

74

PROUST AND RUSKIN: A STUDY IN INFLUENCE

by

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LIST OF CONTENTSpage no.

(ii)	Summary
1	Chapter One: Proust traduit Ruskin
17	Chapter Two: <u>Ecrivain</u> and <u>Ecrivain</u>
45	Chapter Three: Ruskin and the Proustians
113	Chapter Four: Interchapter: On Influence
135	Chapter Five: Theseus and the Spider - Autobiographical Structures in Ruskin and Proust
208	Chapter Six: Conclusion - Autobiographical Fiction/Fictional Autobiography
236	Notes to Chapter One
239	Notes to Chapter Two
244	Notes to Chapter Three
252	Notes to Chapter Four
255	Notes to Chapter Five
265	Notes to Chapter Six
269	Bibliography

SUMMARY

The following thesis is a comparative study of Ruskin and Proust. The six years which Proust spent studying the Englishman's works have prompted several full-length studies and many articles devoted to tracing the nature and extent of Ruskin's influence on the creation of A la recherche du temps perdu. In the first three chapters I suggest that the very proliferation of such studies indicates that a different emphasis is required; one which pays full attention to Ruskin's qualities as a writer and is even prepared to consider the paradox of Proust's influence on Ruskin. Where previous scholars in this field have over-emphasised the dubious notion of influence, unquestioningly adopting Proust's version of an idealist aesthetic and presenting it as a nimble adaptation of Ruskin's clumsy prototype, my study defers questions of influence and affinity and contrasts the two writers under the terms of écrivain and écrivain (chapters 2 and 3). In noting the extent to which the self-regulating theory embedded in Proust's novel has informed, and indeed controlled subsequent critical debate, I indicate how the true nature and import of Ruskin's work has been obscured, and examine incorporations of the 'marginal' discourses of art criticism and autobiography into the mainstream genre of the novel.

A chapter on the evaluative connotations of 'influence' is followed by an extended comparison of Praeterita and Fors Clavigera with A la recherche du temps perdu as examples of the creation and re-creation of the self through the act of writing (chapters 5 and 6). The question of sources is only tangentially addressed, my main aim being to allow two radically

different yet representative writers to confront each other, rather than to consolidate any questionable theory of succession. By analysing ways in which Ruskin's writings prefigure those of Proust in their mingling of narrative, descriptive and autobiographical modes, I hope to have demonstrated that the waning of Ruskin's influence in the twentieth century was in part due to the fact of his influence on Proust, and to have made some contribution to the current reappraisal of his writings.

PROUST AND RUSKIN: A STUDY IN INFLUENCE

'Titian and Bellini are each true representatives of the school of painters contemporary with them; and the difference in their artistic feeling is a consequence not so much of difference in their own natural characters as in their early education: Bellini was brought up in faith; Titian in formalism.'

John Ruskin, The Stones of Venice

'Mais les philosophes qui n'ont pas su trouver ce qu'il y a de réel et d'indépendant de toute science dans l'art, ont été obligés de s'imaginer l'art, la critique et cetera, comme des sciences où le prédécesseur est forcément moins avancé que celui qui le suit.'

Marcel Proust, Contre Sainte-Beuve

CHAPTER ONE

Proust traduit Ruskin

CHAPTER ONE

'Depuis une quinzaine de jours, je m'occupe à un travail absolument différent de ce que je fais généralement à propos de Ruskin et de certaines cathédrales.'¹

Thus Marcel Proust signalled to Marie Nordlinger the beginning of his six years' work on the English writer, although he had already been aware of Ruskin's writings for at least three years.² The same letter points to the suspension of Proust's ambitions as a novelist.

'Je travaille depuis très longtemps à un ouvrage de très longue haleine, mais sans rien achever. Et il y a des moments où je me demande si je ne ressemble pas au mari de Dorothee Brook dans Middlemarch et si je n'amasse pas des ruines.'³

The 'ouvrage de très longue haleine' is Jean Santeuil, Proust's first tentative venture in the autobiographical novel, the forerunner of A la recherche du temps perdu, and the allusion to Middlemarch refers to the dry pedant Mr. Casaubon, who labours in vain to produce a key to all mythologies which would:

'show ... that all the mythical systems or erratic mythical fragments in the world were corruptions of a tradition originally revealed. Having once mastered the true position and taken a firm footing there, the vast field of mythical construction became intelligible, nay luminous, with the reflected light of correspondences.'⁴

Casaubon's failure to attain the true position and transfigure his material with the reflected light of correspondences, in spite of years of hard work amassing volumes of notes, would serve as a chilling reproach to a young writer who had still not evolved the unifying aesthetic which was to inform A la recherche du temps perdu.

Proust's work on Ruskin has a complex history. The death of Ruskin in January 1900, after more than a decade of madness, conferred an imprimatur on Proust's ambitions to articulate his enthusiasm for the Victorian sage. A short obituary, simply titled 'John Ruskin', appeared in La Chronique des arts et de la curiosité a week later.

Proust's lament for Ruskin is also a valediction for the nineteenth century European mind, whose other great 'directeurs de conscience' (Nietzsche, Tolstoy, Ibsen) are now in decline. A short résumé of Ruskin's life and career is tendered along with a promise that a more comprehensive introduction to the Englishman's works will be published in a forthcoming edition of La Gazette des Beaux Arts. Two such articles appeared in April and in August, and were later incorporated into the preface of La Bible d'Amiens. On February 13th, Le Figaro carried another article by Proust, entitled Pèlerinages ruskiniens en France, an incitement to the sort of literary tourism and idolatry which he himself was later to decry.

'Des milliers de fidèles vont aller à Coniston prier devant une tombe où ne reposera que le corps de Ruskin: je propose à ses amis de France de célébrer autrement le "culte de ce héros", je veux dire en esprit et en vérité, par des pèlerinages aux lieux qui gardent son âme ...' ⁵

Another article, 'Ruskin à Notre-Dame d'Amiens', appeared in the Mercure de France in April. This again was incorporated in the preface to La Bible d'Amiens.

Meanwhile Proust was devoting much time and trouble (not all his) to his proposed translation of The Bible of Amiens, one of Ruskin's later and less popular works, in many ways atypical of his oeuvre. Proust's choice was probably directed by the desire to make Ruskin known to a wider public in France, and Ruskin's guide to the sculptures of Amiens would be invaluable to aesthetic pilgrims commuting from Paris. Proust enlisted the help of his mother and of his friends Marie Nordlinger, Douglas Ainslie and Robert d'Humières. He had never formally studied English, and according to Georges de Lauris, 'Il eût été fort embarrassé dans une société anglaise et même pour commander une côtelette dans un restaurant' ⁶, but he threw himself into the work with a Casaubonesque intensity and single-mindedness. Marie Nordlinger tells us that Madame Proust supplied a rough crib which was later embellished by the writer. Proust was fiercely proud of his attainments as translator and of the discipline and self-denial necessary to his task. In an angry letter to Constantin de Brancovan, who had dared to suggest in company that the translation might be riddled with mistakes, he insisted that:

'cette traduction, non pas à cause de mon talent qui est nul, mais de ma conscience qui a été infinie - sera une traduction comme il y en a très peu, une véritable reconstitution. Si vous saviez qu'il n'y a pas une expression ambiguë, pas une phrase obscure sur laquelle je n'aie demandé des consultations à au moins dix écrivains anglais et sur laquelle je n'aie un dossier de correspondance, vous ne prononceriez pas le mot de "contresens". Et à force

d'approfondir le sens de chaque mot, la portée de chaque expression, le lien de toutes les idées, je suis arrivé à une connaissance si précise de ce texte que chaque fois que j'ai consulté un Anglais - ou un Français sachant à fond l'anglais - sur une difficulté quelconque - il était généralement une heure avant de voir surgir la difficulté et me félicitait de savoir l'anglais mieux qu'un Anglais. En quoi il se trompait. Je ne sais pas un mot d'anglais et je ne lis pas bien l'anglais. Mais depuis quatre ans que je travaille sur La Bible d'Amiens je la sais entièrement par coeur et elle a pris pour moi ce degré d'assimilation complète, de transparence absolue, où se voient seulement les nébuleuses qui tiennent non à l'insuffisance de notre regard, mais à l'irréductible obscurité de la pensée contemplée. Pour plus de vingt phrases, d'Humières me disait: "C'est impossible à traduire, cela n'a aucun sens en anglais. Si c'était moi, je la sauterais". A force de patience, même à ces phrases-là j'ai fini par trouver un sens. Et s'il reste des fautes dans ma traduction, ce sera dans les parties claires et faciles, car les obscures ont été méditées, refaites, approfondies pendant des années je ne prétends pas savoir l'anglais. Je prétends savoir Ruskin.⁷

This defiant rationale dramatises a movement between identification and dissociation which is characteristic of Proust's writings on Ruskin. On the one hand, there is the impulse to attain complete involvement with and assimilation of Ruskin's idiolect; to translate his works in the purest sense. But this impulse seems to be checked by a growing disillusion, marked by a feigned elevation of labour over talent and an exaggeration of the amount of time spent on the task. In fact, Proust had been working for only three years at the time of this letter. The truth is that Proust's enthusiasm for Ruskin had reached its peak at the time of the trip to Evian in the summer of 1899, that is to say, before his engagement with Ruskin's writing actually began. The abandoning of his own work initiated a gradual

disenchantment, born of greater knowledge and involvement. Although this disenchantment was eventually to result in the articulation of new positions contradicting and qualifying Ruskin's dicta, it would also manifest itself in the stubborn exaggeration of the task seen in the above letter, and in resentful baying at the star which had dragged Proust's wagon for so long along a bumpy road.

'Ce vieillard commence à m'ennuyer',⁸ he wrote to Marie Nordlinger in 1904, and a letter to Léon Bélugou written in the summer of 1906 betrays the intermittencies of the literary heart with the same poignant mingling of elation and doubt with which Swann and Marcel analyse their quite different love affairs.

'Just recently, while reading one of Ruskin's travel books and feeling my heart beating with the desire to see the same places once more, I said to myself: "If I no longer cared for him, would he still be making the world beautiful for me, until I am consumed with longing and desolation whenever I look at a railway timetable?" Yes, my affection for Ruskin has lasted. Only sometimes nothing chills it so much as reading him My original love was more involuntary.'⁹

Shortly after Mallarmé had proclaimed English to be 'la langue contemporaine peut-être par excellence, elle qui accuse le double caractère de l'époque, rétrospectif et avancé',¹⁰ Proust was denying the currency of English as general langue and seeking in isolation to reconstitute the parole of Ruskin's writings, divorced from the past and future of historical/linguistic contexts and from his own past and future as novelist. By absorbing himself totally in Ruskin, he was able to confront the English writer in all his foreignness and difference, to 'plonger au sein du non-moi'.¹¹

La Bible d'Amiens was published in March 1904 with copious notes and a four-part preface. The translation was generally well received by critics¹²; Albert Sorel indicated that Proust had succeeded in his high ambitions: 'Il écrit ... un français flexible, flottant, enveloppant, en échappements infinis de couleurs et de nuances, mais toujours translucides',¹³ while Henri Bergson, addressing the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques, insisted that it did not read like a translation at all. But it will be noted that these are tributes to eloquence rather than to fidelity.

Later, more exigent critics have thoroughly exposed Proust's defects as a translator¹⁴ and the author himself poked fun at his pretensions and achievements in the 1909 pastiche, 'La Bénédiction du Sanglier': '... nous avons suivi la traduction que M. Marcel Proust a donnée de l'Édition des Voyageurs, traduction où d'adroits contresens ne font qu'ajouter un charme d'obscurité à la pénombre et au mystère du texte'.¹⁵

Even this tongue-in-cheek remark confirms Proust's insistence on the individual oeuvre as sole guarantor of self-supporting meaning. A note to the translation asserts that 'les ouvrages d'un grand écrivain sont le seul dictionnaire où l'on puisse contrôler avec certitude le sens des expressions qu'il emploie'¹⁶ and it is the figure of Ruskin as grand écrivain which the preface of La Bible d'Amiens chooses to uphold and explore. The greater part of this preface was written in 1900 and derives largely from previous French works on Ruskin: Milsand's L'Esthétique anglaise, Étude sur M. John Ruskin and La Sizeranne's Ruskin et la Religion de la Beauté. Even in controversy Proust relies on the authority of quotation for his point of departure, using other critics' arguments as grounds for his own

observations on Ruskin, just as he would liberally quote from the master's own writings to re-enact his pilgrimages and provoke meditations on the roles of reader and writer. As Richard A. Macksey¹⁷ has pointed out, such a tissue of quotation helps construct an internal lexicon for reading in context. Proust outlines his plan in a long footnote to the preface:

'En mettant une note au bas des passages cités de La Bible d'Amiens, chaque fois que le texte éveillait par des analogies, même lointaines, le souvenir d'autres ouvrages de Ruskin, et en traduisant dans la note le passage qui m'était ainsi revenu à l'esprit, j'ai tâché de permettre au lecteur de se placer dans la situation de quelqu'un qui ne se trouvait pas en présence de Ruskin pour la première fois, mais qui, ayant déjà eu avec lui des entretiens antérieurs, pourrait dans ses paroles, reconnaître ce qui est chez lui permanent et fondamental. Ainsi j'ai essayé de pourvoir le lecteur comme d'une mémoire improvisée où j'ai disposé des souvenirs des autres livres de Ruskin - sorte de caisse de résonance où les paroles de La Bible d'Amiens pourront prendre quelque retentissement en y éveillant des échos fraternels. Mais aux paroles de La Bible d'Amiens ces échos ne répondront pas sans doute, ainsi qu'il arrive dans une mémoire qui s'est faite elle-même, de ces horizons inégalement lointains, habituellement cachés à nos regards et dont notre vie elle-même a mesuré jour par jour les distances variées. Ils n'auront pas, pour venir rejoindre la parole présente dont la ressemblance les a attirés, à travers la résistante douceur de cette atmosphère interposée qui a l'étendue même de notre vie et qui est toute la poésie de la mémoire.'¹⁸

The intertextual resonance posited here by Proust establishes a referential authority which is crucial to the task of beginning.¹⁹ Other critics and the present reader are summoned to witness Proust's

inwardness with Ruskin's oeuvre and to assent to opinions, judgements, a writing practice which are new and Proust's own. The subsequent fleshing-out of intentions, it will be seen, leaves Ruskin, his subjects and his apologists behind, and sees Proust embarking on more independent projects.

If quotation can guarantee knowledge, the critical apparatus to La Bible d'Amiens shows that Proust knew some dozen of Ruskin's works, most of them at first hand.²⁰ The greater part of the preface was written in 1900. Part II is the original Mercure de France article published in April of that year, under the title 'Ruskin à Notre-Dame d'Amiens'. This section is a largely superfluous résumé of Ruskin's book, interlarded with lengthy quotations from the original, as though Proust's hagiographic respect for the cultist of beauty demanded only a sonorous incantation of the sacred texts, with repetition enforcing submission.

'Comprenant mal jusque-là la portée de l'art religieux au moyen âge, je m'étais dit, dans ma ferveur pour Ruskin: Il m'apprendra, car lui aussi, en quelques parcelles du moins, n'est-il pas la vérité? Il fera entrer mon esprit là où il n'avait pas accès, car il est la porte. Il me purifiera, car son inspiration est comme le lys de la vallée. Il m'enivrera et me vivifiera, car il est la vigne et la vie.'²¹

'Our fathers have told us:

"You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer has been valid. And prayer is more
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation

Of the praying mind, or the sound of the voice praying.
 And what the dead had no speech for when living,
 They can tell you, being dead: the communication
 Of the dead is tongued with fire beyond the language
 of the living."²²

There is a noticeable distancing from this quasi-mystical union with the dead writer in the third section, which is a conflation of the two Gazette des Beaux Arts articles of April and August 1900. Praise gives way to exegesis; the 'on a dit's of heresiarchs Milsand and La Sizeranne are confuted and the seeming paradoxes of Ruskin's scripture are shown to have a transcendent harmony. Attempts to classify Ruskin as realist or intellectualist, as pure moralist or pure aesthete, are shown to be irrelevant:

'Si les objections ne portent pas, c'est qu'elles
 ne visent pas assez haut. Il y a dans ces critiques
 erreur d'altitude.'²³

Further exposition of Ruskin's ideas leads on to a narrative of a pilgrimage made to Rouen to verify the presence of a tiny figure in the cathedral's portail des Libraires, mentioned briefly in The Seven Lamps of Architecture. This recondite detail is seen as an emblem of the permanence of Ruskin's thought: Proust's insistence on following his master even to the citing of a sculpted footnote confirms a tradition which attributes sacramental qualities to minutiae. The much later pilgrimage to see the 'petit pan de mur jaune' is the climactic gesture of this acceptable, because hermetic, idolatry.

These relics of Proust's infatuation with Ruskin are framed by the later contributions, foreword and post-script, which in different ways begin to establish a movement of dissociation. The foreword maps out Proust's proposed technique of citation and commentary, thus marking a greater concentration on his own role as reader and mediator. The post-script is generally seen as the first evidence of Proust's disenchantment with his master. Ruskin is criticised on two counts, firstly for basing his work on the selfsame idolatry which he himself castigated in his Lectures on Art, and secondly for confusing moral judgements with aesthetic ones. The English writer is taken to task for those inconsistencies which Proust was content to gloss over in the earlier essays. An interior duel between idolatry and sincerity was resolved to integrity's detriment by the force and beauty of Ruskin's rhetoric.

'au moment même où il prêchait la sincérité, il y manquait lui-même, non en ce qu'il disait, mais par la manière dont il le disait. Les doctrines qu'il professait étaient des doctrines morales et non des doctrines esthétiques. Et pourtant, il les choisissait pour leur beauté.'²⁴

Proust has, of course, shared in these transgressions and he meditates on his past identification with Ruskin.

'Cette idolâtrie et ce qu'elle mêle parfois d'un peu factice aux plaisirs littéraires les plus vifs qu'il nous donne, il me faut descendre jusqu'au fond de moi-même pour en saisir la trace, pour en étudier le caractère, tant je suis aujourd'hui habitué à Ruskin.'²⁵

Identification is replaced by complicity, and Proust appropriates one of Ruskin's own dicta to signal the conditions of his emancipation:

'Aussi cette servitude volontaire est-elle le commencement de la liberté. Il n'y a pas de meilleure manière d'arriver à prendre conscience de ce qu'on sent soi-même que d'essayer de recréer en soi ce qu'a senti un maître.'²⁶

This project of self-realisation reaches fruition and fullest expression in Proust's next major endeavour, again undertaken with Marie Nordlinger, a partial²⁷ translation of Ruskin's Sesame and Lilies. This quaintly-titled series of lectures on the educative importance of art urges the readers to be humble and submissive to the thoughts of great men. We come to the library, 'that great concourse of the dead', not merely to know from them what is true, but chiefly to feel with them what is just. Proust chose to translate only two of the three lectures which comprise Ruskin's book, omitting 'The Mystery of Life and its Arts', a largely confessional piece which summarises Ruskin's career to date (1868) and confronts with some perplexity the contending claims of aesthetic, moral and social interests. Since this is a very useful statement of the English writer's position, placing his own work in some historical context, we might wonder why Proust chose not to make it available to his French public.

Various extracts from the translation were published in Les Arts de la vie before Sésame et les lys appeared in May 1906. The preface to this work, 'Sur la lecture', provides us with the most revealing and coherent statement of Proust's reading aesthetic thus far, and announces his complete emancipation from Ruskin. For the first fifteen pages indeed, there is no mention of Ruskin: the tone is intimate, autobiographical, iterative, as Proust relates the circumstantial experiences of childhood reading.

'Il n'y a peut-être pas de jours de notre enfance que nous ayons si pleinement vécus que ceux que nous avons cru laisser sans les vivre, ceux que nous avons passés avec un livre préféré.'²⁸

Our true consciousness of the beauty and significance of past days is facilitated by the act of reading as an escape from false and limiting self-consciousness.

'Pour moi, je ne me sens vivre et penser que dans une chambre où tout est la création et le langage de vies profondément différentes de la mienne, d'un goût opposé au mien, où je ne retrouve rien de ma pensée consciente, où mon imagination s'excite en se sentant plongée au sein du "non-moi"'²⁹

From here Proust goes on to question Ruskin's emphasis on the reading experience as conversation – or rather audience – with great men – the 'kings' in 'Of Kings' Treasuries'. This is an inadequate account of what happens when we open a book. A note to the translation insists that:

'Quand on lit, on reçoit une autre pensée, et cependant on est seul, on est en plein travail de pensée, en pleine aspiration, en pleine activité personnelle: on reçoit les idées d'un autre, en esprit, c'est-à-dire en vérité, on peut donc s'unir à elles, on est cet autre et pourtant on ne fait que développer son moi avec plus de variété que si on pensait seul, on est poussé par autrui sur ses propres voies.'³⁰

Even a conversation with Plato, adds Proust, would still be just a conversation, that is to say, a much more superficial experience than reading.³¹ This leads on to Proust's most important point, that 'notre sagesse commence où celle de l'auteur finit, et nous voudrions qu'il nous donnât des réponses'.³² Books supply their authors with conclusions to trains of thought and experience. For the creative reader, however, they can only provide incitements to new ones. The movement of emancipation is thus completed. It is worth noting that the lectures of Sesame and Lilies were delivered to audiences largely composed of young women who were expected to submit to patriarchal wisdom.³³ Proust's insistence on the creative role of the reader shuns submissiveness in favour of active reclamation, and shifts the ground of knowledge from the public lecture to the private lecture.

In the silence of reading, other voices are heard. The role of quotation in writing is shown and exemplified in the preface. Schopenhauer, Hugo, Alphonse Daudet incorporate the works of anterior writers in their own productions. The single master invoked in the Bible d'Amiens preface is replaced by a whole classical tradition embodied in a tissue of quotation and commentary. Immersion in this tradition can lead the writer out of the sort of rut or block remarked on by Proust at the outset of his work on Ruskin.

The preface to Sésame et les lys thus constitutes, as Maurice Bardèche has pointed out,³⁴ a 'retour sur lui-même' at the end of Proust's Ruskin studies. If we leave aside the Ruskin pastiche, which I hope to examine in detail at a later stage, this episode of Proust's career is now ended. There remains only the independent enshrinement of the two prefaces in Proust's oeuvre.

These reappear in Pastiches et Mélanges with the new titles of 'Journées de pèlerinage' and 'Journées de lecture'.

The changes in title help map the change in emphasis in Proust's work over the period. We might characterise his next two projects as 'Journées de critique' and 'Journées d'écriture' respectively, thus pointing out a fourfold stage in his apprenticeship, where the last term includes all the others and is seen to have been implicitly dominant all along.

I follow normal practice in closing my account of Proust's 'Ruskin years' in resonant anticipation of the 'real work' to come. It is to be expected that commentators should emphasise the major achievement of the mature Proust and view the earlier work as preparation only, interesting for the light it may shed on the genesis of A la recherche du temps perdu. The phrase temps perdu itself connotes both wistfulness and impatience, and George Painter opts for the latter in his summing-up of Proust's Ruskinian apprenticeship.

'Of the two false quests which for the Narrator were necessary stages in his recovery of Time Lost, and which he calls Names of People and Names of Places, Proust's pursuit of high society corresponded to the first, and his circular journey in the steps of Ruskin to the second.'³⁵

A 'false quest', a circular journey. Thus Proust's involvement with Ruskin is closed off and circumscribed, leaving biographers and critics to concentrate on the fruition of the writer's career and the novel which both comprehends and vindicates it. The translations, articles and prefaces are seen as important mainly, if not only, insofar as they announce the themes

and procedures of A la recherche du temps perdu. The question of Ruskin's role in the novel's genesis can scarcely be said to have been neglected by Proustians. There are four full-length studies of Ruskin and Proust, and more than a score of articles, not to mention important chapters and sections devoted to the topic in biographies and major critical studies. Such perseverance cannot be accounted for solely by the self-perpetuating drive of a critical industry. Back in 1959, Philip Kolb was able to complain that:

'Les travaux concernant les rapports de Proust et Ruskin s'échelonnent déjà, on le sait, sur une trentaine d'années. Peut-être serait-on en droit de demander s'il vaut la peine de soulever une telle question.'³⁶

Embarrassed invocations of a lasting moratorium on the question are symptomatic of a growing impatience. Critics have tended to echo Proust's own weary exclamation that 'ce vieillard commence à m'ennuyer', but without having experienced the initial fascination. I would suggest that the very proliferation of these studies points to an unresolved difficulty among Proustian scholars in accounting for the Ruskinian apprenticeship. The nature of the translations and prefaces as biographical fact has entailed the application of a literary-historical darwinism which demands a fixed way of looking at the relations between the two writers, limiting the domain of its findings and leading to inevitable frustration. The emphasis on historical/biographical research, the unquestioning invocation of the dubious notion of 'influence' and the regrettable concentration on paraphrasable content to the neglect of form which we find in most studies of Ruskin and Proust represent aspects of criticism which have been largely revised, if not discredited, over the past

eighty years. In surveying the history of Proust/Ruskin criticism and indicating its limitations and errors with the help of recent and not-so-recent developments in critical theory, I would hope to avoid charges of arrogant anti-passéisme and suggest ways in which an assessment of the relations between Ruskin's and Proust's writing might be made at once more precise and more comprehensive.

CHAPTER TWO

Ecrivain and Ecrivain

CHAPTER TWO

'Nous ne sommes tous, nous les vivants, que des morts qui ne sont pas encore entrés en fonction.'¹

Proust's funeral orations on Ruskin express the filial sentiments of a parricide. The act of critical homage performs a double movement of closure in insisting on the pastness and the necessary intimacy of his reading as an act of productive transcendence preparatory to writing - 'Notre sagesse commence où celle de l'auteur finit.'²

The two great governing themes of the Proustian novel, the Self and Time, both imply a qualified rejection of Ruskin as being other, representative of a fixed past, recoverable only by the novel's final encompassing aesthetic, retrospective and personal. The very scale of inclusiveness aspired to by A la recherche du temps perdu can only be achieved by submission by the writer to necessary elision and effacement. Thus, although 'tous les matériaux de l'oeuvre littéraire, c'était ma vie passée, qui aurait pu se résumer sous ce titre: une vocation',³ the book is also 'un grand cimetière où sur la plupart des tombes on ne peut plus lire les noms effacés.'⁴ As the narrator is forced into a process of selection and hence exclusion in order to express the essential relationships between characters and events, so the novel, in subsuming other genres such as autobiography and art criticism, also dismisses them and their practitioners as somehow partial, incomplete, on the margins of literary discourse. This becomes evident when we see how critics insist on the dissimilarity between Proust and Ruskin, usually to the English writer's detriment. The self-

regarding cumulative integrity of the Frenchman's life and its fictional model is set against the centrifugal discontinuities of Ruskin's work with its abortive interventions in so many areas of discursive thought and its final dispersal in madness. Already in 1902, with Proust still in the throes of fascination, a perceptive French critic set the tone for Ruskin's fall from favour by enumerating the aspects of his work which have made him unreadable for most of this century.

'Qu'un lecteur ouvre n'importe lequel des quatre-vingts volumes écrits par Ruskin: au bout de la troisième page, il perdra de vue le fil des idées. Il pourra être charmé, ému. Il ne sera jamais convaincu. En vain s'efforcera-t-il de retrouver l'enchaînement des pensées, il ne pourra que dégager une impression dominante.'⁵ 'l'exposé impartial des idées de Ruskin est le meilleur moyen de les réfuter'⁶ 'Incapable de toute déduction forte, il n'avait ni la méthode, ni l'esprit scientifique'⁷ 'Dès que Ruskin parle d'un problème dont la solution rationnelle ne saurait être découverte qu'après de patients et méthodiques efforts, il inquiète ses lecteurs, et désole ses amis.'⁸

In his rhetoricity, his irrationality, his superfluity, Ruskin has continued to disconcert many readers in the twentieth century. Even the thirty-nine volumes of his works prepared by Cook and Wedderburn as monument to the corpus is insufficient to contain Ruskin in his excess of writing. The flood of words spills over into diaries and letters, where a given sentence stands as much or as little chance as any in the recognised oeuvre of being the last, answering, integrable word. A recent slogan becomes particularly applicable in this case: 'Il n'y a pas de hors-texte'.

Beside this excessiveness of Ruskin's writing we must also consider the public nature of his work. While the Proustian novel remains transcendently committed to the formal articulation of an individual life, the motive force behind much of Ruskin's writing is suasive, educative: aiming for a useful intervention for society's good. Goaded by an intellectual and artistic curiosity as boundless as it was desultory, his declamatory, repetitious, discursive production doubly compromises Proust's mature aesthetic. Thus, although Ruskin in his 1871 preface to Sesame and Lilies admits that phrases written for oral delivery become ineffective when quietly read,

'Yet I should only take away what is good in them if I tried to translate them into the language of books, nor, indeed, could I at all have done so at the time of their delivery, my thoughts then habitually and impatiently putting themselves into forms fit only for emphatic speech; and thus I am startled, in my review of them, to find that, though there is much, (forgive me the impertinence) which seems to me accurately and energetically said, there is scarcely anything put in a form to be generally convincing, or even easily intelligible: and I can well imagine a reader laying down the book without being at all moved by it, still less guided, to any definite course of action.'⁹

This need to move others to a definite course of action leads Ruskin to waver between emphatic speech and the language of books. The notion of influence takes on a more specialised, pragmatic significance in such a public context, far removed from 'cette amitié pure et calme qu'est la lecture'.¹⁰ We will recall that 'l'atmosphère de cette pure amitié est le silence, plus pur que la parole.'¹¹ The Proustian space of reading is an inner, sheltered place that has to protect itself against the invasion of an

outside world, but that nevertheless has to borrow from the world some of its properties. The cunning, self-undermining aphorism, 'Une oeuvre où il y a des théories est comme un objet sur lequel on laisse la marque du prix',¹² so often cited as proof of Proust's aesthetic wisdom, defends this space against the contaminative language of the market place. Like so much of A la recherche du temps perdu, it partakes of the nature and privileges of 'discursive' language, while at the same time invoking the unique privileges of the all-inclusive novelistic discourse.

This difference in uses of and attitudes to language, obviously crucial to our task of comparing Ruskin and Proust as writers, demands a fuller exploration, in which I believe distinctions between écrivain and écrivain, and transitive and intransitive prose might prove useful. For the moment, however, I would confine myself to the remark that it was this public aspect of Ruskin, his achievement and status as moralist and preacher, his indefatigable urge to be useful, which gave him an exaggerated renown and influence among his contemporaries and which ended in posterity's revulsion. In an attempt to revive interest in Ruskin in the 1960s, Kenneth Clark offered these reasons for the public reaction:

'We all hope to improve, and like writers who try and improve us - on our own terms. We even put up with a scolding if the teacher is saying the sort of thing we want to hear. But the moment his message doesn't suit us we turn from him with indignation and contempt.'¹³

As is the case with most preachers, the problematic relationship between medium and message is glossed over to make way for an insistence on the clear immediacy of truth. And, of course, once this truth is called into question, the rhetorical gestures which gayed our forebears are set up for

ridicule. The recognition of the falsities and contradictions implicit in many of Ruskin's judgements is compounded by a rejection of the hectoring tone in which these judgements are delivered. The prophetic excesses learned of Carlyle and the King James Bible and the suasive eloquence modelled on Hooker exacerbate the reader's sense of anachronism. The excessiveness to which I have alluded is admitted in a letter from the fourteen-year-old Ruskin to his father:

'I would write a short, pithy, economic, sensible, concentrated and serious letter, if I could, for I have scarcely time to write a long one. Observe, I only say to write for as to the composition 'tis nothing, positively nothing. I roll on like a ball, with the exception, that I have no friction to contend with in my mind and in consequence have some difficulty in stopping myself when there is nothing else to stop me.'¹⁴

Jay Fellows has observed¹⁵ that Ruskin's books are not enclosed – they are like his rooms, which always have views. They transgress the boundaries of genres and fields of interest, constantly invoke the presence and knowability of the outside world and repeatedly call for the reader's collaboration/corroboratorion.

'I had the better pleasure now of feeling that my really watchful delineation, while still rapid enough to interest any stray student of drawing who might stop by me on his way to the Academy, had a quite unusual power of directing the attention of the general crowd to points of beauty, or subjects of sculpture, in the buildings I was at work on, to which they had never before lifted eyes, and which I had the double pride of first discovering for them and then imitating, not to their dissatisfaction.'¹⁶

This is quite some way from the kind of intimacy which Proust sees as prerequisite to the sharing of one's vision:

'L'écrivain ne dit que par une habitude prise dans le langage insincère des préfaces et dédicaces: "mon lecteur". En réalité, chaque lecteur est, quand il lit, le propre lecteur de soi-même. L'ouvrage de l'écrivain n'est qu'une espèce d'instrument optique qu'il offre au lecteur afin de lui permettre de discerner ce que, sans ce livre, il n'eût peut-être pas vue en soi-même.'¹⁷

The movement between identification and dissociation which we noticed earlier is again evident in this passage, where the experiences of reader and writer are conflated and yet held apart by the inscrutable autonomies of work and self. Thus the collaborative intimacy demanded by Proust is at once greater and lesser, and altogether subtler in its ramifications, than any which Ruskin might have asked for.

All this derives from what I suppose is a rather blatant distinction: Proust wrote fiction and Ruskin did not. But I hope to show that this obvious distinction must be our starting point if we hope properly to analyse the relation between the two writers. Ruskin's distaste for the novels of his contemporaries is matched and surpassed by the distaste and neglect shown him by later generations for whom the novel had become the dominant mode of literary creation. This dominance was unprecedented in that it derived not only from the fact that the most gifted and innovative writers of the era chose it as their medium and used it to express (or more often create) the spirit of the time, but also from the new awareness that it could perform and transform the functions of most other literary

genres. In their polyphony, unified by the gesture of self-begetting, the two great texts of modernism, A la recherche du temps perdu and Ulysses, stand as monuments to this enormous leap in ambition. Although Ruskin made a considerable contribution to the evolution of descriptive prose in English, and hence to an important aspect of the novel, this very success kept him on the margin as the novel became our favoured means of describing or recreating the world. Descriptions are only useful or important to us if they can relay some sense of intelligible sequence or cause. Even the absence of such sequence, as for example in Keats' Ode on a Grecian Urn, is important only and precisely in that it presents a direct contrast to the way in which we normally experience and interpret the world as it is.¹⁸ For the early Ruskin a transcendent cause was to be found in the Divine as it is manifested in nature, but when his deconversion robbed him of this sense of intelligible purpose, his attempt at establishing an explanatory system, largely unsatisfactory in any case, broke down altogether. Already in the second volume of Modern Painters there is a troubling lack of clarity in distinguishing between viewer and artist, between man in general and the artist, and between the artist's mind and the finished work, as Ruskin strives to articulate and illustrate his concept of the imagination. These blurrings are reproduced but resolved in A la recherche du temps perdu where viewer, artist, man, mind and work are all presented as aspects of the plot 'Marcel devient écrivain'. This self-containing narrative movement, prompted and justified by the fundamental mystery of 'la mémoire involontaire', has led Gérard Genette to the contestation that '[Proust] n'a jamais écrit autre chose que A la recherche du temps perdu, [et qu'] il a consacré, et peu à peu identifié toute sa vie à une seule oeuvre'.¹⁹ Thanks to this act of identification, and to the structuring principle which made it possible, Proust was no longer

compelled to finish one work and face the anguish and désœuvrement implicit in the task of beginning anew. Rather, the act of writing became for Proust the most natural and necessary of activities, co-terminous with the life it was relating.

'Il a vécu en l'écrivant, sans avoir presque à y entrer ni à en sortir. Elle lui a été sans cesse ouverte, et il a pu maintenir sans discontinuité l'osmose entre sa vie et son oeuvre L'acte d'écrire une oeuvre de fiction devient aussi naturel que celui d'une correspondance ou d'un journal de bord.' ²⁰

Proust's spiritual log-book enjoys all the privileges which Maurice Blanchot sees as being special to the journal:

'Ecrire chaque jour, sous la garantie de ce jour et pour le rappeler à lui-même, est une manière commode d'échapper au silence, comme à ce qu'il y a d'extrême dans la parole. Chaque jour nous dit quelque chose. Chaque jour noté est un jour préservé. Double opération avantageuse. Ainsi l'on vit deux fois. Ainsi l'on se garde de l'oubli et du désespoir de n'avoir rien à dire.' ²¹

A la recherche du temps perdu doubled in size between 1913 and the author's death in 1922, but by a process of internal accretion within the framing structure rather than by addition. It is this phenomenon which leads Genette to characterise the novel as inexhaustible. That this fertile and dynamic act of communication is conditional on the preservation of integrity, solitude and silence is made clear at the beginning and end of A la recherche du temps perdu:

'Cette obscure fraîcheur de ma chambre était au plein soleil de la rue ce que l'ombre est au rayon, c'est-à-dire aussi lumineuse que lui et offrait à mon imagination le spectacle total de l'été dont mes sens, si j'avais été en promenade, n'auraient pu jouir que par morceaux; et ainsi elle s'accordait bien à mon repos qui (grâce aux aventures racontées par mes livres et qui venaient l'émouvoir) supportait, pareil au repos d'une main immobile au milieu d'une eau courante, le choc et l'animation d'un torrent d'activité.' ²²

The implicit metaphor behind this central paradox of retreat or descent into 'luminous shadow' in order to discover a plenitude of light and activity is that of the photographic negative, although it is difficult not to notice intimations of purgatory, reminiscent of Milton's 'darkness visible' ²³ and the Book of Job's 'where the light is as darkness', ²⁴ and consistent with the novel's repeated associations of the closed room with guilt and unknowable vice. The figure of the hand in running water presents the idea of a still consciousness registering the flow of experience while remaining immune to its buffetings, an idea which is resuscitated after the final revelations of Le temps retrouvé. Solitude is now no longer a physical state but an intellectual function.

'Que ce fût justement et uniquement ce genre de sensations qui dût conduire à l'oeuvre d'art, j'allais essayer d'en trouver la raison objective, en continuant les pensées que je n'avais cessé d'enchaîner dans la bibliothèque, car je sentais que le déclenchement de la vie spirituelle était assez fort en moi maintenant pour pouvoir continuer aussi bien dans le salon, au milieu des invités, que seul dans la bibliothèque; il me semblait qu'à ce point de vue, même au milieu de cette assistance si nombreuse, je saurais réserver ma solitude.' ²⁵

The passage pays homage to the impetus of single-mindedness. But unity of purpose is nothing without unity of form. Proust showed an awareness of this when he wished both on Ruskin in a footnote to Sésame et les lys:

'C'est le charme précisément de l'oeuvre de Ruskin qu'il y ait entre les idées d'un même livre, et entre les divers livres des liens qu'il ne montre pas, qu'il laisse à peine apparaître un instant et qu'il a d'ailleurs peut-être tissés après-coup, mais jamais artificiels cependant puisqu'ils sont toujours tirés de la substance toujours identique à elle-même de sa pensée. Les préoccupations multiples mais constantes de cette pensée, voilà ce qui assure à ces livres une unité plus réelle que l'unité de composition, généralement absente, il faut bien le dire.' ²⁶

The constancy in diversity to which Proust alludes here is difficult to discover or define. If there is a single impulse in Ruskin's writing, it is surely that of unrelenting opposition to any view of art that ignores its total context. Such a refusal to admit any limits to relevance produces a writing which is doomed never to be satisfied in its purchase on the world and the reader. In a letter to F. J. Furnivall in 1854 Ruskin wrote, 'Unless people are ready to receive all that I say about art as unquestionable I don't consider myself to have any reputation at all worth caring about'. ²⁷

The urgency of his didacticism also militates against the possibility of his work being completed, by conferring the power of veto on an often recalcitrant readership: his wish was to force people to examine their ideas and then commit themselves, but this brought to the fore the un-governable décalage between his thoughts and observations and the necessity of expounding them to his pupils. This resulted in the characteristic imbalances and inconsistencies of Modern Painters, where a

thin veneer of system is laid over a disorderly mass of perceptions. The tension between didact and autodidact was also partly responsible for the extreme forays into parenthesis (Ruskin asserted that all Modern Painters together would be the explanation of a parenthesis in The Stones of Venice)²⁸ and what Harold Bloom calls the apocalyptic desires of his later works.²⁹

To say with Proust that Ruskin's works were lacking in compositional unity is not, of course, to assert that he had no sense of it. Such a sense is obvious in his consciousness of his own limitations:

'There was the violent instinct for architecture, but I never could have built or carved anything, because I was without power of design'³⁰

and:

'I can no more write a story than compose a picture'.³¹

Indeed, the modesty of his repeated disclaimers to any capacity for creative design might attest to his astonishing prescience regarding the then largely unacknowledged difficulties of composition and representation, difficulties which became the major theme of art in the Modern era.

At this point we might usefully invoke Roland Barthes' distinction between écrivains and écrivants.³² Using as his starting point the grammatical opposition between transitive and intransitive operations of the verb, Barthes defines the écrivain as the writer who takes language itself for his object: 'l'écrivain est celui qui travaille sa parole (fût-il inspiré) et s'absorbe fonctionnellement son travail pour l'écrivain, écrire est un

verbe intransitif'.³³ In contrast, the écrivain uses language transitively: 'Les écrivains posent une fin (témoigner, expliquer, enseigner) dont la parole n'est qu'un moyen; pour eux la parole supporte un faire, elle ne la constitue pas. Voilà donc le langage ramené à la nature d'un instrument de communication, d'un véhicule de la "pensée" ce qui définit l'écrivain, c'est que son projet de communication est naïf: il n'admet pas que son message se retourne et se ferme sur lui-même'.³⁴

In defining himself as écrivain, Ruskin shuts himself off from the possibility of realising this desire to articulate the world in its multiplicity and totality. As Barthes puts it:

'L'écrivain est un homme qui absorbe radicalement le pourquoi du monde dans un comment écrire. Et le miracle, si l'on peut dire, c'est que cette activité narcissique ne cesse de provoquer, au long d'une littérature séculaire, une interrogation au monde: en s'enfermant dans le comment écrire, l'écrivain finit par retrouver la question ouverte par excellence: pourquoi le monde? Quel est le sens des choses? En somme, c'est au moment même où le travail de l'écrivain devient sa propre fin, qu'il retrouve un caractère médiateur: l'écrivain conçoit la littérature comme fin, le monde la lui renvoie comme moyen: et c'est dans cette déception infinie, que l'écrivain retrouve le monde, un monde étrange d'ailleurs, puisque la littérature le représente comme une question, jamais, en définitive, comme une réponse'.³⁵

Often hailed or derided for his materialism and scientism, Barthes is here compelled to speak of miracles. His enthusiasm for the higher potential of the fictive brings him close to the aesthetic idealism of Wallace Stevens:

'Poetry is the subject of the poem,
From this the poem issues and

To this returns. Between the two,
Between issue and return, there is

An absence in reality,
Things as they are. Or so we say.

