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RUSKIN, REFLECTION, SELF RECOGNITION AND SELF CREATION IN PROUST

SARAH TRIBOUT-JOSEPH

The reader of *A la recherche du temps perdu* should know better than to dismiss anything the pedant Brichot says as uninteresting. Presented as an utter bore, he nevertheless fascinates the narrator. For the duration of the train ride to Raspelière, the latter is entirely absorbed in Brichot's account of the local etymology. Brichot is clearly mocked in the narrative. His nature as a bore is emphasised by his thick-rimmed glasses and the fact that too much time spent with his head in books has made him extremely short-sighted. It is perhaps surprising, therefore to find, slipped into the account of the local etymology, a subtle observation of the natural world: 'La rivière qui a donné son nom à Dalbec [sic] est d'ailleurs charmante. Vue d'une falaise [...], elle voisine les flèches de l'église située en réalité à une grande distance, et a l'air de les refléter'.¹ What does he mean by the fact that the river 'seems' to reflect the church spires? Surely it either reflects them or it does not. Does he mean that the reflections in the water are actually of something else? Or does he mean that the reflected images are so distorted that they can no longer be considered to be reflections, that the inverted image is unfaithful? Or is it the spectator himself who projects a prolongation of the spires in an imaginary reflection? Brichot, in spite of his poor eyesight, or perhaps because of it, seems to have identified a curious optical illusion.² Beginning with Ruskin's theory of reflection, this article will explore how image and reflected image do not always coincide in Proust. I go on to consider how Proust exploits the metaphor of reflection further as a rhetorical figure for the presence or absence of self recognition leading to the act of self creation which constitutes the Proustian enterprise itself.

I. Ruskin on the Truth of Reflection

Proust's knowledge of Ruskin has been well documented. As a letter to Mme de Clermont-Tonnerre makes clear, Proust possessed the Library Edition totalling thirty-nine volumes. From 1900 to 1906 he makes a thorough study of Ruskin, resulting in the translation of two works: *The Bible of Amiens* (1904) and *Sesame*

1. Marcel Proust, *A la recherche du temps perdu*, ed. by J.-Y. Tadié and others, 4 vols (Paris: Gallimard (Pléiade), 1987-89), III, p. 329. All references are to this edition (hereafter *RTP*).
2. The narrator has in fact already observed and admired this effect in Elstir's paintings (*RTP*, III, 329).

and Lilies (1906).³ There is general agreement amongst critics that Ruskin's most important lesson to Proust is in teaching him to see. Cocking emphasizes how this task is fictionalized with Elstir teaching Marcel to experience life with his eyes.⁴ It is indeed in witnessing a scene of natural beauty at Montjouvain that the narrator has a first insight into how he should write, namely that he should seek to emulate in writing what his eyes have just seen.

It is not surprising that the study of water should occupy a central place in Ruskin's work. Amongst his favourite painters, Turner in particular, as a proto-Impressionist, was preoccupied with the effects of light upon water. Three chapters in *Modern Painters* are thus dedicated to the study of water (all are in volume one). Ruskin can be seen to aim at a scientific understanding of the laws governing the play of reflection, considering such factors as the amount and strength of the light, whether waters are clean or murky, which objects reflect, the effect of the wind and of ripples (including the reflection of reflections in ripples, so that an image of the far side of the shore is also transmitted to us), the effect of depth, the transparency of the water and the fact that we either see the duckweed in the water or reflections on the water but that it is not possible to see both simultaneously.

Ruskin, like the Impressionists, constantly criticizes the painter who finishes off his paintings at home. For him, many painters can give an impression of water but:

to paint the actual play of hue on the reflective surface [...] with its variety and delicacy of colour, when every ripple and wreath has some peculiar passage of reflection upon itself alone, and the radiating and scintillating sunbeams are mixed with the dim hues of transparent depth and dark rock below, to do this perfectly is beyond the power of man; to do it even partially has been granted to but one or two, even of those few who have dared to attempt it.⁵

Ruskin argues that Turner's 'Nottingham' is one of the few successful attempts to paint reflection and I would like to consider this passage.

3. See Cynthia Gamble, *Proust as Interpreter of Ruskin* (Alabama: Summa Publications, 2002).
4. J. M. Cocking, 'Proust and Painting', in *Proust: Collected Essays on the Writer and his Art* (CUP, 1982).
5. *Modern Painters in The Works of John Ruskin* ed. by E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, 39 vols (London: George Allen, 1903-12), III, p. 495. All references are to this edition, hereafter 'Library Edition'. Ruskin has been criticised as insular for ignoring the French Impressionists. Quentin Bell defends him on the grounds that they were only gradually emerging at the end of the century, although Monet's influence on British artists can be traced from the 1890s, *Victorian Artists* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 78.



