



Marcel Proust
The Swann Way

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS



OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

THE SWANN WAY

MARCEL PROUST (1871–1922) is best known as the author of the seven-volume masterpiece *A la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*, 1913–27). He was born in Auteuil, to the west of Paris, to well-to-do parents; at the age of 10 he suffered a near-fatal asthma attack and his life from that point onwards was marked by ill health. He began writing reviews, short stories, and society journalism whilst studying at the Lycée Condorcet and published a collection of these pieces, *Les Plaisirs et les jours* (*Pleasures and Days*) in 1896. Family connections and schoolfriends gave him access to the highest Parisian social circles, on which he would later draw for his portrayal of the society life in *In Search of Lost Time*. His first attempt at an extended narrative (posthumously published as *Jean Santeuil*, 1952) was abandoned; subsequent stages in his apprenticeship as a writer include translating works by the English art historian and social critic John Ruskin and producing dazzling pastiches of major French writers. Finally, during 1908–9, whilst working on a critical essay taking to task the great nineteenth-century critic Sainte-Beuve, Proust began to draft fragments of a first-person narrative that coalesced into what would become *In Search of Lost Time*. The first volume appeared in 1913. Unfit for military service, Proust spent the wartime years expanding his novel, the subsequent volumes of which appeared between 1919 and 1927. Proust's devotion to his work, sleeping by day then writing and making additions and revisions through the night, was ruinous for his already fragile health and he died in 1922, while still engaged in the corrections to his final volumes.

BRIAN NELSON is an Emeritus Professor at Monash University, Melbourne, and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of the Humanities. His publications include *Zola: A Very Short Introduction*, *The Cambridge Introduction to French Literature*, *The Cambridge Companion to Zola*, *Zola and the Bourgeoisie*, and translations of Zola's *The Assommoir*, *His Excellency Eugène Rougon*, *Earth* (with Julie Rose), *The Fortune of the Rougons*, *The Belly of Paris*, *The Kill*, *Pot Luck*, and *The Ladies' Paradise*. He has also translated *Swann in Love* by Marcel Proust for the Oxford World's Classics series. He was awarded the New South Wales Premier's Prize for Translation in 2015.

ADAM WATT is Professor of French & Comparative Literature at the University of Exeter, where he is Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the Faculty of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences. His books include *Reading in Proust's A la recherche: Le Délire de la lecture* (2009); *The Cambridge Introduction to Marcel Proust* (2011); a critical biography of Proust (2013); and, as editor, *Marcel Proust in Context* (2013) and *The Cambridge History of the Novel in French* (2021). He has published comparative work on Proust and a range of writers from Valéry, Rivière, Beckett, and Barthes to Eve Kosofsky-Sedgwick and Anne Carson.

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

For over 100 years Oxford World's Classics have brought readers closer to the world's great literature. Now with over 700 titles—from the 4,000-year-old myths of Mesopotamia to the twentieth century's greatest novels—the series makes available lesser-known as well as celebrated writing.

The pocket-sized hardbacks of the early years contained introductions by Virginia Woolf, T. S. Eliot, Graham Greene, and other literary figures which enriched the experience of reading.

Today the series is recognized for its fine scholarship and reliability in texts that span world literature, drama and poetry, religion, philosophy, and politics. Each edition includes perceptive commentary and essential background information to meet the changing needs of readers.

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS



MARCEL PROUST

The Swann Way



Translated by

BRIAN NELSON

Edited with an Introduction and Notes by

ADAM WATT

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

OXFORD
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Great Clarendon Street, Oxford, OX2 6DP,
United Kingdom

Oxford University Press is a department of the University of Oxford.
It furthers the University's objective of excellence in research, scholarship,
and education by publishing worldwide. Oxford is a registered trade mark of
Oxford University Press in the UK and in certain other countries

© Editorial material Adam Watt 2023 Translation Brian Nelson 2023

The moral rights of the authors have been asserted

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in
a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the
prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press, or as expressly permitted
by law, by licence or under terms agreed with the appropriate reprographics
rights organization. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside the scope of the
above should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the
address above

You must not circulate this work in any other form
and you must impose this same condition on any acquirer

Published in the United States of America by Oxford University Press
198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, United States of America

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Control Number: 000000000

ISBN 978-0-19-887152-1

Printed and bound in the UK by
Clays Ltd, Elcograf S.p.A.

Links to third party websites are provided by Oxford in good faith and
for information only. Oxford disclaims any responsibility for the materials
contained in any third party website referenced in this work.

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
<i>General Editors' Preface</i>	ix
<i>Translator's Note</i>	xiii
<i>Introduction</i>	xvii
<i>Note on the Text</i>	xlix
<i>Select Bibliography</i>	li
<i>A Chronology of Marcel Proust</i>	lv
THE SWANN WAY	i
Combray	5
Swann in Love	175
Place Names: The Name	355
<i>Explanatory Notes</i>	399

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

OUR thanks go to Judith Luna and Chris Mann for reading the translation in its draft form and for making a number of helpful comments; and, for exchanges on Proust and translation matters, to Esther Allen, Andrew Benjamin, Peter Bush, Ilona Chessid, H el ene Jaccomard, Valerie Minogue, Julie Rose, and Robert Savage. We are grateful to Luciana O'Flaherty for her encouragement and wise counsel. Adam Watt is grateful to Stacey Hynd for her support and to Brian Nelson for his patience and goodwill throughout the production of this work.

GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

IN Search of Lost Time, published between 1913 and 1927, is recognized as the undisputed masterpiece of twentieth-century fiction. Endlessly rich in its themes and idioms, it is a philosophical novel about time, memory, imagination, and art; a psychological novel about human behaviour, love, and jealousy; a social novel about France, especially high society, as it evolved from the end of the nineteenth century to the aftermath of the 1914–18 War; and a comic novel of manners, character, and language. It is also an experimental novel, quite unlike what contemporary readers normally understood to be a work of fiction. Part of Proust's importance historically is that he redefined the boundaries of the genre. Instead of a conventional linear story with a clearly identifiable plot, the *Search* uses a kaleidoscope of memories to create a startlingly new form of narrative. For those who come to the *Search* for the first time, it reads very much like an autobiography. There is an 'I', a first-person narrator who is telling the story of his childhood experiences and the life that follows, adding analytical comments as he goes. But although there are strong autobiographical elements in the novel—the places and characters can be matched with Proust's own experience, and the narrator's name is eventually revealed to be Marcel—these elements have been transformed, and a world created out of them which, though based on real experiences, is an imaginary one, a fictional creation. Moreover, the narrative 'I' is a double 'I', moving fluidly between the present of the narrator and the past of his younger self, building multiple perspectives into a symphonic structure and promoting a dramatic narration as the narrator comes slowly to understand the significance of his past experiences. The novel invites the reader to enter the narrator's mind, to accompany him on his journey of discovery as he explores the workings of his own consciousness and seeks to understand not only the meaning of his own life but also the nature of the human condition.

There is no ideal, ultimate translation of a given original. There cannot be, given that nothing is exactly the same in one language as in another. Moreover, as Kevin Hart has noted, following Jacques Derrida, while any text is always open to translation, 'no version,

faithful or free, will ever exhaust its meaning. There will always be a supplement of signification which remains outside even the most successful translation, and that supplement will always entice another translator to begin work.¹ Classic texts in particular, from Homer onwards, are susceptible of multiple readings and retranslations over time. Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* has been retranslated into English over twenty times since its publication in 1857. Retranslation of classic works, and the ability to compare different versions of a given text, afford an opportunity to celebrate not only the expressive capacities of the English language, the role of the translator, and the creativity involved in the translator's art, but also 'the rich multiple presence of the translated text'.² Our aim with this series of new translations, accompanied by detailed notes and readable introductions by leading scholars, is to contribute to that richness—to widen still further the appeal of a work that offers inexhaustible rewards.

Publication will be in seven volumes. There will be a different translator for each volume (except the first and last). We have chosen to standardize certain terms, recurrent phrases and expressions, modes of address, personal titles, use of elision and so forth across the translations, and, more generally, have attempted to facilitate unity of voice, a stylistic consonance, across the various volumes (while bearing in mind shifts in Proust's voice and tone as his work progressed). The views on translation expressed in the Translator's Note in this volume are, broadly speaking, those of the team. Ultimately, however, the best guarantee that Proust's voice will come through in each volume is the artistry of the translators themselves.

Proust's themes and preoccupations, the threads with which the seven individual volumes of the *Search* are stitched together into a coherent whole, are as relevant and speak as directly to us now as they ever have in the course of the last century. Desire, attraction, betrayal; ageing, memory, and identity; death, loss, and the solace of art: all of these human concerns speak to us from the pages of Proust's novel. But in their interweaving—and this cuts to the core of the

¹ Quoted by Paolo Bartoloni, 'The Virtuality of Translation', in Christopher Palmer and Ian Topliss (eds.), *Globalising Australia* (Melbourne: La Trobe University, 2000), 77–83, at 78.

² Dominique Jullien, 'The Way by Lydia's: A New Translation of Proust', in Suzanne Jill Levine and Katie Lateef-Jan (eds.), *Untranslatability Goes Global* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 64–76, at 72.

Search's remarkable hybrid status—we encounter a quite extraordinary array of cultural and historical references. From cave paintings to music hall, Renaissance sculpture to advertising hoardings, high culture to lowbrow ephemera, Proust's novel throngs with allusions to centuries' worth of history and cultural production. Though contemporary readers, unlike those of Proust's own time, have the facility of consulting a search engine to learn in a matter of seconds, for example, who painted the *Virtues and Vices of Padua*, or who Planté and Rubinstein were, we felt nevertheless that incorporating a set of explanatory endnotes in each volume was at once desirable and valuable. Those who choose to ignore them can of course forge ahead in their reading uninterrupted; but those who are curious will find socio-cultural, historical, geographical, and artistic allusions illuminated and contextualized. The notes seek not to offer any sort of critical commentary on Proust's novel, but rather to clarify dates and details that will enrich readers' appreciation of its unique breadth of reference.

The introductory essay to each volume outlines the key concerns and preoccupations of the volume in question, providing a broad frame of reference for readers tackling the novel for the first time and reflecting on the role of that volume in the wider structure of the novel as a whole. These essays will prime readers for the journey that lies ahead but should be read with the awareness that they—inevitably—contain 'spoilers' or anticipations of what is to come.

