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## A Significant Source for the Madeleine and Other Major Episodes in Combray: Proust's Intertextual Use of Pierre Loti's *My Brother Yves*

### Abstract

The most famous passage in Marcel Proust's *In Search of Lost Time*, and one of the most famous passages in Western literature, is the moment when the narrator sips tea while eating a shell-shaped pastry called a madeleine and suddenly recalls very vividly an apparently long-forgotten scene from his childhood. From this episode Proust developed his theories about involuntary memory and its important role in our emotional welfare.

Proust was an avid reader of the French novelist Pierre Loti when he was young. Contemporary accounts show that he was able to recite whole passages from Loti's work in public from memory. This article demonstrates the extent to which Proust made intertextual use of scenes from Loti's novel *My Brother Yves* in constructing the madeleine and other famous passages in *Combray*, the first section of *In Search of Lost Time*. It does not attempt to question the originality of Proust's work. Rather, building on previous studies of intertextuality in Proust, it seeks to show how the author went about creating his work and dialoguing with at least some of his potential contemporary readers.

### Keywords

Marcel Proust, Pierre Loti, *My Brother Yves*, intertextuality

A Significant Source for the Madeleine and Other Major Episodes in *Combray*:  
Proust's Intertextual Use of Pierre Loti's *My Brother Yves*

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While it is true that Proust developed much that was new and innovative in his novel *À la Recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*), it is also true that he often reworked things he found in the texts of other writers. This led Danielle-Claude Bélanger to assert that “the *Search* occupies a privileged place with critics and professors who deal with intertextuality” (67), the evocation of previous texts woven through a more recent one.<sup>1</sup> When these previous texts had the *cachet* of a Ruskin, for example, Proust was sometimes eager to make his borrowings known. In other cases, however, he did not signal them directly, leaving us to wonder what he expected his readers to catch and how he imagined that doing so would shape their perceptions of his work. These questions are raised in a particularly striking way by the discovery of the extent to which Proust made such unsignaled borrowings from Pierre Loti's once popular 1882 novel *Mon Frère Yves* (*My Brother Yves*) in the creation of the most famous episode in the *Search*, the madeleine episode in the first part of the novel, known as *Combray*. This study looks at those borrowings, and then considers possible answers to those questions.

Part One: The Textual Evidence of Borrowing

Proust regarded the focus on involuntary memory that he first elaborates in the madeleine episode as something new. In 1913, on the eve of the publication of *Du Côté de chez Swann* (*The Way by Swann's*), of which *Combray* constitutes the first third, he told Élie-Joseph Bois that “my work is based on the distinction between involuntary and voluntary memory, a distinction which not only does not appear in M. Bergson's philosophy, but is even contradicted by it” (Carter 551). While it may not appear in Henri Bergson's philosophy, it does appear in Loti's novel, and in much of his work, which Proust knew well from his own adolescence.<sup>2</sup> Whether that is where Proust first found his inspiration for his elaboration of this issue in his own work I cannot say. However, the younger author found in *My Brother Yves* many of the elements he used to construct the famous madeleine episode that he used to introduce the theme of involuntary memory in the *Search*.

In part because his father died when Yves was still a child, in part because his work at sea keeps him away from the scenes of his youth, the title character of Loti's novel, Yves Kermadec, a career sailor in the French navy, feels particularly

detached from his childhood. Then one day he gets a chance to visit his mother, who in her widowhood has moved to Kergrist, outside Paimpol on the north Breton coast. When he and his officer friend, the narrator Pierre, make rounds to see neighbors, “c’était surtout de l’enfance d’Yves que l’on aimait à causer” (XXI) ‘It was of the childhood of Yves that these good people loved most to talk’ (*Tale XXI*).<sup>3</sup> This starts the sailor thinking about his childhood. As a result:

Vers le soir, à marée basse, nous descendîmes, Yves et moi, dans le lit du lac d’eau marine, dans la prairie d’algues rousses. Nous emportions chacun une tartine de pain noir bien beurré et un grand couteau pour prendre des *berniques*. Un régal de son enfance qu’il voulait renouveler avec moi, des coquillages tout crus avec du pain et du beurre. . . .

Nous prenions les *berniques* au bout de nos couteaux, et nous les mangions toutes vivantes, en mordant à même dans nos tartines, ayant faim tous deux, nous dépêchant de finir, de peur de ne plus y voir.

“Ce n’est plus si bon qu’autrefois”, dit Yves quand il eut tout mangé. . . . Allons-nous-en, voulez-vous?” (XXI)

Towards evening, at low tide, we descended, Yves and I, into the bed of the salt-water lake, into the meadow of brown seaweed [formed by the Trieux River at low tide]. We carried, each of us, a slice of black bread well buttered, and a large knife for opening shell-fish [*berniques* in the original French]. A feast of his boyhood which he wanted to renew with me: shell-fish eaten raw with bread and butter. . . .