But are these separate? Is it
An absence for the poem, which acquires

Its true appearances there, sun's green,
Cloud's red, earth feeling, sky that thinks?

From these it takes. Perhaps it gives,
In the universal intercourse.' ³⁶

With Proust, then, it is the very deferment of engagement with the world, achieved by enclosing the world in a fictive 'absence', which guarantees the articulation of things as they are. In the project of representation this fictiveness is conjoined with another paradoxical operation: that of narrative. More than any other novel, A la recherche du temps perdu presents narrative as the constant movement towards the place of knowledge from which narrative can occur – hence the constant dislocations in order, duration and frequency of event between récit and histoire, brilliantly charted by Gérard Genette.³⁷ The retrospective synthesis of the novel depends on the distinction between the hero, the narrator and the author – a distinction which is as much temporal as modal.

A diary entry by Ruskin in 1849 has him considering writing an essay on the uses of ignorance, 'being much struck by the diminution which my knowledge of the Alps had made in my sublime impression of them'.

Proust shows himself to be well-versed in the uses of ignorance. In a letter to Jacques Rivière he concedes that, 'je suis forcé de peindre les erreurs, sans croire devoir dire que je les tiens pour des erreurs'.³⁹ Such mistakes are not only 'Marcel's'. They are, in a sense, also the reader's. For the characteristic effect of the Proustian sentence is to approximate the experience of the reader to the movement of its own structure.⁴⁰ We are told in the preface to Sésame et les lys that while we may wish for authors to provide us with answers, all that they can do is give us desires.⁴¹ These desires are realised and enacted by the dramatisation of learning in A la recherche du temps perdu, where recognition and miscognition interweave, propelling the text towards the grasping of the truth. Discontinuities of perception can be glossed over by highlighting the egocentric character of Proust's world, as the continuity of the Proustian personality and vision holds together the diversities and intermittencies of Marcel's and the readers' experience.

However, if we withdraw the presence of the author in his role as guarantor of the text's unity; that is to say, if we refuse to let Proust have it both ways, as écrivain and écrivain - (here let us recall the ambivalence of the voice which militates against works of art which contain theories and which yet claims to set the conditions under which its own text ought to be read) - then discontinuity reasserts itself as a phenomenological necessity, and the metaphor of another English writer swims into pertinence:

'An eminent philosopher among my friends,
 who can dignify even your ugly furniture by
 lifting it into the serene light of science, has
 shown me this pregnant little fact. Your pier-
 glass or extensive surface of polished steel
 made to be rubbed by a housemaid will be minutely
 and multitudinously scratched in all directions;

but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun. It is demonstrable that the scratches are going everywhere impartially, and it is only your candle which produces the flattering illusion of a concentric arrangement, its light falling with an exclusive optical selection. These things are a parable. The scratches are events, and the candle is the egoism of any person now absent⁴²

We would do well, then, to bear in mind that the classifications of écrivain/écrivant, in so far as they concern ignorance, may be focussed in two ways - through the author's intentions and/or chosen practices, or through the reader and the operation of the reader's expectations on the text. This option is especially available to us with Proust, where the reader shares the author's privilege of combining ignorance and judgement. Since most careful readings of the text are in fact re-readings, we have, in the memories and lapses and dislocations of memory of our first reading, a relation to our more innocent selves which is similar to that between narrator and hero in the novel.

The choice whether to use author or reader as focus for classification is the choice whether to focus on author or text. The nominal nature of the terms écrivain and écrivant should not mislead here. They need not, and properly should not, refer to persons, rather to practices of writing. Indeed, it is only when one takes the historical author as focus for this classification that the classification becomes personal. Then the écrivain or écrivant remains rooted in a self-imposed role which s/he may have chosen but which may no longer be relevant. Within the limited value-judgement which the distinction connotes (écrivain is surely more

interesting than écrivain), it becomes possible to interpose metaphors of creativity and magic which the author as historical personage might sanction but which are also based on time-bound conventions of what is literary or non-literary, what is prosaic, what is poetic, and so on. Ecrivain/écrivain does not correspond to poetic-prosaic. To read the distinction thus is often to subsume one's own aesthetic judgement under that of the author – a perfectly proper and advisably modest strategy, of course, but one which is inimical to the very notion of the écrivain as one '[qui] perd tout droit de reprise sur la vérité, car le langage est précisément cette structure dont la fin même (du moins historiquement, depuis le Sophisme), dès lors qu'il n'est plus rigoureusement transitif, est de neutraliser le vrai et le faux'.⁴³ The characteristic property of écriture as practised by the écrivain is its intransitivity, not its poeticity or suggestiveness. These last are in fact écrivain ways of describing the deferred, refracted purchase on truth enjoyed by the work of the écrivain. If, then, we focus on the text, provisionally removing the presence of the author as centre of illumination, the classification becomes the responsibility of the reader. And a reader-oriented criticism, with its close commitment to the linguistic texture of writing, will recognise that few texts will be wholly écrivain or wholly écrivain. Barthes comes to admit as much at the end of his essay:

'Je décris là une contradiction qui, en fait, est rarement pure: chacun aujourd'hui se meut plus ou moins ouvertement entre les deux postulations, celle de l'écrivain et celle de l'écrivain: l'histoire sans doute le veut ainsi, qui nous a fait naître trop tard pour être des écrivains superbes (de bonne conscience) et trop tôt (?) pour être des écrivains écoutés. Aujourd'hui, chaque participant de l'intelligentsia tient en lui les deux rôles, dont il "rentre" plus

ou moins bien l'un ou l'autre: des écrivains ont brusquement des comportements, des impatiences des écrivants; des écrivants se haussent parfois jusqu'au théâtre du langage. Nous voulons écrire quelque chose et en même temps nous écrivons tout court. Bref, notre époque accoucherait d'un type bâtard: l'écrivain-écrivant'.⁴⁴

As often happens with middle-period Barthes, an important insight is here deflected by his polemic, programmatic zeal into a vague argument for the evolution of a genre, when it is really a question of a revolution in our climate of reading. The recognition that écrivain/écrivant is a question of how authors are read and not one of rigid genre classification is crucial to any projected comparison of Ruskin and Proust and entails what Geoffrey Hartman calls 'a re-thinking which is itself creative, of what others hold to be creative, a scrutiny of the presence of the fictive, and of the fiction of presence, in every aspect of learning and life'.⁴⁵

An awareness of the pressures, both textual and institutional, brought to bear on our reading of Ruskin and Proust might help us better understand not only similarities and differences, but the shifting conditions of such similarities and differences. Both writers need, in a sense, to be emancipated from genre expectations. Firstly, the narrow classification of Ruskin as a discursive writer leaves him in a double bind. While discursive writing was characterised as drab, any deviation from such drabness was viewed as 'fine writing', connoting at once inferiority and redundancy. At once too functional and too dilettante, Ruskin's writing became an embarrassment.

The way in which Proust suffers from genre expectation is less clear, but the problem lies in the fact that A la recherche du temps perdu is a novel which tells us how it should be read. Although this lesson is an exemplary one, it imposes stringent limitations and is jealous of encroachments. Jean-Yves Tadié gratefully accepts these limitations in his Proust et le Roman:

'Nous n'avons donc pas voulu imposer à l'oeuvre de Proust des catégories extérieures à elle, une idée générale du roman, ou de la manière dont on doit étudier un roman; non pas un traité de roman, dont les illustrations seraient empruntées à la Recherche des concepts nés de l'oeuvre et qui permettent de lire Proust comme celui-ci a lu Balzac et Flaubert. Il n'y a de théorie de la littérature que dans la critique du singulier.'⁴⁶

Tadié here seems to take up Proust's tacit invitation to confuse the author's theories with those of the narrator, but even if we take the 'concepts nés de l'oeuvre' to refer not only to the various direct meditations on art and aesthetics but also to the implicit aesthetic borne out in the texture and achievement of the novel, such a reading would still enforce an unwarranted immanence on the text. If our experience of A la recherche du temps perdu is to be limited by Proust's conception of its extent, then the novel and all its readings stopped in November 1922. It is, moreover, impossible for us to read Proust as he read Balzac and Flaubert. For one thing, we have the towering example of A la recherche du temps perdu to remind us that fiction had potential unguessed at by Balzac and Flaubert - or, one might say, even by Proust, before he had written it. T.S. Eliot sketched the obverse of this point in 'Tradition and the Individual Talent':

'Someone said, "The dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did." Precisely, and they are that which we know.'⁴⁷

As will, I hope, be seen, this point is worth bearing in mind when it comes to reassessing Ruskin's importance vis-à-vis Proust and the twentieth century. For the moment, however, I would insist on the limitations involved in our taking Proust's aesthetic pronouncements as doxa - that is to say, granting to certain passages in the novel the authority of the écrivain mode, playing down its fictiveness so that the text may be more easily salvaged as a totality. Such passages need not be prosaic or drab; indeed, it is those moments of privileged insight into the subtle laws of beauty, those most 'evocative' passages which are likeliest to evoke this sort of response. Mme. de Cambremer's experience of a Chopin prelude at the soirée of Mme. de Ste. Euvette is a particularly striking example, since it offers us a perception of art which is not only that of a third person, but that of a fairly nondescript character. By this very distancing, one might say, the general applicability of the prelude's underlying law is insisted upon:

'Elle avait appris dans sa jeunesse à caresser les phrases, au long col sinueux et démesuré, de Chopin, si libres, si flexibles, si tactiles, qui commencent par chercher et essayer leur place en dehors et bien loin de la direction de leur départ, bien loin du point où on avait pu espérer qu'atteindrait leur attouchement, et qui ne se jouent dans cet écart de fantaisie que pour revenir plus délibérément- d'un retour plus préméditée, avec plus de précision, comme sur un cristal qui résonnerait jusqu'à faire crier - vous frapper au coeur.'⁴⁸

This is the archetypal Proustian sentence, its meaning and the enactment of its meaning perfectly harmonised, glorying in its artifice - note the teasing mimicry of 'revenir plus délibérément, d'un retour plus préméditée'. The beckoning moral is that here we have a mise-en-abîme of the novel's structure as a whole. The free and sinuous incursions of the Proustian plot and sentence into the most extreme foreign territory are eventually and deliberately, yet surprisingly, brought back to their point of departure with a new plangency of recognition. The author's power is that of the narrator's father who leads the family on moonlight walks about Combray:

Tout d'un coup mon père nous arrêta et demandait à ma mère: "Où sommes-nous?". Épuisée par la marche mais fière de lui, elle lui avouait tendrement qu'elle n'en savait absolument rien. Il haussait les épaules et riait. Alors, comme s'il l'avait sortie de la poche de son veston avec sa clef, il nous montra debout devant nous la petite porte de derrière de notre jardin qui était venue avec le coin de la rue du Saint-Esprit nous attendre au bout de ces chemins inconnus. Ma mère lui disait avec admiration: "Tu es extraordinaire!". Et à partir de cet instant, je n'avais plus un seul pas à faire, le sol marchait pour moi dans ce jardin où depuis si longtemps mes actes avaient cessé d'être accompagnés d'attention volontaire: l'Habitude venait de me prendre dans ses bras et me portait jusqu'à mon lit comme un petit enfant.⁴⁹

The Proustian trajectory of a slow and anfractuous return to the point of departure, where 'the end of all our exploring/ Will be to arrive where we started/ And know the place for the first time',⁵⁰ inspires in the reader a sense of wonder similar to that expressed by the narrator's mother, but

this wonder entails a passivity and dependence which has as its parallel the young hero's impotent submission to Habit. To insist thus on the novel's circularity is to some extent to reduce its 3,000 pages to a single insight teasingly withheld by the author as magician and as knowing father. The above passage at once suggests and warns against the illusion of conflated time and space which acts as a spur to the retrieval of temps perdu, or rather, it warns against those readings which see this illusion as the key to the whole novel. Gate, garden and street here appear with father's key, just as all of Combray and its surroundings sprang into being, town and gardens alike, from the narrator's cup of tea. But to describe the conditions of their reappearance does not, of course, absolve the narrator from the necessity to recreate them in their temporal and spatial extensiveness. Equally, the provision of a structure for the novel which affords immediate and momentary comprehension does not or should not detract from the irreducibility of the text. The attractions of such a structure for those who would see a novel clearly and as a whole are obvious, but it is nevertheless true that, in Percy Lubbock's phrase, 'the book vanishes as soon as we lay our hands on it'.⁵¹ In other words, our apprehension of a work's meaning or structure dissolves on exposure to the written page in its materiality and particularity, its difference. In our desire to recover meaning, we discover various short-cuts. Indeed, both macro- and micro-textual ways of reading may be enlisted to cut out what is, for the moment and purpose of interpretation, irrelevant. Appeals to the novel's architecture blind us to the distractions of its textual dimension, would have us see the work spatially and appreciate its symmetry and resolution. But close textual analysis can also be invoked to discover self-illustrative metaphors of the novel's structure, as when Jean Ricardou sees a metaphoric leap uniting the Swann and Guermantes ways, thus eliminating the parcours métonymique which constitutes the

long way round.⁵² The tension between long and painful apprenticeship and instantaneous revelation is maintained throughout A la recherche du temps perdu. The frequently disappointed desire for illumination shows us that to wait for it passively is to succumb to the banalities of habitual vision, but the role of accident in the actual moments of insight shows us that habit or blindness are its very conditions. We can only write our way out of it. We may exclaim with T.S. Eliot, 'ridiculous the waste sad time stretching before and after',⁵³ but should be wary of confusing life with text. The novel fully maps those 'terres reconquises sur l'oubli', of which the instances of involuntary memory only provide landmarks, and it is a mistake to pay too great attention to the huge mirroring points of Proust's narrative in order to see the work as one and at once. Although it has become proper to view narrative as the expansion of a single form or of a basic verbal articulation,⁵⁴ the act of expansion, of articulation, should be recognised in its full significance; otherwise our reading succumbs to the condition of habit. Proust was not alone among his contemporaries in pointing out the antagonisms of art and habit. In his 'Art as Technique',⁵⁵ Victor Shklovsky indicated how in the novel habituation produces a reductive algebra of language whereby words in prose are not heard or noticed in their entirety. In a very Proustian formula he insists that 'Habitualization devours work, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war'.⁵⁶ The tendency to foreground incident and commentary crucial to the novel's comprehension is initiated by the author and welcomed by most critics, even though it relegates the background to the unread, the taken-for-granted, the realm of habit. As Sur la lecture makes clear, critical studies are often anthologies, and a Proustian chrestomathy suggests itself on reading the corpus of commentary devoted to A la recherche du temps perdu. As I have tried to show, Proust, perhaps malgré lui, encourages this reductiveness by the diagrammatically reflexive

structures of the novel, and there is no doubt that he would impose a similar grid of reference on the even more inchoate work of Ruskin. In a letter to Georges Goyau written in March 1904, he expresses the regret that the clutter of Ruskin's writing cannot be reduced and purified, its ornaments mounted, as it were, in an ethereal musée de l'imaginaire. Proust reveals that he originally intended to publish from his translation of The Bible of Amiens only selected passages which would give of Ruskin 'la plus haute idée, la plus digne de sa renommée et la plus ressemblante à son génie', but that Ollendorff, a now departed editor, had insisted on a translation of the whole work.

'J'ai achevé le travail auquel j'avais pris goût dans l'intervalle et je n'ai pas eu le courage de sacrifier ensuite une seule de ces belles nebuleuses que j'avais essayé d'amener à une lumière relative. Et pourtant j'aurais été récompensé du sacrifice. Chaque partie ennuyeuse, chaque page obscure supprimée se serait changée aussitôt en un air respirable et pur qui aurait circulé entre les pages choisies et les parties magnifiques, les mettant à leur place et dans leur atmosphère - en piédestaux pour exhausser les pages nobles et hautes - en miroirs magiques qui des parties conservées auraient à l'infini répété et multiplié les beautés.'⁵⁷

Again we see that it is the public aspect of Ruskin's writing which taints the occasional purity of his prose. Neither proper truth nor proper fiction, or, as we would say, neither écrivain or écrivain, his work occupies a no-man's-land of superficial archaeology, whimsical history and fantastic etymology. In the same letter Proust promises the possibility of a purer and more attractive introduction to Ruskin: 'une simple conférence sur

la Lecture (Sésame - of Kings' Treasuries) celle-là sans longueurs, sans défaillances, sans obscurités, sans fatras d'archéologie superficielle et d'histoire fantaisiste',⁵⁸ but in the event this project also succumbed to the Ruskinian - and Proustian - logic of accretion, and a second lecture, 'Of Queens' Gardens', was added. With Ruskin, the model of the Chopin prelude does not pertain, the harmonies are never fully resolved, the écarts de fantaisie can either come to nothing or form the basis for another work altogether. Ruskin's writings have no self-governing aesthetic, no unambiguous statement of how they are to be read and received in their fullness. The modes of écrivain and écrivain apply intermittently, as with Proust, but nowhere in Ruskin does the écrivain mode apply to the structure of Ruskin's work itself, unless apologetically.

The tension in Ruskin between the technical and the poetic, the literal and the fabulous - or rather the refusal to recognise a sustained distinction between such terms - caused as much perplexity among his contemporaries as it did in Proust's time or does today. In W.H. Mallock's satire The New Republic (1877) Ruskin is represented in the figure of Mr. Herbert, of whom a subsidiary character makes the following observation.

'What a dreadful blowing up Mr. Herbert gave us last night, didn't he? Now that, you know, I think is all very well in a sermon, but in a lecture, where the things are to be taken more or less literally, I think it's a little out of place.'⁵⁹

The contrast between the lecture, where 'things are to be taken more or less literally', and the sermon is a telling one. The question of how we are to 'take' sermons, how to interpret the literature of revelation, has its

importance for the literary critic as well as for the theologian, and given the decline in faith since Ruskin's time and the attendant collapse in the civilised world of literalist interpretations of scripture, this distinction is particularly poignant with regard to Ruskin, who, it will be remembered, based much of his aesthetic of art, truth and nature on the subtle system of typology elaborated by the Evangelicals. This drew coherence and revelation from world and book where there had appeared only obscurity and confusion. Such interpretative ingenuity was emulated by Ruskin in his reading of nature, which drew at all times on his comprehensive knowledge of the Bible, which he learned by rote from early childhood until he went up to Oxford. Robert Hewison has accurately stressed the importance of the Bible in Ruskin's work:

'..... his prose echoes and re-echoes with the texts he learnt as a child and continued to study as a man. His constant Biblical references have sometimes been described as a kind of nervous tic, but the early emphasis on Scripture gave him a great deal more than a clerical style of address: it was a link to an unfailing source of wisdom and truth. His references were not a decoration designed for audiences more familiar with the Bible than ourselves, they were an appeal to a fundamental authority; and when Ruskin refers to it, it is always worth checking at its source.'⁶⁰

This recognition crucially qualifies Proust's assertion that 'les ouvrages d'un grand écrivain sont le seul dictionnaire où l'on puisse contrôler avec certitude le sens des expressions qu'il emploie',⁶¹ by bringing broader issues of intertextuality, authority and cultural context to bear on the vexed question of influence.⁶² By his own admission 'educated in the doctrines of a narrow sect'⁶³, Ruskin relies on the words of the Bible to

supply resonance and authority to his earlier work, and it has been argued that the dissipation of his later writings is partly due to the frenzy of his attempt to compensate for the withdrawal of scriptural authority. Even in such a late work as the Bible of Amiens Ruskin recognises the centrality of the Bible in Western culture as its strongest and most pervasive influence: its effect traceable even in decadent ages and unfenced fields, where it has produced for us 'Paradise Lost no less than the Divina Commedia, Goethe's Faust and Byron's Cain no less than the Imitatio Christi'.⁶⁴ The greatest interpretations of Scriptural truth, however, are embodied in the works of painters and sculptors: Ruskin goes so far as to assert that their study is a necessary part of Biblical scholarship, and mocks the would-be independent Protestant student of Scripture who is 'usually at the mercy of the nearest preacher who has a pleasant voice and ingenious fancy; receiving from him thankfully, and often reverently, whatever interpretation of texts the agreeable voice of ready wit may recommend',⁶⁵ while ignoring the teaching 'free from all earthly taint of momentary passion'⁶⁶ of such men as Orcagna, Giotto and Fra Angelico. This elevation of interpretation-as-art and art-as-interpretation over the mere voice and wit of the preacher is typical of Ruskin's veneration for the creative mind. It sets up a hierarchy of Revelation in nature, interpretation in art, and commentary in criticism in which the writer who insists that he is 'without power of design'⁶⁷ commits himself diffidently to the third grouping, his humility itself an index to the scale of his ambition.

'Whatever I say is to be understood as a conditional instrument - liable to and inviting correction.'⁶⁸

This humility is the obverse of the will to infallibility in all matters of art and nature expressed in the letter to Furnival in 1854.⁶⁹ Indeed, both attitudes are the antipodes of a lifelong obsession with the possibilities of revelation, an obsession which is rooted in Ruskin's early, total immersion in the words of the Bible; chapter, verse and logos: the 'maternal installation of my mind in that property of chapters',⁷⁰ which is evoked in such detail in the opening sections of Praeterita. In his own words Ruskin admits to having been 'forced' by his mother to learn most of the Bible by heart and to read it aloud from Genesis to Apocalypse every year. His relation with the Bible is one of near-complete textual intimacy and unquestioning regard for the book's authority. Such a relation conditions his conception of the didactic capacities of all art and all literature: it demands that all reading and writing aspire to the condition of Scripture.

The worst children of disobedience are those who accept of the Word what they like and refuse what they hate.'⁷¹

The position of the Bible as Ur-Text, as major guarantor of authority in Ruskin's world lends support to the totalising impetus which we have remarked on earlier. (Characteristically, the nine-year-old Ruskin drafted a poem called 'On the Universe'.⁷²) If this textual and epistemological dependence on the Bible has contributed to the difficulties of reading Ruskin today it should also illustrate how our ways of reading and writing can be conditioned by certain texts which are particularly representative of the age or of the individual consciousness. For Ruskin, the Bible was such a text. For us, or at least for the Proustians whose work I will be discussing in the next chapter, A la recherche du temps perdu has achieved this status of a work which is trans-historical in its governance of our

perceptions of literature and its possibilities. A remark by Harold Bloom that 'it is difficult to conceive of Revelation as Proust would have written it, yet that is what the prophetic Ruskin gives us',⁷³ suggests the interposition of these two texts between us and Ruskin's writings. I would suggest that in discussing the possible influence of Ruskin on Proust we remain aware of what particular and pervasive influences are operative upon our readings. An influential writer, theorist and Proustian recently mapped the place of Proust in our reading habits:

'Lisant un texte rapporté par Stendhal (mais qui n'est pas de lui), j'y retrouve Proust par un détail minuscule. L'évêque de Lescars désigne la nièce de son grand vicaire par une série d'apostrophes précieuses (ma petite nièce, ma petite amie, ma jolie brune, ah petite friande!) qui ressuscitent en moi les adresses des deux courrières du Grand Hôtel de Balbec, Marie Geneste et Céleste Albaret, au narrateur (Oh! petit diable aux cheveux de geai, ô profonde malice! Ah jeunesse! Ah jolie peau!). Ailleurs, mais de la même façon, dans Flaubert, ce sont les pommiers normands en fleurs que je lis à partir de Proust. Je savoure le règne des formules, le renversement des origines, la désinvolture qui fait venir le texte antérieur du texte ultérieur. Je comprends que l'oeuvre de référence, la mathésis générale, le mandala de toute la cosmogonie littéraire – comme l'étaient les Lettres de Mme. de Sévigné pour la grand-mère du narrateur, les romans de chevalerie pour Don Quichotte, etc.; cela ne veut pas du tout dire que je sois un "spécialiste" de Proust: Proust, c'est ce qui me vient, ce n'est pas ce que j'appelle, ce n'est pas une "autorité"; simplement un souvenir circulaire. Et c'est bien cela l'inter-texte: l'impossibilité de vivre hors du texte infini – que ce texte soit Proust, ou le journal quotidien, ou l'écran télévisuel: le livre fait le sens, le sens fait la vie.'⁷⁴

CHAPTER THREE

Ruskin and the Proustians

CHAPTER THREE

""Whom do you think has been your best reader?"

A Russian friend met a lady, a very old lady, who was copying the whole book out by hand, right to the last line. My friend asked her why she was doing it and the lady replied, "Because I want to find out who is really mad, the author or me, and the only way to find out is to re-write the book". I find it hard to imagine a better reader than that lady.'

(Plinio Apuleyo Mendoza in conversation with Gabriel García Márquez in The Fragrance of Guava, London, Verso, 1983)

Of all the comparative studies of Ruskin and Proust which have been published since 1922 very few can be said to be comparative in the proper sense. The great majority, in fact, address themselves to the question of Ruskin's influence on A la recherche du temps perdu, or more exactly, how Proust's work on the English writer contributed to the genesis of his novel. The project suggests archaeological analogies: we are invited to 'trace' the influence of one writer on another, and indeed all that remains to our critical attention are traces of Ruskin's writing embedded in the more recent, the more relevant fabric of Proust's novel. Torn out of context, and often subject to reductive and anachronistic hypotheses, Ruskin's works are accorded the fragmentary and enigmatic status of ruins, fossils and palimpsests. Though this is perhaps the general fate of literature and the inevitable consequence of our ways of reading, Ruskin's burial is unusually precipitate. If any Ruskin is left to us, it is only second-hand.

Before embarking on a survey of these studies, I should like to offer a rationale to those who might wonder why we should suffer a further interposition between reader and primary text. I would argue that it is only by discussing the methods of this criticism and the principles underlying it that its faults and contradictions can be resolved. In order to do so it is necessary to consider the history of Proust criticism and Ruskin criticism in this century, independent of those studies which consider the two writers together.

The discernible orientations¹ of Proust criticism have usually been guided by the explicit aesthetic of A la recherche du temps perdu, which, while encouraging a wide range of mimetic, expressive and pragmatic interpretations of the text, holds such interpretations in balance by insisting on the transcendent objectivity of the work of art as heterocosm:

'Grâce à l'art, au lieu de voir un seul monde, le nôtre, nous le voyons se multiplier, et, autant qu'il y a d'artistes originaux, autant nous avons de mondes à notre disposition, plus différents les uns des autres que ceux qui roulent dans l'infini et, bien des siècles après qu'est éteint le foyer dont il émanait, qu'il s'appelât Rembrandt ou Ver Meer, nous envoient encore leur rayon spécial.'²

The amount and variety of scholarship devoted to Proust is commensurate with the magnitude of his achievement. Three generations of Proustians have aspired to a definitive presentation and history of his life and work, yet even today Philip Kolb's complete and chronological edition of the correspondence is only at the halfway stage and the team at the Centre d'Etudes proustiennes is still at work on the sixty-two cahiers and four

carnets full of innumerable drafts and reworkings of the text. Yet while this valuable work has been proceeding, A la recherche du temps perdu has also been the focus of some of the most original and illuminating criticism of our time, from Fernandez and Curtius down to Genette, Richard and Deleuze. As Sigbrit Swahn has pointed out, 'l'oeuvre de Proust qui a tant enrichi la littérature a aussi permis un développement de la critique et de la recherche'.³ With much of this criticism a proper attention has been paid to formal and philosophical elements of the novel; elements of style, structure, theme, technique, aesthetics, psychology and phenomenology, while the shifting ambivalences of relation between writer, narrator and hero and the explicit lessons of Contre Sainte-Beuve may be invoked as necessary correctives to an over-emphasis on the author's biography as key to his work.⁴ In Ruskin's case, however, for reasons expounded in the last chapter, such guides to critical orientation are wanting, and it has correspondingly proved difficult to isolate considerations of the work for considerations of the man. Praeterita is his one work in which we might hope to see a discrete formal fusion of the elements of life and work, but it mocks such hopes with enormous elisions and a measured narrative which denies the profusion of his experiences and writings. Remarking on this profusion, John Dixon Hunt⁵ has taken Ruskin's frequent invocation of Tintoretto's dictum, 'E faticoso lo studio della pittura, e sempre si fa il mare maggiore', and adapted it for the title of his recent biography which argues that Ruskin's publications 'were at best only interim reports' of research and travel 'interrupted or invalidated even before completion, reworked, re-edited and re-adjusted whenever possible to accommodate new knowledge and above all self-knowledge', as the act of defining and writing only revealed new problems, new ignorances.⁶ Ruskin's life, then, has provided the only

feasible, coherent and comprehensive framework for critical attention, and since Cook and Wedderburn set the pattern with their thirty-nine volume edition of the works, a great deal more scholarship has been devoted to the presentation of the life and the restitution of a mare maggiore of primary and secondary texts.⁷ In a bibliographical guide to Ruskin criticism,⁸ Francis G. Townsend makes the important observation that Ruskin scholarship begins where most scholarship ends, in a monumental edition, and goes on to assert that the Library Edition, instead of promoting scholarship, seemed to inhibit it, because the conventional lines of investigation known at the time had all been pursued with the widest diligence. Partly as a result of this, Ruskin's biographers have been particularly zealous, and readers educated according to the Proustian and modernist strictures against confusing the man who suffers with the mind which creates might find it difficult to accept the excessive attention paid to the circumstances of Ruskin's failed marriage with Effie Gray or indeed to credit the first and only volume of Helen Gill Viljoen's projected 'definitive' biography, entitled Ruskin's Scottish Heritage, and which closes with an account of his parents' honeymoon.⁹ Despite a considerable sharpening of critical focus and concomitant resurgence of interest in Ruskin's writings over the past twenty years, the history of Ruskin criticism gives little encouragement to any readings which would salvage his work within the context of the twentieth century's various revolutions in literature and aesthetics. Although the generation of writers which initiated the unprecedented revision of the textual universe were always prepared to acknowledge their indebtedness to their immediate predecessors, the reaction against the nineteenth-century world view which was embodied in their works invoked a filial rebellion which was maintained with greater vehemence by those critics who

learned from Proust, Joyce, Valéry and Eliot. As we shall see, many scholars who have studied the question of 'Ruskin's influence on Proust' evince a tangible unease at the fact that the man who altered the history of the novel should have spent years of his life translating the works of a passé figure like Ruskin, much as more recent critics have found it difficult to accept Borges' avowed indebtedness to Chesterton as anything but a whim of a grand old man. The fluctuations of criteria of value which provide the hidden history of literature and criticism have been especially unkind to Ruskin. Indeed, we might, while not necessarily agreeing with the terms of the narrator's polemic, compare the fate of Ruskin in the twentieth century with that of Bergotte as described in Le Temps retrouvé.

'On préférerait à Bergotte, dont les plus jolies phrases avaient exigé en réalité un bien plus profond repli sur soi-même, des écrivains qui semblaient plus profond, simplement parce qu'ils écrivaient moins bien. La complication de son écriture n'était pas faite que pour des gens du monde, disaient des démocrates qui faisaient ainsi aux gens du monde un honneur immérité Car il y a plus d'analogie entre la vie instinctive du public et le talent d'un grand écrivain, qui n'est qu'un instinct religieusement écouté au milieu du silence imposé à tout le reste, un instinct perfectionné et compris, qu'avec le verbiage superficiel et les critères changeants des juges attitrés.' ¹⁰

More important than the rather commonplace irrationalist attack on literary opinion-makers is the implicit recognition that all cultural phenomena, including demarcations between the permanent and the ephemeral, the shallow and the profound, are subject to the same laws of

fashion, and that in a sense we are all 'gens du monde'. The cultural vertigo that this realisation induces leads the narrator elsewhere in the same passage to insist that 'dès que l'intelligence raisonneuse veut se mettre à juger les oeuvres d'art, il n'y a plus rien de fixe, de certain: on peut démontrer tout ce qu'on veut',¹¹ thus stretching to breaking point that uneasy contract with the reader which sanctions the author's critical and theoretical assertions by placing them within a fictional context. For it is indisputable that Proust's own contribution to the orthodoxies of twentieth century critical discourse was immense, and although the complexity of his novel's narrative structure is true to the conditions of enunciation, this does not prevent readers and critics from applying the judgements of Marcel in other contexts, and invoking the authority of A la recherche du temps perdu.

This unspoken reliance on an aesthetic abstracted from A la recherche du temps perdu leads to major imbalances in studies which aim to assess Ruskin's influence. Instead of considering how the transmutation of fiction can validate vision and theory, and examining Ruskin's work for elements of spiritual and aesthetic autobiography which could only come to full fruition within a novelistic tradition, they scan the works of both writers primarily as examples of didactic prose from which meaning may be quarried by paraphrase. It comes as no surprise, then, to find that the resultant distillate of meaning appears both forced and quaint when compared with the irreducible and coherent textuality of Proust's novel. Ruskin's work may also be many sided and, in its way, irreducible, but it retains a disadvantageous contiguity with the writer's life in its incoherence, its ragged edges, its want of a sense of ending, and finds itself largely obscured by the dual action of erosion of time and Proust's

revisions. The thirty-nine volumes of Ruskin's work, plus the letters, plus the diaries, become a palimpsest, obscured and (in every sense) over-written. Because our reading of Ruskin is stencilled by Proust, it becomes redundant to speak of Ruskin's influence, since the partiality of Proust's reading renders the English writer's work unreachable and unreadable as a totality.

'The worst children of disobedience are those who accept, of the word, what they like, and refuse what they hate'.¹² Ruskin's admonition becomes more striking when we consider how his literary successors - Proust, Tolstoy, Shaw - based their indebtedness on only a partial knowledge of his works. For those of us who approach Ruskin's work through his successors there is then the temptation to be twice partial, a temptation which has been taken up by most Proustians, given the near-absence, for much of this century, of any real critical engagement with Ruskin's writings. Thankfully, the developments in critical theory and practice, partly initiated and maintained by Proust's work, have eventually led to the position from which it is possible to rediscover Ruskin as a producer of texts - by the 1970s the central focal point for critical orientation. This movement has, as Hunt's work proves, provided the impetus for the renewal and relocation of Ruskin studies.

There remains the problem of the nature of literary influence, which is as difficult to define as to discern. Eagerly chased by literary detectives, and as hotly denied by authors, it has proved one of the most elusive concepts of literary history, compromised equally by the vagueness of such imponderables as filial debt and rebellion, affinity and infidelity, and the confining insufficiency of more recognisably technical terms like

imitation and pastiche. When it comes to positing a direct influence of one writer on another, the problems become more acute, as J. M. Cocking emphasizes in speaking of the precariousness of defining and attributing paternity to literary influence.

'..... whenever we set about estimating an influence, or even an affinity, we must keep our eye on the background. If we fix our eyes only on the pair of minds we are considering, and conscientiously tabulate every parallel idea, feeling, value and belief, we shall find, when our glance is lifted, that a good many items appear to need to be struck out as properly common to more than our pair. Even in these cases, one particular formulation of a generally held idea, one particular expression of a wide-spread feeling may prove to have attracted particular attention; and then it may be illuminating to discover why. But it is equally illuminating to discover why what is not assimilated has been neglected.' ¹³

This has proved to be the case with most assessments of Ruskin's importance to Proust. In seeking to trace a pattern of cause and effect operative between the works of two writers, it has proved all too tempting to go along with the scholastic fallacy of post hoc ergo propter hoc, and efforts to insist on a relation of paternity between sage and novelist have, probably as much because of the salient differences between the two writers as in spite of them, turned a blind eye to the contingencies of context. Indeed, as was pointed out in a perceptive review of Jean Autret's L'influence de Ruskin sur la vie, les idées et l'oeuvre de Marcel Proust, the great danger of such studies is that they can appear to indicate that Proust had read nothing but Ruskin.¹⁴ One way of

avoiding such absurdities might be to reverse the terms of the relationship and speak, however paradoxically, of Proust's influence on Ruskin; that is, to explore the ways in which our knowledge of the achievement of A la recherche du temps perdu impinges on our evaluation of Ruskin's writings. This might leave the way open for a critique of comparison, rather than a mere study of derivation; a properly comparative textual and contextual consideration of the two writers' differing responses to similar dilemmas of expression, description, autobiography and autobiography.

A recent study of Flaubert and Henry James by David Gervais explicitly invoked Proust's words that:

'Les personnes médiocres croient généralement que se laisser guider par les livres qu'on admire, enlève à notre faculté de juger une partie de son indépendance. "Que peut vous importer ce que sent Ruskin: sentez par vous-même". Une telle opinion repose sur une erreur psychologique dont feront justice tous ceux qui, ayant accepté ainsi une discipline spirituelle, sentent que leur puissance de comprendre et de sentir en est infiniment accrue, et leur sens critique jamais paralysé. Nous sommes simplement alors dans un état de grâce où toutes nos facultés, notre sens critique aussi bien que les autres, sont accrues. Ainsi cette servitude volontaire est-elle le commencement de la liberté. Il n'y a pas de meilleure manière d'arriver à prendre conscience de ce qu'on sent soi-même que d'essayer de recréer en soi ce qu'a senti un maître.'¹⁵

and goes on to suggest that:

'James's relations to Flaubert, like Proust's to Ruskin, can only be understood if we leave each writer free to confront the other, undistorted by the links which the literary historian makes between them. It is a relation made up of things James developed and things he reacted against, of lessons learned and lessons skipped. In it we see the two novelists facing each other across time like two mirrors, each reflecting things in the other and receiving a reflection back from it. To think of them together is a way of understanding them both, as long as we first take both separately. The advantage of such comparison is that it gives a critic something against which to measure his sense of a writer's greatness, rather than just promoting him to some individual eminence, somewhere between Valhalla and limbo.'¹⁶

Equally, one might add, the disadvantage of such comparison which does not grant each writer equal freedom to confront the other is to promote one to an uncriticised Valhalla and condemn the other to an unremarked limbo. Such has been the case with Proust and Ruskin, which is why I have insisted on the need to salvage the Englishman's works from long years of critical neglect, years when Joan Evans could confidently assert that the majority of Cook and Wedderburn's thirty-nine volumes would not be opened again, while Helen Gill Viljoen researched into Ruskin's genealogy. I propose further and fuller discussion of literary influence and its relation to larger concepts of tradition and intertextuality in a later chapter. For the moment I wish to examine the various literature comparing Ruskin and Proust; its achievements, its difficulties and its failures which, pace Philip Kolb's remarks quoted at the end of chapter one, have left the question unresolved.

A recurring problem in the history of aesthetics is that the urge to classify and distinguish between schools of concepts carries with it the risk of adopting a meretricious binarism which can fuel distortion and prove impossibly false to the individual case. Distinctions between Classical and Romantic, mimetic and expressive, modernist and post-modernist are often helpful and, we sense, necessary, but can be infuriatingly problematic and all too easily congeal into dogma. Ruskin's exasperation with bogus polarities is famously expressed in the opening words of his essay on the Pathetic Fallacy:

'German dullness, and English affectation, have of late much multiplied among us the use of two of the most objectionable words that were ever coined by the troublesomeness of metaphysicians - namely, "Objective" and "Subjective".

No words can be more exquisite, and in all points, useless; and I merely speak of them that I may, at once and forever, get them out of my way and out of my reader's.' ¹⁷

But as many other passages in Modern Painters make clear, Ruskin's own works are not innocent of the movement, perhaps germane to all but the most occasional critical discourse, which turns a momentarily useful insight into a constricting schema. A thematic criticism can afford to keep such schematicism at bay by ranging widely over individual instances. A criticism, however, which is based on authorial personalities will find it too easy to ingest a mythologised binarism which ignores at will the individual instance in its wish to attain a paraphrased synthesis.

This is the case with Jessie Murray's The Influence of Ruskin on Marcel Proust,¹⁸ the first full-length study of the topic. In its zest for paraphrase and its neglect of detail for the sake of coherence it is typical of work in the field, although it must be admitted that it proves a good deal kinder to Ruskin than subsequent studies, and does acknowledge the decline in the English writer's fortune since his death. More importantly, in alluding to the limbo to which Ruskin had been consigned by the English generation succeeding his death, Murray suggests that it is through Proust that we may get to know Ruskin once again.

'Since the days of Ruskin's triumph there has been a violent reaction against him, and it is in the thick of this reaction that we hear his name echoed anew from an unexpected quarter and a belated disciple of his may perhaps make us wonder if our present belittlement of Ruskin is after all the true measure of his greatness.'¹⁹

But one does not pass through purgatory unaltered, and it is a strange Ruskin which we meet in Murray's account, and a stranger Proust. Of the two writers, one has been transfigured by the passage of time, the other has been even more transfigured by the glamourisation of the exotic. This is how Murray's study, which aims 'to deal only with those Ruskinian ideas which have become part and parcel of Proust's own thought', characterises the two writers:

'Could anything be more foreign to Marcel Proust's cloistered existence, to his horror of practical things, than this superhuman activity of Ruskin? The cork-lined room, in which the sickly, introspective and tormented Proust lived his imprisoned life, seems very far removed from the handsome Victorian

surrounding in which Ruskin lived - his beautiful house at Denmark Hill, the refined comfort of Brantwood, or his rooms at Corpus Christi College, where, surrounded by his favourite pictures, a Titian, a Raphael, Meissonier's Napoleon and his beloved Turners, he entertained his friends and students and devoted to them and their interests long hours of intimate talk which for many of them were of decisive importance in the shaping of their lives and the moulding of their thoughts. Who would have dreamed that this eloquent and captivating talker, this social reformer and Victorian moralist, this enthusiastic idealist whom French onlookers were inclined to regard as an artistic but unintelligibly insular Rousseau, should one day cast his spell over a disillusioned self-analyst like Proust.'²⁰

Murray's account of the various aesthetic theories promulgated by the two writers starts out from this distinction of their separate literary personalities, and it is inevitable that its wrong-headedness should disinform subsequent discussion. We are offered heavily-mythologised caricatures rather than any true picture of careers, works and aims.