BRIAN NELSON
ADAM WATT

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

NEW translations of classic authors are produced to some extent in the shadow of their predecessors, of which they offer, implicitly or not, a kind of critique.¹ In the case of Proust the longest shadow is cast by C. K. Scott Moncrieff. For decades, his translation of *A la recherche du temps perdu* (*A la recherche* for short), published between 1922 and 1931, was the only one available to English-speaking readers unable to read Proust in the original. This translation was monumental in its scale and in many ways admirable in its realization. Moncrieff had a fine ear for the cadences of Proust's prose, and a considerable talent for elegant phrasing. But his language dated over time, especially in dialogue, and from the beginning he was prone to tamper with the text, through embellishment or the heightening of language. His translation also contained various errors and misinterpretations. The reservation most commonly voiced about his translation, however, is that it changed Proust's tone. He tended to make Proust sound precious and flowery, whereas Proust's style is not in the least affected or ornate. His prose is precise, rigorous, exact. Grand rhythm and maxim-like concentration often work together. Proust's sentences, though elaborately constructed, have a beautiful balance, a musicality that becomes particularly apparent when the text is read aloud. As John Sturrock observed, Moncrieff's choice of English title, the 'poetical', Shakespearean *Remembrance of Things Past*, hardly reflects the plainness (or the thematic implications) of *A la recherche du temps perdu*. The contrast is symptomatic, Sturrock noted, of 'the unhappy way in which Scott Moncrieff contrived to play down the stringent intelligence of his author by conveying it in an English prose that is constantly looking to prettify. It's as if the translator had been taken aback by how acrid and how ruthless Proust can be in his exposure of the deep falsities of the inhabitants of the Parisian *beau monde*, and was determined to muffle its cruelty by the gentility of his English.'²

¹ Cf. Antoine Berman, *Toward a Translation Criticism: John Donne*, ed. and trans. Françoise Massardier-Kenney (Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2009) (French original 1995).

² John Sturrock, 'Proust in English', in *The Word from Paris: Essays on Modern French Thinkers and Writers* (London: Verso, 1998), 110–18, at 115.

Since Moncrieff's day, literary translation has become a much more self-conscious practice, while recent years have also seen the rise of the discipline of translation studies. The aim of capturing a writer's style has been equated by some contemporary translators and translation studies scholars with 'foreignization'. This denotes, in its milder form, a determination to stay as close as possible to the original, and, in its most zealous form, a kind of interventionism that heightens one's awareness of the foreign. The latter approach implies the production of a consciously defamiliarized English by the retention of syntactical or grammatical conventions from the source language: to make the translation 'feel French' (or German, etc.) and remind readers that they are reading a translation. Proponents of this approach feel it shows respect for the other and has the merit of alerting readers to the diversity, and the need for diversity, among cultures. There is of course a foreignness inherent in the text, both for linguistic reasons and because different languages reflect different social and cultural worlds. Who would not wish to respect foreignness in the latter sense—for instance, by keeping culturally specific words and phrases in the original? But foreignize stylistically? Proust sounded strange in French, to his French audience, because of the particularity of his voice, a strikingly original new voice given shape in his native language. It is a verbal strangeness—a stylistic otherness—the translator should keep in order to allow the anglophone reader to experience something equivalent to the experience of the native French reader. But this is not the same as trying to make the translation sound French *per se*. Successful translation of Proust is achieved (unsurprisingly, one might feel) by making him sound like Proust—by giving him an English voice, a voice that conveys his vision, his sensibility, and his unique qualities as a writer. Moreover, Proust in English can be idiosyncratic without ceasing to be idiomatic. Anthea Bell has written: 'translators are in the business of spinning an illusion. The illusion is that the reader is reading not a translation but the real thing'; 'I am not saying, of course, that the illusion should deprive readers of the foreignness of the original text . . . Far from it: I mean only that I hope a translation will read as easily and be as appealing to the reader as if it had been originally written in English.'³ Surely this

³ Anthea Bell, 'Translation: Walking the Tightrope of Illusion', in Susan Bassnett and Peter Bush (eds.), *The Translator as Writer* (London: Continuum, 2006), 58–67, at 59, 60.

is the highest form of respect a translator can pay a text and its culture, and the readers of the text in the target language.

The task of the translator is to get inside the author's skin. I think of translation as an art of imitation: a quest to find and reproduce a text's 'voice'. It is a kind of performance art, combining close reading and creative (re)writing. A sequence of words in one language is replaced by a sequence of words in another language. Everything is changed so that the text stays the same, that is to say as close as possible to the translator's experience of the original. This involves scrupulous attention to verbal detail—myriad decisions concerning tone, texture, rhythm, register, syntax, sound, connotations: all those things that make up style and reflect the marriage between style and meaning. Proust was the greatest prose stylist of his generation. His style is largely identified with his famous long sentences, with their 'coiling elaboration'.⁴ As they uncoil, the sentences express the rhythms of a sensibility, the directions and indirections of desire, the conflicts and convolutions of a mind, the narrator's or Swann's, that forms the framework—indeed the subject matter—of the narrative, as it unfolds, via many detours and with a dynamic backward- and forward-looking movement, from childhood beginnings to mature adulthood. While recognizing the impossibility of exact equivalence, my aim has been to recreate the intricate harmonies of Proust's sentences, and the whole pattern of effects embodied in his prose, in such a way that the translation creates the 'illusion' of which Anthea Bell speaks.

I have tried to maintain the full range of Proust's tones and registers, and the shifts between them. I have also tried to capture as much as possible of his humour. Proust is a deeply serious novelist, but he is also a great comic writer. Comic vision is central to his work, and assumes varied forms. Most obviously, there is the comedy of character: Marcel's invalid Aunt Léonie, who 'never sleeps', lying in bed all day and using her hypochondria as a vantage point from which to satisfy her craving to know everything about the life of the town; his eccentric grandmother; his timid high-minded aunts, unable to thank Swann for a case of wine without expressing their gratitude in such cryptic terms that no one could possibly understand what they mean;

⁴ Richard Howard, 'Intermittences of the Heart', in André Aciman (ed.), *The Proust Project* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 98.

the buffoon Cottard, with his ludicrous self-consciousness and obsession with puns and figures of speech. There is the social comedy, whether it be the rituals of the narrator's family and the town of Combray or the snobbery of the bourgeois and aristocratic circles of Paris. There is the high comedy of the great set pieces in 'Swann in Love' (the dinner at the Verdurins', the soirée at the Marquise de Saint-Euverte's). There is the irony that suffuses the narrative: the narrator, as he looks back on his younger self, and on Swann's experience of sexual jealousy, chronicles the tantalizing gaps—a tragicomedy of errors—between desire, perception, and reality.

Finally, the title. *The Way by Swann's* I find awkward, while Moncrieff's *Swann's Way* shifts the emphasis somewhat from 'way' (the path along the edge of Swann's estate, one of the two different paths taken by Marcel and his family on their Combray walks) to Swann and sounds oddly ambiguous (as in: what sort of way?). I chose *The Swann Way* because it forms a perfect balance with *The Guermantes Way* (the opposition is an important element in the architecture of the novel) and fits smoothly into the flow of the text (see the first mention of the two 'ways' on pp. 125–6).

B.N.

INTRODUCTION

Readers new to the novel should note that this Introduction makes details of the plot explicit.

A Novel of Time

STALACTITES, reflections, patinas, rays of light, visitors from the past: early in 1912, these were the notions that Marcel Proust was pondering as he sought out a title for a novel on which he had been working, with ever-increasing intensity, since 1908.¹ He was fascinated by the different ways our bodies and brains store up lived experience, intrigued by the ways in which the past can make itself felt in the present, and determined to capture these in a narrative form that would communicate a particular subjectivity whilst also exploring the wider world of which he was part. But finding a title was tricky. Eventually the stalactites and patinas were rejected and Proust came to focus on the dimension of human experience that underpins and determines all experiences of past and present: Time. Minutes that drag lazily on, hours that skip by unnoticed, years that weather faces and dull what once was bright: all of this would become the very substance of Proust's book and, after a number of fits and starts, *A la recherche du temps perdu* took hold as the overarching title. A literal translation gives *In Search of Lost Time*, and this indeed is our chosen rendering. The first published translation took a different, lyrical tack, proffering *Remembrance of Things Past*, a borrowing from Shakespeare's rather maudlin Sonnet 30 ('When to the sessions of sweet silent thought | I summon up remembrance of things past, | I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought').² What this Shakespearean title puts centre stage is the importance of memory in Proust's enterprise, but it pushes into

¹ Letter to Reynaldo Hahn, first semester of 1912, in *Correspondance de Marcel Proust*, ed. Philip Kolb, 21 vols. (Paris: Plon, 1970–93), xi. 151.

² Proust's first English-language translator was Charles Kenneth Scott Moncrieff (1880–1930). His *Swann's Way* appeared with Chatto & Windus in 1922, the year of Proust's death. Scott Moncrieff's labours were not complete at his death in 1930 and the final volume, *Le Temps retrouvé* (*Time Regained*), was completed by Stephen Hudson (pen name of Sydney Schiff), appearing in 1931.

the wings any mention of loss, equally important in the French formulation since, as an idiom or standard formulation, 'temps perdu' can be lost or *wasted* time. And *A la recherche du temps perdu* is a massive novel that invites its readers to take a big gamble: read me, it says, page after page, volume after volume, and see what return you might get on your investment. Will it be time well spent or time wasted? Proust's novel, which swelled from its originally planned, relatively modest dimensions of two, perhaps three volumes, to become the seven-volume saga we have today, demands of its readers a very considerable commitment of time. Its sheer length means that if it is read from start to finish, even a speedy reader without undue disruption or delay will be, at the very least, several months older and wiser by the time she finishes her task. The subtle (and the radical) ways in which individuals change over time are at the core of Proust's thinking and are something to which a reading of his novel renders us acutely sensitive. When we live with the cadences of his sentences, the rhythms of his thoughts, the profundity of his insights, and the acuity of his wit, our own being-in-the-world is altered. Our vision is adjusted, our senses delicately recalibrated both to the rich and varied world around us and to our own inner landscape: what we mean and who we are when we say 'I'.