Nottingham City Museums and Art Galleries.

Now one instance will be sufficient to show the exquisite care of Turner in this respect. On the left-hand side of his Nottingham, the water (a smooth canal) is terminated by a bank fenced up with wood, on which, just at the edge of the water, stands a white sign-post. A quarter of a mile back, the hill on which Nottingham Castle stands rises steeply nearly to the top of the picture. The upper part of this hill is in bright golden light, and the lower in very deep grey shadow, against which the white board of the sign-post is seen entirely in light relief, though, being turned from the light, it is itself in delicate middle tint, illuminated only on the edge. But the image of all this in the canal is very different. First, we have the reflection of the piles of the bank sharp and clear, but under this we have not what we see above it, the dark *base* of the hill (for this being a quarter of a mile back, we could not see it over the fence if we were looking from below), but the golden summit of the hill, the shadow of the under part having no record nor place in the reflection. Now this summit, being very distant, cannot be seen clearly by the eye while its focus is adapted to the surface of the water, and accordingly its reflection is entirely vague and confused; you cannot tell what it is meant for, it is mere playing golden light. But the sign-post, being on the bank close to us, will be reflected clearly, and accordingly its distant image is seen in the midst of the confusion; relieved, however, not now against the dark base, but against the illuminated summit of the hill, and appearing therefore, instead of a white space thrown out from blue shade, a dark grey space thrown out from golden light. I do not know that any more magnificent example could be given of concentrated knowledge, or of the daring statement of most difficult truth. For who but this consummate artist would have had the courage, even if he had perceived the laws which required it, to undertake, in a single small space of water, the painting of an entirely new picture with all its tones and arrangements altered, — what was made above bright by opposition to blue, being underneath made cool and dark by opposition to gold; or would have dared to contradict so boldly the ordinary expectation of the uncultivated eye, to find in the reflection a mockery of the reality? (Library Edition, III, 542-43)

Ruskin's aim here is to demonstrate the laws of reflection (before conceding to the role of artistic imagination). He emphasizes the division of the canvas in two and focuses on the fact that there are two different images in the picture. He demonstrates the role that distance plays in the laws of reflection and the reproduction or absence of background and foreground images. Furthermore, and this will be crucial to Proust, water does not, as the uncultivated eye would expect, provide an inverted mirror image but rather it acts upon the image. For Ruskin the painting exemplifies the mixing of hues that reflection produces and the fact that all tones are relative to one another. Water is not the transparent medium that Proust claims.

Before showing the relevance of this passage to Proust, I would like to consider a case for comparison made by Diane Leonard. She analyzes how a passage on the Combray steeple (*RTP*, I, 47) evokes a Ruskinian description of Turner's watercolour 'Salisbury'.⁶ She shows how the description of the church 'tenant serrés autour de sa haute mante sombre [...] comme une pastoure ses brebis, les dos laineux et gris des maisons rassemblées' (*RPT*, I, 47) in Proust recalls the Ruskin passage in which 'houses [are] scattered like a flock of sheep', and the cathedral gives its cloak to the children.⁷ Importantly Proust offers no specific acknowledgement of the source. It is just meant to resonate with the reader as Leonard argues: to be resurrected through involuntary memory.⁸ Proust nowhere refers directly to Turner's 'Nottingham' or to Ruskin's commentary.⁹ Proust's words do not directly echo Ruskin's as in the Combray/Salisbury example but nevertheless I will argue that Ruskin's reading of 'Nottingham' reflects not only Proust's understanding of the nature of reflection on water but also establishes a more metaphorical displacement of a reflected image. It should further be noted that it is as melancholy sets in when the narrator stays on alone in Venice, after his scheduled departure with his mother, that the city begins to disintegrate and lose its meaning and even deny its indebtedness to Turner (*RTP*, IV, 231). The attention drawn by the disavowal in Proust is clearly indicative of just such an indebtedness to Turner in the reader's and the narrator's visions of watery Venice and, by extension, in the game of light on water more generally.

6. Diane R. Leonard, 'Proust and Ruskin 2000, in *Proust in Perspective*, ed. by Armine Kotin Mortimer and Katherine Kolb (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. 213-26.

