu de la loi mystérieuse de «compensation» d'Emerson, d'une «surprise» plus féerique que moi ce soir" [no invalid was ever so "spoiled," was ever so overwhelmed, by virtue of Emerson's mysterious law of "compensation" by such a magical "surprise," as I have been this evening in reading your article] (*Corr.* IV:177; *SL* II, 57). As in *Jean Santeuil*, we find Proust associating Emerson with the unexpected pleasure of discovering in "some newspaper installment, a passage ... which we had not previously seen" – in this case Sorel's favorable review in *Le Temps* of Proust's translation of Ruskin's *La Bible d'Amiens*. "Compensation" contains other elements that we know attracted Proust to Emerson, not least the call to reject family and friends in favor of individual destiny (*EL*, 288, 301). The essay returns to the earlier material of "History," with "Every thing is made of one hidden stuff" (*EL*, 287) echoing and developing "There is one mind common to all individual men." The examples Emerson gives to illustrate this take the form of a series of what we might call "hieroglyphs" which show how that "mind" pictures itself as series of hybrids: "The naturalist sees one type under every metamorphosis, and regards a horse as a running man, a fish as a swimming man, a bird as a flying man, a tree as a rooted man" (*EL*, 289). The parallels between this and Proust's depiction of Charlus and Jupien as man-bumblebees, man-birds, and man-insects are striking. As is Jupien's transformation, almost word-for-word, into Emerson's "tree as a rooted man" ("enraciné comme une plante" [rooted like a plant]) (1211; IV:8).

What Emerson's "mysterious law" expounds is a theory similar to Proust's *l'inverti*. Where Emerson writes of "an inevitable dualism bisect[ing] nature, so that each thing is a half, and suggests another thing to make it whole; as spirit, matter; man, woman" (*EL*, 287), so Proust's male inverts are not men who desire other men *per se* but men who embody, so to speak, their other half. In Charlus's case this leads him to being always on the look out for men who "compensate" for his own essential, if disguised, femininity: "je comprenais maintenant pourquoi ... j'avais pu trouver que M. de Charlus avait l'air d'une femme: c'en était une! Il appartenait à la race de ces êtres moins contradictoires qu'ils n'en ont l'air, dont l'idéal est viril, justement parce que leur tempérament est féminin" [I understood now why ... I had been able to think that M. de Charlus had the look of a woman: he was one! He belonged to that race of beings less contradictory than they appear to be, whose ideal is virile, precisely because their temperament is feminine] (1219;

IV:19). The authority and objectivity of the Narrator's classifications, however, do not bear much scrutiny. Charlus's behavior in the first chapter of *Sodom et Gomorrhe*, not to mention elsewhere in the novel, breaks apart the system that is being constructed around him. For example: if Charlus disguises his femininity, how is it that he reminds the Narrator of a woman? Such contradictions are, in reality, not at all contradictory. Rather, like transition, they allow us a glimpse of something in transit, "still *in performance*," from which Proust does not allow his novel's arbiter of objectivity – its narrator – to be exempt. Thus *A la recherche* inverts its own orders of meaning even in the process of establishing them.

Marcel's apprenticeship to signs means that he must himself become an "invert." Which is to say he must learn to incorporate the metaphorical, the transitional. His experiences in the Guermites courtyard leave him with eyes that have become "newly opened" [mes yeux dessillés], and the Narrator likens him to Ulysses at the moment when he first recognizes the goddess Athena. "Mais les dieux," Proust adds, "sont immédiatement perceptibles aux dieux, le semblable aussi vite au semblable, ainsi encore l'avait été M. de Charlus à Jupien" [But the gods are immediately perceptible to the gods, as like equally soon is to like, and as M. de Charlus had been to Jupien] (1218; IV:17). What this remarkable aphorism does is to relocate the god-like perspective Emerson discovered at the Jardin des Plantes, a perspective we remember that transforms the viewer/reader into a poet capable of forging new metaphors, new ways of establishing "like with like," to Proust's novel.

There is much more to this than what some, among them J. E. Rivers, have read as Proust's reliance in dealing with homosexuality on the view that can be summarized as "it takes one to know one." This isn't what Proust says. What he actually says is that it takes an invert to recognize the moment of transition when one thing becomes another, and to be able to hold both in the mind at once. This, I need hardly add, is what the Narrator does when he describes a bee approaching an orchid, and at the same time uses it as a metaphor for Charlus and Jupien's courtship. Inversion, then, becomes the Proustian metaphor *non pareil*. In reading, and in turning our reading to writing, we must all become inverts. For the word, as Rivers does usefully say, carries many different meanings and uses in the novel, not all of them to do with sex. *A la recherche* is itself "inverted," moving as it does from *temps perdu* to *temps retrouvé* (1980, 216). Inversion, like a metaphor, is a kind of go-between. Such is the nature of Proust's provocation to the reader and to himself as writer.

The nature of memory

Change, Emerson declares in "Compensation," is a condition of existence: "And such should be the outward biography of man in time, a putting off of dead circumstances day by day." Nevertheless, Emerson warns, it "comes by shocks" (*EL*, 302). This sloughing of the self's habitual circumstances culminates in *A la recherche* in the discovery of *mémoire involontaire*.

What Emerson took home with him to Concord were a set of classificatory models and principles that were to underpin his own writing. On returning from Europe he began a journal that between December 1833 and December 1834 grew to some 167 manuscript pages. They are divided into eighty-two index topics, including "Analogy of Mind and Matter," "Naturalist," "Goethe," and "Progress." A few other topics, such as "Compensation," were of longer-standing interest. What is perhaps less obvious from this urge to arrange and order is the importance Emerson attached to spontaneity. Far from seeing artistic expression as human beings at their most subjective, Emerson came to believe, as he writes in "Compensation," that it was "the best part of each writer, which has nothing private in it; that which he does not know; that which flowed out of his constitution, and not from his too active invention" (*EL*, 293). As a result, his interest in writing as itself a process of discovery rather than the record of fixed definitions began to come more and more to the fore.

Tenuous as the connection may seem, the importance of the conjugation of subject and object as experienced by Emerson when looking at the various cabinets in the Muséum d'Histoire Naturelle has a parallel in Proust's description of the room in the Grand-Hôtel de la Plage at Balbec where the young Marcel travels with his grandmother. It is a merging of self and other in the act of perception that was central to aspects of Symbolism. What the symbolists took from Emerson, as Charles Feidelson says, was "an attempt to find a point of departure outside the premises of dualism – not so much an attempt to solve the 'old problems of knowledge' as an effort to redefine the process of knowing in such a manner that the problem never arises" (Feidelson 1953, 4).

Proust's description of the hotel room opens the third part of *Du côté de chez Swann*. It signals a decisive shift in the narrative from Combray, Paris, and childhood to the wider world of adolescence: "Parmi les chambres dont j'évoquais le plus souvent l'image dans mes nuits d'insomnie, aucune ne ressemblait moins aux chambres de Combray,

saupoudrées d'une atmosphère grenue, pollinisée, comestible et dévote, que celle du Grand Hôtel de la Plage, à Balbec" [Among the bedrooms whose images I summoned up most often in my nights of insomnia, none resembled less the rooms at Combray, dusted with an atmosphere that was grainy, pollinated, edible and devout, than the room at the Grand-Hôtel de la Plage, at Balbec] (309; I:387).

For all the idyllic aspects of Marcel's childhood home-from-home at his aunt's house in the country, the Narrator is clearly signaling in those adjectives "grenue, pollinisée, comestible et dévote" an atmosphere at once dangerous to the health of an asthmatic and steeped in a religiosity which Emerson saw as perpetuating the "dead forms of our forefathers." Characterized not by the close-knit, stifling conformities of a bourgeois family upbringing but by multiplicity, art, and the involuntary, Balbec offers an altogether different world. The passage continues:

Le tapissier bavarois qui avait été chargé de l'aménagement de cet hôtel avait varié la décoration des pièces et sur trois côtés, fait courir le long des murs, dans celle que je me trouvai habiter, des bibliothèques basses, à vitrines en glace, dans lesquelles, selon la place qu'elles occupaient, et par un effet qu'il n'avait pas prévu, telle ou telle partie du tableau changeant de la mer se reflétait, déroulant une frise de claires marines[.]

[The Bavarian decorator who had been commissioned to furnish the hotel had varied the design schemes of the rooms and on three sides, along the walls, in the one I was occupying, had placed low bookshelves, with glass panes, in which, depending on the spot they occupied, and by an effect he had not foreseen, one or other part of the changing picture of the sea was reflected, unfurling a frieze of bright seascapes.]

Returning to Feidelson, we can see how the self-contained reflections of the seascapes within the glass-fronted cases are analogous to what he says about the relationship between *verba* and *res* in the symbolist text:

In poetry we feel no compulsion to refer outside language itself. A poem delivers a version of the world: it is the world for the moment ... The elements of metaphor have meaning only by virtue of the whole which they create by their interaction: a metaphor presents

parts that do not fully exist until the whole which they produce comes into existence. (1953, 57, 60–61)

It is a relationship, Feidelson later argues, that is grounded in Emerson:

When Emerson says that the “perception of symbols” enables man to see both “the poetic construction of things” and the “primary relation of mind and matter”; and that this same perception normally creates “the whole apparatus of poetic expression,” he is identifying poetry with symbolism, symbolism with a mode of perception, and symbolic perception with the vision, first, of a symbolic structure in the real world and, second, of a symbolic relationship between nature and mind. (1953, 150)

What is significant with regard to Marcel’s hotel room is that the artistry of the decorator is allied to a law of nature which brings about “un effet qu’il n’avait pas prévu.” With its kaleidoscopic view of shifting scenes from nature projected not so much onto as into glass cases containing ordered rows of books, the room becomes at once a miniaturized version of the Muséum d’Histoire Naturelle, and a microcosm of *A la recherche* itself. (It also, to anticipate the discussion in Chapter 5 of Whistler’s influence, converts a seascape (see Plate 1) into interior design (see Plate 2) in such a way as again illustrates Emerson’s concept of transition.)

In a novel so concerned with the unconscious self – or, rather, with those moments when the unconscious is brought to consciousness – this shouldn’t surprise us. The world consists all too much of those invisible presences which, like the pollinated atmosphere at Combray, we are unable to detect until they have affected us. Nature is one such influence; culture, in the form of religion, another. Yet another is history, without which, Emerson says, no man is explicable. For the young Marcel, Balbec exists at the interstices between these various influences. Discussing his proposed visit with Swann, the older man tells him of the church there: “du XII^e et XIII^e siècle, encore à moitié romane, est peut-être le plus curieux échantillon du gothique normand, et si singulière, on dirait de l’art persan” [built in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, still half Romanesque, perhaps the most curious example of our Norman Gothic, and so singular! It’s almost Persian in style] (310; I:388). As with the hotel room, the “singular” appeal of the church lies in its opposite quality: multiplicity. For Emerson the idea of history is intricately bound up in a belief that “there is one mind

common to all individual men” and that history is the record of this mind “illustrated by the entire series of days” (*EL*, 237). The church at Balbec, then, is a record of those fluctuations in the “one mind” or unconscious “law of nature” capable of reconciling differing historical and cultural influences within a unique structure.

Only when Marcel hears Swann describing the church does Balbec come to life as a real place existing in time and space. It becomes for him a key illustration of the connection between the evolution of human consciousness and older processes of growth and change:

Et ces lieux qui jusque-là ne m'avaient semblé être que de la nature immémoriale, restée contemporaine des grands phénomènes géologiques – et tout aussi en dehors de l'histoire humaine que l'Océan ou la Grande Ourse, avec ces sauvages pêcheurs pour qui, pas plus que pour les baleines, il n'y eut de Moyen Âge – ç'avait été un grand charme pour moi de les voir tout d'un coup entrés dans la série des siècles, ayant connu l'époque romane, et de savoir que le trèfle gothique était venu nervurer aussi ces rochers sauvages à l'heure voulue, comme ces plantes frêles mais vivaces qui, quand c'est le printemps, étoilent çà et là la neige des pôles. Et si le gothique apportait à ces lieux et à ces hommes une détermination qui leur manquait, eux aussi lui en conféraient une en retour ... et le gothique me semblait plus vivant maintenant que séparé des villes où je l'avais toujours imaginé jusque-là, je pouvais voir comment, dans un cas particulier, sur des rochers sauvages, il avait germé et fleuri en un fin clocher.

[And that region, which until then had seemed to me similar in nature to the immemorial, still contemporaneous great phenomena of geology – and just as completely outside human history as the Ocean itself or the Great Bear, with those wild fishermen for whom, no more than for the whales, there had been no Middle Ages – it had been a great delight for me to see it suddenly take its place in the sequence of the centuries, now that it had experienced the Romanesque period, and to know that the Gothic trefoil had come at the proper time to pattern those wild rocks too, like the frail but hardy plants which, when spring comes, spangle here and there the polar snow. And if the Gothic brought to these places and to these men a definition which they lacked, they too conferred one upon

it in return ... and the Gothic seemed to me more alive now that, having separated it from the towns in which until then I had always imagined it, I could see how, in a particular case, on wild rocks, it had germinated and flowered into a delicate steeple.] (310; I:388–389)

The telling thing here is the intense interaction between nature and human beings. The result is a kind of architecture which, in its attempt at echoing natural forms, seeks to bring further into consciousness the human apprehension of the divine. And while we are used to acknowledging Ruskin's influence on this aspect of Proust's art, the passage in which Swann discusses the church at Balbec is full of references to Emerson's own enthusiasm for the Gothic. Indeed we might assume from this passage that Swann, as his author, is an admirer of Emerson.

Swann's evocation of a style of architecture that is both Gothic and Persian reiterates Emerson's descriptions in "History" of the Gothic as "a blossoming in stone," and his evocation of the Persian artist who "imitated in the slender shafts and capitals of his architecture the stem and flower of the lotus and palm." In this way, Emerson says, "History becomes fluid and true, and Biography deep and sublime" (*EL*, 246). Whether Emerson had thought in such terms before visiting Paris in 1832 we cannot know. From the evidence of his Journal entry after visiting the Jardin des Plantes, however, the realization was profound: "The universe is a more amazing puzzle than ever, as you glance along this bewildering series of animated forms, – the hazy butterfly, the carved shells, the birds, beasts, fishes, insects, snakes, and the upheaving principle of life everywhere incipient, in the very rock aping organized forms" (*SPP*, 520).

As the transition from nature to culture, art is the clearest record we have of our attempt at bringing to consciousness all the freight of the unconscious self. Like "ces sauvages pêcheurs" figured by Proust's Narrator, art hauls its cargo from out the dumb depths of the human psyche. What distinguishes the work of art from the artifact is that the former remains fluid, not simply marking the point of transition but enacting it. This returns us to an 1847 journal entry which reads: "Every thing teaches transition, transference, metamorphosis: therein is human power, in transference, not in creation; & therein is human destiny, not in longevity but in removal. We dive & reappear in new places" (cited in Levin 1999, 3). What keeps the church at Balbec "alive," both as an artwork and, for Swann, a Jew, a place of secular worship, is that it partakes, in Emersonian terms, not in a single moment of cultural and

historical “revelation” but, like the glass bookcases at the Grand-Hôtel, an infinite variety.

Emerson’s visit to the Jardin des Plantes was a primary influence when he came to write *Nature*. Throughout it he uses images that locate the essay firmly in that experience. This is particularly so when he comes to give a definition of art:

The production of a work of art throws a light upon the mystery of humanity. A work of art is an abstract or epitome of the world. It is the result or expression of nature, in miniature. For although the works of nature are innumerable and all different [the] poet, the painter, the sculptor, the musician, the architect, seek each to concentrate this radiance of the world on one point ... Thus is Art a nature passed through the alembic of man. (*EL*, 18–19)

The importance of nature is its capacity to awaken us into “the present, which is infinite” (*EL*, 394). “Nothing divine dies,” Emerson wrote. “All good is eternally reproductive. The Beauty of nature re-forms itself in the mind, and not for barren contemplation, but for new creation” (*EL*, 18). Such, though expressed in very different terms, is the movement of Proust’s thought as we approach, in the novel’s prelude, the first description and analysis of involuntary memory.

The adult Marcel is lying awake, unable to resurrect his memories of Combray. The failure, as he comes to understand it, belongs to the shortcomings of voluntary memory, “la mémoire de l’intelligence” [the memory of the intelligence], because “les renseignements qu’elle donne sur le passé ne conservent rien de lui” [the information it gives about the past preserves nothing of it]. Combray must remain dead. “Dead for ever?” he asks. “Possibly” [Mort à jamais? C’était possible]. The Narrator then goes on to discuss the Celtic belief that

les âmes de ceux que nous avons perdus sont captives dans quelque être inférieur, dans une bête, un végétal, une chose inanimée, perdues en effet pour nous jusqu’au jour, qui pour beaucoup ne vient jamais, où nous nous trouvons passer près de l’arbre, entrer en possession de l’objet qui est leur prison. Alors elles tressaillent, nous appellent ... Délivrées par nous, elles ont vaincu la mort et reviennent vivre avec nous.

[the souls of those we have lost are held captive in some inferior creature, in an animal, in a plant, in some inanimate thing, effectively lost to us until the day, which for many never comes, when we happen to pass close to the tree, come into possession of the object that is their prison. Then they quiver, they call out to us ... Delivered by us, they have overcome death and they return to live with us] (44; I:46-47)

Quickly disavowing such supernatural phenomena, he locates the retrieval and redemption of the past not in the spiritual world but in the relationship between the material world and our own habits. It is a relationship that relies not on faith or deeds but the involuntary.

Having written off the efficacy of “la mémoire de l’intelligence” it is to his fledgling experience of the potency of the involuntary that the Narrator returns, remembering a day in winter when his mother “voyant que j’avais froid, me proposa de me faire prendre, contre mon habitude, un peu de thé” [seeing that I was cold, suggested that, contrary to my habit, I have a little tea]. At first he declines, only for the involuntary to break the chains of the habitual. For no particular reason, he says, he changes his mind [je ne sais pourquoi, me ravisai]. His mother then sends for “Petites Madeleines” which look as though “they have been moulded in the grooved valve of a scallop-shell” [“qui semblent moulés dans la valve rainurée d’une coquille de Saint-Jacques”]:

Et bientôt, machinalement, accablé par la morne journée et la perspective d’un triste lendemain, je portai à mes lèvres une cuillerée du thé où j’avais laissé s’amollir un morceau de madeleine. Mais à l’instant même où la gorgée mêlée des miettes du gâteau toucha mon palais, je tressaillis, attentif à ce qui se passait d’extraordinaire en moi. Un plaisir délicieux m’avait envahi, isolé, sans la notion de sa cause.

[And soon, mechanically, oppressed by the gloomy day and the prospect of a sad future, I carried to my lips a spoonful of the tea in which I had let soften a piece of madeleine. But at the very instant when the mouthful of tea mixed with cake-crumbs touched my palate, I quivered, attentive to the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. A delicious pleasure had invaded me, isolated me, without my having any notion as to its cause.] (44-45; I:47)

Trying to understand the meaning and origin of the sensation, he drinks a second mouthful, then a third. But each subsequent sip only dilutes the immediacy of the first. Undaunted, the Narrator decides to pursue the experience but along different lines: "Il est clair que la vérité que je cherche n'est pas en lui, mais en moi. Il l'y éveillée, mais ne la connaît pas, et ne peut que répéter indéfiniment ... ce même témoignage que je ne sais pas interpréter" [It is clear that the truth I am seeking is not in the drink, but in me. The drink has awoken it in me, but does not know that truth, and cannot do more than repeat indefinitely this same testimony which I do not know how to interpret]. What the Narrator must learn, as Emerson wrote in "Circles," is that "In nature every moment is new; the past is always swallowed and forgotten; the coming only is sacred" (*EL*, 413). While this might appear to contradict what is often seen as the purpose of *mémoire involontaire*, the purposeful rediscovery and deliberate remembrance of lost time, this would be to misunderstand Proust. It is not the past *per se* that Proust aims to reclaim, but rather those aspects of our lives that are otherwise overlooked and that might, as with the *madeleine*, allow us the ability to read into ourselves whole new worlds of possibility. *Mémoire involontaire*, then, is less an act of remembrance than of forgetting. "Our faith comes in moments," Emerson wrote; "our vice is habitual" (*EL*, 385). We must throw off the shackles of our habitual selves, which otherwise constrain and limit us within those bounded circles of knowledge that Emerson wished to "unsettle." And it is in "Circles" that we have as good a definition of the workings of the involuntary in Proust as we might wish: "The one thing which we seek with insatiable desire is to forget ourselves, to be surprised out of our propriety, to lose our sempiternal memory, and to do something without knowing how or why; in short, to draw a new circle" (*EL*, 414).

Only at the point of mental exhaustion, when Marcel is about to return to the habit of giving himself up to the worries of the day that has passed, or his desires for tomorrow ["mes ennuis d'aujourd'hui, à mes desires de demain"], does the hidden memory reveal itself:

Ce goût c'était celui du petit morceau de madeleine que le dimanche matin à Combray (parce que ce jour-là je ne sortais pas avant l'heure de la messe), quand j'allais lui dire bonjour dans sa chambre, ma tante Léonie m'offrait après l'avoir trempé dans son infusion de thé ou de tilleul.

[That taste was the taste of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (because that day I did not go out before it was time for Mass), when I went to say good morning to her in her bedroom, my Aunt Léonie would give me after dipping it in her infusion of tea or lime-blossom.] (46; I:49)

The parallels between Proust's cup of tea and Emerson's "alembic of man" may be merely coincidental. What is surely more significant, if we can for a moment retrace the Narrator's search for the origins of involuntary memory, is that Combray, a kind of Eden, arises from Aunt Léonie's "medicinal" preparation: a cup of tea made from the desiccated stems of lime-blossom. Proust, with his Jewish mother and Christian upbringing, is clearly establishing a form of secular Holy Communion, with the *madeleine* as Body and the infusion of tea as Blood. We know, as must Proust from having read Dugard's *Ralph Waldo Emerson: Sa vie et son oeuvre*, that Emerson's break with Unitarianism (and some would argue Christianity) came ostensibly because he was no longer willing to serve at Communion. "We buy ashes for bread; / We buy diluted wine," he wrote in "Bacchus," a poem which celebrates not Christ but an older god of a "remembering wine" that is capable of "Retriev[ing] the loss of me and mine / ... / A dazzling memory revive" (*SPP*, 462). Similarly, reading Proust's description of the tisane alongside Emerson's declaration in *Nature* that "nothing divine dies ... The Beauty of nature re-forms itself in the mind, and not for barren contemplation, but for new creation" (*EL*, 18), we cannot fail to be struck by the fact that Proust turns Emerson's theory into practice:

dans de petites boules grises je reconnaissais les boutons verts qui ne sont pas venus à terme; mais surtout l'éclat rose, lunaire et doux qui faisait se détacher les fleurs dans la forêt fragile des tiges où elles étaient suspendues comme de petites roses d'or ... me montrait que ces pétales étaient bien ceux qui avant de fleurir le sac de pharmacie avaient embaumé les soirs de printemps. Cette flamme rose de cierge, c'était leur couleur encore, mais à demi éteinte et assoupie dans cette vie diminuée qu'était la leur maintenant et qui est comme le crépuscule des fleurs.

[in some little grey balls I recognised the green buds that had not come to term; but especially the pink lustre, lunar and soft, that

made the flowers stand out amid the fragile forest of stems where they were suspended like little gold roses ... showed me that these petals were in fact the same ones that, before filling the pharmacy bag with flowers, had embalmed the spring evenings. The candle-pink flame was their colour still, but half doused and drowsing in the diminished life that was theirs now, and that it is a sort of twilight of flowers.] (50; I:54)

The progressive movement from the winter's day on which his mother offers him tea and cake, through the resurrection of a sun-drenched Combray to the closing cadence of "le crépuscule des fleurs," mirrors almost exactly Emerson's description in *Nature* of his own experience of "seeing" a winter landscape coming again to life through his ability to re-imagine it as art: "The leafless trees become spires of flame in the sunset ... and the stars of the dead calices of flowers, and every withered stem and stubble rimed with frost, contribute something to the mute music" (*EL*, 15).

Julia Kristeva has commented on the fact that what we have in the episode of the *madeleine* is nothing less than "the taste of the sense of time, of writing as transubstantiation" (1996, 22). What she means by this latter phrase is that "writing is memory regained from signs to flesh and from flesh to signs through an intense identification (and a dramatic separation from) an other who is loved, desired, hated, and rendered indifferent" (1996, 245). Summoning the spirit of James Joyce, Kristeva quotes his description of writing as "the advent of new signs and a new body." Kristeva is surely right in tracing a direct path from the "transubstantiation" at Combray to the final revelation when Marcel stumbles outside the home of the Prince de Guermantes, thereby initiating both the novel's closing section and, at the same time, the rebirth or transubstantiation of Marcel, the third-person character into the first-person narrator.

Had Proust limited the discovery of involuntary memory to the episode with the *madeleine*, he would in effect have been circumscribing his central character's experience within the "grenue, pollinisée, comestible et dévote" world of childhood. What the fall outside the Prince de Guermantes's hôtel provides, with its correlative in time of Marcel tripping over the uneven paving stones in the baptistry of Saint Mark in Venice, is, to borrow a word from Kristeva, a "threshold" between the secular and the divine. Proust's discovery is similar to that of Emerson when he says that the role nature plays in our lives is that of awakening us to the infinity

of the present. Proust puts it differently, of course, but even so there is a fascinating correlation between *mémoire involontaire* as it appears here in the final movement of *A la recherche* and Proust's earliest published work with its acknowledged debt to Emerson.

The memory of stumbling in Venice is quickly followed by two more moments of involuntary memory: the sound of a servant chancing to knock a spoon against a plate, and the sensation of wiping his mouth with a napkin. The latter, the Narrator tells us:

avait précisément le genre de raideur et d'empesé de celle avec laquelle j'avais eu tant de peine à me sécher devant la fenêtre, le premier jour de mon arrivée à Balbec, et, maintenant devant cette bibliothèque de l'hôtel de Guermantes, elle déployait, réparti dans ses pans et dans ses cassures, le plumage d'un océan vert et bleu comme la queue d'un paon ... je venais par trois fois en quelques minutes ... l'extrême différence qu'il y a entre l'impression vraie que nous avons eue d'une chose et l'impression factice que nous nous en donnons quand volontairement nous essayons de nous la représenter

[had exactly the same stiffness and the same degree of starch as the one with which I had had so much trouble drying myself in front of the window, the first day after my arrival in Balbec, and, now, in this library in the Guermantes' *hotel*, it displayed, spread across its folds and creases, the plumage of an ocean green and blue as a peacock's tail ... I had just experienced three times in a few minutes ... the enormous difference between the true impression we have had of a thing and the artificial impression we give ourselves of it when we try by an act of will to represent it to ourselves] (2264; VI:177)

Here in the Guermantes's library, replete with its rare and valuable literary treasures, Marcel finally learns that it is to the involuntary that he must trust if, as Emerson wrote in *The Method of Nature*, he is to "enact our best insight" through an attentiveness not to the idealized but to the particular. "Do what you know, and perception is converted into character. The doctrine of the Supreme Presence is a cry of joy and exultation," Emerson says (*EL*, 131). To which the Narrator rejoins:

Capables d'être utilisées pour cela, je sentais se presser en moi une foule de vérités relatives aux passions, aux caractères, aux mœurs.

Leur perception me causait de la joie; pourtant il me semblait me rappeler que plus d'une d'entre elles, je l'avais découverte dans la souffrance, d'autres dans de bien médiocres plaisirs

[I felt thronging within me a crowd of truths relating to passions, characters and conduct, all capable of being used in that way. Their perception caused me joy; yet it seemed to remind me that I had discovered more than one of them in suffering, and others in very ordinary pleasures] (2287; VI:207)

The truths of Proust's *mémoire involontaire* as with Emerson's transcendentalism do not exist above material and cultural experience, rather they reside within them. As Marcel learns through his prolonged struggle to comprehend and ultimately read the involuntary, it is a process that seeks the "arrest and fixation of the most volatile and ethereal currents" (*EL*, 131). Once arrested, however, it must then be let free to determine its own form and shape. These shapes, Proust writes, "people our lives with divinities" [peupler ... notre vie de divinités].

For the origins of Proust's "divinités" we should look to lines from Emerson's "History" that Proust, in Montégut's slightly amended French translation, took for the epigraph to the opening story in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*: "Apollo kept the flocks of Admetus, said the poets. When the gods come among men, they are not known" (*EL*, 251). As if to take Emerson at his word when he writes, "Nothing in nature is exhausted in its first use. When a thing has served an end to the uttermost, it is wholly new for an ulterior service" (*EL*, 28), Proust refers again to the quotation in the series of short pieces called "Les Regrets, rêveries couleur du temps" when he describes a walk through a farmyard:

Mais quelle est cette personne royalement vêtue qui s'avance, parmi les choses rustiques et fermières, sur la pointe des pattes comme pour ne point se salir? C'est l'oiseau de Junon brillant non de mortes pierreries ... le paon dont le luxe fabuleux étonne ici ...

Mais non, c'est ici que le paon passe sa vie, véritable oiseau de paradis dans une basse-cour, entre les dindes et les poules ... Apollon qu'on reconnaît toujours, même quand il garde, rayonnant, les troupeaux d'Admète.

[But what is that regally attired personage carefully picking his way among the rustic farm implements as though afraid of soiling his

feet, offended by the dirt? It is Juno's bird, gorgeous not with lifeless gems ... the peacock, whose fabulous splendour seems so surprising in such a place ...

And yet it is right here that the peacock spends his life, a veritable bird of paradise in the barnyard among the turkeys and the hens ... a radiant Apollo, recognisable always – even when he guards Ademetus' flocks.] (*JS*, 107–108; *PR*, 118–119)

So it is we first encounter the peacock whose tail will reappear as a napkin in the Guermantes's library. Read within the context of the full discovery of the involuntary in *Le Temps retrouvé*, Proust's epigraph to "La Mort de Baldassare Silvande" takes on a power and resonance that alone it doesn't possess. Put at its simplest, Proust's epiphany is that the power to transform one's life is immanent in the world. In recognizing this, Proust makes it clear that the self, as realized in the work of art, becomes one with whatever materials the artist uses. For the writer this is language; thus the movement of his characters through their lives is figured in the movement of metaphors, joining as they do the physical world with that of the intellect, and ultimately marking the way in which the involuntary recollection of the past becomes an active metamorphosis of the present. It is a vision prospectively as democratic as anything offered by Emerson:

La vraie vie, la vie enfin découverte et éclaircie, la seule vie par conséquent pleinement vécue, c'est la littérature. Cette vie qui, en uns sens, habite à chaque instant chez tous les hommes aussi bien que chez l'artiste.

[Real life, life finally uncovered and clarified, the only life in consequence lived to its full, is literature. Life in this sense dwells within all ordinary people as much as in the artist.] (2284; VI:204)

Democracy, however, particularly the American model, was riddled with anxieties. It is to these that we now turn.

CHAPTER 3

A Bout de Souffle

The French theory of [love] involves a great deal of killing, and the ladies who are the subject of it must ask themselves whether they do not pay dearly for this advantage of being made love to. By “killing” I allude to the exploits of the pen as well as to those of the directer weapons [.]

—Henry James, “The Journal of the Brothers de Goncourt”

Henry James’s view that Emerson’s life was “curiously devoid of complexity” (1987, 210) is hardly borne out by the evidence of Emerson’s essays. Certainly the radical, optimistic call to arms of *Nature* arose from the contradictory experience that “our age is bewailed as the age of Introversion” (*EL*, 68). Emerson goes on to quote Hamlet’s epitaph for his own failure of nerve – “Sicklied o’er with the pale cast of thought” – and it seems that the play’s sense of modern men and women drowning in self-doubt and existential terror haunted Emerson. It is certainly a theme to which he turned repeatedly. As a result transcendentalism cannot be either explained or understood without reference to Emerson’s belief that his was an age “miserable with inaction. We perish of rest and rust” (*EL*, 204).

As Margaret Gilman (1943) has suggested, what Baudelaire and others in France discovered in Emerson was both an acknowledgement of, and a corrective to, often profound anxieties. Baudelaire, who diagnosed the tributary cause of his own lack of will to the fact that, as his father had been thirty-four years older than his mother, only a freak could have been born to them, must have concurred with Emerson that it was a consummation devoutly to be wished that we should not be subject to inherited traits nor our future circumscribed by the past. In this, ironically, Baudelaire, who loathed America for its democratic institutions and, as he saw it,

appointment of the masses as the arbiters of taste, was responding to an essential aspect of not only Emerson's writings but American culture: the promotion of the modern over the inherited, and a deep-rooted belief in rationalization and progress.

"Let a Stoic open the resources of man," Emerson wrote, "and tell men they are not leaning willows, but can and must detach themselves" (*EL*, 275). Such detachment, or a version of it, is taken to heart by Huysmans's *Des Esseintes*. Certainly it is difficult to think of anyone who more enthusiastically pursues the "vigorously cultivated passivity" that Jonathan Levin sees as the meaning of the famous "transparent eye-ball" passage in Emerson's *Nature* (1999, 37). Again, the irony of this is that while Emerson's robust, pragmatic philosophy may indeed have offered an antidote to what Peter Gay describes as an "age of Hamlets," during which the "English malady" of melancholia spread across continental Europe, during the latter decades of the nineteenth century it was the United States which came increasingly to be associated with the root cause of all such "disorders of self-esteem" (2006, 129). Evidence of this can be found in the fact that while such nebulous (though none the less physically and mentally debilitating) symptoms as Gay refers to had hitherto gone under the name neurasthenia, in the 1880s another diagnosis was made available: American Nervousness.

Defined by George Beard in *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences* (1881) as a physical and mental condition characterized by morbid anxiety, fatigue, hypochondria, irrational fears, and compulsive or inadequate sexual behavior, American Nervousness could be triggered by any number of specifically modern conditions or inventions: excessive attention to timekeeping (clocks and watches); rapid changes in technology (steam power); new means of travel (the railway) and communication (the telegraph); the volatility of the stock market; and the mental strain placed on women entering higher education.¹ Beard went on to list some eighty-one mental and physical ailments resulting from American Nervousness,

¹ Here, as elsewhere, American Nervousness drew on aspects of the diagnosis of hysteria, the main difference between the two being that hysteria was thought to be the root cause rather than a side effect of the changing role of women. "Hysteria," declared Fritz Wittels, a Viennese contemporary of Freud, "is the basis for a woman's desire to study medicine, just as it is the basis of women's struggle for equal rights" (cited in Showalter 1997, 50).

concluding, "The above list is not supposed to be complete, but only representative and typical" (1972, 8).

It was Beard who, in an article published in the *Boston Medical and Surgical Journal* in 1869, had "discovered" and promoted a series of cures for neurasthenia. The article, "Neurasthenia, or Nervous Exhaustion," was followed in 1880 by a book-length study, *A Practical Treatise on Nervous Exhaustion (Neurasthenia): Its Symptoms, Nature, Sequences, Treatment*. With American Nervousness, however, Beard made it clear that neurasthenia was of global significance. As with American invention or agriculture, Nervousness was "peculiar and pre-eminent," and "once we understand the causes and consequences ... the problems connected with the nervousness of other lands speedily solve themselves" (1972, 8).

The reasons for American Nervousness being of worldwide concern became ever more pressing as the United States exported its business and trade practices, its industrial processes, and its mechanized agricultural system.² Beard, however, derived his evidence from somewhat more "nuanced" examples. Fortunately, he commented, "but a few millions have reached that elevation where they are likely to be nervous" (1972, 97). For inasmuch as it was "developed, fostered and perpetuated with the progress of civilization, with the advance of culture and refinement," American Nervousness was an illness of the middle and upper classes (Beard, 1972, 26). This it shared with decadence, which, stressed Paul Bourget in his *Essais de psychologie contemporaine* (1883), was limited in its sphere of influence to only "the upper ten thousand" (cited in Birkett 1986, 8). For obvious reasons, then, Beard's theories came quickly to be regarded as being as much a cultural as clinical diagnosis. It was one that had repercussions for Proust.

L'enfant nerveux

Proust's family referred to him as "un enfant nerveux." He grew up in an environment where this was unlikely to be a casual aside. His father, Dr. Adrien Proust, was the coauthor with Gilbert Ballet of *L'Hygiène du*

² To understand how markedly different were Beard's views from those of just a few decades earlier, we need only look at *American Progress*, a post-Civil War painting by John Gast, which shows the Goddess "Liberty" moving westward across the American landscape. Accompanying her are symbols of American progress, among them telegraph lines and steam railways. Reprinted in Maier, Roe Smith, Keyssar and Kevles 2003, 434-435.

neurasthénique (1887) in which neurasthenia is referred to as the “maladie du siècle.” The study, as William C. Carter has noted, reads like a case study of the then sixteen-year-old Marcel, warning as it does against a lifestyle that could result in a heady brew of ailments: dyspepsia, insomnia, hypochondria, a fear of drafts and germs, auditory hypersensitivity, and abusive masturbation (2000, 220). We can imagine, then, the conversations that must have taken place between father and son on the subject of the connection, as Adrien Proust saw it, between neurasthenia and “those who pursue vain pleasures rather than selecting a career suitable to their milieu and abilities” (2000, 221).

So severe were the symptoms experienced by Proust that in July 1896, at a time when he was attempting to come to terms with his own sexuality, and at the instigation of his father (whose previous suggestion, a visit to a brothel, failed to have the desired effect), he agreed to meet with Dr. Louis-Denis Brissaud whose *Hygiène des asthmatiques*, published only a month after Marcel’s consultation, was to carry a preface by Adrien Proust. Though Brissaud’s immediate impact on Proust’s asthma was negligible, the emphasis he placed on the root causes of the ailment deriving from neurosis rather than a set of purely physical symptoms had longer term repercussions. Similarly influential, given Proust’s lifelong and ultimately fatal habit of self-medication, was Brissaud’s practice of allowing patients to treat themselves, believing that they rather than doctors would instinctively know what was good for them.

Given his family background and personality, it is not surprising that references to neurasthenia and its symptoms figure so prominently in Proust’s writings. What is more, given contemporary ideas regarding the diagnosis and treatment of the illness, it is equally unsurprising that Proust should consistently be drawn toward representing neurasthenia as the harbinger of anxieties to do with sexuality, guilt, and artistic creation. References, then, to neurasthenia are necessarily inflected by the terms under which studies on the illness evolved in the late nineteenth century: moving from an illness the causes of which were to do with subjective suffering, to one bound up with sexual repression and sublimation, until finally arriving at a point where it was in effect a defining aspect of modernity. Such a movement suggests parallels with, and offers new perspectives on, recognized aspects of Proust’s development as an artist, as well as serving to remind us just how profoundly unsettling an experience reading *A la recherche* continues to be.

As we will see, characters who suffer from neurasthenia are scattered throughout Proust’s fiction. In his depiction of the condition it seems safe to

assume that Proust was drawing for reference not only on his own symptoms but on his father's extensive library. A similar exactitude characterizes Huysmans's *A Rebours*, which, Huysmans assured Emile Zola, was based on the documentary evidence of medical textbooks on nervous disorders (2003, xxiv, 230 n. 5). Elsewhere in his writings, Huysmans continued to see nervousness as a significant aspect of *Arte Moderne*: Berthe Morisot was a "nervous colourist"; Jean Baptiste-Antoine Guillemet a "packet of nerves"; Gauguin a "skin beneath which the nerves vibrate"; and Mary Cassatt a "whirl of feminine nerves" (cited in Weber 1986, 12). Others were equally sensitive to the correlation between nervousness and creativity. In the case of Degas, characterized as "sickly, neurotic" by Edmond de Goncourt, it was the collision between sensibility and art that made him uniquely able to represent and catch the spirit of modern life (Goncourt and Goncourt 1980, 226). For Zola, however, it was the Goncourt brothers themselves whose work was a "sort of vast neurosis" (cited in Weber 1986, 12). Henry James agreed, labeling them "two almost furious *névrosés*" and "a pair of *déliçats*" (1987, 269, 279). Little wonder that Freud, while studying under Charcot in the 1880s, came to see the French as "the people of psychological epidemics, of historical mass convulsions" (Gay 2996, 48).

Born during the *annus terribilis* of 1871, Proust must often have been struck by the coincidence between his own constitutional nervousness and the frailties of the French body politic during his lifetime. It is therefore in the context of recent French history that we encounter those neurasthenic characters that throng the pages of *A la recherche*. Most important, of course, is Marcel, whose whole life is circumscribed by his inability to resist yielding to "une impulsion nerveuse" [a nervous impulse] (36; I:36). For the young Marcel such sensitivity is a natural phenomenon. Lying in bed, unable to sleep, listening to his family conversing with Swann, and knowing that Swann's presence means that his mother will not come and kiss him goodnight, the Narrator describes the natural world outside Marcel's bedroom window in terms barely distinguishable from Marcel's own neuroses: "Ce qui avait besoin de bouger, quelque feuillage de marronnier, bougeait. Mais son frissonnement minutieux, total, exécuté jusque dans ses moindres nuances et ses dernières délicatesses, ne bavait pas sur le reste, ne se fondait pas avec lui, restait circonscrit" [What needed to move, some leaves of the chestnut tree, moved. But their minute quivering, complete, executed even in its slightest nuances and ultimate refinements, did not spill over on to the rest, did not merge with it, remained circumscribed] (35; I:36).

Even the most subtle of movements are tracked by Marcel's hypersensitivity. It is an early indication of the link between nervous illness and a refined sensibility that prepares the way not only for Marcel's appreciation of the natural world but also his entry into, and rapid promotion through, the ranks of Parisian society. Indeed the higher Marcel climbs, the more pronounced becomes his neurasthenia: "Quand vous arrivez à ces sites relativement élevés comme celui où nous nous trouvons en ce moment, remarquez-vous que cela augmente votre tendance aux étouffements?" ["When you come to these relatively elevated situations, such as that where we find ourselves in at the moment, have you noticed whether it increases your tendency to breathless attacks?"], asks Cottard (1453; IV:323).

The roll call of other character in *A la recherche* referred to as being neurasthenic is extensive: Aunt Léonie, Morel, Andrée, and Mme Verdurin are all diagnosed as sufferers; while Charlus and Saint-Loup, via Morel, are associated with the condition. Even Swann does not remain untouched. In his failure to complete a long-promised study of Vermeer, he, too, is brushed by the wing of a debilitating lack of will. Doctor Boulbon, meanwhile, the physician who treats Marcel's grandmother in her final illness, tells of visiting a clinic for neurasthenics. It is through Doctor Boulbon that we get a description of the "typical" sufferer – one that no doubt served as a self-portrait of Proust immediately recognizable to anyone who knew him:

Hier, j'ai visité une maison de santé pour neurasthéniques. Dans le jardin, un homme était debout sur un banc, immobile comme un fakir, le cou incliné dans une position qui devait être fort pénible. Comme je lui demandais ce qu'il faisait là, il me répondit sans faire un mouvement ni tourner la tête: « Docteur, je suis extrêmement rhumatisant et enrhumable, je viens de prendre trop d'exercice, et pendant que je me donnais bêtement chaud ainsi, mon cou était appuyé contre mes flanelles. Si maintenant je l'éloignais de ces flanelles avant d'avoir laissé tomber ma chaleur, je suis sûr de prendre un torticolis et peut-être une bronchite ».

[Yesterday I visited a home for neurasthenics. I saw a man standing on a bench, motionless as a fakir, his neck bent down in a position that must have been really painful. When I asked him what he was doing, he replied without moving a muscle or turning his head: "Well, Doctor, I get very bad rheumatism and I catch cold very easily.

I've been taking too much exercise and stupidly getting myself too hot, with my neck touching my flannels. If I move it away from my flannels now before I cool down, I'm bound to get a stiff neck and even catch bronchitis."] (979; IV:301)

Further "self-portraits" occur earlier in Proust's writings. In "Violante ou la mondanité" [Violante, or Worldly Vanities] from *Les Plaisirs et les jours* the eponymous heroine is a woman who, not unlike Proust's younger self, though born of wealthy, lively, and successful parents, struggles to lead a productive and creative life. Her parents being killed in a hunting accident, she turns first to sensual pleasure, then boredom and disgust. Moreover, like Morel and Andrée her neurasthenia singles her out for homosexual attention, with the Princesses de Mien, a much older woman who accosts her in a park, providing an early incarnation of the predatory Baron de Charlus. In his essays, meanwhile, Proust was drawn to such writers as Nerval who were consumed by "une sorte de subjectivisme excessif" [a sort of excessive subjectivism] that attached greater importance to "un rêve, a un souvenir, à la qualité personnelle de la sensation" [a dream, to a memory, to the personal quality of a sensation] than to reality. Such a state is, Proust wrote, "au fond la disposition artistique" [fundamentally that of the artist] (*CSB*, 234; *ASB*, 25).

A less optimistic view of the marriage between art and neurasthenia forms the basis of a falling out between Marcel and his grandmother. The cause of the argument is a difference of opinion over the importance of "breeding" and such social graces as "tact ... shrewdness ... discretion ... self-effacement," none of which Marcel sees as important to the kind of artist he dreams of becoming but which his grandmother regards as vital to any future happiness he might achieve:

Comme on dit que c'est l'intérêt de l'espèce qui guide en amour les préférences de chacun, et pour que l'enfant soit constitué de la façon la plus normale, fait rechercher les femmes maigres aux hommes gras et les grasses aux maigres, de même c'était obscurément les exigences de mon bonheur menacé par le nervosisme, par mon penchant maladif à la tristesse, à l'isolement, qui lui faisaient donner le premier rang aux qualités de pondération et de jugement ... esprit qui met plus de bonheur, plus de dignité dans la vie que les raffinements opposés, lesquels ont conduit un Baudelaire, un Poe, un Verlaine, un Rimbaud, à des souffrances[.]