We took the shell-fish on the end of our knives and ate them as they were, all living, with our slices of bread, being both hungry and in haste to be done before the light should fail.

“It’s not so good as it used to be,” said Yves when he had finished eating. . . . Let us go, shall we?” (*Tale XXI*; all inserted explication is my own)

When Yves tries to recapture his past (voluntary memory, to use Proust’s terminology), he turns to taste and shellfish, specifically *berniques*, a sort of small clam whose shell resembles a madeleine much more than a scallop shell does. In the madeleine passage in *Combray*, the Narrator says of the little cakes the taste of which, mixed with that of tea, trigger his involuntary memory: “ces gâteaux courts et dodus appelés Petites Madeleines . . . semblent avoir été moulés dans la valve rainurée d’une coquille de Saint-Jacques” (*Du Côté* 44) ‘those squat, plump cakes called *petites madeleines* . . . look as though they have been molded in the grooved valve of a scallop shell’ (*The Way* 45). As will be the case in Proust’s novel, Yves is less interested in recovering past events than the feelings they

awakened in him. His effort to so do voluntarily is a failure, however, just as Proust's Narrator later remarks of his own conscious efforts to recall his childhood in Combray: "ce que je m'en serais rappelé m'eût été fourni seulement par la mémoire volontaire, la mémoire de l'intelligence, et . . . les renseignements qu'elle donne sur le passé ne conservent rien de lui" (*Du Côté* 43) 'what I recalled would have been supplied to me only by my voluntary memory, the memory of the intelligence, and . . . the information it gives about the past preserves nothing of the past itself' (*The Way* 44).

Yves has much better luck in an earlier scene, however, when chance allows him to visit St. Pol de Léon, the small city further west on the North Breton coast that had been the place of his birth and early childhood. Since he has no family there, Yves undertakes this trip very specifically to recapture his childhood: "Yves rêvait de revoir ce Saint-Pol-de-Léon, le pays de sa naissance" (IX) 'For many years Yves had been looking forward to seeing this Saint Pol-de-Léon, the little town where he was born' (*Tale IX*).<sup>4</sup> Once again he tries to recover childhood emotions actively. He wanders around the neighborhood where he had lived trying to force his memory to yield up episodes from his youth, but it refuses to cooperate: "Yves regardait partout, s'étonnant qu'aucun souvenir ne lui revînt de sa petite enfance, cherchant, cherchant très loin dans sa mémoire, ne reconnaissant rien, et alors, peu à peu, se trouvant désenchanté" (X) 'Yves took in everything, marveling that no recollection of his early childhood came back to him, seeking, seeking in the dim background of his memory, recognizing nothing, and then, little by little, becoming disillusioned' (*Tale X*).

Then Yves's luck changes. The hostess at an inn on the cathedral square recognizes him because of his resemblance to his father and his name and starts telling him stories about Kermadec senior and junior, convincing some of the other elderly neighbors to join in. One of these stories, about a large, wild horse that only Kermadec senior could ride, triggers Yves's involuntary memory:

– Ah ! dit Yves, frappé tout à coup comme d'une image qui lui serait revenue de très loin, je me souviens de ce cheval, et je me rappelle que mon père me prenait dans ses mains et m'asseyait dessus quand il était amarré à l'écurie. C'est la première fois que je me souviens de mon père, et que je revois un peu sa figure. Il devait être noir, ce cheval, et il avait les pieds blancs. (X)

"Ah!" said Yves, stuck suddenly with a recollection ["image" in the French original] which seemed to have come to him from a great distance. "I remember that horse, and I recall that my father used to lift me up and sit me on it when it was tied in the stable. It is the first recollection I have of my father and I can just picture a little his face. The horse was black,

was it not, with white hoofs?" (*Tale X*; inserted comments mine)

The story summons up a visual "image" from his subconscious, involuntary memory, and from that image Yves is able to reconstruct a scene in his childhood.

Three decades later, Proust's Narrator will explain that he needs to see the image associated with some sensory perception to understand the memories that a sensory perception can call forth from the depths of his memory:

je sens tressaillir en moi quelque chose qui se déplace, voudrait s'élever, quelque chose qu'on aurait désancré, à une grande profondeur. Je ne sais ce que c'est, mais cela monte lentement. J'éprouve la résistance et j'entends la rumeur des distances traversées.

Certes, ce qui palpète ainsi au fond de moi, ce doit être l'image, le souvenir visuel, qui, lié à cette saveur, tente de la suivre jusqu'à moi. . . . Mais je ne peux distinguer la forme, lui demander, comme au seul interprète possible, de me traduire le témoignage de sa contemporaine, de son inséparable compagne, la saveur, lui demander de m'apprendre de quelle circonstance particulière, de quelle époque du passé il s'agit.