This is in part because *In Search of Lost Time* takes the form of a first-person narrative, a novel built around a narrator-protagonist we meet in the first, enigmatic sentence of the book ('For a long time I went to bed early') and whose company we keep through each of the seven volumes. *The Swann Way*, then, is the doorway to the narrator's world, but what we encounter is not a conventional linear account of his life. Rather, and this is one of the great innovations of Proust's writing and one of the main challenges it poses to readers, we find ourselves plunged into the recollections and reminiscences of the adult narrator, who describes and reflects on moments of his past from positions of varying distance from the events in question. *The Swann Way* is principally concerned with the narrator's childhood (and, in 'Swann in Love', its prehistory) but the narrative perspective repeatedly shifts: at times the voice that speaks is noticeably mature and worldly-wise, at others it has the naïve and unworldly qualities of the youthful protagonist at the time of events portrayed. This shifting focalization creates a dynamism in the narrative that serves to underscore one of Proust's key observations: that our subjectivity, what we

mean when we say ‘I’, is not singular and unchanging. When we consider the duration of a lifetime we realize that ‘I’ am made up of continuity and change, multiple selves that bloom and recede, traits and proclivities that predominate and subside, characteristics and identities that surge and fade. For Proust, as for Whitman, ‘I contain multitudes’. What intrigued Proust was how our past selves, the instantiations of who I was and what I experienced before the present moment, that we may believe to be lost or forgotten, nevertheless linger, latent within us, emerging unexpectedly into the here and now when triggered by the right stimulus. This form of *involuntary* memory (as opposed to our conscious or voluntary efforts that allow us to recall an address or the spelling of a word) is of vital importance in Proust’s project. The experience of involuntary memory is staged, most famously, in *The Swann Way* via the narrator’s encounter with a madeleine, a small cake to which we will return below. The powerful involuntary experience, when a sensation in the present moment prompts an unbidden memory of a previous encounter with the same sensation, recurs at various points in Proust’s narrative, but it is the madeleine scene that has become the defining ‘Proustian moment’, familiar even to those who have never read a page of *In Search of Lost Time*.

Before we come to a discussion of those pivotal pages and the purpose they serve within *The Swann Way* and the wider novel as a whole, it will be helpful to provide some wider context about the author of this very particular work of fiction that takes subjectivity and individual perspective and knowledge so very seriously. Who was Marcel Proust, and how did he come to write the novel that he did?

Marcel Proust—A Life of Writing

Marcel Proust was the first son born (in 1871) to wealthy, upper-middle-class parents, Adrien Proust, a celebrated physician and public health specialist and his wife Jeanne Proust, née Weil, a highly intelligent woman born into a wealthy Jewish family. While Proust’s younger brother Robert, born in 1873, would go on to be a medical man like his father, the young Marcel had no such inclination. His childhood was marked by ill health, in particular acute asthma. Attempts to push him, in time, towards a conventional career came to naught. His desire to write was strong from an early age (already at high school, the Lycée Condorcet in Paris, he established and contributed to

a short-lived literary and artistic review with his classmates). He went on to produce a substantial body of journalistic writings, reviews, and essays on literary and artistic topics which illuminate his age and provide a rich sense of how his personal aesthetics developed between his years as a precocious lycée student in Paris in the 1880s and the later period, from 1908 to 1922, in which he devoted (and ultimately sacrificed) his life to the composition and publication of his novel.³ Early attempts at finding a voice and a vehicle for it can be most profitably read and studied. In 1896 he produced a volume of mannered prose sketches and somewhat derivative poems, mostly previously published in newspapers and journals, entitled *Pleasures and Days* (*Les Plaisirs et les jours*), which insofar as it was critically heeded at all, gave him a reputation as a lightweight society writer, dilettantish and lacking direction. Determined to prove himself, yet uncertain of the best route to take, he subsequently channelled his creative efforts into four partially overlapping projects. First, he produced over fifteen hundred pages of manuscript notes towards a narrative that never quite coalesced into a coherent, structured novel. Begun in 1895, these notes—written in the third person and above all concerned with the thoughts, impressions, and perceptions of a young man by the name of Jean Santeuil—were abandoned by 1899. They were posthumously ordered, edited, and published as *Jean Santeuil* in 1952. Although it contains a good many elements that would be recycled or incorporated in one way or another into *In Search of Lost Time*, the *Jean Santeuil* material is a long way from being an ‘early novel’. We might think of it as a set of stepping-stones at best. Secondly, between 1899 and 1906 Proust devoted his time not to the production of fiction (the *Jean Santeuil* notes had left him at something of an impasse) but to the work of translation. In an idiosyncratic yet effective way, Proust worked with his mother and Marie Nordlinger, the English-speaking cousin of his friend Reynaldo Hahn, to produce French versions of two works by the English critic, artist, social thinker, and art historian

³ This section draws on material previously published as the Introduction to *Swann in Love* (Oxford World’s Classics, 2017). For a more detailed account of Proust’s life, see my critical biography *Marcel Proust* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013). The ‘standard’ full biographies in English and French are William C. Carter, *Marcel Proust: A Life* (2000; New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013) and Jean-Yves Tadié, *Marcel Proust: Biographie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996)—also translated into English by Euan Cameron: *Marcel Proust* (New York: Viking, 2000).

John Ruskin (1819–1900). Proust’s heavily annotated translation of *The Bible of Amiens* appeared in 1904, followed by his version of *Sesame and Lilies* in 1906, to which is appended an important prefatory essay, subsequently widely republished as ‘Days of Reading’.⁴ This essay in particular was a chance for Proust to explore ideas about art, memory, and the nature of subjective experience that would feed into the pages of ‘Combray’ (and other parts of the *Search*). Ruskin provided lasting lessons in aesthetics, in architectural and art history, and in the less concrete but equally pertinent matter of how as individuals we relate to place and space. Proust is a writer greatly sensitive to the world around him, both its natural and built environments, and Ruskin played a major role in developing that sensitivity. The practice of translation, however, in the end left Proust unfulfilled—it did not feel like ‘real’ writing, as he put it, but drudgery in the service of others.⁵ His father and mother had died in 1903 and 1905 respectively: now he was alone (his brother had married and started a family), his fortieth birthday was on the horizon, and he had precious few accomplishments of which to speak.

The turning point came for Proust during 1908–9 when he embarked on two broadly concurrent undertakings. Following news reports of the extraordinary ‘Lemoine Affair’—the tale of a crooked engineer who succeeded, for a time, in swindling the De Beers diamond company out of almost two million francs with the claim that he had mastered a method of manufacturing diamonds—Proust wrote a series of quite brilliant pastiches of well-known writers in the French tradition, based on the outlandish events. He wrote accounts of the affair in the style of (among others) the great nineteenth-century novelists Honoré de Balzac and Gustave Flaubert, as well as the Goncourt brothers, the prolific critic Émile Faguet, and the historian Jules Michelet.⁶ The process of identifying and reproducing the salient traits of style of revered authors was a sort of ‘literary criticism in action’ for Proust

⁴ *The Bible of Amiens* (1882) is Ruskin’s study of the development of Christianity in France, with a focus on Amiens and its cathedral, originally constructed in the thirteenth century. *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) brings together two lectures Ruskin gave which treat the respective education, duties, and comportment of men and women.

⁵ Letter to Antoine Bibesco, 20 December 1902, in *Correspondance de Marcel Proust*, ed. Kolb, iii. 196.

⁶ For an incisive and illuminating account of these texts and their relation to Proust’s later writing, see Hannah Freed-Thall, ‘“Prestige of a Momentary Diamond”: Economies of Distinction in Proust’, *New Literary History* 43/1 (2012), 159–78.

while also, crucially, serving as ‘a matter of hygiene . . . necessary to purge oneself of the most natural vice of idolatry and imitation’.⁷ Proust realized that by actively reproducing the writing style of others, he could avoid the risk of unconsciously doing so when creating his own work. He was thus able to arrive at the voice that speaks to us from the pages of *In Search of Lost Time*, but this would only emerge from a final transitional project that was begun at the same time Proust was crafting his pastiches.

In 1908, he started working on a piece of writing we now know as *Against Sainte-Beuve* (*Contre Sainte-Beuve*, posthumously published in 1954), which was ultimately abandoned in favour of the novel that grew out of these notes. *Against Sainte-Beuve* can be read as one might walk around an artist’s studio or workshop, examining sketches and maquettes, rough drawings and studies that show the tentative, combinatory steps that precede and foreshadow a masterpiece.⁸ Here we can see Proust trying his hand at a variety of approaches to the writerly vocation. Proust started with the idea of a critical essay taking issue with the methods of Charles-Augustin Sainte-Beuve (1804–69), the most influential French literary critic of the nineteenth century. His intention was to write a fictional dialogue between himself and his mother, who would come to his bedside and listen to his account of plans for an article challenging Sainte-Beuve’s view that the merits of a given literary work are determined by the moral qualities of the writer who produced it. Proust’s view—that a work of art should be judged on its own terms, regardless of the qualities of its creator—prefigures the aesthetic lessons learned in the *Search* by the novel’s narrator-protagonist, as well as later twentieth-century literary theoretical writing concerning ‘the death of the author’ and the autonomy of the work of art. This dialogue-cum-essay, however, grew quickly beyond its anticipated dimensions and in one of Proust’s notebooks

⁷ See *Correspondance de Marcel Proust*, ed. Kolb, viii. 61 and xviii. 380.

⁸ A recent discovery of material from this period has added yet further to our understanding of Proust’s early steps towards the novel as we have it today. This is the seventy-five pages of draft material begun in late 1907 and elaborated during the first half of 1908 that came to light amongst the papers of Proust scholar Bernard de Fallois at his death in 2018. They show some of the earliest versions of scenes that take their final form in *The Swann Way*, but also in three of the novel’s later volumes, showing how adept Proust was at saving, adapting, and reemploying draft material long before word-processing made such things possible at the touch of a button. See Marcel Proust, *Les Soixante-quinze feuillets*, ed. Nathalie Mauriac Dyer (Paris: Gallimard, 2021).

from this time, known as the *Carnet de 1908*, it is possible to trace the fervent, dynamic, multidirectional movements of his thinking: here we find, intermingled with notes relating to potential developments of the essay on Sainte-Beuve, fictional fragments—sketches of scenarios and characters—as well as reading notes and scribbled lists of topics for exploration, and possible structural forms for his narrative.⁹ Gradually, in this and a succession of other *carnets* (notebooks) and *cahiers* (school jotters that Proust bought cheaply in large quantities), between 1908 and 1912 a first-person voice and a guiding structure emerged that would, in time, become *A la recherche du temps perdu*, a wholly new sort of text that retains and incorporates traits of the critical or philosophical essay within its hybrid form.