[Just as it is supposed to be a concern for the species that influences choices in love, steering fat men towards thin women and thin men towards fat women, so that the make-up of the future child may be as well-balanced as possible, so it was my grandmother's inkling of the requirements of my happiness, under constant threat from my inclination to nerves and my unwholesome tendency towards melancholy and aloneness, which made her stress qualities such as steadiness and judgement ... a spirit bringing more happiness and dignity to life than were ever afforded by cultivation of the opposite tastes, which led the Baudelaires, the Edgar Allan Poes, the Verlaines and Rimbauds into suffering and low esteem] (575; II:306–307)

The fear that neurasthenia might, as an inherited disease rather than illness, literally have something to do with breeding was obviously one that ran deep. Proust's Aunt Élisabeth, his model for the bedridden and neurotic Aunt Léonie, was neurasthenic,³ and at one point Marcel is left to confide in the reader that so abject does he feel at his inability to begin writing the novel which might establish his "life in literature" he is convinced he has become possessed by Léonie's transmigrated soul (1661; V:67). Echoes of the grandmother's warnings can also be found in Proust's late essay "À propos de Baudelaire" (1921) in which, while hailing Baudelaire as "the greatest poet of the nineteenth century," Proust comments on the tendency in his poetry to fall flat or lack stamina [tombe presque à plat ... un manque de souffle] (*CSB*, 624; *ASB*, 293).

Important in the context of Baudelaire and a hereditary lack of willpower is the grandmother's mention of Edgar Allan Poe. Poe, who died in 1849, was writing before the advent of American Nervousness. This is not to say that those disparate forms of disquietude and their influences isolated by Beard were not already in the ascendancy. In 1836 Morse had invented the telegraph; in 1838 the first steamship sailed between England and the US; and throughout the period the American economy fluctuated wildly between boom and bust. As a result Poe's fiction, like the eponymous bells of his poem, chimes with the words "nervous" and "nervousness." The narrator of "MS. Found in a Bottle" confesses to "a kind of nervous restlessness which haunted me like a fiend"; the narrator

³ "Like her nephew after her, Aunt Élisabeth became an imaginary invalid, a voluntary prisoner in her bedroom, and died at last of a malady in which no one but the sufferer had quite believed" (Painter 1983, 15).

of “The Tell-Tale Heart” is “dreadfully nervous”; both in person and in his letters to the narrator of “The Fall of the House of Usher,” Roderick Usher manifests “nervous agitation”; and in “The Man of the Crowd” the narrator is convalescing in London after a long nervous illness. The connection between modernity and such nervousness is explicitly stated in “The Man that Was Used Up,” a story that voices a very particular concern: that the human will be made subject to the machine. Poe’s spokesman for “this age of mechanical invention” is Brevet Brigadier General John A. B. C. Smith, whose entire body has been replaced by mechanical parts after being torn limb from limb by the “Kickapoos,” a tribe of indigenous Americans who fought white settlers in the Florida Indian Wars of 1839. Smith, we are told, is one of the great triumphs of an age of steam, commerce, war, and electricity:

Parachutes and rail-roads – man-traps and spring-guns! Our steam boats are upon every sea, and the Nassau balloon packet is about to run regular trips ... between London and Timbuctoo [*sic*]. And who shall calculate the immense influence upon social life – upon arts – upon commerce – upon literature – which will be the immediate result of the great principles of electro-magnetics. (*CS*, 386)

That Poe’s “overrefined, overcivilized, artificial and decadent” stories (to borrow a phrase applied originally not to Poe but to France [Weber 1986, 22]) found so receptive a readership in France can be seen as reflecting very particular French anxieties. As I discussed in Chapter 1, there were concerns in the wake of Haussmann’s refashioning of the city in the 1850s and 1860s that Paris was turning into “some future American Babylon.” And as mentioned in Chapter 1, electric street lighting in the Place de la Concorde reminded Edmond de Goncourt of “a Road of Souls of which I had read a description in Poe” (1980, 314). If the supernatural locations of Poe’s fiction could so easily be mapped onto the changing topography of Paris, this was complicated by the fact that the landscape of Poe’s tales, often regarded as being archetypically Gothic, can in many ways be located within eighteenth-century French discourse concerning America. Thus “The Fall of the House of Usher” with its “dreary tract of country ... insufferable gloom ... a few rank sedges ... a few white trunks of decayed trees” (*CS*, 365) is less a product of Poe’s imagination than those French writers who saw America as evidence that Nature had “gotten an entire hemisphere wrong.” A “boundless swamp of a continent,” an “unending

backwater” where “men were deficient [and] silhouettes [went] roving in the darkness of the forests” (cited in Roger 2000, 2, 7), such descriptions came back to haunt France’s febrile imagination in descriptions such as the “black and lurid tarn” into which the Usher house finally collapses and sinks.

For twenty years Baudelaire’s translations fed the French appetite for Poe’s stories. In his *Journaux Intimes*, published posthumously, Baudelaire confessed how, addressing his morning prayers to God and, as his intercessor in heaven, Poe, he prayed that he might be granted “the necessary strength to fulfil all my appointed tasks” (1989, 61). Certainly the artist as neurasthenic underscores many of Poe’s stories, most notably “The Fall of the House of Usher” in which Roderick Usher appears as a type of the modern artist: neurotic, hypersensitive, and given to abstract art:

From the paintings over which his elaborate fancy brooded, and which grew, touch by touch, into vaguenesses at which I shuddered[.] For me at least ... there arose out of the pure abstractions which the hypochondriac contrived to throw upon his canvas, an intensity of intolerable awe. (CS, 372)⁴

Proust would have flinched at the idea of his own writings ever being accused of “vagueness” or “abstraction,” or accused, as he did Baudelaire, of lacking stamina. Indeed the movement in his oeuvre from a style dependent on symbolism to one that allied itself with realism might be regarded as a response to anxieties about relying too heavily on the kind of subjectivity he saw as defining writers such as Baudelaire and Nerval. Every recurrent bout of neurasthenic symptoms, then, can only have left him in a state akin to that described by Severin in Sacher-Masoch’s *Venus in Furs*, when, alone in a “small Carpathian resort,” he comments:

It was boring enough to pen an idyll. I had sufficient leisure to come up with a whole gallery of paintings, to furnish a theater with an entire season of new plays, to supply a dozen virtuosi with concertos, trios, and duets. But – what am I saying – ultimately I did nothing. (2000, 11).

⁴ Inasmuch as for English critics French art was synonymous with degeneracy, Whistler, as an “en-Frenchified American,” was discussed in terms colored by the discourse of decadence. Thus *The (London) Times*, commenting on Whistler’s perceived inability to “finish” a painting, put it down to his lacking “the power or the patience” (Stephenson 2000, 142, 145).

Severin's lack of will is associated with very particular anxieties. Firstly we are told that he lives "according to ... the clock, and not only that, but also the thermometer, barometer, aerometer [and] hydrometer"; secondly, that he doubts whether his sexual fantasies can ever be realized in a world where "Venus in her unclad beauty and serenity can stroll impunitively among railroads and telegraphs" (2000, 7, 21). Severin, it appears, is afflicted by modernity itself. As such he suffers from American Nervousness *avant la lettre*.

The evidence, as Michael R. Finn has outlined it, is that Proust's interest in the symptoms of "hystero-neurasthenic" behavior was prompted by doubts about his strength of will to be an artist and concerns about his sexual degeneracy. Finn further suggests that it is plausible to read *A la recherche* "not only as the search for an artistic vocation, but specifically as the novel of a neurasthenic's search for a literary vocation" (1997, 295). In many ways Finn is highlighting and developing an aspect of Proustian criticism initiated by Walter Benjamin. Commenting on Proust's psychosomatic asthma, Benjamin saw illness as a – if not *the* – defining aspect of Proust's life and writing. Indeed, Benjamin suggests that it is impossible to know which created which: illness the art, or art the illness:

The doctors were powerless in the face of [neurasthenic asthma]; not so the writer, who very systematically placed it in his service ... Even as a writer of letters he extracted the most singular effects from his ailment. "The wheezing of my breath is drowning out the sounds of my pen and of a bath which is being drawn on the floor below." ... This asthma became part of his art – if indeed his art did not create it[.] (1999b, 246)

Finn is assiduous and illuminating in tracking down the influence of neurasthenia on developments in Proust's literary style, placing them alongside changes in the medical and clinical treatment of the illness. What Finn pays much less attention to, however, are the specific terms under which Beard analyzed neurasthenia as American Nervousness. In this Finn follows in the footsteps of Adrien Proust, who drew a firm distinction between "American 'nervous exhaustion' and the continental neurosis that stems from exhaustion" (1999, 59). The importance of this omission is twofold. Firstly, it irons out the wider political, cultural, and economic aspects of American Nervousness as opposed to the subjective experience of neurasthenia. Or, as Adorno said about Baudelaire, it

is the difference between a writer who “did not stop at the suffering of the individual but chose the modern itself” (1991, 44). Secondly, it excludes from Proust’s writings the centrality of his representation of women and female sexuality. For while Finn is right in claiming that *A la recherche* “should be read, at least on one level, as a *fin-de-siècle* moral tale in which art and aesthetics conquer medical determinism” (1991, 1), what needs also to be admitted is that within both the life of the novel and its author this only becomes possible with the deaths of a succession of women: Proust’s mother, Jeanne; Marcel’s grandmother; and Albertine Simonet, the young orphan whom Marcel first sees while on holiday with his grandmother at Balbec. These are, moreover, deaths experienced as having been the result of homicide or matricide rather than natural causes. As Leo Bersani has said, *A la recherche* testifies that “the possession of others is possible only when they are dead ... Biological death accomplishes, or literalizes, the annihilation of others that Proust tirelessly proposes as the aim of our interest in others” (1998, 224). The “mortuary aesthetic” of Proust’s novel, then, is predicated on an obsessive need to control a woman’s sexual behavior and intellectual cast of mind, most notably – though not exclusively – Marcel’s confinement of Albertine. This is important for a number of reasons, not least because it shows how Albertine is in certain regards subjected to a process of scrutiny analogous to the “medical determinism” which Finn sees Marcel/Proust as having transcended. What she also personifies are the points at which key elements of Beard’s American Nervousness merge with Proust’s defense of his whole artistic enterprise.

The ‘It’ girl

Throughout his writings Proust engaged with those technological and social changes that Beard saw as determining influences on American Nervousness. In “Mondanité et mélomanie de Bouvard et Pécuchet” [Ambitions and Tastes of Bouvard and Pécuchet], for example, Flaubert’s comic duo is exhumed from the literary grave in order to bemoan musical fashion “dans le siècle de la vapeur, du suffrage universel et de la bicyclette” [in this age of steam, universal suffrage and the bicycle]. Likewise they condemn the stresses and strains of the modern financier, who “est soucieux dans le bal le plus fou” [remains harassed even at the wildest ball] because “Un de ses innombrables commis vient toujours lui donner les dernières nouvelles de la Bourse, même à quatre heures du

matin” [One of his innumerable employees always comes to give him the latest news of the Stock Exchange even at four o’clock in the morning] (*JS*, 61; *JS English*, 110, 106).⁵

While these remain brief, somewhat ironic and flippant asides, by the time Proust came to write *A la recherche* such references take on a different tenor. At the height of his suffering in *Albertine disparue* the Narrator comments that if Marcel was to give “ces heures du martyr incessant” [these hours of unremitting torture] a graphic form, chief among them would be “la gare d’Orsay [et] Saint-Loup penché sur le pupitre incliné d’un bureau de télégraphe où il remplissait une formule de dépêche pour moi” [the Orsay railway station [and] Saint-Loup leaning over a post-office counter filling in a form to send me a telegram] (1954; V:433]. What these images do, in a novel famous for its use of metaphors, is substitute for “l’image d’Albertine” a series of metonyms derived from a discourse of anxiety and nervousness.⁶ That there is something

⁵ The lot of the French businessman in the early stages of globalized capital and information, and at a time when trade with the Americas was rapidly expanding, was bemoaned as early as 1863 by Jacques Fabien: “Our great heads of finance, industry, big business have seen fit ... to send ... their thoughts around the world, while they themselves remain at rest ... To this end, each of them has nailed up, in a corner of his office, electric wires connecting his executive desk with our colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Americas. [H]e can communicate directly over tremendous distances ... One branch-correspondent tells him, at ten in the morning, of a ship-wrecked vessel worth over a million ... ; another, at five after ten, of the unexpected sale of the most prosperous house in the two Americas; a third, at ten after ten, of the glorious entrance, into the port of Marseilles, of a freighter carrying the fruits of a Northern California harvest. All this in rapid succession. The poor brains of these men ... have simply given way” (cited in Benjamin 1999a, 567).

⁶ The telegram was the focus of other complications in Proust’s life. In May 1908 Proust made enquiries about a young male telegraph operator, Louis Maheux, who he wanted to get to know as “research” for something he was writing. Proust stipulated that Maheux appear in his uniform. This “something,” as Tadié says, was linked to the essay on homosexuality that Proust lists in *Le Carnet de 1908* as having a mind to write (2000, 508–509). That Proust felt it necessary to use the excuse of research for satisfying what we must assume was a strong sexual attraction may owe something, as William C. Carter suggests, to the fact that in London in 1889 police inquiries discovered a male brothel at which telegraph boys could earn significant sums prostituting themselves (2000, 446). It may also remind us of the scene in *La Prisonnière* where Marcel asks Françoise to send for the young bicycling errand-girl from the diary, ostensibly so that she can deliver a

essentially *modern* about the form Marcel's "unremitting torture" takes is further spelled out by the Narrator:

mes relations, ma fortune, tout les moyens matériels dont tant ma situation que la civilisation de mon époque me faisaient profiter, n'avaient fait que reculer l'échéance de la lutte corps à corps avec la volonté contraire, inflexible d'Albertine, sur laquelle aucune pression n'avait agi comme dans ces guerres modernes où les préparations de l'artillerie, la formidable portée des engins, ne font que retarder le moment où l'homme se jette sur l'homme et où c'est le cœur le plus fort qui a le dessus. Sans doute j'avais pu échanger des dépêches, des communications téléphoniques avec Saint-Loup, être en rapports constants avec le bureau de Tours, mais leur attente n'avait-elle pas été inutile, leur résultat nul ? Et les filles de la campagne, sans avantages sociaux, sans relations, ou les humains avant ces perfectionnements de civilisation ne souffrent-ils pas moins, parce qu'on désire moins[?]

[my connections, my wealth and all the material means from which both my position and the civilisation of the day allowed me to benefit had done no more than postpone the moment of the hand-to-hand struggle with the contradictory, inflexible will of Albertine, which had resisted all pressure. Of course I had been able to exchange telegrams and telephone calls with Saint-Loup and remain in constant touch with the telegraph office in Tours, but had these expectations not been vain, their result null? And did a country girl with no social advantages and no connections, or people who lived before these advances of civilisation, not suffer less?] (1983; V:470-471)

Albertine, then, even in her absence, becomes a focus for the shortcomings of technology to assuage Marcel's anxieties. To make this clearer it is worth retracing aspects of Marcel's relationship with Albertine in order to show how firmly she is embedded in elements of Beard's American Nervousness.

The first time Marcel sees Albertine at Elstir's studio she is "la jeune cycliste ... sur ses cheveux noir, son polo abaissé vers ses grosses joues, ses

message, though Marcel clearly intends to seduce her. That the girl reminds him of Albertine and her rendezvous with the lesbian Mlle Léa only further establishes the link in Proust's mind between sexual deceit and the telegram.

yeux gais et un peu insistants” [the young cyclist ... with her black hair, and her toque pulled down, her plump cheeks and her cheerful, rather insistent eyes] (663; II:423). Later he comments on her “belles jambes, que le premier jour j’avais imaginées avec raison avoir manœuvré pendant toute son adolescence les pédales d’une bicyclette” [fine legs, which I had marked down on the first day, rightly, as having spent their whole adolescence turning the pedals of a bicycle] (1890; V:353). This association of Albertine with speed and physical desirability, however, is double-edged. Gilberte Swann, describing Albertine to Marcel long before he meets her at Balbec, calls her “la fameuse ‘Albertine.’ Elle sera sûrement très ‘fast’” [that Albertine ... I’m sure she’ll be very “fast” one of these days] (409; II:87). Absent from James Grieve’s translation, though retained by Kilmartin and Enright, the scare quotes with which Gilberte surrounds the mere mention of Albertine creates an aura of promiscuity and deceit: is Albertine playing not only “fast” but loose; and is “Albertine” even her real name?

This unsettlement in language parallels Françoise’s comment that Albertine seems never to stay still: “Et avec une allant vite comme elle ... Ah! maintenant, mademoiselle Albertine, c’est quelqu’un” [And always on the move as she is ... Oh, now, Mademoiselle Albertine, she’s quite a one] (1342–1343; IV:178). Once at Balbec, however, the reality is even more daunting with Marcel imagining Albertine transformed into a gorgon, “rapide et penchée sur la roue mythologique de sa bicyclette ... la tête enturbannée et coiffée de serpents, elle semait la terreur dans les rues de Balbec” [bent over the swiftly turning mythological wheel of her bicycle ... her turban-helmeted head swarming with serpents as she spread terror throughout the streets of Balbec] (1971; V:455).⁷

Here as elsewhere Marcel proves himself a product of his age. Alongside the Mona Lisa, Judith, or Salome – female archetypes “simultaneously defiant and submissive” (Birkett 1986, 5) – the decadent imagination was drawn to the figure of Medusa as the personification of the Modern Woman. As seducer and destroyer, Albertine represents both the *femme vitale* and the *femme fatale*. Kitted out in her figure-hugging

⁷ According to Walter Sickert, Whistler was “a sort of gorgon’s head” as far as establishment painters such as Sir John Everett Millais and W.P. Frith were concerned (Sturgis 2005, 55). In bringing Whistler’s name within the orbit of *la méduse* with its connotations of lesbianism, such views can be seen as responding – unconsciously or otherwise – to those critics who, as discussed in Chapter 5, thought to question Whistler’s “virility.”

mackintosh (“la tunique guerrière de caoutchouc” (1971; V:455)), she is both destroyer (Perseus) and destroyed (Medusa). Albertine thrills and inspires Marcel. She also, as the reference to Medusa confirms, petrifies him. It is a thrill and fear he learns to experience as analogous to sex. Yet sexuality – or its consequences – is something from which Albertine herself is in need of protection. And so, inasmuch as Charles Goodyear’s invention of vulcanized rubber not only had an effect on the production of clothing and car and bicycle wheels but facilitated birth-control devices such as the cap and condom, dressed in “la tunique guerrière de caoutchouc” she becomes the personification of women’s increasing sexual independence.

Albertine is the antithesis of *la Parisienne*, the five-metre high effigy of a woman dressed in *haute couture* that met visitors as they approached the entrance to the 1900 Exposition Universelle. If *la Parisienne* represented the decorative and feminine, Albertine is an altogether more provocative example of femininity.⁸ Similarly, Proust’s description in *La Prisonnière* of a Paris seemingly run and populated solely by women – “quelque blanchisseuse portant son panier à linge, une boulangère à tablier bleu, une laitière ... quelque fière jeune fille blonde suivant son institutrice” [some laundry woman carrying her linen basket, a baker’s wife in her blue apron, a dairy-woman ... some proud, fair-haired young girl following her governess] (1623; V:20) – not only represents Marcel’s predatory sexuality, especially when it comes to the working class, but his concern that Albertine will herself strike up a relationship with one or all of these women.⁹

Contemporary anxieties about the changing social roles of women are played out through Marcel’s sexual neuroses. Such neuroses still evidently exist, and if we were to look for a contemporary way of understanding the

⁸ Equating post-Haussmann Paris with the capriciousness of women’s fashion, not to mention the female body, began as early as 1860. “From the viewpoint of both hygiene and artistry,” Alexandre Weill wrote, “nothing is more ghastly than the interiors of the new houses along the Boulevard Sébastopol. All these crinoline mansions are in disguise and wear hats on their heads” (cited in Lehmann 2000, 24).

⁹ While the fictional events of the *roman d’Albertine* pre-date 1914, Proust was engaged in writing it during and after the outbreak of war. Proust’s description of an all-female Paris accurately reflects, then, the reality of life in the city during the First World War, when, with so many men away at the Front, working women were more visible than had previously been the case.

link between Albertine, *la Parisienne*, and an all-female Paris, the 1997 spring–summer show of fashion designer Alexander McQueen provides a fascinating correlative. With its “terrifyingly tall amazons,” “a regiment of superwomen” that “stalked the cobbles of an old Parisian stable,” “McQueen’s runway suggested a world without men, not because men were absent from it (they were not), but because it was a world in which gender was unsettled by women who were both hyperfeminine and yet in some respects terrifyingly real.”¹⁰

Such fears as are provoked by “a world without men” are also figured in Proust’s reference to the mythological Medusa. As Elizabeth Ladenson points out (and as I touched on in the previous chapter), “Proust’s insistent analogy between jellyfish (in French, *la méduse*) and homosexuality should be perhaps read as an implicit commentary on the petrifying effect of feminization” (1999, 88). There is certainly a tradition of Proust’s critics responding to him in strikingly similar terms. D.H. Lawrence, critical of his analysis and dissection of every emotional impulse, characterized Proust’s Narrator as “water jelly”; charges of effeminacy underlie George Moore’s description of Proust “ploughing a field with knitting needles”; while Aldous Huxley goes even further in equating Proust with the Female when he has a character in *Eyeless in Gaza* proclaim “that asthmatic seeker of lost time, squatting, horribly white and flabby, with breasts almost female” (cited in Peyre 1963, 28). Proust himself only complicates matters still further when, in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, his Narrator likens an invert to “une méduse stérile qui périra sur le sable” [a sterile jellyfish that will perish on the sand] (1228; IV:30). The male invert, Proust seems to say, is actually a lesbian.

Proust is giving voice to concerns similar to those expressed in Beard’s *Sexual Neurasthenia* (1886). Sounding more and more like Herodotus or Sir John Mandeville, Beard provides details of a form of sexual perversion allegedly experienced by men in the Caucasus, who “lose the attributes of virility before their old age; their beard falls off; their genital organs atrophy ... and at last they come to a condition where they partake of feminine costume, and assimilate to women in many of their occupations” (1886, 99). Interestingly, the cause of such

¹⁰ Evans 2003, 152–153. At one point Proust turns Paris into a catwalk by having Albertine look out of Marcel’s apartment at the passing figure of Mme de Guermantes as she “models” the latest fashions. Whatever Albertine likes, he then goes out and buys for her (1626; V:24).

masculine ossification mirrors to a remarkable degree the warnings of contemporary commentators who noted that the clothes women wore to cycle were making them indistinguishable from men.¹¹ There were other concerns expressed: that “Cyclomania” was bringing about “lubricious overexcitement [and] sensual madness” (Weber 1986, 201). Little wonder that Marcel is left to ponder the significance of the “mystérieux sourire” [mysterious smile] that appears on Albertine’s face whenever she mentions going for a ride (1892; V:356).

Still more powerful forms of modern transportation exerted a fascination for Proust. The excitement provoked by Marcel anticipating the train journey to Balbec is countered by the realization that his going away only proves “qu’il était possible que mère vécût sans moi” [it was possible for my mother to live without me]. Here, then, is a vision of train travel haunted by anxieties of impotency and the fear of death: “la cruauté de ce genre d’adieux ... une séparation apparaît brusquement impossible à souffrir, alors qu’elle n’est déjà plus possible à éviter, concentrée tout entière dans un instant immense de lucidité impuissante et suprême” [the sorrow of a last-minute leave-taking ... that moment when the coming separation, which has lain concealed and possibly not inevitable among the preliminary bustle and haste, suddenly becomes unbearable and looms before us, impossible to elude now, concentrated into a stark and flagrant instant of impotent awareness] (515; II:227).

For “inevitable” we can read “timetable,” the introduction of which “imposed a precision nobody had bothered with before” and contributed to “the habit of considering not just hours but minutes.”¹² Marcel’s obsession with train timetables results in a “palpitating heart” (311; I:389), and so profound is his excitement at the prospect of visiting Florence and Venice

¹¹ The sight of women wearing men’s clothing would also have brought back raw and bitter memories of the Siege of Paris in 1871, during which women were seen wearing trousers. In the following decade or so women needed to apply for permission from the police to wear men’s clothing. Such an application was necessary if, as did the American painter Elizabeth Gardner in 1873, a woman wanted to gain access to the government-run drawing classes at the Gobelins tapestry school. See Hirshler 2006, 84.

¹² Weber 1986, 201. Reliant financially after his parents’ deaths on his portfolio of investments, Proust had other reasons to be anxious about the condition of the railway: he owned shares in United Railways of Havana, the Tanganyika Railway in east Africa, and the mellifluous S.A. Chemin de Fer de Rosario à Puerto Belgrano.

– an excitement fed by “les guides ... et, plus que les guides, l’indicateur des chemins de fer” [guidebooks ... and still more than the guidebooks, the railway time-table] (315; I:395) – that he succumbs to a fever “si tenace, que le docteur déclara qu’il fallait renoncer non seulement à me laisser partir maintenant à Florence et à Venise mais, même quand je serais entièrement rétabli, m’éviter d’ici au moins un an, tout projet de voyage et toute cause d’agitation” [so tenacious that the doctor declared they would not only have to give up the idea of allowing me to leave for Florence and Venice now but, even when I was entirely well again, spare me for a least a year any plans for traveling and any cause of excitement] (316; I:397).¹³

Commenting on rail travel as a source of erotic experience and deep anxiety, Freud wrote, “It is a puzzling fact that boys take such an extraordinarily intense interest in things connected with railways, and, at the age at which the production of phantasies is most active (shortly before puberty), use those things as the nucleus of a symbolism that is peculiarly sexual” (1977, 121). Marcel, then, is an amalgam of Freud’s adolescent and Beard’s description of an altogether more circumspect view on letting the train take the strain:

A German physician has given the name “Fear of Railway Traveling,” to a symptom that is observed in some who have become nervously exhausted by long residence on trains; they become fearful of taking a journey on the cars, mainly from the unpleasant sensations caused by the vibrating motions of the train.¹⁴

¹³ We can also link the distress experienced by Marcel after his asthma attack with what Freud says about the repression in adults of the prepubertal excitation caused by railway journeys: “A compulsive link ... between railway-travel and sexuality is clearly derived from the pleasurable character of the sensation of movement. In the event of repression, which turns so many childish preferences into their opposite, these same individuals, when they are adolescents or adults, will react to rocking or swinging with a feeling of nausea, will be terribly exhausted by a railway journey, or will be subject to attacks of anxiety on the journey and will protect themselves against a repetition of the painful experience by railway anxiety” (1977, 121).

¹⁴ Beard 1972, 113. Recognizing that the steam engine symbolized the challenge or threat of modernity, the group of artists who gathered around Whistler in the 1890s and which included Walter Sickert, Mortimer Menpes, and Théodore Roussel, had printed headed notepaper stamped with “a steam engine advancing with its red-light displayed – a warning signal to the Philistines that the reformers were on the track” (Sturgis 2005, 139).

Among the only moments of peace Marcel experiences with Albertine (during which she might be likened to Breton's ideal image of *la beauté convulsive* as "a speeding locomotive abandoned for years to the delirium of the forest") are those times when he watches her sleeping in his parents' Paris apartment, contrasting the sound of her breath – "son haleine venant expirer sur ses lèvres, à intervalles intermittents et réguliers, comme un reflux, mais plus assoupi et plus doux" [like the sounds of waves, but softer and more subdued] – to that of traffic "passaient bruyamment dans la rue" [passing noisily in the street] (1655; V:60–61).¹⁵ Such need for respite is in stark contrast to Marcel's rapture when he first sees *le petite bande* at Balbec: "ô rayon successif dans le tourbillon où nous palpitions de vous voir reparaître en ne vous reconnaissant qu'à peine, dans la vitesse vertigineuse de la lumière" [O successive flashes in the whirlwind where we tremble to see you reappear, barely recognizing you in the dizzying velocity of light] (1650; V:55). It is a vision of sexual attraction that summons up the Book of Job ("Then the Lord answered Job out of the Whirlwind") and anticipates Marcel's later fear that Albertine will prove "une lubrique Furie" [a lubricious Fury]. However, asleep, silent and apparently lifeless ("Ce fut une morte en effet que je vis quand j'entrai ensuite dans sa chambre ... ses draps, roulés comme un suaire autour de son corps" [It was a dead woman that I saw when I went into her room ... her sheets, wrapped round her body like a shroud] (1873; V:332)), Albertine ceases to be those aspects of the modern world that overstimulate Marcel.

A description such as this reminds us that several years before the French translation of *Sexual Neurasthenia (Nervous Exhaustion, Its Hygiene, Causes, Symptoms and Treatment)* in 1895, Beard's theories had been introduced into French medical practice by Charcot in a series of lectures. The influence of Charcot is interesting, not least because the ambiguous nature of the relationship between Albertine and Marcel coincides with contemporary speculation about relations between patients and doctors at La Salpêtrière (see Finn 1999, 39). It is certainly the case that asleep or otherwise passive, Albertine becomes readily available to participating in Marcel's sexual fantasies, just as Charcot's predominantly female patients were made to

¹⁵ With the passing decades, one effect of Haussmann's modernization and his belief in an aesthetic of speed and mobility was to open Paris up to increasing numbers of motor cars. Indeed, in 1922 the Paris authorities did not renew licenses for horse-drawn cabs because their "slowness" was hindering the city's motor traffic (Jones 2004, 421).

assume *attitudes passionnelles* suggestively called “amorous supplication,” “eroticism,” or “ecstasy” (Showalter 1997, 33). This in turn anticipates the “confusion” that defined later surrealist fantasies: in Aragon’s *Le Paysan de Paris* (1926) the narrator mistakes a prostitute for a “living corpse”; while in *Nadja* (1928) the wax figure of a prostitute is seen as more provocative than a real woman.

Such associations are highlighted by Chantal Akerman in her film *La Captive* (2000), most notably in the scene where Marcel is aroused by watching the Ariane/Albertine character while she either feigns sleep or actually slips into unconsciousness because the tension between them is raised, in Akerman’s words, “to the point where the air starts to get thin, perhaps so far it becomes unbearable.”¹⁶ Indeed the connection between their love-making and the symptoms of neurasthenic-asthma are made further apparent when, coming to after Marcel has reached orgasm by rubbing himself against her, Ariane invites him to join her and Andrée the next day: “No, I don’t think so,” Marcel replies. “There’s too much pollen.”

¹⁶ See the interview with Chantal Akerman included on the DVD of *The Captive* (Artificial Eye, 2000), a fascinating retransposition of Hitchcock’s *Vertigo* onto *A la recherche* to which Hitchcock’s film was itself indebted. As Marcel is introduced to Albertine by Elstir, so Scottie, Hitchcock’s protagonist, falls in love with a woman, Madeleine, to whom he is introduced by her husband, an old college friend called Gavin Elster [*sic*]. Like Marcel, Scottie soon finds himself in the role of both detective and analyst: on the one hand he is looking for evidence that Madeleine is having an affair; on the other, he is looking for clues to Madeleine’s past, interpreting her dreams, piecing together the fragments of her biography. After having witnessed what he thinks is Madeleine’s death in a fall from a bell-tower, Scottie has a nervous breakdown and becomes obsessed with looking for her on the streets of San Francisco. When he discovers Judy, a dead ringer for Madeleine, he makes her dress up and dye her hair so as to become Madeleine’s double. Only at the end of the film does Scottie discover that Madeleine and Judie are the same woman, and that Madeleine’s death was a hoax. At the moment he confronts her with this, Judy falls from the same tower as was used to fake Madeleine’s death – this time with fatal consequences. The story, Hitchcock told Françoise Truffaut, is about a man “who wants to go to bed with a woman who is dead; he is indulging in a form of necrophilia.” Akerman borrows a number of motifs from Hitchcock in the scenes where Marcel follows Ariane/Albertine by car through a Paris that owes more to San Francisco than Haussmann’s city, and into an art gallery that clearly refers to the parallel scene in *Vertigo*. Gertrude Stein for one would not have been surprised by the transposition. In *Paris France* she reminisces about her childhood in San Francisco, a city she calls the most French of American cities.

It doesn't require a great leap of the imagination to see a connection between an Albertine kept indoors and under close supervision and one of George Beard's treatment regimes for nervousness: the "rest cure." At one point the Narrator comments that so much weight has Albertine put on that she has become virtually unrecognizable; while later this "new Albertine" [Albertine nouvelle] is referred to as "bloated" [bouffie] (1932, 2090; V:404, 608). Usually reserved for women, Beard's regime required patients to keep to their beds for six to eight weeks while being fed a diet that aimed to promote the body's supply of fat and blood, both of which were thought essential to vital energy. Thus the "disciplined, streamlined modernist body," as Caroline Evans calls the female body emancipated from "the outer discipline of the corset" (2003, 172), and personified by Albertine in "la tunique guerrière de caoutchouc," found itself restrained not by fashion but medicine.

The influence of Beard becomes all the more apparent when we remember that the condition which Marcel's increasingly "scientific" treatment of Albertine hopes to cure is her suspected lesbianism, a tendency which the novel, via Morel and Andrée, firmly associates with neurasthenia. The irony, of course, is that this displaces the burden of nervousness from Marcel to Albertine, with the result that it is she rather than he who must be treated. The problem Marcel encounters, however, is that the more he attempts to diagnose the exact nature of Albertine's "illness," the more he sees her as a multiplicity of selves, each of which demands that he in turn becomes a vast array of specialists able to scrutinize her every word and gesture: a chemist, philologist, pathologist, logician, biologist, physiologist, astronomer, historian, botanist, and meteorologist. The search for Albertine becomes what Deleuze calls "the exploration of different worlds of signs that ... intersect at certain points," and among which Marcel loses track not only of her but himself (2000, 4). Far from establishing Albertine's innocence or guilt, such "empirical conviction" (Deleuze 2000, 133) as Marcel is able to summon to his aid only leads him into further bouts of involuntary jealousy and suspicion, the overwhelming power of which blanks rational analysis. As well as preparing us for those similarities between the investigative methods and procedures of Marcel and Poe's Dupin that I will consider in the following chapter, this suggests that Proust may have been parodying the belief that science provides any sure way of defining the laws of desire. There may be elements here of self-parody. Proust recognized in himself the kind of writer "qui ait besoin

de connaissances précises, de savoir exactement les choses dont je parle ... Et sans doute vous écrire m'eût épargné les correspondances interminables que j'aie eues avec des horticulteurs, des couturiers, des astronomes, des héraldistes, des pharmaciens, etc." [who needs precise information, who must have an exact knowledge of the things I'm talking about ... And doubtless writing to you would have spared me the interminable correspondence I've had with horticulturalists, dress-makers, astronomers, genealogists, chemists, etc.] (*Corr.* XII:254; *SL* III:198–199).

Slaughterhouses of love

For all that American Nervousness now reminds us of other nineteenth-century "sciences," such as phrenology, mesmerism, and magnetism, Beard's ideas were for a while influential, not least among the nascent practitioners of psychotherapy, where he assumed the role of *bête noire*.

While Beard came to identify the origins of neurasthenia with environment, Freud, in "On the Psychotherapy of Hysteria" (1895), was to stress its psycho-sexual causes and symptoms. Neurasthenia, he concluded, corresponds to "a monotonous clinical picture in which ... 'psychical mechanisms' play no part." What was required, Freud countered, was a distinction between the neurasthenic/physical axis and that of psychical symptoms which admit "the far-reaching possibility of reducing it by psychotherapy." These neurotic symptoms Freud termed "anxiety neurosis," defining them as "sexual in origin" and coinciding with "the neurosis that in so many accounts is acknowledged alongside hysteria and neurasthenia under the name 'hypochondria'" (2004, 259, 260). Freud returned to the relationship between the repression and sublimation of sexual behavior and anxiety in 1908. "A person's sexual behaviour," he wrote,

often *sets the pattern* for all his other ways of reacting to the world. Any man who energetically conquers his sex object is credited with the same ruthless energy in the pursuit of other goals too. Yet if, for a variety of reasons, he refrains from satisfying his strong sex drives, his behavior in other spheres of life will be conciliatory and resigned, rather than energetic[.] (2002a, 99–100)

Though Freud agreed with other nerve specialists of his day that neurasthenia (neurosis) was attributable to the stresses and strains of modern urban life, unlike Beard he saw the cause as less to do with "the

tireless unbridled pursuit of money and possessions [or] with the immense advances in applied sciences” than excessive sexual restriction. Where they agreed was on the contribution to this of the United States: “The present state of American civilization,” Freud commented, “would provide a good opportunity to study the cultural damage that is to be feared” (2002a, 88, 52). Beard, as I say, was generally loath to give much credence to sex. Even he had to admit, however, that sexual repression was a contributing factor to American Nervousness:

Love, even when gratified, is a costly emotion; when disappointed, as it is so often likely to be, it costs still more, drawing largely, in the growing years of both sexes, on the margin of nerve-force, and thus becomes the channel through which not a few are carried on to neurasthenia, hysteria, epilepsy, or insanity[.] (1972, 119)

The “disappointment” against which Beard warns comes close to personifying Freud’s model of the suppression of “normal” sexual activity:

The stern demands of civilization and the difficult task of abstinence have combined to make avoidance of the union of the male and female genitals the essential feature of abstinence and to favor other forms of sexual activity that amount, one might say, to a kind of semi-obedience. Since normal sexual intercourse is so relentlessly persecuted on grounds of morality – and of hygiene, too, in view of the possibilities of infection – the so-called perverse forms of heterosexual intercourse, in which other parts of the body take over the role of the genitals, have undoubtedly increased in social importance. (2002a, 101)

Albertine, however, refuses to fully comply with such self censorship, hence Marcel’s irresolvable fears about her lesbianism. Furthermore, the facility to express verbally what she and Marcel share in common, erotomania – “a delirious pursuit of the beloved, rather than ... a delirious illusion of being loved” (Deleuze 2000, 179) – means that Marcel is in a permanent nervous twitch.

Albertine’s longest speech in the novel, the passage in *La Prisonnière* where she becomes rhapsodic on the pleasures of eating ice cream from the Ritz (a diet that would meet with the approval of Beard’s “rest cure”),

unsettles Marcel precisely because “ces paroles du genre de celles qu’elle prétendait dues uniquement à mon influence, à la constante cohabitation avec moi, ces paroles que pourtant je n’aurais jamais dites, comme si quelque défense m’était faite par quelqu’un d’inconnu de jamais user dans la conversation de formes littéraires” [her words were of a kind that she maintained were owed solely to my influence, to her living permanently with me, but they were words that I myself would never have used, constrained as I felt by some unknown influence never to use literary forms in conversation] (1699; V:114). Thus Albertine’s verbal, emotional and intellectual assurance makes him nervous because her sudden improvisations on the theme of desire and pleasure challenge his own repressed energies, sexual and artistic. What her talking does not do, *pace* Derrida’s “[s]peaking in order not to say anything is always the best technique for keeping a secret” (1995, 59), is reveal the nature of her sexuality. Marcel, then, is left to eroticize, even fetishize, this absence. As a result their relationship reminds us of what Foucault says about repression being “the fundamental link between power, knowledge, and sexuality,” and how nothing less than “an irruption of speech, a reinstating of pleasure within reality” can free us from such structures (1998, 5).

In Albertine’s case, the culmination of such verbal “irruptions” is her expression of a desire to be sodomized (Freud’s “so-called perverse forms of heterosexual intercourse”) which marks the crisis in her affair with Marcel. That shortly after saying these words she “disappears” from the novel only further links her to Foucault’s analysis:

If sex is repressed, that is, condemned to prohibition, non-existence, and silence, then the mere fact that one is speaking about it has the appearance of a deliberate transgression. A person who holds forth in such language places himself to a certain extent outside the reach of power; he upsets the established law; he somehow anticipates the coming freedom. (1998, 5)

There is a section of the narrative from which Marcel, too, is condemned to “non-existence.” Or rather, there is a period of his life about which the Narrator remains silent. Between Marcel’s returning from Venice to find that Gilberte has married Saint-Loup, given birth to a daughter, and discovered that her husband is homosexual, and his visits to wartime Paris, he retreats to a sanatorium. He returns there after the war, before re-entering the novel and paying a visit to the Princess de Guermantes

during which he discovers the significance of *mémoire involontaire*. In other words, some fourteen or fifteen years go uncommented on. A clue as to why is provided in the first of Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* (1905), in which Freud describes how illness provides the male hysteric "a way of escape" from "the pressure of the [sexual] instinct and his antagonism to sexuality." The passage continues: "It does not solve his conflict, but seeks to evade it by transforming his libidinal impulses into symptoms" (1977, 79).

It is certainly the case that the precise nature of Proust's sexuality remains something of a mystery. This has unfortunately led to the "fact" of his homosexuality resulting in that most reductive of readings of *A la recherche*, with each of Marcel's female lovers understood to represent one of Proust's male acquaintances. In this game of literary drag, Albertine is "really" Alfred Agostinelli, Proust's chauffeur, with her death while horse riding paralleling Agostinelli's sudden loss in a plane crash in May 1914. And though it is entirely plausible, as Elizabeth Ladenson comments, "that the portrait of Albertine owes much to Proust's relationship with Agostinelli, at the level of the text the transposition theory breaks down.¹⁷ It cannot account for Gomorrah, for if Albertine is 'really' a man, what are we to make of her suspected lesbianism" (1999, 13–18). For my own part, I would simply want to expand on what Ladenson says by opening up her argument to the influence of American Nervousness. For the medium other than sexual desire that joins Proust/Marcel to Agostinelli/Albertine is speed and travel, with the attendant anxieties and pleasures inexorably bound up in Proust's imagination with the axis of art, nervousness, and homosexuality. What we have, therefore, is less a transposition than a modulation: both deaths occurred while the "victim" was in flight from their own Marcel; and both fall under the influence of a desire that can only be satisfied by a craving for speed. Thus Proust offered to buy Agostinelli an aeroplane and a Rolls-Royce (*Corr.* XIII:217–223; *SL* III:256–259), while Marcel offers Albertine a Rolls-Royce and a yacht. Furthermore, the inscription from Mallarmé's sonnet, "Le vierge, le vivace et le bel aujourd'hui [The virginal, vibrant, and beautiful dawn] which ends with the words "l'exil inutile le Cygne" [the useless exile of the Swan], and which Proust wanted to have

¹⁷ The transposition theory (i.e. that each of Marcel's female lovers is actually based on one of Proust's homosexual relationships) was put forward in 1949 by Justin O'Brien in his essay "Albertine the Ambiguous: Notes on Proust's Transposition of the Sexes" (see Ladenson 1999, 13–18).

inscribed on the fuselage of Agostinelli's plane becomes, in one of the letters Marcel sends Albertine after she has fled Paris, a yacht "s'appelle, selon votre désir exprimé à Balbec, le *Cygne*" [called, in accordance with the wish you expressed at Balbec, *le Cygne*] (1946; V:423). The parallels between Agostinelli's death in a plane crash and Albertine's while horse riding are further cruelly underlined by the grotesque irony of the fact that, in the only letter from Proust to Agostinelli to have survived, and written on the day on which Agostinelli drowned, Proust informs him that "if I keep [the plane] (which I rather doubt) ... it will probably remain in the stable."

Keeping mum

The "type" of femininity represented by Albertine locates *A la recherche* within a tradition in post-1800 French literature that dealt with the "unvirile" man. Chateaubriand's René, Stendhal's Julien Sorel, and Flaubert's Frédéric Moreau all share, writes Alison Finch, the "physical susceptibility and introspectiveness of Proust's Narrator." Such characteristics influence their choice of a particular kind of partner: "robust, unintellectual."

With regard to the latter, Finch might have added Baudelaire, who expressed a fascination with Woman as "idol, stupid perhaps, but dazzling and bewitching" and who, not unlike the vision of Albertine as Medusa, "holds wills and destinies suspended on her glance" (1964c, 30). Marcel is equally in thrall to Woman. It is difficult, though, to credit Baudelaire, as Marcel does Albertine, acting out scenes from Racine's *Esther*, or discussing Dostoevsky with his "idol." Neither is Albertine anyone's fool. She proves a shrewd literary critic, and her comments on Dostoyevsky take us to the heart of Marcel's barely conscious fear that to love is to commit the ultimate crime: "Mais est-ce qu'il a jamais assassiné quelqu'un, Dostoïevski? Les romans que je connais de lui pourraient tous s'appeler l'Histoire d'un Crime. C'est une obsession chez lui, ce n'est pas naturel qu'il parle toujours de ça" [But did he murder anyone, Dostoevsky? All of his novels that I've read could be called *The Story of a Crime*. He's obsessed with the subject, it's not natural always to be talking about it] (1888; V:350).

That Albertine is reading Dostoyevsky in the first place is down to a desire to satisfy Marcel's wish to educate her. This in turn adds a further significance to the fact that it is scenes from *Esther* which they act out. Written to be performed at a school for young noblewomen at Saint-Cyr, Racine's great play of female self-sacrifice and bravery "tells much about the ambivalence of an educational system straining between a closed ideal

world ... and the practical needs of modern life and openness to social reality” (Lyons 1994, 369). And just as the “concept of enclosure and control of the scholastic space” were central to the regime at Saint-Cyr, so Marcel strives in vain to impose similar limitations on Albertine’s errant sexuality.

Beard was convinced that “the mental activity of women” (by which he was referring to the increase in women taking their place among America’s “brain workers”) was a contributory factor to Nervousness. Some indication of contemporary sensitivity to the issue of women’s education is demonstrated by the pen-and-ink drawing by Walter Sickert included in the first edition of the notorious *Yellow Book* in 1894, copies of which were sold in Britain, on the continent, and in the United States. Already infamous for his paintings of London’s music halls, a theme he adapted from Degas’ depiction of Parisian café concerts, Sickert’s sketch of a young woman in a hat reading a book was “an image that, with its suggestions of female independence, education, and emancipation, was calculated to unsettle, if not shock, a contemporary audience” (Sturgis 2005, 213). Similar charges had been made exactly a decade earlier when Sickert’s teacher and some-time confidant, Whistler, exhibited *Pink Note: The Novelette* (see Plate 3). The watercolor was described in the *London Standard* as portraying a “grisette” (a term indicating a young working-class woman, with the added implication of sexual immorality) and “delightful devourer of penny sentimentals” (MacDonald et al. 2003, 143). The assumptions here are telling. That a woman engrossed in reading some cheap novel of the day – and we should note that there is no suggestion that she might be studying Hebrew, Euclid, or, for that matter, reading Dostoyevsky – should arouse such associations (working-class sexuality, whatever the effects of the patronizing adjective “delightful,” is imagined as a kind of *vagina dentata*) parallels Albertine’s own ambiguous social origins and wayward lifestyle.