Of course, parallel tabulation is a procedure even more ill-advised with regard to lives than with regard to works, but that does not excuse the arbitrariness of much of the categorisation to be found in the above paragraph, much of which is quite interchangeable from one writer to another. Proust, for example, lived among surroundings every bit as opulent as Ruskin and the testimonies of his artistic and aristocratic friends bear ample witness to the 'eloquent and captivating talker' who 'devoted to them and their interests long hours of intimate talk which for many of them were of decisive importance in the shaping of their lives and

the moulding of their thoughts'. And if any literary work of this century bears the mark of 'superhuman activity' it is surely A la recherche du temps perdu. There is no mention of the internal stresses and divisions which led Ruskin to eventual madness in Murray's picture of a Victorian literary grandee, no Storm Cloud of the Nineteenth Century passing over the sunny gardens of Denmark Hill (where Ruskin lived with his parents in conditions much more imprisoning to the psyche than Proust's self-imposed regime).

The one true note struck by Murray's account is that which hints at a distinction between the respectively public and private worlds of the two writers. But this distinction is enlisted in the service of the mythology of the lonely neurasthenic artist in his cork-lined room which valorises the achievement of the suffering novelist above that of his 'worldly' predecessor. The picture of Proust we are given is doubly Romantic: firstly, following Stendhal's sense of Romanticism as 'l'art de présenter aux peuples les oeuvres littéraires qui, dans l'état actuel de leurs habitudes et de leurs croyances, sont susceptibles de leur donner le plus de plaisir possible. Le classicisme au contraire, leur présente la littérature qui donnait le plus grand plaisir possible à leurs arrière-grands-pères'.²¹ A second, broader and more profound conception of Romanticism would admit Proust as the eventual legatee, by way of the French symbolists, of the cult of the Image as radiant truth which Frank Kermode saw as being crucial to the Romantic conception of art.²² Kermode comments on the inextricable association of this belief in the image and the necessary isolation or estrangement of men who can perceive it; and in her denial of this isolation to Ruskin and her exaggeration of Proust's artistic estrangement from society, Murray is implicitly disinheriting the English

writer from the most consistent and influential aesthetic tendency of the last two hundred years, a tendency, moreover, to which Ruskin contributed enormously, as well as taking to the limits its possibilities of engagement with social and moral needs. The enlistment of Proust in the vulgarised bohemian tradition of the pale, struggling, immoral artists trivialises the issue, and while the trajectory of Ruskin's career is much truer to the Wordsworthian paradigm:

'We poets in our youth begin in gladness,
But thereof comes in the end despondency and madness.'²³

Ruskin's despondency and madness arises from his position as a late Romantic writer ill at ease with the English Romantic reluctance to involve itself with the social order. Where a contemporary such as Matthew Arnold was able to channel conflicting impulses and perceptions into two distinct personalities, Arnold the Critic and Arnold the Poet, respectively prone to the complacencies of optimism and despair, yet setting up in their opposition a productive tension, Ruskin's seamless but polymorphous oeuvre fluctuates between magnificent and intolerable private insights and the consequent doomed need to exhort the world into change:

'But how can He expect that others should
Build for him, sow for him, and at his call
Love him, who for himself will take no heed at all.'²⁴

Ruskin, the self-perplexed prophet, vainly calls on the language of the Bible to dispel the plague wind and plague cloud of the Nineteenth Century. There is no Leech-Gatherer figure of human persistence and spiritual

permanence to annul the doubt and despair of the following passages, only a numinous audience, a vainly invoked God, as Ruskin attempts to exorcise the plague by the act of writing.

'Brantwood, 13th August 1879

The most terrific and horrible thunderstorm, this morning, I ever remember. It waked me at six, or a little before - then rolling incessantly, like railway luggage trains, quite ghastly in its mockery of them - the air one loathsome mass of sultry and foul fog, like smoke; scarcely raining at all, but increasing to heavier rollings, with flashes quivering vaguely through all the air, and at last terrific double streams of reddish-violent fire, not forked or zigzag, but rippled rivulets - two at the same instant some twenty to thirty degrees apart, and lasting on the eye at least half a second, with grand artillery-peals following; not rattling crashes, or irregular cracklings, but delivered volleys. It lasted an hour, then passed off, clearing a little, without rain to speak of, - not a glimpse of blue, - and now, half-past seven, seems settling down again into Manchester devil's darkness.

Quarter to eight, morning. - Thunder returned, all the air collapsed into one black fog, the hills invisible, and scarcely visible the opposite shore; heavy rain in short fits, and frequent though less formidable flashes and shorter thunder. While I have written this sentence the cloud has again dissolved itself, like a nasty solution in a bottle, with miraculous and unnatural rapidity, and the hills are in sight again; a double - forked flash - rippled, I mean, like the others - starts into its frightful ladder of light between me and Wetherlam, as I raise my eyes. All black above, a rugged spray cloud on the Eaglet

Blanched Sun - blighted grass - blinded man. -
If, in conclusion, you ask me for any conceivable cause of meaning of these things - I can tell you none, according to your modern beliefs; but I can tell

you what meaning it would have borne for the men of old time Of states in such moral gloom every seer of old predicted the physical gloom, saying, "The light shall be darkened in the heavens thereof, and the stars shall withdraw their shining."²⁵

It should be remembered that the first section of the above passage consists of a diary entry, later incorporated into a series of lectures delivered at the London Institution in 1884. Taken as a whole, it affords us a particularly striking example of the contrast between Ruskin's private and public modes of writing, and is evidence both of the success and failure arising from his great breadth of involvement. In another context Ruskin alluded to this division in his writing although he subdivided his public discourse into two separate styles:

'I have always had three different ways of writing; one, with the single view of making myself understood, in which I necessarily omit a great deal of what comes into my head; another in which I say what I think ought to be said, in what I suppose to be the best words I can find for it (which is in reality an affected style - be it good or bad); and my third way of writing is to say all that comes into my head for my own pleasure, in the first words that come, retouching them afterwards into (approximate) grammar.'²⁶

It is the third way of writing which is exemplified by the diary entries quoted above, and if there is little evidence of pleasure in them, something beyond pleasure, an exultant panic, is embodied in these lines. Ruskin's rage for inclusiveness is given rein by a favourite device: the 'not - nor yet - but' qualification, twice employed here, both insists by its precision on

the singularity of the phenomena described and, by insisting what is not there, yet brings the forked and zigzag lightning, the crackling and crashing of thunder to our attention on the page, even though its absence in nature, opening the one perception out into other moments and marking the constant and discriminating vigilance of the observer. The charged concentration of images of the industrial revolution ('railway luggage trains'), of hell ('foul fog', 'devil's darkness' and the dark pun of 'reddish-violent fire') and war and destruction ('artillery peals' and 'delivered volleys') carry a sustained intensity of portent equal to the storm itself. And indeed for a moment it seems as though the fury of Ruskin's writing has quelled the storm: 'While I have written this sentence the cloud has again dissolved itself, like a nasty solution in a bottle, with miraculous and unnatural rapidity, and the hills are in sight again; a double-forked flash - rippled, I mean, like the others - starts into its frightful ladder of light as I raise my eyes'.

Ruskin here comes up against the Shandean predicament - common to all diarists and autobiographers - of life outpacing the act of writing.

When we come to the public section - that which is composed for, or delivered as, the lecture - we see with what dissolution of effect Ruskin's style has changed. The rage for inclusiveness, exacerbated rather than tempered by the single view of making himself understood, becomes in the public register an over-engagement with the world, with religion, politics and morality. The immediacy of the writing and describing present is dissipated in an anguished attention to the legendary past of the present generation. In his desperate invocation of the long-dead prophets

and his exhortation to a ghostly public, Ruskin seems to the modern reader to inhabit a world where, to adopt Heidegger's words, 'Das Licht des Öffentlichen verdunkelt alles'.

As I have remarked, Ruskin's dilemma is more explicitly announced, if not so well exemplified, in Arnold's poetry:

'Too fast we live, too much are tried,
Too harass'd, to attain
Wordsworth's sweet calm, or Goethe's wide
And luminous view to gain

.....

Ah! two desires toss about
The Poet's feverish blood.
One drives him to the world without,
And one to solitude.' ²⁷

The obvious irony to be pointed out is that Proust's withdrawal from society led to the creation of a richly-populated world, while Ruskin, for all his engagement with the wider world, remains no more than a restless, lonely, vigilant voice.

Setting out from her comparison of the two writers' personalities, Jessie Murray, maintaining her insistence of their unlikeness, if not irreconcilability, by invoking Ruskin's words that 'No true disciple of mine will ever be a Ruskinian', and insisting that 'it is not as a man of action, nor as a thinker, nor as a moralist, but as a painter, that he attracted Proust'²⁸ and that 'with cool indifference the latter sets aside almost all Ruskin's arguments and theories',²⁹ thus leads one to expect a technical comparison which would eschew any but the most strictly necessary

aesthetic generalisations and offer some account of how the painterly aspects of Ruskin's writing, especially his gift for minute, precise and impassioned observation and description, are carried forth and embodied in A la recherche du temps perdu. Such expectations, however, are dispelled by the chapter-headings on the list of contents, which, besides announcing two chapters devoted to Proust's remarks on Ruskin in his critical essays, show most of the study as being devoted to a systematic opposition of the two writers' ideas - i.e. their arguments and theories, on various topics: 'Conception of Art in Ruskin and Proust', 'Sensation in Ruskin and Proust', 'Discipline in Creative Art according to Ruskin and Proust', 'Memory in Creative Art according to Ruskin and Proust', and so on. The impulse for paraphrase which such titles imply leads to a study which presents the critical views of both writers outside their generic context and largely offers a vision of Proust's aesthetic theories as nimble adaptations of Ruskin's clumsy prototype. Divorced from the force and sweep of his arguments, Ruskin's theories, so crucially dependent on long and searching parenthesis and actualising description, fall flat in paraphrase, and occasionally a forced rapprochement of the two writers falls into extreme bathos, as when we are informed that 'Ruskin and Proust both regard a great artist as being a true creator'.³⁰ Ruskin and Proust are both seen as exponents of intuitive impressionism, distrustful of the insights of intelligence alone, (although intelligence is invoked in the narrow sense in the more dogmatic section of Le temps retrouvé, connoting an arid subordinate rationality rather than the Intellectualismus which Curtius sees as being inextricably interwoven with impressionism in the fabric of Proust's writing). The third chapter of Murray's study, that which deals with sensation in Ruskin and Proust, is richest in insights, if distorted somewhat by the insistence that Proust was, in the fashionable phrase of

the time, a 'psychological' novelist. Alluding to Ruskin's Science of Aspects, a sort of phenomenology of landscape which aimed to analyse the effect of nature on the eye or heart, Murray notes that 'what Ruskin taught with reference to painting has been taken up by Proust in psychology. Ruskin limits himself to studying the sensations which the beauties of the earth produce in us; but Proust goes further, and subjects to the same minute analysis all the countless other sensations registered by his sensitive organism' 'Though Proust has the Ruskinian gift of evoking past experience, he undoubtedly applies it to a new order of sensations, the like of which had rarely appeared in the pages of literature, and which are of less interest to a painter like Ruskin than to a psychologist like Proust'.

There are some important points here, yet the two writers seem to be, in turn, insufficiently differentiated and over-differentiated. The gift of evoking past experiences might be called 'Ruskinian', but it is hardly exclusively so. On the other hand, the over-insistence on the broader and more exotic subject matter of Proust's work suggests an assessment of the writers which owes more than it ought to the determinants of genre and content. The announced projects, the hortative rhetoric of Ruskin's works may suggest the opposite of introspection, but the texture and tenor of his items suggest a continual and uncompromising exploration of the self.

When it comes to listing exempla of the theories at work, Murray concentrates almost exclusively on their presence in A la recherche du temps perdu; whether because Proust was at that time still relatively unknown to English audiences, or because Ruskin's work was thought to be

sufficiently familiar to the reader, or because it was felt that Proust had superseded Ruskin in perfecting the application of the latter's theories, it is hard to tell, yet the presentation of most of his concepts in paraphrase seems once again unfair to the Victorian writer, whose arguments were constantly furnished with meticulous example.

We are indebted to Jessie Murray for an important insight to be developed by another critic some fifty years later,³² that the great point in common between Ruskin and Proust is that they show an equal tendency to be dominated by spatial sensation, but the point is again left tantalisingly underdeveloped. 'The perception of space-distances and the obstacle of distance, the slightest accident of relief, changes of perspective, the relative order and groupings of things in space - such phenomena as these produce invariably an uncommonly powerful effect on Proust For Ruskin, also throughout his whole work, it is this all-absorbing attention to spatial sensation which provides him, not only with his metaphors and comparisons, but even with the actual matter of his writing. Like Proust he translates his thoughts into terms of perspective, as if he were merely putting into words what his own instinct would have expressed more naturally with designs or diagrams' 'there is in both the same urge towards the spatialisation of ideas'.³³

After some tenuous speculation on the link between Ruskin's preservation of historical artefacts and their moral and customary significance through his teachings and the central Proustian discipline of memory - both representing the 'resurrection of past sensations by thought' - and remarks on their shared cult of Medieval architecture, Murray summarises Proust's comments on Ruskin's idolatry and occasional hypocrisy for art's sake and, in a discussion of morality and art, alludes to the important note to

Sesame and Lilies, where Proust, with what Murray terms merciless sincerity, asserts a humane, novel sensitivity germane to the novelist, which would shame the moralist and prophet.

Proust remarks on Ruskin's summary judgements:

'De tels passages paraissent aux petits esprits l'oeuvre d'un petit esprit; les grands esprits au contraire reconnaîtront que c'est, en morale, la conclusion à laquelle aboutissent tous les grands esprits. Seulement ils pourront regretter (pour les autres) que Ruskin s'explique aussi peu et donne cette forme un peu bourgeoise et un peu courte à des vérités qui pourraient être présentées moins prosaïquement. Cf. (pour cette manière d'exposer une vérité en la rapetissant volontairement, en lui donnant une apparence offensive de lieu commun démodé) Bible d'Amiens IV, 59: "Toutes les créatures humaines qui ont des affections ardentes, le sens commun et l'empire sur soi-même, ont été et sont si naturellement morales un homme bon et sage diffère d'un homme méchant et idiot, comme un bon chien d'un chien hargneux". Ruskin, quand il écrit, ne tient jamais compte de Mme. Bovary, qui peut le lire. Ou plutôt il aime à la choquer et à lui paraître médiocre.'³⁴

Here Proust wittily yet nonetheless seriously applies the subtle artistic and moral standards of fiction to Ruskin's public discourse, treating Ruskin with a mingled understanding, amusement and awe, as he would one of his own characters. While Murray recognises that Proust in his novel is striving not to justify immorality but to ensure that it shall be judged within the higher domain of art, yet she is surely wrong to assert that he is 'only mildly interested'³⁵ in moral questions, and she mistakes his

profoundly informed moral agnosticism for the facile amorality of the fin-de-siècle aesthete when she comments of the above note that 'for him the form is of more account than the substance'. Given that Murray quotes elsewhere in her study Proust's letter to Robert Dreyfus, to the effect that style is in no way a mere embellishment or a question of technique, but 'une qualité de vision, la révélation de l'Univers particulier que chacun de nous voit et que ne voient pas les autres',³⁶ this crude application of the form/content dichotomy informs us only of a certain unease on the critic's part with regard to the subject matter of certain sections of A la recherche du temps perdu.

There are interesting parallels drawn between the two writers' attitudes to discipline and the necessarily submissive role of the creative artist, and again Proust is shown as giving intense though qualified assent to Ruskin's ideals, while restricting their application to the domain of art. There is clearly a felt understanding of a deep affinity between Ruskin and Proust, but when specific textual instances are required, the temptation to employ the methodology of Procrustes, always present in such studies, proves irresistible. In commenting on their shared sense of the artist's need to submit without compromise or deviation to the demands of his individual vision, Murray quotes a passage from Proust on the Vinteuil sonata:

'Tout amateur un peu fin se fût tout de suite aperçu de l'imposture, si Vinteuil, ayant eu moins de puissance pour en voir et en rendre les formes, avait cherché à dissimuler, en ajoutant çà et là des traits de son cru, les lacunes de sa vision en les défaillances de la main.'³⁷

and comments:

§

'For this quotation one might, without in any way modifying its content, substitute various passages from the art criticism of Ruskin. Here, for example, is exactly Proust's conception, but expressed in the language of Modern Painters:³⁸

" and all efforts to do things of a similar kind by rule or by thought, and all efforts to mend or rearrange the first order of the vision, are not inventive; on the contrary, they ignore and deny invention Dreams cannot be ruled as they come so must they be caught, and they cannot be caught in any other shape than that they come in and (one) might as well attempt to rule a rainbow into rectitude, or cut notches in a moth's wing to hold it by, as in any wise attempt to modify, by rule, the forms of the involuntary vision."³⁹

'It is therefore obvious that Proust and Ruskin share the same conviction. For the expression of it, it is immaterial whether one seeks it in the Temps Perdu (sic) or in Modern Painters.'⁴⁰

Now one might well invoke the last sentence of the above as a caveat against those who would strain form and sense to insist that two writers were saying the same thing, 'only' in a different language.

Although Murray is fully aware of the Proustian doctrine of the 'phrase-type', of the 'contexture intime' of each writer's language, she fails to adopt such insight in her own method. The two passages are patently not the same; they are wrenched together by the act of

paraphrase; but their irreducible quidditas rejects such false contexture; instead of, as might be done, striking sparks off each other, alternately mirroring or illuminating each other's knowledge and blindness, they are harnessed as the thesis and antithesis of a false triad, with the critic's bland paraphrase as the synthesis.

The spatial metaphor is characteristically Proustian, and it is interesting to see the figure of a triangle adopted in a note to Sésame et les lys as a metaphor of coincidence.

'Quand deux triangles ont un angle égal compris entre deux côtés égaux, les 2 angles et le troisième côté coïncident aussi. De même quand on a pu faire coïncider certains points générateurs de deux esprits, d'autres coïncidences en découleront: on pourra ne les observer qu'ensuite mais elles étaient enfermées dans la vérité première'.⁴¹

But in this case, as usual, Proust is alluding to an aspect of technique shared by Ruskin and Robert de Montesquiou. There is no recourse to paraphrase, rather the emphasis is on what writers do rather than on what they say.

I have probably been over-critical of Murray's study, but in singling it out for special treatment I have aimed to bring to attention certain assumptions, habits and misconceptions of methodology which go on recurring in subsequent literature on the subject. These largely involve a refusal to apply Proust's own strictures regarding the irreducibility of the written text, the irrelevances of biographical criticism and the tendency of the works of great writers to transcend local boundaries of history and

genre, and a consequent overreliance on stated intention and paraphrasable content. An extreme but nonetheless valid solution to the problem of comparison and paraphrase would be to adopt the strategy of Jacques Derrida in Glas, where excerpts from a novelist and a discursive writer - in this case Genet and Hegel - are displayed in parallel columns, intermittently linked by comments and extrapolations from the third party. By this blatant act of artificial contextualising, the mechanics of comparative reading are laid bare, and the two writers are left free to confront one another in their specificity, bringing to light coincidences and ironies of juxtaposition and producing a dynamic and polyphonic text instead of the static binary compare-and-contrast document to which we are accustomed.

Towards the end of her study, Murray remarks that most of the resemblances between Proust and Ruskin are the outcome of affinity rather than direct influence. There never was and never could be, on Proust's part, the slightest inclination to accept Ruskin's thought as such. He examined it minutely, he set himself seriously to 'rethink it', but only in order to develop the originality of his own thought. It is rightly pointed out that in his own critical comments to La Bible d'Amiens and Sésame et les lys, and especially in his crucial disagreement over the nature and importance of reading - a disagreement, let us recall, which insists on a discrimination between public and private discourse - Proust largely pre-empted the task of those critics who would attempt to assess the extent of his debt to Ruskin. As I hope to have shown, any reading of the two writers together must start out from that Proustian distinction.

Murray concludes by invoking the suggestive passage of Sodome et Gomorrhe in which Marcel remarks that:

'certains artistes d'une autre époque ont, dans un simple morceau, réalisé quelque chose qui ressemble à ce que le maître peu à peu s'est rendu compte que lui-même avait voulu faire. Alors il voit en cet ancien comme un précurseur; il aime chez lui sous une tout autre forme, un effort momentanément, partiellement fraternel. Il y a des morceaux de Turner dans l'oeuvre de Poussin, une phrase de Flaubert dans Montesquieu.'⁴²

but she ignores the very interesting meditations on the reversal of the laws of literary history, and on the relation between Tradition and the Individual Talent which are consequent on this insight. It is most tentatively suggested that 'now and again' in the work of Ruskin there 'might' be a touch of Proust, but no examples are given as to how such manifestations would present themselves. An eventual reliance on the numinous concept of affinity maintains Murray's concentration on the spirit rather than on the letter, on what is said rather than 'how'.

A similar tendency prevails in Sybil de Souza's doctoral thesis, L'Influence de Ruskin sur Proust,⁴² published in the same year as Murray's study. Of its 160 pages only 53 are devoted to 'les différences entre les procédés d'expression de Proust et Ruskin'. The Englishman's style is correctly seen as stopping at an earlier, pre-symbolist technical stage (although it is difficult to conjecture how it could be otherwise) and is considered subject to the same reproach which the mature Proust addressed to Paul

Morand, that 'il y a quelquefois des images autres que des images inévitables',⁴³ yet Proust's craft is curiously seen to reside in his spontaneity.

'Les images de Ruskin n'ont pas toujours la spontanéité qu'ont celles de Proust; elles ne jaillissent pas toujours du plus profond de son moi.'⁴⁴

Ruskin is unfairly submitted to the same set of idealist preconceptions which Proust invokes in Le temps retrouvé in order to rationalise and tidy up the disparate material of his novel. De Souza offers a good analysis of how Proust's descriptions follow the contours of his thought but Ruskin's similar gifts of contextual exactness are ignored - an omission which is hardly surprising given that the Englishman's own words are entirely absent from the thesis. We are offered the Ruskin of de la Sizeranne, of Mourey, of Proust's own translations and allusive critical apparatus, and there is no evidence that de Souza has read Ruskin in the original nor, more importantly, that Proust had any experience of the works in English. What we get is a Ruskin twice removed by translation and commentary or paraphrase, whose writings are deferred in favour of a French audience's contemporary inquiry into and endorsement of Proust's aesthetic system. Since the thesis was written at a time when Le Temps retrouvé was still being assimilated by the public; and readers were learning to judge the whole roman fleuve retrospectively by the light of the aesthetic propounded at length in its final volume, it is understandable that de Souza should concentrate on what is seen as Proust's philosophical system. Ruskin's influence is, for de Souza, not restricted to a certain education of the aesthetic sense: rather, it is important insofar as its traces are to be

discovered in 'la philosophie sur laquelle repose l'oeuvre maîtresse de Proust'.⁴⁵ This curious emphasis on the novelist as builder of philosophical systems leads to such slightly simplistically generalisations as 'Ruskin n'était pas assez philosophe pour concilier le beau et le bien'.⁴⁶

As has often been shown, the coherence of Le Temps retrouvé's retrospective aesthetic, and its efficacy and relevance as a guide to the reading of the novel or as evidence of its genesis are open to question, and it is the naive view that A la recherche du temps perdu is little more than disguised autobiography which finds most sanction in the structure of revelations of the final volume. As J. M. Cocking points out:

'The novel is not an account of [Proust's] life, but a fiction which reflects the essence of his life as he believes it to be. The theory of Le Temps retrouvé is not a circumstantial account of how he came to write the novel, but an attempt to tidy the process of creation as he experienced it into a system and to read it in terms of his idealist preconceptions.'⁴⁷

Ruskin's main importance, as de Souza sees it, is to have provided - quite unconsciously, we are given to understand, the English writer not having been 'assez philosophe' - the brouillons for this system with his thoughts of there being a hidden reality behind appearances and his insistence on the spiritual permanence of works of art. These are important insights, however vague, but they are invalidated by the structure of de Souza's argument, which treats A la recherche du temps perdu as straight autobiography, and comparing its events, self-questionings and final resolution with instances from the public career of John Ruskin as made available through his French interpreters. Since the reader is given little

opportunity to judge Ruskin's work other than through paraphrase into French, and since the generic differences between his writings and the post-Symbolist novel are glossed over, he is neither surprised nor convinced by de Souza's conclusion that 'Proust a infiniment dépassé Ruskin grâce à ses dons de sincérité, de courage intellectuel'.⁴⁸

What I have described as the moral, public impulse of the Englishman's work is momentarily dwelt on when it is remarked that 'Ruskin donne à ses idées une force concrète, dans le but de réagir sur la sensibilité de ses lecteurs',⁴⁹ but the opportunity to examine how this difference in purpose relates to Proust's ability to have description follow the contours of his thought is passed over in favour of an assertion of the latter's greater intellectual intensity. Overt appeal to the reader's sensibility is regarded as an insult to that sensibility: the tacit sympathy engendered by the novelist's discourse is, by contrast, richer, deeper, more appealing in its ambiguous fictive intimacy. De Souza's strictures on Ruskin are couched in similar terms to those applied to Nietzsche by one of his translators (interestingly, Ruskin is himself invoked as sharing the faults enumerated):

'The trouble with Zarathustra lies not in its verbal pyrotechnics, nor in its doctrine, which is centrally sound; it lies in the author's stance, who in this work addresses the crowd from the wrong rostrum, with a fury that is obnoxious only because it is constantly restrained, occulted with biblical echoes, set out in rows of grandiloquent propositions which, instead of fiercely pointing out or persuading, exhort.'⁵⁰

The writer here is willing to forgive Nietzsche several faults which posterity has found unpardonable in Ruskin, but in the end the two stand

convicted of the same crime - of speaking in public accents of themes and preoccupations, experiences which the modern era has entrusted to the novelist and poet. These artists have responded with such an acuteness and depth of concern for inner reality that Lionel Trilling was moved to observe that 'No literature has ever been so intensely spiritual as ours'.⁵¹ Trilling, however, went on to describe the eventual and awful dilemma to which this spiritual secularisation leads us. In discussing with his students Thomas Mann's idea of the educative value of illness, he arrives at the reflection that:

'This idea, like so many ideas encountered in the books of the course, had to be thought of only as having reference to the private life; that it touched the public life only in some indirect or tangential way; that it really ought to be encountered in solitude, even in secrecy, since to talk about it in public and in our academic setting was to seem to propose for it a public practicality and thus distort its meaning.'⁵²

The uneasy collocation of 'secrecy' and 'meaning' anticipates Trilling's final point, which is that the chief intention of modern literature is to free writer and reader not only from the middle class but from society itself. The engagements demanded by this sort of hermetic pact between author and reader ensures that any writing in public discourse, however rich and suggestive it may be, and however it may avail itself of the techniques of novelist and poet, is denied critical attention.

In de Souza's case, it is to be expected that almost all the actual criticism is devoted to A la recherche du temps perdu, given the vast and hitherto uncharted areas it offers to the contemporary critic for evaluation and

analysis. It is therefore gratifying to find André Maurois, in his 'Proust et Ruskin'⁵³ treating the two writers almost as equals, and making fruitful suggestions regarding their stylistic affinities. While concurring with de Souza that the germs of Proust's mature aesthetic are already to be found in the preface to La Bible d'Amiens and remarking that the two writers share a need to balance aesthetic and moral concerns, Maurois insists that any comparison ought to be situated at a more precise, textual level, invoking Proust's own remarks on Ruskin to support his argument.

'Si le critique n'a pas su démêler ces traits singuliers et essentiels, il pourra écrire tous les livres du monde sur Ruskin, l'homme, l'écrivain, le prophète, l'artiste, toutes ces constructions s'élèveront peut-être très haut, mais à côté de son sujet. Elles pourront porter aux nues la situation littéraire du critique mais ne vaudront pas, pour l'intelligence de l'oeuvre, la précision exacte d'une nuance juste, si légère semble-t-elle'.⁵⁴

Drawing on the two writers' shared notion of the great artist as intercessor between the consciousness and nature, Maurois suggests that our rediscovery of Ruskin might be important for its own sake, rather than just as a guide to the evolution of A la recherche du temps perdu, and notices how Proust and Ruskin had in common 'un même goût inné pour les nuances, une semblable manière de savourer les couleurs et les formes',⁵⁵ and the capacity, first remarked by Curtius, to produce 'une spécialisation de la sensibilité poussé à l'extrême'.⁵⁶ These affinities are seen as being above all located where vision is embodied in style, and a slow-motion, almost microscopic way of looking at the world is enacted. One of Ruskin's many graceful yet scientific descriptions of water is quoted and compared with Proust's description of the fountain at the beginning of

Sodome et Gomorrhe, with the comment that 'tous deux cherchent, par une suite continue de plusieurs adjectifs, à serrer de plus en plus la description de l'objet'.⁵⁷

Although this is a modest beginning to the project of comparing the styles of the two writers, it is a suggestive one, particularly as Maurois goes on to comment on the thematic recurrence of certain images – in this case, the repeated use of jewel metaphors in the depiction of nature, and on the possibility of Proust's having developed the hawthorn image of Combray from the emblematic use of almond blossom in Praeterita. Further, it is hinted that the very idea of the necessity of recurrent themes as a binding structural principle was suggested to Proust by Ruskin's example. Maurois quotes as evidence the following footnote to Sésame et les lys:

'C'est le charme précisément de l'oeuvre de Ruskin qu'il y ait entre les idées d'un même livre, et entre les divers livres, des liens qu'il ne montre pas, qu'il laisse à peine apparaître un instant et qu'il a d'ailleurs peut-être tissés après-coup, mais jamais artificiels cependant puisqu'ils sont toujours tirés de la substance toujours identique à elle-même de sa pensée, voilà ce qui assure à ces livres une unité plus réelle que l'unité de composition, généralement absente, il faut bien le dire.'⁵⁸

Finally, however, Maurois agrees with most other readers that Proust's analysis is more profound 'puisque'il est beaucoup plus préoccupé de la vérité rigoureuse de ses observations que ne l'est Ruskin, soucieux surtout de donner un enseignement moral'.⁵⁹ Above all, Proust has applied Ruskin's microscopic vision in areas of the human consciousness and morality

itself where the Englishman feared to tread. This evaluation is still not quite fair to the sense of multiplicity and depth which more recent critics have found in Ruskin's later and more anguished writings, but at least, in sending the reader back to the text to make his own judgements, it encourages some reevaluation.

'L'innombrable postérité de Proust qui, en ce moment, se multiplie en France est aussi, sans le savoir, une postérité de Ruskin que dans la plupart des cas elle ignore.'⁶⁰

This was recognised by the unsigned review in Notes and Queries which remarked that 'M. Maurois's "Proust et Ruskin" is not only important for an understanding of Proust and the great volume of French literature derived from him, but likewise of importance for the true re-valuation of Ruskin which, if begun, is certainly not complete'.⁶¹

Although Maurois's comments on stylistic similarity are among the most illuminating to be found in the already voluminous literature devoted to the subject, there is unquestionably a danger of tendentiousness in positing such a comparison between writers who, after all, wrote in different languages, particularly since Proust's English was far from perfect. The latter's failings as linguist are examined in A.J. Roche's 'Proust as a translator of Ruskin' (1930). Taking issue at the outset with Maurois's having called Proust Ruskin's great disciple, Roche remarks that there does not seem to be much affinity between the 'Victorian sermoniser' and 'the passionate pilgrim of the human heart' - again exhibiting the then-fashionable contemptuous misreading of Ruskin as

arch Victorian and arch-sermoniser - but conjectures that it might be interesting to examine the Proust translations nonetheless. Roche's verdict is that Proust is by no means a good translator, finding some thirty inaccuracies in the first lecture of Sésame et les lys alone. Even more damningly, 'the almost continual heaviness and awkwardness of the style seems to show that such translating was a drudge to him rather than a work of love. His French reads like dictated unpruned speech in many cases and not always very fluent speech at that'.⁶² Proust clings slavishly to his text, and this too close submission, far from giving an impression of conscientious accuracy, denotes an imperfect mastery of the English language: 'we feel that Proust does not soar over his text but painfully crawls along the lines'.⁶³ Despite the occasional felicity, the overall impression gleaned by Roche is that Proust found the discussion of Ruskin's ideas much more congenial than the task of translating.

Roche's analysis, though it refers only to part of one translation, raises important questions about the nature of translation and its function in the development of a prose style which merit consideration in full at a later stage, but his conclusion, that the only contribution to A la recherche du temps perdu which is directly traceable to Ruskin is that of Balbec church, and that 'on the whole Ruskin was to him chiefly a noble and inspiring example of conscientious and steady working during those years when the young writer was observing life so patiently and waiting to plume his feathers and let grow his wings'⁶⁴, is unacceptable. Whatever the difference between the two writers, they do not preclude any influence beyond the superficial, and it is absurd to suggest that the chief function of the six-year Ruskinian apprenticeship was to keep the young Frenchman off the boulevards.

As this particular branch of the Proust industry burgeoned, the misrepresentation of Ruskin continued. Roche's High Victorian stakhanovite becomes, in Henri Lemaître's 1944 monograph, an aesthetic paraclete. Sizeranne's notion of Ruskin as priest of a universal religion of beauty is quoted with approval before Proust is introduced as a young writer in search of a transfiguring faith who, on discovering Ruskin, preaches the word against false prophets of dilettantism. However astute his evaluations of Proust's knowledge of and indebtedness to the Englishman, Lemaître's concluding remarks uphold the trend of disembodiment of Ruskin from his writings, presenting him as available in spirit only, through the lasting letter of Proust's work.

'Quand il connut Ruskin, il trouva le Maître qui lui donnerait l'impulsion nécessaire à son propre développement. C'est en ce sens en effet que s'est exercée l'influence de Ruskin. Proust écouta attentivement son enseignement; il en fut, nous l'avons vu, profondément imprégné; et tout en restant un génie original, il sut tirer de Ruskin la riche et fortifiante substance qui devrait lui permettre de construire solidement son oeuvre.'⁶⁵

Again we find advanced the idea of Ruskin being available only in edited highlights, from which we can draw the sustantifique mouelle which does no more than inform the solid structure of Proust's novel. Although Lemaître distinguishes himself from most of his fellow Proustians by quoting widely and well from the better known of Ruskin's works, the methodological burden of proving the novel's genesis - and, by consequence, the novel's ascendancy - still debars the evaluation of Ruskin in terms other than those set by the aesthetic adumbrated in Le Temps retrouvé. This latter aesthetic, if reduced to the crude formula of 'life

redeemed by art' – and why else should it be that 'Marcel devient écrivain'? – can be made to subsume the most radically divergent views on the worth and function of the aesthetic attitude.

Lemaître tells us that he gleans the same impression of art as the loftiest manifestation of existence from such hugely different passages as the following, quoted in juxtaposition in his section on 'Les sources ruskiniennes de l'Esthétique de Proust'.

'Vous ne pouvez avoir un paysage par Turner sans un pays où il puisse peindre. Vous ne pouvez avoir un portrait de Titien sans un homme à peindre. Le commencement de l'art consiste à rendre notre peuple beau. Il y a eu sans doute un art dans des pays où les gens n'étaient pas tous beaux, ou même leurs lèvres étaient épaisses et leur peau noire, parce que le soleil les avait regardés; mais jamais dans un pays où les joues étaient pâlies par un misérable labeur et par une ombre mortelle et où les lèvres de la jeunesse au lieu d'être pleines de sang étaient amincies par la famine ou déformées par le venin.'⁶⁶

This passage, from one of the 1870 lectures on art, I have decided to leave in Sizeranne's translation, since it accentuates the contrast with an extract from A l'ombre des jeunes filles en fleurs:

"Je vous plains beaucoup", dit Bergotte au narrateur malade, "et pourtant je ne vous plains pas trop; parce que je vois que vous disposez des jouissances de l'intelligence et parce que celles-ci pour vous comme pour tous ceux qui les connaissent, sont vraisemblablement les seules qui comptent."⁶⁷

Both these passages, it is true, are expressive of the need for some sort of aesthetic attitude; but the valedictory anguish and frantic snobbery of the Ruskin lecture section contrasts strikingly with Bergotte's tranquil advocacy of the contemplative life, and this contrast derives from the historical shift in aesthetic priorities which was initiated by the Romantics, was articulated in all its tensions by Ruskin, and was completed by the works and manifestoes of High Modernism.

A retrospective account of the reasons underlying such a shift – reasons which have much to do with the increasing sophistication of expressive modes themselves – is given by Roger Fry in his 'An Essay in Aesthetics' of 1909. Beginning with what he calls 'some elementary psychology', Fry observes that the whole of animal life, and a great part of human life, is made up of instinctive reactions to sensible objects, and their accompanying emotions.

'But man has the peculiar faculty of calling up again in his mind the echo of past experiences of this kind, of going over it again, "in imagination", as we say. He has, therefore, the possibility of a double life; one the actual life, the other the imaginative life. Between these two lives there is this great distinction, that in the actual life the processes of natural selection have brought it about that the instinctive reaction, such, for instance, as flight from danger, shall be the most important part of the whole process, and it is towards this that the man bends his whole conscious endeavour. But in the imaginative life no such action is necessary, and, therefore, the whole consciousness may be focused upon the perceptive and the emotional aspects of the experience. In this way we get, in the imaginative life, a different set of values, and a different kind of perception.'⁶⁸

The inescapable difference in import between the two passages cited by Lemaître is that whereas Bergotte's credo argues unequivocally for the second, 'imaginative' life, Ruskin's recognises tensions between the actual and the imaginative, which are born of their interdependence. For both writers, imagination and reflection offer the only freedom from insight, but while in Proust's novel this freedom is guaranteed only in a seamless, fictive world, which the individual may contemplate in hermetic isolation, the author's consciousness being the only still point in the turning world from which temporal events may be resolved in aesthetic stasis, Ruskin insists on this freedom being predicated on a community of imagination which might lead to a better world. Desire for social change, which would add another tense - the future of fear and anticipation - to the present contemplation of past events, admits the contamination of instinct to Ruskin's aesthetic, and disrupts the calm of Modernist aestheticism. The over-earnestness and occasional panic which ensue from the adoption of such overwhelming responsibilities led extreme formalists to castigate Ruskin as a *démodé* moralist. (For the purpose of their polemic the word moral and its adjuncts are usually made to connote the rules of Dr. Arnold rather than the tradition of Plato.) Thus Roger Fry, later in the same essay:

'The view that the imaginative life does subserve morality is inevitably the view taken by moralists like Ruskin, to whom the imaginative life is yet an absolute necessity. It is a view which leads to some very hard special pleading, even to a self-deception which is in itself morally undesirable.'⁶⁹

This last point, a rough echo of Proust's own criticism of Ruskin, shifts the grounds of accusation in a way familiar to readers of a critic who was hardly innocent of special pleading in his elaborations of a myth of transcendent integrity and coherence. This myth is largely deconstructed by Proust in his practice of writing and in the depiction of 'les intermittences du coeur', but reasserts itself at the final annunciation of Le Temps retrouvé. The transcendently pure work of art is seen as free from any moral engagement. Fry again:

'Art is an expression and a stimulus of this imaginative life, which is separated from actual life by the absence of responsive action. Now this responsive action implies in actual life moral responsibility. In art we have no such moral responsibility - it presents a life freed from the binding necessities of our actual existence.'⁷⁰

Even if we accept that (some of) the greatest works of art have no discernible ethical content, or that their aesthetic and moral force are independent of each other, it is a dangerous consequence of this argument to assume, as many critics have done, that the proportion of moral intent in a work of art is directly subtractable from its sum aesthetic value, for this aesthetic value cannot be at once component and total. Yet this strategy has often been invoked in order to marginalise Ruskin as a figure of insular values and local significance. It is perhaps regrettable from the point of view of comparative judgements that the writers with whom we are concerned shared such an interest in the plastic arts, for it has proved too tempting to discuss their work in terms of the broad, occasionally seductive, but often reductive metaphorical terms of general affective aesthetics, rather as simply - and complexly - practitioners in language.

To return to Lemaître, it is unlikely that a criticism blind to such obvious distinctions can be helpful in the comparisons it draws.

The publication of the Marie Nordlinger correspondence (1944) and the appearance of Jean Santeuil (1952) and Contre Sainte-Beuve (1954) lent new impetus to the project of establishing a chronology for the genesis of A la recherche du temps perdu, and the question of Ruskin's influence became more strictly subject to the criteria of documentary evidence, however intermittent and unstable. Proust's own ironic aside in Contre Sainte-Beuve about how we arrive at a writer's individual truth:

'Il est trop facile de croire qu'elle nous
arrivera un beau matin dans notre courrier,
sous forme d'une lettre inédite qu'un
bibliothécaire de nos amis nous communiquera,
ou que nous la recueillerons de la bouche de
quelqu'un qui a beaucoup (connu) l'auteur' 71

has not always dissuaded the scholar or memoirist from their natural propensity to Sainte-Beuvism.

Marie Nordlinger's testimony to the large contribution made by herself and Proust's mother to the translation of the Bible of Amiens lends further support to the argument that Proust knew little English and was manifestly unsuited to the task which he had set himself, even going so far as to assert that the book itself remained inaccessible to him. The general impression to be gleaned from the correspondence is the familiar one of discipline and discipleship, but there are two important statements among the letters which go unremarked by Proust's collaborator. One is the revelation that, among other works of Ruskin, he knew Praeterita by

heart.⁷² The other is a reflection on technique which suggests that his reading of Ruskin was responsive to poetic resonances in a way which transcends the journeywork of literal translation.