It is commonplace to associate Proust with the image of the ivory-tower artist, a reclusive figure in a cork-lined room, dedicated only to matters of the mind and the production of his novel, swathed in blankets and burning medicated powders to ease the rattling of his asthmatic chest. Such an image has its roots in reality: in 1910 he did have the walls of his Boulevard Haussmann bedroom lined with cork in an attempt to muffle the sound of the busy thoroughfare and the lively neighbourhood beyond his apartment windows, and his poor health, nocturnal regime, peculiar diet, and proclivity for self-medication did lead to the rhythms of his life being idiosyncratic and its duration relatively short, but he was by no means a lifetime recluse or anchorite of art. His relationships were intense (especially with the loves of his adult life—Reynaldo Hahn, Bertrand de Fénelon, and Alfred Agostinelli) and his network of contacts and correspondents varied and extensive. He could not have written the novel he did without a finely calibrated and highly trusted social compass, an awareness of the extraordinary riches that can be gleaned by an attentive observer in a given social setting.¹⁰ Until the last years of his life when respiratory and other health problems curtailed his physical activity, he was a passionate participant in the artistic and cultural life of the French

⁹ See *Cahiers Marcel Proust*, 8. *Le Carnet de 1908*, ed. Philip Kolb (Paris: Gallimard, 1976). Also available online at <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b6000655q.r=NAF%2016637> (accessed August 2022).

¹⁰ For an insightful overview, see Edward J. Hughes, 'Proust and Social Spaces', in Richard Bales (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Marcel Proust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 151–67. Michael Lucey's *What Proust Heard: Novels and the Ethnography of Talk* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2022) is an immensely valuable, extended account of Proust's novel as a study in the production of sociological knowledge.

capital, its theatres and concert halls, its museums and galleries, private salons and balls. (And even at a time when, by his own account, he had been taking aspirin, morphine, adrenalin, and other substances to manage rheumatic pain, asthma, and fevers, he nevertheless left his bedroom sanctuary in May 1921, just eighteen months before his death, to visit an exhibition of Vermeer paintings at the Musée du Jeu de Paume.¹¹) Though his travels were largely domestic, and never took him further than Belgium, Holland, Switzerland, and Venice, via tireless reading and astonishing volumes of correspondence, he kept himself apprised of matters ranging from politics and international affairs to share trading, gastronomy, horticulture, and of course literature and the arts. Limitations of space preclude us from expanding further here on the details of Proust's life, though many of them emerge in the following pages: the novel grew and evolved symbiotically with the arc of his life, as we shall see. In a long letter of January 1920, he wrote: 'I sacrifice to this work my pleasures, my health, my life.'¹² Such hyperbole in Proust's correspondence is common, but in this he was accurate. The intensity with which he dedicated himself to his literary enterprise almost certainly curtailed his life, but the quid pro quo was the singular work of literature that we have today.

Composition and Structure of In Search of Lost Time

Proust's novel is the story, told in the first person, of how an individual comes to recognize that he is ready and able to fulfil his vocation as a writer. The narrator-protagonist's life is not especially eventful, but the society in which he moves, the relationships he forms, and the struggles he endures with his health serve nevertheless, for most of his life, to prevent him from getting down to work. The complexity—and astonishing accomplishment—of the novel is in the telling, in the non-linear structure of the narrative, in the variability in perspective of the voice that leads us through the tale and the multiple speeds at which it moves. A brief event or a fleeting impression may be dwelt on for pages, while months, even years, can pass in a brief parenthetical remark. As noted above, at times we hear the voice of the youthful

¹¹ See *Correspondance de Marcel Proust*, ed. Kolb, xx, 163.

¹² *Correspondance de Marcel Proust*, ed. Kolb, xix, 78.

protagonist, close in to the action of which he is part, at others we are in the company of a more worldly, adult narrator looking back on the events of his life. This plurality of perspective and approach is mirrored in the composition history of the work, which rapidly and untidily grew well beyond its original anticipated parameters.

The novel's seven volumes did not materialize, of course, all at once. Proust began with *The Swann Way*, which appeared in 1913, but the second volume published, *In the Shadow of Girls in Blossom* (1919), was not the second to be written. Proust began by writing 'Combray', the opening part of the first volume, more or less as we have it, and then wrote what we now know as the closing part of the final volume, *Time Regained*. These bookends were in place by 1910–11 and the writing of the latter parts of the first volume and what would become the third volume, *The Guermantes Way*, followed in 1911–12. Prior to this Proust had envisaged a novel in two parts, the volumes entitled *Le Temps perdu* and *Le Temps retrouvé* (*Time Lost* and *Time Regained*), but as the first volume grew, for practical reasons a certain amount of material had to be excised and placed at the beginning of a second volume. With the publication of *The Swann Way* in 1913 a three-volume structure was therefore anticipated: the second would be *The Guermantes Way* and the last *Time Regained*. The planned overarching title at this stage was *Les Intermittences du cœur* (*The Intermittencies of the Heart*). Proust's writing, however, never tended towards concentration: proliferation, rather, is the watchword of his creative process and in 1914 the material of that envisaged second volume was in fact separated out, spliced with new drafts and expansions, to form the basis of *In the Shadow of Girls in Blossom* and *The Guermantes Way*.

Two major events of 1914—one personal, one geopolitical—had further and fundamental impact on the development of Proust's novel. The outbreak of war meant the suspension of the publication of Proust's work, though ill health meant he was not engaged for service and was thereby at liberty to continue to develop his novel during the years of the conflict. It is likely that Proust's relationship with a young man seventeen years his junior, Alfred Agostinelli, was a motivating force in his developing the story of the protagonist's relationship with a girl named Albertine, encountered among a group of young friends in the fictional resort town of Balbec. Agostinelli was a 19-year-old taxi driver when Proust first met him during his vacation

in the Normandy seaside town of Cabourg in the summer of 1907. They saw each other regularly—Proust spent the summer in Cabourg every year from 1907 to 1914—and eventually, in the spring of 1913, Proust installed Agostinelli in his Paris apartment, ostensibly to serve as a secretary. When, unannounced, Agostinelli fled the capital in December 1913 for Monte Carlo, Proust was distraught and went to great lengths (in vain) to secure his return. Using money Proust had given him, Agostinelli registered at a flying school under the assumed name of ‘Marcel Swan’.¹³ When news reached him that Agostinelli had drowned after crashing his plane into the sea off Antibes in May 1914, Proust was devastated. These events contributed to the drafting of two volumes of *In Search of Lost Time* that took shape during the war years: *The Captive*, which tells of the narrator’s fraught existence with Albertine in Paris, and *The Fugitive*, which deals with her flight and death in a horse-riding accident. The story of the narrator’s relationship with Albertine begins in *In the Shadow of Girls in Blossom*, which became the *Search’s* second volume, published to significant acclaim—and the award of the Prix Goncourt—in 1919. *The Guermantes Way*, which offers an anatomy of Parisian high society life during the Belle Époque period, followed in two instalments in 1920 and 1921, with the *Search’s* fourth volume, *Sodom and Gomorrah*, the heart of its radical exploration of the various shadings of human sexuality and also largely the product of the war years, appearing in two instalments in 1921 and 1922, the year of Proust’s death. *The Captive* and *The Fugitive*, sometimes known as the ‘Albertine cycle’, were published posthumously, in 1923 and 1925 respectively, their editing (and that of *Time Regained*) completed by Proust’s brother Robert and his editor Gaston Gallimard. Finally, having been repeatedly revised, expanded, and adjusted by Proust up to the end of his life, so as to take into account the developments of the intervening volumes unforeseen when it was first drafted in 1910–11, and dealing in

¹³ Biographers and scholars had until recently reproduced Proust’s own belief, mentioned in a note to an essay in the *Pastiches et mélanges* volume published in 1919, that the pseudonym was Marcel Swann. (See *Pastiches et mélanges* in *Contre Sainte-Beuve précédé de Pastiches et mélanges et suivi de Essais et articles*, ed. Pierre Clarac and Yves Sandre, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 66. Recent archival research has shown otherwise: see Jean-Marc Quaranta, ‘Marcel Swan’, in *Un amour de Proust: Alfred Agostinelli (1888–1914)* (Paris: Bouquins, 2021), 251–4.

significant measure with the effects of the war on life in Paris, *Time Regained* eventually appeared in 1927.¹⁴

Overture

Many readers find their initial encounter with Proust's writing to be a destabilizing, even a daunting, experience. This is not because the themes are especially challenging; rather, it is because of the uncertainties that underpin the writing itself: we are plunged straight into the thoughts of a narrator who seems to be lacking all bearings, unsure where and, perhaps even more troublingly, *who* he is. He is existentially unmoored and readers have to embrace the heave and sway of his thoughts and preoccupations as he reflects on questions of memory and identity, the experience of waking from sleep and the hinterland between the unconscious and conscious realms of existence that we usually traverse quite unthinkingly. This is a novel that does not eschew the conventional narrative props of time, location, and character, but rather tweaks or modifies them in unexpected ways, creating friction or turbulence in our reading. The comfortingly unequivocal narrative openings of much nineteenth-century realist fiction give way to a swirl of memory, dream, speculation, and uncertainty. We know that a first-person voice speaks to us, but is he young or old? He recalls a number of bedrooms and sleeping arrangements, but where is he now, as he recalls his memories and early versions of his self? There is a good deal of interplay of light and dark in these opening pages (the real candles and curtains, windows and shadows of the rooms in which the protagonist has slept, the darkness of unknowing and the figurative illumination or enlightenment of understanding that comes by and by to the narrator and his reader). As the narrator searches for his bearings, conversationally weaving through reminiscences that expand and bloom from within, growing with layers of metaphor, analogy, and association, we realize that as readers we are sharing in this enterprise: our reading of Proust's opening pages is

¹⁴ For a concise and authoritative account of these matters, see Nathalie Mauriac Dyer, 'Composition and Publication of *A la recherche du temps perdu*', in Adam Watt (ed.), *Marcel Proust in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 34–40. Those interested in the timeline of events that can be construed from a reading of the novel will learn much from Gareth H. Steel's *Chronology and Time in A la recherche du temps perdu* (Geneva: Droz, 1979).

supposed to be uneasy and uncertain—if it weren't, we wouldn't be immersing ourselves in the mental space of the first-person guide who will be our companion over the course of the volumes to come.