Marcel’s need to police Albertine’s “orality” becomes figured not simply in a desire to “strip away” the surface and read what he finds there – “j’aurais voulu non pas arracher sa robe pour voir son corps, mais à travers son corps voir tout ce bloc-notes de ses souvenirs” [I longed not to tear her dress off and see her body, but to see through her body to the whole note-book of her memories] (1672; V:82) – but to turn her into literature. Thus he experiences her imagined seduction by Léa as if it were “une flambée brûler d’un seul coup un roman que j’avais mis des millions de minutes à écrire” [flames tearing through a novel I had spent ten million

minutes composing] (1866; V:323). The antithesis to this are those moments when her behavior is “confusée, effacée, autant dire indéchiffrable, dans ma mémoire” [confused, half erased, unreadable in my memory] (1667; V:75). Albertine, then, must be interpreted, deciphered, and explicated (Deleuze 2000, 17). Brought home to him at such moments, and showing just how important Albertine is to the novel’s structure as a whole, is a recognition of “celle du néant ... analogues à celui que j’avais éprouvé en goûtant la madeleine trempée dans la tasse de thé” [nothingness ... analogous to the one I had experienced on tasting the madeleine soaked in tea]. What these momentary insights prove is that in “nothingness” may lie not “vagueness” but that profundity on which *la recherche* is founded. Or they may simply mean that nothing comes of nothing: “rien ne m’assurait que le vague de tels états fût une marque de leur profondeur, mais seulement de ce que nous n’avons pas encore su les analyser, qu’il n’y aurait donc rien de plus réel en eux que dans d’autres” [nothing proved that the vagueness of these states was a sign of their profundity, rather than of our inability, so far, to analyze them: there would therefore be nothing more real in them than in others] (1890; V:352).

Albertine embodies Marcel’s inability to write the novel he feels himself capable of, yet lacking the will to start. Some similar fascination moved and troubled Proust during the immediate years following his mother’s death, and which evidently came to a head on January 24, 1907, when *Le Figaro* printed on its front page news of “An Act of Madness.” The report described the killing of one Mme Van Blarenberghe at the hands of her son, Henri, and how, with her last breath, Mme Van Blarenberghe had accused him of her murder. He, meanwhile, having stabbed and shot himself, was interrogated by police as he lay dying.

Jeanne Proust died in September 1905. Her son’s sense of guilt at his own imagined part in her final illness clearly fused with reports of Mme Van Blarenberghe’s death, and resulted in an article Proust wrote at the suggestion of Gaston Calmette, editor of *Le Figaro*. “Sentiments filiaux d’un parricide” [Filial Sentiments of a Parricide] was published on February 1. It marked, as Proust wrote to Lucien Daudet, a thawing of the writer’s block that had gripped him since the publication in May 1906 of his translation of Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies*, on which he had collaborated so extensively with his mother (*Corr.* VII:58–61; *SL* II:251–252). With his mother firmly in mind, he wrote somewhat apocalyptically in the article that “il n’y a peut-être pas une mère vraiment aimante qui ne pourrait, à son dernier jour, souvent bien avant, adresser ce reproche à son fils” [perhaps there is

no truly loving mother who would not be able, on her last day and often long before, to reproach her son]. Read in these terms, Proust's sublimated feelings for his mother become "staged" in the character of Albertine, with Marcel's guilt at having "murdered" her mirroring Proust's own deep-rooted terror that his degenerate, neurasthenic lifestyle contributed to his mother's final illness. As he concluded in "Sentiments filiaux d'un paricide": "Au fond, nous vieillissons, nous tuons tout ce qui nous aime par les soucis que nous lui donnons, par l'inquiète tendresse elle-même que nous inspirons et mettons sans cesse en alarme" [At bottom, we make old, we kill all those who love us, by the anxiety we cause them, by that kind of uneasy tenderness we inspire and ceaselessly put in a state of alarm] (*CSB*, 158; *FSP*, 354). The transference of his own repressed feelings to his fiction becomes even more compelling in light of the fact that, in a preface to *Contre Sainte-Beuve*, it is the mother with whom Proust's narrator acts out scenes from *Esther* (*CSB*, 217; *ASB*, 8).

In the summer of 1907, still grieving his mother's death, Proust traveled to Cabourg in Normandy, where he went out almost daily in a red taxi driven by Alfred Agostinelli. Proust likened being driven by Agostinelli to "la vie de boulet de canon lancé" [the life of a flying cannon-ball]. Clearly the automobile had replaced the train engine in its capacity to provoke: "une sorte de tremblement pareil à celui du moteur continue à ronfler en moi et à frémir quand je suis descendu de la voiture et empêche ma main de se poser et de m'obéir" [a sort of trembling like that of the engine continues to purr and vibrate in me when I've got out of the car and won't let my hand come to rest and obey me] (*Corr.* VII:263; *SL* II:325). When he returned to Paris, Proust wrote an article about the experience for *Le Figaro*, "Impressions de route en automobile." Two things are important here. Firstly, that with very few changes Proust reused the article when it came to providing the prose-poem the young Marcel writes in *Du côté de chez Swann* about seeing the steeples of Martinville from a horse-drawn carriage. Secondly, Proust describes in the article how he returned home from the drive with Agostinelli and saw his parents, both of whom were in fact dead by that time. In *Contre Sainte-Beuve* and "Impressions de route en automobile," then, Proust carries on an imaginary conversation with a dead mother. It seems reasonable to draw the conclusion that this imagining himself as being able to speak to his mother allowed Proust to discover the narrative voice and structure that would make the writing of a novel finally possible. The deaths of Jeanne Proust, Mme Van Blarenberghe, Albertine, and the grandmother fulfill aspects of literary discourse surrounding male

artistic creativity and representations of the female body (a female corpse transformed into the male corpus). Furthermore, if we apply Barbara Johnson's words on the trope of the death of women in French literature to Albertine, the ultimate truth of her life, her death, becomes a form of "poetic self-reflexiveness: woman equals beauty equals [the novel] itself, which is killed into art" (Johnson 1994, 629). I would go further, and say that in so much as she remains an enigma, Albertine has much in common with Proust's justification of his novel as an aesthetic and moral whole.

Repeatedly in his letters Proust felt compelled to defend his frank depiction of degeneracy. Only when his novel had been published in its entirety, he argued, would readers recognize that what seemed perverse and sensational in a scene such as the lesbian seduction at Montjouvain (132–137; I:159–166) would be revealed as germane to the overall structure. Writing to Paul Souday in November 1919, Proust disclosed:

Ma composition est voilée et d'autant moins rapidement perceptible qu'elle se développe sur une large échelle ... mais pour voir combien elle est rigoureuse, je n'ai qu'à me rappeler une critique de vous, mal fondée selon moi, où vous blâmiez certaines scènes troubles et inutiles de *Swann*. S'il s'agissait, dans votre esprit, d'une scène entre deux jeunes filles ... elle était, en effet, « inutile » pour le premier volume. Mais son ressouvenir est le soutien des tomes IV et V (par la jalousie quelle inspire, etc.). En la supprimant, je n'aurais pas changé grand'chose au premier volume; j'aurais, en revanche, par la solidarité des parties, fait tomber deux volumes entiers, dont elle est la pierre angulaire, sur la tête du lecteur.

[My method of composition is veiled, and all the less immediately apparent for taking shape on a wide scale ... but to remind myself of its rigour, I need only turn to your review, ill-founded, in my opinion, in which you condemn certain scenes in *Swann* as obscure and unnecessary. If what you had in mind was a scene between two young women ... it's true that it was "unnecessary" to the first volume. But its recall is the mainstay of volumes IV and V (because of the jealousy it inspires etc). By suppressing it, I wouldn't have materially altered the first volume; on the other hand, because of the interdependence of the parts, I would have brought two entire volumes of which it is the cornerstone crashing down about the reader's head.] (*Corr.* XVIII: 464; *SL* 4:98–99)

Marcel's desire to make the truth about Albertine visible through turning her into literature has similarities to Rousseau's comment at the end of Book 4 of the *Confessions* about wanting to make his own mind "transparent to the reader" (2000, 170). Albertine, however, proves opaque. She is too great a subject matter for Marcel. She leaves him breathless, unable to pronounce the words that might free him from the spell cast by his own neuroses. Even should he succeed in writing the truth, there is the danger that he may be misinterpreted, thereby creating a false Albertine who, like the real one, would escape his "authorial" intention. For as Rousseau said regarding the differences between the life which is written and that which is lived, it becomes the task of the reader to "assemble all these elements and to determine the being that they constitute; the result must be his own work, so that if he is mistaken, all the error is on his side."

Albertine's disappearance plunges Marcel into a Proustian inferno of guilt and terror. News of her fatal accident when it arrives in the form of a telegram (another of Beard's triggers for American Nervousness) represents the loss of all the habits on which Marcel has grown to depend for a secure sense of himself: "J'aurais été incapable de ressusciter Albertine parce que je l'étais de me ressusciter moi-même, de ressusciter mon moi d'alors" [I would have been incapable of reviving Albertine because I was incapable of reviving myself, of reviving my former life] (2089; V:606). To lose her is to lose everything, returning him to the feeling of being torn in two when, separated from his mother in the novel's primal scene of neurasthenic anxiety, he isn't allowed to give her one last kiss before being led to bed (31; I:31). The telegram also reminds us of Marcel's experience in *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* when he receives a letter from Gilberte. It is a moment in which the seeds of his affair with Albertine, the manner of her death, and his subsequent mistake of misreading Albertine's signature for Gilberte's, thus momentarily reviving Albertine from the dead, already lie dormant. What unites these otherwise disparate events, together with the mention of Albertine being "fast," is an overwhelming sense of vertiginous speed: "Pendant un instant [la lettre] ne fit que frapper d'irréalité tout ce qui m'entourait. Avec une vitesse vertigineuse, cette signature sans vraisemblance jouait aux quatre coins avec mon lit, ma cheminée, mon mur. Je voyais tout vaciller comme quelqu'un qui tombe de cheval" [For a moment, all [the letter] did was cast an unreal light on everything around me. At dizzying speed, the improbable signature jumbled the things in my room, the bed, the fireplace, the walls. Everything I looked at was

wobbling, as though I had had a fall from a horse] (399; II:74–75).

The compulsion to repeat, particularly his repressed desire for the mother, coupled with the resulting lack of will and other neurasthenic symptoms, is nowhere so explicitly and uncannily described as when Marcel, trying to imagine Albertine's return from the dead, begins to touch himself:

Instinctivement je passai ma main sur mon cou, sur mes lèvres qui se voyaient embrassés par elle depuis qu'elle était partie, et qui ne le seraient jamais plus; je passai ma main sur eux, comme maman m'avait caressé à la mort de ma grand-mère en me disant: « Mon pauvre petit, ta grand-mère qui t'aimait tant ne t'embrassera plus. »

[Instinctively I stroked my neck and my lips, which had imagined themselves being kissed by her since she had left, yet which would never be kissed by her again; I stroked them as mama had caressed me on my grandmother's death, saying to me, "My poor child, your grandmother who loved you so much will never kiss you again."] (1962; V:444)

Marcel's auto-eroticism, verging on masturbation, and the extraordinarily morbid thoughts it gives rise to are clear examples of the kinds of physical and mental states adduced first by Beard, and later Adrien Proust and Gilberte Ballet, as prime examples of neurasthenic neurosis. Above all, it is a version of reality – paranoid, obsessive, irrational, overwhelmed by guilt, morbid, and hypochondriacal – that contributes to the essential modernity of Proust's writings. At the heart of the labyrinth into which Marcel's desire leads him is not Albertine but his own self. The pursuit of the truth Marcel thinks she represents actually corresponds to the truths hidden within his own life. The crime Marcel uncovers is less the fact of her lesbianism than Proust's unwritten but far from silent guilt for the death of his own mother. As Deleuze says, "We search for truth only when we are determined to ... undergo a kind of violence that impels us to such a search" (2000, 15). What the novel records, then, is a form of lacerating, sado-masochistic self-disgust. Or, as Irigaray recounts a male friend as having told her: "It's true, I have always thought that all women were mad ... No doubt I wanted to avoid the question of my own madness" (2000, 415).

Male hysteria

Jean Santeuil promises the reader that it will be “une étude historique sur la société à la fin du xix^e siècle” [an historical study of the last years of the nineteenth century] (*JS*, 426; *JS English*, 167). It has as both its theme and eponymous hero a nervous subject. At no point, however, is Jean’s “énervements prolongés” [prolonged nervous crisis] (*JS*, 205; *JS English*, 27) referred to in terms of neurasthenia. Neither is Jean as overtly concerned by the march of modernity as is Marcel. Rather, it is Jean’s father who is anxious about rail travel, and only then because his official position means that “Nul plus que lui n’était sollicité par les personnes ambitieuses de voyager seules en chemin de fer” [no one was more frequently asked to exert his influence for persons anxious to have reserved carriages on the railways] (*JS*, 212; *JS English*, 36). America is present in the novel but more in the form of financial chicanery than the all-pervading psychological upheavals of *A la recherche*. There is certainly no figure comparable to that of Albertine. Nor, for that matter, Morel.

As shown by Alison Winton in her research into Proust’s additions to his novel from 1914 onward, Morel’s inclusion in *A la recherche*, and his increasing importance, cannot be divorced from Proust’s inclination to include more specific references to neurasthenia than exist in *Jean Santeuil*. Similarly, the attention Proust paid to modernity and sexual repression as the root cause of deep-rooted anxieties. As Winton says, prior to Proust’s expansion of the novel, Morel, or Bobby Santois as the character was first called, “in as much as he had a character ... was empty-headed, temperamentally unartistic ... and coquettish: he was, in fact, a mediocre, even a simple, good-looking young man” (1977, 184–185). What Morel subsequently became was not only, as Proust explained, the “liaison” between Baudelaire’s Lesbos and his own Sodom and Gomorrah (*CSB*, 633; *ASB*, 302), but a focal point for the novel’s neurasthenic characters. If Marcel is the “innocent” eye through which the reader only gradually sees the shifting sands of sexuality and how it in turn shapes our perception of character, it is Morel to whom he is indebted. Morel is both the lover of Charlus (a relationship that counterpoints that of Marcel and Albertine) and Saint-Loup (his affair with whom provides the means by which Saint-Loup is finally “outed”). There is also some indication that he has slept with Albertine in the course of first seducing and then handing over to her a succession of young girls (2056; V:564). This Marcel learns while himself engaged in a semi-carnal relationship (“demi-relations charnelles”)

with Andrée which provides him with the only “hard evidence” he has as to the facts of Albertine’s lesbianism. Morel, then, becomes a kind of trigonometric point for the sexual lives of the novel’s various decadents and neurasthenics. He also makes visible the novel’s male hysteria. This is literally so in *Le Temps retrouvé*, where he is implicitly compared to Charcot’s female patients at Salpêtrière (2133; VI:6). He also provides Marcel with an alter ego that counters the earlier influence of Swann. It is surely no coincidence that Morel shares a Christian name with Charles Swann (an echo of which we find in “Charlus”), nor that his surname is strikingly similar to the Narrator’s own Christian name – Marcel. Indeed, we can easily imagine “Morel” being misread as “Marcel” in precisely the same way as “Albertine” becomes “Gilberte.”

As with Albertine, Morel’s increased significance to the structure and thematic material of *A la recherche* tells us that neurasthenia and its development as American Nervousness became as important to Proust as *mémoire involontaire*. If involuntary memory provides Marcel with the content of his future novel, the Muse who inspires him is Albertine. Part lubricious fury, part vulcanized “It” girl, she represents the spirit of modernity: the troubling and ultimately unfathomable sense that who we are, and what we would make of ourselves, lies in a complex of guilts and omissions, historical circumstances and cultural influences experienced by those of Proust’s generation as recognizable but impenetrable. Albertine stands from the outset as a fleeting figure of speed and sexual ambiguity. She enlivens and petrifies. She is Marcel’s apprehension of the heart of sexual darkness, representing both those “primitive” influences that contributed to some of Modernity’s greatest achievements in the field of art: *Le sacre du printemps* (1913), with its depiction in music and dance of the sacrifice of a young woman, or the prostitutes of Picasso’s *Les Femmes d’Alger* (1907), with their faces set in mask-like gestures of sexual provocation. Similarly she stands for aspects of the modern that are to do with mass-production, hence Marcel’s impulse to demodernize her by dressing her in the exclusive and anachronistic designs of Fortuny rather than the gender-bending fashions of the day. Above all, she locates the novel in the urban. For as Walter Benjamin recognized, Albertine is “the object of a love which only a city dweller experiences.” Benjamin associates Albertine with Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd,” a story that, like American Nervousness, reveals “aspects of social forces of such power and hidden depth that we may include them among the only ones that are capable of exerting both a subtle and profound effect upon artistic production”

(2003a, 324). Proust, meanwhile, has Albertine emerge from the Balbec twilight as though she were Mephistopheles surprising Faust. She is, the Narrator says, “comme une simple objectivation irréaliste et diabolique du tempérament opposé au mien, de la vitalité quasi barbare et cruelle dont était si dépourvue ma faiblesse” [the simple objectification, unreal and diabolical, of the temperament opposite to my own, of the almost barbaric and cruel vitality ... which I lacked] (671; II:433). The significance of this description is that Marcel has just been looking at Elstir’s painting of the fictional Carquethuit, a picture that re-imagines the Brittany coast as the “curious” and “savage” Florida coastline. This association of an “unreal” and “diabolical” Albertine with a “curieux,” and “extrêmement sauvage” America prepares us for the wider influence of Poe on *A la recherche*.

CHAPTER 4

Exquisite Corpses/Buried Texts

The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only
the critic.

—G. K. Chesterton

“I will be a naturalist!” Emerson declared in his journals after visiting Paris and the Jardin des Plantes in 1832. What he did was to become an author for whom writing was a vehicle, partly literary, and partly scientific. Edgar Allan Poe, otherwise so unsympathetic to Emerson’s “owl-like dignity,” “mystification,” “transcendental notions,” “*cul-de-sac* machinations and pure *fuss*”¹ (the feeling was mutual, Emerson infamously called Poe the “jingle man”), nevertheless pursued not dissimilar aims if in widely differing forms. D.H. Lawrence for one saw Poe as being “more a scientist than an artist,” and for reasons which bring Poe surprisingly close to the Emerson who would smash “the sepulchers of the fathers”: “Moralists have always wondered helplessly why Poe’s ‘morbid’ tales need have been written. They need to be written because old things need to die and disintegrate, because the old white psyche has to be gradually broken down before anything new can come to pass” (1961, 330).

The scientific streak discerned by Lawrence is apparent in the original 1841 version of “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” in which Poe’s anonymous narrator takes issue with “the vulgar dictum ... that the calculating and discriminating powers ... are at variance with the imaginative.” Such a view, as Matthew Pearl has commented, will on inspection be discovered as “ill-founded ... the processes of invention or creation are strictly akin with

¹ Poe’s comments come in his essay “The American Drama.” Emerson is not mentioned by name, though it is apparent that Poe’s barbs were aimed in the direction of Concord.

the processes of resolution – the former being nearly, if not absolutely, the latter conversed” (*MRM*, xi). We have seen similar processes of invention at play in Proust’s “natural history” of inversion in *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, where Emerson’s influence was decisive in allowing Proust to marry the disciplines of naturalist with those of poet. Poe’s Dupin, too, is described as both poet and analyst, and it is the various contributions Poe made to *A la recherche* that I now want to examine.

The distinction we have come to accept between science and art is a relatively recent one. Not until the 1830s did the word “science” begin to assume the contours that today distinguish it, and in many ways define it, as the opposite of imagination. Until then, the word was used to denote almost any sort of knowledge or practical skill. Similarly, access to scientific discoveries and debates was not confined to the specialist. Just as scientists were expected to be familiar with the classics of Western literature, and be able to quote from them, so the educated reader would peruse articles on current scientific debates in a variety of periodicals and magazines, as well as daily newspapers (see Otis 2002, xvii–xxviii). Little wonder, then, that Emerson singled out Goethe, who “found himself the master of histories, mythologies, philosophies, sciences, and national literatures[,] geology, chemistry, astronomy” (*EL*, 751), as his representative writer. Poe, meanwhile, played fast and loose with the use he made of science. For if stories such as “The Man That Was Used Up” parody advances in technology, yet elsewhere in his writings he litters the text with references to scientific treatises so as convince (or just plain con) his reader that what they have before them is verifiable fact rather than fiction.

George Steiner argues that the process of specialization during the seventeenth century, when “significant areas of truth, reality, and action recede[d] from the sphere of verbal statement” meant that the language of such inquiry, analytical geometry and algebra, inaugurated a process of “*progressive untranslatability*” (1985a, 32). It is a phrase we can imagine Poe relishing. Steiner’s elegy for a general loss of faith in literature’s ability to speak about the workings of the universe, and its subsequent retreat into silence, runs parallel to his claim that the nineteenth century marked the watershed of narrative as the defining feature of the novel. What followed was a turning inward that afforded at best only a kind of “bleak clarity” that, by continuing to assert the ascendancy of humanistic authority, lacked the imagination to engage with scientific discoveries. Moreover, the advances in scientific knowledge that literature turned a blind eye to,

“probably give an image of the perceptible world truer to fact than can be derived from any structure of verbal assertion” (1985a, 35).

Elsewhere, Steiner has described how such writers as Kleist, Stevenson, Mérimée, and Poe, writers who moved away from action to psychology, established a form of fiction inherited by the likes of Henry James, Robert Musil, Virginia Woolf, James Joyce, and Proust (1985b, 295). We might add Freud. For as Mark Cousins has commented, such a retreat from the ideals of the Enlightenment resulted in circumstances whereby the

ratio between clarity and obscurity at the level of knowledge tipped towards obscurity ... Problem after scholarly problem withdrew from a field of transparent relations into opacity. What was said, what was done, what was expressed no longer belonged to a human discourse illuminated by reason and understood by spontaneous consciousness ... The subject was surrounded not by a transparent world but by overlapping systems which did not disclose their conditions of intelligibility[.] (Freud 2005b, vii)

We will find that the juxtaposition of clarity and obscurity, light and shade, reason and unintelligibility pursues us throughout this chapter.

That Poe is included among the authors cited by Steiner is significant, as it is arguably Poe's greatest contribution to literature, the invention of the detective story, which sheds most light on the gas-lit obscurity of the nineteenth century. The narrative form par excellence, Poe's detective stories have at their heart the mysterious figure of the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, who, Proust-like, spends his days behind closed shutters in the unnatural darkness of his Paris apartment, from where, like the Marcel of the *roman d'Albertine*, his occupation is one of “disentangling” the causes of “crimes of passion.” He is, we are told in the opening pages of the first of the Dupin trilogy, “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” not so much a detective as an “analyst” who “derives pleasure from ... enigmas ... conundrums ... hieroglyphics.” He is, like the Marcel of Deleuze's description, an “apprentice to signs.” His methods, moreover, “have, in truth, the whole air of intuition” and he trusts to “the seemingly irrelevant ... to *calculate upon the unforeseen*” (CS, 473). As an “analyst,” he also shares an interest in mathematics that defines some of Proust's neurasthenic characters: M. Santeuil is advised to teach Jean calculus as an antidote to his desire to write poetry (JS, 214; JS *English*, 38); while twice Morel is associated with the study of algebra – once when he claims it

helps relieve his neurasthenia (1565; IV:470) and again when it is clear that his telling Charlus he wants to keep his evenings clear to continue his studies is a ruse that allows him to see other lovers (1724; V:145). The Morel of such deceptions even sounds like the crepuscular Dupin: “Morel avait l’habitude de parler de sa vie, mais en présentant une image si enténébrée qu’il était très difficile de rien distinguer” [Morel often spoke of his own life, but gave an image of it so shrouded in darkness that it was difficult to make anything out]. All of which leads us to wonder whether the kind of existence Dupin chooses for himself isn’t his own way of combating a form of neurasthenia.

While Poe used the word “analyst” in the sense of a mathematician, it is impossible for us now not to register the word in terms of psychoanalysis. The two need not be mutually exclusive. For Dupin, getting to the heart of those human passions which can lead to criminal behavior means a methodical retracing of the chains of association. At the same time, however, Poe’s tales of ratiocination, in attempting to throw a logical, progressive light on human action, move inexorably toward the psychological. While it is hardly revolutionary to compare the rise of the detective story in America, Britain, and France with the work of Freud in Vienna, nevertheless it is important to note that what connects them is not only the striving for clarity (though the essential search for a moral conclusion that defines detective fiction is necessarily absent from psychoanalysis), but a recognition that at the heart of modern life lie crime, guilt, and sadomasochistic pleasure. With modernity’s emphasis on self-consciousness came the sense that the conscious self is predicated on the unknowable. Our most closely guarded secret is that which we keep from our selves. Poe was certainly aware of such ironies. In “The Purloined Letter,” for example, the final panel of the Dupin triptych, Dupin cannot help but become part of the widening circles of duplicity and culpability that underlie his analysis. Reason – ratiocination – may be the ideal, but passion – here associated with crime – is contagious. Little wonder that Dupin makes a merit of the fact that his work must take place in darkness and obscurity: “If it is any point requiring reflection,’ observed Dupin, as he forbore to enkindle the wick, ‘we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark” (CS, 684).

Dupin’s method is strikingly similar to the Narrator’s realization in *Le Temps retrouvé* that “les vrai livres doivent être les enfants non de grand jour et de la causerie mais de l’obscurité et du silence” [true books must be the product not of daylight and chitchat but of darkness and silence]

(2286; VI:206).² These words echo not only Poe's criticism in "Philosophy of Furniture" of "glare", "flashiness," and "glitter," to which I will return, but also those of Whistler:

As the light fades and the shadows deepen, all petty and exacting details vanish, everything trivial disappears, and I see things as they are in great strong masses; the buttons are lost, but the garment remains; the garment is lost but the sitter remains; the sitter is lost but the shadow remains. And that night cannot efface from the painter's imagination. (cited in Eddy 1903, 214)

Something of this emphasis on "method" and "knowledge" can be discerned in the kind of rigor that Jacques Rivière saw as defining Proust's enterprise: "The title of his book, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, says everything; it implies a certain difficulty, an application, a method, an undertaking [that] implies a need of knowledge; it announces a discursive conquest of the reality pursued" (1960, 43).

Rivière goes on to describe Proust's "unfurling of lucidity and discernment" in terms that are similar to Freud's talking cure: "Proust plunge[s] into himself [and] ask[s] questions, explore[s], guess[es], recognize[s] and gradually explain[s] people and things to himself. His mind very gently eats away all that is obscure or opaque" (1960, 45). Certainly we should not lose sight of this aspect of *A la recherche*. However, as we saw in the previous chapter, it is for precisely her discursive powers that Albertine is punished. Marcel's attempts to fathom Albertine, then, come closer to Foucault's thesis in *The Order of Things* that rather than doing away with obscurity, scientific disciplines had in fact separated out our experience of the world into discrete entities.

Poe's use of science in his stories is characterized by similar ambivalences and seeming contradictions. His equal fascination with and suspicion of scientific discourse marks him out as belonging to the nineteenth century when, as C. A. Bayly comments, "science not only validated the establishment [but] was drawn upon by its opponents" (2004, 315). In this,

² The English translation "products" gives no sense of the ambiguity contained in Proust's reference to "les enfants." That the "products" of darkness and silence can be both children and art suggests, as I discussed in Chapter 3, and as I will go on to discuss further in this chapter, that the sexual and the textual became inextricably linked in Proust's conception of *A la recherche*.

if nothing else, Poe shares something of what Andrew Brown has said with regard to Flaubert's *Memoirs of a Madman* in which Flaubert "paid eloquent homage to madness as not just an escape from but a critique of a world in which industrialization and mechanization seemed increasingly to privilege calculative rationality" (Flaubert 2002, xvi). Whereas in "The Man That Was Used Up" Poe used advances in technology to fantastic effect, yet elsewhere in his writings he littered the text with references to scientific treatises in order to make them believable as fact rather than fiction. The discoveries of science and the technologies that were making their practical application a daily part of the modern world could not be ignored. And yet, as many of Poe's stories attest, the supernatural could not easily be glossed over.

Half a century after Poe's death in 1849, electricity was still being referred to in a guide to the 1900 Paris Exhibition as a magic fluid whose sorcery was white rather than black. Meanwhile, the International Psychological Institute heard a lecture by Emile Duclaux, head of the Pasteur Institute, in which Duclaux gave as much credence to telekinesis as the telephone (see Weber 1986, 74, 326). Even where science seemed guaranteed to pierce the penumbra of suspicion and fear, what was actually discovered was a lack of surety. For all that electricity successfully revives the dead in "The Premature Burial," our knowledge of death, Poe's narrator says, leads us to conclude that "the grim legion of sepulchral terrors cannot be regarded as altogether fanciful" (*CS*, 725). In "Mesmeric Revelation," far from satisfying the narrator's scientific curiosity, Mr. Vankirk, suspended as he is between life and death, only leaves him wondering whether "during the latter portion of his discourse [he had] been addressing me from out of the region of shadows" (*CS*, 711). Central to the games Poe plays in the story is his suggestion that a rational inquiry may be at odds with the resulting information, or that all attempts at logical inquiry inevitably lead to skepticism. In this Poe's writings seem strikingly similar to Nicola Luckhurst's description of *A la recherche* as "a rhapsody of knowledge [that] entails ... the failure of reason and the loss of the desire to know" (2000, 225).

"Mesmeric Revelation" disguises its fantastical elements through being a pastiche (even practical joke) at the expense of the kind of scientific reports regularly published in magazines and journals on both sides of the Atlantic. In any number of branches of research and study, the search (*la recherche*) was on for definable and distinguishable origins. Such a quest can be seen as literally defining Proust's novel. Over and above the rigorous examination of *mémoire involontaire* that lays the foundations for Marcel's

(re-)writing of modernity, there are, for example, his less progressive obsessions with the etymology of French place-names and his concern with the genetic origins of his nervousness, the source of which he comes to believe to be his aunt Léonie. Like Poe's narrator and mesmerist who, when told by Mr. Vankirk that if he is to ask questions he should begin at the beginning, cries, "The beginning! But where is the beginning?", scientists and scholars knew that the search for absolute points of origin was a not wholly credible concept. As the story goes on to conclude, while the "*rationale* of mesmerism, its startling *facts* are now almost universally admitted" (*CS*, 702) the result of such inquiries into the nature of matter remain, like Mr. Vankirk, caught in a no-man's land between science and faith: "You know that the beginning is GOD" (*CS*, 704).

Some similar slippage between science and superstition occurs with Marcel when discussing his aunt:

Ma tante Léonie, toute confite en dévotion et avec qui j'aurais bien juré que n'avais pas un seul point commun ... c'était, transmigrée en moi ... Quand nous avons dépassé un certain âge, l'âme de l'enfant que nous fûmes et l'âme des morts dont nous sommes sortis viennent nous jeter à poignée leurs richesses et leurs mauvais sorts, demandant à coopérer aux nouveaux sentiments que nous éprouvons et dans lesquels, effaçant leur ancienne effigie, nous les refondons en une création originale.

[Yes, Aunt Léonie, steeped in piety and with whom I would have sworn I did not have a single thing in common ... it was a soul transmigrated into me ... Once we pass a certain age, the soul of the child we used to be and the souls of the dead from whom we spring come and scatter over us handfuls of their riches and their misfortunes, asking to bear a part in the new feelings we are experiencing: feelings which allow us, rubbing out their old effigies, to recast them in an original creation.] (166r; V:67-68)

Art, Proust seems to be suggesting, arises out of the points where science and superstition meet. It is also a process whereby the new is overlaid on the old, creating a palimpsest that mirrors the ways in which genetic material is handed down through the generations. The old may, in one sense, be "effaçant," but Proust knew enough to realize that matter cannot be destroyed only reformulated. Hence in part the references in *A la recherche*

to a belief in the transmigration of souls. A similar preoccupation works its way through Poe's stories, notably "Ligeia," in which an unnamed narrator marries the eponymous heroine only for her to die after a brief marriage during which they study occult (or what we might call pre-scientific) forms of knowledge. The narrator remarries, only for wife number two, Rowena, to also die before rising from her bier in the form of Ligeia. As Richard Wilbur has commented, it is a story that is coherent without making the least bit of sense (1976, 50–51). The problem with Wilbur's *aperçu*, however, lies in his expectation that the facts of the story coincide with the rationale we expect from plot and characterization. Instead the story provides a perfect example of Gothic fiction's ability to sidestep the rational and in doing so highlight the ways in which conventional binaries do not explain our experience of ourselves and the world. As Fred Botting has commented:

This play of terms, of oppositions, indeed, characterizes the ambivalence of Gothic fiction: good depends on evil, light on dark, reason on irrationality, in order to define limits. The play means that Gothic is an inscription neither of darkness nor of light, a delineation neither of reason and morality nor of superstition and corruption, neither good nor evil, but both at the same time. Relations between real and fantastic, sacred and profane, supernatural and natural, past and present, civilized and barbaric, rational and fanciful, remain crucial to the Gothic dynamic of limit and transgression. (1996, 9)

This "both at the same time" quality is prevalent throughout *A la recherche*, nowhere more so than in the Narrator's description of Albertine's body. It is a description which leaves the reader unsure as to whether what we are being presented with is a body or a statue, organic or inorganic matter, human or vegetable, male or female:

Les deux petits seins haute remontés étaient si ronds qu'ils avaient moins l'air de faire partie intégrante de son corps que d'y avoir mûri comme deux fruits; et son ventre (dissimulant la place qui chez l'homme s'enlaidit comme du crampon resté fiché dans une statue descellée) se refermait, à la jonction des cuisses, par deux valves d'une courbe aussi assoupie, aussi reposante, aussi claustrale que celle de l'horizon quand le soleil a disparu.

[The two high little breasts were so round that they seemed not so much integral parts of her body as two fruits that had ripened there; and her belly (hiding the place which, in men, is made ugly by something like the metal pin left sticking out of a statue when it is removed from its mould) was closed, at the meeting of the thighs, by two curves as gentle, as restful, as cloistered as the horizon when the sun has disappeared.] (1661; V:68)

Like Wilbur's description of Poe's stories, Albertine's naked body is coherent while making no literal sense. It is a description that cannot be securely integrated into our reading of the novel. To try to find some authenticity in Proust's description, to locate an actual bodily presence, proves impossible. Something similar defines such stories as "Ligeia," "Berenicë," and "The Fall of the House of Usher." For in contrast to the Dupin stories which revolve around "victimized females and the accompanying attempts to restore order," these narratives spell "the loss of the female [and] final disintegration of any prevailing order" (*MRM*, xiii). That the passage describing the naked Albertine appears immediately after Marcel's realization that he is "possessed" by the soul of Aunt Léonie, and that art is a perpetual effacing and recasting of matter, only links Proust further to the ability of the Gothic to call into question both the integrity of our several ways of understanding the world and the integrity of that world and our integration in it. As summarized by David Van Leer, "Identity expressed [for Poe] not who a person *really* was but how a person could be a unit – how we wake up in the morning knowing ourselves to be the same consciousness that went to sleep the night before" (*ST*, xv). This remained an issue for Proust. It figures throughout *A la recherche* as both Marcel's anxiety about falling asleep and whether, waking up in a strange room, he will be able to remember who he is.

Marcel's suspicion that his aunt's soul has taken him over defines his relationship with women. In kissing Albertine, for example, what is revived is the memory of his mother's much-delayed goodnight kiss at Combray:

C'était un pouvoir d'apaisement tel que je n'en avais pas éprouvé de pareil depuis les soirs lointains de Combray où ma mère penchée sur mon lit venait m'apporter le repos dans un baiser.

[It was a calming effect so powerful that I had experienced nothing like it since the far-off evenings in Combray when my mother came and, leaning over my bed, brought me rest in a kiss.] (1659; V:66)

After Albertine's death come a succession of women each of whom attracts Marcel either because they resemble Albertine or are the kind of woman he imagines would have attracted her. Next are the women he cannot help but turn into versions of Albertine: the young Austrian woman he meets in Venice who soon begins to provoke in him the same anxieties and jealousies caused by Albertine (2094; V:613); or the unnamed mistress he keeps hidden away in his apartment in Paris "en souvenir d'Albertine oubliée" [in memory of the forgotten Albertine] (2116; V:642). Even Albertine, he discovers, represents some earlier inexpressible, petrifying experience of the Female:

D'ailleurs à Balbec, quand j'avais désiré connaître Albertine, la première fois, n'était-ce pas parce qu'elle m'avait semblé représentative de ces jeunes filles dont la vue m'avait si souvent arrêté dans les rues, sur les routes[.]

[Moreover in Balbec, when I had wanted to meet Albertine for the first time, was it not because she had seemed to me to stand for all the girls whose sight had so often rooted me to the spot in the street or in the road.] (2027; V:526)

Thus it is that in falling in love with Mlle d'Éporcheville, Marcel finds himself returning to his earlier inability at Balbec to be able to visualize the woman he desires: "[je n'aurais pas pu dire exactement comment était faite Mlle d'Éporcheville, je revoyais vaguement un blond visage aperçu de côté, mais j'étais amoureux fou d'elle" [I would have been incapable of saying exactly what Mlle d'Éporcheville looked like, I vaguely recalled a blonde head seen from the side, but I was madly in love with her] (2028; V:528).

All these are examples of the novel's belief in metempsychosis: "à l'appel de moments identiques, la perpétuelle renaissance de moments anciens" [the perpetual rebirth of moments from the past called forth by identical moments] (1964; V:445).³ Everything and everyone in the novel is in a

³ See also Proust's earliest description in a Preface to *Contre Sainte-Beuve* on the theory of involuntary memory: "ces heures du passé ne vont se blottir que dans des objets où l'intelligence n'a pas cherché à les incarner" [moments from the past go

perpetual state of becoming something or someone else. This is particularly true of women, calling forth either sexual anxiety – “Je pouvais presque croire que la personnalité sensuelle et volontaire de Gilberte avait émigré dans le corps d’Albertine” [I could almost believe that the somber and sensual personality and the cunning, willful character of Gilberte had returned to tempt me, incarnate this time in the body of Albertine] (1981; V:468) – or homicidal guilt – ‘Dans ces moments-là, rapprochant la mort de ma grand-mère et celle d’Albertine, il me semblait que ma vie était souillée d’un double assassinat” [In such moments, connecting my grandmother’s death with that of Albertine, it seemed to me that my life was besmirched by a double murder] (1977; V:463). It is a chain of associations that Marcel cannot imagine ever reaching an end:

Qui sait si alors les mêmes qualités de sang riche, de rêverie inquiète ne reviendraient pas un jour jeter le trouble en moi, mais incarnées cette fois en quelle forme féminine, je ne pouvais le prévoir

[Who knows then whether the same hot-blooded, restless, fantastical qualities might not return again one day to upset me, but incarnate this time in a feminine form which I could not yet foresee] (1982; V:469)

Like Gilberte before her, Albertine is destined to be “reincarnated” in the form of those other women whom Marcel desires until all these women culminate in the body of Mlle de Saint-Loup, Gilberte’s daughter and Odette’s granddaughter, who provides him with the insight necessary to begin work on his novel: “comme les individualités (humaines ou non) sont dans un livre faites d’impressions nombreuses” [that individual entities (whether human or not) in a book are made up of a large number of impressions] (2391; VI:344). Similarly Poe’s Ligeia is herself a composite: she is Homeric, Hebrew, Egyptian, Turkish. She represents “the many incomprehensible anomalies of the science of the mind” (*CS*, 352), and embodies “all the wide areas of moral, physical, and mathematical science” (*CS*, 354). Like Albertine, she is less a woman than a body of knowledge. She is encyclopedic, and this emphasis on the word becoming flesh (and vice versa) is a defining aspect of Poe and Proust.

to bury themselves only in objects which the intellect has not sought to embody them] (*CSB*, 213; *ASB*, 5).

Double trouble

Proust read Poe in Baudelaire's translations, the first of which, *Révélation magnétique* (*Mesmeric Revelation*), appeared in 1848, the year before Poe's death. Further stories, poems and essays followed in 1852 (*The Pit and the Pendulum*, *Berenicë* and "Philosophy of Furniture") and 1853 (*The Black Cat*, *Morella*, *The Tell-Tale Heart* and "The Raven"). In March and April 1852 the *Revue de Paris* published Baudelaire's essay "Edgar Allan Poe, sa vie et sa ouvrages," the first important study of Poe to appear in France; while between July 1854 and April 1855 *Le Pays* published a number of his increasingly admired if controversial translations. In 1856 Michel Lévy published *Histoires Extraordinaire* "par Edgar Poe, traduction de Baudelaire," with a revised version of Baudelaire's 1852 essay serving as introduction. *Les Nouvelles Histoires Extraordinaire* appeared in 1857, followed by *Les Aventures d'A. G. Pym* and *Eureka* in 1858. *Histoires Grotesques et Sérieuses* was published in 1865.

When we consider that among Poe's other translators were Mallarmé – who, it is said, learned English the better to read Poe – and Paul Valéry, it becomes clear that Poe's earliest advocates included among them the most influential French writers of three generations. Poe's presence can also be found in writers as diverse as Huysmans and Apollinaire, Jules Verne and Lautréamont, the Goncourt brothers and Villiers de l'Isle-Adam. Indeed, so resonant a figure was Poe that Alexandre Dumas claimed to have lived with him in Paris in the early 1830s. It is also notable that Poe's work was wide-ranging enough for his acolytes to have been influenced by differing aspects of his writings: his symbolism, his decadence, his aesthetic theories as spelled out in "Philosophy of Composition," his tales of terror, his tales of ratiocination, or as I have discussed, his ambivalent relationship with the literature of science. Neither was this a case of French writers deliberately wanting an American influence. Baudelaire for one was drawn to Poe because of his anti-Americanism, and he praised Poe for managing to write in "a country without a capital, properly speaking, and without an aristocracy" before going on to lambast America, "this newcomer in history," for having "a simple faith in the all-powerfulness of industry" (1964a, 73). It probably helped that Baudelaire was also able to find in Poe ideas that were "authentically" French, what Walter Sickert defined as the "French logic of curiosity" (2000, 180). Baudelaire was not alone in seeing such a connection. Of the generation of writers before Proust, Régis Massac isolated in Poe the influence of Boileau and Balzac, Rémy de Gourmont saw

“a lucid intelligence of the order of Pascal,” and the leading symbolist critic André Fontainas viewed Poe as a descendant of the French seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (see Quinn 1954, 34–35).

Eighteen months before his death, Proust wrote to Natalie Clifford Barney saying:

Je comprends votre admiration pour Pöe ... même ses livres de simple aventure comme *Arthur Gordon Pym* restent dans la désolation de ma vie, une des bénédictions du souvenir.

[I understand your admiration for Poe ... even his simple adventures such as *Arthur Gordon Pym* remains in the desolation of my life one of the blessings of memory] (*Corr XX*, 92; my translation).

We might wonder how often during the long nights of composing *A la recherche* Proust returned to Poe's story. A superficial comparison of the two books, unlikely as it might seem, would suggest that *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838) played something like the same role in providing an archetype for Proust as do the magic lantern show of Golo and Geneviève Brabant, *Les mille et une nuits*, George Sand's *François le Champi*, or Racine's *Esther* for Marcel. Indeed in Daniel Hoffmann's summary of *Pym*, we can be forgiven for thinking that it is Proust he is discussing:

his tale is a harrowing sequence of entombments ... and murder ... Most of these motifs are duplicated and reduplicated in a fashion like that of dreamwork. They seem obsessive ... full of learned and interesting disquisitions on ... geology and language, and [he] proves to be an observant recorder of the flora, fauna, and ... customs ... [H]e remains through most of his narrative a passive character, one to whom things happen ... He does not recognize where he is going or why ... It has been charged by critics that the *Narrative* is shapeless and chaotic, a sprawling mass of compulsive repetitions which betrays its author as an obsessive neurotic. (1972, 261)

Which is not to say that the comparisons between *Pym* and *A la recherche* are necessarily apparent from a summary of Poe's novella, telling as it does of five increasingly hazardous and supernatural journeys by boat of the eponymous hero. Still I wonder if *Pym's* sea voyages might not have “transmigrated” into *A la recherche*: the ships' wooden hulls becoming the

slats and headboards of Marcel's various beds at Combray, Balbec, Paris, Venice, and elsewhere. Similarly, Poe's dual authorial voice, divided as the writing of *Pym* is between the fictional Pym and textual Poe, echoes the blurring of Proust's own narrative between Marcel and the Narrator. We might also consider how Proust, a lifelong sufferer from debilitating asthma attacks, responded to Pym's obsessive fear of being buried alive, a terror that recurs throughout Poe's *oeuvre*:

My nerves became thoroughly unstrung, and I fell prey to perpetual horror. I hesitated to ride, or to walk, or to indulge in any exercise that would carry me from home. In fact, I no longer dared trust myself out of the immediate presence of those who were aware of my proneness to catalepsy, lest, falling into one of my usual fits, I should be buried before my real condition could be ascertained. (*CS*, 721)

Certainly the elaborate plans the narrator of "The Premature Burial" makes to mitigate his burial alive – "There were arrangements ... for the free admission of air and light, and convenient receptacles for food and water ... Besides all this, there was suspended from the roof of the tomb, a large bell, the rope of which, it was designed, should extend through a hole in the coffin, and so be fastened to one of the hands of the corpse" – are reminiscent of Marcel's nervousness when faced with a new bedroom, which is alluded to in terms akin to being trapped inside a coffin: "elle me torturait du cri de ses lamentations chaque fois que mes regards, ne pouvant se détourner de ce qui les blessait, essayaient de se poser au plafond inaccessible" [it tortured me with the din of its wailing every time my eyes, unable to look away from what affronted them, tried to reach that inaccessible ceiling] (534; II:250–251). As a result of this morbid fear, Marcel and his grandmother have an understanding at Balbec that, should he wake in the night, he will knock on the wall dividing their rooms and she will come to rescue him (531; II:247). Sleep, though, offers little respite from the anxieties of sleeplessness. It exists as a form of catalepsy or paralysis from which we come to ourselves only with superhuman effort: "Et souvent une heure de sommeil de trop est une attaque de paralysie après laquelle il faut retrouver l'usage de ses membres, apprendre à parler. La volonté n'y réussirait pas. On a trop dormi, on n'est plus" [And sometimes an hour of sleep is a paralytic stroke after which we must regain the use of our limbs, learn to speak again. Will is not enough. We have slept too long, we have ceased to

exist] (1694; V:109). If sleep, as Roger Shattock has said, parallels the Fall (2000, xvii), waking is a resurrection from the dead.