7. Leonard, pp. 222-23.

8. Leonard, p. 224.

9. See Eric Karpeles, *Paintings in Proust* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2008) for references to Turner in the *Recherche*, p. 350.

II. A Metaphor for Good Writing Style

In the *Recherche* the narrator's main concern is how to become a writer. His most sustained commentary on the development of a writing style arises out of frustration at his inability to capture in writing the subtle play of reflection in the Montjouvain pond scene. In describing the play of light on the waters of the Montjouvain pond, the narrator decries his own inarticulate response of 'zut' as 'opaque' (*RTP*, I, 152-54); then, he comes back to the passage to lament once more the opacity of his words before his 'vision transparente' (*RTP*, IV, 151). It would therefore appear that the key issue here is to move from opacity to transparency; this, however, is contrary to the fact that vision in Proust is always distorted. Despite the narrator's equation of style with transparency, the object and the image reflected back seldom coincide.

In the early episode in *Combray* the narrator stops and arrests the narrative before the scene of natural beauty. The terrain of his childhood is carefully framed:

Quand j'essaye de faire le compte de ce que je dois au côté de Méséglise, des humbles découvertes dont il fut le cadre fortuit ou le nécessaire inspirateur, je me rappelle que c'est, cet automne-là, dans une de ces promenades, près du talus broussailleux qui protège Montjouvain, que je fus frappé pour la première fois de ce désaccord entre nos impressions et leur expression habituelle. (*RTP*, I, 153)

Our attention is clearly being drawn to this passage. Critics have tended to hurry over it, seeing it merely as a preamble to the protagonist's first literary effort, the prose poem on the *clochers de Martinville*, reproduced textually only twenty pages later.¹⁰ It has thus mainly been viewed at the face value of the analytical level, signalled by the 'quand j'essaye de faire le compte', regarding the difficulty of translating impressions into words and the beginnings of a theory of involuntary memory.¹¹ Thus the focus has been on the phenomenological attempt outlined by

10. Jean-Pierre Richard examines the Montjouvain scene as a beginning of a theory of metaphor. *Proust et le monde sensible* (Paris: Seuil, 1974), pp. 81-86. As will be examined, Nathalie Aubert also analyzes this scene but reads it through another passage.
11. In this respect Peter Collier and J. D. Whiteley's reconstruction of the 'unwritten' passage that frames the steeples of Martinville prose poem is relevant. What makes the passage stand out is 'the demarcation of the *surrounding* textual space as *non-artistic*', by the heavy usage of both analytical language and deliberate depoetization through cliché, 'Proust's Blank Page', *MLR*, 79 (1984), 570-78 (pp. 573-74, p. 578n). They note that a similar process of embedding is at play in the Montjouvain episode.

the narrator to attain essences from experience.¹² Once we know, however, at the end of the book that what we have been reading is the narrator's story of how he became a writer, this passage seems most disingenuous. For in beautiful poetic prose, the would-be-writer laments his lack of talent. If, however, the narrator criticizes himself for not paying due attention, it would seem that he also invites the reader to pause and contemplate the scene. The position of the reader is mirroring that of the narrator. The reader should not be fooled by what are given as the only words the narrator can muster, the cry of 'zut!'. Rather, he should examine the pleasurable sensation which indeed *is* conveyed to the reader in writing by the mature narrator. Here is the passage in full:

Après une heure de pluie et de vent contre lesquels j'avais lutté avec allégresse, comme j'arrivais au bord de la mare de Montjouvain devant une petite cahute recouverte en tuiles où le jardinier de M. Vinteuil serrait ses instruments de jardinage, le soleil venait de paraître, et ses dorures lavées par l'averse reluisaient à neuf dans le ciel, sur les arbres, sur le mur de la cahute, sur son toit de tuile encore mouillé, à la crête duquel se promenait une poule. Le vent qui soufflait tirait horizontalement les herbes folles qui avaient poussé dans la paroi du mur, et les plumes de duvet de la poule, qui, les unes et les autres se laissaient filer au gré de son souffle jusqu'à l'extrémité de leur longueur, avec l'abandon de choses inertes et légères.