'Ce qu'on appelle habileté technique n'est pas un savoir à proprement parler, car il n'existe pas en dehors des mystérieuses associations de notre mémoire et du tact acquis de notre invention quand elle approche les mots. Le savoir dans le sens d'une chose qui est toute faite en dehors de nous et qu'on peut apprendre comme dans les sciences, est nul en art. Au contraire, c'est quand les rapports scientifiques entre les mots ont disparu de notre esprit et qu'ils ont pris une vie où les éléments chimiques sont oubliés dans une individualité nouvelle, que la technique, le tact, qui connaît leurs répugnances, flatte leurs désirs, connaît leur beauté, touche leurs formes, assortit leurs affinités, peut commencer. Et ceci n'existe que quand un être est une âme et n'est plus tant de carbone, tant de phosphore, etc.'⁷³

Rather than being an obfuscatory rationale for Proust's defects as a translator, this strikes one as an example of the subjective and metaphorical mode of reading which Maurois remarked on as being capable of recreating Ruskin for a new audience.

For students of the evolution of À la recherche du temps perdu, the reappearance of Jean Santeuil and Contre Sainte-Beuve dispelled once and for all the myth of Proust the dilettante and clearly situated the period of Ruskin translations between two abortive projects whose contributions to the novel's substance and structure were nonetheless abundant.

While many sections of the novel were now shown to be plainly traceable to parts of the earlier works, the place of the Ruskin translations in the Proustian canon became more problematic, given their function as an act of devotion to an earlier and alien writer, an act of abeyance if not aberration from the central and self-centred project of Proust's career.

However vehement and principled his attacks on idolatry and other matters of literary bad faith in the prefaces and notes to La Bible d'Amiens and Sésame et les lys, it is clear that Ruskin was never the sort of productive irritant that Sainte-Beuve became for Proust. Proust's criticisms of Ruskin are always filial rather than polemical, and he never uses him as a scapegoat for the excesses of nineteenth century criticism. Such was Proust's homage, and so muted were his own ambitions during the translation years, that Henri Lemaître is impelled to assert, in a 1953 article, 'De Jean Santeuil à La Recherche du Temps Perdu: la médiation ruskinienne', that: 'La publication de Jean Santeuil apporte une précieuse confirmation à la thèse selon laquelle le contact avec Ruskin détermina dans l'âme de Proust une sorte de révolution spirituelle d'une plus profonde portée qu'une simple influence littéraire'.⁷⁴

Mere literary influence, for Lemaître, is much inferior to those 'harmonies préétablies' remarked on by Proust in a letter to Marie Nordlinger⁷⁵ - harmonies which echo a deep spiritual affinity between writers of genius. There existed a Ruskinian spiritual dimension in Proust which was foreshadowed by certain elements in Jean Santeuil but only brought into the open by six years of discipleship. Lemaître uses the evidence of Praeterita to suggest this pre-established harmony, pointing out, as did Sybil de Souza, the broad similarities in the childhood circumstances of the two writers, and their common association of early memories with an

unusual receptivity to natural beauty. Above all, it is a shared patience and precision in the analysis of sensation, such as is asserted by Ruskin in the third chapter of Praeterita, which is paramount to their nostalgic recreation of formative experience, and it is here that their profound affinity is seen to be located. This affinity of souls, of which any linguistic affinity is only a symptom, is more easily brought out by a comparative reading of Jean Santeuil as largely unmediated autobiography. Despite Lemaître's unhelpful invocations of the charismatic, he does briefly sketch out certain technical similarities between the two writers and hints at a revaluation of Ruskin as the pioneer of a new kind of descriptive prose which enacts 'l'art - très original dans l'Angleterre victorienne - du transfert imaginatif d'une sensation, à travers le glissement progressif des mots dans la phrase, cet art proprement poétique qui est un des secrets les plus neufs du langage proustien et qui n'est pas non plus sans analogie avec la technique impressionniste.' ⁷⁶

A few passing examples are given of Proustian phrases and rhythms avant la lettre, but Lemaître's explicit suggestion is that these should be anthologised rather than analysed.

Lemaître's article is the first to make extended reference to Praeterita, and, invoking the unpublished testimony of Mme. Riefstahl-Nordlinger, asserts that Proust did not know the work, and cites as proof that there is no mention of it in his writings.

He admits himself to being quite glad that this is the case, since any evidence of direct influence might minimise the role played by that inborn spiritual affinity which he is at pains to establish. Unfortunately, it is

not the case, there being at least three mentions in the correspondence,⁷⁷ including one in Marie Nordlinger's own collection, where Proust says he knows the work by heart, and an allusion, in a letter to Robert de Billy in 1907, to an abortive project to translate the book. In addition, Jean Autret points out five quotations and one reference to Praeterita in the annotations to La Bible d'Amiens,⁷⁸ and of these only one has been borrowed from Bardoux, and concluded that Proust's use of comparison and juxtaposition would indicate that he had a full knowledge of at least Praeterita, Queen of the Air, and Val d'Arno.⁷⁹

It is, of course, possible to doubt Proust's own word as evidence, his propensity to exaggerate in correspondence being well-established, but it is difficult to imagine his indulging in the special hypocrisies of the ill-read. Clearly, the example of Praeterita is crucial to any examination of the relationship between Ruskin and Proust, whether we are concerned with the genesis of one major work of fiction or more concerned with the broader developments which some might consider the proper study of the literary historian. An extreme statement of the latter point of view can be found in Oswald Ducrot and Tzvetan Todorov's 'Dictionnaire encyclopédique des sciences du langage':

'L'objet de l'histoire littéraire n'est pas la genèse des oeuvres. Tynianov écrit dès 1927, "le point de vue adopté détermine le type de l'étude. On en distingue deux principaux: l'étude de la genèse des phénomènes littéraires, et l'étude de la variabilité littéraire, c'est-à-dire de l'évolution de la série". Nous poserons en une première approche que l'objet spécifique de l'histoire littéraire est cette variabilité de la littérature, et non la genèse

des oeuvres que d'aucuns continuent de considérer comme l'objet de l'histoire littéraire et qui, selon nous, relève en fait de la psychologie ou de la sociologie de la création.'⁸⁰

The assertion that no one is concerned anymore with the genesis of individual works of art belongs to a tradition of prescriptive polemic common enough in recent critical debate, and can be dismissed as such, yet it is remarkable to what extent enquiries into the genesis of A la recherche du temps perdu have dominated the endeavours of Proustian scholars over the past 50 years, as though the novel constituted a texte limite for certain tendencies in literature. This concentration is partly explained by the very gradual coming to light of ancillary documents, but I hope to show that there are also important literary historical factors at play. Certainly there are no signs of any abatement of the stream of studies examining Ruskin's influence on Proust, despite the forbidding example of Jean Autret's L'Influence de Ruskin sur la vie, les idées et l'oeuvre de Marcel Proust (1955) which constitutes the most thorough and painstaking examination of the subject. Autret offers a detailed and scholarly chronology of Ruskin's fortunes in France before Proust, and of Proust's own work on Ruskin, analyses the prefaces and judges the translations, before turning to the question of influence itself. Here he differentiates between direct influence - what Proust retained from his reading and criticism of Ruskin - and indirect influence, consisting of those areas of aesthetic experience, notably painting and religious art, which contribute to the matter of the novel and in which it is questionable whether Proust would have had as much knowledge or interest without Ruskin's guidance. With the first of these categories, Autret offers a systematic list of ten Ruskinian ideas which were retained and integrated

into the Proustian aesthetic as construed from Le Temps retrouvé, the letter written to René Blum in 1913, and the interview which appeared in Le Temps in the same year.

Of these Ruskinian ideas, most refer to the role of the artist as the devoted transcriber of the beautiful. Other ideas, concerning the relations between habit, impression and knowledge, and on principles of composition founded on repetition, are tantalisingly alluded to, but remain unexplored. Questions of technique are in the main ignored by Autret who, in his concluding remarks, insists that Ruskin's influence on Proust has three major aspects - influence on the man, on his ideas, and on his general knowledge and the subject matter of his novel. Here, as elsewhere, Mallarmé's dictum that the poet (or, we may add, the novelist, or even the art historian) does not write with thoughts but with words, is overlooked. That both Ruskin and Proust chose metaphors of vision to describe the quiddities of individual style (this being both the idiom of the day and the one best suited to the discussion of the plastic arts) is no reason why we should choose the same metaphors to discuss their achievement. Rather, the adoption of their discourse makes analysis impossible, being locked in a circle of restatement.

This is evident in Autret's one abortive discussion of the question of stylistic influence:

' il convient de remarquer que, hormis les quelques réminiscences et pastiches de Ruskin que l'on trouve dans *Swann* - et dont nous avons signalé quelques-uns - le style de Proust n'est nullement ruskinien. Déjà avant d'écrire son long roman, Proust avait son propre style. Les idées mêmes de Ruskin l'avaient amené à affirmer que

le style répond à une nécessité intérieure: dans l'interview du Temps, en 1913, il déclarait que le style était la révélation de l'univers particulier que chacun de nous voit, et dans Le Temps retrouvé il répète cette définition. Ruskin a exercé une influence sur le style de Proust, mais elle ne se manifeste pas dans une similarité entre le style des deux écrivains; l'influence de Ruskin a été de rendre le style de Proust aussi proustien que possible puisque Proust, suivant les préceptes ruskiniens, s'est efforcé par son style de traduire sa vision particulière du monde.'⁸¹

The visual and spatial vocabularies in which Ruskin (in his most influential works) and Proust (in such moments of prescriptive insight as the final chapter of Le Temps retrouvé and the meditations in Elstir's studio) couch their arguments encourage literalist interpretations of Flaubert's notion of style as 'une manière absolue de voir les choses' and readings which would subtract the very materiality of language from the concept of style. Within these limits, even helpful dichotomies such as that elaborated by Curtius, between intellectualism and impressionism, are shadowed and caricatured by their exemplars in A la recherche du temps perdu; characters for whom language is only an unworked and secondary mode of expression. Elstir, Vinteuil, even Bergotte are, of course, present as artists in the narrator's subtle and echoing evocations of their work. A passage like the hero's meditation in Elstir's studio⁸¹ presents for the reader a very complex phenomenon indeed: a fictional character describing and commenting on a non-existent work of art - "Le Port de Carquethuit" - using as metaphor for the painter's method the very word 'metaphor'. At another level, those aspects of the narrative that would control our response to the novel's structure hint that this 'metaphor' is itself a metaphor for the novelist's own method of

structuring experience. The language of writing and the language of painting encroach on each other as do Carquethuit and the sea, as referents meet, coincide and drift apart. The narrator's observations on painting and impressionism are used to support not only Proust's conception of painting but also of literature. The functions of reader and spectator, artist and writer, are expressed as cognate, and the episode's rhetoric constantly elicits our approval of the closed autonomous work of art which is the result of a single untainted vision. This work of art can be a painting or a novel – vision is the primary stylistic component. What goes for Elstir's painting goes for A la recherche du temps perdu itself, and Proust urges a confusion of literary and pictorial terms in order to reinforce the book's status as a verbal icon. At a micro-textual level, literary terms are invoked to describe Elstir's technique:

'j'y pourrais discerner que le charme de chacune consistait en une sorte de métamorphose des choses représentées, analogue à celle qu'en poésie on nomme métaphore, et que, si Dieu le Père avait créé les choses en les nommant, c'est en leur ôtant leur nom, ou en leur en donnant un autre, qu'Elstir les recréait. Les noms que désignent les choses répondent toujours à une notion de l'intelligence, étrangère à nos impressions véritables, et qui nous force à éliminer d'elles tout ce qui ne se rapporte pas à cette notion.'⁸²

This last sentence drifts far enough from the initial import of Marcel's observations into the finality of aphorism to inform us of a larger, metatextual function. Once the motifs of intelligence and impression have been sounded, they carry far beyond the Elstir discussion, while the

idea of renaming creation, only incidentally applicable to Elstir - 'Au moment où j'entrai, le créateur était en train d'achever, avec le pinceau qu'il tenait dans sa main, la forme du soleil à son coucher'⁸³ - as a somewhat stretched metaphor for the painter's art, is more closely and literally linked with the activity of the novelist, particularly this novelist with his obsessive interest in the resonances of names. Altogether the passage employs the gamut of rhetorical effects to subdue the importance of rhetoric. The distancing gestures of the narrator/hero as observer and the fictional artist (with his fictional work of art) as practitioner serve to suggest that aesthetic concepts like intellectualism and impressionism are equally applicable to the literary and the plastic arts. The developing analogies encouraged by the *mise-en-abîme* gradually open out from Elstir's painting to the narrator/hero's proposed novel to the example of À la recherche du temps perdu itself to make a definite assertion about the real world.

This whole process involves a curious denial of the suggestive yet disruptive potential of language, that which enables Mallarmé to say the word flower and evoke something absent from all bouquets. Yet Proust in this passage is using language in its most sophisticated form as an entirely fictive structure to insist on an iconic rather than a linguistic reading of these structures, a reading which subverts the nature of language itself. The tendency to use iconic metaphors as conceptual paradigms in aesthetic systems has been charted and analysed by M. H. Abrams in The Mirror and the Lamp, where it is observed that 'the very sharpness of focus afforded by a happily chosen archetype makes marginal and elusive those qualities of an object which fall outside its primitive categories'.⁸⁴ As the analogy of 'metaphor' had been useful at a micro-textual level in the Elstir passage to describe the painter's

procedure, which itself becomes, at a macro-textual level, a metaphor for the novelist's art, a similar figure, that of the hieroglyphic, is used to posit a fusion of the linguistic and the iconic, the visual and the scriptural as a preliminary to the macro-textual and metalinguistic presentation of the novel as icon to be perceived spatially rather than read serially. (In passing let it be remarked how the word 'figure' is itself an example of the phenomenon under discussion.)

'Je me souviens que déjà à Combray je fixais avec attention devant mon esprit quelque image qui m'avait forcé à la regarder, un nuage, un triangle, un clocher, une fleur, un caillou, en sentant qu'il y avait peut-être sous ces signes quelque chose de tout autre que je devais tâcher de découvrir, une pensée qu'ils traduisaient à la façon de ces caractères hiéroglyphiques qu'on croirait représenter seulement des objets matériels. Sans doute ce déchiffrage était difficile, mais seul il donnait quelque vérité à lire. Car les vérités que l'intelligence saisit directement à claire-voie dans le monde de la pleine lumière ont quelque chose de moins profond, de moins nécessaire que celles que la vie nous a malgré nous communiquées en une impression, matérielle parce qu'elle est entrée par nos sens, mais dont nous pouvons dégager l'esprit. En somme, dans un cas comme dans l'autre, qu'il s'agit d'impressions comme celle que m'avait donnée la vue des clochers de Martinville, ou de réminiscences comme celle de l'inégalité des deux marches ou le goût de la madeleine, il fallait tâcher d'interpréter les sensations comme les signes d'autant de lois et d'idées, en essayant de penser, c'est-à-dire de faire sortir de la pénombre ce que j'avais senti, de le convertir en un équivalent spirituel. Or, ce moyen qui me paraissait le seul, qu'était-ce

autre chose que faire une oeuvre d'art? Et déjà les conséquences se pressaient dans mon esprit; car qu'il s'agît de réminiscences dans le genre du bruit de la fourchette ou du goût de la madeleine, ou de ces vérités écrites à l'aide de figures dont j'essayais de chercher le sens dans ma tête où clochers, herbes folles, elles composaient un grimoire compliqué et fleuri, leur premier caractère était que je n'étais pas libre de les choisir, qu'elles m'étaient données telles quelles. Et je sentais que ce devait être la griffe de leur authenticité. Je n'avais pas été chercher les deux pavés inégaux de la cour où j'avais buté. Mais justement la façon fortuite, inévitable, dont la sensation avait été rencontrée, contrôlait la vérité du passé qu'elle ressuscitait, des images qu'elle déclenchait, puisque nous sentons son effort pour remonter vers la lumière, que nous sentons la joie du réel retrouvé. Elle est le contrôle aussi de la vérité de tout le tableau, fait d'impressions contemporaines qu'elle ramène à sa suite avec cette infailible proportion de lumière et d'ombre, de relief et d'omission, de souvenir et d'oubli que la mémoire ou l'observation conscientes ignoreront toujours.⁸⁵

In this long passage from Le Temps retrouvé we see the resident ambiguities of the concept 'l'oeuvre d'art' brought out in a general fusion of linguistic, conceptual and pictorial vocabularies. The vocabulary of intellectual inquiry - 'penser', 'traduire', 'lire', 'réminiscences', 'interpréter' - is invaded and gradually superseded by the vocabulary of impression or impressionism, while the secret language of the narrator's experience is one which is exclusively iconic, divorced from the properties of enunciation, 'caractères hiéroglyphiques', 'signes', 'vérités écrites à l'aide de figures', 'grimoire compliqué et fleuri', 'la griffe de leur authenticité', and in the following paragraph the narrator's livre intérieur

de signes inconnus is described as being composed of signs carved in relief. In the final sentence, the narrator's experience is presented as an impressionist picture, analysable in terms of proportions of light and shade. The narrator's valuing of impressions received through the senses above the truths discovered by the light of intelligence echoes the two paradigmatic metaphors of mind explored by M.H. Abrams in The Mirror and the Lamp.⁸⁶ The first of these, deriving from Plato by way of Locke, sees the mind as a mirror which fixes the object it reflects, a tabula rasa on which sensations write or paint themselves, or a waxed tablet into which sensations, like seals, impress themselves. The archetype of the lamp, established by Plotinus and developed by the Romantics, denies the mind this passive role and assigns to it the active function of projector. Although Proust does occasionally allude to the creative role of intelligence in constructing a work of art after the fact of aesthetic epiphany, his insistent anti-intellectualism in developing the pictorial analogy as he strives to express the iconic and impressionistic spatial simultaneity of aesthetic experience tends to suppress the active and sequential qualities inherent in the reading and writing of narrative. As Georges Poulet points out, this phenomenon is inherent in the metaphorical structure of le souvenir involontaire.

'Ce n'est pas seulement certaine période de son enfance, que l'être proustien voit sortir de sa tasse de thé; c'est aussi une chambre, une église, une ville, un ensemble topographique solide, qui n'erre plus, qui ne vacille plus.'⁸⁷

This metaphorical structure subverts narrative by conflating both time and space in an aesthetic stasis, yet it is still asserted in narrative and

furthermore in a narrative which is highly didactic for all its rhetorical sophistication. Where the subversion of narrative is acceptable with regard to the moments of illumination outside time, it becomes much more problematic when characters, events, and imaginary works of art are constrained in order to valorise the subversion, telling us how to read the work as well as how it was written. The story of A la recherche du temps perdu, Proust's own story, which has been summarised by Genette as 'Marcel devient écrivain', normally depends for its claims to truth on its complex system of first-person narration. As Maurice Blanchot explains it, this narration, these truth-claims, are posited on a fourfold metamorphosis of the writer.

'Proust ne dit donc pas la vérité? Mais cette vérité, il ne nous la doit pas et il serait incapable de nous la dire. Il ne pourrait l'exprimer, la rendre réelle, concrète et vraie qu'en la projetant dans le temps même dont elle est la mise en oeuvre, d'où l'oeuvre tient sa nécessité; ce temps de récit où, bien qu'il dise "je", ce n'est plus le Proust réel, ni le Proust écrivain qui ont pouvoir de parler, mais leur métamorphose en cette ombre qu'est le narrateur devenu "personnage du livre", lequel dans le récit écrit un récit qui est le livre lui-même et produit à son tour tous les autres métamorphoses de lui-même que sont les différents "Moi" dont il raconte les expériences. Proust est devenu insaisissable, parce qu'il est devenu inséparable de cette quadruple métamorphose qui n'est que le mouvement du livre vers l'oeuvre.'⁸⁸

The conflation of voice (the multiple 'je') and of time (the metaphorical structure of the souvenir involontaire) operate powerful rhetorical strictures on the classic novelistic functions of character and event.

Characters like Elstir and Bergotte have neither the ontological status nor the suasive force of the all-telling 'I' – they function alternately as porte-parole or ironic agent, and their actions are both ruled from above and constrained on their own fictive level by the multiple narrator. Moreover, the narrative time in which they act is rendered superfluous by the structure of illuminations which lends meaning to the narrator/hero's experience. Blanchot, adopting Proust's spatial terminology, sees the privileged moments as starry points of significance surrounded by celestial spheres which partake of the void of experience yet reflect the light and significance of their central points. In the Proustian cosmology, style is not putting words together, but a matter of (Dantesque) vision.

The quest to trace the genesis of A la recherche du temps perdu has found new levels of precision and intensity in the work of the team of scholars at the Centre d'Etudes proustiennes, for whom the formula 'la littérature commence avec la rature' justifies the project to establish 'une édition génétique, restituant dans son dynamisme, tant en ce qui concerne le détail des phrases que l'agencement des ensembles, le processus continu de l'élaboration, le devenir de la Recherche depuis les balbutiements initiaux, jusqu'à cette version que seule la mort de l'auteur a rendue "définitive", et donnant, du même coup, à lire le fonctionnement de l'écriture proustienne.'⁹¹

Initial steps in this undertaking have been restricted to the establishment of certain episodic and thematic subsections of the final text, which are traced in their development through various layers of elaboration and elision, from the cahiers and carnets to the more or less definitive manuscripts, typescripts and proofs. In one such study,⁹² Jo Yoshida

shows that the gradual development, through various drafts, of the character Elstir as portrayed by word, deed and creation marks a rejection of Ruskin as homme de goût and professional art historian. The Ruskinian elements of Elstir's personality ('Elstir théoricien Elstir homme de goût et amoureux du Moyen Age') are at first balanced and eventually displaced at the manuscript stage by an ever greater insistence on Elstir's Impressionism of the type practised and advocated by Monet and the arch anti-Ruskin, Whistler - that willed myopia which rejects empirical knowledge in favour of artistic vision. Yoshida does acknowledge that this attitude derives in part from Ruskin's famous anecdote about Turner's riposte to the naval officer who pointed out that the artist had omitted the portholes - 'My business is to draw what I see, not what I know',⁹³ but insists that Ruskin's 'impressionist' aspect has been exaggerated by critics like Bardèche who speak of his 'anti-intellectualisme'⁹⁴ and Autret who overstressed Ruskin's idealist and impressionist side in order to underline his influence on Proust.

'Précisons: le travail de Ruskin, qu'il porte sur l'architecture, la peinture, la géologie, la botanique ou la sociologie, est fondé sur une recherche intellectuelle, souvent très scientifique; le Ruskin poète et impressionniste, celui que présenta Robert de la Sizeranne et dont s'éprit le jeune Proust, existe, mais par intermittence, seulement là où il se livre à sa propre vision poétique.'⁹⁵

It is true that Ruskin's impressionism has been exaggerated; so, we might add, has been that of Proust, whose every sentence enacts an intellectual exploration, and both writers certainly suffer from, and create out of, a sense of emotional and aesthetic intermittence which characterises their

work as uniquely and immediately responsive to the dilemmas of the writing self. The problem lies with the word 'impressionism' itself, which is inextricably associated with a school of painters whose achievement as painters is important within the context of art history, but whose legacy of slogans and manifestoes does much to blur and confuse previously established critical categories. This is always likely to be a consequence of the rationales offered by artists whose first medium is not language. From Turner's bluff ripostes through Whistler's foppish synaesthesia to the metaphysical speculations of Kandinsky or Rothko, such utterances are usually helpful only in that they tell us what the artist thought he was doing at the time of composition. The effect is even more confusing when schools or categories take their name from a chance remark of local polemic, as happened with 'Metaphysical Poets' or 'Impressionists'. Being linked with a school of painters, and primarily with their artefacts, the term impressionism can hardly be used reliably as a quasi-philosophical aesthetic or literary category. It is difficult enough to say in what respects a particular painting is impressionist; to use the same term to describe thoughts, thinkers, writers and books leads to acute terminological confusion. From the beginning, impressionism was to be opposed to the operations of the intellect:

'L'horreur de la composition est le signe caractéristique de l'impressionnisme; il repousse tout effet obtenu par des apprêts intellectuels et subjectifs, il n'admet que les arrangements libres de la nature.'⁹⁶

The (however hostile) definition given here is (just) adequate to the business of painting, but the term's openness to polemic exploitation and false opposition, however Hegelian, shows how inadequate it is to a

serious and verbally conceived aesthetic. It is ironic that it should be thought sufficient to damn Ruskin by remarking that he was insufficiently or incompletely 'impressionist' when a great part of his work consists of the most thoroughgoing and various investigation of the phenomenology of mundane and aesthetic vision, an undertaking which invents, explores and discards heuristic categories akin to impressionism with a rigour which is almost reckless in its vitality. This project, however intermittent, was always central to Ruskin, and, as we shall see, as personal as autobiography.

The équipe Proust is, however, not concerned with the consideration of Ruskin's work in its various totality. Its project is to trace the evolution of Proust's text and the ideas embodied therein towards the final extant stage. This final text, while not definitive, in that its revision and expansion were halted only by Proust's death, still confers retrospectively standards for evaluation of previous gaps, diversions and roads-not-taken. Yoshida's concern here is to locate precisely the crucial instant of quarrel with Ruskin - 'selon Proust l'essentiel est de chercher à fixer l'impression individuelle. Ici il s'oppose nettement à son maître'⁹⁷ - and in doing so reduces Ruskin to a component of a character. For the committed Proustian who adheres to the creed announced in Le Temps retrouvé, the ideas of Ruskin can be marginalised by the same rhetoric of disqualification which is satirically applied to the 'theories' of the Duc de Guermantes. His words are subjected to paraphrase and other forms of distortion by the Proustian reader intent on discovering the author's final word rather than on tracing the patterns of intertextuality which can be revealed by historically informed but rhetorically unconstrained individual acts of reading.

One of the finest studies devoted to A la recherche du temps perdu, Tadié's Proust et le roman, restricts itself to the concepts grounded in the work itself, eschewing the imposition of categories foreign to the novel itself or foreign methods of reading the text. This is quite proper to a historico-formalist ambition to read Proust as he himself read Balzac and Flaubert, and practice bears out Tadié's insistence that 'il n'y a de théorie de la littérature que dans la critique du singulier',⁹⁸ but the moment one embarks, as one must, on comparative study of the texts and authors, at least two texts impose themselves upon the reader in all their singularity and difference, and all acts of suppression, compression, and/or marginalisation become wilfully provisional, subject to the exclusive demands of a project of interpretation. In this case my aim is to salvage the writings of Ruskin from the overwhelming patterns of reading determined by Proust's example and followed too zealously by Proustians who know Ruskin only through their master's word. This involves recognising that Ruskin is a writer as well as, if not more than, a theorist, and that his work merits close technical scrutiny. Although, unlike Marcel Proust, Ruskin's own practice as writer has no developed manifesto – rather a series of momentary insights into the writing predicament, it is still possible to discern principles of composition; principles unannounced, but inherent in the work, or due to be invested in it by the act of reading.

In his Proust et les signes, Gilles Deleuze offers the most satisfactory solution to the problematic opposition of impressionism/intelligence:

'Le grand thème du Temps retrouvé est celui-ci: la recherche de la vérité et l'aventure propre de l'involontaire. La pensée n'est rien sans quelque chose qui

force à penser, qui fait violence à la pensée. Plus important que la pensée, il y a ce qui "donne à penser"; plus important que le philosophe, le poète Le leitmotiv du Temps retrouvé, c'est le mot forcer: des impressions qui nous forcent à regarder, des rencontres qui nous forcent à interpréter, des expressions qui nous forcent à penser ...
 ... Ce qui nous force à penser, c'est le signe. Le signe est l'objet d'une rencontre; mais c'est précisément la contingence de la rencontre qui garantit la nécessité de ce qu'elle donne à penser. L'acte de penser ne découle pas d'une simple possibilité naturelle. Il est, au contraire, la seule création véritable. La création, c'est la genèse de l'acte de penser dans la pensée elle-même.'⁹⁹

Deleuze here exerts his own pressure on contingent points of the text to yield new patterns of meaning. Elsewhere in his study, he insists that the Proustian work of art is not, and does not propose itself as, an organic totality, but is in essence fragmentary, crystalline, mosaical.

'Le monde est devenu miettes et chaos. Précisément parce que la réminiscence va d'associations subjectives à un point de vue originaire, l'objectivité ne peut plus être que dans l'oeuvre d'art: elle n'existe plus dans des continus significatifs comme états du monde, ni dans des significations idéales comme essences stables, mais uniquement dans la structure formelle signifiante de l'oeuvre, c'est à dire dans le style.'¹⁰⁰

The production of meaning was recognised by Proust himself as a dynamic process involving the reader and the microtextual and intertextual resonances of the author's style.

'Ainsi j'ai essayé de pourvoir le lecteur comme d'une mémoire improvisée où j'ai disposé les souvenirs des autres livres de Ruskin - sorte de caisse de résonance, où les paroles de la Bible d'Amiens pourront prendre quelque retentissement en y éveillant des échos fraternels.' ¹⁰¹

The Deleuzian concept of the novel as a machine capable of producing other sensations for the reader than those specifically noted by the narrator/ Marcel/Proust is taken up belatedly by Lee McKay Johnson's The Metaphor of Painting: Essays on Baudelaire, Ruskin, Proust and Pater, ¹⁰² to suggest the inexhaustibility of the vast réseau of correspondances which constitute À la recherche du temps perdu. The essay format serves Johnson well, since it enables close study of the authors in some depth without the impositions of a duty to prove influence or precedence. Johnson's central thesis is that all four writers used painting as a lens for intensifying their perception of literature, and because of their love for painting and the 'spiritual shock' it produces, they changed our sense of language and literary structure. While restricting himself to the critical framework provided by each writer, Johnson draws valuable comparisons between Ruskin's response to Turner and that of Proust to Vermeer, and the former is supported by extensive quotations from Ruskin's writings (though these are regrettably restricted to the early works and to the more well-known passages of Praeterita). Unfortunately Ruskin is still invoked as an écrivain whose writing offers transparent access to his 'ideas', Turner's painting, or Wordsworth's texts, while Proust's language

is more exhaustively read for its literariness. Structures of meaning are seen to be more complex in Proust's novel, while Ruskin's meaning, however precise and profound, is basically unproblematic. In refuting the vulgar notion of Ruskin as a vague and over-subjective writer of purple prose, Johnson insists on the clarity of his writing to the point of denying it its very substance.

'The reader is made to feel that Ruskin's prose is an absolutely clear and transparent medium for recording the impressions produced by Turner's paintings; it is as if the reader is seeing Turner through Ruskin's eyes as Turner might have seen himself, if the painter were able to step momentarily into the position of critic.'¹⁰³

If Ruskin's acts of description are this successful, they duplicate the real, and are therefore redundant. (One might ask why Ruskin bothered to illustrate his books.) In contrast, Proust's tendency to refract reality through layer upon layer of art is well remarked by Johnson. Ruskin's descriptive prose constitutes a recreation¹⁰⁴ of the visual object, while that of Proust gives a new form to evanescent experience.¹⁰⁵ The best feature of Johnson's study is her illustration of how the prose of both Ruskin and Proust enacts the roving and focusing of the eye over a recessional landscape, but more attention needs to be paid to the linguistic, hence serial aspect of this process: the ways in which language distorts reality by exploiting the often bizarre potentialities of syntax, semantics and historical etymology, and also enacts, yet resists, the passage of time. It is this which prompted the recurrent sense of failure in both writers and their occasional but absolute triumph.

In 'Proust et Ruskin: Nouvelles Perspectives'¹⁰⁶, Philip Kolb, while voicing some impatience at the extent and persistence of Proust-Ruskin scholarship, concedes rightly that the exclusive concentration of de Souza, Lemaître, Autret et al on the borrowing of ideas rather than on technical affinities was to be expected from the critical horizons available to them at the time of their research, and uses the evidence of correspondence and other recently available documents in an attempt to clarify once and for all the essential facts determining the relationship between the two writers. In doing so, Kolb tends to minimise this relationship, insisting that the true translator of The Bible of Amiens was Proust's mother, and that Proust's active interest in Ruskin, dating from November 1899, would soon have died of natural causes had Ruskin himself not done so in January 1900, thus creating a climate of topical interest in his works from which the eager young Frenchman showed himself keen to profit. As for the Ruskinian ideas said to have percolated into Proust's work, those of art as vision, and of the self-reliance of the individual artist, were, says Kolb, very much common currency at the time. (These ideas, of course, are not Ruskin's, having been drained of authority by paraphrase.) Kolb is equally dismissive of any stylistic influence, pointing out that Proust's sentences had always shown a tendency to increase in length and clausal complexity according to the developing rhythm of his thought. The translation work did have the salutary effects of sharpening Proust's style, broadening his knowledge and bringing discipline to his writing, but it is candidly admitted that another teacher might have done just as well.

But having cleared away to his satisfaction the bothersome tangle of conjecture, Kolb does allow that Proust owed one precious debt to Ruskin. He invokes the inchoate diversity of the material accumulated in the work we now know as Jean Santeuil and imputes the abandonment of this work

to the lack of some unifying principle. Such a formal paradigm was to be found in Ruskin's work, and Kolb directs us to a long footnote to Sésame et les lys where Proust remarks on Ruskin's habit of placing at the beginning of his writings some cryptic epigraph whose full meaning is not revealed until the author's argument has developed in full.

'Cette épigraphe projette comme un rayon supplémentaire qui ne vient toucher que la dernière phrase de la conférence mais illumine rétrospectivement tout ce qui a précédé

Cette citation pose nettement dès le début les trois sens du mot Sésame, la lecture qui ouvre les portes de la sagesse, le mot magique d'Ali-Baba, et la graine enchantée. Dès le début Ruskin expose ainsi ses trois thèmes et à la fin de la conférence il les mêlera inextricablement dans la dernière phrase où sera rappelée dans l'accord final la tonalité du début (sésame graine), phrase qui empruntera à ces trois thèmes une richesse et une plénitude extraordinaires.' ¹⁰⁷

Although Maurois had made reference to this same note in his article of 1932 (see above, p.77), Kolb is bolder in applying its formal categories to the structures of A la recherche du temps perdu. He suggests that we substitute the first pages of Swann for the epigraph with which Ruskin prefaces his lecture, and the last chapter of Le Temps retrouvé for Ruskin's closing sentence, and concludes that, mutatis mutandis, the remarks on Ruskin's technique could equally stand as a commentary on the Proustian novel. The whole structure of A la recherche du temps perdu - enigmatic exposition of themes, exhaustive demonstration and final revelation/resolution - is thus to be found en abîme in a minor footnote -

an insight which is itself remarkably Proustian in movement, reminding us of Proust's discovery of the tiny figure in the portal at Rouen mentioned in one of Ruskin's footnotes, and the revelation, further mediated by the fictional personage of Bergotte, of Vermeer's petit pan de mur jaune. (Bergotte, it will be recalled, is first alerted to this phenomenon by a passing allusion in a newspaper.) The sense of Proust arriving at Ruskin's truth through liminal notes is also expressed in Richard A. Macksey's 'Proust on the margins of Ruskin'¹⁰⁸, one of the few critical studies prepared to accord to Ruskin near-equal status as a writer. In describing how Ruskin's digressive technique is constantly escaping unity even as it hints and aspires towards it, Macksey points out how many of the most telling assessments of A la recherche du temps perdu could also apply to the vast monument assembled by Cook and Wedderburn.

'Many of Proust's most perceptive critics have remarked of his great novel, which must be read both "tour à tour et à la fois", that it is the product of a double discourse, one undoing (or completing) the work of the other. Walter Benjamin speaks of Proust's "Penelope-work" of weaving and unweaving, or recollection and forgetting; Ernst Robert Curtius, in terms reminiscent of Proust on Ruskin, speaks of the "braiding" of "intellect" and "impression"; Roland Barthes describes the two discourses in more purely linguistic terms as that of the "decoder" and the "encoder"; Gérard Genette argues that A la recherche must be seen at once "comme oeuvre" and "comme approche de l'oeuvre". All these deeply duplicitous characterisations could, with important qualifications, be applied to Ruskin's work as well. It is these resonances that perhaps go furthest towards explaining the affinities between the two writers, how the example of the English prophet was assimilated into the sensibility of the French novelist.'¹⁰⁹

For Kolb, however, a 'stylistic eccentricity' of Ruskin led to Proust's devising a system which would renew our conception of the novel. Macksey shows that this new conception itself involves a radical questioning of its own principles which can lead to a reevaluation of previous writers, other genres. Ruskin's works may have been marginalised by generations of Proustian/modernist critics, but Proust's own example, derived from Ruskin, teaches us to ignore the margins at our peril, for a footnote or subtitle may contain the clue to an entirely new hierarchy of formal values.

As we have seen, the mainstream of Proustian criticism, informed by the privileged concepts foregrounded in Le Temps retrouvé has tended to underrate the importance of Ruskin, placing him as an écrivain rather than an écrivain, insisting on the unproblematic transfer of ideas rather than on the complexities of intertextual resonance, and using as a point of critical departure the moment of Proust's turning away from Ruskin, thus avoiding the problem of confronting Ruskin as Proust did, in a foreign language and under the historical terms of a foreign literary tradition.

The most extreme example of this marginalisation is to be found in Maurice Bardèche's Marcel Proust romancier,¹¹⁰ which speaks of a 'vieux fermier des Westerns' and a 'prophète barbu du Far West', and concludes that 'on ne voit pas bien comment on peut accorder la pensée toute dogmatique de Ruskin, dont l'oeuvre est au fond la prédication d'un prophète, avec l'amoralisme fondamental de Proust à la fois en art et dans la vie'.¹¹¹

Less acute examples of critics sharing Proust's final exasperation with Ruskin are the omission of the Englishman from the studies of Proust's

predecessors undertaken by Elizabeth Czoniczner and Margaret Mein,¹¹² and the degree to which broad studies of Proust's reading of other literature, like Walter A. Strauss's Proust and Literature,¹¹³ René de Chantal's Marcel Proust critique littéraire,¹¹⁴ and P.E. Robert's Proust, lecteur des Anglo-saxons¹¹⁵ limit themselves to a résumé of Proust's own comments.

The subject would seem to have exhausted itself, or to be unproductively inexhaustible. Yet some recent criticism suggests that there may be other possibilities. A footnote to George Steiner's After Babel¹¹⁶ insists that the extent to which stylistic displacements in Proust's several translations from Ruskin anticipate his own idiom as a novelist remains to be investigated. W. Kassel, in his 'Proust the Pilgrim: His Idolatrous Reading of Ruskin',¹¹⁷ and Barbara Harlow in 'Sur la lecture',¹¹⁸ offer re-readings of the translations and their prefaces, and deconstruct the concepts of idolatry and translating/traducing respectively. The object of both studies, however, continues to be the delineation of Proust's evolution as a novelist. In Harlow's words, they aim for 'a productive reading which, quite properly, ignores the question of Proust's relation to Ruskin except as the killing of a dead discourse.' More importantly, Sigbrit Swahn suggests in Proust dans la recherche littéraire¹¹⁹ that a tradition of poetic autobiography might be traced from De Quincey through Baudelaire and Ruskin to Proust, thus admitting a dimension of comparative literary study across cultural, historical and generic divides which had been missing from the criticism surveyed in this chapter. The link between autobiography and the Proustian novel is also stressed in David R. Ellison's The Reading of Proust,¹²⁰ which insists that 'Proust's theory and practice of reading are understandable only in opposition to the ideas of Ruskin on the same subject Unlike those proustiens who have done traditional source studies on the Ruskin-Proust connection. I am less concerned

with general thematic parallels than I am with certain not so immediately visible, often involuted textual manipulations. The major thrust of Chapters Two and Three is to demonstrate the way in which Proust inverted and strategically transformed Ruskinian critical concepts into novelistic forms.' ¹²¹

The nature of my debt to and disagreement with these latter critics will be apparent throughout the remainder of this thesis. I will close this section with some remarks of Proust pertinent to any discussion of literary history.