Arrivera-t-il jusqu'à la surface de ma claire conscience, ce souvenir, l'instant ancien que l'attraction d'un instant identique est venue de si loin solliciter, émouvoir, soulever tout au fond de moi? . . .

Et tout d'un coup le souvenir m'est apparu. Ce goût c'était celui du petit morceau de madeleine que le dimanche matin à Combray . . . ma tante Léonie m'offrait après l'avoir trempé dans son infusion de thé ou de tilleul. . . .

Et dès que j'eus reconnu le goût du morceau de madeleine trempé dans le tilleul que me donnait ma tante . . ., aussitôt la vieille maison grise sur la rue où était sa chambre vint comme un décor de théâtre s'appliquer au petit pavillon donnant sur le jardin qu'on avait construit pour mes parents sur ses derrières (ce pan tronqué que seul j'avais revu jusque-là). Et avec la maison, la ville, depuis le matin jusqu'au soir et par tous les temps, la Place où on m'envoyait avant déjeuner, les rues où j'allais faire des courses, les chemins qu'on prenait si le temps était beau. (*Du Côté* 47-49)

I feel something quiver in me, shift, try to rise, something that seems to have been unanchored [as a *berniq*ue needs to be forcefully detached from the rock to which it is attached] at a real depth; I do not know what it is, but it comes up slowly; I feel the resistance and I read the murmur of the distances traversed.

Undoubtedly what is palpitating thus, deep inside me, must be the

image, the visual memory which is attached to this taste and is trying to follow it to me. . . . but I cannot distinguish the form, cannot ask it, as the one possible interpreter, to translate for me the evidence of its contemporary, its inseparable companion, the taste, ask it to tell me what particular circumstance is involved, what period of the past.

Will it reach the clear surface of my consciousness—this memory, this old moment which the attraction of an identical moment has come from so far to invite, to move, to raise up from the deepest part of me? . . .

And suddenly the memory appeared. That taste was the taste of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray . . . my aunt Léonie would give me after dipping it in her infusion of tea or lime blossom . . .

And as soon as I had recognized the taste of the piece of madeleine dipped in lime-blossom tea that my aunt used to give me . . ., immediately the old gray house on the street, where her bedroom was, came like a stage set to attach itself to the little wing opening onto the garden that had been built for my parents behind it (that truncated section which was all I had seen before then); and with the house the town, from morning to night and in all weathers, the Square, where they sent me before lunch, the streets where I went on errands, the paths we took if the weather was fine. (*The Way* 46-48)

Unlike Proust's Narrator, Yves' first encounter with involuntary memory does not summon up his whole childhood, just that one image of his father on horseback.

The rest comes soon, however. The hostess indicates the house in which Yves lived as a young child and tells him which room was his. He and Pierre go for a visit, but again, voluntary memory proves worthless: "Yves regarde partout, essayant de tendre son intelligence vers le passé, s'efforçant de se souvenir. Mais non, c'est fini ; et, là même, il ne retrouve plus rien" (X) 'Yves looks all round, trying to stretch his intelligence into the past, to force himself as it were to remember. But it is no use. It is finished; and even here he can find nothing' (*Tale X*). Yves gives up and they start to leave.

Nous redescendions pour nous en aller, quand tout à coup quelque chose lui revint comme une lueur lointaine.

"Ah ! dit-il, à présent, je crois que je reconnais cet escalier. Tenez, en bas, il doit y avoir une porte de ce côté-là pour entrer dans la cour, et un puits à gauche avec un grand arbre, et, au fond, l'écurie où se tenait le cheval aux pieds blancs."

C'était comme si une éclaircie se fût faite tout à coup dans des nuages. Yves s'était arrêté sur ces marches et, les yeux graves, il regardait

par cette trouée qui venait de s'ouvrir subitement sur le passé; il était très saisi de se sentir aux prises avec cette chose mystérieuse qui est le souvenir.

En bas, dans la cour, nous trouvâmes bien tout comme il l'avait annoncé, le puits à gauche, le grand arbre et l'écurie. Et Yves me dit avec une sorte d'émotion de frayeur, en se découvrant comme sur un tombeau:

“Maintenant, je revois très bien la figure de mon père!” (X)

We were descending preparatory to leaving, when suddenly something came back to him like a light in the distance.

“Ah,” he said, “I think now that I recognize this staircase. Wait! Below there should be a door on that side leading into a yard, and a well on the left with a large tree, and, at the back, the stable where we used to keep the horse with the white hoofs.”

It was as if there had suddenly come a break in the clouds. Yves stood still on the stairs, gazing through this gap which had just been opened on the past; he was thrilled to feel himself at grips with that mysterious thing which men call memory.