Le toit de tuile faisait dans la mare, que le soleil rendait de nouveau réfléchissante, une marbrure rose, à laquelle je n'avais encore jamais fait attention. Et voyant sur l'eau et à la face du mur un pâle sourire répondre au sourire du ciel, je m'écriai dans mon enthousiasme en brandissant mon parapluie refermé: "Zut, zut, zut, zut."
Mais en même temps je sentis que mon devoir eût été de ne pas m'en tenir à ces mots opaques et de tâcher de voir plus clair dans mon ravissement. (*RTP*, I, 153)

The scene is framed so carefully that it almost seems to be a painting. Having begun with the frame, the narrator takes us with him into the picture, giving us first the background with the bushy slope, then moving us to the centre ground as the narrator arrives at the edge of the pond in front of the shed. This is the perspective from which the scene will be viewed but the emphasis on the arrival at the scene with his tartan robe swung over his shoulders and his tussled appearance bearing witness to the force of the elements (*RTP*, I, 151-52) and his frustrated departure, set up the expectation of a double perspective in which the protagonist can also be seen.

12. Nathalie Aubert assimilates this scene to a dream the narrator has in which the reflective surface of the water is substituted for 'ces prairies où, quand le soleil les rend réfléchissantes comme une mare' (*RTP*, I, 183). Her study, which begins with an assessment of the role of Proust's work as a translator of Ruskin, emphasizes the need to translate the original vision, *Proust: La Traduction du Sensible* (Oxford: Legenda, 2003), pp. 111-12. Thus Aubert reads the *Recherche* as a 'phénoménologie de la perception', p. 6.

Such careful staging of the scene for Landow is the essence of Ruskin's art of word painting. This, Landow explains, can take three forms: firstly an 'additive style' in which visual details are described one after another; secondly, Ruskin creates a dramatized scene to which we are spectators. Thirdly he sets us within the scene and makes us participants sharing his feelings and thoughts. This he sees Ruskin achieving by what he terms anachronistically 'cinematic prose': that is, he moves the centre of perception, or seeing eye, either by zooming in or by moving laterally while remaining at a fixed distance from the subject, or in cinematic terms, panning.¹³ Proust seems here also to use the cinematic zoom technique. First we have a rare shot of the protagonist from the outside, then the subjective camera moves us in to show us the beauty of the scene before zooming in on the light source itself and slipping over into overexposure and zooming out to an external shot of the protagonist waving his umbrella in frustration.

As with the Impressionists and predecessors such as Turner, the picture is actually dictated by the prevailing atmospheric conditions and the seasonal hues. They are the subjects of the verbs. Autumnal associations colour the scene in the narrator's memory and the spectator's imagination. The wind gives us the direction of the brushstrokes: it blows the long grass horizontally across the canvas and this directional movement is picked up again and its strength reinforced as it blows the length of the downy feathers. The harmony of the image is added to by linking up the various sections of the canvas. The wind, rain, and light are palpable across the canvas. The 'dorures lavées' unite the sky, the trees, the wall and the roof of the shed under the same glow. The ruffled hen feathers provide an unusual visual transition. The narrator begins by telling us that the rain has just stopped yet the whole canvas remains saturated with water. The sun's smile extends over the page. The image above the water is seemingly inverted in the water.

However, the image above the water and the image in the water are, as in Ruskin's commentary on Turner's 'Nottingham', like two separate pictures.¹⁴ Above the water the scene has three focal points. Firstly it is animated by reference to the gardener's habitual action of putting away his tools in the shed. Secondly there is the chicken strutting on the rooftop. Thirdly there is the action of the narrator himself as he arrives on the scene and later as he waves his

13. 'There Began to Be a Great Talking about the Fine Arts' in *The Mind and Art of Victorian England*, ed. by Josef P. Altholz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1976), pp. 138-39.

14. It is in this respect that the pond provides a better illustration of Ruskin's theory of reflection than the castle which forms a complete circle with its reflection in the water (*RTP*, II, 195) to which Lee Johnson compares it in Proust: it seems that it is the two different images that Ruskin is stressing. *The Metaphor of Painting* (Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1980), p. 172.

umbrella wildly in the air. None of these three animate beings find their reflection in the water. The chicken is obviously too small. The gardener, if present that day, would be partly concealed as he moves in and out of the shed. The figure we might expect to see would be that of the narrator. He is, however, as will be examined, conspicuously absent. Form is lost in the reflection and instead the subject of the inverted image becomes light and colour. Furthermore, colours and materials are reflected back in a changed state. Water transforms the material world. The golden light of the sun acts upon the red roof to produce a pink light. The humble tiled roof is elevated to the status of marble. It is a true Ruskinian observer who has noted this veined effect, probably produced by a mixture of the light falling on the rippled water (the wind's force has been emphasized) and by mingling with the colour of the water itself. Again in accordance with Ruskin's analysis, in the inverted image, only the highlights are picked out, darkness, shadow and distant objects (the slope and the bushes) find no reflection in the water.