The opening pages, then, take a gamble—they invite us to share an experience of instability and lost or unknown identity in order, gradually, page by page, to find our way again with the narrator as he settles into the account of his life, seeing, hearing, and encountering the world as he does. And this is what, ultimately, *In Search of Lost Time* is—the story of a life—but to think of it as no more than a fictional autobiography strips it of its riches, its extraordinary breadth and scope. We might think we know the shape of a life, the possible trajectories an individual might take from childhood through adolescent discoveries, adult accomplishments or disappointments, to late life fulfilment (or otherwise). These more or less familiar paths are the heart of the tradition known in German as the *Bildungsroman*—the novel of formation or becoming—the classic example being *Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship* (1795–6) by Goethe (1749–1832). While we do find these elements in Proust, they represent only the most rudimentary outline of what is in fact an astonishingly complex and multifaceted structure, as if we were comparing a photograph of a massive hedge-maze taken from ground level with one taken from above. *In Search of Lost Time* invites us repeatedly to rethink and reassess what we thought we knew and its author delights in the revelations that come from a change in perspective. It is a novel about love and relationships, the many forms they take and the ways in which they are doomed to fail; it is about the sparkling allure and ultimate emptiness of social life; the contemplation of beauty in nature; the enrichment provided by our interactions with art; the ways through which we seek to understand who we are and come to an understanding of the wider world and our place in it; how we are affected by loss; and how our minds struggle to cope with the things we can't control and tend to shut down (or go into overdrive) as means of self-protection. Proust's novel explores all of this and much, much more besides, and intimations of these vast vistas of human experience, via explicit references, subtle foreshadowings, or what nowadays some readers might know as 'Easter eggs', are there to be had in the course of the opening volume. *The Swann Way*, to use a musical term employed by Proust himself, is a sort of overture to the work as a whole, an introduction to the key themes, people, and places of the

Proustian world, such as one finds in the opening musical sequence of an opera. Across the opening ten or so pages, in particular, Proust makes us privy to the main locations of the novel, mentions many of the key dramatis personae, and starts to draw us into the themes of time, memory, identity, and belonging that will be sustained throughout each of the successive volumes.

Structure

The Swann Way has a peculiar and somewhat uneven structure. In what follows I will consider key aspects of each part in turn, beginning with a brief overview of the volume as a whole.

The opening part of the volume is 'Combray', which takes its title from the name of the provincial town where during the narrator's childhood his family would spend time away from Paris, at the house of his great-aunt. This part is subdivided into two sections that are qualitatively very different: 'Combray I' recounts the limited aspects of his childhood that the narrator could voluntarily recall of his early life prior to the 'madeleine moment' mentioned above, the period when his only consolation during the trauma of going to bed was his mother's kiss, often denied him when his parents had guests. Many years later, tasting a madeleine dipped in lime-blossom tea, the memory of the rest of his childhood existence in Combray is suddenly restored to him. 'Combray II' narrates the far more expansive, richly detailed account of this period that comes flooding back to him as a result of that experience. We learn about the narrator's family; their servant Françoise; their friend Charles Swann; we witness the caste-like divisions and cyclical minor dramas of small-town life in Combray; we glimpse the aristocratic Guermantes family and the narrator's first indications of wanting to become an artist. The second part of the volume then steps abruptly some way backwards in time: 'Swann in Love' is a discrete narrative in its own right, the interpolated story, told in the third person, of the troubled love affair between the family friend Charles Swann and the woman who would become his wife, Odette de Crécy. She is a woman of relatively low social standing and one of the little clan of 'faithfuls' at the home of the Verdurins, a socially ambitious bourgeois couple. Swann moves in the highest social circles and we encounter some of the prominent figures at a soirée he attends, held by the Marquise de Saint-Euverte. This part

of the novel chronologically long predates the narrator's own story and may be seen as a sort of blueprint for it. It can be read as a stand-alone novella, a bite-sized Proust for those without the time or volition to launch into the *Search* as a whole, but it also serves a key function as part of the 'overture' to the wider work, staging the great risks we face (betrayal, jealousy, self-deception, ridicule) when we fall in love, risks the narrator will in turn run as his own amorous life develops. The relation of 'Swann in Love' to *The Swann Way* and the wider novel as a whole is most instructive: it gives us a model, a set of worked examples, as it were, from which we can extrapolate laws or generalizations about love, society, human behaviour, and relationships. Proust is fascinated by the relation of part to whole, microcosm to macrocosm, and 'Swann in Love' is the first substantive manifestation of this in the novel. We see how Swann behaves, we see how he is treated by those around him, and we may recall the patterns and pitfalls of his experience when in later volumes the narrator in turn goes out into society and seeks comfort and pleasure from the company of others. Before then, however, the volume closes with a brief final part entitled 'Place Names: The Name', which begins with a discussion of the evocative power of place names, before switching to the time when the narrator would play in the Champs-Élysées with Swann's daughter Gilberte (first met in Combray). The narrator loves Gilberte but soon she disappears, leaving him bereft. The volume closes with a passage, narrated from a much later point in time, reflecting on the irrevocable changes that have occurred in the Bois de Boulogne since that distant period of the narrator's childhood. He sombrely acknowledges the unrelenting advance of time and the impossibility of holding on to, or voluntarily recreating, the past.

The Swann Way: *Key Moments*

More than the work of any other author, it seems, Proust's vast literary edifice is with great regularity reduced to a single scene that is taken as representative of the writer's achievements. That scene, spanning little more than three pages, is—of course—the madeleine scene, mentioned above. A number of factors determine why it should have become emblematic of Proust's writing even for those who have never read the novel. The scene is brief (in contrast to the novel that runs so counter to our modern taste for instantaneity, and Proust's

many much more extended set-pieces that unfold, quite unhurriedly, at very great length); it is memorable (by dint of its intensity, striking imagery, and rich, sensory nature); and the scene has a universality to it, what some might nowadays call a 'relatable' quality (in this novel where, as I have been arguing, so much about the narrator is idiosyncratic, rarefied, one-off, the madeleine scene recounts an experience each of us can and will have). The madeleine moment, then, is brief, memorable, and universal: a surging, soaring instance of exultant happiness when—albeit fleetingly and without warning—the narrator suddenly relives a moment from his past in the actuality, the very presentness, of the here and now. The intensity of the experience, by Proust's account, comes from the *sensory* nature of the stimulus. The narrator does not actively seek to recall his childhood through a voluntary act of intellectual engagement. His mind is elsewhere, he acts 'mechanically', and abruptly it is the taste sensation that triggers something within him:

It had instantly made the vicissitudes of life unimportant to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory, acting in the same way that love acts, by filling me with a precious essence: or rather, this essence was not in me, it was me. I no longer felt mediocre, contingent, mortal. Where could it have come from, this powerful feeling of joy? (p. 45)

The prose here is rich, but its structures are simple, a rapid flow of thoughts divided only by the gentlest of pauses imposed by Proust's commas. After a slew of questions and ponderings, active mental endeavours, and renewed, inquisitive mouthfuls of tea and cake that yield no answers, once his mind is left idling, the realization comes to him: 'The taste was the taste of the little piece of madeleine that my aunt Léonie would dip in her infusion of tea or lime blossom and give me when I went into her bedroom to kiss her good morning on Sundays' (p. 46). And all that he had thought to be forgotten, condemned to oblivion (the French 'oubli' covers both of these bases) is revitalized through the catalyst of the narrator's cup of tea. '[W]hen nothing subsists of one's distant past,' he observes, 'smell and taste live on for a long time, alone':

more fragile but more enduring, more immaterial but more persistent, more faithful; they are like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest, bearing unflinchingly on their almost impalpable little drop, the vast edifice of memory. (pp. 46–7)

And this radical juxtaposition of the impalpable little drop and the vast edifice is highly characteristic of the insights of Proust's writing, writing that draws us into the finest of details, the most fleeting of moments, to allow us better to understand the role they play in our existence and better to appreciate the magnitude of the lessons we can derive from them. Proust's madeleine reminds readers that our past is never fully out of reach, that we contain depths well beyond what is voluntarily accessible via intellectual means. And it reminds us of the wonders that are to be found in the humblest of things: like his contemporaries, the cubists, incorporating everyday objects, newsprint, rope, wallcoverings, into their revolutionary collages and *papiers collés*, Proust finds revelation and euphoria in what Samuel Beckett called 'the shallow well of a [tea]cup's inscrutable banality'.¹⁵

Structurally the madeleine moment is crucial—it brings 'Combray I' to a close and permits access to the rich and varied textures of 'Combray II': the narrator's account of provincial life, local gossip, and family events and traditions, the forces and structures that shaped his childhood. Many vignettes stand out: the depiction of Aunt Léonie, the elderly hypochondriac who shares a range of traits with the young protagonist and his older self; his youthful infatuation with the beauty of nature, the hawthorn blossom, the vistas that meet his eyes on country walks after long afternoons spent reading; and the vision of Gilberte, his first love, emerging from amongst the blooms in Swann's park at Tansonville. On one level these and many other scenes are so many disparate episodes of a comfortable, cosseted middle-class childhood. But examined again, with a closer attention to structuring and themes, we realize that every scene that makes up the narrative of 'Combray II' is a lesson of one sort or another for the young protagonist and a lesson from which readers also profit in turn. The jolt of an unexpected ethical dilemma when the saintly Françoise is witnessed brutally killing a chicken in the kitchen yard; confusion when encountering adult attitudes and conventions, with the alluring lady in pink or the snobbish Legrandin; fascination and mystery prompted by same-sex desire as witnessed between Mademoiselle Vinteuil and her friend at Montjouvain; and so on. Repeatedly the world and the people in it prove to be more complex, more given to

¹⁵ Samuel Beckett, *Proust* (1931), in *Proust and Three Dialogues with Georges Duthuit* (London: John Calder, 1987), 35.

mutability and variance than to stability and stasis. They are, in the words of the poet Louis MacNeice, ‘incorrigibly plural’. Coming to terms with this plurality, the condition that MacNeice memorably qualifies as ‘the drunkenness of things being various’, is a major dimension of Proust’s novel.¹⁶ As the mature narrator looks back on his youthful experiences—the conclusions he jumped to, the comments he misconstrued, and the situations he misread—he realizes with increasing certainty how important perspective, vision, and point of view are when it comes to understanding the world and our place in it. This is a theme that is introduced in ‘Combray’ and sustained, with varying intensities, across the full extent of the *Search*. The local priest is among the first to draw attention to the benefits of changing perspective: climb the tower of the Combray church, for instance, and, as he puts it, ‘the great thing is you can see at the same time things you can normally only see separately’ (p. 100). The narrative sets up a world of divisions and distinctions: the family and the servants; the peasant class, middle classes, and the aristocracy; the Swann way and the Guermantes way; the differently experienced spaces of home, town, church, and countryside; childhood and adulthood; weekdays and weekends. But learn a person’s back story (as we do in ‘Swann in Love’) or look back with the wisdom of hindsight and adult understanding on what was bewildering to a child (as the narrator does repeatedly), and things take on a different colouring. This process of temporal reappraisal and review is a gradual and repeatedly iterated one that shapes the novel and our relationship with the narrator.