Below, in the yard, we found everything as he had described it, the well on the left, the tree, the stable. And Yves said to me with an emotion of awe, removing his hat as if he were by a grave:

“Now I can see quite clearly my father's face.” (*Tale X*)

Just as Yves suddenly and involuntarily recovers whole scenes from his childhood because he recognizes the stairway that goes down to the courtyard where he had played as a child, so, with this passage, we discover a whole bank of elements that Proust reused in his development of the madeleine episode.

The stairway is the most obvious one. It is at the head of the stairway in his great aunt's home in Combray that Proust's young Narrator had sat that terrible night, waiting for his mother to come up so that he could demand a kiss, an event so traumatic that, he tells us at the beginning of the madeleine episode, it is virtually all he can remember of his childhood in Combray:

C'est ainsi que, pendant longtemps, . . . je n'en revis jamais que cette sorte de pan lumineux, découpé au milieu d'indistinctes ténèbres . . . . À la base assez large, . . . le vestibule où je m'acheminai vers la première marche de l'escalier, si cruel à monter, qui constituait à lui seul le tronc fort étroit de cette pyramide irrégulière. Et, au faîte, ma chambre à coucher avec le petit couloir à porte vitrée pour l'entrée de maman ; en un mot, toujours vu à la même heure, isolé de tout ce qu'il pouvait y avoir autour, se détachant seul sur l'obscurité, le décor strictement nécessaire . . . au drame de mon



déshabillage. Comme si Combray n'avait consisté qu'en deux étages reliés par un mince escalier . . . . (*Du Côté* 43)

So it was that, for a long time . . . , I saw nothing of it but this sort of luminous panel, cut out among indistinct shadows . . . . at the rather broad base, . . . the front hall where I would head toward the first step of the staircase, so painful to climb, that formed, by itself, the very narrow trunk of this irregular pyramid; and, at the top, my bedroom with the little hallway and its glass-paned door for Mama's entrance; in a word, always seen at the same hour, isolated from everything that might surround it, standing out alone against the darkness, the bare minimum of scenery . . . needed for the drama of my undressing; as though Combray had consisted only of two floors connected by a slender staircase. . . (*The Way* 43-4)

There are other elements that Proust borrowed from *My Brother Yves* as well, however. The things that Yves remembers are all down at the bottom of that stairwell; some of them go even further down, like the well and the stable, which is “at the bottom” of the courtyard. As already noted in the long passage from *Combray* quoted above, Proust's Narrator describes the images of his past as located “at a real depth” in his mind, “anchored” to its floor as if at the bottom of a sea, which he describes as “darkness.” “Arrivera-t-il jusqu'à la surface de ma claire conscience, ce souvenir” ‘Will it reach the clear surface of my consciousness—this memory,’ Proust's Narrator wonders.

Loti's Narrator had described the effect of Yves's unexpectedly recovered memory with similar images of dark and light: “C'était comme si une éclaircie se fût faite tout à coup dans des nuages” ‘It was as if there had suddenly come a break in the clouds.’ Proust repeats this light imagery: as an image of Aunt Léonie in Combray starts to come back to him, his Narrator notes that his mind must now “[la] faire entrer dans sa lumière” ‘bring [it] into its light’ so as to bring about “un éclaircissement décisif” ‘a decisive clarification’ (*Du Côté* 48; *The Way* 45).

There are too many specific similarities and parallels here to dismiss them as coincidence, or even unconscious recollections.<sup>5</sup> Proust must have recalled *My Brother Yves* while he was working on the madeleine episode and decided to build the latter in part from elements in Loti's work. What does this tell us about Proust's creative process and the reactions he imagined he might evoke with such intertextuality?

## Part Two: Interpreting the Evidence of the Borrowings

We might start with a misunderstanding that this discovery will help dispel, one that is less prevalent today than when the *Search* first came out: the

idea that Proust's novel is reliable autobiography. As Anthony R. Pugh demonstrated in his study of the drafts of the *Search*, the solid food that, along with the tea, unlocks the Narrator's memories of his childhood was initially an ordinary piece of toast (II.147; also Bélanger 76). Proust did not change this to a specifically scallop-shell-shaped madeleine until a later draft of the episode in 1909.<sup>6</sup> Whether or not he himself ever had one revelatory moment like this that involved two comestibles, one of them was definitely not a madeleine, therefore; that element he borrowed from Loti and then modified. Why?