'Mais les philosophes qui n'ont pas su trouver ce qu'il y a de réel et d'indépendant de toute science dans l'art, ont été obligés de s'imaginer l'art, la critique etcetera, comme des sciences où le prédécesseur est forcément moins avancé que celui qui le suit.' ¹²²

CHAPTER FOUR (INTERCHAPTER)

On Influence

INTERCHAPTER: ON INFLUENCE

I have borrowed the term and strategy of an 'interchapter' from Harold Bloom, whose studies on the nature of poetic influence inform (influence) some of the arguments which follow. In The Anxiety of Influence and its succeeding work, A Map of Misreading,¹ Bloom elaborates a theory of poetry which insists that the history of literature is indistinguishable from the history of poetic influence, since strong poets make history by misreading the works of their predecessors in order to clear imaginative space for themselves. Such misreadings or misprisions involve both the parricidal sentiments familiar to all students of Proust's psychic history and the radical revision of aesthetic, spiritual and social priorities exhorted and experienced by Ruskin at various stages of his writing career. Any difficulty in placing these writers within the category of 'strong poets' need not detain us for long. It is no longer possible to question the pre-eminence of Proust in our century, and the habit of using the term 'poet' to cover any literary artist is as old as Aristotle. In the case of Ruskin, any diminution of strength, whether in force or reputation, has been, as we have seen in the preceding chapters, due, in part, to the fact of his influence on Proust, whose acts of filial transcendence helped create a modernist tradition which demonstrated how the activities of aesthete, autobiographer, memorialist and poet could be subsumed under the all-inclusive and self-regulating practice of the novelist. This conflation of genres had the initial effect of highlighting the limitations of more circumscribed modes of writing, but in its invitations to scrutinise prose at a level of intensity previously sustainable only in the

reading of poetry, and in its late-Romantic accretion of the most voluminous and diverse material around the controlling consciousness of the author, it eventually encouraged the consideration of non-fictional prose as a similar exercise in self-expression through various modes of metaphorical structure. In their introduction to The Art of Victorian Prose,² George Levine and William Madden argue that in non-fictional prose of the highest order, in the prose of a Pater, Ruskin or Newman, we are at the point where practical prose is on the verge of becoming pure fiction in the technical sense, pure story – the imitation of an action which is inward, spiritual and profound. Such considerations leave us uncomfortably close to the woozy world of prose-poetry, purple prose and sunset effusions which Ruskin has long occupied in the mind of popular mythology. Discouraged by his own juvenile verse exercises in the manner of Wordsworth, Byron and Scott and by the early proof of his facility to sway the public with partial and unsubstantiated argument, Ruskin was embarrassed by his reputation as a poet in prose:

'It is the chief provocation of my life to be called a "word painter" instead of a thinker.'³

Against the evidence of his own practice, Ruskin was always anxious to insist on his language as a transparent and unproblematic medium for the communication of thoughts. For him, the highest thoughts in literature were those which are least dependent on language, and the true value of a composition was in exact proportion to its independency of language or expression. Ruskin consistently refused the laurels of Poet or Maker, despite the attentions of literary men and women. Elizabeth Barrett Browning's opinion that 'for a critic to be so much a poet is a great thing'⁴

was not shared by Ruskin or by those of his disciples, including Proust, who believed that the truth-value of his teachings was occasionally obscured by his rhetorical flights. In his Short History of English Literature George Saintsbury contended that 'from the date of the first appearance of Modern Painters, the prose poetry style has more and more engrossed attention and imitation. It has eaten up history, permeated novel writing, affected criticism so largely that those who resist it in that department are but a scattered remnant'.⁵ But the novel's capacity to absorb such tendencies was limitless, and rhetorical devices are much more tolerable to the reader of fiction than to the student of reported fact.⁶ The cult of style which enjoyed a brief vogue in England and France in the late 19th century was absorbed into the much larger religion of the novel as the one bright book of life. This episode is symbolically present in the 'Oxen of the Sun' chapter of Ulysses where Peacock's Anthology of English Prose from Mandeville to Ruskin is subsumed into the parodic account of the birth of a 'disembodied Speech which promptly fills the universe with its yells'.⁷

Against these tendencies a twofold movement has been apparent in more recent criticism. In the first development the notion of thought content as being independent of and recoverable from language has been under fairly constant attack for the past seventy years, until the orthodox position held by writers, literary artists, literary critics and linguistic philosophers alike, has become that of the old lady in E.M. Forster's anecdote who exclaims, 'How do I know what I think until I see what I say'.⁸ Old habits of thought die hard, however, particularly among Ruskinians, as can be seen by the example of a recent editor of Unto this Last who complains of Ruskin's various syntactical confluences and dislocations which 'reduce many passages to a shorthand form in which the mind

absorbs the meaning without following the systematic processes of thought.⁹ It is ironic that such a critique of Ruskin should derive from the prophet's own prejudice against language as superfluous to the naked act of vision, voiced in a prose which is either embarrassed by or wilfully ignorant of its own devices. Ruskin's mistrust of metaphor leads him to spin it out into its most obvious and general manifestation, that of the parable, where the message is "spelled out" as if to prove that there is no intrinsic alchemy in his own words, just sound sense and honest tools to excavate the gold of more truly creative writers.

'There seems, to you and me, no reason why the electric forces of the earth should not carry whatever there is of gold within it at once to the mountain tops, so that kings and people might know that all the gold they could get was there; and without any trouble of digging, or anxiety, or chance, or waste of time, cut it away, and coin as much as they needed. But Nature does not manage it so. She puts it in little fissures in the earth, nobody knows where: you may dig long and find none; you must dig painfully to find any.

14. And it is just the same with men's best wisdom. When you come to a good book, you must ask yourself, "Am I inclined to work as an Australian miner would? Are my pickaxes and shovels in good order, and am I in good trim myself, my sleeves well up to the elbow, and my breath good, and my temper?" And, keeping the figure a little longer, even at cost of tiresomeness, for it is a thoroughly useful one, the metal you are in search of being the author's mind or meaning, his words are as the rock which you have to crush and smelt in order to get at it. And your pickaxes are your own care, wit, and learning; your smelting furnace is your own thoughtful soul. Do not hope to get at any good author's meaning without those tools and that fire; often you will need sharpest, finest chiselling, and patientest fusing, before you can gather one grain of the metal.¹⁰

This tension between a sophisticated and metaphorical deployment of language and its message of an ideally unmediated access to truth can be analysed fully thanks to the second broad development in literary study – the movement towards what Hans Robert Jauss calls a work-immanent (*werkimminante*) method of interpretation, as exemplified by critical schools as diverse as Russian Formalism, American New Criticism and Deconstructionism.¹¹ The theories and practices of these movements, in taking formalism to its furthest conclusions and beyond, have subjected the written word to an intensity of scrutiny which breaks the bonds of genre. This is the argument rehearsed by Geoffrey H. Hartman in the introduction to his Criticism in the Wilderness, that although we have perfected – some will say overperfected – the technique of close reading, it has been applied almost exclusively to creative writing rather than to criticism or non-fictional prose.¹² The concept of "The Critic as Artist" is, as Hartman acknowledges, one largely associated with the figure of Oscar Wilde. As I have tried to show, the question of the priority of genres is, in the case of Ruskin and Proust, closely linked to that of the priority held by the influences over the influencer. When writers operate within the same generic strictures, the positions are reversed. A more 'natural' relationship, in terms of literary history, pertains – that of the anxiety announced by Bloom and voiced, again by Wilde, in The Picture of Dorian Gray:

'..... To influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions. His virtues are not real to him. His sins, if there are such things as sins, are borrowed. He becomes an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him.'¹³

It is this shadow cast by precursors, with its dominating effect on the poetic psyche, and the melancholy effect of the creative writer's desperate insistence on priority, which most concern Bloom, and which are taken up by David R. Ellison in his The Reading of Proust. Ellison insists throughout on the mutual interdependence of textual theory and praxis, and this insight is skillfully brought to bear on his deciphering of the semiotic structures of A la recherche du temps perdu, and the strategies by which it enacts Proust's struggle to master his master in the act of reading.¹⁴ But although Ellison sees the need to examine those Ruskinian texts which Proust read, and in effect re-wrote, he does not subject these texts to anything like the deconstructive reading which is applied to Proust. This is not to say that Ruskin's works are everywhere as rich in metaphorical self-questionings as those of Proust, but to restrict the deconstructive reading to A la recherche du temps perdu seems to invoke a principle of intentionalism which would be at odds with Ellison's professed method. At one point, indeed, Ellison contends that in the section of the novel dealing with the 'Soirée chez la marquise de Sainte Euvverte', 'one senses that the author's intention is to dismantle all the conventions by which Realism establishes its powers of verisimilitude and "lifelike" appearance'.¹⁵ The faults of Ruskin's theories of the precedence of content over form are demonstrated in a reading which in fact respects and adheres to the declared Ruskinian principle. Elsewhere Ellison argues that 'to see Proust read Ruskin is to study the series of repetitions, exchanges, contradictions and strategic reworkings of ideas that link four stages of reflection in a complex unity'.¹⁶ There are in fact five stages: La Recherche itself, Proust's critical articles, Proust's notes to La Bible d'Amiens and Sésame et les lys, the translations, and, finally, Ruskin's

work itself, standing in the same unmediated and ungraspable isolation that 'reality' enjoys in a postmodern reading of a classic realist novel. Ellison's blindness to the Ruskinian text illustrates an alternative phenomenon to that of the shadow cast by the precursor - that of eclipse, or the shadow cast backwards by the successor.

This eclipse is in this case compounded by Ellison's refusal to confront the split between rhetoric as trope and rhetoric as persuasion which is invoked by his mentor Paul de Man in a reading of Nietzsche:

'Within the pedagogical model of the trivium, the place of rhetoric, as well as its dignity, has always been ambivalent: on the one hand, in Plato for example and again at crucial moments in the history of philosophy (Nietzsche being one of them), rhetoric becomes the ground for the furthest-reaching dialectical speculations conceivable to the mind; on the other hand, as it appears in textbooks that have undergone little change from Quintilian to the present, it is the humble and not-quite-respectable handmaiden of the fraudulent grammar used in oratory.'¹⁷

While conceding that the distance between the two functions is so wide as to be nearly unbridgeable, de Man remarks that the two modes can manage to exist side by side where one would least expect it in the works of Nietzsche and, we might add, in the generically undetermined universe of Ruskin's writings. A writing which is fully aware of the misleading power of tropes yet which persists in the use of suasive - that is to say, performative - modes seems to set itself up as a text which, again in de Man's words, 'allows for two incompatible, mutually self-destructive points of view, and therefore puts an insurmountable obstacle in the way

of any reading or understanding'. De Man then refuses to pursue the distinction between rhetoric as text and literature as text, the legislative metalanguage employed in, for example, Proust's novel, being no guarantee against the figurative aporia discussed above.

In questioning the generic and theoretical grounds for the eclipse or forgetting of Ruskin's writings, it ought to be possible to proceed to argue for a new historical understanding in the establishment of an archaeology of the text rather than a genealogy; that is to say, an attempt, through all the problematics of the context and the reader's historical position, to recreate as fully as possible the text's épistème rather than treat it simply as a source for a more amenable work.

These tendencies have been summarised by Roland Barthes in an article on the theory of the text for the Encyclopaedia Universalis:

'If the theory of the text tends to abolish the separation of genres and arts, this is because it no longer considers works as mere 'messages' or even as 'statements' (that is, finished products, whose destiny would be sealed as soon as they were uttered), but as perpetual productions, enunciations, through which the subject continues to struggle; this subject is no doubt that of the author, but also that of the reader. The theory of the text brings with it, then, the promotion of a new epistemological object, the reading Not only does the theory of the text extend to infinity the freedoms of reading (authorising us to read works of the past with an entirely modern gaze, so that it is legitimate, for example, to read Sophocles' Oedipus by pouring Freud's Oedipus back into it, or to read Flaubert on the basis of Proust), but it also insists strongly on the productive equivalence of reading and writing.'¹⁸

The inversion, by means of the reader's consciousness, of the common movement of literary influence, so that we read a past writer's works 'through' the works of his successors, is legitimised by the Eliotic concept of 'the historical sense' which recognises and exploits the fact that there can be no such thing as a purely synchronic or a purely diachronic reading, but that all readings fluctuate between these axes of interpretation.

'The historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity ' 19

Eliot goes on to indicate how each new work has the potential to disrupt the system of proportions and values which constitute the whole order, and that it would not be preposterous for those who accept his idea of order to conclude that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past.

Bloom's demon of continuity is, then, capable of imprisoning the past in the present (or in recent history) as much as it imprisons the present in the past. The anxiety felt by the strong poet is exacerbated by his greater

knowledge of what has gone before; his reluctance to procure a spurious originality by a facile reaction against the immediate past. There may be whole areas of literary history which are available to the strong history-conscious writer, which may not be so to his audience, if only because his status as creator can guarantee leaps of insight, which the literary historian, necessarily bound to rules of linearity and inclusiveness, dare not attempt.

Yet, in that these flashes of perception exploit the privileged knowledge which is inseparable from the guilt of the latecomer, such paradoxical sallies are not without a taint of bad faith. The strain of originality, of the writer's feeling more aware of both past achievement and future possibility than his contemporaries, can often provoke a rhetorical doubling of the self which defers indefinitely the writer's/critic's own judgements on literary history. Wilde's The Critic as an Artist is aware of the devices of the Socratic dialogue to the extent that its rhetoric becomes, in a Yeatsian sense, poetical. In spite of his name, Ernest is not so much a straight man or comic feed as a check on the author's dislodging of concepts and manoeuvring of signifiers.²⁰ A similar device operates in Roland Barthes par Roland Barthes, which carries the caveat 'Tout ceci doit être considéré comme dit par un personnage de roman'.²¹

As we have seen, the device of locating aesthetic arguments within the framework of a fictional polylogue in order to defer the burden of final judgement is brought to the highest level of sophistication in the work of Proust. A passage from Sodome et Gomorrhe, best known by its closing epigram, shows this method at work in a meditation on the problems of intermittence and continuity in literary tradition.²²

The theme is first developed satirically through the figure of the young Madame de Cambremer, who, as the sister of Legrandin and sometime mistress of Swann, inherits the snobbery of one and contracts the dilettantism of the other.²³

So closely are the two allied in her case that clear parallels are drawn between her aesthetic and social judgements. Just as she deigns to speak with Marcel because he is a friend of Robert de Saint Loup, so she eventually condescends to reconsider Poussin because she hears that his work is admired by Degas. Unable to see beyond the tyrannical glamour of names - as Marcel finally does - she considers art in the same terms as she does society, each having its aristocracy, its lineage, its outcasts and usurpers, dowagers and degenerates, and each affording an entrée only by the recommendation of a 'name'. Her disdain for the dépassé in art is equalled by her contempt for the déclassé in society, and these are united in her slighting behaviour towards her mother-in-law, whose modest correctness in judgement is cruelly mocked by her physical decrepitude. Insistent as ever on the contrast between appearance and reality, Proust here presents the elder Mme. de Cambremer with a seemingly obsessive attention to the bodily symptoms of her spiritual enthusiasm.

'Chaque fois qu'elle parlait esthétique, ses glandes salivaires, comme celles de certains animaux au moment du rut, entraient dans une phase d'hypersécrétion telle que la bouche édentée de la vieille dame laissait passer, au coin des lèvres légèrement moustachues, quelques gouttes dont ce n'était pas la place. Aussitôt elle les ravalait avec un grand soupir, comme quelqu'un qui reprend sa respiration.

Enfin, s'il s'agissait d'une trop grande beauté musicale, dans son enthousiasme elle levait les bras et proférait quelques jugements sommaires, énergiquement mastiqués et au besoin venant du nez.²⁴

For all this, Mme. de Cambremer is shown as having a true, if limited, perception of what art is, and encourages the narrator to appreciate Chopin the more and to reconsider his conception of a seascape. In short, she is an influence. Her outward repulsiveness is only another manifestation of the Romantic dichotomy between appearance and reality. She is a more mundane version of Baudelaire's albatross, whose 'ailes de géant l'empêchent de marcher'. In contrast, her daughter-in-law is more akin to the same poet's 'Charogne', seeking to present a false homogeneity of aspect to the world, whose saliva remains in its proper place, but whose inner corruption will all the more shockingly reveal itself in time.²⁵ The young Mme. de Cambremer is all surface, and is in consequence reified in the text as a mere piece of confectionery.

'Mais j'aurais pu être bien plus familier encore qu'elle n'eût été que douceur moelleuse et fondante; je pouvais dans la chaleur de cette belle fin d'après-midi butiner à mon gré dans le gros gâteau de miel que Mme. de Cambremer était si rarement et qui remplaça les petits fours que je n'eus pas l'idée d'offrir.'²⁶

In her infatuated insistence that il faut être absolument moderne, Mme. de Cambremer-Legrandin, who can't tell an albatross from a seagull, values artists only in so far as they surpass their predecessors, who pass so easily for the inattentive into a limbo of sepia-tinted quaintness.

'Du reste j'ai horreur des couchers de soleil, c'est romantique, c'est opéra.'²⁷

In her elevation of Debussy and dismissal of Chopin, the worldly modernist betrays herself as much more concerned with the rules of fashion than with the complexities of art, and Proust observes this lofty modishness with the same ironic fascination that he devotes to other minutiae of the fashionable world. Just as the dropping of a hemline or of a particule's 'e' can signify acceptance to or exclusion from the élite, so the shift of a single letter can play havoc in a sign system which is even more arbitrary, since only the true artist (like Marcel) has the historical access necessary to diagnose a true sense of relational identity. Proust here makes serious play with a tendency to see two substantially different painters as terrible twins, the result of the name-dropper's mnemonic.

"Au nom du ciel, après un peintre comme Monet, et qui est tout bonnement un génie, n'allez pas nommer un vieux poncif sans talent comme Poussin. Je vous dirai tout nûment que je le trouve le plus barbifiant des raseurs. Qu'est-ce que vous voulez, je ne peux pourtant pas appeler cela de la peinture. Monet, Degas, Manet, oui, voilà des peintres! C'est très curieux, ajouta-t-elle, en fixant un regard scrutateur et ravi sur un point vague de l'espace, où elle aperçevait sa propre pensée, c'est très curieux, autrefois je préférais Manet. Maintenant, j'admire toujours Manet, c'est entendu, mais je crois que je lui préfère peut-être encore Monet. Ah! les cathédrales."²⁸

Having directed the reader's sympathies beyond question by means of this piece of polemical burlesque, the author now shifts briskly into a more authoritative mode, endowing the narrator/hero's ruminations with a sophistication and authority refused to any of the other voices we hear in the novel.

"Je serais très heureuse de vous faire de la musique, me dit Mme. de Cambremer. Mais, vous savez, je ne joue que des choses qui n'intéressent plus votre génération. J'ai été élevée dans le culte de Chopin", dit-elle à voix basse, car elle redoutait sa belle-fille et savait que celle-ci, considérant que Chopin n'était pas de la musique, le bien jouer ou le mal jouer étaient des expressions dénuées de sens. Elle reconnaissait que sa belle-mère avait du mécanisme, perlait les traits. "Jamais on ne me fera dire qu'elle est musicienne", concluait Mme. de Cambremer-Legrandin. Parce qu'elle se croyait "avancée" et (en art seulement) "jamais assez à gauche", elle se représentait non seulement que la musique progresse, mais sur une seule ligne, et que Debussy était en quelque sorte un sur-Wagner, encore un peu plus avancé que Wagner. Elle ne se rendait pas compte que, si Debussy n'était pas aussi indépendant de Wagner qu'elle-même devait le croire dans quelques années, parce qu'on se sert tout de même des armes conquises pour achever de s'affranchir de celui qu'on a momentanément vaincu, il cherchait cependant, après la satiété qu'on commençait à avoir des oeuvres trop complètes, où tout est exprimé, à contenter un besoin contraire. Des théories, bien entendu, étayaient momentanément cette réaction, pareilles à celles qui, en politique, viennent à l'appui des lois contre les congrégations, des guerres en Orient (enseignement contre nature, péril jaune, etc., etc.). On disait qu'à une époque de hâte convenait un art rapide, absolument comme on aurait dit que la

guerre future ne pouvait pas durer plus de quinze jours, ou qu'avec les chemins de fer seraient délaissés les petits coins chers aux diligences et que l'auto pourtant devait remettre en honneur. On recommandait de ne pas fatiguer l'attention de l'auditeur, comme si nous ne disposions pas d'attentions différentes dont il dépend précisément de l'artiste d'éveiller les plus hautes. Car ceux qui bâillent de fatigue après dix lignes d'un article médiocre avaient refait tous les ans le voyage de Bayreuth pour entendre la Tétralogie. D'ailleurs le jour devait venir où, pour un temps, Debussy serait déclaré aussi fragile que Massenet et les tressautements de Mélisande abaissés au rang de ceux de Manon. Car les théories et les écoles, comme les microbes et les globules, s'entre-dévorent et assurent, par leur lutte, la continuité de la vie. Mais le temps n'était pas encore venu.

Comme à la Bourse, quand un mouvement de hausse se produit, tout un compartiment de valeurs en profitent, un certain nombre d'auteurs dédaignés bénéficiaient de la réaction, soit parce qu'ils ne méritaient pas ce dédain, soit simplement - ce qui permettait de dire une nouveauté en les prônant - parce qu'ils l'avaient encouru. Et on allait même chercher, dans un passé isolé, quelques talents indépendants sur la réputation de qui ne semblait pas devoir influencer le mouvement actuel, mais dont un des maîtres nouveaux passait pour citer le nom avec faveur. Souvent c'était parce qu'un maître, quel qu'il soit, si exclusive que doive être son école, juge d'après son sentiment original, rend justice au talent partout où il se trouve, et même moins qu'au talent, à quelque agréable inspiration qu'il a goûtée autrefois, qui se rattache à un moment aimé de son adolescence. D'autres fois parce que certains artistes d'une autre époque ont, dans un simple morceau, réalisé quelque chose qui ressemble à ce que le maître peu à peu s'est rendu compte que lui-même avait voulu faire. Alors il voit en cet ancien comme un précurseur; il aime chez lui, sous une toute autre forme, un effort

momentanément, partiellement fraternel. Il y a des morceaux de Turner dans l'oeuvre de Poussin, une phrase de Flaubert dans Montesquieu. Et quelquefois aussi ce bruit de la prédilection du maître était le résultat d'une erreur, née on ne sait où et colportée dans l'école. Mais le nom cité bénéficiait alors de la firme sous la protection de laquelle il était entré juste à temps, car s'il y a quelque liberté, un goût vrai, dans le choix du maître, les écoles, elles, ne se dirigent plus que suivant la théorie. C'est ainsi que l'esprit, suivant son cours habituel qui s'avance par digressions, en obliquant une fois dans un sens, la fois suivante dans le sens contraire, avait ramené la lumière d'en haut sur un certain nombre d'oeuvres auxquelles le besoin de justice, ou de renouvellement, ou le goût de Debussy, ou son caprice, ou quelque propos qu'il n'avait peut-être pas tenu, avaient ajouté celles de Chopin. Prônées par les juges en qui on avait toute confiance, bénéficiant de l'admiration qu'excitait Pelléas, elles avaient retrouvé un éclat nouveau, et ceux mêmes qui ne les avaient pas réentendues étaient si désireux de les aimer qu'ils le faisaient malgré eux, quoique avec l'illusion de la liberté.' ²⁹

The tone is one of magisterial intimacy such as is dramatised for us in the conversation with the author's mother in Contre Sainte-Beuve or with Albertine in A la recherche du temps perdu. It commands attention and assent as though these were aspects of maternal or conjugal duty. The intimacies of contract between writer and reader provide much stronger bonds than do those publicly drawn manifestoes drawn up by schools and theorists, and they alone defy the entropy which ensures cultural continuity. The example of Wagner is cited to show how the protracted span of attention demanded by the great artist can shield one from the distractions caused by shifting trends.

Proust here shows an awareness of the phenomenon of influence under both its main aspects: as a struggle between where the disciple uses his knowledge and technique as weapons to overcome the master's influence, then as a momentary fraternal union between two artists, where the precursor has anticipated some innovation without having the historical advantage necessary to develop it in full. Beyond this, Proust is aware of the very complexity of influence, its dependence on a caprice which may be serious or frivolous, ignorant or informed. The cultural past is as prone to oblivion, as resistant to voluntary memory, and as open to spontaneous and total recall as the narrator's own individual past. And the process of recovery is as intermittent and digressive as the narrator's self-discovery.

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The whole passage, and the whole novel, is a vindication of sustained attentiveness over the dull confusions of habit, and as such owes much to the example of Ruskin's writing. The aphorism which sums up this protracted meditation on literary continuity, insisting that 'Il y a des morceaux de Turner dans l'oeuvre de Poussin, une phrase de Flaubert dans Montesquieu', represents an early statement of a theory of intertextuality which might supplant the partial and reductive practice of

'influence-hunting', and prepare the way for a relocation of Ruskin's writing within a new canon which would be less bound by strictures of genre and historical period. This is not to argue for an ahistorical impressionism, wilfully ignorant of the conventions governing a work's inception: such controlling factors as the author's intentions, the response of a contemporary audience, even what we might term the work's own self-sustaining confidence in language's ability to communicate unproblematically – these must not be disregarded, but they may be held in abeyance while other methods of deciphering a text's operations are essayed.

In his 'A Short History of Practical Criticism', Geoffrey Hartman³¹ argues that every literary theory is based on the experience of a limited canon or generalises strongly from a particular text-milieu. We have already remarked how Proust's work has generated its own theory and its own canon in this century, to the extent of collaborating in the exclusion of a writer who was championed by Proust for some six years. In examining the ways in which Proustian theory is embedded in his fictional text and often put into question by the practice of writing, we prepare the way for a reevaluation of the theory of influence; firstly by exploring the paradox of Proust's influence on Ruskin, and consequently by restoring to Ruskin's work that degree of autonomy denied it by submission to the influence of the Proustian canon. This entails the provisional establishment of a new canon which is neither that of Ruskin himself or of his Proustian successors, but which follows principles of composition employed by both writers in that it imposes order retrospectively. This provisional canon might take as its base a tradition of poetic autobiography running from Wordsworth and De Quincey through Ruskin to Proust and beyond, as has

been suggested by Sigbrit Swahn,³² or we may choose to embark on a reassessment of Ruskin's writings using critical techniques first established in recent interpretations of *A la recherche du temps perdu*, thus recreating a canon in the light of theories formed by a criticism of Proust. In either case Ruskin can be re-read in opposition to Proust and not merely as a minor predecessor.

The object of this rethinking of the concept of influence is to provoke a fairer and more productive comparison between the two writers. In order to do so it has proved necessary to insist on their differences in areas where resemblances had previously been seen and to stress affinities which had hitherto been ignored, particularly within the domain of writing practice. Previous 'comparative' work on Ruskin and Proust tended to concentrate on source studies, reading Ruskin's work as a model to be reproduced with inspirational improvements by the novelist. In treating Ruskin's work as an inert model, the critic neglects his function as a prose artist by insisting on the paraphraseable, that is to say, copiable aspects of his work. In a different way, Proust's status as writer is diminished by the source-hunter's attribution of 'genius' as the main point of difference between him and his predecessor. In his comparative study of Flaubert and Henry James, David Gervais, following Barthes' polemic in 'Les deux critiques', observes that 'the notion of "influence" too often makes art out to be an imitation of earlier art with "genius" stirred in, like pectin in jam, to make it set. It also tends to put too much emphasis on the influenced writer so that the influencer's work gets inertly left as a known quantity. Great writers are great because they are unlike previous great writers.'³³

As we have seen, many Proustian commentators have been surprised, if not exasperated, by the unlikelihood of Ruskin's influence on the novelist. Yet what makes the comparison of the two writers of more than local importance is that it invites a consideration of how one of the most energetic and versatile of didactic writers was championed and subsequently challenged by a major proponent of self-referential fiction. The works of Ruskin constitute the last considerable corpus of literature which does not lay claim to the privileges of fiction; while A la recherche du temps perdu is one of the greatest monuments to the principle that it is only through imaginative fiction that literature can have any purchase on reality. The greatest critical solecism for Proustians is to read La Recherche in order to discover some sort of truth about Proust's life; not only is the author's presence supposedly refined out of existence, but we are taught to speak of the narrator, not of Marcel. The novel becomes, in the words of Philippe Sollers, 'l'aventure d'une écriture' instead of 'une écriture de l'aventure'.³⁴ As the novel becomes an apprenticeship of signs, so the reader's attention is focused on the moment of writing. If Proust's work is to be reduced to a formula, it is that of the struggle of an individual towards the moment of writing as an existential act. Under pressure, literature will always claim for itself the saving status of parable - in the instance of A la recherche du temps perdu, it is the fable of the novel's own inception which finally guarantees its value as a work of art. It may not be the autobiography of Marcel Proust, but it is the autobiography of the novelist; even, we might say, of the novel itself. As the classic autobiography leads us to a vantage point from which the writer's life may be judged in its fullest significance, Proust's novel goes one stage further in showing this crucial vantage point to be situated in the moment of writing, where the author succeeds eventually in defining

himself. Every autobiographer is thus shown to be a self-made man. It is this insight achieved in fiction that enables us to return to the works of Ruskin and examine these as examples of self-definition through writing. Wanting the manifest privileges of the novel, Ruskin's various exercises in art criticism, social education, history, geology and mythological interpretation might seem like so much dabbling, with no central or governing impetus. The one controlling factor in the hectic diversity of Ruskin's writings is the author's style, his very presence as writer. In this near-tautology we have a key to the interpretation of his works which runs quite against the grain of modern criticism, in that it posits the figure of the author as the major focus for our understanding of the text. This, however, seems an inescapable consequence of the Proustian identification of the only tolerable life as that which is recreated through writing. This terminal vindication of literature carries the implication that all literature is reducible to autobiography – an assertion which erases all sorts of generic boundaries at a stroke, and with them removes most of our necessary terms and rules for critical description and comment. Clearly, such a reduction must only be provisional, as a means of holding together for consideration the disparate though interconnected forms and ambitions of Ruskin's work.

In his essay on 'The Origin of the Work of Art', Martin Heidegger, a philosopher who will be seen to share a surprising amount of techniques and concerns with Ruskin, offers in characteristic manner a rationale for a radical but provisional reductivism, while also preparing the ground for a resolution of the problems of influence, affinity, debt, succession, imitation, misreading, misprision and mastership, by positing the existential irrelevance of such concerns.

'On the usual view, the work arises out of and by means of the activity of the artist. But by what and whence is the artist what he is? By the work; for to say that the work does credit to the master means that it is the work that first lets the artist emerge as a master of his art. The artist is the origin of the work. The work is the origin of the artist. Neither is without the other. Nevertheless, neither is the sole support of the other. In themselves and in their interrelations artists and work are each of them by virtue of a third thing which is prior to both, namely that which also gives artist and work of art their names - art.'³⁵

The notion of influence depends on that of precedence. This precedence need not be historically defined; it is a matter of which text is read - is known - first. From our position, the oeuvre of Proust is much more current than that of Ruskin. It is impossible for us to recreate the conditions whereby Proust would be a new, or unknown, writer subject to the influence of Ruskin. Proust is too well known to us, and it is Ruskin who must be recognised as a difficult but amenable contemporary, whose writings might be incorporated into the canon which we create by our habits and patterns of reading.

CHAPTER FIVE

Theseus and the Spider – Autobiographical Structures in Ruskin and Proust

CHAPTER FIVE

We have seen how the reflexive structure of A la recherche du temps perdu encourages the reader to gloss over the novel's diffuseness and occasional incoherences. The novel, although unfinished, depends on a rhetoric of completeness, of the quest's eventual success, which allowed for an internal expansion curtailed only by the author's death. Proust's novel was, in every sense, his life's work. Those writings which preceded A la recherche du temps perdu are largely interpreted and valued according to the degree to which they confirm the novel's achievement, so that the revelations of Le Temps retrouvé exert control beyond the bounds of A la recherche du temps perdu itself. Ruskin's works are considerably more voluminous and diffuse, but with no such controlling structure retrospectively conferred. Although his writing depends just as much as Proust's on the dramatic revelation of hidden unity behind the most disparate phenomena, this want of a containing structure has constituted a major barrier to the understanding of Ruskin in this century. Cook and Wedderburn's editorial practice in the Library Edition, complete with its bowdlerised biography, selections from correspondence, catalogues and reports of the Guild of St. George, together with critical editions of the works published out of strict chronological order, confirms our impression of Ruskin as a writer of tremendous industry and breadth of sympathy, whose work was nonetheless marred by a wild discursiveness and undeveloped sense of economy, order and proportion. If Proust aspired to the condition of architecture for his novel, the main focus of his cathedral

analogy was a structural one¹; if Ruskin's work reminds us of a cathedral it is texturally: in the Gothic prodigality of his writing, and in its tortured organic growth, reminiscent of a Gaudí. Given his preference for ornament over design, texture over structure, and sculpture over architecture,² and his avowed lack of the faculty of design,³ it is not surprising that Ruskin's achievement should appear so restlessly inchoate beside the planned unities of highly formalised prose fiction. When one adds to the problems of length and discursiveness the problem of a bulky and imperfect edition, Ruskin is seen to become incompletely available to the reader. The concept of availability was adumbrated by Philip Hobsbaum in his A Theory of Communication:

'All works of literature are not equally present to the interested reader. A given text may convey different things to different people. In such a case, it would be unwise to assume that any of the readings are necessarily "wrong". What should be said is that the work is not completely available.'⁴

Certain works do not awaken in one reader much that corresponds with the experience of another. To interpret these works as wholes seems to be a venture doomed to fail. Critics who make the attempt do much of the author's work for him: their efforts at understanding are not recreative but, in a bad sense of the word, creative. They rely, in fact, upon a mode of reading which, to those who do not share the same predilections, may seem nothing short of wilful. There is always a temptation to turn the author's inconsistencies or failures into strokes of ingenuity miraculously uncovered by percipience on the part of the critic.

Bearing in mind this latter caveat, we might insist that the works of Ruskin were robbed of their availability, in theoretical terms as well as practical ones, by the monumental Library Edition, to the extent that two extreme positions are now offered to the reader of Ruskin - firstly the partial access of the chrestomathy, which would perpetuate his reputation as a painter of purple passages, and alternatively, the radical purism of Helen Gill Viljoen, whose sense of the fallibility of the Library Edition was so exacerbated that she insisted that any student of Ruskin should return to the original manuscript if at all possible.⁵

Neither of these positions is tenable for the serious reader of Ruskin who is concerned with the evaluation of his works as opposed to any definitive biographical interpretation. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that Praeterita should be regarded as the most accessible of Ruskin's writings and even as the most representative. As early as 1927, Virginia Woolf noted that a recent abridged edition of Modern Painters would suggest that, while people still wanted to read Ruskin, they had no longer the leisure to read him in the mass. Happily, there remained Praeterita, a book 'which contains as in a teaspoon the essence of those waters from which the many-coloured fountains of eloquence and exhortation spring'⁶. 'We none of us need many books', wrote the Ruskin of Sesame and Lilies,⁷ and if only one of his books is to be retained for our critical attention, the compact and accessible Praeterita would seem the most fitting for those who value its serenity and restraint. Being the last piece that Ruskin wrote, it also possesses a certain valedictory charm which intimates some solace after the storm and stress of later years. More significantly, it has obvious echoes, or rather, pre-echoes of Proust, notably in its title

which in its allusion to things past possibly reminds us of the Shakespearian tag which Scott-Moncrieff applied to his translation of A la recherche du temps perdu. The work is unfinished, as is A la recherche du temps perdu, is also in three volumes and treats evocatively of the narrator's childhood in a way which recalls some of the most characteristic Proustian reveries. The fact that an apparent project to translate Praeterita was mooted in 1907⁸ might be held to prove that Proust's novel is a 'version', a highly sophisticated imitation of and extrapolation from Ruskin's autobiography. In a review of Terence Kilmartin's revised Remembrance of Things Past, a leading Proustian went so far as to assert that Ruskin's three-volume autobiography of a self constantly unwoven and rewoven in the writing is closer to A la recherche du temps perdu than any novel written,⁹ while Dona Brand, in another recent article, saw striking similarities between the Combray section of A la recherche du temps perdu and Ruskin's own account of his childhood,¹⁰ and David R. Ellison, in the study already discussed, noted a wealth of details which 'seem to have been taken over by Proust and inserted into his novel as an homage to his master'.¹¹ Of particular interest are the parallels drawn between some of the characters surrounding the young Ruskin and some of the figures who populate Combray, and Ellison's comparison of the euphoric epiphanies which punctuate the narrative of Praeterita with the revelations of involuntary memory in Le Temps retrouvé. It is encouraging to note that Praeterita is beginning to be analysed as a narrative construct, however secondary or minor. In order, however, that it be authentically compared with Proust's work and its significance for the contemporary reader redefined, its particularity among Ruskin's writings must be stressed.

Ruskin's autobiography is patently not an English version of A la recherche du temps perdu, whatever its occasional similarities in subject matter and structure. Where Proust aimed to create a text which would constitute itself in the relation of its own genesis, Ruskin's final book is a sedate, valedictory appendix to his life and work, in many ways a gesture of final detachment from both. Yet one does not have to share the clinical bent of many interpreters of Ruskin to note that there is evidence of sedation in the sedateness, and that the valediction carries strong overtones of loss and sacrifice. Rather than an exploratory or even explanatory exercise in autobiography, Praeterita strikes one as a shoring up of fragments of peace, fulfilment and intellectual enlightenment against the intolerable frustration of a life which has attempted to explore and explain too much, and has failed. The defeat which it represents can be seen to be literary and formal, as well as existential, and to demonstrate this, it will be necessary to say something about Ruskin's titles.

Along with his fondness for creative etymologising, Ruskin's habit of adopting resonant and occasionally sybilline titles for his work is well known. With his later manner, these titles had, in his editor's words, 'facets as many as his mingling thoughts',¹² flashing out different lights depending on the perspective from which they were viewed. This tendency reached its apotheosis in the metaphoric concentration of Fors Clavigera, which was first announced in a footnote to Munera Pulveris, commenting on Shakespeare's choice of name for the heroine of The Merchant of Venice:

'Shakespeare would certainly never have chosen this name had he been forced to retain the Roman spelling. Like Perdita, "lost lady" or Cordelia, "heart lady", Portia is "fortune" lady. The two great relative groups of words, Fortuna, fero, and fors-Portio, porto, and pars (with the lateral branch opportune, im-portune, opportunity, etc), are of deep and intricate significance; their various senses of bringing, abstracting and sustaining being all centralised by the wheel (which bears and moves at once), or still better, the ball (spera) of fortune, - "Volve su spera, e beata si gode", the motive power of this wheel distinguishing its goddess from the fixed majesty of Necessitas with her iron nails; or with her pillar of fire and iridescent orbits, fixed at the centre. Portus and porta, and gate in its connection with gain, form another interesting branch group; and Mors, the concentration of delaying, is always to be remembered with Fors, the concentration of bringing and bearing, passing on into Fortis and Fortitude.' ¹³

As a footnote to his footnote, Ruskin adds that the above 'is literally a mere memorandum for the future work which I am now completing in Fors Clavigera; it was printed partly in vanity, but also with real desire to get people to share the interest I found in the careful study of the leading words in noble languages'. ¹⁴

Not so much a careful study as a violent quizzing - or, if you will, a deconstruction - is brought to bear on language in passages such as the above. The lexical bricolage, the stressing and fracturing of word

components, the punning exploration of words linked by phonetic resemblances and etymological change, the macaronic allusiveness, anticipate Derrida, even if the only Saussure annotated by Ruskin was Horace-Benedict, the geologist.

Titles such as Fors Clavigera pointed to an ambition and concentration of meanings - etymological, metaphorical, symbolic, mythic - in one word or phrase at a level usually only attempted by the highest or most 'inspired' poetry. What Ruskin made of the image of Fors was not so much a compact and economical representative icon as a litany of properties. For example, Fors Clavigera is a trinity of Fate: Force the club-bearer, or strong wisdom; Fortitude the key-bearer or patience, and Fortuna the nail-bearer, or necessity.

It will be apparent that we have here not only Ruskin at his most modern, but also Ruskin at his most prophetic. Prophetic in two senses, in that he both announces the writings of a later period and recalls to us the urgent tones of Biblical prophets. In both senses he becomes unavailable to his own time and that of his immediate successors - historically unreadable, that is, to such readers as Proust and his disciples. If one ignores the paedophile coquetry of some of the later volumes and letters, it might be said that the most deterrent aspect of Ruskin's writings is this prophetic style, which is directly dependent on his early and total immersion in the language of the Bible. In order to understand Ruskin it is necessary to understand what the Bible meant to him. Such an understanding has been made possible by Northrop Frye's recent study of the Bible and Literature,

The Great Code.¹⁵ In this work, Frye, elaborating on Vico and on his own earlier theories in The Anatomy of Criticism, distinguishes three cardinal phases of language or modes of writing: (1) the hieroglyphic, or 'poetic' use of language, where words are used as particular kinds of signs, and where there is relatively little emphasis on a clear separation of subject and object, the emphasis falling rather on the feeling that subject and object are linked by a common power or energy; (2) the hieratic or allegorical, where abstraction becomes possible, and 'signs' can 'stand for' 'things'; and lastly, (3) the demotic or descriptive phase, the present one, where thing dominates sign, in the sense that the truth value of a statement is dependent on empirical observation. In that these historical phases of language are also modes of writing, it is evident that they may co-exist at one time, but at such a time one of them will exert some sort of dominance over our thinking. Frye reads the Bible as issuing from the first, hieroglyphic, poetic or metaphorical mode which has become largely unavailable to us who live under the dominance of the third while recalling only the second, that of Plato and the Biblical exegetes, as an alternative. In our age, according to Frye, it is the primary function of literature, and more particularly of poetry, to keep re-creating the first or metaphorical phase of language during the domination of the later phases, to keep presenting it to us as a mode of language that we must never be allowed to underestimate, much less lose sight of.¹⁶ While the origins of the Bible are in the first metaphorical phase, much of its substance is contemporary with the second-phase separation of the dialectical from the poetic, so that its poetic use of language does not confine it to the literary category, while it never falls wholly into the conventions of the second phase.¹⁷ It may seem odd to consider Ruskin's writings as being similarly positioned

between the first two phases, given the explicit appeal to empirical reality which dominates books like Modern Painters, yet those rebarbative aspects of his later works which earned him the titles of Victorian prophet and even 'prophète barbu du Far-West', are best explained by reading them as we would the words of prophets, by admitting that they share the transitional langage of the Bible. Such a reading would consider the works of Ruskin as intermittently literary and non-literary, metaphorical and allegorical, poetic and instructive. As Frye admits, the linguistic idiom of the Bible does not really coincide with any of the three phases of language:

'It is not metaphorical like poetry, though it is full of metaphor, and is as poetic as it can well be without actually being a work of literature. It does not use the transcendental language of abstraction and analogy, and its use of objective and descriptive language is incidental throughout.'¹⁸

To resolve this categorical ambiguity, Frye appeals to a transitional stage, that of oratorical rhetoric. Between Cicero and the Renaissance the orator became the symbol of an educational ideal of versatility and fluency in the use of language, which made the orator to some degree the successor of the poet in the earlier phase as the teacher of his society, the encyclopaedic repository of its traditional knowledge. But since the training of the orator was largely a training in the kind of rhetorical and figured language that poets also use, oratory at its best is really a combination of metaphorical or poetic and 'existential' idioms: it uses all the figures of speech, but within a context of concern and direct address that poetry as such does not employ. This special mode of rhetoric, called by Frye

kerygma, or proclamation, excites distrust or misinterpretation in an age dominated by the descriptive mode: it is thought to be the wrong kind of rhetoric.¹⁹ Nevertheless, it is the essential idiom of the Bible, and as such it should exercise control over our reading not only of the Bible, but also of those works of literature which have been influenced by the Bible.