Another formative lesson takes place in these pages that introduces us to the experience of perspective and point of view in relation to space. Following a family walk, the young protagonist gains a new vision of his environment when he rides next to the coachman in Dr Percepiéd’s carriage:

At a bend in the road, all of a sudden, I experienced that special pleasure, unlike any other, when I caught sight, first, of the twin steeples of Martinville, which were lit up by the setting sun and seemed to keep changing position with the movement of the carriage and the twists and turns of the road, and then the steeple of Vieuxvicq, which, though separated from

¹⁶ Louis MacNeice, ‘Snow’, in *The Collected Poems of Louis MacNeice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1967), 30.

the others by a hill and a valley, and situated on higher ground in the distance, seemed to be right next to them. (p. 167)

The experience of shifting perspective from a moving point of observation fills the protagonist with a joy he cannot fully comprehend. Instead of being remote, fragmented, and able to be witnessed only separately, familiar elements of the landscape appear to interact, to dance before his eyes. As in the madeleine scene, the experience yields a notion of revelation or disclosure, a deeper access to the world, combined with an almost overpowering giddiness, akin to MacNeice's 'drunkenness' quoted above. The protagonist beholds the dance of the steeples and has his first impulse to write, to translate his feelings into language:

Soon their lines and their sunlit surfaces split apart, as if they were a kind of bark, a little of what was hidden inside them appeared, a thought that had not existed a moment before occurred to me, taking shape in words inside my head, and the pleasure I'd felt at the sight of them was so increased by this that, overcome by a sort of drunkenness, I could think of nothing else. (p. 168)

Following this, we then are privy to the words he jots down in the moment, inlaid in the narrative of 'Combray'. A narrative is born of shifting perspectives and the young protagonist's trajectory towards his vocation as a writer is begun.

The volume shifts tack significantly in its second part, 'Swann in Love', which is not only narrated in the third person, but also takes place at a temporal moment some time before the narrator's childhood that is recounted in 'Combray'.¹⁷ Here we have what is at once a stand-alone narrative—the tale of a courtship, a fraught love affair across social boundaries—and a crucial part of the novel's overall architecture. I suggested above ways in which 'Combray' provides a sort of overture to *In Search of Lost Time*. With 'Swann in Love' we get a new relation of part to whole, in that this portion of the novel provides us (albeit highly condensed, in fewer than two hundred pages) with a sort of miniature of the protagonist's later adult experiences that we encounter in subsequent volumes. The thematic preoccupations of 'Swann in Love' are cut from very much the same

¹⁷ What follows draws in part on my Introduction to *Swann in Love*, trans. Brian Nelson (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2017), pp. vii–xvii.

cloth as the rest of the *Search*: we find the exploration of how social context colours the way individuals interact, how they relate to works of art, how infatuation leads to what we call love, and how this can spill over into jealousy. It is a study in desire, an examination of how the pursuit of pleasure inevitably brings with it some measure of suffering. It also returns repeatedly to the question of truth in human relations and how capable we are of telling lies (even, or especially, to ourselves) when it suits us, yet we cower and crumble when we discover (or merely suspect) that our beloved might have lied to us. In all of this 'Swann in Love' anticipates the larger movements of Proust's novel, outlined above.

Just a very few pages into *The Swann Way*, the narrator indicates that Monsieur Swann's visits 'became less frequent after his unfortunate marriage, as my parents had no desire to receive his wife' (p. 16). At the time, no explanation or further detail is provided for these enigmatic comments; 'Swann in Love' provides the basis for his parents' damning judgement. Swann, a highly cultured and well-connected man-about-town, frequents the most distinguished salons and socializes with those whose well-shod feet tread the corridors of power. 'Swann in Love' opens, however, in a resolutely bourgeois context, in the salon of Madame Verdurin who, as the narrator puts it, 'came from a respectable, extremely wealthy, and utterly undistinguished family' (p. 177), poles apart from the storied lineage of the Guermantes, for instance, with whom Swann is intimately connected. Swann, however, is a special case, a sort of amphibious creature, welcomed and comfortable amongst those with crowned heads and ancient titles and also able to make small talk in the much less rarefied circle of Madame Verdurin's 'little clan'. He is a man of means and has no qualms in pursuing sexual pleasure outside the circle of the upper crust or *gratin* of Belle Époque society. He does not consider social standing as a barrier to possible sexual gratification. Thus he becomes acquainted with Odette de Crécy, whose background is neatly (and discreetly) summed up by the narrator as being 'almost of the demi-monde' (p. 177) and who invites him to join her *chez* Verdurin.

We noted above the important role of the madeleine scene in 'Combray'. 'Swann in Love' also includes a similar experience of involuntary memory, though rather than being associated with joy and exhilaration as it is for the protagonist in 'Combray', for Swann

it is an experience that teaches him lessons about love that are far harder to palate than a spoonful of cake crumbs dissolved in tea. The seeds of Swann's love for Odette are sown when he unexpectedly hears in her presence a piece of music he had listened to once before. The unanticipated pleasure and contentment derived from re-hearing the Sonata for Piano and Violin by the fictional composer Vinteuil (the sometime piano teacher in Combray) are projected on to the relationship that subsequently develops between Swann and Odette: they come to think of the sonata as the 'national anthem of their love'. In the latter stages of 'Swann in Love', having all but separated from Odette and purposefully avoided the sonata, Swann hears it once more and finds himself involuntarily confronting his feelings for the woman he cannot but associate with a particular 'little phrase' from that sonata. The little phrase, fleeting and condensed as it may be, contains by turns the tenderness of Klimt's *Kiss* and the aching turmoil of Munch's *Scream*.¹⁸

While the opening part of *The Swann Way* presents the provincial, slow-paced, often quaint, familial setting of Combray, 'Swann in Love' announces the more dynamic societal world of Paris that will be the setting for much of the remainder of the *Search*. Love is undoubtedly an important theme in 'Combray' but the focus there is principally on the protagonist's childhood love for his mother, whose attention and embrace at bedtime he was on occasion forced to forgo as a result of the presence of a dinner guest who kept his mother from him. That guest, 'the unwitting author of my sufferings' (p. 43), as the narrator puts it, was Charles Swann. In 'Swann in Love' we find that he was already the author of a good deal of suffering of his own. But the pattern of suffering in love that we encounter there, which takes a series of forms—from infatuation, blinkeredness, and possessiveness to creeping suspicion and crushing jealousy—recurs not only in the protagonist's later relationship with Albertine but also in the relations of characters whose roles develop in later volumes such

¹⁸ Gustav Klimt (1862–1918) and Edvard Munch (1863–1944) were both contemporaries of Proust, though it seems he did not encounter their work. Munch's *The Scream* was painted in 1893, during approximately the period dealt with in 'Swann in Love'; Klimt's *The Kiss* dates from 1907–8, the year that *In Search of Lost Time* began to take shape in Proust's notebooks. The Chilean filmmaker Raoul Ruiz directed films relating to both artists: his fascinating, surrealistic *Le Temps retrouvé* (*Time Regained*) appeared in 1999, whilst his biopic *Klimt* appeared in 2006. John Malkovich, who plays the Baron de Charlus in *Time Regained*, also plays the title role in *Klimt*.

as Robert de Saint-Loup and his mistress Rachel or the Baron de Charlus and the violinist Charlie Morel. Human desire, by Proust's account, whether directed towards the same or the opposite sex, tends sooner or later to lead individuals to behave in ways that are damaging to themselves and hurtful to those they love.

Works of art—and not just Vinteuil's sonata—punctuate Swann's trajectory in 'Swann in Love'. Two main periods stand out as the most frequently occurring: the first is the nineteenth century, which is to say the period contemporary to the narrative. 'Swann in Love' can be read as a commentary on the fascinating coexistence of various cultures—high-, middle- and low-brow—in the Paris of the Belle Époque. A marked conflict of taste exists between Swann, who attended the École du Louvre (the establishment that produces museum conservators trained in subjects such as art history and archaeology), and the bourgeois denizens of the Verdurin circle, especially Odette, whose tastes are, in the main, diametrically opposed to his own. The second period spans the fifteenth to the seventeenth century: time and again in these pages we find allusions to artists of the Renaissance, to Botticelli and to Michelangelo, to Mantegna, and to others that followed, in particular Rembrandt, and Vermeer. The eyes through which Swann sees the world are those of a connoisseur (perhaps a dilettante) but not the eyes of an artist—for these we must look to Proust's fictional figures who all, as the *Search* progresses, serve in a variety of ways as tutors or models for the protagonist: the composer Vinteuil, the painter Elstir, and the writer Bergotte.

Swann's points of reference are the old masters; Odette's are twee, popular numbers from the theatre and vaudeville, even the mention of which would normally cause Swann to recoil in discomfort. Curiously, though, it is his learning and culture that lead him, in part, to fall for Odette. The enchantment of the little phrase from Vinteuil plays its role, but so does Swann's tendency to find in visual art substitutes or replacements for the figures he encounters in real life. In the footmen on the stairs of Madame de Saint-Euverte's residence, for example, Swann sees figures from Mantegna and Dürer, and in the kitchen maid at Combray he sees an embodiment of Giotto's *Charity* from the Arena (Scrovegni) Chapel in Padua. However, his most enduring artistic substitution comes with Odette. What captures his imagination is the resemblance she bears to the figure of Jethro's daughter, Zipporah, as depicted, famously, in Botticelli's

fresco of *Scenes from the Life of Moses* (1481–2). Swann is quickly in thrall to the notion that Odette is an embodiment of an ideal of beauty and grace otherwise only accessible via a reproduction in a book or, at best, by craning one's neck and squinting up at the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel itself. His admiration for art blinkers him to the actual failings of the flesh-and-blood Odette and clouds his awareness of their incompatibilities. And so it is that their 'love', as Proust presents it, gathers strength and its hold over Swann: since his imagination is captured by the emotive power of Vinteuil's music and the entrancing quality of Botticelli's Zipporah, his rational judgement is suppressed or ignored. Love, in Proust's vision of things, is a contrary force and as 'Swann in Love' unfolds it becomes more and more clear that rather than being soulmates somehow cosmically destined to share a life together, as a conventionally romantic love story might have it, Swann and Odette are in fact bonded by his idolatrous relation to art.¹⁹