To begin with, the shellfish was a useful element, one that fit into the image system Proust was developing at this point far better than the original toast. As his choice of images makes clear, Proust wanted his readers to perceive the temporarily forgotten memories in his Narrator's unconscious as located at the bottom of a depth that, because of the associations with "anchored" and "surface," resembled some great body of water. Transforming the memory-triggering food from landlubbing toast into something at least resembling shellfish would have contributed to this oceanic image system.<sup>7</sup> Proust's use of the *berniq*ue episode in Chapter XXI of *My Brother Yves* therefore shows that, whatever the autobiographical reality behind his novel may have been, he was willing to abandon the surface forms, the visual images involved, if he could find others that would convey his ideas—as opposed to the mere autobiographical fact—more artistically. This coincides with his Narrator's dismissal of the mere facts that voluntary memory can summon up as "les renseignements qu'elle donne sur le passé [qui] ne conservent rien de lui" 'the information it gives about the past [that] preserves nothing of the past itself.'<sup>8</sup>

Proust's evocation of the Chapter XXI episode in *My Brother Yves* may also have been meant to highlight the difference between the failure of voluntary memory, which is what Yves tries to employ when he attempts to "renew a feast from his childhood" with the *berniq*ues, and the success of involuntary memory, which is what is involved in Proust's Narrator's use of the shell-shaped madeleine. As Anthony Pugh has shown in his study of the various drafts of Proust's text, it was while elaborating the madeleine episode that Proust really began to develop his distinction between the two types of memory. It is not surprising, therefore, that while developing the madeleine episode he should have turned to *My Brother Yves*, where memory in general and the distinction between voluntary and involuntary memory in particular play so important a role.

Modern readers of the *Search* may not know Loti's corpus, especially if they are not French, but in Proust's day, at least through World War I, Pierre Loti was one of the most popular novelists in France. *My Brother Yves* was one of his more successful works: it had already reached its 81<sup>st</sup> edition by 1898 and 207<sup>th</sup> by 1923 (Serban 339). Proust could therefore have counted on Loti's text being known to at least some of his readers when he made the changes to the madeleine

episode and others in his work that evoke his older contemporary's novel. Gasiglia-Laster makes an important point in her study of the now-forgotten plays to which Proust refers in the *Search*: "When Proust evoked these plays, he probably didn't imagine that they would be forgotten a half-century later" (135). Loti's fame was so great during Proust's lifetime, and Proust himself thought so highly of his work, that there is no reason not to believe that he imagined Loti's more popular works would be read as long as his. But how many of his readers did Proust imagine would catch these intertextual evocations?

The madeleine and other important episodes early in *Combray* with which Proust evokes Loti's novel also set it in the mind of readers familiar with it as a reference against which Proust develops more general aspects of his novel down the road. Somewhat past the half-way point of *My Brother Yves*, its narrator, the naval officer Pierre, takes Yves prisoner. The sailor had once again gotten drunk during his shore leave and into trouble, so Pierre has him locked in his cabin. "Cette idée sombre me venait pour la première fois, qu'il était perdu, bien perdu, malgré tout ce que je pourrais tenter pour le sauver de lui-même" (LXIII) 'And the black thought came to me for the first time that [Yves] was lost, beyond redemption, no matter what I might do to save him from himself' (*Tale LXIII*). Proust's Narrator does something very similar with Albertine at the end of *Sodom and Gomorrah*, and for the same reasons: he wants to save her from what he sees as her "predisposition du vice" (*Sodome et Gomorrhe* 514) 'predisposition to vice' (*Sodom and Gomorrah* 522), in this case what he imagines to be a desire to become sexually involved with women. In *My Brother Yves*, Loti had used Yves's alcoholism as a metaphor for possible homosexual desire (Berrong *In Love* 99-103).

It is true that Proust had an immediate and personal inspiration for part of the Albertine episode: the sudden departure of his chauffeur Alfred Agostinelli from Paris for Monte Carlo in December, 1913, just before the writer started to develop Albertine's imprisonment and flight in *In Search of Lost Time*. As Pugh notes in his study of the genesis of the novel, "there is no hint, either in earlier treatment of the motif of suspicion or in the 1913 plan [written before December of that year, i.e. before Agostinelli took flight], that Proust had envisaged a prisoner and a fugitive" (II.769).

While it is therefore likely that Albertine's escape was inspired by Agostinelli's sudden departure (Loti's Yves does not flee Pierre's cabin; Pierre finally releases him), it is equally true that Agostinelli was not, prior to leaving for Monte Carlo, Proust's prisoner. That element and the motivation for it Proust seems to have borrowed from Loti. This shows once again that, as with the metamorphosis of the toast into a madeleine, the bookish author of the *Search* was amenable to modifying autobiographical facts when he found something more artistically interesting in the works of a colleague.