For all that this thesis has attempted to challenge the usefulness and validity of the term 'influence', it will be seen that in this context the word has a much stronger, metaphorical sense. It is no longer a matter of proposed inheritance from one writer to another, rather of the transference of occult power from a sacred text into the langage of latter-day prophets. It is one thing to talk of the influence of Petrarch on Ronsard, of Seneca on Shakespeare, of Dante on Beckett, quite another to contemplate the 'influence of the Bible on Milton, Blake or Ruskin.

The influence of the Bible on poets, as a transference of mythic and metaphorical structures, is acceptable: in a different way, the tradition of prose commentary which seeks to elucidate but not usurp the power of the original is welcomed as a necessary mediation, but when a writer such as Ruskin uses the prose medium while exploiting the Biblical idiom, and this in expounding a secular typology, it is seen to be the wrong type of rhetoric. As Frye remarks, the Bible is often thought to be the wrong type too; a horrified pre-Revolutionary French lady is said to have remarked, 'Quel effroyable ton!' on opening a Bible for the first time.²⁰ In an era where critics like Booth and Genette have reclaimed some respectability for rhetoric by associating the term with complex and often self-

contained fictional structures, Ruskin's oratorical form of rhetoric is still seen, particularly by Proustians, as not quite de bon ton. Nevertheless, the recognition of the extent to which Ruskin's work derives from the Biblical idiom might go some way towards resolving the écrivain/écrivain dilemma presented in Chapter 2. Tantalisingly, Frye suggests at one point that 'Ruskin's work would surely have been far less diffuse if his conceptions of Biblical typology had been more systematically worked out'.²¹ One would welcome an elaboration of this point, partly because it might resolve the near-tautologous opposition of the diffuse and the systematic and partly because Frye's suggestion does not appear to touch on the fact that for Ruskin, as for Sir Thomas Browne, the whole of nature was God's book²² and that Ruskin's work was less a commentary on Revelation than an endlessly proliferating interstitial expansion of it. In the midst of a crisis of faith undergone in Venice in 1852, during which he wrote a long study of the Book of Job, Ruskin wrote to his father in terms which seem to question Job's resignedness in the face of Revelation.

'..... it seems to me that from a God of Light and Truth, His creatures have a right to expect plain and clear revelation touching all that concerns their immortal interests. And this is the great question with me - whether indeed the Revelation be clear, and men are blind or whether there be not also some strange darkness in the manner of Revelation itself.'²³

Given the dominance of the visual metaphor over Ruskin's consciousness, the dilemma facing him here is a crucial one, and one not restricted to the religious sphere. Either Revelation is clear, and all men, not only those whom Ruskin has aspired to teach, including Ruskin and Turner themselves,

are blind, or there is 'some strange darkness in the manner of Revelation' which insists on continued and possibly fruitless exploration of il mare maggiore. The phrase 'darkness in the manner' again suggests that the secret resolution of the problems of vision should be a formal one, but this was a lesson which Ruskin to the end refused to apply to his own writing. It was left to his disciple Proust to recognise that the intermittence of blindness and insight could best be resolved by various structures of self-consciousness; by a triple awareness of the function of metaphors in his own writing, of the self as source of vision despite its perceived intermittence, and of the need for a self-imposed formal structure which will contain the author's experience as a precondition for the act of explanation. Ruskin's writing, dominated by the metaphors of vision, is circumspect: that of Proust, governed by the existential/fictional force of the act of writing, is circumscribed. The idea of formal limitations being a prerequisite of self-expression is as old as literature itself. With Proust this idea is metaphorically embedded within the text. The opening section of A la recherche du temps perdu²⁴ describes an efflorescence of consciousness from mind to body to bedroom to family to village, community and history which determines the form of the narrator's experience in a way complementary to the final revealed structure of Le Temps retrouvé. The latter acts as a strict control on the applicability of the narrator's experience, while the former one insists that what seems like proliferation of described experience is in fact an opening-out - that is to say, not a continued mapping of a wider sea but a self-centred extension of consciousness which, however far from the bed - the legendary site of Proust's writing-consciousness - it may stray, the textual web may be drawn into the knot of its origin. If the Proustian narrative is a circular web issuing from its creator and offering him a

panoptic control over his experience, the structural model for Ruskin's writing is more properly the labyrinth. The figures have a superficial similarity, but where the web is truly concentric, the labyrinth is centrifugal. The web is the instrument of its creator's power, giving him the possibility of unobstructed vision. The labyrinth is primarily an instrument of trial and punishment - our concern is for the hero in his negotiation of its twistings, and our knowledge of it is focused through the hero and not through its creator. Above all it is a figure of restricted vision, and the hero has to rely on the assistance of an outside agency in order to escape from its perilous restriction. In letter 23 of Fors Clavigera, Ruskin indicates how the labyrinth motif was important to him, providing the following commentary on the figure as it appeared on two Cretan coins and in a carving on the Southern wall of Lucca cathedral:

'Now, in the pictures of this imaginary maze, you are to note that both the Cretan and the Lucchese designs agree in being composed of a single path or track, coiled and recoiled upon itself. Take a piece of flexible chain and lay it down, considering the chain itself as the path: and, without an interruption, it will trace any of the three figures. (The two Cretan ones are indeed the same in design, except in being, one square, and the other round.) And recollect, upon this, that the word "Labyrinth" properly means "rope-walk", or "coil-of-rope-walk", its first syllable being probably also the same as our English name "Laura", "the path", and its method perfectly given by Chaucer in the single line - "And, for the house is crenkled to and fro". And on this note, farther, first, that had the walls been real, instead of ghostly, there would have been no difference whatever in getting either out or in, for you could go no other way. But if

the walls were spectral, and yet the transgressions of them made your final entrance or return impossible, Ariadne's clue was needful indeed.

Note secondly, that the question seems not at all to have been about getting in; but getting out again. The clue, at all events, could be helpful only after you had carried it in; and if the spider, or other monster in midweb, ate you, the help in your clue, for return, would be insignificant. So that this thread of Ariadne's implied that even victory over the monster would be vain, unless you could disentangle yourself from the web also.'²⁵

In this and the following letter, Ruskin goes on to invoke the labyrinthine properties of Dante's hell, calling down, as so often, its punishments on the sins of the nineteenth century.²⁶ The greatest of many ironies in Ruskin's predicament is that he, the most perceptive and most visually-gifted of writers, should be locked into the structure of apperception which is the labyrinth. He is the latter-day Theseus who, in the guise of Kata Phusin (according to nature), kills Procrustes only to discover that he is trapped within a more sophisticated system of blindness and coercion. His Daedalus may be the dark god of nineteenth century industrialism or the unrevealed deity of Revelation: in either case, he finds himself in the position of the hero faced with a task; unable to be a craftsman himself, he is compelled to interpret blindly the craftsman's work, all the time imploring the aid of an absent Ariadne. Ruskin translates the commentary of the Lucchese labyrinth thus: "This is the labyrinth which the Cretan Daedalus built, / Out of which nobody could get who was inside, / Except Theseus; nor could he have done it, unless he had been helped with a thread by Ariadne, all of love."²⁷

The 'spectral walls' of the labyrinth allow perception of a sort, but the perceiver is ignorant of the true path out of the labyrinth and of the nature and mind of its creator. Not so with Proust, where from the opening pages of his novel stress is laid upon the identification of author and hero, where Theseus, Daedalus and Minotaur are indistinguishable, even and especially at the level of the subconscious.

'Un homme qui dort tient autour de lui le fil des heures, l'ordre des années et des mondes. Il les consulte d'instinct en s'éveillant et y lit en une seconde le point de la terre qu'il occupe, le temps qui s'est écoulé jusqu'à son réveil; mais leurs rangs peuvent se mêler, se rompre.'²⁸

Proust's resolution of the problems of autobiography raised by Ruskin's writings can now be seen to involve four main critiques, of which two are explicit and doctrinal, and two implicit and formal. The first two are well known to us, being the reactions against artistic idolatry and submissive reading contained in the introductions to La Bible d'Amiens and Sésame et les lys respectively. The others entail a rejection of the attributes of Ruskin's writing discussed in this chapter - firstly the hieroglyphic or cratylist mode of writing, which, along with the exegetical mode of Frye's second phase, had been instilled in Ruskin by his childhood training, with the result that his prose becomes increasingly diverted from the descriptive mode proper to his situation to a tendency to the prophetic or revelatory. As with the other areas of dissent, Proust counters this tendency by stressing the subjectivity of the writer in the existential

novelty of his situation. For the writer of A la recherche du temps perdu, as well as for the narrator, words, names and etymologies are subject to an arbitrariness which is rooted in the intermittences of the subjective consciousness. The fourth and conclusive stage of Proust's critique involves the maze/web dichotomy explored above, by which the writer achieves a panoptic identification with the structure of his work.

As critiques, modifications or improvements, these re-readings and re-writings of Ruskin inevitably take us back to the evaluation of the influencee as being greater than the influenced, but it is also worthwhile asking whether the re-reading has entailed any limitation, disruption and loss. In comparing Ruskin's autobiographical writings with sections of A la recherche du temps perdu, I propose to examine ways in which the integrative process of Proust's manner of writing might have created some gaps of meaning in filling others. Admittedly, this procedure is perhaps not concessive to the Ruskinian mode, since it subjects Proust's text to the same fragmentary readings usually devoted to Ruskin, but since A la recherche du temps perdu can be shown to be much less integrated at the microtextual level than its conclusion would have us believe, this approach could provide a useful prologue to a reevaluation of both writers.

The defeatism of Praeterita alluded to above (p. 139) is emblematically present in the work's title, for praeterita can mean not only 'things past', but also 'things passed by', things left out. The little-known rhetorical figure of 'praeterition' refers to the tactic of omitting to mention something in order to draw attention to its absence. In his 'Discours du Récit', which uses Proust's novel as a point of departure for a general

poetics of narrative, Gérard Genette adopts 'praeterition' or, more precisely, its synonymous term *paralepsis*, and applies it to non-temporal gaps in narrative structure.

'Il est une autre sorte de lacunes, d'ordre moins strictement temporel, qui consistent non plus en l'émission d'un segment diachronique, mais en l'omission d'un des éléments constitutifs de la situation, dans une période en principe couverte par le récit: soit le fait, par exemple, de raconter son enfance en occultant systématiquement l'existence de l'un des membres de sa famille (ce qui serait l'attitude de Proust envers son frère Robert si l'on tenait La Recherche pour une véritable autobiographie). Ici le récit ne saute pas, comme dans l'ellipse, par-dessus un moment, il passe à côté d'une donnée.'²⁹

This sort of systematic occultation will be familiar to any reader of Praeterita who has a passing acquaintance with the details of Ruskin's life, but the narrative lacunae of this autobiography go far beyond its much remarked-on sexual reticence. As we have seen, Ruskin's very facility with words encouraged a distrust of figural language, his concern with the truth of revelation leading him to search for a way to bypass the linguistic medium. In much of his later work, language is as it were pressed against the object in the hope of forcing out its truth. Having eschewed from the outset of his career any formal solution to the epistemological problem, Ruskin was doomed to wander from passages of great perceptive brilliance to prolixity, hysteria and madness. In this context, Praeterita seems to derive from a recognition of failure, a settling back into the reasonable and discursive.

'I have written [these sketches] frankly, garrulously, and at ease; speaking of what it gives me joy to remember, at any length I like and passing in total silence things which I have no pleasure in reviewing, and which the reader would find no help in the account of. My described life has thus become more amusing than I expected to myself, as I summoned its long past scenes for present scrutiny: - its main methods of study, and principles of work, I feel justified in commending to other students.'³⁰

The reductive tenor of Ruskin's prefatory remarks derives from something more profound than the customary modesty of the memoirist. A deference which in earlier works might be reserved for the divine in nature and in art is here maintained towards the reader himself. The critic and prophet whose combative didacticism influenced - in a tangible and unproblematic sense - the great majority of the viewing and reading public of his age now shows a belated and unwarranted sensitivity to the criticism that he used too many words. Such criticism may be incidentally true, but a sympathetic student would recognise that the wide range of Ruskin's concerns, and the depth of his commitment to them, could not admit the economies demanded by the occasional reader. Ruskin's own knowledge of literature would tell him that many years of single-minded discipline would be required before a writer would be capable of a satisfactory formal conspectus. Hence the undertones of loss and sacrifice in his valedictory work. This is made more apparent in the dedication to Ruskin's parents.

'I wrote these few prefatory words on my father's birthday, in what was once my nursery in his old house, - to which he brought my mother and me, sixty-two years since, I being then four

years old. What would otherwise in the following pages have been little more than an old man's recreation in gathering visionary flowers in fields of youth, has taken, as I wrote, the nobler aspect of a dutiful offering at the grave of parents who trained my childhood to all the good it could attain, and whose memory makes declining life cheerful in the hope of being soon again with them.' ³¹

Praeterita is not only an attempt to recreate the emotions and images of childhood, but also a conscious effort to recapture some of the humility and unquestioning obedience demanded by well-intentioned but unimaginative elders. Maudlin allusions to failing faculties, disappointments and approaching death make what would be self-denial more of a show of wilful self-pity, and the pretence that mama, or the reader, knows best is so uncharacteristic of Ruskin's proud and uncompromising intellect that it can only have been held in moods of petulant concession. Ruskin's unease with this deference to the bien-pensant is evident both from tensions within the text of Praeterita and from remarks in his correspondence, as where he writes of the 'please-your-worship and by-your-leave style of Praeterita' ³² - a style exemplified by passages such as the following:

'I do not mean this book to be in any avoidable way disagreeable or querulous; but expressive generally of my native disposition - which, though I say it, is extremely amiable, when I'm not bothered ' ³³

Combinations of circumstance and temperament ensured that Ruskin was very rarely 'not bothered' in the latter part of his life. Given the amount of public calumny which was aimed at him, it would be understandable that

he should, like Bellow's Moses Herzog, be overcome by 'the need to explain, to have it out, to justify, to put in perspective, to clarify, to make amends'.³⁴ This is in fact what happens in Fors Clavigera, where Ruskin, again like Bellow's hero, tries to argue the case for the Romantic imagination in a post-Romantic age by means of epistolary self-revelation, the addressees being incapable of answering back.³⁵ In Praeterita such self-analysis is only intermittently attempted, and then, as it were, in grudging deference to the Whistlers, Grays and La Touches of the world. Chapter two of the autobiography, 'Herne Hill Almond Blossoms', sees Ruskin counting the blessings and calamities of his life.³⁶ Of the former category, the most important gifts have been 'Peace, Obedience and Faith (that is, the blessings of religion), the habit of fixed attention with both eyes and mind, and an extreme perfection of palate'.³⁷ The 'Calamities' are the omissions of his upbringing which had such bitter and violent consequences in later years - the absence of objects of affection, the want of opportunity to practise fortitude, the omission from his education of any precision or etiquette in manners, and 'lastly and chief of evils My judgment of right and wrong and powers of independent action, were left entirely undeveloped; because the bridle and blinkers were never taken off me.'³⁸

The blinkers recall the predicament of Theseus in the labyrinth. At this point in his narrative Ruskin is attempting to evoke the landscape of his childhood, and to place his former self as an observer of that landscape, in a manner reminiscent (for reasons expounded in Chapter Three, I consider the term justifiable) of Marcel's evocations of Combray. But Proust locates his narrator/former self in a position of privileged vision,

unobstructed by irrelevancies and undisturbed by authority, not in an ivory tower, but in a 'petit cabinet sentant l'iris' at the top of his aunt's house, where the three secret practices of reading, masturbation and observation are thematically linked. (One may add a fourth intimate activity, that of writing itself.)³⁹

The Proustian hero's sense of dependence on authority has been exorcised by the earlier 'drame de son coucher'.⁴⁰ The presence of his mother, previously sought out, has now become oppressive, and escape from it is now not just possible but necessary if his guilt is to be assuaged. The hero's freedom is both reward and punishment for his earlier lapse, and is exercised in long hours of solitary indulgence. The epithet 'self-indulgent' is so often ignorantly used in condemnation that it might blind readers to the importance of indulgence and self-indulgence as an argument of Proust's novel. Ruskin shows himself to be equally aware of the fundamental doubts about writing as an anti-social activity when he invokes his mother's judgement that he had been too much indulged as a child. In expiation, he sets out with some reluctance to chasten his prose.

'Thus far, with some omissions, I have merely reprinted the account of these times given in Fors: and I fear the sequel may be more trivial, because much is concentrated in the foregoing broad statement, which I have now to continue by slower steps; - and yet less amusing, because I tried always in Fors to say things, if I could, a little piquantly, and the rest of the things related in this book will be told as plainly as I can. But whether I succeeded in writing piquantly in Fors or not, I certainly wrote often obscurely; and the description above given of Herne Hill seems to me to need at once some reduction to plainer terms.'⁴¹

Ruskin makes some attempts to follow these precepts in the subsequent description of Herne Hill and environs,⁴² this being for the most part an amiable ramble as bland as any extract from a local guide book. Before long, however, the congenial style suffers interruption from some typically Ruskinian anticipations and digressions. The Norwood hills have sufficient space and height in their sweep as to give some promise of 'true hill-districts', but the prospect of further exploration by the spectator is denied by the present-day monstrosity of the Crystal Palace. Ruskin tries to return to the vision of his childhood, but the depth and intensity of the mind's eye's involvement with the landscape can no longer be enacted; only alluded to by means of an anecdote which is tantalising in its terse self-deprecation.

'But then, the Nor-wood, or North wood, so called as it was seen in Croydon, in opposition to the South wood of the Surrey downs, drew itself in sweeping crescent good five miles round Dulwich to the south, broken by lanes of ascent, Gipsy Hill and others; and, from the top, commanding views towards Dartford and over the plain of Croydon, - in contemplation of which I one day frightened my mother out of her wits by saying "the eyes were coming out of my head!". She thought it was an attack of "coup de soleil."' ⁴³

Ruskin here refuses an opportunity for the sort of autobiographical journey into the landscape which characterised his earlier writings, and of which the most celebrated example is probably the dual evocation of an English Cathedral close and the approach to St. Mark's Place in The Stones of Venice.⁴⁴ In such passages, as indeed in The Bible of Amiens,⁴⁵ Ruskin

constructs an ideal recreation of his first sight of a landscape or work of architecture in order to guide the reader to the fullest understanding and appreciation of the sight – as place and as event. Proust praises Ruskin for this solicitude for the reader, and for the personal dimension which he brings to the role of guide; coming, as it were, to fetch you at the station rather than leaving you to find your own way to the cathedral.⁴⁶ In such passages it is interesting to note how Ruskin insists on accompanying the reader through the labyrinthine complexities of the surrounding streets, as though the only way to escape the predicament of Theseus were to act as an Ariadne in the interests of others.

In the passage quoted above, Ruskin appears to recognise the limitations of this guiding role, especially when it is the open country, rather than the city, which is to be negotiated. In such writings as Modern Painters, the paintings of Turner mediate between the reader and Ruskin's verbal evocations of landscape, even if Ruskin believed that he himself was mediating between reader and painter.⁴⁷ With no Turner to act as a template for his vision, and no science to impose order on his crowded impressions, the boy is left exposed to the act of seeing as either self-transcendence or madness, these being alternatives which the ageing memorialist is reluctant to explore.

As Elisabeth Helsinger has shown, Ruskin was one of the first to react against the 'sublime egotism' of romanticism.⁴⁸ A scepticism about the Wordsworthian 'single path' of introspection, shared with writers as diverse as Tennyson, Arnold and Pater, is allied in Ruskin with a doubt about the value of language itself. This radical scepticism comes to the

fore in the section of Sesame and Lilies entitled 'The Mystery of Life and its Arts'⁴⁹ – the one part of the book which is ignored by Proust – where it is insisted that 'The moment a man can really do his work he becomes speechless about it. All words become idle to him – all theories'.⁵⁰ If it be argued that this statement implies oppositions between manual and intellectual labour, and plastic and verbal arts, it should be remembered that an earlier part of the lecture had dwelt on the failures of the greatest of literary artists, of Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Milton. Ruskin asks if they have 'any peace to promise to our unrest, or any redemption to our misery', and concludes that:

'they do but play upon sweetly modulated pipes; with pompous nomenclature adorn the councils of hell, touch a troubadour's guitar to the courses of the suns; and fill the openings of eternity, before which prophets have veiled their faces, and which angels desire to look into, with idle puppets of their scholastic imagination, and melancholy lights of frantic faith in their lost mortal love.'⁵¹

Although the lecture ends in an appeal to practical Christianity, as an alternative to the 'morbid corruption and waste of vital power in religious sentiment'⁵² which had estranged Rose La Touche, the main thrust of 'The Mystery of Life and its Arts' indicates an abiding doubt about the expressive powers of the self and language. This doubt derives from the sense of a language whose authority surpasses that of Homer, being the language of Revelation. Knowledge that this first phase of language can no longer be aspired to evokes in Ruskin an attitude of pessimistic perseverance.

'the more beautiful the art, the more it is essentially the work of people who feel themselves wrong; - who are striving for the fulfilment of a law, and the grasp of a loveliness, which they have not yet attained, which they feel even farther and farther from attaining the more they strive for it.' ⁵³

Lost in the maze of the uncompleted self, Ruskin is committed to finding a way outwards through the line of writing towards a sense of mutuality, or of the divine. Elisabeth Helsinger compares Praeterita with Tennyson's In Memoriam as examples of a new type of autobiography which, from motives of loss, opposes a self-involvement which it must record.⁵⁴ It is in Walter Pater's conclusion to The Renaissance that this crisis of self-hood is most acutely recorded.

'And if we continue to dwell on this world, the whole scope of observation is dwarfed to the narrow chamber of the individual mind. Experience, already reduced to a swarm of impressions, is ringed round for each one of us by that thick wall of personality through which no real voice has ever pierced on its way to us, or from us to that which we can only conjecture to be without. Every one of those impressions is the impression of the individual in his isolation, each mind keeping as a solitary prisoner its own dream of a world.' ⁵⁵

Pater's escape route from this solipsistic world of the self - the love of art for art's sake - is well known, but more important to our consideration of Ruskin and Proust, and incidentally less open to misrepresentation, are

two of Pater's comments on the way to his conclusion. One of these concerns the theme, most familiar to us through Proust, of the deadening force of habit.

'Failure is to form habits; for habit is relative to a stereotyped world; meantime it is only the roughness of the eye that makes any two persons, things, situations, seem alike.'⁵⁶

In both Praeterita and A la recherche du temps perdu the failure of time lost is associated with habitual perception; time is regained by recognising the uniqueness of each individual moment – by moving outside time.

And yet, as Proust's narrator suggests in the closing paragraphs of Le Temps retrouvé (and here surely narrator and hero are closest to author, and novel closest to autobiography), the notions of character and identity themselves are only intelligible within the dimension of time.⁵⁷ Any escape from temporal bounds which is vouchsafed to the attentive or artistic consciousness also entails an escape from the sense of identity, and an end of character as such. Given that this recognition is itself the result of epiphany or revelation, it is not surprising that the two closing paragraphs should be insistently, vertiginously paradoxical. The final sentence might clang to a close on the dominant, thus echoing in miniature the structure of false resolution which we find in the novel as a whole, but what goes before is sufficiently wavering in tone as to insist in almost a Shandean way on the precariousness of the self in the act of writing.

'J'éprouvais un sentiment de fatigue et d'effroi à sentir que tout ce temps si long non seulement avait, sans une interruption, été vécu, pensé, secrété par moi, qu'il était ma vie, qu'il était moi-même, mais encore que j'avais à toute minute à le maintenir attaché à moi, qu'il me supportait, moi, juché à son sommet vertigineux, que je ne pouvais me mouvoir sans me déplacer.'

Issuing from this sense of vertigo there comes an ungainly image, an image of ungainliness, that of the stilted giants which are men 'plongés dans les années'. The narrator shares the dizziness of his characters. Character, formerly a social creation, is now elevated to a status cognate with that of identity itself. The organic control exercised by the narrator is thrown into question by the image of clumsy artificiality. The description of others might, it is suggested, entail their description as 'monstrous beings'. The self-created world of Proust as spider-in-his-web ('tout ce temps ... avait ... été ... secrété par moi') might prove indecipherable and terrifying. The spider might turn out itself to be the monster in the labyrinth, even more trapped and threatened than Theseus. The uncertainties woven into this segment of Proust's text derive from the blind spots created by writing on its highest pitch; at the moments of purest perception we become ignorant of other people, other times and other possible selves. When, in his preface to Sésame et les lys, Proust had rejected Ruskin's ideals of reading as a publicly available communication in favour of writing as intimate self-transcendence,⁵⁸ he gave himself over to the predicament described by Pater en route to his insistence on l'art pour l'art. Pater goes on to set the conditions for a new structure of autobiographical writing:

'It is with the movement, the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off, - that continual vanishing away, that strange perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves.'⁵⁹

For Elisabeth Helsinger, this pattern of weaving and unweaving best describes the dissatisfaction with the achieved self which she discerns in Praeterita. In place of completed identity we have a peculiar sensibility, a given receptiveness: in place of characters we have a series of spiritually significant locations. The Wordsworthian path, or traceable pattern of growth, gives way to a series of repetitions and returns through which Ruskin's sense of his original identity, the peculiar sensibility of his 'tadpole self' is steadily intensified. A sequence of descriptive passages, closely linked by imagery and by conscious recall, give Praeterita a definite structure it at first seems to lack. This structure is called by Helsinger one of 'metaphoric and affective connections'⁶⁰ - a formula which must recall for us both the implicit and explicit structures of A la recherche du temps perdu.

Are the two works structurally comparable? In an article welcoming the revised English translation of Proust's novel, Roger Shattuck suggests as much, again invoking the Paterian image:

'Ruskin's three-volume autobiography of a self constantly unwoven and rewoven in the writing is closer to A la recherche du temps perdu than any novel in English.'⁶¹

To a Proustian reader ignorant of Ruskin's work, the implicit comparison between the 'three volume' Praeterita and the Pléiade volumes of Proust 'disposés trois par trois aux vitrines éclairées'⁶² might prove misleading, but in suggesting that Praeterita is closer to A la recherche du temps perdu than any English novel, Shattuck is making a bold point which deserves to be taken up.

At least from the point of view of documentary truth, there is no doubting the fictiveness of Ruskin's autobiography. This is not a genteel way of suggesting that Ruskin omitted, or simply forgot; more an acceptance of the fact that this autobiography, as much as any, recreates and re-imagines past experiences in terms recognisable to the author at the moment of writing. This is to say that autobiography is, literally, a recognition of past events, a thinking-through and living-through of experience a second time, by a more 'experienced' and hence more articulate self. This fictive nature of Praeterita has been established by the documentary research of Van Aken Burd, who compares episodes related in the autobiography with Ruskin's diary of the time.⁶³ The epiphany at Fontainebleau, where the act of sketching a single aspen gives him an insight into a new silvan world, is not recorded in the diary of that year. Praeterita insists that there was no diary of the feelings or discoveries of that year, its author surmising that they were too many, and bewildering, to be written. This may have been so, but the mundane fact is that there was a diary, which had been given to Charles Eliot Norton in 1872, which does not record any epiphany or even suggest any humbled reticence which could be read as its consequence. Nor, as Ruskin's most recent biographer reminds us, is there any contemporary drawing of an aspen which might correspond with these reminiscences.⁶⁴

Van Akin Burd concludes that, whether Ruskin knew what he was doing or did not, his autobiography makes the discoveries of his youth more startling than 'they were at the time'.⁶⁵ But from St. Augustine onwards, autobiography has been concerned with the dramatising of conversion, a process which is also the major theme of Proust's novel. In the Confessions, the converted narrator's self-knowledge enables him to interpret correctly each past experience in relation to the entire pattern of his life.⁶⁶ Jean Starobinsky has suggested that in autobiography 'it is the internal transformation of the individual - and the exemplary character of the transformation - which furnishes a subject for a narrative discourse in which "I" is both subject and object it is because the past "I" is different from the present "I" that the latter may really be confirmed in all his prerogatives.'⁶⁷

In so far as it follows the dramatic structure which is explicitly formulated in A la recherche du temps perdu, Praeterita may indeed be said to be closer to Proust's work than any English novel. If Praeterita is an unusually fictive autobiography, A la recherche du temps perdu is a uniquely autobiographical fiction. Gaetan Picon has insisted on the originality of Proust's achievement.

'Pour la première fois avec Proust, un romancier conçoit que son oeuvre doit traduire une expérience indivisible et complète du monde et que tout le reste - personnages, situations, milieux - n'est qu'une médiation contingente et subordonnée.'⁶⁸

And as Leo Bersani puts it, the novel substitutes a history of the author's sensibility for the invented situations and characters of traditional fiction.⁶⁹

It is not just that the two works share some common ground, more that each approaches the other by relinquishing some of the original concerns of its genre, with the result that the characters of Proust's novels are feared by the narrator to be monstrous creations, while Ruskin's autobiography is almost useless as a record of his public and professional career.

As records of a peculiar sensibility coming to terms with empirical reality through a series of epiphanies, both Praeterita and A la recherche du temps perdu employ a sophisticated rhetoric of conversion which undermines the conventions of the genre to which they belong. The arguments sustained by these rhetorical structures are, however, diametrically opposed. While the argument of A la recherche du temps perdu can be reduced, as we have seen,⁷⁰ to the formula 'Marcel devient écrivain', that of Praeterita is Ruskin's failure as an artist, and not only as a pictorial artist, but also as a writer. Praeterita is packed with allusions to its author's creative incapacity, while its interest, and even its mystery, lies in the evocations of incidents which would support this contention.

This is best brought out if we compare the relevant passages of Praeterita with those episodes of Proust's novel which are similarly torn between the promise of aesthetic deliverance and the threat of failure. Of all the chapters of Ruskin's autobiography, that entitled Fontainebleau⁷¹ is most insistent on its author's mingled sense of promise and incapacity. The chapter opens on the themes of illness and submission to discipline. A planned tour in Wales with his boyhood friend, Richard Fall, Ruskin's 'first independent journey',⁷² is scotched by his father's insistence that he

return to Leamington Spa in order to follow the regime imposed by Dr. Jephson. For six weeks, 'not unpleasant, now remembered',⁷³ the young man submits accurately to this discipline, finding life still worth having on these terms, and is surprised to note that while he had been extremely dull under Mount Avenine, the grotesquely prosaic nature of his surroundings here leaves him not at all disposed to dullness. He reads a book on fossils, delighting in the lithographs, but concluding that its author Agassiz is a blockhead and that 'it didn't matter a stale herring to any mortal whether [the fish] had any names or not'.⁷⁴ From his frustration Ruskin derives a consoling knowledge of the superiority of the artist to the scientist, and continues with an elaborate drawing of the Château of Amboise, in imitation of Turner's grandest manner, but the subsequently recognised failure of both this and its accompanying verses '[proved] to me that in those directions of imagination I was even a worse blockhead than Agassiz himself'.⁷⁵ This period marks the end of Ruskin's poetic ambitions, and yet it was also at this time that he composed his one work of fiction.

"The King of the Golden River" was written to amuse a little girl; and being a fairly good imitation of Grimm and Dickens, mixed with a little true Alpine feeling of my own, has been rightly pleasing to nice children, and good for them. But it is totally valueless, for all that. I can no more write a story than compose a picture'.⁷⁶

Within the space of a couple of pages then, Ruskin has renounced any ambitions of creative expression. But a story is being told, and told well, of the author/hero's artistic apprenticeship, and the thematic economy of Ruskin's account will not go unnoticed by readers who approach Praeterita

by way of Proust. For all its tonal lapses of irascibility and coyness, the Fontainebleau chapter cunningly interweaves and juxtaposes themes of discipline and renunciation, artistic ambition and failure, even the pressures of love and friendship upon the occasions of literary production. The little girl for whom 'The King of the Golden River' was written was, in fact, Effie Gray, and Ruskin's dismissal of the story is plainly as much a dismissal of the childishness of its addressee. Coupled with this is the author's contempt for his own callow enthusiasms, calling this period a 'particularly foolish crisis of life'⁷⁷ and contrasting his own fruitless ambitions with the achievements of masters such as Dickens and Turner. Ruskin, however, is not content to dwell on past pretensions; his incapacities are translated into the present tense. 'The King of the Golden River' he finds 'totally valueless', adding that 'I can no more write a story than compose a picture'. It is in this conflation of past and present failure that Praeterita is most anomalous, not only with regard to the Proustian roman d'apprentissage, but also within the historical paradigms of autobiography as genre. These are set out by William C. Spengeman in his study The Forms of Autobiography, which adopts the Confessions of St. Augustine as the formal paradigm for the genre and analyses it in terms highly reminiscent of the structure of A la recherche du temps perdu.⁷⁸ The structure of the Confessions is seen to be tripartite. In the first section, Books 1 to 9, the converted Augustine surveys his temporal life from the fixed, exalted vantage point of received faith. Augustine, Spengeman insists, is looking down as well as back from this position, drawing a sharp distinction between his old, unregenerate self, who could see his life only from an ever-shifting perspective within it, and his new converted self, who sees that life as an eternally complete moral design

with all its parts existing simultaneously in timeless space.⁷⁹ If we make the necessary adjustments for Proust's secular aesthetic world view, this description would equally well account for the double 'je' of A la recherche du temps perdu, and its attendant contrast between 'les intermittences du coeur' and the certainties of achieved art. In either case, the rhetorical burden adopted by the author is unavoidable. In Spengeman's words 'the religious significance of the conversion, the accuracy of the meanings he assigns to his past life, the whole lesson of the narrative, in fact, depend upon the narrator's ability to persuade himself and the reader that he has attained this timeless wisdom, and can now see the true, eternal pattern of his false, temporal life'.⁸⁰

If that first section of the Confessions corresponds most closely with the structure of A la recherche du temps perdu, the remaining chapters also have their counterparts within Proust's novel, although it must be pointed out that Augustine's rhetoric of progressive enlightenment differs from Proust's more subtle practice of embedding meditative passages within temporal narrative and aesthetic description. Books 10 to 12 of Augustine's autobiography consist of a series of meditations on Memory, Time and the Creation, corresponding with those ruminative and aphoristic pages where the narrator elaborates the governing theory of his novel. The last book of the Confessions presents its author in a position of complete enlightenment.⁸¹ Spengeman's account of this book deserves particular attention. Written by a late twentieth century literary formalist, concerned with reclaiming Augustine's work for the secular canon of great texts, it largely ignores the theological context of the Confessions, its anti-Manichean polemic, its aspirations to the condition of perfect prayer

as a dialogue with God and, most notably, its dependence on Scripture as ultimate source of meaning. Instead, the closing pages are presented as belonging to a mode of 'poetic self-expression' whereby 'art has become the sole means of realising the truth that doctrine preaches but does not tell us how to achieve'.⁸² This back-dated Romantic formalism leads to an assessment of the Confessions which would suggest that the paradigm for autobiography is not Augustinian, as Spengeman would have it, but Proustian. Spengeman does admit in his introduction that the modernist movement away from representational discourse towards self-enacting, self-reflexive verbal structures and the critical theories that have been devised to explain this movement conspire to make the very idea of literary modernism seem synonymous with that of autobiography, and his description of the import of Confessions, Book 13, confirms this.

'Although time, change and ignorance are the inescapable conditions of our mortality, when redeemed by faith, time can symbolise eternity, inquiry can adumbrate knowledge, corruption can mirror grace, the created can glimpse its creator, and the conditional can find, in the fleeting instant, its absolute ground.'⁸³

if one substitutes the word 'art' for 'faith', the above would serve as a passable restatement of Proustian idealism. This is not to say that A la recherche du temps perdu does not depend to a large extent on later developments in autobiography, in particular the Wordsworthian reliance on:

'..... spots of time,
That with distinct pre-eminence retain
A renovating virtue, whence our minds
are nourished and invisibly repaired.'⁸⁴

But the ease with which Proust's work may be seen to conform to the Augustinian model suggests a deep paradox latent in the difference between his approach to autobiography and that of Ruskin.

A la recherche du temps perdu follows the earliest of autobiographies in its admittance of the possibility of redemption, indeed in the celebration of that possibility, all in spite of the disappearance of the divine as agent of revelation. Proust's novel supplies in God's place its own typology and constitutes its own scripture. This secularisation of the Augustinian model gives Marcel Proust his own original project, his raison d'écrire. Ruskin's reliance on Scripture denies him this originality: the account of his life becomes that of a series of dependencies, whether on God, as in Augustine, or on Nature, as in Wordsworth. Originality becomes impossible for him because of the strongest anxieties of influence: those imposed by the vanishing realities of God and Scripture. In his later works his vocation to teach others to see nature and art with his own clarity and precision is lost as he realises the limitations and intermittence of his own vision. The predicament of Theseus is that of being lost, blinded, in a microcosm which is not of his own making, whose creator is beyond appeal. Ruskin's macrocosmic perspective makes his situation all the more intolerable. As Augustine teaches at the end of his Confessions, only the creator can wholly see his own creation. Indeed, seeing is creation.

✧

'We see the things which you have made, because they exist. But they only exist because you see them. Outside ourselves we see that they exist, and in our inner selves we see that they are good. But when you saw that it was right that they should be made, in the same act you saw them made.'

'..... you are Goodness itself and need no good besides yourself. You are forever at rest because you are your own repose.'

'What man can teach another to understand this truth? What angel can teach it to an angel? What angel can teach it to a man?'⁸⁵

The Modernist response to a God-deserted era was to forsake didacticism in favour of the limited certainties of a self-sufficient art. Hence Elstir's ambition to take away the names given by God to things and replace them with his own, in this manner creating reality anew, since a revision of the world also involves a critique of the language which previously constituted that world.⁸⁶ This Mallarmean ideal of the work of art as infinite alternative, or alternative infinite, resurfaces towards the end of Le Temps retrouvé where the narrator conceives of a book in which 'la vraie vie' might be realised. To write such a book, an author would have to 'le créer comme un monde sans laisser de côté ces mystères qui n'ont probablement leur explication que dans d'autres mondes et dont le pressentiment est ce qui nous émeut le plus dans la vie et dans l'art'.⁸⁷ This work would be as a great cathedral; aspiring to infinity, permanently unfinished and eventually containing the tomb of its initiator. It is not, however, the book which the narrator is to write - 'Mais pour en revenir à moi-même, je pensais plus modestement à mon livre'.⁸⁸ But the evocation of such a Grand Œuvre, the cumulative rhetorical force employed in the listing of its attributes, ensure that its image persists, not only as an ideal version of A la recherche du temps perdu, uninterrupted by death, but also as a model for all autobiographies. This is confirmed by the supposed reversion to the narrator's own work.

'Je pensais plus modestement à mon livre, et ce serait même inexact que de dire en pensant à ceux qui le liraient, à mes lecteurs. Car ils ne seraient pas, selon moi, mes lecteurs, mais les propres lecteurs d'eux-mêmes, mon livre n'étant qu'une sorte de ces verres grossissants comme ceux que tendait à un acheteur l'opticien à Combray; mon livre, grâce auquel je leur fournirais le moyen de lire en eux-mêmes.' ⁸⁹

Neither the transition from third person to first nor the pre-emptive declaration of modesty and insertion of the homely image of the optician's glass are sufficient to erase the metonymic association between the two concepts of the book.

As images of A la recherche du temps perdu, the descriptions are complementary rather than contrastive: they constitute the double presumption to recreate the world in the author's own image and to have that image suffice for everyone else. In aesthetic terms, the passage quoted replicates the braggart modesty projected in the depiction of the social careers of a Swann, a Charlus, or a Marcel. Under the magnifying glass of his novel, the author's mundane preoccupations, apologies and scores to be settled take their own place among the 'purer', more fictive elements. Among these is the will to be estimated correctly by posterity along with the fear of being misread and undervalued by one's contemporaries. This is evident in the strongly polemical bent of Proust's critical writings, which blame the poor critical fortunes of the greatest French writers of the nineteenth century on a failure to separate the man from the work. The major culprit of this misreading is of course Sainte-Beuve,

but others, including Ruskin and Anatole France, are implicated in the supposed conspiracy of blindness. The last-named writer figures as a critical adversary in the preface written in 1920 for Paul Morand's Tendres Stocks,⁹⁰ where the dissenting respect accorded France does not disguise a self-confidence in the writer's own style and vision, which had its origins in the prefaces to Ruskin. In refuting France's contention that bad writing had become the rule since the end of the eighteenth century, Proust not only reiterates his vindication of Baudelaire and Stendhal in the face of Taine or Sainte-Beuve, but also insists on the importance, indeed the necessity, of novelty and originality.

'La vérité (et M. France la connaît mieux que personne, car mieux que personne il connaît tout), c'est que de temps en temps, il survient un nouvel écrivain original Ce nouvel écrivain est généralement assez fatigant à lire et difficile à comprendre parce qu'il unit les choses par des rapports nouveaux.'⁹¹

The gist of this passage is to be found transposed and developed in that important meditation on Art and Time at the beginning of the second book of Le côté de Guermantes.⁹² There it serves to explicate the work of Bergotte, a character who, for all his derivation from Anatole France, stands in the same relation to the narrator of A la recherche du temps perdu as does Paul Morand to the novelist and author of the essay under consideration. In the Tendres Stocks preface, the emphasis is once again on the question of Tradition and the Individual Talent and, as with Eliot, there is little question as to whose individual talent is the ultimate concern. Proust insists on a lineage of style and of originality stretching

from his representative Morand through Baudelaire, back to Racine, and in doing so he confirms the mythological symbolism which maintains his theory and practice of the autobiographical novel.

At the beginning of his preface, Proust compares Morand to the Minotaur:

'On n'a encore livré à notre minotaure Morand que trois jeunes demoiselles et le traité en prévoit sept.'⁹³

Towards the end of the essay, the source of this allusion is made explicit: it is the evocation of the labyrinth in the crucial scene of Phèdre where the heroine reveals her passion to Hippolyte, having first attempted to disguise it by complicated interposition.