Images of entombment abound in Proust. In 1921, for example, while correcting the proofs of *Le Côte de Guermantes II* and *Sodome et Gomorrhe I*, he wrote to Émile Mâle: “Je viens de passer de longues années véritablement au tombeau, où je suis toujours. Je n’ai même pas la force de corriger de mon lit les épreuves de mes livres” [I’ve just spent long years literally in the tomb, where I still am. I don’t even have the strength to correct the proofs of my books from my bed] (*Corr.* XX:297; *SL*, IV:225). In addition there is Céleste Albaret’s description of Proust in her memoir of him, a book that vividly captures the extremes of his illness and the crippling demands his eccentric lifestyle imposed on others. To read Albaret is to be reminded not only of Baudelaire’s description of Poe’s “aristocratic mien and the perfumed atmosphere of his rooms,” but to see Proust transposed to the hallucinatory world of Poe’s fiction:

when he woke up, M. Proust ... burned fumigation powder ... The only light was from a bedside lamp, and that gave just a little glow, through a green shade ... His face was hidden in the shadows and the smoke from the fumigation, completely invisible except for the eyes looking at me – and I felt rather than saw them. (1976, 16)

In turn, the effect of Proust’s lifestyle was to provoke in Albaret the sensation of being herself buried alive: “I felt as if I’d been transported back into the quarry, amid the color of the sliced earth, with the noise all shut out behind me” (1976, 17).

Returning to Proust’s evocation of reading Poe, it is worth considering why he chose to be so effusive about *Pym* to Natalie Barney. The clue lies in the fact that Barney had first written to Proust in sending him an unexpurgated copy of her novel *Pensées d’une amazone* (1920), with a note which reads: “To Marcel Proust, whose understanding merits this unexpurgated copy – between pages 72 and 73 ... Where he will find himself mentioned” (cited in Carter 2000, 724). Proust would have known of Barney’s reputation and openly gay lifestyle, both of which can only have interested and influenced him when writing about Odette’s and Albertine’s adventures on the sexual high seas. Like Albertine, Barney represented an aspect of the “modern woman,” typified, as I will discuss in Chapter 5, by the “amazon” and female dandy.

How Proust felt about being “outed” by Barney we can only imagine.

We know that he was sensitive to suggestions in print that he was homosexual, particularly when it threatened his reputation as a writer. Hence his duel in 1897 with the gay poet, critic, and journalist Jean Lorrain after Lorrain suggested in an article in *Le Journal* that Proust and Lucien Lemaire, the son of Proust's illustrator for the book, were lovers. That the article also included virulent criticism of *Les Plaisirs et les jours* must have contributed to Proust becoming adept at blurring the fine distinction between the self as author and as the subject of writing. As he wrote Rosny Aîné in June 1921, thanking him for a copy of an article Aîné had dedicated to Proust: "Vous dites que l'œuvre d'art reflète son auteur et c'est absolument vrai; mai cet auteur n'est pas tout à fait l'«homme» qui se montrait à ses contemporains" [You say that the work of art reflects its author and this is absolutely true; but that author is not the whole of the man whom he shows to his contemporaries] (*Corr.* XX:335; my translation). Significantly, Aîné's essay, which was concerned with literature and science, included a discussion of Poe.

The sense that an author has to bury or disguise aspects of himself is hardly surprising given that contemporary science saw homosexuality as a "sort of schizophrenia" (Rivers 1980, 164). Proust's interest in the double or *Doppelgänger*, however, goes much further. While it is one among a number of Gothic conventions he inherited from Poe, his incorporation of doubles is much more highly charged and motivated – obsessive, even – than is accounted for by simple narrative expediency. We might even say that in using them Proust was taking Pym/Poe as an alter ego. Certainly the theme of the *Doppelgänger* dominates *Pym*, where there are in fact two sets of doubles: Pym and Augustus, the decadent young man who first entices him to deceive and defy his family and set sail; and Pym and Dirk Peters, who rescues Pym from drowning. Variations on the theme can be found in any number of Poe's narratives, not least the three Dupin stories. This is nothing, however, to the abundance of doubles that stalk the pages of *A la recherche*: Marcel (character)/Marcel (author); Marcel/Narrator; Marcel/Albertine; Albertine/Morel; Morel/Marcel; Charlus/Swann; Swan/Marcel; Charlus/Saint-Loup; Saint-Loup/Marcel; Odette/the "lady in pink"; Odette/Miss Sacripant; Elstir/M. Biche, and so on. The effect is to turn the novel into nothing less than a bewildering hall of mirrors.

Pierre-Edmond Robert has written about Proust's "doubling" of characters in the context of Oscar Wilde. Robert is interested in the way in which Wilde used the double to portray "l'hédonisme" (for which we can read the kinds of "decadent" behavior discussed in the previous chapter)

through “la double figure de Lord Henry, le tentateur [the tempter],” and Dorian Gray, “le jeune homme dont le portrait s’enlaidit à mesure de ses turpitudes” [the young man the ugliness of whose portrait is a measure of his depravity] (1976, 35; my translation). Such doubling of characters, particularly male characters, also forms part of Leslie Fiedler’s study of a homoerotic undercurrent to American literature. Fiedler included Poe among his subjects and his ground-breaking – and initially controversial – study has recently been used as the basis for a reading of Poe’s novella by Brad Lint. What is significant about Lint’s essay is his refusal to “ascribe a fixed sexual identity to Pym or his compatriots,” arguing that “the destabilization of sexuality seems sufficient for a queer reading” (2006, 55). There are obvious comparisons here with Proust’s own narrative strategies when it comes to ascribing sexual identity, as there are between the same-sex bonding/doubling that underpins *Pym* and Proust’s lifelong infatuations (which as far as we know were not always either reciprocated or consummated) with male friends.

There is another context for making such a reading available to *A la recherche*. Emily Eells’s study of Proust and what she suggestively terms “Anglosexuality” scrutinizes Proust’s use of intertextual borrowings, or “writing double,” to “lend respectability to the sections of his novel pertaining to homosexuality” (2002, 89). Though Eells does not refer to the Gothic *per se*, she does discuss the influence on Proust of Walter Scott and Robert Louis Stevenson (as does Pierre-Edmond Robert), both of whom contributed to developments in Gothic fiction in the nineteenth century (89–112). If we apply what Eells says to Poe (who seems no more or less a figure of “respectability” than Baudelaire, one of the figures Eells discusses), we can appreciate how Proust made use of Poe’s versions of Gothic to “write double” in the widest possible sense of the term.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has convincingly argued that the Gothic was for over a century the only literary form in English to have “close, relatively visible links to male homosexuality, at a time when styles of homosexuality, and even its visibility and distinctness, were markers of division and tension” (1985, 91). I say English rather than England, as this was the case for writers as otherwise diverse as Horace Walpole, Lord Byron, Herman Melville, and Oscar Wilde, whose sexual orientation was either, like the contents of Poe’s purloined letter, an open secret or one much speculated upon. In part, Sedgwick’s argument is that the Gothic allowed male and female writers an outlet for the expression of a “homosexual panic” that was in reality an anxiety about representations of

heterosexuality (Freud 1990, 193). That Lacan for one saw such anxieties as dependent on, and proceeding from, the mirror-stage returns us, if in a rather literal way, to the motif of the double. Indeed, there is a close proximity between Lacan's analysis of "Aggressivity in psychoanalysis" and any number of Poe's stories. The "images of castration, mutilation, dismemberment, dislocation, evisceration, devouring, bursting open of the body" that Lacan groups together under the structural term of "imagos of the fragmented body" are defining features of Poe's fiction (1977, 11). Such explicit violence may seem a long way removed from Proust's Faubourg. As we saw in the previous chapter, however, throughout *A la recherche* – whether in terms of the "homosexual panic" that drives Saint-Loup to his death in the trenches, or Marcel being haunted by the idea that it is his "hédonisme" that has made him a murderer – sexuality and violence are all but synonymous.

Evidence of "l'hédonisme" is woven like a fine thread through a number of Poe's stories. In "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," for example, there are several references to Plato's *Symposium*, one of the great disquisitions on same-sex desire (which, interestingly, Barney refers to in the same passage of *Pensées d'une amazone* as she mentions Proust) and, as David Van Leer notes, one of the origins of the *Doppelgänger* theme in literature (*ST*, 330 n. 97). Altogether less obvious is the reference in the same story to the "fruiterer" who describes a character called Chantilly, a cobbler with aspirations to play tragic roles on the stage, as being "not of sufficient height for Xerxes *et id genus omne*" (*CS*, 478). Xerxes and *all his kind* is both the fruiterer's opinion of Chantilly's acting skills (i.e. he isn't up to tragic roles) and a suggestion of effeminacy on the part not only of Chantilly, but also Poe's narrator.

Where Van Leer sees Poe's narrator as unconsciously expressing his fear about the sexual ambiguity of his relationship with Dupin, Graham Robb's reading of the story is wholly unambiguous both in terms of the closeted gay subject matter and it being a celebration of gay relationships at a time when references to homosexuality in print depicted characters with names like "Beefsteak Pete" or the "Man Monster." Robb's, then, is a reading of Poe that seems profoundly Emersonian given, as discussed in Chapter 2, the close parallels that existed for Emerson between friendship, reading, and homosexuality.

In Robb's ludic and illuminating commentary, "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" becomes, like Eells's Anglosexuality, writ double:

The murder story can now be seen as a symbolic reflection of the whole. Just as the “man” who commits the murders is not a man, the man who solves them is not a man either in the normal sense of the word. Two “wild” things are alive in the city (the adjective is applied twice to Dupin and twice to the [orang-utan]): one of them has very large hands, tawny hair and the strength of a lunatic; the other is a nocturnal creature with heightened senses and unusual mating habits. (2003, 259)

Though Proust was himself incapable of creating a gay character unaffected by self-loathing, and he himself equated homosexuality with criminality and prostitution, still we can see that he must have been influenced by one of the founding texts of the Urban Gothic.⁴ Indeed the influence of Poe’s story seems decisive when we recall that Morel, during a fit of murderous rage against his fiancée, is described as “un orang-utang” (1748; V:175) – the very animal that commits the crime Dupin is bent upon solving.

Economies of desire

Harold Bloom, deeply antithetical to Poe as both a man and a writer, while referring to Emerson as “the mind of America,” isolates in Poe “our hysteria, our uncanny unanimity in our repressions” (1985, 5). The mention of hysteria has implications for a reading of Proust. For if, as Rachel Bowlby has written, hysteria is a “ghost” that “never [stops] coming back, in every kind of guise and disguise ... to haunt with the shadow of its strangeness” (2004, xxvii, xxxi), we can associate it with the examples of the transmigration of souls discussed earlier and the wider implications of *mémoire involontaire*. In the resonant words of Freud and Breuer, Marcel is one of those “[h]ysterics

⁴ With Marcel’s parents’ apartment a version of the Gothic castle transposed to bourgeois Paris, Proust was clearly influenced by the trend in nineteenth-century Gothic writing to create narratives that center on the urban and domestic. Certainly it is possible to read the *roman d’Albertine* as a development of the genre, one containing the essential elements of “usurpation, intrigue, betrayal and murder ... criminal behavior, violent executions of carnal desire [and] blurred definitions of reason and morality” (Botting 1996, 6). Another variation executed by Proust is to internalize the labyrinthine narrative of Gothic fiction. The complexity of the *roman d’Albertine* lies not so much in external events but in the tortuous and circuitous paths of Marcel’s jealousy and love.

[that] suffer for the most part from reminiscence" (2004, 10). His efforts at reading these memories, however, are frustrated. It is as though they were a locked book inscribed with the closing words of Poe's "The Man of the Crowd": "*er lässt sich nicht lesen*" [you shall not read] (*CS*, 450).

Hysteria, as Botting has said about the Gothic, is "a writing of excess" that struggles to withhold from us its origin. There are other connections to be made between hysteria and this excess of signification as it appears first in Poe and then in Proust. A key text in these terms is "The Purloined Letter," several references to which appear in *A la recherche* in relation to the novel's depiction of inversion and Marcel's inability to recognize its presence and influence. Before examining these, however, I want to return to Marcel's pursuit of the fugitive Albertine, and the ways in which she represents those troubling aspects of modernity mentioned at the close of my previous chapter.

Poe's "Philosophy of Furniture" is critical of the "*glare*," "*flashiness*," and "*glitter*" of contemporary America (though having italicized each of these words he lends them precisely the attribute he condemns) either in the form of gas ("The light proceeding from one of these gaudy abominations is unequal, broken, and painful"), or glass ("The huge and unmeaning glass chandeliers ... which dangle in our most fashionable drawing-rooms, may be cited as the quintessence of all that is false or preposterous in folly") (*CS*, 439). We need only compare Emerson's celebration in "Experience" of the "evanescence and lubricity of all objects" to Poe's sense of the "unequal, broken and painful" to recognize how out of sorts with the transcendentalists was Poe. Just what is it, though, that Poe is frightened of seeing, or of having someone else see? What has he to hide?

That the detective novel is bound up with the domestic interior was commented on by Walter Benjamin with particular reference to Poe's essay:

To dwell means to leave traces. In the interior, these are accentuated. Coverlets and antimacassars, cases and containers are devised in abundance; in these, the traces of the most ordinary objects of use are imprinted. In just the same way, the traces of inhabitants are imprinted in the interior. Enter the detective story, which pursues these traces. Poe, in his "Philosophy of Furniture" as well as in his detective fiction, shows himself to be the first physiognomist of the domestic interior[.] (1999a, 9)

Benjamin's comments are an invaluable guide to the Dupin trilogy, each of which in its own way describes a domestic crime. As such we are taken to the very heart of the world Proust creates in the *roman d'Albertine*: a series of literal and metaphorical closed or locked spaces shut off from the light of day in which experiments are carried out into the nature of sexuality and guilt.

In "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt" Dupin and the narrator are visited at home by the Prefect of Police, G. Engaged in research which has "absorbed our whole attention," the narrator adds that "it had been nearly a month since either of us had gone abroad" (*CS*, 547). Nor will they do so in the course of Dupin's ultimately frustrated attempts at solving the mystery. The association between the story and "Philosophy of Furniture" could not be clearer: "Those who are guilty of such horrid crimes," Dupin tells the narrator, "choose darkness rather than light" (*CS*, 551). That Dupin himself prefers night to day, and sits in darkness without lighting a lamp, forces us to consider his own potential criminality.

The comparisons between Poe's stated ideal in the essay and the facts of Proust's retirement from the world into the cloistered rooms of first 102 Boulevard Hausmann and then 44 rue Hamelin seem too good to be true. Walter Benjamin certainly saw Proust's immersion in his "work of recollection" in terms that mirror "Philosophy of Furniture": "Proust ... turned his days into nights, devoting all his hours to undisturbed work in his darkened room with artificial illumination, so that none of those intricate arabesques might escape him" (1999b, 238). Liking Proust to Homer's Penelope, who also worked by night, the "arabesques" to which Benjamin refers are the warp and the weft of remembering and forgetting. We might then ask not so much what Poe and Proust are hoping to hide but what it is they struggle to forget to remember.

John Seelye has commented that "Poe's obsession with the death of beautiful maidens was not so much inspired as necessitated by [his mother's] premature demise, an eroticized bereavement with overtones of Oedipal desire, reminding us that 'Eddy Poe' (as his adopted mother-aunt, Maria Clemm, called him) is a pun on 'Oedipus'" (*CS*, xv). Similarly, Marie Bonaparte, in her full-length psychoanalytical study of Poe, rooted his fiction in the facts of his troubled life, specifically the death of his mother when he was less than three years old. The crux of Bonaparte's reading is that the early death of Elizabeth Poe left her son a necrophilist, someone for whom corpses held an erotic attraction. Unable to accept the fact of her death, Poe's stories all narrate the same

unconscious tale: “[It] is as though Poe himself were to declare ‘Because I am fixated on my mother, I cannot love another woman’” (1949, 655). This “mad desire” or “dark continent’ *par excellence*,” as Kristeva calls the relationship with the Mother, becomes in Poe’s “The Black Cat” a “homely narrative” from which the narrator neither expects nor looks to solicit belief. A key story for Bonaparte in revealing the “dream-work” of Poe’s fiction, it tells of an anonymous narrator who wishes simply to “place before the world, plainly, succinctly, and without comment, a series of mere household events” (CS, 648). These events, however, tell of a man who has murdered his wife (“I ... buried the axe in her brain”) and who, rather than “cutting the corpse into minute fragments ... determined to wall it up in the cellar” (CS, 654).

In this and other stories by Poe, the “homely” (Freud’s *heimlich*) becomes the quintessential setting for what Botting, with regard to the conventions of Gothic, calls “psychodramas of diseased imaginings and deluded visions that take grotesque fantasies to spectral extremes. [A] morbid fascination with darkly exotic settings mirroring extreme states of disturbed consciousness and imaginative excess, presenting fatal beauties, bloody hauntings, premature entombment and ghastly metempsychosis” (1996, 119–120).

Gothic draws a clear correlation between the house and the human. “A man’s house,” comments the narrator of Sarah Orne Jewett’s story “Along Shore,” “is really but his larger body, and expresses in a way his nature and his character” (cited in Brown 2003, 104). That Jewett’s narrator is commenting on a house that has become a kind of museum to preserve the memory of a dead wife only brings the sentiment closer to the world of Poe, in which so many houses have “memorialized” within them the dismembered bodies of women, or the bodies of women buried alive. It also connects us to *Albertine disparue* where, following Albertine’s disappearance, every object in the apartment embodies a separate memory of her (1927; V:397–398).

As discussed in Chapter 3, a key moment for Proust during the “incubation” period of *A la recherche* in 1907/08 was his fascination with the murder of Mme Van Blarenberghé at the hands of her son, Henri. The details of the crime read like something out of Poe: servants of the family had found the mother covered in blood, and with her last breath she had accused Henri, who, meanwhile, had stabbed and shot himself. Henri was interrogated by police as he lay dying, his left eye dangling from the socket onto a pillow. Written at the suggestion of Gaston Calmette, editor of

Le Figaro, “without doing a draft, straight on to the *Figaro*’s copy paper” (Carter 2000, 419), Proust’s article, “Sentiments filiaux d’un parricide” [Filial Sentiments of a Parricide], was published on February 1, 1907, and clearly justifies Walter Benjamin’s comment, “there was something of the detective in Proust’s curiosity. The upper ten thousand were to him a clan of criminals” (1999b, 243).

Proust described the murder of Mme van Blarenberghe as having taken place in “a pure and religious atmosphere of moral beauty.” In this we can discern an echo of Poe’s credo in “Philosophy of Composition,” that “the death ... of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world” (*FHU*, 436). Writing the article marked, as Proust wrote in a letter to Lucien Daudet, a thawing of the writer’s block that had gripped him since the publication of his translation of Ruskin’s *Sesame and Lilies* in 1906. For Proust, as for Poe, the death of a mother resulted in the necessity of invention. It is certainly the case that Proust’s article has been mistaken for a work of fiction by at least one editor.⁵ Read in the context of such tales as “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt,” where the brutal murder of a woman is recounted from newspaper reports, “The Black Cat,” where the sublimated sexual desire of the man for a woman become figured in the image of a damaged eyeball, or “The Purloined Letter,” where the act of writing is analogous to both criminal acts and their detection, we can see that it is an easy mistake to make.

Ingrid Wassenaar, however, has voiced some criticism of the ways in which “Sentiments filiaux d’un parricide” has been seized upon as a “ghostly *avant-textes* which might be ... triumphantly held aloft as proof of Marcel Proust’s ambivalence towards his mother” (2000, 13). Wassenaar’s argument is premised on her belief that such readings betray “the underlying misogyny at work in this kind of criticism.” We might agree that misogyny is at work here, but I would suggest that Wassenaar is deflecting such criticisms from Proust and blaming his readers for coming to conclusions that are very difficult to avoid: that *A la recherche* is, if not a misogynistic novel, then one in which misogyny is writ as deep and large as the wounds on Marie Rogêt’s corpse. The Female as “Other” in Proust is unarguably the site of powerful male anxieties which necessitate her being kept under careful scrutiny. She

⁵ Obviously unaware of the provenance of Proust’s article, Charles Neider writes in his Introduction to *Great Short Stories of the Masters*: “It’s hard to know how much of Proust’s story is autobiographical and how much not, but it hardly matters” (2002, n.p.).

must be contained, analyzed, investigated, and, if all else fails, punished. One might love a woman, as Proust did his mother and as Marcel does Albertine, but one may still go in fear and distrust of the emotions contained in the verb “to love.” If this happens, it is likely to be the object of the emotion rather than the emotion itself that is subject to attack.

This is a long way from Baudelaire’s praise of the sexless narratives of Poe’s stories: “Poe’s chivalrous respect for women is borne out by the fact that ... there is not a single passage in the whole of his works that touches on lewdness or even on the delights of the senses” (1964A, 85). In returning to “The Black Cat,” however, and Daniel Hoffman’s discussion of the significance of Poe’s narrator carving out the eye of the eponymous animal, a whole world of sexual anxiety, fear, and loathing opens beneath us like a trap door:

A frightened cat would be likely to scratch its owner, but narrator [*sic*] is goaded to cut out its eye not by a scratch but by a *bite*. But see, there’s more to chew on here than at first glance appeared. As Mme Bonaparte intuited, identifying the cat’s mouth as the feared *vagina dentata*[.] (1972, 233)

Hoffman goes on to look at other incidences of mutilation in Poe’s stories, in particular “Berenicë” where the narrator desecrates the tomb of his wife (who, we discover, far from being dead was buried alive) and removes her teeth. The coincidence of eyes and teeth leads Hoffman to put two and two together:

Consider in what ways mouth and eye resemble each other. Each is an orifice in the body, surrounded by lips or lids which seem to open and close by a will of their own. Each is lubricated with a fluid of its own origin, and each leads inward ... The thought may occur which other orifice of the body – of the female body – these two ... might be conceived to resemble. And let us propose for the purpose of this investigation, a male ratiocinator who is rendered incapable of referring to, of dealing with, of describing, of touching, that female part – rendered so by a fear, a terror, a hysteria so pervading that he must obsessively dwell on what he cannot bring himself to touch[.]

Though Hoffman is as cagey about female anatomy as Proust’s Narrator when it comes to describing the naked Albertine, his reading offers some

kind of answer to the question Jessica Benjamin poses in *Like Subjects, Love Objects*: “Why do images of death and violence inspire sexual excitement?” In doing so it turns the question on its head: because sexual excitement inspires images of death and violence. Quoting Bataille, Benjamin argues that death is a reference to the loss of differentiation between self and other: “Eroticism opens the way to death. Death opens the way to the denial of our individual lives. Without doing violence to our inner selves, are we able to bear a negation that carries us to the farthest bounds of possibility” (1995, 181–182). That Bataille does not mean death in the literal sense but “the fusion of separate objects,” and by this the dissolution of the self, provides us with a model for reading not only the sadomasochistic relationship between Marcel and Albertine but all Marcel’s relationships with women. It is Marcel, after all, who fantasizes about cutting Giselle into pieces so that he can get to the truth about Albertine (1738; V:163). The comparison with “The Mystery of Marie Rogêt” is telling. A fictionalized account of the real-life murder of a New York shop girl, Mary Rogers, transposed by Poe to Paris, the story associates crime with language, writing, and books: Marie is murdered because she was too “discursive” in her walks through the city; her supposed murderers are “guilty authors”; and the evidence found at the crime scene is “deposited as if upon shelves” (CS, 172, 182).

“Perpetual masochism,” wrote Proust’s friend Prince Antoine Bibesco, “that is Marcel’s conception of love, a conception sinister enough, in which the role of Sherlock Holmes is doubled with that of Othello” (cited in Davenport-Hines 1996, 93). I would also want to suggest further connections between Poe, Proust, and Bataille’s *Eroticism*. Inasmuch as Dupin’s work is combating violence, the *Tales of Ratiocination* contribute to what Bataille has to say about the “world of work or reason to which another world of violence was opposed. Certainly death is like disorder in that it differs from the orderly arrangements of work.” In a footnote Bataille adds that the world of work or reason equates to the profane, while that of violence is the sacred (2001, 45). This undercurrent of violence will keep breaking through into the rational world, despite or even because of the various taboos established to counter it. This is the nature of Dupin’s analysis of the three crimes against women that he investigates; and there are also clear parallels with the sadomasochism that Marcel sees dictating the sexual lives of characters as varied as Charlus, Mlle Vinteuil, and even Swann. Similarly in his own unconscious life, it can be argued that the taboo against incest merely defers rather than overcomes the violent desire Marcel feels for the Mother. Hence the importance of what I had to say

in the previous chapter about the relationship between death or illness and Marcel's efforts at making art *work* for him. Work, in Bataille's words,

demands the sort of conduct where effort is in a constant ratio with productive efficiency. It demands rational behavior where the wild impulses worked out on feast days and usually in games are frowned upon. If we were unable to repress these impulses we should not be able to work, but work introduces the very reason for repressing them. These impulses confer an immediate satisfaction on those who yield to them. Work, on the other hand, promises to those who overcome them a reward later on whose value cannot be disputed except from the point of view of the present moment. (2001, 41)

Thus the "games" Marcel plays with Albertine, including their acting out scenes from Racine's *Esther* with its implied violence, are a way of repressing the violence Marcel feels. But as Bataille says, and as Vinteuil's sonata proves in its various incarnations throughout the novel, a result of such work is a need for increased vigilance against those impulses from which it safeguards us.

In *A la recherche* physical violence against women is rarely far from the thoughts of a number of the male characters. Morel's murderous, ape-like rage against his fiancée has been commented on. More surprising are the bouts of crippling jealousy that afflict Swann and lead to his wanting to subject Odette to the same punishment as Poe's cat: "il éprouvait de la haine pour Odette, il aurait voulu crever ses yeux qu'il aimait tant tout à l'heure, écraser ses joues sans fraîcheur" [he felt he hated Odette, he would have liked to cut out those eyes of hers that he had loved so much just a moment ago, crush those pallid cheeks] (303; I:381). Even the dream Swann has, which prompts the realization that he has wasted the best years of his life for a woman who was not his type, leaves him with a lasting impression of Odette as a living cadaver returned, like Madeleine Usher, from the grave: "il repensa à son rêve, il revit, comme il les avait sentis tout près de lui, le teint pâle d'Odette, les joues trop maigres, les traits tirés, les yeux battus" [he thought about his dream again, and saw once again, as he had felt close beside him, Odette's pale complexion, her too thin cheeks, her drawn features, her tired eyes] (304-305; I:383).

Evidently for Proust as for Bataille, murder is "the pinnacle of erotic excitement" (2001, 18). From the frank depiction of Jupien and Charlus fucking ("j'aurais pu croire qu'une personne en égorgeait une autre à côté

de moi et qu'ensuite le meurtrier et sa victime ressuscitée prenaient un bain pour effacer les traces du crime" [I might have thought that one person was slitting another's throat close beside me and that the murderer and his resuscitated victim were then taking a bath in order to erase the traces of the crime] (1215; IV:13) to the sadomasochistic affair between Mlle Vinteuil and her unnamed lover – a relationship that later, with disastrous consequences for Marcel, implicates Albertine – Proust's genius speaks of and for a concern with the relationship between sexual desire and aggression.

Such are the similarly uncomfortable conclusions of Freud's *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), where, in a footnote to section IV, he states that

erotic relations are often associated with a degree of direct aggression, quite apart from the sadistic component that properly belongs to them. Faced with such complications, the love-object will not always be as understanding and tolerant as the farmer's wife who complained that her husband no longer loved her because he had not beaten her for a week. (2002c, 43).

This last sentence brings to mind aspects of the relationship between Marcel and Albertine. Not that physical beatings characterize their affair; rather, the same balance between the sadistic and the outwardly aggressive or controlling reported by Freud is seen as fundamental to Marcel's desire for Albertine and, we must suppose, in her reciprocation for, or passivity in the face of, his feelings. The "moral," then, of the *roman d'Albertine* is similar to that of Freud: aggression is accompanied by intense erotic pleasure; it breaks down the boundaries between self and other, giving a voice to the need to possess and control. It is a version of reality – paranoid, obsessive, irrational, overwhelmed by guilt, morbid, and hypochondriacal – that parallels the universe of Poe's stories.

Nowhere is such paranoia more explicit than in *La Prisonnière*, where the language of criminality and Poe's detective fiction runs parallel with Marcel's suspicions that Albertine's sexuality is too "discursive." Albertine's potential female lovers are "complices" [accomplices] (1618; V:15); the Narrator talks about "livre à ce genre de causeries investigatrices" [engaging in investigative conversations] (1620; V:16) with Albertine; Andrée and Marcel's chauffeur "de surveiller Albertine" [keep watch on Albertine] (1620; V:17); and Albertine's words become "un alibi qui n'avait pas été donné sans intention" [an alibi which must have been given for a purpose] (1666; V:75). In addition to the team of scientific experts Marcel becomes in order to analyze Albertine,

he must also discover within himself “un préfet de police ... un chef de la Sûreté, qui au lieu de rêver aux possibles que recèle l’étendue jusqu’aux quatre points cardinaux, raisonne juste” [a prefect of police ... a head of criminal investigations who, instead of letting his mind wander among all the possibilities between here and the four corners of the universe, reasons logically] (1620; V:17).

But like the Dupin of “The Purloined Letter,” Marcel’s attempts at solving Albertine’s “crime” inexorably lead to him acting himself in a criminal way. This is most notable following Albertine’s disappearance, when Marcel lures a young girl whom he finds stationed outside Albertine’s house back to his own apartment. The child’s parents report Marcel to the police, and he is grilled by the chief inspector in their presence. Only the difficulty of bringing a charge allows him to escape prosecution. Nevertheless when the parents leave “le chef de la Sûreté qui aimait les petites filles changea de ton et me réprimandant comme un compère” [the chief inspector, who had a weakness for little girls, changed his tone of voice and reprimanded me as a partner in crime] (1938; V:412). In a neat reversal of Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd,” where it is the narrator who detects crime in the faces of the anonymous urban dwellers, Marcel is suddenly aware that “[Tous les passants, jusqu’à ce que je fusse rentré, me parurent des inspecteurs chargés d’épier mes faits et gestes” [Every stranger I passed on the way home seemed to be a police inspector spying on my every act and gesture]. His paranoia grows until he wonders whether he isn’t in actual fact guilty of pedophilia:

Mais tout à coup, par une confusion dont je ne m’avisai pas (je ne songeai pas en effet qu’Albertine, étant majeure, pouvait habiter chez moi et même être ma maîtresse), il me sembla que le détournement de mineures pouvait s’appliquer aussi à Albertine. Alors la vie me parut barrée de tous les côtés.

[But suddenly, in a moment of unwitting confusion (for in fact I had never imagined that if Albertine had not been over the age of consent, she would have lived with me, let alone been my mistress), I thought that “the seduction of minors” could also refer to Albertine. Thus my life seemed walled in on all sides.] (1940; V:414)⁶

⁶ All of which might remind us of John Seelye’s description of Poe as “a man who fell in love with child-women and was prone to sentimental postures ending in a prat-fall” (see *CS*, vii).

It is an apprehension of his own guilt and complicity that leaves Marcel feeling hemmed in on all sides, as though he were buried alive like any number of characters in Poe.

Don't look now

The dialectic between the willed and the involuntary intrigued Walter Benjamin. Referring to Freud's comment in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* that memories are "often most powerful and most enduring when the incident which left them behind was one that never entered consciousness," Benjamin goes on to develop a theory of "the shock factor" against which consciousness has ever to be on guard. "Shock," in Benjamin's terms, like Beard's American Nervousness, is an expression of, and a symptom arising from, our encounters with the disorientating metropolis of modernity.

There are also elements here that return us to the discussion of art and science at the beginning of this chapter. As Susan Sontag wrote, such efforts as have been made to fashion a "new (potentially unitary) kind of sensibility" that will join science and art are rooted in the nineteenth century with its "extreme social and physical mobility; in the crowdedness of the human scene [and] in the availability of new sensations such as speed" (2001, 296). Sontag's "unitary sensibility" might be read as a late-twentieth-century version of Baudelaire's theory of *correspondences*. Certainly Benjamin, one of Sontag's heroes, believed that modernity's greatest poet was Baudelaire, and that behind Baudelaire stood the figure of Poe and "The Man of the Crowd." What attracted Baudelaire to the story, Benjamin believed, was the character of the narrator: a recovering invalid who, while looking through the window of a London coffee-house, becomes absorbed in the milling crowd.⁷ One male face in particular fascinates him, and he decides to follow the man as he walks across the city. For a day and a night he tracks him, in a way that is reminiscent of a detective trailing a criminal. The analogy is born out by the story's enigmatic concluding sentences:

⁷ In the same journal entry in which he associated electric lighting in the Place de la Concorde with funeral tapers illuminating "a Road of Souls of which I had read a description in Poe," Edmond de Goncourt goes on to describe what can be called the Americanization of Paris: "the tangle of thousands of carriages, the jostling crowds on the pavements, the crush of people on the tops of the trams and omnibuses, the procession on foot or awheel [*sic*] of a multitude of human beings silhouetted against the golden letters of the shopfronts, with, in the darkness, the agitated, hurried awakening, the movement, the life of Babylon" (1980, 314–315).

And, as the shades of the second evening came on, I grew wearied unto death, and, stopping fully in front of the wanderer, gazed at him steadfastly in the face. He noticed me not, but resumed his solemn walk, while I, ceasing to follow, remained absorbed in contemplation. "This old man," I said at length, "is the type and genius of deep crime. He refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd* ["] (CS, 450).

Having given in to a lonely impulse, Poe's narrator is presented with the fact that at the heart of the metropolis is a manifestation of some nameless crime. Why does he choose to follow the anonymous stranger? Pure chance. Where does this chance lead? To the same recognition which, Benjamin says, were the emotions of the first people to observe urban life at close quarters: "Fear, revulsion, and horror." It is also important to note how similar is Baudelaire's summary of "The Man of the Crowd" in "Le peintre de la vie moderne" to events in *A la recherche*: Poe's narrator, like Marcel after his retreat to a sanatorium following Albertine's death and his subsequent return to Paris some years later, finds himself "on the brink of total oblivion ... and fervently desires to remember everything" (1964c, 7). More importantly it is the method of this "remembrance" toward which our attention is drawn.

At the outset of the Dupin trilogy, Poe foregrounds the differences between Dupin and other detectives by drawing an analogy between two different ways of playing chess or card games.

To observe attentively is to remember distinctly ... Thus to have a retentive memory, and to proceed "by the book," are points commonly regarded as the sum total of good playing. But it is in matters beyond the limits of mere rule that the skill of the analyst is evinced. He makes, in silence, a host of observations and inferences. So, perhaps, do his companions; and the difference in the extent of the information obtained, lies not so much in the validity of the inference as in the quality of the observation. The necessary knowledge is that of *what* to observe ... He recognizes what is played through feint by the air with which it is thrown upon the table. A casual or inadvertent word; the accidental dropping or turning of a card, with the accompanying anxiety or carelessness in regard to its concealment ... all afford, to his apparently intuitive perception, indications of the true state of affairs. (CS, 474-475)

This provides a useful summary of the differences between “Marcel” the central character and “Marcel” the Narrator, and the mediating role played by involuntary memory. For while the former is all but incapable of seeing the hidden truths of both society and his own temperament, the latter, who has discovered the insights available to consciousness afforded by the involuntary, is better placed to glory, as Poe puts it, “in that moral activity which *disentangles*” (CS, 473).

Proust himself outlines the difference between the life lived and the life remembered, and how the two give rise to entirely different narrative perspectives, when, in *La Prisonnière*, he has the Narrator ponder how an objective person – the reader of the novel, perhaps – would view the facts of his affair with Albertine: “Bien vite je me dis: « On peut tout ramener, en effet, si on en considère l’aspect social, au plus courant des faits divers: du dehors, c’est peut-être ainsi que je le verrais [»]” [Soon I said to myself, “The whole thing could be reduced, if one looks at it from the social point of view, to the most banal, everyday story: if it were happening to someone else, perhaps that is how I would see it”] (1876–1877; V:336). What this does is to locate Marcel as reader rather than author at this stage in the novel. It is a novel, however, personified by Albertine, that resists his every attempt at interpretation: “cette partie du récit était confuse, effacée, autant dire indéchiffrable” [this part of the story was confused, half erased, in other words unreadable]; and “Parfois l’écriture où je déchiffrais les mensonges d’Albertine, sans être idéographique, avait simplement besoin d’être lue à rebours” [Sometimes the script in which I deciphered Albertine’s lies was not ideographic, but simply had to be read backwards] (1667, 1670; V:75, 79). Marcel, like Dupin, must learn to detect in the present the influence of an unobserved or overlooked event from the past. They are both involved in a process central to modernity: the creation of a history that feels like truth made from the fragments of previous times. And it is Albertine – the orphaned fabricator of her own past, the weaver of lies and deceits, the ghost in the novel’s machinery and, like Marie Rôget, a posthumous Muse – who (dis)embodies this.

While in my second chapter I emphasized that in the context of Emerson involuntary memory is a wholly positive and redemptive force, read alongside Poe the opposite is true. This is no doubt because Poe, as Graham Clarke writes,

consistently inverts American myth and questions its beliefs. What, in Emerson, Whitman and Thoreau, is a transcendent land celebrated for its size, space, openness and newness – symbolic of an imaginative and spiritual potential which “dazzles the imagination” – in Poe becomes the antithesis of hope and promise; a process in which the culture, and the psyche, is stripped of its myths and certainties, and where dream is invariably nightmare and the familiar is strange and alien. (*TMI*, xxii)

Emerson and Poe thus represent the twin poles of Proust’s *mémoire involontaire*: the rediscovery for art of paradises lost, and the vertiginous hell of desire and guilt. As Geneviève Henrot has pointed out, while the former provide a “source of pure ecstasy and fundamental aesthetic revelation,” the latter are “related to transgression and suffering” (2002, 109). While certain examples of involuntary memory open up the narrative to the wider world of landscape (Combray, Balbec), yet others plunge us into a Proustian inferno. And while the episode of the *madeleine* and the cup of tea, to give only the most famous example, gifts Marcel with a moment of consolation, yet others, and Proust explicitly associated these with the death of Albertine, are to do with remembering as a kind of delirium and fragmentation:

Émiettement d’ailleurs qui ne fait pas seulement vivre la morte mais la multiplie. Quand j’étais arrivé à supporter le chagrin d’avoir perdu une de ces Albertine, tout était à recommencer avec une autre, avec cent autres. Alors ce qui avait fait jusque-là la douceur de ma vie, la perpétuelle renaissance des moments anciens, en devint le supplice[.]

[A fragmentation moreover which not only makes the dead girl live but multiplies her. Once I had managed to bear with the unhappiness of having lost one of these Albertines, I had to begin all over again with another, with a hundred others. Then, what had hitherto been the consolation of my life, the perpetual rebirth of its earlier moments, became its torment.] (*CSB*, 562; *ASB*, 240)⁸

⁸ Proust wrote this in 1915 on the blank pages of a copy of *Du côté de chez Swann* that he presented to his friend, Marie Scheikevitch. The lengthy inscription has come to be known as “Révélation de Proust sur la suite de son roman vers la fin de 1915.”

There are, then, parallels to be drawn between Marcel's fugitive memories of Albertine, and the realization that her death has denied him any sure knowledge of her real identity, and "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt." What replaces memory in Poe's story are the competing narratives of Marie's death that appear in various Paris newspapers. Over and above these, there is the fact that the fictional Marie Rogêt is based on the real-life Mary Rogers. In other words, one aspect of Mary Rogers's life – the unsolved mystery surrounding her violent death – comes back to haunt the text.

For Dupin getting to the heart of those human passions that lead to criminal behavior means retracing a chain of associations. Nowhere is this more explicit than in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" where Dupin appears to read the narrator's very thoughts. From a Proustian perspective what is interesting here is that Dupin's analysis of the history of his companion's thought processes begins with his witnessing the narrator stumble over a loose paving stone:

"You stepped upon one of the loose fragments, slipped, slightly strained your ankle, appeared vexed or sulky, muttered a few words, turned to look at the pile, and then proceeded in silence. I was not particularly attentive to what you did; but observation has become with me, of late, a species of necessity." (CS, 479)

Comparing these sentences to the description in *Le temps retrouvé* of Marcel tripping on a paving-stone inside the Guermantes courtyard and being momentarily overwhelmed by his memories of Venice, what is immediately apparent is that we are returned to an unobserved event (unobserved in that no mention is made in *Albertine disparue* of Marcel having thus stumbled) while being made aware that truly to observe a thing is to see it not only in its present aspect but in the fleeting echoes it carries of a whole stream of previous actions:

j'étais entré dans la cour de l'hôtel de Guermantes et dans ma distraction je n'avais pas vu une voiture qui s'avancait; au cri du wattman je n'eus que le temps de me ranger vivement de côté, et je reculai assez pour buter malgré moi contre les pavés assez mal équarris derrière lesquels était une remise. Mais au moment où, me remettant d'aplomb, je posai mon pied sur un pavé qui était un peu moins élevé que le précédent, tout mon découragement s'évanouit

devant la même félicité qu'à diverses époques de ma vie m'avaient donnée la vue d'arbres que j'avais cri reconnaître dans une promenade en voiture autour de Balbec, la vue des clochers de Martinville, la saveur d'une madeleine trempée dans une infusion, tant d'autres sensations dont j'ai parlé[.]

[I had entered the Guermantes' courtyard and in my distraction had failed to see an approaching car; at the chauffeur's shout I had time only to step smartly aside, and as I retreated I could not help tripping up against the unevenly laid paving-stones, behind which was a coach-house. But at the moment when, regaining my balance, I set my foot down on a stone which was slightly lower than the one next to it, all my discouragement vanished in face of the same happiness that, at different points in my life, had given me the sight of trees I had thought I recognised when I was taking a drive round Balbec, the sight of the steeples of Martinsville, the taste of a madeleine dipped in herb tea, and all the other sensations I have spoken about.] (2262: VI:174-175)

Marcel stumbles because he steps aside to avoid being run over by a car; Poe's narrator so as to avoid being jostled by a "fruiterer." So striking are the similarities between Marcel's slipshod arrival at the Princess de Guermantes and the implications it will have for his discovery of the involuntary that it is difficult to believe Proust did not have in mind Baudelaire's translation of Poe's story, with its narrator's comment that there are "few persons who have not, at some period of their lives, amused themselves in retracing the steps by which particular conclusions of their own minds have been attained" (*CS*, 479).

Hand in glove

While Poe ultimately failed to create a fictional archetype that gripped the imagination of America, the same cannot be said of his impact in France. In many ways, though, Poe's greatest creation was himself – aided and abetted by Baudelaire, "that second and unforeseen collaborator in the posthumous rewriting of Poe," whose intercession made Poe into a dominant figure in the movement from romanticism to *modernité* (Fiedler 1967, 393). It is alongside some of his French disciples that the only explicit reference to Poe in *A la recherche* occurs.

The reference comes during a speech by Marcel's grandmother in which she takes him to task for his "degenerate" behavior and warns against the influence of writers who might contribute to "suffering and low esteem" (575; II:306–307). No one could accuse Marcel's grandmother of not being an astute reader of character, nor for that matter the literary avant-garde. There is, though, some irony in the fact that the writers against whom she warns her grandson are precisely those to whom he is likely as a result to feel a heightened sense of affinity. Moreover, the mention of Poe in the context of Verlaine and Rimbaud brings together key elements of *A la recherche*: writing, criminality, and homosexuality.⁹

Proust's analysis of inversion is at several points underpinned by references to the Dupin trilogy, "The Purloined Letter" in particular. The most easily recognizable of these, appropriately enough, appears in *Sodom et Gomorrhe*, the volume of the novel, as Eells has commented, concerned with making the invisible visible. "Knowledge of homosexuality," she writes, "[gives] a certain depth to the narrator's vision," and she compares the ability to recognize that someone is an invert to learning to "decipher a hidden language." The discovery of homosexuality makes sense of the incomprehensible and renders "the indecipherable legible" (2002, 145, 146). Relating Eells's comments to what I have said in earlier chapters concerning Marcel's "apprenticeship to signs" and the unreadability of Albertine's sexuality, we can see how Marcel is denied precisely this kind of epiphanic moment with regard to lesbianism. Once he has learned to recognize the presence of male homosexuality, however, he is able to "decipher" it in situations where other people are otherwise as oblivious as he himself has been. It is in this context that Proust directs us to Poe.

The setting is the same hotel at Balbec where Marcel encounters *le petite bande*, and is prefaced by Marcel being kept awake at night because "le feu éclairait comme si on eût allumé une lampe" [the fire was as if a lamp had been lit] (1493; IV:376). The light "flares" [flambée], reminding us of Poe's strictures against rooms with too much "glare." Once asleep Marcel enters a phantasmagorical world where "La race qui l'habite, comme celle des premiers humains, est androgyne. Un homme y apparaît au bout d'un instant sous l'aspect d'une femme. Les choses y ont une aptitude à devenir des hommes, les hommes des amis et des ennemis" [The race which

⁹ While living together in London, Rimbaud and Verlaine read Poe's poems in what Graham Robb calls "a very modern programme of language acquisition" (2000, 196).

inhabits it, like that of the earliest humans, is androgynous. A man there will appear a moment later in the aspect of a woman. Objects have the ability to turn into men, and men into friends or enemies] (1493: IV:376). Not unlike Joyce's Nighttown, we enter a place where appearances are not only deceptive but protean.¹⁰ Opposites coincide. It is a realm defined by an inversion of the kind signaled by Poe in his epigraph to "The Murders in the Rue Morgue": "What song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, although puzzling questions, are not beyond *all* conjecture" (CS, 473).