To read 'Swann in Love' as a love story, as we have seen, involves coming up against Proust's gloomy, not to say pessimistic, view of human relations. It should be noted, however, that Proust's presentation of sexual identity and preference as qualities that shift and vary throughout a person's life and according to circumstance was radical in its time. Both Odette and Albertine have affairs with lovers of both sexes and Swann's fears about Odette's lesbian affairs adumbrate those that preoccupy the protagonist to the point of obsession in his relations with Albertine. In *In the Shadow of Girls in Blossom*, Proust's protagonist, even while their relationship is in its earliest stages, expresses suspicions about Albertine's intimacy with the other girls at Balbec. He pries, he questions, he insinuates, just as Swann had before him. Later in the novel it is the belief that he has 'proof' of her lesbian past in a remark she makes about a close friendship with the composer Vinteuil's daughter, known to be a lesbian, that prompts the protagonist to move Albertine into his Paris apartment where he hopes he can prevent her from further indulging such proclivities. In *The Captive*, we find that the narrator's mind, even more inquisitive than Swann's, proves to be a yet richer source of hypothetical situations

¹⁹ Swann's tendency towards mediated forms of desire or, to put it another way, his habit of investing in interposed, substitute objects is memorably epitomized in his allusion to their lovemaking as 'doing a cattleya', in reference to the flowers Odette wore in her corsage when they consummated their relationship.

in which his beloved may or may not have deceived him or betrayed him with other young women, or with men. And the fear of otherness—in this case, the straight man's fear of lesbian betrayal—is interestingly illustrative of the socio-cultural climate at the time of which Proust writes.

On the basis of 'Swann in Love', one might not initially consider Swann himself to be an individual with whom one would associate alterity or outsider status: he is an associate of the Prince of Wales, a close friend of the President of the Republic, a member of the exclusive Jockey Club. Yet for all these seemingly unequivocal marks of being an elite 'insider' (the status, indeed, that keeps the Verdurins, as aspiring bourgeois, from ever fully accepting him) in late nineteenth-century France, one detail of Swann's identity indelibly marks him out from those with whom he associates: his Jewishness. Swann's origins as the son of a Jewish stockbroker, about which readers learn in 'Combray', differentiate him from his blue-blooded friends and associates. The shifting attitudes towards him and his family (and towards other Jewish characters) as the Dreyfus Affair unfolds are explored by Proust in particular in *The Guermantes Way* and in *Sodom and Gomorrah*, where the plight of Jews in contemporary society is compared at length with that of another persecuted minority group: homosexuals.²⁰ Social acceptance—being 'in' or 'out', fashionable or behind the times, up-to-date or out-of-touch—is a major theme of 'Swann in Love', which is, after all, more than a 'mere' love story. It offers a snapshot of various strata of French society at the *fin de siècle*; the contemporary artistic allusions that underpin the novella

²⁰ The Dreyfus Affair grew out of the case of Alfred Dreyfus, a Jewish captain in the French army who in 1894 was convicted of treason for allegedly selling secrets to the Germans. Dreyfus was publicly degraded then deported and held in solitary confinement in dreadful conditions on Devil's Island (off the coast of French Guiana). The case stirred powerful and widespread anti-Semitism in France throughout the 1890s. Public pressure, including the campaigning of the novelist Émile Zola (1840–1902), his emphatic public letter 'J'accuse' and the 'Manifesto of the Intellectuals', a petition on which Proust's signature appears (both were published in 1898), led to Dreyfus's retrial. Despite the weight of the case against the army, for their framing of Dreyfus and the various cover-ups that had ensued, Dreyfus, farcically, was found guilty a second time. He was eventually pardoned in 1899 and reinstated in the army, but the divisions the affair had caused ran deep. For an incisive overview, see Edward J. Hughes, 'The Dreyfus Affair', in Watt (ed.), *Marcel Proust in Context*, 167–73; for an accessible, authoritative historical account, see Ruth Harris, *The Man on Devil's Island: Alfred Dreyfus and the Affair that Divided France* (London: Allen Lane, 2010).

point towards this, as suggested above, but a range of other elements in the narrative are also revealing of the societal backdrop of 1880s Paris.²¹

Proust's novel is structured throughout with parallelisms, mirrorings, and echoes, and within 'Swann in Love' we find an illuminating structural parallel between the bourgeois salon of the Verdurins and the aristocratic Saint-Euverte salon at which Swann suffers his final realizations about the state of his relationship with Odette towards the end of this part of the novel. What Proust presents here are two worlds that exist in parallel. While each social class outwardly condemns the other as variously vulgar, tawdry, lacking in taste, dull, and unthinkably boring, we glimpse how the attraction of the unknown creates an allure around the aristocratic milieu in the eyes of the bourgeois and how the aristocrats themselves seem desperate to hold on to a world that is increasingly under threat of extinction. Proust uses the two salons to hold up a range of characters to satirical scrutiny, and neither side, bourgeois or aristocratic, is portrayed in a particularly endearing light. A notable contrast is that a good number of the guests at the Verdurin salon have professions: Cottard is a doctor, Monsieur 'Biche' a painter, Brichot an academic at the Sorbonne, and Saniette an archivist. As such they have a degree of anchorage in the world beyond the drawing room and dining table that is rather more substantive than that of the aristocrats that mingle *chez* Saint-Euverte. Swann, although loosely engaged in writing a study of the Dutch artist Vermeer (1632–75), is essentially a man of leisure. Proust sensitizes us to the class divides in French society while at the same time alerting us to the foibles and insecurities that are common to all human subjects, regardless of heredity or income. *Chez* Verdurin, Dr Cottard is perpetually fearful of having misunderstood a coded reference or blundered over a question of etiquette and so constantly churns out puns, clichés, and non sequiturs in the hope of keeping face, while the painter revels in vulgarity, knowing that his status as an

²¹ It is unusual, in discussion of Proust's novel, to be able to identify with certainty the period of a given episode, for reasons outlined above in relation to the novel's shifting narrative perspectives. The autonomy of 'Swann in Love' as a retrospective account of a single set of events makes it a case apart. Indeed, there are more explicit references to concrete dates and events in these pages than anywhere else in the *Search*. Swann, for example, is said to be a regular diner with Président Grévy: Jules Grévy's presidential term ran from 1879 to 1887.

artist in such surroundings grants him immunity from criticism. Meanwhile, in the Saint-Euverte salon we find minor aristocrats eager to ensure that others are aware of their more distinguished connections and, just as Madame Verdurin perpetually overemphasizes how moved she is by the works of art she encounters, we find a competitive edge to the way Madame de Saint-Euverte's guests record their appreciation of the music being played. In short, we see variations on effectively the same anxieties and the same compensatory, defensive responses to them. The two salons are arenas for the observation of human interaction—it is not by chance that the novelist encountered at Madame de Saint-Euverte's indicates that he is there 'as an observer' (p. 303)—and Proust's astonishing ear for argot and sociolects, as well as his eye for the physical tics and twitches that mark us out individually and as groups within groups, provide much of the liveliness and energy of these scenes.

Swann is unique in his participation in both salons, but another element is also common to both and for Swann this spells disaster: it is the piece of music that is played, Vinteuil's Sonata for Piano and Violin. When Swann and the Princesse des Laumes meet at Madame de Saint-Euverte's salon their conversation is a joy to behold: it is easy-going and understated, much is unsaid, insinuated. The wit, humour, and mutual understanding of two old friends, meeting in territory familiar to them both, are captured wonderfully, and strike a marked contrast to Swann's more reserved interactions with the Verdurin set. His spark and verve are quickly extinguished, however, once the strains of Vinteuil's sonata reach his discerning ears. Hearing the sonata once again brings about the involuntary memory of happier times with Odette but also brings with it the realization that the relationship has left him 'a wretched figure' he struggles even to recognize (p. 321).

With the short closing part of *The Swann Way*, 'Place Names: The Name', Proust loops us back to the considerations of sleeping and waking with which the volume began, pulling us out of Swann's doldrums and right back into the sensory, hyper-alert register of the narrator we came to know in Combray:

Of all the bedrooms I pictured to myself as I lay awake at night, none was less like the rooms at Combray, powdery with a grainy, pollenated, almost edible atmosphere, redolent of piety, than the room at the Grand-Hôtel de

la Plage at Balbec, whose enamel-painted walls contained, like the polished sides of a swimming pool that tint the water blue, a pure, azure air, smelling slightly of sea salt. (p. 357)

The evocative power of place names (all the more evocative for those, like the protagonist, who are so often unable to travel due to ill health) is introduced as a topic for reflection. The seaside town of Balbec is evoked, along with more distant sites—Florence, Venice, Parma, Pisa. Since the narrator is unable to visit these places in person, their names take on a powerful, heady allure, his imagination and powers of association filling in the gap between the word and the thing itself, in this case the Italian cities so redolent of art, architecture, and beauty in all its forms. This contemplative mood continues and soon we are shifted into a passage of recollection of another place, this time in Paris—the Champs-Élysées—where the protagonist would play with Gilberte, now a fixture in his childhood and the object of his intense affections, some time after that first glimpse of her through the hedge in her father's park at Tansonville. In this context we meet Swann once more, not the lovestruck man-about-town of 'Swann in Love' but now the husband of Odette, father to Gilberte, and a source of great fascination for the young protagonist. Equally fascinating is Madame Swann, of whom, when she takes her daily walk in the Bois de Boulogne, he tries to catch a glimpse, as do many of the older male denizens of Paris, familiar with her reputation prior to her marriage.

Separated from the preceding section by just a small textual break—a white space on the page—and concerning the same physical space (the Bois de Boulogne), the closing pages of the volume are in fact separated from what comes before by a considerable temporal distance. Tone and perspective have radically shifted: no longer focused on the child accompanied on his walks by the ever-present Françoise, the narrative tells now of the experience of a much older narrator, who leaves his 'closed room' (reminiscent of the enclosed, cork-lined environment in which much of Proust's novel was written) to walk across the Bois to Trianon. In so doing he reflects on different scales of temporal change, on the cyclical, seasonal alterations to the wood's natural environment, and the starker shifts in fashion and technology he perceives around him: motor cars have replaced carriages, the women he sees seem less elegant, the fashions and behaviours seem vulgar in comparison with the treasured impressions of

this enchanted place that he had for so long stored up in his mind. And so it is that the volume that opened in the dark with an exploration of spaces mental and physical comes to its conclusion with a somewhat gloomy realization about space and place and identity. We risk great and inevitable disappointment, the narrator notes, if we seek out in reality confirmation of the images we carry around in our heads. Realities change and our memories, source of comfort though they may be, are always only partial, contingent, fugitive.