If, because of his modification of the autobiographical facts, some of Proust's readers recalled *My Brother Yves's* narrator's imprisonment of the title character when reading about the *Search's* Narrator's imprisonment of Albertine, the first thing they would have noticed was that the person who gets imprisoned by the narrator in Loti's novel to save him from giving in to bad inclinations is not a woman, but a man. Nor was he just any man. By the time Proust developed the Albertine episode, the fairly obvious homoeroticism of Loti's novel had turned the words "frère Yves" into slang for a gay man's companion. In 1903, for example, before Proust started the *Search*, artist Paul Iribe published a cartoon in the 25 April issue of the well-known satirical magazine *L'Assiette au beurre* ('The Butter Dish') showing a society woman who says to an unseen interlocutor: "Vous venez, ce soir, dîner, n'est-ce pas? . . . Nous avons Pierre Loti et son nouveau frère Yves" (1832) 'You're coming to dinner this evening, aren't you? . . . We'll have Pierre Loti and his latest Brother Yves.' Another cartoon in the same issue featured a woman holding a novel entitled *Mon frère IV* by Pierlo To looking disdainfully at an overly-bejeweled man smelling a flower and remarking: "Allons donc, mon cher! . . . Vous n'avez même pas l'excuse d'être dans la marine!" (1822) 'Come now, my dear! . . . You don't even have the excuse of being in the navy!' The parallel with the relationship between Loti's narrator and Yves Kermadec created by Proust's borrowing of the imprisonment element from their story would therefore have evoked male homosexuality behind the story of Albertine's imprisonment.

This means that long before literary scholars began using Proust's notebooks to argue whether his Narrator's love for Albertine could be read as a literary transformation of the author's feelings for Agostinelli, Proust was using the repeated intertextual evocations of *My Brother Yves* to tell the part of his readership who recognized this parallel with Loti's tale: "I won't say it directly, but my Narrator, when he is in love with Albertine, is in a way actually in love with a man, just as Loti's first-person narrator loved Yves."<sup>9</sup>

The fact that Proust deviated from autobiographical reality to make the Albertine-imprisoned episode resemble the Yves-imprisoned episode suggests that he derived some pleasure from hinting to the astute what he denied in front of the general and sometimes hostile public. In other words, he evidently conceived of different publics who would or would not perceive different substrata in his works as a function of their previous reading experiences. Did he imagine that no one hostile to homosexuality would have read the fairly clearly homoerotic *My Brother Yves*, such that his intertextual evocation of it in the Albertine episode would have escaped homophobes who ventured to read *Sodom and Gomorrah*?

Some readers did link the two writers on this issue. The author of the very homophobic *The Third Sex*, published by Willy in 1927 shortly after Proust's and Loti's deaths, twice read Albertine as a female stand-in for an unnamed male real-

life lover and both times evoked Loti as a precursor in that literary device (*Troisième Sexe* 132, 229; *Third Sex* 48, 84).<sup>10</sup> In his next novel, *Pêcheur d'Islande* (1886, translated as *Iceland Fisherman*), Loti had in fact done the same thing himself, though in the opposite fashion. That work recounts Gaud Mével's love for Breton fisherman Yann Gaos, but repeats in many ways structures from *My Brother Yves*, so that Gaud's heterosexual love ends up being viewed by the astute reader against Pierre's never-quite-defined interest in Yves Kermadec (cf. Berrong, *In Love* Ch. Six). Proust changed the sex of the object of desire rather than that of the desirer, but the result was the same: he was able to speak more directly of a love that he had himself experienced because he could now present it in traditional heterosexual terms.<sup>11</sup> His intertextual evocation of *My Brother Yves* in the imprisonment episode of *Albertine* suggests that Proust wanted to leave at least a hint of what he had sacrificed with that change and saw intertextual evocation as a way to do so.

The complex intertextual evocation of *My Brother Yves* in the *Search* would have pointed out something else to Proust's astute readers as well: the fact that, with his Narrator, Proust fused Yves Kermadec, the apparently heterosexual sailor in search of memories of his childhood, with Pierre, the possibly homosexual officer-narrator who is given to writing and artistic reflection in a way apparently completely beyond Yves. This was not without precedent in Loti's work. After the revelatory scene in Chapter X of *My Brother Yves* quoted above in which a fortuitous encounter with a stairway causes the sailor suddenly to remember scenes in his childhood, Yves announces to Pierre: "Demain matin . . . il faudra que vous me permettiez d'entrer de bonne heure dans votre chambre, à bord, pour écrire sur votre bureau. Je voudrais raconter tout cela à ma mère avant de partir de France" (X) "Tomorrow morning . . . you must let me come into your room on board very early, so that I may write at your desk. I want to tell all that we have found out to my mother before leaving France" (*Tale X*). This prefigures the episode later in *Combray* where the intellectually lazy Narrator decides for once not to let his reactions to beauty pass unanalyzed. Having been struck by the appearance of the sun reflecting off the two steeples of the church of Martinville and the one on the church of Vieuxvicq as he sees them from different angles while riding with Dr. Percepied in the latter's buggy, another passage for which Proust found a model in *My Brother Yves*, Proust's Narrator also decides to pursue his "impressions" for once and write them down so he can understand them better: "puisqu'il c'était sous la forme de mots qui me faisaient plaisir que cela m'était apparu, demandant un crayon et du papier au docteur, je composai malgré les cahots de la voiture, pour soulager ma conscience et obéir à mon enthousiasme, le petit morceau suivant" (180) "since it had appeared to me in the form of words that gave me pleasure, I asked the doctor for a pencil and some paper and I composed, despite the jolts of the carriage, and in order to ease my

conscience and yield to my enthusiasm, the following little piece' (185).<sup>12</sup>