The instability of identity in dreams serves as a preface to the Narrator recounting Charlus's attempts at chatting-up an off-duty footman while

¹⁰ Or, for that matter, Walt Whitman's "The Sleepers." Despite the many parallels between aspects of Whitman's poetry and *A la recherche*, the evidence for Proust having read him is not so much tantalizing as all but nonexistent. Proust's only reference to Whitman appears in a letter to the poet and novelist Paul Morand who in 1919 published a collection of poems called *Lampes à arc*. Included in the book was "Ode à Marcel Proust," a poem which threatened to expose aspects of Proust's private life to public scrutiny. Proust wrote to Morand to acknowledge having received the book, referring to him as "cher Walt Whitman de notre temps et de notre pays" [dear Walt Whitman of our time and country]. The epithet is clearly meant to be double-edged. For though Whitman was becoming extremely popular in France, Proust seems to have been unimpressed: "nous n'avons plus qu'à subir sans frein ce que nous dicte notre inconscient. Et c'est toute mon esthétique. Mais est-ce bien laisser parler l'inconscient que de noter avec les yeux seulement, sans *impression* véritable ... [M]ais cher ami vous êtes trop l'intelligence même pour ne pas savoir que cela est de la simple notation" [all we need do from now on is to let our subconscious dictate to us unhindered. And that's exactly my own aesthetic. But is it really allowing the subconscious to speak, simply to take note, with the eyes alone, without any real *sensation* ... [Y]ou, dear friend, who are the personification of intelligence, must know that it is the merest notation] (*Corr.* XVIII, 423; *SL* IV:94). If Proust had read Whitman, it would have been the translation of *Leaves of Grass* by Léon Bazalgette (1909, 1914, and 1922). Bazalgette's versions, however, according to André Gide, were too facile and "prettified" (see Gay Wilson Allen, *Comparative Literature* 1, no. 3 [Summer, 1949]:272–273) and as an antidote to Bazalgette's first two editions, Gide, Jules Laforgue, and others published a number of translations of their own in *Oeuvres Choïsies: Poemes et Proses* (1918). We know that Proust was sent a copy of this book in August 1919 by Gustave Tronche, marketing director at Proust's publishers, NRF (see *Corr.* XVIII:384–385). Whether Tronche was sending the book at Proust's request, we do not know; neither do we know if Proust had time to read it before his death.

dining at the hotel restaurant. This he attempts to do in the presence of the other guests, in particular a lawyer that he knows:

Celui-ci ne se douta de rien non plus qu'aucun autre client de l'hôtel, qui virent tous un élégant étranger dans le valet de pied si bien mis. En revanche, si les hommes du monde s'y trompèrent et le prirent pour un Américain très chic, à peine parut-il devant les domestiques qu'il fut deviné par eux, comme un forçat reconnaît un forçat, même plus vite, flairé à distance comme un animal par certains animaux.

[The latter no more suspected anything than any other of the hotel guests, all of whom saw an elegant foreigner in the very well-turned-out footman. On the other hand, if the men of the world were deceived and took him for an ultra-smart American, hardly had he appeared before the servants before they saw through him, just as one convict will recognise another convict, even quicker, nosed out from afar, as one animal is by certain others.] (1499; IV:383)

That the footman is mistaken for an elegant American by all but his fellow servants runs parallel to the inability of those present to “read” Charlus’s behavior. Only when Charlus’s cover is blown by a casual phrase from the *sommelier*, spoken in a stage whisper, are those present alerted to, and horrified by, intentions which, we should remember, were still punishable by French law.

The inference of criminality in Charlus’s actions is a motif that runs throughout this scene, culminating in a direct reference to “The Purloined Letter.” Marcel is introduced to two male waiters whose names he has forgotten, but of whom he is told, “Ils veulent se marier et ils ne savent seulement pas l’anglais!” [They want to get married and they don’t even know English!] (1500; IV:385). To speak “English,” as Eells says, was a reference to homosexuality, “le vice anglais” (2002, 16). Marcel is unaware of the coded nature of the phrase and misinterprets it as meaning that the two waiters will have problems getting a job. The Narrator, however, directs us to Poe’s text as the apogee of deception and revelation:

Ils me rappelèrent leur nom, qu’ils m’avaient souvent servi à Rivebelle. Mais l’un avait laissé pousser sa moustache, l’autre l’avait rasée et s’était fait tondre; et à cause de cela, bien que ce fût leur tête d’autrefois qui était posée sur leurs épaules ... elle m’était restée aussi

invisible que ces objets qui échappent aux perquisitions les plus minutieuses, et qui traînent simplement aux yeux de tous, lesquels ne les remarquent pas, sur une cheminée.

[They reminded me of their names, and that they had often waited on me at Rivebelle. But one of them had let his moustache grow, the other had shaved his off and been shorn; as the result of which, although it was the old heads that were set on their shoulders ... *they had remained as invisible for me as those objects that elude the most painstaking search, yet are simply lying in full view, unnoticed by anyone, on a mantelpiece.*] (1500; IV:385; my italics)

In its very obliquity the reference enacts an important aspect of Marcel's growing awareness: that homosexuality is visible only to those who are in the know. Dupin is able to discover the "hiding place" of the missing letter not because of any methodical process of investigation but because of his ability to empathize with the thief – what Poe's narrator summarizes as "the identification ... of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent" (CS, 693).

This presents us with a development of the *Doppelgänger* motif. In the opening sentence of the story Poe refers to the "twofold luxury of meditation and meerschäum," and a little later Dupin calls the story the Prefect of Police tells him about the theft of an important letter from the royal apartments "simple and odd" (CS, 684, 685). Such "doubling" runs throughout the story: the thief, the Minister D—, and Dupin share the same initial; they are both poets, and they are both "analysts" in the mathematical sense of the word. They are also both thieves: the Minister steals the letter from the "royal boudoir," while Dupin steals it back from the Minister's own apartment. Even the letter itself becomes its own *Doppelgänger*: the Minister first hides it by turning it inside-out (inverting it) like a glove, only for Dupin to recognize it and replace it with a "facsimile." The story does not tell us whether he then returns it to its owner. What we do know is that Dupin inscribes within the facsimile a quotation from a play that he knows the Minister will recognize, and thus be alerted to who it is that has unraveled the mystery:

"Why – it did not seem altogether right to leave the interior [of the duplicate letter] blank – that would have been insulting. D—, at Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-

humoredly, that I should remember. So, as I knew he would feel some curiosity in regard to the identity of the person who had outwitted him, I thought it a pity not to give him a clew. He is well acquainted with my MS., and I just copied into the middle of the blank sheet the words –

– Un dessein si funeste, S'il
S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste["] (CS, 700–701)

The text written by Dupin to D. as a clue to his identity comes from Prosper Jolyot de Crébillon's tragedy *Atrée*, and refers to Atreus dishing up Thyestes' children to him as revenge for seducing his wife. Crime begets crime, as text begets text. This concealing of a text within the folded sheet of paper anticipates the surrealist practice of exploiting chance in the collage of words known as *le cadavre exquis* (exquisite corpse). Based on the old parlor game Consequences, it was played by several people, each of whom would write a phrase on a sheet of paper, fold the paper to conceal part of it, and pass it on to the next player who would in turn add a phrase without knowing what words the others had written.¹¹ The result, as the Greek surrealist poet Nicolas Calas describes it, was to expose “the unconscious reality in the personality of the group.”¹²

What Dupin does, then, is create a proliferation of texts that exposes not a single but multiple crimes: the unknown crime of the royal personage (implicitly sexual in nature); the undivulged “evil” that D. did Dupin in Vienna; Atreus's murder of his nephews; and Thyestes' seduction of his sister-in-law. They are crimes to do with the breaking of taboos, that “protective barrier against excessive desires” discussed by Bataille in the context of eroticism and cannibalism (2001, 71). We can see how Proust does something very similar. His reference to “The Purloined Letter” is inscribed within the folds – *pli selon pli* – of his own text. He therefore relies on his reader, like Dupin, to recognize something that has been

¹¹ The game was later adapted to the creation of visual images, with the paper folded in three: the top third showing the head of a person or animal, the middle third the torso, and the bottom third the legs. It is interesting to note how similar are the juxtapositions of organic and inorganic materials that go to make up the Narrator's description of Albertine's naked body and those surrealist drawings constructed through the method of *le cadavre exquis*. The reference earlier in this chapter to Albertine's body being coherent but making no literal sense is a very good description of the drawings produced by Breton, Ernst, and others.

¹² <http://www.exquisitecorpse.com/definition.html>. Accessed 4 January 2007.

inverted, turned inside-out like a glove. That this makes Marcel Dupin's double is ironic, given that for much of *A la recherche* Marcel is closer in his behavior to the clumsy if rigorous procedures of the Prefect of Police than Dupin's instinctual analysis. For example, in seeking to unearth evidence of Albertine's "crimes" he is as thorough and as unsuccessful as is the Prefect in searching the Minister's apartment for the missing letter:

"[W]e opened every package and parcel; we not only opened every book, but we turned over every leaf in each volume ... measured the thickness of every book-*cover*, with the most accurate admeasurement, and applied to each the most jealous scrutiny of the microscope ... Some five or six volumes, just from the hands of the binder, we carefully probed, longitudinally, with the needles." (*CS*, 689–690)

The Prefect suspects books and language of harboring evidence and subjects them to a kind of torture in order that they give up the truth. The same is true of Marcel's desire to "interrogate" the contents of Albertine's "notebook of memories."

Just as Poe's eponymous letter implicates the whole of society in a literally unspeakable crime (the contents of the original letter remain unpublished), so Proust's references to the story draws in an ever-widening circle of characters. Not only Charlus and Jupien, but Morel and, most unexpectedly, Robert de Saint-Loup become part of the cavalcade of sexual desires and the breaking of taboos. Further, they are discoveries that take place alongside Marcel's corresponding failure to get any concrete evidence about Albertine's sexuality. In fact, the passage quoted above follows hard on the heels of Marcel mistaking Gilberte's signature for that of Albertine. Character and characters elide: "On devine en lisant, en crée" [We guess as we read, we invent] (2099; V:620). As in Poe, the criminal behavior of men is open to detection; that of women remains a secret. This much Proust could have taken from "The Mystery of Marie Rogêt," where Dupin's reading and analysis of the reported events surrounding Marie's death result in failure. Like Albertine, Marie's textual life merely leads to further uncertainties. Dupin promises his listener that but one more fact is required for him to solve the murder. That this missing piece of evidence is a rudderless boat – the original free-floating signifier – merely warns us that as a semiotic interpreter Dupin is flawed.

A second reference to "The Purloined Letter" occurs later in *Sodom et Gomorrhe*. Again it is to do with homosexuality, though by now the

truth about Charlus seems to have become common knowledge. “Seems” because exactly what Mme Verdurin is referring to when discussing Jupien and Charlus remains veiled and unspoken, just like the contents of Poe’s letter:

Il tient Charlus par des lettres qui sont quelque chose d’effrayant, il paraît. Je le tiens de quelqu’un qui les a vues, il m’a dit: “Vous vous trouveriez mal si vous voyiez cela.” C’est comme ça que ce Jupien le fait marcher au bâton et lui fait cracher tout l’argent qu’il veut. J’aimerais mille fois mieux la mort que de vivre dans la terreur où vit Charlus.

[He’s got a hold on Charlus through some letters, the most dreadful things apparently. Someone I know has seen them, and he told me. “They’d make you sick if you read them,” he said. That’s how Jupien keeps him under his thumb and makes him cough up all the money he wants. I’d rather a thousand times be dead than living in terror as Charlus does.] (1814; V:258)

Both “la terreur” under which Charlus now lives and “The Purloined Letter” have parallels with Foucault’s comments on how the “language of terror is dedicated to an endless expense, even though it only seeks to achieve a single effect. It drives itself out of any possible resting place” (1977, 65). As with the ability of Gothic to produce an excess of signification while endlessly deferring the signified, so in Foucault’s terms we can read both letters, Poe’s and Charlus’s, as being excessive in the meanings and contents that others are by necessity forced to apply to them precisely because the contents are in both cases unspeakable. The fate of characters such as Charlus is thus to be caught between silence and an inability to refer to a sexuality that exists outside utterance. As such he becomes like Poe’s letter, visible and invisible, readable and yet indecipherable. Fact give way to gossip and innuendo, just as the stolen letter gives rise to a multiplicity of texts and criminality.

This state of things being visible but unseen, the ensuing terrors it causes and the acceleration in sexual anxiety, is further highlighted by Proust’s quoting from Racine’s *Esther* in the context of Françoise and Albertine being too afraid to wake Marcel up in the morning without him first calling. The broken couplet Proust quotes – “*une majesté terrible / Affecte à mes sujets de me rendre invisible*” [a terrible majesty / Keeps me unseen by

my subjects] (1913; V:381) – by joining together the concepts of the “terrible” and the “invisible” not only brings us close to being a version of Poe as discovered in Racine – a further “doubling” of Poe’s text – but reminds us that *Esther* is not only about a secret (in this case, that Esther is Jewish), but, as Antoine Compagnon has commented, its very presence in *A la recherche*, as I am suggesting is the case with “The Purloined Letter,” is evidence of the proliferation of homosexual narratives.¹³

The culmination of Marcel’s knowledge of the extent of homosexuality, and the point at which the reader of the novel has placed before them “une réalité différente à la même place que celle qui est près de nous, ils nous étourdissent tout autant qu’un vertige” [an alternative reality in the same place as the one we see before our eyes, making us reel with dizziness] (1962–1963; V:444), comes when he learns through the (again) unnarrated contents of a letter that Saint-Loup has been having an affair with Morel. The irony, of course, is that Robert disguises his sexuality by becoming a “fac-simile” of his uncle, Charlus:

Mais l’amour-propre, le désir de tromper les autres, de se tromper soi-même, la connaissance d’ailleurs imparfaite des trahisons, qui est celle de tous les êtres trompés, d’autant plus que Robert, en vrai neveu de M.de Charlus, s’affichait avec des femmes qu’il compromettait, que le monde croyait et qu’en somme Gilberte croyait ses maîtresses ...

[But self-respect, the urge to deceive others and deceive oneself, and the inevitably imperfect knowledge of one’s betrayal which is the lot of all deceived people, were aided and abetted by the fact that Robert, a true nephew of M.de Charlus, showed himself off in public with women whom he compromised and whom everyone, no doubt even Gilberte, believed to be his mistresses.] (2116; V:642)

The levels of self-deception involved here are vertiginous and ultimately tragic: Saint-Loup, in order to conceal his inversion, takes as his model of heterosexuality his uncle, the man whose male lover he unknowingly shares, who has in the past been used by Swann to escort Odette, little

¹³ See Compagnon 1992, 53–92. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has similarly written of the Esther narrative in terms of homosexuality, suggesting that it “seems a model for a certain simplified but highly potent imagining of coming out and its transformative potential” (1990, 75).

thinking that Charlus, in his bisexual youth, had had an affair with Odette, and who only introduced her to Swann in order to get her off his hands. Sexuality, as with Malcolm Bowie's description of the importance of "The Purloined Letter" to Lacan, is a "Protean object of desire [that] sometimes become[s] overwrought in [the] attempt to trap and devour it" (1987, 155). The significance of Poe's letter for Lacan, as is inversion for Proust, is that it is

a pure migratory signifier. As it passes from hand to hand, and moves from point to point within a complex web of intersubjective perceptions (Poe speaks of the "robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber"), it attracts different meanings to itself, mediates different kinds of power relationship and determines subjects in what they do and are ... (1987, 124)

The spectral child

In a brief reference to "The Man of the Crowd," Baudelaire discusses the significance of the narrator of the story being a convalescent.

The convalescent, like the child, is possessed in the highest degree of the faculty of keenly interesting himself in things, be they apparently of the most trivial. Let us go back, if we can, by a retrospective effort of the imagination, towards our most youthful, our earliest, impressions, and we will recognize that they had a strange kinship with those brightly colored impressions which we were later to receive in the aftermath of a physical illness[.] (1964c, 7-8)

"Convalescence," Baudelaire says, "is like a return to childhood." It is precisely such a "retrospective effort" that defines the opening pages of *À la recherche*.

Proust's evocation of the joys of childhood reading reminds us of those comments he made in the last months of his life to Natalie Clifford Barney about Poe being "one of the blessings of memory." It is a memory that can be seen as having more of an influence than we might otherwise expect. For after the Narrator's description of his adult bedtime reading, we are introduced to another form of story telling: the magic lantern which Marcel's parents set up in his bedroom to distract him from his anxiety at

having to go to bed and be separated from his mother and grandmother. The lantern turns his bedroom into a Gothic cathedral, or the kind of dimly lit domestic space advocated in "Philosophy of Furniture": "elle substituait à l'opacité des murs d'impalpables irisations, de surnaturelles apparitions multicolores, où des légendes étaient dépeintes comme dans un vitrail vacillant et momentané" [it replaced the opacity of the walls with impalpable iridescences, supernatural multicoloured apparitions, where legends were depicted as in a wavering, momentary stained-glass window] (17; I:13). That Proust associated Poe with such effects is clear from a letter he wrote to Gabriel Mourey congratulating him on his translation of Poe. The language of Proust's praise – *translucide* (translucent), *texte irisé* (iridescent text) (*Corr.* X, 91) – is directly comparable to his description of the effects of the magic lantern. Similarly the story told through the lantern's moving images, the medieval legend of Golo and Geneviève, a jealous husband who orders the death of his innocent wife, has infinite repercussions for the events that are to follow.

In *Le Temps retrouvé* we find Marcel waiting in a library-cum-sitting-room at the home of the Princess de Guermantes. It is here that Marcel encounters the sound of a spoon knocking against a tea cup and the sensation of stiff linen against his lips. As we saw in Chapter 2, these constitute the opening chords of what is to become his symphonic recreation of lost time. What he also discovers in the library is a copy of George Sand's *François le Champi*, the novel given him as a boy by his grandmother and read to him one evening by his mother when he is unable to settle himself to sleep. Dovetailing as it does the beginning and end of the novel, we should be aware that Sand's novel is a peculiar choice of gift, telling as it does of the incestuous love of a mother for her adoptive son. No less strange, though, than those tales by Poe which the young Proust avidly devoured.

In his writings on hysteria, Christopher Bollas discusses the resurrection of "the virgin mother and her child lover" in ways that are reminiscent of Poe's Berenicë, Ligeia, and Morella or indeed Proust's Duchesse de Guermantes, Gilberte, and Albertine. For this idealized mother-figure to return there must be that disavowal of the genitals which most obviously characterizes Marcel's sexual relations with Albertine. Only then, Bollas says, can the hysteric survive the trauma of knowing that the mother is a sexually independent being separate from the role of infant caregiver. The result of this is that the hysteric unconsciously eroticizes the mother's "absence" in a way that seems borne out by those many moments in the

novel that are located between waking and sleeping, and in *La Prisonnière* become focused on Albertine's corpse-like body:

When the hysteric marries it is to a heavily idealised figure, with intercourse often occurring as a kind of hypnotic moment – the genitalia obliterated from mind by the mesmerising effects of the sexual – or to a perpetually disappointing figure, with the ideal object carried in the mind in countless daydreams everyday ...

The hysteric does not partake of erotic knowledge and makes love in either a blind or detached manner, using the other as a figure with whom to masturbate ... The auto-erotic denies the pleasure of the other [and] eroticises the work of absence ... They imagine themselves the mother's secret object of desire and then, through self-stimulation, eroticise this object[.] (2000, 38, 62)

Bollas's vision of an hysterical desire for the absence of the mother coincides with Proust in that it offers a version of psychic and sexual reality that is morbid and overwhelmed by guilt. Nowhere more so than when Marcel, as I discussed in Chapter 3, trying to imagine Albertine's return from the dead, begins to touch himself:

Instinctivement je passai ma main sur mon cou, sur mes lèvres qui se voyaient embrassés par elle depuis qu'elle était partie, et qui ne le seraient jamais plus; je passai ma main sur eux, comme maman m'avait caressé à la mort de ma grand-mère en me disant: « Mon pauvre petit, ta grand-mère qui t'aimait tant ne t'embrassera plus. »

[Instinctively I stroked my neck and my lips, which had imagined themselves being kissed by her since she had left, yet which would never be kissed by her again; I stroked them as mama had caressed me on my grandmother's death, saying to me, "My poor child, your grandmother who loved you so much will never kiss you again." (1962; V:444)

Bollas's theory also provides an insight into the relationship between Marcel – who throughout the novel remains strangely ignorant or innocent of sexuality – and Proust's omniscient Narrator:

One aspect of hysterical dissociation derives from the maternal split of the child's erotic being. Whilst ignoring the child's body self as her erotic object, she objectifies before his or her eyes, through performance and narrative, a spectral child whom she engages in highly sensuous ways. It is as if she were reading a book held out in front of her, that is the story of her love of this child, to which she directs the child's attention, riveting him or her to the story through gaze and voice. Any telling or performing, however, may be at variance with the true state of interrelating, especially with adult hysterics, who seem skilful narrators of their lives, but for whom sexual representation and narrative are strangely at odds with each other[.] (2000, 61)

This reading to a "spectral child" parallels Marcel being read George Sand's *François le champi*, while Marcel's inability to reliably narrate his sexual experiences are highlighted in, for example, his misreading of Gilberte's sexual come-on. Similarly Marcel's learning to objectify the erotic has repercussions for his constant references to Albertine as though she were a notebook or a work of literature. The effect of this is, as Mary Ann Caws says in an essay on Baudelaire's translation of Poe's "The Oval Portrait," that each time the death of the model in Poe's story is represented, she is dispossessed of her life all over again, and each time the essence of the painting is put into words the woman diminishes while the portrait gains in power (1983, 679–687). So the death of a mother, otherwise unspeakable, becomes figured in the rebirth of a succession of women who provoke a desire that cannot be separated from the fear of having committed a murder. And this "murder," as "The Oval Portrait" makes clear, is the very act of creating a work of art.

Elizabeth Ladenson has called George Sand's presence in Proust's novel "a buried Gomorrhean intertext" (1999, 117). It is a phrase I would like to borrow and apply to all that Poe – a man pursued all his life by the death of his mother – evidently meant to Proust. Poe's (inter)textual presence is buried within *A la recherche* in the sense that the theme of sexual desire, whether Golo and Geneviève or *François le champi*, appears in the novel as a transgressive act right from the very opening. As with Marcel's magic lantern, desire can only be told through silence and shadows. Proust may later have praised Mourey for the "translucency" of his translations, but behind such language is Dupin's comment, "If it is any point requiring reflection ... we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark." They are

words we can imagine haunting Proust as he struggled night after night to “disentangle” the chains of association which, in his own mind at least, left him a fugitive from love.

CHAPTER 5

Proust's Butterfly

He painted his landscapes with his back to the window.

—James Fenton, “Remembering the Aurochs”

In contrast to Emerson and Poe, who receive just one mention apiece in *A la recherche*, James McNeill Whistler appears by name more often than Flaubert, Manet, Mallarmé, Debussy, Zola, the Goncourt brothers, Gautier, Degas, or Monet. Only Baudelaire is referred to more frequently. Whistler is mentioned more than Mozart, Dante, Watteau, Shakespeare, Clemenceau, or Napoleon; while among painters only Vermeer and Rembrandt merit more attention. And, of course, Elstir, Proust's fictional artist, to whom Whistler contributed both a near-anagram of his name and a number of personal and artistic traits.

Proust was interested in Whistler's art from as early as 1891, when he was just shy of twenty and Whistler, at fifty-six, remained at the height of his powers. Between November 1890 and the following September, Proust was involved in editing a magazine called *Le Mensuel* (The Monthly) to which he contributed a number of articles. Most, as with “Impressions of the Salons,” which appeared in May 1891 and contained some mention of Whistler, appeared under a nom de plume, in this case *Fusain* (an artist's charcoal crayon used for drawing). From the beginning, then, Whistler is associated with Proust's fictionalizing of himself. Writing and art, *fusain* and *stylo*, are interchangeable.

Proust's admiration for Whistler surely played some part in the friendship that sprang up in 1895 at Beg-Meil on the Brittany coast, where along with his friend, the Venezuelan-born composer Reynaldo Hahn, he met the American painter, Alexander Harrison. While Beg-Meil was later to form the basis for Balbec, Harrison is a vital member of the artistic family-tree that was to culminate in Elstir. As with Marcel's first sight of Elstir while

dining with Saint-Loup at Rivebelle, so Proust and Hahn dropped Harrison a note telling him how much they admired his work and asking that he join them for dinner. Unlike Elstir, Harrison accepted. What is more, Harrison's later enjoinder that the friends visit the Pointe de Penmarch because it was "a sort of mixture of Holland, the West Indies and Florida" (Carter 2000, 1988) became transposed in *A la recherche* to the fictional Carquethuit that Elstir paints and which puts him in mind of "certain aspects de la Floride" [somewhere in Florida] (671; II:433). Certainly Proust came to recognize the importance of the meeting. In *Le Carnet de 1908* he was to note that Harrison had proved a "stimulating guide" ["Je n'admets les autres que comme indicateurs excitants (Harrison) Floride"] (*C 1908*, 99). Thus a real-life American artist became first a fictional novelist ("C," whom Jean Santeuil is introduced to at Kerengrimen) and then a painter, Elstir, whose work bears repeated comparison with another real-life American, Whistler. Clearly, then, the fusion of French and American art and landscape proved extremely important to Proust in the early development of *A la recherche*.

In 1896 Proust met Marie Nordlinger, Hahn's English cousin. It was Nordlinger who was to play a decisive part in Proust's knowledge and appreciation of Whistler's late paintings.¹ Even at an early stage in their friendship, Nordlinger recalls, Whistler's art was important to how Proust saw and represented himself to others: "We amused ourselves (as Swann was to do in *The Search*) by attributing portrait painters to our acquaintances and friends ... but we never quite succeeded for Marcel – Carrière, early Courbet, perhaps Pisanello, or Whistler?" (Prestwich 1999, 57). It was Nordlinger who sent Proust a copy of Whistler's *Ten O'Clock* lecture, in English rather than in Mallarmé's translation, and Nordlinger to whom in February 1905 Proust admitted that "dans ma chambre volontairement *nue* il y a une seule reproduction d'oeuvre d'art: une admirable photographie du *Carlyle* de Wisthler au pardessus serpentín" [in my intentionally naked room there is only one reproduction of a work of art: an excellent photograph of Wisthler's *Carlyle* in a serpentine overcoat] (*Corr.* V:42–43; *SL* II:137).²

¹ Nordlinger was not, though, as Kazuyoshi Yoshikawa has said, responsible for "initiat[ing] our author to the works of Whistler" (2002, 248).

² I have reinstated Proust's allusive misspelling of Whistler, the significance of which the editors of the *Selected Letters*, having regularized it, deny the English reader. Far from being accidental, Proust's spelling is a reference to Huysmans having persisted in referring to Whistler as "Wisthler." A copy of *À rebours* inscribed "À M. James Wisthler, l'un de ses fervents, J. K. Huysmans" is held in the Whistler Collection, Glasgow University Library.

It was a description Proust was to reiterate in a letter he sent Hahn in October 1908 that included a sketch of the same painting, re-titled “Karlich par Wisthlerch” (see Plate 4).³ By the time he was twenty-seven and had fallen under the influence of Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac, the subject of an 1891 portrait by Whistler⁴ and the larger-than-life presence behind Proust’s Charlus, Proust was ready to admit the American to a canon that included past masters such as Watteau and modern French painters including Gustave Moreau, Émile Gallé, and Paul César Helleu.

Proust and Whistler met only once. The occasion throws into relief, however, a number of aspects of contemporary Parisian society that would become important to *A la recherche*. In the summer of 1897 Proust was invited by Hahn to accompany him to the salon of Méry Laurent, a “cocotte” who “first posed in tights and spangles at the Théâtre du Châtelet, then put on

³ It is worth noting that in Proust’s sketch of “Karlich par Wisthlerch,” obviously done from memory, he includes only one of the two pictures that hang on the wall behind Carlyle in Whistler’s painting. The sketch can therefore be seen as a self-portrait of Proust himself in “ma chambre volontairement *nue*” with its one reproduction of a work of art. It is a sketch that also bears an uncanny resemblance to both Paul Helleu’s etching and Man Ray’s photograph of Proust on his deathbed.

⁴ Exhibited on April 25, 1894, at the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Whistler’s portrait went under the title *Noir et Or. Portrait du comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac*. In conversation with the Goncourt brothers, Montesquiou provided one of the most vivid descriptions we have of what it was like to sit for Whistler: “[H]e had given him seventeen sittings during a month’s stay in London. For Whistler, the sketch is a positive onslaught on the canvas, one or two hours of fevered madness, from which the thing would emerge fully structured in its externals ... and the sittings, long sittings where, most of the time, with his paintbrush held close to the canvas, the painter would not make the stroke he had at the tip of his brush, but would throw it aside and take another – and sometimes, in three hours, he would put only fifty or so strokes on to the canvas ... each stroke, according to Whistler, lifting a veil from the glaze of the sketch. Oh! the sittings where it seemed to Montesquiou that Whistler was drawing his life from him with the fixity of his attention, was sucking something of his individuality from him” (reprinted in Spencer 1991, 275). Montesquiou’s description remind us of Poe’s story “The Oval Mirror,” in which a woman is literally drained of life and eventually dies by having her portrait painted. In addition, Rodolphe Rapetti has written about how painting rapidly was “considered expressive of the modern world, with its cult of speed” (2006, 179). Whistler’s drive to complete a portrait in one sitting, and the attendant “nervousness” produced in the sitter, can therefore be seen as having parallels with those contemporary anxieties discussed in Chapter 3.

more clothes to become an actress, and lastly took everything off to be an artist's model" (Painter 1983, 204). Laurent was mistress to Dr. Thomas Evans, Napoleon III's American dentist, though this didn't prevent her indulging a passion for poets and painters, among them Manet and Mallarmé. She was, as Painter suggests, one of the models for Proust's Odette, and her affair with Manet mirrors Odette's early liaison with Elstir. Likewise, Laurent's apartment with its oriental tapestries and Japanese lanterns provided a prototype for the rooms where Odette entertains Swann.

It was in these imaginatively charged circumstances that Proust met Whistler and, not without some bravery, took to discussing Ruskin with him. Bravery because, since 1878 and the libel suit that followed Ruskin's infamous comments regarding Whistler having flung "a pot of paint in the public's face," Ruskin was the sworn enemy of everything in which Whistler believed. "Thanks to Reynaldo ... I met Whistler one evening and he told me Ruskin knew absolutely nothing about pictures" (cited in Prestwich 1999, 136). The meeting took place during the period when Whistler was grieving the loss of his wife Beatrice, and when the dandy of the 1880s had been replaced by a very different though no less striking figure: "... the indispensable monocle is not in evidence. The white plume pales against Whistler's graying curls. Gone is the walking stick. Whistler's hands are empty. Haunted by his bereavement" (Park Curry 2004, 62). The detail of Whistler being "empty-handed" is doubly moving when we read that Proust left the meeting with a souvenir of the great man: a pair of "handsome grey gloves" [*jolis gants gris*] that Whistler left behind and which Proust subsequently misplaced (*Corr.* V:42; *SL* IV:137).

It speaks volumes for Proust's charm and tact, Whistler's affability, and Mme Laurent's cellar that the conversation appears to have ended amicably, with Proust cajoling Whistler into "say[ing] a few kind words about Ruskin!" (Prestwich 1999, 136) In many ways the conversation would have been Proust's way of effecting a reconciliation between two opposing forces that meant much to him. Ruskin he was to translate with the assistance of his mother and Marie Nordlinger; Whistler he was to remain a lifelong champion of.

As Donald Holden has pointed out, Whistler's late works, his small oils and watercolors, were, at the time of his death, largely unknown to the public. That this has continued to be the case (and it perhaps remains a reason why critics have seen Whistler's contribution to the character of Elstir as being primarily composed of his society portraits, insisting it is to

Monet that we should look for Proust's "painterly writing" about landscape) is largely due to the fact that the majority of these pictures are housed in America, the bulk of them in Washington's Freer Gallery of Art, from where, because of the terms of the Freer bequest, they are forbidden to travel. Proust, however, through Nordlinger, would at least have known of, and been fascinated by, pictures described by Holden as being "the product of a memory systematically trained to record and edit the details of the visible world" (1969, 14). Indeed, we might wonder whether the description of Marcel standing in awe before a room full of Elstirs owned by the Guermantes doesn't represent a wish-fulfillment on Proust's part: that he, too, could have been present when, in America in 1904, Charles Freer showed Nordlinger the "innumerable, undreamed-of masterpieces" he was planning to loan to the Whistler Memorial Exhibition.

Within two years of his death on July 17, 1903, Whistler's reputation was in decline in France. This despite the mounting of memorial exhibitions in Boston in 1904, and in London and Paris in 1905. Among his erstwhile supporters now turned renegade critics was Blanche, who referred to him as a man of exquisite taste but not a great artist.⁵ Proust, however, remained firm:

Si celui qui a peint les *Venise* en turquoises, les *Amsterdam* en topaze, les *Bretagne* en opôle, si le portraitiste de Miss Alexander, le peintre de la chambre au rideaux semés de bouquets roses et surtout des voiles dans la nuit ... n'est pas un grand peintre, c'est à penser qu'il n'y en eut jamais

[If the man who painted those Venices in turquoise, those Amsterdams in topaz, those Brittanies in opal, if the portraitist of Miss Alexander, the painter of the room with the rose-strewn curtains and above all of the sails at night ... is not a great painter, one can only think there never was one] (*Corr.*, V:260–261; *SL*, II:198)

Why Proust stuck with Whistler and allotted him so prominent a role in *A la recherche* is the subject of this chapter. To understand the significance of Whistler's contribution, however, it is important to examine the nature of his considerable contribution to French art in the closing decades of the

⁵ Tadié 2000, 862. Blanche may have been swayed by the opinion of his friend Walter Sickert. Sickert had been Whistler's greatest student but their friendship had, like so many, fallen foul of Whistler's demands for absolute fidelity.

nineteenth century. In so doing, we will need to take into account a range of specifically American influences.

The painter of modern life

A la recherche is not the only French novel to figure Whistler. In *L'Oeuvre* (1886), the most autobiographical of the twenty novels that make up the Rougon-Macquart series, Emile Zola drew up a cast list of characters based on Courbet, Manet, Monet, Pissaro, and Cézanne, his boyhood friend. The novel shows how deeply entrenched were the lines of battle between the old and new in French society, describing as it does how, before their art could meet with the level incomprehension of the Parisian public, artists had first to battle with their teachers at the *École des Beaux-Arts* and the members of the Selection Committee for inclusion in the yearly and, after 1850, biennial Salon. Official recognition brought financial rewards, with Paris dealers not expecting to sell anything by an artist who hadn't been represented at the Salon. It also brought the burden of social and cultural conformity.

Such rhetoric defines the speech given by Achill Fould, a Minister of State, at the Salon of 1853 in which he compared the age of the Second Empire with earlier periods of cultural greatness: the ages of Pericles, Augustus, Leo X, and Louis XIV (Anderson and Koval 1994, 55). Indeed almost two decades later at the height of the German siege, Victor Hugo, newly returned from exile in Jersey, was impelled to proclaim, "There has been an Athens, there has been a Rome, and there is a Paris ... Is the nineteenth century to witness this frightful phenomenon? A nation fallen from polity to barbarism, abolishing the city of nations" (cited in Horne 2004, 14). Little wonder that Zola has his rebellious central character, Claude Lantier exclaim:

"Down with the Greek Temples; there was no use or place for them in modern society! Down with the Gothic cathedrals; belief in legends was dead! Down too with the delicate colonnades and the intricate tracery of the Renaissance, that Classical revival crossed with medieval art, which produced architectural jewels but could never house modern democracy!"⁶

⁶ Zola 1993, 151. Lantier is a composite of the personalities and working methods of Manet and Monet. Proust may therefore have had Zola's example in mind when creating Elstir.

With hindsight the Exposition Universelle of 1855 can be seen as marking the high point of government control of the arts in France. From that point on the relationship between politics and art grew steadily more relaxed, as evidenced by the institutional changes introduced into the Salon rules and regulations in 1857. An even greater cause of rapid change came in 1863 when, following complaints that grew vociferous enough to reach the Emperor's ears, "His majesty, wishing to let the public judge the legitimacy of these complaints, has decided that the rejected works of art are to be exhibited in another part of the Palace of Industry" (Anderson and Koval 1994, 131). The "alternative" exhibition immediately became known as the Salon des Refusés and, as described by Zola in the fifth chapter of *L'Oeuvre*, caused uproar among public and critics alike. Two works in particular were singled out: Manet's *Le Bain* (later retitled *Déjeuner sur l'herbe*) and Whistler's *The White Girl* (later retitled *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl*):

On every side the walls were covered with a mixture of the excellent and the execrable, in every possible style; last-ditchers of the "historical" school cheek by jowl with youthful fanatics of Realism, colorless mediocrity with blatant originality, a "Jezebel Dead" that looked as if she had moldered away in the cellars of the Beaux-Arts hung next to a "Woman in White,"⁷ a curious vision, but seen by the eye of a great artist. (1993, 135)

Zola returns to the painting, describing how "Woman in White" provided some amusement ... for she was rarely without her group of grinning admirers digging each other in the ribs and going off into fits of helpless mirth" (1993, 136).

The fictional version of events is borne out by documentary evidence. The *Revue des Deux Mondes* saw the Salon des Refusés as "at once sad and grotesque"; while the *Moniteur*, whose chief critic, the poet and novelist Théophile Gautier, devoted some twelve articles to the official Salon, chose to ignore it completely. Nevertheless Whistler was not without his

⁷ Zola's mistitling of Whistler's painting owes everything to the popularly held view that the picture referred to the eponymous heroine of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*. It was clearly not, then, as Whistler was later to say, the English alone who "cannot and will not consider a picture as a picture, apart from any story which it may be supposed to tell" (Thorp 1994, 51).

supporters, including Paul Mantz, writing in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, who thought the painting firmly within the French tradition.⁸ Mantz's comment is important, and I will return to it shortly. The point I want to reiterate here, however, is that at the moment when French Art became what we recognize today as essentially modern, an American artist was a defining presence.

Neither was he alone. American artists featured in each of the five international expositions mounted in Paris between 1855 and 1900. From being a rather loose gathering in 1855, the presence of the United States evolved into a deliberate campaign which, with official support and financial backing from the federal government, looked to promote not only American art but America's expansionist policies abroad. Nowhere was this aim more clearly articulated than in Francis Day Millet's painting *The Expansionist (The Travelled Man)*, shown in 1900. Center-stage in the painting are a wooden globe and a number of maps and other objects culled from his travels. As David Park Curry comments, the painting represented the view that the New World not only could but would supersede the Old (2006, 202).

While Whistler, too, wanted to prove himself against the Old Masters, from the start the nature of his art was recognized as being markedly different from that of his compatriots. He stood out from the crowd of other American artists in Paris, because, as the English photographer P. H. Emerson said in 1899, he was contributing to developments in modern French art in a way that no other American artist had before. Emerson wrote:

Of American art there is but little to say. No name stands out worthy of record till J. M. Whistler appears, and he, though American by birth, can hardly be called an American painter, for the life and landscape of his country he neglects, as also does Sargent, a strong painter, French by education[.] (reprinted in Spencer 1991, 323)

Neither was this appropriation short-lived. Writing some seven decades after Whistler's death, the French poet and novelist (and friend of Proust), Paul Morand (1888–1976) continued to conflate Whistler with other French-born artists and an imagined France as evocative and influential as Elstir's portraits with an American motif:

⁸ For further critical responses to Whistler's work at the Salon, see Anderson and Koval 1994, 132–135.

I had been brought up in the grimy Paris of Zola, along the tar-blackened streets of Whistler, among Maupassant's gloomy peasants, in Flaubert's sombre countryside ... This magical mirror enabled me to glimpse my future life; elemental forces which had hitherto been dormant radiated forth. In a trice, I was at the heart of my being. (Morand 2002, 28)

The White Girl marked not only Whistler's acceptance within the new school of French art but distinguished him as one of its leaders. His elevation was made semi-official in Henri Fantin-Latour's *Homage à Eugène Delacroix* (1864) in which Whistler stands cheek-by-jowl beside influential painters/etchers (Manet, Fantin-Latour, Louis Cordier, Félix Bracquemond, Alfred de Balleroy, and Alphonse Legros) and writers/critics (Edmond Duranty, Jules Champfleury, and Baudelaire). It is Whistler, however, holding a bouquet of flowers before a portrait of the deceased Delacroix who, like the globe and maps of Millet's *The Expansionist*, commands attention.

Delacroix died in the August following the Salon des Refusés, and the two events led to a recognition that an era in French art had come to a close. Over the following weeks his influence was debated and analyzed, one of the most significant contributions being written by Baudelaire – a three-part article that appeared in the form of an open letter to the editor of the widely read *Opinion Nationale*. Delacroix was the first great specifically *modern* artist. His pre-eminence, Baudelaire wrote, lay in the fact that he “interpreted” humanity “with no other means than color and contour” and that he did so “with the perfection of a consummate painter, with the exactitude of a subtle writer, with the eloquence of an impassioned musician” (Baudelaire 1964d, 43). Baudelaire's belief in a correspondence between the arts was hugely influential – not least on the design of Fantin-Latour's *Homage*, where “the new generation [of painters] and its allied critics honored a painter who had maintained a link with the literary and the poetic” (Rubin 1994, 92). It was an aesthetic that no doubt decided Whistler in lending his own paintings titles prefaced by “Harmony,” “Arrangement,” “Symphony,” and “Note” – paving the way for Debussy's Whistler-inspired compositions, and for Proust's experiments in “painterly writing.”

The portrait came in for some fierce criticism, notably from Jean Rousseau, a regular contributor to *Le Figaro*:

This *Homage to Delacroix* consists of a bouquet of flowers about to be presented in front of his portrait by a young man who is completely unknown. A good-looking, well-dressed chap, nevertheless ... I suppose that the homage ... is serious; but the most illustrious representatives of art and literature should have been convened for a ceremony of this sort[.] (reprinted in Spencer 1991, 72)

The “well-dressed chap” was Whistler, whom, in his reply to Rousseau’s article, Fantin-Latour singled out alongside Manet as the greatest representative of contemporary painting today (reprinted in Spencer 1991, 75). However, Whistler’s importance to Parisian art also derived from another source, one that brought him within the orbit of Proust and the salon of Méry Laurent discussed earlier.

Whistler was neither the first nor necessarily the most rigorous advocate of Japanese art. He was in fact annoyed when his *Nocturnes* were described as being “so original as to be entirely Japanese” (Sickert 2000, 186). Nevertheless his name soon became synonymous with *Japonisme*. Perhaps this had something to do with his close association with Bracquemond, who, in legend at least, received a set of porcelain from Japan and found that the plates had been wrapped prints by Hokusai. However he came across them, what is certain is that as soon as he became aware of such prints Bracquemond began showing them to his artist friends. Among them was Manet who, James A. Michener writes, “filled several pages of his notebooks with sketches so completely Japanese in character that he copied meaningless Japanese characters below them for titles” (1983, 237). More famously, Manet incorporated Japanese themes and prints into his portrait of Zola (1868), in which, alongside a photograph of Manet’s *Olympia* and what appears to be a copy of Velasquez’s *The Topers* (*The Triumph of Bacchus*) there stands the figure of a sumo wrestler. Japanese motifs and influences entered the work of other artists, notably the American artist Mary Cassatt and Degas who, Emil Maurer argues, without the knowledge of Japanese art

would certainly not have gone so far so quickly in his “directorial” approach to the picture, with his cutting and highlighting of detail, overall fragmentation, polarization of near and far, full and empty, the upward or downward angle of the viewing axis, always [leading] back to the decorative surface, to pictorial rhythms[.] (1994, 112)

Among his contemporaries it was Degas whom Whistler most respected and admired. Little wonder, then, that he went on himself to complete a series of paintings with an explicitly Japanese-inspired style and subject matter. Two of these paintings, *Variations in Flesh Color and Green: The Balcony* (1865) and *Variations in Violet and Green* (1871), inasmuch as they show groups of young women gathered near water, can be considered kissing-cousins to *le petite bande* at Balbec.

The comparison with Proust is instructive. For whereas Proust moved from symbolism to realism (though of course both coexist within *A la recherche*), Whistler's earliest work, influenced by Courbet, reprises key aspects of naturalist art, none more so than *Wapping* (1860–64) with its depiction of the London riverfront and unflinching portrayal of prostitution. What we see in a painting such as *The Balcony*, however, is how the influence of *Japonisme* allowed Whistler to break away from a straight depiction of urban landscapes and the narrow confines of contemporary depictions of femininity and sexuality. Such a movement, as we will see, was to prove central to the importance allocated Elstir in *A la recherche*.

There is another reason why Whistler should have acquired the nickname of the “Japanese artist,” one that has less to do with his being an artist than his being American. In the case of Japanese art and its influence on the early impressionists, the global role of the United States was vital. Though Japanese art had been arriving in Europe for three centuries (since 1624 the Dutch had been allowed to maintain a small trading post on the artificial island of Dejima in the harbor of Nagasaki), it wasn't until 1854 and the treaty signed between Admiral Matthew Calbraith Perry and representatives of the emperor that Japanese isolationism in respect of trade with the outside world came to an end. The effect in terms of knowledge of Japanese culture was instantaneous – dangerously so, as far as Japan was concerned. For when, in 1856, the English writer Kinihan Cornwallis published *Two Journeys to Japan*, in which he describes Perry's landing at the port of Shimoda, he tells how the shogun halted all sales of prints to the Americans because “the pictures in question would give too good an idea of what was going on in Japan to the people of other nations” (Michener 1983, 239).

When, in a number of paintings from the period, Whistler shows women holding decorous paper fans, what we are seeing is further evidence of American military power – such fans having been mass-produced for export following Japan opening its doors to trade. By the early 1860s shops in London and Paris were offering for sale a wide range of imported

Japanese goods. Among the first customers to flock to Farmer & Roger's Oriental Warehouse in Regent Street and *La Porte Chinoise* under the arcades of the Rue de Rivoli were the pre-Raphaelites, William Morris, Ruskin, Bracquemond, Baudelaire, the Goncourt brothers, Manet, Zola, Monet, and Fantin-Latour. A restless traveler between London and Paris, Whistler visited both. We can imagine that they were joined in their browsing by Méry Laurent, Proust's Odette, and other representatives of the *demi-monde*. It also seems likely that it would have been from one of these outlets that Marie Nordlinger bought Proust a packet of the Japanese water flowers – “tiny pieces of compressed, colored pith ... contained in little boxes or shells” (Prestwich 1999, 140–141) – which, when dropped in water, opened to become flowers and, in the last paragraph of the opening chapter of *Du côté de chez Swann*, become so powerful a image for the workings of involuntary memory.