Critical Reception

There is a vast volume of criticism on Proust's novel, as well as accounts of his life and times and what one might term 'Proustiana', the extensive fringe of writing, both creative and critical, prompted by or in homage to the author and his novel. For a century critics and scholars have tackled the major themes of time, art, and memory, love, desire, and sexuality, singly and in combination and with reference to many of Proust's myriad sub-themes and preoccupations. (A representative choice of the best such studies is included in the Select Bibliography.) His immense correspondence is an invaluable source of evidence, information, and gossip. It exists in a serviceable twenty-one-volume scholarly edition in French and a generous selected edition in English translation. A digitization project is now underway.²²

The initial reception of Proust's work was complicated by the extended period over which it was published (1913–27) and the great socio-cultural changes that took place during that period.²³ Early critics tended to consider Proust's novel as thinly veiled autobiography, treating author and narrator-protagonist as one and the same. They

²² 'Corr-Proust', a project to start the digitization of Proust's letters, is a collaboration between the Proust-Kolb Archive at the University of Illinois, the Université Grenoble-Alpes, and the Institut des textes et des manuscrits modernes (ITEM), Paris. It represents a first stage in providing a digital, open-access edition of Proust's letters, including diplomatic transcriptions and high-resolution images of original documents. See <http://proust.elan-numerique.fr/> (consulted August 2022).

²³ On the early reception of Proust's work, see Anna Magdalena Elsner, 'Critical Reception during Proust's Lifetime' and Vincent Ferré, 'Early Critical Responses, 1922–1950s', in Watt (ed.), *Marcel Proust in Context*, 183–90 and 191–8 respectively. For a selection of contemporary responses, from reviews of *Pleasures and Days* in the 1890s to the 'Homage' published after Proust's death by the *Nouvelle revue française* (NRF) and the earliest critical essays of the 1930s, see Leighton Hodson (ed.), *Marcel Proust: The Critical Heritage* (London: Routledge, 1989).

struggled with the style and syntax that made them work hard for their readerly gratification and enlightenment. Even some of the biggest names of twentieth-century literature in French, such as Jean-Paul Sartre, criticized Proust for snobbishness and elitism and to an extent wrote off his work for reasons similar to those that had caused André Gide initially to reject *Du côté de chez Swann* on behalf of the NRF imprint (though he would later repent and the novel, with the publication of its second, Goncourt Prize-winning volume, *À l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs*, transferred to the publisher directed by Gaston Gallimard).²⁴ It is with the development of phenomenological criticism in the 1950s, associated with figures such as Georges Poulet and Jean-Pierre Richard, and structuralist and post-structuralist thought and theory in France in the 1960s and 1970s, in particular the work of critics and thinkers such as Gérard Genette, Roland Barthes, and Gilles Deleuze, that the vast spectrum of interest—philosophical, philological, sociological, aesthetic—to be found in Proust's novel, came properly to be acknowledged, picked apart, and accounted for.

The first reviews of *The Swann Way* were largely lukewarm: Proust's elaborate syntactical structures and shifting perspectives left many early readers somewhat perplexed. The initial breakthrough for Proust and the *Search* came with the renewed impetus and publicity the work received in 1919 with the change of publisher from Grasset to the imprint of the NRF, the publication of *In the Shadow of Girls in Blossom*, and the award of the Goncourt Prize to this volume. After an opening part set in Paris, Proust's second volume then transports its readers to the seaside and immerses us in a bright and enchanting world of sea-spray and sunrises, of adolescent infatuation and the protagonist's various, continuing initiations into the domains of society, of love, and of art, away from the confines of family life in Combray and Paris. The idea that, in Proust's novel, the protagonist's journey

²⁴ Early exceptions to this rule (the dismissal of Proust as indulgent and difficult) include the work by Samuel Beckett already mentioned, as well as the following immensely insightful studies: Ernst Robert Curtius, *Marcel Proust* (1928; Frankfurt am Main: Schöffling & Co., 2021); Walter Benjamin, 'The Image of Proust' (1929), in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Jonathan Cape, 1970; Pimlico, 1999), 197–210; Eric Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953); J. M. Cocking, *Proust* (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1956); and Leo Spitzer, 'Le Style de Marcel Proust' (1961), in *Études de style*, trans. Alain Coulon (Paris: Gallimard, 1970), 397–473.

towards fulfilling his vocation as a writer takes the form of a series of apprenticeships, or processes of learning how to interpret the world around him in all its multifariousness, has been an influential one in Proust criticism and stems principally from a critical study titled *Proust et les signes* (*Proust and Signs*), first published by Gilles Deleuze in 1964 and reissued, with revisions and additions, in its final form in 1970.²⁵ Society, love, and art all involve us in emitting or interpreting signs of various sorts: by Deleuze's reading, this situation is complicated by the fact that in society and in love people are in the habit of projecting images or emitting messages that are not wholly or consistently truthful. And art, Deleuze argues, is made up of signs that do not correlate to material referents in the world, and as such are a purer, higher order of 'sign' (take, for example, the little phrase in Vinteuil's sonata, which Swann loads with significance yet which has no objective existence or referent beyond the fleeting sound signature emitted by the instruments that produce it).

The first scholarly edition of *A la recherche* was published, in three volumes, in the prestigious 'Bibliothèque de la Pléiade' series in 1954, giving readers and scholars a standard point of reference. Shortly after, in 1962, the main body of the 'fonds Proust'—the material, archival substance of Proust's novel, in the form of jotters and notebooks, loose leaves and extraordinary paper confections (*paperasses*) held together by glue, pins, and good fortune—was acquired by the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris and since then, in parallel (and at times in concert with) the developments outlined above, scholars of 'genetic criticism' have worked tirelessly to elucidate Proust's working practices, his modes and means of composing, editing, revising, and reshaping his work through time. This editorial activity and associated scholarly publications have provided remarkable insights into how Proust's ideas evolved; how his sentences grew (and shrank); how certain notions, themes, or preoccupations were amplified or refined, adjusted or reframed; how certain units of text were moved around, spliced, or filleted. They have also brought to light a staggering amount of cultural-historical data about Proust's Paris and contemporary French society, as well as information relating to what and how Proust read, whom he interacted with, and how all this

²⁵ On the criticism of this period, see Thomas Baldwin, 'Mid-Twentieth-Century Views, 1960s to 1980s', in Watt (ed.), *Marcel Proust in Context*, 199–205.

came to nourish the novel that would be published between 1913 and 1927.

The 1971 centenary of Proust's birth prompted a new wave of scholarly editions as well as critical studies and reappraisals. Two more weighty volumes were added to the Pléiade collection—*Contre Sainte-Beuve*, published together with Proust's pastiches, essays, and articles, and *Jean Santeuil*, published alongside *Les Plaisirs et les jours*. Jean-Yves Tadié published his landmark study *Proust et le roman* (Proust and the Novel) in 1971 and would go on to direct the 'new Pléiade' edition of *A la recherche*, bringing together a broad team of genetic scholars to create a modern edition with a vast critical apparatus and selections of *esquisses* (early draft sketches of given passages) that appeared in four volumes between 1987 and 1989.²⁶ Tadié's door-stop biography of 1996, mentioned above, is an outstanding achievement (published in English translation by Euan Cameron in 2000) and numerous illuminating studies have subsequently followed from his pen.

As I (and others) have argued elsewhere, Proust is very much a pivot point between two eras in European literature, the grand realist tradition of the nineteenth century and the modernist innovations of the early to middle years of the twentieth century. On one hand scholars have sought to shed light on Proust's debts to his predecessors (key figures include Balzac and Flaubert, Baudelaire and Nerval, but also more temporally distant figures such as Saint-Simon or La Fontaine, and writers of other languages that Proust encountered in translation such as Hardy, Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky). On the other hand, Proust has often been read, quite rightly, as a modernist, and so he is compared and contrasted with writers of his time as diverse as James Joyce, Virginia Woolf, and Robert Musil, whose publishing trajectories and writerly preoccupations overlapped with those of Proust to varying degrees. He is 'the first contemporary writer of the twentieth century', as Edmund White has it, 'for he was the first to describe the permanent instability of our times'.²⁷ Proust's experimentation with the possibilities of first-person narrative lead back to Augustine

²⁶ The most recent, and hugely substantive, addition, to the scholarly editing of Proust's work comes in the shape of a new Pléiade volume (re)collecting Proust's non-fictional writings: see *Essais*, ed. Antoine Compagnon, Christophe Pradeau, and Matthieu Vernet, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris: Gallimard, 2022).

²⁷ Edmund White, *Proust* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1999), 140.

and Montaigne while concurrently stretching forward to anticipate the writings of Samuel Beckett and announce what will come to be known in the later twentieth century as autofiction. This plurality, a sort of self-renewing plasticity in the literary qualities we find in the novel from one reading to the next, would suggest that *In Search of Lost Time* will remain a vitally important touchstone for critics and general readers alike for a long time to come.

Later twentieth-century scholarship has provided some scintillating studies that avoid the trap of claiming Proust for any one school and embrace the destabilizing, at times frustrating, plurality of his writing.²⁸ High points include Malcolm Bowie's peerless *Proust Among the Stars* (1998), Christopher Prendergast's *Mirages and Mad Beliefs: Proust the Skeptic* (2013), and Michael Lucey's *What Proust Heard: Novels and the Ethnography of Talk* (2022). Rewarding critical appreciations of Proust's writing, his place in Belle Époque culture, and his relation to his contemporaries, the novel's structure, themes, and legacies can be found in the essays collected in *The Cambridge Companion to Proust*, edited by Richard Bales (2001); *Marcel Proust in Context*, edited by Adam Watt (2013); and two introductory works that offer helpful volume-by-volume analysis and discussion: David Ellison's *A Reader's Guide to Proust's 'In Search of Lost Time'* (2010) and my *Cambridge Introduction to Marcel Proust* (2011). Readers seeking brief and accessible overviews in essay format are well served from recent companions and histories.

²⁸ For an overview of scholarship, focusing on the period from 2013 to 2018, but with a range of references further back into the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, see my 'État présent: Marcel Proust', *French Studies* 72/3 (2018), 412–24. Here I discern six main areas of critical interest in Proust: correspondence, biography, and genetic criticism; philosophy; the arts; intertextual, contextual, and thematic studies; modernism; creative responses.