What animates the scene, however, is not merely the atmospheric conditions governing the play of light on water. Again as found in Ruskin, the landscape is brought to life as the protagonist projects his emotion onto the natural world.¹⁵ The narrator's impressions and his sensation of pleasure are expressed through being injected back into the scene. In this passage, as opposed to the later steeples of Martinville scene, the embedded artistic passage is not a free-standing piece that can be cut out and sent into the newspaper. As will be seen, analytic and poetic discourses alternate from sentence to sentence and even within the same sentence, as evidenced for example in the pervasive anthropomorphism. If the tone of the piece is framed by the overflow of rapture into frustration at the beginning and end, this is nevertheless only part of the framing device and the governing tone is that of rapture under the metaphor of the smiling sun. The wall is made human and given a 'face' which replies with a smile to the sun's smile. That nature should smile is of course not the response, as he says, of one inanimate object to another, but rather to his feelings. Coupled with his jubilant mood is the fact that sunshine when it falls on our eyes and our faces does indeed often make us smile in a physical response which influences our state of mind. On the written page the narrator in fact succeeds perfectly in translating his experience into words. There is even a suggestion that the mature narrator is revelling in his victory and smiling slyly at the reader. In the distorted mirror of projected images, the feeling of frustration at not being able to express oneself as well as the narrator indeed does

15. In Ruskin 'Vital Beauty [as opposed to Typical Beauty] is the beauty of living things, and it is concerned not with form but expression – with the expression of the happiness and energy of life, and [...] moral truths by living things', George Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), p. 148.

express himself, could be seen to be passed onto the reader. Suffering as he does almost continuously under the weight of jealousy, the narrator, in this instance, perhaps seeks to manipulate the reader's feelings and cast him, for once, as the jealous party, frustrated and envious of this perfect mastery of language.

At the analytical level, the narrator laments his 'idées confuses', the 'désaccord' between our impressions and their 'expression habituelle' in words, his 'humbles découvertes' and our way of dismissing them, 'nous en débarrasser', in a 'forme indistincte'. The poetic discourse, however, breaks through the convoluted prose and heavy syntax of the analytical discourse. Forced to produce cumbersome prose to achieve an 'unwritten' effect, the narrator, pent up like the spinning top, unleashes his metaphor.

Quand j'étais fatigué d'avoir lu toute la matinée dans la salle, jetant mon plaid sur mes épaules, je sortais : mon corps obligé depuis longtemps de garder l'immobilité, mais qui s'était chargé sur place d'animation et de vitesse accumulées, avait besoin ensuite, comme une toupie qu'on lâche, de les dépenser dans toutes les directions. (RTP, I, 152).

Transformed into poetic prose a tortuous expression such as 'le plaisir d'une dérivation plus aisée vers une issue immédiate' provokes anthropomorphic smiles. The 'forme indistincte' becomes the word painting. The Montjouvain piece is an embedded artistic passage just as the steeples of Martinville passage is, but one which does not proclaim itself as such and which, on the contrary, tries to pass for unwritten in order to make the spoken words stand out as inadequate, as a performative failure.

III. Self Recognition and Self Creation

Why then, does the narrator want this piece to stand out as a failure? There is something missing in the Montjouvain scene: the reflected image of the narrator himself. He looks in the water but does not see himself. His body produces no reflection, as if he were immaterial. There are few external images of the narrator in the *Recherche*. It is one of the paradoxes of the text that during the course of the novel we learn so much about his interior being and yet so little of his outer physical appearance. It is perhaps apt then that no outward image should be reflected back. The narrator is at pains throughout the text to conceal his outward appearance and other individualizing features such as his name. If on the one hand it has been argued that the anonymity of the narrator means that the reader is better able to identify with him, that is to read himself into the narrator, on the other hand critics such as Serge Doubrovsky have argued that this absence of a body, this denial of the body, is linked to the displacement and concealment of Proust's own homosexuality in the text. Doubrovsky in his *La Place de la Madeleine* identifies

a Freudian ‘return of the repressed’ in the ‘Petite Madeleine’, the capitals ‘M’ and ‘P’ standing for ‘Marcel Proust’.¹⁶

In this respect it is of note that it is also at Montjouvain, only a few pages later, that the narrator oversees a scene of sadism in which Mlle Vinteuil and her female lover profane the image of the recently deceased father. The staged voyeurism of the scene would seem to suggest that we can find an image of ourselves in the other, an image either identified with, refused, projected, or fantasized. The conspicuously absent image of the narrator is replaced by that of Mlle de Vinteuil whom he sees ‘en face de moi’ (*RTP*, I, 157).