As suggested earlier in relation to Degas, one aspect of Japanese artists that influenced European and American artists was their ability, in the words of one contemporary critic, to “express themselves by the scantiest means, shrink from saying too much, and aim at only a rapid and right expression of total effect, leaving to the imagination the task of supplementing and amplifying what is given” (Muther 1895, 91). It is a description that comes close to what Emil Maurer has seen as a distinguishing feature of both Degas's and Whistler's portraits: “the bourgeois interior as a surrounding to set off the individual, complicated by both painters in confusing perspectives, overlappings, cut-off edges – permitting no easy access for the viewer. In the work of both the portrait is slightly or more distanced and does not reveal all its secrets” (1994, 115).

American interiors, too, were being influenced by the aesthetics of Japanese art, providing an antidote to the “meaningless bric-à-brac” and “indiscriminate riff-raff” that was otherwise the middle-class ideal. What was to replace this “passion for acquisition and display was a sense of ‘harmony’” (see Brown 2003, 144). It is interesting, then, to consider the influence of the “quiet, airy, open rooms” advocated in the 1880s by interior designers in the States, which depended for their effect on the scarcity of objects, alongside Whistler's genius for “dressing” both those gallery spaces and domestic interiors in which his art was to hang [see Plate 2] and Proust's description of his “intentionally bare room” with its copy of a Whistler.

Given what I said earlier about *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl*, something else that can only have interested Whistler is that many of the examples of Japanese art he came across were defiantly nonliterary and

nonhistorical in their subject matter, recording instead “the most refined effects of light” on scenes including “illuminated bridges, dark firmaments, white sickles of the moon, glittering stars” (Muther 1895, 94). Japanese art looked for the essence of a scene rather than a photographic likeness. In this it could not fail to attract the attention of a generation of painters in need of redefining what it was painting could do faced with the challenge of the camera. It was also an aesthetic concerned with the effect memory played in the painting and composition of a picture. And it is in this respect that we find a synthesis between Oriental art and another of Whistler’s earliest influences in Paris: Horace Lecoq de Boisbaudran.

Ways of seeing

Boisbaudran was born in Paris in 1802 and entered the *École des Beaux-Arts* when he was seventeen. He exhibited at the Salon between 1831 and 1844, at which point his painting – described as “cold and hard, showing unmistakable signs of a bad education” (Boisbaudran 1911, xi) – gave way to teaching. In 1863, after a series of teaching posts, Boisbaudran was authorized to employ his own teaching methods and to open a class for memory training at the *École Impériale et Spéciale de Dessin et Mathématique* where he taught, among others, Fantin-Latour. It seems likeliest, then, that it was from Fantin-Latour that Whistler came to know of Boisbaudran’s ideas about memory training: that memory is “stored observation” and that the artist should be taught “to seize essentials with increasing rapidity.” Students with a well-developed memory, he observed, “were able to draw for a longer time, without the least loss of accuracy, before they needed to look at [the model] again, which proves that their impression was better observed and was retained for a longer space of time.” And, in words that anticipate Proust’s great project, he emphasized that there should be no conflict between memory and imagination, which “are so closely linked that imagination can only use what memory has to offer her ... How much more productive then must the imagination be when nourished by a cultivated memory, for it has at its service a store of material richer both in quantity and variety, yet absolutely precise” (1911, 3, 4, 16, 21).

Though Boisbaudran’s influence on Whistler was indirect, it was nonetheless profound. Evidence of this comes from sources close to Whistler: Walter Sickert, who was convinced that Boisbaudran stood alongside Delacroix and Courbet in having formed Whistler as a painter

(Sickert 2000, 183); and Thomas Way, who, in his memoir of Whistler, not only describes Whistler “memory training” at work but mentions a letter he had from L.D.Luard, Boisbaudran’s English translator, commenting on Whistler and Boisbaudran.

Thomas Robert Way was the son of Thomas Way, the owner of a London-based lithographic firm under whose encouragement Whistler took up lithography in 1878. Way was to continue to print all Whistler’s lithographs until he settled in Paris in the 1890s. Thomas Way Jr. therefore spent a great deal of time with Whistler, and recounts an incident when he witnessed first-hand his use of memory training:

We had left the studio when it was quite dusk, and were walking along the road by the gardens of Chelsea Hospital, when he suddenly stopped, and pointing to a group of buildings in the distance, an old public house at the corner of a road, with windows and shops showing golden lights through the gathering mist of twilight, said, “Look!” As he did not seem to have anything to sketch or make notes on, I offered him my notebook; “No, no, be quiet,” was the answer; and after a long pause he turned and walked back a few yards; then, with his back to the scene at which I was looking, he said, “Now, see if I have learned it,” and repeated a full description of the scene, even as one would repeat a poem one had learned by heart ... In a few days I was at the studio again, and there on the easel was the realization of the picture ... Mr. Luard wrote to me some time ago, suggesting that [Whistler] probably learned this system of grasping his subjects from the French Professor, De Boisbaudran, who was teaching such a method at the time [Whistler] was studying in Paris. (reprinted in Spencer 1991, 106–107)

Though there is no evidence that Proust knew of Boisbaudran’s book, we do know that he associated Whistler’s art with memory. In “Éventail” (Fan), first published in the *Revue Blanche* in 1893 and included in *Les Plaisirs et les jours*, Proust’s artist-narrator addresses a society hostess for whom he has painted a series of images on a fan: “Puisse-t-il selon votre désir évoquer dans votre retraite les formes vaines et charmantes qui peuplèrent votre salon, si riche alors de vie gracieuse, à jamais fermé maintenant” [May it, in your retreat, according to your desire, call back the vain and charming forms that once peopled your drawing-room, then so full of gracious life, and now forever closed] (*PJ*, 50; *PR*, 76–77).

Proust's story is reminiscent of those Japanese-inspired portraits by Whistler, including *Rose and Silver: The Princess from the Land of Porcelain* (1863–64) and *Symphony in White No. 2: The Little White Girl* (1864), that show women in tastefully decorated interiors staring abstractedly into space while holding precisely the kind of fan mentioned earlier. However rudimentary, “Éventail” is also concerned with the changing face of portraiture in modern art, and the relationship between art and life that was to dominate *A la recherche*.

Even at this early stage in his writings, Whistler was central to how Proust thought these things through:

Vos plus délicieuses amies sont là. Me le pardonneraient-elles si vous leur montriez l'éventail? Je ne sais. La plus étrangement belle, qui dessinait devant nos yeux émerveillés comme un Whistler vivant, ne se serait reconnue et admirée que portraituree par Bouguereau. Les femmes réalisent la beauté sans la comprendre.

[Your most delicious friends are there. Will they ever forgive me if you show them this fan? I'm not sure. That most strangely beautiful woman, who seemed a living Whistler to our wondering eyes, would never recognize and and admire herself unless painted by Bouguereau. Women are the living realizations of beauty, but they do not understand it.] (*PJ*, 52; *PR*, 79)

As Luzius Keller writes with reference to this same paragraph:

The most glamorous guests are not actually portrayed; instead they are characterized by their aesthetic views ... “Éventail” mirrors the *fin de siècle* culture of the society salon and its aestheticism as represented, for example, by Robert de Montesquiou. In this context Whistler can be used as an example of modern painting as opposed to the traditional portrait painting someone like Bouguereau[.] (1994, 129)

However, as Keller acknowledges, by the time Proust began to compose *A la recherche* in 1908, Whistler was no longer regarded as an example of Baudelaire's truly modern painter. He was, rather, associated by many with exactly the cloying aestheticism – the culture of the “society salon” – that defines *Les Plaisirs et les jours* and of which Proust needed to rid himself if he was to write a novel capable of sustaining acute psychological insight as well as a portrait of social, economic, and artistic upheaval. In other

words, while Whistler could afford to “care nothing for the past, present, or future” of his painted subjects, the same approach would not be an option for Proust the novelist.⁹

There is something in Proust’s associating certain characters with actual works of art so as to “authenticate” them that is reminiscent of his use of intertextuality in his novel. Walter A. Strauss has written how literature is “omnipresent in the novel” and that literary references lend depth and individuality to Proust’s characters (1957, 12). The same can be said for painting. For running alongside literary pastiche, the most notable among which is the fragment from the journal of the Goncourt brothers that appears in *Le Temps retrouvé*, we find a number of pastiches that draw for their effect on Proust’s knowledge of the visual arts. While there are elements in such pastiches of Proust’s continuing debt to the decadent ideal of the interrelation of art and life, they also serve to “deepen” the realist aspect of his fiction. If, as Leo Spitzer suggests, “for Proust the art of characterization consists in quoting, in reproducing ... in creating pastiches” (cited in Strauss 1957, 26), then we must add to our appreciation of these exercises in mimesis Proust’s gifts as a painterly writer with a particular fondness for the work of Whistler.

As with Marcel’s relationship with Swann, Whistler represents in the novel what William Sansom defines as “that special kind of unattainable nostalgia tinged with envy of one’s parents for living then” (1973, 111). Proust’s evocation of the years immediately prior to Marcel’s birth are lent authenticity by Elstir’s portrait of Odette dressed as “Miss Sacripant.” The portrait, the Narrator comments, has with time come to be seen as

l’extrait de naissance le plus accablant pour Odette parce qu’il faisait d’elle non pas seulement, comme ses photographies d’alors, une cadette de cocottes connues, mais parce qu’il faisait de son portrait le contemporain d’un des nombreux portraits que Manet ou Whistler ont peints d’après tant de modèles disparus qui appartiennent déjà à l’oubli ou à l’histoire.

⁹ Discussing *Harmony in Grey and Gold*, Whistler said: “My picture [is] a snow scene with a single black figure and a lighted tavern. I care nothing for the past, present, or future of the black figure, placed there because the black was wanted on that spot. All that I know is that my combination of grey and gold is the basis of the picture” (Thorp 1994, 51).

[her most merciless birth certificate, not just because, like photographs of her from the same time, it made her a junior among well-known courtesans, but because it showed that the painting dated from the period of the many portraits by Manet or Whistler of sitters long vanished, consigned to history, gone to oblivion.] (677; II:441)

As Gertrude Stein wrote in "Portraits and Repetition," "the strange thing about the realization of existence is that like a train moving there is no real realization of it moving if it does not move against something and so that is what a generation does it shows that moving is existing" (1988, 287). By setting Odette against the unchanging backdrop of Elstir's portrait, Proust "realizes" the passing of a time exterior to the lives of his characters. What differentiates a painting from a photograph, Proust suggests, is that by capturing the present moment so faithfully photography severs itself from the one dimension we cannot escape: Time. Painting, however, tells us that not only is the past unattainable, so is the present. With a photograph, as Barthes said, it is only the subject that we see; the photograph itself remains invisible. Moreover, the photograph provides an illusion that we hold the event, the very person in our hands. While this may lend photography its incurable sense of melancholy, it remains incapable of telling us – as does a painting – that the sitter is never commensurate with the portrait. Far from holding out the promise of eternal life, the painting becomes Odette's life sentence.

The association of Whistler with a sense of time that is not passed but passing (the former would be static and thus attainable, the latter is always out of reach) is emphasized when the young Marcel has fully emerged into the butterfly-world of high society and finds himself in conversation with the flirtatious Charlus:

« Hé bien voilà, me dit-il en traînant encore, c'est le moment où, comme dit Whistler, les bourgeois rentrent (peut-être voulait-il me prendre par l'amour-propre) et où il convient de commencer à regarder. Mais vous ne savez même pas qui est Whistler. »

["Well, there we are," he continued, still marking time, "it is the hour, as Whistler says, when the bourgeois go to bed" (perhaps he now wished to exploit my own sense of pride) "the moment to start taking a look at the world. But you don't even know who Whistler is."] (1178; III:563)

Balanced between his feelings of cultural and social superiority and his awareness of himself as an ageing roué, Charlus's anxieties focus on one of the great figures of his youth. "Unless you have heard of Whistler," Charlus is saying, "I cannot exist for you. You cannot imagine what I am, or who I have been." Proust underlines this a little later in the novel, when he refers to Charlus as though he were transformed, like the women in "Éventail," into a living portrait by Whistler:

J'eus tout le loisir ... d'admirer la volontaire et artiste simplicité de son frac qui, par des riens qu'un couturier seul eût discernés, avait l'air d'une « Harmonie » noir et blanc de Whistler; noir, blanc et rouge plutôt, car M. de Charlus portait, suspendue à un large cordon au jabot de l'habit, la croix en émail blanc, noir et rouge de chevalier de l'ordre religieux de Malte.

[I had ample leisure ... in which to admire the wilful and artistic simplicity of his dress coat which, thanks to tiny details that a couturier alone might have discerned, looked like a "Harmony" in black and white by Whistler; or rather black, white and red for M. de Charlus wore, suspended by a broad ribbon against the jabot of his evening-dress, the white, black and red enamel cross of a Knight of the religious Order of Malta.] (1249; IV:58)

We are presented here with three things at once: a portrait in the *style* of Whistler, a portrait *by* Whistler, and a portrait *of* Whistler. Whistler did indeed paint a male sitter in black and white, though he chose to call it *Arrangement in Black and Gold*. The picture, a dazzling portrait of Comte Robert de Montesquiou-Fezensac, a model for Charlus and a friend to both Whistler and Proust, shows Montesquiou dressed in evening clothes and carrying in one hand a walking stick, in the other a woman's chinchilla stole. By adding to Whistler's *Arrangement* a red *tache*, however, Proust refers the reader to Giovanni Boldini's 1897 portrait of Whistler wearing a monocle and, as with *Arrangement in Black and Gold*, full evening attire.¹⁰ Like Charlus, Boldini's Whistler sports a bravura dash of red: Whistler's chevalier medal presented to him by the French Légion d'honneur. In the act of showing the reader what Charlus looks like, or in Stein's words "realizing his existence," Proust enacts just how

¹⁰ Boldini, who Proust had met and pumped for information about Whistler, also painted Montesquiou's portrait in 1897.

complicated is the relationship between his characters and Marcel's search for a verbal – literary – form of representation. Rather, then, than offering certainty, Proust multiplies our perspective on the moment of Marcel's *looking* rather than that at which he looks. To capture that moment with any faithfulness means referring the reader to two actual portraits of two real figures, only in so doing to create an imaginary third. Our attention is drawn less to the object depicted than the drama of representation. As we saw in Chapter 2 with Proust's description of Charlus and Jupien in the Guermantes courtyard, successive comparisons are needed in order to show “des aspects différents d'une même réalité” [different aspects of the one reality] (1225; IV:25).

Such tactics, James H. Rubin argues, are central to an essentially “poetic” approach to the visual, one which “produces effects that enhance ... our awareness that we are encountering painted signs – figurations rather than figures themselves, representations rather than their referents” (1994, 12). This has implications for what in Chapter 2 I said about Marcel's “apprenticeship to signs,” and how Emerson was read as a decadent rather than a classical author. A reason for this, as I discussed in Chapter 1 with reference to what Havelock Ellis said about Emerson's influence on the Decadent movement, is that Emerson's writing subordinates the whole to the individual parts. Classicism works in the opposite direction: the individual parts subordinated to an ordered whole (Ellis 1969, xiv). If we return to Proust's “portrait” of Charlus, we see that in a very real sense there is no visual “whole” into which the individual panels of his triptych of Harmonies and Arrangements cohere. Rather, what we experience with Marcel is the unsettling act of seeing Charlus. Or, remembering the gaze with which Charlus fixes Marcel at Tansonville and again at Balbec, of being himself looked at. To quote Rubin once more:

in the technique and intellect underlying [non-descriptive] representation ... figures impinge on us with their gazes, their scale and their physicality[.] We might call this a “semiotic” or “performative” *experience*, as opposed to the paradigm of *reading* ... the work as “text.” In it, the figures encountered by the gaze are experienced as signs that are no longer transparent ... but are displayed as events[.] (1994, 19)

In stressing the performative aspect of this kind of art, we can see a connection between Marcel's effort at realizing Charlus as a fixed

and readable entity – a character – and what Eve Sedgwick says about sexuality being for Proust “still *in* performance” (1990, 213). These seemingly irreconcilable qualities – stillness and maneuverability – act out a tension we met earlier in Elstir’s portrait of Odette. At such times Proust’s painterly writing becomes another means of figuring what in the context of Emerson and “transition” Richard Poirier calls “a movement away from substantives or ‘resting-places’ or settled texts” (1987, 16). Transition, Poirier says, underlies Emerson’s effort to communicate how all things are ever in a state of becoming – “like catching a glimpse of a thing before it is possible to recognize or name it, the moment just before it can be classified by language and thus become composed or reposed in a human corpus or text” (1987, 46). Charlus’s gaze is one such “glimpse.” He refuses, as Rubin says of Manet’s various portraits of Victorine Meurent, to lower his eyes to avoid the charge of impudence (1994, 49).

Indeed, the gaze with which Charlus fixes Marcel is essentially a “female” gaze. Not only because Charlus is an invert – “je comprenais maintenant pourquoi ... j’avais pu trouver que M. de Charlus avait l’air d’une femme: c’en était une! Il appartenait à la race de ces êtres moins contradictoires qu’ils n’en ont l’air, dont l’idéal est viril, justement parce que leur tempérament est féminin” [I understood now why I had been able to think that M. de Charlus had the look of a woman: he was one! He belonged to that race of beings less contradictory than they appear to be, whose ideal is virile, precisely because their temperament is feminine] (1219; IV:19) – but because of what Rubin says about Manet’s portraits of Meurent providing the viewer with the unsettling experience of not only looking but of being themselves seen: “just as we feel discomfort when an unfamiliar person we are watching discovers us doing so, the viewer of [*Le Bain*] feels the privacy of his perceptions violated” (Rubin 1994, 50). In looking at Charlus, and in being looked back at, it is as though Marcel experiences a return to Montjouvain and the scene of his spying on Mlle Vinteuil and her lover. The difference now is that they return his stare.

The blurring of fact and fiction that occurs in this passage returns us to Proust’s assumption of a *nom de plume* when writing about Whistler in *Le Mensuel*. It is in itself a very Whistlerian thing to do when we consider how in a number of paintings Whistler plays games with what is real and what is artificial. In *Variations in Flesh Color and Green: The Balcony* (1864–1870s), for example, his trademark butterfly signature (a cartouche that resembles the seals and stamps found on Japanese *ukiyo-e*, or woodblocks) appears

alongside the painted representation of real butterflies. It is a painting that further asks us to consider the reality of what it depicts. This group of four women sitting, lying, and standing on a balcony, playing music or languorously wafting a fan: what is the relationship between the idyll they represent and the grimy industrial scene that emerges in the background? That the picture occupied Whistler for the best part of a decade also implicates the role memory must have played in its painting. For like Elstir's portrait of Odette, it would have dated its original models while creating an illusory sense of timelessness played out amidst the smokestacks and slag heaps of the late nineteenth century.

Elstir is specifically linked to the relationship between memory and art. He first appears in the novel sitting alone – “ce dîneur obscur, isolé et retardataire” – in the same Rivebelle restaurant where Saint-Loup has taken Marcel. The first thing we are told about Elstir is that he is looking into space: “le regard songeur restait fixé avec application dans le vide” [staring at nothing with pensive, unfocussed eyes] (649; II:405). This could simply give us a portrait of a man with something on his mind, or it may be that this “unfocussed” gaze is Proust's depiction of the artist given over to recreating the world through memory. Certainly there is something in Elstir's behavior that puts us in mind of Boisbaudran's description of his own students: “It was a remarkably interesting sight to watch their young faces, and see a look deep and thoughtful as that of some solitary sage” (1911, 11). The aim of Boisbaudran's memory training was to allow the artist to be able to “draw and redraw his model either upon paper *or* mentally, as often as he finds it necessary to enable him to reproduce the object from recollection” (1911, 5). We are given some indication that Elstir later teaches Marcel something about this retention of images. In the second chapter of *Sodom et Gomorrhe*, the Narrator tells how Marcel, standing at a hotel window looking out at the sea, tries to call to mind the Albertine of the previous summer. First he stresses how changeable is the view depending on the season or the weather, and how unreliable his memory has in the past proved at retaining what he has seen. This, however, has changed because “mes yeux instruits par Elstir à retenir précisément les éléments que j'écartais volontairement jadis, contemplaient longuement ce que la première année ils ne savaient pas voir” [my eyes, educated by Elstir to retain precisely those elements that I had wilfully discarded, dwelt at length on what that first year they had not known how to see] (1347; IV:185). What Proust describes here is strikingly similar to Boisbaudran quizzing his students:

Question. – What do you do when the model, or rather the image, is too indistinct, or even disappears entirely? *Answer.* – It becomes more visible as I try to recall it; sometimes it suddenly escapes me altogether, but by making efforts I manage to recover it. *Another answer.* – The image appears indistinct as a whole, but if I give my whole attention to a single detail, this part becomes sufficiently distinct for me to draw it, and this first detail helps me to recall another, and so I get from one bit to another until I can manage the whole drawing[.] (1911, 12)

This has other applications. It is Elstir who enables Marcel to meet Albertine, the novel's fugitive, indistinct Muse; and it is Elstir's art with which Marcel most closely associates Albertine:

je feuilletais un album d'Elstir, un livre de Bergotte ... je faisais sans m'en douter sortir de moi les rêves qu'Albertine y avait jadis suscités quand je ne la connaissais pas encore et qu'avait éteints la vie quotidienne ... Elle avait à ce moment-là l'apparence d'une oeuvre d'Elstir ou de Bergotte, j'éprouvais une exaltation momentanée pour elle, la voyant dans le recul de l'imagination et de art.

[I would leaf through an album of Elstir's or one of Bergotte's books ... I unconsciously brought out of myself the dreams which Albertine had sown there in former times when I did not know her and which had shrivelled away in the familiarity of daily life ... At that moment she seemed like a work of Elstir or of Bergotte, I felt a moment of lofty enthusiasm for her, seeing her distanced by imagination and art.] (1644; V:47)

Memory transforms Albertine, as it does the women in "Éventail" and the Baron de Charlus, into a *tableau-vivant*. Even the inclusion here of a reference to the novelist Bergotte, rather than diminishing Proust's emphasis on the painterly, actually does the opposite. For Bergotte is described, critically as it happens, by M. de Norpois as having "talent de peintre ... Il sait graver au burin ou à l'eau-forte, sinon brosser" [painterly gifts ... He knows all about engraving and etching, even brushwork on a large scale] (916; III:219); while at the end of his life, rapt by Vermeer's *View of Delft*, Bergotte is left to bemoan, "C'est ainsi que j'aurais dû écrire, disait-il. Mes derniers livres sont trop secs, il aurait fallu passer

plusieurs couches de couleur, rendre ma phrase en elle-même précieuse” [That is how I should have written, he said to himself. My last books are too dry, I should have applied several layers of color, made my sentences precious in themselves] (1743; V:169). Such “painterly writing” provides an invaluable key to understanding *A la recherche*, and remained an aesthetic ideal for Proust.

White is the new black

This is not to say that memory alone is foolproof. Given the importance of the visual arts in *A la recherche*, Marcel has great problems seeing the world straight. Most famously there is the matter of Albertine’s beauty spot that moves from her chin to her cheek, to below the eye, before settling on her upper lip, just under the nose. In the end Marcel trains his powers of observation and his “*mémoire errante*” to retain the “absolute fidelity of likeness [and] exactness” that calls for, as Boisbaudran says, “very close study, by comparison and observation” (1911, 13).

The role of comparison and observation is central to Proust’s fascination with those things that defy visualization. He is, as Elisabeth Ladenson puts it in an essay that focuses on the scene where Gilberte makes a gesture toward Marcel which he reads as insolent and indecent, “unequivocally equivocal” about the ways in which the visual troubles our powers of interpretation (2002, 148). Gilberte continues to provoke such difficulties. At Tansonville her eyes, unlikely as it might seem given her blonde hair, are black; yet to Marcel’s memory they are vivid azure (“*d’un vif azur*”). At the conclusion of the sentence he settles for them being simply blue (118; I:141–142). However, the keynote to the passage is less the determining of a fixed color than the acknowledgment of the part memory plays in allowing us to see, and how in turn memory relies on senses other than the visual.

Color is central to the description of Gilberte and her surroundings: the flowers are pink; there is a watering hose painted green; Gilberte’s hair is reddish blonde, and then simply blonde; she has pink freckles. As though he were experimenting with Baudelaire’s theory of a *correspondence* between the arts, color is experienced through both other senses and with reference to rather mundane objects. Thus the pink of the flowers is evocative of the smell of an old leather purse; and the water that spurts up from the several punctures in the hose send up a “prismatic vertical fan” (“*l’éventail vertical et prismatique*”). Indeed, there is much about the scene that reminds us of Baudelaire’s poem “Correspondences” with its “forest of symbols,” which,

like Gilberte, “remark our passage with accustomed eyes.” When we pierce the “forest,” Baudelaire says, we discover that “the sounds, the scents, the colors correspond” (1987, 193).

Maurice E. Chernowitz has analyzed Proust’s use of colors as adjectives, commenting on how he “places primary emphasis on the sensory quality of the experience ... In keeping with the precedents of literary Impressionism, Proust even places color adjectives before their noun. This position stresses the synthetic, instead of the analytical approach” (1945, 159). In part, then, this returns us to Whistler’s refusal to make painting subservient to narrative. “As music is the poetry of sound,” he said, “so is painting the poetry of sight, and the subject matter has nothing to do with harmony of sound or color” (Thorp 1994, 52). To his contemporaries, Whistler’s art placed him “at a point where vision and representation are almost – but not quite – rendered obsolete ... on a threshold between description and subtle dissolution” (Lochnan 2005, 147). This is the case with Gilberte’s eyes, the color of which partakes of what we might call the harmonic spectrum of blue-black. It can also be applied to Odette when the Narrator refers to her as the living embodiment of a “symphonie en blanc majeur.”

dans des fourrures, ses mains et ses épaules frileuses disparaissant sous le blanc et brillant tapis d’un immense manchon plat et d’un collet, tous deux de zibeline, qu’elle n’avait pas quittés en rentrant et qui avaient l’air des derniers carrés des neiges de l’hiver plus persistants que les autres et que la chaleur de feu ni le progrès de la saison n’avaient réussi à fondra.

[wearing furs, her shivery hands and shoulders disappeared under the dazzling white of a great flat muff and tippet, both of ermine, which she had been wearing outside and which looked like winter’s last and most persistent patches of snow, unthawed by the warmth of her fireside or the change of season.] (502; II:210)

The irony here, read in the light of Whistler’s “subtle dissolution” of the narrative matter of a painting, is that this is precisely what Odette, now Mme Swann, is attempting to do: erase her past. She is turning herself into an artwork. Odette, we might say, is the author of her own image, bringing about what elsewhere in the novel the Narrator, paraphrasing Emerson, associates with Elstir: namely, the artist’s ability to recreate things by removing their names: “une sorte de métamorphose des choses

représentées, analogue à celle qu'en poésie on nomme métaphore et que si Dieu le Père avait créé les choses en les nommant, c'est en leur ôtant leur nom, ou en leur en donnant un autre qu'Elstir les recréait" [a kind of metamorphosis of the things depicted, analogous to the poetical device known as metaphor, and that, if God the Father had created things by naming them, Elstir recreated them by removing their names, or by giving them another name] (656; II:415).

If Odette is looking to disguise her past by the donning of such feminized and indeed fetishized clothing (previously at Tansonville she appeared as "une dame en blanc"), this is in stark contrast to the portrait of her as "Miss Sacripant" which, we are told, "d'être sur le point d'avouer qu'il était celui d'une fille un peu garçonnière, s'évanouissait, et plus loin se retrouvait, suggérant plutôt l'idée d'un jeune efféminé vicieux et songeur ... restait insaisissable" [seemed at times on the point of owning up to being that of a rather boyish girl, faded at others into the impression of an effeminate young man, perverted and pensive ... always elusive] (667; II:428). Elstir's painting reveals what Odette will come to want to hide: how her "caractère ambigu" is made visible through being dressed "demi-travesti." Odette, then, appears as a female dandy. She is neither wholly masculine nor feminine. She wears a bowler hat, and though her hair is cut short it is "bouffants." She is therefore transformed into what Joe Lucchesi terms a "troubling social symbol and enticing sex object" (2001, 172).

This blurring (or dissolution) of gender and sexual identity is characteristic of the *fin-de-siècle*, and of Whistler's art in particular. There is, for example, his portrait of Lady Archibald Campbell in the role of Shakespeare's Orlando (*Note in Green and Brown: Orlando at Coombe*, ca. 1884. See Plate 5). Whistler's picture certainly chimes with Proust's own discussion of Shakespeare's female characters disguising themselves as men in his comedies:

pour l'inverti le vice commence, non pas quand il noue des relations ... mais quand il prend son plaisir avec des femmes. Le jeune homme que nous venons d'essayer de peindre était si évidemment une femme, que les femmes qui le regardaient avec désir étaient vouées ... au même désappointement que celles qui, dans les comédies de Shakespeare, sont déçues par une jeune fille déguisée qui se fait passer pour un adolescent. La tromperie est égale, l'inverti même le sait, il devine la désillusion que, la travestissement ôté, la femme éprouvera, et sent

combien cette erreur sur le sexe est une source de fantaisiste poésie.

[for the invert vice begins, not when he establishes a relationship ... but when he takes his pleasure with women. The young man whom we have just tried to depict was so obviously a woman, that the women who looked longingly at him were doomed ... to the same disappointment as those who, in Shakespeare's comedies, are taken in by a young girl in disguise who passes herself off as an adolescent boy. The deception is the same, the invert knows it even, he can guess at the disillusionment the woman will experience once the travesty is removed, and senses how rich a source of poetic fancy it is, this mistake over gender.] (1224; IV:25)

A Proustian reading of Whistler's portrait of Lady Archibald Campbell, then, would show not a woman dressed as a man but a male invert unable fully to disguise "the unconscious yet visible woman within" ["la femme inconsciente et visible"].

Similarly there is Whistler's portrait of Théodore Duret, *Arrangement en chair et noir* (1884), in which Duret is seen holding a woman's pink fan and opera cloak. Though this isn't to say that Whistler was "outing" Duret, it does tell us that, like Proust, Whistler was interested in the expression, or even repression, of sexuality through fashion. Charlus, for example, the first time Marcel is introduced to him, is described largely in terms of his clothes. What Marcel picks up on in Charlus's dress, however, is of greater significance and more profoundly moving than anything he can presently imagine:

Je vis qu'il avait changé de costume. Celui qu'il portait était encore plus sombre; et sans doute c'est que la véritable élégance est moins loin de la simplicité que la fausse; mais il y avait autre chose: d'un peu près on sentait que si la couleur était presque entièrement absente de ces vêtements, ce n'était pas parce que celui qui l'en avait bannie y était indifférent, mais plutôt parce que, pour une raison quelconque, il se l'interdisait. Et la sobriété qu'ils laissaient paraître semblait de celles qui viennent de l'obéissance à un régime, plutôt que de manque du gourmandise. Un filet de vert sombre s'harmonisait, dans le tissu de pantalon, à la rayure des chaussettes avec un raffinement qui décelait la vivacité d'un goût maté partout ailleurs et à qui cette seule concession avait été faite par tolérance, tandis qu'une tache

rouge sur la cravate était imperceptible comme une liberté qu'on n'ose prendre.

[I saw that he had changed his clothes; the suit he now wore was even darker than the other one – no doubt true elegance is closer to simplicity than is false elegance; but there was something else about him: at close range, one sensed that the almost complete absence of colour from his clothes came not from any indifference to colour, but because, for some reason, he deprived himself of it. The sobriety apparent in his clothing gave the impression of deriving from a self-imposed diet, rather than from any lack of appetite. In the fabric of his trousers, a fine stripe of dark green harmonised with a line visible in his socks, the refinement of this touch revealing the intensity of a preference which, though suppressed everywhere else, had been tolerated in that one form as a special concession, whereas a red design in the cravat remained as imperceptible as a liberty not quite taken, a temptation not quite succumbed to.] (595; II:333–334)

Charlus's clothes make visible his efforts to keep his sexuality under wraps.¹ He is, as it were, in mourning for a sex life he can only express in secret, for certain sensual refinements that lead him to be beaten black and blue in male brothels.

Neither are Proust's arrangements in black and white so easily gendered, with femininity being clothed in white and masculinity in black. On first seeing Saint-Loup, Marcel is dazzled: "Vêtu d'une étoffe souple et blanchâtre comme je n'aurais jamais cru qu'un homme eût osé en porter ... on savait que ce jeune marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray était célèbre pour son élégance" [In a loose off-white garment, the like of which I would never have believed a man would dare to wear ... we beheld the young Marquis de Saint-Loup-en-Bray, famous in the fashionable world] (576–577; II:308). Though seemingly the opposite of an uncle who dresses in black, Saint-

¹ Writing in 1885, Theodor Lipps thought "our general aversion to bright colours, especially in clothing for men, evinces very clearly an oft-noted peculiarity of our character ... In our predilection for the various shades of gray ... running to black, we find an unmistakable social reflection of our tendency to privilege the theory of the formation of the intellect above all else. Even the beautiful we can no longer just enjoy; rather, we must first subject it to criticism, with the consequence that ... our spiritual life becomes ever more cool and colorless" (cited in Benjamin 1999a, 80).

Loup's suit is merely another form of "la vivacité d'un goût" which dares not speak its name. Saint-Loup's is a double-bluff: by appearing in clothes that are obviously "feminine," he hopes to disguise the fact of his inversion. Like Odette's portrait as "Miss Sacripant," however, he has chosen a way of making visible exactly what he wishes no one to see.

Odette, Charlus, and Saint-Loup are walking metaphors, inasmuch as a metaphor defers and displaces meaning while drawing together seemingly disparate elements. It is a synthetic, or synaesthetic, act. Perhaps this is why Odette's metamorphosis of herself into "une dame en blanc" takes the form of replacing flesh and blood with animal skins, the warmth of fabric and material giving way to the numbing chill of ice and snow. If that is what she intends, Proust's Narrator makes sure that a different narrative emerges. For in bringing her and, it must be said, Saint-Loup within the orbit of Whistler's own "*symphonies en blanc majeur*," most notably *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl*, Proust makes them synonymous with the *cause célèbre* that surrounded the painting's first exhibition and its being mis-identified as a portrait of the eponymous heroine of Wilkie Collins's "sensation novel" *The Woman in White* (1860), the identity of whom is shrouded in mystery. Neither should we forget that as the model for the cross-dressing Miss Sacripant, Odette would have had first-hand knowledge of the ambiguous social place of artists' models such as Joanna Hiffernan, Whistler's model for his series of Harmonies in white. Hence the fact that *Symphony in White, No. 1* was read variously as portraying a "fallen woman," as showing a woman attempting to dress above her station, as being an image of a virginal bride, or a red-headed temptress.

Proust may also have known one of Courbet's four portraits of Joanna Hiffernan, *Les Dormeuses (The Sleepers)*, in which Hiffernan and another female model appear flushed and naked, their limbs intertwined in an explicit lesbian clinch. If so, he may also have heard that the painting and Hiffernan's affair with Courbet caused Whistler to suffer excruciating jealousy. Given the series of sexual *voltes faces* that are the lives of almost every major character in the novel, Proust could only have been attracted to a painting that showed a heterosexual woman engaging in homosexual intercourse. It may even have prompted the description of two paintings by Elstir depicting two nude women (2001; v:493) that arouse in Marcel what J. E. Rivers calls "a paroxysm of jealousy and [the] suggestive interplay of memory and fantasy" (1980, 247).

Neither should we overlook the element of self-portraiture latent in Whistler's "white series." While black was the predominant tone in men's

clothing, and it is in black that Whistler always depicted his male sitters, there is a drawing by Edward Poynter of Whistler in December 1858 wearing what looks like a white jacket, and a photograph from 1860 that shows him wearing a pale "suit of dittos" (matching jacket and trousers). Two decades later Mortimer Menpes published a drypoint entitled *Whistler Times Seven*, in which a stocky-looking Whistler adopts seven poses while modeling a greatcoat with shoulder capes. What is striking about the image is that Menpes has left the greatcoat largely unhatched, making it look as though it were made of some kind of white material. As with Poynter's drawing, the effect is to highlight the mass of Whistler's famously dark and vigorously curly hair with its trademark white "plume." Thomas Armstrong's recollection of meeting Whistler for the first time, meanwhile, could have served as a model for Saint-Loup's own "mode Americano":

I remember the exact spot at the corner of the Odéon Theatre ... and his image rises before me as I think of it. It was in the warm weather of August or September, and he was clothed entirely in white duck (quite clean too!), and on his head he wore a straw hat of an American shape not yet well known in Europe ... At that time, and long afterwards, the ringlets of his black curly hair were much longer than when he became well known in London[.] (reprinted in Spencer 1991, 56)

Such depictions, taken alongside Aubrey Beardsley's lithograph *Whistler as Pan* (1892–93) in which the plume of Whistler's hair becomes two horns and Whistler's white suit the naked skin and fur of a faun, suggest that Whistler has something in common with Odette in her dazzling white ermine muff and tippet. After 1895 and the retrial and conviction for sodomy of Oscar Wilde, Whistler's dandyism was too easily elided with the stereotype of the male decadent homosexual, the "Oscar Wilde type." While I am not in any simplistic way saying that Whistler was homo- or even bi-sexual, nevertheless it is apparent that, like Proust, his work testifies to a profound engagement with the complexity of sexual identity. It is an aspect of Whistler's influence on Proust that I will consider again in the final section of this chapter. For now, however, I want to return to the importance of the relationship between Elstir's art and Marcel's inquiries into metaphor and metamorphosis.

Painterly writing

Marcel's visit to Elstir's studio in the second part of *A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleur* is central to the sequence of events framing his first glimpses of and growing intimacy with *le petite bande*. It is here that he discovers the identity of "Miss Sacripant" and the "lady in pink," whom he met briefly as a boy when visiting his Uncle Adolphe. The discovery that "both" women are Odette sheds further light on events anterior to Marcel's life – events which themselves anticipate his fateful relationship with Albertine. Painting and all manner of visual representation are crucial to these events: Elstir's portrait exposes that strain of sexual ambiguity that comes to dominate Marcel's narrative; while Swann's falling in love with Odette because of her likeness to a figure in a painting by Botticelli anticipates the trajectory of Marcel's affair with Albertine.

As Luzius Kellor comments, these scenes at Balbec provide "a kind of encyclopedia of painting and painterly writing" (1994, 133). What is surprising is that, although Keller highlights the presence of Degas, Manet, Poussin, and Rubens, he omits Whistler. This despite the fact that this section of *A l'ombre des jeunes filles* culminates in Proust taking a portrait by Whistler and transforming it into a Proustian landscape.

As we have seen, Whistler's portraits are firmly associated with the 1870s and 1880s. They provide the era with its "birth certificate." By the first decade of the twentieth century, however, they were no longer regarded a part of the future trajectory of *modernité*. Given the attention Whistler gave to portraiture, especially his own self-portraits, in response to the belief that portraiture was *the* modern and modernizing mode, there is some irony in this. As Andrew Stephenson argues, a painting such as *Arrangement in Grey: Portrait of the Painter* (1872) signaled "Whistler's aspirations to be looked on as a portrait painter in the Grand European tradition through its references to the authoritative pose, somber attire and serious tone of Rembrandt's *Self-Portrait* (1659)." Yet Whistler's portraits are not in any way parodies or pastiches. They use, Stephenson comments, modern techniques that stress "fragile, dissolving appearances" and engage with "the styling of an artistic identity referenced to the Great Masters of the Past as opposed to one self-consciously fashioned under the dynamic conditions of modernity" (2000, 141, 142).

We should bear this in mind when we read Proust's description of Marcel's delight when faced with the Elstirs gathered together in one place at the Guermites – paintings that are very different in tone and

style from the work he has previously seen in Elstir's studio at Balbec. As with Whistler's portraits, the paintings evoke a vanished past – the magic lantern shows of his childhood, the beach at Balbec where he first saw Albertine – while also enabling him to formulate a theory of the relationship between sight and art:

Seulement une fois en tête à tête avec les Elstirs, j'oubliai tout à fait l'heure du dîner; de nouveau comme à Balbec j'avais devant moi les fragments de ce monde aux couleurs inconnues qui n'était que la projection de la manière de voir particulière à ce grand peintre ... Les parties du mur couvertes de peintures de lui, toutes homogènes les unes aux autres, étaient comme les images lumineuses d'une lanterne magique laquelle eût été, dans le cas présent, la tête de l'artiste ... Parmi ces tableaux, quelques-uns de ceux qui semblaient le plus ridicules aux gens du monde m'intéressaient plus que les autres en ce qu'ils recréaient ces illusions d'optique qui nous prouvent que nous n'identifierions pas les objets si nous ne faisons pas intervenir le raisonnement. Que de fois en voiture ne découvrons-nous pas une longue rue claire qui commence à quelques mètres de nous, alors que seul devant nous un pan de mur violemment éclairé nous a donné le mirage de la profondeur! Dès lors n'est-il pas logique ... de représenter une chose par cette autre que dans l'éclair d'une illusion première nous avons pris pour elle? Les surfaces et les volumes sont en réalité indépendants des noms d'objets que notre mémoire leur impose quand nous les avons reconnus.

[But the moment I was left alone with the Elstirs, I completely forgot about time and dinner; once again, as at Balbec, I had before me fragments of that world of strange new colours, the projection of the great painter's particular vision ... The parts of the walls that were covered by his paintings, each of them part of a homogeneous whole, were like the luminous images of a magic lantern which, in this instance, was the mind of the artist ... Among these pictures, several of the ones that society people found most absurd interested me more than the rest because they re-created the optical illusions which make it clear that we should never be able to identify objects if we did not have some recourse to some process of reasoning. On just how many occasions, as we are moving along in a carriage, have we not seen a bright street opening up a few metres away, when what

our eyes are really confronting is merely a patch of wall in the full glare of sunlight creating the mirage of depth. Bearing this in mind, it surely makes sense ... to represent one thing by the other for which, in an initial flash of illusion, we mistook it. Surfaces and volumes are in reality independent of the names which our memory imposes on things once we have recognised them.] (1069–1070; III:417)

The key, then, to understanding Proust's painterly writing is metaphor. When Marcel first catches sight of the band of girls at the far end of the esplanade, it is not them he sees but the projection of "une tache singulière" [a strange mass of ... colours]. Only later, returning to the root of the impression, is he able to logically deduce that what he saw was "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" [five or six young girls, as different in their appearance and ways from all the other people one was used to seeing in Balbec as the odd gaggle of seagulls which turns up out of the blue to strut along the beach] (621; II:369). Logic, however, leads the Narrator in his efforts to visualize the scene to interpose another image, and to metamorphose the girls into birds. A little later and the attempt to recognize the girls as individuals again throws Marcel into wonderment: "merveilleux parce qu'y voisinaient les aspects les plus différents, que toutes les gammes de couleurs y étaient rapprochées, mais qui était confus comme une musique où je n'aurais pas su isoler et reconnaître au moment de leur passage les phrases, distinguées mais oubliées aussitôt après" [wonderful because the most dissimilar aspects were mixed into it and all the shades of colour were juxtaposed, but also as confused as a piece of music in which one cannot isolate and identify the phrases as they form, which once heard are soon forgotten] (623; II:370).

A further transposition then occurs, the girls becoming "un flottemont harmonieux" [a ripple of harmonious imprecision] (623; II:371). The phrase can only remind us of Stephenson's analysis of Whistler: the seeming contradiction of attempting to establish something artistically permanent (harmonieux) on the basis of the "fragile" and "dissolving" (flottemont). The effect is that the girls take on a visual "flatness" which, as Bal has brilliantly analyzed, is central to Proust's use of metaphor. What happens at such moments of impaired or distorted visualization is that "identifications collapse into one another ... the subject incorporates everything by going out of himself, by becoming [the] other [and] the flat image offers ... a

ground on which he can temporarily lay down his fantasies" (1997, 157). It is a flatness which, when returned from the subjective to the objective, is made up of banal fragments: one of the girls is pushing a bicycle, two others carry golf clubs; some have black eyes, some green; one wears a hooded cape; another, a black polo-cap. These may be different girls. They might be the same girl seen on different occasions (as with Odette and "Miss Sacripant" and the "lady in pink"), in which case time is involved. The visual, as Marcel will realize when faced by the Guermantes' collection of Elstirs, provides us with an illusion (*le mirage de la profondeur*) that collapses or dissolves both time and space. Art, or an art like that of Whistler, Elstir, and Proust, emphasizes instability even as it seeks to establish continuity and stability.

This appeal to a pictorial flatness, Bal's "mottled screen," can be seen as having something in common with what Donald Holden says about the difference between a traditional approach to portrait painting and that adopted by Whistler:

The "normal" method of lighting was to place a light source [so as to] throw the forms into relief, to emphasize three dimensionality, like a photograph of a piece of sculpture. But Whistler placed the sitter in a frontal or diffused light, thereby minimizing the play of light and shade that made the figure look round. In this sort of light, the figure was reduced to flat patches of tone and color[.] (1969, 16)

A danger of this approach, Holden says, is that it can lead to a paper cut-out or playing-card look. The way of avoiding this, the experienced painter knows, is to "pay careful attention to what he calls edges – where one shape ends and another begins." In the case of those painters Whistler admired and imitated, notably Rembrandt and Velasquez, this was achieved by "blurri[ng] these transitions, throw[ing] them out of focus ... so that there was no precise line where one ended and the other began." Thus at Balbec, the Narrator describes the view from Marcel's bedroom window in terms of an ever-dissolving gallery of images inspired by Japanese art:

Une fois c'était une exposition d'estampes japonaises: à côté de la mince découpeure du soleil rouge et rond comme la lune ... J'avais plus de plaisirs les soirs où un navire absorbé et fluidifié par l'horizon apparaissait tellement de la même couleur que lui ... comme si on n'eût fait que découper sa coque et les cordages en lesquels elle s'était

amincie et filigranée dans le bleu vapoureux du ciel.