'Par vous aurait péri le monstre de la Crète,
Malgré tous les détours de sa vaste retraite:
Pour en développer l'embarras incertain,
Ma soeur du fil fatal eût armé votre main.
Mais non: dans ce dessein je l'aurais devancée;
L'amour m'en eût d'abord inspiré la pensée:
C'est moi, prince, c'est moi dont l'utile secours
Vous eût du labyrinthe enseigné les détours.
Que de soins m'eût coûtés cette tête charmante!
Un fil n'eût point assez rassuré votre amante:
Compagne du péril qu'il vous fallait chercher,
Moi-même devant vous j'aurais voulu marcher;
Et Phèdre au labyrinthe avec vous descendue
Se serait avec vous retrouvée ou perdue.'⁹⁴

Temps retrouvé, temps perdu; the self rediscovered or lost – the solution is found in Proust's evocation of the labyrinth in Phèdre, the play, and Phèdre, the character. Just as in Racine's play a deliberate confusion is

engendered between Hippolytus and Theseus, between Phaedra and Ariadne, so Proust encourages a mingling of the duties and attributes of Theseus and the Minotaur in his envoi to Morand.

'Mais si, avant qu'il devienne ambassadeur et rivalise avec Beyle consul, il veut visiter l'Hôtel de Balbec, alors je lui prêterai le fil fatal:

"C'est moi, prince, c'est moi dont l'utile secours
Vous a (sic) du labyrinthe enseigné les détours." 95

In his admiration, Proust compares Morand to the Minotaur; in his criticism, Morand becomes Theseus, the lost hero in need of guidance. Proust's comparison of himself with Phèdre provides us with the clue: when he adopts Phèdre's tactics of projection and displacement, we see that his essay on Morand is in fact an act of self-revelation; his ideal novelist, his ideal writing self, is at once Minotaur, Ariadne and Daedalus. (Morand's domains are palaces 'qui ne valent pas Dédale'.)⁹⁶ The Proustian spider is at once thread, trap and monster. As narrator, this triple being teases, threatens and saves the Thesean hero, and this same triune power is enabled to create and delimit the world. One tug on the central thread and the vast world contracts:

'Pour l'enfant amoureux de cartes et d'estampes
L'Univers est égal à son vaste appétit.
Ah! que le monde est grand à la clarté des lampes!
Aux yeux du souvenir que le monde est petit!' 97

Only by a return to the intimacy of reading and writing can the extent and diversity of the world be restored to us: such is the lesson of Journées de

Lecture. The reduction of Ruskin's Wider Sea to Rimbaud's pond⁹⁸ is the necessary creative act imposed by Proust and by that other great master of the self-engendering novel, who names his hero after the author of the labyrinth.

'Je crois que tout art véritable est classique, mais les lois de l'esprit permettent rarement qu'il soit, à son apparition, reconnu pour tel.'⁹⁹

The supposed classicism of Proust's poetic is perhaps best represented by the formal reduction of macrocosm to microcosm which we find symbolised at the end of the madeleine episode. The whole of Combray, town and gardens, is rediscovered in a cup of tea. The childhood of the narrator is to be found on the tip of his tongue.¹⁰⁰

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

Again, in the Morand essay, we find the evocation of a forest as being only approachable when reduced, domesticated to the scale, sureness and clarity of tapestry.¹⁰¹ In the comprehensive vision of the true formalist, the dantesque selva oscura is reduced to the intelligible structure of the maze. The merged impulses of didacticism, classicism and formalism, the Godlike comprehension of human scale which we find in A la recherche du temps perdu are, perhaps suprisingly, anticipated in English literature by the work of Pope.

'The spider's touch, how exquisitely fine!
Feels at each thread, and lives along the line.'¹⁰²

For Proust's narrator, the fictive world becomes:

'A mighty maze, but not without a plan.'¹⁰³

And in a passage uncannily reminiscent of Proustian procedures, Pope spells out the way in which self-comprehension can spread to a centrifugal conception of the world.

'God loves from whole to parts, but human soul
Must rise from Individual to the Whole
Self-love but serves the virtuous mind to wake
As the small pebble stirs the peaceful lake;
The centre mov'd, a circle strait succeeds,
Another still, and still another spreads;
Friend, parent, neighbour, first it will embrace
His country next, and next all human race
Wide and more wide, th' o'erflowings of
the mind.

Take ev'ry creature in, of ev'ry kind,
Earth smiles around, with boundless beauty blest,
And Heav'n beholds its image in his breast.'¹⁰⁴

Pope's long poem may appear to be an unlikely precursor of Proust's novel, but in its unifying of elements traditional and modern in a world view which gathered up the muddle and miscellany of things in a comprehensive intellectual order, above all in its formal enactment of the faith it was proposing, it looks forward to the achievement of A la recherche du temps perdu.

The holistic formalism espoused by Pope and Proust contrasts sharply with the world view, atomist and organic, that we find in the pages of Ruskin. Although he shared Byron's enthusiasm for the author of the Essay on Man, and indeed insists in Praeterita that he endeavoured to keep the cadences of Pope and Johnson for all serious statement,¹⁰⁵ the grand structural design of the Essay, presumptuous in its imprecations against presumption, and godlike in its microcosmic interpretation of the divine plan, would surely have been inimical to him. Again we are faced with the contrastive images of Theseus, bold but blinded by the labyrinth, and the spider, omniscient at the centre of his self-created model of a world:

'Who made the spider parallels design,
Sure as De-moivre, without rule or line?'¹⁰⁶

The thematic linking of the organic with the mathematical insists on a faith in created, rather than discovered, form which Ruskin could never share.

We have been some time absent from Fontainebleau, but, returning there, we find in Ruskin's Epiphany of the aspen some proof of his failure as an artist being rooted in a refusal to insist on his own capacity to perceive

formal correspondences, except on a strictly local level. (In passing, you may note two distinctly Popean cadences, where the most serious statements are being made.)

'Languidly, but not idly, I began to draw it; and as I drew, the languor passed away; the beautiful hues insisted on being traced, - without weariness. More and more beautiful they became, as each rose out of the rest, and took its place in the air. With wonder increasing every instant, I saw that they "composed" themselves by finer laws than any known of men. At last, the tree was there, and everything that I had thought before about trees, nowhere.' ¹⁰⁷

This is a passage which relates a moment of euphorically intense engagement with an aesthetic experience. What distinguishes it from both the much-anthologised Ruskinian purple passage and the modernist epiphany of Proust or Joyce is the virtual absence of any trace either of the initial aesthetic impression or of the resultant work of art. In the tradition of the epiphany, the form or status of this work of art can vary, from Ruskin's expansive prose poetry in the guise of scientific description, to Stephen Dedalus' villanelle in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, to Marcel's juvenile sketch which is prompted by his vision of the steeples at Martinville.¹⁰⁸ What these imaginary artworks have in common is their real or supposed inferiority to the felt drama of aesthetic discovery: a drama which is itself enacted, often with greater poetic resource, in the attendant preparation for the epiphany.

In the Martinville section of Du côté de chez Swann this inferiority is made explicit. The narrator's impressions here are no less significant, and certainly no worse evoked, than those of the uneven paving stones, the starched napkins, or the tinkling spoon in Le temps retrouvé. What does impose dramatic meaning on the contrast between one experience and the closely successive set of others is the author's recognition that a single lyrical catharsis of the euphoric moment will not preserve that moment; rather than an act of preservation, it is, literally, an evacuation and a dereliction.

'Je ne repensai jamais à cette page, mais à ce moment-là, quand, au coin du siège où le cocher du docteur plaçait habituellement dans un panier les volailles qu'il avait achetées au marché de Martinville, j'eus fini de l'écrire, je me trouvais si heureux, je sentais qu'elle m'avait si parfaitement débarassé 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.' ¹⁰⁹

The symbolic importance of the impression produced by the Martinville steeples is well documented within the novel itself. This impression, like those of the three trees of Hudemesnil, of the works of Vinteuil, and of the madeleine itself, is an emanation of the vraie vie which haunts the narrator. But just as significant, although less foregrounded in the narrative, is the fate of the prose sketch written at the time. This sketch is particularly important, because in this archetypically autobiographical novel, which, moreover, purports to be the history of a vocation, it represents the only 'concrete' - however fictive - evidence of the

narrator's vocation. Of course, insofar as A la recherche du temps perdu can be said to enact its own genesis, the novel itself exists as proof of its narrator's vocation; but in its qualitative isolation from the rest of the text, the Martinville sketch and its eventual destiny play a crucial part in the rhetoric of success and failure which governs our notion of the unity and value of the novel as a whole.

The prose sketch re-emerges three times in the course of the novel, although in the first of these recurrences there is a slight ambiguity. This is when Marcel shows Norpois 'un petit poème en prose que j'avais fait autrefois à Combray en revenant d'une promenade'.¹¹⁰ This could well be construed as the Martinville sketch, which is written in Dr. Percepied's carriage on the way home from a walk. Equally, it might refer to some other short prose work written on returning home from one of Marcel's many walks along the Swann or Guermantes ways. The distinction between singular and repeated events is, after all, often blurred in A la recherche du temps perdu, as has been demonstrated by Gérard Genette in his identification of the three temporal modes which are characteristic to the Proustian narrative. The second, the iterative, tells us once something that happened repeatedly, while the last, the pseudo-iterative, narrates as something that happened repeatedly an event whose very particularity makes it appear singular. The surface ambiguity as to which text Marcel does submit to Norpois thus reinforces what Genette calls 'l'itératisme proustien', that governing principle of the Proustian cosmology which guarantees recurrence and hence salvation.¹¹¹

In any case, Norpois' mannered, philistine response to Marcel's submission temporarily destroys the latter's faith in himself as a writer. The piece is

handed back to Marcel without comment, Norpois only delivering himself of his sententious opinions when he discerns the malign influence of Bergotte. The old ambassador's diatribe is one of the finest caricatures of the Ste.-Beuvist fallacy to be found in the novel, and yet Marcel's own motives for raising the subject of Bergotte are shown to be romantic and social.¹¹²

From the mature viewpoint of the narrator, Bergotte is presented here as the practitioner of the pure and self-sufficient art to which the young protagonist ought to aspire. For reasons both textual and biographical, Bergotte is commonly thought to share many ideals and characteristics with Ruskin. In this episode, however, Norpois, the anti-Bergotte, voices several opinions which can be read as travesties of Ruskin's thought, notably the trite comparison of Romanesque and Gothic architecture and the denunciation of artists who tend the cult of pure form at a time when the barbarians are at the gate.¹¹³ Marcel's own perceptions are at this stage contaminated by the false talk and vision of those who surround him, by 'cette perpétuelle erreur, qui est précisément "la vie"'.¹¹⁴ Art offers an escape from this erroneous social language, but at the moment the hero's art is forgotten in the blindness of social and emotional concerns.

The second recurrence of the Martinville sketch comes in the second chapter of Book Two of Le Côté de Guermantes,¹¹⁵ at a stage of the narrative where the primary obstacle to aesthetic fulfilment is now not social or sexual ambition, but the demands of friendship. The narrative voice is here more confident, more insistent on the superficiality of social relations, however noble or intellectual, and the incommunicability of our real selves save through the medium of art. The prose poem has been

rediscovered, altered, submitted to and rejected by Le Figaro. This information is given us in parenthesis, in the midst of a passage which foretells the novel's final revelation. The presence of Robert de Saint Loup denies Marcel the solitude necessary to pursue his momentary insight into the nature of time and memory.

'J'éprouvais à les percevoir un enthousiasme qui aurait pu être fécond si j'étais resté seul, et m'aurait évité ainsi le détour de bien des années inutiles par lesquelles j'allais encore passer avant que se déclarât la vocation invisible dont cet ouvrage est l'histoire.'

- 'Si cela fût advenu ce soir-là, cette voiture eût mérité de demeurer plus mémorable pour moi que celle du docteur Percepied sur le siège de laquelle j'avais composé cette petite description - précisément retrouvée il y avait très peu de temps, arrangée, et vainement envoyée au Figaro - des clochers de Martinville.'¹¹⁶

The textual absence of the prose sketch is a sign of the narrator/hero's failure. And yet, were the impulse and lesson of Martinville and episodes like it to be rediscovered and sustained, the vocation which constitutes the real story of the novel would no longer be invisible or occluded. The detour of wasted years would be avoided, but since this detour constitutes the substance of much of the novel, the narrator's assertions here would seem to weaken rather than reinforce the arch thrown between Combray and Le Temps retrouvé. We are reminded of past revelations and forewarned of those to come, but such is the preterition of the associative moment, the suppression of aesthetic evidence, that we are forcefully reminded of Ruskin's painful derelictions in the late years of writing his

autobiography. The deferral of the pure aesthetic moment, the blaming of friends, is itself recognisably Augustinian. 'Lord', the text seems to be saying at this point, 'make me virtuous, make me lyrical and aesthetic, but not yet'. There is more life, more narrative, to be dealt with.

The Martinville sketch recurs a third time in a passage at the beginning of La Prisonnière where the interplay between the iterative and pseudo-iterative modes aptly conveys the habitual frustration of the hero at this time.

'Je sonnais Françoise. J'ouvrais le Figaro.
 J'y cherchais et constatais que ne s'y
 trouvait pas un article, ou prétendu tel,
 que j'avais envoyé à ce journal et qui n'était,
 un peu arrangée, que la page récemment
 retrouvée, écrite autrefois dans la voiture du
 docteur Percepied, en regardant les clochers
 de Martinville. Puis je lisais la lettre de
 maman. Elle trouvait bizarre, choquant, qu'une
 jeune fille habitât seule avec moi.'¹¹⁷

The rapid sequence of verbs in the imperfect convinces us in a typically Proustian manner of Marcel's repeated failure to realise his ambition to be a writer. By using the same tense to refer to a quite different phenomenon - his mother's constantly-held opinion -

'Puis je lisais la lettre de maman. Elle
 trouvait bizarre, choquant, qu'une jeune
 fille habitât seule avec moi.'

- the text implies persuasively but not abruptly the connection between the hero's frustrated ambitions and his frustrations with Albertine.

For all his possessiveness, Marcel is denied knowledge and control of what Albertine desires. Similarly, he now finds himself impotent and ignorant with regard to his own writing. Leo Bersani has suggested that Marcel's aesthetic desires are just one facet of his compulsive need to possess something different from himself.¹¹⁸ Following this compulsion, exhaustive description comes to seem the equivalent of possession. At the beginning of La Prisonnière, Albertine, the unknown, has come under the hero's limited control, as the impressions of Martinville were provisionally captured by the prose sketch. These captive insights are themselves in thrall, however, to the judgement of outsiders, the newspaper editors, while Marcel's act of sequestration is questioned and delimited by those powerful moral forces from his past: his mother and Françoise.

The Martinville text is thus gradually removed from the reader's attention, becoming as unknowable as Albertine. When Marcel eventually succeeds in getting an article published in Le Figaro,¹¹⁹ this piece of work seems to have little or nothing to do with a descriptive epiphany. As a piece of superior journalism, remarkable only for its allusion to the now-fashionable Elstir, the article now seems to have degenerated into what Gilles Deleuze calls a 'signe mondain vide',¹²⁰ the power of judging its truth having been delivered from the author into the hands of a diverse and partial audience. By a prettily damning conceit, the newspaper is described as 'le pain spirituel qu'est un journal, encore chaud et humide de la presse récente et du brouillard du matin où on le distribue dès l'aurore aux bonnes qui l'apportent à leur maître avec le café au lait, pain miraculeux, multipliable, qui est à la fois un et dix mille, et reste le même pour chacun tout en pénétrant à la fois, innombrable, dans toutes les maisons'.¹²¹

Comparing this rather sickly tribute to the press with Swann's Ruskinian dismissal of the newspapers in the overture to the novel,¹²² we find that the persistently logged destiny of the Martinville sketch matches the hero's descent into mundanity.

Swann is a much more convincing fictional counterpart to Ruskin than is Bergotte. He is the teacher who is in his failure an example to the pupil: although a dilettante, his interest in the visual arts involves the submission of word to image. He introduces the hero to Balbec as Ruskin introduced Proust to Venice and Amiens, and just as Proust values Ruskin's works more for their incitements to writing than for their contents, so Swann is paid tribute by the narrator of Le Temps retrouvé for the consequence of having gone to Balbec, indeed, for having unconsciously supplied the raw material for the whole book. Finally, Swann is like Ruskin in that, blinded by personal obsessions, he is unable to recognise that the true cult, in Proustian terms, is that of the artistic vocation, and not that of art itself. If one restricts oneself to the latter, the intermittent desires of the heart will demand the indulgence of artistic idolatry, while the former path leads to the self-discovery of formalised memory.

Swann rejects the meretriciousness of newspapers in terms which could have come straight out of Sesame and Lilies.

'Ce que je reproche aux journaux, c'est de nous faire faire attention tous les jours à des choses insignifiantes, tandis que nous lisons trois ou quatre fois dans notre vie, les livres où il y a des choses éternels.'¹²³

The eventual insignificance of the prose poem inspired by the Martinville experience is thus prefigured by Swann's judgement - the judgement of a failed artist, perhaps, but nevertheless of one who is aware of his failure and where failure lies. Ruskin may have chosen the word 'Today' as his motto, but his life's work seeks to expound the paradox that, while truth and beauty can be discovered in the perception of the ephemeral, the meaning of such perceptions can only be grounded in a mythical framework of interpretation; that is to say, one in which history and prophecy are subsumed under a timeless principle of vision. In this scheme of things fine writing has no place: hence Ruskin's consistent depreciation of his own skills beyond those of a teacher. It was impossible for Ruskin to envisage any work of fiction which would combine 'poetry, philosophy and religion - all in one',¹²⁴ these being his conditions for seeing clearly. Dante was the last writer possessed of the strength of faith and fund of myth sufficient to such an undertaking. Artists of the following generations, like Wagner, Proust and Joyce, who had the hubris to attempt such a task, would be far beyond the comprehension of Ruskin, who explored for so many years the labyrinth of nature before realising, too late, that its creator had absconded.

The Fontainebleau episode is held up by many as a late example of the typical Ruskinian prose poem - a 'reconstruction of the perceptual process', as Lee McKay Johnson puts it.¹²⁵ This is not the case. Indeed, its omissions and absences are more important than what is written. Like Proust's Martinville sketch, it demonstrates the worthlessness of the contemporary account of an impression beside the fact of the lesson learned from the impression, and from its recurrences across time. The

Martinville sketch is gradually obliterated through the narrative progression of A la recherche du temps perdu. The Fontainebleau sketch, whether verbal or visual, has also disappeared by the time its author has come to write Praeterita. The lessons of Fontainebleau and Martinville have to be expressed differently; translated, as it were, onto a wider canvas.

Praeterita foreshadows the Proustian novel in its exploration of different modes of aesthetic disappointment, but in theory and execution it is a much more pessimistic work. It has been remarked that Ruskin's repeated variations on the theme of failed imagination are similar, even indebted to, Wordsworth's 'Immortality' and Coleridge's 'Dejection' odes, and that Proust's theory of involuntary memory is similar in proposed function if not in source to the Coleridgean ideas of the imagination.¹²⁶ This shared indebtedness, if such it be, raises important issues. If Proust knew of Wordsworth or Coleridge, it would most likely be through George Eliot rather than Ruskin, she being a writer who tended to idealise the English Romantics. Such an unproblematic, because mediated, conception of their works would confirm his sense of the redeeming powers of imagination and memory. Proust's vision of the English Romantic achievement would match, in imagery and optimism, the young Wordsworth's vision of France.

'But 'twas a time when Europe was rejoiced,
France standing on the top of golden hours.
And human nature seeming born again.'¹²⁷

For Ruskin, however, the temporary failure of adequate response is much more than a rhetorical device, as it is for Wordsworth, Coleridge, Proust. Where these writers used moments of accidie as incitements to creation,

Ruskin, in some ways a more truly post-Romantic writer than Proust, saw such moments more as intimations of incapacity. Thus in the Cumae chapter of Praeterita, that which precedes 'Fontainebleau', extracts from his 1840 journals, registering his disgust with Rome and with himself, are included as 'perhaps worth keeping'.

'I have been walking backwards and forwards on the Pincian, being unable to do anything else since this confounded illness, and trying to find out why every imaginable delight palls so very rapidly on even the keenest feelings. I had all Rome before me; towers, cupolas, cypresses, and palaces mingled in every possible grouping; a light Decemberish mist, mixed with the slightest vestige of wood smoke, hovering between the distances, and giving beautiful grey outlines of every form between the eye and the sun; and over the rich evergreen oaks of the Borghese gardens, a range of Appennine, with one principal pyramid of pure snow, like a piece of sudden comet-light fallen on the earth. It was not like moonlight, nor like sunlight, but as soft as the one, and as powerful as the other. And yet with all this around me, I could not feel it.'¹²⁸

Perhaps because of the anxiety of influence, perhaps as a result of his laconic acuity with regard to poetry, Ruskin's judgements of Wordsworth tended to the harsh. In the 'Roslyn Chapel' section of Praeterita, for example, he remarks that 'On the journey of 1837, when I was eighteen, I felt, for the last time, the pure childish love of nature which Wordsworth so idly takes for an intimation of immortality'.¹²⁹ A further, equally damning judgement comes in 'Fiction Fair and Foul'.

'Wordsworth is simply a Westmoreland peasant, with considerably less shrewdness than most border Englishmen or Scotsmen inherit, and no sense of humour; but gifted (in this singularly) with vivid sense of natural beauty, and a pretty turn for reflections; not always acute, but as far as they reach, medicinal to the fever of the restless and corrupted life around him.'¹³⁰

The dismissal of the conquest of time by the romantic imagination as, respectively, an idle extrapolation from the childish love of nature and a 'pretty turn for reflections' is another indication of Ruskin's distaste for protracted introspection. In his insistence that meaning is located beyond the individual consciousness, Ruskin is perhaps less old-fashioned than his detractors and ambitious disciples might suppose. Certainly, in his reflection on the intimations of immortality, he deserts both fine writing and the pulpit tone for a quiet plangency:

'It is a feeling only possible to youth, for all care, regret, or knowledge of evil destroys it; and it requires also the full sensibility of nerve and blood, the conscious strength of heart, and hope; not but that I suppose the purity of youth may feel what is best of it even through sickness and the waiting for death; but only in thinking death itself God's sending.'¹³¹

The consolations of art are denied Ruskin, perhaps by Ruskin himself, for everywhere in his writings artistic modes of knowledge are complemented and extended by scientific curiosity.

'A snowdrop was to me, as to Wordsworth, part of the Sermon on the Mount; but I never should have written sonnets to the celandine, because it is of a coarse, yellow and imperfect form.'¹³²

The extension of knowledge, which Ruskin would call circumspection, encompasses the formal circumscription of the Wordsworthian fictive consciousness, of the Proustian novel. An inexhaustible world exhausts the subject. Ruskin as scientist denies himself the evasions of Ruskin the poet. Theories should pertain to the outside world, whether this is governed by God, nature or language. The Proustian distinction between outer and inner chronology, a distinction imposed by the imminence of death, is, for all its gracious convenience, still fortuitous, in bad faith. Ruskin's mingled curiosity and disgust is met in Milton, Baudelaire, Sartre, but not in Romantics like Wordsworth or the Proust of Time Regained. As écrivain, Ruskin recognises that language is engagée, committed to the description and interpretation of facts, people, itself. Introspective writing is that which reflects upon itself and its tasks, not upon upper-case metaphoric concepts such as God, Nature, Self. Ruskin might be termed a transcendental materialist, in that he consistently writes as though meaning is located beyond the individual consciousness, while denying that consciousness, with its individuality and its suspect ignorance, the right to dictate the boundaries of contingent knowledge.

Beginning in France with Flaubert, it has been a commonplace of Modernism that the artist and his works be taken at his own estimation. In England, the tradition begins earlier, with Shelley and his 'unacknowledged legislators'.¹³³ Ruskin, in his overreaching modesty, rejects the tendency to equate self with world:

'With Shelley, I loved blue sky and blue eyes,
but never in the least confused the heavens
with my own poor little Psychidion.'¹³⁴

In literature as in the visual arts, Ruskin's aesthetic demands a return to first principles, to an apprenticeship of vision which, for one so catholic in his knowledge and interests, implies the rejection of any premature espousal of limiting formal patterns. Thus it is that the divergent aspects of his theories - on the one hand aspiring to an ever-widening knowledge of what has been achieved; and on the other, wishing oneself beyond knowledge towards a primal innocence of vision - result in a method of structuring his works which is, so to speak, permanently provisional. For Ruskin as for Proust, illumination is intermittent, and the writing of experience must reflect, or better enact this intermittence. Unlike Proust, however, Ruskin seems unwilling or unable to compromise his insight by imposing a general, all-explaining structure on his work. Certainly this is the impression gleaned from a reading of the unfinished Praeterita, where the sequence of illuminations seems unresolved, and the very repetition of moments of epiphany suggests failure, a want of confidence in the rhetoric of conversion. And yet a similar judgement was possible in the case of the unfinished A la recherche du temps perdu.

'Proust's conclusion has not been published yet, and his admirers say that when it comes everything will fall into its place, times past will be recaptured and fixed, we shall have a perfect whole. I do not believe this. The work seems to me a progressive rather than an aesthetic confession, for with the elaboration of Albertine the author is getting tired. Bits of news may await us, but it will be surprising if we have to

revise our opinion of the whole book. The book is chaotic, ill constructed, it has and will have no external shape; and yet it hangs together because it is stitched internally, because it contains rhythm.¹³⁵

Although the conclusive form of Le Temps retrouvé makes nonsense of Forster's predictions, some of his strictures concerning the unresolvable mass of the middle sections are nonetheless pertinent. To put it baldly, the framework pre-elected for the novel seems to most readers too flimsy properly to contain the weight of unrevised experience presented in the novel's central books. The containing books of A la recherche du temps perdu, Du côté de chez Swann and Le Temps retrouvé, are still the most read and the most admired. Yet it is well established that both of these would have been expanded to something like the dimensions of the middle section had Proust's formal or writing procedure (unusually among modernist writers, these are not the same) not been denied by the deadlines of publisher and mortality.¹³⁶ As I have often reiterated, the closing cadences of Time Regained argue for a greater degree of formal resolution than is actually attained. Pierre Clarac suggests that the theme of victory over time 'se serait épanoui dans une conclusion beethovenienne, si Proust avait pu donner au troisième volet de son triptyque l'ampleur qu'il rêvait'.¹³⁷ Helpful as this insight is, one has to admit to some unease at another facile invocation of a sister art in order to explain Proust's formal intentions. In calling attention to cathedrals or pieces of music as analogies for his novel, Proust appears to be aspiring to the acquisition of aesthetic properties which the novel can possess only intermittently. Where music or the visual arts may be perceived and comprehended within a limited space of time, and can indeed move the listener or viewer towards an illusion of complete and simultaneous perception, the practice

of novel-writing, particularly when taken to Proustian extremes, sooner or later leads one to the Shandean paradox of mimetic prose, whereby writing, by striving to represent the world in time and extent, must end up representing only itself. The outer sections of A la recherche du temps perdu constitute a limited attempt to escape this paradox, and certainly their rhetoric does much to redeem the prolixity of the intervening books. This rhetoric of completion and redemption goes some way, in fact, towards invoking a sense of the narrative itself as example and imitation of Temps perdu. This is not to suggest that the bulk of Proust's novel is some grandiose and futile exercise in imitative form, but the rhetoric of completion and closure in Swann and Le Temps retrouvé does undertake to deny the accretive linearity which Forster noticed. In suggesting that the major function of the outer books is to cajole the reader into a paradoxical forgetting of the objects of the narrator's memory, I have probably been unfair to Proust's achievement, although it is instructive to note the extent to which Proustians have consistently invoked the author's own manifesto-like comments in order to explain away the novel's longueurs and irrelevancies.

One is reminded of the wag's remark that people tend to over-praise long novels out of a sense of self-congratulation at having finished them. A less philistine (or more pretentious) approach to the problem might be to consider the Proustian devices of retrospective form and involuntary memory as instances of narrative subversion. The novelist, recognising his generic thralldom to the discursive, aspires to a further significance for his work, more lyric than narrative, depending more on metaphor than on metonymy. The interplay between these modes of writing reflects that

between novel and autobiography (the latter considered in the Augustinian/Wordsworthian sense). Such autobiography insists, structurally, on the affinity between writer and reader: the double 'I' working to implicate the reader in the quest of the writer's past, incomplete self. Proust's attempt to write novel and autobiography involved a partial rejection of the Stendhalian conventions of narrative. This rejection is conveyed more wholeheartedly in a youthful observation by Proust's contemporary, Gide.

'Le roman doit prouver à présent qu'il peut être autre chose qu'un miroir promené le long d'un chemin Il montrera qu'il peut être oeuvre d'art, composé de toutes pièces, d'un réalisme non des petits faits et contingents, mais supérieure Il faut que dans leur rapport même chaque partie d'une oeuvre prouve la vérité de chaque autre - il n'est pas besoin d'autre preuve.'¹³⁸

The idea of novel as mimesis, with its attendant temptations towards the Shandean paradox, is replaced by the idea of the novel as structure, playing with different modes of ordering and enabling the reader to understand how he makes sense of the world. Or rather, not replaced but counterbalanced, since these two functions of the novel must remain in conflict within the text itself. Even the purest novel retains the trace of the contingent, or at least the scars of a (contingent) decision to expunge contingency. In the case of Proust, the metonymic, that is to say, combinative and contextual functions of narrative - the 'stories' of thwarted ambition and desire - are at once countered and rendered significant by the metaphorical functions of epiphany, involuntary memory and symbol, those being unusually concentrated towards the beginning and

end of the novel. Although I criticised above the Proustians' tendency to apply concepts from the visual arts to the novel, this is one context in which a pictorial analogy can prove helpful. In comparing A la recherche du temps perdu to a triptych, one is forced to concede the particular relevance of this sort of devotional art. The central panel is usually twice the width of the wings: the wings usually provide a commentary on any hidden message in the centre, and/or a completion of any narrative. When closed, the backs of the wings usually bear the owner's coat of arms.

The above discussion of the structure of A la recherche du temps perdu depends, as all such discussions must, on knowledge of the book's ending, a knowledge which was not available to Forster. It is my contention that a misinterpretation similar to that of Forster is difficult to escape when faced with the uncompleted Praeterita. Happily, Ruskin did set out a schema which might allow a provisional estimation of what he might have achieved, and certainly permits a more generous evaluation of what he did. But Praeterita, we have to remind ourselves, is not a novel; nor is much of A la recherche du temps perdu. A satisfactory litmus test is suggested by David Lodge:

'If a text which is not foregrounded as literature can nevertheless become literature by responding to a literary reading, it can only be because it has the kind of systematic internal foregrounding which makes all its components aesthetically relevant.'¹³⁹

I do not think it special pleading to question that last 'all'. In any genre outside the sparsest lyric there will be much which is not aesthetically relevant. In Ulysses, the most foregrounded of all novels, there exist a

great many aesthetic irrelevancies,¹⁴⁰ and in any case, and particularly that of Proust, there is often the temptation to confuse aesthetic relevance with 'what-is-relevant-to-the-artist'. In the case of Praeterita, there is a sufficient preponderance of aesthetic/rhetorical components for it to pass Lodge's test.

Ruskin originally planned for Praeterita to comprise three books, each of twelve chapters. The third volume of the autobiography as we have it ends with Chapter Four, 'Joanna's Care'. A manuscript scheme for the remainder of Book Three tells us much about Ruskin's working principles and the ultimate plan arrived at for his valedictory work.¹⁴¹

Most of Praeterita's chapter headings celebrate place names with a resonance which seems to suggest some sort of structural or thematic principle at work. Admittedly, the place names also happen to coincide with a roughly chronological account of the study-tours undertaken by Ruskin for most of his life, yet if Praeterita is elusive and incomplete as autobiography, it is doubly so as travel chronicle. Ruskin in fact uses places, and the names of places, in a way which undoubtedly foreshadows Proust's celebrated distinction between 'Noms de pays - le nom' and 'noms de pays - le pays'. Ruskin explores, as does his disciple, the similarities and divergences between inner and outer topographies, between the physical fact of places and the mythic/symbolic resonance given them by art or word. The result is a kind of pilgrimage, whose purpose is to reconcile self with world by means of the word. The two paths of Proust's narrator's boyhood are thus reconciled in Le Temps retrouvé, but not in the way the narrator suggests, in the figure of Gilberte's daughter.

'Et avant tout venaient aboutir à elle les deux grands "côtés" où j'avais fait tant de promenades et de rêves.'¹⁴²

This reconciliation of the paths is in fact false because for the reader there has never been a divergence. Both Swann's Way and the Guermantes Way have from the beginning of our experience of the book been equally charmed, 'Enfermés dans les anneaux nécessaires d'un beau style'.¹⁴³ The act of writing has already performed the magic which Proust has to rehearse for rhetorical reasons in his final volume. The famous image on metaphor which I have just quoted offers another illustration of how Proust was constantly drawn towards figures of closure, and the image of the two paths is probably the governing example of this within the novel.

Ruskin's scheme for the completion of Praeterita shows a similar impulse at work.¹⁴⁴ His lists of alternate chapter-titles are an indication of how he sought the maximum resonance for each one. Other titles considered for 'Joanna's Care', for example, were 'The Lost Sunsets' or 'The Sunsets that nobody saw'. Titles seem to dictate subject-matter, rather than the other way round, as though Ruskin's discursiveness could only be tamed, enfermé, by the sibylline multivalency of a chapter heading.

The proposed final chapters give a strong indication that Ruskin intended a grand ricorso in the Proustian manner: they are noted respectively as 'xi. Shakespeare's Cliff. Early Dover returned to. Summing of literary purpose. Last review of England.' 'xii. Calais Pier. Early France returned to and ended with. Last review of France.' These are, admittedly, titles only, but they do seem to support the idea that, in Praeterita, Ruskin was tempted

to a death-bed pact with a formalism which he spent much of his career rejecting. Back in 1858 he brought out a collection of lectures under the proleptically Proustian title 'The Two Paths'; but Ruskin's paths are not equivalent, nor to be valued in their eventual convergence. Rather they represent clear alternatives for students of art, 'whether you will turn to the right or the left in this matter, whether you will be naturalists or formalists; whether you will pass your days in representing God's truth, or in repenting men's errors'.¹⁴⁵ This is reminiscent of an earlier remark in The Stones of Venice, where he compares the work of Giovanni Bellini and Titian in terms which we could fruitfully apply to Ruskin and Proust:

'Now John Bellini was born in 1423, and Titian in 1480. John Bellini, and his brother Gentile, two years older than he, close the line of the sacred painters of Venice. But the most solemn spirit of religious faith animates their works to the last. There is no religion in any work of Titian's; there is not even the smallest evidence of religious temper or sympathies either in himself, or in those for whom he painted Now this is not merely because John Bellini was a religious man and Titian was not. Titian and Bellini are each true representatives of the school of painters contemporary with them; and the difference in their artistic feeling is a consequence not so much of difference in their own natural characters as in their early education: Bellini was brought up in faith; Titian in formalism. Between the years of their birth the vital religion of Venice had expired.'¹⁴⁶

Ruskin was fond of opposing the formal with the 'vital' – hence his insistence that Praeterita was to be concerned with what he calls 'the vital fact',¹⁴⁷ but there are in his autobiography various indications that his notion of the vital has been revised: instead of looking out into the world for revelation, and consequently writing a sustained pilgrimage of digressions, Ruskin adopts a principle of selectivity which is half-psychological, half-formal. The remarks on Bellini and Titian quoted above are, as I have suggested, applicable also to Ruskin and Proust. The gap between the respective ages (in both senses) of the artists is similar. Ruskin was wont to conflate the perceived ills of Renaissance and Industrial Revolution, and his suspicion of the new age's morbid interest in fiction and formalism is well established. Thus it could be said that Proust was the gifted successor whom Ruskin might have feared, whose advent the Victorian prophet did his best to forestall, until forced to realise that the decline of personal and public faith made formalism already inevitable. Note that Ruskin insists on formalism as limitation – all art, to him, depends to an extent on form, but the exclusive insistence on form's sufficiency denies not only religion but the science of perception, since frames always delimit, and there is always a wider sea for the seeing eye to explore.

One of Ruskin's biographers has suggested that 'the writing of Praeterita in the 1880s was a final attempt to lay hold of an ineluctable yet elusive whole; to shape a gestalt that was life and work all together, all complete and all restorative'.¹⁴⁸ The proposed ending of the work certainly tempts us with this interpretation, but since we must forever remain as innocent of Ruskin's endings as Forster was of Proust's, we must look for other proof of a late conversion to formal holism.

Ruskin's autobiography is strong in evidence of a conscious move from écrivain to écrivain, of a Theseus settling in despair in some corner of the labyrinth, so as to create his own maze of a monument. The first requirement of formalism is that it address the work rather than the world. Praeterita does not, in the manner of Proust's novel, explicitly renounce the world, but in its concern with the self it does offer its author an opportunity to project techniques already well-established in his more 'prosaic' writings, and for the reader to recognise and interpret these within a delimited frame of reference. For once it is possible to treat Ruskin in terms of effect rather than of performance. To borrow a concept of E.H. Gombrich's, Praeterita allows us to treat its author's writing as schema rather than as a consistent correction of a schema - or subversion of all schemata.¹⁴⁹ For Gombrich, the schema enables the world to be represented, while correction evokes the observer's reactions towards that represented world, and Wolfgang Iser invokes the idea of Gestalt to explain the process of the reader's appropriation of the text:

'As meaning is not manifested in words and the reading process therefore cannot be mere identification of individual linguistic signs, it follows that apprehension of the text is dependent on gestalt groupings.'¹⁵⁰

Iser goes on to distinguish between open and closed Gestalten, quoting Umberto Eco to the effect that 'it is only natural that life should be more like Ulysses than like The Three Musketeers, and yet we are still all more inclined to think of it more in terms of The Three Musketeers than in terms of Ulysses - or rather, I can only remember and judge life if I think of it in terms of a traditional novel'.¹⁵¹

In Iser's sense, A la recherche du temps perdu is a traditional novel, though any novel would appear traditional beside Ulysses. La Recherche is traditional in its insistence on formal closure, its peculiar resistance to linguistic resourcefulness. Any gestures towards the paradigmatic are too often based on form and fond. These are in fact presented as one in Le Temps retrouvé, where the protracted drama of the search for lost time demands the dénouement of a manifesto. In Praeterita, contrastingly, form tends to be present more in terms of technique, as though a style had eventually become conscious of its potential as something other than discursive explanation or iconic shorthand. Praeterita seems to offer an exception to Philippe Lejeune's rule for autobiography, which, for him, is defined less by its formal elements than by a 'contract of reading'.¹⁵² Ruskin's contract seems to be with himself; the conditions for reading his autobiography have more to do with an inward knowledge of his writing practice than with the supposed (and denied) demands of any prospective reader. Ruskin would always be aware of form, but his implicit distrust of it would always insist on some concealment: on the submission of form to technique – technique in the high, Russian, formalist sense.

'The notion of "technique", because it has to do directly with the distinguishing features of poetic and practical speech, is much more significant in the long-range evolution of formalism than is the notion of form.'¹⁵³

This is closer to the literary practice and aesthetic theory of Ruskin than to Ruskin's literary theory or Proust's theory or practice. The basis of Eichenbaum's position was that the objects of literary science must be the

study of those specifics which distinguish it from any other material. That is to say, it is a generic, morphological science, but one which concerns itself with inner, implicit structure rather than outward, closed form.

Praeterita remains inchoate and unassimilable if we adhere to the Proustian theory of form, which subverts narrative linearity and the forces of dispersal always at work within the text in order to supply the reader with a spatial concept of time, personality, writing itself. There is, however, another order of formalism which is perhaps closer to the spirit and performance of Ruskin's work which eschews the iconic metaphor in favour of a linguistic one, and whose principles are sufficiently exemplified in A la recherche du temps perdu to allow for legitimate comparison of Proust and Ruskin. This is the formalism of Viktor Schklovsky:

'Art exists to help us recover the sensation of life; it exists to make us feel things, to make the stone stony. The end of art is to give a sensation of the object as seen, not as recognised. The technique of art is to make things "unfamiliar", to make forms obscure, so as to increase the difficulty and the duration of perception.'¹⁵⁴

The Schklovskian ideal of defamiliarisation has been so influential in twentieth century literary criticism and theory that it is a wonder that no one has pointed out its applicability as the central aspect of comparison between Ruskin and Proust. Schklovsky's observation that 'habitualisation devours works, clothes, furniture, one's wife, and the fear of war'¹⁵⁵ is

remarkably Proustian in tenor – compare Proust's 'voile lourd de l'habitude (l'habitude abêtissante qui pendant tout le cours de notre vie nous cache à peu près tout l'univers et dans une nuit profonde, sous leur étiquette inchangée, substitue aux poisons les plus dangereux ou les plus enivrants de la vie quelque chose d'anodin qui ne procure pas de délices) '156

But the idea that the dead hand of habit is to be countered by an association of perception and technique, indeed a sense of perception as technique, is even more remarkably Ruskinian. Compare the following passages, the first by Schklovsky:

'The end of art is to give a sensation of the object as seen, not as recognised. The technique of art is to make things "unfamiliar", to make forms obscure, so as to increase the difficulty and the duration of perception.' 157

and this from The Stones of Venice:

'The dimly seen, momentary glance, the flitting shadow of faint emotion, the imperfect lines of fading thought, and all that by and through such things as these is recorded on the features of man, and all that in man's person and actions, and in the great natural world, is infinite and wonderful; having in it that spirit and power which man may witness, but not weigh; conceive, but not comprehend; love, but not limit; and imagine, but not define; – this, the beginning and the end of the aim of all noble art, we have, in the ancient art, by perception; and we have not, in the newer art, by knowledge.' 158

It is in this defamiliarisation, in the aesthetic prolongation of perception, that the reader finds the true common ground between Proust and Ruskin. The digressiveness, the protraction of the sentence, the insistence of the individual voice: all of those stylistic tics which are obvious to the most innocent or inexperienced reader are grounded not in a shared theory but in a shared writing process which embodies perception. In the most characteristic sentences of each author the process of perception is mimicked, re-presented, made strange by the process of writing. This involves a spectacular promotion of the use of description in narrative, from the purely decorative through the explanatory or symbolic (in Barthes' sense, hermeneutic) to a status which actively challenges that of narrative itself. The manifesto for such a promotion was made by the nouveaux romanciers, but they have stated their indebtedness to Proust, and that of Proust to Ruskin is, as we shall see, eminently traceable.