If the Montjouvain pond passage provides an insight into how the narrator should write, in his equation of style with the transparency of water, where the narrator errs is precisely in thinking that water is transparent. Style, the writer’s medium, transforms language and experience, leaving a reflection of the writing subject. The missing reflection of the narrator in the water symbolizes the fact that the young narrator has not yet understood this. This understanding comes only at the end of the novel, when the narrator realizes that:

Ceux qui produisent des œuvres géniales ne sont pas ceux qui vivent dans le milieu le plus délicat, qui ont la conversation la plus brillante, la culture la plus étendue, mais ceux qui ont eu le pouvoir, cessant brusquement de vivre pour eux-mêmes, de rendre leur personnalité pareille à un miroir, de telle sorte que leur vie si médiocre d’ailleurs qu’elle pouvait être mondialement et même, dans un certain sens, intellectuellement parlant, s’y reflète, le génie consistant dans le pouvoir réfléchissant et non dans la qualité intrinsèque du spectacle reflété. (*RTP*, I, 545)

In this first-person narrative, the self will be taken as the mirror through which to see the world and through which to reflect it back. What counts is not the subject matter but the ability to narrate, the narrator’s ability to recreate himself in writing.

The self in Proust is multifaceted. Visions of ourselves that are reflected back to us, particularly in the eyes of others, may appear strange and even unrecognizable to us. Such is the case for example when Albertine pastiching the narrator does not sound like the narrator (*RTP*, III, 636). Similarly, in *Le Côté de Guermantes* the drunk narrator sees ‘un homme spécial, un buveur [...] hideux, inconnu, qui [le] regardait’. This vision is in fact his own reflection in the mirror:

16. This empty self has been seen as a forerunner to Beckett’s heroes by critics such as Doubrovsky and Anne Henry. See Eugène Nicole, ‘Quel Marcel: And Other Oddities of the Narrator’s Designations’, in *The Strange M. Proust*, ed. by André Benhaïm (London: Legenda, 2009) for an up-to-date assessment of the narrator’s supposed anonymity. Following a genetic approach, Nicole argues for an autobiographical reading of the text: ‘Proust identified all but systematically with him [the narrator]’, p. 39.

it is his 'moi affreux' (*RTP*, II, 469). The narrator thus fails to recognise himself: this aspect of himself is seen as totally other.¹⁷ The scriptural construction of the self, however, requires the recognition of oneself in the mirror image (if the third person is not to be used throughout). It requires the recognition of the multifaceted nature of the self. *A la recherche du temps perdu* could not have been written about a man who left no trace of himself. This is why, at the symbolic level, as an initiation to writing, the Montjouvain pond scene is made to represent a failure.

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Reflection, as Ruskin teaches us, does not happen in clear transparent waters. Murky waters in the shade are much better reflectors.¹⁸ At its most subtle, the written text of the *Recherche* imperceptibly passes through the medium of the narrator's troubled consciousness which, like water, the narrator's metaphor for style, acts upon the material. Confronted with the tortuous imaginings of the narrator's mind, the reader should never lose sight of the fact that this is first-person narration and that as such it should be handled warily. Reading Proust is a process of re-establishing the displacement and distortion of an object and its inverted or reported image in the narrative. There is always a danger that in turn, the reader, in seeing the world and reading himself through the narrator's experience, comes to create a distorted image of himself. Reading Proust may even warp the mind, introducing a degree of paranoid jealous inflection into the reader's own thoughts.

I am grateful to the AHRC and to the Carnegie Trust for funding this project.

17. For Anne Simon 'Proust thus includes, [at] the heart of his novel, a scene of misrecognition'. Although he finds himself abject he does not wish lose this aspect of himself. She concludes, in line with Barthes, that the scriptural practice is the 'only way for Proust to not simply accede to the self but rather to create a self that did not exist before this construction', 'The Formalist, the Spider, and the Phenomenologist', in Benhaïm, p. 23.

18. 'visible transparency and reflected power of water are in inverse ratio' (Library Edition, III, 499).