[One evening it would be an exhibition of Japanese prints: beside the flimsy cut-out sun, red and round as the moon ... On other evenings, there was greater enjoyment to be had: from a ship which had been absorbed and liquefied by the horizon, and which had the appearance of being of the same colour as it ... as though once the hull and rigging had been cut out of it, it had faded away into the hazy blue of the sky.] (634; II:385)

There are obvious parallels here with a number of impressionist artists. Proust, however, wants to draw our attention to the specific importance of his “eccentric American.” The view Marcel sees from his hotel window would have been identical to those painted by Whistler when he visited northern France in 1865 (see Plate 1), and he acknowledges as much by appending to his description of the seascape Whistler’s famous signature: an emblematic butterfly.

Marcel’s as yet purely visual encounters with the girls are punctuated by scenes in which he returns from the beach to his hotel room and looks out of his window. The view is by turns a Japanese print, an impressionist painting, a drawing by Pisanello, or an enamel by Gallé. There is even the inference in Proust’s description of swifts and swallows as being like “un feu d’artifice de vie, unissant l’intervalle de ses hautes fusées par la filée immobile et blanche de longs sillages horizontaux” [fireworks of vitality, filling the intervals between their vertiginous rocket-like ascents with the straight white wake of a long unwavering glide] (633; II:385) of Whistler’s notorious *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1875) – the painting Ruskin likened to a pot of paint thrown in the public’s face. Certainly the juxtaposition of Proust’s Balbec with the Cremorne Gardens, a public park in London notorious for sexual license, adds a not inappropriate resonance to this section of the novel.

Finally one evening the Narrator describes how

parfois sur le ciel et la mer uniformément gris, un peu de rose s’ajoutait avec un raffinement exquis, cependant qu’un petit papillon qui s’était endormi au bas de la fenêtre semblait apposer avec ses ailes, au bas de cette « harmonie gris et rose » dans le goût de celles de Whistler, la signature favorite du maître de Chelsea.

[sometimes, with exquisite delicacy, a touch of pink was added to

the uniform grey of sea and sky; and at the very bottom of this *Harmony in Grey and Pink* after Whistler, a tiny butterfly² asleep on the window-pane seemed to lend its wings to the favourite signature of the master from Chelsea.] (634; II:387)

As with Whistler's own questioning of illusion and reality when setting the seal of his butterfly cartouche on a painting containing the depiction of "real" butterflies, "real flowers," and "real" young women, so Proust's reference to Whistler stresses how Whistler merges the different elements of a composition in such a way as to make unclear whether it is, say, land or sea at which we are looking. This would have struck a number of chords with Proust. For in some ways Whistler was continuing a practice begun by Turner and commented upon by Ruskin:

The sea up to that time had been generally regarded by painters as a liquidly composed, level-seeking thing, with a smooth surface, rising to a water mark on sides of ships ... But Turner found ... that the sea was not this: it was, on the contrary, a very incalculable and unhorizontal thing[.] (Cocking 1982, 147)

If any novel teaches us that the world is "incalculable and unhorizontal," it is *A la recherche*. Constantly raising questions about not only how we see but what it is that emerges from the act of looking, we learn that the two are not always synonymous.

No doubt with the scene at Balbec in mind, Donald Holden comments that Proust wrote "landscape descriptions in the manner of Whistler" (1969, 12). This isn't, however, an entirely accurate summary of what Proust does here. It seems to me highly unlikely that Proust did not know that Whistler had indeed painted a *Harmony in Pink and Grey*, just as he would have known, and in all likelihood seen, Whistler's *Arrangement in Black and Gold*, his portrait of Montesquiou on which Proust drew for his depiction of Charlus. Whistler's *Harmony in Pink and Grey* (1877–83), though, is not a landscape but another portrait, this time of Valerie Meux, later Lady Meux, wife of the wealthy brewer Henry Bruce Meux. Like so many of Whistler's commissioned portraits of women, it is a frank and challenging image of

² Grieve has "moth" at this point in his translation, though he earlier translates "papillon" as butterfly. I see no reason not to follow Kilmartin and Enright in translating both references as "butterfly."

female power and sexuality. Lady Meux stands in voluptuous profile, her face turned toward the viewer. It is her lips, though, that draw our attention. As in Boldini's portrait of Whistler where the limited palette of blacks and whites is disturbed only by the *tache* of color that is Whistler's Légion d'honneur, Lady Meux's lips are blood red. The effect, if one allows the eye to see not a figure but an interplay of tones and subtle variations of color, is not dissimilar to looking at a late painting by Rothko.³ What is more, as another "dame en rose" Lady Meux had much in common with Odette. Both were from humble origins and both, as I earlier said with regard to Odette, did much to try to conceal their past. The same, of course, is true of Albertine.

It may even be that it is Lady Meux rather than Montesquiou who stands behind Proust's description of Charlus as a "Harmony" in black and white. Whistler completed two portraits of Valerie Meux, the second of which he called *Arrangement in Black* (1881). As in *Harmony in Pink and Grey*, Meux's kohled eyes and bee-stung *rouge à lèvres* lips provoke and confront the viewer as though demanding that we question her right to stand before us in a formal portrait. Meux is dressed in a black sleeveless velvet gown, while draped across her left shoulder so that it cascades down to the ground both behind and in front is a fur-trimmed cloak. It is this cloak that allows us to distinguish her from the inky darkness from which she emerges. Whistler's title may have highlighted the painting's use of black tones, but in every other respect the portrait is a harmony in black and white. An *Arrangement in White and Black* (ca. 1876), however, does exist. Again it is portrait of a woman, and again it challenges and engages societal norms and prejudices. Whistler's model in this slightly earlier portrait was Maud Franklin, and because Franklin's intimate relationship with Whistler as model and lover was well known, the figure-hugging dress she wears and her provocative pose led many who saw the painting to decry its "vulgarity." What better way, then, of revealing Charlus's inversion than likening him to such representations of female sexuality.

Odette, we know, was painted by Elstir at a time when he was not regarded as either a serious person or an artist of promise. The case with Albertine is subtly and significantly different. For all that she is associated in the novel with Elstir, she is not painted by him. This is not to say that

³ This need not strike us as a ridiculous comparison. As Denys Sutton has pointed out, the influence of Japanese art on American artists has persisted into the twentieth century and among those he mentions is Rothko (Sutton 1963, 45).

Proust does not portray her sexuality through references to art. He does. Albertine, “que son nez droit, sa peau brune mettaient en contraste au milieu des autres comme, dans quelque tableau de la Renaissance, un roi Mage de type arabe” [whose straight nose and darker complexion marked her out among the rest, as a king of Arabian looks may stand out in a Renaissance painting of the Magi], remains insufficiently differentiated from the other girls until, as Swann Odette, Marcel associates her with a work of art (622–623; II:370). That in doing so he turns her into a man returns us to what I have been saying about Proust’s “painterly” depiction of Charlus, and how dynamic is Proust’s treatment of sexual and gender identity.

Men-milliners

In Virginia Woolf’s last, great novel *Between the Acts* (1941), the characters gather to watch a village pageant that presents scenes from English history. Angry at the time the performers are taking to reappear on stage and present “ourselves ... a June day in 1939,” Colonel Mayhew barks: “What’s [Miss La Trobe] keeping us waiting for? ... They don’t need to dress up if it’s present time” (2005, 111). The Major, it seems, has read *A la recherche*, in which Proust states: “notre désir, notre croyance confèrent au vêtement ... une particularité individuelle, une irréductible essence ... [À] défaut de la croyance disparue, le costume signifie la suppléance à celle-ci par le moyen d’une illusion volontaire” [our desires and convictions confer on ... clothing a unique character, an irreducible essence ... [In] the absence of any convincing reality, costume comes to replace that reality by creating a deliberate illusion] (1045; III:384).

Writing about Walter Benjamin and *die Mode*, Ulrich Lehmann comments on how fashion

reshap[es] the silhouette of historical structures, by altering the way one perceives the succession of past epochs and the relation of the present to them ... On a smaller scale it also focuses on the sociohistorical accessories, on the nuances within the appearance of the past, that reveal and determine more than mere historicism ever could. (2000, 205)

Benjamin was profoundly influenced by Proust, and we shouldn’t therefore be surprised if his reading of fashion and time coincide with aspects of *A la recherche*.

Benjamin's conceit for fashion, the *Tigersprung* (tiger's leap), appears in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" where it is referred to in the context of how to draw a distinction between "homogeneous, empty time" and "now time" (*Jetztzeit*). The latter we apprehend when we experience a disruption in the "continuum of history," or what Proust called Habit. Fashion, then, inasmuch as it quotes from previous epochs and cultures, is precisely one such "tiger's leap into the past." But as Benjamin warns, this leap takes place in "an arena where the ruling class gives the commands" [Benjamin 2003c, 395].

Throughout *A la recherche* this aspect of fashion is made abundantly clear. What is interesting, however, is that Proust focuses on women rather than men, the impact of successive French political revolutions having been made manifest in the changing aspect of feminine couture. This is notably the case in *Le Temps retrouvé* where wartime fashion reverts to the austerity of *le Directoire*, the revolutionary government that ruled France between 1795 and 1799. Thus Proust allows us to catch a glimpse of Benjamin's *Tigersprung* in the form of how contemporary fashion quotes not only from earlier forms of dress but earlier forms of government. For in wearing clothes that approximated the Directory, women drew inspiration from ancient Greece. *Directoire* fashion, the art historian Ewa Lajer-Burcharth has suggested, represented an effort to come to terms with the Terror, with women's bodies becoming "marked by trauma" (cited in Evans 2003, 159). The logic of the readoption of such fashions during the First World War is inescapable.

Proust also draws attention to the ways in which art and fashion intersect, and how they are each related to cultural influence and prestige. Thus the Duchesse de Guermantes wears an "evening cloak of a magnificent Tiepolo red" (1256; IV:67), while Odette dresses herself in a *crêpe-de-chine* tea gown that is "Tiepolo pink" (430; II:116). As befits a character who first appears in the novel in various "disguises" – the "lady in pink," "Miss Sacripant," and Botticelli's Zipporah – and whose life appeared to Swann "avec son fond neutre et sans couleurs semblable à ces feuilles d'études de Watteau" [with its neutral and colourless background, similar to those pages of studies by Watteau] (197; I:243), Odette is firmly associated with fashion as art, and art as fashion. She wears a "Rembrandt-style hat" and Watteau-style tea gowns (488; II:192), and she allows Swann to buy her a dress based on that worn in Botticelli's *La Primavera* (489; II:194). Neither is she alone in this. Her daughter, Gilberte, is likened to "a lovely garden by Poussin" (317; I:398). Elsewhere a dress by Fortuny becomes as unalterable as a work of art ("fixés que ceux d'une œuvre d'art"); and the fashions of

the day, Proust tells us, “n’étaient pas un décor quelconque, remplaçable à volonté, mais une réalité donnée” [were not a trivial decoration which could have been replaced by any other, but an inescapable reality] (1627; V:25). Little wonder, then, during the First World War and with Paris’s art galleries closed, that when Marcel reads in a newspaper of “Une exposition sensationnelle” he assumes that what is being advertised is an exhibition not of paintings but of dresses (2152; VI:31).⁴

Given the relationship in his art between his aspirations to be looked on as a portrait painter in the Grand tradition and the “fragile, dissolving appearances” of his paintings, Whistler is the artist who most closely resembles Baudelaire’s painter of modern life. By *modernité* Baudelaire meant “the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent” which in great art we find

clothed in the costume of their own period ... because everything – from costume and coiffure down to gesture, glance, and smile (for each age has a deportment, a glance and a smile of its own) – combines to form a completely viable whole. This transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid, must on no account be despised or dispensed with. (Baudelaire 1964c, 12)

Proust’s muse of *modernité* is Albertine, and Elstir is its greatest exponent. It is from Elstir that Marcel learns the application of Baudelaire’s aesthetic theories; and it is Albertine who provides him with tantalizing and terrifying insights into the relationship between creativity and death. Albertine’s metamorphosis from being part of a Whistlerian harmony – “une tache singulière,” “un flottement harmonieux” – to a woman “avait une robe de satin noir qui contribuait à la rendre plus pâle, à faire d’elle la Parisienne blême, ardente, étiolée par le manque d’air, l’atmosphère des foules et peut-être l’habitude du vice, et dont les yeux semblaient plus inquiets parce que ne les égayait pas la rougeur des joues” [wearing a black satin dress which made her skin paler, gave her the look of the pallid Parisienne, intense, her colour destroyed by the want of fresh air,

⁴ Walter Benjamin noted a similar phenomenon from earlier in the century, this time with fashion replacing not art but music: “Programs for evening clothes appeared, as if for the newest symphonic music. In 1901, in Paris, Victor Prouvé exhibited a formal gown with the title, ‘Riverbank in Spring’” (Benjamin 1999a, 68).

the atmosphere of crowds and perhaps habits of vice, whose eyes seemed more anxious because not brightened by any pinkness in the cheeks] (1678; V:90) is as terrifying a decline as anything in literature. Drained of color, she becomes an abstraction of the anonymous urban crowd – in Ulrich Lehmann’s resonant phrase, “a dark and passing memento mori of modernity” (2000, 45).

Baudelaire advised artists to study the fashions of women such as Albertine: “those creatures whom the dictionary of fashion has successively classified under the coarse or playful titles of ‘doxies,’ ‘kept women,’ *lorettes*, or *biches*” (1964c, 14). Perhaps with this in mind, Proust has the Verdurins give Elstir the pet name “M. Biche.” It means literally a “doe” or a “hind,” and in addition to the sexual connotations of Baudelaire’s usage it is also a term of affection that translates as something like “my honey.” Whatever the shades of meaning, the connotations are that Elstir is feminized. This is important in the context of Marcel’s discovery that Elstir and the painter whom he knows only by the name “M. Biche,” and about whom he has heard mixed reports (Swann finds him pretentious and vulgar while admiring his intelligence), are one and the same person. At the same time, therefore, as the cross-dressing “Sacripant” is revealed to be Odette, Elstir – “cet homme de génie, ce sage, ce solitaire, ce philosophe” [a brilliant man, a solitary, a philosopher] – is shown to have been “le peintre ridicule et pervers adopté jadis par les Verdurin” (677; II:441).

Alongside Charlus, Elstir is the novel’s great arbiter of taste and style. When Charlus admires Albertine’s dress one evening, Marcel is doubly pleased: it is he who chose the outfit, and he did so under the influence of Elstir. The *ensemble* is an arrangement or harmony in gray: “sa jupe de crêpe de chine gris, sa jaquette de cheviotte grise” [her *crêpe-de-chine* skirt, her grey cheviot jacket]. What draws Charlus’s applause, however, are the sleeves which were “d’un écossais très doux, rose, bleu pâle, verdâtre, gorge-de-pigeon, ce fut comme si dans un ciel gris s’était formé un arc-en-ciel” [a very soft tartan, pink, pale blue, greeny, dove-coloured, it was as if a rainbow had formed in a grey sky]. Charlus’s appreciation, as we know, is drawn from all he denies himself in his own clothing. He is responding to Albertine as both a work of art and an expression of a femininity he feels himself to share. “It is only women who do not know how to dress who are afraid of colour,” Charlus says [“Il n’y a que les femmes qui ne savent pas s’habiller qui craignent la couleur”]. We might also add men who do know how to dress but are concerned, like Charlus, that the addition of color will be recognized as a sign of effeminacy (1548–1549; IV: 448).

In *Le Temps retrouvé*, the Narrator admits that Marcel's appreciation of Elstir would not have been possible without there having been a Whistler to guide the likes of Charlus and Swann and to give them "leçons de gout" [lessons in taste] (2188; VI:78). "To have known Whistler and not be schooled in taste," Charlus tells Marcel, "was all but unthinkable" ["Cela m'étonne autant que si je voyais quelqu'un avoir connu Whistler et ne pas savoir ce que c'est que le goût"] (1830; V:278). Such lessons were not universally appreciated, and bear witness to the fact that Whistler's status in France was nowhere near as secure as Fantin-Latour's *Hommage à Eugène Delacroix* suggested.

Whistler divided opinion in France and England. To Frederic Leyland he was an "artistic Barnum"; for Duret he was an "en-frenchified American." In *Le Côte de Guermantes* it is his butterfly signature that authenticates the beauty of the French aristocracy (778; III:39), and yet his inclusion as an American painter in the 1900 Exposition Universelle "swept [him] into the vanguard of American imperialism."⁵ Like the American West of popular myth and history, Whistler, in the words of a contemporary reviewer, was "willful, lawless, bold"; yet in language that reminds us of the discourses of neurasthenia and degeneracy, he was regarded as capricious, unable to apply "finish" to his canvases (Stephenson 2000, 140). To the English this was a sign of his "Francophile aesthetic gaze," lacking the analytical, "masculine" merits of English art (Stephenson 2000, 144). And at the same time as he was being undermined by his dalliance with Continental "degeneracy," he was accused of associating with the "brutal materialism" of Courbet.

Central to such dichotomies was Whistler's approach to line and color. Line was associated with the rational structuring and ordering of "formal relationships," a "stabilizing narrative ... signaling intellectual distance and moral control." Color, meanwhile, was "sensuous, decorative, superficial ... treacherous and unstable." In short, "unredeemably feminine" (Stephenson 2000, 142). As a result, the language of sexual politics and frank misogyny were never far from contemporary comment on Whistler. This despite the fact that his early reputation made much of his masculine virility and his

⁵ Park Curry 2004, 30. This, however, does not tell the whole story. Whistler's *Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl* had been rejected by both France and Britain for inclusion in the 1863 Exposition, hence his exhibiting at the Salon des Refusés. In 1867 Whistler therefore requested that it hang in the American pavilion. In 1878 and 1889 he showed in the British section, while in 1900 he returned to the American section (2004, 196, 205).

relationships with various models, as well as his rumored “courting” of his paying clients’ wives. Indeed Ruskin’s savage attack on *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* branded him a “cockney” and a “coxcomb,” with the charge that he had flung paint in the public’s face suggestive of an ejaculation.

Countering this was Whistler’s appearance. David Park Curry writes how “images attest that the way Whistler handled his cane and crooked his elbow to align himself within the ranks of the Victorian dandy took his posturing to the edge of gender limits,” and he records Degas calling after him: “Whistler, you have forgotten your muff” (2004, 56). Like Charlus, Whistler possessed “le don d’observer minutieusement, de distinguer les détails aussi bien d’une toilette que d’une « toile »” [the gift of carefully observing, of being able to describe in the finest detail, either an outfit or a “canvas”] (1759; V:189). Certainly Whistler’s keen eye for female fashion and the fact that he personally designed some of the clothes which his female sitters wore did not help his reputation (see Plate 6). For Walter Sickert, his doing so meant an erasure of the distinctions between painter and dressmaker, and he criticized Whistler for “tying Mrs. Leyland’s dress up with little ribbons, and placing bows of pre-ordained colors at thought out points.”⁶ *Symphony in White, No. 3* marked a further “low-water mark ... Folds of drapery are expressed by ribbons of paint in the direction of the folds themselves” (Sickert 2000, 184). And while Degas took laundry women as one of his subjects, Whistler sketched himself doing his own washing (see Plate 7).

Arthur Jerome Eddy, who sat for Whistler in 1894 and subsequently wrote a collection of recollections and impressions of the artist, thought Whistler’s art “closely allied to and quite dependent upon the tailor and dressmaker” (cited in Macdonald et al. 2003, 21). Writing in 1930, the fashion historian James Laver agreed: Whistler “was as much obsessed by elegance as a man-milliner” (Macdonald et al. 2003, 29–30). The phrase is telling. A “man-milliner” was the disparaging name given to male department store clerks, though it came to be used of any man involved with women’s fashion. Even the great couturier and self-publicist Charles

⁶ A detail from *Symphony in Flesh Color and Pink: Portrait of Mrs. Frances Leyland* (1871–74) was used by Penguin as the cover for volume 5 of the UK edition of the new translation of *In Search of Lost Time*. The detail is of Frances Leyland’s lower arms and hands, seemingly bound with rope. It is a fascinating and wholly appropriate choice for the volume that contains *La Prisonnière*.

Worth (1825–1895), whose dresses could cost more than a painting (Worth justified this by saying that he didn't so much design dresses as compose them), was referred to in such terms. It also, as with Charlus's nickname "la Couturière" (the Dressmaker), carried other associations.

Though Wilde's trial was still a decade away, Whistler's infamous *Ten O'Clock* lecture, imagining as it does the (male) artist as one who stays behind with the women and engages in "domestic" chores while other men pursue more "virile" activities, remains a provocative document:

In the beginning, man went forth each day – some to do battle – some to the chase – others again to dig and to delve in the field ... until there was found one among them, one, differing from the rest – whose pursuits attracted him not – and so he staid [*sic*] by the tents, with the women, and traced strange devives, with a burnt stick, upon a gourd. (Thorp 1994, 82)

Whistler's rhetoric, however, was not wholly unprecedented. For in his introduction to *Nature*, Emerson likens the work of the artist to activities more usually connected with the drudgery of housework: "a little chipping, baking, patching, and washing" (*EL*, 8). Proust was obviously sympathetic to such a view. He had responded early in his life to Emerson's writings, and when in Mallarmé's translation of the *Ten O'Clock* he came across Whistler's images of the male artist as a "dreamer apart," a "designer of quaint patterns" and a "deviser of the beautiful," he perhaps made a connection between the two Americans and his own temperament.

What is certain is that the artist as a "man-milliner" struck a chord. When, at the end of his life, Proust was searching for a way to describe the task Marcel has before him of fashioning from the scattered fragments of *mémoire involontaire* a cohesive narrative the Narrator offers the startling revelation that Marcel's future novel is essentially no different from a dress and that the writer, as in Whistler's description of the artist in the *Ten O'Clock*, is a man who stays and works alongside women. Twice Proust returns to the analogy, and the passages are worth quoting in detail:

Et, changeant à chaque instant de comparaison selon que je me représentais mieux, et plus matériellement, la besogne à laquelle je me livrerais, je pensais que sur ma grande table de bois blanc, regardé par

Françoise ... je travaillerais auprès d'elle, et presque comme elle ... car, épinglant ici un feuillet supplémentaire, je bâtirais mon livre, je n'ose pas dire ambitieusement comme une cathédrale, mais tout simplement comme une robe. Quand je n'aurais pas auprès de moi toutes mes paperoles, comme disait Françoise, et que me manquerait juste celle dont j'aurais besoin, Françoise comprendrait bien mon énervement, elle qui disait toujours qu'elle ne pouvait pas coudre si elle n'avait pas le numéro de fil et les boutons qu'il fallait ...

À force de coller les uns aux autres ces papiers que Françoise appelait mes paperoles, ils se déchiraient çà et là. Au besoin Françoise ne pourrait-elle pas m'aider à les consolider, de la même façon qu'elle mettait des pièces aux parties usées de ses robes ... Françoise me dirait, en me montrant mes cahiers rongés comme le bois où l'insecte s'est mis: « C'est tout mité, regardez, c'est malheureux, voilà un bout de page qui n'est plus qu'une dentelle » et l'examinant comme un tailleur: « Je ne crois pas que je pourrai la refaire, c'est perdu. C'est dommage, c'est peut-être vos plus belles idées. Comme on dit à Combray, il n'y a pas de fourreurs qui s'y connaissent aussi bien comme les mites. Ils se mettent toujours dans les meilleures étoffes. »

[And as every few moments I changed the comparison by which I could best and most materially represent the task on which I was embarking, I thought that at my big deal table, watched by Françoise ... I would work next to her, and work almost in the same way as her ... for, pinning a supplementary page in place here and there, I should construct my book, I don't dare say, ambitiously, as if it were a cathedral, but simply as if it were a dress I was making. When I did not have all of what Françoise called my manuscribbles within reach, and could not find just the one that I wanted, Françoise would sympathise with my annoyance, as she always used to be saying how she could not sew if she did not have the right number thread and the proper buttons ...

Because I often had to glue one piece on to another, the papers that Françoise called my manuscribbles kept getting torn. But Françoise would always be able to help me mend them, just as she put patches on the worn-out parts of her dresses ... Françoise would say to me, pointing to my note-books, eaten away like wood that insects have got into: "It's all moth-eaten, look, that's a pity, there's

a page here that looks like lace,” and examining it closely like a tailor: “I don’t think I can mend this, it’s too far gone. It’s a shame, those might have been your best ideas. You know what they used to say in Combray, even the best furriers don’t know as much as the moths. They always get into the best material.”] (2390, 2391; VI:343, 344)

Perhaps nowhere else in the novel do we sense the mask that is “Marcel” slipping to reveal his author. Certainly Proust’s friends, his long-suffering publishers, and those readers who had heard rumors of his eccentric lifestyle and the painstaking labor that consumed the last fourteen years of his life would have read these paragraphs as a self-portrait. That the passage repeats itself and that Proust mixes his metaphors means that had he lived to correct the manuscript he would no doubt have made alterations. That he didn’t would suggest that he was writing both under the pressure of imminent death and the sense of having made a discovery about his own life and its relationship to art. There was little time to pause and reflect. Like the descriptions we have of Whistler executing one of his portraits, he would need to get it all done in a single sitting.

It is only fitting that it should be Françoise who is left to work in this way alongside Marcel. As early as *A l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs* it is Françoise who provides Marcel with a model for the artist of *modernité*. All that Marcel later learns from Elstir is dormant in the brief scene where Françoise, like Baudelaire’s rag picker, takes the discarded and puts it to new use. Taking an old, expensive but ugly coat “surchargé de dessins affreux et de jais” [overloaded with jet and ghastly designs], a hat “avec l’immense oiseau qui le surmontait” [with a huge bird perched on top of it], she turns the coat inside out (inverts it) and reveals “de drap uni d’un beau ton” [a fine cloth in a handsome self-colour]. Wearing the “new” outfit, Françoise becomes both a still life and a portrait: a work of art that is at once quintessentially French, yet cosmopolitan, urban, sophisticated, and above all modern:

Et, de même qu’il est quelquefois troublant de rencontrer les raffinements vers lesquels les artistes les plus conscients s’efforcent, dans une chanson populaire, à la façade de quelque maison de paysan qui fait épanouir au-dessus de la porte une rose blanche ou souffrée juste à la place qu’il fallait – de même le nœud de velours, la coque de ruban qui eussent ravi dans un portrait de Chardin ou de Whistler,

Françoise les avait placés avec un goût infaillible et naïf sur le chapeau devenu charmant.

[And, just as it is sometimes strange to notice refinements which the most deliberate artist might have to strive for, in a popular song or in a single white or yellow rose blooming at exactly the right spot on a peasant's house, so with her sound and simple taste Françoise had placed on the hat, which was now a pleasure to behold, the velvet bow and the cluster of ribbon that would have delighted one in a portrait by Chardin or Whistler.] (516; II:228)

If fashion by its very evanescence embodies Time, it is the dressmaker who stitches together the different strands and materials. If Time is to be made visible it is not through the permanent, the aim of which is to deny that Time exists let alone that it passes, but through the ephemeral. Proust's interest in fashion, then, while it affirms the *actualité* of his characters by enabling them to exist in history, also enables us to apprehend their mortality.

In a note for his essay on Proust, Walter Benjamin wrote, "The hallmark of his creation which is hidden in the folds of his text (textum = fabric) is remembrance. To put it differently: before Proust no one had been able to prize open the secret drawer of 'atmosphere' and make what had been inside truly his own."⁷ But before Proust, we might say, there was Françoise, reversing the fabric of time to reveal the modern. Whistler, too, spoke of his art in terms of fabric and dressmaking. Color should be "*embroidered* ... the same color reappearing continually here and there like the same thread in an embroidery ... the whole forming in this way an harmonious *pattern*" (Thorp 1994, 33). "Costume is not dress," he warned his audience at the *Ten O'Clock* lecture, if it means the self is hidden: "beneath your travestied awkwardness, we have trouble to find your own dainty selves" (Thorp 1994, 91). This is what Proust took from Whistler: that his characters should be portraits that reveal the complex and shifting conundrums of our inner lives. As with *Swann's Way* and the *Guermantes*

⁷ Quoted in Lehmann 2000, 210. Though Lehmann writes about Benjamin's interest in the "fabric" of Proust's novel, both in terms of Proust's references to fashion as a way of evoking memory and the process of remembrance itself being "ideally woven like a tapestry or fabric" and the "infinite number of pleats and folds in which ... memory is embedded" (209), he does not refer to Proust's own depiction of the novelist as dressmaker.

Way, the beguilingly complex and the profoundly simple are alternative paths that meet. Whistler provided one such point of mediation. He is both the great artist of the recent past, and the artist who guided Proust to his own unique vision of modernity.

Bibliography

- Abraham, Nicolas (1994), "Notes on the Phantom: A Complement to Freud's Metapsychology" (1975), in *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, ed. and trans. Nicola Abraham and Maria Torok, intro. Nicholas T. Rand (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press), 171–177.
- Adler, Kathleen, Erica E. Hirshler, and Barbara Weiberg (2006), *Americans in Paris: 1869–1900* (London: National Gallery).
- Adorno, Theodor W. (1991) "On Lyric Poetry and Society" (1957), in *Notes to Literature 1*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nichol森 (New York: Columbia University Press), 37–54.
- Albaret, Céleste (1976), *Monsieur Proust*, trans. Barbara Bray with a Foreword by André Aciman (New York: New York Review Books)
- Allen, Virginia M. (1983), *The Femme Fatale: Erotic Icon* (New York: Whitson Publishing)
- Anderson, Ronal and Anne Koval (1994), *James McNeill Whistler: Beyond the Myth* (London: John Murray)
- Apollinaire, Guillaume (1965), *Selected Poems*, trans. with an introduction by Oliver Bernard (London: Penguin)
- (2004), *Calligrammes: Poems of War and Peace (1913–1916)*, trans. Anne Hyde Greet (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press).
- Armstrong, Carol (2002), *Manet Manette* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press)
- Bal, Mieke (1997), *The Mottled Screen: Reading Proust Visually*, trans. Anna-Louise Milne (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press).
- Bales, Richard (ed.) (2001), *Cambridge Companion to Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Bataille, Georges (2001), *Eroticism (1957)*, trans. Mary Dalwood, intro. Colin MacCabe (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
- Baudelaire, Charles (1964a), "Edgar Allan Poe: His Life and Works" (1854), in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, trans. and ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon), 70–92
- (1964b), "Further Notes on Edgar Poe" (1857), in *The Painter of Modern Life*, 93–110.
- (1964c), "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863), in *The Painter of Modern Life*, 1–41.
- (1964d) "The Life and Work of Eugène Delacroix" (1863), in *The Painter of Modern Life*, 42–69.
- (1987), *Les Fleurs du Mal*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Picador).
- (1989), *Intimate Journals*, trans. Christopher Isherwood (London: Picador).
- Baudrillard, Jean (1988), *America (1986)*, trans. Chris Turner (London: Verso).
- (1990), *Fatal Strategies*, trans. Phillip Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e)).
- Bauman, Felix, and Marianne Karabelnik (eds.) (1994), *Degas: Portraits* (London: Merrell Holberton).

- Bayly, C. A. (2004), *The Birth of the Modern World: 1780–1914* (London: Blackwell).
- Beard, George M. (1972), *American Nervousness: Its Causes and Consequences* (1881) (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times).
- (1886), *Sexual Neurasthenia* (New York: E. B. Treat & Co.).
- Benjamin, Jessica (1995), *Like Subjects, Love Objects: Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).
- Benjamin, Walter (1999a), *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press).
- (1999b), “On the Image of Proust” (1929, rev. 1934), in *Selected Writings*, vol. 2, trans. Rodney Livingstone *et al.*, ed. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 237–47.
- (2003a), “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” (1940), in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, trans. Edmund Jephcott *et al.*, ed. Howard Eiland and Michael W. Jennings (Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 313–55.
- (2003b), “Work of Art in the Age of Reproducibility” (3rd version), in *Selected Writings*, 4:251–83.
- (2003c), “On the Concept of History,” in *Selected Writings*, 4:389–400.
- Berger, John (2001), “The Moment of Cubism” (1969), in *John Berger: Selected Essays*, ed. Geoff Dyer (London: Bloomsbury).
- Berman, Marshall (1983), *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso).
- Bernard, Anne-Marie (ed.) (2002), *The World of Proust as Seen by Paul Nadar* (1999), trans. Susan Wise (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).
- Bersani, Leo (1998), “Death and Literary Authority: Marcel Proust and Melanie Klein” (1990), in *Reading Melanie Klein*, ed. Lyndsey Stonebridge and John Phillips (London: Routledge), 223–244.
- Birkett, Jennifer (1986), *The Sins of the Father: Decadence in France 1870–1914* (London: Quartet Books).
- Blanchot, Maurice (1986), *Le Livre à venir* (1959) (Paris: Gallimard).
- Bloom, Harold (ed.) (2005), *Modern Critical Views: Edgar Allan Poe* (New York: Chelsea House).
- Boisbaudran, Horace Lecoq de (1911), *The Training of the Memory in Art and the Education of the Artist* (1847, 1862), trans. L. D. Luard, intro. Selwyn Image (London: Macmillan & Co.).
- Bollas, Christopher (2000), *Hysteria* (London: Routledge).
- Bonaparte, Marie (1949), *The Life and Works of Edgar Allan Poe* (1933), trans. John Rodker, foreword Sigmund Freud (London: Imago).
- Botting, Fred (1996), *Gothic* (London: Routledge).
- Bowie, Malcolm (1987), *Freud, Proust and Lacan: Theory as Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- (1998), *Proust among the Stars* (London: Fontana Press).
- Bradbury, Malcolm, and James McFarlane (eds.) (1991), *Modernism: A Guide to European Literature, 1890–1930* (London: Penguin).
- Brassaï (2001), *Proust in the Power of Photography* (1997), trans. Richard Howard (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press).
- Brée, Germaine (1967), *The World of Marcel Proust* (London: Chatto & Windus).
- Brown, Bill (2003), *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press).
- Brown, Lee Rust (1997), *The Emerson Museum: Practical Romanticism and the Pursuit of the Whole* (Cambridge, MA, London: Harvard University Press).
- Bruhm, Stephen (2000), “Picture This: Stephen King’s Queer Gothic,” in *A Companion to the Gothic*, ed. David Punter (London: Blackwell), 269–280.
- Buzzard, James (2001), “Perpetual Revolution,” *Modernism/modernity* 8, no. 4:559–581.
- Cambiare, Célestine Pierre (1927), *The Influence of Edgar Allan Poe in France* (New York: G. E. Stechert & Co.).

- Carter, Everett (1992), "The Emersonian Proust," *Comparative Literature Studies* 29:39–53.
- Carter, William C. (1992), *The Proustian Quest* (New York and London: New York University Press).
- (2000), *Marcel Proust: A Life* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).
- (2002), "'Am I a Novelist?' Proust's Search for a Genre," in Mortimer and Kolb (eds.), 32–44.
- Caws, Mary Ann, "Insertion in an Oval Frame: Poe Circumscribed by Baudelaire," *French Review* 56 (April 1983): 679–687.
- Chateaubriand, François-René de (1961), *The Memoirs of Chateaubriand*, selected, trans., and intro. Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
- Chernowitz, Maurice E. (1945), *Proust and Painting* (New York: International University Press).
- Cocking, J.M. (1982), *Proust: Collected Essays on the Writer and His Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Compagnon, Antoine (1992), *Proust: Between Two Centuries* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- (2004), *James McNeill Whistler: Uneasy Pieces* (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts).
- (2006), "American Art, American Power at the Paris Expositions Universelles," in Adler, Hirshler and Weinberg (eds.), 191–205.
- Davenport-Hines, Richard (2006), *A Night at the Majestic: Proust and the Great Modernist Dinner Party of 1922* (London: Faber & Faber).
- Davis Vines, Lois (ed.) (1999), *Poe Abroad: Influence, Reputation, Affinities* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press).
- Dayan, Joan (1995), "Amorous Bondage: Poe, Ladies and Slaves," in Rosenheim and Rachman (eds.), 179–209.
- Deleuze, Gilles (2000), *Proust and Signs* (1964), trans. Richard Howard (London: Athlone Press).
- Deppman, Jed, Daniel Ferrer, and Michael Groden (eds.) (2004), *Genetic Criticism: Texts and Avant-Textes* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press).
- Derrida, Jacques (1995), *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Dugarde, Marie (1907), *Ralph Waldo Emerson. Sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris: Armand Colin).
- Duhamel, Georges (1931), *America the Menace: Scenes from the Life of the Future* (1930), trans. Charles Miner Thompson (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company).
- Dumas, Ann, and David A. Brenneman (2000), *Degas and America: The Early Collectors* (Minneapolis: Rizzoli).
- Edel, Leon (ed.) (1975), *The Letters of Henry James*, vol. II, 1875–1883 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Eddy, Arthur Jerome (1903), *Recollections and Impressions of James A. McNeill Whistler* (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott & Co).
- Eells, Emily (2002), *Proust's Cup of Tea: Homoeroticism and Victorian Culture* (Aldershot: Ashgate).
- Ellis, Havelock Ellis (1969), Introduction to J. K. Huysmans, *Against the Grain* (1931) (New York: Dover), v–xxxii.
- Ellison, Julie (1999), "Tears for Emerson: Essays, Second Series," in Porte and Morris (eds.), 140–161.
- Evans, Caroline (2003), *Fashion at the Edge: Spectacle, Modernity and Deathliness* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).
- Feidelson, Charles (1953), *Symbolism and American Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press).
- Fiedler, Leslie A. (1967), *Love and Death in the American Novel* (London: Paladin).
- Fillin-Yeh, Susan (ed.) (2001), *Dandies: Fashion and Finesse in Art and Culture* (New York: New York University Press).
- Finch, Alison (2001), "Love, Sexuality and Friendship," in Bales (ed.), 168–182.

- Finn, Michael R. (1997), "Neurasthenia, Hysteria, Androgyny: The Goncourts and Marcel Proust," *French Studies* 51, no. 3:291-304.
- (1999), *Proust, the Body and Literary Form* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Flaubert, Gustave (2002), *Memoirs of a Madman*, trans. Andrew Brown (London: Hesperus).
- Foster, Hal (1993), *Compulsive Beauty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).
- Foucault, Michel (1977), "Language to Infinity," in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (London: Blackwell).
- (1998), *The Will To Knowledge: The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 (1976), trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin).
- Freud, Sigmund (1977), "Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality" (1905), in *The Pelican Freud Library*, vol. 7 (London: Pelican).
- (2002a), "'Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness" (1908), in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. David McLintock, intro. Leo Bersani (London: Penguin), 85-104.
- (2002b), *The Schreber Case (Psychoanalytic Remarks on an Autobiographically Described Case of Paranoia (Dementia Paranoides)* (1912), trans. Andrew Webber, intro. Colin MacCabe (London: Penguin).
- (2002c), "Civilization and Its Discontents" (1930), in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 3-82.
- (2003), "The Uncanny" (1919), in *The Uncanny*, trans. David McLintock, intro. Hugh Houghton (Harmondsworth: Penguin), 123-162.
- (2004), "On the Psychotherapy of Hysteria" (1895), in *Studies in Hysteria* trans. Nicola Luckhurst, intro. Rachel Bowlby (London: Penguin), 257-306.
- (2005a), "A Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis" (1936), in *On Murder, Mourning and Melancholia*, trans. Shaun Whiteside, intro. Maud Ellmann (London: Penguin), 235-244.
- (2005b), *The Unconscious*, trans. Graham Frankland, intro. Mark Cousins (London: Penguin).
- Furbank, P.N., and A. M. Cain (2004), *Mallarmé on Fashion: A Translation of the Fashion Magazine La Dernière Mode, with Commentary* (London: Berg).
- Galassi, Susan Grace and Helen M. Burnham (2003), "Lady Henry Bruce Meux and Lady Archibald Campbell," in MacDonal (eds.). 2003, 156-183.
- Garrelik, Rhonda K. (2001), "The Layered Look: Coco Chanel and Contagious Celebrity," in Fillin-Yeh (ed.), 35-58.
- Gay, Peter (2006), *Freud: A Life for Our Time* (London: Max Press).
- Geller, Jeffrey L., and Maxine Harris (1994), *Women of the Asylum: Voices from Behind the Walls 1840-1945* (New York: Random House).
- Genet, Jean (1964), *Our Lady of the Flowers* (1943, rev. 1951), trans. Bernard Frechtman, intro. Jean-Paul Sartre (London: Faber & Faber).
- Gilman, Margaret (1943), "Baudelaire and Emerson," *Romantic Review* 34, no. 3:211-222.
- Girard, René (ed.) (1962), *Proust: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New Jersey: Spectrum).
- Goldman, Jane (1999), "Works on the Wild(e) Side - Performing, Transgressing, Queering," in *Literary Theories: A Reader and Guide*, ed. Julian Wolfreys (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 525-36.
- Goncourt, Edmond, and Jules de Goncourt (1980), *Pages from the Goncourt Journal*, ed. and trans. Robert Baldick (London: Folio Society).
- Gonnaud, Maurice (1987), *An Uneasy Solitude: Individual and Society in the Work of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, trans. Lawrence Rosenwald (Princeton: Princeton University Press).
- Halls, W.D. (1966), *Maurice Maeterlinck: A Study of His Life and Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Hartman, Geoffrey H. (1983), "Literature High and Low: The Case of the Mystery Story," in Most and Stowe (eds.), 210-229.
- Hawthorne, Nathaniel (2002), *The Marble Faun* (1860), ed., intro., and notes Susan Manning (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- Henrot, Geneviève (2002), "Mnemosyne and the Rustle of Language: Proustian Memory Reconsidered," in Mortimer and Kolb (eds.), 105-115.

- Higonnet, Patrice (2002), *Paris: Capital of the World*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Hirshler, Erica (2006), "At Home in Paris," in Adler, Hirshler, and Weinberg (eds.), 59–113.
- Hobsbawm, Eric (1998), "Jazz Comes to Europe," in *Uncommon People: Resistance, Rebellion and Jazz* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson), 265–273.
- Hoffmann, Daniel (1972), *Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe Poe* (London: Robson Books).
- Holden, D. (1969), *Whistler: Landscapes and Seascapes* (New York: Watson-Guption).
- Hollier, Dennis (ed.) (1994), *A New History of French Literature* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press).
- Horne, Alistair (2002), *Seven Ages of Paris: Portrait of a City* (London: Pan Macmillan).
- (2004), *The Terrible Year: The Paris Commune, 1871* (London: Phoenix).
- Hughes, Clair (2001), *Henry James and the Art of Dress* (Basingstoke: Palgrave).
- Hussey, Andrew (2006), *Paris: The Secret History* (London: Viking).
- Huysmans, Joris-Karl (2003), *Against Nature* (1884), trans. Robert Baldick, intro. and notes Patrick McGuinness (London: Penguin).
- Irigaray, Luce (2000), "The Bodily Encounter with the Mother" (1981), trans. David Macey, in *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader* (2nd ed.), ed. David Lodge with Nigel Wood (Harlow: Longman), 414–423.
- James, Henry (1984), *The Europeans* (1878), ed with intro. Tony Tanner (London: Penguin).
- (1987), *The Critical Muse: Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. with intro. Roger Gard (London: Penguin).
- (1994), *The American Scene* (1907), ed. with intro. John F. Sears (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
- (2001), "Occasional Paris," in *Portraits of Places* (London: Duckworth), 71–87.
- Johnson, Barbara (1994), "The Lady in the Lake," in *A New History of French Literature*, ed. Denis Hollier (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press).
- Jones, Colin (2004), *Paris: Biography of a City* (London: Penguin/Allen Lane).
- Karlin, Daniel (2005), *Proust's English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Kedward, Rod (2005), *La Vie en Bleu: France and the French Since 1900* (London: Penguin).
- Keller, Luzius (1994), "Portraiture between Tradition and Avantgarde: Proust and Degas," in Bauman and Karabelnik (eds.), 128–34.
- Kendall, Richard (ed.) (1987), *Degas by Himself* (Boston, New York; London: Little, Brown & Co.).
- Kennedy, J. Gerald (1987), *Poe, Death, and the Life of Writing* (New Haven and London: 1987).
- Kern, Stephen (1983), *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880–1918* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Klein, Melanie (1975), "Early Analysis," in "Love, Guilt and Reparation," and *Other Works 1921–1945* (New York: Dell).
- Kozloff, Max (1970), *Jasper Johns* (New York: Abrams).
- Kristeva, Julia (1996), *Time and Sense: Proust and the Experience of Literature* (1994), trans. Ross Guberman (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Lacan, Jacques (1977), *Écrits: A Selection* (1966), trans. Alan Sheridan (London: Tavistock).
- Ladenson, Elisabeth (1999), *Proust's Lesbianism* (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press).
- (2002), "Gilberte's Indecent Gesture," in Mortimer and Kolb (eds.), 147–156.
- Lawrence, D. H. (1961), "Edgar Allan Poe" (1924), in *Selected Literary Criticism*, ed. Anthony Beal (London: Mercury Books), 330–346.
- Lee, Hermione (2007), *Edith Wharton* (London: Chatto & Windus).
- Lehmann, Ulrich (2000), *Tigersprung: Fashion in Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).
- Levin, Jonathan (1999), *The Poetics of Transition: Emerson, Pragmatism, and American Literary Modernism* (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press).
- Lint, Brad (2006), "The Hermaphrodite in the Abyss: Queering Poe's Pym," *Edgar Allan Poe Review* 7, no. 1:49–60.
- Lochnan, Katherine (2005), *TurnerWhistlerMonet* (London: Tate Publishing).