This intertextual evocation points out a significant difference: Yves, the largely uneducated sailor, does not succeed in getting his discovery down on paper, either this time or other times when he wants to preserve a strong experience in writing. Each time, he either gives up or is thwarted by nature. Proust's Narrator does succeed, however, and so successfully that, having written down his impressions of the sunlight reflecting off the church steeples: "je me trouvai si heureux, je sentais qu'elle m'avait si parfaitement débarrassé de ces clochers et de ce qu'ils cachaient derrière eux, que comme si j'avais été moi-même une poule et si je venais de pondre un oeuf, je me mis à chanter à tue-tête" (180) 'I was so happy, I felt it had so perfectly relieved me of those steeples and what they had been hiding behind them, that, as if I myself were a hen and had just laid an egg, I began to sing at the top of my voice' (186). As Proust's Narrator explains repeatedly throughout the *Search*, it takes real willpower/*volonté* to triumph over man's natural laziness and make the effort to record such fleeting emotions in a clear and analytical way. It's hard enough for Proust's Narrator to bring himself to do it; his intertextual evocations of Yves Kermadec's failures in this endeavor only emphasize the universality of the problem.

In *My Brother Yves*, it is the narrator who ends up writing about Yves's experiences with memory, since Yves himself cannot. This narrator, the naval officer Pierre, claims to understand Yves's thoughts and feelings and so, he assures us, will be able to convey them as Yves himself would have done. One night in Toulven (based on Rospenden), the birthplace of Yves's wife in the interior of Brittany, the narrator, feeling oppressed by the unfamiliar surroundings, remarks: "Yves subit ces impressions et me les exprime d'une manière naïve, d'une manière à lui, qui n'est guère intelligible que pour moi" (XLVI) 'Yves suffers these impressions and tells me of them in a naive way, a way peculiarly his own, which would scarcely be intelligible to anyone but me' (*Tale XLVI*).

This would not have worked for Proust, however, who was interested in ever more detailed analyses of impressions, something that Pierre could not achieve working with the largely non-verbal and not self-analytical Yves. Instead, as the intertextual differences force us to see, Proust collapsed Loti's two characters into one, his Narrator, someone with highly refined sensibilities and an interest in philosophy, literature, and art. This allowed Proust to have richer basic material, "impressions," for his Narrator to analyze than Yves Kermadec was able to furnish Pierre. Just as the madeleine scene is a fusion of two episodes from *My Brother Yves*, so Proust's intertextual use of Loti's novel shows his astute reader that his Narrator-Protagonist is a fusion of Pierre and Yves.<sup>13</sup>

## Conclusion

Jean Milly's conclusion to his study of Proust's intertextual use of some of Henri de Régnier's work is a good starting point for considering the implications of Proust's more extensive intertextual evocations of *My Brother Yves*:

If the intertextuality between these two writers is obvious to us, it isn't a matter of pure and simple theft: Proust found nourishment in the text of his predecessor, here as in many other instances, and incorporated it in his own work to various degrees. Sometimes he reproduced it almost literally or in condensed and ironic form . . ., sometimes he mixed different borrowings together . . . and made them undergo the laws of his own original creation, in which they may still be detectable, but where they have been transformed sufficiently that they appear to belong to Proust. (43-44)

It is, of course, particularly fascinating to discover that so much of the most famous episode in the *Search*, and indeed one of the most famous passages in Western literature, was derived—not stolen, but derived—from another novel. This doesn't call Proust's achievement into question. It does, however, as Jean-Marc Quaranta and others writing on the *Search* and intertextuality have argued, give us insight into how Proust constructed his *magnum opus*, what Danielle-Claude Bélanger has called “the assimilative work of Proust's writing” (88). It also gives us insight into the different audiences he must have envisioned for his work as he wove various intertextualities through it and how they would be affected by their discoveries of them. While it is our duty—and pleasure—to bring these intertextualities to light for the modern reader who is unlikely to know many of the works Proust could have expected at least some of his contemporaries to recognize, it is also true that Proust's extensive use of non-canonical intertextualities suggests that he envisioned the possibility of different perceptions of the *Search* as a function of each reader's previous personal experiences, another theme that he would have found in Loti's best work (Berrong, “Modes”).