Carried to Ruskinian/Proustian extremes, description can be actively subversive of narrative, insofar as narrative can be considered as an expected, realistically motivated concatenation of events. Where description and narrative attain this sort of equivalence, a new sort of writing is generated, whereby the descriptive and narrative merge into a new mode of autobiographical writing.

'En fait la "description" proustienne est moins une description de l'objet contemplé qu'un récit et une analyse de l'activité perceptive du personnage contemplant, de ses impressions, découvertes, progressives, changeantes de distance et de perspective, erreurs et corrections, enthousiasmes ou déceptions, etcetera.'¹⁵⁹

Genette's perception also holds for many of Ruskin's 'descriptive' passages. As Genette remarks elsewhere, description marks a 'frontière intérieure du récit',¹⁶⁰ that is to say, one of those tendencies in narrative according to which narrative can be negatively defined and hence reinvented. Another such frontier would be autobiography, and it would be fitting to end this chapter, which has largely concerned itself with the freedoms granted the writer by the self-referential novel, by considering some of the liberties which can be taken by the autobiographer, or first-person narrator.

'The first person will draw a rambling, fragmentary tale together and stamp it after a fashion as a single whole. Does anybody dare to suggest that this is a reason for the marked popularity of the method among our novelists? Auto-biography - it is a regular literary form, and yet it is one which refuses the recognised principles of literary form; its natural right is to seem wayward and inconsequent; its charm is in the fidelity with which it follows the winding course of the writer's thought, as he muses upon the past, and the writer is not expected to guide his thought in an orderly design, but to let it wander free. Formlessness becomes actually the mark of right form in literature of this class: and a novel presented as fictional autobiography gets the same advantage.'¹⁶¹

Percy Lubbock, in this matter like Schklovsky, seized on this paradoxical definition of form as formlessness as a consequence of his insight that 'to

grasp the shadowy and fantasmal form of a book is the effort of the critic and it is perpetually defeated'.¹⁶² Description and autobiography, two marginal modes or aspects of the novel, are, then, more necessary to the novel's aesthetic success than the retrospective conferral of iconic structure. In my final chapter I propose to demonstrate how the Ruskinian manner of descriptive autobiography informs A la recherche du temps perdu and how in return certain techniques of Proust's, figural, narrative and thematic, can be discovered retrospectively in Ruskin's autobiographical writings and hence offer material for a re-assessment of such works as Praeterita and Fors Clavigera.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion - Autobiographical Fiction/Fictional Autobiography

'I liked him as he did not look for an ideal object.
When he heard: "only the object which does not exist
Is perfect and pure", he blushed and turned away.

In every pocket he carried pencils, pads of paper
Together with crumbs of bread, the accidence of life.

Year after year he circled a thick tree
Shading his eyes with his hand and muttering admiringly.

How much he envied those who draw a tree with one line!
But metaphor seemed to him something indecent.

He would leave symbols to the proud busy with their cause.
By looking he wanted to draw the name from the very thing.
When he was old, he tugged at his tobacco-stained beard:
"I prefer to lose thus than to win as they do."

Czeslaw Milosz, from 'Bobo's Metamorphosis', translated by the author.

CHAPTER SIX

'But of those parts of anything which are in themselves beautiful, I think the indistinctness no benefit, but the brighter they are the better; and that the peculiar charm we feel in conception results from its grasp and blending of ideas, rather from their obscurity; for we do not usually recall one part at a time only of a pleasant scene, one moment only of a happy day; but together with each single object we summon up a kind of crowded and involved shadowing forth of all the other glories with which it was associated, and into every moment we concentrate an epitome of the day and so, with a kind of conceptive burning-glass, we bend the sunshine of the day, and the fullness of all the scene upon every point that we successively seize.' ¹

The above passage from Modern Painters is unusually prescient of the Proustian concern with the significant moment, with epiphany as epitome, which guarantees the consonance of the individual's existence across time. In discussing Proust's technique of recovering the typical from the individual and various, Gérard Genette employs a formula which, allowing for the effect of technological change on a crucial simile, faithfully reproduces Ruskin's own aesthetic meditation.

'Dans cet effort pour composer grâce à de tels réseaux la cohérence d'un lieu, l'harmonie d'une "heure", l'unité d'un climat, il semble exister dans la Recherche du temps perdu quelques points de concentration ou de cristallisation plus intense, qui correspondent à des foyers d'irradiation esthétique.' ²

Genette's remarks are to be found in his article 'Métonymie chez Proust' in which he points out that Proust's insistence on the importance of metaphor, which for him is to art what involuntary memory is to life,³ is somewhat compromised by the fact that many of his metaphors are not metaphors at all but hybrids of metaphor and metonymy. Genette identifies the phenomenon of 'metonymic contagion' in several significant passages of A la recherche du temps perdu, quoting the descriptions of St. André-des-Champs in Combray -

'Sur la droite, ajoute-t-il, on apercevait par-delà les blés les deux clochers ciselés et rustiques de St. André-des-Champs, eux-mêmes effilés, écailleux, imbriqués d'alvéoles, guillochés, jaunissants et grumeleux, comme deux épis.'⁴

- with a reminiscence of the church of Saint-Mars-le Vêtu in Sodome et Gomorrhe:

'Saint-Mars, dont, par ces temps ardents, où on ne pensait qu'au bain, les deux antiques clochers d'un rose saumon, aux tuiles en losange, légèrement infléchis et comme palpitants, avaient l'air de vieux poissons aigus, imbriqués d'écailles, moussus et roux, qui, sans avoir l'air de bouger, s'élevaient dans une eau transparente et bleue.'⁵

As Genette points out, the signified physical properties of the two pairs of church towers are remarkably similar, near identical, yet the terms of comparison wholly different. Of one church the towers are likened to ears of corn, of the other to fish. In the second case Proust inserts a parenthetical indication of the psychological cause for the divergent

metaphors. The description is located in place, time and character; the narrator is at Balbec 'par ces temps ardents où on ne pensait qu'au bain'. In the case of the first description the explanation is made more discreetly, the towers are 'eux-mêmes éffilés'; that is to say, shaped as two ears of corn among others. The metaphors are, then, contextually derived; it is the surrounding landscape which conditions the terms of the metaphor. Such metaphors are thus based on the principle of metonymic combination rather than the usual principle of analogy or substitution. These hybrid figures are called by Genette 'métaphores diégétiques',⁶ i.e. metaphors whose vehicle is borrowed from the surrounding 'world' of the narrative, and which consequently fulfil a function which is narrative as well as descriptive. Description may be prolonged since, instead of being trapped in the isolation of the 'purple passage', it becomes motivated, inextricable from the chain of narrative event.

'Si l'on veut bien, comme le propose Roman Jakobson, caractériser le parcours métonymique comme la dimension poétique, on devra alors considérer l'écriture proustienne comme la tentative la plus extrême en direction de cet état mixte, assumant et activant pleinement les deux axes du langage, qu'il serait certes dérisoire de nommer 'poème en prose' ou 'prose poétique' et qui constituerait, absolument et au sens plein du terme, le Texte.'⁷

Although it would be foolish to suggest that anything like Proust's seamless enmeshing of the descriptive and the narrative exists in any of Ruskin's writings, Genette's insights do perhaps offer to the reader, at last, some intelligent means of coping with Ruskin's poetic prose.

In what is perhaps the most famous paragraph of all Ruskin, there is a striking example of metonymic contagion. This is the description in The Stones of Venice of the first sight of St. Mark's.

'And well may they fall back, for beyond those troops of ordered arches there rises a vision out of the earth, and all the great square seems to have opened from it in a kind of awe, that we may see it far away: - a multitude of pillars and white domes, clustered into a long low pyramid of coloured light; a treasure heap, it seems, partly of gold and partly of opal and mother of pearl, hollowed beneath into five great vaulted porches, ceiled with fair mosaic, and beset with sculpture of alabaster, clear as amber and delicate as ivory - sculpture fantastic and involved, of palm leaves and lilies, and grapes and pomegranates, and birds, clinging and fluttering among the branches, all twined together into an endless network of buds and plumes; and in the midst of it, the solemn form of angels, sceptered, and robed to the feet, and leaning to each other across the gates, their figures indistinct among the gleaming of the golden ground through the leaves beside them, interrupted and dun, like the morning light as it faded back among the branches of Eden, when first its gates were angel-guarded long ago.

And round the walls of the porches there are set pillars of variegated stones, jasper and porphyry, and deep-green serpentine spotted with flakes of snow, and marbles, that half refuse and half yield to the sunshine, Cleopatra-like, "their bluest veins to kiss" - the shadow, as it steals back from them, revealing line after line of azure undulation, as a receding tide leaves the waved sand; their capitals rich with interwoven tracery, rooted knots of herbage, and

drifting leaves of acanthus and vine, and mystical signs, all beginning and ending in the Cross; and above them, in the broad archivolts, a continuous chain of language and of life-angels, and the signs of heaven, and the labours of men, each in its appointed season on the earth; and above these, another range of glittering pinnacles, mixed with white arches, edged with scarlet flowers, - a confusion of delight, amidst which the breasts of the Greek horses are seen blazing in their breadth of golden strength, and the St. Mark's lion, lifted on a blue field covered with stars, until at last, as if in ecstasy, the crests of the arches break into a marble foam, and toss themselves far into the blue sky in flashes and wreaths of sculptured spray, as if the breakers on the Lido shore had been frost-bound before they fell, and the sea-nymphs had inlaid them with coral and amethyst.'⁸

The contextual motivation for the closing metaphor is self-evident. Indeed, the metonymic contribution to Ruskin's description of the heights of St. Mark's is somewhat overdetermined, leading to false analogy (as in the case of the sea-nymphs). A contemporary review of The Stones of Venice, unsigned though attributed to Meredith, insisted that 'the language and the power of discerning remote resemblances, of which [Ruskin] is so great a master, sometimes master him, and carry him beyond the boundary of the sublime into the confines of the neighbouring kingdom'.⁹ Since this power of deriving remote resemblances derives from the context, and one which is, moreover, topographical and historical rather than subjective, Ruskin's fault in this passage would seem to be in what Jacobson would call the predominance of the axis of combination over the axis of selection. Ruskin's prose here is not, as is commonly thought, over-poetic but over-prosaic. Meredith makes this point when, invoking Lessing's Laocoön, he suggests that Ruskin's limitations are those of language itself.

Although language is the most powerful and broad-ranging mode of expression, when confronted with the expression of what we would call a gestalt (Meredith cites a beautiful face or a beautiful landscape) it is almost powerless. 'It can only enumerate the parts in succession; and the mind of the reader is unable to retain and combine the parts so as to form a whole without an effort of attention and imagination on his part greater in reality than that which is exercised by the author'.¹⁰ This last observation of Meredith's contains an important truth: that the operation of either of the basic figures of literary discourse demand of the reader the operation of the opposite and complementary figure in the act of interpretation. Poetry is frugal in its use of the signifier, lavish in its exploitation of the signified. With prose, the opposite pertains. The act of reading metaphor-based texts is prolonged, combinative, metonymic, whereas the reading of metonymic texts (traditionally this means the novel or other discursive prose) involves the reader in responses of combination or selection.

This delegation of responses is fair and adequate in cases of 'pure' metonymic or metaphorical writing. With hybrid forms such as we find in Proust or Ruskin, the reader is faced with a hybrid dilemma. With Proust, there is always the directive of genre or contained manifesto to guide the reader. With Ruskin, however, the only contextual metaphor is that of the wider sea.

The 'metonymic context' of Ruskin's description of St. Mark's is itself metaphorically charged, invoking not only the surrounding sea, as Proust's metaphors evoke a subjectively perceived anonymous typography, but the history of Venice, Graeco-Roman myths of the sea and a typology at once

highly personal and publicly responsible. So many are the figural trees in the above passage that it is possible to miss the wood of the central governing metaphor – the identification of art with life. As Ruskin's prose enacts the eye's journey up the cathedral's façade from porch to pinnacle, alabaster birds cling and flutter, angels lean and stand guard, serpentine pillars are flaked with snow, shadows retreat from marble 'as a receding tide leaves the waved sand'. In describing stones thus, Ruskin is doing much more than pay homage to the representational qualities of sculpture: he is in fact openly indulging in the error for which the Romantic poets were taken to task in the essay on the Pathetic Fallacy – that is, the sincere, if self-deceiving, attribution of power to an object or image that does not properly contain this power. This may also be defined as idolatry. But in an appendix to The Stones of Venice Ruskin added his own qualification to what we have come to regard as Proust's category of judgement. Ruskin makes the distinction between 'imaginative' worship and idolatry – since God cannot be seen he must be imagined. Idolatry cannot be determined because its basis, the subject's authenticity of worship, cannot be determined. A further qualification is made when Ruskin insists that 'Poetical effusions' are exempt from the category of idolatry, they are 'illusory and fictitious rather than idolatrous'.¹² Here Ruskin's growing animus against fiction asserts itself in tandem with its cause, his problematic faith in the revealed truths of religion. Hence his blindness to the fictional (or figural) techniques present in his own acts of 'imaginative worship'. In the St. Mark's description, it is the metonymic presence of the cathedral itself which animates Ruskin's metaphorical ecstasy. St. Mark's is the central monument of Venice and the central metaphor of Ruskin's faith. And Venice is the capital city of the contagious metaphor, of the metonymic symbol, a city whose cats become

the lion of St. Mark, whose pigeons are the dove of the Holy Spirit, whose Doge, impossibly, wedded the Adriatic Sea. In Ruskin's Venice was born the Proustian notion of significant topography. Seen in this light, Proust's usage of a later passage in the same chapter of The Stones of Venice to demonstrate Ruskin's idolatry becomes especially significant. Proust, it will be remembered, insisted that 'les doctrines qu'il professait étaient des doctrines morales et non des doctrines esthétiques, et pourtant il les choisissait pour leur beauté. Et comme il ne voulait pas les présenter comme belles, mais comme vraies, il était obligé de se mentir à lui-même sur la nature des raisons qui les lui faisaient adopter'.¹³ In this context, Proust adds, immoral ideas sincerely held would be less damaging to the writer's integrity than moral ideas affirmed insincerely, according to principles which are in fact aesthetic. Proust goes on to criticise Ruskin's upholding of St. Mark's as a locus of spirituality unheeded by the Venetians in their decline.

'Or, si Ruskin avait été entièrement sincère avec lui-même, il n'aurait pas pensé que les crimes des Vénitiens avaient été plus inexcusables et plus sévèrement punis que ceux des autres hommes parce qu'ils possédaient une église en marbre de toutes couleurs au lieu d'une cathédrale en calcaire, parce que le palais des Doges était à côté de Saint-Marc au lieu d'être à l'autre bout de la ville.'¹⁴

As David Ellison has pointed out,¹⁵ Proust here spots Ruskin's manipulation of a strict metonymical relationship – the spatial co-presence of people and a cathedral, into the fluid appearance of a metaphorical synecdoche.

The question arises as to why this démarche should be applauded in Proust's novel yet taken as a sign of bad faith in The Stones of Venice. There are traces of semantic slippage here. Ruskin, it seems, is too 'sincere' to be sincere! Because he eschews 'the fictitious' (his own term), he is disqualified from owning the higher moral force of the novel. Proust insists, in a peculiarly self-vaunting way, that here he is trying to push intellectual sincerity to its furthest and cruellest limits, to wrestle with his most cherished aesthetic impressions. Writing out of this spirit of high disinterestedness, Proust goes on to berate Ruskin for his excessive abuse of such words as 'irreverent and insolent', yet what is Proust's philippic against 'les célibataires de l'art' in Le Temps retrouvé but a prolonged accusation of irreverence and insolence towards the religion of art?

'Car il y a plus d'analogie entre la vie instinctive du public et le talent d'un grand écrivain, qui n'est qu'un instinct religieusement écouté au milieu du silence imposé à tout le reste, un instinct perfectionné et compris, qu'avec le verbiage superficiel et les critères changeants des juges attitrés.'¹⁶

Idolatry towards artist and artifact is supplanted here and in Proust's critique of Sesame and Lilies by idolatry towards the shaping subject. A true artist is he who has talent; talent is that possessed by the true artist. Circularity of form and of memory entail a circularity of language and logic where it is insisted, a couple of pages earlier, that:

'On peut faire se succéder indéfiniment dans une description les objets qui figuraient dans le lieu décrit, la vérité ne commencera qu'au moment où l'écrivain prendra deux objets différents, posera leur rapport, analogue dans le monde de l'art à celui qui est le rapport unique de la loi causale dans le monde de la science, et les enfermera dans les anneaux nécessaires d'un beau style; même, ainsi que la vie, quand, en rapprochant une qualité commune à deux sensations, il dégagera leur essence commune en les réunissant l'une et l'autre pour les soustraire aux contingences du temps, dans une métaphore.'¹⁷

Proust's definition of truth and life here depends on an analogy between resemblance and causality; that is to say, a metonymic relation is posited as a metaphor for metaphor itself. If the artist can get away with this assertion, he can get away with anything. By closing itself off from life, art becomes sincere, necessary, essential. Idolatry, or 'imaginative worship' of art and life? One might well follow Ruskin's uncharacteristically tolerant judgement that idolatry cannot be determined because its basis, the subject's authenticity of worship, cannot be determined. Ruskin makes this point within a context where the desired object of faith - as represented in architecture, a city, its history - can at least be identified communally. Proust's 'authenticity of worship' is thrown into question by a splitting of the subject - is it author, narrator or hero who speaks, and can any of these be called Marcel? This tactic can be justified as authentic under various Humean or Freudian conceptions of the subject. It can equally be justified by the didacticism of the solipsist. Proust's idealistic rejection of the social/historical nature of art, and his

inauthentic worship of the self, is best revealed in the passage of Contre Sainte-Beuve where he refers to the 'moi profond' 'le moi qui a attendu pendant qu'on était avec les autres, qu'on sent bien le seul réel, et pour lequel seul les artistes finissent par vivre, comme un dieu qu'ils quittent de moins en moins et à qui ils ont sacrifié une vie qui ne sert qu'à honorer'.

It is questionable whether Ruskin's insistent location of God in nature is any more inimical to our experience of the world than Proust's invocation of the god within the self. Indeed, the callow mysticism of the above passage indicates the true, intentionalist verification of the so-called 'triple self' of Proust's novel. The split between hero, narrator and author is less a Freudian splitting/layering of the self than an invocation of the triune spirit of the writing subject - Proust the Father, the narrating Redeemer and Marcel the Holy Spirit.

The mystical figure of the Trinity turns up again in the coy typology applied to the death of Bergotte. The author is resurrected:

'On l'enterra, mais toute la nuit funèbre, aux vitrines éclairées, ses livres, disposés trois par trois, veillaient comme des anges aux ailes éployées et semblaient, pour celui qui n'était plus, le symbole de sa résurrection.'

This may well reflect a tradition of remembrance into immortality which goes back at least as far as Ovid, but it is interesting to note just how much Proust's elegy on a fictional author, Bergotte, depends on the equally fictional attributes of the author's work. It is an accepted device of the Künstlerroman novels to hint at the qualities of the fictional works of the fictional artist, yet the 'works' of Bergotte, Elstir and Vinteuil remain

curiously dependent on their author's unwarranted and ill-evidenced estimation. The imaginary works of art are (perforce) mystified in Proust. They are necessarily declared objects of idolatry. In restricting the world to the self-created, the writer invokes metaphor as the proper figure for self-comprehension. Metonymic connections – meaning anything beyond the basically articulated 'Marcel devient écrivain' – are recognised as self-defeating. In recognising Ruskin's limitations, Proust may have discovered the freedoms of formal closure. In our recognition of the limitations inscribed in the notion of closure, we may arrive at a perception of the freedoms of language and of space renounced by Proust. We may, indeed, discover in their divergent approaches to autobiography two paradigmatic modes of relating language to the world and to other people.

Other people first. Praeterita is, as I have remarked, notorious for its elisions in terms of the author's relations with ostensibly the most important people in his life – namely, Effie Gray and his students. Being a novel, A la recherche du temps perdu cannot be so criticised, yet such is its length as text and its breadth of interest and (we must not forget), its habit of saying 'je', that the neglect of certain areas of experience is such that we cannot ignore its own praeteritions. These are of two kinds, denoting two different sorts of absence. Firstly, there is the absence of father and fatherhood, marked by a refusal to write about them at any length – a dismissal, as it were. Then there is the admitted absence of any knowable, essential Albertine, an absence which is enacted by the opposite means – an over-writing about her. Much of this over-writing consists of a prolonged meditation on her unknowability, her untrustworthiness. In a novel where the father's physical resemblance to the son is posited as the

only resemblance²⁰ – the 'inner' person or personality being taken for granted as merely social, diplomatic, the only departure from this depiction taking place in the midst of La Prisonnière.

'C'est la trop grande ressemblance qui fait que, malgré l'affection, et parfois plus l'affection est grande, la division règne dans les familles
 Ne cachait-il pas, au fond, d'incessants et secrets orages, ce calme au besoin semé de réflexions sentencieuses, d'ironie pour les manifestations maladroites de la sensibilité, et qui était le sien, mais que moi aussi maintenant j'affectais vis-à-vis tout le monde, et dont surtout je ne me départais pas, dans certaines circonstances, vis-à-vis d'Albertine.'²¹

Compare this with the invocation of the father's intellectual and political affinities in the very first sentence of Praeterita: 'I am, and my father was before me, a violent Tory of the old school'.²² From this Ruskin moves into literary kinship – his indebtedness to Homer and Scott. The presence of parents and literary ancestors in the author's memory seems to entail – as we have seen, a deliberate modesty and taciturnity in his autobiography – a reversal of his former writing practice. The paradox that it is possible, perhaps necessary, to write so much about the unknown, and so little about the known, informs both A la recherche du temps perdu and Praeterita.

If, as has been remarked, Praeterita is in its placid evocations of youth a plausible forerunner of Combray, there is a similarly convincing parallel

to be drawn between the Albertine sections of Proust's novel and the obsessive meditations on Carpaccio's St. Ursula in Fors Clavigera.

For many readers the crucial episode of La Prisonnière is that wherein Marcel observes the sleeping Albertine. The technique of the episode oscillates between the iterative and singulative modes, fittingly, since it describes the existence of many Albertines in one as it implies the conflation of many moments in one. It is with the sleeping Albertine that Marcel enjoys his greatest moments of security.

'Etendue de la tête aux pieds sur mon lit, dans une attitude d'un naturel qu'on n'aurait pu inventer, je lui trouvais l'air d'une longue tige en fleur qu'on aurait disposée là; et c'était ainsi en effet: le pouvoir de rêver que je n'avais qu'en son absence, je le retrouvais à ces instants auprès d'elle, comme si, en dormant, elle était devenue une plante En fermant les yeux, en perdant la conscience, Albertine avait dépouillé, l'un après l'autre, ces différents caractères d'humanité qui m'avaient déçu depuis le jour où j'avais fait sa connaissance.'²³

Asleep, stripped of her humanity and powers of desire, vision, discourse, Albertine becomes a plant, a landscape, a kind of poupée gonflable inspired by Marcel's breathy soliloquy (cf. A la recherche du temps perdu, I, p.4, 'Quelquefois, comme Eve naquit d'une côte d'Adam, une femme naissait pendant mon sommeil d'une fausse position de ma cuisse. Formée du plaisir que j'étais sur le point de goûter, je m'imaginai que c'était elle qui me l'offrait'.)

In contrast, the waking Albertine, her unknown desires, actions and motivations, represents for Marcel a psychological equivalent of Ruskin's 'mare maggiore'. 'C'était une terra incognita où je venais d'atterrir, une phase nouvelle de souffrances insoupçonnées qui s'ouvrait'.²⁴ The false death imposed on the unconscious beloved is also contrasted with the haunting suffered by Marcel after Albertine has been killed. On one occasion in Venice his love for her is revived by the recognition that a Fortuny gown which he had had made for her was modelled on the cloak of a Carpaccio nobleman.²⁵

The art of Carpaccio also takes on the lineaments of ungratified desire in Fors Clavigera. Ruskin devoted much time and many words to one of the paintings in the St. Ursula series in the Accademia. Entitled The Dream of St. Ursula, it depicts the visitation of an angel to the sleeping saint. Ruskin spent so much time with the painting that it came to be known as 'il quadro del Signor Ruskin'.²⁶ The reason for this obsessive interest, as John Dixon Hunt tells us, is that Ruskin compulsively conflated the painting's images with his own images of Rose la Touche. A letter to Joan Severn brings this out:

'Fancy having St. Ursula right down on the floor in a good light and leave to lock myself in with her There she lies, so real, that when the room's quite quiet, I get afraid of waking her! How little one believes things really. Suppose there is a real St. Ursula, di ma, taking care of somebody else, asleep, for me.'²⁷

In one of the Fors accounts, the sleeping princess is described with the same relish that Marcel devotes to Albertine:

'The young girl lies straight, bending neither at waist or knee, the sheet rising and falling over her in a narrow unbroken wave, like the shape of the coverlet of the last sleep, when the turf scarcely rises. She is some seventeen or eighteen years old, her head is turned towards us on the pillow, the cheek resting on her hand, as if she was thinking, yet utterly calm in sleep, and almost colourless.'²⁸

Undoubtedly a similar impulse towards possession and control is present in the St. Ursula and Albertine passages. In each a contrast is made between the simple, malleable, knowable nature of the sleeping beloved - transmuted, in fact, into vessels of the solipsistic imagination - and the intractable waywardness of a conscious, talking, sensual woman. In the same Fors letter, two American jeunes filles en fleurs are presented as the exasperating modern counterparts to Carpaccio's sleeping saint. Ruskin observes them on the afternoon train from Venice to Verona:

'a district which, if any of the world, should touch the hearts and delight the eyes of young girls What a princess's chamber, this, if these are princesses, and what dreams might they not dream therein.'²⁹

These dreams are, of course, Ruskin's, but he is no more free to impose his visions or desires on them than is Marcel with the petite bande. They fidget, wriggle, eat, read French novels, anything but see the world which Ruskin sees.

'By infinite self-indulgence, they had reduced themselves simply to two pieces of white putty that could feel pain.'³⁰

Ruskin ends his description by comparing Ursula's 'sacred imagination of things that are not' with 'the tortured indolence, and infidel eyes, blind even to things that are'.³¹

Marcel's ability to inform the sleeping Albertine with his sacred imagination valorises the central books of Proust's (his) novel, offers a reason for its inner accretions, another access to essential truth beyond the involuntary memory. At the time of his reveries on St. Ursula/Rose, Ruskin was convinced of a similar impulse – the formal equivalent, if you like, of Stendhal's 'crystallisation'.

Ruskin interpreted a series of events around Christmas 1876 as some continued manifestation of Rose's presence and guidance from beyond the grave. A sequence of what he saw as mystical correspondences rather than coincidences persuaded him that 'I saw in the most perfect chemical solution, as it were, every one of the movements of my own mind'.³² Yet the movements of John Ruskin's mind were so manifold that he could have no access to the fictional structures used by Proust, and the consequence was madness.

There is no mention of St. Ursula or Rose in Praeterita, as Ruskin 'passes in silence' things which he has no pleasure in reviewing. The St. Ursula/Rose figure was draped in as many correspondences as Albertine in A la recherche du temps perdu, but the correspondences derive, not from some private fund of significant moments and imaginary works of art, but from a public heritage of myth and identifiable histories and topographies.

While Fors Clavigera is an elaborative, 'present tense' autobiography which has no idea of the future, and no planned destination, Praeterita is, as we have seen, blocked out in advance, but incomplete. The prospective layout insists on economy, even though Ruskin accommodates his historian's rage for parenthesis, his curator's yen for footnotes, with the appended Delicta, arranged 'for the illustration of Praeterita'. The economy of the text, and its author's peace of mind, are assured by the work's being laid out in the form of a lifetime's tour, the stages of which are as rigorously mapped-out as the tours organised by Ruskin's father and described in chapter six with the chapter titles often acting as avant-couriers.

'And now, I must get on, and come to the real first sights of several things.'³³

Many years earlier Ruskin had remarked in Modern Painters that to see something well was to see it for the first time,³⁴ and in this, his valedictory work, he was to demonstrate this principle by enacting in prose the first primal vision of the landscapes and cities whose significance had never been exhausted. Praeterita is the least introspective of autobiographies; there is no mystery in the perceiving self, which is often belittled:

'I already disliked growing older - never expected to be wiser, and formed no more plans for the future than a little black silkworm does in the middle of its first mulberry leaf.'³⁵

'I must get back to the days of mere rivulet - singing, in my poor little watercress life.'³⁶

'..... my poor little nascent personality.'³⁷

On occasion, this diminution of the self leads to a wish for self-obliteration: prescient, perhaps, of Marcel the voyeur.

'My entire delight was in observing without being myself noticed, - if I could have been invisible, all the better. I was absolutely interested in men and their ways, as I was interested in marmots and chamois, in tomtits and trout.'³⁸

Not that Praeterita consists exclusively of evocations of place: scattered about its pages there are drawings, poems and other juvenilia, excerpts from conversations with Carlyle and various anecdotes whose contextual significance is not always made clear. Although the work was blocked out in advance, only twenty-eight of the proposed thirty-six chapters were completed, and the resultant structural void can be compared to that of an unfinished drawing, whose blank spaces and want of balance or frame can render even the most perfectly realised detail grotesque or irrelevant.

It is not surprising, then, that Ruskin's most discernible methods of structural organisation should be intra-textual, based on what he calls 'the property of chapters'. The most straightforward instance of this is the already-mentioned technique of reverting at the end of a chapter to a singular instance of its titular theme. The 'poor little watercress' self finds its setting in the title and final paragraph of Praeterita's first chapter.

'although in the course of these many worshipful pilgrimages I gathered curiously extensive knowledge, both of art and natural scenery, afterwards infinitely useful, it is evident to me in retrospect that my own character and affections were little altered by them; and that the personal feeling and native instinct of me had been fastened, irrevocably, long before, to things modest, humble, and pure in peace, under the low red roofs of Croydon, and by the cress-set rivulets in which the sand danced and minnows darted above the Springs of Wandel.'³⁹

- the immersion, not to say dissolution, of the self in the waters which irrigate his chosen paradisaal landscape (these occasional glimpses of the rivers of Paradise). Earlier in the chapter mention is made of the river Tay at the bottom of his aunt's garden in Perth ('which ran past it, clear-brown over the pebbles three or four feet deep; swift-eddying, - an infinite thing for a child to look down into').⁴⁰

Running water presents for Ruskin, as the Vivonne does for Marcel, an escape from sociality into the world of ecstatic contemplation. However, the Proustian fascination with water ends with the 'zut' of his exasperation at nature's incommunicability.⁴¹ The Vivonne dries up in later years, just as the spring of crystal water at the Croydon aunt's door is, in Ruskin's reminiscence, 'long since let down into the modern sewer'.⁴² The authors' reactions to the disappearance or desiccation of the natural and atavistic figure of childhood purity mimic en abîme the structure of their autobiographies. While Ruskin embarks on a quest to discover other

rivers, other landscapes and other societies in which he might rediscover, in more stable form, the innocence glimpsed in youth, the more advanced and problematical mind of Proust alights on an image which suggests better than those of cathedral or dress the proposed textual seamlessness of his work.

'Je m'amusais à regarder les carafes que les gamins mettaient dans la Vivonne pour prendre les petits poissons, et qui, remplies par la rivière où elles sont à leur tour encloses, à la fois "contenant" aux flancs transparents comme une eau durcie et "contenu" plongé dans un plus grand contenant de cristal liquide et courant, évoquaient l'image de la fraîcheur d'une façon plus délicate et plus irritante qu'elles n'eussent fait sur une table servie, en ne la montrant qu'en fuite dans cette allitération perpétuelle entre l'eau sans consistance où les mains ne pouvaient la capter et le verre sans fluidité où le palais ne pourrait en jouir.'⁴³

Form and content, self and world become interchangeable, and the proposed 'adoration perpétuelle' of Proust's novel is transfigured into the strange device of 'l'allitération perpétuelle'.

If Marcel's vision of the Martinville steeples is eventually incorporated into the extended text of Combray (serving indeed as an embodied annunciation of its context), the Fontainebleau sketch, compared earlier with the Martinville episode, offers in Ruskin's more linear, less problematic work a preparation for Praeterita's most fully achieved exercise in prose description, in the narrative of seeing. The

Fontainebleau account told but did not show; in the following chapter, 'The Simplon', Praeterita is, as I have mentioned, an act of filial duty as well as a religious quest for a lost paradise. It is also in part a rebellion against his parents, and a repeated admission that paradise, wholeness and purity of vision, are unattainable. In the famous passage describing the waters of the Rhône all of these themes are presented together. The opening pages of the chapter are devoted to the praise of Switzerland, and in particular the Genevoise cantons, as Ruskin's ideal society.

'(It) is the focus of thought and of passion, of science, and of contrat sociale (sic); of rational conduct, and of decent - and other - manners. Saussure's school and Calvin's - Rousseau's and Byron's, - Turner's, - And of course, I was going to say mine; but I didn't write all that last page to end so.'⁴⁴

Geneva is described 'as it once was', the centre of religious and social thought, and of physical beauty, to all Europe. Its pre-eminence is paradoxically linked to its modesty of size, as the gardens of childhood are credited with the aspects of paradise. The city is presented as an ideal spot on earth which unites the contrastive impulses of Ruskin's youth and subsequent career: namely, the impulse towards the sublime and the respect for the modest bourgeois values, moral and mercantile, represented by John James Ruskin. In Geneva, each of these impulses hold the other in check. One of its roads - the Route de Paris - is 'intent on far away things', while 'branching from it right and left ... (there was) ... a labyrinth of equally well-kept ways for fine carriage wheels between the gentlemen's houses with their farms'.⁴⁵

The labyrinth is tamed by the ordered domesticities of Protestant gentlemen. In Ruskin's sketch of his parents in Volume I, chapter 7, he had referred to a letter to his father from the professor of moral philosophy at Edinburgh, Dr. Thomas Brown, in which it is insisted that 'There is one science, the first and greatest of sciences to all men, and to merchants particularly - the science of Political Economy'.⁴⁶ Later in the same chapter Ruskin remarks that 'very early in my boy's life I began much to dislike these commercial feasts [business dinners arranged by his father] and to form, by carefully attending to their dialogue an extremely low estimate of the commercial mind as such; estimate which I have never had the slightest reason to alter'.⁴⁷

The merchants of Geneva are redeemed in Ruskin's eyes by being also craftsmen, watchmakers and jewellers. One of these, a Mr. Bautre, comes to represent a crucial resolution of the three impulses of Ruskin's autobiography: to reconcile himself with his father, to reaffirm his faith in a divine power, and to re-enact for the reader, by means of estranging devices, his vision of the beauty of the physical world. From the Salève cliff, where the 'incredible mountains' of the Alps could be contemplated, 'you fell down a perpendicular lane into the lower town again, and you went to Mr. Bautre's'.⁴⁸ Ruskin employs the vocative to implicate the reader in his experience. Mr. Bautre is depicted, or rather approached, since here we are entering a mythopoeic dramatisation of the author's aesthetic, with a peculiar mixture of religious reverence and client's deference. 'One went to Mr. Bautre's with awe, and of necessity, as one did to one's bankers'.⁴⁹ There is, to be sure, a modest comedy in this collocation, but there is also a reminiscence of Ruskin's fascination with the encrusted wealth of Venice, a city whose accumulated booty could

nonetheless be informed with mystical significance. But only in the past could this happen, as only in the past could the author's innocent vision be reconciled with the wealth of his father. Here, in recollected Geneva, the images of merchant and aesthete, wealth and beauty, and father and son are again reconciled in a description which also calls up the presence of an immanent creator. When Ruskin had earlier lamented that he had nothing to love in his youth, he observed that 'My parents were - in a sort - visible powers of nature to me, no more loved than the sun and the moon'.⁵⁰ In Bautre's shop the figures of father and son are merged into the figure of the craftsman - the Ruling Power.

'A not large room, with a single counter at the further side. Nothing shown on the counter. Two confidential attendants behind it, and - it might possibly be Mr. Bautre! - or his son - or his partner - or anyhow the Ruling power - at his desk beside the back window. You told what you wanted: it was necessary to know your mind, and to be sure you did want it; there was no showing of things for temptation at Bautre's. You wanted a bracelet, a watch - plain or enamelled. Choice of what was wanted was quietly given. There were no big stones, nor blinding galaxies of wealth. Entirely sound workmanship in the purest gold that could be worked; fine enamel for the most part, for colour, rather than jewels; and a certain Bautresque subtlety of linked and wreathed design, which the experienced eye recognized when worn in Paris or London. Absolutely just and moderate price; wear, - to the end of your days. You came away with a sense of duty fulfilled, of treasure possessed, and of a new foundation to the respectability of your family.

You returned into the light of the open street with a blissful sense of a parcel being made up to be sent after you, and in the consequently calm expatiation of mind, went usually to watch the Rhone.⁵¹

The duty fulfilled, the family respectability founded anew; Ruskin's avowed intentions in writing his autobiography are metaphorically accomplished here, and consequent upon this, the treasure which he received from Baulte informs metonymically one of his finest passages in prose. The jewel becomes the river, and the self is lost in the river's play of surfaces and depths. The Rhône description is a superbly achieved blending of intellectualism and impressionism, wedding his mature artistic gifts with the scientific urge which led him at the age of 15 to compose a paper called 'Enquiries on the Causes of the Colour of the Water of the Rhône'.⁵² Frustration with the labyrinthine complexities of history leads the author only a few pages later to another of those cadenced returns into despondency where he mourns the many hours spent watching skies and much which was written 'which would be useful to myself; but in the present smoky world, to no other creature; for it is to me only sorrowful memory, and to others, an old man's fantasy'.⁵³ But when in the recreated 'high rural empyrean' of Geneva Ruskin averted his vision from the skies and wider seas, there is offered, albeit in miniature, provisional and imperfect, a prospect of Time Regained.

'For all other rivers there is a surface, and an underneath, and a vaguely displeasing idea of the bottom. But the Rhone flows like one lambent

jewel; its surface is nowhere, its ethereal self is everywhere, the iridescent rush and translucent strength of it blue to the shore, and radiant to the depth.

Fifteen feet thick, of not flowing, but flying water; not water, neither, - melted glacier, rather, one should call it; the force of the ice is with it, and the wreathing of the clouds, the gladness of the sky, and the continuance of Time.

Waves of clear sea are, indeed, lovely to watch, but they are always coming or gone, never in any taken shape to be seen for a second. But here was one mighty wave that was always itself, and every fluted swirl of it, constant as the wreathing of a shell. No wasting away of the fallen foam, no pause for gathering of power, no helpless ebb of discouraged recoil; but alike through bright day and lulling night, the never-pausing plunge, and never-fading flash, and never-hushing whisper, and, while the sun was up, the ever-answering glow of unearthly aquamarine, ultramarine, violet-blue, gentian-blue, peacock-blue, river-of-paradise blue, glass of a painted window melted in the sun and the witch of the Alps flinging the spun tresses of it forever from her snow.

The innocent way, too, in which the river used to stop to look into every little corner. Great torrents always seem angry, and great rivers too often sullen; but there is no anger, no disdain, in the Rhone. It seemed as if the mountain stream was in mere bliss at recovering itself again out of the lake-sleep, and raced because it rejoiced in racing, fain yet to return and stay. There were pieces of wave that danced all day as if Perdita were looking on to learn; there were little streams that skipped like lambs and leaped like chamois; there were pools that shook the sunshine all through them, and were rippled in layers of overlaid ripples, like crystal sand; there

were currents that twisted the light into golden braids, and inlaid the threads with turquoise enamel; there were strips of stream that had certainly above the lake been millstreams, and were looking busily for mills to turn again; there were shoots of stream that had once shot fearfully into the air, and now sprang up again laughing that they had only fallen a foot or two; – and in the midst of all the gay glittering and eddied lingering, the noble bearing by of the midmost depth, so mighty, yet so terrorless and harmless, with its swallows skimming instead of petrels, and the dear old decrepit town as safe in the embracing sweep of it as if it were set in a brooch of sapphire.

And the day went on, as the river; but I never felt that I wasted time in watching the Rhone. One used to get giddy sometimes, or discontentedly envious of the fish. Then one went back for a walk in the penthouse street, long ago gone. There was no such other street anywhere.⁵⁴

Although the quoting of such passages as the above might seem the all-too-predictable recourse to the devices of the anthologist, I would insist that in Praeterita the relation between the writer's past and present selves appears to the present reader as a problem in narrative form. That it does so is testimony to the governing example of Proust's novel. It is by means of the interpretive structure of A la recherche du temps perdu that the modern reader has learned to read a life as a novel and, most importantly, how to question the narrative's gaps and omissions and understand its drive towards unity and intelligibility. If in Praeterita we can read too many indicators of final disappointment, there is still, in what Ruskin calls 'the well-formed habit of narrowing oneself to

happiness',⁵⁵ a foretaste of the need for formal limits, the 'anneaux nécessaires', which made Proust's great achievement possible. Of course, autobiography is not fiction, and one must respect the strictures of Albert Thibaudet, who insisted that 'L'autobiographie, c'est l'art de ceux qui ne sont pas romanciers Ecrire une autobiographie, c'est se limiter à son unité artificielle: faire une oeuvre d'art, créer les personnages, c'est se sentir dans sa multiplicité profonde'.⁵⁶

The above is, however, more than a vindication of the novel; it is also a defence of a realist tradition which has been questioned more and more in recent times. Since this questioning of the relation of character to the writing subject was in part initiated by Proust himself, it is perhaps ironic that it should enable us to trace the development of the writing subject in Ruskin and, as it were, set him up once again in rivalry with the author of A la recherche du temps perdu.

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