- Lucchini, Joe (2001), "The Dandy in Me: Romaine Brooks' 1923 Portraits," in Fillin-Yeh (ed.), 153–184.
- Luckhurst, Nicola (2000), *Science and Structure in Proust's A La Recherche Du Temps Perdu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Lyons, John D. (1994), "Pedagogy," in Hollier (ed.), 369–373.
- Macdonald, Margaret F., Susan Grace Galassi, and Aileen Ribiero, with Patricia de Montfort (2003), *Whistler, Women, and Fashion* (New York: Frick Collection and Yale University Press).
- MacMillan, Margaret (2001), *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World* (London: Random House).
- Maier, Pauline, Merritt Roe Smith, Alexander Keyssar, and Daniel J. Kevles (2003), *Inventing America: A History of the United States*, vol. 1, *To 1877* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Co.).
- Mak, Geert (2007), *In Europe: Travels through the Twentieth Century* (2004), trans. Sam Garrett (London: Harvill Secker).
- Man, Paul de (1999), *Allegories of Reading: Figural Language in Rousseau, Nietzsche, Rilke and Proust* (1979) (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).
- Marcus, Laura (1983), "Oedipus Express: Trains, Trauma and Detective Fiction," in Most and Stowe (eds.), 201–221.
- Maurer, Emile (1994), "Portraits as Pictures: Degas between Taking a Likeness and Making a Work of Art (Tableau)," in Baumann and Karabelnik (eds.), 99–117.
- Mauoris, Andre (1966), *The Chelsea Way, or Marcel in England* (1929), trans. George D. Painter (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson).
- McFarlane, James (1991), "The Mind of Modernism," in Bradbury and McFarlane (eds.), 19–55.
- Mencken, H.L. (1936), *The American Language: An Inquiry into the Development of English in the United States* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf).
- Michel-Thiriet, Philippe (1989), *The Book of Proust* (1987), ed. Dominique Frémy, trans. Jan Dalley (London: Chatto & Windus).
- Michener, James A. (1983), *The Floating World* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press)
- Morand, Paul (2002), *Venices*, trans. Euan Cameron, afterword Olivier Berggruen (London: Pushkin Press).
- Mortimer, Armin Kotin, and Katherine Kolb (eds.) (2002), *Proust in Perspective: Visions and Revisions* (Urbana and Illinois: University of Illinois Press).
- Most, Glenn W., and William W. Stowe (eds.) (1983), *The Poetics of Murder: Detective Fiction and Literary Theory* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich).
- Muller, John P., and William J. Richardson (eds.) (1988), *The Purloined Poe: Lacan, Derrida and Psychoanalytic Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press).
- Muller, Marcel (1983), *Les Voix narratives dans "la recherche du temps perdu"* (1965) (Geneva: Droz).
- Muther, Richard (1895), *The History of Modern Painting*, vol. 3 (London: Henry & Co.).
- Newfield, Christopher (1996), *The Emerson Effect: Individualism and Submission in America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press).
- Nietzsche, Friedrich (1984), *Human, All Too Human* (1878), trans. Marion Faber and Stephen Lehmann, intro. and notes Marion Faber (London: Penguin).
- Orton, Fred (1994), *Figuring Jasper Johns* (London: Reaktion Books).
- Otis, Laura (ed.) (2002), *Literature and Science in the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Painter, George D. (1983), *Marcel Proust: A Biography* (London: Penguin).
- Park Curry, David (1984), *James McNeill Whistler at the Freer Gallery of Art* (New York: Freer Gallery of Art).
- (2004), *James McNeill Whistler: Uneasy Pieces* (Richmond: Virginia Museum of Fine Arts).
- (2006), "American Art, American Power at the Paris Expositions Universelles," in Adler, Hirschler and Weinburg (eds.), 191–205.

- Parkhurst Ferguson, Priscilla (1994), *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press).
- Peyre, Henri (1963), "The Legacy of Proust," in Girard (ed.), 28–41.
- Poirier, Richard (1987), *The Renewal of Literature: Emersonian Reflections* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).
- Porte, Joel (ed.) (1982), *Emerson in His Journals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Porte, Joel, and Sandra Morris (eds.) (1999), *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Waldo Emerson* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Prestwich, P. F. (1999), *The Translation of Memories: Recollections of a Young Proust from the Letters of Marie Nordlinger* (London and Chester Springs: Peter Owen).
- Quinn, Patrick F. (1954), *The French Face of Edgar Poe* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, London and Amsterdam: Southern Illinois University Press).
- Rapetti, Rodolphe (2006), "Assimilation and Resistance 1880–1900," in Adler, Hirshler, and Weiberg (eds.), 179–189.
- Rawlings, Peter (ed.) (1996), *Henry James: Essays on Art and Drama* (Aldershot: Scholar Press).
- Richardson, Joanna (1994), *Baudelaire* (London: John Murray).
- Rimbaud, Arthur (1986), *Collected Poems*, intro. and prose translations Oliver Bernard (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
- Rivers, J. E. (1980), *Proust and the Art of Love The Aesthetics of Sexuality in the Life, Times, and the Art of Marcel Proust* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- Rivière, Jacques (1960), "Analytic Tradition," in Girard (ed.), 42–46.
- Robb, Graham (2000), *Rimbaud* (London: Picador).
- (2003), *Strangers: Homosexual Love in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Picador).
- Robert, Pierre-Edmond (1976), *Marcel Proust lecteur des anglo-saxons* (Paris: Nizet).
- Roger, Phillipe (2005), *The American Enemy: The History of French Anti-Americanism* (2002), trans. Sharon Bowman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press).
- Rosenheim, Shawn, and Stephen Rachman (1995) (eds.), *The American Face of Edgar Allan Poe* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press).
- Roth, Joseph (2005), *The White Cities: Reports from France 1925–1939*, trans. with intro. Michael Hofmann (London: Granta).
- Rousseau, Jean-Jacques (2000), *Confessions*, trans. Angela Scholar (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Rubin, James H. (1994), *Manet's Silence and the Poetics of Bouquets* (London: Reaktion Books).
- (1997), *Courbet* (London: Phaidon).
- Sacher-Masoch, Leopold (2000), *Venus in Furs* (1870), trans. Joachim Neugroschel (London: Penguin).
- Said, Edward (2004), *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (London: Palgrave).
- (2006), *On Late Style* (London: Bloomsbury).
- Salt, Laura (1995), "(Horrible to Relate!): Recovering the Body of Marie Rogêt," in Rosenheim and Rachman (eds.), 237–267.
- Sansom, William (1973), *Proust* (London: Thames & Hudson).
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky (1985), *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press).
- (1986), *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen).
- (1990), *Epistemology of the Closet* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf).
- (1994), *Tendencies* (London: Routledge).
- Seigel, Jerrold (1986), *Bohemian Paris: Culture, Politics, and the Boundaries of Bourgeois Life 1830–1930* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press).
- Showalter, Elaine (1997), *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (London: Picador).
- Sickert, Walter (2000), *The Complete Writings on Art*, ed. Anna Gruetzner Robins (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Sontag, Susan (2001), "One Culture and the New Sensibility" (1966), in *Against Interpretation* (London: Verso).
- Spencer, Robin (ed.) (1991), *Whistler: A Retrospective* (New York: Wing Books).

- Stambolian, George (1972), *Marcel Proust and the Creative Encounter* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago).
- Stein, Gertrude (1995), *Paris France* (1940) (London: Peter Owen).
- (1998), *Lectures in America, Writings* vol. 2, 1932–1946, ed. Catherine R. Stimpson and Harriet Chessman (New York: Library of America).
- Steiner, George (1985a), “The Retreat from the Word,” in *Language and Silence* (London: Faber & Faber), 30–54.
- (1985b), “Mèrimère,” in *Language and Silence*, 289–296.
- Stephenson, Andrew (2000), “Refashioning modern masculinity: Whistler, Aestheticism and National Identity,” in *English Art 1860–1914: Modern Artists and Identity*, ed. David Peter Corbett and Lara Perry (Manchester: Manchester University Press), 133–149.
- Stern, Radu (2004), *Against Fashion: Clothing as Art, 1850–1930* (1992) (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).
- Strauss, Walter A. (1957), *Proust and Literature: The Novelist as Critic* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press).
- Sturgis, Matthew (2005), *Walter Sickert: A Life* (London: Harper Perennial).
- Sutton, Denys (1963), *Nocturne: The Art of James McNeill Whistler* (London: Country Life).
- Tadié, Jean-Yves (2000) *Marcel Proust: A Biography* (1996), trans. Euan Cameron (London: Penguin).
- Teahan, Sheila (1996), “Engendering Culture in *The American Scene*,” *Henry James Review* 17, no. 1:52–57.
- Thorp, Nigel (ed.) (1994), *Whistler on Art: Selected Letters and Writings 1849–1903 of James McNeill Whistler* (Manchester: Carcanet).
- Tickner, Lisa (2000), *Modern Lives and Modern Subjects* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press).
- Tocqueville, Alexis de (2003), *Democracy in America and Two Essays on America*, trans. Gerald E. Bevan (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
- Topping, Margaret (2000), *Proust’s Gods: Christian and Mythological Figures of Speech in the Works of Marcel Proust* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Virtanen, Reino (1977), “Proust and Emerson,” *Yale French Studies* 55:5.
- Ward, Graham (2005), *Christ and Culture* (London: Blackwell).
- Wassenaar, Ingrid (2000), *Proustian Passions: The Uses of Self-Justification for A la recherche du Temps perdu* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Weber, Eugen (1986), *France: Fin de Siecle* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press).
- Wharton, Edith (1970), *Madame de Treymes* (1906), in *Madame de Treymes and Others: Four Novelles* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons).
- (1998), *A Backward Glance: An Autobiography* (1933) (New York: Simon and Schuster).
- (2000), *The Custom of the Country* (1913), ed. with intro. and notes Stephen Orgel (Oxford: Oxford World Classics).
- Wilbur, Richard (1976), *Responses: Prose Pieces 1953–1976* (New York: Harcourt Brace).
- Wilson, Edmund (1993), *Axel’s Castle* (1931) (Harmondsworth: Penguin).
- Wilson-Bureau, Juliet (ed.) (1991), *Manet by Himself* (London: Macdonald & Co.).
- and David C. Degener (2003), *Manet and the American Civil War* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art).
- Winton, Alison (1977), *Proust’s Additions: The Making of A la recherche du temps perdu* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
- Wolf, Virginia, (2005), *Between the Acts* (1941) (London: Vintage).
- Yeats, W. B. (1992), *The Poems*, ed. and intro. Daniel Albright (London: Everyman).
- Yoshikawa, Kazuyoshi (2002), “The Models for Miss Sacripant,” trans. Jane Kuntz, in Mortimer and Kolb (eds.), 240–253.
- Zola, Emile (1993), *The Masterpiece* (1886), trans. Thomas Walton (1950), rev. and intro. Roger Pearson (London: Penguin).

Index

Page references for notes are indicated by n

- A la recherche du temps perdu* 3-4, 14
- American influence on French society
34-8
- American women 16-19
- anti-Americanism 25-6, 46-7
- la beauté convulsive* 91-8
- black and white 217-23
- blacks 29
- "double I" 78
- economics of desire 167, 168, 170-1, 173-6
- electricity 50-1, 54
- and Emerson 66, 67, 70-4, 78
- English language 6-10
- friendship 86-7
- history 83-4
- homosexuality 88-91
- Lusitania* 47-8
- mémoire involontaire* 59-61, 99-111
- mistaken identities 20
- modernity 62
- modernity and myth 57-8
- modernity and technology 52-4
- neurasthenia 116-19, 122-3, 124-34, 135-41,
143-4, 145-7
- painterly writing 224-31
- Parisian society 197-8
- photographs 54-5
- and Poe 150-2, 153-5, 177, 178, 181-90
- reading 69
- signs 85-6
- telephone 56-7
- title 152
- transmigration of souls 155-8
- and Whistler 195, 210-17, 231-41
see also Proust, Works
- A rebours* (Huysmans) 33-4, 46n, 113, 116, 196
- Adams, John 26n
- Agostinelli, Alfred 12, 58, 137-8, 141
- Ainé, Rosny 163
- Akerman, Chantal 35n, 132
- Albaret, Céleste 162
- America *see* United States
- "American Drama, The" (Poe) 148n
- American Nervousness 13, 14-15, 113-14, 122-3
see also neurasthenia
- "American Scholar, The" (Emerson) 41
- American women 16-25
- Americanization 6, 8-9, 32n, 42, 176n
- Anglomanie* 7-8, 16
- Anglophilia 1-7
- Anglosexuality 7, 164
- anti-Americanism 7-8, 24-5, 30, 46-7, 48, 65
- apaches 37
- Apollinaire, Guillaume 16, 60, 63, 159
- Aragon, Louis 132
- "Arbre" (Apollinaire) 16
- Armstrong, Thomas 223
- art 210
- American collectors 45
- flag 44
- France 200-4
- and memory 103-4, 215-17
- modernity and myth 57-8
- and science 149, 176
- Stars and Stripes 43-4
- Arte Moderne* 116

- asthma 115, 122
Atrée (Crébillon) 186
 "Au Lecteur" (Baudelaire) 64
 Aureville, Jules Barbey 33
- Bain, Le* (Manet) 201, 214
 Bal, Mieke 226–7
 Baldwin, James 2
 Ballet, Gilbert 15, 114–15
 Balzac, Honoré de 37
 Barbier, Émile 31
 Bardèche, Maurice 65
 Barney, Natalie Clifford 160, 162, 165, 190
 Barnum's circus 46
 Barthes, Roland 211
 Bartholdi, Frédéric-Auguste 5, 6
 Bataille, Georges 172–3
 Baudelaire, Charles
 in *A la recherche* 195
 Adorno on 122–3
 Americans 25
 "Au Lecteur" 64
 correspondence theory 176, 203, 217–18
 Delacroix 203
 and Emerson 67, 112–13
 fashion 41–2, 234
 Lesbos 145
 modernism 2, 3
 native Americans 25n
 and Poe 121, 159, 162, 171, 176, 177, 181, 190
 Proust on 119
 and Whistler 233
 women 138
 Baudrillard, Jean 48, 54, 60–1
 Bayly, C.A. 152
 Bazalgette, Léon 183n
 Beard, George 13, 14–15, 134
 American Nervousness 113–14, 122
 masculine ossification 128–9
 rest cure 133
 sexual repression 135
 trains 130
 women 139
 Beardsley, Aubrey 223
 Beg-Meil 195
 Benjamin, Jessica 172
 Benjamin, Walter 43–4, 45, 59, 122
 Albertine 146
 camera 54
 fashion 231–2, 233n
 and Poe 167–8, 176, 177
 and Proust 170, 240
 shock 176
 "Berenicé" (Poe) 156, 159, 171
 Berger, John 62–3
 Berry, Walter 4, 26
 Bersani, Leo 123
Between the Acts (Woolf) 231
Beyond the Pleasure Principle (Freud) 176
 Bibesco, Prince Antoine 172
 Billy, Robert de 2, 3, 65, 66
 biography 84
 Birkett, Jennifer 33, 126
 black 221–3, 230
 "Black Cat, The" (Poe) 159, 169, 170, 171
 blacks 28–30
 Blanche, Jacques-Emile 199
 Blanchot, Maurice 62n
 Bloom, Harold 166
 Boisbaudran, Horace Lecoq de 207–8, 215–16,
 217
 Boldini, Giovanni 212, 230
 Bollas, Christopher 191–3
 Boltyn, William 48
 Bonaparte, Marie 168, 169
 Boston dip 35–6n, 46
Boston Medical and Surgical Journal 114
 Botting, Fred 155, 166n, 167, 169
 Bourget, Paul 114
 Bowie, Malcolm 7
 Bowlby, Rachel 166
 Boyd, David 33n
 Bracquemond, Félix 204
 Bradbury, Malcolm 62
 Brassäi 55
 Brée, Germaine 66
 Breton, André 93
 Brissaud, Dr. Louis-Denis 115
 Brodkey, Harold 2
 Brown, Andrew 153
 Brown, Lee Rust 80, 82
 Bryon, Lord 164
Burlington Magazine 45
 butterfly 214–15, 228, 229
 Buzzard, James 11
- Caitlin, George 25n
 Calas, Nicolas 186
 Calmette, Gaston 140, 169–70
 camera 54–6
Camera Work 56n
caoutchoucs américains 8, 9

- Captive, La* (film) 35n, 132–3
 Carlyle, Thomas 66, 75, 78, 196–7
 Carnegie, Andrew 46
 Carquethuit 12–13, 39, 146, 196
 Carter, William C. 115, 124n
 Cassatt, Mary 116, 204
 Caws, Mary Ann 93–4, 193
 centaur 58
 Charcot, Jean-Martin 14, 15, 130–1, 146
 Chase, William Merritt 4
 Chateaubriand, François-René de 38–9, 138
 Chernowitz, Maurice E. 218
 Chesterton, G.K. 148
 childhood 190–3
Civilization and Its Discontents (Freud) 174
 Clark, Carol 35
 Clarke, Graham 178–9
 Coburn, Alvin Langdon 56n
 Cocking, J.M. 65–6
 cocktails 34–5n
 Collins, Wilkie 201n, 222
 Communion 107, 108
 Compagnon, Antoine 189
 compensation 97
Confessions (Rousseau) 143
 Consequences 186
Conspiration des milliardaires, La (Le Rouge)
 48
 consumerism 33, 52
 Copeau, Jacques 74
 Cornwallis, Kihinan 205
correspondence theory 176, 203, 217–18
Côté de Chelsea, Le (Maurois) 27–8, 30, 39
Cotton Office, New Orleans, The (Degas) 30
 Courbet, Gustave 30n, 205, 222, 235
 Cousins, Mark 150
 Crébillon, Prosper Jolyot de 186
Customs of the Country, The (Wharton) 17
- dance 35–6n
 dandyism 22, 25n, 223
 Dante 83
 darkness 151–2
 Daudet, Lucien 170
 death 123, 153, 168–9, 171–2
 Debussy, Claude 2, 3, 67n, 203
 decadence 33–4, 67, 114, 121n, 163, 213
 Degas, Edgar 30, 116, 204, 205, 206, 236
Déjeuner sur l'herbe (Manet) 201, 214
 Delacroix, Eugène 203
 Deleuze, Gilles 84, 85, 91, 133, 135, 140, 144,
- 150
Democracy in America (Tocqueville) 31
Demoiselles d'Avignon, Les (Picasso) 146
 Derrida, Jacques 136
 detective stories 150
Directoire 232
 “Disturbance of Memory on the Acropolis,
 A” (Freud) 80
 dollar princesses 17–18, 36n
 domestic interior 167–8
 Donne, John 13
Doppelgänger (doubles) 163–6, 185–6
Dormeuses, Les (Courbet) 222
 “double I” 78
 Duclaux, Emile 153
 Dufy, Raul 49
 Dugard, Marie 75, 76–7, 107
 Duhamel, Georges 18, 30
 Dumas, Alexandre 37, 159
 Duret, Théodore 220, 235
- Eastman, George 55
 Edison, Thomas 37, 46, 49, 53
 Eells, Emily 7, 8, 164, 182
 Eiffel, Gustave 7
 Eiffel Tower 7, 32–3
 electricity 49–51, 54, 61, 153
 Eliot, George 3, 66, 74
 Ellis, Havelock 67, 213
 Ellison, Julie 55n
 Emerson, P.H. 202
 Emerson, Ralph Waldo 3, 13, 63
 “American Scholar, The” 41
 anxieties 112–13
 artists 237
 bio(s)pheres 79–85
 death of son 55n
 decadence 213
 “Experience” 55n
 friendship 87, 88, 91
 and Goethe 149
 influence on Proust 64–79
 involuntary memory 178
 memory 99–111
 metaphor 94, 97
 natural history 92–4, 98
 Paris 32
 and Poe 148, 165, 167
 Representative Men 66
 Society and Solitude 75
 transition 92, 214

- Emile-Blanche, Jacques 2
 English language 1, 6–10
 Enright, D.J. 126, 229n
 entombment 161–2
Essais de philosophie américaine (Montégut) 68, 75
Essais de psychologie contemporaine (Bourget) 114
Esther (Racine) 138–9, 173, 188–9
 Evans, Caroline 53, 133
 Evans, Dr. Thomas 198
Expansionist, The (Millet) 202
 “Experience” (Emerson) 55n
 Exposition Universelle 1855 34, 201
 Exposition Universelle 1889 37
 Exposition Universelle 1900 127, 235
 Exposition Universelle 1937 49
Eyeless in Gaza (Huxley) 128
- Fabien, Jacques 124n
 “Fall of the House of Usher, The” (Poe) 120–1, 156
 family ties 76
 fans 205, 208–9
 Fantin-Latour, Henri 203–4, 207, 235
 fashion 19n, 42, 127n, 128, 231–4, 239–40
 Fauré, Antoinette 5
Fée Electricité, La (Dufy) 49
 Feidelson, Charles 99, 100–1
 Ferguson, Priscilla Parkhurst 6
 Fiedler, Leslie A. 3, 65n, 76, 91, 164
Figaro, Le 140–1, 170
 Finch, Alison 138
 Finlay, Hugo 22
 Finn, Michael R. 15, 122–3
 First World War 90
 American entry into 25–6, 47–8
 effect on publishing 42n
 fashion 232
 and music 28
 Paris 45, 127n
 Fitzgerald, F. Scott 2, 20
 flag 39–41, 43–6
Flag (Johns) 44, 45–6
 Flaubert, Gustave 2, 33, 138, 153
 Fontainas, André 160
 Footit, George 22
 Foucault, Michel 136, 152, 188
 Fould, Achille 200
 Franco-Prussian War 53–4n, 129n
François le champi (Sand) 191, 193
Frankfurter Zeitung 27
 Franklin, Benjamin 26n, 49
 Franklin, Maud 230
 Freer, Charles 199
 French language 74
 Freud, Sigmund 80, 116, 130, 150, 151, 166–7
 involuntary memories 176
 neurasthenia 134–5, 136, 137
 sexual desire and aggression 174
 friendship 76–7, 78, 86–91
- galoshes 9
 Gardner, Elizabeth 129n
 Garrelík, Rhonda 22
 Gast, John 114n
 Gaugin, Paul 116
 Gautier, Théophile 201
 Gautreau, Mme Virginie Avegno 32n
 Gay, Peter 113
 gaze 89, 91, 92, 96, 213, 214
 Genet, Jean 69
 Gide, André 183n
 Gilman, Margaret 112
 Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von 84–5, 149
 Golo and Geneviève 160, 191, 193
 Goncourt, Edmond de
 Americanization of Paris 176n
 on Degas 116
 electric street lighting 120
 Paris 32n
 streetlighting 49–50
 Goncourt brothers
 anti-Americanism 6, 31
 Barnum’s circus 46n
 mechanization 53–4n
 nervousness 116
 and Poe 159
 in Proust 210
 Rome 32
 Gonnard, Maurice 87n
 Gothic fiction 102–3, 155, 164–5, 169
 Gounod, Charles 5
 Gourmont, Rémy de 159–60
Great Gatsby, The (Fitzgerald) 20
 Grevy, Jules 6
 Grieve, James 126, 229n
 Guilbert, Yvette 22–3
 Guillemet, Jean Baptiste-Antoine 116
Gynandre, La (Péladan) 43
- Hahn, Reynaldo 2, 75n, 195, 196, 197, 198

- Halévy, Daniel 68, 87–8
 Hardy, Thomas 3, 66
 Harrison, Alexander 195–6
 Harrison, Thomas 75n
 Haussmann, Baron George Eugène 6, 32, 33, 131
 Heath, Willie 16
 Helleu, Paul 197n
 Hemingway, Ernest 2
 Henrot, Geneviève 179
 Hermant, Abel 88
Heroes and Hero-Worship (Carlyle) 75n
 Herrick, Myron 45
 Hiffennan, Joanna 222
 history 82–4
 Hitchcock, Alfred 132n
 Hoffmann, Daniel 160, 171
 Hofmannsthal, Hugo von 64
 Holden, Donald 198, 199, 227, 229
Hommage à Eugène Delacroix (Fantin-Latour) 203–4, 235
 homosexuality 162–6, 182, 185, 187–9
 Agostinelli and Albertine 137–8
 Elstir's painting 42–3
 and friendship 86–91
 inversion 78–9n
 and jellyfish 128
 language 52
 and metaphor 95–8
 la vie sauvage 29–30
 hot running water 35
 Hughes, Clair 19–20
 Hugo, Victor 6, 200
Humanité, L' 27
 Humières, Robert d' 2
 Huxley, Aldous 128
 Huysmans, J.K.
 anti-Americanism 33
 circus 46n
 and Emerson 67, 113
 modernism 2, 3
 nervousness 116
 and Poe 33–4, 159
 and Whistler 50n, 196n
Hygiène des asthmatiques (Brissaud) 115
Hygiène du neurasthénique, L' (Proust and Ballet) 14–15, 114–15
 hysteria 113n, 145–7, 166–7, 191–2

Illustration, L' 31–2
Index des noms de lieux (Tadié) 38
 inversion *see* homosexuality
 involuntary memory 59–63, 79, 99–111, 176, 178–9
 isolationism 46–8

 James, Henry 72
 American women 52, 65n
 on Emerson 65, 112
 Goncourt brothers 116
 “Journal of the Brothers de Goncourt, The” 112
 Kodak 55
 Paris 32, 49
 photographs 55–6n
 skyscrapers 33n
 Japanese art 204–7, 214, 227–8, 230n
 Jardin des Plantes 80, 93, 99, 101, 103
 jazz 28–9, 30, 37
 Jefferson, Thomas 26n
 jellyfish 95, 128
 Jewett, Sarah Orne 169
 Jews 29
 Johns, Jasper 44, 45–6
 Johnson, Barbara 142
 Jones, Colin 32
 Joubert, Joseph 73, 74
 “Journal of the Brothers de Goncourt, The” (James) 112
Journal Intime (Baudelaire) 25
 Joyce, James 2, 3, 108

 “Karlich par Wisthlerch” (Proust) 197, Plate 4
 Karlin, Daniel 7–11, 34n
 Kedward, Rod 28–9, 59
 Keller, Luzius 209, 224
 Kern, Stephen 58
 Kilmartin, Terence 126, 229n
 knuckle-dusters 37
 Kodak 55–6
 Kolb, Philip 78
 Kozloff, Max 44
 Kristeva, Julie 108, 169

 Lacan, Jacques 165, 190
 Ladenson, Elisabeth 96n, 128, 137, 193, 217
 Lajer-Burcharth, Ewa 232
Lampes à arc (Morand) 183n
 language 52n, 74
 see also English language
 Lartigue, Jacques-Henri 61–2
 Laurent, Méry 197–8

- Lautréamont, Comte de 159
 Laver, James 236
 Lawrence, D.H. 128, 148
 Le Rouge, Gustave 48, 49
Leaves of Grass (Whitman) 183n
 Lee, Hermione 17, 18
 Lehmann, Ulrich 19n, 41, 45, 231, 234, 240n
 Lemaire, Lucien 163
Leopard, The 62
 lesbianism 95, 96n, 133, 182
 Levin, Jonathan 84, 113
 Lévy, Michel 159
 Lewis, Monk 22
 Leyland, Frances 236
 Leyland, Frederic 235
liberté éclairant le monde, La (Bartholdi) *see*
 Statue of Liberty
 "Ligeia" (Poe) 155, 156, 158
 line (art) 235
 Lint, Brad 164
 Lipps, Theodor 221n
London Standard 139
loopings 7–8, 12
 Lorrain, Jean 163
 Luard, L.D. 208
 Lucchesi, Joe 219
 Luckhurst, Nicola 153
Lusitania 47–8
- McFarlane, James 62
 McGuinness, Patrick 33
 Macksey, Robert 66–7
 McQueen, Alexander 128
Madame Bovary (Flaubert) 33
madeleine 59, 106–8
 Maeterlinck, Maurice 67, 68
 magic lantern 160, 190–1, 193
 Maheux, Louis 124n
 Mâle, Émile 162
 Mallarmé, Stéphane 2, 159, 237
 "Man of the Crowd, The" (Poe) 120, 146, 167,
 175, 176–7, 190
 man-milliner 236–7
 Man Ray 197n
 "Man That Was Used Up, The" (Poe) 120,
 149, 153
 Manet, Edouard 30, 201, 204, 214
 Mantz, Paul 202
 Marcus, Laura 59
 Massac, Régis 159
 masturbation 69
 mathematics 150–1
 Maurer, Emil 204, 206
 Maurois, André 27–8, 30, 39, 65
 mechanization 53–7
méduse, la 95, 126, 126n, 128
 Melville, Herman 164
mémoire involontaire 59–63, 79, 84, 99–III, 176,
 178–9
Mémoires d'outre tombe (Chateaubriand) 38–9
Memoirs of a Madman (Flaubert) 153
 memory
 and art 215–17
 Emerson 84, 99–III
 involuntary 59–63, 79, 99–III, 176, 178–9
 Whistler 208
 men, hysteria 145–7
 Mencken, H.L. 34–5n
 Menpes, Mortimer 130n, 223
Mensuel, Le 195, 214
 "Mesmeric Revelation" (Poe) 153, 159
 metaphor 79, 81, 84, 94–8, 226–7
 metempsychosis 155–8
 Meux, Henry Bruce 229
 Meux, Valerie 229–30
 Michener, James A. 204
 Millet, Francis Day 202
 Millikan, Robert Andrews 49
 misogyny 170–1
 modernism 2–3, 28–9, 41–2, 54
Mobicians de Paris, Les (Dumas) 37
 Monet, Claude 199
Moniteur 201
 Montégut, Émile 68, 75, 110
 Montesquiou-Fezensac, Comte Robert de 197,
 212, 229, 230
 Moore, George 128
 Morand, Paul 17, 183n, 202–3
Morella (Poe) 159
 Morisot, Berthe 116
 motor cars 131n, 141
 Mourey, Gabriel 191
 "MS. Found in a Bottle" (Poe) 119
 Muller, Marcel 96n
 "Murders in the Rue Morgue, The" (Poe)
 148–9, 150–1, 165–6, 180, 183
 Murry, John Middleton 63
 Musée National d'Histoire Naturelle 80, 93,
 99, 101, 103
 music 28–9, 35–6, 37
Mystères de Paris, Les (Sue) 37
 "Mystery of Marie Rogêt, The" (Poe) 168,

- 170, 172, 180, 187
 myth 57–8, 59
- Nadja* (Aragon) 132
 Napoleon III 5
Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, The (Poe)
 159, 160–1, 162, 163, 164
 native Americans 25n, 37
 natural history 92–3
 nature 104, 108–9
nègre primitif, le 29, 30
 Neider, Charles 170n
 Nerval, Gérard de 118, 121
 neurasthenia 13, 14–15, 134–8, 138–44
 Beard 114
 male hysteria 145–7
 Proust 114–34
 “Sur la lecture” 83
 Newfield, Christopher 88, 89, 90
 Nicolson, Harold 27
 Nietzsche, Friedrich 96
 Nordlinger, Marie 2, 16, 196, 198, 199, 206
- O’Brien, Justin 137n
 “Ode à Marcel Proust” (Morand) 183n
Oeuvre, L’ (Zola) 200, 201
 “On the Image of Proust” (Benjamin) 45
 “On the Psychotherapy of Hysteria” (Freud)
 134
Opinion Nationale 203
 Orton, Fred 43, 45–6
 “Oval Portrait, The” (Poe) 193, 197n
- Painter, George D. 119n, 198
 Parc de Monceau 5
 Paris
 Americanization 6, 32n, 176n
 Eiffel Tower 32–3
 Exposition Universelle 34, 37
 and fashion 128n
 First World War 127n
 Hausmannization 6, 32n, 33, 120
 motor cars 131n
 Musée National d’Histoire Naturelle 80,
 93, 99, 101, 103
 society 23–8, 197–8
 streetlighting 49–50
 and women 127
Paris France (Stein) 1, 132n
Parisienne, la 127, 128
 Park Curry, David 202, 235n
- Patterson, Ian 24n
 “Pavane pour une Infante défunte” (Ravel) 36
Pays, Le 159
Paysan de Paris, Le (Aragon) 132
 Pégoud, Adolphe 9
 “Peintre de la vie moderne, Le” (Baudelaire)
 41
 Péladan, Joséphin 43
Pelléas et Mélisande (Debussy) 67n
Pensées d’une amazone (Barney) 162, 165
 Peychaud, Antoine Amedee 34n
 “Philosophy of Composition” (Poe) 159, 170
 “Philosophy of Furniture” (Poe) 152, 159, 167,
 168, 191
 photographs 54–6
 pianola 36
 Picasso, Pablo 146
Pit and the Pendulum, The (Poe) 159
 Plant, Sadie 53
 Plato 165
 Poe, Edgar Allan 3, 13, 33–4, 133, 148, 150–8,
 181–90
 “American Drama, The” 148n
 Baudelaire’s defense 25
 “Berenicë” 156, 159, 171
 “Black Cat, The” 159, 169, 170, 171
 economies of desire 166–76
 “Fall of the House of Usher, The” 120–1,
 156
 Goncourt brothers on 46n
 influence on Proust 159–66
 involuntary memory 176–81
 “Ligeia” 155, 156, 158
 “Man of the Crowd, The” 146
 “Man That Was Used Up, The” 150
 “Mesmeric Revelation” 153, 159
 Morella 159
 “MS. Found in a Bottle” 119
 “Murders in the Rue Morgue, The” 148–9
 “Mystery of Marie Rogêt, The” 168, 170,
 172, 180, 187
 Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, The 159,
 160–1, 162, 163, 164
 nervousness 119–21
 “Oval Mirror, The” 193, 197n
 “Philosophy of Composition” 159, 170
 “Philosophy of Furniture” 152, 159, 167,
 168, 191
 Pit and the Pendulum, The 159
 “Premature Burial, The” 153, 161
 “Purloined Letter, The” 151, 167, 170, 175,

- 182, 184–90
 “Raven, The” 159
Révelation magnétique 153, 159
 the spectral child 190–3
 “Tell-Tale Heart, The” 119–20, 159
 and Tocqueville 31
 Pointe de Penmarch 196
 Poirier, Richard 92, 214
 Polignac, Prince Edward de 36
 “Portraits and Repetition” (Stein) 211
 Poynter, Edward 223
Practical Treatise on Nervous Exhaustion, A
 (Beard) 114
 “Premature Burial, The” (Poe) 153, 161
 Proust, Dr. Adrien 14–15, 114–15
 Proust, Jeanne 123, 140–1
 Proust, Works
see also A la recherche du temps perdu
A l’ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs 4n
 blacks 29
 Carquethuit 12–13
 dedication 36
 Françoise’s new outfit 239–40
 Gilbert’s letter 143–4
 visit to Elstir’s studio 224
Albertine disparue 42n
 memorialization of Albertine 169
 neurasthenia 124–5
 stumble in Guermantes courtyard 180
 “A propos de Baudelaire” 119
Carnet de 1908, Le 74–9, 124n, 196
Contre Sainte-Beuve 74, 75, 78, 141, 157–8n
Côté de Guermantes, Le 4n, 9–12, 87n, 235
Du côté de chez Swann 4n
 inscription 179n
 Japanese water flowers 206
 Martinville 7n, 141
 memory 99–103
 “Éventail” 208–9, 216
 “Impressions de route en automobile” 141
 “Impressions of the Salons” 195
Jean Santeuil
 American women 20–3
 Emerson 66, 68–9, 70, 72–3
 mathematics 150
 memory and technology 61
 neurasthenia 145–7
 “Mondanité et mélomanie de Bouvard et
 Pécuchet” 123–4
Pastiches et mélanges 4, 26
Plaisirs et les jours, Les
 criticism 163, 209
 dedication 16
 Emerson 68, 70, 75
 and Emerson 110–11
 fans 208
 neurasthenia 118
Prisonnière, La
 bathing 35
 blacks 29
 cover 236n
 errand-girl 124–5n
 hysteria 192
 life lived and life remembered 178
 mechanized femininity 52–3
 neurasthenia 135–6
 paranoia 174–6
 pianola 36
roman d’Albertine 42n
 women 65n
Resemblance de Karlich et d’Anatole Le Roy
Beaulieu 197, Plate 4
roman d’Albertine 42n
 “Sentiments filiaux d’un parricide” 140–1,
 170
Sodome et Gomorrhe 87n
 American women 18
 inversion 43, 87, 88, 95, 149, 182
 jellyfish 128
 memory and art 215
 nature 92–3
 references to Poe 181–90
 transition 91–2
 “Sur la lecture” 81–2, 83n
Temps retrouvé, Le 16
 darkness and silence 151
 Emerson 76
 fashion 232, 235
François le champi 191
 Goncourt brothers’ journal 210
 male hysteria 146
 Parisian society 23–4
 stumble in Guermantes courtyard
 180–1
 Prouvé, Victor 233n
 Prussia 5
 publicity 34
 “Purloined Letter, The” (Poe) 151, 167, 170,
 175, 182, 184–90
 Racine, Jean 138–9, 173, 188–9
 railways 129–30, 145

- Rapetti, Rodolphe 197
 Ravel, Maurice 36, 37
 "Raven, The" (Poe) 159
 reading 68–70, 81–3
 Rembrandt 195, 224, 227
 Renan, Ernest 34
Representative Men (Emerson) 66
 rest cure 133
Révelation magnétique (Poe) 153, 159
revolver, le 9–12
Revue Blanche 208
Revue de Paris 159
revue des deux mondes, La 2, 201
 Rimbaud, Arthur 80, 182
 Rivers, J.E. 98, 222
 Rivière, Jacques 152
 Robb, Graham 165–6, 182n
 Robert, Pierre-Edmond 7, 66, 163–4
 Robida, Albert 52n
 Roger, Philippe 7, 30, 63
 Rogers, Mary 180
 Ross, Betsy 43
 Roth, Joseph 27
 Roth, Philip 2
 Rothko, Mark 230n
 Rousiers, Paul de 31
 Rousseau, Jean 203–4
 Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 143
 Roussel, Théodore 130n
 Rubin, James H. 213, 214
 Ruskin, John 16, 66–7, 103
 Proust's break with 81
 and Whistler 198, 236
- Sacher-Masoch, Leopold 121–2
Sacre du printemps, Le (Stravinsky) 146
 Said, Edward 62
 Salon 200–1
 Salon des Refusés 201–2, 235n
 Sand, George 191, 193
 Sansom, William 210
 Sartre, Jean-Paul 48–9
Scenes de la Vie Future (Duhamel) 18, 30
 Scheikevitch, Marie 179n
 Schiff, Sydney 16
 Schiff, Violet 1
 science
 and art 149–50, 176
 Poe 152–3
 and superstition 153–5
 Scott, Walter 164
- seascape 101
 Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky 69–70, 90, 94,
 164–5, 189n, 214
 Seelye, John 168, 175n
 self-reliance 78, 83, 87, 90
Sept essais d'Emerson (Will) 68
Sesame and Lilies (Ruskin) 140
Sexual Neurasthenia (Beard) 14, 128–9
 sexual repression 135
 sexuality
 and fashion 220–1
 Proust 137–8
 see also homosexuality
- Shattock, Roger 162
 shock 176
 Siamese twins 46
 Sickert, Walter 130n
 and Boisbaudran 207
 and Poe 159
 and Whistler 126n, 199n, 236
 women's education 139
- signs 85–6
 simultaneity 60
 Singer, Winaretta 36
 Singer sewing machine 35, 36
 skyscrapers 33n
 "Sleepers, The" (Whitman) 183n
Sleepers, The (Courbet) 222
 snow boots 7
Society and Solitude (Emerson) 75
 Solomon, Alan R. 44
 Sontag, Susan 176
 Sorel, Albert 97
 Souday, Paul 142
 spectral child 190–3
 spiritualism 54
 Spitzer, Leo 210
 Stambolian, George 66
 Stars and Stripes 39–41, 43–6
 Statue of Liberty 5–7
 Stein, Gertrude 1, 3, 132n, 211, 212
 Steiner, George 149–50
 Steinmetz, Charles Proteus 49
 Stendhal 138
 Stephenson, Andrew 224, 226, 235
 Stevens, Wallace 64
 Stevenson, Robert Louis 3, 66, 164
 Strauss, Mme 74
 Strauss, Walter A. 66, 78, 210
 street gangs 37
 Sue, Eugène 37

- superstition 153–5
 Sutton, Denys 230n
 sweaters 35n
 Symons, Arthur 50
Symposium (Plato) 165
- Tadié, Jean-Yves 38, 66, 73, 124n
 Tarbull, Edmund Charles 6–7
 tea 106–7
 technology 53–5
 and memory 61
 and myth 57–8
 telegrams 124–5, 124–5n, 143
 telepathy 50
 telephone 37, 56–7
 “Tell-Tale Heart, The” (Poe) 119–20, 159
Ten O’Clock lecture (Whistler) 196, 237, 240
 Tesla, Nikola 49
 “Theses on the Philosophy of History”
 (Benjamin) 232
Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality (Freud)
 137
 Tickner, Lisa 53
Tigersprung 232
 time 231–2
Times, The 121n
 Tissot, James Jacques-Joseph 30
 Tocqueville, Alexis de 30, 31
 trains 129–30, 145
 transition 81, 91–2, 214
 transmigration of souls 155–8
 transubstantiation 108
 Tronche, Gustave 183n
Two Journeys to Japan (Cornwallis) 205
- United States 1
 admiration for 30
 anti-Americanism 31–3
 anxieties about 48–9
 artists 201–2
 First World War 25–6, 47–8
 flag 39–41, 43–6
 influence on France 4–13, 34–8, 46–7
 and Japan 205
 jazz 28–30
 women 16–25
 see also Americanization
 United States Steel Corporation 4
- Valéry, Paul 2, 159
 Van Blarenberghe, Mme 140, 169–70
 Van Kannell, Theophilus 11
 Van Leer, David 156, 165
 Velasquez, Diego 227
Venus in Furs (Sacher-Masoch) 121–2
 Verlaine, Paul 182
 Vermeer, Johannes 195, 216
 Verne, Jules 159
Vertigo (film) 132n
Vie électrique, La (Robida) 52n
 Villain, Fernand 14
 Villiers de l’Isle Adam, Auguste 159
 violence 165, 173–4
 Virgil 83
 Virtanen, Reino 65
 Votey, Edwin 36
- Walpole, Horace 164
 washing 35
 Wassenaar, Ingrid 87n, 170
 Way, Thomas 208
 Way, Thomas, Jr. 208
 Weber, Eugene 34n
 Weill, Alexandre 127
 Westinghouse, George 49
 Wharton, Edith 2, 17, 18, 20
 Whistler, James McNeill 3, 13
 Arrangement en chair et noir 220–1
 Arrangement in Black 230
 Arrangement in Black and Gold 197, 212, 229
 Arrangement in Grey: Portrait of the Painter
 224
 Arrangement in Grey and Black No. 2 196–7
 Arrangement in White and Black 230
 artistic Barnum 46
 Blanchissage a Cologne 236, Plate 7
 Blue and Silver: Trouville 101, 228, Plate 1
 dandyism 22
 dark 152
 decadence 121n
 Degas on 30
 Design for a dress for Miss Cicely H.
 Alexander 236, Plate 6
 Design for wall decoration at Aubrey House
 101, 206, Plate 2
 gender and sexual identity 217–23
 Harmony in Grey and Gold 210n
 Harmony in Pink and Grey 229–30
 in *Hommage à Delacroix* 203–4
 and Japanese art 204–7
 as man-milliner 235–7, 240–1
 memory 207–17

- modernity 233
Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket 228, 236
Noir et Or 197, 212, 229
Note in Green and Brown: Orlando at Coombe 219–20, Plate 5
 paranormal 50
Pink Note: The Novelette 139, Plate 3
 portraits 224–31
 and Proust 195–200
 publicity 34n
Rose and Silver: The Princess from the Land of Portraits 209
Symphony in Flesh Color and Pink: Portrait of Mrs. Frances Leyland 236n
Symphony in White, No. 1: The White Girl 201–2, 203, 222, 235n
Symphony in White No. 2: The Little White Girl 209
Symphony in White, No. 3 236
Variations in Flesh Color and Green: The Balcony 205, 214–15
Variations in Violet and Green 205
 virility 126n
Wapping 205
Whistler as Pan (Beardsley) 223
Whistler Times Seven (Menpes) 223
 White, Edmund 2
 white 221–3, 230
White Flag (Johns) 44
 Whitman, Walt 183n
 Wilbur, Richard 155
 Wilde, Oscar 163–4, 223
 Will, I. 68
 Williams, C.K. 2
 Wilson, August 2
 Wilson, Edmund 2
 Wilson, Woodrow 26–7
 Winton, Alison 145
 Wittels, Fritz 113n
Woman in White, The (Collins) 201n, 222
 women
 American 16–23, 65n
 anxieties about 127–9
 death 123, 140–2, 168–9, 171–2
 education 138–9
 fashion 232–4
 hysteria 113n
 men's clothing 129
 misogyny 170–1
 modernity and technology 51–4
 rest cure 133
 Woolf, Virginia 3, 231
World of Marcel Proust, The (Maurois) 65
 Worth, Charles 236–7
 Wright, Richard 2

 yacht painting 39–41, 42–3, 44, 45
Yellow Book 139
 York ham 37–8
 Yoshikawa, Kazuyoshi 196n

 Zola, Emile 116, 200, 201, 204



1 James McNeill Whistler, *Blue and Silver: Trouville* (ca. 1865)



2 James McNeill Whistler, *Design for wall decoration at Aubrey House* (ca. 1873-74)



3 James McNeill
Whistler, *Pink Note:
The Novelette* (early
1880s)



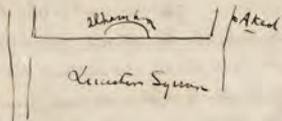
4 Marcel Proust,
*Ressemblance de Karlich et
d'Anatole Le Roy Beaulieu*
(1908)



5 James McNeill Whistler, *Note in Green and Brown: Orlando at Coombe* (1884)

1958
2 B
34

Alhambra as you face it and on the same side of the square - like this



Or perhaps Turner & Rogers may have done it - they often keep it - But try Alhambra first -

The dress might have puffs on the skirts and about it - and a fine little ruffle for the neck - or lace lace -



also it might be looped up from time to time with Paws of pale yellow ribbon -

In case the Indian muslin is not to be had, - then the usual fine muslin of which ladies' dresses are made will do - the skirt well taken out - and the white dress afterwards done up by the laundress with a little starch to make the puffs and skirts &c stand out - of course not an atom of flour! -

As I intended as far as I had written to my son for his approval, he went on with it himself - but that you need not feel nervous about the time it takes, I have taken the freedom to put the dress left in my trunk, into the hands of my Laundress much to extract the right line of the bias which is the sole objection, and so, it will be ready for you if the one ordered cannot be finished by then.

I must now express my grateful sense of your goodness in your invitation for next Sunday, the Old Chelsea Church being closed & my basket almost empty like a stray sheep & shall I am sure be compelled by attending your place of public worship, and am as fond of attendance as of sweet wine, I shall

6 James McNeill Whistler,
Design for a dress for Miss Cicely
H. Alexander (1873)



7 James McNeill Whistler,
Blanchissage à Cologne (1858)