As Danièle Gasiglia-Laster remarked in her study of intertextuality in Proust, it is at our own risk that we ignore his evocations of works some of us might disdain: “the danger is that we might pass by signals that Proust is making to us” (137). I suspect that for Proust these evocations of previous texts, especially the contemporary ones, were at least in part a game that he was playing with potential readers. Like Anatole France, whose work he also greatly admired, Proust knew that there was fun to be had for a certain type of educated and astute

reader in catching hints and clues to works that he or she could take a certain intellectual pride in recognizing.

#### Notes

1. On intertextuality in Proust see, for example: Bélanger, Bouillaguet, Debray-Genette, Gasiglia-Laster, Leriche, Milly, Muller, Murphy, Naturel, Quaranta, Rey.
2. Proust's early fascination with the works of Pierre Loti is well documented. When the latter's *Le roman d'un enfant* (*The Story of a Child*), a middle-aged man's efforts to recollect his childhood, appeared in 1890, Proust recommended it to his mother and they then quoted from it in their letters (Proust, *Correspondance* 136). A few years later, in response to a question in a keepsake book, Proust named the author of *Iceland Fisherman* (*Pêcheur d'Islande*) along with Anatole France as his favorite prose writers (Carter 140). In her romanticized biography of Loti, Lesley Blanch claimed that Proust "electrif[ied] a dinner table, at the mention of *Aziyadé*, by quoting whole pages, on the spur of the moment" (145).
3. Because there are many editions of *My Brother Yves* in French and English but no standard ones, and because the chapters are very short, I will follow the tradition in Loti scholarship and cite the novel using chapter numbers rather than page numbers in a particular edition that a given reader might not be able to find. I use William Peter Baines's often-reprinted English translation, which isn't very accurate, and modify it when necessary.
4. As Yves and Pierre approach St. Pol de Léon in a carriage, we see the origin of the parallel passage describing the Narrator's family's first perceptions of Combray from the train. There isn't space to consider it here, but the reader will find the parallel passages in *Mon Frère Yves* IX/*Tale* IX and *Du Côté* 47/*The Way* 49. Once they arrive in St. Pol de Léon, Yves and Pierre climb to the top of the tower of the Creizker chapel. This gives them a view of the entire area around the city (X) in a way that Proust's Narrator can only achieve for Combray when he thinks back on the côté de Guermantes and the côté de Méséglise through memory . . . though the local priest assures the Narrator's Aunt Léonie that such a unified view can be obtained from the top of his church's steeple (*Du Côté* 104-105/*The Way* 107-108).
5. There are also other parallels, some very important, between *My Brother Yves* and *Combray*, but space limitation doesn't allow me to go into them here. The



most striking is that between the famous opening pages of *The Search*, in which the Narrator tries to reconstruct his surroundings from non-visual stimuli, and *My Brother Yves* VI, where Yves attempts the same thing. This is not an isolated passage in Loti's work. He discusses the return to consciousness upon waking repeatedly, most notably in *The Story of a Child*, a work from which, as already noted, Proust quotes in his letters.

6. For an edition of the drafts of the madeleine episode, see Keller. The scallop-shell-shaped madeleine appears in place of the toast for the first time as of M6 (Keller 55). Proust may have opted for a scallop rather than a *berniq*ue because many of his non-Breton readers would have been unfamiliar with that more specifically Breton shellfish, just as Baines's English translation uses the generic term "shell-fish" rather than bothering with the exact English equivalent, limpet. Or he may have wanted to make recognizing his source more difficult.

7. The anchor already existed in one form or another in some of the previous drafts of this episode. See Keller 35, 48.

8. In his study of Proust's borrowings from the works of another of his contemporaries, Henri de Régnier, Jean Milly remarked that "we recognize . . . a general tendency in Proust to hide the impressions at the origin of his work more and more the more he writes" (35). Milly's earlier observation, that in many things Proust preferred nature that had been improved with technique and art (28), seems to be the overriding issue, at least with his use of *My Brother Yves*.

9. The critical debate concerning Albertine started with O'Brien's *PMLA* article. On the homoeroticism of the narrator-Yves relationship in *My Brother Yves* and how Loti rewrote that in *Iceland Fisherman*, see Berrong, *In Love* Chs. 5-6.

10. *The Third Sex* was probably not written by Willy, but that's not relevant here.

11. There are many studies of how Proust spoke of love between two men. The interested reader can start with Lucey, Rivers, and Sedgwick.

12. Proust derived much of this episode from *My Brother Yves*, including the view of separate bell towers from a moving carriage. Compare Chapter X with *Du Côté* 66/*The Way* 69.

13. In a famous passage in *Le temps retrouvé* (*Time Regained*), Proust explained that his characters are amalgams of traits from different individuals he had known (206). His fusing of *My Brother Yves*'s title character and narrator shows that he amalgamated individuals taken from literature as well.

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